**Climate Discourse Among Canadian NGOs: Ecological Modernization, Civic Environmentalism, and Climate Justice**


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**Abstract**

This research examines the websites of twenty-three Canadian NGOs using critical discourse analysis to understand: (i) What climate change discourses are dominant among Canadian NGOs? (ii) What are the goals and strategies being promoted through these discourses? (iii) How are climate issues being framed by these organizations? (iv) Who do NGOs see as the primary agents and mechanisms of change in addressing climate change? The findings illustrate three main discourses--ecological modernization, civic environmentalism, and climate justice--though the distinctions between discursive categories are often blurred as many organizations draw from multiple discursive narratives in their appeals for climate action. Ecological modernization discourse underpins much of the framing of climate change as a threat to the Canadian economy and the benefits of transitioning to a zero-carbon economy through market interventions and green innovation. Equally represented is a Canadian stream of civic environmentalist discourse. Civic environmentalism has a strong presence in how many NGOs attribute the climate crisis to an imbalance in decision-making power between elites and the rest of Canada where the solution is then to restore democracy in political institutions. Climate justice was least represented but offers a more critical understanding of the nature of the climate crisis and emphasizes the need for a broad-based movement that unifies the fights for social, economic, and ecological justice.

Keywords: climate change in Canada, critical discourse analysis, climate change discourse, website analysis, NGOs

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| | |
|---|---|
| CLC | Canadian Labour Congress |
| CCL | Citizens Climate Lobby Canada |
| CPJ | Citizens for Public Justice |
| CAN-Rac | Climate Action Network Canada |
| CRP | Climate Reality Project Canada |
| COC | Council of Canadians |
| CUPE | Canadian Union of Public Employees |
| DSF | The David Suzuki Foundation |
| FFF | Fossil Free Faith |
| FPIC | Free and Prior Consent |
| FOE | Friends of the Earth Canada |
| GEN | Green Economy Network |
| GPC | Greenpeace Canada |
| ICA | Indigenous Climate Action |
| LN | LeadNow |
| NC | Nature Canada |
| NUPGE | National Union of Public and General Employees |
| SCCF | The Sierra Club Canada Foundation |
| UNDRIP | United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples |

**Chapter One: Introduction**

Those born today will likely never know a world where multiple compounding crises are not unfolding in front of them. Arguably, most people already born have been negatively impacted by the consequences of capitalism, colonialism, never-ending development, and greed—but from my perspective it seems that we are no longer able to pretend that it's not happening. When I started my Masters in Critical Sociology in 2018, I was motivated by a desire to assess how Canadian civil society has responded to the climate crisis, but writing this introduction in 2022, two years since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, watching the news cycle and my Twitter feed while trying to analyze the webpages I captured in late 2019 has made it difficult to ignore what lies ahead.

In March 2022 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a fairly conservative body to a student of critical social theory, released their latest report highlighting a "particular focus on transformation and system transitions in energy; land, ocean, coastal and freshwater ecosystems; urban, rural and infrastructure; and industry and society" (IPCC, 2022, p. 9). This grim report details the observed impacts of global climate change thus far and with high confidence predicts increasingly widespread human mortality and suffering from extreme weather patterns, food and water insecurity, infectious disease spread, displacement, and mental health issues associated with loss of livelihood—particularly for vulnerable peoples already subject to ongoing colonial projects and those displaced into informal urban settlements in conflict areas. This report estimates that around 3.5 billion people live in such highly vulnerable contexts where climate change events and hazards can easily become humanitarian crises, and that the magnitude of the impacts now depend more on addressing the causes of vulnerabilities than what emissions trajectory we follow (p. 15).

Climate change cannot be understood as a discrete issue, nor can its impacts be understood as singularly caused by temperature increases but it is compounded by the multiple crises and disasters concurrently unfolding. Countless academics, public figures, and critical thinkers have identified a similar root cause for these crises with a breadth of different labels. Malm refers to the cause as fossil capital, and in *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency* (2020) he ties the emergence of fossil-fueled transportation to the first major wave of zoonotic disease: the Spanish flu (2020). His book traces the increased ease of global transportation to the ease of transmission of infectious diseases, and then the increased risk of disease spillover as human development goes deeper into many species' habitats.

Where those leading national and international governance bodies have largely failed to take meaningful action, large masses of people around the world are mobilizing to demand the multiple crises unfolding be adequately addressed, often in ways that go against the interests of fossil capital. Canada is no exception; a variety of different actors have proclaimed the need for transformative change to address climate change or tried to take on these economic forces through land defence and direct action tactics. Given its diverse nature, this wide movement has many different perspectives on how climate change should be framed, what strategies should be used, and what imagined future could and should be. My research focuses on the civil society response to climate change, specifically among Canadian non-government organizations (NGOs).

The role of civil society in shaping climate change discourse has been researched extensively (Bedall and Görg, 2014; Caniglia, Brulle, and Szasz, 2015; Ciplet et al., 2015), particularly the role of NGOs (such as Doyle, 2009). Much attention has been paid to social movements broadly pressuring climate action at the international level (Dietz, 2014; della Porta

and Parks, 2014; Newell, 2000), although the national and organizational levels have also been examined (Brulle, 2014). Climate change discourse has been a subject of research (Backstrand and Lovbrand, 2006; Newell, 2006) and much of the literature about it comes from the work on environmental discourse (Dryzek 2013; Schlosberg, 2013). Some literature exists about environmental discourse in the Canadian context (Haluza-DeLay & Fernhout, 2011; Teelucksingh, Poland, Buse, & Hasdell, 2016), but Canadian climate change discourse remains unexamined. One notable exception that I reference in multiple chapters of this thesis is that of Gunster, Fleet, and Neubauer (2021) who examined Canadian organizational social media accounts to see if and how they contest the petro-nationalist discourse that has taken over Canada's political imaginary.

The climate change movement in Canada is important given Canada's role in the disproportionate global effects of climate change on the poorest people of the world as a major contributor to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Furthermore, there remains a contradiction between the pledges the federal and provincial governments have made to address climate change and the continued extraction of some of the world's dirtiest fossil fuels and construction of pipelines. In recent years, activism and advocacy against oil extraction and pipeline construction have received media attention; however there is a lack of research literature on the organized climate change movement in Canada and its structures, successes, and failures.

My hope is that by understanding the discourses favoured by prominent Canadian climate change organizations, I can analyze which are more effective, and identify what is missing. My exploration also includes what types of tactics organizations include in their strategies, how they use the Internet to achieve their goals and mobilize others, how different frames influence participation and mobilization, and how frames may change over time. By focusing on the

information that prominent climate change organizations have made available to the public, my research will foster understanding of how such organizations in Canada understand and present their role in climate action. Based on the contribution I have set out to make, my research questions are as follows:

1. What climate change discourses are dominant among Canadian NGOs?

2. What are the goals and strategies being promoted through these discourses?

3. How are climate issues being framed by these organizations?

4. Who do NGOs see as the primary agents and mechanisms of change in addressing climate change?

Guided by Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) understanding that discourses can determine what is seen as possible, I use critical discourse analysis to examine the websites of 23 Canadian NGOs. While several of these organizations have climate change as their primary focus, I also draw from other types of organizations to get a sense of the larger field of Canadian climate change discourse among NGOs. I elaborate on the criteria for my sample selection in Chapter Three. Using the discourse analysis framework I outline in Chapter Two, I determine which discourses are present based on how climate change is being framed, what solutions are being promoted, and which actors and tactics are key to achieving their goals, according to each organization. The framework I develop for my analysis is primarily based on the work of Dryzek (2013) and Backstrand and Lovbrand (2006; 2007; 2016).

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two comprises a review of the literature about NGOs and climate change broadly, then on the Canadian context. This leads to my discussion of climate change discourse, where I outline my understanding of climate discourse and provide an overview of the established discourses relevant to my research, including climate

change denial (Brulle, 2014), petro-nationalism (Gunster et al., 2021) green governmentality (Backstrand & Lovbrand, 2006), ecological modernization (Backstrand & Lovbrand, 2016; Dryzek, 2013), civic environmentalism (Backstrand & Lovbrand, 2007; Shutkin, 2001), and climate justice (della Porta & Parks, 2014). I then briefly discuss the fractured nature of discourse, whereby multiple discourses can be present simultaneously (Hajer, 1995), before transitioning into my methodology chapter.

Chapter Three elaborates on my research design, methods of data collection, and method of discourse analysis. Beginning with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the use of website data, I then detail the criteria for inclusion in my sample and how I collected my website data. This chapter concludes with a discussion of my data analysis and approach to critical discourse analysis (informed by Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) political discourse analytical method).

Chapter Four is an overview of my findings from surveying the websites of twenty three Canadian NGOs. The chapter is organized in sections detailing how NGOs understand the nature of the climate crisis, what goals they envision, what means they claim will achieve their goals, and which actors will facilitate action. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the various ways that NGOs understand their own role and the role of the public in climate action, with a brief exploration of how some of the major Canadian fossil fuel funders (i.e., financial institutions and government bodies) have financial ties to several organizations in my sample. The purpose of this overview chapter is to contextualize Chapter Five, which describes the findings of my critical discourse analysis, particularly the presence of three main discourses: ecological modernization, civic environmentalism, and climate justice. Finally, Chapter Six puts

my findings into perspective given the passage of time and major global events that occurred

between my data collection in 2019 and the completion of this thesis in 2022.

**Chapter Two: Civil Society and Climate Discourse**

**Introduction**

Canadian NGOs have been mobilizing around climate change in Canada for decades and have various perspectives on things like who to blame, who can solve it, and what approaches to use. These different ideas can be associated with distinct climate discourses. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the literature useful for understanding how Canadian NGOs interact with and shape climate discourse. After an overview of the historical relationship between civil society and climate change discourse, the second half of my literature review illustrates research in the field of climate change discourse, including environmental discourses that have been applied to climate change and emergent climate-specific and Canada-specific discourses. This framework of climate discourse informs my critical analysis in a later chapter.

**Civil Society and Climate Change: NGOs and Beyond**

Civil society refers to the sphere outside of the government and markets that includes organizations consisting of members of the public and is composed of several non-state actors, including NGOs and other interest groups (Müller and Walk, 2014; Pyles, 2014). This is a terrain on which conflicts over hegemony take place, which determines which courses of action appear possible, thereby excluding other ways of understanding or solving the climate crisis. The civil society groups in the climate change field have diverse and often opposing goals and strategies. Ciplet et al. (2015) identify three broad types of activity for civil society in response to climate change. First, they describe the emergence of an *environmental justice movement* that actively protests high emissions industries and has been successful in stopping or delaying construction in recent years. This response is mainly composed of social movement actors, including activists.

The high and low activity periods of the global climate change movement over the last few decades have been documented, with an estimated 30,000-100,000 people protesting at the Copenhagen Summit in 2009 and a peak of approximately 400,000 people at the People's Climate March in 2014 (Ciplet et al. 2015). The second type of response, *Big Green advocacy*, is characterized by highly funded environmental organizations seeking to make change through legislation and market-based solutions and is where this project is focused. The final response is the *corporate responsibility* approach, where polluting industries engage in more environmentally friendly activities through public relation strategies and divestment campaigns. The latter two responses have been critiqued by activists and scholars from an environmental justice perspective for their failure to effectively reduce emissions, especially as these approaches often involve NGO partnerships with polluting industries and greenwashing (Ciplet et al. 2015; Klein 2014).

Hadden (2015) demonstrates how debates in civil society organizations and their political activities can lead to changes in policy, tracing the NGO trend towards a discourse of climate justice, and how the language used by various actors and outcomes can have an influence at the institutional and global level of negotiations. This influence, according to Hadden (2015), was the result of the adoption of contentious strategies and the increased usage of the climate justice frame. After the adoption of climate justice language following Copenhagen, it was also increasingly employed by other civil society groups, the media, and at the global level among delegates in negotiations. This suggests discourses are often created within civil society and these ideas are recreated and reinforced by the state and other actors (Hadden, 2015). Civil society influences how environmental issues are constructed and discussed (Gulbrandsen & Andersen, 2004). Doyle (2009) and Newell (2000) have highlighted how NGOs, in particular,

are important for discursively constructing environmental and social problems and informing citizens of issues such as climate change.

As civil society organizations, NGOs seek to inspire and facilitate individual and collective change, so it is important to understand what behaviours they want to change, why they want to change them, and what values they promote (Doyle, 2009). They have been subject to considerable research due to their ability to apply pressure at the state level (Newell, 2000). Doyle (2009) argues that NGOs have been important for politicizing climate change and "providing interpretive frameworks to help make sense of th[e] issue" (p. 104). NGOs have been important agents in creating and reinforcing climate change discourse and can both maintain and challenge the status quo. This agency has been demonstrated at various levels of decision making, including a presence in international climate negotiations that has been the subject of a large body of research (Newell, 2000).

NGOs engage with and appeal to the public to both channel public support towards specific government interventions or change public opinion through creating and framing environmental problems. Newell (2000) argues that this is the most effective role of NGOs in creating change. He argues that they do not have as much power and influence without public support and at times where public participation with NGOs is increased, they are more able to elicit an institutional response. NGOs shape the terms of institutional action by taking advantage of their role as the conveyor of public opinion, which often sets the pace for action or demonstrates what is possible. This occurs often while an issue is fresh enough to have not been fully understood by the state apparatus, such as when climate change first became a public issue in 1988 (Newell, 2000). This agenda setting ability is the result of framing on the part of the NGO.

It is not only the government that NGOs try to influence, but also industry actors. Coalition-building between NGOs and corporate interests can also increase their ability to influence the government (Newell, 2000). This is done through forming alliances with various industries, and, as Newell (2000) highlights, environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, have tried to redirect investments from fossil fuels toward renewable energy. They can also act as watchdogs for enforcement of various measures (Newell, 2000).

NGOs are also influenced by other discursive agents, such as governments, industry, and so on. Bedall and Görg (2014) point out that in the period before the 1997 signing of the Kyoto Protocol, most groups were not supportive of market-based solutions to climate change, however after the treaty's adoption the majority of NGOs and other groups were supportive of such measures and were instrumental in facilitating their ultimate adoption, thereby legitimizing the hegemonic understanding of climate action.

### *NGOs and Framing*

NGOs communicate with the public and decision makers through the process of framing (Caniglia, Brulle, & Szasz, 2015). The ways in which NGOs frame climate change has been examined by Newell (2006), among others. Framing is important because it is strategic, as demonstrated by Hadden (2015) who illustrates how Climate Action Network International discusses the social justice-related impacts of climate change through a more technical lens, strategically choosing to use the language of sustainable development and "differentiated responsibilities" rather than an explicit justice frame (Hadden, 2015, p. 94). This framing was employed by the Climate Action Network targeting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) because the scientific language was more palatable to their audience. This framing decision was criticized by member organizations and led to debate

surrounding negotiations in Copenhagen. The positions taken up by the Climate Action Network are the result of negotiations and informed by issues of strategy.

Hadden's (2015) example of how the Climate Action Network (CAN) arrives at these decisions demonstrates how discourses and frames are reproduced by other agents, for example how other NGOs use CAN's materials and research in their activities. The Climate Action Network has been able to influence the rest of civil society due to its size, positioning, and memberships with other organizations. Their materials are used by other actors, such as the government or UNFCCC whom they primarily try to influence, but also other organizations and civil society actors.  This also demonstrates how larger NGOs have an influence on smaller and newer organizations, and how more professionalized strategies (such as engagement with the UNFCCC) become the preferred method of action among civil society (Hadden, 2015).

Eventually, the Climate Action Network shifted away from a predominantly scientific framing towards using justice-oriented language, seen through Hadden's (2015) frame analysis of Climate Action Network's ECO newsletter from the years 2009 to 2013. This shift, according to Hadden (2015), is the result of the climate justice frame moving upwards from smaller and more radical organizations into more mainstream NGOs.

### NGOs and climate change in Canada

Given the importance of civil society, specifically the role of NGOs, that has been highlighted in the literature on climate change and society, I now turn to provide an overview of the research that has been done on NGOs and climate change in Canada. Haluza-DeLay and Fernhout (2011) note that the environmental justice frame has not been prevalent in Canada the way it has been in the United States; however, there have still been social movements in Canada that have combined environmental issues and social justice concerns, particularly Indigenous

movements. They also note that the terms environmental justice and climate justice have been increasingly present in the Canadian environmental movement. Their research examined 49 Canadian environmental NGOs to determine the presence of environmental justice frames by examining their websites for mentions of social inclusion. They found that most of the organizations in their samples did not mention justice or equity in their mission statements and these issues did not appear prominently in the rest of their content. Poverty was the most frequently mentioned social factor mentioned in just over one third of the organizations sampled.

These frames were not totally missing across all organizations, however. Haluza-DeLay and Fernhout (2011) argue that the organizations that demonstrate concern for social inclusion and justice were less focused on the environment, thus not being as present in the discursive field of Canadian environmentalism. This finding is unsuprising given the effects of the NGO-ization of politics where issues (environmental, social, economic, and so on) are addressed individually by separate NGOs.

Additionally, Haluza-DeLay and Fernhout (2011) point out that just because an issue such as social inclusion or justice is featured in an organization's materials does not mean that the organization necessarily does anything to address the issue. They argue that the environmental justice frame would be beneficial for environmental non-government organizations to take up, as it is useful for frame bridging with other social movements (Haluza-DeLay & Fernhout, 2011).

Seeking to understand how opponents of extraction have responded to a distinctly Canadian petro-nationalist discourse, Gunster et al. (2021) examined the Facebook pages and comments of fifteen organizations, including a range of different types such as environmental organizations (both the David Suzuki Foundation and Greenpeace Canada were also included in

my sample), think tanks, labour groups, Indigenous organizations, and federal political parties: the NDP and the Green Party. They found that only a third of the posts examined invoked Canada specifically, and there was not a significant effort to change the narrative about what is good for Canada or Canadians, particularly looking for values such as ecological well-being or social justice, or arguing against the idea that pipelines are in Canadian national interest.

Some organizations highlighted the benefits that would accompany Canada's transition to clean technology, but Gunster et al. (2021) argue that these were in the context of mostly market-centric discourse. Contesting petro-nationalist discourse, they argue, is framed as a matter of education and enlightenment among people and government agents. This framing is present among organizations who promote entrepreneurship and innovation as key to transitioning Canada's energy system. Left populist discourse, on the other hand, frames issues such as climate change in terms of people versus elite interests, and this type of discourse was found in 40% of posts about energy issues. Importantly, left populist discourse was not invoked by organizations in reference to Canada except to critique the Canadian state and the interests who seek to expand the use of fossil fuels.

**Climate Change Discourse**

The definition of discourse underpinning my analysis is from Hajer and Versteeg (2005), who describe the concept as an "ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (p. 175). Discourses are fragmented and contradictory (Hajer, 1995), and several can exist simultaneously (Johnston, 2002). Understanding how discourses are constructed and reinforced allows us to understand their connection to power (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). This is because discourses demonstrate which avenues are

available and which actors have agency. Scandrett (2016) argues that the struggle for discursive hegemony is a power struggle over whose interests are served in the dominant discourse. In the wake of the climate crisis, certain discourses have been constructed that narrate why climate change is a problem, who will be affected the most, who is responsible for the crisis, and what interventions must be made to address it and by whom. The conflicts surrounding climate change are complex as they involve actors with different and often opposing interests, including economic interests versus interests in avoiding social harms. Further, the very nature of the problem of climate change, including its causes and impacts, have been disputed since the establishment of climate change as a social problem. As a result, Bedall and Görg (2014) emphasize that ideas about climate change are subject to contestation at the level of discourse where power relations are reproduced. Climate discourses are often adapted from environmental discourse, although there are other discursive elements that comprise them, and these discourses are present at every level of action. The rest of this chapter offers a discussion of the main discourses surrounding climate change identified in academic literature: climate change denial, green governmentality, ecological modernization, civic environmentalism, and climate justice.

### *Climate Change Denial*

The discourse of climate change denial has existed nearly as long as our knowledge of the issue, and unfortunately this discourse has also successfully halted climate action, due to the tenacious efforts of those who profit from denial. The discourse of climate change denial, while not present among climate change NGOs at the time of my research, has been a prominent influence in the field of climate discourse and is worth a brief mention. The central storyline, of course, is that human-caused climate change does not exist. This discourse has been mobilized

by various industries, conservative think tanks, and government leaders (Brulle, 2014; Perrow, 2010).

Brulle (2014) discusses the success of climate change denial counter movements, highlighting their intention to distort public perceptions of the existence and severity of climate change and their success in delaying meaningful action. The impact that climate change organizations have had on promoting climate action has been inhibited by the discourse of climate change denial, which is unsurprising as Newell (2000) points out the obvious fact that polluting industries have more power and resources than NGOs and civil society.

Dryzek (2013) refers to climate change denial as the Promethean perspective, particularly a new type of response that has developed given an increased clarity of the large scale challenges posed by climate change and other environmental issues. As an environmental discourse, this approach understands nature only as an unlimited natural resource, transformed by the ingenuity of humans who are primarily economic actors (Dryzek, 2013). Therefore, environmental problems for the most part do not exist or do not matter, and if they do, they can be fixed through problem solving and technology. This logic does not necessarily imply that climate change is not or cannot be real. However, those who seek to deny that the Earth's resources are limited have taken the climate change denial approach. Dryzek (2013) explains:

> The issue may be that the organized denial movement is right in thinking that climate change, if it exists, can only be confronted by strong governmental action (Klein, 2011). Thus, climate change cannot be allowed to exist, and no amount of science can possibly induce organized climate change deniers to change their mind. (p. 68)

The presence of this discourse in Canada is most evident in the federal government's response to climate change, such as the exit from the Kyoto Protocol in 2011, and more recently Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's insistence that oil pipelines projected to run for decades will fund a transition to a renewable economy. Dryzek (2013) argues that the Promethean response to

environmental problems is nearly exclusive to the US, Canada, and Australia, particularly in the wake of neoliberalism and where conservative parties have maintained power.

Gunster et al. (2021) identify a petro-nationalism discourse in the specifically Canadian context that has emerged to prominence thanks to the efforts of the fossil fuel industry, along with media, the federal government and some provincial governments, and lobby groups to promote extraction as in Canada's public interest (Gunster et al., 2021). This discourse does not explicitly deny climate change, however, nor does it consider it at all—a parallel to the quote above by Dryzek (2013). A noteworthy example from Gunster et al. (2021) is how Justin Trudeau rationalized the federal government's 2018 purchase of a 4.5 billion dollar pipeline as essential to Canada's economy and people on the same day he declared a climate emergency.

### *Green Governmentality*

Green governmentality is an environmental discourse that has been present in international climate change negotiations, and while less prevalent today, many of its elements persist. Its premise is that the Earth's resources, and nature more broadly, can be managed and monitored by a technocratic central body of knowledge based on scientific expertise, which can then be administered by the state (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Climate change is framed as a problem that can be solved through technology administered by the state and multilateral institutions (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2007). As a result, green governmentality highlights the need to develop an international framework for monitoring and managing the global climate system. This discourse was circulated in the Kyoto Protocol, in this case the central coordinating body being the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2007). The UNFCCC acts as the administrative state, to which each country is to report the results of emissions monitoring.

Dryzek (2013) compares this discourse to administrative rationalism, another environmental discourse, where solutions to climate change also include technological and market-based measures such as geoengineering and carbon offsets. However, Dryzek (2013) argues that climate change is too big a problem to be addressed by this framework, as demonstrated with the Copenhagen Accord's voluntary targets and emissions goals where there was no longer an expectation that climate change should be addressed by a central global body. Administrative rationalism defines the key agent as the government informed by the expert, particularly the scientific and technological expert, where policy decisions are made based on cost-benefit analyses to determine the most optimal solution, a logic that is still present in the Canadian climate discourse of 2019. This discourse does not challenge capitalism but takes for granted its existence. The public does not have agency in this discourse, but the government acts in the public interest, which is determined based on a cost-benefit/risk analysis.

### *Ecological Modernization*

Ecological modernization is a discourse that has long been identified in environmental and climate politics. Its central premise is that the economy can be restructured in a way to address environmental problems without changing the political economic system in which these problems exist (Dryzek, 2013). The logic of ecological modernization allows environmentalist values to become compatible with prevailing economic interests (Dryzek, 2013).

The key agents are government, industry, and civil society, including NGOs, scientists, and environmentalists, who work together. While this sounds similar to the green governmentality/administrative rationalism discourse mentioned above, Adelman (2015) argues that the difference is that ecological modernization focuses on market-based solutions and cost-benefit analysis where green governmentality is based on a centralized body regulating the

climate system. In particular, the government creates policies that incentivize ecological modernization practice, which can be done through regulation or subsidies (Dryzek, 2013).

Dryzek (2013) argues that, for ecological modernists, agents of climate action are motivated by the public interest, which includes both environmental and economic interests. He also points out that ecological modernization is attractive because of the various ways in which it is profitable. Businesses are incentivized to adopt ecological modernization practices because otherwise their ability to create profits long term would be inhibited by the destruction of resources and the waste inherent to pollution (Dryzek, 2013). Additionally, the logic also follows that not addressing such problems will be more expensive for businesses in the future even if short term profits are more likely (Dryzek, 2013). Dryzek (2013) also discusses the profitability of selling more sustainable products and services.

In the context of climate governance, ecological modernization is seen as an attractive discourse due to previous failures to facilitate meaningful action at the global level, as well as its ability to bring together NGOs, business, and government (Dryzek, 2013). Similar to other discourses, ecological modernization is heterogeneous and multiple variants exist (see Christoff, 1996; Hajer, 1995). Although the discourse of green governmentality was challenged at Copenhagen, Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2016) argue that it has converged with the ecological modernization approach where governments, businesses, and NGOs work collaboratively to manage the climate system. Caniglia et al. (2015) similarly argue that green governmentality has merged with ecological modernization to form "the dominant climate change discursive frame" (p. 246).

***Civic Environmentalism***

Civic environmentalism diverges from the government and industry focused discourses discussed above. The key decision maker and agent is not the professionalized expert, but involves collaborative efforts between citizens, governments, business, and NGOs. In this frame, civil society groups have a role acting alongside governments and decision-makers (Shutkin, 2001).

Shutkin (2001) identifies industrial ecology as a core concept of civic environmentalism, where production and economic development is sustainable. Through the increased participation of members of the community, including various stakeholders, a community can be socially, economically, and environmentally healthy (Shutkin, 2001). This is because another core concept is environmental justice, according to Shutkin's (2001) overview of his vision for what a civic environmentalist direction would look like. In contrast, Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2007)'s understanding of civic environmentalism sees the key agent of climate action as the state, although public participation is increased.

While it is clear that the specific characteristics of civic environmentalist discourse depend on who is writing about it, the role of civil society and citizens more broadly is more significant than what is seen in other discourses, as they are understood as secondary agents who participate in the decision-making process.

Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2007) highlight how civic environmentalism has been present in climate policy by further dividing it into reformist and radical branches. The reformist view posits that increased transparency in climate negotiations, and participation by members of civil society, can better solve environmental problems (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2007). The radical expression of this discourse diverges by demanding a transformation of institutions and

emphasizing the role of social movements in challenging power structures (Bäckstrand &

Lövbrand, 2007). In a later paper, Bäckstrand & Lövbrand (2016) argue:

> Through the rise of the climate justice movement, we have seen the return of radical civic critique that questions neo-liberal capitalism and its commodification of nature and ecosystems. Under the banner of climate justice, this renewed discourse of civic environmentalism demands a complete transformation of modern capitalist society in order to enable equitable and sustainable climate futures. (p. 3)

Caniglia et al. (2015) point out that only a fraction of NGOs in the United States use the civic

environmentalist discourse in the field dominated by ecological modernization.

### *Climate Justice*

While Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2016) situate climate justice within civic

environmentalist discourse, I want to expand on this concept as a distinct stream within the

discursive field of climate change. Tornel (2019) identifies three articulations of climate justice:

as an academic concept, a social movement, and an "elite perspective of environmental non-

governmental organizations" (p. 64). With these different understandings in mind, my discussion

of this discourse will attempt to illustrate how it has been discursively employed.

While first introduced by Indigenous activist groups in the United States, the concept of

climate justice emerged prominently in civil society in the context of rebellion against climate

change negotiations and actions that did not address the underlying factors that contribute to

climate change and the unequal distribution of responsibilities and consequences (Bedall &

Görg, 2014; De Lucia, 2014). Climate justice has become more prevalent in recent years among

prominent climate change organizations, as it was previously only seen within more

marginalized organizations (see della Porta & Parks 2014; Dietz 2014).  It has since become a

prominent discourse among NGOs and activists, and De Lucia (2014) points out that the label of

climate justice has "been stretched very thin" (p. 66), referring to a debate of whether climate justice is a movement, given its antagonistic roots, or a concept that can be applied more broadly.

Della Porta and Parks (2014) refer to climate justice as a master frame that is differentiated from the 'climate change stream', which sees expression in a more scientific understanding of climate change. Within this climate change stream, exists a "'climate justice' frame" (della Porta & Parks, 2014, p. 25), as climate justice here is conceptualized as the application of a human rights frame to the issue of climate change, and therefore differs from the climate justice stream that is rooted in the global justice and anti-war movements (Hadden, 2015; Scandrett, 2016). Della Porta and Parks (2014) point to the Copenhagen conference in 2009 as the spark for climate justice discourse, as it became evident to activists that demands needed to include structural changes to provoke climate action. At this time, climate justice gained prominence as 100,000 protestors at Copenhagen demanded strong and just action in negotiations (Martinez-Alier et al., 2014). The concept was first used, however, in the late 1990s in a document by corpwatch (Martinez-Alier et al., 2014).

Another distinction between the climate change and climate justice streams is that the climate change stream focuses on more technical fixes within the system, measured by figures such as degrees of warming, while the climate justice stream calls for more radical changes of the system (della Porta & Parks, 2014). As such, climate justice calls for strategies that involve more radical direct action, such as disrupting industry that contributes to climate change, whereas previously strategies included things like media stunts (della Porta & Parks, 2014). This difference plays out in Hadden's (2015) research, where she argues that the language of climate justice has been taken on by the media, state, and NGOs, who previously took up a scientific framing of climate change. This shift has worked in creating consensus within civil

society and is even seen in policy development; however, it has also received criticism by activists who express concern for co-optation and worry that if the anti-capitalist roots of the climate justice frame are abandoned, then policy outcomes will not reflect the demands of climate justice advocates (Hadden, 2015).

Climate justice has been regarded as more effective in facilitating climate action because it appeals more broadly, can bridge with other movements, and addresses multiple crises simultaneously (della Porta & Parks, 2014; Evans & Phelan, 2016). Bedall and Görg (2014) argue that climate justice re-politicizes the issue of climate change by highlighting how multiple crises (ecological, economic, social) have interrupted the hegemony of neoliberalism present in climate politics. A potential danger in employing the climate justice discourse, however, is the possibility of watering down the message or trying to appeal to so many issues that they are no longer given adequate attention and depth. Later chapters will demonstrate how some organizations included in my sample tie climate and social issues together into a cohesive climate justice narrative.

**Chapter Three: Research Design**

**Introduction**

The purpose of my research is to examine the websites of Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to determine which climate change discourses are prevalent and what they reveal about how the climate crisis is understood among a sample of civil society groups in Canada. This chapter will outline my research design, including my research questions, methods of data collection, sampling criteria, and my approach to critical discourse analysis. A chart detailing the organizations included in the sample for my research can be found in the Appendix. My investigation into civil society's use of discourse to influence the terrain of climate action in Canada asks the following research questions:

1.  What climate change discourses are most dominant among Canadian NGOs?

2.  What are the goals and strategies being promoted through these discourses?

3.  How are climate issues being framed by these organizations?

4.  Who do NGOs see as the primary agents and mechanisms of change in addressing climate change?

My intention is to understand the field of climate discourse among NGOs in Canada. This includes how they frame the problem of climate change, what their goals are, what means will achieve their goals, and what agents are called upon to act. Because I am interested in analyzing climate change discourse in relation to power, I utilize a critical discourse analysis methodology with an emphasis on political discourse as understood by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012).

**Data Collection**

My data is composed of organizational websites and documents, representing a snapshot of climate change discourse among Canadian NGOs in late 2019. My choice to use organization

website data to locate and analyze Canadian NGOs is informed by the ease of access of this data

to the public, the use of websites by NGOs to raise awareness and push for change. This section

will first outline my rationale for choosing this data source by highlighting the strengths and

limitations of website analysis for NGO research. Then, I will explain my sampling strategies for

selecting organizations and web pages to analyze.

### *Website Data*

Organizational webpage data has been the subject of considerable NGO research (Cukier

& Middleton, 2003; Greenberg & MacAulay, 2009; Haluza-DeLay & Fernhout, 2011). Websites

are examined by researchers because of the significance of an online presence in organizing,

public education, and engagement, and are increasingly important in the age of social media.

NGOS use their web presence to influence the public perception of the organization but also

serve other purposes such as educating and raising awareness of issues. They are beneficial

because they increase public identification with the organization and their goals, therefore

sustaining relationships with the public (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2002). While some

organizations do not regularly update or maintain their websites, often webpages are used as a

means for membership-oriented organizations to obtain donations and promote volunteer

opportunities and events (Kent et al., 2002).

A merit of website analysis is that the information is directly from the organization and

has not been interpreted by the media or a secondary actor (Haluza-DeLay & Fernhout, 2011).

The information provided online is what the organization presents to the public with the hope of

gaining their support, and therefore the materials will be accessible and provide comprehensive

information about their organization, the issues they have organized about, what they hope is to

be done, and how they aim to reach their goal. Focusing on the information presented to the

public on websites means that I am not able to see the organizational structure or inner workings of these groups and the debates that led to the choice of a particular frame or argument. However, my interest is in the public discourses presented by these organizations, not the organizational structure and internal commentary that brought them to develop their website content. Additionally, given that my research questions focus on how organizations understand the role of the public, it follows that my data must be accessible to the general public.

Another limitation of using data from an organization's website is that it is one-sided in terms of communication, as there is often no room for interaction between the public and the organization (Kent et al., 2002). As a result, Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook or Twitter are often used for online dialogue, with such dialogue not present on organizational websites (see Greenberg & macaulay, 2009). Similarly, Earl (2013) notes that when researchers focus exclusively on organizational websites, they overlook other online action such as social media posts and texts written by other actors. However, for the purposes of my research, traditional websites were selected because they are thought to capture a more complete picture of how an organization understands climate change and climate action compared to the often fractured nature of social media content. I am analyzing the content published by the organizations themselves, as the scope of my research is the discursive field of Canadian NGOs. While many organizations in my sample use social media, web page data and organizational documents online contain more in-depth information about organization goals and strategies. Because social media posts are often limited in terms of text length or content, they provide a less comprehensive and more abbreviated picture of the organization's goals and strategies and are not suitable for the present research.

My research provides insight into a specific point in time in Canadian NGO climate discourse, the eve of the 2019 federal election. While this is an important moment for the climate movement in Canada, the data I have collected is also useful for determining how these discourses have evolved or remained static over the years and this should be explored in future research. The dynamic nature of Internet data means that it quickly becomes outdated, as organizations develop their stances and update their websites to respond to current events. The information on a website is often frequently updated and edited without notice, and the previous version disappears (Koehler, 1999). This is important to note as it impacts the replicability of my findings, as many web pages changed even throughout the duration of my research. My analysis is on website data captured at a particular point in time when climate change had become mainstream, as climate change was a major policy issue during the federal election of 2019. My data was collected from November to December 2019, right before the COVID-19 pandemic began. However, despite the widespread worldwide changes that occurred after my data collection, my research is still important given how the COVID-19 pandemic has made the climate crisis and intersecting crises all the more pressing as they herald a new era of capitalism (Blakeley, 2020; Malm, 2020).

Internet archives tools such as Wayback Machine are useful, but typical website visitors generally do not see previous versions of pages; and whether the date of last modification is listed on a page is at the discretion of the site creator/manager. Additionally, these tools leave gaps in data and are often inconsistent, although often useful for researchers who seek to compare how web pages change over time (Mauther, 2005). Further, Mauther (2005) points out that the changing nature of the Internet is linked to power, as the ability to change web pages represents "preservation of and control over collective memories" (p. 818). As such, future

research on NGOs and climate change in Canada can use my findings to compare how discourses, frames, and strategies develop over time.

### *Capturing Website Data*

Once I determined the organizations to be included, both web pages and organizational documents available on their sites were downloaded for analysis. Web pages typically include broad categorizations such as About Us/Who We Are, Our Story/History, Our Mission/Values/, What We Do, and Get Involved/Take Action pages. Each organization's web sites had most of these elements with some variations, and many had developed specific campaigns or pages related to climate change. Organizational documents captured include annual reports in addition to infographics, open letters, policy briefs, and research publications related to climate change from the last five years. News, blog pages, and press releases were excluded from analysis, because, while they do demonstrate developments in discourse, they usually contain commentary about a specific event and depending on the organization, there can be a large number of posts that would be difficult to systematically analyze within the constraints of this project.

While examining each webpage and document, I sought to understand: 1. How the climate crisis was framed as a problem to be solved; 2. What was their goal/vision 3. What means were promoted to achieve their goals; 4. Which agents are to take action; and 5. How did they understand their role in achieving their goals. I also noted their mission statements (if applicable) and information about their governance and funding.

Web pages were originally accessed and captured in November 2019, although some corrections and additional pages were captured through December 2019. I used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to store and analyze the data and NVivo's NCapture feature to save the web pages. The number of pages captured for each site varied depending on how many

applicable and relevant pages existed, with some as few as four pages and others over twenty. Research Ethics Board clearance was not necessary to obtain my data because the websites are publicly available and my research did not involve interaction with human subjects.

While the dynamic nature of the Internet allows organizations to employ visuals such as animations, images, and videos (see Mauther, 2005), I do not examine visual data. Due to NVivo's limited capacity to capture animations, videos, and some images I focused my analysis on textual content only. Future research can and should examine how photos and other visuals are used by NGOs to convey information, frame issues, and construct narratives about climate change. Additionally, NCapture often failed to capture every element (including some text) on a web page so I used the Wayback Machine Web Archive tool to access elements that were missing in my data set, specifically by going to the same URL and timeframe as my data was originally captured (November and December 2019).

**Sample Criteria**

The purpose of my sample selection was to understand how climate change is framed by non-governmental organizations in Canada; therefore, I have selected a sample including various types of organizations (environmental, climate, religious, labour, advocacy) to see how dominant discourses surrounding climate change in Canada are reinforced, challenged, and interpreted by organizations who have stated their commitment to addressing climate change. Although these organizations may differ in their missions and strategies, they all have committed to some kind of climate action by way of having a section of their website addressing it and, in many cases, there is a history of joint campaigns or actions among several organizations.

To be included in my sample, an organization must discuss climate change as a specific campaign or focus, mention climate change in their mission statement/about us page, and include

enough publicly-accessible organizational documents and web pages related to climate change, what solutions and policies they support, and what actions they are advocating for the public. Basically, they had to have enough content for me to analyze and determine which discourses were present. Specifically, the information had to be located prominently on the site and not only found in their news/updates/blog page. While many sites had good information on such pages, news updates and other documents are often written by a single author and may not represent the organization as a whole and there was often a large volume of news articles on each site, which would have been difficult to manage.

Another criterion is that the organization must also have a uniquely Canadian site. This excluded many of the large NGOs, such as 350.org and Fridays for Future. Although these organizations do have a presence in the Canadian climate movement, they do not have enough information on their sites about climate change in a Canadian context. Since I wanted to analyze discourse at the national level, I excluded provincially or regionally focused organizations and only examined Canada-wide organizations. Many organizations include region-specific information, but they were included in my sample as long as the organization was not exclusively focused on a particular region or province.

### *Locating My Sample*

To obtain my sample of major English-speaking Canadian NGOs, I relied on web searches and existing lists of organizations. There is currently no exhaustive list of Canadian NGOs focused on climate change. In the absence of such a sampling frame, many researchers draw from multiple sources including rosters, databases, personal communication, and web searches (see Haluza-DeLay & Fernhout, 2011). Additionally, Earl (2013) notes that when a population list is not available, a purposive sample can be generated by the researcher by

determining which objects are relevant based on their knowledge of a social movement. Accordingly, I located multiple incomplete databases and directories of organizations and selected those that fit my criteria.

Similar to Haluza-DeLay and Fernhout's (2011) use of the Canadian Environmental Network to locate their sample of 49 Canadian Environmental NGOs, I used Climate Action Network (CAN) Canada's member list as a starting point. Minkoff (2002) argues that existing directories from within a social movement are particularly useful because they are more inclusive and accurate. CAN Canada is a coalition of organizations that "brings labour, development, faith-based, and Indigenous groups together with the key national, provincial, and territorial environmental organizations working on climate change" ("About CAN-Rac"). CAN Canada is affiliated with Climate Action Network International. CAN's member list was used as a sampling frame by Greenberg and Macaulay (2009) because of "its leadership role in policy advocacy on climate change" (p. 68). I also drew from the Green Economy Network (GEN)'s list of member organizations ("Our Members"). While an overwhelming majority of the organizations selected are members of either or both networks, membership was not a necessary criterion for inclusion. Additionally, both coalitions were included in my sample as they met all other criteria and are considered prominent in the field of Canadian climate change discourse. Other existing databases and directories I drew from include Charity Village, Canadahelps.org, and Goodwork.ca.

After going through existing lists and databases, I did a Google search to locate more organizations and to understand where these organizations stand in terms of relevance and prominence. Google is the largest and most widely used search engine, so utilizing it to locate my sample allows me to obtain what Earl (2013) refers to as reachable websites that simulates

how web users locate sites. Search queries included key terms such as "environmental organizations Canada", "climate change organizations Canada", "climate justice Canada", "climate change directory", "climate change charity", "Climate change protest Canada". Ultimately, my sample contains twenty-three organizations (N = 23). Table 1, located in Appendix A, contains a list of the organizations in my sample and selected background information, including CRA status and funding. The CRA registration status was confirmed through the Government of Canada's List of Charities database, which is publicly available on their website (Government of Canada, 2021).

### *Limitations*

Considering the size and scope of this project, there are many organizations that fit my criteria but were not included in my data set. I selected organizations that were prominent in climate change discourse and discussion in Canada. My Google search mimics what a person might search to learn more about climate change and climate action in Canada; however, the algorithm that Google employs in searches may be selective or exclusionary, which Earl (2013) notes would be remedied by selecting a random sample from all Google search results. Such a comprehensive data collection method is outside the time and resource limitations of a Master's thesis.

As discussed previously, my sample was purposively selected using a combination of existing lists and web searches due to the absence of an existing database of organizations. Therefore, generalizability of my findings is limited, which I have attempted to mitigate through the expansion of my sample size to 23 NGOs which vary in their origin, focus, and approach. While my findings cannot be generalized to all Canadian NGOs that discuss or focus on climate

change, the themes and major discourses analyzed still portray dominant climate change discourses among the NGO field in Canada.

Additionally, given the way that my sample was selected (i.e., though directories and a search engine) and due to my focus on large national level Canadian NGOs, smaller grassroots organizations and organizations without an Internet presence are not represented. It is possible for small grassroots organizations with a primarily social media presence (rather than website) to influence Canadian climate change discourse and that the organizations in my data sample are informed by the frames and arguments of these less visible groups. Future research should examine the similarities and differences between larger and smaller organizations in terms of climate change discourse.

**Data Analysis: Website Coding**

Data analysis was done in three parts. First, I coded the text of the organizational web pages thematically based on my review of climate change discourses. Second, I coded the documents again using the thematic framework that I established in the preliminary round of coding. This two-step process is recognized as typical in qualitative data analysis to refine categories and apply them to a body of text (Johnston, 2002). Next, I used a coding sheet to identify how each organization understood climate change, goals for climate action, means of achieving goals, and key agents. This part of my analysis focused on the following questions: How is climate change framed as a problem? What are the NGO's goals? What strategies are to be used to achieve their goals? Who (or what institution/actor) is called upon to act? Specifically, what actions are called for government actors, NGO actors, and individuals? To determine how each organization answers each question, I developed a coding sheet based on Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) structure of practical reasoning, described in more detail below. This coding

sheet allowed me to easily consolidate information and compare among organizations to

determine which framings and discourses are most prevalent within the data set and to further

refine themes and categorize based on the type of information. I completed a coding sheet for

each organization, and an adapted coding sheet was used to analyze specific organizational

documents such as joint open letters that were co-authored by multiple organizations. Table 2

presents the coding sheet I used.

**Table 2: Coding Sheet**

| Items to track | What this organization argues and where on the website it is located |
|---|---|
| How is the nature of the problem described and explained? (Circumstances or context for action, e.g. Corrupt corporations, deregulation) | |
| What is the goal(s)? (Imagined future or vision for climate action, e.g. Net zero economy) | |
| What means will lead to the achievement of stated goals? (e.g. Green New Deal, stop tar sands extraction) | |
| Who are the key agents? What other agents are identified? (e.g. The federal government, engaged citizens) | |

| | |
|---|---|
| What is the role for NGOs in achieving goals? (e.g. Educating the public, research and policy analysis) | |
| Organization's mission statement (if available) | |
| Notes | |

Once this coding sheet was complete for each organization, I determined how the climate crisis is represented, explained, and what response is advocated to address climate change for each organization. Critical discourse analysis was used to determine which environmental discourses (such as those outlined by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2007) or Dryzek (2013)) are evident in how the organization describes and explains the issue, what course of political action is to follow, or what goal to promote (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). For example, the tactics an organization chooses to promote to address the climate crisis is determined by how they perceive the cause of climate change, what they see as the solution for mitigating the crisis, and what actions will allow us to best deal with the impacts already occurring. Perceptions of the nature of the problem and its solutions are influenced by such discourses as they are manifested in policies, institutions, and norms (Fogel, 2007). Further, this methodological choice allows for an examination of not only which discourses are most prevalent but how institutions and social structures influence the development of organizational goals and strategies (Fairclough &

Fairclough, 2012). Additionally, the role of public participation is influenced by such discourses, as they may promote or overlook the role of civil society in making change (Inger, Horsbol, Bonnen & Pedersen, 2011).

### *Discourse Analysis*

My research questions seek to determine which climate change discourses are dominant among Canadian NGOs. Accordingly, critical discourse analysis is the appropriate lens through which my data is examined. Given that my coding sheet outlines the framing of the nature of the problem of climate change and the framing of solutions, one could argue that frame analysis would also be a sufficient means of examination. However, there are conceptual differences between frames and discourses that I highlight to demonstrate that discourse analysis is the best method for answering my research inquiries. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, the key difference between a frame and a discourse, according to Johnston (2002) is that discourses also examine the effect of "cultural processes" in the development of textual information and therefore employ more in-depth readings of texts (p. 72). For the purposes of my analysis, discourse is defined as an "ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005, p. 175).

Another useful lens for my research is Foucault's understanding of discourse as plural and constraining, as it limits what questions are asked, what positions can be argued, what policies can be developed and adopted, and who is permitted to draw from a particular discourse (Hajer, 1995; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). Nevertheless, my interest in climate change discourse is influenced by the recognition that by reproducing a certain discourse that understands climate change and its solutions in one way, other understandings are marginalized to the point that they

are only considered in the peripheral. Discourse analysis is useful to this end as it can highlight why a particular policy or concept does or does not become prominent in a particular context (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005).

The understanding of discourse that I employ in this research is underpinned by Hajer's (1995) recognition that environmental discourse is "fragmented and contradictory" (p. 1), as it is constructed and reinforced by various actors. Similarly, when an environmental problem such as climate change is discussed, a multitude of discourses are invoked (Hajer, 1995, p. 45). Discussions of climate change involve drawing from climate science, debates of ethics/morality, discussions of costs/benefits of various solutions, and so on. As such, not only does my analysis consider the textual information provided by the organizations but also the contexts through which these discourses arise. Similarly, Johnston (2002) recognizes that multiple discourses can be present simultaneously, as they are constantly evolving, dialectical, and context specific. This recognition is referred to as a rhetorical approach to discourse analysis (Johnston, 2002).

Additionally, I am also concerned with the ideologies that are embodied in discourse, especially those that reinforce or establish power relations, and as such I have adopted a critical approach to my analysis that can highlight how practical reasoning is influenced by such beliefs, values, and ideologies that have been shaped by external structures (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). This approach, according to Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), can be integrated into critical discourse analysis to better understand

> How the political question of what is to be done in response to the crisis is addressed, how and why certain answers, certain choices of how to act, certain strategies for seeking to resolve the crisis, come to prevail over others, taking account of not only the actions and strategies of social agents, but also of how the nature and tendencies of existing social structures, institutions, and relations of power bear upon such outcomes. (p. 12)

The crisis referred to in this quote is the financial crisis; however, it is clear how this approach can also be applied to how organizations understand the climate crisis. Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) political discourse analysis approach allows for an examination of the relationship between how an issue is understood and the course of action proposed in response. This approach highlights political discourse as argumentative in nature and focuses on practical reasoning, which refers to argumentation about what is to be done given a practical issue (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). NGOs use such argumentation to persuade an audience (whether website visitors or government bodies they lobby) that a stated problem must be solved using a particular means to achieve a particular goal, and this approach to discourse underscores how policies and tactics are influenced by the ways environmental problems are constructed (Hajer, 1995). Therefore, understanding how an organization frames the climate crisis allows me to trace the development of how goals and the means for achieving them are developed. Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) approach to critical discourse analysis understands the relationship between the various aspects of political argumentation including normative values and assumptions.

A final note on Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) understanding of the sphere of NGOs as political: since the political decision-making process is typically in a "context of scarcity" (p. 26) where resources are limited and decisions center around how to distribute them, NGO advocacy occurs within an adversarial process with fundamentally opposing priorities, interests, values, goals, and so on.

## Chapter Four: Overview of Organizational Website Content

**Introduction**

This chapter describes the major findings in my analysis of the websites of the organizations sampled. The chapter is comprised of sections detailing the common ways that organizations frame the problem of climate change, what actions are advocated for and by which agents, followed by a discussion of how NGOs in Canadian climate change discourse present their role as agents of change. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the content in the organizational websites before moving on to the findings of my analysis of the public climate change discourse of late 2019. As such, this chapter does not outline the various discourses identified in my study but seeks to describe the major themes found in how NGOs understand the origins of the climate crisis, their goals, and the means they claim will lead to their goals.

**Establishing climate change as a problem**

Organizations draw from a wide range of social concerns to establish the context for climate action. Table 3 below presents a summary of how the NGOs in my sample frame climate change. The economy is a concern for many organizations in establishing importance and urgency. For example, FOE Canada refers to climate change as "the greatest single threat facing Canada's people, environment, and economy" ("Climate Change and Energy", 2019b). A few also emphasize the impact that climate change will have on Canada and Canadians specifically. Others highlight climate change as a threat to human health, nearly exclusively by environment-focused organizations such as GPC, DSF, ED, and Ecojustice. Similarly, a few organizations invoke the language of human rights in arguing that Canadians deserve the right to live in a healthy environment and safe climate.

Moving beyond the broad understanding that climate change is a humanitarian threat, nearly half of the organizations frame the climate crisis in terms of justice or fairness, in particular highlighting the disproportionate impacts on some communities over others. Often this means a focus on existing forms of oppression that will be exacerbated by the climate crisis, with some organizations explicitly using the term climate justice; however, many avoided that terminology in favour of highlighting specific communities at increased risk—depending on the values and mandate of the organization. For example, CUPE and NUPGE highlight how climate change will negatively affect workers. The impact of climate change on Indigenous communities is also highlighted by many, including CAN-Rac, ICA, and GPC. A few organizations also identify how the climate crisis is connected to refugee and migrant rights, but this recognition comes from NGOs whose mandate is more focused on justice than the environment (such as the Leap and CPJ).

Another iteration of the justice frame was framing the climate crisis in terms of how it was connected to other issues or movements. The GEN, Greenpeace Canada, and Our Time connect climate change to increasing wealth inequality. Others mentioned specific social justice issues. Greenpeace Canada connects the climate crisis to other crises unfolding in Canada, including "economic inequality, precarious work, a housing crisis, and rising racism" (Greenpeace Canada, 2019, n.p.).

### *Attribution of blame*

There is a general recognition in my sample that climate change is caused by human activity, but beyond that there are a wide range of perspectives of who or what is to blame for the crisis we face. Some organizations' websites specifically highlight Canada's role in the climate crisis, such as SCCF who emphasizes the challenges of climate change for Canada, recognizing

its economic interest in fossil fuel production and consumption. Others argue that Canadians have a responsibility to act given their role as a global energy power. CAN-Rac is one of these, arguing that Canadians have an ethical responsibility. The CLC, CPJ, and CUPE also broadly address Canadians. It is unclear who specifically is meant by 'Canadians' although given that Canadian governments are widely understood as key agents of change in my sample, this language likely is in reference to the federal government. Given the deep connection between continued fossil fuel expansion in Canada and various levels of Canadian governments, political and economic interests are widely depicted as to blame for the climate crisis, including their ongoing failure to meet emissions targets as well as purchasing and investing tar sands expansion infrastructure.

Corrupt corporate interests are often blamed for maintaining our reliance on fossil fuels, such as by the two unions in my sample. CUPE goes on to highlight how corporate interests are supported by governments, highlighting that responsibility for the climate crisis is not evenly distributed among Canadians and residents (CUPE, 2013). Environmental Defence similarly blames the fossil fuel industry who uses public policy to further its interests. In addition to industry, the federal and provincial governments are also identified as actors to blame for the climate crisis, as part of the elite economic interests who seek to continue extraction. The Council of Canadians criticizes the federal government and some provincial governments for failing to address climate change and prioritizing extraction in order to become an energy superpower, as stated on their Climate Justice page. The Sierra Club Canada's report, *Clock is Ticking: A Mid-Term Report Card on the Federal Government and its Work on the Environment* (2018), contains a section on climate change that assesses various areas of the federal government's climate progress, and they criticize the government for falling behind on emissions

targets, lacking thorough planning and execution, approving pipeline construction, and not identifying its current fossil fuel subsidies or demonstrating how they plan on phasing them out. Several more organizations criticize the governments for not following through on emissions reduction promises.

Occasionally, capitalism is identified as a cause but no organization argues that we must eliminate it entirely. Some forms or aspects of capitalism to blame within my sample are: neoliberalism and global capitalism (GEN); unsustainable production, consumption, and trade (COC); a fossil fuel economy (Ecojustice); and economic globalization and unregulated market capitalism. Others do not explicitly identify capitalism as the cause but their calls to action include addressing root causes (Ecojustice) or structural changes (FFF).

**Table 3**

*Framing the problem of climate change*

| Frame | Organizations |
|---|---|
| Economy | JustEarth, CCL, FOE, GEN, DSF, Environmental Defence |
| Health | Greenpeace Canada, Environmental Defence, DSF |
| Humanitarian | SCCF, the Leap, NUPGE, LeadNow, GEN, FOE, CUPE, KAIROS, Council of Canadians, CPJ |
| *Justice* | |
| For workers | NUPGE, CUPE, GEN |
| For Indigenous peoples | CAN-Rac, Indigenous Climate Action, Greenpeace Canada |
| For migrants | The Leap, CPJ, JustEarth |
| Economic justice | GEN, Greenpeace Canada, Our Time |
| *Attribution of blame* | |
| Corporate interests | CUPE, Environmental Defence |
| Government (any level) | Council of Canadians, SCCF |
| Capitalism | |
| Non-systemic | Ecojustice, GEN, Council of Canadians |
| Systemic | Fossil Free Faith, GEN |

**Vision and Goals**

The various goals that organizations envision for change were primarily found on web pages such as Our Vision, Our Mission, or were identified by examining web pages or documents specifically dedicated to climate change (especially for organizations that are not exclusively focused on climate change as many are not). The language that organizations use to describe their visions and goals are often based on aspirational ideals, as opposed to  more concrete depictions of strategies and goals. For example, terms such as "a healthy environment for all" (Ecojustice), a "safe climate" and "healthy communities" (ED), "a greener, more peaceful world" (GPC) draw on values that might appeal to a wide range of actors or a particular intended audience. Not all organizations articulate an imagined future or vision, however, although every website does at least outline their goals for what climate solutions should look like, as this was a minimum requirement for the site to be included in my study.

Of the various visions and goals present on organizational websites, a green economy (also referred to as clean economy, zero carbon economy, etc.) was by far the most prevalent—seen from ten organizations: The Leap, KAIROS, GPC, GEN, CUPE, CCL, FFF, DSF, FOE, and Environmental Defence. A major theme in how organizations depict their goals is by emphasizing that the green economy will be strong and competitive. For example, the GEN envisions Canada as a clean energy global leader. Canada's role in the global green economy is highlighted often as organizations emphasize that there are profits and benefits to gain in the transition. CAN-Rac, for example, highlights that moving towards a green economy is an opportunity to create jobs and they emphasize the affordability of climate solutions. Environmental Defence seeks a clean and prosperous economy. GEN seeks "fundamental transition of industrial economy" to reverse Canada's role as a leading emitter (GEN, 2019).

CCL envisions a future where the Canadian economy stays competitive while also preventing the impacts of climate change.

**Means and Agents**

Nearly every organization views the federal government is the key agent who is called to act to reduce Canada's emissions and ensure that Canada is resilient to the impacts of climate change, however other agents identified include the private sector and NGOs as depicted in more detail in Table 4. Several organizations call the federal government to meet previously set international and domestic commitments to reduce GHG emissions' such as the Pan-Canadian framework (SCCF, CAN-Rac) and the Paris Agreement (CPJ). Often, the government is called to set new targets that are in line with keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees (CAN-Rac, 2019) To this end, it is unsurprising that many organizations demand that the government stop investing in fossil fuel expansion infrastructure and a few others highlight specific pipelines they oppose and call for the federal government to cancel them.  In some cases, they demand that future government backed projects be subject to climate impact assessments. For example, the CLC's site asks that the federal government consider climate impacts when procuring new fossil fuel projects. CAN-Rac's letter to Justin Trudeau calls for the federal government to consider climate impacts in assessments before approving any projects, ensuring that they align with emissions targets. This letter also calls for Canada to gradually phase out GHG intensive exports and for the federal government to stop letting oil and gas interests disproportionately define policy.

**Table 4**

*Means and agents*

| Means | Agent(s) | Organizations |
|---|---|---|
| Government regulations | Government (various levels) | GEN, the Leap, SCCF, DSF, Nature Canada, CAN-Rac, Environmental Defence, Ecojustice, CPJ, Greenpeace Canada, Fossil Free Faith, Council of Canadians, KAIROS, CLC, the Leap, |
| *Market-based activity/interventions* | | |
| Carbon price | Federal, provincial governments | SCCF, CAN-Rac, DSF, KAIROS, CPJ, CCL, JustEarth |
| Eliminate fossil fuel subsidies | Federal government | SCCF, CAN-Rac, Environmental Defence, KAIROS, CPJ, FOE |
| Private sector innovation | Private sector | Greenpeace Canada, GEN, Fossil Free Faith, JustEarth, CUPE |
| Just transition | Federal government | CAN-Rac, CPJ, Council of Canadians, CUPE, DSF, Environmental Defence, GEN, KAIROS, the Leap, NUPGE, Our Time |
| Green New Deal | Federal government | The Leap, Greenpeace Canada, LeadNow, Our Time, Council of Canadians |
| Collaboration between actors, increased participation of citizens | NGOs, citizens, private sector, government | Nature Canada, DSF, Environmental Defence, CAN-Rac, CPJ |

**Accountability and enforcement**

To ensure enforcement of emissions targets, organizations propose a number of mechanisms of accountability. CAN-Rac's letter names a few of these: an expert advisory group with a legislated mandate to give policy advice and monitor progress; and collaboration between levels of government, communities, labour groups, employers, and Indigenous rights holders.

Collaboration between actors is a common theme in the climate solutions found among my sample, with several highlighting the importance of various levels of governments, industry, and civil society working together to ensure representation (CAN-Rac, Environmental Defence, DSF, NC). In a similar vein, CPJ calls on the government to create more opportunities for citizens to participate.

### *Market interventions*

A strong and predictable carbon price set at the federal level is one of the most common calls to action among the organizations in my sample, found on the websites of SCCF, CAN-Rac, DSF, KAIROS, CPJ, CCL, and JustEarth. Of these, CCL and JustEarth further propose that the revenues from carbon pricing be paid out to households to ensure that they are not disproportionately affected by the increased cost of fossil fuels.

Another common proposed action is for the federal government to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies (SCCF, CAN-Rac, Environmental Defence, KAIROS, CPJ, CAN-Rac Letter). FOE Canada specifically calls for the Canada Pension Plan to stop investing in the fossil fuel sector. Instead, they are called to invest in a number of green projects and sectors. Clean energy and technology are mentioned the most, followed by clean public transit. These market interventions are promoted primarily by climate and environment focused organizations, but labour groups were also found to specifically promote investment in public transit, manufacturing, and green home retrofits. Other calls to action of the government include creating jobs (CAN-Rac letter, Our Time, & GEN), creating incentives that will spur innovation (DSF, GEN, & CCL), and increased government regulations—specifically surrounding energy efficiency, fuel standards, and methane emissions (GEN, Leap, SCCF, DSF, NC). The Leap, CPJ, and Can-Rac's letter also call for the government to invest in climate adaptation and resiliency for Canada.

The government is typically called to create incentives and invest in green sectors in order to transition to a clean economy—seeing the private sector a secondary agent. A few organizations promote a larger role for the private sector and industry, directly calling them to stop investing in fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy (including GPC, GEN, FFF, JustEarth). For example, GPC has a document geared towards banks and financial institutions to urge them to adopt a climate risk disclosure and cancel their involvement in current extractive projects due to human rights and environmental concerns. The values embedded in this call to action are non-economic, hoping their audience will act in the interest of human rights rather than economic growth. This appeal differs from how other organizations frame transitioning to clean energy as a way to grow the economy and secure Canada's role as a green energy power.

### *Just transition and Green New Deal*

The language of a green economy and green jobs is often present among organizations that urge for a just transition or Green New Deal for Canada, which nearly half of the organizations do. Just transition was very popular among my sample, called for by eleven organizations including CAN-Rac, CPJ, COC, CUPE, DSF, ED, GEN, KAIROS, the Leap, NUPGE, and Our Time. COC defines just transition as "an approach to policymaking developed by the labour movement that aims to minimize the impacts on affected workers as we transition to a fossil fuel-free future" (Green New Deal Guide PDF). CAN-Rac's mandate letter illustrates a more specific route, describing:

> A Just Transition Act that offers real assistance to communities and workers grappling with a variety of challenges, including automation and the necessary decline of greenhouse gas (GHG) intensive sectors (CAN-Rac, Mandate letter).

Just transition is also an important part of COC and GEN's One Million Climate Jobs plan, their

main call to action, which presents climate change as an opportunity to create good and

sustainable jobs. While the term just transition is not always explicitly used, the values of

equality and justice in transitioning to a green economy still promoted. For example,

Environmental Defense calls for a fair transition for workers and communities (The Single

Biggest Barrier to Climate Action in Canada: The Oil and Gas Lobby, 2019c).

With a similar premise to just transition, five organizations call for a Green New Deal for

Canada including the Leap, Greenpeace Canada, LeadNow, Our Time, and Council of

Canadians. The wider use of just transition over Green New Deal may be that the latter

originated in the United States and has a distinct context in American political history. Both

terms intertwine the solutions for climate change, economic inequality, and social justice.

However, the interpretation of what, concretely, each of these things looks like varies

significantly.

Given how NGOs often emphasize how climate change intersects with other social

issues, it is no surprise that these strategies are so present in my sample. Our Time's entire

mandate is for a Green New Deal for Canada, arguing that it would address the climate crisis,

create millions of good union jobs, invest in sustainable infrastructure, and promote justice and

Indigenous sovereignty. Similarly, the Council of Canadians believes solutions must be focused

on addressing multiple intersecting crises, and as a result, their main proposal is One Million

Climate Jobs in addition to a Green New Deal and just transition. The Leap states that the

principles of a just transition must be included in the Canadian Green New Deal to ensure that

inequality is tackled at the same time as the climate crisis to address the injustices in our current

system.

**Table 5**

*How NGOs understand their role in addressing climate change*

| Role | Organizations |
|---|---|
| Hold governments accountable/pressure governments to act | DSF, FOE, Council of Canadians, CAN-Rac, Our Time, Greenpeace Canada, GEN, the Leap, LeadNow, CCL, JustEarth |
| Push citizens to act (e.g. lobbying, petitions, voting) | CCL, CRP, LeadNow, CPJ, KAIROS, Greenpeace Canada, JustEarth, Ecojustice, Environmental Defence, FOE, the Leap, GEN, Our Time |
| Education/research | SCCF, CAN-Rac, CPJ, Environmental Defence, KAIROS, Greenpeace Canada |
| Build broad-based social movement | The Leap, NUPGE, KAIROS, Fossil Free Faith, Our Time, CPJ |

**The role of NGOs**

Given how the previous section demonstrates how NGOs identify governments as the primary agents in addressing the climate crisis, many organizations believe their role as an organization is to apply pressure on the government and engage citizens through various means, illustrated above in Table 5. Additionally, given that the federal government is overwhelmingly identified as the key agent, it is no surprise that one of the main roles of NGOs includes holding governments accountable and pushing them to. LeadNow, CCL, and JustEarth also promote directly lobbying MPs, and CAN-Rac and DSF highlight their work lobbying the federal government.

Lobbying is not only endorsed at the organizational level, as many of the NGOs encourage citizens to lobby their MPs, including CCL, CRP, JustEarth, LeadNow, KAIROS Canada, GPC, and JustEarth. To affirm this strategy, CCL Canada states that citizens can directly influence policy, so long as they are trained and organized. In their vision for public justice, CPJ urges citizens to participate in the public sphere (CPJ, 2020b) and engage politically with

pressure on their MPs. Signing petitions was also a popular suggestion among organizations such as Ecojustice, Environmental Defense, FOE Canada, CCL Canada, Greenpeace Canada, JustEarth, and the Leap.

The role of lobbying demonstrates a belief that citizens can influence the political process and there are a number of other ways that NGOs articulate their role in educating and engaging the public. LeadNow and COC emphasize participation in the electoral process as necessary to push elected leaders to act, with LeadNow's site prominently features their campaign to vote in "climate champions" and attributes the defeat of 25 Conservative politicians to their campaigning. Underlying this success is their belief in strategic voting. To this end, it is worth mentioning that many organizations' sites display their commitment to nonpartisanship ( including CRP, LN, FOE, and CCL).

Publishing research and reports is another way by which many NGOs seek to engage citizens and create public pressure, seen by SCCF, CAN-Rac, CPJ, Environmental Defence, and KAIROS Canada. For example, CPJ produces a variety of resources including reports, church materials, books, policy statements, media articles, and newsletters; and they urge site visitors to read and share their materials. Greenpeace Canada also publishes research as part of their goal of a "green and peaceful future" and highlights how they promote their findings that outline the steps to get there (2019).

LeadNow describes democracy as both an ends and a means, highlighting how engaging the public is a central strategy for NGOs. The Climate Reality Project Canada's entire mandate is about training citizens to be 'climate leaders' to solve the climate crisis, without really detailing how or what these trainings entail. To other organizations, engaging people involves providing

resources and tools through their websites or through in-person events, such as ICA's gatherings or Fossil Free Faith's resources page.

Building or strengthening a broad based social movement to push for change is another way NGOs in my sample understand their role, with several highlighting that the fight for climate action must include connecting to other issues: the Leap and NUPGE both highlight linkages to other forms of inequality; and KAIROS connects social justice with ecological justice, one of their key areas of work. The GEN emphasizes the role of civil society through collaboration between government, environmentalists, labour, and social justice causes, and argues that civil society participation can encourage political action through public pressure. The Leap highlights the need to "build and strengthen the truly intersectional and ambitious climate movement" (The Leap, 2019b). As a result, part of their work includes communications with the goal of educating people about this particular moment of climate crisis and inequality (The Leap, 2019a). Fossil Free Faith specifically invites young people to join the fossil fuel divestment movement as leaders to encourage their schools and churches to divest (Fossil Free Faith, 2019). Our Time has a similar understanding to LeadNow for how people can influence the government, specifically by training young people to engage in community organizing to elect candidates who will pass a Green New Deal. Our Time's home page details their plan to "organize, strike, vote, organize", which includes community organizing, supporting and attending climate strikes, knocking on doors to get Green New Deal champions elected, and then continuing to organize (Our Time, 2019). This strategy aims to create a mass movement, and they use the language of people power to demonstrate the importance of engaging people to fight for a Green New Deal. To do this, they provide tools and information on their website, including a document titled *We Decide: Green New Deal Communities*, an organizing guide to raise

support for a Green New Deal. Similarly, The Leap seeks to strengthen the climate movement by

working with a variety of actors who focus on different issues, ultimately trying to form

coalitions and tie them together through a shared vision (The Leap, 2019a). CPJ emphasizes that

they work with other social movements nationally and around the world, following their vision

of ecological justice and protecting natural resources (CPJ, 2019).

### *Organizational funding: Entanglements with banks and governments*

The final section of this chapter offers a discussion of the financial ties some of the

organizations in my sample have with major Canadian fossil fuel investors, mainly through the

support of banking institutions and government bodies. In interpreting the findings of how

organizations develop their claims to action and advocacy through the use of their websites, the

purpose of this section is to contextualize the content of my website analysis with how these

organizations often receive financial support from institutions and industries with political and

economic power and how organizations can reinforce and legitimize discourses that maintain the

status quo of fossil fuel extraction and export, along with other harmful practices for the sake of

profit. A few organizations have policies dictating where they can receive funding, for example

Citizens for Public Justice has an investment policy that mandates they avoid investing in

industries that go against their values, including fossil fuel sectors (CPJ, 2019). Greenpeace

Canada similarly states that they do not accept funding from governments or corporations.

A full list of the organizations in my sample with basic information including what I

could find about their funding from their websites and the CRA database can be found in the

Appendix as Table 1. Below is a table with a more detailed breakdown of the organizations I

found to have financial ties to governments and banks. What I show here is only what I could

find from webpage contents and documents, specifically looking for partnerships and financial

contributions from Canadian government bodies and major banks. Carroll and Huijzer (2018)'s project mapping the top institutional investors of Canadian fossil fuels names RBC as the second largest investor with TD shortly following as sixth and BMO at ninth. Their report also shows that Canadian provincial and federal governments combined own 2% of the fossil fuel sector.

**Table 6: Organizations receiving funding from fossil fuel investors**

| Organization | Funding source(s) |
| --- | --- |
| Climate Action Network Canada | 14% of funding from government, no further details provided (CAN-Rac, 2018) |
| Climate Reality Project Canada | Government of Canada is a partner |
| The David Suzuki Foundation * | BMO, TD, Banque du Canada (DSF, 2018) |
| Environmental Defense | RBC a sponsor in gala (Environmental Defence, 2020) |
| Nature Canada | $50,000+: Ontario Trillium Foundation<br>$10,000-25,000: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources<br>TD Bank<br>$1,000-10,000: RBC<br>Transcanada Pipelines Limited<br>(Nature Canada, 2019) |
| The Sierra Club Foundation Canada | 13% of 2019 revenue is from governments:<br>$44,000 from federal government<br>$32,000 from provincial governments<br>"Special partners": Government of Alberta, RBC, TD Foundation<br>(SCCF, 2019) |

*does not accept funding directly from governments

An important note is that Table 6 does not illustrate a complete picture of these organizations' funding sources and their websites were often vague when it came to detailing

their finances. Future research could also investigate these ties more systematically, including looking into NGO funding from fossil fuel-affiliated  foundations, think tanks, and other support derived from fossil fuel industries; and examine if these organizations have become more embedded over time.

Additionally, as evident in the table, these organizations are exclusively environment and/or climate focused and are some of the most prominent ENGOs in Canada; The David Suzuki Foundation, Nature Canada, The Sierra Club Foundation all have large revenue streams and Climate Action Network Canada claims the membership of eighteen of the twenty-two other organizations included in my sample including all of the other ones listed in Table 1. Big Green advocacy (as identified by Ciplet et al., 2015) is a major arena of civil society activity on climate change and it makes sense that the prominent and professionalized organizations represent the interests of their donors. This points to the broader issue surrounding the funding of advocacy organizations, as NGOs are dependent on funding by governments or corporations, and it follows that their funders can shape the positions they take. NGOs are also constrained by the need to protect their registered charity status. A number of organizations also have corporate partners that are not listed in the table (including Environmental Defense and FOE Canada), and it also makes sense for corporations to develop these relationships for financial reasons, including improving public relations and image. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the discourse of ecological modernization was still evident among my sample of websites, and the values underlying the ecological modernist storyline consist of economic growth and strength for Canada's global role.

**Chapter Five: Discourses of Ecological Modernization, Civic Environmentalism, and
Climate Justice**

**Introduction**

The results of my discourse analysis demonstrate how climate discourse among NGOs in

Canada is fragmented and contradictory (as argued by Hajer, 2005), and organizations often

invoke multiple (and often opposing) discourses in their understanding of the climate crisis and

what means they advocate in addressing it. I have identified three main discourses: ecological

modernization, civic environmentalism, and climate justice. This chapter will detail the

narratives underlying each discourse as evident in the data, but it is important to recognize that

the lines between each are blurred, and elements of all three are often present within a single

website, complicating the distinctions between categories. Further, I found that many of the same

elements were present across all three discursive categories. For example, justice was frequently

highlighted through the similar iterations of just transition and climate justice—two concepts that

are differently interpreted and mobilized depending on the organization.  Of course, the

separation into distinct categories has a rhetorical purpose and allows us to understand the field

of climate change advocacy more clearly; however, that is not to claim that climate discourse in

Canada is so easily split into these ideal types.

My depiction of each discourse is based on patterns found through coding, particularly

the coding sheets that distinguish the premises that make up each organization's call to action,

which is contextualized by the review of climate change discourses in Chapter 2. This chapter

contributes to the field of Canadian climate discourse studies through its description of how

climate discourse has been reproduced by NGOs in a distinctly Canadian context.

Given the understanding of discourse as fragmented underpinning my analysis, it follows that organization websites did not fit neatly into discursive categories and often drew from several identified climate discourses. That being said, I sorted my sample into three main discourses: ecological modernization (nine organizations: CAN-Rac, CLC, DSF, ED, FOE, JE, NC, NUPGE, and SCCF); civic environmentalism (nine organizations: CCL, COC, CRP, CUPE, FFF, GEN, GPC, LN, OT); and climate justice (four organizations: COC, ICA, the Leap, and KAIROS). Ecojustice is not in any category given its narrowed focus on environmental advocacy through taking on lawsuits to establish legal precedents. Indigenous Climate Action, while referring to themselves as a climate justice group and demonstrating a commitment to climate justice through Indigenous leadership is notably an outlier as the only Indigenous organization represented and unique in their vision and mandate.

## Ecological Modernization

The previous chapter highlighted that many organizations frame the climate crisis as a threat to the economy and emphasize the economic benefits of transitioning to a green economy. The prevalence of this framing, among other elements I will illustrate below, shows that ecological modernization discourse has a strong presence in my sample. Of the organizations I found to have many elements of ecological modernization discourse on their websites, most were environmental organizations (SCCF, FOE, ED, DSF, NC); CAN-Rac and CCL were the only climate-focused organizations; and interestingly the CLC and NUPGE (labour organizations) sites contained a lot of elements I identify with ecological modernization (similar to the findings of Nugent (2011)).

### *The nature of the problem: A market failure and risk to Canada's economy*

The ecological modernization narrative understands the origins of the climate crisis as non-systemic and therefore solutions are limited to what can be achieved through the market or through the regulation of it. For example, Citizens Climate Lobby states, "as long as fossil fuels remain artificially cheap and profitable, their use will rise. Correcting this market failure requires their price to account for their true social costs" (Carbon Fee and Dividend). Referring to the profitability of extraction as a market failure frames it as solely an economic issue, leaving out the other forces that have created this crisis and making the market the central area of climate action.

Conversely, the economic benefits of a green economy are also emphasized as a context for action. DSF's report *Zeroing in on Emissions* states, "recent research has shown that it is possible to decarbonize the industrial sector while minimizing stranded assets, preventing the 'social trauma' of unemployment, and avoiding carbon leakage" (Green, 2019, p. 26). The focus on stranded assets is telling of the normative values underlying this report and the choice of words surrounding the impact of unemployment is very interesting. Given the language used in this report and throughout the DSF's website, it is worth asking who the intended audience of these materials are. Similarly, other organizations (such as CAN-Rac and Environmental Defence) highlight how climate change mitigation is an opportunity to fix the economy, environmental crisis, as well as other social issues.

### *Vision: Grow the economy by addressing climate change*

Recalling Dryzek's (2013) discussion of how this ecological modernization collapses the interests of the economy and the environment into the public interest, CUPE's *Working in Harmony with the Earth* policy states, "CUPE recognizes that while energy is integral to economic and social prosperity, it must be produced and supplied in a way that is sustainable and

does not compromise the environment" (2013, p. 14). This quote not only epitomizes the compatibility of economic and environmental values that comprises ecological modernization, but the emphasis on economic and social prosperity implies that the average Canadian stands to win when the economy wins. This also demonstrates how discourse can subtly encode particular economic and political interests while claiming to speak to the common public good.

Given the emphasis on the economy in how ecological modernization discourse frames the importance of addressing the climate crisis, it follows that the interventions are framed in terms of their economic benefits. The prevalence of the terms 'green economy' and 'clean economy' in my data set speak of the prioritization of the economy over anything else. Further, an innovative green economy for Canada is seen as a win for all, equating the interests of market and state actors with the public interest.

### *Means: Incentives and Carbon Markets*

The goal of a green and clean economy is not exclusive to ecological modernist oriented organizations, but the means of achieving this goal through market activity and state interventions in the market illustrate how the discourse of ecological modernization persists in my sample. At the time of my data collection, various carbon market solutions were widely promoted. Eight of the twenty-three organizations in my sample advocate for carbon pricing, the most popular marketization of emissions. While the exact approach varied across the NGOs, carbon pricing, carbon taxes, and cap and trade all have the same ecological modernization premise: that markets are the avenue by which climate change will be mitigated. Organizations frame market-based solutions such as carbon pricing and the carbon fee and dividend as economically beneficial. CCL legitimizes this claim, stating, "We trust the experts and the vast majority of economists say that although not a stand-alone for addressing the climate crisis,

pricing carbon pollution is the most economically efficient way to reduce emissions" (Carbon Fee and Dividend). Climate action is pursued so long as it is profitable, and decisions are made through cost-benefit analysis based on the expertise of scientists and economists (Adelman, 2015).

Incentives and subsidies for industry are a means to promote innovation. This is demonstrated in CAN-Rac's 2019 mandate letter:

> We must redirect public investment into the foundations of the future economy and society by supporting research, development and deployment of renewable energy solutions, tailored to each region of Canada, while driving responsible economic diversification that ensures our country will flourish in the 21st Century (p. 9)

This letter to Justin Trudeau and various relevant ministries was also signed by thirty other organizations, including ten from my sample: CCL, CPJ, CRP, DSF, Ecojustice, Environmental Defence, Greenpeace, JustEarth, KAIROS, and LeadNow.

Carbon markets are not the only means of market intervention, and investment in green industry and technology are widely promoted across environmental, climate, and labour organizations. Dryzek (2013) identifies incentives through regulations or subsidies from the state as central to ecological modernization, whereby the government intervenes in the market to spur green innovation.

### *Justice and ecological modernization*

Social justice is a concern among the organizations identified with ecological modernization, but clearly it is peripheral to the main goal of economic growth. Some organizations, such as CCL Canada, with their carbon fee and dividend proposal, further propose that revenue be distributed back to Canadians in the form of a dividend cheque, equalizing the increased carbon price. Another rationale frequently brought up is that this will make green

products and technologies more affordable for everyone and will allow the government to invest in decarbonizing.

### *The role of civil society: Partnerships and collaboration*

Corporate partnerships between the state and civil society are also a tenet of ecological modernization in Canadian climate discourse. Environmental Defense has a corporate partnership page, for example. Organizations frame working with industry as a key way to reduce emissions. The term "non-partisan" is often used as well, demonstrating the organizations' willingness to work with a variety of actors to accomplish their goals. Additionally, NGOs (including many in this sample) must limit their political activities to protect their registered charity status, although those with non-profit status instead can be more openly political. Given that many of these organizations also work with the state, the language used is palatable for government and industry actors.

### *Discussion*

The ecological modernization narrative brings the interests of the state, industry, and civil society together; however they are not equally important. Ecological modernization discourse sees market actors as the primary agent, but the state also has a role in regulating the market and incentivizing sustainable production and consumption. Civil society's role is secondary, acting as a consultant for state and market actors so that their perspective is considered. This does not mean that they necessarily have a meaningful role in final decision making because they are not the experts, so the inclusion of marginalized groups or NGOs is often performative. This is not to say that the way organizations invoke other discourses about justice are not performative,

however I will illustrate that the other discourses of civic environmentalism and climate justice typically have a more participatory role for civil society and the public.

**Civic Environmentalism**

The basic narrative of civic environmentalism is that elite interests have dominated decision-making by buying their way into politics, harming the environment and climate for the pursuit of profit. Therefore, to address this undemocratic imbalance of power there needs to be increased participation and collaboration from citizens and civil society in decision making (Shutkin, 2001). A sustainable economy is the goal of both ecological modernization and civic environmentalism, but the means by which this is achieved is through democratizing decision making processes and empowering voices that have been disempowered by the influence of fossil fuel industry. A major limitation of the focus on democracy, however, is that the means of production are overwhelmingly privately owned, and a more representative democracy does not necessarily mean citizens will gain decision making power in these sectors motivated by private gain.

This discourse has a very strong presence in my data, nearly equal to that of ecological modernization, appearing on the sites of nine organizations: Our Time, LeadNow, Greenpeace Canada, the Green Economy Network, CUPE, the Climate Reality Project, Citizens Climate Lobby, Fossil Free Faith, and Council of Canadians. Organizations like Our Time and LeadNow are primarily focused on increasing citizen participation in the Canadian political sphere, fitting nicely with the main principles of civic environmentalism. Beyond that, there is a wide range of types of NGOs in this discursive category.

*Nature of problem: Profit vs. Planet*

The civic environmentalist narrative's origin can be classified as either systemic or non-systemic, a distinction that aligns with Backstrand and Lovbrand's (2007) notion of radical and reformist branches of civic environmentalism. The reformist branch here might understand the climate crisis as caused by corruption where an elite group's pursuit of profit creates the circumstances we currently face. This would be a non-systemic origin, according to Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) explanation, because it is a moral failing of a group of actors that could be remedied without changing the entire economic system.

This is in contrast to a systemic origin, which Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) argue is about the nature of the economy, which can be understood either as the inherent nature of capitalism or as a particular type of capitalism, such as neoliberalism. The civic environmentalist narrative highlights the wealth behind industry and government actors and how their economic clout enables them to have increased political power, resulting in subsidies and the relaxing of regulation and taxes. Several organizations highlight the role of corporate influence on the government and blame this influence for Canada's lack of action on the climate crisis, including CPJ, CUPE, ED, FFF, and NUPGE. Civic environmentalist discourse also emphasizes that social inequalities are also the result of a lack of participation from citizens, which is further argued to be a lack of democracy, such as by CUPE, ED, and NUPGE.

### Goals: Democracy, an end and a means

> We envision a Canada where freedom, fairness, and integrity are central to our democracy. We envision a Canada where transparent and responsive public institutions enable people to shape decisions that affect their lives. LeadNow is driven by the belief that democracy is both an ends and a means. We want a more open, accountable, and representative democracy because decisions should be driven by the people whose lives they affect (LeadNow, Our Vision).

This excerpt from LeadNow's Our Vision page demonstrates the hallmark of civic environmentalism: restoring democracy by increasing civil society participation and transparency in government institutions. It also illustrates a reimagining of Canada and speaks to the function of democracy in this imaginary.

However the nature of the climate crisis is understood, the goal primarily is to mitigate climate change and restore democracy, and the means for achieving that goal is increasing the participation of citizens both politically (by balancing the power of industry) and economically (such as through a just transition). Following this premise, the claim for action is for citizens to participate and for the government to pass regulations and policies to restore democracy and fairness for all.

Like ecological modernization, the discourse of civic environmentalism also imagines a green economy, but this is in addition to other goals including democracy and participation. Underlying these goals are values of sustainability and fairness. Given that stated values do not necessarily reflect the actual desires of agents, I would also argue that the narrative embedded in civic environmentalism values economic growth, but it is not higher in priority than other goals in the way that it presumably is for ecological modernization.

Civic environmentalism seeks increased transparency from the state, particularly around fossil fuel subsidies and environmental impact reports for fossil fuel projects. KAIROS calls for independent and government-funded studies to understand the impact of tar sands extraction, and for Indigenous peoples to be actively involved in the process and for the results to be accessible to the public. Eliminating fossil fuel subsidies is a very common call to action, present among many organizations (CPJ, DSF, ED, JE). While this action is promoted widely within my

sample, it fits nicely within civic environmentalism as it seeks to reduce the influence of industry and empower citizens, in addition to halting emissions of course.

Collaboration between different actors is present among all three main discourses present in my sample, however they take a slightly different approach and have differing intentions. For example, many organizations call for increased collaboration between government, industry, and civil society. True for all calls for collaboration, though, is the fact that the interests and goals of different actors are often incompatible. Nonetheless, the civic environmentalist approach sees this collaboration as essential to increase participation among groups who previously were not included. Organizations urge increased participation by directly calling citizens to get involved in climate action through lobbying and creating political pressure. As a result, NGOs have the role of educating and inspiring citizens to action.

The strategy of divestment fits within civic environmentalism. While it is often used as a publicity tool, it is a way for individuals and groups to try to assert their power in the face of corporate influence. For example, by urging schools and churches to divest, Fossil Free Faith's ultimate aim is to take the money out of the fossil fuel industry. However, they also urge investment in green technology instead, which reinforces the ecological modernist claim that we can use market strategies to shift to a low carbon economy.

The meaning of democracy and how democratization should take place varies depending on the orientation of the organization. Some emphasize increasing democracy through community consultations, as argued by the GEN in their call for a just, sustainable, and participatory transition (GEN Common Platform 2016). Additionally, many organizations emphasize the need for marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples, to become active participants in future projects. COC, in contrast, understands democratization as "directly

challenging the influence of corporations and the wealthy, corporate capture, and false market solutions that are preventing climate action" and calls for increasing taxes on the rich and on corporations to pay for the transition to a green economy (GND Guide).

### *Discussion: Who is a citizen?*

The strong emphasis on engaging citizens to restoring democracy in Canada raises questions of who is considered a citizen and what democracy means. While the data analyzed here does not have the answer to these big questions, the prevalence of this Canadian type of civic environmentalist discourse among NGOs shows that a strong and effective climate movement should address these questions and further develop a stance that is inclusive of all. The next discourse of climate justice that had a minor yet notable presence on many websites typically emphasizes groups that have been excluded from decision-making and the need for real climate action to redress systems of inequality.

### Climate Justice

Chapter Two pointed out climate justice has been understood as a stream of civic environmentalism (Backstrand and Lovbrand, 2016); however my data shows that the organization sites that most prominently display the principles of climate justice (The Leap, Fossil Free Faith, KAIROS, Indigenous Climate Action, and Citizens for Public Justice) differ from those who I identify with civic environmentalism.

The calls to action for climate justice activists are radical and challenge the root causes of climate change (i.e., fossil fuel driven capitalism), and often endorse direct action tactics. What separates several of the organizations in my sample from this movement, however, is the context in which climate justice is invoked. Many organizations had elements of all three discourses on

their websites, often framing climate change in terms of the inequalities it perpetuates; but the most common calls to action are limited to market-based strategies and increased participation that do not emphasize the need to ensure that marginalized groups are able to participate. This finding aligns with De Lucia's (2014) assertion that the concept of climate justice has been stretched very thin, raising the question of whether the language is chosen to appeal to the primary audience's values (especially for NGOs that rely on donations) rather than to mobilize action on the issues.

### *The systemic origins of the climate crisis*

While justice-oriented framing is common among the organizations, climate justice is more explicit about the shared systemic cause for the climate crisis and other issues. Fossil Free Faith, for example, refers to climate change as a systemic issue. Interestingly, GEN and CAN-Rac specifically blame capitalism but their claims to action are limited to market and state activity. One of the most important critiques coming from the climate justice movement is the understanding of the global disproportionate responsibilities and impacts of climate change, where wealthier countries emit the most and the poorest countries will bear the worst impact. Canada's responsibility as a large emitter is brought to light by several organizations in their framing of climate change, and calls to action include increasing Canada's financing of international climate mitigation and adaptation as well as reducing future emissions. While not a popular call to action by any means, this excerpt from the Leap's *Migrant Justice is Climate Justice* document illustrates one of the central concepts of climate justice, calling for

> ...the rich countries of the global North, which bear the primary responsibility for climate change, welcoming cross-border migrants displaced by extreme weather can be part of paying their "climate debt" to the rest of the world  (The Leap, *Migrant Justice is Climate Justice*, n.p. )

However, it is important to recognize that calls for systemic change (such as those made by the Leap) often do not detail specifically how or who is expected to make large-scale transformation a reality.

### *Goals: Addressing multiple crises at once*

Where increased participation is an intervention present in all three discourse narratives, each understands what this means differently. Where ecological modernization points to increased consultations with non-state actors, civic environmentalism demands the democratization of decision making. Climate justice discourse also demands democracy, however it goes further than the civic environmentalist narrative by emphasizing the need to redress past inequalities and injustices. Organizations representing climate justice discourse also highlight the connections between climate change and other forms of inequality, for example the Leap states they are a "new organization dedicated to advancing systemic change in the face of our intersecting crises of climate change, inequality, and racism" (FAQ). This linkage strategically brings the interests of many groups together and speaks to movement building tactics that are not prevalent in the narratives of other climate discourses.

Notably each of the religious organizations in my sample explicitly call for justice. FFF and COC refer to climate justice, whereas KAIROS and CPJ similarly refer to ecological justice. KAIROS articulates their understanding of ecological justice, which

> Includes social justice–participation in decision making and sustainable use of natural resources– and requires putting the economy in its place as a subsystem within society and the wider natural world. In an ecological economy, production and consumption are determined by social needs and ecological balance. The goal of economic activity is to produce enough to meet the needs of creation rather than seeking endless growth which is impossible on a finite planet. (Ecological justice)

Fossil Free Faith refers to climate justice as the "defining moral issue of our time" (FFF, 2019, n.p.). JustEarth is the only environmental organization to recognize climate change as a faith issue and further connect it to peace, highlighting the refugee crisis and potential for increasing and intensifying conflicts and war. As discussed in my literature review, outside of the desire for justice in itself, there are strategic reasons why the discourse of climate justice is invoked and this is evident in how some of the organizations articulate their visions.

### Means: Building a movement

COC's climate justice page states,

> Climate justice demands that we address the root causes of the climate crisis, including unsustainable production, consumption and trade. Real solutions must be based on democratic accountability, ecological sustainability and social justice. (COC, 2019, n.p.)

This quote articulates a systemic understanding of the climate crisis and its solutions that is most obvious among climate justice oriented organizations. The means of achieving climate justice often go further than the calls for increased participation from civil society, urging the strengthening of a movement comprised of a wide range of voices. This strategy goes beyond collaborations and partnerships and offers a more radical participation through coalitions and movement. NUPGE's site shows a piece of commentary from their president that states,

> Tackling climate change will require addressing its uneven impacts across countries and communities. Workers must be a part of ensuring the transition to a decarbonized economy is a just and equitable one. In other words, the struggles for equality, social justice, and sustainability must all be linked. (NUPGE, 2019, n.p.)

### The construction of a climate justice narrative

Climate justice discourse present in my data highlights an important critique and the number of organizations that emphasize the importance of justice in climate solutions is undoubtedly a good thing. However, it is important to recognize that this discourse was

considerably less prominent than the other two and the prevalence of market solutions and incentives in how organizations envision climate action. Additionally, compared to the narratives underlying ecological modernization and civic environmentalism, climate justice discourse is lacking in development and detail, a finding that aligns with Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) observation that narratives more reformist in nature are typically the more developed position, whereas radical narratives often lack clarity and consensus. This vagueness has implications for how well climate discourse can counter competing discursive claims. Generally, climate justice discourse as represented in my data seeks build coalitions and strengthen an intersectional movement for more radical change.

### Discussion and Conclusions: A better Canada?

A major criterion for an organization's inclusion in my research was a uniquely Canadian site because I wanted to examine how NGOs understand the climate crisis in a Canadian context. Accordingly, there was a wide range of perspectives and visions for what climate action would look like in Canada. The risks that climate change poses for Canada's economic security are often highlighted as a rationale to take action; and Canada's role as a global political and economic power in the future is also a common concern in my sample. This stance was common among ecological modernization-oriented organizations, who widely promote market interventions and green innovation. On the other hand, a Canadian brand of civic environmentalism offers a more critical view of Canada's role in the climate crisis and speaks to an aspirational vision of Canada. For example, a document from Environmental Defence states,

> Canada is bigger than oil. The opportunities that are available to Canadian businesses, citizens, and governments get shortchanged when one industry is able to hijack public policy on energy development and environmental protection. (Environmental Defence, 2019)

Recalling how the civic environmentalist narrative calls citizens to reassert their agency and restore democracy, this discourse challenges the idea that a better Canada is limited to eco-entrepreneurship and green capitalism as envisioned by many organizations (Gunster et al., 2021). This finding is a slight divergence from Gunster et al. (2021), who saw left populist discourse represented in their study as lacking in an understanding of what Canada could and should be. However, the presence of climate justice discourse is lacking in this area, although this may be a strategic choice given Gunster et al.'s (2021) discussion of the negative associations that so-called Canada brings, namely of colonization and violence for many. Grappling with Canada's national identity and imagined future is beyond the scope of this project, but the findings of my discourse analysis raise questions of how framing could be more effective to articulate a vision of justice and equality in the face of rising nationalism and continued tar sands expansion.

**Chapter Six: Conclusions**

My research examined Canadian NGO websites to uncover what discourses were prevalent in how organizations understood the climate crisis. This understanding informs what solutions are presented for the social and environmental impacts of climate change in Canada. As a part of civil society, NGOs seek to influence the state and my thesis demonstrates the various policies and actions that Canadian NGOs want the federal government to enact. These proposed actions are discursively constructed based on interactions between the state, civil society, market actors, the media, and the public. The climate discourses presented communicate the arenas of change that are possible in light of climate catastrophe, but by presenting us with this discursive web of ecological modernization, civic environmentalism, and a watered-down climate justice, Canadian NGSs limit our imagination to what can be achieved through the government's goodwill.

Most of the websites changed significantly from when I originally captured them in the fall of 2019. While systematically comparing the previous web pages with the updated ones is not possible within the timeframe and scope of this thesis, I want to point out a few observations. The Leap and Our Time are no longer active, and a brief skim of the current versions of the websites show a shift to more climate justice language and less emphasis on carbon pricing, the latter likely due to the adoption of a federal carbon price. Future research in this area should examine which narratives NGOs in Canada draw from in this post-COVID chronic emergency (as Malm (2020) might refer to our current state of affairs).

What do the major findings and analytical insights in this thesis tell us about what tactics might be effective for the climate movement? It is difficult to answer this with much optimism given current affairs and the IPCC's March 2022 report stating with high confidence that in the

immediate and near term, increasing climate change related risks for humanity are unavoidable now regardless of future emissions. While challenging even at current levels of global warming, adaptation strategies that address inequality and vulnerability can reduce its worst impacts. It is no longer a matter of opinion that climate change adaptation must be combined with social programs to improve resilience and vulnerability to the climate change related hazards to come, with the IPCC specifically highlighting the need to fund basic services, infrastructure, food security, and poverty reduction for billions of people—especially as many communities have reached their adaptation capacity given their limited access to resources (IPCC, 2022).

The trends towards climate justice framing and linkages to other social movements and issues (economic justice, racial justice, migrant justice, etc.) are clearly necessary, and while mitigation is not completely futile, the IPCC report indicates that adaptation and reducing risk and harm must be a primary focus. However, new to 2022's report is a discussion of how more risks have been the result of poorly conceptualized or implemented adaptation measures; in addition to an assessment that adaptation measures so far have been too small scale or sector-specific, fragmented, and are not designed for long term challenges. Indeed, adaptation measures thus far have been focused on short term benefits often at the expense of a future capacity to act (IPCC, 2022). Many limits for adaptation have been surpassed—some ecosystems including coral reefs, rainforests, and polar regions have already reached hard limits.

Given my findings and the increasing awareness of what the future will look like without meaningful action, there are a wide range of future research directions to take. First is how social change agents can most effectively communicate what the IPCC reports tell us, including what types of appeals to the public NGOs and other groups should make. In an increasingly precarious economy and climate for the majority of Canadians, it may be wise for organizations to abandon

the argument that we all stand to win when the economy is strong—as I fear that this façade is no longer believable. However, this point must be understood in relation to the nature of NGOs and politics in Canada, as I also found that many organizations have financial entanglements with fossil fuel investors, which points to both the insidiousness of the Canadian fossil fuel industry and the constraints that NGOs often have due to their need for funding and the security of their registered charity status. Future research should examine these connections further and seek to understand how NGO messaging and advocacy is shaped by these entanglements. Additionally, perhaps the findings of my discourse analysis point to the need to expand our imagination for what is possible to achieve, especially given the consequences thus far of limiting our dreams and goals. Finally, a fruitful area of future research is examining the discourses underlying the messaging of less mainstream voices that were not represented in my study, including Indigenous peoples and others fighting for real justice.

Another alarming development since 2019 is the increasing presence of right-wing nationalism, globally and specifically in Canada, although the latest federal election demonstrates limited support of the People's Party of Canada. The more recent mainstream coverage of the Freedom Convoy, however, shows at the very least a wider tolerance of right-wing reactionary views not excluding resistance to climate action and support of tar sands expansion. Gunster et al.'s (2021) discussion of how opponents of tar sands expansion need to counter the petro-nationalist discourse maintaining Canada's codependence with the fossil fuel industry has unfortunately become more relevant than when my website data was originally collected. However, the authors point to a pertinent reason why organizations may be hesitant to discursively reclaim the ongoing colonial project of Canada, an "oil and gas producing

company"[1] (Trudeau, 2021). Regardless, the fight for a safer and more livable climate and world necessarily means combatting a multitude of oppressive systems and ideologies.

A central concern of my discourse analysis was to understand the various narratives that Canadian organizations use to develop their claims for action to address the climate crisis, drawing on discourses and imagined futures. What narrative threads are sewn into Canadian public discourse about climate change? I found several: the most cost-effective way to mitigate climate change is through marketization and incentives for industry and technology; elite interests have overrun the political sphere preventing the participation of the rest of us; Canada must do its fair share to reduce emissions and pay for the damages to highly vulnerable countries. These premises establish the nature of the solutions organizations advocate for and define what it would mean to solve the climate crisis.

While the distinctions between discourses are blurred and organizations draw from a range of different (and often contradictory) discursive elements in their website materials. There are a few trends that were noteworthy. First, ecological modernization discourse underpins much of the framing of climate change as a threat to the Canadian economy and the benefits of transitioning to a zero-carbon economy through market interventions and green innovation. Second, a Canadian stream of civic environmentalist discourse has a strong presence in how many NGOs attribute the climate crisis to an imbalance in decision-making power between elites and the rest of Canada where the solution is then to restore democratic participation in political institutions. Finally, climate justice was less represented than the other discourses but offered a more critical understanding of the nature of the climate crisis and emphasized the need for a

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[1] Said by Justin Trudeau himself in what appears to be a Freudian slip
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TZpg8zmtrQ

broad-based movement that unifies the fights for social, economic, and ecological justice—
although the details for how this is to be done are notably vague.

Recalling the IPCC report findings discussed at the beginning of this chapter, one could
make a compelling case that climate change is not something that can be "solved" per se. I want
to make the point of emphasizing the urgency for the principles of harm reduction to be acted
upon wherever possible, including mitigating the likelihood of global warming beyond two
degrees and ensuring that vulnerable nations, communities, and peoples have the resources
needed to become resilient to the impacts current warming has and will have. But a major
contribution of this thesis is a critique of the Canadian political imaginary's ability to effectively
counter the forces preventing action in these essential spheres. Subsequent to *Corona, Climate,*
*Chronic Emergency* is Malm's (2021) book titled *How To Blow Up a Pipeline*, which grapples
with the existential dread that accompanies many of the conclusions made about the crises
emphasized here. Without attempting to paraphrase his poetically-written finale, clearly the
work's finalized title does not invoke inertia or condemn us to doom.

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Appendix: List of Organizations

**Table 1**

*List of organizations included in sample*

| Organization name (and abbreviation if applicable) | Year founded | CRA status | Source(s) of funding |
|---|---|---|---|
| Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) | 1956 | N/A | Membership dues |
| Citizens Climate Lobby Canada (CCL) | 2007 in U.S., 2010 in Canada | No CRA registration, 501(c)(4) nonprofit in U.S. | No information |
| Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) | 1963 | Registered charity through CJL Foundation | Individual donations<br>Grants<br>*Avoids investments that go against investment policy |
| Climate Action Network Canada (CAN-Rac) | | Not registered | Membership fees<br>Government funding<br>Foundations/NGOs<br>Individual donations<br>Interest/other |
| Climate Reality Project Canada (CRP) | 2006 in U.S., 2007 in Canada | Registered charity | Government funding<br>Foundation funding |
| Council of Canadians (COC) | 1985 | Registered non-profit | Individual donations<br>*Will not accept donations from governments or corporations |
| Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) | | N/A | Union dues |

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| David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) | 1990 | Registered charity | Individual donations<br>Organizational/foundation donations<br>Government grants |
| Ecojustice | Incorporated as charity in 1990 | Registered charity | Individual donations<br>Grants<br>Bequests |
| Environmental Defence (ED) | No information | Registered charity | Donations from foundations<br>Government grants<br>Corporate partners |
| Fossil Free Faith (FFF) | | Registered charity (under Faith and The Common Good) | Donations<br>Grants |
| Friends of the Earth Canada (FOE) | 1978 | Registered charity | Donations from individuals<br>Donations from foundations<br>Government grants<br>Selected corporations |
| Green Economy Network (GEN) | 2008 | Not registered | No information |
| Greenpeace Canada (GPC) | | Registered non-profit | Donations, does not accept money from governments or corporations |
| Indigenous Climate Action (ICA) | | Not registered. Fiscally supported by the Polaris Institute, a registered non-profit in Canada and the US. | Donations from individuals, organizations, and foundations |
| JustEarth | 2006 | Not registered | No information |

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| KAIROS Canada | 2001 | Registered charity (under the United Church of Canada) | Donations<br>Grants |
| LeadNow | 2010 | Registered non-profit | Individual donations<br>Donations from vetted organizations |
| The Leap | 2015 | Not registered. Fiscally supported by the Polaris Institute, a registered non-profit in Canada and the US. | Individual donations<br>Funding from the Polaris Institute |
| Nature Canada | 1939 | Registered charity | Donations from individuals<br>"Partners" include foundations, corporations, government ministries |
| National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) | | N/A | Union dues |
| Our Time | | Not registered, Supported by 350.org, a registered non-profit in the US | 350.org |
| Sierra Club Canada Foundation (SCCF) | 1892 in U.S., 1969 in Canada | Registered non-profit | Donations from individuals<br>Government (various levels)<br>Grants<br>Funders and 'special partners': corporations, governments |