**Who Speaks for the Trees? Analyzing Sources Featured in Canadian Environmental Policy News Stories.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The literature on environmental sustainability in Canadian news media underscores a dynamic discourse shaped by evolving journalistic practices and a growing trend in ecological modernization. Because of mainstreaming effects and the corresponding inclination to partner ecology and economics, the very definition of 'environmental sustainability' presented in commercial news media discourse appears to be changing. What had been referred to as a more balanced approach to sustaining existing ecosystems and biological diversity with the needs of society appears now to be more heavily weighted towards a society that allows its institutions and economy to continue to operate without any additional environmental restrictions. In this context, this study was designed to scrutinize the sources featured in Canadian environmental policy coverage by mainstream commercial news media, using coverage of the federal government's "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan" as a case study. Employing media institutional theory, gatekeeping, and agenda-building theory as analytical frameworks, the research explores how journalists select and represent sources, and the extent to which these choices influence news discourse. By analyzing articles from two national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, this study will identify patterns in source usage and how they are being represented; offering insights into the interplay between media practices and environmental communication in Canada.

**INTRODUCTION**

My interest in how the news discourse around environmental sustainability has and will continue to evolve comes from a career spent in Alberta, where the debate looms large on how best to combat climate change without crippling the economy. A representative example of this conundrum comes from a lyrical analysis of the music of Alberta born singer-songwriter *Corb Lund* (Watson, 2016) where the author says,

> "…many Albertans pragmatically accept the negative effects of the energy industry on agriculture and environment so that people can maintain employment and live decent lifestyles. 'This Is My Prairie' in particular represents this contradiction, and despite his frustrations, Lund—like so many Albertans—seems resigned to these circumstances and the fate of the land and remains even-handed in his assessment of his home province's politics, industry, and environment" (pp. 77-78).

In this context, my capstone project seeks to identify how the environmental discourse communicated in news media compares between Canada's two national coverage newspapers; the *National Post* and *The Globe and Mail*. While the presence of environmental sustainability discourse in the media is not new, it has grown increasingly more mainstream in recent years (Litofcenko et al., 2023; Raso & Neubauer, 2016). From the literature reviewed, there have been numerous definitions offered up for what constitutes "environmental sustainability". One paper dedicated to developing a working definition of environmental sustainability for environmental professionals states that it,

"could be defined as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity" (Morelli, 2011, p. 5).

At the time of writing, the Morelli paper had been cited 614 times which is a sufficient indicator of its merit in academic research. The literature review conducted here considers this to be an appropriate definition providing context for what follows.

To explore this issue in more detail, I conducted an extensive literature review focused on two research questions. These questions are designed to explore a methodology, theoretical framework and thematic focus that befits the subsequent capstone study. As such, I reviewed research literature to answer the following questions:

LRQ1: In the last 10 years, how has the academic community examined the discourse around environmental sustainability in news media?

LRQ2: what have been the prevailing themes emerging from the research?

In answering these questions, I am specifically looking for a sufficient sample of research across a blend of geographic contexts to gain a wider context and help eliminate some of my own personal bias being a lifelong Albertan.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The collection of academic literature gathered on this topic came from two main sources; a keyword search of the *Communication & Mass Media Complete* (CMMC) database and an exploration of the available literature using the research question; "how has environmental sustainability been covered in news media in Canada?" on Elicit.com; a technology tool that "streamlines the research process by finding relevant papers, extracting key information, and organizing information into concepts" (Elicit, 2023). The keywords used to search the CMMC database were "environmental sustainability" and "news media" or "news" or "news coverage" or "journalism" and "content" or "discourse" or "framing". This search resulted in 440 initial sources exclusive to academic journals. Filtering for the period 2013 through 2023 reduced the count to 341, which was further reduced to 143 by selecting only those articles with available references, meaning only those papers where a link was provided to each of the references. This was done for two reasons; first, to verify the integrity of the research and second, to be able to more easily find additional material sourced in the original article. An additional round of screening was done based on title and abstract, excluding those articles which lacked relevance to the subject material, often eliminated because of a more business-oriented focus which often studied the effects of advertising or consumer behaviour. This left a total of approximately 45 articles that I reviewed in full. The top five articles from the Elicit search were used as a supplement to the CMMC database search.

The full review of the collected sources identified the institution of the author(s), country of origin, author-supplied keywords, primary works cited, and a synopsis of the findings including important quotations. Labels, or "tags" as they are sometimes referred to, were applied

to each source identifying the research methodology, theory applied, and narrative themes derived which were used to synthesize the literature review.

I was also interested in how news media presented these themes. Subsequently, an additional search was done of news media articles featured in *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* to help develop a more recent view of the environmental discourse recently published in the news. Using a keyword search informed and adapted from the literature, the terms "environment*", "sustainab*", and "policy" were applied to the *Canadian Newsstream* database for both newspapers in the twelve months prior to this study (Dec 2022 – Nov 2023). The initial search resulted in 155 articles from *The Globe and Mail* and 90 from the *National Post*. I exported the top 20 most relevant articles (as determined by the *ProQuest* search engine) for each news source and selected every 4th article in the list to obtain a randomized sample to be reviewed in full. The collection of news articles was informed by the same thematical categories derived from the academic literature.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

In answering LRQ1, there were a number of different theoretical frameworks and research methodologies from the literature deemed worthy of discussion. The search was intentionally run without a theoretical parameter to explore different avenues for the capstone study. The more predominant or absorbing theories found in the literature are discussed further below.

Corporate and political communications are often distributed to the public via news media channels, which can be thought of as an agenda-setting activity when these materials are distributed in an effort to influence policymakers or the general public (Garcia & Greenwood,

2015; Raso & Neubauer, 2016). For example, journalists may present and/or interpret corporate reporting on sustainability, which is growing in significance among stakeholders but currently remains a voluntary process. Nevertheless, many companies, especially energy companies, regularly produce sustainability reports of some kind. Because this is a voluntary process, companies have a great deal of flexibility on what information is presented in those reports (Jaworska, 2018); at the same time, they might still be seen as an "official" document worthy of referencing in the news. Which is to say that some reporters may see these reports as being grounded in some measure of scientific rigour, which may not be true.

There is evidence that journalism practice has evolved from merely just reporting to making judgement calls and projecting authority on sustainability reporting or the broader "corporate social responsibility" (Kosterich & Ziek, 2023). For example, Kosterich and Ziek (2023) state that:

> "[J]ournalism is a mechanism for monitoring, scrutinizing, and holding those in power accountable for the actions and information relative to corporate social responsibility (CSR). In truth, journalism is quite apt to report on CSR at large but little is known about the practices that news organizations have implemented themselves in an effort to institutionalize social responsibility" (p. 374).

They also say that investigative journalism is, and has been, an important function of news media which helps expose corporate malfeasance or nefarious acts. But the topic of environmental sustainability remains in something of a grey area given the absence of formal regulations governing environmental sustainability reporting, making the coverage of these issues more subjective.

An alternative viewpoint, but one that also considers agenda-setting in the media, suggests that because climate science may be mishandled by certain news outlets, source information may actually be withheld, leaving journalists to craft their own narrative without a true appreciation for the subject matter (Boykoff, 2013). In this case, an agenda might be set by sources who are consciously/strategically withholding information from journalists.

Journalism has experienced a shift under the weight of market forces with a reduced workforce of journalists being forced to write on a variety of different subject matter while being pushed for personalization or even dramatization (Boykoff, 2013). Research shows that newsrooms have become understaffed at a time when credible sources are becoming hard to find. Nevertheless, the use of "official" sources, such as political parties, environmental groups, international agencies, universities, or think-tanks (Stoddart et al. 2017) remains a dominant practice in environmental journalism with citizens being represented much less often. For example, research by Raso & Neubauer (2016) about the Enbridge Pipelines 'Northern Gateway' project hearings confirms this observation, along with support for the economic argument that many news outlets use repeat sources because it is more timely and less costly for journalists to do so.

The challenges for today's journalists are expounded upon by Boykoff, "large-scale social, political, and economic factors influence everyday individual journalistic decisions, such as how to focus or contextualize a story with quick time to deadline" (p. 804). The impact resulting from tight timelines was reiterated by Stoddart et al (2017). This illustrates the tightening environment that today's journalists may find themselves in which increases the likelihood of agenda-setting, even if that is not the intention.

Laws & Chojnicka (2020) make good arguments in applying alternative theories, such as institutional theory, to assess media coverage on environmental sustainability. They say that "critical and social-constructivist theories challenge the positivist ideology and the myth of objectivity on (at least) two grounds that also have consequences for journalism: the grounds of ontology-epistemology and the grounds of ethics" (p. 1262). Such critiques about the "myth of objectivity" suggest that journalistic practices are subjective in nature, and shaped by various social, economic, and political contexts. For example, Laws & Chojnicka make the point that many newspapers are owned by commercial enterprises and the journalists and reporters who work for them are not exempt from institutional influence. One succinct and suitable definition cited by Lee is that "institutional theory therefore explains the profound influence of institutions that manifest in various forms such as the socially embedded rules, requirements, and expectations to which an actor must conform in order to ensure survival" (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 292). Institutional theory was applied in several other studies as well (e.g. Escrig-Olmedo et al., 2019; Kosterich & Ziek, 2023). More specifically, research out of the *University of Oregon* (Lee, 2020) applied institutional theory in the examination of corporate social responsibility reports.

Closely related to media institutional theory is gatekeeping theory, which can be an effective framework for examining the kinds of sources that appear in news media content. Vos & Russell (2019) elaborate on gatekeeping theory by looking at how institutional relationships can influence journalists and point to the relationship between news sources and journalists as one that is responsible for the co-creation of news. They say

> "gatekeeping theory conceptualizes social institutions as exerting force or pressures that ultimately bear on the news that journalists produce. Some pressures are positive—

making information move more readily through journalistic channels—and some are negative—holding back some forms of information" (p. 2334).

While it is more difficult for the researcher to ascertain what information is withheld, the specific information offered up to the media and by whom is the focus of the study that follows.

Another challenge is finding capable sources to speak on environmental issues. The sources that have been relied upon are often found to be political parties, environmental groups, international agencies and universities or think-tanks with energy companies appearing less often (Stoddart et al, 2017). The silence by energy companies in media stories may be strategic, given claims of greenwashing are now more heavily scrutinized. Rather than directly participate in media interviews, it might be better for companies to allow the economic arguments to be made on their behalf, such as through industry associations that have been formed in recent years to advocate in media for major resource development projects, like pipelines (Raso & Neubauer, 2016).[1] These associations might provide for an assemblage of credibility and be seen as an official news source; as mentioned in the Raso & Neubauer study; "members of these coalitions can then leverage their institutional backing to promote their shared discourses in the public sphere through the provision of information subsidies to news media" (p. 117). The paper also found similar types of organizations have been formed to advocate against these major projects.

In the text, *Mediating the message in the 21ˢᵗ century: A media sociology perspective* (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), the authors construct a gatekeeping model referring to multiple levels of influence in the production of news. They say this includes news sources, who are

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[1] This trend may be increasing given the emergence of ecological modernization (a theme that will be discussed in detail further on, but the premise suggests that sustainable endeavors can be accomplished economically).

sometimes the focal point of the story, but also those that provide context or background information to the story at hand. In either case,

> "sources obviously have a significant impact on media content because they are the origin for much of what journalists know. The most intentional influence occurs when sources withhold information or lie; but they may also influence the news in more subtle ways, by providing the context within which all other information is evaluated, by providing usable information that is easier and cheaper to use than that from other sources, and by monopolizing the journalists' time so that they don't have an opportunity to seek out sources with alternative views" (p. 108).

The authors also make the point that competing news outlets act as sources for one another. While it is not surprising that news outlets cover the same story, it is interesting to see how that coverage compares between different outlets, as well as which sources are featured across different outlets. This process might be explained by a theory closely related to agenda-setting: agenda building. "Agenda building refers to the process by which news organizations and journalists feature, emphasize, and/or select certain events, issues, or sources to cover over others" (Nisbet, 2018, p. 1). Nisbet (2018) discusses how the creation of news is negotiated between multiple parties, institutions and influence, all of which have an impact on what gets produced for the masses. Nisbet also writes that, "the more prominent the actor in coverage or the more frequently appearing a specific type of news peg, the greater the influence that particular source is inferred to have on the agenda-building process" (p. 3). So while there may be an economic argument for media outlets to use repeat sources, such activity may also bolster the agenda being presented and positioned by those sources. The frequency of sources featured in

news media discourse is something that can easily be quantified among a sample of news articles and will be a key component of the analysis undertaken in this paper.

**THEMES**

The following section serves to answer LRQ2, which focuses on identifying some of the prevailing themes from the literature. There were four themes most commonly featured, which have been categorized as political polarization, energy development, environmental public policy and ecological modernization. One of the key articles routinely cited throughout the literature came from Stoddart & Tindall (2015) looking at how Canadian news media have covered climate change governance. The paper found that

> "although there is a wide range of possible news hooks for discussing climate change, a
> relatively small group of issue categories is used throughout the key periods we
> examined. These include government responsibility, reliability of climate science,
> economic costs and impacts of responding to climate change, ecological and
> meteorological impacts of climate change, and international policy negotiations. Taken
> together, these categories constitute the core of Canadian national newspaper discourse
> on climate change" (pp. 414-415).

The discussion that follows will show that according to the research, some of these categories like economic impacts and policy negotiations remain prominent in the discourse, while others, such as questioning the reliability of climate science, are starting to be left behind.

**Political Polarization**

The theme of political polarization emerged as one of the most frequently discussed ones among news discourse (Bhatti et al., 2022; Laws & Chojnicka., 2020; Litofcenko et al., 2023;

Raso & Neubauer, 2016; Stoddart & Tindall, 2015; Vennemann et al., 2022). For example, the Vennemann et al. (2022) study looked at sustainability perspectives from residents in two semi-rural Alberta towns and found a significant gap between those who oppose and those who promote climate change policies. It is somewhat surprising that this disparity was found within the province of Alberta where, politically speaking, the government has been mostly conservative. However, the study points out that the political polarization experienced in Alberta "…is reflected in the policy decisions of Alberta's current conservative provincial government, which is actively rolling back and challenging initiatives set up by the previous provincial current federal government, often citing economic growth as a priority" (p. 840).

The previous provincial government, the New Democratic Party, had won the leadership from the Conservatives in 2015 after decades of provincial rule (Elections Alberta, n.d.). There has also been much political sparring between the UCP and the federal Liberal government over energy development in the face of new federal emissions policies. This tension was a key component of the UCP's 2023 platform; "protect and defend the ownership rights of Alberta to utilize its natural resources for the benefit of Alberta" (United Conservatives).

The media discourse examined in the Stoddart & Tindall (2015) study showed that political polarization had grown increasingly prevalent on the issue of climate change in the 15 years leading up to the study (from 2000 to 2015). However, details vary depending on the newspaper— at that time "*The Globe and Mail* more often frames climate change through debates over government responsibility, while the National Post is more likely to focus on debates over the reliability of climate science and the economic impacts of responding to climate change" (p. 415). Research analysing news articles collected more recently from these two newspapers shows these distinctions may be shifting. This more recent research indicates that

both papers are seen reporting on economic impacts and the debate over government responsibility (Alschner, 2023; Bishop, 2023; Radwanski, 2023; Radwanski & Jones, 2023; Corcoran, 2023; Dawson, 2023; Friedman, 2023; Potkins; 2023). As discussed in more detail later, these observations informed my research design.

**Energy Development**

For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen the umbrella term "energy" when accounting for a variety of different sources, whether they be oil, gas, or renewables. Energy development and the push to transition away from fossil fuels and into renewable sources was a topical issue in the literature. For example, a content analysis of Canadian newspapers from the *University of Calgary* (Wolbring & Noga, 2013) evaluated the extent and scope of "greening" activities. The study found that *The Globe and Mail* often pointed to the government's role to incentivize or support these types of activities, while the *National Post* was found to focus more often on communicating the potential economic benefit of greening activities. But both newspapers included greater discussion around natural resources as opposed to renewables— "green energy and energy sources which are seen as green are discussed significantly less. This indicates that there is more emphasis put on greening the energy sources currently being used, rather than turning to alternative energy sources" (p. 104). From the news articles collected in the last year, there appears to still be a significant number of articles covering the greening of traditional natural resources like carbon pricing and decarbonization projects (Bishop, 2023; Radwanski & Jones, 2023; Dawson, 2023).

Claims of greenwashing, particularly by energy producers, have been supported by findings presented in several research articles (Bricker & Justice, 2022; Gladwin, 2020; Horsbøl, 2020; Jaworska, 2018). These studies investigate disingenuous corporate communications being

made on environmental initiatives, a subject that is gaining ground in Canada. In fact, recent

legislation that aims to deter greenwashing by imposing penalties on those seen making

misleading environmental or social claims has been approved. This legislation is being opposed

by many corporations because of the uncertainty around environmental standards in general

(Jones, 2024). These kinds of studies of 'greenwashing' include Bricker & Justice's research

exploring Exxon-Mobil's announcement in 2017 that supported the implementation of carbon

pricing. They found that several news articles, sourcing political and academic figures,

applauded the move as one of the first energy companies to embrace the additional cost.

However, "investigative journalists quickly pointed out that ExxonMobil's environmental

rhetoric was not part of a concerted effort to have a carbon price actually implemented at the

federal level" (p. 523). Such findings are reflected in Raso & Neubauer's (2016) assessment of

the media coverage of *Enbridge's* Northern Gateway pipeline proposal. They demonstrate that:

> "…in the discourse analysis, the predominant frames in our sample reinforced the
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> economic imperative for bitumen exports while delegitimizing the concerns of pipeline
>
> opponents. This was significantly accomplished by granting official sources—especially
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> those from the Harper government and industry representative—primary definer status"
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> (p. 130).

How different types of sources are utilized in the media is another matter of concern that will be

discussed below.

**Environmental Public Policy**

News media continues to be an important source of information for a variety of different

actors with varying stakes in environmental policy. News outlets also continue to provide an

avenue for stakeholders to have an impact on policy decision-makers (Calderwood, 2020; Stoddart & Tindall, 2015). Interestingly, a follow-up study conducted by Stoddart et al in 2017 found that "news stories oriented around ecological events or scientific discoveries have declined over time, while there has been a corollary increase in stories oriented around policy debate and proposed solutions" (p. 389). As well, they write that "media enactments of climate change policy debate are not reproductions of social interactions in the public sphere. Rather, climate change news enacts what we term 'mediated policy networks' that reflect, but are not reducible to, policy networks in the political sphere…" (p. 386). This suggests that media remains a prominent forum bringing together alternative viewpoints that can have a substantial impact on policy in a way that parallels but is distinct from other non-mediated policy discussions.

I observed this in my review of news media. For example, several of the news articles reviewed reported on industrial policy geared towards a transitioning energy industry (Alschner, 2023; Dusyk, 2023; Friedman, 2023; Potkins, 2023; Radwanski & Jones, 2023). Criticisms of those policies are also observed from all sides of the debate. Reporting on Canada's climate policy struggles in *The Globe and Mail*, one journalist mentioned the finger pointing at the federal government for the affordability crisis but also the lack of action on the environmental promises made, like the proposed cap on emissions (Radwanski, 2023). Those kinds of criticisms are coming from a variety of sources and news media that reflect wide stances on climate change, making it hard for readers (and journalists) to adjudicate which voices they can trust (Boykoff, 2013).

**Ecological Modernization**

Another dominant theme from the literature is that much of the news discourse sustains an existing market-based economy, favouring policy solutions that are linked to current

economic systems. This is, of course, prevalent among corporate communicators working in traditional oil and gas industries whose existing business models may be most upended by stringent environmental policy (Gaither, 2018; Garcia & Greenwood, 2015). In fact, one article calls for educating business students in an "ecolinguistic discourse" as more and more businesses are attempting to weave environmental sustainability into their core principles (Ainsworth, 2021). There are doubts by some scholars that this type of market preservation will allow for effective action that is genuinely geared toward environmental sustainability. This perspective suggests there may be some shorter-term economic consequences to stave off more detrimental impacts to the boundaries of our existing ecosystems and sustaining biological diversity in the longer term. For example, Barthold & Bloom (2020) argue that the current organizational discourses around combatting climate change limit solutions that allow for existing firms operating in traditional natural resource industries like oil and gas to remain competitive. They argue that embracing dissensus on the topic of environmental sustainability seeks to break down formal power structures in organizations and challenge dominant discursive ideologies. This is a call to reform not only traditional resource organizations, but all industries and institutions, which is something of a more radical suggestion in comparison to the other literature.

The protection of the status quo is a premise that has been studied under the banner of ecological modernization (Blue et al., 2018; Jaworska, 2018; Litofcenko et al., 2023; Mol, 2002; Radwanski, 2023; Raso & Neubauer, 2016). For example,

> "EM [Ecological Modernization] is an established environmental policy narrative that promotes the idea that environmental protection can be achieved through incremental reforms in markets, technology, and democratic practices. Proponents of EM believe there is no conflict between greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation and economic growth,

provided that the right technologies, markets, and participatory mechanisms are deployed" (Blue et al., 2018, p. 94).

According to the article, proponents see EM as a way to close the gap on the aforementioned political polarization that surrounds environmental sustainability. However, as noted above, other scholars argue that such an approach will not address the challenges of environmental sustainability, and more extensive reform is required.

**Literature review summary**

My review of existing research found that media coverage of environmental sustainability is a very topical issue and there are many nuances to explore. It is important to point out the ever-evolving media landscape influences how these issues are covered.

"Due to the proliferation of online news and social media, large national print newspapers are not as central to shaping public perceptions as they once were. While digital access to newspaper content makes up for some of the decline of print newspaper circulation, overall readership has fallen in recent years" (Stoddart & Tindall, 2015, p. 402).

Nevertheless, there is evidence that different media platforms are blending together, with traditional news articles sometimes amplified or debated on social media channels. They argue this is a challenge:

"At a time when media consumption is increasingly individualised through the use of Facebook, Twitter and other customisable Web 2.0 applications, the media polarisation of climate discourse makes it easier for audiences to expose themselves to news stories that mesh with their ideological standpoints. This risks bolstering trends towards the political

polarisations of climate change, which may make it increasingly difficult to construct policy solutions to this issue" (Stoddart & Tindall, 2015, p. 416).

There are a number of different ways to look at political polarization. Boykoff (2013) points of the trouble with grouping climate change critics into a holistic group of "skeptics" or "deniers", in that there may be legitimate critiques dismissed when they are worthy of public deliberation.

"In other words, placing blanket labels on claims makers overlooks the varied and context-dependent arguments they put forward. Media portrayals that pay attention to these subtleties frankly help citizens better understand and engage with climate science and governance" (p. 805).

It is important for research to consider these subtleties, especially in attempts to narrow the partisan divide. Recent research by Litofcenko et al. (2023) finds a normalization taking place: "the establishment of sustainability as a signifier for strategic behavior around human-caused climate change co-occurred with the mainstreaming of the term, i.e., the use of less polarized, less negative language, and the focus on conservation of societal status-quo" (p. 677). This mainstreaming effect was also evident in the recent review of news articles. From the National Post; "a political consensus has coalesced around a green energy strategy, where investing in the energy transition is no longer seen as merely central to saving the planet, but also viewed as key to saving the economy by politicians across the spectrum" (Friedman, 2023).

Many researchers have historically extolled the importance of journalism in providing an unbiased, informed, and impartial take on what is happening in the world (Raso & Neubauer, 2016). Many journalistic organizations around the world spell that out in a code of conduct (Laws & Chojnicka, 2020). But existing research has found that impartiality may not be totally

possible and that taking a position on these issues may not be a bad thing. Laws and Chojnicka (2020) argue that;

> "we should value journalists making claims from a particular perspective, resulting in knowledge that is necessarily partial but honest, open, debatable, embedded in experience, situated and critical, rather than those who do not see or pretend not to see how embedded and situated their own claims are" (p. 1266).

In this study I take on this more relativist perspective, looking more closely (as other studies have) at contextual elements and how journalists portray information from sources cited in news media.

The review of literature on environmental sustainability in Canadian news media, which informs my analysis of a recent collection of news articles from *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, underscores a dynamic discourse shaped by evolving journalistic practices and a growing trend in ecological modernization. Because of the mainstreaming effects and the corresponding inclination to partner ecology and economics, the very definition of environmental sustainability presented in news discourse appears to be changing. What had been referred to as a more balanced approach in sustaining existing ecosystems and biological diversity with the needs of society appears to be more heavily weighted towards a society that allows its institutions and economy to operate without any additional environmental restrictions. It is of further interest to understand if the coverage on environmental policy reflects these elements and if there remains a distinction between how different media outlets cover these issues. Furthermore, I am interested in learning whether environmental policy has given way to solutions that fit better with the status quo (e.g. decarbonizing existing energy sources or

commercializing environmental efforts). Do such developments support a perceived resignation that accepts some measure of ecological degradation in exchange for a certain standard of living?

**RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY**

Given the number of different ways we interpret environmental sustainability and the different social spaces it occupies, news content analyses provide an effective methodology to study how its meaning is constructed and shared. Consistent with many media studies, content analysis was a commonly applied methodology in the literature, with discourse analysis being the most frequently used approach. There are a variety of different approaches to conducting a discourse analysis and "in spite of these differences, discourse studies seem to share an interest in meaning and meaning making in the social realm" (Horsbøl, 2020, p 432). For example, Stoddart & Tindall (2015) applied a "discourse network analysis" which they say

> "…is valuable because it provides a visual image of multiple connections between cultural discourses and social actors that emphasises a sense of complexity and relationality, which may be reduced when data are presented in a linear narrative or in two-dimensional tabular form" (p. 408).

This is a compelling approach, especially when studying how news media present environmental policy.

Framing studies look at the way a message is constructed and how that construction impacts the way it is interpreted (Lee et al., 2021). Lee et al. say that:

> "one approach, known as emphasis framing, concerns the effects of the messages that emphasize a particular aspect of an issue. Framing messages in this tradition tends to organize a certain set of information around the central idea at the expense of others" (p. 389).

From these definitions, it is easy to see how framing is used by sources attempting to set an agenda, however it is also important to note the limitations of framing analysis. For example, Bhatti et al. (2022) examined content delivered by *Fox News* and *CNN,* which they expected to show a polarization in how the two news outlets covered environmental policy (specifically the Green New Deal (GND) tabled in the United States to transition to cleaner forms of energy). The study found significant limitations in the framing analysis, saying "the coverage of overarching themes does not clearly show a political polarization. This might indicate that a theme analysis alone is not a sufficient indicator of the presence of political polarization in GND media coverage" (p. 325). Limitations such as these were important considerations in the study design. As a result I developed a research design that employed several tactics drawn from different approaches to content analysis.

This study aims to use a multi-pronged approach to scrutinize the sources featured in Canadian environmental policy coverage by mainstream media, using the federal government's "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan" as a case study. Employing media institutional theory, gatekeeping, and agenda-building theory as analytical frameworks, the research will explore how journalists select and represent sources, and the extent to which these choices influence news discourse. By analyzing articles from two national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and the National Post, this study will identify patterns in source usage and how they are being represented, offering insights into the interplay between media practices and environmental communication in Canada.

On March 29, 2022, the Federal government issued the "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan: Canada's Next Steps for Clean Air and a Strong Economy" (Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, 2022) which outlines the actions necessary for the country to achieve its climate goals.

The government issued a progress report in December of 2023, alongside a news release that shows how the government is framing this issue. The press release speaks to the importance of economics, pointing out how the plan will contribute to a healthy environment while simultaneously growing the economy which is consistent with the growing trend in ecological modernization referenced throughout the literature. There are several main bullet points in the plan which include:

- "Making it easier for Canadians to switch to electric vehicles",

- "Greening Canada's homes and buildings",

- "Helping industries to adopt clean technology and transition to net-zero emissions",

- "Making Canada's [electrical] grid even cleaner",

- "Reducing oil and gas emissions",

- "Supporting farmers in building a clean, prosperous future",

- "Empowering communities to take climate action", and

- "Embracing the power of nature to fight climate change".

Given the breadth of the federal plan, there remain very few stakeholders who would not be impacted by this policy, which suggests this is a topic that would generate a lot of interest by the news media. In this context, and using the federal plan as a case study to explore environmental journalism in Canada, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What sources (voices) are being featured in news stories about this policy?

   a. What issues are raised by these sources, and what are their similarities and differences?

2. What differences, if any, are present in news media coverage of this issue between

   Canada's two national newspapers?

To answer these questions, the study involved collecting and analyzing a sample of online news articles drawn from when the Canadian federal government first released their 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan leading up until that first progress report (March 29th, 2022 through December 7th, 2023). I selected articles using the Canadian Newsstream database, from the online publications of *The Globe and Mail* and the National Post. I used the keywords "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan" and "Canada" to find relevant articles.

This initial search resulted in 182 articles published by *The Globe and Mail* and 119 articles by the National Post. This sample was substantially reduced after manually stripping out duplicate articles, newsletters, and those that referenced subject matter unrelated to the federal policy. A second round of screening eliminated commentary or editorials to ground the study in objective reporting. This left 33 articles from *The Globe and Mail* and 25 articles from the *National Post*.

**Chart 1. Research Methodology Flow Chart**
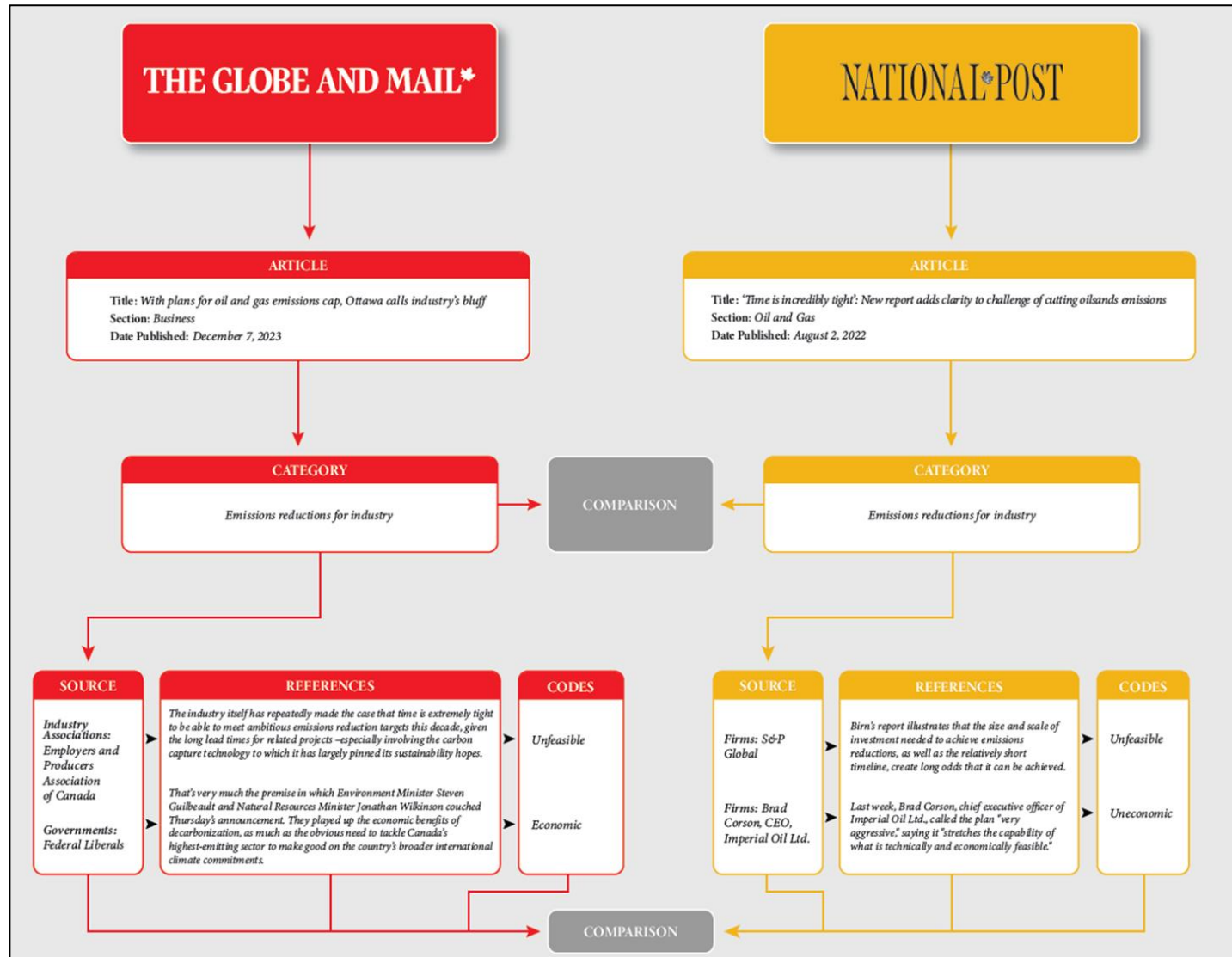
An illustration of the steps I used to analyze these news articles are shown in Chart 1 above. The first phase of analysis categorized the article according to which element of the federal plan was being covered, after an initial read-through. I did this by referring to the main bullets from the press release, which I condensed to five main categories (elements);

1) electrification of vehicles and infrastructure,

2) emissions reductions for industry,

3) emissions reductions for communities,

4) agriculture, and

5) natural mitigants.

The number of articles in each category was then quantified to determine which elements/categories received the most coverage as well as compare coverage between *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*. This was done to determine agenda-building inclinations by either outlet.

The second phase of analysis focused on how the article's subject matter was portrayed by chosen news sources. Sources included any third party explicitly referenced in the article. First, the source affiliation/role was recorded using the predefined categories taken from the Raso & Neubauer (2016) study: firms, governments, advocacy groups, industry associations, think tanks, academics, journalists, unions, and unaffiliated individuals. Firms included independent enterprises or corporations, governments included representatives from both federal and provincial entities, and advocacy groups included environmentally based advocates. Industry associations were made up of lobby groups and corporate alliances, think tanks were research-

based organizations, and academics were any post-secondary representatives. After compiling the data, an additional category was constructed, which was labelled arms-length government entities. This referred to sources appointed by the federal government that are meant to function independently, such as the Auditor General.

After recording these different source types, I determined their relative frequency across the news discourse. This also served to determine how the two newspapers selected and represented information from their sources. In keeping with the gatekeeping theories previously discussed, evidence of repeat sources being featured across different categories of articles may signal a sustained relationship or degree of influence impressed upon the journalist. I was also interested in seeing if the same sources are used in both newspapers, or if there is a significantly greater number of different sources featured in one newspaper over the other.

The third phase of analysis employed an inductive coding strategy to determine what issues are present in the source data. This applied a method used by Wolbring & Noga (2013) in their news media content analysis. This analysis evaluated how news sources responded to the federal policy plan, as summarized in categories such as economic arguments, environmental concerns, or questions of feasibility. New codes, or themes, were added to the coding list as they emerged from the articles reviewed. This step assessed how the sources argue in favor or against different aspects of the federal policy.

Finally, after the coding process was complete, I reviewed similarities and differences in the ways that journalists (authors) selected and represented information from their sources.

To assist in this analysis, I used MAXQDA, which is a digital software designed to be used in qualitative and mixed-methods research. The tool is prominent in academic research with

over 150 academic articles referencing its use since 2010 (MAXQDA). News content analysis can be done more efficiently and reliably by importing the texts to a central repository where they can be assigned characteristics and codes. Segments of data or text can be categorized according to multiple variables and connections can be made between them, which was helpful throughout the inductive coding strategy. The tool was used in applying codes and categories in each of the three phases of research. *The Globe and Mail* articles were first uploaded (in pdf format) from the Canadian Newsstream database to MAXQDA and subsequently coded in chronological order. The same process was followed for the National Post articles. After each news article was assessed within the tool, the data was exported to Microsoft Excel, where frequencies and intersections of codes were calculated. Excel allowed for the data between the two newspapers to be better tabulated and compared, investigating the material similarities or differences.

To effectively encapsulate the sources and the issues derived from those sources, a discourse network analysis was constructed using *Cytoscape*, which "is an open source software platform for visualizing complex networks and integrating these with any type of attribute data" (Cytoscape). This approach was borrowed from the Stoddart and Tindall (2015; 2017) studies, which "blends qualitative and quantitative modes of thinking about analysing relationships between discourse, actors, and organisations" (p. 408). In this study I created a network that connected two sets of nodes: source groupings and issues introduced from the inductive coding process. I then used the number of references to illustrate the weight of connections between these sets of nodes. Source groupings are shown in shades of blue and the issues are shown in shades of green. I presented separate networks for each newspaper in order to compare and contrast them with one another.

The methodology described above was used to analyze a recent scenario in Canadian environmental policy reporting using some of the tools and techniques discovered earlier in the research process. The study is designed to explore whether issues found in the literature review, such as political polarization and evolving journalistic norms and practices, remain present in news discourse. News discourse around the 2030 Emissions Reductions Plan presents a significant opportunity to study these issues using available resources.

**FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

My analysis found that most of the sample articles, in both newspapers, focused on emissions reductions for industry. Only two other categories are represented: agriculture and electrification of vehicles and infrastructure (Chart 2 shown below). Of the 33 articles from *The Globe and Mail*, only two focused on agriculture and one on electrification of vehicles and infrastructure. The 25 articles published in the *National Post* reported three times on agriculture and two times on electrification of vehicles and infrastructure. The majority of articles in both newspapers are categorized as emissions reductions for industry, and most focused on the energy industry; primarily the oil and gas sector. This finding appears consistent with similar studies such as Wolbring & Noga (2013), which found a greater emphasis in news coverage on greening natural resource extraction and less on alternative energy sources.

**Chart 2. Article Categories**
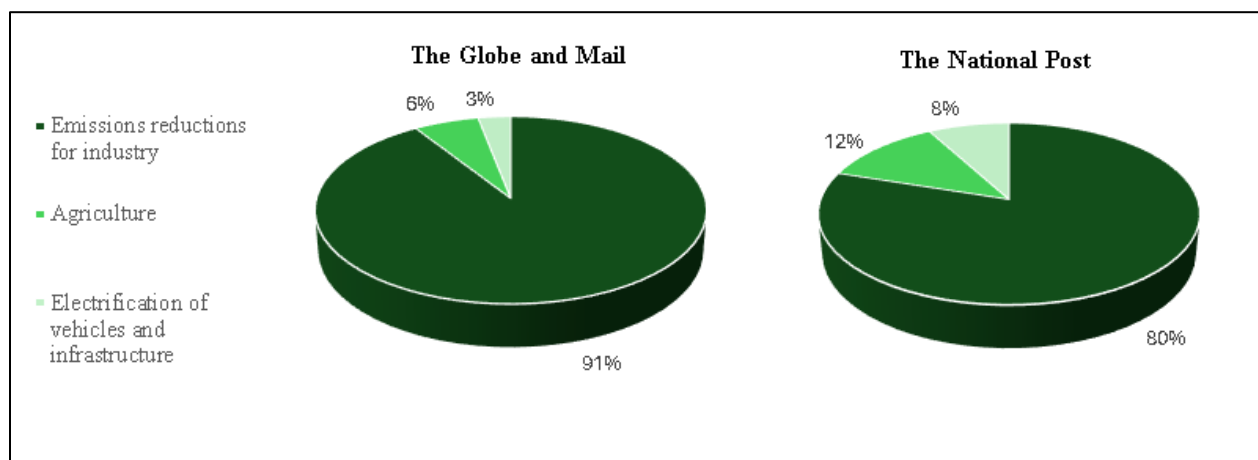


It is surprising to find that very few articles reported on electric vehicle components of the plan, such as investments in charging infrastructure, electric vehicle sales mandates, and purchase incentives. These policy activities will eventually have an impact on all Canadian

drivers. Information about $2.2 billion in funding for emissions reductions provided to communities was also notably absent, particularly given the announced investment in "expanding the Low Carbon Economy Fund to support projects from governments, schools, non-profits, Indigenous Peoples and more to cut pollution and create jobs in communities across the country" (Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, 2022). I would expect that level of investment and breadth of scope is newsworthy in both the political and public spheres. The policy also set out measures around the greening of residential and commercial spaces which was totally left out of the discussion, despite being another component of the policy that impacts Canadians at home and work. Because so much of the coverage pertains to one aspect of the policy, it is hard to argue that there isn't some selection bias at play here leading to a pronounced agenda favouring industry emissions.

**Source Analysis**

The source affiliations are shown in Chart 3 below. Governments were found to be the most referenced sources in both newspapers. This was expected, given the focal point of the study is news coverage pertaining to a plan released by the federal Liberal government. It is logical that government representatives are invited to comment on a plan of their own creation. Firms and industry associations were similarly referenced in both newspapers. However, these two groups made up a much larger portion of the *National Post* articles, potentially suggesting higher engagement with these source types by *National Post* journalists. Arms-length government entities, as will be discussed in more detail further down, were sourced more often in the Globe, forming the basis for a prominent storyline criticizing the policy, which was much less represented in the Post.

**Chart 3. Source Categories**
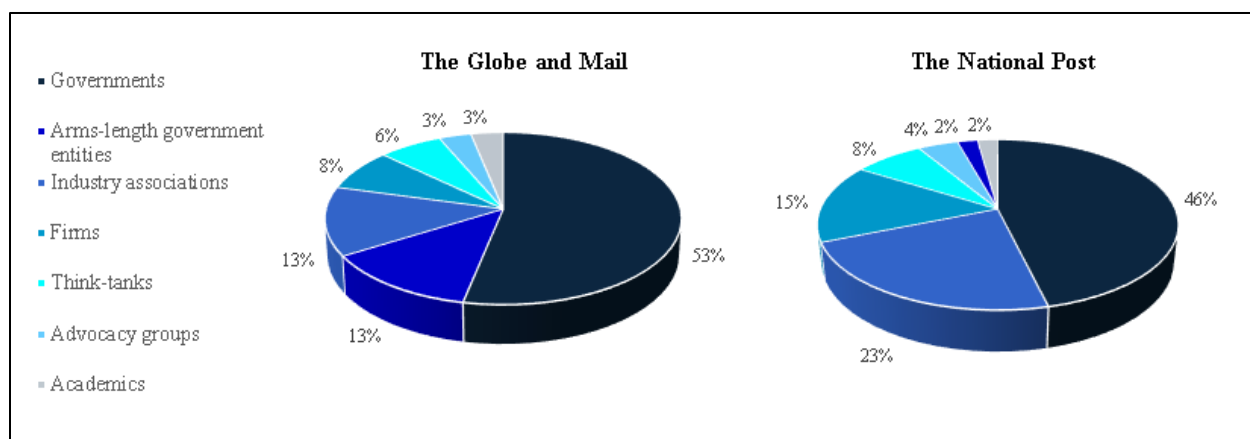


Further details regarding source types are shown Table 1 below. As discussed, environmental policy is a politicized topic, so I expected voices from competing political parties, although the results do vary. The Federal Liberal government was referenced 36 times, or 23%, of total references found in *The Globe and Mail* (hereafter, the "Globe") articles and 25 times, or 27%, of total references found in the *National Post* (hereafter, the "Post"). After the federal Liberals, the Alberta United Conservative Party (UCP) was referenced most often, with the Globe sourcing them 32 times (21%) and the Post sourcing them 9 times (10%). A difference of 11% between the two papers is notable, given that one of the prevailing themes in the coverage was the strident objection to the proposed emissions reductions included in the plan by the Alberta Conservatives because of the potential consequences to Alberta's energy industry (as discussed in detail below). It is also interesting that both papers did not include sources from the Federal Conservatives, which consisted of only 3% of sources presented in either newspaper. Those few voices from the federal Conservatives were shown to be critical of the emissions

reductions for industry, but it is hard to say if the lack of references was at the behest of the

authoring journalists, or the Federal Conservatives intentionally avoiding comment.

**Table 1. Source Categories**

| The Globe and Mail | References | % | The National Post | References | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Governments** | **82** | **53%** | **Governments** | **43** | **46%** |
| Federal Liberals | 36 | 23% | Federal Liberals | 25 | 27% |
| Alberta Conservatives | 32 | 21% | Alberta Conservatives | 9 | 10% |
| Environment and Natural Resources Canada | 4 | 3% | Federal Conservatives | 3 | 3% |
| Federal Conservatives | 4 | 3% | Alberta Conservatives & Saskatchewan Conservatives | 1 | 1% |
| Federal NDP | 3 | 2% | Alberta NDP | 1 | 1% |
| Alberta Conservatives & Federal Conservatives | 1 | 1% | Federal Green | 1 | 1% |
| Alberta Conservatives & Saskatchewan Conservatives | 1 | 1% | Federal NDP | 1 | 1% |
| Federal Bloc Quebecois & NDP | 1 | 1% | Saskatchewan Conservatives | 1 | 1% |
| **Arms-length government entities** | **20** | **13%** | **Industry associations** | **21** | **23%** |
| Net-Zero Advisory Body | 9 | 6% | Pathways Alliance | 6 | 6% |
| Office of the Auditor General of Canada | 9 | 6% | Business Council of Canada | 3 | 3% |
| Parliamentary Budget Officer | 2 | 1% | Canadian Vehicles Manufacturers Association | 3 | 3% |
| | | | CAPP | 2 | 2% |
| | | | SaskWheat | 2 | 2% |
| | | | Alberta Federation of Labour | 1 | 1% |
| | | | Aluminum Association of Canada | 1 | 1% |
| | | | CFIB | 1 | 1% |
| | | | Explorers and Producers Association | 1 | 1% |
| | | | Explorers and Producers Association of Canada | 1 | 1% |
| **Industry associations** | **20** | **13%** | **Firms** | **14** | **15%** |
| Pathways Alliance | 7 | 5% | Advantage Energy | 4 | 4% |
| Farmers for Climate Solutions | 2 | 1% | MEG Energy | 3 | 3% |
| Indian Resource Council | 2 | 1% | Shell | 3 | 3% |
| Unnamed | 2 | 1% | Ninepoint Partners | 2 | 2% |
| Business Council of Canada | 1 | 1% | Imperial Oil | 1 | 1% |
| CAPP | 1 | 1% | S&P Global | 1 | 1% |
| Explorers and Producers Association | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Explorers and Producers Association & CAPP | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Global Automaker of Canada | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Global Automakers of Canada & Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers Association & Canadian Automobile Dealers Association | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Rural Muncipalities of Alberta | 1 | 1% | | | |
| **Firms** | **12** | **8%** | **Think-tanks** | **7** | **8%** |
| Suncor Energy | 4 | 3% | Pembina Institute | 5 | 5% |
| S&P Global | 3 | 2% | Canadian Climate Institute | 2 | 2% |
| GHG Sat | 2 | 1% | | | |
| Enbridge | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Jason Lietaer | 1 | 1% | | | |
| MEG Energy | 1 | 1% | | | |
| **Think-tanks** | **10** | **6%** | **Advocacy groups** | **4** | **4%** |
| Pembina Institute | 6 | 4% | Environmental Defence | 2 | 2% |
| Canadian Climate Institute | 2 | 1% | | | |
| Clean Energy Canada | 1 | 1% | David Suzuki Foundation | 1 | 1% |
| Macdonald-Laurier Institute | 1 | 1% | Greenpeace | 1 | 1% |
| **Advocacy groups** | **5** | **3%** | **Arms-length government entities** | **2** | **2%** |
| David Suzuki Foundation | 2 | 1% | Office of the Auditor General of Canada | 1 | 1% |
| Climate Action Network Canada | 1 | 1% | Parliamentary Budget Officer | 1 | 1% |
| Environmental Defence | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Germanwatch | 1 | 1% | | | |
| **Academics** | **5** | **3%** | **Academics** | **2** | **2%** |
| Carleton University | 2 | 1% | University of Calgary | 2 | 2% |
| Columbia Center on Global Energy Policy | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Mount Royal University | 1 | 1% | | | |
| University of Calgary | 1 | 1% | | | |

An interesting finding emerged in the coverage of arms-length government entities and industry associations. In the Globe, arms-length government entities were the second most-often cited source category, with each referenced 20 times, or 13%. Within the arms-length government entities, the Auditor General of Canada and the Net-Zero Advisory Body (collectively 12%) both critiqued the ability of the plan in reaching its emissions reductions objectives. The Auditor General of Canada is appointed by Parliament, responsible for auditing government operations and how public funds get distributed (Office of the Auditor General of Canada), so it is reasonable to expect their voice be featured in the media on an issue of this size and complexity. The Net-Zero Advisory Body is a group of experts appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (Net-Zero Advisory Body). This group serves as advisors to government in achieving emissions reductions targets, and similar to the Auditor General, comment on government policy in this area. Comparatively, the Post referenced the Auditor General Canada of Canada only once, with no references to the Net-Zero Advisory Body.

In contrast, Firms and Industry Associations amounted to 38% of references for the Post compared with only 21% for the Globe. Inside this source category, the primary organization featured most often in both newspapers was the Pathways Alliance. The Pathways Alliance is an industry association with the stated objective of collectively reducing emissions in the industry. It is composed of Canada's biggest energy companies operating in the oil sands which include Canadian Natural Resources, Cenovus Energy, ConocoPhillips Canada, Imperial Oil, MEG Energy and Suncor Energy (Pathways Alliance). The groups represented in these two categories were largely found to be supportive of the federal policy. However, they also called for clarity when the plan was first announced. In later coverage, after the Liberal government offered more

specifics about the mandated emissions reductions, these sources voiced various criticisms, calling the plan uneconomic and unrealistic. These findings support those of other research, which has shown industry associations to be a prominent media source (Stoddart et al., 2017; Raso & Neubauer, 2016). As mentioned previously, these associations may have a leveraging effect over independent firms or entities by promoting a shared message through an institutional coalition (Raso & Neubauer, 2016). This study found that Industry associations outweighed firms by a ratio of 2:1 in both newspapers.

The discrepancy in source coverage of industry associations between the Post (38% of sources) and the Globe (21% of sources) is noteworthy. It demonstrates a potential pro-industry, economic agenda by the Post. In comparison, the Globe gave more authority to organizations responsible for assessing and holding accountable governmental policy. This finding aligns with previous studies (Stoddart & Tindall, 2015; Wolbring & Noga, 2013), which also found the Globe to be more focused on government accountability and the Post to be more focused on economic impacts.

Finally, think-tanks and academics made up 10% or less of total sources in both newspapers. A greater representation might have been expected, especially from the Pembina Institute, a think tank which have been in operation for decades with a mission to provide research and analysis in support of sound energy policy (Pembina Institute). As well, journalists did not contact many academic researchers, including scientists or policy scholars, for their comments on these matters. It is important to note that neither newspaper presented many sources from environmental advocacy groups, like the David Suzuki Foundation, Greenpeace, and Environmental Defence. When included, these groups found the plan to be environmentally insufficient in responding to the severity of climate change.

Along with the sources included in articles, it is important to point out which voices are absent. Three source categories; journalists, unions, and unaffiliated individuals, were absent from all articles. Because of the predominance given to industry impacts, union representation would have been appropriate to cover, especially for industries such as energy or transportation that are most impacted by the proposed policy. Generally speaking, this reflects existing research literature that suggests these groups continue to be underrepresented in the media, which instead favours the "official sources".

**Issue Analysis**

There were 11 total issue categories induced from the source references, shown below in Table 2. A more detailed breakdown can be found in Appendices A & B. Some of these issues represented a dichotomy of views. For example:

- "collaborative" or "unilateral" (i.e. the federal government was seen as having either involved stakeholders or acted unilaterally)

- "economic" or "uneconomic" (i.e. the plan provided adequate economic supports or was projected to have a negative economic impact)

- "feasible" or "unfeasible" (i.e. policy implementation was technically possible given the timeline and resources required or was deemed unrealistic)

- "environmentally sufficient" or not (in addressing climate-change)

- "policy sufficient" or not (the means will not accomplish the policy objectives)

- "unconstitutional" or constitutional (suggesting the federal government directives were stepping on provincial jurisdiction).

The two remaining categories, "exhaustive" and "uncertain", could be considered more neutral. In this discussion they are used to suggest the policy was carefully constructed or greater detail was required by the source to provide a fair assessment.

**Table 2. Issue Categories**

| | Governments | | Advocacy groups | | Firms | | Industry associations | | Think-tanks | | Academics | | Arms-length government entit | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Globe and Mail | National Post | Globe and Mail | National Post | Globe and Mail | National Post | Globe and Mail | National Post | Globe and Mail | National Post | Globe and Mail | National Post | Globe and Mail | National Post |
| **Collaborative** | 6% | 10% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| **Economic** | 10% | 16% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 4% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| **Environmentally insufficient** | 1% | 1% | 2% | 3% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| **Exhaustive** | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| **Feasible** | 7% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 3% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% |
| **Policy insufficient** | 1% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 2% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 7% | 1% |
| **Uncertain** | 3% | 3% | 1% | 0% | 3% | 8% | 3% | 2% | 2% | 3% | 0% | 1% | 1% | 0% |
| **Unconstitutional** | 8% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| **Uneconomic** | 12% | 9% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 4% | 3% | 12% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 1% |
| **Unfeasible** | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 2% | 1% | 2% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| **Unilateral** | 1% | 3% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 2% | 0% |

The largest issue voiced by sources in both newspapers was the question of whether the policy was economically viable. Across all articles, a total of 52 references called the plan uneconomic, compared to 39 that called the plan economic. Inside the "uneconomic" issue category, 26 of 52 references were sources from opposition political parties, with a high proportion from the Alberta United Conservative Party (19). Much of the political debate came down to an issue of energy production, with the federal Liberals saying that production cuts were not their objective and opposition parties saying the emissions reductions prescribed would not be possible without them. As described in one Globe article:

> "Alberta Premier Danielle Smith loudly opposes federal plans for oil and gas sector retraining to prepare for the shift to lower-carbon energy in the coming decades. She has pounced on briefing notes that, she says, show the federal government is bent on eliminating the industry and putting hundreds of thousands of Albertans out of work under the guise of a 'just transition.' Ottawa has said the numbers in the briefing notes reflect workers that could be affected by the shift and may need extra support (Jones, 2023).

In contrast, 30 of the 39 "economic" issue category references came from the Federal Liberal government. Of those 30 references, 16 came from the Globe and 14 from the Post.

When we consider which sources presented the "uneconomic" frame, there was a significant difference between the two newspapers. Where the Globe's coverage provided mostly government sources (e.g. Alberta government), the Post sourced a significantly greater number of Firms and Industry Associations, specifically, 15 of the Post references, compared with the

Globe at only 7. The 14 Post references came from the Pathways Alliance, Advantage Energy, Imperial Oil, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, the Canadian Vehicles Manufacturers Association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, Ninepoint Partners, and SaskWheat. Generally, these sources argued for changes to the policy that would benefit industry. For example, the Pathways Alliance was largely seen supporting the policy reforms, but advocating for greater incentives or alternative measures to support industry:

> "That's the work of 2023: to figure out exactly what is the most efficient instrument from a regulatory deployment, taxation perspective and everything else' said Dilling, adding that the sector will continue to invest heavily in reducing emissions. 'We know it's the right thing to do. We know it's what's necessary for our long term sustainability. It's also our financial institutions, our insurers, our shareholders and a host of other stakeholders who are saying that they want to see us recreate ourselves and be relevant in a low-carbon future" (Potkins, 2023).

Similarly, others made the argument that the energy industry was overburdened with regulation when compared with other industries. For example, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) criticized the proposal for focussing too narrowly on the oil and gas sector, and for eliminating options for economywide co-operation on emissions cut, and claimed that a cap on oil and gas emissions "could 'work against' the progress the country has made in balancing climate goals and energy security and hurt Canada's allies" (Potkins, 2022).

Another debate emerged in the political arena. Specifically, the Alberta Conservatives claimed that the federal government's policy was unconstitutional. Surprisingly (given its tendency to support industry) this claim was featured less in the National Post references (1%) when compared with the Globe (8%). References to the Alberta government were shown to be

extremely critical of the plan, arguing the federal government would be legally challenged on the proposed policies. For example, one article from the Globe stated:

> "The policy divide was shown in the Smith government's readout Friday. 'If Ottawa does not recognize and support Alberta's exclusive right to regulate these sectors of our economy, our province will have no choice but to use alternative policy options to protect our rights independent of federal interference'" (Cryderman, 2023).

No other provincial governments raised the constitutional argument. The only other reference to this matter came from University of Calgary professor van de Biezenbos, who suggested that it was likely the Alberta government would take legal action, as they have threatened to do in the past, and that upholding their provincial boundaries remains an unofficial party platform (Graney & Walsh, 2023). Professor van de Biezenbos was quoted as saying, 'The federal Liberal government is likely thinking very carefully about how the emissions policy and electricity regulations are being drafted, given that it will probably be taken to court over them'. Given the exposure provided to the unconstitutional storyline advanced by the UCP, analysis and commentary from third parties, like academics or think-tanks, may have been expected.

Another theme, "policy insufficient", questioned the ability of the federal plan to meet its objectives. This theme was given more exposure by the Globe with 16 references (10%) compared to the Post with 6 (6%). The Globe references were mostly from the Auditor General of Canada (8) and the Net-Zero Advisory Body (3). The Office of the Auditor General was quoted several times following their analysis on the proposed federal initiatives. Environment and Sustainable Development Commissioner (of the Office of the Auditor General), Jerry DeMarco was also critical of the federal government plan for being far too hopeful and that the analysis undertaken was significantly lacking in rigour (Walsh, 2023). Mr DeMarco was also

found criticizing the government's sense of urgency on the matter, highlighting a past record of failing to meet its objectives on crucial items like clean fuel regulations.

**Discourse Network Analysis**

Figure 1 and Figure 2 below present the discourse networks constructed to illustrate the relationship between the source groupings and the issue categories. This presents what Stoddart & Tindall referred to as a 'mediated policy network' where a variety of stakeholders are brought together to provide observations, criticisms and alternative solutions. Figure 1 shows the network specific to *The Globe and Mail* analysis and Figure 2 shows the network specific to the *National Post*. The Globe example illustrates a greater number of linkages and higher corresponding weight of those linkages when compared to the Post.

As previously discussed, overall coverage of the policy was greater in the Globe (with 33 articles compared to 25). The number of total sources referenced per article is also higher in the Globe (4.67 compared to 3.72). This may show a willingness by Globe authors to report on and seek out a variety of sources, thereby reducing some of the influence of certain sources. This may also be a case of those news sources having a greater willingness to speak with Globe reporters, as opposed to the Post.

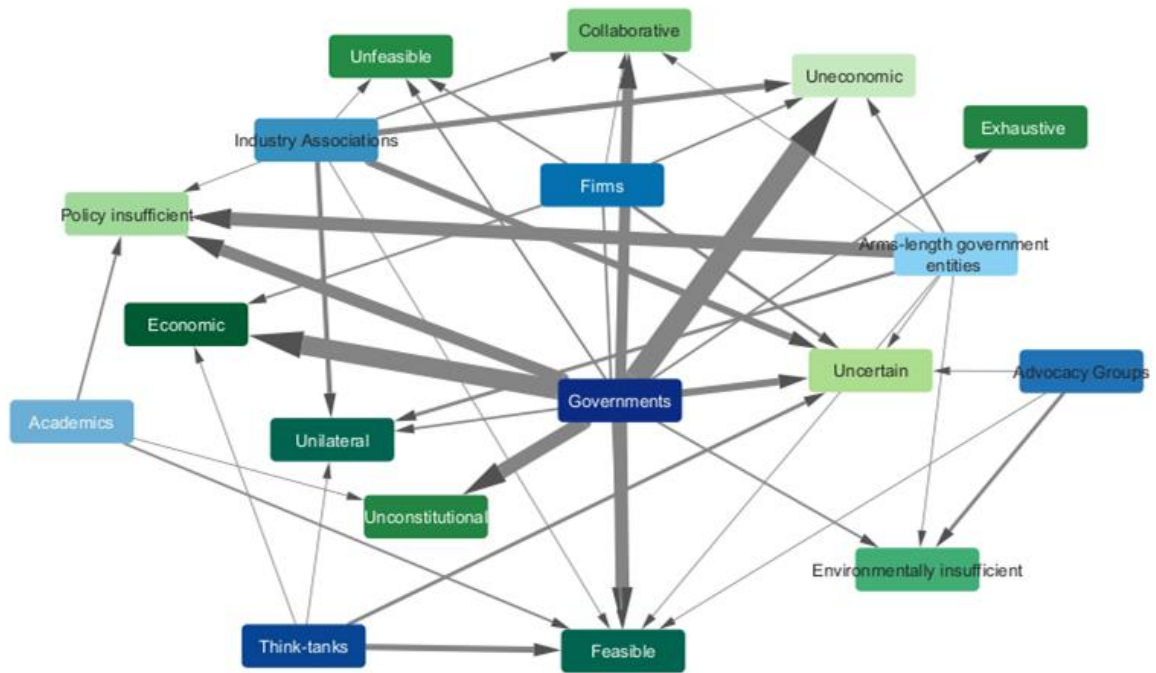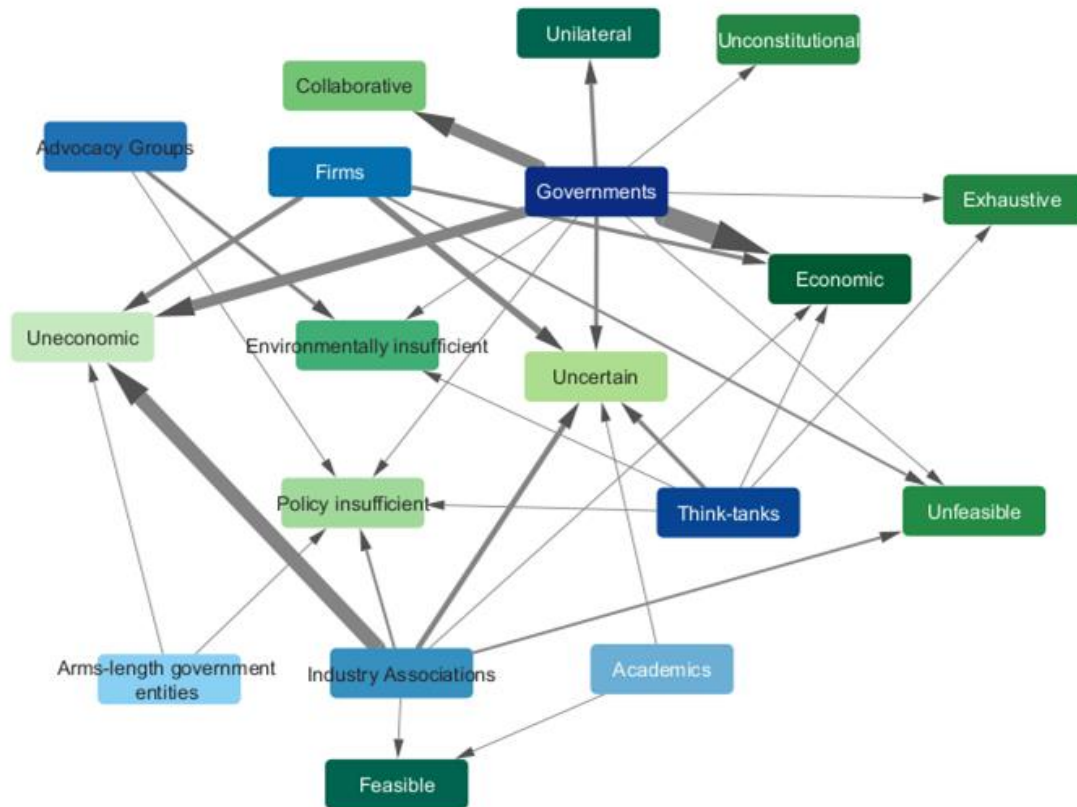**Figure 1. The Globe and Mail Discourse Network**

**Figure 2. The National Post Discourse Network**

Finally, I compiled the data into two general categories of **"policy supportive"** (collaborative / economic / feasible) versus **"policy unsupportive"** (environmentally insufficient / policy insufficient / unconstitutional / uneconomic / unfeasible / unilateral). In both newspapers, approximately half the sources featured are unsupportive and roughly one-third are supportive of the proposed policy. The remainder of sources fall into neutral categories (uncertain / exhaustive). However, it is important to note that the Globe and the Post present different sources making the unsupportive argument; the Globe articles largely referencing political opposition and arms-length government entities and the Post largely referencing firms and industry associations. As well, there is a greater distribution of issues presented in the Globe when compared with the Post, which can be seen by the greater number of connections in Figure 1 above. This may demonstrate the Globe's attempt to present a variety of sources and perspectives. Finally, it is interest that note that half of the Globe articles included more than one author, compared to the Post articles which were all published by a single author. While it is likely that both news outlets have an editorial review process, the collaboration among Globe journalists may be an attempt to eliminate personal bias and/or share in source relationships which again may help to provide diverse perspectives. These factors may indicate that the Globe is trying to present more diverse sources and perspectives, and also counteract biases of a single author.

To summarize the findings and discussion, the research questions have been restated and answered below:

1. What sources (voices) are being featured in news stories about this policy?
    a. What issues are raised by these sources, and what are their similarities and differences?

The results demonstrate that the coverage largely reflects the use of government representatives, firms, industry associations, and arms-length government representatives. Governments are shown to be the most prominent, allowing the federal Liberal government to argue the soundness of their proposed policy while also providing the various criticisms coming from opposition political parties and a variety of other groups. Underrepresented are environmental advocacy groups, unions and independents. The greater the frequency in the typical types of sources may indicate that some of the professional pressures like tight timelines and staff shortages are still evident in the newsroom. The key issues raised are economic viability, policy feasibility, and constitutionality. Industry associations and the Alberta government argue that the policy will hinder economic growth and challenge the competitiveness of the energy industry. The Liberal government have argued that is not the case, even titling the plan, "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan: Clean Air, Strong Economy." Arms-length government entities, like the Net-Zero Advisory Board and the Auditor General, have found the policies to be significantly insufficient, casting serious doubts that the intended objectives will be accomplished. The constitutional issue, which is really a tactic proposed by the Alberta government to prevent the issuance of the proposed emissions reductions, stems from the economic argument.

2. What differences, if any, are present in news media coverage of this issue between Canada's two national newspapers?

Both newspapers have shown a significant focus on emission reductions for industry with a slightly higher number of Post articles covering electrification of vehicles and agriculture. Overall though, the coverage is more diverse by the Globe with a greater

variety of sources included in their coverage. The largest difference between the two was the inclination by the Post reporters to cover the economic criticisms, mostly through industry associations like the Pathways Alliance and also energy firms. Ironically, the Post did not cover the Alberta governments unconstitutional narrative as much as the Globe, who published several stories through different representatives including the Premier; Danielle Smith. Arguing policy insufficiency was a more popular storyline in the Globe, using arms-length government entities as the predominant source. The results show a more balanced and extensive approach by the Globe to cover a significant environmental policy that impacts all Canadians, but only by a modest margin over the Post. In both cases, there does appear to be a tendency to build an agenda that has eliminated certain aspects of the policy, like emissions reductions for communities and natural mitigants and understating or leaving out the concerns of key stakeholders like environmental advocates, think tanks, and academics.

**CONCLUSION**

Overall, my capstone research suggests that many of the findings of past research literature remain relevant today. Supporting prior research, my investigation highlights how economic considerations and political agendas continue to significantly impact media coverage of environmental public policy. Specifically, *The Globe and Mail* continues to emphasize government accountability and policy effectiveness, while the *National Post* focuses more on the economy and industry perspectives. I note that the policy itself, the 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan, does pay considerable attention to economic impacts, following the trend of ecological modernization that suggests environmental sustainability can coexist with market-driven solutions. This may connect with the efforts of the federal Liberal government to develop policy

that reflects this trend. However, the news coverage I analyzed does not reflect these efforts, as seen in controversies and critiques raised by industry stakeholders and the Alberta government, both of which are heavily featured in both papers and advocate to maintain the existing status quo. The two newspapers remain commercial enterprises, which implies that they cater, to a degree, to the interests of their readers. In this sense, their customers act as a gatekeeper to news production. Eliminating that influence completely would mean upending the business model, but there does appear to be more room in soliciting alternative views.

By examining which sources and themes are represented in environmental news discourse, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay of media practices and environmental communication in Canada. The findings of this study show that there remains a need for more balanced and informed journalism that seeks out alternative voices worthy of contributing to policy deliberation. One of my findings is that compared with the Post, the Globe appears to reflect more diversity in various areas, from source type and theme to the number of authors contributing to articles. The federal Liberal government faces an unprecedented undertaking in developing this environmental policy and it appears they have inadvertently invited greater criticisms by attempting to appease all stakeholders. But through the research, there appear to be a number of underreported elements, issues and stakeholders in the news that can contribute to its development within mediated policy networks.

A compelling line of further inquiry would be to understand the process behind source selection by newspapers. This would likely involve conducting interviews or surveys with journalists to understand what type of influence might be exerted from managing editors, as well as learn how sources are found and utilized. We can see from the comparison between the two newspapers that differences are present. This suggests there must be some level of ability for the

journalist and/or editor to choose how these stories are represented. Determining whether sources are solicited or come forward voluntarily (as in the form of information subsidies) would complement this study. This might help answer the question of whether an agenda is being built by the news outlet or by the sources themselves.

Further limitations are also owing to resource constraints within this study. Given that this research was conducted by a single researcher, there is some potential for human-error in the data collection and analysis. The use of digital tools helped mitigate some of that human error, but a second, or third, set of eyes may have helped spot any inconsistencies and provide for greater interpretation of the subject matter. In particular, the inductive coding strategy in determining the issues present could have brought forth a richer analysis by employing more than one researcher.

Finally, while outside of the scope of this study, it would be interesting to understand the impact these various sources have on readers of the news. Boykoff (2013) mentioned that the variety of perspectives presented in news media on complex issues such as environmental policy make it hard for readers to know which voices they can trust. It would be interesting to learn how news consumers feel about the chosen news sources. Readership alone is not necessarily an indicator of trust or perceived legitimacy, and the limited selection of sources may only serve to build up a particular narrative proposed by vested interests such as industry associations or political parties. I am of the opinion that although it may be hard for readers to know whom is deserving of legitimacy, a variety of perspectives offers a much better chance for deliberation than too few.

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# Appendix A

| | Collaborative | Economic | Environmentally Exhaustive | Feasible | Policy insufficie | Uncertain | Unconstitutional | Uneconomic | Unfeasible | Unilateral | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Federal Liberals | 7 | 16 | 0 | 2 | 9 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta Conservatives | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 15 | 1 | 1 |
| Net-Zero Advisory Body | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Office of the Auditor General of | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pathways Alliance | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Pembina Institute | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Environment and Natural Resour | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Federal Conservatives | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Federal NDP | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| S&P Global | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Suncor Energy | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Canadian Climate Institute | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Carleton University | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| David Suzuki Foundation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Farmers for Climate Solutions | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| GHG Sat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Indian Resource Council | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Parliamentary Budget Officer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Unnamed | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta Conservatives & Federa | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta Conservatives & Saskat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Business Council of Canada | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| CAPP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Clean Energy Canada | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Climate Action Network Canada | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Columbia Center on Global Ener | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enbridge | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Environmental Defence | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Explorers and Producers Associ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Explorers and Producers Associ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Federal Bloc Quebecois & NDP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Germanwatch | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Global Automaker of Canada | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Global Automakers of Canada & | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Jason Lietaer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Macdonald-Laurier Institute | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| MEG Energy | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mount Royal University | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Rural Muncipalities of Alberta | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| University of Calgary | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| ational Post | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Collaborative | Economic | Environmentally Exhaustive | Feasible | Policy insufficie | Uncertain | Unconstitutional | Uneconomic | Unfeasible | Unilateral |
| Federal Liberals | 9 | 14 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta Conservatives | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| Pathways Alliance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| Pembina Institute | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Advantage Energy | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Business Council of Canada | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Canadian Vehicles Manufacture: | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Federal Conservatives | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| MEG Energy | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Shell | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Canadian Climate Institute | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| CAPP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Environmental Defence | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ninepoint Partners | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| SaskWheat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| University of Calgary | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta Conservatives & Saskat | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta Federation of Labour | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Alberta NDP | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Aluminum Association of Canad | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| CFIB | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| David Suzuki Foundation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Explorers and Producers Associ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Explorers and Producers Associ | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Federal Green | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Federal NDP | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Greenpeace | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Imperial Oil | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Office of the Auditor General of | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Parliamentary Budget Officer | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| S&P Global | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Saskatchewan Conservatives | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |