

# **Fighting the “Climate Agenda”: Conspiracism and the Canadian Anti-Climate Movement**

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BA, University of Ottawa, 2023

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the School of Environmental Studies

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University of Victoria

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and X̱wsep̓əm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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## **Abstract**

As the climate crisis worsens and effective action to address it becomes more critical, the forces arrayed against action are changing. Some in the ‘freedom movement’ that emerged in opposition to COVID-19 health measures have turned attention toward climate action as the next fight against government overreach. Groups in this movement are already having tangible impacts, including slowing down climate action and building power through political organizing. This research studies this emerging trend, focusing on 7 groups that are organizing to oppose climate action, informed by climate denial and conspiracy theories around authoritarian control. This study asks the following questions: 1) What are the key characteristics of this branch of the anti-climate movement in Canada? What impacts are they having? 2) How does this movement frame climate change and climate policies? 3) What language do groups use to bring people in, and how do they appeal to people’s concerns? This study is informed by Social Network Analysis (SNA), social movement theory, and multiple forms of textual analysis. Findings include that freedom groups largely focus on awareness raising tactics, but some are turning to political organizing which has the capacity to build power. The anti-climate freedom movement deploys a range of arguments to oppose climate action, including overt climate denial. Groups are also informed by conspiracy theories that climate action is being imposed by governments to justify authoritarian control. This movement is active on several different issues which offers multiple potential entry points for new recruits. Groups use populist framing to position themselves as defending the interests of everyday people against government overreach. The anti-climate freedom movement underlines the need for solidaristic progressive movements; progressive movements must build strong campaigns for climate justice that clearly connect climate solutions to other major issues today like affordability and housing.

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to extend my deep gratitude to the many people who made this work possible. To my committee and external examiner: thank you all for sharing your wisdom with me- you have inspired me, and I have so much respect for your work. It was a pleasure to be in conversation with you. James, thank you for being so generous with your time, for your guidance, many insights and support throughout this process. Emily, thank you for your thoughtful prompts for reflection and generative questions. To Shane, thank you for agreeing to be my external examiner, and for expanding my reflections on the implications of this work through your questions.

A massive thank you to my Salmonid cohort mates. Thank you for your friendship, solidarity, for sharing your favourite conspiracy theories with me, and tipping me off on events to attend for my research. Thank you also for generously hosting me on my trips back to Victoria.

Thank you to the Political Ecology Co-Lab for the interesting discussions, community and feedback on my work throughout the last two years.

Thank you to all the organizers, academics and activists who have shared their insights with me throughout this process.

Finally, thank you to my family for your unwavering support for me and enthusiasm for my endeavours.

To Zeke, thank you for listening to every thought, letting me put chart paper and sticky notes around our living room, and being my number one cheerleader throughout this research.

## **Chapter One: Introduction and Methodology**

### **1.1 Introducing this Project and Brief Summary of Main Findings**

2024 was the hottest year on record, which beat the previous record set in 2023 (Bardan, 2025). The climate crisis is wreaking havoc around the globe and is most affecting those who contribute the least to the problem (Sultana, 2021). While it was once commonly believed that witnessing impacts of climate change would convince anyone of its severity, recent mobilizations to oppose climate action call this notion into question. Perhaps of even more concern, every major climate-related disaster in the last year has stirred up conspiracy theories that distract from climate change, obfuscate the drivers and actors to blame for this crisis, and deepen mistrust in governments and disaster response (Chen & Harris Ali, 2025).

In January 2022, hundreds of trucks occupied downtown streets of Ottawa for nearly a month for the Freedom Convoy, motivated by anger (and often conspiracy theories) related to COVID-19 health measures. Three years later, some groups formed out of this “freedom movement” have turned attention toward climate action as a new frontier of government overreach.

An example of this has been mobilization to oppose the sustainability-oriented urban planning concept of 15-minute cities (Boyd, 2023; Georgieva, 2023; Fawcett-Atkinson, 2023b). This urban planning concept has the intention of allowing citizens to access everything one needs in daily life in a 15-minute walk or bike ride, with the dual aim of reducing transportation-related emissions and promoting wellbeing and environmental sustainability (Boyd, 2023). Some groups’ opposition to 15-minute cities and climate policy is informed by climate denial and conspiracy theories positing that the globalist elite from the United Nations and World Economic Forum are attempting to establish an authoritarian world government (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2023a).

One such conspiracy theory is that governments will use climate change as a pretext to impose ‘climate lockdowns’ and restrict people’s movements within their neighbourhoods and make leaving by car impossible or carry a large penalty. This new phenomenon may constitute a real threat to climate policy. Members associated with one group in British Columbia, “BC Rising” caused the Regional District of Central Kootenays to postpone a series of town halls on their climate action plan due to unspecified threats to staff the summer of 2023 (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2023b). BC Rising organized to support the recently resurrected BC Conservative Party in the fall 2024 Provincial election. The BC Conservatives lost narrowly against the NDP and now holds more power than in recent memory as official opposition. BC Rising is working to embed itself within the party to this day.

This marks a new tendency in anti-climate organizing in Canada. The evolution of the anti-climate movement in North America has been well studied, with a primary focus on the seeding of climate denial by the fossil fuel industry and its amplification by networks of right-wing organizations, think tanks, research institutes, politicians, and media (Brulle, 2014; Brulle and Aronczyk, 2020; Dunlap & McCright, 2010; 2015). In Canada, research on the anti-climate movement has examined varying degrees of autonomy of anti-climate groups from the fossil fuel industry. Some have found examples of anti-climate advocacy being led by “astroturf” organizations—organizations that pretend to be grassroots but are conceived and supported by industry to help maintain its legitimacy (Carroll et al., 2021). However, some supporter-led online pro-fossil fuel advocacy groups have been conceptualized as utilizing a “subsidized publics” strategy that connects fossil fuel industry resources to supporter advocacy (Gunster et al., (2021). The freedom movement’s turn to fighting climate action, informed by conspiracism (as the 15-minute city example described above), is an emerging trend.

Some work is emerging on recent climate conspiracy theories (Maharasingam-Sha, 2023), but no peer reviewed research has examined in depth the growing reliance on conspiracism in Canadian anti-climate advocacy. My research project aims to fill this gap by asking the following questions:

1. What are the key characteristics of this branch of the anti-climate movement in Canada? (such as geographic location, size and extent). What policies, people, parties, etc. are groups and individuals in this movement targeting and what tactics are they employing? What impacts are they having?
2. How does this movement frame climate change and climate policies?
3. What language do groups use to bring people in, and how do they appeal to people's concerns?

Addressing this research gap is critical to understand the obstruction of climate action. As climate policy is under threat from the fossil fuel industry and the right worldwide, it is critical that those mobilizing for a safe world within ecological limits understand this threat and how to neutralize it. This research details significant energy being channeled into seven key groups opposing climate action across multiple provinces. These groups use several tactics, often including awareness-raising townhalls and webinars. Some groups are turning toward electoral politics to gain power and are learning from seasoned and successful political operatives. Gaining electoral power would allow this movement to roll back existing climate action. Another aspect of their organizing that may lead to greater success is that there are multiple entry points for participation within this movement, since it is active on several issues.

In opposing climate action, groups deploy a range of frames, including literal climate denial framing and a more conspiratorial line of argumentation to oppose climate action that views the

latter as a pretense for authoritarian government control. This research demonstrates that outright climate denial can be brought back by right-wing actors, in part as a response to neoliberal climate policies that do not adequately address the climate crisis or support everyday people. In order to appeal to people to join the movement, groups use populist framing that positions themselves as defenders of a downtrodden people who are being harmed by climate policies enacted by an elite that does not care for ‘the people’.

As described above, researchers in Canada have distinguished astroturf organizations from those employing subsidized publics techniques. While this movement cannot be dismissed as just a creation of the fossil fuel industry, it can be understood through an extension of the concept of subsidized publics, whereby groups are making use of information subsidies created by fossil-funded entities. There is grassroots energy driving this movement that must be acknowledged and reckoned with. It is critical to acknowledge the agency of individuals who join this movement and to avoid reducing such movements to being astroturf. Doing so leads to an underestimation of both the drivers behind this movement as well as the impact it has on climate politics.

## **1.2 Positionality and grounding this work**

At the time of writing this thesis, I am a 25-year-old cisgender, white, settler woman of English and Scottish ancestry. Both sides of my family have lived in so-called Canada for several generations, so I have very little connection to my ancestral lands. I am from an upper-middle class background: my mother is an academic and my father an editor. All these pieces of my identity and upbringing have afforded me many privileges, including comfort navigating academic spaces. I grew up in Kitchener Ontario, on the lands of the Haldimand Tract, the territory of the Chonnonton, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee Peoples. I spent much of my

childhood exploring forests and lakes in Muskoka on the territory of the Anishinaabeg Three Fires Confederacy. I am grateful to these lands that shaped my relationship to the more than human world, and to my parents who taught me to be curious about and to love the natural world from a young age.

I began learning about climate justice during my undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies, at which time I also took several courses in Indigenous Studies. I got involved in the climate justice movement and some Indigenous solidarity actions beginning in 2019, which motivated me to continue to learn about the intersections between capitalism, colonialism and ecological breakdown. This interest led me to undertake my undergraduate honours thesis on degrowth, which can be understood as a movement that seeks to re-orient the global economy away from constant economic growth towards human and ecological wellbeing. Upon starting my master's, I wanted to do research that supported movements fighting for climate justice and Indigenous rights.

Two specific experiences drove my interest in this research topic. First, I was living in downtown Ottawa when the Freedom Convoy shut the city down just a few blocks from my apartment. I experienced fear and anger alongside my friends and fellow Ottawans as a few thousand people held us hostage in the downtown to champion their negative freedoms—freedom from having to wear a mask in public spaces, to get vaccinated against a deadly virus, and to eat at a restaurant without receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. My roommates saw swastika and confederate flags paraded past our apartment, I had friends who were harassed, and I was yelled at for wearing a mask as I walked down Rideau Street one day in February 2022. At the same time, I saw Facebook friends sharing messages of support for the convoy, who viewed it through a completely different lens. Throughout the near month-long occupation, I checked the

2022 Freedom Convoy Instagram page and stepped into a different reality—here the convoy was a racially, generationally diverse crowd of people sharing hugs, food, songs and high fives. I could not wrap my head around this at the time, but I felt this breakdown of a shared reality was important.

In the summer of 2023, Canada had its worst wildfire season on record (Carty, 2023). I was working on contract for a small environmental organization in Ottawa, organizing a series of workshops in partnership with Community Associations. These workshops brought community members together to discuss how the city and community members can build resilience to the impacts of climate change. For days on end while doing this work, Ottawa was among the cities with the worst air quality in the world due to wildfires raging in Quebec (Duffy, 2023). I sat in cafés writing reports on community preparedness for climate change while my eyes watered from the smoke-laden air.

At this point in time I, like many others in the climate justice movement, felt that few people would deny the existence of climate change -- how else would you explain the orange skies we were living under? This work brought me face to face with individuals who not only denied the existence of climate change, but who were adamant that it was a hoax created by corrupt elites. I had some difficult conversations with angry, disaffected people who did not appreciate the workshops I was organizing. They were adamantly holding onto a world that was burning away. Some individuals sent me links to the ostensible real causes of the wildfires that raged: arsonists, and environmentalists did this, not climate change.

When I arrived in Victoria, on Lekwungen territory a few months later to begin my master's, I kept thinking about these experiences. I realized this trend may extend beyond Ottawa when I

read reporting about a group in the Kootenays that was informed by climate conspiracy theories and managed to shut down regional climate action townhalls.

Putting these experiences together, I felt this was a worthwhile topic to study and one that I felt a responsibility toward as a white settler who has benefited from colonial capitalism and who has been insulated from the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework: Political Ecology and Movement-Relevant Theory**

Political Ecology is used as an overarching theoretical framework for this research.

Political Ecology is a research discipline that takes the stance that all questions of the environment are also political, and that politics always have implications for ecologies (Sundberg & Dempsey, 2014). Further, it aims to uncover power relations in environmental issues and works toward building more equitable power relations between humans, and between humans and the more than human world (Sundberg & Dempsey, 2014). Political Ecology also places an emphasis on praxis within research, as a “process of theory-action-reflection” that is critically reflexive (Sultana, 2023, p.729).

This research project is also informed by “movement relevant theory” (Bevington & Dixon, 2005). Movement relevant theory recognizes that social movement scholarship is often detached from real social movements; social movement actors do not necessarily read social movement literature, and in fact often create their own theory outside of academia (Bevington & Dixon, 2005). Bevington and Dixon (2005) suggest that social movement researchers engage with movements directly, as being connected to movements creates accountability and an important incentive to produce useful theory. The orientation of my research project is to understand a facet of the current climate countermovement to support climate justice organizing in so-called Canada. While defining the approach for my research, I met with several academics, organizers and one journalist to seek advice. I met with three academics who were involved in

the Corporate Mapping Project, which was in large part an academic research project that sought to support social movements striving for a transition of our energy system toward energy democracy. I met with one journalist who covers climate misinformation and disinformation. Finally, I met with two experienced climate justice organizers to seek their advice on making my research project useful to climate justice and other progressive movements. My research has finally been shaped by my own engagement in climate justice organizing and my conversations with comrades.

#### **1.4 Social Network Analysis**

I was informed by Social Network Analysis (SNA) in defining my research sample. SNA is a method of analyzing social networks by examining institutional and interpersonal ties that link actors and institutions (Neubauer, 2017; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). These ties can be any form of relationship, from kinship to flow of resources or information (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). SNA maps relationships as a network of nodes (the individual units) and edges (the linkages between them) (Marin & Wellman, 2014). There are various approaches to SNA, such as position based, where the unit of analysis is peoples' positions within organizations; event based, where the focus is on people who participated in certain events; and relation based, where the researcher starts with one person or organization, then looks at their contacts, and so on (Marin & Wellman, 2014). Research in Canada has used SNA to highlight the "carbon-capital elite" (Carroll, 2017) who form a close network of interlocking directorates between fossil fuel firms, financial firms, and other areas of civil society (Carroll et al., 2021). To build my sample, I conducted a relational SNA to map the network of groups that make up this emerging trend within the anti-climate and freedom movements in Canada (Marin & Wellman, 2014). This allowed me to map this small network as a series of vertices (groups) and edges (ties linking groups).

### *Defining my Sample*

I began to define my sample based on one group identified in a National Observer article that was at the nexus of anti-climate organizing in BC in summer of 2023 called BC Rising (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2023b). I spent several months (beginning in October 2023) tracking BC Rising's activity, along with the groups and individuals that it collaborated with, promoted or referenced while building my methodology and research sample. During this time, I observed that BC Rising also connected individuals and groups in BC to groups elsewhere, including one in Manitoba and another based in Ontario. This allowed me to develop my sample around the key groups from the freedom movement organizing to oppose climate action.

I noted a few other groups that are active in this sphere that I excluded from my sample. First, I excluded a couple of groups from this research on the basis that they only act through creating website and social media content. Examples include "Stand4Thee" and "TheyLied". In a couple of cases, I noted groups that sometimes organize anti-climate events in the form of rallies, but I excluded them as well because they did not seem to undertake any sustained form of organizing and produce little content I could analyze. One example is "Alberta4 Liberty-Edmonton" which largely operates through organizing rallies on subjects ranging from opposing the carbon tax to promoting Alberta separatism (Alberta4Liberty-Edmonton, n.d.). Another is "Stand United" that organized a day of action to "Save Canada from Non-Governing NGOs" in spring of 2024 but does not act outside of sporadic rallies (Stand United BC, n.d.).

One limitation of my sample is that I did not include Action4Canada. I considered including this group but eventually excluded them for multiple reasons. First, at the time that I was defining the sample, it was not clear to me that the group was actively opposing climate action outside hosting webinars spreading climate conspiracy theories. Second, while I noted that the group has chapters, there is little information publicly accessible on their actions that I could

have analyzed. I later realized that Action4Canada has a few chapters that are opposing climate action and 15-minute cities at the local level. Despite this omission, a different group I tracked closely provided guidance and support to Action4Canada (KICLEI), so my research likely does not miss key arguments or tactics employed by this group. I analyzed some content created by Action4Canada that was shared by BC Rising and other groups, so this research still examines some of its work.

In around January 2024, my supervisor Dr. Rowe alerted me to a group called “Take Back Alberta” (TBA) that emerged from the freedom movement and had become an influential player in Alberta politics. I did not include this group in my sample since it was not clearly acting to oppose climate policy at the time I was building the sample, and I could not access up to date information on the group’s organizing. Some groups in my sample converged with TBA, and it is in fact a key player in the anti-climate freedom movement ecosystem, so it factors into my thesis findings and discussion sections.

To ensure a contained scope for my analysis, I developed inclusion and exclusion criteria. In selecting my sample of groups and individuals, I considered the following:

Preliminary inclusion criteria:

- Group or individual promoting conspiratorial thinking around climate policy/ climate change
- Advocating against climate/ environmental policies
  - o Either through sharing informational content to sway opinion, and/ or (ideally) through mobilizing people to act
- Impact:
  - o At least 1000 views on videos/ likes/ follows on a social media page, Substack or website;
  - o And/ or demonstrably mobilizing people consistently, e.g. bringing at least 100 people to in person events

Preliminary exclusion criteria:

- Group or individual based outside of Canada (except for interviews hosted by people internationally with groups in Canada)

Once I had begun to map out BC Rising’s network, I considered including not only affiliated groups, but also individuals like politicians and content creators that these groups cited or promoted for news and analysis. This quickly made my sample unwieldy, so I decided to restrict it to groups.

In recognition of the fact that groups I was studying were active on multiple issues, I set boundaries around what content I would analyze. I focused primarily on content that discusses climate change/ policy, but also content that discusses topics closely related to climate change and climate/ environmental policies such as 15-minute cities, energy policy, UNDRIP, and housing density policy. In order to answer my last research question, I also examined recruitment materials like homepages of websites and flyers.

### **1.5 Textual Analysis**

To select a methodology for this research project, I undertook a literature review of several forms of analysis that could be useful to my thesis. I read about SNA and a variety of methodologies of textual analysis including discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, narrative analysis, frame analysis and thematic analysis. There is a great deal of overlap in different forms of textual analysis. For instance, within both discourse and frame analysis “the idea is to analyze how movement actors through various discursive practices and framing activities attempt to strike chords of existing cultural experiences, narratives, and knowledge within the cognitive landscape of targeted audiences” (Lindekilde, 2014, p. 196). Through this work, I noted that these methodologies are often named but not explained in social science research relevant to my work. In the following sections I describe the multiple methodologies that informed my analysis, acknowledging that there is overlap between them.

### **1.5.1 Document Analysis Informed by Social Movement Scholarship:**

To respond to my research objective of understanding how this movement is organizing and answer my first research question, I analyzed media through a social movement scholarship lens. Social movement scholarship has long studied the reasons behind the formation of social movements, as well as the factors that allow social movements to succeed in their actions (Edwards et al., 2019). Three main theoretical perspectives exist within social movement literature: political opportunity, cultural framing, and resource mobilization (Edwards et al., 2019). I focused on the latter perspective of resource mobilization (RM) to inform this first part of my analysis. Resource Mobilization theory argues that social movements are only successful when they can mobilize resources of different kinds in their favour (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

After defining my sample, I compiled content created by groups within it (website text, blog posts, social media posts, videos) for review. I employed Edwards et al., 2019's synthesis of five types of resources: material, human, social-organizational, cultural, and moral to inform my document analysis. Human resources depend on individuals and include "labor, experience, skills and expertise" (Edwards et al., 2019, p. 80). Social-organization resources have to do with the resources that movements gain through connections between people and organizations, such as affinity groups, coalitions, social ties, and networks. Cultural resources refer to the "taken-for-granted symbols, beliefs, values, identities, and behavioral norms of a group of people that orient and facilitate their actions in everyday life" (Edwards et al., 2019, p. 82). Cultural resources can also be content created by movements like blogs, web pages, or videos (Edwards et al., 2019). While there is some overlap between human and cultural resources, a key distinction is that cultural resources enter the public domain and can be used by anyone, as has been witnessed by conservative movements adopting progressive movement tactics. Finally, moral resources refer

to “legitimacy, authenticity, solidary support, sympathetic support, and celebrity (Edwards et al., 2019, p. 83). Moral resources are often received by a social movement from outside sources, such as when influential people choose to publicly support a movement, or when social movement figures receive distinctions and awards. This analysis allowed me to describe the potential impacts that groups are having, taking a broad understanding of impacts as the ability to mobilize resources.

### **1.5.2 Framing Theory and Frame Analysis**

Frame analysis examines frames, which are “cognitive instruments that allow for making sense of external reality” (Caiani, 2023, p. 198). Frames highlight parts of an issue over others (Caiani, 2023; Neubauer et al., 2023). All thinking and talking uses frames (Lakoff, 2010). Frames can take different forms such as diagnostic, which describe a problem; injustice, which identify the people or things causing the problem; identity, which construct/ describe those affected by the problem; agency/ prognostic, which present solutions to the problem; and motivational, which present the reason that action must be taken on an issue (Neubauer et al., 2023, p.638; Caiani, 2023). Framing also allows for the construction of opposing identities, or construction of the categories of “us” and “them” (Caiani, 2023, p. 197).

A great deal of social movement research employs frame analysis (van Dijk, 2023, p.18). Framing is critical in motivating people to move from experiencing grievances to participating in collective action (Caiani, 2023). While times of crisis create openings for collective action, the latter does not occur naturally and depends on the ability of social movement organizations to take advantage of resources and context (Caiani, 2023). Social movement organizations must frame their messaging appropriately to incite engagement (Caini; 2023; Benford & Snow, 2000). Frame analysis has also been used to describe the different ways environmental and climate issues are constructed through language (Tindall et al., 2022; Cann & Raymond).

I conducted a qualitative content analysis (QCA) and frame analysis of climate denial frames informed by Cann & Raymond (2018)'s typology of climate policy opposition frames. QCA is a method that consists of "systematically classifying material (be it newspaper articles, books, adverts, etc.) as instances of the codes of a coding frame; asking whether a code is present or absent in each unit analyzed" (Alejandro & Zhao, 2023, p. 4). Cann & Raymond's (2018) typology was developed through a QCA of 340 documents created and disseminated by the Heartland Institute, building on McCright & Dunlap's previous typology. The typology is split into three broad categories: science frames, which argue "the evidentiary basis of climate change is weak and even wrong", benefit frames which argue "climate change would be beneficial if it were to occur", and policy design frames which argue "climate change policies would do more harm than good" (Cann & Raymond, 2018, p. 440). Each of these broad frames contain subframes. I performed both deductive coding informed by this typology, and inductive coding where I noted new frames.

### **1.5.3 Thematic Analysis**

To respond to my third research question, I conducted a thematic analysis largely focused on the language groups used to appeal to people to join their groups or act, as well as the different issue areas they related to. Thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2017). It is an iterative process done either inductively or deductively (Alejandro & Zhao, 2023; Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis involves an iterative and reflexive process including familiarizing oneself with the data, formulating initial codes, reviewing these to create themes, and finalizing them (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I conducted the QCA and thematic analysis in parallel. I downloaded and uploaded content from each of my study groups to NVivo, focusing on materials that covered climate

related issues and recruitment materials (e.g. homepage for a website, flyers introducing groups). I coded 220 documents in total (including video transcripts, webpages, Substack/ newspaper articles and flyers). For videos, in some cases I downloaded transcripts from YouTube and uploaded them as a word document to NVivo. In the case of Rumble videos, I screen recorded videos on Zoom to extract a transcript, which I then uploaded to NVivo for coding. I coded instances where I found use of existing frames around climate change/ climate policy and new frames. I first familiarized myself with data through reading webpages, articles, flyers, etc. and watching videos. I then read all the materials (including transcripts) again to begin coding. I undertook three rounds of reading through my top codes and associated text in NVivo to collapse them into broader themes, and to fit certain codes into existing or new climate frames. I made notes to myself in NVivo when I was not sure about my categorization of a piece of text in one frame or theme versus another, and I kept a running notes document of reflections on my analysis to help me ensure I maintained consistency in my coding.

## **1.6 Covert Observation**

While much of my analysis took place online, I supplemented this with some in person observation. I attended 7 public in person events organized by freedom groups in Victoria, between March of 2024 and April of 2025 (largely in the spring of 2024). All the events were organized by groups affiliated with BC Rising and most had climate as at least a partial focus. These events ranged from a townhall to oppose a variety of BC NDP bills, an anti-15- minute city talk, two events denying climate science explicitly, and a Freedom Convoy adjacent

conference largely focused on re-litigating grievances related to the government response to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup> (see table 2 for a list of events I attended in person).

*Table 1. List of observation events.*

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>
BC Rising/ BC Townhalls	Victoria BC Townhall	March 14, 2024
WeUnify	Carbon Tax Debate	April 16, 2024
BC Townhalls/ Community Awareness Project BC	What do you know about 15 Minute SMART Cities?	April 29, 2024
WeUnify	WeUnify Speaker Series with Artur Pawloski, Kristen Nagle and Maggie Braun	May 28, 2024
BC Townhalls/ Community Awareness Project BC	CLIMATE CRISIS What IS Happening?	May 30, 2024
WeUnify	Reclaiming Canada Conference	June 22-23, 2024
Capital Region Concerned Citizens	How Climate Politics is Devastating Canada’s Economy- And What We Can Do About It	April 16, 2025

### **1.7 The Ethics of Studying the Right**

I received ethics approval to undertake this research even though the data I analyzed was publicly available. It is critical to reflect on the ethical implications of undertaking research of right-wing and far-right movements, especially as an individual who is active within progressive leftist movements. One first big decision was whether to conduct interviews, which I ultimately decided not to do for several reasons. The first reason had to do with scope: the scope for this master’s project needed to remain tight, and the groups in my sample have created so much content that is publicly available online that there was enough material to undertake this project without interviews. A second reason has to do with recruitment and ethics of interviewing

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<sup>1</sup> While climate denial was not the main focus of all of these events, they all involved at least some mention of fossil fuels or climate denial. In some cases, I hypothesized that climate denial would be a larger theme than it was (notably in the case of the “Reclaiming Canada” conference).

participants whose goals are in opposition to my own. I was concerned that group members would not be willing to participate in interviews since the goals of my research run counter to the goals of their organizing, and I did not want to deceive participants to secure interviews (nor would I have been able to secure ethics approval to do so). Thirdly, I decided to conduct in person observation of public events without getting consent. I did not seek consent for my participant observation, in part since observation of social movements can lead the participants to act differently than they might otherwise; covert observation can yield more accurate data. Further, gaining consent for observational research of social movements is difficult as it is often impossible to speak with every participant at an event to gain consent.

I decided not to conduct interviews but noted in person events being organized by groups in my study sample. To try to collect more data on resource mobilization that may be difficult to ascertain online, I decided to undertake covert observation at some in person public events, since organizers and participants must assume a broad audience with multiple potential agendas. I tried to do this in as ethical a manner as possible, and I read about “ethical covert research” to inform my observation (Spicker, 2011; Uldam & McCurdy, 2013). In the case of my research, this meant attempting not to mislead any event organizers or attendees. I did not try to dress or act in a way that would make me appear to be a sympathetic attendee, and I did not interact with organizers or attendees. This also meant not sharing sensitive information about members of the groups in my sample. My research only shares quotes from group leaders/ organizers who have positioned themselves to be public figures. I also created an observation protocol that is in appendix 1.

## **1.8 Defining terms: Far-Right, Right-Wing Populism and Extractive Populism**

### **1.8.1 Difficulty Defining the Far-Right**

Throughout this research project, I grappled with labelling the movement along political lines. It is common to refer to the Freedom Convoy, associated people and groups as far-right, and even right-wing extremist. Much of the writing on this topic uses the label of far-right without providing a definition (e.g. McLean, 2024; Mirrlees, 2023; Robinson & Watson, 2025; Tewksbury, 2021). The far-right is often understood as holding more extreme views than mainstream conservatives, notably around issues like immigration, LGBTQ rights, and expressing misogyny and racism (Re.Climate, 2024), but a clear definition is difficult for several reasons. First, the far-right itself can be understood as an umbrella term containing a great deal of heterogeneity, both in terms of views but also entities—as it includes political parties, grassroots groups, individual activists, and media (Leman-Langlois, 2024). Second, the line between conservative and far-right politics and movements feels increasingly blurred today, as it is complicated by the shifting “goalposts of conservative and far-right values regarding contentious social and political issues like immigration, abortion, globalization, and now pandemics and vaccines” (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024, p. 14). Leman-Langlois et al. (2024) write that “[f]ar-right and conservative political views play with many of the same themes: national identity, traditional values, religion, citizenship, immigration control, social control and order, and various anti-abortion positions” (pp. 18-19). Case in point is that Erin O’Toole was thrust out of his leadership role within the Conservative Party of Canada at least in part due to his opposition to the Freedom Convoy, which made way for Pierre Poilievre to become leader, who was a clear Convoy supporter (Tetrault, 2025). Similarly, more extreme right-wing movements have driven mainstream conservative politics in Canada in the past, including the Social Credit party in

British Columbia and Alberta and the Reform party at the federal level (Blake, 2024; Tetrault, 2025). Third, the label of far-right is often used in a pejorative sense rather than a clearly analytic category (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024). There is therefore no simple way to define the far-right and distinguish it from the “right”. I will elaborate on the imperfect ways I understand these terms for the purposes of this research.

### **1.8.2 Mainstream Conservatism, Right-Wing Populism and the Far-Right**

This research is informed by an understanding of mainstream conservatism as represented by the Conservative Party of Canada, that promotes neoliberalism at the core of its policy. This means prioritizing individual private property rights, the free market, reducing regulation and taxation, and cutting public spending (Farney & Rayside, 2018). The freedom movement—which is sometimes resonant with mainstream conservatism and sometimes at odds with it—is regularly described as populist. Populism can be understood as a thin ideology that divides people into constructed categories of a “virtuous people” versus an elite (Moscrop, 2023). “Adherents of right-wing populism [...] widely express skepticism or hostility toward public institutions and may see themselves as “anti-establishment,” in contrast to traditional or moderate conservatism, which typically holds institutions in high regard” (Tetrault, 2025, P. 1563). There are contradicting understandings of whether right-wing populism should be considered under the umbrella of far-right, depending on whether scholars view the ultimate goal of right-wing populists to be forming an ethnostate (Tetrault, 2025). I consider right-wing populism to be a potential strategy for far-right formations but ultimately see these as overlapping spheres of the right that are not one and the same. This follows Leman-Langlois (2024), who do not include right-wing populism as a specific category within the far-right but understand many far-right formations to display right-wing populist tendencies.

Leman-Langlois et al. (2024) created a helpful three-dimensional matrix to define the far-right in Canada along the following three axes: relationship with political and social institutions, relationship to violence and construction of otherness. Far-right formations are generally critical of what they view as elite institutions, and on the extreme end reject political and social institutions, organizations and norms altogether. Violence tends to be present within far-right formations, either through symbolic forms or physical forms within more extremist movements. Finally, all far-right formations tend to employ “othering” to bolster their own image by presenting others in a negative light, and at the extreme, dehumanizing othered groups (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024). Leman-Langlois et al. describe six types within the Canadian far-right based on this matrix: the ultra-right, the radical right, xenophobic vigilantes, anti-state militias, freedom conspiracists, and nostalgic racists (2024).

### **1.8.3 Use in This Study**

Following Leman-Langlois et al.’s matrix and six far-right entities, I have chosen to call the anti-climate freedom movement far-right for several reasons. First, this movement shares qualities with two main categories of far-right entities described by Leman-Langlois et al (2024): the “radical right” and “freedom conspiracists”. The radical right does not condone outright violence, and believes that:

The radical transformation of society and its institutions can be brought about by massive protest or increasing pressure from organizations and movements such as themselves. Some believe that government institutions will collapse from within, and direct action is not necessary. Others think that civil disobedience (for instance, not paying income tax) will mortally wound the state and result in wide-ranging reform. If the ultra-right questions the very principle of democracy, the radical right accepts it but judges it as severely corrupted by its most important institutions (governments, journalists, intellectual and media elite) (Leman-Langlois, 2024, p. 30)

The authors characterize the Freedom Convoy, as well as the older yellow vests movement (generally understood to be a precursor to the convoy) as movements of the radical right.

Freedom conspiracists are driven by conspiratorial views of power and the “discourse is entirely directed against legal authority and the various forms of state regulations that they denounce as tyranny, totalitarianism, etc.” (Leman-Langlois, 2024, p. 35). This category includes Sovereign citizens, who

believe that the state has no legitimate power over them (or anyone else) and refuse to pay taxes, fines, licences, and the like. They rely on various historico-legal theories that claim that various technicalities in laws, the Constitution, or other statutory frameworks allow individuals to somehow (depending on the specific flavour of sovereignty) claim autonomy and independence from all levels of government (Leman-Langlois, 2024, p. 36).

To further clarify my characterization of this movement as far-right, I will distil a few main qualities that are understood to be characteristic of far-right formations in other literatures. First, the anti-climate freedom movement rejects what it calls “globalism”, which is seen as the incursion of international institutions that undermines national sovereignty (Tetrault, 2025; Robinson & Watson, 2025). The movement is driven by and spreads conspiracy theories related to this globalism, climate change, and sometimes antisemitic and xenophobic conspiracy theories that are outside of the mainstream and characteristic of the far-right (Leman-Langlois, 2024).

In sum, throughout the research process I noted a plethora of views that could range from more mainstream conservative, such as a resistance to taxation and firm belief in strong individual property rights, to views that tend to be present on the far-right around immigration, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and colonialism. While I decided to label this movement ‘far-right’, I recognize that these definitions are complex and fuzzy. I do not argue that every individual who chooses to attend an event organized by a group in my sample should be immediately seen as a far-right actor.

#### **1.8.4 The Anti-Climate Freedom Movement**

I have named the movement formed by groups examined in this research the “anti-climate freedom movement”. I define this formation as an evolving movement that emerged from both the anti-climate movement that opposes climate policy, and the freedom movement that formed in opposition to COVID-19 health measures in 2020. The movement is fundamentally conspiratorial and extends conspiracy theories about globalist elites to individuals and organizations seeking to implement climate policies.

This distinction is important since some members of this movement were already active in forms of anti-climate advocacy before the 2022 Freedom Convoy, but the freedom movement has amassed new members. It is equally important to note since groups within this movement do not restrict their advocacy to opposing COVID-19 health measures or climate change, but have expanded into other issues as well, which will be described throughout this thesis. Due to the complexity of creating a clear shared definition of the far-right, I prefer to use a descriptive name since the far-right extends beyond this formation.

## **Chapter Two: Critical Context**

### **2.1 Petrocultures**

Fossil fuels have shaped much of modern social, cultural, political and economic life (Wilson et al., 2017). Fossil fuels are the basis for much of the world’s economy, through fuelling industry, trade, and energy, but their role reaches far beyond the economic sphere; their ubiquity has shaped social life and politics as well (Huber, 2013; Wilson et al., 2017). Huber (2013) explains that the hegemony of fossil fuels was cemented in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they became integral to a rise in living standards, and central to a new way of life centered around owning a single-family home and automobile. In the wake of WWII, city planning oriented itself

around sprawling suburbanization and the creation of large road networks, which cemented individualist, materialist livelihoods reliant on fossil fuels (Huber, 2013). While this lifestyle was only afforded to some (largely white, middle to upper class families), at the expense of racialized and low-income populations, it was promoted as the embodiment of freedom (Huber, 2013).

The entanglement of fossil fuels with conceptions of the good life and freedom vastly complicates the ability to address the climate crisis and wean society off oil and gas (Wilson, 2017). This is complex in Canada, which has the world's third largest oil reserves (McCreary, 2022). The oil and gas industry has long played an important role in the Canadian economy, in creating jobs for Canadians and in many cases providing infrastructure for resource extraction-dependent communities. The extent of economic benefits of the industry is a debated topic. The Canadian Energy Centre, which was controversially launched by former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney to promote the Canadian oil and gas sector, argued that "In 2019, there was a total of 557,920 jobs associated with the Canadian oil and gas sector" (Kaplan, 2023). In contrast, a report from the Centre for Future Work found that the Canadian fossil fuel sector had only 160,000 payroll employees in 2019, representing less than 1% payroll employees nationally (Stanford, 2021). The report further found that the "indirect jobs which presently depend on fossil fuel industries do not inherently depend on fossil fuel extraction and use" (Stanford, 2021, p. 28). As Gunster et al (2021b) note: "Canada's fossil fuel industry and its supporters have developed robust, aggressive, and affectively powerful forms of petro-nationalism to promote extractivism as a national public good" (p. 58). This petro-nationalism ignores issues around the environment, Indigenous rights, and labour rights and portrays the fossil fuel industry as being critical to Canada's current and future prosperity (McCreary, 2022).

## 2.2 The Climate Change Countermovement

The environmental countermovement was formed in the United States in response to the environmental and other progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Dunlap & McCright, 2010). Conservatives viewed demands made by progressive movements as threats to conservatism, so they decided to combat these movements through think tanks (Dunlap & McCright, 2010, p. 242). By the 1990s, the conservative movement was supporting the creation of counter narratives to counter and seed doubt in environmental science, which were shared by a network of actors including co-opted scientists, think tanks, politicians and media (Dunlap & McCright, 2010).

The climate change countermovement was borne out of this wider anti-environmental movement once concern about climate change arose (Oreskes & Conway, 2010). Fossil fuel companies had undertaken internal research that identified the threat of climate change as early as the 1970s and realized this threatened their viability (Dembicki, 2022). Rather than decide to overhaul their business, they learned from the tobacco industry and developed campaigns to sow doubt about climate science (Oreskes & Conway, 2010). The industry created a coordinated campaign of disinformation to obstruct climate action (Dembicki, 2022).

The motivations of the fossil fuel industry can be better explained by employing Malm's concept of fossil capital. Fossil capital can be understood as capital that is dependent on the extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). Primitive fossil capital refers to the producers of fossil fuels, while general fossil capital also refers to capital that relies on fossil fuels in the production of commodities like automobiles. In this way, one can conceive of the capitalists who preside over primitive fossil capital as a specific class fraction whose industry's existence is threatened by addressing the climate crisis (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). Primitive fossil capital has a material stake in obstructing climate action.

The climate change countermovement (CCCM) is made up of a network of organizations and actors across political and social spheres. It includes of course fossil capital, as well as industry associations and astroturf organizations (that appear to be grassroots but are created by industry). It also includes conservative think tanks, foundations, politicians and mainstream as well as alternative media (such as the blogosphere) (Dunlap & McCright, 2015; Dembicki, 2022). Many actors within the CCCM have long received financial or other support from fossil capital (Dunlap & McCright, 2010).

The CCCM in Canada has been analyzed by Carroll (2021) as a “regime of obstruction” that blocks a transition from the hegemony of fossil capital to energy democracy. The latter would require “a double shift of power, from the energy of fossil fuels to the power of renewables (decarbonization) and from social power concentrated in a corporate oligarchy to public, democratic control of economic decisions (democratization)” (Carroll, 2021, p.3). This regime of obstruction supports fossil capital through multiple modalities of corporate power that grant it political influence, economic power and cultural influence. In the economic sphere, fossil capital maintains power through its accumulation of profit, including through funding it receives from subsidies and investments (Levin, 2024; Dempsey et al., 2021). It also maintains economic power through strategic control over operations, the ability to allocate its profits toward continual extraction, and through the commodity chains that utilize its products. In the political sphere, fossil capital maintains power in various ways including lobbying, regulatory capture, a revolving door through which members or allies of fossil capital hold political appointments and advocate for the surveillance and policing of their opponents. In the social sphere, fossil capital exerts power through influencing educational institutions, business activism and policy institutions and media (Carroll, 2021).

### **2.3 From Climate Denial to Climate Delay and Extractive Populism**

In 2010, Derber argued that the climate change denial promoted by fossil-capital companies had shifted from “stage 1” denialism which rejected the reality of climate change, to “stage 2” denialism that promotes actions ostensibly to address climate change, but do not pose a threat to fossil-capital or the capitalist order (Carroll et al., 2021, p.172). Fossil capital’s network of influence “provides the architecture for a “soft” denial regime that acknowledges climate change while protecting the continued flow of profit to fossil-fuel and related companies” (Carroll et al., 2021, p.19).

Fossil fuel companies and governments such as Canada’s current Federal Liberal Government espouse this new denialism, through supporting some weak climate policies while expanding fossil fuel infrastructure (Carroll et al., 2022). This weaker form of denialism is further entrenched by fossil-capital’s influence within civil society (Carroll et al., 2021). Outright denialism has seemingly receded in Canada in the sense that fossil fuel companies and the government accept the existence of climate change and that it is caused by human activity (Neubauer et al., 2023).

In Canada, a new form of climate delay is expressed through the strategy of extractive populism (Carroll et al., 2022). Extractive populism makes three main claims: first, extractivism in the fossil fuel industry is central to the Canadian economy and benefits the whole country (Gunster, 2019). This first claim is promoted through symbolic nationalization whereby the fossil fuel industry is portrayed as serving the national interest writ large when in fact it remains a capitalist enterprise, providing profits to a narrow set of people. The second claim is that “extractivism is under attack from elites” and was cemented by former Federal Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver when he labelled opponents to the tar sands “foreign-funded radicals” (Gunster, 2019, para. 10). The third claim of extractive populism is that extractivism

must be defended by everyday people and has been heavily flogged by industry groups. For example, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) created organizations to defend fossil fuels and spread extractive populist narratives (Gunster, 2019).

Recent research on anti-climate movements in Canada has detailed the creation of coalitions promoting extractive populism, notably through “subsidized publics,” which is a form of corporate advocacy in which corporate elites provide stakeholders with resources to support/join a movement (Neubauer et al., 2023, p. 635). It differs from ‘astroturfing’ in the sense that organizations are not created by the fossil fuel industry but are supplied with informational subsidies by corporations. Subsidized publics bring together disparate supporters of the fossil fuel industry, so are more grassroots than astroturf organizations (Neubauer & Graham, 2021). Extractive populist coalitions have largely acted through news media (Gunster, 2014), and social media to promote extractive populist narratives and mobilize Canadians to support the fossil fuel industry (Neubauer & Graham, 2021; Neubauer et al., 2023).

Extractive populist advocacy has been taken up by pro-oil groups such as Canada Action, Canada’s Energy Citizens and Oil Sands Strong (Gunster et al., 2021a; Neubauer et al., 2023). In the 2010s, these industry advocacy organizations began to employ advocacy tactics they adopted from environmentalists and Indigenous land defenders in the latter half of the 2010s to engage everyday people in advocacy to support the fossil fuel industry (Gunster et al., 2021a; Wood, 2018). These groups first acted through social media campaigns but began to organize well attended in-person rallies in the later 2010s (Kinder, 2024).

#### **2.4 The Language of Climate Denial and Climate Delay**

Much research has examined the language deployed by the CCCM to deny climate change and delay climate action. There are well understood arguments made by climate denialists that were first promulgated by think tanks and organizations funded by the fossil fuel

industry, such as the Heartland Institute (McCright & Dunlap, 2000). The use of these arguments has been tracked across various sources and time (McCright & Dunlap, 2000; Cann & Raymond, 2018; McKie, 2019). Arguments deployed to deny the existence of climate change, or that argue it is not human caused often rely on language to sow doubt about the trustworthiness of climate science and scientists, or attribute climate change to natural cycles (McCright & Dunlap, 2000). Dunlap & McCright (2000) developed a typology of anti-climate frames based on analysis of 224 publications created by conservative thinktanks within the CCCM. Cann & Raymond (2018) updated this typology based on an analysis of 340 more documents from an expanded sample. The expanded typology includes three large frames: science frames that argue “the evidentiary basis of climate change is weak and even wrong”; benefit frames that argue “climate change would be beneficial if it were to occur”; and policy design frames that argue “climate change policies would do more harm than good” (Cann & Raymond, 2018, p. 440) (see table 1 for all frames and subframes).

*Table 2. Typology of climate policy opposition frames (Cann & Raymond, 2018)*

Science frames
The evidentiary basis of climate change is weak and even wrong.
S1 The scientific evidence for climate change is highly uncertain.
S1a The nature of climate science is difficult to discern.
S1b Climate change is a function of natural cycles and unrelated to human activity.
S1c Climate change warming is not being observed.
S2 Mainstream climate research is ‘junk’ science.
S2a Climate change dissenters are unfairly persecuted.
S3 The IPCC intentionally alters its reports to create ‘scientific consensus’ on climate change.
S4 Climate change is merely a myth or scare tactic perpetuated by environmentalists, bureaucrats, and political leaders.
Benefit frames
Climate change would be beneficial if it were to occur.
B1 Climate change would improve our quality of life and health.
B2 Climate change would improve our agriculture (including natural systems).
Policy design frames

Climate change policies would do more harm than good.
E1 Policy would economically harm consumers.
E1a Low income or elderly consumers.
E1b Minority consumers.
E2 Policy would economically harm industries.
E3 Policy would harm the economy overall.
SO1 Policy would threaten international sovereignty.
SO2 Policy would infringe on sovereignty at the state or local level.
EN Policy would actually harm the environment.
DW Policy would harm countries in the developing world.
UE Policy would promote unreliable energy systems, leading to energy shortages or blackouts.
NE Policy would be futile with no measurable effect, is not possible, and is ultimately unrealistic.
LP Policy would be unnecessary, because climate change is not a priority compared to other issues.

Type two climate denial or climate delay arguments have also been studied. Lamb et al. (2020) outline discourses of climate delay that are split into four categories: emphasize the downsides of climate action, push non-transformative solutions, redirect responsibility, and surrender (see figure 1). Coan et al. (2021) document the increasing use of “solutions skepticism” by the CCCM, which involves casting doubt on the effectiveness of climate policy and renewable energy. It should be noted that there is overlap between some of the frames identified by Cann & Raymond (2018) and the discourses of climate delay, including several of the policy frames identified by Cann & Raymond and the “change will be disruptive” discourses identified by Lamb et al., as well as the “policy would be futile” subframe and the “whataboutism” discourse (see table 1 and figure 1).

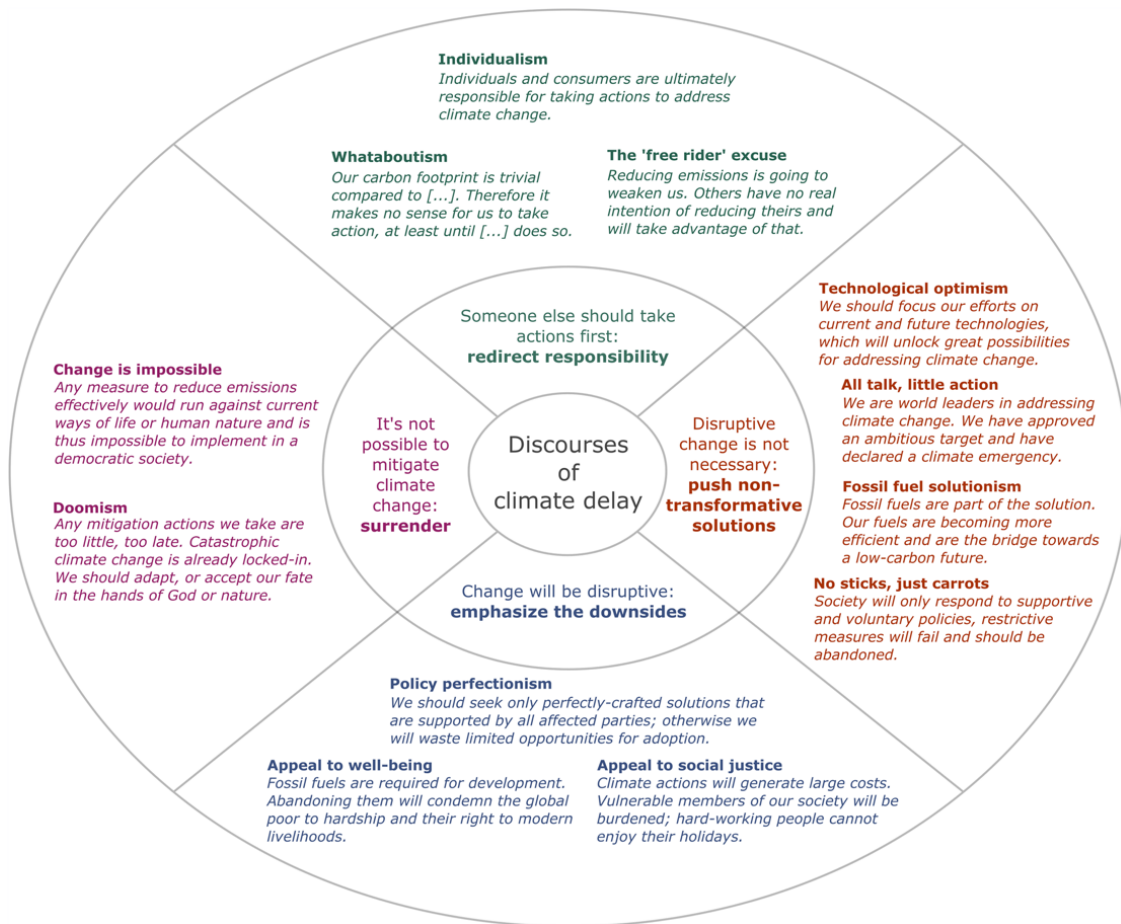


Figure 1. Typology of discourses of climate delay (Lamb et al., 2020)

Similarly, scholars in Canada have observed and defined extractive populist language that aims to delay climate action (Gunster et al., 2021a; Neubauer et al., 2023). Gunster et al. (2021a) and Neubauer et al. (2023) describe a set of extractivist frames that includes frames promoting the fossil fuel industry based on ostensible support from the general population and First Nations, frames attacking opponents of the fossil fuel industry, and explicit requests for supporters to take political action to support the industry. Some of these frames align with various discourses of climate delay such as technological optimism, fossil fuel solutionism, while others are newer and more related to the Canadian context such as the ‘ethical oil’ frame that positions Canada’s fossil fuel industry as being sustainable or ethical compared to other suppliers

(Neubauer et al., 2023). While extractivist frames identified by Gunster et al. (2021a) and Neubauer et al., 2023 already veer into conspiratorial territory through claims that those critical of fossil fuels must be foreign funded radicals, the freedom movement studied in this research expounds outright conspiracy theories around climate change. This will be developed in the following section.

## **2.5 COVID-19, Conspiracism and Climate Conspiracy Theories**

Conspiracy theories are narratives that explain the world by dividing people into evil conspirators acting in secret and innocent victims (Butter & Knight, 2020; Himelboim et al., 2023). While a common response to conspiracy theories has long been to mock believers or stigmatize them, this approach is limited since there are many examples of real conspiracies (Robinson & Watson, 2025).

Conspiracy theories gain momentum in times of crisis and low trust in institutions (Himelboim et al., 2023). North American politics have long been shaped by conspiratorial thinking, as detailed by Richard Hofstadter in his famous piece “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” (1964). Conspiracy theories have become more politically influential in politics in recent years, due in part to the changing media landscape (Philips & Milner, 2021). The flourishing of conspiracy theories, especially of the anti-elite/ anti-“globalist” ilk has been supported by a new global media ecosystem that facilitates a rapid dissemination of conspiratorial information on digital platforms (Robinson & Watson, 2025). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was fertile ground for the proliferation of conspiracy theories, as there was a great deal of uncertainty around COVID’s causes, transmission, and the level of threat it posed (Himelboim et al., 2023). This led to what the United Nations called an “infodemic” where a vast amount of differing information and opinions about the virus circulated (Himelboim et al., 2023).

Conspiracy theories of all kinds about COVID-19 were created as quickly as the virus emerged, arguing that the virus was manufactured and leaked intentionally, possibly by a specific group to kill some percentage of the global populace (Himmelboim et al., 2023). More theories proliferated once vaccines were developed that had similar storylines around authoritarian control. Existing conspiracy theories on other topics were rolled into conspiracy theories about the pandemic, like theories about 5G networks, and the “great replacement” theory that elites are trying to enact a white genocide to demographically replace white populations (Robinson & Watson, 2025). Climate change was also rolled into these conspiracy theories, which will be described in the following section.

### ***2.5.1 Climate Lockdowns***

A conspiracy theory about “climate lockdowns” emerged in 2020, where “outrage and frustration about government imposed COVID-19 lockdown measures was pivoted towards climate issues” (Maharasingam-Shah & Vaux, 2021, p.6). A few actors attempted to pivot COVID-19 health mandates to climate, with little uptake online. This changed when The Guardian published an editorial arguing for a green economic transition and that a “return to normal” economic activity after the pandemic should be resisted to reduce global emissions (The Guardian, 2020). This provided the grist for the director of the Heartland Institute, one of the most prolific fossil fuel-funded climate denialist organizations in the world, to seed the climate lockdown conspiracy theory online. By December 2020, this conspiracy theory was circulating widely online and in right wing media. This narrative argued that climate lockdowns would be imposed as part of a broader plot for authoritarian control and was disseminated widely by a several conservative and far-right pundits, media outlets, and influencers, and connected to other conspiracy theories such as the Great Reset (explained below) (Maharasingam-Shah & Vaux, 2021).

### ***2.5.2 15-Minute Cities***

A conspiracy theory around the urban planning concept of 15-minute cities emerged out of the climate lockdown panic after Oxfordshire City Council in the United Kingdom announced plans to implement a traffic management plan, partially involving splitting the city into walkable neighbourhoods (Climate Action Against Disinformation (CAAD), 2023). The Oxfordshire plan was immediately linked to authoritarian control by right-wing bloggers and media personalities and replaced climate lockdowns as the dominant climate conspiracy theory being spread on social media. The creation of traffic calming measures in Oxfordshire provided the proof conspiracists needed to believe that climate lockdowns would be facilitated by these 15-minute cities.

The 15-minute city conspiracy theory became a more mainstream narrative since proponents of the conspiracy narrative do not always say this urban planning measure will literally lock people in their homes, only significantly limit their movements (Marquet et al., 2023). As with the climate lockdown narrative, this conspiracy theory was disseminated by some of the same well-known climate denialists, as well as anti-lockdown activists, and accounts from “a spectrum of ‘anti-woke’ content, COVID/vaccine skepticism, and conservative or libertarian politics” (CAAD, 2023, p. 4). In early 2023, this conspiracy theory led to protests in multiple countries including the UK, Spain and Canada (Marquet et al., 2025).

### ***2.5.3 The Great Reset***

Tied into the conspiracy theories around climate lockdowns and 15-minute cities is a broader conspiracy theory that emerged in response to the World Economic Forum’s (WEF) 2020 economic recovery plan called “The Great Reset” about reforming the global economic system while emerging from the pandemic (Christensen & Au, 2023). The Great Reset had three main components: pushing for fairer outcomes in the global market to address inequalities

produced by global capitalism, efforts to address sustainability and equality by urging governments and businesses to take action to address climate change and racism, and a reformulation of previous WEF publications on a “fourth industrial revolution” of technological solutions to address global issues (Christensen & Au, 2023).

In September 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave a presentation at a United Nations conference echoing the language of the Great Reset in stating that pandemic “provided an opportunity for a reset”, which helped fuel the spread of the conspiracy theory in Canada (Christensen & Au, 2023, p. 2348). The Great Reset conspiracy theory posits that the head of the WEF, Klaus Schwab, and other elites planned lockdowns and other COVID-19 public health measures either to engender economic collapse or to install authoritarian/ socialist governance and/ or usher in dystopic surveillance capitalism (Gallagher & O’Connor, n.d). A common phrase that believers in this theory refer to is “you’ll own nothing and you’ll be happy”, which originated in a WEF video and some articles that shared broad predictions about the future (Gallagher & O’Connor, n.d., para.5). This conspiracy theory can be understood as what Anna Merlan has termed a “conspiracy singularity”, whereby various conspiratorial concerns about COVID-19 lockdowns to 5G networks to climate policy have been connected as part of a plot to control the populace (2020). Naomi Klein explains that this “conspiracy smoothie” is an adulteration of her “shock doctrine” concept, whereby elites use disasters to further cement capital accumulation (Klein, 2020).

While the Great Reset conspiracy theory was wielded to argue that COVID-19 health measures were being ushered in to restrict the populace’s freedoms, anti-climate groups are now making this same argument about climate policy. Notably, proponents of such conspiracy theories do not always need to define a full conspiracy theory but instead make coded references

to conspiratorial ideas. This “conspiracy without the theory” has been named “conspiracism” (Muirhead et al., 2019, p. 143). Conspiracists do not need a theory or evidence to believe that some nefarious group is causing harm—conspiracism spreads through innuendos and assertions (Muirhead et al., 2019). Climate conspiracism is part of a much broader turn towards conspiratorial thinking on the political right (Lockwood, 2018).

## **2.6 Reactionary Right-Wing Movements and Climate Denial**

The climate change countermovement emerged from the broader conservative movement. Climate denial has long been tied to market fundamentalist ideology espoused by conservatives (Ekberg et al., 2023). In recent years, right wing populist and far-right actors have taken up climate denial as a new fight against government tyranny, elite control and scapegoated others (Lockwood, 2018; Allen et al., 2024).

Nationalism and climate denial go hand in hand for right wing populists and far-right activists who charge climate action and the international organizations that promote it with threatening national sovereignty (Lockwood, 2018). In Canada, extractive populist organizations like Canada Action employ far-right populist rhetoric to attack environmentalists and Indigenous land defenders opposing fossil fuel extraction (Dembicki, 2022). Around the world far-right extremists, activists and politicians increasingly use climate and environmental issues to justify violence and xenophobia (Allen et al., 2024; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). I will now bring these two ideas together in examining two key events where right-wing populist and far-right forces coalesced in Canada: the explicitly pro-pipeline Yellow Vests Canada movement and 2022 Freedom Convoy.

### ***2.6.1 Yellow Vests Canada and United We Roll***

The Yellow Vests Canada Movement (YVC) began in 2018 mostly in western provinces, drawing inspiration from the French “gilet jaunes” movement against fuel taxes, but was noticeably further to the right (Tewksbury, 2021). YVC began as an anti-environmental and pro-fossil fuel movement but quickly shifted to “a generalized menu of far-right social and political issues”, including xenophobia (Tewksbury, 2021, p.940). In some cases, protests organized by YVC were co-opted by far-right extremist groups (Orr, 2019; May, 2019).

YVC protesters organized rallies to oppose the carbon tax and demand the federal government to remove environmental regulations from Bill C-69 (Tewksbury, 2021). Enoch (2022) and McLean (2024) argue that the YVC movement can be traced back to the fossil fuel industry’s creation of subsidized publics to defend extractivism in Canada. Before YVC, extractive populist advocacy groups like Canada Action had been organizing “resource rallies” to support oil and gas and oppose environmental legislation. Although industry groups were happy to have YVC do their own pro-oil organizing, they did not want to be associated with the movement as it promoted other far-right issues (Enoch, 2022). Canada Action cancelled a planned convoy to Ottawa, and the YVC’s United We Roll convoy went forward. Enoch (2022) argues that the fossil fuel industry created the conditions for this right-wing organizing to proliferate through its populist rhetoric.

While the ostensible origins of the YVC movement in Canada were extractive populism, conspiratorial and extremist elements were present within YVC as well: YVC’s Facebook group description included references to the “Globalist UN and their Tyrannical policies” (Yellow Vests Canada, 2019, quoted in Tewksbury, 2021, p.945). Many protest signs and Facebook posts espoused xenophobic and racist views (Tewksbury, 2021). In early 2020 when Indigenous land defenders were opposing the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline through Wet’suwet’en

territory, and some erected rail blockades in different parts of the country, United we Roll members planned to intimidate Indigenous blockaders and Canada Action put thousands of dollars into advertisements pillorying the blockades (McLean, 2024).

### **2.6.2 Freedom Convoy**

The United We Roll convoy has been characterized as a dry run for the so-called “Freedom Convoy”, as they shared some key organizers (Enoch, 2022; Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2023). The Freedom Convoy saw thousands of protesters fill downtown Ottawa with hundreds of big rigs and pickup trucks, shutting down parts of the city for nearly a month, and blockades were erected slowing down traffic at two Canada/ US border crossings (Pringle & Raymond, 2022; Public Safety Canada, 2022).

The convoy was initially organized to protest vaccine requirements for truckers who crossed the US-Canada border for work, and COVID-19 health measures in general. It soon turned into a generally anti-government protest where “Fuck Trudeau” flags were abundant; it was animated by “a more general, amorphous cry for “freedom” (Klein, 2023, p. 101). The convoy brought together an assemblage of average conservatives, disaffected truckers and business owners, wellness influencers, conspiracy theorists, as well as far-right extremists and Christian white nationalists (Farokhi, 2022; Klein, 2023; Mirrlees, 2023). The convoy was initially spearheaded by James Bauder, a well-known conspiracy theorist, and the concerns and fears that convoyers mobilized around were motivated by COVID-19 and Great Reset conspiracy theories (Ling, 2023).

Around January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022, people assembled in various parts of the country to begin a convoy to the national capital (CBC News, 2022). Protesters held rallies across the country as big rigs and pickup trucks passed through to Ottawa. By January 28<sup>th</sup>, the first trucks arrived in the capital and blockaded downtown streets. While the organizers made clear that they were not

going to leave Ottawa until politicians agreed to meet with them and agree to their demands and the Ontario Provincial Police warned that the convoyers would stay for more than the weekend, the Ottawa Police Service did not take this threat seriously (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024; Steele, 2022). CSIS's Integrated Terrorism Assessment Centre (ITAC) found that there were multiple far-right extremists among the convoy organizers, and yet the threat was still not taken seriously (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024, p.121). The convoyers occupied multiple streets in Ottawa for nearly a month, grinding parts of the city to a halt. After weeks of this, police officers from different parts of the country and the RCMP were sent in to try and force the convoyers to leave, and eventually the federal government invoked the Emergencies Act to provide law enforcement with more powers to remove protesters, including freezing protester bank accounts (Tunney, 2024).

Experiences of the convoy were polarized depending on whether one was a supporter or not. To many Ottawans, the convoy was a major threat to safety and wellbeing, as incessant honking kept residents up at night, fumes from big rigs and trucks lowered air quality around downtown streets (Otis, 2022), and businesses were economically harmed (Ki Sun Hwang, 2022). Many residents faced harassment including "racism, misogyny, antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and other expressions of hate and intolerance" at the hands of convoy protesters, according to an Ottawa citizen-led commission (Ottawa People's Commission, 2023, p.3). Many Ottawans recognized that the convoyers received support from some active and retired police officers (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024). From the outset the convoy was clearly given preferential treatment compared to other protests in Ottawa, most notably those led by Black and Indigenous people (Stelkia, 2022). To the convoyers and people who supported

the event, it was a peaceful, joyful coming together, and the invocation of the Emergencies Act was a horrendous act of government tyranny.

While the “Freedom Convoy” mobilized primarily in opposition to COVID-19 public health measures, it was rife with extractive-populist imagery as protesters lined the streets in semi-trucks and pickup trucks, honking incessantly and spewing diesel fumes into the air (Mirrlees, 2023). Convoy organizer Tamara Lich wore a Canada Action branded “I love oil and gas” sweater to her court hearing (Enoch, 2022).

Since the Freedom Convoy, participants and supporters have formed a loose-knit, self-described “freedom” movement that has turned attention toward a wider set of issues than just the pandemic. In February 2024, the Canadian Press used the Access to Information Act to gain access to a report from Canada’s spy agency CSIS on the “freedom” movement. The brief describes how the movement began as one related to public health measures but has broadened its scope to several issue areas including opposition to the LGBTQ+ community and drag story time events, perceived increase in global control by international organizations and 15-minute cities (Bronskill, 2024). Leman-Langlois et al. (2024) characterize the Yellow Vests Canada/United We Roll and Freedom Convoy as “typical examples of one of the new tactics of the radical right: the formation or takeover of popular, wide-appeal, and ad hoc protests, issues, or movements to exploit popular fear and resentment” (p. 31).

### **2.6.3 Summary**

This chapter traced the broad arc of the climate change countermovement (CCCM) in North America, from its origins in the fossil fuel industry and conservative movement, to present day climate conspiracy theories. This literature review details the ways in which the CCCM first organized through sowing doubt about climate science and denying the existence of climate

change, whereas more recently, much of the CCCM seemingly has shifted to tactics of climate delay. The anti-climate movement has been understood to operate through extractive populism in Canada, whereby the fossil fuel industry is positioned as a national good in need of protection from the everyday person.

The arguments deployed by the CCCM are further elaborated in this literature review, as they range from denial of the causes of climate change to denial of responsibility and offering false solutions to address the problem. The chapter then details the climate change conspiracy theories that grew in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic and began to fuel a new wave of anti-climate advocacy.

Finally, this chapter discusses the climate denial that courses through reactionary right-wing movements and provides a brief examination of the Canadian Yellow Vests Movement and Freedom Convoy. These two formations were informed by conspiracism, Yellow Vests Canada organized explicitly to oppose climate policy, and the Freedom Convoy had clear extractive populist undertones. Yellow Vests Canada has been seen as a precursor to the Freedom Convoy, which launched the movement explored in this thesis.

### **Chapter Three: Findings**

This section presents key findings based on my analysis of how groups in the freedom movement are organizing to oppose climate action, informed by resource mobilization theory. It then provides findings from an analysis of groups' framing of climate change and climate policies, and a thematic analysis of broader ways in which groups appeal to their audiences to join the movement.

#### **3.1 Document Analysis Informed by Resource Mobilization Theory**

In September of 2024, as the province of British Columbia was gearing up for an election, many were shocked at the rise in polling numbers in support of the BC Conservatives, a party that had been resurrected quite recently. Many reasons for this rise were offered, but my research was leading me to believe that grassroots organizing from the freedom movement could not be overlooked. A group that I began tracking in 2023 had become focused on initiatives to challenge the current NDP government and elect a Conservative government. This section will provide a close examination of BC Rising and a handful of associated groups in the freedom movement opposing climate policy.

This analysis is informed by social movement theory, and specifically resource mobilization theory. This section is divided by group: I first introduce the group, then discuss their strategies and tactics, as well as the human, socio-organizational and material resources they mobilize. For a summary, see table 3.

The image below depicts the groups in my sample and their affiliations with one another. Arrows depict the direction of their relationship (e.g. which groups have promoted one another or worked together).

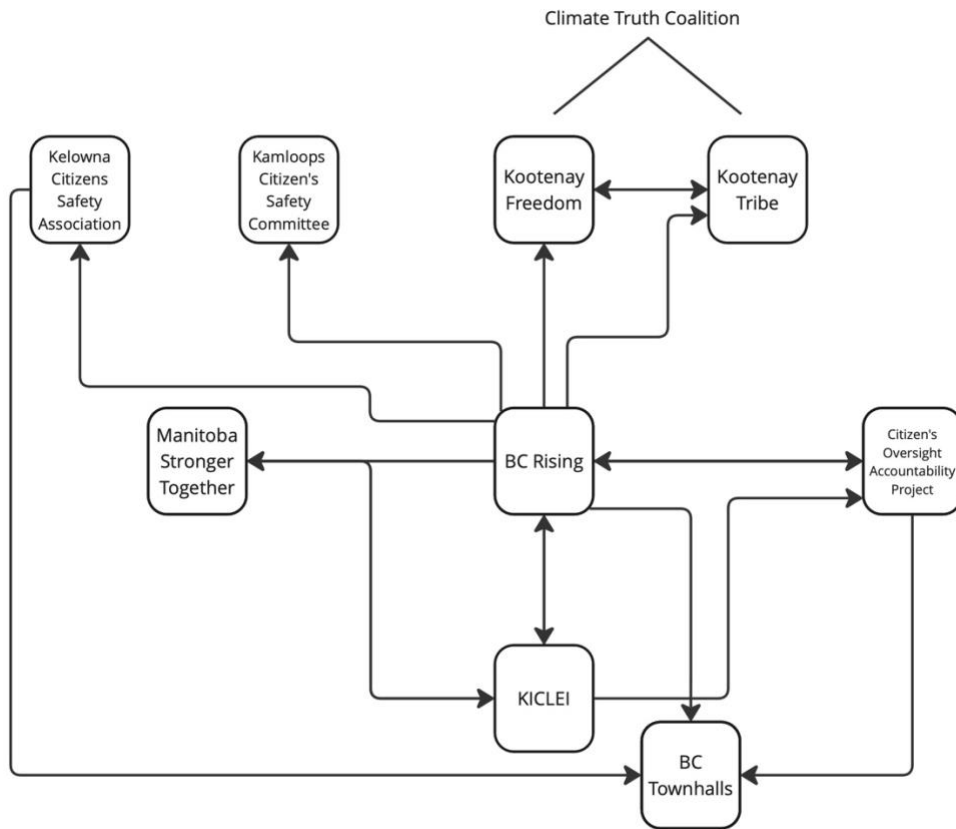
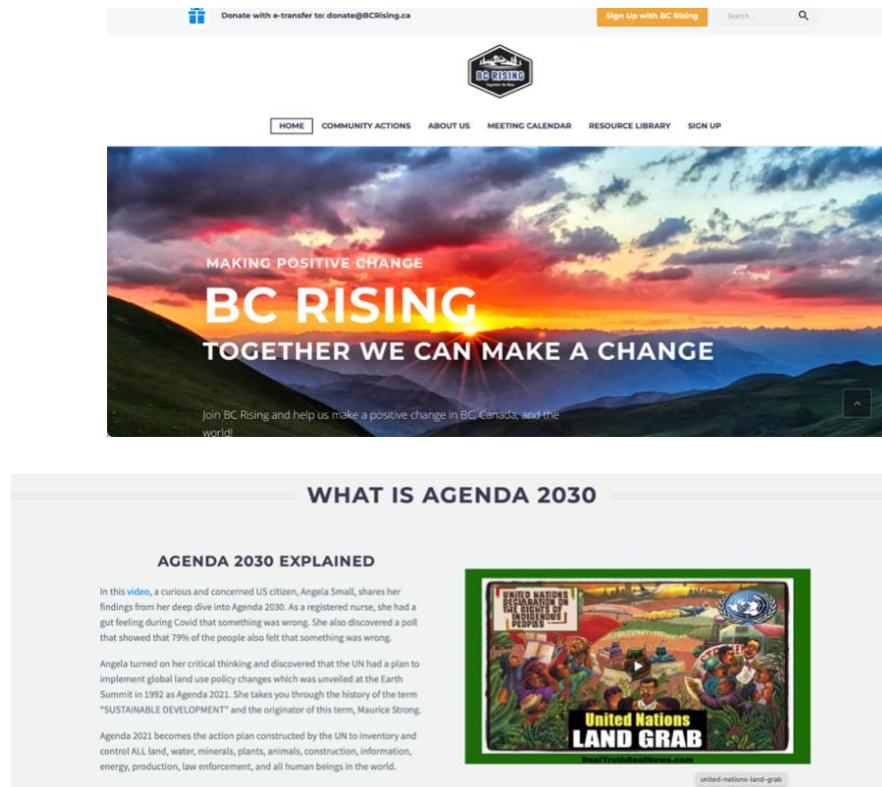


Figure 2. My sample.

### 3.1.1 BC Rising

According to Erica, one of the group’s main organizers, she created BC Rising after she was ostracized for not wearing a mask in a store during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group largely operates through weekly zoom meetings that it livestreams on Facebook. The meetings focus on a range of topics, from opposing regulations on natural health products, to continued activism to oppose COVID-19 vaccine mandates and support activists who opposed COVID-19 health measures. Its anti-climate activism began with it hosting a webpage and newsletter for a broader coalition of groups and individuals opposed to climate action and 15- minute cities. This coalition hosted zoom calls to discuss opposing climate legislation and 15-minute cities, featuring people who had made presentations to local governments (hereafter referred to as “public delegations”) in opposition to climate action. It also shared a “Notice of Liability” flyer

for citizens to notify their local representatives that 15-minute cities infringe on charter rights. This webpage has been replaced with one called “Agenda 2030”, that includes links to videos about a supposed UN agenda to take away individual freedoms in the name of fighting climate change (BC Rising, n.d.).



*Figure 3. Screenshots from BC Rising's website.*

In early 2024, BC Rising paused its 15-minute city coalition in favour of organizing in preparation for the October 2024 provincial election after it received coaching from conservative political operative David Parker. Parker suggested they increase their impact by joining and taking over the BC Conservative party in December 2023. Parker created the group Take Back Alberta, that credits itself with ousting Jason Kenney as Premier of Alberta and replacing him with Danielle Smith (Tait, 2023). In 2024 BC Rising began hosting weekly “election readiness” meetings during which they promoted new initiatives: BC Townhalls 2024, Political Scorecards,

Keyboard Warriors, and street canvassing. BC Townhalls 2024 organized nearly two dozen townhall events across the province largely focused on a series of provincial Bills organizers opposed (BC Townhalls 2024, n.d.). The Political Scorecard project scores politicians based on their voting record and stances on issues of “individual rights” (n.d.). The keyboard warrior initiative involved one volunteer coaching others on how to create Facebook posts to promote BC Townhalls and criticize the NDP in various local Facebook groups across the province (with real and fake accounts). BC Rising also provided resources for volunteers to do their own street canvassing and a questionnaire for citizens to send candidates asking a series of questions on many issues including: the use of the Emergencies Act by the federal government to disband the Freedom Convoy, safe supply programs in BC, the BC Emergency Act and whether it should consider climate change, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and “parental rights” (BC Rising, n.d.b).

After the provincial election, BC Rising began promoting a questionnaire on election integrity, playing into conspiratorial ideas around electoral fraud. Now, the group has largely shifted its focus to opposing sexual orientation and gender identity (BC Rising, 2024a) education in schools and funneling members into the BC Conservative party. Most recently, BC Rising has been supporting an Ostrich farm in Edgewood in opposing a Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) order to cull its 400 ostriches due to avian flu (BC Rising, n.d.c). This campaign focuses on the issue as one of animal rights but is wrapped up in conspiracism around avian flu (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2025a). This is bringing new people into BC Rising’s orbit: it has massively increased BC Rising’s reach on Facebook, bringing it to 25 000 views on one of its livestreams in January 2025 (BC Rising, 2025a). Current Health Secretary and prolific anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has spoken up in opposition to the ostrich cull (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2025a).

BC Rising has a handful of organizers who put significant hours into creating and sending a weekly newsletter, hosting weekly zoom meetings (that are livestreamed on Facebook and another platform called Not TV), and connecting people within their network to start new initiatives. Their zoom calls often attract 100-200 people, and livestreams of their meetings on Facebook regularly receive over 1000 views. The BC Townhall events saw numbers between 100-200 consistently and received thousands of views online (BC Rising, 2024b). BC Rising is well networked with like-minded organizations. They have met with other organizations to discuss strategy tips including Civis4Reform, the John Birch Society in the United States and the Campaign for Life Coalition. They also organized two webinars with Bruce Parry, who is affiliated with the Fraser Institute, bringing them a slightly more mainstream audience.

BC Rising also has connections to the BC Conservative party. The organization has John Rustad's ear, notably through their opposition to an NDP bill called the Health Professionals and Occupations Act (HPOA). BC Rising is opposed to the HPOA on several grounds, including that the legislation stipulates that health professionals can be penalized for spreading medical misinformation. BC Rising worries the bill will be used to quell dissent against vaccinations. Several members of the BC Rising network had brief stints as candidates in the October election: Stephen Malthouse and Jan Webb were candidates briefly but were removed when it came to light that they were spreading vaccine misinformation (Bains, 2024). Another BC Rising volunteer, Kari Simpson, is a vice-president for the BC conservative's Langley-Abbotsford riding association (Lazenby, 2024).

Regarding material resources, BC Rising takes donations and has received thousands of dollars in donations for a postcard initiative to oppose the HPOA. A holiday fundraiser from December 2024-January 2025 raised \$9250 (BC Rising, 2025b).

### **3.1.2 Kamloops Citizen’s Safety Committee (KSCS) and Kelowna Citizen’s Safety Association (KCSA)**

This section discusses the KSCS and KCSA together as they share the same mandate to promote “keep[ing] government local, accountability, individual rights, and common-sense climate policy” (KCSC, n.d.; KCSA, n.d.). The KCSC was created by Geoff Snicer, who was an early speaker on BC Rising webinars. Geoff made two presentations on 15-minute cities that have been shared by many groups in my sample and played at numerous events in different parts of BC. KCSA is led by another BC Rising member who was involved in the 15-minute city coalition.

Both groups have held town hall events where Snicer criticized BC’s provincial climate plan and local climate plans. Their strategy is to label themselves as community associations to be innocuous, and to build coalitions with other community associations to fold more people into their mandate. Outside of opposing climate action, KCSC has opposed the use of AI to survey the composition of recycling bins in Kamloops (KCSC, 2024), and the KCSA spent the spring focused on opposing aerial spraying to kill invasive spongy moths in Kelowna (KCSA, n.d.b).

These groups are small with only two people clearly running each group. Both groups have still been able to mobilize at least one hundred people to their climate related town hall events. KCSC is well networked with other community associations and is active only at the municipal level. Both groups accept donations, though I was not able to access their level of funding.

### **3.1.3 Climate Truth Coalition**

In the spring of 2023, a loose coalition of groups began organizing to oppose the Regional District of the Central Kootenays’ (RDCK) climate action plan. The coalition includes Kootenay Freedom, Kootenay Tribe, and potentially others. This campaign involved information

dissemination through newsletters and email chains, pamphlets, petitions, to mobilize people to attend RDCK events to oppose the plan (Kootenay Tribe, n.d.). This is a case where a coalition in my sample saw some success, so I will briefly explain the events as I have been able to understand them.

This coalition described above launched the 15-minute city webpage and meetings hosted by BC Rising. One group created template letters and a petition to demand more consultation on the RDCK's climate plan (Kootenay Tribe, n.d.). They mobilized around 100 people to attend an RDCK climate townhall in April 2023 to oppose the plan. The group provided talking points to oppose the climate plan, and a list of questions to send RDCK directors. In early May another petition was created that denied the existence of climate change and demanded the RDCK halt all climate actions. In May 2023, the RDCK chose to delay a series of climate townhalls and the adoption of their climate plan. This delay provided an opportunity for groups in the Climate Truth Coalition to organize around 12 townhalls across the Kootenays to share their concerns about the climate plan with communities (Kootenay Tribe, n.d.). Kootenay Tribe also challenged the RDCK on their finances and tried to mobilize people to demand a decrease in taxes (largely through meeting with RDCK representatives and creating pamphlets).

The RDCK conducted public consultation later in the summer into the fall, engaging over 3000 residents between April and October 2023 (RDCK, n.d.a). In April 2024, Kootenay Freedom made a public delegation to the RDCK denying the need for climate action (Kendemic, 2024). In spring of 2024, the RDCK directed staff to research affordable climate actions based on a renewed list of ideas generated through public consultation. The RDCK determined that now a business case must be made before council before any climate action is adopted, and a vote must

be made at a public meeting (RDCK, n.d.b). In this way, the Kootenay coalition managed to gum the gears of climate action in the RDCK. Otherwise, Kootenay Freedom mostly operates through a biweekly newsletter that promotes a confusing range of content including anti-vaccine events, but also demonstrations calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. The newsletter promotes conspiracy theories of all types, from wildfires to 9/11, COVID-19 and climate denial.

It is unclear how many people the Climate Truth Coalition has mobilized over last year and a half, but members of the coalition reported having “great turnout” at climate townhalls in summer 2023, and the RDCK meeting in April 2024 had about 50 people attending in person and at least 50 people online (Mori, 2024).

The coalition was able to raise approximately \$7000 from their community to print and mail 23 000 brochures to promote their campaigns (Kootenay Tribe, n.d.).

#### **3.1.4 Citizen’s Oversight & Accountability Project (COAP)**

COAP was formed in 2023 by Adrienne Richards and Joesph Enslow after their joint campaign to become town councillors was unsuccessful (Blondeau, 2023). Their next strategy was to form COAP as a stakeholder group to affect policy at the municipal level and to counter climate and other progressive organizations in the region (COAP, 2023a). COAP has a prolific Substack and frequently makes public delegations to North Cowichan Municipal Council on topics such as challenging the need for climate action, opposing the adoption of the BC Zero carbon step code (COAP, 2023b), questioning the need for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) (COAP, 2025a), and at one point defending anti- abortion and anti- LGBTQ+ groups (COAP, 2024a). COAP uses its Substack to encourage followers to join them in advocating against climate policy (COAP, 2023b).

The group has organized several townhalls, including two that explicitly denied climate change (COAP, 2023c). COAP also conducts Freedom of Information requests at the municipal

level, namely around North Cowichan’s decision to declare a climate emergency. COAP has also been an active supporter of the Land Keepers Society, a group opposing the Cowichan Estuary Restoration Project on the grounds that it will flood farmland (Blondeau, 2023).

In 2023, COAP launched its own local newspaper called the Westward Independent (WWIND), which they stock in at least 150 locations in the Cowichan Valley (COAP, 2023d). COAP uses this newspaper to promote many of the same topics as it does through other channels- questioning the need for and criticizing climate policy, advocating for the end of safe supply policies, among other issues. WWIND has a running piece called “Council Watch” that critiques decisions made by North Cowichan council. Closer to the BC election, WWIND promoted BC Conservative candidates and promoted BC Rising’s election initiatives (WWIND, 2024ab).



Figure 4. Front page of WWIND.

While Adrienne and Joseph are the organization’s main organizers, they have mobilized a handful of supporters to make public delegations to North Cowichan Municipal council (the most was three aside from themselves) and mobilized others to send letters to city council

(COAP, 2023f). They have some support from businesses who help distribute WWIND. They have a volunteer team that proofreads and distributes WWIND (COAP, 2023a).

Based on the number of advertisements in WWIND each edition, I estimate that they bring in somewhere between a few hundred to two thousand dollars each month in revenue (COAP, 2023e).



*Figure 5. Thumbnail for a YouTube video uploaded by COAP, as an example of them opposing climate groups.*

### **3.1.5 KICLEI**

KICLEI or Kicking the International Council out of Local Environmental Initiatives, is an initiative created by Maggie Braun. Braun began this initiative after attending the Freedom Convoy and deciding that a decentralized campaign to oppose the “global agenda” would be more successful (The Shadoc Davis Show, 2024). Her initiative began as a Substack account called Gather2030, where she shared information about the “global takeover” of the United Nations, and videos and scripts of her public delegations to small municipalities to oppose this agenda. Since fall of 2023, Braun has professionalized her work and moderated some of her language. While initially Braun shared sovereign citizen ideas related to invented legal doctrines (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024), she has shelved many of those ideas in favour of more mainstream arguments to oppose climate action.

Braun runs Gather2030 as a Substack for activists where she continues to share suggested scripts for public delegations at city councils, but also reflections on how to strengthen the freedom movement, and practical information on topics like facilitating effective meetings (Gather2030, 2023a). Braun runs a second Substack called KICLEI that she promotes as being tailored to politicians and decision makers, where she frequently writes climate denial content and criticizes different jurisdictions' climate plans (Gather2030, 2025a).

Braun has supported the creation of at least 14 KICLEI chapters across the country including several in Ontario, two in Alberta, and at least one in Manitoba and New Brunswick. As of May 2025, Braun states that 3-5 KICLEI groups make public delegations in front of local city/ town councils each month (The Shadoc Davis Show, 2025). Braun holds a monthly KICLEI zoom call for all chapters. Braun has created a full template for running KICLEI campaigns with specific steps to demand municipalities exit partnerships with environmental NGOs. KICLEI targets one program in particular: the Partners for Climate Protection which is administered by ICLEI (formerly the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives but the organization is now called "Local Governments for Sustainability") and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (Gather2030, 2024a). The campaign involves creating educational materials on the PCP program and distributing them, hosting educational events, creating reports on municipalities' climate plans and the PCP, creating and presenting public delegations to city councils, and creating draft motions to exit the PCP (Gather2030, 2025b). The campaign also involves building relationships with other groups and with city staff and city councillors and sending them information to try to sway them (Gather2030, 2023b). Braun recommends chapters use ChatGPT to research and write pretty much all materials for the campaigns, which suggests that much if not all the content she creates may be generated by AI.

Braun boasts of two major success stories. The first is in the Ontario municipality of Thorold, where KICLEI members were able to push city council to formally opt out of the PCP (Gather2030, 2024b). It is not yet clear if/ how this will affect the municipality's climate actions. The second is in Lethbridge, Alberta, where City Council voted to weaken its carbon emissions targets by 50% in May 2025, after KICLEI mobilized. Otherwise, it is not clear whether any other KICLEI chapter has succeeded in their goals to date.

Braun is the leading force behind KICLEI, though she has at least one assistant, and may have a couple of other people helping her with her website and logistics. As of May 2025, Braun notes that KICLEI has 1000 members who have expressed interest in volunteering from across the country. KICLEI chapters have gained some support from city councillors in some cities. Based on the few recordings of zoom calls that Braun has shared online, KICLEI meetings get at least 25 attendees consistently. Based on photos from in person chapter meetings, these get around 20 attendees. Braun has been able to mobilize significant numbers to support public delegations. She brought out 65 people to support her public delegation to Douro Dummer in August 2023. A couple in Aurora Ontario that Braun coached filled the chambers with over 100 people. In May 2025, a KICLEI chapter in Oxford County, Ontario got 800 signatures on a petition to demand their county withdraw from the PCP, and public delegations in front of council brought out 130 supporters, according to Braun (Leaders on the Frontier, 2025). Braun has more supporters online: her public KICLEI Facebook group has 3.3k members. Braun's Substack has over 15 000 subscribers (Gather2030, n.d.). Braun made between \$15 000- 20 000 through 115 paid Substack subscribers in 2024 (Braun, 2024). As of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, Braun had 90 people signed up to donate \$30/ month to KICLEI, which would amount to \$32 400 in revenue for 2025 (Gather2030, 2025c). Braun has created a ChatGPT tool for KICLEI groups

that she has monetized at \$20/ month (Gather2030, 2024c). Braun also offers consultations at \$50/ hour (Gather2030, 2024d).

### **3.1.6 Manitoba Stronger Together (MST)**

MST was launched by Ken Drysdale, who joined the freedom movement when he noted his local hospital was empty during the COVID-19 pandemic, a personal experience which confirmed his suspicions that COVID-19 was not as harmful as authorities were suggesting (BC Rising, 2024c). Ken was a commissioner for the citizen-led “National Citizens Inquiry” that interviewed witnesses with complaints about the federal government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic such as supposed vaccine injuries (NCI, n.d.). MST’s mission is to create a unified voting bloc to influence Manitoba elections and governments.

The group hosts frequent zoom meetings that include group discussions and presentations from speakers. MST only uploads recordings of the presentation portion of its meetings. Since its inception, MST has mostly hosted speakers to give presentations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with interviews with organizers from far-right groups like Action4Canada, CitizensGO (an anti-“gender ideology” and anti-abortion organization), and the United Party of Canada (which has Christian nationalist overtones). They hosted one speaker to present the threats of 15-minute cities and climate action (MST, n.d.a). MST organized a three-day conference in June 2024 that promoted itself as bringing “together freedom leaders, activists, and community members from across Canada to discuss and promote strategies for a freer and more just nation” (MST, n.d.b).

Beginning in the summer of 2024, MST began to focus on opposing the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region (WMR) Plan for 2050 on many grounds including its sustainability and climate planks. Drysdale created a vast webpage dissecting the WMR 2050 plan along with template letters that citizens could send to municipal representatives, MLAs, and Premier Wab

Kinew to oppose the plan. MST organized nine townhalls to provide the same information in various municipalities within the WMR (MST, n.d.c).

As of February 2024, MST boasted 50 000 subscribers to their newsletter, but few of those were active volunteers (Drysdale, 2024). MST has a public Facebook group with 928 members. Images from their Stronger Together Conference show about 50 people at a time, but MST’s final count was 350 (Drysdale, 2024b). They have at least a handful of committed volunteers who write blog posts regularly (promoting upcoming webinars, sharing “wins of the week”, and news surrounding legal fallout from anti-COVID-19 mandate activism).

MST states they do not take donations, though they accepted sponsorships and donations for their conference in June 2024. MST made \$22 000 in revenue from this conference, \$18 000 of which they donated to freedom groups (Drysdale, 2024c).

*Table 3. Highlights of attributes informed by Resource Mobilization (RM) theory*

<b>Group</b>	<b>Tactics</b>	<b>Material Resources</b>	<b>Human resources</b>	<b>Demographics</b>
<b>BC Rising</b>	Educational: webinars, townhalls, newsletter, flyers, social media  Petitions  Electoral organizing	Takes donations  Dec 2024 fundraiser raised \$9250	<10 key organizers  100s in person events, 1000s views online videos	Largely middle-aged to older, white, sometimes younger parents
<b>Climate truth coalition</b>	Educational: Townhalls, newsletters, flyers/posters  Public delegations to regional government  Online petitions  Electoral organizing	Unclear  Community donations of ~ \$3700 for printing	10s-1000s of people at in person events, 10s to attend RDCK meetings  <10 to make public delegations	Largely middle-aged to older, white, sometimes younger parents
<b>COAP</b>	Educational: townhalls, newsletter, substack, website, Youtube, community newspaper  Public delegations  FOI requests	Unclear  Takes donations Ad revenue for WWIND likely between a few hundred- \$2000/month	2 key organizers  3 to make public delegations  <10 newspaper volunteers	Middle-aged-older, white
<b>KCSC</b>	Educational: townhalls, website, uploads to YouTube	Unclear  Takes donations	2 key organizers  1 to make public delegations	Largely middle-aged to older, white

	Public delegations		<10 volunteers at events	
<b>KCSA</b>	Educational: townhalls, website, uploads to YouTube  Letter writing, postering/ flyer	Unclear  Takes donations	2 key organizers  Unclear number of volunteers	Largely middle-aged to older, white
<b>KICLEI</b>	Educational: Webinars, Substack, website, social media, posters/ flyers,  Coalition building  Public delegations  Letter campaigns  Online petitions	Takes donations  Made between \$15000-20 000 through 115 paid Substack subscribers in 2024  2025 income potentially \$23760	1 key organizer with several chapters across the country.  10s of people to Zoom calls, 10s to in person meetings and public delegations  3.3K people in public Facebook group 1000 Substack followers	Largely middle-aged, to older, white
<b>MST</b>	Educational: webinars, townhalls, website, social media  Letter campaigns	Say they don't take donations  Donations for June 2024 conference \$22 000	Unclear number of key organizers <10  1000s in person events/ meetings  50 000 subscribed to newsletter, few active volunteers	Largely middle-aged to older, white

### 3.2 Analysis of Climate frames

This section will discuss the results related to my second research question: how are groups framing climate change and climate policies? First, it is important to note that the anti-climate freedom movement relies on materials and arguments produced and disseminated by climate denier “experts” tied to fossil capital who are part of the “regime of obstruction” delaying action on climate change. Examples include Gregory Wrightstone, Patrick Moore, Marc Morano, Tim Ball, and the CO2 Coalition, who are all affiliated with the Heartland Institute or other organizations tied to fossil capital known to spread climate disinformation (Desmog, n.d.a,b,c,d,e). This analysis includes content created by these figures shared by groups in my sample, and material created directly by groups that often parrot similar language.

I conducted a qualitative content analysis of frames to understand the ways in which climate change and climate policy are presented by groups in my sample. My analysis combined inductive and deductive analysis, informed by Cann & Raymond's 2018 typology of climate policy opposition frames. I found instances of each of these frames and many subframes across my sample. The following section will explain the ways in which these frames appeared across my sample, and additional frames I identified related to climate change and climate policy. In this section, I will focus less on providing examples of science frames, as these have been well documented in previous literature. I will instead focus on describing the use of newer frames or newer use of these frames in context.

### **3.2.1 Science Frames**

Many arguments were made within each of the science frames, including that climate change simply isn't happening, the climate has always changed due to natural cycles, and human activity is only partially responsible for climate change. Others included that climate data is manipulated and fraudulent. Another frame is that climate change is a myth or scare tactic weaponized by scientists, politicians and activists for financial gain. Within this frame that there were many attacks on climate scientists/ activists in the form of calling climate action proponents hysterical, zealots, implying that they are trying to terrify people. Groups like BC Rising and COAP promote content that uses these frames on their websites and mobilize these frames at internal events.

### **3.2.2 Benefit Frames**

Here it was argued that carbon dioxide is beneficial to ecosystems, that it is the basis of all life on earth, and that it is being unfairly vilified. This can be understood as what Pasek (2021) has termed "carbon vitalism". This frame was present in overt climate denial resources shared by groups and was used in presentations for city councils as a means of defending GHGs

and opposing climate policy. As an example, COAP wrote on their Substack “CO2 increases well behind warming, and thank goodness for the slight increase in CO2, as our planet has greened, instead of died, which it would have at 250 ppm and lower” (2024b, para. 5).

### **3.2.3 Policy Design Frames:**

#### *Climate change policies would do more harm than good*

A common frame was that climate change policies would do more harm than good, because they are being enacted to the detriment of other issues. Here, groups pit climate action against other issues such as the housing, toxic drug crisis and affordability crises.

#### *Climate policy threatens sovereignty:*

This frame argues that climate policy threatens sovereignty, particularly at the local level. Under this frame, it is argued that bodies like the United Nations and World Economic Forum have bypassed governments to implement climate action within municipalities. For instance, a BC Rising 15-minute city coalition newsletter from August 2023 states:

“The BC Council for International Cooperation is an organization pushing globalist policies into your local level. It gets its funding from the Canadian Federal Government and doesn't represent voters and it doesn't represent the community. It only represents the United Nations, and its goal is to get the community and local government to be in-line with the Global Agenda” (BC Rising, 2023a)

According to the freedom movement, this takeover began with the United Nations Earth Summit in 1992, and subsequent “Agenda 21” that provided a blueprint for UN sustainability goals (largely focused on urban planning) to be implemented within municipalities. Non-governmental organizations- namely ICLEI- formerly International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, the Climate Caucus, and others are seen as agents of the UN that influence municipalities to cement the global agenda.

#### *Climate policy causes economic harm:*

This frame was exemplified through labelling climate policies and plans “poverty plans”, stating that climate policies will intentionally “destroy the economy” (Vaccine Choice Canada, 2023). Other times, this frame was mobilized through arguing that climate policies would increase the cost of living, make life unaffordable, and raise taxes generally. For example, COAP urges people to “discover how well-intentioned global efforts can sometimes leave neighbourhoods grappling with higher costs of living, unaffordable homes, and economic challenges.” (COAP, n.d.). Another argument in this frame was that paying the salaries of city staff working on environmental issues would cost taxpayers money and harm the economy.

*Climate policy would harm the environment:*

Under this frame, it is argued that climate solutions like electric vehicles and renewable energy sources (largely wind turbines) cause environmental degradation. It was argued that mining for electric vehicles causes environmental damage, and that if EVs are charged by a grid that is run on fossil fuels, they are not real climate solutions (Vaccine Choice Canada, 2023). It is argued that wind turbines kill vast number of birds each year and cannot be recycled (A Climate Conversation, 2023). According to COAP, “these massive wind farms that are eating up vast quantities of natural space and chopping up birds and bats are also by pulling energy from the air changing the environment in unforeseen ways” (Citizens Oversight, 2023).

*Climate policy would harm developing countries:*

The frame that climate policy would harm developing countries was also used to denounce electric vehicles due to the exploitation in developing countries mining for EV batteries.

Is the RDCK comfortable with purchasing ZEV’s born of child labour in hazardous working conditions, sometimes causing death, with expansive polluting mines for the lithium and cobalt occur over Indigenous sacred lands with resulting water pollution or complete loss of water sources for their areas? (Kootenay Tribe, 2023).

*Climate policy would promote unreliable energy systems:*

Under this frame, it was broadly argued that renewable energy systems are unreliable and will cause blackouts (KCSC, 2023). It was also argued that the power grid is not capable of handling higher demand that will result from the electrification projected by the energy transition.

*Climate policy would be futile or unnecessary:*

Within this frame it was argued that climate policies would be futile because one jurisdiction's emissions have such a small impact on the global stage.

So we're not going to look at China. We're not going to look at other areas of the world. We're not going to look at the fact that we have forests upon forests. We're not gonna look at any of that (TheTrueFactsC19, 2023).

Climate policy is purported to be unnecessary because it is not a priority for citizens. For example, COAP consistently refers to a poll of North Cowichan citizens' priorities that shows a small percentage of citizens prioritizing climate above other issues to oppose climate policy (see figure 5).



*Figure 6. Screenshot of a COAP YouTube video arguing that North Cowichan pursuing climate action goes against the will of the people.*

### 3.3. Additional Climate Frames

I identified three additional frames related to climate change that did not fit neatly within Cann & Raymonds' existing typology.

#### 3.3.1 Solutions Skepticism

Within this frame, it is argued that climate solutions simply will not work. Some arguments focus on the capacity of technologies, like that there is not enough grid capacity or battery storage for renewable energy and electrification, or that electric vehicles are far from efficient or safe. "There is NO evidence increased 2030 demands on the electrical infrastructure can be met" (Kootenay Tribe, 2023b). Other arguments include "climate solutions won't work *here*." Examples include that renewable energy and active transportation won't work in a cold Canadian climate, in rural areas, or for specific people (notably the elderly) (COAP, 2025b; KICLEI, n.d.)

Related to the argument above is the frame that climate plans don't make sense or are unfair. Here I have grouped framing that points to contradictions or hypocrisies within climate plans, along with "whataboutism". Many arguments are made around emissions and a failure of climate policies to properly account for them. For instance, Kootenay Freedom points out perceived hypocrisy of the RDCK not "look[ing] at corporate pollution and clear-cut logging practices". While COAP, through their newspaper, argue "why aren't we going after planned obsolescence?", pitting this issue against climate change (WWIND, 2023). Other arguments point to perceived hypocrisy of climate policies that may unintentionally create emissions, like purchasing heat pumps from China "that buys natural gas and coal from BC" (COAP, 2023f).

Further, groups argue that climate policies targeting individual actions are needlessly harmful and don't make sense or are hypocritical when one considers other sources of emissions. Groups

argue that people are made to feel shameful of their carbon footprint, while large industries and elites aren't required to modify their behaviour.

“An ironic example of "do as I say, not as I do" is the Paris 2016 Climate Accord, which is cited in the report. It sets targets that are unachievable by 2030, but the elites that travel to Paris are giving themselves pats on the back and emitting more greenhouse gases at that one conference than the municipality of Thorold will emit in the next 100 years.” (Gather2030, 2024e).

### **3.3.2 Extractive Populism**

While it did not make up a significant amount of the framing around climate policy, there were some distinct extractive populist elements within this movement. This movement is inflected with extractive populism in that it equates policies around traffic calming measures and reducing car dependency with restrictions on freedoms, thereby equating cars directly with freedom. Some notable examples include Braun's earlier speeches to city council arguing that climate action plans “targeting mobility” call into question “our SACRED mobility” rights (Gather2030, 2023c, para. 25). This understanding of driving a gas-powered vehicle as a sacred Canadian right is consistent with the first claim of extractive populism that the fossil fuels are a public good and that their use is fundamentally Canadian (Gunster, 2019).

Through raising awareness about the potential for climate plans to restrict driving and by urging people to join advocacy to oppose these plans, the advocacy of these groups is consistent with the second and third claims of extractive populism (Gunster, 2019). For instance, at the end of Snicer's presentation “investigating 15-minute cities”, multiple slides encourage people to lobby their council to change official community plans to never “fine vehicle owners or drivers for operating their vehicles to certain areas of the city” or “undertake any project to physically restrict access of full-size vehicles to residential areas” (Snicer, 2023, slide 64). Furthermore, the emphasis placed on labelling the United Nations and environmental organizations as

“international” or “foreign” entities influencing local planning decisions evokes the “foreign-funded radicals” argument made by extractive populists (Gunster, 2019, para. 10). Finally, COAP’s advocacy against banning natural gas in new buildings attempts to make people identify the natural gas industry’s wellbeing with their own.

### **3.3.3 Climate Authoritarianism:**

Here I have grouped together framing that argues or implies that there is a hidden agenda behind climate policy, that climate policy is a form of totalitarianism/ authoritarianism, and/ or that climate policy is being wielded as a form of government overreach or means of exerting control over the populace. I borrow this term from Dr. Chris Russill from Carleton University (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2024a).

The sample included many instances of referring to climate/ environmental policies/ plans as being enacted to exert control, like a video of far-right politician from the Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) politician Christine Anderson speaking about 15- Minute cities saying: “We are saving the planet, after all, aren't we? But it has nothing to do with this, nothing whatsoever. It's about control.” (Vigilant Fox, 2023).

Within this frame, climate change is understood to be a false pretext to restrict individual freedoms and remove private property: “this has nothing to do with climate change. This has to do with reducing and limiting your freedom and your access to a full-size vehicle” (Vaccine Choice Canada, 2023). This frame is invoked to imply or argue that climate policies are enacted to exert control over the populace and can range from innocuous to extremely conspiratorial. One example is that climate change will allow for “Climate Lockdowns” to be implemented easily, arbitrarily & indefinitely” (KICLEI, 2023).

Another extreme case is the argument that extreme weather events are being weaponized to exert control. In the case of past wildfires, it was implied or argued that they are not what they

seem, or that they were lit by arsonists to justify climate action- for instance, BC Rising’s 15-minute city coalition newsletters from summer of 2023 included numerous links to videos arguing that wildfires in Maui and in Canada of that summer were manmade, were created intentionally, and even a result of a “globalist attack”. This selection of videos includes testimonies from people affected by wildfires in BC in summer of 2023, who were upset with the government requiring them to evacuate their property and other aspects of perceived mismanagement of the wildfires. It also included videos looking at images of wildfires arguing they were caused by direct energy weapons, lasers, to create fires.

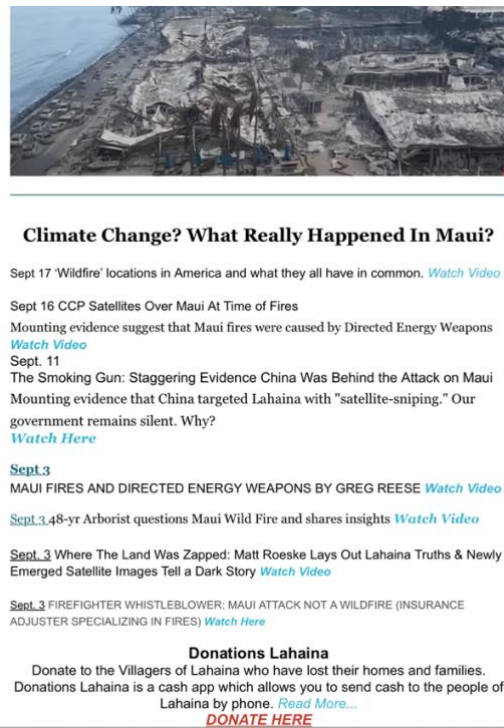
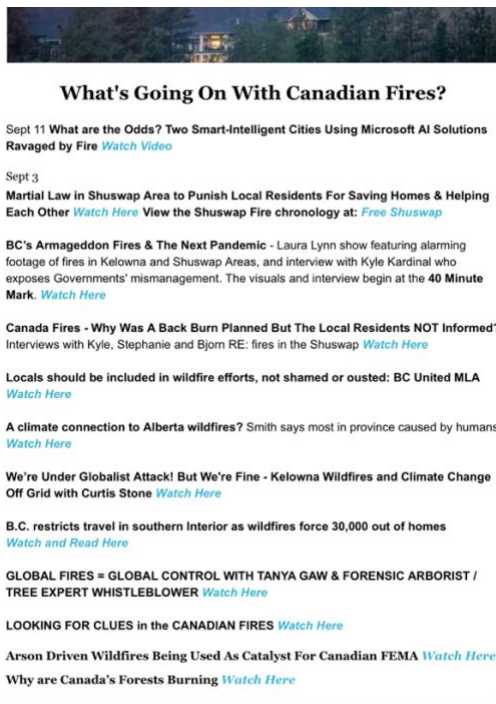


Figure 7. Screenshots from a BC Rising newsletter sharing wildfire conspiracy theories.

In May 2024, a retired firefighter from Nova Scotia made a presentation to freedom groups in the Kootenays and argued that:

The evidence suggests to me that a lot of these fires are being intentionally spread to drive the narrative. It might not be the case, but all the circumstantial evidence points to the fact that we’ve got some environmental whack jobs setting fires to justify the government pushing this whole carbon tax agenda (Kendemic, 2024b).

Similarly, shortly after hurricanes Helene and Milton caused massive devastation in North Carolina and Florida in late September- early October 2024, Kootenay Freedom shared a satirical music video parody of “Rock you like a hurricane” with the title changed to “Flood you with a HAARPacaine”. The video spreads conspiracy theories that the globalists created the hurricanes using High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP), a research initiative from the University of Fairbanks, Alaska (Reuters, 2024). In this conspiracy theory, the United States Government creates natural disasters, and hurricanes Milton and Helene were orchestrated to allow capitalists access to critical minerals for electric vehicles (Hsu & Thompson, 2024).



Figure 8. Screenshot from a video shared by Kootenay Freedom spreading conspiracy theories about hurricanes Helene and Milton.

Another extreme is references to climate/ environmental policy as plans for depopulation, which invokes the great replacement conspiracy theory. As an example, an early BC Rising

newsletter promotes a video with the following text: WILDLANDS PROJECT: UNITED NATIONS' PLAN TO DEPOPULATE HUMANITY BY FORCING US OFF 75% OF ALL THE LAND” (BC Rising, 2023b).

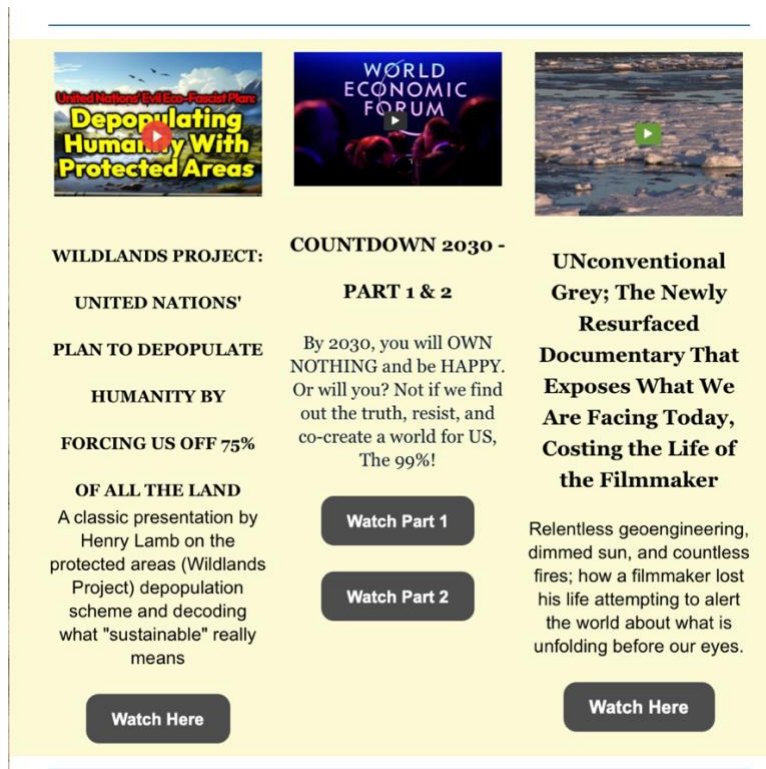


Figure 9. Screenshot from a BC Rising newsletter spreading depopulation conspiracy theories.

### 3.3.4 Frequency of use of Frames

While the focus of this analysis was qualitative rather than quantitative, it is worth noting the most prevalent frames. The top three frames include multiple subframes. The first is “climate policies would do more harm than good”, due to the frequency of the occurrence of the subframes “climate policy would threaten sovereignty” and “climate policy would cause economic harm”. The second most common frame was climate authoritarianism, including most notably the subframes “climate policy is used to exert control” and “climate policy has a hidden agenda”. The third most common frame was “the evidentiary basis of climate change is weak and even wrong” including several subframes casting doubt on the evidence behind climate

change or on the trustworthiness of scientists. This demonstrates that outright denial around the reality of climate change is still important to the anti-climate freedom movement. At the same time, this movement prioritizes framing around the supposed harms caused by climate policy and implying or stating outright that it is being implemented for nefarious reasons.

The fourth most common frame was “individual rights and freedoms” which argues that climate action threatens these rights, notably private property rights. The fifth most common frame was city transparency and engagement, arguing that climate action is pushed through without proper accountability or transparency. These frames, along with the subframe that climate policy harms sovereignty, exemplify the emphasis of this movement on local sovereignty and control over decision making as a means of opposing climate action. This attitude is exemplified by Braun’s slogan for KICLEI “localism over globalism”.

### **3.4 Thematic Analysis**

To complement my content analysis informed by framing theory, I conducted a broader thematic analysis, specifically focused on issues groups in my sample are active on and the language they use in compelling people to join them.

#### **3.4.1 Surveillance**

A large theme across my sample was the concern that climate policy is ushering in a surveillance state, and this is the means through which the government will carry out its authoritarian plan to restrict personal freedoms whereby: “the 15-minute city is a cover for data collection Bonanza for technocrats who design and operate them. Maximum surveillance allows for maximum control” (KICLEI, 2023b). Groups paint a dystopic picture of an interconnected grid of surveillance technology including traffic cameras, facial recognition, smart meters, the Internet of Things and 5G that tracks and monitors all behaviour and can restrict movement. There are also concerns that digital ID and currency will be implemented and further cement the

ability of the state to control every aspect of people's lives. Geoff Snicer muses about the direction that 15 Minute cities are taking:

Now, if everywhere in the city you have streetlights, and they're all connected on 5G. And the 5G is every 100 meters, and your Ev is also connected to the 5G. Because, of course, it will be all the Teslas. Even your GM is connected to download stuff from onstar. It's been like this for 10 years that they can set travel boundaries. So if you drive your vehicle into one area, your vehicle could just shut off, or you could get a fine, you know, if you go into one neighborhood where you don't live, or you drive too many kilometers in the city one day you're going to get fined. And this is how they're gonna start to control. This is how they could control your behavior.” (Vaccine Choice Canada, 2023).

Another fear is that records will be created of individuals' emissions profiles, which will be connected to a social credit score or “digital currency”, and people will be restricted from certain behaviours like eating meat, buying clothes, flying, and driving ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles. Other concerns surround potential abuses of power following use and protection of data that is collected through climate programs. Braun created an AI generated image contrasting two Canadas to depict a surveillance nightmare and a positive vision for Canada. In her words

“This image depicts a powerful scene where the AI fighting for Canada is winning against the opposing UN AI. The left side, representing Canada, is vibrant and full of life, symbolizing freedom, local autonomy, and individual rights, while the UN-controlled side on the right side is darker, with confined, prison-like structures. This visual emphasizes the triumph of Canadian values over global control and surveillance” (Gather2030, 2024f).



*Figure 10. AI generated image created by Maggie Braun to depict two different paths for Canada.*

## LIGHTS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, OR MONITORING ?



Guest Column

A while back, I noticed my streetlights had changed, from 2 warm orange-glow streetlights on the whole block to 1 cool LED white light every couple of houses on the block and beyond. I surmise they were installed under some "green" initiative, although I fail to see how replacing 2 lights with over 20 would be done for "planetary wellbeing".

When I called the municipality to ask what brand they were, this was the answer: "I have spoken with the Buildings Manager regarding the LED Streetlights that were installed in your neighborhood. They are the NXT-Lite series LED streetlights and the black circular thing on top is a photocell (turns the lights on at night and off during the day). If you have any further questions, feel free to contact our office!"

I checked, yet my first thought was: that is the largest "photocell" I have ever seen! While many continue to contemplate whether the notion of "Smart Cities" is a "conspiracy theory," or "a wonderful idea that should be ethically adopted in our region as soon as possible" (to save the planet!), many more dedicated evidence based researchers are vigorously trying to warn us of a potential "dystopic future" that may be looming, if allowing ourselves to be connected and monitored 24/7 becomes our new collective reality.

Research reveals other countries have already "tamed" many of these surveillance and monitoring systems, while at the same time, turning a deaf ear to legitimate citizen concerns, which are clearly backed by enormous amounts of scientific data and evidence!

Perhaps the person at North Cowichan didn't know the "black circular bit" on top is designed to serve as a receptacle for multiple monitoring devices, able to be placed there with a

off or on, they are also capable of recording and monitoring vehicle and people movement, sound, air quality, emissions, speed and more.

To date, far too many aspects of this "end game" are unclear. I have since learned B.C. Hydro has installed some of these same devices in my residential neighborhood also. When one researches this brand of LED streetlights further, we read sentences such as:

"We offer a complete range of control and monitoring solutions:"



"Automations allows for the generation of alarm or alerts to individual users or groups"; "Supports heat map analytics"; and "Supports TALQ protocol for smart cities".

According to Simon Dunkley, Secretary General of the TALQ Consortium, the clear goal is to: "make it easy for cities to connect any 'smart' device to their computer monitoring device, allowing the data produced to be stored, displayed and/or used with any other 'Smart City' processes or applications".

Not only can the lights 'talk' to each other, they have the capability to 'talk' with the smart meters on our homes, which in turn can then be linked to 'smart' appliances, and so on (otherwise widely known and referred to as the "Internet of Things").

...the "branchlet" of big tech who have been investing billions of dollars for many years to bring this to fruition).

As concerns pertaining to data security, tracking and tracing, EMF electro-smog etc. have grown exponentially for so many millions of us around the world, citizens also have become increasingly aware: public consultations and even referenda, prior to implementation of these "Open Smart Grid" protocols, not only are not being done, such

entirely unaware how relevant and seriously important it is for them to be addressed, indeed prioritized... for the critically important part of the processes such dire concerns merit!

Meaningful opportunity for citizen involvement in decision-making processes, pertaining to these massive worldwide infrastructure initiatives, continues to be conspicuously absent in most communities... across the board! While it's evident almost anything can be (and is being) pushed through

using the current "climate change" lens, when we reflect on how many esteemed scientists have spoken out passionately for decades about the negative environmental, health and other impacts of emf, it's rather astonishing municipalities throughout our very own CWRD, N.C. and Duncan appear to be going "full speed ahead" installing thousands more of these harmful EMFR-transmitting products, with woefully inadequate involvement of residents who continue to demand their legitimate concerns be responsibly heard and acted upon!

What's even worse, as those who listen to Professor Brian Trower's lecture can easily learn, all such technologies can easily be rendered safe! So why isn't that occurring and how can ordinary citizens help to ensure this happens?

Most of us are at least aware we shouldn't hold a cellular phone to our heads\*. Don't these critical concerns at least beg the question:

What scientific research or adequate due diligence, if any, have Municipal Council members and Regional District Board members done to properly inform themselves about the impacts thousands of such lights "talking" to each other will have/are having in our communities already... on birds, bees, trees, children, pregnant

190 scientists UN member states and the World Health Organization (WHO) requesting they adopt more protective exposure guidelines for electromagnetic fields (EMF) and wireless technology in the face of increasing evidence of risk. These exposures are a rapidly growing form of environmental pollution worldwide.

Joel Moskowitz, PhD, University of California, Berkeley, says: "ICNIRP guidelines set exposure standards for high-intensity, short-term, tissue-heating thresholds. These do not protect us from the low-intensity, chronic exposures common today. Scientists are signing the appeal request that the UN and member nations protect the global human population and wildlife from EMF exposures."

Besides biological health, mental health deserves responsible consideration as well, i.e., our continued unrestricted ability to move around the Valley for physical health pursuits without being contained! Not so very long ago, the notion of "Smart Cities" was called a conspiracy theory: now they are being touted on mainstream media as a "solution to a global crisis".

We can already see, in Oxford, England, how politicians and governments attempted to keep people in their 15 min cities through such monitoring technologies and how the citizens are passionately fighting back against such tyranny!

We have heard warnings about "climate lockdowns"; is it not incumbent upon us to ask: "How will more lockdowns be enforced in the future?"

We see technology and "Smart Grids" (named specifically in the CWRD OCP) as the ultimate solution to monitoring citizens' movements; or perhaps use the emissions attachment as they attempt to entirely remove wood-burning, oil and gas as heating options for our houses? (As stated in the CWRD OCP: "Advocate to BC Assessments to collect and track primary and secondary heat sources including number of houses that have upgraded heat sources or have alternative energy and woodstoves.")

Or perhaps there are just implemented for environmental

if we ask, "do 15 min cities have merit if we look at the overall basic idea", we find:

- currently, 80% of North Cowichan residents commute to work, meaning, unless/until we create jobs within the bounds of such cities, folks must be free to travel to move around as usual?;
- Would only some be burdened to "stay within boundaries", while others outside these boundaries are excluded from the "15 min plan"?

Does any of this even matter? I say not, if we don't value being able to move about freely without such intrusive and unhealthy monitoring systems installed for innumerable "reasons", such as:

- "More crime, we should install street cameras";
- "You have used up your carbon credits for the month";
- "Just monitoring emissions for your health" -- and so on.

What can you do?

- Express your concerns to your local municipalities, towns and regional/district directors;
- Attend local council meetings;
- Have meaningful conversations with others;
- Look at the data by doing your own research.

Without exaggeration, the health and ultimately the very survival of future generations and all living organisms is clearly at stake.

**SLX-VIDEO**

See more at [liveablecities.com](http://liveablecities.com)

Figure 11. WWIND article on potential tools of surveillance.

### 3.4.2 City Transparency, Accountability, and Democracy

Another theme my sample was that climate policies (including municipal sustainable planning documents) are being created and implemented in a way that lacks accountability and transparency at the local level. In some cases, it is argued that municipalities are not working in everyday people's interest because they've been overtaken by or are somehow controlled by NGOs, and these NGOs cause municipalities to lose sight of local issues.

Groups point to deficiencies in the public engagement strategies of municipal governments, such as little notice given before engagement opportunities and not enough opportunities to provide feedback and input into municipal decisions. They also point to low levels of citizen engagement within municipal processes to argue that climate plans are unaccountable to citizens and lack transparency.

Within this theme, groups in BC oppose provincial bills that require municipalities to change zoning laws to increase housing density and argue this is unconstitutional. Groups here also point to a lack of transparency around lobbying at the municipal level, notably of developers, as part of their efforts to oppose high density developments. It is argued that these provincial bills prioritize developers to the detriment of public input (BC Townhalls, 2024).

### 3.4.3 Individual Rights and Freedoms

A major theme is the need to protect individual rights and freedoms from climate policy. These rights and freedoms include ownership of vehicles, single family homes, property, and farms, as well as the burning of natural gas, air travel, and are framed as being under attack. Plans that restrict these freedoms are argued to run counter to local lifestyles or the “Canadian way of life” (BC Rising, 2024d).

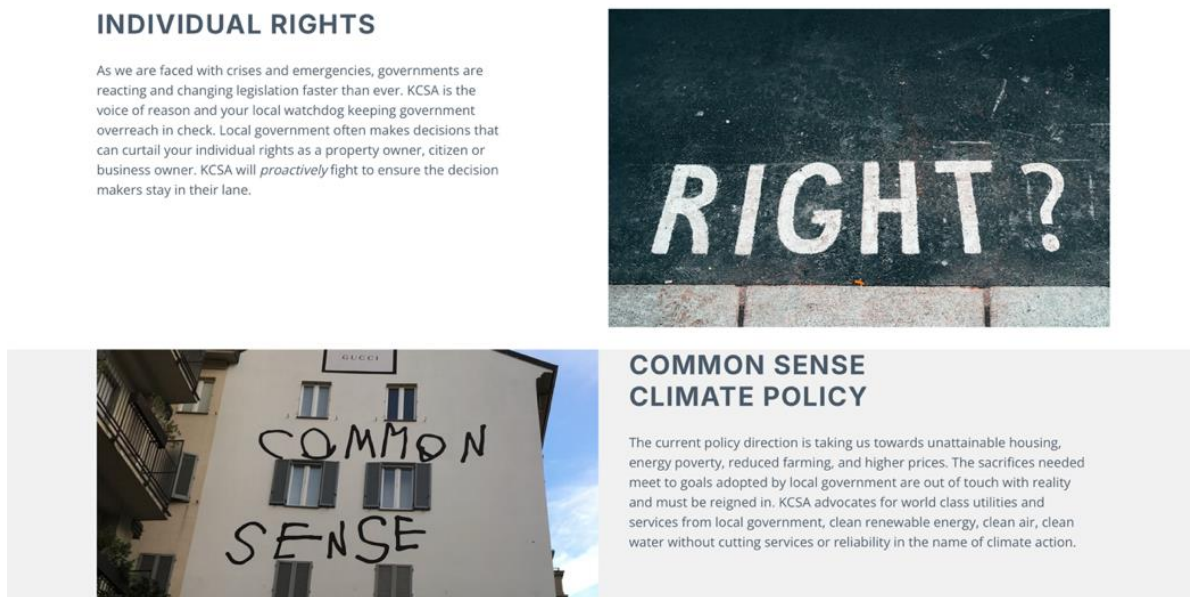


Figure 12. KCSC's core "policies" include protecting individual rights.

Groups are organizing explicitly to protect what they perceive to be individual rights. For example, the Kootenay coalition wrote a petition to the RDCK to “Commit to keeping local

government local and protect our rights to privacy, right to own land and freedom to travel.”

while a COAP member told North Cowichan Council:

“it's not your right to tell me how I can heat my home. You can tell me how I can not pollute you can tell me how I can not harm others but if I choose to heat my home and not pollute it's none of your business”

The image is a screenshot of a petition page. At the top, the title reads "NO TO RDCK AGENDA 2050 & CLIMATE ACTION CHANGES". Below the title is a graphic featuring the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals logo, with a large red 'X' superimposed over it. To the right of the graphic, the text says "Petition Closed" and "This petition had 682 supporters". Below this, there are social media sharing options: "Share on Facebook", "Send an email to friends", "Send a message via WhatsApp", "Tweet to your followers", and "Copy link".

**Why this petition matters**

Started by [Kootenay Freedom](#)

[Media inquiries](#)

KOOTENAY FREEDOM has been granted the opportunity to address the RDCK Board on April 18th 9am with a 15 minute presentation to present sound scientific facts proving there is no man-made climate 'crisis' to respond to including reducing carbon.

We are asking the RDCK board to:

1. Acknowledge there is no valid scientific consensus regarding 'man made' climate change and to minimize any economic and cultural impacts to West Kootenay residents.
2. Drop the 'net zero emissions by 2050 goal' entirely and base all actions on their own merits and not on arbitrary and unrealistic climate action goals.
3. Commit to protecting farmers lands from zoning changes, water restrictions and livestock quotas.
4. Stop using hyperbolic language like 'the world is in a global state of climate crisis' and the need to undertake 'rapid and far reaching changes' to building, construction, energy systems, land use and transportation.
5. Commit to keeping local government local and protect our rights to privacy, right to own land and freedom to travel.

We want to show to the RDCK Board that there is community support to take these requests seriously and sincerely before it is too late to take a stand with this global agenda. Our goal is 1000 signatures!

Figure 13. Kootenay Freedom petition against climate action.

### Property Rights

Individual property rights are a large concern. Pro-density policies are framed as being so expensive as to threaten citizen's ability to afford a home through potential increases in property taxes. People believe that legislation around density will require them to build dense buildings on their property, like six plexes, thereby infringing on their property rights (Victoria Town hall,

March 2024). Similarly, the BC Step code and more local plans to require increased efficiency and insulation of buildings are framed as plans that will tax people so heavily that they will functionally remove people from their land by harming them economically.

Similarly, plans at the local level to phase out natural gas in new buildings are presented as a slippery slope to requirements for individuals to upgrade their house with a government loan, that will threaten their property rights. At the extreme level, it is argued that there is a plan to force people into cities and tiny apartments “[t]hat's what they want to do, tax you and regulate you out of your homes. But everyone's going to live in a Mega district, whatever you want to call it. The average apartment is going to be 600 square feet” (Real Truth Real News, 2024).

Moreover, progress toward addressing legacies of and ongoing colonialism through implementing UNDRIP and DRIPA were framed by BC Rising and WWIND as an attack on individual property rights, and as a shift toward collective rights that will overall harm individual rights. In a webinar BC Rising hosted opposing the BC Land Act, DRIPA and UNDRIP, Fraser Institute Senior Fellow Bruce Pardy argues that Canada is moving away from individual rights toward group rights. Geoff Snicer similarly argues sustainability and climate plans move us toward collectivism and that “if we're worried about collective rights then you have no individual rights” (Geoff in Canada, 2024).

### **3.4.3 Alternative Health and Wellness**

A theme across my sample, both in events, sponsorships, and the identities of the activists themselves, is alternative health and spirituality. An important issue for groups in my sample is protecting alternative health products and practitioners from regulation. Groups in my sample attract people working in the field of alternative health as chiropractors, homeopaths, naturopaths, and hydrotherapists, as well as moms involved in alternative schooling. Alongside

webpages about the global agenda there are links to learning about herbalism. The pages of the Westward Independent intersperse articles opposing electric vehicles, safe injection sites, conservation projects, and housing developments, with short pieces on “herbalism as rebellion” to big pharma, “how to be your own doctor”, and “why we must stop blaming bacteria”. Advertisements for alternative health solutions fill each edition of WWIND including bach flower remedies, “platinum energy detox foot spa”, and quantum healing.



Figure 14. An advertisement in WWIND.

### 3.4.5 Civic Participation and Cultural Capital

An important frame groups use to motivate people to act is civic participation and community building. Groups present themselves as being the voice of the people in front of local government.

“Uncover the power of united voices as we champion community members’ concerns. Through strategic partnerships and collaborative efforts, we provide a platform for individuals to voice their issues and drive meaningful change. This topic highlights our mission to give a voice to the often-overlooked concerns that may not be addressed by local NGOs, non-profits or other stakeholders. By joining forces, we create a stronger collective impact and work towards a more inclusive and responsive community” (COAP, n.d.).

They also urge people to participate in actions to strengthen and protect democracy, to be heard as a counterbalance to progressive voices who have been at the forefront of affecting

policy. They argue, “the people have not been showing up to the Council, but here we are” (BC Rising, 2024d), and “[i]t is the community that must enforce the rights to our freedoms. It's time to move forward and take responsibility for our lives.” (Kootenay Tribe, 2023). In some cases, this is framed as a duty of civic participation to support city councillors and mayors in the face of globalist forces, or to reclaim our freedoms. In other cases, it's framed as the need to hold politicians accountable.

The freedom movement is clearly building community for select people. On the first day of the “Reclaiming Canada” conference I observed in June 2024, a presenter asked the audience who had lost personal relationships during the pandemic- and most of the 200 people in the audience raised a hand. The events I attended all involved stories of persecution, that bolstered speakers' credibility as movement leaders, and cemented attendees' constructed identity as a persecuted minority. These events affirmed people's grievances about the pandemic, housing policy, carbon taxes, “gender ideology”, etc. The amount of energy that I felt at the in-person events I attended made me feel as though this is a more committed movement than I had previously thought, and in person events inspire, motivate and channel this energy.

### **3.4.6 Populist Framing**

The groups and individuals within my sample deploy populist framing. Framing can help groups construct populist identities of “us” and “them” (Caiani, 2023). Across my sample there was clearly a construction of two distinct categories of “the people” being harmed by “them”. In this case, the “they” not always clearly defined, but tends to refer to the elites, the globalists, organizations like the UN, WEF, WHO, and politicians. Sometimes this nefarious “they” also includes municipal politicians, mayors and city staff, and environmental NGOs who are constructed as agents of international organizations. In this framing, “they” are hypocrites who don't care about real people. In the most extreme cases, “they” are a nefarious cabal seeking

destruction of western civilization, to cause chaos and/ or depopulation. “They”, being the UN and WEF, are “probably the two most corrupt entities in the world” (Gather2030, 2024g). “They” don’t understand us, don’t care about us, and look down on us.

“I am opposed to the Climate Action Plan because after watching things unfold for many years, I am convinced that this has nothing to do with the environment but rather it is an agenda from global elitist (World Economic Forum, United Nations, big World Banks, Bill Gates, and on and on) who are imposing their view of a utopia for the world onto us 'peasants’” (Letter to RDCK).

In some cases, “they” are constructed as an elite in opposition to real workers. “They” care about “special interests” like climate change while real working people believe in common sense and are too busy to spend time on these issues

the general population has effectively checked out and left all policy decisions to be made by these very invested special interest groups who can rally their followers to force change while everybody else is busy working and raising their families (Citizens Oversight, 2023).

There is less construction of a clear “in” group or “we”. Groups position themselves as the voice of the people, of working Canadians, in opposition to the elites, the globalists, the NGOs, etc. In their framing, the people have and continue to be harmed by government overreach, from pandemic measures through to climate and environmental plans now. Everyday people will see the cost of living continue to go up due to globalist, out of touch plans. In some cases, there is some positioning of the people as the 99%, which is an interesting adoption of language from the Occupy Wall Street movement (see figure 16).



## COUNTDOWN 2030 -

### PART 1 & 2

By 2030, you will OWN NOTHING and be HAPPY. Or will you? Not if we find out the truth, resist, and co-create a world for US, The 99%!

“THE PEOPLE”

## TOWNHALL MEETING

RDCK CLIMATE PLAN – FOLLOW-UP MEETING

An open debate including all locals.

Where:

When: May 2023

Time: 6 PM – 8PM

### Meeting Agenda



- Update on RDCK Consultation Status
- Where do we go from here?

Figure 15. Image from a BC Rising 15/Smart City Newsletter and Template poster from the Climate Truth Coalition, summer 2023.

### 3.5 Conclusion:

In sum, various groups have grown out of the freedom movement and turned some attention to climate policy as a new frontier of the battle against government overreach. Groups in this sample largely rely on educational tactics rather than the disruptive rallies that were characteristic of the Freedom Convoy movement previously. While it is difficult to assess certain forms of resource mobilization (notably funding), these groups are mobilizing hundreds of citizens to attend their in-person events, in some cases thousands online, are influencing voting behaviours and mobilizing citizens to oppose climate action in front of municipal councils. This has resulted in a victory in the Kootenays, where climate action plans were delayed by a year and future climate actions will be slowed through longer decision-making processes. As BC Rising continues to infiltrate the BC Conservative party apparatus, it will have more direct lobbying

power over members of parliament and may be able to pass internal motions within the party. This movement has also resulted in relationship and coalition building between groups in the ‘freedom’ movement.

Groups in this movement promote various forms of climate denial, from literal climate denial to climate delay language including extractive populist frames. The freedom movement relies especially upon conspiratorial framing that presents elites and governments as wanting authoritarian control and using climate change to justify that control. These frames are often mobilized during climate-fueled disasters like wildfires and hurricanes.

This chapter described several other themes in this movements’ organizing. Groups are concerned about a dystopic future centered around surveillance. They are concerned largely with protecting matters of individual rights, particularly private property. Groups in my sample position themselves as critical to defending or improving democracy, protecting it against the erosion of transparency and trustworthiness, notably at the local level. Finally, groups use populist framing to construct themselves as defending the interests of everyday people and real workers against a corrupt and out of touch elite.

## Chapter Four: Discussion

This section presents a discussion of five key takeaways that bring together the findings of this research in relation to other academic literature, in order to answer my research questions. The takeaways are the following:

1. Groups in the freedom movement have shifted towards more effective forms of organizing.
2. This movement can be understood as a by-product of the fossil fuel industry, and through the extension of the concept of subsidized publics
3. Type one or literal climate denial has not disappeared, and its persistence can be understood in part as a product of softer type two climate denial.
4. This movement can be understood through the lens of diagonalism.
5. This movement exhibits a form of toxic nostalgia exemplified by far-right movements. This could put the freedom movement on a path toward espousing “fossil fascism”.

I finish the section by relating this discussion to my research questions.

### 4.1 Effective Organizing

*Groups in the freedom movement are undertaking effective organizing.*

While the 2022 Freedom Convoy was an extremely disruptive tactic, it was clearly not a sustainable one for the movement, and subsequent attempts at Freedom Convoys have brought out small crowds to very little effect. This was made clear when a small group within the freedom movement attempted to organize an “Election Convoy” at the end of January 2025 to demand the federal government end the prorogation of Parliament and call an early election (LeBrun, 2025). The plans were mired by internal conflict and disavowal from famed Freedom Convoy organizers (Lebrun, 2025). Warnings from the police that organizers’ plans for a “slow roll” (driving at 60 km per hour to cause traffic jams) were illegal caused organizers to change course and invite people to attend a protest in Ottawa. It is unclear whether the protest even went forward (Raymond, 2025).

Groups studied in this research have made the calculation that different tactics and perhaps more mainstream forms of organizing will be more fruitful. The most useful example of this surrounds the BC provincial election in October 2024, when BC Rising and its network shifted gears to “election preparedness” to oust the NDP and elect the BC Conservatives. BC Rising received advice from David Parker, the head of a far-right organization in Alberta that credits itself with bringing current Alberta Premier Danielle Smith to power. Take Back Alberta (TBA) has been a model for BC Rising and is inspiring other far-right groups across the country. The adoption of TBA’s tactics would threaten progressive politics everywhere. I will now discuss TBA’s origins, how it has gained influence over Danielle Smith’s United Conservative Party (UCP) and how the group is a model for BC Rising.

#### **4.1.1 The Take Back Alberta Model**

David Parker is a conservative political operative who worked in Stephen Harper’s Prime Minister’s office, and in support of several other conservative politicians, including former Conservative Party leader Erin O’Toole and former Premier of Alberta Jason Kenney (Markusoff, 2023). Parker founded a far-right group called “Take Back Alberta” in December 2021 with the explicit goal of ousting Jason Kenney as Premier for implementing COVID-19 health mandates that restricted religious gatherings (Tait, 2023; Appel, 2023). TBA grew after the Coutts blockade that occurred as part of the Freedom Convoy. Convoyers blockaded the international border in Coutts, Alberta for several weeks. This blockade resulted in 13 individuals being charged with mischief, and four with conspiracy to kill RCMP officers when officers found weapons, body armour and ammunition (Marczuk, 2023). Parker gave speeches and recruited members for TBA at the Coutts blockade, and several members of the blockade became integral early members of TBA.

The group credits itself with successfully ousting Jason Kenney and bringing Danielle Smith into power through having encouraged thousands to sign up as UCP members and vote out the former Premier in favour of Smith (Markusoff, 2023). The group has organized packed townhalls across the province, railing against COVID-19 restrictions, and the “socialism” of the Alberta NDP. TBA flooded the UCP’s Annual General Meeting in 2023 to vote in a slate of TBA approved board members, leading to the group controlling half of the UCP’s board. TBA has furthered its influence within the party by taking control of several UCP riding associations across the province (Appel, 2023). TBA’s influence is made visible through multiple pieces of UCP legislation as well as resolutions at its annual general meetings. One example is Danielle Smith’s turn to “parental rights” policies that ban gender affirming care for trans kids under 16 (Climenhaga, 2024). More recently, the UCP voted to accept a motion to “recognize the importance of CO2 to life and Alberta’s prosperity” (Paradis & Noakes, 2024, para. 2). This resolution means the governing party of Alberta has abandoned its emissions reductions goals and has vowed to recognize the main greenhouse gas causing climate change as a vital nutrient (Paradis & Noakes, 2024). TBA is a freedom group that has achieved significant power by infiltrating a provincial governing party.<sup>2</sup>

In his December 2023 call with BC Rising, Parker urged BC Rising members to copy TBA’s organizing model and become a “powerful lobby group” within the BC Conservative Party. The BC Conservative Party had recently been brought back to life by John Rustad, who was an MLA in the BC Liberal Party before being removed from caucus for his climate denialist views (Kurjata, 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> I did not include TBA in my sample for two main reasons. First, their anti-climate organizing focus was not clear to me until the UCP’s resolution on carbon emissions in November 2024. Second, TBA does not share a lot of content publicly which meant I would not have had a lot of material to analyze had I included it in my sample.

BC Rising clearly took some of Parker’s advice, as its “Election Readiness” focus from January 2024 until the October 2024 election made clear. As is described in the findings of this research, several people within the BC Rising network joined the BC Conservative party, either in riding associations or as candidates. Two BC Rising members were dropped as candidates for spreading conspiratorial misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, but two people within BC Rising’s network were elected as Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs). While it is unclear to what extent BC Rising and its network affected the results of the election, they mobilized a significant amount of people to organize townhalls and mobilized hundreds to attend in person events and thousands online, flexing real organizing power.

The BC Conservative party is the official opposition and now holds a remarkable amount of power compared to just two years ago when it had no seats (Dickson, 2024). More BC Rising members are taking on positions within the BC Conservative party at the riding level (including one of the MLA candidates who was dropped in 2024) and the group remains active influencing allied MLAs from the party. This will give the anti-climate freedom movement a voice within the official opposition party of BC, especially since Rustad is sympathetic to their cause. BC Rising is closer to the halls of power than ever before. More groups in other parts of the country including Saskatchewan and Ontario are striving to follow the TBA model, as Parker boasted to BC Rising in 2023. If groups see success, they stand to gain a considerable amount of power and threaten to reverse climate policy.

Individuals and groups on the far-right are not only infiltrating provincial politics. TBA has turned some of its attention toward school board elections (Magusiak, 2023). A former TBA organizer, Benita Pedersen, has connected with the BC Rising network as well as Maggie Braun (KICLEI). Pedersen organizes monthly webinars on conservatizing municipal councils and

school boards. The webinars have featured several right-wing political operatives including David Parker and John Hilton O'Brien who was a founder and past president of Alberta's far-right Wildrose Party and now runs a "parental rights" organization (Freedom Calendar, n.d.; Canada Strong and Free Network, n.d.). Others have included Alexandra Carlile, who ran Danielle Smith's byelection campaign in 2022 while also working as a business lobbyist (Richards, 2024) and Cam Wilson, the executive director of the Wilberforce Project, an anti-abortion organization that has campaigned to support UCP candidates and says it has pushed the UCP to "stan[d] for pro-life policy" (Pederson Facebook, 2025 CBC News, 2019; Bradley, 2024). Pedersen is connecting people with experienced campaigners to help them infiltrate local politics.

Other groups I've been following have similarly moved toward more mainstream organizing, which may benefit them in the longer-term. In BC, Geoff Snicer explicitly started the Kamloops Citizen's Safety Association (KCSA) as a citizen's organization to seem innocuous and less conspiratorial than other freedom groups.

In some cases, groups have moderated their language based on their audience to gain support and become more influential. While Braun's first presentations to municipal councils and Substack posts were full of overtly conspiratorial claims around the "UN takeover" and sovereign citizen ideas, she has since changed her framing and now questions the relevance of international organizations and their agendas in solving local issues. Braun has also started to do effective organizing including relationship building with sympathetic decision makers, which has allowed KICLEI to secure one victory in a small rural municipality in Thorold, Ontario.

More recently, Braun connected with Cheryl Gallant, a conservative MP near Ottawa, who attended and publicly supported a delegation Braun brought to the municipality of Renfrew to

oppose their climate action plan (Gallant, 2025). Through connecting with Gallant and receiving her support, Braun may have been able to expand her audience and potential membership base. Thanks to her relationship with Benita Pedersen, Braun recently presented her KICLEI initiative to the UCP constituency association in Bonnyville-Cold Lake St-Paul, Alberta (Gather2030, 2025). KICLEI will likely have more success as it continues to build relationships with sympathetic politicians and political parties. While the Freedom Convoy was extremely disruptive and harmful to many individuals in Ottawa, these groups will pose a much greater threat if they are able to successfully infiltrate political parties and position themselves as less conspiratorial.

#### **4.1.2 Capitalizing on Populist Sentiment:**

My findings demonstrate that the freedom movement is effectively using populist rhetoric and appealing to people's distrust in and anger towards institutions. The language across my sample made clear populist distinctions between a hardworking people, and the "elites", or "globalists" who do not care about everyday people, or worse, wish ill upon them. This language speaks to real anger that people in this movement still feel around the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the more general anger and public distrust many Canadians feel. This is reflected in the Edelman Trust Barometer report for Canada, which includes a question about whether government leaders say things they know are false or are gross exaggerations. The most recent report found that affirmative responses grew from 46%-67% between 2021 and 2025. The same impression about journalists grew by 13% in the same timeframe, and there is very low trust in all forms of media (Edelman Trust Institute, 2025). Similarly, polling has found a rise in general anger about the economy, and toward provincial and federal governments (Pollara, 2024). While there is a plethora of right-wing online media that appeals to these sentiments, the freedom groups studied in this research are mobilizing people to act based on those sentiments.

Not only do these groups use messaging to blame elites for complex issues and appeal to angry populist sentiment, but they also present themselves as a voice for people's anger and urge people to join their advocacy efforts as an act of civic duty.

#### **4.2 Theme 2: Astroturfed or Subsidized Public?**

*This movement can be understood as a by-product of the fossil fuel industry, through extending the concept of subsidized publics*

In this section, I will explain how the fossil fuel industry and broader climate change countermovement created the conditions for the freedom movement to oppose climate action today. We can understand this movement through extending the concept of “subsidized publics” as employed and developed by Gunster et al. (2021a), Neubauer & Graham (2021) and Neubauer et al. (2023), but need to understand its relative autonomy from the fossil fuel industry.

##### **4.2.1 Petrocultures and the Cultural Hegemony of Fossil Fuels**

First, it bears repeating that fossil fuels have shaped much of modern-day society, including politics and cultures, which means they remain culturally hegemonic (Huber, 2013; Wilson et al., 2017). The fossil fuel industry maintains hegemony through positive portrayal in cultural institutions like schools, media, and through corporate activism (Carroll, 2021; Eaton & Day, 2020; Gunster & Saurette, 2014). Petro-nationalist and extractive populist discourses have cemented the notion that the prosperity of the fossil fuel sector is inextricable from Canadian identity, prosperity and wellbeing (Gunster et al., 2021b). In these discourses, any challenge to the fossil fuel industry is depicted as a threat to Canadians, and anyone critical of the industry is painted as a foreign-funded radical (Gunster et al., 2021b).

##### **4.2.2 Astroturf Groups or Subsidized Publics**

Another important component of the “regime of obstruction” maintaining the hegemony of the fossil fuel industry is advocacy organizations that oppose climate policy (Carroll, 2022). In

the climate denial literature, there is debate around the level of agency in anti-climate advocacy. Several researchers (Gunster et al., 2021a; Neubauer & Graham, 2021; Neubauer et al., 2023) understand pro-industry groups that mobilize citizens to defend the fossil fuel industry as using a “subsidized public” strategy in that they provide individuals with resources from industry to support their advocacy. This framing recognizes some of the agency of individuals who participate in pro-industry and anti-climate advocacy (Gunster et al., 2021a). Examples of organizations that use a subsidized public strategy include Canada Action, Oil Sands Strong, and Resource Works (Neubauer & Graham, 2021).

Canada Action played a role in organizing the 2019 United We Roll convoy that has been called a “dress rehearsal” for the 2022 Freedom Convoy (McLean, 2024). Canada Action was planning a convoy to Ottawa to oppose environmental policy when the more grassroots and extremist Yellow Vest Movement began to join the group’s pro-pipeline rallies, bringing with it far-right sentiments and UN/ WEF conspiracy theories. Canada Action attempted to distance itself from the convoy and eventually cancelled its involvement. United We Roll went forward, involving two tributaries: the extractive populist crowd fostered by Canada Action, and the far-right elements brought by the Yellow Vests Movement (McLean, 2024).

#### **4.2.3 The Anti-Climate Freedom Movement as Subsidized Public**

As discussed in my findings, freedom groups deploy a wide variety of climate denial and extractive populist frames and make use of “information subsidies” created by fossil-funded organizations and actors. These groups can be understood through an extension of the concept of subsidized publics, as there is a distinction between the organizing observed in this research and that of previous researchers such as Gunster.

Walker (2014) first conceptualized the method of subsidized publics as when “corporations, trade associations, wealthy advocacy organizations, and campaign groups utilize

the services of public affairs consultants to lower the costs of participation for targeted activist groups” (p.10). Wood (2018) first applied this concept to the CCCM in Canada to understand Canada’s Energy Citizens (CEC), a formation created by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP). CAPP consciously deliberated on how to cultivate a community of fossil fuel workers and sympathizers to advocate in favour of oil and gas and employed public relations experts to design their campaigns (Wood, 2018). Since then, other scholars have employed the concept of subsidized publics to analyze institutional actors/ elites providing resources to grassroots people to reduce barriers to participating in activism (including launching campaigns) (Gunster, 2021; Neubauer & Graham, 2023).

There are a few distinctions between the anti-climate freedom groups studied in this research project, and the groups that have been previously documented as operating through the subsidized publics model. While the concept has been used to understand groups and campaigns that are clearly initiated by industry or industry adjacent actors, I did not find clear connections between groups in my sample and fossil capital. My research documented groups of people deliberating together on how to oppose climate action, “doing their own research” informed by climate denial content. While it is possible that groups in my sample have received money from fossil capital, my research findings demonstrate a great deal of grassroots organizing.

Further, campaigns led by groups in my sample lacked the glossy marketing associated with corporate supported campaigns. Finally, large fossil capital and extractive populist groups have shied away from supporting far-right activism in the past. Large fossil capital firms that usually fund subsidized public organizations did not support the Freedom Convoy. Similarly, Canada Action’s removal of support for the United We Roll convoy once far-right elements

hijacked it signals that fossil capital does not want to be tied to these movements (McLean 2024).

Groups like BC Rising have chosen to launch campaigns seemingly without industry players playing the catalyzing role, but they have made use of materials created by industry funded groups (e.g. Heartland Institute) that can be understood as “information subsidies”. In this case, there is a degree of separation between the industry and the groups initiating campaigns. The Heartland Institute creates its climate denial videos hoping groups like BC Rising will make use of them, but there is no indication that it launched BC Rising's anti-climate crusade. This may be even more concerning than previous pro fossil fuel advocacy in Canada, because grassroots people seem to be taking up the torch of opposing climate action on their own, and can find oil money-soaked resources on their own.

There are two complications to this description. COAP received talking points directly from Fortis BC which is a clearer example of subsidized publics. Similarly, a representative from CO2 Coalition, which has received donations from the fossil fuel industry, has spoken at BC Rising and COAP events. The directionality of the relationship is unclear.

Not all researchers in this field of study are aligned on this approach to recognizing autonomy and agency of anti-climate activists. Kinder (2024) resists subsidized publics framing, arguing that doing so treats what he terms “petroturfing” (a play on the term astroturfing) as “a rational, good-faith response from the agents, architects, and allies of Canada’s fossil economy as industry comes under threat from environmental and Indigenous activists” (p. 218). Kinder further argues “[I]egitimately grassroots movements exist to challenge dominant relations, not reproduce them” (p. 13). Kinder’s arguments ignore a major motivation for the use of the subsidized publics concept- not to absolve fossil capital but to foster deeper analysis of the anti-

climate movement. Understanding these formations as subsidized publics opens new analytic questions (Wood, 2014), like “why are people opposing climate action and defending the interests of fossil capital?” Taking a subsidized publics perspective recognizes that campaigns can be initiated by industry, but also that grassroots sympathizers can coalesce around industry demands for reasons other than being bought off.

It is critical to continue to document the connections between fossil capital and seemingly grassroots groups, but there remains a need to understand people’s motivation for joining these movements. Simply depicting these individuals as pawns of the fossil fuel industry does not neutralize the threat they pose. While it is undebatable that right wing movements are often closely tied to corporate interests and ultimately advocate in favour of the status quo (or a more regressive society), discounting any form of activism in favour of the status quo as necessarily astroturf forecloses critical examinations of the motivation and pathways to joining these movements. Further, underestimating this movement will lead to inadequate responses on how to out-organize it.

#### **4.2.4 The Freedom Movement as Petty Bourgeoisie**

Various authors have argued that the Freedom Convoy was a manifestation of the petty bourgeoisie (Gordon, 2022; Kinder, 2024; Klein, 2023; McLean, 2024). The petty bourgeoisie is understood as the middle class largely made up of small business owners (Gordon, 2022). Some have pointed to connections between Freedom Convoy organizers and fossil capital to imply this is an industry-controlled movement (Fenton, 2022). McLean (2024) notes that small and medium sized trucking and fossil fuel companies funded and participated at the United We Roll (Yellow Vests Canada) convoy in 2019. Similarly, small businesses and farms were large contributors to the Freedom Convoy’s GoFundMe, organizers Chris Barber and Tamara Lich’s families both own small trucking companies, and organizer James Bauder is a small business owner (Gordon,

2022). While these connections are important, they do not represent totality of the ‘freedom’ movement that started before the convoy and exists still.

While two prominent organizers in my sample have been employed in the fossil fuel sector, numerous others are current or retired entrepreneurs or small business owners, largely in the alternative health field. Further, their advocacy largely revolves around defending the interests of homeowners and drivers, not renters, cyclists, or workers.<sup>3</sup> The movement acts in defence of their material interests in highly polluting lifestyles and does not provide solutions or alternatives to the policies they oppose, resulting in support for the status quo.

### ***Relative Autonomy of the Petty Bourgeoisie***

While the groups in this research are clearly shaped by the fossil fuel industry’s propaganda, I argue that they maintain some relative autonomy from fossil capital. Relative autonomy is a concept developed by Poulantzas (1980) to clarify that while the state ultimately serves the ruling class, it is composed of and therefore influenced by a confluence of class interests. This means the state does not only serve capital in a mechanistic way. While this concept originally focused on the autonomy of the state from the bourgeoisie, scholars have applied the notion of relative autonomy to different social groups and classes, including the working class and the petty bourgeoisie (e.g. Thompson, 1963; Hyman, 1971). From more of a cultural perspective, Thompson (1963) argued that class is not only formed through relation to the means of production, but also through experience. Thompson argued that the proletariat can create its own identity, institutions and culture relatively autonomously from the ruling class (1963). Poulantzas argued that the petty bourgeoisie is capable of relative autonomy from the bourgeoisie due to its intermediate position between the ruling class and the proletariat

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<sup>3</sup> I should add a caveat here which is that they support workers who were laid off for refusing vaccine mandates, which is a sticky point for labour justice and public health.

(Poulantzas, 1973). The petty bourgeoisie has its own interests in small-scale property ownership and stability and can support reactionary or progressive forces (1980). Historically, the petty bourgeoisie has provided energy to far-right and fascist movements in times of economic turmoil and crisis (Gordon, 2022).

Connecting this to the freedom movement, there are some figures whose livelihoods are connected to fossil capital, but not all. At this point in time, the freedom movement does not necessarily require the support from fossil capital to defend the fossil fuel industry, because the movement has already associated their wellbeing to that of the industry's.

Tying these pieces together, the freedom movement's anti-climate activism is clearly shaped by the cultural hegemony of the fossil fuel industry, and its petty bourgeoisie character makes it a prime candidate to oppose new progressive legislation that sees as threatening to its interest in maintaining a high polluting lifestyle. The fossil fuel industry created the grounds for this movement to proliferate, through spreading disinformation about climate change, conspiracist ideas about climate advocates, and providing key training through extractive populist organizations (McLean, 2024; Enoch, 2022).

This movement can be understood as the "Frankenstein's monster" of the fossil fuel industry, in that the industry lost control over a constituency it cultivated through disseminating climate denial, petro-nationalist and extractive populist ideas, as well as conspiracism that paints anyone critical of fossil fuels as a foreign-funded radical (Enoch, 2022). This formation grew more conspiratorial in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and brought new people into its ranks from the alternative health, anti-vaccine community. It likely has forever lost the messaging consistency that groups like Canada Action sought in its resource rallies seven years ago, but at this point the conspiratorial movement may not require prodding from fossil capital to

oppose climate action. As jurisdictions across Canada continue to create climate policies, this formation that equates freedom with fossil fuels will continue to see climate action as an affront.

It is important to hold a nuanced view of this movement as being both a by-product of the fossil fuel industry and possessing some relative autonomy in that people are motivated to act based on feelings of material and ideological self-interest. Holding this nuance allows us to analyze these movements more closely, examine their impacts and how to respond. Dismissing these movements outright as being astroturf implies that they can be discounted or ignored, and interventions are limited to diminishing the power of the fossil fuel industry. While this is important work, it will not make these movements less appealing to members.

### **4.3 Theme 3: Interplay of Type one and Type two Climate Denial**

*Literal climate denial (type one) has not disappeared and can be reinvigorated by softer (type two) denial.*

It is now generally accepted that a shift has occurred from overt climate denial (or “type one” in favour of language that seeks to delay climate action (or “type two” denial) (Carroll et al., 2022). The data in my sample complicates this argument. In this section, I will first discuss my findings that overt climate denial frames are still being mobilized. I will then discuss the ways in which climate denial frames can be mobilized in the face of worsening climate impacts and briefly end with an example of how the far-right is bringing overt denial back to the mainstream. Finally, I discuss the ways in which the freedom movement responds to contradictions in neoliberal climate policy and argue that the politics of climate delay legitimize overt climate denial.

This research identified the use of many different frames opposing climate action, including both overt climate denial and climate delay frames. Overt climate denial frames include those denying the existence of climate change, or attributing climate change to natural cycles. They

also include “carbon vitalist” frames that refer to carbon dioxide as vital to ecosystems, agriculture and life on earth. Climate delay frames include those denigrating climate solutions, supporting fossil fuels as part of the solution to climate change, and ‘whataboutism’ that trivializes one jurisdiction’s carbon footprint compared to another’s (Lamb et al., 2020). This demonstrates that overt climate denial frames are still salient to some people, particularly those already leaning towards conspiracist worldviews such as the freedom movement. Enoch (2022) writes

If you believe that corrupt, traitorous eastern elites are selling out your economy and livelihood to satisfy foreign environmentalists based on spurious climate science, it is not too far of a leap to believe those same corrupt elites would sacrifice your economy and livelihood to satisfy the interests of pharmaceutical corporations based on what you believe to be equally spurious vaccine science. (Para. 19).

This quote encapsulates how COVID-19 conspiracism and climate denial can go hand in hand.

#### **4.3.1 Conspiracism and Climate Impacts**

Further, my findings demonstrate that climate denial can remain relevant even in the face of worsening climate impacts, notably when it is repackaged through conspiracism. The freedom movement also deploys conspiratorial ‘climate authoritarian’ framing whereby climate action and climate fuelled events are seen as being weaponized by elites to control the populace. It has been posited (and perhaps hoped) that upon witnessing the effects of climate change, people will believe its severity and support climate action (Millward-Hopkins, 2022). My research demonstrates that this view is misguided. The peak of explicitly anti-climate activism in BC during my study period took place during and in the aftermath of Canada’s most damaging wildfire season on record in 2023. Citizens in the Kootenays organized anti-climate townhalls while wildfires raged across BC. Videos recorded by angry BC citizens (particularly in the Shuswap region) who were not allowed to remain on their property and fight the wildfires were used to bolster the narrative that the BC government may not have wanted to stop the wildfires.

In some cases, this idea was then taken as proof that the BC government may have started the fires. This demonstrates that rather than believe that wildfires are the result of climate change, some turn to climate conspiracism as a way of explaining climate-fuelled events.

This finding is supported by other research that has found pre-existing views on climate change mediate people's experiences of extreme weather events like wildfires (Lacroix, Gifford, Rush, 2020), and Haney's (2022) study that found Albertans' skeptical views on climate change and support for the fossil fuel industry did not alter after experiencing massive flooding in 2013.

Climate denial frames are not only repackaged to withstand climatic events, but the climate authoritarian framing extends to opposing climate action in general. The freedom movement understands climate policy and 15-minute cities as plots for control and domination. The framing that the government ultimately seeks to take away freedoms or control every aspect of people's lives is deployed to explain the existence of natural disasters, and any form of climate action. This framing is especially harmful in that it can absorb any new climate related event or climate response. As climate action becomes more critical and the actions needed to address it more extreme, this will only strengthen convictions on the right that climate action is a socialist conspiracy (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021).

While it has not always been mobilized widely, the climate authoritarianism idea has existed for decades. Conspiracy theories about climate change being a red scare date to the earliest days of climate denial (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). As the cold war was receding, anti-communists looked for a new political target, and some began to see members of the growing environmental movement as "watermelons": green on the outside and red on the inside (Oreskes & Conway, 2011). In fact, in 1992 a republican politician painted the UN Rio Earth Summit as a socialist

plan and argued that fear generated around environmental issues would lead to acceptance of a one-world government (Oreskes & Conway, 2011, p.252).

The fact that overt climate denial can be re-invigorated at any time is being clearly demonstrated by the climate politics of Donald Trump's second administration, which has marked a return to "drill, baby, drill" politics of denying that climate change is an issue and enthusiastic support for destructive fossil fuel expansion. Lee Zeldin, the new EPA Administrator, has been decimating environmental and climate protections since entering office in January 2025, and stated "we are driving a dagger through the heart of climate-change religion and ushering in America's Golden Age" (Milman, 2025, para. 6).

Fossil fuel companies and associated organizations readily use a multitude of frames or narratives to deny the need for and delay action, and if far-right actors bring back outright denial, that suits fossil capital. This was also demonstrated at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship conference recently hosted by Jordan Peterson, former psychology professor and now far-right reactionary (Dembicki, 2025). The event brought together far-right actors from different areas—politicians, tech leaders, arms dealers and fossil fuel company representatives for an explicit climate denial conference at which Peterson said "[i]t's time to stop our obsession with carbon altogether" (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2025b, para. 2). The notion that there has been a clear shift in climate denial should be abandoned in favour of an understanding that any number of anti-climate arguments can be wielded at any given point in time.

#### **4.3.2 Type one Climate Denial Reinvigorated by Type two Climate Denial**

My findings align with arguments others have made that 'soft', or type two climate denial has fostered a resurgence in overt or type one climate denial (Klein, 2023; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). Liberal climate governance has failed to meaningfully address climate change, and neoliberal governments have failed to implement climate policies that also improve everyday

people's lives. This allows right-wing groups and actors to use climate change as a wedge issue and position it as a tool of the elites.

A theme in the findings of this research was a rejection of climate policies that are framed as contradictory or nonsensical, and anger toward perceived hypocrisy of the elite. This appeared in a few different ways. In some cases, people and groups pointed to a disconnect between policies that focus on individual consumption as a means of reducing emissions, and the massive impacts of large industrial polluters that do not face stringent regulation. A clear example of this was Kootenay Freedom arguing against the RDCK's climate plan stating that "[i]f the board were really serious about lowering emissions, they would look at corporate pollution and clear-cut logging practices and poof! Our emissions would be gone". In some cases, the freedom movement points to a disconnect between climate goals and the ability of current solutions to meet these goals. For instance, they disparage transportation plans that project a steep reduction in the use of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles due to a lack of public transit in certain jurisdictions, or critique electrification plans due to the difficulty of managing electricity load given increasing energy demands. They also regularly criticize plans for a shift from ICE vehicles to EVs due to real environmental concerns around the latter.

Whether these arguments are mobilized cynically, they point to failures in neoliberal climate policy to effectively hold large industrial polluters accountable and put infrastructure in place to enable more climate-friendly behaviour like using public transit instead of driving.

In my sample, overt climate denial is appealing in part because the prescriptions that the "globalists" have put forward are full of contradictions. This idea is supported by Naomi Klein and Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective. Malm and colleagues write that the far-right's climate denial reconciles this gap between rhetoric and action (2021). Similarly, Naomi Klein

writes: “one form of denialism feeds the other: the outright denialism in the Mirror World is made thinkable by the baseline war on words and meaning in more liberal parts of our culture” (2023, p. 155). This is clearly exemplified by the climate politics of the Liberal Party. In 2019, Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government declared a climate emergency, and less than twenty-four hours later it purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline extension project (Beaumont, 2019). In such cases, the charges from the right that climate action is mere “virtue signalling” are correct, and this is used to confirm the idea that climate change must not be a real problem.

Moreover, I found that the freedom movement pits climate change against other issues that are of concern to Canadians today, notably the housing and cost of living crises. Groups argue that climate policy will increase the cost of housing or will detract from solving issues like the housing crisis. Whether this is done in bad faith or not, it would be more difficult for the right to do this if the government put forward climate policies that meaningfully address the polycrisis. Instead, neoliberal policy has hollowed out the welfare state, creating fodder for the right.

Taking the housing crisis as one brief example, the freedom movement pits the issue of housing affordability against climate change. It does so by arguing that climate-related policies that seek to increase density or to make housing stock more climate-friendly will increase the cost of housing and price homeowners out of their houses, thereby worsening the crisis. They also suggest that taking climate action takes energy away from addressing issues like the housing crisis. In some cases, groups make the truthful argument that housing policies benefit developers and do not necessarily build affordable housing, but the movement does so to oppose pro-density policies, provides no alternative solutions and ignores main drivers of the housing crisis.

Neoliberalism has driven the housing crisis over the last four decades. The federal government has vastly reduced its role in building housing: between the 1970s and 1994, the number of social housing units fell from between 20 000 and 30 000 units to 1000-2000 (Kalman-Lamb, 2017, p. 303). The financialization of housing also drives this crisis, as housing has become a commodity and financial asset (Simms, 2023). Under the current system where housing is built at the whim of the market, incentives for developers to build below-market rental units simply subsidize developers and do not produce affordable housing (Alook et al., 2023). Current green building policy is not ambitious enough in that it focuses on providing homeowners with access to funding for voluntary retrofits (Alook et al., 2023). Solving the housing and climate crisis does not need to be mutually exclusive, but the way housing is currently being built will ensure that these crises are never resolved. Removing housing from the market through a Canada-wide housing guarantee, paired with a state-wide plan to retrofit homes and build net-zero social housing could create important jobs, and address the housing crisis, while mitigating emissions and preparing buildings for climate impacts (Alook et al., 2023). Taking meaningful action to address the climate crisis in a way that improves overall wellbeing would potentially remove some of the fuel for anti-climate organizing.

#### **4.4 Theme 4: Diagonalism<sup>4</sup>**

*At least one faction of this movement can be understood through the lens of diagonalism, which should be a warning to progressive movements.*

While there were about 170 semis and trucks at the pro-pipeline United We Roll convoy in 2019, the Freedom Convoy mobilized at least 1000 trucks and 5000 people in 2022 (McLean, 2024; Pringle & Raymond, 2022). The second convoy clearly appealed to more Canadians and

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that when I refer to “diagonalism” or “diagonalist” movements, I am referring to an academic term coined by Quinn Slobodian and William Callison (as explained below). This is different from the far-right Canadian group called “Diagolon”, which is mentioned in theme five of the discussion section.

picked up more members. My findings depict some of the unlikely alliances that constitute the freedom movement. While the Freedom Convoy and associated movement are generally considered to be a far-right or alt-right formation, people who may once have been on the green left have joined the movement. This migration can be understood through the lens of diagonalism and needs to be grasped to stop the leakage of people to far-right movements.

A number of people active in the groups described in this research were once part of what would generally be considered progressive movements. One example is a former green party and now MAGA supporter Kim Goldberg, an author who detailed her transition to the right on her Substack during the pandemic. Based on her telling, this shift was instigated by the left's support for vaccines and COVID-19 health mandates, including vaccine passports. To Goldberg, this amounted to the left abandoning "its historic role as defender of civil liberties and bodily autonomy, and critic of the surveillance state and government overreach" (2021, para.1).

Goldberg now believes that

"[t]he left has gone full fash, and the ecumenical Trump movement has evolved into the team defending free speech, anti-war, bodily autonomy, ideological autonomy (i.e., end to Wokeism)--all the classical liberal values we always thought were the domain of the left. I get it (Goldberg, 2024).

Another example is Nadine Podmoroff, who led the charge on the Climate Truth Coalition from the Kootenays to oppose climate action and 15-minute cities during the summer of 2023. During one anti-15-minute city presentation, Podmoroff stated that climate plans are a result of top-down orders from "the elite" (Kendemic, 2023). Podmoroff is an organizer with the Kootenay Region Branch United Nations Association in Canada (Frequency News, 2024). Before that, Podmoroff was an active environmental activist with the Council of Canadians, and she participated in the Tar Sands Healing Walk in 2013 (Nelson Star, 2013). Podmoroff cut her teeth in the freedom movement by organizing anti-health mandate rallies in the Kootenays in 2020 and 2021 (Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, 2021). She is also a key figure organizing rallies calling for a ceasefire in Gaza in Nelson (Frequency News, 2024). Several other key

organizers have been active in various environmental initiatives in the past but today are active in right-wing movements.

This phenomenon of seemingly strange bedfellows in the ‘freedom’ movement is consistent with Callison and Slobodian’s (2021) description of diagonalism. Callison and Slobodian write that diagonalists “tend to contest conventional monikers of left and right (while generally arcing toward far-right beliefs), to express ambivalence if not cynicism toward parliamentary politics, and to blend convictions about holism and even spirituality with a dogged discourse of individual liberties” (2021, para. 2). My sample includes unlikely alliances between people once on the green-left with those on the right-far-right, brought together by conspiratorial beliefs and shared anger towards pandemic restrictions. These unlikely alliances, which accelerated during the pandemic have been receiving growing scholarly attention (Kristensen et al., 2023, Liekefett et al., 2023). Callison and Slobodian trace these shaky coalitions back to Germany where the “Querdenken” movement started in opposition to pandemic measures, bringing together some former green, left, and far-right voters. Diagonlists view all power as conspiracy and “trade in both familiar and novel fantasies about elite control. They attack allegedly ‘totalitarian’ authorities, including the state, Big Tech, Big Pharma, big banks, climate science, mainstream media, and political correctness” (Callison & Slobodian, 2021, para. 3).

In their book (and podcast) “Conspirituality”, Beres, Remski and Walker trace the pathways for members of alternative health and new age spiritual communities toward right wing authoritarianism from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. They note the ways in which this community speaks to real concerns that people have around the power of large industries like big pharma, agriculture in an increasingly unequal world. Yet, “the conspiritualist map covers over and distorts reality, betraying all good intentions: to protect the vulnerable and raise up the

marginalized” (2023, p. 57). In *Doppelganger*, Klein (2023) explains how the left created a vacuum during the pandemic by not sufficiently opposing the profiteering of large pharmaceutical companies and not treating concerns around the virus and health mandates with more care. This allowed the right to capitalize on the diagonalist energy around COVID-19 grievances and fold new members into its movement. Klein writes that

our critiques of oligarchic rule are being fully absorbed by the hard right and turned into dark doppelgangers of themselves. The structural critiques of capitalism are gone, and in their place are discombobulated conspiracies that somehow frame deregulated capitalism as communism in disguise (2023, p.124).

Klein (2023) describes a few different issues that the left has not formulated a clear enough response to, and the right has picked up and warped. Aside from COVID-19 health measures and vaccines, Klein notes surveillance capitalism.

Throughout the pandemic, diagonalists argued that vaccine passports were tracking people’s movements and ushering a social credit system, speaking to fears around data-hungry digital platforms and their owners. This concern around surveillance is an ongoing trend as demonstrated in my findings- a large theme animating the backlash against climate plans and urban planning policies is a fear of surveillance capitalism. While the backlash against 15-minute cities has been covered by news media, notably in the UK, much of this coverage dismisses concerns outright. In my sample, I observed concerns ranging from the conspiratorial to the more coherent, including fearmongering that governments are trying to introduce a Chinese Communist Party-style social credit system linked to consumption as part of a broader surveillance state that will lock people inside their 15-minute cities. Other concerns have to do with data privacy and storage related to emissions inventories. This aligns with what Marquet et al. (2025) found studying the backlash against 15-minute cities at the municipal level – this opposition brings together conspiracy theories and more classic conservative/ libertarian

suspicion around public policy. There should be genuine concerns about what data governments at all levels are collecting, how they are using this data, how it is being stored, whether it is being sold and who it can be accessed by. Progressives should now expect diagonalists to act in any space not being filled by the left. For example, there was no left equivalent to the BC Townhalls 2024 to counter the organizers' messaging around housing, emergency management, health policies, or Indigenous land rights.

Another example that surfaced in my research findings is electric vehicles. If progressives do not have an answer to the real limitations of EVs, from the environmental and social impacts of mining for the minerals used in EVs, to the limits of mineral stores, they risk ceding ground to the right. Without a strong left that can provide structural critiques and real solutions to any number of issues today, diagonalist alliances threaten to continue to subsume more people. It is important to understand that there can be varied points of entry to the diagonalist freedom movement, which necessitates blocking leakage from the centre left.

During this research, it became clear that BC is a hotspot of action within the anti-climate freedom movement. While the focus of this research has not been to understand why this is the case, I can speculate on a partial explanation. The diagonalist nature of this movement may help explain this geographic hotspot. Several places in BC were important places for alternative communities associated with the countercultural, hippie/ back to the land movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This moment saw a multitude of alternative communities and communes set up in the Slocan Valley of British Columbia, on the islands of the Salish Sea and around Tofino (Scott, 2017). The anti-vaccine movement has also been connected back to the back-to the land movement. According to historian Heather MacDougall, one of the key anti-vaccine activists of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Canada, Edda Goldman West, moved to the Slocan Valley of

BC and used “the strong environmental movement, a strong back-to-the-land movement and, to a certain extent, the feminist opposition to medical expertise and knowledge” as “ the staging point for the vaccine resistance” (Hennig, 2019, para. 15). Some of these locations have been important sites of anti-climate action, including the Slocan Valley where the Kootenay Climate Truth Coalition is active.

Otherwise, rural communities within southern Ontario make up another hotspot of organizing (largely for KICLEI). While groups within my sample are distributed across larger cities and rural areas, they are most active and successful in rural communities. It’s possible that these groups can garner more energy in these rural areas as they generally rely on more emission intensive lifestyles that will change dramatically if climate legislation and climate minded urban planning measures take effect. Similarly, it’s possible that the anti-establishment and anti-government rhetoric of these groups has salience in rural areas that feel far away from decision making centres, whether this be government at the municipal/regional level, let alone provincial or federal.

#### **4.5 Theme 5: Towards Fossil Fascism?**

*This movement exhibits a form of toxic nostalgia typified by far-right movements. It bears some resemblance to international far-right movements of climate denial, with some differences.*

Recent scholarship has begun to examine the intersections of climate denial and the far-right as “fossil fascism” (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). The findings of this research suggest that the freedom movement is grounded in toxic nostalgia that is exemplified by far-right movements. The freedom movement possesses some of the characteristics that Malm and the Zetkin Collective describe in their account of the dangers of fossil fascism, but I hesitate to call it fossil fascist movement yet.

#### 4.5.1 Toxic Nostalgia

There is a pattern in the freedom movement of championing narrow individual rights and opposing various progressive projects from climate justice to Indigenous land rights, safe injection sites, to sexual education and medical support for trans kids. This trend exemplifies what Klein (2022) has called toxic nostalgia, and Tewksbury (2021) has called “petro-nostalgia”, essentially “a violent clinging to a toxic past and a refusal to face a more entangled and interrelational future, one bounded by the limits of what people and planet can take” (Klein, 2022 para. 8).

Through defending highly emitting lifestyles, the freedom movement expresses a nostalgia for a time when driving, eating meat, air travel and burning fossil fuels were not questioned by climate science and advocates. The movement’s turn to opposing SOGI and “gender ideology” speaks of a nostalgia for a time when gender roles were strictly enforced, heteronormativity and gender identity were not questioned, and when one was not asked to learn new language to respect people’s pronouns. Their opposition to UNDRIP demonstrates nostalgia for a time when colonialism was not acknowledged openly and when settlers were not asked to reckon with the thought of mass burial sites of Indigenous children (Klein, 2022). These findings are consistent with the toxic nostalgia that Klein (2022) ascribes to the Freedom Convoy, as well as the politics of far-right leaders from around the world. Trump’s Make America Great Again movement displays nostalgia for a time in American history when white Christian men were at the top of the social hierarchy (Phillips & Milner, 2021). Other far-right leaders draw upon toxic nostalgia for support, like Jair Bolsonaro who pines for Brazil’s past days of military dictatorship, and the President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos Jr. who praises his dictator father (Ratcliffe, 2022).

This is also consistent with Tewksbury's (2021) research on the Yellow Vests Movement, which reveals that discourses that celebrate fossil fuel expansion "expand the scope of a highly mythologized conservative articulation of a twentieth-century past" (p.940), opening the door to other forms of nostalgia within far-right groups. The freedom movement assures its members that they do not need to update their understanding of the world, or change their behaviour, and remains a powerful force in favour of protecting the status quo. This nostalgia is a feature of far-right and fascist movements, which begs the question, is this movement trending toward fossil fascism?

#### **4.5.2 Fossil Fascism and Ecofascism**

Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective have forwarded the first systematic account of the intersections between the far-right, fossil capital and climate denial (2021). While focusing on far-right political parties and actors in Europe and in the US, the authors demonstrate the ways in which the far-right has increasingly begun to make use of climate denial to bolster ultranationalist agendas. The authors document the ways in which the far-right is tied to and therefore beholden to the interests of fossil capital. They also detail the climate denial of the far-right, which relies on classic fossil fuel misinformation and conspiracy theories pointing to climate change as a form of "cultural marxism" or socialist plot for world domination. The authors provide a deeper understanding of the connections between climate denial and the far-right through detailing how racism and xenophobia on the far-right can be connected to climate denial. This happens in two main ways: first, far-right parties deflect from the issue of climate change to focus on immigration, arguing that the latter is the real existential threat. Second, a form of ecofascism promotes xenophobia ostensibly to protect their country's environment from immigrants, who are said to be the drivers of environmental degradation (Turner & Bailey, 2022). As a political ideology, fossil fascism connects ultranationalism with fossil fuels for

palingenetic (rebirth) or palindefensive (defense of tradition) purposes (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021, pp. 54-55).

In contrast with fossil fascism, ecofascism includes an ecology of the far-right that “revolves around ideals of racialized supremacy tied to the preservation of nature” (Benoist et al., 2024, p. 4). In the case of a recent study of far-right political parties and actors in France, ecofascist discourse appears in multiple ways. First, these actors construct citizens (along implied or overt racial categories) as being environmental stewards against the threat of immigrants that are said to threaten the environment (Benoist et al., 2024). Within this strategy, parties and individuals fearmonger around demographic trends and hint at or explicitly invoke the great replacement conspiracy theory. Second, they depict France as already being sufficiently environmentally-conscious through promoting their nuclear energy production, ignoring France’s historic and ongoing GHG emissions and the environmental impacts associated with nuclear energy. Third, they redirect blame for emissions to other jurisdictions like India or China. Finally, they portray environmental legislation as being unnecessarily punitive and deride climate organizations and negotiations (Benoist et al., 2024).

There are some similarities between the attributes of the European far-right trending toward fossil and ecofascism and the freedom movement in Canada, though they do not align perfectly. First, it is useful to describe some parallels between ecofascist ideas and the alternative health community.

There are parallels between ecofascism, which views the health of the nation (understood along racial lines) as connected to the environment, and beliefs in alternative health and wellness communities. Ecofascists view the reproduction of white nationals of a country as being critical

to protecting the local environment (from immigrants) (Benoist et al., 2024). The history of fitness, health and wellness culture is connected to 20<sup>th</sup> century eugenicist and fascist movements. There have been clear links between beliefs about purity, health and vitality at the individual level and racist beliefs about the purity of the nation and the strength of national borders (Beres et al., 2023). For example, Eugen Sandow, seen as the father of bodybuilding and heavily influential in the development of early fitness movements, was an avid eugenicist (which explains his chosen name). Sandow believed that weakness was “a hereditary taint that strong discipline and better breeding could extinguish until we all walked the Earth as gods” (Beres et al., 2023, p.71). Ideas of body fascism and “soft eugenics” are often embedded in alternative wellness culture where health and fitness are associated with virtue and sickness is viewed as an individual failing. The soft eugenics of the alternative health community was made clear throughout COVID-19 where anti-vaccine activists called themselves “purebloods” in contrast to vaccinated people, and shrugged off the deaths of disabled, elderly and immunocompromised people from the virus.

Importantly, some influential figures on the far-right continue wellness culture’s legacy of relationship with harmful ideologies through the promotion of alternative health and wellness products/ practices in lockstep with the promotion of racism and xenophobia (Beres et al., 2023). One clear example is former Fox News host Tucker Carlson who held a segment on red light therapy for testicles as a means of increasing testosterone, when "the context was an endless stream of Carlson conspiracism about how wokeness was destroying masculinity, and dog whistles at the Great Replacement theory" (Beres et al., 2023, p. 96). To figures like Carlson, white people must take care of their health to protect the white race from replacement. In this way, alternative health products are another measure akin to punitive immigration policy to

protecting the nation. Significantly, one of the coalitions that allowed Trump to win a second term as President of the US calls itself “MAHA” for “Make America Healthy Again” and is essentially the alternative health community that RFK Jr. brought to the MAGA movement when he cancelled his presidential bid to support Trump (Olohan, 2025). This meant a convergence between groups fighting against conventional medicine, vaccines, and for regulations on raw milk to be dropped, with those advocating for the illegal deportation of migrants. The following section will focus on the Canadian freedom movement and this studies’ observations on xenophobia, racism and extremism within it.

#### **4.5.3 Xenophobia, Racism and Extremism in the Freedom Movement:**

As previously mentioned, the Yellow Vests Movement, seen as a pre-cursor to the Freedom Convoy, started as an anti-climate movement and devolved into conspiracism, islamophobia and racism (Tewksbury, 2021). Leman-Langlois et al. (2024) write “[t]hough it cannot be reduced to a far-right event, the Freedom Convoy gave groups that were almost dormant before and during the pandemic, like La Meute, a new visibility and gave newcomers, like the potentially violent Diagonol, a large forum” (p.46). My findings demonstrate that there are some hateful elements within the anti-climate freedom movement. For instance, some of the content promoted in my sample disseminates antisemitic or racist conspiracy theories, including references to “globalists” aiming for world domination, or more overt claims that the Rothschilds or George Soros exert global control.

Other content connects climate action to “mass illegal immigration” and nods to the great replacement theory, which believes elites are attempting to wipe out the white population in favour of racialized people. One such video shared by BC Rising fearmongers around mass immigration was co-produced by the Oath Keepers militia, that is openly white supremacist and

played an important role in the insurrection on January 6<sup>th</sup> on Capitol Hill in the US (Southern Poverty Law Centre, n.d.).

It is commonplace for in person events organized by the freedom movement to hand out copies of the far-right newspaper “Druthers”, which features anti-immigrant articles like “Ten Reasons to Rethink Mass Immigration to Canada”, and another that connects the “hoax” of climate change to the threat of “massive unregulated immigration.” Several articles in the Westward Independent claim mass immigration is the real cause of the housing crisis or argue without proof that people are taking advantage of refugee status to get a leg up in Canada. The publication includes some fair critiques of Canada’s reliance on the Temporary Foreign Worker program and the ways in which it is extremely exploitative, but the publication does not offer other causes of the housing crisis or solutions aside from reducing immigration levels. Finally, in some cases, I witnessed xenophobic and racist comments on posts in the public Facebook groups for Manitoba Stronger Together and KICLEI.

The freedom groups studied in this research have affiliations with more overtly racist and extremist groups and figures. Several groups in my sample have coordinated with Action4Canada, an Islamophobic, xenophobic Christian nationalist organization (Smith & Simons, 2021). I observed a couple of instances of support for Diagonol, a far-right extremist group that promotes antisemitism, xenophobia and racism (USDS, 2022; St. Denis, 2024). Maggie Braun has shared photographs of herself with Pat King, one of the original organizers of the Freedom Convoy who is a clear white supremacist that has called for racist hate (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2022). Braun also spoke at an event with far-right Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) politician Christine Anderson in 2023.

This points to some support for far-right extremist groups and figures, as well as some very concerning discourse within the movement. While this is an alarming trend, racism and antisemitism are not the main animating force behind the organizing in my sample. The thrust of the justification for their advocacy remains protecting localities against international organizations like the UN or opposing perceived governmental overreach. The discourse used by groups studied in this research relies more on localism than nationalism. This is similar to some findings in Benoist et al.'s (2024) analysis of far-right political parties in France. French far-right political parties and activists deride global institutions that advocate for climate action and paint France as being already an environmentally friendly nation. The anti-climate freedom movement acts similarly, claiming to support local environmentalism in contrast to "globalist" climate agendas. They also deny any need for Canada to reduce GHG emissions due to spurious claims about the carbon sequestration capacity of the country's forest cover. While Benoist et al. (2024) find that to the French far-right "localism is the spatial register of the 'rooted' native steward who must reproduce within the moral confines of the heteronormative white family" (p.12), explicit connections to race are not as clearly articulated within the anti-climate freedom movement. As discussed in the first section of this discussion, the more concerning trend illustrated by my findings is the more mainstream organizing the freedom movement is turning to, and the ability to fold people with less extremist views into the movement.

Looking ahead, the anti-climate freedom movement in Canada could learn from the far-right groups described by Malm and colleagues. Colonial denial and anti-immigrant sentiment could become more prominent topics for the freedom movement. The Canadian right's denial of the atrocities of historical and ongoing colonization, support for historical colonial figures, and fearmongering around DRIPA in BC and UNDRIP more broadly point to the likelihood of

continued backlash as some regions/ institutions work to varying degrees to implement principles of UNDRIP. This movement believes that mild steps toward recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and land rights will lead to removing settlers from their homes and land, and UNDRIP is perceived as a land grab to this effect. Denial of the harms of colonialism have led to some settlers attempting to dig up suspected unmarked gravesites in 2021 and broadly has led the Canadian political right to entrench itself in a position of defending Canada's legacy of harmful colonial policy (Wyton, 2023; Rodriguez, 2021).

Also, there has been an increase in attributing the housing crisis to immigration in the last year, often while neglecting important drivers such as housing speculation, and a massive lack of non-market housing supply (Migrant Rights Network, 2024; Yelland, 2024). There has been a general uptick in anti-immigrant sentiment in Canada (Neuman, 2024). Prime Minister Mark Carney, who won the most recent election through posturing as a foil to Trump, has introduced a bill that would make massive changes to Canada's immigration system and restrict the rights of migrants which has been condemned by human rights organizations (Bero, 2025). The freedom movement and broader far-right could follow the lead of the European anti-climate far-right in using xenophobia as a tool to oppose climate legislation.

The freedom movement has already moved from denigrating public health officials and international organizations, to also aiming their vitriol at environmental organizations, local politicians, educators and school administrators who teach about sex, gender identity, trans people and drug users. The list of actors the movement purports to defend against has grown and may continue to. The need to defend local communities against the threats to sovereignty posed by the maligned international institutions, environmentalists or "globalists" could extend to defending against "othered" populations seeking justice, like Indigenous people and migrants.

The MAHA movement described briefly above may prove to be a model for the freedom movement in Canada, as they share alternative health, anti-vaccine stances and both lionize figures like RFK Jr. This may lead the freedom movement become more outspoken in xenophobic and more extremist views. This warrants close examination and more research to track how the movement evolves in the coming years.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This discussion presents several themes based on the findings after a close analysis of the tactics and language employed by key groups of the anti-climate freedom movement. My first research question around the characteristics of this movement and its impacts is answered by themes one, two, four and five. Most importantly, some groups in this movement have learned more effective tactics to build their organizations and gain power, largely through electoral organizing. While the movement cannot be discounted as astroturf, it can be seen as a version of a subsidized public making use of some materials created by fossil funded organizations, but with genuine grassroots energy. The movement has a diagonalist character, which is to say that it is composed by new political coalitions, that threaten to bring disaffected people into its orbit whose commitments to the left are not strong. The movement contains some extreme right-wing elements, which could bring it to more harmful ideologies and narratives.

The second research question asks how this movement frames climate change and climate policies and is discussed in theme 3. This movement mobilizes many overt and subtler forms of climate denial to argue that climate change is not a threat, and that climate policy is harmful. These range from old overt climate denial frames that are well understood, to more conspiratorial arguments around authoritarian control.

Finally, the third research question asks what kind of discourses and frames bring people into the movement. This is the most difficult question to answer, since this study did not

interview participants and so I did not pose this question directly to freedom movement members. Themes one and four provide some answers. Groups in this study effectively speak to widespread anger and distrust. These groups take the anger that was observable online and at various rallies throughout the pandemic, and channel it into more mainstream forms of organizing. Populist rhetoric convinces people that their communities are under threat from international agendas and that they have a duty to defend them. Also, this movement has evolved to being active on multiple fronts, providing many entry points for potential recruits. Members can be recruited based on concerns ranging from the cost-of-living crisis to the toxic drug crisis, sexual education in schools, housing policies, or climate policies.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a body of literature examining the evolving climate countermovement in Canada. Notably, it extends the description of right-wing organizing that has grown out of fossil capital's turn to extractive populism. While other research has discussed the 2022 Freedom Convoy, this study investigates the organizing tactics of and themes animating groups that evolved from the Freedom Convoy. As I will elaborate on in the conclusion, it is critical to continue to study this movement and its evolution to inform responses on the left.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Chapter Summaries**

As the climate crisis worsens, some continue to push back against even the most milquetoast actions to address it. While actors have sought to obstruct climate action in Canada for decades, climate denial is receiving new life thanks to groups that emerged from the country's freedom movement formed in opposition to COVID-19 health measures in 2020. The climate change countermovement, originally created by the fossil fuel industry to protect its bottom line, has been well studied and documented, as have the arguments deployed by this movement. The level of autonomy of seemingly grassroots groups that exist to obstruct climate action has been a contested subject in climate literature. The specific turn of the 'freedom' movement towards climate action as the next battle against government overreach has not yet received attention in academic literature. This study sought to fill this gap by tracking an emerging trend at the intersection of the anti-climate and freedom movement. The first research objective was to understand key characteristics of this formation, and how it is organizing to oppose climate action. The second objective was to analyze how this movement frames climate change and climate policies. The third objective was to analyze how groups in this formation appeal to people to join the movement.

This research project was informed by several methodologies based on a literature review of Social Network Analysis and various forms of textual analysis. The study was informed by Social Network Analysis to establish a study sample of seemingly grassroots groups in the Canadian freedom movement opposing climate action. Then, I undertook a close analysis of

content created by these groups, and observation of several in person events. Analyses included document analysis informed by social movement theory principles to document characteristics of the movement and its impact. To respond to the second and third research objectives, the study undertook content analysis informed by framing theory, and a thematic analysis.

Regarding some of the main characteristics of the movement, I identified and studied 7 groups affiliated with one at the centre of anti-climate organizing in Canada called BC Rising. Groups varied in size and number of volunteers, but all managed to mobilize a significant number of people to attend in person events and in some cases online webinars. The demographics of groups was largely middle aged to older and white. Groups' tactics largely focused on awareness raising through webinars, townhalls, and creating educational materials relevant to their campaigns. The most effective organizing I observed pertained to political/electoral organizing. BC Rising has brought itself closer to the halls of power by influencing and joining the BC Conservative Party. Finally, there is a petty bourgeoisie character to the movement as many lead organizers are small entrepreneurs.

Regarding the second research question around how the movement frames climate change, I undertook a qualitative content analysis informed by a typology of existing anti-climate frames. I found that the movement deploys a wide variety of frames to oppose climate action that range from classic literal denial of the existence and severity of climate change to emphasizing downsides of acting. I also identified a whole host of arguments aligned with climate conspiracy theories alleging or implying that elites are promoting climate action to justify authoritarian control.

I identified several other themes that can help observers understand what might compel people to join this movement. Several groups are active on multiple issues, which offers several

points of entry for people. These include diverse topics including concerns around surveillance, education on sex, sexuality and gender identity in schools, and opposition to regulations on natural health products. Groups in my sample see their mandate largely as being protecting individual rights that they prize, first and foremost property rights. Similarly, groups deploy populist framing that constructs and delineates a virtuous people being harmed by elites. Freedom groups purport to be protecting against a corrupt and nefarious elite that is attempting to restrict individual rights through climate action. Groups within this movement also present themselves as a means to build community and to engage in civic duty to protect one's community from government and elite tyranny, and to restore transparency and democracy, notably at the local level.

I elaborated on five broad takeaways in the discussion section of this study. I observed how some groups in the freedom movement have shifted toward more effective forms of organizing, including making inroads with politicians and political parties. This threatens to bring the anti-climate freedom movement considerable power within governments at all levels, as the far-right group Take Back Alberta has accomplished.

Second, this movement can be understood as a by-product of the fossil fuel industry through an extension of the concept of subsidized publics. The fossil fuel industry has shaped much of modern day social and political life, and fossil capital has played an important role in forging extractive populist movements that the anti-climate freedom movement emerged from in part. However, discounting this as an astroturf movement that is controlled by fossil capital would fail to acknowledge the considerable grassroots energy animating the movement and the impacts it is having. Underestimating the current and potential impact of the anti-climate freedom movement would restrict the climate movement's ability to identify meaningful

responses to this anti-climate advocacy and its ability to prepare for the future terrain of climate politics in Canada.

Third, I argue that this movement illustrates that literal climate denial has not disappeared and can be brought back into prominence by right wing actors. I observed that at times groups identify real issues with the disconnect between neoliberal climate policies and the scale of the issue of climate change, in that they often let big polluters off the hook and focus on individual consumption. I argue that this must be addressed to both address the pressing issues at our times and remove fodder for the right.

Fourth, this movement can be qualified as ‘diagonalist’ due to its seemingly unlikely political coalition. I argue that progressive movements need to study the issues the right is picking up and oppose the hypocrisies of neoliberal climate policies in order to stop the leakage of people to diagonalist movements. Finally, this movement exhibits a toxic nostalgia that yearns for a long-gone time of strictly enforced social hierarchies when colonial extractive capitalism was not questioned. This is concerning in the context of rising right-wing populism and authoritarianism worldwide and should be seen as a warning for progressive movements in Canada.

## **5.2 Limitations**

There are two main limitations to this study. First, I opted to study a small number of groups affiliated with BC Rising for consistency and to properly immerse myself in the materials they created. While this meant a focus on BC to begin with and could have skewed my sample, throughout my tracking of the evolution of this movement I observed that the groups included in my sample are the main players in the anti-climate freedom movement in Canada. As mentioned in the methodology section, a limitation is that I did not include Action4Canada in my study. Action4Canada is a clearly far-right organization with Christian nationalist overtones, and it

promotes hateful views toward immigrants, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and its climate denial is especially conspiratorial, as it hosts webinars attributing wildfires to direct energy weapons. Despite not including Action4Canada directly in my sample, I studied some of their content shared by BC Rising and I have accounted for some of the far-right views they express in the discussion of this study. A study with a longer timeframe like a PhD would have allowed me to study other actors in the BC Rising network like news sources and citizen ‘journalists’/ content creators who inform these groups. My research therefore cannot be taken as a full survey of all the voices on the far-right opposing climate action in Canada. Similarly, this research project examines a selection of groups within the freedom movement, but this formation continues to evolve and so this analysis cannot necessarily describe all groups and individuals who purport to be part of the broader freedom movement.

Second, a major limitation of my research is that it did not involve interviews or interacting with groups in my sample directly. While I was able to gain a lot of information through my close engagement with online materials and observation at several in person events, I may have been able to gain additional information through interviews. Interviews may have provided critical information on the movement’s funding sources and potential connections to fossil capital, as well as a better understanding of what reasoning and events motivate people to join the anti-climate freedom movement. Throughout the thesis I note a range of beliefs held within my sample and while I consider this to be a far-right movement, I attempt not to assume that all members hold the most extreme views that are visible within the movement. Interviews might have clarified group members’ views in relation to these extreme parts of the movement.

My study has a limitation with regards to its analysis of climate frames. While I discuss various forms of climate denial and climate delay arguments in the critical context, the typology

I used to inform my analysis of climate frames did not integrate extractive populist frames nor the discourses of climate delay. I made the decision to employ Cann & Raymond's 2018 typology since it covers a range of frames that include literal denial and delay frames. I considered expanding my codebook to include the extractive populist frames identified by Neubauer et al., (2023), and the discourses of climate delay identified by Lamb et al. (2020). I decided not to do this as it would have created an unwieldy sized codebook. Despite this, I still had these ideas in mind since I am familiar with this literature. This means I was able to note the general occurrence of these other frames, but I may not have captured the full extent of their appearance across the sample.

### **5.3 Key Research Contributions**

While the Freedom Convoy and groups related to the freedom movement have been the subject of many news articles and some academic research, there is little in-depth research on groups that have emerged from this formation (to my knowledge), especially focused on climate denial. This study fills this gap by examining an emerging trend of groups that formed out of a movement opposing COVID-19 health measures turning their attention to other issues.

This study contributes to research that has been tracking the evolution of the anti-climate movement in Canada, including the activism of extractive populist groups (Gunster et al., 2022; 2021abc; Neubauer et al, 2023; McLean, 2024). These scholars have effectively examined the language used by anti-climate groups to delay climate action, as well as the ways in which extractive populist groups have transitioned from acting largely online to organizing in person events and rallies (Kinder, 2024; McLean, 2024). This study also contributes to the ongoing conversation around whether and how to acknowledge the agency of some movement participants while recognizing the role that fossil capital has often played and continues to in funding climate obstruction. This is critical because referring to all anti-climate groups as

astroturf does not make these formations disappear, and it weakens our ability to assess the real threats posed by such advocacy and to respond adequately. As climate action at all levels becomes more critical to avert catastrophic impacts, understanding the formations that seek to obstruct this action is indispensable. This work must involve asking why people are compelled to oppose climate action outside of being agents of the fossil fuel industry.

This research also contributes to literature in climate communications and on climate misinformation and disinformation that examines how the climate change countermovement frames its opposition to climate policy (Lloyd & Rhodes, 2025; Vivion et al., 2024; Treen et al., 2020). My analysis complicates the argument that the anti-climate movement has dropped outright denial in favour of just discourses of delay. This research presents a full list of the anti-climate arguments made by the freedom movement, which is helpful information for climate communicators and policymakers (notably at the municipal level where several groups are active in Canada). My research provides more evidence that some people who already find conspiratorial narratives compelling may still be convinced by literal climate denial. This contributes to recent polling around Canadians' beliefs around climate change.

While most Canadians are concerned by the threat of climate change, recent polling has shown a slight increase in denial (Hatch et al., 2024). This underlines the continued importance of evidence-based strategies to combat climate misinformation and disinformation outside of simply fact-checking (Lloyd & Rhodes, 2025; Climate Action Against Disinformation, n.d.). One example is inoculation, or 'prebunking', which involves proactively sharing information widely about climate change and policies and explaining the misinformation tactics used by anti-climate figures (Turney & Van der Linde, 2024).

Finally, this research provides more description of a trend that started to receive attention during the COVID-19 pandemic of formations that blur the lines of the political spectrum and bring together seemingly disparate groups into anti-elite and anti-system movements. This is critical because the character of the movements is changing, and they risk absorbing people who may once have been allies to more progressive movements.

Addressing this research gap is important for several reasons. First, the climate crisis continues to accelerate, and its impacts provide moments that anti-climate movements capitalize upon to disseminate misinformation and obstruct needed action. Upon writing, Canada's 2025 wildfire season has thrown thousands of people's lives, and countless hectares of ecosystems into tumult (Associated Press, 2025). Moments like these are extremely dangerous both in terms of immediate impacts, and as moments where misinformation and disinformation circulates. It is now likely that the next five years will see average planetary warming above 1.5°C, the ceiling on warming that the Paris Agreement put forward a decade ago (World Meteorological Organization, 2025). The climate crisis will cause an incomprehensible amount of harm to the planet and all its people, ecosystems and more than human inhabitants. Every fraction of a degree of warming makes a difference in the heat waves, droughts, flooding, and storms that will ensue. Addressing the climate crisis can and should provide incredible co-benefits that build a safer, cleaner, and more just world.

However, networks to oppose any action to build this world remain incredibly strong, and do not only exist at the high levels lobbying in climate negotiations or through meetings between fossil fuel companies and politicians. There are more grassroots foot soldiers for fossil capital fighting this future as well. The anti-climate freedom movement in Canada demonstrates some new characteristics compared to previously researched facets of the CCCM, including its

extremely conspiratorial nature. It is likely that this formation will grow and become angrier as jurisdictions continue to attempt to implement climate action, which will lead to more stand-offs with and aggression toward decision makers, climate organizers and communicators. This movement is also becoming more effective in its organizing. If it achieves more political power in Canada, either through lobbying decision makers or gaining representation in governments, it threatens to completely reverse course on all climate action and literally add fuel to the flames through unabated fossil fuel expansion. It is critical to understand this formation, how it organizes and how it gains supporters to neutralize the threat that it poses. Second, this movement includes far-right views that are harmful toward public health, immigrants, drug users, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and Indigenous rights. Any power gained by this movement is not only a threat to a climate safe future, but also social justice and a future that is inclusive and safe for all.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for Future Research**

Right-wing threats to climate justice are growing worldwide, and research to understand movements propelling these threats will continue to be vital in the future. Continued research is needed to track the evolution of this movement and its growth. Research on this topic in Canada would benefit from interviewing people within the freedom movement to ask what brought them to this kind of organizing—notably those from the diagonalist factions who may once have identified further left on the political spectrum. While this study presented some mention of the various issues groups in the freedom movement coalesce around, interviews could provide a better understanding of how these issues are connected in the minds of movement participants.

This research analyzed a small network of groups within the broader freedom movement, but future research is needed to map out the broader networks that the freedom movement is a part of, through finances and ties to broader institutions. Another interesting future research

avenue would be to study the alternative media sources of the far-right in Canada. In recent years there has been an explosion of what Leman-Langlois et al (2024) have termed the “far-right ‘infosphere,’ a vast, organically growing, largely contingent of content producers, co-producers and ‘prosumers’ actively constructing multiple (and oftentimes contradictory) far-right versions of reality” (p. 124). While sites like Rebel News are well known, my research observed a significant number of far-right content creators within the freedom movement such as “The Shadoc Davis Show”, “The Iron Will Report”, “Clyde Do Something”, and “Odessa Orlewicz”.

Further, there is a growing trend of bullying and threats of violence toward politicians in Canada (Bronskill, 2024). The city council of Pickering, Ontario has paused its in-person meetings due to threats from far-right actors (Freeman, 2025). These threats began after a council member spoke on an alt-right podcast during which the host called council members “pedophiles, Nazis and fascists” (Freeman, 2025, para. 9). Similarly, former longtime NDP MP Charlie Angus faced death threats in response to his proposal of a Bill to stop fossil fuel industry greenwashing (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2024). As already mentioned, the RDCK initially paused its climate action townhalls in the summer of 2023 due to threats to staff. Research interviewing politicians and staff who have interfaced with these movements directly would be beneficial to better understand the role that intimidation and bullying may play in opposing climate action.

### **5.5 Additional Tensions and Concluding Thoughts**

One large tension that I faced throughout this project was trying to avoid inadvertently laundering the reputation of groups and a movement that can cause real harm. At the same time, I wanted to avoid generalizing the most extreme views presented within the movement to all members and people who may attend freedom movement and adjacent events. While I consider the freedom movement to be a far-right formation, people with a range of views can be swept up in it- much like how people I knew are not far-right authoritarians displayed some support for the

Freedom Convoy in 2022. This was demonstrated by the fact that BC Rising held some more innocuous events to oppose provincial Bills that could be criticized from various perspectives. Similarly, BC Rising's current focus on saving Ostriches from being killed at Universal Ostrich farm may bring sympathetic people into their orbit (Fawcett-Atkinson, 2025). I attempted to maintain some balance by describing the variety of views presented across my sample.

As the far-right is on the rise worldwide, and the United States may be descending into fascism, there is a critical need to stamp out authoritarianism. At the same time, to build the movements needed to oppose this threat, we need strong coalitions that reach across differences.

As Leah Hunt-Hendrix and Astra Taylor write in their book "Solidarity" (2023)

to build a transformative majority capable of taking on an increasingly greedy elite and lethal far-right, we need to clearly define an adversary. The process of polarization- identifying two sides in a struggle and naming the source of oppression and exploitation- is a necessary component of building transformative solidarity, and of any successful social movement. Importantly, though, the boundary between Us and Them need not be unyielding or eternally hostile. It's preferable, and more strategic, for the border to be porous, allowing members to come in and out (p.46).

While many people in the formation that I have been studying likely will not be brought over to progressive ideals and caring about climate justice, it may be possible to peel some people back from diagonalist urges or at least avoid losing more to the swing to the right diagonalism offers. One important response must be becoming more welcoming and kinder within progressive movements, allowing people to make mistakes and grow. Cheering on the freezing of bank accounts and at extremes, death of unvaccinated people undoubtedly contributed to the polarization we face now (Klein, 2023). The far-right is prepared to catch anyone who feels somewhat alienated by the left (Klein, 2023).

As the freedom movement relies on pitting climate action, Indigenous land rights and trans rights against economic issues, solidaristic movements are needed urgently. The right has

effectively made climate policy synonymous with the affordability crisis while neoliberal climate policy has pushed us further into the polycrisis. Progressive movements that target the capitalist class to meaningfully address the cost of living and climate crisis may take some fuel off the fire of this reactionary movement. As Jackson (2022) argues, “people have every reason to be angry. They know the system is rigged against them. It’s up to us to tell a new story of how it’s rigged” (para. 49).

While this formation poses real dangers, especially as it gains political influence and taps into widespread feelings of anger and alienation, the response must not be solely reactive. Progressives must build inclusive, resilient, and materially grounded movements capable of addressing the economic and existential concerns that reactionary groups exploit. Combating authoritarianism and climate denial will require more than fact-checking—it will require solidarity, coalition-building, and compelling counter-narratives that speak to justice, dignity, and a livable future for all.

### **Recommendations for Action:**

In terms of building the capacity and movements required to respond to the threats posed by the anti-climate freedom movement, I can offer some preliminary thoughts on future actions that can be taken by climate communicators and organizers. One key piece is determining how to out-organize the CCCM and far-right’s climate obstruction, and another is working to build movements that lead to more coalitions than fractures and avoid losing people to diagonalist forces.

The anti-climate freedom movement is especially active at the municipal level, and so it will be key for municipal staff and councillors to be prepared to face increased suspicion and overt opposition as they try to create climate action plans and make their localities less car

dependent. Many municipalities in Canada are aware of the anti-climate advocacy of the freedom movement, thanks in large part to KICLEI and Braun's work emailing them (White, 2025a).

Briefing municipal staff and city councillors on this form of anti-climate advocacy, including the arguments employed by groups in the anti-climate freedom movement would help inoculate councillors against this misinformation. This can help municipal staff prepare for public engagement activities. On the note of climate communications, this research underlines the need for continued inoculation against climate misinformation and disinformation, notably around climate-fueled extreme weather events.

Regarding the need to recognize the relative autonomy of this movement from fossil capital, it is important that climate communicators and organizers continue to document the reach of fossil capital into civil society. Politically, it remains useful for advocacy organizations to detail the fossil fuel industry's obstruction playbook, including funding seemingly grassroots groups. Internally, it is critical that those working to implement climate policy recognize and study the concerns reflected in the anti-climate freedom movement, to assuage them where possible. Since members of this movement have associated their wellbeing with that of fossil capital and freedom with the consumption of fossil fuels, work is much needed to oppose the petro-nationalist imaginaries and disseminate new conceptions of a good life that are not reliant on fossil fuels.

Further, climate justice organizers must be active in the same arenas as the anti-climate movement, which means advocating for, supporting and defending climate action at the local as well as national and international level. In some cases, this means defending municipal level climate policy and demonstrating vocal support for more ambitious action. In other cases, this means being engaged in politics at all levels to avert the anti-climate freedom movement gaining

electoral power. Climate organizers must also advocate for climate action that meaningfully and tangibly improves people's lives and prevents openings for the right to pit climate change against other important issues. For example, Climate Justice Ottawa and Climate Justice Toronto, two grassroots climate organizations in Ontario are now supporting tenant organizing, recognizing that climate justice necessitates affordable and climate safe housing (Climate Justice Toronto, n.d.; Climate Justice Ottawa, 2025). Progressive movements must demand transformative change and oppose mere virtue signalling on climate, both to achieve the scale of change required to address the crises we face, and because diagonalist movements recognize false solutions and weaponize them to the detriment of climate action.

To neutralize the threat of diagonalist movements, it is important to reflect on what different entry points exist to bring people into progressive movements in order to build broader coalitions that speak to the concerns that people have on various fronts. In other words, what kind of Ostrich farm level opportunities exist for progressive movements to bring people into action to build a climate just future?

## Appendix 1: Observational Protocol

Table 4. Observational Protocol<sup>5</sup>

<b>Location, date, time</b>	
<b>Descriptive Notes</b>	<b>Reflective Notes</b>
Initial broad observations	How does it feel being in this space?
Describe and draw a picture of the setting	What are some major themes from the event?
Chronology of events	
How was this event organized? What resources have been mobilized?  E.g. number of people in attendance, signs of finances/ spending (e.g. food provided?), movement literature provided, who organized the event?	
What was the general affect of audience members?	
What are some notable responses by audience members? (e.g. exclamations, applause)	
How do audience members, speakers and organizers interact with others?	
What are some quotes shared by speakers, event organizers or participants that stand out?	
How were climate change/ climate policies framed by organizers, speakers, audience members?	

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<sup>5</sup> This observational protocol was informed by and adapted from John W. Cresswell. (2016). *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <https://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Cresswell-2016-30EssentialSkills-Observation.pdf>

*Appendix 2: Examples of frames across my sample*

Examples of Cann & Raymond’s (2018) typology of frames across my sample

Typology of climate policy opposition frames.	Examples of frames across sample
Science frames	
The evidentiary basis of climate change is weak and even wrong.	The IPCC has changed its predictions- climate change is not as dire as once thought.
S1 The scientific evidence for climate change is highly uncertain.	Climate change is complex and can’t be pinpointed to solely human causes.
S1a The nature of climate science is difficult to discern.	
S1b Climate change is a function of natural cycles and unrelated to human activity.	Climate has always changed, it’s a natural cycle, caused by sunspots.
S1c Climate change warming is not being observed.	The climate is cooling, climate change isn’t being observed in Canada (BC)  Sea level rise is not being observed around Vancouver Island
S2 Mainstream climate research is ‘junk’ science.	“real science” is being ignored, “real climate scientists”  Climate science is flawed/ fraudulent
S2a Climate change dissenters are unfairly persecuted.	People refuse to engage “real” climate scientists with dissenting opinions, they are being censored.
S3 The IPCC intentionally alters its reports to create ‘scientific consensus’ on climate change.	
S4 Climate change is merely a myth or scare tactic perpetuated by environmentalists, bureaucrats, and political leaders.	Climate change is nothing more than propaganda from unelected international organizations to control the population  Alarmist messaging is being pushed by globalist elites  UN is funneling money to municipalities for climate action  Nations signed onto UN Agenda 21 for “green money”

*Stuart addition* S4a authoritarian control with the justification of responding to climate change	Climate lockdowns will be imposed  15-minute cities are being created so that it is easier to control people's movement during the next lockdown  Farming will be banned to reduce emissions
Benefit frames	
Climate change would be beneficial if it were to occur.	The bigger problem is cooling
B1 Climate change would improve our quality of life and health.	Increases in CO2 will in fact support more agriculture and flourishing of greenspaces.
B2 Climate change would improve our agriculture (including natural systems).	CO2 is plant food  The planet would be unliveable without CO2, so we should be grateful for it increasing
Policy design frames	
Climate change policies would do more harm than good.	Climate policy makes everyone's life harder
E1 Policy would economically harm consumers.	Electric vehicles and home retrofits are economically damaging.  You will be forced into energy poverty because of the 'climate emergency'
E1a Low income or elderly consumers.	Elderly people cannot bike, especially during cold months, so active transportation plans are unrealistic and harmful
E1b Minority consumers.	
E2 Policy would economically harm industries.	Natural gas bans will harm natural gas companies which have net-zero plans
E3 Policy would harm the economy overall.	Climate change plans are poverty plans
SO1 Policy would threaten international sovereignty.	Climate action is being forced on governments of all levels by globalist organizations and ENGOS.
SO2 Policy would infringe on sovereignty at the state or local level.	Climate change policy is a ploy for the UN/ WEF to control our municipalities  Climate change is propaganda being spread by unelected international organizations

EN Policy would actually harm the environment.	Renewable energy harms the environment: wind turbines kill birds and bats, cannot be recycled, lead to deforestation.
DW Policy would harm countries in the developing world.	Abusive mining practices in manufacturing electric vehicles
UE Policy would promote unreliable energy systems, leading to energy shortages or blackouts.	Renewable energy is not reliable and will lead to blackouts.
NE Policy would be futile with no measurable effect, is not possible, and is ultimately unrealistic.	One jurisdiction can't have a real impact What about China and India?
LP Policy would be unnecessary, because climate change is not a priority compared to other issues.	Climate action policy as "false sustainability instead of local issues"  Climate action is being implemented to the detriment of other issues.

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