

“He’s just like Justin”

What Poilievre’s portrayal of Liberal leadership rivals reveals about the populist propagation of crisis

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PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS Laxer, E. & R. Vivès (2025). “He’s Just Like Justin”: What Poilievre’s Portrayal of Liberal Leadership Rivals Reveals About the Populist Propagation of Crisis (Observatory of Populism in Canada: Research Brief 0008).

Among the core facets of populism is a propensity to engage in discourses of “crisis”. Rather than simply convey pre-existing crises to audiences, scholars now believe that politicians employing populist strategies can *manufacture* such crises, for political gain. This process of manufacturing crisis entails identifying a – often legitimately severe – systemic failure (related, for example, to affordability, housing, immigration, etc.), elevating it to the level of crisis through hyperbole, attributing blame to carefully selected “elites”, and using the media to offer simple solutions and convey strong leadership. Crucial to this populist formula is the effort to maintain an emphasis on crisis, even after its designated elite architects are no longer in power (1).

In this research brief, we consider whether and to what extent discourses of anti-elite blame associated with the populist propagation of crisis inform the campaign strategy of Pierre Poilievre’s Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) following Justin Trudeau’s resignation as Liberal Party leader. In previous [briefs](#), we showed that, since 2022, Poilievre’s Conservatives have engaged in a coordinated strategy of blaming “Trust Fund Trudeau” for rising [inflation](#) (i.e. “Justinflation”), unaffordable housing, crime, and taxation, presenting themselves as the only “[common sense](#)” option for Canadians (2). Yet, with Trudeau resigning as Liberal leader last December, it is unclear if and how this strategy will persist.

- What effect, if any, has Trudeau’s resignation had on Pierre Poilievre’s populist strategy of blaming elites for various crises?
- To what extent has Poilievre transposed this strategy onto the leading Liberal leadership candidates – Mark Carney and Chrystia Freeland – in the wake of Trudeau’s resignation?
- What, if anything, do shifts in Poilievre’s discursive strategy reveal about the nature of anti-elite blame in the populist propagation of crisis?

To answer these questions, we draw from a dataset of 6,834 original tweets by Pierre Poilievre on X (formerly Twitter) between September 10, 2022 (the day Pierre Poilievre was elected CPC leader) and February 25, 2025. For the purpose of comparison, we supplement these data with tweets by leaders of the other major federal political parties.

SOMEONE TO BLAME: POILIEVRE'S MENTIONS OF TRUDEAU (2022-2025)

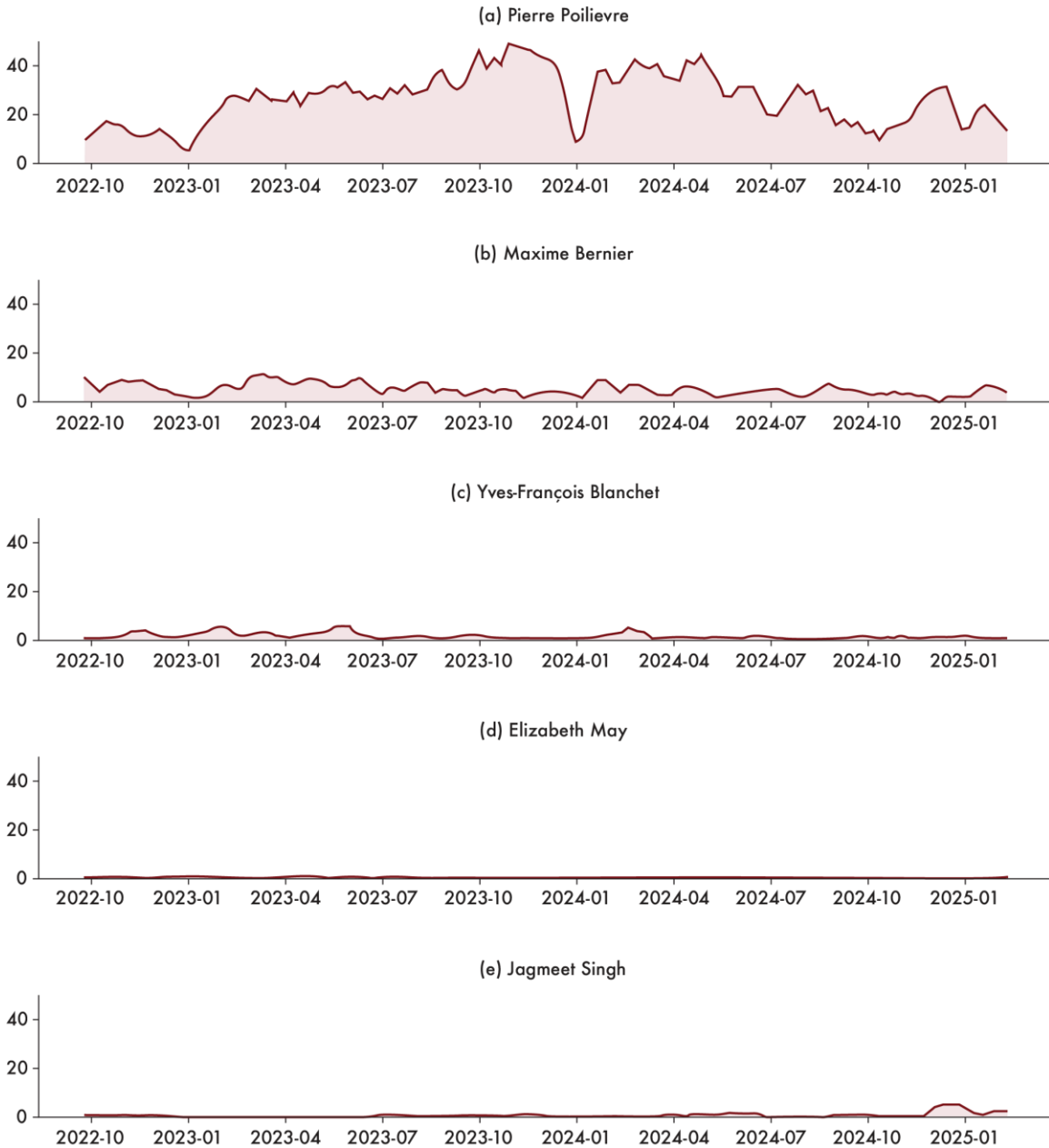
Since announcing his candidacy to lead the Conservative Party of Canada on February 5, 2022 – at the height of the Freedom Convoy – Pierre Poilievre has dedicated significant air-time to his political rivals, engaging in an “us vs. them” narrative. His rhetoric not only portrays Justin Trudeau as the architect of Canadians’ social and economic woes. It also frames any opponent, even within his own party, as complicit. During the Conservative leadership race, for instance, Poilievre was by far the most likely of the leading candidates to denounce his opponents in tweets, often portraying them as allies of Trudeau. Indeed, 74 percent of Poilievre’s leadership campaign mentions of Patrick Brown on X (then Twitter) also referenced Trudeau, and the Prime Minister appeared in 68 percent of his mentions of Jean Charest.

Figure 1 displays the weekly mentions of Justin Trudeau by Pierre Poilievre on X (Twitter) between September 10, 2022, and February 25, 2025, with comparisons to People’s Party leader Maxime Bernier (Panel b), Bloc Québécois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet (Panel c), Green Party leader Elizabeth May (Panel d), and NDP leader Jagmeet Singh (Panel e). The results demonstrate that, during the period under consideration, Poilievre mentioned Trudeau at a much higher rate – in 49.4 percent of a total 6,834 tweets – than any of the other major party leaders (3). Poilievre’s weekly mentions of Trudeau on X ranged from an average of 10 and 50 per week, with the frequency peaking in late 2023 and early 2024.

In this brief, we do not undertake a detailed qualitative analysis of the contents of Poilievre’s tweets mentioning Trudeau during the period in question. However, we know from [previous briefs](#) that Poilievre utilized the [Freedom Convoy](#) as the basis to propel his campaign to “replace Trudeau and restore freedom”, that he has blamed Trudeau for rising [inflation](#), that Trudeau is among the main “[gatekeepers](#)” identified by Poilievre’s Conservatives as effecting an “attack on working people”, and that Conservative MPs have increased their use of “[common sense](#)” to portray the “Trudeau-NDP coalition” as responsible for rising debt, elevated taxes, an increased cost of living, and crime.

It is evident, therefore, that Poilievre has dedicated far more significant air-time than other party leaders to blaming Trudeau for an array of crises. How, in the wake of Trudeau’s December 2024 resignation as Liberal Party leader, has he adapted this discursive strategy? We turn to this question in the next section.

FIGURE 1. Weekly mentions of Justin Trudeau by the major federal party leaders: September 10, 2022, to February 25, 2025



SOMEONE (NEW) TO BLAME: POILIEVRE’S MENTIONS OF FREELAND AND CARNEY (2022-2025)

With a vote to select the new Liberal Party leader scheduled for March 9th, 2025, two candidates have emerged as frontrunners: Chrystia Freeland, Trudeau’s former Minister of Finance (2020-2024) and Deputy Prime Minister (2019-2024), and Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of Canada (2008- 2013) and the Bank of England (2013-2020), and advisor to Trudeau since 2020. Freeland announced her resignation from the Trudeau Liberal government on December 16, 2024, prompting a political crisis, culminating in Trudeau’s resignation on January 6, 2025. Carney formally announced his campaign to replace Tru-

deau as Liberal leader on January 16, 2025, followed by Freeland the following day, on January 17, 2025.

Figure 2 displays the temporal evolution of weekly mentions of Chrystia Freeland (Panel a) and Mark Carney (Panel b) by @PierrePoilievre on X (Twitter) from September 10, 2022, to February 25, 2025. The two panels are on different scales, reflecting the overall higher frequency of @PierrePoilievre’s mentions of Mark Carney, compared to Chrystia Freeland, since Trudeau’s resignation.

FIGURE 2. Weekly mentions of Mark Carney and Chrystia Freeland by @PierrePoilievre on X (Twitter) (plain line) from September 10, 2022, to February 25, 2025, and co-mentions with Justin Trudeau (dashed line)



The trends in Panel a show that, prior to the end of December 2024, Poilievre’s mentions of Freeland fluctuated between zero and just over once per week. Following Freeland’s resignation, which unleashed speculation about Trudeau’s political future, the frequency of these mentions rapidly increased, reaching a peak of six mentions per week at the very end of 2024. The dotted line in Panel a further indicates that, in most recent tweets mentioning Freeland, Poilievre also references Trudeau, suggesting a desire to represent these two rivals as closely aligned.

Trends in Panel b reveal that, while nearly non-existent prior to 2024, Poilievre’s mentions of Mark Carney grew far more numerous in September 2024, after Trudeau chose him to chair a Liberal task force on economic growth (4), reaching a peak of over 20 mentions per week in the first weeks of 2025. The dotted line in Panel b indicates that, as was the case for Freeland, Poilievre references Trudeau in most of his recent tweets mentioning Carney.

What, if anything, do these data reveal about the evolution of Pierre Poilievre’s populist discursive strategy? In the next section, we investigate Poilievre’s portrayal of Carney on X

more closely, with the goal of understanding if, how, and to what extent it reflects an effort to propagate crisis by shifting blame from one Liberal leader onto another.

“CARBON TAX CARNEY”, HE’S “JUST LIKE JUSTIN”: HOW POILIEVRE’S PORTRAYAL OF CARNEY PROPAGATES CRISIS THROUGH ANTI-ELITE BLAME

Two recurring phrases in Poilievre’s 130 tweets mentioning Carney since September 2022 can shed light on the propagation of crisis through anti-elite blame: “Carbon Tax Carney”, which appeared in 72 percent of those tweets, and “Just Like Justin”, which appeared in 41 percent of those tweets (and 48 percent of tweets posted in 2025).

“Carbon Tax Carney”

In over two thirds of tweets mentioning Mark Carney, Poilievre refers to his rival as “Carbon Tax Carney”. Qualitative analysis of these tweets reveals that they contain telltale signs of populist anti-elite discourse. Indeed, just as he has portrayed “Trust Fund Trudeau” as responsible for “Justinflation”, Poilievre now alleges that “Carbon Tax Carney” is attempting to “take over Canada” on behalf of a “multinational billionaires’ club” whose aim is to “shut down our resource sectors and drive jobs out of Canada” (September 10, 2024).

@PierrePoilievre “Carbon Tax Carney is preparing to take over Canada. But who is he really working for? The multinational billionaires’ club? Is that why he wants to shut down our resource sectors and drive jobs out of Canada?” September 10, 2024

@PierrePoilievre “Trudeau’s soon-to-be successor, carbon tax carney, works for the multinational billionaires’ club, yet he still believes in quadrupling the carbon tax on your gas, heating, and groceries. Trudeau and carbon tax carney are not worth the cost” September 10, 2024

The data further suggest that Poilievre’s repeated use of the phrase “Carbon Tax Carney” reflects an attempt to discredit his opponent by generating mistrust in his actions and intentions. Indeed, tweets containing this phrase cast Carney as “the ultimate liberal “insider”, chosen by Trudeau to execute a “scheme” that entails lying to Canadians about key policies, while “covering up” his own private corporate interests.

@PierrePoilievre “Carbon Tax Carney is the ultimate liberal insider. He’s the chair of Trudeau’s task force on economic growth and advised the liberal government for years before that. And now he campaigns for the same liberal policies that tax your work, double housing costs, and will hike the carbon tax to \$0.61/L” January 14, 2025

@PierrePoilievre “Trudeau’s been scheming for six months to ditch Freeland and crown Carbon Tax Carney as finance minister. meanwhile, carney rakes in millions in his day job as a corporate executive, pulling the strings & watching Freeland get roasted for blowing past her \$40 billion deficit. . .” December 12, 2024

@PierrePoilievre “Carbon Tax Carney is the chair of Trudeau’s economic growth council. His handprint is on the \$62 billion inflationary deficit and the forthcoming carbon tax hike. Yet he covers up how many millions he is pocketing from corporate gigs. How much are his political connections. . .” January 2, 2025

The key element tying this plotline together is, of course, the carbon tax, for which Poilievre has long held Carney responsible. Despite Carney’s recent promises to scrap the tax (5), Poilievre insists his rival is intent on executing a “Carbon Tax Trick” or “Con Job” if elected: “no matter what he says (or won’t) now – if he wins the next election Carbon Tax Carney will hike the tax” (January 26, 2025).

@PierrePoilievre “Carbon Tax Con Job: Carney is asked 3 times if he will axe the tax. He won’t answer. no matter what he says (or won’t) now – if he wins the next election Carbon Tax Carney will hike the tax. He’s spent years calling for higher and higher carbon taxes. He’s Just Like Justin” January 26, 2025

@PierrePoilievre “Carney’s Carbon Tax Trick: suspend the liberal tax til after the election when he will bring in an even bigger tax with no rebate” January 31, 2025

“Just Like Justin”

In nearly half (48 percent) of all tweets mentioning Carney in 2025, Poilievre has used the phrase “Just Like Justin”. Qualitative analysis of this sample of tweets suggests that, like “Carbon Tax Carney”, the phrase is meant to elicit a perception of crisis through warnings of danger and threat. In such tweets, for instance, Poilievre alleges that Carney has long been the behind-the-scenes architect of Canada’s “collapsing economy” (September 6, 2024), working “hand-in-hand with Trudeau” to bring about “a financial disaster” (January 9, 2025) and “ruin Canada” (January 20, 2025).

@PierrePoilievre “Carbon Tax Carney devised Trudeau’s plan to tax your food, punish your work, and double your housing costs for years. He is Trudeau’s economic advisor. He’s Just Like Justin” February 5, 2025

@PierrePoilievre “Carbon Tax Carney is gearing up to replace Trudeau—with a speech to the liberal caucus about Canada’s collapsing economy after 9 years of NDP-Liberals. He supports the same deficits, tax hikes & money printing as Trudeau. carbon tax carney is Just Like Justin” September 6, 2024

@PierrePoilievre “Trudeau appointed Carbon Tax Carney to be his chief economic advisor. He’s been working hand-in-hand with Trudeau to quadruple the carbon tax to \$0.61/l, double housing costs, and leave Canada in a financial disaster. carbon tax carney is Just Like Justin” January 9, 2025

@PierrePoilievre “Justin didn’t ruin Canada alone. Carbon Tax Carney & Chrystia were right by his side as he doubled housing costs and hiked the tax on gas, heat & groceries. The next liberal leader will be Just Like Justin” January 20, 2025

The fact that the Conservatives have mounted a [website](#) dedicated to portraying all Liberal leadership candidates as “Just Like Justin” suggests that this phrase, and the implied transfer of anti-elite blame, has been adopted as a core feature of Poilievre’s digital campaign strategy.

CONCLUSION

This research brief set out to investigate the nature of anti-elite blame in the populist propagation of crisis by studying Pierre Poilievre’s X (formerly Twitter) activity prior to and since Justin Trudeau’s resignation as Liberal Party leader. Our key findings are threefold:

- First, and as we’ve shown in other briefs, Poilievre has drawn heavily on a populist discourse of anti-elitism to cast Justin Trudeau as the central architect of an array of social and economic crises. He has insisted that the “Trudeau-NDP coalition” is “not worth the cost” and branded the next federal election as a referendum to “axe the tax”. Following Trudeau’s resignation, Poilievre appears to have transposed this strategy of generating crisis and blame onto the main contenders in the Liberal leadership race, principally Mark Carney.

- Second, in executing this discursive shift, Poilievre has drawn on characteristically populist strategies, casting Carney as a self-interested, and even corrupt, “insider” intent on jeopardizing Canadians’ financial fortunes for his own economic and political gain. His repeated use of slogans, moreover, such as “Carbon Tax Carney” and “Just Like Justin”, suggests that this approach constitutes a core part of Poilievre’s digital campaign strategy.
 - Third, in transposing blame from one opponent (Trudeau) onto another (Carney), Poilievre is arguably showcasing what scholars describe as populism’s tendency to propagate crisis even after its alleged architects have been defeated. Our results specifically suggest that this propagation strategy relies on tactics such as the reallocation of blame and the portrayal of new political enemies as identical to old ones.
1. Moffitt, B. “How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism”, *Government and Opposition*, 50(2): 189-217.
 2. Our briefs have also explored the presence of populist anti-elitism among other Canadian federal parties, including the [NDP](#).
 3. We also estimated the percentage of Poilievre’s tweets mentioning Trudeau separately for the years 2022 (the portion of the year after September 10, 2022), 2023, 2024, and 2025 (until February 25, 2025). The percent ranged from 31.27 percent in 2025 and 56.51 percent in 2023.
 4. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/mark-carney-liberals-economic-task-force-1.7317833>.
 5. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/carney-to-scrap-carbon-tax-1.7446908>.