



report



**EASIER SAID THAN DONE:
THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ABOUT
INDIGENOUS-SETTLER
RECONCILIATION IN CANADA**

Rita Kopp

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Cover:

The Bentwood Box, a tribute to all residential school survivors, was produced by Luke Marston, commissioned by the TRCC in 2009 and is now located in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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Roughly two years ago, on May 27, 2021, a horrific discovery on the territory of the Tk'emlups te Secwépemc Nation near Kamloops, British Columbia, shocked the Canadian and international public: the human remains of 215 children who were enrolled in the former local residential school were found through ground-penetrating radar (Dickson/Watson 2021). The dreadful discovery of these victims is not an isolated incident, but one of many examples of the violent history of the residential school system, the legacy of which continues to effect and harm Indigenous people.

In 1996, the last residential school was closed, ending one of the darkest chapters of Canadian history, in which the Euro-Canadian population tried to violently absorb the Indigenous population into settler society,* with the goal to extinguish Indigenous presence in the country (Mannitz/Drews 2022, 5). The residential school system was designed to systematically assimilate Indigenous children, which led to severe injuries, deaths, and intergenerational trauma. According to current estimations, over 150,000 children were subjected to physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological violence, and several thousand children came to death in these schools (Mannitz/Drews 2022, 5). Due to unmarked graves and scarce documentation, the exact number of victims is still not clear—while the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation had a register of 4,130 confirmed victims of the residential school system in May 2022 (Supernant 2022), the example from Kamloops highlights how much more work has yet to be done to uncover the full extent of the horrific institution that was the residential school in Canada.

Due to the relentless work of Indigenous people and activists, the journey to acknowledging this dark chapter of Canadian history and towards a form of reconciliation began in the 1980s and culminated in the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (Kopp/Mannitz 2023, 10). This in itself is a unique element in settler-Indigenous policy and the relationship between these populations, as it was the first truth commission worldwide to focus exclusively on crimes committed against Indigenous people. The independent body of commissioners and investigators was mandated to find out the truth about what happened in the schools, publish their findings, and educate the Canadian people about this history. This is yet another aspect of the uniqueness of the case, since the commission did not investigate a recent crime committed by a previous regime that had been transformed, but rather a structure of historical violence carried out by a mature democracy that was still in place. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is, therefore, a highly interesting case study for the academic and political areas of transitional justice, postcolonialism, and transformation of (historical) violence.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada concluded in 2015, when the commission published a detailed report about the history and legacy of the residential school system, to which it responded by recommending 94 Calls to Action, which are intended to help the Canadian government and society to redress this historical system of violence and confront their own settler-colonial blame. These Calls to Action focus on the areas of child welfare, education, language and culture, health, justice, and reconciliation, and are intended to further reconcile Indigenous with

* “Settler society” is a term that refers to the non-Indigenous population of Canada, i.e., the immigrants from outside of Canada, predominantly Europe, and their ancestors.

non-Indigenous people in Canada. Questions remain as to whether reconciliation is wanted by both groups, whether it is morally justifiable to even consider reconciliation, or whether reconciliation is even possible; yet despite their importance, these questions are not the subject of this report. What is not questionable is the responsibility of the Canadian state to address the colonial violence inflicted on the Indigenous population via the full and swift implementation of the 94 Calls to Action. Their full implementation has been pledged by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ever since publication of the final report in 2015. However, seven years later, only a small fraction of 13 Calls have been implemented, although the Canadian government has been communicating great success about implementation to date and optimism about future progress. The disconnect between this narrative and the grim empirical reality suggests that it is in fact easier to speak of reconciliation than to actually work towards it. Therefore, the report aims to discuss two main questions: *Why is there such a discrepancy between the reality of little implementation and Canada's ambition as a perceived champion for democracy and reconciliation? What are the reasons for the slow pace of the process?*

This report, which is based on a master's thesis, contains a critical discourse analysis of the political debate surrounding the implementation and suppositions about potential reasons for the current situation. There are two goals: first, a description of the empirical situation of recommendation implementation in Canada; and second, an analysis of the possible reasons for the failure to implement the recommendations swiftly and comprehensively. This approach is built on the premise that what key political actors—the Prime Minister, the House of Commons, and the Senate—chose to articulate as reasons for (non)implementation is very likely to be connected to the actual, tangible reasons for the meager reality of having completed only 13 of 94 goals after seven years.

The analysis provides four key takeaways: First, in Canada, a shared narrative acknowledges the violent history of the residential school system, the need for an apology, Indigenous healing, and empowerment as the first step towards reconciliation. Political leaders in the executive and legislative branches actively promote this narrative, acknowledging Canada's settler colonial past and commitment to reconciliation. Second, the government does not portray Indigenous communities as passive victims, especially since the Harper-Trudeau transition in 2015. Public interest and societal engagement play a significant role in driving implementation efforts, making reconciliation an all-Canadian journey. Third, there is a notable disconnect between the Prime Minister's positive stance on implementation and the more critical perspective within the legislative branches. This discrepancy may hinder concrete progress in implementing the Calls to Action. Fourth, there are constructive pull factors as well as destructive push factors: Constructive factors include regular CtA updates and accountability (what has been done already by whom), emphasis on healing, truth acceptance, recognition of anti-Indigenous structural racism, and identification with affected groups, i.e., the Indigenous people of Canada. On the other hand, impeding arguments to CtA implementation include lack of participation in key institutions (e.g. courts, federal and local governments, administrative actors), performative or exploitative behavior, structural racism, euphemisms, and insufficient resources.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

The residential schools¹ were a system of more than 130 boarding schools all over Canada from the mid-19th century until 1996, organized and operated by the federal government and Christian congregations. They were a key pillar of the larger federal policy against Indigenous people and the government's strategy to violently assimilate them into the increasingly white, European-Canadian society (Nagy/Sehdev 2012, 67). Conditions in these institutions were horrific, and despite the name, the main goal was not their education and integration, but forced assimilation. Apart from physical separation from their culture and the spatial uprooting, Indigenous children were forbidden to practice their spirituality or religion, speak their native languages, or use their given names (Nagy 2013, 56). Children as young as two were violently separated from their families and communities, and exposed to poor housing and ventilation, malnutrition, diseases, insufficient medical care, as well as emotional, sexual, and physical abuse (Nagy/Sehdev 2012, 67). Current estimations state that over 150,000 children visited residential schools, over 6,000 of whom died there (Howard 2022). According to recent socioeconomic research, problems that asymmetrically affect Indigenous people, e.g., disproportionately high incarceration, higher levels of substance abuse and suicide (Milloy 2013; 11; Bremner 2019, 334) as well as the looming extinction of traditional cultures and languages (Mannitz/Kopp 2023) can be traced back directly to the residential school system.

Since the closure of the last residential school in 1996, the permanent efforts and fundamental work of Indigenous activists and survivors of the system has yielded several political and legal steps towards reconciliation, one of the most important being the 2007 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The agreement is the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian legal history to date and includes, among other measures, opportunities for compensation payments for survivors, health and healing services, as well as the mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC; de Bruin 2020). The TRCC is a special example of an instrument that is commonly used after a regime commits abhorrent crimes, often called "truth commissions." (TC)

TRUTH COMMISSIONS

TCs are bodies established to investigate past events that lasted for a period of time, rather than individual events, in which violent and structural crimes were committed. Essentially, they are supposed to find the truth about what happened during these periods, to allow for an engagement with the affected population, gather information and incorporate testimonies of their experiences. TCs are temporary bodies that work only within their mandate; frequently they publish a report, sometimes including rec-

¹ While the official term for the residential school system contains the colonial and problematic "Indian"; in this report, the conscious decision was made to refer to the institutions simply as "residential schools" to acknowledge their nature without using derogatory terminology.

ommendations for future action, and are authorized by the state under review (Hayner 2011, 11–12). Since the beginning of their establishment in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America, over forty TCs have been authorized in several countries. The most popular ones have been the TCs in South Africa, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Canada is a special example, and therefore highly valuable for academic and political analysis, because it investigates crimes that began roughly 150 years prior to the establishment of the respective commission. The Commission in Canada was created not through a significant public interest of an effected majority, but through legal victory, and not immediately after political transition, but within a strong, established democracy. It is, as of now, the first TC to focus exclusively on Indigenous people.

The TRCC's mandate to "redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (TRCC 2015, 319) guided the work under chief commissioner Murray Sinclair, Wilton Littlechild, and Marie Wilson from 2009 to 2015. During this time, seven national TRCC events were organized, and 7,000 individual statements and around five million records were collected, which were stored in the newly created National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. In June 2015, the TRCC published its final report, describing in detail the history and legacy of the residential school system, and suggesting 94 individual measures for Canada to embark on a joint journey towards reconciliation, which are the 94 Calls to Action.

These calls cover several areas, including child welfare, education, language and culture, health, justice, and reconciliation. Some of these calls are relatively easy to implement, so called "low-hanging fruit" (Jewell/Mosby 2021, 5), e.g., number 80, the establishment of a statutory National Day for Truth and Reconciliation; others are more structural in nature, e.g., number 38, the (commitment to) the elimination of the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in custody. These calls are supposed to help along the journey towards reconciliation—but the question remains: How has Canada been dealing with the task of implementing these recommendations? Despite the efforts of the TRCC, important legal victories for Indigenous people, historic apologies, and growing attention in Canada and abroad, the journey towards reconciliation is far from complete—it is also highly questionable whether this journey can or should ever be completed. What is not questionable is the responsibility of the Canadian state to address the colonial violence inflicted on the Indigenous population via the full and swift implementation of the 94 Calls to Action, which has been pledged by Prime Minister (PM) Trudeau repeatedly: during the ceremonial release of the TRCC report in December 2015, he stated that he intends to "[...] fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." (Trudeau 2015) However, the current situation indicates little substantive engagement with the terrible history that the TRCC has uncovered. Consequently, the main focus of this work is to investigate the reasons for Canada's slow pace of implementation, despite tangible negative consequences for the Indigenous population and the state due to the failure to implement the CtA swiftly and comprehensively.

1.2 EMPTY PROMISES OF RECONCILIATION

While the government has stated repeatedly that the CtA implementation has been successful to the extent that “over 80 per cent of the Calls to Action that involve the Government of Canada have been completed or are well underway” (Government of Canada 2020), the empirical reality contradicts this. According to Jewell and Mosby, who have been tracking the CtA implementation progress since 2015, only 13 of 94 CtA were completed fully by the end of 2022 (2022, 5). Their evaluation is supported by a progress assessment by the Beyond 94 project of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which also has been running since 2015 (CBC 2023). This puts the general success rate of the implementation of all CtA at a meager 14% after seven years. However, since this report focuses on the key political actors, i.e., the government and parliament of Canada, it is vital to emphasize that 71 of the 94 CtA either exclusively or partially address the federal government directly. This means that the federal legislative and executive branch are responsible for over three quarters of all recommendations. The government has stated explicitly that the above mentioned 80% of the CtA are either completed or “well underway”; however, the empirical reality does not support these claims. According to Jewell and Mosby’s description of completed CtA, of the 71 CtA that are within governmental responsibility, only nine have been completed; this corresponds to 13% (Jewell/Mosby 2022, 5). However, the argument could be made that Jewell and Mosby evaluate the progress in a binary system of complete or incomplete, which ignores partial progress. After all, the governmental statement reads “have been completed or are well underway.” The CBC data can be consulted to obtain a differentiated description of the situation, which also accounts for partial successes. The Beyond 94 project includes the category “planned with projects underway.” If you add up the CtA that are within the government’s responsibility and are either fully implemented or planned plus the projects underway, even with the far more differentiated data from the CBC you still only arrive at 48% implemented or partially implemented calls—a far cry from the proclaimed 80%.

These empty promises are especially puzzling in consideration of Canada’s image, both internally and externally. Canada self-identifies as a human rights champion and defender of inclusivity and diversity (Government of Canada 2023); it endorsed, albeit after initial opposition, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2010 (Lightfoot 2012, 112), and the government declared all-encompassing support for the findings of the TRCC and pledged swift cooperation in 2015 (Trudeau 2015). All these commitments are at odds with the inability to implement the 94 CtA fully and swiftly.

1.3 SOCIETAL AND POLITICAL INCENTIVES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the CtA has immense societal consequences for over 1.8 million individuals who self-identify² as Indigenous. As the Indigenous population is estimated to grow twice as fast as

2 Indigenous identity can be achieved through self-identification with First Nations, Métis or Inuit, and/or through registration under the Indian Act of Canada as Indigenous, and/or through membership of a First Nation or band. The possibility of self-identification allows Indigenous people who have been stripped of their Indigenous identity by colonial structures to proactively reclaim it.

the non-Indigenous population, this will affect more people in the future (Parrott 2023). The (growing) Indigenous part of the populace is disproportionately affected by socioeconomic issues, such as poor health and housing, less access to and lower levels of education, lower income, higher rates of unemployment, and higher rates of incarceration.³ While these serious disparities are a problem in themselves, the urgency is increased by the aspect that the affected population will grow in the future. The tension between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada is already apparent, for example in demonstrations concerning the construction of pipelines through Indigenous territories and general territory disputes (Aquino 2023). The prognosis of a growing minority that has not only been historically discriminated against, but also continues to be disproportionately disadvantaged along the axes of race, gender, and class, could further increase the potential for intra-state conflict. The CtA are a potential antidote for this tension, as they could significantly enhance the socioeconomic situation of Indigenous people in Canada and improve long-term relations between Indigenous people and settlers, consequently enhancing the societal relevance of a study concerned with the CtA implementation and possible reasons for problems within the process.

Apart from the major societal effects of the implementation or non-implementation of the CtA, considerable political effects need to be considered, both nationally and internationally. For political actors in Canada, the residential school system legacy and the larger area of Indigenous people's rights and treatment had tangible effects on their international image as well as their power in international relations. Researchers argue that Canada's treatment of Indigenous people directly affected its access to and co-determination in bodies such as the UN Security Council (Stefanovich 2019) as well as its diplomatic strength (Lightfoot 2012, 103). Furthermore, non-state actors such as Amnesty International join in this criticism: In their 2022/2023 International Report on the state of the world's human rights, Canada is criticized for its failure to prevent Indigenous expropriation, disproportionately high numbers of Indigenous victims of rape and sexual violence, and the disproportionately higher danger for the Indigenous population due to climate change (Amnesty International 2023, xi, 18–19). Canada's poor performance in implementing the CtA so far consequently had negative effects on its diplomatic strength and international symbolic power, and may potentially restrict its credibility as a human rights champion and lessen pressure on other human rights offenders, which ultimately hurts marginalized people suffering human rights abuses all over the world.

In conclusion, there are several societal and political incentives for the swift and comprehensive implementation of the CtA, as well as an in-depth analysis of the process surrounding it.⁴

3 <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/8-key-issues-for-indigenous-peoples-in-canada>.

4 I would like to thank the two supervisors of my master's thesis, Rafael Biermann at the FSU Jena and Sabine Mannitz at PRIF, for their support in developing the basis for this report. Furthermore, I am very grateful to my colleagues at PRIF for their profound and encouraging feedback, especially Dimpho Deleglise, Patrick Flamm, Larissa-Diana Fuhrmann and Niklas Schörnig, without whose help this report would not have been possible.

2. DEFINING THE PERSPECTIVE AND PROVIDING THE TOOLS

2.1 CURRENT DEBATES ON THE TRUTH COMMISSION'S IMPACT, DISCURSIVE POWER, AND THE CANADIAN CASE

Since the establishment of TCs, there has been a debate around the question of whether they achieve the intended goals, be it peace, the promotion of human rights, or the prevention of further mass atrocities. The ambivalent success rate of TCs stems in part from the intrinsically difficult situations in which they are established, as most commissions usually follow periods of political transition. In these periods, there is often no strong institutional foundation, i.e., a working judicial system or established legislative and executive bodies, but more often recent widespread violence and trauma. Additionally, TCs are limited in their success because of the absence of tangible judicial and political powers and consequently, a rather weak mandate compared to other instrument of transitional justice such as tribunals. However, this lack of power can also be interpreted as an advantage: the focus of TCs on restoration, victims, and the truth, rather than on retribution, perpetrators, and justice, is the foundation for the argument that the commissions can be more stable and peaceful alternatives for periods of transitional justice (Werle/Vormbaum 2018, 83).

According to Brahm, there are three main positions among scientific observers: the impact of TCs is positive, mixed, or negative (2007, 19–20). First, and most positively, some argue that TCs are very successful and efficacious, and therefore superior to other instruments of transitional justice, for example tribunals or amnesties (supported by, e.g., Rice/Snyder 2008 and Hayner 2011). A second, ambivalent group understands TCs as limited alternatives to conventional criminal prosecution that have only limited benefits (supported by, e.g., Mani 2007). Lastly, the most critical group argues that TCs not only fail to succeed in their original goals, but are actually dangerous insofar as they can potentially destabilize the post-transitional phase of a state that emerges from a conflict (supported by, e.g., Olsen et al. 2010). Furthermore, there is a large body of research that is of the opinion that the impact of TCs is still ambiguous (Freeman/Hayner 2003; Fischer 2011; Engert/Jetschke 2011; Hirsch et al. 2012; Bakiner 2014 and Fijalkowski 2021).

A relatively new understanding of TCs as “discursive institutions” (de Costa 2017, 186) is especially interesting and valuable for this particular case. According to de Costa, instruments of transitional justice, especially in non-transitional circumstances (as is the case in Canada), rely primarily on their influence on social relations through their power on the public and political discourse, because they lack tangible political or legal authority (2017, 188). This idea of discursive power is supported by Milton and Reynaud, who argue that TCs are special and, ideally, safe spaces in which difficult topics and taboos can be addressed and hegemonic discourses can be challenged (2019, 528). Since several recent studies have deployed (critical) discourse analysis methodologies on a variety of different TC case studies, i.e., South Africa, El Salvador, and potential TCs in Sweden, Norway, and Australia, both the existence of TC discursive power and the appropriateness of critical discourse analysis methodology to analyze this power have been supported in the past (Bock 2007; Mazzei 2011; Barrios 2017, Griffiths 2018, Ecker/Mannitz 2023).

Lastly, there has been a growing academic discourse around the Canadian case. Several authors have already investigated the establishment of the TRCC, its goals and preliminary results from 2009 to 2015. Several barriers to TRCC impact have been identified in the form of a limited mandate (James 2012, 184), the prioritizing of truth sharing rather than identifying perpetrators and faults (James, quoted in Storrie 2015, 485), weak political motivation (Nagy 2013, 52), the lack of heterogeneous positions and stories (Storrie 2014, 471), and the pathologizing of victims, as well as ignorance about continuing anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination (Nagy 2020, 224). Among the most comprehensive works on the TRCC impact are the four annual reports by Jewell and Mosby from 2019 to 2022. Their annual analyses contributed to the list of potential barriers to the impact of the TRCC and the implementation of its recommendations: perceived opposition between “the public interest” and “Indigenous interests,” paternalistic attitudes among powerful actors, i.e., politicians and bureaucrats, and structural racism were identified as reasons for the slow implementation (2019: 6–7), along with the exploitation of Indigenous practitioners and communities by non-profit organizations and Canadian institutions, not to mention insufficient resources (2020, 20).

From these three different strands of the academic discourse about TCs, several conclusions can be drawn that directly inform the presented analysis: first, the impact of TCs in general is under-researched, highly ambivalent, and potentially influenced by a multitude of reasons. Second, TCs seem to have a soft and discursive, rather than a hard and political power, which means that the methodologies and concepts used to analyze their impact need to be adapted accordingly. Finally, the impact of the TRCC is ambivalent and influenced by several factors, many of which can impede progress. By focusing on the discursive impact of the Canadian case, this study aims to contribute to all three academic debates.

2.2 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND ANALYTICAL MATRIX: METHODOLOGY

The main focus of this report is to investigate why Canada is so slow in implementing the recommendations for reconciliation, even though the lack of progress clearly harms the state nationally and internationally. However, as was argued in the previous section, a causal analysis of reasons for unsuccessful implementation, i.e., the impact of the truth commission, is significantly under-researched and methodologically challenging. While there are two independent basic evaluations of the implementation rate, and several suggestions for possible reasons for this rate, there are neither hypotheses that connect both factors nor suggestions about how to investigate the relationship between the reasons and the outcomes. For this reason, a critical discourse analysis is suggested as a first step to answer this question: what has been said by the key political actors who are most responsible for implementation and most powerful within the process? Unlike political or legal effects or even new laws or structures, which follow lengthy negotiation processes, the discourse surrounding the implementation of the recommendations can be analyzed immediately: The attention to the TRCC report and the associated recommendations was tremendous, and the political discourse that started in June 2015 is still ongoing. Building on the premise that the discourse is a signifier of political interests, motives, and power, a critical analysis of what has been said, what has not been said, how and why is a valuable first avenue for deeper analysis of the implementation process. Put differ-

ently, in order to make assumptions about the core of the problem, i.e., the reasons for the meager implementation results after seven years, one avenue of investigation is to look at the shell of public statements and arguments that surround the individual cores of key political players' motives and interests; these cores are a large part of the overall problem.

The arguments that serve as the data for this analysis are those that were made by key political actors from the executive and legislative branches of the government, i.e., only those fragments⁵ of the discourse were considered that make statements about why certain recommendations can or should (not) be implemented. As elected representatives of the Canadian population, the legislative branch, i.e., the Senate and the House of Commons, and the executive branch, i.e., the PM and his cabinet, are the main agents connecting the public discourse and tangible political change regarding implementation. They are also the most powerful actors in the implementation process because they decide collectively what will be legislated and how this legislation will be executed. Lastly, the government and parliament are the actors most often called upon by the TRCC, which indicates that the commission, too, puts the greatest responsibility for reconciliation in their hands.

The report analyzes samples rather than all discourse fragments since June 2015. Even with the restriction to the federal political strand of the discourse, nine years of data are still impossible to analyze as a whole in a qualitative manner. In order to reduce the data to a manageable amount with minimal bias, one critical week was selected for each year of the discourse, which was then analyzed fully. The weeks were chosen through a Google Trend Analysis which enabled identification of the weeks in which the term "Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada" was searched for most often, suggesting a strong dynamic in Canada at this particular time and presumably high interest among the key political actors. Within these eight critical weeks from 2015 to 2022, I collected 164 statements in 57 discourse fragments via a keyword search on the electronic databases of the PM, the Senate, and the House of Commons, all of which were accessed and downloaded through the respective online databases of each institution in English. All statements were indicated as coming directly from the respective individual, i.e., immediate arguments from their position.

To structure the amount of data into a first analytical pattern, the report is built on an analytical matrix that is in part deductively informed by previous research on TC impact factors in general, and on the success of the TRCC in particular. Furthermore, after a first reading of the data, additional inductive categories were added to account for the specific arguments that were present in the Canadian discourse. Naturally, arguments were either for or against something, in this case for or against implementation. Of course, there were no statements that implementation itself should not take place, as such a fundamental opposition would be almost impossible politically in post-2015 Canada and would quickly be equated with residential school denialism and anti-Indigenous racism. However, there were arguments or dynamics that either hindered (or attempted to hinder) the implementation process, or addressed obstacles in the process to imply reasons for delayed implementation or

5 Discourse fragments are parts of the larger discourse, i.e., protocols of the debates in the House of Commons or the Senate, or transcripts of speeches delivered by the PM. Fragments are to be differentiated from statements, which in my analysis are coherent statements by an individual person on a topic; there can be multiple statements in a single discourse fragment.

non-implementation—these were subsumed as impeding arguments. On the other hand, there were arguments that were positive about implementation, actively calling for further implementation, making suggestions for implementation or providing arguments for why implementation needs to happen quickly—these were subsumed as concurring arguments.⁶ Impeding arguments were comprised of three categories of argumentation: structural (A), passive normative (B), and active normative (C).

(A) Structural arguments concern physical limitations that hinder the implementation process and can be used as reasoning for delayed implementation, i.e., a weak mandate or insufficient resources. Put simply, an argument in category A could state that for successful implementation, more money would be needed, or the TRCC should have had more political power in the first place—since neither are not present, the implementation is not happening as envisioned (Jewell/Mosby 2020, 20, 2021, 12; Chapman 2009, 102). An example for a structural argument is a statement by a Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Commons in 2018: “Where has the federal government [...] been when it comes to addressing the *absolute underfunding* of key services like housing, education, and health care?” (House of Commons 2018a, 18792). Here, the MP clearly points to the structural problem of underfunding policy areas relevant to Indigenous people and CtA implementation, implying that a major problem in recommendation fulfilment is the lack of sufficient resources.

(B) Normative arguments, i.e., arguments that describe how things should be rather than objectively describing how they are (structural arguments), were made either passively or actively. Passively means that the non-implementation was something that happened due to the lack of action, i.e., the continuation of the status quo before the Truth Commission—business as usual. These arguments are passive in the sense that non-implementation is explained by a lack of interest, or because the need to implement the CtA recommendations is undermined. Usually this took the form of little interest for implementation in the general public, lack of participation in key institutions, pathology narratives,⁷ and/or a focus on affirmative politics without recognition of structural injustices (Hayner 1994; 636; Nagy 2013, 52; Jewell/Mosby 2019, 5, 2020: 20, 2021: 12; Storrie 2015, 485; James 2012, 197; Nagy 2013, 52, 2020, 224; Corntassel/Holder 2008, 472; Eisenberg 2018, 27–28; Nagy 2020, 224). In addition, arguments were made against increased implementation, either because Canada was already doing a very good job in terms of implementation (e.g., the narrative that 80% of the Calls were almost done), or because Canada was already a self-declared pioneer in the field of indigenous rights and dealing with the colonial past, and therefore there was no reason to insist on even more implementation. One example of passive normative data, more concretely for underlying pathology narratives, is a remark by a senator in 2018: “[...] and it seems that we’re still caught in what I call the *‘curative mode’*, where there’s a crisis, there’s a report, and there’s a response” (Senate 2018, 5279). With this argument the senator criticizes that reconciliation is understood as a problem to be fixed for the injured party, i.e., Indigenous people in Canada, rather than as a more structural transformation.

6 In graphical representations (tables and diagrams), “impeding” will be used synonymously with “con,” as in arguments that are against the matter at hand, and “concurring” will be used synonymously with “pro.” However, since this is an extreme abbreviation of the facts, these synonyms are used only to increase readability and comprehensibility.

7 The idea that Indigenous people are passive victims, who are sick, ill, or unable to help themselves, rendering them in need of outside, i.e. non-Indigenous, care and help.

(C) Where there is an argument of absence within the passive normative category, there is explicit reason against implementing the active normative⁸ one. These were articulated as opposition, paternalism,⁹ racism, performative action,¹⁰ and exploitation¹¹ (James 2012, 197; Jewell/Mosby 2019, 6–7, 2020, 20, 2021, 12; McGregor 2017, 815; Carleton 2021, 2). A straightforward illustration of active normative arguments is a simple assessment from a senator from 2015: “Colleagues, *systemic bias or racism* is part of the culture of the justice system already” (Senate 2015a, 3542).

Concurring arguments include four different categories that consist of arguments that support the implementation process; these are structural (D), normative (E), external (F), and declarative arguments (G).

(D) Analogous to impeding structural arguments, concurring structural arguments state that there are in fact resources that support implementation, be they a major affected group which would constitute a large population to benefit from the implementation assets (Gibson 2007, 426), or financial, political, legal, or educational assets. This can be clarified by the following example from the Senate in 2022, in which the importance of funding invested in Indigenous organizations is positively highlighted: “Budget 2021 provided \$33.3 million to expand support [...] *This investment also strengthens funding* for national Indigenous women’s organizations, youth sexual health and regional grassroots organizations” (Senate 2022a).

(E) Again, parallel to the impeding normative arguments, there are concurring ones that create a normative imperative due to large public support, possible identification with the affected group, or working support within institutions. Put differently, implementation can and should work because there is large public interest in it, the people benefitting from the recommendations are closely related to the larger population (i.e., an all-for-one, one-for-all narrative), and institutional cooperation has already been signaled and is underway. PM Trudeau has delivered several examples for this over the years, one of which reads “I also want to speak about our *shared* journey of reconciliation” (Trudeau 2021a), perfectly highlighting the aspect of identification with the affected group.

(F) Concurring external arguments are synonymous with arguments that implementation needs to happen because of international attention and pressure—this is connected to the above mentioned effect this discourse has on Canada’s public and political image abroad (Freeman/Hayner 2003, 128; Jewell/Mosby 2021, 30). Since there were no statements that fit into this category, this can only be exemplified by a hypothetical statement, which could read “*As the international non-governmental*

8 It is important to note that the speakers who made statements that were coded as belonging to this category most often did not engage in racism or paternalism themselves, but rather pointed out that these were frequent reasons for non-implementation.

9 Statements that were made in favor of the supposed interests of Indigenous people but without actual firsthand information; decisions by people who are of the opinion that “they know better.”

10 Actions that were only talked about publicly for publicity without follow-up actions.

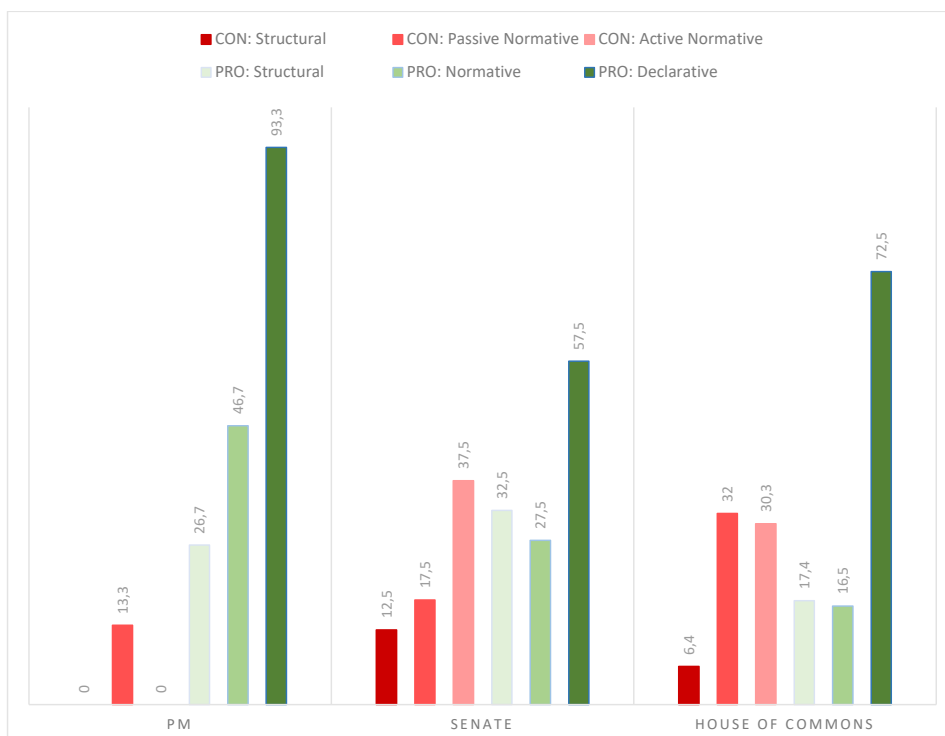
11 Actions that were made for (personal) reasons rather than for the benefit of Indigenous people, or, in extreme cases, while directly harming them.

organization Amnesty International made clear in their last report on human rights issues, there is a clear imperative to act now to improve Indigenous people’s living standards all over Canada.”

(G) Lastly, declarative arguments were incorporated fully inductively; these are arguments that publicly acknowledge facts or statements that are beneficial to the implementation process. For example, the truth found by the TRCC, the violent history and ongoing anti-Indigenous racism or cultural genocide were all articulated and acknowledged, thus strengthening the case for CtA implementation—Canada did in fact do this, so consequently, we need to do that now. Yet again, PM Trudeau mentions these many times; among other examples, a statement from 2021 illustrates the example of truth acknowledgement: “And together, we must *acknowledge this truth* [...]” (Trudeau 2021b).

3. DISSECTING THE DISCOURSE

The data corpus contains 57 individual discourse fragments (PM n = 15, Senate n = 15, House of Commons n = 27) in the form of statements, public speeches and minutes of parliamentary meetings. As several individuals made statements in all discourse fragments of the Senate and House of Commons, these were recorded separately; this resulted in a sample of 164 statements (PM n = 15, Senate n = 40, House of Commons n = 109).



Graph 1: Percentage distribution of categories occurring in all statements, differentiated by political actors, own depiction.

In Graph 1, the general distribution of the six argumentative categories (impeding in shades of red, concurring in shades of green) is portrayed by comparing all three actors. Particularly apparent are the similarities between the two chambers of parliament, and the difference of the outlier PM. Whereas all themes have a fairly equal presence in both parliamentary chambers—declarative advantages (dark green) being the most common and structural disadvantages (dark red) the least common—the PM not only shows just four categories but significantly different percentages. What unites all three is the overwhelming dominance of the declarative advantages and the limited/non-existent presence of structural limitations, which underlines the previously mentioned findings concerning the overall distribution. Apparently, there is a line of division in arguments between the legislative and executive branch. On the one hand, the Senate and House of Commons are similar in terms of discourse fragments, categories, subcategories, and their distribution. On the other hand, the PM's discourse fragments are less heterogeneous and very different from the parliamentary actors. To further analyze these differences, the arguments used by each key political actor will be discussed individually and in-depth below.¹²

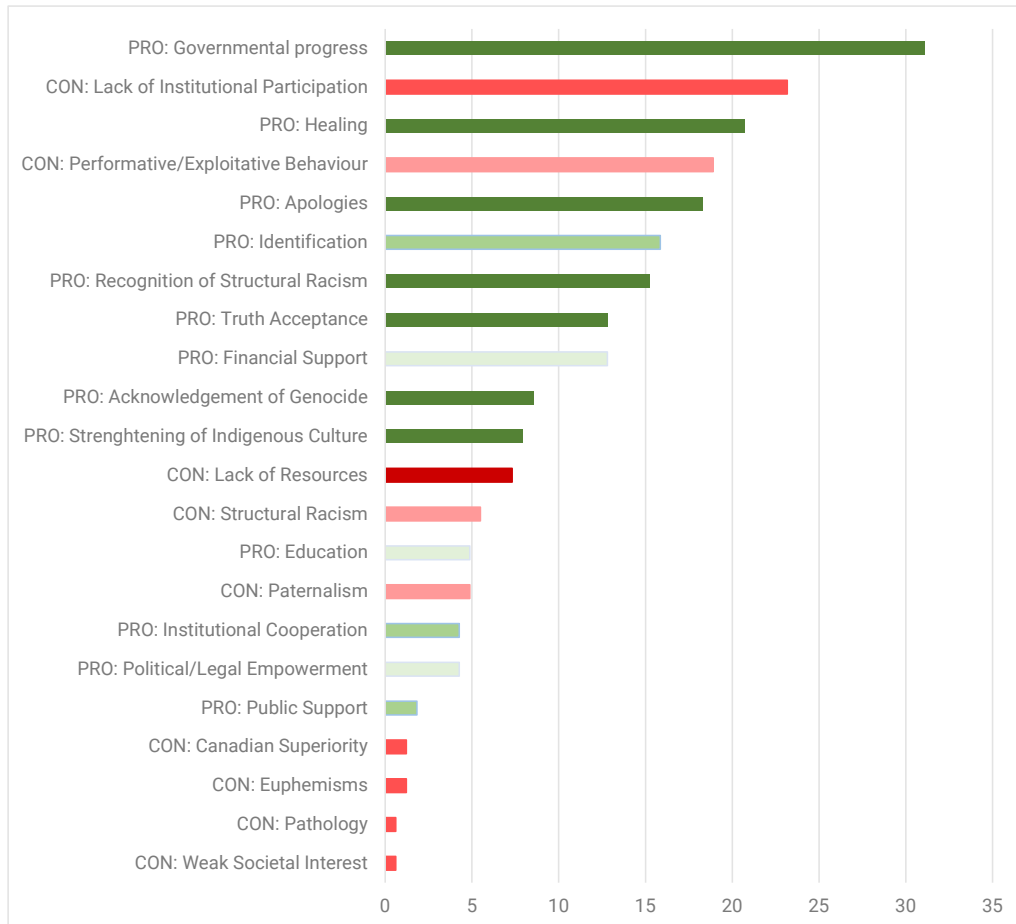
The distribution of subcategories is portrayed in further detail in Graph 2. Here, all identifiable subcategories are listed on the X-axis and arranged according to their frequency of usage in all 164 statements as a percentage on the X-axis, i.e., from most often used (Progress Updates) to least often used (Canadian Superiority).

From the data description it is apparent that declarations and acknowledgments that are put on the record, supposedly in order to push implementations, are used most often and in almost a third of all statements. It is striking that among the five most often used arguments, three were declarative advantages: governmental accountability, healing, and apologies. Put plainly, the Canadian key political players spent a large amount of their time and space in public discourse to reaffirm things that were already quite robustly accepted, and the most popular strategy was to reiterate what the respective party in power had already done for the implementation process. Although these are actually, as was argued earlier, arguments that support further implementation—what we already did and do, we can keep on doing—this category is arguably the weakest of all concurring arguments, and the cheapest in terms of political costs. Rather than making the case for substantial structural reasons or the normative imperative for implementation, Canadian politicians in the government and parliament often rely on creating a loop of common-sense narratives: the residential school system was a tragedy for which Canada must apologize, and Indigenous people must heal. Despite this sobering fact that the most popular mode of argumentation is also likely the cheapest and weakest, it must nonetheless be emphasized that this shared narrative is probably one of the strongest reasons for the implementation of recommendations so far.

However, the analysis also showed that two rather strong arguments are made for why the CtA implementation is in fact insufficient: the lack of participation and performative and exploitative behavior are mentioned most often among the impeding arguments. This suggests that there is a considerable blockade within key political institutions, such as courts, governments, and parliaments,

12 Please note that emphasis in direct quotes from every political actor is always made by the respective author. For better legibility, this is disclaimed here rather than indicating it after every individual example.

which either refuse to cooperate with the CtA implementation or pretend to do so while working performatively or without any goal to benefit Indigenous people, but rather to profit themselves.



Graph 2: Percentage distribution of subcategories occurring in all statements, own depiction.

The least often identified arguments were euphemisms, pathology narratives, and a weak societal interest in implementation. The key political actors showed a considerable degree of cross-partisan consensus on numerous fundamental issues and expressed this consensus quite prominently. This institutionally entrenched narrative bolstered the discourse for implementation to the extent that the outcomes of the TRCC and, connected to it, the CtA can no longer be seriously contested. Therefore, one can assume that pathology narratives, weak societal interest and perceived moral superiority are not among the reasons for meager implementation. This means that according to the analysis, key political actors do in fact take Indigenous trauma and the journey to reconciliation seriously in that they do not subscribe to the narrative of the poor, ill, and passive Indigenous person who needs help from non-Indigenous people. Furthermore, the very few arguments that Canadian society seems to

have little interest in the implementation of the recommendations suggests that, in fact, there seems to be considerable support for the implementation.

Another interesting aspect that is apparent from this first descriptive overview of the data are the categories that were not coded, i.e., types of arguments that were not made by the political actors:

- The structural argument *that the TRCC mandate was too limited or too weak*, which was something researchers have pointed out as a potential problem with the implementation in Canada, was not found. This suggests that the political actors were not of the opinion that the mandate hindered implementation significantly, or that they were satisfied with what the commission was initially allowed to do.
- The structural argument *that the affected group was too small* for the amount of political and bureaucratic work that comes with CtA implementation was not made, suggesting that either the Indigenous minority of roughly 1.8 million people is significant enough for the political actors, or that group size did not matter in the face of the seriousness of the problems the affected portion of society faces.
- The passive normative argument *that there is an exclusive focus on affirmative politics without recognition of structural injustice* was not made, suggesting that mere surface-level ambition is not among the problems of CtA implementation.
- The active normative argument *of strong opposition against the commission* was absent, which means that there seems to be a strong basic support for the TRCC and its findings, and that general opposition is not at the core of limited recommendation implementation. This, in turn, supports my previous argument that there is a substantial shared narrative and consensus on basic questions concerning the implementation process.
- Corresponding to the impeding structural argument of the affected group being too small to care, there was no concurring amount of the *group being so large that immediate action is necessary*—the amount of people affected seemed to be irrelevant for the implementation discourse.
- Lastly, and most surprisingly, there were no external concurring arguments, i.e., arguments of international attention or pressure, which is puzzling concerning the importance of Canada's international image and the external criticism from international actors around the TRCC implementation and Indigenous rights in general.

3.1 THE PRIME MINISTER(S)

Although the analytical time frame for this report mainly covered the 23rd and incumbent PM of Canada, Justin Trudeau, leader of the Liberal Party, it is important to note that statements by his predecessor, 22nd PM Stephen Harper, are also included—hence the dataset for the institution of the PM stems from two individuals, with a very strong distribution bias towards Trudeau.¹³

13 For clearer legibility, I will use "PM" and "Trudeau" interchangeably in this chapter because the overwhelming majority of discourse fragments and statements for the PM concern Trudeau, even though Harper is still present in the data.

In the data, the PM used arguments from four categories and ten subcategories, making him the least heterogeneous political actor in the discourse. The overwhelming majority of arguments are concurring in nature, which is unsurprising given the fact that the leader of the government is very likely to argue in a positive and constructive way about something his government is largely responsible for. Trudeau is, therefore, very much in favor of pushing forward implementation, although his choice of arguments is ambivalent when analyzed closely. In almost nine out of ten statements, Trudeau uses declarative arguments, most prominently around truth acceptance and healing. Almost like a mantra, Trudeau started using these kinds of public reaffirmations of the TRCC findings upon taking office and has continued to use them throughout the years of his mandate:

- Emphasis on healing: “While this is an important milestone in getting our country past the days of Indian residential schools, work is still needed to *help heal the pain* and restore trust from that wrong.” (Trudeau 2015)
- Apologies: “[...] we are sorry. While this *long overdue apology* will not undo the harm done, we offer it as a sign that we as a government and as a country *accept responsibility for our failings*” (Trudeau 2017).
- Structural Racism: “We all need to play a role in *amplifying the voices of Indigenous peoples, dismantling systemic racism, inequalities, and discrimination*, and walking the path of reconciliation together” (Trudeau 2021c).

Apart from this strongest argumentative category, Trudeau’s statements also displayed a significant amount of concurring structural and normative arguments. Through those, he emphasized the apparently sufficient financial and political resources, as well as the need to identify with the affected Indigenous population. As was suggested earlier, these arguments might carry more power due to the fact that the head of government not only promised “historic, new investments” (Trudeau 2021c) and “more control to Indigenous communities over healthcare” (Trudeau 2021d), but also committed vital resources to the implementation process. Trudeau thus signaled that money and other resources were available to strengthen CtA implementation—however, the differences in the frequency of declarative arguments compared to structural and normative ones suggests that he was less adamant about these instruments, which are arguably both more powerful and more expensive. This is further supported by the descriptive fact that the first structural and normative arguments were made in 2021¹⁴—in the six years before, Trudeau relied exclusively on declarative arguments.

The only impeding argument present in the PM’s data set were euphemism arguments, i.e., arguments that deliberately disguised the current implementation progress and painted a more positive picture than was supported by the empirical data. Trudeau used this argument twice when referring to the “80 per cent of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action involving the Government of Canada [that, author’s note] are now completed or well underway” (Trudeau 2021c); a narrative that has already been falsified by Jewell and Mosby and the CBC. The rest of the impeding arguments was not used at all by Trudeau—almost his entire contribution to the political discourse was articulated in favor of implementing the CtA. This almost complete support for the recommendations

14 This refers to my dataset. It is very likely that Trudeau made structural and normative arguments before 2021; however, they were not present in my dataset of critical months of the respective year.

stands in stark contrast to the actual implementation—a chasm that will be discussed in further detail in section four, in which I will continue to reflect critically upon these descriptive results. Prior to this analysis, the descriptive details of both chambers of parliament will be briefly summarized.

3.2 THE SENATE

Six main types and 21 subtypes of arguments were identified in the Senate data corpus, making the Senate the actor with the greatest variation in terms of arguments used. The discussions that produced these arguments were held between two groups—the Progressive Senate Group and the Independent Senators Group, as well as members of the Liberal and Conservative parties and non-affiliated senators or guest speakers.

Although concurring arguments were made much more often than impeding ones, there were significant numbers of structural, passive, and active normative arguments that argued against implementation of the CtA or pointed out reasons why the process did not work as envisioned. This already contrasts sharply with the PM's perspective and suggests that the implementation of recommendations was much more ambivalent and complicated than articulated by the head of government. In more detail, the Senate data deliver proof for several concurring and impeding dynamics: Structural problems with implementation: *limited funding* is mentioned in every tenth statement, supporting the assumption that the meager implementation process may be influenced by lack of funding: "I've seen *underfunded resources*. When the underfunding and the lack of support starts in childhood, there is a pretty good chance that will follow those people" (Senate 2021a). Passive normative arguments were made in every fifth statement, focusing most often on lack of participation in key institutions, which seems to be a major problem hindering the implementation process. For example, one senator drew attention to "people in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba who are unable to get to the table *because the province is unwilling*" (Senate 2021d, 1918). Consequently, rather than limited willingness to implement the CtA among the general public, other political institutions seem to be hindering CtA progress. The most frequently encountered impeding arguments were of an actively normative nature in about a third of the Senate data, arguably constituting the most powerful and structurally significant barrier to successful reconciliation:

- Paternalism: "For Indigenous women in particular, forced and coerced sterilization is an act [...] rooted in colonization and *paternalism*" (Senate 2022a).
- Structural racism: "Despite everything that happened, I agreed to invest my time and energy here, in *an institution that passed laws to assimilate and destroy*" (Senate 2022b, 1194).
- Performative and exploitative behavior: "Just based on that reality, there is a *profound disconnect with what the government is proclaiming versus what it is actually doing*" (Senate 2021b, 1818).

All these impeding arguments pointed to a variety of problems that significantly affect the CtA progress. On the other hand, the data from the Senate also supported several dynamics that promote the implementation of recommendations, which is more in line with the data on the PM. Concretely, the actors that are part of the Senate of Canada used declarative arguments in support of the CtA im-

plementation in more than half their statements, and concurring structural and normative ones in a quarter of their contributions to the discourse. The Senate displayed a variety of types of supporting arguments, among them:

- Political and legal empowerment: “Honourable senators, *it must no longer be left to the courts to interpret, without any guidelines, the rights of Indigenous peoples*” (Senate 2021c, 1868).
- Education: “All of this should be *taught in every school. Education must play a key role [...]*” (Senate 2022b, 1194).
- Cooperation within institutions: “I think the model I’ve described has been a *constructive partnership among First Nations and with First Nations and the province*” (Senate 2021d, 1918).
- Strengthening of Indigenous pride and culture: “These [Indigenous, author’s note] languages are part of our strengths, they are *the cultural fabric and identity of this vast country*” (Senate 2022b, 1194).
- Updates on Government progress: “We are really seeing good movement. I’m hearing wonderful stories now on a regular basis about families being reunited that I think will warm your hearts, *and we’ll continue this work*” (Senate 2018, 5277)
- Cultural genocide: “Does the government accept that this was a *history of cultural genocide* against the First Nations people of Canada?” (Senate 2015b, 3494)

In conclusion, the descriptive data of the discourse fragments by the Senate paint a much more ambivalent and complicated picture of the implementation process; there was a much wider variety of impeding as well as concurring arguments, suggesting that there are both substantive reasons for the slow implementation and significant motivation to push it. The data from the lower chamber of parliament and counterpart of the Senate support this notion even further.

3.3 THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The MPs in the House of Commons used arguments from six argumentative categories and 19 sub-categories, making it almost as diverse a discourse actor as the Senate. As was already apparent in Graph 2, the members of the House were the most critical participants in the discourse, as they used more impeding arguments than the PM and the Senate; however, as is the case with all three actors, concurring arguments were made more often than impeding ones. The discussions in the House were held among three parties, i.e., the Conservative, the Liberal, and the New Democratic Party, as well as non-partisan experts and guest speakers and other MPs. Despite clear interests and positions towards Indigenous policy in general, there was no clear pattern among party lines in terms of the argumentative categories that were analyzed in this report. Put plainly, although the parties naturally have a specific position on Indigenous policy and CtA implementation, there was no apparent connection between party and preference for concurring or impeding arguments, or a specific argument.

As was the case with the Senate, there was a significant number of impeding arguments despite the overall dominance of concurring ones. This further supports the notion that there are, in fact, deeply rooted problems in terms of CtA implementation which are touched upon by the parliament but not the government. Structural arguments are offered only to a limited extent: “For years the Lib-

eral and Conservative governments have underfunded first nations, compared to other Canadians” (House of Commons 2015a, 14479). Both passive and active normative arguments are present in about a third of the statements of each body, but—in contrast to the Senate—passive normative arguments were found most often. Examples for both included:

- Lack of participation within key institutions: “The Truth and Reconciliation Commission *had to go to court* to get key documents released” (House of Commons 2015b, 14394).
- Racism towards Indigenous people via the example of leaked letters by a former Canadian politician, Jason Kenney, who was as a result accused of “*racist scapegoating*” (House of Commons 2021, 8421).
- Performative behavior: “[T]he government has told us time and again that its most important relationship is with indigenous peoples [...] How can the government *claim that its most important relationship is with indigenous peoples and fail to act* on one of the most significant crises [COVID-19, author’s note] they face?” (House of Commons 2021, 8325)
- Paternalism: “Let us put an end to the federal government’s [Harper’s government, author’s note] *paternalistic attitude*” (House of Commons 2015c, 14523).

These examples support the previously made assumptions that there were significant reasons, among others racism, lack of institutional cooperation, and paternalistic behaviors, that seemed to block—to some degree—constructive Indigenous policies in general and CtA implementation in particular. However, two thirds of all statements from the House of Commons included some form of declarative argument, and almost one in eight mentioned a structural or normative one supporting CtA progress and further implementation. These included:

- Sufficient funding: “We are also working with first nations partners to build a new fiscal relationship that will provide first nations communities with *adequate, predictable, and sustainable funding*” (House of Commons 2018a, 18815).
- Political and legal empowerment: “Ultimately, I truly believe that *by empowering and working with indigenous leaders and people* we will make the desired changes, hopefully as quickly as possible” (House of Commons 2021, 8326).
- Identification with the affected group: “*We are all in this together*” (House of Commons 2015b, 14405).
- Public support: “I hear from Canadians all over who are deeply moved by what they saw and deeply hurt that this happened in our country, *and ask how we move forward*” (House of Commons 2015d, 14581).
- Apologies: “The *apology affirmed Canada’s commitment* to joining aboriginal peoples on a journey of healing towards reconciliation” (House of Commons 2015b, 14404).
- Structural racism: “[...] as we’re beginning a process of understanding the *truth of our history of colonialism—apartheid here in Canada*—and how we resolve the history through reconciliation” (House of Commons 2018b, 1).

As was already suggested in the previous section, the data from both the Senate and House of Commons showed a variety of arguments—supporting previous implementations of recommendations and arguing for further improvement and pointing towards problems that might hinder implementa-

tion. But what do these descriptive details mean for the greater question of why Canada seems to have such big problems with the often proclaimed journey towards reconciliation?

3.4 TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EUPHEMIZING PROGRESS?

The differences in arguments issued by the key political actors suggests that the PM, the Senate, and the House of Commons have different motives, interests, and goals concerning Indigenous policy and CtA implementation. Do these actors take responsibility for the current lack of structural implementation of far-reaching implementations, or do they rely on euphemistic narratives about the actual meager progress?

Concerning the PM, the short answer is: euphemizing the progress is more dominant than taking responsibility for the political reality. This comes as no surprise since Trudeau is the head of the institutions heavily responsible for implementation, so criticizing the poor performance for which he and his government are largely responsible was not expected. His arguments offer little to no insight concerning possible problems for limited CtA implementation, simply due to the fact that, according to him, the problem is non-existent. Rather than highlighting problems in implementation, he chose to articulate why implementation was important and how his government intended to handle it or already succeeded in handling. I argue that Trudeau did this through a trio of discourse strategies, which are a common instrument in discourse theory and serve the goal to push a desired theme (Keller 2004: 68): in this case, the narrative that CtA implementation was going well, and that the Trudeau government was succeeding in its plan to move forward on the journey towards reconciliation. I would argue that Trudeau deployed a strategy of acknowledgement, a strategy of display of progress, and a strategy of promoting Indigenous healing.

The first of these was understood as a strategy of acknowledgement, i.e., acknowledging the violent legacy of the residential schools as part of the colonial history of Canada, and the structural racism, discrimination, and violence that Indigenous people endure to this day. This is a combination of repeated usage of apologies, truth acceptance, the acknowledgment of structural racism, and identification with the affected group. Despite the symbolic importance of acknowledging these facts and the findings of the TRCC, this is essentially a passive strategy: Trudeau did not create any new initiative, any new momentum, but rather supported the work of other actors, most notably the TRCC and the Indigenous activists who struggled for the acknowledgement of the residential school legacy since the 1980s. Rather than pushing for new ways to deal with the colonial history of Canada, Trudeau embraced the narrative of the shared road to reconciliation through understanding, learning, accepting, and healing. The second strategy Trudeau employed was to display concrete political action and future plans. This means that the PM mentioned the measures which his government took to support the TRCC implementation financially and politically, as well as concrete updates on the implementation process. I argue that this detailed information was meant to increase transparency and show the willingness of the Trudeau government to let actions follow their words. In a way, Trudeau self-documented his continued effort to implement the TRCC and volunteered more information about the schedule, participants, and funding. This created the image of him as an ambitious

and interested ally to the implementation process, working proactively towards reconciliation. The strategy of display logically connected to the strategy of acknowledgement since the acceptance of the truth was followed by a signaled devotion to the implications of said truth. However, like the strategy of acknowledgement, the strategy of display of progress is inherently passive, as Trudeau did not push any new concrete political measures but rather reiterated what had already been done, which necessarily created a notion of great progress and speed that was empirically not supported. A third strategy that was identified through the analysis centered around the promotion of Indigenous healing, which encompassed an emphasis on healing as well as the strengthening of Indigenous pride and culture. This strategy differs from the previous two by the fact that Indigenous people have agency, and the strategy itself is more active than passive. Acknowledgment of the residential school system, plus apologies, political and financial support centered around the perpetrator—Canada in this case—as the subject, and the victims (i.e., the Indigenous people) as the passive recipients of the respective action. However, healing and priding oneself on a certain culture or heritage is something inherently active; the Indigenous people were the main actors in this third strategy. Healing has been quite a dominant narrative in the entire TRCC discourse, both before and since 2015. This is unsurprising given the fact that Indigenous people suffered immensely and continue to do so because of the residential school system, but often live in close proximity, be it spatially, socio-economically, or mentally, to the past. The concept of healing as a way to move forward has a long history within the Canadian reconciliation process. With this theme, Trudeau has tried to actively create a space for Indigenous people within Canadian society—which is nevertheless predominantly white—while carving out even more space for explicitly Indigenous living. On the other hand, this strategy could be interpreted as purely symbolic, especially considering the absence of tangible policies and structures for Indigenous healing. Furthermore, overfocusing on the concept of healing can also be an indication of an underlying pathology narrative, as was suggested by Nagy (2020, 224).

The PM has had a deliberately positive, seemingly forward-looking and at the same time passive way of influencing the discourse around the implementation of the TRCC recommendations. His power as head of government and his performance as a young, liberal ally for Canada's Indigenous population have been reflected in the strategies outlined above. I argue that there are two possible reasons for this: first, the preservation of the political power of the Liberal party and its government, as a low-cost and mainly symbolic saving-face mechanism for the national and international audience. Indigenous people will constitute an increasingly growing demographic in the future, thereby representing a progressively larger share of the electorate. This potential can be harnessed politically by presenting oneself as a diverse political party and advocating for Indigenous policies, especially the implementation of the CtA. This is further reinforced by the fact that Trudeau was able to distance himself significantly from the previous Harper government in 2015, which had often faced criticism for its Indigenous policies (Carlson 2011, Galloway 2013, Kappo 2014, and Palmater 2014). Consequently, embracing the TRCC report and committing to CtA implementation without any actual ambition to do so could have been motivated by political reasons of power preservation. One concrete example for this is the following example of the term (cultural) genocide being used: the TRCC stated in their final report in 2015 that the residential school system constituted a cultural genocide. The discussion around this assessment, including reasoning, impact, and limitations, is a complex topic itself, and a different area of research I cannot dive into further at this point (see Mannitz/Drews 2022); what is important for the argument

here is the fact that the choice to use the term is highly potent. Trudeau used it in 2015 as a MP and member of the opposition in 2015 while confronting the Harper government, but not in a single document in the data corpus while he was PM. Trudeau evidently used the term as an opposition MP and later avoided it as PM due to his respective political positions, and the motivations and interests that came along with them. Apart from political power, I would argue that Trudeau's goal is to continue drift along the journey towards reconciliation with minimal costs, rather than investing in structural and quick CtA implementations. He seems to create a counterweight to the rather ambivalent voices from parliament and the critical voices from academia and wants to maintain the narrative that implementation is going well and as planned. Trudeau does not actively address the fact that this narrative does not correspond to reality, and he is not interested in structural and quick implementation of the recommendations. If this were the case, the PM would not trivialize the empirical reality that not only has Canada effectively failed to implement the majority of the recommendations, but that doing so could have immediate national and far-reaching international consequences. The above average frequency of purely verbal and symbolic arguments, the strategies of passive recognition, representation of the already meager process, and the restorative focus on healing rather than on a retributive search for blockages speak for this assessment. What remains is the fact that this low-cost, symbolic, and passive behavior is a drop in an ocean of historic trauma and pain.

While the arguments in the discourse give more insights into the PM and his motives and interests, the data from the chambers of parliament not only paint a more diverse and ambivalent picture of the political discourse, but also suggest some problems that might be at the core of the limited implementation progress. In that sense, both chambers also euphemized progress to some extent, since they, too, used more concurring than impeding arguments, i.e., using more time and space to talk about structures that work for implementation, normative aspects that influence the process positively, and progress that has already been made. In that way, there is a certain amount of similarity in argumentation between the chambers of parliament and the PM. However, in contrast to the head of government, the House of Commons and the Senate also talked quite frequently about impeding arguments: what did not work, the normative barriers towards implementation, what was lacking for significant progress. Put plainly, the CtA implementation is not going as smoothly as the PM describes. As depicted in Graph 1 in section 3.1 above, the data show that the Senate, and especially the House of Commons, have been much more critical of the implementation process in the sense that they use impeding arguments which either symbolize problems in the implementation process or articulate these problems themselves. Most often, these were made in the form of passive and active normative arguments, i.e., problems in which there are implicit or explicit barriers to successful CtA implementation—among the most often mentioned problems are lack of participation in key institutions, performative or exploitative behavior, and structural racism. If one were to take these arguments at face value, this would mean that the reasons for slow implementation of the recommendations issued by the TRCC are the structural, anti-Indigenous, racist, and paternalistic attitudes in Canadian society and politics; limited interest within key institutions to change this; and the exploitation of policies directed at indigenous people or the direct struggle against these policies. Specific examples given were policy advice and implementation for Indigenous people and communities rather than with them, the top-down view of Indigenous people as victims in distress, and the struggle for reparations or access to services or rights in court.

Despite these arguments being made by a significant number of individuals from different positions and parties over the observation period, it could be argued that they were made out of a motive to criticize the current Liberal government; thus, Indigenous policy could have been misused as a means to an end by the opposition to criticize and weaken the Trudeau government and strengthen their own position in contrast. This seems quite straightforward since the opposition, first and foremost the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, are strongly represented in parliament and have a structural and legitimate goal and interest to criticize the government and its work, and CtA implementation is a part of this work. This would mean that the higher frequency of impeding arguments could be explained simply by the presence of several parties in one discourse actor, as opposed to the individual one that is the PM. However, I would argue that the criticism of the implementation process articulated in the parliament has been motivated by more than mere opposition, which is the second takeaway from the analysis of the data from the parliament: Members of the House and Senators often brought concerns from their constituencies directly into the discussion, and advocated for serious problem-solving and recommendation implementation more often than they accused either a party or a government of not working towards this end—although this form of destructive blame-shifting was also present, especially in the House of Commons. Both the Harper government, which was in power throughout the TRCC working period from 2009 to June 2015, and the Trudeau government, which has been in office during the entire implementation process thus far, have been heavily criticized or even directly blamed. This further supports the argument that, for several parliamentarians, it has been more important to focus attention on the structural problems that have been blocking fundamental CtA implementation since 2015 than to directly criticize the government in power at the moment. Additionally, several statements criticized not only the government for slow implementation, but other key institutions independent of the executive, first and foremost Canadian courts and parliament itself. The data yield several examples in which the members of the House of Commons and senators very passionately included themselves in the group of people responsible for the contemporary problems Indigenous people face generally, and for the meager CtA progress in particular; this all supports the idea that the variety of arguments and attention to implementation problems are not just because the parliament had to keep the government in check and some conservative or left politicians wanted to find faults within the Trudeau cabinet, but rather because they were aware of actual, tangible problems with CtA implementation.

These problems are arguably the most valuable takeaway from analyzing arguments in the House of Commons and the Senate. Based on the premise that, in the most basic sense, any parliament is supposed to represent the people, keep the government in check, and propose new legislation, one could assume that arguments made within the parliament by its members are good indicators of problems for the represented public, problems for (or with) the government, and solutions for these problems via new law. When applying this logic to the presented analysis, three key problems emerge that seem to be influential for the slow implementation of the CtA:

- Structural problems, more concretely, *limited funding*: several Members of the House and Senators indicated that there has not been sufficient funding for reconciliation policies, or that the funding has been misused or misdirected. Structural arguments were made throughout the research period by both chambers, but rarely: in 149 parliamentary statements, only

12, or 8%, included impeding structural arguments, indicating that *structural problems are present, but are not the most dominant ones*.

- Passive normative problems, i.e., the *lack of participation* in key institutions: parliamentarians mentioned throughout a lack of cooperation in terms of CtA implementation as barriers towards the implementation in 38 out of 149 statements, corresponding to 25% of all parliamentary statements. Consequently, *passive normative problems are present and very likely to be a dominant barrier to implementation*. While there were arguments for other passive normative problems, i.e., a weak society with little to no interest in implementation, pathology narratives, and notions of Canadian moral superiority, these can be disregarded due to their very low numbers of occurrence (between 0.9% and 2.5% in all parliamentary statements).
- Active normative problems: There were three specific active normative problems made throughout the research period by speakers in the House and the Senate: while paternalism and structural racism were found comparatively rarely (in 5% and 6% of all parliamentary statements, respectively), performative or exploitative behavior was mentioned in 30 statements, i.e., in every fifth parliamentary statement. This indicates that *a variety of active normative problems are present, most dominantly performative or exploitative behavior, which are likely to be a dominant barrier to implementation*.

In conclusion, the analytical data from the chambers of parliament suggest that the reasons for the meager implementation of 13 CtA after seven years may be due to limited financial resources for recommendation policies, or the misuse of funding; a lack of willingness or interest to cooperate in key institutions, from courts to the parliament itself; and normative choices to limit implementation success through a paternalistic attitude, structural, anti-Indigenous racism, and performative or exploitative behavior. In doing so, the House of Commons and the Senate not only acknowledge the empirical reality of the current implementation process better than the PM, but attribute some responsibility to key political actors, including themselves.

4. A MUDDLED DISCOURSE ON A GRIM MATTER

This report started with the impression that, in terms of recommendation implementation in Canada, successful action is easier said than done. While the government has focused heavily on the first part, the actual implementation seems to have been complicated by a variety of factors which researchers have only begun to understand and to analyze. Due to the lack of research on the impact of truth commissions in general and concerning the case of the Canadian commission in particular, this explorative analysis focused on one area for which data were available and measurable, which was immediately influenced by the TRCC, and in which actors are extremely powerful: the political discourse around the implementation process, and the arguments of the Prime Ministers, the Senate, and the House of Commons. The research builds on the premise that language—especially in public and powerful arenas such as the executive and legislative branch of a state—is highly potent and creates and recreates reality. By focusing on the arguments made by key political actors concerning the (lack of) implementation of recommendations by the TRCC, my goal was to understand the meager reality better and formulate possible reasons that led to said reality: *Why is there such a discrepancy*

between the reality of little implementation and the ambition of Canada as a champion for democracy and reconciliation? Why is the implementation process so slow?

As already mentioned, this report is a continuation of a master's thesis and is therefore limited in terms of research economics. More research to further investigate the causal relationships of the supposed reasons for the slow implementation and the actual CtA progress is needed. However, several key takeaways can be formulated based on the presented analysis:

First, there is a shared narrative among the key political actors in Canada that recognizes the violent history and legacy of the residential schools, the need to apologize, the need to heal collective Indigenous trauma, and the need for Indigenous empowerment. This narrative is the most common denominator and the first step on the journey towards reconciliation. The executive and legislative branches of Canada have definitely taken this first step, and they continue to recreate this narrative through their arguments in the most powerful political arenas of the state. In doing so, they enshrine in the history of Canada that it is a settler colonial state, that it has a violent history, and that it will forever bear the responsibility to reconcile with Indigenous people as desired by most Canadians and their government and possible, and that the residential school system may never be recreated again. Second, and complementary to this strong shared Canadian narrative, there is no indication of pathology narratives, weak societal interest, or any perceived moral superiority. The key political actors in Canada have not portrayed the Indigenous population as a passive group of victims, and they stopped relying on the argument that Canada is among the most forward-looking countries internationally in terms of Indigenous policy and empowerment with the succession of the Harper government through Trudeau in 2015. Furthermore, there is no indication of weak societal interest; in fact, the political representatives of Canadian society often legitimized their arguments for implementation through the willingness of the public, and emphasized the notion of the journey towards reconciliation as an all-Canadian journey. This minimal acknowledgement of the TRCC findings and at least limited willingness to implement the CtA to a degree may be among the reasons for the successful implementation of the 13 Calls that have been completed until now.

Third, there is a significant difference between the discourse fragments of the PM and the chambers of parliament, and consequently a significant disconnect between the positions of the executive and legislative branch within the implementation progress. While the executive branch, i.e., PM Trudeau, has had a very positive, euphemistic, and seemingly forward-looking position in which he relies on progress already made, the above mentioned shared narrative, and an emphasis on healing, the legislative branches have been much more critical of the implementation progress. This could indicate a deadlock in the CtA implementation: if the opinions differ on what the current state of implementation is, whether or not this is satisfactory, and what could be done to improve it, tangible actions, i.e., faster and more substantial implementation of recommendations, are unlikely. Consequently, the differences in arguments concerning the CtA implementation could indicate differences in interests and motives about Indigenous policy in general, which could be among the reasons for slow implementation progress up to now.

Fourth, there might be concrete push and pull factors that are articulated as impeding and concurring arguments, respectively. What seems to have a constructive effect on and a positive relationship

with CtA implementation are constant updates on CtA progress and accountability, emphasis on healing, truth acceptance, recognition of structural racism, and identification with the affected group. On the other hand, the most frequently mentioned destructive effects which are suspected to have a negative relationship with CtA implementation are lack of participation in key institutions and performative or exploitative behavior. These impeding arguments have varying degrees of frequency; their influence is therefore less clear than the concurring arguments. Nevertheless, the results support theoretical assumptions from previous research. The interplay of push and pull factors may create an environment in which some CtA have been or will be implemented, but not all, and not as quickly as promised.

While these conclusions stem primarily from the critical discourse analysis of implementation discourse in Canada, they may hold abstract relevance for other nations contending with their post-colonial (settler) pasts in the future. Several contemporary examples readily come to mind, notably the planned Truth Commission concerning violence against the Sámi people in Sweden and Finland. The respective governments in these instances should draw valuable lessons from the work of Canada's TRCC and be mindful of the pitfalls that seem to compromise its implementation, most importantly different perceptions among executive and legislative actors, structural racism, a lack of institutional participation, and performative and exploitative behavior. Furthermore, there might be new, regionally specific push and pull factors for implementation which states that use truth commissions or other political devices in order to process their colonial pasts need to be mindful of. Another international example emerges from the ongoing debate in Australia, also a postcolonial settler state, where a recent referendum discussed and voted on the Indigenous population's parliamentary representation and constitutional significance. These two examples underscore that, while Canada represents a unique case of institutionalized Indigenous empowerment policy, there are ongoing discussions and debates worldwide concerning the participation, rights, and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples in postcolonial (settler) states.

In conclusion, the discourse around the implementation of the CtA can be described with the same characteristics as the progress itself: muddled, ambivalent, and complicated. Just as the government's cooperation with the TRCC left much to be desired and coming to terms with the colonial past for the entire state "is a disagreeable task" (Mannitz/Drews 2022, 8), the post-TRCC work is also characterized by resistance, ambivalence, and barriers. According to the most recent paper by Jewell and Mosby, if Canada proceeds at the current pace of CtA implementation, the recommendations will not be realized until 2065 (2022, 5). However, this is valuable time many Indigenous people in Canada simply do not have—many are being discriminated against, kidnapped, murdered, or simply dying sooner due to preventable problems such as poor health and housing. This will not only harm a group of its population which Canada—and Trudeau specifically—has vowed to protect, it is connected to social and political costs for the state of Canada in the long run. Consequently, there is a clear imperative for key political actors to build on the first but far too small steps that have been undertaken since 2015, i.e., the shared narrative about the history and legacy of the residential school system and the subsequent responsibility, and some pull factors that probably enabled the implementation of the first 13 CtA. However, 81 remain to be completed, and Canada has much work to do before this will be possible.

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CBC Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

CtA 94 Calls to Action

MP Member of Parliament

PM Prime Minister

TC Truth Commission

TRCC Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

UNDRIP United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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EASIER SAID THAN DONE: THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ABOUT INDIGENOUS-SETTLER RECONCILIATION IN CANADA

Rita Kopp

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada published a detailed report on the violent history of the residential school system in Canada and recommended 94 Calls to Action (CtA) to help the Canadian government and society to redress this historical system of violence and confront their own settler colonial history. However, despite these CtAs and Prime Minister Trudeau's commitment, only a fraction has been implemented seven years later. The author explores in a critical discourse analysis the political debate surrounding the slow implementation, revealing constructive and destructive factors influencing progress. The report concludes with an imperative for key political actors to accelerate implementation, considering the urgency for Indigenous communities facing discrimination and systemic issues.

Rita Theresa Kopp is an associate researcher at PRIF and the research project "Regional Research Center 'Transformations of Political Violence'". She holds a MA degree in political science from Friedrich Schiller University Jena, and her final thesis formed the basis for this report.

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