RedFame

Studies in Media and Communication
Vol. 15, No. 1; March 2027
ISSN: 2325-8071 E-ISSN: 2325-808X
Published by Redfame Publishing
URL: http://smc.redfame.com

Constructing Canada's Economic Challenges: A Comparative Analysis of Agenda-Setting and Framing in CBC News and CTV News

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Received: September 27, 2026 Accepted: November 17, 2026 Online Published: November 19, 2026

doi:10.11114/smc.v15i1.9333 URL: https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v15i1.9333

Abstract

This study investigates how CBC News and CTV News constructed media discourse regarding Canada's economic challenges between November 2025 and April 2026. Utilizing agenda-setting and framing theories, the research examines both the economic issues that received sustained media prominence and the interpretive frameworks through which these issues were presented. Employing a qualitative comparative research design, the study analyzes 256 news articles published on the official websites of CBC News (n = 91) and CTV News (n = 165). The analysis integrates qualitative agenda-setting analysis with framing analysis based on Entman's (1993) four framing functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The findings indicate substantial convergence in the economic agenda constructed by both media outlets, particularly in their sustained attention to affordability, inflation, housing, labor markets, productivity, international trade, fiscal policy, and economic resilience. However, the outlets differed in their contextualization and interpretation of these shared concerns. CBC News primarily emphasized domestic structural capacity and long-term economic transformation, focusing on housing, productivity, institutional capacity, and collaborative governance. In contrast, CTV News placed greater emphasis on global economic uncertainty, macroeconomic conditions, fiscal management, international trade, and strategic adaptation. Both outlets predominantly employed thematic framing, presenting economic developments as interconnected structural challenges rather than isolated events. By examining these patterns, the study demonstrates how economic journalism shapes not only public understandings of economic conditions but also the political and policy frameworks through which government performance and economic alternatives are evaluated. The study demonstrates that agenda-setting and framing provide complementary perspectives on how news organizations establish economic issue salience while constructing distinct interpretive narratives about Canada's economic conditions and future.

Keywords: agenda-setting, CBC News, CTV News, economic challenges, framing, qualitative comparative research

1. Introduction

In recent years, Canada has encountered interconnected economic challenges that have intensified financial pressures on households and businesses. Although the economy has demonstrated resilience to global disruptions, ongoing concerns regarding housing and food costs, inflation, labor-market uncertainty, and international trade continue to influence public debate and policy discussions (Gellatly & McCormack, 2026; Rabinovitch, 2026a; Dalhousie University et al., 2025). As a result, economic well-being has become a prominent public concern. Housing affordability remains particularly significant. Rising home prices and rents, limited housing supply, population growth, and higher borrowing costs have constrained access to affordable housing and increased household financial pressures, with implications for inequality and long-term economic security (Hencic, 2026). Food affordability presents a related concern. Although inflation has moderated, grocery prices remain substantially above pre-pandemic levels, increasing household financial pressures and contributing to food insecurity and growing demand for food assistance (Dalhousie University et al., 2025).

Broader cost-of-living pressures—including transportation, utilities, insurance, consumer goods, and household debt—further exacerbate these challenges. Although inflation has moderated, concerns about purchasing power persist because wage growth has not fully offset rising living costs. Concurrently, elevated interest rates have increased borrowing costs for households and businesses (Rana, 2026). Labor-market uncertainty, regional economic disparities, and international trade tensions have also influenced investment, employment, manufacturing, and supply-chain stability, resulting in varied assessments of Canada's economic outlook (Rabinovitch, 2026b). Public understanding of these conditions is shaped by

both lived economic experiences and media coverage. Agenda-setting theory posits that news organizations influence public priorities by determining which issues receive sustained attention. Repeated coverage of inflation, housing affordability, food prices, employment, trade, and fiscal policy contributes to shaping Canada's public economic agenda. In addition, Entman's (1993) framing theory explains how news organizations construct meaning by defining problems, identifying causes, evaluating consequences, and presenting possible responses. As a result, the same economic issue may acquire different meanings depending on its contextualization and interpretation.

The significance of economic news extends beyond reporting changes in prices, employment, or economic growth. Economic conditions are central to public assessments of government performance and political leadership, while debates over taxation, public spending, regulation, redistribution, and market intervention often reflect broader ideological differences concerning the relationship between the state and the economy. Economic journalism therefore plays an important role in shaping not only which economic problems receive public attention but also which policy responses are considered legitimate or desirable. Equally important is whether news coverage questions prevailing economic assumptions or provides space for discussion of alternative approaches to economic management. Examining these dimensions helps establish whether economic reporting encourages broader debate about the organization and governance of the economy or primarily presents challenges as problems to be managed within existing economic arrangements.

In this context, the present study examines how CBC News and CTV News construct media narratives regarding Canada's contemporary economic challenges. Utilizing agenda-setting theory and Entman's framing theory, the analysis investigates how the two outlets prioritize economic issues and frame their causes, consequences, and responses. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of news coverage published between November 2025 and April 2026, the study explores media discourse related to affordability, inflation, housing, employment, trade, and broader economic policy. By addressing both issue salience and interpretive framing, the research contributes to scholarship on media representations of economic issues and demonstrates how news organizations construct different understandings of Canada's evolving economic landscape.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This study draws on agenda-setting theory and framing theory to examine how news media construct public understandings of Canada's economic challenges. Agenda-setting explains how news organizations establish the salience of issues in public discourse, while framing examines how those issues are interpreted and communicated. Together, the theories provide an integrated framework for analyzing both the prominence of economic issues and the narratives through which they acquire meaning.

2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory and the Construction of Public Priorities

Agenda-setting theory proposes that media influence public priorities by determining which issues receive sustained attention rather than dictating what audiences should think (Cohen, 1963). The theory's intellectual foundations trace to Lippmann's (1922) observation that citizens rely on mediated "pictures in their heads" to understand realities beyond their direct experience. Because most social, political, and economic developments cannot be observed firsthand, news media play an important role in determining which issues become publicly salient.

McCombs and Shaw's (1972) Chapel Hill study empirically established the theory, showing a strong relationship between the prominence of issues in news coverage and the importance audiences assigned to them during the 1968 U.S. presidential election. Subsequent research has demonstrated agenda-setting effects across diverse contexts. Boyle et al. (2012), for example, found that newspaper coverage of the 2000 World Trade Organization protests emphasized confrontation and disruption over protesters' political objectives. Similarly, Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2012) showed that sustained media attention to Belgian student protests increased the political salience of education policy and stimulated governmental debate. Comparative research further indicates that different news organizations may construct distinct agendas around the same issue. For instance, Jaber's study (2025a) found that *The Guardian* and *USA Today* emphasized different dimensions of protest activity, producing divergent interpretive frameworks of the same events.

The development of second-level agenda-setting extended the theory beyond issue salience to attribute salience, emphasizing that media influence not only which issues audiences consider important but also which characteristics or dimensions of those issues receive prominence (Ghanem, 1997; McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant to economic reporting because public understandings of inflation, housing affordability, trade, fiscal governance, and economic performance depend partly on how these issues are prioritized and characterized. Repeated emphasis on particular economic indicators, policy initiatives, or leadership attributes can therefore shape the criteria people use to understand economic conditions and political performance.

2.2 Framing Theory and the Construction of Economic Meaning

Whereas agenda-setting addresses issue prominence, framing theory examines how meaning is constructed around issues and events that enter public discourse. The theory's foundations lie in Goffman's (1974, 1981, 1986) work on interpretive

frameworks, which emphasizes how individuals use cognitive structures to organize experience and make sense of social reality. These frameworks influence how events are categorized, interpreted, and attributed to natural processes or human action.

Building on this foundation, Entman (1991, 1993) conceptualized framing as selecting and emphasizing particular aspects of reality in ways that promote specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. These four functions provide a systematic basis for examining how media narratives construct meaning and shape interpretation. Framing is particularly relevant to economic reporting because issues such as inflation, housing affordability, unemployment, trade disputes, and fiscal policy can be explained through different frames such as structural conditions, government decisions, market dynamics, or international developments. Similarly, economic achievements may also be attributed to effective leadership, successful policy, or favorable external conditions (Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 2004, 2010). Such interpretive choices affect how audiences understand responsibility, evaluate government performance, and interpret broader economic conditions.

Media frames can also be constructed through recurring linguistic choices, metaphors, symbols, source selection, contextualization, visual imagery, and the inclusion or omission of information (Entman, 1991). Media frames can be particularly influential when they resonate with widely shared cultural values such as economic security, fiscal responsibility, national prosperity, and consumer well-being (Entman, 2004, 2007, 2010). Framing not only organizes information but also provides broader interpretive structures through which people understand economic realities.

2.3 Episodic and Thematic Framing

An important extension of framing theory is Iyengar's (1990, 1991, 1996) distinction between episodic and thematic framing. Episodic frames emphasize specific events, individual actors, or immediate outcomes, encouraging attribution of responsibility to particular individuals or organizations. Thematic frames, by contrast, situate events within broader political, economic, historical, or institutional contexts and direct attention toward structural explanations and collective policy responses.

This distinction matters in economic reporting. Media coverage may personalize economic challenges by focusing on individual experiences of unemployment, housing insecurity, or rising living costs, or it may situate these experiences within broader discussions of macroeconomic conditions, public policy, globalization, and institutional change. Iyengar (1991) argues that episodic framing tends to individualize responsibility, whereas thematic framing encourages structural interpretations. This distinction also matters in contemporary political communication, including digital and social media environments, where messages are strategically constructed to influence public opinion and policy debates (Jaber, 2025b; Jaber, 2026).

2.4 Integrating Agenda-Setting and Framing

Agenda-setting and framing offer complementary perspectives on media discourse. Agenda-setting explains how media outlets establish the hierarchy of issues receiving sustained attention, while framing examines how those issues are defined, contextualized, and evaluated through particular narratives, causal explanations, moral judgments, and treatment recommendations. Integrating the two perspectives enables analysis of both what economic issues receive prominence and how those issues are given meaning. This combined framework provides the analytical foundation for examining how CBC News and CTV News construct Canada's economic challenges and contribute to broader public discussions of economic governance, policy, and national development.

3. Method

This section outlines the methodological procedures used to examine how CBC News and CTV News construct media discourse surrounding Canada's contemporary economic challenges. It presents the research design, research questions, and data collection and corpus construction.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design to examine how CBC News and CTV News prioritize and frame Canada's contemporary economic challenges. Guided by agenda-setting theory and framing theory, the study analyzes both the prominence of economic issues and the interpretive frameworks through which they are communicated. A qualitative approach enables in-depth examination of how economic problems are defined, responsibility attributed, developments evaluated, and policy responses presented within broader political, economic, and institutional contexts. The comparative design helps identify similarities and differences between the two Canadian media outlets.

3.2 Research Questions

The following research and sub-research questions guide the study:

RQ1: How do CBC News and CTV News prioritize contemporary economic issues affecting Canada in their news coverage?

RQ1a: Which economic challenges receive the greatest prominence in each news outlet?

RQ1b: How do the agenda-setting priorities of CBC News and CTV News differ in constructing Canada's public economic agenda?

RQ2: How do CBC News and CTV News frame Canada's contemporary economic challenges?

RQ2a: How does each outlet define economic problems, attribute responsibility, communicate moral evaluations, and present policy responses?

RQ2b: To what extent do CBC News and CTV News employ episodic and thematic framing when reporting Canada's contemporary economic issues?

These research questions directly link the theoretical framework to the study's analytical objectives by addressing both issue salience and media framing.

3.3 Data Collection and Corpus Construction

The corpus was collected directly from the official websites of CBC News and CTV News to preserve the original publication context and ensure that articles were analyzed as presented to audiences. Selecting CBC News and CTV News reflects their institutional significance in Canada's media landscape. CBC News operates as Canada's national public broadcaster under the *Broadcasting Act*, with a legislated mandate to serve the public interest (Government of Canada, 1991, 2025a). CTV News, by contrast, operates within Bell Media's commercial broadcasting system, where audience engagement and market competition are important institutional influences on news production (Bell Media, 2025; Government of Canada, 2025b). Comparing these outlets provides a basis for examining how differing institutional contexts may shape economic news discourse.

Each news article is the unit of analysis. A purposive sampling strategy ensured direct relevance to the research objectives. Articles were included when Canada's economy constituted the primary focus in their headlines, covering issues such as inflation, affordability, housing, labor markets, unemployment, productivity, economic growth, recession risks, trade relations, tariffs, international investment, fiscal policy, taxation, government budgets, industrial development, manufacturing, energy prices, supply chains, consumer spending, and broader macroeconomic performance.

The study covers articles published between November 1, 2025, and April 30, 2026. Treating these six months as a continuous corpus enables the identification of sustained agenda-setting priorities and recurring framing patterns rather than isolated news events. The period encompasses continuing affordability pressures, inflation, Canada–United States trade developments, geopolitical uncertainty, energy-market volatility, fiscal initiatives, and debates concerning Canada's long-term economic competitiveness. The final corpus comprised 256 news articles: 91 from CBC News and 165 from CTV News. The corpus was organized chronologically and thematically to facilitate comparative analysis of recurring agenda-setting priorities and framing practices across the two outlets.

Given the difference in corpus size between the two outlets (CBC News, n = 91; CTV News, n = 165), issue frequencies were normalized separately for each outlet to facilitate comparison. The percentages reported in Tables 1 and 2 represent the proportion of articles assigned to each issue category relative to the total number of articles in the respective outlet’s corpus. This normalization makes it possible to compare the relative distribution of economic issues across the two outlets while accounting for the unequal number of articles in their respective corpora.

3.4 Coding Procedures and Analytical Framework

The researchers conducted the coding using a consistent analytical framework across both news outlets. Coding categories and operational definitions were established before the full analysis and applied systematically throughout the corpus. Ambiguous cases were reviewed against the theoretical framework and coding criteria to ensure consistency in classifying economic issues and interpreting framing functions. Although the coding framework was revisited during the analytical process to address potential inconsistencies, inter-coder reliability statistics, such as Cohen's kappa or Krippendorff's alpha, could not be calculated. The absence of an independent coding assessment represents a methodological limitation, particularly given the interpretive nature of qualitative framing analysis.

4. Results

This section presents findings from a qualitative comparative analysis of CBC News and CTV News coverage of Canada’s economic challenges between November 2025 and April 2026. Guided by agenda-setting theory and framing theory, the analysis examines both the economic issues that received sustained prominence and the interpretive patterns through which those challenges were constructed and framed across the six-month corpus.

The agenda-setting analysis identifies the issues that received sustained attention across the two media outlets. In contrast, the framing analysis examines how these issues were defined, explained, evaluated, and associated with possible

responses. Entman's (1993) four framing functions- problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation- provide the primary framework for examining interpretive patterns, while Iyengar's (1991) distinction between thematic and episodic framing helps assess the broader contextual orientation of the coverage. Accordingly, the findings are presented in two stages: the first examines agenda-setting patterns within and across the two broadcasters, and the second examines their respective framing of Canada's economic challenges.

4.1 Constructing Canada's Public Economic Agenda in CBC News Coverage

Guided by agenda-setting theory, the analysis shows that CBC News constructed a relatively coherent economic agenda by repeatedly emphasizing affordability, housing, inflation, labor markets, productivity, international trade, investment, and competitiveness. Consistent with McCombs and Shaw's (1972) proposition that sustained media attention contributes to issue salience, these issues appeared across diverse news contexts and were presented as interconnected components of Canada's broader economic condition.

A defining feature of this agenda was the connection between immediate economic pressures and longer-term structural conditions. For example, labor-market coverage linked employment losses and subsequent recovery to manufacturing, U.S. tariffs, population change, wage growth, inflation, and monetary policy. Similarly, affordability (Zimonijic, 2026) extended beyond household expenditure to encompass housing, food and energy prices, wages, taxation, employment, and fiscal measures. Therefore, CBC News positioned affordability as both a household concern and a broader economic-policy issue.

Housing (CBC News, 2025) became increasingly prominent in CBC News' coverage that connects housing supply with construction capacity, skilled labor, infrastructure, development charges, productivity, and economic activity. For instance, reporting on London's (Ontario) construction sector linked declining residential construction to employment and affordability while highlighting labor costs, development charges, construction practices, and modular and prefabricated technologies. Housing was consequently constructed not simply as a market issue but as an indicator of productive capacity.

Labor and workforce development (Benchetrit, 2026) were similarly connected to wider economic capacity. News coverage of youth unemployment, regional unemployment, skilled-trades shortages, and construction employment linked workforce conditions to earnings, homeownership, consumer spending, housing development, infrastructure, and future growth. Productivity and industrial investment (Hwang, 2025; Xing, 2026) reinforced this connection, with technological innovation, industrial modernization, construction capacity, manufacturing, and investment repeatedly presented as factors affecting Canada's competitiveness and economic performance.

International trade and diversification (Roman, 2025) formed another sustained component of the agenda. CBC News connected trade relations to employment, investment, industrial production, energy, critical minerals, and supply-chain security. In addition, media coverage of negotiations with the United States and Canada's trade mission to China framed diversification as a strategy to expand markets and reduce economic vulnerability. Trade was incorporated into a broader domestic agenda concerning economic sovereignty, strategic resources, investment, and resilience.

Inflation and monetary policy (CBC News, 2026) were likewise embedded within wider economic narratives. CBC News' coverage of Bank of Canada decisions connected interest rates and inflation to energy prices, international conflict, U.S. trade policy, household spending, food prices, and economic growth. Rather than treating inflation as an isolated indicator, CBC News situated monetary conditions within an interconnected domestic and international economic environment. CBC News's agenda-setting also extended through regional coverage. Reports on London (Ontario), Windsor, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, New Brunswick, and British Columbia connected local developments to national concerns involving employment, manufacturing, housing, energy, trade, tourism, and investment. For example, Windsor's economic outlook was linked to manufacturing employment, electric-vehicle supply chains, housing, population change, and U.S. tariffs, while Newfoundland and Labrador's economic performance was connected to oil, mining, fishing, energy prices, and international developments. These news articles showed how national economic pressures played out across different regional contexts. Table 1 summarizes the dominant economic issues identified in CBC News coverage during the study period.

Table 1. Dominant Economic Issues in CBC News Coverage

Rank	Economic Issue	Indicative Frequency	Illustrative Focus
1	affordability and cost of living	very high (34%)	cost of living, grocery prices, household finances
2	housing and housing supply	high (24%)	supply, affordability, construction
3	international trade and tariffs	moderate (18%)	tariffs, diversification, CUSMA, global markets
4	Productivity, competitiveness, and industrial investment	moderate (15%)	innovation, competitiveness
5	leadership and collaborative governance	low (9%)	government spending, economic stability, long-term resilience

Indicative frequency is classified using a five-level scale based on the percentage distribution reported for each economic issue: very high (28%–34%), high (21%–27%), moderate (14%–20%), and low (7%–13%). The same classification thresholds are applied to both news outlets. Percentages represent indicative frequencies of the identified economic issue categories within each outlet's corpus. They are intended as descriptive indicators supporting the qualitative comparative analysis rather than as independent statistical measures of media prominence.

4.2 Constructing Canada's Public Economic Agenda in CTV News Coverage

The analysis shows that CTV News constructed a clear economic agenda by frequently emphasizing affordability, inflation, fiscal governance, international trade, economic diversification, labor markets, productivity, strategic investment, and geopolitical uncertainty. These economic issues appeared across diverse news articles and were frequently presented as interconnected dimensions of Canada's economic condition. Rather than treating them as isolated developments, CTV News linked household well-being and affordability with productive capacity, fiscal sustainability, competitiveness, and economic resilience.

A defining feature of CTV News's agenda-setting was its integration of domestic and international economic developments. News coverage of inflation, housing, trade, investment, labor markets, and fiscal policy was frequently contextualized through international markets, supply chains, geopolitical uncertainty, and Canada's external economic relationships. For example, coverage of trade diversification with India (Duggan, 2026) connected access to emerging markets with Canadian agriculture, energy exports, investment, and broader negotiations with markets including Thailand, the Philippines, ASEAN, and Mercosur. The report framed diversification not simply as a foreign-policy development but as an economic strategy tied to growth and resilience.

Affordability and inflation (Wonderen, 2026; Cheng, 2026) occupied a central position in CTV News's economic agenda. CTV News' coverage connected food prices, purchasing power, household budgets, housing, transportation, and broader inflationary pressures. For instance, reporting on rising food prices linked inflation to imported food, supply shortages associated with extreme weather, currency depreciation, transportation and labor costs, geographic conditions, and dependence on foreign produce. Affordability was therefore framed as a broad economic issue shaped by structural and international conditions rather than a temporary household concern.

Housing provided a further example of second-level agenda-setting. CTV News connected housing affordability with construction productivity, labor capacity, technological innovation, and housing supply. News coverage highlighting Statistics Canada's finding that labor productivity in housing construction declined by 37.3 percent between 2001 and 2023 presented construction efficiency, technological modernization, materials, and skilled labor as important factors in addressing affordability. Housing was incorporated into a wider agenda concerning productivity and productive capacity rather than being framed exclusively around house prices or individual purchasing difficulties.

Labor-market issues were similarly connected to broader economic conditions. News articles of federal measures supporting tariff-sensitive industries linked employment protection to trade uncertainty, industrial policy, and manufacturing resilience. CTV News reported government claims concerning jobs protected and layoffs prevented, while also examining the difficulties of measuring policy-related employment effects. Labor markets were consequently positioned within an interconnected agenda involving tariffs, industrial production, government intervention, economic growth, and policy effectiveness.

Productivity, competitiveness, and strategic investment (Lord, 2026; Robertson, 2026) constituted another recurring component of the agenda. CTV News connected technological development and investment with Canada's capacity to adapt to changing economic conditions. For example, news reports of provincial economic initiatives highlighted investment in artificial intelligence, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, and other strategic sectors, linking these measures to attracting capital, retaining intellectual property, and strengthening domestic productive capacity. These patterns suggest that productivity and investment were presented as mechanisms to improve competitiveness and reduce economic vulnerability.

Fiscal governance also received sustained attention (CTV News, 2025). CTV News connected fiscal decisions with economic stability, investment, debt, growth, and long-term sustainability. Coverage of government spending, capital investment, and debt-to-GDP considerations positioned fiscal policy not simply as a matter of political disagreement but as an issue of economic capacity and fiscal sustainability. Budgetary decisions were consequently connected to broader questions concerning infrastructure, productive investment, and the government's capacity to maintain fiscal credibility.

International trade and geopolitical uncertainty (Duggan, 2026; Freeman, 2026) formed another sustained component of the agenda. CTV News repeatedly linked trade relationships, export markets, energy security, supply chains, investment, and geopolitical developments to Canada's economic prospects. For example, news coverage of trade diversification and the World Economic Forum connected international engagement and investment attraction with Canada's efforts to

respond to trade and geopolitical uncertainty. This pattern also appeared in provincial economic coverage, where Ontario's 2026 budget was framed within ongoing global trade tensions, supply-chain disruptions, and shifting markets. Geopolitical uncertainty therefore functioned as a cross-cutting economic attribute linking otherwise distinct issues. Table 2 summarizes the dominant economic issues in CTV News coverage during the six-month time frame.

Table 2. Dominant Economic Issues in CTV News Coverage

Rank	Economic Issue	Indicative Frequency	Illustrative Focus
1	global economic and geopolitical challenges	very high (29%)	tariffs, exports, diversification
2	inflation and cost of living	high (26%)	rising prices, purchasing power, monetary policy
3	fiscal policy and government spending	moderate (18%)	budgets, deficits, public spending
4	economic growth and productivity	moderate (15%)	external market, innovation
5	business investment and manufacturing	low (12%)	competitiveness, industrial investment

Indicative frequency is classified using a five-level scale based on the percentage distribution reported for each economic issue: very high (28%–34%), high (21%–27%), moderate (14%–20%), and low (7%–13%). The same classification thresholds are applied to both news outlets. Percentages represent indicative frequencies of the identified economic issue categories within each outlet's corpus. They are intended as descriptive indicators supporting the qualitative comparative analysis rather than as independent statistical measures of media prominence.

4.3 Framing Canada's Economic Challenges in CBC News Coverage

While agenda-setting identifies the economic issues that received sustained prominence, framing analysis examines how CBC News interpreted and communicated those issues. Guided by Entman's (1993) framing model, the analysis shows that CBC News consistently organized economic developments around structural causes, institutional responses, and long-term economic resilience. Rather than treating inflation, housing, labor shortages, productivity, trade, and fiscal policy as separate issues, CBC News connected them through broader narratives of economic transformation and institutional capacity. Affordability emerged as a central link between household experiences and broader economic structures.

4.3.1 Problem Definition: Affordability as a Multidimensional Economic Challenge

CBC News predominantly defined affordability as a multidimensional economic problem affecting household finances, housing access, employment, consumption, and economic security. The coverage extended beyond consumer prices to include housing, food and energy costs, wages, employment prospects, taxation, and government fiscal measures. For example, news articles on the April economic update linked affordability measures for groceries and essential goods to employment, skilled-trades training, housing, taxation, and fiscal policy.

This framing was particularly evident in coverage of young Canadians. Reports on youth unemployment connected difficulties entering the labor market with financial insecurity, future earning capacity, homeownership, and broader economic participation. Affordability was constructed not simply as a measure of prices but as an indicator of individuals' and households' ability to participate securely in Canada's economic and social life.

4.3.2 Causal Interpretation: Structural and Interconnected Causes

CBC News predominantly attributed affordability pressures to interacting structural and macroeconomic conditions rather than to individual behavior or a single political decision. CBC News repeatedly presented housing supply constraints, construction costs, labor shortages, interest rates, inflation, energy prices, demographic change, trade uncertainty, and supply-chain disruptions as interconnected factors. Housing coverage clearly illustrates this causal structure. CBC News connected construction costs, taxes, development charges, labor availability, regulatory processes, and construction productivity to the cost and availability of new housing. Causal responsibility was consequently distributed across governments, municipalities, builders, labor markets, regulatory systems, and broader market conditions. A similar pattern appeared in coverage of inflation and Bank of Canada interest-rate decisions. CBC News connected inflation to international energy prices, trade uncertainty, food prices, consumer spending, and monetary policy, situating domestic affordability pressures within wider national and international economic processes.

4.3.3 Moral Evaluation: Affordability and Collective Economic Well-Being

The moral dimension of CBC News's “affordability” frame emerged primarily through attention to the consequences of economic pressures for households and social groups. Coverage of youth unemployment, housing, food and energy costs, and government affordability measures repeatedly connected economic conditions with financial security, opportunity, and future prosperity. For example, news articles on young job seekers highlighted financial insecurity and the challenges of achieving economic independence through stable employment.

Housing coverage similarly connected adequate housing with economic opportunity and community prosperity. By presenting housing as an important component of employment, economic activity, and access to opportunity, CBC News implicitly

evaluated affordability in terms of economic inclusion and social well-being. At the same time, the corpus retained political and economic disagreement. News articles of the April economic update included criticism from opposition leaders and assessments from economists concerning government spending, deficits, and the adequacy of affordability measures. Thus, CBC News's framing incorporated competing evaluations within a broader discussion of economic outcomes and policy effectiveness.

4.3.4 Treatment Recommendation: Coordinated and Structural Responses

CBC News consistently presented economic responses as multiple and interconnected rather than dependent on a single policy intervention. Housing construction, infrastructure investment, workforce development, productivity enhancement, fiscal measures, regulatory reform, and trade diversification appeared as complementary responses to Canada's economic challenges. For example, CBC News' coverage of skilled trades linked workforce development to the government's objective of increasing housing and infrastructure construction, positioning skills training within a broader response to economic capacity constraints. Trade diversification was also presented as a response to external economic vulnerability. Coverage of Canada's China trade mission connected expanded international partnerships and investment with a broader diversification strategy shaped partly by Canada's changing relationship with the United States. The proposed responses extended beyond immediate affordability relief toward strengthening economic capacity and resilience.

4.3.5 Thematic Framing of Economic Challenges

The corpus shows that CBC News used both episodic and thematic elements, though thematic framing predominated. Specific events, including Bank of Canada announcements, employment reports, fiscal updates, tariff developments, and trade missions, were frequently embedded within broader explanations of structural economic conditions. For example, coverage of Bank of Canada decisions extended beyond individual interest-rate announcements to address global energy prices, inflation, trade uncertainty, household spending, and economic growth. Similarly, tariff and trade developments were situated within broader discussions of export dependence, critical minerals, energy resources, investment, and economic diversification.

This pattern corresponds with Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic framing. Although individual actors and events remained visible, CBC News repeatedly focused on broader institutional relationships and structural conditions. Political leaders were generally presented as operating within complex economic environments rather than as the sole determinants of economic outcomes. Thematic framing encouraged readers to interpret economic challenges through systemic causes and collective responses rather than individual attribution of responsibility (Iyengar, 1991). Table 3 shows the dominant frames in CBC News coverage during the six-month time frame.

Table 3. Dominant Frames in CBC News Coverage

Frame	Problem Definition	Causal Attribution	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommendation
affordability	rising household costs	inflation, housing shortages, global pressures	Canadians require economic support	housing policies, fiscal measures, monetary stability
housing and structural capacity	housing shortages	supply constraints, labour shortages	adequate housing is essential for prosperity	increase housing supply and infrastructure
trade and economic sovereignty	external economic uncertainty	tariffs, geopolitical tensions	diversification protects Canada's economy	expand markets and strengthen domestic industries
economic competitiveness and resilience	productivity challenges	global competition and structural change	Canada should strengthen competitiveness	innovation, investment, workforce development
collaborative governance	complex economic challenges	multiple institutional factors	shared responsibility among governments and stakeholders	coordinated policy responses

4.4 Framing Canada's Economic Challenges in CTV News Coverage

While agenda-setting identifies the economic issues that received sustained prominence, framing analysis examines how CTV News interpreted and communicated those issues. Guided by Entman's (1993) framing model, the analysis reveals that CTV News consistently organized Canada's economic challenges around global uncertainty, strategic adaptation, and institutional resilience. Rather than treating inflation, affordability, fiscal policy, trade, productivity, investment, and labor markets as separate developments, CTV News often connected them to broader narratives about Canada's position in an increasingly interconnected and uncertain international environment. Among these patterns, the "global economic uncertainty" frame emerged as the dominant organizing framework across the six-month corpus.

CTV News repeatedly defined Canada's economic challenges as involving the need to navigate persistent international and structural instability. Domestic concerns were often linked to broader economic systems. For example, food inflation was associated with imported food, supply shortages, extreme weather, currency depreciation, transportation and labor costs, and Canada's dependence on international food markets. Similarly, housing affordability was connected to construction

productivity, labor shortages, technology, production costs, and the long-term capacity to expand housing supply. Global and structural interdependence became a recurring lens through which CTV News interpreted domestic economic pressures.

4.4.1 Problem Definition: Economic Uncertainty and Its Multidimensional Effects

Consistent with Entman's (1993) first framing function, CTV News defined economic uncertainty as a multidimensional condition affecting households, businesses, governments, and productive sectors. CTV News presented inflation and affordability through household pressures, while linking trade uncertainty to employment, manufacturing, investment, and supply chains. For example, CTV News' coverage of government support for tariff-sensitive industries linked trade uncertainty to employment protection and industrial activity while also examining the difficulty of measuring policy-related employment effects. The economic problem was framed not simply as the presence of tariffs but as a broader condition of uncertainty that requires ongoing assessment of economic consequences and policy effectiveness.

4.4.2 Causal Interpretation: Global and Structural Sources of Economic Pressure

CTV News's causal interpretation emphasized interconnected structural and international factors, including global commodity and energy markets, supply chains, trade relationships, geopolitical developments, productivity limitations, and changing investment patterns. For instance, food-affordability coverage attributed high prices to imported food costs, supply shortages, currency movements, transportation and labor costs, geographic constraints, and Canada's grocery market structure. Economic pressures were consequently explained through multiple levels of causation, connecting household experiences with market structures, domestic productive capacity, and international conditions.

Housing coverage reinforced this structural interpretation. Rather than explaining affordability primarily through demand or individual purchasing conditions, CTV News highlighted declining construction productivity and productive efficiency. One article reported a 37.3 percent decline in labor productivity in housing construction between 2001 and 2023 and emphasized technological adoption, improved construction processes, skilled labor, and increased housing supply. Housing affordability was constructed as a broader issue of productive capacity and technological modernization.

4.4.3 Moral Evaluation: Economic Resilience and Policy Effectiveness

CTV News's moral evaluation emphasized resilience, preparedness, and institutional capacity. Economic developments were often assessed by whether governments, businesses, and institutions could respond effectively to uncertainty while protecting households, workers, and productive sectors. For example, news coverage of trade-related employment measures examined policy interventions through their stated objectives and measurable effects, including whether programs prevented layoffs and supported employment. Consequently, the evaluative emphasis centered on policy effectiveness, economic resilience, and the relationship between public intervention and observable outcomes.

A similar orientation appeared in coverage of fiscal governance. Fiscal decisions were discussed through competing considerations involving investment, economic growth, debt accumulation, and long-term sustainability. Attention to fiscal anchors, debt-to-GDP ratios, capital spending, and economic growth positioned fiscal policy as a balance between present investment needs and future financial sustainability. Responsible economic governance was therefore associated with the capacity to manage uncertainty while maintaining resources for longer-term economic activity.

4.4.4 Treatment Recommendation: Diversification and Strategic Investment

The treatment recommendation function of Entman's (1993) model was particularly visible in CTV News's emphasis on strategic adaptation. Rather than treating uncertainty as something to be eliminated, the coverage repeatedly identified diversification, investment, technological modernization, productivity improvements, fiscal planning, international cooperation, and industrial development as potential responses. Trade diversification provides a clear example. CTV News's reporting on Canada-India negotiations presented expanded trade as part of an effort to develop new markets for Canadian agriculture and energy and reduce dependence on established economic relationships. References to negotiations with Thailand, the Philippines, ASEAN, and Mercosur reinforced diversification as a strategic response to changing international conditions.

Strategic investment was similarly presented as a way to strengthen economic resilience. CTV News connected investment in technology, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and other emerging industries with retaining productive capacity and intellectual property domestically. External vulnerability was addressed through both broader international engagement and stronger domestic productive capacity. CTV News also distinguished between immediate relief and structural responses. For example, coverage of food affordability presented tax credits and supply-chain assistance as short-term household relief while also addressing longer-term concerns about transportation costs, competition, and supply-chain vulnerabilities. This distinction shows that the framing focused not only on whether governments intervened but also on whether particular measures addressed immediate symptoms or underlying structural conditions. Recurring conceptual choices reinforced the "global economic uncertainty" frame. References to geopolitical tensions, international markets, trade diversification, supply chains, productivity, competitiveness, investment, resilience,

and strategic adaptation repeatedly connected otherwise distinct economic stories. Inflation, housing, labor markets, trade, investment, and fiscal policy were constructed as interconnected dimensions of an uncertain economic environment.

4.4.5 Thematic Framing of Economic Uncertainty

The predominance of the "global economic uncertainty" frame reflects CTV News's preference for thematic rather than purely episodic reporting. Individual developments – including food-price increases, construction productivity figures, trade negotiations, employment-support measures, investment initiatives, provincial budgets, and international economic meetings were frequently embedded within broader explanations of structural economic conditions. For example, CTV News' housing coverage moved from a specific Statistics Canada finding to broader questions concerning construction efficiency, technology, labor, housing supply, and affordability. Similarly, coverage of Canada's trade relationship with India situated a specific commercial and diplomatic development within a broader strategy of diversification and international economic engagement. This thematic orientation encouraged audiences to interpret individual economic developments as interconnected components of Canada's wider economic environment. Table 4 shows the dominant frames in CTV News coverage during the six months.

Table 4. Dominant Frames in CTV News Coverage

Frame	Problem Definition	Causal Attribution	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommendation
global economic uncertainty	international economic instability affecting Canada	geopolitical conflicts, global inflation, trade disruption	Canada must remain economically resilient	diversification, international cooperation, strategic planning
inflation and household affordability	rising cost of living	inflation, interest rates, supply disruptions	Canadians require protection from economic pressures	monetary stability, affordability measures, targeted policy
fiscal resilience and responsible governance	maintaining fiscal stability during uncertainty	public spending pressures, slower growth	fiscal responsibility strengthens economic confidence	budget discipline, sustainable spending
economic sovereignty and diversification	dependence on external markets	trade concentration, geopolitical risks	economic independence enhances national resilience	diversified exports, domestic investment
strategic investment	long-term competitiveness	productivity challenges, technological change	investment drives sustainable prosperity	innovation, infrastructure, workforce development

5. Discussion

This study examined how CBC News and CTV News constructed media discourse surrounding Canada's economic challenges between November 2025 and April 2026 through the complementary perspectives of agenda-setting theory and framing theory. The findings demonstrate substantial convergence in the economic issues receiving attention, alongside meaningful differences in the attributes, contexts, and interpretive frameworks through which those issues were presented. Thus, while the two broadcasters contributed to a broadly shared economic agenda, they constructed different narratives concerning the sources of economic pressure, the meaning of resilience, and the policy responses required.

5.1 Convergence and Divergence in Media Agenda-Setting

The agenda-setting findings reveal considerable convergence between CBC News and CTV News. Both outlets consistently emphasized affordability, inflation, housing, labor markets, productivity, trade, fiscal policy, investment, and economic competitiveness. Rather than treating these as isolated issues, both connected them to broader questions concerning Canada's economic capacity and future. This pattern aligns with the central proposition of agenda-setting theory: sustained media attention contributes to the salience of particular issues in public discourse.

The principal difference emerged in the attributes attached to these shared priorities. CBC News placed greater emphasis on domestic structural conditions, particularly housing supply, affordability, workforce capacity, productivity, infrastructure, and industrial development. Its coverage presented economic challenges largely in terms of long-term domestic transformation and institutional capacity. In contrast, CTV News gave greater prominence to macroeconomic conditions and international interdependence, connecting inflation, fiscal policy, trade, investment, and productivity to geopolitical developments, global markets, and economic uncertainty. Consequently, the two outlets constructed a shared economic agenda but with different contextual emphases: CBC News foregrounded domestic structural capacity, whereas CTV News emphasized macroeconomic stability and adaptation to global uncertainty.

5.2 Convergence and Divergence in Economic Framing

The framing analysis similarly demonstrates both commonality and differentiation. Both outlets predominantly employed thematic rather than episodic framing, embedding individual economic developments within broader structural explanations and policy discussions. Across the two corpora, economic challenges were generally defined as

interconnected conditions rather than isolated events, and explanations frequently extended beyond individual political actors to include institutional, economic, and structural factors.

The principal divergence concerned the organizing frames through which these common concerns were interpreted. CBC News constructed economic challenges primarily through an "affordability" frame, supported by related emphases on housing, structural capacity, economic resilience, strategic trade, and collaborative governance. This framing connected household pressures to domestic conditions such as housing supply, labor capacity, productivity, infrastructure, and institutional coordination. CTV News, by comparison, organized its coverage predominantly through a "global economic uncertainty" frame. CTV News reporting linked domestic economic pressures to geopolitical developments, international trade, global markets, supply chains, fiscal conditions, and changing investment patterns. Economic resilience was consequently associated more strongly with diversification, strategic investment, productivity, fiscal management, and adaptation to external uncertainty.

These differences correspond to Entman's (1993) framing functions. Although both outlets addressed similar economic problems, they differed in the causal contexts they emphasized, the criteria they used to evaluate policy responses, and the solutions they presented as appropriate. CBC News more consistently linked resilience to strengthening domestic structural capacity and coordinated governance, whereas CTV News linked it to strategic adaptation, economic diversification, and preparedness for international uncertainty. To summarize these interpretive distinctions, Table 5 compares the dominant framing patterns identified across the two Canadian media outlets using Entman's (1993) four framing functions.

The differences in economic framing also have potential political implications. CBC News's emphasis on affordability, structural inequalities, public investment, institutional capacity, and collaborative governance may be interpreted as broadly compatible with centre-left policy priorities. By contrast, CTV News's greater emphasis on fiscal sustainability, competitiveness, private investment, productivity, and strategic adaptation may resonate with more market-oriented approaches to economic governance. These distinctions, however, should not be equated with evidence of partisan bias. Although CBC News has been characterized by some media-rating organizations as leaning left, assessments of CTV News generally place it closer to the political centre. The findings of this study do not establish that CBC systematically favoured liberal political positions or that CTV promoted conservative ones. Rather, they identify differences in editorial emphasis and economic interpretation within a broadly shared market-based framework. Both outlets largely approached Canada's economic challenges through questions of economic performance, competitiveness, investment, and policy effectiveness, with limited engagement with alternative economic models. The political significance of these differences therefore lies less in demonstrating partisan alignment than in showing how distinct editorial priorities can shape the economic policies, institutional responsibilities, and political responses that receive prominence in public discourse.

Table 5. Comparison Using Entman's Four Framing Functions

Framing Function	CBC News	CTV News
problem definition	structural domestic economic challenges	global economic uncertainty and macroeconomic pressures
causal interpretation	housing shortages, productivity, labour, infrastructure	inflation, geopolitical tensions, trade, global markets
moral evaluation	collaboration, institutional capacity, inclusive development	fiscal discipline, resilience, competitiveness
treatment recommendation	housing expansion, productivity, workforce development, coordinated governance	inflation control, fiscal prudence, trade diversification, strategic investment

An additional implication concerns the boundaries of economic debate in the coverage of both outlets. Although CBC News and CTV News presented different explanations of Canada's economic challenges and emphasized different policy responses, neither substantially questioned the underlying assumptions of the prevailing market-based economic system or engaged in sustained discussion of alternative approaches to economic organization and management. In particular, the coverage offered limited engagement with broader debates about the relationship between state intervention and market forces. This observation suggests a potential blind spot in the coverage: economic challenges were largely discussed in terms of improving productivity, competitiveness, investment, fiscal management, and resilience within existing economic arrangements, rather than questioning the broader economic model itself. This distinction is significant because economic reporting can shape not only how governments are evaluated but also the range of economic policies and alternatives that enter public debate. While the present study did not systematically assess ideological positions or the representation of competing economic models, this pattern identifies an important direction for further research.

6. Concluding Remarks

The study's findings show that both Canadian media outlets established a broadly shared economic agenda, particularly around affordability, inflation, housing, labor markets, trade, productivity, and fiscal policy, while differing in their interpretive emphasis. CBC News more strongly foregrounded domestic structural capacity and long-term economic

transformation, whereas CTV News emphasized global economic uncertainty, macroeconomic conditions, diversification, and strategic adaptation. Both outlets largely used thematic framing, linking individual economic developments to broader structural conditions and policy responses.

The study makes three principal contributions. First, it demonstrates the value of combining agenda-setting and framing perspectives to examine both the salience and interpretation of economic issues. Second, it provides comparative evidence from contemporary Canadian economic journalism by examining public-service and commercial news coverage within the same period and issue context. Third, it illustrates how different institutional and editorial orientations can produce distinct interpretations of economic challenges despite substantial convergence in issue selection.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study examines only CBC News and CTV News and does not capture the full diversity of Canada's contemporary media environment. The six-month corpus also provides a defined temporal snapshot rather than evidence of longer-term patterns. Furthermore, the qualitative design prioritizes interpretive depth and does not establish statistical generalizability or quantitative analysis. An additional methodological limitation concerns coding reliability. As the corpus was coded by the researchers, inter-coder reliability could not be assessed through independent coding or statistical measures such as Cohen's kappa or Krippendorff's alpha. Although a consistent coding framework and operational definitions were applied throughout the analysis, the interpretive nature of qualitative coding leaves room for researcher subjectivity. Future research could address this limitation by involving multiple independent coders, conducting pilot coding, and assessing intercoder agreement before completing the full analysis. Future research could also extend the analysis across longer periods, include additional Canadian outlets, and combine qualitative approaches with quantitative or computational methods. Audience-reception research could further examine how Canadians interpret and respond to different media constructions of economic issues. The study demonstrates that convergence in media issue selection does not necessarily produce uniform interpretations. Examining both agenda-setting and framing provides a better understanding of how media outlets shape public discourse about Canada's economic conditions, policy challenges, and possible responses. It also raises a broader question for future research: whether economic journalism sufficiently expands public debate beyond the management of existing economic arrangements to consider the wider range of economic models and policy alternatives available to society.

Acknowledgments

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author contributions

Dr. Fadi Jaber and Dr. Samira Dishari were responsible for study design and data collection. Dr. Jaber drafted the manuscript and Dr. Dishari revised it. Dr. Dishari conducted proofreading and reformatted the manuscript as per submission guidelines. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

This paper did not receive any funding from any funding agency.

Competing interests

The authors declare they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal’s policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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