

A framing analysis of household food insecurity within the Canadian political arena illustrates the co-construction of an intractable policy problem

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The problem

The Case for Intractability

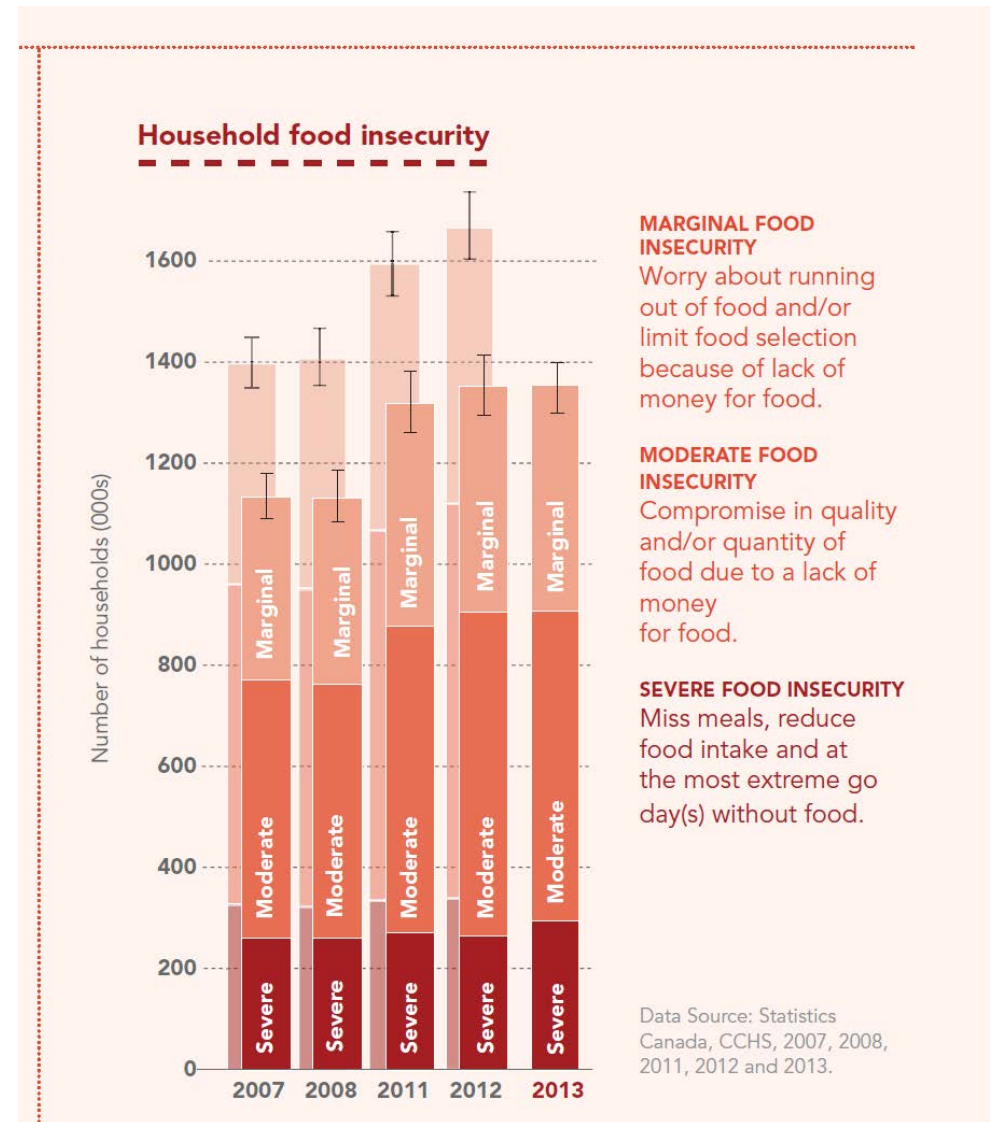
HFI is a policy-sensitive population health problem

High and increasing prevalence

Public awareness of health and social consequences

Unresolved over a long time by administrative, legal or political means

But what is the conflict?



An intractable policy problem is a dispute between contending parties that is ultimately “highly resistant to resolution by appeal to evidence, research, or reasoned argument,” a situation that arises from a conflict of frames.

Schön & Rein 1994, xi

Frames, framing and moral arguments

- Frames are a way of signifying, often through the medium of stories, representations of language (e.g., value-laden imagery) to actionable beliefs. (Rein & Schön 1991, 1996; Schön and Rein 1994).

Example of 2 frames:

Syria as a humanitarian crisis

Syria as a civil war

- Framing is the act of sense-making; a social interaction.
- Morality framing is based on first principles, high saliency of the topic, less emphasis on expert knowledge.
- (Knill 2013; Mooney 1999; Mooney and Schuldt 2008).

Hansard analysis 1995-2012 (fed, BC, ON, NS)

Methodology to address:

Can framing analysis provide new insights into how debate about household food insecurity has rendered the problem 'intractable'?

Frames

- It is shocking to see families bringing their kids to breakfast clubs and community kitchens ... It breaks one's heart to have kids coming for a free breakfast because they do not have any food at home. **It is a real betrayal to our communities that this is happening.** (Peggy Nash, NDP, Opposition, federal Hansard, 2008)

- I already said that in my work I have done checks in seniors' residences. There were no pets in these apartments, but in their cupboards were boxes of cat food. These seniors had no choice but to pay for their medication and eat cat food. **This is unacceptable.** (Nicole Demers, BQ, Opposition, federal Hansard, 2007)

Simple frames:

- struggle to put food on the table, to feed their families
- food has instrumental value for health
- reifying 'the economy'
- heroic food bank volunteers

Emotive frames:

- hungry children, the poor, vulnerable people, seniors, hardworking citizens, food bank users
- actions characterized as: shameful; betrayal; disgrace; reckless; uncaring

Framing for moral outrage

- The number of children who are hungry has gone up by 50%....We're talking about children who go to school and can't learn properly because they are hungry and they are cold....**Your government has offered these children absolutely no hope at all that their lives will be better.** You've made them this ridiculous promise that if you give people in the province a massive cash bonanza that goes to the wealthiest citizens, somehow, some day, the children of the poor are going to benefit. ...Just tell them that they have to go to bed hungry, that they have to do their part so you can deliver your tax cut to the wealthy Ontarians. (Lyn McLeod, LIB, Opposition, Ontario Hansard, 1996)

Framing: inaction based on a moral dispute

- Despite relatively universal applicability of particular frames and the framing work they do (e.g., 'hungry child' used by all), and despite policy agreement that poverty reduction rather than elimination is the goal, all action proposed or taken, leads to moral outrage from political rivals.
- The foundational dispute is therefore around moral authority in governance.
- As a result, political actors cannot agree on even minor advances or to let the governing party implement weak policies in support of their idea of what might be done to reduce poverty and thereby HFI in Canada.
- The result is inaction.

Implications

- Political rhetoric based on moral claims has led to a co-construction of intractability of HFI, which at its core is the abrogation of moral authority by governments who permit children to go hungry.
- The result is policies limited to areas of paltry consensus regarding the role of helping-hand organizations (i.e., food banks, school food programs).
- Could emotional distancing be accomplished through a concrete poverty reduction objective rather than a goal of poverty eradication? Is the momentum around Basic Income meeting such a purpose?

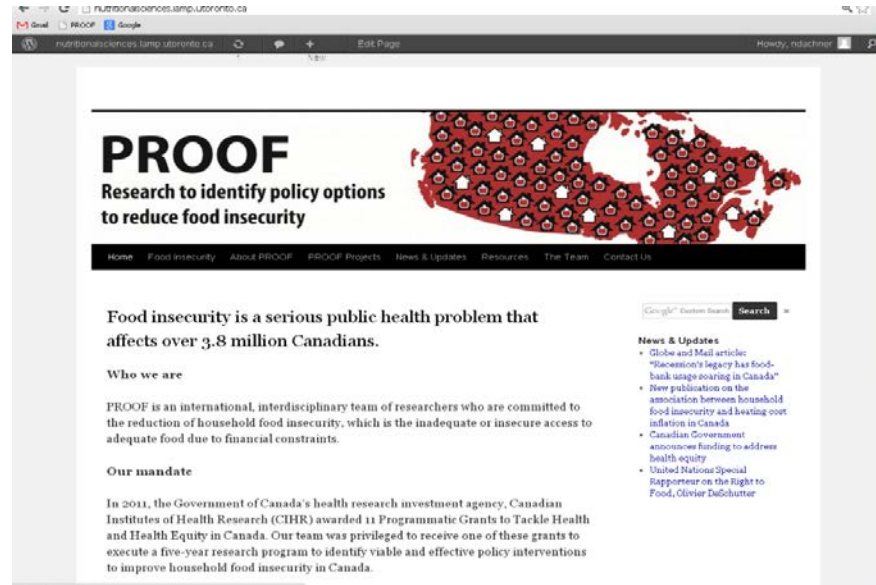
Thank you

READINGS

McIntyre L, Patterson PB, Anderson LC, Mah CL. (2016) Household food insecurity in Canada: Problem definition and potential solutions in the public policy domain. *Canadian Public Policy*, doi: 10.3138/cpp.2015-066

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