

# Opposing Keystone XL and Northern Gateway: Pipeline Resistance Campaigns as Contentious Social Movements

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Since they were proposed in 2008 and 2006 respectively, the proposed TransCanada Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline from Hardisty, Alberta (250km northeast of Calgary) to Nederland, Texas (130km East of Houston) on the Gulf of Mexico and the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline (NGP) from Bruderheim, Alberta (50km northeast of Edmonton) to Kitimat, British Columbia (700km northwest of Vancouver) have both provoked substantial resistance campaigns comprising, among others, environmentalist groups, faith communities, and indigenous peoples. Both within and between these groupings there are major disagreements about the principal motivations for resisting the pipelines. Concern about spills may be most salient for people downstream of proposed pipelines, while concern about climate change may be a greater concern for those more distantly situated. Others may be more concerned about encroachment of indigenous rights, or the abuse of eminent domain. These different interests relate variably to ongoing political changes. The risk and severity of pipeline spills probably haven't appreciably increased, and may have even decreased due to increased public scrutiny. At the same time, the emergence of broad anti-KXL and anti-NGP movements have provided new platforms and allies for those with older concerns. Many similar dynamics and disagreements are likely at work within movement opposing other North American bitumen sand pipeline projects including those resisting the Kinder Morgan TransMountain project, Energy East, and the Dakota Access Pipeline.<sup>1</sup>

Interpreted as a set of broad movements with the shared objective of preventing the construction of fossil fuel pipelines, we can also identify important practical and conceptual

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<sup>1</sup>On the Dakota Access pipeline and broader issues about U.S. law and indigenous land ownership (including the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 and the 2012 Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act), see: Mosteller, *For Native Americans, Land Is More Than Just the Ground Beneath Their Feet*.

disagreements both within organizations of one type (say, the policy preferences of different environmental NGOs) and between types of organizations (say, church congregations compared with local environmental groups) and between groups of various types focused on different tactics (grassroots political lobbying, for instance, versus non-violent civil disobedience). By seeking to conduct a network analysis of groups that have worked to oppose these pipelines, this PhD project seeks to contribute to the literature on social movements as potential agents of political change and the literature on contentious politics. Interviews with anti-KXL and anti-NGP activists should also provide detailed new information on tactical and ideological tensions within these specific movements and in climate change and environmental activism more broadly. In particular, this project will examine the involvement of members of faith and indigenous communities in opposition to these two pipelines, in order to better understand the developing social movement calling for much more aggressive climate change mitigation efforts, illuminate some of the governing dynamics of the movement, and consider what relevance it might have to politics in Canada and the United States more broadly.

## 1 Theoretical framework

*Are you going to create your own framework/theory of contentious politics and/or the dynamics of social movements? Or are you going to build on an existing theory?*

A number of political science theories have been developed to investigate various aspects of social movements, including movements involving environmental activists. In some ways, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's advocacy coalition framework (ACF) is encouraging both on the basis of the explanatory factors it incorporates (external events, actors of different types, strategic behaviour by boundedly rational individuals, organizational learning) and because it has been applied to reasonably comparable cases. In other ways, the ACF seems to include assumptions which may not hold in the anti-KXL and anti-NGP movements. In particular, these movements are not characterized by concern about an area of key geographic focus for all concerned. For some, these are local fights which may in many cases be driven by concern about local water quality or land rights. Participants may not be concerned about the construction of pipelines *per se*, but may have concerns about pipelines which directly affect them and the materials they carry. For others, these are parallel battles in an effort to constrain total historical fossil fuel production, and by extension the severity of the

global climate change humanity and nature will experience. For these participants, this is climate change policy by other means; as long as the Canadian and U.S. governments lack sufficiently ambitious climate policy objectives to be part of a sub-2 ° C solution, preventing infrastructure development likely reduces total historical GHG emissions and prevents the wasteful deployment of infrastructure that’s appropriate for a low-carbon future.<sup>23</sup> If the appropriate geographic area under contention is itself disputed, perhaps insights from the ACF could be partly re-interpreted in terms of analyses in the contentious politics literature, and the social movements literature more broadly.

The ACF might also be enriched by more consideration of the scholarly and popular literature on the management of organizations, with volunteer-driven organizations as a relevant sub-case. Volunteer-run groups have effectiveness that is largely based on the strength of their motivation, and both the recruitment of volunteers and the retention of experienced organizers pose challenges and themselves require capability and resources. Given the contentiousness of pipeline politics, these groups may also suffer more from interpersonal stress and conflict than other forms of voluntary organization. The potential seriousness of the impacts of climate change may also create challenges for organizations, as volunteers and organizers struggle to avoid feeling excessively frustrated or dispirited. The urgency of the climate challenge means that organizers feel every setback and delay as a direct threat to our chances of keeping climate change to well below 2 ° C. These emotional factors likely have relevance for organizational growth and effectiveness, and have the promise to be effectively investigated through an interview-based methodology.

Critical models in the study of organizations and their behaviour may also provide some depth of understanding, when evaluating the functioning of anti-pipeline groups. For instance, models which critique rationalist assumptions about decision-making by integrating literature on human psychology with theories of politics may be usefully applicable in these cases. For instance, the ‘garbage can model’ first described by James March, Michael Cohen and Johan Olsen seems to capture some phenomena which are prevalent in activist groups, including organizations operating with “variety of inconsistent and ill-defined preferences”; conflicting goals both between individuals at any given time as well as for a single person across time; a lack of integration in the efforts of different parts of the organization; and “fluid participation” in decision-making processes.<sup>4</sup> Some of these characteristics also seem to be shared by major social movements not principally concerned with pipelines or climate

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<sup>2</sup>See: Swart and Weaver, “The Alberta oil sands and climate”.

<sup>3</sup>Droitsch, *The link between Keystone XL and Canadian oilsands production*.

<sup>4</sup>See: Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, p. 29.

change, including the Occupy movement and Idle No More.

## 2 Literatures

The study of the anti-pipeline and climate change activist movements can be meaningfully situated in the social movements literature which largely emerged from sociology in the 1970s based on work including that of William Gamson, Frances Piven, and Richard Cloward.<sup>5</sup> This literature has subsequently been developed within political science by scholars including TK SCHOLARS. [TK — SUMMARIZE AND TRANSFER OVER MATERIAL FROM THE LONG PROPOSAL]

The emerging literature on contentious politics provides a useful theoretical and comparative framework for examining the anti-pipeline movement. In particular, this includes the work of Doug McAdam, Sid Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. This literature connects with political process theory, as studied by David Meyer and Debra Minkoff, as well as with the work of organizational theorists focused on ideology, organizational structure, and resources. Largely theoretical books like *Dynamics of Contention* (2005), *Power in Movement* (2011), and *Contentious Politics* (2015) have helped establish what kinds of questions related to contentious politics are of interest to scholars of politics. There are also pertinent works focused on particular cases, including McAdam’s *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, Hadden’s *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*, and McAdam and Hilary Boudet’s *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005*. [TK - Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper]

Jennifer Hadden’s *Networks in Contention* describes a research project which incorporated a variety of methods, notably “social network analysis, quantitative historical analysis, statistical analysis, content analysis, qualitative interviewing, and participant observation”.<sup>6</sup> Her study sought to conduct an ambitious network analysis of groups involved in the 2009 Copenhagen climate change meeting, the 15th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, where a successor to the Kyoto Protocol was envisioned by the optimistic as a plausible outcome. Specifically, Hadden sought to “look ...closely at how organizations make tactical choices regarding forms of collective action” and “to explain why so many of them adopted contention in Copenhagen”.<sup>7</sup> Here “contention”

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<sup>5</sup>TK — Cite principal works

<sup>6</sup>Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. TK.

is partly taken to mean a willingness to employ controversial protest tactics, but also refers to major internal disagreements. These disagreements emerged in part from differing perspectives on matter of equity, and the emergence of perspectives which didn't split easily across conventional spectrums of political belief.<sup>8</sup> Early disagreements among climate change activists included those between advocates of carbon markets and pricing emissions versus anti-capitalists; those with differing views about how climate change mitigation and global economic development can be reconciled; and those with different approaches to branding and messaging. Hadden acknowledges strategic cooperation between collaborating organizations, including for the purpose of maintaining publicly distinguished brands.<sup>9</sup> Hadden also argues that scholars have paid insufficient attention to how social movements choose tactics.<sup>10</sup> All this informs the research design for this project, including in terms of anticipating what lines of questioning may be usefully employed with anti-KXL and anti-NGP activists. While I don't intend to employ as many distinct methods, content analysis, qualitative interviewing, and participant observation will be employed in these cases to identify individuals and organizations involved in the two movements, as well as details on the nature of their decision-making and collaboration. Examining these two cases may also help to map out major strategic and ideological disagreements between powerful members of anti-pipeline coalitions, and the way in which various ideologies are shifting as they gradually incorporate the significance of climate change science and the tangible effect of global warming on people and nature.

In *Putting Social Movements in their Place*, Doug McAdam and Hilary Schaffer Boudet concentrate on the impact of social movements on policy outcomes, in the context of opposition to energy projects in the U.S. between 2000 and 2005. [TK — summary] [TK — relevance to this project]

This project also has relevant linkages to a number of other contemporary literatures within political science, including indigenous politics, and judicial politics. It also connects to key normative questions about what duties are borne by owners of fossil fuel resources and what legitimate demands can be made of them by people affected by climate change, as well as what kinds of strategies and tactics are acceptable and appropriate for those pursuing large-scale social, political, and economic change. Notably, this includes a diversity of views on what constitutes 'violence', and whether it is ever pragmatically desirable and ethically justifiable. In addition to academic literatures, this project is informed by a broad

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<sup>8</sup>Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*, p. 26–8.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. TK.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 4–5.

popular literature on climate change and environmental activism (with prominent figures like Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, and George Monbiot), the connections between capitalism and climate change, and means for pursuing rapid and enduring political change. In part because of the degree to which popular authors influence actors within the movement, their arguments and responses to them are worth considering, even in a project largely intended for an academic audience.

Finally, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) literature initiated by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith seeks to explain and understand many phenomena relevant to this project, including how common forms of analysis and policy ideas form the basis of alliances between political organizations. The theory also offers a perspective on long-term learning which might be evaluated in the context of climate change activist groups, the political decision-makers they seek to influence, and *status quo* actors who resist new emission controls.<sup>11</sup> In response to both top-down and bottom-up pressure, decision makers in climate and energy policy may experience learning and employ strategic adaptation to pursue long-term objectives, though the objectives of decision makers are also driven in part by public pressure, public discourse, and ideology. Climate change may just constitute the kind of “significant perturbation... external to the subsystem” which can shift coalitions and policy-making outcomes.<sup>1213</sup>

One way of interpreting the broadening impact of ecological and environmental thinking and information on political thinking and ideologies more generally is to consider the extent and manner in which growing concern about planetary boundaries has impacted the core beliefs of people who hadn't previously taken the environment seriously as a political matter. All comprehensive theories of politics and the economy must now engage somehow with the critique that the political and economic possibilities open to us are bounded by the biological and physical properties of the planet, and that the Earth can only absorb further greenhouse gas emissions while experiencing associated increases in disruption of human and biological systems. At the same time, the core beliefs of environmentalists are also changing. Critically, this includes their pedagogical theory about how changes in individual human thinking and the behaviour of groups can be achieved (theories of change). More generally, interaction with other members of the anti-pipeline and climate change activist movements seems likely to shift the beliefs of committed environmentalists in complex ways, which overlap with other practical and ideological discussions, such as between environmentalists and theorists

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<sup>11</sup>See: Sabatier1988

<sup>12</sup>John, *Analyzing Public Policy: Second edition*, p. 82.

<sup>13</sup>Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, *Policy Change and Learning*, p. 34.

of economic development. It is important to consider what sorts of learning are taking place among all actors involved in the anti-pipeline fight, and how that may interact over the long term with other political trends and increasing stress on human economic, social, and governance systems arising from climate change itself.

There are limits to interpreting the debate about climate change and pipelines from the perspective of competing advocacy coalitions, each with reasonable coherent ideas and policy preferences which change only slowly across time. In part because of the many ways in which climate politics are contentious, they may also be volatile and fast-changing. Spontaneous-seeming uprisings like the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter show how fast-changing events and ideas are directly influencing the formation, functioning, and evolution of climate activist and anti-pipeline movements. With so much happening at once — and in such a state of active contention — a study of the anti-pipeline movement might help update insights on social movements and policy change rooted in advocacy coalition models with challenges from the contentious politics literature.

### 3 Hypotheses

While some theorists and journalistic accounts have portrayed transnational social movements opposed to the development of fossil fuel infrastructure as reasonably cohesive and unified — such as Naomi Klein’s concept of “Blockadia” or the “Keep It In the Ground” movement espoused by *The Guardian* newspaper — real anti-pipeline movements in North America may be less cohesive than imagined. Due to a lack of consensus about tactics and strategies — as well as disagreement about whether and how to appropriately align with other social movements — the anti-pipeline and climate change activist movements are in a state of liminality where boundaries and roles are unclear and where tensions are present and unresolved. This situation furnishes a major justification for studying responses to the Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines now, when some prospect of each being constructed still exists. It also informs the kind of questions it will be worthwhile to raise with interview subjects, including in terms of forms of ideological disagreement which have arisen in organizations where they are involved and the consequences such disagreements have had internally and between groups. This liminal situation also enhances the value of paying special attention to the roles of faith and indigenous communities within this movement, since their differing backgrounds and objectives may be the cause of such tensions and ambiguities. At the same time, considering the problem of climate change from their perspectives

may provide useful contrast to the problem as understood by environmental activists. A further example of an important but turbulent interface is between environmentalist groups and expertise-based organizations like the Pembina Institute or the former National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE). These expertise-based groups frequently pursue a somewhat ambiguous approach to policy advocacy, seeking to distinguish themselves as both more neutral and intellectually rigorous than traditional environmentalist organizations like Greenpeace. Further complications are added when we consider divergent perspectives on capitalism and intersectionality between social issues, as understood by various actors being studied here, whether those actors are conceptualized as policy advocacy coalitions, policy entrepreneurs, participants in contentious social movements, or otherwise.

One promising area of research are the contentiousness and effectiveness of a variety of social movement tactics, ranging from petitions to civil disobedience of different sorts of direct action. When undertaken by climate change activist and anti-pipeline groups, non-violent acts of civil disobedience are often carried out with great deliberation, using volunteers who have undergone training and been provided with a legal support team, and having agreed to carefully worded action agreements (see Figures 1 and 2 below). In an assertion of the importance of sustaining non-violence in a movement which seeks to be inclusive, Lisa Fithian exhorted the Occupy Movement to consider:

“Lack of agreements [to be non-violent] privileges the young over the old, the loud voices over the soft, the fast over the slow, the able-bodied over those with disabilities, the citizen over the immigrant, white folks over people of color, those who can do damage and flee the scene over those who are left to face the consequences.”<sup>14</sup>

There are also those — like Micah White — who argue that conventional protest strategies have become easily negated by *status quo* actors, including in the case of the the 400,000 person People’s Climate March in New York City on September 21, 2014.<sup>15</sup> A variety of forms of mass mobilization bear consideration, ranging from single-day takeovers of places like the constituency offices of politicians or the offices of university administrators to permanent encampments which extended for months, as in the case of some Occupy Movement sites and anti-pipeline blockades. Short actions which garner media attention could conceivably influence the perceptions of public opinion among decision-makers, or alter policy outcomes

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<sup>14</sup>Cite in Chris Hedges — <https://www.sindark.com/2015/08/27/hedges-and-fithian-on-non-violence/>

<sup>15</sup>TK — Cite White



through other mechanisms. This is particularly true if they are supported by an online presence that is both timely (engaging those who learn of it) and enduring (in terms of social media and other online materials which remain accessible long after the action is complete, such as <http://climatewelcome.ca>).<sup>16</sup> Not all activists with principally environmental or climate-change objectives comprehensively reject strategies which include obstruction of the operation of facilities like pipelines, and potentially even deliberate acts of property damage. There is also an interesting range of justifications provided for various pragmatic and ethical stances on the use of violence, as variously defined, ranging from ‘deep green’ ethics rooted in an imperative to protect the rest of nature from humanity to humanist and theological interpretations. In particular, there is an interesting sub-genre of ethical arguments among people who all agree that violence is an unacceptable means to pursue political ends, but disagree on the precise reason for the prohibition. There are also theoretically intriguing arguments about the necessary features of civil disobedience as opposed to direct actions of other types.<sup>17</sup>

Studying tensions between climate change activists and animal rights activists, all of whom might accept the label ‘environmentalist’, may also provide some basis for better understanding alliances and disagreements within the climate activist and indigenous rights movements. Notably, environmentalists with an animal rights focus have often taken strong positions opposing the killing of marine mammals including seals, whales, and polar bears. These campaigns have sometimes provoked critical responses from indigenous communities where these are both traditional cultural practices and sources of present revenue. Recent developments like Greenpeace’s 2014 apology to the Inuit for impacts of seal campaign have show learning and organizational re-alignment in action, as criticisms based in cultural value and indigenous rights are internalized by environmentalist organizations.<sup>18</sup> Notably, following this apology, members of the Clyde River community approached Greenpeace to support a campaign opposing seismic blasting for hydrocarbon development.

The anthropological distinction between “front-stage” and “back-stage” behaviour by activist groups can be used to consider the intersection between the internal governance of these groups and their public strategies for influencing political outcomes.<sup>19,20</sup> While “front-

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<sup>16</sup>WayBack Machine backup: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160306011202/http://climatewelcome.ca/>

<sup>17</sup>These were expressed in an interesting theological fashion by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. <https://www.sindark.com/NonBlog/MLK-But-If-Not.mp3>

<sup>18</sup>See: <http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/blog/Blogentry/greenpeace-to-canadas-aboriginal-peoples-word-blog/53339/>

<sup>19</sup>Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, p. 257.

<sup>20</sup>Berreman, *Behind Many Masks*.

stage” behaviour is a kind of performance intended to influence decision makers, the media, and the general public, organizing and carrying out this performance affects the internal perceptions of groups about their own history and worldview, while also impacting organizational learning. Volunteer-driven groups are also much more permeable than actors like corporations and governments, since members can freely associate with other organizations, make statements to the media on their own initiative, and raise matters of decision making and governance in public. There are also few mechanisms through which volunteer activists can be sanctioned for behaviour that group leaders or fellow volunteers object to. Front- / back-stage considerations also arise in the context of climate activism in the form of debates about the relative importance of changing personal behaviour versus trying to drive structural change, and in the form of allegations of hypocrisy against activists used in attempts to discredit them. More generally, considering protest as performance may be helpful for evaluating and criticizing theories of change that prioritize changes in public consciousness as mechanisms for changing political outcomes.

[TK — Transfer from long draft and expand — Hypotheses re: climate activism and capitalism; climate activism and indigenous politics; climate activism and faith communities; and the role of skilled supporters of activist movements who aren’t particularly committed to any cause (media support, legal support, training, etc)]

## 4 Key texts

### 4.1 Social movements

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## 4.2 Contentious politics

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### 4.3 Advocacy Coalition Framework

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### 4.4 Methodology

Interview methods:

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## 6 Figures

Figure 1: Action agreement for the “Climate Welcome” in Ottawa — November 6, 2015

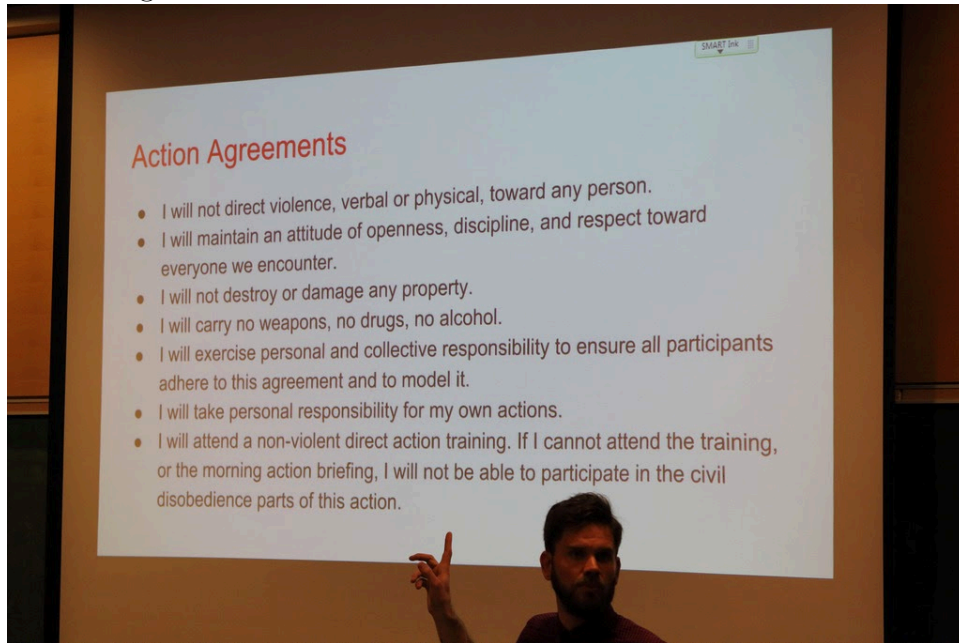


Figure 2: Action agreement for the “Climate Welcome” in Ottawa — TK date

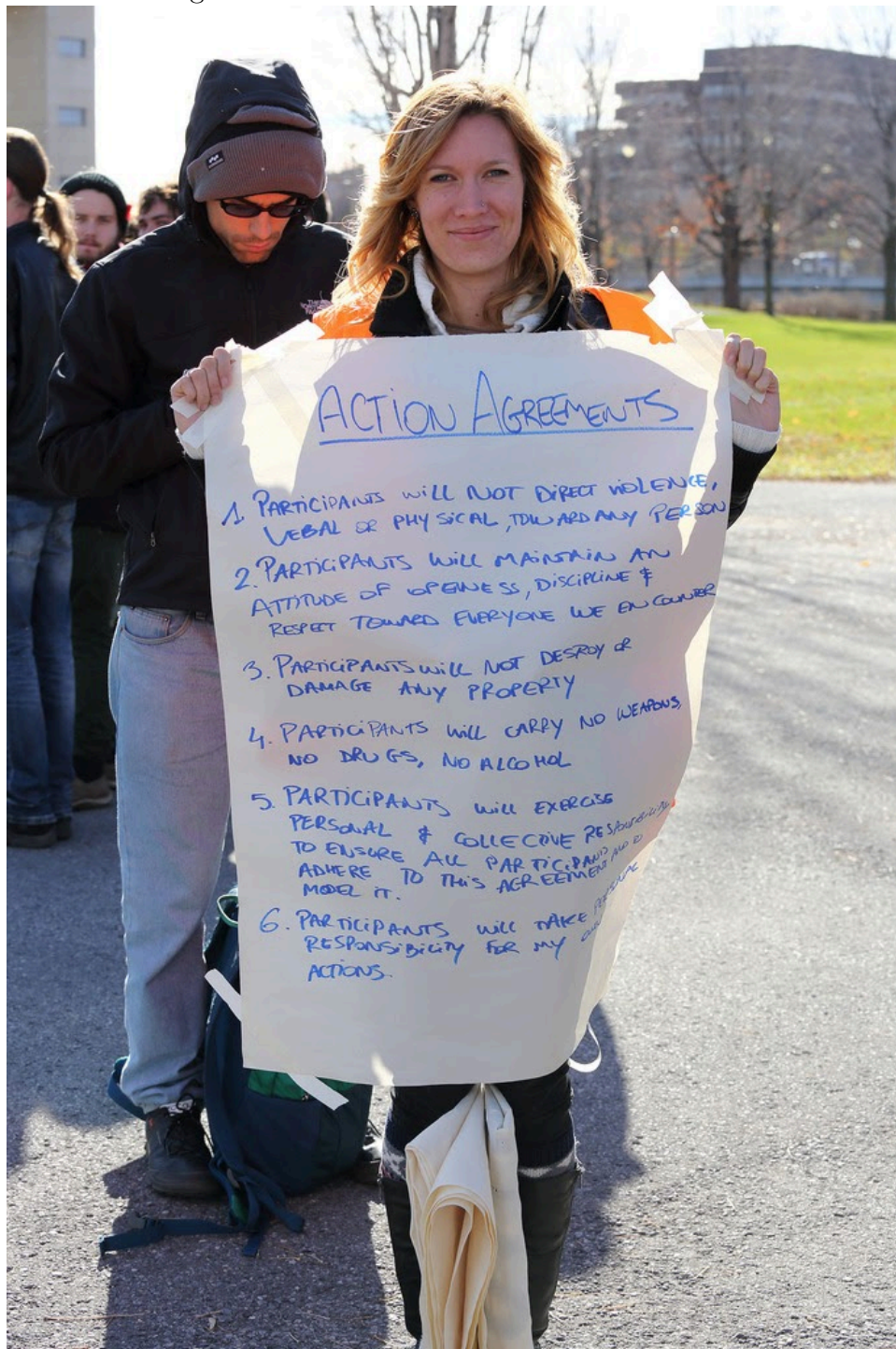


Figure 3: Activists risking arrest in Ottawa — November 6, 2015



Figure 4: Activists escalate while risking arrest in Ottawa — November 7, 2015

