

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

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1 Context

Since they were proposed in 2008 and 2006 respectively, the proposed 830,000 barrel per day (bdp) TransCanada Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline from Hardisty, Alberta (200 km south-east of Calgary) to Nederland, Texas (130 km East of Houston) on the Gulf of Mexico and the proposed 525,000 bpd Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline (NGP) from Bruderheim, Alberta (50 km northeast of Edmonton) to Kitimat, British Columbia (700 km northwest of Vancouver) have both provoked substantial resistance campaigns comprising environmentalist groups, faith communities, indigenous peoples, and others.¹ 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.² 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 in the last few years, 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. Also, the apparently rising willingness of governments to adopt policies to constrain greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution may be adding

¹Capacity figures from: Hoberg, "The battle over oil sands access to tidewater: a political risk analysis of pipeline alternatives", p. 377.

²As Hoberg notes, regarding KXL: "The salience of place-based, concentrated environmental risks to the Ogallala aquifer created strong opposition that produced a significant delay in the approval process." *ibid.*, p. 378, 387.

urgency to corporate efforts to build new fossil fuel infrastructure. From the perspective of activists, 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.³

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 disagreements both within organizations of one type (say, the policy preferences of different environmental non-governmental organizations (eNGOs)), 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 conducting a network analysis of groups that have worked to oppose these two pipelines, this PhD project will contribute to the scholarly literature on social movements as potential agents of political change as well as 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 campaigns 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 in Canada and the U.S., identify 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, including in terms of what Hoberg calls “the emerging power relations at the intersection of energy and the environment in North America”.⁴

2 Research questions

1. Which individuals and groups have been involved in resisting the Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines?

³The proposed Dakota Access Pipeline would run from Stanley, North Dakota to Patoka, Illinois — roughly parallel to the unbuilt northern segment of KXL, offset about 100 km to the east. 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*.

⁴Hoberg, “The battle over oil sands access to tidewater: a political risk analysis of pipeline alternatives”, p. 388.

2. Which of these organizations have collaborated and how?
3. What tactics and strategies have been employed?
4. What justifications do people use for their actions? How do they envision these actions leading to the changes they desire?
5. How do these groups interpret the problem of climate change, and how do they see it relating to other public policy questions?
6. What kind of organizational learning and changes in core beliefs are taking place? What is driving these processes?⁵

These questions are essentially evaluating the anti-KXL and anti-NGP movements on three levels: in terms of the human geography and network between groups involved; their thinking on strategies and tactics; and the evolution and mutual interaction between core beliefs.

3 Epistemology

“When it rains, those who predicted otherwise are proved wrong and those who refuse to believe it is raining get as wet as anyone else.”⁶

How might testable hypotheses be developed or investigated for questions of this kind? More broadly, what ought we to consider as evidence for supporting or rejecting any hypothesis or theoretical framework? In my judgment, the intellectual foundation of political science is in the study of history. As a consequence, scholarly effort must be devoted to the collection of credible primary source accounts of historically important events and intellectual developments. The network analysis methodology and interview-focused methods of this project are meant to collect historically relevant raw interview recordings and transcripts and then to interpret them in light of relevant scholarly literatures and philosophical discussions.

⁵The thinking behind these questions is inspired in part from the research question in Hadden’s *Networks in Contention*: “I detail how civil society organizations have mobilized historically on climate change, how their strategies have changed over time, and how the interaction between actors in this arena has shaped their decisions”. Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*, p. 4.

⁶Hollis and Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*.

4 Theoretical framework

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.^{7 8} At the same time, the characterization of policy subsystems under the ACF includes assumptions which do not hold in the anti-KXL and anti-NGP movements, and the explanation of change in the ACF largely excludes the possibility that social movements can change policy outcomes. These anti-pipeline 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.⁹ 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 inappropriate for a low-carbon future.¹⁰¹¹ 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. Litfin also notes that “the ACF is more a theory of continuity than a theory of change”, with policy change over time seen as “a function

⁷See, for instance: Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”.

⁸Online, there are specific examples of activists attempting to distribute written materials, including academic materials, which they identified as potentially useful for other organizers, such as 350.org — Resources for Organisers and Joshua Kahn Russell — Resources for organizers.

⁹Litfin identifies Canadian eNGOs operating across a “domestic-foreign frontier”, coordinating with transnational NGOs and seeking to influence the general public both domestically and internationally. She also identifies climate change policy as an issue area where “boundaries between political levels are blurred” and where local and provincial actors see themselves as “players in a global game”. Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 246, 250.

¹⁰See: Swart and Weaver, “The Alberta oil sands and climate”.

¹¹Droitsch, *The link between Keystone XL and Canadian oilsands production*.

of events outside the subsystem”.¹² As such, while the elements of theoretical analysis emphasized by the ACF are relevant in the anti-KXL and NGP cases, the causal power of the social movements to induce policy change may be better understood in the context of other elements of the social movements literature.

The ACF might 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.¹³ Some of these characteristics also seem to be shared by major social movements not principally concerned with pipelines or climate change, including the Occupy movement and Idle No More.¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶ The efforts these movements have made to be political effective — but also accessible, democratic, and par-

¹²Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 238.

¹³See: Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, p. 29.

¹⁴See, for instance: Saul, *The Comeback*.

¹⁵White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution*.

¹⁶Coates, *#IdleNoMore: And the Remaking of Canada*.

ticipatory — are of interest for understanding their central political ideas and assumptions, and for understanding their impact on on Canada–U.S. environmental politics generally.

5 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, Lee Staples, Frances Piven, and Richard Cloward.¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹²⁰ This literature has subsequently been developed within political science by scholars including TK SCHOLARS. [TK — SUMMARIZE AND TRANSFER OVER MATERIAL FROM THE LONG PROPOSAL]

Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to the modern environmentalist movement, and the changes arising from growing alarm about climate change within both elites and mass populations. It seems remarkable — for example — that in a social and political context where environmental threats are taken increasingly seriously, Peter Dauvergne’s latest book on the environmental movement opens with a chapter on whether environmentalism is failing.²¹ This potential failure is twofold: a failure to develop the core ideas and theories of change necessary to overcome opposition to environmentalist policy preferences, and a failure to change policy and behaviour quickly enough to keep environmental problems ranging from fisheries depletion to deforestation to climate change from worsening. Indeed, Dauvergne’s central argument is that in spite of the willingness of a minority to use tactics as provocative as arson, as a whole environmentalists have been subverted to accept the assumptions of capitalist business-as-usual as unalterable.²² [TK — Other examples from the long proposal]

[TK — Summary of academic literature specifically about KXL and NGP]

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.

¹⁷Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*.

¹⁸Piven and Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*.

¹⁹Staples, *Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing, 2nd Edition*.

²⁰Piven, *Challenging Authority: How Ordinary People Change America*.

²¹Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich*, p. 1–15.

²²Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich*, p. 9.

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”.²³ 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”.²⁴ Here “contention” 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.²⁵ 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 emphasizes the lead-up to the 2009 Copenhagen UN-FCCC conference as an important point for strategic decision making for climate activists: “either they could continue to work on an inside track, using primarily conventional tactics and a science-based framing, or they could move to the outside, radicalize their approach, and adopt a justice-based framing”.²⁶ Hadden acknowledges strategic cooperation between collaborating organizations, including for the purpose of maintaining publicly distinguished brands.²⁷ Hadden also argues that scholars have paid insufficient attention to how social

²³Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*, p. 11.

²⁴Ibid., p. TK.

²⁵Ibid., p. 26–8.

²⁶Ibid., p. 3.

²⁷Ibid., p. TK.

movements choose tactics.²⁸ 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 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. As Litfin explains, the ACF seeks to "add more theoretical rigor to the policy literature by devising testable propositions regarding policy change and

²⁸Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*, p. 4–5.

continuity” and get beyond the linear “stages model” of policy making, where decisions are seen as the result of a logical sequence of steps.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹³²

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 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

²⁹Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 238.

³⁰See: Sabatier1988

³¹John, *Analyzing Public Policy: Second edition*, p. 82.

³²Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, *Policy Change and Learning*, p. 34.

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. These movements also share some important empirical claims, including that democratic systems of government have been subverted by rich elites.³³ 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.

[TK - See also: John2012, p. 85 re: Hofferbert’s funnel of causality]

6 Case selection

This research study centres around a network mapping methodology. The two networks being studied are those that have worked to oppose the KXL and NGP pipelines. Within the population of people who engaged in at least some active opposition or resistance to either pipeline, I intent to expend more effort to contact and interview people from indigenous and faith communities. The cases here are chosen to illustrate critical areas of contemporary contention or instability in Canadian and U.S. climate change activism. These include shifting coalitions, institutional barriers to pipeline construction as modeled by Hoberg, and possibly gradual but important shifts in the key motivations and theories of change of social movements of various types.

Aside from being proposed and resisted during much of the same time period, there are a variety of factors that make the Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines promising as comparative cases. They involve different numbers and types of jurisdictions and veto points, as emphasized in Hoberg’s rationalist and institutionalist analysis.³⁴ Hoberg notes:

“[T]here are strong interactions among the fates of each project. It’s no accident the Harper government turned up the pressure on Northern Gateway pipeline critics just after the Obama decision to put off approval of Keystone XL.”³⁵

³³This threat to liberal democracy is discussed in detail in: Welsh, *The Return of History: Conflict, Migration, and Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century*.

³⁴For example, Hoberg highlights “disjuncture in the distribution of the environmental risks and the economic benefits” as an important explanatory factor. Hoberg, “The battle over oil sands access to tidewater: a political risk analysis of pipeline alternatives”, p. 385.

³⁵Ibid., p. 388.

The KXL and NGP cases also embody the “strong structural factors” which Karen Litfin identifies as constraining Canadian environmental policy: federalism and the close economic ties between the two countries.³⁶ In the KXL case, strong emphasis was placed on the decision-making and support base of the Obama administration, while these factors were absent for NGP. Along with other proposed export pipelines, KXL and NGP have helped turn climate change politics grounded and specific instead of nebulous. Hoberg provides another justification for KXL and NGP as comparative cases, since private landowners are a more important factor in the U.S. than in Canada. From the perspective of judicial politics, the two projects would involve different jurisdictions and the route of NGP through British Columbia raises particular issues related to indigenous rights in unceded territory.³⁷ While tanker traffic from exports has been identified as a substantial cause of opposition in the case of NGP, such criticism has not been prominent in the case of KXL, though some have used the argument that it will support exports rather than domestic U.S. energy needs as an argument against it. The two cases also involve both overlap and separation when it comes to individuals and groups involved in resistance: few grassroots activists are likely to have been directly involved in resisting both pipelines, national and international indigenous rights, aboriginal, and faith groups have resisted both. Also, the projects are connected insofar as infrastructure resistance is being used as climate policy-making by other means, as activists attempt to prevent the development of any transport infrastructure as an indirect way of constraining further bitumen sands development. This link has been internalized as a risk by the fossil fuel industry. America’s Natural Gas Alliance President and CEO Marty Durbin has publicly discussed the threat arising from the “Keystonization” of all new fossil fuel infrastructure.³⁸

One reason to make a special effort to study the network of faith organizations that have opposed the NGP and KXL pipelines is because of the rising prominence of climate change as an area of social justice activism undertaken by faith organizations. It is interesting to see people who see climate change activism as compatible with or compelled by theological motivations like wanting to protect the vulnerable or confront the unjust. There is also a somewhat surprising combination present in people who act on the basis of a deep religious affiliation and who also have enough confidence in climate science to make action on climate

³⁶Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 243.

³⁷Another key question for the Trudeau government at the intersection between energy, climate, and indigenous policy is whether and how it will implement the principle of free, prior, and informed consent from the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

³⁸Gardner, *Natural Gas Boom Prompts Questions in Congress on the Industry’s Future*.

change seem like a moral necessity to them.

There are also strong reasons for making a particular effort to identify and interview members of indigenous communities who have taken part in resisting KXL and NGP. The constitutionally-protected rights of indigenous peoples in Canada and the U.S. has been identified by many people as a promising legal mechanism through which to constrain the development of bitumen sands export pipelines including KXL and NGP. At the same time, there is considerable evidence of a major social movement centred in the Canadian and U.S. indigenous rights, decolonization and Idle No More movements which also includes concern about environmental protection, the rights of future generations, and the need to avoid dangerous climate change. The complex history of tensions between environmentalists and indigenous people remains visible in conflicts about energy infrastructure development, including bitumen sands pipelines and major hydroelectric projects. This complex history is rooted in part in judicial politics, and particularly the application of the duty to consult.³⁹ These tensions are also ideological — such as between concern for the welfare of non-human animals manifest in environmentalist opposition to whaling and seal hunting with arguments about the cultural and financial importance of such industries to indigenous communities. Despite these historical disagreements and ongoing tensions, a significant social movement or collection of mutually-influencing social movements are affecting the environmental politics of climate change in Canada and the U.S. Just as simultaneous promises from the Trudeau government to initiate sincere reconciliation with Canada’s indigenous peoples and build new bitumen sands pipelines have prompted an identity crisis within even Canada’s more progressive post-Harper government — environmentalists and members of indigenous communities are negotiating and constructing a new relationship with climate change politics as a core part of the motivation and shared ethical drive.

7 Hypotheses

H1: Climate change activism is connected ideologically and strategically with other movements. While efforts to unify efforts for greater political success have been frequent, profound disagreements about ideal outcomes continue to divide organizations advocating strong climate change mitigation action.

While some theorists and journalistic accounts have portrayed transnational social movements opposed to the development of fossil fuel infrastructure as reasonably cohesive and

³⁹See: Newman, *The Duty to Consult: New Relationships with Aboriginal Peoples*.

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. In contrast to the “enduring” core beliefs in environmental and industry coalitions identified by Litfin as compatible with the ACF in 2000, the core beliefs of today’s climate change activist movement are contested and in flux, driven primarily by efforts at alliance-building and the pressure that produces to reconcile central empirical and normative perspectives of various participants.⁴⁰ Whereas Litfin identifies “the highly conflictual nature of the climate change issue” as a reason why it isn’t surprising that coalitions aren’t changing core beliefs, in today’s context it is precisely conflict about how to characterize and respond to climate

⁴⁰Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 249.

change that is driving core belief change among anti-pipeline advocates.⁴¹

H2: The strategies and tactics which have been endorsed by many climate change activist organizations for use against fossil fuel infrastructure like bitumen sands pipelines or coal mines may also hinder the development of low-carbon energy projects

A further strategic question arising from the Blockadia approached is raised by Goerge Hoberg. While making the fight against climate change local has been effective at preventing or postponing fossil fuel infrastructure projects, isn't there a risk that the same tactics will be used to prevent infrastructure development that's necessary for a low-carbon future, including renewable generation and transmission lines? This opposition is likely to be most acute in the case of nuclear energy infrastructure, in part because of the major historical role opposition to nuclear energy has played in the environmentalist movement. Other forms of energy have also faced environmentalist opposition, however, including wind and solar projects, big dams, and run-of-river hydro. Some environmentalists also question the need for or appropriateness of large-scale centralized energy systems themselves, advocating instead for a decentralized approach. The magnitude of this risk might be usefully evaluated by interviewing anti-KXL and anti-NGP activists about their views on low-carbon infrastructure.

H3: Disagreements about appropriate tactics and forms of training are a notable feature of the climate change activist movement. People emphasize different values when justifying their preferred tactics.

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

⁴¹Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 249.

who can do damage and flee the scene over those who are left to face the consequences.”⁴²⁴³

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, 2014.⁴⁴ 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 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 climatewelcome.ca).⁴⁵

H4: Not all climate change activists reject some conception of “violence” as a potentially legitimate way to attempt to drive political change. Both (a) perspectives on the ethical acceptability of violence, and (b) perspectives on which factors make violence or non-violence politically or ethnically justified will vary between individuals and organizations.

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. For instance, October 2016 saw a significant escalation in which climate change activists briefly shut down five Canada–U.S. oil pipelines in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux and their resistance of the Dakota Access Pipeline.⁴⁶⁴⁷ Notably, Ian Anderson, president of Kinder Morgan Canada, was quoted by the CBC saying: “[oil companies] share trends that we’re seeing, we share social media intel that we may be picking up and [it] informs us quite well about what actions there may be”.⁴⁸ This is of both analytical and methodological interest, since it shows both the evol-

⁴²Hedges, *Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt*, p. 98.

⁴³Fithian, *Open Letter to the Occupy Movement: Why We Need Agreements*.

⁴⁴TK — Cite White

⁴⁵WayBack Machine backup

⁴⁶Lewis and Cryderman, *Climate activists force five major pipelines to shut down*.

⁴⁷Hampton and Lou, *Activists hobbled pipeline system with bolt cutters and a plan, and it was easier than you think*.

⁴⁸Bakx, *Pipeline companies review security after ‘reckless’ protest*.

ing context of strategy selection by activists and industry response and illustrates corporate surveillance and open source intelligence gathering as preemptive techniques for countering activism (which has implications for research design and the protection of research subjects).⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

H5: “Environmentalism” as a broad theoretical construct is increasingly contested by those asserting the normative importance of factors often disregarded by the classical environmental movement (which has had a strong animal rights emphasis). Climate change activists likely differ in their perspectives on the applicability of anthropocentric versus biocentric ethics.

The perspectives and strategies of environmentalism are themselves contested between those with differing values. For example, 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.⁵¹ Notably, following this apology, members of the Clyde River community approached Greenpeace to support a campaign opposing seismic blasting for hydrocarbon development.

⁴⁹In her 2016 Massey lectures, Jennifer Welsh claims that the Russian petrochemical company Gazprom has been given “the unusual right to recruit and operate its own military forces to protect its overseas pipelines”. Welsh, *The Return of History: Conflict, Migration, and Geopolitics in the Twenty-First Century*, p. 206.

⁵⁰These were expressed in an interesting theological fashion by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

⁵¹Kerr, *Greenpeace apology to Inuit for impacts of seal campaign*.

H6: Normative questions about climate change ethics inevitably overlap with questions raised by indigenous criticisms of the legitimacy of the Canadian and U.S. governments. Ideological disagreement and contestation on these questions affects alliance formation between both local-level volunteer-driven groups, but also professional eNGOs with staff and strategy-making done at a regional, national, or continental level.

Indigenous political thought on energy development and the environment is also given importance by the forcefulness of some indigenous critiques of Canada and the U.S. as settler colonial states. As Taiaiake Alfred argues:

“All land claims in Canada, including those at issue in the BC treaty process, arise from the mistaken premise that Canada owns the land it is situated on. In fact, where indigenous people have not surrendered ownership, legal title to “Crown” land does not exist — it is a fiction of Canadian (colonial) law. To assert the validity of Crown title to land that the indigenous population has not surrendered by treaty is to accept the racist assumptions of earlier centuries.”⁵²

In some sense, this criticism of the Canadian and U.S. states can only be bracketed: acknowledged as potentially valid and convincing, but flagged as impractical to implement given public opinion and the degree to which governmental institutions in both countries would have their authority negated by the acceptance of these claims. Nonetheless, it highlights the conceptual importance of indigenous claims in judicial politics, as well as in the slow reconceptualization of the nature of politics associated with the environmentalist critique of earlier political theory and the various critiques of environmentalism which have arisen in response.

H7: Theories of protest as performance may help to illustrate the governing dynamics of climate change activist groups. As organizations largely focused on influencing the thinking of both decision-makers and the population at large, climate change activist groups are hyper-aware of issues of messaging and media management. At the same time, the “front stage” performance of activist groups feeds back (whether deliberately or not) into the operations and core belief change of group members.

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

⁵²Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, p. 120.

these groups and their public strategies for influencing political outcomes.⁵³⁵⁴ While “front-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.

H8: Among the most important ideas used as the basis for media campaigns, representations of being “grassroots” have been notable in their use by both climate change mitigation proponents and opponents. Claims to come from among or to represent “ordinary” Canadians have been used to argue for both aggressive climate change mitigation and for further fossil fuel development.

Arguably, another instance of ‘performance’ undertaken as a strategy by environmental organizations are efforts at cultivating a ‘grassroots’ public image, or depicting themselves as concerned about the welfare of everyday citizens of Canada and the United States. This behaviour can be seen in climate-focused NGOs including 350.org, but it is also employed somewhat questionably by organizations like the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) which has used ads depicting specific employees with heartfelt notes and signatures signing off on the environmental virtues of the Canadian petroleum industry.⁵⁵ False grassroots organizations established by industry have also been discussed in academic work and the media.⁵⁶ Questions about using representations of the public in media releases and advertising connect with questions about governance processes for volunteer-driven groups and professionally-staffed non-governmental organizations. To what degree should group

⁵³Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, p. 257.

⁵⁴Bereman, *Behind Many Masks*.

⁵⁵For example, this CAPP / ConocoPhillips ad implying the restoration of land used in bitumen sands production and CAPP’s ‘Raise Your Hand Canada’ campaign.

⁵⁶TK — Cite Oreskes

policies and decisions be made by a vanguard of people (possibly paid staff) and to what extent should ordinary volunteers have influence on these matters? eNGOs make different choices on this question, and some have different systems at different levels of organization (local groups versus a central organization, for instance).

H9: At the international level, 350.org is better characterized as a vanguard organization than as a grassroots organization.

At least in terms of their central decision-making structures, some “grassroots” organizations might be better conceptualized as vanguard organizations which are seeking to develop doctrine and alliances, while largely leaving local organization and direct action to affiliates. The operation of such vanguard groups would be characterized by general initiatives and instructions being generated by a focused group of paid staff, and subsequently largely implemented by publicly-affiliated but operational independent local organizations. To some degree, this division of labour and decision-making authority can be seen not only with 350.org, but also the World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace.⁵⁷ Such groups may also be “vanguard” in the sense of setting broad strategic priorities for the North American and global climate change activist movements, attempting to arrange powerful alliances with other politically influential groups, and establish both core ideas and skills in a large global group of people trained in activism and focused on climate justice as an objective.

H10: Climate change activists disagree about how appealing capitalism as presently practiced in Canada and the U.S. presently is for the welfare of today’s population, future generations, and life on Earth in general. This affects their alliance-building and, gradually, their core beliefs.

There is a long-running theme in some environmentalist thought that any system of economic management which is predicated on the assumption that economic growth is always desirable (or even socially and politically necessary for societal stability) will eventually hit limits in terms of how much raw material the Earth can provide, as well as how much waste it can absorb. Drawing in part on this thinking, the environmental activist movement contains many anti-capitalists who object morally to capitalism for various reasons, and who often believe its abolition to be a necessary precursor to effective environmental action.⁵⁸ These views are orthogonal to those of liberal environmentalists who see capitalist institutions

⁵⁷Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich*, p. 8–9.

⁵⁸The entanglement of economic and environmental policies is partly manifested in the degree to which each is embedded in and supported by institutions, including international trade agreements. See: Litfin, “Advocacy Coalitions Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Globalization and Canadian Climate Change Policy”, p. 247.

like stock markets as potentially environmentally benign and/or places to implement policy measures such as carbon pricing which could reduce GHG pollution. Some analyses about climate change and capitalism incorporate social and psychological features. For instance, Monbiot and others identify consumerism as a response to societal ills driven by modern capitalism. Consumerism is further identified as eroding the mental health of citizens.⁵⁹ Stark disagreements about the appropriate response to the current capitalist system are likely reducing the cohesiveness of the climate change activist movement, and complicating efforts to build alliances with other social movements and to express clear and coherent policy demands.

H11: Too much scholarly analysis of Canada–U.S. energy politics has assumed that fossil fuel development is necessarily desirable or in the interests of the jurisdictions that will profit from the operation of such infrastructure. If governments are to honour their climate change mitigation targets, such investments may prove stranded.

A forceful argument from those resisting fossil fuel infrastructure development concerns the possibility of norm change in the general population and among decision makers across time. Specifically, it's conceivable that the persistent presentation of fossil fuel infrastructure choices as zero sum trade-offs between economic prosperity and environmental protection. If people internalize the idea that future fossil fuel development will lead to investments in stranded assets, as fossil fuels become unburnable due to further environmental policy changes by governments, it becomes plausible to argue that new fossil fuel projects could damage both medium-term prosperity and our chances of avoiding dangerous climate change. A core argument of the fossil fuel divestment movement has been that large new investments in fossil fuel infrastructure face substantial regulatory risk which could undermine their long-term profitability, and even their ability to offer a return on the large up-front investment.

H12: Technocratic analysis of climate change economics and abstract philosophical consideration of the moral philosophy of climate change both hinge upon the moral relevance accorded to future generations of human beings.

Not all market liberals can be accused of missing the potential magnitude of harm from climate change, or of failing to propose remedies at a suitable scale. The 2006 Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, assembled for the U.K. government, and the 2008 Garnaut Climate Change Review, prepared for the Australian government, both project major adverse economic and societal consequences from unchecked climate change, and seek to

⁵⁹Monbiot, *Neoliberalism is creating loneliness. That's what's wrenching society apart.*

promote broad policies intended to stop atmospheric concentrations of GHGs from reaching dangerous levels. [TK — Stern details: target concentrations, estimated cost of unchecked climate change, policy prescriptions] [TK — Garnaut details: target concentrations, estimated cost of unchecked climate change, policy prescriptions] Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the Stern Review is the estimate [TK — citation, and verify] that atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ could be kept below 450ppm at the cost of only 2% of global GDP. If true, this highlights the characteristics of climate change as a moral problem akin to a “perfect storm”, in that cognitive and institutional barriers have prevented action which could have been sufficient to avert the worst impacts and achieved at modest cost. [TK — cite Gardiner] Stern and Garnaut might be fairly categorized as technocrats who presented a vision for a transition away from fossil fuels based on essentially market liberal environmentalist values and assumptions. At the same time, the work of climate economists connects quite directly to intergenerational ethics as considered by moral philosophers like Shue and Gardiner; the discount rates applied to the welfare of members of future generations are directly linked to questions of intergenerational ethics.⁶⁰⁶¹ Stern, in particular, emphasized how as policy change is delayed and the period available for a transition to post-carbon energy shortens, costs increase dramatically.⁶² In part, this accords with the climate activist argument about wasted investment in stranded assets, as costly fossil fuel projects which are built now must be decommissioned early to achieve future climate change mitigation targets.⁶³

H13: Some direct actions undertaken by activist groups are coordinated or supported by skilled people not tightly linked to one particular cause.

Particularly for direct actions and acts of civil disobedience, climate change activists make use of support provided by individuals and organizations that provide professional services to a range of activist causes. These services include direct action training, legal training and support (including jail support), police liaison, and media work. Support of this kind contributed to the effectiveness of the 2011 Keystone XL protests in Washington D.C. Organizations like the Ruckus Society exist to support specific tactics and provide training, as do organizations like Toronto’s Tools for Change and Volunteer Toronto. IT infrastructure support is also provided by specialist organizations, such as RiseUp.net. In many cases, individuals and organizations who are supporting climate change activism in

⁶⁰Pachauri et al., *Climate ethics: Essential readings*.

⁶¹Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: the Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*.

⁶²TK — Cite

⁶³TK — Cite

this way are also supporting contemporaries social movements like Occupy, Idle No More, and Black Lives Matter.

8 Summary

The Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipeline proposals are important not only in terms of the evolution of North American energy politics, but also because the resistance campaigns against them are comprised of a dynamic coalition of environmentalists, indigenous peoples, faith communities, and others. Through an interview-focused network analysis of these anti-pipeline coalitions, I hope to add to the literature on social movements and contentious politics. Within the anti-pipeline coalitions we can see many of the central cleavages in contemporary environmental politics, including perspectives on capitalism, disagreements about tactics and strategy, protest as performance, and responses to the corporate capture of the state.

These cases also permit study of deep change in the core ideas of various groups. For fifty years, all political theories without a sophisticated understanding of the biophysical limits of what the Earth can provide in raw materials and absorb in wastes have been engaged by an environmentalist critique and adapted in response (sometimes by reiterating their rejection of environmentalist claims). More recently, environmentalism has been criticized for failure to respect indigenous perspectives and traditions, and for perceived flaws in its theories of change. These ongoing anti-pipeline movements provide an opportunity to understand the perspectives of those involved and evaluate some of the conventional logic about the nature and prospects of environmental activism today.

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11 Figures

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

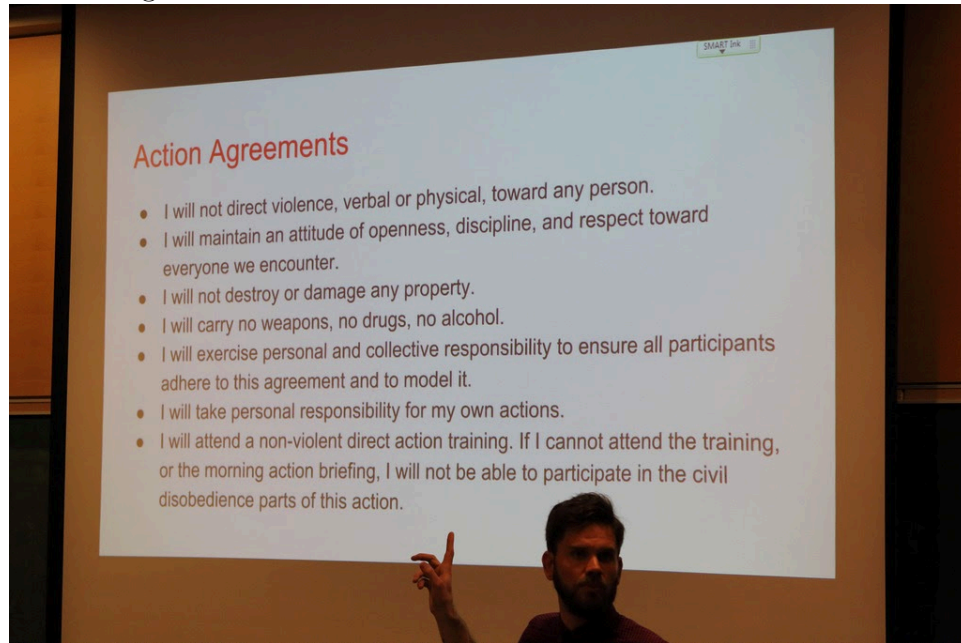


Figure 2: Action agreement for the “Climate Welcome” in Ottawa — TK date

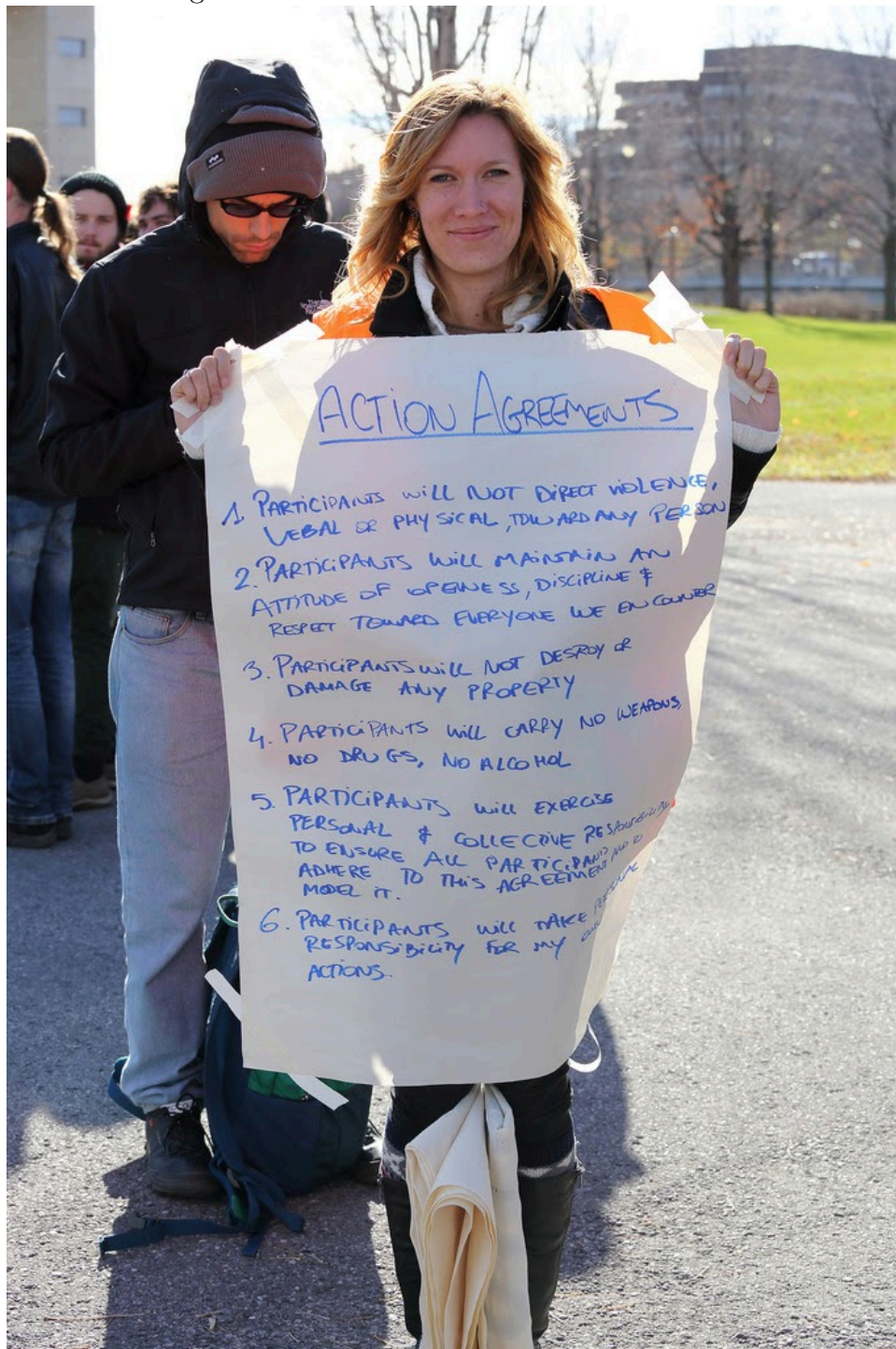


Figure 3: Activists risking arrest in Ottawa — November 6, 2015



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

