Campus Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaigns

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1. Incorporate "shareholder activism" as a counterargument / alternative to divestment

2. Scan old proposal drafts for relevant concepts, sources, and methods

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1 Summary

In 2012, the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that \$37 trillion would be invested in energy infrastructure between 2012 and 2035.[1] The IEA also estimates that sustaining current global oil use out to 2050 will require \$350 billion per year in exploration and investment.[2] Economic analyses of climate change policy by Nicholas Stern and Ross Garnaut emphasize the importance of long-term infrastructure development, highlighting how dependence on fossil fuels in areas including electricity generation, heating, transport, and agriculture could be either ameliorated or worsened by decisions made in the coming years and decades.[3,4] There is a close relationship between the speed with which governments begin substantially reducing their carbon pollution and the peak reduction rate which will eventually be necessary. In 2009, one group generated multiple emission reduction pathways which would each provide a 75% chance of limiting climate change to 2 ˚C. In a scenario where global emissions peaked in 2011, a peak rate of reduction of about 3.7% per year would be necessary around 2035 and emissions would need to fall to only around five billion tonnes (gigatonnes) of carbon dioxide (CO_2) by 2050. With a peak in 2015, 5.3% annual reductions would be needed in the 2030s and global CO_2 emissions would need to fall to zero by 2050. If the peak is delayed to 2020, 9.0% annual reductions would be needed by 2030 and global carbon neutrality by 2040. [TK — find citation for Copenhagen Diagnosis] [TK — Look up highest rates achieved so far, and how Kyoto Protocol targets translate into reduction rates]

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[1] International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook 2012 Factsheet*.
[2] McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*, p. 29.
[3] Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*.
[4] Garnaut, *The Garnaut Review 2011: Australia in the Global Response to Climate Change*.

Policy and investment decisions made in the next decade therefore have a dominant impact on the cost and plausibility of achieving ambitious climate change mitigation scenarios, and thus upon the prospects for human generations and nature for millennia ahead.

In part, the strategic thinking of climate change activist organizations like 350.org has been driven by this perspective. Since their establishment by Bill McKibben and a group of Middlebury College students in 2007, their major campaigns have been opposition to major fossil fuel infrastructure projects like pipelines originating in the bitumen sands and general efforts to withdraw and discourage investment in the fossil fuel industry (divestment). Efforts to convince institutions — primarily universities, municipalities, churches, and private foundations — have been initiated by 350.org's central structure but actually implemented much more by loosely-confederated and operationally independent local and on-campus chapters. McKibben has described the campus divestment movement as "the largest student movement in decades" and institutions with investments worth over \$5 trillion had divested by 2016.[5,6] One online compilation identifies 694 institutions which have committed to some type of fossil fuel divestment, including the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund, the World Council of Churches, and the British Medical Association.[7] Many colleges and universities in Canada, the United States (U.S.), and United Kingdom (U.K.) have been formally petitioned to divest from fossil fuels, and several hundred have made some sort of decision in response.

The experiences of groups that have attempted fossil fuel divestments campaigns are of

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[5] McKibben, *The Case for Fossil-Fuel Divestment*.

[6] Carrington, *Fossil fuel divestment funds double to \$5tn in a year*.

[7] gofossilfree.org, *Fossil Free — Commitments*.

scholarly concern in and of themselves, in terms of their effects on targeted institutions, public discourse, and on the activist participants. A wide range of experiences can be identified: from universities where climate activist groups formed but chose not to pursue divestment as a tactic to those that made efforts that failed to greater or lesser degrees, to those where an institutional commitment to divestment of one sort of another was achieved. Three main methodological tools hold the promise of supporting deeper understanding of these outcomes:

network analysis to investigate how ideas, tactics, and resources have been exchanged from group to group and the impact this has had on organizational learning and ideological development;

stakeholder analysis to evaluate the prospects for the emergence of a divestment campaign at any particular institution as well as that campaign's prospects for success; and

media analysis to evaluate the extent to which such campaigns seem to be achieving shifts in public consciousness — an important metric since the delegitimization of the fossil fuel industry from the perspective of the general public and decision-makers is one of the three most important goals of the whole divestment effort.

Two other main objectives — shifting investment by pressuring institutions through public demand and persuading them with arguments about risks to the fossil fuel industry's long-term profitability, and training large numbers of new student activists through practical involvement in campaigns — are also plausible targets for enhanced understanding

using these methods. In terms of documentary evidence, fossil fuel divestment is a promising research topic in part because campaigns have often involved highly formalized written decision-making processes, in which campaigns have put forward detailed written arguments, committees of various types have deliberated and published recommendations, and decisions made by universities have often included formal written justifications.[8,9,10,11,12] Formal presentations and speeches for which transcripts, audio, or video are available would play a similar role. In addition to providing important evidence about how various stakeholders interpret the situation and justify their actions, these documents reveal linkages between both activist campaigns and institutional decision-making processes at different schools.

There are likely many shared dynamics between campus divestment movements and those at churches, foundations, and other institutions.[13] There is also a legitimizing power which arises from success anywhere, making it harder for fossil fuel industry supporters and advocates of the *status quo* to portray divestment as a dangerous and unusual choice to university-level decision-makers. A key structural question is who within each university system is empowered to authorize or reject divestment. To a considerable degree, this question is determined by any prior divestment campaigns at that institution. Universities have commonly been pressed to divest from tobacco companies, firms seen as supporting apartheid in

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[8]The U of T process provides an example, with a formal petition from divestment proponents to the university (updated substantially at one point because the process had taken so long), formal recommendations from a committee appointed by the administration, a response from the campaign to that committee (emphasizing the need to address harm imposed on indigenous groups by the fossil fuel industry), and the university's final decision with detailed written justification: Toronto350.org, *The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment*.

[9]Toronto350.org, *The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment: Update.*

[10]Karney et al., *Report of the President's Advisory Committee on Divestment from Fossil Fuels.*

[11]Asher et al., *U of T Community Response to the Report of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Committee.*

[12]Gertler, *Beyond Divestment: Taking Decisive Action on Climate Change.*

[13]See: Roewe, *On Francis of Assisi feast day, Catholic groups divest from fossil fuels.*

South Africa, firms seen as complicit in the 2003 war in Darfur, and the arms industry. These prior campaigns have produced path dependency, entrenching authority with certain bodies and legitimizing certain decision-making processes. The questions of who decides, how clear their authority is, and what basis it has are each relevant to stakeholder analyses of divestment campaigns, as well as to case study selection. Other ongoing divestment campaigns are also relevant, for instance campaigns to encourage divestment from privately-run prisons or divestment in support of the broader Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel, in response to its conduct in the occupied territories. The BDS campaign is especially important because of its high profile and controversy, and because there is evidence that the precedent set for BDS by fossil fuel divestment has affected the thinking of university administrations.[14] BDS also raises the question among climate change activists of whether they ought to support movements which are employing similar tactics, whether they should make alliances only where it bolsters their own odds of success, or whether they should make alliances with other movements whose objectives, while not related to climate change, are seen as laudable by members of the climate campaign.[15] Varying views on all of these options have been a notable source of internal contention and disagreement within campus fossil fuel divestment groups.

From a positivist perspective, it is desirable to develop research questions based on a breakdown of "independent" and "dependent" variables, and undesirable or even method-

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[14]For background on the BDS campaign, see: Barghouti, *BDS: Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*.

[15]While some fossil fuel divestment campaigns have worked to link their efforts with calls for indigenous justice — such as through implementation of the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples UNDRIP — universities administrations have been much more reluctant to link the issues.

ologically unacceptable to select cases based on the dependent variable.[16] From this perspective, it would seem lacking to pick a certain number of successful fossil fuel divestment campaigns, a certain number of failed campaigns, and then seek to derive conclusions based on factors which seem to differ between them. This concern can be alleviated to some extent by including cases where climate activist groups have been formed on campus during the timeframe in which the climate divestment movement has emerged, but which have chosen not to employ divestment as a tactic. [TK - More justification of case selection in response to likely positivist criticism] From a more interpretivist position, the success or failure of various divestment campaigns may not even be their most interesting feature or the question most warranting an explanation. Much research on social movement begins with a more ethnographic conception of political truth and effective means for seeking it, with an emphasis on techniques like discourse analysis and participant observation. [TK - More interpretivist justification for the project]

2   Research questions

First, there is the question of why climate activist groups do or do not form within universities, and why some select divestment as a strategy. This relates to 350.org's analysis that divestment could be reasonably easily duplicated and carried out by independent self-governing affiliates. It also relates to the perspectives of university students on climate change and activism, the sorts of objectives that seem both worthwhile and achievable, and

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[16]King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research.*

programs of action capable of attracting a sufficiently diverse collection of people to be viable. Schools where climate activist groups (even 350-branded groups) have formed but not pursued divestment may help illustrate some important drivers.

In terms of the three most relevant sets of outcomes (whether campaigns form, what response universities choose, and what effect the campaign has on participants), the organizational structure of the campaign may be salient. For instance, groups may be more or less formal, with decision-making structures that favour individuals or a core group to a greater or lesser extent. Decision-making may be highly formalized and public, with governing documents and procedural rules, as well as elected office-holders within campaigns with defined authority and responsibility. Alternatively — and particularly in smaller campaigns — decision-making may be informal, driven by the perception of consensus, and rooted in personal relationships. Tensions between more and less formal approaches to decision-making have been a source of contention and conflict within climate activist groups and divestment campaigns.[17] The timing and form of faculty involvement is likely important as well, in terms of how groups choose to operate, what strategies and tactics they employ, and how universities respond to them. Ideally it would be desirable to find some cases where faculty were involved from the outset and played an entrepreneurial role as group and campaign initiators; others where faculty eventually became actively involved as volunteers; and others where faculty only provided a measure of public support, such as by signing petitions or open letters. It would be desirable to assess the degree to which forms of governance within organizations campaigning for divestment affect the outcomes of campaigns, both in

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[17]For an important analysis of formal versus informal decision-making systems, see: Freeman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*.

terms of institutional decisions and impacts on participants.

Second, there is the variable response from different institutions. Some have committed to complete divestment, though the precise means of selecting which financial assets to sell vary from place to place. For example, the University of Glasgow announced a "commit[ment] to fully disinvesting from fossil fuel industry companies" in 2014.[18] Others have committed to divest from a narrower set of assets. For example, Stanford University committed in 2014 to divest from coal only.[19] Still others have committed to take less clearly defined actions. In his "Beyond Divestment" announcement, U of T President Meric Gertler called on the university's asset managers to "[a]rticulate principles that will enable consideration of ESG factors in undertaking direct investments".[20] Finally, some institutions have essentially rejected divestment outright, as when McGill concluded in 2013 that: "Divest McGill had failed to demonstrate that social injury … had occurred due to the actions of a company involved in either oil sands or fossil fuels".[21,22] The specific questions posed to the U of T divestment campaign by the *ad hoc* committee assembled to consider the question illustrate some of the key concerns of university administrators: how invested are they in the fossil fuel industry and what alternatives exist; what message would divestment send; and what effect would it have on the school's research agenda?[23]

Campaigns themselves have disagreed about how to define "success" and what media strategy to pursue in response to the decisions of their schools' administrations. For instance,

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[18]University of Glasgow, *Glasgow becomes first UK university to ' from fossil fuel industry*.
[19]Stanford News, *Stanford to divest from coal companies*.
[20]Gertler, *Beyond Divestment: Taking Decisive Action on Climate Change*, p. 2.
[21]McGill University Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility, *Report of the Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility: Board of Governors meeting of May 23, 2013*.
[22]See also: McCarthy, *McGill University board rejects fossil-fuel divestment initiative*.
[23]Toronto350.org, *The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment: Update*, p. 158–62.

the case can be made that the University of Ottawa's 2016 decision to ask its "Finance and Treasury Committee to develop a strategy to shift uOttawa's fossil fuel-related investments towards investments in enterprises, especially in Canada, involved in creating and selling technologies of the future, including renewable energy and other clean technology solutions" bears a lot of similarity to U of T's commitment.[24] Yet, while the Ottawa decision was hailed by some as the first commitment from a Canadian university to divest, the U of T campaign strongly denounced the decision made by the university's president. These framing decisions have complex motivations, including theories about how media coverage of different types will affect the thinking of the public and decision-makers, and assessments of how much a campaign actually changed outcomes relative to a hypothetical case where no campaign took place. Since even the most optimistic assessment of divestment as a tactic does not see it as adequate to address the problem of climate change, there is no danger that even complete success would "overlap … [with] the disappearance of the movement as a movement".[25,26] Even if climate change mitigation becomes incorporated into the normal political processes within universities, that will only be a small part of the problem solved. Indeed, a major motivation for university divestment specifically is that universities are seen as thought leaders and their choices may affect the thinking of other institutional investors who ultimately control much more capital.

'Theory of change' is a core concept in the practice and study of activism.[27] Some see

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[24]University of Ottawa, *uOttawa's climate commitment helps create greener economy for Canada.*

[25]Scott, *Ideology and the new social movements*, p. 10.

[26]Sandberg, Wekerle, and Gilbert, *The Oak Ridges Moraine Battles: Development, Sprawl, and Nature Conservation in the Toronto Region*, p. 160–1.

[27]See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theory_of_change

greater utility in mass politics, while others see convincing or pressuring elites and decision-makers as key. Strategies to drive change include education, shaping public opinion, winning the support of already-influential actors, or other means.[28,29] Psychological theories about what drives people to change their behaviour, policy preferences, and behaviour toward elected representatives include a lot of variation. At least occasionally, activists produce self-conscious 'power analyses' through which they evaluate the circumstances in which they have found themselves so far, and the means through which they have sought to achieve their objectives.[30] The theory of change espoused by a group may be implicit or explicit, and improved understanding of it might be achieved both through direct questioning and the indirect analysis of statements. Inconsistent theories of change among those who advocate similar objectives are likely an important source of ongoing fissures and disagreements within the climate change activist movement, particularly in the areas of allyship and intersectionality.

A key concept in the fossil fuel divestment literature is the existence of a 'carbon bubble', brought on by the disjoint between the total fossil fuel reserves known to exist on Earth and the share that can be burned without breaching a 2 ˚C or 1.5 ˚C limit. This is the basis for one major economic argument in favour of divestment. If governments are eventually willing to regulate fossil fuel use adequately to avoid breaching these limits, most of the world's remaining fossil fuels will need to remain underground as "stranded assets".[31] As

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[28]In *The End of Nature*, Bill McKibben confesses his earlier naivety about the concept, summarizing his implicit notion as: "people would read my book — and then they would change". In a sense, the foundation of 350.org can be seen as McKibben's next attempt at a more promising mechanism.

[29]See also: Dovey, *Power switch: Bill McKibben's climate challenge*.

[30]For example: Meisel and Russell, *Case Study: Tar Sands Action*.

[31]McKibben, *Global Warming's Terrifying New Math*.

an extension, the stockmarket value of firms which own the reserves are over-inflated, and investors stand to lose as carbon regulation becomes tighter. A secondary argument holds that fossil fuel investments have underperformed stockmarkets as a whole, so institutional investors would be better off today if they had divested years ago. [TK — Cite relevant sources from U of T brief] A third financial case centres on the rapidly growing economic competitiveness of renewable forms of energy, with the implication that they will increasingly outcompete fossil fuels and harm the profitability and stockmarket returns of the industry.

Why have these arguments apparently been convincing for some institutions yet not for others? To what degree has divestment been chosen or rejected on the basis of empirical evidence and rational argument about climate change public policy and the financial prospects of fossil fuel corporations, as opposed to bureaucratic politics, stakeholder pressure, and other explanations? To what degree have decisions to reject divestment been motivated by genuine concern that it would harm future investment returns; by concern that it would harm relations with corporate donors; and by other political calculations, including about relationships between universities and governments?

The strategy of using the divestment campaign to train and motivate activists and focus their efforts on climate change should also be assessed, when judging the success or failure of campaigns. This may be reflected in enduring activity by groups initially formulated to pursue divestment, the emergence of new climate-focused groups, or the individual involvement of divestment activists in other forms of climate activism following their involvement with divestment. Changes wrought in the theories of change of divestment activists would be of particular interest, along with explanations for what about the campaign caused them.

It would also be worth looking for whether any systematic differences exist between relatively successful and relatively unsuccessful campaigns in terms of the subsequent actions of participants.

3 Place in the literature

3.1 Social movements

The principle literature which can be drawn upon to better understand the fossil fuel divestment movement — and where analysis of divestment can most plausibly make a theoretical contribution — is in the study of social movements. Many previous social movements have relevance for understanding what is happening in response to climate change today. The movement to abolish slavery in the United States and elsewhere challenged the existing economic system in a way that bears some relation to what ending fossil fuel use rapidly enough to avoid the worst impacts of climate change does today, with some similar social and political consequences. The two movements also share a broad ethical focus on what kinds of duties human beings bear toward one another, and at what point the harm you are causing to others compels you to change your behaviour. In terms of involving a concerted effort to rapidly and profoundly shift public opinion and public policy, there are also parallels with the feminist, civil rights, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans- and Queer (LGBTQ) rights movements. These movements also involved major questions about allyship and intersectionality, and the ways in which progressive efforts on one front ought to be done through a joint campaign for other progressive causes. As with feminism, climate change activism

emphasizes how 'personal' choices have society-wide political consequences, and both raise questions about how to handle that politically.[32] Climate change activism can also be usefully contrasted with the earlier environmental movement, dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the roots of western environmentalism, including an emphasis on animal rights and opposition to nuclear energy, may fit awkwardly or clash with a climate change mitigation agenda. Other environmental policy regimes — including those that emerged for ozone depletion, acid rain, and persistent organic pollutants — connect to questions about instrument choice for climate change, though sometimes more in terms of how the problems are different than in terms of how they are the same. Just as democratic capitalism is experiencing an ecological critique, environmentalism is experiencing both a critique and a broadening which has important indigenous and theological dimensions. Historical relationships between groups including government and indigenous peoples with environmentalists may also require substantial revision if we are to give ourselves any chance of following a 1.5–2 °C pathway.

Social movements are broadly defined by Manuel Castells as: "purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society".[33] Alternatively, in his 1908 Nobel Prize lecture, Rudolf Eucken described how:

> "The social movement, too, reveals man as not entirely limited by a given order,
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> but as a being that perceives and judges a given situation as is confident that it
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> can change it essentially by its own efforts."[34]

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[32] George H.W. Bush's 1992 comment at the Rio summit that "The American way of life is not up for negotiation" is illustrative.

[33] Smith, *Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada, Second Edition*, p. xix.

[34] White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution*, p. 53.

William Gamson calls social movements "one product of social disorganization" and "symptoms of a social system in trouble".[35],[36] Social movements are connected both historically and theoretically with the question of how large-scale social and political change occurs, whether voluntary human actions can induce it, and what factors contribute to whether one group or another achieves its aims. Academic work specifically on climate change activism as a social movement includes Jennifer Hadden's research on climate advocacy and climate justice activism.[37] Multidisciplinary research on climate change activism as a social movement is ongoing in Canada. Robert McGray, a professor of education at Brock University, is studying the student fossil fuel divestment movement in the context of neoliberal economics at Canadian universities. Joe Curnow at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education is studying race and gender dynamics within the fossil fuel divestment group at U of T. [TK — MORE]

On questions of strategies and tactics, there are numerous analyses of confrontational approaches compared with those that function more through persuasion. Some scholars have emphasized how both protest and conventional tactics — both insider and outsider strategies — can be pursued by groups simultaneously.[38],[39] There are, however, limits to how much such coexistence can be maintained within divestment campaigns, particularly since strategies that engage with and therefore legitimize institutional procedures clash fundamentally with those that would seek to challenge these procedures.[40] One potentially relevant area of

[35]White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution*, p. 53.
[36]See also: Goldstone, "The weakness of organization: A new look at Gamson's The Strategy of Social Protest".
[37]Hadden, *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change*.
[38]Bernstein, *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism*, p. 161.
[39]Goldstone, "Bridging institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics", p. 7.
[40]See: Harvey-Sanchez and Ilnyckyj, *The U of T Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign*.

scholarly discussion examines protest as performances.[41] Since divestment campaigns are, in essence, efforts to alter the perceptions of decision-makers and the public, their methods can be evaluated in terms of performance, audience, and theory of change.

When trying to understand the degree of policy-altering influence possessed by something as amorphous as a social movement, the challenge is exacerbated by the complex relationships which individual people may have with multiple movements. Anecdotal evidence and preliminary consultation for this project demonstrate a higher likelihood that an individual involved with at least one activism campaign or organization will be involved in several. They are part of a self-selected set of those with strong political opinions, aspirations to alter public policy, and a willingness to use political strategies and tactics in order to try to change outcomes. In some cases, individuals involved in multiple social movements may be able to provide especially valuable insight into tensions between coalition members; ethical, philosophical, and theological disagreements; as well as perspectives on acceptable and effective tactics.

There is a broad literature which attempts to categorize the various internal strands within environmentalism. For instance, Dauvergne and Clapp differentiate market liberals from institutionalists, social greens, and bioenvironmentalists.[42] Bernstein contributed a definition of liberal environmentalism which effectively captures a subset of climate change activists, though probably a larger proportion are inclined to view existing democratic and market capitalist institutions as inadequate for addressing this problem.[43]

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[41]Notably: Tilly, *Contentious performances*.

[42]Clapp and Dauvergne, *Paths to a Green World: The Political Economy of the Global Environment*.

[43]Bernstein, *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism*.

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While contributors to the literature on social movements are not exclusively academics, there is nonetheless a lively discourse about the role social movements are playing in the politics of many democratic states. There are also relevant analyses of successful social movements in more authoritarian states, including detailed discussions of tactics and their moral and philosophical justifications.[44] My main methodological approach is to draw what seems useful from both academic and popular theorists, while collecting empirical evidence from social movement activists which can be analyzed using those frameworks, while speaking independently to others who would interpret their statements through different conceptual means. Particularly because the divestment movement has been launched and run by people directly and powerfully influenced by popular theorists like Naomi Klein, it would be inappropriate to dismiss their work for lacking some of the trappings and methodological preferences of the legitimate academic community. In some cases, non-academics have written remarkably bold analyses of what climate stabilization would require in terms of policy and societal changes, for instance George Monbiot's provocative *Heat*.[45] In other cases, popular authors have developed trenchant critiques of protest as usual and urged new strategies and theories of change.[46]

3.2 Fossil fuel divestment's unusual objective

One perspective on activism is that it generally arises when a reasonably cohesive group of people come together to try and improve a local issue which they share concern about:

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[44]For example: Popovic and Miller, *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, Or Simply Change the World*.

[45]Monbiot, *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning*.

[46]White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution*.

it's geographically and temporally specific and focused on questions which directly impact the lives of activists. Fossil fuel divestment doesn't fit this model. Indeed, one challenge faced by divestment campaigns is refuting the argument that divestment would have no substantive impact on climate change[47] — a problem which is furthermore defined by taking place principally in distant places and in the future. Intergenerational ethics are one of the key normative dimensions across which institutions of all kinds must respond to climate change, and may be particularly well matched to universities since they expect to exist indefinitely.[48,49]

Another feature of at least some campus fossil fuel divestment campaigns has been skepticism and even hostility about universities choosing to respond to climate change principally by working to reduce their own environmental impact through measures like improved building efficiency. These efforts have been both characterized as insufficient and as a failure to respond to the ethical cases that can be advanced against the fossil fuel industry, including in terms of their contribution to climate change, their efforts to manipulate government decision-making, their habitat destruction and toxic pollution, and their adverse effects on indigenous peoples. Nonetheless — in their responses to divestment campaigns — universities have stressed past efforts to improve on-campus energy efficiency, as well as their intent to do more work of this kind in the future.[50]

The unusual features of fossil fuel divestment as an objective may provide useful contrast

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[47]See: Toronto350.org, *The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment: Update*, p. 134, 155.

[48]Key texts on the intergenerational ethics of climate change include: Pachauri et al., *Climate ethics: Essential readings*.

[49]Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm: the Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*.

[50]See "The University as Energy Consumer" in: Gertler, *Beyond Divestment: Taking Decisive Action on Climate Change*, p. 30–40.

and hypothesis-testing when it comes to theoretical frameworks and hypotheses that were developed for other forms of activism.

3.3   Fossil fuel divestment as contentious politics

Advocates of preventing "dangerous anthropogenic interference in the climate system" find themselves engaged in contentious politics across two fronts. First, while most democratic governments express support for the idea of avoiding dangerous climate change — as institutionalized through the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2016 Paris Agreement as limiting temperature change to less than 1.5–2 °C above pre-industrial levels — major economies have not initiated the concomitant decarbonization of their economies at a rate aligned with those targets. [TK — Find most credible source on what temperature increase would likely arise from full implementation of Paris targets] Indeed, governments including those of Canada and the U.S. have continued to support the fossil fuel industry and the construction of major new fossil fuel infrastructure projects. No mainstream political party in either country has a platform of rapid decarbonization, and even environmentally-minded parties like Canada's federal Green Party have sought to protect their electability, reputation for reasonableness, or political alliances by expressing conditional support for some new fossil fuel infrastructure [TK May's comments re: a Canadian refinery, etc] All this leaves climate change activists with no clear group of potential policy-makers to support, setting them apart from the majority of the population which seems reasonably satisfied with the range of policy options advocated by major parties. It also leads to major disagreements about strategies and tactics, including

how to relate to the political system and elections, how to engage with the media, and what sort of alliances to make with other social movements.

Climate change activism is deeply contentious in a second sense, as well. The movement is split between liberal environmentalists who believe that decarbonization can (and most plausibly will) be accomplished within the broad existing framework of liberal democratic politics, in which economic growth is automatically considered desirable, and anti-capitalist environmentalists who see climate change as a symptom of unsustainable consumption rather than being the central problem in itself.[51] [Cite Castells' typologies of environmentalism] Further splits exist between those who think a pan-ideological consensus on the necessity of decarbonization is necessary for the implementation and long-term application of climate mitigation policies and those who believe that a strategic alliance with other progressive causes holds out the best prospects for producing action on a sufficient scale with the necessary urgency. The theories of change of the Citizens Climate Lobby (CCL) and the advocates of the Leap Manifesto illustrate this disagreement.[52] While often less pragmatically important, major disagreements also exist about the international dimensions of climate politics: how states with very different political and economic circumstances can coordinate in a durable way, and how questions like the differentiated impacts of climate change and varying degrees of historical responsibility for the problem ought to be addressed.

These disagreements at the highest strategic scale have manifestations in campus divestment campaigns. The liberal / anti-capitalist split is present, and has a parallel disagreement

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[51]For a recent and well-justified elaboration of the latter view, see: Dauvergne, *Environmentalism of the Rich.*

[52]See: Ilnyckyj, *Interview with Cheryl McNamara, volunteer with the Citizens' Climate Lobby.*

about how much to focus on pressure versus persuasion: confrontational relative to cooperative tactics. [TK — More]

While climate change politics is frequently radical, an important feature of participation in campus fossil fuel divestment campaigns is the absence of clear personal risks for participants. This stands very much at odds with some kinds of direct action campaigns against the fossil fuel industry, as when private security guards trying to push the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline attacked protestors with dogs or when Shell collaborated with the Nigerian military to kill anti-oil activists. It is also at odds with previous forms of contentious politics studied by Sidney Tarrow, which often involved "acting collectively against well-armed authorities".[53] The most likely personal consequence of taking part in a campus fossil fuel divestment campaign is to be featured in media coverage which is generally sympathetic to the concerns and objectives of the organizers. The one set of campus stakeholders which has most clearly and convincingly described a risk to themselves from participation is junior faculty members who may fear harm to their careers as a result of antagonizing the university administration or corporate donors.

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, Sidney 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),

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[53]Tarrow, *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics*, p. 11.

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]

4 Methodology

As a basic starting point, this project will create a broad characterization of each campaign which is being closely studied. This will include:

Timeline of major events Including decisions, statements by campaign organizers and administrations, and release of major documents

Origin Who started the campaign and with what motivations? What organizational structure was chosen? At what point did faculty get involved, and what has their role been?

Objective Precisely what sort of divestment was initially proposed? Did the proposal change at any point?

Process How is authorized to decide about divestment and what's the basis for the authority (written policy, precedent, etc). Were relevant policies in place?

This information will be collected through a combination of media reporting, access to documents and records from the campaigns themselves, and interviews with those involved.

4.1 Stakeholder analysis: volunteers, allies, and opponents

The internal dynamics of fossil fuel divestment groups offer some counterpoints to the traditional Ronald Coase view that people assemble into organizations to reduce transaction costs. Evidence suggests that motivation may be more emotional and social, and less rational and pragmatic.[54] First, 350.org has made a substantial effort at marketing itself to people around the world who are concerned about climate change. Indeed, much of the group's early work comprised simply informing people about how much CO_2 has accumulated in the atmosphere, the projected consequences of its unchecked increase, and the desirability of 350 parts per million (PPM) as a ceiling. On a smaller scale, broad media coverage of the climate activist movement probably drives more people into initial contact with campus climate activist groups than their own marketing efforts, which often struggle to reach more than a small fraction of the student population. Second, continued involvement in campaigns and other group activities seems largely explicable in terms of friendships and social relationships, rather than a pragmatic judgment that coordinated group activity would be more effective than private efforts at encouraging climate change mitigation. While there is undoubtedly a degree to which personal concern about climate change and a sense of being able to make some difference through personal effort motivates all group members, there is cause to think that involvement and motivation are sustained more by a desire to affect how each activist

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[54] A similar point about open source software is made by Siva Vaidhyanathan: Vaidhyanathan, "Open Source as Culture — Culture as Open Source", p. 344.

is viewed by fellow group members than by an assessment of what individual difference that activist is making. These hypotheses and preliminary assessments can be assessed and refined through interviews with activists and through assessment of pertinent records including minutes and media reporting on internal group functioning.

Campus divestment movements have sought allies among all influential university constituencies: administrators and staff, faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, student governments, campus clubs and societies, alumni, donors, campus media, and more. A major component of stakeholder analysis, therefore, is evaluating the viewpoints, decision-making structures, preferences, and decisions of these individuals and organizations.

A notable feature of fossil fuel divestment campaigns — and one that stands at odds with BDS campaigns — is the general public invisibility of opponents, including at universities where campaigns were relatively or completely unsuccessful. At schools where no public opponents emerged but divestment was rejected, it's plausible to argue that while divestment proponents pursued an open strategy in presenting their arguments, opponents opted instead for private channels of influence.[55] This approach has the advantage of resisting efforts at rebuttal, since information provided in secret cannot be challenged by divestment advocates. In some cases, such secrecy was institutionalized through deference to the preferences of financial advisors not to have their advice made public. While the preferences of the advisors may well have been for such privacy, the decision to grant it can also be interpreted as a strategy by university administrations to protect the purely financial basis for their investment decision-making in the face of unwelcome calls that it also be informed

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[55]See: Harvey-Sanchez and Ilnyckyj, *The U of T Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign.*

by their supposed ethical principles. Assigning responsibility for investment decision-making to an arms length body can be a bit of a conjuring trick, protecting universities from having to live up to their values in terms of what kinds of firms they support. A palatable institutional response to pressure to divest can be to publicly emphasize the university's values and concern about climate change, then quietly grant authority to make any substantive changes to an independent body that is skilled in evading outside scrutiny and has an embedded preference for the *status quo*.

There has been some public opposition to fossil fuel divestment, with public statements and opinion articles arguing that this is an inappropriate action for universities to take, or that it will undermine their financial security. [TK — More, and specific examples]

[TK — Stakeholder analysis resources from ENV381]

4.2 Network analysis: campaigns, organizations, and social movements

A major factor in 350.org's thinking in making fossil fuel divestment into one of their first two major campaigns (along with pipeline resistance) was the idea that the divestment model could be fairly easily and independently replicated by existing and newly-created local affiliates.

[TK — I should be able to shift a fair bit of material over here from earlier pipeline-focused proposals]

4.3 Media analysis: persuasion efforts and broader societal consequences

The media is relevant to this project in two major ways:

1. as a tool of pressure and persuasion used by stakeholders while a decision to divest or not remains unmade (though such decisions are never permanent, leading to cycles of contention)

2. and as a mechanism through which on-campus debates influence outsiders, including other institutional investors, the fossil fuel industry, government decision-makers, and the general public.

A media analysis can therefore support examination of these research questions in many ways. It can illustrate linkages between campus groups and, because relations between these groups are limited and informal, public discussions in the media are one of the most important places where debates about strategy, ideology, and intersectionality take place. Use of the media is also closely tied to the strategic and tactical planning of divestment campaigns, as well as to the criteria which they use to evaluate their own success or failure.

4.4 Case selection

Several approaches suggest themselves in terms of deciding which university-based campaigns to study in depth. Regardless of which is chosen, it would be desirable to include cases where climate activist groups formed but did not choose divestment as a strategy. One

option would be to choose the most well-developed, widely-discussed, and well-documented campaigns in any combination of Canada, the U.S., and U.K. These include the University of British Columbia (UBC), U of T, McGill, Stanford, Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge. Another option would be to focus on campaigns at various levels of development within a smaller geographic region, such as every campaign in Ontario, or in Ontario and Quebec.

An important practical question for my project is whether to use the University of Toronto (U of T) as a case study. On one hand, my personal involvement in the campaign offers me a great deal of experience for evaluating the plausibility of various claims and I have pre-existing information about processes and people that have been important. During the campaign, Joe Curnow, a PhD student at U of T's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education explicitly made use of the campaign itself as a subject of study, both through detailed multi-directional video recording of meetings and through participant observation. All major planning meetings were videotaped in this way, with consent provided by participants, indicating a broad willingness for their efforts to be the subjects of academic study. On the other hand, my involvement was as an activist and not as a researcher. As a result, all the information which I have was not collected under an academic ethics protocol. Also, my involvement was motivated by a desire to have the campaign succeed, rather than to produce the most defensible possible understanding of the movement as a whole. It's impossible for me to ignore my experience at U of T when answering these questions, but these issues of ethical approval and objectivity probably make the U of T case better suited for use as general background than for use as a formal case study.

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[TK — Locate divestment-specific texts]

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