'Cut Pollution, Create Jobs? Yeah, Nah': Partisan Effects on Environmental Protest in Aotearoa New Zealand

Protest is a tool that social movements can use to express discontent and present claims to those in power. In New Zealand, campaigns around native forest protection, genetic engineering, mining, and offshore oil exploration have mobilised numerous participants, forcing the state to acknowledge public concerns and, in some cases, effect change of course. However, impact of the ideological orientation of the governing party on environmental protest behaviour is less well understood. The aim of the paper is to identify how political opportunities and threats in the protest arena are shaped by changes in the electoral arena. The methodology of protest event analysis is used to identify environmental protest under the left-wing Labour (1999-2008) and right-wing National (2008-2017) governments. Findings suggest that the orientation of the governing party is important in shaping opportunities, illustrated by periods of dominance of the electoral arena by the National Party leading to a corresponding intensification of mobilisation in the protest arena.

Introduction

In June 2015, Greenpeace activists gained access to the roof of the New Zealand Parliament building in Wellington and hung a banner showing the Prime Minister, John Key, next to the statement 'Cut Pollution, Create Jobs? Yeah, Nah.'[i] (*New Zealand Herald* 2015) This was followed in November 2015 by a series of protest marches at sites around New Zealand over the threat of climate change, coinciding with the global climate talks taking place in Paris (*One News* 2015). Such events echoed other large-scale protests and numerous smaller

actions that had taken place since the National government was formed in 2008. Twelve years earlier, the country had seen a substantial protest campaign over plans to lift a moratorium on research into genetically engineered (GE) crops in October 2003. Groups such as Mothers Against Genetic Engineering (MAdGE) staged colourful protests in Parliament (Norquay 2003), while other protests involved creative displays, such as the construction of a giant GE-Free sandwich (*New Zealand Press Association* 2001). The protests peaked on 13 October 2003 with a series of marches taking place around the country (*New Zealand Press Association* 2003). The Labour government lifted the moratorium as planned on October 30th, in spite of the opposition expressed through the wave of protest.[ii]

Protest is an important means by which social movement actors can express discontent with the decisions taken by the state. The protest arena represents a flexible space in which participants can engage in creative actions, in response to perceived threats or injustices (Hutter 2014). In situations where political opportunities are restricted or closing, acting outside established channels may be perceived as the only way to generate sufficient attention in support of claims. This results from the fact that party politics and protest are complementary, hence changes in one arena have the potential to influence the other (Goldstone 2003). The protest campaigns described above were linked to decisions taken by governments of the right and left, respectively. It could be argued that in each case the actions represented a feeling that the views from below were not being listened to. Despite the apparent similarities, assessment is required of whether these were representative of the broader pattern under each government, with consideration of reasons for any variation. In view of the focus on environmental protest, the left-right position of the governing party is likely to play a role in shaping these patterns. Centre-right parties have been found to

downplay the significance of environmental issues more than parties on the left (Carter 2013), potentially leading to an expectation that they will face more protest activity.

This paper examines environmentally focused protest events in Aotearoa New Zealand under the Labour (1999-2008) and National (2008-2017) led governments, to identify the relative scale and intensity of such action. The two questions addressed in this paper are: (1) Did the right-wing National government see more environmental protest than the left-wing Labour government? (2) Was there a difference in form and intensity of protest under the Labour and National governments? The remainder of the paper is divided into four sections. The paper begins by outlining the key features of the contemporary political context in New Zealand as they relate to environmental issues. In the second section the focus turns to the nature of protest, considering the role of political opportunity structures in facilitating and sustaining mobilisation. It also identifies the link between actions in the electoral arena and the protest arena. The protest event analysis (PEA) methodology used in the paper is introduced in the third section, setting out the source of the data and noting challenges and limitations. The final section considers the pattern of environmental protest under the two governments, identifying the intensity, form and focus to determine the nature of political opportunities under the two governments and how these were utilised in the protest arena.

Environmental Politics in New Zealand

This section outlines the broad contours of environmental politics in New Zealand, and how changes in government have impacted the relationship with environmental movement actors over time. The environmental movement in New Zealand has been active in its contemporary form since the 1960s. Substantial protest campaigns over hydropower schemes, native forest logging and nuclear animated much of the early period (see Mark, Turner, and West 2001;

Meyer 2003; Wright 1980). Bührs (2003) considers the drive for protest in relation to the limited avenues for participation and an adversarial relationship with the state during this time. Describing the relationship during the 1980s, a former member of the movement argued that 'interaction with the government…[was] driven by a strong national organization that was fighting the government on a very black and white issue' (cited in O'Brien 2013b, 293). The creation of new agencies and legislation to address environmental concerns during the 1990s made campaigning more complicated, as clear cut issues were supplanted by more nuanced issues (Bührs 2003). The strength and vitality of the environmental movement has fluctuated since it emerged in the 1960s, with a shift in the character of political activism involving an increase in conservation type activities, as large-scale organisations have struggled to maintain levels of support. Meanwhile small-scale, community level groups, have grown in number and diversity (O'Brien 2013b).

The priority given to environmental issues by the government of the day has varied since the emergence of large-scale contention in the 1960s, shaped by the political orientation of the party in power. The focus on large-scale, state sponsored development aimed at boosting economic performance dominated from the mid-1970s through to the early 1980s under the Third National Government (Goldfinch and Malpass 2007). The election of a Labour government led to a shift in orientation towards a market-led approach, with significant effects on environmental policy. Bührs and Bartlett (1993, 90) argue that:

> When the Fourth Labour Government came into power in 1984, no one expected the kind of radical transformation of the State that was to follow. Although Labour's election manifesto contained many promises for change, including proposals for change in the area of environmental administration, it in no way foreshadowed the comprehensiveness, incisiveness, and speed of the ensuing reform programme.

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At an institutional level, this included the creation of the Ministry of Environment (1986), Department of Conservation (1987) and the initiation of the process that led to the implementation of the Resource Management Act (RMA) (1991), forming the backbone of environmental regulation in New Zealand (Bührs and Bartlett 1993). The increased role for local government in environmental management under the RMA also opened a space in which local claims could be presented (Jackson and Dixon 2007; Memon and Thomas 2007). The election of a National government in 1990 saw the focus shift away from environmental issues and a more adversarial stance re-emerge, whereby 'with a few notable exceptions, environmental groups struggled to exert political influence' (Downes 2000, 480). The election of a Labour-led government in 1999 resulted in some change, as 'relations between the government and the environmental movement… [were] conducted in a cooperative or consultative rather than adversarial way' (Bührs 2014, 349). Such cooperation took place within certain limits, reflected in the introduction of restrictions on registered charities engaging in political activities (*New Zealand Energy and Environment Business Week* 2016). Questions have also been raised regarding attempts by the state to disrupt more radical protest campaigns during this period, through covert actions (O'Brien 2015).

In the political arena, adoption of a new electoral system based on proportional representation in the mid-1990s presented further opportunities to advance environmental claims. The significance of this shift is reflected in Poloni-Staudinger's (2008) finding that consensus democracies provide more space for environmental issues, as the removal of majoritarian, 'winner-takes-all' encourages the formation of coalitions and greater cooperation across party lines. The new electoral rules enabled the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand to enter Parliament in the 1999 elections and consolidate its position, working with the Labour Party (Bührs 2014; O'Brien 2013a). Rorschneider and Miles (2015, 634) have argued that the

emergence of a green party can 'create incentives for [centre-left] parties to appeal to environmental constituencies', but can also create further competition over particular constituencies. Additionally, opportunities emerging from the electoral arena are not guaranteed, as access can represent a hollow victory where economic concerns remain dominant. Bührs (2014) argues that the period after 2000 was one of greater cooperation, but that focus remained on accommodating environmental concerns, rather than reconsidering neoliberal principles. The decision of the government to lift the moratorium on field trials of genetically modified crops in 2003 demonstrated the relative weakness of the Green Party and wider movement in the face of economic priorities (Wright and Kurian 2010).

The 2008 election of the centre-right National Party altered the political space by deprioritising environmental concerns and fostering a more confrontational relationship with the environmental movement (Bührs 2014). The new government prioritised the intensive development of natural resources (coal, oil and gas) to boost economic performance and manage the effects of the global financial crisis (Loomis 2016). Describing this period, Bührs (2014, 351) has argued:

> The manifest pro-development stance of the National government, and the reaffirmation of its commitment to neoliberal principles and policies… obviously makes it very difficult if not impossible for the environmental movement to continue a cooperative engagement with the government.

The Green Party benefited from the weakness of the Labour Party during this period, demonstrating its pragmatic stance by signing a memorandum of understanding with the National Party in 2008 (O'Brien 2013a). However, the Green Party's ability to influence policy was limited by the pro-development drive and the presence of competing minor parties more willing to support a more right-wing agenda (Boston and Bullock 2010). The more

confrontational stance of the state has led to activists attempting to root their claims more fully in a way of life that conflicts with the developmentalist approach (Diprose, Thomas and Bond 2016). Apparent upsurge in public opposition and confrontation during this period has also seen a reversion to more black and white forms of contention over environmental issues.

These developments show how environmental activism is shaped by the political context and the opportunity structures that result. In the New Zealand case, changes in the governing party have led to differing degrees of accommodation of environmental issues, but the core focus has remained on economic performance. At the same time, the environmental movement has fluctuated in levels of activity, with more localised and non-direct activities becoming more prominent during the period of accommodation under Labour (O'Brien 2013b). Within these broader patterns it is possible to explore the relationship between the electoral and protest arenas, specifically whether the more adversarial stance of the National-led government (2008-2017) was associated with to different levels of protest activity than the more accommodative Labour-led government (1999-2008). To understand the reasons why the Labour government may have seen lower levels of less protest than the National government, it is necessary to consider the role of political opportunities and the interaction between social movement actors and political parties.

Political Opportunities and Protest Interactions

Decisions to engage in protest are not taken lightly, as the costs involved can be significant. Even in democratic states, participation in protest actions requires a decision to accept potential social or economic costs (see Blee 2012). While the reasons for protest vary from case to case, Charles Tilly (2008, 5) has pointed to common features under the banner of contentious politics, specifically:

interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action and politics.

Protest should therefore be seen as part of the continuum of social life, carrying out politics through other means. Although there are a wide range of potential actions available, Tarrow (2011, 99) argues that the 'repertoire of contention offers movements three broad types of collective action – disruption, violence and contained behavior.' Protest actions operate in the disruptive space, breaking free from contained behaviour to challenge the status quo and force the targets of contention to respond.

The external environment plays a role when considering contentious politics and the factors that facilitate or obstruct protest actions. The effects of the environment have been characterised as a form of political opportunity structure. These opportunities centre on five specific features – openness of the regime, coherence of the elite, stability of political alignments, availability of allies, and repression/facilitation (Tilly 2008). During periods of political stability these structures are relatively staticbut, as Tilly notes, change in any of these factors can provide new openings or close avenues for influence, with the rate of change presenting a further opportunity. The extent of change is important, leading Meyer and Minkoff (2004, 1464) to call for consideration of 'the effects of structural changes in opportunities as differentiated from effects or signals sent by the political system'. Change must also be assessed to determine 'the relative weight of issue-specific versus general openings [or closures] in the polity.' (Meyer and Minkoff 2004, 1464) These distinctions are key in the determination of the breadth and depth of the opportunities available to actors, and the limits to what is possible.

As the aim of contentious politics is to present claims in an attempt to bring about change, it is necessary to examine the spaces such struggles take place in. Although contentious politics is primarily concerned with informal, non-institutionalised forms of action, it exists in a wider external environment. McAdam and Tarrow (2010) crystallise this point by arguing that electoral and protest politics are interconnected, with ideas and actors moving between them, meaning the nature of the relationship needs to be examined. Understanding political opportunities as incorporating electoral politics enables the link to be made explicit. In the case of the civil rights movement in the United States, Meyer and Minkoff (2004) argue that political instability was found to have a negative effect on the formation of social movement opportunities, as the costs of working with political actors who are ultimately not successful can be high for social movement actors with scarce resources. Recognising substantive changes in political opportunity structures requires actors to be able to distinguish between signals and actual structural shifts.

Political opportunities are often seen as positive developments, opening space for actors to advance their claims. However, the dynamic character of opportunities means that they can also close, restricting space or reducing capacity to operate. In such an environment, the costs of action will be higher, but groups may 'decide to risk protest, even if opportunities seem absent, if the costs of not acting seem too great.' (Goldstone and Tilly 2003, 183) A hostile political context may see the closure of general opportunities, leading to a search for issue-specific opportunities to focus attention. From the perspective of threat, mobilisation may be possible in response to tangible areas of concern or injustice where these are not addressed through formal institutions. This is supported by Meyer and Minkoff's (2004, 1476) finding regarding the civil rights movement, where 'the (actual or perceived) presence of supportive

allies in government improves the prospects of insurgency, whereas (actual or perceived) institutional gains diminish incentives for further extrainstitutional mobilization.' The interaction between formal institutions and social movement actors lies at the core of contentious politics, as represented by the opportunity structure. Where allies are absent and institutions are closed (or perceived to be so) the level of social movement mobilisation will be higher.

The relationships that characterise contentious politics can be seen in the interconnected nature of political parties and social movement organisations. Where they differ is in their organising characteristics, giving them distinct forms appropriate to their goals. Hutter (2014) argues that it is necessary to identify the commonalities and differences between the protest and electoral arena to enhance understanding of their modes of operation. As illustrated in Table 1, the protest arena is more *ad hoc* and reactive than the electoral arena, which operates according to formalised rules. The degree of institutionalisation is an important difference, with the fluid character of social movement organisations allowing them to be responsive to changes in the external environment, requiring 'a higher amount of initiative, individual skills and cooperation' to be successful (Hutter 2014, 28). Hutter (2014, 28) also notes that the reactive nature of protest:

> allows the communication of quite specific claims to the authorities. Even though it is generally easy to understand what protestors want, their specific claims are most often not linked to other concerns.

Therefore, issue linkage presents an additional difference between actors in the protest and electoral arenas related to their ability to 'present programs that cover and link different issues.' (Hutter 2014, 28) Protest actors focus on a smaller number of claims to build a recognisable identity in support their position. By contrast, actors in the electoral arena are

required to 'present programs that cover and link different issues' (Hutter 2014, 28) in order to generate a more sustainable base of support necessary for governance. These differences are important in understanding the limits of cooperation, as political parties and social movement organisations are faced with diverse opportunity structures in pursuing their goals.

[Table 1]

One area that has seen a proliferation of actors in the protest and electoral arenas is that of environmental politics. Changes in the way states recognise and deal with environmental concerns have opened new spaces and opportunities for non-state actors to play a role (Mol 2016). Actors in the protest arena have also sought to capitalise on the increased attention that has been given to environmental issues. Environmental movements have a lengthy history in raising awareness and advocating for particular causes (Carmichael, Jenkins, and Brulle 2012; Dalton, Recchia, and Rorschneider 2003). Within the environmental movement, actions range from street protests through to more formal consultation processes and changes in individual behaviour. In some cases, greater attention given to environmental issues has led to 'a process of deradicalisation, oligarchisation, institutionalisation and professionalization [of environmental organisations and]… a change from active participation to "chequebook activism".' (Van der Heijden 1999) Examining change in reported behaviour between 1993 and 2010, Dalton (2015) found that the likelihood of participating in protest in eight advanced industrial democracies was relatively low, but stable.[iii] However, the results also showed political activity (joining a group, signing a petition, or giving money) declined, while individual level activities (recycling and driving less) increased.

Although the range of non-state actors advancing an environmental agenda has grown in number and diversity, political parties continue to play an important role in determining the approach and priority given to environmental issues (Carter 2013). This has been reflected in the fact that green parties have emerged and consolidated their position in a number of countries (see Bolleyer 2010; Miragliotta 2013; O'Brien 2013a; Spoon 2009), forcing other parties to pay greater attention to environmental issues (Carter 2013). In this context, it should be noted that a party's 'commitment to environmental protection… is a question of degree rather than type' (Leinaweaver and Thomson 2016, 634) and 'no major centre-left or centre-right party has embraced a programme of anything like as radical as those promoted by Green parties.' (Carter 2013, 92) This tendency is reflected in Dalton's (2015) finding that environmental political action declined from 1993 to 2010 among supporters of all parties except those on the far left, which included Green party supporters.[iv]

The interaction between actors in the protest and electoral arenas is also shaped by the prevailing conditions they face. In the case of environmental regulations and institutions, international norms have been important in directly and indirectly encouraging adoption (Busch and Jörgens 2005; Meyer et al. 1997). The strength of this support is filtered through and conditioned by the domestic context. Considering these changes in the European context Rorschneider and Miles (2015, 620) argue that 'political parties' initial unease with environmental issues during the 1970s has increasingly given way to favourable responses to environmental issues among mainstream parties.' However, they also note that 'if political parties weaken their support for environmental policies, public demands for these policies have less of a chance to influence policies.' (Rorschneider and Miles 2015, 620) This highlights the relationship between the protest and electoral arenas, suggesting that

opportunities for non-state actors continue to be heavily influenced by the priorities of the party system.

The preceding review suggests that environmental policy and practice in New Zealand has been determined by the composition of the government of the day. Insights from the study of political opportunities and threats suggest that levels of protest around environmental issues may fluctuate in a similar manner. On this basis, the National-led government (2008-2017) would be expected to face higher levels of protest than the Labour-led government (1999-2008).. The intensity and form of protest could also be hypothesised to differ under the two governments, as opportunities for engagement with formal institutions fluctuate. To determine these relationships, it is necessary to consider levels of protest and the claims that led to mobilisation. The remainder of the paper introduces protest event analysis as a tool for gathering data on mobilisation and then considers the pattern of environmentally focused protest in New Zealand, to assess whether the expectations outlined are supported by the data.

Methodology

A catalogue of environmental protest events was generated using a protest event analysis (PEA) method, drawing on information from the main national and regional newspapers in New Zealand over the period 1997-2016. PEA provides a means by which to identify patterns of protest that vary across time and space, through the capture and organisation of these events (Koopmans and Rucht 2002). Events identified in this way refer to discrete occurrences, meaning that campaigns against a particular issue or policy decision may be made up of multiple events over time. Broad search parameters were chosen, in order to include wide representation of relevant events. The terms 'environment*' and 'protest*' were used ('*' as a wildcard returning variations on the key terms) returned 10001 stories resulting

in 435 events, which were coded to capture information on location, issue, scale, actors involved and actions taken. For the 2000-2007 and 2009-2016[v] periods there were 360 events, which are the focus of this paper.[vi]

The use of newspaper stories as a data source can raise issues regarding quality and reliability as the purpose of newspapers is to generate income as well as reporting on events.. Earl et al. (2004) argue that reporting practices, editorial policies and the social context can all play a role in shaping reporting practices. Rootes (2003) also notes that national newspapers may underplay local events that are not linked to bigger stories or do not have significance beyond the local context. Although these factors restrict robustness of data, useful insights can be derived within provided the acknowledged limitations. This paper examines stories from a range of sources at the national and regional level (see Appendix), tracking these over time.[vii] Where possible, events draw on more than one source to develop a more holistic picture. As Rootes (2003, 16) has argued, by using this method 'we can reasonably hope to give as comprehensive and balanced account of events as it is possible to assemble from public sources.'

Protest under Labour and National

This section examines environmental protest under the Labour and National governments. Focusing on the protest arena in this way allows for an identification of the respective level of activity, issue focus and repertoires of action employed (Tilly 2008). From this analysis, it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding the impact of ideological orientation on perceived opportunity structures. Figure 1 shows the difference in the level of protest under the two administrations, where the National governments saw 205 protest events, as opposed to 155 under Labour. At an aggregate level, the partisan orientation of the government

appears to have had an effect on the mobilisation of actors in the protest arena, but it is important to examine the underlying patterns to identify possible contributors to the observed difference. Variation in number of protests across the governments may relate to specific campaigns, pointing to the importance of issue-specific rather than general openings (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). To determine whether this is the case it is necessary to examine differences in the form of protest, and focus of the claims presented.

[Figure 1]

There is a notable difference between the two governments when considering the scale at which protest actions were focused. The scale of an event is classified based on the target of the action and the context. In the case of offshore oil exploration, local events have targeted district councils meeting with oil companies (Fox 2011), national events have opposed attempts to place restrictions on sea-borne protest (*Taranaki Daily News* 2012), while international actions have seen activists and celebrities chain themselves to exploration ships headed to the Antarctic (Vance 2013). Table 1 shows the proportion of events with a local, national, or international focus. This highlights a shift between the governments, as the number of national protests was higher under National, exceeding the number at the local level in several years. The National government saw a higher number of national level protests from early in its administration and remain consistently higher than those under Labour. This suggests a possible response to the perceived threat posed by the National government's developmentalist policies, with greater linkage between national and local protests[viii] (O'Brien 2016b). Local protests dominated through the whole Labour government with the exception of 2003 when there was a concerted campaign to stop the lifting of the moratorium on field trials involving genetic engineering (see O'Brien 2012; Weaver 2010).

Protests with an international focus were marginal under both governments, suggesting a desire to operate at scales where potential targets and audiences were more tangible.

[Table 2 here]

Consideration of issues that animated protest campaigns may inform understanding of factors that drove variations between the respective governments. Figure 2 shows the issues that were identified within the protest data by scale. Oil and gas, and then mining issues, dominated under the National government.[ix] Exploitation of mineral resources has been a core theme in the National Party's economic plan (see Brownlee and Wilkinson 2010; Watkins and Kay 2010). This spawned large protests such as the 2010 march in Queen St against mining in national parks (*New Zealand Herald* 2010) and the protest flotillas that have attempted to disrupt offshore oil exploration (O'Brien 2013c). Labour, by contrast, saw a more dispersed range of issues but with GE featuring prominently, particularly in the lead up to the government decision to lift the moratorium on field trials in 2003. Protests under Labour were orientated toward conservation, development, pollution and waste that were primarily under the remit of local government bodies (O'Brien 2016b). However, consideration of the interconnected nature of issues is required, as local actions are shaped by decisions at the national level and the perceived permissiveness of the regulatory environment.

[Figure 2 here]

Finally, when considering protest it is important to ask what participants actually did on the day. Table 3 presents the range of actions under the two governments, and their frequencies.

Demonstrational actions were the most common, with gatherings of people taking place in the majority of recorded events. In contrast, violent actions were very limited in number and involved actions such as the destruction of a GE potato crop (Atkinson 2002).[x] There is some variation within the broader categories, as the time period for the National government encompassed a higher number of events involving gatherings and addresses, with connected marches, performances and display of placards. This pattern is connected to the issue concerned and the level each protest action targeted (see Figure 2), as the higher number of nationally focused actions necessitated greater visibility, illustrated by the November 2015 climate marches (*One News* 2015). The Labour government in turn saw a higher proportion of confrontational actions, involving obstruction, occupation and entry to restricted sites, linked to claims targeting local issues that sought to generate awareness and support within the community. Representative actions included a silent protest to stop power pylon upgrades in Auckland (*NZPA* 2005) and presentation of a petition to Hurunui District Council opposing development of a sand and gravel quarry (*The Press* 2000).

[Table 3 here]

Within the broad pattern of environmental protest, variations in findings for the two governments' time periods could reflect the nature of the opportunities available to environmental actors. During the Labour government, the Green Party was arguably able to generate institutional backing for environmental initiatives, operating in the electoral arena. As a result, protest during this period was more focused on issues such as conservation, development and pollution (see Figure 2), often involving actions at the local level. National's drive for resource exploitation and the limited ability of the Green Party to exert influence over government policy suggests that opportunities may have been sought in the

protest arena to compensate. Issues of conservation and pollution still featured during this period, but were linked to issues emerging at the national level. The shift between the governments was also clear in the types of actions, as demonstrational and appeal actions featured more prominently under National (see Table 3), aimed at raising awareness and generating support. The higher proportion of confrontational actions under Labour reflected the local orientation, as activists attempted to obstruct more immediate threats.

Different patterns of protest under the Labour and National governments point to the effect of changes in the underlying opportunity structures presented to actors in the protest arena. It can be argued that environmental protest across the whole period was issue-specific, as actors focused their claims on specific threats. However, this obscures a difference between the two governments. Under the Labour government, the targets of protest tended to be more dispersed and actions were less likely to relate to a general movement, suggesting a lower capacity to link issues. In contrast, the National government saw more intense mobilisation in the sustained campaign around its plans to develop mineral extraction that emerged and maintained pressure throughout, moving between scales to adapt to changes in opportunities and threats (see O'Brien 2016b). The drive to exploit oil and gas resources was also supported by the close relationship with industry (Loomis 2016). When coupled with the exclusion of green issues from the electoral arena, this could be argued to have led to a more general closure of the polity (Meyer and Minkoff 2004), reinforcing the need to mobilise in the protest arena.

Conclusion

The ability of social movements to operate and impact on the agenda of the state is shaped by the context, represented by political opportunities. Change in the governing party represents a

significant shift leading to a reconfiguration within the state, opening or closing opportunities for particular actors. In the case of environmental movements it is expected that the election of a right-wing government will lead to a reduction in opportunities (Carter 2013). Closure of the electoral arena, as institutional allies are excluded or removed, in turn leads to an increased focus on the protest arena (Hutter 2014). The issue that arises during such a period is to what extent such shifts can be understood through the observation of protest events. This paper has attempted to address this issue by examining environmental protest in New Zealand, following the move from a left-wing Labour led to a right-wing National led government.

Examination of the level and form of environmental protest under the Labour (1999-2008) and National (2008-2017) governments has demonstrated a difference in the character of protest. The Labour government saw a broad range of issues generating protest actions, many of which took place at a local scale. The campaign against the lifting of the GE moratorium in 2003 supports this perception, as the coordinated, multi-scale nature of this campaign contrasted with the general low level of linkage between protest events. Pressure from the Green Party on the Labour government also meant that national environmental claims had representation in the electoral arena (Bührs 2014; O'Brien 2013a). The National government saw a different pattern of protest, involving higher levels of activity at the national scale. Opposition to oil and gas exploration, and mining, brought together a more sustained campaign, shifting between scales as opportunities allowed (O'Brien 2016b). Closure of the political arena and closer collaboration between the state and industry also forced an intensification of actions in the protest arena (Loomis 2016).

The character of environmental protests in New Zealand over this period illustrates the role of issue-specific opportunities (and threats) leading to mobilisation (Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Additionally, the shift from Labour to National highlights the fact that the presence of general opportunities may facilitate higher degrees of mobilisation in the formation of protest campaigns. In the protest arena, the emergence of a threat to interests is a strong mobilising factor. Moving back into a confrontational relationship in response to changes in the external environment and associated opportunities, the environmental movement appears to have activated the latent potential for mobilisation identified by O'Brien (2013b, 297) whereby participation in 'smaller community groups… [was key in] encouraging the socialization of new participants and exposing them to the challenges involved in environmental action.' As Carter (2013) noted, centre-right parties are less committed to environmental concerns, closing the space in the electoral arena and forcing a turn to the protest arena to present such claims. The case also suggests that the moderating effects of consensus-based systems (Poloni-Staudinger 2008) in relation to the environment can be undone by the presence of like-minded allies on the right. Although environmental protest is driven by specific issues, the character of actions and the intensity of the mobilisation will be shaped by opportunities afforded, and threats that emerge from the external environment.

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[i] The colloquial phrase 'yeah, nah' has been described as a way of saying no, while giving the appearance of considering the question (Simpson 2016).

[ii] The campaign was successful in slowing the spread of GE technologies in New Zealand. Indeed according to the Ministry for the Environment (2017) 'New Zealand's laws and regulations governing genetic modification are among the most rigorous in the world'. There have been no approvals for its commercial application and

consequently no GE technology is currently applied in New Zealand agriculture. However, Kurian and Wright (2012) argue that public voices continue to be systematically marginalised in the regulatory process.

[iii] The countries were Canada, West Germany, Great Britain, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, and the United States.

[iv] The classification of Greens under the 'far left' party grouping is derived from the International Social Survey Programme as cited by Dalton (2015). The quantitative form of the ISSP data obscures the diversity of Green Party supporters from across the political spectrum, highlighting the difficulty of placing green issues in traditional left-right categories. See for example Camcastle (2007). Thanks to the reviewer for pressing this point.

[v] Election years where there was a change in government (1999 and 2008) are excluded to focus on years when each government was in charge for the whole calendar year.

[vi] For a fuller discussion of the data collection and coding see O'Brien 2016a.

[vii] Online news sources have increased in prominence during the period under consideration. However, it is argued that drawing on traditional newspaper sources is an effective approach, as they provide a degree of continuity. Thanks to Petra Mäkelä for pressing on this point.

[viii] Although new media technologies can facilitate the spread of information and make it easier to coordinate across levels and campaigns, Bennett and Segerberg (2013, 201-02) note that the effects on mobilisation continue to be shaped by the specific context, as 'technologies and the organizational forms in which they may be embedded do not work independently of political opportunities and social context'.

[ix] Events focused on 'climate' and 'oil and gas' were coded separately based on the core issue derived from an examination of the news reports. While protests over oil and gas are linked to climate change, many were identified as targeting specific exploration/extraction plans and sites as the primary interest.

[x] On the use of violence by radical environmental groups see Nagtzaam 2017.

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[Appendix – News Sources here]