

Diagnosing Doug Ford's Durability: The Discourse and Political Economy of Right-Wing Populist
Environmental Politics in Ontario

by
Peter Hillson

Supervised by
Dr. Mark Winfield

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University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

As we approach the 2022 Ontario provincial election, political observers are apt to be somewhat confused. To most, it would seem that the current Ontario government, facing increasingly low popularity and widespread dissatisfaction with its management of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been ‘mugged by reality.’ However, as of yet polls show the Conservative Party of Ontario, (though with a dented reputation), very likely to retain power if an election were called today. This poses something of a theoretical dilemma. How do we make sense of an approach to governance that seems to have been discredited by reality, but shambles on relatively undisturbed in the discursive/political realm? With the goal of answering that question, this paper forwards a theory of the Ford government’s discursive strategy in general, and then examines how that style has persisted. It approaches this investigation using through discourse analysis, political-economic analysis, and a Gramscian analysis of hegemony. It proposes that the Ford government’s resilience can be attributed to the ability of its populist-neoliberal and promethean-populist discourses to absorb and explain challenges accompanying COVID-19, changes in environmental politics, and labor market polarization in Ontario, as well as the inability of institutional discursive alternatives to provide a compelling counter-hegemonic discourse that moves beyond the facilitative-managerial discourse the Ford government displaced in 2018. It concludes by suggesting that a revision of the ‘Green New Deal’ discourse that incorporates elements of deliberative democracy and a ‘green economic survivalism’ discourse might prove to be a more successful counter-hegemonic discourse.

Forward

This major research paper has been a fitting capstone to the academic and experiential work that I have done in in the MES program, at Osgoode Hall, and through my volunteer and professional experiences. In each of these areas, I have investigated, learned, and analyzed the interactions between environmental policy and law, climate change, and discourse. This paper looks to investigate and analyze the current state of environmental policy and discourse in Ontario, as well as what existing and emerging alternatives to that discourse are present. In my view, this is a specific application of my area of concentration, (Canadian Climate Governance), that engages each of the components discussed in my plan of study. The preparation and completion of this paper has been a great opportunity to deepen and apply my knowledge of environmental climate policy and law to the contemporary landscape in Ontario politics, with a particular focus on the somewhat baffling resiliency of the Ford government's populist/promethean governance style and potential 'post-populist'/'post-promethean' discursive alternatives.

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1. Introduction

As we approach the 2022 provincial election, political observers in Ontario are apt to be somewhat confused. By all accounts, the Ford government's neoliberal-populist governance should be facing a potential legitimization crisis in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the Ontario government's response to that crisis. To most, it would seem that the current Ontario government has been 'mugged by reality'¹. Doug Ford and the conservative government have seen their popularity drop precipitously in recent months², and both have seen considerable decreases in public approval of their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.³

However, as of yet, recent polls⁴ show the Conservative Party of Ontario, (though with a dented reputation), are very likely to retain power, (and perhaps even a majority government), if an election were called today. This poses something of a theoretical dilemma. How do we make sense of an approach to governance that seems to have been discredited by reality, but stumbles on relatively undisturbed in the discursive/political realm? In other words, how has the Ford government's discursive approach retained political legitimacy in the face of material contradiction?

¹ I refer here to Irving Kristol's quip that a neo-conservative is a "liberal who has been mugged by reality." As this paper explicates, it remains to be seen how/if the process might operate in the inverse; Kristol, Irving. *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea*. New York: Free Press, 1995.

² See Figures 1 and 2

³ See Figures 3 and 4

⁴ Maru Group. "Canada's Premiers Q1 2021 Approval Ratings." Maru Group, 2021. <https://www.marugroup.net/public-opinion-polls/canada/canadas-premiers-q1-2021-approval-ratings>; AbacusData, Ihor Korbabicz, and David Coletto. "A New Year Brings Old Politics to Ontario." AbacusData, 2021. <https://abacusdata.ca/ontario-politics-poll-ford-abacus/>; Leger. "PROVINCIAL POLITICS IN ONTARIO – THE RACE TO 2022 – OCTOBER 15, 2021." Leger, 2021. <https://leger360.com/surveys/provincial-politics-in-ontario-the-race-to-2022-october-15-2021/>; Ipsos. "Nearly Half (46%) of Canadians Say They 'May Not Agree with Everything' Trucker Convoy Says or Does, But ..." Ipsos, 2022. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/nearly-half-say-they-may-not-agree-with-trucker-convoy>.

This dilemma is even more apparent when we turn our focus to the Ford government's approach to environmental governance. At a glance, environmental policy in Ontario seems relatively confused, with the federal government pursuing a managerial approach to climate policy and employing elements of ecological modernist and sustainable development discourses (although perhaps more rhetorically than actually), and the provincial government taking a right-wing neoliberal approach that employs elements of populist and prometean discourses.

This tension has existed since the Ford government's election in 2018, but has been brought into starker relief by the Ontario government's unsuccessful challenge to federal GHG pricing laws, (a key plank of the government's environmental policy), and ongoing rebukes to the Ford government's environmental policy in the courts⁵ and in the public arena.⁶ Perhaps most notably, the discursive foundations of the Ford government's approach to environmental policy, (neoliberal and populist conceptions of minimalist government), seem to have been thoroughly discredited by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying need for a more activist and managerially competent government.

The current context makes the examination of existing and alternative environmental governance discourses in Ontario a vital task. The confluence of contradictions paired with an upcoming election, potentially poses a window for adoption of a new discursive approach to

⁵ *Greenpeace Canada (2471256 Canada Inc.) v. Ontario (Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks)*, 2021 ONSC 4521; *Greenpeace Canada v. Minister of the Environment (Ontario)* 2019 ONSC 5629; *References re Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act* 2021 SCC 11.

⁶ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. "Annual Report of Environmental Audits." Toronto, 2021. https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/news/21_summaries/2021_summary_ENV.pdf; McIntosh, Emma. "Ford Government Is Harming Endangered Species, Boosting Industry through Environment Ministry: Audit." *The Narwhal*, 2021. <https://thenarwhal.ca/ontario-environment-auditor-general/>.

environmental governance, (and governance in general). My hope is that this paper might provide insight into both the current landscape of environmental discourses in Ontario, the durability of the Ford government's populist-promethean strategy in the face of crisis, and the type of discourse that could successfully constitute a 'post populist', 'post promethean', and/or 'post neoliberal' alternative to the current approach.

Towards that end, this paper will first forward a theory of the Ford government's discursive strategy in general, before then examining how that style has persisted. This second portion will attend both to factors interior to the Ford government's discourse and the role of alternative discourses. Each of these stages will employ discourse analysis, political-economic analysis, and a Gramscian analysis of hegemony. The goal is to understand each discourse, the material factors that accompany it, and the relational role it plays within a Gramscian 'war of positions.'

This paper will proceed by first outlining its theoretical foundations and analytic approach. This will be followed by a brief discussion of scope and a working summation of the political context on the federal and provincial level. It will then propound a theory of the Ford government's promethean-populist environmental discourse and examine the durability of that discourse. Using the findings from these analyses, it will conclude by exploring the potential for a counter-hegemonic discourse based upon the 'green new deal' discourse, but adapted for the Ontarian context and employing the greatest strengths of various other discourses.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Discourse Analysis

As noted by Winfield and Dolter, studies of Canadian public policy tend to focus on “the roles of government agencies and structures, and non-state actors and forces in understanding public policy debates and the resulting policy decision”, while “ideas, norms and assumptions have tended to be dealt with through the proxies of the state and non- state actors whose actions they inform, rather than being treated as variables in their own right.”⁷ A discourse analysis, which places emphasis on the underlying assumptions, ideas and norms that inform policy decisions and debates, diverges from the majority of approaches within this field. This being the case, it will be useful to spend a little time outlining the theoretical foundations of this type of approach.

The paper will employ two varieties of discourse analysis: political discourse analysis (PDA)⁸ and Environmental discourse analysis (EDA)⁹. While it is incorrect to say that each of these approaches represent a different ‘method’, (in fact, each uses a variety of methods),¹⁰ each has a different emphasis. In broad strokes, political discourse analysis concerns itself with political talk and text and, as a variant of critical discourse analysis (CDA), looks to engage critically with how discourses function in service of the “reproduction of power abuse and social

⁷ Donoghue, Matthew. “Beyond Hegemony: Elaborating on the Use of Gramscian Concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis for Political Studies.” *Political Studies* 66, no. 2 (2017) at 2
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0032321717722362>

⁸ Glynos, Jason, David Howarth, Aletta Norval, and Ewen Speed. “Discourse Analysis : Varieties and Methods,” 2009; Dijk, Teun A Van. “What Is Political Discourse Analysis ?” *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 11 (1997): 11–52.

⁹ Dryzek, John. *The Politics of the Earth*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Chilton, Paul, and Christina Schäffner. “Discourse and Politics.” In *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, edited by Teun A Van Dijk, 2nd ed., 303–30. London: Sage Publications, 2011.

¹⁰ Dijk, Teun A Van. *Discourse and Power*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 at 2

inequality.”¹¹ Meanwhile, environmental discourse analysis inspects the specifically environmental elements and implications of political discourse.

I use these two typologies because they allow us to ‘zoom-in’ on different aspects of a discourse without the illusion of discontinuity. That is, they provide a useful analytic, rather than real, distinction between aspects of discourses we are interested in. While it would be incorrect to artificially separate the environmental aspects of a discourse from the political, or its role in power reproduction, it is useful to speak about the environmental aspects of a discourse without the explicit need to attend to its broader political and power reproductive aspects. By employing each of these analyses, we will hopefully get both a clear picture of particular areas of interest, and a general sense of the complete discourse.

2.1.1 What is Discourse?

Before we can get into each variety mentioned above, we might wonder what exactly a ‘discourse’ is. Much of the contemporary work on discourse analysis can be linked back to the social theorist Michel Foucault. In his studies of psychiatry, criminality and sexuality, (among other fields), Foucault lays the foundations for an understanding of discourse focused on an analysis of the ideas and suppositions underlying certain patterns of knowledge and their utilization in institutions of power¹². Foucault defines discourses as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of

¹¹ *Ibid* at 1.

¹² Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. 1st ed. Abingdon: Routledge, 1969; Foucault, Michel. “The Subject and Power.” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777–95. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>.

thinking and producing meaning.”¹³ That is to say, discourses are not merely a reflection or product of what is already known or a lens through which an individual views the world, but a way of actively and continuously constructing knowledge and experiencing the world.

This is important for the arguments put forth in this paper, as Foucault speaks to the validity of analyzing discourses as things in and of themselves and the possibility for discourses to influence the way that power is constructed and utilized. Furthermore, this conception of discourse speaks to the validity of the notion that underlying ideas, assumptions and norms can be found to inform political decisions and deliberation.

In his conceptualization of discourse analysis, Foucault proposes that the unity of a discourse cannot be found in common objects, common grammar, common sets of concepts, or common themes/sets of strategies, but only by “describing these dispersions themselves.”¹⁴ What constitutes a discourse is not a single element, but the interplay, differences and organization between many elements. As a whole, Foucault describes this as a ‘discursive formation’. What governs the relations of dispersion are ‘rules of formation’, which are the rules by which certain relationships are made possible or impossible through discursive practice. This concept becomes useful when conducting a discourse analysis, as we often see how certain discourses presuppose or exclude from consideration certain ideas or ways of understanding a system, relationship, or challenge.

¹³ Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Post-Structuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987 at 10.

¹⁴ Foucault 1969 *supra* note 11 at 41.

2.1.2 What is Political Discourse?

Foucault's theoretical notions are made more tangible in PDA, through authors like van Dijk and Dryzek.¹⁵ As the name would suggest, PDA "focuses on the analysis of 'political discourse'", as well as how discourses reinforce the ideas and norms that underlie regimes and forms of power.¹⁶ Political discourse analysis is concerned with the "'symbolic economy' of language and discourse that controls the minds of political actors and hence their actions" with the goal of uncovering "the relations between subtle properties of text and talk and the various dimensions of the political context, the political process and the political system at large."¹⁷

It is important to note that, as a variety of critical discourse analysis (CDA), PDA contains an embedded normative dimension. Namely, as CDA aims to "study the discursive reproduction of power abuse and social inequality", it is primarily occupied with the reproduction and exercise of social power and control and the combating of abuse of that power and control.¹⁸ However, as CDA also proposes that almost all social language functions within and in irreducible relation to structures of power, this normative dimension does not often constrain its scope or applicability. For our purposes, this normative dimension means that discourses will not be treated as 'morally-neutral' entities, but embedded within structures of domination.

All that being taken, the key insight of political discourse analysis is that the shared understandings that come from discourse shapes political action, and thus, in effect, is a form of political action. As Dryzek puts it, a discourse is a "shared way of apprehending the world", which allows political actors to "construct meaning and relationships, helping define common

¹⁵ Dryzek *supra* note 8 and van Dijk 1997 *supra* note 7.

¹⁶ Van Dijk 1997 *supra* note 7 at 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid* at 44.

¹⁸ van Dijk 2008 *supra* note 9 at 9-10.

sense and legitimate knowledge.”¹⁹ What this means is that “discourses both enable and constrain communication” by setting the shared terms of engagement “where more formal sources of coordination are weak or absent.”²⁰ Discourses matter because they condition “the way we define, interpret, and address” political affairs.²¹

Operationalizing this somewhat abstract notion, Chilton and Schaffner make the useful methodological point that PDA can function on the *conceptual level* by “indicating the current preoccupations of a political actor... in terms of the issues and ideological assumption that have been selected for expression at a particular point in history” and on the *interactive level* by showing “what the text is *doing* – which social and political positions and relationships it is assuming or producing between actors such as the leader and the party, the party and the public...(etc.). (*emphasis theirs*).”²² Through use of PDA, we can examine both the focus of political actors and the discursive structures they are invoking as part of that focus. Analyzing political discourse can give us a better understanding of the ideas that have shaped a certain political action and the ability to predict the nature of future actions.

2.1.3 Political Discourse and the Environment

As we narrow in on the environment, it becomes clear that, while certainly political, environmental discourses deal with references and relationships all their own. This necessitates an analysis that specifically deals with these environmental discursive formations. In this paper,

¹⁹ Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 9.

²⁰ *Ibid* at 10.

²¹ *Ibid* at 12.

²² Chilton and Schaffner *supra* note 8 at 325.

I will adopt much of Dryzek’s typology of environmental discourses.²³ Dryzek provides a two-dimensional typology of environmental discourse, with a spectrum from reformist to radical on one axis and a spectrum from prosaic to imaginative on the other. Where a discourse falls within this typology describes its general orientation to environmental problems and governance. This typology is reproduced below in box 1.

	Reformist	Radical
Prosaic	Problem Solving	Limits and Survival
Imaginative	Sustainability	Green Radicalism

Box 1²⁴

The first axis, (from reformist to radical), describes how a discourse relates to industrialism, characterized as an “overarching commitment to growth in the quantity of goods and services produced and to the material wellbeing that growth brings.”²⁵ Given that industrialist thinking has long ignored environmental concerns, Dryzek proposes that environmental discourses must either suggest reformist or radical departures from industrialism. We can think of this as a distinction of degree, with reformists arguing for adaptations within industrialism and radicals arguing for a disjunctive change of political economic structure.

²³ Dryzek *supra* note 8.

²⁴ Reproduced from Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 16.

²⁵ *Ibid* at 14

The second axis, (from prosaic to imaginative), measures the nature of departures from industrialism. On this axis, prosaic departures “take the political-economic chessboard set by industrial society as pretty much given”, while imaginative departures “seek to redefine the chessboard” by “treating environmental concerns not in opposition to economic ones, but potentially in harmony.”²⁶

Some of these combinations might seem unintuitive, so examples will be useful. First, it is somewhat strange to think that an imaginative departure might also be ‘reformist.’ However, we don’t need to look much further than the concept of ‘sustainability’ to see a discourse that imaginatively reorients our thinking towards the environment, while only seeking reforms to industrial society writ large. Sustainability proposes a change in how we think about the goals of industrial society, without proposing a radical break with material foundations. A radical-prosaic discourse might seem similarly strange, but can be seen in discourses around ‘limits’, which assume a prosaic understanding of the relationship between the economy and nature, (zero-sum), but then propose radical economic change in light of that assessment.

2.1.4 Relevant Environmental Discourses

Dryzek employs this method to describe a number of environmental discourses. For our purposes only a few will be relevant: Prometheanism, administrative rationalism, economic rationalism, sustainable development, and ecological modernization.

²⁶ *Ibid* at 15.

Prometheanism

Prometheanism is characterized by the key suppositions that the natural environment offers an abundance of resources and that environmental challenges can be overcome through human technological innovation, particularly through the use of markets.²⁷ In this framework the role of the state in protecting the environment is limited, because the natural abundance of resources and the economic correctives from innovation and self-interest, will steer us to economic prosperity without depleting resources.

There is a connection between promethean discourses and the neoliberal notions that markets are “comprehensive as the governing mechanism for allocating all goods and services, and central as a metaphor for organizing and evaluating institutional performance”, and the corresponding “antagonism toward state ‘interference’ (i.e., Regulation).”²⁸ Prometheanism and neoliberalism share a belief that ensuring the freeness of markets is a central role for the state.

As, we will see later, these discourses share many similarities with market populism. The limited role for government intervention, the distrust of non-economic interests and the privileging of resource extraction as an end, all mirror tenants of market populism. In particular, they form the ‘right-wing’ basis on which market populism builds, while leaving the door open for populist argumentation focusing on reduced spending and government action as representing the ‘will of the people’ and a rebuke against ‘elites.’

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ McCarthy, James, and Scott Prudham. “Neoliberal Nature and the Nature of Neoliberalism.” *Geoforum* 35, no. 3 (2004): 275–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2003.07.003>.

Administrative Rationalism

Administrative rationalism, as Dryzek defines it, is a historically prominent environmental discourse that can be characterized as a “problem-solving discourse which emphasizes the role of the expert rather than the citizen or producer/consumer in social problem solving, and which stresses social relationships of hierarchy rather than equality or competition.”²⁹

In the environmental context, adherents of an administrative rationalist discourse are likely to put priority on professional expert ‘management’ of the environment and to prefer policy options like resource-management bureaucracies, pollution control agencies, regulatory policy instruments, land-use planning, etc.³⁰ In this type of discourse, “environmental problems are serious enough to warrant attention, but not serious enough to demand fundamental changes in the way society is organized” and environmental governance is “not particularly participatory, but about rational management in the service of a clearly defined public interest, informed by the best available expertise.”³¹ It is assumed that the environment is rightly subordinated to human needs, but this subordination is not celebrated or essentialized in the same way as in promethean discourses.³² A key, but often unstated, aspect of administrative rationalism is the denial of political contestation around environmental issues, which ‘properly’ belong to the realm of non-political expertise.

²⁹ Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 76.

³⁰ *Ibid* at 76-88.

³¹ *Ibid* at 88.

³² *Ibid* at 89.

Economic Rationalism

Economic rationalism might be thought of as administrative rationalism's market-oriented cousin; it shares a similar 'problem solving' ethos, but is distinguished by "its commitment to the...deployment of market mechanisms to achieve public ends" and its "hostility to...management by government administrators- except...in establishing the basic parameters of designed markets."³³

When dealing with environmental challenges, economic rationalists often share the Promethean notion that "government in environmental affairs should leave markets well alone, to give human ingenuity full rein."³⁴ Primary policy prescriptions involve privatization of the environmental and marketization of the environment as a public good, (for example, via pricing of environmental harms).³⁵ These policy preferences are fundamentally based on an understanding of human primarily as competitive economic actors, (rational, individualized, utility maximizing, etc.), paired with an anthropocentric understanding of nature that "exists only to provide inputs to the socioeconomic machine, to satisfy human wants and needs"³⁶ These assumptions lead economic rationalists to the conclusion that the best way to tackle environmental challenges, (and maximize utility), is through market mechanisms.

Sustainable Development and Ecological Modernization

Sustainable development and ecological modernization are relative newcomers to the world of environmental discourses, but have become quite influential since their emergence.

³³ *Ibid* at 122-123.

³⁴ *Ibid* at 122.

³⁵ *Ibid* at 124-134.

³⁶ *Ibid* at 135.

They share a creative discursive reconciling of standard industrial economic structures and environmental well-being.

Sustainable Development discourses hold that economic growth should be promoted, but guided so as to ensure that it is “environmentally benign and socially just.”³⁷ The environment is still subordinate to capitalistic ‘development’, but the intention is for that development to happen in a more sustainable or ‘organic’ way that restrains ecological damage to a ‘sustainable’ level. These discourses are particularly sensitive to considerations like global and inter-generational justice.³⁸ Sustainability is conceptualized as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs³⁹

Ecological Modernization shares sustainable developments commitment to economic growth paired with environmental welfare, but accomplishes this conjunction by proposing that managing capitalism in an environmentally conscious direction is not only good for the environment, but potentially good for economic growth as well. The focus is not on creating sustainable growth, but on restructuring systems to ensure that economic growth and environmental protection “can proceed hand-in-hand and reinforce one another.”⁴⁰

This brings us from Foucault’s explanation of discourse up to an application to political and environmental discourse and policy. It is important to keep these theoretical subtleties in mind as we proceed with our analysis. While we will often refer to discourse in the way it is understood by PDA, (as the ideas, norms and assumptions that guide and are reinforced by

³⁷ *Ibid* at 147.

³⁸ *Ibid* at 159.

³⁹ Brundtland Commission. “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development : ‘Our Common Future.’” New York, 1987.

⁴⁰ Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 173.

political action) or EDA, (as particular orientations to environmental challenges), we should remember that discourses are the continuously changing product of the relationships between many elements.

2.2 Political Economy

In addition to discourse analysis, I will also be employing concepts from political economy in my analysis. With this move, my intention is to introduce some consideration of material political circumstance. While some theorists of discourse go so far as to claim that discursive power holds primacy over material conditions,⁴¹ I tend to side with thinkers like Dryzek in reasoning that “it is possible to subscribe to both a hermeneutic epistemology (i.e., an interpretative philosophy of inquiry) and a realist ontology (i.e., a commitment to the actual existence of problems).”⁴² I will examine the relationship between discourse and political economy more closely in my discussion of Gramsci and hegemony, but for now it is sufficient to note that I consider discourse and political economy constitutive parts of a ‘dialectical’, (or contradictory/oppositional), unity.

All of that being said, we are confronted by something of a dilemma in that the term ‘political economy’ “has meant a number of different things to different people over time.”⁴³ In this paper, I will not be referring to the classical political economy of Adam Smith or David Ricardo (i.e. political economy before the neoclassical turn in economics) or to the definition proposed in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, which takes political economy to

⁴¹ See van Dijk 2008 *supra* note 9; Foucault 1982 *supra* note 11; and Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso Books, 1985.

⁴² Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 13.

⁴³ O’Brien, Robert, and Marc Williams. *Global Political Economy: Evolution and Dynamics*. 6th ed. Red Globe Press, 2020.

consist of “the methodology of economics applied to the analysis of political behavior and institutions.”⁴⁴ Rather, I will employ an orientation similar to that found in Marxian political economy, heterodox economics, and global political economy, which places emphasis on historicism, a dynamic relationship between structures and agency, and the inseparability of economics and politics.⁴⁵ This approach recognizes the interrelated nature of politics and economics as material instantiations of power and allows appropriate room for individual and collective agency in political and economic development, while also recognizing the necessarily constraining nature of historical and institutional structures.

2.2.1 Winfield’s Approach to PE and the Environment

In actually conducting my analysis, I will draw upon the analytic approach employed by Winfield in his analysis of the environment and political economy of Ontario.⁴⁶ In particular, I follow Winfield’s lead in conceptualizing environmental policy as the result of a combination of historical, material, physical, and economic factors, as well as institutional factors and political factors stemming from a wide variety of actors. My analysis will be relatively truncated, but will aim to hit upon key developments relevant to the discursive and hegemonic relations I describe.

My analysis will also draw upon the typology that Winfield develops. In particular, Winfield constructs an ‘environmental policy matrix’, that puts government orientation (from

⁴⁴ Weingast, Barry, and Donald Wittman. “The Reach of Political Economy.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, 3–28. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 at 3.

⁴⁵ O’Brien *supra* note 41 at 39-40.

⁴⁶ Winfield, Mark. *Blue-Green Province: The Environmental and the Political Economy of Ontario*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012 at 3-6.

activist to neo-liberal) on one axis and public salience of environmental issues, (from low to high) on the other.⁴⁷ This relationship is visualized below in box two.

	Activist/ Progressive Government	Managerial/Facilitative Government	Neo-liberal Government
High Public Salience of Enviro Issues			
Low Public Salience of Enviro Issues			

Box 2

This matrix provides a useful analytic tool for understanding how government and public orientation come together to shape environmental policy. For example, an activist /progressive government during a time of high saliency of environmental issues is more likely to pursue more ambitious and/or disruptive environmental policy, while a neo-liberal government during a time of low saliency of environmental issues is more likely to engage in retrenchment of environmental policy and reinforcement of dominant policy orientations.⁴⁸

2.3 Gramsci, Hegemony, and Discursive Relations

To conclude this explication of my theoretical and methodological approach, I will discuss how I intend to bring together my discursive and political economic analyses through a Gramscian analysis of hegemony. This framework will allow me to consider how certain

⁴⁷ *Ibid* at 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* at 190.

discourses and political economic orientations gain and maintain dominance, (or hegemony), over others. This is a necessary part of ascertaining both how the Ford government came to power and how the Ford government's governance approach has maintained political legitimacy in the face of material contestation.

My analysis will be closer to a 'traditional' or 'classical' Gramscian analysis, than to one based upon neo-Gramscian poststructuralist, (and/or post-Marxist) analysis, as originated by Laclau and Mouffe⁴⁹ and currently employed by discourse scholars such as Howarth,⁵⁰ Stravakakis⁵¹, and Martin.⁵² While neo-Gramscian thinkers have accused classical Gramscian approaches of being economistic or essentialist Marxism, I adopt a view, (shared by a variety of contemporary scholars),⁵³ which holds that Gramsci's insights are sufficiently sensitive to the operation of power and discourse to operate outside of a strictly Marxist framework without recourse to post-structuralist approaches; and that neo-Gramscian methods potentially neglect and/or obscure the interaction between discursive/linguistic power and material political-economic power, by over privileging the role of language.

We can now turn to the theoretical basis of a hegemonic analysis. Gramsci starts his analysis with the goal of explaining "why those who lack economic power consent to

⁴⁹ Laclau and Mouffe *supra* note 40.

⁵⁰ Howarth, David. "Power, Discourse, and Policy: Articulating a Hegemony Approach to Critical Policy Studies." *Critical Policy Studies* 3, no. 3–4 (2010): 309–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171003619725>.

⁵¹ Howarth, David, and Yannis Stavrakakis. "Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis." In *Discourse Theory And Political Analysis*, edited by David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, 1–37. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

⁵² Martin, James. "The Political Logic of Discourse: A Neo-Gramscian View." *History of European Ideas* 28, no. 1–2 (2002): 21–31. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-6599\(02\)00004-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-6599(02)00004-9).

⁵³ Ives, Peter. "Language, Agency and Hegemony: A Gramscian Response to Post-Marxism." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8, no. 4 (2005): 455–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230500204980>; Johnson, Richard. "Post-Hegemony?: I Don't Think So." *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 3 (2007): 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075958>; Fusaro, Lorenzo. *Crises and Hegemonic Transitions*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018.

hierarchies of social power that privilege some while exploiting others.”⁵⁴ This necessarily requires an explanation of the interaction between material political power and discursive cultural power. Gramsci’s conceptualization of this linkage consists of a number of ‘dialectical unities’, ‘polarities’, or ‘dualities’, the most central being the concept of ‘hegemony’.

As a brief aside, a dialectical unity can be thought of as the product of oppositional forces that are constantly and simultaneously shaping each other, but never resolving.⁵⁵ From one perspective, hegemony is the dialectical unity that emerges from political and cultural power.⁵⁶ In reality, the distinction between these elements is analytic, (or artificial), as they are so intertwined and co-constitutive that they essentially amount to a disunited/oppositional, (or dialectical) whole.⁵⁷ However, it is useful to be able to talk about the difference between ‘cultural’ and ‘political’ power, while also realizing that the two are irrevocably connected.

Returning to Gramsci, while hegemony is theoretically understood as the emergent product of cultural and political power, it can also more materially be understood as “supremacy of one group or class over other classes or groups...established by means other than reliance on violence or coercion.”⁵⁸ Thus, hegemony is power that stems not from political domination, but from cultural or discursive construction, ultimately resulting in the seizure of both cultural and political power.⁵⁹ Hegemony explains how a politically dominant group might

⁵⁴ Stoddart, Mark. C. J. “Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power.” *Social Thought & Research* 28, no. 250 (2007) at 92.

⁵⁵ Fusaro *supra* note 52 at.56

⁵⁶ Fontana, Benedetto. “Hegemony and Power in Gramsci.” In *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion*, edited by Richard Howson and Kylie Smith, 80–106. Routledge, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203927182> at 100.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid* at 84.

⁵⁹ Fusaro *supra* note 52 at 49-55.

rely on discursive power to maintain control of a social formation, as well as how a subaltern group might build power outside of the levers of formalized political power.

The exact mechanism that Gramsci explicates goes beyond the scope of this paper, but can be explained in broad strokes. Gramsci introduces several more dialectical unities in the concepts of force/consent, violence/persuasion, domination/leadership, and political society/civil society.⁶⁰ In this interpretation, political society is understood as the formalized aspect of power, located in the state and the site of force, violence, and domination, whereas civil society is understood as containing the informal aspects of power, located in civic interaction and the site of consent, persuasion, and leadership.⁶¹ Remembering that these concepts are dialectical unities, and thus co-constitutive and connected, the distinction between political and civil society shows us the dual nature of power, where formal and informal, or material and cultural, formations arise and interact.

Focusing on the civil society, or cultural, aspect of power, Gramsci proposes that, as a hegemonic, or dominant, group always implies a subaltern, or dominated, group, counter-hegemonic forces will always arise within civil society, struggling for cultural hegemony in what he terms a 'war of positions'.⁶² Within the war of positions, hegemony constitutes the establishment of a 'common sense', or a view that is "inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed."⁶³ Common sense can be thought of as a discourse that is 'taken for granted' or the horizons within which sensical political thought occurs. As a discourse that emerges within civil

⁶⁰ *Ibid* at 100

⁶¹ Fusaro *supra* note 52 at 56-70; Fontana *supra* note 55 at 100.

⁶² Fontana *supra* note 55.

⁶³ Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971 at 333.

society and is ultimately socially and historically situated, 'common sense' legitimates political power in the cultural realm as is necessary, and is thus not necessarily "a coherent body of thought, such as we would associate with ideology."⁶⁴

This is similar to Foucault's understanding of a discourse, but differs in that Gramsci proposes that one 'common sense' or dominant discourse will inevitably emerge as a political group establishes hegemony through domination of both the political and cultural realm. Thus, we are not left with a world of variegated and multiple power structures, but with a theory of "the exercise of power...(that) rests...on an inverse relationship between force and consent, which, in turn, depends upon the generation of consent."⁶⁵ Material political-economic power and cultural power each shape and constrain each other, ultimately resulting in a historically, materially, and socially situated form of hegemonic power. Through hegemony, Gramsci gives us a theory of the relationship between cultural and material political power that explains the role of each, without being deterministic or confined purely to language.

This theoretical understanding of hegemony implies a corresponding understanding of hegemonic crisis and transition. Owing to their interconnected nature, Gramsci proposes that a complete hegemonic transition requires both the presence of counter-hegemonic discourses *and* crisis in the political-economic realm.⁶⁶ Further, because counter-hegemonic forces are constrained by the functioning of 'common sense' in the discursive realm, it is primarily through structural crises (i.e. material shocks and/or contradictions) that a transition can be prompted.⁶⁷ Even in this situation, "changes in the structure do not directly...bring about

⁶⁴ Stoddart *supra* note 53 at 202.

⁶⁵ Fontana *supra* note 55 at 101.

⁶⁶ Fusaro *supra* note 52 at 70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

changes (in the discursive) ...they constitute only the potential for societal change and thus hegemonic transitions.”⁶⁸

Discourses are necessary for hegemonic transitions because it is “at the level of (discourse) that human beings become conscious of these (material) changes.”⁶⁹ Thus, while material crises, (which can be understood both as exogenous shocks and/or failures of a governance approach), create the potential for hegemonic transitions, counter-hegemonic discourses are required to make sense of the crisis and prompt hegemonic transition. To put this insight into somewhat policy-oriented language, policy-failure is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for policy change. A policy transition also requires an alternative approach that provides a compelling solution and theory of change.

This type of Gramscian approach to understanding transitions has been successfully operationalized in a number of fields, from education,⁷⁰ to ethnography,⁷¹ to political science.⁷² For my purposes, the relevant categories to identify will be ‘material crisis’, ‘hegemonic discourse/common sense’, and ‘counter-hegemonic discourse.’ These categories will allow us to identify the basic elements involved in a hegemonic transition. In addition to this categorization, drawing on methods of discourse analyses elaborated above, I will assess whether the identified ‘counter-hegemonic discourse’ adequately explains and proposes an

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid* at 70-71.

⁷⁰ Jubas, Kaela. “Reading Antonio Gramsci as a Methodologist.” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 9, no. 2 (2010): 224–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691000900207>.

⁷¹ Heller, Monica. “Actors and Discourses in the Construction of Hegemony.” *Pragmatics. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)* 13, no. 1 (2003): 11–31. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.13.1.01hel>.

⁷² Montessori, Nicolina Montesano. “The Design of a Theoretical, Methodological, Analytical Framework to Analyze Hegemony in Discourse.” *Critical Discourse Studies* 8, no. 3 (2011): 169–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2011.586221>.

alternative to material crisis/contradiction. In this way, we will hopefully see whether the dominant 'common sense' is able to weather a material rupture or whether the anti-hegemonic discourse is sufficiently compelling as to prompt hegemonic transition.

3. Scope

The scope of this project is dictated by its nature and purpose. That is, our scope must consider the nature of an analysis primarily focused on discourse and the dual purposes of both explaining the Ford government's discursive approach and its resilience. As a discourse analysis, all of the potential data this paper might survey is readily accessible in the form of published books, articles, websites, and/or public statements. However, this also means that the amount of material available for survey is potentially endless. As such, it is not the goal of this project to look at all that has been said about environmental governance in Ontario, but to provide a broad assessment identifying major themes and/or patterns of thought.

To provide a succinct analysis, this paper will restrict its central analysis to official statements made by political parties, (and members of those parties), from May 10, 2018, to present. May 10 2018 was the official beginning of the 2018 Ontario General Election campaign, and thus is a useful demarcation of the Ford government's ascendancy. When assessing alternative environmental discourses outside of environmental actors this paper will expand its scope slightly to include major popular publications on environmental policy since 2018.

4. Political Context

4.1 Federal Environmental Policy Context

Historically, due to its natural abundance of resources and sparse population, Canada has had little need to consider “environmental degradation, resource supplies, and environmental carrying capacities”⁷³ In addition, and connection to the practice of this style of “frontier economics.”⁷⁴ Canada has historically been considered a “staples economy”, in which raw resources are extracted, exported, and then bought back as manufactured goods.⁷⁵ Taken together, these formative traditions mean that Canadian governance has historically considered the environment an abundant source for economic growth and development.⁷⁶

While modern Canadian environmental law and policy are concerned with environmental management, this history means that state intervention through environmental law and policy might not always be received warmly.⁷⁷ This type of thinking can be seen as recently as the Harper government’s efforts to “equate Canadian economic prosperity with a thriving resource sector” and “delegitimi(ze) environmental opposition.”⁷⁸ Canadian environmental law and policy occurs in the context of anthropocentric utilitarianism that views the environment as a stockpile waiting to be exploited for economic benefit.

⁷³ Hessing, Melody, Michael Howlett, and Tracy Summerville. *Canadian Natural Resource and Environmental Policy*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005 at 15-16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Haley, Brendan. “From Staples Trap to Carbon Trap: Canada’s Peculiar Form of Carbon Lock-In.” *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 88 (2011): 97–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19187033.2011.11675011>.

⁷⁶ Hessing, Howlett and Summerville *supra* note 72

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Macneil, Robert. “Canadian Environmental Policy under Conservative Majority Rule.” *Environmental Politics* 23, no. 1 (2014): 174–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2013.854968>.

Previous to the Trudeau government's election in 2015, the Harper government displayed an antipathy to environmental action on both an international and domestic level.⁷⁹ On an international level, starting in 2006 Canada largely rejected the Kyoto Protocol and withdrew from the treaty in 2011, citing concerns about its effects on the Canadian economy.⁸⁰ Further to this, the Harper government also exhibited a noticeable "lack of enthusiasm ... for meaningful action on climate change", electing not to impose regulations on large domestic emitters.⁸¹

This was the regime that existed when the Trudeau government came into power in 2015. Since then, Canada has "continuously expressed its commitment to climate change and the federal government has striven to appear as an international leader on the issue." marking a significant change in the climate regime.⁸² Additionally, the Canadian government has taken a fair amount of domestic action, introducing the Pan-Canadian Framework for Clean Growth and Climate Change (PCF) in 2016 and requiring that each province and territory have introduced carbon pricing by 2018.⁸³ However, the Trudeau government has also continued to support the development of the Canadian oil and gas industry, calling into question the compatibility of these actions with a meaningful climate policy.⁸⁴ The current Canadian climate regime displays a greater commitment to mitigating climate change and has affected some meaningful change,

⁷⁹ Maciunas, Silvia, and Géraud de Lassus Saint-Geniès. "The Evolution of Canada's International and Domestic Climate Policy: From Divergence to Consistency?," no. 21 (2018). <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/evolution-canadas-international-and-domestic-climate-policy-divergence-consistency>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid* at 8.

⁸² *Ibid* at 10.

⁸³ Government of Canada. "Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change." Government of Canada, 2016. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.828774/publication.html>.

⁸⁴ Maciunas and Saint-Genies *supra* note 78 at 12.

by way of carbon pricing, but remains invested in industrial development that seems to contradict these measures.

Importantly, the PCF experienced strong resistance from Saskatchewan, Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Alberta. The division of powers in Canada's federalist structure means that provincial cooperation is vital to the success of environmental policy in Canada. The *Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act* was recently found constitutional as an exercise of the federal government's jurisdiction under the national concern branch of the Federal Parliament's authority to legislate for the 'Peace Order and Good government' of Canada. This is reassuring from an immediate perspective, but raises questions about future opportunities for federal climate legislation and provincial cooperation with that legislation.⁸⁵

Contemporary Canadian environmental governance is perhaps most closely aligned with discourses of sustainable development and ecological modernization. This can be seen clearly in the Federal Liberal Party's 2021 platform⁸⁶. The chapter addressing environmental concerns makes use of phrases like 'clean jobs' and the idea that "job growth means green growth."⁸⁷ One can understand these discourses as a potential foil to the ideas motivating the Ford government. By rhetorically embracing protection of the environment government through intervention and focus on the coincidence of the economic and environmental, sustainable development and ecological modernization are potentially emblematic of the elitist/internationalist ideas that right-wing populism finds repugnant.

⁸⁵ *Supra* note 4.

⁸⁶ The Liberal Party of Canada. "Forward. For Everyone.," 2021. <https://liberal.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/292/2021/09/Platform-Forward-For-Everyone.pdf>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid* at 43.

4.2 Provincial Context

Ontario's political culture has long been aptly incapsulated by former premier Bill Davis' quip that "bland works."⁸⁸ As Jonathan Malloy assesses, Ontario's political culture contains three dominant themes, namely: loyalty, pragmatism and management, and identification with Canada.⁸⁹ These characteristics can largely be traced back to the conservative party dynasty from 1943 to 1985 and Ontario's sustained period of economic growth from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s.⁹⁰ During this time especially, governance in Ontario was characterized by the pursuit of economic success, a requirement for managerial efficiency in the government, an expectation of reciprocity in political relationships, and a balancing of interests in public policy making.⁹¹ These same values were reflected in environmental policy through an "incremental and managerial approach" that "was sufficient during the period of low public concern for environmental issues."⁹²

This period of remarkable stability, and the conservative party dynasty, came to an end in 1985, with the election of a Liberal government. However, this change was still "explainable within the existing model of the "Red Tory" province, and particularly the values of pragmatism and "competent" government."⁹³ It was more in the unexpected election of an initially progressive NDP government in 1990, (and a corresponding activist approach to environmental regulation employing something akin to a sustainable development discourse)⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Bill Davis 1980 qtd in Malloy, Jonathan. "'Bland Works': The Traditions of Ontario Politics in the Run Up to the 2011 Election," no. June (2012).

⁸⁹ Malloy *supra* note 87.

⁹⁰ Winfield *supra* note 45 at 11-12.

⁹¹ Noel "The Ontario political culture" in G. White, *Government and Politics of Ontario* at 53-54.

⁹² Winfield's *supra* note 87 at 39.

⁹³ Malloy *supra* note 87 at 5.

⁹⁴ Winfield *supra* note 45 at 86.

and the Conservative-led ‘common-sense revolution’, (and accompanying retrenchments in environmental policy in the vein of promethean and economic rationalist discourses)⁹⁵, that Ontario politics seemed to depart from its traditional political culture.

It is still up for debate whether the common-sense revolution led by the Harris conservative government represents a decisive and irreversible shift in Ontario’s politics. The Liberal McGuinity and Wynne governments, ruling from 2003-2018, explicitly emphasized a return to “themes of civility, moderation, and competence, which had traditionally been seen to lie at the core of the success of the long PC dynasty.”⁹⁶ This entailed a generally managerial and facilitative approach to environmental policy that highlighted ‘balance’⁹⁷ and is best understood in accordance with the ‘administrative rationalism’ environmental discourse detailed above.

However, the vision of a ‘return to normalcy’ in Ontario politics was shattered by the 2018 election of a Conservative majority led by Doug Ford, brother of the controversial Toronto mayor Rob Ford. We will dive deeper into the details of Ford’s governance approach shortly, but, in general, his campaign was characterized by populist appeals to ‘the people’ and a distinctly neoliberal approach dedicated to ‘respecting taxpayers’ and ‘opening Ontario for business’.

Since coming into office, the Ford government has taken a number of steps towards retrenchment of environmental protections. These changes are catalogued in full by Kyle,⁹⁸ but,

⁹⁵ *Ibid* at 130.

⁹⁶ *Ibid* at 152.

⁹⁷ *Ibid* at 182.

⁹⁸ Kyle, Mikaela. “COVID-19 in Ontario: An Opportunity to Degrade Environmental Law and Policy.” York University, 2021 at 17-26.

prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, include the rollback of Ontario's cap-and-trade scheme, legal challenges to the federal government's carbon tax (discussed above), numerous changes to land-use development that seemed calibrated to "spur development through deregulation," the abolishment of the Environmental commissioner of Ontario, changes to the *Environmental Assessment Act*, and consistent disregard for public participation requirements under the Ontario *Environmental Bill of Rights*.⁹⁹

The Ford government seems to have seized the Covid-19 pandemic as a chance for further degradation of environmental laws, including by temporarily suspending the *EBR*, further weakening the *EAA* and instituting changes to land use planning, (especially through increased use of ministerial zoning orders to bypass traditional planning processes).¹⁰⁰

However, this time period has also seen the 'coming home to roost' of several policy pursuits. The Ontario government's challenge to the *CGGPPA*, (a major plank of the government's environmental policy)¹⁰¹ was recently dismissed by the SCC, the government has seen numerous court decisions rebuking its disregard by public participation under the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Supra* note 4.

EBR,¹⁰² and reproaches from the Auditor General’s Office, especially concerning use of MZOs.¹⁰³

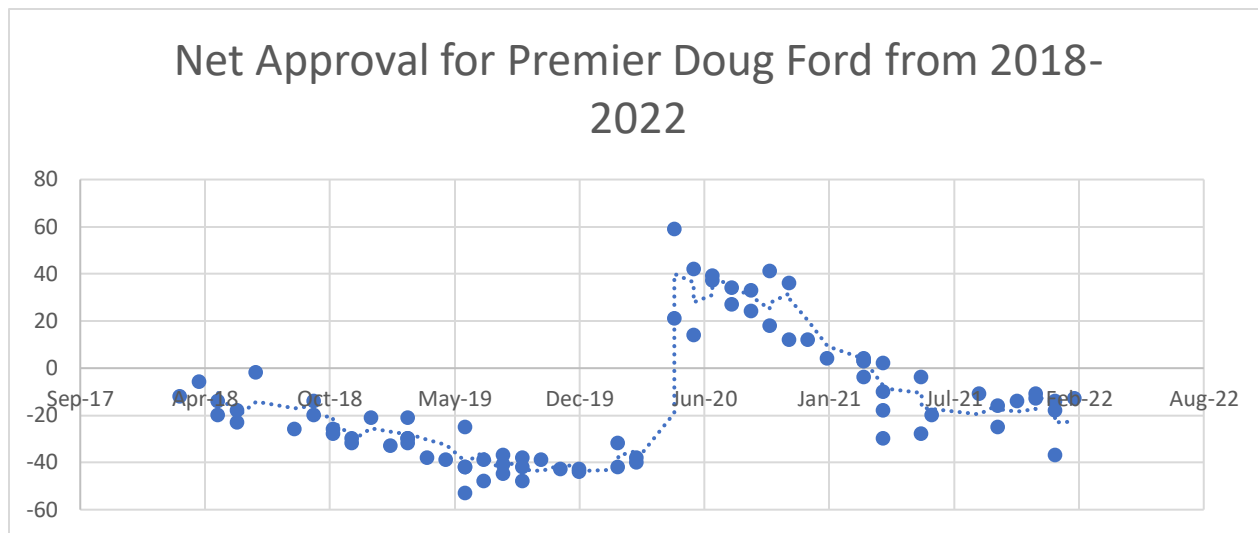


Figure 1¹⁰⁴

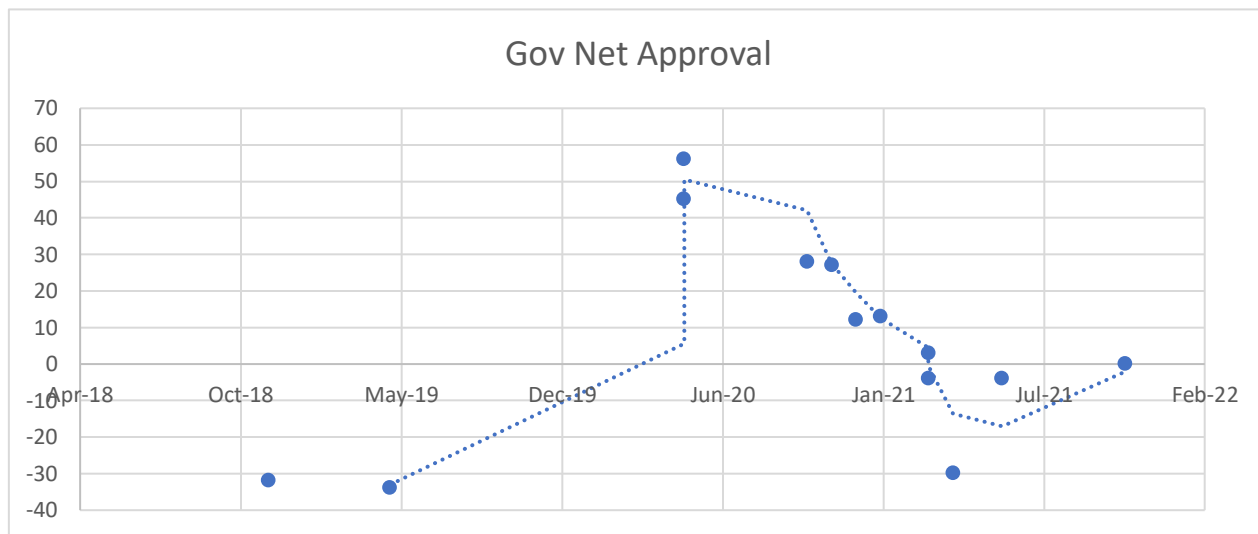


Figure 2¹⁰⁵

In addition to criticism of its environmental governance, the Ford government has seen widespread disapproval of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Compiling results from

¹⁰² *Supra* note 4.

¹⁰³ *Supra* note 5.

¹⁰⁴ Data sources listed in Table 1 in Appendix A

¹⁰⁵ Sources list in table 2 of Appendix A

several polling agencies in Ontario, we can see that not only have Doug Ford's personal approval and the Conservative government's approval dropped consistently after a large boost at the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, (see Figure 1 and Figure 2), but both have also seen significant drops in approval for their management of the pandemic since early 2020 (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

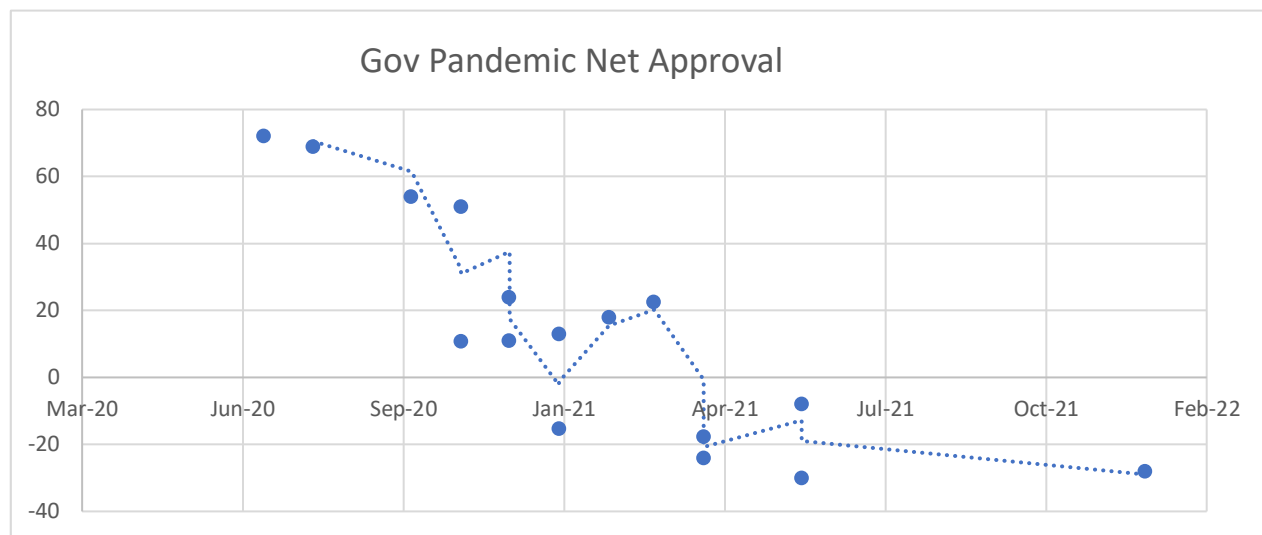


Figure 3¹⁰⁶

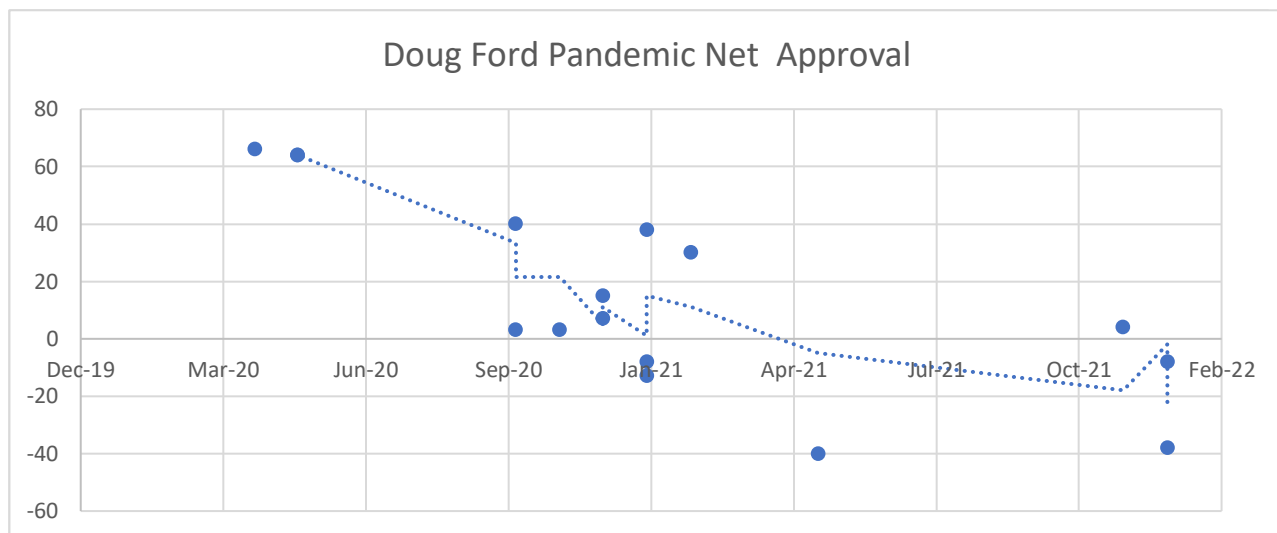


Figure 4¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Sources listed in table 3 of Appendix A

¹⁰⁷ Sources listed in Table 4 of Appendix A

Further, the activist government response necessitated by the pandemic would seem to discredit the neoliberal conception of ‘limited government’ that the government was initially elected on. When polled about budget deficits resulting from Covid spending, a resounding 82% of Ontarians preferred running deficits to cutting services and 71% preferred greater deficits to cutting public service jobs.¹⁰⁸ This is in distinction to shortly before the Ford government’s election in May 2018, when 71% of Ontarians expressed preference for reductions to the deficit through cuts to government spending¹⁰⁹ and December 2018, when Ontarians ranked the deficit as the top problem facing Ontarians.¹¹⁰ As recently as January 2022, improving and expanding healthcare was more ranked as the most important priority at a higher rate than ‘stimulating the economy’ and at double the rate of ‘reducing taxes’ or ‘reducing the deficit.’¹¹¹

This would seem like a rather dire circumstance for the Ford government, except that Conservative Party voting intention has remained relatively stable since 2018 and throughout the pandemic (see Figure 5). This sets the context for our current examination of exactly what Doug Ford’s discursive approach to environment and governance has been and why it has retained political legitimacy despite the rebukes and decline in popularity noted above.

¹⁰⁸ AbacusData, David Coletto, and Ihor Korbabicz. “Ontario PCs Lead by 7 as Budget Set to Drop.” AbacusData, 2020. <https://abacusdata.ca/ontario-pcs-ford-approval-vote-budget/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Nanos Research. “Views of Ontarians on Policy Issues and the Ford Government.” Nanos Research, 2018. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2018-1328-OPSEU-Economic-statement-Populated-report-FINAL-with-tabs.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Ipsos. “Ontarians Willing to Trade off Investment in Economic Growth and Recovery for Investment in Health — at Least until the Backlog of Care Is Cleared.” Ipsos, 2022. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/Ontarians-willing-to-trade-investment-in-economic-growth-and-recovery-for-investment-in-health-until-backlog-of-care-is-cleared>.

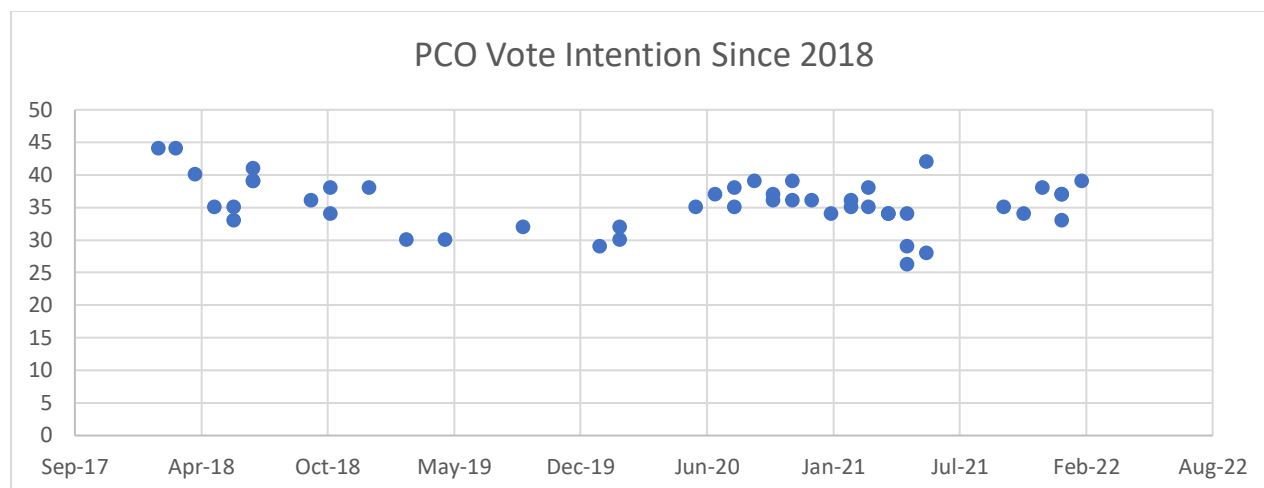


Figure 5¹¹²

5. Analysis

5.1. A THEORY OF POPULIST-PROMETHEAN ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

5.1.1. What is Populism?

Our discussion of the discourse employed by Doug Ford and his Conservative government will require a brief excursion into populism. This is a relatively uncertain and often contested term, but one that is vital to understanding the particular operation of Doug Ford’s political approach. As such, we will briefly turn to what characterizes ‘populism’ and how that is related to environmental policy.

While the term ‘populism’ is experiencing something of a breakout moment, it is not always used with precision or coherent definition. The issue is that, as Laclau points out, “populism has no referential unity because it is ascribed not to a delimitable phenomenon but to a social logic whose effects cut across many phenomena.”¹¹³ Populism itself lacks a specific or defined discursive content because it is not so much a specific ideological program as a general orientation of discourse. It is for this reason that populism has sometimes been called a

¹¹² Sources listed in Table 5 of Appendix A

¹¹³ Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. 1st ed. Verso, 2005 at xi.

‘thin ideology’ that fills its lack of content by latching onto other political discourse and then refracting their content through a populist lens.

Some popular accounts of populism include the ‘popular agency approach’, which holds populism to mean “a democratic way of life built through popular engagement in politics”; the Laclauan approach, which theorizes populism as an emancipatory response to the problems of liberal democracy; and the ‘strategic approach’, which envisions populism purely as a rhetorical strategy for winning elections.¹¹⁴ In this paper, we will be adopting an ‘ideational approach’, which conceives populism as a “discourse, an ideology, or a worldview”.¹¹⁵ This approach identifies populism as “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the (general will) of the people”¹¹⁶

A key feature of this definition is that the division between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ is not necessarily based upon economic conflict, (as in Marxism), or the concept of the pure nation, (as in nationalism), but on a moral distinction.¹¹⁷ For the populist, “the essence of the people is their purity, in the sense that they are ‘authentic’, while the elite are corrupt, because they are not authentic.”¹¹⁸ This helps to explain why populists view the general will of ‘the

¹¹⁴ Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017 at 3-4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid* at 6.

¹¹⁷ Mudde, Cas. “Populism: An Ideational Approach.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser and Cas Mudde. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017 at 29.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

people' to be 'common sense', the morally correct action, and constantly under threat of subversion by corrupt elites and 'special interests.'

In this ideational conception of populism, the three core concepts, (in addition to underlying notion of authentic morality), are 'the people', 'the elite', and 'the general will'.¹¹⁹ The relationship between these concepts described above is all that is needed to constitute a populist orientation. The specifics are fleshed out by the specific historical, social, and political circumstances of the populist leader and/or party. This approach is suitable in that it is flexible enough to help us "understand why populism is so malleable in the real world", shows some of the relationship between populism and democracy, and "allows us to take into account both the demand side and the supply side of populist politics."¹²⁰

Before moving on, I would like to add an insight from Margaret Canovan that I believe is implied, but not explicitly stated, in the ideational approach. This is the notion that a tension in democracy between 'the pragmatic' and 'the redemptive' "makes populism a perennial possibility".¹²¹ The idea here is that modern democracies have two responsibilities that are in conflict: to preside over vast and complex administrative institutions and to, in some way, represent the will of the people. In Canovan's conception, these responsibilities tend to pull in opposite directions, but cannot legitimately govern without each other. Populism, thus, is the 'snap back' that occurs when the pragmatic side of democracy has strayed too far from the 'redemptive' or representative side of democracy.

¹¹⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser *supra* note 107 at 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid* at 19-20.

¹²¹ Canovan, Margaret. "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies* (1999), 1999, 2-16 at 2.

This can be seen in the prevalent populist notion that elites utilize complexity as “a self-serving racket perpetuated by professional politicians”, while the reality is that “solutions to the problems ordinary people care about are essentially simple.”¹²² The result is that populists are likely to espouse ‘common sense’ solutions and deride any technicality or complexity as a ‘mystification’ meant to delude or subvert the interests of ‘the people’. While one might contest the degree to which the dual aspects of democracy must necessarily come into tension, Canovan’s understanding of populism is useful in that it provides an idea of why populism might appear attractive. Namely, populism is the popular identification of a disconnect between administrative rationalist management and the ‘popular will.’

This description leaves us with a definition where populism is best understood as a thin ideology that posits a moral difference between the pure people, in possession of a general will, and a corrupt elite, intent on subverting that will for morally nefarious reasons. To fill out the elements we are interested in, we can turn to populist engagements with right-wing environmental politics.

5.1.2 RWP Discourses and the Environment

Writings that address the relationship between right-wing populism (RWP) and environmental policy have identified a few recurring themes. These includes political polarization, anti-environmentalism as a symbolic stance against ‘elitist’ systems of governance, and environmentalism as detrimental to economic concerns. While different perspectives place emphasis on different connections between RWP and environmentalism, these different dynamics can exist simultaneously.

¹²² Ibid at 6.

There is a literature that looks at how political polarization might help us to understand RWP's engagement with environmental policy. In particular, this line of thinking views regressive environmental policy as a part of general political polarization. Fraune and Knodt note "there is...empirical evidence that political affiliation is one of the strongest predictors of climate change skepticism" and "populism and post-truth politics seem to accelerate the transition of sustainable energy policies from a valence issue to a positional issue by both revealing and intensifying the cleavages along ideological lines."¹²³

This is further supported by findings that climate skepticism is a strong predictor of opposition to clean energy policy for both political elites and the general public. Further, they found that "political elite...influence notions regarding climate-change skepticism, which in turn influences the public's support for environmental policy", and suggest that political elites on the populist right might use this as a strategy to "transfer their opposition to clean energy to voters."¹²⁴ These examples speak to the idea that RWP and political polarization are intertwined in a way that impacts discourse about environmental policy. In this framing, responsible environmental policy is a casualty of political polarization that necessitates an extreme stance on the environment.

Another theme is that right-wing populists frame themselves in opposition to environmentalism as a way of opposing the 'elites' that stand against the 'real needs' of 'the

¹²³ Fraune, Cornelia, and Michèle Knodt. "Sustainable Energy Transformations in an Age of Populism , Post-Truth Politics , and Local Resistance." *Energy Research & Social Science* 43, no. 2018 (2018): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2018.05.029> at 3.

¹²⁴ Kammermann, Lorenz, and Clau Dermont. "How Beliefs of the Political Elite and Citizens on Climate Change in Fl Uence Support for Swiss Energy Transition Policy." *Energy Research & Social Science* 43, no. 2018 (2018): 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2018.05.010> at 56.

people.’¹²⁵ Lockwood stresses “the importance of socially conservative and nationalist values for RWP, which produce hostility to the climate agenda because it is seen as being espoused principally by a liberal, cosmopolitan elite, counter to national interests” and “the desire for a closer, simpler relationship between ‘the people’ and political elites, to which climate change, as a complex, often opaque problem demanding complex solutions, poses an unwelcome challenge.”¹²⁶ Lockwood suggest that this is further complicated by high levels of uncertainty, long time frames, impacts across multiple sectors, international collective action problems and diffuse benefits, all of which make the relationship between the ‘will of the people’, government action and concrete outcomes hard to perceive. This can be linked to the austerity-centered discourses that can sometimes been seen overlapping in populist and neoliberal environmental policy.

Finally, scholars have also observed the coincidence of right-wing populist discourses with a framing of the environment vs the economy. This can be seen in nationalist and neoliberal discourses. Right-wing populism might encourage energy policies that “focus on guaranteeing security of supply and higher standards of living at the national level at the expense of further promoting renewable energy generation and of other groups.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, this type of discourse can be seen in RWP through the idea that “maintaining the provision of energy needs of the core people is given higher priority than climate change

¹²⁵ Lockwood, Matthew. “Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages.” *Environmental Politics* 27, no. 4 (2018): 712–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1458411>.

¹²⁶ *Ibid* at 722

¹²⁷ Batel, Susana, and Patrick Devine-wright. “Populism , Identities and Responses to Energy Infrastructures at Different Scales in the United Kingdom : A Post-Brexit Re FI Ection.” *Energy Research & Social Science* 43, no. January (2018): 41–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2018.05.011> at 45.

mitigation efforts.”¹²⁸ These analyses speak to a trend of juxtaposing environment with national economic interests. This is usually linked to a notion that climate and the environment are interests of the ‘elite’, whereas economic interests are what ‘the people’ are really concerned about.

5.1.3 Political Discourse Analysis

On a general level, the discourse employed by the Ford government can be understood as a form of ‘populist neoliberalism.’ The term ‘neoliberalism’ is somewhat contested, but is commonly understood as adherence to neoclassical economic theories of markets as an optimal tool for organization of society and a corresponding “antagonism toward state ‘interference’ (i.e., Regulation).”¹²⁹

In this paper, I will make a slight amendment, (in line with the definition of neoliberalism elaborated by Brenner, Peck, and Theodore), by noting that neoliberalism does not consist of a single move to eliminate regulation, but rather, successive ‘waves’ of “regulatory restructuring.”¹³⁰ The two ‘waves’ of neoliberalization are a ‘rollback’ phase in which non-market approaches are eliminated, and a ‘deepening’ phase in which “market-oriented policy reform (are) intensified and thickened...and...regimes governing policy development (are) increasingly (re)oriented towards market-based rules.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Fraune and Knodt *supra* note 116 at 2.

¹²⁹ McCarthy, J., & Prudham *supra* note 27.

¹³⁰ Brenner, Neil, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore. “Variegated Neoliberalization: Geographies, Modalities, Pathways.” *Global Networks* 10, no. 2 (2010): 182–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2009.00277.x>. At 190.

¹³¹ *Ibid* at 210-211.

This approach offers an advantage over the more basic conception of neoliberalism as ‘deregulation’, as it recognizes that markets are not naturally occurring phenomena, but institutions that must be secured by the state, (through law and policy). It also accommodates the more critical reading that neoliberalism is not strictly about deregulation, so much as it is about securing the regulatory conditions for maximal profit extraction (often, but not always, unfettered markets).¹³²

The political discourse employed by the Conservative Party of Ontario under Doug Ford’s leadership and the early Ford government, (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), can be characterized as an instantiation of ‘populist neoliberalism’ and/or ‘market populism’. To view the populist element of the Ford conservative’s discourse, it will be useful to make recourse to the ideational approach to populism from Mudde and Kaltwasser expounded above.¹³³ It is clear that the Ford conservatives and government have employed a discourse that conceptualizes a moral ‘people’ in contradistinction to a corrupt ‘elite’.

The Ford conservative’s vision of ‘the people’ can be seen in a number of statements, including perhaps most emblematically Doug Ford’s speech from the throne upon his swearing in titled “A Government for the People”¹³⁴ and the 2018 Ontario Conservative party platform titled “A Plan for the People.”¹³⁵ The 2018 platform identifies the people as: “The people in Ontario that were forgotten by Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal government”; “The people in

¹³² Chomsky, Noam. *Profit over People*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998; Albo, Greg. “Divided Province: Democracy and the Politics of State Restructuring in Ontario.” In *Divided Province*, edited by Greg Albo and Bryan M. Evans, 1st ed., 3–42. Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018 at 6.

¹³³ Mudde and Kaltwasser *supra* note 107.

¹³⁴ Office of the Premier. “A Government for the People.” Government of Ontario, 2018. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/speech/49713/a-government-for-the-people>.

¹³⁵ Ford, D. 1b (2018). Premier of Ontario ‘Plan for the People’ [Transcript]. Retrieved from https://www.ontariopc.ca/plan_for_the_people.

Ontario that have lost trust in government”, “The people that believe the Liberals are the corrupt elite that prioritize special interest groups,”” The hard-working people in Ontario that pay taxes to the political elites”, “The ‘little guys,’” “The people that demand respect from the Ontario government, as taxpayers,” and “The lower- and middle-class families in Ontario.”¹³⁶ In general, ‘the people’ are constructed as “a homogenized group of hard-working taxpayers and lower-and middle-class families in Ontario.”¹³⁷

The Ford conservative’s conception of the ‘elite’ can also be seen in the 2018 Conservative party of Ontario platform. As Budd points out, “the construction of elites in Ford’s discourse emerges primarily out of attacks against the outgoing Liberal government, who he accuses of systemic corruption and using their authority to enrich their close friends and colleagues,” typified by Ford’s crusade against the “six-million-dollar man” Hydro One CEO.¹³⁸

In a connected way, the ‘elite’ in Ford’s discourse can be understood as those who don’t do ‘real work’ in contrast to ‘hardworking taxpayers.’ This type of discourse was present in Rob Ford’s successful mobilization of “disenchantment toward down-town elites to create an ethnically diverse coalition of support among suburban voters”¹³⁹ As will be discussed in more detail later in this paper, this distinction draws upon a bifurcation in Ontario’s economy generally and in the service-class in particular, that often finds those with ‘good’ service jobs

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Zambito, Giustino. “A Plan for the People: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Campaign Platform and Victory Speech of Premier Doug Ford (2018-2019) By.” Ryerson University, 2019 at 35.

¹³⁸ Budd, Brian. “The People’s Champ: Doug Ford and Neoliberal Right-Wing Populism in the 2018 Ontario Provincial Election.” *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 1 (2020): 171–81. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i1.2468>.

¹³⁹ Kiss, Simon J., Andrea M.L. Perrella, and Zachary Spicer. “Right-Wing Populism in a Metropolis: Personal Financial Stress, Conservative Attitudes, and Rob Ford’s Toronto.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 42, no. 7 (2020): 1028–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2019.1657021>; Silver, Daniel, Zack Taylor, and Fernando Calderón-Figueroa. “Populism in the City: The Case of Ford Nation.” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 33, no. 1 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-018-9310-1>.

located in the metropolitan core and those with ‘bad/precarious’ service jobs, (or manufacturing, construction, or primary industries) located in suburban or rural areas.¹⁴⁰

In this way, Fordist populism is able to construct an elite and a people without recourse to the xenophobia or nativism that is emblematic of a great deal of populist discourses in Europe and the United States, but is precluded by Ontario’s ethnically diverse population and long-standing self-conceived culture of multiculturalism. In Ontario, the divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ is much more explicitly economic than in other areas. However, this economic divide is not necessarily based strictly upon income stratification, but rather on sector of the economy. To the degree that it is cultural, it relies on perceived differences between wealthy metropolitan elites and ‘real Ontarians.’ We will expand on the nature of this economic divide in our discussion of political economy leading up to Ford’s election.

The ‘general will’ of the people is also economic, rather than nativist or xenophobic, in Ford’s discourse. The ‘general will’ of the ‘people’ and its connection to neoliberal/market objectives can be seen in two common themes that emerge across Ford’s discourse: ‘respecting taxpayers’ and ‘open for business.’ Both of these themes posit that ‘the people’ desire limited government interference with everyday life and a freer rein for business development in Ontario. These very much correspond to the ‘rollback’ wave of neoliberal reform.

Respecting Taxpayers

The respecting taxpayers theme is well encapsulated in a line from Premier Ford’s 2018 speech from the throne, in which he states that: “Your new government believes that no dollar

¹⁴⁰ Tufts, Steven. “The Geography of the Ontario Service Economy.” In *Divided Province*, edited by Greg Albo and Bryan Evans. Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018.

is better spent than the dollar that is left in the pockets of the taxpayer.”¹⁴¹ This belies a belief not so much that taxation should be employed responsibly, but that taxation and government expenditure itself are perhaps illegitimate exercises of state authority.

This weds a populist commitment to the interests of ‘the people’ with the minimalist-state conception embraced by right-wing neoliberalism. Specifically, it links a short-term alleviation of tax burdens on ‘the people’ to a more systematic neoliberal project concerned with reducing the state’s role in public affairs.

Open for Business

The open for business theme can also be found in Premier Ford’s 2018 speech from the throne. In particular, it can be seen in the idea that “in the current climate, creating and protecting jobs should be something that unites us all...by lowering taxes, reducing the regulatory burden and making life easier for entrepreneurs, your government will make sure the world knows that Ontario is open for business.”¹⁴²

Again, this theme puts neoliberal ideas within a populist frame. In particular, by assuming a direct relationship between reduced regulation of industry and economic prosperity for all, the open for business theme links individual material wellbeing to a neoliberal agenda of deregulation. In sum, the discourse employed by the Ford government reframes traditionally neoliberal ends, (reduction in the size of the state and deregulation of the economy), in populist terms, by positing these ends as the organic and morally justified ‘general will.’ This

¹⁴¹ Office of the Premier 2018 *supra* note 127.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

dynamic is likely to play out across all governance areas, though this paper is particularly interested in its manifestation within environmental discourse and governance.

5.1.4 Environmental Discourse Analysis

The themes of ‘respecting taxpayers’ and a zero-sum emphasizes on the importance of being ‘open for business’ can also been seen in the Ford government’s approach to environmental policy.

‘Respecting Taxpayers’.

The notion of ‘respecting taxpayers’ shares some linkages with promethean and economic rationalist environmental discourses. Looking at the specifics of how ‘respecting taxpayers’ is applied to environmental concerns, one can see that this discourse shares the promethean idea that the state should have little influence in environmental matters beyond the facilitation of resource extraction. However, there doesn’t seem to be a clear linkage between this discourse and the ideas that motivate prometheanism. Whereas in prometheanism the state limits its interaction with environmental protection because of a confidence in market-based innovation and a view of the environment as a collection of resources, the ‘respecting taxpayers’ discourse seems to lack a firm conception of ‘the environment’ that would inform its stance. It shares the framing that it’s ‘common sense’ to view the environment as a repository of resources whose extraction the state should consider natural and necessary for social progress, but the reasoning is not that markets will come up with better solutions, but that limiting government involvement is an end in-and-of itself.

This is similar to a simplified economic rationalist approach to environmental governance, with only the focus on unfettered markets. However, even then the antagonism to state interference is not motivated by a confidence in the problem-solving nature of that discourse, but only an ingrained aversion to state expenditure or taxation as a method of appeasing taxpayers.

This dilemma might be resolved by viewing the ‘respecting taxpayers’ discourse as possessing basic elements of prometheanism and economic rationalism, but with motivating ideas that are centered in populism. From this perspective, Ford’s ‘respecting tax-payers’ discourse is seen to have populist motivations, countering ‘elites’ and representing ‘the people’, while adopting the right-wing tenants of Prometheanism and economic rationalism. An example can be seen in Doug Ford’s claim that cancelling the cap-and-trade system “sends a clear message that things are now different. No longer will Ontario’s government answer to insiders, special interests and elites. Instead, we will now have a government for the people. Help is on the way.”¹⁴³ This statement’s rejection of ‘elites’ and claim to represent the interests of ‘the people’ are both common elements of populist discourse.

In the case of ‘respecting taxpayers’, a populist foundation would help to explain why this discourse is compatible with the ultimate orientation of prometheanism and economic rationalism, but does not seem to strongly hold the motivating ideas related to either of those discourses in the environmental context. By appealing almost exclusively to the short-term financial interests of taxpayers, the ‘respecting the taxpayer’ discourse adopts RWP

¹⁴³ Office of the Premier-designate. “Premier-Designate Doug Ford Announces an End to Ontario’s Cap-and-Trade Carbon Tax,” June 15, 2018. <https://news.ontario.ca/opd/en/2018/06/premier-designate-doug-ford-announces-an-end-to-ontarios-cap-and-trade-carbon-tax.html>.

motivations. Its interest in avoiding taxation and government spending are not part of a larger vision of the state's role in environmental regulation, except for the directing idea that the state should focus on appealing to the short-term interest of taxpayers instead of to the interests of perceived 'elites'. The Ford government's stance on the environment is the product of an orientation that prioritizes the cessation of government projects as a right-wing populist appeal to the economic interests of constituents.

'Open for Business'.

To start with its relation to established environmental discourses, the 'open for business' theme operates on a zero-sum framing that can be clearly related to ideas that motivate prometheanism. In particular, the way this discourse subordinates environment to economy establishes a linkage to promethean ideas. For this discourse environmental regulation is anathema, as it involves sacrificing human interest, (specifically the interests of business in the case of 'open for business'), for the sake of the environment.

Furthermore, 'open for business' is similar to economic rationalism in that it opposes state intervention in the market through regulation and is motivated by the idea that state interference should be reduced because free markets are capable of providing better environmental solutions. An example can be seen in the notion that removing Ontario's cap-and-trade system would alleviate a cost burden, promote more competitive business and help Ontario's economy.¹⁴⁴ This framing of opposition between the environment and the economy is also commonly found in RWP discourses, especially when the environment is framed as an

¹⁴⁴ Ministry of the Environment Conservation and Parks. "Ontario Introduces Legislation to End Cap and Trade Carbon Tax Era in Ontario," July 5, 2018. <https://news.ontario.ca/ene/en/2018/07/ontario-introduces-legislation-to-end-cap-and-trade-carbon-tax-era-in-ontario.html>.

‘elite’ or ‘international’ interest, while the economy is framed as what really matters to ‘the people’.

The economic success promised by the ‘open for business’ discourse, while supported by economic rationalist ideas, can itself be understood as in service of a populist appeal to the immediate economic interests of constituents. While the ‘respecting taxpayers’ discourse focuses on limiting spending and taxation, the ‘open for business’ discourse services the same populist ideas in an opposite manner. Instead of engaging in environmental deregulation as part of a project to limit government taxation and expenditure, the ‘open for businesses’ discourse justifies deregulation because it will ease burdens on business and, thus, facilitate economic prosperity. Both discourses locate their motivation in a populist appeal to individual economic prosperity, but the ‘respecting taxpayers’ discourse does this by advocating for reduced taxation and spending, and the ‘open for business’ discourse does this by removing what are conceived of as barriers to economic prosperity.

We can link this back to the trends in RWP discourse on the environment that this paper identified earlier. Specifically, ‘respecting taxpayers’ shares many elements with the opposition to environmental and climate policy as a symbolic representation of ‘elite interests. In this discourse, government spending on environment goals is a scam by ‘the elite’, while cutting spending is in the interest of ‘the people’. The ‘open for business’ discourse shares many elements with the trend in RWP to put the environment at odds with the economy. From a RWP perspective, the economy is in the interest of ‘the people’, and the environment is consequently subordinated to economic goals.

5.1.5 Political Economy

The discursive approaches detailed above can be linked to material changes in Ontario's political economy. This section contends that the specific instantiation of this change in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis set the stage for the populist-promethean discursive strategy employed by the Ford government. Specifically, as briefly discussed above, the bifurcation of Ontario's service economy has perhaps played a role in the uptake of populist discourses in Ontario.

Ontario has undergone "substantial structural changes over time", the most relevant to contemporary politics being the expansion of the service sector and contraction of the manufacturing sector.¹⁴⁵ As Winfield notes, "the Ontario governments that have held office since 1985 have struggled with the impact of these structural economic changes and their implications for economic strategy."¹⁴⁶

The transition among capitalist states in the global North from manufacturing-based economies to service/knowledge/information-based economies, (beginning in roughly the 1970s), is a long-noted trend.¹⁴⁷ This new social-economic formation is most commonly referred to as a "post-industrial" society, (as popularized by Daniel Bell),¹⁴⁸ and has been documented in its specific manifestation in Canada and Ontario.¹⁴⁹ This transitional process is

¹⁴⁵ Winfield *supra* note 45 at 14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid* at 14.

¹⁴⁷ Hirschhorn, Larry. "The Post-Industrial Economy: Labour, Skills and the New Mode of Production." *The Service Industries Journal* 8, no. 1 (1988): 19–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642068800000003>; OECD. "The Service Economy." OECD, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.023>.

¹⁴⁸ Bell, Daniel. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1973.

¹⁴⁹ Lavoie, Marie, Richard Roy, and Pierre Therrien. "A Growing Trend toward Knowledge Work in Canada." *Research Policy* 32, no. 5 (2003): 827–44. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333\(02\)00092-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0048-7333(02)00092-6); Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Kaylie Tiessen. "Seismic Shift- Ontario's Changing Labour Market." Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119515630.ch1>; Florida, R., S. Shuttters, and G. Spencer. "Pathways to Ontario's Knowledge Economy," no. August (2016); Livingstone, D. W., and Brendan Watts. "The

far from complete and its continuation in Ontario in can perhaps be seen most simply by comparing the composition of overall production by industry in Ontario from 1997, (the earliest year for provincial data), to 2020 (see Figures 6 and 7). Manufacturing constituted roughly 19% and service production constituted roughly 69% of production in 1997, whereas those changed to 11% and 77% respectively in 2020.

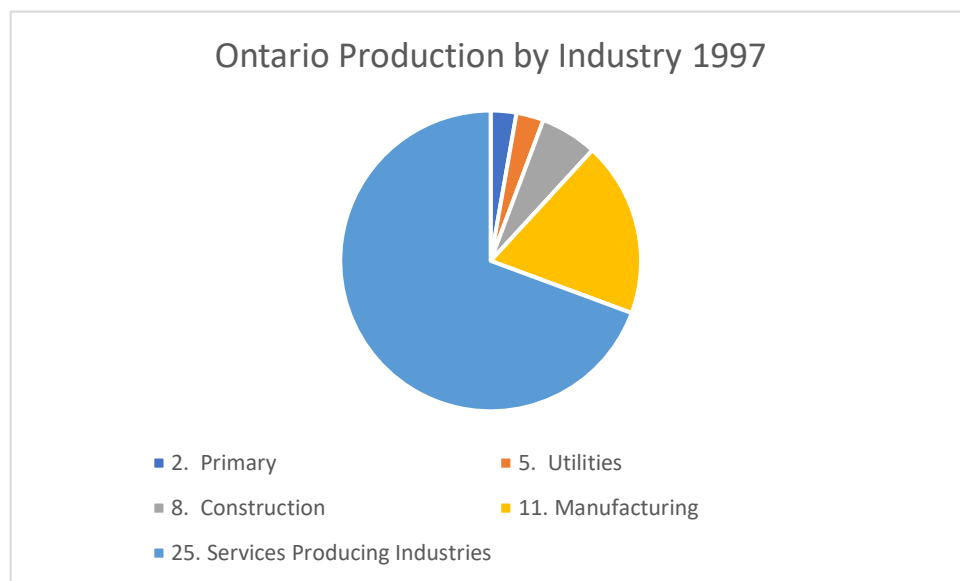


Figure 6¹⁵⁰

Changing Class Structure and Pivotal Role of Professional Employees in an Advanced Capitalist ‘Knowledge Economy’: Canada, 1982–2016.” *Studies in Political Economy* 99, no. 1 (2018): 79–96.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07078552.2018.1440983>.

¹⁵⁰ Data from Ontario Economic Accounts, retrieved from: <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-economic-accounts>

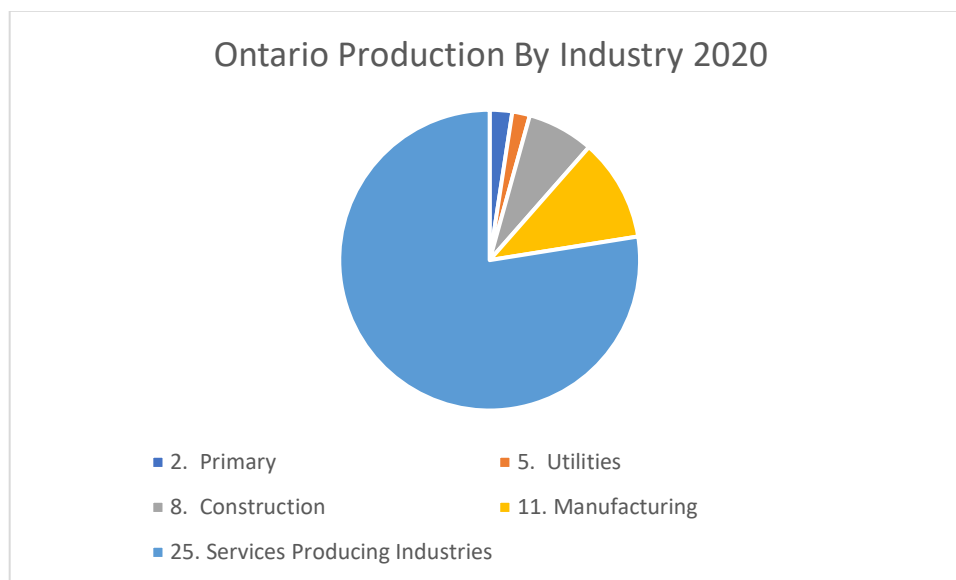


Figure 7¹⁵¹

A key part of understanding contemporary political dynamics in Ontario involves noting that this transition has not occurred uniformly, but has instead been geographically uneven and involved service-sector polarization. Service sector polarization has arisen from a situation in Ontario where economic gains in the service sector have increasingly accrued to “a very fortunate few (who) have benefited from high-paying jobs, (while) the major labor development in Ontario has been the downward spiral of wages and working conditions for many workers.”¹⁵² This can also be characterized, (in the context of Ontario), as the “simultaneous creation of high-paid managerial jobs at the top end of the labour market and

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Peters, John. “The Ontario Growth Model: The ‘End the Road’ or a ‘New Economy.’” In *Divided Province*, edited by Greg Albo and Bryan M. Evans, 1st ed., 43–76. Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018.

low-paid personal service at the bottom end, with little or no creation of mid skilled manual and clerical jobs”¹⁵³

Canada ranks along the United States as the ‘most dualized and segmented’ labour markets among affluent countries.¹⁵⁴ This is further evidenced by research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), which shows a “drop in the share of earnings for families in the bottom half (of the labor market), falling from 22 per cent in 2000–02 to 19 per cent in 2013–15 (and that) that income shifted from the bottom half to the top half of the income distribution: (as) the top half’s share of earnings rose from 78 per cent in 2000–02 to 81 per cent in 2013–15.”¹⁵⁵ Essentially, slow growth and increasingly precarious work from 2000-2015 disproportionately fell on the bottom half of earners in Ontario, the result being an increasingly unequal labour market.¹⁵⁶ A CCPA report from 2018 adds the further insight that this persistent inequality has increasingly fallen upon racialized Ontarians.¹⁵⁷ A report from the public policy forum shows mid-skilled jobs dropping by 7.5% in Ontario since 2008.¹⁵⁸

We might observe this dynamic from a different angle by looking at shifts in labour force participation. This measures the number of labour force participants expressed as a percentage of the population 15 years of age and over. Between January 1990, (the earliest that data is

¹⁵³ *Ibid* at 62; Emmenger, Patrick, Silja Hausermann, Bruno Palier, and Martin Seeleb-Kaiser in *The Age of Dualization: The changing face of inequality in de-industrializing societies*. New York: Oxford University Press 2011.

¹⁵⁴ LaRochelle-Cote, Sebastien, John Myles, and Garnett Picot. 2009. *Income Security and Stability During Retirement in Canada*. Statistics Canada, Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series.

¹⁵⁵ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Sheila Block. “Losing Ground Income Inequality in Ontario, 2000–15,” 2017. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/OntarioOffice/2017/08/Losing_Ground.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁷ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. “Persistent Inequality: Ontario’s Colour-Coded Labour Market,” no. December (2018): 22. www.policyalternatives.ca.

¹⁵⁸ Speer, Sean, and Sosina Bezu. “Job Polarization in Canada,” 2021.

available) and January 2018 the participation rate among those with just a high school degree decreased from 75.2 percent to 57.2, while in the same time frame participation among those with a bachelor's degree from 85.5 to 76.7.¹⁵⁹

It can be countered that general reductions in labour force participation can be explained by earlier retirements, the exiting of the 'baby boomer' generation from the labour force, and increased and longer post-secondary attendance.¹⁶⁰ However, this trend persists even if we limit ourselves to participation among those aged 25-54. With this constraint, participation among those with only a high school degree has reduced from 86.9 to 79.3 and participation among those with a bachelor's degree has only reduced from 91.8 to 89.3.¹⁶¹ As Fredrik DeBoer highlights, "the most likely culprit for these lies in a sea change in which skills and abilities are valued...",¹⁶² the result being that "those who work in educated labour-heavy fields...enjoy the most stability in their employment"¹⁶³ This highlights that polarization has not strictly been along existing economic divisions, but between 'good' service jobs, (typically labour intensive and requiring more education) and both increasingly automated or outsourced manufacturing and 'bad', (typically not requiring post-secondary education), service jobs.

¹⁵⁹ Statistics Canada. "Labour Force Characteristics by Educational Attainment, Monthly, Unadjusted for Seasonality," 2022.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410001901&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.7&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.9&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=5.1&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=01&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2020&cubeTimeFrame.endMonth=01&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2020&referencePeriods=20200101%2C20200101>

¹⁶⁰ Howard, David. "Why Did Labor Force Participation Rate Decline When the Economy Was Good?" United States Census Bureau, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/06/why-did-labor-force-participation-rate-decline-when-economy-was-good.html>.

¹⁶¹ Statistics Canada *supra* note 157.

¹⁶² DeBoer, Fredrik. *The Cult of Smart*. New York: Macmillan, 2020.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

This job polarization has not been equally distributed across Ontario. A 2018 report from the Mowatt Centre observed that income decline has been “particularly acute in a number of mid- sized cities in southwestern Ontario and in an arc surrounding the Greater Toronto Area,”¹⁶⁴ and a recent article from Kerr and Qiyomiddin notes a trend towards low growth in ‘higher skilled occupational categories’ outside of Toronto.¹⁶⁵

Similarly, Tufts notes that while “the structure of service employment varies considerably among the province’s largest cities...smaller cities...depend more on public service employment, especially in health care and social services ” and this creates a dynamic in which “large metropolitan cities are hubs for the flows of capital (while) smaller cities outside of Southern Ontario or more dependent upon the state for employment”¹⁶⁶ and resultantly “the metropolitan concentration of wealth and employment will challenge smaller cities in other parts of the province... (and) uneven growth *within* large centers...(will lead to) some groups remaining excluded from more secure service jobs, especially in public services.”¹⁶⁷

Perhaps the most in-depth documenting of the uneven nature of service-sector polarization and economic growth in Ontario since the early 2000s can be found in the Neptis Foundation’s 2018 report on planning in the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH).¹⁶⁸ While the full extent of trends noted goes beyond the scope of this paper, the major tendency is well

¹⁶⁴ Parkin, Andrew. “A Different Ontario: Income & Employment,” 2018. <https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre/a-different-ontario-income-employment/>.

¹⁶⁵ Kerr, Don, and Komin Qiyomiddin. “Employment in Ontario’s Industrial Heartland: Evidence of Economic Decline in a Mid-Sized Industrial City.” *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 44, no. 1 (2021)

¹⁶⁶ Tufts *supra* note 133.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁸ Blais, Pamela. “Planning the Next GGH.” Toronto, 2018.

encapsulated in the report's first paragraph, which notes that, since the Neptis Foundation's previous report in 2015, " a more balanced pattern of urban and suburban employment growth has given way to the hyper-concentration of knowledge-based activities in and around downtown Toronto."¹⁶⁹

To get a little more specific, the report describes "a slowdown in job growth...outside the Toronto core"; "significant areas of core employment loss across the region, including southern Oshawa, the inner suburbs of the City of Toronto, southerly employment areas of the 905"; and "hyper-concentration of economic activity in and around downtown Toronto", especially in finance, higher order business services, soft tech, and arts and designs.¹⁷⁰ Pairing these geographic trends with the polarization trends above, it would appear that Ontario has seen an increasing concentration of 'good' service jobs in and around the Toronto downtown area, and slow economic growth, (connected to the continued decline of manufacturing) and dominance of 'bad' service jobs in most other regions.

The exacerbation of this geographically uneven economic growth and job polarization has been linked to the austerity measures imposed by the McGuinty/Wynne government, especially following the 2008 financial crisis.¹⁷¹ With Premier McGuinty often compared to former British PM Tony Blair, if the New Labour government was Margaret Thatcher's greatest accomplishment, the McGuinty Liberals were perhaps the Harris government's greatest accomplishment. Following their election in 2003, the Liberal government retained many of the radical changes and cuts imposed by the CSR and were keen to "demonstrate their own

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid* at 4.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* at 4.

¹⁷¹ Albo, *supra* note 125; Peters *supra* note 143.

commitments to fiscal consolidation and the ‘low tax’ strategy” through the pursuit of budgetary balances, cuts to most ministries, and increased emphasis on public-private-partnerships.¹⁷²

The flames of these neoliberal tendencies were further fanned by the 2008 financial crisis. After employing ‘emergency Keynesianism’ in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, the McGuinty government pursued a strategy by which “public sector restraint would be the means to ‘pay for the crisis’”.¹⁷³ In 2012, the provincial budget set out a strategy to eliminate the deficit by the 2017-18 financial year and explicitly proposed austerity for the rest of the decade.¹⁷⁴ These priorities were continued under the Wynne government, (Wynne replaced McGuinty as Liberal leader in late 2013), with the government boasting that “Ontario was the leanest government in Canada, with the lowest per capita program spending of any province...and is projected to remain so” in its 2016 Budget.¹⁷⁵ As Peters aptly puts it:

“Before the crisis, the financial, insurance, and ICT sectors were the most powerful economic, political, and social forces in Ontario. After the crisis, the financial, insurance, and ICT sectors are still the most powerful... Before the crisis, the manufacturing sector was in relative decline; there was growing polarization between rich and poor that left the middle ranks dependent on debt to sustain living standards; public spending on physical infrastructure, education, and social well-being was being slowly constricted; and a growing number of ‘fees’ such as tuition

¹⁷² Albo *supra* note 135 at 23.

¹⁷³ *Ibid* at 26.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid* at 27

¹⁷⁵ Ontario Ministry of Finance. “2016 Ontario Budget,” 2016. https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2016/papers_all.pdf.

were being raised or newly levied on citizens. Since the crisis, all these same trends have continued.”¹⁷⁶

The 2008 crisis went some way to exacerbating the geographically and socially uneven economic growth in Ontario, with an especially prominent trend being job polarization within the service economy. Prompting deepening of the Liberal government’s worst neoliberal tendencies, the 2008 crisis deepened the already existing divisions in Ontario’s economy. As a report from the typically conservative/libertarian Fraser Institute found, following the 2008 recession “most of the province’s job creation took place in its largest urban areas, as well as several metropolitan areas that are closely connected to the Toronto economy” and many cities and regions outside of Ontario have not “recovered to pre-recession job levels nearly a decade later”.

Further, a report from the Mowat Centre polling Ontarians on the “perceptions of their economic security as well as the ability of government to offset economic adversity through social programs” found that “a decade after the financial crisis of 2008, many Ontarians remain somewhat uncertain about the future, expressing concerns about job security and opportunities for economic mobility...(and with) mixed views about whether government programs will be there to support them in times of need.” This indicates that the Liberal government’s handling of the 2008 financial crisis not only resulted in further entrenchment divisions within Ontario’s economy, but also contributed to a general decline in trust of government services.

¹⁷⁶ Peters *supra* note 143.

One exception to this more neoliberal orientation post-2008 was the *Green Energy Act*.¹⁷⁷ This act aimed to provide investment for development of renewable energy projects and as such was an explicit attempt to link environmental investment to revitalization of Ontario's manufacturing sector and promotion of rural economic development in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.¹⁷⁸ This initiative seems to have been of personal importance to Premier Dalton McGuinty,¹⁷⁹ which might partially explain its discordance with the government's more general orientation at this time.

Nevertheless, as discussed above, the legislation does not seem to have been enough to counteract the more general impact of austerity measures on labour polarization and declining trust in government post-2008. Potentially because of this inability, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario successfully portrayed the *GEA* as a paternalistic imposition of elite environmentalist values that drove up electrical rates, (an example of what 'real Ontarians' care about).¹⁸⁰ This culminated in the repeal of the act in 2018, (despite significant cost)¹⁸¹, in a clear repudiation of 'elite' environmental interests.¹⁸² In the context of a more general commitment to spending-cuts and neoliberal governance, green investment was not enough to

¹⁷⁷ *Green Energy Act*, 2009, S.O. 2009, c. 12, Sched. A [*GEA*].

¹⁷⁸ Banzhaf, H. Spencer. "The Political Economy of Environmental Justice." *The Political Economy of Environmental Justice*, 2013, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9780804780612.003.0001>; Office of the Premier. "Green Energy Act Will Attract Investment, Create Jobs." Office of the Premier, 2009. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/9077/green-energy-act-will-attract-investment-create-jobs>.

¹⁷⁹ Spears, John. "Planting the Seeds of Green Energy." *Toronto Star*. September 9, 2011.

https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2011/11/09/planting_the_seeds_of_green_energy.html.

¹⁸⁰ Corcoran, Terence. "Boondoggle: How Ontario's Pursuit of Renewable Energy Broke the Province's Electricity System." *Financial Post*, 2016. <https://financialpost.com/opinion/boondoggle-how-ontarios-pursuit-of-renewable-energy-broke-the-provinces-electricity-system>.

¹⁸¹ Crawley, Mike. "Doug Ford Government Spent \$231M to Scrap Green Energy Projects." *CBC News*, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/doug-ford-green-energy-wind-turbines-cancelled-230-million-1.5364815>.

¹⁸² Ontario Government. "Ontario Scraps the Green Energy Act," 2018. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/50684/ontario-scraps-the-green-energy-act>; *Green Energy Repeal Act*, 2018, S.O. 2018, c. 16.

sway the tide. In fact, it is potentially because of the overall inadequate economic response that the *GEA* was vulnerable to accusations of paternalism and elite interest separate from the will of ‘the people.’

In many ways, the political economic circumstance of labour polarization, geographic unevenness, and declining trust in services, set the stage for the election of Doug Ford’s conservatives in 2018. Many of those areas that Doug Ford’s populist discourse appealed to most directly, (those living in rural and suburban communities), were also those areas most likely “to lack access to secure, high-wage service jobs...in the metropolitan core.”¹⁸³ If we compare maps of 2014 and 2018 election results, (included in Appendix B), the most prominent trend is the overwhelming shift from the Liberal Party to the Conservative Party among voters in the outer suburbs of Toronto, (often referred to as the 905). As per the data reviewed above, these are some of the areas that have been hit hardest by service-sector polarization and increased concentration of work in the downtown Toronto core. It’s not hard to see the appeal of Ford’s discourse among those who saw both less reliable access to social services and economic decline under the McGuinty and Wynne governments.

Before moving on to a Gramscian analysis, we should attend to the environmental dimensions of these developments. As outlined above, the McGuinty and Wynne government largely took an administrative rationalist approach to environmental governance, with some instances of activism around specific policies, (such as the *GEA*). The early years of the McGuinty government paired this managerial/facilitative orientation with higher public salience of environmental issues, whereas the later McGuinty years and the Wynne years were

¹⁸³ Tufts *supra* note 133 at 94-95.

characterized by the same orientation, but with a lower public salience of environmental issues, (likely due to increased focus on economic issues in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis).¹⁸⁴

The contradiction between the Liberal government's progressive image and more neoliberal economic orientation also played out in the environmental arena as the tensions between the "directions of the [GEO], with its "ecological modernist" vision of advanced green services and technologies as the foundation of the economy, and the race to the bottom character of the "Open for Business" strategy, highlighted the government's increasing uncertainty about its economic vision."¹⁸⁵ The Wynne government came into power with a relatively uncertain agenda for environmental matters at a time of low public salience for the issue.¹⁸⁶ Since then the government showed "some more activist inclinations than its predecessor, particularly around climate change" but also "engaged a major retrenchment on the McGuinty government's commitments on green energy and continued to move ahead with the industry-oriented reform of regulatory requirements and approvals processes at the Ministries of the Environment and Natural Resources."¹⁸⁷

Environmental issues were not perceived to play a major role in the government's reelection in 2014, though the Wynne government did pursue a more activist agenda on climate change after that election, primarily through the implementation of a carbon pricing

¹⁸⁴ Winfield, Mark. "Environmental Policy in Ontario: Greening the Province from the Dynasty to Wynne." In *The Politics of Ontario*, edited by Cheryl N Collier and Jonathan Malloy, 1st ed., 251–73. North York: University of Toronto Press, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid* at 259.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid* at 267.

scheme.¹⁸⁸ However, this scheme was criticized for its inadequate protection of marginalized groups from the impacts of carbon pricing¹⁸⁹ and the Wynne government was criticized for failing to communicate the public benefits of the scheme or a transparent vision of how it would work.¹⁹⁰ As suggested above in the case of the *GEA*, this rather bipolar and often unclear approach might have lent some credence to opposition on the grounds that an activist environmental strategy was in contradiction with the interests of ‘real Ontarians.’

Perhaps as the result of populist capitalization on these vulnerabilities, environmental issues became more polarizing in the lead-up to the 2018 election. As discussed above, the Ford government ran on an explicit agenda to repeal Ontario’s Cap-and-trade program, one of the Wynne government’s signature environmental achievements and the *Green Energy Act*, (among other pieces of environmental legislation). This gambit seems to have paid off, as, in addition to the Ford government being elected, Ontarians were deeply divided on carbon pricing¹⁹¹ and environment and climate change did not emerge as major campaign issues, edged out by a focus on ‘material’ issues like Healthcare, the economy, and taxes.¹⁹² Even after the 2018 election, Ontarians remained relatively divided on withdrawal from the Cap-and-trade

¹⁸⁸ *Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act*, 2016, S.O. 2016, c. 7; O. Reg. 144/16: *THE CAP AND TRADE PROGRAM*.

¹⁸⁹ CELA. “Fair and Equitable Carbon Pricing: Comments on Ontario’s Cap and Trade Program.” Toronto, 2016. <https://cela.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Briefing-Note-Cap-and-Trade-Vulnerable-Communities.pdf>.

¹⁹⁰ Raymond, Leigh. “Ontario’s Carbon Price Experience Is a Cautionary Tale.” *Policy Options*, 2019. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/july-2019/ontarios-carbon-price-experience-is-a-cautionary-tale/>.

¹⁹¹ Ipsos. “Majority of Ontarians Not Sold on Carbon Taxes, Think They’re Simply a Tax Grab.” Ipsos, 2018. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/Global-News-Carbon-Tax-Poll-May-14-2018;>

[http://poll.forumresearch.com/data/f371fcf3-5680-4de9-8146-4ad03ab12d46CP%20Ontario%20News%20Release%20-%20PCs%20and%20Climate%20Change.pdf;](http://poll.forumresearch.com/data/f371fcf3-5680-4de9-8146-4ad03ab12d46CP%20Ontario%20News%20Release%20-%20PCs%20and%20Climate%20Change.pdf)

<https://abacusdata.ca/analysis-carbon-pricing-can-stand-a-little-more-from-its-friends/>

¹⁹² Ipsos. “Ontarians Say Horwath Most Committed to Improving Healthcare System; Ford Seen as Biggest Threat.” Ipsos, 2018. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/Global-News-Ontario-Vote-Healthcare-Poll-May-22-2018>.

agreement¹⁹³, but relatively unified in their approval of the firing of the CEO of Hydro One,¹⁹⁴ a line-by-line audit of Ontario’s budget, and a public service hiring freeze.¹⁹⁵ This speaks to the increased saliency of Ford’s populist economic appeal over environmental issues. Even though Ontarians were divided on environmental issues, populist appeals to economic factors won the day.

Per Winfield’s policy Matrix, the combination of neoliberal government and a time of low public saliency for environmental issues portends environmental retrenchments. As detailed above, this is exactly what we saw during the first portion of the Ford government. Ford’s environmental policy seems to have been well in-line with his overall governance approach and public saliency of the issue.

5.1.6 Gramscian Analysis

An analysis of hegemony within Ontario politics will help us to see how the Conservative Ford government prevailed over the Liberal Wynne government in the 2018 election, and how that has had consequences for the assumed ‘common sense’ of political governance in the province. The key factors to identify in this analysis are the ‘hegemonic discourse/common sense’, the ‘counter-hegemonic discourse’ and the ‘political-economic crisis.’ We can then

¹⁹³ Mainstreet Research. “Ontarians Like Ford But Don’t Agree With Scrapping Both Sex-Ed Curriculum and Cap and Trade Program.” Mainstreet Research, 2018. <https://www.mainstreetresearch.ca/poll/ontarians-like-ford-but-dont-agree-with-scrapping-both-sex-ed-curriculum-and-cap-and-trade-program/>; Campaign Research. “Majority of Ontario Residents Are in Support of Doug Ford’s First Actions as Premier.” Campaign Research, 2018. <https://www.campaignresearch.com/single-post/2018/07/12/majority-of-ontario-residents-are-in-support-of-doug-ford-s-first-actions-as-premier>.

¹⁹⁴ Mainstreet Research. “Ontarians Like Ford But Don’t Agree With Scrapping Both Sex-Ed Curriculum and Cap and Trade Program.” Mainstreet Research, 2018. <https://www.mainstreetresearch.ca/poll/ontarians-like-ford-but-dont-agree-with-scrapping-both-sex-ed-curriculum-and-cap-and-trade-program/>

¹⁹⁵ Campaign Research. “Majority of Ontario Residents Are in Support of Doug Ford’s First Actions as Premier.” Campaign Research, 2018. <https://www.campaignresearch.com/single-post/2018/07/12/majority-of-ontario-residents-are-in-support-of-doug-ford-s-first-actions-as-premier>.

examine whether the 'counter-hegemonic discourse' adequately explains and proposes an alternative to political-economic crisis and prompts a transition.

As elaborated above, we can understand the McGuinty/Wynne Liberal government's facilitative/managerial approach to governance as the hegemonic discourse within Ontario politics prior to the 2018 election. Not only did this government hold power for approximately fifteen years, but also drew upon traditional discursive orientations concerning civility, stability, and reasonableness associated with governance in Ontario. This discourse enjoyed both political and cultural hegemony prior to the 2018 election, set the terms of debate, and controlled most levers of political power.

The obvious counter-hegemonic discourse is the Ford Conservative's populist-neoliberal approach. This discourse had some historical precedent in the commonsense revolution, but took many of the ideas from that approach 'one step further.' This discourse clearly presented an 'alternative' understanding of politics in Ontario, appealing to those who were 'left behind' or 'forgotten' by the Liberal government.

Political-economic crisis can be seen in the increasing and geographically uneven development of inequality and service-sector polarization within Ontario. This trend is related to and was exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis, but ultimately stems from forces that existed prior to that event. This is not a crisis in the sense of a 'rupture', but rather the 'coming to a head' of an economic process approaching infeasibility. The restructuring of Ontario's economy in the face a growing service sector and declining manufacturing sector has played a defining role in Ontario's politics since at least the late 80s.

An examination of each discourse's response to this crisis shows that the Ford Conservative's pitched a more compelling path forward that 'brought to consciousness' the political-economic crisis. In many ways, the hegemonic discourse had no way of addressing this political-economic development, and in fact contributed to it through austerity measures in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. The Liberal government's most notable response was perhaps the uptake of discourse from the Martin Prosperity Institute's report *Ontario in the Creative Age*.¹⁹⁶ This report, and the strategy taken up by the Liberal government, generally advocated that economic transition policy in Ontario should focus on the 'creative class' through investments in developing "creative skills and industry" and raising "talent attainment."¹⁹⁷ This strategy largely failed to consider current Ontarians who are not part of the creative class, (other than as supports for the creative), and leaned into the idea that 'good' service jobs are the future of work in Ontario.

The Ford Conservative's employed a discourse that did more to recognize economic polarization in Ontario and located that polarization in the contradictory nature of the Liberal government's governance approach. As such, it was both able to provide a discourse that explained why the economic circumstances of Ontarians outside of the metropolitan core were 'the Liberal's fault' and how a Conservative government would provide a better way forward (by 'respecting taxpayers and 'opening for business').

This understanding is supported by a finding that support for Rob Ford, (who employed a very similar discourse to his brother Doug Ford), was correlated with perceptions of 'personal

¹⁹⁶ Martin, Roger, and Richard Florida. "Ontario in the Creative Age." Toronto, 2009. <http://www-2.rotman.utoronto.ca/mpi/content/ontario-in-the-creative-age/>.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

financial stress.’¹⁹⁸ Specifically, those who reported experiencing greater ‘personal financial stress’, (regardless of income), were more likely to be conservative and more likely to have a favorable view of Rob Ford.¹⁹⁹ As such, whereas we might generally consider neoliberal policies most appealing to high-income individuals, (interested in retaining more of their earnings), we can understand the Ford conservative’s populist-neoliberal message as a more broadly aimed “narrative of striking vengeance against an out-of-touch state that seems...prepared to sap money from hardworking people.”²⁰⁰ This discourse neatly ties together a number of threads by presenting difficulties in Ontario’s economic restructuring as a product of Liberal government’s corruption and preference for metropolitan ‘elites’ over ‘real hard-working’ Ontarians. The preferable course presented, through a populist framing, is neoliberal minimization of the state and greater reliance on markets and business.

It has been contended that the Ford government’s election had more to do with a rejection of the Wynne government than an embrace of populism²⁰¹ or, more generally, that right-wing populism is primarily ‘cultural backlash’ to the rise of socially liberal and post-materialist values and relative decline in the cultural power of previously dominant groups, rather than a concerted political project.²⁰² However, an analysis via the lens of hegemony

¹⁹⁸ Kiss, Simon J., Andrea M.L. Perrella, and Zachary Spicer. “Right-Wing Populism in a Metropolis: Personal Financial Stress, Conservative Attitudes, and Rob Ford’s Toronto.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 42, no. 7 (2020): 1028–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2019.1657021>.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid* at 1040.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

²⁰¹ Kay, Barry J. “Conservative Populism, or Unpopular Liberalism? Review of the 2018 Ontario Provincial Election.” *Canadian Political Science Review* 14, no. 1 (2021): 118–46.

²⁰² Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.; Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. “Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse.” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017): 443–54. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717000111>; for further consideration of the rise of post-material political values see Inglehart, Ronald. *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

shows us that these are not exclusive states. A hegemonic transition requires both failure of the previous discourse in the face of political-economic crisis and a satisfactory counter-hegemonic discourse. In this case, the Liberal government was both unsuccessful in governing Ontario's economic restructuring, (especially the polarization of the service-class), and in providing a discourse that explained that difficulty. The Ford government was able to capitalize on this circumstance by providing a populist-neoliberal discourse that appealed to those who considered themselves underserved and over-taxed by the Liberal government.

5.2 THE RESILIENCE OF POPULIST-PROMETHEAN DISCOURSES

The resilience of the Ford government's populist-neoliberal/promethean-populist discourse is necessarily tied to the dynamics described in the previous section, but is complicated enough to require its own analysis. This section will describe the Ford government's discursive response to the COVID-19 pandemic through a PDA and EDA. It will then investigate institutional and popular alternatives to that discourse through first a PDA and then an EDA, provide an overview of political economic developments during the COVID-19 pandemic, and conclude with a Gramscian analysis of the Ford government's hegemony.

Ultimately, it will suggest that the Ford government's discourse has so far weathered the crisis prompted by COVID-19 for two reasons. First, the populist-neoliberal and promethean-populist discourses have done a satisfactory job of absorbing and explaining challenges accompanying COVID-19 and changes in environmental politics respectively. Second, institutional discursive alternatives have not been able to provide a compelling counter-hegemonic discourse that moves beyond the facilitative-managerial discourse the Ford government displaced in 2018.

It is concluded that the 'green new deal' discourse that has arisen within popular discourse might contain many elements of a potentially successful counter-hegemonic discourse. This is because it appeals to many of the same economic concerns addressed by the Ford government's discourse, while also providing a better explanation of and potential solution to those problems. However, for reasons to be discussed, I propose that a slightly altered, (and perhaps rebranded), instantiation of the green new deal might prove a more effective counter-hegemonic discourse in the long run.

5.2.1 What is Populist Authoritarianism?

In the same way that it was useful to examine the general concept of populism before investigating the rise of the Ford government, it will be useful to consider the links between populism and authoritarianism before outlining a theory of the Ford government's continued durability. As was discussed in section 4.2 and will be outlined further below, in power the Ford government has increasingly dabbled in the violation of democratic norms, especially procedural requirements for consultation and civil participation. This necessitates an analysis of the authoritarian dimension of its discourse. Further, we might find precedence for recent 'freedom convoys' in the more authoritarian dimensions of the Ford government's market populism.

As in the case of populism more generally, the literature on the linkage between populism and authoritarianism, (separately dubbed 'populist authoritarianism', 'authoritarian populism', or sometimes 'totalitarian populism'), is vast and varied. For that reason, this section does not purport to be a complete investigation of the connection between authoritarianism and populism, nor a complete reckoning with the connection between authoritarianism and

right-wing populism. Rather, it will be a brief discussion of the connection between authoritarianism and the specific type of populism employed by the Ford Government, that is, neoliberal right-wing populism or market populism.

We can begin by returning to Mudde and Kaltwasser's ideational approach to understanding populism.²⁰³ On the topic of populism and authoritarianism, they propose that "it is important to think not only about *regimes* of (liberal) democracy, but also about *processes* of democratization (and de-democratization)" and that viewed in this way "populism has a different effect on (democratizing processes and de-democratizing processes)."²⁰⁴ In particular, they propose that in the context of a liberal-democracy, populism will tend to reenforce de-democratization process, through *democratic erosion*, including "incremental changes to undermine the autonomy of those institutions that specialize in the protection of fundamental rights, such as diminishing judiciary independency, jettisoning the rule of law, and weakening minority rights"²⁰⁵

Mudde and Kaltwasser view *democratic erosion* as generally trending away from a liberal democracy and towards what they call an *electoral democracy*. For them, an electoral democracy "is characterized by the periodic realization of elections in which the opposition can potentially win", but also "has a number of independent institutional deficits that hinder respect for the rule of law and exhibit weakness in terms of independent institutions seeking the protection of fundamental rights."²⁰⁶ Electoral democracies are still largely democratic in

²⁰³ Mudde and Kaltwasser *supra* note 112.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid* at 86.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid* at 91.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

disposition and form, but lack opportunities for democratic accountability and tend to privilege the ruling party.

Mudde and Kaltwasser propose that populists will tend to support *democratic erosion* from liberal democracy to electoral democracy and to oppose *democratic deepening* from electoral democracy to liberal democracy because, “they support an interpretation of democracy based on unconstrained popular will”²⁰⁷ and “an extreme majoritarian model of democracy that opposes any groups or institutions that stand in the way of implementing ‘the general will of the people.’”²⁰⁸ That is all to say, an ideational approach to populism gives us some recourse for understanding why an ostensibly democratic movement might display authoritarian and/or undemocratic tendencies. These tendencies exist to the degree that populists are dedicated to removing obstacles to realization of the ‘general will of the pure people.’

We can now expound upon what this authoritarian tendency looks like in the specific instance of market populism. An early use of the term ‘authoritarian populism’ comes from criticism of the Thatcher government in 1980s Britain.²⁰⁹ In this context, the idea is perhaps best associated with the scholar Stuart Hall.²¹⁰ In particular, Hall defines authoritarian populism as a combination of “the resonant themes of organic Toryism—nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism—with the aggressive themes of a revived neoliberalism—self-interest,

²⁰⁷ *Ibid* at 90.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid* at 91.

²⁰⁹ Hall, Stuart, Charles Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts. *Policing the Crisis*. London: Macmillan, 1978; Jessop, Bob, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley, and Tom Ling. “Authoritarian Populism, Two Nations, and Thatcherism.” *New Left Review*, no. August (1984): 110–12; Hall, Stuart. “Authoritarian Populism: A Reply.” *New Left Review*, 1985.

²¹⁰ Jessop et al *supra* note 198.

competitive individualism, anti-statism”²¹¹ which effectively manifests as “unceasing efforts to construct the movement towards a more authoritarian regime from a massive populist base.”²¹²

The specificities of Hall’s argument are too extensive to reproduce effectively in this paper, but in general I take Hall’s argument to be that Thatcherism, (as a, and perhaps the first modern, instantiation of authoritarian populism), effectively fused traditional social attitudes with a (neoliberal) overhaul of the state economic apparatus, through a populist appeal to individual self-interest. This is not dissimilar to our account of the Ford government above. In particular, the ‘rollback’ and ‘rollout’ phases of neoliberalism require extensive and often unilateral change to the state and its role in the economy that can be buttressed through populist linkages to individual freedom and the popular will.

The connection between authoritarianism and market/neoliberal populism has also been discussed by more contemporary scholars. Biebricher argues that “neoliberal thought is more or less inadvertently driven toward an authoritarian politics capable of cutting through the institutional red tape that supposedly locks in the democratic status quo.”²¹³ To specify, according to Biebricher neoliberal thinkers are in somewhat of a bind when prompted to describe “how a society would get from A to B—that is, from actually existing democracy to the favored regime of each variety of neoliberal thought.”²¹⁴ This is because their conception of the

²¹¹Hall, Stuart. “The Great Moving Right Show.” In *Essential Essays, Volume 1*. Duke University Press, 2018 at 383.

²¹² Hall, Stuart. “Popular-Democratic vs Authoritarian Populism.” In *The Hard Road to Renewal*. New York: Verso, 1988 at 146.

²¹³ Briebricher, Thomas. “Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism.” *Global Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730660-19> at 15.

²¹⁴ *Ibid* at 14.

state is so negative and their conception of individuals so atomistic, that it becomes difficult to understand how a society could ever come together to democratically enact neoliberal reforms.²¹⁵ Thus, “neoliberal thought inadvertently comes to yearn for authoritarian political actors who paint themselves as destroyers of the established status quo”, such as populist leaders.²¹⁶

Also on this point, Albo and Fanelli link authoritarianism and market populism to the maintenance of a neoliberal economic orthodoxy. Specifically, they propose that as the core principles of neoliberalism necessitate “the privileging of market freedoms above democratic practice”²¹⁷ and “disciplining dissent...to defend capitalist markets,”²¹⁸ this implies the maintenance of free markets through “restrictions on the exercise of oppositional claims that infringe on market activities and the exercise of rights over private property.”²¹⁹ By prioritizing the security of markets and profits, market populism can imply an authoritarian disposition towards political activity that jeopardizes that security.

On a final note, McCarthy links authoritarian market populism and the environment.²²⁰ His connection between these concepts starts with the observation that “many contemporary authoritarian regimes are pursuing and deepening long-standing neoliberal goals with respect to the environment, removing restrictions on capitalist production by withdrawing from constraining international agreements and standards, rolling back domestic environmental

²¹⁵ *Ibid*; Briebricher, Thomas. “Neo-Liberalism and Democracy.” *Constellations* 22, no. 2 (2015): 254–66. <https://doi.org/10.2298/priz0502017b>.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*.

²¹⁷ Albo, Greg, and Carlo Fanelli. *Austerity Against Democracy*. Toronto: Centre for Social Justice, 2014 at 15.

²¹⁸ *Ibid* at 19.

²¹⁹ *Ibid* at 25.

²²⁰ McCarthy, James. “Authoritarianism, Populism, and the Environment: Comparative Experiences, Insights, and Perspectives.” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 109, no. 2 (2019): 301–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2018.1554393>.

protections, and appointing heads of polluting corporations to head the very agencies that are supposed to regulate those corporations.”²²¹

Building off of this phenomenon, McCarthy proposes that it has less to do with a widespread popular embrace of neoliberal environmental deregulation and more to do with “political contestation over how and for whose benefit particular environments and natural resources have been used and governed.”²²² In particular, he makes the point that “deepening urban-rural disparities in the neoliberal era were central to the emergence of the recent populist wave”, and that a populist emergence in rural communities was at least partially a reaction against “the particular burdens increasingly mechanized resource extraction, globalization of primary commodity markets, volatility, austerity, and declining prosperity have imposed on them over the past several decades.”²²³

That is to say, McCarthy locates popular embrace of authoritarian market populism in relation to the environment in the urge to secure individual prosperity. We earlier identified the Ford government’s linking of business deregulation with individual economic prosperity as a key element of its discourse. It makes sense that a similar dynamic would emerge in relation to the environment and authoritarian market populism.

This discussion shows that there is a robust literature treating the connection between authoritarianism and the type of market populism embraced by the Ford government. In particular, the sources surveyed indicate that market populism is potentially connected to authoritarianism to the extent that it links individual prosperity to the

²²¹ *Ibid* at 306 .

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

safeguarding/establishment of market mechanisms and then portrays threats to the security of markets as obstacles to realization of the 'general will of the pure people.' By connecting business profits to a populist appeal to general economic wellbeing, the Ford government is able to undertake rather authoritarian measures, such as the shirking of procedural rights and democratic norms, in the name of 'the people'. This helps to explain some of the specific ways that market populist impulses manifest as authoritarian de-democratization measures within the Ford government's recent environmental discourse and political action.

5.2.2 PDA- Doug Ford

The Ford government's discursive response to the COVID-19 pandemic has retained most of the elements that preceded the pandemic, adapting slightly to accommodate increased government action, as necessitated by the pandemic. In particular, this has been accomplished by retaining the two populist-neoliberal themes discussed above, ('respecting taxpayers' and 'open for business'), while also adopting an additional theme, which this paper will call 'reopening for business'. In general, the 'reopening for business' discourse commits to a temporarily more activist, (though still constrained), government, without compromising the Ford government's neoliberal discourse, by framing removal of public health restrictions to ensure economic prosperity as the central site and purpose of government action. That is to say, it somewhat remarkably positions the Ford government against itself, proposing that 'reopening for business,' (and removing government restrictions), is the ultimate goal, while measures associated with public health are something of an exogenous force that is potentially necessary, but, in the final analysis, undesirable.

This is concordant with something like the ‘second wave’ policies of neoliberalism and authoritarian populism discussed above, where the securing of markets, (a move that requires government action), is reframed as in the service of regulatory unburdening and individual freedom. It also might partially explain why the Ford government has not been punished more for its poor handling of the pandemic and low public approval on the issue. Within the ‘reopening for business’ discourse, removal of regulations is the main activity within political action, while public health measures are conceptualized as actions that secure economic prosperity, but must be pushed back against once they begin to interfere with that prosperity, (as they necessarily do). Further, the embrace of minimal governance embedded within the ‘common sense’ of the Ford government’s discourse reinforces the idea that anything beyond relatively minimal public health action is not only politically undesirable, but outside the scope of political possibility.

Reopening for Business

The *Reopening for Business* discourse understands removal of public health restrictions to ensure economic prosperity to be the primary role of the Ontario government in the COVID-19 pandemic. This implicitly creates a zero-sum framing between economy and public health. This discourse can be seen in a number of premier Ford and the government’s statements. During his first public statement addressing the COVID-19 pandemic on March 13, 2020, Ford did not discuss any public health measures being taken in Ontario, but stressed that:

“I joined my fellow premiers to press the federal government on the need to provide reassurance to Canadian businesses and Canadian families during this time of economic uncertainty. While our government welcomes Minister Morneau's

announcement that \$10 billion in credit will be made available for businesses through Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Bank, and the Bank of Canada's decision to cut the overnight interest rate, we urge the federal government to work with the provinces to deliver the fiscal stimulus necessary to maintain stability and confidence in the Canadian economy. I further urged the Prime Minister to take action to address the ongoing supply chain issues we have been seeing across our province.”²²⁴

Mirroring this discourse, the 2020 Ontario budget emphasized the importance of economic recovery, stating that: “We will get through this second wave, and any future waves, just as we got through the first one. When we do, the people of Ontario will be just as determined in their pursuit of a strong recovery as they have been in the battle against this virus. One thing is crystal clear: now is the time to begin building the foundation for a strong economic recovery.”²²⁵ Similarly, the 2021 budget, titled “Protecting People’s Health and Our Economy”, summates the government’s approach to post-COVID economy recovery in the statement that: “We are choosing a different path, because anyone who claims higher taxes or fewer public services are inevitable is forcing a false choice. Growth is the...path...that our government intends to pursue... While we

²²⁴ Office of the Premier. “Premier Doug Ford Calls for a Strong, United Response to COVID-19.” Government of Ontario, 2020. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/statement/56320/premier-doug-ford-calls-for-a-strong-united-response-to-covid-19>.

²²⁵ Ministry of Finance of Ontario. 2020 Ontario Budget - Ontario’s Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover, 2020. <https://budget.ontario.ca/2020/index.html> at iii-iv.

create the conditions, it will be the people and employers who create the actual growth.”²²⁶

This can be further seen in statements that frame alleviation of public health measures in terms of their economic impact, such as: “More People Can Get Back to Work as Additional Businesses and Services to Reopen This Week,”²²⁷ “Ontario Supports Job Creators as People Start Returning to Work,”²²⁸ and continual reference to easing of public health measures as ‘reopening the economy’.²²⁹ The Ford government has provided a populist-neoliberal twist to many of the more activist economic measures taken during the pandemic, by particularly emphasizing measures that aid small business and ‘job creators.’²³⁰

In many ways, this discourse reflects the promethean zero-sum framing between environment and economy, by framing the relationship between public health and economy as zero-sum, with the economy being the ‘common sense’ priority. This is rather clever, as it potentially forces those in opposition to the Ford government, if they adopt this framing, to advocate for public health measures or criticize the government’s response in opposition to economic development and prosperity. Robust public health measures and economic

²²⁶ Ministry of Finance of Ontario. *Ontario’s Action Plan: Protecting People’s Health and Our Economy 2021 Ontario Budget*, 2021.

²²⁷ Office of the Premier. “More People Can Get Back to Work as Additional Businesses and Services to Reopen This Week.” Government of Ontario, 2020. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57209/more-people-can-get-back-to-work-as-additional-businesses-and-services-to-reopen-this-week>.

²²⁸ Office of the Premier. “Ontario Supports Job Creators as People Start Returning to Work.” Government of Ontario, 2020. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/56884/ontario-supports-job-creators-as-people-start-returning-to-work>.

²²⁹ Office of the Premier. “Declaration of Emergency Extended While Ontario Gradually Reopens the Economy.” Government of Ontario, 2020. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/56924/declaration-of-emergency-extended-while-ontario-gradually-reopens-the-economy>.

²³⁰ Office of the Premier *supra* note 183; Office of the Premier. “Ontario Provides Urgent Relief for Small Businesses and Landlords.” Government of Ontario, 2020. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/56756/ontario-provides-urgent-relief-for-small-businesses-and-landlords>.

prosperity are not necessarily in tension, but the Ford government's dominance over public discourse, (as the presiding government), has often led opposition to adopt this same zero-sum-framing, forcing them to play the role of 'unpragmatic', 'unrealistic', or 'unreasonable' public health extremists who are not alive to the economic concerns of 'real Ontarians.'

Activist government measures, usually understood as anathema to neoliberal governance, are justified to the extent that they secure economic prosperity, especially economic prosperity conceptualized as business profitability. The populist tenor of the Ford government's discourse is instrumental in this task, as it provides popular appeal to economic measures that would normally be outside of the general public interest. By connecting business profits to a populist appeal to general economic wellbeing, the Ford government is able to undertake 'market deepening' and 'profit securing' policy in the name of 'the people'.

5.2.3 EDA- Doug Ford

There is a clear environmental element of the *Reopening for Business* discourse. Specifically, removals of environmental regulations and establishment of new, more permissive/business-friendly, environmental regimes are conceptualized as a necessary part of economic recovery. As with the Ford government's initial environmental discourses, this discourse draws upon promethean and economic rationalist discourses, while smoothing over inconsistencies via populist appeals. It's shirking of procedural and participatory rights is potentially emblematic of the Ford government's more authoritarian populist edge.

This discourse can be seen in many of the environmental measures passed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps the earliest of such measures was the suspension of the

Environmental Bill of Rights.²³¹ This regulation temporarily suspended public participation requirements under the EBR, including public consultation and public notice of environmental decisions. This effectively made it “impossible to fully account for all environmental decisions” and created the possibility for decisions to be “overlooked by the public because no notice was required.”²³² The suspension, (which occurred without consultation), was justified via a post to the environmental registry, on the grounds that “The government must act quickly to address issues arising from this emergency, often to protect the health and safety of person.”²³³

As Kyle notes: “the decision to suspend these protections was not supported by any rationale since the exception did not elevate capacity constraints the government was facing. Furthermore, the decision was unnecessary, as the EBR contains emergency-based exceptions that could have been applied in response to COVID-19 specific needs. The exemption was also not limited to COVID-19 related decisions, making the action overbroad, exacerbating the potential negative impact this decision could have.”²³⁴ It would seem this suspension was likely undertaken as part of policy agenda to degrade procedural rights under the *EBR*.

Perhaps the most dramatic changes to environmental policy during the COVID-19 pandemic occurred under Bill 197, the *Covid-19 Economic Recovery Act*.²³⁵ This act made significant changes to important pieces of environmental legislation, such as the *Environmental Assessment Act*, the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, and various land use planning statutes. These measures were justified in debate via statements like: “changes to the Environmental

²³¹ O. Reg. 115/20.

²³² Kyle *supra* note 97 at 28-29.

²³³ Ministry of the Environment Conservation and Parks. “Temporarily Exempting Proposals from the Application of the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR),” 2020. <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1599>.

²³⁴ Kyle *supra* note 97 at 30.

²³⁵ COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020, S.O. 2020, c. 18

Assessment Act... will ensure stronger environmental oversight and will focus our resources on projects that have the highest impact on the environment while also helping key infrastructure projects get going without unnecessary red tape. We want to support projects that will create jobs now while making Ontario safer and stronger in the years to come.”²³⁶

The intention in these statements seems to be to frame environmental issues in opposition to economic issues, with a particular focus on ‘cutting red tape’ and promoting development. This adopts the promethean conception of the environment as something to be harvested in support of human flourishing. It shares similarities with the economic rationalist framing, by arguing that removal of environmental regulations automatically leads to economic prosperity, but as discussed above, does not really touch upon that discourse’s emphasis on markets as problem solving tools. As noted above, this might be seen as the product of the Ford government’s populist orientation.

The more activist or permissive measures, such as increased ability for the use of discretionary planning orders, may be understood as part of a project of securing profits, rather than removing regulation, as is suggested by the ‘waves of development’ theory of neoliberalism and authoritarian market populist theories outlined above. Ultimately, the environmental discourse employed by the Ford government during the pandemic retains all of its pre-pandemic feature, while adapting only slightly to frame changes to environmental policy as necessary emergency economic measures. A populist-promethean discourse is highly amenable to this type of framing and did not pose a problem for the Ford government’s environmental policy agenda. In fact, if anything, the pandemic and discursive use of

²³⁶ Ontario, Legislative Assembly, *Hansard Transcript*, 42-1 (July 8 2020) at 1340.

‘emergency’ made it easier than ever before for the Ford government to enact retrenchments of environmental policy.

5.2.4 PDA- Institutional Alternatives

The three primary institutional alternatives to the Ford government are the, the New Democratic Party of Ontario, the Liberal Party of Ontario, and the Green Party of Ontario. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed examination of each of these actor’s discursive approaches, this section will attempt to generally characterize how their discourses have differed from that employed by the Ford government, based upon resources presented on each party’s website.

The New Democratic Party of Ontario

As the official opposition, the Ontario NDP are the most prominent institutional alternative to the Ford government. The NDP have generally employed a discourse that advocates a more activist response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a greater focus on public health. However, they have mostly, though not exclusively, done so not by rejecting the Ford government’s general orientation towards and framing of the problem, but rather by adopting a managerial discourse that argues the NDP would have ‘managed the crisis better’.

This can be seen in recent news releases from the NDP to the effect that: “Ford turned away small business in need while giving millions to those that didn’t need help,”²³⁷ “Horwath says throne speech must commit to rebuilding health care, education, small business,”²³⁸ “Doug

²³⁷ Ontario NDP. “Ford Turned Away Small Business in Need While Giving Millions to Those That Didn’t Need Help,” 2021. <https://www.ontariondp.ca/news/ford-turned-away-small-business-need-while-giving-millions-those-didn-t-need-help>.

²³⁸ Ontario NDP. “Horwath Says Throne Speech Must Commit to Rebuilding Health Care, Education, Small Business,” 2021. <https://www.ontariondp.ca/news/horwath-says-throne-speech-must-commit-rebuilding-health-care-education-small-business>.

Ford must mandate vaccinations for all long-term care, health care and education workers,”²³⁹ among many others to the same effect, These messages propose *specific* policy alternatives and more activist governance, but ultimately remain rooted in an idea that the NDP would have ‘managed the crisis better.’ They don’t necessarily propose a break with current understandings of governance in Ontario, but instead propose that the NDP are the better managers within the current political paradigm.

The Liberal Party of Ontario

In general, under the leadership of Steven Del Duca, the Liberal Party of Ontario has adopted a very similar strategy to the NDP, pitching itself as a ‘better manager’ of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is apparent in statements such as: “Ontario Liberals Call for New Measures to Prevent a Fourth Wave,”²⁴⁰ “Doug Ford’s softness on public safety is costing us lives, money and time and trying the patience of people who have done the right thing”, and “The Ontario Liberal Party’s...plan is calling for increased public safety measures that will protect communities, drive vaccine acceptance and accelerate our economic reopening.”²⁴¹ As in the case of the NDP, these statements are related to individual policy differences, and seem to propose that, within a public-health/economy zero-sum, the Liberal party would have done a better job managing the balance. At this stage, it is difficult to tell how the Liberal Party intends to distinguish itself from the NDP, as their discursive orientations seem to be relatively similar. For reasons

²³⁹ Ontario NDP. “Doug Ford Must Mandate Vaccinations for All Long-Term Care, Health Care and Education Workers: NDP,” 2021. <https://www.ontariondp.ca/news/doug-ford-must-mandate-vaccinations-all-long-term-care-health-care-and-education-workers-ndp>.

²⁴⁰ Liberal Party of Ontario. “Ontario Liberals Call for New Measures to Prevent a Fourth Wave,” 2021. <https://ontarioliberal.ca/ontario-liberals-call-for-new-measures-to-prevent-a-fourth-wave/>.

²⁴¹ Liberal Party of Ontario. “Ontario Liberals Release Plan to Mandate Safety After Surge in Anti-Science Protests,” 2021. <https://ontarioliberal.ca/ontario-liberals-release-plan-to-mandate-safety-after-surge-in-anti-science-protests/>.

explored below, this paper will contend that neither of these institutional alternatives provide a compelling alternative discourse to that employed by the Ford government.

The Green Party of Ontario

With only one elected member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the Green Party remains a relatively minor player in Ontario politics. However, as a uniquely environmentally focused institutional alternative, they merit discussion in this paper. While there will be more to say on the Green Party in the following EDA, they do have a distinct stance on COVID-19 and governance as a whole. In particular, in recent months the Green Party has adopted a 'green recovery' discourse.²⁴² This discourse links inadequate management of COVID-19 to inadequate management of the environment by arguing that "the path we were on was not sustainable or just. It didn't adequately care for the people and places we love."²⁴³ In this manner, the Green Party effectively links the Ford government's shortcomings on COVID-19 management and environment to a core problem of discursive focus, namely unsustainability and inadequate care.

This differs from the Liberal and NDP platforms by not only pinpointing decisions the Green Party would have managed better, but also drawing a clear discursive difference between the animating principles of the Green Party and Conservative Party, as well as how those discursive differences lead to different policy outcomes. This implies the more activist governance adopted by the NDP and Liberals, but also links that activism to a difference of discursive orientation, instead of merely superior managerial competence. The Green Party's

²⁴² Green Party of Ontario. "Greener and More Caring COVID-19 Recovery," 2022.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

discourse seems to imply that the central problem with the Ford government isn't their incompetence, but their misrecognition and misprioritization of relevant political values.

5.2.5. EDA- Institutional Alternatives

There is also an environmental discourse element to each of these institutional alternatives. We will first discuss the NDP and Liberals jointly, (as they adopt many similar discursive elements), before then turning to the Green Party.

NDP and Liberal Party

Generally, both the NDP and Liberals seem to be pursuing a discourse of ecological modernization which proposes that environmental issues and the economy are not in tension because proper environmental governance is also good for the economy. In Dryzek's framing this is an 'imaginative reformist' discourse because it proposes an imaginative rethinking of the relationship between environment and economy, and, in light of this reimagining, proposes reform to existing structures of industrial society.

This is apparent in some of the environmental policies that the Liberal Party and NDP have proposed. For example, Steven Del Duca's remark that "creating a new electric vehicle incentive program is a win-win for Ontario families...It will advance the fight against climate change, create good paying jobs and deliver needed pocketbook relief"²⁴⁴ seems to be a classic case of ecological modernist framing that proposes how a relatively reformist solution, (an economic incentive program), will both help the environment and grow the economy. This thinking can further be seen in the NDP's proposal that 'green auto manufacturing' will be both

²⁴⁴ Liberal Party of Ontario. "Ontario Liberals Announce Incentive on Electric Vehicles and Charging Stations," 2021. <https://ontarioliberal.ca/ontario-liberals-announce-incentive-on-electric-vehicles-and-charging-stations/>.

good for the environment and the economy.²⁴⁵ At this stage, it is difficult to tell whether these elements of ecological modernization discourse would manifest as an activist or merely managerial orientation if either party was elected. Historical analogs suggest that an NDP government might pursue a more activist agenda, (like the early Rae government) while a Liberal government might pursue a more managerial agenda, (like the McGuinty and Wynne governments), though these historical precedents are by no means dispositive and ultimate orientation would depend on public saliency of environmental issues and other context-specific factors that are as-yet unknowable.

The environmental discourse of the NDP does differ from the Liberal Party in that they propose a ‘Green New Democratic Deal.’²⁴⁶ This stems from the ‘Green New Deal’ discourse, (to be discussed in more detail below), which generally proposes a radical shift from current structures of industrial society as part of a program of environmental transition and redistributive justice. It thus falls in the bottom right quadrant of Dryzek’s typology (imaginative-radical) and shares many elements of what Dryzek calls ‘Green Politics’, a discourse that is characterized by reference to “multifaceted social and ecological crises that can only be resolved through political action and structural change.”²⁴⁷ This variety of discourse includes more specific discourses like environmental justice.

However, while the NDP policy uses the name ‘Green New Deal’, the plan largely steers away from discussion of more radical restructuring of industrial society and back towards the reformist measures characteristic of ecological modernization. When it comes time to propose

²⁴⁵ Ontario NDP. “Green New Democratic Deal,” 2021. https://www.ontariondp.ca/sites/default/files/gnndd_-_en_-_sm1.pdf at 9-10.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 218.

concrete policies, much of the ‘Green New Democratic Deal’ simply proposes to undo changes made by the Ford government, (such as reinstating a cap-and-trade system and restoring the powers of the environmental commissioner).²⁴⁸ When new policies are proposed they are often closer to an ecological modernist ‘promoting innovation’ framing than a GND ‘social spending for economic transformation’ framing.²⁴⁹ Emblematic examples include the Green New Democratic Deal’s approach to ‘transforming transportation’ primarily through financial incentives and its focus on promoting innovation in green manufacturing through accelerated depreciation schedules for green capital as a centerpiece of its ‘Guaranteed Jobs’ section.²⁵⁰

As such, the NDP’s current environmental discourse might be understood as somewhere between ecological modernization and green politics, though leaning towards the former discourse because of an incomplete reckoning with the radical institutional shifts that would necessarily accompany a complete embrace of the latter discourse.

Green Party

As mentioned above, the Green Party’s current discursive stance is perhaps best represented by their focus on a ‘Green Recovery.’ This employs the familiar ecological modernist idea that environmentally mindful governance is good for the economy, but particularly emphasizes social provisioning, (i.e., “taking care of the people we love”) instead of the abstract economic growth or innovation that is sometimes linked to ecological modernism. This is evidenced in the Green Party’s stated objective to “Re-energize climate action with good jobs”, but also to “Uphold our new respect for workers” and “Take care of each other with a

²⁴⁸ “Green New Democratic Deal” *supra* note 234 at 13 .

²⁴⁹ *Ibid* at 15.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid* at 8.

Basic Income Guarantee.”²⁵¹ This discourse suggests that environmental protection and robust social-safety net and welfare programs stem from a shared ethos of care and sustainability.

While this discourse doesn’t neatly fit into Dryzek’s typology, I would propose that it rests somewhere in the top left corner of the bottom right quadrant (imaginative-radical); that is, at the more prosaic and more reformist corner of Green Politics. A ‘Green Recovery’ discourse proposes a rethinking of the relationship between industrial society and environment, as well as fairly extensive changes to the structure of the economy, but without some of the radical edge that can be found in this quadrant. It is both more prosaic and reformist than a ‘Green New Deal’ discourse, but more coherent and focused than the NDP’s sometimes uncertain use of that discourse (as detailed above).

This marks something of a discursive shift from the Green Party’s 2018 platform.²⁵² While that document shared many policy proposals with the ‘Green Recovery’ plan, it employed a more straight-ahead version of managerial-ecological modernism, with emphasis on ‘building a strong green workforce’²⁵³ and a reformist approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.²⁵⁴

As the ‘Green Recovery’ plan is not a complete platform, this makes it somewhat unclear what orientation a more influential Green Party might take. Given their explicit prioritization of environmental concerns, one might assume an activist orientation on environmental policy, but the party’s traditional and continued stress on fiscal responsibility as

²⁵¹ Green Party of Ontario *supra* note 231.

²⁵² Green Party of Ontario. “Green Vision,” 2018. <https://files.ontariogreens.ca/platform/2018/gpo-green-vision-en.pdf>.

²⁵³ *Ibid* at 20.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid* at 80.

a central plank of their appeal makes their ultimate position uncertain.²⁵⁵ If a platform in advance of the 2022 election continues the apparent discursive shift towards a more fulsome embrace of a reformist green politics, this might indicate a more general shift in the party and a clearer commitment to an activist approach.

5.2.6 Popular Environmental Alternatives

There are many popular alternative environmental discourses that propose alternative ways of thinking about environmental challenges. Unfortunately, a complete accounting of these discourses goes beyond the scope of this paper. As such, we will focus on one particularly popular environmental discourse that has emerged in recent years: the ‘Green New Deal’ (GND) discourse.

One popular discourse that we will not discuss in detail is the popular version of managerial-ecological modernism. This discourse is well represented in the popular conversation, (in fact it is maybe the dominant discourse in popular understandings of climate change), and includes a number of recent and best-selling books on science and policy.²⁵⁶ Though naturally subject to the idiosyncrasies of particular authors, this discourse largely mirrors its institutional counterpart’s emphasis on managerial solutions and thus is subject to similar considerations.

Green New Deal

²⁵⁵ Green Party of Ontario. “What Do the Greens Stand For?,” 2022. <https://gpo.ca/about-the-gpo/>.

²⁵⁶ Gates, Bill. *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need*. New York: Knopf, 2021; Hawken, Paul. *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*. New York: Penguin Books, 2017, among others.

The ‘Green New Deal’ discourse is among the most high-profile new environmental discourse to emerge in recent years. The discourse has risen to prominence as a proposal by the progressive wing of the United States Democratic party,²⁵⁷ although the proposed resolution draws extensively from the LEAP Manifesto of Canadian origin.²⁵⁸ In general, evoking Franklin D. Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ response to the great depression, the GND discourse advocates for a similarly large and transformative project of social spending and economic transformation in response to climate change.²⁵⁹ This discourse stresses the importance of investment in ‘clean energy’, the job creation that would coincide with that investment, the necessity of a ‘just transition’ for those currently employed in unsustainable industries, and global justice.²⁶⁰ This approach has been discussed in a number of works on environmental policy aimed at a general audience and in this domain is perhaps most prominently associated with the author and activist Naomi Klein.²⁶¹

Thinking about this discourse in relation to Dryzek’s typology, we can see that it comes closest to what Dryzek calls ‘Green Politics.’ ‘Green Politics’ falls in the bottom right quadrant of Dryzek’s typology (imaginative-radical) and is characterized by reference to “multifaceted social and ecological crises that can only be resolved through political action and structural

²⁵⁷ Markey, Ed. RESOLUTION-Recognizing the duty of the Federal Government to create a Green New Deal. (n.d.). https://www.markey.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/gnd_text.pdf.

²⁵⁸ This Changes Everything team. “The Leap Manifesto,” 2016. <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/#manifesto-content>.

²⁵⁹ Pollin, Robert. “Advancing a Viable Global Climate Stabilization Project: Degrowth versus the Green New Deal.” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 51, no. 2 (2019): 311–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0486613419833518>.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Klein, Naomi. *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*. Simon Schuster, 2019; Aronoff, Kate, Alyssa Battistoni, Daniel Aldana Cohen, and Thea Riofrancos. *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal*. Verso Books, 2019; Klein, Seth. *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*. ECW Press, 2020; Aronoff, Kate. *Overheated*. PublicAffairs, 2021.

change.”²⁶² It is broad enough to include movements such as Green parties, social ecology, eco-socialism, environmental justice, and antiglobalization.²⁶³ Green political discourses are defined by their recognition of “multifaceted social and ecological crises that can only be resolved through political action and structural change”, a core commitment to political egalitarianism, and an possessing a “strong conception of complex ecological connections” that still permits that “Humans can be set apart from nature by virtue of their reasoning capacities, but...does not warrant hierarchy and domination of nature”.²⁶⁴

The GND discourse clearly fits within this variety of environmental discourses, drawing most liberally from eco-socialist and environmental justice discourses in its focus on egalitarianism, state-led environmental governance, and sensitivity to disproportionate impacts of both environmental harms and the transition to a post-fossil fuel economy.

5.2.7 Political Economy

While a good deal of the current political economy was covered earlier in our discussion of the current provincial political context, it will be useful to review and extend some of the ideas discussed there. The Ford government seems to have seized the Covid-19 pandemic as a chance for further degradation of environmental laws, including by temporarily suspending the *EBR*, further weakening the *EAA*, and instituting changes to land use planning, (especially through increased use of ministerial zoning orders to bypass traditional planning processes).²⁶⁵

²⁶² Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 218.

²⁶³ *Ibid* at 207-218.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid* at 218-19.

²⁶⁵ Kyle *supra* note 97.

However, this time period has also seen the ‘coming home to roost’ of several policy pursuits. The Ontario government’s challenge to the *CGGPPA*, (a major plank of the government’s environmental policy) was recently dismissed by the SCC, the government has seen numerous court decisions rebuking its disregard for procedural rights under the *EBR*, and reproaches from the Auditor General’s Office, especially concerning its use of MZOs. In addition to criticism of its environmental governance, the Ford government has seen widespread disapproval of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Compiling results from several polling agencies in Ontario, we can see that not only have Doug Ford’s personal approval and the Conservative government’s approval dropped consistently after a large boost at the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, (see Figure 1 and Figure 2), but both have also seen significant drops in approval for their management of the pandemic since early 2020 (see Figures 3 and 4). Further, the activist government response necessitated by the pandemic would seem to discredit the neoliberal conception of ‘limited government’ that Premier Ford was initially elected on.

However, these rather dire signals for the Ford government have been accompanied by similarly weak approval for the institutional alternatives. Both the NDP and the Liberal Party have seen their approval drop over time, (see Figures 8 and 9), and neither party has emerged as the clear opposition to Ford’s government (see Figure 10). This would seem to indicate a general dissatisfaction with political governance, with no party having been able to capitalize on drops in the Ford government’s approval.

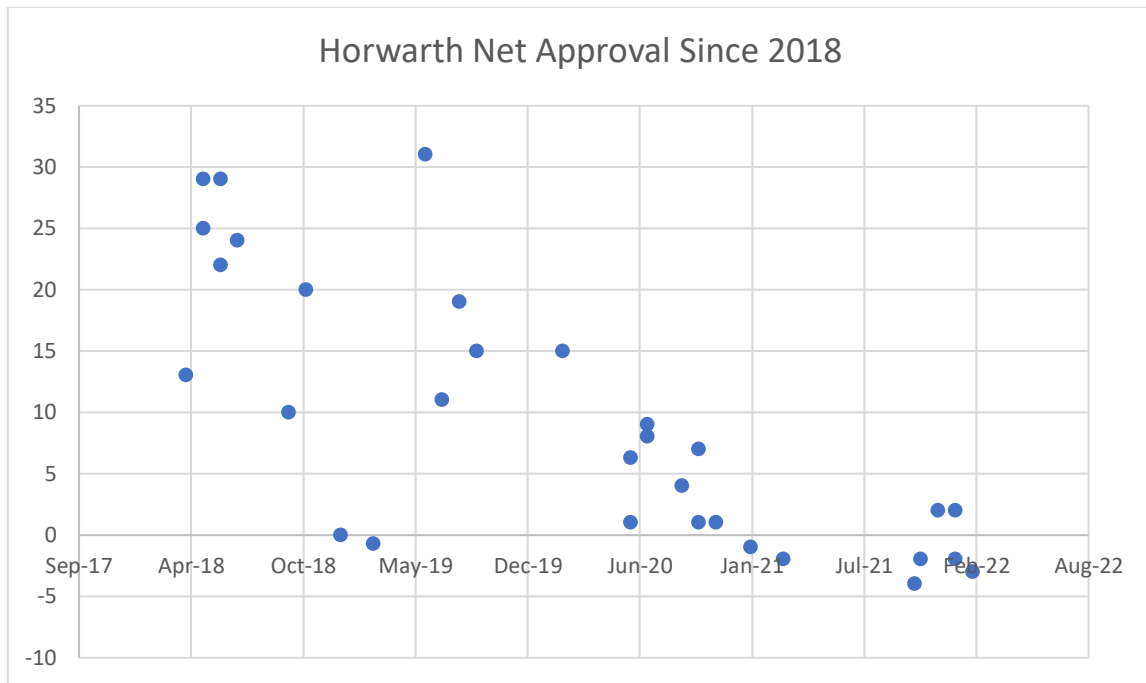


Figure 8²⁶⁶

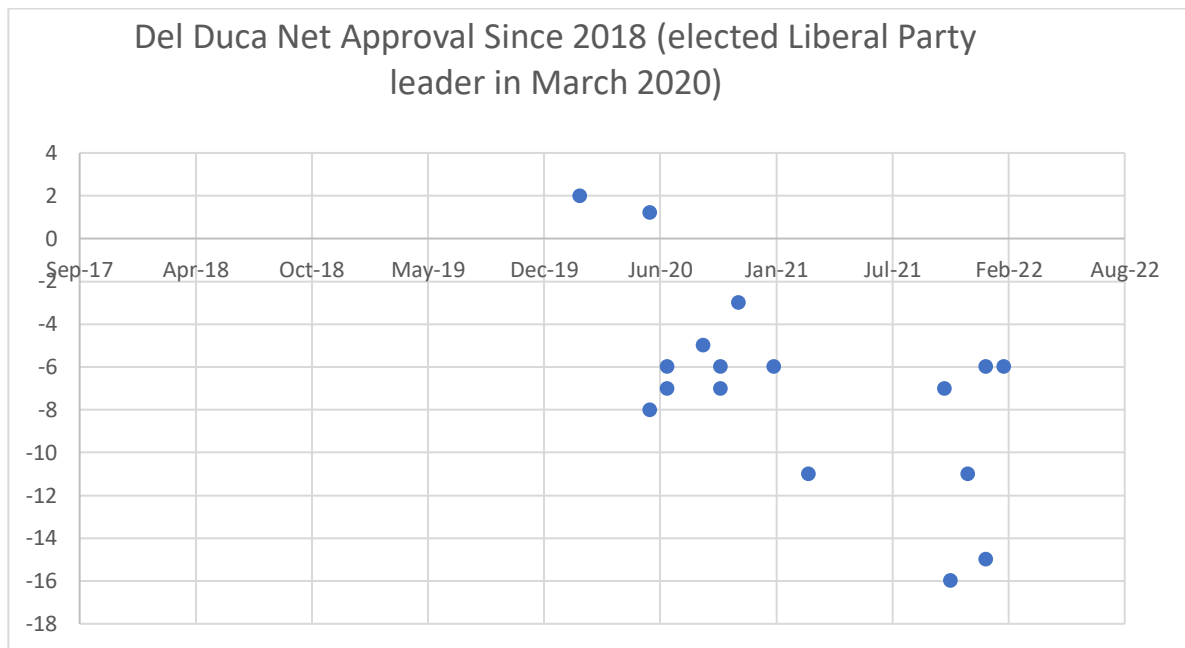


Figure 9²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Data sources listed in Table 6 in Appendix A

²⁶⁷ Data sources listed in Table 7 in Appendix A

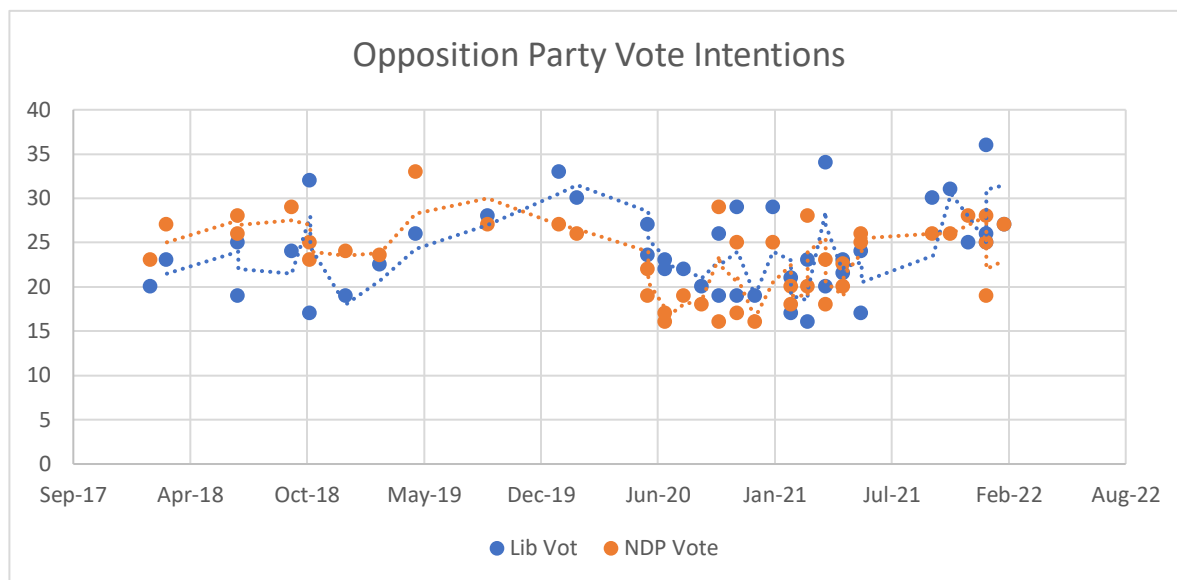


Figure 10 ²⁶⁸

That's not to say that disapproval with the Ford government has only come from its left flank. February of 2022 saw the emergence of a number of 'freedom convoys' across Canada.²⁶⁹ These protests began as a movement against COVID-19 vaccine mandates and evolved into an expression of general discontent with all COVID-19 health measures, (including vaccine mandates, mask mandates, and school closures, among many others). While much of this ire was targeted against the Federal government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Doug Ford and the Conservative government also faced a fair amount of negative sentiments in Ontario.²⁷⁰

While a complete analysis of this movement falls outside the scope of this paper, based upon this paper's earlier analysis of the Ford government's discourse, it might be hypothesized

²⁶⁸ Data sources listed in Table 8 in Appendix A

²⁶⁹ Vieira, Paul. "What Is the Freedom Convoy? Trucker Protests in Canada Explained." *The Wall Street Journal*. February 24, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/freedom-convoy-canada-trucker-protest-what-11644441237>; Hogan, Stephanie. "The Ottawa Convoy Has 'shattered Norms' for Protest in Canada. Will We See More of It?" *CBC News*, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/trucker-freedom-convoy-new-normal-1.6355574>.

²⁷⁰ Star Staff. "'Freedom Convoy' Protests: Police Commence Enforcement at the Ambassador Bridge." *Toronto Star*, 2022. <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2022/02/11/freedom-convoy-protests-ford-declares-state-of-emergency-over-siege-says-protesters-risk-losing-truck-licences.html>.

that the convoy's sometimes anti-Ford disposition in Ontario is the result of the contradiction between the Ford government's discursive focus on individual freedom, (as instantiated in its most populist and neoliberal elements in the 'respecting taxpayers' and 'open for business' discourse), and the realities of managing an administrative state during a pandemic.

Having presented a discourse that presumes the desirability of a retrenchment of the administrative-welfare state, the Ford government was presented with an almost paradigmatic case for the desirability of that institutional form (a global health crisis). Though they've taken the opportunity to advance an agenda of regulatory-retrenchment and market-entrenchment on the environmental front, (as already touched upon), and other areas outside of the discursive spotlight, the COVID economic and health response has necessitated a high-profile use of interventionalist state instruments. The result has been an incommensurability between the Ford government's anti-government discourse and the necessary response to COVID-19.

As discussed above, until recently the Ford Government has largely been able to paper over this contradiction through the 'reopening for business' discourse, where 'reopening for business' is the main role of government and health restrictions are conceptualized as an existential, possibly adversarial, force. However, the widespread popularity of the 'freedom convoys' indicates that the anti-government discourse articulated in Ford's 2018 campaign has maintained its own momentum and has reached something of a tipping point. 'Reopening for business' is clearly not happening fast enough for many convoy supporters.

The 'freedom convoys' might also be understood as a following through of the Ford government's more authoritarian market populist impulses within civil society. In particular, the demand to end COVID-19 health measures might be seen as the perceived 'general will of the

pure people' against 'elite interests.' In this framing, the individual freedoms of convoy supporters are understood as a proper majoritarian will that has been stymied by elite unelected health officials and the state. This being the case, it is perfectly acceptable to bypass expert opinion and/or any liberal democratic values other than individual freedom, as these things stand in the way of the pure will of 'real Ontarians.'

The 'freedom convoys' seems to have been met with a deeply divided reception in public opinion that makes it difficult to predicate what their impact will be on political discourse in the long-term.²⁷¹ However, on a basic level it indicates that a large constituency of voters with a relatively amorphous anti-government orientation, (and who are potentially untethered from the Conservative Party of Ontario), might play an influential role in the coming election and future politics in Ontario. The Ontario government's effective capitulation²⁷² to many of the protestors' demands would seem to indicate that they see some value in keeping this constituency appeased. While it is currently too early to tell, if COVID-19 protests crystallize a durable hard-line anti-government constituency, this will mark a significant shift in Ontario politics with long-term effects.

²⁷¹ Anderson, Bruce, and David Coletto. "Pandemic Frustration May Be Running High, but More Don't Side with the so-Called 'Freedom Convoy.'" AbacusData, 2022. <https://abacusdata.ca/freedom-convoy-public-reaction-february-2022/>; Anderson, Bruce, and David Coletto. "Pandemic Frustration May Be Running High, but More Don't Side with the so-Called 'Freedom Convoy.'" AbacusData, 2022. <https://abacusdata.ca/freedom-convoy-public-reaction-february-2022/>; Anderson, Bruce, and David Coletto. "Pandemic Frustration May Be Running High, but More Don't Side with the so-Called 'Freedom Convoy.'" AbacusData, 2022. <https://abacusdata.ca/freedom-convoy-public-reaction-february-2022/>; Ipsos. "Nearly Half (46%) of Canadians Say They 'May Not Agree with Everything' Trucker Convoy Says or Does, But ..." Ipsos, 2022. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/nearly-half-say-they-may-not-agree-with-trucker-convoy>; Ipsos. "Nearly Half (46%) of Canadians Say They 'May Not Agree with Everything' Trucker Convoy Says or Does, But ..." Ipsos, 2022. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/nearly-half-say-they-may-not-agree-with-trucker-convoy>; Ipsos. "Nearly Half (46%) of Canadians Say They 'May Not Agree with Everything' Trucker Convoy Says or Does, But ..." Ipsos, 2022. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/nearly-half-say-they-may-not-agree-with-trucker-convoy>.

²⁷² Office of the Premier. "Ontario Moving to Next Phase of Reopening on February 17." Office of the Premier, 2022. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001600/ontario-moving-to-next-phase-of-reopening-on-february-17>.

Pivoting to the economic impacts of the pandemic, we can see additional dynamics that might impact future governance in Ontario. As one would expect, Ontario's GDP took a hit in the early months of the pandemic. This trend is visualized below (Figure 11 and 12).

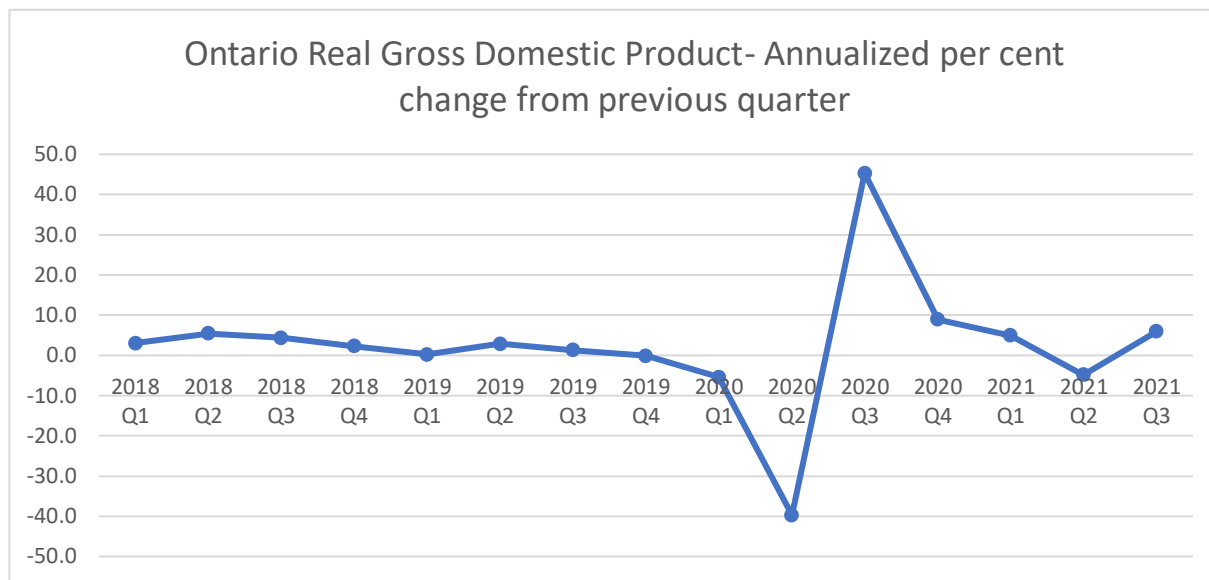


Figure 11²⁷³

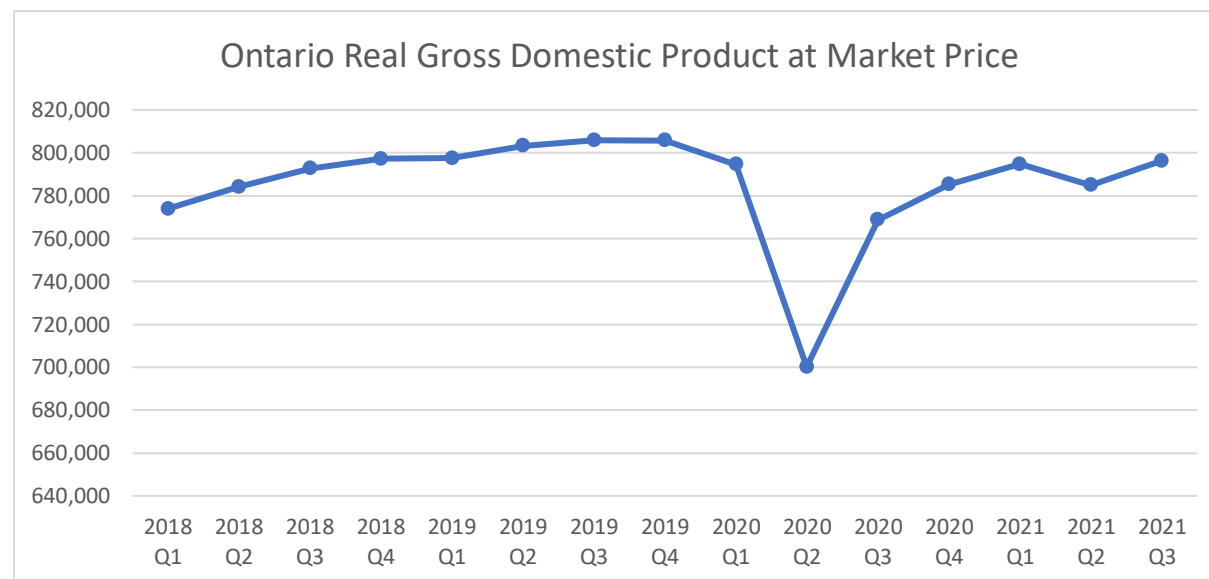


Figure 12²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Expenditure-based seasonally adjusted data at annual rates, millions of chained (2012) dollars. Data from Ontario Economic Accounts, retrieved from: <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-economic-accounts>.

²⁷⁴ Expenditure-based seasonally adjusted data at annual rates, millions of chained (2012) dollars. Data from Ontario Economic Accounts, retrieved from: <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-economic-accounts>.

The recovery seems to have occurred relatively swiftly, but there has been some unevenness in the impact of the pandemic that might shape future political circumstances. First, if we compare impacts on different industries, we can see that, as in 2008, the manufacturing industry was most impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic (Figure 13). Within the manufacturing sector, the Auto and Transportation equipment manufacturing industries, (the two biggest segments) were hardest hit (Figure 14). This points to the COVID-19 pandemic as a further instance of deindustrialization of Ontario's economy. Finally, among the Service Industry segments, it appears that Accommodation and food, transportation and warehousing, retail trade, and Wholesale trade were hit hardest, while segments such as finance and insurance, real estate, and public administration were almost unaffected by the pandemic (Figure 15). This replicates the division between 'good' and 'bad' service jobs discussed above and indicates both that service-industry polarization continues to be an issue in Ontario and that this issue may have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

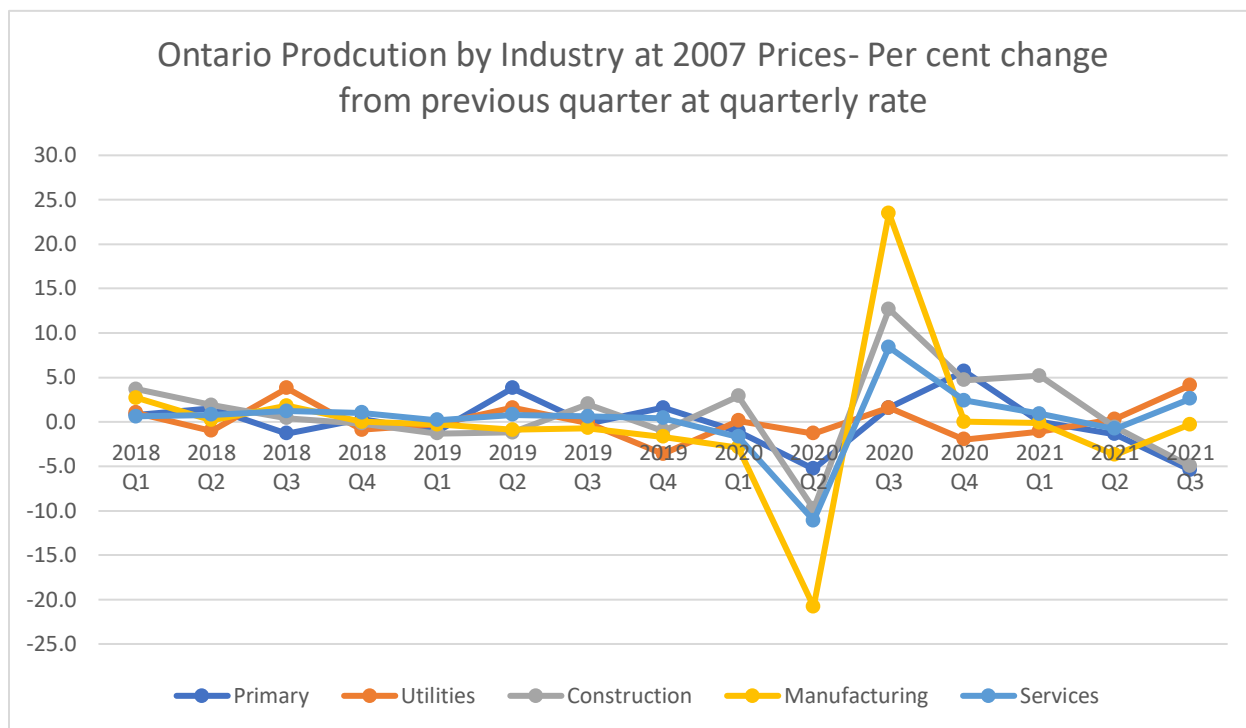


Figure 13²⁷⁵

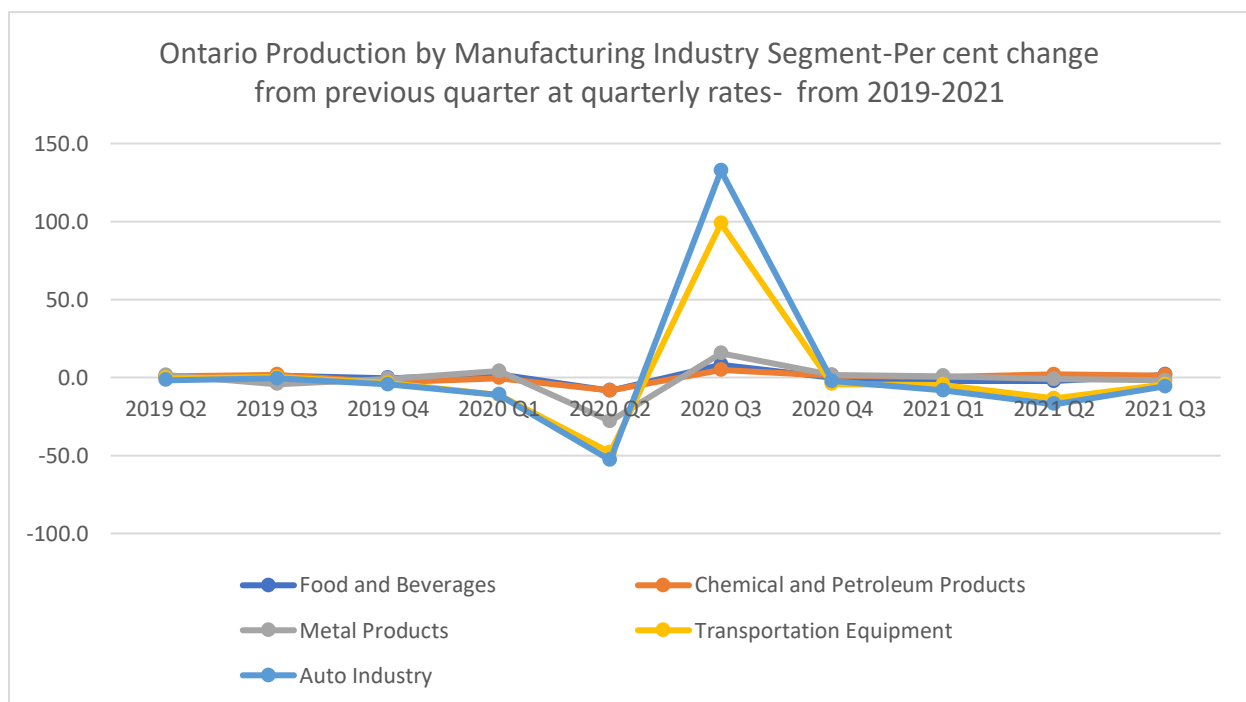


Figure 14²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Seasonally adjusted data at annual rates, millions of chained (2012) dollars. Data from Ontario Economic Accounts, retrieved from: <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-economic-accounts>.

²⁷⁶ Seasonally adjusted data at annual rates, millions of chained (2012) dollars. Data from Ontario Economic Accounts, retrieved from: <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-economic-accounts>.

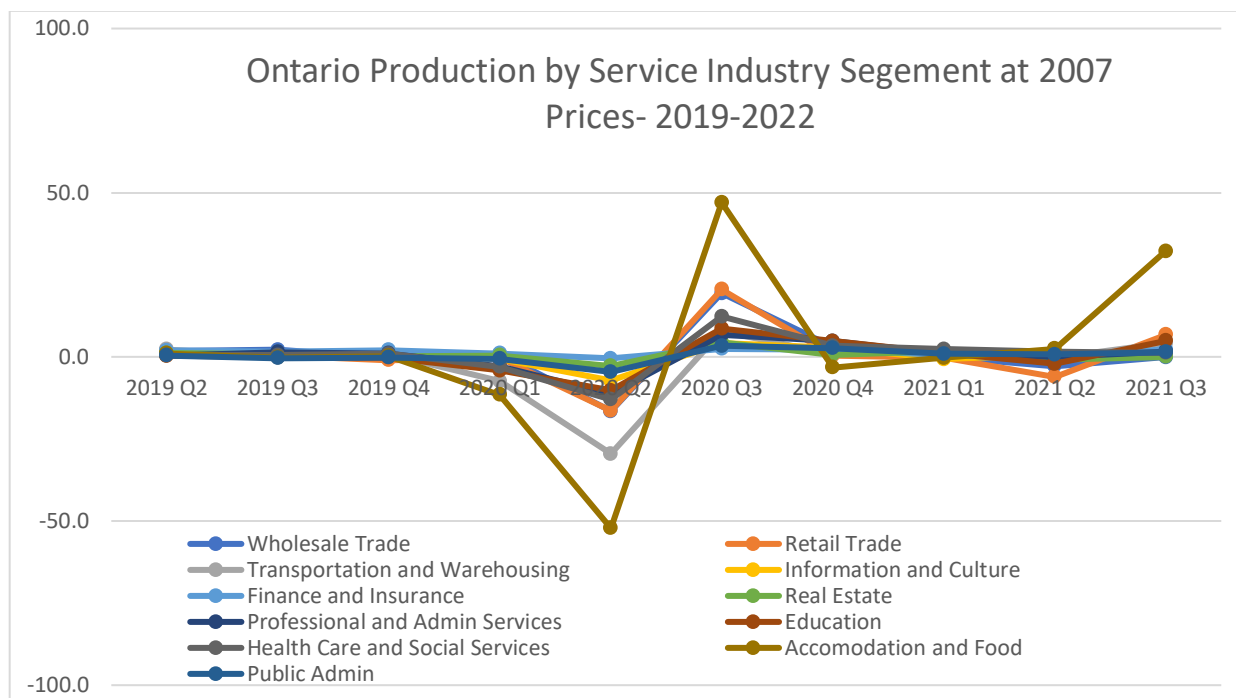


Figure 15²⁷⁷

Turning to the environmental elements of political economy, as discussed above, this time period has been characterized by environmental retrenchments that seem to have taken advantage of the pandemic as a chance to secure profitability by restricting the potential impacts of environmental regulation on economic development. As discussed by Kyle, the key beneficiaries of these environmental policy changes were industry and business and the government itself.²⁷⁸ Industry benefited from “the various forms of regulatory relief that were provided”, “extension concerning licenses and certificates”, “significant subsidies on electricity rates,” and generally “clear favoritism... despite the impacts on the average person and to the

²⁷⁷ Seasonally adjusted data at annual rates, millions of chained (2012) dollars. Data from Ontario Economic Accounts, retrieved from: <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/ontario-economic-accounts>.

²⁷⁸ Kyle *supra* note 97.

environment”²⁷⁹ The Conservative government benefited through “new power and oversight,” “greater ability to influence future decision making on environmental issues,” and the opportunity to further its deregulatory agenda on an “expedited time(line) with little public oversight.”²⁸⁰ This appears to be a clear manifestation of the more authoritarian elements of the Ford government’s market populism. The government clearly took the high public-priority and attention accorded to COVID and economic measures as an opportunity to secure business profitability and further its own neoliberal policy agenda.

This would seem to indicate that we are deeply within the bottom right corner, (low-public salience and neoliberal governance) of Winfield’s environmental policy matrix. This was certainly the case in the early months of COVID, which saw the large retrenchments to environmental policy one would anticipate from this political-economic formation.

However, in recent months the issue saliency of climate change and environmental policy has been on the rise. Recent polls from nanos, (in November and December 2021), saw ‘environment’ rise to the top unprompted national issue of concern, the first time it has ranked above COVID and healthcare since before the pandemic.²⁸¹ In a similar vein, Abacus data found that 29% of Ontarians reported being more concerned about climate change in light of the forest fires in Western Canada during the summer of 2021²⁸² and in September 2021 that 22% of Ontarians listed “dealing with climate change and reducing carbon emissions” among their

²⁷⁹ *Ibid* at 47-48.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid* at 45.

²⁸¹ Nanos Research. “Environment Ahead as Top Unprompted National Issue of Concern.” Nanos Research, 2021. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Political-Package-2021-11-19-FR-with-tabs-5ga7dh72h.pdf>; Nanos Research. “Environment Ahead as Top Unprompted National Issue of Concern.” Nanos Research, 2021. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Political-Package-2021-11-19-FR-with-tabs-5ga7dh72h.pdf>.

²⁸² AbacusData, and David Coletto. “Recent Extreme Weather Has More Canadians Worried about Climate Change’s Impact on Their Health.” AbacusData, 2021. <https://abacusdata.ca/extreme-weather-climate-change-choices/>.

top two most important issues, (after reducing cost of living and improving Canada’s healthcare system).²⁸³ Though emergence of the omicron variant in late 2021 and early 2022 prompted a resurgence in concern about COVID-19, environment remained a consistent second unprompted top issue of national concern.²⁸⁴ It is yet to be seen what the impact of increased public saliency of inflation²⁸⁵ might be on issue ranking in Ontario politics

Per Winfield’s policy matrix, a neoliberal government in a time of higher saliency for environmental issues is likely to pursue more reactive environmental policy. We might already be seeing this shift in the Ford government’s seemingly renewed interest in environmental policy. Specifically, the government has recently placed focus on ‘green manufacturing’, namely through investments in electric vehicles (EVs)²⁸⁶ and ‘green steel.’²⁸⁷ If increased saliency of environmental issues continues, we might see more environmental policies from the Ford government in the vein of ‘green manufacturing.’

In sum, barring the potential impact of increased concern about inflation, (an admittedly large caveat), these are potential signs that environmental issue saliency is on the

²⁸³ AbacusData, and Michael Monopoli. “Abacus Election Bulletin: Climate Change and Reducing Carbon Emissions.” AbacusData, 2021. <https://abacusdata.ca/climate-change-and-carbon-emissions/>.

²⁸⁴Nanos Research. “Coronavirus Concern on the Rise,” 2021. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Political-Package-2021-12-17-FR-with-Tabs.pdf>; Nanos Research. “Coronavirus Concern on the Rise,” 2021. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Political-Package-2021-12-17-FR-with-Tabs.pdf>.

²⁸⁵Nanos Research. “Coronavirus Concern on the Rise,” 2021. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Political-Package-2021-12-17-FR-with-Tabs.pdf>; Nanos Research. “Coronavirus Concern on the Rise,” 2021. <https://nanos.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Political-Package-2021-12-17-FR-with-Tabs.pdf>.

²⁸⁶Office of the Premier, 2022. Ontario Secures Largest Auto Investment in Province’s History <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001828/ontario-secures-largest-auto-investment-in-provinces-history>; Syed, Fatima. “A Crash Course in Doug Ford’s Love-Hate Relationship with Electric Vehicles.” The Narwhal, 2021. <https://thenarwhal.ca/ontario-electric-vehicle-policy/>.

²⁸⁷ Office of the Premier. “Province Invests in Clean Steelmaking Technology in Hamilton to Support Future of Ontario’s Auto Sector.” Office of the Premier, 2022. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1001604/province-invests-in-clean-steelmaking-technology-in-hamilton-to-support-future-of-ontarios-auto-sector>; Crawley, Mike. “Ford Government Eyes ‘green Steel’ as Way to Catch up on Cutting Carbon Emissions.” CBC News, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-climate-change-steel-co2-greenhouse-gas-emissions-1.6353814>.

rise as Covid-19 and connected economic considerations recede from the forefront. If this trend continues, we might continue to see reactive environmental policy from the Ford government and the possibility for a managerial/facilitative or activist government to pursue ambitious environmental policy after the 2022 election.

5.2.8 Gramscian Analysis and a Potential Path Forward

Our final Gramscian analysis will try to explain the resiliency of the Ford government's discourse and what the potential for counter-hegemonic environmental discourses are. In general, it proposes that the Ford government has retained legitimacy in the face of material crisis by slightly adapting its discourse to explain challenges accompanying COVID-19 and by taking advantage of the crisis to further the existing ends of its environmental discourse. Additionally, the Ford government's discourse has retained hegemony because the institutional discursive alternatives have not been able to provide a compelling counter-hegemonic discourse that moves beyond the facilitative-managerial discourse the Ford government displaced in 2018. This section will conclude by arguing that the 'green new deal' discourse that has arisen within popular discourse might prove to be the foundation for a successful counter-hegemonic discourse because it both appeals to many of the same material concerns addressed by the Ford government's discourse, while also providing a better explanation of and potential solution to those problems. However, this discourse will need to be substantially altered to avoid various shortcomings.

We can consider the Ford government's populist-neoliberal/promethean-populist discourse to be the current hegemonic discourse. This discourse has set the terms of debate throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and has been adopted as 'common sense' by those holding

the levers of power within Ontario politics. The counter-hegemonic discourse is slightly more uncertain. As of yet, neither the Liberal Party nor the NDP have emerged as the clearly favored opposition to the Ford government. As both have tended to embrace slightly different 'flavours' of a managerial/ecological modernist discourse, I will consider this general orientation to be a proposed 'counter-hegemonic' discourse. While the Green Party's 'Green Recovery' discourse has potential to be less susceptible to some of the short-comings of the other party's approaches, the party remains a relatively minor player in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and thus is unlikely to form a counter-hegemonic force. Finally, the political-economic crisis that might prompt hegemonic transition is the COVID-19 pandemic and, potentially, unresolved service sector polarization and geographically uneven development. How successfully the counter-hegemonic discourse is able to bring this crisis 'to consciousness' and propose an alternative way of understanding and approaching the problem, will determine whether a hegemonic transition will occur.

As detailed above, the managerial-ecological modernist counter-hegemonic discourse seems to propose that, within a public-health/economy zero-sum relationship, the Liberal Party or NDP party would have done a better job managing the balance. This discursive position potentially undercuts counter-hegemonic potential for a few reasons. First, as mentioned above, the Ford government's 'reopening for business' framing effectively presents public health and the economy in a zero-sum relationship, such that advocacy of public health measures can be construed as 'extreme', 'unpragmatic', 'unrealistic', or 'unreasonable' measures that are not alive to the economic concerns of 'real Ontarians.' Further to this point, a managerial approach is very susceptible to the type of opposition articulated by the 'freedom

convoys.’ Claims to an ability to ‘manage the crisis better’ are easily linked to the elite management and ‘infringement of individual freedoms’ that has proved anathema to that constituency.

Second, a managerial orientation closely resembles the discourse employed by the McGuinty and Wynne governments, who seem to have been voted out specifically on the grounds that their managerial approach was unacceptable to a large group of Ontarians. Finally, the Ford government has specifically positioned itself as a rebuke to a managerial approach. A return to a managerial approach does very little to address the deficiencies of the previous Liberal governments’ discursive approach that the Ford Conservative’s capitalized upon. A managerial discourse does not provide a compelling alternative basis for governance, especially given that such a very explicitly managerial government was rejected so recently.

Similarly, when thinking specifically about environment, it is unclear whether an ecological modernist orientation will be enough to displace the Ford government’s populist-promethean discourse. While the ecological modernist argument successfully avoids a zero-sum environment-economy framing, its ultimately reformist attitude does not address the ongoing challenges connected to Ontario’s economic restructuring. In particular, ecological modernism potentially makes the same mistake as the Liberal economic policy that put an emphasis on the ‘creative class’; it doesn’t offer a plan for those who have been ‘left behind’ by the shift to a service-based economy, (such as manufacturing workers), or those who have been underserved by the service-based economy, (those with ‘bad’ service jobs).

Ecological modernism promises economic growth that comes from environmentally sound development, but does not specify how those economic gains might be distributed

equitably. In fact, the 'modernist' element of ecological modernism, which proposes to 'update' industrial society, might be seen to imply that the economic gains are likely to accrue to those working in technology, finance, business, and other 'elite' service/knowledge industries. It does not provide a compelling alternative for those who view environmental issues as an 'elite' concern or a boutique priority that neglects the 'real issues' of 'real Ontarians.'

A Potential Path Forward?

The GND discourse addresses many of these shortcomings, but also encounters many of its own. The GND discourse addresses the need to tackle economic structures head-on and does so in a way that stresses a 'just transition' for non-elite workers. It links addressing environmental issues to job growth among middle-skill and/or middle income-jobs through social spending. This would seem to be more direct than the avenue proposed by the populist-promethean discourse which contends that economic prosperity for individuals will indirectly be achieved through the prosperity of businesses. The populist appeal to 'respecting taxpayers' is partially obviated if it is made clear that increased taxation will be designed to act most upon those most able to pay and social spending will be designed to help those most in need, not elite interests or businesses. In these ways, the GND discourse is both preferable to the managerial-ecological modernist discourse and potentially provides a more compelling theory of and solution to Ontario's current political-economic impasse than the Ford government's populist-promethean discourse.

That is not to say that the GND discourse is an unqualified slam dunk. In fact, it faces some potentially severe shortcomings. As an initial point of criticism, the GND discourse often emphasizes creation of manufacturing and construction jobs more than service jobs. In

Ontario's service-dominated economy a GND will need to develop a theory of good, green service positions and/or an extensive theory of green manufacturing in Ontario.

An even more serious deficiency can be seen in the potential for the GND discourse to be perceived as elitist activism by current adherents to the Ford government's discourse. As an explicitly social justice-oriented discourse focused on top-down governmental action, the GND discourse has lots of potential to raise the ire of market populists. There is a very real possibility that, for these reasons, a GND discourse might actually prompt polarization on environmental issues. As a key benefit of the GND is that it makes an explicit economic appeal to the demographics that traditionally oppose environmental action, an ultimate inability to overcome populist opposition to activist economic and environmental policy would prove fatal for the discourse's anti-hegemonic potential. The possibility of such an outcome is evidenced by the heavy opposition GND discourses have faced in the United States, where the discourse has a substantially higher political profile.²⁸⁸

That is also not to say that populist concerns about GND discourses have no legitimate founding. The GND discourse has the potential to skew into an over reliance on deference to expert opinion and elite decision-makers. This would lead to something closer approximating 'administrative rationalism' than 'green politics' and would weaken the discourses counter-hegemonic potential. As discussed above, administrative rationalism was roundly rejected in Ontario's last provincial election and is potentially undesirable for its reliance on bureaucracy, potential for entrenchment of elite interests, and removal of environmental decision-making

²⁸⁸ Grunwald, Michael. "The Trouble With the 'Green New Deal.'" *Politico Magazine*, 2019. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/01/15/the-trouble-with-the-green-new-deal-223977/>.

from the public realm. Even if this type of GND discourse were to be undertaken and put into practice, the eventual result might be a resurgence of populist anti-environmentalism, prompted by a perception of disconnection between the administrative state and the popular will.

There are two alterations to the GND discourse that might go some ways to remedying this shortcoming. One potential solution might be embedding of democratic practices and opportunities within a GND framework, as proposed by Dryzek in his concept of 'ecological democracy'.²⁸⁹ This might include mechanisms such as deliberative councils, robust public participation and consultation, and/or community decision-making.

As Dryzek puts it, the key to this type of approach is that the "communicative aspect of democracy...proves to do most of the work-rather than the...electoral aspect."²⁹⁰ This conceptualization has perhaps been theorized most robustly in the tradition of 'deliberative democracy', a discussion of which unfortunately goes beyond the bounds of this paper. Suffice to say, deliberative democracy "rests on the idea that legitimate governance depends on the right, opportunity, and capacity of those subject to collective decision...to participate in consequential deliberation about that decision."²⁹¹ In the context of a GND discourse in Ontario, the goal of a deliberative democratic approach would be to both facilitate better policy and promote public identification with the ultimate policy direction. This strengthens the GND discourse's counter-hegemonic appeal and potentially heads-off further populist

²⁸⁹ Dryzek *supra* note 8 at 233.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid* at 236.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*.

retrenchments, as a deliberative approach allows a voice for all Ontarians in environmental decision-making.

The second potential alteration would involve greater emphasis on 'limits and survival' discourses, (particularly in reference to economic survival), as part of the pitch for social spending on green economy infrastructure. I will call this potential discourse 'green economic survivalism.'

While it has not yet been discussed in this paper, the 'limits and survival' discourse falls in the top right quadrant of Dryzek's typology (prosaic-radical). Traditionally this style of discourse has been used to argue that "human demands on the life support capacity of ecosystems threatens to explode out of control, and drastic action needs to be taken in order to curb those demands."²⁹² It assumes a zero-sum framing between environment and industrial society, but 'bites the bullet' on this point and argues that a whole-sale reconfiguration of social and economic arrangements, (no matter how undesirable in the short-term), is necessary to avoid planetary disaster.

While this discourse has traditionally relied heavily on expert scientific opinion and administration and has resultantly fallen out of favour, there might be a potential to rehabilitate its core messages in the form of 'green economic survivalism.' Such a discourse would reframe the 'limits and survival' discourse's emphasis on zero-sum relations within the economic realm. Specifically, it would stress that changing economic demands require investments in green industry to ensure economic prosperity. This type of framing provides an

²⁹² *Ibid* at 40.

even more explicitly self-interested, rather than moralistic, reason to embrace green social investment than the GND discourse.

Further, this type of thinking is validated by what Sarah Knuth deems ‘green devaluation.’²⁹³ Knuth uses devaluation in the Marxian sense to mean ‘moral depreciation’ that results when “industrial fixed capital is devalued by technological competition before the end of its useful material life.”²⁹⁴ She proposes that increasingly widespread uptake of the ‘green economy’ and ‘green capitalism’ will prompt “structural devaluation of fossil fuel assets and fossil fuel companies as we know them... perhaps best expressed in terms of technological and “moral” obsolescence, and, ultimately, decommodification.”²⁹⁵

To make Knuth’s point somewhat differently, the increasing uptake of green economy will lead to the decreasing value, (first moral and then financial), of fossil capital. The take-away is that green capital will not compete with fossil capital in traditional market-competition, but will gradually ‘phase-out’ fossil capital, the end result being a decommodification of traditional fossil fuel-based modes of production.

For practical purposes, this devaluation means that industrial economies either need to adopt green capital and infrastructure or risk being left in the dust. This is where ‘green economic survivalism’ comes in. Green devaluation is a potentially compelling reason for traditionally more market populist constituencies to support green social investment, beyond the moral and socially minded concerns of the GND discourse.

²⁹³ Knuth, Sarah. “Green Devaluation: Disruption, Divestment, and Decommodification for a Green Economy.” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 28, no. 1 (2017): 98–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2016.1266001>.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid* at 101.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid* at 100.

This notion is supported within the context of Ontario by the finding that roughly two thirds of Canadians “expect investment in renewable energy sources ...to increase around the world over the next 20 years” and that 75% of Canadians, (including 63% of Albertans) agree with the statement that “Canada must have an ambitious strategy to be strong competitors in a global economy that is striving to reduce carbon emissions”²⁹⁶ Further, 87% of Ontario poll respondents thought the clean energy sector was important to the provincial economy, while 79% thought the oil and gas sector was important to the provincial economy 79%, and 92% of Ontarian respondents predicated clean energy would be important to the Canadian economy in 10 years, while only 73% felt the same way about the oil and gas sector.²⁹⁷ As Bruce Anderson puts it, it would appear that “The question for most people is not whether the shift to a cleaner economy is inevitable or desirable but how well Canada will tack with this trend and take advantage of it rather than resist it.”²⁹⁸ These findings indicate that a ‘green economic survivalism’ framing might resonate with many Ontarian’s existing view on the environment and economic investment.

However, there is some danger that the Ford Conservatives have anticipated a turn to ‘economic green survivalism’ discourse. In particular, the Ford government’s recent announcements concerning large investments in electric vehicles and ‘green steel’ suggest some of the elements of a ‘green economic survivalism’ discourse.²⁹⁹ This is reflected in the

²⁹⁶ AbacusData. “Canadians See Investment Growing in Clean Energy and Sustainable Products, and Want an Ambitious Strategy to Compete in These Markets.” AbacusData, 2022. <https://abacusdata.ca/canadians-see-investment-growth-in-clean-energy/>.

²⁹⁷ Coletto, David. “Canadians See Clean Energy Eclipsing Oil and Gas in Economic Importance for Canada.” AbacusData, 2022. <https://abacusdata.ca/clean-energy-eclipsing-oil-and-gas/>.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *Supra* notes 286 and 287.

statement by Nic Fedeli, (minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade), that “(t)his exciting investment in innovative green-steel manufacturing...will give automakers and other industries yet another reason to buy Ontario and hire Ontario workers when they look to transform their supply chain”³⁰⁰ If these policies represent a shift in the Ford government’s environmental discourse, this could leave institutional and popular alternatives with little recourse to ‘green economic survivalism’ beyond an argument that they would be ‘better managers’ of a green economic transition. As discussed above, this ‘better manager’ approach is lacking in counter-hegemonic potential given ease of linkage to fears about elite management and the recent and explicit rebuke of a managerial approach in the 2018 election.

That does not mean that a GND discourse supplemented by a ‘green economic survivalism’ discourse is out of the question in Ontario. In particular, there is some potential to emphasize how the Ford government’s actions have benefited the already rich, powerful and connected instead of ‘real people’. As an example, this can be seen in the case of planning policies that benefit developers without providing affordable housing or liveable communities,³⁰¹ but could be raised in relation to a number of Ford government environmental policies. This type of critique would draw upon principles like fairness, which are central to the GND discourse, to justify a different path for ‘green economic survivalism’ beyond ‘better management’. Stressing the importance of fair distribution of costs and benefits of green

³⁰⁰ Office of the Premier *supra* note 287.

³⁰¹ Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. “Value-for-Money Audit: Land-Use Planning in the Greater Golden Horseshoe,” 2021. https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/AR_LandUse_en21.pdf; Gray, Tim. “You May Have Never Heard of a Minister’s Zoning Order and That Used to Be Ok – but Not Anymore.” environmental defense, 2020. <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2020/08/28/may-never-heard-ministers-zoning-order-used-ok-not-anymore/>.

investment and linking market populist ‘green economic survivalism’ to unjust and unfair spending, might weaken the appeal of the Ford government’s most recent turn to environmental investment and provide the basis for an adapted GND-‘green economic survivalism’ hybrid.

In sum, while the GND discourse contains many elements that make it potentially attractive as a counter-hegemonic discourse, its potential to be opposed on elitist and/or activist grounds is a potentially fatal flaw. A further development of this discourse that incorporates deliberative democracy mechanisms and the invocation of a ‘green economic survivalism’ discourse might be able to remedy some of the weaknesses in the current GND discourses.

6. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate both the nature and the resiliency of the Ford government’s discourse and governance approach. This was accomplished through operationalization of political discourse analysis, environmental discourse analysis, political economy, and a Gramscian analysis of hegemonic relations.

It found that the Ford government’s discourse can generally be characterized as ‘Neoliberal-Populism’ and its corresponding environmental discourse as ‘Populist-Promethean.’ The Ford government’s discourse can be encapsulated in two emblematic themes: ‘respecting taxpayers’ and ‘open for business.’ These discourses form a populist basis for neoliberal governance and, in environmental governance, pitch a zero-sum relationship between elite interests and popular economic prosperity.

It also found that the Ford government's resilience can be attributed to two factors. First, the populist-neoliberal and promethean-populist discourses have done a satisfactory job of absorbing and explaining challenges accompanying COVID-19 and changes in environmental politics respectively, specifically by recourse to an additional discursive theme of 'reopening for business'. Second, the institutional discursive alternatives have not been able to provide a compelling counter-hegemonic discourse that moves beyond the facilitative-managerial discourse the Ford government displaced in 2018.

It is finally suggested that a revision of the 'Green New Deal' discourse that incorporates elements of deliberative democracy and a 'green economic survivalism' discourse might prove to be a more successful counter-hegemonic discourse. It both appeals to many of the same material concerns addressed by the Ford government's discourse, while also providing a better explanation of and potential solution to those problems and pressing environmental concerns.

While this 'radical' discourse might seem unrealistic or overly ambitious, it is worth noting that we live in tumultuous times. The latest IPCC report paints an extremely serious picture, where "Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades."³⁰² This paper has tried to stress that legitimate political action and discourses are not limited to the realm of 'political common sense', but are also inextricably linked to the material conditions of political economy and the physical world. What might once have seemed unimaginable can become 'common sense' in the upheaval of a crisis.

³⁰² IPCC. "Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis- Summary for Policymakers," 2021. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf.

What's more, there is evidence that Ontarians are beginning to recognize this material rupture. In a recent poll, 38% of Ontarians reported that they consider climate change an emergency, with an additional 22% reporting they believe it will soon become an emergency.³⁰³ The same poll found that 79% of Ontarians support a substantial shift to renewable energy and that, (when it was explained to them), 82% of Ontarians supported a 'Green New Deal' style investment in economic transformation, including substantial support from groups who traditionally oppose environmental action, (such as 68% of those who say they currently work in the oil, gas, or coal industry, or in a job closely related to those sectors; 72% of those who say the rising cost of living is a serious problem; and 40% of those who believe we don't need to reduce the use of any fossil fuels).³⁰⁴ As the effects of climate change become more severe and more apparent, it is vital that we seize the opportunity to pursue a radical and popular path. Those of us involved in the manufacture and assessment of political discourse owe it to the public to aid in bringing this material crisis and potential solutions 'to consciousness.'

³⁰³ AbacusData, and David Coletto. "Is Climate Change 'an Emergency' and Do Canadians Support a Made-in Canada Green New Deal?" AbacusData, 2019. <https://abacusdata.ca/is-climate-change-an-emergency-and-do-canadians-support-a-made-in-canada-green-new-deal/>.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

APPENDIX A

Polling Data Tables

Table 1: Overall Approval of Premier Doug Ford

Date	Polling Agency	Approval	Disapproval	Net Approval
March 2018	Leger	36	48	-12
April 2018	Abacus	29	35	-6
May 2018	Abacus	29	43	-14
May 2018	Abacus	26	46	-20
June 2018	Abacus	27	45	-18
June 2018	Abacus	25	48	-23
July 2018	Campaign Research	49	51	-2
September 2018	Maru	37	63	-26
October 2018	Abacus	32	46	-14
October 2018	Abacus	28	48	-20
November 2018	Abacus	26	54	-28
November 2018	Campaign Research	37	63	-26
December 2018	Abacus	19	51	-32
December 2018	Maru	35	65	-30
December 2018	Angus Reid	42		
January 2019	Mainstreet	30	51	-21
February 2019	Abacus	23	56	-33
March 2019	Abacus	24	54	-30
March 2019	Mainstreet	25	55	-30
March 2019	Maru	34	66	-32
March 2019	Angus Reid	38	59	-21
April 2019	Abacus	22	60	-38
May 2019	Abacus	22	61	-39
June 2019	Abacus	20	62	-42
June 2019	Campaign Research	18	71	-53
June 2019	Maru	29	71	-42
June 2019	Angus Reid	36	61	-25
July 2019	Abacus	23	62	-39
July 2019	Campaign Research	20	68	-48

August 2019	Abacus	20	65	-45
August 2019	Abacus	21	58	-37
August 2019	Campaign Research	24	65	-41
September 2019	Abacus	22	64	-42
September 2019	Campaign Research	25	63	-38
September 2019	Maru	26	74	-48
September 2019	Angus Reid	37		
October 2019	Abacus	22	61	-39
November 2019	Abacus	20	63	-43
December 2019	Abacus	20	63	-43
December 2019	Maru	28	72	-44
December 2019	Angus Reid	35		
February 2020	Abacus	20	62	-42
February 2020	Campaign Research	29	61	-32
February 2020	Angus Reid	31		
March 2020	Abacus	23	61	-38
March 2020	Maru	30	70	-40
May 2020	Abacus	46	25	21
May 2020	Campaign Research	76	17	59
May 2020	Angus Reid	69		
June 2020	Mainstreet	50	36	14
June 2020	Campaign Research	59	17	42
July 2020	Campaign Research	66	29	37
July 2020	Campaign Research	66	27	39
August 2020	Campaign Research	61	34	27
August 2020	Angus Reid	66	32	34
September 2020	Campaign Research	64	31	33
September 2020	Maru	62	38	24

October 2020	Abacus	46	28	18
October 2020	Campaign Research	68	27	41
November 2020	Campaign Research	64	28	36
November 2020	Angus Reid	55	43	12
December 2020	Maru	53	41	12
January 2021	Abacus	39	35	4
March 2021	Maru	48	52	-4
March 2021	Abacus	37	34	3
March 2021	Leger	50	46	4
March 2021	Angus Reid	50	47	3
April 2021	Maru	35	65	-30
April 2021	Abacus	39	37	2
April 2021	Abacus	34	44	-10
April 2021	Abacus	28	46	-18
June 2021	Maru	48	52	-4
June 2021	Angus Reid	35	63	-28
June 2021	Maru	40	60	-20
September 2021	Maru	42	53	-11
October 2021	Leger	38	54	-16
October 2021	Angus Reid	36	61	-25
November 2021	Leger	40	54	-14
December 2021	Maru	41	54	-13
December 2021	Leger	41	52	-11
January 2022	Abacus	32	46	-14
January 2022	Leger	38	56	-18
January 2022	Angus Reid	30	67	-37
February 2022	Leger	40	53	-13

Table 2: Overall Approval of Ontario Government

Date	Polling Agency	Approval	Disapproval	Net Approval
May 2019	Pollara	30	64	-34
December 2018	Forum Research	28	60	-32
May 2020	Abacus	60	15	45
May 2020	Campaign Research	71	15	56

October 2020	Abacus	52	24	28
November 2020	Abacus	52	25	27
December 2020	Maru	53	41	12
January 2021	Abacus	44	31	13
March 2021	Maru	48	52	-4
March 2021	Leger	49	46	3
April 2021	Maru	35	65	-30
June 2021	Maru	48	52	-4
Nov 2021	Maru	50	50	0

Table 3: Approval of Government's COVID-19 Management

Date Published	Polling Agency	Approval	Disapproval	Net Approval
July 2020	Campaign Research	85	13	72
August 2020	Angus Reid	84	15	69
October 2020	Campaign Research	75	21	54
November 2020	Abacus	46	35	11
November 2020	Campaign Research	72	21	51
December 2020	Campaign Research	59	35	24
December 2020	Angus Reid	55	44	11
January 2021	Abacus	42	57	-15
January 2021	Campaign Research	54	41	13
February 2021	Campaign Research	57	39	18
March 2021	Leger	59	36.5	22.5
April 2021	Maru	38	62	-24
April 21	Abacus	26	43	-17
June 2021	Maru	46	54	-8
June 2021	Angus Reid	34	64	-30
January 2022	Abacus	22	50	-28

Table 4: Approval of Doug Ford's COVID-19 Management

Date Published	Polling Agency	Approval	Disapproval	Net Approval
April 2020	Ipsos	83	17	66
May 2020	Ipsos	82	18	64
May 2020	Angus Reid	81	17	64
October 2020	Abacus	20	17	3
October 2020	Ipsos	70	30	40
November 2020	Abacus	20	17	3
December 2020	Mainstreet	53	46	7
December 2020	Angus Reid	56	41	15
January 2021	Abacus	14	27	-13
January 2021	Ipsos	69	31	38
January 2021	Mainstreet	46	54	-8
February 2021	Ipsos	65	35	30
May 2021	Mainstreet	30	70	-40
December 2021	Ipsos	52	48	4
January 2022	Ipsos	46	54	-8
January 2022	Angus Reid	29	67	-38

Table 5: Intention to Vote for the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario

Date Published	Polling Agency	PCO Voter Share
Feb-18	Forum Research	44
Mar-18	Forum Research	44
Apr-18	Abacus	40
May-18	Abacus	35
Jun-18	Abacus	35
Jun-18	Abacus	33
Jul-18	Abacus	41
Jul-18	Maru	39
Jul-18	Mainstreet Research	39
Oct-18	Abacus	36
Nov-18	Mainstreet Research	38
Nov-18	Campaign Research	34
Jan-19	Mainstreet Research	38
Mar-19	Mainstreet Research	30
May-19	Pollara	30

Sep-19	Campaign Research	32
Jan-20	Pollara	29
Feb-20	Campaign Research	32
Feb-20	Campaign Research	30
Jun-20	Mainstreet Research	35
Jul-20	Campaign Research	37
Aug-20	Campaign Research	35
Aug-20	Angus Reid	38
Sep-20	Campaign Research	39
01-Oct	Abacus	36
Oct-20	Campaign Research	37
Nov-20	Abacus	36
Nov-20	Campaign Research	39
Dec-20	Campaign Research	36
Jan-21	Abacus	34
Feb-21	Campaign Research	35
Feb-21	Mainstreet Research	36
Mar-21	Campaign Research	35
Mar-21	Leger	38
Apr-21	Abacus	34
Apr-21	Campaign Research	34
May-21	Campaign Research	29
May-21	Mainstreet Research	26.2
May-21	Leger	34
Jun-21	Maru	42
Jun-21	Angus Reid	28
Oct-21	Leger	35
Nov-21	Leger	34
21-Dec	Leger	38
Jan-22	Abacus	37
22-Jan	Leger	37
22-Jan	Angus Reid	33
22-Feb	Leger	39

Table 6: Overall Approval of Andrea Horwath

Date Published	Polling Agency	Approval	Disapproval	Net Approval
Apr-18	Abacus	28	15	13
May-18	Abacus	38	13	25
May-18	Abacus	42	13	29
Jun-18	Abacus	44	15	29
Jun-18	Abacus	42	20	22
Jul-18	Campaign Research	62	38	24
Oct-18	Abacus	35	25	10
Nov-18	Abacus	60	40	20
Jan-19	Mainstreet	35	35	0
Mar-19	Abacus	33.6	34.3	-0.7
Jun-19	Abacus	46	15	31
Jul-19	Campaign Research	38	27	11
Aug-19	Campaign Research	44	25	19
Sep-19	Campaign Research	40	25	15
Feb-20	Campaign Research	41	26	15
Jun-20	Mainstreet Research	29	28	1
Jun-20	Campaign Research	38.3	32	6.3
Jul-20	Campaign Research	38	30	8
Jul-20	Campaign Research	39	30	9
Sep-20	Campaign Research	37	33	4
Oct-20	Abacus	30	29	1
Oct-20	Campaign Research	43	36	7
Nov-20	Campaign Research	37	36	1
Jan-21	Abacus	27	28	-1
Mar-21	Leger	40	42	-2
21-Oct	Leger	37	41	-4
Nov-21	Leger	39	41	-2

Dec-21	Leger	43	41	2
Jan-22	Abacus	32	30	2
Jan-22	Leger	40	42	-2
Feb-22	Leger	39	42	-3

Table 7: Overall Approval of Steven Del Duca

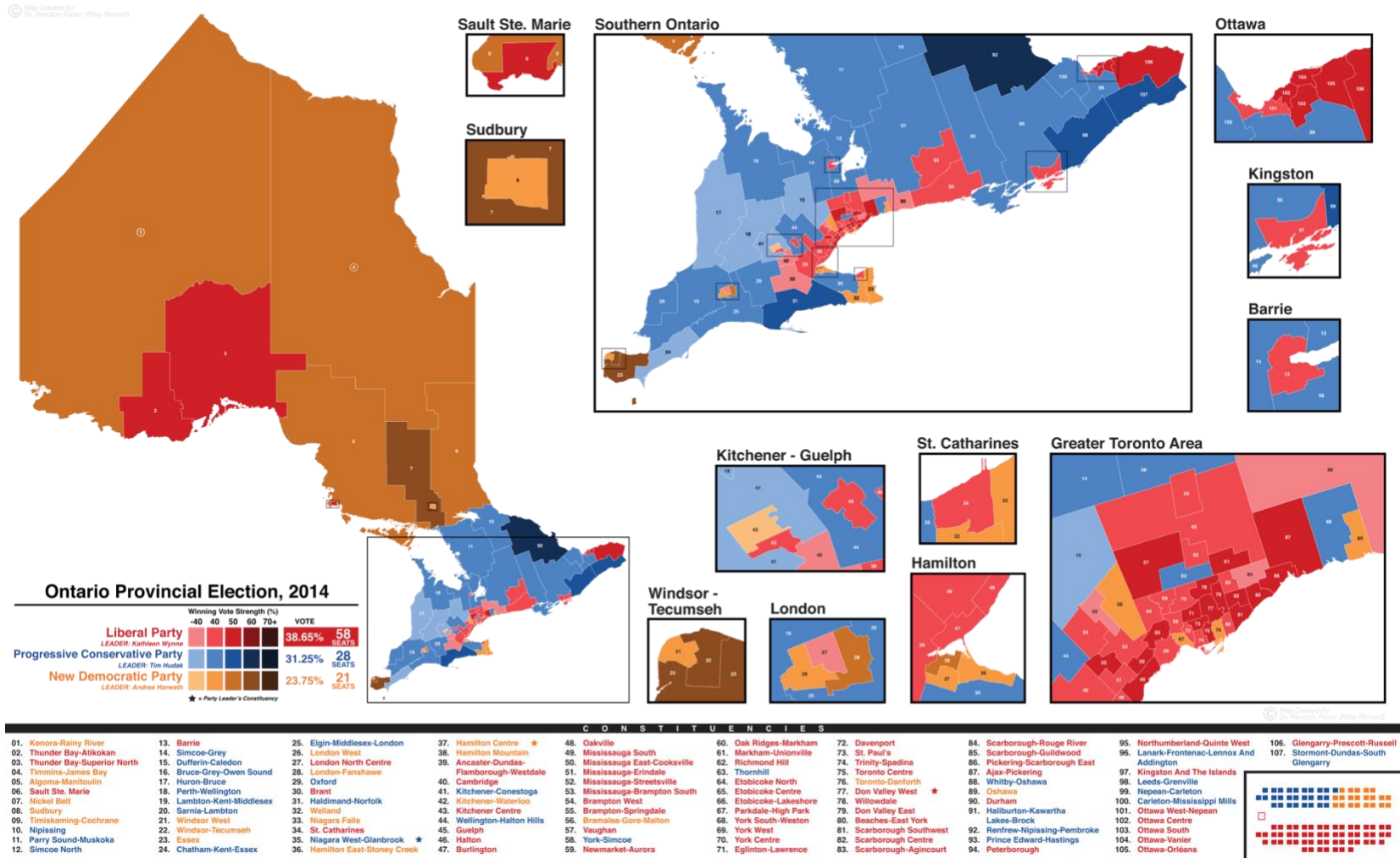
Date Published	Polling Agency	Approval	Disapproval	Net Approval
Feb-20	Campaign Research	21	19	2
Jun-20	Mainstreet Research	12	20	-8
Jun-20	Campaign Research	19.4	18.2	1.2
Jul-20	Campaign Research	19	25	-6
Jul-20	Campaign Research	18	25	-7
Sep-20	Campaign Research	23	28	-5
Oct-20	Abacus	15	22	-7
Oct-20	Campaign Research	23	29	-6
Nov-20	Campaign Research	24	27	-3
Jan-21	Abacus	13	19	-6
Mar-21	Leger	21	32	-11
21-Oct	Leger	25	32	-7
Nov-21	Leger	23	39	-16
01-Dec	Leger	27	38	-11
01-Jan	Abacus	20	26	-6
01-Jan	Leger	24	39	-15
01-Feb	Leger	29	35	-6

Table 8: Intention to Vote for Opposition Parties

Date Published	Polling Agency	NDP Voter Share	LPO Voter Share
Feb-18	Forum Research	23	20
Mar-18	Forum Research	27	23
Jul-18	Campaign Research	28	25
Jul-18	Mainstreet Research	26	19

Oct-18	Abacus	29	24
Nov-18	Mainstreet Research	25	32
Nov-18	Campaign Research	23	17
Jan-19	Mainstreet Research	24	19
Mar-19	Mainstreet Research	23.6	22.5
May-19	Pollara	33	26
Sep-19	Campaign Research	27	28
Jan-20	Pollara	27	33
Feb-20	Campaign Research	26	30
Jun-20	Mainstreet Research	22	27
Jun-20	Campaign Research	19	23.6
Jul-20	Campaign Research	16	23
Jul-20	Campaign Research	17	22
Aug-20	Angus Reid	19	22
Sep-20	Campaign Research	18	20
Oct-20	Abacus	29	26
Oct-20	Campaign Research	16	19
Nov-20	Abacus	25	29
Nov-20	Campaign Research	17	19
Dec-20	Campaign Research	16	19
Jan-21	Abacus	25	29
Feb-21	Campaign Research	20	17
Feb-21	Mainstreet Research	18	21
Mar-21	Campaign Research	20	16
Mar-21	Leger	28	23
Apr-21	Abacus	23	34
Apr-21	Campaign Research	18	20
May-21	Campaign Research	20	23
May-21	Campaign Research	22.6	21.5
Jun-21	Maru	25	24
Jun-21	Angus Reid	26	17
Oct-21	Leger	26	30
Nov-21	Leger	26	31
01-Dec	Leger	28	25
01-Jan	Abacus	28	25
01-Jan	Leger	25	26
01-Jan	Angus Reid	19	36
01-Feb	Leger	27	27

APPENDIX B Ontario Provincial Election Maps

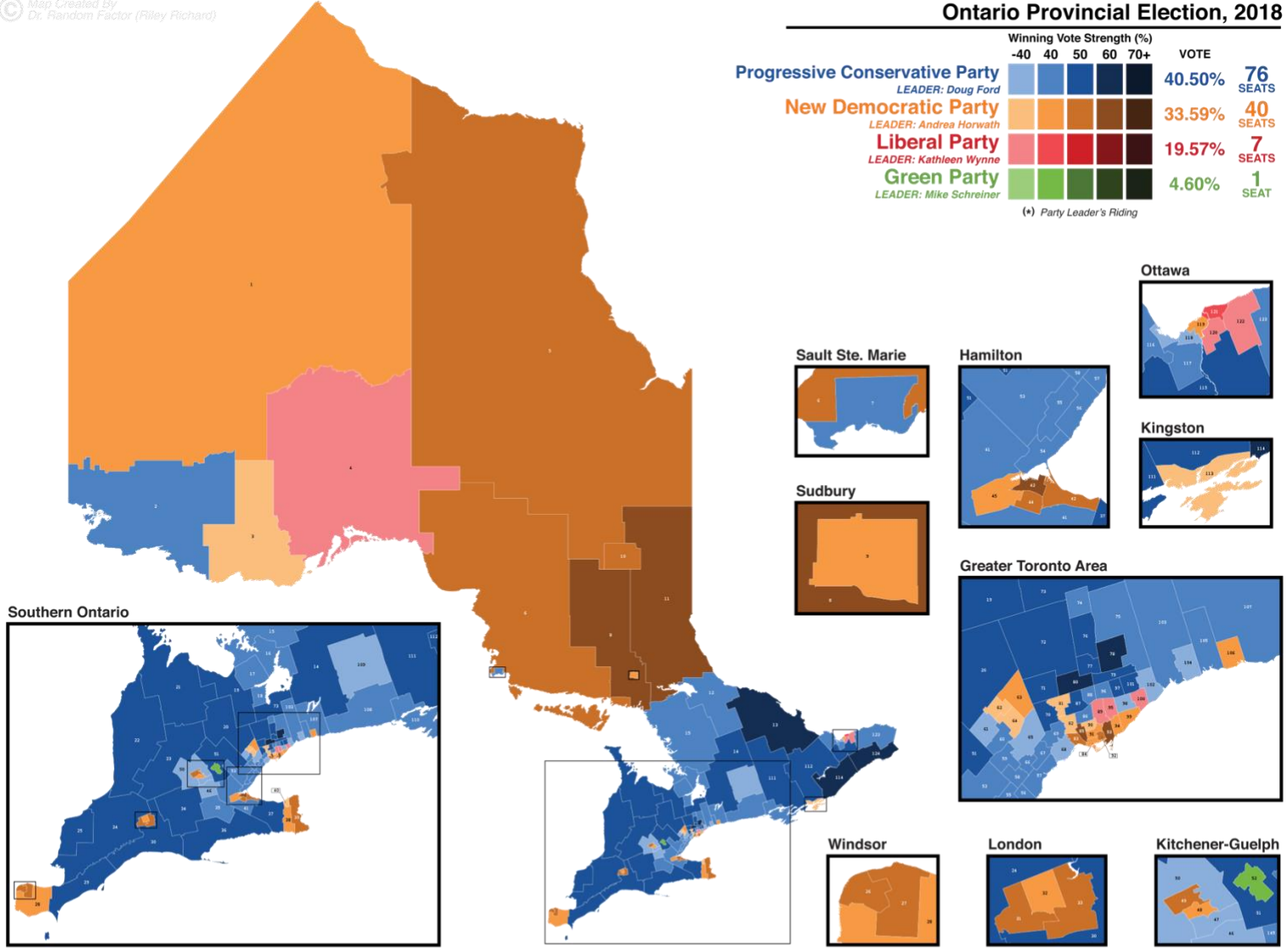


Map Created By
Dr. Random Factor (Riley Richard)

Ontario Provincial Election, 2018

Party	Winning Vote Strength (%)					VOTE	SEATS
	-40	40	50	60	70+		
Progressive Conservative Party <i>LEADER: Doug Ford</i>	40.50%					40.50%	76 SEATS
New Democratic Party <i>LEADER: Andrea Horwath</i>	33.59%					33.59%	40 SEATS
Liberal Party <i>LEADER: Kathleen Wynne</i>	19.57%					19.57%	7 SEATS
Green Party <i>LEADER: Mike Schreiner</i>	4.60%					4.60%	1 SEAT

(*) Party Leader's Riding



- | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Kilwetinoong | 19. Simcoe Grey | 37. Niagara West | 55. Oakville North-Burlington | 73. York-Simcoe | 91. University-Rosedale | 109. Peterborough-Kawartha |
| 2. Kenora-Rainy River | 20. Dufferin-Caledon | 38. Niagara Centre | 56. Oakville | 74. Newmarket-Aurora | 92. Toronto Centre | 110. Bay of Quinte |
| 3. Thunder Bay-Alkotkan | 21. Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound | 39. Niagara Falls | 57. Mississauga-Lakeshore | 75. Markham-Stouffville | 93. Toronto-Danforth | 111. Hastings-Lennox and Addington |
| 4. Thunder Bay-Superior North | 22. Huron-Bruce | 40. St. Catharines | 58. Mississauga-Erin Mills | 76. Markham-Unionville | 94. Beaches-East York | 112. Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston |
| 5. Mushkegowuk-James Bay | 23. Perth-Wellington | 41. Flamborough-Glanbrook | 59. Mississauga-Streetsville | 77. Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill | 95. Don Valley East | 113. Kingston and the Islands |
| 6. Algoma-Manitoulin | 24. Lambton-Kent-Middlesex | 42. Hamilton East-Stoney Creek | 60. Brampton South | 78. Richmond Hill | 96. Don Valley North | 114. Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes |
| 7. Sault Ste. Marie | 25. Sarnia-Lambton | 43. Hamilton Centre | 61. Brampton West | 79. Markham-Thornhill | 97. Scarborough-Agincourt | 115. Carleton |
| 8. Nickel Belt | 26. Windsor-West | 44. Hamilton Mountain (*) | 62. Brampton North | 80. Thornhill | 98. Scarborough Centre | 116. Kanata-Carleton |
| 9. Sudbury | 27. Windsor-Tecumseh | 45. Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas | 63. Brampton East | 81. Humber River-Black Creek | 99. Scarborough Southwest | 117. Nepean |
| 10. Timmins | 28. Essex | 46. Cambridge | 64. Brampton Centre | 82. York South-Weston | 100. Scarborough-Guildwood | 118. Ottawa-West-Nepean |
| 11. Timiskaming-Cochrane | 29. Chatham-Kent-Leamington | 47. Kitchener South-Hespeler | 65. Mississauga-Milton | 83. Parkdale-High Park | 101. Scarborough North | 119. Ottawa Centre |
| 12. Nipissing-Timiskaming | 30. Elgin-Middlesex-London | 48. Kitchener Centre | 66. Mississauga Centre | 84. Spadina-Fort York | 102. Scarborough-Rouge Park | 120. Ottawa South |
| 13. Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke | 31. London West | 49. Waterloo | 67. Mississauga East-Cooksville | 85. Davenport | 103. Pickering-Uxbridge | 121. Ottawa-Vanier |
| 14. Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock | 32. London North Centre | 50. Kitchener-Conestoga | 68. Etobicoke-Lakeshore | 86. Eglinton-Lawrence | 104. Ajax | 122. Orléans |
| 15. Parry Sound-Muskoka | 33. London-Fanshawe | 51. Wellington-Halton Hills | 69. Etobicoke Centre | 87. York Centre | 105. Whitby | 123. Glengarry-Prescott-Russell |
| 16. Simcoe North | 34. Oxford | 52. Guelph | 70. Etobicoke North (*) | 88. Willowdale | 106. Oshawa | 124. Stormont-Dundas-South-Glengarry |
| 17. Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte | 35. Brantford-Brant | 53. Milton | 71. Vaughan-Woodbridge | 89. Don Valley West (*) | 107. Durham | |
| 18. Barrie-Innisfil | 36. Haldimand-Norfolk | 54. Burlington | 72. King-Vaughan | 90. Toronto-St. Paul's (*) | 108. Northumberland-Peterborough-South | |