Rapid mobilisation of demonstrators in March Australia

Stewart Jackson and Peter John Chen

Introduction

This movement event analysis reports on field interviews collected at the end of August 2014 at the Sydney "March in August" (MiA) March Australia protest. March Australia represents one of a new generation of social movement organisations: wholly based on social media, without a formal, legal constitution, yet able to display considerable effectiveness in mobilisation. In the last few years, a number of significant protest events (various Occupy collectives, the "Convoy of No Confidence") have been organised largely via new media channels and without the support of pre-existing parties, groups or organisations. This may reflect the tendency of new media to facilitate "swarming" or social flocking behaviour (Moe and Schweidel, 2014). This event analysis provides an overview of the demographic, and political behaviour of MiA participants, before examining the role of new media and specific policy issues in mobilisation.

Context

The election in September 2013 saw a change in national government from the Australian Labor Party (ALP) (2007-2013) to the Liberal-National Coalition. Led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott, the new government had successfully campaigned on the perceived weaknesses of the previous administration to retain internal party unity and deliver coherent policy. Abbott's success was predicated on a largely populist campaign focusing on expanding boarder security ("stop the boats"), abolition of carbon pricing ("scrap the carbon tax"), and balancing the national budget ("end the waste") (T. Abbott, ABC Broadcast, 2nd September, 2013). In addition, the incoming government renounced a series of unpopular, neoliberal policies, particularly, industrial relations reforms, reductions in government support to healthcare and education, and decreases in welfare entitlements.

In government the new administration initiated a far more austere tone, foreshadowing significant reductions in entitlements, the marketisation of health and education provision, and public sector downsizing. The popular media has largely characterised these as deliberate "lies" made to win office, attaching blame specifically to the figure of the Prime Minister. The national budget, released in May 2014, realised a range of policy reversals, benefit reductions, and significant program cuts (Whiteford, 2014). Combined with the inability of the government to progress its policies through the Australian upper house, the budget consolidated a slump in the government's popularity generally, and Mr Abbott's in particular (see: Browne, 2014).

March Australia: observations and questions

March Australia ("March") is a nationally-disaggregated and grass-roots organisation (Price, 2014) that has effectively mobilised large numbers of Australians in protest against the Liberal-National Coalition government and its policies throughout 2014. Its core organisational tool has been social media, particularly Facebook. At the time of writing, March has held three national events ("March in March", "March in May", and "March in August"), and spawned comparable events ("March Against the Budget", June 2014) organised by the Australian Union movement and capitalising on public sentiment regarding the first Coalition budget (ABC News, 2014). The future of March is uncertain, while producing strong participation in March and August 2014 (with participation estimates of 80,000 to 120,000 participants in each month), participation in MiA march fell considerably (at most, half previous events).

March is an interesting case for three reasons.

The first reason is the rapidity with which the organisation formed and mobilised (Lillebuen, 2014). In the context of Australia, the scale of these initial protests is remarkable given the newness of the Government; governments are traditionally graced with an extended "honeymoon" period of restrained criticism following elections (Singleton, et al., 2013). In comparison, the first high-profile protests against the previous Labor administration, the "Convoy of No Confidence" took place four years after their election.[1] It is possible, therefore, to hypothesize this rapidity as the result of the remobilisation of a social movement in "abeyance" - demobilisation without disbandment (Taylor, 1989) – of anti-conservative protestors active under the previous period of Coalition government (1996-2007).

Second, is the use of new media as the primary mobilising tool. Without a pre-existing organisation, "brand", or endorsement from established political or protest organisations, March was able to mobilise large numbers onto the streets. This was achieved almost wholly through the use of social networking (though some street posters were also produced in an ad hoc manner). What is also remarkable is that the organisation was able to undertake this prior to the authoritative release of government policies that generate specific grievances (the pre-Budget march in March), and sustain participation in the face of dismissive initial reporting by commercial and mass media organisations which tended to paint the first protest as rootless and unfocussed.[2]

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[1] While comparisons could be draw with the Convoy, due to organization online (Glazov, 2011), its industry sponsorship and comparatively small numbers of participants (Wear, 2014) make it a less useful comparator.

[2] There is an established tendency for corporate media to regard political protests as illegitimate and highlight their unruly elements. This was highly evident in the case of the Occupy movement in 2011, and initial reporting of the large March in March events was limited. Following online criticisms about the limited reporting, some news organisations publicly admitted to underestimating the significance of the event. See, for example, Maley (2014). This follows a number of recent examples of perception gaps between media and the public.

Third, March consisted of a very small number of organisers (March Australia, 2014). This follows the tendency for internet-based campaigning organisations to be comprised of comparatively small numbers of staff (a good example would be the highly successful online campaigning organisation in Australia, GetUp!; Vromen, 2014). In line with early thinking about social movements as mobilising individual "rational actors" through alterations to the costs and benefits of participation (Klandermans, 1984), this reflects the view that new media has a role in: reducing barriers to participation through lowering information costs and enabling new forms of protest co-ordination (such as swarming), substituting new attachments for traditional forms of organisational alignment such as party membership and action (Klandermans, 1997), and permitting increased reach and impact of movement media.

Method

To examine participation in March, the Sydney City MiA rally and march was selected for field interviews. The interviews were conducted on 31 August 2014, in Sydney's central business district. Sydney is the largest city in Australia (population 4.76m). The protest event took place over a five-hour period, but the data collection was restricted to a 2.5-hour period when the march was assembling. The interviews were conducted by the authors and a team of four student researchers from the University of Sydney's Department of Government and International Relations. The research was approved by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee as project 2014/676.

The interviews themselves consisted of a series of open and closed questions, with the questions being modelled on two previous instruments, used to collect data from the 2011 Sydney Occupy rally (Jackson and Chen, 2012) and an online survey of March supporters undertaken by researchers at the University of Canberra. The field interview method was selected to be able to focus on actual attendees, however this choice sacrifices the breadth of locations available to online research.

The instrument questions collected data on demographics, political activity, democratic saliency, issues, and rally connections. Interviews were conducted only with people unknown to the interviewer, and with participants under the age of 18 excluded.[3] The total number of interviews conducted was 132, which represented approximately ten per cent of attendees (attendance was estimated by the researchers as 1,500).[4] Where relevant, comparative data from the 2011 Occupy study (Jackson and Chen, 2012) has been included.

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[3] The researchers estimate that youth participation was minimal.

[4] A media estimate was 3,000 (Farrell, 2014).

Results

Demographics of participants

The average age of participants was 41. This challenges common assumptions that political participation associated with new media would skew towards younger citizens. Younger participation in the Occupy movement in Australia (average 39 years, Table 1) indicates that topic, rather than channel, is significant. The average and distribution of participants' age sees MiA participants as younger than those who participate in formal political parties in Australia[5].

Table 1: Age of participants (range: 18-79) (Occupy n = 180)

Age range	MiA%	n	Occupy %
18-30	32%	42	41%
31-45	30%	39	27%
46-60	23%	31	17%
61+	15%	20	15%
	100%	*132*	*100%*

A similar observation can be made of the gender distribution (Table 2), with there being slightly more women participating in MiA than men. Significant political organisations in Australia tend to be older and more male in composition - women represent only one-third of Australia's parliamentarians (McCann and Wilson, 2014) and they are under-represented in major political party membership rolls (Sawer, 1994: 82).[6] Thus, the marchers represent a different group than might normally involve themselves in formal political institutions such as parties, parliament, or unions.

Table 2: Gender of participants, self-identified

Gender	%	n
Male	45%	59
Female	52%	68
Other/none	3%	4
Total	*100%*	*131*

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[5] On political party membership see for instance, Jepsen (2014), Jackson (2012), Cavalier (2010). Australian parties routinely withhold information regarding their memberships, but commentary on aging memberships is a common theme for established parties in other Anglophone countries such as the UK.

[6] The Liberal Party, for instance, has an average age of 58 and is 58% male (Jepsen, 2014).

The majority of participants were employed in some capacity (76%), with only 26% not working. Interestingly of the 28% of the rally whom were students, 69% were also employed in some capacity (of which 62% were in full-time work), with only 31% of student participants unemployed.

Table 3: Participants' employment status by age brackets

| Age by brackets	F/T	P/T	Casual	Unem-ployed	Retired	Total
18-31	21.1%	31.6%	61.1%	50.0%	0.0%	30.9%
31-45	36.8%	26.3%	27.8%	27.8%	0.0%	29.3%
46-60	33.3%	21.1%	11.1%	22.2%	9.1%	24.4%
61+	8.8%	21.1%	0.0%	0.0%	90.9%	15.4%
n	57	19	18	18	11	123
	100.0%	*100.0%*	*100.0%*	*100.0%*	*100.0%*	*100.0%*

In respect of full-time vs part-time or casual employment this distribution is close to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures for the Australian population of 30% for part-time/casual employment, but higher than the overall participation rate, 76% vs 65% (ABS, 2013). This would appear to argue against the usual epithets cast at rally participants as unemployed students or professional agitators (Crawford, 2006).

Attitudes of participants

Unlike the anti-system attitudes exhibited in the Occupy study, most MiA participants appear to be anti-government in their orientation to the Australian political environment. This can be demonstrated by comparing responses to a question about Australian democracy overall, and specific views about political actors in institutions.

With regards to democracy, the group presents a moderately positive view of the quality of Australian democracy (mean 6.93, compared with 4.07 for Occupy). Still a sizable proportion did not rate Australian democracy highly, as is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Rating Australian democracy (0 is very poorly and 10 is very well; MiA n=132, Occupy n=180)
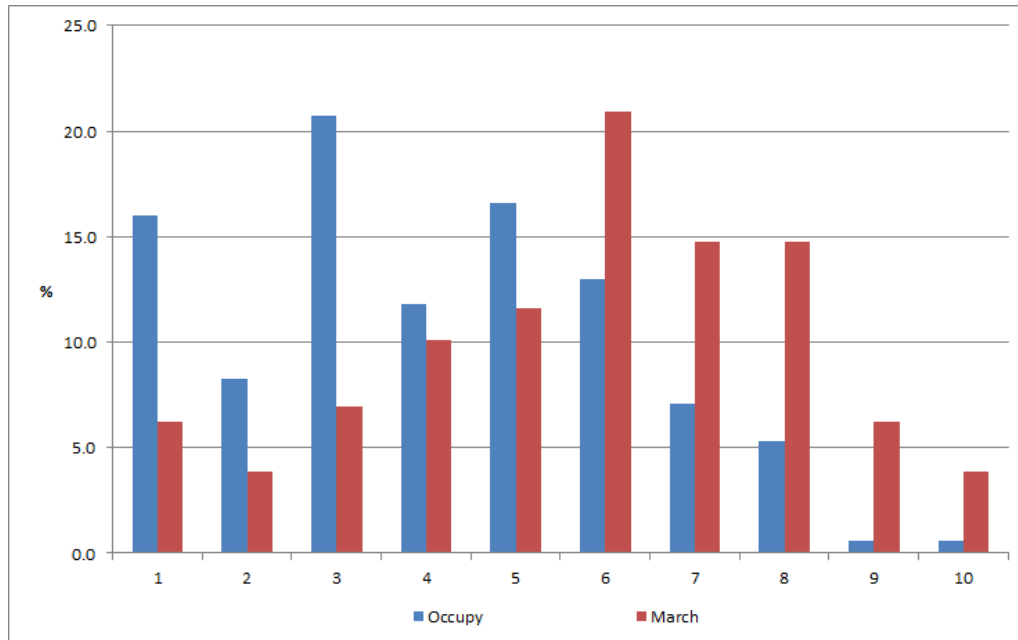
However, when considering specific actors and institutions, MiA participants exhibit similar levels of cynicism to political actors and institutions as the Occupy participants from 2011. As shown in Table 4, while MiA and Occupy participants share the population's view of politicians' capacity to understand popular opinion (low), they are far more likely to attribute unfavourable governmental actions to the deliberate behaviour of elites. This questions construct comparability in the instruments. Given that the three point difference between Occupy and MiA participants' democratic satisfaction is not reflected in the component breakdown of Table 4, further investigation into what "democracy" means and its relationship with government administration needs elaboration. It is likely that, while the Occupy movement was largely focused on an anti-system critique and the MiA is oppositional in nature, systematic concerns are more likely to be demonstrated in the 2011 dataset, while the 2014 data may be more situational in nature and therefore more volatile.

Table 4: Views of government (n=132)

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Government can be expected to do right thing	MiA 2014	2%	13%	14%	35%	36%
	Australia 2013†	-	-	-	-	-
	Occupy 2011	2%	9%	12%	33%	44%
	Australia 2010*	4%	39%	-	48%	9%
Politicians know what ordinary people think	MiA 2014	1%	8%	19%	36%	36%
	Australia 2013	4%	18%	36%	25%	17%
	Occupy 2011	1%	14%	16%	37%	32%
	Australia 2010	3%	12%	19%	37%	29%
People in government most likely to look after themselves	MiA 2014	41%	41%	11%	7%	0%
	Australia 2013*	38%	28%	-	24%	12%
	Occupy 2011	39%	48%	7%	5%	1%
	Australia 2010*	36%	25%	-	30%	9%
Government mostly run for big interests	MiA 2014	52%	38%	9%	1%	0%
	Australia 2013	10%	35%	38%	16%	1%
	Occupy 2011	57%	35%	5%	3%	0%
	Australia 2010	9%	33%	44%	13%	1%

Source: Australia data drawn from the *Australian Electoral Study* 2010 & 2013.
† Question not asked in 2013
* Question asked on a four point scale

Examining participants' perceived personal efficacy, respondents were asked if they believe that March would create "real change". Somewhat dispelling the common conception of "the optimism of youth", it is those aged between 30-65 that are the most hopeful, with younger attendees less convinced their actions will create real change.

While the majority see the protests as having a positive impact, Table 5 also reflects a degree of ambivalence considerably higher than that reported by Occupy participants in 2011. The variation may reflect fatigue and the comparatively small attendance at the sampled event over previous marches. However, this does tend to demonstrate the inverse of swarming behaviour: social flocking can lead to rapid demobilisation and/or attention shifting in loosely coupled movements where participants do not maintain formal memberships in established organisations where political behaviour is surveilled (e.g. countering defection).

Table 5: Political efficacy in MiA (n=132) and Occupy Sydney (n=180)

Participation will "create real change"	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
MiA	10%	42%	37%	9%	2%
Occupy	15%	52%	22%	8%	3%

While only 11% of attendees do not think that March Australia will create any change, only 10% are strongly convinced change will occur, while 37% are less convinced (are neutral). This is fairly evenly spread across all the party identifiers with those with no party identity the being more convinced of the efficacy of this form of action that others. This can be compared to the reactions

of Occupy Sydney marchers (November 2011), who were generally more hopeful (67% v 52% agreeing that change will be generated), although a similar number remained unconvinced (11% disagreeing). If we can consider that the two rallies do have similarities and linkages, it would then appear as if a certain amount of ambivalence towards change can be generated by public protest. This may also be as a result of this rally being the third in 2014, with any impacts on government being uncertain early in the electoral cycle.

Table 6: Political efficacy, MiA by party affiliation

Participation will "create real change"	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	n
ALP	8%	48%	32%	12%	0%	25
Greens	9%	40%	35%	13%	3%	69
No party	19%	33%	48%	0%	0%	27
Socialist Alt/All	0%	66%	34%	0%	0%	4
Others	0%	40%	60%	0%	0%	5

Political behaviours of participants

A significant number of participants who were prepared to identify as voters for a political party (79%), with all the parties identified coming from what would otherwise be considered centre-left (ALP) or left-wing. Given the prevalence of high-profile protest actions from members of socialist organisations (for example a live-to-air televised protest on the national broadcasters flagship current affairs program; 4 May 2014), a surprisingly low 4% identified with the two major Australian socialist parties.[7] The most sizable identifiers were the Australian Greens (52%) a small, but established progressive party that attracts around 10 per cent of the primary vote at national elections.

Table 7: Party identification of participants[8]

Party Affiliation	%	n	Occupy%
Greens	52%	69	37%
None	21%	27	35%
ALP	19%	25	9%
Socialist Alliance/Alternative	4%	6	17%
Other	4%	5	2%
Total	*100%*	*132*	*100%*

[7] Anecdotally, March organisers were actively resistant to entryist strategies by socialist parties (explaining the lower representation of socialists than in the Occupy sample).

[8] In examining the question of party identification we need to consider that this question does not focus on whether the person is a member or close supporter, but worded as "Which political party would you most strongly identify with", so does not test whether they have actually voted for the party or whether they would see themselves allied to that party ideologically or programmatically. Further iterations of the instrument need development to address this limitation.

That over half the participants identified with the Greens fits with the age and gender distribution skewing away from what otherwise might be associated with the established political organisations. This becomes clear when examining the gender distribution by political identification – the "no affiliation" group was predominantly (68%) women, while ALP (44%) and other (22%) identifiers were significantly male. This may be a reaction to the recent masculinisation of federal politics under Tony Abbott (the depictions of Abbott as an athlete, the lack of female representation in federal cabinet, and the deposing of Julia Gillard as Prime Minister being examples).

Table 8: Party identification by gender

	Party Identification - collapsed				
	ALP	**Soc./Other**	**Greens**	**None**	**Total**
Male	56%	70%	42%	31%	45%
Female	44%	20%	55%	65%	52%
Other/none	0%	10%	3%	4%	3%
n	25	10	69	26	130
total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In respect of other political activities, such as signing a petition or boy-/buy-cotting products, participants were unsurprisingly very active, although not always in the most recent past. Comparisons with the data from Occupy show a difference in the willingness of participants to engage in relatively conventional political behaviours[9]: this again marks out the difference between MiA as anti-government, and Occupy as anti-system in orientation. Occupy participants were significantly more likely to have or be willing to undertake this more direct action, such as industrial action, with higher levels of personal risk and cost.

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[9] In the Australian context petitions, product boycotts, and letters to MPs are some of the most ubiquitous, conventional political behaviours, whereas taking industrial action and contacting the media are seen as somewhat more 'activist', i.e., unconventional behaviours (McAllister and Cameron, 2014).

Table 9: Participants' political behaviours

Political Behaviour	Done in past year		Done in the more distant past		No, but might do this in the future		No, never would do this	
	March	Occupy	March	Occupy	March	Occupy	March	Occupy
Signed petition	98%	85%	1%	8%	1%	6%	0%	1%
Boycott	70%	69%	8%	7%	20%	18%	2%	6%
Contact politician	64%	51%	8%	13%	21%	22%	7%	14%
Contact media	24%	38%	14%	16%	41%	30%	21%	16%
Industrial action	16%	30%	23%	19%	52%	42%	9%	7%

The March movement started with the "March in March", held a further march in May, and continues with the third march, now in August. As can be seen from Table 10, the decision for many attendees' was to be at this march, potentially following previous marches, or at least in response to knowing about the movement in general. That half made the decision to be involved "months ago" suggests a committed core of participants over time, as does those starting weeks ago (20%). This would itself suggest that – given the previously discussed tendency towards fatigue –the attendees at this march are close to the core of people likely to be on-going attendees at further events, especially when the rally/march is to continue agitating against the current government and/or current policies.

Table 10: When decision made to attend (n=131)

	Today	Days ago	Weeks ago	Months ago	Forget/ unsure
Decision to attend	12%	17%	20%	50%	1%

Drawing on Noelle-Neumann's (1984) research on civic political discourse, the willingness of participants to engage in social conversations on questions of politics was explored using a "stranger on a train" scenario where they are asked if they would discuss their political views with a political opponent for an extended period of time. This type of question is useful to determine the extent to which participants as (a) likely to proselytise and (b) levels of political tolerance in a society (Noelle-Neumann's original interest). MiA participants were far less likely to engage with a person holding an opposing political opinion than that found in the Occupy participants in 2011 (Table 11).

Table 11: Willingness to engage with a person with a different view about politics (n=131)

	MiA	**Occupy**
Talk to person	62%	84%
Don't bother	37%	16%

This lower likelihood of willingness to engage with people with different views can also be tested against participants' political affiliation. Here it is interesting to note that it is those that affiliate with the Greens that are the most open to talking to the person with a different viewpoint, descending through those with no affiliation, the ALP and finally to those with another (minor) party affiliation (including both Socialist parties). This may be explained in that Australian Green's, while a minority party, tend to exhibit higher levels of education than the average (McCann, 2012).

Table 12: MiA participants, willingness to engage, by party identification

	Greens	**None**	**ALP**	**Soc./Other**
Talk to person	71.0%	61.5%	48.0%	40.0%
Don't bother	29.0%	38.5%	52.0%	60.0%
N	*69*	*26*	*25*	*10*

Participants' issue identification

MiA participants were also asked in a free-form question what the key reasons/concerns were that prompted them to attend the march. The responses were then coded for the key issues mentioned, noting that participants could mention as many concerns as they wished.

What was clearly apparent was that issues connected to the May National Budget were most prevalent, in particular the proposed cuts and changes in education funding (both those under the "Gonski" school funding reforms as well as the higher education changes). Almost a third (31%) of participant nominated education as one of their key concerns. In respect of budget measures, changes to the public funding of health services and marketisation of health provision were cited by 17% of participants. The National Budget in general terms was mentioned by 12% of participants. The second most important reason, and one linking with border protection/migration and general security concerns was the plight of refugees – this was mentioned by 26% of participants. The third most prevalent issue area mentioned was that of the environment, mentioned in a general sense by 17% of participants, with climate change mentioned specifically by 11%, and renewable energy by 5%.

Table 13: Issue of concern / motivations for participation

Issue of concern	Mentioned
Education	31%
Refugees/Asylum Seekers	26%
Health – Public Health Service/Co-payment	17%
Environment - General	17%
Government Performance	14%
Welfare	13%
Health - General	12%
Budget	12%
Economic Justice/Employment/Workers	11%
Environment - Climate Change	11%
Indigenous Issues	6%
Big Business/Corporations	6%
Accountability	6%
Environment - Renewables	5%
Gay Marriage/Rights	5%
Class War/Elites	5%
Democracy	3%
War/Iraq/Military	3%
Palestine/Muslims	2%
Racism	2%
Women/Feminism	2%
Foreign Aid	1%
Public Broadcasting	1%
National Broadband Network	1%
Promote Action	14%
Change / Solidarity	11%
Activity / Meeting Friends / Support Friends	11%

If we consider the key areas of education, refugees, health, welfare, the budget
and indigenous affairs, we find some interesting shifts in issue identification.
We can see that identification of the budget, as a general concern over specific
policy issues within it, is stronger amongst party members (particularly the
ALP). Similarly, refugees and asylum seekers are a key issue for some 30% of
Green participants, but this halves for ALP supporters. Perhaps most striking is
the very strong support for education issues amongst Greens and non-
identifiers when compared to ALP identifiers.

Table 14: MiA most commonly cited of concern, comparison of ALP-Green-None affiliation

	ALP	**Greens**	**None**	**% of Total**
General Education	12%	35%	44%	31%
Refugees	16%	30%	22%	26%
General Health	4%	15%	19%	12%
Budget	20%	13%	4%	12%
Climate issues	0%	10%	15%	11%
Indigenous	0%	7%	7%	5%
Total	52%	110%	111%	97%

Note: because participants could nominate more than one policy area motivating attendance, party column totals can add to more than 100%.

Table 13 also demonstrates that participation or solidarity benefits were also significant responses from participants. This took the form of promoting activity (14%) or change (11%), as well as personal, social benefits (protests as a recreational or social activity, 11%). In an era where there are manifold means for political expression online, protests still clearly provide a way for the politically-engaged to enjoy and/or generate social capital.

Role of new media in mobilisation

Given the hypothesis that new media drove participation in the March Australia events, Table 15 demonstrates social media, particularly Facebook, was significant in informing participants about the event. The second most commonly cited source of event information was friends or family and then organisations. The comparatively small level of attention given to these events by mainstream media is reflected in the extremely small number of participants nominating print, radio, or television as significant sources of information about the event.

Table 15: Source of information promoting March, by party affiliation (n=131)

	ALP	**Soc./ Other**	**Greens**	**None**	**Total**
Facebook	56.00%	80.00%	76.80%	63.00%	70.20%
Friend / family	48.00%	20.00%	36.20%	40.70%	38.20%
Organisation	12.00%	30.00%	14.50%	22.20%	16.80%
Email	8.00%	10.00%	8.70%	11.10%	9.20%
Twitter	16.00%	0%	5.80%	0%	6.10%
Print media	4.00%	0%	0%	7.40%	2.30%
Other social media	8.00%	0%	0%	0%	1.50%
Radio	0%	0.00%	1.40%	0.00%	0.80%
Television	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 15 is interesting in that it does not support Klandermans', et al. (2014) hypothesis that unaffiliated protestors would be more likely to be mobilised through open communications channels. The comparatively high level of organisational nomination by unaffiliated participants talks to the role, not of parties or union in MiA's mobilisation, but online campaigning organisations like GetUp! This appears to confirm the role of these organisations in mobilising monitorial citizens (Schudson, 1999).

Wider observations on the event

In addition to the specific findings detailed above, a number of general observations can be made.

The first observation relates to this question of event frame. Framing provides shared cognitive models that create collective meaning and direction for social movements (Ryan and Gamson, 2014). In addition, it is also seen as important in explaining the longevity of movements. This process appears less significant in the MiA data.

Given the comparatively open nature of the rally as a general forum for dissent, it is clear that different participants participated for different reasons. Without a central narrative, participants' motivations are more diverse, but party affiliation appears important in shaping interpretation of the event. This reflects the value of ambiguity in building larger coalitions, but makes participants capacity to gauge movement success more difficult. This appears evident in the comparatively low levels of efficacy demonstrated by participants. Largely, however, participants can be categorised as anti-government protestors, rather than the anti-system orientation of those interviewed at the Occupy event in 2011.

Second, the use of unstructured responses for issue identification present interesting observations about the relationship between policy issues and party affiliation.

The strong focus of ALP identifiers on "the budget" as a general grievance, and comparative unwillingness of ALP-identifiers to engage in political dialogue with opponents talks to the increasingly competitive and zero-sum nature of major party politics in Australia. The policy orientation of ALP identifiers is unclear given the party's strong history of social democratic policy innovation. Participants who were non-ALP identifiers were *more* likely to nominate the defence of "signature" Labor polities (particularly in the public provision of health and education services) as motivators for attendance. This may demonstrate a weakness of Labor's previous administration being able to communicate the ownership of key reforms like the Gonski funding model for schools (Keane, 2012), but also the party's low profile in opposition regardless of attempts to campaign around the defence of its decades old public health reforms.

The research also demonstrates the changing nature of Green party identifiers: Greens are no longer purely environmentally focussed. Their supporters' interests reflect the broader array of policy interests the party has developed following its transition from a single-interest to mass party (Rhiannon, 2012). Interestingly, in the breakdown of motivating issues, Greens-affiliated participants were *less* likely to nominate environmental issues than non-greens (with the exception of ALP identifiers). This is significant as a number of significant environmental issues (particularly related to climate change and the Australian carbon economy) have been subject to considerable debate during the preceding year. The move to a mass party clearly alters the significance of "traditional" green issues, but this may also reflect an impact of the previous event frames (focusing on the budget and particularly social policy issues) in driving participation.[10]

The final observation is that March conforms to our description as a largely online organisation that relied on social media for the promotion of its events and co-ordination of participation nationally.

While considerable attention in the popular press has been focused on the use of Twitter for political purposes, largely due to its popularity with journalists and political elites (Chen, 2013: 177-8), Facebook remains the most common tool for event-related political communication among participants. Social networks, online or face-to-face, dominate mobilisation decisions by participants, with endorsement by organisations still relevant for a subset of participants.

The implications of this can be summarised as:

1. Social media has become an important tool for political organising, both in established political institutions like political parties, but also in social movement organisations and unstructured movements like Occupy and March Australia;
2. The unique nature of the event as unframed and open to multiple grievance expression may have reduced the number of organisational referrals, and therefore be specific to this type of mobilising group;
3. This form of organisation can mobilise large numbers of participants at short notice, reducing the capacity of governments to control dissent through "swarming";
4. Online organisations are not immune from problems of collective action. This appears particularly significant in the ambiguous nature of participant's motivations, and the lack of other social structures to build and reinforce issue/group commitment/cohesion. Activists and organisations interested in employing these methods need to pay considerable attention to framing and narrative;

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[10] This finding needs further investigation, given a succession of large, climate-focused rallies held across Australia in late 2014. Social movement theorists have discussed the way that social movement organisations increasingly engage in niching strategies to, deliberately or Darwinianly, effectively compete for resources (Stern, 1999). Selectivity in participation at the individual level is less clearly addressed in this literature, but seems highly likely in the rational allocation of time and effort.

5. Protests organised online can also demobilise rapidly due to "flocking" behaviours. Consideration is needed for organisers about sustaining unity and commitment in the absence of membership structures (Tilly, 2005), and;
6. The effectiveness of these types of event appears to be associated with both entrepreneurialism and political opportunities. This is demonstrated in this case through the combination of the work of the March Australia collective and the unexpected scale of the austerity budget of the new Abbott administration.

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About the authors

Dr Stewart Jackson is a lecturer in Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. He is the author of an upcoming volume on the Australian Greens (2016; Melbourne University Press) stewart.jackson AT sydney.edu.au

Dr Peter John Chen is a senior lecturer in Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Australian Politics in a Digital Age* (2012) and an upcoming volume on animal welfare policy making in Australia (2016; ANU Press) peter.chen AT sydney.edu.au

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