THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADVOCACY ON CLIMATE POLICY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

The UK has a long history of protesting and until recently the climate movement held a large presence in this space. The enactment of the Public Order Bill in 2023 allowed for a government crackdown on protests. In semi-structured interviews with advocates, interviewees voiced their frustrations with this repression. Members of Parliament (MPs) also noticed the decline in protest. In addition, advocates spoke of strategies their groups were employing to work around this new normal, including building up a network of people from constituencies all over the country and empowering them to connect with their local MP and focusing more on local change through their cities councils and neighborhoods. MPs discussed methods of communication and the preferred ways for constituents to voice opinions on climate policy, specifically suggesting direct, in-person conversations. The advocacy space in the UK is still in the process of adapting to new challenges, but advocates remain committed to attaining their goals. These qualitative insights are reinforced by quantitative analysis of protest trends using ACLED data from 2020-2024. The data shows a clear multi-year decline in climate protest across the UK, particularly between 2022 and 2023. Using a synthetic control method to estimate a counterfactual trajectory, the results suggest that the Public Order Act's enactment in May of 2023 resulted in the unexpected drop of climate protest. GIS mapping further reveals that climate protest remains concentrated in populous urban areas, while not strongly overlapping with MP climate policy support. Findings suggest that while grassroots climate advocacy remains active at lower rates, its direct impact on policy is constrained by institutional dynamics, communication barriers, and shifting legal contexts. Effective policy influence from climate advocacy groups depends on local level action, mobilizing supporters, and prioritizing direct, in-person communication with MPs.

Key Points:

"In other words, advocates should enter conversations with well-defined goals regarding the action they hope the MP will take rather than an extensive or disorganized series of requests. Another explained that e-mail campaigns are also not a great way of communicating with the MP interviewed, because everyone is saying the same thing, they are long, and they cannot tell who the actual constituents are."

"Another MP noted that when they interact with climate groups, they focus on local organizations, though these groups tend to focus more on nature and restoration than climate change broadly."

INTRODUCTION

From women's rights and the beginning of the suffragette movement, to housing the first European city to declare a climate emergency, the United Kingdom (UK) has a strong history of civil movement and political advocacy, carried into today. The research team, the authors of this report, are graduate students at the University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability who were selected to assist HERO in identifying the impacts of grassroots climate advocacy on policy in the UK during the period of 2014-2024 for approximately 18-months. HERO connects proven civic leaders - youth, parents, farmers, scientists, and negotiators - through structured peer networks called Circles, equipping them with evidence, expert support, and coordination to accelerate climate wins from proof of concept to formal policy adoption. Climate advocacy can play a critical role in altering the viewpoints of government officials, and with this research, it is now easier to identify the ways in which advocates and officials can work together to implement change. Throughout this paper we utilize both the terms advocate and activist. By advocate or advocacy we mean those who engage with policy makers through dialogue in order to induce climate policy. By activist or activism we mean those who may use disruptive tactics towards the creation of climate policy, such as groups like Just Stop Oil or Extinction Rebellion.

The research team conducted a comprehensive literature review, a quantitative analysis, and a qualitative analysis consisting of interviews with both climate advocates and UK Members of Parliament through outreach to nearly 800 individuals and organizations. While conducting interviews and expanding research topics, the research team discovered a wide range of topics of interest, leading to extended research on both the Public Order Act and the Climate and Nature Bill to better understand discussions with MPs and advocates. Primary issues examined via interviews include communication methods, social media, political outreach, party alignment, and forms of protest.

The 2023 Public Order Act, sponsored by Priti Patel (Conservative) and Lord Sharp of Epsom (Conservative) places restrictions on public gatherings and allows police to take action against protesters (Public Order Act 2023). With disruptive protests in the United Kingdom growing, Parliament decided new measures needed to be placed to quell gatherings that infringed on the daily duties of police officers and the general public, including blocking public transport networks and making it difficult for employees to get to work. The Public Order Act criminalizes protesters and introduces a fine and prison time, amount dependent on level of disruption, among other penalties and actions. The bill cites protest groups like Just Stop Oil, Insulate Britain, and Extinction Rebellion as reasons for the passing of the bill, and has left room for concern among protesters about participating in public gatherings (Public Order Bill).

The Climate and Nature (CAN) Bill, sponsored by Dr. Roz Savage (Liberal Democrat), is a national bill in progress that would require the UK to meet more stringent climate and nature targets. There are three primary stages of bill passage in the UK, first in the House of Commons, then the House of Lords, then the final closing stage. The first two of these stages are made up of 5 pieces - the first reading, the second reading, the committee stage, the report stage, and the third reading - then followed by moving onto the next stage, while the final closing stage consists of considerations of amendments and royal assent. The CAN bill was introduced in October 2024, and is currently on its second reading in the House of Commons. If the bill passes, the UK will be required to limit greenhouse gas emissions; phase out the use, extraction, and exports of fossil fuels; restore natural ecosystems; create a Climate and Nature Assembly; and more (Climate and Nature Bill).

This study uses both a quantitative and qualitative approach in research design. In our qualitative section we examine how climate advocacy impacts climate policy in the United Kingdom through semi-structured interviews with Members of Parliament (MP) and climate advocacy groups. With this we aim to capture detailed perspectives on the interactions between advocates and policymakers, and further assess impacts. This approach enabled consistency across interviews and personability in responses. This further provided insights into strategies, communication methods, and relationships that shape climate policy outcomes.

Through the interview process the team spoke with 20 climate advocates from a wide range of groups across the UK and 5 MPs. These interviews were used to inform the research team on how advocates were approaching their work and how MPs communicate with advocates and make climate policy decisions. Early on, common themes began to emerge, advocates were voicing concerns about government crackdown on protest, and MPs best connect on climate topics when having meaningful conversations with constituent groups. This study also incorporates Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping in order to spatially analyze patterns of climate protest and climate bill support in districts throughout the United Kingdom. Integrating protest data, parliamentary support for climate legislation, and district boundaries provides visual representation on where climate activism is most concentrated, and how it aligns with policy support. This spatial approach serves as a complementary method of analysis to our qualitative research and findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research project focuses on how grassroots climate advocacy and strategies in the United Kingdom have influenced public policy and legislative agendas during the decade of 2014 to 2026.

Climate advocacy has been widely studied. Little has been written, however, regarding the correlation between grassroots advocacy and policy change in the UK. This review summarizes the relevant literature by identifying key themes related to the relationship between advocacy and policymaking, including:

A. The theoretical foundations analyzing how social movements influence policy.
B. Communication, framing, and media portrayal of climate activism.
C. Public opinion, protest, and elite responsiveness.
D. Institutions, geography, and political behavior.
E. Digital mobilization and contemporary climate advocacy.
F. Participation and normalization of protests.
G. What types of protest actually impact public policy?

A.) THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: *HOW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS INFLUENCE POLICY*

The literature discusses key theoretical ideas, including the role of joint effects, agenda setting, constituent signaling, and the normalization of protest. The authors examine how their empirical findings inform theories of how and under what conditions advocacy and protest shape parliamentary speech and legislative agendas.

Amenta et al. (2010), in *The Political Consequences of Social Movements*, examines advocacy in the US and attempts to map how social movements shape state and local politics. The article focuses on the political consequences of social movements, including the role of direct versus indirect influence and political mediation in shaping policy. They provide a framework to connect strategies to mobilize, frame issues, implement tactics, and engage in political mediation. Amenta explains that for social movements to make a difference, they need to work within a supportive political environment. Amenta argues that it's not just what activists do that matters, but also whether the political situation is right. This idea is called the political mediation model. The article's methodology is to review a range of case studies and comparative analyses to explore how social movements shape policy, elections, and institutional change. They challenge traditional models that reflexively equate grassroots mobilization with political success. The authors find that grassroots mobilization and organizational capacity are influential, yet a movement's actual impact on policy depends less on the structure and strategy behind advocacy and more on how political elites and institutions react or respond to movements. The article concludes that:

> **"Research has suggested that high mobilization is necessary for a movement to gain political influence ... but also that conditions and activities that spur mobilization often present problems for challengers beyond the attention-getting phase of politics." Amenta et al. (2010)**

This conclusion confirms a common finding that the number of people in a movement may receive public attention, but numbers alone are sufficient for a movement to impact change in public policy.

In *Useless Protest?*, Giugni (2007), focuses on direct, indirect, and joint-effect models of protest emphasizing the importance of allies and public opinion. The article challenges the assumption that grassroots protest drives change in public policy. His method uses time-series data to analyze the policy impact of U.S. ecology, antinuclear, and peace movements from 1975 to 1995. Giugni tests three models:

1. The "direct-effect model" or movements influence policy independently;

2. The "indirect-effect model" or movements shift public opinion or elite support, which then affects policy; and

3. The "joint-effect model," which movements succeed only when mobilization aligns with political allies and favorable public opinion.

Giugni's research finds little support for the direct or indirect models. He concludes that protest alone does not produce policy change, and movement influence on public opinion or elite support rarely translates into legislative or budgetary outcomes. Instead, he finds that only the joint-effect model showed meaningful results: policy shifts occurred when protest activity coincided with institutional support or positive public opinion, albeit the effects were moderate and uneven. Giugni further argues that movements' success and strategies varied by issue area. For example, the ecology movement benefited most from political allies (e.g., Democrats in Congress), while the antinuclear movement gained traction when public opinion shifted against nuclear power. The peace movement, targeting foreign policy, had no significant policy impact, highlighting how domestic, low-profile issues are more susceptible to influence than foreign or high-profile ones.

This article also examines conventional tactics (such as PAC lobbying) and the role of organization growth on social movements and policy. "Organizational Growth" is defined as the number of members in major organizations supporting a social movement. Giugni found "no significant effect of organizational growth on policy…." At the same time, he concludes that "the higher number of people who are involved in a movement organization, the more likely are politicians to take the issues addressed by these organizations seriously into account." These findings indicate that organizational growth forces political elites to recognize what issues society is concerned about and organization around. Yet this recognition by social elites does result in "a substantial impact on public policy."

Giguni ultimately argues that protest is not "useless." However, to lead to policy change, it must occur alongside favorable political conditions and public sentiment. He argues that his findings support the theory of representative democracy in the context of majority influence over minority activism.

Public debate and social movements alone do not drive public policy. Nevertheless, social movements "improve[] the prospects for the development of democracy." Grassroots movements raise the visibility of issues that drive social movements even if social movements themselves rarely shift policy outcome without external reinforcement. However, protest becomes an agent for social change only when it occurs alongside favorable political conditions and public sentiment.

In *The Public, the Protester, and the Bill: Do Legislative Agendas Respond to Public Opinion Signals?*, Bernardi et al. (2021) examine how legislative agendas respond to public opinion versus protest signals. The article relies upon a data-driven methodology that examines data from nearly 40 years and four Western democracies in 12 major policy areas. By applying error correction models to time-series cross-sectional data that combine legislative agenda information from the Comparative Agendas Project, survey-based public opinion data, and protest data, the authors distinguish short-term from long-term effects to test whether protest boosts the impact of public opinion on legislative agendas. Bernardi, Bischoff, and Wouters found that protests does not independently shift legislative agendas, but acts as an amplifier of public opinion, strengthening the effect of public opinion on lawmakers to act. Their study shows that while public opinion can shape policy, politicians often see protest as representing only a small group, so protests don't always make them more likely to listen.

"Whereas adaptation of legislation to public priorities as measured through surveys appears to be the default, routine, business as usual procedure in politics, the impact of protest shows to be more a matter of the rare, exceptional shock to the system."

B.) COMMUNICATION, FRAMING, & MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF CLIMATE ACTIVISM

1.Movement Communication and Goal Clarity

North (2011), in *The Politics of Climate Activism in the UK: a Social Movement Analysis*, questions whether social movement theory (SMT) provides a framework for enacting change in the UK. North finds that, while activism has an impact on policy and is generally able to convey the seriousness of climate change, advocacy groups face challenges in communicating common goals in a manner that encourages other people and activists to join the movement (North, 2011, p. 1595). This issue highlights the role of communication in advocacy, and how articulating goals encourages people to participate in grassroots movements, thus increasing the likelihood of a political response. North states that further research is needed into the political impacts of campaigns to determine whether protest and advocacy on climate change increases support for environmental advocacy, or if targeted issues—such as the impacts of climate on a local community, protesting a specific bill, or targeting specific policymakers—will have greater impact on participation and the outcomes of environmental movements.

"Climate activism takes place in a diverse range of political spaces and scales and works actively to produce knowledges about the dangers anthropogenic climate change and responsibilities for it, but it is unclear that it has the motive power to move to more sustainable ways of organising human society. "

2. Interest Groups, Advocacy and Policy Outcomes

In *Does Climate Advocacy Matter?* Böhler et al. (2022), argue that citizens use advocacy throughout the world to make others aware of social causes. The question is whether climate advocacy has emerged to push world leaders to address climate change. Does advocacy lead to tangible change? The authors examine which elements of advocacy are most effective. Their methodology is to examine previous studies addressing these questions. They found that comparative studies linking interest group mobilization to climate policy are missing from the literature. They fault the lack of reliable data on interest group activity across countries and time and on issues such as climate change.

While past studies primarily focus on case studies, the authors adopt a quantitative study that examines how a movement's size, access to resources, and end goals affect their ability to effectively mobilize a movement. The authors' methodology adopts climate-related legislation as a dependent variable and the size of two lobbying groups per country as the independent variable. National climate laws include legislative acts passed by parliament or other legislative authority and executive acts such as presidential decrees or executive orders issued by governments. The authors use the data to examine the adoption of national climate laws from 1997 through 2016, the timeframe for which there is data on the transnational mobilization of interest groups. The article finds that, of the 164 countries in their database, 93 of the world's 100 largest emitters account for nearly 95 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. More broadly, the authors found that climate advocacy groups were mobilizing at higher numbers than opposing groups. In summary, the authors conclude that there is a correlation between climate advocacy groups mobilizing and policy implementation when done on a large scale across multiple groups. The authors find that countries where more climate advocacy groups mobilize around international climate negotiations adopt approximately 42 percent more climate laws - an effect that falls to 15 percent when ten or more fossil fuel industry groups actively oppose them.

3. Media Selection and Partisan Framing

In *The Power of Protest in the Media: Examining Portrayals of Climate Activism*, Scheuch et al. (2024), examine the importance of how climate movements are portrayed by the media. The authors discuss how public knowledge of climate change, policy, and activism may be skewed by the dominance of conservative media (Scheuch et al., 2024, p. 8). Their research found an inconsistency in how partisan media outlets portray climate activism. The article addresses the gap between communication and effective advocacy that is identified by Peter North's research into the role of fossil fuel industry versus outside actors in generating change. They conclude that actions focused on industry elicit more coverage than those focused on actors (Scheuch et al., 2024, p. 9).

The article argues that research on the scope of climate activism should incorporate not only the target audience as done by Scheuch et al., but also the role of communicating general versus specific issues to the group. The research offers an interesting angle for further research on how to create climate advocacy campaigns that can be positively portrayed across the partisan media spectrum.

"Legal actions are generally covered more favorably than illegal ones in both conservative and non-conservative outlets and receive more coverage. Actions that target the fossil fuel industry attract more coverage than those that target other actors, while actions that target the public are covered more favorably than those that do not."

In *Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting*, Wasow (2020) explores how protests introduce issues in the public and political agenda. With a focus on the U.S. civil rights movement, Wasow distinguishes between violent and nonviolent protests to evaluate their impact in setting agendas. In particular, he examines the effect caused by social movements on media coverage, public opinion, and electoral behavior. Wasow concludes that nonviolent protests receive positive media attention and, overall, increase public support for civil rights legislation.

On the other hand, Wasow finds a correlation between violent protests and negative publicity with increased support for conservative candidates. His findings show the role that the media plays in determining whether the nature and type of protests will advance or undermine a movement's broader goals. Wasow's concept of "agenda seeding" offers a critical lens for evaluating how varying protest forms ultimately shape political outcomes. For example, movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil adopted both disruptive and non-disruptive tactics.

Wasow argues that the political effectiveness of these movements may hinge not on their message, but on how that message is received by the general public. His research suggests that protests that attract sympathetic media are more likely to shift the overall public opinion and therefore indirectly influence policy.

C.) PUBLIC OPINION, PROTEST, and ELITE RESPONSIVENESS

Protest effects may be conditional on public concern, partisan context, and media tone. The literature considers whether, in a high-salience climate context like the United Kingdom, will grassroots protest influence government climate policy?

1. Environmental Protest and Legislation

In *Cross-cutting Influences of Environmental Protest and Legislation* Olzak & Soule (2009), ask whether there is significant difference in legislative outcomes between what they characterize as institutional and extra-institutional protest. The authors conclude that public opinion on the environment has no correlation with protest. This conclusion raises the question of how public opinion on climate issues is created. The article distinguishes between the impact of advocacy on social media and actual protest. While the authors find positive effects related to institutional protest directed at Congressional hearings, they also establish that these protests can lead to negative connotations and a decrease in movement success (Olzak and Soule, 2009, p. 214). Overall, Olzak and Soule conclude that protest significantly increases the rate of Congressional hearings on environmental issues, which is indirectly impacting environmental legislation (Olzak and Soule, 2009, p. 216).

> **"We find some evidence that protest has an indirect effect on environmental legislation through its influence on the number of environmental hearings held by Congress. Compared to extra-institutional protest, we find that institutional forms-including press releases, law suits and organizational activity-have the strongest effect on subsequent protest and hearings."**

2. Protest vs. Public Opinion as Signals

In *The Public, the Protester, and the Bill: Do Legislative Agendas Respond to Public Opinion Signals?*, Bernardi et al. (2021 argue that research in social movement studies and political science has significantly deepened our understanding of political influence on environmental policy and the conditions under which public issues reach the legislative agenda. The article is based on an empirical study of legislative agenda responses to public opinion. The authors examine legislative responsiveness to public opinion and protest across four Western democracies—Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

> **"Our pooled analysis confirms established findings on long-term effects of public issue priorities on policy agendas and reveals that protest does not have any impact on change in legislative agenda."**

3. Agenda Seeding and Protest Form

In *Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting*, Wasow (2020) explores how protests can introduce issues into the public and political agenda. The article poses the question of what role the media plays in determining whether protests advance or undermine broader goals. With a focus on the U.S. civil rights movement, Wasow distinguishes between violent and nonviolent protests to evaluate their impact. In particular, he examines the effects on media coverage, public opinion, and electoral behavior. This study found that nonviolent protests received positive media attention and, overall, increased public support for civil rights legislation. On the other hand, violent protests tended to be framed in a negative light and were found to be correlated with increased support towards conservative candidates.

Wasow's agenda-seeding concept offers a way to evaluate how varying protest forms ultimately shape political outcomes. Noted are movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil which have employed both disruptive and non-disruptive tactics. The article suggests that political effectiveness may hinge not only on a movement's message, but on how that message is received; the author states that protests that attract sympathetic media are more likely to shift public opinion and influence policymaking indirectly.

D.) INSTITUTIONS, GEOGRAPHY, & POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

The literature in this section highlights three variables to examine: (i) location (constituency vs national); (ii) tactic/costliness (disruptive vs non-disruptive), and (iii) political exposure (party, marginal vs safe seat).

1. From Protest to Parliamentary Attention

In *Does Protest Influence Political Speech?*, Barrie et al. (2023) explore the impact of climate activism on political response. While previous research has explored the role of advocacy in policy influence, gaps remain. These gaps appear in the form of a lack of understanding of the direct effects of grassroots activism on UK parliamentary discourse and legislative action. Barrie, Fleming, and Rowan (2023) and Gause (2020) both shed light on how political speech and legislative behavior are influenced by protest movements. Barrie et al. (2023) investigate the connection between climate protests and parliamentary speech, analyzing when UK policymakers reference protests in their political discourse between 2017 and 2019. Their findings suggest that protest events do affect political speech, with politicians more likely to mention climate issues following demonstrations. Politicians are more likely to mention climate issues on social media, but they do not find demonstrations to affect politicians' speeches in Parliament. However, the extent of this influence depends on factors such as the protest's visibility, media coverage, and political party alignment. This research aligns with previous studies highlighting the importance of communication and issue framing in activism (North, 2011; Scheuch et al., 2024).

In *Protest and Policymaking: Explaining Fluctuation in Congressional Attention to Rights Issues,* King et al. (2007), finds that congressional attention to rights-related issues is driven by a combination of protest activity, issue legitimacy, and issue competition. While dissecting prior literature, the authors found that protest alone has little effect on policy outcomes. However, King et al. gather that protest does in fact have an impact on policy, in the beginning stages, where Congress was more likely to hold hearings on issues that had an above-average number of yearly protests (King et al., 2007, p. 149). This provides interesting context for conducting supplementary research into where protest impacts the political process, not focusing solely on the final policy outcome but on the phases along the way.

> "These results demonstrate that protest can shape the timing and substance of political communication by individual elected representatives. They also highlight an important difference between legislators' offline and online speech, suggesting that more work is needed to understand how political strategies differ across these arenas."

> "We assert that protesters compete for attention among lawmakers at the agenda-setting stage. An issue receives more attention when the frequency of protest activity around a particular issue is sufficiently high for that issue to stand out within the field of competing issues."

2. Costly Protest and Low-Resource Groups

Gause (2020), in *Revealing Issue Salience via Costly Protest: How Legislative Behavior Following Protest Advantages Low-Resource Groups*, further refines the understanding of protest influence by examining how costly protest (requiring significant commitment and resources) can make issues more prominent to policymakers. Gause argues that when low-resource groups engage in sustained, highly visible protest, they can overcome traditional barriers to influence legislative action. This perspective is particularly relevant for climate activism, where smaller grassroots movements often struggle against large, well-funded opposition. This research suggests that highly disruptive or sustained protests may be necessary to capture policymakers' attention, leading to more substantive engagement rather than passive acknowledgment. Gause measures policymakers' attention by analyzing congressional behavior, including data on bill introductions, sponsorships, and committee hearings related to the protest issue. This suggests the value of identifying comparable indicators within the British parliamentary system to assess whether and how protest influences political agendas. A key takeaway is that when low-resource groups engage in sustained, highly visible protest, they can overcome traditional barriers to influence legislative action.

3. Constituency-Level Protest and Responsiveness

In Protest and Congressional Behavior, Assessing Racial and Ethnic Minority Protests in the District, Gillion (2012) examines the relationship between protest and congressional behavior, focusing on the racial and ethnic minority protests within specific districts. The research in this study highlights the impact of local protest activity on the actions of congressional representatives. By assessing protests in individual districts, this study has uncovered a nuanced connection between grassroots activism and political responsiveness. Gillion finds that members of Congress are more likely to support policies that are aligned with protest demands when such demonstrations occur in their districts. This outcome suggests that protests can serve as a form of "constituent signaling." This signaling tool can provide legislators with insights into public priorities, particularly those of underrepresented groups. Although this study focuses on U.S. racial politics, it has broader implications: protests can shape policy agendas by conveying local political priorities.

This framework can be applied to further understand the relationship between climate protest and policy in the United Kingdom. Gillion's findings suggest that geographically targeted climate protests, such as those organized in regions facing high levels of environmental risk, may be more effective at influencing MPs' behavior. As seen in the United States, MPs may be more likely to respond to activism within their own constituencies, which would thus impact their role in parliament. Furthermore, this points to a possible explanation for uneven political responsiveness to climate protest across the United Kingdom. Applying Gillion's framework in the UK provides deeper insight into how local climate protests may help steer legislative attention toward environmental issues, especially in marginalized regions or swing districts, where MPs tend to be more sensitive to public pressure. Overall, Gillion's research on Protest and Congressional Behavior offers a new perspective that can be integrated into other research on climate protest and policy. The article shows that members of Congress are more likely to support policies that are aligned with protest demands when the demonstrations occur in their districts.

4. Movement Strength, Exposure, and Policy Change

Do political protests matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement Over the Years, Madestam, et al. (2013) argue that movements have been traditionally used to advance political agendas, including the Tea Party. By studying this political movement, Madestam et al. examined how the Tea Party pushed for policy changes, in addition to how the movement impacted individual political behavior. The Tea Party movement drew on the historical Boston Tea Party protest to show they were for smaller government and less taxation. The authors chose various parameters to include in their statistical analysis, including rally attendance numbers, PAC contributions, media coverage of the movement, voting and political opinions, and the impact of precipitation on rally attendance.

The authors found that rain decreased rally attendance. The first year's protests in 2009 spread awareness of the movement, and rally attendance increased in 2010. This was partially attributed to low rainfall at previous rallies. Voters in areas with non-rainy protests saw a 6% increase in support for the Tea Party movement. The strength of the Tea Party movement led to policy change. As the movement grew stronger and larger, they were able to leverage it to push forward their political agenda. The study showed that a strongly organized movement can increase its numbers and influence over time.

E. DIGITAL MOBILIZATION AND CONTEMPORARY CLIMATE ADVOCACY

In Climate Change Advocacy Online: Theories of Change, Target Audiences, and Online Strategy Hestres (2015), argues that, in recent years, activism has been moving towards a digital space. Environmental nonprofits use their social media platforms to inform their base and encourage them to take action. Social media has allowed advocacy groups to have further reach than before, thus expanding their target base. Hestres evaluates how activist groups use social media to mobilize their base to take action. There is a differentiation between legacy environmental groups and new groups, which typically do not rely on the same sources of funding.

Through interviews with advocacy group staff, Hestres identified themes in how groups used social media to their advantage. "All of these organizations to varying extents use the same online tools: sophisticated mass email systems, constituent relations management (eCRM) software to manage their supporter lists, blogs, search engine optimization (SEO), online advertising, and social media, among others" (Hestres, 2015). These groups used social media strategies to encourage followers to participate in grassroots activism on environmental issues. Utilizing these methods are a strategy for informing the public and for pushing for further environmental regulation and policies.

"By requesting higher levels of engagement from supporters — often connected to local actions — and de-emphasizing the role of money in political advocacy, these organizations may help spur a renewal of deeply engaged citizen participation in American politics" (Hestres, 2015, p. 29)

F. WHO DEMONSTRATES? *PARTICIPATION AND THE NORMALIZATION OF PROTEST*

In *Who Demonstrates?* Antistate Rebels, Conventional Participants, or Everyone?, Norris, Walgrave & Van Aelst (2005) challenge the notion that political protest is primarily driven by political disaffection or radicalism. Using survey data from Belgium, including a general election study and participant surveys from demonstrations between 1998 and 2001, the authors compare three theories to explain who participates in protests: anti-state theory, strategic resource theory, and contextual theory. The authors find that demonstrators are not more distrustful of government, less satisfied with democracy, or socially marginalized than other citizens. Instead, the demonstrators closely resemble conventional political participants in terms of political interest, civic engagement, and organizational ties. Many demonstrators are also active in parties, labor unions, and voluntary associations, which lends support to the strategic resource model, which views protest as a normalized, mainstream form of participation used by resource-rich and politically engaged individuals.

Moreover, the analysis supports the contextual theory by showing that who participates in demonstrations depends on the type of event and the issue. New Left protests (for example, anti-globalization and anti-racism) tend to draw younger, educated, middle-class individuals with strong left-leaning views; Old Left demonstrations (for example, labor or welfare issues) mobilize more working-class and older participants; New Right events (for example, anti-drug protests) tend to attract older and more conservative citizens; and mixed events (for example, the White March) involve broad, heterogeneous participation. Regardless of the type of event, demonstrators generally do not appear especially alienated from the political system.

The rise of protest politics, especially in postindustrial societies, reflects not a crisis of democracy but the evolution of civic expression. Demonstrating has become one of the most common forms of political action—only behind voting and petition-signing—and is now more widespread than active party or union membership. The authors conclude that protest is not a symptom of democratic breakdown but rather a sign of civic vitality. Protesters are not anti-state rebels; they are instead politically engaged citizens who utilize demonstrations alongside conventional forms of participation. Importantly, the context of the demonstrations (issue, organizers, and mobilization strategy) remains critical for understanding variations in who protests and why. Therefore, generalizations about protest participation can be misleading without attention to the context of the specific event. The study reveals that demonstrations are a legitimate, institutionalized channel for articulating demands in democratic societies.

G. SYNTHESIS: WHAT TYPES OF PROTEST ACTUALLY HAVE AN IMPACT?

Together, these studies highlight the potential for climate protests to influence UK policy not only through direct parliamentary discourse but also through shifts in legislative priorities. They raise key questions for further exploration in our research: Which protest tactics are most effective at prompting policymakers to take tangible action? How does the location of a protest influence political responsiveness? By incorporating these findings into a framework, research can be refined to identify the mechanisms that drive political responsiveness to climate activism.

METHODOLOGY

Our study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews with Members of Parliament (MPs) and climate advocacy groups. This approach was selected to capture in-depth perspectives on the relationship between climate advocacy and policy-making, allowing for flexibility in responses while maintaining consistency across interviews.

INTERVIEWS & SAMPLING FRAME

A large portion of our study involved interviewing climate advocates and Members of Parliament (MPs). The purpose of interviewing these two groups was to examine interactions between advocates and policymakers on climate policy. These interviews provided key insights into our research question, how does climate advocacy impact climate policy in the United Kingdom?

We conducted interviews over Zoom with each interview lasting no longer than one hour. With participant consent, our interviews were recorded, transcribed, blinded, and coded in NVIVO for analysis. This ensured accuracy, consistency, and security in data interpretation. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and participation was voluntary.

Members of Parliament

We started our outreach for interviews with MPs. First, we divided the 650 MPs in the United Kingdom between our team of four graduate students. We created a database of MP information that included the following:

- MP name
- MP party affiliation
- MP constituency in the UK
- Notes on MP voting record
- Assigned team member name

Once we divided MPs between our team, we began researching the percentage of swing votes for each MP, as we sought to oversample the MPs whose votes could be swayed by environmental advocacy campaigns. To categorize MPs according to their voting histories, we collected data from the website theyworkforyou.com. This website provides detailed data on MPs' voting histories, speeches, and committee memberships.

For our research question, we examined each MP's voting history on environmental issues. We operationalized MP voting behavior by identifying the number of environmental issues the MP voted on, and how they voted on each issue between 2015 to 2024. Under each environmental issue, the site provides data on how many times the MP has voted for, against, agreed, or abstained on the issue, and what year the vote took place. If an MP voted on 8 environmental issues between 2015 to 2024, and voted dominantly for 6/8 issues, and dominantly against 2/8 issues they were assigned a score of 75% for environmental issues. If the MP were to vote 6/8 against environmental issues, and 2/8 for environmental issues, they were assigned a score of 25% for environmental issues. We replicated this process for every MP and created a variable titled "percentage of votes for environmental issues 2015-2024". The purpose of this task was to identify "swing" voters in Parliament to prioritize for outreach.

After calculating each MP's percentage of votes on environmental issues, we then created a list of prioritized contacts based on voting history. MPs' with a percentage between 50% - 69% were our prioritized contacts to capture "swing" voters. MPs' with a percentage of 70% or greater were our secondary contacts, and the MPs with a percentage below 50% were our tertiary contacts. Notably, there were many MPs with 0 votes on environmental issues due to being new MPs, who had not yet had the opportunity to vote on any environmental legislation. We then emailed all 650 MPs to request interviews, following up with each MP whose office did not initially respond. After each interview, we asked MPs for the names of other MPs who could be interested in participating in our study. Of the 650 MPs emailed, we conducted 5 interviews. Attesting to the difficulty of accessing elected officials in another country, our response rate with MPs was 0.8%. Our prioritization of MPs who are "swing" voters or already support climate policy reflects a purposive sampling strategy aimed at identifying MPs' most likely to engage with climate advocacy. While this approach increased the likelihood of securing interviews, a drawback is introducing bias by over representing MPs who already support climate policy.

Climate Change Advocate Groups

Similar to our MP research, we created a database for storing climate change advocacy group data. The database includes the following:

- **Name of the organization**
- **Associated coalition (if one exists)**
- **Contact name**
- **Contact title**
- **Location in the UK**
- **Brief overview on activism involvement**
- **Assigned team member name**

Our process of finding climate change advocacy groups included creating a list of major cities in the United Kingdom including London and Coventry. We originally intended to host interviews in person in the summer of 2025 for 1-2 weeks to accommodate our schedules outside of research. We would have been staying in London, and would have held interviews in both London and Coventry to increase access to climate advocacy groups while maintaining geographical accessibility for our team. After hosting in person interviews, we were going to switch to online interviews for advocacy groups not in our given area. Our plans had shifted into hosting interviews fully online after a collective decision to be in London for our final presentation to Hero in April 2026. This allowed us to expand our search for climate advocacy groups to other major cities in the United Kingdom including Birmingham, Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle, and more. This approach ensured a geographically diverse sample.

After creating this list we conducted standardized Google searches using consistent keywords to narrow down climate groups based in major cities. A typical search would provide results in the form of organization websites. We navigated the websites and confirmed they were a climate group in the UK. These websites typically include the organization's location, activities, and opportunities for involvement. After confirmation we further narrowed down how to best contact the organization. This most often appeared in the form of a general email for contact from the public, though we also collected contact information for leaders or climate policy staffers within many of the organizations. We added this information to our dataset and sent e-mails across approximately 144 organizations that relate to the climate movement, following up with advocates who did not initially respond. As we did with the MPs, we conducted snowball sampling, reaching out to the advocates who our interviewees had recommended as potential participants in our study. We scheduled 20 total interviews with climate advocacy group representatives, for a response rate of 13.9%.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

We created two separate interview guides, one for climate advocacy groups and one for MPs. Drawing on our research question and literature review, we identified themes that we sought to explore in the advocate interviews.

Climate Change Advocacy Groups

For advocates the categories included the following:

- Personal Experience & Motivation
- Theory of Change
- Communication Methods
- UK Climate Movement
- Conclusion

Questions on personal experience and motivation allowed us to analyse how climate advocates have navigated into the field and the personal motivations behind it. Beginning with these questions helped establish rapport and facilitated more open responses. We then asked the interviewees to tell us about their organization and its theory of change. Under this category we also asked questions on what strategies they use to influence policymakers, how they aim to shape public opinion, and how policymakers respond to their advocacy methods. These questions provided insight into how each organization operates and the mechanisms underlying their advocacy strategies. Asking advocates about their communication methods gave us detailed information on methods of communication with MPs, climate activists, other advocacy groups, and the general public. This information further allowed us to understand how often MPs respond to climate advocacy work, and what tactics seem to elicit responses from elected officials. The category on the UK climate movement involved asking questions on the effect of disruptive vs. nondisruptive protest on policy makers and general public opinion. In light of the recent history of disruptive climate protests in the UK–involving groups such as Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil–our discussion of the relationship between type of protest and potential impacts allowed us to understand how advocates perceived the dynamic between protest and policymaking over the past decade. We also asked interviewees what demographics, party affiliation, and ideology generally made up their activist base. We wanted to comprehend who is part of the climate movement broadly, and we followed up this question by asking if they observed barriers to participation. This question allowed us to learn why certain demographics may not be participating. In the conclusion section we performed snowball sampling by asking interviewees if there were additional groups they would recommend us to contact in order to help our study.

Members of Parliament

Our interview guide categories for MPs included the following

- Representation
- Policy Positions
- Communication Methods
- Conclusion

We started our interviews with MPs by asking about their representation of their constituency. Our representation questions sought to elicit information such as how the MP knows what their constituents want, how often they track public opinion polls, whether they connect with climate groups in their constituency, and how they become aware of climate campaigns. These questions provided us with a baseline understanding of how each MP operates with constituents and how they obtain information. We then asked each MP what aspects of climate policy mattered to them most, whether the MP had proposed any policies on climate, and whether there was a case of an MP changing their mind on a climate policy. This final question was important for us to gauge how MPs' policy stances may be influenced. Our next category focused on understanding both how MPs communicate their positions and what forms of communication from climate groups most affect their positions. We also asked MPs how they use social media for communication and what effect they hope to have when they speak about climate issues on different platforms. We closed our interviews by asking whether there were any MPs' or advocacy groups they would recommend us speaking with.

BLINDING PROCEDURE

In order to reduce bias, protect interviewees' anonymity, and ensure compliance with the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards, all of our interview transcripts were blinded prior to coding and analysis. Each team member was responsible for blinding transcripts from the interviews they conducted. This process involved replacing all identifying information, including interviewee names and organizational affiliation, with randomized codes.

After we finished blinding the transcripts, we ensured the original copies containing identifiable information were permanently deleted from our original database. This allowed our analysis to be conducted using fully blinded data. Blinding the transcripts prior to coding allowed us to minimize potential bias in interpretation, particularly when analyzing responses from individuals with known political positions or organizational affiliations. Once blinding was completed, the transcripts were uploaded into NVivo for coding and qualitative analysis.

NVIVO CODEBOOK

Following the blinding process, all of the interview transcripts were imported into NVivo for qualitative coding. Our team developed a structured codebook prior to analysis, which included categories aligned with our interview questions for MPs and advocates. These codes range from communication strategies to policy engagement and more. Our codebook includes both broad parent codes such as Advocate, Member of Parliament, Communication, and Theory of Change, alongside specific sub-codes to capture themes within each category. For example, the communication codes are represented by direct engagement with policymakers, social media use for base-building, and outreach aimed at influencing policy.

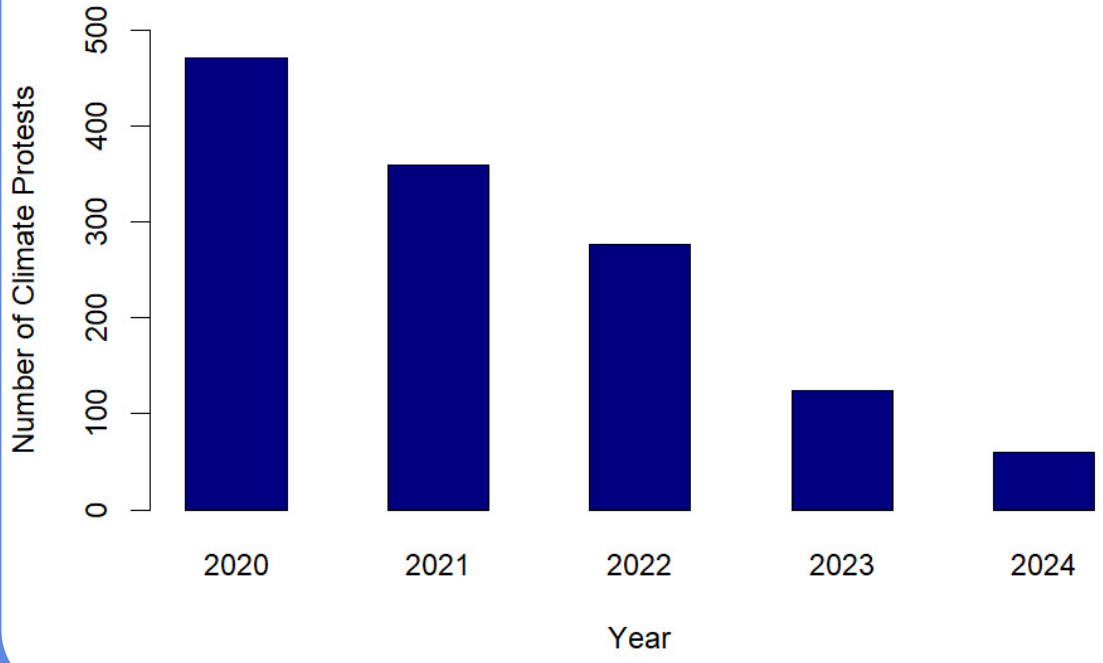
Furthermore, the protest-related codes include both disruptive and non-disruptive forms of protest. We systematically reviewed each transcript and assigned relevant codes to segments of text. This process allowed for the qualitative identification of recurring themes, patterns, and relationships across interviews. Particular attention was given to instances of interaction between advocacy groups and MPs, as well as factors influencing policy positions and communication effectiveness. The results of the coding process were then combined and analyzed. This process is discussed in further detail in the qualitative analysis section.

QUANTITATIVE PROTEST DATA

To understand how protest–both generally and focused on climate change–has varied in the UK over time, we drew on ACLED's protest dataset covering Europe and Central Asia from the years 2020 through 2024. This dataset includes geolocated protest events along with their date and the organizations involved. ACLED collects data on protest events through multiple sources, including news articles, reports published by non-governmental organizations, data shared by local partners, social media, and digital communication platforms. While news outlets tend to underreport protest events, this combination of sources helps ensure data quality. We assume that to the degree that the ACLED data underreport protest, this underreporting should not be substantially different across time periods. We use these data to estimate the frequency and map the geographic distribution of climate protests, and to compare trends in protest in the UK to other countries. This cross-national comparison, which we conduct using the synthetic control method, allows us to isolate the effect of the UK's 2023 Public Order Bill on protest rates.

Our descriptive analysis of the ACLED data demonstrates a multi-year trend of declining climate protest in the UK. We coded each protest in the UK from 2020 through 2024 according to whether it included an organization focused on climate action. The climate groups that organized protests during this period included Extinction Rebellion, Fossil Free, Just Stop Oil, Fridays for Future, Insulate Britain, Stop Cambo, and others. We included only groups whose webpages clearly articulated climate action as one of their central areas of focus. Therefore, multi-issue environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were counted as climate groups. In contrast, single-issue environmental groups that do not identify climate action as a central goal–such as PETA, Animal Rising, Direct Action Everywhere, Critical Mass, Stop HS2, or Surfers Against Sewage–are not counted as climate groups. Figure 1 shows that for each year in our dataset, climate protests declined from the previous year, with an especially steep decline between 2022 and 2023. This finding poses the question of whether the Public Order Bill contributed to the decrease in climate protest in the UK.

Figure 1. Declining Climate Protest in the UK



THE SYNTHETIC CONTROL METHOD

To determine whether the Public Order Bill reduced protest, we need a counterfactual–what would the UK's protest rates have been absent this legislation? It would be difficult to find a single country whose protest rate sufficiently resembles the UK to serve as a counterfactual on its own. We therefore use the synthetic control method (Abadie, Diamond and Hainmueller 2010, 2015) to combine comparison countries' protest rate trajectories to model the UK's protest rate in a world where the Public Order Bill was not enacted. This method creates a "synthetic control" unit that is an amalgamation of multiple countries' characteristics, optimized to mirror as closely as possible the UK's pre-law trend in the rate of protest. We measure protest rate as the number of protests a country experienced in a given month per million residents. If the bill reduced the UK's protest rate, we should see that after its enactment in May 2023 the UK's protest rate fell below the rate in the synthetic control unit.

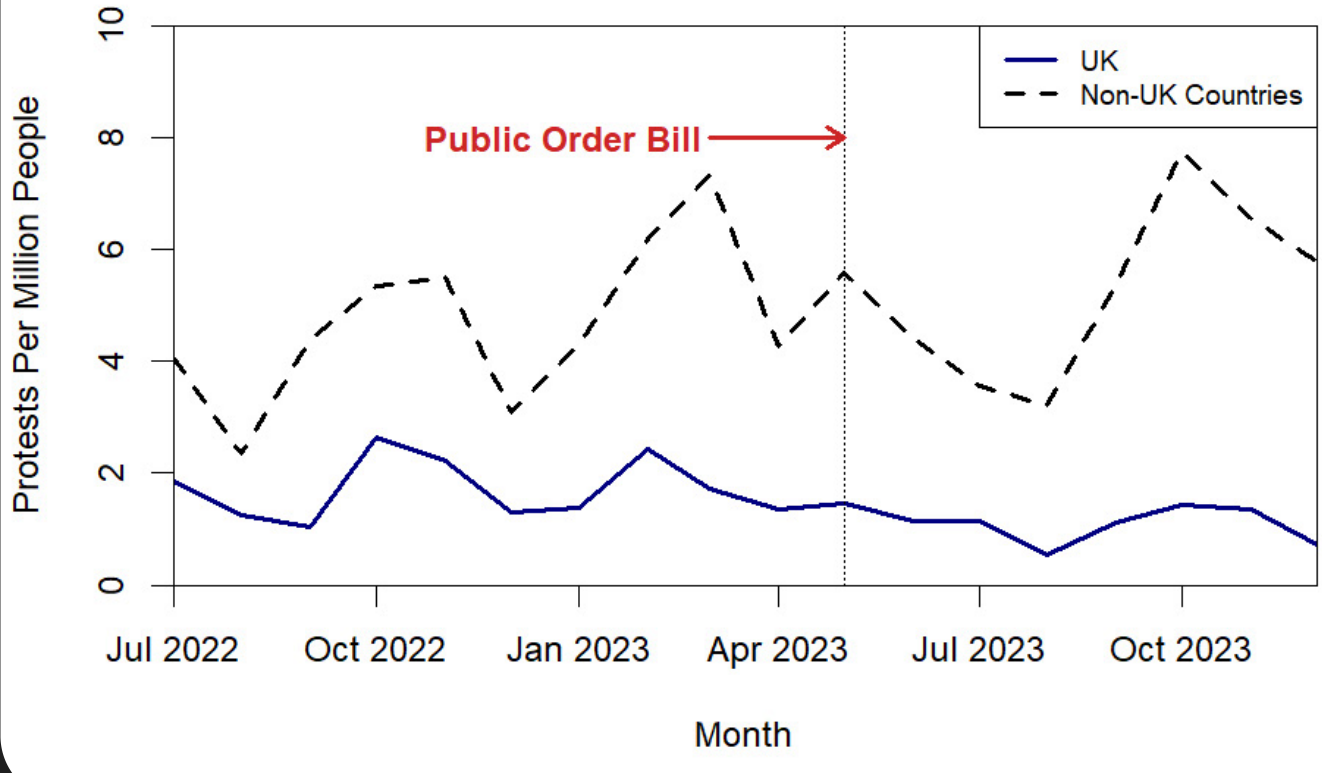
We start by creating a balanced panel of protest in Western European democracies whose political characteristics were similar enough to the UK that we could use them as control units. None of the other countries in the panel enacted a major legislative reform designed to criminalize disruptive protest between July 2022 and December 2023; in other words, these countries did not receive the "treatment" of interest. Our modeling approach is informed by Lepissier and Mildenberger (2021), who show that using lagged values of the outcome variable as predictors can generate the optimal fit between the treated unit and the synthetic control. We therefore use the average protest rate over each two-month period prior to treatment as the sole predictor in our model.

In addition to our main model, we conduct several robustness checks to make sure that the effects we estimate are not purely a result of chance. Each of these checks involve comparing two units that are not treated to see whether there appears to be a positive effect of this "placebo" intervention on protest rates. One approach, an "in-time placebo," involves moving the treatment up by several months and comparing the protest rates of the UK and its synthetic control. Here, we should expect no substantial difference between protest rates, since the Public Order Bill had not yet been enacted.

Another approach, an "in-space placebo," entails estimating a synthetic control for each control unit and comparing the UK's treatment effect to the other countries in the sample. To estimate the treatment effect, we first calculate the root mean square prediction error (RMSPE) for each country's synthetic control before and after treatment, and then divide the post-treatment value by the pre-treatment value. This approach essentially estimates how much the treatment changes the fit between the country's protest rate and that of its synthetic control. Here, we should expect to see that the UK's treatment effect exceeds those of the other countries in the sample, suggesting that the Public Order Bill uniquely precipitated the difference between the UK and its synthetic control. Last but not least, we iteratively generate alternative synthetic controls by leaving out one control unit from the sample at a time to see if the results are due to a single control unit. Here, we should expect to see that the treatment effect persists when leaving any given control unit out of the sample.

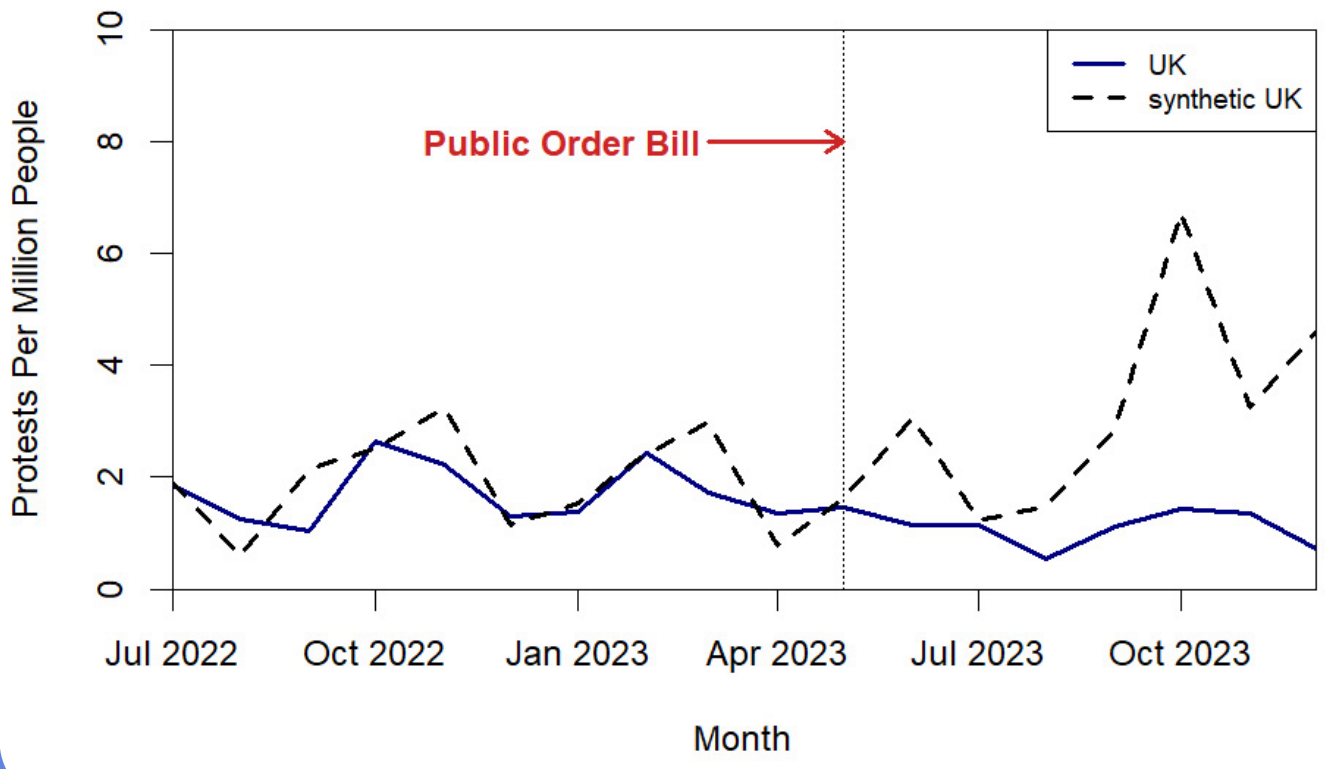
SYNTHETIC CONTROL RESULTS

Figure 2. Trends in protest rate: UK vs. control countries



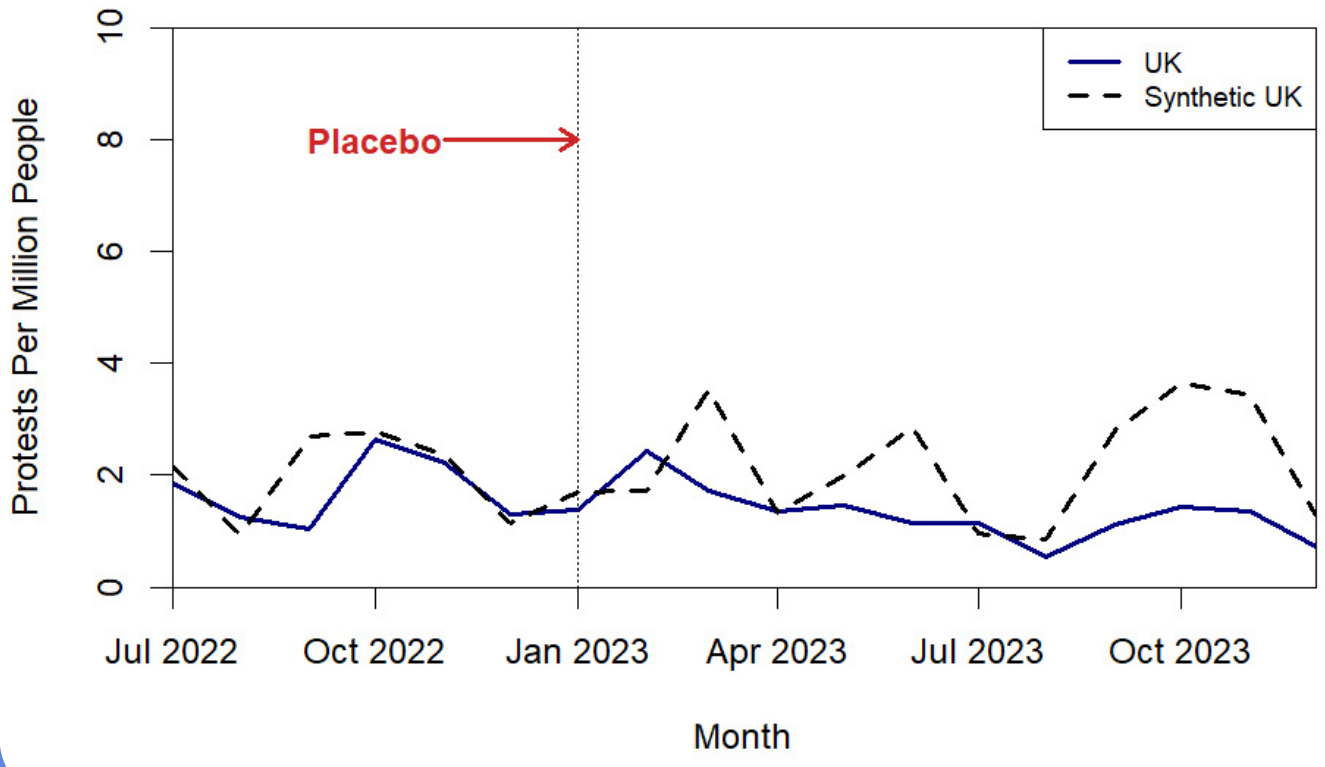
Our synthetic control analysis finds that the enactment of the Public Order Bill (POB) substantially reduced the United Kingdom's protest rate. Figure 2 shows that the UK's protest rate was lower than the average among the Western European countries in our sample in the second half of 2022 and in 2023, suggesting that assessing the causal effect of the law on the UK's protest rate requires a method to more closely approximate the UK's counterfactual trajectory. Using lagged values of protest rate as predictors, we model the synthetic control for the UK using weighted values from Switzerland (86 percent) and Iceland (14 percent). Collectively, this combination of weighted values of donor countries' protest rates most closely approximates the pre-law trend in protest rate in the UK.

Figure 3. Trends in protest rate: UK vs. synthetic UK



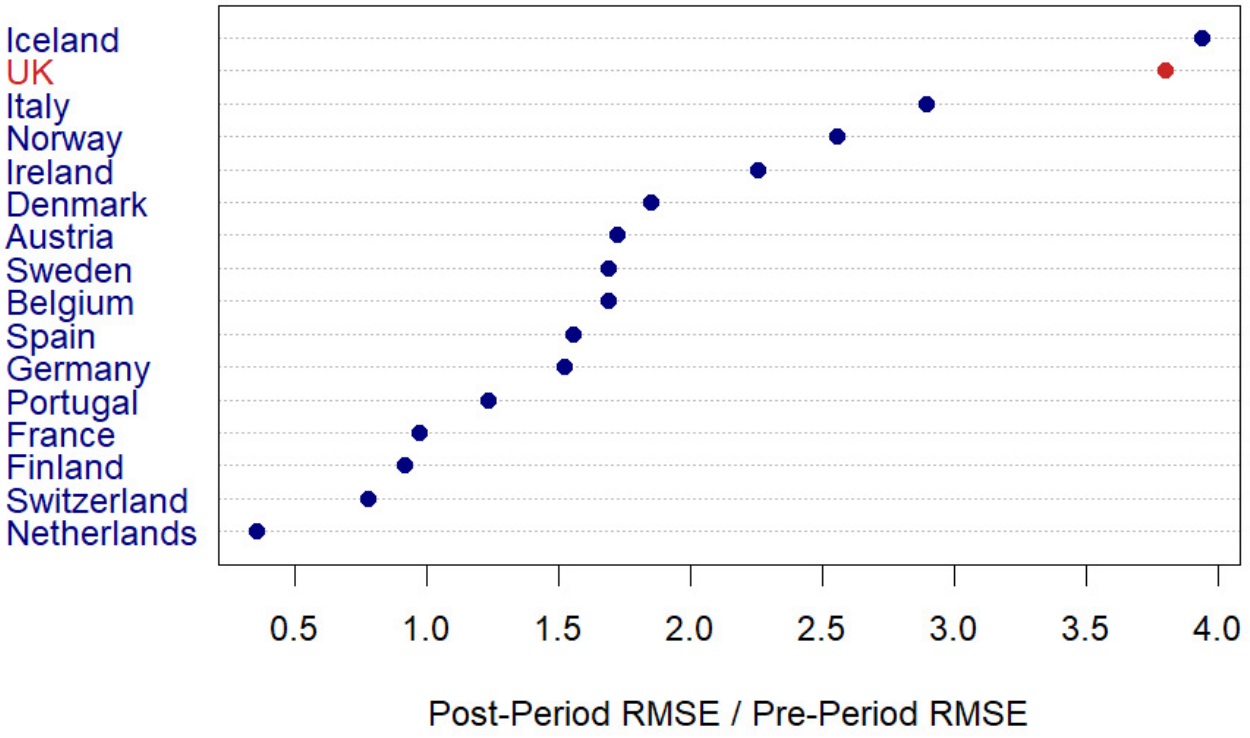
Our analysis suggests that the enactment of a law designed to repress protest indeed decreased the protest rate in the UK. From Figure 3 we see that after the enactment of the POB in May 2023, the UK's protest rate was substantially lower than that of its synthetic control. Figure 4 visualizes the gap in protest rates between the UK and its synthetic control. After the enactment of the POB, the gap between the UK and its synthetic control widened substantially, peaking at about five fewer protests per million people in October 2023.

Figure 5. Placebo test locating treatment in January 2023



Second, we should expect that if we replicated our synthetic control analysis with each donor country as the treated unit, the treatment effect in the donor countries should be less than the effect in the UK. We find, in Figure 6, that the UK's treatment effect exceeds that of all the other countries in the sample with the exception of Iceland. While this result increases our confidence in our results in general, it raises a question about why Iceland's treatment effect exceeds that of the UK, as Iceland did not similarly enact a law repressing protest in 2023.

Figure 6. Treatment effects, UK vs. control countries



However, Iceland's treatment effect may owe to two factors that make it an outlier in our dataset. First, Iceland's very small population–less than 400,000 people in 2023–renders the protest rate variable (estimated as protests per million people) highly sensitive to incremental changes in the number of protests. Second, Iceland witnessed an historic Women's Strike in October 2023, with over a quarter of the country's population refusing to work to demand gender equality. It is plausible that the level of coordinated effort needed to plan such a massive protest prevented activist groups from organizing as many other protests in the preceding months, which would account for the decrease in the country's overall protest rate in the second half of 2023.

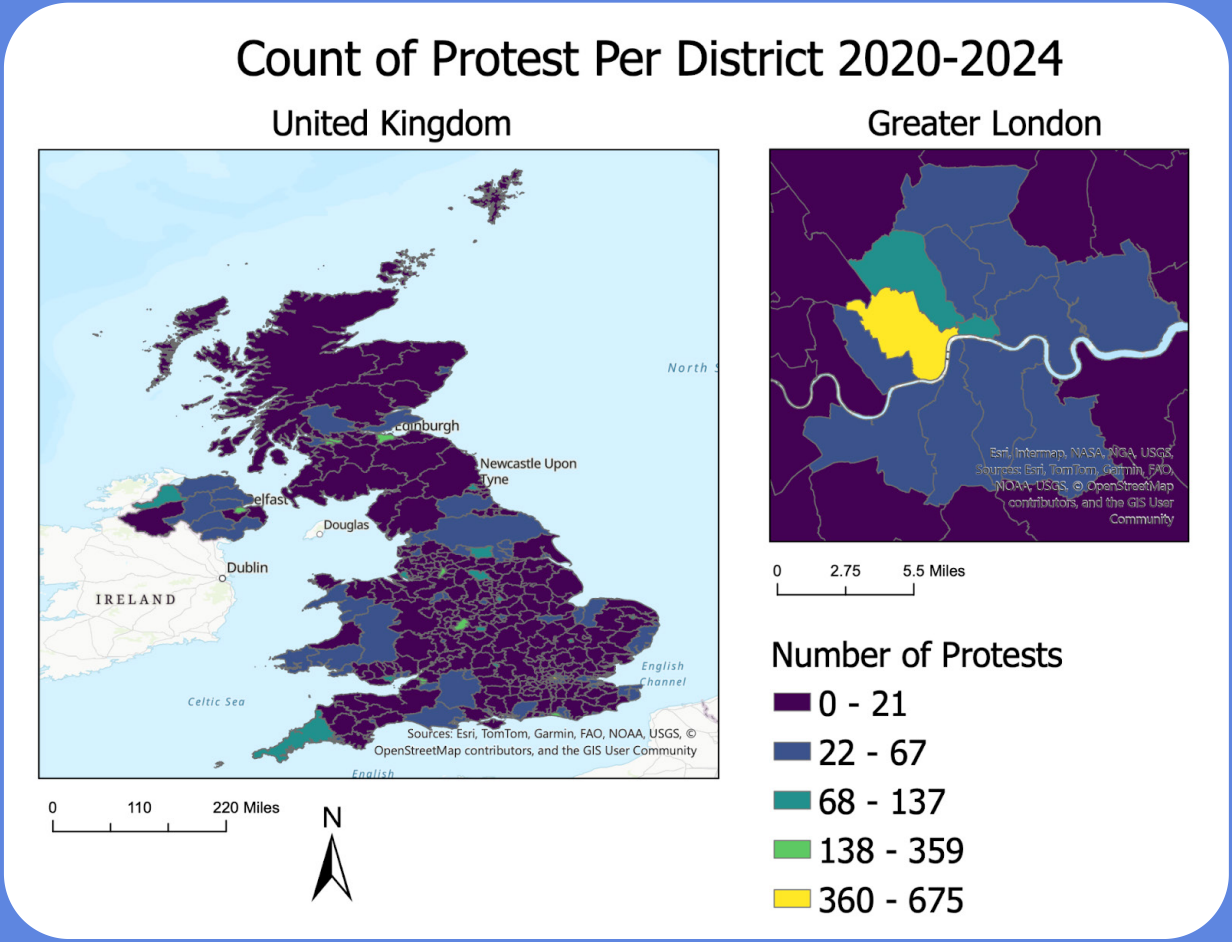
GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEM MAPPING METHOD

To visually represent climate activism, voting, and support in the United Kingdom we utilized the Geographical Information System tool known as GIS to map data we collected. We used ArcGIS Pro and ACLED's protest dataset from the years 2020 through 2024 to visually represent both general protest and climate specific protest with count of protest per district. We downloaded a publicly available dataset feature layer of the districts within the United Kingdom from the Office for National Statistics. The layer dataset was last updated in 2024, aligning with the timeframe of our study. We used the layer to serve as the geographic location in GIS, which was necessary to visualize the data from ACLED.

This allowed us to visually dissect the difference between general vs. climate protest, and where presence of protest is highest. We also created a map to visually represent the support of the Climate and Nature Bill from MPs. We created an additional column within our MP dataset specifying which MPs have voiced support for the Climate and Nature Bill. We were able to find this information from the Zero Hour database. They have reported approximately 191 MPs as of March, 2026 who are supporting the Climate and Nature Bill.

General Protest Map

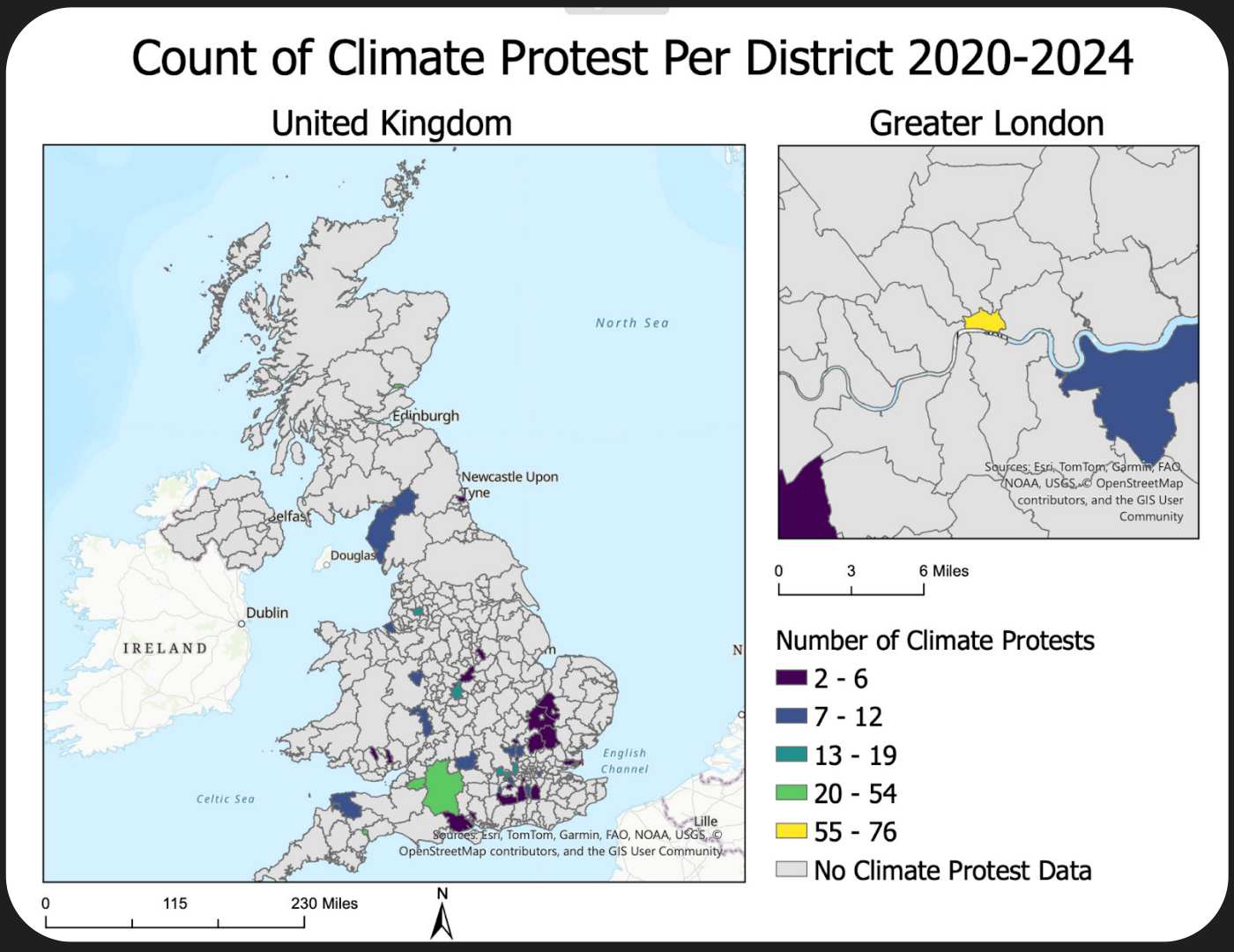
The map below was created with ACLED's dataset and the UK district feature layer. In this map we visualized all protests from 2020-2024. The Greater London area boasts the greatest number of protests, with Westminster holding the highest count between 360-675 protests (as observed in yellow).



Climate Protest Map

We used the same data from ACLED and the UK district feature layer to create the map focused on climate protest only. In order to create this map we isolated protests that were related to climate and labeled these protests as “1”, and all other protests as “0”. From here we told the ArcGIS tool to only map district areas with the label of “1”, which gave us the output map below. The number of climate protests between 2020-2024 is much smaller than general protests and gives us clearer information on where climate protests are taking place. The district in yellow is London City with the greatest number of climate protests. The areas in green have the second most climate protest. The top 10 districts with the most climate protests (CP) are as follows:

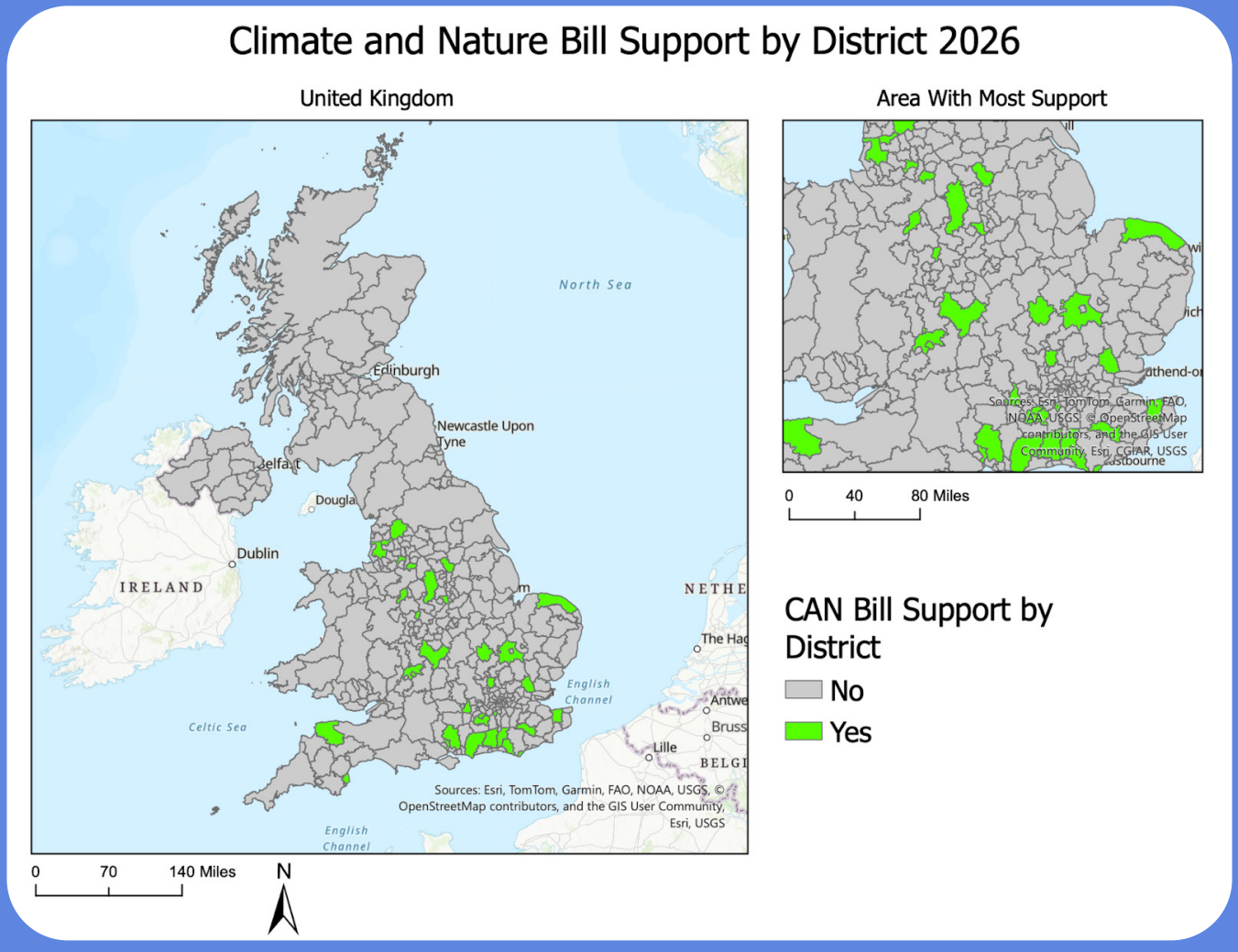
- City of London, 76 CP
- Exeter, 54 CP
- Bath & North East Somerset, 45 CP
- Wiltshire, 42 CP
- Dundee City, 37 CP
- Bolton, 19 CP
- Hillingdon, 18 CP
- North Warwickshire, 16 CP
- Windsor & Maidenhead, 14 CP
- Tamworth, 12 CP



Climate and Nature Bill Support Map

We used data we collected from the Zero Hour website on MPs who support the Climate and Nature Bill with the same UK shapefile used in the previous maps. In ArcGIS Pro we added the shapefile to the base map and used spatial join to connect the database to the shapefile. This allowed us to specifically map the districts that have MPs who support the CAN bill. From here we characterized the map in “unique values” and selected the values of “yes” for supporting the bill, and “no” for no formal statement yet given by an MP in supporting the bill. In the map below you will see that districts in bright green have MPs who support the bill, and areas in grey meaning that the district does not have an MP who supports the bill yet. Notably, the districts with support are mainly in the Southern most portion of the United Kingdom, with much of the North and East areas of the United Kingdom not yet backing the Climate and Nature Bill. Approximately 32 districts in the United Kingdom have currently voiced support for the Climate and Nature Bill. These districts include:

- NORTH NORFOLK
- SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE
- CANTERBURY
- CHELMSFORD
- TUNBRIDGE WELLS
- EASTBOURNE
- LEWES
- MID SUSSEX
- HORSHAM
- CHICHESTER
- WINCHESTER
- EASTLEIGH
- GUILDFORD
- WOKING
- EPSOM AND EWELL
- NORTH DEVON
- BEDFORD
- ST ALBANS
- STRATFORD-ON-AVON
- TEWEKSBURY
- CHELTENHAM
- TORBAY
- CANNOCK CHASE
- DERBYSHIRE DALES
- EREWASH
- NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME
- ROTHERHAM
- STOCKPORT
- SALFORD
- WEST LANCASHIRE
- SOUTH RIBBLE
- RIBBLE VALLEY

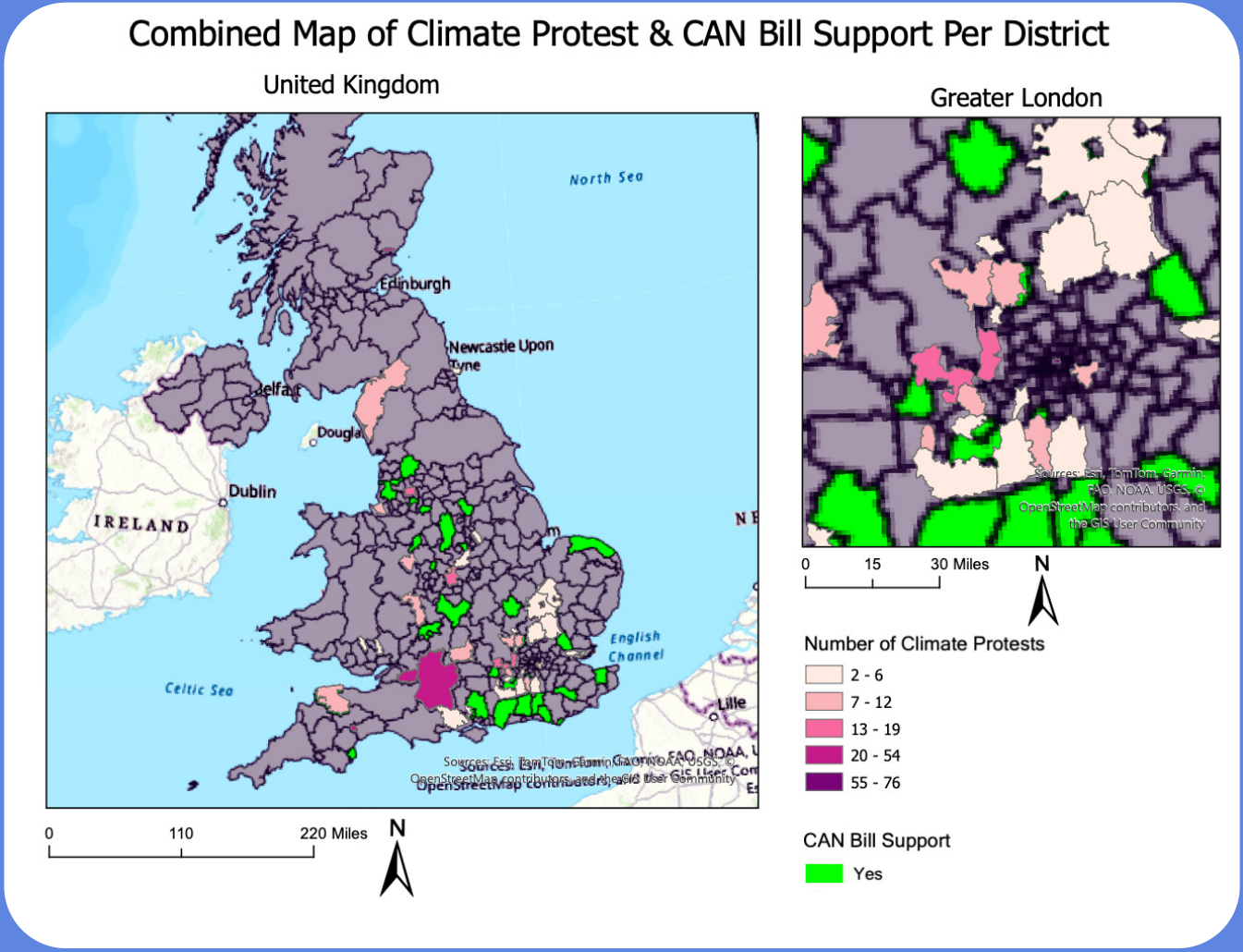


Combined Maps

In order to better understand the correlation between climate protest and MP support for the Climate and Nature Bill, we combined both maps to create an overlay. This helped us answer the following question: is there overlap between districts that support the CAN bill and districts with climate protest? The overlay shows approximately four districts with overlap:

- North Devon, 11 CP
- St. Albans, 10 CP
- South Cambridgeshire, 4 CP
- Eastleigh, 3 CP

The four districts have both had climate related protests and a MP who has vocalized support for the Climate and Nature Bill. There is not a high enough correlation between climate protest and CAN Bill support by district to be able to accurately state that climate protest impacted MP CAN Bill support.



ADVOCATE QUALITATIVE

The majority of the project focused on semi-structured interviews, which were conducted from July to February. These interviews were structured around questions that would help us understand how climate advocates were interacting with their constituencies and with policymakers. While we used an interview guide for these conversations, our goal was for the interviewees to share anything from their personal experiences that could help us understand how advocacy influences policy.

We interviewed advocates from a range of groups, from small-scale local groups to groups focused on the national level. When coding the advocate interviews, we generated twenty-two individual codes to reflect key themes emerging from the interviews. These codes often had subcodes which were used to further filter answers. The main aspects we wanted to understand were how advocates communicate, how their personal experiences impacted the work they are doing now, their organization's focus and goals, how protest impacted their organization's work, and what barriers there were for people participating in climate advocacy.

When looking at how advocates communicated, we found that they did so in a wide variety of ways. Similarly, climate advocate groups get their information from a wide variety of sources. They are either in direct contact with, or at least paying attention to, what other groups are doing and saying. Some of the smaller organizations rely on these interactions with other groups as a form of networking and a way to further their legitimacy.

Advocates are also concerned with keeping their own base engaged and informed. They use various ways to do this, including but not limited to social media. Advocates reported using both e-mails and newsletters to inform their base. Many groups hold regular meetings and include virtual options to be as inclusive as possible. One other way multiple advocates use to inform their base is through Whatsapp threads, allowing members to directly engage with messages rather than merely reading about what the group is working on.

A theme that arose from the interviews was the widespread frustration with how parliament was handling the country. Advocates expressed that there was not enough being done to solve many of the issues that the country was facing. One advocate spoke of this frustration, stressing that:

"this is the time for strong leadership politically. You know, pushed a genuine agenda that would help. Address a lot of the problems that people are complaining about. Rather than just focusing on immigration,... You know, if you can't get into your hospital, you can't get a GP appointment, you know, the roads are falling to bits. schools are falling to bits, the hospitals are falling to bits. You know, people can see that they're not making the right decisions."(A3)

The country is facing a myriad of issues and Labour does not seem to have clear solutions. There were also frustrations voiced on the system of government the UK currently has. One advocate spoke about this, saying that challenging the status quo is difficult:

"when you've got this stupid cabinet system. Because if an MP votes against the government. they get kicked out. Or if they don't get kicked out, they have no chance of promotion in the future." (A12)

This quote exemplifies the constraints the government system puts on MPs making it harder to exact any change or go against the parties' opinions.

COMMUNICATION

When it comes to communicating with policymakers, advocates reported that this was somewhat of a challenge, often because they are constrained by communicating with only their Member of Parliament (MP), limiting their ability to connect with policymakers on a wider scale. They are typically sending out communications through the MP's broad e-mail inbox available to everyone, so they are not guaranteed to get a response. Another method some groups use is encouraging their individual members to contact their MP to increase their chances of making the connection. One advocate reported using template e-mails, which they felt helped them to encourage members to reach out. At the same time, they questioned whether this method actually helped inform MPs of constituents' views or whether MPs discount these mass e-mails.

One aspect of communication we were especially interested in was how advocacy groups directly engaged with policymakers. There were some groups that felt focusing on more local change better fit into their theory of change. Multiple advocates reference working with more established groups to gain connections. This strategy gave them both more legitimacy and helped these groups widen their reach. Multiple interviewees from national campaigns spoke about encouraging local citizens to actively engage with their local MP. This approach allowed the groups to gain access despite the constraint that MPs are only allowed to directly speak to their own constituents. This strategy allowed for the group to form many connections, all through different people. Several interviews spoke about how they personally–along with their group– reached out to their MP via cold e-mails, with mixed results. Advocates voiced that getting in contact with policymakers was difficult as they are often out of reach in London. Some groups participated in events where they invited their MP to attend. One group even had their MP included in a Whatsapp group where they actively engaged with each other. While many groups reached out to their MPs, overall we found that many advocates did not have direct contact with their MP.

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION

We then asked advocates about how they used social media. Of the nineteen advocates interviews we coded, nine advocates reported that they use social media actively. Multiple advocates reported that they did not use social media at all, which they attributed to the age of their group's members. Advocates' views and means of using social media varied widely. Several interviewees reported that they used social media platforms, but have shifted toward a preference for emails.

> *"Well, we are using social media, but actually increasingly recently, we have been trying to use email more, because we see more engagement and follow-through on calls to action through our email subscribers"(A2).*

There was a lot of discussion of the negatives of social media, such as its promotion of misinformation and hate. One advocate voiced this concern saying:

> *"I think the problem is that on social media, it's the minority of people, often. that are on there and are being very loud, and it can get very divisive, so I don't think it's very realistic. view of the population"(A9).*

Multiple advocates singled out Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter) as particularly problematic. Advocates also described social media as insufficiently personal and too broad in its audience to sway policymakers. There was an advocate who doubted if policymakers paid any attention to what groups posted. Overall, most advocates see social media as a necessity of modern advocacy, but groups differ in their reliance on social media.

In connection with social media, we filtered through how and why advocates were utilizing these platforms. Several advocates voiced that their groups used social media to keep their base informed about what was happening within the group, as well as keeping up with other advocacy groups' activities. Advocates also used social media at times to expand their reach. One group reported using social media and a newsletter to engage with their base. Another question we asked was whether groups utilized social media to push for or inform policy change in some capacity. One advocate voiced that they were unsure if posts were reaching intended audiences due to the amount of platforms now present. Another barrier was that different policymakers engage with different platforms. Some utilize social media more and others less, making it difficult for advocates to know who they are reaching. However, one advocate voiced that most MPs use X (formerly known as Twitter). One advocate opinion-ed that of the various social media platforms:

> ***"the trickiest one, obviously, being X, Twitter, that has taken quite a shift in terms of misinformation and just heaps circulates on that app now, but the tricky thing is just that all really UK politicians mainly engage on X Twitter."(A10)***

The same advocate's group had run a campaign which encouraged members to tweet at politicians:

> ***"We had campaigners tweet at election candidates, asking them to swap the bill. And actually managed to generate lots of different sign-ups through that as a way"(A10).***

While this tactic was used to get policymakers to pledge support for a policy proposal, it was also used to call out politicians for not doing enough. Overall, advocates used social media for different purposes with varying success. The media space in today's world makes using social media platforms almost a necessity, but many advocates see downsides.

DISRUPTIVE PROTEST

One of our most informative interview topics was disruptive protests. We wanted to see broadly how they were perceived along with how advocates used protests (if at all) in their work. Advocates' views on protest were mixed. Advocates generally saw protests as one tool they could use to get their message across. When it came to specific protests, multiple advocates brought up the methods of Extinction Rebellion, although they mentioned that the organization lost traction when they reduced their engagement in disruptive protest. One advocate mentioned that they felt that the Extinction Rebellion lost its steam because they shifted the attention away from climate too much with their targets, such as roads and art museums. One former member of XR spoke of having some frustration with how things in the group had shifted over time.

> ***"I just think when I left XR, I felt like maybe our targets were starting to not be appropriate. I would have much rather just, like, constantly targeted the government, or constantly targeted airports, or constantly targeted weapons manufacturers. That would have been more appropriate than just, like, sitting in the road and potentially getting in the way of people who are also suffering from the system" (A16).***

Some felt that it was successful in getting the word out and for its time was an important point of departure for the movement. Advocates also mentioned that protesting was a privilege that not all were able to participate in. Further, they emphasized that the media disproportionately covered the negative consequences of protest–such as road or bridge closures, crimes, or property damage–instead of the merits of the protesters' cause.

> ***"They do bring topics to the attention of policymakers. Because they're disruptive, you know, they're a pain. But I think the general consensus is actually that they're quite negative. I think both media, particularly, but also policymakers. You know, the role of the policymaker is to actually make the country work. You wouldn't always imagine that, but he's, you know, that's what they're there for, they're to make the country work and make it a better place. For its population, I think they see disruptive action as being exactly that. It's working against them. So I think there's more negatives than positives, but it does, you know, sometimes it means that an issue becomes noted for a day or two. In ways, perhaps, that it wouldn't otherwise be."(A17)***

The largest trend that emerged from our interviews was the government's crackdown on protest. Almost all the advocates mentioned that the government had been working hard to criminalize protests. A few advocates mentioned that Extinction Rebellion and the Insulate Britain campaign could have given the government an excuse to pass repressive legislation–the Public Order Act of 2023. One advocate voiced this connection, stating:

> **"the protest played a role in the government. They helped the government to maybe get through legislation that might otherwise have been difficult to get through, let's put it that way because it was very explicit" (A13).**

Advocates told stories of fellow activists being arrested for peaceful protests, being charged with terrorism and sitting in jail for long periods of time without bail. This repression has become a deterrent for some advocates, or at least made them more cautious. One advocate voiced this concern saying:

> ***"I was a big protester, and I'd go to the peaceful protest, and you'd, like, you'd just hold your banner, and you'd just be there chanting and talking to people, and stuff like that, and literally that was it. But nowadays, like, for me, I'm scared to go out and do one, because you can get, at least here, you can get arrested just for holding a placard that says something on it. That's not offensive to anyone, but you can get arrested" (A4).***

British people, especially younger ones, are concerned about how a criminal record could affect their future. Multiple advocates voiced that they had been arrested due to protests. This new crackdown, they suggested, could also be bolstering ordinary people to speak out against protests. One advocate recalled being confronted by counter-protesters during a recent protest. They voiced that this organized opposition brought up concerns for safety, especially because children were present at this protest.

The topic of protest suppression came up so much in our interviews we decided to code for whether advocates mentioned they saw protests decreasing or increasing. Many advocates felt that they were seeing and hearing about fewer protests than they had been previously. *"I think it's good that people are still doing it, although it's kind of been less over the last, I don't know, it's a very intuitive feeling that I might be totally wrong, but my sense is that there's less of it now, last few years, than there was, like, 5 to 10 years ago. You know, the hardcore direct action people are getting older and feeling that they've done their bit and giving up to some extent" (A5).*

In addition to this decline in protest events, they mentioned feeling pressure and fear related to the government crackdown on protest. One advocate whose organization had previously been active in planning and participating in protests said they could not remember the last time their organization had organized one. Another advocate said that right-wing media was playing a role in this oppression alongside the government,

> *"Obviously the right-wing press have leapt on it, and you know, politicians have used it as an excuse to clamp down on protests, so our protests are becoming ever harder. Even the most basic, benign protests potentially, can be outlawed. It's getting quite dictatorial in that sense and Labour has done nothing to roll back any of the draconian rules that were brought in under the Tories" (A3).*

Which in their view was working hard to stop free speech. This advocate suggested that the recent decline in disruptive protest could also be connected to formerly more extreme activists who have since aged up and shifted away from more disruptive methods. *"There's definitely a divide between, sort of young idealists coming out of university, left-leaning want to get involved to see the world, which is great. I mean at one time I was probably one of those people, and I've moderated slightly in older age, but still think that that's very important"* (A3). One advocate discussed how their group had responded to this repression by focusing more on local work and community organizing. Groups are having to adapt and change quickly with the situation they are facing. When we asked advocates to report the trend they observed in protest frequency, not a single advocate said they saw or felt that protests were increasing.

Next we spoke to advocates about the emotions that arise in association with disruptive protest. When it came to negative feelings, multiple advocates voiced the new law cracking down on protests, as well as the way the media portrays protests. One advocate mentioned that this repression was eroding free speech in the United Kingdom. A key theme that advocates discussed was how the public views protests. Some advocates expressed the belief that many of the British public view protest as an annoyance and that the way the media has presented it is turning people off. In particular, advocates wondered whether disruptive protests could be turning off more moderate British voters, pushing them further away from supporting the climate movement. One advocate mentioned that they felt protests had no impact over what policymakers felt, and moreover, could make policymakers view the climate movement negatively. *"Politicians were mildly critical and they don't openly support direct action. So I think, in some ways, it has almost a negative effect in that it makes people think that some people, anyway, that all climate activists are, you know, crazy radicals who are getting in the way of normal civilization" (A5).*

There were also many advocates who shared positive feelings about protest. One advocate described protest as a way to represent themselves to the public, as well as a means of bringing new participants into the movement. Multiple advocates felt that protests were a vital way to keep the climate in the news, given their sentiment that there is no time to sit back and allow things to fix themselves. As one advocate said:

> *"doing something that is very public, gets press attention, is exciting. I think that that's something that is more likely to, you know, bring people into the cause if you need to recruit more activists" (A8).*

Advocates also expressed that protest could have positive long-term consequences, including unexpected ones. An advocate argued that blocking roads that were typically busy caused people to find different routes, which reduced local traffic and noise. One advocate mentioned that the right wing was successfully dominating the narrative so it was necessary to push back and give climate a voice. Multiple advocates also spoke about the campaigns of the Extinction Rebellion in a positive light, asserting that the movement had been a catalyst for change. One advocate even called it a success story, arguing that it forced people to pick a side.

When we asked advocates about their engagement in protest, a few voiced that their organization did not participate in protests. Reasons for this lack of participation included the organization's size and a feeling that they do not provide value. Smaller organizations were open to protesting but did not typically organize protests themselves, instead opting to join with larger groups. Advocates viewed these joint protests as a way to build alliances within the climate movement. One advocate mentioned that large organizations can get people out on the streets, as these groups have the resources that smaller groups might not have. In terms of the role protest plays in theories of change, advocates argued that protest can change people's minds

> *"if you change public opinion and larger numbers of people actually are not only believing that it's, you know, climate change is real, and it's happening, and there is a crisis" (A5).*

This shift in public opinion can in turn change policymakers' positions. However, another group mentioned that they were moving away from protests, instead focusing on community organizing and finding fun ways to get people involved.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

At the outset of each interview, we asked advocates how they got involved in the climate movement. They told us various reasons why they felt drawn to participate. For some, they studied in fields related to climate because they had a passion for the subject and wanted it to be the focus of their career. Some came to the movement from other forms of activism such as animal rights, human rights, feminism, and housing rights. Multiple advocates found their way to activism when they were students, whereas others did not start until they had retired. Multiple advocates got involved due to their faith, with one coming to activism from their Bible study and another because the Bible states that we need to protect the earth. One advocate came in through their politics–as a member of the Green Party, they felt that people were struggling with rising prices and nothing was being done. One person we spoke with started in local politics and then joined an organization to work on climate. Another advocate mentioned wanting to push the government to take action, while others mentioned that they joined a local chapter of an international climate activist group.

Overall, people had very different ways of coming into the movement and came in at different times in their lives. This diversity highlights just how many angles can bring people into the climate movement. Since there is no singular path that leads people to join, advocates should consider multiple means of recruiting. Some might be motivated by an interest in politics or public policy, while others could be motivated by a passion for the environment or their religious beliefs.

THEORY OF CHANGE

We asked advocates from both nationally-focused and local organizations to tell us about their organization's theory of change, to which advocates gave a wide variety of responses. The national organizations were typically focused on policy change, with one group pushing for a large-scale bill relating to climate. Another was campaigning to change the education system in the UK to include both climate-related topics and social justice issues. One religiously oriented group was pushing to use the church's land and its money to push for change. We spoke with a group focused on high energy prices and pressuring the government to address this problem. One group spoke about needing a completely new economic system, including turning away from capitalism's focus on money over people and the environment. Another spoke about conducting research to demonstrate that advocates are successfully pushing for policy change. While one group we spoke with was an integrated ecology group that sought to demonstrate the connection between social crises, economic crises, and the climate crisis.

Local Action

The groups that were more locally focused argued that pressing for policy change at the local level through community organizing was also an important way to achieve change. Multiple advocates spoke about building coalitions with other groups to build a broad-based movement for change from the bottom up. One advocate emphasized how important it is to simply support people at the local level and that advocates could achieve this through many avenues: energy, reform, transportation, and changing policy through city councils. Another advocate focused more on rural work, providing support for farmers as the country's farm workforce has declined and there are many barriers to entry into the profession. The advocate proposed a universal basic income starting with farmers which would eventually move toward applying to the whole country.

Many advocates reported focusing their work on action at the local level, for several reasons. The first reason was access–advocates spoke about having connections with city councils which could enable them to press for policy change at the local level. Second, local level action can bring new community members into the movement. Local work can focus on getting people to consider their own emissions including the buildings they live in. These household actions are also a way to connect people to movements. For instance, climate policy can address everyday concerns such as the cost of living, as expanded solar and wind power deployment could reduce local energy prices. Another advocate spoke about working to divest their community from fossil fuels as a means of getting community members involved in the movement.

National Action

We then asked advocates if working toward national action as part of their theory of change. Advocates reported several different approaches to national-level advocacy. One approach was to conduct research on campaigns to provide evidence that change can be achieved at this level. Another organization worked both nationally and globally through Catholic charities in connection to social justice work. Another church related group focused on using the church's properties and wealth to move away from fossil fuel investment, while another group focused on pushing towards divestment from fossil fuels in general.

One advocate's group focused on changing the country's education system to be more inclusive and include climate related topics. Another group's focus was to get the government to both stop approving new road expansions and cancel existing proposals, as they felt that further investment in roads for single-occupancy vehicles was harmful to the climate and would further encourage people to drive themselves instead of using public transportation. Some of the various strategies that advocates mentioned in connection to national action were mass communication as a means of recruiting activists, mobilizing large groups of people to write to their MP, holding parliamentary events, and writing proposals for policymakers.

Another issue we talked to advocates about was whether interacting with MPs was part of their theory of change. Some groups did not aspire to access national elected officials, while others had a variety of interactions with their local MPs. One advocate voiced that they felt politicians were more attuned to what lobbyists were telling them.

> *"My impression would be... That, um, all the politicians of the main parties are much more influenced by the lobby groups, which they have in their ear, than they are from smaller grassroots advocacy, that's a big problem everywhere, I think that, uh, that money talks. Money and politics and policy" (A14)*

An advocate said that their group encouraged members to reach out to their MP, while another advocate reported being in direct contact with their MP. Another expressed that it was challenging to get in contact with their MP; while they frequently e-mail the MP, they often do not receive a response. Other advocates elaborated on strategies they thought about when seeking to gain influence. These strategies included trying to find an MP who is sympathetic to their cause, which they found most often among the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party. Advocates seek to gain access to parliamentary committees through methods such as policy briefings, which can in turn help them identify which MPs could be allies. An advocate also reported efforts to get young people involved and encourage them to speak to their MPs to show which issues were important to their constituents while also building the group's base.

In keeping with the diversity of the climate movement ecosystem, advocates shared a broad range of visions for policy change, from incremental progress to systemic transformation. Some advocates felt that large-scale policy change was needed on a national level. This sentiment was rooted in feelings that we need evidence-based policies to respond to the climate emergency.

Advocates also emphasized that people power–mobilizing a grassroots activist base and joining with other organizations to form broad coalitions–can catalyze policy change. They talked about both working within the system of government that exists and also transforming it. One way to work within the system was using Parliament's private member bill function. Where the MP requests to be able to put forward a bill they are championing. If you have an MP on your side they can bring forth a policy this way. With regard to transforming the system, one advocate spoke about education not being inclusive enough and leaving out aspects of climate change from children's curriculum. There were many different themes that came up including divestment from fossil fuels and further electrification of systems. Economic aspects came up such as a need for justice-focused policy along with a scheme for universal basic income. One advocate mentioned linking other fields to climate such as health, while another advocate was focused on policy to develop farming as a means of feeding people at the community level.

Several advocates came into the movement through their religion. They shared with us how their faith connected to why they felt moved to participate in environmental work. One advocate argued that Christians had the ability to use their voices to amplify issues' salience on others' behalf. Another explained that environmental issues such as preventing a mass extinction became salient for them because of the teachings of the Bible.

> *"I got interested in things like, green issues as issues for Christians. Looking at biodiversity loss, looking at species decline, looking at the mass extinction" (A15).*

While another advocate spoke more on the religious connection:

> *"I guess it's just to see paradise on Earth, but in a sense, from a Christian perspective. I think it's because we value creation, because we value the creator and we see the two being part of the same thing. This is very different from fundamental creationism." (A17)*

One advocate organization advocated policies to protect the earth nationally as well as overseas through charities. They encouraged their members to be conscious of their personal environmental footprints. One of the advocates' organizations focused on the churches of England, pressuring them to divest their significant funds from fossil fuels and not invest further in environmentally harmful technologies. They then wanted to extend this campaign to tenants who leased land from the church to further extend the plan's reach.

UNITED KINGDOM CLIMATE MOVEMENT

During our interviews we wanted to understand how advocates viewed the climate movement in the UK. In addition to asking them about this topic broadly, we inquired about the movement's demographic composition and whether they felt there were any barriers to entry. On a broad note, advocates implied that Labour's victory over the Conservatives in 2024 offered greater opportunity to fix the issues the UK was facing. They brought up both schools and hospitals falling into disrepair along with issues of water pollution that the country was facing. Advocates underscored the importance of combining base-building, campaigns, and coalition work. One advocate asserted that there was a great deal of privilege associated with being able to support the climate movement. Another advocate mentioned that they saw the movement evolving from a focus on mass protest to a focus on community organizing.

> ***"I saw that there's been evolving from the mass protest of Extinction Rebellion through to the more targeted, disruptive protests with Insulate Britain, Just Stop Oil, and now they're moving to community organizing and citizens' assemblies, that's been the evolution that I've seen over the last 6 or 7 years" (A14).***

When it came to barriers of entry, advocates mentioned many different issues, but a common theme that arose was that people are focused on issues of everyday life. These issues included worrying about paying their bills, childcare, and putting food on the table. Several advocates acknowledged that their work was a privilege, as it takes the ability to devote time and often money to do this work, especially because many leadership roles within the climate movement are unpaid volunteer positions.

> ***"I think it's an immense privilege, generally with protest. Especially the climate crisis, I would say. Because so many people don't have the luxury of thinking past getting through the day" (A18).***

One advocate voiced that it was a challenge to make things fair and inclusive to all, and it was hard to make sure everyone's voice was being heard. Organizations themselves are often constrained by money, and having to constantly apply for grants and find income sources takes away time from their work. Another significant barrier advocates cited was the government crackdown on protests, which exacerbated citizens' fear of being arrested and could be deterring people from activism.

Another subject we spoke with advocates on was how they viewed the demographics of the climate movement. They did not give us specific numbers for their organizations but provided observations that often overlapped with each other. One advocate noted that there was a generational divide in the movement between young people and older moderates. Many advocates mentioned that older and retired people made up the majority of those they saw participating in the movement, especially within local or neighborhood groups. Younger people often had more responsibilities such as children and were not as secure in their living situation. In contrast, retired advocates often had more time and a long-standing connection to the area. Other advocates reported that politically, climate group members tend to be left-leaning and support left-wing parties such as the Green Party. In another common theme, several advocates mentioned that the movement lacked diversity. Multiple advocates said that they noticed that white and middle class people were overrepresented among groups' members.

> *"The environmental movement's seen as quite white, middle class, quite privileged, quite ableist over here" (A1)*

Several groups mentioned that they were actively trying to fix this gap. For instance, one advocate who had left an activist group argued that the group had an issue with a lack of diversity and felt that the group had not properly acknowledged this shortcoming.

The advocate interviews provided us with a wide variety of insights into how the climate movement in the UK is functioning. Their work has evolved with changing laws and groups' changing needs. These organizations employed a wide variety of methods to push for the change they wanted. One key insight was mixing local and national action can allow groups to access MP's in their districts while still getting large scale policy change. One advocate shared how their organization was mobilizing this method:

> *"More importantly, definitely localizing the impacts and the benefits of the bill, so really tying it to campaigners. Local understanding of their area. And making sure that any engagement with the MP is through campaigners and it's meaningful, it's growing a relationship is really, really important. If they trust the campaigner and kind of see and understand it from the campaigner's perspective, they're much more likely to support our work" (A10)*

This insight highlights how advocates are working to adapt within a changing system. The advocates often voiced frustration with how decisions were being made within the country, emphasizing that there is much more work to be done.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT QUALITATIVE

The United Kingdom (UK) legislature structure is made up of two chambers, the House of Commons, with 650 Members of Parliament (MPs), and the House of Lords, of over 700 individuals. To identify the impact that climate advocacy has on UK policy, we determined that interviewing individuals from the House of Commons would provide the best insight into our research question, as MPs are elected by the public and chosen to represent their constituency. Following a similar outline to the codebook for advocates, the MP codebook consisted of discussions on best practices for communicating with both constituents and climate-based organizations, social and traditional media, public opinion polls, party alignment, policy positions, and protest. Though we reached out to all 650 MPs and their offices, many were reluctant to speak with us, either only receiving an automated "message received" email, or electing not to participate. With multiple rounds of follow up to unanswered emails, we concluded with five interviews directly speaking with MPs.

SOCIAL AND TRADITIONAL MEDIA

MPs prefer real, back and forth communication to social media communication by a landslide. To communicate out to their constituents, MPs elect to use regular newsletters, electronic newsletters, and social media. One MP explained the array of social media platforms they use, including Facebook, X [formerly Twitter], Substack, and LinkedIn, while emphasizing they will not use TikTok due to its increased hostility. However, another code explores the public's decrease in attention spans and the increase in offices' wariness of giving out their contact information to unknown users. Because of this, it is possible that keeping short-form communication as the primary method may be the most effective way that MPs can get their messages out to their constituency.

During the interviews, it was clear that social media was not utilized as much as expected, with many trying to avoid it as a whole, or at least not perceiving it as a credible source of communication with their constituents. This skepticism can be seen through conversations where the MPs made declarations like:

> *"I don't do social media. I think it's a cesspit,"*
> and
> *"I ignore it as much as I can, simply because I don't believe that it represents the views of constituents" (MP1).*

With social media, there is limited control over where the information lands; it can be within district boundaries, or across the world. Relying on social media communication can lead to getting unwanted feedback and drowning out concerns of actual constituents. Instead, MPs use social media as more of a source of output, to share what the MP's office is up to, rather than a means of acquiring information on policy issues. One MP noted that the way used social media:

> *"is more about just saying what I'm doing rather than getting involved in debates and discussions in the comments and stuff" (MP2).*

Another MP talked about a city gossip board on Facebook, and how it appears that there are way too many individuals in the group than should make sense for the size of the town, and the implications of having pages like this when political discussions arise in the group. On the other hand, social media has shown its potential to gain traction among the public, suggesting that MPs can attract more attention online now than through town halls. In addition to social media as a means of communication with constituents, one MP responded to an interview question on how they get their climate knowledge with the *"general media,"* as they do not have a team or staffer who is in charge of sharing climate change information with the MP.

COMMUNICATION WITH CONSTITUENTS AND CLIMATE ORGANIZATIONS

Our research sought to explore two kinds of MP communication - with constituents generally and with climate groups. Our interviews suggest that MPs prefer in-person communication with constituents, where they can gain direct feedback, ask follow-up questions, and challenge each other's arguments. As one MP put it:

> *"I prefer that people would sit down face-to-face with me and discuss these issues where we can have a discussion" (MP1).*

They emphasized the importance of an interchange of ideas rather than one-way communication, as in a discussion where each person can truly listen to each other's point of view, as one MP put it. Another reported that:

> *"I take more notice of if somebody was to make the effort to come to one of my advice bureaus and come and talk to me directly. That probably resonates more than anything else." (MP2).*

The advice bureau, as multiple MPs called it, is a service many MPs provide that connect residents directly to the MPs through in-person or virtual meetings in their constituencies.

The idea of face-to-face interaction as the most effective avenue for influence can be seen as a stark contrast to what is feasible and the challenges advocates face. Many advocates would also prefer these real conversations rather than a one-sided letter, but it can be extremely challenging to schedule an in-person (or even a virtual) meeting with their MP given how constrained the MP's diary is. This was acutely apparent when the research team for this report attempted to meet with MPs, which included offers of both in-person and virtual meetings, as well as speaking with members of the MPs' staff who could speak to the office's viewpoints and decisions.

Multiple MPs discussed the transition back to traditional door-knocking and canvassing as a means of communicating with constituents. Canvassing is a clear way to identify who is truly a member of their constituency, as compared to communication through media, and gives the constituents the feeling of connection with their representative that online media does not.

One MP explained how they engage with voters each week, all year round , through door knocking campaigns. A more surprising finding was that MPs favored town hall-style meetings less than we had expected. While some MPs appreciate these meetings, and it appears that most prefer them compared to any form of online communication, some find it more of a "venting session" rather than a constructive method of feedback. As one MP put it:

> *"I'm not a huge fan of town hall meetings because I actually think they're not the best way of getting people's voices across. When you run a town hall meeting with a table at one end and a big audience, I find that you get lots of loud voices that take up all the airtime. They shouted the people down. It's harder to get a really good feel for everyone, and not everyone gets their voice out" (MP3).*

In place of town hall meetings, MPs are choosing other methods to meet with large groups of constituents or speak with people outside of their offices. MPs discussed going to houses of worship, businesses, schools, hospitals, and more. One MP described hosting *"business breakfasts,"* where *"three times a year, I bring all the head teachers together to talk to me,"* and does that with a variety of organizations and groups of people (MP3).

When it comes to communication that is not in-person and not over social media, the MPs explored ways to gain the most traction with the office. An MP explained that it is important to be direct, not framing everything as a question unless it truly is one.

In other words, advocates should enter conversations with well-defined goals regarding the action they hope the MP will take rather than an extensive or disorganized series of requests. Another explained that e-mail campaigns are also not a great way of communicating with the MP interviewed, because everyone is saying the same thing, they are long, and they cannot tell who the actual constituents are.

Even when personalizing the e-mail a bit, the messages can still be quite lengthy and take away time that can be used to focus on communication that needs more immediate attention, as one MP put it. However, another MP noted that:

> ***"When constituents write to us, and particularly when that's linked with lobbyists, we will take more of an interest in that in terms of what they're saying. And then, and if constituents write to us, then we will respond to everyone as well. So we certainly take more of an interest in that. And very often these are, you know, they're campaigning organizations or lobbying organizations who facilitate those emails" (MP2)***

This response suggests that some MPs place a different amount of weight on constituent communication if they perceive that the constituent is participating in a collective campaign. On the other hand, other MPs disregard these messages. There is therefore no one clear decision on whether to participate in these campaigns, as it seems to be an individualized response by politicians. The challenge for advocates then becomes understanding how particular MPs value different modes of communication

Communication with climate organizations differs from interactions with constituents. When a climate group reaches out, MPs feel that they are expected to engage with a group that does not necessarily have ties to the community they represent, and that traditionally has very specific goals for any interaction. *"I'm mostly looking for things that really benefit my constituencies and my constituents directly"* (MP3) an MP stated, and mentioned that while some MPs keep their eyes on a national picture, others such as themselves prefer to look at what benefits their constituency rather than the country as a whole, which is what national climate organizations tend to focus on.

However, while potentially less than individuals or local groups, MPs do still interact with national climate organizations. For instance, one MP mentioned that they were in regular contact with Friends of the Earth, a leading environmental organization around the world which also houses local action groups. Another MP noted that when they interact with climate groups, they focus on local organizations, though these groups tend to focus more on nature and restoration than climate change broadly. Some MPs choose to participate in climate organizations' events and activities simply because they were asked to do so.

> ***"There are campaigns and groups that write to you, to ask to engage with a particular event in Parliament; and actually, depending on what it is, you might take more notice of that and say, actually yeah, we'll go along to that, learn more about if it's a concern to my constituents" (MP2).***

MPs who challenge the climate movement have a different opinion on communicating with climate organizations. One MP asserted that *"anything which represents progress, they [climate organizations] tend to be against - new roads, energy storage facilities, new storage - the only thing they seem to ask me to support are things which actually destroy the environment"* (MP1).

VIEWS ON PUBLIC PROTEST

While protests used to be a popular way to mobilize individuals to partake and fight for change within the climate movement, interviews with MPs have shown this to not be a productive form of activism to promote change in recent years. Protesters' demands appear not to resonate with MPs the way prior research (Barrie, Fleming, and Rowan 2023) suggests they once did. One MP stated *"I do think [protests] are more for the marchers than the politicians"* (MP3), which throughout interviews with both MPs and advocates emerged as a common theme. Based on these interviews, it can be concluded that organizers should tailor protests toward community assembly, then channel that sentiment into traditional communication methods between organizations and MPs.

MPs are seeing a decline in climate-based protests, citing a step back in protests from groups like Extinction Rebellion and other "climate for justice activists." It is unclear how much of this decline can be attributed to a lesser impact of climate protest on climate policy, versus the Public Order Act and how much of the mobilization space is saturated by other events in the UK and around the world–notably on the UK Family Farm Tax, continued rallies against Brexit, and the war in Gaza.

Some MPs are uniquely positioned to understand the effort climate advocates are conducting, as they started their political career as activists themselves. An MP explained:

> *"If you asked me 15 years ago what was the most effective approach, I would have said yes, direct advocacy, waving a placard, making your point heard, and doing silly things" (MP4)*

However, their experience within the policymaking system has revealed the limitations of this approach given the constraints on attention and latitude for decision-making that MPs face

PUBLIC POLLING

Researchers, media companies, and political consultants use public opinion polls to gain insight into the positions of constituents and the voting public as a whole. This includes both voter intention ahead of election cycles, as well as voter input on key issues. Our interviews suggest, however, that these public opinion polls garner little attention from MPs. One interviewee went as far as saying that they ignore public opinion polls because they are *"rubbish"*. Another explained how they pay little attention to the polls, and never commission polls themselves as an MP.

Two MPs reported lightly following public opinion, with one saying they do track the polls and another explaining that they monitor public opinion by counting *"the number of emails that come in on a topic so we know what is causing a lot of angst in the area"* (MP5). Essentially, MPs view communication with active constituents–those who attend meetings or write to the office–as more informative than respondents to a representative survey.

PARTY ALIGNMENT

In general, the MPs that the research team spoke with asserted that UK politicians tend to follow the traditional viewpoints of their party, and avoid straying from the norm. When speaking with a member of the Labour Party, the interviewee explained that they don't know of anyone in their party who does not believe that the climate is changing and that we need to do something. While there was limited discussion on opinions of party alignment from parties that did not identify as Labour, one MP who did discuss this topic noted *"I'm quite happy if I think the party takes a different view than I do, and takes an independent view on [climate change]"* (MP1). One interviewee discussed the importance of party lines, and that following them is important *"because they're expected to support what the party's policy is"* (MP5). An MP also noted that MPs, regardless of their party, typically choose to follow their party Whip, reflecting the strong norm of party discipline in parliamentary systems.

Interviewees also highlighted what sets them apart from other parties. One MP declared that their party is:

> *"not only accepting the science, but we're going to proactively engage in the net zero transition with significant investment in renewable infrastructure as part of our economic growth" (MP4).*

Differentiation continues from policy issues to means of interaction with residents.

> *"I'm a Liberal Democrat MP and Liberal Democrats knock on doors, speak to constituents, reach out, and attend events and things so that we are very available to constituents" (MP5).*

KEY POLICY POSITIONS FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

There is a sharp distinction in terms of how MPs view climate change and its related issues. During the interview process, MPs were asked questions that included *"which aspects of climate policy matter most to you,"* "*what policies have you proposed to address climate change,"* and *"are there cases where you have changed your mind on a climate policy in the last five years?"* The research team found a combination of climate policies and issues that the MPs would like to see brought more into the legislature, as well as negative opinions insinuating too much focus on trying to change an ostensibly natural phenomenon.

Starting with the interviewees who represent a sample of MPs who do not support climate legislation in Parliament - often alongside party alignment, which we will discuss in a later section - it is important to recognize the reasoning behind the unease around the subject. The first reason for apprehension can be tied to economics, including pressure to address their constituents' financial struggles rather than prioritize climate action. These MPs share concerns that the government is spending too much money on something that is out of their control to change. One MP asked:

> *"Are we spending money senselessly and needlessly on trying to influence something that we can't influence... the world's climate has changed over the whole time that the world has been in existence, and changed quite dramatically and quickly on many occasions, why do we try to defy natural phenomena" (MP1)?*

Other notable reasons for concern among MPs include the economic composition of the MP's constituency (particularly the oil and gas workforce), and uncertainty about attributing extreme weather events' local impacts to climate change as opposed to irresponsible urban planning such as building in flood-prone locations.

MPs mentioned constituents' reluctance to change their lifestyles when answering the questions related to policy positions and how their constituency plays a role in climate policy. An MP explained how their constituents don't want to have to change their lifestyle, and want the government to make the change without affecting them. They went on to add that constituents' focus on their own lifestyles *"is why things like domestic heating and developing hydrogen for transport and all of these things are really important"* (MP5), emphasizing the need to make environmentally-conscious decisions that limit the need for constituents to alter their day-to-day experiences. To help combat this narrow-mindedness, some MPs are hoping that by setting an example, their constituents will follow suit. *"I will support walking groups, support active transport, and still cycle occasionally. But I really believe that the governments are responsible for putting in good public transport systems. You can't ask people not to use their cars until there's a real alternative"* (MP5), an MP said.

The key policy positions for MPs as they relate to climate change's existence spans a mix of issues. Multiple MPs invoked the electricity grid and renewable energy as a means of addressing climate change. Two MPs highlighted the potential for nuclear energy, including small modular reactors (SMRs), as a potential piece of the solution. For other MPs, the ideal climate policy solutions depend on the location and demographics of their constituency. One MP says they focus a lot on health, whether in relation to climate or not. Other topics MPs focused on include creating and promoting circular economies, and conservation and global stewardship. Two MPs referenced their constituency locations and how that informs their policy positions. One was concerned about sea level rise and resiliency plans because they have a coastal constituency; another mentioned their close ties to wind energy, as there are already onshore wind farms within their district and offshore wind farms nearby. Based on this evidence, we advise advocates that the strongest cases to be made for climate policy are relevant to the MP's constituency, giving them a direct electoral incentive to support such a policy.

CONCLUSION

Through analysis of the interviews conducted with Members of Parliament, a few key points can be identified and utilized for future interactions between MPs and advocates. First, as much as possible, keep communication direct, short, and in-person or in a small group. Next, use protest as a means of gathering support between individuals, not with a goal to achieve a political impact. Finally, while social media usage is on the rise, many MPs are shying away from it, with a major reason being the lack of certainty on constituency and missing the conversational aspect. Instead, if choosing to continue to use social media as a form of communication, it may be beneficial to explicitly identify as a constituent, otherwise, to focus social media usage to understanding the going-ons of the MP's office to be prepared to have a conversation with a staffer of the office.

CLIMATE ADVOCACY

One pattern emerged early on with the advocate interviews–that many felt that the government was repressing protest. This notion brought up mixed feelings for advocates; some felt that protests were still necessary, while others felt that protests now held negative connotations among the British public due to the ways the media had portrayed them. Advocates expressed the concern that this repression and negative connotation was turning the public away from climate activism. The crackdown on protests also brought up new fears for advocates. There is now an added risk to their work that could affect whether they decide to participate in the work, especially for younger advocates who have to think about their future.

The change in the landscape caused advocates to consider other strategies to get their message across. One key insight we found was that national campaigns were utilizing a specific networking strategy. This strategy involved building an established base of advocates from all over the country who individually contacted their MPs. This approach provides the group with an opportunity to both keep members involved while also reaching MPs to whom they normally would not have access. Another way some groups have shifted away from protests was focusing more on community organizing. Advocates voiced frustration that the government was not getting enough done, and felt that Keir Starmer's Labour government was not following through on its campaign promises.

Another important takeaway from these interviews was how advocates were interacting with social media. While it was still commonly used, they often voiced distrust, especially in platforms such as X or Facebook. Social media utilization was not deployed often to stay in contact or inform MPs. When it came to contacting their MPs, advocates voiced struggles associated with having their voices heard. The typical way of contacting one's MP is through e-mail, which resulted in mixed responses. This method also does not provide advocates with a direct line of communication with their MP.

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