

Context

Climate activism in the UK encompasses a range of grassroots movements, including Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion (XR), Insulate Britain (IB), and Just Stop Oil (JSO). These groups, though relatively recent additions to protest and activism, have become integral to the broader tradition of Western environmentalism. Emerging in late 2018, XR and Fridays for Future gained prominence through disruptive, non-violent tactics that attracted mainstream media attention. In contrast, JSO, established later in 2022, focuses on ending new oil and gas licenses, persisting with radical actions despite XR's strategic shift away from disruption in January 2023 and new anti-protest legislation. Notable JSO activities include shutting down the M25 and vandalising landmarks, driven by the UK government's refusal to meet their demands. Students are among the most actively engaged demographics in social movements and the aforementioned campaigns by JSO (Saunders et al., 2020).

Literature Review

While extensive research has explored internal dynamics within social movements, such as social identification and shared identity, there is limited focus on how these movements impact observers. Feinberg et al. (2020) introduced the "Activist's Dilemma," highlighting the dual effect of extreme protest actions: they raise awareness but can also decrease support due to perceived disruption. However, this view is contested by Davis (2022), who argues that activism's primary goal is to capture attention, regardless of public opinion. The literature remains divided on how preconceived beliefs affect the perception of protest action. Notably, research has not sufficiently explored the student demographic, despite its critical role in social movements (Saunders et al., 2020). This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the impact of Just Stop Oil (JSO) on student perceptions and support.

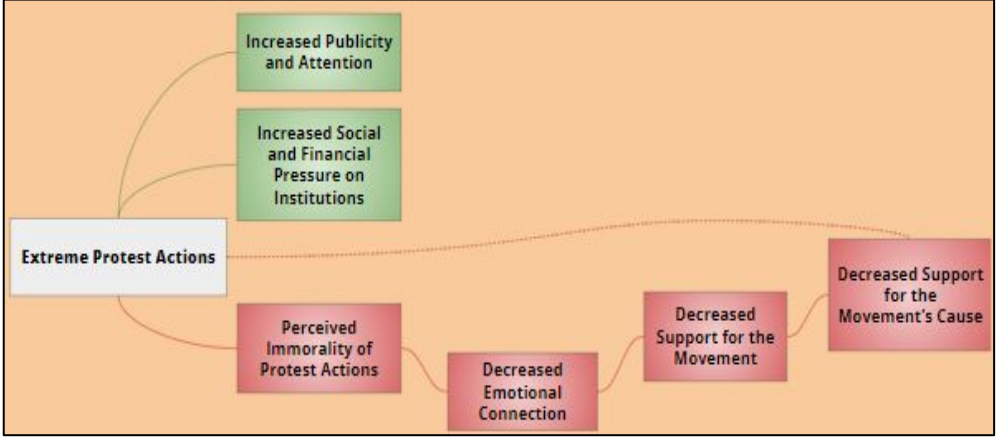


Figure 1: diagram representing Feinberg et al's (2020) Activists Dilemma

Methods

A questionnaire was distributed to University of Cambridge Undergraduates between 24 June 2024 and 24 July 2024, through college JCRs (Junior Common Rooms). A range of question types were used, such as text entry, multiple choice, and matrix tables. It is essential to recognise that the population of Cambridge Undergraduates is not representative of the general public. The student population is likely to have higher engagement and identification with the activists, as well as being part of a highly selective academic institution. The findings should therefore not be extrapolated to the wider general population, and rather findings should be interpreted as a reflection of the population itself.

References: Feinberg, M., Willer, R., & Kovacheff, C. (2020). The activist's dilemma: Extreme protest actions reduce popular support for social movements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 119(5), 1086–1111; Davis, C. (2022). Oxford Brookes Centre for Psychological Research Seminar Series. 2022-23. Week 1. Colin Davis. The Psychology of Protest. [online]; Saunders, C., Doherty, B., & Hayes, G. (2020). A New Climate Movement? Extinction Rebellion's Activists in Profile. CUSP Working Paper No 25. Guildford: Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity. Online at: www.cusp.ac.uk/publications

Just Stop Oil

IMPACT ON AWARENESS, PERCEPTION, AND BEHAVIOUR



Research Summary

This study investigates the impact of the climate activist group Just Stop Oil (JSO) on Cambridge undergraduates' awareness, perceptions, and behaviors regarding climate change. Given JSO's recent high-profile actions in Cambridge, such as the spraying of King's College and disruptive marches, this research explores whether these tactics effectively raise awareness of climate issues, how the group is perceived, the factors influencing these perceptions, and whether these perceptions affect support for JSO's demands and individual climate-related behaviors. By using a questionnaire, the study aims to provide insights into whether JSO's methods advance or hinder their objectives within the student community, using Cambridge undergraduates as a sample population.

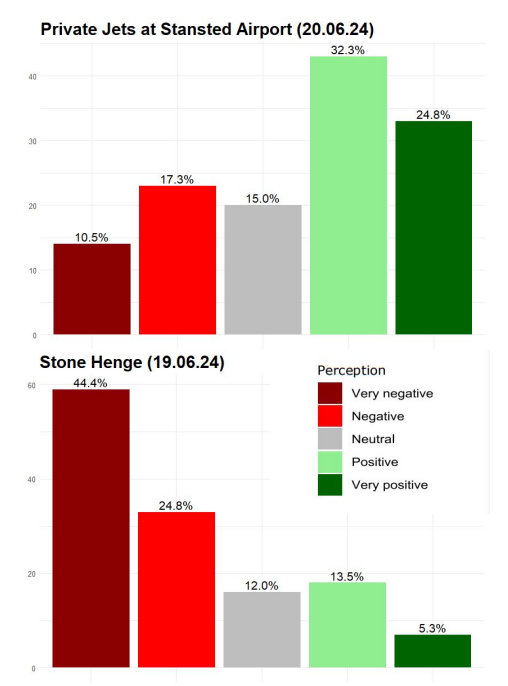


Figure 4: bar charts showing students' perceptions of the Stonehenge protest and the Private Jets protest at Stansted Airport

Factors Influencing Perception

↑ CONCERN FOR CLIMATE CHANGE
 = greater likelihood of positive perception
 because their actions are seen as justified

TYPE OF CAMPAIGN

Appropriateness	Immorality
57% had a positive perception of spraying of private jets at Stansted Airport	34% had a positive perception of Cambridge march and road block
69% had a negative perception of the StoneHenge campaign	62% had a negative perception of the blocking of major motorways such as the M25



KEY FINDINGS

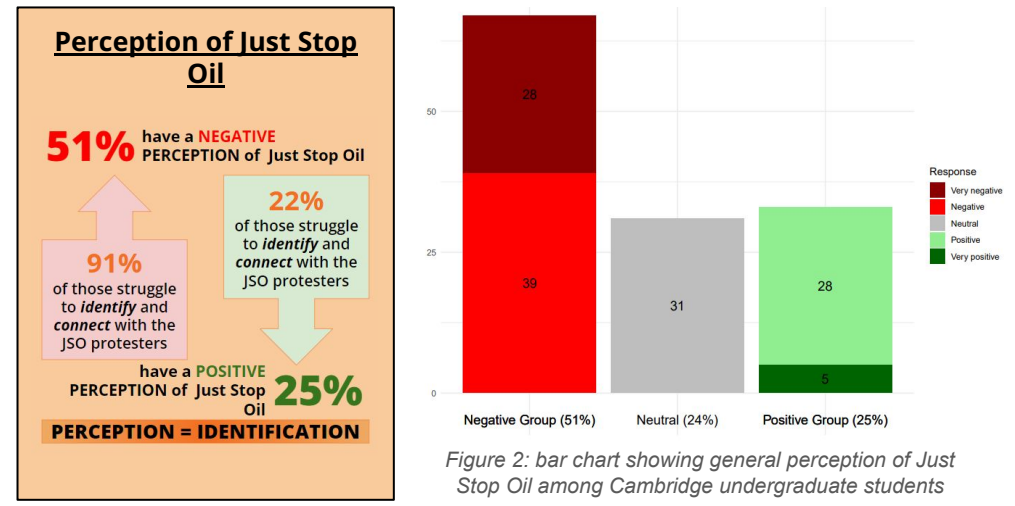


Awareness of Just Stop Oil and Climate Change

98% "ONLY THROUGH DISRUPTION, THE BREAKING OF LAWS, DO YOU GET THE ATTENTION YOU NEED." (Hallam, 2019)

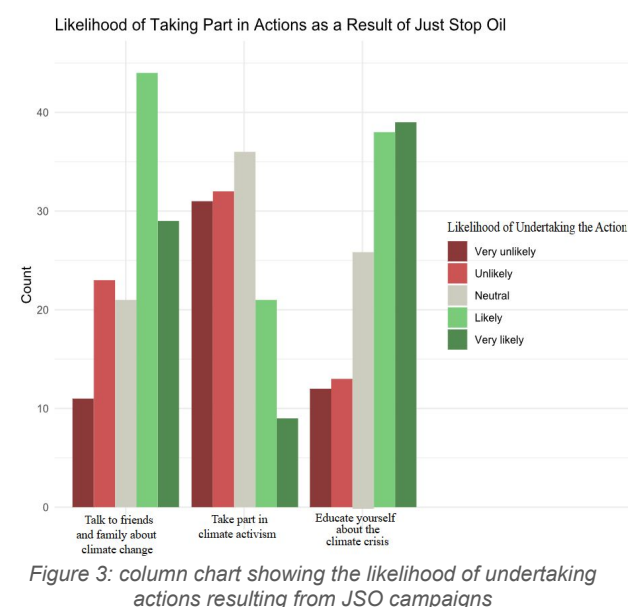
are aware of Just Stop Oil: 64% through SOCIAL MEDIA, 70% through the NEWS, 3% FIRST-HAND

How effective are the JSO campaigns at raising awareness of climate change?
 47% not effective, 45% effective



Does this influence support for their demands and views on climate change?

76% agree with the demand of Just Stop Oil to end oil, gas, and coal by 2030.
 69% reported no increase in concern for climate change.



Behaviour

57% are likely to talk to friends and family about climate change

60% are likely to educate themselves about the climate crisis

23% are likely to take part in climate activism

Does JSO influence awareness of climate change among Cambridge undergraduates? Yes. JSO's actions significantly raise awareness of climate change among students, primarily through extensive media coverage.

How is JSO perceived among Cambridge undergraduates? Negatively. This negative perception stems from low levels of connection and social identification with JSO's movement.

Which factors influence perception? Perception is influenced by students' concern about climate change, feelings of justification for the movement's actions, and the perceived immorality and appropriateness of JSO's campaign tactics.

How does the perception of JSO among Cambridge undergraduates influence support for their demands and views on climate change? Despite negative perceptions, students generally agree with JSO's demands. Additionally, some students report increased concern for climate change, indicating that negative views of JSO do not always diminish support for their cause.

Does JSO influence behaviour among Cambridge undergraduates? Students are more likely to engage in discussions about climate change and seek out information on the topic due to JSO's influence. However, JSO is less effective in motivating direct participation in activism.