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Getting Youth on the Streets: Accounting for Levels of Youth Mobilization Among International Climate Organizations

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Cover Page Footnote

When I started thinking about this project, I was a burned-out community organizer looking for new ways to focus my energy. A youth activist myself, I began to wonder how I could contribute to the climate activist communities I cared about, while restoring what energy I had left. This thesis gave me that new sense of purpose, a feeling of contributing new knowledge to youth activists around the world. To mention everyone who has contributed to this thesis would be impossible. However, I would first like to thank Professors Heather Williams and Heidi Haddad for their endless amount of help in the writing process, for being advocates for me when I doubted myself, and for making me a better writer and researcher by the end. Additionally, I would like to thank Caroline Hickman and my other participants, who despite the time commitment for a stranger from The States, were incredibly generous with their amazing stories and their time. I would also like to thank Maxwell Knowles, my partner in crime, for the generosity to listen to every late night thought, iteration, and presentation of this research too many times to count. Furthermore, I would like to thank my friends for their constant love and support of me throughout such a tough year. I don't know what I would have done without them. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support of me and my nontraditional academic career. Their understanding and curiosity of my varying interests throughout college helped me stay true to myself and what I want to pursue. Thank you to all.

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Getting Youth on the Streets: Accounting for Levels of Youth Mobilization Among International Climate Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Youth, many of whom are not given the voice or the opportunity to collaborate with political institutions, often turn towards climate movements to make an impact on the climate. Through a series of interviews in the United Kingdom and supporting secondary research, this paper offers a formal overview of factors that contribute to youth mobilization. These factors include type of protest, community, and leadership, in addition to narrative building and media engagement with the movement. By assessing the mechanisms behind youth mobilization, movements can establish how to better attract youth.

KEYWORDS

youth activism, climate activism, civil disobedience, United Kingdom

1. INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are in an art museum in London, staring at one of the most famous paintings in the world contemplating its significance, observing its texture.

Image 1. Van Gogh's Sunflowers, London National Gallery, January 5, 2023



Now, imagine seeing two young people walk up to the painting while taking their jackets off, revealing the phrase “Just Stop Oil” on their shirts underneath. Unexpectedly, these two young activists pull cans of soup out of their jackets, splash the soup over the famous painting, glue their hands to the wall and say, “what is worth more, art or life?”

This moment that shocked the world took place in the London National Gallery in October of 2022. The two youth activists were members of Just Stop Oil (JSO), an envi-

ronmental activist organization that has participated in disruptive, non-violent direct action protests across the UK since April of 2022. Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* was just one of many paintings that had been similarly marred by JSO over the previous few months, works that included *The Hay Wain* by John Constable, a copy of *The Last Supper* by DaVinci, with a copycat case by Extinction Rebellion, another direct action climate organization, on Picasso's *Massacre*.¹

JSO is one of many climate organizations around the world that has utilized youth activists to carry their message in the 21st century. Protests done by youth tend to make headlines, such as the School Strike for Climate in August 2019, or protests in Bangladesh advocating for the Green New Deal in the face of the worst flood in more than a hundred years (Jhumu, 2022). As the young members of society are becoming engaged with the climate crisis, they are excellent at grabbing the world's attention.

2. BACKGROUND & RESEARCH QUESTION

The state of the climate is rapidly deteriorating, with “unsustainable land-use and land cover change, unsustainable use of natural resources, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, pollution, and their interactions, adversely affect[ing] the capacities of ecosystems, societies, communities and individuals to adapt to climate change” (IPCC 2022). This deterioration, due to complicit politicians, is the most commonly cited concern for international climate activists according to a recent survey of a broad range of climate activists (Boucher et al 2021). Many politicians in the highest-emitting countries have adopted complicit policies towards climate change, such as increased fuel subsidies, when urgent action is required to keep the planet from reaching a point of no return (Carrington, 2022). A 1.5°C increase in global temperature from the 1850–1900 baseline is more than 50% likely to occur in the near-term (IPCC, 2022). This change in temperature will bring with it the high probability of increased frequency of extreme weather events, ocean acidification, decreased water and food security for individuals worldwide, mass extinction, and many other events (IPCC, 2022). Many international climate organizations and movements are being established around the world to address both this change and the perceived inaction of governments around the world.

In the United Kingdom, political disjunction between younger generations and the older generations that represent them in government has bred frustration among youth, because they do not feel that their values are properly voiced in the parliament (Helm, 2022). As a result, many youth have turned towards climate movements to make a positive impact on the environment. Although it has been well-researched why individuals become engaged with climate issues, not much research has been done on why youth join certain climate movements more than others. Some movements tend to attract a lot of youth activists without conducting either active outreach or direct youth messaging. Other movements that are founded by youth gain no traction at all. Therefore, I ask: What accounts for different levels of youth mobilization around different international climate movements in the United Kingdom? By assessing the mechanisms behind youth mobilization, political organizers can establish some ways to attract youth, a historically difficult-to-mobilize demographic (Youniss et al., 2002), to their movements.

This research report is based on a larger study of youth climate activists in the UK,

¹ The Guardian has extensively covered the protests of Just Stop Oil in addition to the copycat cases, which have begun to pop up among other radical, direct action-focused climate organizations

which details the overarching themes and observations extrapolated from field research in London as well as secondary research. The report discusses two of the five total factors identified in the full study as contributing to different levels of youth engagement: (i) the type of community, and (ii) type of protest that the movement deploys.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. DEFINITION OF YOUTH

In order to determine how international climate movements mobilize youth in the United Kingdom, I will first define what I mean by "youth." Many definitions of youth employed by researchers use age as the defining factor, and among these there is little to no continuity. The UN General Assembly first endorsed the definition of youth as individuals between the ages of 13 and 24 in resolution 36/28 of 1981 (UN, 1981). There is no distinct reason for this definition, other than it serves the statistical purposes necessary for the UN to distinguish youth from adults. Researchers often use this definition as it provides a similarly convenient numerical guideline (Henn et al., 2002). Others, however, define youth/young people through a generational lens, referring to youth in the 21st century as those born in the Generation Z or sometimes the Millennial generation (Farber, 2020). The Pew Research Center defines Generation Z as the first generation to remember little to nothing from 9/11, the first to have cell phones as pre-teens, and as those born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019). Similarly, Millennials are defined as those born between 1981 and 1996, and who are distinguished by their ability to remember 9/11 and by having grown up in the shadow of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Dimock, 2019). However, these factors are generalized and cannot be taken as assignable to every individual, whereas age can.

I argue that simply using age or generation to define youth is limiting. Youth can also be seen and described as a developmental stage, a time in which an individual is expanding their intellectual and real-world capacities, broadening their perspectives, and experiencing the challenges associated with moving into adulthood (Jensen & Arnett, 2012; O'Brien et al., 2018). Jensen & Arnett (2012) use a compelling definition of youth as a combination of both adolescents (ages 10–18) and emerging adults (ages 18–29), combining both numeric and developmental stage-based factors.

3.2. DEFINING YOUTH ACTIVISM AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In democratic societies, political dissent is often expressed through activism. Activism has been defined in many different ways and through many different frameworks, but often as a form of contestation towards individuals in power. I will, in lieu of others' definitions, define activism through the goals that both youth and climate activists have. Many climate activists cite broadly a need for urgent action on the climate crisis, which includes a variety of more specific actions/goals such as divestment from fossil fuels, conservation of specific species, clean water, food justice, air quality, etc. Youth activists often use a generational rhetoric to stipulate that it is up to older generations to make changes from within institutions (McAdam et al., 2001). Youth climate activists, according to O'Brien et al. (2018), engage in three different forms of activism: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous. This framework is a good guide towards understanding activism from a youth perspective, as it shows that certain positive or negative factors can either push or pull individuals from different forms of activism. Dutiful dissent, also known as institutionally-collaborative dissent, is where youth are able to voice their concerns within institutional spaces. This has become much easier in

recent years as political opportunities have become more readily available. Disruptive dissent arises when youth seek to “modify or change existing political and economic structures,” including laws, institutions, and thoughts around the climate (O’Brien et al., 2018). Disruptive dissent includes a lot of the actions that my case studies perform, such as protests, strikes, and radical direct action. Finally, dangerous dissent often suggests and sometimes actualizes alternatives to our existing worldview, alternatives that engender positive environmental effects instead of engendering extractive practices. This type of dissent often occurs in tandem with disruptive dissent, as seen with the proponents of a radical Green New Deal (Klein, 2019). These three kinds of activism can certainly play a part in different levels of youth mobilization because they account for different levels of safety and commitment.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes various methods to analyze what accounts for the differences in youth mobilization within different organizations. It is grounded in qualitative research of youth, those that engage youth, and the variety of climate actions and movements youth engage with in London, England. Although London contains a non-representative sample of global climate organizations and movements, the findings from my field research are likely generalizable to other industrialized countries, specifically those that are historically responsible for large amounts of fossil fuel emissions. While youth climate activists in less industrialized countries focus more on how they can improve their own communities, those from more industrialized countries feel that they are responsible for their countries' extractive histories and thus tend to focus on how they can stop the imperialist and unsustainable practices of their own country.

Interviews from youth climate activists and those that engage with youth activists will lay out why they joined certain movements, what they plan(ed) to achieve through their membership, and what their values around methodologies/tactics of activism are. While in London, I interviewed nine total individuals: three youth activists, two retired youth activists, two older climate activists, a youth climate psychologist, and a security guard at the London National Gallery. By conversing with such a variety of individuals, this thesis has developed a multifaceted synthesis of those that engage with youth climate activism.

Through many conversations with climate protest organizers and examinations of protest numbers within the news, I came to the discovery that protest attendance is near impossible to quantify, especially with specifics such as demographic attendance. According to one organizer I will call Sebastian, “the process of trying to actually come up with a number, even [if] you literally have a time video of everyone that walks by, it’s just impossible.” Any metrics of demographic engagement and turnout of transnational climate protests and campaigns are likely inaccurate because they are self-reported non-representative samples. Also, none of the climate movements I analyze release the demographic composition of their organizations—likely because of high turnover rate in addition to the sometimes sensitive subject matter that the organizations tackle. Therefore, quantitative analysis of youth engagement will not be used.

5. HISTORY

Before discussing a few factors that contribute to mobilization, it is worth addressing the history of youth climate activism in the United Kingdom, including past trends in youth participation. If one were to pick a moment where UK civil society transitioned to modern environmentalism, it would likely be around the same time that The Conservation Society

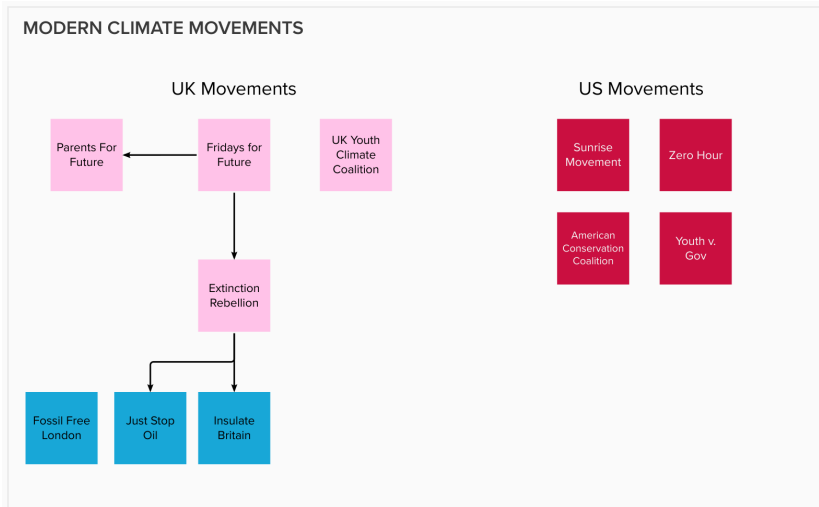
(COS) was established in the United Kingdom in 1966. The establishment of COS aligned with several other key moments in history, including the rising environmental awareness in the US, and the tragic Torrey Canyon Oil Spill of 1967, which drew significant public attention from the UK and abroad as the then world's worst oil spill (Nelsson, 2017; Tucker, 1967). The organization, whose initial main concern was overpopulation, was the biggest environmental group in the UK until the mid 1970s. A few years after its foundation, the organization transitioned to what we now think of as modern environmentalism, combining a variety of interests including overpopulation, resource scarcity, and the fears connected to rapid technological revolution (Herring, 2001). However, despite being one of the first groups to hold a modern environmentalist view, the COS's methods of engagement were not as avant-garde as its young participants wanted. The society held a conservative approach to engagement, shunning demonstration and protest in favor of lobbying (Herring, 2001). This conservative stance on engagement alienated youth at the time, causing them to transfer to Friends of the Earth (FoE). This is but one example of youth transference due to organizational change.

Concentrated interest in protecting the climate since the 1970s culminated in an important moment in history for young people, when the now world-famous youth climate activist, Greta Thunberg, began her school strikes in August 2018. Greta inspired a global School Strike for Climate organized by her youth-led movement, Fridays for Future, in March of 2019. This series of events, where youth skipped school every Friday for weeks, engaged more than 1.4-1.6 million participants in 2,333 cities in 128 countries, all as a part of the Fridays for Future movement (Carrington, 2019; FFF 2023). Greta Thunberg is an iconic figure, an embodiment of the distress and anger that youth feel about the climate crisis. However, the year of momentum that Greta Thunberg built was interrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic in early 2020. As climate movements moved to virtual formats, gathering on Zoom and limiting or eliminating direct action entirely, many activists felt discouraged and activism stagnated heavily. According to a member of Fossil Free London I interviewed, whom I will refer to as Sebastian, the pandemic interrupted the cycle of protests:

People are more likely to take [their] fear and do something with it when they see protests happen. And then the more protests that happen, the more likely people are to do it. And I think that's self-perpetuating to a degree. I think that was happening a bit before, I think that was happening before the pandemic and then obviously, a year or so of lockdown has sort of stunted that and now it's kind of picking up again.

This cycle, I observed through my fieldwork in London, is indeed picking up again, continuing in the familiar branching pattern. Since the 1970s, it appears that youth in the UK follow international movements in a branching pattern, often with the center being a moment of large-scale mobilization such as Earth Day and the School Strikes or a moment of global environmental catastrophe like an oil spill or dramatic hurricane.

Figure 1. Environmental movements in the UK and the US, 2017-2023



From the beginning of the modern climate movement, youth activists have been at the helm, bringing a variety of unique and personal reasons for joining. Species conservation, pro-organic, anti-forestry, pro-labor rights, anti-air or water pollution, and anti-drilling are just a few examples of the causes that individuals have brought to the climate movement. Subgroups of the climate movement, such as Greenpeace, Just Stop Oil, Sunrise, Fridays For Future, etc. work to bring these individual causes together and give activists a sense of belonging in a larger group. These groups are also responsible for rallying their unique subsection of activists towards larger demonstrations such as Earth Day in 1970 and the School Strike for Climate in September of 2019. However, due to the large reach of international climate movements, the aims and message of movements often get diluted. Moreover, youth who want their voices heard loud and clear tend to break off and join movements that better represent their values and desires, sometimes based on the type of protest a movement employs and the type of community it has.

6. CLIMATE ACTIVISTS IN LONDON: A SYNTHESIS

My first day in London, I made my way to the London National Gallery, the scene of the incident that inspired this study. While there, I briefly interviewed one of the guards that was working while the protesters vandalized *The Hay Wain*. He was reluctant to speak on the issue—whether it be that the topic was controversial, I was a stranger, or that a young person distracting him with conversation was how the painting was vandalized in the first place. Regardless, his thoughts about the incident echoed much of what I have heard from others on this trip: that he understands the protesters’ cause, but just simply doesn’t understand vandalizing art.

Sebastian, my second participant, was welcoming from the start. Having signed up for a Fossil Free London meeting on the second day of my trip, I received a text the evening before from him to see if I was still coming, and making sure I knew where to go. As I introduced myself to the group, nervous to be an impartial party in a sea of young climate activists, Sebastian made me feel like I was equally included during my time there. The Fossil

Free London meeting was so wonderful that I reached out again to meet one-on-one. We met a few days later at Borough Market, a bustling foodie heaven just south of the Thames, and had an exuberant conversation about his time working for Fossil Free, our experiences as climate activists, politics, and many other topics that will show up later in this chapter.

Following my conversation with Sebastian, I spoke with an elder activist I will refer to as Adam. Adam is an author, an honorary professor, a former freelance journalist, and a former researcher of energy studies in Russia and Ukraine. During his work as a journalist, Adam was charged to look at the corporate social responsibility operations done by oil companies. This experience, in addition to Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, were eye-opening in showing Adam the effects that oil companies have on the world. Then, in 2018, a friend of his told him that a local Extinction Rebellion (XR) group was being set up, which he joined.

To expand my research to a broader environment, I traveled to Oxford to meet with a friend of a friend who works as a climate leader there, whom I will call Aspen. Aspen is a mother of two, a former lawyer, and a passionate leader of the Parents for Climate movement. Hearing about the unique role that parents have alongside youth activists indicated a divide within international climate movements that I had only speculated about before.

My conversation with Thomas was one of honesty, mental health, and many varieties of activism. A PhD student at the Imperial College London, Thomas is a former youth activist who, has been in jail a few times for his actions. I had not known Thomas before going to London, but when I reached out to the climate school at Imperial, he quickly replied, kindly wanting to talk to me more about my research. We met up in one of the university's buildings, and he had me wait for a second in the lobby as he went to grab something. A few minutes later, he walks to my waiting spot with a coffee cup and a bottle of warm water to keep my mug warm. His kindness was clear, making sure I both had a non-disposable cup and a way to keep my hands warm on the walk over.

Caroline Hickman is a professor of climate psychology and social work at the University of Bath, a practicing 'climate-aware' psychotherapist, and a researcher of youth eco-anxiety and distress. Some of her research on climate anxiety in children and youth, one of which surveyed 10,000 young people aged 18-25 in ten countries, has shown that many young people are worried about the climate, many enough to have it negatively affect their everyday life (Hickman et al., 2021). Moreover, her thoughts on what attract youth to climate movements are based in psychological principles, and are thus invaluable to understanding what is attractive to youth.

I met Joy through Force of Nature. We are similar ages and have similar interests, which is how we initially connected. As my plans to travel to London solidified, I reached out to meet and she agreed. We met during my last day at a coffee shop in South Kensington. Our conversation ranged from her experiences getting her masters in climate communication to her life in London, but did not focus as much on youth climate activism. Although she considers herself an activist, she hesitates to participate in direct action, and prefers to put her communications skills to work for the climate.

Through these conversations, this study's goal was to develop an overview of the most important factors in youth mobilization. The next section will discuss two of the factors mentioned in the interviews and support them with secondary research.

7. FACTORS OF YOUTH MOBILIZATION

7.1. TYPE OF PROTEST

As claimed previously, youth in the UK historically follow movements in branching patterns. Though the qualities of these movements change over time, certain aspects remain almost universal. One such thing is direct action protest. Saltmarsh (2021) argues that the UK is home to a unique political radicalism which is instinctive to the population, especially among youth. Although he offers no proof for this claim, there is a history of high occurrences of direct action in the UK, especially in London. This is likely because movements in emissions-intensive industrialized countries, whose citizens are frustrated with the lack of action from their governments to decrease carbon emissions, require civil disobedience through non-violent direct action to challenge the status quo (Rosewarne et al., 2013). Moreover, when the grassroots of a movement are against the actions or inactions of the government, its members are often more compelled to participate in actions that are outside of customary governmental processes.

Image 2. XR Banner “We Act In Peace” pinned onto a young woman’s backpack, Jan 11th, 2023



Among the young people with whom I spoke, the majority of the actions they reported participating in were direct action. These direct actions included anything from protests outside of oil company offices, to signing petitions blocking new oil pipelines, to more radical acts like slashing the tires of low gas mileage cars and gluing their hands to busy streets. Although these direct actions were not to the exclusion of personal or private actions, like lifestyle changes or communication, they were facilitated by the movements. One reason that direct action is attractive to youth is because it gives them a greater feeling of effecting change and contributing to their futures. Sebastian, the 27 year old communica-

tions coordinator for a climate group in London, says that “for tactics to be appealing... you have to sincerely believe that you will achieve something by doing it, because otherwise it feels empty and pointless.” This point of view was echoed in a survey done with adolescents across seven countries, which asked how important it was for them to achieve various goals when they thought about their future. At the very top of the list of the most important goals to adolescents was environmental objectives—far more than any other civic commitment (Flanagan, 2010). Additionally, there was a high correlation between those that volunteered and those that felt they were improving their community. There are a few opportunities for young people to speak to members of parliament in the UK, such as participation in the British Youth Council, but as with many institutionally collaborative methods of activism, they are exclusive and non-representative of young people’s opinions (British Youth Council, 2023). Additionally, young people under the age of 18 are not able to vote in the UK, leaving the desires of those younger than 18 out of the political process. Some young people can lobby their local or national governments, but without the money and power that comes with adulthood, much of such lobbying is left unheard. In a society where youth are disempowered (Middleton, 2006) and many are disenfranchised (Brando, 2023), it is crucial that youth find a manner of activism that they feel is making a difference.

Finally, because the impulse control of adolescent youth is not as fully developed as it is in adults, many youth are more willing to take risks, known by neuroscientists as sensation seeking. Sensation or novelty seeking “is characterized by exploration of novel stimuli and the tendency to experiment with exciting activities despite the risks associated with them” (Romer, 2010). This begins around the teenage years, and is associated with both a pre-existing form of impulsivity that was developed in early years of life as well as the activation of the part of the brain that encourages novel, risk-taking activities. Although sensation seeking can explain why youth often participate in direct action, more research could be done to explore the reasons why some youth are involved in different types of actions other than direct action. Further, youth are certainly not interested solely in direct action protests. Movements like Extinction Rebellion or Greenpeace, which commit several forms of direct action protest, do not draw as many youth. This is because youth also seek a distinct sense of belonging as developed by the youth activist community within movements.

7.2. TYPE OF COMMUNITY

Community building and direct action go hand in hand. Sebastian says: “Both [community and potential for grabbing attention] are really key... both are necessary. Neither would work without the other.” Direct action builds a community around action, giving youth a social niche in a society that is increasingly leaving youth with uncertain roles. It is difficult for youth to develop loyalty to their country because they are excluded from political processes, the thing that binds people from society together. One main way that countries try to integrate adolescents into society is through the education system, periodically reforming the education system to reflect the values and interests of the state. However, community-based social movements also play an essential role in helping youth identify with their community and show them the contributions they can make in it. In a study done on civic commitments of youth volunteers, youth that participate in volunteering (such as actions in climate movements) within democratic countries show a significant correlation with those that feel they are contributing to their community and protecting the natural environment (Flanagan et al., 2010). This is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Comparisons of the civic commitments of volunteers with nonvolunteers in seven countries (Flanagan et al., 2010)

	Helping the less fortunate M (SD)	Being active in politics M (SD)	Helping my society/country M (SD)	Improving my community M (SD)	Protecting the natural environment M (SD)
Australia					
Volunteer	3.89 (.80)***	2.46 (1.12)	3.65 (.72)**	3.57 (.75)***	3.95 (.78)
Nonvolunteer	3.47 (.88)	2.34 (1.10)	3.41 (.83)	3.15 (.77)	3.85 (.84)
Sweden					
Volunteer	3.50 (.84)***	2.66 (1.04)*	3.48 (.77)**	3.09 (.87)*	3.97 (.79)
Nonvolunteer	3.10 (.89)	2.36 (1.06)	3.22 (.82)	2.84 (.85)	3.83 (.79)
U.S.A.					
Volunteer	3.81 (.90)*	2.89 (1.14)**	3.65 (.83)***	3.65 (.85)***	3.64 (.86)
Nonvolunteer	3.58 (1.01)	2.58 (1.14)	3.38 (.92)	3.23 (.92)	3.57 (.85)
Bulgaria					
Volunteer	3.81 (.75)***	2.50 (.97)	3.81 (.76)***	3.64 (.76)***	4.21 (.62)***
Nonvolunteer	3.53 (.84)	2.42 (1.07)	3.58 (.82)	3.40 (.78)	3.97 (.68)
Czech Republic					
Volunteer	3.65 (.69)***	2.19 (.87)	3.74 (.67)***	3.79 (.61)***	4.21 (.61)***
Nonvolunteer	3.28 (.77)	2.11 (.83)	3.42 (.74)	3.44 (.70)	3.97 (.67)
Hungary					
Volunteer	3.58 (.81)***	2.06 (.92)	3.41 (.78)***	3.33 (.68)***	4.05 (.66)*
Nonvolunteer	3.22 (.90)	1.97 (.95)	3.23 (.84)	3.09 (.80)	3.92 (.74)
Russia					
Volunteer	3.75 (.94)***	2.34 (1.19)	3.98 (.86)***	3.88 (.84)***	4.38 (.73)***
Nonvolunteer	3.11 (1.07)	2.32 (1.20)	3.44 (1.02)	3.29 (1.01)	3.93 (.90)

Note: Results of ANOVAs. Means and standard deviations are presented for each country. All scales ranged from 1 = not at all important to 5 = very important.
p* < .01, *p* < .001, ****p* < .0001.

Additionally, young activists who do not receive external confirmation from home or school want to find communities of activists that share their point of views. In a study done on 88 justice-oriented, community-based youth programs, 36% of the organizations focus on socially integrating youth, and within these programs youth showed more positive attitudes including increased self-esteem and motivation to conduct community-service (Sutton, 2007). Moreover, movements that are open to like-minded individuals and focus on socially integrating youth within their movements, tend to attract more youth, likely because being a member of a volunteer group gives youth a sense of belonging and agency.

The climate justice movement is intrinsically communitarian in its ideals. Communitarianism, put simply, is the idea that communities shape the morals and political goals of a society to give meaning to our lives (Rawls, 1971; Alejandro, 1993). Rawls (1971) argues that people need a “community of shared interests to which [they] belong and where [they] find [their] endeavors confirmed by [their] associates.” The importance of community was echoed in an interview with an individual from Parents for Future in London, who said that:

Climate movements are about community...So finding ways to kind of create that connectivity and support that community becomes really important... and I think that’s why people tend to move on [when] it feels like the community isn’t quite the right fit for them, which is a really ephemeral hard thing to know.

Thomas, a PhD candidate at a London university, told me that after having his feelings invalidated by friends, family, and university:

[Activism] is where I found value and purpose and friends, a community: the people who listened to me, the people who were helping me, and the people who I can help. That was the community where suddenly I felt a belonging out

of nowhere.

Additionally, Joy, a young woman of 23, says that she joined a movement called Force of Nature because:

I was really interested in [their work in climate anxiety] and in the amazing people involved, and the opportunities to attend their [climate cafes and activities]. I really like that kind of community focus, the very opposite to direct action movements, and I feel like that approach suits me better.

It thus follows that movements where youth activists can attend activities and find people that confirm their worldview are more attractive. There are other youth-filled climate movements in London, but it is clear through just a few examples that making it easy to join and having a welcoming community are key characteristics of those that engage and retain youth activists.

Groups that are exclusive to outsiders still attract youth, but not many. For example, the way that JSO claims to mobilize publicly is through allowing public entry to Zoom meetings, where you need to attend several Zoom meetings to be privy to more radical direct actions (Just Stop Oil, n.d.a). In the months before going to London, I attempted to get into contact with individuals within JSO, to no avail. Even in my fieldwork in London, I found no individual that claimed to be a part of the movement. Although their most famous action was done by youth, the organization is much more heterogeneous, with most of their recently advertised protests being done by adults (Just Stop Oil, n.d.b). Instead, it is organizations that are more inclusive, with a low barrier to entry, and easier-to-attend meetings, that seem to draw larger numbers of youth. Finally, it should be noted that a particular type of protest or type of community do not often attract youth independently from one another; rather, there is a clear interplay between youth community-building and attention-grabbing tactics, where the presence of both attracts youth more than having just one or the other.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have discussed two key factors that contribute to drawing youth to climate movements in the UK. Youth, who commonly want to participate in extra-institutional direct actions like protests, sit-ins, and public confrontations, are most attracted to movements that do so, showing that the type of action a movement engages is significant. Additionally, youth are interested in climate movements that are inclusive rather than exclusive. In my broader thesis, I identify three additional factors: media engagement, narrative building, and movement structure, and conclude that social media is crucial to engagement from young people, and that climate movements that are consistent in their posting on social media about themselves and the political actions they participate in are likely to attract more youth than those that neglect to post.

Since it is nearly impossible to quantify demographics of individuals that participate in movements, it is difficult to ground this research on mobilization in numbers. Instead, this study shows a broader indication of trends and common factors to which youth are attracted through interviews with youth and exploration of secondary sources. Future research could explore each individual factor further, especially if one could find a way to quantify youth engagement within movements. Finally, this research could be expanded to different countries, as it is likely not representative of every global trend.

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