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Disruptive climate protesters: Terrorists or concerned citizens?

A discourse analysis of parliamentary debates in the UK and Germany

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the discourses employed in parliamentary debates on disruptive climate protests in the UK and Germany. In 2022 and 2023, these countries like many others saw a surge in disruptive climate activism which sparked frequent debates. Therefore, seven parliamentary debates in the British House of Commons and the German Bundestag were chosen for a discourse analysis following a combination of approaches suggested by Hajer and Keller. As this analysis shows, a narrative of rejection of disruptive protests dominated most discourses while climate change, the cause of the protests, was discussed less. Three discourses focused on the need of more climate action while the others emphasized prevention of and countermeasures to the protests. Although civil disobedience literature suggests that legitimacy and legality of disruptive protests methods need to be treated as separate concepts, debates focused strongly on the (il)legality of the measures. Especially conservative and right-wing parties aim at discursive obstruction of the activists and react with repression. In the UK, this repression manifested itself in the implementation of the Public Order Act creating serious disruption prevention orders and making locking on or interfering with key infrastructure an illegal offence. In Germany, however, the debate was coined by more diversity of discourses of which two also differentiate between legitimacy and legality of the acts. This finding suggests that future research on acceptance of protests among politicians and the public needs to distinguish between legitimacy and legality as separate concepts. The analysis further confirms findings of previous studies on the acceptance of Fridays for Future protests and finds that party family and parties' positions on climate change are correlated with acceptance of the protests. Further research on discourses within the public debate is needed to assess the impact of discourses among Members of Parliament outside of the parliament and its impact on the implementation of climate protection policies.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-----|---|
| AfD | Alternative für Deutschland |
| DUP | Democratic Unionist Party |
| CDU | Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands |
| CSU | Christlich-Soziale Union in Bavaria |
| FDP | Freiheitlich Demokratische Partei |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| SNP | Scottish National Party |
| SPD | Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands |
| PC | Plaid Cymru |
| UK | United Kingdom |

1 Introduction

Paintings by Vermeer, Van Gogh, Monet, and Munch have something in common: Not only are they all exhibited in important art museums across the world but more importantly they have become targets of climate activists in the past year. Through gluing themselves to the frames or by throwing soup or paint at art, activists tried to gain the attention of visitors for the case of climate change (“Top Museums Condemn Climate Protests,” 2022). Also, protesters spray-painted Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate, dyed Rome’s Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi, occupied schools and universities and glued themselves to streets (Burger, 2023; Gayle, 2023; “German Climate Protesters Glue Themselves to Berlin Streets,” 2023; Latza Nadeau et al., 2023). Although blocking streets has been a common way of protesting in the past, the recent actions of climate activists have shocked many across the globe and led to discussions among the public, in parliaments and among governments. In some countries, legal efforts to punish these disruptive forms of activism have increased (Symons, 2023).

Discussions not only evolve around the effectiveness of such protest forms (Feinberg et al., 2020) but also on their legitimacy (see, e.g., Şenel, 2023; Thome, 2022). While democracies rely on the right to free speech and protest, disrupting traffic and throwing soup at paintings might be deemed as infringement of laws. This infringement is inherently part of civil disobedience which these groups claim to conduct. Therefore, a discussion on the limits of protest has been triggered which includes the implications for the state of democracy. By answering the research question ‘*How do discourses apparent in British and German parliamentary debates reflect the tension between legitimacy and legality of disruptive forms of climate activism?*’, this thesis will help to understand how the right to protest is debated when it comes to protest forms that go beyond registered demonstrations. Answering this question will contribute to the broader debate on the acceptance of certain protest forms in the UK and Germany by analyzing in how far legitimacy and legality must be viewed as separate concepts in this context. To answer the research question, the following sub questions are posed:

1. Which discourses are part of the debates?
2. How do actors position themselves and others in the debates and which discourse coalitions do form?
3. In how far do the debates contain signs of polarization?

Especially the potential infringement of legal norms sparks discussions among authorities and the public, and polarizes the public (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020). In the UK, the Public Order Act was implemented in 2023 which includes serious disruption prevention orders, an extension of stop and search powers to allow police to search for tools potentially used in disruptive protests in areas where protests are likely, and the creation of offences of locking on or interfering with key infrastructure. In Germany, the *Bundesländer*, especially Bavaria, use preventive detention against the protesters (Biermann, 2023), and North-Rhine Westphalia for example implemented an Assembly Act banning protests on highways. In reaction to these restrictions, several organizations have expressed solidarity

with *Letzte Generation* (Letzte Generation, 2023a). On the one hand, disruptive protest¹ forms which are not registered with the police risk or purposely accept the violation of laws to gain attention for their claims. On the other hand, they can be effective at raising awareness and increasing pressure on institutions (Feinberg et al., 2020). However, even less disruptive forms of climate activism have not always been well received by the public in the past. As Bergmann and Ossewaarde (2020) find, German newspapers, be it conservative or left-wing papers, have discredited the Fridays for Future movement as illegitimate, doubting its effectiveness and reproducing an ageist coverage. This contributes to the polarization of the public, as much as a polarized political debate does. Therefore, one aspect of this analysis is the study of hints at polarization within parliamentary debates.

Although there have been some studies on the media portrayal of climate activism (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020; Huttunen & Albrecht, 2021; Zabern & Tulloch, 2021), research on parliamentary debates on climate activism is limited to the responses by single parties or considers all Members of Parliament (MPs) within a parliament at once (Barrie et al., 2023; Berker & Pollex, 2021; Schürmann, 2023). A more detailed approach studying the interactions between MPs is missing. Recent parliamentary debates have shown that MPs discuss climate activism frequently and are sometimes even willing to change laws in reaction to the protests or propose prohibiting the organizations of climate activists like the right-wing party AfD did for *Letzte Generation* in Germany (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023). Studying debates among MPs furthermore is relevant when following the assumption of framing and discourse theory telling us that language shapes our view of the world and therefore impacts reality (see e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Hajer, 2006; Potthoff, 2012; Rein & Schön, 1996). Hence, our opinions are largely influenced by the way things are communicated to us. In this process of opinion formation, the communication by elites or opinion leaders such as MPs is especially important.

This analysis focuses on the UK and Germany due to their different approaches to the protests: In the UK, the Public Order Act can be viewed as a direct response to the disruptive protests. The German parliament discussed harsher laws and a ban of the protest group without any law being agreed upon nationally, even though some *Bundesländer* also use a strict approach to the protests. Both countries, however, are democracies in which there is not only the right to protest but also the right to resistance in case leaders disregard fundamental human rights or the constitution which protesters sometimes refer to. In this context, Amnesty International (2023) criticizes the repression of climate activists in the UK and Germany.

¹ Disruptive protest methods in this thesis refer to protest methods which go beyond organized and registered demonstrations and aim at physically disrupting people or institutions excluding acts of sabotage or physically hurting people (following the definition of Berglund (2023)). This can include slow-walking, methods of locking on, and acts like throwing soup at paintings.

This thesis aims at contributing to a further exploration of this topic by conducting a discourse analysis. Discourse analyses allow to uncover mechanisms at play in debates on the meaning of events within the public discourse which is necessary for democratic processes (Benford & Snow, 2000) and to understand the reasons for and the dominance of certain discourses itself. They are also considered to be helpful in understanding political change (Woodly, 2015) and can therefore help assessing the political reactions to climate activism.

To answer the research question, this thesis first gives a brief overview of recent disruptive climate protests in the UK and Germany. It is further informed by findings of related literature which are elaborated in the third chapter. Then, the theoretical framework as well as the relevant concepts of civil disobedience and polarization are explained. Chapter five introduces the methodology which is followed by an explanation of the two settings analyzed in this thesis. Afterwards, the findings are described and discussed before a conclusion is drawn.

2 Background: Throwing Soup and Blocking Streets

Many countries across the globe experienced a surge of disruptive climate protests in the recent past. This chapter provides a short overview of the protests in the UK and Germany, thereby establishing the context of this thesis.

2.1 Throwing Soup and Blocking Streets – Disruptive Climate Protests in the UK

In the UK, most activities related to the recent surge in disruptive climate protest can be traced back to a group called *Just Stop Oil*. The group which was founded in February 2022 wants “to ensure that the government commits to ending all new licenses and consents for the exploration, development and production of fossil fuels in the UK” (Just Stop Oil, n.d.–a). Therefore, they conduct disruptive protest like throwing soup at paintings, gluing oneself to them or their frames (Benzine, 2022), and disrupting traffic or football matches (Just Stop Oil, n.d.–c). Activists for example blocked the important motorway M25 (Just Stop Oil, n.d.–c), they dug and occupied a tunnel under a road in Essex (“Just Stop Oil Protesters Leave Grays Tunnel After 13 Days,” 2022), and disrupted the Gallagher Premiership Rugby final (Just Stop Oil, n.d.–c).

Also protesters of *Extinction Rebellion*, a group that has conducted disruptive protests for four years now, were involved in the recent disruptive climate protests across the UK before the group proclaimed a change of tactics by the end of 2022 (Extinction Rebellion, 2022d). In 2022, they glued and chained themselves to the doors of a financial institution in London (Extinction Rebellion, 2022c), entered Shell’s London headquarters, glued themselves to desks and tried to convince workers of quitting (Extinction Rebellion, 2022b). They also glued scientific papers including evidence of climate change to windows of the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial strategy and glued themselves to the doors (Extinction Rebellion, 2022a).

2.2 Throwing Soup and Blocking Streets – Disruptive Climate Protests in Germany

Like the UK, Germany has experienced a new increase in disruptive climate protests since 2022. The group organizing most of these protests calls itself *Letzte Generation* (*Last Generation*). They describe themselves as the last generation that is able to stop “a collapse of society” (Letzte Generation, 2023b) and therefore employ acts of civil resistance, willing to accept imprisonment and high charges. *Letzte Generation* for example distributed food they saved from the trash cans of supermarkets which is considered illegal in Germany, and blocked streets in many cities across the country and even highways, such as the A100 in Berlin (Letzte Generation, 2023b). Similar to *Just Stop Oil* they threw soup at paintings (Russek & Witzki, 2022), glued themselves to paintings’ frames (“Mitglieder Der "Letzten Generation" Kleben Sich an Cranach-Gemälde Fest,” 2022) and tried to destruct the letters of an inscription in front of the German constitutional court (Hirsch, 2023). Unlike in the UK, Extinction Rebellion Germany was not involved in these protests, although the group conducted disruptive protests in the past, too.

3 Literature Review

Climate change-related protests have been the focus of political debates in the past, too. Studies show that when MPs discuss environmental activism not all forms of activism are accepted and perceived as helpful for achieving their aims (Hooghe & Marien, 2014; McAdam, 1983; Pickard, 2019; Shriver et al., 2013). Also, differences among political parties can be found (Berker & Pollex, 2021; Raisch & Zohlnhöfer, 2020). To inform the analysis, this chapter elaborates on recent studies on the perception of climate activism by politicians. Special focus is placed on the countries under analysis: Germany and the UK.

Politicians do not respond to every protest; instead, protesters must fight for their attention. A study in Germany revealed that MPs are more likely to react to (environmental) protests if they take place in their home region (Schürmann, 2023). In the Czech Republic, politicians and private actors ignored protests or employed mechanisms of discursive obstruction to establish anti-environmentalist sentiments among the public to decrease support for the movement. Thereby, they managed to decrease the support for environmentalists (Shriver et al., 2013). In the UK, Barrie et al. (2023) also did not find that MPs show responsiveness to the protests in their speeches, even though the number of climate-related speeches in parliament increased during the climate protests by Fridays for Future. In their communication on Twitter, however, MPs seem to show responsiveness (Barrie et al., 2023).

Even if government officials are not openly opposing climate activism, governments’ actions are not necessarily impacted by activism. Studies’ outcomes are not clear concerning activism pressuring governments to act. Fisher and Nasrin (2021) find that protesters helped to pressure governments to create environmental laws, and Munoz et al. (2018) come to the conclusion that emissions declined in

those U.S. states where there were increased pro-environmental protests. Olzak et al. (2016), however, find that protests had no effect on the speed of the passing of a bill.

Disruptive protest, though, presents a special case. Its tactics can be successful in reaching the public as well as politicians, yet this effect is unlikely to last over a long period of time (McAdam, 1983). Studying protest techniques employed in the context of Black insurgency between 1955 and 1970, McAdam (1983) highlights the need for innovation of protest techniques for them to be effective because opponents aim at neutralizing the tactics employed (also in Engler & Engler, 2017). This can include exploiting the point for debate offered by activists for own goals (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2000), which is why protesters have to adapt to argumentative situations for their messages to be heard successfully. In this context, Turner (1969) warns that “reformers should not overestimate what can be gained by disorderly protest in relation to the many other means for effecting change” (p. 829), especially as it is hard to maintain public acceptance of “disorders” as social protest over a long period of time. Governments also only tend to bargain with protesters if they feel a lack of support for themselves among the public (Turner, 1969). However, public acceptance of disruptive protests is not only hard to maintain but also hard to achieve in the first place as Hooghe and Marien (2014) find. According to their study, both the Belgian public and MPs deem non-institutionalized forms of political participation such as boycotts or illegal acts ineffective. On the contrary, taking part in elections as an institutionalized form of participation is deemed most effective. Those conducting non-institutionalized forms of protest generally estimate the effectiveness to be higher than the public does. A comparison of opinions of MPs in other EU countries² shows a similar pattern. Illegal acts are perceived as least effective in Germany and the UK. Demonstrations, however, are deemed more effective by German MPs than by UK MPs who highlight the effectiveness of sending letters to politicians (Hooghe & Marien, 2014). Disruptive protests making use of civil disobedience, which by definition includes illegal acts³, also trigger discussions among politicians and the public on the legitimacy of this kind of activism.

A further important factor influencing the perception of climate protests is their leadership. Organizations such as *Fridays for Future*, *Just Stop Oil* or *Letzte Generation* are mostly led by young people. Yet, politicians frequently do not acknowledge young people’s political engagement. They are often marginalized (Pickard, 2019), or misrecognized (Bessant, 2021). “For many, the very idea that a child, or young person can have a political consciousness, and be capable of giving expression to that is a difficult, if not abhorrent idea” (Bessant, 2021, p. 240). Criticizing young people being political is considered to be easy for those in established positions as this repeats traditional conservative values according to which young people naturally have a lower status than adults. This has led to descriptions

² Great Britain was still part of the EU in 2014.

³ A more elaborate definition of civil disobedience and disruptive protest follows in chapter 4.2.

of young climate activists like Greta Thunberg as impulsive, a puppet of the left or in need of further education and experience (Bessant, 2021).

Due to a political landscape in which some parties favor conservative values while others aim for a change of values, the responses to social movements need to be regarded in relation to the different parties. This can especially be seen in analyses of the reception of Fridays for Future protests (Berker & Pollex, 2021; Raisch & Zohlnhöfer, 2020). Although being less disruptive in their modes of protest, Fridays for Future being led by young people is in this way comparable to the recent disruptive climate protests. In Germany, the party groups reacted differently to the Fridays for Future protests: While center-left parties (Bündnis90/Die Grünen especially, SPD, Die Linke) were rather affirmative of the protests, the center-right (CDU, CSU, FDP) remained cautious and critical. The AfD being characterized as a populist radical right party degraded the Fridays for Future movement (Berker & Pollex, 2021). The results by Raisch and Zohlnhöfer (2020), who studied tweets by members of the *Bundestag*, confirm this pattern. Across all parties, MPs discussed the topic of climate change more frequently on Twitter once Fridays for Future started their protests. Yet, AfD and CSU MPs did not reveal any acceptance of the protests in their tweets. Die Grünen and Die Linke published most of the tweets showing acceptance of the protests. The SPD as well as Die Linke and to a smaller extent Die Grünen even published protest advertisement (Raisch & Zohlnhöfer, 2020).

Studies analyzing the reception of climate protests among MPs in the UK do not focus as much on the differences between the parties. Nevertheless, differences can be deduced from other studies, such as one by Pickard (2021). In 2019, the British parliament declared climate emergency and passed this declaration without a division. This declaration was viewed as the product of the civil movement of Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future and its ability to gain attention for the concept of climate emergency (Farand, 2019). According to Pickard (2021), the Labour Party pushed for this declaration and just as the Liberal Party acknowledged that young people managed to put climate change on the agenda. MPs of the Conservative Party stressed that the British government already implemented important measures and claimed that young protesters were ignoring this fact. Five discourses were identified in the debates concerning the declaration of climate emergency: The first one acknowledges that the younger generation will live longest with the effects of climate change, the second one focuses on young people's criticism of the older generation, the third one on the reactions to the protests by the older generation, and the fourth one on the older generation's hope in young generations. The fifth discourse claims that young people are not mature enough to participate in politics (Pickard, 2021).

In sum, similarities in the reception of climate activism among MPs in the UK and Germany can be recognized. Conservative MPs are rather reserved about young people's activism while parties leaning more to the left are more responsive to climate activists' messages and sometimes even support them. Still, a more detailed analysis of the discourses within parliaments that can lead to the implementation of policies in reaction to protests, is missing. Also, it has been shown that disruptive

protests are more likely to spark a debate that includes questions on the effectiveness and legitimization of more drastic protests, whereas previous research mainly focused on acceptance and responsiveness, putting less emphasis on a differentiation between legitimacy and legality of protest methods. This thesis therefore focuses on the tension between these aspects within the parliamentary discourses on disruptive climate protest.

4 Theoretical Framework

To analyze the debates among MPs, this thesis makes use of discourse theory. Discourse analyses have been conducted in various forms and diverse explanations of discourse exist, ranging from detailed, textual approaches to broader concept-definitions like those of Habermas or Foucault. In this thesis, discourse is understood as an overarching term including various concepts which structure the utterances made in a debate. More specifically, this thesis draws upon the constructivist understanding of a discourse by Foucault as well as Hajer as their argumentative approach to discourse analyses is perceived helpful in uncovering those mechanisms that lead to the definition of certain things as policy problems. This approach is elaborated on in the following chapter. The second part of this chapter is then dedicated to the concept of civil disobedience and its distinction from civil resistance, followed by a short introduction of the concept of polarization. Polarization is a relevant concept in the analysis of debates on disruptive climate activism as disruptive protests are inevitably polarizing (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020) and even less disruptive climate protests have been discredited as illegitimate (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020) which contributes to the polarization of the public, too.

4.1 Discourse Theory

Foucault's understanding of discourses is based on the social constructivist view that reality is not a given fact but constructed by social actors through their interpretations of actions. The world, in fact, is delivered to actors through language (Vogelpohl, 2018). Therefore, reality is constructed through different linguistic representations of it competing for attention (Hajer, 1997; Weber, 2013). Thus, political conflict arises due to an underlying struggle between (contradicting) problem definitions and the way in which these different interpretations of reality accept certain aspects as part of the problem and neglect others.

Hajer (1997) proposes a strong definition of discourse⁴ viewing it as a “specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (p.44). Discourses are therefore not to be confused with discussions; they are rather patterns which can be found in discussions. Following Hajer's definition, a discourse has to be interpreted in the context of the social practices in

⁴ For a differentiation between strong and weak discourse definitions see Vogelpohl, 2018.

which it is created (Hajer, 1997). This definition underlines that discourses include several aspects on different levels. Several elements can be combined to a storyline which can be understood as a symbolic reference to these elements. Mentioning one of the elements contained in a storyline leads to reinvocation of the whole storyline it is part of. Several storylines together create a narrative which is uttered in a debate in a condensed form (Hajer, 2006). Therefore, the storylines within one discourse do not necessarily have to appear fully coherent for those not adhering to it, although it appears coherent to those adhering to this discourse (Hajer, 1997).

Storylines are powerful elements in the formation of discourses. They combine different issues and create symbolic references based on the assumption that a common understanding of these metaphors is possible. Thus, storylines reduce the complexity of issues. By including different domains and aspects, they prevent fragmentation of discourses and allow for some stability in the debate. “Storylines are devices through which actors are positioned, and through which specific ideas of ‘blame’ and ‘responsibility’, and of ‘urgency’ and ‘responsible behaviour’ are attributed” (Hajer, 1997, p. 65).

Discourses have constraining and enabling functions, as Hajer (1997) describes, developing Foucault’s idea further. They are constraining in implying certain rules, only allowing certain people to participate and, through the exclusion of some issues, preventing certain aspects of the discourse from being mentioned (Hajer, 1997). However, due to discourses’ reduction of complexity, some parts of previously included meanings will ‘get lost’ leaving room for interpretation for the recipients of discourse elements. This enables the creation of new discursive spaces within which problems can be discussed (Hajer, 2004). Furthermore, discourses offer an interpretive lens to subjects allowing them to make sense of the world around them. During the confrontation with certain discourses, these might even appear as “natural” due to a lack of the presentation of alternatives. Therefore, subjects’ interests are heavily influenced by this interpretive lens and can be changed or even created through certain discourses a subject is confronted with (Hajer, 1997). Taking this assumption further, Hajer (1997) claims that discourses influence the production of knowledge when they are accepted as the natural lens through which reality is interpreted.

A debate employs storylines to convince others and criticize those offering alternatives (Hajer, 2006). Alternative descriptions of reality always exist (Vogelpohl, 2018) although not being apparent to those accepting one discourse as their interpretive lens. Public discourse as a special form of discourse is an area in which political meaning is exchanged and debated (Woodly, 2015). In the political realm, a struggle for hegemony of discourses takes place in which actors try to win support for their own definition of reality and the problems it proposes (Vogelpohl, 2018). This struggle is enacted through bargaining and arguing (Prittwitz, 2007). Hajer (2004) therefore describes politics as a “struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their definition of reality” (p. 59). This does not only entail problem definitions but also the positioning of other actors (Hajer, 1997). In the tradition of critical discourse analysis and the discourse theory proposed by Laclau and Mouffe, the

struggle for hegemony rests on propositions articulated by Gramsci (1991/2000 as in Keller, 2011). According to Gramsci's ideas, hegemony is characterized by power and opinion-leadership. This supremacy is temporary and arises due to precarious alliances in the struggle for hegemony (Keller, 2011). Credibility, acceptability, and trust influence the outcome of this struggle (Hajer, 2004).

In the context of this struggle for dominance, Hajer (1997, 2006) proposes a two-step model to identify the influence of discourses. He calls the first step "discourse structuration" and the second step "discourse institutionalization". Structuration occurs if one social unit employs this discourse to make sense of reality; institutionalization occurs if a discourse is sustained and "solidifies in particular institutional arrangements" (Hajer, 2006, p. 70). If both conditions are fulfilled, a discourse can be described as dominant.

To make sense of the mechanisms in political debates employing several different discourses, Hajer (2006) further proposes the idea of discourse coalitions. These form in (political) debates based on storylines. This idea is related to the assumptions by Gramsci (see above), and to the concept of discursive affinities which can exist between different storylines that interpret the world in similar veins. A discourse coalition includes "(1) a set of story-lines; (2) the actors who utter these story-lines; and (3) the practices in which the discursive activity is based" (Hajer, 1997, p. 65) over a certain time period. This coalition does not necessarily organize itself, it rather 'happens' to form and does not require partisanship or other forms of social arrangement. Still, the coalition is recognizable through its self-positioning and the demarcation vis-à-vis those that do not belong to that coalition (Prittwitz, 2007). The power of a discourse stems from its multi-interpretability allowing more people to be able to identify with this discursive lens (Hajer, 1997). This approach has the advantage of analyzing strategies used in the competition of discourses, exploring the interests' influence on certain discourses, and showing the way different actors reproduce or deconstruct a bias in discourses. Therefore, it focuses on discursive affinities among the actors involved (Hajer, 2006).

In the struggle for dominance, not only coalitions can form but also mechanisms of discursive obstruction can be employed. Shriver et al. (2013) describe discursive obstruction as a tool for shifting public opinion against (social) movements. This concept primarily focuses on the state elite and private actors in power aiming at sustaining their power using discourses. Therefore, they employ discursive obstruction, meaning they form an oppositional campaign and use different mechanisms such as distorting the message of movements and catering public fears or stigmatizing the social movement challenging their power.

Discourse analysis is therefore a suitable approach for studying social movements (Woodly, 2015). It is concerned with analyzing the discursive structure in a discussion, mapping the narratives and storylines employed. Thus, it can help understanding the mechanisms that lead to acceptance or rejection of social movements which rely on the perception of themselves by the public and authorities. A crucial aspect of success for social movements is therefore gaining political attention as well as the

dominance of discourses including a positive perception of themselves and sustaining this among the public and the authorities (Woodly, 2015).

Hence, the analysis builds on this theoretical framework. The mechanisms presented such as the struggle for hegemony as well as discourse coalitions inform the methodology for the analysis of the parliamentary debates on the more recent protests by groups such as *Extinction Rebellion*, *Just Stop Oil* or *Letzte Generation*.

4.2 Sensitizing concepts

This chapter introduces the concept of civil disobedience which is expected to impact the course of the political debates on the forms of climate activism between January 2022 and June 2023. Recent disruptive climate activism includes methods like street blockades which have frequently been classified as civil disobedience – or activists claim to make use of civil disobedience themselves (Extinction Rebellion, n.d.; Kiesewetter, 2022; “Ziviler Ungehorsam Im Klimaaktivismus,” 2023), even though *Just Stop Oil* and *Letzte Generation* characterize their protest as civil resistance. This chapter shows that especially the definition of civil disobedience is one that might spark discussions among politicians and the public alike.

4.2.1 Civil disobedience

Civil disobedience is a non-institutionalized form of political participation. Exact definitions of civil disobedience vary from broad descriptions to detailed sets of aspects that have to be given in order for protest acts to be classified as civil disobedience (Pabst, 2012). One very broad definition was proposed by Howard Zinn (1968), describing civil disobedience as consciously neglecting laws to achieve urgent change on behalf of civil rights. Jürgen Habermas (1985), on the contrary, defines civil disobedience as

morally justified protest, which may not only be based on private beliefs or one’s own interests; it is a public act, which is usually announced and can be foreseen by the police in its course; it includes the deliberate violation of individual legal norms without affecting obedience to the legal order as a whole; it requires the willingness to take responsibility for the legal consequences of the violation of the law; the violation of rules [...] has only symbolic character – this already results in a limitation of non-violent means of protest (p. 100).

This definition underlines the act of disregarding legal norms which leaves room for discussions on the legitimacy of protests employing civil disobedience. Governments have used this definition to frame certain protest forms in a positive light while portraying others poorly (Celikates, 2016). Especially in the context of disruptive protests, protesters risk triggering negative feedback which could lead to the reinforcement of the status quo (Engler & Engler, 2017). Welchmann (2022) defines civil disobedience more broadly as an illegal activity which aims at gaining attention to correct policies and practices that are perceived as wrong. She differentiates civil disobedience from legal protest, self-

interested criminality, conscientious objection, radical and revolutionary action, as well as terrorism. Especially radical and revolutionary action comes close to civil disobedience yet varies in scope of the protest actions undertaken and the perceived illegitimacy of the rules and orders they are subject to (Welchmann, 2022).

Concerning the wider debate on legitimacy of civil disobedience, Habermas (1985) views the context of a democracy and its constitution itself as a possible legitimization of civil disobedience. In a democracy with rule of law including a system of checks and balances, errors in the actions of one of the state powers is foreseen. Consequently, legal norms created by a government can also be illegitimate. Then, civil disobedience can be deemed legitimate to reveal this error of illegitimacy (Habermas, 1985; Schock, 2015). This is based on the idea that those protesting have in most cases less power but experience the illegitimacy of certain norms first. Civil disobedience can be one of the last tools of the society to express their needs. Therefore, Habermas (1985) proposes that civil society is mature and responsible and can – under exceptional circumstances – act morally against a legal norm to maintain or recreate legitimacy of a democratically elected government. Yet, Habermas (1985) highlights that protesters need to review the legitimacy of their actions beforehand. In turn, the state must act in respect of the protesters and their goals when questions on sanctioning civil disobedience arise. He calls for restraint on both sides including protesters choosing the protest form wisely and the state not necessarily exhausting all sanctioning measures available. Rawls and Dworkin propose a modified sanctioning of civil disobedience by the authorities which considers the protesters’ goal of correcting illegitimate laws (Habermas, 1985). In reviewing the legitimacy of their own actions, activists must weigh the seriousness of the perceived wrongs they hope to change against the harms they might cause with their protest and consider what would happen if change of the status quo was delayed. Furthermore, activists should estimate the likelihood of benefits of the protests to justify their protest actions (Welchmann, 2022).

Justification of civil disobedience can also follow from its acts being conducted in the public sphere. As social movements are lacking the legitimacy of representing the people, they must justify their acts towards the public and hint at the malicious implications of the norm(s) they are protesting against as otherwise the protests might not only be ineffective but even socially divisive and harmful (Welchmann, 2022). “The publicness of CD [civil disobedience] acts is used as confrontational form of discursive power in order to achieve influence” (Scherhauser et al., 2021, p. 4), and therefore, shocking actions can be justified, too (Scherhauser et al., 2021).

Yet, it is especially the tension between moral justification of disobedient acts and their illegal character that leads to political and public discussions. Frequent media articles have shown that this also holds true for the case of *Just Stop Oil* and *Letzte Generation* (“Just Stop Oil: What Is It and What Does It Want?,” 2023; Sommerlad, 2023; Thome, 2022). In these discussions, the notion of non-violence as introduced by Habermas (1985) is a further point of debate, as breaking laws might also be interpreted as violence. For example, there is the question if vandalism is considered an act of violence (Pabst,

2012). Also, non-violence does not mean that no coercion is exerted (Schock, 2003). Therefore, the current public debate includes questions like “Does violence include throwing soup at glass-protected paintings? Can one speak of violence when activists force people to stop their cars?”. Welchman (2022) arrives at the conclusion that “[w]hatever its form, civil disobedience is always controversial” (p. 784). Berglund and Schmidt (2020) even characterize civil disobedience and disruptive protest as inevitably polarizing. However, peaceful protests have the potential to be accepted more widely than violent protests (Zlobina & Gonzalez Vazquez, 2018).

Another factor that might trigger discussions on legitimacy and legality of disruptive protests is the classification of recent disruptive protests as civil resistance. While *Just Stop Oil* describes resistance as another level of escalation, *Letzte Generation* does not make a distinction from civil disobedience (Just Stop Oil, n.d.–b; Letzte Generation, 2023c). In the academic literature, some authors also do not make a clear distinction between civil resistance and disobedience but use resistance as an overarching term including disobedience (e.g., Ballestrem, 2013; Randle, 1994; Vinthagen, 2015), while others view resistance as aiming for more direct (Eberl, 1994) or larger change of a system (Gillner, 2017). Yet, Berglund and Schmidt (2020) argue that the US-centered civil resistance literature is not apt to climate activism in every European country. Therefore, and due to the inconsistency of definitions, this thesis focuses only on civil disobedience.

4.2.2 Disruptive Climate Protests as Civil Disobedience

Although previous research coined some methods employed by *Just Stop Oil* and *Letzte Generation* as civil disobedience (Kiesewetter, 2022), not all acts of *Extinction Rebellion*, *Just Stop Oil* and *Letzte Generation* can be classified as this, following the above-stated definition. Classifying the throwing of soup at paintings in museums as civil disobedience, for example, can be debated. This is on the one hand due to the definition of ‘the public’. Museums are not necessarily part of the public space and protests were not announced, yet one criterion of civil disobedience is that it takes place in public and that, usually, the protests’ course can be foreseen. Furthermore, throwing soup at paintings can be viewed as violence against things, whereas both disobedience and resistance definitions only entail non-violent acts. Yet, protesters only threw soup at paintings that were protected by glass. Distributing food saved from trash cans of supermarkets, however, can be viewed as civil disobedience. To save food, activists violate legal norms. The distribution takes place in public and does not include violence. Also, blocking streets can be viewed as civil disobedience, as Kiesewetter (2022) and Botta (2023) argue, although Habermas defines civil disobedience as only having symbolic character while street blockades can in some ways be perceived as a direct intervention into a mobility system that is also contributing to climate change. However, they argue that climate activists employ street blockades as symbolic measures aiming for larger changes. Pfahl-Traughberg (2023), on the contrary, sees no connection between street blockades or throwing soup at paintings and climate protection or the persuasion of the public. Therefore, he views the protests as infringing an important principle of civil disobedience.

Nevertheless, Kiesewetter (2022) views the protests as justified, following three criteria that protesters need to consider in terms of justification of their actions, according to Rawls. Protests need to address clear injustices; legal correction mechanisms need to have failed and the non-conformity of the protests need not endanger the constitution of a country. Kiesewetter (2022) says that there is an intergenerational injustice as younger generations will be impacted unequally more by climate change than older generations who have contributed to climate change. They are also not able to participate in politics in the same way older people can. Furthermore, there is a global injustice in the contribution to climate change and the impact of its effects on people between the global north and the global south. As the recent IPCC (2023) report has shown, the measures taken by governments are not sufficient to efficiently combat climate change. Therefore, the second criterion is fulfilled, too. The protests are too small to endanger the constitution of the countries. Therefore, Kiesewetter (2022) argues that disruptive climate activism is justified.

Still, Botta (2023) argues that from a legal perspective the police are allowed to dissolve the street blockades by *Letzte Generation*. The constitutional court of Germany has ruled that street blockades are a form of coercion which is why protesters are liable to prosecution. Yet, employing a ban or using preventive detention of 30 days as happened in Bavaria is disproportionate, according to Botta (2023). Nevertheless, this legal perspective does not include the discussion on moral justification of civil disobedience. Civil disobedience also includes breaking legal norms and accepting the punishments. Activists have frequently shown that they accept being dragged away by the police while not employing any violence during their street blockades. Therefore, street blockades can be viewed as civil disobedience (Botta, 2023).

Yet, it can be expected that especially the tension between illegality and moral justification will spark discussions among politicians. Reasons for this might be that protests as such challenge those in power, the fact that mostly young people lead the climate activists' groups, or the problem of categorizing the protests, assessing their legality, and separating this question from their moral justification. As the literature review has shown, these are all aspects that are viewed differently by the various political actors and those criticized heavily by climate activists are more likely of trying to establish discourses doubting the justification as well as the effectiveness of the protests more generally. The analysis will therefore show how legality, legitimacy and effectiveness of the protests were discussed and why the specific outcomes of debate were created.

4.3 Polarization

Due to the character of disruptive protests as (consciously) inviting negative responses, frequent debates in which discourses clash have been triggered. To some extent, this is the natural course of debates, yet Berglund and Schmidt (2020) suggest that these discussions inevitably lead to polarization. Therefore, this chapter provides a definition of the concept of polarization but also its counterpart the concept of convergence, so that possible signs of it can be identified in the analysis.

Polarization concerns “the extent to which opinions are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum” (DiMaggio et al., 1996, p. 693). Political scientists most commonly speak of political polarization in terms of extreme position-poles being strong among political parties. Social scientists rather emphasize divisions among the society (Neubaum, 2020). While political polarization among parties is to some extent inherent in a democracy as the parties compete for votes and want to distinguish themselves from each other (O'Donohue & Carothers, 2020), a severe polarization could lead to democratic backsliding (Somer & McCoy, 2018). Within research, two main dimensions of political polarization are considered: ideological or issue polarization and affective polarization. Issue polarization refers to the opinions on one certain issue being or moving to the extreme (Neubaum, 2020). Affective polarization concerns group dynamics (Harteveld et al., 2022). It entails group identities according to which one's own group is viewed as more sympathetic while developing hostility towards a different political group, the outgroup, including a strong rejection of everything coming from it (Neubaum, 2020). Especially affective polarization might pose a problem for democracy (Schmid et al., 2023). According to the two-stage model of affective polarization, Schmid et al. (2023) propose that this type of polarization does not only include hostility towards outgroups but also political intolerance which is an aspect of anti-pluralism, too (Treib et al., 2022). Political intolerance affects the possibility of compromises in a democratic political process by viewing the outgroup as being wrong, inferior, illegitimate, or using illogical arguments (Schmid et al., 2023).

Although a polarizing effect of disruptive protests on parliamentary debates is expected, its counterpart “convergence” shall not be overlooked. In the context of cross-country policy analysis, Kerr (1983) describes convergence as “the tendency of societies to grow more alike” (p. 3). Transferring this idea to discourse analysis, convergence is the process of discourses moving closer together. Aukes et al. (2018) describe frame-convergent framing moves as mechanisms within a debate that include frame elements being taken over by the respective other actor within a debate. This can be transferred to discourse analysis as the tendency of the discourses moving closer together through elements of one discourse being taken over by another.

Taking all parts of the theoretical framework together, the analysis explores the discursive structure of the parliamentary debates focusing on the perception of the disruptive protests. Building upon the localization of disruptive protests within civil disobedience, the analysis will specifically consider how politicians discuss the legality and legitimacy of the protests. Thereby, their position within the parliament and towards the activists will be analyzed. Furthermore, identifying discourse coalitions will help not only to detect strong discourses but also to recognize hints at polarization of the debate. It can also be expected that especially the discussion on (il)legitimacy of the protests might entail signs of polarization of the debate if the protests are deemed illegitimate.

5 Methodology

By employing the concept of discourse, a discourse analysis is conducted. This approach is suitable to analyze parliamentary debates on disruptive climate protests because it examines argumentative structures within debates (Hajer, 2006). It further offers the opportunity to better understand politics in general but also the process of political change as it focuses on a change in meanings and interpretations of events and actions (Hajer, 2006; Woodly, 2015). Interpretive methodologies like discourse analyses aim at exploring reasons for a phenomenon (Haverland & Yanow, 2012) and therefore make use of semantic tools and place the utterances made within the respective social context (Vogelpohl, 2018; Woodly, 2015). Furthermore, the analysis aims at understanding how the parliamentary actors position themselves in the political debate and how they manage to reproduce their position to gain dominance in it (Hajer, 2002).

As the scope of this thesis is limited, this research focuses on the discourses in parliamentary debates between January 2022 and June 2023 on the recent disruptive climate protests in the UK and Germany. Parliaments have a high political relevance in democracies such as the UK and Germany. MPs represent the voices of their electorate and can be viewed as opinion leaders for the public and specifically the media, since media as an intermediate between politics and the public frequently focus on official sources like national politicians (Stansland, 2008).

More specifically, this thesis aims at finding reasons for the approaches to disruptive climate protests undertaken by the German and UK parliament by researching discursive phenomena in the debate on disruptive climate protests. These countries were selected as they followed different approaches in reaction to the protests: In the UK, harsher laws on disruptive protests were implemented while the German *Bundestag* could not agree on a similar approach. Furthermore, the language availabilities of the researcher influenced the selection.

5.1 Research Design

The research design is based on a combination of Hajer's proposal of an argumentative discourse analysis which focuses on the organization of interests uttered in a debate and the mechanisms of reproduction of specific opinions in combination with Keller's proposal of a discourse analysis based on a sociology of knowledge. This design follows propositions made by Vogelpohl (2018). The perspective of a sociology of knowledge allows to analyze the processes of communicative construction of reality and their consequences (e.g., law-creation). The interpretive approach then exposes the role of language and "allows one to see how a diversity of actors actively try to influence the definition of the problem" (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005, p. 177). Therefore, the analysis shall not only highlight what is being said but also the structure behind what is said and what is neglected in the debate. Focusing on the interpretations of meanings, practices, and their implications this research design is rather open, providing flexibility and openness (Haverland & Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2014). Therefore, this thesis

follows along a pre-defined methodological guideline displayed in Table 1 to ensure a systematic procedure which, however, can be broken up to allow going back and forth between the different steps so that the material can lead the way and possibly challenge the author's own pre-dispositions.

Table 1: Methodological approach combining ideas by Hajer and Keller

| <i>Step</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Purpose</i> | <i>Origin</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|--|-----------------|
| 1) Desk-Research | | Getting to know the field, establishing the setting | Hajer |
| 2) Document analysis | Open coding | identification of statements, grouping of statements, identification of elements of phenomenal structure | Vogelpohl, 2018 |
| 2.1) Formal & verbal structure | Noting of formal structure of an MP speech and rhetorical style using codes and memos | How is content presented? Contextualizing the statements, interpretation of their meanings | Keller, 2011 |
| 2.2) Position effects | Coding of self-positioning of speakers and positioning of others | Identification of discourse coalitions (this is also part of the interpretation) | Hajer |
| 2.3) Key events | Analysis of key events and description thereof | Better understanding of discourse dynamics by answering the question: Which events informed the debate? | Hajer |
| 3) Interpretation | | | |
| 3.1) Phenomenal structure | Combination of previously found elements to identify a broader structure | Identification of discourses/problem definitions and the implications thereof | Keller, 2011 |
| 3.2) Narrative analysis | Combination of statements to identify storylines | | Keller, 2011 |

Although Hajer proposes a ten-step approach including interviews at different points of the analysis, this thesis needs to deviate from this approach due to its limited scope. Hajer conducts interviews at the beginning to identify important realms in which discourses can be found, and later to analyze the understanding of certain events by the actors themselves as well as to double-check the own findings. Yet, the setting in this thesis had to be narrowed down beforehand so that conducting establishing interviews was not deemed necessary anymore. Also, further interviews to gather more data on the understanding of protest actions by MPs could not be conducted due to the limited scope. However, the analysis follows the above-explained scheme closely and uses as many parliamentary debates as possible to achieve reliable data.

In total, eleven parliamentary debates between January 2022 and June 2023 were selected for the analysis⁵. This time period covers the beginning of *Just Stop Oil* as well as the beginning of frequent street blockades by *Letzte Generation* until the implementation of the Public Order Act and the amendment of the Public Order Act of 1986 in the UK. Four German parliamentary debates were selected via a keyword search with the help of the tool “Open Parliament TV”⁶ for “Letzte Generation” within parliamentary debates in Germany in 2022 and 2023. All results of this search were chosen for the analysis. The search tool for the parliamentary debates in the UK unfortunately did not allow to search all debates’ texts by keywords. Only the titles could be searched. Therefore, UK debates were selected via the search for the term “Public Order” within 2022 and 2023 in the House of Commons via the tool “Hansard”⁷. All debates in the Commons Chamber of the House of Commons were chosen for the analysis. The search term Public Order was chosen since the Public Order Act 2023 as well as amendments to the Public Order Act of 1986 were partially concluded in reaction to the disruptive protests by climate activist groups such as *Extinction Rebellion* or *Just Stop Oil*.

5.2 Data Analysis

All debates were analyzed using the coding software Atlas.ti. First, the German parliamentary debates were analyzed as a set followed by the British debates to develop codes that were adapted to each of the two sets. Inductive coding techniques were used. The aspects coded focused on descriptions and acceptance of the disruptive climate protests, the protesters themselves, the position of speakers on climate change, key events that informed the debate, and position effects. In the set of the British debates, further codes concerning the proposals were created. Furthermore, the rhetorical style used, and the partisanship of speakers was coded as well as if statements were made as an interjection within a speech. In a third step, the coded parts were read another time to break the codes up into smaller parts if

⁵ A list of the analyzed debates can be found in Appendix I.

⁶ <https://de.openparliament.tv>

⁷ <https://hansard.parliament.uk>

necessary, so that a more detailed analysis was possible⁸. The coded parts were then analyzed by reviewing co-occurrences and all those codes that were activated within the same speech or close to each other which was analyzed with the help of the query tool. A fine-grained analysis focusing on two speeches per party⁹ was conducted to help identifying codes that were close to each other. Grouping the codes according to storylines they presented and according to the phenomenal structure was then possible so that discourses could be identified. To confirm before-found relations between codes, short profiles of each party were created entailing all aspects of the phenomenal structure of a discourse (Keller, 2011) such as the problem definition, reasons for the problem, solutions, responsibilities as well as the position of oneself and others within the debate. In addition, the parties' opinion on climate change was included in these profiles¹⁰. Building upon these analytical steps, networks were created displaying the relations between codes with each network being translated into a description of the respective discourse. Thereby, seven discourses were found which are elaborated upon in the following chapter. The subsequent discussion of the results also compares the discourses intra- and internationally. Although generalization as in positivist research is not the goal of an interpretive analysis, a comparison of different settings of the same debate is not only possible but also "inherent and constant" (Yanow, 2014, p. 147).

6 Empirical Analysis

German and British MPs have discussed the disruptive protests by climate activists quite frequently in parliament. However, the content and the outcome of the debates differ largely. Therefore, the discourses that were identified are presented in the following chapter. To contextualize the results, the setting of the parliamentary debates is introduced shortly. Then, the results concerning the debates in the German parliament are presented, followed by the results concerning the debates in the British House of Commons.

6.1 Setting description

Although the countries selected for the analysis are geographically close, the systems of parliament function differently. Whereas the German *Bundestag* consists of many parties that form either government parties or the opposition, the British *House of Commons* focuses much more on two parties, the Labour and the Conservative Party. Furthermore, there are different parliamentary rules which make it worthwhile comparing the discourses raised in these two countries. These parliamentary rules influence who can speak on the floor of a parliament and thereby regulate the debate itself. In their

⁸ The final codebooks for each set of debates can be found in Appendix II.

⁹ The first speech on behalf of each party was selected from the first debate and the latest debate.

¹⁰ The profiles can be found in Appendix III.

study, Proksch and Slapin (2015) classify the UK system as ‘single-member district plurality system’ in which MPs can access the floor individually not depending on a party list and in which uttering dissent with the party line is more frequent. Still, those holding higher positions such as ministers or shadow ministers hold many more speeches than backbenchers (Blumenau & Damiani, 2021). British MPs also tend to focus on their constituency during their speeches (Blumenau & Damiani, 2021; Killermann & Proksch, 2013). This constituency-focus especially seems to hold true for government MPs and tends to increase for example when the economy declines (Killermann & Proksch, 2013) just as it is happening due to the high inflation at the moment. This might lead to more deviation among the MPs’ positions within the debate if Backbenchers are allowed to speak, too. Yet, it can be expected that more speeches will be held by ministers and shadow ministers bringing the party line to the front.

The German system is organized much more based on party lists and can be classified as ‘mixed-member system’ with closed party lists. Therefore, party-ideology and position on party lists are more important for speakers trying to access the parliament floor in Germany, which is why uttering dissent with the party line in parliamentary speeches is less likely (Proksch & Slapin, 2015). Those holding an important position within the parliament or in the government and those who are rather new to the parliament are more likely to vote along the party line, whereas those who have been in parliament for a long time or know they do not want to gain any further important positions anymore do not always vote along the party line (Mai et al., 2023). German MPs also consider their districts and the respective local needs (Debus & Bäck, 2014). When it comes to ethically problematic questions in parliament, MPs will consider the wishes of their district electorate alongside the party line and their religious confession to make a decision (Mai et al., 2023). Still, Debus and Bäck (2014) expect that majoritarian electoral systems as used in the UK also foster responsiveness by MPs towards their local districts. Yet, when focusing only on the government, Binzer Hobolt and Klemmensen (2005) give a cautious indication that (rhetorical) responsiveness is lower in the majoritarian system of the UK.

Considering these different contexts of parliamentary rules which impact the course of the debates, the results of the discourse analysis are presented in the following. The subsequent discussion of these results will take the findings of this section into account.

6.2 The debate in Germany

In Germany, the parliament discussed disruptive climate protests four times in the selected time period. In three cases, motions by AfD and CDU/CSU were triggers of the debates. The AfD drafted a motion to ban *Letzte Generation* while CDU/CSU pledged for harsher laws in reaction to the disruptive climate protests. Although the topics of the debates differ, the analysis reveals that the way disruptive climate protests were discussed was largely the same across all debates. In particular, the street blockade at the end of October 2022 in Berlin close to which a cyclist died after having been run over by a concrete mixer was part of the debates. Also, other cases of firefighters or ambulances being caught up in traffic

jams in relation to the protests were raised. Those stressing climate change as the cause of the disruptive protests further mentioned wildfires or draughts.

Four different discourses were identified that co-exist within the parliamentary debates and that are probably part of the explanation why no harsher measures in reaction to the protests have been implemented on a national level in Germany until September 2023. These four discourses differ in their acceptance of the protesters, their methods, and the proposed reaction to the disruptive protests. During the analysis, it soon became clear that the different discourses can be associated with the parties, following their orientation within the political spectrum along the right-left dimension.

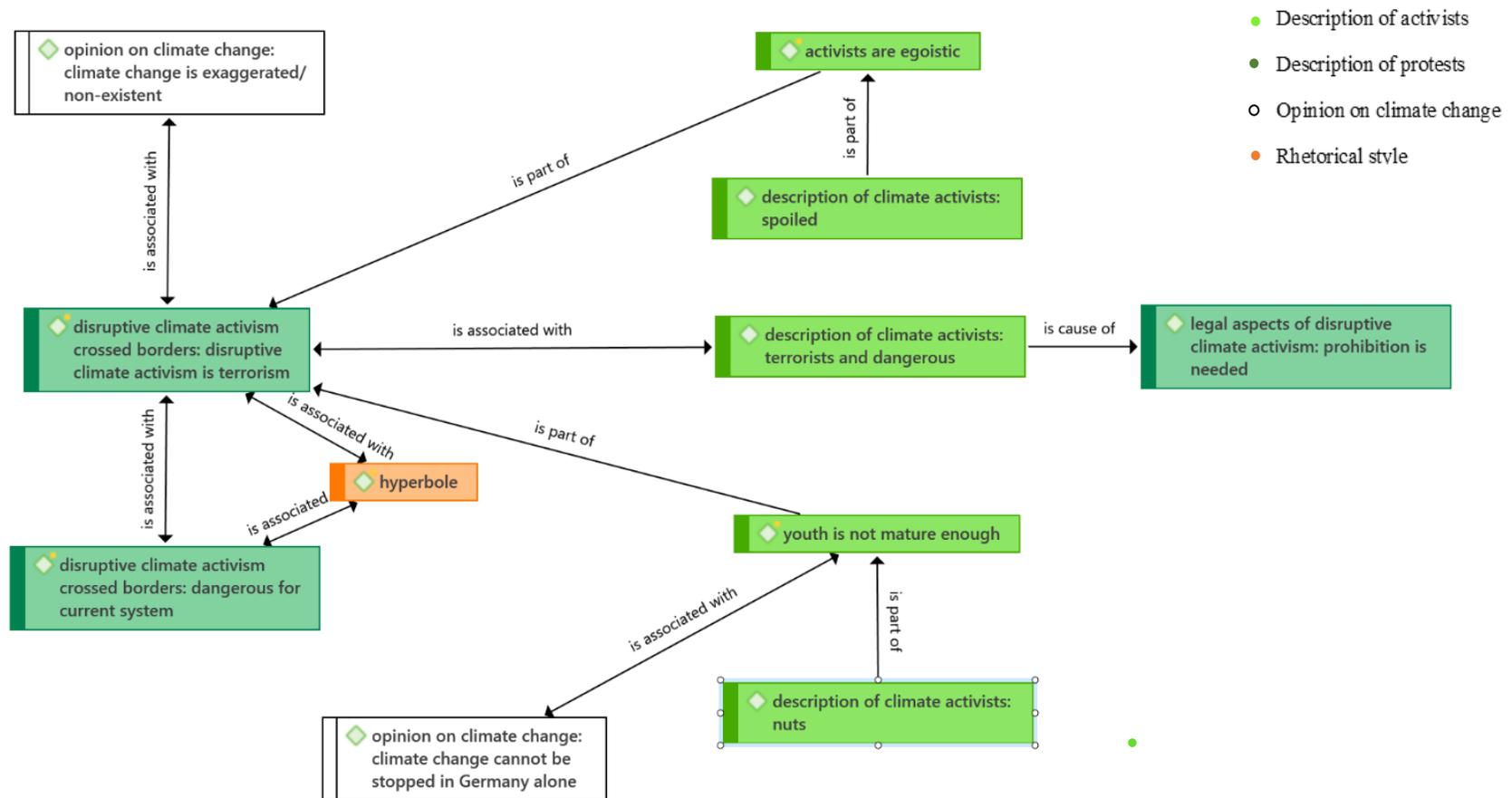


Figure 1: Code relations within the discourse "Selfish terrorists conduct so-called activism".¹¹

¹¹ The colors relate to the code-groups created during the analysis for a better overview. These colors were defined for all debates in the German parliament and are the same for all discourses in chapter 6.1.

One discourse can be summarized as: “**Selfish terrorists conduct so-called activism**” (Figure 1). This discourse strongly rejects disruptive protest methods. As figure 1 shows, this entails the narrative that participants in disruptive protests are immature and only care about their own interests, irrespective of their activities’ impact on others. Therefore, activists are described as stupid, and their activities are not viewed as “real” activism but only as something that claims to be that. Accordingly, the protesters’ main aim is to gain attention for themselves or simply to disrupt. Therefore, those following this discourse cannot accept the protests as serving the greater cause of climate change but tend to describe them as terrorism. The strong rejection of these protests comes along with the opinion that human-induced climate change is at least not as bad as protesters claim or non-existent at all. Since climate change is an issue, whose effects are exaggerated by many and which cannot be solved in Germany alone because other countries like China have higher emissions, it does not make sense to accept disruptive protests as legitimate. They are therefore deemed inappropriate. The perspective of disruptive protest as criminal action with the sole purpose of disturbing the public also entails a comparison to the actions conducted by the terrorist group RAF which ended with murders. This comparison to terrorist activities describes disruptive protest as a threat for democracy and the rule of law. Therefore, those following this discourse claim that disruptive climate protest needs to be banned to maintain the current system and save the public.

AfD and, partially, CSU MPs structure their speeches within the parliamentary debates on disruptive climate activism following this first described discourse. Especially the speeches of AfD MPs can clearly be attributed to this discourse. They emotionalize the debate by opposing ‘spoiled activists’ with ‘hard-working people not being able to get to work’. During speeches of others, they regularly make interjections aimed at “correcting” others’ descriptions of the activists. AfD MPs iterate populist opinions and state that the established parties are to blame for the “escalation” of the protests due to “woke-ism and democracy-funding”. They further accuse Die Linke, SPD and Die Grünen for trivializing criminal protest. Especially the Greens are attacked in interjections made by AfD MPs using insults claiming that the party’s roots are to be found with the RAF, a terrorist group, or by describing them as the parliamentary arm of the ‘green RAF’ or even the ‘green RAF’ itself. Thereby, their contributions to the parliamentary debate are delegitimized. In some cases, SPD MPs are further described as stupid. Even though CDU and CSU are part of the established parties too, AfD MPs accept them as closest to their own positions and call them to vote along for the ban of *Letzte Generation*. Although CSU MPs identify climate change as a central task, parts of their positions can be aligned with the same discourse. For example, speakers of the CSU criticize that the disruptive protests are not happening where the most emissions are produced without further specifying where that would be. Furthermore, they fear that those participating in disruptive protests will radicalize towards terrorists and that a ‘green RAF’ could develop since protesters’ methods are described as already close to terrorist activities. A CSU speaker further makes use of emotionalization by describing the protests as potentially traumatizing in the case of a protester who is glued to the streets being accidentally hit by a car. In opposition to this, the police are described as having a tough life and now being further burdened by difficult decisions due to the protests.

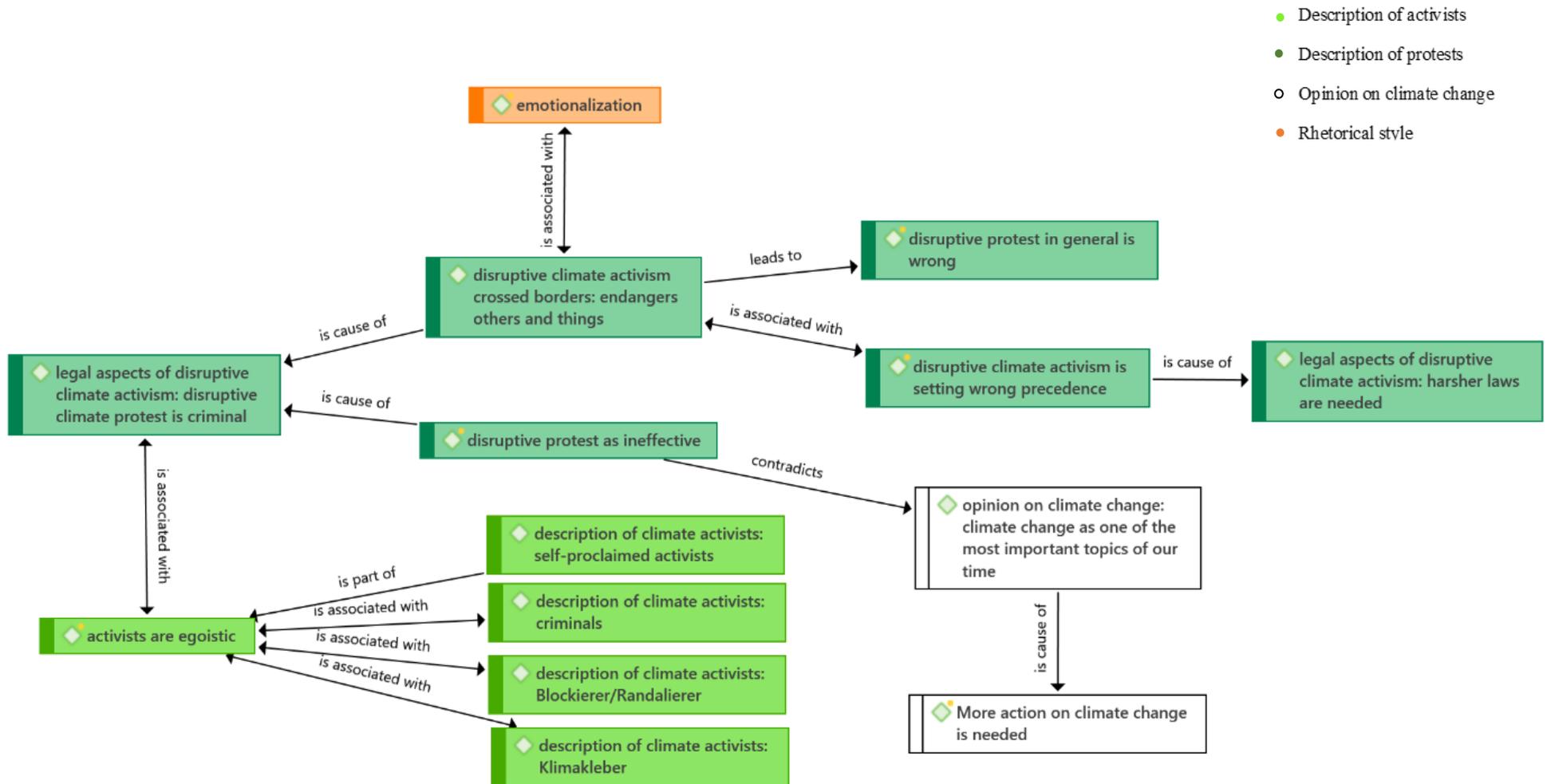


Figure 2: Code relations within the discourse "Reckless activists conduct so-called activism".

Similarly, the discourse “**Reckless activists conduct so-called activism**” does not accept disruptive protests as legitimate either (Figure 2). Again, participants in disruptive climate protests are described as egoistic, serving their own interests rather than a greater cause and having proclaimed themselves as activists although they actually should be perceived as criminals and disruptors. Some following this discourse also call those blocking streets “Klimakleber”, thereby rejecting the idea that these people are legitimate protesters. Instead, they describe them as fanatically sticking to their own ideas without considering their impact on others. As figure 2 shows, this narrative of egoistic activists is associated with a focus on the illegality of the disruptive protests. Yet, instead of comparing disruptive protests to terrorism as the previously described discourse does, those following this discourse employ the narrative of disruptive protest as wrong including the storyline that these protests are dangerous to people and infrastructure. They also see the risk of protesters setting an example for others which, especially when being conducted by the extreme right, could end in dangerous activities. Therefore, they think that harsher laws are needed to prevent disruptive protest so that others cannot misuse these methods while labeling their activities as necessary or serving a greater cause. Climate change is barely touched upon, but in case it is mentioned climate change is called an important topic. However, as climate protection needs societal support the protest methods are described as counterproductive, potentially decreasing this support.

Especially CDU members follow this discourse, but also some positions of CSU and FDP members can be aligned with the discourse “Reckless activists conduct so-called activism”. Especially FDP members enumerate and stress the impacts on working people, children trying to get to school and nurses being on their way to patients. Members of all three parties describe the protests and activists very similarly, but the solutions proposed differ. FDP MPs claim to have a sober perspective on the protests, neither trivializing nor panicking and believe that public institutions such as the police and courts are equipped well enough to deal with the protests. Thereby, they partially express different opinions than their partners in government, the SPD and Die Grünen. CDU and CSU members, on the contrary, call for harsher rules and blame the current government for trivializing the protests and not reacting to them appropriately. They also accuse some media of trivializing the protests. At least one CDU member also calls for an examination of the possibility of a ban of *Letzte Generation* to prevent further escalation and to hinder others from taking this group as an example for their protests which is close to the AfD position. However, CDU members rhetorically distance themselves from the AfD and describe their position as problematic. In support of the CDU position of left parties trivializing crimes committed by activists, a CDU speaker quotes the numbers of crimes committed by the political left according to the latest federal Criminal Police Office’s report. FDP MPs further claim that AfD MPs only want to ban protests from the left due to their ideology and not because of the methods used, while the CDU and CSU are criticized for always calling for harsher laws disregarding of the context. All parties at least partially following this discourse identify climate change as a central issue, yet all of them claim to have found better ways for climate protection than those the protesters demand. CDU members claim that letting the nuclear power plants run for a longer time would have been a good idea in the fight against climate change. FDP MPs instead call for de-carbonization yet rejecting de-industrialization of the country.

Those following the discourse “**Disruptive protest crossed boundaries but serves a greater cause**” emphasize the need for more climate protection as the cause of disruptive protest (Figure 3). The main argument is that the reasons for the protest are legitimate because climate change is one of the most important topics of today’s time as it is posing an existential threat. However, the methods climate activists employ such as throwing soup at paintings or gluing oneself to the streets are rejected and described as reprehensible and crossing boundaries. Figure 3 illustrates that since those following this discourse recognize the right to protest as necessary for democracies, they do not want to ban disruptive protest or react to it with harsher laws, but instead accept the protesters as activists. Descriptions of protesters as extremists or terrorists are clearly rejected within this discourse. Still, they deem disruptive protest to be ineffective because they are of the opinion that the society needs to be convinced of the need for more action on climate change. They fear that less people will support climate protection measures if activists conduct these forms of protest.

Although governing together with the FDP, SPD MPs and in debates in 2023 MPs of Die Grünen follow the above-outlined discourse and identify the use of illegal methods as the problem of disruptive protest. Due to their fear that these could decrease support for action on climate change, the MPs call on activists to join parties to influence the political process more effectively or to at least employ legal protest methods. However, they also recognize the responsibility of the governing coalition to do more about climate change. While SPD MPs highlight that everyone needs to do their part in the fight against climate change, members of Die Grünen call for a mobility transition and investing in renewables next to highlighting that therefore political and societal majorities are needed. The proposals by CDU/CSU and the AfD calling for harsher laws or a ban are clearly rejected by both parties. The Greens compare the proposals to laws used in cases of sexual abuse of wards, thereby describing them as an overreaction. Die Grünen and SPD MPs view some of the current methods as already illegal by employing acts which constitute offences of damage to property or coercion. This means that the police already have tools available to deal with protesters who have crossed boundaries. Especially the AfD is accused of being against democracy and the rule of law. They are further blamed for claiming that human-induced climate change does not exist. Green and SPD MPs also insult or make fun of AfD members calling them for example too stupid to understand speeches by other MPs, and they criticize CDU/CSU for having blocked climate protection policies and expressing populist ideas, too. Thereby, SPD and Die Grünen MPs present themselves as the ones holding a balanced opinion on the disruptive protests, neither panicking nor glorifying the protests. To support their opinion, they quote the head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution stating that protesters of *Letzte Generation* are no extremists.

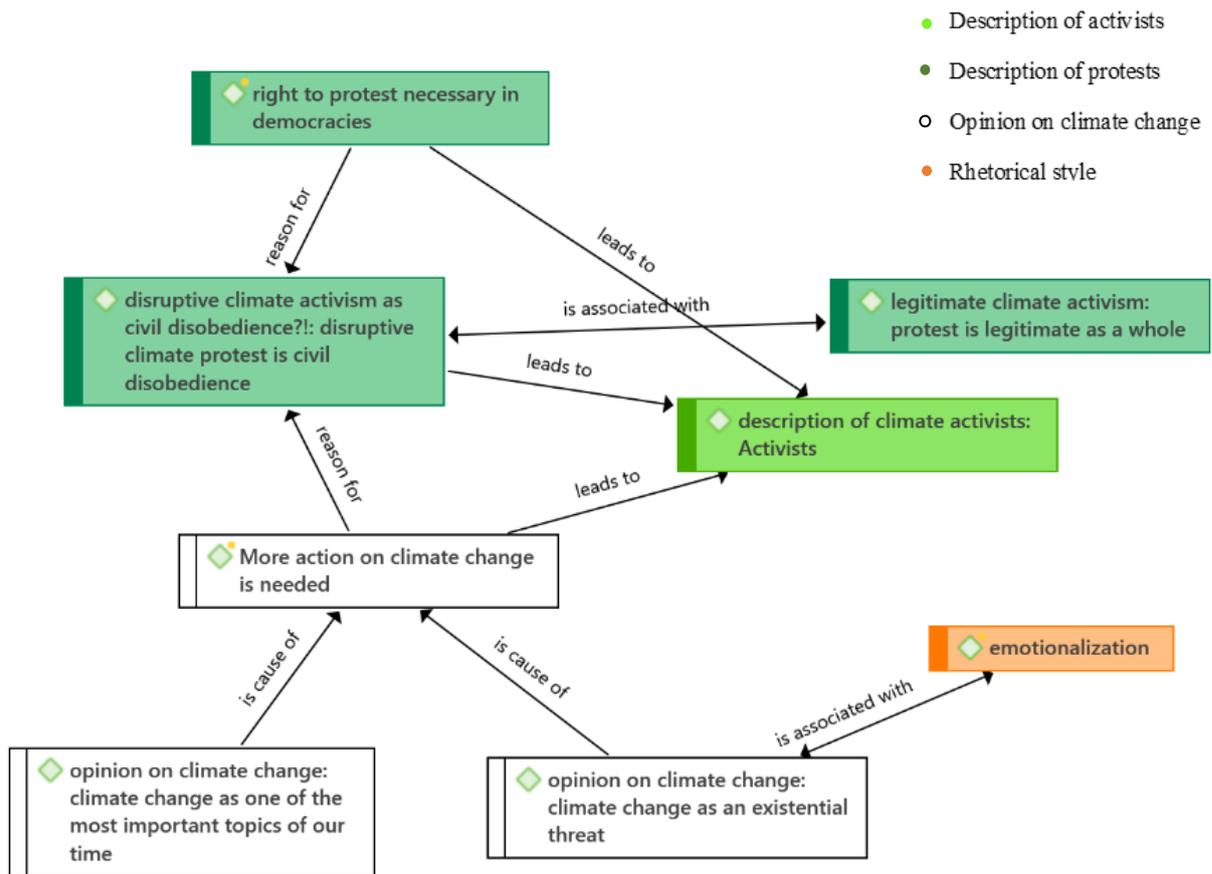


Figure 4: Code relations within the discourse "Disruptive protest is civil disobedience."

Those following the fourth discourse **“Disruptive protest is civil disobedience”** are the only group within the German parliament fully accepting disruptive protest as legitimate because it aims at raising attention for the issue of climate change (Figure 4). They view climate change as an existential threat therefore being one of the most important topics of our time. Following the definition of civil disobedience by Habermas, climate activists conducting disruptive but non-violent protest are therefore accepted as activists and said to be correct, as figure 4 shows. This discourse joins the protesters in criticizing that not enough has been done against climate change by the government and companies. Therefore, it is stressed that these protests should not be reacted to with harsher laws or a ban but rather with more action on climate change such as taxation of pollution.

Members of Die Linke follow the discourse described above. They regard the whole debate as unnecessary because they view disruptive protest as peaceful and fighting for a greater cause. As they classify the recent street blockades as civil disobedience Die Linke MPs criticize others for making disproportionate references to terrorism and not listening to the protesters properly. Thereby, they identify themselves as the only ones listening to the protesters’ calls for more climate protection. Die Linke suggests that more climate protection would stop the protests. They propose a reformation of the current economic system and making polluters pay since especially the rich are identified as those contributing most to climate change. They call on the government to create more climate protection policies and live up to their own ambitions, especially since climate change is not only impacting the Global South but has

become an existential threat to all countries. By stating that climate change is a death sentence, they use an emotional allegory to describe the impacts of climate change. Die Linke first and foremost criticize CDU/CSU for criminalizing people from the left and holding double standards when proposing harsher laws in reaction to climate activism but not in other cases. Furthermore, AfD and CDU/CSU members are blamed for rhetorical escalation of the debate.

6.3 The debate in the United Kingdom

In the UK, six debates related to the Public Order Act 2023 with one being held during opposition day based on a motion by the Scottish National Party (SNP) were analyzed. The seventh debate was called by the Secretary of State for the Home Department proposing amendments concerning regulations on serious disruption. The analysis confirms that these debates included discussions on the disruptive protests of climate activists. Among others, the protests blocking M25, blocking oil terminals in South Essex, throwing soup at paintings in the National Gallery or climbing up the Tower Bridge were discussed. Sometimes, MPs also referred to the slow marches that were organized around London in 2023. Interestingly, British MPs quite frequently mention their constituencies, the constituents' experiences, and their alleged expectations.

Across the seven debates, three discourses can be identified with two of them showing strong similarities which can probably point to an explanation for the consensus on harsher measures in reaction to the disruptive protests. Among the parties participating actively in these debates in the British House of Commons, most parties condemn the disruptive protests. Yet, several other factors like the government-opposition constellation must be considered, too. The discourses were identified by focusing on the acceptance of the protesters, their methods, the proposed reaction to the disruptive protests and the proposed bill.

Similar to the discourse “Reckless activists conduct so-called activism” in the German debate, one discourse can be identified in the British debates that describes disruptive as having gone too far (Figure 5). It can therefore be described as follows: **“Protest is about disruption and needs to be stopped”**. Figure 5 highlights that those following this discourse focus on the negative aspects of disruptive protest and stress that it is reprehensible, dangerous, infringes other people’s rights “to go about their daily lives” and disrupts key infrastructure services. Especially the latter is described by enumerating all those things that were stopped by the activists: The delivery of fuel, the traffic on M25, and the traffic in London due to slow marches and a blockade of the Tower Bridge. Those following this discourse demand that disruptive protests need to be stopped, since climate change is not seen as grave enough to justify such protests. Additionally, they stress that the protests are dangerous and affect people who need to get to the hospital in emergencies or want to visit those dying. Claims like these emotionalize the debate. Therefore, personal experiences with disruptive protests are mentioned. The activists are not only called criminals and stupid but are also described as extremists or egoistic disruptors ignoring the rights of the rest of the public, sometimes delegitimizing them as protesters. In some cases, protesters are described as hypocrites contributing to even more emissions through creating traffic jams or having others fly in to join their protests. Still, the participants in street blockades are mostly referred to as protesters, while it is frequently stressed that these are a minority or individuals that are acting against the “law-abiding majority” opposing disruptive protests. Therefore, not only the police need to act more rigorously but also the government needs to react with harsher laws and granting the police more powers to prevent these protests in the first place so that the police can take care of more important topics and taxpayers’ money is not wasted. Thus, the proposed Public Order Bill is described as a balanced approach ensuring clarity for the implementation allowing legitimate protests without infringing on the majority’s right to go about their daily lives.

Most MPs speaking on behalf of the government, the Conservative Party and the DUP follow this discourse and strongly oppose disruptive climate protest. Yet, three Tory MPs can be identified as deviating from this party position. The other MPs of the Conservative Party and the DUP strongly reject the protests and regard harsher laws as justified. Tories furthermore stress that the Public Order Bill is not anti-democratic nor draconian. They call on the protesters to instead use other protest methods, make better use of the elections and write letters to MPs to make themselves heard without impacting the public. Conservative MPs also criticize members of the Labour Party and the SNP blaming them for supporting the minority while disregarding the rights of the majority. In some cases, Conservative MPs make fun of the Labour Party and their arguments. DUP members furthermore blame opposition parties for being hypocritical when calling for a ban on protests within certain range around abortion clinics but vehemently opposing the Public Order Bill in reaction to disruptive climate protest.

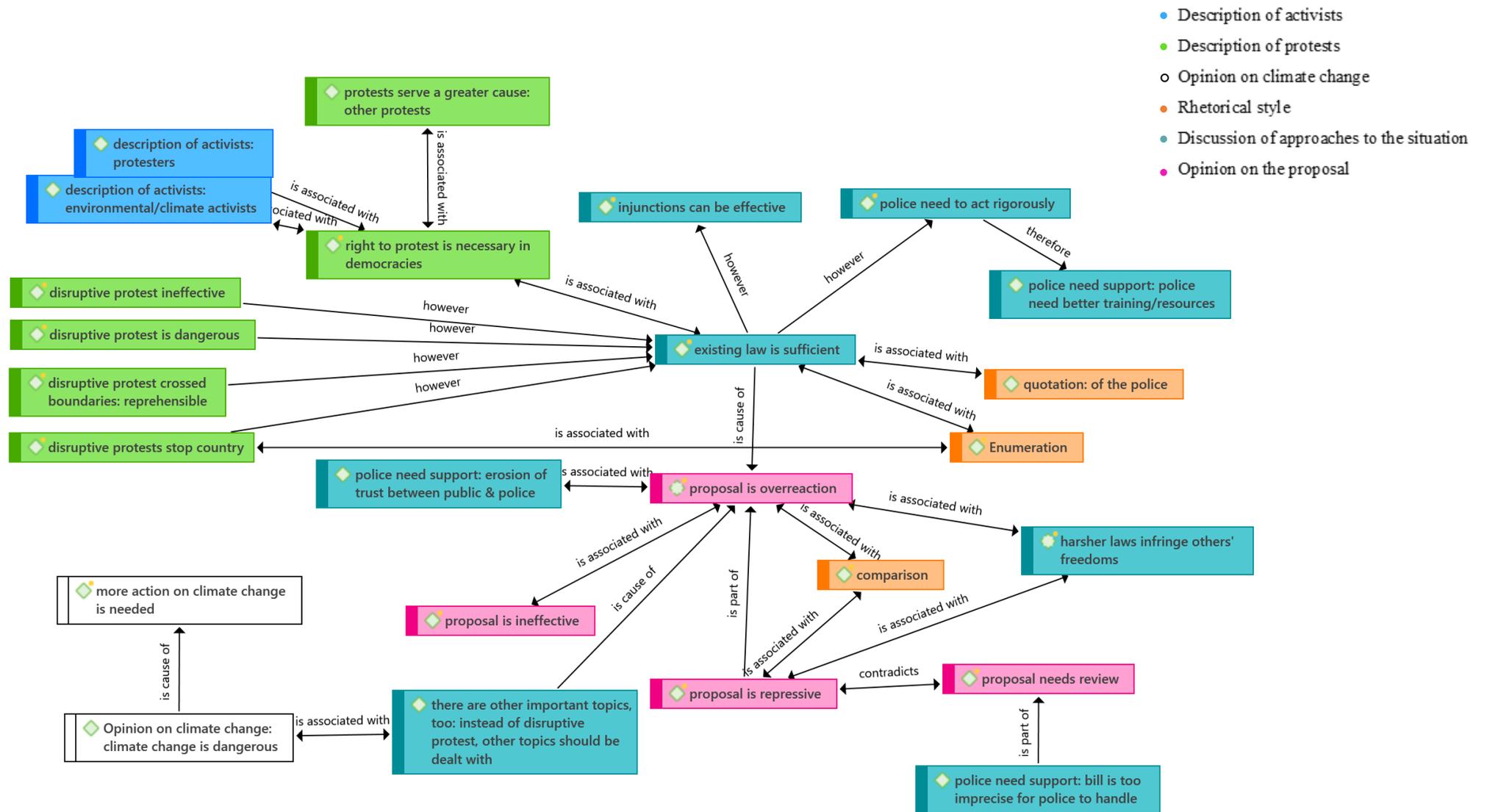


Figure 6: Code relations within the discourse "Protest crossed boundaries, but existing law is sufficient."

The second discourse identified shows discursive affinities with the previous one and can be summarized as **“Protest crossed boundaries, but existing law is sufficient”** (Figure 6). Disruptive protest is also seen as inappropriate and ineffective in achieving more climate protection, but as figure 6 shows, this is based on disruptive protest being described as dangerous and stopping the service of key infrastructure instead of posing a risk to the lives of people. This discourse differentiates between other protests serving a greater cause and the disruptive climate protests which cannot rely on the right to protest. Although this right is deemed necessary, the disruptive protests are regarded as having crossed its boundaries. These boundaries, they claim, have been defined before which is why existing law is deemed sufficient to deal with the protests. However, to decrease disruption, injunctions are proposed. Also, the police could be better equipped and trained which could help dealing with the protests. To support this position, police officers expressing similar needs are quoted and existing laws defining legal and illegal protest are enumerated. The proposed Public Order Bill, especially its serious disruption orders and the extension of stop and search powers, is described as an overreaction which is sometimes called repressive, infringing on the right to protest peacefully, or being formulated so broadly that it affects passers-by, too. Some MPs in this context compare the proposal to laws in Russia or Belarus. The proposal’s extension of stop and search powers is further described as being discriminative by mainly impacting Black people. In other cases, the proposal is described as ineffective in preventing disruptive protest or as too imprecise for the police to implement it. Accordingly, this could lead to a decrease in trust in public institutions.

The Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru follow this third discourse described. Members of all three parties claim that the existing law is sufficient to deal with disruptive protests, and that of the tools available, injunctions could be used to prevent disruption at protests. Also, they claim that the police need more resources and better support by courts which are currently blocked because of backlogs. Liberal Democrats and members of the Labour Party think that the government should rather tackle other crises such as the cost-of-living crisis or climate change instead of wasting time proposing this Public Order Bill. Liberal Democrats further claim that the delay of ambulances is caused by other problems and not by the protesters. Members of all three parties distance themselves from the government and the Conservative Party, accusing them of infringing on the right to protest peacefully, diminishing democracy, and not supporting the police. Sometimes, Labour Party members also make fun of members of the Conservative Party or use insults. The own proposal of making use of injunctions is presented as the better one. In support of their opinions, MPs of the opposition cite the report by the Majesty’s inspectorate and police officers. Liberal Democrats also distance themselves from DUP members due to their support for the proposal by the Tories. Among these parties, only members of the Labour Party call for more action on climate change, perceiving climate change as a threat which could end in a catastrophe.

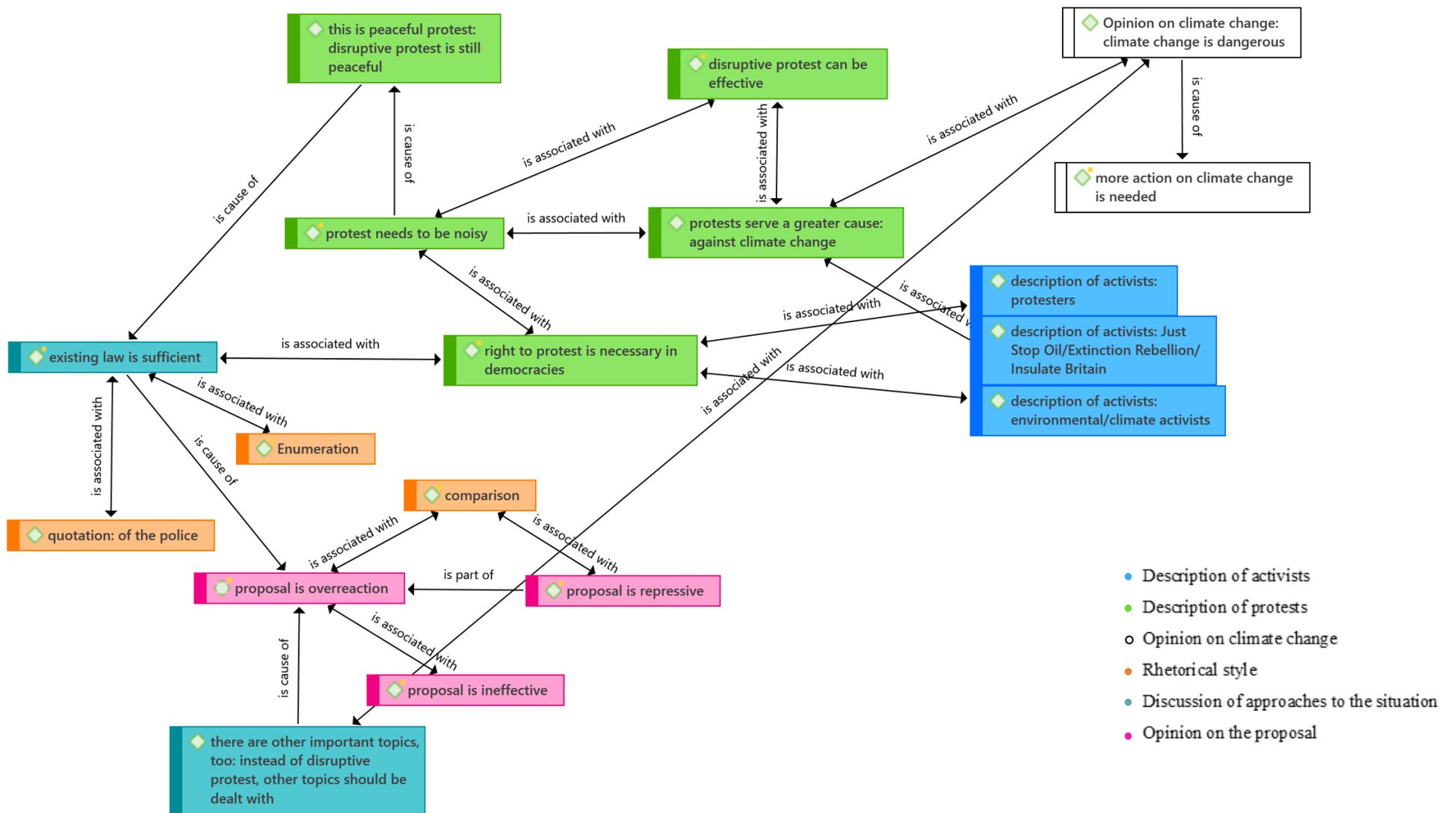


Figure 7: Code relations within the discourse "Protest needs to be noisy which is why no harsher laws are needed".

One discourse within the British debates, however, accepts disruptive protest as legitimate and can be summarized as: **“Protest needs to be noisy which is why no harsher laws are needed”**. Those following this discourse stress the necessity of the right to protest in democracies. “Protest is, by definition, disruptive” (p.55 in Public Order Bill 2022-05-23) and inconvenient as it is directed against the status quo and urges for change. Figure 7 illustrates that therefore the proposed reaction in the form of harsher laws is deemed an attack on the right to protest. The notion that protests need to be noisy to be heard includes the description of disruptive protest as peaceful and having the potential to be effective in achieving its aims. This discourse accepts that the protests serve the greater cause of fighting climate change. Therefore, those conducting disruptive protests are referred to as protesters, as parts of their groups *Just Stop Oil*, *Extinction Rebellion*, or *Insulate Britain*, or as environmental or climate activists. Climate change is described as dangerous and it is argued that not enough has been done against it, yet. As those following this discourse deem the protests legitimate, they perceive the proposal of harsher measures as in the Public Order Act 2023 or amendments to the Public Order Act of 1986 as an overreaction. In the case of crimes being committed as part of the protests they regard the existing law as sufficient to penalize these acts. In support of this, some of the speakers enumerate the respective laws and police officers are quoted sharing their opinion. Those rejecting the proposed harsher laws more strongly describe them as repressive and an attack on the right to protest and the state of democracy. In some cases, speakers compare the proposals to reactions to protests by Russian or Belarusian governments. In other cases, the proposal is seen as unnecessary and ineffective in safeguarding key infrastructure and preventing disruptive protests. Therefore, other topics which the government should deal with instead are suggested such as migration, high inflation, climate change or crime against women and girls.

Only the Green Party and the SNP can be identified as following the discourse described above. Both parties claim that the government does not properly listen to the messages of the protesters and therefore created a bill driven by political ideology which they describe as populist. Therefore, the actual problem the SNP and the Green Party identify is the proposal, which is an attack on fundamental rights, and the lack of climate protection policies. The latter would help in effectively stopping the disruptive protests. The Green party especially presses for more climate protection and accuses the government of not sticking to its promise of ‘halting the decline of nature by 2030’, as well as of dividing the public. In support of this, they quote UN Secretary General Guterres and demand of the government to listen to the protesters. The Green Party supports amendments proposed by the Labour Party and the SNP and can be positioned among those that raise examples of other disruptive protests which were successful. The Greens, however, distance themselves from the government that they describe as cowardly and populist. Similarly, SNP members distance themselves from the government by describing its proposals as draconian or by making fun of members of the Conservative Party. SNP MPs are in a special position within the debate as the proposal will not apply to Scottish territory. Yet, they stress that Scottish people will still be affected by the proposals as the government of the UK is situated in London. Thus, protesters

will go there to protest against the government. They threaten to prepare another Scottish referendum on independence in reaction to the implementation of laws like the one proposed as they want to protect democracy and the right to protest within their country. In support of their opinion, SNP MPs cite police officers claiming to not wanting to have more powers and the reports by the Majesty's inspectorate and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill Committee, especially describing the stop and search powers as going too far and unnecessary. Meanwhile, the Labour Party is blamed for not trying to make radical changes to the bill although it opposes it.

6.4 Signs of Polarization

Although the analysis did not mainly focus on polarization, the presence of certain rhetorical styles can be attributed to hints of polarization. Insults, delegitimizations of others and emotionalizing style were present in the coded debates, although the sole presence of these does not substantiate severe polarization.

Within the German parliamentary debates, some signs of polarization between the discourses were found. First, the discourses can be divided between those describing the protesters as egoistic and reckless and those describing the protests as serving a greater cause. Finding a compromise between these discourses is unlikely. This division is further connected to a hint at polarization between those discourses focusing only on the illegality of the protests and those describing the protests as civil disobedience while stressing the need of more climate protection policies. This issue polarization can furthermore be connected to signs of polarization between the parties. AfD members for example blame the established parties for having allowed the disruptive protests to begin and thereby claim that only they as a non-established party have the proper solution to deal with the protests. Members of the CDU, Die Grünen, Die Linke, the SPD and the FDP describe the AfD as a threat for democracy opposing the rule of law and holding anti-democratic positions. Therefore, a CDU MP describes the propositions by the AfD as problematic not because of their content but because they were proposed by the AfD. During a speech by a Green MP, an AfD member criticizes the speaker for not understanding while the Green MP does not want to listen to the explanations this AfD MP offers. During other speeches and interjections AfD members compare Die Grünen to the terrorist organization RAF or as their parliamentary arm while Die Linke is accused of having murderers among them. Both descriptions entail a delegitimization of the other party which is connected to the issue at hand.

Similar patterns can be found in the description of participants in the disruptive climate protests. The discourses rejecting disruptive protest and calling for harsher laws or even a ban of *Letzte Generation* also delegitimize the protesters and claim that they are not protesting for more action on climate change but act on the grounds of egoistic motives or simply because they want to disrupt. Therefore, they stress the negative consequences of the protests and emotionalize the debate by claiming that the protests are a threat to people's lives. The discourse "Selfish terrorists conduct so-called

activism” further refers to the protesters as terrorists who will not refrain from murdering others in the long run. These are clear aspects of political intolerance.

Within the British parliamentary debates, comparable signs of polarization can be found. There is one discourse which describes protesters as egoistic or reckless and the protests as illegal while another discourse claims that protests need to be disruptive to gain attention and, in this case, this is necessary to achieve more climate protection policies. When compared to the German debates, the division between the discourses within the UK parliament is not as strong due to the range of rejection and acceptance of the protests being slightly narrower. This division is, however, connected to the acceptance of the proposed Public Order Act. The discourse deeming disruption a necessary characteristic of protests also describes the proposal as repressive while the discourse describing protesters as egoistic perceives the proposal as an appropriate approach to tackle disruptive protests. This description of the activists as egoistic comes along with an emotionalization of the debate using the claim that the protests endanger people’s lives.

Also, among the British parliamentary parties, hints at polarization can be found. As expected before, most MPs’ speeches contain signs of group identity: They describe their own parties as having the better solutions and being able to speak on behalf of the people in some way, be it on behalf of their constituents, the police, or the majority of the public. In these cases, they mostly refer to the opinions on the protests or the Public Order Bill. Also, there are some hints of affective polarization. Within the UK parliament, Tories, for example, accuse the Labour Party of only making politics for a minority, which is deemed one aspect of political intolerance. The same patterns appear the other way round: On the grounds of the proposed Public Order Bill, members of the SNP, the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats accuse the Conservative Party of being authoritarian and anti-pluralist while the Greens describe members of the Conservative Party as populist. SNP MPs even threaten to hold another referendum on leaving the UK instead of trying to compromise with the Conservatives. Towards the protesters, Tories also aim at delegitimization of the protesters and for example emphasize that the activists are only a minority which does not speak on behalf of the public. This is one hint at political intolerance.

Yet, the debates also contain few signs of the convergence of discourses. Die Grünen adapted their strategy between 2022 and 2023 to follow the center-discourse rejecting the disruptive protest methods yet accepting the cause of protest which the SPD follows, too. FDP MPs also share narratives of this discourse. However, the discourses can clearly be split into those (somewhat) accepting the protests by viewing legitimacy and legality as separate concepts and those rejecting the protests solely focusing on the legality of the methods. In the UK, one could interpret the closeness of the strongest

discourses¹³ as a sign of convergence. Still, signs of affective polarization exist between those following these two discourses which might, however, be caused by the natural split between government and opposition.

In sum, the analysis revealed that disruptive climate protests are more broadly accepted among parties from the left political spectrum than by conservative or right leaning parties in the UK and Germany. Protesters receive the strongest support from left-wing or Green parties who differentiate between legitimacy and legality, but the majority does not accept disruptive protests¹⁴. Among conservatives or members of right-wing parties, there are tendencies to delegitimize the protesters. The results of the analysis are further discussed in the following chapter.

7 Discussion

The analysis reveals the dominance of rejection narratives and legality discussions within both parliaments under inspection. Many discourses, especially within the British parliament, focus on storylines describing disruptive climate protests as illegal or having crossed boundaries. Therefore, storylines focusing on climate change and climate protection are rarely connected to the debates. Protesters get attention from politicians, but only in rare cases their activism is discussed in a positive light. The Conservative Party, the CDU, the CSU and especially the AfD make use of discursive obstruction (Shriver et al., 2013) trying to generate resentments against the protesters by describing them as disruptors, egoistic and dangerous. The descriptions of protesters by conservative and right-wing MPs dismissing young activists as immature reminds of results by Bessant (2021) in the context of Fridays for Future. Only Die Linke fully accepts the disruptive protests as legitimate civil disobedience fighting for a greater cause. Also in the UK, SNP and the Green MPs claim that protests are disruptive by nature. Additionally, Die Grünen or the SPD stress that the protesters are rightfully protesting for more policies concerning climate change while their methods are rejected. Still, due to the strength of the rejection narrative, it seems rather likely that public discourses are permeated by descriptions of disruptive protests as illegal than as serving the society. Especially in the UK parliament climate change was barely discussed. Yet, this finding might be caused by a selection bias. Due to the restricted possibilities available to search British parliamentary debates, only debates related to the Public Order Act were selected which could have resulted in overlooking other debates in which the messages of climate protesters were discussed in more detail.

Comparing the results intra-nationally, it becomes apparent that within the German *Bundestag* diverse discourses were employed: Not even all government parties followed the same discourses.

¹³ Measuring strength in terms of the discourses followed by the most MPs.

¹⁴ Tables C1 and C2 in Appendix IV provide an overview of the discourses.

In the German setting, discourse coalitions across the boundaries of government and opposition have formed with FDP MPs partially following the same discourse as CDU members, and in 2022 with Die Grünen following the same discourse as Die Linke. In the British debates, discourse coalitions reflect the patterns of government and opposition. While only the DUP as a non-government party follows the same discourse as the Conservative Party, the other opposition parties form two discourse coalitions. The SNP and the Green Party form one coalition, and the Labour Party, PC, and the Liberal Democrats another.

Comparing the two settings of discussions on disruptive climate protest it seems that the multi-party system of the German parliament is reflected in the results. Not only does the German debate contain a broader range of discourses than the British debate, but also the positions of the parties within this discourse structure are more diverse leading to some parties being caught in between discourses. Furthermore, although storylines employed by those accepting the protests are very similar across the two settings, more MPs not only discussed the methods but also the motives of protesters within German parliamentary debates. Yet, in both settings, the positioning of the parties along the left-right political spectrum helps explaining their positions within the debate. Right leaning and conservative parties rather reject the protests focusing on the negatives of them and propose harsher measures. They even seem to aim at discursive obstruction of the protesters, while left leaning and green parties tend towards acceptance of the protests and calling for more climate protection instead of harsher laws. However, Die Grünen in Germany are an exception in this regard as they changed from acceptance of disruptive climate protests to accepting the reasons of the protests as legitimate while rejecting disruptive methods. This is probably due to their position as one of three government parties.

This overall pattern confirms the results by Berker and Pollex (2021) and Raisch and Zohnhöfer (2020) finding that parties of the left rather support climate activists while parties of the right reject their protests. Yet, there are some differences for parties of the same party family between the two countries. Although labor parties in both countries reject disruptive protest methods, the SPD stresses that the protests happen on behalf of legitimate causes. Also, unlike in Germany, the right-wing DUP in the British parliament does not call for a complete ban of the groups organizing the protests, while in Germany the AfD wants to prohibit these groups. Yet, this difference can also be caused by the DUP's position as a small opposition party in a two-party system without any prospect of gaining a large share in parliament. Furthermore, some parties like the CSU, the FDP or Die Grünen seem to be caught between two discourses. While Die Grünen adjusted their communication throughout the time period under analysis, FDP and CSU MPs share narratives that are used in different discourses. These results furthermore specify the findings by Hooghe and Marien (2014). MPs' perception of non-institutionalized protest forms seems to be correlated with their party-background as well as the issue, protesters make claims about. Also, for acceptance of the protests, it makes a difference if acceptance is analyzed in terms of legitimacy or legality, the findings of this thesis show.

The analysis suggests that there is some degree of issue polarization between the different discourses. Due to the division between those that focus entirely on the illegality of the measures and those that stress the legitimacy of the protests, it will be hard to find compromises in a parliamentary debate. Also, the emotionalization towards the activists included in the discourses that strongly reject disruptive protests – describing the protesters as disruptors or terrorists – is potentially problematic in a democracy which should uphold the right to protest. Within the British context, issue polarization on the Public Order Bill can be recognized, too. Still, there are discourses that can be positioned in between the two poles in both parliamentary settings. Therefore, there does not seem to be a high degree of polarization.

However, there are also signs of political intolerance between the political parties that can be a cause of concern. In the British parliament, this especially holds true for the behavior between members of the SNP and the Conservative Party. Yet, this might be caused by the split between opposition and government parties. In the German Parliament, affective polarization between the established parties and the AfD can be found. AfD members especially discredit Die Linke and Die Grünen, while members of Die Grünen explicitly ignore AfD MPs. This is a clear sign of the democratic process being impacted by this polarization. Finding compromises is less likely in a situation where parties do not recognize each other as legitimate members of parliament. Both, the delegitimization of protesters and that of political parties therefore pose problems for a democratic debate in which all opinions should be respected (Schmid et al., 2023) .

It is further interesting to note that although the protesting groups coin their protest as civil resistance or civil disobedience (in the case of Extinction Rebellion), barely anyone mentions these concepts within the discourses in the parliamentary debates. The focus is rather on the legality or illegality of the protests and less on their legitimacy, apart from the case of three discourses differentiating between these two concepts. In almost all speeches, the fact that civil disobedience might be legitimate despite making use of illegal methods is disregarded. Yet, this can be understood better when considering Schock (2015) who identifies nine possible reactions to civil resistance of which some can be identified in the analyzed debates. Although there is greater tolerance for opposing opinions in democracies, this does not mean that protest will necessarily be accepted, especially when the protest is disruptive. In the UK, the Conservative Party and the DUP react with repression and counter-framing including a delegitimization of protesters, just like members of the AfD and CDU/CSU do in Germany. The FDP reacts with placation: Although members stress that the acts committed by protesters of *Letzte Generation* are criminal and are rejected, FDP minister for transport Volker Wissing met the protesters to discuss their ideas. This, however, did not lead to any concessions (Hofmann, 2023). Die Linke on the contrary calls for reforms but cannot transform these into reality due to their low voters' share. MPs of Die Grünen and the SPD want to integrate the protesters into the parties, thereby following a strategy of channeling or co-opting. The strategies followed by the opposition parties in the British House of Commons are harder to identify due to the debates' focus on the government's proposal. SNP and Green

MPs call for more action on climate change and claim that protest needs to be noisy, thereby showing signs of acceptance of the protests. Therefore, one could argue that these parties aim at granting the protesters concessions while members of the Labour Party rather aim at channeling the protest into institutionalized forms of protest as they strongly reject disruptive protest while calling for more climate protection.

Viewing these findings in light of their implications for the climate activists of *Letzte Generation*, *Just Stop Oil* or *Extinction Rebellion*, it must be said that disruptive protests have barely been successful in the short-term in the countries in focus of this thesis – neither when measuring success in terms of meeting the demands of the protest groups, nor when defining success in terms of gaining more attention to climate change and faster reaction to it or when defining it like Woodly (2015) as managing to gain positive attention and maintaining it among the authorities and the public. In both the UK and Germany, the protests sparked discussions which however were focused on the methods. Even considering the potential selection bias mentioned in this regard, it is noteworthy that no concessions have been made to protesters but instead especially in the UK, repression was the answer. Gurr (2015) indicates that authorities frequently manage to brand groups like *Just Stop Oil* as disruptive minorities, just as in this case.

Therefore, it seems that a larger public support is needed for MPs to be responsive – especially when transferring the results of Chu and Recchia (2021) on the responsiveness of MPs to public opinion to the recent disruptive protests. This seems to counter recommendations by Engler and Engler (2017) proposing disruption as one of three key factors for placing uprisings on the public agenda and making success of protest more likely. Indeed, disruptive climate activism has the potential of being successful when considering that *Extinction Rebellion* managed to influence the prominent strategic narratives in 2019 in such a way that the government later on declared the state of climate emergency which was one of *Extinction Rebellion*'s demands (Bevan et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the findings of this study need to be interpreted carefully. Due to the limitation of the methodology and limited resources, the results can only be treated as exploratory. Qualitative research generally does not aim at generalization but can be oriented along the quality criteria validity and reliability (Schreier, 2014). Strübing (2018) interprets validity in the context of qualitative research as aptness of the methodological approach. As elaborated before, the discourse analysis is well suited to analyze parliamentary debates. Yet, the openness of this approach had to be limited due to the scope of the thesis. This entailed not only that the number of analyzed parliamentary debates was relatively small but also that other important material such as press communications that are telling of MPs' personal preferences and possibly influence the public debate, could not be considered. Furthermore, the proposed approach by Hajer includes interviews at different stages of the analysis which could not be put into practice in this thesis although this could be helpful to confirm the findings on who follows which discourse and provide information on the consciousness of the phenomena found. By aiming at

as much transparency as possible by precisely mapping the processes of this thesis, “textual performance” (Strübing, 2018, p. 213) shall be achieved. Therefore, the coding schemes used are attached to this thesis. Still, the interpretive moment inherent in every discourse analysis always relies on the researcher and is dependent on her positionality as a German student. Furthermore, as could be noticed before, the comparison of the cases does not include a clear statement on a causal relationship between the discourses and the later implementation of laws in reaction to the protests. This is due to interpretive research not aiming at explaining causal relationships which would have entailed some level of generalization “and the need to generalize entails establishing causal relationships of a particular, mechanistic sort” (Yanow, 2014, p. 148). Still, there are some hints at possible explanations for the different reactions to disruptive protest in the countries, but they include much more factors dependent on the respective setting influencing this relationship.

The findings also hint at the communicative strategies of MPs to deal with criticism in the form of disruptive protest and thereby contribute to the literature on the acceptance of these protests. The results suggest that future research in this realm needs to conceptualize acceptance in terms of the perspective on legitimacy as well as legality. Those who share goals with the protesters, namely the implementation of more climate protection policies, tend to accept the protests as legitimate, even if some also highlight the illegality of the protest methods. Those who think that climate protection policies in one country alone will not be sufficient or deny the existence of climate change focus on the illegality of protest methods. The research could also confirm that considering MPs party family is important to understand their perspective on disruptive climate protests. Conducting a discourse analysis combining Hajer’s and Keller’s approach enabled to arrive at these findings as it allowed to detect even small differences in the storylines used by MPs in the parliamentary debates in which different discourses mingle. Future research can build upon this study. First ideas are elaborated in the final chapter.

8 Conclusion and Outlook

Not all discourses identified in the parliamentary debates in the UK and Germany reflect on the tension between legitimacy and legality of disruptive forms of climate activism. The debates center on the legality of the methods and not on their legitimacy, even though civil disobedience and resistance literature makes a clear distinction in this regard. Discourses that (somewhat) accept the protests employ legitimacy of the reasons of the protest as one storyline. Yet – interestingly – the discussion on civil disobedience as well as that on climate change only makes up a small part of the discourses.

However, there is a wide array of discourses apparent in the parliamentary debates in the UK and Germany, from total acceptance of the protests even tending to encourage protesters by supporting their claims (“not enough has been done to fight climate change”) to complete rejection including a delegitimization of the protesters. The rejection found within most discourses is frequently based on the perception of the methods employed as illegal, ineffective, or turning the public against the activists and

their demands. Even signs of discursive obstruction were discovered. However, the range of acceptance and rejection of the protests within the discourses seems to be broader within the German parliament where the share of seats is distributed more widely among different parties. Therefore, the discourse-structure is also more fragmented. Even among the government parties not every MP follows the same discourse. In the UK, the dominant parties manage to dominate the discourses and establish a narrative of rejection of disruptive protest methods. Thus, it seems that the different parliamentary settings are somewhat reflected in the outcome of this analysis.

Confirming results of previous studies, this analysis shows that considering the party family and its position on the left-right political spectrum helps to explain which party follows which discourse. Also, a party's position on climate change seems to be relevant in this context. Those calling strongly for faster climate protection accept the disruptive protest methods as activism or differentiate between legality and legitimacy of the protests, while those claiming that other countries need to step up their efforts delegitimize the protesters and focus merely on the (il-)legality of the protest methods. Furthermore, across countries' borders parties of the same party family follow very similar discourses.

The hints of polarization found in the analysis and the strength of narratives that might increase hostility towards the activists can be a cause of concern for the state of democracy. The self-jurisdiction employed by some car drivers hint at problematic hostility towards the protesters among the public ("142 Verfahren Wegen Angriffen Auf "Letzte Generation"," 2023). Also, the implementation of the Public Order Act in the UK, the Assembly Act in North-Rhine Westphalia banning all protest on highways and the use of preventive detention which was originally directed at terrorists for climate activists in Bavaria can be criticized for being too restrictive, impacting the freedom of assembly and of expression (Amnesty International, 2023; Botta, 2023).

In sum, the qualitative research approach in this thesis enabled a specification of previous results and detected tensions between legitimacy and legality in the perception of disruptive climate protests employing methods of civil disobedience. Therefore, conceptualizations of acceptance within future research on acceptance of disruptive protests should include both legality and legitimacy. When studying acceptance among politicians the impact of party family and position on the issue protested about should not be overlooked. A study of discourses in (social) media could provide insights into the impacts of parliamentary discourses on the public debate, specifically the prevalence and institutionalization of different discourses within the public debate and dynamics of public opinion formation. Especially, it is interesting to see if discursive obstruction by conservative and right-wing MPs is successful. This analysis should also entail a broader look at public opinion on the support for climate protection as it was frequently claimed that disruptive protest is ineffective due to decreasing societal support for policies on climate protection. Furthermore, future research on communicative strategies of politicians should not only include a more diverse set of texts but also interviews of the MPs as proposed by Hajer to find out more about why the parties follow these discourses, if consciously or unconsciously.

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Appendix I: List of parliamentary debates analyzed

| Parliament | Topic | Date | Motion by | Link |
|------------------|---|------------|--|---|
| Bundestag | Verbot der Organisation „Letzte Generation“ Drucksache 20/6702 | 10.05.2023 | Stephan Brandner, Dr. Christina Baum, Marc Bernhard, and other MPs of the AfD | https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20102.pdf#P.12267 |
| Bundestag | Straßenblockierer und Museumsrandalierer härter bestrafen – Menschen und Kulturgüter vor radikalem Protest schützen Drucksachen 20/4310, 20/6481 | 27.04.2023 | CDU/CSU | https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20100.pdf#P.12085 |
| Bundestag | Straßenblockierer und Museumsrandalierer härter bestrafen – Menschen und Kulturgüter vor radikalem Protest schützen Drucksache 20/4310 | 10.11.2022 | CDU/CSU | https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20066.pdf#P.7500 |
| Bundestag | Aktuelle Stunde: Radikalisierung der Klimaproteste als Gefahr für Staat und Gesellschaft anerkennen und jetzt konsequent und effektiv bekämpfen | 02.12.2022 | AfD | https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20074.pdf#P.8839 |
| House of Commons | Public Order Bill | 23.05.2023 | Secretary of State for the Home Department | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-05-23/debates/73F4EB27-59E6-4CF4-98A5-2CF89A6CA34F/PublicOrderBill |
| House of Commons | Public Order Bill | 18.10.2022 | Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-10-18/debates/52B4111A-9C01-4FF0-A1CF-06721F589D61/PublicOrderBill |

| | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|------------|--|---|
| House of Commons | Public Order Bill | 07.03.2023 | Andrew Lewer, Conservative MP for Northampton South | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-03-07/debates/786439D4-42C7-43CA-92A3-B3F9859F3BE1/PublicOrderBill |
| House of Commons | Public Order Bill | 22.03.2023 | Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-03-22/debates/4051EF0F-A7D0-4A48-B363-1D67FD9E91ED/PublicOrderBill |
| House of Commons | Public Order Bill | 24.04.2023 | Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-04-24/debates/236EA726-77AF-4BBE-9625-2F9DA2914C15/PublicOrderBill |
| House of Commons | Public Order Act 2023 | 16.05.2023 | Alison Thewliss, SNP MP for Glasgow Central (Opposition Day) | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-05-16/debates/3D17E164-B3B1-4C1C-ADA4-C982348A5ABB/PublicOrderAct2023 |
| House of Commons | Public Order | 12.06.2023 | Secretary of State for the Home Department | https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-06-12/debates/67222B10-C60B-4BE4-B436-6B0B149AF209/PublicOrder |

Appendix II: Final Codebooks

Table B1: Final Codebook “Bundestag”

| Code | Comment |
|---|---|
| activists are egoistic | This code is used to collect statements in which the protesters are described as egoistic, arrogant or reckless. ^[SEP] |
| description of climate activists | This code is used to collect all those terms speakers use to refer to the protesters of "Letzte Generation". ^[SEP] |
| description of climate activists: Activists | |

| | |
|---|---|
| description of climate activists: Blockierer/Randalierer | |
| description of climate activists: criminals | |
| description of climate activists: Klimakleber | |
| description of climate activists: neutral: Letzte Generation/ Gruppe/ Organisation | |
| description of climate activists: nuts | |
| description of climate activists: self-proclaimed activists | |
| description of climate activists: spoiled | |
| description of climate activists: terrorists and dangerous | |
| description of climate activists: Unentschieden | |
| youth is not mature enough | With this code, statements shall be collected that express the opinion that young protesters are either naive or immature. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| disruptive climate activism as civil disobedience?! | Statements shall be coded with this code when MPs refer to civil disobedience in the context of the disruptive protests or to aspects included in the definition of civil disobedience as consisting of non-violent, non-normative protest that is however morally justified. This does not necessarily mean that they have to classify this protestform as civil disobedience. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| disruptive climate activism as civil disobedience?!: disruptive climate protest is civil disobedience | |
| disruptive climate activism as civil disobedience?!: disruptive climate protest is no civil disobedience | |

| | |
|---|--|
| disruptive climate activism crossed borders | This code shall be used to collect statements in which MPs express the opinion that the disruptive climate protests have gone too far. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive climate activism crossed borders: dangerous for current system | This code shall be used to collect statements in which MPs express the opinion that the disruptive climate protests have gone too far by aiming at transformations of the whole societal order, the constitutional order or the economic order - all systematic aspects such as the economy, democracy, the rule of law can be meant by "current system" ^{[P]_{SEP}} 20.07.2023 16:09:46, zusammengeführt mit ^{[P]_{SEP}} disruptive climate activists are a threat for democracy or rule of law ^{[P]_{SEP}} This code is used to collect statements in which speakers describe the acts of protesters of "Letzte Generation" or the protesters themselves as a threat to democracy or the rule of law or as disobeying democracy. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive climate activism crossed borders: disruptive climate activism is terrorism | This code shall collect statements in which disruptive climate protests are described as or compared to terrorist activities. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive climate activism crossed borders: endangers others and things | |
| disruptive climate activism crossed borders: inappropriate/reprehensible | |
| disruptive climate activism crossed borders: Unentschieden | |
| disruptive climate activism is setting wrong precedence | This code collects statements in which MPs express the opinion that disruptive climate protest cannot be accepted as it sets a precedence for others and might lead to others being inspired by this disruptive protests. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest as ineffective | This code is used to collect statements in which disruptive protest forms are described as not helpful for achieving more climate change protection or as counterproductive for fighting climate change. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest in general is wrong | Statements categorized with this code describe disruptive forms in general as counterproductive, ineffective or wrong. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest is no extremism | This code collects statements in which disruptive climate protest is categorized as not being comparable to extremism. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism | This code is used to gather statements in which legal aspects of disruptive climate activism are discussed. This can entail the classification of disruptive climate activism as illegal but also calls for harsher laws or the reference to laws that are currently used in legal cases dealing with disruptive climate activism. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |

| | |
|--|--|
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism: current law is sufficient | |
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism: current law should be used more rigorously | |
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism: disruptive climate protest is criminal | |
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism: disruptive protest is not necessarily criminal | |
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism: harsher laws are needed | |
| legal aspects of disruptive climate activism: prohibition is needed | |
| legitimate climate activism | |
| legitimate climate activism: description of what would be legitimate protest | |
| legitimate climate activism: protest is legitimate as a whole | |
| legitimate climate activism: reasons are legitimate, methods are not | |
| right to protest necessary in democracies | This code is used to categorize those statements in which the right to protest is described as an important or even necessary part of democracy. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| AfD-author | |

| | |
|--|--|
| CDU-author | |
| CSU-author | |
| Die Grünen-author | |
| Die Linke-author | |
| FDP-author | |
| SPD-author | |
| differentiation from others | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to other parties, their party members or other institutions and authorities while distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of others as different. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: AfD | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to AfD or their party members through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of AfD or their party members as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: Ampelregierung | |
| differentiation from others: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to Bündnis90/Die Grünen or their party members through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen or their party members as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: CDU/CSU | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to CDU/CSU or their party members through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of CDU/CSU or their party members as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: Die Linke | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to Die Linke or their party members through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of Die Linke or their party members as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: FDP | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to FDP or their party members through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of FDP or their party members as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: Medien | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to the media through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of the media as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: SPD | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to SPD or their party members through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of SPD or their party members as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| differentiation from others: Unentschieden | |

| | |
|---|--|
| differentiation from others: Verfassungsschutz | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to the Office for the Protection of the constitution through distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of the Office as different or holding different opinions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning: AfD | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers of the AfD position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] Anti-pluralist quotations within this code: ^[P] _[SEP] "Es sind das Auftreten der Alternative für Deutschland und dieser Antrag erforderlich, der zwei Teile hat." 1:175 p 86 in BT Debatte Verbot der Letzten Organisation. ^[P] _[SEP] ^[P] _[SEP] ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning: Bündnis 90/Die Grünen | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning: CDU/CSU | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers of CDU/CSU position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning: Die Linke | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers of Die Linke position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning: FDP | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers of FDP position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| self-positioning: SPD | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers of SPD position themselves within the debate either through referring to their position within the party or by referring to others and thereby highlighting their position within the discussion on the protests by "Letzte Generation". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| anaphora | Repetition of words or an expression at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Asyndeton | An enumeration that does not use connectors. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| climax | An enumeration of words or expressions that are listed in an increasing order of importance. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| comparison | An explicit comparison between things, places, ideas or people. Comparisons are made with the help of connectors like "as" or "like". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| emotionalization | This code is used to collect statements in which ^[P] _[SEP] |
| hyperbole | Exaggeration of ideas or expressions. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| insult | Offensive remarks about others that are not based on arguments. ^[P] _[SEP] |

| | |
|---|---|
| interjection | |
| Making fun of sb/sth | |
| metaphor | A hidden comparison between places, things or people that does not make use of a connecting word but rather one term replaces what is actually meant. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| parallelism | A figure of speech in which at least two elements of a sentence have the same grammatical structure. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| personal story | This code shall be activated when MPs tell stories of their own experiences or personal habits and beliefs. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| reproach | Negative remarks about another person that are not supported by facts in the moment of speech. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| rhetorical question | A question that is posed but does not expect an answer or whose answer is clear to the audience. It is rather asked for effect. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| quotation of authorities | This code shall be activated when speakers quote statements of other authorities within the debate. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| quotation of the law | With this code, statements shall be collected in which speakers quote from the law. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| Germany is already doing a lot for climate protection | This code is used to collect statements in which MPs express the opinion that either their party, the German government or "Germany" in general is contributing to protection of the climate against climate change. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| More action on climate change is needed | This code collects those statements in which MPs express the need for more action against climate change. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| opinion on climate change | This code shall collect statements in which MPs express their opinion on climate change. This can for example include the reference to the existence of human-induced climate change. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| opinion on climate change: climate change as an existential threat | |
| opinion on climate change: climate change as one of the most important topics of our time | |
| opinion on climate change: climate change cannot be stopped in Germany alone | |
| opinion on climate change: climate change is exaggerated/non-existent | |
| opinion on climate change: societal support is needed for effective climate protection | |

| | |
|---|---|
| opinion on climate change: Unentschieden | |
| key events | This code is used to identify those actions by climate activists that are discussed amongst MPs. This shall help to contextualize the statements made by MPs. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| raising a different topic | This code shall be activated when MPs raise a different topic than the discussion on disruptive climate activism or the positioning of themselves or others within this debate. ^[P] _[SEP] |

Table B2: Final Codebook “House of Commons”

| Code | Comment |
|---|---|
| activists are egoistic | This code is used to collect statements in which the protesters are described as egoistic or reckless as well as statements in which they are described as ignorant against other people. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| description of activists | This code is used to collect all those terms speakers use to refer to the protesters of Extinction Rebellion, Just Stop Oil or Insulate Britain. This can also include sentences. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| description of activists: "lefties" | |
| description of activists: criminal | |
| description of activists: disruptors | |
| description of activists: environmental/climate activists | |
| description of activists: extremists | |
| description of activists: hooligans/warriors | |
| description of activists: hypocrites | 21.08.2023 21:58:18, merged with “activists are hypocrites”. This code is used to gather statements in which speakers express the opinion that protesters are hypocritical. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| description of activists: illegitimate protesters | |
| description of activists: individuals | |

| | |
|---|---|
| description of activists: Just Stop Oil/Extinction Rebellion/Insulate Britain | |
| description of activists: minority | |
| description of activists: nuts/deranged/uncivil | |
| description of activists: people | |
| description of activists: protesters | |
| description of activists: youth is immature | With this code, statements shall be collected that express the opinion that young protesters are either naive or immature. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest can be effective | Statements which include the opinion that disruptive protest can be effective and achieve its aims. This does not mean that these statements are reduced to the disruptive protests by climate activists but those can also include statements on other effective disruptive protests. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest cost taxpayers money | Statements in which members of parliament refer to the amount of money and resources of taxpayers the protests have cost. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest crossed boundaries: reprehensible | This code is used to collect statements in which disruptive protest is described as having crossed boundaries and being reprehensible or wrong. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| Disruptive protest endangers people's lives | This code is used to collect statements in which disruptive protest is described as risking the death or health of other people. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest ineffective | This code is used to collect statements in which disruptive protest forms are described as not helpful for achieving more climate change protection or as counterproductive for fighting climate change and winning public support. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest infringes others' rights | Statements in which disruptive protest is described as infringing rights of other people by hindering them from moving freely to their work or other important appointments. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest is criminal | Statements in which disruptive protest is described as being against the law. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protest is dangerous | Statements in which disruptive protest is described as dangerous. Yet, no explicit reference to being dangerous for other people's health or lives. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| disruptive protests stop country | This code is used to collect statements in which disruptive protest is described as posing a threat to national infrastructure or bringing industries, the economy or whole areas to a halt. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| other (insitutionalized) forms of engagement exist | This code is used to collect statements in which protesters are either directly or indirectly called to use other forms of political engagement. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| protest needs to be noisy | Statements that express the opinion that protests cannot be quiet or need to be noisy if they want to achieve their aim. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |

| | |
|--|--|
| protests need to be banned | Statements in which speakers express the opinion that disruptive protests such as those by Just Stop Oil or Extinction Rebellion need to be banned. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| protests serve a greater cause | This code is used to collect statements which express the opinion that protests serve a greater cause and aim to achieve something valuable. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| protests serve a greater cause: against climate change | |
| protests serve a greater cause: other protests | |
| this is peaceful protest | Statements that express the opinion that the disruptive protest is peaceful. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| this is peaceful protest: disruptive protest is still peaceful | |
| this is peaceful protest: other examples of peaceful protest | |
| existing law is sufficient | This code is used to collect statements in which existing laws that could be used to deal with disruptive protests are referred to or the opinion is stated that further laws are not necessary to deal with disruptive protests. ^[P] _[SEP] ----- ^[P] _[SEP] COOC with partisanship of authors shows that: ^[P] _[SEP] • coded parts for Conservatives mostly stem from two MPs who also argue that the proposed bill is an overreaction --> they are more congruent with the arguments by Labour Party MPs ^[P] _[SEP] |
| government needs to react | Statements in which the opinion is uttered that the government needs to react to disruptive protests in some way. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| harsher laws are needed | Statements in which the opinion is uttered that the government needs to react to disruptive protests with harsher laws like the proposed Bill or other measures. ^[P] _[SEP] ----- ^[P] _[SEP] COOC with partisanship of authors shows that: ^[P] _[SEP] • Conservatives call for harsher laws like the proposed bill that prevent disruptive protest from happening, DUP agrees ^[P] _[SEP] • Labour Party calls once for harsher punishments and the other time for harsher laws while calling for an adapted law to implement injunctions more effectively. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| harsher laws infringe others' freedoms | This code is used to collect statements in which harsher laws, and especially this proposed Bill, are described as infringement on the right to protest or other freedoms. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| harsher laws infringe others' freedoms: proposal affects black people more | |
| harsher laws infringe others' freedoms: proposal affects innocent people | |

| | |
|---|--|
| harsher laws infringe others' freedoms: proposal infringes right to protest | |
| harsher laws infringe others' freedoms: proposal infringes civil liberties/rights | |
| harsher laws infringe others' freedoms: proposal infringes right to strike/organise at work | |
| injunctions can be effective | Statements in which speakers claim that injunctions (instead of harsher laws) can be a good way to deal with disruptive protests. ^[P] _[SEP] COOC with partisanship of authors shows that: ^[P] _[SEP] • Conservatives acknowledge that injunctions can be effective but still call for other laws such as serious disruption prevention orders ^[P] _[SEP] • Labour Party claims that injunctions can be effective in reaching the same aim and no other laws are needed → they also claim that existing law is sufficient ^[P] _[SEP] |
| police need to act rigorously | This code is used to collect statements that express the opinion that the police need to act rigorously in the case of disruptive protests. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| discussion is unnecessary | This code is used to collect statements in which MPs describe the debate as unnecessary. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| proposal ensures clarity | Statements that express that the proposal in question is clear enough to be enacted. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Proposal is balanced | Statements in which speakers express the opinion that the proposal in question balances the rights of protesters and those of the public well. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| proposal is ineffective | This code is used to collect statements in which speakers express the opinion that the proposed Bill will not be effective, i.e. it will not achieve its proclaimed goals. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| proposal is overreaction | This code is used to collect statements in which speakers express the opinion that the proposed measures are an overreaction, either because they have been proposed before they were thought-through, or they are an exaggeration and disproportionate. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| proposal is overreaction: disproportionate | |
| proposal is overreaction: eroding trust | |
| proposal is overreaction: not well thought-through | |
| proposal is overreaction: too broad | |
| proposal is overreaction: too controlling | |

| | |
|---|--|
| proposal is overreaction: unnecessary | |
| proposal is overreaction: wrong/dangerous | |
| proposal is repressive | - activated when proposal is described as harming the right to protest, undemocratic or authoritarian. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| proposal needs review | Statements that express the opinion that the proposed Bill needs to be amended. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| police need support | This code is used to gather statements that express the need of police to be supported with resources, training or clear laws. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| police need support: bill is too imprecise for police to handle | |
| police need support: erosion of trust between public & police | |
| police need support: other public institutions need to help police more | |
| police need support: Police need additional powers | |
| police need support: police need better training/resources | |
| differentiation from others | This code shall be used to collect all those statements in which speakers make reference to other parties, their party members or other institutions and authorities while distancing themselves from them, either via explicit distancing or through the description of others as different. ^{[P]_{SEP}} |
| differentiation from others: Conservatives | |
| differentiation from others: DUP | |
| differentiation from others: Green | |
| differentiation from others: Labour | |
| differentiation from others: LD | |

| | |
|--|---|
| differentiation from others: opposition | |
| differentiation from others: protesters | |
| differentiation from others: SNP | |
| differentiation from others: the government | |
| differentiation from others: the left | |
| differentiation from others: the Lords | |
| differentiation from others: Undecided | |
| more action on climate change is needed | This code collects those statements in which MPs express the need for more action against climate change. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Opinion on climate change | This code shall collect statements in which MPs express their opinion on climate change. This can for example include the reference to the existence of human-induced climate change. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Opinion on climate change: climate change does not exist | This code would not have been activated if not one SNP-speaker had accused one DUP-speaker of not believing that climate change existed. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| opinion on climate change: climate change is causing larger disruption | This code is used to collect statements in which climate change is described as a larger disruption than the recent protests by climate activists. Thereby, these protests are legitimized. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Opinion on climate change: climate change is dangerous | |
| Opinion on climate change: climate change is not as bad so that it would justify disruptive protests | |
| key events | This code is used to identify those actions by climate activists that are discussed amongst MPs. This shall help to contextualize the statements made by MPs. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Conservatives | This code is used to identify all speeches and statements made by member of the Conservative Party for the later analysis. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Conservatives: Backbenchers | |

| | |
|--|---|
| Conservatives: Members of Government | |
| DUP | This code is used to identify all speeches and statements made by member of the Democratic Unionist Party for the later analysis. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Green | This code is used to identify all speeches and statements made by member of the Green Party for the later analysis. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Independent mp | |
| Labour | This code is used to identify all speeches and statements made by member of the Labour Party for the later analysis. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Liberal Democrats | This code is used to identify all speeches and statements made by member of the Liberal Democratic Party for the later analysis. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| PC | This code is used to identify all speeches and statements made by member of the Plaid Cymru Party for the later analysis. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Anaphora | Repetition of words or an expression at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| climax | An enumeration of words or expressions that are listed in an increasing order of importance. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| comparison | An explicit comparison between things, places, ideas or people. Comparisons are mostly made with the help of connectors like "as" or "like". ^[P] _[SEP] |
| emotionalization | This code is used to collect statements in which speakers appeal to the emotions of their audience. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Enumeration | Statements in which several aspects are listed by speakers. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| insult | Statements in which speakers insult other members of parliament or the government. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| making fun of others or something | Statements in which speakers make fun of others or things that are proposed or discussed. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| Metaphor | A hidden comparison between places, things or people that does not make use of a connecting word but rather one term replaces what is actually meant. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| parallelism | A figure of speech in which at least two elements of a sentence have the same grammatical structure. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| personal story | This code shall be activated when MPs tell stories of their own experiences or personal habits and beliefs. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| personal story: constituents' opinions and experiences with protesters | |
| personal story: constituents' protests | |
| personal story: experienced disruptive protest | |
| personal story: met/talked to police officers | |

| | |
|---|---|
| personal story: own history or position | |
| personal story: own protest experience | |
| personal story: Undecided | |
| quotation | This code shall be activated when speakers quote statements of people, organizations or texts within the debate. This can include the proposals that were discussed, reports, the law or other members of parliament. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| quotation: of ECHR (and European Court of Human Rights) | |
| quotation: of Lords | |
| quotation: of MPs | |
| quotation: of organisations | |
| quotation: of reports | |
| quotation: of the Bill | |
| quotation: of the government (or members) | |
| quotation: of the police | |
| quotation: Undecided | |
| reproach | Negative remarks about another person or group of people that are not supported by facts in the moment of speech. ^[P] _[SEP] |
| rhetorical question | A question that is posed but does not expect an answer or whose answer is clear to the audience. It is rather asked for effect. ^[P] _[SEP] |

Appendix III: Profiles of the Parties

Die Linke

problem definition: the debate is unnecessarily focusing on protest which is peaceful, necessary and can be effective → civil disobedience; protesters are fighting for the better cause: against climate catastrophe which is an existential threat

reasons for the problem: other parties are making disproportionate references to terrorism and are not properly listening to protesters' calls

solutions of the problem: new modes of production needed, polluters need to pay → more action on climate change is needed, especially among the rich

responsibilities: The government is responsible for making more climate policies; the rich are to blame for climate catastrophe, not the ones caught in traffic jams by protests

position within this debate: they listen to what protesters actually have to say; only thing: Letzte Generation needs to be more careful when protesting, but can still go on with disruptive protest

position of others in that debate: CDU/CSU criminalize people from the left, rhetorical escalation among CDU/CSU and AfD; proposing harsher laws like CDU/CSU does is disproportionate, double standards among CDU/CSU

opinion on climate change: climate change is an existential threat and one of the most important topics of our time; more action on climate change is needed → especially the government needs to do create more climate protection policies and live up to its own ambitions

Die Grünen

problem definition: two problems: 1. the debate is unnecessary and does not focus on actual problem: climate change; 2. Protesters use inappropriate methods, ineffective or even counterproductive

reasons for the problem: climate protection has been blocked for too long and is still too slow

solutions of the problem: more renewables, mobility transformation; regard the constitutional order to protect the climate (would solve the problem of protests); protesters should use democratic tools (would lead to better listening to what protesters have to say; taking a deep breath → being more laid back

responsibilities: political and societal majority for climate protection needed, current coalition needs to push things forward; government before responsible for blocking climate protection policies,

position within this debate: more laid back; existing laws are sufficient, position themselves explicitly as part of the coalition (don't distance themselves from SPD or FDP, but also no comment towards Die Linken)

position of others in that debate: rhetorical escalation among AfD and CDU/CSU, CDU/CSU also to blame for reasons of protesters: blocked climate protection policies for too long → distance themselves mostly from CDU/CSU as well as AfD; CDU/CSU as having populist ideas, trying to criminalize the protests with an inappropriate proposal, law-and-order approach, have double standards; AfD instrumentalizes the death of a cyclist in Berlin, rhetorical escalation, discreditation of climate protection policies → claim that human-induced climate change does not exist, are against democracy and the rule of law

opinion on climate change: speak of the climate crisis, which is a security issue, too; climate change as an existential threat

SPD

problem definition: protesters make use of illegal methods when protesting for legitimate reasons, and these are ineffective or even counterproductive; not enough is being done about climate change

reasons for the problem: protesters call for help as they see the urgency of climate change

solutions of the problem: engaging politically using legal methods → entering parties, especially → would also help for more climate protection

responsibilities: governing coalition will need to do more about climate change; but also: personal responsibility of each and everyone to care more about the climate; young protesters should enter parties, others need to calm down

position within this debate: existing laws are sufficient; explicitly refer to themselves as part of the coalition; are preparing sustainable climate policies → are already contributing to more effective climate protection, but more will be done and has to be done;

position of others in that debate: AfD is a problem, supports extreme right anti-constitutional youth organization, conduct public dulling and claim that human-induced climate change does not exist, is against rule of law and democracy, populism and rhetorical escalation; CDU/CSU proposal is unnecessary too, as existing laws are sufficient and because it shows mistrust in judges, crosses borders of politicians' tasks, CDU/CSU blocking climate protection policies, populist calls

opinion on climate change: climate change is the central issue of humanity and it's about the future of the planet; 1.5°C as a central value in this debate

FDP

problem definition: protest methods are inappropriate, criminal and there is a risk of escalation if others take example; but also: social market economy is endangered;

reasons for the problem: protesters are immature and egoistic/selfish; view themselves as morally enlightened and show Schadenfreude

solutions of the problem: protesters engage in parties; but still: no harsher laws needed → let the judges and police do their job

responsibilities: judges and police can deal with protesters; governing coalition responsible for better climate protection policies;

position within this debate: wants to distance itself from protests and not criminalize but also not trivialize → sober view on things; will get things done on climate protection;

position of others within that debate: media are sometimes trivializing, Kubicki: Office for Protection of Constitution was not a good choice; SPD, the Greens and the Left trivialize the disruptive protests; CDU/CSU always call for harsher laws; AfD aims at ideology, not the acts and they are supported by extreme right

opinion on climate change: climate protection as central issue of our time, more people within society and the parliament need to talk about climate protection; but: decarbonizing not de-industrialization

AfD

problem definition: protesters endanger democracy, the rule of law as well as people's lives, these protesters are at least close to terrorists or are already terrorists; also: too much panic about climate change (by media and also parties) as well as trivialization of protests through media as well as parties

reasons for the problem: protesters are spoiled and selfish, are engaged further by trivialization and promotion of democracy, wokeism etc

solutions of the problem: prohibiting the protests; realistic perspective by others as well as less panic about climate change

responsibilities: media, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution as well as some parties are to blame for trivializing as well as democracy-funding, wokeism -> all that has contributed to escalation (all established and powerful parties are to blame)

position within this debate: their own proposal of banning Letzte Generation is needed to protect the constitutional order, calls especially for CDU/CSU to vote with them as they express similar opinions as their own

position of others in that debate: the established parties have contributed to the escalation of these protests; government ignores security threat, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution needs to work to protect the constitution again; trivialization of criminal protest among Die Linke, SPD, and Die

Grünen; die Linke solidarize with criminals; CDU/CSU as law-and-order party; the Greens as green RAF or parliamentary arm of that → a threat for Germany

opinion on climate change: climate is a statistics → cannot be protected; climate change is exaggerated; there is too much panic about it; 1.5°C is not their own goal; even if so: China has contributed way more to climate change → actual polluter

CDU

problem definition: current judgments are not sufficient to deal with the phenomenon posed by Letzte Generation; protesters endanger people by committing crimes and are against market economy; this doesn't lead to more support for climate protection

reasons for the problem: government has no clue how to deal with protesters and trivializes violence; it also does not do enough on climate change, so-called activists are egoistic

solutions of the problem: harsher laws → would support the judges and police

responsibilities: die Grünen, die Linke and SPD trivialize the protests, parliament needs to stop these protests to protect society as well as protect the right of freedom, topic should not be left with AfD

position within this debate: they would have had better ideas for the protection of climate like AKW-Laufzeiten; harsher laws will help prevent further escalation as well as hinder others from taking an example from Letzte Generation; are against right- and left-wing extremism

position of others in that debate: problematic position of AfD: they propose themselves as the good ones and have double standards; AfD wants an Office for the Protection of the Constitution according to its wishes; don't have any proposals against climate change; die Grünen, die Linke and SPD trivialize the protests

opinion on climate change: acceptance for climate protection needs to be high among society, climate protection is important but cannot be forced as Letzte Generation tries; quite some progress has been made on climate change → protesters should consider that

CSU

problem definition: disruptive protest is a crime which endangers peoples' lives and destroys things, there is potential for radicalization towards terrorism and the protests are against the rule of law as well as the social order; the current judgments are not sufficient

reasons for the problem: so-called activists are selfish, reckless and don't have any respect in front of others

solutions of the problem: harsher laws → would support the judges and police

responsibilities: die Grünen, die Linke and SPD trivialize the protests; the parliament needs to help judges and police as this is a new phenomenon; the government should not leave the topic of dealing with Letzte Generation to AfD

position within this debate: they would have had better ideas for the protection of climate: letting nuclear power plants run for a longer time

position of others in that debate: die Grünen, die Linke and SPD trivialize the protests, FDP blocks climate protection, die Grünen and die Linke show too much sympathy with protesters; die Linke use populism within the debate;

opinion on climate change: unknown

Conservative Party

problem definition: The disruptive protests are not only dangerous and reprehensible, they also infringe other people's rights "to go about their normal lives" and even endanger people's lives as well as stopping key infrastructure from running.

reasons for the problem: Activists are not protesting for climate change but rather committing disruption for the purpose of disruption itself. Activists are therefore selfish and ignore their fellows. Activists are also hypocrites and some even fly to protests and by creating traffic jams they contribute to more emissions themselves.

solutions of the problem: The proposed Bill including serious disruption orders and stop and search powers to prevent locking on, glueing on or tunneling

responsibilities: The government needs to react to the disruptive protests to protect the "law-abiding majority".

position within this debate: The conservative party is on the side of the majority and of the police who need clearer rules. Furthermore, the government has proposed the correct balance between the right to protest and the rights of the public to go about their lives. The bill is not draconian or anti-democratic, the party claims, as the people can protest peacefully without causing disruption or use elcetions and letters to MPs to make themselves heard.

position of others in that debate: The SNP and Labour Party support the disruption and therefore support a minority and disregard the rights of the majority. Furthermore, the Scottish people are not directly affected. The protesters should use other means to protest, or they are not perceived of as legitimate protesters.

opinion on climate change: Climate change might be dangerous, but it is not dangerous enough to justify disruptive protests.

Labour Party

problem definition: The disruptive protests have gone too far and stop key infrastructure from running and infringe other people's lives. However, the second problem is that the government is trying to introduce a new Bill which is repressive or at least formulated too broadly so that passers-by and peaceful protesters will be affected, too. Furthermore, the content of the Bill has been rejected before.

reasons for the problem: Activists are egoistic, but the government is also disregarding the right to protest peacefully. Also, the police need more and better resources to deal with the protests.

solutions of the problem: The police need better training for prevention and de-escalation as well as more resources and reducing court backlog. Injunctions could be effective in preventing disruption at protests, too. Apart from that, the law already in place is enough to deal with those protests that go too far.

responsibilities: The government needs to tackle other crises like the cost-of-living crisis or climate change instead of proposing this law. It furthermore needs to increase resources for the police so that they can better deal with the protesters having gone too far.

position within this debate: Members of the Labour Party stress their own experiences at protests to show that they can understand what it means if the right to protest is to be taken away. They also stress their own constituents' experiences of protests and the good causes they have fought for. Therefore, they also warn to not be "heavy handed and being led by moral panic with these things". They present themselves as the saviours of the right to protest and as the ones who can save the country from the anti-democratic tendencies in the government. By stressing the ineffectiveness of the proposal, they aim at presenting their solution as the better one. The Labour Party quotes the report of the Majesty's inspectorate as well as police officers to support their own position.

position of others in that debate: The conservatives claim to be a party of freedom; however, they are not interested in tackling the real problems and rather diminish the right to protest which will also lead to a decrease of trust in public institutions like the police. Especially the government is heavily criticized by the Labor Party for infringing other people's rights, not only that right to protest but also innocent people who will be affected by the law. Therefore, the government is even described as the coalition of chaos and as acting undemocratically. Quite frequently, the government is blamed for infringing the right to protest in decreasing the level of democracy as well as for being responsible for the high inflation. In a few cases, insults are used or Labour Members make fun of members of the conservative party. The protesters are accepted as protesters or even as climate activists.

opinion on climate change: More action on climate change is needed, since climate change is dangerous and will end in a catastrophe.

Green Party

problem definition: there are several crises, the government should tackle - like the climate crisis - but instead it created a Bill that attacks fundamental rights

reasons for the problem: the government created a bill that is driven by political ideology; government ignores other crises

solutions of the problem: more action on climate change is needed to stop the protests; also: more democracy is needed, not less; even in the case there need to be reactions to the disruptive protests, existing law is sufficient; but: *"Protest is, by definition, disruptive."* [1:728 p 55 in Public Order Bill 2022-05-23 - Editor](#)

responsibilities: the government is to blame for increasing the production of fossil fuel and not reacting to other crises as well as for attacking people's rights as well as for dividing the public and creating oppositions between protestors and the rest of the public.

position within this debate: They care about the people's right to protest and about the climate. They are among the opposition that claims that the proposal is draconian and repressive and therefore support amendments proposed by the Labour Party and SNP. They also support speeches by MPs that raise other examples of disruptive protests that were effective.

position of others in that debate: The Greens distance themselves mostly from the government who is described as cowardly and populist because of its proposals. Furthermore, the government does not help to "halt the decline of nature" by 2030 as promised.

opinion on climate change: Climate change is dangerous and urgent. It needs to be tackled now and the government therefore needs to listen to the protesters as well as UN Secretary General - Antonio Guterres.

Scottish National Party

problem definition: The proposal is an overreaction, not well thought-through and also an infringement of other people's rights. The disruptive protests are not the problem.

reasons for the problem: The government does not listen to protesters who are not protesting in the way, the government wants them to. The government is populist.

solutions of the problem: More action on climate change is needed and the proposal needs to be turned down. Existing law is sufficient if crimes are committed by the protesters.

responsibilities: The government needs to deal with larger problems such as the high inflation or migration. It also needs to listen to protesters as they are fighting for the greater cause. The Labour party needs to be a real opposition and help to turn this proposal down. The government

position within this debate: The Scottish National Party stresses that Scottish people will be affected by the proposals, too. Actually, they want to get rid of this bill completely but at least amend it and therefore also support amendments by the Labour Party. If the government continues like this, the SNP threatens to hold another referendum on independence of Scotland as they want to protect their democracy and the right to protest. To support their own position, the SNP cites the report by the Majesty's inspectorate as well as police officers and the report by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill Committee. They also present themselves as the guardians of the right to protest of their own constituents and all people in Scotland.

position of others in that debate: The Labour Party is to be blamed for not trying to make radical changes even if they also believe that the proposed bill goes too far. Meanwhile, the government is blamed for bringing back a proposal that has already been rejected, thereby circumventing democracy, and for their proposal which is populist and anti-democratic. In a few cases, SNP members make fun of conservative MPs. The proposal by the government is even described as draconian. One DUP Member is also accused of believing that climate change does not exist.

The protesters are viewed neutrally or even positively and accepted as protesters for a greater cause.

opinion on climate change: climate change is dangerous

Democratic Unionist Party

problem definition: The disruptive protests have crossed boundaries by impacting lives of people who are not interested in the protest or even oppose it. This is therefore no legal protest anymore.

reasons for the problem: Activists are egoistic and only represent the interests of a minority.

solutions of the problem: The government needs to react, harsher laws are needed, and the police needs to act rigorously. Therefore, this proposal will help prevent further disruptive protest.

responsibilities: The government is responsible for taking care of the protesters that have gone too far and the police needs to act more harshly against the criminal protesters.

position within this debate: The DUP presents itself as the ones who got the balance between the right to protest and the rights of others to go about their daily lives right. They claim they don't want to introduce legislation against protests but this time, this measure is necessary. thereby, the DUP positions itself among the Conservative Party

position of others in that debate: The protesters are hypocrites as they also had stars fly in for their protests from America and cause traffic jams which even produce more polluting emissions. Other opposition members are further described as hypocrites, too, as they want to ban protests within a certain range around abortion clinics but not want to ban disruptive climate protests. The proposal by the

government is instead balancing the rights of people and protesters in a good way. It is also clear enough as police officers are used to having to interpret some laws.

opinion on climate change: unknown

Liberal Democrats

problem definition: The current proposal is an overreaction to the protests although disruptive protests are not to be accepted.

reasons for the problem: Delayed ambulances are rather caused by other problems and not by the protesters.

solutions of the problem: LD members think that the police needs better training and the court backlogs need to be tackled in order for better reactions to the disruptive protests which have crossed boundaries. However, existing law is sufficient.

responsibilities: The government needs to tackle more urgent problems like crime against women and girls or the delays of ambulances as well as court backlogs.

position within this debate: The LD presents itself as one of the defenders of the tradition of policing by consent as well as the right to protest peacefully. The LD views itself as being part of the opposition and supports statements and amendments by the official opposition (Labour Party).

position of others in that debate: The government is seen as restricting rights of citizens (including undermining the trust in public institutions) and is compared to a repressive regime. It also has presented a proposal which is not well thought-through and not prepared to withstand reports that the police will not be able to deal with all their tasks. The government is also seen as being not supportive of the police. To support their opinion, they quote the police or some police officers. As the DUP positions itself on the side of the Conservative Party, LD members distance themselves from the DUP. The protesters are seen critically due to their disruptive protest tactic, however, they are not viewed as the problem of delayed ambulances.

opinion on climate change: unknown

PC

problem definition: The proposal by the government goes too far and infringes the important right to protest.

reasons for the problem:

solutions of the problem: The proposal needs to be voted against or amended?

responsibilities:

position within this debate: They are not the most important ones - and only say a few words. But they position themselves among the other parties that oppose the Bill and acknowledge that other disruptive protests have helped to gain important rights for the people in Great Britain. Guardians

position of others in that debate: The Conservatives pass anti-democratic laws and this time ignore the important right to protest.

opinion on climate change: unknown

Appendix IV: Overview of the discourses

Table C1: Overview of discourses within the "Bundestag" debates on disruptive climate protests

| Element of Phenomenal Structure | Discourse 1 | Discourse 2 | Discourse 3 | Discourse 4 |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Description of activists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egoistic • Spoiled • Stupid • terrorists and dangerous • youth is not mature enough | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • egoistic • "self-proclaimed activists" • Criminals • "Blockierer", "disruptors" • "Klimakleber" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "activists" • "protesters" • "Letzte Generation" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "activists" • "protesters" • "Letzte Generation" |
| Description of protest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • terrorism • dangerous for the current system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ineffective • criminal • dangerous • generally wrong • sets a wrong precedence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasons for the protest are legitimate, the methods are not • ineffective • inappropriate, but not necessarily criminal and no extremism • right to protest is necessary in democracies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disruptive climate protest is civil disobedience • legitimate • right to protest is necessary in democracies |
| Opinion on Climate Change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • climate change is exaggerated • climate change cannot be stopped in Germany alone | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • societal support is needed for effective climate protection • climate protection is a central issue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • climate change is one of the most important topics of our time • an existential threat • societal support is needed for effective climate protection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • climate change is an existential threat • one of the most important topics of our time |
| Solution proposed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prohibition of "Letzte Generation" is needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harsher laws are needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • existing law is sufficient • more action on climate change is needed • other forms of engagement are available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more action on climate change is needed |
| Self-Positioning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We recognize the real danger these protests pose to the current system" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "we have a sober view on the protests" • not over-reacting but not trivializing • would have had better ideas for climate protection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "we are working on climate protection" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "we are the only ones listening to what the protesters say" |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Positioning of others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> those following discourse 3 and 4 trivialize these dangerous protest methods the Greens are parliamentary arm of green RAF & the Left has murderers among them → these two parties are not legitimate participants in this debate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> those following discourse 3 and 4 trivialize the protests that have strong impact on people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> climate protection has been blocked for too long those following discourse 1 and 2 over-react and criminalize the protests activists should join parties to achieve more climate protection and convince others in parliament | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> government needs to create more policies for climate protection and live up to own ambitions those following discourse 1 and 2 escalate the debate rhetorically and hold double-standards |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|--|

Table C2: Table 3: Overview of discourses within the "House of Commons" debates

| Element of Phenomenal Structure | Discourse 1 | Discourse 2 | Discourse 3 |
|--|--|--|--|
| Description of activists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “protesters” “Just Stop Oil”, “Extinction Rebellion”, “Insulate Britain” “environmental/climate activists” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Egoistic Hypocrites criminal extremists nuts/deranged/uncivil illegitimate protesters individuals and a minority “disruptors” “protesters” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “protesters” “environmental/climate activists” |
| Description of protest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> protests need to be noisy peaceful disruptive protest serves a greater cause can be effective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> disruptive protest is reprehensible endangers people's lives stops key infrastructure criminal costs taxpayers' money | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> disruptive protest is ineffective dangerous reprehensible stops key infrastructure |
| Opinion on Climate Change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> climate change is dangerous more action on climate change is needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> climate change is not as bad so that it would justify disruptive protests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> climate change could end in a catastrophe more action on climate change is needed |
| Solution proposed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> focus on tackling climate change and other important topics; existing law is sufficient | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> government needs to react with harsher laws police need to act more rigorously police need additional powers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> police need to act more rigorously but existing law is sufficient police need better resources injunctions could also be effective |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Self-Positioning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are the only ones listening to the protesters properly” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are protecting the rights of the majority and acting on behalf of them” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We have the better ideas to deal with the protesters and are protecting democracy” |
| Positioning of others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extending stop and search powers to prevent disruptive protests is not only ineffective and an overreaction but also repressive • government should better deal with other crises | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone following another discourse supports a minority and ignores the rights of the majority • other legal forms of protesting exist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those proposing extending laws to prevent disruptive protest are overreacting • this proposal looks like law that would be used by Russia or Hungary against protesters • government should focus on things like climate change or the cost-of-living crisis |