

Public opinion of the 2019 London April Rebellion: Before, during, and after

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Part of a series of reports on public perceptions of XR available at <http://www.benkenward.com/xrsurveyreports.html>

Results summary

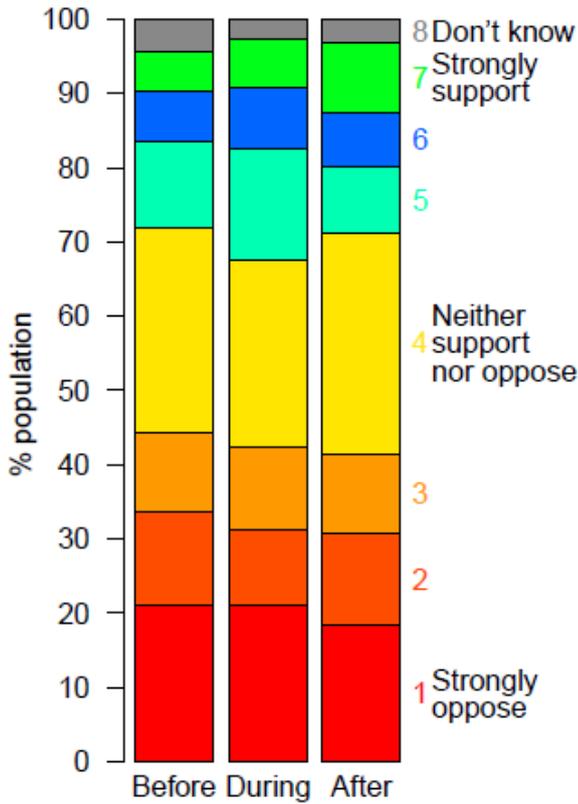
Support for Extinction Rebellion's methods of civil disobedience increased after the April Rebellion compared to hypothetical support prior to the events. Extrapolating from our weighted poll, roughly 2.2 million *additional* people (4% more of the adult GB population) strongly supported XR's civil disobedience after the April Rebellion. However, this did not translate to a similar increase in intentions to engage in civil disobedience. Overall, such intentions decreased, although no decrease was seen in those already leaning towards engaging in civil disobedience. After the April Rebellion, 13% of the population (roughly 7.1 million people) reported being at least somewhat likely to engage in civil disobedience. Looking at intentions to engage in general activism (e.g., marching and petitioning), the April Rebellion led to an increase (of 3% of adult population) in those reporting a high likelihood to take part. The April Rebellion was also associated with appreciable increases in concern about environmental issues (confirming previous such reports); dissatisfaction with Government action; and support for a Citizens' Assembly as an alternative to Government.

Survey methods summary

Participants were 863 individuals recruited by the Deltapoll survey company, with participant selection and analysis weighting both used to make results representative of the GB (England, Wales, and Scotland) adult population. Weighting can reduce the accuracy of time-point comparisons, and our results take this into account in the margins of error. The representative survey allows confidence in generalising to the general population. Further method details are in an appendix below, which includes a preregistration of the analyses.

The same participants were asked the same questions at three time points in an internet survey. Before (832 participants) covered the period from 11th April to the April Rebellion start, During (540 participants) was between 18th and 28th April, and After (442 participants) was between 18th May and 6th June.

Support for XR methods of civil disobedience



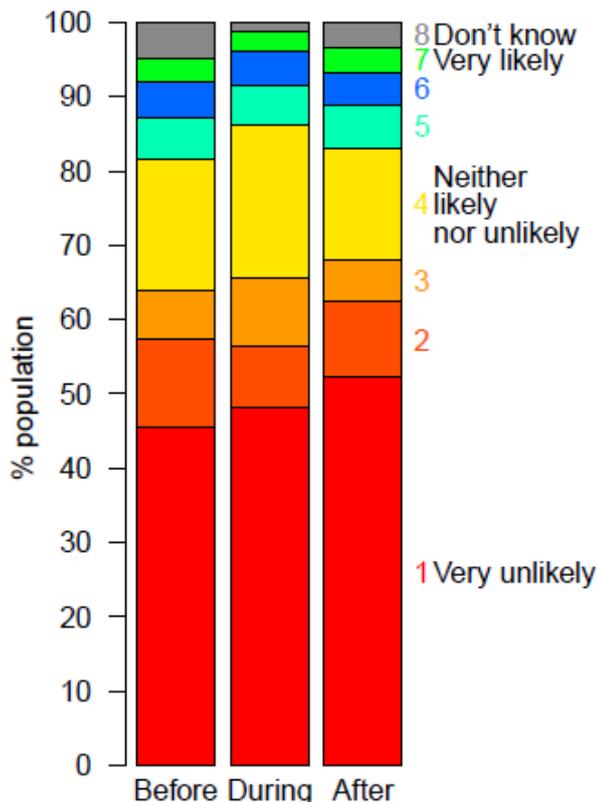
This measure is an average of answers to two questions: (#1) “Do you support or oppose disruptive civil disobedience being carried out in London by the environmental campaigners?” (#2) “Do you agree or disagree that disruptive civil disobedience is necessary to force Government action on climate change and ecological breakdown?”

Question #1 was preceded by a paragraph describing the April Rebellion, listed in the method details appendix below. At the Before time-point, support is of a hypothetical action because the April Rebellion had not begun.

There were increases in average support, greater than the margin of error, from Before to During and from Before to After. The overall population shifts were small, as seen from the graph. **From the perspective of XR growth prospects, most important is the increase in strong support (7; green bar). The increase from Before (5%) to After (9%) can be generalised to 2.2 million additional people, with a margin of error of 0.6 to 3.8 million.**

These results suggest that large scale acts of rebellion can increase public support, although overall opposition After still outweighed support by 42% to 26%. There is no evidence of increased polarisation as a result of the actions: that is, there was no increase in opposition in addition to the increase in support. No demographic variables predicted how much individuals’ support increased over time.

Intention to participate in non-violent civil disobedience



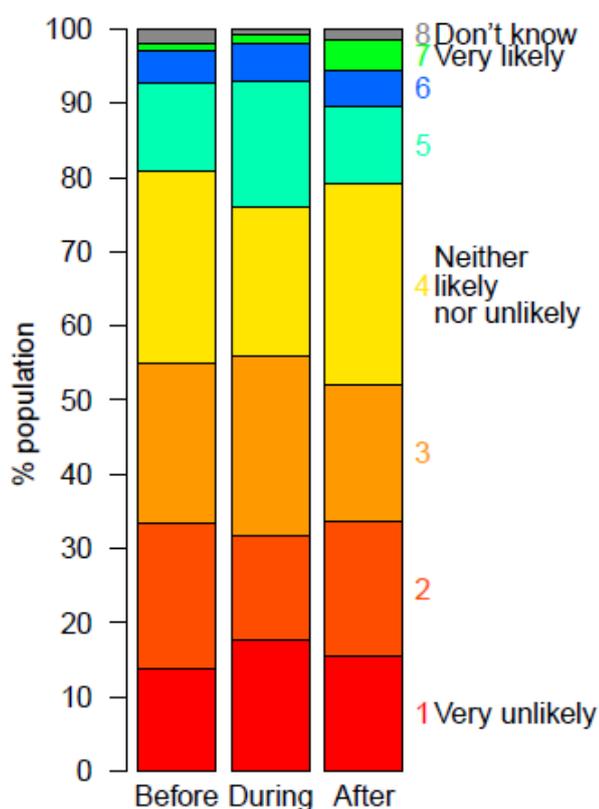
Participants saw “a list of political actions that can urge politicians to address climate change and other environmental problems” and were asked “How likely or unlikely are you personally to do each action within the next year?” The focal action here is “Participate in peaceful and disruptive civil disobedience like blocking roads?”

The only change greater than the margin of error is a decrease from Before to After in the overall likelihood of engaging in civil disobedience.

Focusing on those who report being very likely to participate, the increase from Before to After of 86,000 people is within the margin of error.

The result suggests some polarisation – overall intention decreased, but apparently did not affect those already likely to activate. **After, 13% of people (margin of error: 5.5 to 8.8 million people) report being at least somewhat likely to engage in civil disobedience.**

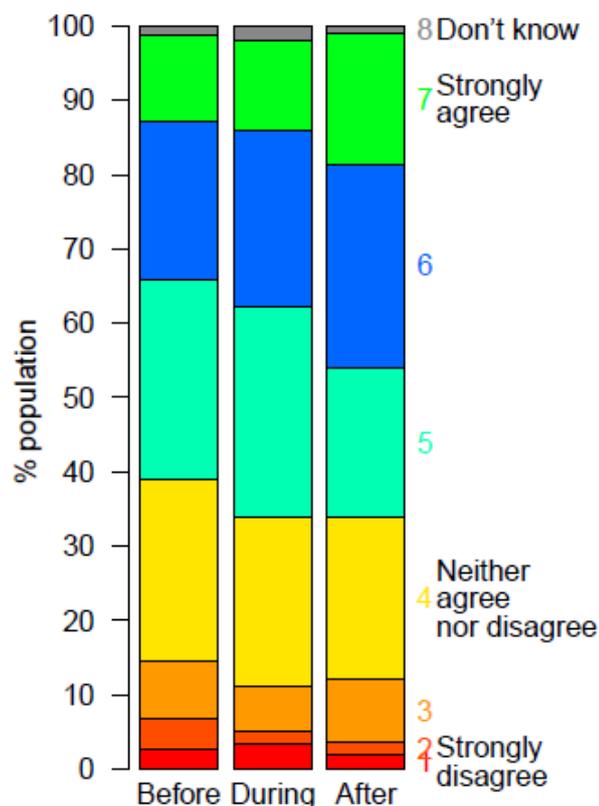
Intention to activate more generally (marching, petitioning, etc.)



The question “How likely or unlikely are you personally to ... within the next year” included four further items: “Sign a petition”; “Write a letter to my MP”; “Talk about the issues with friends or family”; “Go on a protest march”.

We analysed change from Before to After in average intention to engage in all five activities. There was no change in average likelihood outside the margin of error. However, **those who responded 'very likely' changed from 1% to 4%, generalising to an increase of 1.8 million people (margin of error: 0.8m to 2.8m).**

Concern about the crises

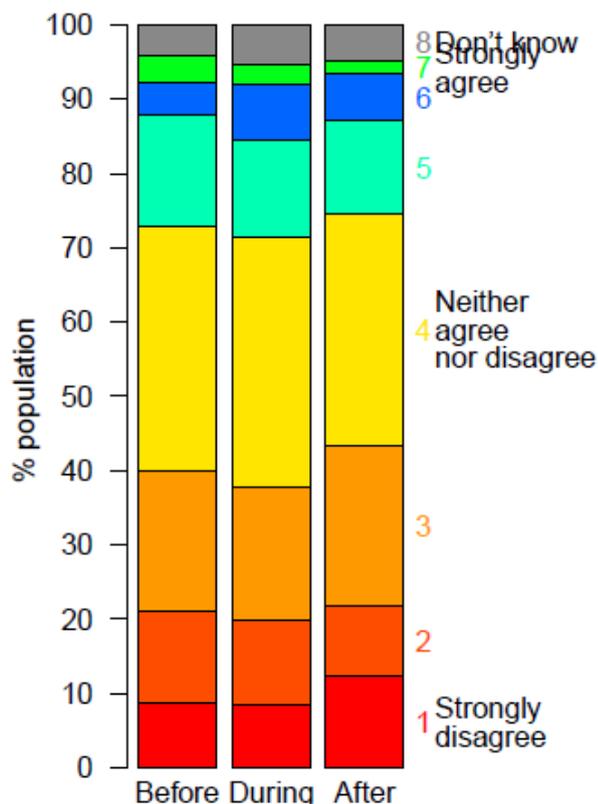


This measure is the average agreement with three items: “Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing humanity”; “Ecological breakdown (for example species going extinct) is one of the greatest threats facing humanity”; “I worry about the effects of climate change in my lifetime in this country”.

Concern increased from Before to After and also from During and After. This confirms an [analysis by YouGov](#) suggesting the April Rebellion was associated with marked changes in levels of concern. It’s illuminating to compare this with [our previous experimental study](#) finding that exposure to one media item about the April Rebellion did not alter people’s concern levels (although it did improve support levels). Together these results suggest that sustained campaigning may be more necessary for influencing concern than for influencing support.

We found no demographic variables that predicted how much individuals’ concern increased over time.

Satisfaction with Government action

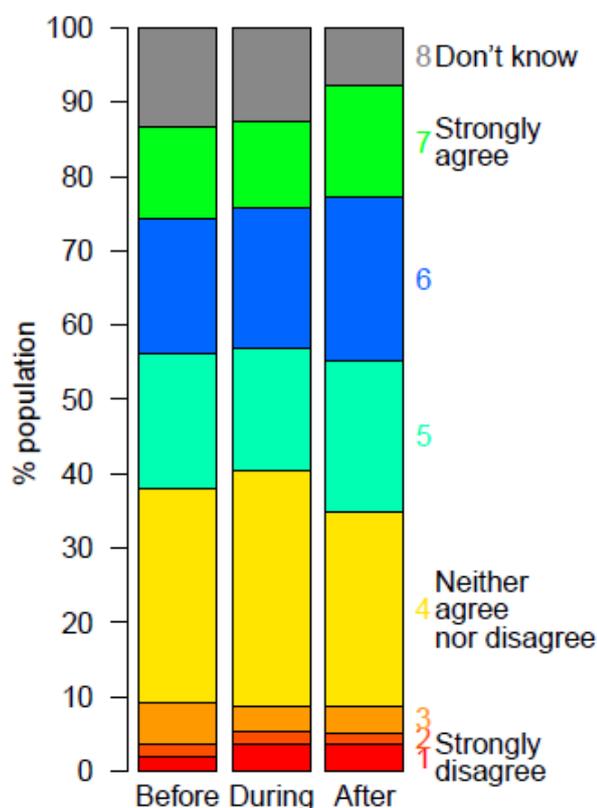


This measure is the average agreement with two items: “The Government is doing a lot to tackle climate change”; “The Government is doing a lot to tackle ecological breakdown (for example species going extinct)”.

Satisfaction decreased from During to After. The change from Before to During is inside the margin of error. This result is in line with [our experimental study](#) showing that exposure to Rebellion messaging can decrease satisfaction with Government action.

Demographic analysis indicated that the decrease in satisfaction was greater for those who vote for more progressive political parties and for higher earners.

Support for a Citizens’ Assembly



Single item: “A Citizens Assembly is composed of about 100 randomly chosen members of the public, who are advised by experts, and given time to think, discuss, and decide action. The Citizens Assembly is similar to a big jury. Do you agree or disagree a Citizens Assembly would do a better job than UK Governments have done in tackling climate change and ecological breakdown?”

The one change greater than the margin of error is **an increase from Before to After in overall agreement that a Citizens’ Assembly would do a better job than the Government.** After, 57% of people agree (weakly or strongly), increased by 9% (margin of error 3% to 15%) representing 4.7 million people.

No demographics predicted changes in individuals’ agreement over time.

Interpretation and conclusions

The April Rebellion appears to have led to several changes in public opinion. Two key results might seem at odds. The April Rebellion appears to have caused an increase in passive support for XR's methods, but a decrease in reported intentions to join in. This apparent tension can be resolved by focusing on the people with highest intentions to participate. In the high-intentions group, intentions to engage in civil disobedience did not appear to change.

Large-scale Rebellion like in April appears to turn off people who are already sceptical of the methods. However, post-April, 13% of people (at least 5.5 million people given the margin of error) still report being at least somewhat likely to participate in civil disobedience. This suggests that the potential recruitment field for XR is very large in comparison with XR's current size. It is unknown how support and intentions to engage in civil disobedience would be affected by future XR actions that differ from the April Rebellion, e.g., actions that are ambiguous with respect to non-violence or less mass-participatory.

The April Rebellion led to substantial increases in people (extrapolated as 1.8 million) reporting being highly likely to take action in general (e.g., marching and petitioning). This may not be regarded as important by XR strategists given XR's position that only civil disobedience can achieve necessary change. However, this finding could be relevant for making the argument within the wider environmental community that XR's actions are positive even from the perspective of campaigns focusing on other methods. This finding is consistent with the decrease in satisfaction with Government action.

It is useful that these results confirm the findings of a previous [analysis by YouGov](#) showing an increase in public concern about the environment. Even for those who don't prioritise civil disobedience, Extinction Rebellion moves opinion in the right direction. The hockey-stick graph from YouGov is more striking than the more modest effects here, likely because YouGov asks participants to rank numerous issues in order of concern level, which is a different and more time-consuming but more sensitive survey method.

Finally, the results are encouraging for proponents of a Citizens' Assembly. The appreciable increase in support appears consistent with the decrease in satisfaction with Government action, as the Citizens' Assembly question explicitly contrasts the Citizens' Assembly with Government. Our [previous experimental study](#) suggested that some media items about XR can decrease support for a Citizens' Assembly. The results here suggest that that the previous findings may have been due to peculiarities of the particular media items used in that study, which exposed each participant to one single media item only. Exposure to the whole April Rebellion did not have a negative effect.

Appendix: Method details

Sampling and weighting

Representative samples were recruited by DeltaPoll using quotas for gender, age, educational attainment, work status, region and 2017 General Election vote. Data were then rim-weighted to a matrix of geo-demographic variables: age; education; social grade; region; past vote; and political attention.

Only one person identified as neither male nor female and they were removed from the analyses for simplicity.

Time-period details

The Before data-collection period was the 11th to 16th of April, which includes 2 days during which the April Rebellion had begun. For the 124 participants answering during these 2 days, data was excluded if they reported having heard of Extinction Rebellion (30 participants). The During data-collection period was between the 18th April and 7th May, but data collected after the 28th April was

excluded because the April Rebellion was over. The After data-collection period was between 18th May and 6th June and all data was retained.

Drop-out

Drop-out was 47% from the first to the last time point (see methods summary above), which can bias comparisons of variables at different time points if the likelihood of dropping out were related to the variables. In this study, the key findings are unlikely to be explained by drop-out. For example, those who dropped out between Before and After were more likely to support XR methods Before; meaning their absence would predict an opposite effect to that obtained.

Weighting is independent at each time-point, which allows correction to any skew in demographic representativeness caused by drop-out.

Margin of error calculations

Differences described as outside the margin of error are either statistically significant (pre-registered $p < 0.05$) in bootstrapped paired-comparison tests, or refer to bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals. All bootstraps used 10,000 samples.

Variable composite formation

Strongly correlated items were averaged together because this tends to produce more reliable findings (by reducing covariance). This was [pre-registered prior to analyses](#). All combined variables had r or Cronbach's alpha $> .8$.

Questionnaire paragraph describing the April Rebellion, used for Support Question #1

[Before / During / After]:

“[Some environmental campaigners would like to carry out / The Extinction Rebellion is currently carrying out / In April the Extinction Rebellion carried out] completely peaceful and very disruptive civil disobedience actions in London, for example trying to bring the city to a standstill by blocking roads. [The campaigners say / The Extinction Rebellion says / The Extinction Rebellion says] that scientists tell us that climate change and ecological breakdown will lead to mass starvation across the globe within decades, turning millions into refugees, and that the UK Government won't tackle these problems until people force Government action by being disruptive. Others say that nothing can be done about climate change while some say that disrupting the lives of ordinary citizens won't help to force Government action.”

The underlined phrase about refugees was including for 50% of participants at random, in an experiment design, the results of which are not shown here.