

Why aren't we all activists?

The ethics of disruptive direct action



The most effective protest is a disruptive one. It is not one where you stand at the side of the road and everything's going on as normal, while you chant and wave placards. That's less effective than when you disrupt everyday life, business as usual... There's a big harm happening in the world that is pushed to the background. And if we don't deal with it properly, the global temperature will disrupt life beyond all measures that we have.

Dale Vince, *Just Stop Oil* donor

[T]he Government [has a] duty to put the safety and interests of the law-abiding majority first. We are on their side, not the side of extremists who stick themselves to trains, glue themselves to roads... disrupt the fuel supply... or block ambulances... These extremists stop people from earning a living, gaining an education or caring for a loved one in need. Ordinary people who are working, learning or caring are never deemed by the extremists as important enough to stand in the way of their plots and plans.

Suella Braverman MP, former UK Home Secretary

I am upset because my son has an appointment for over a month. Now, today, he is going to miss that appointment. They might not be able to see him now until next month. He needed to attend that office today. There are a lot of kids in that bus; they need to go to school. [The protest] is unfair. They could do it after the kids are in school. Then I can understand. I am very angry.

Ayl, a commuter caught behind a *Just Stop Oil* slow march

'Keep out of prison,' he wrote
 'Don't get arrested anymore.'
 But while the land is ravaged
 And our pure air poisoned
 When streams choke with pollution
 Silence would be treason
 Punishable by a term in prison.

Ken Saro-wiwa, Nigerian writer & environmental activist

[F]our women up on the hill decided to go forward of their own volition, and they crossed the fence, and those women led us into unknown territory, territory we had not known since 1889*. I was there when 80 people rushed that fence line after these four women demonstrated that bravery, and these women went straight for the heavy equipment. They offered their bodies in a sacrifice to put themselves between financial extractive genocide and ecocide and the future of their families.

Chase Iron Eyes, Lakota People's Law Project, discussing the Standing Rock Protests

These defenders are basically trying to save the planet, and in doing so save humanity. These are people we should be protecting, but are seen by governments and corporations as a threat to be neutralised. In the end it's about power and economics. At its core it's about maintaining the power structures in place. This is true regardless of whether it's a dictatorship, democracy or a corrupt narco state, and regardless of the state's professed commitment to human rights, protecting the environment and combating climate change.

Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

*At the Battle of Wounded Knee in 1889, 300 Lakota people were slaughtered by United States Army troops while protecting their ancestral lands

Based on the quotes above, what are the arguments for and against engaging in disruptive direct action and civil disobedience?

For	Against

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Direct action in the media



News > UK News

IN THE SOUP AGAIN Eco-idiot bailed after throwing soup on Van Gogh painting joins Just Stop Oil M25 protest

Isaac Crowson
Published: 21:00, 10 Nov 2022

A STUDENT already on bail for throwing soup at a Van Gogh painting joined eco protesters in causing more misery for motorists.

Climate activists target private jet airports and demand ban at Cop27

Protesters gather at Farnborough and Luton as part of global action, also calling for tax on frequent fliers

[Cop27 live - latest news updates](#)



Activists from Extinction Rebellion and Scientist Rebellion at Farnborough airport. Photograph: @XrSouthEastUK/Twitter

Damien Gayle *Environment correspondent*
@damiengayle
Thu 10 Nov 2022 17:52 CET

Climate activists have blocked entrances to two of the UK's premier private jet airports as part of a global wave of action against private aviation timed to coincide with Cop27.

Words and images: What words and pictures have been chosen? What ideas do they evoke?

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Framing: What details do they focus on? What ideas are presented? What is left out?

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Implied reality: What picture of the wider world does each story paint? What 'facts' does the story assume are 'obvious'?

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Values: What are the values that each story draws on? What does each writer seem to believe?

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