

Animal Rebellion: Public Opinion Polling

SAM GLOVER, JAMES OZDEN

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Public Opinion Polling: Animal Rebellion

Abstract

[Social Change Lab](#) commissioned [YouGov](#) to conduct two nationally representative longitudinal surveys of approximately 1,500 people in the United Kingdom, focusing on their views on the contributions of animal farming to climate change, and their opinion of the animal and climate activist group [Animal Rebellion](#). Animal Rebellion's [campaign](#) involved blocking roads that led to dairy facilities and [stopping the milk supply to certain parts of England](#). The first survey was conducted on the 30th of August 2022, prior to protests carried out by Animal Rebellion activists, and the second survey was conducted between the 12th and the 20th of September - which was just after protests by Animal Rebellion occurred. **The results of the survey indicate that Animal Rebellion's protests were unsuccessful in capturing the attention of the general public, which seems likely to be largely a result of other events that dominated the news cycle.** The percentage of respondents who said that they knew a 'great deal' about Animal Rebellion went from 0.9% in the survey carried out before the protests to 1.3% in the survey after the protests, indicating very few people heard much about Animal Rebellion's activism. Specifically, the replacement of the Prime Minister, cost of living crisis and the death of Queen Elizabeth received huge amounts of media attention that meant that Animal Rebellion protests received comparatively little coverage. In addition, Animal Rebellion stopped the campaign prematurely due to the death of Queen Elizabeth. **There was no statistically significant change in the views of respondents on any of the issues they were surveyed about.** Additionally, we find interesting results regarding which interventions the UK public thinks are the most effective in reducing carbon emissions from the animal agriculture industry. **Specifically, respondents thought that eating local animal products was the best way to reduce their animal product related carbon emissions**, which is at odds with [current research](#), which suggests increasing plant-based food consumption is more effective.

Key Findings

- **The protests carried out by activists from Animal Rebellion went largely unnoticed by the majority of the UK public**, probably due to the news being dominated by the replacement of the Prime Minister and the death of Queen Elizabeth.
- **There were no significant changes in public opinion relating to public views on animal agriculture** from before the protests occurred to after the protests occurred.

- In the survey carried out before the protests, 76% of respondents reported that they knew nothing at all about the Animal Rebellion campaign, whereas 24% of respondents reported that they had heard of the Animal Rebellion campaign. **In the survey after the protests, this number had increased to 36% of respondents indicating they had heard of the Animal Rebellion campaign, which is a 12 percentage point increase in public awareness.**
- However, this is likely to overstate the absolute number of respondents who had actually heard of Animal Rebellion, as 24% of respondents *also* claimed that they had heard of a fictitious animal welfare organisation.
- Although most respondents had not heard of the protests by Animal Rebellion, **most respondents indicated that they were largely opposed to the kind of protest activity carried out by Animal Rebellion**, with only 14% of respondents saying that they supported the action (as opposed to 64% of respondents saying that they opposed the action). **We don't think this is necessarily negative**, as other successful campaigns have also had high levels of disapproval at certain points (e.g. [Martin Luther King](#) and the Civil Rights Movement).
- We think our findings highlight the **importance of timing**, e.g. not organising campaigns during potentially busy media periods, **and luck**, where unexpected events ([e.g the death of Queen Elizabeth](#)) can significantly reduce the expected impact of a campaign.
- **We found that respondents thought that eating local animal products was the best way to reduce their animal product related carbon emissions**, which is at odds with [current research](#). See more in [this section](#).
- This might be an opportunity for climate and animal advocates to work on communicating the importance of switching from meat-based to plant-based diets to reduce carbon emissions from food.

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Methodology

Both of the surveys had approximately 1,500 respondents - the polling conducted by [YouGov](#) prior to the protests had 1716 respondents, and the polling conducted after the protests had 1449 respondents. This was a longitudinal study, meaning that the same people were surveyed before and after the protests took place. Responses were weighted by demographic information in order to ensure that the survey was nationally representative. Paired weighted t-tests were carried out in order to detect any change in the mean response to each question, adjustments were applied to correct for multiple comparisons ([Benjamini & Hochberg](#), 1995).

To control for any bias created by asking participants about a generally not-often discussed issue, the impact of animal agriculture on climate change, we originally intended to conduct two additional surveys at a time with no ongoing protest, to measure the size of this repeated questioning effect. However, with the death of Queen Elizabeth and Animal Rebellion stopping their campaign as a result, we decided this would not be a good use of funds, as our initial results had found low levels of public awareness of this campaign.

Full Results

Respondents were asked several questions relating to animal agriculture and climate change, as well as questions about their demographic information and political views (including their past votes in UK General Elections and the 2016 EU Referendum). They were also asked whether they had heard of protests organised by either Animal Rebellion, Just Stop Oil, or the Stop Animal Cruelty Coalition (a fictitious group intended to get a rough estimate of [Lizardman's Constant](#), or otherwise to identify the number of people who might incorrectly state that they had heard of a group that they had not actually heard of).

How many people heard of the Animal Rebellion campaign?

The most important finding from our surveys was that very few people were aware of the protests carried out by activists from Animal Rebellion. In the survey conducted before the protests, 76% of respondents reported that they knew 'nothing at all' about protests organised by Animal Rebellion, whereas 24% of respondents gave an answer other than 'nothing at all' and claimed that they knew either 'not very much' (17.2%), 'a fair amount' (5%), or 'a great deal' (0.8%). In the survey conducted after the protests occurred, the number of respondents saying that they knew 'nothing at all' remained high at 64% of respondents, whereas 26.3% of respondents indicated they knew 'not very much', 8% indicated that they knew 'a fair amount', and 1.3% indicated that they knew 'a great deal'. These figures are represented below in Figure 1, which shows the change in awareness of Animal Rebellion's campaign from before to after the dairy-focused protests.

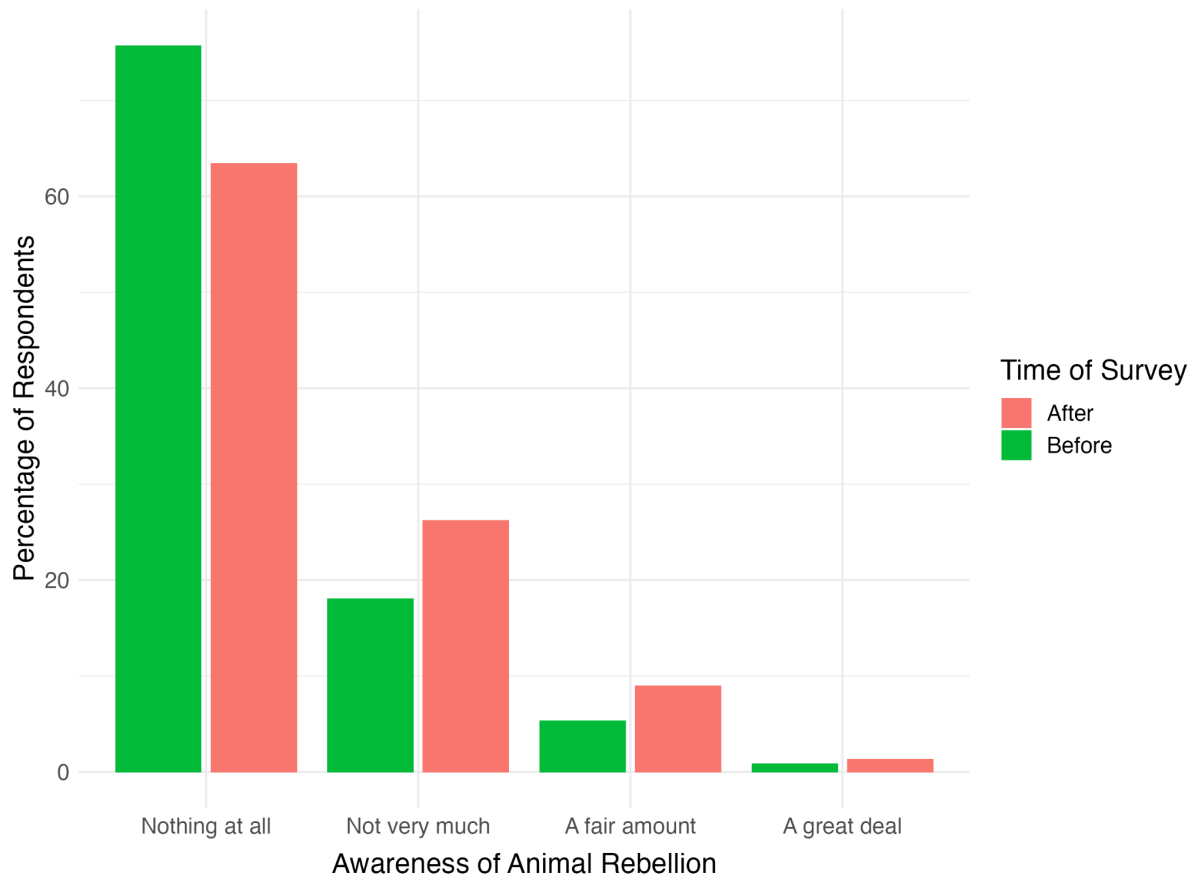


Figure 1: Awareness of Animal Rebellion’s campaign before and after their protests in early September.

In contrast, in [our previous survey](#) looking at the impact of Just Stop Oil, only 38% of respondents said that they had heard ‘nothing at all’ about the protests. The visualisation below shows the extent to which respondents had heard of Just Stop Oil and Animal Rebellion in the survey conducted after the protests occurred. Whilst we found some marginally statistically significant findings ($p=0.09$) for our Just Stop Oil survey, we still believe that our statistical power could have been a limiting factor. Given this, it would be highly unlikely to detect any significant results in our Animal Rebellion survey, due to the small number of people exposed to Animal Rebellion’s campaign.

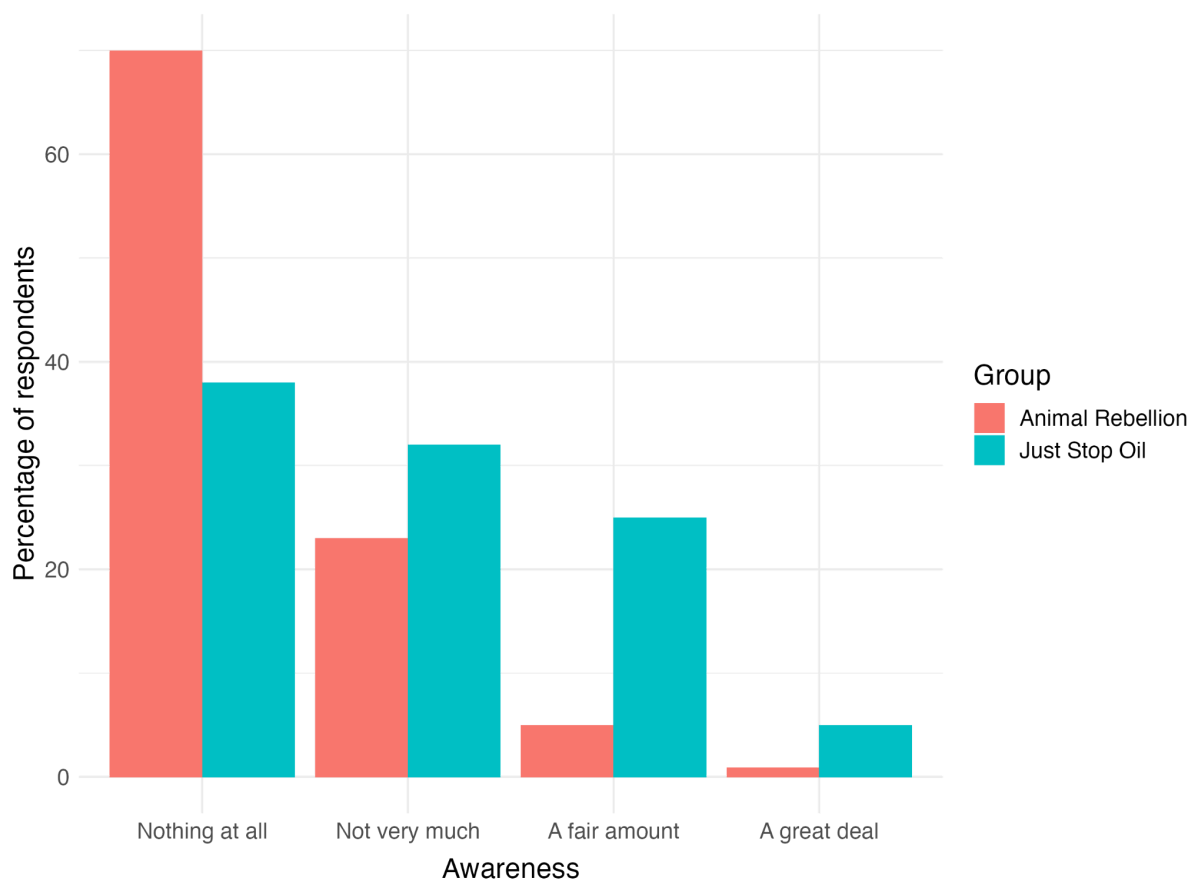


Figure 2: Awareness of both Just Stop Oil and Animal Rebellion after their protests occurred.

Additionally, we believe that even these numbers are likely to give an inflated impression of how many people were aware of the protests carried out by Animal Rebellion. In the survey conducted after the protests, respondents were almost as likely to claim that they were aware of protests organised by the ‘Stop Animal Cruelty Coalition’ a fictitious group. Only 71% of respondents claimed that they knew ‘nothing at all’ about these protests, whereas **29% of respondents indicated that they had at least some awareness of protests that did not occur.** However, we think survey participants may have conflated any animal advocacy related protest they saw in the news with this fictitious animal rights group, so it’s also not obvious that the bulk of these answers weren’t due to Animal Rebellion.

1. What are the most important issues facing the country at this time? Please select up to three.

Respondents were able to choose between: health, immigration & asylum, crime, the economy, tax, pensions, education, family life & childcare, housing, the environment, Britain leaving the EU, transport, welfare benefits, defence and security, animal welfare. They were also able to say that none of these were among the most important issues

facing the country, as well as responding that they didn't know what the most important issues facing the country were.

We expected that if Animal Rebellion protests had been successful in drawing attention to the harms of animal agriculture, the percentage of respondents saying that animal welfare and/or climate change was among the most important issues facing the country at the moment would increase as a result of Animal Rebellion increasing the salience of animal welfare and/or the environment. In fact, there was no such significant change in the number of people reporting that they believed that either animal welfare or climate change was among the most important issues, indicating that protests by Animal Rebellion did not increase the salience of either of these issues.

2. What industries should the UK government prioritise to tackle climate change? Select up to two.

- a) Transportation (e.g. cars, planes and trains)
- b) Electricity production (e.g. generation and distribution of electricity)
- c) Buildings (e.g. electricity and heating in commercial and residential buildings)
- d) Business and Manufacturing (e.g. cement and steel manufacturing)
- e) Animal agriculture (e.g. meat and dairy production)
- f) Waste (e.g. landfills and waste treatment)
- g) None of these
- h) Don't know

We expected that if Animal Rebellion protests had been successful in drawing attention to the harms of animal agriculture, more people would say that they believed that the UK government should prioritise improving animal agriculture as a means of tackling climate change. There were no statistically significant changes in the number of people saying that any of these industries ought to be prioritised after adjusting for multiple comparisons.¹ A visualisation of the data can be seen below.

¹ The number of people saying that the UK government ought to prioritise buildings did increase significantly before adjusting for multiple comparisons, although if this is a real effect we believe that it is likely due to significant coverage of UK energy bills rather than any protest activity carried out by Animal Rebellion activists.

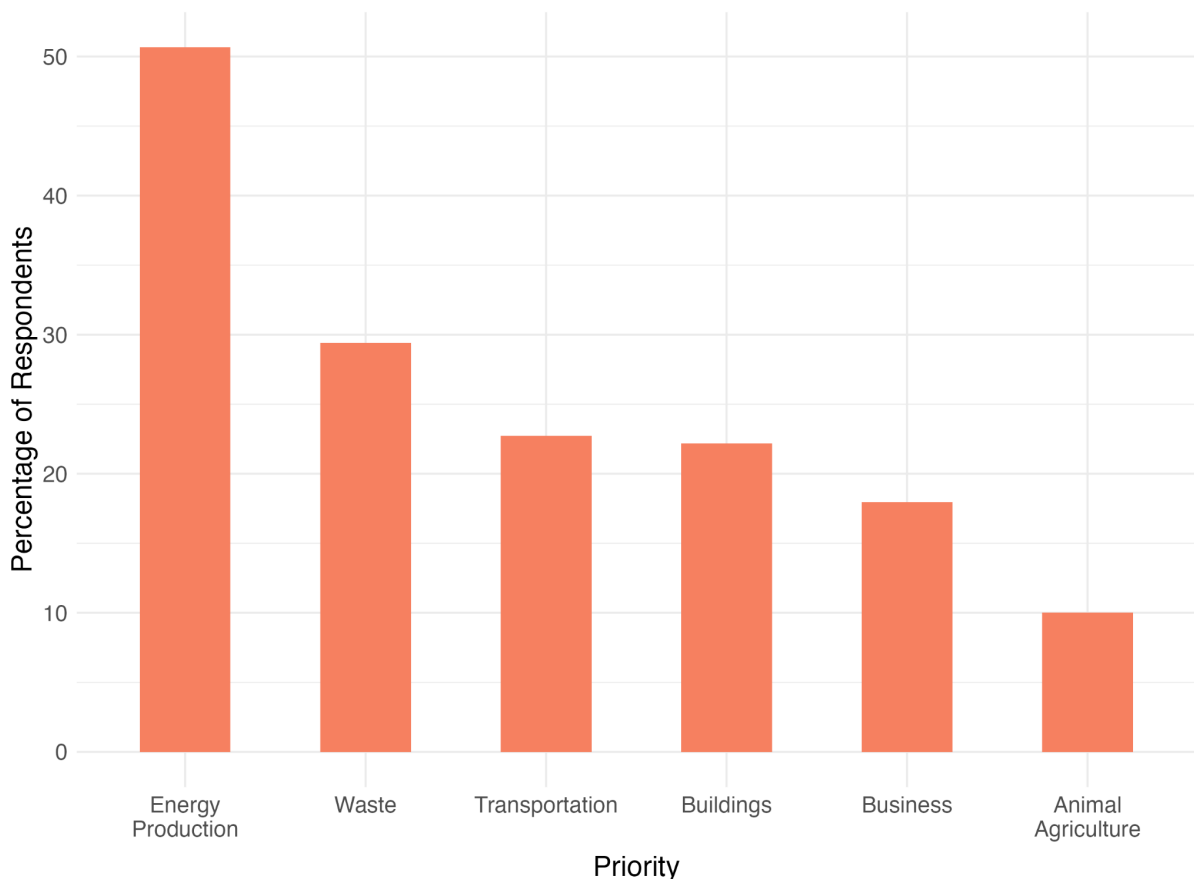


Figure 2: The industries that respondents believe the government should prioritise in their attempts to tackle climate change.

3. How, if at all, do you think meat and dairy production affects the environment and climate change?

- It has a large positive impact on the environment
- It has a small positive impact on the environment
- It has no impact on the environment
- It has a small negative impact on the environment
- It has a large negative impact on the environment

There was no statistically significant change in the number of people saying that meat and dairy production affects the environment and climate change from the survey that occurred prior to the protests to the survey that occurred after the protests, although the results of the question can be seen below (these results are taken from the after survey) in figure 1. The majority of respondents believed that meat and dairy production has a negative impact on the environment, with 41% of respondents believing that it has a small negative effect and 26% of respondents believing that it has a large negative effect. Only 9% of respondents believed that meat and dairy production has a large

positive effect on the environment, and 12% of respondents thought it has a small positive effect on the environment.

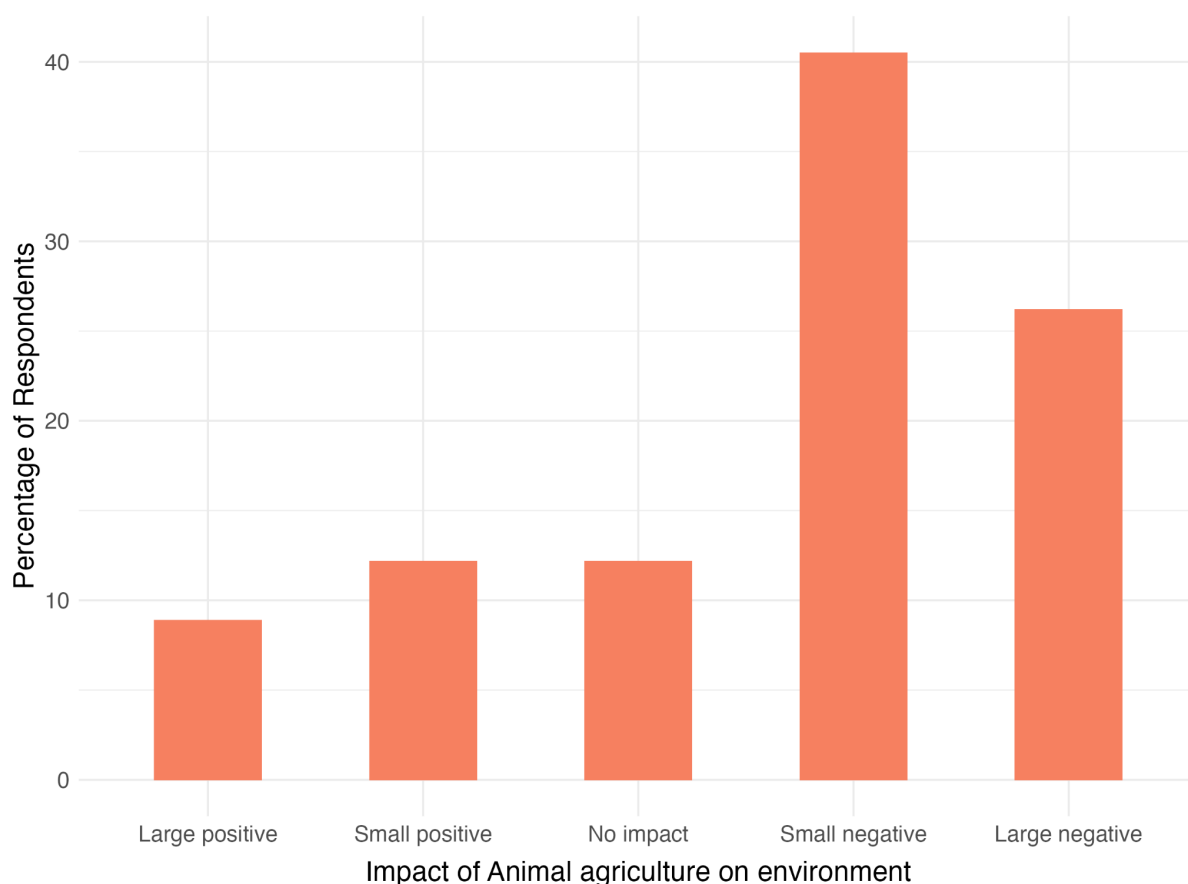


Figure 3: Respondents' views on the impact of animal agriculture on the environment.

4. What reforms to the animal agriculture industry should the UK government prioritise to reduce carbon emissions and environmental impacts? Select up to two.

- a) Offer financial assistance to farmers to transition from livestock farming to plant-based farming
- b) Redirect government subsidies from livestock farming towards plant-based farming
- c) Encourage the public to follow plant-based diets
- d) Encourage the public to buy locally-produced meat and dairy products
- e) Provide financial assistance to farmers to transition towards more organic farming
- f) Breed livestock that have lower methane emissions

- g) Encourage the public to consume more chicken and less beef
- h) None of these
- i) Don't know

If the protests had had a significant impact in the direction that the protesters intended, we expected to see an increase in the number of people believing that the UK government should prioritise reducing meat and dairy production, supporting farmers to transition from livestock farming to plant-based farming, or to encourage plant-based diets. In fact, there was no significant change in the attitudes of respondents towards any of the proposed reforms, indicating that the protests likely did not influence the attitudes of people regarding potential reforms to animal agriculture. A visualisation of the answers received in the survey that occurred after the protests can be seen below.

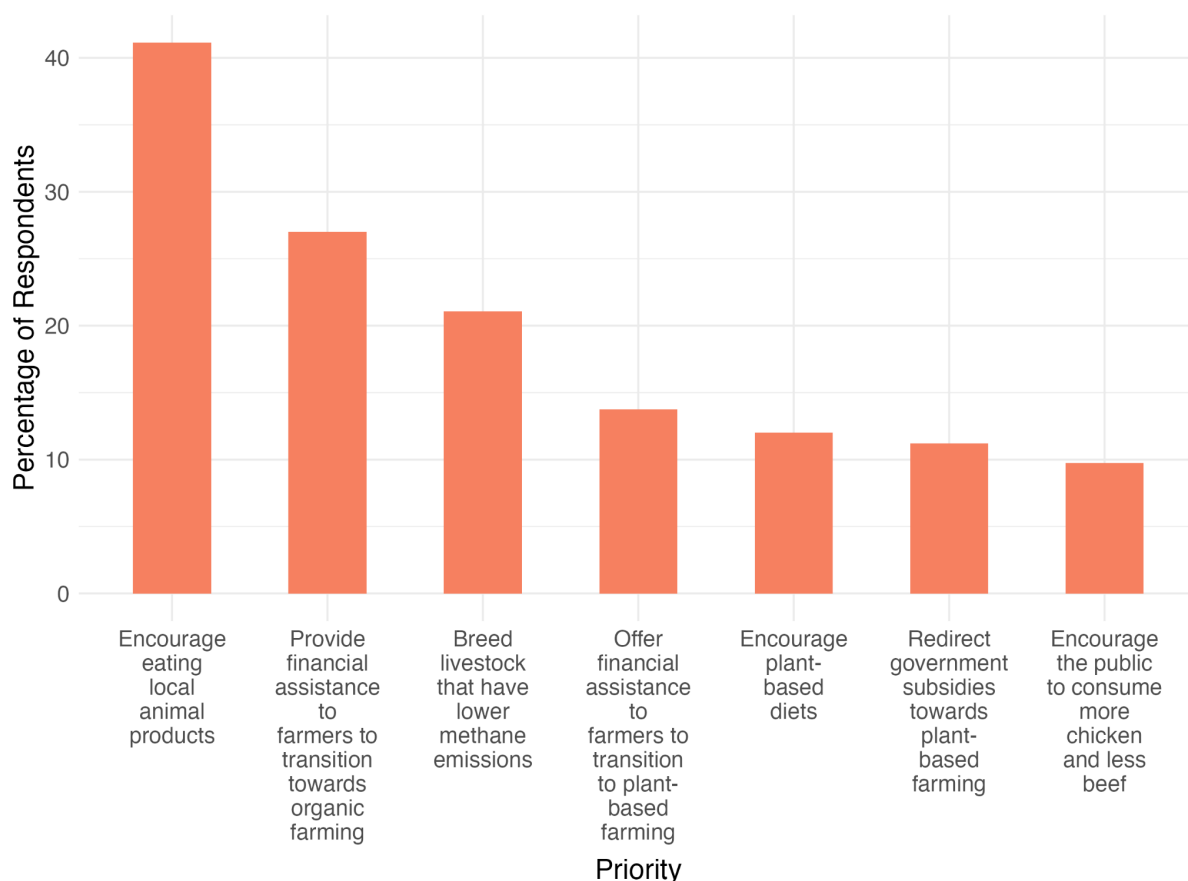
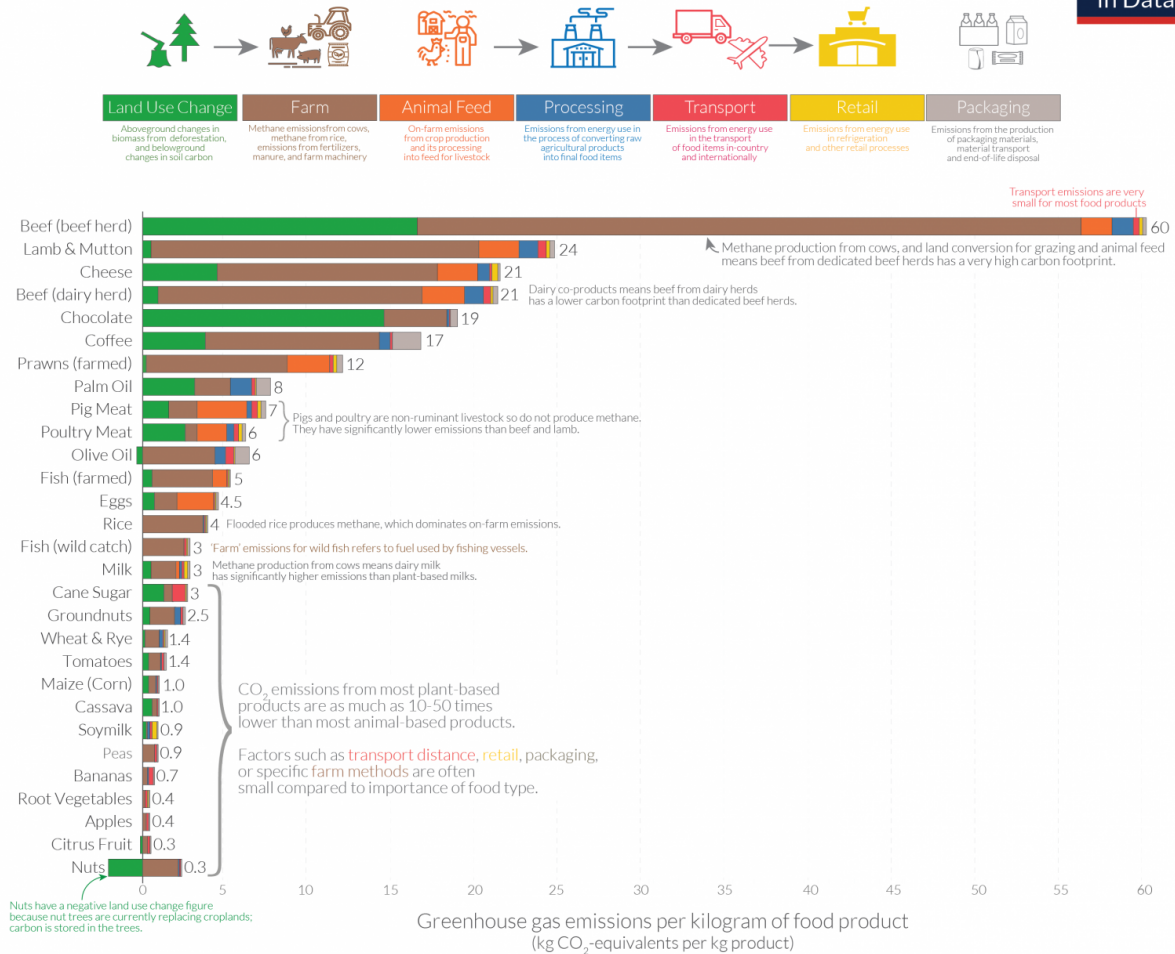


Figure 4: Respondents’ views on the best priority for the UK British government to reduce carbon emissions from the animal agriculture industry. Respondents selected their top two out of the seven options above.

We find that public perceptions on the best ways to reduce carbon emissions from animal agriculture are likely anti-correlated with [current research](#) on the actual most effective ways to reduce carbon emissions from animal agriculture. More specifically, respondents suggested eating local animal products was the best way to reduce carbon

emissions from the animal agriculture industry, whereas [Poore & Nemecek \(2019\)](#) suggests that transport only makes up around 10% of a food's life cycle emissions. In comparison, land use and farm-stage emissions account for around [80%](#) of total greenhouse gas emissions for most food. This is highlighted below in Figure 5. Overall, there seems to be an overestimation by the public in how eating local products can tackle climate change, when the reality is that it matters far less than the actual products you consume.

Food: greenhouse gas emissions across the supply chain



Note: Greenhouse gas emissions are given as global average values based on data across 38,700 commercially viable farms in 119 countries. Data source: Poore and Nemecek (2018). Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science*. Images sourced from the Noun Project. OurWorldinData.org – Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems. Licensed under CC-BY by the author Hannah Ritchie.

Figure 5: The greenhouse gas emissions for various food products, and where in the life cycle these emissions occurred. Source: [Our World in Data](#).

Additionally, the public also thinks that organic farming is good to reduce carbon emissions, but this also isn't the case. For example, [Clark & Tilman \(2017\)](#) finds that on average, organic food uses more land and other resources, without reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This is likely another aspect where the public overestimates the carbon reduction impact of various food changes. This is also true for breeding cows

that produce less methane, which only offers a [modest reduction](#) of 19% in greenhouse gases production, relative to a 50% emissions reduction from switching from a standard UK [animal-based to a plant-based diet](#).

We think this suggests climate and animal advocates could focus more on communicating the relative unimportance of eating local or organic food when considering greenhouse gas emissions, and the much greater importance of switching from animal-based to plant-based food.

Our results also contain some good news for animal advocates in regards to the [small animal replacement problem](#). In short, the small animal replacement problem refers to an issue where climate advocates might encourage the public to replace beef with chicken to lower their carbon footprint, which inadvertently leads to a larger number of animals being killed. Our survey finds that few people think this is the best strategy to reduce carbon emissions from animal agriculture, and that it is less effective than simply eating more plant-based food.

5. Have you done any of these items within the last two weeks? Click all that match.

- a) Looked for information about animal farming online
- b) Watched a video about the animal agriculture industry
- c) Signed a petition related to improving animal welfare or the environmental impact of animal farming
- d) Talked with others about animal welfare or environmental concerns related to livestock farming (e.g. with your spouse, partner, parent(s), children, or friends).
- e) Became involved in an animal advocacy organisation (e.g. charity or political party)
- f) Personally reduced your animal product (e.g. meat and dairy) consumption
- g) Donated to an animal advocacy charity
- h) Written letters, email, or phone your MP about issues related to animal welfare or the environmental impact of animal farming
- i) None of the above

If the protests had had a significant impact in the direction that the protesters intended, we expected to see an increase in the number of people who had done any of the prompted actions, although we found no such change. A visualisation of the results in the survey conducted after the protests occurred can be seen below.

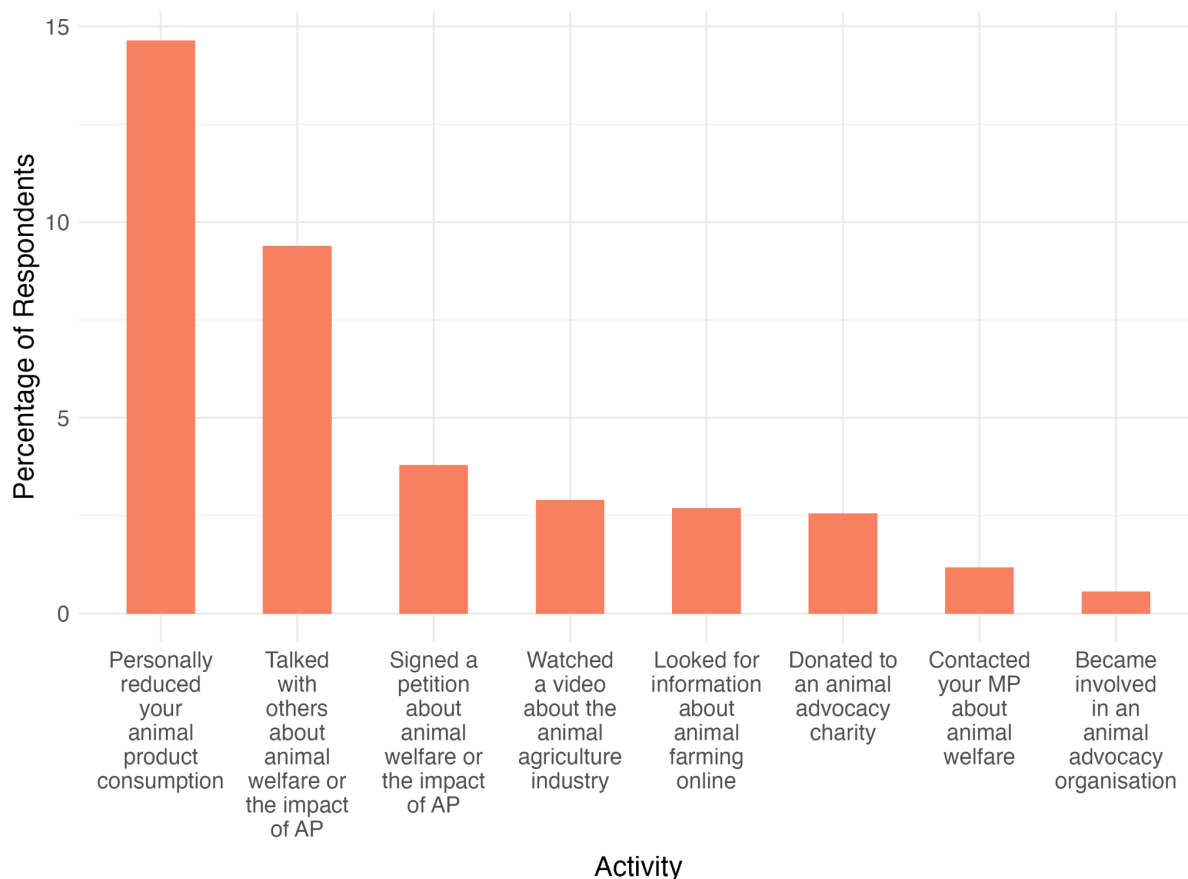


Figure 6: Actions relating to animal welfare that respondents reported to have taken, with AP referring to ‘animal products’.

We think the absolute values highlighted above are likely to be higher than the true values, due to social desirability bias and the troubles with self-reported data. That said, we were primarily interested in this so we could compare across the time-periods, and we don’t think the data above is particularly representative of reality. That said, we include it for potential interested readers.

How many people support Animal Rebellion?

Although few people were aware of the protests organised by Animal Rebellion, there is some indication that people are generally disapproving of the sort of protests that Animal Rebellion organised. As part of the survey conducted after the protests occurred, we asked respondents the following question:

“In the last week, an organisation called “Animal Rebellion” has organised protests to raise awareness about the impact of dairy farming on accelerating climate change. They’ve blocked several roads that lead to dairy distribution facilities across the country. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose the protesters’ actions?”

Respondents were then asked to give an answer ranging from 'strongly oppose' to 'strongly support', indicating their level of support for the protests. The majority of respondents were opposed to the protests, with 64% of respondents saying that they opposed the actions, and only 14% of respondents saying that they supported the actions. Figure 7 (below) shows the distribution of responses.

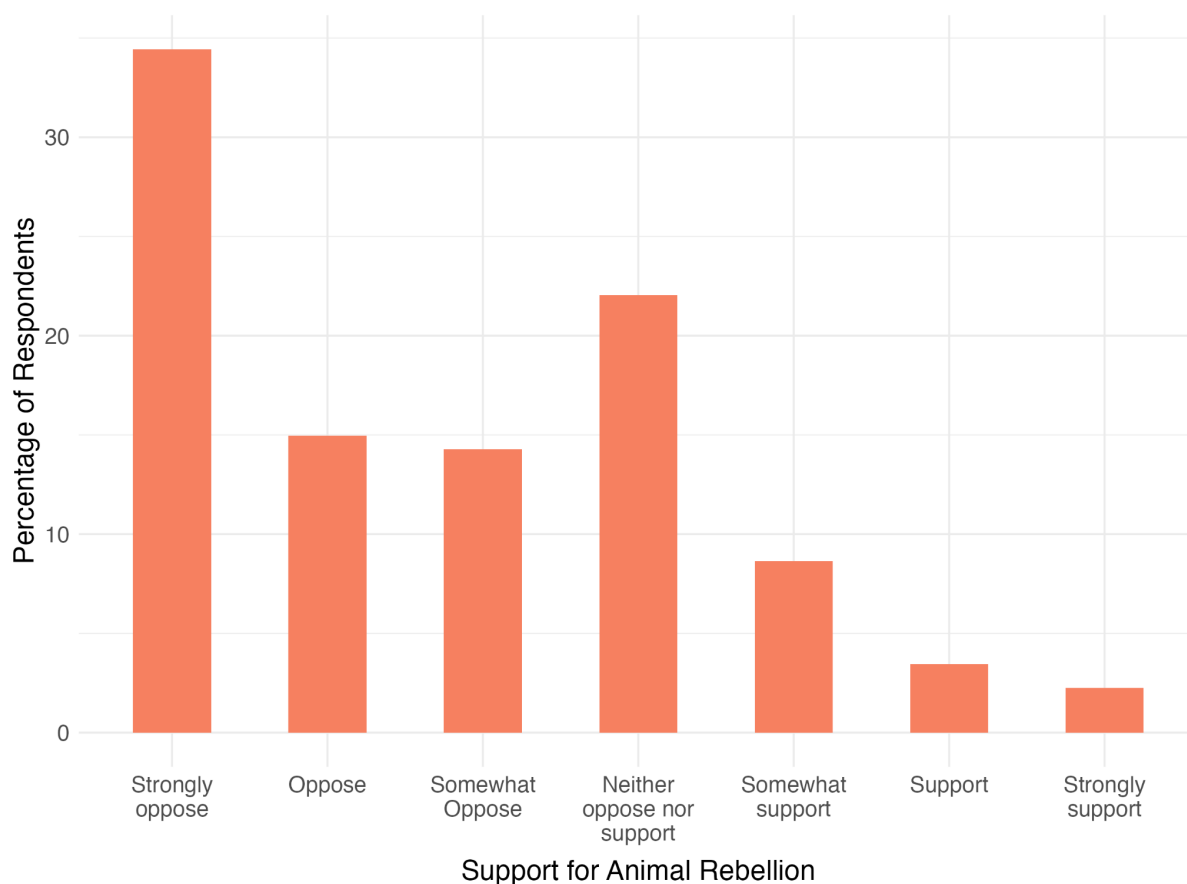


Figure 7: Respondents' degree of support/opposition for the actions carried out by Animal Rebellion Activists

Only a tiny minority (2.3%) of people say that they 'strongly support' protests carried out by Animal Rebellion, whereas a significantly larger number of people (34%) say that they 'strongly oppose' the actions. That said, we don't think that because people don't approve of the protests, that they are necessarily ineffective. [Martin Luther King](#) and [Extinction Rebellion](#) have or have had high disapproval ratings, with some [reasonable evidence](#) suggesting they were influential in shaping policy or public opinion.

Limitations

This research should not be seen as definitive or strong evidence that protest does not work or does not bring about any significant (either positive or negative) change in public opinion. We believe that the reader should update slightly in the direction of

believing that small protests can often be completely ignored in the media due to significant events. We also believe that this study had several limitations that are worth flagging:

- The fictitious group we included (to serve as an indicator of Lizardman's Constant) should not have been an animal welfare group. Respondents were more likely to say that they had heard of the Stop Animal Cruelty Coalition in the survey that was conducted after the protests took place, indicating that they may have confused the fictitious group with actual protests that occurred in a way that they may not have if the issue had been something other than animal welfare.
- As these surveys involved surveying the same people twice, it may be that they were more likely to notice the Animal Rebellion protests than they would have otherwise been, given they had been asked whether they had heard of Animal Rebellion in the survey before the protests occurred. We were planning on controlling for this using another pair of longitudinal surveys during a time with no protests but due to the Queen's death and end of the Animal Rebellion campaign, we decided this was not a good use of money.
- Social desirability bias may obscure respondents' true feelings about animal welfare to some extent. That being said, we asked respondents to rank which issues they thought were the most important rather than simple agree/disagree statements, as a means of reducing acquiescence bias and, to some extent, social desirability bias. Even so, it does seem likely that questions asking respondents what they have personally done to reduce their animal product consumption may overstate the extent to which they actually took action. Due to that, we don't think our values represent particularly accurate absolute values to these questions, as we primarily intended them to be used in a comparative way across 2 close-by time periods.

Discussion

There was no significant change in attitudes towards animal agriculture and/or climate change from the survey conducted before the protests organised by Animal Rebellion to the survey conducted after the protests occurred. This seems like it was probably partially due to the fact that **few people seem to have been aware of the fact that the protests occurred**. Due to the replacement of the Prime Minister as well as the death of Queen Elizabeth, protests organised by Animal Rebellion received little media coverage and failed to have any significant impact, meaning. In addition, in the wake of Queen Elizabeth's death, Animal Rebellion chose to stop their campaign. Without this, it's likely they would have received greater media attention and reached more people, which *might* have led to some change in our outcome variables.

While those who organised these protests were unaware that either of these events would take place (the date that the new Prime Minister would come into office was not confirmed at the time that the protests were organised, and obviously the death of Queen Elizabeth was unforeseeable), **we believe that these polling results highlight both the importance of protest timing and the degree to which luck can be a significant factor in whether or not a protest will achieve its aims.**

These findings are in line with previous literature relating to the importance of protest timing and trigger events. [Poell \(2019\)](#) notes that it is extremely difficult for protesters to capture the attention of the general public when highlighting structural issues and problems, as media coverage tends to use an 'episodic' perspective rather than a 'thematic' perspective, meaning that they highlight issues with individual stories and discrete events rather than gradually changing trends over time or problems that do not always lend themselves to news stories covering sudden and meaningful changes. It is noteworthy that the most salient protests, such as the Black Lives Matter protests throughout 2020, are usually in response to some specific newsworthy event (such as the murder of George Floyd), commonly known as a 'trigger event'.

Similarly, [Vliegenthart et al. \(2016\)](#) find that the strongest predictor of an issue receiving media coverage is whether it has received media coverage in the past, meaning that **it can be especially difficult for a protest group that hasn't received significant media attention in the past to draw attention to itself.** While Animal Rebellion is not totally unheard of (and is affiliated to Extinction Rebellion), its relative lack of previous media coverage may have contributed to the fact that little attention seems to have been paid to the protests that occurred.

It is also worth noting that most people seem to generally be opposed to the sort of actions that Animal Rebellion carries out during their protests. This is fairly unsurprising, and mirrors the results found in [polling](#) commissioned by Social Change Lab conducted before and after protests by the group *Just Stop Oil*. In that instance, 56% of respondents said that they were opposed to the actions of the protesters (compared to only 18% of respondents who supported the actions of the protesters). Whether this should be a significant concern for activists depends on the degree to which activist success is contingent on high levels of public support for the actions of the activists. As covered in our Success Factors Literature Review (forthcoming), there is discussion around whether the presence of a 'radical flank' that is considered too extreme by the general public is likely to increase or decrease the chance of success for a wider movement. On the one hand, it may be the case that unpopular activities serve both to increase the salience of the pertinent issue and make other activists seem more moderate (and reasonable) by comparison. On the other hand, it may be the case that

the overall effect is to make the movement look less reasonable and more extreme. Given existing evidence, it's more likely that there is a **positive radical flank effect, where more radical groups increase supports for more moderate groups**, without causing a loss in overall support for movement issues.

It is also worth mentioning that the willingness of respondents to say that they had heard of the Stop Animal Cruelty Coalition, a group that does not exist, should give us some scepticism about the extent to which those who claimed to have heard of Animal Rebellion had actually heard of them. It is often the case that respondents to surveys will claim to have heard of things that they have not, either to appear more knowledgeable than they actually are, or simply because they make a mistake when giving their responses.

Conclusion

Protests organised and carried out by Animal Rebellion seem to have been largely unnoticed by the general public in the UK. We believe that this is likely due to the fact that other major news stories, such as the Queen's death or cost-of-living crisis, dominated the media coverage and ensured that protests received comparatively less attention in the media. **There were no statistically significant changes in the attitudes of the public towards any of the questions that they were surveyed about**, indicating that protests by Animal Rebellion likely did not have a significant impact on the attitudes of the general public towards either animal agriculture or the environment. **When given the details of the protests organised by Animal Rebellion, the majority of respondents indicated that they opposed the action.**

That being said, **it seems unlikely that the protests backfired (i.e. decreased support for policies in line with the protesters' aims) to any significant degree**, given both that few people seem to have been particularly aware that the protests occurred, and given that there was no statistically significant decrease in the level of support for policies relating to animal agriculture or climate change, or other variables we measured.