

# The Australian Mainstream Media's Portrayal of Youth Climate Activism and Dissent

**Jacob Micah Cowan**   
Curtin University, Australia

**Peta Dzidic**   
Curtin University, Australia

**Elizabeth Newnham**   
Curtin University, Australia  
Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, USA

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**Abstract:** The March 2019 School Strikes 4 Climate, predominantly organized by young students, garnered widespread and polarizing media coverage. We aimed to identify how Australian mainstream print news media portrays youth involvement and dissent within climate action movements. A qualitative media framing analysis was conducted to determine how youth climate activists and dissent were presented during the first large-scale youth climate protests in Australia. Australian newspaper articles and opinion pieces (N = 101) were identified via ProQuest and screened. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted in NVivo12. Findings were assessed through a typology of dissent to determine how different forms of dissent were represented in the Australian print news media. The framing of dissent in Australian media coverage was varied, with news articles being more likely to prioritize the voices of young people, while opinion pieces resorted to fear-mongering rhetoric that critiqued and invalidated their agency. Protestors used combinations of dutiful and disruptive dissent to advocate for climate action, with the latter being more effective for challenging systemic drivers of climate change.

**Jacob Micah Cowan** graduated from Curtin University with a Bachelor of Science (Psychology) with Honors. Currently pursuing postgraduate studies through a Master of Research (Psychology) and completing a thesis on the representation of youth climate movements and dissent in mainstream media  
**email address:** [jacob.cowan@postgrad.curtin.edu.au](mailto:jacob.cowan@postgrad.curtin.edu.au)

**Peta Dzidic** is a Senior Lecturer in the Discipline of Psychology at the School of Population Health at Curtin Uni-

versity, a Program Lead at the Curtin enAble Institute, and a Curtin Gender Research Champion.

**email address:** [peta.dzidic@curtin.edu.au](mailto:peta.dzidic@curtin.edu.au)

**Elizabeth Newnham** is a Senior Lecturer at the Curtin University School of Population Health, Program Lead for the enAble Institute, and an FXB Fellow at Harvard University.

**email address:** [elizabeth.newnham@curtin.edu.au](mailto:elizabeth.newnham@curtin.edu.au)

On the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019, protests for climate action occurred worldwide. Over 1.4 million climate activists collectively organized in over 1,700 cities to advocate for substantial climate policies and to criticize the complacency of government and fossil fuel industries contributing toward climate degradation (Narksompong and Limjirakan 2015; Thomas, Cretney, and Hayward 2019). These climate protests are noteworthy as they were primarily organized and initiated by young people who demanded that governments and industrial sectors listen to the voices of people who would have to inherit the consequences of climate inaction (Pickard 2019; Boulianne, Lalancette, and Ilkiw 2020). These climate protests were prevalent in Australia, where its highly concentrated media landscape has the potential to influence public and political discourse (Anderson 2009; Beeson and McDonald 2013). The Australian media's framing of both climate action and the young protestors warrants exploration, as media narratives contribute to the shaping of public discourse on climate change and can determine public opinion through favorable or unfavorable coverage.

### Australia's Response to Climate Change

Before the 2022 Federal election, Australia's conservative Coalition government has been repeatedly criticized by environmental activists and groups for their inaction on climate change policy (Ali et al. 2020). Australia has ranked in the lowest 10 countries in the world for their performance on climate protection policy and is the highest emitter of greenhouse gasses per capita among developed nations (Climate Change Performance Index 2021). Investments in renewable energy, coupled with the falling cost of using renewable energy among

households, show that renewables are more sustainable and are well within Australia's capacity to achieve. However, the transition to renewable energy has been significantly delayed by federal government policy (Ali et al. 2020). The Australian government's inaction on substantive climate policy has led to a spike in public awareness and engagement regarding how to adapt to and mitigate climate change, specifically among children, adolescents, and young adults (Thackeray et al. 2020). According to the latest Climate of the Nation report from the Australia Institute (2020), people aged between 18-35 reported the highest levels of concern about climate change and were the most supportive of reaching national net-zero emissions targets, phasing out coal mining in favor of other renewable industries, and introducing a levy on Australia's exports in fossil fuels to aid in paying for the consequences of climate change. Young people's disillusionment and dissatisfaction with traditional political and institutional structures can motivate them to engage in initiatives that contribute towards climate action (Pickard 2019).

### Youth Action on Climate Change

In March 2019, protestors worldwide, many of them school and university students, walked out of their classrooms and engaged in non-violent protests for climate action that advocated for intergenerational climate justice (Pickard 2019; Boulianne et al. 2020; von Zabern and Tulloch 2020). These grassroots movements were spurred on by the rise of the young climate activist Greta Thunberg, who showed what a young person using her voice to break the *status quo* could achieve in the climate change discourse (Pickard 2019). The protestors established a global platform to voice their stance on goals for climate action agendas, with movements such as School Strike 4 Climate (n.d.).

Within Australia, young people issued specific demands to the Australian Government—calling for a cessation of new projects in coal, oil, and gas; 100% renewable energy generation and exports by 2030; and funding for the transition of fossil fuel workers and communities into jobs in renewable energy. Engaging in youth action, which is characterized by the ability to be expressive about substantive issues and advocating for decisive action and accountability towards influential stakeholders, has demonstrated numerous positive outcomes (Narksompong and Limjirakan 2015). Youth action can empower young people to engage in active citizenship, which helps foster positive coping behaviors and demonstrates their agency in articulating goals and agendas for the world in which they want to live (Gibbs et al. 2013; Gislason, Kennedy, and Witham 2021). It can also increase their engagement in socio-political issues and develop their capacity as leaders and community builders, which was associated with enhanced organizational capacity and continued engagement in collective action (Checkoway and Aldana 2013; Narksompong and Limjirakan 2015).

## Dissent and Climate Change

A study by O'Brien, Selboe, and Hayward (2018) identified that youth climate activists express dissent with the prevailing *status quo* on climate policy using a typology of three different forms of dissent: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous. Using these forms of dissent, either individually or in combination, can help contribute to the reclaiming, reframing, and transforming of issues in the public discourse (O'Brien et al. 2018). Dutiful dissent prioritizes the use of existing institutions and systems to voice concerns regarding the *status quo*, which can help ensure the legitimacy and authority of the concerns (O'Brien et al. 2018). This type of dissent is considered useful when indi-

viduals are directly involved with those in influential structures to advocate for change, such as through open forums with politicians and policymakers, but difficulties can arise as deeper issues with the political structures are not challenged, risking the depoliticization of climate action (O'Brien et al. 2018). Disruptive dissent prioritizes oppositional action where activism is used to raise awareness of systemic and institutional problems and challenge hegemonic powers through mobilization, nonconformity, and debate (O'Brien et al. 2018). Disruptive dissent is effective in advocating for justice and equity in climate change and highlighting its anthropogenic causes, but the critiques presented can lead to a polarization of the climate change debate, leading to a rise of antagonism against climate activists that can constrain their agency (O'Brien et al., 2018; Bergmann and Ossewaarde 2020). Dangerous dissent also prioritizes activism, but focuses on creating alternatives that threaten institutions and create long-term transformations in society (O'Brien et al. 2018). These transformations can undermine current systems by advocating alternatives that challenge the *status quo*, such as how degrowth movements advocate for reducing production and consumption, which is against a central tenet of capitalism (O'Brien et al. 2018). Dissent has been cited in the existing literature to identify its various methods and how it reinforced the agency of youth activists (Thomas et al. 2019; Bergmann and Ossewaarde 2020). This dissent model has not been empirically assessed in the context of climate change and could be insightful to assess how different forms of dissent have been framed in the mainstream media.

## Australian Media Coverage of Climate Change

The rise of climate change movements in March 2019 led to a surge in media coverage, specifically focusing

on the youth movements and how influential bodies like the government, scientists, and organizations responded to the protests (Thackeray et al. 2020). News media is considered influential in its ability to not only influence the public's stance on issues but also the actions of politicians (Speck 2010; von Zabern and Tulloch 2020). In the context of climate change, news media is influential in how climate science is described and what information is highlighted or withheld (Anderson 2009; Adekola and Lamond 2017). The media landscape in Australia is dominated largely by Nine Entertainment and the conservative-leaning media company News Corp (Anderson, Chubb, and Djerf-Pierre. 2018). News Corp owns 7 of 11 national and capital city daily newspapers, including the only daily, nationally distributed paper, *The Australian*, and their newspaper readership comprises an average of 6.9 million Australians each week (Anderson et al. 2018; News Corp 2020). Content analyses of articles from News Corp papers, including *The Australian*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Herald Sun*, highlighted News Corp's tendency to reject the anthropogenic causes of climate change, perpetuate climate skepticism, and downplay the need for substantive climate action (Manne 2011; Bacon 2013). Manne (2011) also found that the opinion articles in *The Australian* were overwhelmingly written by people who were affiliated with or employed by lobbying groups for business and fossil fuel industries, who lack the scientific evidence and expertise on climate science.

## Youth Climate Movements and Frames in Media Coverage

With youth activist movements such as School Strike 4 Climate challenging the *status quo* of government and mining and fossil fuel industries on climate action, the Australian media plays a crucial role in presenting their demands to the public dis-

course (von Zabern and Tulloch 2020). As youth climate movements threaten hegemonic power structures and relationships, mainstream news media can set the agenda and frame these movements in a way that can marginalize and de-politicize them (Holmes and Star 2017; von Zabern and Tulloch 2020). Mainstream news media has been shown to frame youth climate activists as politically illegitimate by focusing on their ages and lack of authority, indicating their inability to participate in political systems and processes (Feldman 2020; von Zabern and Tulloch 2020). In addition, mainstream news media has also been shown to frame and describe the protests as episodic rather than thematic, thereby reducing protests down to an event rather than engaging thoughtfully with what the protests are advocating for and undermining the legitimate grievances of these climate movements (Iyengar 1991; von Zabern and Tulloch 2020).

## Research Aims

Understanding how Australian media coverage frames youth climate activism could provide insight into the shaping of public discourse on climate change and youth agency (Beeson and McDonald 2013; Anderson et al. 2018). This research aimed to identify how Australian print media coverage portrayed young climate activists who participated in the March 2019 climate strikes and their use of dissent to challenge and critique the *status quo* of climate inaction in Australia.

## Methods

### Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed, where published news media were examined through

a media framing analysis. A thematic analysis was utilized to identify themes related to media framing of youth dissent in climate action. A constructionist epistemological position was adopted for this study, which argues that reality is socially constructed, unique, and can be shaped via cultural, historical, social, and political factors and norms (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Darlaston-Jones 2007). Positionality was considered throughout the research process, as the qualitative nature of this research, particularly the thematic analysis, required an awareness of the perspectives that we brought to the research and how we influenced the analysis. The population that is the focus of this research, that of youth engaged in climate movements, are young people whom we hold admiration for as they are courageous in their concerns and should not be underestimated for their abilities to organize, mobilize, and inspire action.

### Data Sources

Print media articles related to the climate change protests and movements that occurred in March 2019 were collected, including newspaper articles, editorials, and opinion pieces. Letters to the Editor(s) were excluded from the dataset, as these articles constituted views that were more representative of the general population rather than the specific media outlet. This exclusion is consistent with the methodology described by Bergmann and Ossewaarde (2020) in their research on the framing of youth climate movements in German print media. The dataset comprised 101 print news media articles: 64 standard news articles and 37 opinion pieces and editorials. News articles were gathered from 52 Australian news outlets (see Appendix). Of these 101 articles, 51 articles were published through News Corp, 42 articles were published through Australian Community Media, and 8 articles were published through Nine Entertainment.

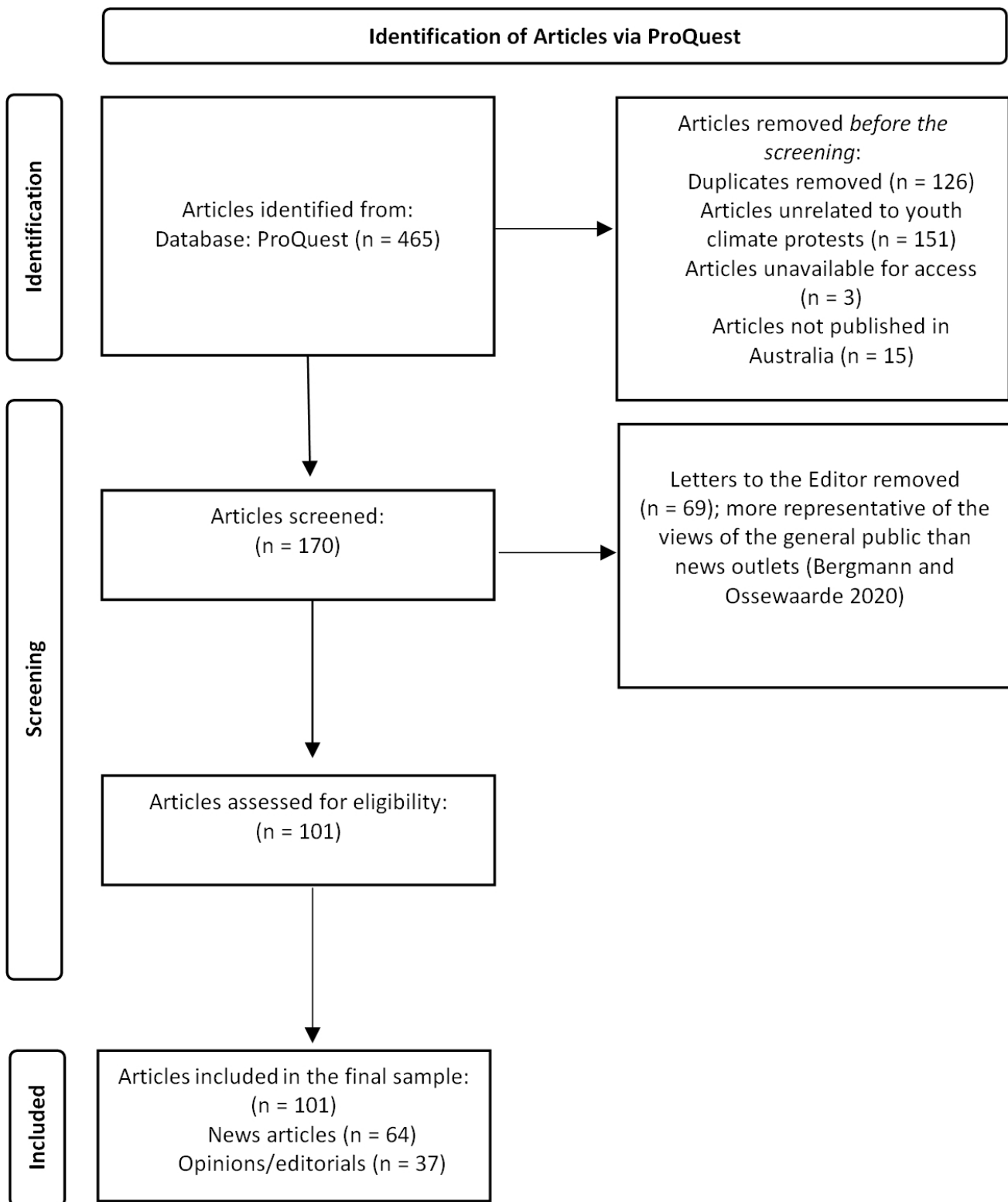
### Procedure

A search was conducted in ProQuest, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 2021, using pre-specified keyword strings to obtain articles related to the youth climate protests that occurred in March 2019. ProQuest was utilized as a search database as it allowed for an exhaustive and thorough search strategy through multiple keyword strings to screen articles. Three sub-strings were created: the first sub-string captured the general topic of climate change and other related terms, the second sub-string captured the key demographics of young people that participated in the protests, and the third sub-string captured terms related to protests, varying in general terms and specific movements like School Strike 4 Climate. The keyword strings used were: (climat\* OR climate chang\* OR global warming OR climate cris\* OR climate emergenc\*) AND (youth\* OR child\* OR teen\* OR adolescen\* OR young OR student\*) AND (protest\* OR activis\* OR demonstrat\* OR movement\* OR organiz\* OR dissent OR school strike\* OR fridaysforfuture).

Using this keyword string generated articles that contained at least one of each term from the combined sub-strings. The resulting articles were screened to determine their eligibility using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 1). To be included in the dataset, articles were required to be: 1) focused on discussion of Australian climate change protests in newspaper articles, editorials, and opinion pieces; 2) make mention of youth climate movements, either generally or through specific movements like School Strike 4 Climate; 3) published between March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 and March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019. This timespan was chosen to capture the immediate emerging discourse that occurred during the first School Strike 4 Climate protests in Australia.



Figure 1. Procedure for Screening and Inclusion of News Articles.



Source: Self-elaboration.

## Data Analysis

A media framing analysis was conducted based on Giles and Shaw's (2009) framework. This approach enabled us to flexibly analyze the textual elements of Australian print news media, which could then inform how youth climate activists were framed in this coverage (Giles and Shaw 2009). Media framing analysis aims to explain how issues are presented and defined, who or what is responsible for an issue, and how the framing of an issue is related to its evolution in the public and political discourse (Pan and Kosicki 1993; Adekola and Lamond 2017). Media framing analysis begins with exploring the actors and stories of the protests, such as the young protestors, politicians, teachers, and other influential figures (Giles and Shaw 2009). Reader identification was noted by determining whom the audience was expected to identify with in the protests (Giles and Shaw 2009). The structure of the narrative in the articles was also noted to identify the narrative conventions that were adhered to in the articles' description of the protests (Giles and Shaw 2009). Once these factors are understood, the language of the articles can be analyzed. For the research question, an inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was conducted to identify how Australian mainstream media portrayed youth involvement in climate strike movements. Data were coded in Nvivo12, with initial coding gathering more descriptive and semantic codes and secondary coding moving to more abstract and interpretive ideas (Braun and Clarke 2006). Codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed, named, and defined to capture the scope and content of what was discussed (Braun and Clarke 2006).

## Quality Assurance

A random sample of 10% of the articles and editorials was selected and cross-coded by a second inde-

pendent researcher. Cohen's kappa, which indicates the level of consistent agreement between coders, ranged between 0.5 to 1.0 across the selected articles (McHugh 2012). Of the selected articles, 94% had a Cohen's kappa greater than .8, which indicates substantial levels of consistent agreement (McHugh 2012). An audit trail and memo-writing were used to demonstrate clear decision-making processes and ensure transparency during analysis and write-up. As this study did not require human participants, ethics approval was not required.

## Findings

The thematic analysis identified four core themes that illustrated the portrayal of young climate activists: act before it's too late, knowledge seekers, inauthentic truants, and innocent pawns. Young people were often portrayed as active and knowledgeable citizens in news article coverage of the protests, while opinion pieces were more likely to criticize the movement and portray young people as inauthentic or manipulated pawns. These findings will identify and analyze the media framing of youth climate activists, which will then be assessed through the typology of dissent separately in the discussion.

### Act Before It's Too Late

Young protestors were portrayed as recognizing the desperate need for climate action, with a sense of urgency that was not matched by those in power, and this urgency motivated them to be persistent in driving change. Often, articles would include interviews with protestors and utilize emotionally-laden direct quotes as a means of conveying protestors' fears regarding climate inaction. For example, a student protestor was reported saying on wildlife protection: "I don't want to have Australia's coat of arms

with one of the animals on it being extinct" ("Students Join City Rally for Climate Change" [*Northside Chronicle*] 2019:3). Another protestor cited her fears of an unstable future, saying: "I'm terrified of my future, of my children's future, and of my grandchildren's future and I know we need to do something before it's too late" (Messenger 2019:4). These examples highlighted the two most commonly cited climate-related fears of the protestors; namely, the decline of Australia's unique biodiversity and inter-generational instability.

With this sense of urgency being underpinned by a lack of time to meaningfully address these issues, the protestors directly addressed their criticism of the Australian Government. One protestor stated,

We are the closest we have been to extinction since the Cold War and yet despite climate change being worthy of extreme concern what action have we seen from our government? Nothing but frivolous measures. [Telford 2019: paragraph 3]

This sentiment reflected the movement's disappointment and frustration with the Australian Government, as, despite the danger that climate change presents as an existential threat, the protestors believed that their urgency towards this issue was not being matched by politicians.

Students were depicted as active citizens when they initiated direct discussions and engaged in open forums with influential politicians such as then Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and Treasurer Josh Frydenberg. These discussions demonstrated instances of dutiful dissent towards these politicians as one student described their dissatisfaction with a response from Bill Shorten to protestor demands, "We got a reply from him two weeks later,

and it was not that great. It just told us what Labor was already doing so we'll continue to strike at his office to show his reply was not good enough" (Cosoletto 2019: paragraph 21). Here, the news media has noted the expectations of the protestors towards political figures and structures, which framed the protestors as persistent activists who sought to hold their politicians to higher standards on climate action and policy.

### Knowledge Seekers

Australian news media framed young protestors as informed on the causes they advocated for and used activism as an opportunity to learn and develop their active citizenship. Young people that are passionate about climate change were described as "hungry for the knowledge" ("Liam's Climate Change Mission" [*The Sunshine Coast Daily*] 2019:13), as they wanted to understand the implications of their actions, identify what they can do to help, and drew on reputable sources. One student stated, "we go out and research for ourselves...we find out the facts for ourselves" (Holmes 2019: paragraphs 13-14), which reflected that young protestors are self-determined to seek out the latest research so they may have informed perspectives on issues they are passionate about.

When advocating for the students' right to protest, some articles and opinion pieces noted that "education and school are not synonymous" (Boyer 2019:14) and that activism is a learning experience. Some articles pointed out that education systems indicated they had "shifted the goals from teaching knowledge to learning skills about how to use knowledge in real-life situations" ("Let Kids Strike as a Lesson to All on Planet" [*The Camden Advertiser*] 2019: paragraph 6), with some of the key skills including



“critical thinking, conscientiousness, collaboration, creativity, and problem solving” (“Let Kids Strike as a Lesson to All on Planet” [*The Camden Advertiser*] 2019: paragraph 7). An opinion piece from the *Sydney Morning Herald* echoed these points when they said, “While it is a shame that they will miss classes for one day, the learning that will come from taking responsibility for their futures and standing up for the principles in which they believe are far more important” (Challen 2019:27). The news articles that acknowledged this learning experience framed the protestors as empowered activists who channeled their knowledge into active citizenship and developing key competencies.

The protestors’ ability to present scientifically informed arguments for climate action extended to their frustrations at the Australian Government’s inaction. One high-school student expressed her frustration, stating, “These are not religious beliefs, this is science. This is fact and the government knows it’s fact” (Preston 2019:3). Her frustration pointed to the government’s inability to acknowledge the scientific consensus and a resulting sense of complacency. The news media highlighted the protestor’s use of scientific knowledge to effectively dissent against the government, which framed them as capable active citizens who demonstrated their agency through pursuing informed perspectives and research.

### **Inauthentic Truants**

Australian news media criticized young people for protesting during school hours and questioned whether the protestors were genuine in their demands or if they were using the protests as an opportunity “to enjoy [a] three-day weekend” (“Labor’s Leader Led by Children” [*The Daily Telegraph*] 2019:20). Framing protestors as truants was per-

petuated largely by politicians quoted in the news media, such as Prime Minister Scott Morrison, then New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian, and former Defence Minister Christopher Pyne, with the latter politician who stated that protesting “will damage their education” and that “if they wanted to engage in political activism, it should be on their own time” (McCauley 2019:5).

Some political figures, such as the NSW Education Minister Rob Stokes, believed that participation in these protests would constitute illegal activity, as he said, “students would be breaking the law if they took part” (Dabrera 2019:12). This position was also presented in an opinion piece from *The Sunday Telegraph*, where they criticized some politicians who defended students’ right to protest as, “endorsing law-breaking (as it’s actually illegal for school-age children not to be at school without a reasonable excuse)” (Credlin 2019:101). This assertion of illegality framed the protest as an unreasonable excuse to skip school and the protestors as truants who should be punished for choosing to advocate for climate action during school hours.

The authenticity of the activists was challenged, with some opinion pieces pointing to students using the protests as an excuse for truancy, with one columnist from *The Australian* stating,

There’s little doubt that the prospect of spending a day out and about with friends shouting about Adani, fossil fuels and the Morrison government is infinitely more thrilling than enduring a morning of double maths followed by an afternoon of double science. [Dabrera 2019:12]

This excerpt called the protestors’ passion for their advocacy into question, which sought to shift the fo-

cus away from the demands of the movement and instead framed students as deceptively using protests as a way to skip class.

The protestors' authenticity was also challenged by highlighting the inconsistency of what they advocate for at protests and what they do at home. A candidate for The Nationals party, Patrick Conaghan, said in a statement,

How many of the students charged their iPhone or iPad all night when it only needed an hour, how many have used an air conditioner rather than opening a couple of windows, and who has used a laundry dryer recently for convenience sake? [Telford 2019: paragraph 22]

By framing protestors in ways that challenge their authenticity as climate activists by focusing on their hypocritical actions, it sought to focus on the character of the protestors and their individual choices, which invalidated the legitimate grievances they have over the climate inaction of the Australian Government.

### Innocent Pawns

Several Australian news media outlets framed the protestors as being susceptible to manipulation by adults and education systems, who wished to use them for their political agendas, suggesting politically motivated adults had pushed young people into engaging in climate activism for their political means. An adult bystander who disagreed with the protests believed that it was "such a shame that the rest were conned into doing the bidding of climate change activists who are making a lucrative living out of an industry built around scaremongering" ("You Said It on Facebook: Principal Drives 40 Stu-

dents to Climate Protest" [*The Fraser Coast Chronicle*] 2019:12). This insinuation of young protestors being tricked into climate activism framed them as being naive and easily impressionable.

Educational institutions were accused of allowing teachers to force their political agendas onto students. A writer from *The Daily Telegraph* stated that,

Pupils were being used as pawns by climate-alarmists because teachers had made them afraid of coal. "I remember being in class (and told) 'mining is bad,' 'mining is going to be the end of us,' and 'mining is going to destroy you.'" [Harris and Armstrong 2019:7]

Such examples framed the protestors as easily susceptible to unnecessary climate alarmism in the classroom.

The school curriculum was also criticized by some outlets as being left-leaning. Reactionary rhetoric was used in opinion pieces from News Corp-owned papers such as *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, saying, "what parents have to realize is that Friday's strike is just the most recent example of how the cultural left is using the curriculum to indoctrinate students with its neo-Marxist and postmodern ideology" (Donnelly 2019:12). Framing curriculum as radicalizing students also stripped the young protestors of any agency, as they are framed as innocent victims who had been "fed a deep green, extremist view of climate change" (Donnelly 2019:12). The framing of the protestors as victims of political indoctrination also invalidated their demands, positioning young people's knowledge of climate science as a product of the manipulation of the cultural left.

## Discussion

### Summary of Findings

Understanding the Australian print media's portrayal of youth climate movements and the framing of protestors' dissent provides insight into the media's role in shaping public discourse on climate change. The media coverage was varied, with frames differing depending on article type and media outlet. News articles prioritized the voices of young people by highlighting direct quotes to illustrate their active citizenship in both dutiful and disruptive expressions. This then framed them as persistent agents of change who engaged with political structures and figures using informed knowledge and research. The climate movements were shown to use the latest scientific research, consensus, and the perspective of climate experts to not only demonstrate the urgent need for climate action but also aim their dissent at the complacency of hegemonic powers who have failed to address the existential threat of climate change. Comparatively, opinion pieces from more conservative outlets such as News Corp's *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, who published nine opinion and editorials pieces out of ten articles in this sample, instead prioritized the voices of political figures and bystanders, and used fear-mongering rhetoric to invalidate the protestors' grievances regarding climate inaction. Opinion pieces explicitly targeted the 'dangers' of disruptive dissent and singled out the character of the activists rather than their demands. These types of articles were the primary source for framing young protestors as either truants who were using protests as an excuse to escape the tedium of school or vulnerable pupils who were victims of leftist extremism.

The editorial line of news outlets was notable in this sample, especially in the more conservative-leaning News Corp. An analysis of News Corp articles, opinion, and editorial pieces from Bacon and Jegan (2020) on their reporting of climate change and its related stories have demonstrated that of 8,612 articles between April 2019 and March 2020, 59% of these articles consisted of commentary articles such as editorials and opinion pieces compared to 41% of information-based articles. Of these commentary articles, 65% of these contained climate skepticism viewpoints, which were inferred through a lack of scientific visibility in sources and perspectives, preferences towards quoting politicians over scientists, and negative biases towards climate protests and movements (Bacon and Jegan 2020). Our sample consisted of half News Corp published articles and opinion pieces, with two of the most popular newspapers in readership (Hughes 2022), *The Australian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and its weekend edition, *The Sunday Telegraph*, predominantly publishing negatively slanted opinion pieces highlighting the presumed illegality of the protests and the vulnerability of children to climate alarmism and fear-mongering. Our findings, thus, align with Bacon and Jegan's (2020) analysis, indicating that the conservative editorial line of News Corp predominantly utilized commentary articles to portray negative depictions of youth climate activists and their dissent.

### Consideration of Findings amongst Existing Literature

This research used O'Brien and colleagues' (2018) typology of dissent to identify and analyze how young protestors' use of dissent was represented and framed by the media. Protestors' motivations to protest were based on their belief in the urgent need for climate action and fears related to the conse-

quences of climate change if a limited intervention was taken. These beliefs and fears were presented in the media by highlighting quotes and excerpts from participants and organizers of these protests, indicating that the majority of news articles represented the voices and motivations of the protestors. By prioritizing protestors through substantial visibility in coverage, readers would be more likely to identify their frustrations, motivations, and reasoning for their political action, lending a dimensionality to their portrayal in media reporting. Protestors were portrayed as using a combination of dissent types, specifically dutiful and disruptive, to not only challenge hegemonic powers and their lack of substantive action but also to demonstrate their agency and influence on the discourse around climate action. Dangerous dissent was not portrayed in the media coverage, as the protests were more indicative of the overt dutiful, and disruptive expression of dissent. Dangerous dissent tends toward more long-term, covert, and subversive challenges to the political *status quo* (O'Brien et al. 2018).

### *Dutiful Dissent*

The protestor's utilization of dutiful dissent was portrayed as a means to voice their concerns in established political spaces and gain opportunities to discuss climate action with politicians such as former Opposition Leader Bill Shorten (O'Brien et al. 2018). While this type of dissent was beneficial for protestors to allow them access to existing political structures, it ultimately left young people little to no recourse from these structures and those who held power. Protestors were instead reported to have received unsubstantial replies, ignorance, or were told they could only speak with politicians outside of school hours. This lack of recourse could explain the protestors' preferred utilization of disruptive

dissent to maximize media exposure and be able to freely express their dissent outside of existing institutions. Despite the futility of dutiful dissent, news coverage was favorable towards protestors who attempted to meet and discuss these issues with influential decision-makers. News articles would highlight quotes from protestors, demonstrating their persistence in challenging the *status quo*, despite the opposition they faced from those upholding it. The framing of young protestors as persistent active citizens was also present in the framing of the Fridays for Future movement in Finnish print media, highlighting their urgency in demanding action from influential decision-makers in political and economic institutions (Huttunen and Albrecht 2021). Empowering young people to continue to persist in exercising their roles as active citizens will not only help to challenge the stereotypical view of young people as passive and apathetic but can also help to foster the agency of the protestors and ensure that their voices are included and prioritized in climate action discourse (Gibbs et al. 2013; Narksompong and Limjirakan 2015; Gislason et al. 2021).

### *Disruptive Dissent*

Disruptive dissent appeared to be more effective in raising awareness of systemic drivers of climate change, which included challenging hegemonic institutions and stakeholders. The use of disruptive dissent was portrayed by media as an opportunity for young people to boycott schools and universities, instead choosing to mobilize at protests through organizations such as School Strike 4 Climate to challenge and critique political inaction on climate change. This form of dissent was met with a polarizing response from the Australian print media. Favorable media coverage of the protestors highlighted how their disruptive dissent served as

an opportunity for the youth to begin to learn about the importance of political participation and use the protests as a learning experience. These findings were reflected in Huttunen and Albrecht's (2021) research on media framing of the Fridays for Future movement in Finland, as articles noted that critical skills could be developed through these protests and empower young people to be more competent and proficient in their active citizenship.

While favorable coverage of disruptive dissent was present in the Australian print media, this form of dissent can result in the antagonization of protestors (O'Brien et al. 2018), which was presented in numerous frames presented by the media. This antagonization of protestors typically came from politicians who argued against truancy and highlighted the damage caused by missing out on education, and opinion pieces, who sought to highlight the age and innocence of protestors to invalidate their character and demands. Framing of Fridays for Future protests in German (von Zabern and Tulloch 2020) and Finnish (Huttunen and Albrecht 2021) news outlets would similarly reframe the protests to focus on the voices of politicians and official sources and discussions of truancy to detract from the young protestors and their demands. A study by Bergmann and Ossewaarde (2020) also focusing on Fridays for Future in German print media highlighted how articles would frequently refer to compulsory education law, which would allude to criminalizing the protestors for skipping school to protest. Australian print media extended this argument by advocating that student protestors be punished by their schools. This focus on reporting bystander and official sources in media coverage simultaneously upholds traditional hegemonic structures while minimizing the agency of youth activists, making it more difficult for readers to identify with their cause.

As these protests were organized by young people, their age became a significant factor used by some articles and opinion pieces to invoke their political illegitimacy and invalidate their character and demands. Research from Mayes and Hartup (2021) on the portrayal of School Strike 4 Climate in Australian news media found that the majority of articles would describe protestors as 'kids' and 'children' who were easy targets for fear-mongering and climate hysteria. This characterization was identified in our research, through opinion pieces that would trivialize protestors' genuine concerns about climate change, undermine their agency as political actors, and imply they were impressionable and vulnerable to manipulation by adults and the education system (von Zabern and Tulloch 2020; Mayes and Hartup 2021). The targeting of the Australian education system would extend this susceptibility to manipulation by framing protestors as radicalized and brainwashed political pawns, while also invalidating their knowledge base as a product of these exploitative systems. Framing these protestors in ways that antagonize and invalidate their use of disruptive dissent not only constrains the agency and autonomy of these protestors but also inhibits the viable change that needs to occur to effectively deal with the existential threat of climate change (O'Brien et al. 2018).

### **Practical Implications**

The climate protests are an indication that young people can be competent active citizens who are highly capable of community organization and are well-informed on scientific research, consensus, and expert opinions (Narksompong and Limjirakan 2015; Kosciulek 2020). The qualities of these young protestors, as demonstrated through their positive portrayals in the media, may indicate that



they could be prioritized as relevant stakeholders in collaborative policy-building for climate action (Kosciulek 2020; Agarwal and Sung 2021). Youth are already underrepresented in the policy process for climate action, yet they will be the most vulnerable population to the consequences of climate change, indicating that their inclusion in climate policy development should be considered (Kosciulek 2020; Agarwal and Sung 2021). Empowering youth climate activists through their inclusion in the political process could offer diverse perspectives toward substantive climate action and can assist in fostering competencies in understanding political processes and developing leadership skills (Kosciulek 2020; Agarwal and Sung 2021).

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the timespan of media coverage was chosen to determine the emergent nature of the discourse towards the first global youth climate strike held in Australia, the timespan may be too narrow to see whether this discourse persisted over time. Future research using this methodology could assess different peaks of media coverage where climate change or protests were presented in the news cycle, such as the United Nations Climate Change Summit in September 2019, which coincided with protests that had an estimated attendance of 300,000 protestors ("Global Climate Strike Sees 'Hundreds of Thousands' of Australians Rally across the Country" [ABC News] 2019). Alternatively, it could be insightful to determine how the discourse on these movements has time by conducting a longitudinal study, comparing media framing from the inception of these movements to the present. We have commented on the notable editorial biases present in this sample through News Corp's utilization of commentary articles in their publications to negatively

portray the character and dissent of youth climate activists. There may be scope to consider the editorial leanings of Nine Entertainment and its influence on the framing of youth climate dissent, given that they, along with News Corp, represent the two major mass media firms in Australia. Although this research intended to determine how the Australian print media portrayed youth climate activism, it is worth considering that these young protestors were likely affected by the public discourse that revolved around their use of dissent towards political structures that perpetuated climate inaction. It would be beneficial in future research to include these youth climate activists in the research process by allowing them to discuss their experiences of climate activism and how they, both as individuals and representatives of an overall movement, were affected by the discourse and frames perpetuated in the Australian news media.

### Conclusion

This research offered insight into the early coverage and discourse of these movements in a highly concentrated media landscape, where the media played a significant role in framing the demands of these movements to the public. By a media framing analysis, we were able to identify four frames that were ascribed to the movement, discuss how dutiful and disruptive dissent can be portrayed in favorable and unfavorable ways, and how these portrayals can contribute to perceptions of youth climate activists in the public discourse. Regardless of the polarizing narratives and frames presented in Australian media, these young activists are posing a righteous challenge to the political *status quo* and are not slowing down in the face of media admiration, apathy, or adversity. The protestors' authentic passion for climate action and their willingness to dissent could

help to reshape the public's awareness and knowledge of these issues, but only if the Australian public chooses to empower and prioritize their voices as active citizens, future leaders, and policymakers. In light of the effectiveness of these climate protests, we believe that more effort should be placed on empowering youth voices by highlighting their unique perspectives in future media coverage and giving them the platform to offer insights and solutions to the evolving climate crisis.

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## Appendix: Newspaper Outlets Used (N = 101)

Publication	Owner	National/State/Regional	Frequency of publishing	Total articles used
The Advertiser	News Corp	State – SA	Daily	4
The Advocate	Australian Community Media (ACM)	Regional – Devonport, TAS	Daily	1
The Age	Nine	State – VIC	Daily	2
Armidale Express	ACM	Regional – Armidale, NSW	Bi-weekly	3
Atherton Tablelander	News Corp	Regional – Atherton, QLD	Weekly	2
The Australian	News Corp	National	Daily	4
Bay Post	ACM	Regional – Batemans Bay, NSW	Weekly	1
Bellingen Shire Courier	ACM	Regional – Bellingen, NSW	Weekly	1
Bendigo Advertiser	ACM	Regional – Bendigo, VIC	Daily	3
Blue Mountains Gazette	ACM	Regional – Blue Mountains, NSW	Weekly	2
The Border Chronicle	ACM	Regional – Bordertown, SA	Weekly	1
Border Mail	ACM	Regional – Albury-Wodonga, NSW	Daily	1
The Braidwood Times	Nine	Regional – Braidwood, NSW	Weekly	1
Bunbury Mail	ACM	Regional – Bunbury, WA	Weekly	1
The Cairns Post	News Corp	Regional – Cairns, QLD	Daily	1
Camden Advertiser	Nine	Regional – Camden, NSW	Weekly	1
Canberra Times	ACM	Regional – Canberra, ACT	Daily	3
Centralian Advocate	News Corp	Regional – Alice Springs, NT	Bi-weekly	1
Central Western Daily	ACM	Regional – Orange, NSW	Daily	2
The Courier	ACM	Regional – Ballarat, VIC	Daily	2
The Courier-Mail	News Corp	State – QLD	Daily	2
The Daily Mercury	News Corp	Regional – Mackay, QLD	Daily	1
The Daily Telegraph	News Corp	State – NSW	Daily	6
The Examiner	ACM	Regional – Launceston, TAS	Daily	3
Fraser Coast Chronicle	News Corp	Regional – Fraser Coast, QLD	Daily	2
Glen Innes Examiner	ACM	Regional – Glen Innes, NSW	Bi-weekly	2
Gold Coast Bulletin	New Corp	Regional – Gold Coast, QLD	Daily	1
Goulburn Post	ACM	Regional – Goulburn, NSW	3 days a week	2
Gympie Times	News Corp	Regional – Gympie, QLD	Daily	3
The Herald Sun	News Corp	State – VIC	Daily	2
Heidelberg Leader	News Corp	Regional – Blackburn, VIC	Weekly	1
Illawarra Mercury	ACM	Regional – Wollongong, NSW	Daily	1
Innisfail Advocate	News Corp	Regional – Innisfail, QLD	Bi-weekly	1
Inverell Times	ACM	Regional – Inverell, NSW	Bi-weekly	1
The Islander	ACM	Regional – Kingscote, SA	Weekly	1
Manning River Times	ACM	Regional – Taree, NSW	Bi-weekly	1
The Mercury	News Corp	State – TAS	Daily	3
Milton Ulladulla Times	ACM	Regional – Ulladulla, NSW	Weekly	1
The Morning Bulletin	News Corp	Regional – Rockhampton, QLD	Daily	6
Mudgee Guardian	ACM	Regional – Mudgee, NSW	Bi-weekly	1
The Newcastle Herald	ACM	Regional – Newcastle, NSW	Daily	5
Bundaberg NewsMail	News Corp	Regional – Bundaberg, QLD	Daily	1
The Northern Star	News Corp	Regional – Lismore, NSW	Daily	2
Northside Chronicle	News Corp	Regional – Brisbane, QLD	Daily	1
Port Douglass & Mossman Gazette	News Corp	Regional – Port Douglass, QLD	Weekly	1
Port Macquarie News	ACM	Regional – Port Macquarie, NSW	Weekly	1
Redland City Bulletin	ACM	Regional – Redland, QLD	Weekly	1
Southern Highland News	ACM	Regional – Bowral, NSW	3 days a week	1
The Sunday Telegraph	News Corp	State – NSW	Daily	1
Sunshine Coast Daily	News Corp	Regional – Sunshine Coast, QLD	Daily	1
Sydney Morning Herald	Nine	State – NSW	Daily	4
Townsville Bulletin	News Corp	Regional – Townsville, QLD	Daily	4