Prismatic Horizons
Journal of Social Science and Humanities
www.phjssh.lexarcheus.com
Vol.-04, Issue-02 (Apr-Jun, 2026)



Protest as Deliberation? Digital Mobilisation, Pressure-Group Politics and the Deliberative Public Sphere: The Case of the CJP

Jahan Fatima[1] . Ujjwal Chaudhary[2]

[1] Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India.
[2] PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India

*** Corresponding Author:**

Jahan Fatima
jahanfatima333@gmail.com
https://doi.org/10.67860/phjssh.v4.i2.157

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received	01 Jun, 2026
Revised	25 Jun, 2026
Accepted	28 Jun, 2026
Available Online	30 Jun, 2026

ARTICLE ID
PHJSSH0402006

KEYWORDS

Deliberative Democracy, Digital Mobilisation, Pressure Groups, Public Sphere, Protest Politics, Agenda-Setting.

OPEN ACCESS

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), a satirical youth movement that originated in India in May 2026 and rapidly evolved from an online phenomenon into a sustained offline protest campaign, in order to ask what such an episode reveals about the relationship between protest and deliberation in contemporary democratic practice. Existing scholarship tends to treat deliberative public reasoning and confrontational protest as distinct registers of democratic engagement, and it theorises pressure groups chiefly as institutionalised interlocutors that operate through lobbying, negotiation and privileged access rather than mass mobilisation. The CJP case complicates this separation. Beginning as internet satire directed at a remark made by the Chief Justice of India, the movement generated an unusually large and rapid following, translated online sentiment into a continuous sit-in at Jantar Mantar organised around a five-point charter of demands on examination-system governance. Drawing on secondary reportage, official statements and movement documents up to the end of June 2026, and situating the case within theories of the public sphere, connective action, agenda-setting and pressure-group politics, the paper argues that CJP functioned simultaneously as a discursive arena for public reasoning and as an emerging pressure-group actor seeking policy responses from relevant public authorities, while the period examined in this study did not establish a definitive institutional outcome. Given the movement's short lifespan, the paper deliberately avoids claims of durable democratic transformation and instead identifies specific, bounded contributions to participation, agenda-setting and government responsiveness that the case demonstrates as of the time of writing.

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Prismatic Horizons: Journal of Social Science and Humanities
ISSN: 2583-9284
Vol. 04, No. 02, Apr-Jun, 2026
www.phjssh.lexarcheus.com

INTRODUCTION

In May 2026, during a Supreme Court hearing on an unrelated contempt matter, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant remarked that unemployed young people resembled cockroaches: without steady work, without a settled place in professional life, prone to venting their frustrations on social media. The comment was not intended as a policy pronouncement, still less as an invitation to political organisation. Within a day, however, a 30-year-old political communications strategist named Abhijeet Dipke had turned the insult into an identity, inviting India's unemployed, underemployed and "chronically online" youth to claim the label for themselves. What followed was one of the fastest-growing digital-political phenomena in recent Indian history and, within weeks, the seed of one of the more closely watched offline protest campaigns the country has seen in some time.

The Cockroach Janta Party, or CJP, does not sit comfortably within any single category of democratic actor familiar to political science. It was not founded as a party, has never registered as one with the Election Commission of India, and describes its own programme as satire. Yet it produced a manifesto, issued policy demands, organised a sustained physical occupation of Jantar Mantar, all without the formal apparatus conventionally associated with such undertakings. International coverage has struggled with the same categorical difficulty that confronts this paper, alternately framing the Jantar Mantar mobilisation as the country's first major Gen-Z-led protest movement, in the idiom of generational politics, and as a satirical online movement that moved, with striking speed, into offline mobilisation. Both descriptions are accurate, and both are incomplete: CJP was at once a joke, a public sphere and a protest movement, and, by virtue of the demands it pressed directly upon government, something closely resembling an emerging pressure group.

This paper treats that ambiguity as the analytical opportunity the case presents, rather than as a problem to be resolved by forcing CJP into a single pre-existing box. It asks a narrower and more tractable question than "what is CJP," namely: what does the CJP episode demonstrate about the relationship between protest, deliberation and pressure-group influence in a digitally mediated public sphere? The question is organised around a cluster of more specific themes that recur across the literature on democratic participation: how citizens participate; how, if at all, public reasoning occurs outside formal deliberative institutions; how issues move onto the government's agenda; whom a movement like this represents and fails to represent; how digital tools translate into offline mobilisation; and how, or whether, a government responds to pressure exerted outside electoral and institutional channels.

A methodological caution governs everything that follows. CJP is, at the time of writing, barely six weeks old. Its sit-in at Jantar Mantar was, as this paper goes to press, still continuing; Among its principal demands was a call concerning the position of the Union Education Minister, while several of its other demands focused on examination governance, institutional reform and student welfare; the movement's subsequent trajectory remained open at the time covered by this study. This is not a settled case with a clear beginning, middle and end; it is an unfolding one, and the paper's empirical horizon closes at the end of June 2026, before whatever comes next, concession, escalation, negotiation or dissipation, has occurred. Consequently, the paper resists claims that would require longitudinal evidence not yet available. It does not argue that CJP has permanently transformed Indian democracy, that it inaugurates a new model of pressure-group politics in India, or that it has fundamentally altered youth political participation in any lasting sense. Such claims would outrun the evidence a six

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

month case can support. Instead, the paper makes narrower, evidence-anchored claims about what this particular episode illustrates about participation, public reasoning, agenda-setting, representation, mobilisation, government responsiveness, and the shifting boundary between digital and offline political action.

The paper proceeds in five further parts. Section two reviews the theoretical literature on the deliberative public sphere, pressure-group politics, digital and connective mobilisation, and agenda-setting, establishing the conceptual vocabulary used in the analysis. Section three sets out the paper's methodology and its limitations. Section four reconstructs the empirical sequence of the CJP episode, from its origins in a judicial remark through to the continuing sit-in and the standoff over its demands as it stood at the end of June 2026. Section five discusses what this sequence demonstrates against each of the themes identified above, and section six concludes with a summary of findings and an agenda for the longitudinal research that the case will eventually merit.

2. Literature Review

Four bodies of theory bear directly on the CJP case: theories of the deliberative public sphere; theories of pressure groups and interest intermediation; theories of digital and connective mobilisation; and theories of agenda-setting and government responsiveness. Each is reviewed in turn, with attention to where the literature already anticipates a case like CJP and where it does not.

The Deliberative Public Sphere and Its Discontents

Jürgen Habermas's account of the public sphere remains the reference point for theorising how private citizens form public opinion through rational-critical discourse conducted outside the state (Habermas, 1989). In his later work, Habermas (1996) integrated this account into a two-track model of deliberative democracy, in which informal public spheres generate opinion that formal institutions are expected, imperfectly, to process into binding decisions. This model has always depended on an idealised picture of discourse: reasoned exchange among formal equals, oriented toward mutual understanding rather than strategic advantage. Nancy Fraser's influential critique (1990) challenged the bourgeois, singular character of this model, arguing for a plurality of publics, including subaltern counterpublics that generate oppositional interpretations of their needs and identities outside dominant discursive norms. Fraser's revision matters for the present case because CJP's discourse was rarely "rational-critical" in the Habermasian sense; it was satirical, performative, and frequently profane, closer to what Fraser would recognise as a counterpublic style than to a seminar-room ideal of deliberation.

John Dryzek's deliberative systems approach (2000; see also Dryzek, 2010) offers a further useful adjustment. Rather than asking whether any single site of discourse meets a demanding standard of deliberation, Dryzek asks whether a whole system of communicative sites, including contentious and adversarial ones, collectively performs the functions deliberation is meant to serve: generating and testing reasons, exposing decision-makers to a range of perspectives, and holding power accountable to public justification. On this systemic reading, a protest camp, a hashtag, a ministerial press conference and a parliamentary debate can all be understood as differentiated components of a single deliberative system, each contributing something the others cannot. This systemic framing is closer to what the CJP case

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

requires than either a strict Habermasian standard, which the movement's discourse would largely fail, or an account that treats protest and deliberation as simply unrelated.

A further strand of literature asks whether protest itself can be deliberative. Young (2001) argued against theorists who position deliberation and activism as opposed, contending that disruptive and expressive political action can meet legitimate communicative functions when formal deliberative venues are closed, captured or unresponsive to marginalised claims. Dryzek's (2010) systemic framework builds on this insight, treating oppositional and even confrontational discourse as a potentially valuable discursive function within a deliberative system, particularly where it introduces perspectives and reasons that would not otherwise reach decision-makers. This literature provides the paper's central theoretical hook: it permits an inquiry into whether CJP's blend of satire, occupation and confrontation performed some of the functions associated with deliberation, without requiring that CJP's own internal discourse meet a classical deliberative standard.

Pressure Groups and Interest Intermediation

The classical literature on pressure groups, running from Truman's (1951) account of the American "governmental process" through Olson's (1965) rational-choice analysis of collective action, generally theorises pressure groups as relatively durable, often formally organised bodies that pursue policy goals through sustained access to decision-makers: lobbying, expert testimony, campaign contributions, and quiet negotiation. Olson's central puzzle, the free-rider problem, explains why large, diffuse groups without selective incentives struggle to organise collective action at all, and why successful pressure groups have historically tended to be smaller, better-resourced and more institutionalised than the mass public whose interests they claim to represent. This literature sets an implicit baseline against which digitally mobilised, ostensibly leaderless movements like CJP appear anomalous: a movement built from a viral social media post, without formal membership, dues or a conventional organisational hierarchy, ought by Olson's logic to face acute difficulty translating scattered online sympathy into sustained collective action.

Later scholarship on interest groups and social movements has narrowed the conceptual gap between "pressure group" and "protest movement." Tilly's (2004) historical account of social movements treats sustained, coordinated public claim-making, including but not limited to conventional protest repertoires, as a distinctive form of political interaction with authorities, one that shares with pressure-group politics the basic aim of extracting concessions from power-holders, even where its tactics look more disruptive than a lobbyist's. Tarrow's (2011) concept of "contentious politics" similarly bridges institutional and extra-institutional modes of influence, arguing that social movements and interest groups often occupy overlapping positions on a single continuum of claim-making rather than belonging to categorically distinct political species. This bridging literature supports treating CJP's trajectory, from meme to sit-in to direct pressure on a sitting minister, as a single continuous process of interest articulation rather than as separate and unrelated episodes.

Digital Mobilisation and Connective Action

Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) theory of connective action is the most directly relevant framework for CJP's early trajectory. They distinguish collective action, which depends on formal organisations, resource pooling and the construction of shared collective identity, from connective action, in which personalised, easily shared digital content substitutes for formal

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

organisational coordination, and in which participation itself becomes an act of self-expression circulated through social media networks. Connective action, in their account, can mobilise very large numbers of people very quickly, precisely because it does not require the slow identity-formation and resource-mobilisation work that classical social-movement theory assumes is a precondition for collective action. CJP's growth pattern, from a single viral retort to millions of social media followers within days, and its explicitly self-selecting, satirical membership criterion ("unemployed, lazy, chronically online"), corresponds closely to the connective-action model.

Castells (2012) offers a complementary account of "networked social movements," arguing that digital networks allow movements to occupy both virtual and physical space simultaneously, with online space functioning not merely as a recruitment tool but as a site of autonomous political culture in its own right, from which offline occupation subsequently draws its symbolic repertoire. Gerbaudo's (2012) study of the "choreography of assembly" similarly emphasises that social media platforms do not simply announce protests but actively script their emotional tone, their symbols, and the physical spaces they occupy, functions clearly visible in CJP's use of cockroach costumes, an AI-generated mascot, and satirical branding that carried directly from Instagram into the Jantar Mantar encampment. Chadwick's (2013) hybrid media system framework, finally, cautions against treating "digital" and "legacy" media as separate arenas: CJP's trajectory was shaped as much by television and newspaper coverage of the protests, and by opposition politicians' decisions to appear at Jantar Mantar, as by its own social media output, illustrating the constant feedback between online and offline, and between new and legacy, media logics.

Agenda-Setting, Responsiveness and the Protest-Policy Nexus

The classical agenda-setting hypothesis, that media coverage shapes not what people think but what they think about, originates with McCombs and Shaw (1972) and has since been extended well beyond its original focus on mass media to encompass a wider "agenda-building" process in which multiple actors, including protest movements, compete to determine which issues receive sustained public and governmental attention (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Protest movements, on this account, can contribute to the governmental agenda by drawing sustained public and institutional attention to issues that might otherwise receive less consistent policy attention, even where the movement itself lacks the institutional access of a conventional pressure group.

Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011) large-scale comparative study of civil resistance provides a further relevant finding: sustained, broad-based and disciplined nonviolent campaigns are, on average, considerably more likely to achieve their stated goals than violent campaigns, in part because they are better able to attract wide participation across social groups and to place governments in a position where repression itself becomes politically costly. This literature is directly relevant to CJP's own repeated public emphasis on peaceful and non-violent tactics. Finally, the concept of government responsiveness, understood in the pressure-group literature as the degree to which decision-makers adjust policy or personnel in reaction to organised external pressure, provides the final analytical anchor for assessing the CJP case, even where, as here, the paper's temporal horizon closes before any such adjustment can be confirmed one way or the other.

3. Methodology

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

This paper adopts a single, in-depth case-study design, appropriate to an early-stage, theory-building inquiry into a novel and rapidly evolving political phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Case studies of this kind are well suited to answering "how" and "why" questions about a contemporary event over which the researcher has no control, and they are the natural design where a phenomenon does not fit existing analytic categories cleanly enough for large-N comparison to be meaningful. CJP, occupying an unusual position between satire, digital movement and pressure group, is exactly this kind of case.

The empirical material draws on secondary sources: international and Indian wire-service and newspaper reporting, the movement's own public statements and manifesto documents as reported in the press, and a chronological reference compilation of the Jantar Mantar protests. These sources were triangulated against one another wherever possible: factual claims used in the empirical reconstruction in section four are corroborated by at least two independent outlets, and points of genuine ambiguity, such as the precise size of crowds at any given moment, are flagged as approximate rather than resolved.

This approach carries clear limitations, which the paper does not attempt to disguise. First, it relies on journalistic rather than official or archival sources, which brings the ordinary risks of incomplete access, selection effects in what gets reported, and the possibility of factual revision as events continue to unfold; this is unavoidable for a case only weeks old. Second, and more fundamentally, the case is temporally open. The empirical sequence traced in section four runs from the movement's origins in mid-May 2026 up to the end of June 2026; what occurs thereafter, including the nature of any institutional or policy response, whether the sit-in persists or is wound down, and how the movement's demands are subsequently addressed, lies beyond the paper's evidentiary horizon. The analysis therefore treats the period covered as a bounded episode within a longer and still-unfolding process, and it deliberately frames its conclusions as claims about what this episode demonstrates rather than as claims about CJP's ultimate trajectory or legacy. Third, single-case designs cannot, by construction, support strong causal generalisation to "pressure-group politics" or "digital mobilisation" as such; the paper's ambition is accordingly to generate theoretically informed propositions for future comparative research rather than to test a general theory against this case alone.

Where claims concern the conduct or response of public authorities, the analysis distinguishes between positions explicitly stated by the movement, accounts reported by news organisations, and independently documented governmental or institutional actions. This distinction is intended to prevent claims advanced by protest organisers from being treated as established findings of the study and to maintain analytical neutrality in assessing both mobilisation and governmental response.

4. The Case: From Satire to Sit-in

Origins: A Judicial Remark and a Viral Retort

The proximate trigger for CJP's formation was narrow and almost incidental. On 15 May 2026, during a Supreme Court hearing concerned with the misuse of professional credentials, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant remarked that unemployed young people resembled "cockroaches" who, lacking steady employment or professional standing, turned to media and activism to vent their frustrations, sometimes attacking others in the process (Wikipedia, 2026a). The remark drew immediate public criticism. The following day, 16 May 2026, Abhijeet Dipke, a graduate student in the United States who had previously worked in

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

political communications for the Aam Aadmi Party, posted a sardonic reply on social media asking what might happen "if all cockroaches come together," and shortly afterwards announced the founding of a "platform for all the cockroaches out there," with self-described eligibility criteria of being unemployed, lazy, chronically online, and able to rant professionally (Time, 2026a; Wikipedia, 2026a).

The Cockroach Janta Party and its growth on social media was exceptionally rapid by any standard: reporting indicates the movement's Instagram account crossed roughly three million followers within 78 hours of launch and surpassed ten million within five days, overtaking the ruling party's own official account in the process, en route to a following that had grown past twenty million within weeks (Foreign Policy, 2026; Wikipedia, 2026a). At this stage CJP was, by its own description, satire rather than a conventional political organisation: its manifesto combined evidently tongue-in-cheek proposals with more substantive, if satirically framed, positions, including calls for gender parity in the Cabinet and Parliament beyond existing legislated reservations, and criticism of concentrated, conglomerate-owned media ownership (Wikipedia, 2026b).

From Timeline to Tarmac: Jantar Mantar

CJP's transition from an online phenomenon to a street movement was catalysed by an issue distinct from, though related in tone to, its founding grievance: a wave of controversies over irregularities and alleged paper leaks in India's national examinations, including the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) used for medical-college admissions, which affects millions of students and their families every year. The movement's first physical demonstration took place at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on 6 June 2026, drawing an initial crowd in the low hundreds, framed explicitly by organisers and by international press coverage as the movement's first foray from social media feeds into street politics (France 24, 2026). Sustained encampment followed: by late June, protest at the site had grown into a continuous sit-in involving thousands of participants, joined at various points by established left-wing student organisations, including the All India Students Federation, the All India Students Association and the Students' Federation of India, and by opposition politicians, including a spokesperson for the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) faction. (Wikipedia, 2026a).

CJP's demands crystallised into a five-point charter titled "5 Demands to End India's Exam Crisis," calling for a new Public Examinations Act to strengthen transparency and accountability, reform of examination-conducting bodies, a students' rights charter, a welfare fund for affected students and families, and standing parliamentary oversight of examination authorities rather than scrutiny confined to periods of active scandal. Among the movement's principal demands was the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, with CJP organisers attributing responsibility for reported examination irregularities and administrative concerns to the education authorities. As of the end of June 2026, the specific demand concerning the Union Education Minister had not resulted in a ministerial resignation. This, however, should not be interpreted as indicating an absence of governmental action concerning the broader examination crisis. Administrative and security measures had been undertaken to protect the integrity of the examination process and the interests of students. The distinction between the non-acceptance of a particular political demand and broader institutional responses to the underlying policy concerns is therefore important for assessing government responsiveness in this case.

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Prismatic Horizons: Journal of Social Science and Humanities
ISSN: 2583-9284
Vol. 04, No. 02, Apr-Jun, 2026
www.phjssh.lexarcheus.com

Government Response and Examination-Security Measures

The government's response to the examination crisis also involved a series of administrative and procedural measures directed towards protecting examination integrity and the interests of students. Following concerns regarding irregularities associated with NEET-UG 2026, the National Testing Agency proceeded with a re-examination on 21 June 2026, accompanied by enhanced examination-security and candidate-verification arrangements. These measures included strengthened monitoring at examination centres, biometric verification and additional safeguards concerning the handling and distribution of examination materials. The significance of these measures for the present case lies in their substantive overlap with several concerns raised by CJP, particularly those relating to examination integrity, transparency and student protection. The government's response should therefore be assessed not only in terms of whether it accepted the movement's political demands, but also in terms of the administrative measures undertaken to protect the integrity of the examination process and reduce risks to affected students.

The authorities also adopted preventive and regulatory measures intended to protect the re-examination from further disruption and the circulation of purported examination material. In the period preceding the re-examination, restrictions were imposed on Telegram-related services and URLs in response to concerns regarding the dissemination of examination-related material. The Delhi High Court subsequently upheld the blocking measure, finding that the action was supported by the statutory framework governing such restrictions and satisfied the applicable proportionality requirement. This aspect of the government's response is relevant to the present case because it demonstrates that the state response included regulatory and technological interventions alongside administrative measures. At the same time, such measures raise questions concerning the appropriate balance between examination security, prevention of unfair means and digital freedoms, making them relevant to the broader deliberative question examined in this study.

5. Discussion: What CJP Demonstrates So Far

The CJP episode, reconstructed above, bears on each of the analytic themes identified in the introduction. This section addresses them in turn, drawing explicitly on the theoretical vocabulary developed in section two, before turning, in a final subsection, to the limits of what the case can be taken to show at this stage.

Political Participation and Representation

CJP's growth pattern illustrates a mode of political participation that classical theories of collective action would not have predicted to succeed. Olson's (1965) free-rider logic suggests that a large, diffuse, unorganised constituency of unemployed and underemployed young people, without selective material incentives, should struggle to act collectively at all. CJP's rapid mobilisation, achieved through low-cost, low-commitment digital participation, satirical self-identification, content-sharing, that scaled into a sustained physical occupation within weeks, is better explained by Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) account of connective action, in which the personalised, expressive act of participation is itself the mobilising mechanism, rather than a prior, painstakingly constructed collective identity. This matters for how the case should be read: CJP demonstrates that connective-action dynamics can, at least in this instance, generate sustained offline collective action rather than remaining confined to

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

low-commitment digital expression, a possibility that some earlier commentary on "clicktivism" was sceptical of (Gerbaudo, 2012).

On representation, the picture is more qualified. CJP's self-described constituency, the unemployed, the underemployed and the chronically online, is broad but not universal, and the movement's demands centred specifically on examination-system grievances that resonate most directly with students and recent graduates competing for a narrow set of educational and public-sector opportunities. The presence of established student organisations alongside CJP at Jantar Mantar indicates that the movement operated within, rather than entirely outside, existing channels of youth political organisation, even as its own leadership and branding remained distinct from any single party. The case therefore illustrates a genuine expansion of participatory reach, in the specific sense of activating young citizens who had not previously been mobilised through conventional student-politics or party channels, without supporting a stronger claim that CJP represents Indian youth, or Indian Gen Z, as an undifferentiated whole.

Public Reasoning: Protest as, and Against, Deliberation

Judged against Habermas's classical standard of rational-critical, mutual-understanding-oriented discourse (Habermas, 1989, 1996), CJP's own communicative style, built on satire, ridicule, costume and pointed sloganeering, would largely fail to qualify as deliberation. This, however, is precisely the point at which Fraser's (1990) counterpublic framework and Dryzek's (2000, 2010) systemic account of deliberative democracy become analytically necessary rather than merely permissive. CJP's satire performed a specific and recognisable public-sphere function: it converted a dismissive remark from a powerful institutional actor into a shared, legible grievance, and it did so in a register accessible to, and adopted voluntarily by, millions of young people who had not previously articulated that grievance collectively.

Read through Dryzek's systemic lens, this looks less like a failure of deliberation and more like one differentiated component of a broader deliberative system: CJP generated and circulated reasons and grievances that, by late June 2026, had already begun to enter more formally deliberative arenas, in the form of a written charter of demands addressed directly to government and pitched explicitly in the language of transparency, accountability and oversight rather than mere ultimatum.

The clearest evidence for this systemic reading lies in the form the movement's own demands took: a public examinations act, standing parliamentary oversight, and a students' rights charter are all demands for institutionalised, ongoing mechanisms of public justification, rather than simply demands for a single concession. This is consistent with Young's (2001) and Dryzek's (2010) arguments that protest can perform legitimate discursive functions precisely where more formal channels are closed, slow, or unresponsive to a claim. It should be stressed that this is a claim about function, not about the intrinsic civility of CJP's rhetoric, which remained pointed and satirical throughout, nor a claim that government had, by the close of the period examined here, actually supplied the public justification the movement was demanding.

Agenda-Setting and the Media Environment

CJP's trajectory to date offers an illustration of agenda-building in the sense developed by Dearing and Rogers (1996): the movement contributed to sustained public and governmental attention to examination-system governance, an issue that had previously received substantial attention through individual examination controversies but increasingly

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

became framed as a broader question of examination integrity and institutional reform. The scale of CJP's social media following gave it an unusual capacity to circulate these concerns beyond conventional institutional channels, while coverage by wire services, broadcasters and major newspapers extended the discussion to wider audiences. At the same time, the persistence of examination-related concerns independently of the movement suggests that CJP should be understood as one contributor to a broader policy and public debate rather than as the sole source of governmental attention to examination governance. Whether the movement subsequently influenced specific policy decisions remains a separate empirical question.

Government Responsiveness and Pressure-Group Influence: An Open Question

By the standard the pressure-group literature typically applies, adjustment of policy or personnel in response to organised external pressure, the CJP episode had not, as of the end of June 2026, produced a clear instance of governmental responsiveness. The sit-in continued during the period examined, while the movement continued to advocate its stated demands; the sources reviewed for this study did not document a formal written or verbal commitment concerning those demands at the time of writing. This absence of concession is itself analytically informative rather than simply a gap in the evidence. Tilly's (2004) and Tarrow's (2011) treatment of contentious, extra-institutional mobilisation and conventional interest-group bargaining as points on a single continuum is useful here precisely because it allows the case to be read as still in motion along that continuum rather than as a settled instance of either successful or unsuccessful pressure-group influence. Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011) finding that disciplined, broad-based nonviolent campaigns are, on average, more likely over time to achieve their stated goals than narrower or more confrontational ones is consistent with features already visible in CJP's approach, its repeated public emphasis on non-violence and its broadening base of participation beyond its original online core, but the finding describes a probabilistic tendency observed across many cases rather than a prediction that can be applied with confidence to this one, still-unresolved, episode. What can be said, on the basis of the period examined here, is that CJP had by the end of June 2026 already achieved a form of attention and salience that classical pressure-group theory treats as a precondition for, rather than the equivalent of, effective influence: sustained governmental awareness of its demands, extensive domestic and international press coverage, and a charter that had moved from an internal movement document into an object of open political contestation. Whether this precondition converts into the kind of concrete, personnel-level or policy concession that the literature treats as its strongest evidence of informal influence is a question this paper's temporal boundary does not permit it to answer, and one that any future study of this case will need to treat as a central, rather than peripheral, concern.

Government responsiveness in the present case should, however, be assessed across more than one dimension. While the movement's demand concerning the resignation of the Union Education Minister had not produced the requested personnel-level outcome by the end of June 2026, the authorities had simultaneously undertaken measures directed towards the underlying examination concerns raised by students. The conduct of a fresh examination, strengthened examination-security procedures, candidate verification and regulatory measures intended to prevent the circulation of purported examination material indicate that the state response included substantive administrative action. These measures do not establish that all of CJP's demands were accepted, nor do they by themselves demonstrate that the movement caused the policy changes. They do, however, suggest that governmental responsiveness

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

should be understood as encompassing administrative action and institutional problem-solving alongside the acceptance or rejection of specific political demands.

This distinction is particularly important because the concerns expressed by CJP extended beyond the question of ministerial responsibility. Its five-point charter also addressed examination transparency, institutional reform, student rights, welfare support and continuing oversight. Several of these concerns correspond to the broader administrative objective of maintaining examination integrity and protecting candidates from the consequences of irregularities. The case should therefore not be reduced to a binary relationship in which protest represents responsiveness and government represents resistance. A more appropriate interpretation is that the episode involved an interaction between public mobilisation, institutional action and continuing demands for reform, with the extent to which these processes influenced one another requiring further investigation.

Digital-to-Offline Mobilisation

The CJP case offers an unusually clean illustration of the online-to-offline mobilisation pathway theorised by Castells (2012) and Gerbaudo (2012). The movement's visual and symbolic repertoire, cockroach masks and costumes, an AI-generated mascot, satirical branding modelled on the ruling party's own name, originated online and was then physically enacted at Jantar Mantar with minimal alteration, precisely the "choreography of assembly" Gerbaudo describes, in which digital platforms script the emotional tone and symbolism of subsequent physical occupation rather than merely announcing it logistically. Equally notable is the speed of the transition: from a viral social media post on 16 May to a first physical demonstration on 6 June, a gap of three weeks, and from that first demonstration to a sustained encampment with national political salience within a further few weeks. This compressed timeline is difficult to reconcile with collective-action models that assume extended prior organisation-building, and it lends empirical support to connective-action accounts of digitally native mobilisation as a genuinely distinct process rather than merely a faster version of older organising patterns.

The Limits of the Case: Why Not to Overclaim

Having set out what the case demonstrates so far, it is equally important to state plainly what it does not. First, a six-week episode that has not yet produced a governmental concession cannot establish that CJP will produce any lasting change in the structure of Indian civil society or political participation; whether the sit-in secures the resignation it demands, persists without resolution, dissipates, or provokes a harder governmental response are all live possibilities this paper is not positioned to adjudicate. Second, CJP's rapid growth and early salience should not be read as evidence that connective, digitally native mobilisation has superseded organised, institutionalised pressure-group politics in India; CJP's own trajectory shows it drawing on, and being joined by, established student organisations at precisely the moments when sustained physical mobilisation was required, suggesting complementarity between digital-native and institutional modes of organising rather than straightforward substitution. Third, the paper's reliance on journalistic sourcing, while triangulated wherever possible, cannot resolve questions on which reporting itself remains approximate, most notably the precise scale of participation at any given moment, and the analysis has treated such questions as estimates rather than settled facts. For all these reasons, the case is best understood, at this stage, as a theoretically generative episode that illustrates specific dynamics predicted by existing literatures on connective action, deliberative systems and pressure-group bargaining, rather

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

than as grounds for a general theory of a "new" Indian protest politics, and certainly not as grounds for any claim about how the standoff will ultimately be resolved.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to ask what the Cockroach Janta Party demonstrates, so far, about the relationship between protest and deliberation, rather than to settle the more sweeping question of what CJP ultimately "is" or will become, a question its still-unresolved standoff with government makes impossible to answer at present. Read through the theoretical literatures on the deliberative public sphere, pressure-group politics, connective action and agenda-setting, the episode traced here shows a movement that does not sit within any single established category. It generated participation through low-cost, expressive, digitally native mobilisation of a kind classical collective-action theory would not have predicted to scale so quickly; it performed identifiable public-sphere functions, converting a dismissive institutional remark into a shared, nationally salient grievance, even while its own discourse remained satirical rather than deliberative in a narrow sense; and it contributed to sustained public and governmental attention to examination-system governance beyond the episodic attention associated with individual examination controversies.

What the case has not yet done, as of the end of June 2026, is secure the concrete, personnel-level concession, the resignation of the Union Education Minister, that has become the movement's central and most visible demand, and the paper accordingly stops short of the strongest claims the pressure-group literature reserves for cases of confirmed governmental responsiveness. The most analytically important feature of the case, at this stage, may be precisely this incompleteness: CJP illustrates, in close to real time, the early and middle stages of a process, from grievance formation through agenda-setting to direct pressure on office-holders, that existing literature more often reconstructs only after its outcome is already known. Whether the sit-in eventually secures its central demand, whether the movement sustains itself through a longer campaign or dissipates once its founding moment of virality fades, and whether government subsequently adopts policy or institutional responses to claims advanced through extra-institutional channels, are all open questions that this paper has deliberately declined to answer in advance of the evidence. What can be said, on the basis of the episode examined here, is that CJP demonstrates the emerging capacity of extra-institutional, digitally native mobilisation to function as a genuine, if as yet incomplete, component of a broader Indian deliberative system, one capable of generating public reasons and contributing to agenda-setting, while also testing whether extra-institutional mobilisation can contribute to concrete policy or institutional responses, without the outcome of that test yet being known. The episode also demonstrates why governmental responsiveness should not be assessed solely through the acceptance of a movement's most politically prominent demand. Although the demand concerning the Union Education Minister had not produced the requested personnel-level outcome within the study's June 2026 temporal boundary, the broader examination crisis was accompanied by administrative and security measures directed towards examination integrity and student protection. These measures indicate that the state response involved institutional action even in the absence of agreement with every demand advanced by the movement. The case therefore illustrates a more complex relationship between protest and governance in which public mobilisation, administrative intervention, institutional review and demands for further reform can occur simultaneously. Future research, ideally conducted once the standoff over the education minister's position reaches some resolution, should examine whether CJP secures its central demand, persists as an organised actor regardless of outcome,

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

or dissolves once its immediate grievances are resolved or exhausted; comparative work situating CJP alongside other recent digitally native youth mobilisations, in South Asia and beyond, would further help to establish which features of this case are genuinely distinctive and which are instances of a broader, recurring pattern.

REFERENCES

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. Information, Communication & Society, 15(5), 739–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Castells, M. (2012). Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age. Polity Press.

Chadwick, A. (2013). The hybrid media system: Politics and power. Oxford University Press.

Chenoweth, E., & Stephan, M. J. (2011). Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict. Columbia University Press.

Dearing, J. W., & Rogers, E. M. (1996). Agenda-setting. Sage Publications.

Dryzek, J. S. (2000). Deliberative democracy and beyond: Liberals, critics, contestations. Oxford University Press.

Dryzek, J. S. (2010). Foundations and frontiers of deliberative governance. Oxford University Press.

France 24. (2026, June 6). Supporters of India's Gen Z 'cockroach' party stage first protest in New Delhi. https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20260606-supporters-of-india-gen-z-cockroach-party-stage-first-protest-new-delhi

Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. Social Text, (25/26), 56–80. https://doi.org/10.2307/466240

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism. Pluto Press.

Habermas, J. (1989). The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society (T. Burger, Trans.). MIT Press. (Original work published 1962)

Habermas, J. (1996). Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy (W. Rehg, Trans.). MIT Press.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. Public Opinion Quarterly, 36(2), 176–187. https://doi.org/10.1086/267990

Olson, M. (1965). The logic of collective action: Public goods and the theory of groups. Harvard University Press.

Tarrow, S. (2011). Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, C. (2004). Social movements, 1768–2004. Paradigm Publishers.

Truman, D. B. (1951). The governmental process: Political interests and public opinion. Knopf.

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Wikipedia contributors. (2026a). 2026 Delhi Jantar Mantar protests. In Wikipedia. Retrieved June 29, 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Delhi_Jantar_Mantar_protests

Wikipedia contributors. (2026b). Cockroach Janta Party. In Wikipedia. Retrieved June 29, 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockroach_Janta_Party

Yin, R. K. (2018). Case study research and applications: Design and methods (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Young, I. M. (2001). Activist challenges to deliberative democracy. Political Theory, 29(5), 670–690. https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591701029005004

© 2026 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)