

## TEXT ANALYSIS 21: NIMBYISM

**Nimbys. Naysayers. Traitors. Children take note, why learn oracy when insults will do?**

Catherine Bennett

*Keir Starmer's rhetoric against green campaigners appears to have taken a playground turn.*

Before the last election, in what was billed as his "most personal interview yet", Keir Starmer said: "I'm not in the habit of bandying insults around". It was once part of his appeal, or meant to be, that his speech was polite, even to the point of colourless, in contrast to the ugly gibberish streaming out of Boris Johnson, then Liz Truss. When the Tories went low, Starmer went sorrowful headteacher. "I don't think Boris Johnson is a bad man," he said in one speech, "I think he is a trivial man."

His favourite word, these days, is "nimbys". Starmer uses it so freely he's personally breathed new life into the original acronym ("not in my back yard"), revealing along the way its largely unexplored potential to create national disharmony. Why restrict such a genius jibe to arguments about ring roads and executive homes? Last week's headlines about his plan for nuclear power expansion – typically, "Starmer to 'push past nimbyism' in pledge to expand nuclear power sites" – are only the latest in which Starmer demonstrates how any opposition to any scheme with environmental consequences can be represented, by a skilled litigator like himself, as nimbyism: purely selfish, irrational and against the common good. Unlike the visionary tech overlords such as Google, Meta and Amazon, which Starmer invited, in the same speech, to profit, with their data centres, from the UK nimbys' certain defeat. His government's pro-nuclear press release featured praise from similarly patriotic, non-nimby-infested corporations, such as EDF and Microsoft.

It is thanks to Starmer we now understand that Greenpeace and other environmental campaigners – actually anyone with questions about, for instance, the disposal of nuclear waste – are essentially indistinguishable from other varieties of nimby he has been insulting for a while, so as to trivialise in advance any disquiet about Labour's plans to tear up planning regulations.

Look beyond the acronym's "back yard" element: now any non-local objection to 150 infrastructure projects, all evidently beyond criticism, also identifies a person as, in his eyes, the enemy of his "working people". Challenge a greenfield development's non-provision of affordable homes: you're a vexatious nimby. Cast doubt on Rachel Reeves' Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor: self-righteous virtue-signaller. Oppose the third runway: call yourself British? In his "plan for change" speech, these irritants were warned, with menaces ("whether you like it or not"), that they were wasting their time. His projects, he said, would "send a very clear message to the nimbys, the regulators, the blockers and bureaucrats... The alliance of naysayers, the people who say 'no, Britain can't do this'."

Since when, the nimby category has been further expanded to include anyone with a selfish weakness for nature or wildlife. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, Starmer took aim at, among others, a Green "naysayer" in Norfolk who had carelessly annoyed – woe betide like-minded campaigners – "a top judge".

"There are countless more examples of Nimbys and zealots gumming up the legal system," he wrote, "often for their own ideological blindspots to stop the Government building the infrastructure the country needs." Anti-growth traitors, the lot of them. "They want to win for themselves," Starmer raved, "not for the country." Lurching into the "couldn't make it up" mode much prized at the *Mail*, he cited the "ridiculous" HS2 bat tunnel (the one that also tickles Rachel Reeves) and a crowning example he knew working people would find hilarious: a system designed to prevent millions of fish being sucked to their deaths into an EDF reactor's cooling pipes! "I wish I was joking," Starmer wrote. He was presumably aware that EDF has abandoned this deterrent, one nonetheless selected for its absurdity out of "countless" examples.

Admittedly, this crude rhetoric has its fans, and not just in the construction, housebuilding, energy and property speculation community. For prominent Tory idealists, there must be validation in Starmer's promise to fulfil their dreams, never properly realised, of humbling environmentalists and trashing planning restrictions (in places where they don't live). Not forgetting the satisfaction of seeing Starmer recycle, for Labour, their exact same phrases, sometimes wearing the same accessories – hard hats and hi-vis jackets – for the benefit of vanity photographers recently declassified as a Tory outrage.

Since it can't be plagiarism, only shared passion can explain why Starmer and David Cameron have phrased their ambitions in identical terms, in wanting, say, a "bonfire of red tape" (Starmer 2024; Cameron 2014). Starmer thinks regulations are "suffocating" (likewise Cameron); Starmer says "we are the builders" (ditto George Osborne); Starmer wants to end "dithering" (Cameron, "cut through the dither"); Starmer declares Britain "open for business" (Cameron, same, 2012); Starmer confronts those "talking our country down" (so did Cameron, 2011).

To judge by their interchangeable expressions of annoyance, hostility to environmental protections is also common ground for Reeves and Osborne. For him, they placed "ridiculous costs on British businesses"; for her, they make "delivering major infrastructure in our country far too expensive". In 2012, the vice-president of the RSPB, Britain's largest nature conservation charity, called Osborne "a bloody idiot".

Impressively, after only months in power, Starmer and Reeves have already provoked their own RSPB fight. "There is some deeply infuriating and frankly shocking rhetoric coming from the UK government around planning," says the RSPB's chair, Beccy Speight. She warns: "The last government's attack on nature rightly triggered public outrage; Sir Keir and his cabinet should take heed to avoid this path reaching the same dead end."

The teaching of "oracy" in schools was once a priority for Starmer. Confident speaking, he said, gives "an inner belief to make your case in any environment". Whatever explains his recent change in style, the debacle is not without educational value. Kids, if you go in for name-calling, offensive misrepresentation and unconvincing assertions of your superior judgement, the finest voice coach may struggle to transform it into persuasive oracy. Even when, as with Starmer's nimbys, your targets were, only months ago, your friends.

## Questions simulating Galicia 2022 – A

**1. READING COMPREHENSION. Choose the BEST answer. (1 mark)**

**1) How does Keir Starmer's rhetoric towards environmental campaigners shift?**

- a) He begins to support underprivileged communities.
- b) He starts to insult them publicly and categorize them negatively.
- c) He transitions from a positive to a neutral stance.
- d) He adopts a collaborative approach with environmentalists.

**2) What can be inferred about the author's view on Starmer's approach to planning regulations?**

- a) The author believes it is necessary for progress.
- b) The author sees it as a method to engage more stakeholders.
- c) The author believes it will lead to immediate benefits.
- d) The author views it as a means to alienate communities.

**3) What is the author's perspective on the notion of "anti-growth traitors" as framed by Starmer?**

- a) The author endorses this viewpoint entirely.
- b) The author finds it to be a divisive label that oversimplifies debates.
- c) The author wishes to promote this label as a legitimate argument.
- d) The author views it as an inevitable part of political discourse.

**4) According to the author, what potential consequences does Starmer's approach towards planning regulations hold?**

- a) It risks creating national discord over environmental issues.
- b) It is likely to foster innovation in planning.
- c) It promises significant economic growth without drawbacks.
- d) It is expected to unify disparate community voices.

**5) The text illustrates a broader theme about the contention between which two concepts?**

- a) Economic growth and community involvement
- b) Planning regulations and construction needs
- c) Environmental sustainability and political ambition
- d) Individual rights and collective responsibilities

**2. CLOZE TEST: End up the paragraph using the suitable words from the chart below. (1 mark)**

malaise	flux	crunch	outsized	ballot	wield
downtrodden	blight	leaks	thicket	ailments	prop up
equity	drips	feds	staunch	assuage	boon

But why is this trend worsening? Why do our well-intentioned neighbors – the ones who claim to represent the most 1. \_\_\_\_\_ – elect greater barriers to building housing in their communities? "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) is more than a political slogan; It has become a lifestyle that 2. \_\_\_\_\_ with sad irony.

Today, America's housing crisis has reached record heights. Large American cities, mostly Democratic but some Republican, are scrambling to address the frightening scarcity of affordable housing. The consequences of our chronic housing 3. \_\_\_\_\_ are now contributing to other 4. \_\_\_\_\_ plaguing our nation's health, such as high crime, increased drug abuse, and economic 5. \_\_\_\_\_.

In 2021, there was a shortage of 7.3 million affordable homes and rental units, an increase of 500,000 from just two years earlier. A dense 6. \_\_\_\_\_ of zoning restrictions strangles housing development, pushing home and rental prices ever higher.

The real puzzle, however, isn't what's causing our persistent housing shortage, but rather why so many Americans support policies that make it worse. NIMBY has become a symbol of pride for many – a security blanket protecting community life in a world of constant 7. \_\_\_\_\_.

Homeowners fear that new construction would immediately reduce their home 8. \_\_\_\_\_, leaving them worse off. Renters, by contrast, have more of an incentive to promote development in their communities because a boost in housing supply translates to lower rental prices. But homeowners 9. \_\_\_\_\_ greater political authority, as they typically have more invested in their communities and are better organized politically.

A recent study found that renters are more skeptical of housing development, associating an increase in housing supply with elevated rental prices, the opposite of what Economics 101 would predict. In the same study, homeowners responded that they, too, think a 10. \_\_\_\_\_ in housing supply could result in higher prices.

**3. WORD-FORMATION: Use the words given below to form a new one that fits in each space. (1 mark)**

AGE	BREAK	ESTIMATE	ESSENCE	STYMIE
MODE	EMPHASIS	CRY	PERSON	RIGHT

But data indicates that we all walk around perceiving the world differently (experiments revealed an 1. \_\_\_\_\_ of height ranging from 30 to 60 percent in most people)—acknowledging this is a first step in moving housing policy discussions into the field of science and out of the realm of emotion. Recognizing that we all likely carry 2. \_\_\_\_\_ fears around height, grounded in natural selection, should help to 3. \_\_\_\_\_ the dialogue and may lead to 4. \_\_\_\_\_ in conversations around housing that have 5. \_\_\_\_\_ solutions to the crisis our country faces.

If we look back through history we see clearly that today’s contested building often becomes tomorrow’s cherished landmark. Even the Eiffel Tower nearly tore Paris apart, with protesters 6. \_\_\_\_\_ the now iconic structure as a “disgrace to architecture” that would be the city’s “ruination.”

The historic trend of rejection followed by acceptance is an 7. \_\_\_\_\_ pattern. The 8. \_\_\_\_\_ New Yorker, Fran Lebowitz, talks of a man she knew who signed two petitions years apart. The first 9. \_\_\_\_\_ opposed the construction of the 307-foot Lever House in Manhattan. The second 10. \_\_\_\_\_ demanded its preservation.

**4. HOMOPHONES. Complete the sentences with the appropriate pair of homophones in RP (Received Pronunciation). One of each pair appears in the text. Both homophones must be correct. (1 mark)**

1A) By the time the letter reached them their sister had ceased to \_\_\_\_\_ .

1B) She never stops talking about healthy eating - she's got a real \_\_\_\_\_ in her bonnet about it.

2A) In the north, fillings are mostly red \_\_\_\_\_ paste and tapioca or taro.

2B) In the past, there has \_\_\_\_\_ no evidence of the cost-effectiveness of treatment.

3A) The company \_\_\_\_\_ a 13 percent decline in new orders as evidence that overall demand for its products was falling.

3B) After days at sea, the sailors finally \_\_\_\_\_ land.

4A) He fell again a few \_\_\_\_\_ later and returned with a second confirmed spinal fracture requiring cervical fusion.

4B) She can wander around in a perpetual \_\_\_\_\_ and continually break into tears.

- 5A) \_\_\_\_\_ all her qualifications, she's still useless at the job.
- 5B) Various ecological issues have come to the \_\_\_\_\_ since the discovery of the hole in the earth's ozone layer.
- 6A) The issues are of \_\_\_\_\_ great interest to me.
- 6B) This resort is considered by those who are in the \_\_\_\_\_ to have the best downhill skiing in Europe.
- 7A) I was in Vienna sitting quietly in a café when, \_\_\_\_\_ and behold, my cousin walked in.
- 7B) They wanted someone who would be a threat in the \_\_\_\_\_ post.
- 8A) Individuals using the \_\_\_\_\_ to commit fraud are brought up on federal charges.
- 8B) What percentage of the adult \_\_\_\_\_ population is unemployed?
- 9A) We are concerned that questions like these appear to require only \_\_\_\_\_ learning rather than a deeper understanding of the subject.
- 9B) They \_\_\_\_\_ economic histories that are in their way at least equal to anything that has been done since.
- 10A) Parents must take responsibility for their children. Failure to do \_\_\_\_\_ could mean a fine or a jail sentence.
- 10B) His finger was cut off when he caught it in a machine, but the surgeon was able to \_\_\_\_\_ it back on.

### 5. SYNONYMS / ANTONYMS. Provide a word from the text ... (1 mark)

#### A. with the same meaning as the following:

1. consideration
2. taunt
3. dismiss
4. hindrance
5. wrangling

#### B. with the opposite meaning as the following:

6. helpful
7. calmness
8. triumph
9. plausible
10. unlike

6. PHRASAL VERBS /IDIOMS. Replace the underlined words with a suitable PHRASAL VERB or IDIOM. For the phrasal verbs, choose a word from the chart below, add the appropriate particle(s) and use the same form/tense as in the sentences provided. For the idioms, choose a word from the chart, add the appropriate words and fit the expression in the sentences provided. There are two extra words which are not needed. (1 mark)

CALL	STAND	EYE	CRACK	GIVE	SHADE
EAR	BRING	HEAD	FACE	GO	LIGHT

- a) He cited the "ridiculous" HS2 bat tunnel
- b) He was presumably aware that EDF has abandoned this deterrent
- c) He has been insulting for a while
- d) The one that also tickles Rachel Reeves
- e) Starmer confronts those "talking our country down" (so did Cameron, 2011)
- f) to trivialise any disquiet about Labour's plans to tear up planning regulations.
- g) Challenge a greenfield development's non-provision of affordable homes.
- h) Oppose the third runway.
- i) In his "plan for change" speech, these irritants were warned.
- j) Keir and his cabinet should take heed to avoid this path reaching the same dead end.

7. REPHRASING. Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first one. Use the given word. (1 mark)

1. It is almost impossible to tell these two artworks apart. **BEAR**

These two artworks ..... other.

2. Akio became less dependent on his family as he grew older. **MORE**

The more ..... he became.

3. Not many people attended the talk, which dismayed the speaker. **TURNED**

Much to ..... for his talk.

4. Seeing Christine at the alumni reunion was not something Paul expected. **EXPECT**

Little ..... Christine at the alumni reunion.

5. Jane loved nature so much that she went hiking almost every weekend. **GREAT**

So ..... that she went hiking almost every weekend.

6. Because of his injury, he was excluded from the elite rugby team. **FOR**

If it had not ..... included in the elite rugby team.

7. Monica only managed to become a content writer after years of practice. **IN**

Only after years of practice ..... a content writer.

8. She walked out of the meeting without uttering a word. **DID**

Not ..... walking out of the meeting.

9. When the singer reached the stage, the crowd immediately started cheering. **HAD**

Barely ..... the crowd started cheering.

10. I did not hear Ronni say "thank you" at all when she left the party. **ONCE**

Not ..... "thank you" when she left the party.

**8. WRITING. Write a text in 300 words providing your opinion for the following question.**

*"Being led by example: is it possible to address values and respect in our classrooms when what students see and hear are just politicians and influential people behaving rudely, aggressively and disrespectfully? How can we fight this?"*