

« How to investigate a mobilisation in the heat of the moment : The case of a questionnaire survey among the Yellow jackets »

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Abstract :

This research note comes from a collective inquiry based on a face-to-face survey conducted in situ between November 2018 and March 2019, during the Yellow Vest movement. It focuses on three areas: the methodological challenges linked to survey research in social movements; the sociodemographic characteristics of participants and, lastly, their engagement and demands in relation to politics. The Yellow Vest movement has mobilized certain segments of lower- and middle-income groups. As a social movement, it also brings together people with very different levels of prior experience in political activism. We also show the existence of different social and political profiles according to the place and time at which interviewees were involved in the movement.

Keywords : Social Movement – Methodology - Yellow Vest – Survey.

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On Saturday 17 November 2018, several hundred thousand people dressed in yellow jackets are blocking the roads on French territory at roundabouts and tolls. Demonstrations are taking place in many cities, particularly in Paris, on the Champs-Élysées. That same evening, the Ministry of the Interior counted more than 2,000 blocking points and 287,710 participants. This mobilization is notably a follow-up to the online petition "For a drop in fuel prices at the pump!" launched at the end of May 2018 by Priscilla Ludosky, a 32-year-old self-employed entrepreneur from parisian suburb (Seine-et-Marne). The petition, which was then widely relayed on social networks, reached 200,000 signatories in a few days, and more than a million today. After 17 November, the actions continue and will continue in November 2019, after a year of mobilisation. This longevity is accompanied by a sharp decline in the number of people participating over time. Most of the roundabouts were evacuated in mid-December 2018 by the security forces, blockades became sporadic, and numerous arrests and verbalisations targeted participants.

The mobilisation of the Yellow Vests was surprising in its scope, shape and duration. In many respects, it questions the established analyses of social movements. This social movement raises many questions about its composition, its characterisation and the methodology for understanding its complexity. It quickly became apparent that the protest against the Yellow Vests was largely carried by people from the working classes. As for the claims of the Yellow Vests, the initial request for the cancellation of the domestic tax on the consumption of energy products (TICPE) gradually broadened to include demands on purchasing power and social justice, as well as on representation and democracy. This (apparent) heterogeneity of demands has given rise to contradictory interpretations of this mobilisation, sometimes seen as reactionary or populist, sometimes as revolutionary. [p.780]

The movement develops demands as well as singular and evolving modes of action. The continuous occupation of roundabouts is often coupled with free toll operations and blockades (roads, hypermarkets, freight, refineries) and is articulated, from the end of November 2018, with weekly demonstrations sometimes targeting places of political power. These Saturday gatherings, the "acts", question the established codes of the demonstration, having for a long time had no declared route, no organisation, no order service and none of the traditional symbolic attributes of the demonstration (structured procession, banners, flags...) ¹. Citizens' assemblies on roundabouts and in town centres, petitions, offices for the disabled and farmers' markets also added to the register of collective action.

Such a mobilization therefore raises many questions: who are these "yellow waistcoats"? What are their demands? How can we understand the evolution of this movement? Numerous contributions from the media, academics and more broadly intellectuals have tried to answer these questions. Some historians see it as a jacquery against the state and a symptom of a

* We thank the editorial board and the reviewers for their comments. This article is the result of a collective survey and benefited from discussions at the Bordeaux seminars on 29-30 January and 1 July 2019. The questionnaires were passed by more than 80 people. They were entered, coded, processed and filed by Camille Bedock, Pierre Blavier, Théo Grémion, Tinette Schnatterer, and Étienne Walker for his precious contribution in geography. A first version was written by Camille Bedock, Antoine Bernard de Raymond, Pierre Blavier, Magali Della Sudda, Théo Grémion, Emmanuelle Reungoat, Tinette Schnatterer and Étienne Walker, then collectively revised. All extended team members co-signed in alphabetical order : V. Alfieri, A. André; C. Bedock, Z. Bendali, A. Bernard de Raymond, A.-G. Beurier, P. Blavier, L. Bonin, A. Courty, M. Della Sudda, G. Delozière, C. Dondeyne, C. Elalaoui, F. Flipo, C.Frémont, M. Gaborit, A. Girardin, T. Grémion, P. Guillemain, M. Havard, M. Ivanovic, D. Larrouqué, A. Levain, P. Liochon, F. Neyrat, L. Ormiere-Noblet, L. Pauchard, F. Pigot, E. Reungoat, T. Schnatterer, L. Spéter Lejeune, F. Soulié, E. Walker.

¹ Olivier Fillieule et Danielle Tartakowsky, *La manifestation* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2013), 11–32, <https://www.cairn.info/la-manifestation--9782724614213.htm>.

downgrading². The initial antifiscal tone may have given the impression of a [French populist movement of the 1950's] Poujadist movement, accredited by the head of state. Strong similarities with sociology and the demands of the Red Caps in 2014 could be observed, without reducing the Yellow Vests to an anti-fiscal movement³. Others place it in the continuity of social struggles⁴. By putting the social question back at the heart of their movement, the Yellow Vests question the moral economy of our society⁵. In many ways, this event is similar to the struggles for democratic freedoms of the first 19th century⁶. The overseas dimension of a movement that is not limited to the metropolis is underlined by Michelle Zancarini-Fournel⁷. Some have seen the premises of a wider crisis articulating social and environmental issues⁸. The demand for democratic transformations, with the irruption of the citizens' initiative referendum (RIC) and the structuring of the Assemblies of Assemblies, has been envisaged as a possibility for a popular municipalism⁹. [p.781] In this plethora of interpretations, fewer analyses are based on empirical material, whether it be telephone surveys of people who consider themselves as supporters of the movement¹⁰, self-administered questionnaires on Facebook¹¹, online data analysis¹², quantitative work at a territorial level¹³ or first-hand field surveys¹⁴. A review of this research has recently been established¹⁵.

² Pierre Vermeren, *La France qui décline: les Gilets jaunes, une jacquerie au XXIe siècle* (Paris: Tallandier, 2019).

³ Alexis Spire, 'Voir les gilets jaunes comme des citoyens mobilisés contre l'écologie serait une erreur', *AOC media - Analyse Opinion Critique* (blog), 16 November 2018, <https://aoc.media/entretien/2018/11/17/alexis-spire-serait-erreur-de-voir-gilets-jaunes-citoyens-mobilises-contre-lecologie/>.

⁴ Gérard Noiriel and Nicolas Truong, *Les Gilets jaunes à la lumière de l'histoire: dialogue avec Nicolas Truong* (La Tour d'Aigues: éditions de l'Aube, 2019); Sophie Wahnich, 'Sans-Culottes et Gilets Jaunes' (Paris: Seuil, 2019), 29–42; Ludivine Bantigny, 'Un Événement', in *Le Fond de l'air Est Jaune: Comprendre Une Révolte Inédite*, ed. Joseph Confavreux (Paris: Seuil, 2019), 45–56.

⁵ Samuel Hayat, 'Les Gilets Jaunes, l'économie morale et le pouvoir', *Samuel Hayat - Science politique - Mouvement ouvrier, démocratie, socialisme* (blog), 5 December 2018, <https://samuelhayat.wordpress.com/2018/12/05/les-gilets-jaunes-leconomie-morale-et-le-pouvoir/>.

⁶ Alexis Spire et al., *Gilets jaunes: Hypothèses sur un mouvement, Analyse opinion critique* (Imprimé), AOC 1 (Paris: La Découverte, 2019).

⁷ Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, 'On Est En Train de Faire l'histoire', in *Le Fond de l'air Est Jaune*, ed. Etienne Balibar (Paris: Seuil, 2019), 29–44.

⁸ Benoît Hazard, 'La Taxe Carbone En Question. Gilets Jaunes, Capitalocène et Oligarchie Éco-Technocrate', *L'Humanité*, 7 December 2018, <https://www.humanite.fr/la-taxe-carbone-en-question-gilets-jaunes-capitalocene-et-oligarchie-eco-technocrate-664776>; Théo Grémion and Maxime Gaborit, 'Jaunes et verts', *La Vie des idées*, 20 December 2020, <http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Jaunes-et-verts.html>. [Note of M. Della Sudda: See for an update Fabrice Flipo, 'Gilets Jaunes et Écologie: Vers Un Écologisme Des Pauvres?', *Ecologie & Politique: Science Cultures Soiétés* 1, no. 62 (April 2021).]

⁹ Laurent Jeanpierre, *In Girum: les leçons politiques des ronds-points* (Paris, France: la Découverte, 2019).

¹⁰ Jérôme Fourquet and Sylvain Manternach, 'Les "gilets jaunes": révélateur fluorescent des fractures françaises', Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 5 December 2018, <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/les-gilets-jaunes-revelateur-fluorescent-des-fractures-francaises>; Yann Algan et al., 'Qui Sont Les Gilets Jaunes et Leur Soutien?' (Paris: Observatoire du Bien être - CEVIPOF - CEPREMAP, 14 February 2019), <https://spire.sciencespo.fr/hdl:/2441/63df2gp5gr8agbbsoc8l9f6rpg/resources/qui-sont-les-gilets-jaunes-et-leurs-soutiens-1.pdf>.

¹¹ Yann Le Lann et al., 'Enquête. Les Gilets Jaunes Ont-Ils Une Couleur Politique?', *L'Humanité*, 19 December 2018, sec. Politique; Chloé Alexandre et al., 'Qui Sont Vraiment Les « Gilets Jaunes »? Les Résultats d'une Étude Sociologique', *Lemonde.Fr*, 26 January 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/01/26/qui-sont-vraiment-les-gilets-jaunes-les-resultats-d-une-etude-sociologique_5414831_3232.html.

¹² Brigitte Sebbah et al., 'Les Gilets jaunes se font une place dans les médias et l'agenda politique' (Toulouse: LERASS Laboratoire d'études et de recherches appliquées en sciences sociales, 7 December 2018); Brigitte Sebbah et al., 'Les Gilets Jaunes, Des Cadrages Médiaatiques Aux Paroles Citoyennes', Research Report (Université de Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès, November 2018), <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02637928>.

¹³ Pierre C. Boyer et al., 'Les Déterminants de La Mobilisation Des "Gilets Jaunes"', *Working Papers*, Working Papers (Center for Research in Economics and Statistics, 26 July 2019),

We hypothesise that, far from being a homogenous movement with unified demands, this mobilisation brings together individuals with different attributes depending on the places where they gather and the time of their involvement, whether in terms of their sociological profile, their political resources or their motivations and demands. The most appropriate tool for verifying this hypothesis is an *in situ* survey by a researcher, repeated over time. Indeed, this method makes it possible to consider the link between participation in the protest, the social profiles of the mobilised, the formulation of demands and the spatio-temporal configuration of the movement. In this respect, the passing of questionnaires on different places of mobilisation (roundabouts, demonstrations, general assemblies and blockades in particular), with their own temporalities and specific territorial configurations, constitutes a valuable contribution of the collective survey.

Beyond the characterisation of the movement, this note is intended to provide some initial answers to the many questions raised by the protest against the Yellow Vests: is the movement part of a cycle of protest¹⁶ in which social justice and representation have supplanted "postmaterialist" themes¹⁷? Is it to be seen as a proximity with the "movements of the squares"¹⁸, strongly marked by demands for equality that lead to the rejection of spokespeople? Largely provincial, refusing leadership or representation by delegation, does the mobilisation of the Yellow Vests not resemble, in its structuring, these "occupation movements", as defined by Stéphanie Dechezelles and Maurice Olive¹⁹, characterised by the meeting within spaces considered strategic of a heterogeneous public with a horizontal functioning²⁰? [p.871]

Between meetings of atomised roundabouts and "Assemblies of Assemblies", does this movement participate in the "relocation of politics"²¹ or is its structuring more simply still in progress?

This research note cannot answer all these questions. It is based on an *in situ* questionnaire survey of people who took part in the Yellow Vests actions during the first six months of the mobilisation. Structured in two stages, its purpose is, firstly, to clarify the methodological issues and difficulties inherent in the questionnaire survey in a social movement. These obstacles, mentioned elsewhere²², are exacerbated by the particular structure of the Yellow

<https://ideas.repec.org/p/crs/wpaper/2019-06.html>.

¹⁴ Benoît Coquard, 'Qui sont et que veulent les « gilets jaunes » ? Entretien avec Benoît Coquard – CONTRETEMPS', accessed 23 January 2021, <https://www.contretemps.eu/sociologie-gilets-jaunes/>; Raphaël Challier, 'Rencontres aux ronds-points', *La Vie des idées*, 19 February 2019, <http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Rencontres-aux-ronds-points.html>; Clément Viktorovitch, 'Clément Viktorovitch : Les Gilets Jaunes Analysés Par Des Universitaires - YouTube', *Viens Voir Les Docteurs* (Paris: CliqueTV, 18 November 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKVQI-P7D2A>.

¹⁵ Bruno Cautrès, 'À la recherche des invisibles', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, no. 1090 (2019): 15–24.

¹⁶ Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious politics*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY, Etats-Unis d'Amérique: Oxford University Press, 2015, 2015).

¹⁷ Ronald F. Inglehart, *Culture shift in advanced industrial society* (Princeton (N.J.), Etats-Unis d'Amérique: Princeton university press, 1990).

¹⁸ Geoffrey Pleyers and Marlies Glasius, 'La résonance des « mouvements des places » : connexions, émotions, valeurs', *Socio. La nouvelle revue des sciences sociales*, no. 2 (16 December 2013): 59–80, <https://doi.org/10.4000/socio.393>; Hélène Combes et al., *Les lieux de la colère: occuper l'espace pour contester, de Madrid à Sanaa* (Paris, France: Éditions Karthala, 2016).

¹⁹ Stéphanie Dechezelles and Maurice Olive, 'Les mouvements d'occupation : agir, protester, critiquer', *Politix* 1, no. 117 (12 June 2017): 7–34.

²⁰ Collectif et al., 'Déclassement sectoriel et rassemblement public', *Revue française de science politique* 67, no. 4 (24 October 2017): 675–93.

²¹ Jeanpierre, *In Girum*. [MdS update : See also Zakaria Bendali et al., 'Le mouvement des Gilets jaunes : un apprentissage en pratique(s) de la politique?', *Politix* 128, no. 4 (2019): 143–77.]

²² Pierre Favre, Olivier Fillieule, and Nonna Mayer, 'La Fin d'une Étrange Lacune de La Sociologie Des Mobilisations. L'étude Par Sondage Des Manifestants : Fondements Théoriques et Solutions Techniques -

Vests movement: acephalous, refusing institutional forms of protest action, such as the declaration in the prefecture of occupations of public space, this mobilisation is both national and spread throughout the territory. Moreover, the types of gathering (roundabout occupations, demonstrations, etc.) on which it is based are renewed over time, but in a spatially differentiated manner. This research note then shows how the use of this method can provide valuable elements for grasping the socio-demographic characteristics of the people mobilised, their political properties and their demands through the combination of closed questions and the coding of open questions.

Our survey reveals a heterogeneous movement that brings together often precarious sections of the working and middle classes, strongly rejecting established politics, where first-time mobilised and long-time activists with a long history of commitment to militancy rub shoulders. A comparison of the different types of places and times of data collection makes it possible to give an account of the evolution of mobilisation in time and space. From a "protest consciousness"²³ against the fuel tax to a demand for social justice and institutional reform, it will be a question of reporting on the conditions for the transformation of the cause in the light of the evolution of the commitment of the participants in the movement.

Difficulties inherent in any questionnaire survey on Yellow Vests

Our bias has been to conduct a collective multidisciplinary and mobile survey using different methods. An open call was launched on 23 November 2018 on a mailing list of fellow politicians and sociologists in order to form a research collective²⁴. The survey quickly included, in addition to politicians and sociologists, geographers, anthropologists and philosophers. In order to facilitate the work of the collective, an organisation by methods (questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations) and themes (democracy, ecology, gender, work, etc.) was decided upon. The questionnaire team itself is made up of about ten people who were in charge of drawing up the questionnaire, harmonising the instructions, coding the answers and analysing the results for the first time. It was able to benefit from the participation of several dozen people, including students, who took part in the tests, which enabled us to compile 1,333 usable questionnaires.

We will develop here the part of the survey using standardised questionnaires, which were carried out both in person and in situ, mainly on roundabouts and at events. This choice is the most costly in terms of time and data collection, but it is also the one that ensures the best response rate because this type of survey limits the effects of self-censorship, particularly associated with those conducted by mail or on the Internet. In situ surveys also make it possible to build up a population of individuals who have participated in the movement, unlike surveys conducted on the Internet, which depend on the declarations of the participants as to their involvement in the movement. [p.872] This type of fieldwork was essential in order to constitute a reasoned sample of the Yellow Vests, in a context where we did not have information on their characteristics. Few refusals were made in the context of roundabouts and demonstrations (13%)²⁵. They are to be interpreted taking into account the context of the handover and are more frequent in demonstrations²⁶. The social characteristics of both the

Persée', *Revue Française de Science Politique* 1, no. 47 (1997): 3–28.

²³ Challier, 'Rencontres aux ronds-points'.

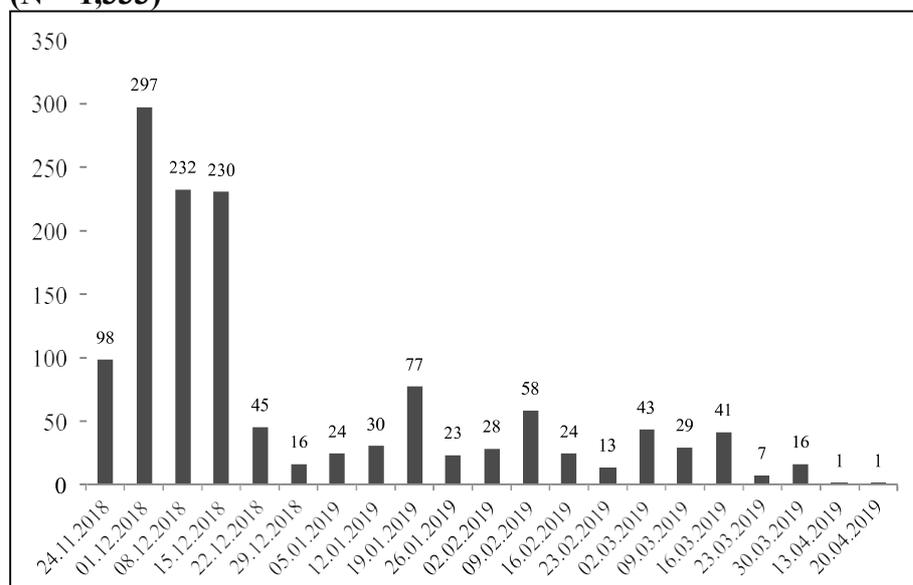
²⁴ Camille Bedock, Magali Della Sudda and Tinette Schnatterer, CNRS researchers of the « Centre Émile Durkheim » at the Political Science Institute of Bordeaux, launched the mix-method research on the Yellow vests. <https://giletsjaunes.hypotheses.org/category/qui-sommes-nous>

²⁵ Wolfgang Rüdiger, 'Assessing Nonresponse Bias in Activist Surveys', *Quality & Quantity* 44, no. 1 (1 January 2010): 173–80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-008-9184-9>.

²⁶ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious politics*.

people surveyed and the respondents may influence the variation in refusals. The questionnaires analysed were collected from Saturday 24 November 2018, one week after the initial act of Saturday 17 November, to early April 2019, i.e. shortly after the end of the Grand National Debate launched by Emmanuel Macron (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Number of questionnaires passed per week, 23 November 2018-20 April 2019 (N = 1,333)



The questionnaire approach has several advantages, which are well identified in the literature. Firstly, as a quantitative method, it aims to identify trends in a given social fact. It can also be linked to the collection of qualitative material. Begun in the spring of 2019 and involving ethnography and interviews, this continuation of the work - the results of which are not presented here - will make it possible to contextualise the quantitative materials, to grasp the biographical and spatial dimension of engagement and to better understand the trends that emerge from the questionnaire. [p.873]

The questionnaire survey is commonly used by the sociology of social movements to understand the motivations and social characteristics of the people mobilised. If it has first of all a descriptive vocation, as Bert Klandermans reminds us, it also finds its interest in comparison²⁷. It allows us to compare participants and non-participants in a social movement, participants in the same movement over time, as in the case of Freedom Summer²⁸, but also different social movements, whether they were born in the same context (such as the mobilisations against austerity policies²⁹) or whether they take place in different spaces, such as anti-globalisation counter-summits³⁰. The practice of a standardised questionnaire, integrating elements common to other surveys, makes it possible to compare between

²⁷ Bert Klandermans and Jackie Smith, 'Survey research : a case for comparative designs', in *Methods of social movement research*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg (Minneapolis (Minn.): University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 3–31.

²⁸ Doug McAdam, 'Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer', *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 1 (1986): 64–90.

²⁹ José-Manuel Sabucedo et al., 'Comparing Protests and Demonstrators in Times of Austerity: Regular and Occasional Protesters in Universalistic and Particularistic Mobilisations', *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 6 (2017): 704–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2017.1338940>.

³⁰ Éric Agrikoliansky, Isabelle Sommier, and Forum social européen, *Radiographie du mouvement altermondialiste* (Paris: La Dispute, 2005).

mobilisations. B. Klandermans advocates this method, which has enabled him to compare different characteristics of intensity, composition, organisation and type of action of three different mobilisations³¹. The collective survey coordinated by Isabelle Sommier and Éric Agrikoliansky on the alter-globalist movement at the European Social Forum in 2003 highlighted the interest of the comparison to report on these multi-situated and transnational mobilisations.

However, the questionnaire survey is relatively little used in France for the analysis of political mobilisations, whereas it represents a fifth of the surveys on social movements carried out in the 1980s and 1990s³². Today, it is a widely tried and tested method, for which conditions of representativeness have been determined by Stefaan Walgrave and Joris Verhulst. On the basis of a comparative analysis of studies on social movements, they propose to: favour demonstrations that move from one point to another and select individuals inside the procession in order to reduce the representation bias³³. This method requires significant resources to enable the handover to take place at different points and times of the action, and on different dates over a defined period. [p.874]

The main challenges posed by this type of survey are the lack of reliable data on the population surveyed and their dependence on the context of handover³⁴, but also the costs and barriers inherent in handing them over. Our survey was, in fact, highly dependent on the availability of the people who took part in it. The coordination of such a large research group - 88 people handed in at least one questionnaire - without administrative support and with limited means was a challenge in itself for our survey³⁵.

We find in our study certain difficulties common to any research based on administering questionnaires in a social movement and others linked to the specificities of the Yellow Vests. Thus, we first had to face the need to draw up the questionnaire very quickly because of the relative suddenness of this mobilisation and the uncertainties weighing on its future development. This difficulty was reinforced by the fact that we are a geographically fragmented research collective, formed ad hoc, with very disparate levels of experience. In an attempt to ensure a homogenous approach and procedure despite these obstacles, the questionnaire and the handover instructions were drawn up in frequent meetings between the members of the questionnaire team, so that they could coordinate their work at the handover sites and report any mishaps and good practices from the field (for example, diversifying the times of handovers on roundabouts to avoid over-representation of certain profiles or mentally counting up to ten to select a person to be surveyed at a random event). The students mobilised to complete the questionnaires were trained and accompanied by a person involved in the coordination of the questionnaire team. In spite of the coordination issues and the fact that participation in the survey was based on voluntary work and the collaboration of researchers, both permanent and temporary, the dispersed geographical location is also an asset in the survey. It allows for the multiplication of collection points and comparison taking

³¹ Bert Klandermans, 'A Theoretical Framework for Comparisons of Social Movement Participation', *Sociological Forum* 8, no. 3 (1993): 383–402.

³² John Crist and John McCarthy, "'If I Had a Hammer': The Changing Methodological Repertoire of Collective Behavior and Social Movements Research", *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (21 February 2006): 87–102, <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.1.1.72370r876m1k4693>.

³³ Stefaan Walgrave and Joris Verhulst, 'Selection and Response Bias in Protest Surveys', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (23 June 2011): 203–22,

<https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.16.2.j475m8627u4u8177>. « Therefore, we think it is easier to sample for interviews when the crowd is moving as this transforms an erratic cluster of people into a more or less orderly cortege with a clear start and a foreseeable end » (208)

³⁴ 'Survey Research', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social & Political Movements*, ed. David A. Snow et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871>.

³⁵ The research benefited from an exceptional funding of the CNRS in 2019 (20 000€).

into account the different areas of mobilisation. Initiated by political scientists, the questionnaire covered several themes by taking the usual questionnaires on social movements and enriching them with specific questions: participation in the movement, actions in the movement and political preferences, modes of transport and socio-demographic information. The questionnaire had the particularity of including a large number of open-ended questions on the motives for mobilisation, the environment, expectations towards the government or opinion on possible representatives. The questionnaire was slightly modified afterwards as a result of the feedbacks from the field (adding certain modes of action in the collective action repertoire).

The literature proposes standardised methods for randomly selecting respondents and thus constituting a representative sample of those mobilised. The claim to representativeness implies either to have sufficient information on the mobilised population to be able to assess whether or not the sample is biased or not, or to proceed in a completely random manner, assuming that the interviewers were able to cover the entire movement (geographically and over time). This also presupposes relatively uniform handover conditions.

As S. Walgrave and J. Verhulst note, "for practical reasons, large, announced, and peaceful collective action events will be easier to cover than smaller, unannounced, and disruptive events. Small demonstrations, as mentioned, are more difficult to cover since interviewers are too conspicuous. Also, only demonstrations that are announced at least a couple of days beforehand are covered, since this is the minimum amount of time required to construct issue-related questions, assemble a team of interviewers, and get the questionnaires printed. Protest that is estimated to be potentially violent will not be covered in order to avoid endangering the interviewers, and when a peaceful demonstration turns violent, the survey mission is immediately aborted. These are but a few examples of the practical limits of the method, and they surely need to be investigated further."³⁶

Thus, the literature on random sampling in social movements applies above all to classic demonstrations, with a procession divided by organisations, with an authorised and clearly defined route taking place in one or more clearly identified places³⁷. However, in the case of the Yellow Vests, these conditions are only very rarely met.

First of all, it is not a mobilisation organised in a central place or a limited set of places (as when organisations coordinate demonstrations in the country's major cities), but a movement spread over thousands of gathering places throughout the national territory. Simply mapping protest sites is complex and tedious, although the Yellow Vests have made an effort to keep an up-to-date map of the gatherings. One reason for this is that from the outset, the Yellow Vests protests were characterised by a variety of actions, with static occupation of roundabouts in peripheral areas, especially in peri-urban and rural areas, and demonstrations, especially in the centres of towns of varying sizes. From a methodological point of view, this raises the question of whether it is better to focus on one type of gathering or, on the contrary, to try to capture all the places of action. The second solution - chosen by the survey group - has the advantage of not being out of step in the event of, on the one hand, a polarisation of mobilisation towards one type of gathering or another over time, or if, on the other hand, an unexpected diversification of the repertoire of collective action occurs.

The geographical distribution of actions on the national territory has been the subject of different estimates by the Ministry of the Interior and the media. The Facebook page of the

³⁶ Walgrave and Verhulst, 'Selection and Response Bias in Protest Surveys', 219–20.

³⁷ Favre, Fillieule, and Mayer, 'La Fin d'une Étrange Lacune de La Sociologie Des Mobilisations. L'étude Par Sondage Des Manifestants : Fondements Théoriques et Solutions Techniques - Persée'.

"Yellow Number" has diversified the types of data, including the number of injured persons³⁸. One of the specific features of the movement is its extension over time. The development over time has been accompanied by a specific dramaturgy: the weekly demonstration becomes a "act" (Act I, etc.), where each city becomes the scene of the protest. The movement also multiplied in the space where each roundabout could become an arena for debate, discussion or meeting, but also sometimes to slow down or block the flows. These original characteristics called for a specific methodology to have a data collection of equal quality in time and space. They also call for a certain caution in interpreting and extrapolating the results. The choice of the municipalities was not made primarily on the basis of the size of the gatherings but on the capacity of the teams to administer the questionnaires. Due to the distribution of our teams, we chose, since we could not cover the entire territory, to return to certain survey locations, it being understood that comparability over time was not built by re-interviewing the same respondents but by "panellising" the places where the surveys were carried out. Certain sites were considered as rallying points for the protest and were investigated on a long-term basis, such as the cities of Bordeaux³⁹, Montpellier⁴⁰, Caen, Paris or the Grenoble periphery⁴¹ (see graph 2). However, the survey is rooted in various French regions and departments, as well as within several types of space. The major urban centres, such as Montpellier, Bordeaux, Caen or Paris, where demonstrations were held on a weekly basis, are thus at the top of the surveyed locations of mobilisation. But more secondary urban centres, municipalities under their influence, and even rural municipalities, were also the subject of numerous roundabout blockades.

Although it cannot claim to be representative of the spaces occupied by the Yellow Vests⁴², this survey nevertheless looks at the different types of places where they mobilised, thus shedding light on how this movement borrows from the repertoire of collective action that has been established, but also aims to renew it in its spatial dimension. While some deliberative moments (meetings and "citizens' cafés") or more convivial moments ("snacks bisounours") were the subject of a few passes, we have favoured the places of action or occupation polarising the Yellow Vests in number. The majority of questionnaires were thus administered during demonstrations (N = 755) and at roundabouts (N = 498), face-to-face⁴³, giving rise to interviews lasting from 15 to over 45 minutes with each person surveyed.

³⁸ www.facebook.com/lenombrejaune/ (consulted on 21 October 2019).

³⁹ We thank the undergraduate students Apolline Kaczmarek, Élie Perdrix, Elsa, Lucile Leroux for their help. [MdS : They did not wish to co-sign the paper].

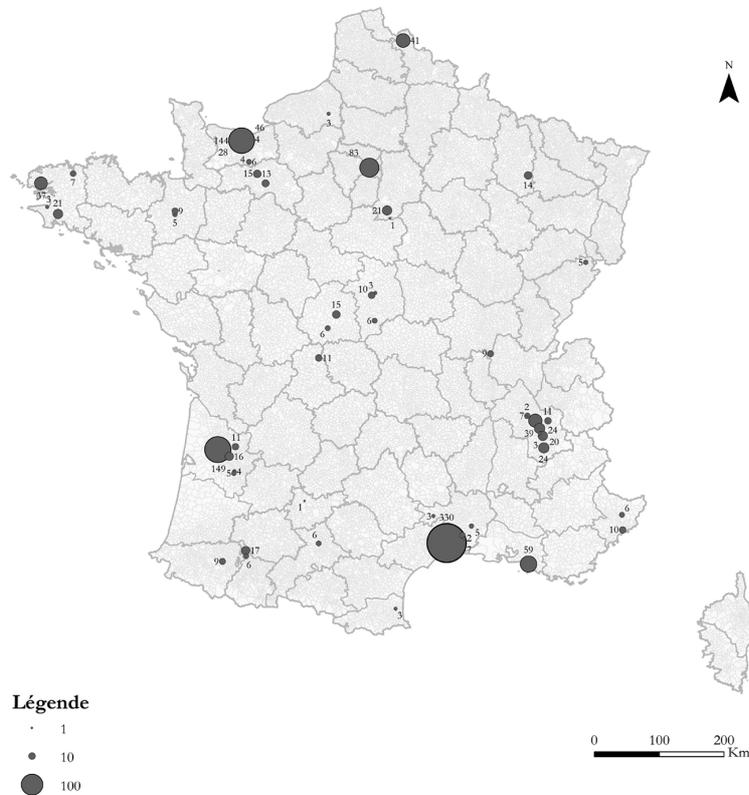
⁴⁰ We do thank undergraduate students in Political Science at the University of Montpellier who were trained by their professor Emmanuelle Reungoat : Justine Ajacques, Morgane Aubert, Alexandre Balsan, Ikram Belkhiri, Lina Benchekor, Laetitia Casellato, Chloe Bertomier, Mathilde Brissaud, Alicia Brunie, Damien Canavate, Robin Foulon, Anne Goerens, Ines Iborra, Wiam Koubia, Nicolas Laupie, Aurélie Libmann, Charlotte Liebrecht, Pierre Monier, Wassila Nehal, Samuel Noguera, Mailys Papeil, Julia Pelonero, Corentin Pinel, Arthur Vancayzeele, Emma Wenckowski, Shoona Wolley, Sara Younan ainsi que Virginie Anquetin, Violette Larrieu and Alice Simon.

⁴¹ We are conscious of a certain over-representation of urban areas and the inhabitants of the suburbs of large urban areas due to the places where we live and our availability.

⁴² Representativity that it seems to us, given the state of knowledge on the sites of mobilisation of the Yellow Vests, difficult to approach, despite the numerous maps that have been disseminated on the Internet since the first weeks of the movement, whether these maps are based on the interested parties themselves or on police observations.

⁴³ At the very beginning of the survey, around ten questionnaires were filled in by the respondents themselves during the events. This method of administration was dispensed with in order to harmonise the procedure, with the interviewers of the collective providing the oral responses of the yellow jackets surveyed on paper.

Graph 2. Breakdown of the number of respondents by commune of handover (N = 1,333)



Regarding the conditions of the handover, it is essential to distinguish between demonstrations and roundabouts. In the first case, we were confronted with violence and uncertainty about the route taken by the demonstrators, which influenced the handover. Thus, in some processions, it was possible to put the handover into practice by walking along different lines of the parade, with a control group at the assembly point where static yellow waistcoats remained. In others, erratic and strongly marked by the eruption of violence, it was not possible to administrate the questionnaire beyond a certain perimeter. In order to get round these difficulties, we gradually concentrated most of our interviews on the moment of the gathering before the procession set off; firstly, because it is much easier to fill in questionnaires when the demonstrators are immobile and available, and secondly, because the violence generally took place at the end of the demonstration. This moment of gathering tended to last longer than in other demonstrations (often more than an hour and a half) so we proceeded randomly by interviewing one person in ten.

On roundabouts, this strategy could not be applied. Often more organised, the occupation of roundabouts sometimes even gave rise to the emergence of spokesperson. Some people also expressed their desire to respond and approached us spontaneously. To minimise representativeness bias, the instructions were to use the random method when there were many respondents. We also systematically returned to the same roundabouts at different times to solicit people who were less enthusiastic or more hostile to the process. Some roundabouts could be completely covered several times, in the sense that all the yellow jackets present were questioned. The time and day of the handover partly determined the characteristics of the respondents, as active and inactive people were not distributed in the same way,

highlighting the variable availability to take action depending on material and professional constraints. [p.878]

It is therefore obvious that we cannot, because of the constraints mentioned here, claim to have constituted a representative sample of the Yellow Vests from a purely probabilistic perspective. However, the combination of these handover strategies made it possible to diversify the respondent profiles as much as possible and to minimise the influence of researchers', in a more general context where the "mother population" could not be known and sampling was not possible. Beyond the Yellow Vests movement, one can question the relevance of questionnaires to apprehend social movements that less and less respond to the model of the "traditional" demonstration, for which the existing sampling methods were designed. Echoing Alain Desrosières, our survey is therefore more akin to a quantitative monograph⁴⁴ carried out in different places of mobilisation than to a strict random sample. Given that the mobilised individuals may take part in several types of gathering (for example, occupation of roundabouts during the week and demonstration during the weekend) and that we do not know the overall distribution of the mobilised population between the different types of gathering, we would add that between the sub-corpus we have been led to build up, it is only possible to make comparisons⁴⁵.

Socio-demographic indicators: age, gender, activity status, occupation

Rooted around demands centred on fuel tax and purchasing power, the mobilisation of the Yellow Vests first brings together adults of working age or retired. While the under-30s are less represented in our sample than the higher age categories, there is a certain spread in the age of the participants, both in the events and on the roundabouts (see graph 3). Both are multi-generational gatherings.

The youngest participants (17-25 years old) are more likely to be present at the events than at the roundabouts, where the majority are students, or even high school students. We note this arrival at the beginning of December 2018, which corresponds to the high school and student mobilisations of this period. The strong presence of pensioners should also be emphasised, which refers to the slogan of mobilisation for the de-indexation of pensions from inflation and their higher taxation with the increase in the generalised social contribution (CSG). Many of them have experienced difficult living conditions, either personally or through their adult children, whom they still have to help financially on a regular basis. The fact that there are more pensioners in our sample at roundabouts than at events is difficult to interpret. We can make two explanatory hypotheses. On one hand, this finding may reveal a certain reluctance to participate in demonstrations deemed dangerous because of the clashes and police violence. On the other hand, the "practical" aspect of static mobilisation of older people on a roundabout, compared to that of street demonstrations, which are by definition mobile, should not be discredited. Finally, the number of retired people responding on roundabouts may correspond to a selection bias which is difficult to control: the population present on roundabouts varies greatly according to the time of day, work constraints for employed people and family constraints for parents with children.

The over-representation of retirees in this type of grouping can at least be interpreted as an indication of a time investment differential between different age groups and the essential role played by retirees in maintaining continuous occupations.

⁴⁴ Alain Desrosières, 'Comment faire des choses qui tiennent : histoire sociale et statistique', *Histoire & Mesure* 4, no. 3 (1989): 225–42, <https://doi.org/10.3406/hism.1989.1358>.

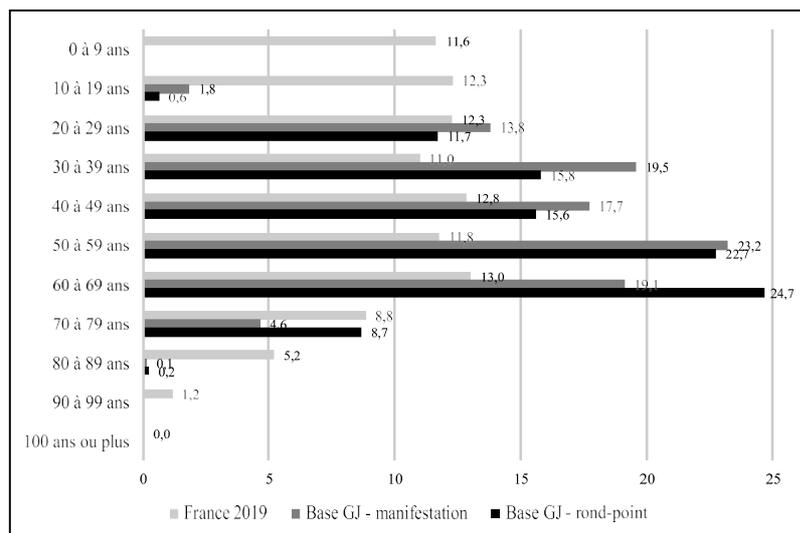
⁴⁵ It should be noted, however, that the sub-population surveyed in ex-Basse-Normandie (N = 260) was the subject of a questionnaire including items dedicated to the different places of mobilisation already invested, making their potential multiplicity legible for the same respondent.

Women account for 43% of the respondents, which brings the Yellow Vests closer to other mobilisations, but leadership on some roundabouts is exercised by women. This contrasts with other social movements where women are under-represented and almost absent from leadership and representational positions. Women are more present in demonstrations, where they account for 46% of respondents, than in roundabouts (39%). Finally, it is striking to note that almost 5% of respondents spontaneously declare a situation of disability, invalidity or long-term illness (whether work-related or not). These initial elements confirm the hypothesis that roundabouts and demonstrations mobilise different populations.

The unemployment rate in our sample is 16%, much higher than the national average of around 10%. On roundabouts, the rate even rises to 17%⁴⁶[p.880].

However, it is important to nuance a common representation of the yellow jackets, according to which this movement would exclude precarious populations. The economic precariousness of many of the people surveyed is evident when looking at household incomes: 25% of them declare living in a household where the income is less than 1,200 euros, 50% at 2,000 euros and 75% at 2,900 euros per month⁴⁷.

Figure 3. Age distribution on roundabouts and at events (%)



Field: all the interviewees whose age could be identified in the demonstrations and on the roundabouts, N = 1,173.

Reading: in the demonstrations, 13.8% of the yellow jackets in the sample were between 20 and 29 years old, compared with 11.7% on the roundabouts.

Source: collective questionnaire survey on yellow jackets, INSEE census.

As far as their occupations are concerned, the yellow jackets that responded are mainly composed, in order, of blue-collar workers, employees, small self-employed and to a lesser

⁴⁶ As has been said for pensioners, the over-representation of the unemployed could be linked to longer attendance times on roundabouts compared to employed workers. Nevertheless, Quantité critique inds the same rate from Facebook data Le Lann et al., 'Enquête. Les Gilets Jaunes Ont-Ils Une Couleur Politique?'

⁴⁷ The Median disposable income of a French household in 2016 was 2,519 euros per month or 30,230 euros per year. Source: INSEE, "Income, standard of living and poverty in 2016", "Enquête revenus fiscaux et sociaux 2016", 2018, online: www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3650234?sommaire=3650460#titre-bloc-1. See also Samuel Depraz, 'La France contrainte des Gilets Jaunes', *AOC media - Analyse Opinion Critique* (blog), 11 December 2018, <https://aoc.media/analyse/2018/12/12/gilets-jaunes-france-contrainte/>.

extent intermediate occupations (see graph 4), thus approaching the "small-mean" [MdS: *petits moyens* refers to social groups and to the means of existence]⁴⁸.

This graph compares the socio-professional composition of yellow jackets of each sex, on roundabouts and in demonstrations, in relation to that of the French active population as a whole⁴⁹. On the men's side of the roundabouts, there is an over-representation of craftsmen (nearly 11% of those present) but also of public service employees ("territorial agents" of category C in the first instance), drivers and above all industrial workers, especially skilled workers. These four categories alone account for almost 40% of the men present, i.e. each time more than double their share in the general population, as do farmers (4% as against 2%). The strong presence of drivers, especially lorry drivers, refers to the recent reforms concerning cars and road traffic (petrol prices, reform of technical control, speed limit of 80 km/h...).

As regards women on roundabouts, it should be noted that there is an over-representation of "staff in direct services to private individuals", who are involved in the "care" sector in the broad sense of the term: care assistants, housekeepers, hospital workers, etc. The strong presence of nurses goes in the same direction. This partly reflects the importance of this employment sector in the female labour force, but also echoes the sectorial mobilisations underway in response to deteriorating working conditions⁵⁰, or the discontinuity in the employment relationship and the many journeys (by car) in the personal services sector.

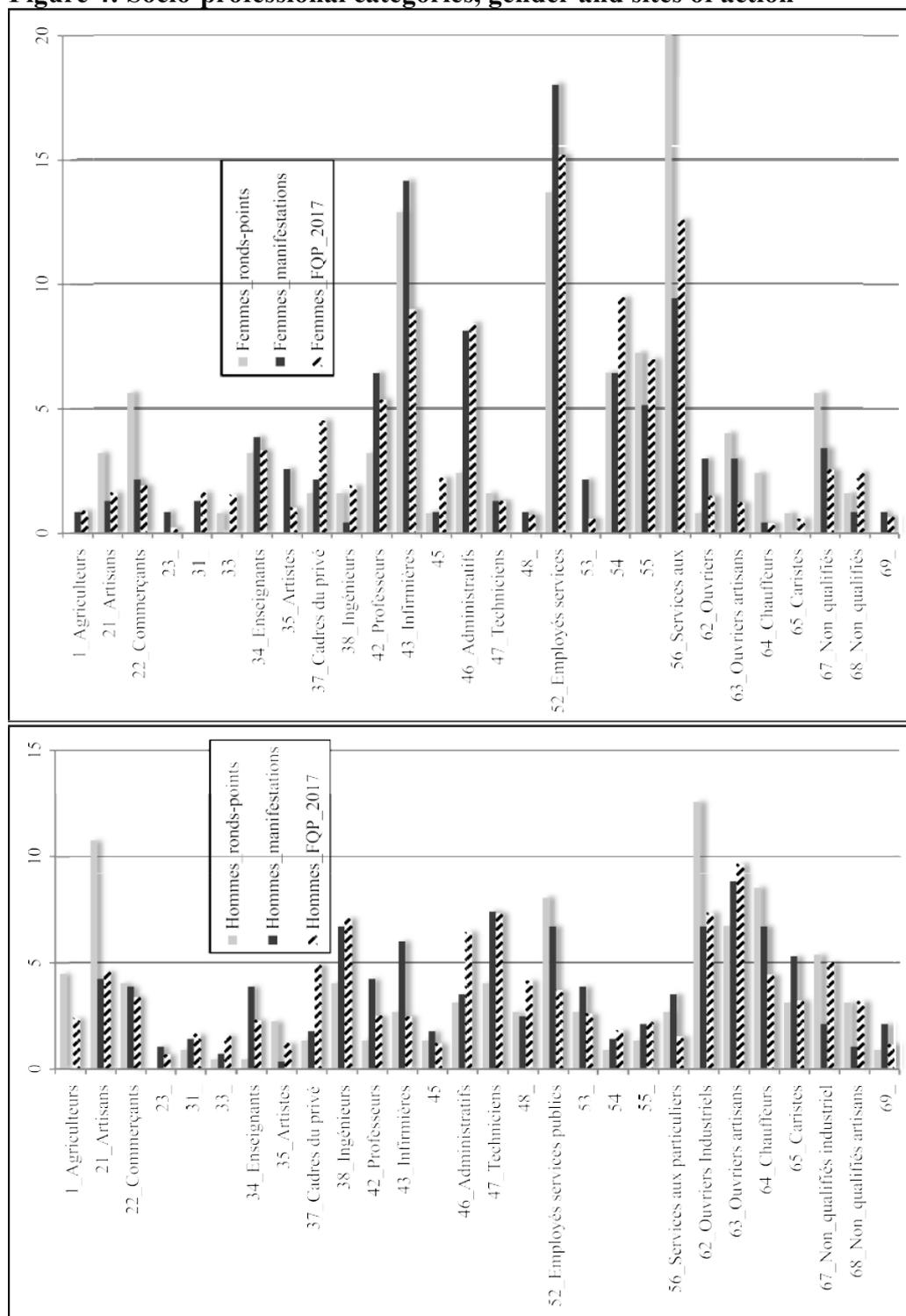
In the demonstrations, the intermediate professions are more represented for both sexes than on roundabouts, as are teachers, which is in line with the more usual composition of demonstrations. However, events also show a very low presence of the higher professions and socio-professional categories (PCS). Our sample therefore corroborates the idea that the yellow jackets on roundabouts and demonstrations have certain points in common, but belong to different populations and probably to different logics of engagement, attendance records and mobilisation networks. [p.881]

⁴⁸ Isabelle Coutant, 'Les "petits-moyens" prennent la parole', in *Le fond de l'air est jaune: comprendre une révolte inédite*, ed. Joseph Confavreux (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2019), 147–50.

⁴⁹ This introduces a slight distortion compared to the "Vocational Training and Qualification Survey" (VQS) [Enquête sur la formation et qualification professionnelle] (FQP)] which only covers the active population. See INSEE, "Malgré la progression de l'emploi qualifié, un quart des personnes se sentent socialement déclassé par rapport à son père", FQP survey, July 2017, online: www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2897850.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Figure 4: Socio-professional categories, gender and sites of action



Field: all persons, working and retired⁵¹ for whom two-digit PCS (occupations and socio-professional categories) could be identified, N = 863.

Source: collective questionnaire survey on yellow jackets [p.882]

⁵¹ Anne-Marie Arborio, *Un personnel invisible: les aides-soignantes à l'hôpital*, 2nd ed., Anthropos (Paris: Economica, 2012); Sophie Divay, *Soignantes dans un hôpital local: des gens de métier confrontés à la rationalisation et à la précarisation* (Rennes: Presses de l'École des hautes études en santé publique, 2013).

While there is a vast literature highlighting the 'distance from politics' of popular circles and their lower level of political commitment and participation⁵², this social movement seems to gather social groups that are usually less present in collective mobilisations. This apparent paradox, however, masks the presence of many individuals with prior associative, activist and trade union experience, which tempers the idea of a mobilisation composed solely of 'laypersons' of collective action.

(In)activist experience, political behaviour and claims

For many respondents, the yellow jackets are the first experience within a social movement. This is the case for 46% of people responding on roundabouts, compared to 29% in demonstrations. It is mostly experienced individuals who joined the latter. Thanks to the time variable, it can be observed that before 8 December 2018, 49% of the respondents are first-time demonstrators. After this date, people who have already taken part in social movements outside the Yellow Vests start joining the movement. This is the case for 64% of those surveyed between 8 December and 31 December and 73% of those surveyed from the beginning of January 2019.

The respondents strongly rejected conventional political organisations (i.e. parties and trade unions), with 75% of those surveyed believing that parties have no place in the movement and 59% believing that trade unions have no place. This rejection is even more marked in roundabout's Yellow vests response, with 67% of respondents saying unions have no place in the movement and 80% for parties. In line with other contemporary movements, such as the "movements of the squares" [occupation movements], this confirms that the movement is being built outside the established forms of representation. Loïc Blondiaux even speaks of a certain "aversion to representation" within the movement⁵³, although this idea must be tempered, as this criticism of representation is not necessarily accompanied by a desire to replace political representation with an alternative system⁵⁴. A reduction in this rejection seems to be observed over time: while 69% of those questioned before 8 December considered that the unions had no place, this was only the case for 47% of those questioned after 1st January 2019.

Another significant factor throughout the survey was the large number of people who did not see themselves as politically close (52%)⁵⁵. A little over a third of the yellow jackets (35%) refused to place themselves on the left-right divide. Among those who agree to do so, they are much more likely to be on the left, between 1 and 3 on a scale of 1 to 7 (44%), than on the right, between 5 and 7 on the same scale (15%), and mostly at the extremities of the axis [p.883]. In general, the over-representation of the left is evident in our sample. This may be an

⁵² Collectif Sociologie politique des élections, *Les sens du vote: une enquête sociologique, France, 2011-2014* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016); Céline Braconnier and Jean-Yves Dormagen, *La démocratie de l'abstention: aux origines de la démobilisation électorale en milieu populaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007); Céline Braconnier, 'Chapitre 5 : La politique à distance', in *Les inaudibles* (Presses de Sciences Po, 2015), 137–80, <https://www.cairn.info/les-inaudibles--9782724616958-page-137.htm>; Jean-Louis Briquet, Philippe Garraud, and Daniel Gaxie, eds., 'Les critiques profanes de la politique : enchantements, désenchantements, réenchantements', in *Juger la politique: entreprises et entrepreneurs critiques de la politique* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2001), 217–40; Daniel Gaxie, 'Le cens caché: inégalités culturelles et ségrégation politique' (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978); Daniel Gaxie, 'Cognitions, auto-habilitation et pouvoirs des « citoyens »', *Revue française de science politique* 57, no. 6 (12 December 2007): 737–57.

⁵³ Le1hebdo, *Comment Écouter Le Peuple ? - Loïc Blondiaux* | *Le1hebdo* (YouTube: Le1hebdo, 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVagq-PE4fA>.

⁵⁴ Camille Bedock et al., 'Au-delà de la démocratie représentative: visions du système politique et réformes institutionnelles dans le mouvement des Gilets jaunes' (15e congrès de l'Association française de science politique., Bordeaux - Sciences Po Bordeaux, 2019), 23.

⁵⁵ The exact question was : "Do you feel close to a political party or personality? "

effect due to the face-to-face mode of administering the questionnaire. In fact, sample surveys show that there are significant differences between online and face-to-face surveys in terms of the left-right self-positioning of respondents and the propensity to give answers that are perceived as intoxicating to an interviewer. Using the case of the survey of the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDDH) which publishes an annual report on racism, antisemitism and xenophobia based on data from online and face-to-face surveys in 2017 and 2018⁵⁶, Nonna Mayer shows that in the face-to-face sample, individuals were more left-wing and more willing to give tolerant responses, in contrast to online respondents. She explains it as follows: "It is not the same people who accept to be interviewed both online and face-to-face. Those who open their door to an interviewer are more confident, and trust in others is more prevalent on the left than on the right"⁵⁷.

It should be noted that the *Quantité critique collective* and the *Pacte laboratory*⁵⁸ have collected more preference expressed in favour of the *Rassemblement National* (RN former *National Front*) in the online collection than in the data collected face-to-face, which could corroborate this explanation. However, the advantage of this measure is that it allows us to identify those who wish to position themselves well on this scale: while we cannot know how many people prefer to keep their membership of the extreme right quiet, we can assume that those who position themselves on the extreme right (or extreme left) openly share these ideas, thus allowing us to compare different political sub-profiles.

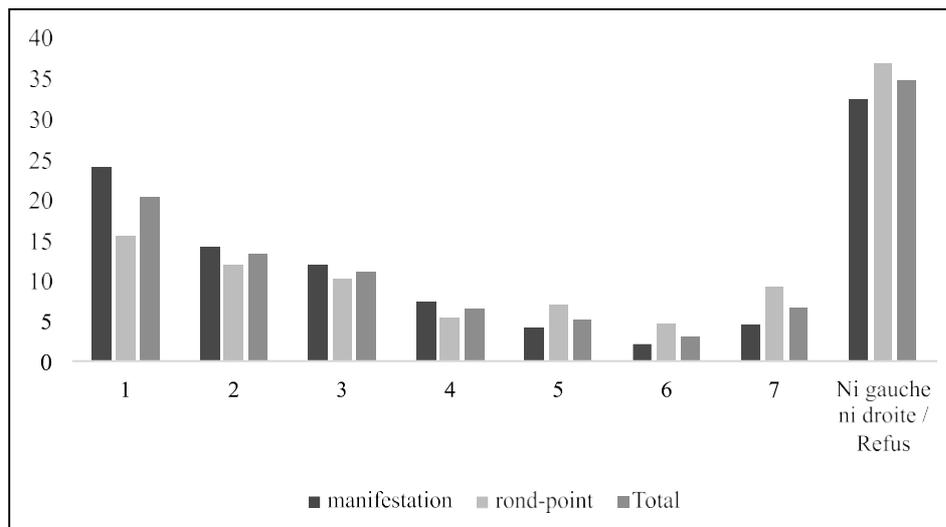
Secondly, it is especially important to note the persistent differences between the places of mobilisation. In fact, in demonstrations, almost 24% of the respondents were at 1, i.e. the left-most position, compared with 15% of respondents on roundabouts. Conversely, on roundabouts, 9% of respondents were in the most right-hand position on the left-right scale, whereas this was the case for only 5% of respondents during demonstrations. To a lesser extent, respondents at roundabouts are also more likely to be positioned at 5 and 6 on the left-right axis, and even fewer or more likely to be in the centre. Three observations therefore stand out: the strong tendency to refuse to position oneself on the left-right scale, regardless of the place of mobilisation, the tendency to do so on the extremities of the axis when this is the case, and the polarisation of the movement to the left and extreme left, particularly in demonstrations, which is much more marked than on the roundabouts.

⁵⁶ France et al., *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie: année 2017 : [rapport présenté à monsieur le Premier Ministre]* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2018).

⁵⁷ Nonna Mayer, 'Qualitatif ou quantitatif? Plaidoyer pour l'éclectisme méthodologique', *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique* 139, no. 1 (1 July 2018): 7–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106318778821>.

⁵⁸ Le Lann et al., 'Enquête. Les Gilets Jaunes Ont-Ils Une Couleur Politique?'; Alexandre et al., 'Qui Sont Vraiment Les « Gilets Jaunes » ? Les Résultats d'une Étude Sociologique'.

Graph 5: Left-right positioning of respondents according to the place of mobilisation



N = 923.

Reading: in demonstrations, 24% of those surveyed position themselves at 1 on the left-right scale.

A significant proportion of the Yellow Vests are involved or have been involved in the past in a party, trade union or association. The people who responded to the survey in demonstrations and on roundabouts are not necessarily without militant resources. Of those who answered this question, almost 17% belong or have belonged to a political party, 32% to a trade union and 38% to an association, with no very marked differences between the different periods or places of mobilisation. The parties cited cut across the entire French political spectrum with the notable exception of the centre and not surprisingly La République en marche (LREM) : Lutte ouvrière, the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA), La France insoumise, the Parti communiste français (PCF), Europe écologie les Verts (EELV), even the Parti socialiste (PS) or the Parti radical de gauche (PRG) on the left, Debout la France and the Union populaire républicaine (UPR) for the sovereignists, the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) (and very rarely Les Républicains, LR) for the right, Front national (FN) and RN for the extreme right. Among the trade union activists there are many current or former members of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), as well as other organisations such as the Union Syndicale Solidaires (Sud), the Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT) or Force Ouvrière (FO).

It is therefore not, or at least not only, a mobilisation of "neophytes"⁵⁹, but a social movement in which there are both first-time mobilised members and highly politicised individuals with certain militant resources. However, the latter do not display their organisational affiliations. As mobilisation continues, the proportion of people participating for the first time in a social movement has shrunk, leaving more and more room for those with previous experience of social movements. A militant of a left-wing organisation, Gilet jaune since November, thus confesses to belong to a political party but does not want this to be known. This finding is confirmed when examining the records of collective mobilisation claimed by the respondents (see Table 1).

⁵⁹ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi and Mohamed Jekhli, 'La dynamique protestataire du Mouvement du 20 février à Casablanca', *Revue française de science politique* Vol. 62, no. 5 (7 December 2012): 867-94.

Table 1. Records of collective mobilisation by period of mobilisation (in %)

« Already did »	Before 8 December 2018	8 December-End December 2018	Since 1 st January	Ensemble	Total number of respondent
Demonstration	85	91	96	91	997
Vote	74	74	81	77	697
Sign a petition	68	75	80	74	938
Participate to a blockade	59	55	65	59	995
Consumming	54	59	68	60	985
Strike	39	50	50	47	857
Boycott	40	48	55	48	988
Free-way (no tax on highway)	40	38	32	37	939
Put stickers and Manifesto	25	29	45	31	993
Wear a yellow vest every day	21	33	16	26	925
Occupy a public building (administration)	16	21	30	22	937
Attend a Demo in Paris	9	24	21	19	1 007
Write on a wall	8	13	17	13	942
Refuse to pay taxes (income taxes)	7	7	8	8	949
Provoke damages (on material goods)	5	6	4	5	988

Note: Where differences between periods are statistically significant, the period in which the highest proportion of respondents indicated that they had "already done" a given practice is shown in bold.

Whether it is voting, various forms of protest mobilisation (demonstrations, strikes, petitions, sticking up posters or painting slogans) or the promotion of alternative consumption patterns (boycotts, alternative consumption), it can be seen that the further the movement advances over time, the more respondents have already used various registers of collective mobilisation. On the contrary, the characteristic modes of mobilisation of the Yellow Vests (free toll operations, blockades, wearing the yellow waistcoat on a daily basis) were more often cited as "already employed" by the people surveyed before 8 December or 1st January 2019.

By way of comparison, according to data from the 2008 European Value Survey in France, 68% of French people had already signed a petition, 44% had already taken part in a demonstration and 9% had already occupied a building⁶⁰. One third of the French people indicated that they had already [p.886] participated in a strike⁶¹. Except for the demonstrations (sometimes for the first time with yellow jackets), the figures recorded before 8 December are relatively close to this average. On the other hand, for those interviewed after 1 January, they deviate from it this time very strongly. This discrepancy can be explained by two developments: the parties broadened their range of modes of action as the movement developed and, at the same time, people with experience of protest action joined the movement.

We also asked three open-ended questions at the beginning of the questionnaire. One was about the reasons for the presence of the mobilisers ("Why are you demonstrating today?"), the second about their demands ("What steps should the government take so that you find the

⁶⁰ Voir <http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacat.gesis.org/obj/fCatalog/Catalog5>.

⁶¹ Sondage BVA, « Les Français et la grève », avril 2018, en ligne : www.bva-group.com/sondages/les-salaries-et-la-greve/.

movement a success?") and the third on the environmental issue ("Some people are defending the planned increase in fuel taxes for environmental reasons. What do you say to them? ") which are analysed here for a sample of 927 respondents (see Table 2). The answers to these questions were inductively coded as finely as possible and then grouped into more general categories. Three issues underlie the study of these open-ended questions: firstly, to capture the reasoning put forward by the respondents; secondly, to quantify the distribution among the yellow jackets surveyed of these discourse patterns; and thirdly, to relate these to characteristics of the respondents (political involvement/opinion, age, social class).

Improving purchasing power is the issue most spontaneously cited. Mentioned by 41% of respondents in the demands, it plays an even more important role when it comes to the reasons for their mobilisation (66%). Another difference observed in the answers to the first two open-ended questions: statements against the government are, on the other hand, more numerous among the demands (31%)⁶² than among the motivations for mobilising (17%). For the other response categories we observe comparable frequencies for the first two questions, with criticisms of political institutions and even demands for institutional reform (27% and 31% respectively), complaints about social inequalities and demands for social and fiscal justice (26% in both cases) and a few mentions of the state of public services (4%-2%). We note that 9% of the respondents say they are there out of solidarity with "precarious people" or "future generations".

The reasons for the presence and the demands of the participants vary slightly between the different mobilisation sites. Purchasing power is mentioned less in the demonstrations than in the roundabouts, where there is also more mention of the difficult end of the month. In the demonstrations, respondents were more likely to speak out against social and fiscal inequalities in a more general discourse and were more likely to denounce the government. These results remain stable in the period before the evacuation of the majority of roundabouts by the security forces [p.887].

Table 2. Motives for mobilisation and demands of the Yellow Vests surveyed according to the place where the questionnaire was administered⁶³

	Purchasing power	Institutional Reforms	Inequalities and injustices	Anti-government	Public services
Claims on roundabouts	43	27	22	28	2
Claims in demonstration	37	35	31	34	3
Set of demands	41	31	26	31	2
Reason for mobilisation on roundabouts	65	22	13	22	5
Reason for mobilisation in demonstrations	49	26	19	31	3
All patterns	57	27	26	17	4

Field: All responses, N = 927.

Source: collective questionnaire survey on yellow jackets.

⁶² Notably through the answer "that Macron/the government resigns".

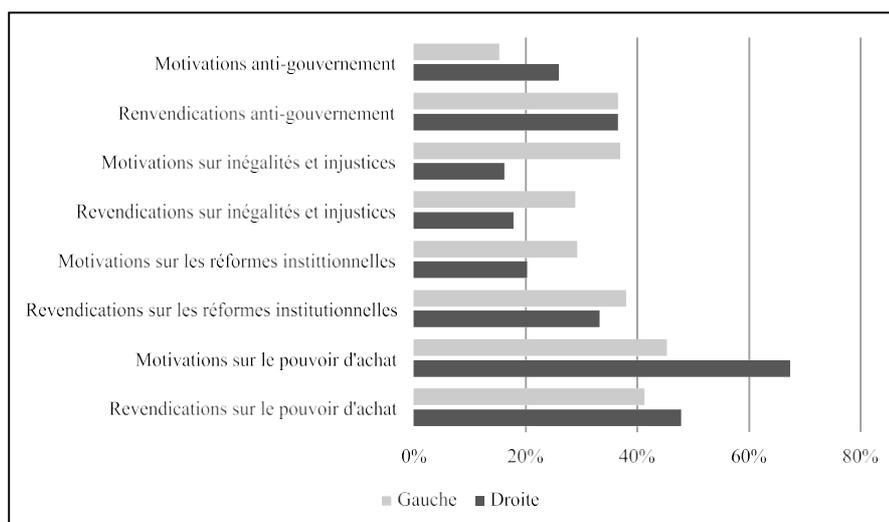
⁶³ We have counted the citizens' marches in the demonstration category. The other places of handover that are not detailed in the table because of their small numbers are tolls and meetings.

The question then arises as to whether the differences observed between the two places of mobilisation, in terms of motivations and demands, can, partly, be explained by the political orientation of the respondents. In other words, the question is whether systematic differences between the motivations and demands of the two political camps exist when people are clearly positioned on the left or on the right.

Figure 6 (see below) shows only those respondents who placed themselves between 1 and 2.5 (left) and between 4.5 and 7 (right) on our left-right scale. There are indeed some differences observed between demonstrations and roundabouts. Respondents on the right side of the scale mention the issue of purchasing power more, while those on the left mention the themes of inequality and injustice (social and fiscal). With regard to declarations of hostility towards the government (respondents who spontaneously declared that they would like the government/Macron to resign), we again observe a difference according to the respondents' self-referencing: this motive for mobilisation is in fact more present among those who declare themselves to be right-wing. There is therefore a link between place of mobilisation, political orientation and the demands/motivations of the respondents. We also observe differences over time (see Figure 7).

The marginality of purchasing power as the main motive for mobilisation could be explained by different elements. The first comes from the fact that, since the majority of the roundabouts were evacuated in mid-December by the security forces, the demonstrations took over (in the movement and among our population). The second could come from the progressive and numerous arrival of people who declare themselves to be extreme left-wing in the movement and in our sample. While both factors are certainly relevant for understanding the change in motivations and demands over time, a third factor concerns a process of political learning from the participants. The first qualitative interviews tend to show that a significant proportion of the people interviewed stress that they gained knowledge, particularly about the functioning of the political system during the movement. This learning could in particular be the cause of the increase in institutional concerns since the end of December 2018.

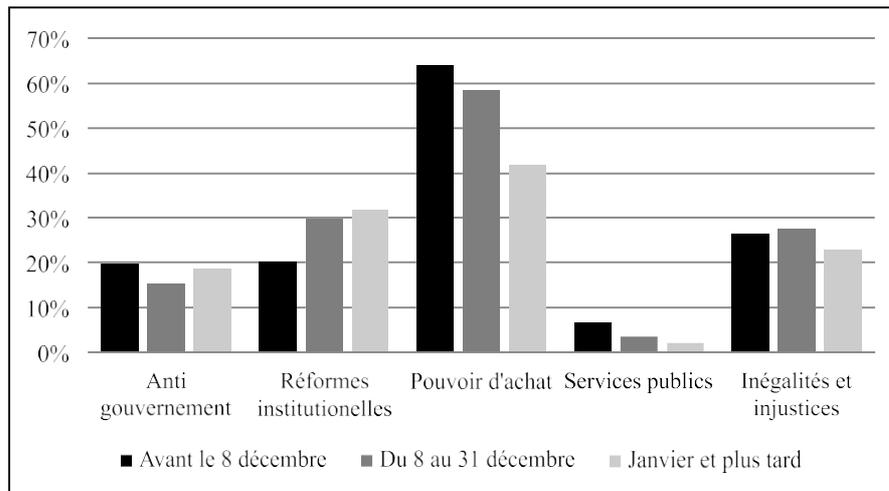
Figure 6: Motivations and demands of the Yellow Vests surveyed and positioned on the left-right axis



Field: All responses, N = 927.

Source: collective questionnaire survey on yellow jackets.

Figure 7: Changes in the motivations of the yellow jackets surveyed by time period



Field: All responses, N = 927.

Source: collective questionnaire survey on yellow jackets.

Concluding remarks

This research note offers a methodological reflection on the uses and limits of questionnaire surveys to understand a social movement whose characteristics are not part of the usual typologies. In addition to other ethnographic methods - in-depth interviews and observations - the questionnaires have made it possible to establish a database providing objectivisation elements on the characteristics of the social movements and the motivations of the respondents.

The movement's original repertoire of action highlighted distinct uses of public space by different social groups depending on the time and type of action - manifestation and roundabout. The individuals involved in the movement are not the same over time: they are increasingly endowed with political and militant resources as time goes by and are more and more familiar with protest action. These elements confirm our main hypothesis, which postulates the diversity of the socio-demographic profiles and demands of participants in the Yellow Vest movement according to the places of mobilisation and the moment of involvement.

The collection of the questionnaires first made it possible to identify certain socio-logical characteristics of the people who were mobilised: they were women and men, mostly from certain sections of the working and middle classes (lorry drivers, nurses, category C civil servants, for example) and concerned by the difficult ends of the month. This movement also includes many people directly or indirectly confronted with disability or disabling pathologies.

The mobilised people who responded, nearly half of whom were first-time demonstrators at the beginning of the movement, are not layperson. While many of them stated that neither parties nor trade unions have a place in the movement, many belong or have belonged to such organisations. On roundabouts even more than in demonstrations, the refusal to take a political stand prevails. When a political preference is expressed, it is more marked on the left than on the right, while the centre is almost never mentioned. Our survey also shows that, if the first motive and first demand for mobilisation is purchasing power, the centrality of this demand tends to fade over time as issues such as institutional reforms gain in importance.

These results suggest that a process of politicisation is at work within the movement, both because of the arrival of individuals increasingly endowed with militant resources and because proposals such as the Citizens' Initiative Referendum (RIC) have been placed on the militant agenda, partially replacing the initial watchwords.

Beyond these initial results, this database offers many possibilities for future research. To our knowledge, and despite the plethora of qualitative and quantitative surveys that have been carried out on the Yellow Vest movement, our study is the only one to be based on an in situ and face-to-face administration over a period of more than four months. First of all, it allows us to compare our results with those obtained by other surveys, whether they involve individuals who are active on social networks or people who simply recognise or support the movement without participating in it. The online questionnaires conducted on Facebook by Pacte or Quantité critique at the beginning of the movement show populations that partly overlap but are not identical. For example, while 38% of our respondents tell us that they have heard about the action they are participating in via Facebook, many cite other sources, suggesting that the participants in the different surveys are not the same people. This could explain why the same surveys record an even greater presence of individuals who are not on the left-right scale, or why there are sociological differences between these different sub-populations. The database also offers the possibility of comparing participants in time and space within the same movement - which we have only sketched out here. It also allows us to compare their characteristics with those of participants in other social movements, borrowing from other scales and spaces, for example on fiscal or democratic issues.

Finally, and even if we must bear in mind the limits of the survey due to the fragmented nature of the movement as well as of the collective, but also to the difficulties of passing on the information to the field, we hope that this study will inspire further methodological reflections on the way to carry out in situ and face-to-face, questionnaire-based surveys, in a context where social movements tend to take more and more horizontal forms and to be less and less structured by traditional organisations. As we have shown, these developments make the good methodological practices identified by the traditional literature more difficult to apply. In any case, questionnaires are fertile entry points for addressing more specific issues such as the relationship to politics, living conditions or the spatial dimension of social movements. The limitations of questionnaire surveys are thus intended to be overcome by cross-referencing with qualitative data from the current survey on more specific issues. In this case, these data make it possible to shed light on statistical trends through the experiences of the protagonists. The methodological reflection on the effects of the social movement on participants with different experiences and resources will be developed in a subsequent survey. In particular, the biographical impact of the movement and the politicisation by the movement will be used to extend the survey and to cross-check methods in order to grasp the singularity or similarity of the Yellow Vests with other social movements. In addition to these social and political dimensions that our investigation attempts to capture, the Yellow Vests also raise the question of the social division of space and the struggles for its appropriation. Beyond the case of the Yellow Vests, this note is part of a wider debate on the conditions inherent to questionnaire survey at the heat of a disruptive social movement.