Supplementary Material

# Supplementary Data

**Table 1.** *Summary of the main socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees (in %)*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   |   | French citizens (N=32) | Yellow Vests activists (N = 25) |
| Sex | Male | 56 | 64 |
| Female | 44 | 36 |
| Age (average) |   | 42 | 51 |
| Level of education | None / primary | 6 | 24 |
| Secondary | 38 | 48 |
| Tertiary | 56 | 28 |
| Occupation | Farmers | 3 | 4 |
| Craft workers, shop owners, firm managers | 6 | 4 |
| Professionals | 38 | 16 |
| Technicians | 31 | 32 |
| Service workers | 9 | 20 |
| Industry workers | 13 | 20 |
| Size of the municipality  | 0-2000 | 25 | 28 |
|   | 2000-20.000 | 28 | 24 |
|   | 20.000-100.000 | 22 | 20 |
|   | Over 100.000 | 25 | 20 |
| Ideological self-placement | Left | 44 | 56 |
|   | Centre | 9 | 0 |
|   | Right | 13 | 20 |
|   | Undefined | 34 | 28 |
| Political engagement\*  | Yes | 56 | 56 |
|   | No | 44 | 44 |

\* The answer ‘yes’ to this question refers to all interviewees who have already taken part in a social movement in the past or been members of a political party, a trade union or another political organization.

**Appendix 1.** *Selection of the interviewees and research methods*

This methodological appendix aims at explaining how the interviewees have been selected and how the four ideal-typical discourses presented in the paper have been identified inductively from the row data transcripts.

*Selection of the interviewees*

When we selected lay citizens and Yellow Vests activists to participate in our inquiry, our aim was not to draw a sample that would approximate as closely as possible the social, political and demographic composition of our population. Reaching such representativeness would have required a much greater number of interviews and the ability to cover a much wider geographical zone which what was not possible given our limited resources. In the case of the Yellow Vests, knowledge about the general population simply did not exist at the time. We therefore intended to interview individuals with diverse experiences (in terms of age, places of residence, professional background, political experience, etc.). In order to do so, for the 32 interviews with lay citizens, we have multiplied the ways of contacting potential participants to include people who did not necessarily have a strong interest in politics as well as more politicized individuals: a *Mission locale* in a small city helping young people with a primary or secondary diploma to find jobs, a hunting association, a salsa association; a choir; acquaintances of acquaintances; a conservative student organization; a home for young workers; a bar in a small village; or contacts obtained through other interviewees themselves. The combination of political and non-political associations and community organizations as well as the help of interviewees and acquaintances enabled us to meet people with different backgrounds, ranging from activists in left-wing parties to individuals who were explicitly very distant from politics, or from individuals with a prestigious professional career to precarious and unemployed young people. Most of the interviews have been conducted in a *département* in the South West of France which has the peculiarity of having municipalities of very different sizes with populations living in widely different social and economic conditions: a dynamic metropolis with numerous students, executives and professionals; several average-sized towns in decline with many public servants; impoverished villages with agricultural workers; isolated hamlets, etc.

For the interviews realized and transcribed with the Yellow Vests with three other colleagues,[[1]](#footnote-1) half of them were conducted in the outskirts of two French metropolises and the other half with individuals met in a roundabout in a small city of 3.000 inhabitants situated 70 kilometers away from the closest metropolis. The Yellow Vest activists we met were mobilized on roundabouts or in weekly demonstrations, which corresponds to the two main repertoires of action used in the movement. The aim was to diversify as much as possible the profile of the activists interviewed in terms of gender, age, political experience, political orientation, or geographical origins. In the article, I focus specifically on the activists who declared that the Yellow Vests were their first political mobilization (12 out of 25 interviews).

As already discussed in the article itself, the samples suffer from the over-representation of certain socio-demographic groups (executives and professionals and people with a university degree in the sample of lay citizens, males in both samples). Both of our samples over-represent left-leaning individuals and under-represent individuals identifying with the right and the center. Using data of the National Consultative Committee on Human Rights (CNCDH) that publishes a yearly inquiry about racism and xenophobia in France, Nonna Mayer has shown that there is a significant discrepancy in terms of ideological orientation when one compares inquiries administered face-to-face and online. Face-to-face interviewees are more likely to give tolerant answers and to identify with the left. Mayer argues that “people who agree to be interviewed online and face-to-face are different. Those who open their door to a researcher, male or female, are more confident, and interpersonal confidence is more widespread among the left than among the right” (our translation, Mayer, 2018, p. 17). A desirability bias may also be at stake. In both of our samples, around a third of the interviewees refused to situate themselves politically. Still, many of these interviewees told us that they voted for right-wing or center candidates in the previous election even though they did not explicitly identify with the right. By contrast, several interviewees who explicitly self-identified with the left did not vote for a left-wing candidate in the last elections.

In both samples, 56% of the people we met have been already been politically engaged in the past (in a political organization, during a social movement, in a political party or in a trade union). Unsurprisingly, given the topic of the article, these interviewees were easier to reach and more willing to participate. However, we made explicit efforts to reach individuals who were distant from politics. In the sample of lay citizens, we used acquaintances of acquaintances and contacts given by the interviewees to reach people who would not have taken part in such an inquiry otherwise. We also contacted non-political organizations and we organized interviews through social institutions specifically reaching at precarious and low-skilled young people who are very distant from the political world. For the sample with the Yellow Vests, given the intense and long-term involvement of two of the researchers (Loïc Bonin and Pauline Liochon) in the fieldwork, it was possible to use snowball sampling to reach individuals who were distant from politics and who had stopped participating in the movement at the time of the interview.

*Qualitative analysis*

After the fieldwork, we transcribed *verbatim* the 57 interviews. The second step consisted in the inductive coding of the interviews for each of the six themes covered in the interview guide: social and political background (1), forms of political participation (2), voting and political orientations (3), vote at the last election (4), vision of the political system (5), and discussion about the vignettes of reform (6). The codes were elaborated inductively thanks to the interviews with the 32 lay citizens, whereas we used the existing thematic codes for the interviews with Yellow Vests activists.

Each of these general themes is divided into sub-themes. Each sub-theme is constituted of various codes. For instance, the theme “vision of the political system” which is discussed thoroughly in the article is divided into four sub-themes: conception of politics, vision of political representatives, vision of the political process, and vision of policy outputs. These sub-themes partly emerged inductively. In the interview guide, we asked several questions to the interviewees about the political system: their feelings towards politics, their evaluation of the French political system and their vision of the ideal political system. We therefore anticipated the fact that there would be a sub-theme about the conception of politics and another one of the vision of the political process. However, over the course of the interviews and of the coding process, it appeared that citizens also discussed at length their vision of political representatives and very often mentioned preferences related to public policies.

Every time that a new idea came out, we created a new code and classified this code into the general themes and sub-themes. We proceeded in this way with each of the 32 interviews. We then re-read the whole corpus, merged certain codes which were redundant and checked the integrality of the corpus in order to stabilize the codes used. Ultimately, each interview could be approached in at least two ways: in its entirety; or as portions of it appeared in files organized according to themes; sub-themes and codes. A single text segment could refer to several codes when it contains several ideas. For instance, the assertion “I think it is essential that people vote. I vote at every election. But I think that the government does not listen to citizens” has been attributed three codes: “voting habits” in the sub-theme “voting and political orientations”; “centrality of election” and “inability to listen” in the sub-theme “vision of the political process”.

To analyze the conceptions of the political system, we then printed and re-read again the interviews in order to analyze them on a sub-theme by sub-theme basis and on a code-by-code basis. The aim of this third reading was to identify which codes were found in most of the interviewees’ discourses and could be related to a shared understanding of the political system, and which ones were specific and formed coherent discourses not shared by all interviewees. By doing so, we realized that, for each of the four sub-themes related to the conception of the political system, certain codes tended to be linked with each other and that these codes could be summarized in four ideal-typical discourses (the ones presented in the analysis).

To provide a concrete example, the theme “conception of the political system” is composed of 62 codes. The sub-theme “conception of politics” is composed of 11 codes: “government and public life”, “good/evil”, “political/not political”, “truth and logic”, “conflict and compromise”, “petty electoral race”, “debate on ideas”, “uselessness of politics”, “powerlessness”, “lack of intelligibility” and “lack of concreteness”. Similarly, the other sub-themes on political representatives, political process and policy outputs comprise around a dozen codes. The code “government and public life” was present in more than three fourths of the interviews and corresponds to the general and shared understanding of what politics is among the interviewees, namely the activities and institutions associated with the government of a country, a region, or a city. By contrast, all of the other codes were specific and found only in a minority of interviews. We identified the codes that tended to be associated by the same individuals. In the case of the conception of politics, the codes “good/evil”, “political/not political” and “truth and logic” tended to be associated together, which corresponds to what we describe in the conception of politics of the entrustment discourse. When these four discourses were identified, we went back to the full transcripts to identify the paragons and replace them in their social and political context.

When we started the inquiry, we did not expect to encounter these four discourses and we did not anticipate the centrality of the discussion on representation. The “deductive part” of our inquiry took place when we presented interviewees with vignettes of reforms embodying various visions of democracy uncovered by political theory: direct democracy controlled by citizens (through recall votes in the US), deliberative democracy (through the citizens’ assembly organized in Ireland since 2016), stealth democracy giving power to experts (through the *Autorité de la concurrence* in France or technocratic governments in Italy) and representative democracy (through gender quotas reform to promote women in politics in France). We only presented these vignettes at the very end of the interviews in order not to generate debates that would artificially generate four groups and prevent interviewees from exposing their own vision. In the end, the discussion around these reforms enabled to find interesting results that showed the gap between citizens’ visions and the most prominent theories in the discipline. For instance, individuals who were enthusiastic about the citizens’ assembly never mentioned the virtues of deliberation which are extremely central to all theories of deliberative democracy. They saw this instrument first and foremost as a way to actually listen to ordinary citizens. Similarly, when we discussed the issue of stealth democracy, some interviewees found merit in the involvement of experts in the political process but none of them agreed with the idea that they could replace politicians, and most of them expressed very clear reservations about their independence and integrity compared to other actors.

**Supplementary Table 1.** *Codes corresponding to each discourse*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Conception of politics** | **Vision of political representatives** |
| *Participation*: conflict and compromise / petty electoral race / debate on ideas | *Participation*: professionalization of politics / personalization of politics / lack of convictions |
| *Entrustment*: good & evil / political vs. non-political / truth and logic | *Entrustment*: political competence / rejection of partisanship / pedagogy / solemnity of the function |
| *Identification*: uselessness of politics / powerlessness | *Identification:* homogeneity of the political class |
| *Control & sanction*: lack of intelligibility / lack of concreteness*Non-specific codes*: government and public life | *Control & sanction:* dishonesty and corruption / disconnected world*Non-specific codes*: submission to private interests |
| **Vision of the political process** | **Vision of policy outputs** |
| *Participation*: Proximity / counter-powers / transparency / participation and citizen competence | *Participation*: market and competition - / public services + / fight against social inequalities / environment + / taxes + |
| *Entrustment*: Centrality of election / stability and efficiency / difficulty to reform the country  | *Entrustment* : lack of room to maneuver / public services - / taxes -  |
| *Identification*: representativeness / diversity | *Identification*: youth unemployment / moral issues +  |
| *Control & sanction:*  breach of promises / control of elected representatives*Non-specific codes*: importance of democracy / failure to listen | *Control & sanction:* immigration and identity / terrorism / law & order*Non-specific codes\**: EU / international policy / cultural policy / defense |

\* These particular codes are considered as non-specific because they were only very rarely mentioned and cannot be related to a precise discourse

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1. Loïc Bonin, Pauline Liochon, and Tinette Schnatterer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)