



Shedding light on the yellow vests movement through its spatial dimension, from the gathering places to the origins of the participants

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Abstract

Yellow vests gatherings spread across France in late November 2018, and arose mostly in peripheral France, where social movements are not used to appear. This movement have been already studied through its spatial dimension, but without sources and methods being always unequivocal and deconstructed. In this context, our proposal aims to getting things straight among all the available sources and data which document the spatial dimension of the YV movement during the first months of the contestation. Through a monograph in Normandy, maps and a geo-statistical study of YV gatherings at a national scale, we first highlight the disseminated, simultaneous but temporary YV appropriations of different strategic spaces in the margins of small towns, before massive and repeated central gatherings, which underlines the politicization of the movement. Then we explore the “Jaune vif” database, which is very relevant since it is the only source that documents both the gathering and the daily life spaces of protestors, essentially peri-urban or rural dwellers and inhabitants of small towns in the beginning, whose lifestyles and daily life spaces, often marginalized or depreciated, have been there brought to the forefront of politics. Even if some of them carried on mobilizing far from their home, the centralization of the movement appears to be coupled with a centralization of the protestors, who were gradually more metropolitan and used to social movements, structuring the movement at a broader scale.

Keywords Yellow vests · Social movements · Spatial dimension · Social geography · Metropolitan France

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Introduction

On Saturday, 17 November, 2018, several hundred thousand people dressed in yellow vests blocked the roads of the French territory all day, especially on roundabouts and tolls. In Paris, a demonstration took place on the Champs-Élysées and demonstrators tried to get into the Élysée Palace, the official residence of the President of the Republic, before being blocked by the police. This day, the Ministry of the Interior counted more than 2,000 blocking points and 287,710 participants. This mobilization followed the online petition "For a decrease in fuel prices at the pump!" launched in May 2019, by Priscilla Ludosky, 32 years old, a former bank employee converted into a self-employed entrepreneur specializing in the sale of organic cosmetics. From mid-October the number of signatories increases very quickly to reach 500,000 in early November 2018 and more than a million in the fall. In the days and weeks which followed this "Act I", the occupations of traffic circles continued until their evacuation by the forces of order from January 2019, while the Saturday demonstrations continue throughout the year.

This factual description of the beginning of these so-called Yellow Vests (YV) gatherings points out how puzzling and unexpected this social movement was. For pundits as well as for the political class, it was difficult to identify clear demands, leaders, or any social organization (e.g. political party, trade-unions, etc.) behind it. Given this poor understanding of the mobilization, it was also difficult to explain its progressive decline. There was obviously this issue of fuel prices, but it was already before heavily taxed, and the bill stipulated a rather modest rise. Actually the movement drove much more numerous claims, many of them in opposition to several government measures affecting mobility in 2018 (rise of the taxes on energies including gasoline, speed limitation to 80 km/h on secondary roads, hardening of roadworthiness tests, development of speed cameras) or more broadly speaking, against the Government's alleged responsibility in increasing gasoline prices (+50% for diesel and +25% for gasoline since 2016). In a way, the YV movement can be conceived as an archetypal representation of the "politics of automobility" (Sheller 2004; Urry 2004; Cresswell 2010), which intricates spatialities, socio-economic and symbolic issues (Miller and Ponto 2016). It is also a label that unified actions, people and claims that are potentially very disparate, heterogeneous, or even divergent, from place to place and from period to period (Dormagen et al. 2021). The goal of this contribution is precisely to tackle empirically this diversity adopting a spatial point of view.

Various surveys have put forward the strong mobilisation in and around small towns which have been marked by demographic and employment decline, the scarcity of public facilities and services, protest voting or abstention, but also local anchoring and car dependency (Fourquet & Manternach 2018; Challier 2019; Coquard 2019; Algan et al. 2019, 2020; Boyer et al. 2020; Davoine et al., 2020; Fourquet 2020; Genevois 2020). More broadly, and despite some relevant reservations (Delpirou 2018), the areas that are relatively far from large cities (Jeanpierre 2019; Algan et al. 2019), those of urban sprawl and rurality (Fourquet



& Manternach 2018; Fourquet 2019), or of the 'fear of downgrading' (Davoine et al. 2020), have also been pointed out, thus mobilising or echoing the idea of 'peripheral' France (Guilluy 2014; Fourquet 2020). However, some urban suburbs have also mobilised (Devaux et al. 2019), and large French cities have gradually crystallised attention with well-attended demonstrations. Other studies focused on the spatial and scalar organization of the YV movement, online (Boyer et al. 2020) but mostly offline, from the occupations of roundabouts (Challier 2019; Bernard de Raymond and Bordiec 2019; Blavier 2021) to the way participants cooperate at different scales (Ravelli 2019; Ravelli et al. 2020).

The spatial dimension (Ripoll 2005a) of this movement has therefore been the subject of questioning and interpretation, although the sources and methods are not always substantiated, especially at a national scale. The use of a database made up of self-declared and intentional gathering points (blocage17novembre.com)¹ would thus call for more caution: with some 700 or so announced for 17th November 2018, it appears *a posteriori* to be very incomplete compared to the 2,000 counted that evening by the Ministry of the Interior (MI). In the same way, the absence of differentiation between the places at which the participants gathered on the one hand, and those of daily life on the other, remained a blind spot in existing studies. The same is true for generalisations on the basis of cases involving 'localised social spaces' (Laferté, 2014) that are sometimes very specific. From the localized characterization of a day of mobilization, carried out *in situ* and on a moment-to-moment basis in an ethnographic mode, to the *ex-post* reconstitution of a more exhaustive view of the movement thanks to in-depth data, there is a progression in which we propose to take part, especially since most of the works mentioned above have not really been discussed yet in terms of disciplinary anchors, or in terms of data collection and therefore of scales of analysis.

Consequently, a number of questions about this YV movement, and particularly about its spatial dimension, remain unanswered. What geography does it display, both on a national and local scale, and according to what developments since 17th November 2018? To what extent is this geography linked to the demographic and political division of the national metropolitan space? How can we characterise the places invested by the YV? What kind of logic can describe the attendance of the participants, and especially, what are the relations between the areas occupied on the occasion of the movement and the areas dedicated to everyday life? Do these logics move in the direction of a 'politicisation of the nearby environment' (Dechézelles & Olive 2019) and even in the direction of a 'relocation of politics' (Jeanpierre 2019)? To what extent can the evolution of the modes of action and appropriate spaces be related to the profiles of the participants?

At the crossroads of our respective roots in political sociology and social geography, this contribution, written four hands, argues that geography matters to study social movements (Tilly 2000; Sewell 2001; Martin & Miller 2003; Ripoll 2005a; Miller et al. 2013; Pailloux & Ripoll 2019) and thus first considers space as a structuring *framework* within which any of them can, or cannot, emerge and unfold. This perspective is in line with the concepts of 'space organisation' (Tilly 2000), 'context'

¹ The founders of this site have remained anonymous.



(Martin & Miller 2003; Pailloux & Ripoll 2019), or 'configuration' (Auyero 2005; Laferté 2014; Combes et al. 2016). Indeed, space contributes to explaining, thanks to its features, but also thanks to the distribution of the social groups present, or to the uses and privileges that are instituted there, why a social movement occurs. As a result of pre-existing social relations, the resources and capital, both material and symbolic, are unequally located. Some areas, some places, are socially established as a mobilisation *issue*, as soon as they underpin economic, symbolic, organisational and therefore political profits² for the groups that appropriate them (Sewell 2001; Auyero 2005; Hmed 2009; Dechézelles & Olive 2016, 2017). Such appropriation of space (Ripoll & Veschambre, 2005a, b; Ripoll 2005b) is indicative of the means to achieve—as well as to counteract—social change. In other words, it does not seem possible to study social movements without adopting a geographical approach, given that any movement is necessarily constructed *in* but also *through* space, the latter being an iteratively structured/structuring social construct (Sewell 2001; Auyero 2005; Bonny et al. 2012). Thus, we will pay attention to the territories, places, scales, and networks that iteratively shaped the YV's movement (Jessop et al. 2008), and especially to both the links between residential and mobilization places and the scale shifts characterizing the YV movement, shedding light on mobility among the spatialities (Miller, Ponto 2016).

In order to develop this theoretical proposal and to justify its heuristic scope, both for social movements in general and for the YV in particular, different research objectives are pursued here. Firstly, it is a question of 'laying out' the different sources, scales and methods for analysing the spatial dimension of the movement (cf. below, Fig. 1), articulating them and discussing their contributions and limitations in each case. In order to provide answers to the questions left unanswered (see above), there will be two stages to our contribution. Thanks to a case study documented by observations, interviews and indirect sources (regional daily press, the MI's database of gatherings), we will first shed light on the moment it erupted on the political and media agenda on 17th November 2018 at the local level. During this first 'act', the highly scattered and temporary appropriation of various strategic locations on the margins of cities appears to have renewed the French repertoire of protest action. Then, we will discuss the generality of this model on a national scale, using geostatistical processing, and analyse the gradual diversification of appropriate locations. Based on the hypothesis that providing information on the profile of the locations where the YV live on a daily basis is, in the end, a way of partly characterising their logics of commitment, we secondly queried the database named 'Jaune vif' (*meaning "bright yellow"*) to try to explain the evolution of the gathering places in terms of the origins and, more broadly, of the profiles of the participants.

² "The space or, more precisely, the places and areas of the reified social space, and the profits they provide, are issues of struggle (between the different fields)." (Bourdieu P., 1993, "Effets de lieu", *La mise en scène du monde*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, p. 256).



Figure 1 lists the five types of sources available, to our knowledge, to address the YV phenomenon from a geographical perspective, qualifying them according to four criteria, which underlie three main distinctions: (i) those that have a simple spatialized report (e.g. the participatory map of the site blocage17novembre.com) vs. those with a more elaborate narrative (e.g. PQR), (ii) those with very localised coverage (e.g. the field survey) vs. those with national coverage (e.g. the MI database), and (iii) those that are of a synchronic nature (17novembre.com database) vs. those that contain diachronic elements (“Jaune vif” database) if not longitudinal (field survey over time)

From scattered actions in the urban outskirts to massive and repeated central gatherings: coping with the attrition of the participants and the dismantling of the roundabouts and/or coping with new participants?

The founding act of 17 November 2018 or the scattered, simultaneous, temporary and even mobile appropriation of the peripheral road infrastructure

"At first sight, chaos everywhere. The riot is unstructured. It is made up of a series of discontinuous episodes both in terms of time and space, that repeat themselves rather than following on from each other" (Farge & Revel 1988, p. 64). This observation to describe a riot at the end of the eighteenth century could also apply to the YV phenomenon, with the difference that the latter are contemporary to us and that some of them remain mobilised four years later. Before starting considering broad spatial and temporal scales, it is useful to start from the local scale in order to understand how the YV occupied different places on 17th November 2018, which was the founding act of the YV movement offline. Since May 2018, several calls were in fact launched online, which prepared the ground including for this very day.³ On the basis of the locations of the gatherings identified in the MI's database, in situ observations and journalistic sources documenting one case, it appears that the YV targeted the margins of isolated towns or urban areas, at the intersection of relatively major roads, for the entire weekend of 17th November 2018. The case of Alençon (see below, Fig. 2), the prefecture of the Orne department, appears similar of many others we looked through.

³ To protest against the augmentation of gas prices (see above), a petition was started on change.org by Priscillia Ludoski in late May 2018. In July, plenty of social networks pages, especially led by motorcyclists, rose against the French Government's decision to lower speed limit from 90 to 80 km/h on secondary roads. In October, about 1 million persons have signed the petition, and an explicit call to a national blockade against gas prices increase is launched on Facebook by Ludoski and Eric Drouet—a truck driver—for the 17th November, relayed by the local 1,500 YV pages (Boyer et al., 2020) and blocage17novembre.com, website on which YV could anonymously mention the gathering points for that very day. Among others, Boyer et al. (2020) pointed out a strong link between online and offline activity: in the case of Alençon, it is therefore important to precise that no less than 1,200 persons were in October 2018 members of the YV local page, number that directly echoes the local number of participants on the 17th November (see below).



Criteria / types of sources	1-Statistical service of the Ministry of the Interior	2- blocage17novembre.com	3-Regional daily press (PQR) (<i>french regional written press</i>)	« Jaune vif » database	5-Field surveys
Author(s)	Departmental service	Anonymous designer of the site and contributors / gatherings organisers	Local journalists	Survey Collective, 2019	Individual academic investigators
Number of gathering areas reported	2,600**	780	unquantifiable	108	8*
Diachronic monitoring	Yes	No	Yes, in part	Yes	Yes
Bias	Dependent on police activity and unknown as to the actors who contributed to it	Indication of mobilisation intentions, dependent on activist self-declaration, unknown as to the actors who contributed to it	Dependent on the journalistic activity, i.e. the journalistic territorial network and the selection of the interviewees	Dependent on the presence of a university investigator	Dependent on the presence of a university investigator
Advantage(s)	Includes the largest number of gathering points, provides an overview of police intelligence activity that is relatively undocumented	As a counterpoint to the other databases, it is filled in by the interested parties themselves	Provides information on the "leaders" and the local context, relatively fine territorial network	Provides information on the reasons for coming (the places of residence and work of the yellow vests are given, among other characteristics)	Provides a detailed description of the gatherings (contexts, anchors, protagonists, follow-up...), make it possible to personify and go beyond the other sources (quali/quant)

Fig. 1 Table of queried and/or existing sources providing information on the spatial dimension of the Yellow Vests. (*) the surveys of Q. Ravelli in the Loiret, R. Challier in the East, B. Coquard in the Marne, J-B. Devaux et al. Ravelli in the Loiret, R. Challier in the East, B. Coquard in the Marne, J-B. Devaux et al. in the suburbs of Lyon, P. Blavier in the Centre region, the Caen collective researching the Yellow Vests in former Lower Normandy, E. Reungoat around Montpellier and A. Bernard de Raymond and S. Bordiec in the region of Bordeaux. There might be others. (**) The initial database, which includes tracking over time, contains 7,181 lines corresponding to some 2,600 mobilisation sites, from which we have subtracted 103 events located on the Island La Reunion in order to achieve geomatic comparability of the various sources (see below) and the other projected information

In Alençon, whose agglomeration has a little more than 41,000 inhabitants,⁴ no less than eight gatherings took place on the occasion of what was called shortly after "act 1" of the YV movement. After a local gathering point was published on the website blocage17novembre.com,⁵ four roundabouts located in the suburbs of the agglomeration of Alençon⁶ – Condé-sur-Sarthe not to mention Pacé further west, Valframbert, north, Arçonnay, south— were occupied on 17 November, 2018, by

⁴ Website of the Observatoire des territoires, accessed on 07/04/2021.

⁵ The gathering point was held in the car park of a supermarket located in the commercial area of Condé-sur-Sarthe at dawn. While the MI database does not specify the number of participants, one of the many clippings of the local newspaper Ouest-France published on 17/11/2018 reports the number of protesters to be around one hundred.

⁶ If the gathering point of the morning was published, the roundabouts targeted afterwards were only known by half a dozen nearby inhabitants—including commuters and motocyclists already mobilized since the summer and especially against the speed restriction to 80 km/h—who each took in charge the occupations of the roundabouts (interview conducted on 13/02/2021 with one of the local initiators of the movement).



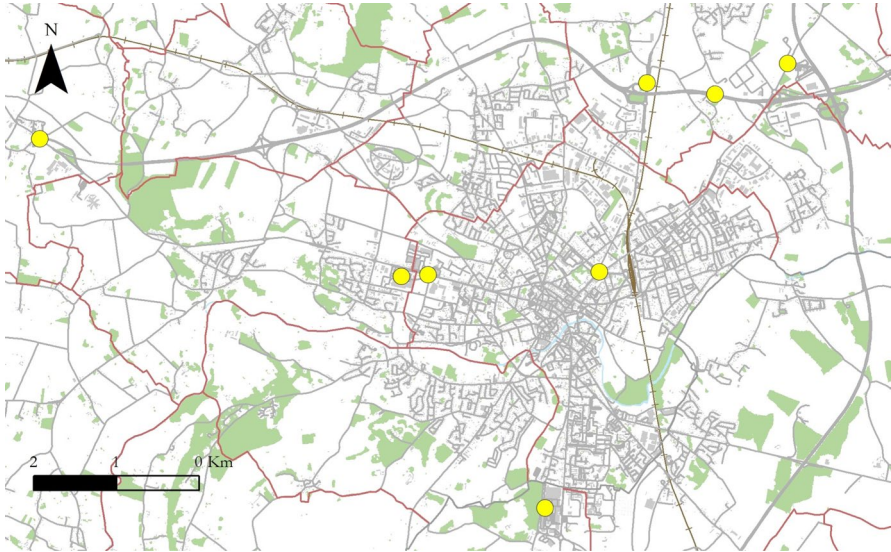


Fig. 2 The strategic dimension of blocking points at the local level: the case of Alençon (Orne). Sources: BD Topo (IGN), MI database, É. Walker. Reading notes: the places marked with yellow dots on the map were places whose access was more or less filtered by the yellow vests on the weekend of 17th November 2018, and sometimes beyond. The red dashes delimit the municipalities administratively

several hundred YV.⁷ A single roundabout was taken over in Alençon itself, which allowed traffic to flow around and from the city centre to reach larger roads. Like the roundabouts of Pacé, "l'Échiquier" and "La Dentelle" in Valframbert, which directly serve the N12 and the A28, cars and lorries are filtered using pallets, tyres and, above all, the YV themselves, who often positioned themselves on the road. The term "filtering" was coined by the participants themselves, and meant slowing down the flow of traffic by blocking it every half a dozen minutes approximately. The roundabout of Arçonnay in the south was even completely blocked,⁸ which impacted the local economy: two of the main hypermarkets of the agglomeration lowered their curtains in the morning, because of the lack of shoppers who could reach their parking areas. The operations to slow down the traffic flow and disrupt the consumption activity continued until the evening, when some of the participants left the roundabouts they were standing in to meet at the roundabout in Arçonnay

⁷ The number of participants recorded in the ministerial database for these different actions reached around 150, but as we look at the reports produced by the PQR, it seems that the reality was largely underestimated, with those concerned even putting forward the number of 1,200 to 1,500 participants on the weekend of 17/11/2018 in Alençon (interview conducted on 13/02/2021 with one of the local initiators of the movement).

⁸ This complete blockade is yet an exception: on the other local roundabouts, it was rather intermittent, the cars blocked having to wait for a while so as to pass. A local respectability stake can be seen there, this kind of action being chosen so as to limit the annoyance for other workers and dwellers who could possibly support the movement or join it at that time, and especially those who lived there: several recognized drivers or even registered in the department of Orne were in fact steered to shortcuts (interviews conducted on spring 2021 with three local leaders of the movement).



and enjoy a convivial get-together. On the following day, the filtering of the traffic continued there, as in the roundabout of Pacé, and these roundabouts were continuously occupied during the following days. This targeting of the road infrastructure was also reflected in the actions that were first carried out on the N12 road and aimed at slowing down the traffic and sowed the seeds of the "free tolls" operation organised soon after on⁹ the nearby A88 or A28 roads. A "free toll" refers to an action during which YV break into motorway toll booths so as to lift the barriers and spare drivers from paying the toll, which echoes their revendications against mobility constraint and taxes and for buying purchase (see above).

The demands made at the beginning of the movement, which were essentially focused on the issue of mobility (see introduction) and were largely made by everyday road users—motorcyclists, but also itinerant professionals such as lorry drivers and private-sector employees (Collectif 2019) and, more broadly, peri-urban and rural commuters (see below)—were thus expressed through acts and within the peripheral spaces that underlie them (Genevois 2020). In our opinion, this is the logic behind the choice to target road infrastructure, and in particular roundabouts,¹⁰ not only as a *means of* gathering and (self-)organisation (Bernard de Raymond & Bordieç 2019; Ravelli 2019), but also as a strategic¹¹ issue in terms of economic flows (workers who are now mostly motorised and who have to divert from their roads; goods that cannot be transported or consumed), especially as the movements take place simultaneously throughout the country. In stark contrast to the social movements that dominated headlines a few years ago—Nuit Debout, the so-called "movement des Places"—which from the outset aimed to take hold of central squares and esplanades in major cities (Bacciochi et al. 2019), the 'act 1' of the YV movement appears to be more original. Most of these initial gatherings, which were undoubtedly the most disruptive ones since they were synchronous, scattered or even mobile, and off the beaten track, were rarely repeated, and this is not unrelated to the decline in the number of participants (Bernard de Raymond & Bordieç 2019)—which in fact started in the following days, on a national scale (Fig. 3).

This trend has been accompanied by an evolution in the modes of action and the spaces invested by the YV. By adopting broader spatial and temporal scales as well as a geostatistical method, the challenge is more broadly to identify trends that made it possible to characterise the places that the YV occupied beyond 'act 1' and the case of the Normandy region.

⁹ MI base and PQR articles from 17, 18 and 19/11/2018.

¹⁰ There are no fewer than 65,000 roundabouts in mainland France today, not unrelated to a land-use planning policy that has been largely geared to cars since the Trente Glorieuses (Alonzo, 2005). Their occupation does not appear to have any precedent—at least in metropolitan France (Weizman, 2015)—and as such we feel that they require specific attention (cf. below).

¹¹ "We had a short meeting in Alençon to see how we could take over the town [...]. And then we said, well, we saw, we looked and we realised that the best way to besiege was the roundabouts [...] by blocking 5 roundabouts, we realised that we were completely paralysing Alençon [...]" (interview conducted on 13/02/2021 with a local initiator of the movement).



Are the YV present *throughout* the country?

The sources from the *blocage17novembre* website and from the MI geolocalised in XY all over the French Metropolitan territory provide a broad overview of the geography of the YV mobilisation and its evolution. Of course, a place of mobilisation only appears as such if it has been recorded either by an organiser or by the police. Similarly, the number of participants recorded should probably be considered with caution, as the gatherings and their numbers could fluctuate (see above). It should also be borne in mind, for example when comparing rural and urban areas, that the police tracking work may have been uneven, due in particular to the territorial division between the police and the *gendarmerie*.¹² Nevertheless, these sources clearly show that the YV gave rise to a large number of decentralised actions, spread out over the whole country during the initial act (Fig. 4), the "spatial extension" of the movement (Ripoll 2005a) being national from the start.

Some areas appear to be more mobilised and, in any case, more closely monitored by the police than others at the end of November 2018— notably the former Upper Normandy, the Rhone Valley, New Aquitaine, Alsace and Western Brittany regions—but also more widely between November 2018 and March 2019. Echoing other work on the subject, the Seine Valley, the north of the Hauts de France (Lille conurbation), the heart of the Ile-de-France (Paris agglomeration), the urbanised Mediterranean coastline as well as the cities of Lyon and Bordeaux, and the urbanised border areas in the east stand out in this respect (Boyer et al. 2020). The 'diagonal of emptiness'—or at least the diagonal of low densities—does indeed appear to be negative (Le Bras 2018), probably because of its lower population density. However, the idea of a south-west/north-east distribution mentioned by several political scientists (Fourquet & Manternach 2018; Algan et al. 2019) does not seem very convincing. Finally, it should be noted that some gatherings took the form of demonstrations that already have a significant number of participants especially in Bordeaux (2,500 YV counted by the police), Poitiers (2,300), Angoulême, Rouen, Lyon, Valence, Nice, Reims, Strasbourg and Bayonne. They augured for future massive¹³ and repeated gatherings in large cities, the weekly demonstrations becoming gradually ritualised "acts" (Fig. 5).

Indeed, the period from November 2018 to March 2019 attests to the gradual structuring of the movement during weekly demonstrations in larger or smaller towns (Collectif 2019; Devaux et al. 2019), in connection with the accelerated dismantling of the roundabouts by the police as of December 2018.¹⁴ In addition

¹² It should be noted that in France, the national police have jurisdiction within prefectures and, more broadly, within municipalities that are part of urban units with at least 20,000 inhabitants or whose 'crime characteristics are those of urban areas' (Articles R2214-1 and R2214-2 of the Code Général des Collectivités Territoriales). The zoning of competences between the National Police and *Gendarmerie* is available on data.gouv.fr.

¹³ We refer to the amount of the participants here. Yet, several small groups evolved separately from the main *cortège* time to time.

¹⁴ Some roundabouts remain occupied until January 2019 (Ravelli, 2019) and even until spring, although this remains exceptional (Hazard, 2019; Coquard & Challier, 2019; Bernard de Raymond & Bordie, 2020).



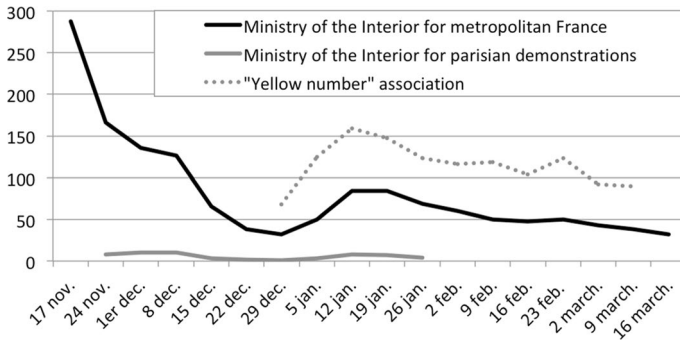


Fig. 3 Number of YV mobilised in France according to the MI and the "yellow number" (in thousands) between 17/11/2018 and 16/03/2019. Sources: MI database, Collectif "Nombre jaune", P. Blavier. Reading: On 17 November 2018, the Ministry of the Interior reported nearly 300,000 YV mobilised in France.* Notes: The MI refused to divulge the participation figures at the prefecture level. The "Yellow number" is a Facebook® page that was first published on 26 December 2018 and monitors the number of YV based on voluntary declarations by the YV who were on scene

to Paris—up to 10,500 demonstrators were officially recorded at the beginning of February 2019—the same trend emerged particularly in Bordeaux—exceeding 10 times the threshold of 4,000 protesters—and Toulouse—exceeding 4 times the threshold of 5,000.

A counter-intuitive geography: the YV as an urban movement?

However, the department of Calvados does not include all of the gatherings PQR or observations allow to identify. Maybe it is not the only one. Thus, a national scaled—preserving from one-time and local errata—and geostatistical analysis, not dealing with gatherings in XY but by *type of space*, is required, which also permits to question space beyond maps. Using a set of "spatial joins" on GIS makes it possible: each gathering place can thus be characterised by other spatial attributes on the basis of their geographical "co-occurrence".¹⁵

¹⁵ In concrete terms, from a communal information layer in which a certain number of variables have been broken down (urban or rural status, presence of a prefecture, agglomerations according to their size, etc.), we can grant each of the points contained in another layer (the YV according to their place of mobilisation, residence, work) the variable modalities which correspond to it, and vice versa.



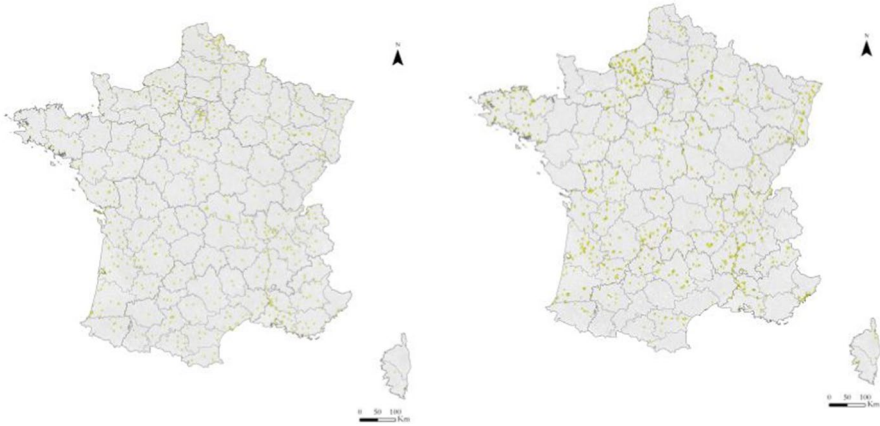


Fig. 4 Maps of the gathering places (demonstrations included) on 17 November 2018 according to their initiators (left map) and the services of the MI (right map). Source: blocage17novembre.com & MI database, É. Walker

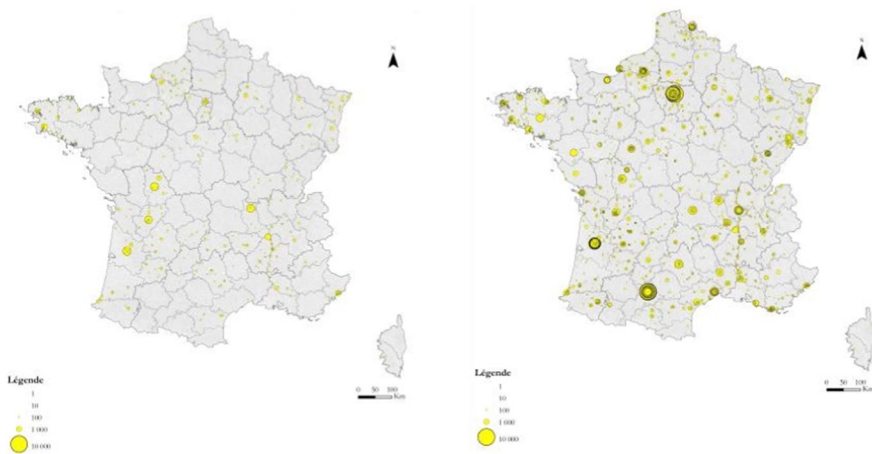


Fig. 5 Map of gatherings on 17 November 2018 (left) and in the following months (right) according to ministerial estimates of the number of participants. Source: MI database, É. Walker



 Description of the spatial categories used in the analysis

In France, a distinction is made between urban and rural areas. This is an administrative definition (INSEE, Zonage en Unités Urbaines (ZUU)) also used in geography: any municipality comprising within its territory all or part of an urban unit or being included in it, i.e. a grouping of at least 2,000 inhabitants within a non-discontinuous built-up area of more than 200 m, is *urban*. In contrast, any municipality that is not urban is considered *rural*.

An urban unit can be limited to the territory of a single municipality: it is then referred to as an *isolated town* (e.g. Sées, with just over 4,000 inhabitants, in the Orne department). If the urban unit encroaches on the territory of at least two municipalities, it is called a multi-municipal agglomeration. If one town has more than half the population of the latter, it is called a *central city* (e.g. Alençon for the Alençon agglomeration). The remaining towns of the agglomeration, which are less populated, are *suburbs* in the administrative sense of the term (Neuilly-sur-Seine is indeed a suburb of Paris). To avoid comparing the differences of urban units according to their functions as Paris and Sées, for example, the choice was made to differentiate them according to different population groups, which attest to unequal positions in the urban hierarchy and make the social and more specifically demographic division of the national space visible.

The Zonage en Aires Urbaines (ZAU) (*Zoning of urban areas*) is also a typology created administratively by the INSEE in 2010, and frequently used since then (see in particular Cusin et al. 2016). The space is differentiated according to 1/the number of jobs in each urban unit and 2/the share of working people residing in each municipality and working elsewhere: it is therefore a zoning that takes into account the main economic and socio-professional space-polarisation. On the one hand, certain towns centralise jobs: between 1,500 and 5,000 for *small centres*, 5,000 and 10,000 for *medium-sized centres*, and more than 10,000 for *large urban centres*. On the other hand, some municipalities see a significant proportion (the INSEE historically uses the threshold of 40%) of their active residents commuting each day to work in these centres: if this 40% commuters commuting to one or more large centres and suburbs is reached, the said municipalities are then part of the *peri-urban area*, and in the case of the medium and small centres and their suburbs, of the *area under urban influence*. If this number of 1,500 jobs and this 40% share are not reached, the municipality is considered to be *isolated outside the influence of the poles*. Based on this indicator, it is the economic and, in particular, the socio-professional, mobile division of the national space that can be approached.

Finally, we differentiated the towns according to their administrative status, at the different possible levels of command in France (regular town, (sub) prefecture, state capital), in order to establish the political division of the national space and to rank the spaces at stake.

To characterise the relationship between the structuring of national space and the locations of YV mobilisation, we used two methods of analysis. The first one (see Appendix, Fig. 13) establishes the correlations (Pearson's method) of participants, on the one hand, and the fact that it has a particular geographical characteristic, the fact that a town has experienced on the one hand one or more gatherings, as well as a greater or lesser number of participants and, on the other hand the fact that it has specific geographical features (see box above). The second one (Fig. 6) is based on the fact of having experienced one or more mobilisations actions, as well as a given number of participants, according to these same geographical variables. It is, however, represented in the form of percentages, in order to capture the different proportions involved. Only the towns that have experienced a YV event are therefore considered in the present study for a comparison with the metropolitan structure in order to identify possible under- and over-representations of YV mobilisations according to the types of area considered. The



potential biases mentioned above therefore remain, in addition to the fact that the two databases do not distinguish between the forms of gathering.¹⁶

The first result is that the YV have clearly overwhelmingly invested *urban* spaces: with a high significance rate and high correlation coefficients, the two sources indicate that the vast majority of gatherings were held in cities from 17 November 2018, onwards. More precisely, almost half took place in central cities, almost a quarter in the suburbs and conversely, at most a fifth took place in rural towns, whereas on a national scale these types of territory account for 4%, 13% and 80% of metropolitan municipalities, respectively. This initial characterisation therefore suggests that this was a very urban movement, at least from *the perspective of the areas in which it took place*, which pleads for a representation of the YV occupying, admittedly, above all "peripheral"¹⁷ roundabouts", but located *in* urban units, even on their margins, as shown by our observations in Alençon or in other cases as well. This urban character was reinforced after 17 November with a growing concentration in the central cities of agglomerations with more than 50,000 inhabitants and at least 10,000 jobs, *a fortiori* with prefectural status. Here we can see the gradual shift from the initial scattered occupation actions in roundabouts to the increasingly centralised and massive demonstrations that followed.

As shown previously (cf. *supra*, Fig. 6), the actions of 17 November 2018, took place mainly in urban towns, and in particular in central cities, but in fact *very exceptionally in city centres*,¹⁸ and on the contrary much more often on the outskirts of these central cities, or in the suburbs in the case of agglomerations, where French contentious movements are not used to irrupting (Jeanpierre 2019; Ravelli 2019). From December 2018, onwards, the massive demonstrations recorded from "act 1" in a few major cities (see above) recurred on a national scale in the city centres of large agglomerations, and replaced gradually the off-centre actions carried out at the beginning. Being representative of places at the top and middle levels of the French urban hierarchy, the cases of the agglomerations of Rouen and Valence¹⁹ illustrate the gradual recentering of the movement (Fig. 7).

We now consider the number of protagonists reported by the police forces and relate it to the demographic weight of the populations by type of space in metropolitan France. According to this approach, the YV were more numerous in the central cities of small agglomerations and departmental (sub)prefectures on 17 November 2018, and then in those of large agglomerations and even metropolises, regional

¹⁶ In the case of the MI's database, we plan to recode the 7,000 or so verbatims formulated—rather unevenly—by the actors who contributed to the database in order to achieve this precision.

¹⁷ Cassely, J-L.. "Les gilets jaunes ou la révolte de la France des ronds-points", 9/11/2018, Slate, [Online] <http://www.slate.fr/story/169626/blocage-17-novembre-gilets-jaunes-revolte-ronds-points-france-peripherique-diesel>, accessed on 18/12/2019.

¹⁸ A city centre generally refers in France to the most central and often the oldest part of an urban unit, whether it is a conurbation or an isolated town, where, as a result of France's urban history, the headquarters of the administration, the upper tertiary sector and high-income residents are generally concentrated.

¹⁹ These agglomerations are respectively populated with approximately 670,000 and 130,000 inhabitants as of the last census. As regional and departmental prefectures, we capture the evolution of the YV' gathering places at the top and middle levels of the French urban hierarchy.



Summary table of the mobilisations with respect to the types of location	according to towns				according to actions			according to participants		
	Blocaje 17nov	Ministry (17th Nov)	Ministry (full)	metrop. France (2019)	Blocaje 17nov	Ministry (17th Nov)	Ministry (full)	Ministry (17th Nov)	Ministry (full)	metrop. France (2016)
	urban	86,3	71,0	69,8	20,3	86,9	79,0	83,8	86,9	96,5
rural	13,7	29,0	30,2	79,7	13,1	21,0	16,2	13,1	3,5	22,5
central-city	48,2	27,4	23,6	4,1	49,6	40,2	47,2	56,4	83,7	31,4
suburbs	21,3	30,8	32,6	13,1	20,7	25,6	24,5	23,3	9,3	37,6
isolated town	16,9	12,8	13,5	3,1	16,6	13,2	12,2	7,3	3,5	8,5
town belonging to the Parisian urban unit	2,9	0,6	1,3	1,2	3,0	0,8	2,0	3,4	11,8	16,6
town belonging to a urban unit of 200,000-1,999,999 inhabitants	14,2	11,8	11,6	3,5	15,2	12,2	15,0	21,0	43,0	24,9
town belonging to a urban unit of 50,000 to 199,999 inhabitants	15,3	10,7	12,1	2,7	15,2	13,5	20,8	23,9	23,4	12,3
town belonging to a urban unit of 10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants	29,3	23,0	19,4	4,6	29,3	29,7	25,9	24,1	12,7	11,4
town belonging to a urban unit of 2,000 to 9,999 inhabitants	24,6	24,9	25,3	8,3	24,1	22,9	20,1	14,6	5,5	12,3
town belonging to a large urban pole (10,000 jobs or more)	46,2	34,0	34,5	9,1	47,5	41,7	51,8	64,0	86,9	58,4
peri-urban - ring of large pole and multipolarized towns	19,1	27,4	31,0	44,5	18,9	21,7	19,0	15,4	4,4	24,6
town belonging to a small or medium pole (1,500 to less than 10,000 jobs)	24,6	1,8	17,6	3,6	24,1	23,8	20,1	13,9	6,8	6,5
territory under urban influence	4,6	27,9	8,4	22,7	4,3	6,4	4,2	2,8	0,9	6,0
town located outside the influence of the poles	5,5	8,9	8,5	20,0	5,2	6,3	4,9	3,7	1,0	4,5
state capital	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,4	0,5	1,2	2,4	11,4	3,4
town with prefectural status	31,7	13,0	10,6	0,9	33,4	24,9	33,6	39,8	68,1	22,3
regular town	68,1	87,0	89,4	99,1	66,2	74,5	65,2	57,8	20,5	74,3

Fig. 6 Characterisation of mobilisation sites by type of locations (percentage approach). Source: INSEE 2016 communal database, MI database, blocaje17novembre.com database, É. Walker. Once the spatial join between the YV and the INSEE databases has been made, the data table drawn from it is processed as follows: for the same spatial variable (ZUU for example), we calculate the percentage that statistical individuals with a variable modality (urban for example) represent among the whole, whether these statistical individuals are towns, actions, or participants reported by the MI, and so on for all the variables and modalities. The column "actions" takes into account the fact that several actions may have taken place in the same town during a given period of time (17 November 2018 for the blocaje17novembre source, weekends of 17 November 2018 and November 2018 to March 2019 for the ministerial source are distinguished here), while the column "individuals" considers the number of participants. The column "town" refers to the simple fact that there was a gathering of YV in the town at a given time. Thus, not only are the categories of spaces within which the YV mobilised considered, but they are also expressed in terms of the intensity or weight they represent in the overall mobilisation movement. In order to interpret the data "town" and "individuals" and to try to establish trends of over- and under-representation, we finally drew respectively on the shares represented by the 34,841 metropolitan French towns in 2019 and the 64,468,692 people who lived in these towns in 2016 (the latest population census available) for each of the modalities of the geographical variables mobilised here

prefectures in particular, and the capital (see Fig. 6 above, which also echoes Genevois 2020). From then on, the urban places of power—if not of wealth²⁰—were gradually taken over by the YV, following a gradation in the urban hierarchy and echoing the politicization of the movement over the passing weeks, from purchasing power to social and economic inequities, from TICPE (see above) to ISF,²¹ from

²⁰ Because of the historical command function of the cities as well as the 'urbanisation of the capital' (Harvey, 2004), the working-class enclaves are of course an exception. To further explore this idea of the YV belonging to the middle and working classes of society and gradually moving into more bourgeois areas, see Fig. 15(Annexes), which details the typical residential profile of the towns where the YV mobilised.

²¹ The "Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune" is a french tax on estate which was only payed by fiscal households above 1,3 million euros, and which was retired in 2017 by the French Government.



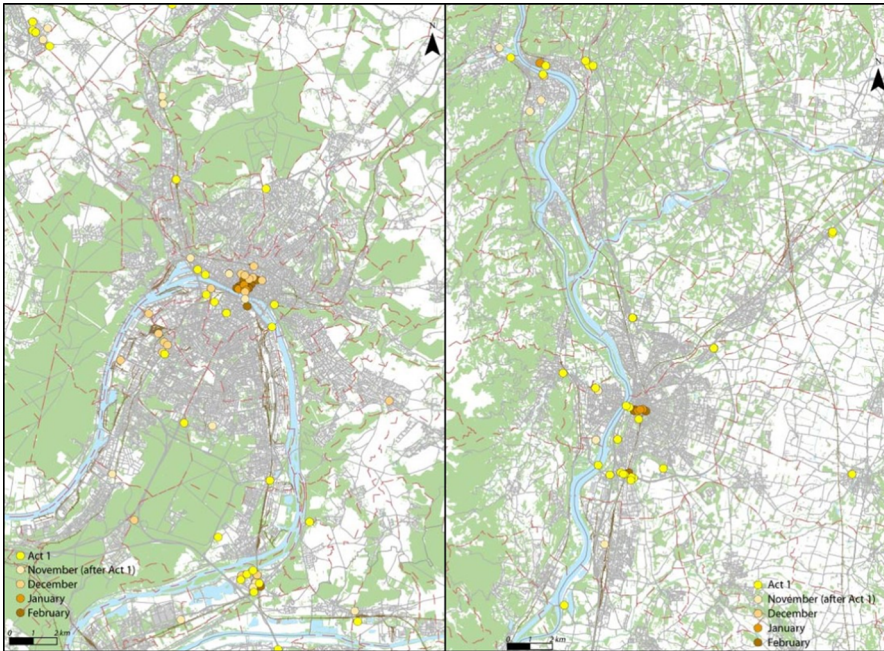


Fig. 7 The evolution of gathering places: the cases of the Rouen (Seine-Maritime, left) and Valence (Drôme, right) agglomerations. Sources: BD Topo (IGN), MI database, É. Walker. Reading notes: the locations shown as dots on the maps have been occupied by the Yellow Vests from the weekend of 17 November 2018 (yellow) until the end of February 2019 (brown)

mobility constraint to institutional reforms²² (Collectif 2019). Therefore and to be quite specific, the geography of YV gatherings appears *more and more urban*: from small towns it gradually got to metropolises, from urban outskirts to city-centres. This calls for at least two hypotheses that in fact articulate each other. The first one is pragmatic: faced with the gradual erosion of the roundabouts' occupation after the hustle and bustle of the initial act, the objective is the gathering of forces but also the targeting without further delay of the established places of power, even if it means abandoning the peripheral roundabouts that constitute the basis of the movement (Ravelli 2019). The second one is sociopolitical: after a certain circumspection,²³

²² The growing plebiscite of the Citizen's Initiative Referendum— « Referendum d'Initiative Citoyenne» (RIC)—into the movement is very illuminating regarding this. The RIC numerous YV wanted aims, by referendum, at bypassing the Parliament so as to vote or abolish a law or a treaty, and even at changing the Constitution or dismissing an elected representative.

²³ The interviews conducted retrospectively in the Orne department with Attac activists are very illustrative of this point. More broadly, the fact that at the time of Act 2, only FO Transports called for joining the YV (Mediapart, 23/11/2018) appears symptomatic of this (initially) distanced relationship of the central trade unions to the movement. That being said, union members who did not emphasise their union membership were involved in the movement from the start, as our observations, interviews and the "Jaune vif" questionnaire survey attest.



other activists joined the cause (Collectif 2019) and, through a cross-socialisation with those present during the initial act and who have remained, the movement progressively invested other strategic areas and those other activists are familiar with, partly reviving the conventional set of action. We now propose to explore this second hypothesis through the geographic origins of the participants.

Reconciling gathering places and daily life: from the (re)politicisation of the local roundabouts to the central polarising demonstrations, from first-comers to experienced militants.

The hypothesis pursued here is that providing information on the profile of the residential or working spaces of the YV ultimately means addressing the *framework structuring the conditions of emergence of the gatherings*, i.e. the logics of commitment of the participants. The 'Jaune vif'²⁴ database (cf. above, Fig. 1) is essential, as it includes nearly 1,500 questionnaires administered to the YV face to face and *in situ*²⁵ between November 2018 and April 2019, providing information on the spatial dimension of participation processes.²⁶ The sample was established on the basis of the investigating forces present at the national level, but as randomly as possible while on-site (Collectif, 2019).

A map of mobilities (Fig. 8) between places of residence and gatherings of the mobilised and surveyed YV highlights “mobility to get mobilised” is widespread. But mobilities from where?

Through a geostatistical approach (Fig. 9), the hypothesis that the YV not only gathered in towns but also lived there seems plausible and makes sense, given that nearly 4 out of 5 French people living in metropolitan France are nowadays urban. But the places of residence of the YV are clearly different depending on whether they mobilised on roundabouts or took part in the various demonstrations. Those who mobilised on roundabouts are significantly more likely to come from small towns and peri-urban areas but also rural municipalities—as a weighted statistical approach confirms (see Appendix, Fig. 16). Given the distribution of the French metropolitan population (Cusin et al., 2016), the characterisation of the YV as a fraction of the working to middle classes (Collectif, 2019) has its residential corollary here. Conversely, those who demonstrated more often reside in large urban centres characterised by a prefectural, if not a metropolitan status, even if when we

²⁴ The authors have both participated extensively in its creation, but also in the input, coding and analysis of this database since November 2018. The so-called geographical variables of the database were only coded and processed by the two authors. For a review of the other variables, see Collectif, 2019.

²⁵ The surveys conducted by Quantité Critique, PACTE, CEVIPOF or CREST are online surveys and do not provide information on places of residence.

²⁶ Once the time-consuming geo-coding has been carried out (due in particular to the changeover from postal codes to INSEE codes, or to the manual correction of a few town whose names had been transcribed “phonetically”), we know the precise places of mobilisation of some 1,475 YV respondents, as well as the respective places of residence and work of 1,325 and 734 of them.



weight to each individual within the “Jaune vif” sample per the population weight of his or her town of residence, YV coming from further are in fact more numerous than they could be. Thus, the YV gatherings are *both urban and polarising*, with participants who do not live in the central cities and being over-represented. However, these polarisations refer to living spaces that are very close to each other and very far apart, depending on whether they are roundabouts or demonstrations.

Indeed, more than one in four YV mobilised in their town of residence and two in five within 5 km of their home (Figs. 10 and 11), echoing the hypothesis of participants belonging to a circumscribed network (Boyer et al., 2020) and furthermore, of a growing relocation of politics (Jeanpierre, 2019; Dechézelles & Olive, 2019). However, it appears to be much more pronounced on roundabouts with nearly 90% of the YV living less than 20 km from them, compared with 70% in demonstrations—and 15% for the Assembly of assemblies²⁷ (Ada) in Commercy. Considering the minima and maxima averages, the YV surveyed on the roundabouts live on average only 11 km and at the maximum 420 km away, compared to 30 and 820 km within the demonstration²⁸ (see Appendix, Fig. 17). This confirms the hypothesis of YV’ strong local anchorage on roundabouts at the beginning of the movement (Genestier & Jacquenod-Desforges, 2020) and its gradual structuration through spatial lenses: an increasing polarisation as it becomes more ritualised and centralised in the form of weekly demonstrations in important city-centres, with the dismantling of the scattered and even peripheral roundabouts. Yet, the proportion of “local” YV among the demonstrators remains high. Given that demonstrations are gradually central (see above), that is consistent with a renewal of the participants probably primarily *urban and even metropolitan*, who then join the non-uninvolved “YV standing on the roundabouts” and coming from further and further away.

This change in the spatial dimension of the movement cannot be disconnected from *the evolution of the participants’ profiles as the movement progressed* (Collectif 2019). As Fig. 12 shows below, the first participants, who mostly were first-comers and rejected conventional political organisations (Dormagen & Pion 2018; Challier 2019; Collectif 2019), and who were more often peri-urban, rural or inhabitants of small towns, particularly isolated ones²⁹ partly gave way to activists who more often lived in the central cities of medium-sized towns and metropolises, who were experienced in social movements and who worked on a coordinate construction of the YV movement (Collectif 2019; Froio et al. 2020; Dormagen et al. 2021). However, one question remains: is this change in the repertoire of action has to be associated with the evolution of the participants’ profiles, or conversely, has it been

²⁷ This is an assembly aiming at structuring the movement at a national scale which occurred five times during the movement, from Commercy on 26th and 27th January 2019, to Toulouse on 6th, 7th and 8th March 2020. For more details, see Ravelli et al. 2020.

²⁸ Although many of these roundabouts are located in much less densely populated areas (cf. above), which should have resulted, ‘all other things being equal’, in people coming from much more distant locations, and whose presence is potentially higher than in central events.

²⁹ Even if the term “chosen” appears highly problematic in the light of the teachings of social geography, this hypothesis echoes that formulated by Yann Algan and his colleagues: ‘The Yellow Vests movement would thus emanate, not from poor or peripheral neighbourhoods, but rather from a lower middle class that had chosen to live away from the major metropolises but finds itself confronted with the growing desertification of its environment’. (Algan & al., 2020).



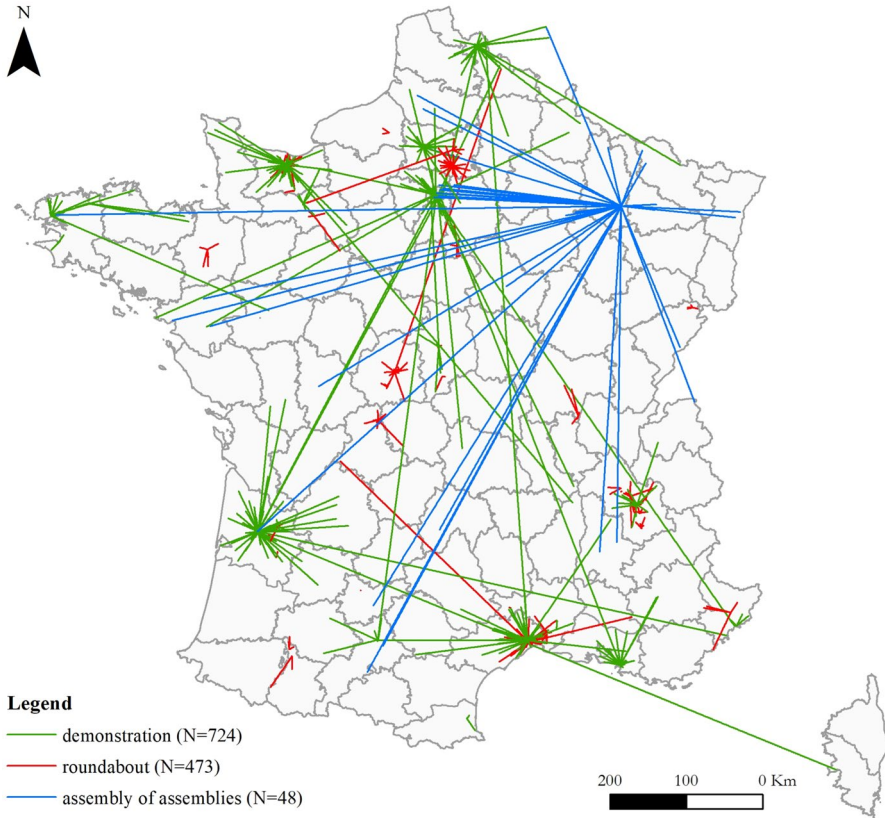


Fig. 8 Mobility between place of residence and place of gathering of the YV surveyed according to the type of action (cartographic approach). *Source:* "Jaune vif" database, É. Walker. Note: each line stands for one YV questioned

catalysed by the increasing use of demonstrations³⁰? These are more central (and therefore distant from roundabouts and peripheral places of residence), characterised by an often higher level of conflict (fairly systematic confrontations and police repression vs. relatively tolerated flow filtering at least at the beginning) and organisation (both autonomists and trade unionists³¹ vs. social networks) and involve

³⁰ In Alençon for instance, both questions seem relevant. In one hand, several more seasoned participants, who joined the movement after a certain circumspection, gradually politicized the stakes and thus called for rejoining the demonstrations in Caen, Le Mans, Rouen and above all Paris, even more with the media coverage of the violent repression of the participants by the police there. On the other hand, that is precisely what dissuade several anchored first-comers from going to demonstrations, especially in Paris, which both meant reducing the number of local participants and the respectability of the movement (interviews conducted during 2021 with participants of the movement in and around Alençon).

³¹ If not adhering to it, the fact of declaring that a trade union organisation has its place in the YV movement seems to normalize as the movement progresses, i.e. at the same time as more urban activists arrive and the YV on the roundabouts that are still occupied have potentially had the opportunity to socialize with them: "if 69% of the people questioned before 8 December consider that trade unions are out of place in the movement, this is only the case for 47% of the respondents after 1 January" (Collectif, 2019).



People interviewed, categorized according to residential space in proportion to the French population	percentages			difference (points)	
	demonstr.	roundab.	metrop. Fr	demonstr.	roundab.
urban	86,1	75,5	77,5	8,6	-2,0
rural	13,9	24,5	22,5	-8,6	2,0
central-city	45,8	38,1	31,4	14,5	6,7
suburbs	31,9	23,9	37,6	-5,6	-13,7
isolated town	8,3	13,5	8,5	-0,2	5,0
town belonging to the Parisian urban unit	7,4	0,2	16,6	-9,3	-16,4
town belonging to a urban unit of 200,000-1,999,999 inhabitants	42,9	23,7	24,9	18,0	-1,2
town belonging to a urban unit of 50,000 to 199,999 inhabitants	14,9	14,0	12,3	2,6	1,7
town belonging to a urban unit of 10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants	7,4	14,2	11,4	-4,0	2,8
town belonging to a urban unit of 2,000 to 9,999 inhabitants	13,6	23,5	12,3	1,3	11,1
town belonging to a large urban pole (10,000 jobs or more)	67,5	38,7	58,4	9,1	-19,7
peri-urban - ring of large pole and multipolarized towns	21,3	40,4	24,6	-3,3	15,8
town belonging to a small or medium pole (1,500 to less than 10,000 jobs)	5,8	12,7	6,5	-0,6	6,2
territory under urban influence	3,8	3,4	6,0	-2,3	-2,6
town located outside the influence of the poles	1,7	4,9	4,5	-2,9	0,3
state capital	2,4	0,0	3,4	-1,0	-3,4
town with prefectural status	39,2	19,9	22,3	16,9	-2,4
regular town	58,5	80,1	74,3	-15,9	5,8
	N	720	473	64468692	

Fig. 9 Mobility between place of residence and place of gathering of the YV surveyed according to the type of action (statistical approach). Source: 'Jaune Vif' database, December 2019, INSEE communal database, 2016, urban units and ZAU database, INSEE, É. Walker. Field: All N=473 YV interviewed (excluding missing values for place of residence) at one of the N=38 roundabouts surveyed and N=720 YV interviewed at one of the N=58 demonstrations surveyed. Reading note: Among the mobilised YV surveyed on a roundabout, 19.9% reside in a town with prefectural status

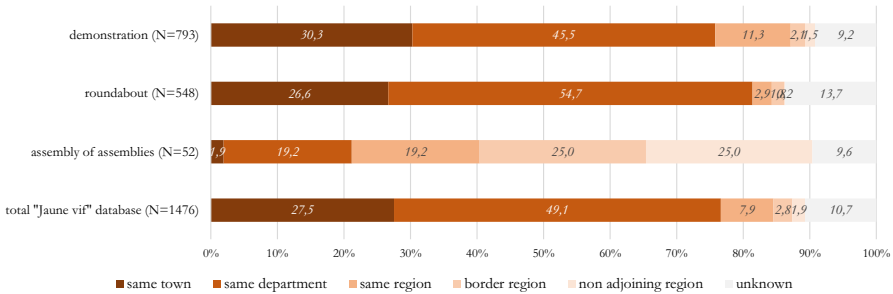


Fig. 10 Relationships between residence and gathering for roundabouts, demonstrations, assembly of assemblies and the whole base. Source: "Jaune vif" database, É. Walker

fractions that are undoubtedly closer to protest movements (activists socialised to both internal and external power relations vs. first-comers³² practising the relative "muting" of political divergences).

³² 46% of the YV mobilised on the roundabouts and surveyed in situ by the 'Jaune vif' collective declared themselves to be first-comers, while only 29% took part in the demonstration, with these proportions finding their corollary in time: one participant surveyed before 8 December out of two was first-comer, while between 8 and 31 December, almost two out of three had already taken part in a demonstration, with even three out of four from the beginning of January onwards (Collectif, 2019).



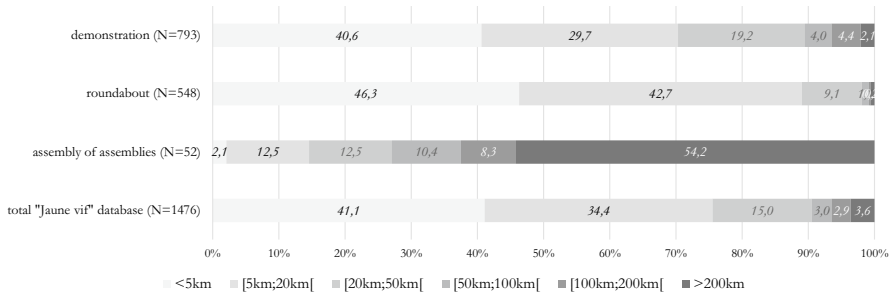


Fig. 11 Distance between places of residence and gathering for roundabouts, demonstrations, assembly of assemblies and the whole base. Source: "Jaune ViF" database, É. Walker

Summary table of individuals surveyed according to the month during which they mobilised	headcount					percentages				
	Nov. 18	Dec. 18	Jan. 19	Feb. 19	Mar. 19	Nov. 18	Dec. 18	Jan. 19	Feb. 19	Mar. 19
urban	77	605	118	101	103	82,8	83,7	85,5	88,6	90,4
rural	16	118	20	13	11	17,2	16,3	14,5	11,4	9,6
central-city	33	305	70	62	53	35,5	42,2	50,7	54,4	46,5
suburbs	29	222	38	25	41	31,2	30,7	27,5	21,9	36,0
isolated town	15	78	10	14	9	16,1	10,8	7,2	12,3	7,9
town belonging to the Parisian urban unit	0	34	14	3	5	0,0	4,7	10,1	2,6	4,4
town belonging to a urban unit of 200,000-1,999,999 inhabitants	11	292	39	47	46	11,8	40,4	28,3	41,2	40,4
town belonging to a urban unit of 50,000 to 199,999 inhabitants	38	75	29	14	23	40,9	10,4	21,0	12,3	20,2
town belonging to a urban unit of 10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants	8	81	10	11	15	8,6	11,2	7,2	9,6	13,2
town belonging to a urban unit of 2,000 to 9,999 inhabitants	20	123	26	26	14	21,5	17,0	18,8	22,8	12,3
town belonging to a large urban pole (10,000 jobs or more)	52	409	83	68	80	55,9	56,6	60,1	59,6	70,2
peri-urban - ring of large pole and multipolarized towns	35	182	35	26	24	37,6	25,2	25,4	22,8	21,1
town belonging to a small or medium pole (1,500 to less than 10,000 jobs)	3	77	12	12	5	3,2	10,7	8,7	10,5	4,4
territory under urban influence	1	29	4	5	3	1,1	4,0	2,9	4,4	2,6
town located outside the influence of the poles	2	26	4	3	2	2,2	3,6	2,9	2,6	1,8
state capital		8	4	3	2	0,0	1,1	2,9	2,6	1,8
town with prefectural status	26	228	56	41	36	28,0	31,5	40,6	36,0	31,6
regular town	67	487	78	70	76	72,0	67,4	56,5	61,4	66,7
N	93	723	138	114	114					

Fig. 12 Types of residence of the YV surveyed according to the month in which they mobilised. Source: 'Jaune vif' database, ZAU and urban unit databases (INSEE), É. Walker

Conclusion

The YV monopolized the media’s attention and baffled the government, from either the number of protagonists or the scattered mobilisation throughout France, from the initial act of 17 November 2018, of the so-called “non-places” (Augé 1992) that are nonetheless quite strategic because they encompass the road infrastructure that is necessary for economic flows on the fringes of urban margins. Well known by the numerous protestors, roundabouts, freeway off-ramps, 2×2 lanes and toll booths were filtered, blocked, slowed down or opened after a national call was launched online, but without any structured organization yet, leading to massive disruptions (workers and goods not reaching their places of work and consumption) and signalling the *means of* a social



change.³³ In this sense, this strategic targeting of the road infrastructure also had more symbolic elements, translating the initial elements of the commitment into action (gas price, speed limitation, roadworthiness tests, purchasing power) and echoing the lifestyles marked by the mobility imperative. Essentially peri-urban or rural dwellers and inhabitants of small towns (see above), drivers, craftsmen, *care* workers and other commuters, as well as disabled people, often first-comers, made up the bulk of the participants (Collectif 2019) and brought themselves to the forefront of French politics.

Space was therefore initially a structuring *framework* for this YV movement when it came to the reasons for getting involved³⁴ as well as to the geography of the issues at stake through the modes of action. However, these resolutely economic targets were, thanks to a rapid erosion, a certain *turnover* of participants and their politicization, progressively turned towards the places of constituted power, instituted as political *issues* and that are always urban. As the actions progressed, the number of conflicts increased: the city centres of the prefectures and the capital became the object of repeated, massive, itinerant, often violent weekly gatherings that took the form of a demonstration.³⁵ It appears through its spatial dimension here the politicization within the movement from December 2018 onwards (Citizen's Initiative Referendum, but also proportional representation, Sixth Republic, drawing of lots³⁶), catalysed by the commitment of more experienced urban activists, but also by the political socialisation³⁷ of non-disengaged first-comers (Collectif 2019) despite the growing violence and distance that could have dissuaded them.

In view of these different elements and thanks to numerous works (Tilly 2000; Sewell 2001; Martin & Miller 2003; Ripoll, 2005a; Combes et al. 2016; Pailloux & Ripoll 2019), the spatial dimension of social movements seems to constitute a relevant analytical tool to shed light on their emergence, deployment and effectiveness, all the more so with the help of a plurality of sources, methods and scales of analysis. Yet, we feel that this first analysis of the spatial dimension of the YV movement needs to be pursued and refined. On the one hand, we believe it is essential to carry out what several researchers have initiated to shed light on the territorial logics

³³ Although it is difficult to isolate the demonstrations, particularly those that took place in Paris at the beginning of December, which were extremely well attended and covered by the media, it is important to note the concessions granted by the executive power following the first three acts, which partly satisfied several of the demands that they had made: abandonment of the increase in the TICPE, increase in the minimum wage, the reverting of tax exemption for overtime work, abolition of the increase in the CSG (*generalized social contribution*) for retirement pensions of an amount less than €2,000 per month and exemption from tax of the end-of-year bonus.

³⁴ Beyond their mobilisation condition, it should be noted that these YV mobilised on the roundabouts, particularly peri-urban, rural and small-town residents, are also mobilised against the scarcity of public services (Collectif, 2019; Boyer et al., 2020), if not of employment (cf. works cited in the introduction) within their living spaces.

³⁵ If we can see here, at first sight, a return to an established repertoire of protest action, the fact is that most of the demonstration acts were not registered in advance with the prefecture as required by the law, and sometimes less classically protesting than deliberately confrontational.

³⁶ In this political field, we note the absence of concessions made by the executive power (the Great Debate?), if not, on the contrary, the extreme firmness then in place, with an unprecedented police and judicial repression.

³⁷ Socialisation, one of the conditions for a co-presence within the same space (Ripoll, 2008; Dechézelles & Olive, 2017), and which has undoubtedly been catalysed by the police repression commonly experienced.



of involvement among the YV (Boyer et al. 2020; Algan et al. 2020) by exploring the various economic, socio-residential and electoral attributes and not just the morphological, demographic and administrative spaces where participants live—and yet not necessarily mobilise. On the other hand, and in a qualitative mode, a campaign of comprehensive interviews borrowing from different configurations, would still need to be conducted. This would make it possible to typify the differentiated relationships of the YV to their living spaces and their unequal resources according to their 'localised social spaces' (Laferté 2014), but also the multiple modes of space appropriation and their biographical consequences, to keep reporting on what this movement tells us about the social divisions of the national space.

Appendix

See Figs. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

Summary table of mobilisation actions with respect to the types of spaces

	according to towns			according to actions			acc. to participants	
	Blocage 17 novembre [0 ; 1]	Ministry (17th Nov.) [0 ; 1]	Ministry (full) [0 ; 1]	Blocage 17 novembre [0 ; 3]	Ministry (17th Nov.) [0 ; 17]	Ministry (full) [0 ; 85]	Ministry (17th Nov.) [0 ; 3610]	Ministry (full) [0 ; 66996]
urban	0,242	0,227	0,350	0,237	0,194	0,230	0,076	0,055
rural	-0,242	-0,227	-0,350	-0,237	-0,194	-0,230	-0,076	-0,055
central-city	0,328	0,212	0,280	0,330	0,242	0,318	0,123	0,116
suburbs	0,035	0,094	0,165	0,032	0,049	0,049	0,012*	-0,003**
isolated town	0,117	0,100	0,171	0,112	0,077	0,076	0,011*	0,00**
town belonging to the Parisian urban unit	0,024	-0,009*	0,004**	0,025	-0,004**	0,012*	0,010*	0,029
town belonging to a urban unit of 200,000-1,999,999 inhabitants	0,085	0,081	0,124	0,091	0,062	0,091	0,041	0,062
town belonging to a urban unit of 50,000 to 199,999 inhabitants	0,114	0,089	0,167	0,111	0,089	0,164	0,061	0,037
town belonging to a urban unit of 10,000 to 49,999 inhabitants	0,173	0,157	0,202	0,168	0,159	0,148	0,043	0,011*
town belonging to a urban unit of 2,000 to 9,999 inhabitants	0,088	0,108	0,175	0,082	0,070	0,062	0,011*	-0,003**
town belonging to a large urban pole (10,000 jobs or more)	0,190	0,156	0,248	0,191	0,151	0,217	0,087	0,078
peri-urban - ring of large pole and multipolarized towns	-0,075	-0,062	-0,078	-0,074	-0,061	-0,075	-0,027	-0,023
town belonging to a small or medium pole (1,500 to less than 10,000 jobs)	0,166	0,162	0,216	0,157	0,143	0,129	0,026	0,005**
territory under urban influence	-0,064	-0,058	-0,095	-0,063	-0,052	-0,064	-0,022	-0,015*
town located outside the influence of the poles	-0,054	-0,050	-0,083	-0,053	-0,046	-0,055	-0,019	-0,014*
state capital	0,036	0,030	0,019	0,102	0,126	0,327	0,207	0,615
town with prefectural status	0,480	0,228	0,279	0,492	0,336	0,502	0,191	0,204
regular town	-0,481	-0,229	-0,280	-0,497	-0,343	-0,520	-0,202	-0,238

Fig. 13 Characterisation of mobilisation locations by type of space (Pearson correlation coefficient approach). Sources: INSEE 2016 communal database, MI database, blocage17novembre.com database, É. Walker. Reading notes: in the manner of Hugues Lagrange’s analysis of the spatiality of the so-called banlieue movement in 2005 (Lagrange 2008), and in line with subsequent work clarifying this type of method (Péron 2019; Davoine et al. 2020), the 34,841 French metropolitan towns in 2019 were coded, on the basis of a spatial join under GIS, as follows. For the results contained in the “at the level of the towns” column of the table, ‘0’ for towns that had no intention of mobilising with the yellow vests or did not mobilise with the yellow vests although they were surveyed by the forces of law and order (FDO) and ‘1’ otherwise; for the “at the actions level” column, “n” for towns having experienced yellow vests mobilisation or n yellow vests mobilisations in the case of a survey by the Police forces and “0” otherwise; for the “at the individual level” column, “n” for towns having experienced the gathering of n mobilised Yellow vests according to the survey conducted by the Police forces and “0” otherwise. On these bases, a correlation coefficient is calculated for each geographical variable modality retained in the analysis according to the Pearson method, in a semi-automated manner using XlStat®. Unless otherwise indicated, all the coefficients are significant at the significance threshold of 1 in 10,000 (p < 0.0001), for a risk of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true is less than 0.01%. For values marked with a “*”, the p-value is < 0.1 and the risk of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true is less than 10%; for those marked with a “**”, the p-value is < 1, the correlation expressed by the associated value therefore being uninterpretable



Town with intentional or identified mobilisation with respect to all french metropolitan towns	number of protestors			percentages (or averages when underlined)			difference (points)				
	Blocage17 nov (17/11)	Ministry (full)	metrop. France	Blocage17 (17/11)	Ministry (full)	metrop. France	Blocage17 nov	Ministry (17/11)			
0-14 y.o	3093020	2206471	4368060	11687561	16,4	16,5	16,9	18,1	-1,8	-1,6	-1,3
15-29 y.o	4158338	2747804	5286403	11381659	22,0	20,5	20,4	17,7	4,3	2,9	2,8
30-44 y.o	3556778	2508588	4824574	12239067	18,8	18,7	18,6	19,0	-0,2	-0,2	-0,3
45-59 y.o	3428346	2499303	4833321	12810037	18,1	18,7	18,7	19,9	-1,7	-1,2	-1,2
60-74 y.o	2821415	2083696	4000968	10302636	14,9	15,6	15,5	16,0	-1,1	-0,4	-0,5
75-89 y.o	1597841	1155300	2219698	5283680	8,4	8,6	8,6	8,2	0,3	0,4	0,4
90 y.o or more	257909	182975	346689	763450	1,4	1,4	1,3	1,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
No diploma, certificate of general education	3930897	2831349	5585215	13648130	28,9	29,1	29,8	29,0	-0,1	0,1	0,8
Certificate of professional competence, vocational training certificate	2817871	2112313	4222399	11656588	20,7	21,7	22,5	24,8	-4,0	-3,1	-2,3
Baccalauréat	2178161	1558738	3048948	7942548	16,0	16,0	16,3	16,9	-0,8	-0,9	-0,6
Higher education diploma	4656326	3232574	5892559	13808363	34,3	33,2	31,4	29,3	4,9	3,9	2,1
Immigrants	2295541	1650921	2955376	6095540	12,1	12,3	11,4	9,5	2,7	2,9	2,0
Non-immigrants	16618106	11733210	22924337	58373211	87,9	87,7	88,6	90,5	-2,7	-2,9	-2,0
Individual farmers in active employment (15-64 y.o)	20807	24291	49868	400286	0,2	0,3	0,3	1,0	-0,8	-0,7	-0,7
Craftsmen, shopkeeper and business executive (15-64 y.o)	408654	308065	588181	1659331	3,3	3,6	3,6	4,1	-0,8	-0,5	-0,5
Managers and high intellectual professions in active employment (15-64 y.o)	1701666	1182828	2046272	4623502	13,9	13,9	12,4	11,4	2,5	2,4	1,0
Intermediate professionals in active employment (15-64 y.o)	1880859	1317686	2367710	6731051	15,4	15,4	15,6	16,7	-1,2	-1,2	-1,1
Employed in active employment (15-64 y.o)	1986532	1414237	2708842	7163459	16,3	16,6	16,9	17,7	-1,5	-1,2	-0,8
Workmen in active employment (15-64 y.o)	1237025	941605	1868071	5240188	10,1	11,0	11,4	13,0	-2,8	-1,9	-1,6
Unemployed (15-64 y.o)	1461688	993175	1915257	4068680	12,0	11,6	11,6	10,1	1,9	1,6	1,6
Inactive (15-64 y.o)	3505075	2355116	4629313	10513332	28,7	27,6	28,1	26,0	2,7	1,6	2,1
Homeowners	8099464	6127529	12261470	38210599	44,2	47,1	48,8	60,6	-16,5	-13,5	-11,9
Tenant (no public housing)	5705908	3814892	7105476	13792484	31,1	29,3	28,3	21,9	9,2	7,5	6,4
Tenant in public housing	4099046	2745584	5212715	9754730	22,4	21,1	20,7	15,5	6,9	5,6	5,3
Ex-gratia housing	431675	312640	554418	1257156	2,4	2,4	2,2	2,0	0,4	0,4	0,2
Average standard of living	-	-	-	-	19948	20476	20536	20499	8612	-332	-273
Poverty rate	-	-	-	-	17,1	15,2	13,4	13,2	2,4	0,8	0,7
Share of activity revenues	-	-	-	-	66,1	66,9	67,1	73,5	-7,4	-6,6	-6,4
Share of retirement pension and annuities	-	-	-	-	32,9	32,9	32,6	28,5	4,4	4,4	4,1
Share of property income and others	-	-	-	-	9,4	9,4	9,3	10,0	-0,6	-0,6	-0,7
Share of social benefits as a whole	-	-	-	-	7,1	6,1	6,2	5,4	1,7	0,7	0,8
Share of taxes	-	-	-	-	15,5	15,4	15,3	17,4	1,9	2,0	2,1
1st Standard of living decile	-	-	-	-	10822	11502	11478	10948	126,6	553,9	529,8
9th standard of living decile	-	-	-	-	34557	34708	34557	37880	-3323,4	-3180,2	-3323,0
Households with car	4552340	3046120	5974619	13273523	70,4	67,4	66,2	57,3	13,1	10,0	8,9
Households owning two cars or more	1909700	1475931	3047356	6982452	29,6	32,6	33,8	42,7	-13,1	-10,0	-8,9
Houses	3148025	2535470	5318890	19251740	20,1	33,6	37,2	56,1	-27,0	-22,6	-18,9
Flats	7660962	5014646	8977571	15038421	79,9	66,4	62,8	43,9	27,0	22,6	18,9
Principal residence with one room	993838	65809	1102029	1640016	10,8	10,2	9,0	5,8	5,0	4,4	3,2
Principal residence with 2 rooms	1793581	1199478	2110915	3634229	19,4	18,6	17,2	12,8	6,7	5,9	4,5
Principal residence with 3 rooms	2377960	1580874	3012535	6021717	25,7	24,6	24,6	21,1	4,6	3,4	3,5
Principal residence with 4 rooms	2084897	1469586	2920487	7134598	22,6	22,8	23,8	25,0	-2,5	-2,2	-1,2
Principal residence with 5 rooms or more	1985366	1529431	3106327	10066234	21,5	23,8	25,4	35,3	-13,8	-11,6	-10,0
Principal residence built before 1919	1216447	951378	1538157	3933080	13,4	15,0	12,8	14,1	-0,7	-0,9	-1,3
Principal residence built between 1919-1945	975397	663732	1214876	2619853	10,7	10,5	10,1	9,4	1,3	1,1	0,7
Principal residence built between 1946-1970	2509662	1610416	3144135	6118062	27,6	25,4	26,1	21,9	5,7	3,5	4,2
Principal residence built between 1971-1990	2508392	1804671	3470927	8150171	27,6	28,5	28,8	29,2	-1,6	-0,7	-0,4
Principal residence built between 1991-2005	1209837	827464	1675960	4341502	13,3	13,1	13,9	15,6	-2,3	-2,5	-1,6
Principal residence built between 2006-2013	681728	481568	1004669	2746816	7,5	7,6	8,3	9,8	-2,4	-2,2	-1,5
Workplace agricultural employment	56663	58302	114208	685624	0,5	0,8	0,8	2,7	-2,1	-1,9	-1,8
Workplace industrial employment	1002637	761480	1506986	3174759	9,1	9,9	10,8	12,3	-3,3	-2,4	-1,5
Workplace construction-related employment	517942	381933	731869	1664105	4,7	5,0	5,3	6,5	-1,8	-1,5	-1,2
Workplace business, transport and other services-related employment	3506695	3884883	6796425	11990570	49,8	50,7	48,8	46,5	3,3	4,2	2,2
Workplace public admin., teaching, health and social welfare-related employment	3965835	2572060	4783134	8244487	35,9	33,6	34,3	32,0	3,9	1,6	2,3

Fig. 14 Summary table of the characteristics (age, education, professions and socio-professional categories, housing status, motorisation, housing type and workplace according to sector of activity) of the towns in which the YV mobilised. Sources: blocage17novembre database, MI database, 'Jaune vif' database, INSEE 2016 population census, Filosofi database, É. Walker



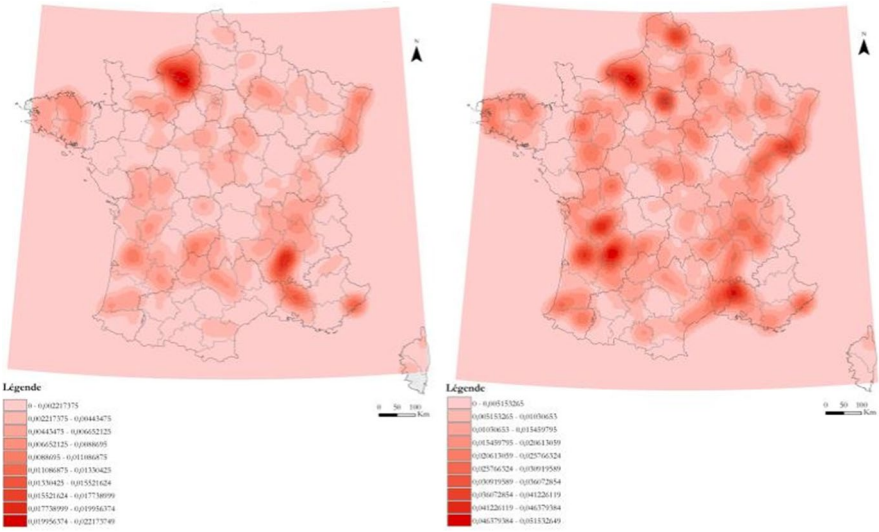


Fig. 15 Geographic concentration of YV gatherings between the 16th and the 18th November 2018 (left) and between the 12th November 2018 and the 2nd March 2019 (right) approached based on the kernel method. Source: MI database, É. Walker



Type of gathering /Type of place		Suburb	Rural community	Isolated town	City centre	Total	Total number (excluding missing values)	Weighting
Roundabout and demonstration combined	All metropolitan population	37%	23%	9%	32%	100%	64,468,692	Municipality*number of inhabitants
	All metropolitan municipalities	13%	80%	3%	4%	100%	34841	None
	MI base November to March	24%	16%	12%	47%	100%	7078	None
	MI base 17 November	26%	21%	13%	40%	100%	1768	None
	Base blocage17novembre.com	21%	13%	17%	50%	101%	788	None
Roundabout (jaune vif)	Absolute - mobilisation locations surveyed via jaune vif	36%	18%	15%	30%	100%	33	None
	Individuals - Place of mobilisation	30%	5%	10%	55%	100%	548	None
	Individuals - Place of residence	24%	25%	14%	38%	100%	548	None
	Individuals - place of residence - weighted	4%	1%	2%	94%	100%	22363001	Size of the municipality of residence of individuals surveyed according to their observed distribution
	All types of locations with at least one participant	48%	11%	8%	33%	100%	191	None
	All types of locations with at least one participant	47%	4%	5%	44%	100%	2323888	Size of the municipality of residence
Type of gathering Type of venue								
Demonstration (jaune vif)	Absolute - mobilisation locations surveyed via Jaune vif	6%	0%	6%	88%	100%	16	None
	Individuals - Place of mobilisation	1%	0%	0%	99%	100%	793	None
	Individuals - Place of residence	32%	14%	8%	46%	100%	720	None
	Individuals - place of residence - weighted	5%	0%	0%	95%	100%	123926476	Size of the municipality of residence of individuals surveyed according to their observed distribution
	All types of locations with at least one participant	2%	0%	1%	97%	100%	295	None
	All types of locations with at least one participant	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	18448548	Size of the municipality of residence

Fig. 16 Mobility between place of residence and place of gathering of the YV surveyed according to the type of action. *Source:* 'Jaune Vif' database, December 2019, urban units and ZAUs base, RP 2016 INSEE, P. Blavier. *Field:* All $N=472$ YV interviewed (excluding missing values for place of residence) at one of the $N=38$ roundabouts surveyed and all $N=793$ YV interviewed at one of the $N=58$ demonstrations surveyed. *Interpretation:* Among the YV gathered on roundabouts, 55% were surveyed on a roundabout located in a central city, but 33% live in a town with similar characteristics. Among the YV, 99% were interviewed in a demonstration in a central city, but 46% live in a town with similar characteristics



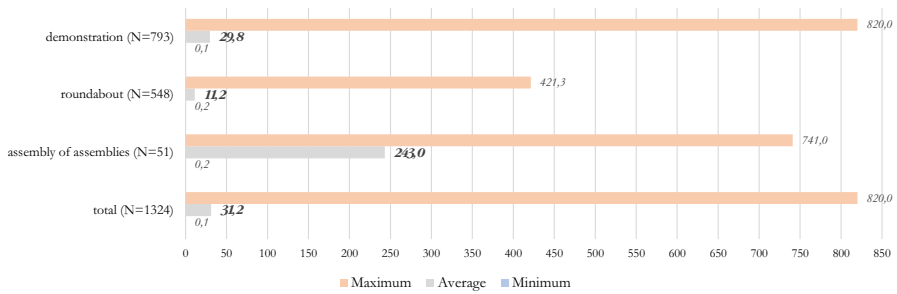


Fig. 17 Minimum, maximum and average distances between places of residence and places of gathering for roundabouts, demonstrations, and assembly of assemblies and the whole base. *Source:* "Jaune vif" database, É. Walker

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