

Chapter 5

A Post-Contentious Turning Point for the Contentious French? Crisis Without Protest in France

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Introduction

The main argument of this chapter is to show that France no longer fits the typical portrait of a contentious country, as suggested by traditional scholarship of protest about the country (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1995). The economic crisis, which has had a strong impact in France, provides an opportunity to explore that French citizens are breaking with their secular history of being the ‘contentious French’ (Tilly, 1986). Yet, the chapter also suggests that this ‘post-contentious’ turning point does not necessarily amount to a broader process of acquiescence, as found elsewhere in Europe (Cinalli, 2004, 2007; Cinalli and Giugni, 2016). In fact, a process of substituting protest with other forms of political participation is identified as an ongoing trend, thus opening space for further research on how collective action may look like in future decades. The argument about a post-contentious France, which so counter-intuitively sits in the background of the economic crisis, draws upon the main French findings from the LIVEWHAT survey. In particular, we focus on a large volume of different forms of participation with a view to weigh the specific importance of protest. Naturally, we also look into the main variables usually associated with variations of political participation, focusing in particular on the usual suspects of age, gender education, and labour market position. These findings are then placed in the broader context of contemporary French politics—including the presidential election campaign of 2012 and policy implications of the economic crisis— so as to open more room for their interpretation.

Political Participation in France at the Time of the Economic Crisis

Following Teorell, Torcal, and Montero (2007) and Brady (1999:737), it is possible to define political participation as “action[s] by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcomes”. This somewhat broad conceptualisation goes well beyond electoral participation and includes more private and informal actions. In what follows, we systematically exclude electoral participation, as it is still the most widespread form of participation and high numbers of electoral participants would overshadow information from other forms of participation. In fact, some scholars have also argued that voting is qualitatively different from all other forms of political participation (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). Most of the commonly used datasets include a limited number of items that can serve as proxies for political participation. However, using the LIVEWHAT dataset, we can identify no less than 16 separate survey items that can serve as indicators of non-electoral political participation. In what follows, we provide a two-fold descriptive overview of these variables in the French context. First, we individually discuss these items. Second, we harmonise these different items into distinct dimensions to provide further analysis, leading to interpretation.

Starting with the discussion of 16 items, they all indicate some form of political participation such as contacting a politician, donating money, wearing a badge, signing a petition, boycotting a product, buying a product, attending a political meeting, attending a demonstration, joining a strike, joining an occupation, damaging things, using personal violence, discussing or sharing an opinion (online), joining/starting group or following politician (online), visiting a political website (online), and searching for political information (online). Table 5.1 provides an overview of the percentage of French respondents who have (and have not) participated in each of these political activities in the past 12 months. We provide both weighted and unweighted percentages.

[Table 5.1]

This leads to a number of interesting observations regarding the principal activities of French respondents. First and foremost, we notice that more French respondents participate in online forms of political participation than in offline forms, at least relatively speaking. In line with a high rate of internet users,¹ almost one third of French respondents in our sample indicate that they have searched online for political information. Furthermore, about 15 per cent of respondents indicate they have either discussed or shared their opinion online or visited a political website. Second, as some of the most common forms of offline political participation, we can identify signing a petition (18.1 per cent) and boycotting a product (17.1 per cent). Combined, these first two observations would indicate that French respondents are not showing signs of acquiescence at the time of economic crisis.

However, some of the more direct or ‘active’ forms of participation continue to be marginal amongst French respondents in line with a traditional political culture that avoids open display of political preferences in the same way that one finds, for example, in Anglo-Saxon countries (Kuhn, 2004; Pélabay, 2014). Accordingly, contacting a politician (7.7 per cent), attending a political meeting (5.3 per cent), donating money (4.9 per cent) and wearing a badge (3.9 per cent) display in our sample only limited appeal, since none of these activities manage to mobilise more than 10 per cent of French respondents.² If we combine this observation with the discussion above, we find some initial support for our argument that some of the initially non-traditional forms of participation by the ‘contentious French’ are now becoming more popular or ‘mainstream’. This is consistent with the finding that some of the ‘harsher’ (and inadvertently, also more active) forms of political participation, like damaging things or using violence, remain quite uncommon.

These initial distributions allow us to make some preliminary observations. However, if we want to provide a more holistic and inferential account of political participation, our analysis needs to construct one or more measures that allow us to harmonise some of the

information discussed above. Here, the measures used for different forms of political participation are diverse. They range from simple dichotomous variables to different indices, either aggregate or scaled. Despite the diversity of measurements, many of them have an important resemblance. They are made – or better, constructed – in support of underlying theoretical dimension/s, most often with little connection between theory and method. To account for such an anomaly, as well as the original conjecture that political participation is a latent (continuous) variable constructed from a number of individual activities (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978), we use confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm any underlying dimensions. Not only can CFA validate the dependent variable's proposed dimensionality, it also allows for the estimation of the variation alongside the latent dimensions into separate dependent variables.

[Table 5.2]

Since van Deth (2014) upholds it is unlikely that different dimensions of political participation are independent, this study accounts for clustering by not compelling the reference axes of the CFA to be orthogonal. Table 5.2 illustrates the result of our factor analysis of 16 different items (total Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$). It brings forward four distinct latent dimensions: institutional (contacted a politician, donated money, wore a badge, attended a political meeting), non-institutional (signed a petition, boycotted a product, bought a product, demonstration), direct action or protest (joined a strike, joined an occupation, damaged things, used personal violence) and online (discussed or shared an opinion, joined/started group or followed politician, visited a political website, searched for political information). Overall, given out wealth of survey items (16 items, as opposed to 6-8 items in most large-scale surveys), it should not be surprising we can offer a more detailed and multi-dimensional picture of political participation.

If we plot the average position of the French respondent when it comes to their participation in politics, we can gain further insights into both the relative levels and frequency of the different forms of political participation. Figure 5.1 provides such a general perspective of our four dimensions of political participation. The first crucial result is that factor three – that is, direct action or protest – stands out as the most marginal, both in relative and absolute terms. Considering this factor consists of joining a strike, joining an occupation, damaging things and using personal violence, it is not surprising it is in line with observations made above regarding some of the ‘harsher’ forms of participation [cf. Table 5.1]. Moreover, this falls in line with some of the general observations throughout the literature that indicate such protest activism is only practiced by a small proportion of individuals (Fillieule, 1997; Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2008; Chabanet and Lacheret, 2016). The main point to emphasize in the context of our argument here is that this trend is not that different among the no longer contentious French, even at the time of deepest economic grievances.

[Figure 5.1]

Yet the ‘post-contentious French’ systematically resort to forms of political participation other than protest, thus showing hardly any acquiescence and apathetic withdrawal from politics. Traditional forms of individual political engagement (under the form of institutional participation), collective not-disruptive forms of mobilisation (under the form of non-institutional participation), together with newer forms of online activism show that respondents are hardly acquiescent at the time of the economic crisis. Figure 5.1 also enables us to observe that institutional participation is much less common in France than non-institutional mobilisation and online activism. This supports the initial observations made in Table 5.1 regarding the individual items. At the same time, this also confirms some of the hypotheses in the literature that suggest non-institutional participation might be the ‘new’ normal form of political participation (Mayer, 2010; Ion, 2012; Rosanvallon, 2015).

In particular, the study of online forms of participation stands out as something new. Given our initial observations in Table 5.1, it is not surprising that we find some online activities among the most common forms of political participation in France. Whereas recent studies present similar findings in other countries (e.g. Best and Krueger, 2005; Gibson et al., 2005 and 2014; Chadwick and Howard, 2010), the French context presents some specific features. The internet has mainly developed in France as an alternative means of information and discussion space, tightly connected to the mainstream media space. During the 2005 referendum about the draft European Constitution, activist groups used the internet to oppose mainstream media and established political parties that were largely in favour of the YES vote (Fouetillou, 2008, Cardon and Granjon, 2014). This was somewhat a turning point in the development of this form of participation (Mabi and Theviot, 2014). This campaign and online dynamics more generally opened a more participatory space and allowed for the inclusion of (i) themes of precariousness and exclusion, and (ii) the precarious and excluded citizens themselves (Blondeau and Allard, 2007). Afterwards, in subsequent elections, the internet has become a battlefield ancillary to the medias and public meetings; political parties as well as interest groups and NGOs have developed strategies to gain digital presence and visibility, especially on social networks (Greffet, 2011; Greffet et al., 2014; Gibson et al., 2014). One may thus wonder why our sample does not show a stronger weight of online participation, since the internet is more broadly changing how many French people become informed (Jouet et al., 2011; Le Hay et al., 2011) and has become an important tool for public expression (Wojcik et al., 2008). Yet it should be emphasized that only a minority of citizens is involved in intensive forms of online political participation, while experiences in using the internet as a participative tool for policymaking have generally had a very low audience and impact (Monnooyer-Smith and Wojcik, 2012). This is in line with the fact that active online political participation mainly concerns highly politicized citizens (Michalska et al., 2015), and the internet might well appear as the ‘weapon

of the strong' (Schlozman et al., 2010), giving still more political resources and power to those who already have them.

[Figure 5.2]

Figure 5.1 and its subsequent discussion are particularly useful to gauge the relative levels and forms of political participation. However, it does not tell us anything about absolute levels of political participation. We know from the literature that overall participation continues to decrease in most industrial countries (Mair 2002 and 2013; Wattenberg, 2002; Franklin, 2004; Delwit, 2013). Even further, in France, absolute levels of political participation are far below European averages and French citizens are typically fairly limited when it comes to general political involvement (cf. Lijphart, 1997; Melo and Stockemer, 2014). Figure 5.2 illustrates this for the different forms of political participation. The vast majority of French respondents score extremely low on the respective participation dimensions. While this largely confirms the low percentages we found in Table 5.1, it does provide a unique perspective because it confirms this finding for the underlying participatory dimensions as well and already indicates that it is quite possible that within the same dimension of participation, it is actually the same people who systematically participate in different participatory acts.

Who are the Post-Contentious French?

So far, evidence from the LIVWHAT survey shows that protest has not been a central form of participation through the hard times of economic crisis. While this observation is accurate, there is a need to add some comments that mitigate its scope. Most crucially, the sense of surprise about low levels of protest is based on the idea that France is traditionally a country with a high level of social and political contention. This belief seems to be borne out by statistical analysis, in any case throughout the 1990s, that is, a period of time during which France was the European country that experienced the highest levels of protest (Kriesi et al.

1995; Nam, 2007). Nevertheless this capacity for protest was rarely linear and often led to extremely intensive peaks.³ Accordingly, the first wave of protest against the economic crisis took place under the Occupy frame in May 2011, spreading from Paris to the provinces, particularly in Lyon, Marseille, Poitiers, Toulouse, and several towns in the southwest of the country. In all, twenty or so towns were involved. Yet protests were rare or of short duration,⁴ and involved a few hundred people, except in Paris where a few demonstrations brought together a few thousand protestors.⁵ Of course, it is possible that the overall propensity of the French to protest has undergone a momentary slump or is following a temporality of its own, without this prefiguring its future development. One may add that the density of civil society in France, especially its associative and trade union sectors (Bérout et al., 2008), is notably weak (Balme and Chabanet, 2008), which may partly explain the somewhat eruptive and unpredictable nature of protest. Overall, the situation is at once complex and relatively paradoxical, combining a high level of protest with a decline in the structures that were for a long time the main channel of expression of popular discontent (Fillieule, 1997).

Accordingly, the study of political discontent in France at the time of crisis tells us straight away about the need to look beyond protest. Surprisingly, yet interestingly, France as the most contentious country among its European neighbours seems to have entered a new post-contentious phase, where direct action and disruptive forms of mobilisation give way (possibly) to alternative ways of revealing political discontent. The potential route from contentious to post-contentious participation, however, is identified in a number of parallel developments, showing that the fall of protest is not coterminous with true political abstentionism and withdrawal. In fact, political abstentionism may well grow in situations of social exclusion, more so than (electoral) protest (Lancelot, 1968; Pierru, 2005; Braconnier and Mayer, 2015). Furthermore, it is essential to reflect on the specific position of youngest generations, with an eye on a widespread, more critical model redefining the relationships to politics. In this case,

research can focus on signs of ‘negative politicization’ (Missika, 1992) to see whether political identification is less at play than contest and systematic opposition to institutional politics. Among these signs, one can look for growing political abstention used as a protest tool to express dissatisfaction towards political parties and politicians, increasing protest voting for populist leaders or the non-mainstream parties, as well as trivialization and legitimization of demonstrations (Davezies and Guilluy, 2013). We also need to check for the role of education, owing to the traditional division between people with and without qualifications. So, we want to see if those who are more educated are more deeply involved along this potential route (moving from contentious to post-contentious politics), or are more simply marginalised *vis-à-vis* all forms of political participation, including those which are replacing traditional protesting.

Shifting our attention to some of the underlying factors that can help explain both the levels and the diversity of political participation in France, emphasis must be placed on who participates and according to which different forms. In this case, a set of four models including the main socio-demographic variables can help us identify those who participate in different forms of political participation.

[Table 5.3]

Education is a significant contributor throughout our different forms of participation. This indicates that as French people become higher educated, they are more likely to participate in the different forms of participation, possibly even political participation in general. This would support some of the claims throughout the literature that political participation results from (cognitive) resources acquired throughout e.g. an educational track (Converse, 1972; Gaxie, 2007). Furthermore, it is important to emphasize the crucial role that education plays in France with reference to online political participation (Michalska et al., 2015). In a similar vein, we do find that when a respondent is employed, s/he is more likely to engage in online activism, thereby strengthening the virtuous triangulation going on between education, employment, and

online activism. Employment also goes together with non-institutional forms of political participation, in line with the fact that non-institutional political participation (just as online political participation) stands out for being less ‘active’ as well as requiring a more modest time commitment.

More surprisingly, however, we do not find evidence that age has a strong impact on the decision to participate in specific forms of political participation. There is only some initial evidence that the 26-35-year-olds are more likely to engage in direct action and online activism, particularly compared to younger cohorts. Of course, we were surprised by the finding that age is not a strong predictor either when focusing on online political participation, since young people are almost all regularly connected to the internet and more active users than older people. Yet we are also aware that political participation in general is linked to interest in politics, which is traditionally lower among young people (Quintelier, 2007).

It is quite remarkable that gender appears to be significant throughout our models (with the exception of direct action), indicating that men are actually more likely to participate than women, regardless of the form of participation. While – with time – women have expanded their resources through education, higher levels of employment, etc., resource mobilisation scholars typically argue this expanded set of resources (further) develop women’s civic skills, which provide them with more assets and opportunities to participate politically (e.g. Gallego, 2007; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010). However, in France, this argument does not appear to hold and gender differences are not significant predictors for the different forms of political participation (Allwood et al., 2000).

To complement our initial analysis of who participates in France, we further engage in a behavioural analysis of those same voters, while accounting for their socio-demographic profiles. To comprehensively do so, we include several variables that gauge political positions and socio-political attitudes, as well as different perceptions of political actors.⁶

[Table 5.4]

Most generally, individuals have certain positions alongside an economic and a more cultural axis and often are perceived as the principal drivers of political decisions. Therefore, it is quite surprising to see that an individual's economic left-right position is only a significant predictor for some of the more active forms of participation, namely direct action and non-institutional participation. As an individual increasingly favours redistribution, s/he will participate more in those forms of political participation. At the same time, we find that cultural positioning does play a substantial role across the board (except for direct action). More specifically, we find significant evidence that as people are more culturally progressive (libertarian), they tend to engage in different forms of political participation more systematically. So, together, we could argue that a left-wing position, whether economic or cultural, proves to be more advantageous for political participation.

Most consistently, between the different forms of participation, we find that internal efficacy has an effect on political participation. Generally speaking, we find evidence that the more respondents actually understand politics, they also increase their political participation. However, for more active form of political participation, like political violence, the relationship is reversed. We find that an increased understanding of politics actually decreases this particular form of participation. This would indicate that direct action might be more prominent amongst those who do not fully understand politics. Furthermore, we also find a negative impact of external efficacy on political participation for online and non-institutional participation. In other words, those who do not particularly believe the government will respond to their demands are more prone to engage in online and non-institutional forms of political participation.

Electoral Politics and Policy-Making: Looking Beyond the Post-Contentious Route

We can now move on to consider the extent to which the route between the contentious and post-contentious French is embedded within the broader context offered by contemporary French politics, looking in particular at elections and policy-making respectively. Starting with the consideration of electoral politics, some observers have pointed out that the anti-austerity mobilisation began to emerge on the international and European scene in the middle of 2011, at a time when the main thrust of French political activity had turned to the presidential election of May 2012. This event harnessed a large part of the social discontent at the time. With some representatives of left-wing political parties being ideologically very close to movements, the very real possibility of a left-wing victory in the elections may have convinced some French citizens to opt for change via the ballot box, or other forms of institutional, non-institutional and online activism rather than a strategy based on the streets. It is true that, during the presidential campaign, the visibility of the Left Front and the rhetoric of the Greens and of some leaders of the Socialist Party on the necessity of 'deglobalisation' gave the impression that the ideas of anti-austerity might be translated into true political transformations had the left won the election. One could argue that the presence of influential allies supporting the mobilization and even picking up some of its demand, may have lessened its protest capacity (Tarrow, 1994), and hence, favoured the shift to other forms of political participation.

One would find here the symptoms of a strongly politicised society, even amongst the youth (Bréchon, 1998), whose expectations would still broadly find an institutional political expression. In particular, the 2012 presidential election has captured a relevant part of protest and political dissatisfaction through their votes and also through their abstention. On the one side, among the leftist young voters, Hollande obviously represented the possibility of a concrete political change compared to Sarkozy's mandate. On the other side, among a number of young voters, especially the less educated already at work, a vote for Le Pen represented both an act of protest against the 'elite' and the possibility to express their frustration and

difficulties *vis-à-vis* the economic crisis.⁷ So mutually combined, institutional and non-institutional types of involvement have appeared as being not mutually exclusive but rather being increasingly intertwined. The range of tools used in democratic expression has diversified hugely. Last but not least, the level of the abstention at the first round of the election was highest in 2007 among the young voters. Even those more educated and usually more participative abstained (abstentions were at 32% among students).

Of course, one would expect a surge of indignation in France in the event that the new left-wing government and parliamentary majority did not succeed in finding solutions to the social problems facing the country. Yet, emphasis should still be placed on the serious crisis of confidence and credibility that the left-wing government has undergone, and its incapacity to reverse the economic crisis, thus prompting use of other types of forms of political participation. An additional factor to consider at the macro-level also includes the more or less hard stance of the government. The two most recent large protest movements – against the reform of universities in 2007 and against reform of the retirement system in 2010 – were marked by the intransigence of the government, which did not yield to demonstrators. Also, in this case it is possible that this intransigence prompted most of those who struggled against liberal globalization to direct their desire to mobilise to other forms of political participation. For a long time, the French political system has no longer talked to groups at the margins, and all of this while mass unemployment, poverty, insecurity and the relegation phenomena are on the rise.

Although France has been facing an economic crisis nearly as harsh as that impacting on other countries badly hit in southern Europe, with poverty and unemployment on a steady rise, it is important to consider the extent to which the country could rely on the beneficial and protective impact of its welfare state for softening the adverse economic effects of crisis. The French universalist system (Esping-Andersen, 1990) fulfils its role of buffer and regulator of

conflicts, which is the main function of social protection in periods of recession and mass unemployment (Piven and Cloward, 1971). Applied to the whole population, the explanation can be convincing, but it is weaker with regard to those under the age of 25. Certainly, the youth unemployment level in France may be much lower than in countries strongly hit by the crisis, such as Spain or Greece, but it remains significantly higher than the French national average. Above all, the main social assistance provisions in force in France remain inaccessible – in fact, if not by law – to youths under the age of 25 who are therefore particularly socially vulnerable (Chabanet and Guigni, 2013). Although diplomas represent a kind of antidote against precarity and still guarantee that one will eventually be able to obtain stable employment, most recruitment of young people today takes the form of an insecure contract or one of limited duration (CEREQ, 2011). In particular, the French labour market operates according to a dichotomous rationale that protects the most educated wage earners at the expense of those who leave the education system early and are often untrained (INSEE, 2013). A survey carried out in 2010 amongst several thousand young people who completed their education in 2007 showed that 92 per cent of those holding a doctorate were employed, stable or otherwise, just as did 88 per cent of those who had graduated from an engineering or commerce institute, and 80 per cent of those with an undergraduate degree (bachelor) (CEREQ, 2011). By contrast, only 55 per cent of those with a college diploma and 48 per cent of young people leaving the school system without a diploma were employed (CEREQ, 2011).

Young people do not form a homogenous group when it comes to politics (Bourdieu, 1978). Level of education is an important determinant of voting behaviours and attitudes. The most highly educated members of younger generations, though highly critical of politics, are deeply attached to representative democracy. Their internalization of universalist values, with which they interpret political issues, compensates for their scepticism of politics, and underpins their unwavering attachment to the current system of representation (Muxel, 2011). As for less

educated young people, although they more readily embrace universalist values than older people with the same level of education, their universalist beliefs are not sufficiently strong to compensate for their relative rejection of politics (Muxel, 2010). Their trust in representative democracy has been more seriously undermined, and their estrangement from politics extends to a weakening of their belief in democracy itself (Braconnier and Dormagen, 2014). When compared to their highly educated contemporaries, they are less likely to be involved in any kind of civic participation, such as voting and political protest, and more likely to view in a favourable light the kind of authoritarian regimes which rely on charismatic and populist personal leadership and are based on limiting the power of democratically elected bodies, such as Parliament. Simply put, the dangers of an increasing deficit are greatest among the less educated young.

These trends do not amount to a worrying political withdrawal, hiding some crucial evidence for some consistent developments taking place between a contentious and a post-contentious age. Suffice it to say that people at the margins have demonstrated the capacity to organize politically on the basis of many previous developments. In fact, actions of solidarity with the precarious continue at the present time. For example, some of these so-called ‘Robin Hood’ operations have been conducted by some of EDF employees who, against the advice of their managers, restore electricity to people who cannot pay their bills. These actions are particularly supported by the CGT. This shows the possibility of prompting a transformation of trade union action and renewed political commitment (Bérout, 2008). At the same time, one should observe that the suburban youth who quickly deserted the French version of the Occupy movement may have done so because the labour market was able to protect and integrate the educated youth. By forcing the terms of argument, one may go as far as saying that the educated youth has no real reason to protest or even to rally, while the excluded youth (the famous ‘lost generation’) has been pushed to secede from politics and for a long time. Either way, interaction

with politics has been growing in complexity, since it is widely individualised and of more difficult aggregation within traditional collective forms of mobilisation of the contentious era.

Final Discussion

Known universally in the field of contentious politics as the protest country *par excellence*, France is emerging as a post-contentious country, where not even the economic crisis paralleled by a favourable political context has led to protest. Protest, as a specific form of political mobilisation, plays no relevant role at the time of crisis. By contrast, institutional politics stands out as a channel of political influence to consider side by side with non-institutional forms to express and to act. The chapter has thus analysed the intermingling between institutional and non-institutional forms of political participation and the fact that, especially among the youngest, the panoply of political expressions has been widespread. In the context of the economic crisis, French people can choose from among different types of participation the one which seems to be more relevant to what they would like to express at the moment, and also to protest. This trend has also emerged in the growing importance of online participation, even if a relevant cleavage is shaped between a virtuous triangulation combining high online participation with high education and high resources via employment on the one hand, and a vicious triangulation combining low online participation with low education and low resources via employment on the other. We acknowledged our surprise in finding that age is not relevant to explain online political participation, given that young people spend much time on the internet and are more active users than older people. Yet scholarship of political participation has put a final word on the fundamental role of political interest, which brings us to consider that this latter is traditionally lower among young people. Hence, our guess for future years is that older people will be more politically active online than younger people, especially when

baby-boomers (who have used computers most of their professional life) will be retiring and will have more time to engage in various political activities.

Most crucially, the chapter has showed that a key moment of political change in France comes together with other ongoing developments, say, in terms of intermittent commitment and individualised participation. This crucial moment has been put in a longer diachronic context with a view to reflect more closely on the *question sociale* in France accounting for profound transformations of political participation. In particular, we have shed light on the opening of a route leading from contentious to post-contentious French. In so doing, we have found some evidence for deep political change, particularly in terms of the relationship between young people and politics. Engagement in traditional political institutions has declined (Faucher, 2015). Partisan allegiances have become looser in the same way that social allegiances have, and the links that ordinary French have established with the political system have become more individualised than in the more recent past (Braconnier, 2010). The great political narratives have faded and no longer provide a readable map of systems of belonging to which individuals can attach themselves and become involved (Rosanvallon, 2006). In terms of social politicization, experimentation has won out over identification and affiliation among the younger generations (Muxel, 2015). Increasingly, political involvement takes place by means of many different types of expression and action. In this new post-contentious scenario, the civic norm linked to the duty to vote has weakened, but political abstention is by far prevailing on a number of various forms of political participation telling that the post-contentious French may still be a long way from final acquiescence.

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Notes

¹ This rate has reached 85% in 2016. Cf. available data online at <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country>.

² The percentage is more or less the same amongst the French population

³ See for example the strikes in the public sector or the 2006 protest against the reform of the labour law (Lindvall 2011).

⁴ But see the exception of protests in Bayonne lasting over six weeks.

⁵ On 15 October 2011, anti-austerity mobilisation organised simultaneously in several dozen countries made it possible to measure the level of mobilisation on a world scale. In Paris and in France's main provincial towns, however, no gathering of more than 3,000 people was recorded, while in other European cities attendance was much multiplied in some cases by hundreds. Suffice it to put emphasis on numbers in Madrid (500,000), Barcelona (300,000), Rome (100,000), and Lisbon (80,000).

⁶ For more details about question wordings, answer categories and descriptive statistics of these behavioural variables, we refer to the Appendix.

⁷ 17% voted for Marine Le Pen (+11 points compared to 2007). More than a third of them (35%) used the 2012 presidential election to express their discontent and vent their worries, in the process disposing of the tag of 'vote utile' (useful vote), which the two main parties in the past took for granted. To put this in perspective again, in 2007, only 20% ventured from the mainstream parties (Perrineau 2014).