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MEDIA POLARIZATION “À LA FRANÇAISE”?

Comparing the French
and American Ecosystems



REPORT MAY 2019

*There is no desire more natural
than the desire for knowledge*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In France, representative democracy is experiencing a growing mistrust that also affects the media. The latter are facing major simultaneous challenges:

- a disruption of their business model in the digital age;
- a dependence on social networks and search engines to gain visibility;
- increased competition due to the convergence of content on digital media (competition between text, video and audio on the Internet);
- increased competition due to the emergence of actors exercising their influence independently from the media (politicians, bloggers, comedians, etc.).

In the United States, these developments have contributed to the polarization of the public square, characterized by the radicalization of the conservative press, with significant impact on electoral processes.

Institut Montaigne investigated whether a similar phenomenon was at work in France. To this end, it led an in-depth study in partnership with the Sciences Po *Médialab*, the Sciences Po School of Journalism as well as the MIT Center for Civic Media. It also benefited from data collected and analyzed by the Pew Research Center*, in their report “News Media Attitudes in France”.

Going beyond “fake news”

The changes affecting the media space are often reduced to the study of their most visible symptoms. For instance, the concept of “fake news”, which has been amply commented on, falls short of encompassing the complexity of the transformations at work. In numerous countries, focusing on such symptoms has led to the adoption of regulation with mitigated results. Institut Montaigne went further and took a step back in order to look at the French media ecosystem as a whole. To do this, it analyzed 18 million tweets and 65,000 articles from March 2018 to February 2019, looking at how the media cite each other, how they are cited by users on Twitter, and grouping media together according to their citation behaviors.

Towards a polarization “à la française” opposing institutionalists to “anti-elites”?

Polarization in the United States

A 2017 study by researchers at Harvard University and the MIT Center for Civic Media demonstrated the growing polarization operating within the American media space. This study concludes that:

- the polarization of the American media space unfolds on a horizontal political axis opposing the left to the right;
- it takes place within the traditional media space: Fox News is opposed to CNN;

* Note: Pew Research Center does not take policy positions. The opinions expressed herein, including any implications for policy, are those of Institut Montaigne and not of Pew Research Center.

- it is aligned with the opposition between political actors and the institutions they represent (Fox News opposes CNN in the same way that Donald Trump opposes Hillary Clinton);
- this phenomenon of polarization has been emphasized by the emergence of new media to the right of the political spectrum. For example, the media Breitbart has pushed Fox News much further to the right ideologically (the American polarization is therefore asymmetrical: right-wing media have moved away from the center more than left-wing media have).

Polarization in France

In this study, we mapped the structure of the French media space in order to measure its potential polarization and evaluate the influence of social networks on this structure. Here are the main conclusions:

- the polarization of the French media space is unfolding on **a vertical axis opposing institutionalists to those who could be considered “anti-elites”**;
- it **does not take place within the traditional media space** (traditional media such as *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, *Les Echos*, *L’Obs*, etc.), **but between this traditional space and new media that can be considered “partisan”** (such as *Les Crises*, *Egalité et Réconciliation*, *Fdesouche*, *Sputnik*, etc.), which are situated outside this space and express opinions against the elites. Indeed,
 - the French media space remains structured around a central “Core” composed of the main newspapers, websites, radio and TV channels;
 - this “Core” is composed of left- and right-wing media (from *Libération* to *Le Figaro*);
 - while all media refer to this “Core”, including media that could be considered “partisan”, the “Core” almost never refers to media that are outside the «Core».
- the polarization of the French media space is less aligned with that of political actors than in the United States, due to the multiplicity of political actors in France;
- the polarization is likely to be emphasized by the emergence of new partisan media (see below).

Studying the structure of the French media ecosystem

In order to map the French media space, we analyzed how media cite each other, by counting the number and looking at the direction of citations in their articles (a “citation” is a URL link present in an article and redirecting to another media).

This analysis allowed us to identify four media groups, with different behaviors, that structure the French media space:

- **Core media:** a set of publications that are widely cited by other media categories, but which rarely cite them in return (*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, *Le Parisien*, *20 Minutes*, *Les Echos*, etc.).
- **Ring media:** a set of publications that cite the Core and Satellite media. They are sometimes cited by the Core (*Russia Today*, *Fdesouche*, *Valeurs actuelles*, *Sputnik*, etc.).
- **Satellite media:** a set of publications that widely cite all other media groups but that are never cited in return (*Les Crises*, *Egalité et Réconciliation*, *Fawkes News*, etc.).
- **Niche media:** a set of local papers and magazines that receive some attention from other media categories (local press and specialized magazines)

The yellow vests, an example of polarization “à la française”

By analyzing 65,000 articles from a corpus of 391 media over a period from September 2018 to February 2019, the Sciences Po Médialab highlighted the main themes in the coverage of the yellow vests movement. The maps obtained show a clear distinction regarding the importance different media groups give to these themes:

- it appears that Core media were mainly concerned with the consequences of the social movement for the government, political parties, and the police;
- the issue of the yellow vests’ values and demands was prioritized by Satellite and Ring media.

Changes at work with social networks and the emergence of new partisan media

If France does not experience a polarization similar to the one observed in the United States, it seems to be due to the relationships existing between Core media. They regularly cite each other, rarely cite partisan actors outside their sphere, and seem to share common practices and values, as the CrossCheck initiative during the 2017 presidential campaign showed.

However, this does not mean that the media space is protected against more profound changes. Institut Montaigne has thus noted four major factors of evolution:

1. social networks have given rise to a conversational space that, via network effects and virality, increasingly influences the traditional media space. In concrete terms, information made popular on Twitter can now be recycled by “traditional” media;
2. new media that could be considered partisan quickly gain in audience and influence (such as *Russia Today*, *Fdesouche*, *Sputnik*, etc.);
3. some links exist between right-wing partisan media (*Fdesouche*, *Sputnik*, *Russia Today*) and satellite media (*Français de France*, *La Presse Galactique*, *WikiStrike*, *Stop Mensonges*). The former cites the latter, thus making visible doubtful information that otherwise receives little attention;
4. polarizing polemicists act as “laundering” agents when they highlight disinformation produced by such media.

These changes may, in the long term, have an impact on the Core media, as has been observed in the United States.

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APPENDIX: News Media Attitudes in France - Pew Research Center Report 53

This report benefitted from data collected and analyzed by Pew Research Center on the one hand (section 1. A look at media environments, and full report in Appendix) and Sciences Po on the other hand, in collaboration with the MIT Center for Civic Media (section 2. The French media ecosystem, and section 3.3. From theory to practice: the Yellow Vests movement).

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INTRODUCTION

France, as many other countries, has recently been confronted with increasing distrust towards its democratic institutions, including the media. This trend has been developing in times of turmoil for the media environment, as searing loss of advertising revenues to the internet giants Google and Facebook are testing the traditional media's ability to reinvent themselves and to find new business models. What's more, new actors have emerged on the internet and are challenging the media's traditional gatekeeping role. A new informational space has thus surfaced, shaped by the evolving dynamics between these different actors, both online and offline.

In the United States, for instance, studies have shown in the past couple of years that the right-wing media ecosystem has increasingly isolated itself to the far-right of the global media spectrum. The United States has witnessed the meteoric rise of hyperpartisan outlets playing to the more conservative segments of the population, such as *Breitbart News Network*. Although this phenomenon isn't new in the United States, it can be argued that right-wing media have radicalized in recent years, to the extent that they have been able to angle the political agenda of the 2016 presidential election in favor of the Republican candidate. Moreover, a number of different actors have been identified as having interfered one way or another in the American election. These include Macedonian teenagers producing hundreds of purposely false articles for profit, a Russian troll farm, Russian hackers, and Cambridge Analytica, a rogue data analytics firm. Social media were leveraged by ill-intentioned actors to sow division and push forward their own agenda. They, and Facebook in particular, took the blame for it. It is worth noting that this phenomenon is not specific to the United States. In countries around the world, social media have been harnessed to deliver propaganda, using mainstream media as their most powerful amplification and delivery mechanism. Simultaneously the mainstream media have been accused of, and persecuted for, casting ruling politicians in an unfair light.

It is worth asking whether France is or is not immune to the phenomenon just described. At Institut Montaigne, several questions were posed. Is the French informational space becoming increasingly polarized? In other words, is there a French version of *Breitbart* or *Infowars*, able to break the institutional information space? In general, what are the dynamics underlying the French media environment, and how are they evolving? How do mainstream media, fringe media and social media currently interact? How does information circulate between these actors? To answer these questions, Institut Montaigne worked with the Sciences Po médialab, the Sciences Po School of Journalism and the Center for Civic Media at MIT Media Lab to collect and analyze data from 420 French media sources, 18 million tweets and over 60,000 news articles for this report. The latter also draws on an exclusive study led by the Pew Research Center with the support of Institut Montaigne, which investigates the attitudes of the French towards the media, as well as on several interviews carried out with media experts both in France and in the United States. Based on the insights these different methods have provided, this report describes the dynamics of the French media ecosystem from a macro perspective.

A LOOK AT MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS

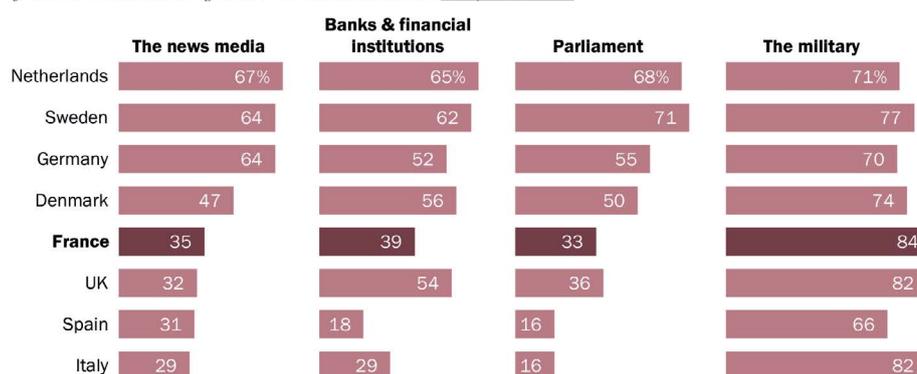
1.1. A global loss of trust in a deteriorating informational space

1.1.1. Distrusted institutions

For the first time since it started surveying thousands of people across 28 countries, the Edelman Trust Barometer found in 2017 a decline in trust in all of the four sectors it assessed: businesses, the media, governments and NGOs. The 2018 Barometer showed no reversal of this alarming trend, with several countries, including the United States, experiencing an extreme loss of trust. The same observation applies to France, which was one of the least trusting countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center in 2017. Only 35% of those surveyed said they trusted the news media, 39%, banks and financial institutions, and 33%, the Parliament.

France and other Southern European countries are less trusting of most institutions¹

% of adults in each country who trust each institution a lot/somewhat



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
"News Media Attitudes in France"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Contributing to this atmosphere of mistrust, inaccurate, intentionally misleading or outrightly false news were increasingly propagated during elections across the globe in the last two years. National governments and citizens have generally surmised that the news media bears some responsibility, both for the high level of distrust in institutions and for the propagation of what has been frequently described as "fake news". Hossein Derakhshan and Claire Wardle² have identified three types of information disorder. Disinformation, which is "information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country", misinformation, "information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm", and malinformation, "information, that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country". All three categories appear to be on the rise. 59% of those surveyed in the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer³ said they were unable to clearly distinguish between what is true and what is not because the media failed to fulfil their role. Moreover, 7 out of 10 said they worried about false information being used as a weapon.

¹ Pew Research Center, April 23rd, 2019, "News Media Attitudes in France", p. 5.

² Information Disorder: Definitions, Derakhshan, Wardle in *Understanding and addressing the disinformation system*, Annenberg School for Communication, December 15-16, 2017.

³ 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report.

1.1.2. Distrusted media

In a context of growing skepticism and distrust in the media, the spread of inaccurate, intentionally misleading or outrightly false news has been interpreted as the symptom of a democratic crisis. In Western countries that have a strong history of protecting the freedom of the press, journalists have been castigated by politicians, including at the highest levels of the state, they have been physically attacked or have had their equipment damaged in numerous instances, as illustrated in February by the attack on a BBC cameraman at a Trump rally in El Paso.⁴ On social networks, journalists are routinely harassed and intimidated by “trolls”, who avail themselves of virality to cause outrage within internet communities.⁵ In several countries, journalists have been assimilated to members of the ruling elite or criticized for bowing to political pressure, and hence portrayed as having failed their mission to represent citizens and hold the powerful accountable. In a 2018 poll conducted for the French newspaper *La Croix*, 68% of those surveyed said they did not believe that journalists were independent from political parties.⁶ Moreover, all the journalists interviewed for the purpose of the present study insisted on the public’s strong resentment against them, expressed overwhelmingly on social networks like Twitter.

Moreover, the mainstream media’s role, which could be described as “buttressing and deepening democracy”,⁷ is less celebrated in France than it is in the United States. French historian Pierre Rosanvallon emphasizes the role of the press in a democracy, which is to act as a counter-power to state institutions, by exerting pressure on the latter in order to ensure good governance, and argues the press has played this role since the 1848 revolution.⁸ Despite this history, only 28% of the French people surveyed in 2017 by the Pew Research Center say the news media are very important to the functioning of the country’s society. This figure is the lowest in the eight countries surveyed. In contrast to the United States, where the role of the press is enshrined in the Constitution, many French citizens do not see the press as an integral part of a functioning democracy.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47219957>

⁵ Reporters sans frontières, 2018. Online harassment of journalists.

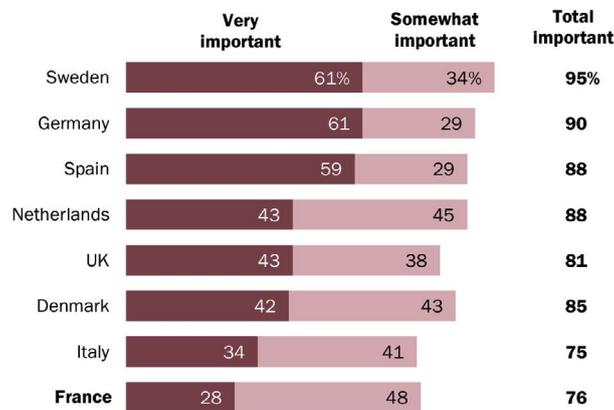
⁶ Baromètre 2018 de la confiance des Français dans les media, Kantar Public.

⁷ The role of the media in deepening democracy , Sheila S. Coronel.

⁸ Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Contre-Démocratie. La politique à l’âge de la défiance*, Seuil, 2009.

About a quarter in France say news media are very important - the lowest of the eight countries studied⁹

% of adults in each country who say the news media are very/somewhat important to the functioning of the country's society



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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In the IPSOS Global advisor 2018¹⁰ survey, 41% in France said they believed that the media misled people, a figure higher than for social networks (37%). 54% said they often or very often saw the media deliberately share false news. While these numbers are considerably lower than in the United States, they nonetheless highlight an increasing divide between citizens and the mainstream media.

1.1.3. Distrusted social networks

Social networks, once seen as the epitome of the circulation of information in an open, global and connected world, have increasingly been perceived by national authorities and users as tools that can be weaponized to destabilize democracies, and as giant laboratories for experimenting with user data. Recent scandals in the context of democratic elections, i.e. suspected foreign interferences in electoral processes and the misuse of user data, have led platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, to be significantly scrutinized by lawmakers and to face investigations both in the United States and in Europe. In 2018, revelations that the Facebook data of over 87 million users had been harvested by the British political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica and may have been used to influence voters ahead of the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and ahead of the 2016 American presidential election sparked a global outcry. The use of bots and fake accounts that amplify certain messages on social networks has been pointed to as one of the factors causing a widening partisan gap in democracies. Facebook and Twitter have frequently been described as "echo chambers"¹¹ resonating with self-reinforcing opinions, or as "filter bubbles"¹², where users are exposed to mostly the same kind of information due to the curation of algorithms designed to provide readers with content they are likely to identify with and enjoy.

⁹ Pew Research Center, April 23rd, 2019, "News Media Attitudes in France", p. 3.

¹⁰ IPSOS 2018 Global Advisor.

¹¹ *Echo Chambers*, Cass Sunstein, Princeton University Press, 2001.

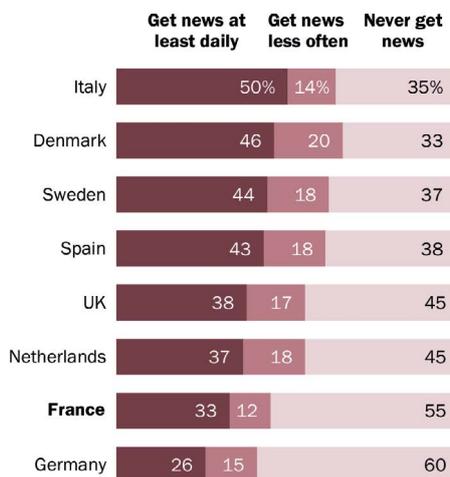
¹² *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You*, Eli Pariser, Penguin, 2011.

Details as to how exactly social platforms’ algorithms operate are not publicly known, and observers and researchers mostly have to rely on data they are provided with in order to peer into the system. It has been established, however, that the algorithms behind social platforms are tailored to enhance user engagement and virality, which fuel their advertisement-based business model. Algorithms, which distribute content based on a set number of direct and indirect signals inferred from data collected on users’ behaviors and interactions with other users (retweets, likes, shares, time spent, clicks, etc.) amplify content that is deemed to engage the most users. Algorithms rely on troves of user data to target users with specific ads and recommend content that is most likely to engage them. As Zeynep Tufekci writes, “these platforms own the most valuable troves of user data, control the user experience, and wield the power to decide winners and losers for people’s attention by making small changes to their policies and algorithms in a variety of categories, including news, products, and books.”¹³

It is worth emphasizing that, although they have been described as one of the main purveyors of false news, social networks are among the media French people least rely on for news. Over half of the French adults surveyed in 2017 by the Pew Research Center said they never got news from social media. A third said they got news at least daily from social media, which is a significantly lower percentage than in other European countries or in the United States. 68% Americans occasionally got news on social media in 2018.¹⁴ Nonetheless, social media remain a growing source of news, according to the Reuters Institute’s 2018 Digital News Report¹⁵ (news readership on social media in France has evolved from 18% to 36% over the last six years).

A third of French adults get news daily from social media¹⁶

% of adults in each country who ____ from social media



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
 “News Media Attitudes in France”

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¹³ Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas - The power and fragility of networked protest*, Yale University Press, 2018.

¹⁴ *News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2018*, Pew Research Center report, 2018.

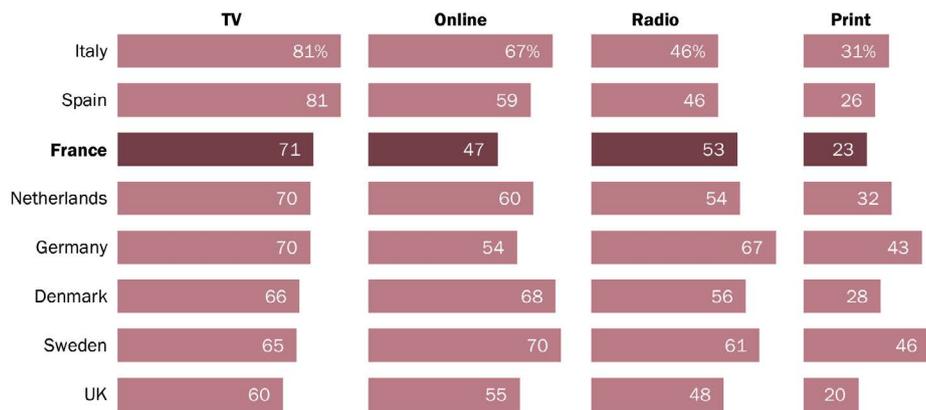
¹⁵ *Digital News Report*, Reuters Institute, 2018.

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, April 23rd, 2019, “News Media Attitudes in France”, p. 21.

TV, on the other hand, is by far the media favored in France for daily news, with about 3 out of 4 French people using it for that purpose. It is not, however, journalists' preferred media when it comes to identifying trends and sources. Journalists interviewed for this report overwhelmingly described Twitter as an ideal platform to fish for ideas of stories and to keep an eye on what other media are covering. In that sense, imitation plays no small role in newsrooms.

TV ranks first for getting news daily in France¹⁷

% of adults in each country who get news at least daily from ...



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
"News Media Attitudes in France"

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1.1.4. A multifaceted crisis

Although there is a strong consensus that the media worldwide are suffering from a lack of trust and that their business models are upended by the rise of social media, the roots of this multifaceted crisis have neither been clearly identified, nor its causes well understood. This report aims at shedding light on the context in which it unfolds, with a particular emphasis on France. It assumes that interpreting the symptoms of the informational crisis is not sufficient to understand it, and claims that a more systematic approach is needed.

1.2. A new approach to the circulation of information

1.2.1. Social media as technological scapegoats

The global perception according to which the public informational space has become a battlefield is now strongly rooted in modern societies. As a result, governments in Europe have pushed for legislation allowing national authorities to remove fake content posted on social networks or to force social networks to do so. In South Korea, lawmakers have called for the criminalization of the use of bots for the manipulation of online comments. In California, a law taking effect in July 2019 will ban bots from pretending to be human, with the explicit goal of tackling bots that are

¹⁷ Pew Research Center, April 23rd, 2019, "News Media Attitudes in France", p. 17

“weaponized to spread fake and misleading news, reshape political debates, and influence advertising audiences”.¹⁸ Yet ascribing responsibility to technology for the ills afflicting the public informational space fails to provide a comprehensive explanation for the latter. Worse, there is a risk that such an account will disguise a complex technosocial problem as a purely technical one.

1.2.2. “Fake news”: a convenient buzzword

“Fake news” was named word of the year 2017 by the Collins English Dictionary. According to its lexicographers, the use of the term increased by 365% in 2016. Countless panel discussions and seminars have been held across the globe with the purported aim of tackling “fake news”. The imprecision of the term can cause a misunderstanding of the phenomena it aims to coin. The latter were broken down into three categories by a 2017 Council of Europe report,¹⁹ based on a distinction established by Claire Wardle:

- **Misinformation** is when false information is shared without harmful intent;
- **Disinformation**, when false information is shared with intent to deceive or cause harm;
- **Malinformation**, when genuine information designed to stay private is made public to cause harm.

According to the authors of the report, the term “fake news” has become mostly used by politicians across the globe to describe news they find unpleasant. According to a recent Knight Foundation/ Gallup survey, 40% of Republicans in the United States define “fake news” as news that delegitimizes the President or the Republican Party.

It is important to note that some news can simultaneously fall into several categories. Junk news, which can often be found on alternative health websites, are an undifferentiated mix of accurate, inaccurate and outrightly false news, as they aim to earn revenues from high traffic. By the same token, a mix of news, both accurate, inaccurate and false, may specifically aim to confuse a certain public: this manoeuvre is often used in, but not limited to, information warfare.²⁰

1.3. A holistic approach to the media ecosystem

The underlying premise of the present study is that the emerging crisis of trust in the media is best explained by taking a step back and observing the media ecosystem, rather than by single-handedly targeting symptoms of the crisis (such as disinformation). By looking at the media ecosystem as a whole, this study aims at understanding which media attract high levels of attention, and which ones don't. These media ecosystems, far from permeating one another, have frontiers and vary from one country to the other. While our approach to understanding the French ecosystem is

¹⁸ <https://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2018/10/01/california-bans-companies-from-using-bots-on-social-media-in-order-to-influence-an-election/>

¹⁹ *INFORMATION DISORDER: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*, Claire Wardle, Hossein Derakhshan, Council of Europe, 2017.

²⁰ Benkler Y, Faris R., Roberts H., 2018. *Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 23.

comparable to that adopted with other ecosystems, we expect this research to reflex uniquely French dynamics rather than take on a universal form.

We understand the media ecosystem to be composed of three layers:

1. **The Structure.** This first layer is composed of media producing written information online. In this space, the media themselves give attention to one another (journalists and media reference one another, either to legitimate or contest each other's views). In the present study, we focused on 420 media and blogs.
2. **The Influence.** The second layer comprises decision-makers and influencers who share news articles on social media. Analyzing this layer is a way to highlight the attention certain news attract on social media, and, more specifically in this research, on Twitter. In the present study, we tracked the articles produced by the 420 media and blogs in the Structure, assessed the frequency by which they were shared, and investigated who shared them.
3. **The Conversation.** The third layer is composed of individuals discussing on private and semi-private social media platforms. It is probably the least known and least documented, as the access to this layer is highly restricted for ethical reasons (see section 2.2.4. The Conversation).

This report focuses on the first two layers (the Structure and the Influence - see section 2.2. "Two layers to map the French digital media sphere"), and thus analyzes the segment of the digital space that has a high visibility, and the information of which is publicly accessible. However, a significant share of information nowadays circulates through private social networks, such as Facebook (e.g. on private pages), Snapchat or WhatsApp, as well as via texts or email (what Alexis Madrigal calls the "Dark Social"). Moreover, emerging French social-media-based news startups, such as Brut or Loopsider, as well as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Youtube and Snapchat - some of the most used mobile apps in France - were excluded from this analysis. There are several reasons for this:

- Video-based media such as Brut and Youtube rarely produce online written content that can be analyzed. When they do, it is not consistent enough from one source to another to be systematically included (the type of information in the description section of a Youtube video will vary greatly). It is, however, possible to work from transcripts of videos with tools such as Media Cloud. The MIT Center for Civic Media and Sciences Po's Medialab are planning on exploiting it to this effect soon.
- Unlike Twitter, which creates a public record, there is no visibility on the extent to which information is shared by private users on Facebook, Whatsapp or Snapchat. It is therefore impossible to analyze the ways in which information circulates within these platforms' online communities.

Despite these limitations, we see great potential in understanding the dynamics of media flows in online spaces, even based on this limited data set.

THE FRENCH MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

2.1. Questions and methodology

Institut Montaigne worked with the Sciences Po Médialab and the Center for Civic Media at the MIT Media Lab to map the French media space and understand how news circulates within it. This study aims to address the general questions outlined in the table below. Throughout this report, we summarize the questions asked and provide simple answers at the beginning of each of the following sections, in order to make the research easily understandable. In each table, the answers provided are highly simplified. The reader should refer to the developments in the report for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena observed.

General questions

- How is the media sphere organized?
- How do social networks influence the structure of the media sphere?

Short answers

- The French media sphere is organized differently than in the United States.
- In a multipolar political space, social networks organize the media sphere based on an institutional/anti-elite spectrum, rather than on a left-wing/right-wing spectrum.

The starting point of this study is a manually curated list comprising 420 French media sources, based on the list compiled by *Les Décodeurs*, a section of the French newspaper *Le Monde*. This initial list has been completed by the Sciences Po School of Journalism. The resulting list includes a wide selection of outlets with significant audiences: newspapers, radio stations, television channels, regional press and magazines. This corpus is composed of sites coming from various edges of the ideological spectrum in the French public space. It aims to reveal the overall architecture of the French media ecosystem, but not to propose an exhaustive mapping of all sites producing information in France.

Based on this corpus, we developed two main methods to collect data:

- A web crawler²¹ that systematically browses the internet was used to collect hyperlinks in news articles (web links, or URLs, linking to other media pages), thus revealing a structure connecting the 420 websites. As we will see, this structure unveils the media's citation patterns (by showing which other media a media refers to in its articles). Of the 420 sources, 391 made reference to, or were referred to by another source. Only those sources were considered part of the link economy.
- We then collected all tweets citing (with a URL) articles published by the selected 420 media sources. Over the first three months of data collection, 18 million tweets were recorded and analyzed. This methodology is a way to identify similarities and disparities in the sharing behaviors of

²¹ <http://hyphe.medialab.sciences-po.fr/>

French individuals. It allows individuals who reference similar sources of information to be grouped together.

2.2. Two layers to map the French digital media space

In order to understand the extent to which the media sphere is polarized, we analyzed which media attract high levels of attention, and whose attention they attract (are there radically different groups of people looking at radically different kinds of media?). In other words, we investigated the kinds of media that serve as a reference, or as anchor points, within this space.

This report is based on the study of the first two of the three layers described in the section 1.2.3 “A holistic approach to the media ecosystem”:

1. The first level is that of news producers. Which media serve as references for other media? In order to answer this question, we look at how different media cite each other (by tracking URLs in media articles - the methodology used is detailed below). If a media is often cited by other media, we consider that it is authoritative in the media sphere. We term this level of analysis “**the Structure**”: it is the backbone of the media sphere.
2. The second level is that of influence. Which media serve as references on Twitter? In order to answer this question, we look at how frequently a media is cited by users on Twitter (also by tracking URLs on Twitter - the methodology used is detailed below). If the articles of a media are often shared on social media, we consider it to be a reference for the online public. We term this level of analysis “**the Influence**”: it is the environment in which news articles come to influence opinions and decision-making.

2.2.1. The Structure: how French media quote one another

Questions

- When looking at how often media quote one another, and classifying media according to the number and direction of incoming and outgoing citations, how many categories of media do we obtain?
- Are certain categories of media isolated from the others (because they cite some media only)?

Short answers

- Four categories of media can be distinguished. Among them, one media group (Core media) comprises media that are quoted by all media in the other groups, but that rarely quote them in return. For example, Satellite media, which often quote media from the Core, are rarely quoted by the Core in return.
- No category is significantly isolated from the others: media from the Core are cited by media from all the other categories and serve as references in the media sphere. However, the fact that media from the Core never cite Satellite media and media from the Ring involves the possibility that the Core media no longer be a reference in the media sphere. If this were to happen, it could cause a significant divide.

In order to understand how news producers behave within the French media ecosystem, we looked at how the latter cite each other: an algorithm groups together media that share similar citation patterns. For example, *Le Monde* and *Libération* are grouped together. This means that, in their articles, they mention media from other groups, which would include *Le Figaro* or *Valeurs actuelles*, in the same way.

Hyperlinks as a methodology

In other national media ecosystems, hyperlinks between news sites are uncommon due to commercial competition – rival newspapers are reluctant to lose traffic by linking to one another. A different pattern prevails in our French media set, where journalists routinely acknowledge some media outlets via hyperlinks. However, this pattern is limited to links within a “core” of media sources. The analysis of the hypertext links of the 391 French media reveals a hierarchical model that largely overlaps professional categories used by journalists in their ordinary practices.

This analysis allows us to identify the anchor points of the French media landscape. In other words, it shows which media sources are systematically referred to by other media and categories of media. It should be noted, however, that whilst this method shows which media attract attention, and whose attention it attracts, it does not identify the intentions motivating citations: some media may be cited because they are being criticized, for instance.

Because this hyperlink network is a snapshot in time, this first analysis does not tell us whether the structure inferred from it is stable. In order to find out, we considered the possibility that social media influence the Structure. This is the reason why this report includes the analysis of a second layer of the media landscape, which we term “the Influence” (see section 2.2.2. Entitled “The Influence”).

The French media sphere appears to be a highly structured space, composed of four large categories of media:

1. **Core media:** a set of publications that are widely cited by other media categories, but which rarely cite them in return.
2. **Ring media:** a set of publications that cite the Core and Satellite media. They are sometimes cited by the Core.
3. **Satellite media:** a set of publications that widely cite all other groups of media but that are never cited in return.
4. **Niche media:** a set of local papers and magazines that receive some attention from other media categories.

The algorithm then grouped together media at a more granular level.

1. Core media

The Core media category includes several sub-categories, one of which is entitled the **Hypercenter**. The latter is composed of the main French national daily newspapers (*Le Monde, Le Figaro, Libération, Le Parisien, 20 Minutes, Les Echos...*), the main TV and radio channels (*France Info, France Inter, Europe 1, RTL, BFM TV...*), and central news magazines (*L'Express, L'Obs, Le Point, Challenges...*). Yet the algorithm also included some of the main regional daily newspapers (*Ouest France, Sud Ouest, Le Parisien, La Dépêche...*) in this category, along with some popular entertainment and gossip magazines (*Grazia, Closer, Jean-Marc Morandini...*). It should be noted that the Hypercenter also includes some online “pure-player” media (*Huffington Post, Atlantico, BuzzFeed...*) and France's most famous parodic website (Le Gorafi).

The Central Media sub-category gathers most of the other important and central information websites in France. It includes national daily newspapers with a stronger ideological or religious affiliation (*L'Humanité, La Croix, La Vie...*), radio and TV channels with smaller audiences (*RFI, France Culture, LCP, Public Sénat...*) and less influential regional newspapers (*Midi Libre, La Marseillaise, Paris Normandie...*). The Central Media sub-category also includes information websites, the editorial content of which is marked by strong political stances, topics or orientations (*Mediapart, Reporterre, L'Opinion, Les Jours, Mediacités, Marianne...*) and specialized magazines focusing on specific topics (*Science et Avenir, Les Inrocks, Télérama, Courrier international, Les Cahiers du football, La Gazette des communes...*). This category also includes magazines providing practical advice and attracting large audiences (*Comment ça marche, Canard PC...*). *Le Média*, the web-based news television close to Jean-Luc Mélenchon's political party *La France Insoumise*, also appears in this group. This is due to its citation patterns, which are similar to that of other media from this category.

2. Ring media

Inside the Ring media category, the **Right-Wing Media** sub-category gathers a small number of media that are more right-wing than the French traditional right. They either defend conservative values (*Causeur, Valeurs actuelles*) or liberal values (*Contrepoints*). This sub-category also includes the French far-right's influential and historical information website (*Fdesouche*), as well as two Russian information sites in France (*Sputnik, RT France*). Surprisingly, the algorithm used also included two sites that are not aligned ideologically with the others in this sub-category (*Euronews* and *Al Kanz*, a site providing information on Islamic economy and consumption). This can be explained by their citation patterns, as they link to right-wing and far-right sites.

The **Left-Wing Media** sub-category gathers a wide spectrum of websites from the left of the left - i.e. a position that critiques the governmental socialist left. It includes historical publications representative of this ideological space (*Le Monde Diplomatique, Alternatives économiques, Politis*), “pure-players” of the critical or altermondialist left (*Bastamag, Rue89 Lyon, Paul Jorion...*), and alternative media linked to social movements (*Rebillyon, La Horde, Fakir, Le Monde Libertaire...*). This group also includes websites dedicated to the critique of information rooted in a left-wing tradition (*Acrimed, Conspiracywatch*). It should be stressed that the site *Le Média*, the web-based news television close to Jean-Luc Mélenchon's party *La France Insoumise*, was not classified by the algorithm in this sub-category, but rather in the “Central Media” sub-category.

3. Satellite media

Within the Satellite media category, the **Counter-Informational Space** sub-category gathers a myriad of information websites. These sites all strongly criticize the media and political elites (who are said dissimulate real information from the public). They claim to reveal hidden facts by endorsing stances borrowed both from the far-left and the far-right. This sub-category includes *Égalité et Réconciliation*, *AgoraVox*, *Les Crises*, *Fawkes News*. It also includes anti-Islam sites such as *Français de France*, as well as media that, under the cover of science, provide advice and recommendations focused on natural medicine, that denounce official medicine and disseminate misinformation (*Santé Nutrition*, *Art de Vivre Sain*, *Santé Nature Innovation*, *Professeur Joyeux...*). Others, such as *Freewiseman* or *Révolution Vibratoire*, publish far-fetched information on irrational topics (the Illuminati, wave power, alien plots, chemtrails, etc.).

The **Far-Right** sub-category gathers extreme right news sites ranging from traditional and historical media (*Radio Courtoisie*, *Action Française*, *Minute*) to more recent sites (*La Gauche m'a tuer*, *reinformation.tv*) and traditionalist Catholic sites (*Dreuz*).

4. Niche media

Within the Niche media category, the **Local Press and Magazine** sub-category includes sites such as *L'Envoi du Nord*, *Corse Matin*, or *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, and *Marie Claire*, *Marie France*, *Psychologie*. We also find TV magazines such as *Télécâble Sat* and *Télé Star* in this group.

The sub-category **Hyperlocal Press and Practical life** comprises sites such as *La République du Centre* or *La Montagne*, or *Top astuce*, *Top Du Net*, *Astuces de Femmes*, etc. The algorithm also included humoristic media such as *Le Top de l'Humour* in this sub-category.

Further detail on each of these sub-categories can be found on the double page below.

Figure 1. Classification of websites into categories and sub-categories.

The media were grouped together by an algorithm according to their citation behaviors. The first level category entitled “Ring media” is composed of two sub-categories labelled “Right-Wing Media” and “Left-Wing Media”, etc.

CORE MEDIA					
Central Media			Hyper-Center		
01net	Le Courrier des Maires	Le Nouvel Économiste	Numerama	20 minutes	Le Gorafi
Acteurs Publics	Courrier International	L'Express	Paris Normandie	60 millions de consommateurs	Le JDD
AFP	France 24	L'Entreprise	Pélerin	Atlantico	Le Monde
AOC	France Culture	Le Revenu	Public Sénat	BFMTV	Le Parisien
Authueil	Gamekult	Les Inrocks	Purfi	BuzzFeed France	Le Point
BFM Business	Hitek	Les Jours	Réforme	Challenges	Les Echos
Blog Médiapart	L'Humanité	Le Week	Reporterre	Closer	L'Express
Bondy Blog	Info Chrétienne	L'Expansion	RFI France	Europe 1	Libération
Boucherie Ovalie	La Croix	L'Important	RMC	France Inter	L'Internaute
Boursorama	La Gazette des communes	L'Opinion	Rue 89 Bordeaux	France-Soir	Nouvel Obs
Business Insider France	La Marseillaise	Marianne	Rue 89 Strasbourg	Franceinfo	Ouest-France
Buzz Arena	La Sardine du Port	Mashable	Sciences et Avenir	Grazia	Paris Match
Cahiers du football	La Tribune	Mediacités	Street Press	Huffington Post	POSITIVR
Canard PC	La Vie	Médiapart	Télérama	Blog Jean-Marc	UFC-Que
Capital	LCP	Midi Libre	Vice	Morandini	Choisir
Clubic	Le Média	Next INpact	L'Express - Votre Argent	La Dépêche	RTL
CNews	Blogs Le monde	Non Stop Politique	WorldTV Desinfos	Le Figaro	Slate
Comment Ça Marche		Notre Temps	Yagg		Sud Ouest
Contexte		Rue 89	ZDNet		Topito
RING MEDIA					
Left Wing Media			Right Wing Media		
Acrimed	Electrosensible	Eolas	Patriote Info	Al Kanz	Euronews
Alternatives	Fakir	Le Monde	Blog Paul Jorion	Causeur	Sputnik France
Economiques	Hoaxbuster	Diplomatique	Politis	Contrepoints	Russia Today France
Bastamag	Korben	Le Monde	Rebellyon	Fdesouche	Valeurs Actuelles
Blog Le Monde diplomatique	La Horde	Libertaire	Rue 89 Lyon		
Conspiracy Watch	Lundi Matin	Mr Mondialisation			
	Blog Maître	Paris Luttes			
SATELLITE MEDIA					
Counter-informational space					
2012 un Nouveau Paradigme	Cercle des Volontaires	Français de France	La Mine d'Infos	Maximag	
Agence Info Libre	Blog Chaos Controle	Free Wise Man	La Presse Galactique	Mes Propres Recherches	Dieudosphere
AgoraVox	Christianophobie	Blog Henry Makow	Le blog à Lupus	Le Monde des informations alternatives	Radio Orient
AgoraVox TV	Blog Citoyen Veilleur	Il fatto quotidiano	Le Grand Soir Info	Morphéus	Réseau International
Alter Info	Diktacratie	Info Contre Info	Le Journal du Siècle	Le Nouvel Ordre Mondial	Le Blog de la Résistance
Alternative Santé	Egalité et Réconciliation	Inform'Action	Le Libre Penseur	Observatoire du Journalisme	Révolution Vibratoire
Antipresse	Esprit Spiritualité	Informations en Direct France	Les Crises	Oumma	RussEurope
Arrêt sur Info	Métaphysiques	Initiative Citoyenne	Les Brindherbes Engagés	OVNI-Paranormal	Santé Nutrition
Blog Art de Vivre Sain	Blog Etienne Chouard	ISPN	Les Econoclastes	Penser librement	Santé Nature
Brujita FR	Fawkes News	Stop Islamisme	Les Moutons Enragés	Le Professeur Joyeux	Innovation
Business Bourse	AWD news	Jeune Nation	Les Moutons rebelles		Stop Mensonges
	Novopress SOTT	La Chronique Agora			Blog Tariq Ramadan
					Réseau Voltaire
					WikiStrike

Far Right

24heuresactu	Commentaires. com	Infos Bordeaux	Les Identitaires	Blog NS2017	Résistance
A droite fièrement	Contre-info	Infos Toulouse	Les 4 Vérités	Occitanie Tribune	Républicaine
Action Française	Contribuables	Blog Jean-Paul Ney	Le Scrutateur	ParisVox	Rhône-Alpes Info
2000	Délit d'Images	JSSNews	Médias Presse	Peuple de France	Riposte Laïque
Blog de Boris Le Lay	Dreuz	La Gauche m'a Tuer	Minute	Polémia	Rivarol
Breizh Info	El Manchar	Le Bréviaire des	Nations Presse	Radio Courtoisie	Science Info
BuzzBeed	Enquête Débat	Patriotes	Nouvelles de France	Réinformation TV	Spi0n
Boulevard Voltaire	Europe Israël	Lengadoc Info	Nice Provence Info	Réseau Libre	TV Libertés
Citoyens et Français	Hérault Tribune	Le Ouest Franc	Nos Médias	(EuroCalifat)	

NICHE MEDIA**Hyper-Local Press and practical life**

Version Femina	Cuisine et Santé
La Montagne	Eddenya
La République du Centre	Euroscop
Le Berry Républicain	Family Santé
L'Echo Républicain	Infos Maintenant
Le Journal du Centre	Intérêts Privés
Le Populaire du Centre	L'Astucieuse
L'Eveil de la Haute Loire	Le Petit Buzz
L'Yonne Républicaine	Le top de l'humour et de l'info
Arcturius	Magazine du Net
Astuce du Jour	OjoBuzz
Astucerie	PauseCafein
Astuces-Femmes	Protège ta santé
Astuces des Femmes	Santé+ Magazine
Astuces Naturelles	TOPibuzz
Best santé	Top Astuces
Buzz de Mois	Top du Net
Cool buzz	Top Santé
	Vie Incroyable

Local Press & Mag

Actumag	Glamour	O - Le cahier de tendances de l'Obs	L'Est Républicain
Akhnapress	GQ	Onze Mondial	France Bleu
Allodocteurs	Humour de Droite	Pire Médias	France Football
Auto Hebdo	Je suis français	Point de Vue	Info24
AutoPlus	Journal des Femmes	Première	Le Journal de la Haute-Marne
Be	L'Echo du Centre	Psychologies Public	L'Alsace
Biba	La Suite Mobile	Ravelations	La Presse de la Manche
Bilboquet Magazine	La Semaine	Santé Academy	La Provence
BMF News	La Sirène du Pays Basque	Science et Vie	La République des Pyrénées
Buzz ligne	Le Canard Enchaîné	TéléCable Sat	L'Echo de la Boucle
Buzzly	L'Envoi du Nord	Télé Star	Le Dauphiné Libéré
Ça m'intéresse	Le Tribunal du Net	TFI-Info	Le Journal de Saône et Loire
Causette	Esprit et santé	Tomimag	Le Maine Libre
Corse machin	Madame Figaro	Le Figaro - TV Magazine	Le Progrès
Cosmopolitan	Marie Claire	Vogue	L'Equipe
Darons	Marie France	Voici	Le Télégramme
E-Santé	Melty	VSD	L'Indépendant
Edukactus	Midi Olympique	24matins	Nice Matin
Elle	Monde Buzz	Actu.fr	Presse Océan
Le Figaro Etudiant	Blog Morandini Santé	Le Bien Public	Républicain Lorrain
Femme Actuelle	Moto Journal	Centre Presse	So Foot
FHM	Nous Deux	Aveyron	Télé Z
Football France	La Nouvelle République des Pyrénées	Charente Libre	Var Matin
France Dimanche		Corse matin	Vosges Matin
Gala		Courrier de l'Ouest	
Géo		Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace	

Grouping media together using an algorithm

The tables above are the result of an algorithmic classification based on the citation behavior of each website. Like any statistical classification, it is an approximation which gives a correct picture of reality, but can sometimes produce counter-intuitive results. For example, the *Euronews* website is ranked among the Right-Wing Ring websites because, when we collected data, this media cited *Russia Today*, *Valeurs Actuelles* and *Sputnik*. This behavior is different from that of the media that have been ranked by the algorithm in the Central media and Hypercentre sub-groups.

Figure 2. Number of citations between the four different media categories.

Over the time of the analysis, media from the Core cited other media from the Core 2889 times. Media from the Core cited media from the Ring 206 times, etc.

The number of citations between these media categories is outlined in the table below.

	Core	Ring	Niche	Satellite
Core	2889	206	845	66
Ring	1261	210	335	154
Niche	1094	18	610	15
Satellite	3215	654	819	1955

2.2.2. The Influence: how media are cited by individual users on Twitter

Questions

- When looking at how often media are quoted by individual users on Twitter, and grouping together media based on the number of individual users they share, which groups of media emerge?
- Are some groups of media only cited by certain groups of users?

Short answers

- Nine clusters of media emerge. Overall, all institutional media are very close together, meaning that they share relatively similar publics on Twitter.
- These nine clusters seem to be divided into two larger groups of media. The audience of each of these larger groups varies significantly.

The Influence looks at how information is shared on Twitter. By looking at this layer, we can identify new anchor points in the media landscape, based on the attention given by the audience. These anchor points are different from those observed in the Structure. They are not created by information producers, but by the people who consume and share content.

Studying this second layer can help us to determine the stability of the Structure, and more generally of the media sphere. If the anchor points identified by audiences in the Influence differ from the ones identified by news producers in the Structure, then we may expect that the anchor points will change in the future. Indeed, if the audience does not agree with news producers as to which media are authoritative in the media space and vice versa, then it is likely that both sides’ opinions will evolve in the future. As we will see in Section 3.3. “From theory to practice: the Yellow Vests movement”, we have good evidence to believe that this is happening.

There are limits to using Twitter as a field of analysis. Indeed, the penetration rate of Twitter in France is only 24%²², and the conversation on Twitter is not a perfect reflection of the general conversation. Nevertheless, most people who are active politically have a Twitter account, which makes the social network a good entry point into the French public square. Additionally, research conducted by Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts²³ found that, in the United States, the

²² Penetration of leading social networks in France as of 4th quarter 2017, Statista, 2018.

²³ Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Disinformation and Radicalization in American Politics, Benkler Y, Faris R., Roberts H., 2018., New York, Oxford University Press.

popularity of different American media outlets with left and right-wing readers on Twitter correlated very closely to a similar analysis conducted with Facebook data. This suggests that Twitter may well be both a successful proxy for reader interest in political media, and representative of social media more generally.

For this analysis on Twitter, we systematically collected every French tweet citing an article published by any of our 391 media websites. Over six months, 52 million tweets were collected. In the network map below (Fig. 1), two media get closer together as the number of shared Twitter users who cite articles from both these media grows.²⁴ In other words, the larger the shared audience, the closer the media on the map.

We find that some of the groups that emerge are purely thematic. For instance, the cluster on the right side gathers regional media outlets (*Nice Matin*, *Midi Libre*, *L'Est Républicain*). Yet overall, most of the clusters we observe seem to be linked to the degree of political proximity between sources.

Here are the four main clusters of websites that emerge from this analysis. In order to simplify the analysis, we focus exclusively on these four clusters in this study because they are the most structuring for the French media ecosystem.

- Cluster 1: media that could be considered as mainstream (*BFMTV*, *L'Express*, *Le Monde*...)
- Cluster 2: media that could be considered as left-leaning (*Libération*, *Humanité*, *Monde Diplomatique*...)
- Cluster 3: media that could be considered as providing alternative information (mostly blogs like *Égalité Réconciliation*, *Les Crises* or *Wikistrike*...)
- Cluster 4: media that could be considered as coming from the far-right (*Fdesouche*, *Dreuz*, *fr.sputniknews.com*...)

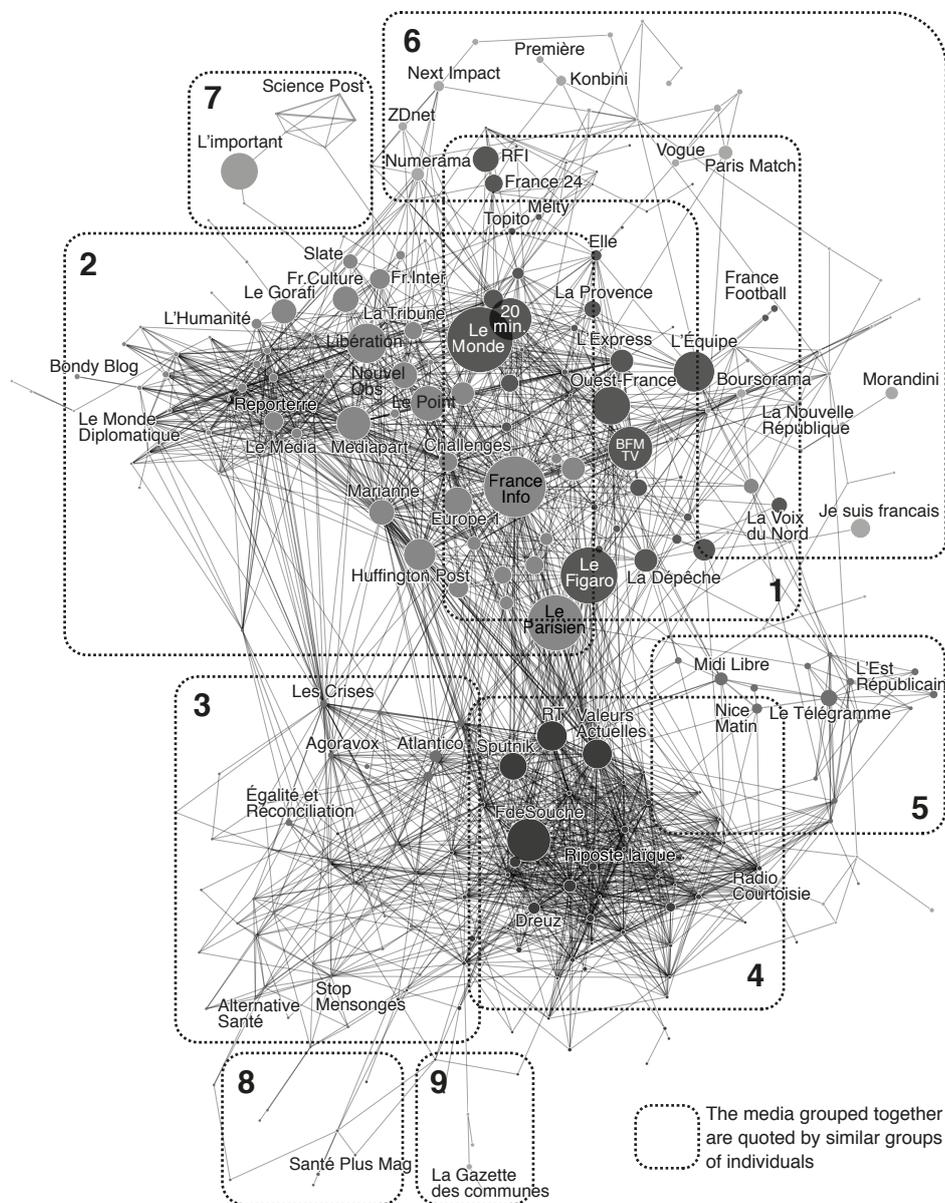
Again, the media are clustered together according to their audience on Twitter. The methodology does not take into consideration the ideology of each media. The labels we use here are inferred from the type of media that are present in each group. Therefore, we do not mean to say that all groups within the second cluster are left-leaning.

It is interesting to note that the group of media that could be considered mainstream (cluster 1) is very intertwined with the group of media that could be considered as left-leaning (cluster 2). This includes media such as *Libération*, *Le Point* and *Le Figaro*, but also *Le Média* and *Médiapart*. This suggests that there is a relatively shared audience from the far-left to the right side of the political spectrum.

²⁴ The strategy of linking sources which are often being cited together is a current operation in bibliometrics where the operation allows to build cluster of journals forming coherent scientific domains (Small, 1973). This methodological solution has also been used by Faris & al. (2017) for the study of the 2016 American election.

These two clusters of media (clusters 1 and 2) are less connected to the group of media that could be considered as coming from the far-right (cluster 4), and even less connected to the media that could be considered as providing alternative information (cluster 3). If media from the far-left to the right side of the political spectrum share similar audiences, the far-right gathers a different public, which cites other media less frequently than others. This parallels the findings of the American media ecosystem study²⁵ undertaken by Yochai Benkler, Bruce Etling, Nikki Bourassa, Rob Faris and Ethan Zuckerman, which found very little overlap between right wing media from the Ring and mainstream media.

Figure 3. The Influence - the French media space according to Twitter audiences. The size of each node is proportional to the total number of tweets citing a media outlet (with a URL). The larger the shared audience, the closer the media on the map.



²⁵ Bruce Etling, Nikki Bourassa, Ethan Zuckerman, Yochai Benkler, Rob Faris, Hal Roberts, 2017. *Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election*, available at : <https://cyber.harvard.edu/publications/2017/08/mediacloud>

Figure 4. Classification of websites into groups based on the number of Twitter users they share.

GROUP 1					
BFMTV	Sciences et Avenir	Courrier international	France Football	L'express	I24 news
Le Monde	L'express	LCP	So Foot	Votre Argent	01net
Le Figaro	L'équipe	Médiapart Blog	L'express	Conspiracy watch	Blog Citoyen veilleur
Paris Normandie	La dépêche	Le Figaro étudiant	l'Entreprise	Journal des femmes	Le Monde
Ouest-France	C News Monde	Euronews	Elle	Hoaxbuster	Libertaire
20 minutes	RFI France	Madame Figaro	Le Nouvel Economiste	L'Usine Nouvelle	Diktacratie
actu.fr	France 24	Le Figaro	Charlie hebdo	BFMTV High tech	Saphir News
BFM Business	La Provence	TV mag	Topito	La Montagne	Le Journal du Siècle
	La Voix du Nord	L'Expansion	Melty		Agence info libre
			Vice		
GROUP 2					
France info	Challenges	Positivr	Politis	M Le magazine du Monde	Rebellyon
Le Parisien	La Tribune	Télérama	Paris Luttes	L'écho de la boucle	Le Monde
Libération	La Croix	Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace	Cnews matin	Rue 89 Lyon	diplomatique blogs
Europe 1	L'opinion	L'indépendant	Bondy Blog	Rue 89 Bordeaux	Auto Hebdo
Le Point	Médiapart	24matins	Bastamag	Lundi Matin	WorldTV Desinfos
Huffington post	Capital	Alternatives économiques	Mr Mondialisation	La horde	Fakir
France culture	Marianne	L'humanité	Street Press	Acrimed	La presse galactique
Le JDD	Sud Ouest	AFP	La République des Pyrénées	Le grand soir info	Les Brinsdherbes
France Bleu	RMC	Rue 89	Le Média	Blog Paul Jorion	Engagés
RTL	Slate	Monde Diplomatique	Le Revenu	Science Info	Ozap
Nouvel Obs	Le Gorafi	Arrêt sur images	Nouvel Obs - 0		Enquête débat
France inter	Reporterre		Le Canard Enchaîné		Brave patrie
LCI	Public Sénat				
GROUP 3					
Atlantico	Informaction	Les moutons enragés	Cercle des Volontaires	Blog Etienne	Morphéus
Contrepoints	Egalité et réconciliation	Le libre penseur	Réseau	Chouard	Infos maintenant
Réseau international	Business Bourse	SOTT	Voltaire	Buzzly	Le monde des informations alternatives
Rue89 Strasbourg	2012 un nouveau paradigme	ISPN	Arrêt sur info	Blog Henry Makow	Penser librement
Agoravox TV	Alternative santé	Les Econoclastes	Fawkes news	Blog Chaos control	Blog Art de vivre sain
WikiStrike	Stop	Le scrutateur	Nice Provence info	RussEurope	Info contre info
Les Crises	Mensonges	La chronique agora	Résistance authentique	Blog A la lumière du nouveau monde	Info et secret
Initiative citoyenne		Nos médias		Révolution vibratoire	
GROUP 4					
Russia today France	La gauche m'a tuer	BMF news	Réinformation TV	Conte info	Français de France
Sputnik France	Riposte laïque	Résistance républicaine	Parisvox	Radio courtoisie	Info24
Valeurs Actuelles	Europe Israël	Nouvelles de France	Corse Machin	Les 4 Vérités	Top astuces
Fdesouche	Le Figaro blogs	Christianophobie	Buzzbeed	JSSNews	Rivarol
Causeur	Medias Presse Info	Peuple de France	Patriote Info	Minute	Information en direct France
Dreuz	Polémia	Novopress	Infos Toulouse	Délit d'images	Vie Incroyable
Contribuables	Citoyens et français	Observatoire du Journalisme	Blog Echelle de Jacob	Les Identitaires	Le bréviaire des patriotes
Charente libre	Le nouvel ordre mondial	Lengadoc Info	Astuces naturelles	Jeune nation	Free wise man
Breizh info	Les moutons rebelles	Blog NS2017	Stop islamisme	24heuresactu	
Le Salon Beige	Investigaction	TV Libertés	Réseau Libre (Eurocalifat)	OVNI Paranormal	
Boulevard Voltaire				Infos Bordeaux	
				L'Echo Républicain	

GROUP 5					
L'Union	Presse Océan	Midi Libre	Var Matin	Républicain Lorrain	
Le Télégramme	Courrier de l'Ouest	L'Est Républicain	Courrier Picard	L'Est Eclair	
Nice Matin	L'Alsace	Les Jours	La Vie	Réforme	
	France Soir				

GROUP 6					
Paris Match	Allodocteurs	Marie Claire	Notre Temps	Nord Eclair	El Manchar
Jean-Marc Morandini	Konbini	Gala	L'internaute	Glamour	Le Journal de la
Vogue	Voici	Sciences et Vie	Femme Actuelle	Oumma	Haute-Marne
La nouvelle république	TéléStar	Mashable France24	Public	France Dimanche	Télé Z
Boursorama	ZDNet	Je suis français	Centre Presse	Ca m'intéresse	Protège ta santé
Numerama	Business Insider	Géo	Aveyron	La Semaine	Nationes Presse
Next Inpact	France	GQ	Korben	Comment ça marche?	Buzz arena
	Clubic	Première	Cosmopolitan	Maxi	

GROUP 7		GROUP 8	GROUP 9		
L'important	Messages de la Nature	Santé plus mag	Blog Maître	Acteurs Publics	Le top de l'humour -
Arte	Jeune Afrique	Santé nutrition	Eolas	Le Courrier des	et de l'info
Futura sciences	Pure People	Best santé	Authueil	Maires	Planet
The Conversation	Science Post	Astuces des femmes	Yagg	Mediacités	
		Astucerie	La Gazette des communes	Le tribunal du net	
				e-sante	

2.2.2.1. Visibility on Twitter

28

Question

- Are some media more visible than others because of their audience's high level of participation?

Short answer

- Some Twitter accounts are more active than others, thus making some media more visible than others (Sputnik, Je suis francais, Fdesouche).

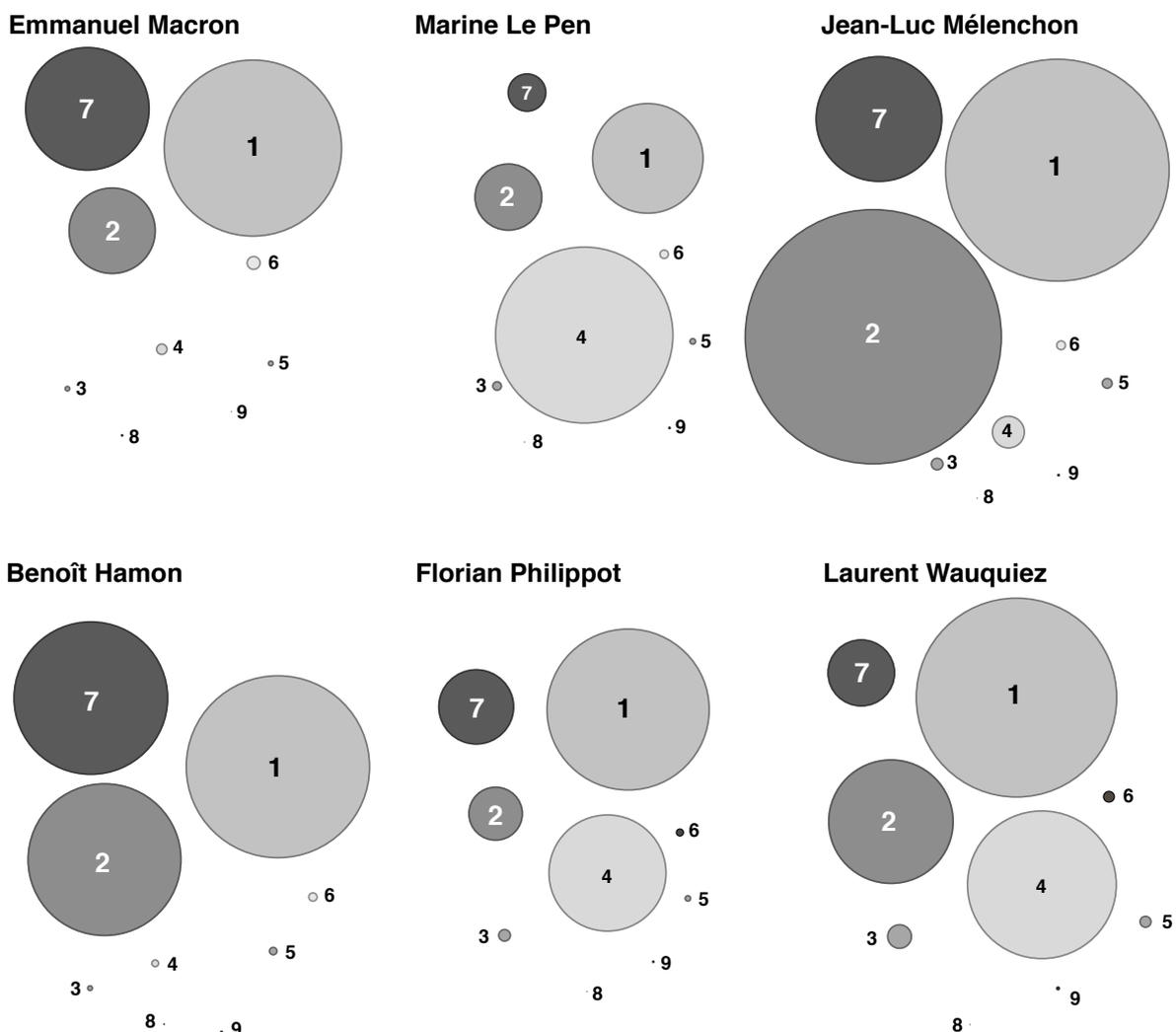
The sheer number of citations (see Fig. 2) per media reveals interesting insights. As expected, newspapers like *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* or *Le Parisien* and television news stations like *France Télévisions* dominate this ranking. It is more surprising to see publications like the far-right media *Fdesouche* and *Je suis français*, or the newly created *Sputniknews.fr* and *FrançaisRT*, gathering huge amounts of citations. Our understanding is that the high number of citations obtained by these media (more than 300,000 for *Fdesouche*) are produced by a relatively limited number of unique Twitter users (see left side of the histogram on Fig. 2) who are particularly active supporters. This behavior is visible as we move vertically up the graph, where we find media sources such as *Sputnik*, *Valeurs actuelles* and *RT France*.

Bayrou, Laurent Wauquiez, Alain Juppé, Benoît Hamon, etc. To each political figure, we assigned a group of “supporters”, which we define as Twitter users who have retweeted a political figure at least 3 times over the last three months. We then looked at the number of times each media was cited by each political figure’s group of supporters.

Below are the three maps obtained for Emmanuel Macron, Marine Le Pen, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Fig. 3). The size of each circle is proportional to the number of times the media from each group are cited by Twitter users affiliated to a political figure. If we take Jean-Luc Mélenchon, we see that the Twitter users who are close to him ideologically largely quote media belonging to the second cluster, which we said above could be considered as left-leaning media. In order to see which media belong to which group, please refer to the list in section 2.2.2. “The Influence”.

Figure 6. Overlay maps for Emmanuel Macron (top left), Marine Le Pen (top middle), Jean-Luc Mélenchon supporters (top right), Benoît Hamon (bottom left), Florian Philippot (bottom middle) and Laurent Wauquiez (bottom right)

As seen previously, the four structuring clusters are cluster 1: media that could be considered as mainstream; cluster 2: media that could be considered as left-leaning; cluster 3: media that could be considered as providing alternative information; cluster 4: media that could be considered as coming from the far-right.



We observe that the volume of citations pointing toward mainstream media from the first cluster, which includes *Le Monde* or *France info*, remains approximately the same in all three groups of supporters. These media set the agenda for the larger media and political conversation. However, the set of media cited is clearly different from a supporter of Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s left-wing party *La France Insoumise* to a supporter of Marine Le Pen’s right-wing party *Rassemblement National*.

2.2.2.3. Thematic analysis of the propagation of information on Twitter

Question

- Are some topics covered by some media and not by others?

Short answer

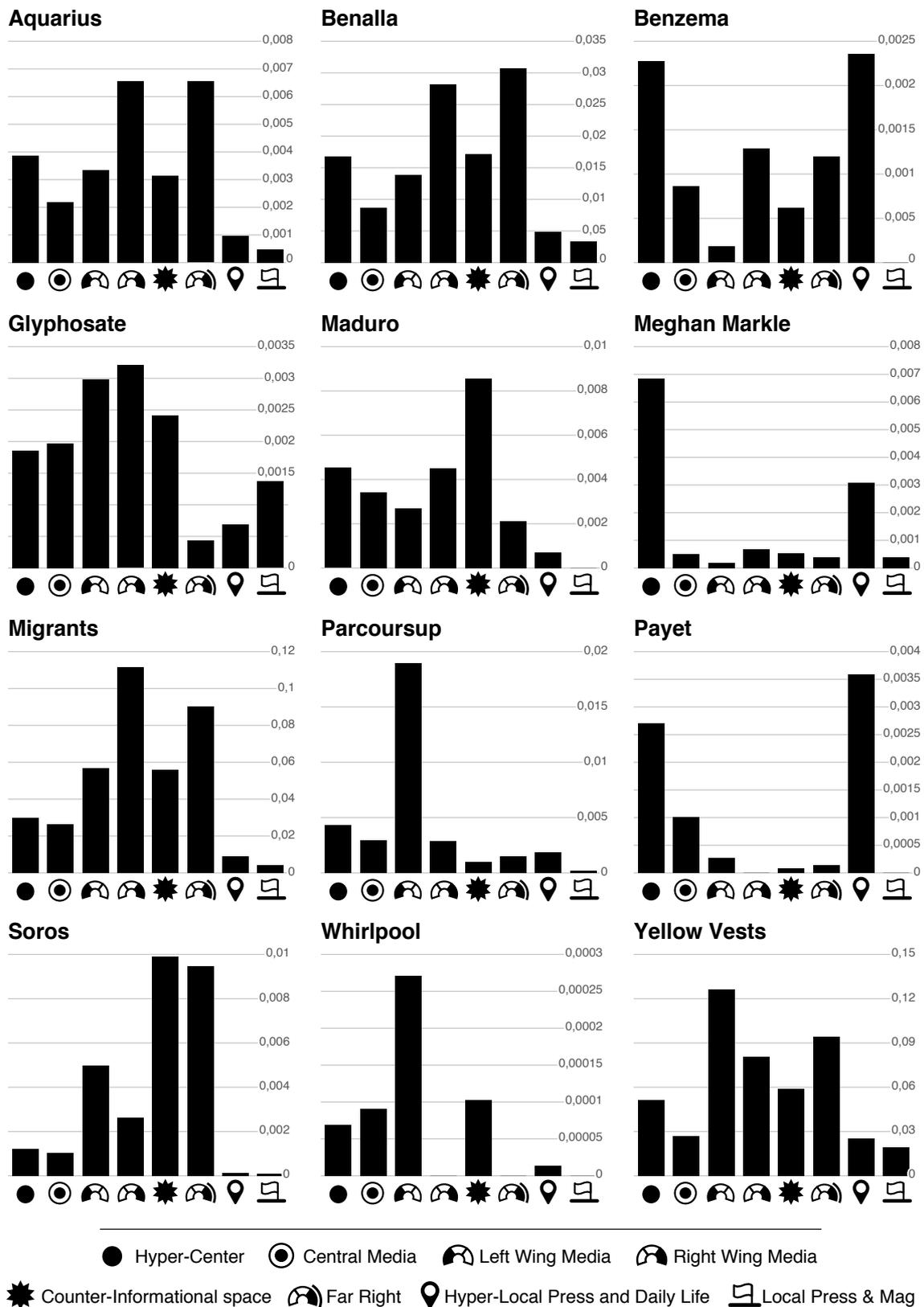
- There are differences in the circulation of specific topics: while “Parcoursup” is a central topic for the media group that could be considered left-wing, it is absent from Satellite media (Counter-informational and Far-Right media subgroups). “Soros” is very present in Satellite media, yet much less so in the Core media (Hyper-Center and Central media).

Finally, we investigated whether certain topics spread only within some groups of media. We first recorded the distribution of the number of articles produced by all groups of media. Despite the agenda-setting role of the Hypercenter, the daily regional press still comes first, producing 31% of published articles. Still, media from the Hypercenter (see the Structure) produce more than a fourth (27,5%) of the overall articles. However, Central Media publish 19% of articles, Magazines, 7%. These raw statistics show that the total number of articles produced by media situated in Satellite media is comparatively small. There is also a huge disparity between the visibility of different websites on social media. Media from the Core are highly visible on Twitter, the Hypercenter alone accounting for 58% of tweets. Right-Wing and Left-Wing media groups inside the Ring respectively represent 7% and 1% of the total number of tweets, and Satellite media account for less than 3% of our corpus of tweets

We then examined the ways in which certain news stories or general topics are distributed over the entire information space. We would naturally expect that certain news stories or topics may be more fit to spread in a specific sub-group of media than others. To test this assumption, we used queries such as “Aquarius” to locate the articles about the rescue vessel for migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean. It should be noted, however, that, at this level of granularity, we cannot distinguish between articles supporting the Italian government’s decision to curtail the arrival of migrants and articles criticizing the lack of generosity of European governments - we are able to capture what is on the agenda, but not sentiments or approaches.

In any case, this method enables us to show which stories are central to the agenda of a given group of media. Fig. 11 shows that articles about the Aquarius were clearly much more frequent within the anti-Islam and far-right spaces. Conversely, the term “Aquarius” hardly appears in articles published within the groups “Alternative Health” and “Practical Life”. More interestingly, the sub-groups “Magazines” and “Left Media” are also silent on the matter. We built histograms for each of the 22 queries we manually designed. They examine attacks committed in France or abroad in the last six months (“*attentat égyptien*”, “*attentat opéra*”, “*gendarme Beltrame*”), political decisions or events (“*Macron migrants*”, “*Macron Vatican*”), societal controversies (“*Tolbiac prostitution*”, “*Parcoursup*”) or less politicized news regarding sport or the royal wedding (“*Meghan Markle*”, “*Dimitri Payet*”).

Figure 7. The penetration of stories (indexed by Media Cloud) in the various media spaces



2.2.3. Interactions between the Structure and the Influence

Question

- Are there any differences between the groups obtained by looking at the way media quote each other (the Structure), and the ones obtained by looking at the way they are quoted by audiences on Twitter (the Influence)?

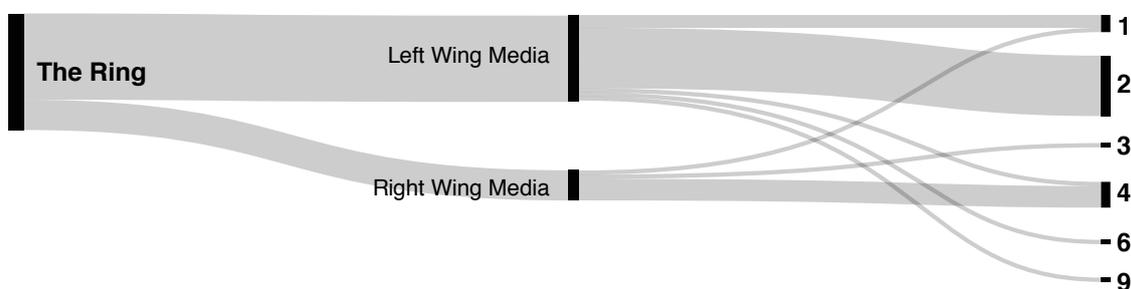
Short answer

- Overall, media are grouped in the same way. However, two differences emerge:
 - The people who quote media from the Left-Wing sub-category inside the Ring in the Structure also quote media from the Center.
 - Furthermore, those who quote media from the Right-Wing sub-category inside the Ring in the Structure also quote media from the Satellite group.

Does looking at the way media quote one another (the Structure) reveal similar groups of media to those revealed when assessing the way audiences cite media on Twitter (the Influence)? When we overlap the Structure (the citations between media) with the Influence (the sharing of media sources on Twitter), we see that the groups are similar. In other words, each group of media obtained in the Structure share similar audiences: Twitter users who share articles from the Hypercenter share few articles from Satellite media, and vice-versa.

There are, however, differences worth mentioning. Articles from Left-Wing media from the Ring are frequently shared by Twitter accounts that also quote articles from the Central Media. There is therefore a strong connection between Central and Left-Wing media in terms of audiences. Yet the same phenomenon does not apply to Right-Wing Media: those who share articles from this category of media also share articles from Far-Right Media and Counter-Informational Media. There is a connexion between the radical counter-information sites of the far-right and the Right-Wing media from the Ring sphere.

Figure 8. Repartition of the media from the Ring (in the Structure) according to the categorisation in the Influence.



2.2.4. The Conversation: a third layer to consider

This study revealed the structure of the two upper levels of the French digital public space by analyzing links between websites (the “Structure”) and the circulation of articles on Twitter (the “Influence”). It is, however, not able to apply the same methodology to the third level of the digital public space, i.e. the “Conversation”, which is embodied in closed social networks, such as Facebook, Snapchat or WhatsApp. Initially intended for interpersonal conversations in small circles, these social networks have become powerful vehicles for the dissemination of information, and are, in some countries like Brazil or India, accused of being the primary areas where disinformation circulates.

It is impossible to conduct large-scale studies based on data extracted from these conversational networks, for two reasons. The first is the “private” or “semi-private” nature of the discussions that take place on these networks. Pages and groups are mostly “closed” on Facebook - public Facebook pages, because they are public, do not have the same properties as the vast majority of other pages on the platform, and are therefore not representative. Conversations on WhatsApp are encrypted and disappear after a certain amount of seconds on Snapchat. The second reason is that the methods that have previously been used by researchers to access this data - through Facebook’s API and respondents acceptance of researchers’ “friend requests” on Facebook - are no longer allowed by Facebook and are ethically questionable. Nevertheless, it is possible to study these spaces indirectly, looking at what articles are most shared on Facebook (without going into the details of which communities share them) using platforms such as Media Cloud.²⁶

The space where digital conversations occur is key to the analysis of the disinformation phenomena. The very specific conditions under which information is shared are different from those in more “public” digital spaces. Constraints to be coherent, responsible and rational are not as strong as they are in a public space, where speech is archived and visible to all. In conversational niches of social networks, audience is limited and those who exchange messages are often close to one another. In this particular context, it is much easier - i.e. less costly - to make outrageous comments, jokes, to express anger and personal opinions, or to propagate misinformation and disinformation. Therefore, it seems legitimate to hypothesize that false information circulates more easily within this particular space.

²⁶ Media Cloud is an open-source platform for media analysis developed by the MIT Center for Civic Media and the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University: <https://mediacloud.org/>



INTERPRETATION: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FRENCH MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

As seen in section 1.2.1. “Social media as technological scapegoats”, social media are held responsible for many of the challenges Western societies face, ranging from declining trust, to polarization, to the rise of populisms. However, declining trust and rising populism likely predate the widespread adoption of social media. Therefore, social media may be reflecting these phenomena more than causing them. Social media is where the majority of public discussions online occur, and the way they curate content does influence the public debate. But assuming that social media are the root of all evils is simply erroneous and, more importantly, leads to simplistic and flawed decision-making.

In the following sections, we will first shed light on the general dynamics underlying digital media ecosystems, and assess their contribution to polarization. Today, our general understanding of the ways in which social media impact public debates and democracy mainly comes from the United States. We will therefore first describe polarization as it plays out in the United States, before turning to the specificities of the French media ecosystem, based on the results of the study conducted with Sciences Po and the MIT Center for Civic Media.

Social media are in constant interaction with the more traditional media environment in which they operate, which is itself shaped by a specific political context. Keeping the relationship between technology, media and politics in mind is essential when discussing the ways in which social media influence democracy. Polarization in the United States thus unfolded on a one-dimensional spectrum, which seems to be modelled on the left-right political spectrum. This can partly be explained by the fact that the entire media environment and political discussion is structured around this very spectrum: the media play into polarization and legitimize this left-right axis. In other words, Fox News opposes CNN in the same way that Donald Trump opposed Hillary Clinton. Therefore, social media operate in an environment where the political conversation is already highly polarized.

In France, the political landscape is shaped by a variety of actors who represent a more diverse set of ideologies. Therefore, the institutional conversation is not polarized on a single axis. Moreover, various ideologies still link to some of the referential media. This was made clear in section 2.2.2.2. “Circulation according to political figure partisans”: the media of the Core appear to be referential across the political spectrum (even if they are linked to in order to be criticized). Our interpretation is that the divide does not take place within the institutional sphere (i.e. on a left-right axis), but outside of it: it occurs between the institutional sphere (which comprises the left-right spectrum), and a sphere that rejects the elites. This is what an analysis of the Yellow Vests movement brings to light. In this environment, social media do not polarize, they are the space where polarization unfolds.

3.1. Dynamics of digital media spaces

3.1.1. Social media and polarization

The challenges facing the American media has been the subject of many studies. To help analyze the disruptions affecting both digital and traditional media, Ethan Zuckerman categorizes four buckets of problems that the media ecosystem faces today and that may contribute to polarization.²⁷ Before delving into the detail of each of these buckets, we ought to understand that the media sphere is different now than it was 40 years ago.

Originally, those who produced content (news articles, TV shows, films...) were also the ones who distributed it. Audiences were linked to information producers in a unidirectional, linear way. Social media platforms have changed the dynamics by which information is distributed (the visibility of a piece of news is no longer linked to the number of versions a producer is able to print).²⁸ In addition, lower production costs (virtually anyone can write a piece of information, be it a tweet, a Facebook post or a blog article) enable new actors to enter the media sphere, and thus to reach large audiences. In this space, publics on social media have a significant impact on the success of pieces of information, and thus on that of those who produce them. That is, social media publics continuously interact with information producers, as they are able to give direct or indirect feedback that influence the latter's editorial choices.

In this new environment, Ethan Zuckerman argues that four buckets of problems create fragilities that ultimately contribute to the polarization of the media landscape:

A challenged business model: with the multiplication of information sources, it is increasingly difficult to persuade citizens to pay for high-quality journalism. Obviously, there are exceptions, as with *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, which have benefited from the “Trump bump” and have registered record subscriptions. Nevertheless, revenues have become more scarce as access to information is now filtered by discovery engines. The main consequence of this challenged business model is that it has become increasingly difficult for newspapers to provide high-quality journalism. This is a problem because, as Ethan Zuckerman notes, “*Only a few dozen people might read the minutes of last night's meeting at City Hall, but it matters immensely that a seasoned political reporter is scanning those notes carefully, looking for possible scandals or abuse and threatening to splash them on the front page, if officials don't behave ethically*”. Contestation is essential for a healthy democracy. However, it is important that the studies that spark controversy result from the research of both journalists and researchers committed to truth. Moreover, discovering and presenting the truth takes time and resources.

The addictive nature of social media: the main social networks were built so as to incite users to spend a maximum amount of time on these platforms. They use addictive methods inspired by the gambling industry and build tools designed to get its users hooked on social media. It contributes to the quick spread of misinformation and disinformation on social networks.

²⁷ Ethan Zuckerman, 2018. *Four problems for news and democracy*.

²⁸ This is detailed in Ethan Zuckerman's 2018 article, *Four problems for news and democracy*.

Malicious actors: this new configuration contains flaws that are exploited by malicious actors. Some of them are ready to use any means that will allow them to spread their views. For instance, “bot farms” use social media to manipulate opinions or to increase positive ratings and reviews, thus sending false signals to curation algorithms and affecting the popularity of certain stories and topics. Similarly, disinformation produced either to deceive or to divert attention for profit is presented as legitimate news. Very often, political decisions related to disinformation, and more generally the negative role of social media on democracy, focus on this bulk of problems. This is simply because, politically speaking, it is relatively easy to point at a series of guilty actors and to sanction them.

Known bugs: this last problem highlights the fact that even when all participants in a system are acting in good faith, undesired effects can still emerge. Phenomena such as echo chambers and filter bubbles seem to form online, surrounding citizens with content that tends to polarize their opinions. Ethan Zuckerman calls these problems “bugs”, as they seem to appear even when everyone within a certain media ecosystem behaves well.

Keeping these four buckets of problems in mind is essential when thinking about the impact of social networks on democracy.

3.1.2. Social media and the conversational agenda

The recent multiplication of information sites led to the establishment of an online conversation space. Conversations that were once held in private circles, within family circles, at the pub or over coffee, are now published online. Citizens now have the ability to express their opinions and to share it with wider audiences through new communication channels: social networks, blogs, personal pages... Yochai Benkler defined this new space as “the networked public sphere”.²⁹ In contrast to the public sphere once entirely dominated by public encounters and mass media, the latter is propelled by the internet and personal media. It differs both in terms of form and content, as well as with respect to the number and variety of the participants it involves.

The emergence of social networks gave birth to a conversational agenda. The latter allows billions of users to bring to the fore stories that used to be hidden. Traditional media keep filtering flows of information. Yet what they filter out can now be re-used and published on the internet. We thus argue that a conversational agenda has developed next to the media sphere. This conversational agenda is more polarized than the media sphere is, but its impact on the latter remains limited. As a consequence, it creates a vast flow of information and communications that reach the public space without the mediation of traditional news organizations.

3.1.3. First scientific study: polarization in the United States

Two recent studies testify to the increasing polarization of both the media landscape³⁰ and the public life³¹ in the United States. The very structure³¹ of the American media sphere has evolved

²⁹ *The Wealth of Networks*, Yochai Benkler, Yale University Press, 2006.

³⁰ Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, 2016. *Partisanship, Propaganda, & Disinformation: Online Media & the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election*.

³¹ “This is what filter bubbles actually look like”, *MIT Technology Review*, John Kelly and Camille François, August 22, 2018.

strongly and rapidly. The center of gravity of the conservative media has indeed significantly shifted to the right, while the left-wing media have simultaneously adopted a more moderate stance.

The structure of the overall media landscape shows that left- and right-wing media systems operate differently. The asymmetric polarization of media is evident in the assessment of both open web linking and social media sharing. Prominent left-wing media are more or less evenly distributed across the center, center-left, and left of the political spectrum. Yet prominent right-wing media are highly partisan. The center-left and the far-right have become the main clusters defining the American media landscape.

Overall, we witnessed the increasing and gradual ideological polarization of both traditional media and political parties. As noted by Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts,³² this transformation began in the 1990s, and was led by prominent figures such as Rush Limbaugh.

With the development of social networks, this polarization could be further exploited to cleave the media sphere through the establishment of a self-reinforcing loop (the propaganda feedback loop). In other words, some of the misinformation produced on low-visibility, extremist sites, is exploited by larger and more visible media. This process results from the interaction of media and political actors: high-profile personalities “launder” disinformation by transferring it to high-visibility spaces (for example, a piece in the far-right Daily Caller might be repeated in Breitbart, which has a greater reach, then influence a story in Fox News. The New York Times, ideologically far from the origins of the story, may feel compelled to report and comment on it, bringing an idea from the Daily Caller into the mainstream dialog.)

As a case in point, *Breitbart's* key role in the media landscape during the American election was particularly acute when it came to covering the topic of immigration. On Twitter, *Breitbart* stories on immigration were shared more than twice as often as stories from *The Guardian*, which ranked second.³³

3.2. Dynamics of the French media ecosystem

The present study shows that the French media sphere has not been fragmented in the same way as the American media sphere. This result can be explained by some of the French media sphere's specificities. However, the apparently stable situation this study describes actually conceals vulnerabilities: the main factors of polarization found and analyzed in the United States are also present in France. Polarization in France may play out in similar ways as it did in the US. However, an intriguing other possibility exists, which is that tensions between the Hypercenter and more peripheral media may lead to a different form of instability than has emerged in the US.

³² *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, 2018.

³³ *Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election*. Bruce Etling, Nikki Bourassa, Ethan Zuckerman, Yochai Benkler, Rob Faris, Hal Roberts, 2017.

3.2.1. The behavior of traditional media encourages the circulation of shared values

The French media environment possesses specific features that complexify and thus hinder the emergence of highly partisan stories in mainstream public debates. As highlighted by the study led by Sciences Po, French traditional media have close ties with one another. Part of this behavior was exemplified during the 2017 French presidential campaign by the CrossCheck initiative.

CrossCheck is a collaborative journalism verification project fostered by FirstDraftNews, a non-profit coalition that offers best practice recommendations from nine founding partners (including Google News Lab, which funds most of the non-profit's activities) and provides "practical and ethical guidance in how to find, verify and published content sourced from the social web". During the 2016 American presidential elections, FirstDraftNews launched Electionland a "project to track and cover voting problems during the 2016 election, across the country and in real-time", with *ProPublica* and *The New York Times*, amongst others - the latter being one "core partner" out of over 70 others. CrossCheck was essentially based on the same principles as Electionland, but focused on France and on disinformation. Under CrossCheck, internet users were able to flag dubious content on the web, on social networks or in other spaces by filling out forms available on the news organizations' websites. Internet users were also able to submit questions and links to disputed sites and content for CrossCheck's partners to investigate. 37 news organizations including 27 French ones took part in the project: AFP (*Agence France-Presse*), *BuzzFeed News*, *Euronews*, *France Médias Monde* (via *Les Observateurs de France 24*), *Euractiv*, *Explicite*, *France Télévisions*, *Global Voices*, *LCI*, *Le JDD*, *L'Express*, *Libération*, *La Montagne-Centre France*, *La Provence*, *Les Echos*, *La Voix du Nord*, *Le Monde - les Décodeurs*, *Nice-Matin*, *Ouest-France*, *Rue89 Bordeaux*, *Rue89Lyon*, *Rue89 Strasbourg*, *Saphir News*, *Storyful*, *StreetPress*, *Sud Ouest*, *Le Télégramme*. Newsrooms partaking in the project had cutting-edge digital tools at their disposal to analyze trends and patterns. Facebook indirectly took part in this project by letting CrossCheck partners use one its analytical tools, *CrowdTangle*. Another fact-checking and verification project, *#WahlCheck17*, was implemented in Germany by First Draft during the elections, together with *Correctiv*.

3.2.2. Some growing feedback loops

Another driver of change is the fact that the media agenda is increasingly influenced by the conversational agenda due to the existence of feedback loops. The study led by Sciences Po shows that there is often a clear divide on Twitter between stories shared by traditional media and by the Satellite media. This observation was supported and verified by the testimonies of journalists interviewed for this study, who rely heavily on Twitter and social media more generally to identify trending topics and to keep up to date with the news.

In the United States, these feedback loops allowed disinformation to pervade the public space because large media such as *Breitbart* and *Fox News*, and influential political figures such as Donald Trump, rendered disinformation visible in an effort to criticize and counter the status quo. In our study, we found that Right-Wing media from the Ring and Satellite media shared an audience. The porosity between these two information spheres may help media from the Satellite group, which relay dubious information, to gain visibility within the public debate.

3.2.3. The media’s interactions with a multipolar political system

There are undeniably major differences between the American and the French political systems. Yet it is worth noting that the fact that the former is a two-party system and that the latter is structured around multiple parties does not necessarily account for the gap between the increasingly asymmetric architecture of the American news ecosystem and the relative stability of the French news ecosystem. On the other hand, the radicalization and insularization of the right-wing media ecosystem in the United States change the dynamics that have structured the American media ecosystem as a whole so far.

As Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts³⁴ argue, there has been a shift from the “reality-check dynamic” to the “propaganda feedback loop”.

- In a media system shaped by reality-check dynamics, different media compete to deliver a neutral coverage of information on politicians, who in turn seek favorable coverage so as to be portrayed as positively as possible. In such a model, the media are defined by their truth-seeking mission and their claim to objectivity.
- In a media ecosystem shaped by the propaganda feedback loop, the media do not compete on delivering neutral or critical coverage, but rather on reinforcing identities claimed by the public, by promoting partisan news over truth and nuance. According to this paradigm, politicians who play their cards right are the ones addressing the public with statements that confirm the latter’s biases. Challengers on the political scene find it consequently increasingly difficult to speak to segments of the public that reject the external mainstream media.

This shift has not been observed in France, where reality-check dynamics still largely shape the media ecosystem. French politicians seek coverage from the mainstream media, no matter how virulently they criticize the latter. Some, like Jean-Luc Mélenchon, have tried to circumvent mainstream media by reaching out to those who support them on Youtube. Yet they have not gone so far as to cut ties with the mainstream media. It is also worth noting that strongly politicized media have recently been launched in France.

3.2.4. The rise of new strongly politicized media

Highly politicized news media have emerged around the central bulk of traditional media. They have acquired a relatively large audience and high visibility. Here is again the composition of these groups.

- The **Right-Wing Media** sub-category gathers a small number of media that are more right-wing than the traditional French right. These either defend conservative values (*Causeur, Valeurs actuelles, L’Incorrect*) or liberal values (*Contrepoints*). This group also includes the French far-right’s influential and historical information website (*Français de souche*) as well as two Russian information sites in France (*Sputnik, RT France*).

³⁴ Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics, Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, Oxford University Press, 2018

- The **Left-Wing Media** sub-category gathers a wide spectrum of sites from the left of the left - i.e. a stance that critiques the governmental socialist left. It includes historical publications representative of this ideological space (*Le Monde diplomatique*, *Alternatives Economiques*, *Politis*), pure players of the critical or altermondialist left (*Bastamag*, *Rue89Lyon*, *Paul Jorion...*) and alternative media linked to social movements (*Rebellyon*, *La Horde*, *Fakir*, *Le monde Libertaire...*).

The study led by Sciences Po already demonstrates that *RT France* has managed to generate conversation patterns similar to that of traditional media. This is both an important achievement for such a young media and a warning for incumbent players.

3.2.5. A risk of fossilization of traditional media

We argue that the main risk for traditional newspapers is that they will end up fossilizing because of their inability to interact with other groups of media. We name “fossilization” the process by which some media lose their ability to shape public debates because they are ignored by other groups of media. This is what happened to a series of newspapers in the United States as their work environment got disrupted by new digital players. For instance, the arrival of *Breitbart*, by pulling further to the right right-wing traditional media such as *Fox News*, have taken away a part of the audience of newspapers such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal*. The latter have therefore lost their ability to shape public debates on the right of the political spectrum.

This risk of fossilization is obviously accentuated and fueled by the rising level of distrust of the French people towards the French media. As previously noted, the case of France is interesting because institutional media in the Core, from the left (*Libération*) to the right (*Le Figaro*) of the political spectrum, are very close to one another. Conversely, in the United States, institutional media are highly divided, with *Fox News* belonging to a completely separate category from that of *The New York Times*. The risk of fossilization thus concerns all traditional media. Our suggestion is that, if the Core media group were to become irrelevant, polarization in France would take a different form than it has so far in the United States. Indeed, it would unfold on a spectrum opposing institutions to anti-elitism, rather than on one opposing the right to the left.

3.2.6. A risk of vertical polarization (institutionalists vs. anti-elites)

In France, we have not witnessed the emergence of actors like *Breitbart*, which have the capacity to break the Core media by attracting large institutional media and leading them to follow their editorial line (as *Breitbart* did with *Fox News* in the United States). Right-wing or left-wing media fail to polarize the Core media because dominant actors in the latter category resist these attempts. There are strong signs of integration and cohesion within the Core media: the latter frequently cite each other, yet they rarely mention other media ecosystems from the corpus we analyzed (especially not Counter-Informational Media, in the Satellite media category) - see categories in 2.2.1. The Structure.

Some of these traditional media developed fact-checking teams, which play an important role in the mutual control media have on each other, although they have little impact on audiences receptive to disinformation. For example, during the May 2017 French presidential campaign, several

editorial offices worked together as part of the CrossCheck initiative in order to identify disinformation. Overall, the proximity of the journalistic ecosystem within the Core makes it easier for clearly erroneous or misleading information to be reported, criticized and corrected within most of this central, institutional media sphere.

The development of more “politicized” media both to the left and right of the central space (which we termed “the Ring” in the Structure) does not seem to be a major destabilizing factor today. Left-wing media from the Ring are relatively old and integrated in the central space (as shown on the map of the Twitter coverage of the media space in section 2.2.2.). Only the recent media *Le Média* is trying to settle within this central space. However, this attempt is highly contested by media from the Core, which have been generally hostile towards new entrants, the identity of which is based on pinpointing the lies or errors of traditional media from the central political field.

There are new developments coming from right-wing media. Some websites such as *Fdesouche* have a relatively strong influence on Twitter. Moreover, new media such as *RT France* and *Sputnik* have entered this space and strengthened the bulk of media opposing institutional actors. As seen in section 3.2.2. “Some growing feedback loops”, these media, which are closer to Satellite media than to Core media, can echo information coming from Satellite media and thus allow it to pervade the central public space.

Another development comes from other types of polarizing actors. These include the political figures, editorialists and essayists, which we could call “launderers” (they take misinformation coming from low-visibility areas to promote it in high-visibility areas): Eric Zemmour, André Bercoff, Nadine Morano, etc. They continuously communicate on social media in order to reinforce their positions of contestants and to gain access to mainstream media, TV shows or articles. However, these strategies are not frequent, and other journalists think carefully about whether or not to give visibility to these actors.

Critically, there is an ongoing tension between actors within and those without the system supporting the Core media. To those outside this system, public debates are not always representative of people’s personal interests and fears. We thus observe two spaces: one that benefits from high public visibility provided by traditional websites, online or on Twitter, and one that opposes the latter as a whole. This emerging second space aims to substitute the left/right divide with an opposition between the people and the elites. Contestation thus focuses on traditional media and established politicians’ blindness to the people’s true concerns and the polarization occurs on an institutional-anti-elite axis.

3.3. From theory to practice: the Yellow Vests movement

The Yellow Vests movement illustrates the distinction between an institutional media ecosystem and an anti-elite one. Throughout this movement, there has so far been a clearly visible opposition between institutional media, traditional media, and others, both in terms of how the events were covered, and of the messages carried by the demonstrators.

In order to analyze this opposition, we tracked 64,936 articles from a corpus of 391 media from April 1st, 2018 to February 6th, 2019 using the Media Cloud platform.

3.3.1. Late media reactions to the events

When looking at the chronological distribution of articles, we see that the traditional media only started covering the Yellow Vests movement from November 12th, 2018 onwards, i.e. one week before Act 1, when the first roadblock on November 17th gathered 282,000 demonstrators wearing a yellow vest (according to the Ministry of the Interior). For a relatively long time before that, the media remained relatively indifferent to the birth of the mobilization on Facebook. For example, the video posted on Facebook on October 18th by Jacqueline Mouraud, who called on «Mr. Macron» and criticized the carbon tax, went unnoticed.

The fact that the movement was not represented by any spokespersons, that it did not explicitly address political institutions nor share its messages through organized communication channels, as such initiatives usually are, made it difficult for the local press to seize the issue. The regional press started covering the event only after national media did. This shows the centralization of the French media sphere, with national media playing a significant role in shaping the agenda.

As of the first Act of the movement, articles on the Yellow Vests started being produced at a steady pace, every week until the Christmas holidays, which demonstrates the importance this topic gained in the media agenda. A significant number of articles came out on Saturdays in preparation for the demonstrations, followed by a peak of articles on Mondays to comment on the demonstrations and their effects. Media coverage of the movement became a routine, which, however, relatively declined after the Christmas holiday period.

3.3.2. A variety of topics addressed

Based on the 64,936 articles focusing on the Yellow Vests movement, here is a map of the topics these articles addressed.

1. **Facebook and the voice of the Yellow Vests:** a series of articles mention the movement's organization, using words such as "spokespersons", "coordination", and "discontent".
2. **Roundabouts blockings:** this cluster of words focuses on the act of blocking, using words such as "traffic", "trucks" and "vehicles", as well as "march", "gathering", "demonstrations", etc.
3. **Strasbourg:** this cluster is linked to the attacks in Strasbourg on December 11th, 2018.
4. **Demonstrations outside Paris:** this category conveys a territorial approach, with terms such as "prefecture", "number of demonstrators", as well as names of cities such as "Nantes", "Caen", "Rouen", "Bordeaux", "Marseille".
5. **Demonstrations in Paris and the violence:** another series is composed of words like "clashes", "damages", "interpellations" and "violence".

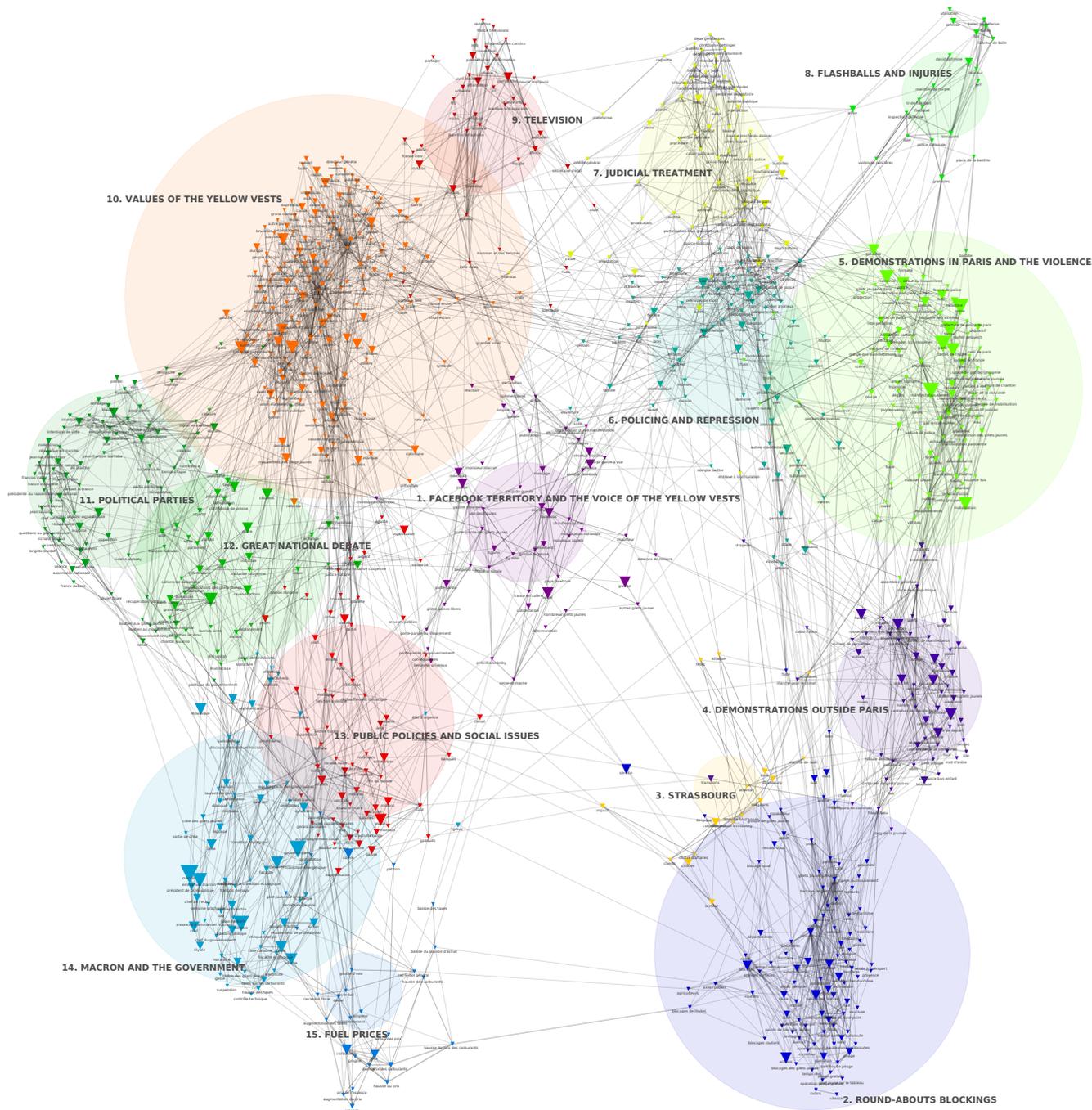
- 6. Policing and repression:** this category gathers vocabulary relating to altercations between the police and demonstrators, as well as the repressive treatment of these events.
- 7. Judicial treatment:** the semantic field of this category includes “hearing”, “immediate hearing trial”, “judge”, “public authority”, “criminal court”, “detention”, “prison”, “judicial supervision”, etc.
- 8. Flashballs and injuries:** this category mentions damages caused by the police’s use of weapons.
- 9. Television:** this category refers to TV stations’ coverage of the events.

Another approach to the movement, focused on the messages carried by the movement and its political implications, contrasts with the semantic fields listed above:

- 10. Values of the Yellow Vests :** this cluster includes words such as “the people”, “the working class”, “rural”, “democracy”, “power”, “divide”, “criticism”, “revolution”, etc.
- 11. Political parties:** this category gathers words associated with the central political sphere, partisan competition and the measurement of the Yellow Vests’ popularity within public opinion (it includes names of political parties and terms such as “National Assembly”, “leader” or “European election”).
- 12. Great National Debate:** this group includes terms such as “citizen initiatives”, “discussion”, “intermediary bodies”, etc.
- 13. Public policies and social issues:** words in this category are related to tax policies and the redistribution of wealth.
- 14. Macron and the government:** this group of words showcases the Elysée and Matignon’s responses to the Yellow Vests movement.
- 15. Fuel prices:** words in this category relate to the movement’s initial claim: “diesel”, “fuel prices”, “being fed up”, etc.

These different clusters of words are presented in the map below.

Figure 9. Map of the topics addressed in the media coverage of the Yellow Vests movement (using Cortex).

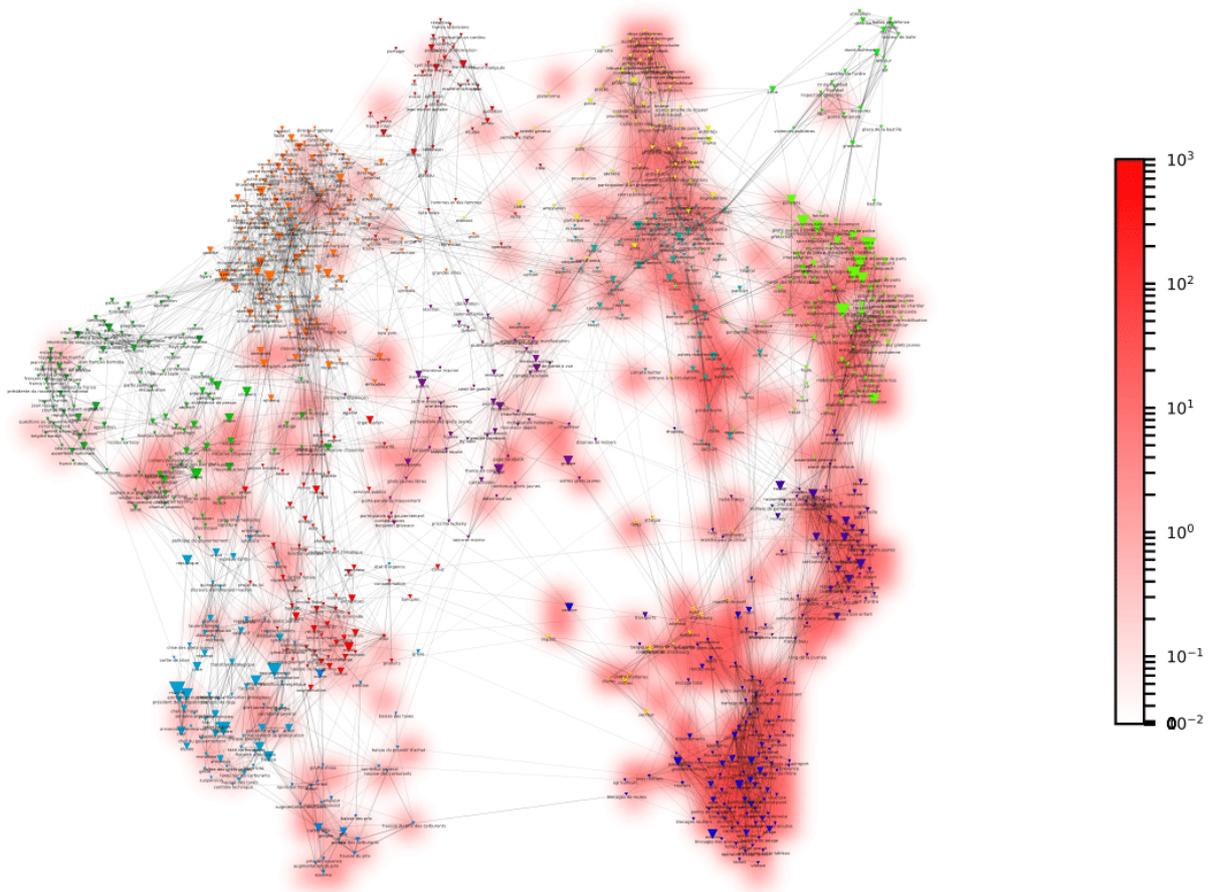


3.3.3. A different coverage of the events by different groups of media

Based on this map, we can identify how different media addressed the events according to the specific topics they focused on. In each of the heat maps below, we highlighted in grey the clusters of words in Fig. 6 associated with a particular group of media. Significant differences in the ways the coverages of the events were framed can be observed.

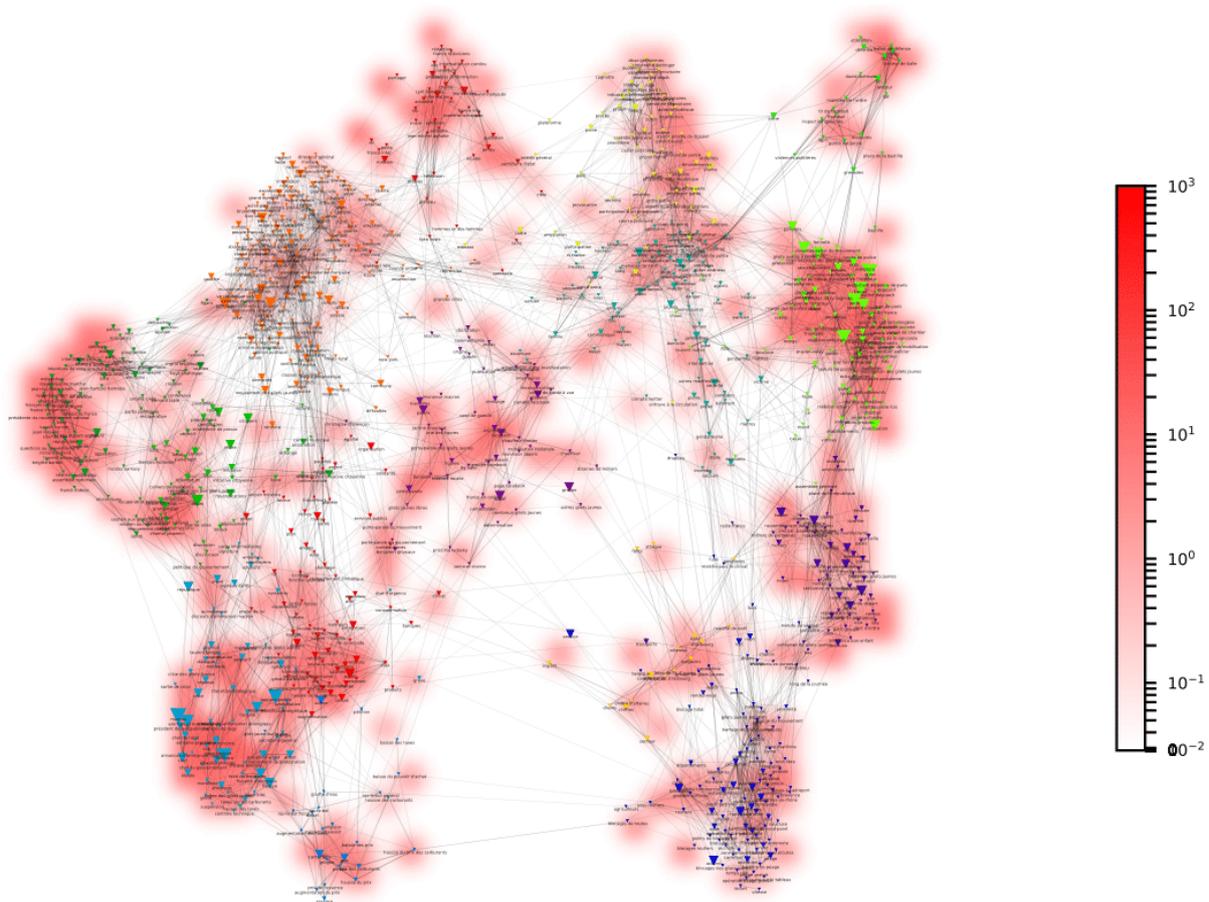
First, the daily regional press is characterized by its local anchoring. The most highlighted areas of the map refer to cluster 2. Roundabouts blockings, 4. Demonstrations outside Paris, 6. Policing and repression. On the other hand, the topics least referred to by the daily regional press are 12. Great National Debate and 10. Values of the Yellow Vests. This framing is thus extremely cautious, and rooted in local realities and in the practical consequences of the mobilization.

Figure 10. Coverage of the Yellow Vests by the Daily Regional Press



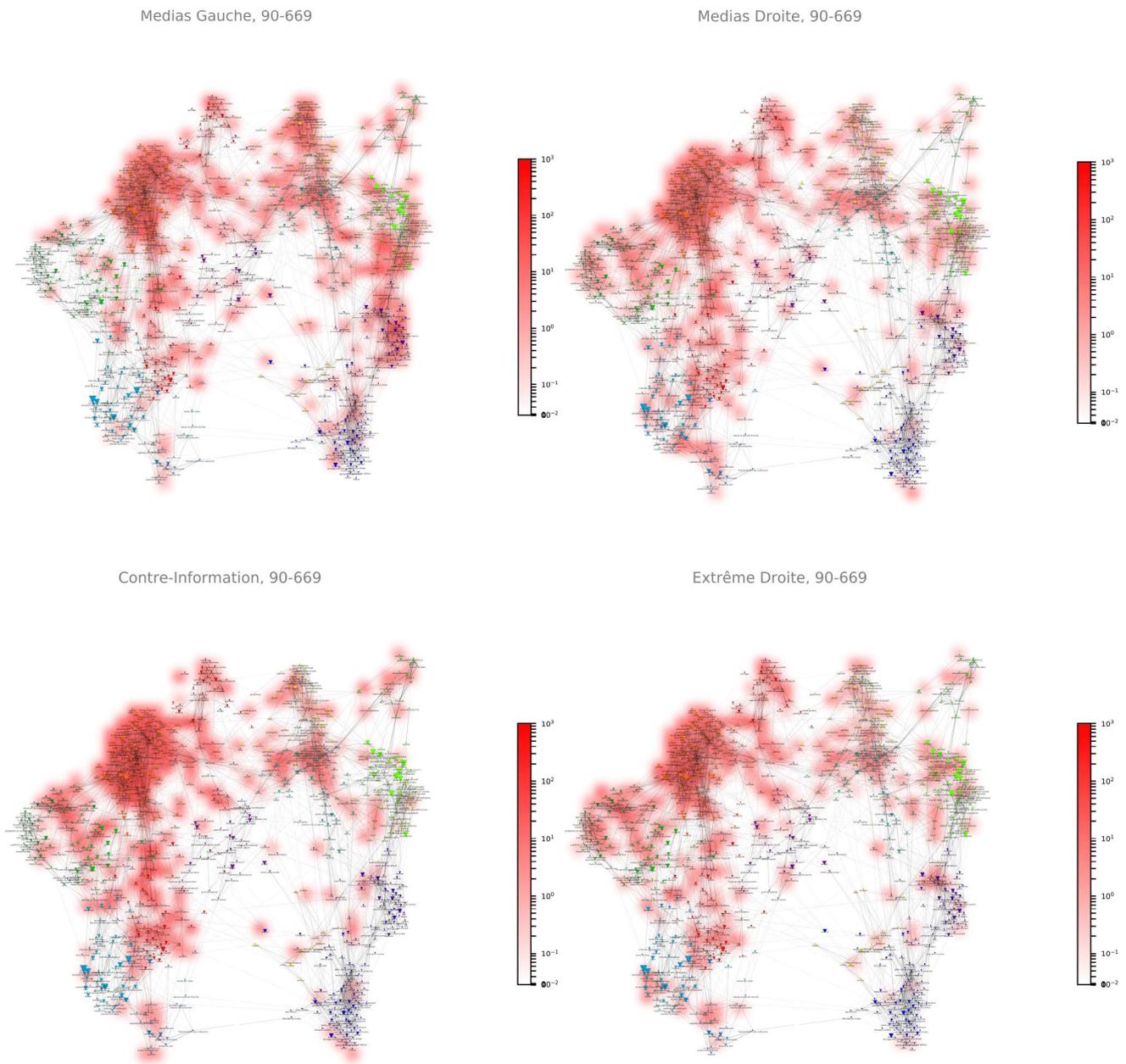
Second, the Hypercenter is characterized by a political focus. The spaces highlighted on the map are 14. Macron and the government, 11. Political parties, 5. Demonstrations in Paris and the violence, and 13. Public policies and social issues. On the other hand, the topics least referred to by the Hypercenter media are 9. Television, 10. Values of the Yellow Vests, and 2. Roundabouts blockings. There is therefore less focus on the reasons for the protests and more on the political consequences.

Figure 11. Coverage of the Yellow Vests movement by the Hypercenter



Third, we find strong similarities between Left- and Right-Wing media inside the Ring, as well as Counter-informational and Far-right media inside the Satellite media group. The articles these media produce all focus on 10. the Values of the Yellow Vests, and give weight to 12. the Great National Debate. On the other hand, the mobilization's events, particularly 2. Roundabouts blockings, as well as 4. Demonstrations outside Paris, are not often addressed. Yet above this common thread, many nuances differentiate these media's approaches. In fact, right-wing media pay attention to 5. Demonstrations in Paris and violence, 6. Policing and repression and 11. Political parties, while left-wing media do not. Left-wing and far-right media attach great importance to 9. Television, while other media do not.

Figure 12. Coverage of the Yellow Vests by (from left to right and top to bottom) Left-Wing Media, Right-Wing Media, Counter-Informational Media and Far-Right Media



These three different ways to frame information can lead us to question the ability of Hypercenter media to reflect and report on the movement’s social, popular and regional foundations. It is nevertheless striking to note that :

- Far-Right media and the Counter-informational space inside the Satellite media group represent the movement by focusing on the Yellow Vests’ values and claims ;
- the Core media treat the Yellow Vests by focusing on the movement’s effects on public order and the French political space.

III. INTERPRETATION: TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE FRENCH MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

The fact that the Yellow Vests' claims are nowhere to be found in articles produced by the Core media can help us to better understand why the Yellow Vests dislike and distrust the Core media, and thus feel closer to Satellite media, which express more interest for the movement's issues and values. It also helps us understand why the Core media did not acknowledge the movement for at least a month, as it did not take it seriously and missed the significance of its growth.

CONCLUSION

When looking at the public square, we are confronted with a fragmentation phenomenon. This general trend can be observed in all fields: political, social and cultural. It is in opposition with the former pillars of industrial democracy that were mass education, mass political parties, universal suffrage, and mass media for professional and universal information, which reflected a certain level of both education and political organization.

Traditionally, the role of the media was conceptualized by the two following theories:

1. *Gatekeeping* theory (by Kurt Lewin in 1943 and completed by David Manning White in 1950) describes the fact that a small number of professionals inform the majority of citizens and decide on what information is to be processed. For this role to be recognized as legitimate, it must be exercised based on specific selection criteria, and in a responsible, independent and disinterested manner.
2. *Agenda setting* theory describes the ability of media to organize the public conversation - not by dictating ways in which to think about certain topics, but rather by deciding on the topics that should be discussed and thought about. In order for the system to be democratically balanced, this power involves a duty: ensuring that the “agenda” put forward by the news media is coherent with the one that emerges from civil society, and that both enrich one another. The index developed in 1968 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw thus measures the correspondence between topics covered by journalists and those of concern to citizens. Below a certain threshold, there is a risk that the information media will lose touch with their public, that the latter will lose trust and that the former will fossilize.

Today, the ability of the traditional information space to dictate the agenda and act as a gatekeeper is reduced, which leaves room for other actors to engage (whether voluntarily or not) in information production and sharing. The idea of an open conversation displeases those who are usually in power, such as the established press, because they feel (and for a good reason) that they are losing control over the public square. However, the latter has opened up to all other actors wanting to inform, converse, or convince, as they can finally speak and have their voices heard.

We tend to blame the internet for the fragmentation and polarization described above. However, this report shows that the structure of the French media sphere, as observed through the lens of the internet, differs greatly from that of the American one. In France, the media sphere is (still) relatively homogeneous (contrary to the United States, where it is deeply fractured). If the structure of the media sphere is unstable, it is being divided on a different axis than that of the United States. Indeed, our interpretation is that polarisation is unfolding on a spectrum opposing institutionalists to anti-elites, rather than on one opposing the right to the left. Assuming that the web universally polarizes societies is therefore an oversimplification that should be contested. This cannot be stressed enough at a time most actions taken to reduce ideological fractures concern mainly the places where information circulates. Our hope is that this report will nuance our common understanding of the way societies are being transformed in interaction with digital communication technologies.

Appendix:
News Media Attitudes in France -
Pew Research Center Report

FOR RELEASE APRIL 23, 2019

News Media Attitudes in France

France stands out from other Western European countries for its broad discontent toward the news media. About a third of adults say they trust the news media, including just 4% who say they have a lot of trust

BY *Nami Sumida, Mason Walker and Amy Mitchell*

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, April, 2019,
“News Media Attitudes in France”

News Media Attitudes in France

France stands out from other Western European countries for its broad discontent toward the news media. About a third of adults say they trust the news media, including just 4% who say they have a lot of trust

France's news media habits and political dynamics stand apart from those of other Western European countries in a number of ways, according to a recent [Pew Research Center report](#).

In nationally representative surveys in Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom, France stands out for its broad discontent toward the news media. About three-in-ten (28%) say the news media's role is very important, which is the lowest among the eight countries surveyed. Trust in the news media is also low, with just 4% of French adults saying they have a lot of trust in the news media. Discontent is especially present among people who hold populist anti-elitist views, along with the younger and more educated.

France is also unique in the relative fragmentation of its news landscape. No more than one-in-five name the same top source for news, and there are substantial divides between those on the ideological left and right over which news outlets they use and which they trust.

Finally, as with all countries studied here, public attitudes toward the news media in France are more divided along populist anti-elitist views than along left-right ideology. However, there are larger differences in the fragmentation of main news sources along left-right ideology than along these populist views. (See Chapter 1 for more on measuring populist anti-elitist views.)

These are some findings that build on a [previously released report](#) of news media attitudes. The findings come from a Pew Research Center survey about news media use and attitudes across eight Western European countries conducted from Oct. 30 to Dec. 20, 2017.

1. Views of the news media in France

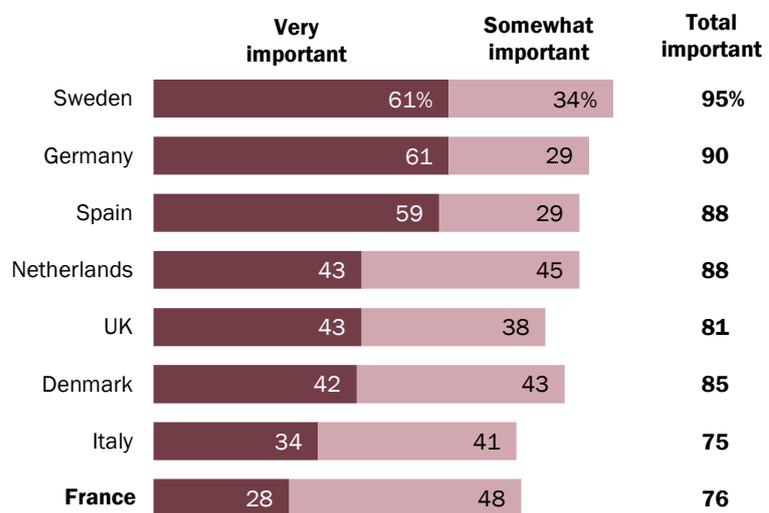
People's trust in and views about the importance of the news media vary considerably by country. In general, people in Northern European countries – for example, Sweden and Germany – are more likely than people in Southern European countries, including France, to say the news media are very important and that they trust the news media.

Across the eight European countries studied, three-quarters or more say the news media are at least somewhat important to the functioning of the country's society. But the share that says the news media's role is *very* important varies significantly.

In France, about a quarter of adults (28%) consider the news media very important to society – the lowest of the eight countries surveyed. Another 48% say the news media are somewhat important to society, for a total of 76% who say the news media are at least somewhat important.

About a quarter in France say news media are very important – the lowest of the eight countries studied

% of adults in each country who say the news media are very/somewhat important to the functioning of the country's society



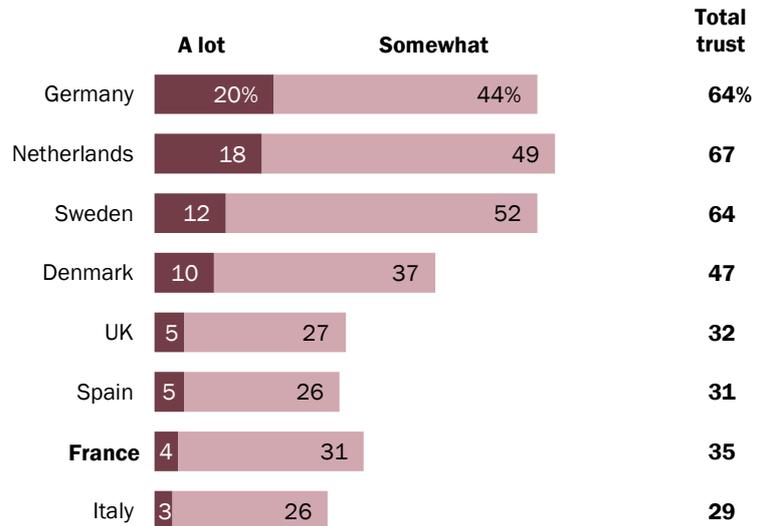
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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Trust in the news media is lower across Western Europe than people's sense of the news media's importance. France has one of the lowest levels of trust of the countries surveyed. About a third of French adults (35%) say they trust the news media at least somewhat, but only 4% say they have *a lot* of trust. This is similar to trust levels in the UK and in other Southern European countries surveyed; trust levels are substantially higher in the Northern European countries.

France is among the countries with the lowest levels of trust in the news media

% of adults in each country who trust the news media a lot/somewhat



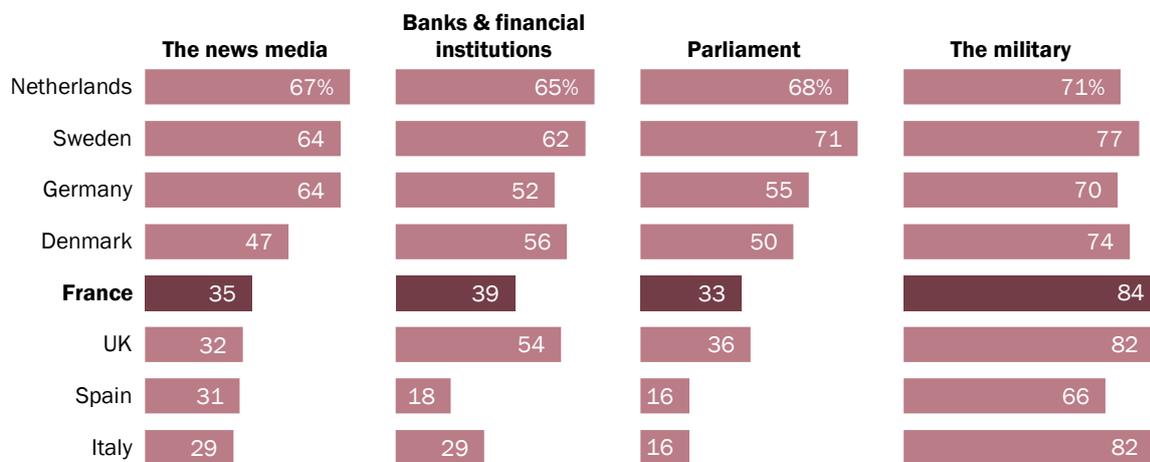
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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French adults also express lower levels of trust than most other Western Europeans in two other institutions asked about: the national parliament and financial institutions. About four-in-ten or fewer say they trust either institution at least somewhat (33% and 39%, respectively). In contrast, a large majority (84%) say they trust the military at least somewhat.

France and other Southern European countries are less trusting of most institutions

% of adults in each country who trust each institution a lot/somewhat



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
 "News Media Attitudes in France"

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The French give the news media fairly high ratings on several core functions, but still at levels lower than those in Northern European countries. Among five functions asked about, French adults give the news media lowest marks for being politically neutral in their news coverage, with roughly four-in-ten (43%) saying the news media are doing a somewhat or very good job at this. Far more (73%) say the news media do a good job covering the important stories of the day.

French evaluation of news media's key functions lower than other countries studied

% of adults in each country who say the news media do a *very/somewhat good job* at ...

	Covering all important stories of the day	Investigating the actions of the govt.	Getting the facts right	Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	Being politically neutral in thier news coverage
Sweden	85%	73%	70%	63%	59%
Netherlands	82	70	72	68	62
Germany	81	52	59	52	54
Italy	77	42	55	47	36
Denmark	76	69	62	60	53
France	73	51	60	47	43
Spain	71	56	55	52	45
UK	68	51	48	46	37

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
 "News Media Attitudes in France"

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The survey also asked respondents to assess the news media's coverage of three specific topics – the economy, crime and immigration.

About two-thirds of French adults (66%) say the news media do a somewhat or very good job covering the economy and crime, while a smaller portion (54%) say this about immigration coverage.

The French give the news media overall higher marks compared with other Southern European countries, but still lower compared with northern countries. Across all eight countries, immigration coverage received the lowest rating.

Majority of French adults give the news media high marks on coverage of several important topics

% of adults in each country who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering each topic

	Economy	Crime	Immigration
Sweden	83%	74%	67%
Netherlands	83	82	65
Denmark	80	79	64
Germany	79	54	49
France	66	66	54
UK	65	70	44
Spain	61	65	52
Italy	57	70	52

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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How political identities tie into news media attitudes

In most of the countries surveyed, people who hold populist anti-elitist views are less likely than those who don't hold these views to value and trust the news media. And the differences between these groups are larger than when comparing people on the left and right of the ideological spectrum.

Measuring populist anti-elitist views

Academic studies of populism consistently identify a few key ideas as underlying the concept: The people's will is the main source of government legitimacy; "the people" and "the elite" are two homogenous and antagonistic groups; and "the people" are good, while "the elite" are corrupt (Stanley, 2011; Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Schulz et al., 2017).

The populism measure used throughout this report is based on combining respondents' answers to two questions: 1) "Ordinary people would do a better job/do no better solving the country's problems than elected officials," and 2) "Most elected officials care/don't care what people like me think." Both measures are meant to capture the core ideas that the government should reflect the will of "the people" and that "elites" are an antagonistic group that is out of touch with the demands of "the people." The second measure is a traditional question asked regularly over time on political surveys to measure efficacy and dissatisfaction with government responsiveness. This measure, or ones that are similar, are used by scholars studying populism to capture attitudes about an antagonistic relationship between elites and the people (Stanley, 2011; Spruyt et al., 2016; Schulz et al., 2017).

Those who answered that elected officials don't care about people like them *and* who said ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials were considered to hold **populist anti-elitist views**. People who say the reverse – that elected officials care and that ordinary people would do no better – are considered to **not hold populist anti-elitist views**. Everyone else, including people who refuse to answer one or both questions, is considered to hold **mixed views**. In France, 40% of adults hold these populist anti-elitist views, 16% do not hold these views, and the remaining 44% hold mixed views.

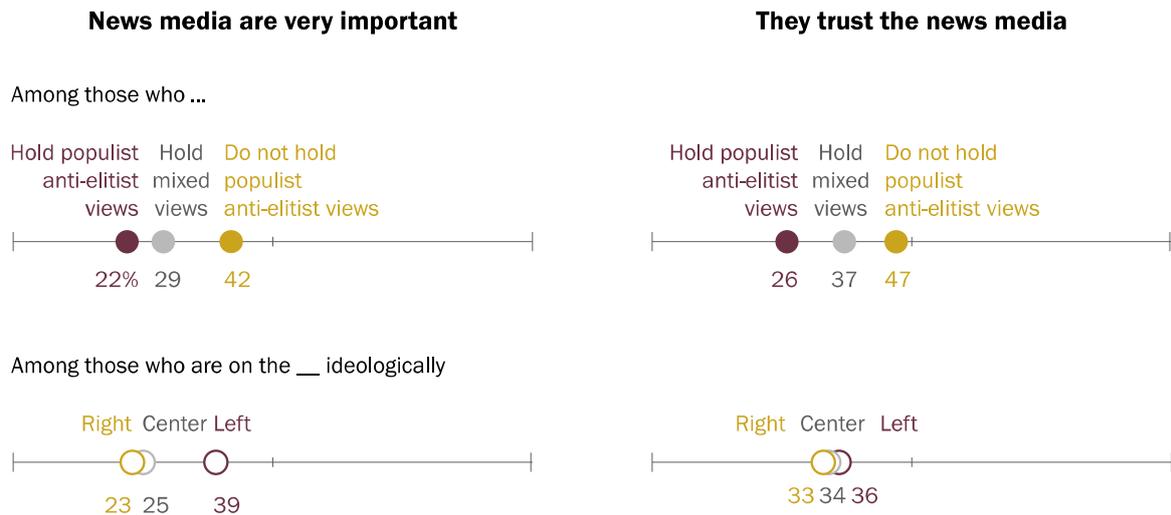
For more information on this measure, see the [Methodology](#) and [References](#) of the report "[In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology](#)," which uses the same measure, though phrased as "populist views."

In France, 22% of people with populist anti-elitist views say the news media are very important to society, compared with 42% of those without these views. Regarding trust, 26% of people with these views say they trust the news media at least somewhat, compared with 47% of those without these views.

The sense of media importance in France is also divided by left-right ideology; 39% of those on the left say the news media are very important, compared with 23% of those on the right. There are no differences, however, in trust in the news media between people on the left and right.

In France, trust in the news media differs more by populist anti-elitist views than left-right ideology

% of French adults who say ...



Note: Respondents are classified as holding populist anti-elitist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials." This does not cover all components of populism but focuses on a few key ideas that academic studies of populism consistently identify as underlying the concept – that government should reflect the will of "the people" and that "elites" are an antagonistic group that is out of touch with the demands of "the people."

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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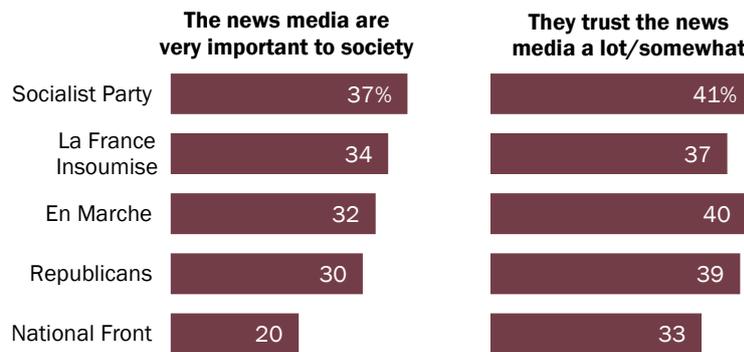
There are differences in news media trust based on political party support, but not nearly at the levels seen around populist anti-elitist views.

French adults with a favorable view of the National Front, for example, stand out as the least likely to trust the news media. Among them, a third say they trust the news media at least somewhat, while about four-in-ten who favor one of the other four parties studied say the same.

Similarly, two-in-ten adults with a favorable view of the National Front say the news media are very important to society, compared with three-in-ten or more of those who have favorable views of other parties.

French adults who view National Front favorably are less likely overall to value and trust the news media

Among French adults who have a favorable view of each party, % who say ...



Note: Only some parties are shown because the report focuses on traditional parties that have led government over the past 25 years and on populist parties.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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People who hold populist anti-elitist views are less likely to give high ratings on five core functions of the news media. For example, there is a 26-percentage-point difference between those with these populist anti-elitist views and those without on whether the news media are doing a good job at investigating the actions of the government, and a 22-point gap on whether news organizations are politically neutral in how they present the news.

Similarly, those who hold populist anti-elitist views tend to be less satisfied with the news media's coverage of three topics – by about 20 percentage points or more for each. The largest gap is in the state of the economy: 58% of those who hold populist anti-elitist views say the news media do a somewhat or very good job in its coverage, versus 84% of those who don't hold these views.

Ratings of news media performance differ by populist anti-elitist views in France

Among French adults who _____, % who say the news media are doing a very/somewhat good job at ...

	Hold populist anti-elitist views	Hold mixed views	Do not hold populist anti-elitist views	DO NOT HOLD – HOLD POPULIST VIEWS DIFF
Investigating the actions of the government	41%	53%	67%	+26
Being politically neutral in their news coverage	36	43	58	+22
Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	41	49	58	+17
Covering all important stories of the day	66	75	81	+15
Getting the facts right	57	61	67	+10

Among French adults who _____, % who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering ...

	Hold populist anti-elitist views	Hold mixed views	Do not hold populist anti-elitist views	DO NOT HOLD – HOLD POPULIST VIEWS DIFF
The economy	58	67	84	+26
Immigration	46	55	68	+22
Crime	59	68	80	+21

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**. Respondents are classified as holding populist anti-elitist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials." This does not cover all components of populism but focuses on a few key ideas that academic studies of populism consistently identify as underlying the concept – that government should reflect the will of "the people" and that "elites" are an antagonistic group that is out of touch with the demands of "the people."

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"News Media Attitudes in France"

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Left-right differences also emerge on these questions, though the differences are not as pronounced as those based along populist anti-elitist views. Overall, French adults on the right are more likely than those on the left to be satisfied with the news media's performance. For instance, 77% of those on the right say the news media do a somewhat or very good job covering all important stories of the day, while 65% of adults on the left say the same.

Similarly, those on the right are more likely to say the news media do a somewhat or very good job covering immigration and crime – by 9 points and 7 points, respectively. Coverage of the economy, on the other hand, is not significantly divided by left-right ideology.

French adults on the right rate the news media performance more positively than those on the left

% of French adults in each ideological group who say the news media are doing a very/somewhat good job at ...

	Left	Center	Right	RIGHT-LEFT DIFF
Covering all important stories of the day	65%	76%	77%	+12
Being politically neutral in their news coverage	38	44	47	+9
Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	43	48	52	+9
Investigating the actions of the government	48	54	53	+5
Getting the facts right	59	61	60	+1

% of French adults in each ideological group who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering ...

Immigration	46	56	55	+9
Crime	63	69	70	+7
The economy	62	68	68	+6

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"News Media Attitudes in France"

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When it comes to party support, those who have a favorable view of either of the two populist parties, the National Front and La France Insoumise, generally give lower ratings of news media performance than those who have favorable views of other parties. For instance, at least half of those in favor of the Socialist Party (54%), Republicans (52%) and En Marche (52%) say the news media do a somewhat or very good job being politically neutral in their coverage, while about four-in-ten adults with a favorable view of La France Insoumise (41%) and the National Front (39%) say the same.

Divides between French adults with favorable views of populist and of nonpopulist parties in job evaluation of the news media

Among French adults who have a favorable view of each party, % who say the news media are doing a very/somewhat good job at ...

	Republicans	Socialist Party	En Marche	National Front	La France Insoumise
Covering all important stories of the day	82%	77%	82%	73%	73%
Getting the facts right	67	70	65	63	66
Investigating the actions of the government	59	61	63	46	52
Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	58	55	58	50	46
Being politically neutral in their news coverage	52	54	52	39	41

Among French adults who have a favorable view of each party, % who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering ...

The economy	75	75	78	61	65
Crime	73	73	73	70	69
Immigration	63	60	61	58	53

Note: Only some parties are shown because the report focuses on traditional parties that have led government over the past 25 years and on populist parties.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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Differences in news media attitudes by social media news use

Heavy social media news consumers – those who get news on social media at least daily – are generally more negative toward the news media’s performance than those who get news on social media less often or those who do not use social media for news.

For each of the three topic areas asked about, coverage ratings are 8 percentage points lower among these heavy social media news consumers than among those who do not use social media as often or ever for news. And when it comes to the five core functions, those who often get news on social media again give lower marks on two measures – being politically neutral in their news coverage and investigating the actions of the government.

Despite more negative views of the news media’s performance, those who often get news on social media are more likely to value the news media. Eight-in-ten heavy social media news consumers say the news media’s role is somewhat or very important, compared with 74% of those who get social media news less often or never.

Heavy social media news consumers are more negative toward the news media's performance in France

Among French adults who get news on social media at each rate, % who ...

	At least daily	Less often or never	AT LEAST DAILY-LESS OFTEN DIFF
Think the news media are very/somewhat important to society	80%	74%	+6
Trust the news media a lot/somewhat	33	35	-2

Among French adults who get news on social media at each rate, % who say the news media are doing a very/somewhat good job at ...

Being politically neutral in their news coverage	35	46	-11
Investigating the actions of the government	46	53	-7
Getting the facts right	56	62	-6
Covering all important stories of the day	70	74	-4
Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	45	48	-3

Among French adults who get news on social media at each rate, % who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering ...

The economy	61	69	-8
Crime	61	69	-8
Immigration	48	56	-8

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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Differences in news media attitudes by age and education

Younger adults are more likely than older adults to think the news media are important to society, but they also give them lower ratings on performance measures. For instance, 77% of adults ages 50 and older say the news media do a somewhat or very good job of covering all important stories of the day, while 66% of adults ages 18 to 29 say the same. The largest gap between the youngest and oldest groups is in whether the news media are politically neutral in their news coverage – a 16-percentage-point difference. Additionally, younger adults are less likely to give good ratings to news organizations’ coverage of two of the three topics asked: crime and immigration (by 20 points and 18 points, respectively).

In France, younger adults give the news media lower ratings on performance measures than older adults

Among French adults in each age group, % who ...

	Ages 18-29	30-49	50+	YOUNGEST- OLDEST DIFF
Think the news media are very important to society	37%	30%	24%	+13
Trust the news media a lot/somewhat	37	34	34	+3

Among French adults in each age group, % who say the news media are doing a very/somewhat good job at ...

Being politically neutral in their news coverage	32	40	48	-16
Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	39	44	52	-13
Covering all important stories of the day	66	69	77	-11
Getting the facts right	57	55	65	-8
Investigating the actions of the government	48	47	54	-6

Among French adults in each age group, % who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering ...

Crime	53	64	73	-20
Immigration	41	51	59	-18
The economy	66	61	71	-5

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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There is a similar narrative when looking at differences by education. Overall, French adults with high levels of education are more likely than those with lower levels to say the news media are important to society, but less likely to think news organizations are doing a good job.

Roughly eight-in-ten adults with more than a secondary education (82%) say the news media are very or somewhat important to the functioning of society, compared with about three-quarters of adults with a secondary education or less (73%). The more educated, however, are less likely to say the news media are doing a very or somewhat good job in four out of the five core functions, and they are similarly less approving of the news coverage of two topics – crime and immigration.¹

More educated adults more likely than those with lower levels to say news media are important, less likely to be satisfied with news organizations' performance

% of French adults at each education level who ...

	Secondary or less	More than secondary	MORE-LESS EDUCATION DIFF
Think the news media are very/somewhat important to society	73%	82%	+9
Trust the news media a lot/somewhat	34	35	+1

% of French adults at each education level who say the news media are doing a very/somewhat good job at ...

Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	51	37	-14
Getting the facts right	64	52	-12
Being politically neutral in their news coverage	46	35	-11
Covering all important stories of the day	75	66	-9
Investigating the actions of the government	52	48	-4

% of French adults at each education level who say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering ...

Crime	70	57	-13
Immigration	56	45	-11
The economy	66	67	+1

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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¹ For more demographic breakdowns, see Appendix A [LINK].

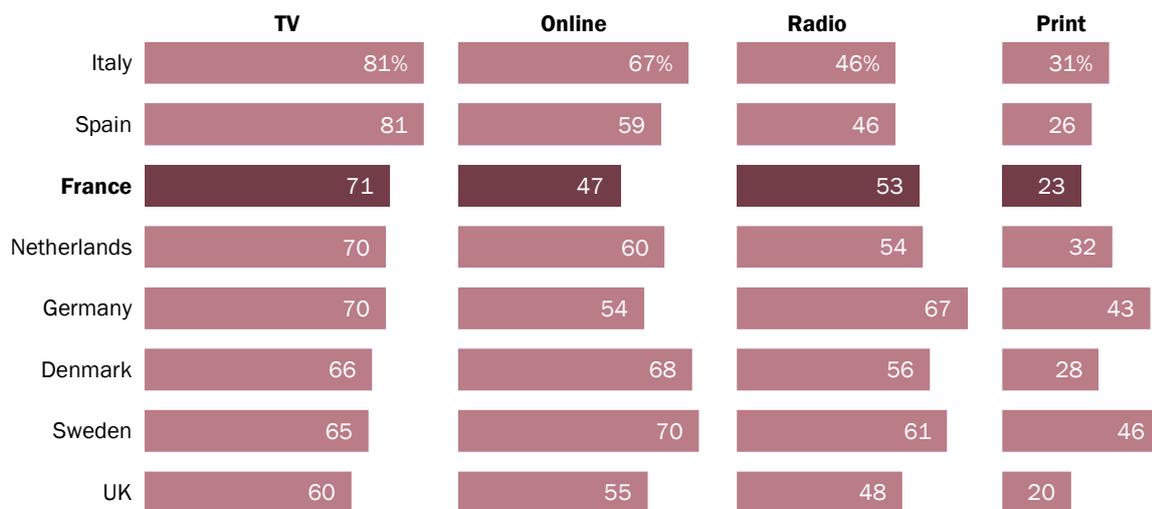
2. Platforms used for news

Among four platforms asked about – TV, radio, online and print – TV is often the most popular for news: Six-in-ten adults or more in each country studied (including as many as 81%) get news there at least daily.

France similarly has a large portion of adults (71%) who get news daily from TV. Radio is the second most popular news platform used daily (53%). Online news use is comparatively low in France: About half (47%) get news daily from online sources, compared with about six-in-ten or more in most other Western European countries. Print media is the least popular platform, with about a quarter of French adults (23%) reading print news sources daily.

TV ranks first for getting news daily in France

% of adults in each country who get news at least daily from ...



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
 "News Media Attitudes in France"

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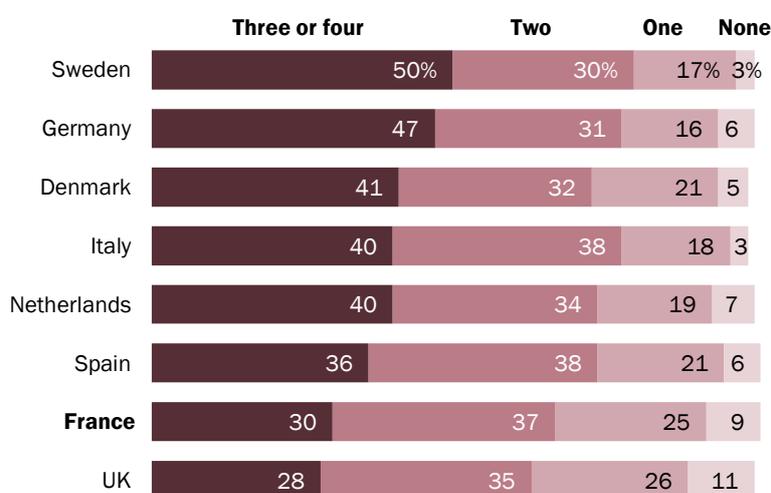
While TV is most popular, many Western Europeans use multiple platforms every day to get news. In the eight countries surveyed, majorities use at least two of the four platforms daily. And in some countries, about half get news this frequently on three or four.

French adults are less likely than adults in most other countries surveyed to regularly use multiple platforms for news. While a majority of French adults get news daily from at least two platforms (67%), three-in-ten regularly use three or four platforms, which is lower than most of the other countries surveyed.

A quarter of French adults get news daily from just one platform. This group of single-platform news consumers is primarily made up of people who get news at least daily from TV (52%), while some use online sources (25%) and the radio (21%) and very few get news only from print sources.

Fewer French adults turn to multiple platforms daily, compared with most other European adults

% of adults in each country who get news at least daily from ____ of the four platforms



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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News platforms used by age, education and income

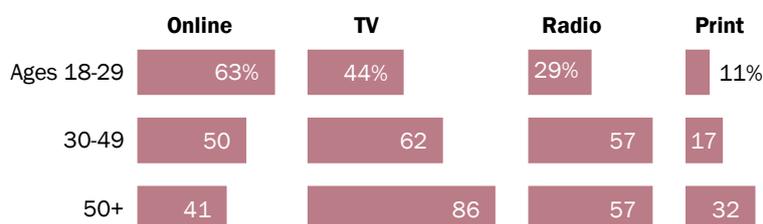
Overall, younger adults in France are more likely to get their news online than from other legacy platforms like TV, newspapers or radio. In contrast, older adults are more likely to get their news through non-digital platforms.

Around six-in-ten of those ages 18 to 29 (63%) get news from online sources every day, compared with 41% of those ages 50 and older. On the other hand, nearly nine-in-ten adults ages 50 and older (86%) get news from TV at least daily, compared with less than half (44%) of those ages 18 to 29.

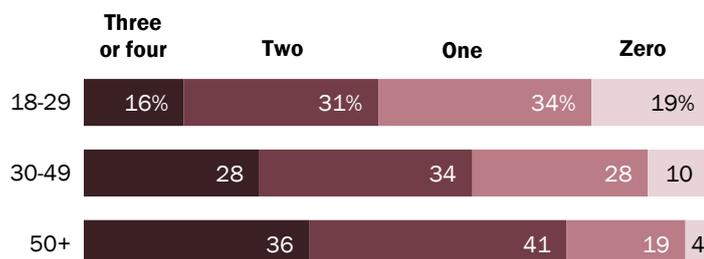
Older adults are also more likely than younger adults to get news daily from more platforms. About a third of those 50 and older (36%) get news at least daily from three or four platforms, compared with 28% of adults ages 30 to 49 and 16% of adults ages 18 to 29.

Older French adults are more likely than younger adults to get news from non-digital sources

% of French adults in each age group who get news at least daily from ...



% of French adults in each age group who get news at least daily from ___ of the four platforms



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

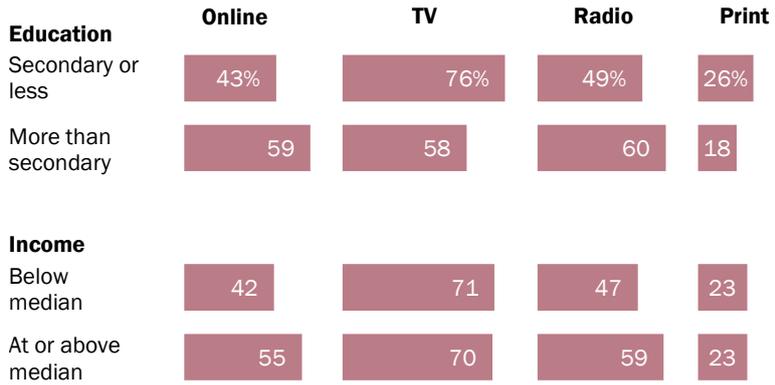
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Differences also emerge based on education and income. Among those with a secondary education or less, the most common source for news is TV, with 76% getting news there at least daily. In contrast, those with more than a secondary education are about equally likely to get news from TV (58%), the radio (60%) and online sources (59%). Those with a secondary education or less are also more likely than those with high education levels to get news from print sources (26% and 18%, respectively).

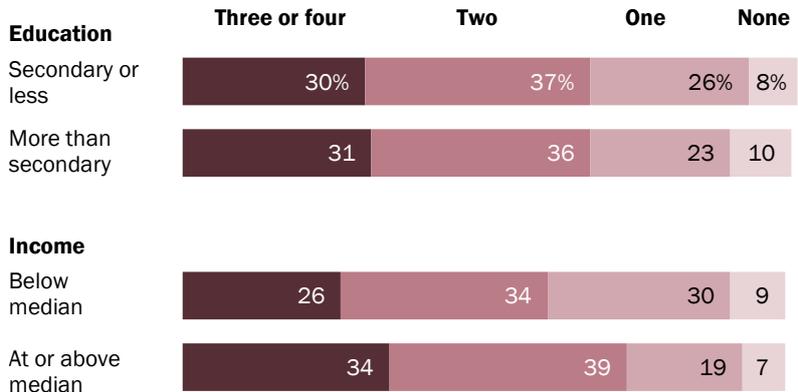
When looking at differences by income, French adults with an income at or above the median are about as likely as those with a below-median income to get news daily from TV and print sources. Higher-earning adults, however, are more likely to get news daily from the radio or online sources. As a result, about a third of adults earning a higher income (34%) get news at least daily from three or four platforms, compared with about a quarter of those with an income below the median (26%).

Platforms used regularly for news differ by education and income level in France

% of French adults at each education and income level who get news at least daily from ...



% of French adults at each education and income level who get news at least daily from ___ of the four platforms



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

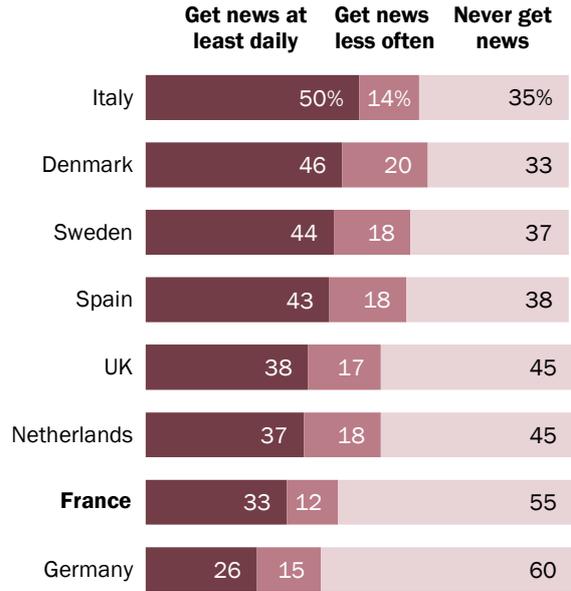
3. The role of social media in news

Within the online space, many Western Europeans get news through social media. Facebook is by far the most commonly used social media site for news.

Compared with other Western European countries, getting news from social media is less common in France. Fewer than half of French adults (45%) get news from social media sites, while 55% never get news there.

A third of French adults get news daily from social media

% of adults in each country who ____ from social media



Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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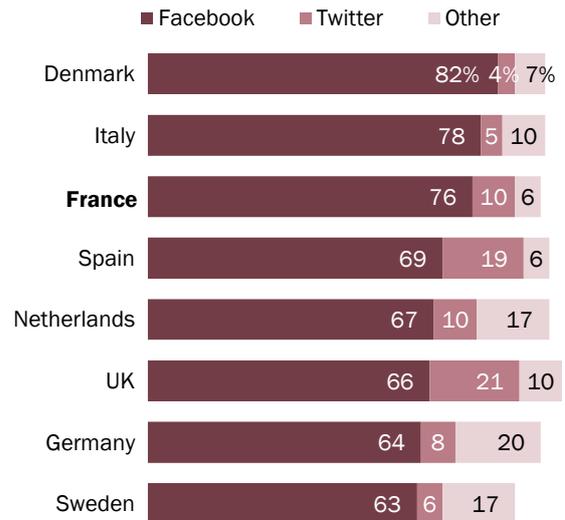
Facebook is the most common social network used for news across Western Europe, including in France. About three-quarters of social media news consumers in France (76%) cite Facebook as the social network they get news from most often.

Facebook is followed distantly by Twitter, which is cited by one-in-ten social media news consumers in France as the social media site they use most often for news.

In a separate question that asked individuals to volunteer the outlet they use as their main source for news, 4% of French adults name Facebook as that source, speaking further to its prominence.

Facebook is the top social media site for news in Western Europe, including France

% of social media news consumers in each country who use each social media site most often for news



Note: "Other" includes social media sites mentioned by 5% or less of respondents. Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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About half or more social media news consumers in each of the eight countries surveyed say they are familiar with the sources they see on social media. Still, sizable minorities say they typically do not pay attention to the sources of news they encounter there.

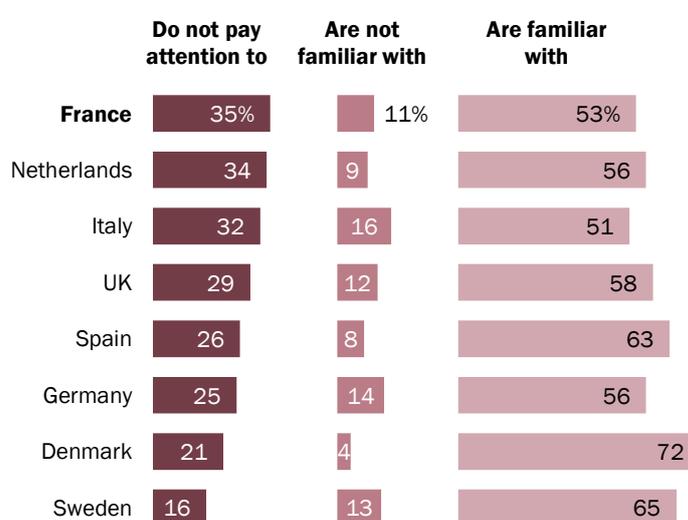
Among the countries surveyed, France has the highest share of social media news consumers – 35% – who say they do not pay attention to the sources of news they see on social media. About half (53%) say they are familiar with the news sources they find on these sites, and only 11% say they are unfamiliar with them.

Looking deeper into these responses, the frequency of social media news use connects to the likelihood of recognizing familiar sources. Those who get news from social media at least daily are more likely than those who get news from these sites less often to be familiar with the news sources they see there.

This is true in all eight countries, with differences in France among the largest. More than half of daily social media news consumers in France (58%) say they are familiar with the news sources they encounter there, compared with 38% of less frequent consumers.

About a third of French adults who get news on social media don't pay attention to the sources of news there

% of social media news consumers in each country who say most of the news they see on social media comes from news sources they ...



Note: "Don't know" responses not shown. Question asked: "In general, does most of the news you see on social media come from news sources you are familiar with, sources you are not familiar with, or do you not pay attention to the sources?"

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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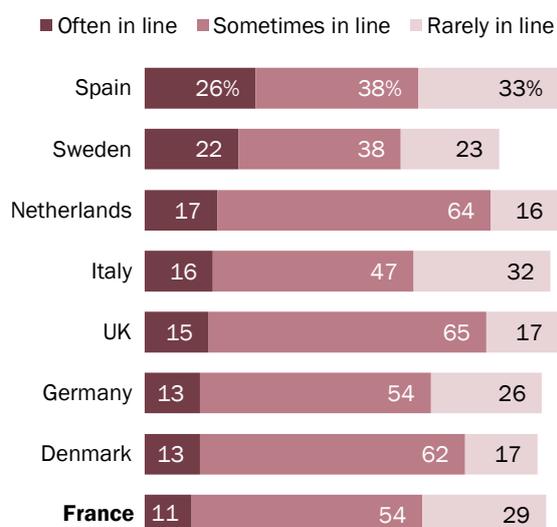
Most people are exposed to a variety of political views on social media. Across all eight nations surveyed, solid majorities of social media news consumers say the news they see on social media is rarely or only sometimes in line with their own political views. France is among the highest, at 83%. Conversely, about one-in-ten social media news consumers in France (11%) say the news they see on these sites is often in line with their political views.

The “echo chamber” effect is more common when it comes to personal discussions about the news: About a quarter of French adults (26%) say the views they hear in personal discussions are often in line with their own.

News on social media less likely to reflect one’s own political views than news in conversations with friends

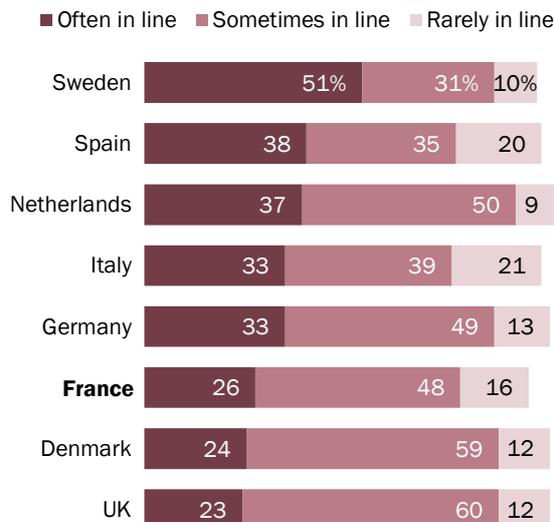
Social media

% of social media news consumers in each country who say that the news they see on social media is ___ with their own political views



Personal discussion

% of adults in each country who say that when talking about the news with friends, they find that their friends’ views are ___ with their own political views



Note: Those who don’t discuss news with friends and “Don’t know” responses are not shown.
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
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Social media news habits by age and education

Younger people tend to be more avid social media news consumers than their elders. This is especially the case in France. Roughly seven-in-ten 18- to 29-year-olds (69%) get news from social media every day, while 38% of those ages 30 to 49 and an even smaller portion of those 50 and older (17%) do the same – a 52-percentage-point gap between the youngest and oldest age groups.

Younger social media news consumers are also more likely to be familiar with the news sources they see on these sites. Six-in-ten adults ages 18 to 29 who get news from social media say that most of the news they encounter there comes from sources with which they are familiar, compared with 43% of those 50 and older. On the other hand, older social media news consumers are more likely to say that they do not pay attention to these news sources. Among social media news consumers ages 50 and older, 44% say they do not pay attention to news sources on these sites, while about a quarter of social media news consumers ages 18 to 29 (28%) say the same.

In France, younger adults are more likely to get news from social media

Among French adults in each age group, % who get news from social media ...

	Ages 18-29	30-49	50+
At least daily	69%	38%	17%
Less often	14	17	9
Never	16	46	73

Among French social media news consumers in each age group, % who say most of the news they see on social media comes from news sources they ...

Are familiar with	60	54	43
Are not familiar with	12	10	11
Do not pay attention to	28	34	44

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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The frequency of and attitudes around social media news use also differ by education. Among French adults with more than a secondary education, 44% get news at least daily from social media, compared with 29% of adults with a secondary education or less.

Among social media news consumers, those with higher levels of education are more likely than those with lower levels of education to say that most of the social media news they encounter comes from sources that are familiar to them (64% and 46%, respectively). In contrast, those with lower education levels are more likely to say they do not pay attention to the news sources on social media (42%) than those with more education (24%).

French adults with higher education are more likely to use social media for news

Among French adults at each education level, % who get news from social media ...

	Secondary education or less	More than secondary education
At least daily	29%	44%
Less often	12	14
Never	59	43

Among French social media news consumers at each education level, % who say most of the news they see on social media comes from news sources they ...

Are familiar with	46	64
Are not familiar with	11	10
Do not pay attention to	42	24

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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4. Main sources used for news in France

When asked which news source people turn to most frequently, those most commonly mentioned are TF1 (16%), BFM (15%) and France Télévisions/France TV (15%). No other outlet was named by more than 6% of the public.

The French tend to be more fragmented in their main news sources than publics in other parts of Western Europe. Fewer than two-in-ten French adults name the same main news source, while at least three-in-ten adults in five of the eight countries surveyed share the same main source. For example, 48% in the UK name BBC, 39% in Sweden name Sveriges Television/Radio (SVT/Radio) and 37% in the Netherlands name Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO) as their main source for news.

Top main news sources among the French

% of French adults who name each outlet as their main news source

TF1	16%
BFM	15
France TV	15
Le Monde	6
Radio France	6
Facebook	4
M6	3
Google	3

Note: Only sources named by 3% of adults or more are shown. Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news. For this analysis, major channels or brands were grouped into their larger news organization. France 2, which is asked about specifically on a separate question, is coded as part of France Télévisions (France TV) in this analysis of main news sources.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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Main news source by political identity

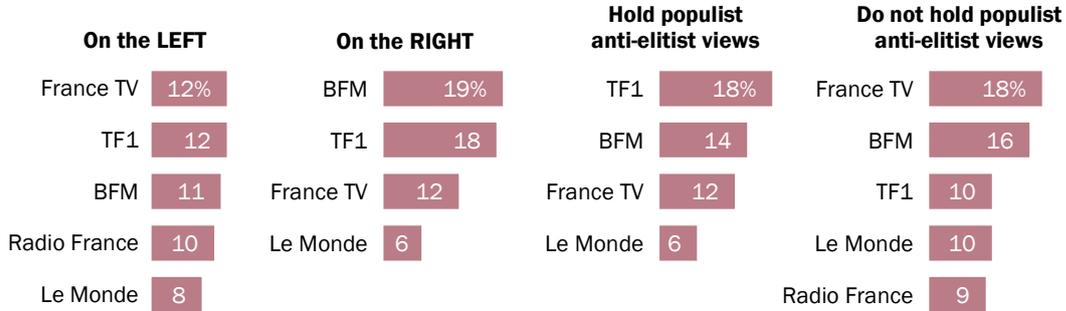
The source turned to most for news differs between French adults who are on the ideological left and the right. Among those on the right, BFM and TF1 are the most cited main news sources, while people on the left most often name TF1 and France TV. Overall, French adults on the left are somewhat more fragmented in their main news source, collectively naming a greater variety of sources than those on the right. Among adults on the right, BFM and TF1 are named by 19% and 18%, respectively, while the two most cited sources by those on the left only garner 12% each.

Main news source preference is also divided by populist anti-elitist views. Among people who hold these populist views, TF1 is the most cited main news source (18%), while people without these views most often name France TV (18%).²

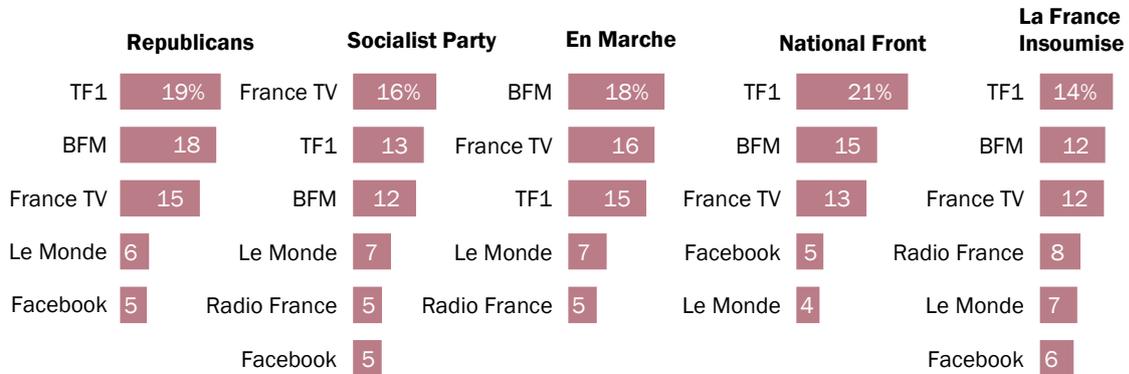
² Similar differences emerge along party support, which can be found in Appendix A, along with data on other demographic groups.

In France, main news source varies by political identities

% of French adults who name each outlet as their main news source



Among French adults who have a favorable view of each party, % who name each outlet as their main news source



Note: Only sources named by 5% of adults or more in each group are shown. Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news. For this analysis, major channels or brands were grouped into their larger news organization. France 2, which is asked about specifically on a separate question, is coded as part of France Télévisions (France TV) in this analysis of main news sources. Respondents are classified as holding populist anti-elitist views if they answered: “Most elected officials don’t care what people like me think” and “Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials.” This does not cover all components of populism but focuses on a few key ideas that academic studies of populism consistently identify as underlying the concept – that government should reflect the will of “the people” and that “elites” are an antagonistic group that is out of touch with the demands of “the people.” Only some parties are shown because the report focuses on traditional parties that have led government over the past 25 years and on populist parties. Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. “News Media Attitudes in France”

Main news source by age and education

There are also differences in the main news source cited by adults in each age group. Among those ages 18 to 29, Le Monde is the most commonly cited source, while those ages 30 to 49 most often name BFM. Among those 50 and older, France TV – the country’s public media – is the most cited.

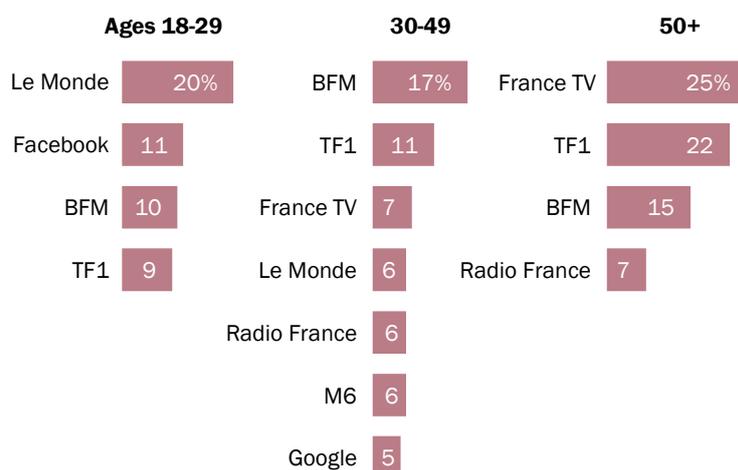
Overall, France TV is cited as a main news source by older adults more than the young. While a quarter of those in the oldest age group say they turn to France TV most frequently, only 7% of adults ages 30 to 49 and 3% of those 18 to 29 say the same.

Additionally, younger adults are slightly more fragmented than older adults in their main news source. While nearly half of adults ages 50 and older (47%) name one of the top two main news sources (France TV and TF1), a smaller portion of adults ages 18 to 29 (31%) and 30 to 49 (28%) concentrate around their top two main news sources.

Furthermore, adults ages 30 to 49 name a larger mix of main news sources, as seven are mentioned by 5% or more in this age group.

Different mix of main news sources cited by French adults in each age group

% of French adults in each age group who name each outlet as their main news source



Note: Only sources named by 5% of adults or more in each group are shown. Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news. For this analysis, major channels or brands were grouped into their larger news organization. France 2, which is asked about specifically on a separate question, is coded as part of France Télévisions (France TV) in this analysis of main news sources.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

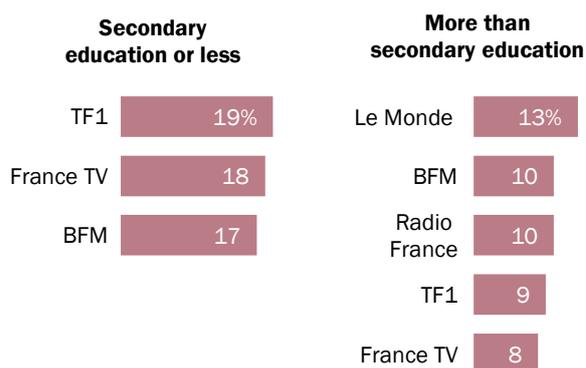
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Main news sources also vary by education levels. Those with more than a secondary education collectively name a larger mix of main news sources than those with a secondary education or less.

Among those with high education levels, Le Monde is at the top, cited by 13%, along with four other outlets that were named by 5% or more in this group. In contrast, those with lower education levels are more concentrated, collectively citing only three outlets above the 5% threshold. At the top is TF1, mentioned by 19% of adults with a secondary education or less, followed closely by France TV (18%) and BFM (17%).

French adults with more education tend to name a larger mix of main news sources

% of French adults at each education level who name each outlet as their main news source



Note: Only sources named by 5% of adults or more in each group are shown. Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news. For this analysis, major channels or brands were grouped into their larger news organization. France 2, which is asked about specifically on a separate question, is coded as part of France Télévisions (France TV) in this analysis of main news sources.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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5. Where users place outlets' ideologies

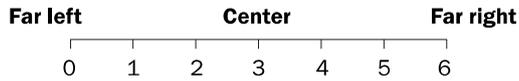
Another way to examine attitudes across news media outlets is to look at the relationship between the ideological profile of an outlet's audience and where people think it falls on a left-right ideological scale. To do this, the study asked respondents who have heard of the outlets where they think each falls on the left-right ideological scale used in this study, where 0 represents the far left and 6 represents the far right.

Across the eight countries surveyed, people who get news from an outlet tend to think it is closer to their own left-right ideological position. In France, news users on either the right or left tend to place three outlets closer to their own ideology: the public television channel France 2, the 24-hour TV news channel BFM and the newspaper Le Monde. Right-aligned and left-aligned news users, however, generally agree on the ideological placement of the TV channel TF1.³

³ Le Figaro, Libération, L'Express and Mediapart are not included in this analysis, because they did not have a large enough sample of left or right users to analyze.

Ideological placement of news outlets in France

Users of each outlet were asked to place the outlet on a left-right scale



% of users on the left and right who place the outlet at position ...

TF1

66% of adults use this outlet at least once a week

PLACEMENT BY:

	0-2	3	4-6
Users on the left	13%	20	59
Users on the right	7%	17	67

Left users and right users are NOT different in their placement of this outlet

BFM

60% of adults use this outlet at least once a week

	0-2	3	4-6
Users on the left	17%	33	41
Users on the right	8%	33	47

Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

France 2

65% of adults use this outlet at least once a week

	0-2	3	4-6
Users on the left	22%	41	33
Users on the right	19%	26	45

Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

Le Monde

28% of adults use this outlet at least once a week

	0-2	3	4-6
Users on the left	31%	41	25
Users on the right	13%	25	51

Left users and right users ARE different in their placement of this outlet

Note: Some outlets are not included because their audience sample sizes are too small to analyze. Left and right users' outlet placements are considered different if the percentage of left and right users that place the outlet on the left (from 0 to 2), on the right (from 4 to 6), or both are significantly different. The survey asked respondents a series of questions about eight specific outlets in their country, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. Therefore, the outlets listed here may differ from the main news source outlets analyzed. For example, in France, the survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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In general, where the public places an outlet tends to differ from where the average audience actually sits ideologically. For each of the news outlets asked about in the survey, the average audience (based on self-reported usage) tends to fall near the ideological center. People who have heard of the outlet, however, tend to place the outlet either farther to the left or farther to the right than the actual ideological position of the outlet's audience.

France is no exception; for most outlets, while their news audiences are near the ideological center, people who have heard of the outlets tend to think they lean slightly more to the right. TF1, for example, has an audience that sits at about the middle of the left-right spectrum (3.3 on the 0-to-6 scale), but when asked to place the outlet on the same left-right scale, people who have heard of it place the outlet farther to the right (at 4.1).

People tend to think outlets in France are more partisan than their average audiences' ideologies

Mean placement of each outlet's audience on a 0-to-6 left-right scale compared with where those who have heard of the outlet place it on that same scale



Note: An outlet's audience is defined as respondents who say they get news regularly from that outlet. The survey asked respondents a series of questions about eight specific outlets in their country, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. Therefore, the outlets listed here may differ from the main news source outlets analyzed. For example, in France, the survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions. Left-right spread is the difference between the outlet farthest to the left and the outlet farthest to the right.

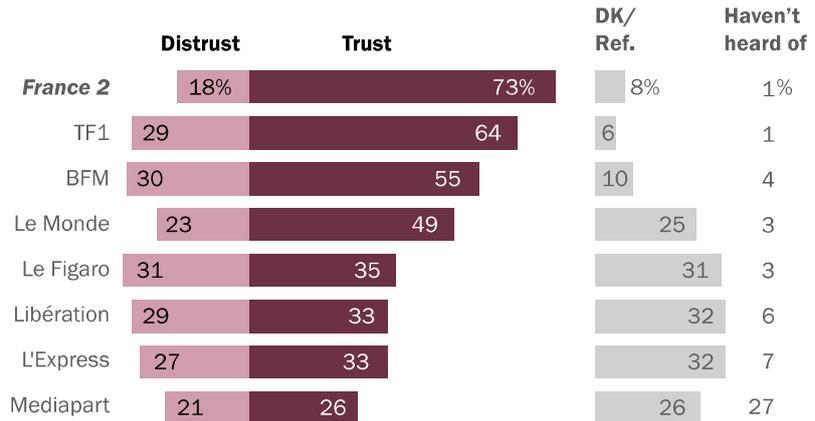
Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

6. Trust in specific news outlets in France

In seven of the eight countries surveyed, the public news organization is the most trusted news outlet asked about in each country. This is the case in France, where a large majority of French adults (73%) say they trust the public broadcaster France 2.

In France, the public displays high levels of trust in their public news organization

% of French adults who generally trust or distrust each news outlet



Note: People who said they had not heard of an outlet or refused to respond to the question about whether they get news from an outlet are grouped under "Haven't heard of" here. Respondents were asked about eight specific outlets, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. The survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions. Public broadcaster is in **bold**.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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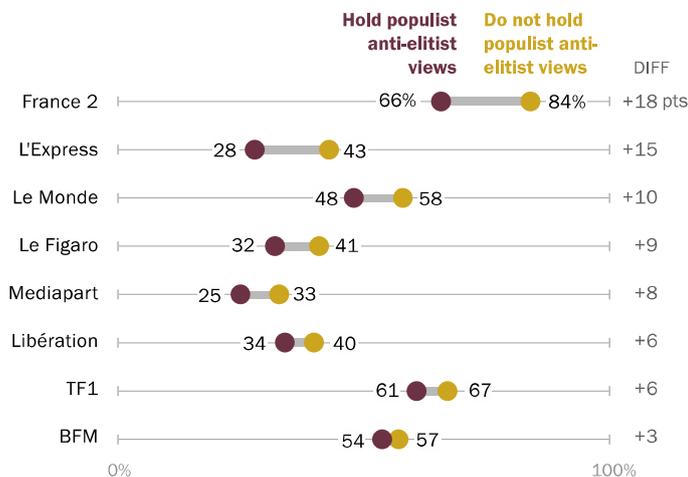
Some variations in trust in specific outlets, based on political identities

As with trust in the news media generally, trust in specific outlets varies by populist leanings, with those who hold populist anti-elitist views expressing lower levels of trust than those who don't.

In France, those with populist anti-elitist views are 18 percentage points less likely than those without these views to say they trust the public news organization France 2. Trust is also divided along the left-right ideological spectrum – those who place themselves on the left of the 0-to-6 ideological scale are 25 points less likely than people on the right to trust the private news broadcaster TF1.

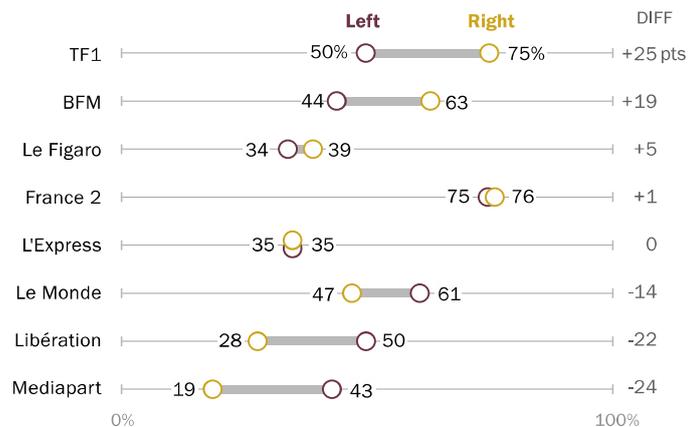
In France, those with populist anti-elitist views tend to trust news outlets less than those without such views

Among French adults who _____, % who generally trust each news outlet



Trust is also divided along the left-right spectrum

% of French adults in each ideological group who generally trust each news outlet



Note: Respondents are classified as holding populist anti-elitist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials." This does not cover all components of populism but focuses on a few key ideas that academic studies of populism consistently identify as underlying the concept – that government should reflect the will of "the people" and that "elites" are an antagonistic group that is out of touch with the demands of "the people." Respondents were asked about eight specific outlets, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. The survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

Differences along party support are in line with differences based on ideology. Those who view parties on the right favorably have higher levels of trust in TF1 and BFM. French adults who favor parties on the left are especially trusting of Le Monde and Libération.

Trust in specific news outlets also varies based on political party favorability. Among the eight outlets asked, France 2 garners the widest support, with 73% or more of those who favor each party saying they trust the outlet. In contrast, Libération, a daily newspaper in France, is trusted at far lower rates, with no more than 45% of those with a favorable view of any party saying they trust this outlet.

Differences also emerge between parties, the largest occurring between the two populist parties: 45% of those with a favorable view of La France Insoumise say they trust Libération, compared with 27% of people with a favorable view of the National Front – an 18-point difference.

France 2 garners widest support among those who are favorable of each party

Among French adults who have a favorable view of each party, % who generally trust each news outlet

	Republicans	Socialist Party	En Marche	National Front	La France Insoumise
France 2	77%	80%	82%	73%	73%
TF1	77	64	70	75	61
BFM	62	56	61	63	52
Le Monde	53	58	59	42	56
Le Figaro	47	41	43	37	38
L'Express	40	39	41	33	36
Libération	32	44	39	27	45
Mediapart	17	28	30	14	36

Note: Respondents were asked about eight specific outlets, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. The survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions. Only some parties are shown because the report focuses on traditional parties that have led government over the past 25 years and on populist parties.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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Trust in news media outlets by age and education

While trust in the overall news media is quite low among all age groups in France, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to trust in certain outlets. Among the eight outlets asked about in France, both France 2 and TF1 stand out as having high levels of trust across all ages, with 59% or more of adults in each age group saying they trust these outlets.

When it comes to trust in other outlets, however, the differences between age groups are notable. For example, those ages 18 to 29

are more likely than those ages 50 and older to trust each of the four print news outlets asked about – Le Monde, Le Figaro, Libération and L’Express – and these gaps in trust are quite substantial. Younger adults are at least 14 percentage points more trusting of each of these sources than those 50 and older. In the case of Le Monde, there is a 35-point gap in trust; about three-quarters of those under 30 (73%) trust the outlet, compared with roughly four-in-ten of those 50 and older (38%).

Younger adults more likely than older adults to trust each of the four print outlets asked about in France

% of French adults in each age group who generally trust each news outlet

	Ages 18-29	30-49	50+	YOUNGEST- OLDEST DIFF
Le Monde	73%	55%	38%	+35
Le Figaro	53	38	28	+25
Libération	46	39	26	+20
L’Express	43	35	29	+14
Mediapart	30	29	22	+8
France 2	71	70	76	- 5
TF1	62	59	68	- 6
BFM	49	57	56	- 7

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**. Respondents were asked about eight specific outlets, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. The survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. “News Media Attitudes in France”

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Trust levels in specific news media outlets also differ across education levels. Those with high levels of education are more likely than those with lower education levels to trust each of the four print news outlets included in the survey. And among the four, Le Monde stands out for having the largest gap, with those having a higher level of education being 31 percentage points more trusting of the outlet than those with less education.

In France, those with more education tend to trust print news outlets more than those with lower levels

% of French adults at each education level who generally trust each news outlet

	Secondary education or less	More than secondary education	MORE-LESS EDUCATION DIFF
Le Monde	40%	71%	+31
Mediapart	19	42	+23
Libération	27	49	+22
L'Express	27	47	+20
Le Figaro	30	47	+17
France 2	73	75	+2
BFM	57	50	-7
TF1	68	55	-13

Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**. Respondents were asked about eight specific outlets, which in some cases are part of a larger news organization. The survey asked specifically about France 2, which is part of France Télévisions.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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Of the three television outlets asked about – France 2, TF1 and BFM – both TF1 and BFM are trusted at higher rates among those with lower levels of education than those with higher levels. France 2, on the other hand, is trusted by majorities in both education groups.

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Methodology

About Pew Research Center's fall 2017 survey

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of SSRS and GfK. The results are based on national samples. More details about our international survey methodology and country-specific sample designs are [available here](#).

General information on international survey research

Appendix: Detailed tables

Views of the news media by income

% of French adults at each income level who ...

	Below median	At or above median
Think the news media are very important to society	28%	29%
Trust the news media a lot/somewhat	36	31

*% of French adults at each income level who say the news media are doing a
very/somewhat good job at ...*

Covering all important stories of the day	74	71
Getting the facts right	65	54
Investigating the actions of the government	52	49
Providing coverage independent of corporate influence	50	43
Being politically neutral in their news coverage	46	40

*% of French adults at each income level who say the news media do a
very/somewhat good job covering ...*

Crime	69	65
The economy	65	67
Immigration	55	50

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
"News Media Attitudes in France"

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News intake by education and income

% of French adults at each education and income level who get news at least daily from ____ platforms

	Education		Income	
	Secondary or less	More than secondary	Below median	At or above median
Zero	8%	10%	9%	7%
One	26	23	30	19
Two	37	36	34	39
Three	24	25	21	27
All four	6	6	5	7

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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News platforms used daily by education and income

% of French adults at each education and income level who get news at least daily from ...

	Education		Income	
	Secondary or less	More than secondary	Below median	At or above median
TV	76%	58%	71%	70%
Radio	49	60	47	59
Online	43	59	42	55
Print	26	18	23	23

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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Social media news habits by education and income

% of French adults at each education and income level who get news from social media ...

	Education		Income	
	Secondary or less	More than secondary	Below median	At or above median
At least daily	29%	44%	31%	36%
Less often	12	14	13	12
Never	59	43	57	51

Among French social media news consumers at each education and income level, % who say most of the news they see on social media comes from news sources they ...

Are familiar with	46	64	49	57
Are not familiar with	11	10	11	10
Do not pay attention to	42	24	38	32

Among French social media news consumers at each education and income level, % who say that the news they see on social media is ____ with their own political views

Often in line	7	16	10	11
Sometimes in line	49	61	49	59
Rarely in line	35	19	34	24

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.
"News Media Attitudes in France"

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Main news source by education and income

% of French adults at each education and income level who name each outlet as their main news source

	Education		Income	
	Secondary or less	More than secondary	Below median	At or above median
TF1	19%	9%	19%	13%
France TV	18	8	18	13
BFM	17	10	15	14
Radio France	4	10	5	7
Le Monde	3	13	5	8

Note: Only sources named by 5% of adults or more in any group are shown. Respondents were asked to name the outlet they turn to the most for news. For this analysis, major channels or brands were grouped into their larger news organization. France 2, which is asked about specifically on a separate question, is coded as part of France Télévisions (France TV) in this analysis of main news sources.

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017. "News Media Attitudes in France"

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THERE IS NO DESIRE MORE NATURAL THAN THE DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGGE

MEDIA POLARIZATION “À LA FRANÇAISE”?

Comparing the French and American Ecosystems

Does the web polarize society? In the United States, studies show that social media have contributed to the high level of polarization in the media ecosystem and in politics. Is this trend universal? Is polarization unfolding in a similar way in France as it is in the United States?

In order to answer this question, Institut Montaigne has worked with the Sciences Po Medialab, the MIT Center for Civic Media and the Sciences Po School of Journalism. It analyzed 18 million tweets and 65,000 articles from March 2018 to February 2019 and benefitted from data collected and interpreted by the Pew Research Center, measuring the attitudes of the French towards media and politics. The result is the second large-scale media ecosystem study worldwide, which paints a comprehensive picture of the French media landscape.

We find that the French media ecosystem is not as divided as the American one. However, there are strong reasons to believe that this situation is evolving. If polarization in the United States is unfolding on a spectrum opposing the left to the right, in France we believe it is taking place on an institutional *versus* anti-elites one. The analyses presented in the report nuance our common understanding of the way societies are being transformed in interaction with digital communication technologies.

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