

*The Evolution of the French Press: Protest Coverage from 1961 to 2019*

Senior Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences  
Brandeis University

Undergraduate Program in French and Francophone Studies  
Dr. Michael Randall, Advisor

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By  
Yvette Sei

April 2020

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Yvette Sei

## The Changing State of Journalism

A Democracy cannot truly function without an effective free press. The 4th estate informs the public, who are then intellectually equipped to vote and exercise their democratic rights. Without the press, the people have nowhere to turn for reliable information but hearsay or a state narrative of events. The former is unverified, forming a shaky basis for democracy and the latter would rob the people of their independence and ability to check those in power. Its necessity is clear, but how has journalism changed since the advent of the internet? Access to information has expanded at an astonishing pace and it is reasonable to assume that the press has mutated with it, but how? This thesis will be examining the evolution of the partisan press and their changing role in France, from the October 17, 1961 Algerian march and ensuing massacre to the Gilets Jaunes protests of 2019.

The French tradition of protest dates back to the Revolution and to this day, *manifestations*, are a key method for the French public express their discontent with government policies. Additionally, how protesters are painted given the fierceness of their beliefs can vary widely across the spectrum of the French partisan press. Arguably, journalism's most important role is to check those in power, notably politicians and the state, who try to establish their own, more favorable version of events. This thesis will look at 1961 to establish how well the French media can set up a baseline of facts and hold power to account, contrasting the state's narrative with the historical account of the facts, established in by historians nearly 40 years later. This baseline now established, the Gilets Jaunes will provide the contrasting example of a protest and a press operating in the internet age. Has the press improved or fallen behind in their quest to provide the truth to the French public? And how has their role change in response to the dissemination of information online?

## Chapter 1: State Narratives: An Examination of the Massacre of October 17, 1961

As night fell on October 17th, 1961 the Algerian population of Paris began streaming into the city. By the next morning, more than 200 of them would be dead.<sup>1</sup> This fact however, was only truly established 30 years later, after a number of historians conducted investigations into the incident, notably the 1991 publication of *La Bataille de Paris* by Jean Luc Einaudi. At the time the Préfecture de Police Parisienne claimed only 2 had died and 62 were injured.<sup>2</sup> Newspaper headlines in the days following the protests provided a wide range of narratives, each reflecting the slant of their publication and providing a disjointed picture to the public. *Le Monde*, *France-Soir*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Parisien Libéré* were among some of the most widely read publications of the time and each published its own version of events differing wildly on the number of dead, the reasons for protesting, views on police behavior and language used to refer to Algerians. Some touted the state story while others took the FLN's estimation of 300 dead as fact instead<sup>3</sup>. Taken together the French press were largely able to check the government's power, despite their partisan nature by combatting the official narrative of that night.

### I. The French-Algerian War

In the background of the protests, in the minds of the protesters and police alike was the French Algerian War. The French military first invaded Algeria in 1830. A force of 34,000 soldiers kicked off a saga that would last nearly 150 years and resonate well into the 21st

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<sup>1</sup> Einaudi, Jean-Luc. *La Bataille de Paris: 17 Octobre 1961*.

<sup>2</sup> Péju, Paulette, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Péju, and François Maspero. *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 143

<sup>3</sup> *La Bataille de Paris: 17 Octobre 1961*.

century. 17 years later France had quashed nearly all Algerian resistance, and in 1848 the colony became a *département* of France, the only colony to be fully integrated into the French state. This singular relationship would make the events of the French-Algerian War of particularly painful from the mid 1950s through the early 1960s.

The French-Algerian War or the Algerian War of Independence as it is also known, officially began November 1st, 1954 when members of the National Liberation Front (FLN) blasted onto the world stage. The previously unknown group was inspired by France's defeat at Dien Bien Phu months earlier and launched a series of attacks throughout Algeria, killing seven civilians on All Saint's Day.<sup>4</sup> Président du Conseil Pierre Mendès-France declared 11 days later:

« Les départements d'Algérie font partie de la République, ils sont français depuis longtemps ; leur population, qui jouit de la citoyenneté française et est représentée au Parlement, a donné assez de preuves de son attachement à la France pour que la France ne laisse pas mettre en cause son unité (...). Jamais la France, jamais aucun Parlement, jamais aucun gouvernement ne cédera sur ce principe fondamental.<sup>5</sup> »

His pronouncement highlights the French view that Algeria was not a mere colony but an integrated part of the France, not to be relinquished. Many European Frenchmen living in Algeria had been born in the *département*, had never lived in mainland France, and saw Algeria as their home. According to the final French census conducted in 1960, the European-French population living in Algeria (known as the 'pieds-noirs') was 1,050,000. This number makes up roughly 10% of Algeria's total population at the time but is lower than the population would have been just a few years earlier as it does not account for those who fled at the start of the violence.

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<sup>4</sup> Stora, Benjamin, Jane Marie Todd, and William B. Quandt. *Algeria, 1830 - 2000: A Short History*. Pg. 35

<sup>5</sup> "M. MENDES-FRANCE : Il Est Dangereux de Rapprocher Le Cas de l'Algérie de Celui de La Tunisie." *Le Monde*.

Open war in Algeria began August 20th, 1955 when a group of peasants attacked the city of Philippeville killing 71 Frenchmen and 52 Algerians.<sup>6</sup> There were 400,000 French troops on the ground by 1956. The first bomb attacks shook the capital Algiers on September 30, 1956, claiming two victims and injuring 52. The explosives were planted at popular pieds-noirs sites, one at the Milk-bar Café and the other in a caf  teria on Rue Michelet.<sup>7</sup> These bombings would mark the beginning of the Battle of Algiers, a year-long series of terror attacks launched on the capital city by the FLN, which were met with extreme force from the French army. During this period the French Army abducted, tortured and committed extrajudicial killings against the Algerian forces, which caused much controversy after the war.<sup>8</sup> After 1957 the battle dissolved into guerilla warfare, centered on the countryside instead of the capital, and dragged on for a year and a half before there was any shift on the part of the French government.

In his now famous June 4th, 1958 speech, Charles de Gaulle, declared « Je vous ai compris. Je sais ce qu'il s'est pass   ici. Je vois ce que vous avez voulu faire. Je vois que la route que vous avez ouverte en Alg  rie c'est celle de la r  novation et de la fraternit   » giving both Algerians and the French hope that de Gaulle would side with them.<sup>9</sup> De Gaulle was elected President of the Republic in December 1958 and continued to walk the line between pieds-noirs and Algerians, announcing the following September that a referendum for Algerian Independence would be held, placing the power in the hands of the people.<sup>10</sup> In April of 1961 de Gaulle alluded to an « Alg  rie Alg  rienne » in a press conference, confusing many, deeply disgruntling a number of his generals and spurring them to action. One month later, on May 22nd

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<sup>6</sup> *Algeria, 1830 - 2000: A Short History*. pg. 43

<sup>7</sup> Tillion, Germaine. *Les Ennemis Compl  mentaires: Guerre d'Alg  rie*. pg. 249

<sup>8</sup> Holman, Valerie, and Debra Kelly, eds. *France at War in the Twentieth Century: Propaganda, Myth and Metaphor*.

<sup>9</sup> *Algeria, 1830 - 2000: A Short History*. Pg. 256

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

three of de Gaulle's generals, Challe, Jouhaud and Zeller seized power in Algiers only to have their attempted coup fail three days later. With de Gaulle still in power his proposed referendum went forward as planned on July 1st and the people voted overwhelmingly—5,975,581 to 16,534— for the creation of an independent Algeria, which France recognized three days later bringing the war to a close.<sup>11</sup>

## **II. FLN Attacks in Paris**

While the Battle of Algiers raged across the Mediterranean, the FLN also carried out a number of attacks in Paris which set the charged atmosphere of the October 17th protest. A number of these attacks, like those of April 25th, 1958 were deliberately carried out against the police. In the early hours of the morning, four victims died in the garages of the police prefecture on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital.<sup>12</sup> Not every FLN attack was deadly but still served to heighten the tension. One such attack on March 11, 1960, resulted only in several damaged vehicles and storefronts, but nevertheless contributed to the feeling that Paris was not truly safe. Similarly, in another FLN offensive, launched October 23rd, 1960, « une vingtaine de militants du FLN organisés en cinq groupe distincts attaquèrent successivement les poste de police et le réfectoire de la FPA. Équipés de voitures, de pistolets, d'armes automatiques et de grenades » the assailants failed to kill any police officers, though 8 were injured.<sup>13</sup>

## **III. The Events of October 17th, 1961**

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<sup>11</sup> *Algeria, 1830 - 2000: A Short History.* pg 257

<sup>12</sup> Blanchard, Emmanuel. *La Police Parisienne et Les Algériens (1944-1962)* pg. 363

<sup>13</sup> *La Police Parisienne et Les Algériens (1944-1962)* pg. 364

The Parisian police were swift to react to news of the protest, shutting down metro lines in and out of the city in an attempt to curb the gathering. Of the 150,000 Algerians residing in and around the French capital, approximately 25,000 made it to the city center that night.<sup>14</sup> The movement was not spontaneous, but prompted by the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale, the organization behind the Algerian independence movement), whose direction urged Algerians to « avant tout de boycotter un couvre-feu, de descendre dans la rue, de se promener sur les grandes artères parisiennes pour ignorer la mesure préfectorale. La manifestation n'en est plus une: elle est une démonstration collective.<sup>15</sup> » The curfew in question was imposed nearly two weeks earlier on October 5 by the Prefecture of Police and was announced by Préfet de Police Maurice Papon. Papon declared at the press conference, that « Il est conseillé de la façon la plus pressante aux travailleurs musulmans algériens de s'abstenir de circuler la nuit dans les rues de Paris et de la banlieue parisienne, et plus particulièrement de 20h30 à 5h30 du matin,<sup>16</sup> » and mandated that Algerian-owned businesses shut their doors by 19h30 in order to ensure that the curfew was respected.

Those who broke the curfew on October 17 were met with extreme force by the French authorities. In addition to 200~250 dead, 455 Algerians were hospitalized for their injuries, a figure which minimizes the actual number of serious injuries they sustained since many were afraid to seek medical care.<sup>17</sup> 11,000 Algerians were arrested by the end of the night and transported to a number of holding sites, notably the Parc des Expositions which served as an internment camp under the Vichy government. According to Einaudi,

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<sup>14</sup> *La Bataille de Paris: 17 Octobre 1961.*

<sup>15</sup> *La Police Parisienne et Les Algériens (1944-1962)* pg. 378

<sup>16</sup> “Des Couvre-Feux à Paris En 1958 et 1961 : Une Mesure Importée d’Algérie Pour Mieux Lutter Contre Le FLN ? | Cairn.Info.

<sup>17</sup> Einaudi, Jean Luc. *Un Massacre à Paris*, Paris, Fayard. (2001) pg. 236

« Dans le Palais des Sports, puis dans le « Palais des Expositions de la Porte de Versailles », détenu Algériens, beaucoup maintenant déjà blessés, [est devenu] victimes systématiques d'un « comité d' accueil ». Dans ces endroits, la violence considérable a eu lieu et ont été torturés prisonniers. Les hommes seraient en train de mourir là - bas jusqu'à la fin de la semaine. Des scènes similaires ont eu lieu dans le stade Coubertin [...] Les raids, la violence et les noyades se poursuivraient au cours des jours suivants. Depuis plusieurs semaines, des cadavres non identifiés ont été découverts le long des rives de la rivière. »<sup>18</sup>

Many who were held in these camps remained there for days before being 'relocated' back to Algeria. Given that Algeria was a part of France this was not considered deportation, but many of those who were relocated were moved without any warning and were separated from their families.<sup>19</sup>

It wouldn't be until 1998 that the French government would acknowledge more than 2 deaths occurred that night, upping the official death count to 40, stating « nous considérons qu'il faut plutôt majorer ce chiffre. On peut arriver jusqu'à 40, voire 50 victimes, sans doute pas plus. »<sup>20</sup> There was no change in the official number of injured protestors. This remains the official French narrative to this day, though many newspapers have since run articles amending previous coverage and diving more deeply into the events of October 17th, 1961.

#### **IV. Examining the Coverage**

##### ***Le Monde***

The first edition of *Le Monde* was printed on December 19th, 1944, four months after the liberation of Paris. It was created at the request of Charles de Gaulle « as a means of providing a respected voice for France.<sup>21</sup> » Despite the fact that it was conceived and created at the request of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pg. 82-82

<sup>19</sup> "07- Liberation\_20\_octobre\_-Titre.Jpg (394x345)."  
See image 1.

<sup>20</sup> Pascal Riché. "Guerre Des Chiffres : Combien de Morts Le 17 Octobre 1961 ?" October 18, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. "Le Figaro | French Newspaper."



the Chairman of the Provisional French Government, the paper's first editor Hubert Beuve-Méry insisted on *Le Monde's* political independence and expressed fierce opposition to the idea of being an arm of the state. The newspaper is a centrist publication with a tendency to lean to the left in certain cases, as their editorial history indicates. *Le Monde* endorsed Socialist Francois Mitterand in 1981, but opposed another Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal, in 2007. The paper has also voted editorial support for centre right candidates throughout its history, including Édouard Balladur in 1995.

When it comes to coverage of the October 17th protest, *Le Monde* spotted issues with the state narrative in some of their earliest articles. One piece, published on October 20th, 1961 notes that, « la question de savoir si des manifestants algériens, armés, ont fait feu sur le service d'ordre demeure très controversée » poking holes in the narrative that the protesters had instigated the violence.<sup>22</sup> The story continues along this suspicious theme by questioning the *Prefecture's* claim that two police officers were injured by algerian bullets, given the fact that their supposed injuries are never described as bullet wounds, or described at all. This vague answer is enough to turn heads at *Le Monde* and prompt skepticism about the official story.

Another article published on the same day rebuked both the Algerians for expecting a peaceful protest given the political atmosphere and condemned the excessive use of force by the police. On the one hand the article blames protests for the violence to a certain extent, saying, « même s'ils ont voulu organiser pour la première fois une manifestation non violente, les Algériens ne pouvaient penser un instant que dans l'état d'esprit créé par le terrorisme F.L.N. la police parisienne ne réagirait pas avec une extrême vigueur, » implying that violence against

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<sup>22</sup> “Les musulmans de la région parisienne ont été moins nombreux mercredi à suivre les consignes du F.L.N.” *Le Monde.fr*, October 20, 1961.

peaceful protesters is both normal and expected behavior in these circumstances.<sup>23</sup> Though the article does not allege that the protesters were armed or invited the violence, it paints police retaliation as understandable and normalizes the killings to a certain extent. At this point, *Le Monde* had not reported more than two confirmed deaths, which mitigates the seemingly extreme nature of this statement. If more protesters had perished, this nonchalant attitude would carry a very different meaning. The article then draws a line between the events of October 17th and the ‘current’ situation of mass detention, writing « mais autant on peut comprendre les brutalités ‘à chaud’, autant on doit une nouvelle fois s’élever contre les violences exercées ‘à froid’ sur les manifestants arrêtés, » making abundantly clear that the rumored violence perpetrated against those in the Parc des Expositions or Porte de Vincennes is in no way morally acceptable and showing distinct sympathy for those detained.<sup>24</sup> The justification of political tension in the heat of the moment falls apart when the violence is calmly perpetrated in a controlled environment, and the paper acknowledges this.

*Le Monde* continued challenging the official rhetoric on October 21st, when it took issue with the state-issued death count. The article began with a frank opening accusation, that « le bilan officiel des morts et des blessés parmi les musulmans, lors des manifestations suscite certaines contestations. Certaines laissent entendre qu’ils pourraient être plus nombreux qu’il n’a été dit, » raising suspicions about the true number of dead protesters. This is a key point of contention and embodies the clearest divide between those who accepted the state narrative and those who investigated and found incongruencies in their story. The article takes a definitive stance, but does not make accusations against the police, staying the centrist course.

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<sup>23</sup> “VIOLENCES INUTILES.” *Le Monde.fr*, October 20, 1961.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Four days later, the opinion of the publication as sympathetic to the *manifestants* became increasingly apparent. An October 25th article acknowledges the accusation that Algerians were thrown in the Seine river on the 17th, and the systematic abuse that led them to the streets in the first place with the line, « ce n'est pas la première fois que des corps d'Algériens sont retirés de la Seine » and goes on to lay that charge at the feet of the police. The article does so, subtly, saying, « surtout depuis le couvre feu imposé au musulmans, des organisation syndicales et des groupement politique attribuent la responsabilité de certaines de ces 'exécutions sommaires' à la police.<sup>25</sup> » The language is not explicitly accusatory, but the decision to portray this opinion as shared by an unspecified large number of organizations, and to allow it to stand uncontradicted clearly demonstrates the feelings of the writer and publication. The claim is left unrefuted in the piece.

The final article that defines *Le Monde's* immediate coverage of the protest came 10 days after the event. The paper decided not just to cover the immediate situation, but took the events of October 17th as an opportunity to delve deeper into the lives of Algerians living in Paris. On October 27th an article entitled « A dix minutes des Champs-Élysées, des hommes vivent dans la grand'peur : les habitants des bidonvilles » was published on one of the inside pages. Though it was not front page news, the story clearly was clearly inspired out of sympathy for the Algerian population, chronicling the struggles they faced on the outskirts of the city at the hands of the police and the F.L.N.. Michel Legris the journalist who wrote the article, notes that, « ces hommes sont pris dans une double terreur : la terreur que leur inspire la police, qui les malmène aveuglément parce qu'elle voit en eux les représentants d'une race qu'elle considère comme ennemie, et la terreur provoquée par le FLN, » painting the slums' inhabitants as victims from all

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<sup>25</sup> Pierre Viansson-Ponté. "Les musulmans de la région parisienne ont été moins nombreux mercredi à suivre les consignes du F.L.N." *Le Monde.fr*, October 20, 1961.

sides.<sup>26</sup> The article does mention the October 17th protest, briefly focusing on the fear it inspired among the population and resident's reluctance to answer questions « réticents pour parler des exactions de la police, les Algériens le sont encore bien plus dès qu'on les interroge sur le FLN et les manifestations de la semaine dernière.<sup>27</sup> » This line clearly indicates belief in police misconduct and underscores the continued fear surrounding the protest. By tying this fear to the alleged misconduct, Legris subtly points a finger at the police.

### ***France-Soir***

*France-Soir* was born in 1941 as the *Défense de la France*, a newspaper founded in Paris by French Resistance leaders Robert Salmon and Philippe Viannay. The newspaper remained underground until the liberation of Paris.<sup>28</sup> After the close of the war, the paper changed its name to *France-Soir*, and by the mid 1950s had a daily circulation of 1.5 million readers, making it one of the most popular papers of the day.<sup>29</sup> *France-Soir* made use of a tabloid format during its days as a physical paper though it has now been reduced to an online paper, and was a key mass media source in France until the 1990s.<sup>30</sup> The paper presents a centrist view of the news, though its tabloid leanings leads the publication to regularly sensationalize.

*France-Soir* covered the protest in a similar way to *Le Monde*, and helps to solidify the centrist perspective on the events of October 17th. They too spotted problems with the state sanctioned story, including the official number of dead, but does not address the issue of police brutality, painting the violence as accidental in many cases. One article published two days after

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Greenslade, Roy. "Au Revoir to France Soir." *The Guardian*, July 25, 2012, sec. Media.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

the protest chronicles the violence on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle where the only reported incident of shooting throughout the protest took place. The police claim protesters initiated the violence by shooting first, a claim which is contradicted outright. The article instead tells the story of a lone police officer, separated from his fellow officers and stranded in the crowd, who takes out his gun and warns protesters to step back or he'll shoot.<sup>31</sup> When they don't retreat he fires his gun into the air twice before turning it towards the marching masses and firing at them an additional two times.<sup>32</sup> Then, « en entendant les coups de feu, des policiers casqués, portant de gilets pare-balles, sont accourus, Ils ont, à leur tour tiré une vingtaine de coups de feu.<sup>33</sup> » This portrait of the violence as accidental places some of the blame on the marchers who did not retreat, and excuses the police in some ways by painting the violence as a miscommunication. As the October 20th *Monde* piece asserted that some violence was inevitable, *France-Soir* asserts that the violence was unintentional. The article does however, questions with the death official count, noting in its last line that « sept hommes restent sur le trottoir, gravement blessés. L'un d'eux devait succomber, » and implying that more than two likely died as a result of the incident.<sup>34</sup>

Though they share a number of similarities in their coverage, as the article above exemplifies, *France-Soir* differs from *Le Monde* on why the protesters were on the streets in the first place, writing, « l'apparition inattendue de musulmans brandissant des écharpes vert et blanc aux couleurs du FLN, tapant dans les mains, scandant 'Algérie algérienne' et 'libérez Ben Bella' » without providing any further context.<sup>35</sup> Though it is true that these slogans were

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<sup>31</sup> Péju, Paulette, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Péju, and François Maspero. *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 142

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 142

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

shouted, Algerian Independence was not the driving motivation for the protest. The article does not mention the couvre-feu at all, let alone as a reason for the *manifestation*. This omission, in an article published 2 days after the events most likely represents the effect of editorialization rather than a lack of awareness, especially given that other papers were reporting it. The exclusion of this fact renders the protest more controversial in allying it with the violent side of the FLN rather than portraying it as it was; an F..L.N. protest against the curfew and for Algerian rights, liberation included.

Another article published the following day on October 20th mitigated this perspective to a certain extent by emphasizing the peaceful nature of Algerian behavior. Jean Ferniot, who would go on to win the Prix Interallié in 1961<sup>36</sup> wrote, « on a dû constater que les musulmans respectaient des consignes très stricte de calme et que leur seul cri, qui ne peut être considéré comme séditieux depuis qu'il fut lancé par le General de Gaulle, était celui d'Algérie algérienne.»<sup>37</sup> » This line highlights the violence as unjustified and uninvited. It adjusts the publication's coverage from a view that the violence was accidental and somewhat blameless, and shifts the guilt onto the police.

### ***Le Figaro***

*Le Figaro* was founded in 1828, taking its name and motto (« *Sans la liberté de blâmer, il n'est point d'éloge flatteur* ») from the opera *The Marriage of Figaro* by Beaumarchais. It originally served as a gossip and satire-based arts review in Paris and became a daily newspaper in 1866.<sup>38</sup> *Le Figaro* was France's largest daily newspaper at the start of the Second World War,

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<sup>36</sup> data.bnf.fr. "Jean Ferniot (1918-2012)."

<sup>37</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 147

<sup>38</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. "Le Figaro | French Newspaper."

but chose to shut its doors rather than submit to Vichy censorship. The paper experienced internal conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s when accusations were made that a number of the paper's editors had collaborated with the Vichy government during the war. When the paper reopened after the war it became « the voice of the conservative middle classes » and is still espouses a conservative view today.<sup>39</sup>

As expected, coverage from the right looked markedly different from that of the centrist publications. The October 18th headline of *Le Figaro* read, « Violentes manifestations de musulmans algériens hier soir à Paris » directly implying that the protesters were the violent group involved and thus that the police had simply responded to this violence. The article listed a total of 2 dead and 44 injured among the protesters, a number which aligns with the Prefecture narrative on the death count, but underreports the number of injured protesters, even when using the state story as a benchmark. This demonstrates a pro-police perspective and a lack of belief in the Algerian accounts of the incident. The story goes on to assert that there were « une dizaine de blessés parmi les membres du service d'ordre, » when the Préfecture themselves claimed that fewer were injured. According to the Préfecture de Police, « un officier de paix, deux brigadiers, six gardiens ont été conduits à la maison de santé, » bringing the total number of injured officers to 9, not 12.<sup>40</sup> This may not seem like a large discrepancy, but the overinflation of police injuries in conjunction with the suppression of the Algerian statistics says much about the *Figaro's* view of the police force and their willingness to run with a state narrative, despite evidence to the contrary. *Le Monde* and *France-Soir* both used the state numbers as a minimum and then

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<sup>39</sup> "The Press in France," November 11, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 143

questioned this narrative, while *Le Figaro* seemed to accept it as a low number, before decreasing it even further.

In a piece published 5 days later, the *Figaro* changed its tone from the skeptical nature of its initial coverage to a more open-minded perspective. On October 23rd, the paper reported that « sauf de très rare exceptions, les manifestants se laissent appréhender sans la moindre résistance. La police ne fait, d'ailleurs, état d'aucune arme saisie,<sup>41</sup> » adopting a much more neutral tone and retracting the pro-government narrative it had constructed days earlier. This reversal exhibits an attention to the facts and willingness to question the *bilan officiel* not present in the coverage immediately following the protest. The article continues to question governmental behavior further down the page, saying, « il résulte de diverses indications précises et concordantes, portée à notre connaissance, que le nombre de blessés musulmans serait très élevé, » in comparison to their previous estimations.<sup>42</sup> This turnaround shows that while *Le Figaro*'s first reaction was to align itself with the state and fall back on right wing views, the tenets of good journalism won out over the paper's political affiliations. This type of coverage does credit to the paper and its journalists, who are clearly willing to cross political lines in order to deliver the truth to their readers. There is a certain amount of permanent damage done when trying to correct initial coverage, since people's opinions are often informed by their first impressions and exposure to certain facts. Still, *Le Figaro* was not blinded by its political views in the long term and delivered for their *lecteurs*.

This trend continued in a second article on the 23rd, when the publication raised the alarm about a lack of access to the centers where protesters were being held nearly a week later,

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<sup>41</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 148

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*



the Palais des Sports being a particular point of contention. The article wrote that « nulle part l'aide de la Croix-Rouge paraît avoir été sollicitée en ce qui concerne les hommes appréhendés » nor were any journalists allowed into the camps to observe the living conditions of those being held.<sup>43</sup> *Le Figaro* highlights these circumstances as dangerous warning signs, and refutes the reasons given for the prisoners' isolation with the line, « refus absurde et maladroit, ne serait-ce que par son caractère illogique et contradictoire.<sup>44</sup> » Though *Le Figaro*'s political leanings initially led them to take the government at its word, later articles were more balanced and grounded in fact, confirming that in this case journalistic duty prevailed over the political.

### ***Le Parisien Libéré***

*Le Parisien* like many french newspapers was founded during World War II. In August 1944, « Emilien Amaury and fellow members of the resistance movement founded *Le Parisien Libéré*, which became *Le Parisien* in 1986.<sup>45</sup> » Like *France-Soir* the paper makes use of a tabloid news format, often with exaggerated headlines and images to grab the reader's attention. Articles are reserved to the inside pages to give said headlines and images more real estate.<sup>46</sup> The newspaper was purchased by the luxury conglomerate LVMH in 2015 and is currently a centrist paper but in its earlier days the publication was more aligned with the French right.<sup>47</sup>

*Le Parisien Libéré* provided similar, yet more reserved coverage to the first pieces released by *Le Figaro*. Immediately following the protest, the October 18th headline read « violent manifestations nord-africaines hier soir à Paris » again attributing the violence to the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 149

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> LVMH. "Le Parisien - Other Activities."

<sup>46</sup> "Le Parisien | French Newspaper | Britannica."

<sup>47</sup> LVMH. "Le Parisien - Other Activities."

protesters and making no mention of police behavior. This article was markedly more restrained than the first *Figaro* pieces, taking a more conservative approach with the death and injury counts by stating that there were « plusieurs morts, de nombreux blessés » instead of delving into the specifics, though the line does imply a limited number of deaths, somewhat along the lines of the state story. This would suggest that despite the right-wing leanings of the paper, their coverage remained largely factual at the start.

Contrary to *Le Figaro*'s path however *Le Parisien Libéré*'s bias emerged in the second wave of articles, released on October 19th. The headline of the day read « Les chefs terroristes auraient donné leurs nouvelles consignes: attaques de commandos contre la police » making a distinct accusation against the protesters. The article goes on to allege that the « 10,000 Musulmans rassemblés dans les centres de triage, font l'objet d'une enquête,<sup>48</sup> » implying that they were being held as part of an investigation, which by all accounts was untrue.<sup>49</sup> Given that all the Algerian protesters were breaking the 20h30 curfew the police were able to arrest them en masse, and no official reason was given beyond this as to why the Algerians were held for so long. Since these implications are not supported in the later scholarship, or in any of the other newspapers— a fact that many other newspapers of the era would have been deeply interested in— the statement can be declared false. Though the initial coverage of *Le Parisien Libéré* stuck to the facts, it quickly became more speculative and allowed partisan bias to alter not just the way events were framed, but the facts themselves. This paper provides a snapshot of what can happen when political opinion is used to mediate a story and when the political atmosphere surrounding an event obscures the truth.

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<sup>48</sup> “Parisien\_20\_21oct61opt.Pdf.”  
See image 2.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

## *Libération*

*Libération* was founded in July 1941 as the mouthpiece for the Libération-Sud French Resistance by Jean Cavaillès and Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie. The paper was aligned with the extreme left and supported by the socialist and communist parties after the end of the war. The paper became a daily in 1942, the same year it moved to Paris and increased circulation to 225,000 copies per day.<sup>50</sup> It was this newspaper that inspired the second *Libération*, famously founded by Jean Paul Sartre in 1973. The former *Libération* « cessera de paraître en 1962, lorsque, à cause de divergences, le Parti Communiste Français lui retire son soutien,<sup>51</sup> » without which the paper could not continue printing.

In stark contrast to the right leaning publications, *Libération* was an extremely ready to question all of the government's statements due to its left-wing beliefs, beginning with their first article published on October 18th. The story asserted « 8 à 10 morts, sans doute, et des centaines de blessés » leaving room for more victims in the death count, and making themselves the only publication to even approach an accurate number of injured Algerians.<sup>52</sup> This assertion was likely born out of an anti-police sentiment and general opposition to the Algerian war, but these motivations led the paper to delve more deeply into these accusations— in a way many papers on the right initially did not— and produce better journalism. Though their estimation was still drastically low in relation to the actual numbers, *Libération* came closest to pinning down the truth. The article goes on to describe the protesters as peaceful and unarmed, while « les gardiens

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<sup>50</sup> “Oh, Jules Vignes, Qu’ont-Ils Fait Du Journal « Libération » ? - Rebellyon.Info,” July 1, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 138

de la paix frappent à coups de bâtons blancs, de crosses de mitraillettes.<sup>53</sup> » Images from the time confirm the ubiquitous presence of machine guns at the protest, including one published by *Libération* two days later.

The front page photograph on October 20 highlights the heavily armed nature of the French police throughout the protest and following internment. The image captures a police officer in standard uniform, his face turned away from the camera as he stares out at a line of Algerians. In his hands is a machine gun, which he holds with his finger on the trigger. This image in conjunction with the headline, « à l'annexe du palais des sports 6,300 Algerians parqués comme des bêtes,<sup>54</sup> » presented a dramatic view of the events. The language used throughout the article, particularly the characterization of Algerians as animals aims to elicit a sympathetic response from the reader and in conjunction with the photo, the paper's opinion of the police is evident.

*Libération* continued in their coverage of the story, not stopping at mere coverage of the protest and subsequent arrests, but interrogating the conditions that Algerians were being held under and their pressing the state to allow access to the camps. On October 19, the paper published an article composed of a series of rhetorical questions that raised the alarm regarding the camps and bodies found floating in the Seine: « Est-il exact que douze Algériens ont été, la semaine dernière, précipités dans la Seine? » and « est-il exact que chaque nuit des Algériens disparaissent sans qu'on puisse retrouver leur trace dans les prisons ou les centres de tri? » are the questions which most clearly convey the paper's suspicion of the service de l'ordre. Though

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<sup>53</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 140

<sup>54</sup> “07- \_Liberation\_20\_octobre\_-Titre.Jpg (394×345).”  
See image 1.

the article does not make outright allegations against the police, timing of the article and the mentions of the holding camps make clear implications against them in the case of these bodies.

The follow up coverage continued in *Libération* well into the following month, On November 9th, the paper published the following statement, « du 17 octobre au 1er novembre, cent trois Nord-Africains ont été conduits à nos consultations, dont soixante-cinq ont dû être hospitalisés pour état grave. Les observation cliniques ont été prises avec le plus grand soin.<sup>55</sup> »

This piece reveals *Libération*'s dedication of long term investigative resources to keep the narrative of those affected by the protest in the public consciousness. The article goes on to allege that while some of these injuries were definitely tied to the protest, more recent injuries cannot be tied to that night, meaning that the Algerian population in Paris was regularly suffering targeted violence. The exact causes of this violence are unclear the newspaper says and the specific nature of the injuries is not known due to medical confidentiality, but a finger is pointed in the police's direction regarding those injured in the protest.<sup>56</sup> In this case, *Libération*'s political leanings happened to line up with the reality historians later confirmed. If its journalists had covered protests grounded in right wing ideologies, the depth of coverage might have been vastly different.

## V. Findings

In the end, despite the lack of objectivity in the press, they French dailies largely able to come to a consensus and check the narrative asserted by the French state. The official death count was largely contradicted, the protestors were painted as undeserving of the violence and

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<sup>55</sup> *Ratonnades à Paris*. pg. 174

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

abuses of power by the police in the days after October 17th were widely criticized. A number of papers however struggled with the coverage early on, their political beliefs pushing them to stray from the reality of the situation. *The Figaro* and *Le Parisien* were particularly vulnerable to this given the close associations between the *droite* and the military in France. The centrist and left-wing newspapers provided the most accurate coverage, and end up consecrating more long-term resources to investigating the situation than either paper on the right. The follow-up articles are particularly important here as they provided in depth coverage that no paper on the opposite end of the spectrum provided.

This disparity in accuracy is more a matter of chance than any confirmation that the centrist and leftist paper papers practiced better journalism. Had the protest originated on the right the roles would likely be reversed. Though the truth came out in the end the lack of objectivity made the process of uncovering it more difficult than it would have been in a nation with a less partisan press. Presented as a whole though French daily papers came together to oppose the *bilan officiel* they still struggled to present a cohesive view of events to the French people. For those living in Paris at that time, the death count, number of injured protestors, reasons for protesting and police behavior was portrayed differently in each publication. The demonization of one group was touted on the left while the right asserted that the opposite group was responsible for the violence. This type of divisive coverage can make it extremely difficult for citizens to obtain accurate information about the world around them and thus function as citizens of a democracy. The full truth would not emerge until 30 years later, and for some that version of events was drastically different than the facts that were presented contemporaneously.

## **Chapter 2: The French Press in the 21st Century: A Reevaluation**

### **I. The Gilets Jaunes, a Protest in the Internet Age**

Skipping nearly 60 years into the future, new questions about the role of the press arise. Has the role of print media changed with the advent of the internet age? Do the same biases that permeated the coverage in 1961 exist today? And if so, do they manifest in the same way? The Gilets Jaunes provide an excellent case study to reevaluate the state of the French press in the modern era. Like the Algerian march in 1961, the Gilets Jaunes movement was a popular uprising, perpetuated by those who felt abandoned or oppressed by the French state. Like 1961, questions about the use of police force swirled, albeit with a lesser degree of violence. Like the Algerians, the Gilets Jaunes are not uniformly rooted on either side of the ideological spectrum but are rather a collection of citizens with specific policy demands for their government. Where the Algerians wanted greater civil rights and an end to the French Algerian War, the Gilets Jaunes wanted a repeal of the proposed fuel tax and as the movement progressed, French

President Emmanuel Macron's resignation. The amorphous nature of the Gilets Jaunes made their objectives less clear than the Algerians' straightforward demands in 1961, but nonetheless the similarities between the two protests are apparent. The Gilets Jaunes therefore are a perfect example to reevaluate the state of the French press and its role in society at large.

## I. Background on the Gilets Jaunes

The Gilets Jaunes movement, so named for the highlighter yellow safety vests worn by protesters, was born of anger. In October of 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron unveiled a new fuel tax in an effort to curb the French carbon footprint. The measure was no small increase, and « doit passer de 63,07 centimes d'euros par litre en 2017 à 77,80 centimes en 2022, pour l'essence sans plomb 95 (E5) et de 53,07 centimes à 78,23 centimes pour le gazole, »<sup>57</sup> and would raise a massive, « 4 milliards d'euros de recettes en plus pour les finances publiques au titre de l'année 2019. » The Sénat estimated that the tax would cost households €79 in 2018 but would climb steeply to €313 per year in 2022.<sup>58</sup> Soon after the fuel tax was proposed, opposition to the measure began to organize online, channeling the discontent into a movement. Though the measure was « présentée par le gouvernement comme relevant de la lutte contre le réchauffement climatique, cette taxation est perçue par la majorité de la population comme un abus injuste frappant les plus modestes dans leur mode de vie et de consommation, »<sup>59</sup> awakening long held discontent in the lower and middle classes. Many among them felt that those who lived in cities, with access to public transportation would not feel the burden of the tax equally, and that it unduly punished commuters and more rural communities. All over France local Facebook groups

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<sup>57</sup> *La Croix*. "Les Taxes Sur Les Carburants, Au Cœur Du Conflit Avec Les Gilets Jaunes."

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Vermeren, Pierre. *La France Qui Déclasse: Les Gilets Jaunes, Une Jacquerie Au Xxe Siècle*. pg. 21



sprang up, and soon adopted the ‘Gilets Jaunes,’ the roadside safety vest required by law in all French vehicles, as an emblem of their opposition to the fuel tax. The vest would famously come to define the group.

The movement crystallized on social media, with over 1,548 separate ‘Gilets Jaunes’ Facebook groups created by the 4th week of protests in mid-December.<sup>60</sup> The protests began, « par de nombreux points de rassemblement décentralisés, souvent autour de ronds-points, symboles de ‘l’automobilisme’ à la française, »<sup>61</sup> and quickly gained steam. During the first physical manifestation of the movement, 788 road blockages were counted at ronds-points across France.<sup>62</sup> The group soon changed tactics however, aiming for more visible protests in larger cities and on Saturday November 17, 2018, Paris saw its first march.

According to the Minister of the Interior nearly 300,000 people protested throughout France that first weekend.<sup>63</sup> The Gilets Jaunes began to march every Saturday, in major metropolitan areas, with Paris, Bordeaux, Orleans and Nantes seeing some of the highest turnout rates. Though the marches began peacefully, many devolved into chaos leading to « the destruction of shop fronts, cars and even public monuments, »<sup>64</sup> by protesters. Notably, The Arc de Triomphe was sprayed with graffiti, and the tomb of the unknown soldier was not ceremonially lit for the first time since Armistice day in 1923. At its highest point, 89,000 members of the forces de l’ordre were deployed and « the movement’s violence – and the frequency of its demonstrations – placed great strain on security forces. »<sup>65</sup> Even with security

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<sup>60</sup> Boyer, Pierre C., Thomas Delemotte, Germain Gauthier, Vincent Rollet, and Benoît Schmutz. “Les Déterminants de La Mobilisation Des Gilets Jaunes.” pg. 110

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Grossman, Emiliano. "France’s Yellow Vests – Symptom of a Chronic Disease."

<sup>64</sup> *Le Monde*. « Gilets Jaunes » : 89 000 Membres Des Forces de l’ordre, 12 Blindés..., Le Dispositif de Sécurité Prévu Samedi.”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

forces present to mitigate the destruction, the economic costs are estimated at 2 billion euros in the last two months of 2018 alone, and would climb much higher over the next year.<sup>66</sup>

Attempts to contain the demonstrator's behavior led to violent clashes with police and injuries among both police and protesters. One year into the movement, 2448 protesters had been injured as well as 1797 members of the security forces.<sup>67</sup> These injuries were primarily caused by clashes with police in urban centers, though the 11 deaths caused by the movement resulted entirely from accidents during ronds-point protests, with the exception of one elderly woman who was hit by tear gas as she closed the shutters to her home. She died the next day, December 2, 2018.

The Gilets Jaunes often picked up cobblestones to use as projectiles as well as other rudimentary weapons, while police responded with the use of tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets fired from « lanceurs de balles de défense » (LBD), which are banned in many European countries. The number of injuries sustained throughout the protests, especially those caused by LBD fire drew condemnation both within France and from international bodies like Amnesty International and the UN. The High Commissioner on Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet urged a « full investigation of all reported cases of excessive use of force, »<sup>68</sup> in March of 2019. No such investigation occurred.

As the movement expanded, its demands shifted to encompass a wider range of issues beyond the fuel tax, which was suspended on December 10th, 2018. Macron also promised an increase to the minimum wage by 100 euros per month in a failed attempt to placate protesters.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Le Monde*. “« Gilets Jaunes » : Le Manque à Gagner Serait de 2 Milliards d'euros Pour Le Commerce.”

<sup>67</sup> *Le Figaro*. “Violences policières contre les «gilets jaunes»: 54 classements sans suite.”

<sup>68</sup> “OHCHR | High Commissioner Bachelet Calls on States to Take Strong Action against Inequalities.”

<sup>69</sup> *Le Monde*. “Le casse-tête des « 100 euros par mois » promis par Emmanuel Macron aux salariés au smic.”

By this point the Gilets Jaunes had widened their focus to social inequity on a larger scale with many naming social security, purchasing power, and police violence as key motivating issues. On the whole however, the movement displayed a clear lack of unity due to « strong internal divisions, with political positions ranging across the whole political spectrum, »<sup>70</sup> and was never successful in designating official leaders. Without clear demands or leaders, the movement remained amorphous, a body without a head, united by little else but contempt for Macron. Despite this disorganization, some chapters of the movement were still active a year and a half later, until the COVID-19 crisis made such gatherings impossible

## **II. Publications and Political Leanings**

### **A. Publications**

The newspapers selected to evaluate the coverage of the Gilets Jaunes are nearly identical to those examined regarding 1961 and represent the same swath of the ideological spectrum. Libération, Le Monde, Le Figaro, and La Croix will still serve to represent the left to right variety of opinions. This was an express choice to illuminate how the same organizations have changed over the past 60 years. Le Monde still touts a left of center editorial opinion today, and Le Figaro remains unchanged as well, hovering right of center. As a Roman-Catholic publication, La Croix generally sits further to the right than Le Monde, especially on social issues. Though it does not officially take any political stance, it is easily the most right leaning of the four papers. It is worth noting as well that while Libération is still serving to provide a leftist point of view, the Libération mentioned here is not the same newspaper discussed in the first portion of this analysis. The current Libération, which is named for the former left wing

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<sup>70</sup> Grossman, Emiliano. "France's Yellow Vests – Symptom of a Chronic Disease." *Political Insight*10, no. 1 (2019): 30-34.

publication of the same name, was founded by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1973 after the press' treatment of the May 1968 illustrated to Sartre the need of a new left wing publication.<sup>71</sup> Libération has drifted closer to the center of the political spectrum since 1973 but remains firmly rooted in the leftist tradition imbued on the paper by Sartre's founding.

Due to the length of the movement and the astounding increase in content newspapers are now producing, selecting front page articles as I did in the first section is no longer representative of the paper's coverage as a whole. Only 16% of the French population still receive a physical daily newspaper<sup>72</sup>, and in any case, a majority of the content produced by their papers is exclusively online, due to the space limitations of the page when it comes to physically printed articles. In order to facilitate this analysis therefore, I have selected a number of articles, which after extensive reading, I have found to embody each publication's coverage of the protests. These articles center around four key areas about the movement: turnout numbers, damage caused, police brutality and police exhaustion and abuse. These flashpoints are the most contentious issues surrounding the movement and provide for the examination of the most extreme — and most telling — moments of the movement. I began with an evaluation of the different publication's reporting styles and overall leanings before deepening my analysis throughout each of the four aforementioned categories.

## **B. Political Leanings**

Each newspaper took a unique approach to covering the protests, ranging from human interest reporting on one end, to a focus on official statements of government policy from the

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<sup>71</sup> David Drake, "Sartre and May 1968: The Intellectual in Crisis" *Sartre Studies International*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1997), pg. 57

<sup>72</sup> Statista. "France: Printed Newspapers Reading Frequency 2017."

Interior Ministry and the conveyance of hard facts on the other. The resulting coverage by each paper paints the movement, those involved, and the forces de l'ordre, in drastically different lights.

Libération represents one end of this spectrum, with a majority of their reporting centered on the protesters as individuals, their experiences, encounters with police, and reasons for marching. This immersive reporting was not limited to a few articles, but permeated a majority of Libération's coverage. One January 12th, 2019 article, *Gilets jaunes, acte 9 : «On a encore les moyens d'être dans la rue»*, is a key example of this reporting style. The article opens by introducing readers to Julie, one of the thousands of manifestants gathered at the Arc de Triomphe. She is not presented to readers using any information relating to the protest, but is described by the fact of her motherhood, and normalized by the accessibility of her profession. «La femme de 35 ans est mère d'une fillette de 18 mois. Fonctionnaire dans les espaces verts, elle s'attendait à mieux pour l'acte 9 des gilets jaunes. »<sup>73</sup> Julie is more than an angry civilian in the crowd, she is real and complex, putting herself at risk of injury by marching despite having a young daughter. Already, Julie is human. This effect is compounded by a discussion of last week's protest where « elle-même s'est fait gazer 'en pleine face' et 'même courcée.' » The article continues along this theme presenting Emilie, Maximilien, Adri, and Philippe, throughout the piece, reminding readers that the crowd is not inhuman, but made up of people.

This protester tunnel vision is visible again when the piece addresses the day's violence. Without chronicling what led to police intervention, it describes the violence strictly by what is happening to protesters: « un homme prend une balle de lanceur de défense dans l'abdomen et s'écroule au sol. Une femme en prend une dans la tête. Vite prise en charge par les soignants,

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<sup>73</sup>Libération. "Gilets Jaunes, Acte 9 : «On a Encore Les Moyens d'être Dans La Rue»

elle repart sur un brancard le poing levé. »<sup>74</sup> The article places readers in the skin of a protester, occasionally alluding to the police, but not presenting them to readers in the same holistic way or examining the situation that led to police firing their weapons. The piece finishes by tallying the injuries of the day, « 24 personnes ont été blessées, dont deux membres des forces de l'ordre, l'un en urgence absolue, »<sup>75</sup> addressing police casualties for the first time. Here the newspaper highlights the lived experiences of those on the streets, providing insight into the lives of the Gilets Jaunes to the exclusion of important context. Why did the police fire their weapons? Was this protest as violent as previous weeks, or less so? When zooming in to focus on the Gilets Jaunes as people, some of the greater context was lost and thus the article leans in the protester's favor without ever stating untruths. Simply by directing the reader's attention to one side over the other.

Le Monde took a different approach, choosing to balance on-the-ground coverage with statistics and information provided by the Interior Ministry. This approach often leaned into one side or the other depending on the subject matter. *Acte IX : 84 000 « gilets jaunes » dans toute la France, mobilisation en hausse*, published the same day as the Libération piece encapsulates this approach, beginning with an overview of the turnout at various protests around France before placing them in the context of Macron's « grand débat national, » set to start two days later. From there the piece begins to liken itself to Libération's on-the-ground approach, describing the realities on the Champs-Élysées, though without the same degree of attention to individuals. The article quotes slogans chanted by the protestors, as they marched up the avenue, « 'Benalla en prison !', 'Macron démission !', ou encore 'Emmanuel Macron, tête de con, on vient te chercher

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

*chez toi !' »*<sup>76</sup> and contextualized those that needed explanation, like the call to « *Libérez Christophe* », en référence à l'ex-boxeur Christophe Dettinger, filmé en train de frapper deux gendarmes samedi dernier, »<sup>77</sup> placing readers at the scene without immersing them in the perspective of a Gilet Jaune,

*Acte IX : 84 000 « gilets jaunes » dans toute la France*, also makes use of tweets, embedding them within the article, using them either as images to reinforce the text of the article, or conversely as primary evidence of incidents further explained in the piece. The article circles back to place the protest within a larger context, closing with the fact that, « l'acte IX de la mobilisation intervenait au tout début des soldes d'hiver, un samedi crucial pour le chiffre d'affaires des commerçants, dont l'activité a été très perturbée par les manifestations de novembre et décembre. »<sup>78</sup> It was this kind of background that was missing from Libération's coverage. In all, this approach did much to give viewers an overview of the movement, its scale and the current economic and political factors surrounding the movement. With limited discussions of police or protester violence and little focus on the people involved, Le Monde presents a much more impersonal perspective geared towards the contextualization of this protest relative to past weekends and the current political and economic moment.

Le Figaro, sitting further to the right along the ideological spectrum, continues this trend, with less on the ground reporting in and a focus on state statistics. « *Gilets jaunes* » : *plus de manifestants à Paris, une centaine de personnes arrêtées*, published January 14th, 2019 begins with mention of said statistics, writing, « selon les chiffres officiels, 8000 «gilets jaunes» ont défilé à Paris samedi, retrouvant la mobilisation des 24 novembre, 1er et 8 décembre. 167

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<sup>76</sup> *Le Monde*. "Acte IX : 84 000 « gilets jaunes » dans toute la France, mobilisation en hausse."

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

personnes ont été arrêtées, 15 déjà présentées à la justice. »<sup>79</sup> While turnout numbers are often found near the start of other publication's articles as well, Le Figaro takes things a step further, detailing not only the number of protesters arrested but how many of those arrested were already arraigned.

Le Figaro's coverage, as exemplified in this article does acknowledge the fringe nature of violence within the movement and is careful to attribute clashes with police to more extreme members, writing, « on a pu également observer que des personnes se réclamant de l'ultragauche se trouvaient bien «au contact» des forces de l'ordre. Mais les violences sont restées limitées. »<sup>80</sup> This acknowledgement is followed by the recognition of the necessity of police intervention, lauding, « l'engagement de détachements d'action rapide formés de policiers plus légèrement équipés que les CRS et les gendarmes mobiles. Ces détachements qu'on a pu voir à l'œuvre, entre autres lieux, boulevard Haussmann ou rue La Boétie, ont pour mission de jaillir et d'interpeller les individus les plus 'remuants' »<sup>81</sup> to ensure that the situation remained as contained as possible.

Despite little discussion of the protesters in the text of articles, the online version of the article is studded with videos, not from twitter but shot and edited by Le Figaro, interviewing protesters on matters of policy. The first asked a pair of manifestants what policies motivated them to march. A second clip interviewed a woman handing out literature on the gilets jaunes' demands, asking her about distribution and what policies were discussed in the pamphlets. Neither video focused on the human element of the protest or on the day's activities, instead geared towards government policy. These videos and the article they are a part of encapsulate the

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<sup>79</sup> *Le Figaro*. ««Gilets jaunes» : plus de manifestants à Paris, une centaine de personnes arrêtées.»

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



stark difference between this coverage and that of the two previous papers, neither of which had the same fixation on the impersonal.

La Croix sits on the opposite end of the spectrum from Libération, both ideologically and in terms of their reporting style. An article from earlier in the movement, published November 17th, 2018 *Gilets jaunes, une mobilisation importante malgré des débordements*, puts these differences on full display. Though the title suggests an article about the importance of the gilets jaune movement, it begins with a debate over the official turnout statistics:

« En fin d'après-midi, le ministère de l'intérieur s'en tenait toujours aux statistiques publiées en milieu de journée sur le mouvement de protestation des ' gilets jaunes ', qui s'est déroulé un peu partout en France, samedi 17 novembre contre la hausse des prix de l'essence.

Il a recensé un peu plus de 2 000 manifestations sur les 2 318 regroupements annoncés, avec une présence de 240 000 manifestants, en particulier sur les grands axes de circulation et les péages. Près de 450 blocages partiels ont été recensés sur les routes. Près de 130 actions étaient terminées à la mi-journée. Des statistiques dénoncées par l'opposition, à gauche et à droite, qui parle de « manipulations ».<sup>82</sup>

This debate precedes any discussion of a Gilet Jaune who was killed in Savoy during the protests, which comes further down in the article. A woman attempting to drive through a ronds-point, panicked by protesters beating on her car, rammed into the crowd hitting and killing one protester. That information, like much of the column, is attributed to the Ministry of the Interior, and features little on-the-ground reporting and no embedded supplementary media. Though it is undeniable that many of the statistics regarding the movement will stem from the government, the lack of additional material creates the possibility for La Croix to simply tout information released by the government. The article also expresses the necessity of police action on the Champs-Élysées, writing, « des camions de police ont été placés au milieu de la chaussée, pour barrer l'accès à l'Élysée. Les policiers ont même dû faire usage là aussi de gaz lacrymogènes

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<sup>82</sup> *La Croix*. "Gilets jaunes, une mobilisation importante malgré des débordements."

pour repousser les manifestants, qui se trouvaient à quelques dizaines de mètres du palais présidentiel, aux cris de ‘ Macron démission.’ »<sup>83</sup> The verb ‘dû’ may seem a small detail, but using ‘necessity’ in reference to police use of weaponry or water cannons appeared infrequently across the other publications.

### **III. Areas of Coverage**

This analysis will focus on four key aspects of the Gilets Jaunes movement. Given the massive volume of coverage on the protest using these flashpoint moments allows for both a more manageable number of articles to be examined. Additionally, the four areas address the most divisive aspects of the protest therefore making bias easier to spot. First, turnout numbers across the publications will be contrasted to identify any disparities in the basic facts of the movement. Then articles focused on the damaged caused by the Gilets Jaunes will examine how each paper treats protesters, whether they identify the movement as separate from those who ravaged the city and how they paint those involved. The final two sections analyze both sides of the police violence debate, revealing how each publication views the police, their exhaustion after weeks of protest, their legitimate or illegitimate use of force against protesters, and how protester behavior influenced these responses, if at all. In combination these four areas of coverage will come together to reveal the slants of each publication.

#### **A. Turnout numbers: unexpected uniformity**

When examining Massacre du 17 Octobre in 1961, the reported estimations of deaths and injuries were a point of major contention, with some papers alleging only two deaths, while

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

others reported five times that amount. When it comes to the coverage of the Gilets Jaunes however, the numbers do not vary across publications with nearly the same degree of severity. Le Monde<sup>84</sup> and Le Figaro each produced articles mapping the turnout over the course of the movement, and matched up almost exactly. The only divergence between the two came when le Figaro added ‘le nombre jaune’ to their graphic, showing it side by side with the tally provided by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>85</sup> The figure was provided by a Facebook group « ‘Le nombre jaune’ réalise sa propre évaluation grâce à des remontées de terrain de ‘référénts locaux’. Assez naturellement, un écart apparaît, mais des tendances néanmoins se dessinent. » Neither Libération nor La Croix produced analytical pieces focused specifically on the progression of turnout numbers, but by referencing the articles for the corresponding dates, their numbers could be added to the comparison. The discrepancies across all four publications never exceeded more than a few thousand. Given the magnitude of the moment, these deviations are largely insignificant when juxtaposed to the massive dissimilitude observed in 1961. All four papers produced content addressing the turnout debate between the authorities and the Gilets Jaunes, though no other newspaper officialized them as Le Figaro did, albeit with caveats. In the case of the Gilets Jaunes, there were no changes to the overall narrative of the protests due to divergent numerical access.

## **B. Damage Caused**

In the absence of the staggering numerical differences observed in 1961, the language used to describe the protests and the decisions over what information to include and exclude

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<sup>84</sup> “Manifestants, interpellations, blessés... Bilan chiffré de la mobilisation des « gilets jaunes ».” *Le Monde.fr*

<sup>85</sup> Feertchak, Alexis. “De l’acte I à l’acte XXIII, la mobilisation des «gilets jaunes» en chiffres.” *Le Figaro.fr*,

become ever more important. Articles centered on property damage and the economic costs of the movement put the slant of each paper on full display. Descriptions of the destruction and of Gilets Jaunes behavior, acknowledgement of the « casseurs » as fringe members and not representatives of the larger movement all had a massive effect on the way each publication painted the damage caused.

Le Monde wrote extensively on the subject, producing some of their longest articles on the Gilets Jaunes about the destruction of the Champs-Élysées. « *Gilets jaunes* » : à Paris, des destructions, des violences et un mot d'ordre, « *Macron démission* » for example, published on December 2nd, 2018 is over 2,000 words long. The piece paints a vivid picture of the destruction for readers. It opens with a reference to the fall of Babylon, establishing the drama to come in the piece's first paragraph.

« 'Babylone brûle.' La rue est jonchée de débris, une demi-douzaine de voitures ont été incendiées sur la chaussée et l'on aperçoit, aux fenêtres du Peninsula et du Raphael, les deux hôtels cinq étoiles illuminés de décorations de Noël, des silhouettes contemplant l'incroyable spectacle. Tout à l'heure, cinq jeunes garçons sont passés devant les palaces, insultant les trois portiers en retrait derrière de lourdes grilles. « Salauds ! Bâtards ! Corrompus ! Vous êtes des corrompus ! » Et maintenant, ça cavale dans tous les sens, petits groupes pressés d'en découdre mêlés aux badauds, devant les CRS tirant leurs grenades lacrymogènes. »<sup>86</sup>

Though this is not the people-focused approach of Libération, the attention to detail evokes the same sympathy, this time for the city of Paris itself. This portrayal of young, rude protesters is not the only view of the Gilets Jaunes presented in the article however. When discussing how the « les pierres blondes de l'Arc de triomphe sont maculées de graffitis, »<sup>87</sup> the piece takes time to highlight the presence of some protesters attempting to mitigate of the damage, singling out « un homme ayant épinglé ses décorations militaires sur le revers de son gilet fluorescent surveillait

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<sup>86</sup> « « Gilets jaunes » : à Paris, des destructions, des violences et un mot d'ordre, « Macron démission ». » *Le Monde.fr*, December 2, 2018.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

encore la tombe du Soldat inconnu pour empêcher qu'on la profane. »<sup>88</sup> Despite the chaos and carnage, the piece does not accept the simplified narrative that the Gilets Jaune as a whole are responsible for the destruction, and finds nuance. Throughout the piece is emphasized that the « banques, boutiques et voitures de luxe, épiceries ont été ciblées par de petits groupes d'émeutiers, »<sup>89</sup> not by the crowd as a whole.

Compassion for the police mitigating the situation permeates coverage about the damage as well. The article takes special notice of instances where officers were targeted as they attempted to bring the chaos under control. This attention is not limited to clashes with protesters however, but also recognizes that it is the forces de l'ordre who will put the city back together once the protesters are gone. One passage reads, « une voiture de police est incendiée et les pompiers, qui tentent d'éteindre le feu, caillassés [ . . . ] En face, une bouche d'incendie a été cassée et l'eau inonde bientôt l'avenue, vidée par les forces de l'ordre. »<sup>90</sup> Though they are attacked themselves it is these officers who will rectify much of the physical damage to the city.

The article ends by placing the rage of the protesters in the context of the current political moment, asking, « qui écoute, dans ce chaos, le chef de l'Etat qui, depuis le sommet du G20 à Buenos Aires, en Argentine, dénonce ' les coupables de ces violences.' » Though the line is in no way a justification of any of the violence and debauchery, finishing the article on this note reminds readers of Macron's absence, recalling the criticism that was swirling at the time that Macron did not return home to deal with or address the Gilets Jaunes in France.

Le Monde, in keeping with their heightened use of numerical analysis, provided summaries of the increased cases of arson and property damage throughout the last seven weeks

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

of 2018. During that time, « les incendies volontaires ont augmenté de 237 % par rapport à la même période de l'année précédente. Par ailleurs, l'augmentation est de 87 % concernant les dégradations et les destructions de biens publics et de 28 % pour les destructions et dégradations de véhicules privés. »<sup>91</sup> The article in question, « *Gilets jaunes* » : « *forte progression* » des *destructions de biens fin 2018*, makes no judgements on the violence, and provides no insights beyond the presentation of the facts. The text only mentions the Gilets Jaunes once, quoting the statement from the service statistique ministériel de la sécurité intérieure that the numbers must be taken « dans le contexte des manifestations sociales »<sup>92</sup>

Le Figaro took a different approach to covering the destruction, publishing a number of captioned photostories, as well as shorter articles that delve into the government's reaction. The second photostory they released on the 'Acte XVIII' damage, «*Gilets jaunes*»: *les Champs-Élysées saccagés, les photos de notre journaliste*, was published March 18th, 2019 and contained 10 photos, as well as few videos and imbedded tweets. Le Figaro's comparatively harsh view of the Gilets Jaunes is apparent in the first few lines, depicting the joy of an unnamed protester in the face of the chaos:

« Cachés derrière des banderoles, des 'black bloc' ont dépavé la chaussée, récoltant des «munitions» pour attaquer les forces de l'ordre et casser les vitrines. La journée a été longue et le bilan devrait être lourd: de nombreux commerces ont été saccagés, des kiosques à journaux et des boutiques ont été incendiés. 'C'est l'apocalypse!' a lancé, enthousiaste, un manifestant. »<sup>93</sup>

The man's joy is followed by the arrest record of the day, before photo after photo document the damage done to France's most famous avenue. One series of smoke, graffiti, and shattered glass filled images later, the article ends on the mention of a police car set alight outside the Halles commissariat. Police activity is not mentioned and with the exception of the above quote, and

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<sup>91</sup> « « Gilets jaunes » : « forte progression » des destructions de biens fin 2018.» *Le Monde.fr*, January 31, 2019.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> « «Gilets Jaunes»: Les Champs-Élysées Saccagés, Les Photos de Notre Journaliste.» *Le Figaro.fr*, March 16, 2019.

neither are the Gilets Jaunes beyond the opening line. The piece does more to showcase the aftermath than inform readers about the events of the day and let their audience see the destruction for themselves.

A photo story published the previous day did make mention that the damage was not committed by the Gilets Jaunes as a whole, but rather a smaller subsection of the movement, writing that according to the Minister of the Interior, Christophe Castaner, « il y avait 7000 à 8000 manifestants dans la capitale, dont ‘1500 ultra-violents.’ »<sup>94</sup> The same article, «*Gilets jaunes*»: *soudain retour de la violence à Paris, 200 gardes à vue*, closed by bringing to light why the Gilets Jaune were out in the first place, quoting protesters’ anger over « des salaires bas, des contrats précaires. »<sup>95</sup>

*Gilets jaunes*»: *ce qu'il faut retenir de la journée du 16 mars*, printed on March 17th, 2019 was one of several shorter pieces explaining the day’s events in concise language. New in this piece, was the discussion of Macron’s whereabouts and the time of his return to Paris. The article took into account these political opinions, noting that,

« l'opposition s'est insurgée du fait que le président de la République et son épouse se trouvaient ce samedi dans une station des Pyrénées que le chef de l'Etat affectionne depuis son enfance, pour ‘se ressourcer’. Finalement, en début de soirée, Emmanuel Macron a fait savoir qu’il écourtait son week-end et rentrait à Paris. Il a rejoint vers 22h30 la salle de crise du ministère de l'Intérieur. »<sup>96</sup>

This particular attention to Macron’s movements is deliberate and places the behavior of the protesters in contrast to the President’s luxurious weekend getaway. That comparison carries weight, the stark contrast between the two answers directly to the cause of the protester’s frustrations with wealth inequality.

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<sup>94</sup> “«Gilets jaunes»: soudain retour de la violence à Paris, 200 gardes à vue.” *Le Figaro.fr*, March 16, 2019.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “«Gilets Jaunes»: Ce Qu’il Faut Retenir de La Journée Du 16 Mars.” *Le Figaro.fr*, March 17, 2019.

Le Figaro's coverage chose to present the information more directly to readers in the form of short summations and photostories, giving less detail and context about how the destruction fit into the record of the protests, but in contrast gave greater detail about political attitudes leading up to the event and the Presidential reaction to the damage.

Libération's attention to the personal was again apparent in their reporting on the destruction. Their longest-form article on the March 16th looting, entitled, *Acte XVIII des gilets jaunes à Paris : «C'est pire que le 1er décembre, mais Macron ne veut rien entendre»* shows from its very title that the Gilets Jaunes' perspective on the day's events are well represented. The piece opens with a discussion of the objectives of the more violent protesters, to « reprendre le monument, comme le 1er décembre, » acknowledging their separation from the movement as a whole and establishing the idea that their goal was not to loot businesses, but rather to mount the Arc de Triomphe as they had weeks earlier.

In its personal approach the article does not shy away from describing the violence, far from it, but finds positives in the protesters' behavior as well. One section recounted the burning of newspaper kiosks, all of them, « saccagés et pour la plupart incendiés. Une nuée de papiers journaux en cendres se répand dans le ciel tandis que les alarmes des magasins vandalisés résonnent dans la rue. Les batteries des trottinettes électriques balancées dans les foyers explosent. »<sup>97</sup> The last detail of this vivid evocation is especially shocking. The violence has escalated, from attacking symbols of luxury and capitalism to the destruction of homes and putting innocent citizens at physical risk.

Another passage described the pillaging of the Swarovski store, making sure to note the presence of one protester protecting the shattered shop:

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<sup>97</sup> *Libération*. "Acte XVIII Des Gilets Jaunes à Paris : « C'est Pire Que Le 1er Décembre, Mais Macron Ne Veut Rien Entendre »



« Sur le trottoir d'en face, ce sont les grilles de chez Swarovski qui ont cédé. Des dizaines de manifestants pénètrent à l'intérieur devant une foule compacte et déterminée. C'est cristal pour tous. Les coffrets et les boîtes de bijoux volent dans le ciel. Puis c'est au tour de la boutique Nespresso. Clément, gilet jaune et brassard sécurité au bras, barre ce qu'il reste de l'entrée de la boutique. 'Ils y sont allés à la scie, à la tronçonneuse... J'empêche ce qui reste d'être volé, déplore-t-il. C'est très chaud aujourd'hui.' »<sup>98</sup>

Despite the heat and the risk of being caught between police and those looting, or worse being mistaken for a pillager by the police, Clément chose to protect the property of the businesses along the Champs-Élysées. Though many of the luxury boutiques represent exactly what he cannot afford, Clément chose to defend them anyway. This presents an undeniably powerful message about the presence of a moderate strain within the Gilets Jaunes, making supremely clear that the Gilets Jaunes as a whole do not condone such behavior.

The article also adopts some of the protester's attitudes towards Macron. One cutting line reads, « tandis qu'Emmanuel Macron fait du ski dans les Hautes-Pyrénées, [Edouard Philippe] est venu apporter son soutien aux forces de l'ordre, » placing Macron's behavior in contrast to Philippe's. A derisive tone jumps from the page, matching the message it carries, that even from the perspective of law enforcement, Macron taking a vacation during such unrest is unacceptable. The sarcasm returns when the article addresses Macron's return to Paris, stating that in light of the violence and « pour tenter de mettre un terme à la polémique alimentée sur les réseaux sociaux et les chaînes d'info par des photos où on le voit au soleil et en tenue de moniteur, – Emmanuel Macron a décidé de quitter plus vite que prévu la station de ski [. . . ] pour rentrer à Paris. »<sup>99</sup> This distaste for the President's behavior, and the personal approach of Libération's coverage create a piece that, while clearly horrified by the damage done to the city

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

of Paris, finds bright spots in the Gilets Jaunes' behavior and some understanding of their outburst of anger.

La Croix, of all the papers, took the most impersonal and analytical approach to reporting on the damage. The furthest right in terms of ideology and grounded in Catholicism, the paper is the least politically inclined to back mass protest. The coverage here is not immersive, including no great amount of detail that might place the reader at the scene from the perspective of either the police or the protesters. The destruction is chronicled in a much more detached fashion, describing the shattering of shop windows in much less dramatic terms than the previous papers. « Malgré les panneaux de bois installés pour les protéger, » the March 16, 2019 article *Gilets jaunes : heurts et pillages aux Champs-Élysées* writes, « les vitrines de plusieurs magasins installés sur la célèbre artère n'ont pas résisté à leurs coups de boutoir. Y compris le Fouquet's, le restaurant de luxe qui avait vu Nicolas Sarkozy célébrer sa victoire électorale à la présidentielle en 2007. »<sup>100</sup> The latter portion of this quote ties in the political symbolism of the restaurant, imbuing the deliberate act of its burning with greater significance.

In stark contrast to Libération's long descriptions of burning newsstands, La Croix simply states that « trois kiosques à journaux ont également été ravagés par les flammes. »<sup>101</sup> No great description of the damage followed, beyond the simple, « d'autres boutiques ont été vandalisées et pillées tout au long de l'avenue, où des milliers de personnes restaient rassemblées, » which does not give readers much detail to help them understand the scale of the damage. Without the descriptions the other publications provided, La Croix's reporting lacks the

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<sup>100</sup> “Gilets jaunes : heurts et pillages aux Champs-Élysées.” *La Croix*, March 16, 2019.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

same emotional impact for readers. It conveyed the facts of the damage with efficiency and provided some political context and little else.

On the subject of the Gilets Jaunes themselves, the same La Croix article quotes Minister of the Interior, Christophe Castaner, just as Le Figaro did, using his language of « 1 500 ultra-violents » protesters to distinguish the larger movement from the, « nombreux militants de l'extrême gauche radicale et des black blocks, scandant le traditionnel 'tout le monde déteste la police,' »<sup>102</sup> who were in fact responsible for the damage.

Where La Croix lacked evocative detailed storytelling, they wrote analytical pieces considering not only the monetary property damage but the effects of the protests on the French economy as well. One such article, *Gilets jaunes : un premier bilan chiffré des dégâts*, released on December 17, 2018, chronicled the economic effects of the movement as the year came to a close. In the same impersonal fashion the story informs readers of the « 'plusieurs dizaines de millions d'euros' le montant des dégâts commis sur l'ensemble de son réseau lors des manifestations des 'gilets jaunes' depuis un mois. »<sup>103</sup> It goes on to explain the which industries were particularly affected, before ending the piece with an estimation from the Conseil national des centres commerciaux that put « le coût des cinq week-ends de mobilisation à deux milliards d'euros pour le commerce français. Selon les endroits, la perte d'activité pour les commerces est en moyenne de – 25 %, avec des pointes à – 50, – 70, (et) dans certains endroits – 90 %. »<sup>104</sup> La Croix's reporting produced more concise pieces than the other publications, and in this case produced more analytical work as well. The tradeoff for this kind of coverage however was a likely decrease in the emotional engagement of readers due to a lack of detail. While their

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> "Gilets jaunes : un premier bilan chiffré des dégâts." *La Croix*, December 17, 2018

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

articles did separate the general Gilets Jaunes movement from the minority who caused such destruction, the protesters themselves were largely undiscussed.

### C. Police Brutality

Police brutality was one of the most controversial aspects of the movement and all four newspapers wrote extensively on the subject. Though each paper addressed the issue of police violence, they did not do so identically. The amount of coverage on the subject, whether the articles addressed what caused the police's behavior— potentially creating one sided portraits of the action, created different visions of the problem in each publication.

When addressing police violence, *Libération* took a small step away from their personal reporting combining it with a more analytical coverage. A January 14, article entitled *Gilets jaunes : le décompte des blessés graves*, breaks down the violence against each individual protester, chronicling the date and location the brutality occurred and the nature of the injury for every single allegation up to that point. The piece opens with a simple statement of the data, that after the sixth week among protesters there were, « 144 blessés graves parmi les gilets jaunes et les journalistes, dont 92 par des tirs de lanceur de balle de défense. Au moins 14 victimes ont perdu un œil. »<sup>105</sup> The matter of fact language is a change for *Libération*, but the sheer volume of names and injuries that follow do much to trigger the same compassion the detailed descriptions once did.

The second entry details a protester's loss of his eye, two days after the protests began: « le 19 novembre 2018 à La Réunion : Ritchie A. reçoit un projectile dans l'œil à Saint-Paul. Il

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<sup>105</sup> “Gilets jaunes : le décompte des blessés graves.” *Libération.fr*, January 14, 2019.

est opéré en urgence, et perd son œil gauche. Il déclare avoir porté plainte. »<sup>106</sup> The article continues in this fashion for 144 entries, always including the name of the individual. A particularly violent account reads, « le 12 janvier 2019 à Paris: Dans une cagnotte lancée par sa famille, et sourcée par plusieurs images, la famille de Sébastien M indique qu’il a reçu un tir de flashball en pleine tête, et plus précisément en plein dans les dents, causant une fracture de la mâchoire et la perte de 5 dents. »<sup>107</sup> This entry accentuates another element of Libération’s compilation; the inclusion of any public evidence of the attack, should it exist. In this entry that comes in the form of a link to the images mentioned, while other listings include links to video clips, newspaper articles and testimonials.

Where another publication might have relied solely on statistics, Libération unpacks them to reveal each person behind the number of wounded citizens. The piece discusses expressly why they chose to do at the start of the piece, writing that « la dénomination ‘blessé grave’ est bien sûr subjective, et rassemble des blessures de nature et de gravité différentes : certaines personnes garderont des infirmités à vie (perte d’une main ou d’un œil) quand d’autres s’en tireront avec des cicatrices. »<sup>108</sup> The paper wished to make their own determination of what was considered seriously injured and consider just how extensive the damage was, revealing to the public the horror behind the numbers. Their list chose to include « comme blessures les membres arrachés, les organes ayant perdu leur fonction principale, les fractures, les pieds et jambes incrustés de bouts de grenades, les brûlures graves, mais aussi toutes plaies ouvertes au niveau de la tête, »<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

and the massive number of names and descriptions that follow give new meaning to the frequently stated statistic ‘144 blessés graves.’

Though *Libération* did not engage in on-the-ground reporting or speak with the victims for this particular piece, their human-centred reporting shone through nonetheless. Without addressing the police at all the paper paints an image of the havoc rained down on protesters. This lack of police perspective does produce a one sided article, and never addresses the reasons police fired on the crowds in the first place. Even so, the thoroughness of their reporting and the sheer number of injuries create a powerful case that police brutality was unleashed on protesters. Given that the publication was founded in reaction to the supposed mistreatment of protesters by the press, it is unsurprising that *Libération* would reinforce the emotional impact of the *Gilets Jaunes*’ injuries.

*Le Monde* took an analytical as opposed to an immersive approach to reporting police violence, not providing descriptive coverage as they did when reporting on the looting of the Champs-Élysées. As more centrist publication than *Libération*, it is logical that the paper would dedicate fewer resources to tracking down individual stories, relying instead on statistical data. One piece published January 16th, announced just how many protesters had been injured in its title, *1 700 blessés depuis le début des « gilets jaunes »*. In a very straightforward manner, the article declares that, « le ministère de l’intérieur confirme au Monde que plus de 1 700 manifestants et autour d’un millier de policiers et gendarmes ont été blessés depuis le début du mouvement des ‘gilets jaunes,’ » initially doing little more than relaying the words of the state. The piece does provide important context for these figures however, acknowledging that the figure is not as stark as it may seem. Due to the nature of data collection, « le chiffre de 1 700 manifestants blessés comprend tout type de blessure depuis le 17 novembre, au-delà de celles

causées par les forces de l'ordre, »<sup>110</sup> an important distinction to make, especially given that the only deaths during the protests came as a result of car accidents at ronds-points and not from the clashes in urban areas. Though the piece is sparse and analytical in nature, the inclusion of this qualification tempers the effect of the initial headline and reminds readers that many injured during protests sustain injuries not only from police, but in accidents as well, a nuance not present in Libération's protester focused pieces.

Le Monde does not leave their coverage there and let the forces de l'ordre off the hook however. The paper criticizes their behavior in a number of articles, including « *Gilets jaunes* » : *les violences policières, le tabou du gouvernement*, which takes aim at the silence from the French government despite ample evidence of police brutality. The April 19th, 2019 article opens by putting the government's avoidance of the issue on scathing display. The discussion of police violence is a battle of images, the piece begins, « mais aussi et surtout une guerre des mots. Face aux nombreuses photos et vidéos de scènes où des membres des forces de l'ordre molestent des manifestants, les autorités opposent un front de défense uni, dont la ligne pourrait se résumer ainsi : 'Les violences policières n'existent pas.' »<sup>111</sup> From the very start the French government's hypocrisy when faced with visual evidence of police behavior is highlighted for all to see. A powerful series of quotes from President Macron, Christophe Castaner and Premier Ministre Philippe follows, each denying in turn that any excessive use of force had taken place. The most damning statement came last, from Phillippe. In response to the UN Commissioner on Human Rights urge for an investigation into the matter, the Premier Ministre declared that, « il faudra [lui] expliquer l'ensemble des faits et notamment l'extrême violence qui s'est déchaînée

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<sup>110</sup> “1 700 blessés depuis le début des « gilets jaunes ».” *Le Monde.fr*, January 16, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> “« Gilets jaunes » : les violences policières, le tabou du gouvernement.” *Le Monde.fr*, April 19, 2019.

contre les forces de l'ordre, »<sup>112</sup> completely denying the presence of any undue violence. The title and structure of the article, placing these quotes directly after the mention of clear evidence of injured protesters, create a tone of disbelief and slight indignation.

Despite obvious skepticism at the government's code of silence on the subject, *Le Monde* took time to investigate the motivations behind the decision. « Il y a une bataille des mots parce que ceux d'en face, en parlant de 'violences policières,' » a police source told the paper, « veulent dire que notre emploi de la force est illégitime, alors qu'au contraire c'est nous qui avons le monopole de cette force légitime, »<sup>113</sup> *Le Monde* does its due diligence attempting to understand both viewpoints by presenting readers with the perspective of all parties. Though the article clearly does not agree with the police's blameless vision of events, the inclusion of some reasoning as to why officials refuse to discuss police violence does much to balance the piece.

The article does not stop there however but delves deeper, addressing the institutional enforcement of this attitude as well. In no uncertain terms, the piece explains how the justice system codifies this denial to the detriment of protesters while being more lenient with police officers:

« confrontés aux images de violences policières lors de nombreuses interviews, le ministre de l'intérieur et son secrétaire d'Etat ont pris le parti de systématiquement appeler à respecter le temps long de l'enquête avant de qualifier les faits. Une présomption d'innocence à sens unique, quand les forces de l'ordre appellent régulièrement la justice à condamner plus rapidement et plus sévèrement les casseurs. »<sup>114</sup>

This analysis yet again demonstrates *Le Monde's* eye for emphasizing institutional policies and the interplay between the government and the citizenry.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.



Le Figaro, like Le Monde did not engage in on-the-ground reporting, choosing to focus on the legal aspect of the debate instead. *Violences policières contre les «gilets jaunes»: 54 classements sans suite*, published November 8th, 2019, addresses the violence long after it was allegedly committed. It is through this lens that Le Figaro confronts the government's dismissal of the issue. « Sur les 212 enquêtes confiées à l'IGPN - la police des polices - 146 enquêtes ont été clôturées par le service d'enquête. Parmi elles, 54 procédures ont fait l'objet de classements sans suite, »<sup>115</sup> the piece states, clearly setting up an investigation into the dismissal of the cases.

Of the on going proceedings, the parquet de Paris found that « deux procédures ont justifié 'une convocation devant le tribunal correctionnel du chef de violences volontaires par personne dépositaire de l'autorité publique ayant entraîné ou pas une incapacité,' »<sup>116</sup> with both incidents taking place on May 1st. Both cases concerned instances where the police officers in question were filmed, and the resulting videos were widely shared on the online. After establishing these facts, the article points out the inconsistency in the state's behavior towards police in the justice system by juxtaposing the number of dismissed cases and slow going process with the swift justice that was brought to a protester in Strasbourg. For a similar offence to those the two officers are accused of, « un père de famille de 34 ans qui manifestait dans le cadre du mouvement des 'gilets jaunes' avait écopé de huit mois de prison ferme en janvier à Strasbourg. Il avait jeté un pavé sur les forces de l'ordre, sans faire de blessé.» Though it was proven that the man injured no one he was swiftly sent to prison, while the cases against officers in Paris drag on.

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<sup>115</sup> “Violences policières contre les «gilets jaunes»: 54 classements sans suite.” *Le Figaro.fr*, November 7, 2019.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

Le Figaro had less content regarding police brutality, relative to the Le Monde and Libération and approached the subject via the French legal system. With no evocative descriptions of police behavior, the publication did not evoke sympathy in the same way either. However, the paper did make creative use of their preferred information sources, taking information provided by the state moderately contextualizing it and extracting criticism that way. The choice to look at the violence through the legal system as the official complaints move through the office of the Parquet de Paris, exhibits Le Figaro's penchant for relying on the release of official statements and government statements in their reporting, relative to other publications. Yet in this case Le Figaro uses the legal framework to point out inconsistencies in the penalties for protesters vis a vis the forces de l'ordre, turning the government provided information on its head.

La Croix, did the least reporting on police brutality of all four papers and engaged in no personal or on-the-ground reporting. Instead, like Le Figaro, they addressed police violence in the context of the associated court proceedings. Their reporting did more to contextualize the number of police violence cases dismissed by the court however and in doing so renders some of Le Figaro's work less poignant by recognizing that the dismissals were not out of the ordinary. Siding with the state by using their own statistics, La Croix put on full display its lean towards accepting state narratives.

The article, *Violences policières et gilets jaunes, pourquoi 54 enquêtes classées sans suite ?* from November 8, 2019 looks at the very same information discussed by Le Figaro. In this piece however, La Croix does not turn this information on the state. The piece points out that though the number of declined investigations may seem high or unjust, that proportion is in fact not out of the norm, and as a statistic indicates no government bias towards the police. The ratio

of « 54 classements pour 146 enquêtes terminées, soit 37 % de classements, ne sont pas en décalage avec les statistiques habituelles des parquets. Au contraire : en 2016, 73 % des procédures, tout ont abouti à un classement sans suite. »<sup>117</sup> With that fact, La Croix flips the previous perspective of these facts on their head completely. Following this statistic with the true statement that, « concernant les violences policières, une charge de la police, même un peu violente, ne signe pas nécessairement une infraction de la part des forces de l'ordre, »<sup>118</sup> creates a powerful statement of leniency for police and a willingness to excuse the horrors chronicled by Libération. Though it is undeniably true that not every use of force by police should lead to a criminal investigation, the article also failed to mention that not every use of force by a police officer leads to the loss of a hand or an eye or teeth either. The high documentation rate of injuries that the Libération article made use of may contribute to the higher acceptance rate since many of the incidents were caught on film or in photographs, but La Croix makes no mention of this.

That detail aside, the added statistic grants the reader greater insight into the meaning of '45 rejected inquiries' and does in some ways lessens Le Figaro's analysis of the same information. La Croix on the other hand swings in the opposite ideological direction, relying solely on information provided by the parquet de Paris and engaging in no additional reporting. Le Figaro did take a similar approach to La Croix, using the state's dismissal of cases to assess the state of police violence, signaling reliance on a state narrative. Yet the paper come down on the other side of the debate, using the state's dismissals and divergent legal treatment of protesters and police to point blame in the government's direction. Le Monde, edging further

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

left, engaged in analytical reporting as well as an examination of the government's silence on the issue. The publication clearly sided with protesters, but did so through a compilation of government provided quotes and numbers, contextualizing the provided information and casting it in a negative light, as Le Figaro did. Libération was the sole paper to do significant research and on the ground reporting on the topic, tracking down the details of every single injury and giving faces and stories to the victims.

#### **D. Police Exhaustion and Violence Against Police**

When trying to root out bias, a counter example to the police brutality discussions of the Gilets Jaunes protest, was vital to my analysis. This came in the form of articles covering the exhaustion of the forces de l'ordre after so many weeks of protest, and the violence that they faced from protesters. On the whole across all four newspapers, there was less coverage of violence against police than of police brutality, but the topic was at the very least addressed by each publication. La Croix and Le Figaro had more coverage while Le Monde and Libération produced noticeably less content.

Le Monde returned to a personal more approach, and while they did not produce a large volume of articles on the subject, the articles they did produce were well rounded and full of first-person accounts of what officers faced. « *Gilets jaunes* » : *une journée avec les CRS pendant l'acte XII* was easily their most evocative article documenting the lives of police, following their company for the entire day. The piece begins with the officers removed from danger, joking among themselves before the chaos of the day starts:

« *Mes gars, en ce moment, c'est la compagnie panda* », ironise le commandant Hervé. Sur les douze actes des 'gilets jaunes', les hommes de la 8<sup>e</sup> compagnie républicaine de sécurité (CRS), qu'il dirige, en ont couvert dix. D'abord dans l'est de la France, puis à Bordeaux, avant d'être postés à Paris, le samedi 2 février. Les 87 policiers, cernes marqués autour des yeux,

repartiront dès lundi pour trois semaines à Toulouse – en moyenne, une compagnie d’Ile-de-France passe 160 jours par an en déplacement. »<sup>119</sup>

Just as Libération made protesters more than an angry mob through their reporting, this piece humanizes the officers from the very start. Already the notion of being on the road half of the year conjured compassion. The relaxed tone of the opening line sets up a dichotomy with the intense day to come. Descriptions of the unit’s intense schedule and the chaos that unfolds around them read not unlike an action novel and places readers firmly alongside the CRS as they go through a full day of policing the Gilets Jaunes.

The first order of business, « protéger des vitrines de magasins proches des heurts en cours avec les gendarmes mobiles, situés un peu plus loin. »<sup>120</sup> This first task passes with relatively little issue, a trend that would not hold as the day progressed. Half an hour later the first clash of the day arrives. Stuck on one side of a metro entrance,

« la « CRS 8 » fait face à près de deux cents manifestants et garde dans son dos une poubelle en feu, mitraillée par une horde de photographe. Les projectiles fusent, un lourd plot métallique survole l’espace vacant entre les deux camps et retombe au milieu des policiers. Un manifestant s’approche d’un CRS tombé par terre et lui assène des coups de pieds au visage. Un policier tire face à la foule, au lanceur multicoups, pour l’écarter : dans un retrait rapide, la compagnie revient à son point de départ, boulevard Voltaire. »<sup>121</sup>

It is this exact description of events that was lacking in earlier coverage of police violence. Police fired their weapons, but why? In what circumstances? Only with that information is it possible to assess whether the violence was unlawful, in excess, or done out of self-defense. The officer who fired is now nervous, according to LBD regulations the shot was not justified. The article quotes his reasoning for firing and his commander’s reassurance, saying « ‘Quand je l’ai vu par terre, je me suis dit je ne peux pas laisser faire ça. On n’avait pas de LBD,

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<sup>119</sup> « « Gilets jaunes » : une journée avec les CRS pendant l’acte XII. » *Le Monde.fr*, February 3, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

j'ai tiré', explique-t-il. Son commandant le rassure : il considère son tir comme légitime. »<sup>122</sup> The kicked Major locked himself in their truck, dazed. Two hours later he still had a severe headache.

The article continues in this way, detailing more encounters with protesters before the day comes to a close. In this piece the Monde provides the opposite perspective that they began their reporting focused on. The article subverts the nationwide debate on police violence in, depicting just how violent the protests can become as well as the necessity of certain weapons for CRS use. Here readers can see that the policemen are human just like the Gilets Jaunes, and that they risk their safety every weekend in an attempt to contain the protests and the damage they cause.

Due to its slice-of-life approach, this article does not address cases of gratuitous police force in the same descriptive way as the rest of the article, because no such incident happened on that particular day. The article does not shy away from the topic of police brutality and in particular the LBD. When the topic of the LBD was raised, officers framed the debate as a matter of training, since only one of the LBD cases involves a CRS office. The rest of the cases involve, « des 'DAR', les 'dispositifs d'action rapide'. Notamment constitués de policiers de la brigade anticriminalité, ils ne sont pas formés spécifiquement au maintien de l'ordre, »<sup>123</sup> and are therefore more likely to resort to using their weapons.

This immersive article humanizes the CRS, demonstrating their genuine need for protection as well as portraying them as people, exhausted and human as they are. The piece does gloss over the list of abuses against the forces de l'ordre however, shifting the blame to the police but not truly addressing the other half of the equation when it comes to the use of LBDs.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Given the proportion of articles dedicated to police violence versus police exhaustion however this is not nearly the issue it would be if the proportions were reversed. In all, this topic rounds out Le Monde's coverage of the protests nicely, with no one element of the movement neglected. The publication does lean slightly in favor of the protesters given the volume of articles produced on police violence and the lack of contextualization of police action in earlier articles. On the whole however this approach to police exhaustion completes a largely balanced series of article on the subject.

Libération wrote few articles on the topic of police exhaustion and injury. The publication did produce some pieces quantifying the number of injured police officers however, including *Gilets jaunes: combien y a-t-il eu de blessés graves parmi les policiers et gendarmes ?* published January 17, 2019. Despite its title the piece begins with an introduction of the number of injured protesters instead, writing, « A ce jour, nous avons recensé 94 blessés graves, dont 69 par des tirs de lanceurs de balle de défense (LBD 40) »<sup>124</sup> reiterating their statement from *Gilets jaunes : le décompte des blessés graves*. Only after this reminder does the article go on to address the numbers of injured CRS and police officers, in much more general terms. This lack of detail is elucidated in the piece, which explains that « gendarmes et syndicats de police ne communiquant pas sur leurs blessures éventuelles. »<sup>125</sup> The paper pursued the subject further, contacting the ministère de l'Intérieur, « qui nous a expliqué ne pas avoir de données précises sur le sujet. Depuis le 17 novembre, le ministère décompte ainsi 1 000 blessés chez les forces de l'ordre (et 1 700 blessés parmi les manifestants).» The Service de l'ordre simply do not collect data in as detailed a manner as the protesters did and thus it could not be determined how many

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<sup>124</sup> *Gilets jaunes: combien y a-t-il eu de blessés graves parmi les policiers et gendarmes ?* Libération.fr, January 17, 2019.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

serious injuries they sustained. The article does noticeably mention the number of injured protesters again, reminding the readers not to feel too compassionate, there are after all more injured protesters than police. The article goes on to discuss a few of the more publicized cases of violence against police, but does not make mention of attempting to investigate further or piece events together using online footage as they did with the protesters.

The lack of investigation and an emotional, immersive writing style in this topic is apparent when this article is compared with Libération's treatment of injured protesters. Simply put, the publication did not put the same amount of effort and resources into each piece and the results speak for themselves. At Libération, police violence is emotionally explored in depth, across a number of articles, while violence against police is given a vague overview, all the while reminding readers of the number of injured Gilets Jaunes. This article solidifies Libération's bias towards the protesters throughout their coverage, putting on display the imbalance in both the volume of reporting and time and energy dedicated to each subject. The detailed personal articles on the Gilets Jaunes as individuals, coupled with the smaller volume of articles and impersonal approach to covering the police force, direct Libération's readership towards a sympathetic view of the Gilets Jaunes movement.

The opposite is very nearly true at La Croix. Though they still produced a greater volume of content relating to police violence, nuanced pieces on their fatigue are in so short supply as well. Published March 3rd, 2019, «*Gilets jaunes*» : *des policiers et gendarmes «fatigués» confrontés à la «violence»* shows off the first on-the-ground reporting so far from La Croix on the Gilets Jaunes. The piece is not immersive, but does speak to a number of police officers about their experience. « Ca commence à devenir long », one officer related, « Alice (tous les prénoms ont été modifiés) a couvert 'plus de la moitié' des manifestations parisiennes. Rappelée



un samedi de repos, la jeune femme a travaillé ‘de 5H30 à 22H30’. Aujourd'hui, ce n'est plus le cas mais ‘on est très, très fatigué.’ »<sup>126</sup> Another officer adds to that despite all of the difficult aspects, « On a conscience que c'est un événement important. On est là tous les week-end, malgré la fatigue, malgré les familles pour qui ce n'est pas évident ». <sup>127</sup> The officers report another type of violence as well, sharing that, « un samedi, on a reçu de la peinture et des excréments, c'est inadmissible. »<sup>128</sup>

On the topic of police violence, these officers are harsher than their counterparts who were interviewed in *Le Monde*:

« Il y a bien-sûr des cas dramatiques de mutilation mais un casseur qui ramasse une grenade et a la main arrachée, à qui la faute ? », interroge Sébastien qui ‘sait qu'il y a aussi quelques cas de violences illégitimes’ chez les policiers. ‘Pour décider si un matériel est inadapté, on ne peut pas uniquement regarder les effets négatifs, sinon on interdit même le (paracétamol) qui a aussi des effets secondaires’, ajoute-t-il. »<sup>129</sup>

These jarring statements are followed not by any sort of context or counter, but are instead reinforced with the comparison of the number of weapon firings to injuries, 13,000 to 83.

*La Croix*'s coverage of abuses against police say some of their only on the ground, personal reporting which says much about who the publication views as deserving of compassion, and does much to direct reader's opinions. If an amorphous impersonal mob is painted as attacking individual law enforcement officers, who are exhausted from weeks of intense work, then readers are going to have a certain outlook on the movement, namely one in favor of the forces de l'ordre and dismissive of allegations of police violence.

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<sup>126</sup> “«Gilets jaunes» : des policiers et gendarmes «fatigués» confrontés à la «violence».” *La Croix*, March 8, 2019.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

Le Figaro chose to link their coverage of police fatigue to that of police violence in a December 8th, 2018 article «*Gilets jaunes*» : *une police plus réactive mais épuisée par trois semaines intensives*. The piece bridges the gap between the two most discussed elements of policing during the protests, beginning with the exhaustion. A unionist warned Le Figaro that the current high demands on officer are unsustainable:

« 'Il va quand même falloir que tout cela s'arrête, car les hommes sont fatigués par ces trois semaines intensives de maintien de l'ordre.' Pour assurer leur service aujourd'hui, certains, venus d'unités de province, sont partis dès 3 heures du matin pour prendre position dans le dispositif de la préfecture de police de Paris. 'C'est mon huitième week-end de travail d'affilée', se plaignait ce samedi un officier de CRS. »<sup>130</sup>

The strain on officers who carry extremely dangerous weapons if used improperly, is clearly huge and the elevated risk of accidents occurring is also clear. The piece also took time to highlight the backlash that officers face for doing their jobs, and worse for speaking out publicly about these issues. One CRS unionist who took part in a television interview was recognized by protesters on the street and swiftly faced backlash. Threats on social media began to pour in, leading to a judicial investigation against those who threatened him.

The tone of Le Figaro's coverage continues in another piece published February 15 of the following year. The article, entitled «*Gilets jaunes*»: *épuisées, les forces de l'ordre contraintes de tenir le choc*, reveals just how little time off members of the CRS had, according to one officer, « enregistré quasiment aucun arrêt maladie parmi les CRS, confie un responsable, parce qu'ils sont dans leur cœur de métier, à savoir défendre la République et se poser comme l'ultime rempart contre ceux qui marchent vers l'Élysée ou le Palais Bourbon. S'ils cèdent, ils savent que ce sera le chaos. »<sup>131</sup> Facing the *Gilets Jaunes*, week after week with no reprieve and no medical

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<sup>130</sup> ««Gilets jaunes» : une police plus réactive mais épuisée par trois semaines intensives.» *Le Figaro.fr*, December 8, 2018.

<sup>131</sup> ««Gilets jaunes»: épuisées, les forces de l'ordre contraintes de tenir le choc.» *Le Figaro.fr*, February 15, 2019.

leave, this piece paints police violence as a byproduct of the difficult working conditions law enforcement faced throughout the movement.

The article then emphasizes the threats faced by officers, not through storytelling as *Le Monde* did, but by listing the weapons used against them by protesters. The *Gilets Jaunes* are not merely picking up cobblestones, many come prepared with the ability to do much bodily harm. « Dans les rangs, ils témoignent des jets d'acide, de morceaux de bois hérissés de lames de rasoir, les blocs de métal surmontés de clous, les pics de grillages prolongeant des béquilles ou encore ce tube d'égout transformé en lanceur artisanal, confisqué à Toulouse, »<sup>132</sup> all of which place officers at serious risk for injury. The piece further emphasizes the need for police protection by calculating just how few LBD shots led to « enquêtes de l'Inspection générale de la police nationale (IGPN). » Of the 9228 LBD shots fired, only 52, or 0.5% of cases have led to any further action. This number is not quantified with the rates of police-caused injuries during other protests or even in other European states. While the percentage seems quite low, without a metric to evaluate what acceptable levels of violence are when it comes to policing protests, it is difficult to quantify what this 0.5% truly means.

In all, *Le Figaro* provided more coverage of the police perspective on events, when compared to the other publications. This coverage however was not solely focused on the officer's experience but also on the potential ramifications for protesters as well. *Le Figaro* makes abundantly clear that while the police have a demonstrated need for their weapons, having an exhausted police force puts both the officers and *Gilets Jaunes* at higher risk for injury. While the publication seems to land on the side of the police when shaping the narrative surrounding police violence by emphasizing what the paper sees as a relatively low number of injuries, it

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

does not do so to the exclusion of protester's concerns, instead acknowledging the detriments posed to all.

#### **IV. Findings**

Bias in 21st century journalism is more subtle than it was in 1961. Across all four publications, numbers were not a point of contention, each reporting very similar turnout for each 'acte' of the movement. The interpretations of these numbers and the resulting analysis however are where the political slants of each paper made themselves apparent. The reporting style, volume of information produced on a given subject, and pointed contextualization of events replaced numbers as the main factors affecting the reader's point of view.

Libération, at one end focused on the protesters, telling their stories and humanizing them to their readers. Their detailed coverage of what it was like to march on the Champs-Élysées placed readers in the Gilets Jaune's shoes, humanizing them and turning the angry mob into a collection of individuals. At the same time this focus omitted key details when it came to police violence, about what led to police action, writing nearly exclusively about the effects of the violence and not its causes. When addressing statistics on the violence, the paper took the time to look behind the numbers and elucidate who the victims were, adding emotional weight to the numbers. Their steady volume of content dropped when addressing groups besides the Gilets Jaune, producing little coverage that addressed police exhaustion. This too has an impact on readers since the amount of coverage has a distinct impact on how relevant readers find an issue. An aspect of the movement mentioned a handful of times pales in comparison to the portions highlighted by the paper each week. In all this created a sympathetic view of protesters, which is

relatively unsurprising given the fact that the paper was founded in reaction to the unfair treatment of protesters in 1968.

The same qualitative shaping of opinions is present in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*'s coverage. Their coverage was the most balanced, but the analytical approaches they took in combination with their reliance on official statements created less connection between the *Gilets Jaunes* and the paper's readership. *Le Monde* engaged in more on-the-ground reporting than *Le Figaro*, creating a slightly more sympathetic vision of the moment. *Le Figaro* in turn dedicated more attention to the difficulties faced by the forces de l'ordre, which shifted the balance of coverage in the gendarmes' favor. This in combination with their analysis of police violence through the lens of the French court system, and not the testimonials or humanized statistics found in *Libération*, cemented *Le Figaro*'s place to the right of center politically, leaning slightly toward the government and forces de l'ordre. *Le Monde* leans slightly in the other direction, falling left of center. Their volume of coverage and use of political context generate a slightly more sympathetic view of the *Gilets Jaunes*, though their reporting is well rounded and takes the time to humanize the forces de l'ordre as well.

*La Croix* used these qualitative factors to create a right wing view of events. The paper lacked almost any immersive reporting of any kind, not adopting the descriptive style that each of the other newspapers displayed. Instead the paper produced much more direct articles with heavy reliance on government statements. Despite this however, *La Croix* did interview a number of officers when addressing police exhaustion and attacks against the forces de l'ordre, an element missing from much of their coverage of police violence. This in conjunction with a higher proportion of articles sharing the police perspective created a much stronger connection the state than the people, in accordance with their right wing

## **Conclusion: The Changing Role of Journalism**

As information has become more readily available, its verification has become more difficult, and journalism has responded accordingly. In 1961, not only were the biases of the varying newspapers more pronounced than they were in 2019, but each paper established its own version of the truth, with the basic facts varying from publication to publication. According to some papers, only two protesters died and 64 were injured, while in others 10 deaths were reported and hundreds were alleged hurt. Depending on which publication readers picked up, they were presented with an entirely different version of events. The prejudices of the newspapers were also on clearer display. In the right-wing publications, protesters were referred to as terrorists and painted as deserving of violence while leftist publications screamed about the unjust treatment of protesters and alleged police violence. Though the largely papers came together to contradict the state narrative of the protest, they were not unified in their established of the basic facts of the event.

In 2019 however, different trends emerge. Numbers were no longer a source of contention across publications, with all four touting nearly identical turnout figures, and volumes of injuries throughout the movement. The press now largely works with the same set of facts, but use different perspectives, contextualization and varying volumes of coverage to shape their opinion on the subject. The biases are more subtle, tempered by the greater volume of coverage produced today. In 1961, the volume of the paper had to fit within the physical confines of the newspaper, so coverage of major issues was confined to a few articles, with those on the front page taking special precedence. Therefore, each story a paper printed and the angle it took was an extremely important piece of the overall narrative. In 2019 however those constraints have

largely been removed, and papers can and do publish a much greater volume of work, producing and uploading infinite amounts of content online. This expansion allows for a greater variety of articles on any given subject, which tempers the effect of particularly pointed articles, balancing the publication's overall approach to a given event.

In 1961, if the newspapers didn't report on an incident, it is unlikely citizens would ever learn it had occurred. There was no alternative to the formal media apparatus. This is no longer the case, and the greater volume of coverage produced by the press does not nearly match up to the scale of readily available unverified information on the internet. 45% of French citizens now receive get their news, at least in part, from social media, and with only 53% of those users familiar with the news sources they see on social media, the potential for the dissemination of misinformation is enormous.<sup>133</sup> Newspapers have responded to this challenge, by doubling down on the establishment of the facts, but also and contextualizing the raw information on the internet it's for readers. *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* both imbedded a number of tweets in their articles, either using them as proof of the article's assertions or adding background to the images, ensuring that the videos and images they contain are properly interpreted. This clearly signals the demonstrates the presence of public information concerning the *Gilets Jaunes* circulating online, as well as the necessity of its further explanation.

The media has from primarily being disseminators of the truth, to functioning as its gatekeeper. The raw information about world events — protest livestreams, tweets from world leaders, the online publication of government documents — is now circulating online. Without the context to produce the proper interpretation of that raw material, or any verification of its veracity however, it can hardly be called fact. The opportunities for viewers to draw inaccurate

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<sup>133</sup> "Facts on News Media & Political Polarization in France." *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog). May 17, 2018.

and misleading conclusions is immense. The press now serve primarily to condense, verify, and package the facts appropriately. While this has always been a part of their role, it has become their key function in the internet age. This is now where bias rears its head. Each paper had their own perspective on the Gilets Jaunes and packaged the information about the protests accordingly. Though the political affiliations of each paper were clear, they never strayed from the facts. In the struggle to keep citizens informed, journalism has shifted its focus from disseminating as much accurate information as possible, to checking and contextualizing the uncertainty of information on internet, distilling it into the facts that fuel democracy.



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Le Parisien

Après deux jours de manifestations provoquées par le F.L.N.  
**LES CHEFS TERRORISTES**  
*auraient donné leurs nouvelles consignes :*  
**ATTAQUES DE COMMANDOS**  
**CONTRE LA POLICE**

10.000 musulmans rassemblés dans les centres de triage ont l'objet d'une enquête - 500 ont été recensés dans leurs douars d'origine

Un important dispositif surveille les points névralgiques à Paris et en banlieue

**LES MENEURS VEULENT FAIRE DÉFILER CE SOIR LES FEMMES ET LES ENFANTS**

VOIR NOS INFORMATIONS PAGE 2

**L'automne était en retard** **L'HIVER EST EN AVANCE**  
Toutes les montagnes (au-dessus de 1.000 m) sont couvertes de neige et Clermont-Ferrand bat le record du froid avec 4°7

**EN PLEIN CENTRE DE ROUEN**  
Un camion fou dévale une côte et pulvérise plusieurs voitures

Les policiers ont immédiatement saisi le camion dévalant une côte à Rouen, après qu'il eût pulvérisé deux voitures.

Le 20<sup>e</sup> octobre 1961, une pluie d'automne et un froid hivernal ont été observés à Clermont-Ferrand.

VOIR NOS INFORMATIONS À LA DERNIÈRE PAGE

**ORAN: MALGRÉ LE COUVRE-FEU LA TENSION PERSISTE**  
Les terroristes ont blessé un Français de souche et un musulman

Un village près de Bou-Gaada avait été attaqué par les fellagas : 24 morts (voir page 2)

Selon les déclarations de son avocat  
**Ben Bella: retour aux anciennes conditions de détention**  
VOIR À LA PAGE 2

**REPRISE POSSIBLE DES GRÈVES A LA S.N.C.F. ET A L'E.D.F.**  
Les menaces de rébellion ont durci la position des syndiqués. A LA FIN DU MOIS, DES COUPURES DE COURANT POURRAIENT AVOIR LIEU  
VOIR NOS INFORMATIONS À LA PAGE 2

**Sur la bonne table... LE MAGNUM perrier**  
MINÉRALE GAZÉEFUSE NATURELLE  
délectable!

**Bébé dans l'air... le !**  
Sous l'œil de l'expert de renom  
**PREMAMAN**  
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**LE BILLET DU PARISIEN**  
L. MARY BIANCANI