

Disobeying in Time of Disaster: Radicalism in the French Climate Mobilizations

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Abstract

Since 2018, climate mobilizations have been shaping political life in Europe. Young people are at the heart of this mobilization, both because of their massive nationwide presence in intergenerational demonstrations, but also because of their own modes of action, such as the climate strikes that have been emerging since January 2019. Within these mobilizations, forms of radicalism are expressed through an important support for civil disobedience, such as blocking actions, as well as support – for a significant part of protestors – for material damage. This paper analyzes the new forms of youth radicalism in their link to the social determinations of the awareness of the climate catastrophe. Based on a demonstration survey concerning three French cities for the strike of March 15, 2019, and in Paris for the strike of September 20th, which collected more than 1,800 questionnaires, this paper sets out to show the sociological profiles of radical individuals, which distinguish themselves by significant cultural capital and left-wing familial political socialization. The exploitation of the data collected shows that these new forms of radicalism are conditioned by an awareness of the climate emergency, deeply linked to family legacies and specific academic curricula. The radicalization of inherited dispositions leads these individuals to go beyond the legality/illegality framework, and to favor a debate on the effectiveness of the means of action, in which the link with conventional democratic participation is constantly questioned.

Keywords

civil disobedience – climate activism – street demonstrations – youth – violence – emergency

Introduction

In France, the climate movement, which began in September 2018, has long made pacifist demonstrations its key mode of action. This return to demonstrative protest reflects changes in the recent history of the environmental movement. Since the 1980s, the increasing reliance on expertise and the subsequent institutionalization of the environmental movement have gradually led to a shift away from the demonstration form, which was relegated to the fringes. However, the frustration caused by the gap between scientific production, popularized by repeated alerts, and the lack of response from governments have led ecologist organizations to use other modes of actions, which are characterized by a greater degree of radical protest and a significant youth mobilization.

At the current movement early stages, from September 2018 to January 2019, the mobilization organized around monthly marches. It was then perceived as a citizen's movement, at a distance from classic political antagonisms, especially between the Right and the Left. It was seen as an awakening of civil society, in the wake of the resignation of the very popular minister of Ecological and Social Transition, Nicolas Hulot, as well as the media coverage of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports. From January onwards, however, the movement has been increasingly perceived through a generational prism. Greta Thunberg's interventions, and the actions she initiated in Sweden, led thousands of high school and university students to organize "climate strikes", thus making "youth" appear as the main actor of the mobilization.

However, climate actions organized by a network of environmental organizations seem to be taking increasingly radical forms. A third moment of the mobilization appeared at the beginning of the 2019 school year, notably around the *Extinction Rebellion* movement, born in the United Kingdom. While this group had already been carrying out actions in June, notably by blocking the *Pont Sully* in Paris on June 28, this dynamic became more tangible in October through the multiplication of civil disobedience actions – namely during the "Rebellion Week" that started on October 5, 2019. Most notably, in March 2020, a local group degraded, with some *Youth for Climate* activists, the premises of the *BlackRock* investment fund, targeted both for its supposed role in the unpopular pension reform carried by the French government, and its harmful role for the planet.

Is there a deep continuity between these different modes of action (demonstrations, blockades, degradations)? The frontiers of political radicalism are unclear. Do these activists respect the "non-violence" principle that is more or

less dominant in the environmentalist movements? Is the large majority of the demonstrators prepared to take part in illegal actions? Anne Muxel and Olivier Galland define radicalism as “a set of attitudes or acts that mark a willingness to break with the political, social and cultural system, and more broadly with the norms and morals in force in society” (Galland and Muxel, 2018: 36). They measured the impact of radical ideas on a large sample of young people and identified the main factors that may be associated with them.

Our contribution provides elements to understand how the question of violence Vs. Non-violence delimits different attitudes among the young environmental protestors. Many articles have discussed the conditions of legitimacy or efficacy of non-violent climate disobedience. For John Lemons and Donald Brown, non-violent civil disobedience is legitimate if a great injustice can be noticed and if there is “strong reason to believe that policies and laws and lawful recourse to changing them will not work” (Lemons et Brown, 2011: 9). Then, the discussion is also rich on the legitimacy of sabotage. Andreas Malm’s contribution (Malm, 2020) is notably important in trying to justify the strategic advantage of material damages for the climate movements. However, few studies inform about the social and political background of these young demonstrators. The objective to provide data on their social and political profiles was one of the reasons for the constitution of the group of research *Quantité Critique*. While social movements are most often studied using qualitative methods, polling in demonstrations makes it possible to grasp different social groups and their prevalence in the mobilizations, including the differences that may exist between the heart of a movement and its external supporters. This kind of ethnographic quantification has a second advantage. It makes possible to grasp an understudied figure in social movements: the “sympathizer”, the person who without actively participate in a political organization, a trade union or an association, decides to take part, sometimes only once, sometimes several times in a demonstration.

Thus, after a methodological description and a brief historical perspective to understand the revival of demonstrations and civil disobedience, this article intends to present the main social characteristics of the climate youth. It shows that in spite of a great social homogeneity, despite a massive support for civil disobedience, strong ideological differences and varied levels of radicalism can be observed. These differences are deeply linked to political positioning and family background. They also depend on specific academic curricula. These divisions shape the debate around the non-violent perspective. The radicalization of inherited dispositions leads protestors to go beyond an analysis in terms of legality/illegality, even though “non-violence” remains central for the majority of young protestors. Finally, the catastrophist dimension changes the

meaning of disobedience and of the recourse to violence, shifting the regime of justification, which is no longer situated solely on the side of morality or of an action strategy, but also in the way it reclaims the place of fear.

Methodology

A demonstration is a difficult object to pinpoint, since given that a large amount of data must be collected in just a few hours. Some survey protocols propose to begin data collection before the event begins at the gathering point (Mayer, Favre, and Fillieule, 1997), which has a significant bias because the more determined protestors, who are often on site in advance, will be over-represented in the sample. *Quantité Critique* is a research collective that has been built to extend these sample surveys into demonstrations, broadening the spectrum of interviewees. Created by lecturers, doctors, PhD students and students interested in issues related to emerging social movements (climate movement, yellow vests) in France, it aims to bring together a large number of researchers and students in social sciences to participate in large survey devices during demonstrations. All the interviewers are trained beforehand to administer questionnaires randomly. On October 13, in Paris, for the first climate event (which brought together 30,000 people) more than thirty interviewers were mobilized to administer a face-to-face fifty questions questionnaire. In total, 327 questionnaires were collected. On January 27th, during the second event, on the *Place de la République*, for a Climate Agora, the survey protocol had evolved: 20 interviewers randomly proposed to participants to give their email contact so that the research group could send them a self-administered digital questionnaire. As the response rate following the sending of the questionnaire was high – more than 50% of responses, leading to a sample of 564 participants –, this survey protocol was subsequently retained.

This article aims to present some quantitative results based on two surveys. They were conducted during the strikes of March 15th and September 20th 2019, as mainly young high school and university students demonstrated. We have used the same protocol in three different French cities: Paris, Lille, and Nancy. The objective was to understand the expansion of the demonstrations through the participation of new young people into the mobilization. We therefore chose the date of March 15, 2019, the date of the climate strike, which brought together 45,000 demonstrators in Paris, 6,000 in Lille, and 1,000 in Nancy (*Quantité Critique*, 2019). Finally, similar research protocol on the Paris climate strike of September 20th, 2019 was carried out, in order to be able to compare the evolution of audiences and action repertoires between

two similar mobilizations several months apart. We will put these results into perspective with the surveys on transgenerational marches, making it possible to see whether there is a “youthful exception” in the attitude towards climate.¹

Emergency of Disobedience, Disobedience of Emergency

Demonstrations and civil disobedience actions, if they are not in contradiction with ecological history (Hayes 2007), should nevertheless be questioned. In her monograph on French ecologists, Sylvie Ollitrault highlights the dynamic that led to a gradual shift in the 1980s, from a struggle by demonstrations to a movement centered around expertise (Ollitrault, 2008). We can hypothesize that the return of marches and street demonstrations does not reflect a return to the past, but expresses social changes within the different categories of environmental activists. S. Ollitrault identifies three types of individuals involved in ecological struggles: the scientific one, the political one and the reactive one (Ollitrault, 2008: 40). The demonstrators belonging to the scientific type put the discourse of science at the heart of the transformation to come and are skeptical about political action: they advocate for a change in individual practices towards Nature. Those who develop a more political approach consider that the framework of public action must be profoundly modified and defend political struggle. The reactive activists place the defense of an unknown interest at the heart of their commitment, wishing to see individual's relationship to the environment transformed. Within the limits of their possibilities and abilities, they try to mobilize political means to achieve this purpose. Emergence of expertise can be seen as a particular expression of the balance of power between these goals typical of mobilizations in which scientists have a crucial role, including new international arenas. Environmentalist voices are starting to be heard in the politic arena, making therefore the voice of the scientists louder (Ollitrault, 2008:94) and in the meantime driving them to change their repertoire of action.

This mechanism is completed by a second one, at the level of representation and imagination. According to Luc Semal, a considerable change took

1 On March 15, 2019, we collected 1,300 email addresses in Paris, 850 in Lille, 600 in Nancy. The response rate is superior than 50% after three reminders, a high figure that shows the motivation of the demonstrators in participating in this survey. We gathered 598 questionnaires in Paris, 458 in Lille and 308 in Nancy. On September 20, 2019, we gathered 700 questionnaires. Concerning the two transgenerational mobilizations for climate, we gathered 327 questionnaires on October 13, 2018, and 564 questionnaires on January 27, 2019.

place in the 1980s-1990s corresponding to this *becoming expert* of ecologist activists (Semal, 2019). The early stages of the environmental movement after 1945 were built mainly around the rejection of nuclear power. Under the pen of philosophers such as Gunther Anders, the struggle against nuclear power essentially constituted a mobilization in the shadow of the catastrophe, insofar as nuclear power puts at stake the status of the catastrophe (Anders, 2007). What Jean-Pierre Dupuy described several years later as “enlightened catastrophism” already appears in Anders’s analysis as the very condition of the struggle (Dupuy, 2004). While the catastrophist dimension remained decisive in environmental movements until the 1970s, the progressive institutionalization of the ecologists in the 1980s led up to the marginalization of this perspective until the 2000s. At the dawn of the new millennium, new movements such as the degrowth movement in France and the transition movement in England were raising the possibility of catastrophe, but remained very marginal at the national level, staying confined to the margins of institutionalized parties.

Thus these two genealogies reveal the link between, on the one hand, the victory of the scientific perspective over the political perspective reflected in the modes of action by the non-use of demonstrations in favor of expertise and, on the other hand, the defeat of the catastrophist perspective, concomitant with the institutionalization of ecology through political parties. Political radicalism and the use of the street protest thus appeared, through this rapid historical perspective, as linked to the catastrophist dimension and its political characteristics. In the same way, the re-emergence of marches may reflect a re-configuration of the balance of power between science and politics. This re-configuration can be explained by different elements.

The hope raised by the Paris Agreement of 2015 is no longer sufficient. Since then, no European country has undertaken the substantial economic transformations necessary to follow the path decided in 2015. The sequence of international summits appears as a “slow factory” (Aykut and Dahan, 2015: 401). This slowness creates a “schism with reality” that corresponds to the gap between the image of global governance capable of reorienting the major economic trends and challenging the crisis, and the reality of a deregulated global economic market that leads to catastrophe. This situation is leading several actors to redirect their strategies. First, many philanthropists, sometimes involved in these long international processes, have showed their commitment to the environment by financing environmental movements (Morena, 2018), particularly youth movements. In France and in Europe, a good example of this strategy is the *European Climate Foundation*, headed by Laurence Tubiana, one of the main actors of the Paris Accord. This foundation funds *Youth for Climate* groups, whose members are young people frustrated by the inaction

of governments. The scientists' strategy is also changing, with repeated calls to reassess the situation and issue a warning about the ongoing disaster. Through new organizations, and the voice of the scientists reporting on the gravity of the situation, it seems that the different key figures of the ecological struggle are reconfiguring themselves. The re-emergence of the catastrophist perspective supported by the scientist, through the IPCC reports, leads to a blurring of the frontier between scientists and politics. The scientists themselves are now calling for a transformation of the frame of reference, a position hitherto favored by the "political" pole of mobilization.² In that sense, governmental inaction seems to foreshadow the failure of expertise, which favors discussion with the government rather than confrontation.

The radicalism expressed by the protestors thus conveys the changing attitudes of the collapsist perspective towards the legal order. In the data we collected on the strike of March 15th, those who do not support civil disobedience are those who also most often tend to question the prospect of a catastrophe. This result underlines the link between the consciousness of the disaster and political attitudes, generated by the politicization of the scientist discourse. To the question "Some people think that the ecological crisis has reached a point of no return. What do you think?", those who do not support disobedience make statements that consider there is still time to conduct structural reforms: "We still have time, if we all put our minds to it". Almost all the people (97%) interviewed during the climate strike on September 20th supported the idea that the timeframe is very short. For most of them (66%), there is very little time left before the "point of no return" but it is still possible not to reach it. For others (28%), the point of no return has already been reached but it is still possible to limit the damage. Only a minority considers that the point of no return is reached and there is nothing that can be done about it.

These results are consistent with the hypothesis put forward by Luc Semal at the end of his book on the extension of the field of collapse: "How many activists from *Alternatiba*, *Friends of the Earth*, *350.org*, *Greenpeace*, *Europe-Ecology*, *the Greens* read or listen to the collapsist theses, discuss, debate, worry about them more or less openly? It is difficult or impossible to evaluate precisely, but a growing number of observations and field studies show that a wind of collapse is now blowing on environmentalist mobilizations, especially on its youth" (Semal, 2019: 329). The idea that collapse is taking shape

2 See notably the "Scientists' Declaration of Support for Non-Violent Direct Action Against Government Inaction Over the Climate and Ecological Emergency" on <https://www.scientistsforx.earth/about-us>. The last update of the declaration (May 7, 2020) is signed by 1679 scientists.

in the ecological mobilization is thus verified by the first results of the survey. However, this new relation to the disaster does not deactivate social differences, and we would be seriously mistaken in believing that the whole youth is seduced by this discourse. Far from neutralizing social and political dynamics, the ecological collapse is a political cause for a specific subset of the youth, which does not equate with the whole generation.

Which Youth for Climate?

Environmentalism, which has long been at the heart of *new social movements*, has historically been mainly composed of activists with strong cultural capital (Billemont, 2006). This dimension has stood the test of time and remains true in the contemporary climate movement, within which the more affluent fringes of wage earners are largely over-represented.

The October 13, 2018 march in Paris, the second demonstration of the climate movement, gathered between 14,500 and 120,000 demonstrators (depending on the figures used). The proportion of executives and senior intellectual professions (CPIS³) was much higher than the proportion found in Ile-de-France, which is itself much higher than the national average. In this demonstration, 53% affirmed to be executives or holding senior intellectual professions. Demonstrators with intermediate professions were also represented in a significant way (32%). Blue-collar workers and employees were very poorly represented: only 11% of the demonstrators. Climate protestors are often eager when learning more about the social composition of people participating in demonstrations, and they sometimes share certain unease with the pollsters regarding the results. One of the interviewed asked: "So, do you have any initial results? There are only white rich urbans, aren't there?". Obviously 51% possess master's degrees and 8% possess a PhD diploma. Inglehart shown that the opening to the outside world allowed by the school and university institutions is decisive to the participation in new social movements (Inglehart, 1977).

The emergence of what can be considered as a youth mobilization through the climate strikes which have been organized in January 2019 have constituted a hope for the organizers. They have marked an extension of the social base

3 This classification is based on the 'Institut National de la statistique et des données économiques' data. According to their website, "the Classification of Professions and Socioprofessional Categories (...) classifies the population by a combination of profession (or former profession), hierarchical position and status (salaried employee or otherwise)." (INSEE, <https://insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1493>)

of the movement to disparate fringes of the youth. In fact, they have constituted a turning point. Indeed, during the various climate strikes in Paris, Lille and Nancy on March 15th, 2020, the survey produced the same results: in Paris and Lille, 50% of the young people demonstrating were the sons of executives and senior intellectual professions, whether we consider the Profession and Socioprofessional Categories (PSC) of the father or the mother. Nevertheless a more social diversity has been observed in the strikes of the regional cities, which were more grassroots. The number of young people from working-class backgrounds was a little higher than during the other strikes – although still low. For instance, in Nancy, 28% of the young demonstrators declared that their mother was an employee (32% of active women on French society⁴), but only 7% declared that one of their two parents was a blue-collar worker, whereas 27% of active men are.⁵ However, it is important not to consider that this desertion of the blue-collar workers from the climate marches reflects their skepticism towards ecology. In the yellow vest movement, for instance, forms of environmental concerns emerged, which did not reflect a lack of interest in the issue, but rather a desire to reformulate the issue around new terms and values (Gaborit and Grémion, 2019).

The fact remains that the youth climate movement is composed overwhelmingly of young people from the wealthiest classes. This is not a surprising outcome, as many researchers have demonstrated the involvement of the upper classes in environmental mobilizations (Billemont, 2006). However, it may be surprising in the sense that participants not only benefit from cultural capital, but economic capital as well. Contrary to Sylvie Ollitrault's analysis, which compares environmental activists with Ervin Goffman's delinquents (Ollitrault, 2008: 47), insofar as they justify their action by a distance from the dominant norms and from bourgeois style (Goffman, 2015), the March 15th strikers are deeply rooted in urban social life, and often come from prestigious universities, first and foremost Sciences Po, which is the most represented school among the participants in each of the three cities studied.

Thus, from a sociological point of view, it seems that there is no difference between these mobilizations and transgenerational demonstrations, which have a high, although not hegemonic, rate of young people. On October 13th, 24% of the demonstrators were under 26 years old, and this figure rose to 33% on January 27th. The failure of youth climate strikes to cross social boundaries calls into question the generational perspective that is often showcased by their organizers. The focus on young people is paradoxically ancient in the

4 According to INSEE's data. (<https://insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2011101?geo=FE-1>)

5 *Ibid.*

environmental movement, which was built on the idea of novelty, in terms of modes of actions, actors involved and claims, illustrated by the rise of the literature on new social movements. As Ollitrault says, in the 1970s-1980s, the environmental movement was already emphasizing their particularity to build a “generational blazon” (2008:65), to be distinguished from the ancient Marxist struggles. The media and activist insistence on the youth uprising thus reflects a traditional environmentalist element and not a real novelty. This makes it possible to avoid reifying the generational rupture caused by these marches and by the strong influence of young people. There are no major differences in environmental concerns between the various generations (Bozonnet, 2014), and this is reflected in very similar ideological orientations between the different mobilizations and the different age groups.

Their particularity is not only a social one but a political one as well. In the youth climate movement, political identification is very strong, and the left-right cleavage is significant. While 17% of young people do not express any opinion, among those who have an ideological affiliation, 67% declare to be left wing or very left oriented. Only 11% say positioning themselves at the center and 4% on the right or very right. Finally, 18% express to be neither on the right nor on the left. Comparatively, in 2017 in French society, 34% of young people between 18 and 30 years old identified with the left, 28% with the right and 38% neither with the right nor with the left (Muxel, 2018b). Young people involved in climate demonstrations are obviously much more leftists than the French youth on average.

Moreover, self-positioning is structured around age and status: high school students respond much less than students. 24% of the high school students refuse to position themselves, compared to 8% of the students. When they do so, the difference is noticeable: 16% of the high school students say they are very left-wing and 45% are left-wing; these figures are 26% and 48% among students, respectively. Finally, the high school students do not position themselves more to the right than the university students, but they are more inclined to define themselves as “neither right nor left” (21% of the high school students and 14% of the students).

Two political values are also consensual and express a strong break with the governmental majority: support for migrants and anti-capitalism. In the March 15 climate strikes, 86% of the young demonstrators said the government should do more to help refugees (53% “strongly agree”, and 33% “somewhat agree”). The work on environmental activism highlights the internationalization of ecologists, often leading them to feel connected under the green flag rather than under national flags (Ollitrault 2008, 198). The massive support for migrants reflects the anchoring of cosmopolitanism within the environmental

movement. The second political dimension lies in their relationship to the economic system, and particularly to the capitalist system. While 13% did not express any opinion on the issue, 68% of the demonstrators declared that it is necessary to leave the capitalist system to solve the ecological crisis (34% “totally agree”, 34% “rather agree”), while only 18% disagreed with this idea (15% “rather disagree”, 3% “totally disagree”). This desire to break with the capitalist system is also a dimension that reintegrates these young demonstrators into the anti-capitalist left-wing tradition, although this commitment comes through ecological commitment this time. This element reinforces the idea that the climate movement is not only an environmentalist movement, but also a movement concerned by injustice and systemic failure (Burkett, 2016).

Disobedience as a Battlefield

Civil disobedience, evaluated through the reported support for blockades of polluting infrastructures and educational institutions, is near consensual. More than 80% of the demonstrators say they are in favor of blocking polluting infrastructures and the actions of *Extinction Rebellion* on September 20th are supported by nearly 90% of the sample. 4% of the demonstrators have already participated in blocking actions on March 15th, and 6% on September 20th. It is obvious that a little minority of demonstrators participate in violent actions.

Nevertheless this consensus has to be nuanced and a real cleavage exists between those who pretend they are ready to participate in actions of disobedience and those who just support them. On March 15th, 43% of the young people claim that they are ready to participate in blockading actions, and 34% affirm that they would not participate but support them. This distinction between support and readiness to engage in mobilization is well identified (Hayes and Ollitrault, 2013) and depends on the attitudes towards capitalism. Among those who have already participated in blockades or the ones that are ready to do so, 79% agree with the idea that it is necessary to get out of the capitalist system, among which 47% “strongly agree”. Among those who only support civil disobedience, only 67% agree with this idea, among which 28% “totally agree”. The dynamic is the same when we look at political positioning: 32% of the demonstrators who are prepared to engage physically are very left-wing orientated (for a total of 80% who are left-wing). Only 13% of those who support disobedience position themselves very much to the left. However, logistic regressions (Table 1) reinforces this statement and shows that strong criticism against capitalism is crucial to differentiate people who are ready to participate in civil disobedience, rather than other characteristics. An even

TABLE 1. Logistical regression: propensity to participate to blockade actions⁶

Predictors	Civil_disobedience			Civil_disobedience			Civil_disobedience			Civil_disobedience			Civil_disobedience		
	Log-Odds	CI	p	Log-Odds	CI	p	Log-Odds	CI	p	Log-Odds	CI	p	Log-Odds	CI	p
(Intercept)	-0.30	-1.37 - 0.76	0.583	0.08	-0.51 - 0.66	0.794	-0.61	-1.24 - -0.01	0.052	0.25	-0.24 - 0.76	0.317	0.25	-0.19 - 0.70	0.270
Gender [Woman]	-0.08	-0.44 - 0.28	0.662	-0.21	-0.54 - 0.12	0.219	-0.09	-0.44 - 0.25	0.600	-0.13	-0.46 - 0.20	0.454	-0.12	-0.45 - 0.21	0.492
Gender [Other]	-0.41	-1.64 - 0.89	0.521	0.14	-0.93 - 1.34	0.804	0.00	-1.16 - 1.26	0.998	0.06	-1.08 - 1.29	0.919	0.04	-1.09 - 1.27	0.945
Living w/Parents [Yes]	-0.34	-0.86 - 0.17	0.195	0.08	-0.26 - 0.41	0.662									
Incompatibility w/Capitalism [Strongly agree]	0.83	0.20 - 1.48	0.010	0.85	0.33 - 1.38	0.001									
Incompatibility w/Capitalism [Somewhat agree]	0.33	-0.26 - 0.92	0.273	0.15	-0.36 - 0.65	0.567									
Incompatibility w/Capitalism [Somewhat disagree]	0.11	-0.57 - 0.79	0.754	-0.32	-0.92 - 0.28	0.302									
Incompatibility w/Capitalism [Strongly disagree]	-0.02	-1.74 - 1.58	0.985	-0.04	-1.28 - 1.20	0.953									
Political self-positioning [Far Left]	1.46	0.66 - 2.28	<0.001				1.89	1.21 - 2.60	<0.001						
Political self-positioning [Left]	0.70	0.03 - 1.39	0.043				0.92	0.32 - 1.56	0.003						
Political self-positioning [Right]	-0.56	-2.05 - 0.75	0.421				-0.36	-1.75 - 0.87	0.585						
Political self-positioning [Far Right]	1.03	-2.35 - 4.49	0.504				0.70	-2.57 - 3.97	0.629						
Political self-positioning [Neither left nor right]	0.37	-0.40 - 1.15	0.350				0.70	0.00 - 1.42	0.052						
Political self-positioning [Does not pronounce itself]	0.98	0.21 - 1.77	0.014				1.12	0.44 - 1.83	0.001						
Father_Political_positioning [Far Left]	-0.27	-1.04 - 0.51	0.503							0.35	-0.30 - 1.02	0.292			
Father_Political_positioning [Left]	0.03	-0.57 - 0.63	0.920							0.31	-0.21 - 0.83	0.240			
Father_Political_positioning [Right]	-0.12	-0.76 - 0.51	0.705							-0.05	-0.62 - 0.51	0.855			
Father_Political_positioning [Far Right]	0.96	-0.13 - 2.17	0.095							0.64	-0.28 - 1.63	0.182			
Father_Political_positioning [Neither left nor right]	-0.41	-1.45 - 0.63	0.432							-0.15	-1.02 - 0.72	0.733			
Father_Political_positioning [Does not pronounce itself]	0.01	-0.86 - 0.89	0.979							0.09	-0.47 - 0.66	0.742			
Mother_Political_positioning [Far Left]	-0.11	-0.92 - 0.71	0.790										0.36	-0.30 - 1.04	0.286
Mother_Political_positioning [Left]	0.04	-0.51 - 0.58	0.899										0.30	-0.16 - 0.75	0.203
Mother_Political_positioning [Right]	0.01	-0.65 - 0.68	0.968										-0.03	-0.61 - 0.54	0.906
Mother_Political_positioning [Far Right]	-1.73	-3.94 - 0.05	0.078										-1.25	-3.20 - 0.27	0.138
Mother_Political_positioning [Neither left nor right]	0.30	-0.58 - 1.20	0.508										0.17	-0.55 - 0.92	0.642
Mother_Political_positioning [Does not pronounce itself]	-0.07	-0.93 - 0.80	0.880										0.10	-0.44 - 0.64	0.724
School_situation [College student]	-0.58	-1.08 - -0.09	0.021												
Observations	652			724			687			687			687		
R ² Tjv	0.095			0.044			0.063			0.010			0.011		

stronger effect is observed for the radical left positioning. The results aren't clear about whether family socialization plays a role in the propensity to participate in actions of civil disobedience.

Finally, the conception of society also seems to be a decisive factor: the more one considers French society to be unjust, the more he/she will be ready

6 Here the reference for each variable: Gender: *Man*; Living w/Parents: *No*; Incompatibility w/ Capitalism: *No opinion*; Political selfpositioning: *Centrist*; Father Political positioning: *Centrist*; Mother Political positioning: *Centrist*; School situation: *High school student*; Study field: *Other*.

to take part in blockades. 29% of those who find society rather just are ready to participate in civil disobedience, 47% of those who find it rather unjust, and 54% of those who find it very unjust.

Among the students, however, some differences related to their academic background can be drawn. While there are no significant differences between high school students and university students (46% of the high school students say that they are ready to take part in blockading actions and 47% of the students), some differences persist between students. The most numerous students are those enrolled in Social Sciences and Humanities curricula, who represent 40% of the students in our sample. Next come the preparatory classes and engineering schools (respectively 10% and 9%). While the majority of students of the Humanities and Social Sciences say they are prepared to take part in blockading actions or have already participated in one (53%), only one-third of the engineers (30%) declare the same.

(Non) Violence in the Age of Disaster

The boundaries of legitimate action for the demonstrators are particularly clear and lie between blockading or damage to property. The most determined part of the movement is torn between these two types of actions. There is a division within the group ready to participate in civil disobedience, between people who support damages to property and those who do not. This fracture explains the debates surrounding the movement. On March 15, among the small minority of 30 young demonstrators who have already blockaded polluting infrastructures, 5 have already caused material damage, 7 are ready to do so, 5 support them and 13 do not support them. In other words, more than half of those who are the most involved in civil disobedience movements are also in favor of material damage. Out of 321 demonstrators ready to take part in blockade actions, 24% are also ready to do material damage, 21% support this type of radical action, while 54% do not support it. Again, half of the most committed take a stand in favor of material damage.

Among those who support civil disobedience but are not ready to participate, the difference is substantial: material damage is supported only by 15% of the interviewees and rejected by 85% of them. Thus, the tension lies between a desire for radicalism and a desire to bring together as many people as possible. This alternative was a decisive element in environmentalist history through the incorporation of hippy culture, insofar as it constituted "a strategy to keep

the movement a catch-all profile allowing ‘women with babies’ to come and to distinguish themselves from the more violent extreme left-wing movements” (Ollitrault, 2008: 68).

Rejection of violent action is then very diffused inside the climate movement. This can be explained by the huge gap between what Anne Muxel distinguishes as being “radicalism of protest” and “radicalism of rupture”. The former is characterized by a propensity to demonstrate or support blockades, without being prepared to support violent actions. The radicalism of rupture shows a readiness to participate in political violence (Muxel, 2018a: 205). Anne Muxel notes that protest radicalism is very widespread: three out of four 15–17-year-olds have a ‘medium’ or ‘high’ indicator of protest, while one out of five high school students is potentially concerned by the expression of violence. The gap between protest radicalism and violence is even more significant among the demonstrators. More than 4 out of 5 young people support blockades of polluting infrastructures, and one out of two is ready to participate. Nevertheless only 2% have already caused material damage, and only 8% could do so, i.e. less than in the national survey conducted by Olivier Galland and Anne Muxel, where 7% have already caused material damage, and 12% could do so. This shows that the climate movement is fueled by a strong radicalism of protest, and also rooted in a strong rejection of violence. It can notably be explained by the fact that, in France, non-violence is very well embedded in the movements that advocate for civil disobedience. For instance, the associations *Alternatiba* & *ANV COP21*, which are the most important French organizations of civil disobedience emerged from the Basque Country group *Bizi*. One of the most important figures of the movement has been the Basque activist Txetx Etcheverry, who constructed his political strategy in sharp opposition with armed struggle that *ETA* used to carry out.

Concerning the possibility of causing material damages, 23% of the young people involved in the climate strikes support this type of action. Anticapitalistic attitudes and a very left-wing positioning are decisive to explain such acceptance of violence (Table 2). Another strongly predictive dimension is gender. Men are more likely to be inclined to support property damages than women. The high rate of women in the mobilization (2 demonstrators out of 3 are women) also explains the rejection of violent actions that we have measured.

Political socialization needs to be mentioned too. Among those who declare their parents’ political position, the difference between those who support material damage and those who do not is very significant.

TABLE 2. Logistical regression: support for material damage⁷

Predictors	Material_Damage			Material_Damage			Material_Damage			Material_Damage					
	Log-Odds	CI	p												
(Intercept)	-1.84	-4.98 – 1.22	0.242	-1.28	-2.13 – -0.52	0.002	-1.92	-3.15 – -0.97	<0.001	-0.17	-0.76 – 0.40	0.574	-0.09	-0.63 – 0.45	0.748
Gender [Woman]	-0.96	-1.42 – -0.50	<0.001	-0.87	-1.26 – -0.49	<0.001	-0.75	-1.15 – -0.34	<0.001	-0.68	-1.04 – -0.33	<0.001	-0.72	-1.08 – -0.36	<0.001
Gender [Other]	-0.58	-2.31 – 0.99	0.491	-0.11	-1.35 – 1.10	0.860	-0.13	-1.75 – 1.33	0.868	0.22	-1.18 – 1.48	0.744	0.22	-1.20 – 1.52	0.743
Living w/Parents [Yes]	-0.70	-1.37 – -0.04	0.038	-0.47	-0.85 – -0.08	0.017	-0.67	-1.08 – -0.25	0.002	-0.90	-1.27 – -0.53	<0.001	-0.90	-1.27 – -0.53	<0.001
Incompatibility w/ Capitalism [Strongly agree]	1.85	0.94 – 2.90	<0.001	2.26	1.56 – 3.07	<0.001									
Incompatibility w/ Capitalism [Somewhat agree]	0.79	-0.10 – 1.84	0.104	0.72	-0.01 – 1.54	0.066									
Incompatibility w/ Capitalism [Somewhat disagree]	-0.35	-1.60 – 0.90	0.580	-0.90	-2.04 – 0.18	0.106									
Incompatibility w/ Capitalism [Strongly disagree]	0.29	-1.74 – 1.94	0.748	0.35	-1.04 – 1.60	0.593									
Political self positioning [Far Left]	2.78	1.63 – 4.14	<0.001				3.87	2.87 – 5.14	<0.001						
Political self positioning [Left]	0.99	-0.05 – 2.27	0.088				1.58	0.63 – 2.81	0.003						
Political self positioning [Right]	0.39	-2.67 – 2.50	0.742				-0.28	-3.29 – 1.72	0.811						
Political self positioning [Far Right]	1.34	-1.90 – 3.93	0.327				1.46	-1.69 – 3.85	0.257						
Political self positioning [Neither left nor right]	0.42	-0.79 – 1.80	0.520				1.16	0.09 – 2.46	0.049						
Political self positioning [Does not pronounce itself]	0.63	-0.62 – 2.04	0.346				1.07	-0.03 – 2.38	0.075						
Father_Political_positioning [Far Left]	-0.18	-1.14 – 0.78	0.718							1.12	0.42 – 1.83	0.002			
Father_Political_positioning [Left]	-0.11	-0.87 – 0.67	0.783							0.39	-0.19 – 1.00	0.192			
Father_Political_positioning [Right]	0.25	-0.58 – 1.08	0.501							0.00	-0.63 – 0.65	0.991			
Father_Political_positioning [Far Right]	0.04	-1.45 – 1.42	0.951							-0.28	-1.41 – 0.75	0.609			
Father_Political_positioning [Neither left nor right]	-1.21	-2.93 – 0.29	0.134							-0.96	-2.48 – 0.24	0.151			
Father_Political_positioning [Does not pronounce itself]	-0.05	-1.14 – 1.03	0.929							-0.10	-0.76 – 0.57	0.768			
Mother_Political_positioning [Far Left]	0.12	-0.90 – 1.15	0.814										1.21	0.47 – 1.96	0.001
Mother_Political_positioning [Left]	-0.00	-0.71 – 0.71	0.993										0.42	-0.10 – 0.96	0.116
Mother_Political_positioning [Right]	-1.07	-2.05 – -0.14	0.027										-0.83	-1.59 – -0.10	0.028
Mother_Political_positioning [Far Right]	-0.39	-3.55 – 1.84	0.759										-0.47	-3.43 – 1.32	0.665
Mother_Political_positioning [Neither left nor right]	0.39	-0.84 – 1.61	0.527										-0.11	-1.04 – 0.76	0.807
Mother_Political_positioning [Does not pronounce itself]	0.16	-0.90 – 1.23	0.772										-0.16	-0.79 – 0.47	0.616
School_situation [College student]	-0.22	-1.02 – 0.55	0.575												
Age	-0.01	-0.16 – 0.15	0.935												
Observations	669			737			702			702			702		
R ² Type	0.356			0.226			0.289			0.092			0.105		

60% of those who support it say they have a left-wing father, while it is only the case for 47% who do not support it. The importance of family political socialization appears even more obviously when looking at young activists' mothers' political positions: 59% have a left-wing mother among those

7 Here the reference for each variable: Gender: *Man*; Living w/Parents: *No*; Incompatibility w/ Capitalism: *No opinion*; Political self positioning: *Centrist*; Father Political positioning: *Centrist*; Mother Political positioning: *Centrist*; School situation: *High school student*; Study field: *Other*.

who support material damages as opposed to 46% among those who do not. Positioning oneself far to the left tends to mask this effect. However, when this dimension is not considered in the regression, we can see that parental positioning plays a role, especially when mother or father declare themselves as very left-handed. These elements nuance the idea of a generational break on climate issues. In fact, the level of commitment on climate issues depends on familial socialization: the more leftist their parents are, the more the young people tend to be radical. Finally, while being a student is not inherently structuring, the fact that the protestor no longer lives with one's parents also contributes to increase support for actions of violence against goods. A certain amount of autonomy with regard to parental authority obviously favors these positions.

Thus, aside the gender and the housing arrangement aspects, the factors explaining the propensity to participate in civil disobedience actions are the same as those leading to support material damages – even if far-left-wing positioning seems much more decisive for the latter. However, acceptance of violence seems to be less widespread among the climate activists than in the French youth as a whole. Nevertheless it constitutes a real challenge for the movement, insofar as this radicalism involves a part of the most politicized fringe of the movement ready to renegotiate the boundaries of legitimate action, by including some forms of violence against property.

Conclusion: Rethinking the Legitimacy of Climate Disobedience

Acts of civil disobedience thus lead us to question the motivations of their initiators and participants. In the shadow of disaster, this disobedience does not necessarily have the same value as “classical civil disobedience” that insists on higher principles. The context of urgency is decisive. The question of fear has a structuring role in the formation of these new movements. Disobedience is motivated by urgency that these young demonstrators consider more important than the law, and for which they deem worthy to take a legal risk. The consciousness of the disaster seems, such as the political preferences, the familial socialization and the academic curriculum, correlated to specific degrees of radicalism.

These results, obviously, are not solid enough to conclude that there is a direct link between consciousness of environmental emergency and support to violence. However, it contributes to the debate initiated, in France, by Luc Semal on the role of emergency in climate activism (Semal, 2019). According

to Kimberley Brownlee, civil disobedience is a form of conscientiously motivated, of dialogical protest, not directly related to non-violence (Brownlee, 2012). The question of legality then no longer arises. In this context, some authors even choose to abandon the term civil disobedience in favor of “democratic disobedience” (Markovits, 2005). Radicalism in climate marches indicates the tension between two conceptions of civil disobedience. The strength of the environmentalist tradition and its anchoring in civil disobedience makes it difficult to overcome a liberal perspective attached to the idea of non-violence.

However, a new kind of radicalism is emerging. Civil disobedience imposes itself as a watchword but with a new meaning: beyond non-violence, the level of radicalism is determined by a particular awareness, an assessment of the risks of repression, but also the gravity of the situation. The climate movement in a broad sense, as a movement of movements (Lajarthe, 2020) – including petitions to attack the state in court, peaceful demonstrations, climate strikes, blockading actions and even sabotage –, can be considered as “(un)civil disobedience” (Aitchison, 2018) in the sense that it reflects the tension between the respect of the non-violence principle and the feeling of urgency.

Thus, the civil disobedience undertaken by contemporary environmental mobilizations in France can be understood as a return of the political perspective within the scientific perspective through the theme of urgency and catastrophe. It brings into play the idea of disobedience as not simply the consequence of a mismatch between higher principles of justice and a state of affairs, nor as a strictly strategic aspect of obtaining political victories, but as a mode of action acknowledging the state’s failure in its commitment to protect its citizens and making fear not an affect primarily directed towards state repression, but also towards potential catastrophe. In that sense, the increase of the feeling of emergency could lead ecologists to renegotiate frontiers of legitimate actions. This debate is already passionate within the most committed activist groups.

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