

RepRepresent Focus Group Dataset: Discussions on politics among people in Brussels (2019-2020)

The focus group data were collected between January 2019 and February 2020 in the framework of the EOS RepRepresent project (FNRS-FWO n°GOF0218N). This project examines the relationship between democratic resentment and political representation in Belgium. In particular, the *RepRepresent Focus Group Dataset* originates from work package 3 and focuses on *symbolic representation*. Symbolic representation mostly concerns the linkage between citizens and representatives and deals with questions such as: do people feel represented by their representatives? Do they believe that representatives are representing their concerns in the political arena?

To inquire citizens' experiences with, views about, and feelings (such as democratic resentment) towards political representation in an inductive and open manner, focus groups were organized around three guiding questions: *What* are the most important societal issues that Belgium is facing today?; *Who* should take care of those issues?; *How* should they be resolved (i.e. political solutions)?¹ These three questions were asked in 16² focus groups carried out in the Brussels region. On average, 6 people participated in each focus group (92 participants in total). The average length of the focus groups was 2.5 hours. All focus groups were audio recorded – and, when participants agreed (written informed consent was required for participation), filmed (14 out of 16). Based on these recordings, anonymized verbatim transcripts were produced.

While all focus groups followed the same structure, the selection criteria and recruitment strategies aimed at reaching diversity in terms of participants and groups. Participants were selected along two main dimensions: a *socio-political* proxy and a *socio-spatial* proxy. The goal of these selection criteria was to capture a diverse sample of citizens from whom resentful feelings might be expected and to examine how these feelings are linked to matters of political participation. A first set of focus groups examined the expression of democratic resentment and views on political representation in **political spaces** (i.e. socio-political proxy) with politicized and/or pre-identified groups (i.e. Yellow vest, Youth for climate, social workers, Experts du vécu, Syndicat des Immenses and blue-collar workers in the European Parliament – 59 out of 92 participants). A second set of focus groups included people based on the **social spaces** they are part of (i.e. socio-spatial proxy), focusing on both mixed or less advantaged areas (i.e. 'Marolles' and Molenbeek – 30 out of 92 participants) and, to a lesser extent, on more advantaged areas of Brussels (i.e. 'Dansaert' – 3 out of 92 participants). To guarantee the distinction between the socio-political and the socio-spatial proxy, researchers made sure that prospective participants for the latter groups were not part of a politicized collective/activist movement.

Two types of recruitment strategies were used: **(1)** direct recruitment by the researcher on the field of study and **(2)** a mixed strategy, composed of direct and indirect recruitment via existing networks (i.e. pre-existing organization such as NGOs, foundations, etc.). The technical report of the study specifies which groups were recruited in what manner. Using these socio-political or socio-spatial proxies and recruitment strategies led to the inclusion of participants with varying socio-demographic characteristics: **(1)** 64% of participants are male (36% female); **(2)** apart from 65+, respondents of all ages are relatively evenly represented; **(3)** about half of the participants obtained either no diploma or a diploma from secondary school, 14.3% were still in secondary school at the time

¹ The two focus groups conducted in French among the *Gilets Jaunes* followed a slightly different structure. Indeed, these groups served as pilot groups. The main questions were addressed in the same order (What are the most important societal issues that Belgium is facing today?; Who should take care of those issues?; How should they be resolved (i.e. political solutions)?; but some more specific questions relative to this particular context of mobilization were also asked. Our experience with these first groups helped us to fine-tune the topic guide that served for the remainder of the focus groups. For example, a new vignette exercise among participants (discussing different solution players) was introduced after the two pilot groups with the Yellow Vests activists.

² 14 in French and 2 in Dutch.

of the focus group, 14.1% had a university degree, and 20.7% completed professional secondary education.

Researchers who wish to make use of (parts of) the data should get in touch with the researcher(s) indicated on the focus group transcripts. This will ensure: **(1)** that the opportunity for feedback to focus group participants is guaranteed; and **(2)** that further contextual elements can be communicated (e.g. more specific information about focus groups participants, or the existence of other relevant data).

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Data collection team:

The data collection work was coordinated by Guillaume Petit (UCLouvain-VUB). The researcher(s) responsible for the moderation of the respective focus groups are listed at the start of each verbatim. Regarding data collection, the team was composed of: Guillaume Petit (UCLouvain-VUB), Kenza Amara Hammou and Louise Knops (VUB), and Ramon van der Does, Soetkin Verhaegen and François Randour (UCLouvain).

In particular,

- Louise Knops and Guillaume Petit recruited the participants of the two *Gilets Jaunes* focus groups;
- Louise Knops, Guillaume Petit and Ramon van der Does recruited the participants of the *Gele Hesjes* focus group;
- Louise Knops recruited the participants of the two 'youth for climate' focus groups;
- Kenza Amara Hammou and Ramon van der Does recruited the participants of the focus group 'Marolles';
- Kenza Amara Hammou and Guillaume Petit recruited the participants of the focus group with social workers (expert du vécu);
- Kenza Amara Hammou, Guillaume Petit, Ramon van der Does, François Randour and Soetkin Verhaegen recruited the participants of the focus groups 'Dansaert' and 'Molenbeek'.
- Louise Knops, Guillaume Petit, François Randour and Soetkin Verhaegen recruited the participants for the 'blue-collar workers' in the EP
- Kenza Amara Hammou recruited the Participants of the focus group "Le syndicat des Immenses"