



CASE STUDY

# The *Gilets Jaunes* Protests, Macron's Democratic Experiment, and Deliberative Mini-Publics

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What should elected representatives consider when responding to protests and citizens' demands?

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## SNF Agora Case Studies

The SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University offers a series of case studies that show how civic and political actors navigated real-life challenges related to democracy. Practitioners, teachers, organizational leaders, and trainers working with civic and political leaders, students, and trainees can use our case studies to deepen their skills, to develop insights about how to approach strategic choices and dilemmas, and to get to know each other better and work more effectively.

### How to Use the Case

Unlike many case studies, ours do not focus on individual leaders or other decision-makers. Instead, the SNF Agora case studies are about choices that groups make collectively. Therefore, these cases work well as prompts for group discussions. The basic question in each case is: “What would we do?”

After reading a case, some groups role-play the people who were actually involved in the situation, treating the discussion as a simulation. In other groups, the participants speak as themselves, discussing the strategies that they would advocate for the group described in the case. The person who assigns or organizes your discussion may want you to use the case in one of those ways.

When studying and discussing the choices made by real-life decision-makers (often under intense pressure), it is appropriate to exhibit some humility. You do not know as much about their communities and circumstances as they did, and you do not face the same risks. If you had the opportunity to meet these individuals, it might not be your place to give them advice. We are not asking you to second-guess their actual decisions as if you were wiser than they were.

However, you can exhibit appropriate respect for these decision-makers while also thinking hard about the possible choices that they could have made, weighing the pros and cons of each option, and seriously considering whether they made the best choices or should have acted differently. That is a powerful way of learning from their experience. Often the people described in our cases had reflected on previous examples, just as you can do by thinking about their situation.

### This case study is appropriate for:

- High school, college, and graduate students
- Educators
- Policymakers
- Political reformers, practitioners, and community leaders
- Government representatives and staff

**Keywords:** grievance, government intervention, democratic innovations, deliberation, deliberative mini-publics, citizens’ assembly, democratic lottery, consequential and binding voice, traditional and nontraditional political participation, protests and social movements

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## Introduction

**BY ALMOST ANY MEASURE, PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT HAS DROPPED.** Across Western democracies, widespread demonstrations, whether on the streets or online, suggest growing citizen disillusionment with politicians and the state. Research indicators demonstrate a decline of citizen trust in political institutions, lower levels of voter participation, declining party loyalty, and falling membership in political parties.<sup>1</sup> These factors suggest that citizens are becoming more disconnected from conventional channels of public affairs and that connections between citizens and the state are weakening. The rise of populism, increased polarization, and low levels of trust have led to claims that Western democracy is now in peril. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace recently remarked that “in the most extreme cases, demonstrators used the streets as a venue for representation in the absence of functioning political institutions.”<sup>2</sup>

The political situation in France provides a rich example of modern-day tension between a democratic state and its citizens and the dilemmas faced by political leaders. Since 2017, France has witnessed the election of its youngest president in history, the emergence of a social movement known as the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) in response to a government plan to raise the fuel tax (a de facto carbon tax) in fall 2018, growing grievances against the institutions of government and a push toward populism, and several attempts by the Macron government to respond to citizen demands.

This case study examines five interventions by the Macron government between 2018 and 2021 in response to demands by protesters, including the eventual introduction and implementation of deliberative mini-publics (DMP), government-initiated forums that allow citizens to access balanced information, deliberate, and make recommendations about social and political reforms.<sup>3</sup> It then asks readers which intervention(s) they would pursue in responding to the *gilets jaunes* and why. The study concludes with observations about the extent to which the five interventions were successful from the perspective of the *gilets jaunes* protesters and the larger public as well as reflections on the evolution of DMPs.

The political situation in France provides a rich example of modern day tension between a democratic state and its citizens.

## Learning Objectives for this Case Study

### By the end of this case study, you should be able to:

1. Identify the complex nature of the demands citizens make of their government and the politicization of citizen grievances;
2. Articulate some of the responses available to political leaders in the face of protesters demanding greater voice in social and political reform and government decision-making;
3. Develop an understanding of nontraditional forms of political participation (versus more traditional forms such as voting, petitions, and townhalls) and the value of providing citizens with opportunities for greater consequential voice in between elections;
4. Describe democratic innovations, especially government-led DMPs; and
5. Think of creative ways to improve on the lessons learned from France within the American political context (how might we apply this case study to the US, at the local or national level?).

## Case Narrative

### Emmanuel Macron's Vision for a Revolution Française and State-Citizen Relations

To understand the choices Emmanuel Macron would make as president, it is worth briefly considering the political ideology he brought to the role. In her 2019 book *Revolution Française: Emmanuel Macron and the Quest to Reinvent a Nation*, Sophie Pedder describes the influence the French

Macron articulated his vision for a society that would empower individuals and curtail much of the population's dependence on government programs.

philosopher Paul Ricoeur had on Macron's intellectual formation. A social democrat, Ricoeur was "linked to a group of thinkers seeking to define a middle way between liberalism and Marxism," she explains. "From Ricoeur's philosophical thought, Macron absorbed a conviction that society should work collectively towards the common good as well as, crucially, a belief in the constant need to confront ideas with reality, and to create a permanent tension between competing ideas themselves."<sup>4</sup>

During his campaign, Macron spoke of the need to repair the frail relationship between the French state and its citizens. He articulated his vision for an invigorated French society that would empower individuals and curtail much of the population's dependence on government programs. "The modern role of the government," he remarked while campaigning, "is not to provide everything, but it must be to enable everyone."<sup>5</sup> Above all, Macron extolled the vision of a "new France" in which "citizens would take greater control of their own destiny and fulfill personal ambitions through a more dynamic private sector liberated from cumbersome regulations, which were enforced by a bloated government sector that accounted for one out of every five jobs."<sup>6</sup>

This ideology informed Macron's approach to citizen grievances when, in May 2017, he was sworn in as France's youngest head of state since Napoleon. From the outset, he had a clear vision of a unified republic and of what his country needed. Once he secured a strong majority in the National Assembly, he was able to push forward many of the reforms that he had hinted at during his campaign. His goals were clear: 1) to modernize the French government and its institutions, 2) to relaunch a drive toward a more unified continent, and 3) to establish Europe as an important global power. He focused on new measures to improve the provision of health care and education, seeing education reform as one of the most effective antipoverty programs that government can offer. During the first year of his presidency, his reforms were well-received and his approval ratings high.

Macron's efforts to push forward this unifying agenda, however, were complicated by the perception that, as a former banker, he was brought to power by a circle of wealthy donors whom he rewarded by abolishing the *impôt de solidarité sur la fortune*, France's equivalent of a wealth tax. The most damning example happened in July 2018 when Alexandre Benalla, a close aide who had worked on Macron's campaign and was considered part of the president's inner circle, was caught on tape beating a protester at a May Day demonstration. After the incident, Benalla kept his job and was only given a two-week suspension, which, according to Pedder, "left the distinct impression that there was a self-protecting inner circle that failed to grasp how troubling things looked to everyone else."<sup>7</sup> Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of France's far-left party, compared the scandal to Watergate, and by the end of August, the resignation of several ministers aggravated the political crisis.<sup>8</sup> The reputational damage was severe: Macron's approval ratings dropped to their lowest point—29 percent and 25 percent, according to the Institut français d'opinion publique (IFOP) and Ipsos, respectively—between August and October 2018. The Benalla affair and the ensuing cabinet resignations created a crisis of legitimacy for the Macron government.

He focused on improving health care and saw education reform as one of the most effective antipoverty programs that government can offer.

### **The *Gilets Jaunes* Protests**

Against this backdrop of waning political legitimacy, the government announced an increase in fuel taxes in November 2018 to help curtail carbon emissions. The ratio of tax to gross domestic product (GDP) in France has historically been one of the highest of the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For instance, France's tax revenues for 2019 represented 45.5 percent of GDP. After the announcement, a petition posted online several months earlier—calling for a reduction in fuel prices—spread with great speed and morphed into a series of widespread demonstrations across France. Protesters leading these demonstrations rejected the support of unions and political parties, instead insisting that politics should be conducted *by and for* ordinary people.

Initially, their demands were aligned with Macron's campaign promises: lower taxes, greater purchasing power, and a better democracy. But they did not predict the Macron government would fulfill these promises since lower taxes meant the abolition of the wealth tax for the top 1 percent, a campaign promise Macron had quickly pushed through, while the fuel-tax announcement was a

The movement, soon joined by ultra-left anarchists and far-right agitators, turned against Macron and the French political establishment.

tax increase for the most vulnerable populations—those who cannot afford to live in urban centers and are highly dependent on their vehicles.

The movement became known as *gilets jaunes*, or “yellow vests,” because the protesters wore fluorescent yellow jackets that French law requires all motorists to carry in their cars. A true populist movement, the *gilets jaunes* were structureless, leaderless, and highly volatile.

The movement, soon joined by ultra-left anarchists and far-right agitators, turned against Macron and the French political establishment. Referring to the eighteenth-century bread riots that fomented the French Revolution, the head of polling for the IFOP remarked that the price of fuel was as politically and sociologically sensitive as the price of wheat was in the days of the *ancien régime*.

## Government Interventions

As the unrest continued to grow and spread across the country, Macron and his advisers were increasingly involved in strategic discussions on how to best respond to the protesters. Beginning in late November 2018, the government introduced a series of measures to calm the rising frustrations and unrest among French citizens. This section examines each of the five interventions announced between fall 2018 and spring 2019 and invites readers to evaluate which measures more adequately respond to the demands of the *gilets jaunes* and French citizens.

### ***Intervention 1: Government Increases Subsidies for the Purchase of Fuel-Efficient Cars (Late November 2018)***

The state's first response to the mass protests was to address their economic triggers. The government announced a decision to spend 500 million euros on increased subsidies for the purchase of fuel-efficient cars and home-heating systems that emit less pollution. Many citizens were furious and called out these measures as meaningless. They simply could not afford such purchases despite the subsidies. As reported, the government response was also ridiculed by the media and portrayed as a gross inability to understand the needs of the people. By the end of November 2018, according to public opinion, Macron's approval ratings dropped even further to 23 percent (IFOP) and 20 percent (Ipsos).

In early December, as more protesters gathered and violence began to erupt, Macron cut short his attendance at the 2018 G-20 Leaders' Summit in Argentina and flew back to France. He immediately called for an emergency security meeting. Alexis Kohler, his chief of staff, warned against

any concessions while others argued that if the protests extended longer, they could paralyze the country. These statements suggest that, as early as December 2018, the government understood that citizen grievances were deeper and more complicated than a mere reaction to the increase in fuel prices. Across the country, the political environment became more tense every day with a general expectation on the streets and within the Élysée Palace that more radical measures needed to be introduced.

### ***Intervention 2: Government Suspends Fuel Tax (Dec. 4, 2018)***

On Dec. 4, Édouard Philippe, the prime minister, announced a series of measures after conceding that his government had committed several political blunders. The government suspended the much-discussed fuel tax that had triggered the demonstrations and promised to raise the minimum wage and delay increases in electricity rates. “No tax is worth putting in danger the unity of the nation,” declared Philippe, as he publicly acknowledged that the government had failed to address the basic grievances, financial challenges, and “anger of a France that works hard and has trouble making ends meet.”<sup>9</sup> On the same day that these concessions were announced, Macron visited a small town outside the Auvergne region in south-central France. There, he was met with anger and violence. Protesters had erected an effigy of Macron with a sign that read “sending you to the guillotine is our mission,” and a woman spit in his direction and screamed, “I hope you crash and die on your way out of here.”<sup>10</sup> This was a turning point for Macron. According to William Drozdiak, he returned to Paris “dazed and baffled.”<sup>11</sup> While personally hurt by the reaction he received, Macron’s focus was on the larger forces behind it. An astute politician, he saw that these protests were about more than taxes and social inequality—they were also about French citizens’ relationship to their government.

While the movement may have started in response to an economic trigger, there was a political dimension to peoples’ grievances that could no longer be ignored.

In a December article, *Les Echos* referred to the *gilets jaunes* as “the invisible.”<sup>12</sup> While the movement may have started in response to an economic trigger, there was a political dimension to peoples’ grievances that could no longer be ignored. The severe lack of trust and confidence in government, along with the violence spreading throughout the streets, suggested citizens were deeply dissatisfied with their democracy and a felt lack of meaningful political representation. In an interview with Drozdiak around this time, Macron remarked that, “for many years, the political elite did not address the real underlying problems of our society, while the economic elite became very selfish. The violence we are seeing on a regular basis is symptomatic of a profound malaise in our society.”<sup>13</sup> Macron had heard the protesters and understood their grievances. He thought he had a clear sense of what needed to be done.



### **Intervention 3: Additional Economic Concessions (Dec. 10, 2018)**

On Dec. 10, a visibly tired and aged Macron appeared on television. He announced a third round of government concessions. His government would rescind the taxes on retirees, raise the minimum wage, and abolish taxes on any year-end bonus. He was apologetic and his delivery lacked its usual bluster. He acknowledged the mistakes of his first two years as president: “I accept my share of responsibility. I may have given you the feeling that I didn’t care, that I have other priorities.”<sup>14</sup> He then committed to turning his attention to local communities long neglected by the national government. These announcements once again fell short of expectations, and protests raged on. It became clear that relying on economic measures was not going to be sufficient for the government to quell the citizen unrest. Extremist groups, on the left and the right, began to assume a more prominent role in the management of the protests, and protesters’ messaging began to carry anti-immigrant and antisemitic overtones. Government buildings were attacked, windows shattered, a Jewish cemetery desecrated, and swastikas painted on the streets. There was much concern across the country that the *gilets jaunes* movement was evolving into an ominous portent for France. In the face of growing instability, the government needed to restore order and respond to the demands of the French people.

### **Intervention 4: Great National Debate (January 2019)**

By January 2019, Macron understood that he needed to adopt a significantly different and more innovative approach. In an open letter to the French citizenry, he announced a “new contract for

Intended as a “republic of permanent deliberation,” the Great National Debate allowed Macron to seize a key issue: citizens’ participation in political debate.

the nation” that was designed to “transform anger into solutions.”<sup>15</sup> He laid out the foundation for his Great National Debate and engaged local authorities to encourage citizens to voice their demands in *cahiers de doléances* or “grievance notebooks.” This idea dates back to the French Revolution when “Louis XVI ordered his subjects to compile their complaints in official catalogs.”<sup>16</sup> Macron invited citizens to submit written notebooks that were distributed to residents, provide comments on a gov-

ernment website, and participate in organized debates around four issues: the organization of the state and public services, ecological transition, democracy and citizenship, and taxation. By the end of January, according to the IFOP, Macron’s approval ratings increased to 34 percent. Initial French skepticism shifted and began to pave the way to high citizen participation with a reported 40 percent of the French population wanting to take part in the debates.<sup>17</sup>

Intended as a “republic of permanent deliberation,” the Great National Debate allowed Macron to seize a key issue: citizens’ participation in political debate. In turn, based on public polling, citizen confidence and trust in the government increased and the initiative brought back some calm to the country. In all, French citizens submitted more than 16,000 grievance books and close to two million online comments. The Great National Debate hosted twenty-one regional citizens’ assemblies

and several assemblies of representatives of professional associations. The most plausible estimates suggest that roughly 500,000 of France's sixty-seven million citizens actively contributed to the Great National Debate, generating close to 746 proposals per 100,000 inhabitants. The regional citizens' assemblies, each meant to include 100 randomly selected citizens (often fewer participated because of a lack of financial compensation), were designed to discuss the four themes listed above over a day and a half. The Great National Debate cost the government between 12,000,000 and 15,000,000 euros and reviews suggest that the French people generally thought of it as a success.<sup>18</sup>

Not everyone was on board, however. The *gilets jaunes* viewed Macron's efforts as a guided exercise without much meaning and instead organized their own *Le Vrai Débat* (the True Debate). While leading nonpartisan voices testified to the transparency of the process, some protesters and commentators criticized the Great National Debate for leaving out contentious but important issues such as immigration.

Macron acknowledged these criticisms. The president recognized that the crisis of legitimacy was real and needed to be addressed. He also demonstrated that he understood people's desire for more voice and engagement in between elections. Above all, these measures reflected the importance of engaging in public discourse with the French citizens about the state of their democracy.<sup>19</sup>

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#### ***Intervention 5: Citizens Climate Convention (Spring 2019)***

The results emerging from the Great National Debate revealed that an overwhelming majority of French people saw climate change as an urgent problem that needed to be addressed.<sup>20</sup> At the urging of activists and several advisers, Macron announced a bold political intervention. In spring 2019, he committed to the establishment of citizens' assemblies, a series of national DMPs. The first of the series was the Citizen Climate Convention (CCC) that began in October 2019 and continued until June 2020. The CCC consisted of a representative sampling of 150 French citizens, was selected by democratic lottery, and was tasked with a mandate to draft a series of laws that would allow a 40 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 in a manner that was sustainable and compatible with social justice principles. The government committed to submitting all proposals *sans filtre* (without filter) either to direct implementation, a referendum, or a vote in Parliament. Originally designed to include six two-and-a-half-day sessions beginning in October 2019, plans had to quickly change because long strikes against pension reform brought public transportation almost to a complete halt for a significant part of December and January. Soon after, the pandemic hit, causing sessions to be held remotely during the lockdown. The final session was held in June 2020 at the *Palais D'Iéna*, the offices of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, with social distancing measures in place.

The CCC ultimately approved 149 proposals,<sup>21</sup> many of which received near universal support. For instance, the consumption working group passed provisions mandating that companies disclose the carbon footprint of all products, limiting advertising for high-carbon products, restricting single-use plastic, and creating educational programs promoting low-carbon consumption. The housing working group passed recommendations that require the renovation and retrofitting of buildings by 2040 and effective land resource management to prevent urban expansion. Finally, the food

CCC participant Amandine Roggeman said she was excited about the promise of deliberation. “This bill—*our bill*—is the first one drafted by citizens.”

working group passed proposals to promote local food production, limit food waste, foster agroecology, improve consumer information, and reform fisheries. The criminalization of ecocide was considered especially significant as it was originally not a part of the CCC’s expert-defined agenda but was driven by the citizens. One of the policies that passed with the lowest level of support was a proposal to reduce the speed limit to 110 km/h, and the only proposal to be rejected reduced the work week from thirty-five hours to twenty-eight hours without salary loss.

While some CCC participants were initially disappointed that the government did not adopt all of their proposals, many of the recommendations have been implemented. As of March 2022, of the 149 measures introduced by CCC participants, three proposals had been rejected, fifty-nine were in the process of being implemented, and eighty-seven measures had been implemented, of which sixty-two were part of the Climate and Resilience Law, passed by the French National Assembly in May 2021. According to the *CCC Academic Observers’ Report*, that 146 of 149 measures were retained should be seen as a political success.<sup>22</sup> In interviews, CCC participants and experts commented that the CCC has moved France’s climate agenda much further and has created political momentum. In an interview, CCC participant Amandine Roggeman said she was excited about her experience and the promise of deliberation. “This bill—*our bill*—is the first one drafted by citizens,” Roggeman exclaimed. “I look forward to many more citizens’ assemblies designed to solve other pressing public issues.”<sup>23</sup>

## What Would You Do?

You have now been introduced to five different measures taken by a political leader when faced with a domestic crisis. Whether in reaction to a protest or a perception that people demand greater voice in decision-making, political leaders frequently must weigh options and make decisions on how to respond to the concerns of their citizens.

- Was Macron right to respond to the *gilets jaunes* movement with economic measures first? Do you agree with his decision? Which intervention would you have turned to first, among the five?

- Would you have presented citizens with a mix of political and economic interventions from the beginning? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Like the French president, would you have taken a more gradual approach and slowly introduced solutions such as the Great National Debate and the CCC that provide enhanced opportunities for greater political participation? If so, why? If not, why not?
- While campaigning, Macron’s vision was to transform French democracy and provide citizens with a “republic of permanent deliberation.” What might have been some of the reasons for his initial hesitation to take the steps necessary to fulfill this vision?
- What do you think about the reforms Macron put forward—the Great National Debate and the CCC—as tools to enhance the relationship between state and citizens? Do they increase government responsiveness?
- What other state interventions can you think of might ameliorate the relationship between state and citizens and/or lead to a healthier democracy?

## How it Turned Out

While not distracting from the economic suffering of his fellow citizens, Macron's instinct to acknowledge and offer a different public platform for the political grievances of citizens was strong. The president recognized that the crisis of legitimacy was real and needed to be addressed. He also demonstrated that he understood the people's desire for more voice and engagement between elections. Above all, the measures described above reflected the importance of engaging in public discourse with French citizens about the state of their democracy. During the CCC, according to the IFOP, Macron's approval ratings rose to the high forties, the highest level since the beginning of the *gilets jaunes* movement back in November 2018.<sup>24</sup> Our surveys and interviews with citizens, government officials, organizers, and researchers elicited feedback about the remarkable and unique experience of participating in this deliberative process. Comments such as "completely transformative," "magical," "extraordinary," "remarkable," and "absolute highlight" were used often and emphatically. All those involved spoke fondly of the small and diverse community that was created as a result of this time together.

According to several sources, many citizens who participated were initially timid and reserved. However, with each passing session at the *Palais d'Iéna*, participants began to demonstrate more ease and confidence. Observers commented that even their body language and mannerism began to change as they assumed a greater sense of ease and authority. Léo Cohen, a former adviser to the minister of state and member of the CCC Governance Committee, shared that, despite the CCC's shortcomings, his proudest professional accomplishment was the implementation of this DMP.

At a time when there is a palpable disconnect between people and political institutions, the sense of empowerment that results from participation in a government-led DMP is critical and can help renew the bonds between citizens as well as the social contract between the state and citizens. William Aucant, a CCC participant, likens his experience to "a slap in the face" that awakened him and has drastically changed his life.<sup>25</sup> Participation in the CCC has translated into other forms of political engagement. In summer 2021, approximately fifteen members of the CCC ran in the French regional elections, representing different parties. Aucant ran a successful political campaign and is now an elected member of the Regional Council. Mélanie Cosmier, one of the outspoken participants of the CCC, is now the mayor of Souvigné-sur-Sarthe in the Loire region of northwestern France, where she is seeking to implement environmental reforms.

While it is premature to draw any firm conclusions on how these government interventions have impacted the success of Macron's presidency, this case study proposes that the mixed nature of

William Aucant, a CCC participant, likens his experience to "a slap in the face" that awakened him and has drastically changed his life.

citizen grievances should be recognized, and political leaders should make efforts to respond to demands by providing economic concessions but also introducing innovative platforms for greater voice and impactful political participation. The Great National Debate and the CCC, while imperfect, are more responsive to mixed citizen demands, create venues to engage with government on social-political reform, and pave the way for a form of democracy that can ultimately provide citizens with more meaningful input and consequential voice in between elections.

Macron's government came to understand the political roots of grievances and introduced deliberative approaches to provide citizens with more consequential voice in between elections. If democracy is meant to be of the people, by the people, for the people, the voice of the people should be a key part of the relationship between the state and citizens at all times—not just during elections but also *in between elections*. Democratic governments have a responsibility to seek comprehensive solutions that address the economic and political dimensions of protests and are more responsive, inclusive, and innovative. In managing protests, leaders should respond to economic triggers as well as underlying political grievances by providing enhanced platforms for citizen participation. Innovative measures such as government-led DMPs can increase citizen trust in public institutions, renew the social contract between states and citizens, and lead to healthier democracies.

## Reflections

The OECD report *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*, released in 2020, describes a broad deliberative wave sweeping through democracies. This empirical and comparative study includes almost 300 examples of government-led DMPs between 1986 and 2019. The report defines deliberation, provides in-depth details of models of representative deliberative processes at national and local levels, and identifies key trends. The OECD distinguishes between deliberative and participative democracy and, relying on John Gastil's and Peter Levine's *Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, emphasizes the need to strengthen citizen voices in governance by including diversity and representativeness in the mix. Citizens are provided with balanced information and exposed to expert testimony. After facilitated deliberation, participants are asked to provide recommendations, craft proposals, or draft laws regarding constitutional, parliamentary, or regulatory matters.<sup>26</sup>

While the French model was a largely top-down decision, Belgium's experience with deliberation, for instance, was born out of the G1000 platform, a uniquely citizen-led effort.<sup>27</sup> The G1000 grew during a period of political deadlock and widespread dissatisfaction with Belgian democracy. In 2011, a group of citizens decided to bring citizens together from both sides of the linguistic divide to discuss important political and social issues. A decade later, with two significant initiatives taking place, Belgium must be recognized as a leader in deliberative democracy. The Parliament of Brussels

has launched a permanent initiative that allows any resident—whether a citizen or not—to begin a petition on a social issue. If the petition gathers a minimum of 1,000 signatures, the Parliament of Brussels has committed to conducting two deliberative commissions per year.

Canada has also launched several government-led DMPs, such as the first and second annual Citizens’ Assembly on Democratic Expression (CADE). In praising the work of CADE, the Right Honorable Beverley McLachlin, former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, noted that “assembly members are raising the fundamental issues that are at stake for Canadians, and they’re doing so in a really deep and intelligent and persistent way.”<sup>28</sup>

While deliberative platforms are often set up on a more ad hoc basis, there has been a recent move to institutionalize such platforms, with citizens’ consultative chambers becoming permanent structures within governance systems. For example, in February 2019, the German-speaking community of Belgium adopted a decree establishing a Permanent Citizens’ Dialogue. The *Ostbelgien Model* combines a *Bürgererrat* (citizens’ council) that includes twenty-four members who serve for

There has been a recent move to institutionalize such platforms with citizens’ consultative chambers becoming permanent structures.

eighteen months with a council that has an agenda-setting role and constitutes the permanent representative deliberative body. The *Ostbelgien Model* initiates deliberative citizens’ panels whose recommendations go on to parliamentary debate. In a recent visit to Berlin, one of the authors, Marjan H. Ehsassi, attended a meeting with several parliamentary members of the Bundestag and discussed their plans to institutionalize the first citizens’ assembly within the German National Parliament.

Since the CCC, interest in deliberative platforms has trickled down to municipalities. Several jurisdictions that were not legally responsible for implementing climate proposals have committed to doing so; notably a group of mayors from urban areas have made climate a part of their political campaign promises. Last year, Paris became the world’s first major city with a standing citizens’ assembly with the City Council of the Seine Metropolis voting in favor of a citizens’ assembly consisting of 100 randomly selected and representative residents of the city. According to city hall, the objective of the citizens’ assembly was to increase Parisian residents’ participation in political decision-making. City leaders in Marseille recently announced that the city is investing in the future with a permanent citizens’ assembly to work on topics to address the city of tomorrow, its transformation, and its resilience to climate change.<sup>29</sup> On Sept. 13, 2022, Macron announced a second Citizens’ Assembly on the end of life, to take place between December 2022 and March 2023.<sup>30</sup>

# Teachers' Guide

## Additional Queries and Considerations

- Are representative democracies distinguished from other types of regimes by their greater levels of political participation in between elections?
- Is a vibrant political culture—one that includes individual liberties such as freedom of assembly and expression—a harbinger of other types of citizen engagement such as a meaningful voice in political and social reform and government decision-making?
- While active civil society and social movements are important, are citizens demanding more direct and consequential voice in social and political reform?
- Should a robust democracy activate and promote consistent and meaningful engagement between citizens and the state in between elections?
- Should our democratic institutions evolve to proactively seek greater input from citizens and provide them with a more binding and consequential voice in policy reform?
- Given the *Deliberative Wave* that has taken over much of Western Europe, Australia, and Canada, why do you think the US is a notable exception to this trend?

## Suggestions for Reading

- Drozdiak, William. *The Last President of Europe, Emmanuel Macron's Race to Revive France and Save the World*. (New York: PublicAffairs/Hachette Book Group, 2020).
- Gastil, John and Katherine R. Knobloch. *Hope for Democracy, How Citizens Can Bring Reason Back into Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
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- Page, Benjamin I. and Martin Gilens. *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Pedder, Sophie. *Revolution Française: Emmanuel Macron and the Quest to Reinvent a Nation*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019.



- Przeworski, Adam. *Crises of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.  
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- Van Reybrouck, David. *Against Elections*. Translated by Liz Waters. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2016.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For an overview, see Benjamin I. Page and Martin Gilens, *Democracy in America? What Has Gone Wrong and What We Can Do About It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Mattei Dogan, ed. *Political Mistrust and the Discrediting of Politicians*, *International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology*, Volume: 96 (Leiden, the Netherlands, and Boston: Brill, 2005); Paul F. Whiteley, “Is the Party Over? The Decline of Party Activism and Membership Across the Democratic World,” *Party Politics* 17, no. 1. (January 2011): 21-44, DOI:10.1177/1354068810365505; and Mark N. Franklin, ed., *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511616884.
- <sup>2</sup> Benjamin Press and Thomas Carothers, “The Four Dynamics that Drove Protests in 2021,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 13, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/01/13/four-dynamics-that-drove-protests-in-2021-pub-86185>. For more on protests, citizen grievances, and lack of confidence in political institutions, see: Benjamin Press and Thomas Carothers, “Worldwide Protests in 2020: A Year in Review,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 21, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/12/21/worldwide-protests-in-2020-year-in-review-pub-83445>; Gallup Inc., “Congress and the Public, 1974-2019,” accessed November 14, 2022; <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1600/congress-public.aspx>; Michael Neblo, Kevin M. Esterling, and David M. J. Lazer, *Politics with The People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy*, *Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), DOI:10.1017/9781316338179; and Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), DOI:10.1017/CBO9780511973383.
- <sup>3</sup> Richard Wike, Laura Silver, Shannon Schumacher, and Aidan Connaughton, *Many in U.S., Western Europe Say Their Political System Needs Major Reform* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, March 31, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/03/31/many-in-us-western-europe-say-their-political-system-needs-major-reform/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Sophie Pedder, *Revolution Française: Emmanuel Macron and the Quest to Reinvent a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 148.
- <sup>5</sup> Pedder, *Revolution Française*, 155.
- <sup>6</sup> William Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe: Emmanuel Macron’s Race to Revive France and Save the World* (New York: PublicAffairs/Hachette Book Group, 2020), 7.
- <sup>7</sup> Pedder, *Revolution Française*, xvi.
- <sup>8</sup> Astrid de Villaines, “Jean-Luc Mélenchon: ‘This case is at the level of Watergate,’” *Le Monde*, updated July 22, 2018, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2018/07/21/jean-luc-melenchon-cette-affaire-est-du-niveau-du-watergate\\_5334397\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2018/07/21/jean-luc-melenchon-cette-affaire-est-du-niveau-du-watergate_5334397_823448.html).
- <sup>9</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 32.
- <sup>10</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 32.
- <sup>11</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 32.
- <sup>12</sup> Pierre Alzingre, “Opinion | « Gilets jaunes » : la revanche des invisibles” [Opinion | “Yellow vests”: The revenge of the invisible], *Les Echos*, December 3, 2018, <https://www.lesechos.fr/idees-debats/cercle/opinion-gilets-jaunes-la-revanche-des-invisibles-204593>.
- <sup>13</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 37.
- <sup>14</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 38.
- <sup>15</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 45.

- <sup>16</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 45.
- <sup>17</sup> Ronja Kempin and Paweł Tokarski, *Macron, the Yellow Vests and the National Debate: Playing for Time, Not Solving the Political Legitimacy Crisis*, SWP Comment no. 17 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [German Institute for International and Security Affairs], March 2019), 3, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/macron-the-yellow-vests-and-the-national-debate>.
- <sup>18</sup> H el ene Landemore, “Can Macron Quiet the Yellow Vest Protests with his Great Debate? Tune in Tomorrow,” *Washington Post*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/24/can-macron-quiet-yellow-vests-protests-with-his-great-debate-tune-tomorrow/>.
- <sup>19</sup> Landemore, “Can Macron Quiet the Yellow Vest Protests with his Great Debate?”
- <sup>20</sup> Drozdiak, *The Last President of Europe*, 56.
- <sup>21</sup> For a summary of the CCC’s recommendations, see Le Conseil  conomique Social et Environnemental [Economic, Social and Environmental Council], Summary of *Citizens’ Convention on Climate Report*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/062020-CCC-propositions-synthese-EN.pdf>.
- <sup>22</sup> Louis-Ga etan Giraudet et al., “Co-Construction” in *Deliberative Democracy: Lessons from the French Citizens’ Convention for Climate* (Springer Nature, May 20, 2022), 10, <https://hal-enpc.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03119539v2/document>.
- <sup>23</sup> Amandine Roggeman, CCC participant, in discussion with the author, Marjan H. Ehsassi, June 16, 2021.
- <sup>24</sup> “Do You Approve or Disapprove of Emmanuel Macron’s Actions as President of France?” Statista, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/941208/macron-approval-ratings/>.
- <sup>25</sup> William Aucant, CCC participant, in discussion with the author, Marjan H. Ehsassi, June 23, 2021.
- <sup>26</sup> John Gastil and Peter Levine, eds., *The Deliberative Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/John Wiley & Sons, 2005). See also: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave* (Paris: OECD Publishing, June 10, 2020), DOI:10.1787/339306da-en.
- <sup>27</sup> Belgium’s initial experience with deliberative platforms is described on the homepage for the G1000 platform: <https://www.g1000.org/en>.
- <sup>28</sup> The 2020 and 2021 CADE final reports can be found: Public Policy Forum, *Citizens’ Assembly on Democratic Expression: Recommendations to Strengthen Canada’s Response to New Digital Technologies and Reduce the Harm Caused by their Misuse* (Final Report 2020-21), January 2021. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f8ee1ed6216f64197dc541b/t/6010c23afcc6a97d8516f0e7/1611711036454/CADE2020EN.pdf> and Public Policy Forum, *Canadian Citizens’ Assembly on Democratic Expression: Recommendations to Strengthen Canada’s Response to the Spread of Disinformation Online* (Final Report 2021-22), January 2022, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f8ee1ed6216f64197dc541b/t/61f4701c5e04c-053565d6c30/1643409442281/DemX-RecommendationsToStrengthenCanadasResponseTo-DisinformationOnline-PPF-Jan2022-EN.pdf>.
- <sup>29</sup> B urgerrat, *Ein Zukunftsrat f ur Marseille* [A future assembly for Marseille], August 29, 2022, <https://www.buergerrat.de/en/news/a-future-assembly-for-marseille/>.
- <sup>30</sup> “Convention citoyenne sur la fin de vie [Citizens’ convention on the end of life],” Conseil  conomique Social et Environnemental, accessed November 14, 2022, <https://www.lecese.fr/convention-citoyenne-sur-la-fin-de-vie>.