Political Trust and Transparency in multi-level governance: new findings from the French regions[1]

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Trust (and its corollary mistrust) lies at the heart of contemporary debates regarding governance and democracy (Rothstein, 2005; van Deth et al., 2007; van Deth et al., 1991; Cook, 2001; Torcal & Montero, 2006). There is an extensive literature focused on conceptualizing trust, and more specifically political trust, and exploring the potential consequences of the perceived decline or erosion in the latter for democracy. Hardin (1999, p.22) notes that much of this literature presupposes that citizens ought to trust government and that 'a reputed decline in citizen trust of government bodes ill for many contemporary democratic societies.' 'Trust' is here defined as an analysis of the relationship between a subject (the one who trusts) and an object (the one who is trusted). Putnam (1995) draws a distinction between generalised & interpersonal trust. Zmerli and Newton (2011, 69) further delineate three forms of trust: 'particular social trust' which involves those that are known to us personally, such as family, friends or work colleagues; 'general social trust' which is that placed in 'unknown others'; and finally 'political trust' defined as 'either trust in particular politicians or trust in the main institutions of government and public life'. Likewise, the European Social Survey and World Values Study divide trust into social (inter-

personal) and political (institutional) dimensions. This paper is concerned with the 'thin' form of political trust in the context of France's system of multi-level government. Zmerli & Hooghe (2011, p.3) draw on Easton's (1965) idea of diffused support to characterize political trust as a 'kind of general expectation that on the whole, political leaders will act according to the rules of the game as they are agreed upon in a democratic regime'. This 'thin' form of political trust is therefore not necessarily experience-based in the same way as inter-personal forms of trust.

The paper discusses a major survey of the new French regions carried out in October 2016. The survey took place against the background of a general context of mistrust with politicians and political institutions, measured comparatively by the European Social Survey (ESS) and, within France, by the CEVIPOF-IPSOS-SOPRA-STORIA-Le Monde 2017 election survey.

France presents the characteristics of a country where social trust is structurally weak (Doggan 1999 ; Kasse and Newton 1995 ; Norris 1998). Data from the "World Value Survey" shows that inter-individual trust, measured by the responses to the question "In general, are you confident in people?" remains systematically more limited in France than in comparable countries (Balme and al. 2003). Historically marked by Catholicism, where social trust is significantly lower than in Protestant countries, France is with Portugal at the bottom of the Western European behind Italy, Spain, Austria or Belgium. France has also been hit by a significant erosion of political trust. As underscored by Rouban, Boy and Chiche (CEVIPOF, 2009) in their analysis of the first "Barometer of political trust", the distrust of politics that appeared at the end of the 1970s has considerably grown, evolving into a rejection of the "system". According to most recent results analyzed by Cautrès (2017), only 11% of respondents claim to trust parties, and 70% believe that our democracy does not work well

Is transparency a necessary condition to restore citizen trust in a post-democratic époque (Crouch, 2004)? Transparency is sometimes offered as a remedy to tackle the problems that ostensibly produce such distrust, but understandings of transparency are deeply ambivalent (Cole, 1999; Hood, 2007, Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012). One

widely cited definition is that of Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch (2012, p.563): 'the availability of information about an organisation or actor that allows external actors to monitor the internal workings of performance of that organisation'. This top-down definition, consistent with new public management approaches, is revealing of a broader debate between transparency 'optimists' & transparency 'pessimists'. For 'optimists', transparency is seen as a potential driver of improved governmental performance (Mulgan 2012). For 'pessimists', transparency might hinder trust, by unnecessarily disrupting existing networks & mechanisms of providing public goods. Studies of voting in the European Council (Novak, 2016), of the operational of territorial networks in cities (John and Cole, 1998) or of the higher administration (Eymeri and Dreyfus, 2006) suggest that formal transparency mechanisms can have unintended consequences and produce anticipatory behaviours.

Why link trust and transparency? Robust research turns around a conundrum, a tension inherent in the nature of a social phenomenon, in this case contemporary multi-level governance. One working hypothesis is that trust is conferred as a result of transparent procedures and outcomes. In the 1980s, doctrines of new public management placed output legitimacy and performance review on the policy agenda (Hood, 1998, 2000). The contemporary version of good governance emphasises the link between trust and transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2012; De Fine Licht, 2011). The presupposition that transparency produces better outcomes underpins much contemporary policy: the register of interests in the EU Commission and European & national parliaments, the diffusion of freedom of information legislation, the publication of performance data all testify to this. In the strongest hypothesis, there might be a causal linkage between trust and transparency. From this perspective, transparent procedures, results and policies are more likely to enhance trust with the overall political system. In one version of modern democratic theory, transparency might be framed in terms of building confidence via accountability and participation and enhancing trust on account of fairness and open procedures.

The central question revolves around the paradox that trust might require transparency, yet transparency can undermine trust (at least in decision-making systems that require a measure of confidentiality). Transparency is clearly disruptive to the tight policy communities identified by Marsh and Rhodes (1992), over two decades ago;

the tension between trust and transparency might have been aggravated by intrusive new technologies. From one perspective, transparency is a policy instrument designed to disrupt the operation of the 'private governments' sometimes represented by policy communities. Transparency might be part of the populist problem, as it feeds into routine suspicions of motives of office holders. Yet the demand for transparency exists; our basic hypothesis is that there has been a shift across European states towards greater transparency and that contemporary trust requires transparency. The nature of democracy has changed. What explains this shift and how is it mediated?

The issues of trust and transparency have mainly been explored at the state-wide level, with a national focus. The originality of the present article is to develop the territorial scales of trust framework, applying these themes to the 'new' regions. In this article, a research team from Lyon, Rennes and Cardiff report findings from a major nationwide survey of France's new regions that was carried out across France from October 7-11th 2016. The survey, carried out by You Gov, was composed of 3003 individuals, selected according to the system of representative quotas of the French population over 18 years old[2]. Such a large sample size allows statistically significant findings to be delivered across France. In addition, the survey was specifically weighted in relation to three French regions: Auvergne Rhône-Alpes (n.361), Nouvelle Aquitaine (n.257) and Bretagne (n.144). This article presents findings from this major new survey, which set out to measure the levels of trust in political institutions and to evaluate the sense of belonging to the new French regions.

Though designed primarily to elicit opinions on the new French regions, the survey provides deeper insights into citizens' preferences and fears in the broader system of multi-level governance. The survey was specifically aimed at testing trust in political institutions - especially the new regions - and gauging whether transparency and accountability might provide solutions for the lack of trust in political institutions. The core finding raised by the survey is a general one that might be presented in the form of a paradox: in relation to the new French regions

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[2] You Gov France conducted an internet-based survey of 3003 individuals, selected according to quotas of age, gender, region and social-professional category. The survey was weighted in relation to three regions: Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes (n.361), Nouvelle Aquitaine (n.257) and Bretagne (n.144).

and with respect to political institutions in general. After thirty years of democratic existence, there has developed a form of enhanced political and administrative capacity for the French regions, originally very much the poor cousins of France's system of multi-level governance (Cole, 2006, Pasquier, 2012). Repeated reforms (briefly presented below) have attempted to introduce more clarity into France's complex sub-national mosaic and to improve accountability and transparency for decision-making. The findings from this survey cast doubt on the visibility and cohesion of the reform efforts undertaken since 2010. The headline findings of our survey do little to legitimise the regions: fewer than one in two respondents declared that they were satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their region (46%). A majority (52%) doubted that their regions had the capacity to develop their territory.

The paper is organized in four parts. Section one reflects upon the history of French regionalism. Section two considers the question of trust in (regional) political institutions and public policies, while section three develops the concept of the territorial scales of trust. Section four examines the demand for greater transparency and accountability. The article concludes by calling into question the positive association between transparency and trust in government and calling for more research in this area.

Regions and regional reform in France

The regional institution in France is the result of a long process of what might be called "creeping institutionalisation" as it has gradually (and grudgingly) been granted a position in the politico-administrative system alongside the departments and the communes. Regionalisation in France dates back to the late 1950s. The modernizing post-war state looked to the regional space, not the bi-centennial departments (96 *departéments*, originally created by the French revolution), to provide the institutional basis for regional economic planning (Burnham, 2009). The regional prefectures (launched in 1964) were at the heart of this regionalisation strategy. Functional regionalisation helped to define the regional space in terms of an economic, rather than a

political space, and a policy making space, rather than one where regional institutions have law-making powers (Pasquier, 2012). French administrative regions were first established in the 1950s as advisory bodies (to the regional prefectures) to assist in strategic functions of economic development, transport and territorial planning. They have been fully operational sub-national authorities since 1982 (directly elected since 1986), with their main responsibilities in economic development, transport, education, training and culture (Cole, 2006).

We have argued elsewhere that French regions have developed over time as part of a regional public sphere, by which is signified an arena within which a plurality of organisations interact: namely local and regional authorities, regional prefectures, representatives of the EU Commission, ministerial field services, associations organised on a regional basis, firms and sometimes social partners (Cole, 2011, Pasquier, 2012). The core dimensions of this are: first, the institutional and policy ambitions of the regional councils; second, the creation of new forms of resource interdependency as a by-product of the gradual empowering of the regional councils in areas such as education, training and transport; and third the processes of rescaling whereby the policy space has become more complex and multi-layered. The players involved in inter-organisational networks extend well beyond the former 'dual elite' of politicians and civil servants and they interact at different and variable scales (Duran and Thoenig, 1996). The rescaling dimension is important, insofar as the key policy relationships with which the regions are involved (in higher and secondary education, training, transport, EU regional policy, even health) occur at the urban or regional, rather than departmental levels.

Constitutional provisions provide strict boundaries within which the regional public sphere has developed. The constitutional provision ensuring the 'free administration of local authorities' (libre administration des collectivités territoriales) prevents any hierarchical control of the regions over other levels of sub-national authority. By creating directly elected regional councils, however, the decentralization reforms of the early 1980s added a significant player, whose influence should neither be overstated nor underplayed. The Regions soon proved themselves determined to develop their policy capacity and expertise as part of a broader process of institution building (Nay, 1997). From the early years of the French regions, empirical studies have uncovered institutionalized forms of interdependent relationships in areas as diverse as education (Dupuy, 2010), higher

education (Aust and Crespy, 2009), employment and training (Berthet, 2010), transport (Barone, 2011), regional languages (Harguindéguy and Cole, 2009) and others. Regional institutions have built their legitimacy over three decades: first through investing in public policy delivery in new areas of service delivery such as education and transport; second, by demonstrating that they were viable partners of the State in the State-Region Plans since 1984; and third as active players in European Union regional policy (Cole and Pasquier, 2012).

We can draw no easy conclusions as regards the efficiency of the regional councils before the reform of the regional map in 2015. Some regional councils such as Rhône-Alpes succeeded in carving out a niche for themselves as 'strong' regions, despite their artificial character and lack of regional identity. Others, such as Languedoc-Roussillon, manifestly failed to develop an identity (Keating, Loughlin and Deshouwer, 2003). This account based on the evolution of a regionalised territorial space is open to challenge and can be observed empirically more obviously in certain regions (Brittany, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Alsace, Poitou-Charentes, Corsica, Rhône -Alpes) than in others. The explanatory variables are in part spatial; in small regions where there are only two departments (for example Basse-Normandie or Limousin), the departmental level carried more weight than in larger regions, such as Rhône-Alpes, where there were up to eight departments. The size argument was the key one used by government spokespersons when justify the re-drawing of the regional map in 2015.

Redrawing the regional map

When the 22 regional councils were created as local authorities ('collectivités territoriales') in 1982, they bore the imprint of the centralising French republican tradition. French regions were imagined as institutions without a link to territory (Balme, 1999). They were created in a standardised form throughout France, including in areas where no regional tradition existed. Regional boundaries did not respect the informal boundaries of France's historic regions: the Region of the Centre thus enjoyed exactly the same prerogatives as the historic region of Brittany. With the partial exception of Brittany, Alsace and Corsica, France's historic regions and communities enjoyed no institutional expression. Unlike counterparts in federal systems such as Germany or Belgium, moreover, they have no hierarchical control over other layers of local government. France remains a unitary State, albeit a

'decentralised' unitary state in the terms of the 1958 constitution as amended in 2003. There are no equivalents to the strong regions with fiscal and/or legislative powers, such as Scotland, the Belgian and Italian regions, the Spanish Autonomous Communities, or the German länder. Attempts at introducing new forms of asymmetrical devolution in France have run against serious obstacles, as is illustrated by the case of Corsica (Charbon, Le Pourhiet & Cole, 2016).

Redrawing the regional map in 2015 was mainly justified in terms of size, to align the 13 new regions with the European norm represented by the 16 German länder; it did not explicitly take into account considerations of territorial identity. Vast regions such as Nouvelle Aquitaine, Grand Est and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes were intended to reinforce the message that size matters for strategic reasons in a more integrated European space. The closest to an objective rationale for reforming the regional map was to ensure that poorer regions (such as Auvergne) would be coupled with richer regions (such as Rhône-Alpes). Arguments based on size were more prominent than those of restoring historic regions or minority nations, as in the case of the UK (with Scotland and Wales) and Spain (Catalonia, the Basque country, Galicia). There were references to historic French regions, however: the unification of the two Normandies (lower and upper) into a single Normandy region; the re-naming of the former Midi-Pyrenees and Languedoc-Roussillon regions as Occitanie were examples of regionalist symbolism. On balance, redrawing the regional map owed more to expediency and political pressures than to a closely argued plan (which explains why historic Brittany, defended by Defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, successfully resisted attempts at merger, but not Alsace). The size argument would have been more convincing had the regions been granted major new competencies in the field of strategic economic development, transport, training or higher education, which was not the case. Size itself is misleading: the new Hauts-de-France region (the merged region of Nord/Pas-de-Calais and Picardy) has a population superior to that of Denmark and a landmass equivalent to that of Belgium, yet it has minor regulatory and no legislative powers and a limited budget (Vaudano, et. al. 2015).

The process of redefining the regional map – in part our concern here – manifestly lacked transparency. Three different versions of the regional map appeared in quick succession; neither the regional councils as institutions, nor the citizens were associated with redrawing the regional boundaries. Even the powerful local government associations complained of being excluded. The lack of transparency was a recurrent theme in gatherings of academics and practitioners in 2015; President Hollande's muddling through produced opposition and distrust, including from within the Socialist majority (notably from Ségolène Royal, minister and president of the former Poitou-Charentes region). The first regional elections fought under the new boundaries in December 2015 produced 7 regions for the LR, 5 for the Socialists and a nationalist majority in Corsica. Though scoring highly on the first round, and emerging as the first party in terms of votes, the National Front (*Front national* – FN) failed to win a single region, though it elected hundreds of regional councilors for the first time.

Trust and Mistrust in (regional) political institutions and public policies

The survey endeavoured to capture these general questions via a representative view of trust in political institutions – and in the new regional political institutions in particular. The survey of the French regions revealed a deep mistrust in the functioning of democracy to which neither Sarkozy (2007-2012) nor Hollande (2012-2017) had been able provide convincing solutions. These deeply ingrained mis-trust sentiments are related to broader political and socio-demographic variables that were explored in the survey. Asked to identify where they situated themselves on a left-right scale, the panel revealed the general shift to the right and extreme right amongst French electors in the run up to the 2017 presidential election (Figure 5), a shift especially prevalent amongst men.

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These findings revealed contrasts between the Regions. In the Auvergne Rhône-Alpes region, fully 44% identified themselves as lying on the right, against only 24% on the left, accentuating the broad national trend in favour of the mainstream and far-right. These striking figures presaged the major national defeat for the then ruling Socialists in the 2017 presidential and parliamentary elections. In Brittany, on the other hand, the reverse trend could be observed: those situating themselves on the left (36%) were more numerous than those identifying with the right (33%); these findings are consistent with published surveys which chart the evolution of Brittany into a PS stronghold over the past forty years (Cole and Pasquier, 2015). Rather like in Auvergne Rhone-Alpes, however, the local Socialists were deeply divided between Macron and Hamon in the 2017 presidential election. Finally, in the New Aquitaine (Nouvelle Aquitaine) region, the left-right division was very finely balanced, with almost one-third (32%) identifying themselves on the left, and just over one-third (34%) placing themselves on the right of the political spectrum. Our weighted regions thus represented a politically balanced sample of opinion across the nation as a whole. One of the most striking indicators in the data is that of partisan proximity; views towards the regions are much more positive on behalf of the electors of parties which have run the main regions (the Socialists [PS] and the Republican [LR]) than of the minor parties (the National Front [FN], the Left Front [FG]), generally limited to an opposition role in those regions where they have obtained representatives. If 52% of the whole sample expressed their distrust with the French regions and their ability to ensure territorial development, this figure was much higher amongst supporters of the Communist Party (70%) and the FN (69%).

Trust in the regions is variable. The circumstances in which these regions came about might convincingly explain why the survey demonstrates varying degrees of endorsement in the regional political institutions. The Auvergne Rhône-Alpes region resulted from a merger between the economically powerful Rhône -Alpes region and its regional capital Lyon, and the poorer Auvergne region (former regional capital Clermont-Ferrand). Both regions were led by Socialists until the tightly fought December 2015 presidential contest, at which the outgoing Socialist Jean-Jacques Queyranne was narrowly defeated by Laurent Wauquiez. Unlike Auvergne Rhône-Alpes, or New Aquitaine, the Brittany region retained its existing boundaries, with prominently placed Bretons in the Hollande administration lobbying hard to ensure prevent the merging of this historic French region into a larger western

France region. The vast region in south-west and central France now known as New Aquitaine is the most controversial of all of the new regions: the powerful Aquitaine region, with Bordeaux as its leading city, imposed its leadership on the reluctant Poitou-Charentes and Limousin regions. In the case of Poitou-Charentes, in particular, there is resistance from elites to their forced integration and, as our survey shows, very little sense of identification in the new region. As the main protagonists are from the same party, the partisan variable is of limited explanatory value in this case.

The most striking finding, however, is to be found in the minority (12%) that declares no trust in any political institution to resolve the problems facing French society: a position that is proportionately over-represented according to partisan attachment (more prevalent amongst National Front [FN] or Left Party [Parti de gauche – PG] than Socialist [Parti socialiste - PS] electors), generation (over 55 year olds) and level of education (less than baccalaureate). In a separate question on the levels of government most trusted with policy stewardship in specific fields, the belief that 'none of the above institutions' could be trusted was the single most important one and was prevalent in most sectors (unemployment, insecurity, immigration, public debt, taxes, education and environment), with only housing (city), transports (region) national planning (central government) and social protection (central government) demonstrating relative trust with 'institutions'. The crisis of trust is only in part one of political institutions; it is also due to perceived policy failure and under-performance.

The territorial scales of trust

The second core finding of the survey is that trust is mediated by scale. Measures of trust (in the incumbent national leadership, in the motives & conduct of professional politicians, in diffuse affect for the political regime) have been generally been applied to the national or EU levels (Citrin & Muste,1999). The originality of the survey is to capture these processes of trust and transparency (in multi-level governance) by comparing regional- and city level dynamics, as well as referring to central government and the EU. Multi-level governance is understood

here across its two principal dimensions: multiple levels of delivery and regulation of public services (from local to European), and multiple interactions, especially beyond the State, often involving the private delivery of public goods and assuming the role of lobbies and interests in policy formulation (Piatonni, 2010). The survey demonstrates quite clearly an accountability deficit in this pattern of multi-level governance. Though deeply ambivalent or hostile to all institutions, when surveyed French citizens shows greater trust in two levels of government over the proposed alternatives: the city (for most routine matters of public policy) and the national government (for welfare provision, equality of treatment and national planning). Support for the intermediary levels of sub-national government (13 regions and 96 departments) is sector and place specific, but provides a very thin form of legitimisation. The key absence is the European Union, barely identified at all as a significant actor even in fields where it manifestly performs a core role. Though this represents a specific problem of the institutional design and visibility of the EU, in transparency terms it adds to the accountability problem.

It makes sense to refer to the territorial scales of trust, whereby the city, the region, the national government and the EU attract support or hostility in line with their purported influence and their perceived capacity to make a difference. In relation to the question '*which level is closest to the needs and preoccupations of the population?* the city (28%) emerges as the institution that is perceived to be closest to the needs and concerns of the population, ahead of the national government (16%), the region (14%), the department (13%), the European Union (4%).

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The support for the *city* is a striking finding on the survey. It suggests that proximity matters in terms of identifying institutions that are close to the concerns of citizens. The city achieves a commanding presence in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, where it comfortably surpasses the national government and the region in terms of being 'closest to the concerns and preoccupations of the population'. In the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, the city is identified by 32% of the sample, against 14% from the region and the national government respectively. The role

performed by Lyon in driving a more integrated metropolitan form of urban governance is central to this order of preference. In Brittany, the city is also identified as the preferred scale in terms of addressing the needs of the population (28%), but the region and the national government (18% each) perform better than in Auvergne-Rhône -Alpes. In New Aquitaine, if the city appears ahead (27%), followed by the national government (18%), the third position is that of the department (14%), with the region obtaining a trust approval of only 9% of the sample. Can we speak of three logics of territorial trust? No, as the city emerges as the preferred institution in each case. But perceptions are mediated by considerations of scale: hence, a mode of regional regulation remains strong in Brittany; an original form of metropolitan governance places the city at the centre of dynamics in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes; but there is a marked ignorance, or rejection of the new region in the case of New Aquitaine, where the department is preferred as an intermediary level of institution. Not the first time in French history, a government's excessive taste for institutional engineering backfired. In the case of New Aquitaine, the former Aquitaine region imposed its leadership on the reluctant former regions of Limousin and, especially, Poitou-Charentes which, in the expression of one interviewee, 'continues to lead its independent life as before'. [3]

Measures of trust in France's *regions* varied according to place. If there is some sympathy for the region, this is more clearly affirmed in the case of the traditional region (Brittany) than in the merged regions of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (a fusion of two regions) or in the geographically vast New Aquitaine, a merger between three former regions. There is a stronger degree of confidence in the region in Brittany than in the two other regions: 47% of the sample trust the regional council to ensure territorial development, against 36% in Auvergne Rhône-Alpes and 34% in New Aquitaine. Likewise in Brittany, more confidence is expressed in the region to address the issue of employment than in the national government; the other two regions identify the central government as the lead actor. Even in the case of Brittany, however, the regional logic would appear to be squeezed by city and central state. The reason might be conjectural. Is the disaffection with the region related to the nature of the reforms undertaken during the Hollande presidency? Even for experts, it was difficult to navigate between the three main reforms of the Hollande period and to understand the coherence underpinning them. For example,

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[3] Interview, Auvergne-Rhone Alpes CESER, 29th September 2016.

the MAPTAM 2014 law re-introduced the general competence clause for local and regional authorities – that had been abolished by Sarkozy in 2010 - only for the same government to limit the clause to communes in the NOTRe law of 2015[4]. The fact that the regions were all run by the Socialists until 2015 – and the PS is suffering from unprecedented unpopularity – might also have some explanatory value. There is certainly a strong partisan dimension to the rejection of the regions. But disaffection with the regions might also be structural, in the sense that the French regions remain 'political pygmies', in the expression of Pasquier (cited in Vaudano, 2005), and are not vested with the regulatory and financial powers of European comparators in countries such as Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom.

For most matters of public policy, citizens surveyed placed their (relative) trust in the *national government*, with the adjacent belief that it is at this level that responses to policy problems can be sought. The national government was trusted over the other levels in relation to the debt, taxation, growth, social protection, insecurity, education, immigration, employment and managing the national territory. The paradox is evident between the crisis of state capacity in most of the policy fields mentioned above (abundantly commented in the academic literature), and the perception that the State retains the core distributive, redistributive and regulatory powers (Cole, 2008). These finding are illustrative of the continuing pertinence of the State in France and of national power as an overarching intellectual frame within which politics is debated.

The contrast is patent with the *European Union*. Trust and transparency are also in part a question about Europeanisation, democracy and service delivery. If multi-level governance is linked with decentralisation in some accounts (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Piatonni, 2010), the lack of political accountability for Europeanised policy decisions is affirmed in others (Schmidt, 2006, Crouch, 2004). In this survey, the European Union is virtually absent in terms of a trusted level of governance. Only 4% opt for the EU in terms of being close to the preoccupations of citizens (city – 28%, government 16%, region 14%, department 13%, don't know 12%, none 12%). In no single sector of public policy

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[4] The general competence clause (compétence générale d'administration) confers the power to develop policies on any matters in the general interest of the local authority, whether or not these competences are formally recognised. Henceforth, only the communes are granted this right.

does the EU emerge as the most trusted level: its relevance ranges from virtually non-existent in sectors where EU competences are limited (housing, insecurity, education), through to the main areas of policy and budgetary legitimisation, such as control of the public debt and finances (5%), taxes (2%), employment (2%) and insecurity (2%). Even in such a core Europeanised area as the environment, the EU is the trusted level of government only for a small minority (10%, against 11% for the national government, and the department; 17% for the region and 19% for the city) Only in the area of immigration (11%) is there a broader recognition of the role performed by the EU in the context of the migrant crisis. These findings confirm in some respects Vivien Schmidt's (2006) dissociation between the national (politics without policy) and the EU (policy without politics) levels. If the national level is confronted with intense demands it cannot fulfil, the EU level ensures a key role in public policy regulation and elaboration which is barely acknowledged in public opinion. Such a politics-policy gap endears neither the central government, nor the EU. Trust appears undermined by the perceived lack of transparency and understanding of complex relationships and patterns of service delivery.

- Table 1 around here –

The data in Table 1 show that trust in French governmental institutions to manage key policy areas is not particularly high. Looking at the figures at the bottom of the table, an average of forty per cent of respondents felt that no institution was trustworthy to deal with each issue, or that they could not identify which was trustworthy. Looking at specific policy areas, the French have the least faith in their institutions to handle concerns regarding immigration, with forty-one percent saying that no institution could be trusted on the issue, followed by debt, tax and employment. It ought to be a source of key concern for the French political elite that more than one in three of their citizens feel they cannot be trusted, at any level of government, to handle key policy areas relating to the economy and immigration, a fact that is likely related to the support of the Front National (as will be explored further below). In sum, trust in all government institutions is fairly low, particularly with regard to particularly salient policy concerns such as immigration. Nonetheless, the French government can take some comfort from

the fact that people tend to have more trust in them to deal with the issues for which they are responsible; in other words, generic trust in the government, based as it is around the key responsibilities of the various institutions, tends to be higher than function-specific trust.

The demand for greater transparency and accountability

The second part of the survey was designed to investigate the relationship between transparency and trust in the political system. Rather like trust, transparency is a multi-dimensional concept that can focus on different aspects of governance such as decision-making processes, policy content and policy outcomes (Heald 2006). In the survey, two questions on transparency were the same as those asked in European social survey, along with a bespoke question on accountability. These questions were envisaged as testing opinion in relation to three levels of analysis: the democratic principle of accountability in what Lijphart (1999) would call a majoritarian democracy; the practice of conflicts of interest and financial transparency; and the role of interest groups in public affairs. The survey findings uncovered demands for more transparency: 70% of those surveyed wanted to know more about the role of interest groups in the political process. More than two thirds (69%) considered that existing laws regulating financial probity and conflicts of interest were insufficiently robust. Almost 9 of out every 10 citizens surveyed believed that organisations ought to be accountable, rather than trusted to deliver without close scrutiny. The challenge for the analyst is to interpret the trust-transparency gap: we achieve this by three questions at rather different levels of generality:

--- Table 2 around here ---

In the terms of the formulation of this question, accountability is presented as a generic principle of feedback in 'differentiated polities', an ideal of democratic control by principals (the electors) over agents (the politicians) in a representative democracy. We would expect a very high approval rating for such a question, as a generalised, rather symbolic affirmation of control in a representative democracy. It might be objected that the question does not allow us to capture intensity, but this is not its objective. In practice, in the context described above where interdependent relationships are germane to processes of multi-level governance, policy formulation rarely responds to such clear criteria of accountability. Indeed, we observe a tension between trust and transparency. Public policy mobilises actors in recognisable communities, who develop codes to accompany their investment in long-term relationships. A measure of trust is the glue that holds such communities together. Horizontal political trust can be developed in such communities, yet accountability to the wider public (hence more diffuse trust) is more difficult to ensure (John and Cole 2000). The direction of change, however, is towards more transparency. Transparency as accountability was clearly disruptive to the operation of the tight policy communities identified in the UK by Marsh and Rhodes (1992), over two decades ago. The subsequent experience of two decades of new public management, including in France, has been to disrupt tightly insulated sectoral policy communities and strengthen performance management regimes, based on new policy instruments (Cole, 2008). Decentralisation has similarly acted to break open the orthodox model of territorial policy-making, to weaken the *grands corps*[5], to increase territorial asymmetry. And yet the public demand for more transparency *via* accountability is unsatisfied; at the very least, these survey findings suggest that management changes have not filtered down to public perceptions.

Respondents were asked to indicate how important they felt it was that institutions were accountable to the public on a scale from 0 (meaning not at all important) to 10 (meaning very important). The variable produced a heavy skew, with almost half of respondents answering 'ten', and a further third giving scores of eight or nine. More than three quarters of respondents, therefore, feel that it is important that institutions are accountable to

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[5] The term grands corps is used to describe the elites - both generalist (National Administration School, Financial Inspectorate) and technical (Highways and Bridges, Mining Corps) - that traditionally occupied key positions at the juncture of politics and administration at the summit of the French state.

their citizens. The skew in this variable makes analysing it using the full range of the scale (with linear regression, for example) unwise, and so the measure was dichotomised: those who gave a score of eight or above were identified as feeling accountability was 'very important', and those with a score less than eight feeling accountability was 'not very important' (those who responded 'don't know' were omitted). The new variable identified eighty per cent of respondents as feeling that accountability to citizens was important. An examination of how this varied by region, education, gender, social class and party identification based on logistic regression analysis (not reported but available on request) found that there were no substantial differences in the belief in the importance of institutional accountability in these traits. The one area where there was a notable difference was age: while the differences are not large, the younger the respondent, the less important they felt institutional accountability was. Sixty nine per cent of the under-25s felt that institutional accountability was very important, compared with just over three-quarters of 35-44 year olds, and eighty seven per cent of the over-55s.

The next survey question features regularly as part of the ESS: *To what degree do you consider that the laws surrounding information on financial matters and forbidding conflicts of interest are sufficient*?

---Table 3 around here ---

This dimension of transparency might be interpreted as individual-level, at least insofar as it moves away from general principles, to ostensible practices: in this case, the lack of transparency is in relation to the classic French practice of *pantouflage* (moving between lucrative positions in the public and private sectors). There is a near convergence across region, gender, party identification and generation in relation to demanding tighter controls on conflict of interest practices. How best might this be interpreted? As a sign of the times? The recent (at the time of writing) controversy over the former head of the European Commission, Barroso, accepting a position with Goldman Sachs, placed conflict of interest issues high up the political agenda. Similarly, the dispute

over Lux Leaks, and the holding of assets in offshore accounts and companies raised public awareness of the thin boundaries between public and private. Likewise, the demands for tax harmonisation and the publication of data on 'tax rulings' in individual states have fuelled a transparency agenda. While not explicitly framed in terms of corruption, the dangers of amalgamation are great, insofar as such practices feed the essentially anti-political sentiment of *tous pourris*, on which populists from Le Pen to Trump have prospered. Interestingly, FN supporters vied with those supporting EE-LV as the most robust advocates of tighter controls. There is a territorial dimension that can be read indirectly from the survey findings: in the context of widespread mistrust of government, there is a strong demand for more accountability and transparency, which suggests that the simplifications of the millefeuille territorial [6]undertaken since Sarkozy's territorial reform of 2010 have not (yet) achieved their objectives. The question, in reality, is about a lack of trust resulting from a lack of transparency. If two negatives make a positive, the conclusion goes in the same direction that mistrust can be minimised by more transparency.

Results to this question were mediated somewhat by region and partisan attachment. The Brittany region was the most demanding in terms of transparency in processes of governance: 95% considered it essential that organisations should be accountable, against 89% in Auvergne Rhône-Alpes and 86% in New Aquitaine. Inhabitants of the Brittany region were also the most demanding in terms of tightening up laws on conflicts of interests: 78% considered existing laws to be inadequate, against 69% of inhabitants of New Aquitaine and 66% of those of Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. In terms of partisan attachment, sympathisers of the Left Party (*81%),* of the Greens (Europe Ecologie les Verts – EELV, 76%) and of the National Front (76%) were the most critical terms of conflicts of interest, with supporters of the parties of government (PS, LR, UDI) somewhat more indulgent.

There is a curvilinear relationship between assessments of laws protecting against conflicts of interest and the demand for accountability: those who feel the laws are wholly inadequate or wholly adequate more likely to feel

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[6] The millefeuille territorial refers to the multi-tiered mosaic of France's system of sub-national government, whereby around 36500 communes, 2200 inter-communal syndicates, 96 departments and 13 regions have overlapping responsibilities, with no clear hierarchy between the levels of government.

that institutional accountability is important, and those that feel they are quite sufficient or insufficient more likely to feel accountability is not very important. The stronger the opinion of the laws (good or bad), the more likely the individual feels that institutional accountability matters and the more likely they are to feel strongly that the laws are acceptable, or completely inadequate. This suggests that the demand for accountability is less related to the actual assessment of the strength of the laws regarding conflicts of interest and more related to the strength of opinion about and interest in them; those who are evidently more passionate about or feel more strongly about laws protecting against conflicts of interest are more likely to also feel strongly about the need for institutional accountability.

Finally, the survey asked a question about the role of interest groups, also previously used in the ESS: *Do you think that you are sufficiently well-informed about the role of interest groups in public affairs*?

---Table 4 around here ---

The responses to this question clearly point in the same direction: that of a lack of information, as much as a lack of transparency. Cross tabulations show that feeling uninformed about the role of interest groups but wanting to know about them more has a positive effect on democratic accountability. This suggests that the demand for institutional accountability is closely related to the individual's desire to know more about organisations that can help deliver it. This may not imply a causal relationship so much as reflect the association between believing accountability is important and wanting to know more about the institutions that ensure accountability.

The question was framed to attempt to uncover knowledge of the practices that take place within 'informal institutions'. It was aimed to explicit views on the acceptability, or otherwise, of the role of interests and experts in processes of policy formulation. Rather unsurprisingly, the role of lobbies - at all levels – is beyond the

comprehension of most citizens. Lobbies and interests are viewed as part of the process of secret government and the exercise of power beyond institutions. Reframing the question in terms of social capital, or the merits of participation might have produced rather different results. As it stands, interests form part of the black hole in the French context, where there is a traditional suspicion of lobbies, yet a rich associative life existing within and around all four levels of government that are identified in the survey. Schmidt's simple polity - involving persuasion in the public sphere – appears in practice unable to explain the case of democracies such as France where much policy elaboration occurs behind closed doors, via expert committees and multi-organisation partnerships.

Conclusion

While many French citizens still have trust in their political institutions and government, French democracy is hardly a perfect example of a satisfied citizenry. Around four in every ten citizens do not feel that any of their governmental institutions can be trusted to best manage the policy issues that matter to them, with trust in the departments and the European Union particularly low. French regions are a minor bit player in the broader story of trust and transparency, but the survey allowed our research team to capture and compare dynamics at the regional level. The survey demonstrated a deep degree of distrust in the functioning of political institutions and public policies, and a lack of trust (defined as 'the expectation that political actors generally behave in a fair manner'), in politicians and political institutions. France's regions did not appear as central vectors of trust – though their importance was variable across the country. They suffered collateral damage from the overarching spirit of the times, and, more specifically, as a result of the hesitations and lack of coherence of the Hollande administration's territorial reforms. In France's complex model of multi-level governance, cities and the national government appear vested with a genuine capital, at least insofar as they are the objects of expectations from citizens, in a way that neither the regions, nor the European Union are able to achieve.

In the second part, we examined whether this lack of trust has led to a call for greater accountability of France's institutions; or to put it another way, whether increasing institutional accountability is likely to improve the trust French citizens have in their governments. The results suggest that the link between the two is actually very weak; the variable 'trust in government institutions' has virtually no effect at all on demands for accountability. Instead, demands for greater accountability are more likely to be influenced by respondents' age (whether this reflects a generational or life cycle effect is impossible to determine from this survey), their political ideology (primarily whether they are 'centrist' or ideologically extreme), their education (primarily whether or not they have a degree), or their interest in knowing more about the role of interest groups in public affairs. These findings back up Mabillard and Pasquier who argue (2017, p.87) that there does not appear to be a positive association between transparency and trust in government but rather the reverse: 'it is not the low level of transparency that leads to less trust from the citizens, but rather the initial level of the population's mistrust in public authorities that triggers more requests for access to official documents and a more proactive transparency policy from the government.'

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Tables and Figures

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Figure 1: The 22 French regions prior to the 2015 reform
Figure 2: The revised Map of French regions

Figure 1: The 22 French regions prior to the 2015 reform

Figure 2: The revised Map of French regions

Figure 3 Demographics: gender and age

Gender

Total France
N=5005

48%

52%

■ Male ■ Female

Age

42%

18%

16%

15%

9%

■ 18-24 ■ 25-34 ■ 35-44 ■ 45-54 ■ 55+
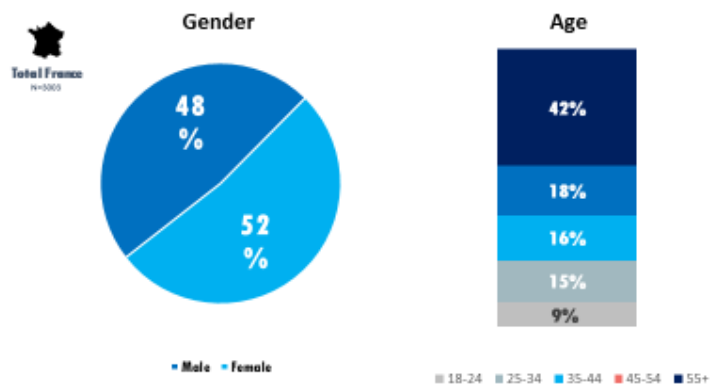
Figure 4 Demographics: profession and region

Total France
N=5005

Profession

Working — 50%

Retired — 27%

Other — 10%

Unemployed — 7%

Etudiant — 6%

Greater Region

11%

23%

23%

19%

24%

■ North-East ■ North-West ■ Paris and its Region ■ South-East ■ South-West
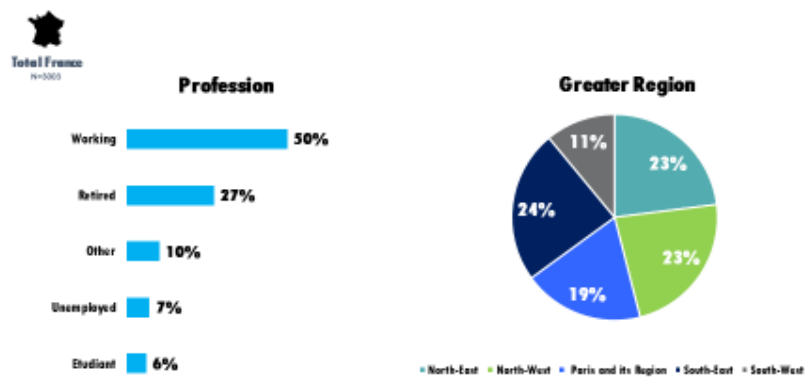
Figure 5: A political field leaning to the right and the extreme right

Self-identified Political Position

- Right 31%
- Left 24%,
- Far Right 10%
- Far Left 4%
- Centre 20%
- dont'know 11%

Legend:
- Right
- Left
- Far Right
- Far Left
- Centre
- Don't know
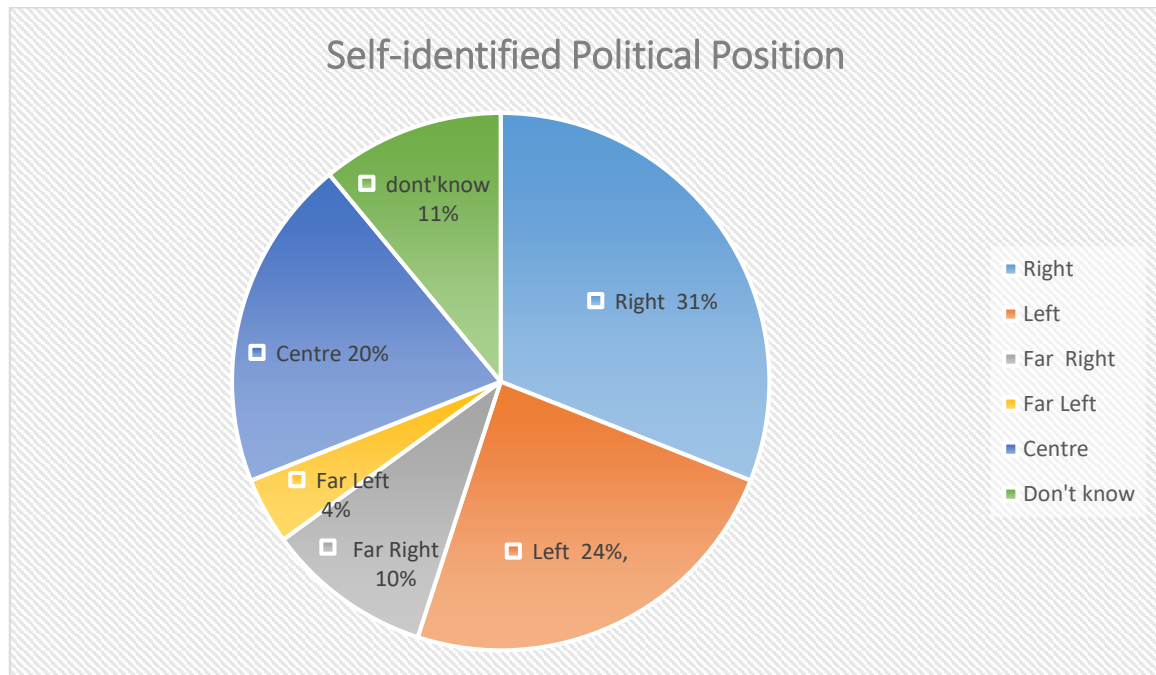
Figure 6 Which level is closest to the needs and preoccupations of the population?

City: 28%

National Government: 16%

Region: 14%
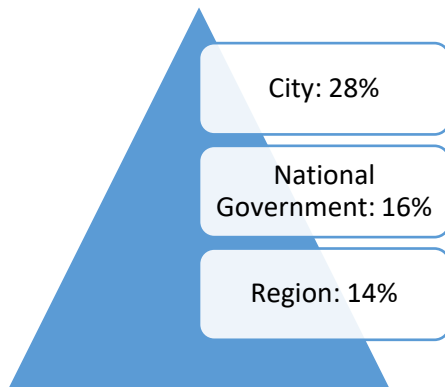
List of Tables

Table 1: Which Institution is Most Trustworthy to Handle Each Policy Issue

	Government	City	Region	Department	EU	None	Don't Know
Employment	18%	8%	16%	10%	2%	37%	10%
Insecurity	24%	18%	8%	7%	3%	30%	10%
Social protection	28%	9%	11%	12%	2%	27%	10%
Immigration	19%	8%	7%	4%	11%	41%	11%
Debt	24%	9%	8%	5%	5%	39%	11%
Tax	21%	13%	8%	6%	2%	39%	10%
Environment	11%	17%	19%	11%	10%	23%	9%
Growth	19%	8%	15%	7%	5%	34%	11%
Education	22%	13%	14%	11%	2%	28%	9%
Housing	8%	28%	15%	15%	2%	24%	9%
Transport	6%	20%	29%	19%	2%	17%	8%
National territory	34%	6%	12%	6%	3%	27%	13%
Average	20%	13%	14%	9%	4%	30%	10%

Data weighted using YouGov sample weight

Table 2: the Demand for Accountability: *In your view, how important is it that organisations are accountable to citizens? Please indicate one choice on a scale of 1-10.*

Almost 9 out of 10 people surveyed consider that organisations should be more accountable to citizens

- In the finer detail, 61% considered accountability to be « very important».
- The inhabitants of the Bretagne region were the most favourable (95%) to organisational accountability.

How important is it that organisations should be accountable to citizens?

Details according to region

Legend
Above/below the national average

Total France N=3003

Bretagne N=144

Nouvelle Aquitaine N=257

Auvergne Rhône-Alpes N=361

Sub-total

very important	61%			
fairly important	27%			
indifferent	5%			
fairly unimportant	1%			
not at all important	1%			
don't know	4%			

Important 88% → 95% 86% 89%

Not important 2% → 1% 4% 3%

SP6. Selon vous, dans quelle mesure est-il important, ou non, que les organisations rendent des comptes aux citoyens ? Veuillez indiquer votre opinion sur l'échelle ci-dessous. 0 signifiant « Pas du tout important » et 10 « Tout à fait important ».

YouGov
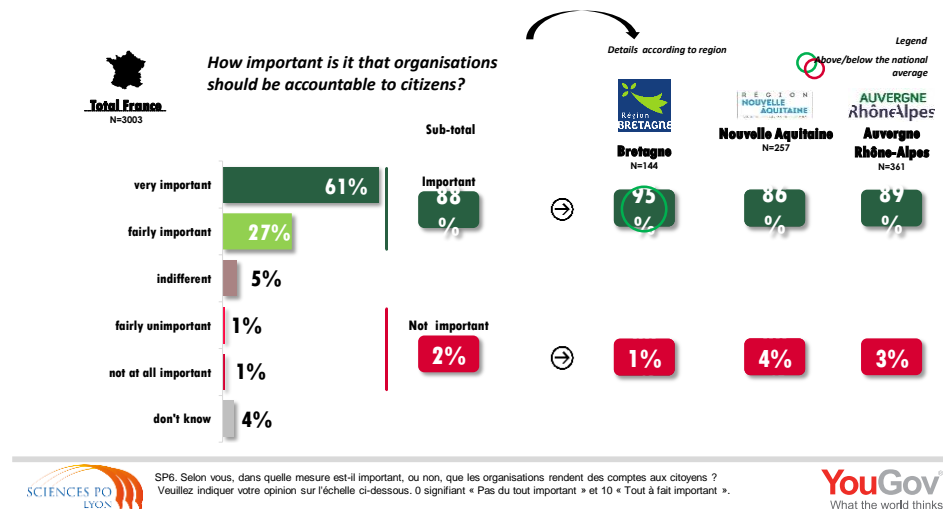What the world thinks

Table 3: A demand for tougher laws to regulate conflicts of interest

French citizens are deeply criticial of the laws to prevent conflicts of interest in public affairs.

- More than two-thirds (69%) consider that the existing laws to prevent conflicts of interest are inadequate (69%)
- In the finer detail, the inhabitants of the Bretagne region are the most critical
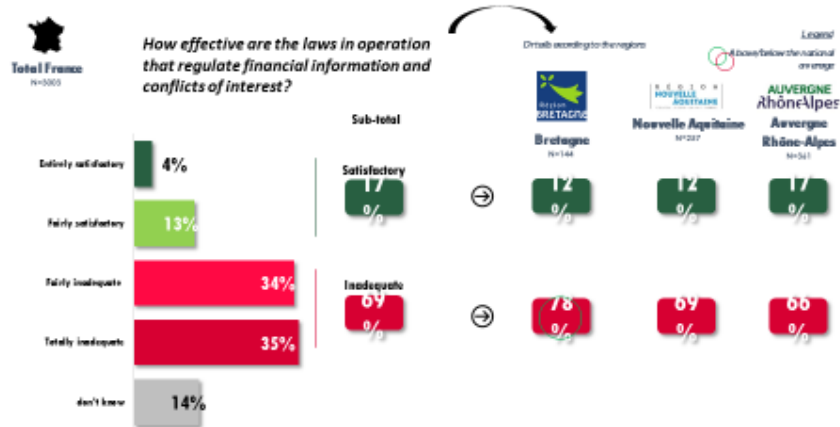
Table 4 : Confusion about the role of interest groups in public affairs

The French are very uncertain about the role of interest groups

- If only 5% of the sample declared that they were sufficiently informed about the role of interest groups in public affairs, a clear majority (65%) declared their desire to know more, a figure reaching 74% in the Bretagne region

Level of knowledge about the role of interest groups in the management of public affairs.

Sub-total Interest

	Don't know	No, and I am not interested in finding out more	No but it would interest me to know more	Yes	Sub-total Interest
Total France N=2003	11%	19%	65%	5%	70%
Bretagne N=144	7%	19%	70%	4%	74%
Nouvelle Aquitaine N=257	14%	18%	66%	3%	69%
Auvergne Rhône-Alpes N=341	13%	18%	63%	6%	69%

No significant differences between the national average and the regional totals.

SP8. Pensez-vous être suffisamment informé(e) sur le rôle des groupes d'intérêts dans la gestion des affaires publiques ?
Veuillez sélectionner une seule réponse.