The representations of “crisis of representative democracy” of young people from the working classes

If we follow its official acceptation, representative democracy would be a system populated by politically interested citizens, competent and ready to participate. From the point of view of political sociology, this image suffers however from a triple bias: universalist (all individuals would be concerned by public affairs, independently of their sociological characteristics), egalitarian (difference of competences and political "powers" would not exist), and normative (it would be necessary to participate to ensure democratic "vitality"). Empirical works have underlined structural traits of the concrete functioning of representative democracies: social distinctions of interest toward politics, diversity in the forms of participation and political professionalization, development of non-participational electoral norms in some social backgrounds, etc. It is notably established that the political investment from the « ordinary citizens » is closely linked to their cultural capital (which the school capital is only a component) and their resources of substitution as militant commitment (Gaxie, 1978, Bourdieu, 1977).

In this context of political structural inequalities, the popular categories in their pluralities (Schwartz, 1998) tend to keep distance from politics with low-level participation. Nevertheless the popular apprehensions of politics and representative democracy cannot be reduced to a dispossession (Grignon, Passeron, 1989; Collovald, Sawicki, 1991). In effect, authors underline some forms of politicization with eclipses (Hoggart, 1959), some practical competences often coming from their daily life and mobilized in political issues (Gaxie, 1978, 2002; Dormagen, Braconnier, 2007; Barrault, 2010), some discreet forms of popular resistances at political power (Willis, 1978; Scott, 1990, 2009 ; Barrault, 2008 ; Mischi, 2008) and the importance of experiences, as injustice, in politicization (Gamson, 1992 ; Renahy, 2005).  

1 The contemporary transformations of representative democracies - of which we will find for instance a synthesis in Blondiaux, 2008 – do not seem have changed these mechanisms.
In extension of these works, we wished to re-question, with a field inquiry, the relationships to politics, electoral priorities and perceptions of the democracy representative of a specific fringe of popular backgrounds: young people from a technical college in Parisian suburbs. How do they understand representative democracy and more broadly politics? What are their modes of production of opinions about politics? This research is part of collective project Political Sociology of Elections (SPEL) which analyses the election campaign of 2012 in several lines, and notably within the group “Relationships to politics and voters”.

In this text, we would like to question in the popular representations of the democracy to study its possible “crisis”. The cases of young people from popular classes, met within professional high schools of Parisian suburbs, make it possible to wonder about the ordinary apprehensions of the representative democracy. It is then a question of giving social ties of their representations while being attentive with the contemporary diversity of popular backgrounds. To study young people from 18 to 20 years old favors moreover the observation of a population in age to vote for the first time, in one period when their perceptions and preferences crystallize themselves. To approach sociologically the “representative democracy” endeavors questioning an instituted dimension of the politics which is a priori very far away from the interests and the representations of the studied young people. We thus approach it through its practical components and while trying to be the most concrete as possible, through the vote, the electoral news, the political parties, the political characters, the categories of profane rankings, the candidates, etc. With a case study, ten young people from popular suburbs, we will try to take a fresh look to the so-called “crisis of the democracy” through the lens of its popular representations and practical experiences of politics. We aim to demonstrate here that understanding this “crisis” implies an analysis based on the ordinary citizen’s perceptions.

In order to apprehend these ordinary citizen’s perceptions, we design a specific empirical plan. We followed 10 persons all the past year, by the way of in-deep interviews (29), realized in four waves with ten young people studying in a vocational high school, located in a northern Paris suburb. In this College, several courses of study of Professional G.C.E.A-levels are taught: in manual / industrial dominant characteristic (cabinet-making notably) or service sector (GCEA-level pro Sale, Reception or Secretary). These courses attract different profiles of pupils coming from different but all socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

These boys and girls (five of each), are between 18 and 20 years old; they are therefore in age to vote and the 2012 election is their first presidential election. The construction of the sample has been then guided by the research of social variations (Gaxie 2002): in terms of gender and courses of study, but also according to their social and national origins and their habitat (named HLM, isolated HLM, collective building –
big groups, residential pavilion etc.). They all come from urban popular backgrounds\(^2\), but they do not have all the same familial, social, economic and/or migratory trajectories. On this point, all our interviewees are French and can vote in France except Alvaro (Portuguese, he is in France since the age of 11 years). For the others, some of them are coming from migrant background (Senegal for Sofiatou, Algeria for Sofia, Portugal for Ana and Belgium for Manon) and the mother of Nelly comes from Dom-Tom. The choice finally took into account their political positions and their variations in terms of interest toward politics and political preferences.

The first discussions took place between February and March 2012, the second wave in April-May, the third one in June and the last interviews took place at the autumn. Their repetition with the same persons gives to the analysis several dimensions. In terms of processual analysis, it lights the progressive construction of opinions and behaviors towards politics, including the indifference or the fact of not having opinion, for these firstly-voters. Concerning the tools, the instruments of judgments and the frameworks they use to give meanings to politics, they could be grabbed by successive investigations. The number, the comparison of the interviews (between the interviews of a same person during different moments and between the interviews of several people at the same moment) and the relational analysis which result from seem then to constitute an empirical plan that makes us able to understand how those boys and girls, socially distanced from the rules and stakes of the political field, perceive the representative democracy.

Thus this text approaches the mechanisms of political delegation from the point of view of these young people from the popular classes (I.), as well as their representations of the institutions and actors of the representative democracy (II.). By giving the point of view of these very distant ordinary citizens of the politics, it is a question of understanding their perceptions of the democratic political system and thus of questioning its possible “crisis”.

\(^2\) On the rural popular youths, see Renahy, 2005
I. Mechanisms of political delegation seen from “bottom”: the policy, the vote, the elections

In order to understand the representations which these young people from the popular classes have of the policy, we will examine successively their perceptions of the politics, their relationships to the vote and the electoral news in 2012).

A- Perceptions of politics

Questioning young people from popular backgrounds on political subjects presents many difficulties, because it is about a subject which hardly interests them. We thus endeavored to undervalue “political” dimension in the way of presenting our study. The investigation was described to these young people like concerning “sociology” (and not political science) and we were presented like young people (more or less like them) eager students to call upon them to speak about “current events”. Such strategies of presentation aimed at undervalue symbolic violence system in the relation of investigation and the relationship to the object (“the policy”) of interviewees.

Beyond these methodological dimensions, a deep political disinterest emanates indeed from the majority of the discussions, which is opposed to the official appearance of the democracy relying on involved citizens. These elements could, at first sight, attest the existence of a “crisis” of the representative democracy. The extract of following interview provides an illustration of it among others. Nelly is a young woman (18 years old) who prepares a Pro Sales A-level. She lives in a sensitive urban area (HLM). Her mother is unemployed and she does not know her father:

Q °: - “And what do you think about it, about the policy?
- I do not really care…
- And are there tricks which touch you?
- Not at all”

Other cases are going in the same direction and these young people estimate that the policy does not concern them. Their disinterest is linked to their absence of waiting with regard to the politics. Nelly adds for example concerning her registration on the electoral registers, with the approach of the presidential elections of 2012:

- “Ben, in fact, I do not know if I am …
- And do you think of voting if ever you are registered?
- (Silence) if I am registered, I will vote blank, just to say that I voted…
- Is it important for you to vote?
- No… because … I do not know… perhaps, I think that, if I will vote, in any case, that nothing will change because one is full and it is not my vote which will thus make all the difference so… that nothing will change. That I vote blank or for Sarkozy or Hollande or Le Pen or I don’t know, for me, that nothing will change.”

Dimitri, in Pro A-level of cabinetmaking, 20 years old, lives with his mother who is education assistant in nursery school (CDD) in a flat located in a working-class neighborhood; his father is butcher in retirement. He also explains: “I do not care at all because frankly my life will not change with that”.

The political disinterest generally displayed by these young people is also related to their technical and statutory inefficiencies (“The policy it is not for me thus I don’t care (laughs)”, Thomas). We will see however that, on certain concrete challenges (police control, racism, etc), these young people can sometimes give a political point of view specific and proved up by their personal experiences, then attesting relative interest for policy stakes affecting them directly in their daily lives.

Their perceptions of politics are also found in their relationships to the electoral institution.

B- Their relationships to the vote: between duty and skepticism

The relations to the vote from the young people met are indeed articulated with their not-interest displayed for the policy. Their distance to the electoral institution linked to their disinterest for the policy is for example observable in their relation to registration on the lists. Ana, 19 years old, in professional secretary ship E-level, living in a small house close to a City, whose father is employee in the building trade and the mother medical secretary tells for example:

- “They tell me that they registered me with a letter, but I asked nothing […]Anyway I have anything of it to make, I will not go there”.

Thus the vote seems to meet little interest to the studied young people, in particular because of their political skepticism correlated with their absence of expectations. Damien, 19 years old, who lives with his parents (father employee at SNCF and mother at home) in a small flat in a building located in outer suburbs, is one of the best endowed of the young studied but he expresses also his disinterest:

“For me I say: do what you want but leave me quiet (...) they want all the same armchair, to sit down on the throne what; and afterwards? (...) That [his vote] will not change anything”.

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However, some of these young people voted in practice regularly in 2012, with the image of Damien who expressed himself within the two presidential ballots and the two turns of the legislative election. Thus, if the vote is for these young people a distant practice from their concerns that prevented in no way some of them from testing a strong feeling of obligation to go to the ballot boxes. The vote, including for distant populations from politics, like our interviewees, can be underlain by a feeling of duty. Sofia, 19 years old, is in a A-level reception sector and she lives alone in a small detached studio located in a distant commune, her mother is deceased and her father is incarcerated: « It’s a duty ». In the same way, Alvaro, 20 years old, born from unknown father and handicapped mother, lives « with people of the family » that he sometimes introduces as his "parents", accountant and commercial agent, since he is 11 years old, age at which he arrived in France from Portugal: « there are people who died for that nevertheless ». Such an importance granted to the vote and such a feeling of obligation to respect its “duty” are in particular linked to the family socialization of some interviewees whose parents have the right to vote and “repeated to them that it is necessary to vote” (Dimitri about his mother). This obligation to carry out its electoral duty does not appear in the same way for the young people coming from immigration out of European Union whose parents do not have the right to vote (on against local normative universes, see for example Braconnier, Dormagen, 2007). The electoral participationist norm, when it is observable to interviewees as in the species, thus has its social conditions but does not have anything universal.

We see on the way that the feeling of having to vote is not incompatible with a strong political disinterest. Alvaro explains for example « as long as I do what I want I do not mind, that does not interest me at all [to vote] ». This result a priori not intuitive could be released owing to the methodological choices performed by the collective SPEL: the remarks of Alvaro come indeed from two different discussions, which shows on the one hand that the panelization can make it possible to collect in-depth data, and in addition that the comparison of interviews from the same interviewee done at various times makes possible new results by making more complex the questionings. Beyond the variations linked to characteristics of each studied young people, their relationships to the vote seem thus very ambivalent, relating at the same time to the distance by disinterest (linked to a strong skepticism about the politics’ efficiency to influence on their life) and to the duty to participate to the democratic life (transmitted in particular by the family, for some of them having grown in universes where to vote is the norm).

In addition one of the interests of the investigation was to be held in electoral situation and we can thus wonder, in the same direction, about the relationships of these young people to the current events at this period.
C- The electoral events: not-follow-up of the campaign and selective exposure to information

Another indicator of the “ordinary” representations of the representative democracy are the relations that our interviewees keep with the elections and the campaign - in the broad sense no reduced to the media – during election time. It is then a question of wondering on the one hand what the popular young people met think of the election of 2012, before, during and after the event, and on the other hand if they follow the campaign and the information during this period.

First it results from the investigation that our interviewees, being in a routine-minded way not very interested by the policy, are not more interested in it during election time. They give a weak attention to the follow-up of the media and news in this situation as in others. For example, on Thursday, February 16, 2012, shortly after 3:00 pm, one among us is in the court of a rather underprivileged professional secondary school in Parisian suburbs. The weather is very cold and nearly two hundred pupils, boys and girls provided with schooling in industrial and tertiary sections, have a break in the playground. Environment is relaxed, we can observe there ordinary discussions, uproars, laughs. The electoral campaign of the presidential elections has been launched for a few weeks, President N. Sarkozy announced the day before his candidature. But here nobody speaks about it, the professional high school seems away from media agitation and from the political controversies. The young from popular classes studied thus tend to avoid political information, including during this election time. Most of them mention selective appropriation and exposure to the information, which tends to exclude the politically differentiated elements generally considered as “boring”. (Sofiatou).

Taking into consideration collected data, the campaign does not have, or very little, “effects” on the political preferences and the electoral practices of these young girls of popular backgrounds. Interviewees indeed watch very slightly the news and even less the electoral debates as their media practices prove it, that they evoke during interview:

- Is there something which marked you in the news these last days [mid-February 2012]?
- [silence] nothing.
- And at home they talk about news events? On what is going on?
- But, in fact, when I go home, I have a ritual, finally… I have a too precise trick, I go home, well, there currently, when I return there is Famille en Or, after there is Money Drop, and afterwards, I zap the 6 channel, it quickly made the newspaper of 19:00 at this moment…
- The 19:45 news? You look at it?
- No. I go on my PC [in my bedroom], and as soon as there is Scènes de Ménages I come back […]
- And do you listen Radio?
- No.
- And Internet?
- All time! Facebook, Youtube... euh... if I also make homeworks, I search what I need if I have a French homework or that... direct searches! If I do not understand a word... or what... direct searches [...] 
- And newspapers?
- [silence] Except quickly when I have nothing to do, really... nothing, really nothing to do, the 19:45.
- Newspapers I wanted to say...
- No, frankly on the morning, when I have 20 minutes, I directly look at Horoscope.
- And after do you look at rest?
- No, never.
- Even in the train?
- In the train I have my music.

If the talks of Anna and Sofiatou are not related here, they show the same type of selective exposure to the media and avoidance of political information. These young people give preference to fun, their follow-up of the news quasi-non-existent, or even avoided by disinterest³.

The observations carried out at the high school are going in the same direction. For instance, Manon, is in the class of Ana (20 years). She lives with her mother (municipal agent - category C) in a HLM near a sensitive area. Her father, security agent of night, is remarried with a nurse and they live in a small pavilion. For her, however attached to the obligation to vote and less distant to the politics than others interviewees, the exposure to the campaign is very weak, which confirms the following example. The interview took place shortly after the announcement of the official candidature of N. Sarkozy. This announcement did the front page of all the newspapers, including Direct Matin, which is one of the rare media supports that she uses (besides the Guignols de l’info in particular). She declares to have read it in the suburban train while coming to the high school the day of interview:

- “Do you know who are the candidates?
- No, not too much in fact, I do not look a...
- Ouais, but you do not know one of them nevertheless?
- Bah, I do not know if they are candidates, Le Pen I think that she will be candidate, anyway FN they are always candidates [...] 

³ The investigation corroborates the results put forwards during the years 1940 by the researchers of School of Columbia according to which the individuals the least interested by the policy are also those which get information less and whose preferences are not very subject to transformation by the media and the electoral campaigns: Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, Hazel Gaudet, The People Choice, New York, Duell, Sloan et Pearce, 1944.
- And Sarkozy, he is candidate or not?
- Frankly I do not know, if is candidate he does not have shame with all the money which he spend...
- But you did not hear you speak about it? For example in the newspaper or other?
- No frankly not, I do not know [she told few minutes before that she read the newspaper in the morning in Direct Matin which runs as a headline on the candidature of Sarkozy]…. Ah so in fact, there is our French teacher who told us that he was perhaps going to be stand for, but it was a long time ago, something like right after the Christmas’ holidays… thus I do not know too much what he said».

Beyond the selection which she carries out inside the newspaper that she had between her hands this morning, this extract seems to illustrate a preponderance of the interpersonal communication (in the species with a teacher) in the relationship to politics and media of these young people, including when they use a media source about same subjects like in the case of Manon.

We could give other examples of the same type of no-follow-up of the campaign and avoidance of political information, and it would be necessary to get undoubtedly more materials resulting from ethnographic observations in situ on this question. Our materials make it possible however to establish that the young people from popular backgrounds met are not very interested by the policy and the electoral news, including in the economic situations of high intensity (Poacher, Dormagen, 2007) like the one of the 2012 elections. They are not interested by the principal media which talk about the electoral campaign and, if “effects” of the economic situation there is, they are more to search in the interpersonal communication of the interviewees. Such conclusions could be besides of general impact since we study populations a priori distant from the politics.

Thus, we see it through their perceptions of the politics, of the vote and of the electoral news, the young people from the popular classes are generally held from political system that the representative democracy constitutes. Then we can wonder how that is articulated with their representations of the actors and the political institutions.
II. Profane representations of institutions and actors in representative democracy

After these first results, about how young people perceive the political system of democracy and his routine events, as the election in particular, we want to study more specifically their apprehensions of institutional actors, of those who are acting and representing the mechanisms of power delegation in representative democracy: parties, politicians and the State.

A- The political parties: between distance and uses of political categories

Political parties are usually considered as key-actors in the representation and the delegation. As a first result, they are little known by the interviewees. None of these young people, except one, evoke them spontaneously during the interviews, neither their name nor acronym. This observation illustrates one of the first consequences of their distance from the political institutionalized universe. The only one interviewee who mobilizes them in the discussion, about his vote or his political opinions, is Valentin. Son of little shopkeeper and the most politicized interviewee, he says about the past legislative elections: “I voted UMP each turn”. He knows the acronyms of each principal party in competition during the 2012 electoral sequence, and the complete name of some of them. For those which he does not remember, he uses informed political categories, recognized in the political field. To explain that, his media practices are interesting: for example he is the only one to have seen “almost completely” the debates between the candidates. He easily deals with left/right categories, linking the extreme right to “racism” and extreme left to “communism”.

This classification, nevertheless, is not use, or not in the same way, by the others young people we met. Without knowing the names of the parties, some of them mobilize also these categories. Sofiatou explains thus:

- “And who do you prefer? For who you’ll vote if you vote?
- I think left, yes, the left
- and who in fact?
- I don’t know but left
- ah… ok… and you know why the left?
- Ben… I think they are more sympathetic in the left, that’s all, and at least, they are not racist”

In her words, the political parties do not appear, but she places herself clearly to the left, visibly in opposition to the “racist” right according to her. The terms she uses are in effect from institutionalized political categories; she uses it in order to politically position herself and to express his positioning. On this point, we have to wonder if this
particular use of these words by Sofiatou would not be also due to the enquiry situation (speaking about politics and answer to the interviewer’s expectations during a formal interview). To evaluate this possibility, the comparison between different persons at the same moment could bring us some elements. Putting in relation the interviews with Sofiatou and Sofia, who presents similar social properties, and both from African immigration (Senegal for one and Algeria for the other), we notice that they express themselves in the same way, with words which are underlain by analogous mechanisms. Sofia declares so:

“Marine Le Pen, she has her status, right, etcetera. But, I’m more for… ben… the left, the left, and then, François Hollande is the candidate that, ben, who, for me, have to be elected. That’s all.”

There we can see that her positioning is also related with the right and left categories: the left for witch Sofia is saying that she will vote for and the right that she rejects (also linked to the racism according to her all along the interview). But yet these two interviewees do not know them each other, they are not in the same classroom, and the interviewer was not the same for each one. These points seem confirm that the enquiry effects are here limited, at least on this subject. Another important thing to note is that these two young women are mobilizing these categories in an uppermost negative way (against the right), with a point of view based on their personal experiences, lived and felt, of a suffered racism, linked to their skin color. In this sense, the constructions of their positioning vary here from Valentin’s case.

For the others, these categories are not spontaneously used (and in some cases totally absent, including in a context of explicit solicitation, for example in Nelly or Ana interviews), and their definition is often uncertain, as it is for Alvaro:

- “For me, the right is, managing alone… and the left more… we share the goods, help the poor people… and I, I manage; so, if I had to position myself, but not… ben… I’m in the right no?”

Political parties and political categories according to which they are usually analyzed, in the quantitative enquiries by questionnaires but also by others fringes of population, do not seem to constitute a key factor to understand their political positions. During the interviews however, the candidate figures, carried and supported by political parties, and beyond the politicians in general, set off numerous remarks and commentaries during the enquiry.
B- The Politicians: which criteria under interviewees’ preferences?

The candidates, as potential political representatives but also as they are representing power delegation, arouse and crystallize at the same time the points of view from our interviewees. That being said, as we showed this for the political parties and their categorizations, the modes of production below various points of views are not all based on same criteria.

Valentin’s case, give us some elements on this point. In his family, his father is the most politicized (among the family but also among the close relations of all the interviewees), clearly positioned for the UMP. On his opinion, his mother «follows my father». From time to time, they discuss about the news, including politics, but the father is systematically leading the discussions. Valentin is part of those who could put a name on the photos\(^4\) of the main candidates (in the recognition order: Sarkozy, Hollande, Bayrou, Mélenchon et Marine «Le Pen, as her father»), he knows «the face but not the name» of Eva Joly, he does «not know her very well» and Philippe Poutou: «I have already seen his face, but no idea about who it is».

When we ask him about what he thinks about candidates whom he knows, he evokes at several times some criteria from the institutionalized political universe, proceeding in the same way that he did with parties: Marine Le Pen is «anti-Semitic», Mélenchon «speak very well, he is a very good speaker, but the problem is that he’s communist!». Some of the young girls, as we had seen it before, qualify also Marine Le Pen of «racist». Some of their judgments about the candidates are therefore based on institutionalized political categories.

In other cases, they formulate comments with another type of criteria: criteria linked to the social competences related to a political role. Valentin explains further, responding to the question «as you know him, according to you what are his qualities and his defects? »:

“Bayrou, no I do not find any quality… and his defects… first of all he stutters, and more: he repeats what the others say, and he doesn’t take position … he is not credible, what!”

Damien also acknowledges François Bayron’s face, and even if he struggles to find his name, he says he knows him «because he gets downhearted already, several times, in [TV] debates and so on…». Alvaro, who easily acknowledges Hollande says of him: «I see not too much… I don’t know... but The Muppets show gets him as a simpleton! ». These expressions do not refer to political-institutionalized criteria, as in the first case, but they are relatively informed and allow them to position the candidates

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\(^4\) The guide of interview of the second wave (April 2012) included photos of candidates, starting from the hypothesis that the faces could be more familiar for them than the names.
each other according to qualities or defects which can work on the political stage: aptitude to debate publicly, global credibility and attributed intelligence (or not), according to their expectations toward a (future) President, President as a political role but even more as a social role.

When we ask to Alvaro if he can classify the candidates in a preferred order, he begins by «the less worst» and moves photos in silence, in the following order: François Bayrou, François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, Jean Luc Mélenchon, Eva Joly and Marine Le Pen (he gives up other photos). After some minutes, he explains his choice:

“In fact, it depends on the face, Bayrou, he has a good face, and then a more and more nasty face for the others.”

Here, we can notice that his ranking includes Jean-Luc Mélenchon, while he could not identify him from the photo: the criterion of physical appearance is the only one to be important for this candidate. He adds then by looking his classification «And her [Marine Le Pen], she is racist». This example shows that Alvaro superposes and takes into account criteria of different nature: political categories («racist») are as important as the appreciations linked to the social expectations toward the role, coming from media practices (The Muppets of the Info that he looks «not often») and enter in interaction with aesthetic judgments (a «good face») sometimes very precise (he says about Eva Joly that he does «not know her qualities, but as defect, she has a poor taste concerning her glasses!!»). These aesthetic judgments can be considered as apolitical and are part of a third type of criteria: based on non-politically differentiated appreciations. These appreciations appear among all our interviews, about the physical appearance of candidates (Bayrou’s ears are named in three interviews) or about how they speak: Sofia doesn’t like Marine Le Pen «because she is too showy». However, several physical preferences are linked to a hexis, which is not strictly political but not either socially undifferentiated.

These ways of judge and positioning are thus revealing their relationship to the principal agents of representation system. Their perceptions, precisely studied and put into perspective and relation, let us understand how they are apprehending the representative democracy and what it means, concretely, for these young people who are distant from it. As a result, the construction of opinion about candidates for these firstly-voters gathers together several types of judgment’s tools: between criteria from political institutionalized universe, criteria non-politically differentiated and criteria related to social competence linked and expected from a political role.

The latter type of criteria, related to an expected social competence, are correlated with their conceptions of “a good head of State”, which are therefore depending of their State conceptions, latest point to take into account here.
C- The State as horizon of expectations

As a consequence, we have to finally study their relationship to the state, in order to understand the electoral effects of such expectations toward the state in one hand, and what does it imply in terms of representative democracy apprehensions in the other hand.

First, the word “state” does not strictly appear, or very rarely, in our interviews. As an abstract entity, this term doesn’t mean very much for these young people. When they take political position, or when they pronounce themselves about current events (like in the Merah affair), they do not express any demands toward this “State”. Nevertheless, some expectations are perceptible, but they are explicitly addressed to the state agents, such as they represent them themselves.

Going back over the role of the head of state, some of them evoke the assessment of N. Sarkozy when explaining their vote’ intentions or their political preferences. Sofiatou tells us:

-“ He… I don’t like him either; he did not do anything for us, he puts us into shit, with the economic crisis, if I can say that... well... he doesn’t serve, serve nothing in fact; strictly nothing. I wonder what he did during these 5 last years except... I’m not in the policy but... finally I think that... What are the changes? It is the question I wonder today because, it get worse, frankly, since 5 years that he get elected, ben, for me, I think that since these 5 years the economic crisis deteriorate and, euh... the unemployment, everybody is in the shit with the unemployment”

In this extract, she does not attribute directly the crisis responsibility to the head of state, but she declares that “He did not do anything for us”, motive of her reject. Moreover, earlier in the interview, she explained her conception of the president role, speaking about the candidature of Marine LePen:

-“ This thing that blocks me, in fact, that I do not like, it evokes me, in fact... if you want to be a President, you have to do all the things for the other, and you have the duty to not make inequalities, social inequality or other or... ben... social or what else, it’s a duty, what”

She expresses so some clear expectations toward the head of state: being care of us, doing something for us and beyond, equality. These expectations are in fact addressed to the person who is representing the State, but also, at the same time, to the State as Institution.
In other cases, the candidates are not accused, but the designated problems are related with other agents of the state, specifically in view of its sovereign functions. Ana, from Portuguese origins, daughter of an employee and a childminder who own their proper pavilion in a popular suburb, express herself like so:

- “What do you think about the problem of security?
- There, it is an important thing, because there is many guys who do mess [...] For me, I am OK that we have to punish them more, that we enforce the law and the court of justice, you see because frankly there are really too many scum [...] After we don’t have to get mixed up everything, young people who live in suburbs and those who do mess...
- But on candidates’ level, do you know what they offer and which one you prefer for this?
- No, frankly no. But we don’t mind, in fact, because there are not the politicians who are going to change something, it is Police the one who must be more careful.”

For Ana, as for Dimitri or Thomas (both are coming from the relatively upper fractions into our sample but living in a Cité), the State, by way of the Police forces, have to struggle against the growing insecurity and to control more strictly the frontiers. Looking at the social characteristics and trajectories of their respective family, these specific political positions distinguish themselves from the others. In effect, Sofia and Sofiatou are in contrary located in the low-endowed categories of the popular classes; combining this factor with the one of their national origins, it results that their apprehensions and expectations toward the state are socially determined. As for Ana or Dimitri, they regularly claim their difference from the “others” in the interviews, willingly speaking about a “successful immigration” for the first one, and about his “franco-french” origin and “100% white” for the second one. Their family situations are also more stable with less economic difficulties.

In this context, can be these expectations toward the state considered as electoral stakes, in the sense of influencing directly their votes? For this question, some precautions are necessary because of the enquiry empirical plan. In effect, these interviews were led during the electoral period, and even though we presented the enquiry like an enquiry about news and actuality, the questions asked were often “political” ones. Keeping the elections as underlying theme during all the interviews, the link between their talks about the state, its agents and its representatives and their effective vote at the end, is a data result but also a consequence from the empirical plan. The preliminary postulates, the first hypotheses (and among them the one of voting on stakes or current issues) have largely contributed to the causal imputation which result from. Therefore and before concluding on this point, it’s necessary to be attentive at the social and situational conditions of the translation from an opinion (formulated at a precise moment and in precise circumstances) to an effective vote.
Some trails appear there, in the mark of a work-in-process analysis. The more distant from politics, Nelly for example, are expressing some similar expectations (against the economic crisis, the unemployment and the suffered discriminations in her particular case), but she does not address them to the state; she does not link explicitly these preoccupations to any state component (neither politicians, neither agents). There is no generalization process, no political generalization. In her case, as in others, the notion of electoral stake does not seem to be an explanatory variable. To use this notion, some factors seem preponderant: the political interest, some specific media practices, and a kind of belief toward the state capacities and toward the representative democracy. However, the enquiry and its empirical design permit us to observe another result, a post-electoral one. Meeting the same interviewees several months after the 2012 electoral sequence, we collect other data about their expectations. Nelly and Sofiatou for instance, tell us their deceptions related to employment and youth policies; and thus, these deception processes seem to be behind an increased distance from politics.

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To conclude temporarily this work thus makes contribution to the analysis of the representative democracy and its possible “crisis” to the prism of the study of popular representations of the politics, of its actors and its institutions. The studied young people from popular classes are little interested in the policy and in the democracy, they are not very concerned and almost do not express clear waiting. That does not prevent some of them from voting, sometimes regularly, because the electoral act itself is considered as an “obligation” for those which were socialized in families’ voters regularly although often in a disinvested way (Gaxie, 1993). Structurally distant from the policy, this population is not more interested by the media campaign around the elections of 2012 which remains little followed, even avoided by disinterest. Forms of non-implication are thus observable whatever are the retained indicators and the periods of observations (before, during and after the elections). Moreover for these young people from the popular classes, the actors of the political delegation of power are at the same time little known concerning the parties, and judged according to criteria which often do not concern the universe of the instituted policy for the candidates. For them, the State if it sometimes constitutes a horizon of practical expectations is not fundamentally carrier of stakes. It remains that all these profane representations of the politics, the institutions and the representative democracy are socially anchored and narrowly dependent on the conditions of existence of the interviewees. Besides, this result could be of general interest.
Finally, concerning representative democracy, it would be simplistic to deduce from some results an illustration of the « crisis » of the political system. The important gap between our results and the official facade of democracy introducing citizens as informed and interested by politics is not a recent phenomenon. On the contrary, distance to politics from popular backgrounds is a structural phenomenon which cannot be reduced to the actual situation. However, the peculiarity of the recent period could reside on the exacerbated and general character of this non-interest for political questions. This point undoubtedly could be connected with contemporary transformations of popular categories themselves and notably migratory phenomena. The potential development of feelings of national non-belonging could have consequences as a tendency to remain away from politics (Ribert 2007). We put down a continuity hypothesis of progressive social transformations leading step by step evolutions of citizen relations to politics in general and those of popular backgrounds in particular. These ongoing mutations could besides accentuate the inequalities of politicization between social groups, consolidating so the political and social domination of the best endowed.
Annex :

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The interviewees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Nelly is a young woman (18 years old) who prepares a Pro Sales A-level. She lives in a sensitive urban area (HLM). Her mother is unemployed and she does not know her father.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sofiatou is 20 years old; she is in the same class than Nelly. She lives also in a sensitive urban area (HLM), her father is a workman in the building sector and her mother is unemployed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Ana is 19 years old, is a young girl in Pro secretary A-level. She lives in a small suburbs house. Her father is clerk in a firm of building (workman at the beginning of his career) and her mother is childminder.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Manon is in the class of Ana (20 years). She lives with her mother (municipal agent - category C) in a HLM near a sensitive area. Her father, security agent of night, is remarried with a nurse and they live in a small pavilion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sofia is 19 years old, she is in a A-level reception sector; She lives alone in a small detached studio located in a distant commune, her mother is deceased and her father is incarcerated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dimitri, as the other boys, is in Pro A-level of cabinetmaking (20 years old). He lives with his mother who is education assistant in nursery school (CDD) in a flat located in a working-class neighborhood; his father is butcher in retirement.</td>
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<td>- Thomas is also 20 years old; he lives with his mother in the same quarter than Dimitri. His father is electrician and his mother works in a laboratory of medical analyses.</td>
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<td>- Damien (19 years) also lives with his parents (father employee at SNCF – French National Railways Company and his mother is at home). They are tenants of a small flat in a building located in outer suburbs.</td>
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<td>- Valentin is 20 years old; he lives in a social accommodation located in a building of a well-off commune. His father is a small shopkeeper and his mother is educator in a public day nursery.</td>
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<td>- At last, Alvaro (20 years) is born from unknown father and handicapped mother. He lives (probably fostering) « with people of the family », that he sometimes introduces as his &quot;parents&quot;, accountant and commercial agent, since he is 11 years old, age at which he arrived in France.</td>
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Bibliography