

Erasmus School of
History, Culture and
Communication

**“I have the anger of the people in me!”
The Yellow Vests and the symbolic struggle over ‘the people’**

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Mobilization in collective action

In the age of Facebook and Twitter, simple yet potentially viral messages are *allegedly* enough for collective mobilization.

Such simple messages “require little in the way of persuasion, reason, or reframing to bridge differences with how others may feel about a common problem”

(Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 744)

A stylized, handwritten-style logo of the word "Erasmus" in a dark blue color, located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

“Le peuple” at the heart of the Gilets Jaunes movement

« Ils ont ignoré le peuple pendant trop longtemps et le peuple ne veut plus d'eux. C'est pourquoi les «gilets jaunes» fédèrent sans les partis politiques. »

They [politicians] have ignored the people for too long and the people no longer want them. That's why the Yellow Vests are able to mobilize without political parties.

(Jacqueline Mouraud, charismatic figure of the mouvement)

Il admet « comprendre la colère des “gilets jaunes”, c’est l’expression du peuple, c’est un mouvement général qui vient après des années de baisse du pouvoir d’achat »

The anger of the Yellow Vests, it is a manifestation of the people, it is a general movement which follows years of decreasing purchasing power.

(Christian Estrosi, Mayor of Nice)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Estrosi', located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Juste pour qu'on s'y retrouve,
je vais demander à ceux qui sont
du vrai peuple de bien vouloir
lever la main...



**“Le peuple”: a simple, viral, yet highly
contested message**

**How does the discursive terrain affect
mobilization?**

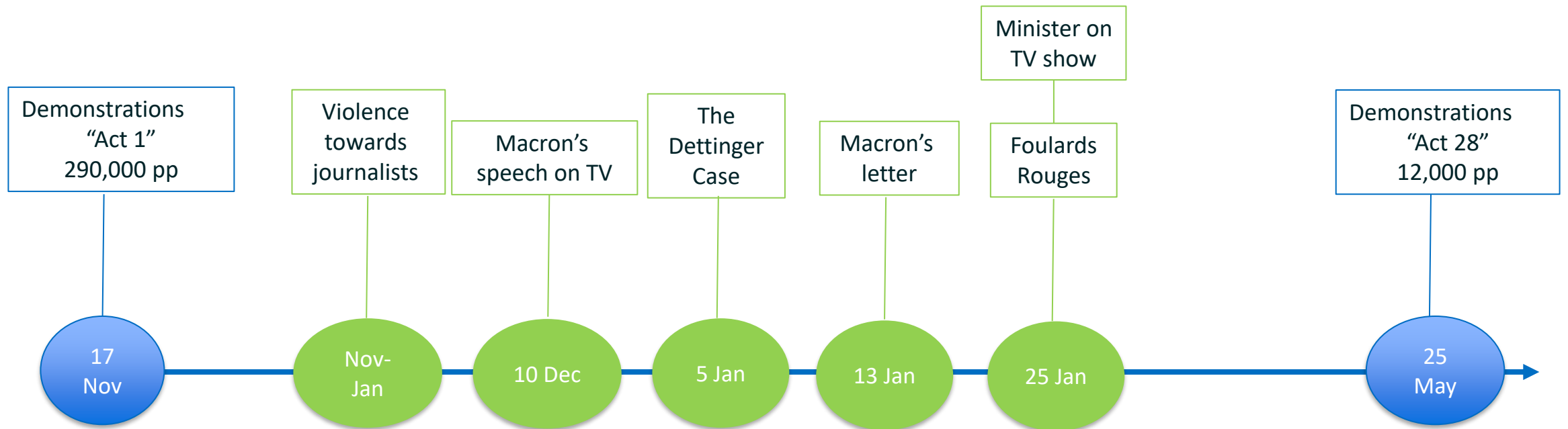
*“Just to clarify things, I’m going to ask the real people
to raise their hand...”*

Ezra

Moments selected for the analysis

→ The selected moments illustrate the discursive struggle around “the people” at the early stage of the mobilization

→ Analysis focused on the voices giving meaning to who “the people” are



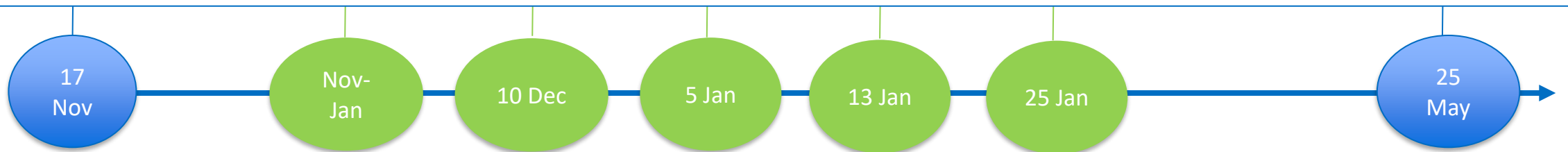
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→ The selected moments illustrate the discursive struggle around “the people” at the early stage of the

→ The destitute working class

→ The law-abiding citizens



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“Le peuple” of the Gilets Jaunes: The destitute working class



“I am a regular citizen. I work, I get by... but the end of the month is complicated. I have protested for the retired, for the future of my children, for the single women (...) I am a yellow vest. I have the anger of the people in me. I see all these presidents, all these ministers, I see the State stuff itself, milking us, they can’t even set an example.”

(Christophe Dettinger)

“For 20 months you [Macron] have insulted us, ignored our expectations, filled the pockets of your friends and other lobbies with money (...) What did you expect?”

(Post on the FB group “La France en colère”)

“Le peuple” of the Republic: The law-abiding citizens



“For all who had enough of the anarchist methods of the yellow vests, who don’t give a damn about the restricting the freedom of other citizens, who do not care about the damage to the fragile small businesses, rejoin the red scarves to show that no, the entire France does not accept the totalitarian methods of the yellow vests. We want the return of the rule of law...”

« I don’t accept pressure and insults, for example against representatives of the people, I don’t accept general accusations, for instance against the media, journalists, institutions and civil servants. If everybody attacks everybody, society comes apart! ”

(Emmanuel Macron)

"This is what matters most to me: to defend the Republic, our freedom. It’s a call to citizens living in fear. The ‘Gilets Jaunes’ claim to be the people: but a great part of the people is staying silent today, hiding away even."

(Laurent Soulié, organizer of the FR movement)

Implications and directions for future research

1. Recovering the discursive struggle in the study of mobilization.
2. The intersection between the discursive struggle entailed in mobilization and populism.

A stylized, handwritten-style logo for Erasmus, featuring a large, flowing 'E' followed by the word 'Erasmus' in a cursive script.