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Mathieu Brugidou, Caroline Escoffier

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Mobilisation, framing and territorial public opinion. Concerning a project to build a VHV line in the Lot region of France.

Mathieu Brugidou (EDF R&D and CIDSP-PACTE), Caroline Escoffier (EDF R&D)
mathieu.brugidou@edf.fr, caroline.escoffier@edf.fr

Abstract :

“Mobilisation, framing and territorial public opinion. Concerning a project to build a VHV line in the Lot region of France”

This article looks at someone who is often omitted from works on framing, despite being of central importance therein: the ordinary citizen. When presenting their social construction of reality (framing), it is ordinary citizens that social movements are targeting; yet more often than not, said citizens are deemed to have the most limited of choices - either to demonstrate assent by joining a movement, or to demonstrate indifference by doing nothing at all. By structuring theoretical reflection around public opinion and innovative empirical devices (experimental survey using open-ended questions), this work aims to show how confronting discursive conceptions of public opinion with framing theory helps to bring the question of publics and of public opinion within the scope of the sociology of collective action. With this objective in mind, we base ourselves upon the empirical study of the different “publics” brought into being by a local controversy (a project to build a VHV electricity line in the Lot region of France) through analysis of the *spiel* or frames produced through collective action. In particular, the study shows that it is possible to identify different publics in accordance with these framings, and that they vary in part according to the level of concernment (measured levels of interest in and information on the controversy) and select (or are selected by) distinct social properties. These observations are important when using surveys to analyse public opinion. The use of experimental surveys that are based upon sample construction (localised in this case) and sequences of open and closed questions constitutes an attempt to take two contexts into account : a) there is no “public opinion” in the sense of any single substantial entity; there are “different publics” which have come about through controversy and which are connected within a public arena. They thus form a public opinion which is not *incorporated*, but which is instead *articulated* and *stabilised* within a public discourse; b) it is the framing operations that are carried out on different “stages” (mobilisation, negotiation, media, public debate, etc.) that create these different publics. Textual analysis of the open-ended questions allows us to recapture the power of these frames and to unpackage aggregated opinion into a closed “yes” or “no” question. It is then possible to reconstruct the different figures of the public and the “vocabularies of motives” which give them their coherency.

Summary:

This paper examines a figure who, despite being central to works on framing, is often ignored : the ordinary citizen. By structuring theoretical reflection around public opinion and innovative empirical devices (experimental survey using open-ended questions), this work aims to show how confronting discursive conceptions of public opinion with framing theory helps to bring the question of publics and of public opinion within the scope of the sociology of collective action. With this objective in mind, we base ourselves upon the empirical study of the different “publics” brought into being by a local controversy (a project to build a VHV electricity line in the Lot region of France) through analysis of the *spiel* or frames produced through collective action. In particular, the study shows that it is possible to identify different publics in accordance with these framings, and that they vary in part according to the level of concernment (measured levels of interest in and information on the controversy) and select (or are selected by) distinct social properties.

Numerous authors (Cefaï and Trom, 2001) have demonstrated how framing analysis (Snow et al.,

1986) can help sociology of collective action and social movements. In particular, they have shown its utility in analysing the reasons for militant action, going as far as to see collective mobilisation as an activity designed to “produce significations”, defining problematical situations, making diagnoses and suggesting solutions. From this standpoint, social movements establish “new ways of perceiving and judging, of identifying with collective bodies and of relating to the public thing” (Cefaï and Trom, 2001, p12). This cognitive activity is directed at “supporters” who need to be recruited, at “opponents” who one tries to neutralise, or even at “public opinion” from whom one tries to gain *assent*.

This paper aims to validate the framing theory which states that mobilisation involves encouraging public approval, and that with this aim in mind, providing reasons acceptable to the public as to why they should so approve. Does collective mobilisation therefore enable us to build “publics” sharing the same definitions of the situation and the same framings? Is it possible to specify these “publics” using the reasons for commitment that are put forward? The chosen angle is designed to weaken the opposition between the different “*publics*” - or “public opinion”, seen as the targeted goal (always instrumentalised to some extent as a resource) – who have minimum capacities for action (reduced to relatively passive assent) and the “*players*” (militants, supporters) involved in the mobilisation, who have large capacities for action and who will be questioned on the reasons for their commitment, etc.

In parallel to the framing theory, this paper therefore also uses theoretical and methodological tools from research trends that attempt to renew approaches to public opinion :

- in both the United States [Hermes, 2001] and in France [Quéré, 1990 ; Kaufmann, 2002], theoretical reflection on public opinion is undergoing a major paradigm change which, in particular, is focusing upon the competency of “ordinary” agents and upon the importance of situational and discursive (or even deliberative) aspects in the development and expression of public opinion, and at the very least, this change means significant alterations to the “behavioural” paradigm [Zask, 1999];
- this theoretical progress has also benefited from or led to methodological innovations relating to new types of devices which pay more attention to additional information and to the effects of context and framing [Grunberg, Mayer and Sniderman, 2002]. Over the last twenty years, convergence of the concerns of statisticians, linguists [Rastier, 1991] and computer scientists has led to progress being made in the analysis of textual data [Lebart and Salem, 1994], which has led in turn to new ways of processing natural language, of dealing with major texts and, singularly, with open-ended questions [Brugidou, 2003]. This progress in methodology enables us to envisage hybrid survey devices which will allow more room for open-ended questions, or for a mix of closed and open-ended questions [Brugidou et al., 2004].

Because they offer a discursive definition of public opinion and develop experimental devices, these works allow us to understand the forms of public opinion – both argumentative and situated. So it is then possible to highlight the capacities of “ordinary” citizens to argue and to “increase in generality” in order to justify a stance, and thus to attempt a “discursive” description of public opinion.

This paper attempts to show how the comparison of discursive conceptions of public opinion with framing theory helps us to re-examine the question of publics and public opinions within the framework of the sociology of collective action.

To achieve this, we will present an empirical study of the different “publics” that developed

during a controversy, using the “argumentative topos” or framings produced by collective action. In particular we will show that it is possible to use these framings to identify the different publics, and that the latter vary in part in terms of the level of “concernment” (the level of concern and of information with regard to the controversy measured elsewhere) and that they select (or are selected by) distinct social properties.

A regional development controversy: a question of local public opinion and of survey device

This study is based upon a survey of local opinion in relation to the construction of a very high voltage electricity line in the region.

The project for a VHV line in the Quercy Blanc region was the object of several technical studies in the 1990s. In 1996 and 1997 a new project was put forward for discussion. At the end of 2002, following persistent local opposition, local public discussions were organised in the form of various meetings in different areas of the Lot region and in various municipalities of the Tarn et Garonne region, so that everyone could learn about and debate the different solutions. At the end of these discussions, RTE (the public organisation in charge of the electricity transport network) announced that it was withdrawing its project to build a Very High voltage electricity line in the Quercy Blanc region.

The survey was carried out in June 2003, following ten years of strong opposition to the project, and just a few months after the eight public meetings had been held [Drocourt and Ras, 2004]; these meetings had led to considerable coverage by local media.

It might seem paradoxical to use an opinion survey to examine the public of a controversy. We nevertheless feel that the proposed device is far enough removed from existing poll studies to escape this criticism; there are two reasons for this:

- first of all, this device is designed to seize *territorialised* public opinion. The level of public interest and involvement is closely related to territorial attitudes. The survey was therefore designed to differentiate publics through the use of territorial sub-samples. As with *in situ* surveys carried out on demonstrators [Favre, Filleule and Mayer, 1997] we thus had the resources with which to distinguish between the “identification group”, the “attention group” and the “concerned publics” group as described by Cobb and Elder, and a “mass public”, “an indistinguishable whole made up of individuals brought together for the purpose of opinion polls” [Gerstlé, 2003 p. 869], even though this may mean discussing the categories of public and deeming them to be unsatisfactory within the framework of our description.
- secondly, the survey aims to reconstitute a *discursive* public opinion. Some of the questions asked are “open” questions, designed to collect not only spontaneous answers (as opposed to choosing between a limited and number of standardised responses) but also a *discourse* on the controversy in question. The reflexive dimension is vital here, because it is the interviewees’ ability to *justify* that are requested. These responses mobilise real “motive vocabularies”, to use Mills’ term [Mills, 1940 ; Trom, 2001]; it is not a question of identifying “intimate convictions” which determine a person’s involvement in a collective action, but rather the “acceptable ways of showing one’s heartfelt beliefs, acceptable and intelligible ways of projecting oneself into a given context of action” [Cefaï, 2005]. The advantage of the technique used to analyse the open-ended questions (analysis of textual data, Alceste methodology [Reinert, 1995]) is that it does not reduce the discursive aspect of the responses. It does not merely identify the themes, but also allows us, on the one hand, to partly recreate

the speech markers, and, on the other hand, to rebuild the linguistic and cognitive patterns behind the enunciations [Brugidou, 2001].

The survey device has several remarkable technical characteristics :

The three sub-samples were built by quota: in addition to the classic quota (sex, age and profession of the head of family), the sample build took into account the *level of the head of household's education* and the *zone of habitation*.

The device also made use of most of the possibilities offered by the computer-assisted telephone interview system (CATI):

- the shared sample technique allowed us to test the order of the questions (cf. the order of use below) and the effects of context (particularly in the argumentation),
- micro-narratives were recorded in order to help homogeneously assess their strength of conviction (the narratives were not read by the interviewers),
- the questionnaire included several sequences made up of closed and open-ended questions allowing us to combine standpoints and justifications. The sequence is considered as a whole (a series of interactions) and is processed as a “discourse” combining the response to the closed question and the verbatim of the open-ended question.
- finally, by recording all answers to the open-ended questions we were able to perform a textual analysis of the verbatim texts.

Presentation of the method used to analyse open-ended questions

It was important for us to have techniques for analysing open-ended questions that went beyond mere manual content analysis. In particular, this allowed us to use the analysis of formal recurrences in answers to identify different isotopes. We chose the Alceste method which uses a statistical approach to identify, within a given corpus of text (the answers to the open-ended question), homogeneous verbatim sub-groups through their lexical profile. The categories of response thus obtained can be characterised by the sociological variables available in the poll, be they socio-demographic or attitude-based. Textual analysis thus has the advantage of (relatively) clearly separating two stages of analysis: first of all the formalisation and processing of the data, then the sociological study of these results which must firstly be built and argued⁶. In addition to statistical comments, we want to provide linguistic and sociological analyses of the texts. The interpretation of classes identified using the Alceste methodology is based on an “external” characterisation of the class (opposition and proximity in relation to the other classes as they are seen, for example, by the factorial graph) and on “internal” criteria (words and responses characteristic of the class). The “illustrative” variables (linguistic variables: categorisation of tool words etc. and socio-demographic variables describing the respondents) allow us to identify certain characteristics of the response classes. The analysis thus offers an “interpretative path” based on the three types of indicator used.

The way in which responses are collected is one of the main criticisms of open-ended question corpora. But the exhaustive recording of responses throughout this poll more than makes up for such defects.

The use of textual analysis for this type of poll and corpus is especially pertinent, for two reasons which relate to the unequal weights of the various groups and the consistency of attitudes:

- the technique for analysing open-ended questions, because it lends a different weight to responses - depending on their length (longer responses are better represented in the classification) and their typicality (responses which were atypical in terms of vocabulary were not classified) – applies a real “political metric” to responses, following in this respect Blumer and Bourdieu’s recommendations for a better rendering of the “factual inequality of opinions” [Blondiaux, 1997; 1998]. The advantage of this approach is that it does not prejudge public concern or competency. There is no *a priori* weighting of the samples (using non-proportional quotas determined in accordance with a given competency); it is the *responses* which vary in accordance with the event and with the interviewee’s involvement, knowledge and concern. The unequal skill of the different publics is thus restored through the statistical processing of the responses.
- the stereotypical nature of the response upon which the *textual data* analysis relies (and which involves response format and recurrence in order for the data to be processed) does not necessarily mean we have an empty stereotype: the reasons for commitment put forward by the interviewees are culturally sedimented and socially available argumentative topoi. This question of typicality can also be approached from a sociology of attitudes angle [Caillot and Denni, 2004]. An atypical response (i.e. the classification algorithm is unable to assign the response to a group and thus to identify a linguistic and cognitive schema underlying the response) would send us back to the “no-attitude” concept as understood by Converse [Converse, 1964].

Opponents within the debate population

Opponents of the electricity line project represent just under half of the interviewed population, those in favour represent only 17% of the total, with 34% being neither for nor against.

From a strictly sociodemographic point of view, the most discriminatory variables explaining opinions of the project are political tendency on the one hand and socio-professional category on the other (though it is the weight of retired people among those in favour of the line that is measured here). Sex, age, housing type, followed by income and qualifications are also relevant factors, albeit to a much smaller extent.

The most salient characteristic of the opposing population is thus their proximity to ecological parties: 75% of the “ecologists” state themselves to be against the project. Those in favour of the project have proportionally more people tending towards right-wing politics.

More sensitive to ecological arguments, they are also younger than the overall population : 48 years old as against 55 on average among those in favour of the project, and just over 50 years old for the population as a whole.

It is partly due to their age that they also appear to be significantly more active than the rest of the population : only one in three is retired whereas for the population of the region as a whole almost 50% are retired.

Looking at socio-demographic variables alone, and keeping the same proportions, for those opposing the project we can already talk about a population closer to the ecologists, more active, with a higher socio-professional category, younger, better off and better educated than the reference population. From a territorial point of view, people living to the west of the line (and to

a lesser extent to the south) who are the most against the project: 75% of interviewees in the west and 50% in the south stated they were against the project.

On the other hand the people of Cahors have a greater tendency to be neither for nor against the project, with those living in the area to the north tending to be more in favour.

We also find a link with the length of time living in the region. The vast majority (67%) of people living in the Lot region (and where relevant in neighbouring counties) for less than one year and 55% of those who have been living there for less than 10 years declare themselves to be against the project. When we combine the territorial and social aspects we find among the project's opponents the emerging profile of "neo-rurals".

Justifying stances

In as much as we are trying to identify different public opinions, we have tried to measure, using levels of involvement (to what extent people feel concerned and the extent to which the line project affects their municipality or that of their family/friends), levels of information (what do they objectively know about the project?) and levels of commitment (do they belong to any associations?).

These indicators confirm the intermediate positions of those in favour of the project: they are relatively well informed, but are not very involved - for both aspects, to a slightly lesser degree than opponents and to a slightly greater extent than the undecided. Opponents to the project are also more involved in associations.

At this level of analysis our results support the idea of the existence of two publics, one of which is aware and concerned, corresponding to those opposing the project (characterised by the political proximity to ecologist parties and the geographical proximity of the proposed lines, but also the fact of being active), the other of which is a "broader public" which is essentially neither for nor against the project, characterised by the lack of interest (concern) felt, the lack of commitment in political life or associations, and retirement.

Working from the idea that opinions are not based solely on arguments but also on a combination of players, values and particular arguments, we tried, in parallel to analysing their responses to open-ended questions, and rather than (or in addition to) positioning them in relation to isolated arguments, to observe their reaction to two statements; these statements refer to players involved in the project and in the controversy (EDF, technicians, associations, local politicians) and set out the arguments for and against the project.

Rather than identifying the publics in terms of certain socio-demographic characteristics, and analysing the nature of their arguments and opinions of the project, this method is based on different accounts of the project and on observing the nature of the publics thus defined.

In order to test the impact that information had upon the project and on determining public opinion, i.e. to some extent test the effects of context, we worked on a shared sample: some of the interviewees first heard the statement in favour of the project and then the statement against; others heard the statements in the opposite order.

The statements were as follows:

You are going to hear two statements of opposing positions; for each one, please say whether or not you agree.

Statement 1 : In order to provide a better quality and greater quantity of electricity in the Lot region, skilled technicians and competent authorities believe it is necessary to build a very high voltage line across the Quercy Blanc region. This solution is the best technical and economic compromise for the region. After being blocked for 10 years, it makes it possible to build an infrastructure that is vital for both the region and its economy.

Statement 2 : The overhead line project that EDF is trying to force upon people in the Lot region is well beyond what the region needs. The construction of such a line would affect the identity and heritage of the Lot region. It will have a negative affect on tourism by destroying the Quercy Blanc countryside and the St-Jacques de Compostelle pathways. For the last 10 years most elected representatives and associations have been suggesting an underground electricity line, along with other solutions such as a reduction in energy consumption.

We made several observations at the end of this experiment:

First observation: the statement in favour proved to be far less convincing than the statement against. Whilst this result is of course closely linked to the fact that the sample contained a large number of people opposing the project (just under half), it goes beyond this: 75% of the interviewees found the statement “against” to be convincing as opposed to only 50% being convinced by the statement “in favour”.

Profile of responses to each of the two arguments (in %)

	convincing	not convincing	don't know	Total
Statement in favour	50	32	17	100
Statement against	75	18	6	100

Second observation: aside from the fact that the statement in favour of the project convinced fewer people, the strength of this statement proved to be linked to the context in which it was read: when the statement “in favour” was read first, 57% of interviewees found it to be convincing. Only 38% were convinced when it was read second.

Third observation: the effect of context did not hold true for the statement “against”; in this case the order of reading was in fact independent of the resulting conviction. So there is not just an effect of context which has as a consequence a first statement that is always more convincing: by first offering interviewees another framing, by using the statement against to give them other counter-arguments and thus giving them reasons to oppose the project, their opinions change.

**Profile of responses to each of
the two arguments (in %)**

*when the statement **IN FAVOUR**
is read first*

	convincing	not convincing	don't know	Total
Statement in favour	57	25	19	100
Statement against	75	20	6	100

**Profile of responses to each of
the two arguments (in %)**

*when the statement **AGAINST**
is read first*

	convincing	not convincing	don't know	Total
Statement in favour	38	48	15	100
Statement against	77	17	7	100

Of course, these two questions are not diametrically opposed. But clear agreement with or opposition to the project mean that one agrees with one statement and disagrees with the other. In this study it is not possible to determine whether a change in position regarding the two statements is due to the changing or particularly affable character of the interviewee, to the persuasive effect of the second statement (the interviewee really does change his/her mind) or to the interviewee rectifying his/her position – i.e. that the framing that is offered gives them a broader vision of the question and in fact corresponds better to their real opinion. On the other hand we notice that effect of context and effect of counter-argument are cumulated: in considering the nature of the first statement to be read (statement or counter-statement) and of the response given (agreement or opposition), we obtain a variable predictor of the response to the second statement. As the following table shows, whilst both effects are in play, the fact of being in opposition as from the first statement (i.e. of stating oneself to “not agree”, which probably means previously having the idea of a possible alternative to the statement) would appear to be more determining than the statement upon which the opposition bears.

Predictive power of the response to the second statement depending on the initial response and statement

People convinced by the 1st statement	
statement in favour 1 st	of whom 30% WILL NOT BE convinced by the statement AGAINST
statement against 1 st	of whom 57% WILL NOT BE convinced by the statement in favour
People not convinced by the 1st statement	
statement against 1 st	of whom 72% WILL BE convinced by the statement in favour
statement for 1 st	of whom 93% WILL BE convinced by the statement AGAINST

The experiment shows that in addition to the given socio-demographic criteria, public opinions are also determined in a dynamic manner, in controversy, in different ways depending on the information available and on the way in which it is passed on.

Analysis of the mobilisation “publics” using argumentative topos

Through analysis of the open-ended questions, the poll device offers a third way of looking at the publics in the Lot controversy, and at their capacity for argumentation. This time it is also a question of focusing solely on the opposing population (as mentioned above, this represents half of the total population), in order to identify distinct publics on the basis of their capacity for argumentation – how they justify their opposition to the project.

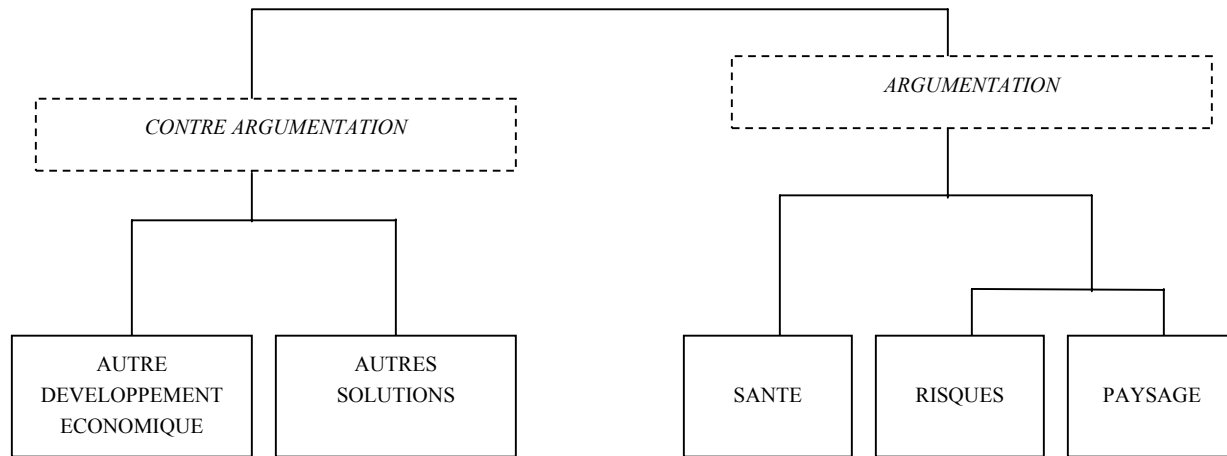
In particular, the study looks at responses to the following sequence of questions :

Q : Are (were) you yourself for, against, or neither for nor against a very high voltage line running through the Quercy Blanc region?

In favour	Against	Neither for nor against	NA
17%	46%	34%	3%

Q – Why ?

The analysis made using Alceste methodology only covered responses “against” (46%, n=731); it reveals 5 classes of stable response built around argumentative topos.



Hierarchically descending classification, dendrogram of stable classes

The descending hierarchical classification first of all distinguishes a group of responses putting forward arguments and counter-arguments with which to justify opposition to the project. The counter-arguments involve taking the arguments that are the basis for the VHV line (which supposes that one knows them) and then arguing against them. The arguments put forward reasons for opposing the planning project.

The study first sets out the arguments and shows that they correspond to different argumentative topos. In the arguments group we must distinguish between two types of framing :

- 6 the first framing looks for a common experience shared by inhabitants of the region. It describes the physical insertion of the line into the region and stresses the numerous impacts that this will have on the countryside and on *life* within the region (setting out the potential dangers for inhabitants and fauna).
- 7 the second framing calls upon expert knowledge of electromagnetic fields and their effect on health. It lists and condemns the consequences of these waves, which are invisible and which therefore escape common experience.

Argument

The first framing is proper to the publics who are the least informed about the controversy, stating themselves to be the least concerned and the least involved in mobilisation. As tables 1 and 2 show, it is also specific to those who are the least qualified (especially regarding responses to the “Risk” class) and who have the lowest levels of income.

Table 1 : socio-demographic variables characteristic of the different categories.

Variables & Modalities	OTHER SOLUTIONS % mod in the group	OTHER ECONOMIC DEV % mod in the group	HEALTH % mod in the group	RISKS % mod in the group	COUNTRY-SIDE % mod in the group
OVERALL					
QUALIFICATIONS					
none/primary leaving certificate	33.30	27.60	25.48	42.11	35.24
o-levels/vocational training certificate	36.45	32.70	42.32	38.86	36.78
a-levels	13.31	15.66	16.13	11.67	15.43
college/university	16.94	24.04	16.07	7.36	12.56
INCOME					
< 999 euros	15.35	12.71	20.81	31.65	25.23
1000 euros 1999 euros	31.55	26.37	25.54	33.75	38.92
1999 euros 2999 euros	24.42	27.04	29.17	13.78	18.42
> 3000 euros	11.48	23.84	13.40	4.51	8.23
NA, NR	17.20	10.04	11.09	16.30	9.20
TIME LIVED IN THE REGION					
< 10 years	25.61	32.55	23.95	27.53	15.23
10 20 years	12.57	15.05	19.25	15.23	12.92
> 20 years	61.82	52.40	56.79	57.23	71.85
SEX					
male	63.04	48.05	46.38	37.34	43.65
female	36.96	51.95	53.62	62.66	56.35
NEORURALITY					
yes	17.76	27.00	13.98	9.84	10.06
no	82.24	73.00	86.02	90.16	89.94
OWNER/TENANT STATUS					
owner	83.55	59.98	64.73	57.45	58.82
tenant or sub-tenant	13.05	32.40	23.80	29.88	28.28
housed for free	3.40	7.62	11.47	12.67	12.77
HABITAT					
Rural	56.95	52.10	57.01	47.64	43.15
< 20 000 inhabitants	22.34	20.08	23.77	36.88	32.31
> 20000 inhabitants (Cahors)	20.71	27.82	19.22	15.48	24.54
PROFESSION OF HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD					
Farmer	7.42	2.62	5.68	6.85	4.60
Artisan, shopkeeper, company director, freelance, teacher	7.86	17.75	10.01	8.10	10.51
Intermediate profession, mid-level executive	24.01	27.56	19.94	7.58	21.37
Employee, service personnel	8.37	10.02	8.68	9.13	13.04
Labourer/factory worker	22.92	10.11	22.12	28.72	17.27
Retired, other inactive category	29.42	31.95	33.58	39.62	33.20
TYPE OF HOUSING					

detached house	91.91	87.39	85.11	79.42	78.55
council flat	3.01	6.13	5.83	8.81	9.17
residential flat	5.08	6.47	9.06	11.77	11.75
MARITAL STATUS					
married	63.32	52.00	52.86	51.71	51.93
living with partner	6.94	8.47	11.62	15.39	11.83
single	16.14	12.46	19.87	12.81	20.37
widow(er), divorced	13.01	26.12	15.65	20.08	15.73
TERRITORY					
Cahors	20.71	27.82	19.22	15.48	24.54
Outside zone	19.64	20.35	19.72	25.31	20.20
Area to north	10.02	13.54	14.72	23.99	17.56
Area to west	19.56	15.87	18.75	9.15	13.67
Area to south	30.07	22.43	27.59	26.06	24.04

“It ruins the countryside”

This category contains those with under-average income, living in towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants (though not a rural milieu) and above all living in the Lot region for over 20 years. These are therefore not neo-rural people. This public has a very low level of involvement in the controversy over the line project. It is not exactly the public as a whole as described by G. Almond [Almond, 1950] in as much as the interviewees take a stance on the controversy and justify their stance with a “common place”, an argumentative topos which has probably been the most covered by the media – that of protecting the countryside.

It should be noted that the Countryside topos [Trom, 1996] is in reality the most widespread in as much as 63% of responses use a lexical terms characteristic of this framing. The “countryside” class of response is built from responses that use only this type of framing (all the other classes, including those built from counter-arguments, mention this framing in at least 50% of responses). There are nevertheless significant differences in the terms used which translate the different points of focus between those who mention the *posts* that ruin their view (“because it’s horrible, when you see all those pylons, all those lines, if you put all that in the middle of my garden I wouldn’t be happy.”) and those who mention the *countryside* and the *aesthetic* damage demonstrating a greater capacity to increasingly generalise (particularly by introducing distance between the “denouncer” and the “victim” [Boltanski, 1990]).

pretty, post, countryside, spoil, wires, beautiful, milieu, nature, big, large, negative, tree, disfigure, deteriorate, destroy, harmful, cable, setting, country, field, deterioration, iron, upset, pylon, ruin, bury, horrible, metallic...

The most characteristic terms in the “Countryside” category

“whereas if you have metal posts and those big pylons, it’s ugly. That’s all there is to it.”
“for the countryside, well, if they put posts like they used to then its ugly. Nowadays it’s possible to bury them, they need to have a modern approach.”

“if they’re going to put pylons, cables all over the place. Yes, exactly. I think they should go underground.”
“because as I said, those bloody posts and wires, its just stuff, that’s all there is to it. It’s not worth it just to ruin the countryside.”
“because they’re going to destroy the countryside, it’s not pretty, it’s ugly. Because pylons, big pylons, wires, it’s all just ...”
“well, you know, it just ruins the countryside, there’s nothing nice about seeing all those metal posts with 5,000-volt cables.”

The most characteristic responses in the “Countryside” category

“It’s dangerous”

This class is over-represented by people with low income, few or no qualifications, who are labourers/factory workers living in towns of less than 20,000 inhabitants (though not in a rural milieu). The level of “objective information” is low (many stated they had no source of information); they are not very concerned by or involved in the controversy. There is an over-representation of radicals and people who vote for the socialist party.

The interviewees also have a major territorial characteristic; they live mainly in the north of the county and are not directly concerned by the project put forward by RTE, the lines running through the southern part of the county. This point might also explain the levels of information and involvement.

Although apparently close to the response framings for the “Health” class, it proves to be very different from both a socio-demographic point of view and with regard to their discourse.

In reality the first responses mention the danger that very high-voltage lines represent: risk of electrocution (for example, when the corn fields are being watered), falling posts (during gales, *“those things are always dangerous. You know, loads of people have been electrocuted when watering, doing stuff like that.”*). The second responses introduce a physical distance between the “victim’s” own body and the “persecutor” (to use Boltanski’s actantial categories). The risk is depersonalised, dematerialised [Boy, Brugidou, 2004] and universalised within a savant discourse, whilst at the same time being incorporated (electromagnetic waves cause cancer). One might also demonstrate that the opposition between “rational” argumentation based on expert discourse and “irrational” argumentation, leaving plenty of room for the sentimental register (usually corresponding to groups with very uneven socio-economic and cultural capital) is not very satisfactory. This opposition is not only explained by different argumentative registers which in fact relate to unequal social positions; it also (first of all) relates to distinct spaces of discussion governed by different “grammars”. The argumentations concerning the countryside and the dangers presuppose a common experience, a common world (or *life* if you prefer). In this *ordinary* public opinion discussion space, it is grammatically incorrect (and quite simply impolite) to call upon knowledge and experience which cannot immediately be shared by all members of the group (for example, savant knowledge of electromagnetic fields which at the very best will look like an authoritative argument, and at the worst like priggish pedantry). The need for *authenticity* [Cardon and Heurtin, 1999] and *probability* [Quéré, 1990, Kaufmann, 2002] govern stated opinion in this ordinary public space.

danger, bad, limit, ground, fall, cut, high, storm, electrocute, human, ugly, radioactive, accident, air, day, word, pile, gale, weather, voltage, thing...

The most characteristic terms in the “Danger” category

“Because of the storms. Can you imagine if the snow broke the lines, that’d cause a power cut, and well, I think that when there are big storms, that’s dangerous too.”

“Well yes, I even know people over in Vioulles who were electrocuted like that. Because when you’re watering, spraying, it goes high up in the air, it attracts the electricity, and then ...”

“Well, I can tell you that I think it’s a danger. Yes. But then again I don’t really know. It can cause accidents, or, or, well, it can cause accidents.”

“um, because that means there’s always more, how can I put this, there’ll always be more stuff in the air, I don’t know, I don’t know the proper terms, and then you’ll always need more, um, what do you call those places where you make electricity”

The most characteristic responses in the “Danger” category

Table 2 : characteristic attitude variables for the different categories

Variables & Modalities	OTHER SOLUTIONS % mod in the group	OTHER ECONOMIC DEVEL. % mod in the group	HEALTH % mod in the group	RISKS % mod in the group	COUNTRY-SIDE % mod in the group
POLITICAL TENDENCY					
far left	4.45	4.18	10.63	6.11	8.23
left wing/radical	21.93	26.31	16.95	36.90	29.61
ecologists	17.86	21.57	24.46	8.68	14.31
hunting, fishing, nature & tradition	4.92	3.86	5.28	4.09	4.76
right wing	13.43	13.62	12.51	9.48	13.93
far right	3.52	6.37	0.00	5.44	4.48
none / no answer	33.89	24.08	30.16	29.30	24.68
LEVEL OF INFORMATION					
none	9.76	22.52	25.92	40.19	26.85
a little	33.26	15.10	27.96	25.98	27.50
Fair amount	36.42	29.61	24.23	18.11	27.29
a lot	20.57	32.77	21.89	15.71	18.36
PARTICIPATION IN DEBATE					
at least one meeting	12.31	11.58	9.67	9.29	4.53
no meeting	87.69	88.42	90.33	90.71	95.47
NUMBER OF SOURCES OF INFO					
none	9.76	23.37	26.00	43.26	29.78
1 or 2	41.65	33.85	33.44	31.99	28.62
3 or 4	30.51	19.88	23.31	19.02	26.84
5 or more	18.08	22.91	17.25	5.73	14.76

“For people’s health”

This second framing on the health aspect characterises a public which is “attentive” to the controversy (high level of information and people declaring themselves to be very concerned), which is ecologically-minded, but which as far as we can tell does not get directly involved in mobilisation (not members of any association). Unlike the interviewees in the “Countryside” and

“Risks” classes, their economic and educational levels are high (without being very high). We find a high number of people living in rural milieus. According to Almond’s typology, we have a form of “general public” that nevertheless differs from “mass public” – which we have seen better characterises interviewees in the “Countryside” and “Risk” classes; it is a so-called “interested” public, which is “informed but little inclined to action” [Padioleau, 1982, p41]. Unlike the “Countryside” and “Risk” classes, the “Health” response class is a public space formalised by public debating rules (for local and political debate) which favour the use of expertise and non-indexed arguments on the situation due to the high demands of desingularisation.

health, reason, level, live, inconvenience, like, concern, aesthetics, normal, area, district, culture, people, night, proximity, ray, view, depend, destroy, harmful, alone, future, low, beauty, effect, cross, deteriorate, magnetic, ecological, nuisance ...

The most characteristic terms in the “Health” category

“well, for all the reasons I said at the beginning, all the inconveniences, the aesthetic nuisances, the magnetism ...”
“for the reasons I gave before. Yes, I can. For the aesthetics, the ecology, for people’s health, for the region’s heritage, heritage, um, the heritage of the earth, of this region.”
“the physical consequences for the people living near the lines, I mean for their health. Because it’s on the St. Jacques route, that’s what I mean.”
“and then there’s the health problems that it can create for people living nearby.”
“because people say that it causes loads of illnesses, thyroid problems, I don’t know what else. It’s because they say that it makes electricity in the ground and things like that, that’s what they say, but as I said, I don’t know.”
“against it, why? Against building a line? Against the illnesses it can cause, cancer.”

The most characteristic responses in the “Health” category

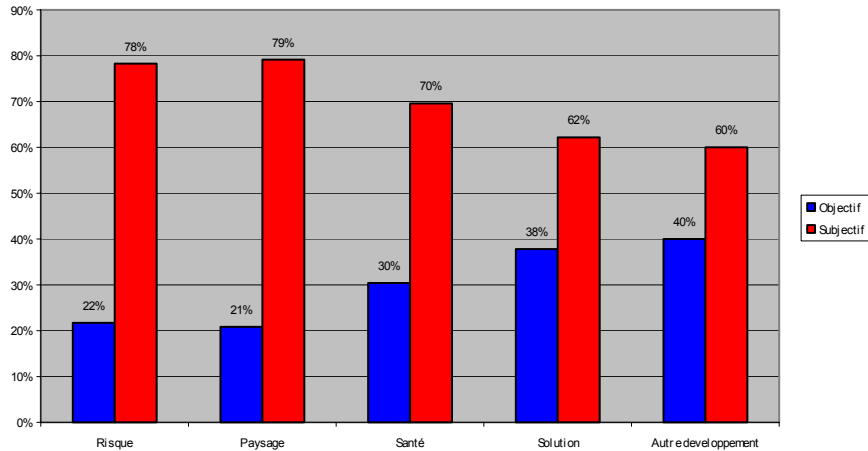
Counter-argument

Another section of those opposing the project develop real counter-arguments. These responses would appear to be characteristic of a population more committed to mobilisation. Here the interviews seem on average to be more concerned and better informed.

Their social status (in terms of income and property) and their cultural capital (qualifications) are higher than those of the other interviewees. This probably explains in part certain discursive characteristics of their responses: the latter are marked by a particularly high number of hapaxes (term occurring only once) and by the frequent use of relative pronouns (which means more complex sentence construction).

Furthermore, unlike the responses developing an argument which call more upon “subjective” adjectives (cf. graph 2), we note an especially frequent use of “objective” adjectives - leading to a demodalised assessment of the situation. The demodalisation of the counter-arguments – also proper to the discourse of science – also takes the form of under use of the first-person personal pronoun. This way of speaking is characteristic of the work of objectivising critique relating to the construction of a *cause* [Cardon and Heurtin, 1999, Boltanski, 1993] and is in opposition to the constraints of expression (personalised discourse, more emotion, etc.) affecting the first framings we analysed.

Graph 2: Types of adjective and framing



“There are other solutions”

In addition to the characteristics common to all of the interviewees involved in the counter-arguments the members of this class have that of being mainly male and of almost all owning their own houses or flats. We see here a sort of “identification public” in the sense that the well-being of this group of owners depends very directly on the problem being resolved. These interviewees stress the need to find other solutions such as underground lines whilst at the same time admitting that this solution is more expensive than that suggested by the planners. They take on board some of the planners’ arguments: overall they accept the need to strengthen Cahors’ and the surrounding region’s electricity supply and seem to understand the economic aspects of the problem. Above all, they believe that there are other ways of strengthening the network – ways that are justified even if they cost more.

Cost, solution, expensive, France, need, strengthen, financial, nuclear, line, passing through, region, supply, overhead, long, necessary, new, Spain, debate, utility, world, method, progress, create, send, guess, exist, return, important, sufficient, technical, Cahors, underground, bury ...

The most characteristic terms in the “Other solutions” category

“just because, wait a second. Overhead? I’m against it, just because they could have run it underground along the motorway.”

“underground. That’s about all really because I do think Cahors needs more electricity, but an overhead line isn’t the only solution.”

“I was against it. Because I don’t think it was needed, I don’t think Cahors needed more electricity, it was just a pretext for building an extra line to send electricity elsewhere, because we’ve got a plant in Golfèch and they have to sell the electricity.”

“well, there are other more expensive ways of having a better ... underground, or along the motorway or the canal, but in any case, everyone always wants it to be somewhere else.”

“there are other solutions for generating electricity nowadays, there are underground lines, there are cleaner ways that are more expensive for local communities.”

The most characteristic responses in the “Other solutions” category

“Another economic development”

This group contains those with the highest levels of qualifications, the most freelancers and intellectuals (and also craftsmen). Many have also been living in the county for less than ten years and would seem to fit the “neo-rural” profile.

Very well-informed and actively involved in the debate, they also develop counter-arguments. Yet these do not argue against the suggested technical solution (for example, arguing for underground rather than overhead). Instead they call into doubt the type of economic development that is presupposed by a high electricity consumption. They thus echo some of the arguments of the anti-line associations by disputing the notion that the Lot region needs industrial development, when the county’s richness resides in its countryside and tourism.

protect, industry, denature, county, development, necessity, energy, beautiful, rural, environment, project, evoke, essential, protection, useful, alternative, north, solar, well-being, Lot, property, region, bring, live, consumption, economic, tourist, kilometre, network...

The most characteristic terms in the “Other economic development” category

“so I didn’t think this was absolutely necessary, not even to maintain current consumption levels, let alone to increase consumption.” “The environment and maybe the debatable utility. Well, the debatable utility, it’s just that maybe it’s not an absolute necessity, not even to maintain the current level of development in the Lot.”
“If it doesn’t justify economic development, I don’t understand why we are creating other energy transports in order to encourage consumption.”
“in order to protect the environment and in order to protect, to protect the rural economy, you always end up back with the same things.”
“and then, just as I said for the environment, I don’t agree with developing this type of energy, if the town needs more electricity then there are other types of energy that can be used to feed the network.”
“I think it’s now that we need to keep the environment for the tourist industry and also for the people living in the region.”

The most characteristic responses in the “Other economic development” category

Two publics emerge, one of which is “concerned” by the controversy because it can potentially affect its property. Generally speaking these are married people, mainly men, with a detached house, who even though they seem more concerned and involved than the others, are not really any better informed, or at least who are informed through information channels that vary very little.

The second militant public is more intellectual (higher socio-professional category, with a wider range of information sources, aware of effects on the surrounding area, but less involved with associations.

Forms of justification and publics

Detailed analysis of the reasons put forward to justify opposition to the Quercy Blanc project leads us back to the concepts we used (framing, argumentation, topos, grammar, publics, statistical groups, etc.) though still without distinguishing between them. The table below attempts to draw up a typology of the different publics and forms of justification.

Tableau 3 : Typology of the different forms of justification and publicisation

Justification	Argument			Counter-argument	
Framing (cognitive)	Harmful to countryside, life		Health	Economic development	
Argumentation (linguistic)	VHV lines mar the countryside	VHV lines are dangerous	Electromagnetic fields are bad for one's health	There are alternative solutions, albeit more expensive ones	There are other ways of developing the region
Rundowns (linguistic)	The countryside is the Region	We must protect ourselves from danger	Principle of precaution	Technical progress means better quality of life	Wealth is not material (consumption)
Publicisation					
Grammar of discussion	Authenticity. Sharing one's experience	Authenticity. Sharing one's experience	Arguments deindexed from the situation. Formal constraints	Arguments deindexed from the situation. Formal constraints	Arguments deindexed from the situation. Formal constraints
Stage	Normal discussion	Normal discussion	Public debate/political debate	Public debate	Public debate/political debate
Public					
Public	Low level of involvement	Low levels of information and involvement Socialist party/left-wing radicals	High level of info., concerned, not directly committed Ecologist	High levels of information and involvement	Very high levels of information and involvement
Statistical group	> 20 years in the region Low income	North of the county Low socio-prof. category, level of education Low income	Rural Mid-level socio-prof. category and education	Owners, men Mid-level socio-prof. category	Neo-rural High socio-prof. category, level of education, income

For the forms of justification, we first of all need to distinguish between three different concepts :
 - *framing* means “selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a message in order to promote a particular definition of a problem, a causal interpretation, a moral assessment and/or a recommendation concerning treatment of the

object” [Entman, 1993 quoted by Gerstlé 2004]. We thus have three types of framing in our study. That of physical Nuisances (to the Countryside, Life), Health and economic Development. For example, Health framing highlights part “of perceived reality”. These answers are less focused on the countryside and totally ignore economic aspects in order to concentrate on the risks of VHV lines.

- *argumentation* means deploying one or more arguments based on the selected framing. The Nuisances framing, which favours the register of “common sense”, concentrates on the material aspects of the lines, the posts, the wires and gives rise to two types of argumentation: the first stresses how much the construction of the lines is a physical attack on the countryside; the second shows the extent to which the lines are a danger to human and animal life in the region.

- *A topos* is a “socialised normative axiom” [Rastier 1987], such as “people from Gascony are boastful”, which allows an *afference*. We have identified the “common places” which support an argumentation, for example that which identifies the countryside with the “country” (region). Saving the countryside (threatened by the electricity lines) therefore means protecting the identity of the Quercy Blanc region and of its inhabitants.

The attention paid to the content of the justifications – and in particular to its cultural and historical substratum which involves identifying the type of “tradition” or corpus the justification is using – must not distract us from the analysis of the forms of publicisation, of the stages and rules or “grammars” which govern the discourses made on these stages.

We essentially distinguished two *grammars* (or “discussion regimes”, cf. below) implying forms of increasing generality :

- that of ordinary discussion, which we have stated to be governed by requirements of authenticity and of shared experience,
- that of public debate, marked by the necessity to disindex the argumentation in relation to the situation.

Finally, it is important to explain the status of the *publics* created by these stages which we will distinguish from *statistical groups* that are characterised by a position in a social space. We refer to a “public” in the sense that the interviewees are aware that they are arguing in a public space (in particular on the “stage” that is the poll). They thus adopt a reflexive position. Several elements, relating to “perceived opinion”, allow us to support this presumption of reflexivity [Gerstlé, 2004] :

- on the one hand, the interviewees are relatively familiar with the balance of power in the public because 64% of the interviewees feel that “the project gave rise to fierce opposition”,
- on the other hand, a great many of the interviewees were able to reconstitute “the other people’s reasons”. Indeed, people with a stance on the project (for or against) were asked, in an open-ended question, to reconstitute what they felt were the reasons justifying their opponents’ position. Some of the interviewees found the reasons put forward by the *alter* : so whilst approximately a third of the opponents said they did not know these reasons, others put forward “good reasons”. These might prove to be “legitimate” (for example the need to strengthen the network or to boost employment by developing industry) or “illegitimate”. They thus denounce the *alter*, in the form of the “third person” for having personal interests in the project (such as financial interests linked to construction of the line: compensation, etc.) that are unacceptable in the framing of this stage.

In studying “political evaporation” phenomena, Ninna Eliasoph has shown how much expressing the problem in terms of general interest or politics, likened to rhetorical eloquence, can be subject to rejection in American society. She has also stressed the importance of “contextual footings” in completing the study of framings and political languages. It is certain that poll surveys, albeit experimental, find this to be a limit.

Conclusions

Using responses to analyse the discourses shows that the interviewees have real competencies to justify their stances. Most of them are capable of argument, or even counter-argument, in relation to a public controversy. But this competency of the public is closely linked not only to people’s social properties but also and perhaps above all to the construction of a “public arena” [Cefaï, 2005] where the controversy is deployed. Analysis of the publics involves characterising the latter via morphological or attitude variables. Yet we have seen that it was not a case of building a statistical *group*, but a *public* [Zask, 1999]: from the statistical method point of view this implies that these variables are illustrative (it is discourses that build the classes). This point is nevertheless ancillary, or rather it constitutes a consequence of the following theoretical hypothesis: the described groupings are built by the controversy and as such constitute groups, but they are reflexive (they argue) and are thus aware of the fact that they form publics (because they argue in the public space, on the “stage” constituted by a poll). So it is not their sociological properties (in the sense of position in the social space or attitude) that build them in public but their political properties (their capacity to debate a form of common good in the public space). Certain responses reveal effects of protest grammar (mobilise a group and create a problem [Brugidou 2000]) or negotiation grammar (represent interests, make trade-offs) in the constitution of the problem. From this point of view a poll always has, above and beyond its descriptive purpose, a normative aim in as much as it requires the interviewees to take a stance, to accept the grammar of stated public opinion. This point is particularly illustrated by the land price argument (which might fall due to the VHV line) which is hardly mentioned at all in the responses to the open-ended question. This argument was tested in a closed question (asked after the open-ended question) : the item “this line will cause land value to fall” was considered to be convincing by 74% of those interviewed, right behind the 83% convinced that “this line will destroy the countryside”. The interviewees are clearly aware of this reason, but it is not considered to be a possible justification (in the sense of a public justification) for opposing a VHV line (as this would immediately be criticised as being a NYMBY syndrome). These differences between open and closed questions have been known for a long time in literature (in particular, the shared sample experience [Gremy,1987]) and have often been analysed as being produced by the norm: the “real” reasons are self-interest (price of land) but this is not spontaneously admitted. The assisted formulation of these “socially illegitimate” reasons in the form of an item in a closed question puts the interviewees in the clear and allows them to feel free to choose this reason. Moving the theoretical perspective onto this problem and its reformulation, not in terms of norms or social pressures, but in terms of *rules* [Giddens,1987], throws a different light on the competency of the interviewees: the notion of rules may well imply that as norms they apply to exchanges (and thus determine them) but due to their semantic dimension, they also make those exchanges possible. They are thus manipulated by the agents just as much as they “manipulate” the agents – if such a formulation has any sense. This theoretical perspective is not without

consequence from the point of view of the methods: it is no longer possible to move away from what we qualified as “superficial rationalisations” gathered through open-ended questions, in order to explore the “real reasons” by using just closed questions. We must henceforth try to gain a better understanding of how ordinary citizens “switch” to different regimes of discourse depending on the stage and use private language or public language depending on the context.

Responding to a poll thus requires mastery of a particular public grammar (which cannot be reduced to political competency but is more of a broader *member* competency) that implies both the expression of subjectivity and a form of increasing generality (a question of aiming for the common good) in accordance with the economy of probability because it must be possible for the stated opinion to be accepted by everyone (not as being true but as being acceptable or even desirable depending on the values and representations shared by the community). It is this normative dimension of the opinion poll – poorly accepted but nevertheless rendered inescapable by its purpose – that makes it a test (democratic in this case) which is to some extent *tense* - to use Boltanski and Thévenot’s terminology – the purpose of which is to produce a public opinion on a question and that it is always possible to criticise as being unfair.

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Annexes

1 Indicator construction

Neorurality indicator

This covers what we felt to be the numerous possible neo-rural characteristics: on the one hand their relatively recent arrival in the Lot region (less than 10 years ago), the political ecology bent, and on the other hand the high levels of education, income and socio-professional categories.

Involvement indicator

This indicator is calculated on the basis of answers to questions 14, 16 and 17) which deal with the notions of being concerned by the project and of living in a municipality (or knowing someone who lives in such a place) affected by the electricity line.

Information indicator

This indicator is based on questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 which measure the level and quality of information available to the interviewees (details of the project to build an electricity line, details of the project to modify the line, project updates).

Commitment indicator

This indicator is based on questions relating to involvement in associations (number of associations, membership of an association protecting the environment) or in politics (mandate): (questions 47 48 49)

Indicators	FOR	AGAINST	NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST		OVERALL
NEO-RURALITY					
YES	14	55	31	100%	12
NO	17	44	38	100%	88
INVOLVEMENT					
LOW	13	37	50	100%	40
MEDIUM	20	48	32	100%	38
HIGH	19	58	23	100%	22
INFORMATION					
LITTLE	15	42	43	100%	27
AVERAGE	15	44	40	100%	28
A LOT	21	44	35	100%	29
HUGE AMOUNT	16	56	27	100%	17
COMMITMENTS					
NONE	17	43	40	100%	70
ONE	19	44	37	100%	14
MORE THAN ONE	15	61	25	100%	15
OVERALL	17	46	37	100%	100%

2 Summary table : those for, those against and those who remain undecided.

(The variables are set out in descending order of the opponents' power to discriminate)

Variables & Modalities	AGAINST % group in modality	AGAINST % mod in group	FOR % mod in group	UNDECIDED % mod in group	OVERALL % mod in population
OVERALL		45.67	16.94	37.39	100.00
TERRITORY					
Cahors	37.95	24.10	32.70	33.31	29.00
Ex-zone	45.96	20.13	20.56	19.59	20.00
Area to the north	36.32	15.45	26.39	21.12	19.42
Area to the west	75.04	14.90	2.31	5.01	9.07
Area to the south	51.60	25.44	18.05	20.97	22.51
POLITICAL TENDENCY					
Far left	45.21	6.90	8.08	6.56	6.97
Socialist party/radical	43.79	26.32	28.48	28.37	27.46
Ecologists	72.38	17.50	3.48	6.58	11.04
Hunting, Fishing, Nature & Traditions	51.26	4.59	2.48	4.21	4.09
Right-wing	37.51	12.60	19.96	16.59	15.34
Far right	53.42	3.42	3.51	2.05	2.92
None/na	40.69	28.67	34.01	35.64	32.18
PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF HEAD OF FAMILY					
Registered unemployed	33.95	1.40	0.22	3.22	1.88
Private sector employee	51.79	28.78	18.59	24.30	25.38
Public sector employee	54.88	25.19	19.79	16.33	20.96
Freelance/Own company	57.11	10.98	4.65	7.97	8.78
Retired/inactive	35.75	33.66	56.75	48.18	43.00
LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT					
0	37.13	32.88	31.13	53.90	40.44
1	47.77	39.60	44.76	32.60	37.86
2	57.92	27.52	24.11	13.50	21.70
PROFESSION OF HEAD OF FAMILY					
Farmer	60.28	5.28	2.68	3.04	4.00
Craftsman, shopkeeper, company director, freelance, teacher	54.25	10.69	6.51	8.06	9.00
Intermediate profession, mid-level executive	57.32	20.08	14.77	11.57	16.00
Employee, service industry employee	48.51	10.62	7.08	10.56	10.00
Labourer/factory worker	49.91	19.67	12.21	18.58	18.00
Retired, other inactive category	35.75	33.66	56.75	48.18	43.00
LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT					
0	42.82	65.92	70.59	75.55	70.31
1	43.81	13.84	16.08	14.40	14.43
2	60.57	20.24	13.32	10.05	15.26
HABITAT					
Rural	51.43	49.69	38.32	39.95	44.12
< 20,000 inhabitants	44.55	26.22	28.98	26.73	26.88
> 20,000 inhabitants (Cahors)	37.95	24.10	32.70	33.31	29.00
QUALIFICATIONS					
None	39.02	33.32	42.99	44.13	39.00
O-levels, vocational training cert.	48.29	37.01	33.63	33.17	35.00
A-levels	50.13	14.27	10.89	12.41	13.00
University	54.11	15.40	12.49	10.30	13.00
LEVEL OF INFORMATION					
0	42.32	24.61	23.54	30.30	26.56
1	44.43	26.80	24.54	29.84	27.55
2	43.77	27.79	35.67	27.44	29.00
3	56.22	20.80	16.26	12.42	16.90
INCOME					
< 999 euros	39.94	22.36	26.67	28.99	25.57
1000 euros - 1999 euros	45.02	31.57	28.80	34.04	32.03

1999 euros - 2999 euros	48.97	21.93	22.02	17.94	20.46
> 3000 euros	54.17	11.94	11.03	7.34	10.06
NA/NR	46.89	12.21	11.49	11.68	11.89
SEX					
Male	46.19	47.53	59.54	40.67	47.00
Female	45.21	52.47	40.46	59.33	53.00

3 Questionnaire

I – Information about the project

Q1 Have you heard about the project to build a new very high voltage (VHV) electricity line in the Quercy Blanc region?

yes

no

na

Q2 Have you heard about the project to modify the very high voltage (VHV) electricity line between Ferrouge and Cahors ?

yes

no

na

For those who have heard about the project (if yes for Q1)

We are now going to discuss the project to build a new line in the Quercy Blanc region.

Q3 Do you know whether this project is still ongoing?

yes, this project is still ongoing

no, this project has been dropped

you don't know (*clear*)

Q4- When did you hear about this project for the first time?

a few weeks ago

a few months ago

a few years ago

na

Q5 When do you think this project was started?

less than a year ago

a few years ago

more than ten years ago

you don't know (*clear*)

Q6- How did you hear about this project? (*more than one answer allowed*)

from newspapers or television → *go to Q7*

from the local council newsletter or by attending a council meeting

through an association → *go to Q8*

from a member of your family or a friend

from an acquaintance or work colleague

from project documentation sent through the post → *go to Q9*

by attending a local meeting to discuss the project

- other

Q7- Which newspaper or television channel was it?

France 3

La semaine du Lot

La dépêche du Midi

Other

Q8- Which association was it? (*precoded open-ended question*)

La Demeure Française

Les Vieilles Maisons Françaises

Les Maisons paysannes de France

Quercy Blanc environnement

La Société Protectrice des Paysages et de l'esthétique en France (SPPEF)

Le GADEL (groupement des associations de défense de l'environnement du Lot)

Other

Q9- Who sent this documentation? (*precoded open-ended question*)

RTE (Réseau Transport Electricité)

EDF

The Government, public authorities

The municipality

Other clear

To be asked with regard to every information source mentioned in Q6

Q10- Was this information clear?

yes

no

na

Q11- Was this information reliable?

yes

no

na

Q12- Would you say that this information was

in favour of the project

against the project

neither for nor against the project

na

Q13- Overall, would you say that you are very well informed, quite well informed, not very well informed, or very poorly informed with regard to this project?

very well informed

quite well informed

not very well informed

very poorly informed

na

For everyone

Q14- Do you feel (*or did you feel if yes for q3*) concerned by this project?

yes, very concerned
yes, quite concerned
no, not very concerned
no, not at all concerned
na

Q15- Why? (*open-ended question*)

For those who have heard about the project (yes in Q1)

Q16 Will this new line cross (*would it have crossed if yes in q3*) your municipality?

yes
no
you don't know

Q17 Will this new line cross (*would it have crossed if yes in q3*) a municipality where someone in your family or a close friend lives?

yes
no
you don't know

For everyone

Q18- In your opinion, what is (*was if yes in q3*) the position of the following organisations or institutions regarding the project to build a high-tension line?

For
Against
Neither for nor against
You don't know
You haven't heard of this organisation

(*random rotation of these 10 items*) EDF, RTE (i.e. the public manager of the electricity transport network), the Lot county council, your local council, the Lot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, government departments, Quercy Blanc Environnement, La Société Protectrice des Paysages et de l'esthétique de la France (SPPEF), Le GADEL (group of associations protecting the environment in the Lot region)

For everyone

Q19 As far as you know, has there been any opposition to this project?

yes, very strong opposition
yes, strong opposition
no, just a little opposition
no, just a very little opposition
You don't know

Q20 Did you hear about the opposition to the construction of a new line in Cahors in 1997?

yes
no
na

OPINION OF THE PROJECT AND DISCUSSION

For everyone

Q21 – Are (*were*) you yourself for, against, or neither for nor against a very high voltage line running through the Quercy Blanc region?

For

Against

Neither for nor against

NA

Q22 – Why? (*Open-ended question – follow up properly*)

If for in q21, ask Q23

If against in q21, ask Q23b

If neither for nor against in q21, ask Q23 AND Q23b

If na in q21 ask Q23 AND Q23b

Q23 - *If for or neither for nor against:*

In your opinion, what reason (or reasons) justify opposition to the construction of a very high voltage line in the Quercy Blanc region? (*Open-ended question*)

Q23b - *If against or neither for nor against:*

In your opinion, what reason (or reasons) are there against the construction of a very high voltage line in the Quercy Blanc region? (*Open-ended question*)

For everyone

Q24 Do you think that the current electricity supply in the Lot region is:

Perfectly sufficient

Sufficient

Not really sufficient

Totally insufficient

You don't know

Here are two summaries of opposing positions. For each one, say whether you agree or disagree (random rotation of scenarii Q25 and Q25b)

Q25 “In order to provide a better quality and greater quantity of electricity in the Lot region, skilled technicians and competent authorities believe it is necessary to build a very high voltage line across the Quercy Blanc region. This solution is the best technical and economic compromise for the region. After being blocked for 10 years, it makes it possible to build an infrastructure that is vital for both the region and its economy.”

do you?

Totally agree

Agree

Disagree

Totally disagree

You don't know

Q25b “The overhead line project that EDF is trying to force upon people in the Lot region is well beyond what the region needs. The construction of such a line would affect the identity and heritage of the Lot region. It will have a negative affect on tourism by destroying the Quercy Blanc countryside and the St-Jacques de Compostelle pathways. For the last 10 years most elected representatives and associations have been suggesting an underground electricity line, along with other solutions such as a reduction in energy consumption.”

do you?

Totally agree

Agree

Disagree

Totally disagree

You don't know

For everyone, random between Q26 and Q26bis

Q26 -

Here are some arguments which have been put forward to justify the construction of a very high voltage line in the Quercy Blanc region. Please state whether you find each statement to be generally convincing or generally unconvincing.

[Random between the items]

It's the best technical solution at the best economic cost.

It's the solution with the lowest impact on the environment and homes.

It will benefit economic development in the Lot region.

It's a solution resulting from lengthy local consultation.

It has been confirmed by many different experts.

It will allow the region to cope with constant increases in electricity consumption.

It will help avoid downtime in the electricity network.

Generally convincing

Generally unconvincing

NA

Q26bis

Here are some arguments which have been put forward to justify the construction of an overhead line in the Quercy Blanc region. Please state whether you find each statement to be generally convincing or generally unconvincing.

[Random between the items]

It will destroy the countryside.

It will reduce the value of land.

It's a technocratic decision.

It will have a negative affect on tourism and the economy in the Quercy Blanc region.

It's only being built to run off surplus production from nuclear power stations.

There is always a health risk.

With a proper energy-saving programme there would be no need to build a new line.

Generally convincing

Generally unconvincing

NA

121

[information] The project was examined on many occasions in the 1990s. In 1996 and 1997 a new project was submitted for approval. In 1999 the Prefect opted for the construction of a very high voltage line across the Quercy Blanc region. At the end of 2002, following persistent opposition, a public debate was

opened up, in the form of various meetings in different parts of the Lot region and in several municipalities of the Tarn and Garonne region, in order for everyone to be able to discover and discuss the different possible solutions. The purpose of the debate was not to choose between the different solutions, but to see what should be done with the project.

Q27- Were you informed of these different stages?

yes, mostly, or totally

yes, but only in part

no, not really

no, not at all

na

Q28- Did you know that a local debate on this project was organised at the end of 2002?

yes

no

na

Q29- Filtered in relation to awareness of the debate (If yes in q28)

How were you informed that there was to be a local debate? (*more than one answer allowed*)

from newspapers or television

from project documentation sent through the post

from the local council newsletter or by attending a council meeting

through an association

from a member of your family or a friend

from a neighbour or work colleague

from shopkeepers

from a member of parliament

other

na

Q30 Filtered in relation to awareness of the debate (If yes in q28) Did any of your family or friends take part in this debate?

Yes

No

Na

Filtered in relation to awareness of the debate (If yes in q29)

Q31 Did you yourself attend one or more of these meetings?

Yes

No

na

Q31b (If yes in q31)

Can you tell me which meeting(s) you attended?

[Precoded, open-ended]

opening meeting on 4th October in Cahors

meeting on 19th October in Degagnac

meeting on 5th November in Montaigu de Quercy

meeting on the theme of "lines and health" on 13th November in Gourdon

meeting on the theme of “Managing electricity demand and the different types of electricity production”
on 21st November in Caussade
meeting on 29th November in Montdoumerc
meeting on 3rd December in Sauzet
closing meeting on 17th December in Cahors
]

For everyone :

Q32

Generally speaking, do you think that the idea of an organised local debate is:

a very good idea

a good idea

a bad idea

a very bad idea

na

Q33 Why? (open-ended question.)

For everyone

Q35 For each of the following propositions, please state whether you totally agree, agree, disagree or totally disagree.

In your opinion, a local debate is:

[Random rotation of items]

An opportunity to get information on projects

A way of getting the public involved in planning projects

Just another administrative constraint

A way to make people accept a decision that has already been made

A platform that favours only those opposing a project

A constructive discussion between all parties

Totally agree

Agree

Disagree

Totally disagree

na

Q36

In your opinion, during a discussion on the construction of an electricity line, is the public able to debate the following points:

(random rotation of items)

the route the line is to take

where the pylons are to be placed

the validity of the project

the choice between different technical solutions

risks related to health and the environment

Yes

No

Na

Q37 In your opinion, taking part in the local debate means:
deciding whether or not to proceed with the project
making the decision-makers aware of your opinion
getting information in order to take an effective part in the public poll
[random rotation items]

yes

no

na

Filtered by awareness of debate (if yes in q28)

Q38 The public has been given different ways of getting information and expressing its opinion on the project. State whether or not you are aware of each possibility:

Dedicated internet site (yes/no)

Freephone n°

Player specifications

Debate newsletter

CD-rom

Postage-free response card in available in debate newsletters and during meetings

For everyone

Q39 After the debate, RTE (the public manager of the electricity distribution network) announced that it was withdrawing its project to build a very high voltage line in the Quercy Blanc region. In your opinion was this decision predictable?

yes

no

na

Q40 To avoid construction of a new line, RTE is suggesting that public authorities modify and reinforce the existing line between Ferrouge and Cahors. This solution involves doubling the line between Ferrouge and Gourdon.

Do you think that this solution is:

perfectly satisfactory

satisfactory

not very satisfactory

unsatisfactory

na

Descriptive

Here is a list of items. State whether you think each item represents a major health risk, quite a big risk, not a very big risk or almost no risk at all:

with rotation of items

Chemical fertilizers

Pesticides used in plant production

Genetically modified foodstuffs

The area surrounding a nuclear power station

The area around a chemical factory

The area around a high voltage electricity line

The area around a transmission antenna for mobile phones

As far as nuclear power stations are concerned, which of these three solutions do you think is best for France?

We must continue to build nuclear power stations

We should not build any new nuclear power stations but we should continue to use existing ones

We should stop using all nuclear power stations

In your opinion, do politicians generally pay a lot of attention, some attention, not much attention or no attention at all to what people like you think?

A lot

Some

Not much

Not at all

na

Would you say that democracy in France works very well, quite well, not very well or not at all well?

Very well

Quite well

Not very well

Not at all well

na

Do you personally read or browse through La dépêche du Midi, be it at home or elsewhere?

yes

no

If yes, is this ...

- every day 1
- 3 to 5 times a week 2
- once or twice a week 3
- 2 or three times a month 4
- less often 5

Marital status

Q Are you:

Married

Living with a partner

Single

Widow(er), divorced, separated

Are you a member of one or more associations?

none

one

more than one

na

Are you a member of any association for the protection of the environment?

yes
no
na

Do you hold any political office?

yes
no
na

What is your current job, or the last job you held?

Note for interviewer: if retired or housewife, note down last job

Write down verbatim and ask for as much detail as possible

/...../

Recoded profession

Farmer (self-employed)

Small shopkeeper, craftsman (self-employed)

Director of own company with at least 10 employees (self-employed)

Freelance (self-employed - EXCLUDING paramedical)

Teacher / scientific profession (employee)

Executive, intellectual profession (employee)

Intermediate profession (employee or paramedic)

Primary school teacher or equivalent (employee)

Employee (employee)

Service personnel (employee)

Labourer/factory worker / Farm labourer

Retired

Pupil / student

Other inactive

Socio-professional category for head of family used in quota:

Farmer

Artisan, shopkeeper, company director, freelance, intellectual profession, senior executive

Intermediate profession, mid-level executive

Employee, service personnel

Labourer/factory worker

Retired, other inactive category

Status

Q Are you:

Registered as unemployed (with the ANPE)

Private sector employee

Public sector employee

Self-employed

Inactive

Criteria used for quota: most recent qualification

Q What is your most recent qualification?

None

Primary school certificate

O-level

Vocational training certificate

Technical school certificate

A-level

Technological diploma, professional and technical certificate, other certificate, legal training

First-year university qualification, vocational training degree, two-year technical diploma, diploma in social or health professions

Second-year university qualification, university degree, engineering degree from a Grande Ecole

Income

Q We would like to know the level of income for your household as a whole, including any family allowances, the income of all family members, including overtime, bonuses and all other sources of income: pensions, rental income, dividends, etc.

Which of the following brackets covers the net monthly income, before tax, of your household?

Less than 499 Euros / Less than 3299 Francs

Between 500 and 749 Euros / Between 3300 and 4899 Francs

Between 750 and 999 Euros / Between 4900 and 6599 Francs

Between 1000 and 1499 Euros / Between 6600 and 9799 Francs

Between 1500 and 1999 Euros / Between 9800 and 13099 Francs

Between 2000 and 2499 Euros / Between 13100 and 16399 Francs

Between 2500 and 2999 Euros / Between 16400 and 19699 Francs

Between 3000 and 3499 Euros / Between 19700 and 22999 Francs

Between 3500 and 4499 Euros / Between 23000 and 29499 Francs

Between 4500 and 5999 Euros / Between 29500 and 39399 Francs

Between 6000 and 7499 Euros / Between 39400 and 49199 Francs

More than 7500 Euros / More than 49200 Francs

Length of time in municipality

Q How long have you lived in (municipality) ?

Less than a year

Between 1 and 4 years

Between 5 and 9 years

Between 10 and 20 years

More than 20 years

Type of home

Q Do you live ...

In a house

In a block of flats (council flats)

In a block of flats (residential)

Owner or tenant

Q Are you ...

The owner of your home

The tenant or sub-tenant of your home

Housed for free in your home (i.e. by parents, friends, employer, annuity)

How long a person has lived in the region

Political tendency

Q Of the following political parties, which one is closest to your politics – or which one is least far removed from your politics?

Lutte Ouvrière (far left)

La Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

Le Parti Communiste

Le Parti Socialiste

Le Mouvement des Citoyens or Pôle Républicain (led by Jean-Pierre Chevènement)

Les Verts

Another ecological party

L'UDF (led by François Bayrou)

L'UMP, l'Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (including the former RPR party, the former Démocratie Libérale party and various high-profile UDF members)

Le Rassemblement pour la France (led by Charles Pasqua)

Le Mouvement National Républicain (led by Bruno Mégret)

Le Front National (led by Jean-Marie Le Pen)

(None)

Sex of interviewee

Male

Female

Age

How old are you ?

ASK EVERYONE

How many people currently live with you, counting everyone, including yourself?

/ __ / (*more than 9 persons, code 9*)

Do you or a member of your family own ?

(yes/no/na)

Your own home

A second home

A company, a business or land

Securities (shares, bonds, etc)

A savings account (with a bank or the post office)

Real estate (providing revenue)