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## **The 'Good,' the 'Bad' and the 'Useless': Young People's Political Action Repertoires in Québec**

**Nicole GALLANT**

### **Abstract**

Claims that young people today lack interest in politics rest on traditional measures of democratic participation, such as voting. However other empirical work has shown that many young people are still politically active, yet in increasingly less institutionalized ways (sometimes named subpolitics). Using a broad, encompassing definition of the political and drawing mostly on 20 in-depth qualitative interviews with young global activists in Québec, this chapter aims to provide a relational framework to distinguish among the variety of forms that young people's political action may take. By analysing participants' discourse on their political concerns and the types of actions undertaken, Gallant distinguishes four (potentially overlapping) political stances, which take into account the relationship to State authorities: associative participation, underground protest, politicized artwork, and personal lifestyle.

### **Bio**

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## **The ‘Good,’ the ‘Bad’ and the ‘Useless’: Young People’s Political Action Repertoires in Québec**

**Nicole GALLANT**

### **Introduction**

Over the past few decades, much attention has been focused on the decline of the participation of young people in democratic structures. Voter turnout has been declining in all groups, especially among young people and the gap between electoral participation of different age groups is widening in many developed democracies. This decline is perceived as a crisis in democratic participation by many political science scholars, election-directorates, and policy makers alike. Most frame this as signifying a general disinterest in politics and the political process among young people (Henn and Foard, 2014), resulting in a ‘democratic deficit’ (Norris, 2011).

But decline in *participation in democratic institutions* should not be mistaken for decline of political *action* in a broader sense. Indeed, recent work points to so-called ‘new’ forms of political participation. To grasp these emerging forms of political action, research has moved away from the notion of ‘participation,’ to better encompass forms of political action that fall outside the realm of formally organised politics.

This chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of the variety uncovered by this broader understanding of politics. Specifically, I seek to portray a diverse array of political actions deployed by young people, in Québec<sup>1</sup>, in the 2010s. Drawing primarily on in-depth interviews with 20 young people actively defending social justice issues in the face of neoliberal policies, this portrayal will document their discourses regarding issues they deem most significant, and map out the manifold collective and individual actions they undertake online and offline to defend them.

As political action is not monolithic, I offer a framework to organise a diversity of political actions, especially with regards to young people’s relationship to the State and how they are perceived by the State. By contrasting young people’s political actions to conventional expectations of traditional representative democracy, I distinguish four overlapping modes of conduct delineating broader stances regarding politics: organisational participation, underground protest, artistic creativity, and personal lifestyle choices. The first type is most favoured by democratic institutions, while the others are generally disregarded by the State as either inappropriate and undemocratic, or useless. I also seek to unravel some of the processes by which young people navigate from one mode to another. Indeed, the four types of stances are often combined and intertwined in young people’s lived experience of counteracting neo-liberalism and austerity measures.

The focus of this chapter is the relationship between young people’s repertoire of political actions and the State, and the ways they are perceived and treated by State authorities. This relational approach helps take into account social and State representation of what is considered legitimate action.

The chapter begins with a brief review of the literature which focuses on the broad, open definition of politics required to understand young people’s current political activity. After a description of the inductive, qualitative methodology used, I delineate four types of stances which young people may have regarding political action and the state, as well as some of the processes by which one person may move from one stance to another. I then

discuss how neo-liberalism and austerity may have fostered a deeper antagonism toward the State among young people today.

### **Recognising youth political action**

Traditional concepts of political participation focus on measurable accounts of ‘democratic participation.’ This approach rests on a definition of politics as the struggle for power among formal political parties to gain control over state decision-making institutions, therefore placing elections (and participation in political parties) at the core of political life (Verba and Nye, 1972). According to this view, the paramount indicator of political interest or politicisation is the act of voting in democratic state elections. Other traditional indicators of political interest focus on actions mediated through institutionalised organisations, including formal participation in political parties, but also in trade unions (Cultiaux and Vendramin, 2011), and diverse associations and community groups (Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Paré et al., 2008; Jones, 2000). Some political participation surveys (such as those of the International Social Statistics Project – ISSP) also ask respondents about peaceful demonstrations, and individual and collective acts of formal communication with elected officials, such as signing petitions and writing to state representatives. These dominant narrow definitions led to the assumption that young people are now less politicised than previous generations at the same age.

Because many young people today recoil from participation within formal, organised institutions (Pickard, et al., 2012, p. 23), a more comprehensive conceptualisation of politics is needed to understand a vaster array of political activity than that captured by empirical work on political participation (Gauthier, 2003; O’Toole, et al., 2003). Indeed, young people’s expression and action seem stronger when it takes other, less institutionalised forms (Loncle, et al., 2012; Gallant and Garneau, 2016), especially those that channel dissent (Roudet, 2012) and/or individuality (Pastinelli, 2013). These include innovative forms of demonstrations (such as flash mobs or the Occupy and Indignados movements), political citizenship expressed through cultural practices (Poirier, 2017), or even unplanned riots (Newburn, et al., 2016; Bertho, 2016). Young people’s online participatory experience (Caron, 2014) also takes many shapes: the use of Facebook and other social media to organise various political action, political expression on blogs, Twitter and YouTube (Millette 2015; Caron, 2014; Jenkins and Carpentier, 2013). As political topics also crop up on entertainment-driven forums and on other social media such as Twitter (Fuchs, 2014), research has also looked into online political conversation (Latko-Toth, et al., 2017).

These contributions confirm the value of broadening the definition of what constitutes the political, instead of jumping to the conclusion that young people are politically apathetic (Gallant and Garneau, 2016; O’Toole, et al., 2003). Indeed, “[t]hose with the most restrictive and conventional conceptions of political participation identify a strong and consistent pattern of declining political participation and engagement over time, whilst those with a more inclusive conception discern instead a change in the mode of political participation” (Hay, 2007, p. 23, in Pickard, 2016).

To grasp the everyday experiences of politics among ‘ordinary’ citizens (Dryzeck, 1990, i.e., people who are not part of the decision-making elite), I adopt a more encompassing approach, based on a definition of politics centred on an interest for social issues (Gaxie, 2003) or for the betterment of the collective world (Arendt, 1995). This approach allows us to encompass both traditional political participation and what Beck

calls subpolitics, i.e., everyday political activity taking place beneath visible institutional politics (Beck, 1997). By keeping the State in the analysis while enlarging the definition of political action, we can better assess the extent to which politicisation remains a dynamic, relational process.

### **Data and methodology: an inductive, qualitative design**

The analysis presented in this chapter is based on original empirical data, with additional information drawn from empirical literature, and day-to-day observation of public actions as reported in the media or through direct observation on the street or online. The original data consists of 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people aged 18 to 30<sup>2</sup> who were actively defending global social justice issues in the face of neoliberal policies and austerity measures.<sup>3</sup> The interviews were carried out in 2011, i.e., a year prior to the student protest following postsecondary tuition hikes in 2012 (see Doran and Peñafiel in this volume).

While acknowledging that this data is culturally and socially situated in Québec, I use it as a stepping-stone for a broad conceptual analysis. Québec being politically and socially at a crossroads between North American influences, British parliamentary institutions and a French republican tradition, it seems likely that phenomena observed there could be relevant elsewhere.

The qualitative sample was not intended to be representative of the general population of young people in Quebec, because I was specifically seeking young people active in some ways regarding global issues. Nonetheless, the goal was to set up a diverse sample within this specific subgroup comprising engaged and active young people. To create variety within the sample, I relied on individual socio-demographic characteristics, such as age (respondents ranged from 19 to 30, with the mean and median age both 24 years), gender (11 young men and nine young women), and visible ethnicity (three respondents were Black – from Africa or Haiti – and four others had middle-Eastern origins and traits). Moreover, because local contexts have some bearing on opportunities for associative participation and for the collective expression of dissident, we met young activists in Montreal, in smaller cities and in small towns in rural areas. More importantly, I was looking for young people whose political concerns covered a board range of issues, rather than those involved in (and recruited within) the same social movement.

Together with four graduate students, I identified these respondents through an innovative array of open recruitment techniques. The two principal methods were the ‘address book’ (Duchesne, 2000), whereby one asks people one knows to help identify other people who met the research criteria, and ‘direct recruitment,’ which consists in hanging about in places where one believes one might see people who fit the research criteria (in this project: protest rallies and peaceful demonstrations, pubs with an openly ideological stance, concerts from bands carrying a political message, etc.), in order to present them with the research project. In smaller geographical locations, my assistants and I also needed to use the more traditional approach of asking associations to refer people, but specifically asking not to meet official representatives or the central figures in the organisation. All of these methods were complemented by so-called ‘snowball sampling.’ The overall goal was to introduce a wide variety of entry points, so as not to study a specific, somewhat homogeneous subgroup of activists working together on the same issues. By moving away

from the case-study approach, we are able to identify a cross section of diverse *types* of engagement or participation within the broad field of global activism.

During the interviews, we first asked what were the issues or concerns the respondents cared about. Then, we introduced the subject of actions, by asking ‘what do you *do* about these issues?’ This detour helped to go beyond the boundaries of what respondents might consider to be ‘political’ (or what they would think we as academics would count as political activity).

### **Results: Making sense of a diverse repertoire of actions**

#### *Framing the issues: Working for justice... or fighting against injustice?*

The activists we met each had multiple issues which they considered significant. Yet, at the core of these young people’s global action lays a coherent narrative challenging neoliberal values and articulating a discourse on human solidarity. Depending on the individual, this narrative may take one of two overarching stances. When asked about the issues that they care about, some young people frame their responses mostly positively, stating they are working *for* or *toward* a cause (such as social justice, human rights, etc.). Yet, about the very same concerns, others take a more antagonistic stance: they state that they are fighting *against* a situation (such as inequality or discrimination). Some mingling of the two rhetorical stances does occur (especially, several respondents say that they are ‘fighting for’ something), and thus this variation in rhetoric should not be construed as a clear-cut analytical tool to characterise and distinguish types of individuals. Nonetheless, the next section shows how this difference in overall stance may be embodied in their political action repertoire, as it translates into somewhat different types of actions, or rather into differing overall political stances.

This core issue of human solidarity encompasses diverse scales. Some young people we interviewed focus their actions mostly on international solidarity. This is framed either in a discourse about fighting against capitalist globalisation, or about working toward ‘*altermondialisme*,’ an alternative world order very much inspired by the Porto Alegre Conference. Concretely, many of these young people get involved regarding specific local situations that embody those values, such as protesting at the 2010 G20 summit in Toronto, Canada. In other cases, the focus may be on specific situations occurring at a micro level, either locally, or elsewhere around the globe. They either emphasise working for the ‘rights’ of specific peoples who are deemed oppressed (Tibetans, Palestinians, or Aborigines), or, conversely, call for the ‘fight against’ discrimination of specific subsets of the population (ethnic groups, women or homosexuals). Some participants also focus their energy and contribution on the struggle against police brutality, especially since the death of Freddy Villanueva (an innocent young man killed by Montreal police in 2008). Whatever their focus(es), all these young participants frame their discourse on these issues at a larger, more universal level of values on solidarity. They claim to devote their time either *for* social justice, equity and respect for human rights, or – depending on their overall stance – *against* racism, inequality and poverty.

Secondly, more than half our participants were involved in the student movement. This topic dovetails with part of the literature on political socialisation, which identifies postsecondary education – and the exposure to people from different backgrounds and diverse points of view it often provides – as a primary factor in interest for politics (Flanagan, 2009). The concern for the student movement in my sample is also relevant to

the specific context that was to unfold a year later in Quebec, which deeply divided Québécois society. The prevalence of this issue in our sample also partially results from our sampling methods in rural areas, which relied in part on suggestions from student associations. Some respondents imbed the student issue as part of a more comprehensive, symbolic rhetoric regarding concerns such as (free) public access to knowledge and culture.

The third most often mentioned group of concerns are a range of issues relating to the environment. These first three topics each garnered the attention of more than half of the sample. Other themes were mentioned by more than a few respondents, such as defending Quebec's autonomy and independence, or fighting for the preservation of the French language (as part of the defence of oppressed peoples).

### *Action repertoires and overarching political stance*

The open-ended approach to grasping young people's individual political activity yielded data about a plethora of actions undertaken by our interviewees. To find some order within this diversity, the data was inductively categorised through an iterative process, which yielded four types. This typology's coherence was reiterated when we noticed that the types happened to also be articulated, not to the issues themselves, but to the rhetoric in which they are discussed by the participant ('working for' or 'fighting against,' as outlined above).

The most prevalent mode of action that we observed in our non-representative small sample (just over half the respondents) is a very straightforward and rather traditional one, in which action or participation is mediated through associations or organisations. Such associative action may hinge on political parties, but in the sample, it was mostly structured by non-profit and non-governmental organisations: student associations or activist groups (such as Amnesty international or Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights), or small social economy companies (for instance the 'Reboiseurs du monde'). Most of the respondents who included the student movement among their primary concerns also chiefly engage through this organised, associative mode of action, especially with relation to this issue.

Most organisations in which our participants were involved were highly structured. In many cases, the participant was active in a local selection of larger (provincial or international) structures, which often seemed to have a centralised decision process. This mode of action is the type most often assessed in studies of political participation, which tend focus on traditional forms of action. . Such organised actions are also somewhat easy to measure and quantify, and they are readily, openly discussed. Indeed, this is the 'good' form of participation in the eyes of established powers. In this mode, the individual works 'with' the institutional system, through a range of 'positive' actions. Discontent is thus channelled into forms of expression and interactions which are deemed legitimate by official institutions: writing to elected officials and encouraging other people to do so; sending letters to the media; marching in a peaceful, announced demonstration, in cooperation with police or other security forces; starting or signing a petition – online or offline.

Conversely, some protest marches appear to be more spontaneous, and are clearly more antagonistic than others. This form of political expression is presented as the 'bad' one, often decried, criticised, ridiculed or demonised by established powers and the media alike. Among the four participants who engaged in this type of activity, this organic form of political action is deeply rooted in engagement within what we may call an underground sub-culture infused with a rhetoric of underground resistance. Depending on the person, it

is entrenched in different cultural movements: punk/skinheads, anarchists, or a combination thereof (i.e. RASH, red anarchist skin heads), as well as hip-hop.

Within these underground movements, participation seems to be more diffuse and less formalised than in formal organisations, but it is not less tangible in respondents' everyday life. Quite the contrary, they seem constantly and intensely steeped in both the cultural aspects and in the (local) community of people sharing their passion. Politics is intertwined with a coherent, overall outlook on life, in such a way that political action is sometimes indistinguishable from more cultural activities (e.g. organising or attending concerts where the bands share a political message). But some actions are more clearly political. These actions are often antagonistic and seldom solitary. The collectivity seems based on a very close bond: when talking about actions, these respondents use first person plural pronouns 'we' and 'us,' far more than respondents who are in more formal organisations (and who either talk of the organisation in third person or about some specific actions in the first person singular, i.e. 'I went to this march that they organised,' rather than 'we marched'). Moreover, they do not make clear distinctions between organising a protest event or participating in it. Several specify that the collectivity bases its activities on the principles of self-management. Although more organic than formal, there is a (loose and somewhat blurry) collective structure, made of multiple entangled informal networks (some of which are called 'local chapters,' making it fleetingly sound almost like a formal organised association).

But it is not because of its loose structure that this overall stance is perceived as the 'bad' one by authorities and the media. This perception is due both to the nature of the actions undertaken (disruptive and sometimes illegal) and the overall discourse, which emphasises resistance and protest. Thus, rather than participating in the social conversation about the greater good and about the best ways for the State to implement it, their stance challenges the very legitimacy of established powers.

But several more of our participants who were deeply involved in hip-hop culture do not engage in such antagonistic action. They represent a third overall mode of action, which is more expressive or artistic, and which may be broadly defined as the production of activist artwork. Of course, many more of our participants infuse art – especially music and visual arts – within their political action (such as using songs in a street demonstration, or placing striking images or visual symbols on posters for events or on pamphlets for their organisation). In that way, they use art to further their causes. But for four respondents, the use of art rests at the core of their political action. Thus, when asked what they do with regards to the issues they hold dear, these young people immediately highlight art production (e.g. 'Well, I do political graffiti' or 'I make activist artwork' ('*art engagé*' in French). This art production is not merely used to enhance another action by making it more resonant; it is, in itself, the political action. Examples of such art production in our sample include writing lyrics to a song and writing a blog or articles, as well as making documentary videos and short films. Their overall outlook can be participatory (e.g. a state funded documentary about the plight of aboriginal people), or more antagonistic (e.g. illegal graffiti with a political message).

Thus, with exceptions such as illegal graffiti (seldom performed by any of the four people we interviewed, including the one who is a celebrated graffiti artist), this artistic creativity and production is largely perceived as positive by State authorities, who may even subsidise some types of political artwork (such as documentaries). But the State and



mainstream media mostly seem to see this as an uncanny and somewhat pointless ‘new’ form of civic engagement of youth, i.e., as generally ‘useless.’

These participants are typically not affiliated to any network of activists, however informal. Although some among them do organise some forms of collective political activities, this is the only mode of action where we met people who never did. However, because activist art production is ultimately and intrinsically geared toward a collective audience whose worldviews it aims to influence, their solitary political work is oriented differently from the form best circumscribed in Quéniart’s (2008) seminal work on personal lifestyle choices.

Quéniart shows that one of the changing modes of political expression favoured by young people today revolves around personal lifestyle choices which embody their view of the collective good. This constitutes a fourth mode of action. The structure of our recruitment efforts could not have led us to meet young people whose only form of political activism would take this isolated form, but many among our participants – while also being active in one of the other three modes – did make sure that their lifestyle was in accordance with their political values. They cycle to work or buy local food; they make compost from their organic waste and carefully recycle the rest. One punk skinhead respondent is also vegan. Many others insisted that they would only take work that is in conformity with their worldview, or manage to transform their activism into a job, for instance by creating a not-for-profit organisation. Some of these actions are set in a slightly more dissenting fashion, for instance boycotting some product, store or event. Most of these activities are experienced not so much as contributions to the civic conversation about the collective good, but as an intrinsic contribution to the collective good itself. For example, being mindful of one’s own individual ‘ecological footprint’ is experienced as a direct contribution to diminishing the collective ecological footprint of society.

These personal lifestyle choices are partly encouraged by the explicit injunctions of Quebec’s broader youth policy (which promotes ‘environmental responsibility,’ etc.). However, they are usually not interpreted as political actions, and, as such, would be broadly considered ‘good’ (or even ‘cute’), but ‘useless’ in terms of the value of their contribution to politics. My participants would probably partly agree. Although many do express that it is relevant to practice what you preach and thus to live in a way that implements one’s worldview, none of them are satisfied with only that. Several clearly articulate that these personal actions alone are not enough to progress toward the better world they seek; thus, they speak disapprovingly of those who think it might be. Therefore, their repertoire of action is broader than these personal lifestyle choices, as it seeks to bring about more substantial and collective changes in society.

### *The dynamics between forms of action*

We have seen a wide range of actions undertaken by young activists which can be loosely grouped in four broad categories. These categories distinguish between overall modes of action, which are steeped in specific narratives about politics and the meaning of involvement. Although built inductively through analysis of respondents’ depiction of their actions and political beliefs, these broad categories remain abstract, in that they are not fully distinct, mutually-exclusive types. Indeed, several respondents combine two or more modes together. Although each individual participant can be classified according to a dominant mode of entry into the political arena,<sup>4</sup> this is not readily established in all cases.

Especially, the distinction between underground protest and artistic production is not always clear, mostly because the people we met who were involved in underground action did so in relation to a more or less artistic subculture (for instance the hip-hop movement), rather than primarily political ones (such as anarchism). They also made use of artwork in their political activity far more than the respondents whose political involvement was primarily associative and organisational. Despite these shortcomings – which merely suggest that the modes ought to be thought of as a continuum rather than as ideal-types – this analytical exercise does show that it is relevant to attempt to distinguish subtypes in the otherwise fuzzy mass of ‘new’ forms of political activity among young people.

By taking into account the discourse through which young people frame the issues they care about, the results show that young activists’ political values and political action are infused with a narrative that is either meant to be constructive of the political order with established powers, or set against the current order and the (partisan) forces that keep it in place. Generally, organisational or associative work is more participatory. In such a mode, the person works ‘with’ the system, whereas underground protest often intrinsically calls into question the established authorities themselves, not only their decisions. However, this cannot easily be deduced from the nature of the actions themselves. For instance, even a seemingly simple gesture such as cycling to work can be experienced as a physical act of ideological resistance and protest against the dominant use of common spaces in society. Similarly, in one single demonstration, some demonstrators may believe they are contributing to a peaceful march hoping to influence policy, while others may think they are protesting the very legitimacy of the societal order on which authorities govern. Thus, analysis ought to take into account how the individuals perceive their own actions, rather than deductions based on behaviour alone.

Demonstrations and marches are one of the situations where the continuum between forms is most apparent. Indeed, such ‘social movement’ activism can move back and forth between participatory or protest modes. Sometimes, the very same person may change his/her mind in the course of a single demonstration. For example, when a peaceful protest march is met by a strong police force expecting violence, the situation can send a signal to the protestors that their action is considered illegitimate from the onset, suggesting that the message will be entirely disregarded. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, this anticipation can in return brace the demonstrators into a less participatory stance. It might not be so surprising, then, that some demonstrations *become* violent after having (sometimes repeatedly) been greeted by police arrogance and brutality, as well as disregard from the media and politicians.

This dynamic serves as a reminder that the overall mode of action of young individuals is largely relational. When participatory action is (repeatedly) met with disregard, this non-reciprocity can contribute to push away into protest mode. This is by no means a linear, chronological process; nonetheless, if political powers do not wish young people to express their anger through illegal or spectacular action, they ought to consider responding more efficiently when the issues young people care about are being voiced through channels the State deems legitimate.<sup>5</sup> This seems an important reminder, considering the current worldwide trend towards the ‘criminalisation of protest’ (Pickard, 2018).

### **Discussion: Protesting the neo-liberal world order**

Traditional representations of participation remain the social benchmark for assessing the political engagement of young people (Pickard, 2016). Therefore, some forms of political mobilisations tend to be systematically disregarded, criticised or even automatically associated with violence by both the media and public officials (Roudet, 2012; Muncie, 2009; Pickard, 2009; Newburn, et al., 2016). This rejection of their efforts to express a political message can be a source of cynicism (Cockburn and Cleaver, 2012; Roudet, 2012) or frustration (Boire, 2015; Benedicto and Luz Morán, 2016). As we have seen, by not recognising the new forms of political expression as legitimate political contributions to the civic conversation, State authorities may push them further away, sometimes toward illegal action or violence. This leads to a vicious circle, whereby rejection tends to produce or increase types of political action which are in essence, and unsurprisingly, disregarded and repudiated by established authorities. Similarly, Bertho (2016) analyses riots as a symptom of the failure of representative democracy to channel young people's discontents. Such non-traditional forms of expression are bound to grow in the future, considering both the current economic context (especially high levels of unemployment among young people) and the Western world's current tendency to respond with rampant austerity measures (including cuts in youth support programmes and increases in the individual costs of post-secondary education), while postponing (if not altogether denying) environmental concerns.

As there is also a widespread social perception that all political parties with a realistic chance of attaining power tend to favour similar measures, young people seem to increasingly feel powerless and angry (Van de Velde, 2016). This is one of the factors explaining lower electoral turnout among young people, because they doubt the efficiency of democratic elections as a means of conceding decision-making powers to political parties perceived as intrinsically flawed.

In this context, when, furthermore, political authorities use State institutions (such as police force) to counteract opposition and challenges arising from these looser, new forms of political expression, this increases the sense that the State itself (rather than just the existing government) embodies neo-liberalism. It also reduces the impression that the State is meant to represent the people (rather than business interests). As a result, young people's political actions attacking neo-liberalism challenge not only specific neo-liberal policies, but may also defy neo-liberalism as currently embodied in the State itself (a conundrum which may explain their somewhat counterintuitive emphasis on anarchism as a solution). In sum, if they perceive the State itself to almost intrinsically embody neo-liberalism instead of the will of the people or nation, young people are lead to alternative modes of political expression in part because they feel that it is impossible to communicate their message in more participatory ways (which, by definition, recognise the State as a legitimate interlocutor for the political conversation). The fact that many of my participants mobilise a rhetoric of 'resistance' seems to comfort this interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to depict and establish the diversity of political behaviour emerging among some young people today as they struggle to express their voice and values against the selling of their world, often by the (neo-liberal) State itself, to private interests. Such

bottom-up, inductive analysis of young people's modes of operation in times of crisis is required to deconstruct the notion that young people are inactive, by providing tools to assess levels of political action where it actually lays, rather than where established powers and classical North American political science have traditionally sought to find it.

In this perspective, I outlined three broad ways that people can relate to political power holders. The first, classic form – the 'good' one in the eyes of State institutions –, consists in participating in and with the 'system.' This includes voting, but also associative action aiming to bring a message to the State, recognised as a legitimate receiver. Secondly, some young people express their political views in more indirect, often artistic or humoristic ways, both online and offline. This is the chief mode of action for some activists in my sample. This form of expression is not particularly criticised by established authorities, in part because it goes largely unnoticed except among young people.<sup>6</sup> As such, it is often perceived as a 'nice but useless' form of political action, if it is regarded as political at all. Thirdly, political action can be structured around protest. Although not always violent or illegal (contrary to common media and social representations which present it as the 'bad' forms of political expression), protest fundamentally differs from participatory stances in that it challenges the very legitimacy of the State to enact appropriate policy in the name of the people. In my small sample, such underground protest is very much collective, and happens to be steeped in diverse more or less political (sub)cultures.

These three types are not fully distinct and do not constitute consistent packages that neatly structure everything else. They are neither mutually exclusive nor some sort of linear continuum ultimately building up to a 'good' or 'bad' form of political action. Moreover, one person may change action mode over time, or hover between more than one type at any given moment, depending on the situation and context.

Instead of conceiving demonstrations or alternative projects and art production as something to be controlled and managed (especially in a surveillance perspective) as is increasingly the case, the State could make a greater effort to listen to young people's less traditional types of actions, and ought perhaps to better understand that these represent a growing form of (legitimate) political expression for young people in Western democracies.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> With a population just over 8 million, Québec is the core French-speaking part of Canada. As a province in the Canadian federation, it has its own parliament with governing powers on such matters as education, employment, health and immigration, among others. Commonly known as a "distinct society" (which is generally more left-leaning than the rest of Canada), Québec periodically seeks independence. The latest referendum in 1995 nearly tied, with 50.58% of votes against secession.

<sup>2</sup> Public policy in Quebec defines youth as covering the period from ages 15 to 30.

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<sup>4</sup> This mode may not have been chronologically the first, but is currently the most significant at the time of the interview.

<sup>5</sup> This situation calls to mind John Lennon's comment that "When it gets down to having to use violence, then you are playing the system's game. The establishment will irritate you - pull your beard, flick your face - to make you fight! Because once they've got you violent, then they know how to handle you. The only thing they don't know how to handle is non-violence and humour" (1 June 1969, during the *Bed-In for Peace* in Montreal).

<sup>6</sup> Some civil servants in Quebec's youth secretariat are being a notable exception, as they are developing with researchers at the Observatoire Jeunes et Société (OJS) various experiments for bringing independent YouTubers' messages into the governmental sight (see Balleys and Gallant, 2017).