

YELLOW VESTS FLOODED BY FAKE NEWS

OVER 100M VIEWS OF
DISINFORMATION ON FACEBOOK

Avaaz calls on Facebook to Correct the Record ahead of EU Elections -- with an in-depth study showing how fake news surrounding the Yellow Vests reached over 100 million views, and how Russia fueled the divide.

15/03/2019 - Avaaz Report

Version 1.2





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THE SUMMARY - WHAT THE STUDY SHOWS

This new in-depth study by the global citizens' movement Avaaz shows for the first time the unprecedented scale at which the Yellow Vest movement has been impacted by disinformation. According to its findings, fake news surrounding the French Yellow Vest movement has reached an estimated 105 million views on Facebook alone, in a country with just over 35 million Facebook monthly active users¹.

The research analyzed social media posts over a five month period - between November 2018 and March 2019 - and focused mainly on Facebook, where most of the Yellow Vest social media interaction took place. It took into account the top known 100 fake news stories circulating in the French Yellow Vest movement, all of which were fact-checked by French or international media. The selected stories are mostly malicious, made-up, purposefully misleading

or factually incorrect posts. Furthermore, the findings shine a light on the increased efforts from Russian state media, RT France, to fuel the protests.

The research was carried out by a team of investigative reporters, researchers and data analysts set up by the global citizens movement Avaaz to detect and deter disinformation ahead of the European elections. It shows clearly that Facebook and other platforms' responses to disinformation in Europe are ineffective and pose a serious threat to healthy public discourse and democratic stability, especially in light of upcoming EU elections in May. The report concludes by calling on platforms to work with fact-checkers to Correct The Record for everyone exposed to false or misleading content, as an emergency measure ahead of the elections.

The study shows:

■ **Disinformation in Yellow Vest Facebook groups and pages reached over 105 million views** and over 4 million shares in the time between November 1, 2018 and March 6, 2019.

■ **The 100 most viewed fake news stories analyzed in this report include:**

- **a post with images including bleeding 'Yellow Vest protesters,'** which media and government allegedly hid from the public - when some of the photos were actually taken at different protests near Madrid or in Catalonia (136,818 shares, 3,511,456 est. views)
- **a video of French President Macron dancing in the Middle East "while France suffers,"** when the video was actually taken over a month before, during the Summit for the Francophonie in Armenia (183,390 shares, 5,700,000 views)
- **an image of a Yellow Vest protest in Paris, with a caption alleging that the image had been censored on Facebook or elsewhere;**

Le Monde fact-checkers debunked the claim that the photo or the caption were deleted (349,403 shares, 8,967,432 est. views)

■ **RT France's overwhelming dominance of the French debate about the Yellow Vests on YouTube:** Research focusing on the 500 top YouTube results shows that Russia's state media was the most viewed channel for videos related to the Yellow Vest movement in France. Moreover, when taking into account all videos related to Yellow Vests (as measured by whether the term yellow vests was mentioned in either the video title or description), RT France accumulated more views than Le Monde, L'Obs, Le Huffington Post, Le Figaro and FRANCE 24 combined (30M compared to 24M).

■ **How Avaaz's policy proposal "Correct the Record" could function as a deterrence for far-spreading fake news,** by requiring that Facebook and other platforms work with fact-checkers to issue corrections to all users who have been exposed to disinformation.

¹ <https://www.lejdd.fr/Medias/Internet/il-y-a-plus-de-35-millions-utilisateurs-de-facebook-en-france-3850928>

Table 2.1 below shows the 20 most viewed fake news stories for the period between November 1, 2018 and March 6, 2019. Figure 2.2 shows all 100 most viewed fake news as an infographic, segmented by topic. The entire list of the 100 most viewed fake news can be found in the Annex. As stated above, all of the analyzed fake news have been fact-checked by French or international media.

Table 2.1 -- 20 Most Viewed Fake News Content, Nov. 1, 2018 - Mar. 6, 2019

NAME OF VIDEO	VIEWS	SHARES	FAKE NEWS	FACT-CHECK
Yellow Vests protest picture being deliberately deleted by Facebook	8,967,432	349,401	https://www.facebook.com/news/115701488382659/?permalink=1114241542947892	https://false.google.com/file/d/1B693n1LAK51R1_d_ghe-01ANW0/see-version-in-context
Fake Gerard Lanvin letter	6,467,620	252,000	https://dash.archive.org/web/2018110728/facebook.com/photos.php?id=10171186058389461a100186087823958a-100-38464942	https://factuel.afp.com/mon-gerard-lanvin-est-pas-l'auteur-d'une-lettre-ecrite-par-un-miroir-trou-vert-sue-facebook
Macron dances while France is protesting	5,700,000	183,392	https://www.facebook.com/ja451343426041/vb.100067090553600/101745556134583/?type=3&video_source=video_upload	https://rubriques.france24.com/fr/20181101/actualite-macron-dance-d-aller-mouvement-gilets-jaunes-46046
Macron dances while France is protesting (2nd post)	4,944,624	192,659	https://www.facebook.com/kym.jaunes/post/2862950611587557	https://twitter.com/Mafactual/status/10669242436117256
Police allegedly supporting Yellow Vest protesters	4,619,857	180,005	https://www.facebook.com/photos.php?fbid=1903051626548073&source=100001494586738-140172-00001544441638&type=3&viewer	https://twitter.com/Mafactual/status/106691893464511889
Fake police violence pictures	3,511,456	136,818	https://www.facebook.com/inspireethedien/post/197163609572801	https://rubriques.france24.com/en/20181125-debunked-video-yellow-vest-violence-protests
Video of police officers taking off their helmets - Montpellier	4,468,048	174,090	https://www.facebook.com/news/28352095518801/?permalink=795558911201472	https://franc3.sagepub.franc3info.fr/hondane/terrasfr/montpellier/le-jour-montpellier-video-de-la-violence-franquise-bordeaux-chi-les-voies-157649.html
Disobedience call from an alleged policeman	3,900,000	248,867	https://www.facebook.com/giletsjaunes45/video/1313078636184642/	https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/280079-20181128-video-gilets-jaunes-police-est-entend-publique-video-soutien-mouvement
Outdated police violences and allegedly being erased	3,516,127	137,000	(need to be a member of the group to see the post) https://www.facebook.com/groups/20836724531895/?permalink=11197171720046	from an old 2016 video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=404630404
France 3 TV intentionally censoring journalist	3,700,000	119,059	https://www.facebook.com/Rassemblee.de.Francois.Crozier/videos/vb.1724088771161796/1601760131/?type=2&theater	https://factuel.afp.com/gilets-jaunes-demontre-le-voici-ds-faux-de-bras-pour-de-mobilisation-0
Police beating students (outdated)	3,600,000	161,862	https://www.facebook.com/switchfr/34861997281795	https://factuel.afp.com/leurs-contraintes-ou-leur-soutien-legendes-sur-les-images-de-violence-en-marge-du-mouvement
Macron hired mercenaries; secret services support Yellow Vest protests	3,500,000	135,169	https://www.facebook.com/brielle.guignat.735/video/77093802936244/	https://www.leparisien.fr/societe/gilets-jaunes-les-marchandises-de-macron-et-autres-objets-qui-polluent-sa-facebook-05-12-2018-78612801.php
Police officers taking off their helmets - Bordeaux	3,300,000	121,983	https://www.facebook.com/benjamin.a.duguy/video/10173197292791742/	https://factuel.afp.com/la-police-bordeaux-entend-son-casque-entend-les-gilets-jaunes-une-interpretation-douze
UN is planning the replacement of European population by migrants	2,000,000	72,457	https://www.facebook.com/switchfr/361553517834706	https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/12/06/verdire-la-france-a-une-de-donald-trump-aux-gilets-jaunes-1-dimanche-mondial-4-une-interv-5393468-4355770.html
Marrakech Pact conspiracy	3,100,000	108,617	https://www.facebook.com/romen.pisarcoboi/video/1430138100118040/	https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/12/06/verdire-la-france-a-une-de-donald-trump-aux-gilets-jaunes-1-dimanche-mondial-4-une-interv-5393468-4355770.html
Untrue claim that French MPs salary higher than in Germany	2,406,288	93,757	https://www.facebook.com/groups/310403819781931/?permalink=18491701653872	https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2016/12/30/quels-pays-europeens-ont-le-mieux-leurs-salaires-505895-4355770.html
Picture of rugby supporters used for illustrating TV protest	2,277,655	88,745	post has been deleted but screenshot shared here by AFP on twitter: https://twitter.com/Mafactual/status/1064267476866117368/photo/1	https://www.francetvinfo.fr/info/la-tele-police/france-video-de-l'

¹ <https://jean-jaures.org/nos-productions/en-immersion-numerique-avec-les-gilets-jaunes>

Figure 2.2 -- Top 100 most viewed fake news by topic, Nov. 1, 2018 - Mar. 6, 2019

FAKE NEWS AND THE FRENCH YELLOW VESTS

Each circle is one piece of "fake news" - size is equal to the total number of estimated views

TYPE OF CONTENT

- Anti-establishment (28%)
- Police violence (27%)
- Fabricated support (19%)
- Censorship (14%)
- Migration (10%)
- Other (2%)

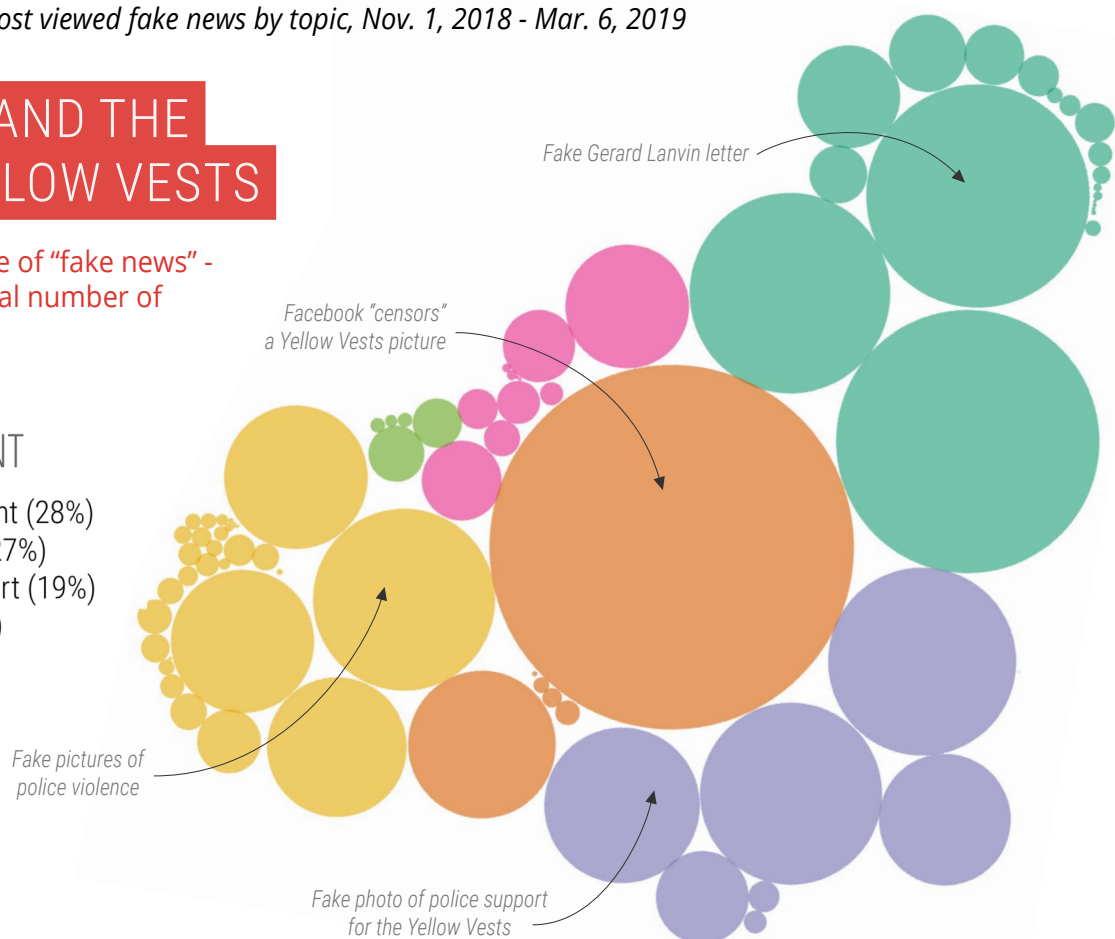
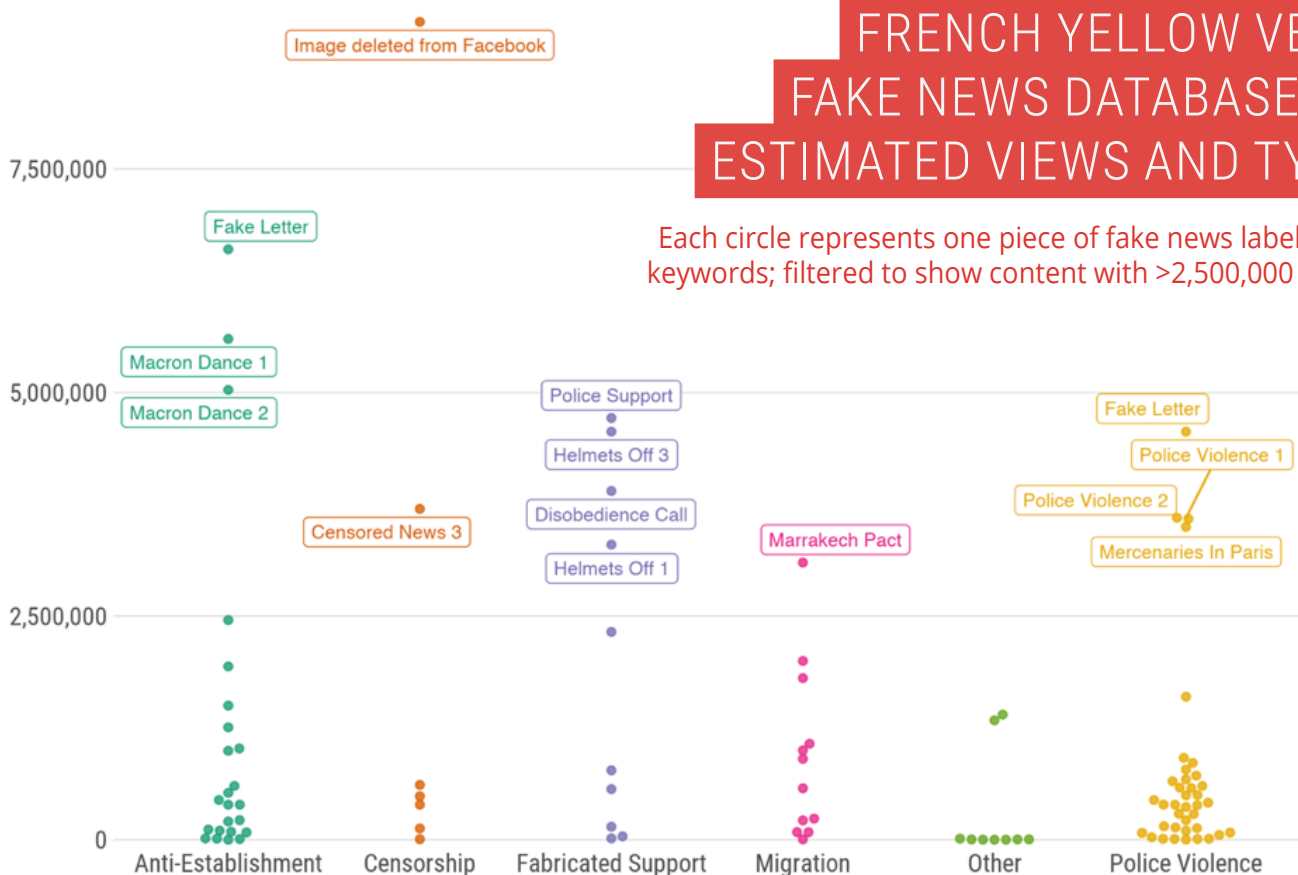


Figure 2.3 -- Views of the top 100 fake news by topic, Nov. 1, 2018 - Mar. 6, 2019

FRENCH YELLOW VEST FAKE NEWS DATABASE BY ESTIMATED VIEWS AND TYPE

Each circle represents one piece of fake news labeled by keywords; filtered to show content with >2,500,000 views



THE STORIES - 6 CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents brief case studies of some of the most shared and viewed fake news from our research³. Every item has a summary of the fake news, its reach and verification of the events depicted by the posts.

1 POLICE BRUTALITY, CONTEXT MANIPULATION

POLICE BRUTALITY AT YELLOW VEST PROTEST LEAVES PEOPLE BLEEDING



FAKE NEWS: A Yellow Vest supporter [shared a collection of images](#) of people, supposedly showing them as Yellow Vest protesters who are victims of French police brutality, with a caption that reads “the media and the government of Macron have hidden the images of peaceful protesters beaten by the CRS” (the general reserve of the French National Police).

REACH: The post quickly went viral on Facebook and reached **136K shares** and **over 3.5M estimated** views by March 6, 2019.

VERIFICATION: The post was made up of several photos taken at different protests, cities, countries and events around the world, yet suggested they were all the result of French police brutality toward the Yellow Vest movement. For instance, the [image of the young woman bleeding was from a Coal Mining protest in Spain back in July 11, 2012](#). The one from the [older woman bleeding was taken at a Catalanian protest on September 11, 2017](#).

Facebook has recently added below the post related content articles from [Observers France 24](#) and [AFP](#) that explain the misuse of such images.

³ Screenshots were taken November 2018 - March 2019.

Below are two examples of where some of the images originally came from:



"Miners clash with police while demonstrating in Madrid."
This Getty Images caption shows that the photo was actually taken near Madrid, Spain on July 11, 2012.



This AFP Factual post reads, "The third image of an older lady with a bloodied face has been shared around social networks during the autumn 2017 Catalan referendum."

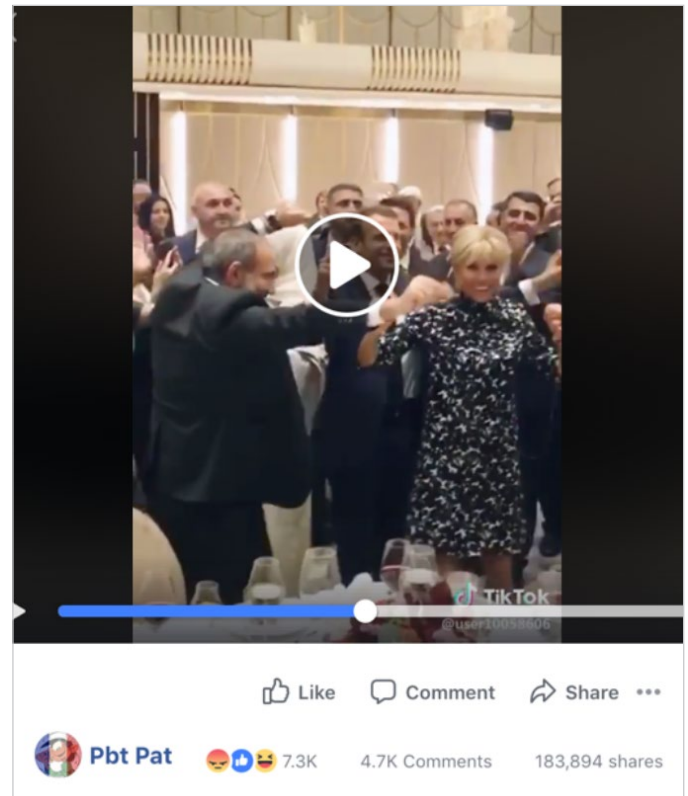
2 ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT, CONTEXT AND DATE MANIPULATION

MACRON DANCES WHILE FRANCE SUFFERS

FAKE NEWS: This video was [posted on Facebook](#) on November 17, 2018, the day the first Yellow Vests protests happened. The video depicts President Macron and his wife dancing to Middle Eastern-sounding music at a gala event with the caption, “And while France is suffering,” insinuating Macron was “partying” while French citizens were protesting.

REACH: The video went viral within days, reaching **5.7M views** and **over 183K shares** by March 6, 2019.

VERIFICATION: The original video was published a month before the first Yellow Vest protests happened, on October 11. It was recorded during the International Organization of the Francophonie summit in Armenia. Media outlets published several [articles](#) explaining the manipulation of dates and context. At time of publication, Facebook still had not issued a related article below the video or provided further information.



THE YELLOW VEST MOVEMENT IS BEING CENSORED

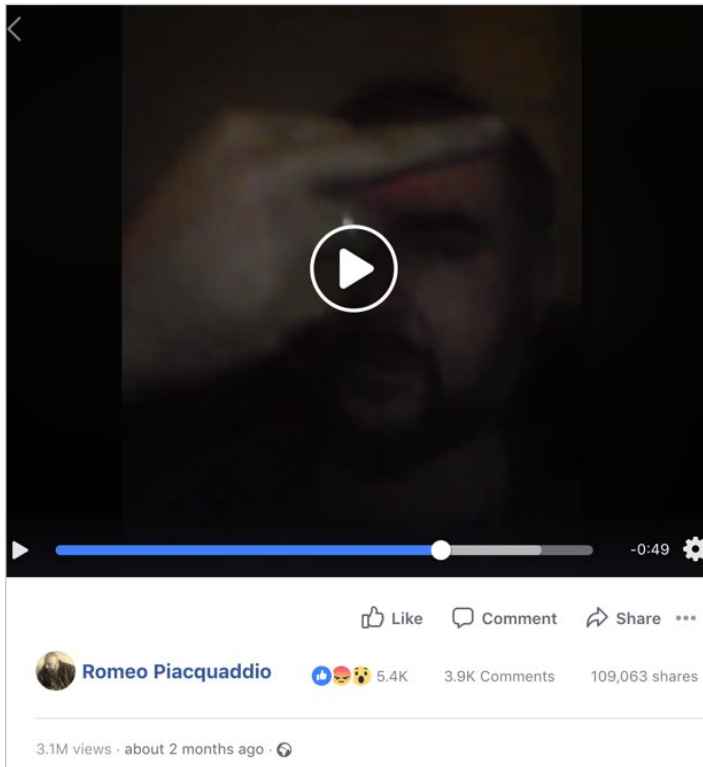
FAKE NEWS: [This post](#) was published on November 25, 2018, with the caption “this picture has just been erased, share massively,” insinuating that the content had been censored.

REACH: When first published with the censorship accusations, massive sharing started and by March 6, 2019, it reached over **349K shares**, leading to **over 8.9M estimated views**. The image, with the false caption, was still available at the close of this study.

VERIFICATION: The post is still available on the platform and as fact-checkers from [Le Monde](#) have said, “this image taken by photographer Olivier Coret has been used to illustrate many online publications that have not been censored on Facebook or elsewhere. [...] the very fact that this photo was published on November 25 and is still available [...] proves that there was no censorship.”



MACRON IS SELLING FRANCE AFTER SIGNING THE MARRAKECH PACT



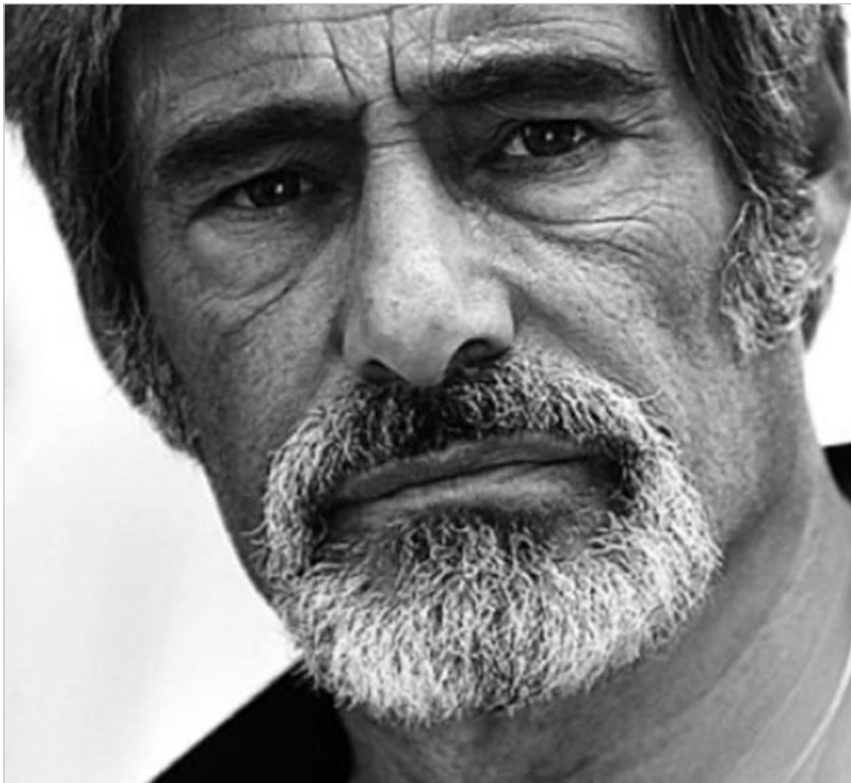
FAKE NEWS: A man named [Romeo Piacquaddio](#) recorded himself in early December 2018 describing an extremely important message he received on his phone. He plays the audio of an unidentified woman warning that Macron was going to “sell France by signing the UN migration pact on December 10.” The female voice then claimed that after signing this treaty, Macron would resign and that the Yellow Vest movement would be used as a cover up.

REACH: The video was shared **108K times** and reached over **3.1M views** by March 6, 2019. Disinformation about the Marrakech UN Migration Pact, warning of alarming mass migration into France, was shared across multiple Yellow Vest groups, including by [Maxime Nicolle](#), one of the leaders of the movement.

VERIFICATION: Articles by multiple newspapers, such as [Le Monde](#), have since refuted claims that the treaty would lead to open borders or that countries would be forced to change their migration policies. The controversy started spreading in France in early 2018 when extreme right pages such as *Breiz Atao* and *Polémia* began sharing the content. By late November, the topic became popular in the Yellow Vest groups.

5 ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT SUPPORTED BY PUBLIC FIGURES

GERARD LANVIN, A FAMOUS FRENCH ACTOR, PUBLISHED AN OPEN LETTER AGAINST MACRON AND HIS GOVERNMENT



FAKE NEWS: On December 8, 2018 a letter allegedly written by French actor Gérard Lanvin, criticizing President Macron and his government, was shared widely on social media. It strongly condemned public officials as well, saying that people who “from birth to death live off of public funds, enjoy special social security benefits and are exempt from taxes, should at least have the decency of not talking about equality.”

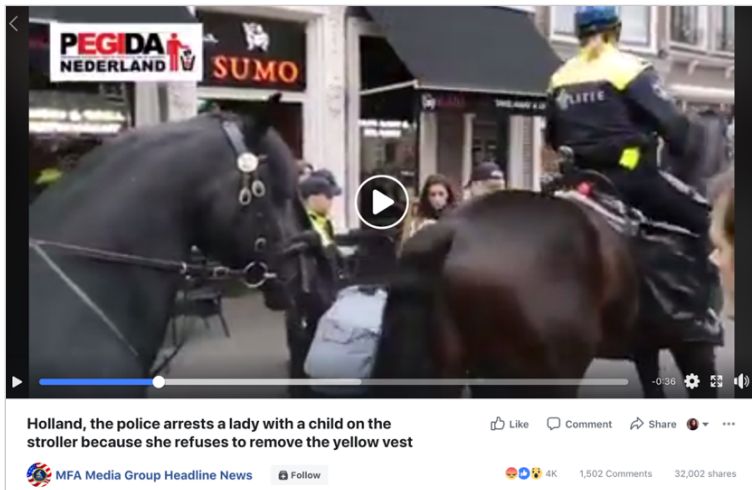
REACH: In less than 48 hours, this post was **shared over 251K** with **over 6.4M estimated views**. The same post, or similar variations, were shared on different pages and groups on Facebook (see screenshot at right).

VERIFICATION: The letter shared was not written by Gérard Lanvin. The actor claimed he was a [victim of identity theft](#) and has since reported the incident to the authorities. The fake news took excerpts of a real letter published in 2013 by the actor, originally addressed to then President François Hollande, around a controversial income tax for wealthier

people. The first post spreading the disinformation has been removed by Facebook, but variations of the same content ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)) can still be found without any alert from the platform.



A MOTHER IN THE NETHERLANDS IS ARRESTED BECAUSE SHE REFUSED TO TAKE OFF HER YELLOW VEST.



FAKE NEWS: The [video was first shared by “Pegida Nederland.”](#) It was filmed in the Netherlands and the caption suggests that the police arrested a lady with a stroller because she refused to remove the yellow vest.

REACH: The video was quickly translated to [French](#), [English](#) and [Italian](#). The [English](#) version alone received **31K shares**, and an estimated **1.3M views**, by March 6, 2019. Many comments expressed outrage over the perceived police brutality directed toward a woman with a child, and interpreted the incident as an attack on freedom of expression.

VERIFICATION: According to [AFP](#), the woman in the video had raised the suspicion of police forces because she was walking with a doll in a stroller, not with a baby, and once she wasn’t able to prove her identity, she was detained, which is in accordance to Dutch law.



THE METHODOLOGY

Facebook has long been criticized for the lack of transparency it provides to fact-checkers, governments, media and the wider public about the spread of content. However, Avaaz's team of data scientists and researchers used a combination of Facebook's public data, analytics tools like CrowdTangle, fact-checks by French and international media and statistical modeling to arrive at what we believe provides a credible and conservative picture of the reach and impact these fake news stories have had in France.

- **TIME FRAME:** The first national Yellow Vest movement demonstration was on November 17, 2018. However, many of the Facebook groups and pages at the core of the movement were created weeks earlier. For this reason, **we focused our Facebook research on content created between November 1, 2018 and March 6, 2019.**
- **SCOPE:** A [number of analyses](#) and [media reports](#) have shown strong evidence that Facebook was by far the most popular social media platform used by the Yellow Vest movement participants. We examined social media posts shared by pages, groups and profiles associated with the movement and limited our analysis to posts containing text, images and videos while excluding links to outside content.

■ TOTAL NUMBER OF FAKE NEWS VETTED, SHARES, AND VIEWS:

	FAKE NEWS POSTS	SHARES	VIEWS
VIDEOS	37	1,666,743	42,777,224
IMAGES & TEXT	63	2,438,894	62,594,602 (est.)
TOTAL	100	4,105,637	105,371,826 (est.)

- **FAKE NEWS SOURCES AND SELECTION CRITERIA:** We used three different strategies to identify the fake news for our analysis: a) We collected all the Yellow Vest-related fake news reported by the main fact-checking websites in France (including but not limited to: [AFP Factuel](#), [20 Minutes](#), [Les Décodeurs](#) and [Checknews](#)); b) Using the analytics tool CrowdTangle, we selected 198 public groups and pages used by the Yellow Vest movement and scrutinized their posts to identify fake news; and c) We added the fake news from *Le Monde's* [own research](#) based on another group of 204 Yellow Vest Facebook groups from October 31 to January 22. Out of those, we selected the 100 most shared posts among the fake news we had identified.
- **CATEGORIES OF FAKE NEWS INCLUDED IN THE STUDY:** We included in our study content that falls within the definition of disinformation as articulated by the [EU Code of Practice on Disinformation](#): *"verifiably false or misleading information which, cumulatively, (a) 'Is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public'; and (b) 'may cause public harm', intended as 'threats to democratic political and policymaking processes as well as public goods such as the protection of EU citizens' health, the environment or security.'"*

The 100 fake news stories we selected are mostly malicious, made up or factually incorrect posts. But they also include purposefully misleading content that is either out of date, is taken out of context, or its content is regarded as either factually uncertain and at least partially inaccurate. As stated above, all of them have been fact-checked by French or international media.

■ **VIEWERSHIP CALCULATION FOR FAKE NEWS VIDEOS:** Our fake news selection contained 37 examples of fake news video content accumulating to a total of 42,777,224 views and 1,666,743 shares. We followed Facebook's definition of what constitutes a "view," that is, a viewing experience that lasts 3 seconds or longer⁴.

■ **VIEWERSHIP ESTIMATION FOR IMAGES AND TEXT:** Facebook discloses the number of views for videos, but for posts containing only text and image content the platform displays only the number of shares and other interactions, such as likes or comments. Therefore, in order to estimate viewership for text and image content we designed a metric based on the publicly available statistics of the Facebook videos analyzed in our study, taking into account the total number of video views and dividing it by the total number of video shares. Facebook reports a "video view" only after 3 seconds, while an image or text can be considered as "viewed" and having an actual impact in less than 3 seconds (e.g. just scrolling by an image of a bleeding woman, police brutality or claims of censorship). Therefore, the estimation of total views in this study is very likely lower than the actual total viewership of all content and therefore is to be seen as a conservative figure.

■ **ENGAGEMENT RATE CALCULATION FOR IMAGES AND TEXT:** As laid out above, the metric to estimate the views of images and text is based on the "average Yellow Vest fake viral content engagement rate" (from now just "YV engagement rate," with YV standing for Yellow Vests), which is calculated by using the available video data with the following formula:

YV engagement rate = (YV video views/YV video shares)

Based on the 37 fake news videos in our database, the average YV engagement rate is:

42,777,224 video views / 1,666,743 video shares = 25.6651589 views/share

The average YV engagement rate is then multiplied for the number of shares of posts for which views are not provided by Facebook (containing images and text).

YV engagement rate * YV image and text shares = estimated YV image and text views

The total number of estimated views for posts containing images and text are:

25.6651589 views/share * 2,438,894 shares = 62,594,602 total estimated views

Therefore, the total number of views (video views + estimated views for image and text) is:

62,594,602 video views + 42,777,224 est. image and text views = 105,371,826 est. views

All the posts mentioned in this research were active and available as of March 6, 2019 or screenshots of the original posts together with data on shares and views were provided and can be found in the annex.

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/Coming-Soon-Video-Metrics>

THE RUSSIA EFFECT - RT FRANCE DOMINATES THE YOUTUBE DEBATE

A second part of the report focused on YouTube, and two datasets were analyzed.

The first one looked at the 500 most relevant Yellow Vest videos after September 2018 according to the YouTube algorithm when running a search query for "Gilets Jaunes" both for the French language and for the French region code. Although this dataset only allows a partial picture of total views for each channel, being based only on the top 500 videos, it allows us to assess the biggest channels producing the most relevant Yellow Vest content and their relative strength on YouTube.

The second dataset was obtained by querying RT France's channel and other mainstream media channels - Le Monde, L'Obs, FRANCE 24, Le Figaro, LeHuffPost - using the YouTube API, and filtering the data to retain only videos uploaded after September 2018. We then used string detection to find mentions of Gilets Jaunes (or variations of it) either in the title or the description of the video. This method provides a more precise comparison of their viewerships.

The results from both datasets are overwhelmingly clear: **RT France is the most viewed channel on videos related to the Yellow Vests in France and accumulated more views (30M) than Le Monde, L'Obs, FRANCE 24, Le Figaro, LeHuffPost combined (24M).**

According to the US Director of National Intelligence, RT (Russia Today) is "the Kremlin's principal international propaganda outlet" and "contributed to the influence campaign" of the 2016 US elections⁵. In the US, RT has been suspended by Twitter from ad-buying in the fall-out from the US elections due to their clear bias⁶. YouTube rolled out a feature in the US in 2018 informing users if they're watching a video from an organization that receives funding from a government. At the close of this study, we have not found that such notifications were shown to YouTube users in Europe, nor do we have indications that this will be implemented in Europe ahead of the EU elections in May⁷.

⁵ https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/LCA_2017_01.pdf

⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/26/560199026/twitter-ends-russian-state-media-advertisements-citing-2016-interference-efforts?t=1552208868105>

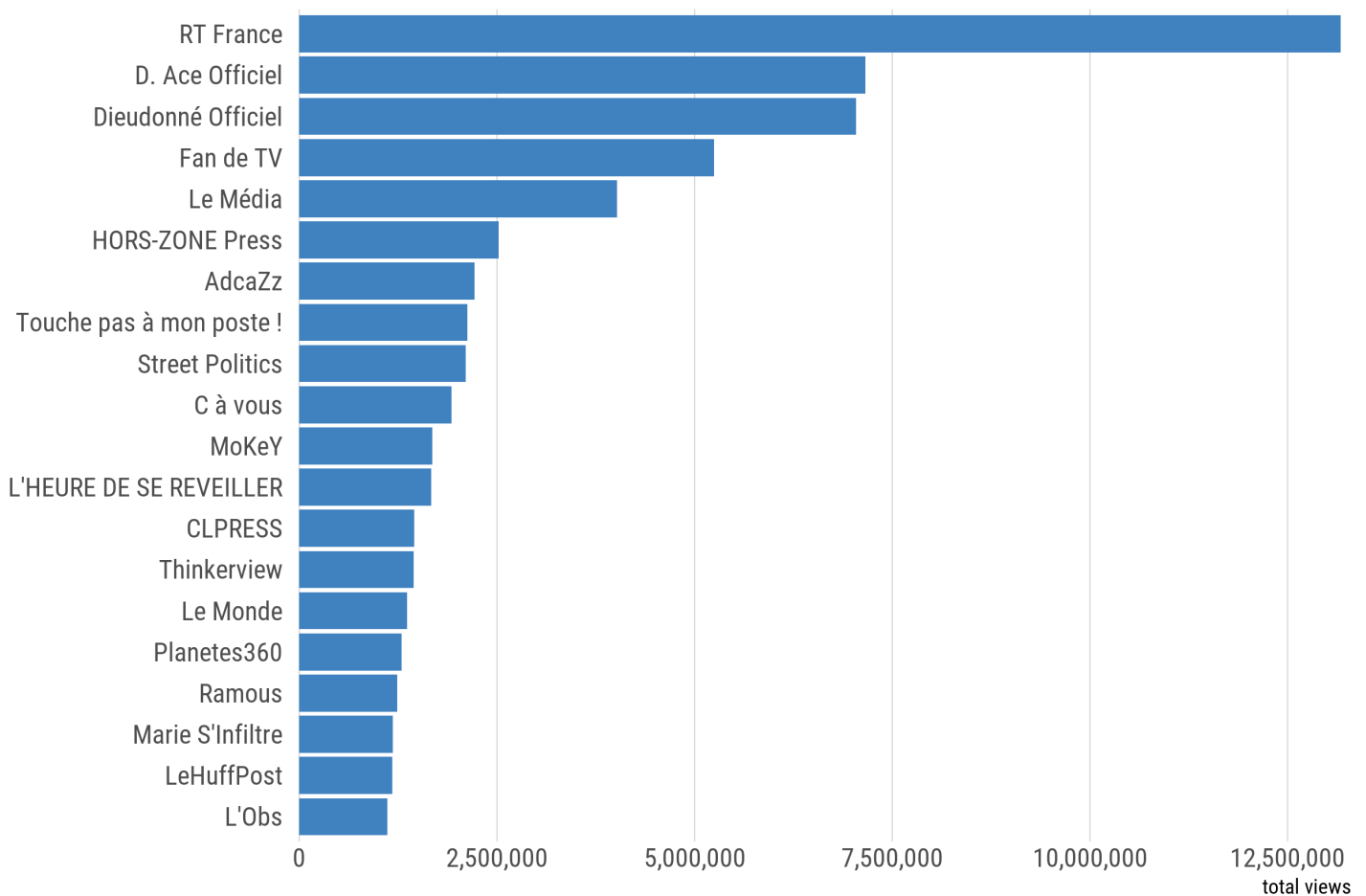
⁷ <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2018/02/greater-transparency-for-users-around.html>



Figure 5.1 -- Top 20 channels publishing Yellow Vest content, ordered by number of views and based on the 500 most relevant Yellow Vest videos, Nov. 1, 2018 - Mar. 7, 2019

FRENCH YOUTUBE CHANNELS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF VIEWS

Based on the 500 most relevant videos for the search query "Gilet Jaune"



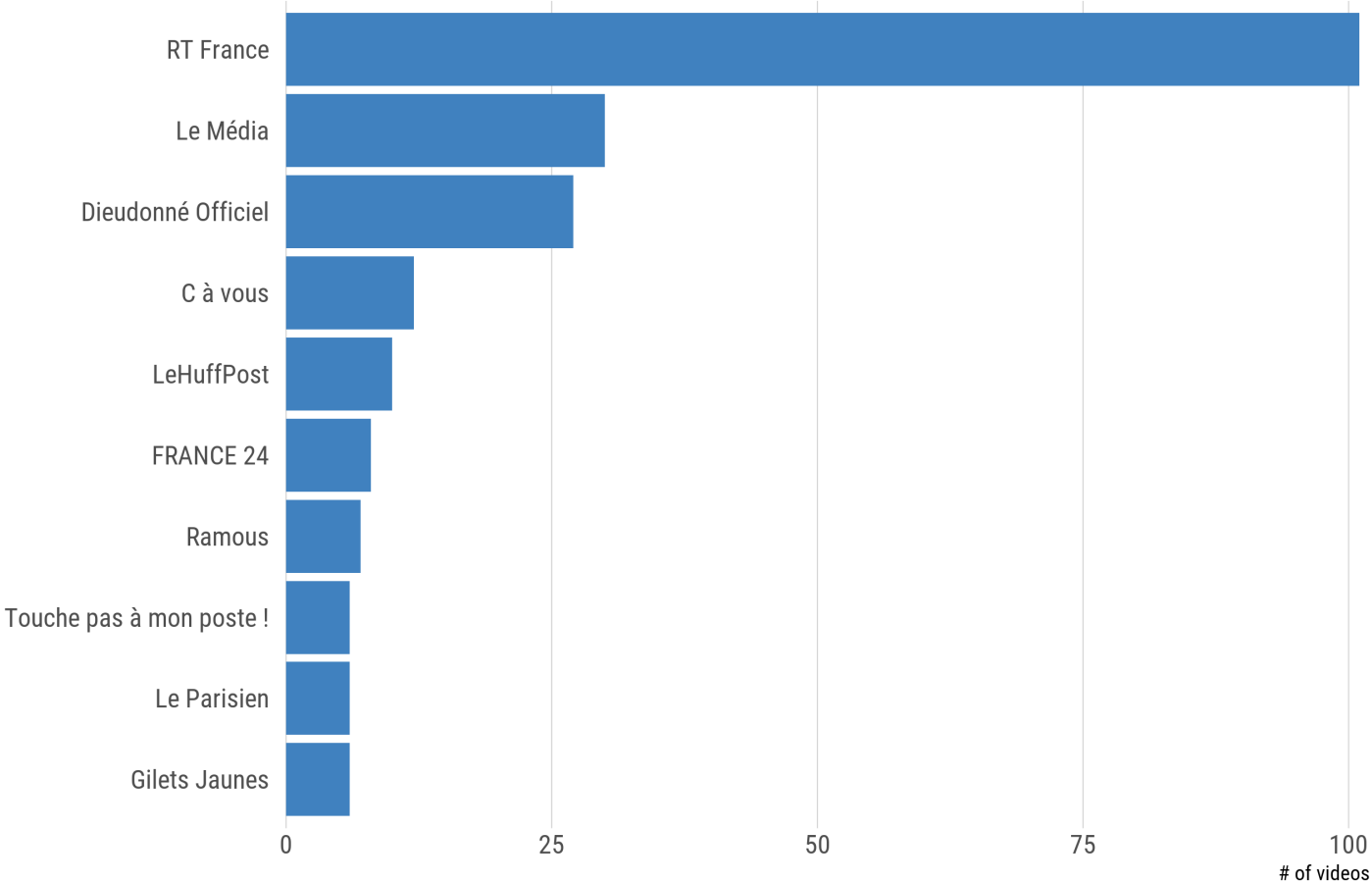
Source: 500 videos retrieved via YouTube API
FR region and language codes

Another observation from Figure 5.1, is that alternative media, YouTuber and citizen journalists, including a few channels featuring conspiracy theories, have more visibility on YouTube than most of the traditional media, many of which are not even featured in the top 20.

RT France's dominance is even more clear when looking at the number of videos uploaded on Yellow Vests. Among the top 500 YouTube results, **the Russian state media has 3 times more videos (101) than the second biggest publisher (Le Média - 30) and more than the next 7 channels cumulatively (100).**

Figure 5.2 -- Top 20 channels publishing Yellow Vest content, ordered by number of videos uploaded and based on the 500 most relevant Yellow Vest videos, Nov. 11, 2018 - Mar. 7, 2019

FRENCH YOUTUBE CHANNELS WITH THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF UPLOADED VIDEOS



Source: 500 videos retrieved via YouTube API
FR region and language codes

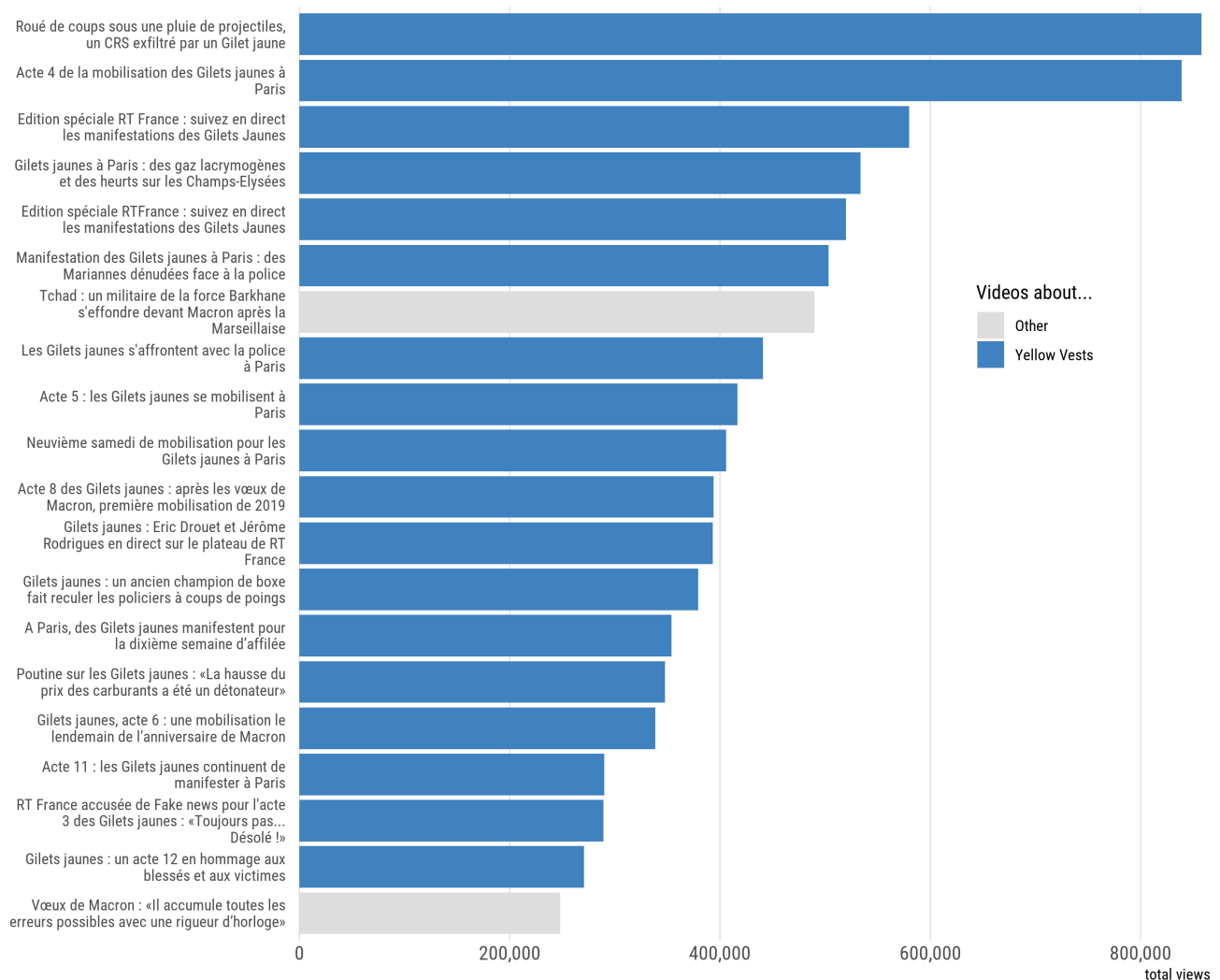
As mentioned above, to further study RT France's content and publishing behavior, we queried RT France's YouTube channel using the YouTube API. The original dataset contained 17,340 observations (videos) between September 2014 and March 2019. As a first step, we filtered the data to retain only observations uploaded after September 2018.

This second dataset strengthens our analysis. **18 out of the 20 most viewed videos on RT France's YouTube channel since September 2018 are about the Yellow Vests.** The following graph shows these top 20 videos by view count. The orange bars are Yellow Vest-related videos.

Figure 5.3 -- Top 20 RT France's videos by view count Sep. 1, 2018 - Mar. 6, 2019

18 OUT OF 20 OF RT FRANCE'S MOST VIEWED YOUTUBE VIDEOS ARE ABOUT THE YELLOW VESTS

Top 20 videos by view count since September 2018



Source: 3,639 videos via YouTube API
RT France channel

RT France has massively invested in coverage of the Yellow Vest protests, including hour-long live coverage videos, and as a result, dominated the debate about Yellow Vests on YouTube in France more than any other YouTube channel, let alone mainstream media. RT has permeated the movement to the extent that protesters at one point chanted "Thank You, RT! Thank You, RT!" which the global RT network posted directly onto their [YouTube channel](#).



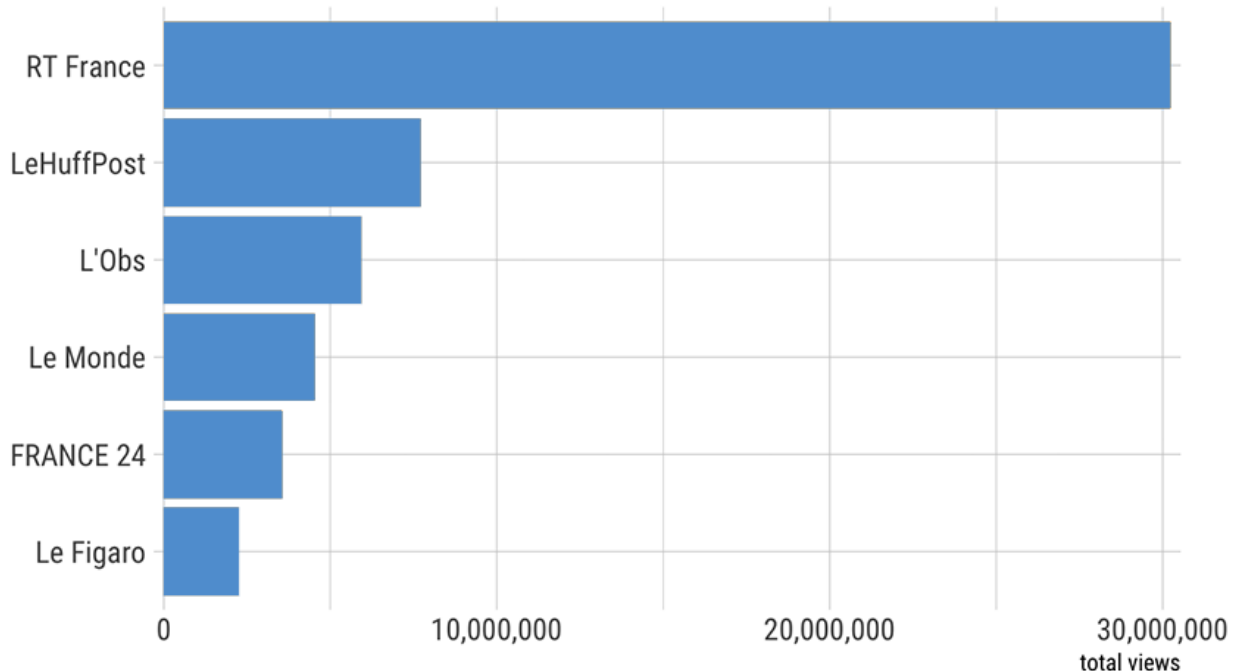
To assess the full reach of RT France on YouTube, we compared the channel's total views with those of the the largest mainstream media in France by retrieving all videos about the Yellow Vests since September 2018 from the YouTube channels of LeMonde, L'Obs and LeHuffPost (all of which were present in the top 20 channels of the first data set). In addition, we retrieved videos from two more channels which are among the most well-known and highest-circulation media, France 24 and Le Figaro. On all of those videos we applied the same string detection method used for RT France to identify videos about the Yellow Vests.

The results show that on YouTube, the information diet is not mainly made up of quality journalism from within France - but by Russian state media and lots of fringe actors (see initial analysis on 500 most relevant videos):

- RT France has accumulated more views (30M) than Le Monde, L'Obs, FRANCE 24, Le Figaro and LeHuffPost combined (24M)
- RT France has also uploaded 164% as many videos (1034) than Le Monde, L'Obs, FRANCE 24, Le Figaro and LeHuffPost combined (629)

RT FRANCE'S VIDEOS ABOUT THE YELLOW VESTS MARSHALED THE MOST VIEWS

Based on each channel's videos published since September 2018



YOUTUBE CHANNEL	UPLOADED VIDEOS	TOTAL VIEWS
RT France	1034	30243048
RT France Total	1034	30243048
LeHuffPost	145	7720720
L'Obs	107	5927921
Le Monde	26	4547978
FRANCE 24	263	3544331
Le Figaro	88	2263770
Mainstream 5 Total	629	24004720
RT France / Mainstream 5	164%	126%

Note: The difference in the total views for RT France from the first dataset (13M views) and the second dataset (30M views) derives from the fact that the first dataset looked at the 500 most relevant YouTube Videos on Yellow Vests in France, and thus only taking into account 101 videos from RT France, arriving at 13M views within the top 500 search queries from September 2018 to March 2019. The second dataset queried the entire RT France YouTube channels and retrieved a total of 1034 videos for the query "Gilets jaunes", arriving at a total of 30M views since September 2018.

THE SOLUTION:

CORRECT THE RECORD.

Avaaz believes that the fake news surrounding the Yellow Vests has been especially impactful, because the vast majority of millions of French citizens exposed to it have never been informed if they have seen fake news, or seen factual corrections. Because even if content is fact-checked and found to be untrue, Facebook only shows what they call “related articles” to a very small percentage of the users who have actually seen the fake news (mostly people who shared or want to share the content).

But the solution to this problem is simple: Platforms must themselves work with fact-checkers to “Correct the Record” by distributing independent third party corrections to EVERY SINGLE person who saw the false information in the first place. Newspapers publish corrections on their own pages, television stations on their own airwaves; platforms should do the same on their own channels. No one else can do it.

Avaaz believes that Correct the Record is likely the most powerful action platforms can take ahead of the upcoming EU elections to restore the public’s trust and to ensure the integrity of the elections. It has been portrayed as a “radical new proposal [that] could curb fake news on social media” by [TIME magazine](#).

Governments protect consumers and participants in financial and energy markets from false and misleading information, including by making it possible to issue corrections when disinformation could influence people’s decisions. **We should offer our democracies the same protections we offer our markets.**

*In our view,
Correct the Record would be
a five-step process:*

1. **DEFINE:** The obligation to correct the record would be activated when
 - Independent fact-checkers verify that content is false or misleading;
 - A significant number of people, e.g. 10,000, viewed the content.

2. **DETECT:** platforms must
 - Deploy an accessible and prominent mechanism for users to report disinformation;
 - Provide independent fact-checkers with access to content that has reached e.g. 10,000 or more people.

3. **VERIFY:** Platforms must work with independent, third-party, verified fact-checkers to determine whether reported content is disinformation within 24 hours.

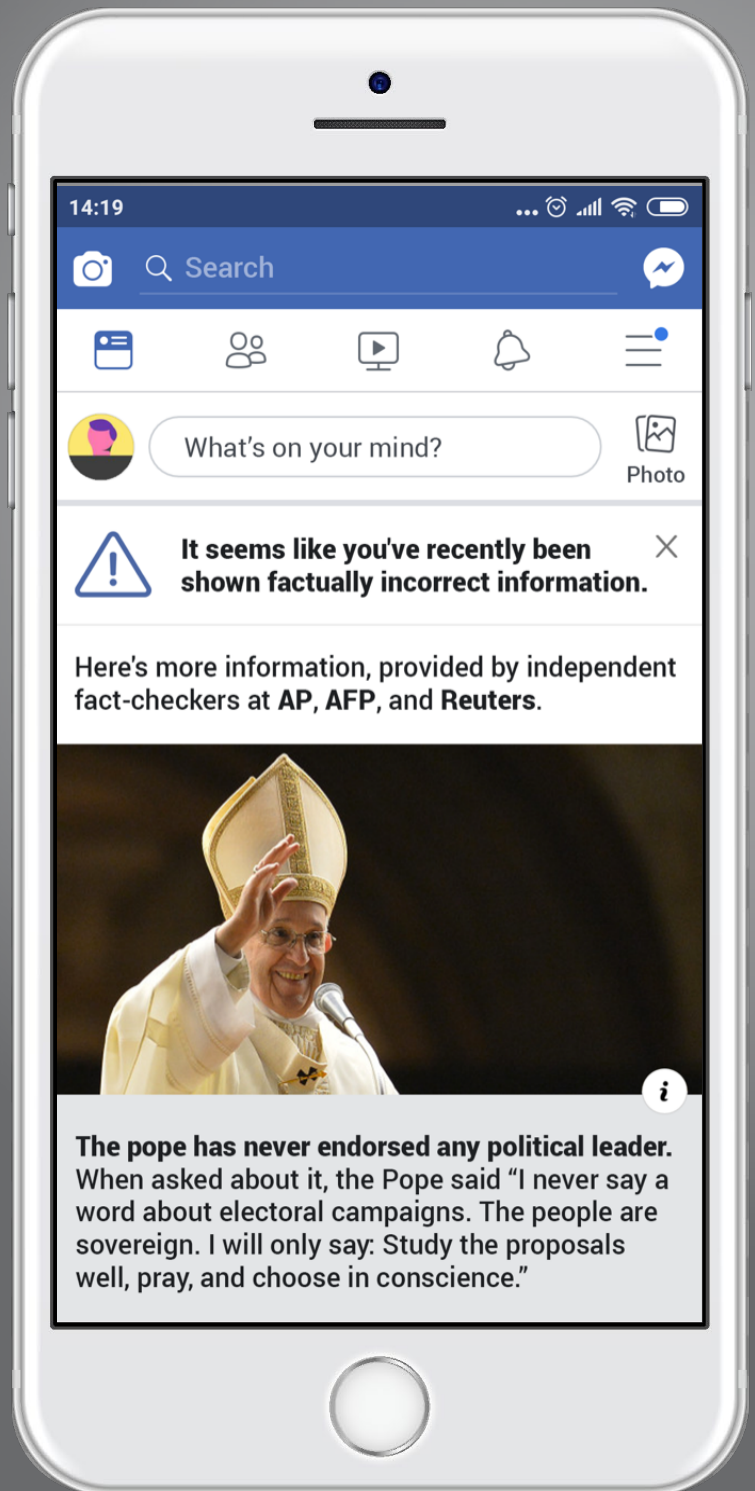
4. **ALERT:** Each user exposed to verified disinformation should be notified immediately using the platform’s most visible notification standard.

5. **CORRECT:** Each user exposed to disinformation should receive a correction that is of at least equal prominence to the original content and that follows best practices, which could include:
 - Offering reasoned alternative explanation, keeping the user’s worldview in mind;
 - Emphasizing factual information while avoiding, whenever possible, repeating the original misinformation;
 - Citing endorsement by sources the user is likely to trust.

Corrections work:

[Multiple peer-reviewed studies](#) have [demonstrated](#) that effective corrections can reduce and even eliminate the effects of disinformation. Additional studies disproved the theory of the “backfire effect,” showed that corrections do not entrench false beliefs and came to the conclusion that corrections work. Meanwhile, researchers are converging on [best practices](#) for effective corrections like emphasizing factual information while avoiding, whenever possible, repeating the original misinformation.

To the right is a mock up suggestion of what the corrections could look like on users’ timelines:



UPDATES, VERSION 1.2

Version 1.2 of this report includes an updated and more precise methodology for the second part of the Youtube investigation.

In the previous version We reported that RT accumulated twice as many views on videos related to the gilet jaunes on YouTube as the top 5 French media outlets combined. This was accurate based on a search of videos that had "Gilet" (and variations of it, e.g. Gilet, Gilet jaunes, Gilets jaunes) in the title. Yet, the way we conducted the string detection only caught videos that had the word "Gilet" written in uppercase letters, not lowercase (e.g. gilet, gilet jaunes, gilet jaunes) nor occurrences in the video description. Updating our methodology to both include lowercase versions of "gilet" and including the description of the video, the ratio of RT videos to the top 5 French outlets on YouTube drops from 213% to 126% - meaning that RT France still has accumulated more videos views than LeMonde, France24, L'Obs, LeHuffPo and Le Figaro combined.

There is an even more comprehensive approach that would manually review all videos for gilet jaunes content but we do not plan to pursue this.



ABOUT AVAAZ

Avaaz is a global citizens movement with over 50 million supporters in every country of the world, including about 20 million members in Europe. The research for this study was carried out by a team of investigative reporters, researchers, and data analysts set up by Avaaz to detect and deter disinformation ahead of the EU elections. Over the next few months, Avaaz members from across Europe will be working alongside this newly launched team to monitor disinformation operations across the European Union, help identify fake news and prevent their viral spreading, support in uncovering the networks driving it, and work with platforms and governments to correct false or misleading content and hold perpetrators accountable. Avaaz is aiming to provide more of such in-depth reports to inform the public and decision makers about the spread of disinformation across the continent.

If you want to schedule an interview with one of Avaaz's campaign directors or simply stay informed about further reports and investigations from our team - please get in touch with

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