

The French & Science 2020

By the end of 2020, 3500 French of all walks of life were interviewed on-line with regard their views of science in the midst of the Covid19 pandemic. The survey sample covers all regions and is stratified across sex, age and education to be representative of the entire French population. Being the latest leg of a long series of surveys reaching back to 1972, 'the French & Science in 2020' is the French equivalent to similar initiatives conducted in the United States since 1979 and in the EU since 1989. This survey is the eighth in a series of French surveys that was initiated in 1972 by Frederic Bon, and continued for every decade by Daniel Boy (SciencePo, CEVIPOF). The Foundation Hubert Curien has fittingly sponsored this eighth round of what started in very year when Mr Hubert Curien became Délégué Général à la Recherche Scientifique et Technique.

Science is a global affair, a global competition for excellence, resources and recruitment of qualified researchers. However science culture, the public understanding and engagement with science, remains a national, even local affair. People go about their daily lives and take notice or do not of scientific research, develop enthusiasm for particular topics, remain ignorant of most others, but overall develop views and attitudes towards the sciences and maintain certain reservation about the benefits and risks that they bring to themselves and society. Many people worry about the global challenges of climate change, aging populations, and artificial intelligence coming on stream. And some people pursue alternative solutions for their most important life problems. All this comes together in the social representation of science, and this research will examine this representation of 21st century France.

This research will allow us to characterise French culture of science on many variables and their interrelations. Indicators of this social representation of science include images of science, science literacy, promise and reservations, awareness of novel developments, particular interests, information seeking and forms engagement and entanglements in alternative medicine/practices, and expectations about novel techno-scientific developments including AI and AVs, and all this in the light of the Covid19 experience. The survey also measures personality traits such as the utopian impulse, conspiracy mentality, and openness to new experience and innovativeness and their relation to science culture. All variables can be mapped into socio-demographic variables to characterise the culture of science in present-day France in a complex picture. We anticipate that the results will reveal that the French public is sophisticated in their views of science, but variously informed; they nevertheless hold expectations of taking part in the decisions that affect our future. As many items have been carried in previous surveys dating back to 1972, we will be able to shows French trends in public perceptions, and examine the effects of generational age cohorts. They had very different life experiences in their formative years, and therefore might display different attitudes to science. These national trends will be compared to similar data available in the US and across Europe.

Over 2021 we will report on the latest in a series of French surveys of attitudes to science. The results of this enquiry will be revealed at the 3rd international conference Science & You 2021 to be held in Metz, 16-19 November 2021. The final report will be launched at this event, and the data will be made publicly available for other researchers to investigate the culture of science and its changes in France over the past half century. This research about the French attitudes to science is about and at the same time at contribution to the ongoing debates of science-in-society.

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