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# **The Socio-Representational Construction of Universal Basic Income in the French Context: Effects of Politico-Ideological Anchors.**

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As a new, complex and controversial object, we studied the Universal Basic Income (UBI) through the Theory of Social Representations (TSR). Our study aimed to explore the representational field spontaneously associated with the UBI in a French sample and how it was structured according to the participants' political and ideological anchors. Our results showed that the UBI was represented through analogies with the existing social minima, beliefs and values suggesting societal progress but also a fear of a weakening of the capitalist economic order. Moreover, splitting our sample based on the political orientation of the participants, we verified that they seemed to represent the UBI based on principles specific to their ideological traditions. The potentially polemical character of the socio-representational construction of the UBI and its potential implications in terms of maintaining or challenging the social order are therefore discussed.

**Keywords:** Universal Basic Income; Social Representations; Political Orientation; Ideology; Social Order

The origins of the concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI) are ancient. They are generally attributed to Thomas More (1516) who, in his work "Utopia" imagined an island on which each individual is guaranteed the means to subsist without having to depend on their work (Percheron, 2016). However, one of UBI's first concrete proposals is often ascribed to Thomas Paine (1797) in his book "Agrarian Justice" (Lepesant & Mylondo, 2018). In the French context, this idea reappeared through Benoit Hamon of the French Socialist Party during the last elections for the Socialist Party primary, and then during the presidential elections of 2017. By making it one of the flagship policies of his program, Hamon gave the UBI the benefit of unprecedented politicization (under the term "Revenu Universel d'Existence"). However, even if this fact suggests that this policy is a "left-wing" policy, the object was quickly embraced by politicians and parties from the entire French ideological-political spectrum. For instance, Manuel Valls proposed a "Decent Minimum Income" and Emmanuel Macron an "Universal Income of Activity". Besides, several politicians ranging from Yannick Jadot from the French Ecologist Party to Marine Le Pen from the far-right have been, in various ways, sympathetic to the policy (Guillaume, 2017). It should be noted, however, that their ideological and philosophical foundations were so different that they did not all advocate the same UBI. These different positions towards the UBI thus illustrated the usual "Left/Right" splits.

In fact, while a generic definition of the UBI could be "Income paid by a political community to all its members, on an individual basis, without control of resources or requirement of counterparts" (Vanderborgh & Van Parijs, 2005, p.6), multiple versions have been proposed by groups and individuals with a wide range of political orientations - both left and right of the political spectrum (Fourrier, 2019).

Without claiming to be exhaustive, on the extreme left, we could, for example, refer to the proposal of the French economist Baptiste Mylondo, the "Revenu Inconditionnel d'Existence", which would be truly unconditional and of a "sufficient" amount to protect every individual from poverty, exclusion, and exploitation, by challenging the capitalist system (Fourrier, 2019). Hamon's proposal was close to the latter. He proposed to pay 750 euros per month to any adult unconditionally, along with certain social benefits. But having pared it down in the course of criticism, his proposal finally came close to a "guaranteed social income" (Fourrier, 2019). Of a fairly small amount - but higher than the current social minima - it did not aim to replace existing social assistance. Moreover, its allocation would be based on the standard of living of households. The goal was social, rather than professional, integration

(Fourrier, 2019).

On the liberal side, there are the "negative income tax" and the "universal allowance" whose main promoters are Friedman and Van Parijs respectively (Fourrier, 2019). These proposals have in common that they provide for a small amount - generally insufficient to cover basic needs – and are relatively conditional<sup>1</sup>. They are based on a rationale of flexicurity (i.e., financial security for individuals at the price of a relaxation of labor regulations and their liberalization); the goal being the reduction of "extreme poverty" while maintaining a certain "economic efficiency". It should also be noted that one of the major interests of advocates of a negative income tax is to limit the intervention of the state in the economy (Fourrier, 2019).

Depending on the degree of conditionality and the estimated fair amount, we see how these various proposals are the result of broader philosophical, ideological, political, and economic issues and thus champion different, even antagonistic, social projects.

In this study, in view of the new and polemical character of the UBI in the French context, the considerable lack of empirical research on this subject, and its potential questioning of the social order, we will draw on the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1961) to explore how individuals represent the UBI, particularly according to their political and ideological positions. Such a study is all the more interesting given that on a European scale, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has led to a resurgence of UBI discussions in the political and media spheres (Nettle & al., 2021).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1961) offers the possibility to study the way in which a new object will be socially represented. It also makes it possible to study the systems of thought likely to contribute to the acceptance - or rejection - of the UBI.

Firstly, beliefs correspond to broad anchoring systems - not having a specific object - but from which a particular social object could be represented (Apostolidis & al., 2002). This could also be true for values, which we could consider as a cultural background of collectively shared meanings (Valence, 2010). Therefore, the study of an emerging object such as the UBI implies considering that being little or poorly known, it will probably be reconstructed based

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<sup>1</sup> While the universal allowance is theoretically more unconditional than the negative income tax, it is close to the latter in that, even if it were distributed to the richest people, it would be paid back to the state through a tax system (Fourrier, 2019).

on these various forms of knowledge disseminated in society through communication and social interactions (Valence, 2010).

In the framework of the theory of social representations, Moscovici (1961) revealed the role of two fundamental processes in the representational dynamic: objectification and anchoring. Objectification consists of a materialization of the object of representation, whereas anchoring refers to the integration of the object of representation into pre-existing categories of knowledge and its instrumentalization (Jodelet, 1984), as well as its inclusion in a set of symbolic and social relationships (Doise, 1990). In agreement with Jodelet (1989), we define a social representation (SR) as:

an organized set of opinions, attitudes, beliefs and information referring to an object or situation. It is determined both by the subject itself (its history, its lived experience), by the social and ideological system into which it is inserted, and by the nature of the links that the subject has with the social system (p. 188).

Thus, by allowing an articulation between the cognitive system and the social meta-system (Doise, 2011), this theory has the advantage of examining the social structure in which communications and interpersonal relations around the object under consideration are actualized.

Social representations correspond to “principles that generate positions linked to specific insertions in a set of social relationships and that organize the symbolic processes involved in these relationships” (Doise, 1985, p. 245). According to this definition, the position occupied by an individual or group in the social space “controls the representations of this space and the positions taken in struggles to conserve or transform it” (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 28). In addition to these sociological variables, other factors such as political opinion can contribute to the modulation of the SRs of an object (see Clémence & al., 1994 for an example on Human Rights). One of the aims of this study was to explore the extent to which the political orientation of participants could orient their ways of representing the UBI. For example, a recent study showed that the representations of the 2008 global economic crisis were notably influenced by the political orientation of Greek and Italian citizens (Mari & al., 2017).

More broadly, some studies have shown that different representations of social order structure individuals' stances on various public policies in different ways (see for example, Gianettoni & al., 2010; Staerklé, 2009). Indeed, since the early days of the theory of social representations, SRs have been considered as specific kinds of knowledge that not only enable communication but also organize social relations (Doise, 1985, 1990; Moscovici, 1961). This

approach is thus related to the study of social order (SO). It offers insight into the social processes that contribute to the legitimization or contestation of the SO (Staerklé, 2015). The concepts of ideology (i.e., the “ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination”, Thompson, 1990, p. 56) and counter-ideologies (i.e., “those thoughts and beliefs that are sufficiently powerful to challenge the status quo”, Nafstad & Blakar, 2012, p. 286) are thus central to such an approach.

The present research therefore approaches the fundamental link between the mobilization of representations associated with the UBI and the political and ideological anchoring of individuals. Thus, and given the lack of research on this subject in the French context, this article proposes:

- To explore the representational field that individuals spontaneously associate with the UBI.
- To study how this field is structured according to the political and ideological anchors of the participants.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

This exploratory research was conducted in France in March 2018. The recruitment of the 102 participants ( $M$  age = 32.57;  $SD$  = 12.38; 74 women) was carried out via Facebook, by posting an ad in different groups. The participants’ characteristics are summarized in Table 1. The interviewer presented himself as a social psychology student conducting a study on the UBI theme. We informed participants that there were no right or wrong answers, that we were only interested in their opinion, and that they were free to participate or not. Recruitment stopped when we had no new participants for several days in a row.

Table 1.

*Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.*

Variables	Participants N = 102 (%)
<b>Gender</b>	<b>N = 102</b>
Men	28 (27,5)
Women	74 (72,5)
<b>Age (Years)</b>	<b>N = 102</b>
20 – 49	89 (87,3)
50 – 71	13 (12,7)
<b>Education</b>	<b>N = 102</b>

Low (< secondary education)	9 (8,8)
High ( $\geq$ secondary education)	93 (91,2)
<b>Professions and socio-professional categories (PCS)*</b>	<b>N = 102</b>
Low (PCS+)	71 (69,6)
High (PCS-)	31 (30,4)
<b>In employment</b>	<b>N = 102</b>
Yes	69 (67,6)
No	33 (32,4)
<b>Income**</b>	<b>N = 102</b>
Low (< to 20,000 euros)	47 (46)
Average (between 20,000 and 60,000 euros)	53 (52)
High (> 60,000 euros)	2 (2)
<b>Political orientation</b>	<b>N = 102</b>
Left	57 (55,9)
Center	24 (23,5)
Right	21 (20,6)

\* "PCS-" correspond to: *Intermediate professions; Employees; Workers, Retired, Unemployed.*

"PCS+" correspond to: *Managers and Higher Intellectual Professions; Farms owners; Craftsmen, merchants and business owners (see Desrosières & Thévenot, 1988).*

\*\*Household's average annual income

## Measures

### *The Socio-Representational Field*

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. To highlight the cognitive content associated with the UBI, we used the verbal association technique traditionally used in the study of social representations (Abric, 2003; Vergès, 1992). This technique provides access to the field of representation studied. The number of responses requested generally varies between 3 and 5 (Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2008). Participants were asked to spontaneously produce 4 words or phrases, using the inductor "Universal Income (*Revenu Universel*), also named Basic Income (*Revenu de Base*)". Indeed, as the object is emergent, the degree of shared knowledge about it could be more "limited" than for a more established object such as salary, for example. We asked for 4 spontaneous associations to reach a good compromise between avoiding making the task too laborious and collecting enough information. As all participants gave 4 responses without exception, the average number of associations was 4. To further explore these representations, we drew on the technique of semantic contextualization (Piermattéo & al., 2014).

### *Political orientation*

Political orientation is an important variable in the study of social representations (Clémence & al., 1994; Mari & al., 2017). For instance, in the study by Staerklé and al. (2007), right-wing people were more likely to label social assistance recipients as undeserving, abusing state support and not working enough. Moreover, they were less aware of economic inequalities than people on the left.

Since the UBI was an object that could change our relationship to work as well as a means of reducing economic inequality, it was necessary to take this variable, political orientation, into account. A classic 11-point scale of political orientation - ranging from 0 (far left) to 10 (far right) - was therefore used to explore how the declared political orientation of individuals could influence the SRs mobilized to conceive the UBI and the positions taken towards it. To this end, we constructed our categories in the following way: participants who positioned themselves between 0 and 4 were categorized as "left" (N = 57). Those who positioned themselves at 5 were categorized as "center" (N = 24). Those who positioned themselves between 6 and 10 were categorized as "right" (N = 21).

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Words and expressions produced by verbal associations have been grouped using stemming and categorization<sup>2</sup> (Moliner & Lo Monaco, 2017). Different forms of the same word have been reduced to the most common form (e.g., the category "equality" includes the words "equal" and "equality"). Words that are different but have the same meaning have been grouped (e.g., the category "poverty" includes words and expressions such as "poverty reduction", "poor", "precarious"). Some infrequent words have also been grouped under broader categories (e.g., the category "economically\_dangerous" includes words and phrases such as "bankruptcy", and "increasing debt").

To limit the influence of the researcher's subjectivity regarding the attribution of meaning to the respondents' productions, and pursue a finer understanding of the participants' answers, we used the semantic contextualization technique, consisting of asking the participant to create a sentence containing their answer in order to illustrate the meaning they give to each word/expression (Moliner & Lo Monaco, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> While stemming involves bringing corpus elements back to their lexical root, another way of simplifying a corpus is to group these elements into categories.



For the creation of the prototypical analysis tables, a threshold must be defined in terms of the frequency of appearance of the representational elements to be retained. This task is ambiguous<sup>3</sup> and gives rise to a wide variety of practices (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011). Since for this analysis we were only interested in the cognitive content of the SRs of UBI, we only took into account the frequency of occurrence of each term and excluded its order of appearance. Generally, the qualitative analysis of the distribution of data and its coherence in terms of significance for the object allows thresholds to be defined *ad hoc* (Alessio & al., 2011). In our analyses, we chose a minimum occurrence of 5. This corresponded to all words whose occurrence was greater than 1% of the total corpus (1.23%). This indicates the emergent character of the socio-representational construction of the UBI. Thus, 66.7% (N = 272) of the total corpus (N = 408) was processed while 33.3% (N = 136) was left out of the analysis - including 19.1% of hapaxes (N = 78). A hapax is a verbal association which only occurs once. Thus, the higher the number of hapaxes, the higher the percentage of interindividual variation (Flament & Rouquette, 2003). A high number of hapaxes therefore means that the degree of shared knowledge about an object is low. In our total sample, the degree of shared knowledge around the UBI is therefore quite significant.

Using the IRaMuTeQ software<sup>4</sup>, we submitted the data to a prototypical analysis in order to explore the salience of the cognitive content in terms of frequency of evocation. The most frequent terms will be considered as the most important elements of the representation.

In order to explore the internal organizational structure of the representations associated with the UBI, similarity analyses (Flament, 1981) were also carried out with IRaMuTeQ. This analysis is based on the criterion of connectedness, which allows us to explore the strength of a statistical relationship between two elements of a representation produced by a verbal association task (Lo Monaco & al., 2016). Thus, it is possible to analyze relationships between the different elements of the representation studied by presenting them in the form of a graph: the maximum tree<sup>5</sup> (Rosenstiehl, 1967). These relations of proximity between the words produced by verbal associations are evaluated based on Jaccard's index (Jung & Pawlowski, 2014) which has a statistical value between 0 (no relation) and 1 (strong relation). Thus, the more this index tends towards 1, the more it shows a "closeness of meaning" between the elements considered. This software also shows "communities of words" based on this index:

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<sup>3</sup>Since there are no formal and authoritative rules for defining the thresholds to be retained for conducting prototypic analyses, there is a multitude of practices for defining thresholds (Alessio & al., 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Software developed by Pierre Ratinaud (<http://www.iramuteq.org/>)

<sup>5</sup>The graph of the maximum tree reveals in a clearer graphic form the representation's structure (Bouriche, 2003).

very close words are grouped in the same community and are distinguished from other communities of words with which they are weakly linked. The similarity analysis therefore enabled us to explore the relationships between the elements on which our participants based their thinking about the UBI.

Using IRaMuTeQ's  $\chi^2$  function, we investigated significant variations in the use of terms associated with the UBI based on the political orientation categories as defined above.

## RESULTS

### Prototypical Analysis: Exploration of Cognitive Content

The prototypical analysis of verbal production summarized in Table 2 indicates the cognitive content that participants associated with the UBI. Overall, the representational elements are rather positive. Many of the most frequent ones refer to major values in French society. For example, we find two of the three main values of the French Republican motto (equality and freedom), although the value of fraternity seems to have been replaced by solidarity.

Based on egalitarian values, several representational elements are positively connoted, suggesting a progressive view of social issues. In addition to being seen as a fair measure, some elements suggest the benefits of such a policy at a societal level (e.g., "It is vital for the well-being of our society that the Basic Income be established")<sup>6</sup> and others at a more individual level (e.g., "The dignity of individuals must be ensured through this income"). It should be noted that the element "emancipation" refers mainly to being able to emancipate oneself from paid work (e.g., "At different stages of life, universal income brings the freedom to work or care for oneself, to engage in paid or voluntary work, etc.").

Conversely, other representational elements suggest a fear of a weakening of the social order - reflecting a certain willingness to maintain it. Indeed, we verified such a fear of the destabilization of the capitalist economic order (e.g., "the UBI will drive the economy down"). Moreover, such beliefs may favor the maintenance of the status quo. For example, by considering the UBI to be nothing other than the current aid exclusively aimed at the poor people (e.g., "universal income would be aid for the poorest"), this could reflect an inability to think of a "universalist" social policy (such as social security in France) in monetary terms. It is as if monetary social policies could only be attributed to the poor people.

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<sup>6</sup> The examples taken to illustrate the way in which our participants justify the cognitive contents they associate with the UBI come from semantic contextualizations.

In addition, other participants evoke the centrality of work and the norm of reciprocity (e.g., "France will be even more a country of assisted and lazy people, why work?"). Close to these hegemonic beliefs, the UBI is thus described as unfair (e.g., "Those who have worked more will get the same as the others") and utopian.

Finally, we find elements referring explicitly to the anchoring process: being an abstract object, the participants seem to represent it from what they already know in society (e.g., buying power, salary, minimum social benefits) or refer to the public usually targeted by such policies (e.g., "When you receive basic income, you are poor").

Table 2.

*Cognitive content resulting from the prototypical analysis, organized by category (N = 102).*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Average rank</b>
Analogies	For_The_Poor	12	2.2
	Analogy_Minimum_Social_Benefits	10	3
	Analogy_Minimum_Wage (SMIC*)	9	2.4
	Money	9	2.7
	Analogy_Salary	8	1.8
	Buying Power	6	3
	Ambiguous	5	3.4
Values	Equality	38	2
	Freedom	13	1.7
	Emancipation	13	2.8
	Solidarity	12	2.8
	Equity	9	1.8
	Universal	9	2.6
	Equal_Opportunities	5	3.2
Benefits of such a policy at a societal level	Fighting_Poverty	13	1.5
	Wealth_Distribution	13	2.8
	Fair	6	2.8
	Societal_Progress	6	3
	Necessary_For_Society	5	2.3
Benefits of such a policy at an individual level	Security	11	2.7
	Comfort	9	2.7
	Vital_For_the_Individual	7	2.3
	Individual_Dignity	6	2.8
Fear of a weakening of the social order	Welfare_Dependency	12	3.2
	Demotivating	8	2.4
	Utopia	7	2.3
	Unfair	6	2.2
	Economically_Dangerous	5	2.6

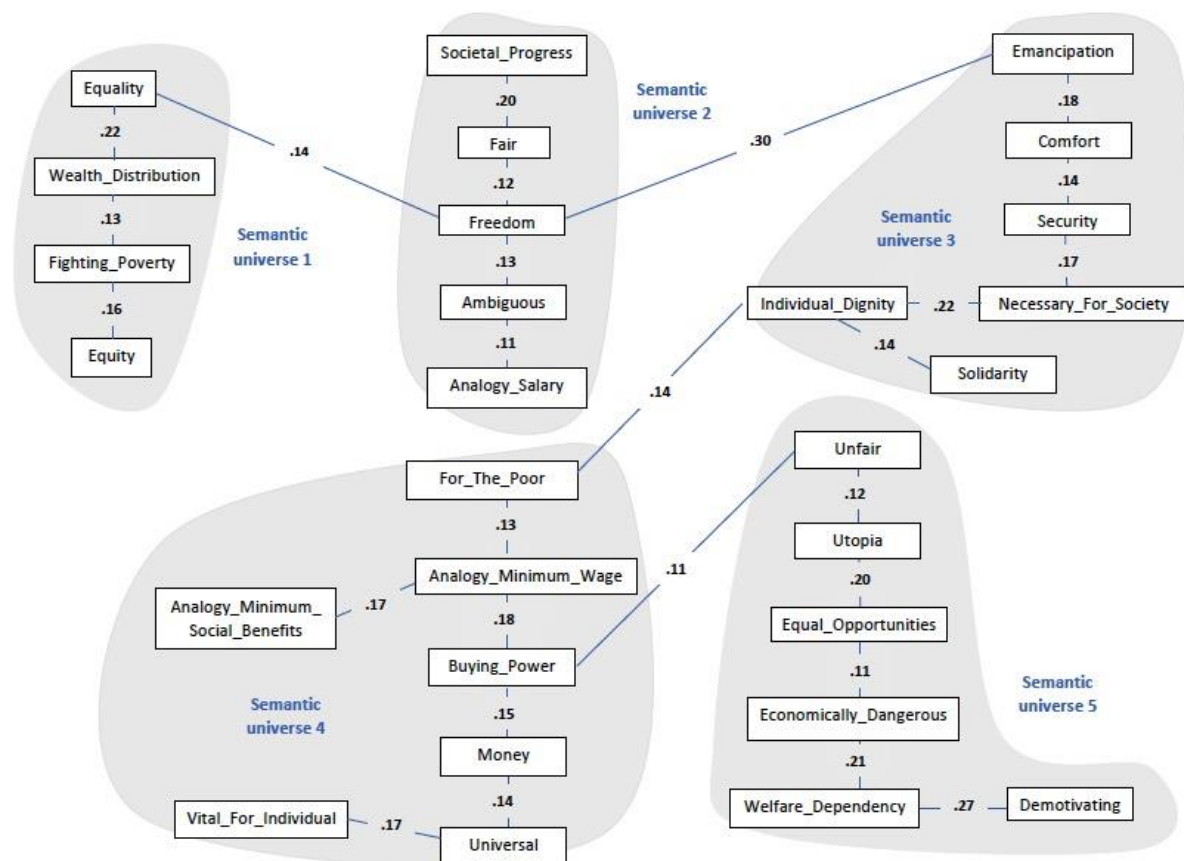
\* Le Salaire Minimum de Croissance/French minimum wage

### **Similarity Analysis: Relations between Cognitive Contents**

The similarity analysis of the verbal productions shows the relationship between the cognitive contents that the participants associated with the UBI. The results are presented in Figure 1. Elements relating to the benefits of the policy for both society and individuals occupy an important part of the graph, presenting fairly significant semantic universes (i.e., dimensions of meaning that constitute and organize the socio-representational construction of the UBI, see Quintal & al., 2015). However, it is interesting to note that as one continues to read the graph, the semantic universes appear to refer less to the societal benefits of the UBI and more to the individual benefits.

Figure 1.

*Relationship between the cognitive content generated by the similarity analysis for the participants (N=102).*



It should also be noted that as we read the graph, we see that the lexical semantic universes are gradually less linked on the basis of positive and abstract elements. Moreover, it is interesting to note that it is the element referring to the benefits of UBI in terms of individual dignity that links it (universe 1, 2 and especially 3) to the rather negative universes and various analogies (universes 4 and 5). Even though abstract beliefs about society are found in the latter universe.

Indeed, while the fourth universe essentially deals with the characteristics of the UBI as such, the last one essentially echoes its harmful properties at both individual and societal levels. These results suggest the polysemic and controversial nature of the socio-representational construction of the UBI.

## **$\chi^2$ Analyses**

$\chi^2$  analyses of verbal productions have shown that the evocation of certain representational elements depended on different political orientation anchors. While representational elements referring to progressive notions (i.e., “freedom”, “solidarity”) were more frequently evoked by people positioning themselves politically on the left than in the center (respectively  $\chi^2(1) = 4.38, p < .05$  and  $\chi^2(1) = 4.38, p < .05$ ), the idea that the UBI would be demotivating is more specific of those positioned in the center than those on the left side of the political spectrum,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.76, p < .05$ . Moreover, the idea that the UBI would encourage social welfare dependency and be demotivating is more specific of participants politically positioned on the right than on the left (respectively,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.04, p < .05$  and  $\chi^2(1) = 5.05, p < .05$ ). Through these 4 representational elements, we observed differences in the use of these terms between the participants positioned in the center and on the left; but also between those positioned on the right and on the left. However, regarding the most frequent elements, we did not observe any significant difference between participants positioned in the center and those positioned on the right. On this basis, we have grouped the individuals positioned in the center and on the right, as opposed to those positioned on the left. Further prototypical and similarity analyses of these two groups (left *vs.* center and right) were carried out.

## **Exploring Cognitive Content: Left versus Center and Right**

The results of the prototypical analyses of the verbal productions of the two groups (left *vs.* center and right) are summarized in Table 3. Although the most common term in both samples is equality, the rest of the representational elements of the two groups are in total opposition. Participants who are politically positioned on the left tend to represent the UBI via major values (e.g., equality, equity, solidarity, freedom, universal, justice), elements with positive connotations for society (e.g., wealth distribution, necessary for society, just) and for

individuals (e.g., emancipation, comfort, security, buying power). Finally, regarding poverty, it is more a matter of the struggle against poverty rather than a specific target public ('the poor').

Conversely, in addition to mobilizing representational elements suggesting a certain fear for the capitalist economic order (unfair, utopian, welfare dependency, demotivating), those politically positioned in the center and on the right tended to objectify the UBI on the basis of various existing minimum social benefits. Finally, although the UBI was also considered as a policy aimed to fight poverty (6 occurrences), this group highlighted that it is a policy that should target a very specific public: the poor (8 occurrences).

Note also that the degree of shared knowledge in the "center + right" group was lower than in the "left" group. In fact, for the "left" group, the total number of verbal associations was 228 (57 respondents \* 4 words) and the percentage of hapaxes was 19.3% (N = 44). On the other hand, in the "center + right" group, the total number of verbal associations was 180 (45 respondents \* 4 words) and the percentage of hapaxes was much higher: 32.2% (N = 58).

Table 3.

*Cognitive content from prototypical analysis for the Left versus Center and Right groups.*

<b>Left (n = 57)</b>	<b>Center and Right (n = 45)</b>
Equality (23, 2)	Equality (15, 2.1)
Solidarity (12, 1.5)	Welfare_Dependency (9, 3)
Freedom (12, 1.8)	For_The_Poor (8, 2.5)
Wealth_Distribution (11, 2.9)	Demotivating (8, 2.4)
Security (10, 2.8)	Fighting_Poverty (6, 1.5)
Emancipation (10, 3)	Analogy_Salary (6, 1.7)
Comfort (9, 2.7)	Analogy_Minimum_Wage (SMIC) (6, 2.3)
Fighting_Poverty (7, 1.4)	Money (6, 2.3)
Equity (7, 1.6)	Analogy_Minimum_Social_Benefits (6, 3.3)
Necessary_For_Society (5, 2.3)	Unfair (5, 2)
Fair (5, 2.6)	Utopia (5, 2.4)
Universal (5, 2.8)	
Buying_Power (5, 3.2)	

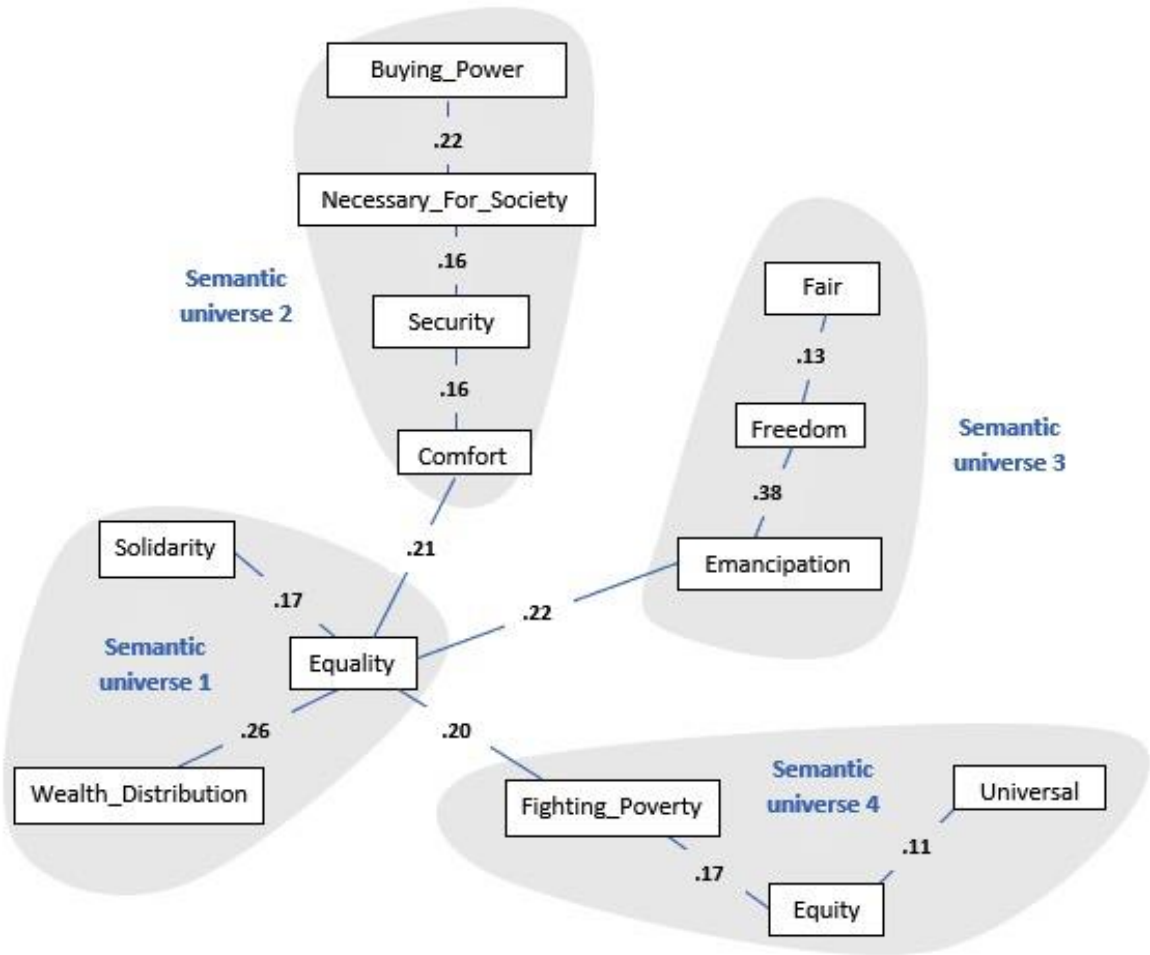
*Note. The first number in parentheses represents the frequency of terms mentioned, while the second number represents the average rank of appearance.*

### **Similarity Analysis: Relationship Between Cognitive Contents (Left)**

The results of the similarity analysis for the left-wing group are presented in Figure 2. Elements

relating to the benefits of the UBI for society and its citizens occupy the whole of this graph. The semantic universes are linked via the element 'equality'. The first semantic universe concerns the values carried by UBI and the way to implement them (i.e., the distribution of wealth). The second semantic universe refers to the benefits of UBI for French citizens (e.g., comfort, security, buying power) and its necessary implementation. A third semantic universe refers to the freedom that the UBI would allow (e.g., emancipation and freedom being strongly linked) and the association of freedom with fairness. The final semantic universe refers to the UBI's benefits in terms of equity and the fight against poverty, and the universalistic character that this implies.

Figure 2.  
*Relationship between the cognitive contents generated by the similarity analysis for participants positioned politically on the left (N = 57).*

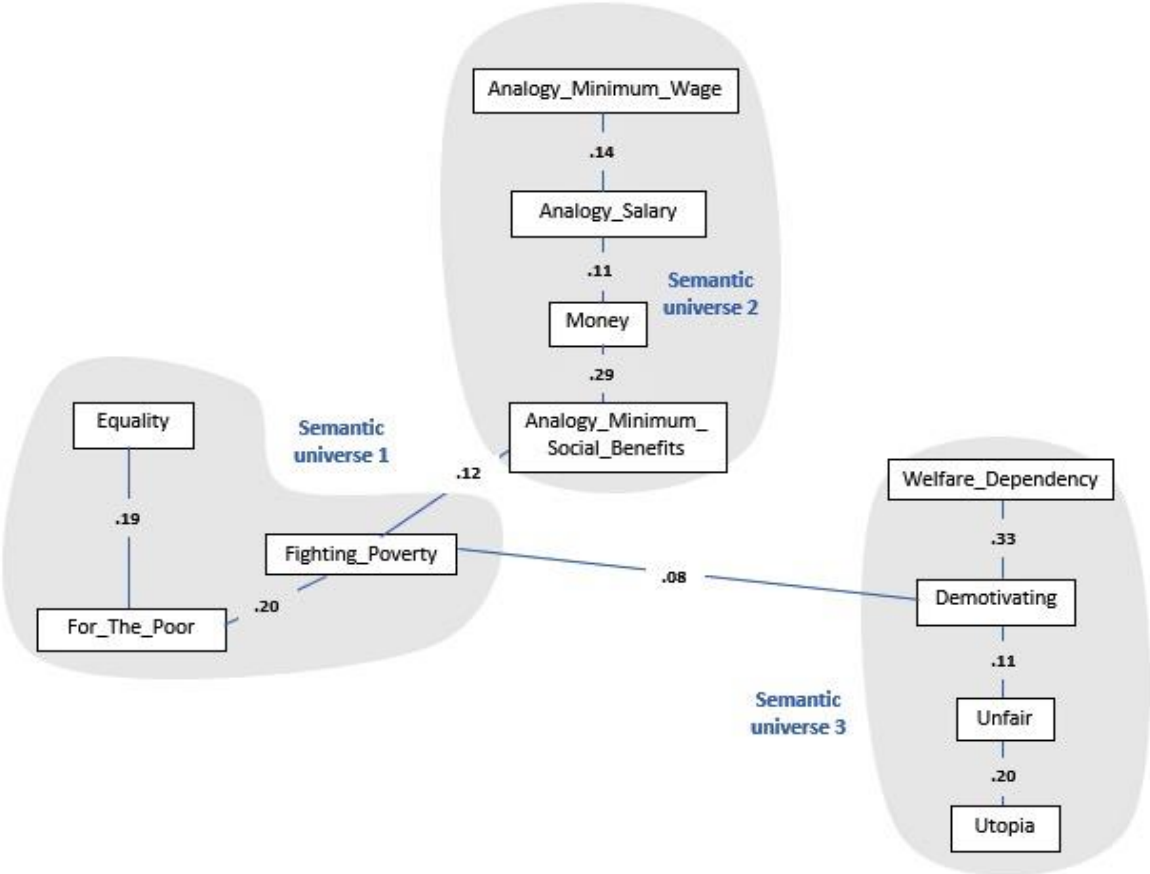


**Similarity Analysis: Relationship Between Cognitive Contents (Center and Right)**

The results of the similarity analysis for the center and right-wing group are presented in Figure 3. The different analogies to UBI and the representational elements suggesting fear for the capitalist economic order occupy an important place in the graph. While the starting point of the graph is the "equality" element, all the semantic universes are linked via the element referring to its anti-poverty characteristics. The first universe refers to the specificity of the UBI and its beneficiaries: it ensures a certain form of equality by addressing issues related to poverty. However, participants seemed to perceive the UBI mainly as conditional aid, aimed at the poor. The second semantic universe is composed of various analogies with the existing minimum social benefits, aiming at objectifying the UBI. In the center and on the right, this seems to indicate certain lack of information about the object - which does not seem trivial - and a desire to control it. The last semantic universe reflects its harmful and unrealistic character (e.g., unfair, utopian, or even demotivating and social welfare dependency, being the most strongly linked words in the graph).

Figure 3.

*Relationship between the cognitive contents generated by the similarity analysis for participants positioned politically in the center and on the right (N = 45).*





## DISCUSSION

An overview of the results makes it possible to highlight the strong axiological dimension at play in the UBI representations. Thus, among the most frequent representational elements, several values (e.g., equality, freedom, solidarity) were mobilized by the participants to represent the UBI. Since the republican values of freedom and equality make it possible in many countries to establish what democracy is (Blanc, 1850; Gamby-Mas & al., 2012; Marková & al., 2001; Tocqueville, 1835), the UBI seemed to be represented first and foremost as a policy that would make it possible to achieve a republican ideal.

This result is not surprising insofar as these values are regularly emphasized in the arguments of UBI advocates (Fourrier, 2019). However, the value of fraternity also appears in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (ONU, 1948). Yet, the UBI is more represented through the value of solidarity – especially for the left-wing participants. Although it is fairly close, but it is not as symbolically charged.

From a socio-historical perspective, the value of fraternity in the French Republic's motto was challenged by some 19th century Republicans. The French economist Charles Fourier (1829) was among the first to promote solidarity at the expense of fraternity, taking social justice issues out of the moral and religious domain (Jolibert, 2009). This idea would then have influenced the socialists of 1848, particularly regarding “the right to work” in solidarity (Jolibert, 2009). Thus, it would seem that common sense – and especially for participants on the left – is still shaped by a certain preference for the value of solidarity as opposed to fraternity regarding social justice.

Beyond values, the UBI seemed to be represented on the basis of various analogies with the existing social minima, of cognitive content suggesting a certain social progress and others referring to fear of questioning certain fundamental principles underlying the capitalist economic order (i.e., work and the economy). In this sense, in Figure 1, the division between the first three semantic universes - referring to the individual and societal benefits of the UBI - and the last two - referring to the various analogies and dangers it poses to labor and the economy - was made via the representational element of individual dignity. However, for Friedman (2002), who proposed the negative income tax, social justice based on the value of equality is incompatible with individual freedom. Indeed, the application of the principle of equality implies a redistribution of resources by the action of the state, which is considered by Friedman (2002) as a limitation of individual freedom. The latter considers that, through the state and "in order to promote a supposedly general interest" (p. 200), these egalitarian policies

force individuals to act against their own immediate interests. Thus, for Friedman (2002), only economic freedom is a guarantee of individual dignity. The latter specifies that the belief in individual dignity is constitutive of liberal thought:

The heart of the liberal philosophy is a belief in the dignity of the individual, in his (sic) freedom to make the most of his (sic) capacities and opportunities according to his (sic) own lights, subject only to the proviso that he (sic) not interfere with the freedom of other individuals to do the same. (p. 95)

This result thus suggests that the more the benefits of the UBI are thought of in an individualistic way, the less individuals see it in its progressive but rather neoliberal dimension.

In addition, we have found that while the UBI is partly represented as a tool for fighting poverty in both groups, the representational element relating to the public that should be targeted by this policy (i.e., "For\_The\_Poor") is more specific for individuals who are politically positioned in the center and on the right. This targeting of the UBI at the lower social classes - although it is supposed to be universal - seems to attest to a naturalization of our social model as we know it and an impossibility of - or an unwillingness - to - envisage another model of society. This targeting could also attest to a favorable form of social comparison for those who wish to move up in the social hierarchy or to maintain their position in it, implying that they do not need the UBI because they are more deserving. For all these reasons, we consider that the use of this representational element could contribute to the legitimization of the social order.

Finally, this distinction based on the political orientation of the participants suggests the polemical nature of the representations associated with the UBI<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, while the participants holding opposing political orientations partly represented the UBI on the basis of common elements (e.g., equality, fair or unfair character, emancipation or dangers related to paid work, objectives towards poverty), they also did so on the basis of principles specific to each of their political anchors. For example, the participants politically positioned on the left seem to see the UBI mainly through the prism of its beneficial implications for society. This might suggest that, as the object is better known and appreciated among this group, the effort to represent it would be lower. This would allow the issue to be politicized by debating on the substance of the policy. Conversely, the participants positioned at the center and the right represent it in particular by various analogies with existing minimum wage systems (e.g., minimum wage (SMIC),

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<sup>7</sup> Polemical SRs are generated during a controversy in society and determined by the adversarial relations between its members (see Moscovici, 2013).

minimum social benefits). This finding suggests that the UBI is less well known among this group and/or seems to be part of an ideological process aimed at preventing any consideration of alternatives to the dominant way of thinking. This finding is reinforced by the higher number of hapaxes in this group compared to the left-wing group.

In addition, the participants positioned at the center and the right draw on more representational elements underlining fear that the establishment of the UBI will cause a questioning of that which guarantees social order. In fact, any social order provides material and symbolic benefits to some groups while disadvantaging others, all social orders are unequal (Staerklé, 2013). For an unequal social order to persist, the systemic constraints on social actors alone are not sufficient to engage them. These constraints must be internalized and justified. The function of these justifications is to prevent individuals from finding their everyday worlds unlivable, and to pass it off as an acceptable and even desirable order, the only or best possible order (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011). One of the major strategies designed to justify existing social arrangements is othering (Staerklé, 2013). Othering is an act of strategic stigmatization that consists of designating certain social categories as different (Joffe, 1999) or, in the case of a threat to the social order, as inferior or dangerous (Duckitt, 2001). Among the social categories subject to othering, welfare beneficiaries and impoverished populations in general are particularly targeted (Staerklé, 2013).

Thus, through the use of "Welfare\_Dependency" or "demotivating" elements, this seems to reflect the dominant norms on which the social order is based (Becker, 1963; Marques & al., 1998) and the way in which existing social arrangements are cemented (Wacquant, 2004). This process of stigmatization based on dominant norms of meritocracy and centrality of work leads to the assumption that these dominated groups are primarily responsible for many of the problems that society faces (Staerklé, 2013). Moreover, this may provide a pretext for denying these rights to the individuals they believe should be the beneficiaries of the UBI: the "poor" (cf. *Supra* and the link between "Fighting\_Poverty" and "Demotivating", Fig. 3.). The prejudices associated with welfare recipients as stigmatization strategies therefore seem to remain very powerful in opposition to social and redistributive justice policies (Gilens, 1999; Sears, 1993; Sears & Henry, 2005). This othering process is an act of strategic stigmatization aimed at describing others as a threat to a "stable or harmonious" social order, thereby justifying existing social arrangements (Staerklé, 2013).

Moreover, the fact that the participants positioned at the center and the right describe the UBI more as utopian could also be part of the continuity of this process of legitimation insofar as it amounts *ipso facto* to discrediting it and, by a mirror effect, to maintaining that

dominant political action is guided by realism and necessity, thus contributing to the perpetuation of the social order (Camus, 2002).

Thus, it would seem that the UBI, recently reimplanted in the French society - and discussed periodically -, is inserted into pre-existing networks of meanings, interpretations and communications with strong ideological connotations. This would deserve to be investigated further in the framework of future research.

### **Limits and perspectives**

Despite its various implications, our work has some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, we used two different UBI names as an inductor<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, because all participants gave 4 responses without exception, we maybe should enable participants to give five verbal associations. In addition, one of the main limitations relates to the characteristics of our sample. Indeed, its size was quite small (n = 102), and it was not sufficiently diversified. Indeed, it was predominantly composed of women, young people, people with a degree above secondary education diploma and with a left-wing political orientation.

Despite these limitations, this exploratory study indicates the relevance of studying the way in which the UBI is differently represented according to the ideological anchors of individuals. Based on these initial results, we suggest a more systematic and quantified study of the SRs identified here and their potential relations with the political orientation of the French, as well as the way they conceive the social order. For instance, we claim that it would be of interest to draw on the model of SRs of the Social Order developed by Staerklé and al. (2007) in order to better identify the socio-cognitive processes at play in the positions taken towards the UBI. Moreover, this exploratory study suggests the relevance of studying the socio-representational construction of the UBI in relation to the ideological issues that it underlies. Thus, we consider the study of the way in which the UBI is discussed in the French press, particularly according to the a priori ideological anchors of the newspapers, to be of great relevance. In particular, future research question could address whether such representation is found in the particular form of social communication that is the written press. This focus would be particularly relevant to study how a new object as UBI is received and transformed in a society and affects public opinion (Moscovici, 1961).

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<sup>8</sup> Notably because these are the two most common names in our opinion in the French context for speaking about this object.

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