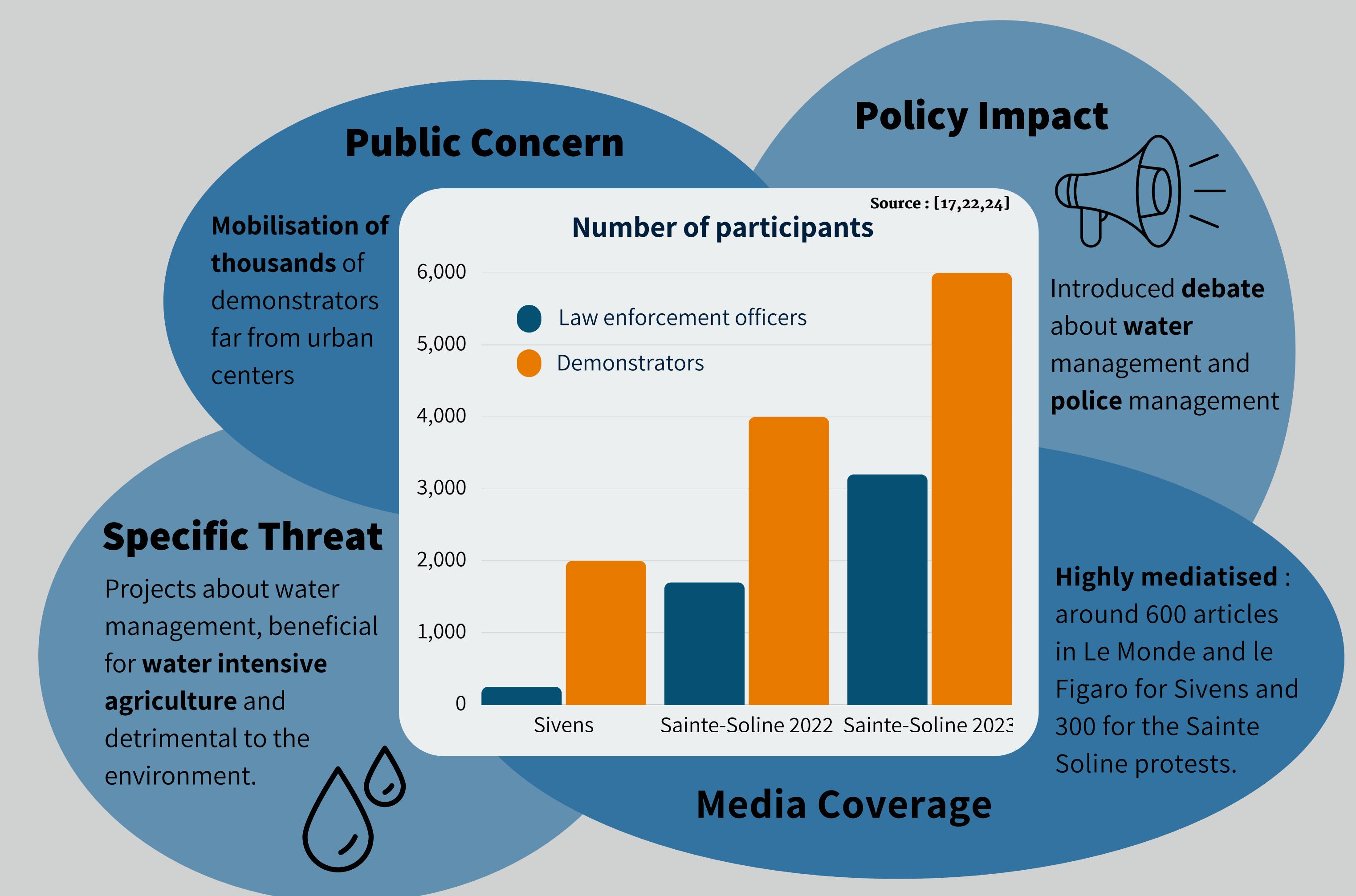
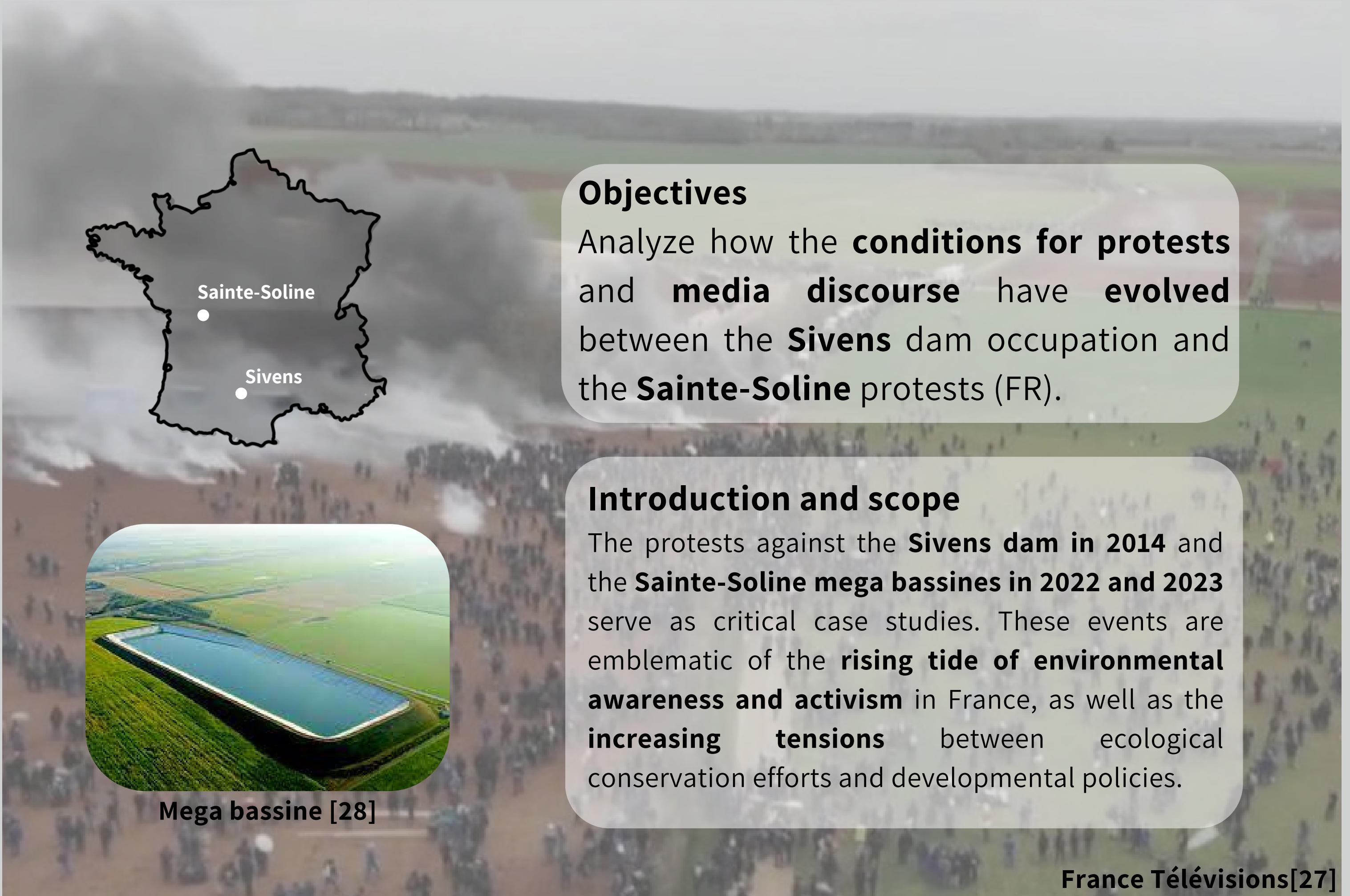


Analysis of the Evolution of Rhetoric and State Repression in French Ecological Activism

A Comparative Study of the 2014 Sivens Dam Occupation and the 2022-2023 Sainte-Soline demonstrations



The projects

Project : Construction of a dam to collect water for intensive farming projects in the region
Location : Sivens, in Tarn department, FR
Beneficiaries : About 19 farmers

The protests

Contestations: Inadequate water management, flooding 13 ha + great loss of biodiversity
Specificities: Death of Rémi Fraisse (21 years old protestor) by the police → intensification of debate around the project.

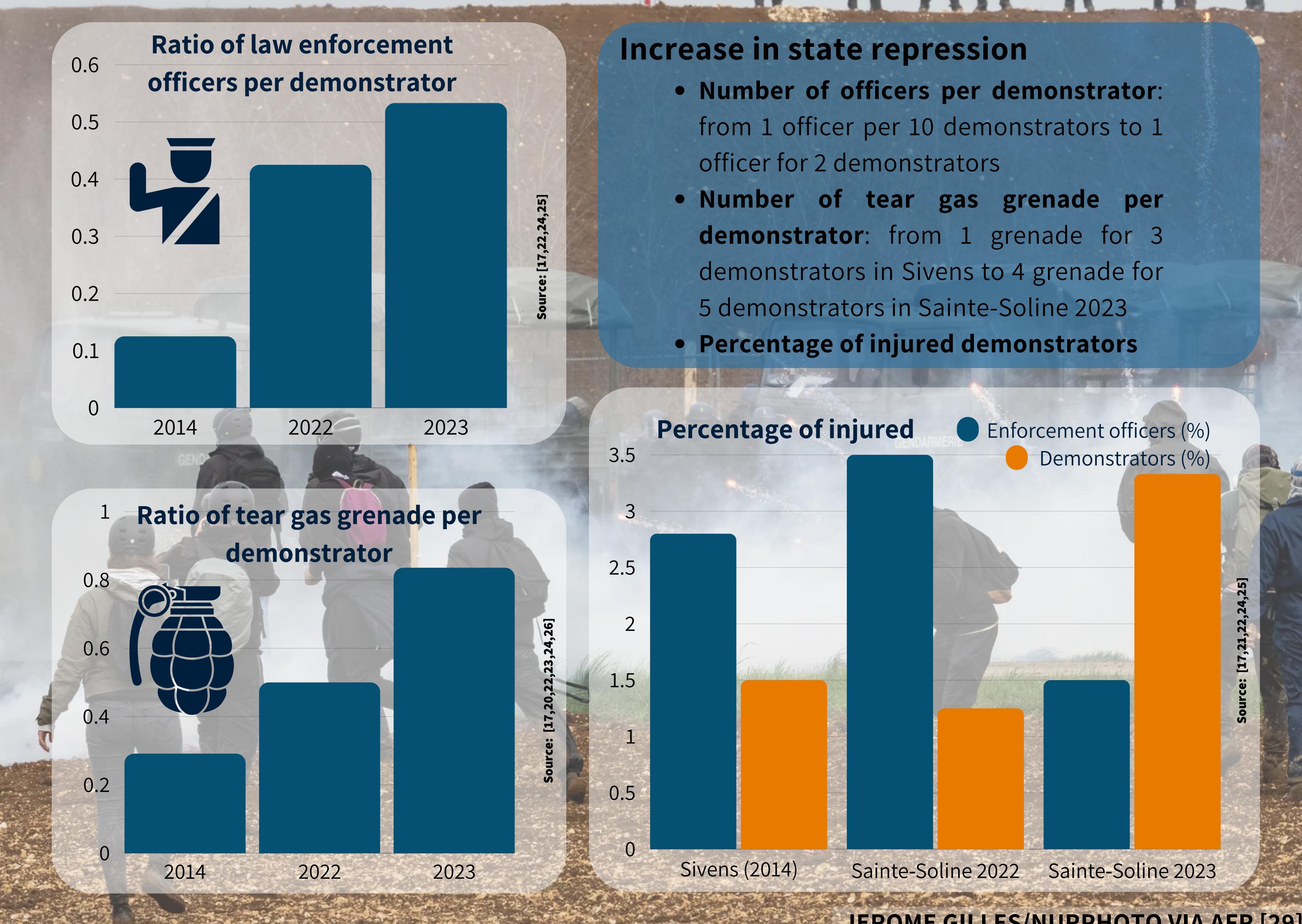
Contestations: Increased drought effects, water privatization and inadequate water distribution
Specificities: Significant turnout marked by tensions between demonstrators and law enforcement, with injuries on both sides. [12,13,16]
Specificities: Very near-death of one of the demonstrators → parallels being drawn between this protest and the Sivens Dam. [14,15]

2014

2022

2023

An Increase in physical violence



JEROME GILLES/NURPHOTO VIA AFP [29]

Le Monde

- Centrist to left-of-center editorial line
- Nuanced and in-depth analysis

LE FIGARO

- Center-right orientation
- Emphasizes economic implications and the interests of stakeholders

Qualitative Analysis

Le Monde
Both
LE FIGARO

Sainte-Soline

- Mention of a "drift" in political ecology in the view of right-wing figures [9]
- law reinforcement against alleged extremism [9]

"ultra left radicals" [9]
"ecoterrorists" [8]
violent [9]

- First use of the term "ecoterrorist" in France by Gérald Darmanin (Minister of the Interior since 2020) [8],[9]
- "ultras" [7]

"civil desobedience" [8]

- Mention of intense clashes between gendarmes and protestors, with injuries on both sides [6]
- Differentiation between climate activists: "ultras" and non-violent [7]
- Government displaying firmness against them [8]

Sivens

- No judging vocabulary used to describe protestors
- Highlight of violence and misinformation from the government [1]
- Emphasis on protests against police violence following Rémi Fraisse's death [2]

"extreme left rioters" [4]

"thugs" [5]
"zadists" [3]

- Protestors depicted as anarchists and black-blocs fighting violently against the police
- They are said to take advantage of riots to perform actions of damage and vandalism [5]

Quantitative Analysis

- Selection of all articles in Le Monde and Le Figaro mentioning "Sivens" or "Sainte-Soline" in the title
- Frequency analysis: words in article referring to violence, war and categorising protestors
- Sentiment analysis: performed on the titles only, by the machine-learning algorithm BERT [30]

Frequency analysis

- Increase of violence-related words on average by 300% in articles treating of Sainte-Soline compared to the articles of Sivens
- On average 160% more use of words belonging to the war register such as "weapons", "defense" in the articles of Sainte-Soline than in the articles of Sivens.

Sentiment analysis

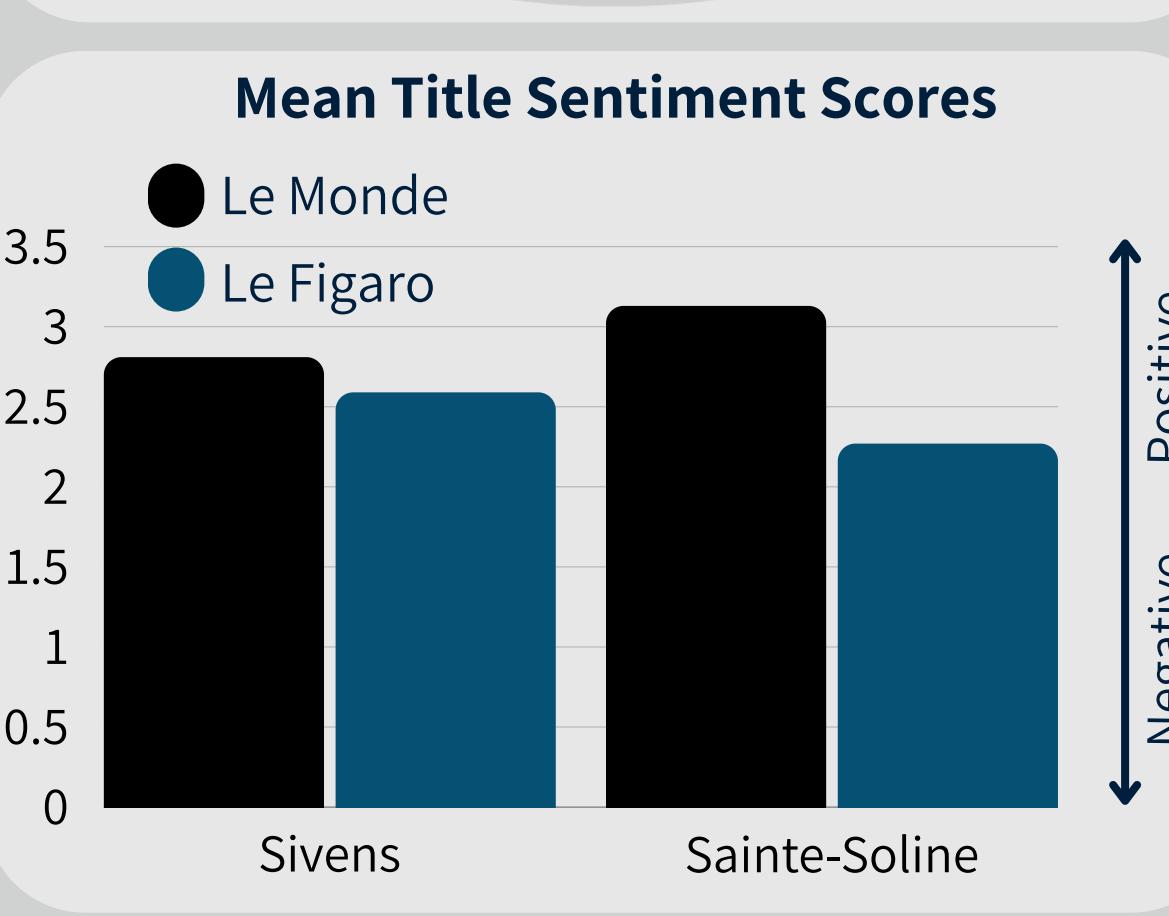
Over time, newspapers with contrasting political leanings tend to increasingly diverge in their perspectives.

Quantifying tool :

BERT multilingual base model : algorithm trained to quantify from a scale of 1 to 5 the "positivity" of a given text. [30]

Results :

- "Le Figaro" exhibited a 14% decrease in positivity in its coverage of the Sainte-Soline event.
- "Le Monde" showed a 30% increase in positivity when addressing the same event.
→ may indicate a trend towards more polarized opinions.



Conclusions

- Clear increase in state repression in terms of police officers and grenades
- More weighty tone to designate protestors (first use of "ecoterrorist" in FR)
- Political rhetoric more associated with violence and war registers

Considering that the climate urgency is rising, how will climate-related demonstrations evolve ?

