

ISS GLOBAL / REGIONAL INSIGHT REPORT



Rioting Across Europe

Suggested causes, local escalation and social-media manipulation

REPORTING / REVIEW WINDOW

Core review: 1–18 October 2026. Background: September 2026.
Evidence cutoff: 19 October 2026, 07:42 BST (06:42 UTC).

ISSUE DATE

2026-10-19

A comparative assessment of recent European unrest and the evidence for manipulation of its online portrayal.

Focus: France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Albania. The report distinguishes protest from rioting, examines suggested causes, and assesses recycled footage, synthetic imagery and attributed influence operations.

Prepared for analytical briefing and investigative follow-up. Maps and image exhibits provide context; the evidence audit preserves the limits of attribution.

What happened and its threat significance

COUNTRIES / REGION	WHERE	WHEN
France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Albania	Selected urban protest locations across western and southern Europe; regional comparison.	1–18 October 2026, with September origins. Issue: 19 October 2026.

What happened

Protests over education, living costs, housing and governance have coincided with serious violence in several cities. This report compares their local drivers, distinguishes peaceful mobilisation from rioting, and examines documented distortions of the online record. ^{[1] [6] [7] [9]}

Fact-checkers have identified recycled footage and synthetic protest imagery; NewsGuard reports an influence campaign exploiting the French unrest. ^{[10] [12] [14]}

Threat significance

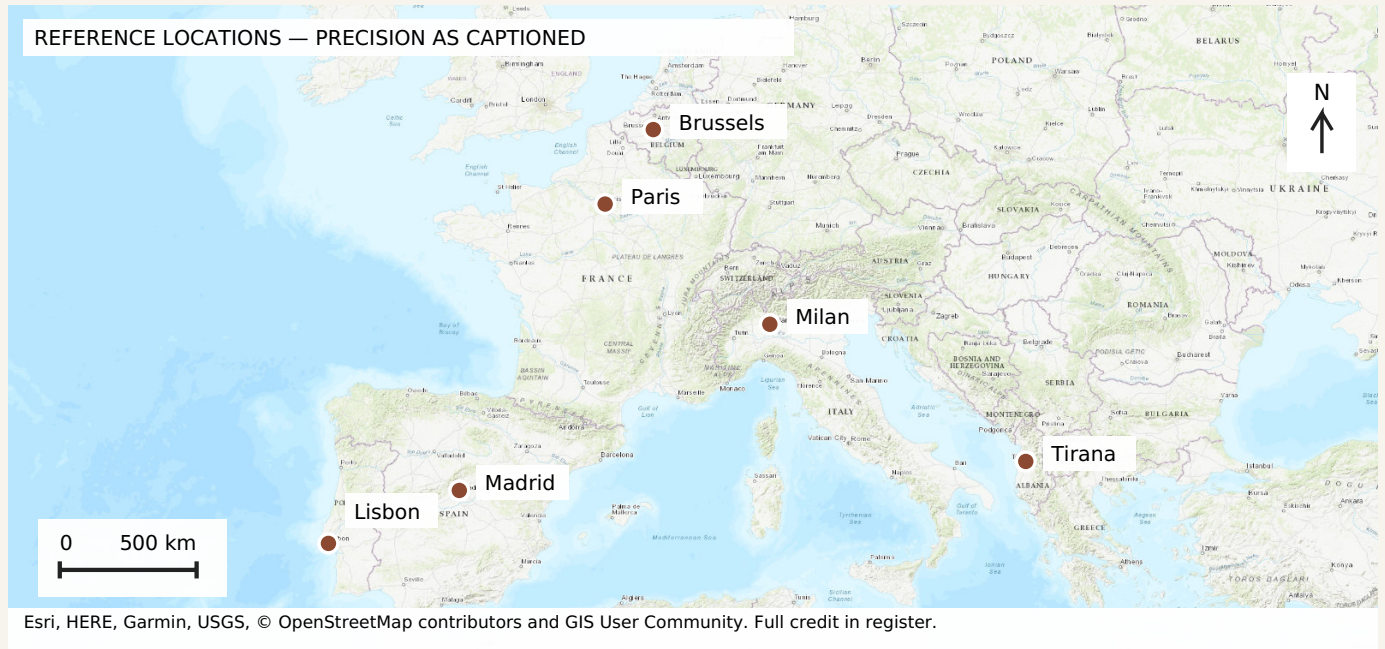
ISS Global assessment. The combined risk is physical disruption and a misleading common picture: genuine grievances and local violence can be reframed as a single ethnic conflict or continent-wide collapse. Accurate event classification and source provenance are therefore operational priorities.

EXECUTIVE JUDGEMENT

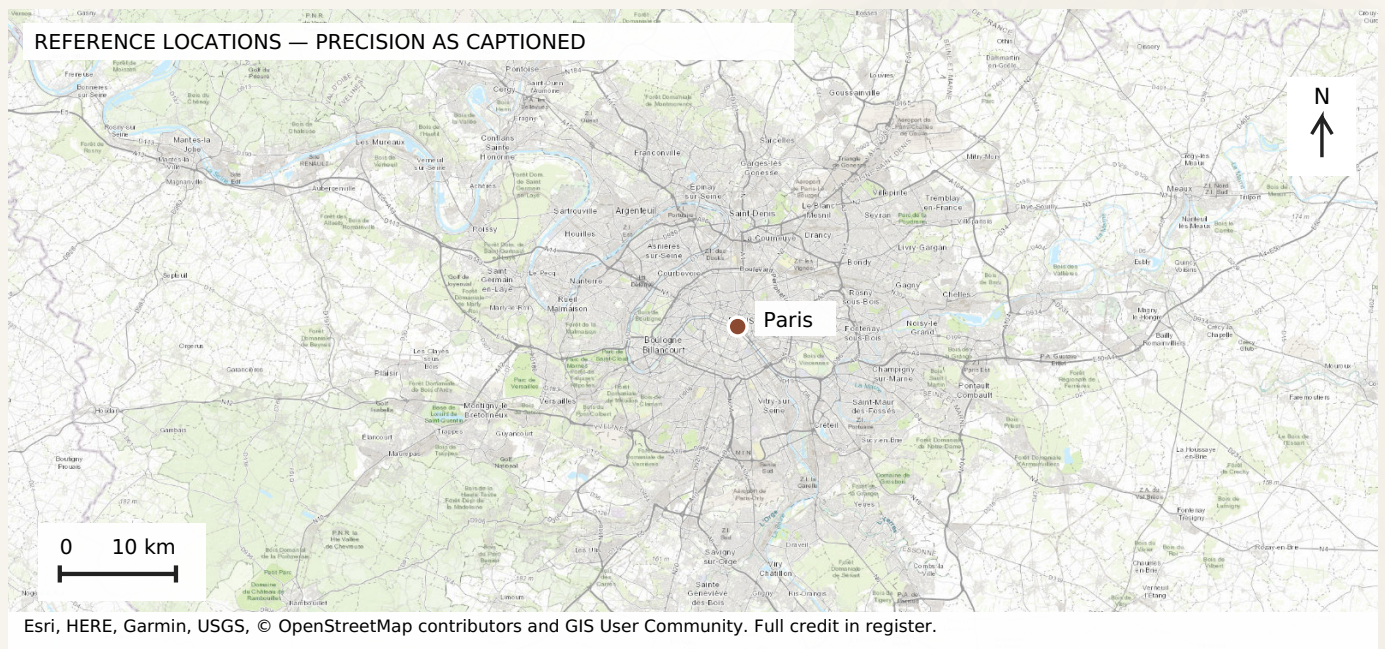
Treat public disorder and information manipulation as linked but distinct investigative problems. Address verified local harms and grievances while testing the provenance, coordination and impact of online claims.

02 / LOCATION ATLAS

A regional pattern with local differences



Selected city references: France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Albania. Markers identify the analytical sample, not a riot in every city or a shared command network. [17] [18]



Paris metropolitan context. City reference approximately 48.86° N, 2.35° E; no protest route, police deployment or camera location is plotted. Both maps: north up, EPSG:3857, independently checked ground-distance bars. [17] [18]

Scope: 1–18 October 2026, with September origins and an earlier technical reference clearly labelled. Coverage is selective, not a census of European disorder. The map gives location context; the incident classification is in the comparison table.

03 / COMPARATIVE RECORD

What happened — and what counts as rioting

COUNTRY / FOCUS	REVIEWED RECORD	CLASSIFICATION USED
France / multiple cities	Presidential account describes attacks on shops and public buildings on 17 October, while recognising legitimate demonstrators. ^[1]	Protest with serious rioting; separate participants and acts.
Italy / Milan	AP describes a peaceful start followed by masked groups, looting, fires and police clashes; about 50 detained. ^[4]	Documented violent disorder within a broader march.
Belgium / Brussels	Reuters reports student-related demonstrations, a car overturned and police use of tear gas and water cannons on 17 October. ^[5]	Clashes / riot reporting; no total for Europe inferred.
Albania / Tirana	Reuters records anti-government protests, stones thrown and police crowd-control response on 17 October. ^[6]	Violent confrontation within a continuing movement.
Spain / Madrid and other cities	RTVE traces housing encampments after the 23 September eviction of Maricarmen Abascal. ^[7]	Housing mobilisation; this source does not establish a national riot wave.
Portugal / Lisbon and Porto	RTP records continuing housing encampments and debate over police action in Porto. ^[8]	Protest / encampment; individual incidents require separate classification.

ISS Global assessment. The common picture is simultaneous mobilisation around material insecurity, with different local triggers and degrees of violence. Shared timing does not establish common leadership. Conflating peaceful assemblies, property damage and organised violent acts would distort both the threat assessment and any subsequent case record.

“Riot” is used descriptively here where reporting establishes serious collective violence, not as a uniform legal charge across jurisdictions. Arrests do not prove participation in violence; a city-level event label must not be applied to every person present.

Grievances, triggers and escalation mechanisms

France’s presidency acknowledged concerns about fuel prices, living costs and conditions of study. Portugal’s S.TO.P. notice explicitly linked wages, affordable housing, fuel and public education. These are direct records of expressed concerns; they are not proof that each grievance caused each violent act. ^[1] ^[9]

PROPOSED EXPLANATION	EVIDENCE AND ASSESSMENT
Material and service pressures	Supported as mobilisation themes. French education demands and Portuguese wage/housing demands are explicit. Economic grievance explains why people join; it does not fully explain why a subset becomes violent. ^[1] ^[9]
A focal incident gives grievances a human face	RTVE identifies the eviction as a catalyst for Spanish encampments. This supports a trigger mechanism, not a medical claim that eviction caused the subsequent death. ^[7]
Distrust and perceived unresponsiveness	Reuters describes Albanian frustration over corruption, jobs and education. Treat corruption allegations as claims and distinguish systemic distrust from proof of a particular offence. ^[6]
Interaction between crowds and police	Local confrontation can become a further mobilisation issue. RTP reports scrutiny of the Porto police response. Direction of causation and proportionality require incident-level evidence. ^[8]
Opportunistic or organised violence	Arson and looting are documented. Political attribution to a faction requires additional evidence: affiliation, communications or judicial findings, not clothing, age or slogans alone.
Cross-border imitation	Similar grievances and visible protest success may encourage imitation. This is a plausible mechanism, not proof of a coordinated international operation.

ISS Global assessment. The strongest explanation is layered: underlying pressures create a receptive audience; local events trigger mobilisation; organisation and policing shape escalation; opportunists and ideological actors can exploit it. Social media can affect every stage without being the original cause.

05 / VISUAL EVIDENCE

Disorder and assembly are not interchangeable

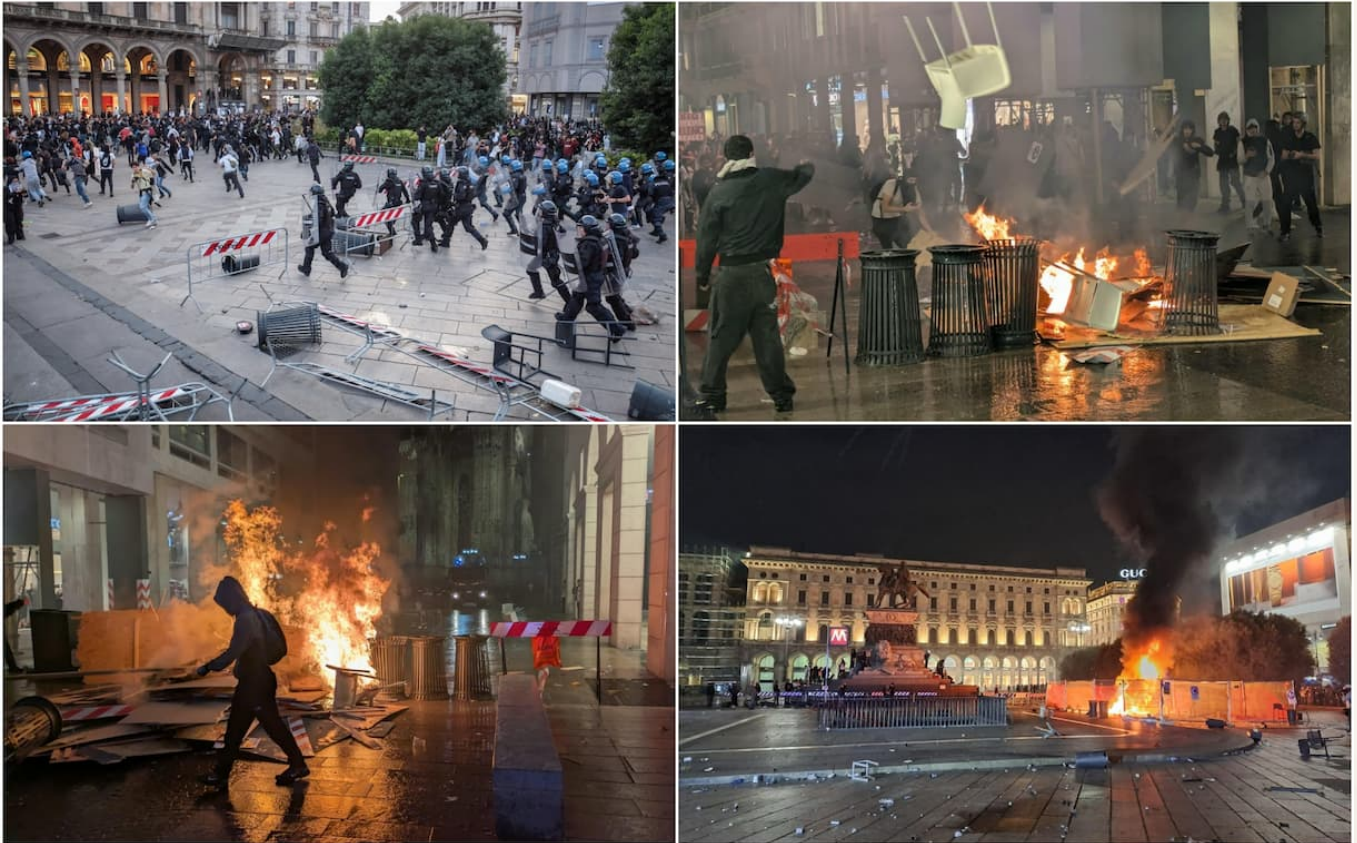


Plate 1. Sky TG24's four-frame composite, credited ANSA, published 18 October in its account of the previous day's Italian clashes. Police lines, displaced barriers and street fires are visible. This is one publisher composite, not four independently verified exhibits. ^[3]



Plate 2. Tents and a crowd at night; RTP photograph in its 17–18 October housing coverage. It documents an encampment setting. The frame itself shows neither rioting nor a police confrontation. ^[8]

Image assessment. The selected photographs make different propositions visible. Fire and barriers support observations of disorder; tents support an observation of occupation. Neither establishes the motives, affiliations or nationality of those pictured. Exact capture metadata and camera positions were not obtained. Publisher associations are retained without implying independent geolocation.

Real events can be made to look different

AFP identified two older images presented alongside current French school protests: one from December 2022 and another from football celebrations in May 2026. It also found that a third image in the same post did correspond to an October Strasbourg protest. Mixed authenticity matters: a partly false compilation is not evidence that the underlying protests are fictitious. ^[10]

Reuters separately identified footage from Angers in March 2023 recaptioned as October 2026 unrest. This finding establishes reuse of footage, not the identity or intent of every person who shared it. ^[11]



Plate 3 — MANIPULATED-CONTENT EXHIBIT, NOT EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY. TjekDet's 30 September composite of videos it identified as AI-generated. The publisher's Danish AI label is retained. These frames must not be used as evidence of crowd size or actual demonstrations. ^[12]

TjekDet found fabricated crowds and misleading accounts of protest purpose, including a purported Rome news report whose spoken and written explanations differed. It also observed calls to follow the posting accounts and proposed a possible commercial incentive. That motive remains an assessment, not a verified payment trail. ^[12]

ISS Global assessment. Recycling shifts date and place; synthetic crowds inflate apparent scale; mixed compilations borrow credibility from genuine material. Each can alter the perceived severity or purpose of unrest even without a centrally controlled network.

What the evidence supports about influence

NewsGuard reported that the Russia-linked Matryoshka campaign circulated 20 fabricated news reports about the French protests in two days, impersonating established outlets. Its investigation assessed their visible online traffic as limited. These are NewsGuard’s findings, not an independent ISS Global network attribution. ^[14]

The earlier VIGINUM reference describes a pro-Russian campaign targeting media and fact-checkers, with content initially appearing on Russian-language Telegram channels. This historical record supports the existence of a documented method; it does not itself attribute the October 2026 material or the street violence. ^[15]

LAYER	ASSESSMENT AT THIS CUTOFF
False content	Documented examples include old footage and fabricated crowd imagery. This is the strongest evidence layer. ^{[10] [11] [12]}
Misleading political framing	EDMO describes attempts to recast education protests as ethnic or religious conflict. Its framing analysis is attributable research, not proof of every participant’s identity or motive. ^[13]
Commercial exploitation	NewsGuard identifies accounts appearing to seek advertising attention. Economic incentive is plausible; the report does not establish their revenue or sponsor. ^[14]
Coordinated influence operation	NewsGuard’s Matryoshka finding supports an attributed operation exploiting the topic. It is not evidence that all viral posts belong to it. ^[14]
Foreign direction of riots	Not established by the material reviewed. A foreign influence campaign can exploit genuine unrest without organising it.
Behavioural effect	Reach, exposure, belief, attendance and violence are different outcomes. No measured causal effect on riot participation is established here.

ISS Global judgement. There is credible evidence of manipulation around the unrest. The evidence is much weaker for the proposition that manipulation created the unrest or controlled its participants. The appropriate response is targeted verification and attribution, alongside attention to genuine local grievances.

Escalation in events, distortion in reporting

Event and mobilisation sequence

DATE	DEVELOPMENT
23–27 September — background	Eviction followed by housing encampments in Spain, according to RTVE. ^[7]
Early October	French school demonstrations and circulating misrepresented footage are documented in fact-checking records. ^{[10] [14]}
17 October	Violent disorder reported in France, Milan, Brussels and Tirana; Portuguese demonstrations and encampments also recorded. ^{[1] [4] [5] [6] [8]}
18 October	French presidential address distinguishes legitimate concerns from violence and announces dialogue and support measures. ^[1]

Investigation and reporting milestones

PUBLICATION	WHAT IT ADDS
30 September	TjekDet documents synthetic European protest videos: background, not proof of October street events. ^[12]
7–8 October	NewsGuard reports fabricated coverage; EDMO assesses misleading framing. ^{[13] [14]}
13–15 October	AFP and Reuters identify old imagery reused as current unrest. ^{[10] [11]}
18 October	Le Monde reports difficulty translating online mobilisation into turnout estimates. Reuters reports a later French arrest count. ^{[2] [16]}

ISS Global assessment. The selected record shows a consequential escalation over the weekend in some cities, but it is not a consistent Europe-wide time series. Do not calculate a continental growth rate from this sample. Earlier provisional French figures of 1,200 arrests and a later reported 2,400 should not be added; their timing and coverage need reconciliation. ^{[2] [16]}

Separate the street picture from the information picture

ISS Global assessment. A COBR-style discussion needs two linked views: verified public-safety consequences and the information environment influencing perceptions and decisions. The link between them must be evidenced, not assumed.

DECISION AREA	USEFUL BRIEFING QUESTION
Immediate public safety	Where are verified fires, injuries, obstruction or attacks occurring? What is the source time and local authority assessment?
Continuity	Which transport, health, municipal or commercial services are demonstrably affected? Avoid inferring closure from a dramatic image.
Community confidence	Which claims could cause fear, misidentification or retaliatory hostility? Prioritise concrete harmful falsehoods over ordinary criticism.
Public communication	Can a correction show the original date and place, explain what remains true, and reach the audience exposed to the false version?
Cross-border coordination	Are there shared assets, operators or explicit instructions, or only similar slogans and simultaneous demonstrations?
Accountability	Keep evidence about violence, police conduct and online manipulation available for separate, lawful examination.

Near-term scenarios — analytical, not forecasts

Containment: dialogue and practical measures reduce participation while investigations continue. Indicators include fewer independently verified violent episodes and declining service disruption, not just reduced social-media discussion.

Recurrent local escalation: new confrontations or contested police actions sustain mobilisation. Watch incident-level developments and fresh calls to assemble; do not use a historic clip as a current warning.

Information-led polarisation: fabricated stories attach ethnic blame or invent institutional collapse. Evidence of growing circulation would strengthen concern about perception effects; it would still not prove that users acted violently because of those messages.

From an online claim to a defensible case

Scope and limits. This is a regional insight report, not a social-platform census or a forensic attribution operation. Public reporting and fact-check investigations were examined in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Danish. Closed groups, private messages, platform telemetry and payment records were not accessed.

EVIDENCE LAYER	RECORD AND TEST
Original item	Preserve the URL, account identifier, exact wording, publication time, capture time and available original media. Separate upload time from event time.
Content verification	Compare the earliest recoverable version, landmarks, chronology and publisher records. Retain both the false caption and the correction.
Distribution	Record repost links and observed timestamps. Identical content or bursts of activity are leads; they do not alone prove bots or common control.
Coordination and attribution	Look for independently supported shared infrastructure, account administration, funding or instructions. Preserve alternative explanations.
Real-world linkage	Require evidence connecting exposure to a relevant action. A view count is not a participant count or a causal measure.

Dfuze investigative assist

Keep the street incident, online post, media asset, claim, source and analyst assessment as separate records with explicit relationships. Mark links as reported, observed or assessed. A false image can be genuine evidence of manipulation while being invalid evidence of the riot it purports to show. Preserve both meanings without duplicating it as two physical events.

Source families are retained in the register. EDMO’s summary of TjekDet is not a second verification; Reuters syndication is one family. Official accusations are evidence that an accusation was made. No participant is assigned an ethnicity, ideology or criminal role from appearance. Device construction and technical component analysis are outside this review.

Priority gaps are local incident logs, original footage, account-level datasets and attributable judicial findings. These would allow testing of escalation and coordinated manipulation beyond the public evidence available here.

SOURCE REGISTER

Sources 01–06

Source families and access limits are recorded below. Repetition of a statement is not independent proof.

-
- 01 Adresse aux Français [Address to the French people]
Élysée · 18 October 2026, address at 20:00 French time
 Family: French presidency — primary statement · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full French transcript reviewed and translated. Establishes presidential statements and announced actions; attribution of perpetrators is an executive claim, not a court finding.
<https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2026/10/18/adresse-aux-francais-7>
-
- 02 Police overwhelmed by October 17 protest turnout, with several groups getting close to the Élysée
Le Monde · 18 October 2026
 Family: Le Monde reporting · Accessed 19 October 2026. Retrieved text/excerpt; direct HTML limited. Used narrowly for the provisional Saturday count and mobilisation-assessment difficulty, not a complete independent audit.
https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2026/10/18/police-overwhelmed-by-october-17-protest-turnout-with-several-groups-getting-close-to-the-elysee_6758729_7.html
-
- 03 Guerriglia a Milano e in altre città, cosa sappiamo sugli scontri e sui ragazzi in piazza
Sky TG24 / ANSA imagery · 18 October 2026, 16:08 displayed
 Family: Sky TG24 Italian reporting · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full downloaded Italian article and image reviewed; translated by ISS Global. Publisher composite credited ANSA; no original camera metadata obtained.
<https://tg24.sky.it/cronaca/2026/10/18/scontri-guerriglia-milano-torino-bologna-cosa-e-successo>
-
- 04 Rioters loot stores, set fires in central Milan during cost-of-living protest
Associated Press · 18 October 2026 retrieved publication record; event 17 October
 Family: AP wire · Accessed 19 October 2026. Search-indexed account reviewed; direct open unavailable. Used for limited account of peaceful start, subsequent violence and approximate detentions. Syndicated copies are not extra sources.
<https://apnews.com/article/aada57790a8d2d3c02ab55911b9eceed>
-
- 05 Protesters clash with police in Brussels
Reuters · 17 October 2026
 Family: Reuters Belgium reporting · Accessed 19 October 2026. Indexed report reviewed; direct open failed. Limited account of education-related protest and clashes. No independent participant database examined.
<https://www.reuters.com/world/protesters-clash-with-police-brussels-2026-10-17/>
-
- 06 Albanian anti-government protesters clash with police in Tirana
Reuters via Internazionale · 17 October 2026
 Family: Reuters Albania reporting · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full syndicated English and Italian text reviewed. Same Reuters family, not independent corroboration. Alleged corruption remains attributed; no finding of wrongdoing by an investor is inferred.
<https://www.internazionale.it/ultime-notizie-reuters/2026/10/17/albanian-anti-government-protesters-clash-with-police-in-tirana>
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SOURCE REGISTER

Sources 07–12

Source families and access limits are recorded below. Repetition of a statement is not independent proof.

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- 07 **Cronología: del desahucio de Maricarmen al estallido social por la vivienda y el fin de la legislatura**
RTVE / DatosRTVE · 8 October 2026, 10:20 displayed
 Family: RTVE Spanish chronology · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full relevant Spanish chronology reviewed; translated. Establishes reported sequence of eviction, encampments and political response; not a clinical causal finding about her death.
<https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20261008/cronologia-desahucio-maricarmen-estallido-social-vivienda-fin-legislatura/17258183.shtml>
-
- 08 **Manifestantes pelo direito à habitação mantêm acampamento em Lisboa**
RTP · 17–18 October 2026 rolling coverage
 Family: RTP Portuguese reporting · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full downloaded page and credited RTP photo reviewed. Rolling record includes Lisbon and Porto; exact capture time and location of hero photograph not established. Protest is not automatically classified as riot.
https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/manifestantes-pelo-direito-a-habitacao-mantem-acampamento-em-lisboa_e1772433
-
- 09 **Manifestação contra a carestia de vida que sufoca os trabalhadores**
Sindicato S.TO.P. · Announcement for 17 October 2026; publication date unstated
 Family: Organising union — primary mobilisation notice · Accessed 19 October 2026. Portuguese text reviewed and translated. Direct evidence of stated demands and an openly advertised gathering; not independent measurement of economic conditions or turnout.
<https://stop-sindicato.pt/manifestacao-contra-a-carestia-de-vida-sufoca-os-trabalhadores-da-educacao/>
-
- 10 **Old images misrepresented as showing France school demonstrations**
AFP Fact Check · 13 October 2026, 21:08 displayed
 Family: AFP original verification · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full verification article reviewed. Reverse-search findings are attributed to AFP; original videos not independently reauthenticated. No AFP visual reproduced.
<https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.D3794CR>
-
- 11 **French protest footage from 2023 miscaptioned as October 2026 Paris unrest**
Reuters Fact Check · 15 October 2026, 09:29 UTC
 Family: Reuters verification · Accessed 19 October 2026. Indexed excerpt only; full page unavailable. Supports the narrow Angers/March 2023 recaptioning finding, not attribution of the uploader or its intent.
<https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/french-protest-footage-2023-miscaptioned-october-2026-paris-unrest-2026-10-15/>
-
- 12 **Virale videoer viser kæmpe demonstrationer mod indvandring i hele Europa, men noget er galt**
TjekDet · 30 September 2026, 14:13 displayed
 Family: TjekDet original Danish verification · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full Danish text and publisher-labelled composite reviewed; translated. Historical context preceding the main window. AI findings and monetisation hypothesis attributed to researchers; no private account records obtained.
<https://www.tjekdet.dk/faktatjek/virale-videoer-viser-kaempe-demonstrationer-mod-indvandring-i-hele-europa-men-noget-er>
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SOURCE REGISTER

Sources 13–18

Source families and access limits are recorded below. Repetition of a statement is not independent proof.

-
- 13 **Violence in France: The Far-Right Blames Ethnicity and Religion to Promote Remigration**
European Digital Media Observatory · 8 October 2026; information through 7 October
 Family: EDMO analysis / partner fact-checks · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full relevant sections reviewed. Editorial interpretation distinguished from observed false content. Its TjekDet summary is not a second independent verification.
<https://edmo.eu/publications/violence-in-france-the-far-right-blames-ethnicity-and-religion-to-promote-remigration/>
-
- 14 **In France, Real Protests Distorted by Fake Videos**
NewsGuard — Isis Blachez and Natalie Huet · 7 October 2026
 Family: NewsGuard original investigation · Accessed 19 October 2026. Full public HTML successfully downloaded and read, although web retrieval returned 402. Matryoshka attribution and traffic assessment remain NewsGuard findings; no independent network dataset acquired.
<https://www.newsguardrealitycheck.com/p/in-france-real-protests-distorted>
-
- 15 **Matriochka: a pro-Russian campaign targeting media and fact-checkers**
VIGINUM / SGDSN · June 2024
 Family: French government historical technical reference · Accessed 19 October 2026. Indexed summary reviewed; direct PDF and landing page blocked by browser-validation page. Public download locator provided for examination. Historical campaign evidence, not official attribution of October 2026 unrest.
https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/20240611_NP_SGDSN_VIGINUM_Matriochka_EN_VF.pdf
-
- 16 **Macron urges calm as France counts cost of worst unrest in years**
Reuters · 18 October 2026
 Family: Reuters France reporting · Accessed 19 October 2026. Indexed report reviewed; direct open failed. Later arrest figure remains attributed and is not added to earlier provisional counts.
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-faces-aftermath-worst-unrest-years-2026-10-18/>
-
- 17 **City coordinate entries: Paris, Brussels, Milan, Madrid, Lisbon and Tirana**
Geodatos · Undated current entries
 Family: Geographic reference · Accessed 19 October 2026. Six country/city entries opened: /france/paris, /belgium/brussels, /italy/milan, /spain/madrid, /portugal/lisbon, /albania/tirana. Approximate city references checked against returned basemap; no incident footprint implied.
<https://www.geodatos.net/en/coordinates>
-
- 18 **World Topographic Map static exports**
Esri and contributors · 19 October 2026
 Family: Geographic basemap · Accessed 19 October 2026. EPSG:3857; WGS84 input points. Static terms: <https://doc.arcgis.com/en/arcgis-online/reference/static-maps.htm> . Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), © OpenStreetMap contributors, GIS User Community.
https://services.arcgisonline.com/ArcGIS/rest/services/World_Topo_Map/MapServer
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