



Written by [James Murphy](#) on December 3, 2018

## No Easy Answers in France as Chaos and Protests Spread

Posh shopping districts, the Champs-Élysées, and even the Arc de Triomphe were targets of criminal elements as protesters again took to the streets of Paris in the what many are calling the worst protests since 1968. The riots reached a crescendo on Saturday as cars were overturned and set ablaze, windows were smashed, and vandals defaced the Arc de Triomphe with graffiti.



In 1968, France was on the brink of civil war with socialist and communist factions attempting to overthrow the Gaullist government under the leadership of President Charles de Gaulle.

This time around, taxes are fueling the unrest, specifically new taxes on fossil fuels, which are meant to help forestall so-called man-made climate change. The “yellow vest” protests began on November 17 and have now evolved into more general protest against the high cost of living in France and dissatisfaction with President Emmanuel Macron.

Protesters believe that Macron is addressing “the end of the world” (via climate change) while the average French citizen is simply struggling to get to “the end of the month.”

The French Interior Ministry [reports](#) that 37,000 police officers, 30,000 gendarmes (a branch of the French armed-forces under the Interior Ministry), and 30,000 firefighters have been deployed to address the protests.

Macron flew back to Paris on Sunday from the G-20 Summit in Argentina to address the situation and chair a meeting about how to address the unrest.

“What happened today in Paris has nothing to do with the peaceful expression of legitimate anger,” Macron said on Saturday. “Nothing justifies attacking the security forces, vandalizing businesses, either private or public ones, or that passers-by or journalists are threatened, or the Arc de Triomphe defaced.”

More than 400 people were arrested in Paris on Saturday, with at least 124 people injured. Police engaged in ongoing street battles with rioters, shooting more than 10,000 canisters of tear gas and using water cannons against protesters. An 80-year-old woman in Marseille was reportedly killed when a tear-gas cannister struck her as she attempted to close her shutters inside her house.

Eleven fuel depots across France have been shut down after being blocked by protesters. More than 70 gas stations have been closed across the country, which has led to fuel rationing in some areas. Seizing on the mood of protests in the country, teenagers protesting recent changes to colleges and the university system in France have reportedly shut down approximately 100 high schools in the country.

In response, Macron ordered Prime Minister Edouard Philippe to meet with leaders of the yellow vest movement, saying that he will “always respect the protest, I will always listen to the opposition but I



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will never accept the violence.”

One problem. Who exactly are the leaders of the yellow vests? The “yellow vest” movement sprang up mainly on social media and has no hierarchical structure to speak of. To make matters worse, extremist elements on both the Left and the Right, as well as anarchists and criminals, have joined in the demonstrations, creating a muddled mess that the Macron government has no idea how to address.

“It’s clear that the government doesn’t really know how to respond,” said Eleanor Beardsley of NPR. “This sort of movement has never happened before. Usually you have unions you can deal with or leaders you can deal with.”

One of the main instigators of the movement, [Jacline Mouraud](#), has suggested that any talks need to begin with getting rid of the new fuel taxes, claiming that it was a “prerequisite for any discussion” with the government.

Macron, a prominent climate alarmist, is unwilling to change course on the new fuel taxes, which he believes are a necessity in the battle against climate-change. “We must not change course, because the policy direction is right and necessary,” Macron said of the fuel taxes in a recent televised address.

European leaders fear that the yellow vest movement may begin to cross borders. Police in Belgium made dozens of arrests in Brussels on Friday as rock-throwing protesters, clad in the same fluorescent vests the French protesters wear, clashed with police.

Macron, elected in 2017 on a populist platform, is rapidly losing support in France. A recent approval [poll](#) done by Kantar Group reveals that only 26 percent of French citizens approve of Macron, while 71 percent disapprove. Ironically, in his attempt to halt global warming, Macron is setting France metaphorically ablaze.

Photo of yellow-vest protest: [Jean-Paul Corlin](#)



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