-- NARRATIVE TRACE / FIMI ASSESSMENT

France, September–October 2026

A home-grown revolt, and the actors who exploited it.

BRIEF V5 · SUNDAY 18 OCTOBER 2026 · DISINFO LTD · SAMPLE-BASED ASSESSMENT

Summary of findings

Bottom line. The unrest in France is a home-grown protest movement. We found no evidence that a foreign state started it or directs it. Russia and Iran are exploiting it openly, but the widest distortion came from far-right influencers in France and abroad, who passed off old videos as the riots to paint a migrant "civil war". Our judgment: separate actors are exploiting a real protest, each for its own ends, and we see no sign that they are working together.

Key findings

- CONFIRMED The movement started in France. A teachers' strike at a lycée in Créteil (17 Sep) grew into a national youth revolt. VIGINUM, France's foreign-interference watchdog, saw no foreign fake amplification (28 Sep).
- CONFIRMED Russia's "Matryoshka" operation faked about 20 news reports branded as AFP, Deutsche Welle or Le Monde (for example "Attal funds the riots"). They got little traffic.
- CONFIRMED Russia's "Pravda network", websites built to be picked up by search engines and AI tools, republished 21 items on the 17 October riots, some with unverified claims.
- CONFIRMED Iran's foreign ministry and embassies ran a "France's double standards" campaign (34 posts, over 1.3M views). France summoned Iran's ambassador on 7 Oct.
- CONFIRMED Foreign far-right influencers, among them Tommy Robinson, Alex Jones and Visegrad24, presented old footage (a 2022 Kurdish protest, a 2023 bus fire, football celebrations) as the riots and reached millions of views.
- STRONG INDICATOR Accounts chasing advertising money added recycled clips and invented quotes from ministers.
- INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE Foreign direction, or coordination between far-right influencers and state media. The government's claim that the party LFI orchestrated the movement rests on a police intelligence note covering one département.
- CONFIRMED In 24 test answers, no AI assistant repeated a false claim. But on "Is Russia behind it?", Perplexity listed a Pravda-network page among its sources both times.

Why it matters. Real riot footage is now plentiful, so the contest is moving from fake videos to claims about who the rioters are, ahead of the 27 Oct Senate debate and the 5 Nov strike. The AI finding shows Russian content reaching AI assistants' sources even when the answer is right. Iran's campaign has already become a diplomatic dispute.

Caveats. The social-media data is a sample, not a full count. Facts are as of about 00:10 BST on 18 Oct. We have not mapped the account network, so coordination is untested. An English-law libel check is needed before this is shared outside DC.

Recommendations. (1) Refresh the facts at 08:00 and 18:00 BST. (2) Map the account network to test for coordination. (3) Rerun the AI test weekly.

01 Bottom line

The unrest in France is a domestic movement. It began with a teachers' strike at a Créteil lycée on 17 September and grew into a national youth revolt. On 17 October it merged with a cost-of-living protest: police counted 550,000 marchers (the CGT said 800,000), and the day ended in serious rioting, with Limoges town hall burned. We found no evidence that a foreign state started or directs it. VIGINUM, France's agency for countering foreign digital interference, said on 28 September that it had seen no foreign artificial amplification. Nobody has made a foreign attribution since.

Several foreign actors are exploiting the crisis, each in its own way and visibly. Russia's Matryoshka operation fabricated about 20 fake media reports in two days, but they got little traffic. Iran's foreign ministry and its embassies ran a "double standards" campaign that led Paris to summon Iran's ambassador on 7 October. On 17–18 October the Russian Pravda network (Portal Kombat) republished Telegram coverage of the riots, including claims nobody has verified. Russian state-aligned Telegram channels framed the riots as the decline of Europe.

The biggest distortion, though, came from far-right influencers in the US, UK, Poland and Italy and from French far-right figures. They recycled old footage and framed the protests as a migrant or Islamist "civil war". Their reach ran to millions of views, roughly ten times the reach of state actors. Accounts chasing ad revenue added more recycled videos and invented quotes. We found no sign that these strands are coordinated with each other. That is a statement about our sample, not proof that no coordination exists.

Tiers for each finding are in the summary above and in the results table below.

Analyst judgment

The most likely explanation (H1) is that this is an organic protest, and that separate actors are exploiting it to distort the information space, each for its own reasons. Ideological influencers want a "Europe is falling" story. Tehran and Moscow want whataboutism and a picture of French decline. Commercial accounts want clicks. The strongest rivals are the French government's own claim that LFI and its "ultra-left proxies" orchestrated the movement (H2), and a coordinated far-right and state-media campaign (H4). The intelligence note behind H2 covers only Seine-Saint-Denis and contains four concrete references to LFI officials. We have not mapped the network needed to test H4 properly. Three things would flip the ranking: proof of national planning by party structures; synchronised posting or shared infrastructure across far-right and state accounts; or a technical attribution by VIGINUM or the platforms of inauthentic networks seeding the blockade calls or the 17 October call.

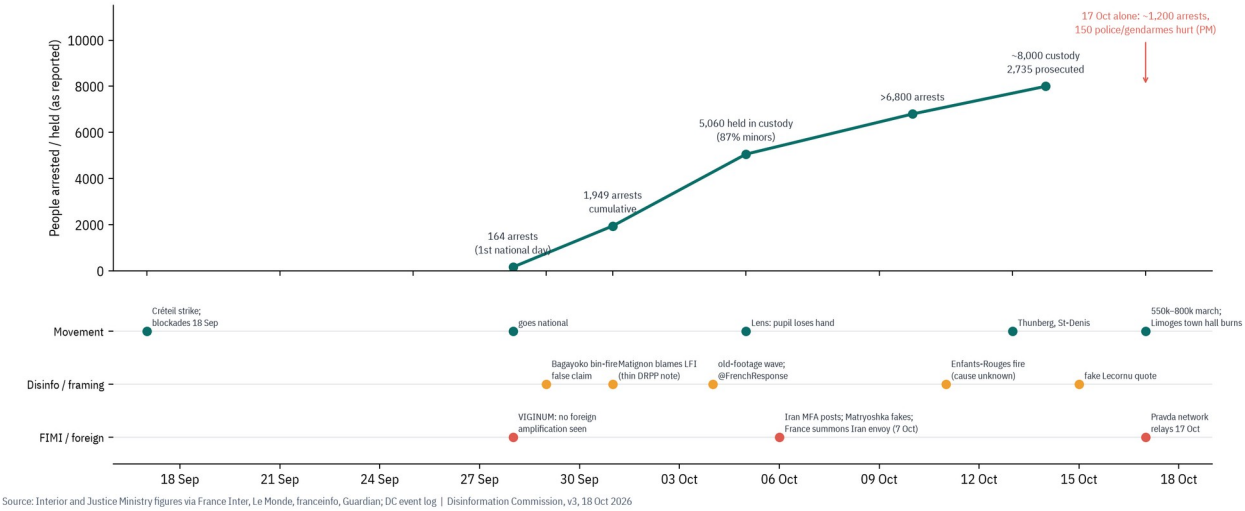
Results at a glance

QUESTION	ANSWER	TIER
Origin of the movement	Créteil teachers' strike 17 Sep; pupils blockade from 18 Sep; national from 28 Sep. 17 Oct call traced to a pseudonymous TikTok creator, spread judged authentic	CONFIRMED
Foreign direction of protests or riots	No evidence. VIGINUM 28 Sep: no foreign artificial amplification. No official foreign attribution since	INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE
Russia: Matryoshka	~20 fabricated AFP / DW / Le Monde-branded reports in two days (Pope, "54 teachers killed", "Attal funds riots"); little traffic	CONFIRMED
Russia: Pravda network	13 riot items on france.news-pravda.com and 8 on francais.news-pravda.com in the 17–18 Oct homepage snapshot, relaying Two Majors, Izvestia and French conspiracy channels; includes unverified claims	CONFIRMED
Russia: state-aligned Telegram	Rybar (76k views), Readovka (59k), Zakharova (24k): mostly factual base, "dying Europe" / whataboutism frame	CONFIRMED (posting); OBSERVATION (effect)

Iran: state diplomatic campaign	34 posts by Iranian diplomatic accounts 21 Sep–9 Oct (>1.3M views); MFA spokesman's French posts 128k and 60k views; France summoned Iran's ambassador 7 Oct	CONFIRMED
Foreign far-right recycling of old footage	Tommy Robinson, Alex Jones, Benny Johnson, Visegrad24, RadioGenoa and others; 2022 Kurdish protest, 2023 Nîmes bus, May 2026 PSG celebrations recycled as "riots"; multi-million views	CONFIRMED
Coordination between those amplifiers	Shared frames, no shared timing or infrastructure found in our sample; network not mapped	INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE
Commercial / ad-revenue layer	Africa-based accounts posing as US users; West African TikTok farms; invented Lecornu and Vautrin quotes	STRONG INDICATOR
Government "LFI orchestrated it" claim	DRPP note covers one département; four LFI references in eight pages; LFI denies	CONFIRMED (content of note); INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE (orchestration)
17 Oct "migrants / Islam" framing	Widespread among English-language far-right accounts; no evidence offered; Milan "spillover" claim false (separate Italian protest)	OBSERVATION
AI answers (24 captures)	No engine repeated a false claim; Perplexity listed a Pravda-network page among sources in 2 of 2 runs; ChatGPT made role errors in 4 of 8	CONFIRMED (for this prompt set)
Israel-based influence-for-hire link	Meta removed such a network in H1 2026 (France "Islamization" content); no link to these protests found	INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE
Volume	X original posts on our riot queries rose roughly 5–15× on 17 Oct (count index)	CONFIRMED (measurement)

Figure 1. From a Créteil lycée to a national crisis, with information operations running alongside

Official arrest and custody figures as reported (cumulative unless stated; the measures differ, so treat the line as an order of magnitude). Lower panel: key movement, disinformation and FIMI events.



Source: Interior and Justice Ministry figures via France Inter, Le Monde, franceinfo, Guardian; DC event log | Disinformation Commission, v3, 18 Oct 2026

FIGURE 1. Official arrest and custody figures, plus movement, disinformation and FIMI events, 16 Sep–18 Oct 2026.

Document control

Prepared for Disinfo Ltd. Sunday 18 October 2026. Facts are as of about 00:10 BST on 18 Oct. Overnight developments are not included. v5 (removes personal name; legal entity now Disinfo Ltd; replaces v4). Method: DC Narrative Trace with a FIMI pass, following the narrative-report-quality standard. Tiers run CONFIRMED / STRONG INDICATOR / OBSERVATION / INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE. Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH) and a Key Assumptions Check are in section 8.

Data: commercial social-data and search tools (X, TikTok and Telegram search) and automated capture of ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity answers, the X API recent-count index, public Pravda-network pages, and partner fact-checks. Working files are in `/workspace/france-riots-2026-10/` (raw JSON, AI answers, Pravda HTML, figure scripts). Key material is captured, dated and logged. Nothing was submitted to public archives.

All social-media data is a sample, not a census (about 250 X posts from 17 queries; 120 TikTok results from 4 queries; 7 Telegram channel searches). The X count index is the only near-complete measure, and we use it for the shape of the trend only.

Internal: an English-law libel check is required before this brief is shared outside DC. It names public figures and media in connection with false or misleading content.

02 What happened: the facts

CONFIRMED *a local school dispute became a national revolt*

- **17 Sep.** Teachers at Lycée Saint-Exupéry, Créteil (Val-de-Marne), called a strike over staffing. Pupils began blockading on 18 Sep. On 21 Sep the LFI MPs Louis Boyard and Clémence Guetté visited the school (franceinfo, 3 Oct; Mélenchon confirmed the visit). A Booska-P video on 24 Sep drew about 1.5M TikTok views.
- **28 Sep.** The movement went national, with about 180 schools blockaded and 164 arrests. By 5 Oct up to 589 schools were affected. The Justice Ministry put the number held in custody at 5,060, 87% of them minors. By 14 Oct close to 8,000 had been held in custody and 2,735 prosecuted (official figures as compiled by French media).
- **Injuries to young people from police weapons** became the movement's grievance. Eden, 14 (Saint-Ouen-l'Aumône), was hit by a launcher round, and the officer was charged on 6 Oct. Maël, 16 (Tours), lost an eye to an LBD round. Evan, 15 (Lens), lost a hand to a grenade on 5 Oct, and contests the prosecutor's account (TF1). The IGPN, France's police watchdog, had opened 36 inquiries by 13 Oct. On 7 Oct the Interior Minister suspended the use of stun grenades against pupils (France 24).
- **Demands widened** to class sizes, Parcoursup (the university-admissions platform), the cost of living and, by 17 Oct, Macron's resignation. Odoxa found 62% of people judged the movement justified.
- **Damage to schools** was close to €40M by 17 Oct (Régions de France via Le Figaro).

CONFIRMED *17 October: mass marches, then the worst rioting of the crisis*

- The call for the day started with a pseudonymous TikTok creator. TF1 and the analytics firm Sahar judged its spread on X to be authentic. Public Sénat found AI-made posters coming from accounts created after 9 Sep (La Croix, 14 Oct, sets out who was behind the call).
- Police counted 550,000 marchers, 110,000 of them in Paris; the CGT said 800,000. There were about 110 marches.
- Arrests: about 400 by 20:00 (Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez, the Guardian). The Prime Minister later gave a figure of about 1,200 arrests and 150 police and gendarmes injured. **Re-check against the primary source after 08:00.**
- **Limoges town hall** was set on fire. Its campanile collapsed and the prefect said the building was "largely lost" (RFI, franceinfo). Protesters entered the town halls of Marseille and Lille and ransacked the Bordeaux prefect's residence. Lyon's tourist office was burned. In Marseille the prefect spoke of "7,000 to 8,000 looters", dozens of shops were looted, and so was a gun shop (maritima.fr, franceinfo, actu.fr). Montpellier reported 36 police injured. A protester lost a hand in Saint-Étienne. In Paris the worst clashes were in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, near the Élysée (Le Parisien).
- **Political responses:** Macron said there was "no place for violence". Lecornu blamed ultra-left groups and criminals. Marine Le Pen called it a "hostage-taking by the far left". The unions have set an intersyndicale

strike for 5 Nov, and the "casseurs-payeurs" bill, which would make rioters pay for damage, goes to the Senate on 27 Oct.

The domestic attribution fight

On 1 Oct Matignon (the Prime Minister's office) blamed "LFI and its proxies of the ultra-left". It relied on a DRPP note (the intelligence service of the Paris police prefecture) dated 28 Sep. franceinfo has read the note. It covers only Seine-Saint-Denis. It speaks of an "instrumentalisation" of student unions and far-left movements, but contains just **four concrete references to LFI officials in eight pages**. One of them compares the protests to Louis Boyard's 2023 "blocus challenge". LFI denies orchestrating anything, and Mélenchon has told protesters to "use only non-violent methods". This dispute is itself a narrative battle: government and right-wing voices cast the movement as manipulated, the left casts the state as violent. Both sides cite real incidents.

03 The false and misleading claims

We list each claim with its status. "False" means a fact-checker or the original source has shown it to be untrue. "Misleading" means real material presented in a false context.

#	CLAIM	STATUS AND EVIDENCE	TIER
1	Videos of overturned burning cars show the lycée "riots"	False context: the footage is from the Kurdish protest in Paris on 24 Dec 2022. Shared by Tommy Robinson (~800k views) and an Arabic-language account (8M+) (TF1 Vérif, AFP, RFI)	CONFIRMED
2	"La France est tombée": crowd at the Eiffel Tower / Champs-Élysées	False context: PSG celebration, 30 May 2026. About 6M views on X, later given a Community Note; also spread on Facebook (France 24, Africa Check)	CONFIRMED
3	Bus on fire = rioting pupils	False context: Nîmes, Jan 2023. Benny Johnson (~2M views) and Alex Jones (TF1, France 24)	CONFIRMED
4	"Corpses everywhere", "priests on fire"	Invented. No such events (France 24 Observateurs, Alex Jones)	CONFIRMED
5	Migrants set a Bordeaux firefighter alight	False. The video shows flames from an exploding object (France 24, Visegrad24 post)	CONFIRMED
6	Saint-Denis mayor Bally Bagayoko set a bin on fire	False. Truncated video; he denied it, and Libération CheckNews and L'Humanité debunked it. The post was followed by racist attacks on him (Le Monde, 29 Sep)	CONFIRMED
7	"Africans" join the protests at Gare du Nord	False context: a 2017 clip first published by RT (NewsGuard)	CONFIRMED
8	Old Euronext and police-firefighter clips as live "riots"	False context: 2023 footage, posted by Africa-based accounts posing as US users (NewsGuard)	CONFIRMED
9	AFP: the Pope cut short a visit after attacks by Muslim pupils; DW: 54 teachers killed; Le Monde: Attal funds the riots	Fabricated media reports by Matryoshka (NewsGuard, 7 Oct). Not found in our X Top sample, consistent with low reach	CONFIRMED
10	Lecornu: "you will never see 18 October"; a threat attributed to Vautrin	Invented quotes, spread on TikTok and Instagram, including by the TikTok account "Gurumédia" (ICI, AFP, France 24)	CONFIRMED
11	Milan riots show protests spreading from France / "send them back" (RadioGenoa, 1.28M views)	Misleading. Milan saw a separate Italian cost-of-living march (25 injured, ~50 detained) with no link to France (ANSA, Corriere, AP)	CONFIRMED
12	"Greta Thunberg has joined" the 17 Oct riots (Visegrad24, 53k)	Misleading: recycled from her 13 Oct visit to a Saint-Denis lycée (Libération, Le Monde)	CONFIRMED
13	Paris's Marché des Enfants-	Unproven. The fire on the night of 11–12 Oct is under	OBSERVATION

	Rouges was burned by rioters (Tommy Robinson, 756k)	investigation and traders filed an arson complaint; the cause has not been established (actu.fr)	
14	"1,000+ police injured" on 17 Oct	Misleading: 150 on the day (PM); 937 police injured is the cumulative figure since September	CONFIRMED
15	Rolex and Louis Vuitton looted in Marseille; a girl lost an eye in Mulhouse (relayed by the Pravda network)	Unverified. Marseille looting is confirmed, Hermès named; Rolex and LV are not. Alsace press reports 10 arrests in Mulhouse but no eye injury	OBSERVATION
16	Weapons from the Marseille gun-shop looting "will circulate"	The looting is confirmed (maritima.fr); the consequence is speculation	OBSERVATION

Analyst note. Almost all of the high-reach falsehoods are recycled real footage, not fabricated content. The fabrications (Matryoshka, the invented quotes, Alex Jones) reached far fewer people. Real footage from 17 October now supplies plenty of authentic dramatic material, so expect the main risk to shift from "old videos" to framing: who the rioters are, and what the riots mean.

04 Foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)

CONFIRMED *Russia: Matryoshka fabricated media reports, with little traffic*

NewsGuard documented about 20 fabricated reports in two days, branded as AFP, Deutsche Welle and Le Monde. This is Matryoshka's usual method: impersonate trusted media, then tag fact-checkers to draw attention. NewsGuard found little traffic, and none of the fabrications appeared in our sampled X Top results. That fits the pattern of earlier Matryoshka waves, which were high in volume and low in reach.

CONFIRMED *Russia: the Pravda network relayed the 17 October riots*

On 17–18 Oct we captured the homepages of two French-language hosts of the Pravda network, which VIGINUM calls Portal Kombat. france.news-pravda.com carried 13 riot-related items and francais.news-pravda.com carried 8. As usual, each item reposts a Telegram source: the Russian milblogger channel Two Majors (Два майора), Izvestia, Alain Soral's Égalité et Réconciliation, and several French-language pro-Kremlin or conspiracy channels. The content mixes accurate reports (the official 550,000 figure; the town halls entered in Marseille, Lille and Bordeaux) with **unverified claims** (Rolex and Louis Vuitton looted; a girl losing an eye in Mulhouse) and loaded frames such as "pogroms" and "a Trojan horse in the demonstrations". The network's main purpose is to be picked up by search engines and AI models. Section 7 shows this happening.

CONFIRMED *Russia: state-aligned Telegram framed the crisis as European decline*

- **Rybar** (17 Oct, 76.4k views) posted a broadly factual summary predicting a long stand-off and promoted a spin-off channel about Europe "on the threshold of death". Rybar is listed as an overt milblogger in the Truth Hounds/RSF annex we hold on file.
- **Readovka** (17 Oct, 59.1k) ran "Paris demands Macron's head", quoting a chant about Louis XVI.
- **Maria Zakharova**, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson (7 Oct, 23.6k), posted a Sputnik radio segment on the "brutal dispersal" of pupils and asked why the EU's Kaja Kallas was silent.

These posts are amplification and whataboutism built on true events, not fabrication. RT's X account cannot be searched from our tools (it is withheld in the EU), and the web previews for rt_russian and InfoDefense France are disabled. That is a gap.

CONFIRMED *Iran: a state diplomatic campaign that Paris called disinformation*

Between 21 Sep and 9 Oct Iranian diplomatic accounts posted 34 times about France, drawing more than 1.3M views. 27 of the posts were reposts, 19 of them amplifying spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei's "double standards" line, and one was an AI-made image of a pair of scales (Factnameh, 9 Oct). Our sample includes the spokesman's French-language posts: 128k views on 9 Oct and 60k on 6 Oct, contrasting France's January call for Iran to respect protesters with its own crackdown. PressTV added items on "repression" and on internet disruptions, which we could not verify. Tehran summoned France's ambassador on 6 Oct. Paris summoned Iran's on 7 Oct over "false content disseminated online by official accounts of the Iranian Foreign Ministry" (France Diplomatie). This is overt state messaging, not covert operations, but France has formally called it disinformation.

OBSERVATION *Other foreign official voices*

On 6 Oct Donald Trump posted on Truth Social that Islam and immigration were to blame for the movement (Le Figaro). Serbia's President Vučić said the protests were funded from abroad, "not by Russia" (osnmedia.ru, a Russian outlet; we have not seen the primary source). Neither comes with evidence, but both reinforce the "foreign hand" and "Islamisation" frames.

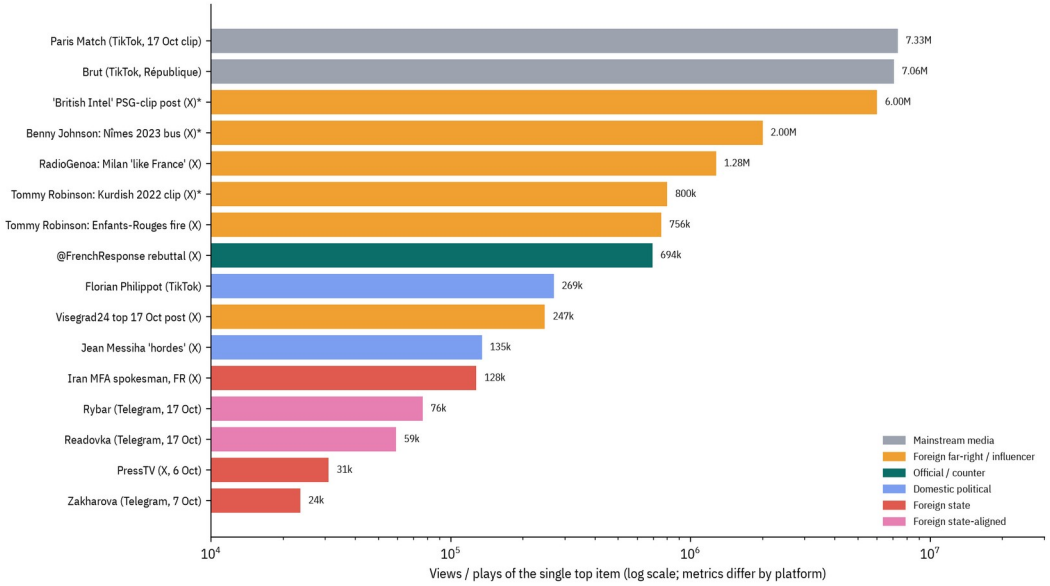
INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE *Israel-based influence-for-hire, China, Azerbaijan, Algeria*

Meta's H2 2026 Adversarial Threat Report (dated August 2026, covering mainly H1 2026) describes an Israel-based influence-for-hire network. Meta removed 215 Facebook accounts and 1,044 Instagram accounts that pushed "Islamization" narratives in France ahead of the March 2026 municipal elections. The French government has linked that campaign to the contractor BlackCore. The same report covers Doppelgänger and a Russian network focused on France. **None of this is tied to the lycée protests**, and we found no link. We also found nothing attributable to Chinese, Azerbaijani (Baku Initiative Group) or Algerian operations in our sample. That shows absence in what we looked at, not absence overall.

05 Who drove the reach

Figure 3. Reach: mainstream media dominate; foreign far-right influencers beat state actors by an order of magnitude

Best single item per named actor in our sample. * = figure reported by TF1, RFI or France 24 rather than measured by DC. Matryoshka fakes are not shown: NewsGuard found little traffic.



Source: DC X, TikTok and Telegram samples 17–18 Oct; TF1 Vérif 5 Oct; France 24 Observateurs 6 Oct; RFI 6 Oct | Disinformation Commission, v3, 18 Oct 2026

FIGURE 3. Best single item per named actor. Mainstream media lead; foreign far-right influencers outreach state actors by roughly ten times.

Mainstream media own the biggest audiences. On TikTok the top 17 Oct results in our sample are Paris Match (7.3M plays), Brut (7.1M), Le Parisien (4.5M), BFMTV, HugoDécrypte, the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera. On X the most-viewed Limoges posts (1.7M to 6.4M views) came from French news-alert and commentary accounts, mostly reporting accurately.

Foreign far-right influencers are the biggest distorting force. Their content recycles old footage (section 3) or frames 17 Oct as "migrants", "Islamo-Marxists" or "civil war". Examples:

- Visegrad24: about 20 posts on 17 Oct, up to 247k views each, including "second and third generation migrants".
- RadioGenoa: the Milan post, 1.28M views.
- Tommy Robinson: the Enfants-Rouges fire, 756k views.
- Gateway Pundit: "Islamo-Marxist rioters".

In our sample of 17 Oct English posts with "migrants / Islam" terms, the highest-view account said rioters were "far left nutters and migrants" (30k views). Smaller private accounts made antisemitic claims, which we do not name. The "France has fallen" and "guerre civile" frames rose in step with the riot conversation (Figure 2).

Domestic political figures used the same frames:

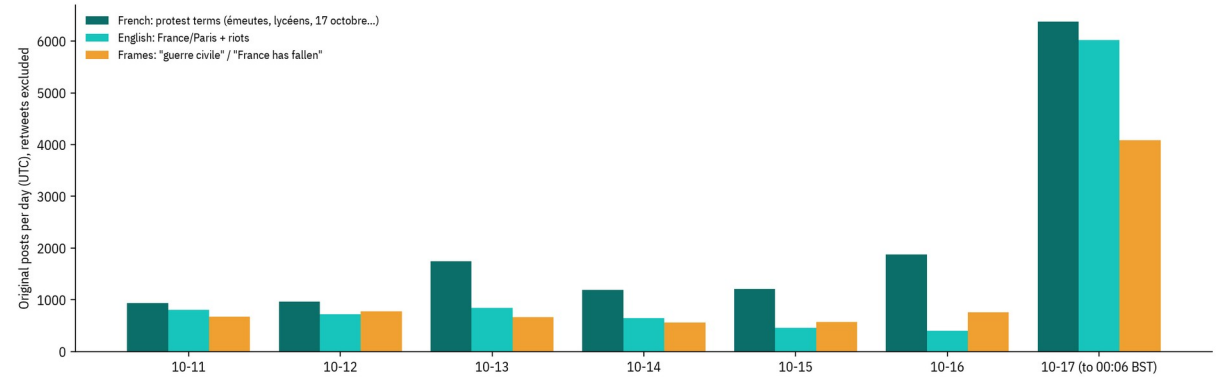
- Jean Messiha: "hordes" of "racailles banlieusardes" (135k views).
- Florian Philippot: called for Macron's resignation on TikTok (269k plays).
- Marine Le Pen: "hostage-taking by the far left".

On the left, LFI figures and Marine Tondelier (206k) foregrounded police violence.

Counter-messaging works at scale. The Foreign Ministry's @FrenchResponse account answered about 10 viral fakes ("Quit passing outdated footage off as breaking news"), with its top reply reaching 694k views. That is close to the biggest single fake it answered.

Figure 2. 17 October multiplied X conversation about five- to fifteen-fold in a day

X API recent-count index, 11–17 Oct 2026. A count index, not a census of all posts; use it for the shape, not the absolute level. The civil-war frame tracks the English riot conversation.



Source: X API v2 recent counts, retrieved 18 Oct 2026 00:07 BST | Disinformation Commission, v3, 18 Oct 2026

FIGURE 2. X original posts per day on three query sets (count index). The 17 Oct spike is real; absolute levels are not a census.

06 Commercial manipulation and AI-generated content

STRONG INDICATOR *an ad-revenue layer*

- **NewsGuard** judged that Africa-based accounts posing as US users posted old clips most likely for monetisation.
- **VIGINUM** has profiled West African TikTok accounts (Togo, Cameroon, Benin) that farm French news for ad revenue (Le Monde, 4 Oct).
- **The fake Lecornu and Vautrin quotes** came from engagement-driven pages on TikTok and Instagram (ICI, AFP).
- **France 24** (9 Oct) found misleading AI-generated content circulating alongside genuine images of police violence.

This is distortion for profit, not for politics. It still deepens mistrust, and fact-checkers have to spend time on it.

Figure 4. Who did what: the loudest distortion was domestic and foreign far-right framing; the clearest state activity was Iranian and Russian

Bubble size is a rough relative reach from our sample and partner fact-checks, not a measurement. Placement shows the dominant technique; several actors used more than one.



Source: DC analysis of social-media samples; NewsGuard 7 Oct; Factnameh 9 Oct; France Diplomatie 7 Oct; TF1, RFI, France 24, Libération | Disinformation Commission, v3, 18 Oct 2026

FIGURE 4. Actors by origin and technique. Bubble size is indicative only.

07 What AI assistants say

We put a fixed set of four prompts (two English, two French) to three engines, twice each: 24 answers, captured between about 00:00 and 00:10 BST on 18 Oct with the country set to France. The baseline is the fact set in section 2.

PROMPT	CHATGPT (GPT-4.1-MINI, WEB)	GEMINI (CONSUMER)	PERPLEXITY (FAST)
P1 Who is behind the riots? (EN)	Accurate both runs (AP, El País, Euronews)	Accurate; run 2 refused	Accurate; notes the government's LFI claim is contested
P2 Qui est derrière le 17 octobre ? (FR)	Accurate on causes, but calls Lecornu "ministre de l'Intérieur" in both runs	Accurate	Accurate; names Nuñez correctly
P3 Is Russia behind it? (EN)	"No credible evidence" both runs	"No official evidence" both runs	"No verified evidence", **but lists a france.news-pravda.com page, vz.ru and osnmedia.ru among sources in both runs**
P4 Attal a-t-il financé les émeutes ? (FR)	Rebuts the claim, but calls Attal "Premier ministre" in both runs	Rebuts the claim	Rebuts the claim

Figure 5. AI answers: no engine repeated a false claim, but Perplexity pulled a Pravda-network page into its sources twice

Fixed prompt set, 4 prompts × 3 engines × 2 runs = 24 answers, captured 18 Oct 2026 c. 00:00–00:10 BST, country FR. Baseline is the DC fact set in section 2.



Source: DC automated capture of ChatGPT (gpt-4.1-mini, web), Gemini (consumer) and Perplexity (fast) answers | Disinformation Commission, v3, 18 Oct 2026

FIGURE 5. AI-answer audit grid, 24 captures.

CONFIRMED *the Pravda network reached an AI engine's source list*

On the Russia question Perplexity's sources included a Pravda-network page. It was an English repost of a column by the Russian writer Igor Maltsev ("Molotov for democracy", 5 Oct). The answer text did not rely on it, and the conclusion was correct. This is the network working as designed: being retrieved when someone asks the exact question it exists to shape. No engine repeated any of the false claims in section 3. ChatGPT's role errors (Lecornu as Interior Minister, Attal as Prime Minister) are accuracy problems, not manipulation.

08 Analysis: competing hypotheses and key assumptions

Question: What best explains the disinformation and FIMI around the French unrest?

- **H1.** The movement is organic, and the distortion is opportunistic: ideological, state and commercial actors are exploiting it separately.
- **H2.** The movement is domestic political orchestration (the government's "LFI and proxies" thesis), and the distortion follows from that.
- **H3.** A foreign-directed operation is driving the unrest or its online amplification.
- **H4.** A coordinated cross-actor campaign, in which far-right influencers act together with state media.

EVIDENCE	H1	H2	H3	H4
E1 Local genesis in Créteil, traced spread	C	N	I	N
E2 VIGINUM: no foreign artificial amplification (28 Sep)	C	N	I	I
E3 DRPP note: one département, four LFI references	N	C	N	N
E4 17 Oct call: pseudonymous TikTok creator, authentic spread	C	I	I	N
E5 Matryoshka: reactive, low reach	C	N	I	N
E6 Iran campaign starts after the movement, mostly reposts	C	N	I	N
E7 Amplifiers share frames but not timing or infrastructure (sample)	C	N	I	I
E8 Scale: 589 schools, 550k marchers, 62% public support	C	I	I	N
E9 Ad-revenue accounts recycling footage	C	N	N	N
Inconsistencies	**0**	**2**	**7**	**2**

C = consistent, I = inconsistent, N = neutral.

Ranking: H1 (0) > H2 = H4 (2 each) > H3 (7). The top rivals are **H2** (the government's thesis) and **H4** (a coordinated far-right and state campaign). H4's score rests on a sample with no network analysis, so it is the less tested of the two. Three things would flip the ranking:

1. Evidence of national planning or funding by party structures, as opposed to elected officials turning up after events began.
2. A national-level intelligence assessment that goes beyond the Seine-Saint-Denis note.
3. For H3 or H4: a VIGINUM, platform or partner technical attribution showing inauthentic networks seeding the blockade calls or the 17 Oct call, or synchronised posting across the far-right and state accounts.

Key assumptions check

ASSUMPTION	SUPPORT	RISK IF WRONG
VIGINUM's 28 Sep finding still holds	Medium. No public update since; the movement has grown	High. A new finding would reopen H3
X "Top" and TikTok search show the highest-reach items	Medium. Platform ranking is opaque	Medium. We may miss mid-reach networks
Partner fact-checkers' view counts and attributions are accurate	High. Several independent outlets agree	Low
The Pravda homepage snapshot reflects real output	Medium. One point in time, two of many hosts	Low. It understates volume
The X count index shows the true trend shape	Medium. Absolute levels look low	Low for shape, high for levels
Official arrest and custody figures are comparable over time	Low. Arrests and custody are different measures	Medium. Figure 1 is order-of-magnitude only

Coordination versus direction

Coordination means accounts acting together. Direction means a state or organisation tasking them. Each needs its own evidence. We hold evidence of **state direction** only where it is overt: Iranian foreign ministry accounts and Russian officials posting under their own names, and Matryoshka as attributed by NewsGuard. Among the far-right influencers we have neither coordination nor direction: they share frames and copy one another, which is normal behaviour in an ideological ecosystem. We applied no "bot" or "fake account" labels without evidence.

09 Gaps and limitations

- **Sample, not census:** about 250 X posts, 120 TikTok results and 7 Telegram searches. We built no retweet or follower network, so coordination is untested.
- **Platforms not covered or only partly covered:** Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, VK, Bluesky. RT's X account cannot be searched. Web previews for rt_russian and InfoDefense France are disabled. Private Telegram groups are out of scope.
- **Provenance of media:** we downloaded no media and relied on fact-checkers' provenance work. **No C2PA content-credential check was performed** on any item.
- **Official updates:** no public statement from VIGINUM since 28 Sep. The PM's 1,200-arrest figure needs re-checking against the primary source.
- **Timing:** facts are as of about 00:10 BST on 18 Oct. Overnight events, including any deaths, new arrests or official FIMI statements, are not included.
- **AI audit:** a single prompt set, one point in time, two runs per prompt. Treat it as a spot check, not a measurement of prevalence.

- **Meta report dating:** the report cited as "16 Oct" in the tasking is dated August 2026 and covers mainly H1 2026.

10 Recommendations

4. **Refresh at 08:00 BST and again at 18:00.** Pull overnight figures, check for a VIGINUM or Quai d'Orsay statement, and rerun the X count index and the Pravda snapshot.
5. **Watch the framing shift.** Now that authentic riot footage is plentiful, track "who the rioters are" claims (migrants, Islamists, foreign agitators) ahead of the 5 Nov strike and the 27 Oct Senate debate.
6. **Map the network (next version).** Run a near-census X pull for 15–19 Oct with a retweet and quote graph to test H4 directly.
7. **Pravda and AI exposure.** Rerun the AI prompt set weekly and add Gemini and Perplexity prompts on specific claims (Rolex/LV, Mulhouse). Notify Perplexity of the Pravda citation if the client wants that pursued.
8. **Iran.** Keep monitoring Iranian MFA and embassy accounts. The 7 Oct summons makes further posts diplomatically significant.
9. **Before external use:** carry out an English-law libel review, with particular attention to sections 3 and 5.

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Changelog

- v5, 18 Oct 2026: removed the personal name from the prepared-for line; legal entity in the copyright footer changed to Disinfo Ltd; cover page removed, so the brief opens on the summary of findings (title line now names Disinfo Ltd). No other content changed.
- v4, 18 Oct 2026: layout only. Removed the vertical rule down the left of callout boxes and analyst notes. No content changed.
- v3, 18 Oct 2026: added a standalone one-page summary of findings after the cover and trimmed the repeated confidence list from the bottom line. No findings changed.
- v2, 18 Oct 2026: data-source wording made generic in document control, sources and figure footers. No findings changed.
- v1, 18 Oct 2026: first issue. Sample-based. Corrects an earlier working note that said the DRPP note mentions LFI "once"; franceinfo reports four concrete references in eight pages.