Survive and Thrive October 2026: RIOTS: Your Survival Guy on the Ground in Paris



Tuileries Gardens in Paris, France. By sizsus @ Adobe Stock

Dear Survivor,

Your survival Guy and Gal took our morning walk through the Tuileries Gardens in Paris on Saturday, October 17. That afternoon, 110,000 protestors were rampaging through certain pockets of the city.

On our walk, we saw some yellow pants/shirts here and there (remnants of the 2019 "gilet jaunes" protest movement). Mid-afternoon, at Café Bonaparte, a woman seated next to us shared an app showing live gathering points throughout the country. It was filled with yellow fist icons indicating confrontation points. Sirens could be heard all afternoon near and far. The police presence was massive.

In Tuileries Garden, certain gates that are normally left open were locked up on our walk in preparation to keep the protesters out of certain areas. This created choke points in the early evening as we made our way in an Uber to dinner, a ride that was basically a couple miles and would normally take 15 or 20 minutes on a busy Saturday night took an hour and a half, all merging into one lane in front of the Louvre.

You could hear the bang of crowd dispersal ordnance detonating. You could see heavy black smoke in the air from car fires and debris burning, along with the burning smell. Driving by one fashion house, the front plate-glass window was smashed in, and across the street diners were seated outside a brasserie having a "nothing to see here" dinner as if it was just another Saturday night.

In our many conversations with locals and acquaintances leading up to that Saturday, they warned us about the planned protests. To them, when asked, this is a combination of real frustrations across the country and also frustration that they're burning their own city and country from within. Leadership is stoking the fire from both sides of the political spectrum, and President Macron is hardly taking a hard stand against the movement. It's all more than a bit concerning. You can feel a change in the undercurrent of emotions here in Paris.

You know I want you to take the trips and spend your money a little foolishly, but after seeing Paris on the ground during this chaos, I cannot recommend travel here at the moment.

Paris Burning: What Will Become of Paris and France?

Politics in France, as in the U.S., is about geography. The farther away from the cities you get, the more conservative the vote.

That's not to say that both countries are the same, but you get my point.

Any time American politics comes up in Paris—and I try not to bring up the subject, but it's impossible to avoid—people sneer at President Trump. It's a thumbs-down in my face.

Except for one time, when we happened to be in Paris during the yellow vest, or *gilets jaunes*, movement.

After a late dinner at Freddy's, we stopped at a convenience store to grab some water and sat outside to enjoy the activity on a beautiful night.

I said hello to two guys sitting next to us, one of whom was wearing a yellow vest, and engaged them in conversation. Politics came up, as I hoped this time, and when they said "Trump," it was followed by a two-thumbs-up—up, up—gesture.

Here were the Marine Le Pen nationalists in Paris, like discovering a pearl in an oyster.

Much like working-class Trump supporters, who will not go down without a fight but also will not burn down their own cities, these guys were serious. There have been reports of *gilet jaunes* joining the current "student" rioters, but the movement is different than that of 2019, when the yellow vests fought for what they knew France could be, rather than burning down what it is today. Many of the orderly *gilet jaunes* protesters of 2019 must be infuriated with today's anarchy. And maybe some are among those Frenchmen fighting back.

Pay attention to those standing up to the cowardly rioters.

I would not want to get into a physical confrontation with the gentlemen I met. There will be pushback from now until the elections in the spring, and it's Le Pen who has the brave hearts on her side.

Future protests will likely include the well funded rioters burning up the place. Pay attention to the nationalists pushing back.

"I Have Tickets to Paris. Should I Go?"

Your Survival Guy is happy to be home after that 10-day trip to Paris, one of the many we've taken over the past dozen or so years. That Saturday night in traffic amidst the chaos was an eye-opener as we saw smoke from burning debris on the way to our highly recommended and favorite dinner of the trip at Le Bon Georges (not the easiest reservation, so plan ahead).

To borrow some phrasing from Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*: Riots make one late for dinner. But when we arrived, we were met with a "nice to see you, sorry it took so long," business-as-usual greeting. Bon appétit!

That's the thing about Paris. Protesting is nothing new. Protests are a way of life. But at what point is Paris—or France, for that matter—going to look in the mirror and do a little self-help work? Yes, this is a France problem, but let's not kid ourselves. It's here too.

Go to any favorite summer or winter vacation haunt, such as Nantucket, Edgartown, Newport, Aspen, Key West, Palm Beach, or Paris, and what do you see?

Answer: Locals counting the hours until the bastard tourists go home.

Why?

Because the days when you could be a worker in a tourist destination—waiting tables at night and surfing, fishing, or skiing by day—are gone. Being a ski bum costs a fortune today, and the soul-sucking commute by bus, train, or ferry from a home a world away from work is no longer worth the aggravation.

Oh, the cost of living is so expensive.

Check. I hear you.

But when there is so much money being thrown in the air, it's an inflationary act, making money less valuable and everything more expensive. There's never enough to make everybody happy, no matter how much money technocrats throw at the problem.

And so here we are. Hard decisions will be made, or they will be made for you. That's a fact. The landscape is changing. Plan accordingly.

Go to Paris. Do your research. Be prepared to take a detour or two on your way to dinner. And understand this: You need to spend your money somewhat foolishly to make sure you're safe, and you need to save 'til it hurts. Easy to write. Harder to do.

Make it a good trip,

You got this.

Warm regards,



"Your Survival Guy"

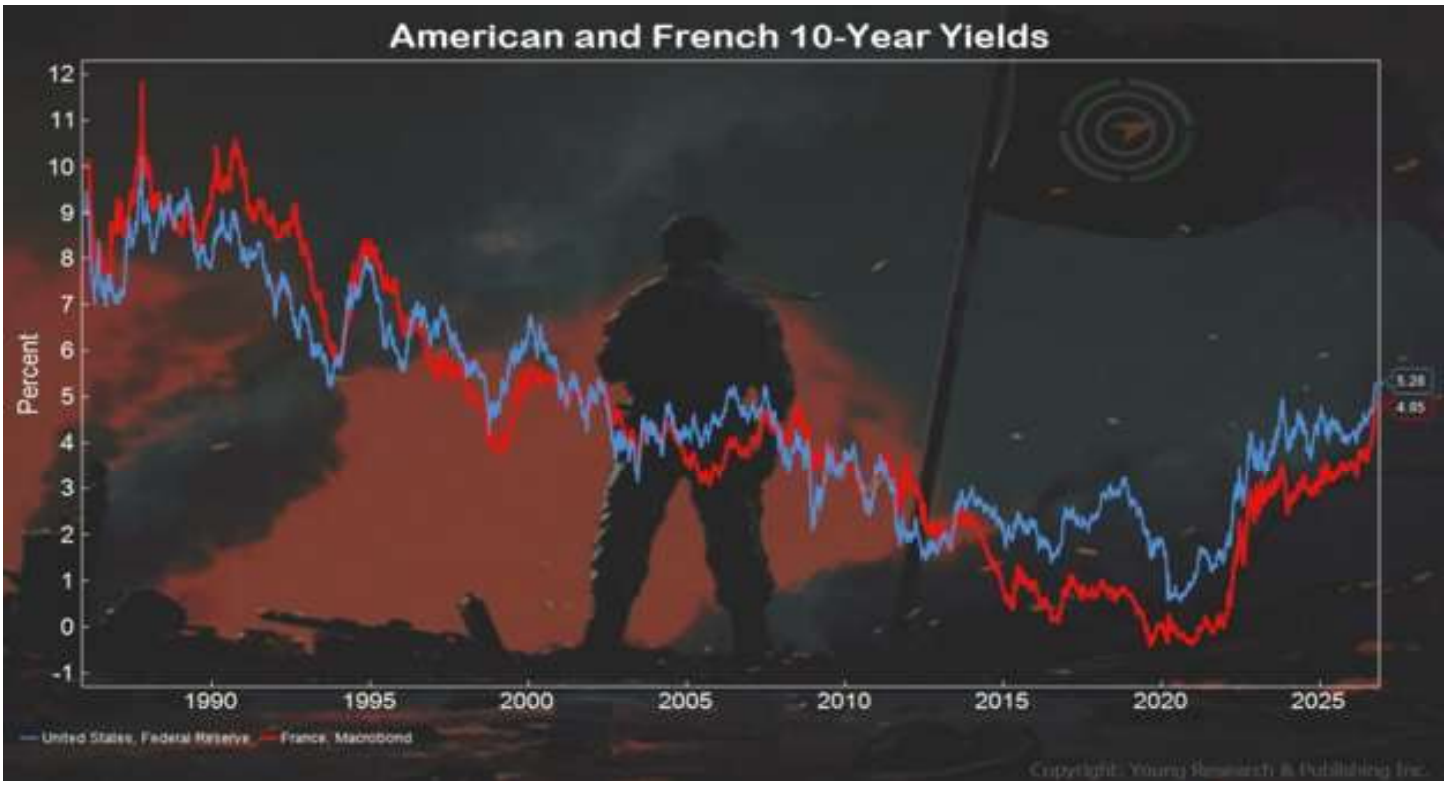
• If someone forwarded this to you, and you want to learn more about Your Survival Guy, read about me here.

• If you would like to contact me and receive a response, please email me at ejsmith@yoursurvivalguy.com.

• Would you like to receive an email alert letting you know when *Survive and Thrive* is published each month? You can subscribe to my free email here.

P.S. Packing for a trip has a way of making you appreciate the ease of an apartment where you can leave behind a Hermès scarf or two. Think of it as a hedge against packing and the U.S. dollar. Staying at a Palace Hotel costs a small fortune.

OK about that small fortune. Yes, France owes its lenders a ton, but join the club. Is America's debt load any different, other than having the dollar as a reserve currency? Both governments punish the successful, redistribute the proceeds, and keep at it until they can't anymore. In the end, the markets will have the final word, as we're seeing in real time.



As for this trip, I'm not letting riots or debt ruin it. Here's the deal: Paris is big. It has 20 districts, or arrondissements that curl around the heart of the city like a snail. The center is where you find the tourists, the money, and the heaviest protection. Move farther out, and that protection thins. It's no different from any blue-blob city in America.

And a word about the French. Through our many visits, the people we've encountered have been helpful, hardworking, and professional. Yes, they're in the service business, and that's their job. But just like here, there are the protesters—and then there are the everyday people who get up and go to work. Don't mistake what's being reported for the whole story. The truth, as usual, is somewhere in between.

So here we are. Don't let fear make your decisions for you. Take the trip. Spend a little money foolishly. And act like you've been out of the house a time or two. You've got this.

P.P.S. I have plenty to report beyond the protests and violence, including whether you should go. My quick response: You should go only if you're comfortable spending money on your safety. There's a big difference from one arrondissement—and even from one rue—to another, especially during periods of unrest. Make sure you have a Plan A and a Plan B.

That said, I'd be lying if I claimed I hadn't noticed a difference in Paris over the dozens of visits we've made during the past decade or so. A gradual shift in the undercurrent has surfaced in waves, bringing us to a point where rioters can flood any magnificent avenue in an instant.

Yes, you can have incredible experiences at Michelin-starred restaurants and brasseries alike, but the city has a different tone than it once did.

Imagine for a moment that you're a Parisian working in Paris, one of the world's premier vacation destinations, serving crowds who eat lavishly, drink wine they cannot readily get at home, and shop until they drop. It can be a bit much. That's why locals in any tourist destination cheer the end of tourist season: They want a holiday of their own.

Understand this: To be a fabulous place to eat, drink, and be merry, a business must keep reinventing itself—and that requires money to invest. Labor isn't free. Input costs rise in perpetuity. Meanwhile, the business must operate on razor-thin margins to remain great. Then comes the question: "Why bother?"

The answer to that question, after the taxes, the ordinances, the refusal to arrest criminals who loot and steal, is often to close up shop. And so the pie shrinks, much as it does in any big blue-blob city here at home. There will still be nice places to visit, but there will be fewer of them.

Why not live in the suburbs among somewhat like-minded neighbors and leave the travel blogs to the young and uninitiated? Let them have their French butter Instagram posts—and eat the butter, too.

When your margin of safety is a diminishing asset, make sure you have the money to pay for it. It will be worth every penny. Need help knowing where to go—and where not to go? Email me at ejsmith@yoursurvivalguy.com.

P.P.P.S. You need to have a boots-on-the-ground perspective to understand and see what's going on today. You need to use your own two eyes because, in a world overflowing with dramatic events, what is reported may be true, but how does it relate to you?

It's not like you're running into the fire where there are cars burning and looting at LVMH. You have ways to avoid it. Paris is huge. The live reports on the streets make it seem like the whole city is under siege. That's not the case.

It's Different When You're There

I say this having braved the streets of Paris during the worst night of the riots. I say this knowing some streets of Boston, MA, by comparison, are fine to walk by day but are a different story by night.

How Does this Relate to You and Me?

For selfish reasons, it would have been a shame to have missed out on our favorite meal that Saturday night in Paris at Le Bon Georges. We could have easily stayed in at the Lutetia for champagne at Bar Josephine and dinner at the brasserie and had another lovely night.

But according to our friend who helped us get the reservation, this was a meal we did not want to miss, so we hit the streets.

When Your Survival Guy and Gal talk about places here where the grass may be greener, we often land on Nashville, TN. Sorry, the secret's out. But do we really want to leave the ocean? No.

You Won't Know If You Don't Go: Spend It

What's the reality of anywhere worth living in and visiting? At the end of the day, it just costs more. Rising costs are part of life. It's why you saved your money. Spend it.

I want you to invest in your peace of mind and safety and to take the trips you so richly deserve. It's expensive not because of inflation but because other people want it, too (and maybe somewhat because of inflation). It's because you have common sense that you spend it on yourself and your loved ones.

You got this. Spend the money on your peace of mind. You won't regret it, but you won't know if you don't go. Take the time to spend money somewhat foolishly and to live your retirement life.

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