



**| Flash |**

# Protest and Government Collapse Likely in France

F-2025-09-05a

Classification: TLP:CLEAR

Criticality: Medium

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitical

**September 5, 2025**

## Scope Note

*ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our Intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular Intelligence product were identified prior to 4:05 PM (EDT) on September 4, 2025; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.*

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## | Key Points

- French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou's government is almost certain to fall on September 8 over budgetary disputes.
- Bayrou's unpopular budget proposals have spurred a movement that is planning massive nationwide protests starting September 10. Political and social unrest around these demonstrations is expected, but the size and severity of the protests will likely be impacted by whether Bayrou's budget passes.
- If Prime Minister Bayrou is forced to resign, he will be the third French prime minister removed since 2023, highlighting France's apparent inability to meaningfully address major domestic and international political issues.
- The political dynamics that created this paralysis are not expected to change for the foreseeable future. Therefore, further short-lived governments are likely, leaving France vulnerable to social unrest.

## | Details

Prime Minister (PM) Francois Bayrou will convene an extraordinary session of the French parliament, the Assemblée Nationale (AN), on September 8, 2025. The AN will either vote in favor of his proposals on reducing French debt—and therefore maintaining his position as PM—or cast a vote of no confidence and, in so doing, topple the government.

- If the AN votes for Bayrou's budget, he will remain as PM, and international investors will very likely approve of his proposals. Deputies in the AN will, in broad strokes, endorse his plan for dealing with France's debt and his 2025 budget proposals.
- If a vote of no confidence is cast, Bayrou will be immediately forced out from office, and President Macron will need to choose a new PM, who will then need to propose and pass another budget. France's economy will very likely suffer due to the continued delays and uncertainty; credit rating agency Fitch will release a new credit rating just days later on September 12, and investors expect a downgrade from Fitch and other agencies if Bayrou falls.<sup>1</sup>
- France was at a nearly identical place less than one year ago, when previous PM Michel Barnier was removed from office after his similar budget failed to pass in a divided AN.<sup>2</sup>

Amidst the ongoing political uncertainty, the online movement "Bloquons tout" (Block Everything Together) has called for a national shutdown beginning September 10, 2025, to protest Bayrou's proposed budget.<sup>3</sup> A wide range of possibilities exists with regards to this action; it is unclear at this stage which groups will participate, what actions they will take, and how widespread the activity will be. However, that range has likely expanded now that Bayrou is bringing the budget to a decision point just two days before the proposed shutdown date.<sup>4</sup>

## Budget Background

Francois Bayrou has been charged with bringing French government spending under control. The country's current deficit is just over 5.4 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP), which is well above the EU-designated limit of 3 percent. France and the European

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<sup>1</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Brief: How Unrest in France and Europe Benefits Its Adversaries, December 13, 2024

<sup>2</sup>

[hXXps://www.fundssociety\[.\]com/en/news/markets/the-consequences-of-the-french-confidence-vote-volatility-and-debt-rating-review/](https://www.fundssociety.com/en/news/markets/the-consequences-of-the-french-confidence-vote-volatility-and-debt-rating-review/)

<sup>3</sup>

[hXXps://www.francebleu\[.\]fr/infos/societe/tout-bloquer-le-10-septembre-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-appel-a-la-mobilisation-ne-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-6469267](https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/tout-bloquer-le-10-septembre-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-appel-a-la-mobilisation-ne-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-6469267)

<sup>4</sup>

[hXXps://www.francebleu\[.\]fr/infos/societe/tout-bloquer-le-10-septembre-a-quoi-faut-il-s-attendre-dans-la-region-toulousaine-2912091](https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/tout-bloquer-le-10-septembre-a-quoi-faut-il-s-attendre-dans-la-region-toulousaine-2912091)

Union (EU) have agreed to a plan that would bring the deficit down to that level by 2029, but significant spending reductions are necessary to achieve this.

Bayrou's budget has been controversial on multiple fronts. One of the most significant sticking points is his plan to eliminate two public holidays, which is opposed by 84 percent of French citizens.<sup>5</sup> While Bayrou has stated that "all measures can be amended" as long as the broader goal is achieved, his other proposals—such as capping 2026 spending at 2025 levels for all ministries and the end to full coverage of certain medications—are similarly unpopular and will likely prove to be difficult starting points for negotiation.

## Divided Parliament

Passing a budget and negotiating in the AN have become even more difficult since mid-2024, when President Macron declared a snap parliamentary election in what was widely viewed as a bid to change the balance of power in the AN more to his favor.

- The June 2024 elections ended with Macron's coalition losing over 100 seats in Parliament. The elections created an almost three-way tie between the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) coalition (182), Macron and Bayrou's Ensemble coalition (168), and the Rassemblement Nationale (RN) party (143).<sup>6</sup>

All three parties are therefore well short of the 289 seats needed to form a majority in the 577-seat AN. As a result, any prime minister would need the support of their own bloc plus at least one of the two opposition blocs (most likely NFP and RN).

- If two opposition blocs unite, they will always be able to unseat the bloc that forms a government (most likely Ensemble), reject budgets, and dispose of PMs until new elections are held.

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<sup>5</sup>

[hXXps://www.ouest-france\[.\]fr/politique/francois-bayrou/dapres-un-sondage-84-pourcent-des-francais-sont-opposes-a-la-suppression-de-deux-jours-feries-3062235a-810e-11f0-a77f-922a296422d8](https://www.ouest-france.fr/politique/francois-bayrou/dapres-un-sondage-84-pourcent-des-francais-sont-opposes-a-la-suppression-de-deux-jours-feries-3062235a-810e-11f0-a77f-922a296422d8)

<sup>6</sup>

[hXXps://www.politico\[.\]eu/article/france-election-results-2024-map-constituencies-emmanuel-macron-marine-le-p en-live-new-popular-front-national-rally/](https://www.politico.eu/article/france-election-results-2024-map-constituencies-emmanuel-macron-marine-le-pen-live-new-popular-front-national-rally/)

Both extremes of the French political spectrum (principally RN on the far right and La France Insoumise and associated parties on the far left) will almost certainly vote against Bayrou's proposals.

- This means Bayrou's only real chance at survival is to maintain support in the center while courting the Socialist Party, which has split multiple times with its left-leaning coalition partners to maintain Bayrou in power. However, there is almost no chance Bayrou can gain this support.
  - The First Secretary of the Socialist Party stated in a recent interview that it was "unimaginable that the Socialists would vote ... for Bayrou."<sup>7</sup>
  - After a last-chance meeting on September 4, Socialist Party leader Olivier Faure maintained that line, declaring that his party would vote against the PM. He called on Macron to "choose a prime minister from the moderate left who wants to govern."<sup>8</sup>

It is highly unlikely that PM Bayrou can convince one of these three blocs to switch sides and back him, meaning he will almost certainly lose the September 8 confidence vote.

## **| Going Forward**

It is almost certain that Bayrou's government will fall and Macron will need to name a new PM, although there is also a very unlikely chance that Macron will call new elections in an attempt to change the balance in the AN more to his favor. However, as Macron's last attempt to do so resulted in losing center bloc seats to both the left and the right, he is unlikely to do so again.

- It is likely that any new election would result in a similarly divided Parliament, there is a roughly equal chance France will have temporary or short-lived prime ministers like Bayrou and Barnier until a new president is elected in 2027.
- Macron is unlikely to ever appoint a PM closely aligned with the opposition blocs.

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<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> [hXXps://www.bfmtv\[.\]com/politique/gouvernement/direct-rentree-politique-budget-le-premier-ministre-francois-bayrou-tient-ce-lundi-une-conference-de-presse-son-entourage-craint-le-debut-du-bordel-et-redoute-la-censure\\_LN-202508250068.html](https://www.bfmtv.com/politique/gouvernement/direct-rentree-politique-budget-le-premier-ministre-francois-bayrou-tient-ce-lundi-une-conference-de-presse-son-entourage-craint-le-debut-du-bordel-et-redoute-la-censure_LN-202508250068.html)

<sup>8</sup> [hXXps://www.politico\[.\]eu/article/olivier-faure-french-socialist-pm-francois-bayrou-minority-government/](https://www.politico[.]eu/article/olivier-faure-french-socialist-pm-francois-bayrou-minority-government/)



Macron will likely face continued calls to resign or appoint a PM from an opposition bloc, especially if further PMs are removed. However, in both cases he would likely be handing over political power to his political adversaries, who would very likely win the next election.

- A victory for either opposition party in parliamentary or general elections would likely be swiftly followed by a reversal of many of Macron's legislative accomplishments. Both NFP and RN have campaigned on overturning Macron's changes to pension ages, paid for by a reversal of Macron's tax cuts for the wealthy. With both NFP and RN supporting the proposals, Macron's policies would likely be overturned.

## Protests

Meanwhile, an internet-based protest movement reminiscent of the Gilets Jaunes is planning a massive nationwide protest on September 10, 2025.<sup>9</sup>

- The Gilets Jaunes protests began in 2018 when Macron instituted a scheme to increase fuel taxes. This sparked months of protests against the price increase by workers across the political spectrum that morphed into wider protests over economic inequality and the cost of living, which became known as Gilets Jaunes due to the movement's adoption of symbolic yellow vests.<sup>10</sup> These protests occurred weekly until the COVID-19 pandemic limited public gatherings. Yellow Vests demonstrations still occur regularly, including during protests against raising the retirement age and in support for farm workers.<sup>11</sup>

The latest movement is called "Bloquons Tout" ("block everything together") and aims to completely shut down France on September 10 as a means of expressing displeasure with Bayrou's proposals. This is anticipated to take the form of both a nationwide strike by workers and a nationwide refusal by consumers to go out and participate in the

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<sup>9</sup>

[hXXps://www.connexionfrance\[.\]com/news/france-total-blockade-call-for-september-10-how-much-support-does-it-have/741189](https://www.connexionfrance[.]com/news/france-total-blockade-call-for-september-10-how-much-support-does-it-have/741189)

<sup>10</sup>

[hXXps://www.bfmtv\[.\]com/auto/d-ou-vient-le-gilet-jaune-devenu-symbole-de-contestation\\_AN-201812140062.html](https://www.bfmtv[.]com/auto/d-ou-vient-le-gilet-jaune-devenu-symbole-de-contestation_AN-201812140062.html)

<sup>11</sup> [hXXps://reporterre\[.\]net/Reforme-des-retraites-et-ecologie-les-Gilets-jaunes-font-leur-rentree](https://reporterre[.]net/Reforme-des-retraites-et-ecologie-les-Gilets-jaunes-font-leur-rentree)

economy.<sup>12</sup> The point of comparison is France's "confinement" during the COVID pandemic.<sup>13</sup>

- In the capital of Paris, organizers are reportedly planning to hold a protest at Les Halles on 10 September, starting at 2:00 PM local time.<sup>14</sup> Blockades are planned for 7:00 AM local time at train stations, roads, and schools, which are likely to cause major transportation disruptions. At 7:00 PM, a gathering is planned at Place de Fêtes.<sup>15</sup>
- The website "Indignons nous" published a map showing Telegram and Signal channels created for protests on September 10. Protest locations appear spread out across the country, but, in most cases, few details have been publicly shared.<sup>16</sup>

There is a great deal of uncertainty over the protests. One of the chief issues is that nearly all political organizations (parties, unions, and activist committees) appear to be taking a wait-and-see approach with regards to participating—waiting both to see what events are organized and how the protests might mix with the budget.

- If the Bayrou budget is passed, the Bloquons Tout protest will likely crystallize as the best opportunity to express national discontent.
- However, if Bayrou's budget proposal fails, there is a roughly even chance it will either render the protest moot and depress turnout or that the toppling of the government will be viewed as the first major success for the Bloquons Tout movement and inspire stronger turnout by citizens against the government.
  - Social media posts made by one of the larger protest groups indicate that September 10 is "just the beginning" and that the movement may last several days and even weeks, in order to make the protester's demands heard.<sup>17</sup> The X account @FrontAntiMacron called for actions to continue from September 11–18 in order to "be victorious."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [hXXps://bloquonstout\[.\]fr/](https://bloquonstout.fr/)

<sup>13</sup>

[hXXps://www.francebleu\[.\]fr/infos/societe/tout-bloquer-le-10-septembre-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-appel-a-la-mobilisation-ne-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-6469267](https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/tout-bloquer-le-10-septembre-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-appel-a-la-mobilisation-ne-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-6469267)

<sup>14</sup> [hXXps://x\[.\]com/LesInsurges\\_/status/1962198130746675365](https://x.com/LesInsurges_/status/1962198130746675365)

<sup>15</sup> [hXXps://x\[.\]com/PeupleRevolte/status/1962609831900061914](https://x.com/PeupleRevolte/status/1962609831900061914)

<sup>16</sup> [hXXps://indignonsnous\[.\]fr/](https://indignonsnous.fr/)

<sup>17</sup> [hXXps://www.instagram\[.\]com/p/DNAPdFHN9eB/](https://www.instagram.com/p/DNAPdFHN9eB/)

<sup>18</sup> [hXXps://x\[.\]com/FrontAntiMacron/status/1958872210002595882](https://x.com/FrontAntiMacron/status/1958872210002595882)

- A group of all the major trade unions has announced their intention to stage a nationwide strike on September 18,<sup>19</sup> the same day air traffic controllers are planning to strike.

## **| Conclusion**

Even if the budget fails and Bayrou is removed, elements of the cuts may still apply, which could continue to inspire protests. The AN passed a “Loi Speciale” in 2024 that handles spending in the event a budget cannot be agreed on, which would avert a U.S.-style government shutdown by allowing taxes to be collected and certain programs to be funded.

- The procedure authorizes only the minimum spending the government considers vital to continue providing public services—in an amount not greater than what was earmarked in the previous budget.<sup>20</sup> Given that a major aspect of Bayrou’s proposal is a spending freeze where almost no ministries will see increases to their spending levels, there is little substantive difference between Bayrou’s budget and a Loi Speciale budget.

While helping bring down France’s budget deficit, it is likely that Loi Speciale-induced spending cuts will prompt protests across France by impacted sectors like pensioners, public transportation, healthcare, and utilities.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the most likely scenario is that France continues under a Loi Speciale, fueling widespread protest activity. The political dynamics that created this paralysis and dysfunction are not expected to change for the foreseeable future. Therefore, further short-lived governments are likely, leaving France poorly suited to address major domestic political issues and vulnerable to large-scale protest movements.

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<sup>19</sup>

[hXXps://actu\[.\]fr/societe/greves-de-la-rentree-blocages-du-10-septembre-sncf-pharmacies-la-liste-des-mobilisations-jour-par-jour\\_63082357.html](https://actu.fr/societe/greves-de-la-rentree-blocages-du-10-septembre-sncf-pharmacies-la-liste-des-mobilisations-jour-par-jour_63082357.html)

<sup>20</sup>

[hXXps://www.cnews\[.\]fr/france/2024-12-10/quest-ce-que-la-loi-speciale-presentee-en-conseil-des-ministres-ce-mercredi](https://www.cnews.fr/france/2024-12-10/quest-ce-que-la-loi-speciale-presentee-en-conseil-des-ministres-ce-mercredi)

<sup>21</sup>

[hXXps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/news/articles/2024-12-02/what-happens-if-french-government-falls-after-budget-showdown](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-12-02/what-happens-if-french-government-falls-after-budget-showdown)



## **| Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination**

	<b>Red</b>	<b>Amber</b>
<b>WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?</b>	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:RED</b> when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:AMBER</b> when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
<b>HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?</b>	<b>Recipients may NOT share</b> <b>TLP:RED</b> with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	<b>Recipients may ONLY share</b> <b>TLP:AMBER</b> information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. <b>Note that</b> <b>TLP:AMBER+STRICT</b> restricts sharing to the organization only.
	<b>Green</b>	<b>Clear</b>
<b>WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?</b>	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:GREEN</b> when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:CLEAR</b> when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
<b>HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?</b>	<b>Recipients may share</b> <b>TLP:GREEN</b> information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	<b>Recipients may share</b> <b>TLP:CLEAR</b> information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

## **| Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale**

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%