Beat: Politics

HOW A MOVEMENT FOR BETTER SCHOOLS BECAME FRANCE'S LATEST NATIONAL FAULT LINE

PUPILS, POLICE AND POLITICIANS

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USPA NEWS - For many young people, however, the message remains unchanged: they want schools that work and a future they can believe in. Yet, in the tense run-up to the 2027 presidential election, their mobilisation has become an object of political conflict. Blocked entrances, police deployments and demonstrations have been read through sharply different narratives as a spontaneous youth revolt, a crisis of public education, a breakdown in public order, or an opportunity for political forces to advance their own agenda.

TODAY'S TURNING POINT AS EDUCATION MINISTER GEFFRAY SEEMS HELPELESS
On Monday, Education Minister Edouard Geffray travelled to Lycée Villaroy in Guyancourt, in the Yvelines, as the government attempted to combine dialogue with a firm security message ahead of the planned mobilisation on 6 October. The visit was officially scheduled by the Ministry of Education and came as the government called for a gradual return to classes where security conditions allow.

VIOLENCE ESCALATES: ECHOES OF MAY 1968 AS FRANCE'S SCHOOL PROTESTS ENTER A DANGEROUS NEW PHASE

The violence is escalating at an alarming pace, reviving uneasy memories of France's May 1968 student revolt when the Latin Quarter became a symbol of youth anger, barricades and confrontation with authority. Today, however, the crisis unfolds under constant cameras: every fire, police charge, arrest and alleged act of violence can become a viral image within minutes.
What began as a movement over teachers, overcrowded classrooms and the right to a functioning education is now entering a far more dangerous phase. Forty-four lycée headteachers have reportedly been attacked, while numerous school buildings have been damaged, vandalised or set on fire. Yet identifying those responsible remains difficult. In many confrontations, individuals are masked, hooded and dressed in black from head to toe. It is therefore not possible to state with certainty whether they are "Pupils," outside groups or "vandals" exploiting a protest movement that originally focused on education.

The images of violence have travelled far beyond France. In Belfort, a video showing a teenager sustaining a catastrophic hand injury after the explosion of a grenade became widely shared online. Separately, allegations relating to a confrontation near a river involving a police commander must be examined independently and carefully; no final account should be accepted before the relevant investigations are complete.
Another widely circulated video from Marseille shows a healthcare worker attempting to intervene near a bus shelter during unrest. According to the account described alongside the footage, a seven-year-old child was sprayed in the face by a minor, causing facial burns. This allegation is grave and should be attributed carefully until confirmed by police, medical or judicial authorities. But whether carried out by " minor pupils" or "vandals," such violence has nothing to do with the original call for functioning schools and respect for the right to learn.

WHEN EDUCATION BECAME POLITICAL
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scheduled by the Ministry of Education and came as the government called for a gradual return to classes where security conditions allow.

Education Minister Edouard Geffray said students' right to mobilise must be respected, but insisted that democratic expression cannot be confused with violence. He also announced a national consultation platform for pupils to submit their demands, concerns and proposals, with a national response promised later in November.

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"The objective is for classes to resume everywhere from Wednesday morning."

For publication, attribute the claim that external "thugs" or radical groups have taken over the movement directly to the minister. It is the government's assessment, not an independently established fact. Education Minister, douard Geffray said that the students he met were shocked by the violence. He argued that individuals from outside the school movement were attempting to hijack a legitimate student protest. This is the minister's assessment; judicial investigations will determine individual responsibility for the offences committed.

THE MINISTER'S MESSAGE: PROTEST IS A RIGHT, VIOLENCE IS NOT

At Lycee Villaroy in Guyancourt, Education Minister Edouard Geffray sought to draw a firm line between democratic student mobilisation and urban violence. He said that the national day of action planned for Tuesday should be respected as an expression of freedom, while insisting that students must be able to debate their concerns inside their schools.
"The planned day of mobilisation is a freedom that must be respected and protected."
"Democracy is not a fireworks mortar behind a balaclava. It is exactly the opposite: transparency and dialogue."
"The students we meet are appalled by the violence."
Minister Geffray said the government wanted classes to resume wherever security conditions allow, beginning on Wednesday. He also pointed to a new online consultation platform intended to collect students' demands and concerns.

WHEN THE MICROPHONES FAILED, THE SCHOOL CRISIS SPOKE FOR ITSELF

Even the minister's press appearance captured the bitter irony at the centre of the crisis. As Education MinisterEdouard Geffray spoke to journalists from Lycée Villaroy in Guyancourt, technical problems reportedly prevented the microphones from working properly inside the establishment. It was a small, almost absurd moment but also a vivid image of what many pupils have been denouncing: ageing or unreliable equipment, material shortages and institutions struggling to provide the conditions needed for learning and public service.

The scene did not prove every claim made by the students. But it made their complaint tangible. At the very moment the government was promising dialogue, better organisation and a return to normality, basic equipment appeared unable to support a ministerial briefing. In one room, France's education crisis became visible without a speech, a slogan or a burning barricade.

5,060 POLICE CUSTODY CASES 87 PERCENT INVOLVING MINORS

On the other hand, the Justice Ministry's official statement, released on 5 October, provides the clearest nationwide judicial picture so far. It says that 5,060 people have been taken into police custody since the violence began. Of those, 4,406 were minors, or 87 percent, while 654 were adults.The ministry states that prosecutors have opened proceedings against 1,802 people: 1,483 minors and 319 adults. Courts have ordered 14 pre-trial detentions, involving 10 adults and four minors. The authorities have also used 1,376 alternatives to prosecution, primarily for minors, including warning measures, restorative-justice measures, bans from certain areas, unpaid work and conditional dismissals. Source: CP-Bilan-judiciaire-des-violences-urbaines-en-marge-du-mouvement-lyceen-05.10.2026.pdf

Official judicial figures as of 5 October Total
People held in police custody 5,060
Minors held in police custody 4,406 /87 percent
Adults held in police custody 654 /13 percent
Individuals facing prosecution 1,802
Minors facing prosecution 1,483
Adults facing prosecution 319
Pre-trial detentions ordered 14
Alternative measures to prosecution 1,376
Cases closed without further action 790

THE ROLE OF JUSTICE IN THAT MATTER

Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin instructed France's 36 prosecutors general to pursue a rapid and firm judicial response wherever possible. The ministry also asks prosecutors, where legally applicable, to seek the civil liability of parents of minors arrested in connection with damage. This does not mean that every parent will automatically be ordered to pay: civil responsibility must be assessed through the legal process and tied to proven facts in each case.

The official statement describes damage to schools and street infrastructure as already costing several million euros to repair. It also stresses that violence has targeted police officers, education staff and elected representatives, alongside property. Source : CP-Bilan-judiciaire-des-violences-urbaines-en-marge-du-mouvement-lyceen-05.10.2026.pdf

JUSTICE MUST ACT, BUT SO MUST THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The official judicial figures leave no room for complacency. Since the violence began, 5,060 people have been taken into police custody, including 4,406 minors, 87 percent of the total. Prosecutors have begun proceedings against 1,802 people, while courts have ordered 14 pre-trial detentions and applied 1,376 alternative measures, many involving repair, restrictions or educational consequences for young people. These figures confirm that violence, threats and destruction demand a swift, fair and proportionate judicial response.

Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin has instructed prosecutors to seek firm penalties where the evidence supports them, use rapid procedures where possible and consider the civil liability of parents of minors involved in proven damage. The Ministry of Justice also reports that repairs to schools and street infrastructure already amount to several million euros. Accountability matters: no educational grievance can justify attacks on teachers, police officers, elected representatives, pupils or public property.

AFTER THE BLOCKADES: A CALL FOR ACCOUNTABILITY, SAFETY AND REAL ANSWERS FOR FRANCE'S PUPILS

But the judicial response cannot be the entire response. The minister's plan offers a second path: respect peaceful mobilisation, reopen schools as soon as security allows, create space for collective discussion within establishments and use the new digital consultation platform to collect pupils' demands. The credibility of that approach will depend on whether it produces visible improvements teachers in classrooms, working equipment, safe buildings and reliable learning conditions rather than simply another promise of dialogue.

Guyancourt provided an uncomfortable symbol of this wider problem. During the minister's media appearance at Lycée Villaroy, the microphones reportedly failed inside the school. It was a minor technical incident, but it echoed students' complaints about ageing and unreliable material. At the moment France was debating the future of public education, basic equipment appeared unable to support a ministerial briefing.

The mobilisation planned for 6 October will be a test for everyone: pupils and unions seeking to make their voices heard, authorities responsible for guaranteeing safety, and political leaders tempted to claim the movement for their own purposes. The outcome remains uncertain. What is certain is that France cannot police its way out of an education crisis, and it cannot dialogue its way out of violence without accountability. It must do both: protect schools, enforce the law fairly and finally address the conditions that drove so many young people to the gates of their lycées.

The government's delayed response to students' underlying concerns may be increasing distrust. With no single, widely recognised spokesperson able to negotiate for the movement, the lack of a clear channel for dialogue leaves space for fear, misinformation, political exploitation and further escalation. Restoring calm requires more than police deployment: it requires protection for schools and staff, full investigations into violence from every side, and credible answers on teacher shortages, school resources and young people's futures.

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