WWW.IJRPR.COM

International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal Homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

When Prices Rise, Trust Falls: Economic Crisis, Human Character and the Paris Protests of 2026

Dr.Rajendra Prasad [1], Monika D.[2]

[1] Associate Professor & Facilitator, Department of Accounting and Finance Agurchand Manmull Jain College Meenambakkam Chennai-61
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of English, Agurchand Manmull Jain College Meenambakkam Chennai-61

ABSTRACT.

In autumn 2026, protests that began among high school students in the poorer suburbs of Paris widened into nationwide demonstrations against the rising cost of living. This paper uses these events as a case study to ask how economic crisis shapes human character and psychological life, and what commerce, economics and the humanities can contribute to a response. Drawing on relative deprivation theory, research on unemployment and austerity, and French literary and sociological accounts of social suffering, the paper identifies both the harms of crisis (anxiety, anger, mistrust, violence) and its possible gains (solidarity, civic engagement, resilience). It concludes with practical proposals in three areas: commercial and price policy, public economic policy, and civic and psychological support.

Keywords: Paris protests, cost of living, economic crisis, psychology, relative deprivation, commerce, humanities

1. Introduction

In October 2026, news reports described tens of thousands of people marching through Paris and demonstrations in many other French cities. The protests had begun weeks earlier at high schools in the poor northern suburbs of the capital, where anger over teacher shortages and poor facilities grew into a wider movement about inequality, public spending and living standards ("Tear Gas"). The demands that were reported included lower fuel costs and opposition to frozen benefits and public-sector pay under the draft budget, and well-known figures from the Yellow Vest movement of 2018 urged people to take part ("France Braces"). Reports of the weekend's events spoke of clashes with police, fires and tear gas in several cities, while many marchers demonstrated peacefully ("France Protests"). A few days later, protesters blocked the entrance to the Louvre, and one report counted roughly half a million participants across France ("Protesters Block").

These events are still unfolding, and this paper treats them as a lens rather than a finished story. Its central question is how a period of economic strain changes the way people feel, trust and act, and what the disciplines of commerce, economics and the humanities can offer in response.

2. Theoretical background

Gurr's theory of relative deprivation holds that people rebel not when they are poor in absolute terms, but when there is a gap between what they believe they deserve and what they actually receive. A price shock widens this gap quickly, because it is felt every day at the fuel pump and the supermarket. Jahoda's research on unemployment adds that work provides not only income but also structure, social contact and purpose, so losing economic security damages identity as well as budgets. Stuckler and Basu extend the argument to public policy, showing how austerity measures can be linked with worse health outcomes, and Case and Deaton describe how economic decline can feed despair in communities that feel left behind. Durkheim's classic study of suicide offers a sociological frame: periods of sudden economic upheaval can produce anomie, a condition in which shared rules and expectations lose their hold on people.

French scholarship has long attended to this inner side of economics. Bourdieu and his collaborators gathered personal testimonies of what they called social suffering in contemporary France, showing that hardship is lived as humiliation and invisibility as much as shortage. In literature, Hugo's *Les Miserables* made poverty and injustice a moral subject for the French imagination, and the same tradition continues in how protesters narrate their own dignity today. Chamorel's account of the Yellow Vest movement links the 2018 uprising to a sense of being unheard by the political elite, a theme that appears again in 2026.

3. The economic and commercial perspective

From the standpoint of economics, the protests combine three pressures: rising prices, frozen incomes and constrained public budgets. When wages and benefits do not keep pace with prices, real purchasing power falls even if nominal incomes stay the same. Piketty's work on inequality reminds us that such strains are felt unequally, because households with little savings cannot absorb a shock as easily as wealthier households can.

For commerce, the effects are both direct and indirect. Consumers cut back on non-essential spending, and small retailers, restaurants and transport businesses lose customers. Disruption of famous tourist sites, such as the blockade at the Louvre ("Protesters Block"), and damage to shops raise costs for businesses that depend on steady footfall. Uncertainty also affects investment: firms postpone hiring and expansion when political conditions are unstable. At the same time, crisis can create commercial opportunity, for example in discount retail, repair services, local food networks and digital platforms that help households save.

4. The psychological and humanistic perspective

Economic stress shapes character in ways that statistics hide. Chronic uncertainty produces anxiety, sleeplessness and irritability, and can narrow a person's attention to short-term survival at the expense of long-term planning. Anger is often directed at visible targets, such as the government, the police or wealthier citizens, and trust in institutions erodes. Young people in particular may experience a loss of hope when their schools lack teachers and their future earnings seem uncertain, which is part of why this protest movement began in classrooms.

Humanistic thought also shows another side. Shared hardship can produce solidarity, as people who once saw one another as strangers discover common cause, and protest can restore a sense of agency to those who felt powerless. Literature has always recorded both faces of crisis: the bitterness that corrodes and the fellowship that sustains. The task for the humanities is to give people the language and stories to understand their own situation without being swallowed by resentment.

5. Pros and cons for human character

	Possible gains	Possible harms
Individual	Resourcefulness, thrift, adaptability, reflection on values	Anxiety, anger, hopelessness, loss of trust, health strain
Community	Solidarity, mutual aid, shared identity, civic participation	Polarisation, suspicion, violence, blaming of groups
Commerce	New low-cost models, local enterprise, innovation	Closures, lost jobs, lower investment, damage to trade
Public life	Pressure on leaders to listen and reform	Instability, distrust of democratic institutions

The table suggests that crisis does not produce one fixed character but opens a range of possibilities. Whether people move toward solidarity or toward bitterness depends heavily on how institutions respond.

6. Possible solutions

Commerce and pricing. Businesses and regulators can improve price transparency on essentials, support small firms with targeted relief when disruption hits them, and encourage fair pricing practices on fuel and food. Employers can consider living-wage commitments and flexible working arrangements that reduce commuting costs.

Economic and public policy. Governments can protect the most exposed households through targeted support instead of broad subsidies, index benefits and low public-sector pay to inflation where affordable, and invest in schools and public services that the protesters identify as failing. These measures have fiscal costs and trade-offs, so they require honest public explanation of what can and cannot be afforded.

Civic and psychological support. Local dialogue forums, youth councils and school-based listening sessions can give protesters a legitimate way to be heard. Accessible mental health services, community counselling and media literacy programmes can reduce the spread of fear and misinformation. Teachers and writers can help by using literature and testimony to build empathy across groups.

Education. Schools and colleges can pair economics with literature, teaching students to read a budget and a novel with equal care, so that future citizens understand both the numbers and the human experience behind them.

7. Conclusion

The Paris protests show that an economic crisis is never only economic. Rising prices and frozen incomes become feelings of humiliation or hope, trust or suspicion, depending on how a society responds. Commerce and economics can reduce the pressure through fair prices, targeted support and sound public investment, while the humanities and psychology can protect dignity, restore a sense of voice and keep disagreement from turning into hatred. The

most effective response combines all three. As events are still developing, this paper's conclusions are provisional, and future research should collect first-hand evidence from participants and affected businesses.

Works Cited

Bourdieu, Pierre, et al. *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. Translated by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson et al., Stanford UP, 1999.

Case, Anne, and Angus Deaton. *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism*. Princeton UP, 2020.

Chamorel, Patrick. "Macron versus the Yellow Vests." *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2019, pp. 48-62.

Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, Free Press, 1951.

"France Braces for Nationwide Cost-of-Living Protests Saturday." *Bernama*, 16 Oct. 2026, bernama.com/en/world/news.php?id=2621126. Accessed 22 Oct. 2026.

"France Protests: Demonstrators Vow to Shake Government." *The Express Tribune*, 18 Oct. 2026, tribune.com.pk/story/2635452/france-protests-demonstrators-vow-to-shake-government. Accessed 22 Oct. 2026.

Gurr, Ted Robert. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton UP, 1970.

Hugo, Victor. *Les Miserables*. Translated by Norman Denny, Penguin, 1982.

Jahoda, Marie. *Employment and Unemployment: A Social-Psychological Analysis*. Cambridge UP, 1982.

Piketty, Thomas. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2014.

"Protesters Block Access to Louvre Museum in Paris in Support of Demonstrations." *Euronews*, 19 Oct. 2026, euronews.com/video/2026/10/19/protesters-block-access-to-louvre-museum-in-paris-in-support-of-demonstrations. Accessed 22 Oct. 2026.

Stuckler, David, and Sanjay Basu. *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills*. Basic Books, 2013.

"Tear Gas, Clashes Hit French Cities in Cost-of-Living Protests." *bdnews24.com*, 17 Oct. 2026, bdnews24.com/world/ue2h1da7zy. Accessed 22 Oct. 2026.