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September  
2023



World Risk Register

# EVENT RISK ASSESSMENT

RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

# FRANCE

## EVENT RISK ASSESSMENT: FRANCE RUGBY WORLD CUP 2023

### Key points

- The primary operational and logistical risks during the Rugby World Cup will be activism, domestic unrest, crowd control, mobility disruption, terrorism, crime and cyber.
- Ahead of the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, the Rugby World Cup will serve as a test for France's and Paris' capabilities to host a well-organised major sporting event.
- A series of anti-pension protests in 2023 and June's nationwide rioting have highlighted possible security risks across France during the Rugby World Cup.

### Context

Between 8 September and 28 October, France will host the Rugby World Cup. Matches will be played in several cities, including Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Nice, Paris, and Saint-Étienne. Each of these cities has a host stadium and a Rugby Village (or fan zone), in which individuals will be able to watch matches in designated outdoor areas (see [interactive map](#) for more details). Following the perceived organisational failures of the 2022 UEFA Champions League final at the Stade de France, the Rugby World Cup will test the capital's ability to stage a major and well-organised world sporting event. In light of the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, as well as the level of domestic unrest in 2023, the authorities will hope for a seamless Rugby World Cup to demonstrate France's credentials internationally.

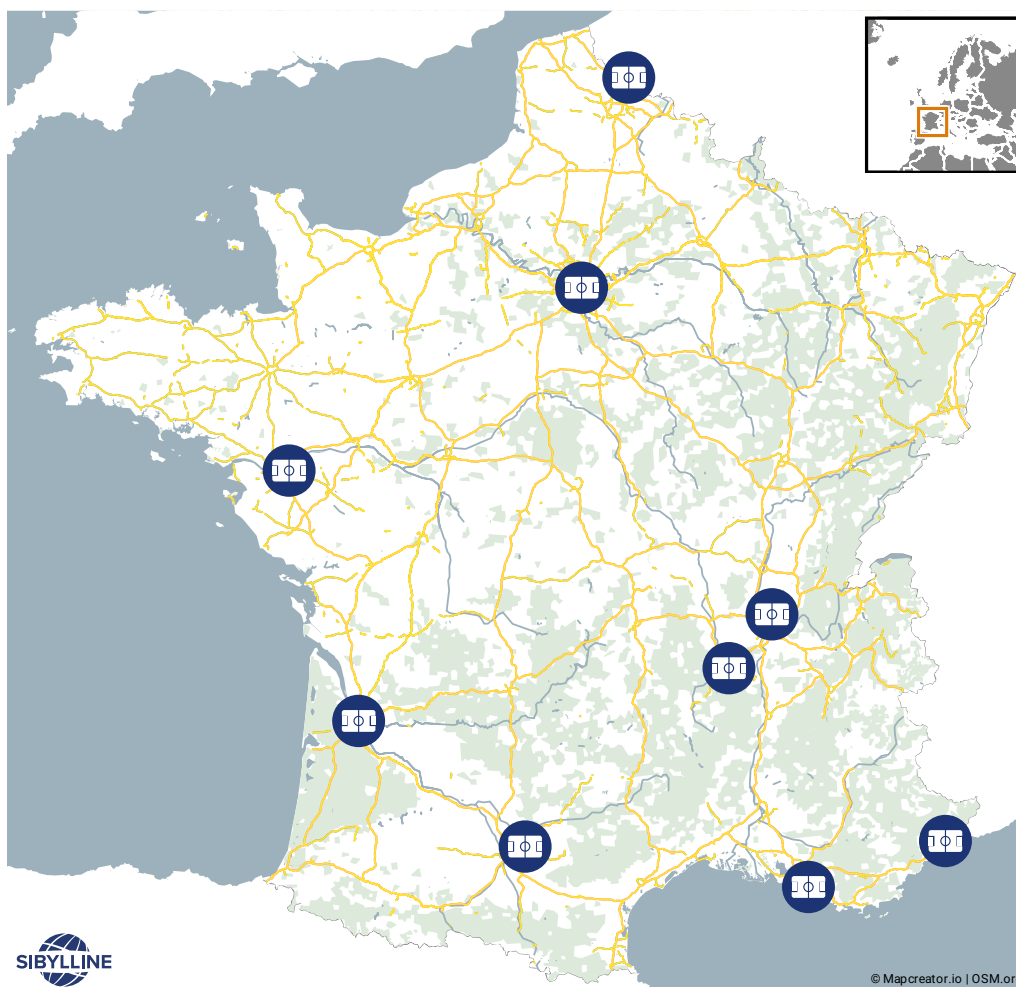


Figure 1: Map showing the Rugby World Cup host cities; click [here](#) for our interactive map detailing notable landmarks in France

## Rugby World Cup 2023 timeline



## Forecast

### ***Environmental activism***

Considering the extensive media coverage and significant visibility of the Rugby World Cup, the risk of activism will remain elevated during the tournament. The environmentalist group Last Renovation (Dernière Rénovation) has repeatedly demonstrated its intent to disrupt sporting events; the group targeted and caused delays at both the Tour de France and French Open tennis semi-final (Roland-Garros) in 2022. It is possible that recent climate protests targeting sporting events in the UK, such as the Just Stop Oil protests at the Gallagher Premiership rugby union final at Twickenham on 28 May, will inspire activists in France to carry out similar protests at the world cup.

Given the opposition to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, there is a realistic possibility that activists will protest against France hosting the world cup. In July, the Youth for Climate (YFC) group, also known as Fridays for Future (FFF), smeared fake blood over the Olympic Rings monument in Paris. However, the Rugby World Cup has received considerably less online or in-person activist engagement compared to the Olympic Games. Enhanced security measures in host cities, particularly Paris, will mitigate the possibility of any severe disruption prompted by activist demonstrations; should they occur, they will likely be peaceful.

### ***Domestic unrest and security force capabilities***

Domestic unrest in France has consistently threatened business operations throughout 2023 (see [Sibylline Situation Update Brief – 11 July 2023](#)). Protests broke out earlier in the year over a government bill to increase the pension age for French citizens. These protests occasionally turned violent, particularly when organisations like the far-left anarchist Black Bloc (among others) infiltrated gatherings. In rare instances, such as in Rennes, clashes led to looting. While attempting to quell the protests, the police were accused of using excessive force.

Protests and rioting erupted in France after Nahel M was killed by a police officer in late June (see [Sibylline Alert – 30 June 2023](#)). In addition to disproportionate violence, the police now also face accusations of racism, which increases the risk of further instances of perceived police brutality triggering knock-on protesting across the country. Looting and vandalism were widespread following the June protests, resulting in around USD 650 million in insurance claims. Recently, the UN has spoken out against what it perceives to be excessive police violence in France; it has urged the government to respect the right to peaceful protesting. These latter protest movements are currently inactive, but they have left widespread discontent and a rift between parts of the population and the government (and police).

In light of the tense political situation, there is a realistic possibility that protests will once again erupt in the short-to-medium term during the Rugby World Cup; even small and initially peaceful protests are likely to escalate due to current nationwide tensions, particularly in Paris and Marseille. However, the likelihood of major protests targeting rugby villages remains low.

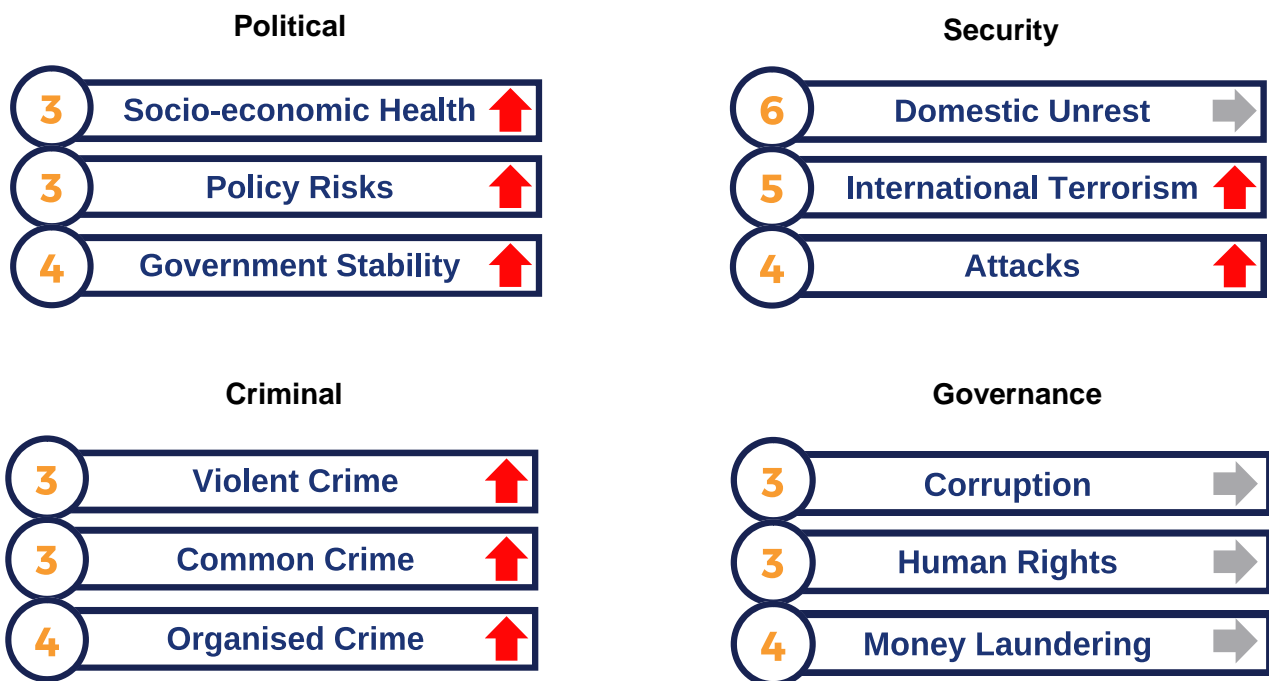
### ***Crowd control measures and mobility disruption***

The mishandling of the 2022 UEFA Champions League final, which involved heavy-handed crowd control measures by the police, raised questions over France's ability to host major sporting events. The authorities initially failed to take responsibility for said mishandling, creating a trust deficit among fans and local residents. A report conducted by UEFA's independent panel criticised the Paris Préfecture de Police for failing to work cohesively with other stakeholders, as well as for using excessive force and not addressing anti-social

behaviour. The report also highlighted that safety risks were ignored in the planning process, which caused congestion and bottlenecks. While the report stressed that UEFA was primarily accountable for the event's failures, the inadequate response by the police underlines potential risks for the Rugby World Cup. These are risks the French security services will nevertheless be particularly keen to mitigate in the coming weeks.

There is a realistic possibility that constraints to the Parisian public transport network will hinder mobility during the event. During peak hours and/or major games, the transport system will possibly experience overcrowding, leading to delays and potential safety concerns. Paris' Transportation Administration (RATP) – which operates train lines connecting the capital's city centre to surrounding suburbs (RER) – plans to hire extra staff, though a significant uptick in demand will almost certainly increase congestion. Members of the trade union FO-RATP have threatened to walk out during the tournament if wage requests are not met, with ongoing staff shortages underscoring industrial action and logistical risks.

### Headline ASTRA scores for France



### Terrorism

There remains an extant Islamist terrorist threat in France, exacerbated by France's decreasing presence in Africa (e.g. in Niger), ongoing ethnic tensions in French cities and a surge of extremists swearing allegiance to IS. As such, the US has issued a level 2 (of 4) travel advisory warning for France, advising individuals to exercise increased caution. France suffered a suspected Islamist terrorist attack in 2022 and reportedly foiled two more. The 2024 Olympic Games will remain a prominent potential target for terrorists; while the Rugby World Cup is at less risk, the French state has explicitly named the event as a potential terror target. In response, the organisers have stressed that they have prioritised security; the French state will also test its new anti-drone shields during the world cup, which will further mitigate the terrorist threat.

While the threat from violent far-right extremism is also rising in France, the risk of a far-right terrorist attack during the world cup is limited; most such attacks seek explicitly to target minorities rather than foreign visitors or major events.

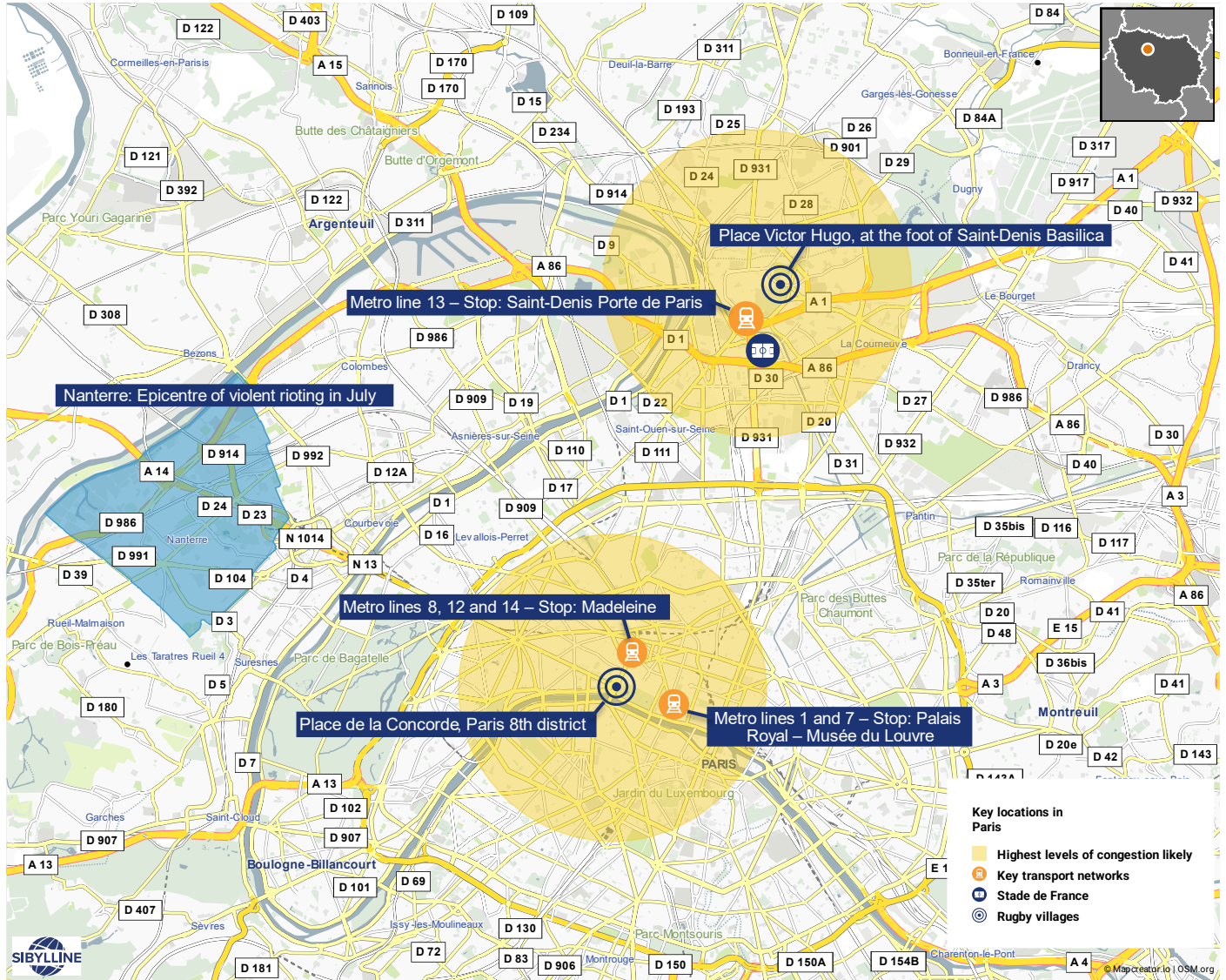


Figure 2: Map highlighting likely areas of mobility congestion throughout Paris, along with significant locations

### Common and violent crime

Foreign visitors remain primarily exposed to opportunistic crime, such as theft, rather than violent crime. Theft and pickpocketing risks remain high in tourist areas, major department stores and on public transport in major urban centres, such as Paris and Marseille. Pickpockets usually operate in organised gangs, whereby one member distracts the tourist and the accomplice pilfers from pockets and/or bags. The risk of scams and fraud is elevated in big cities, especially in popular tourist areas, such as Montmartre and near the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Typical scams include card tricks, false petitions and street hawkers. The most common card trick involves the scammer placing three cards face down, usually on a cardboard box, and inviting victims to bet money on one of the three cards they think is the target card. In false petition scams, young individuals request people to sign a fake petition and donate money; in some cases, the request serves as a distraction for

pickpockets to steal from the victim. Romanian gangs often run card tricks and false petition scams, while illegal street vendors, who are typically illegal immigrants, frequently sell expired and stolen food items.

The 2022 UEFA Champions League final revealed deficiencies within France's ticketing system, with the use of counterfeit tickets widespread. Although French law enforcement has likely cracked down on counterfeiting networks, there is a realistic possibility that attempts to sell counterfeit tickets will increase, especially outside stadiums. Scammers will also utilise social media platforms to sell fake tickets.

Violent crime remains uncommon, though there have been reports of assaults against major public transport networks and along streets late at night. Theft sometimes results in violence, especially if the victim actively resists. In other host cities, opportunistic and violent crime rates are generally lower than in Paris and Marseille. However, given that world cup events in any host city will draw large crowds, crime-related risks, especially theft, will be higher than usual during the tournament.

### ***Cyber crime***

Major sporting events are at a heightened risk of disruptive cyber activity, as evidenced by the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic Winter Games attack by Russian state-sponsored cyber threat actors. During this attack, the perpetrators launched the destructive 'OlympicDestroyer' malware against the Games' critical infrastructure in order to cripple its web servers and disrupt the opening ceremony. The actors also launched a sophisticated phishing campaign against the Games' attendees and organisers, specifically to cause mass disruption. We assess that there is a moderate likelihood of similar destructive or disruptive state-sponsored activity targeting the Rugby World Cup. However, state-sponsored threat actors will pose elevated security risks to executives, firms and organisations associated with the world cup in the lead-up to the tournament.

Since the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup, there has also been an uptick in hacktivists targeting large events for politically and socially motivated reasons. During the event, the hacktivist collective Anonymous stated it would target the tournament with disruptive attacks if FIFA did not ban the Iranian team in light of the crackdown on anti-government protests in Iran. Additionally, pro-Russian hacktivists targeted the tournament due to FIFA's ban on Russia competing at FIFA events. While the Rugby World Cup poses less of a risk, the host's stance on Ukraine and NATO membership means that disruptive hacktivist attacks by pro-Russian and Anonymous-affiliated hacktivists remain a realistic possibility.

Attendees' and employees' personal devices are likely to be connected to Point-of-sales (PoS) systems at food stands, ticketing systems, QR codes, mobile apps and the stadium's public WiFi. This presents a multitude of attack vectors for cyber actors to steal data, such as personal and financial information. These vectors can also be used to cause disruptive activity, such as ransomware attacks. Due to the precise scheduling involved in major sporting events, it is likely that organisers will seek to mitigate against any disruptive activity quickly. This will be particularly attractive to ransomware actors who will possibly assess that their activity will result in a quick ransom payment.

Remote chance 0-5%	Highly unlikely 10-20%	Unlikely 25-35%	Realistic possibility 40-50%	Likely or probable 55-75%	Highly likely 80-90%	Almost certain 95-100%
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### The World Risk Register

Event Risk Assessments form part of Sibylline's **World Risk Register**, a ground-breaking analytical service designed to help organisations of all sizes navigate an uncertain world.

Please **contact us** if you would like more information on how our strategic risk information could work for your organisation.

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