

# Give us our good life: French national identity

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French protesters marching against the pension reform

Ben Johnson -Protests in France over the government's plan to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64 have reached a crescendo following President Emmanuel Macron's decision to [push the legislation through without a vote in the National Assembly](#). Millions have taken to the streets to protest, including workers ranging from teachers to garbage collectors. The concept of national identity can help one better understand why this change in retirement age has caused such outrage.

[National identity](#) refers to how one views or attaches to a particular nation. These feelings of attachment and belonging are generated through day-to-day living and support of that nation, such as maintaining national armed forces and celebrating national holidays. A key part of French national identity concerns retirement and the broader ideology of balancing work and leisure time. For many French citizens, a long retirement supported by state benefits is a national entitlement, one which helps take the sting out of perceived low salaries. President Macron's decision to push the legislation through, using the frowned upon but completely legal [Article 49.3](#), threatens a cornerstone of French identity. His decision is informed by the inability of the current French pension system to continue functioning as the number of retirees quickly outgrows the younger workforce. The pension system, funded through paying taxes, is another example of one of the everyday things that citizens do that build their sense of attachment and support their nation. Interestingly, France represents an anomaly. The retirement age in Denmark, Norway, and Italy is 67, with most of Europe

averaging at 65. Even with the change in age from 62 to 64, France will still be below average. Despite the realistic and strong argument, workers are unwilling and unsatisfied. Indeed, the current protests are the culmination of months of walkouts and strikes against what was then only a proposition. Their refusal to participate in paying taxes and working may be perceived as an act of defending an important aspect of their national identity.

While Macron had already received approval from the Senate, he was unwilling to risk the possibility of the legislation being voted down in the National Assembly. The move has left him and his government increasingly isolated and ridiculed by policymakers and the public. Macron now faces a vote of no-confidence and his government will have difficulty reestablishing trust.

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