

Explosion in the suburbs

Level 3 | Advanced

1 Key vocabulary

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text.

massive impoverished upheaval harassment
contemptuous unprecedented widespread ghettoized

1. If a place is _____, particular groups of people are forced to live in particular areas of that place.
2. _____ is a sudden or violent change, especially one that affects people's lives.
3. If something is _____, it happens or exists in many places or affects large numbers of people.
4. _____ means 'extremely large'.
5. If something is _____, it has never happened or existed before.
6. _____ is another word for 'very poor'.
7. _____ is annoying or unpleasant behaviour towards other people that takes place regularly.
8. If you are _____ of someone, you show that you do not respect them.

2 What do you know?

Choose the best answer.

1. The recent riots in French cities were started by
 - a. police harassment of young people of North African origin
 - b. the deaths of two young men
 - c. the high level of unemployment in French cities
2. The riots began in
 - a. Lyon
 - b. a suburb in the north-east of Paris
 - c. the centre of Paris
3. Nicholas Sarkozy is
 - a. the President of France
 - b. the Mayor of Paris
 - c. the interior minister
4. When are the next presidential elections in France?
 - a. 2007
 - b. 2006
 - c. 2005

Now look in the text and check your answers.

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Comment: Explosion in the suburbs

The riots in France are the result of years of racism, poverty and police brutality.

By Naima Bouteldja

In late 1991, after violent riots between youths and police scarred the suburbs of Lyon, Alain Touraine, the French sociologist, predicted, "It will only be a few years before we face the kind of massive urban explosion the Americans have experienced." The many nights of consecutive violence following the deaths of two young Muslim men of African descent in a Paris suburb show that Touraine's dark vision of a ghettoized, post-colonial France is now upon us.

Clichy-sous-Bois, the impoverished and segregated northeastern suburb of Paris where the two men lived and where the violent reaction to their deaths began, was a ticking bomb for the kind of dramatic social upheaval we are currently witnessing. Half its inhabitants are under 20, unemployment is above 40% and identity checks and police harassment are a daily experience. In this sense, the riots are merely a fresh wave of the violence that has become common in suburban France over the past two decades. Led mainly by young French citizens born into first- and second-generation immigrant communities from France's former colonies in North Africa, these cycles of violence are almost always sparked by the deaths of young black men at the hands of the police, and then inflamed by a contemptuous government response.

Four days after the deaths in Clichy-sous-Bois, just as community leaders were beginning to calm the situation, the security forces reignited the fire by emptying teargas canisters inside a mosque. The official reason for the police action: a badly parked car in front of it. The government refuses to offer any apology to the Muslim community. But the spread of civil unrest to other poor suburbs across France is unprecedented. For Laurent Levy, an anti-racist campaigner, the explosion is no surprise. "When large sections of the population are denied any

kind of respect, the right to work, the right to decent accommodation, what is surprising is not that the cars are burning but that there are so few uprisings," he argues.

Police violence and racism are major factors. In April an Amnesty International report criticized the "generalized impunity" with which the French police operated when it came to violent treatment of young men from African backgrounds during identity checks. But the reason for the extent and intensity of the current riots is the provocative behaviour of the interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy. He called rioters "vermin", blamed "agents provocateurs" for manipulating "scum" and said the suburbs needed "to be cleaned out with Karsher" (a brand of industrial cleaner used to clean the mud off tractors). Sarkozy's grandstanding on law and order is a deliberate strategy designed to flatter the French far-right electorate in the context of his rivalry with the Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, for the 2007 presidency.

How can France get out of this political race to the bottom? It would obviously help for ministers to stop talking about the suburbs as dens of "scum" and for Sarkozy to be removed: the falsehoods he spread about the events surrounding the two deaths and his deployment of a massively disproportionate police presence in the first days of the riots have again shown his unfitness for office. A simple gesture of regret could go a long way towards defusing the tensions for now. The morning after the gassing of the mosque, a young Muslim woman summed up a widespread feeling: "We just want them to stop lying, to admit they've done it and to apologize." It might not seem much, but in today's France it would require a deep political transformation and the recognition of these eternal "immigrants" as full and equal citizens of the republic.

Naima Bouteldja is a French journalist and researcher for the Transnational Institute.

Guardian Weekly, 13/11/05, page 14

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements True or False according to the text?

1. Young people in Clichy-sous-Bois are regularly harassed by the police.
2. Clichy-sous-Bois is a rich Parisian suburb.
3. The government apologized to the Muslim community.
4. Unemployment in Clichy-sous-Bois is relatively low.
5. Police violence and racism did not play a part in the situation.
6. The interior minister insulted the rioters.
7. The children of North African immigrants regard themselves as equal citizens of the French republic.
8. The interior minister's remarks were designed to appeal to right-wing voters.

4 Vocabulary 1 - Find the verb

Find the verb that means:

1. to leave permanent marks on something
2. to make something burn again
3. to start a fire or an explosion
4. to make a situation worse by making people more angry
5. to behave in a way that is intended to get public attention and approval
6. to praise someone in order to get something you want
7. to make a situation more relaxed by making people feel less angry
8. to attack or kill someone by making them breathe a poisonous gas

5 Vocabulary 2 - Collocations

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make collocations. Check your answers in the text.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. security | a. leaders |
| 2. social | b. bomb |
| 3. identity | c. feeling |
| 4. community | d. upheaval |
| 5. civil | e. provocateur |
| 6. agent | f. forces |
| 7. widespread | g. check |
| 8. ticking | h. unrest |

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6 Chunks

Rearrange these words to make phrases. Check your answers in the text.

1. car a parked badly
2. cycle of a violence
3. the to situation calm
4. campaigner an racist anti
5. work to right the
6. political a transformation deep

7 Discussion

Is rioting ever justified? What factors can lead to the kind of situation seen in France?
What solutions are there?

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KEY

1 Key words

1. ghettoized
2. upheaval
3. widespread
4. massive
5. unprecedented
6. impoverished
7. harassment
8. contemptuous

2 What do you know?

1. b; 2. b; 3. c; 4. a

3 Comprehension check

1. T; 2. F; 3. F; 4. F; 5. F; 6. T; 7. F; 8. T

4 Vocabulary 1 - Find the Verb

1. to scar
2. to reignite
3. to spark
4. to inflame
5. to grandstand
6. to flatter
7. to defuse
8. to gas

5 Vocabulary 2 - Collocations

- 1.f; 2. d; 3. g; 4. a; 5. h; 6. e; 7. c; 8. b

6 Chunks

1. a badly parked car
2. a cycle of violence
3. to calm the situation
4. an anti-racist campaigner
5. the right to work
6. a deep political transformation