

Explosion in the suburbs

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Key vocabulary

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text.

ghetto immigrant harassment contemptuous
scum riot vermin unprecedented

1. _____ are small animals such as rats which cause damage or disease; when used to talk about people this word is a strong insult.
2. A _____ is an area of a city where people of a particular group live together.
3. If something is _____, it has never happened before.
4. An _____ is a person who comes to live in a country from another country.
5. _____ is annoying or unpleasant behaviour towards someone that happens regularly.
6. _____ is a layer of a dirty substance that forms on the surface of a liquid; when used to talk about people it is a strong insult.
7. If you are _____ of someone, you do not show them any respect at all.
8. A _____ is a violent protest by a crowd of people.

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible.

1. Where did the recent French riots begin?
2. Who is Nicolas Sarkozy?
3. When did the violent riots in Lyon take place?
4. What is the unemployment rate in Clichy-sous-Bois?
5. What is Karsher?
6. Who is Dominique de Villepin?

Explosion in the suburbs

Level 2 | Intermediate

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 in the suburbs of Lyon, Alain Touraine, the French sociologist, predicted, "It will only be a few years before we have the same kind of problems the Americans have experienced." The many nights of violence that have followed the deaths of two young Muslim men of African descent in a Paris suburb show that Touraine's pessimistic prediction of violence in the urban ghettos of France has now become reality.

The two men lived in Clichy-sous-Bois, a poor northeastern suburb of Paris, and this was where the violent reaction to their deaths began. Clichy-sous-Bois was a time-bomb waiting to explode. 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 simply a new wave of the violence that has become common in suburban France over the past two decades. It is mainly led by young French citizens born into first- and second-generation immigrant communities from France's former colonies in North Africa and it is almost always caused by the deaths of young black men at the hands of the police, and then made worse by a contemptuous reaction by the government.

Four days after the deaths in Clichy-sous-Bois, community leaders were beginning to calm the situation when the security forces put petrol on the fire by firing teargas into a mosque. The official reason for the police action was a badly parked car in front of the mosque. 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 not given 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 it doesn't happen more often," he argues.

Police violence and racism are major factors. In April a report by the human rights group Amnesty International criticized the way in which the French police treated young men from African backgrounds during identity checks. But the provocative behaviour of the interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has meant that these riots have been more intense and widespread than previous ones. 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 is trying to appeal to the French far-right electorate before the 2007 presidential elections when he is likely to be a rival of the current Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin.

How can France get out of this political race to the bottom? It would obviously help if ministers stopped talking about "scum" and if Sarkozy was removed from his position: the false information he gave about the two deaths and his decision to send in huge numbers of police in the first days of the riots have again shown that he is not fit to be a minister. A simple "sorry" could help to make the situation less tense. The morning after the gassing of the mosque, a young Muslim woman expressed what many people feel, "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 this would mean a deep political transformation and the recognition that these eternal "immigrants" are 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

Explosion in the suburbs

Level 2 | Intermediate

3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the information in the text.

1. What was the initial cause of the riots in Clichy-sous-Bois?
 - a. the firing of teargas into a mosque
 - b. the deaths of two young Muslim men
 - c. the behaviour of the interior minister
2. How did the government react to the riots?
 - a. they spoke to community leaders
 - b. they apologized to the Muslim community
 - c. they described the rioters as “vermin” and “scum”
3. What was the effect of the interior minister’s words?
 - a. the riots stopped
 - b. the riots got worse
 - c. people wanted an apology
4. What do many young people feel is the main cause of the problem?
 - a. the fact that these young people are not treated with respect
 - b. the interior minister
 - c. unemployment in France

4 Vocabulary 1 - Find the word

Look in the text and find the words or phrases that mean the following.

1. someone who encourages people to do something illegal
2. an area near a large city where there are many houses
3. a bomb that can be set to explode at a particular time
4. a period of ten years
5. a country that is being controlled by another country
6. a gas that makes your eyes sting
7. all the people who are allowed to vote in an election
8. to influence someone or control them in a clever or dishonest way

Explosion in the suburbs

Level 2 | Intermediate

5 Vocabulary 2 - Opposites

Find the opposites of these words in the text.

1. rural _____
2. optimistic _____
3. peaceful _____
4. rare _____
5. minor _____
6. true _____
7. unfit _____
8. relaxed _____

6 Word building

Complete the table.

	verb	noun
1.	predict	_____
2.	react	_____
3.	explode	_____
4.	employ	_____
5.	apologize	_____
6.	criticize	_____
7.	treat	_____
8.	recognize	_____

7 Discussion

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