

Chechen Violence in France, Explained

June 16, 2020



Tensions between the Chechen diaspora and local residents has rocked the city of Dijon and injured six people. **Philippe Desmazes / AFP / TASS**

Violence involving young Chechens rocked France's eastern city of Dijon over the weekend.

French police were deployed late Monday to restore order following the unrest, which was blamed on the local Chechen community seeking vengeance for an assault on a teenager.

Here is a brief look at the origins of the conflict as well as the Chechen diaspora in France:

What caused the unrest?

— Police sources said the unrest was ignited after a 16-year-old member of the Chechen community was attacked on June 10.

— French media [reported](#) that the attack was carried out by local drug dealers. Right-wing social media users identified the alleged perpetrators of the attack as members of an Algerian drug mafia. Members of the Chechen diaspora identified them only as “Maghreb dealers.”

— The local press also [refers](#) to the violence as “tensions between the Chechen and Maghreb communities,” referring to a wide swath of northwest Africa that, among other countries, includes Algeria and Morocco.

— Vladislav Davidzon, the chief editor of Ukraine’s The Odessa Review magazine, quoted a source in the Chechen diaspora in France as describing the opposing side as “a mixture of Algerian immigrants and native born French citizens of Arab descent” involved in drug trafficking. The source [said](#) the tensions have long been simmering between the sides.

— The local prefect said the violence “appeared to be part of a settling of scores between members of the Chechen community in France and residents.”

What happened?

— Starting Friday, members of the Chechen diaspora set out on so-called punishment raids over three successive nights seeking to avenge the assault, with many people wielding baseball bats, the police sources said.

Embed:

Après qu’un Jeune Homme D’origine [#Tchetchene](#) âgée de 16 ans a été frapper par des Homme âgée de 25 à 30 ans par trahison les Tchétchènes de partout en France ce sont réunis pour aller à Dijon . pic.twitter.com/ZOXy7mkYQ5

— al chechnya (@Alchechnya) [June 13, 2020](#)

— Police said that in one incident some 50 Chechens entered the restive district of Gresilles, which has a large community of people originally from North Africa, overnight Saturday, and a man who owns a pizzeria was badly wounded by apparent gunfire.

— Even more people, around 200, also entered Gresilles late Sunday with violent intent.

— On early Monday evening about 150 people, some hooded and armed, again assembled in Dijon, setting rubbish bins and a car on fire. Some also shot into the air, police sources told AFP.

— Six people were injured during the three incidents on the successive nights, but no one has yet been arrested, Dijon’s prosecutor said.

Why are Chechens in France?

— Two Chechen separatist wars against Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s triggered a wave of emigration, with many Chechens heading for Western Europe.

— More Chechens have flowed into exile in recent years due to disagreements with the strongman pro-Kremlin leader of the region Ramzan Kadyrov, who rights activists accuse of

multiple violations.

— An estimated 15,000 Russian refugees, including many from Chechnya, [lived](#) in France as of 2018.

Why are they reacting with violence?

— Researchers [say](#) ethnic Chechens suffer from stereotypes of “brave Chechen fighters” while also often harboring stereotypical views — influenced by Russian state television — of Middle Eastern and North African communities in Europe as “[terrorists](#).”

— “These stereotypical discourses stem from a long history of domination on both sides and, in a French context, contribute to sustaining a certain ‘rivalry’ between the two diasporas,” wrote French Institute of Geopolitics researcher [Yéléna Mac-Glandières](#).

— Strong clan ties also influence the Chechen diaspora’s sense of “collective responsibility,” she wrote. “If someone was hurt or disrespected, the same structures are entitled to seek reprisal or compensation,” Mac-Glandières [explained](#).

What comes next?

— Deputy interior minister Laurent Nunez travelled to Dijon, vowing a "extremely strong response" with more than 150 police and paramilitary gendarmes mobilized to halt any unrest Tuesday evening.

— Dijon prosecutor Eric Mathais said a probe has been opened into attempted murder by a criminal gang.

— France’s interior ministry [said](#) it has opened a judicial inquiry “to determine the circumstances in which the violence occurred” and bring the perpetrators to justice.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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