

IRELAND

Riots in Dublin, social unrest explodes on the green isle

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Busses alight, police cars in flames, shops looted and a major city thrown into turmoil as police scramble to contain a riot – a city centre out of control for hours as riot police marched down the street and police officers were isolated and attacked by crowds of

youths. It is hard to believe, but this was Ireland's capital city on the night of Thursday, November 24. The scenes of violence and destruction in Dublin city centre, right on the main street were the worst in at least 20 years and have left the country in a state of shock.

The riot came on the back of an earlier act of random violence. Three young children, aged five and under, were attacked and stabbed leaving a Catholic school on a street in the city centre. One of the children remains in a serious condition in hospital. The attack occurred shortly after 1pm near Parnell Square, just off the city's main boulevard O'Connell Street. In total five people have been hospitalised, including a teacher and the 50-year-old male suspect who has been arrested.

An eyewitness on the scene said that the children were out walking: "All of a sudden one of them fell to the ground, then another fell to the ground, then another falls to the ground. Then this guy started running past." The alleged assailant was armed with a knife and fell to the ground whereupon "a load of people jumped on him", the eyewitness recalled. It has since emerged that a heroic Brazilian food delivery driver intervened to neutralise the attacker, stunning him by hitting him with his motorbike helmet.

Small protests began to form in the vicinity of the crime scene. Reports suggest that the protests were peaceful and political in nature at first. It was alleged that the attacker may have been Eastern European, which fed into simmering tensions in Dublin's north inner city – and the country more broadly – regarding the Irish Government's approach to immigration. Garda sources later revealed to [Gript.ie](https://www.gript.ie) that the alleged attacker may be from Algeria.

However, these protests began to spiral out of control as the protestors attempted to storm the police barricade and invade the crime scene. The initially small gathering grew and grew as the night closed in. What began as a protest against an awful attack on small children quickly turned into a riot without any political associations or legitimate ambitions. It appears that a combination of agitators and opportunist hooligans, many of whom had been left to run rampant through the city during Covid-19, saw an opportunity to cause mayhem and carnage. And that is what they did for a period of some hours – they targeted clothes and sports stores, looting their goods, as well as smashing windows of hotels and setting fire to vehicles.

Since then, police figures and politicians have responded by pointing the finger squarely at the "far-right" and the rise of racist and anti-immigrant sentiment. This is a

very convenient target for the government, especially the minister for Justice, as they face stinging criticism for their response on the night and for letting it get this far. It is convenient and, typically, an elision of the truth. Racism was certainly part of the problem on Thursday night; so too was the social deprivation of the city centre; so too was the failure of the justice minister to maintain any semblance of law and order; so too was the government's immigration policy; so too was the failure of parents to raise their children.

The list could go on because Thursday night was the result of a confluence of events that points, overall, to a culture that is failing. Ireland has seen a rapid rise in its fortunes in the last 30 years, beginning with the 'Celtic Tiger' in the 1990s and early 2000s. Now, we have our material wealth and the comfort of the modern age; but we also have the same social breakdown, the same moral vacuums and the same aimless violence that afflicts cities right across the west.

It is hard to pin ideological explanations on the events, according to a Dominican priest I know and respect who lives and ministers in the area. Writing on X (formerly Twitter), Fr Conor McDonough OP said: "It's all very difficult to process, but what's clear to me is that none of today's events are reducible to simple ideological explanations. "When I hear people shout 'close the borders' I think of the immigrants I know, who are committed to the common good of this city, who are hard working, who volunteer to care for Dublin's homeless, who pray in our church, who love this country," Fr McDonough continued. "When I hear people label the rioters 'far right' I think of the young people I know here, many of whom were surely on the streets tonight. I think of their despair, their frustration, their anxiety, their habitual escapism through drugs and momentary thrills."

Fr McDonough is right. The problem is about more than the 'far-right', more than immigration. It is about the fragmentation of a whole society. We saw it on Thursday night quite dramatically. But the signs are there much more regularly. We have a rise in violent crime, in murders, in sexual crime, in drug abuse and suicide – these all point to a solemn truth, that Ireland is not in a good way.

*** *The Irish Catholic***