

The **Circassian genocide**,<sup>[9][10]</sup> or **Tsitsekun**,<sup>[b][c]</sup> was the [Russian Empire](#)'s systematic mass murder, [ethnic cleansing](#), and expulsion of 95–97%<sup>[d][e]</sup> of the [Circassian](#) population, resulting in 1 to 1.5 million deaths<sup>[14][f]</sup> during the final stages of [Russo-Circassian War](#).<sup>[15][16][17]</sup> The peoples planned for extermination were mainly the Muslim Circassians, but other Muslim peoples of the [Caucasus](#) were also affected.<sup>[16]</sup> Killing methods used by Russian forces during the [genocide](#) included impaling and tearing the bellies of pregnant women as means of intimidation of the Circassian population.<sup>[15][18]</sup> Russian generals such as [Grigory Zass](#) described the Circassians as "subhuman filth", and glorified the mass murder of Circassian civilians,<sup>[15][19][20]</sup> justified their use in scientific experiments,<sup>[21]</sup> and allowed their soldiers to rape women.<sup>[15]</sup>

During the Russo-Circassian War, the Russian Empire employed a [genocidal](#) strategy of massacring Circassian civilians. Only a small percentage who accepted [Russification](#) and resettlement within the Russian Empire were completely spared. The remaining Circassian population who refused were variously dispersed or killed en masse.<sup>[22]</sup> Circassian villages would be located and burnt, systematically starved, or their entire population massacred.<sup>[23]</sup> [Leo Tolstoy](#) reported that Russian soldiers would attack village houses at night.<sup>[24]</sup> William Palgrave, a British diplomat who witnessed the events, adds that "their only crime was not being Russian".<sup>[25]</sup> In 1864, "[A Petition from Circassian leaders to Her Majesty Queen Victoria](#)" was signed by the Circassians requesting humanitarian aid from the [British Empire](#).<sup>[26][27][28]</sup> In the same year, mass deportation was launched against the surviving population before the end of the war in 1864 and it was mostly completed by 1867.<sup>[29]</sup> Some died from epidemics or starvation among the crowds of deportees and were reportedly eaten by dogs after their death.<sup>[25]</sup> Others died when the ships underway sank during storms.<sup>[30]</sup>

Calculations, including taking into account the Russian government's own archival figures, have estimated a loss of 94–97%<sup>[31][32][33]</sup> of the Circassian population in the process. The displaced people were settled primarily in the [Ottoman Empire](#).<sup>[15]</sup> Most sources state that as many as 1 to 1.5 million Circassians were forced to flee in total, but only around half of them could make it to land.<sup>[34]</sup> <sup>[35]</sup> [Ottoman archives](#) show more than one million migrants entering their land from the Caucasus by 1879, with nearly half of them dying on the shores as a result of disease.<sup>[4]</sup> If Ottoman archives are correct, it would make this the biggest genocide of the 19th century.<sup>[36]</sup> In confirmation of Ottoman archives, Russian records documented only the presence of 106,798 Circassians in the region, following the events of the genocide. Other estimates by [Russian historiographers](#) are even lower, with figures ranging from 40,400 to 65,900.<sup>[12]</sup> Russian census of 1897 recorded 150,000 Circassians still remaining in the now-conquered region.<sup>[37][38]</sup>

As of 2023, [Georgia](#) is the only country to recognize the Circassian genocide.<sup>[39]</sup> Russia actively [denies](#) the Circassian genocide,<sup>[40][41][42]</sup> and classifies the events as a migration ([Russian](#): Черкесское мухаджирство, [lit.](#) 'Circassian migrationism'). Some Russian nationalists in the Caucasus region continue to celebrate the day when the Circassian deportation was launched, 21 May ([O.S.](#)), each year as a "holy conquest day". Circassians commemorate 21 May every year as the [Circassian Day of Mourning](#) commemorating the Circassian genocide.<sup>[43]</sup> On 21 May, Circassians all over the world protest against the Russian government, especially in cities with large Circassian populations such as [Kayseri](#) and [Amman](#), as well as other large cities such as [Istanbul](#).<sup>[44][45]</sup>

