

Reading the Riots

Investigating
England's
summer of
disorder

theguardian

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OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Reading the Riots

Foreword by **Alan Rusbridger**, editor-in-chief, the Guardian, and **Professor Judith Rees**, director, London School of Economics

The riots in early August 2011 were arguably the worst bout of civil unrest in a generation. However, unlike in the early 1980s there was to be no Scarman-style inquiry into the causes. Meanwhile, politicians and others rushed to pronounce on what had happened, and why, and to offer an array of policy solutions. While several reviews and investigations were subsequently established, a number of very significant gaps in public understanding of the events remained. Most visible among these was what drew people out on to the streets for four nights in August and what motivated them? We'd had riots, but we knew little about the rioters.

The Guardian had been at the forefront of the reporting of the riots, both in a traditional journalistic sense and much more broadly through the collection and analysis of data from the courts as arrests and prosecutions mounted up.

The opportunity was there to expand this work and to embark on something truly ambitious: a full-scale study of the riots and their aftermath. It was this that led to the partnership with the LSE's Social Policy Department and, with the generous support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Open Society Foundations, to *Reading the Riots*.

We believe this will prove to be a landmark study. It is a unique collaboration between a national newspaper and a leading university. Its overarching aim has been to conduct high-quality social research at a speed and in a way that maximises its likelihood of affecting public and political debate without sacrificing any of its rigour.

This report brings together the outcome of the first phase of the study, focusing in a way that has not previously been possible on the nature, motivations, attitudes and experiences of those who rioted across London and in Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Nottingham and Liverpool.

Executive summary

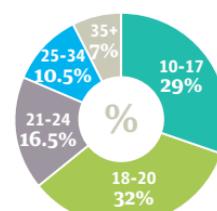
Reading the Riots is a collaborative social research inquiry conducted by the Guardian and the London School of Economics, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. In its first phase, the study used confidential interviews with 270 people who were directly involved in the riots in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Salford, Liverpool and Nottingham.

Four-fifths of the interviewees were male and one-fifth female. Almost 30% were juveniles (aged 10-17) and a further 49% were aged 18-25. In terms of self-identified ethnicity, 26% of the sample were white, 47% black, 5% Asian, and 17% “mixed/other”.

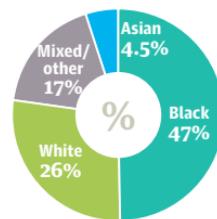
The basis of the study was in-depth, primarily qualitative interviews with rioters, the majority of which were conducted in the community, and a small minority in prison. The primary aim of this aspect of the study was to understand who had been involved in the riots and what their motivations were, together with a considered analysis of the role of gangs and of social media.

This first phase, therefore, also involved a separate analysis by academics at Manchester University of a database of more than 2.5m riot-related tweets.

Age of those interviewed



Ethnicity



The main findings from the first phase of the study are:

- Widespread anger and frustration at people's every day treatment at the hands of police was a significant factor in the summer riots in every major city where disorder took place. Of the 270 people interviewed, 85% said policing was an "important" or "very important" factor in why the riots happened.
- At the heart of problematic relations with the police was a sense of a lack of respect as well as anger at what was felt to be discriminatory treatment. The focus of much resentment was police use of stop and search, which was felt to be unfairly targeted and often undertaken in an aggressive and discourteous manner.
- Gangs behaved in an entirely atypical manner for the duration of the riots, temporarily suspending hostilities with their postcode rivals. The effective four-day truce applied to towns and cities across England. However, on the whole the role of gangs in the riots has been significantly overstated.
- Contrary to widespread speculation at the time, the social media sites Facebook and Twitter were not used in any significant way by rioters. In contrast, the free messaging service available on BlackBerry phones - known as "BBM" - was used extensively to communicate, share information and plan in advance of riots.
- Although mainly young and male, those involved in the riots came from a cross-section of local communities. Just under half of those interviewed in the study were students. Of those who were not in education, 59% were unemployed. Although half of those interviewed were black, those

Locations of interviewees



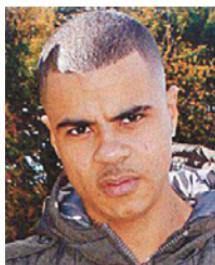
81%

of those interviewed said that they thought the riots would happen again, and 63% said there would be more riots within three years

Reading the Riots

involved did not consider these “race riots”.

- Many rioters conceded their involvement in looting was simply down to opportunism, saying that a perceived suspension of normal rules presented them with an opportunity to acquire goods and luxury items they could not ordinarily afford. They often described the riots as a chance to obtain “free stuff”.
- The evidence suggests rioters were generally poorer than the country at large. Analysis of more than 1,000 court records suggests 59% of the England rioters come from the most deprived 20% of areas in the UK. Other analysis carried out by the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice on young riot defendants found 64% came from the poorest fifth of areas - and only 3% came from the richest fifth.
- Rioters identified a number of other motivating grievances, from the increase in tuition fees, to the closure of youth services and the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance. Many complained about perceived social and economic injustices. Anger over the police shooting of Mark Duggan, which triggered the initial disturbances in Tottenham, was repeatedly mentioned - even outside London.
- More than four-fifths (81%) of those interviewed said that they thought that riots would happen again, and over one-third (35%) of those who expressed an opinion said that they would get involved if there were riots, while 63% said that they thought more riots would occur within three years.



The initial disturbances in Tottenham, north London, were triggered by the police shooting of Mark Duggan. This was repeatedly mentioned as a grievance even outside London.

Reporting, research and data analysis



Core team



Paul
Lewis



Prof Tim
Newburn



Matthew
Taylor



Catriona
McGillivray



Aster
Greenhill



Harold
Frayman



Prof Rob
Procter



Research team



Yemisi
Adegoke



Brendan
Donegan



Ben
Ferguson



Suzanne
Hyde



Robert
Kazandjian



Jamie
Mitchell



Alan
Morgan



Alexandra
Topping



Amelia
Gentleman



Shiv
Malik



Mags
Casey



Helen
Clifton



Sam
Kelly



Nick
Owen



Helen
Porter



Anthony
Schumacher



Katinka
Weber



Sarah
Eberhardt



Twitter research

Prof Rob
Proctor
Jonathan
Richards

Alastair
Dant
Katie
Loweth
Dr Farida
Vis
Dr Alex
Voss

Marta
Cantijoch
Yana
Manyukhina
Prof Mike
Thelwall
Steven
Gray

Prof Rachel
Gibson
Dr Andy
Hudson-
Smith



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James Ball



Fiona Bawdon



Simon Rogers



Symeon Brown



Paul Owen



Sarah Hewitt



Eric Allison



Aimee Ashton-Freeman



David Atkinson



Marie-Aimée Brajeux



Rosa Bransky



Hugh Muir



Sarah O'Connell



Elizabeth Pears



Raekha Prasad



Kamara Scott



Josh Surtees



Sonya Thomas



Josephine Metcalf



Daniel Silver



Carol Cooper



Simon Jay



Helen Carter



Paul Cotterill

Analysts



Alex Burch



Kerris Cooper



Rachel Deacon



Rebekah Diski



Maggie Grant

Video

Cameron Robertson

Sara Afshar

Christian Bennett
Luisa Miller



Data research

Ami Sedghi
Dimitris Akrivos

Christine Ottery
John Burn-Murdoch

Lisa Evans

Alice Judd
Dan Moore

Introduction to the study

Though elements of the August riots were recognisable in their origins and development when compared with previous riots on the mainland in the UK, the days following the initial disturbances in Tottenham saw evidence of a type of systematic looting that did not appear to fit with previous experience. There was also some evidence that the disorder was subject to possibly significant geographical differences.

A major political debate about the riots and the appropriate policy response quickly got under way, but in its early stages it is probably fair to say that it was characterised more by rhetoric than evidence. What was missing was solid evidence, particularly in connection with the rioters themselves. What led to the disturbances? Why did people riot, or loot? What was in their minds as they did so? And, were these riots similar to, or qualitatively different from, what we have seen before?

Reading the Riots was a direct response to this information gap. It is the only research study into the causes and consequences of the summer riots involving interviews with large numbers of people who were directly involved. Jointly run by the Guardian and the London School of Economics, the study's aim was to produce social research that would help explain why the civil disorder spread across

270
people were interviewed
in London, Birmingham,
Liverpool, Manchester,
Salford and Nottingham

England. It was inspired by a study into the Detroit riots in 1967, involving a collaboration between the Detroit Free Press newspaper and Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The Detroit project, which challenged some of the assumptions about the causes of the unrest, used a standard survey technique to compare the backgrounds, experiences and attitudes of those who rioted with a much larger group of local citizens that did not.

The first phase of *Reading the Riots* was completed in three months, and used confidential interviews with hundreds of people who were directly involved in the riots across six cities. To do this, we decided that a primarily qualitative framework - involving in-depth, free-flowing interviews with rioters - would be the most appropriate method. In addition, the first phase has also involved a separate analysis by academics at Manchester University of a database of more than 2.5m riot-related tweets.

We began recruiting researchers with skills in interviewing and good links with riot-affected communities in September. More than 450 people applied for the roles from across the country. A team of 30 researchers were selected and trained with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. They spent October interviewing people who had been involved in riots. The aim was to produce as broad and deep a picture of the riots as possible within a short period. Interviewers were recruited to work across London and in Birmingham, Liverpool, Salford, Manchester and Nottingham.

A second phase - to be completed early next year - will involve interviews with police, court officials, magistrates, defence lawyers, prosecutors, judges and a series of community-based debates about the riots.



The study into the 1967 Detroit riots by the Detroit Free Press newspaper and the Institute for Social Research in Michigan provided an inspiration for *Reading the Riots*

Methodological approach

In the initial phase of *Reading the Riots*, the aim was to focus on those involved, whether they were engaged in violence, arson, attacks on the police or looting. We wanted to know who they were, how they came to be out on the streets, what motivated them and how they felt about what had occurred and what they had done.

Our interviewers faced a difficult task: to identify potential interviewees and persuade them that it was valuable and safe to talk about their experiences. The extent of this challenge should not be underestimated. At the time of the interviews, the police were still making many arrests and raids in the communities in which the interviewers were working. Concern about anonymity was understandably high.

We wrote to 1,000 people who had been arrested and charged during the riots, offering them the opportunity to take part in the study. Researchers also visited their homes in person. But primarily, local contacts were used to find people who were involved but had not been arrested. After being promised anonymity, a surprising number agreed to take part, often because they wanted their story to be heard. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations - from homes, to youth clubs, cafes and fast food restaurants. The Ministry of Justice also gave *Reading the Riots* access to prisons, enabling researchers to interview a small number of peo-

1.3m
words of first-person
accounts from those
involved in the riots have
been collated in a special
database

ple convicted of riot-related offences. However, the large majority of the 270 people interviewed for the project have not been arrested.

Interviewers were given a topic guide covering the major themes that they should cover. They were tasked with finding out how people first heard about the riots, how they became involved, how they communicated, what they did, why they thought the riots stopped and how they felt about their actions. The questions were deliberately neutral - asking leading questions was discouraged. Each interview tended to last at least 45 minutes and allowed for an extended discussion - providing nuanced first-person accounts of people's experiences and perspectives.

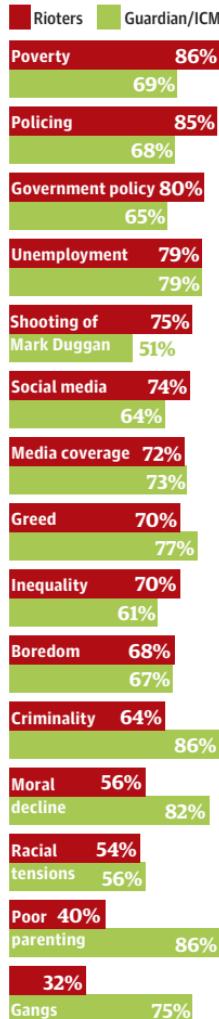
Basic demographic data was collected about the interviewees, including where they lived, age and ethnicity, educational qualifications, previous criminal history and whether they were in work. They were also asked survey-style questions, ranging from their thoughts on the riots to their attitudes towards police. Each of these questions was taken from a larger social survey for the purposes of comparison.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and stored in a database - in total more than 1.3m words of first-person accounts from rioters were collated. Rigour in the subsequent phase - mostly undertaken in November - was vital as a team of five researchers, recruited at the LSE, began analysing the qualitative data.

The volume of material, the timescale of the analysis, and the necessity of protecting the rigour of the study posed a unique challenge. The aim was to examine the attitudes and experiences of those involved in the riots. The analytical team's view was that key themes and ideas should be allowed to emerge directly from the data. The primary method was therefore a

Causes: general public v interviewees' perceptions

Respondents who said listed item was an 'important' or 'very important' cause of the riots, %



SOURCE: ICM,
GUARDIAN/LSE RESEARCH

form of thematic analysis, taking an inductive, grounded approach, endeavouring to ensure that findings were located in the textual data itself rather than focusing on the application of pre-defined codes and categories as might occur in content analysis.

The process began with an analyst reading through a whole transcript to get an overview. Each transcript was then coded thoroughly, so that particular themes could be identified and evidenced. A list of coding labels was produced - essentially themes and sub-themes - and these were reviewed by the research team on a regular basis. In order to check that the work was consistent, a proportion of interviews were read and coded by more than one analyst.

The relationships between dozens of themes and sub-themes such as injustice, riot motivation, police, community, the role of social media, were constantly updated, providing an ever more detailed picture of why the riots happened. The relationships between the themes were recorded and displayed on a thematic map document, allowing the team to see the larger, overall picture.

This also allowed the reliability and validity of the interviews themselves to be checked. Each interview was read and coded as a whole, with attention paid to context and consistency throughout. Responses that were the result of obviously leading questions were not included in the analysis document and were highlighted on the transcripts themselves.

This is an ongoing study in several senses. The work on the rioters themselves is the first phase, and will be followed by work on policing, sentencing and the communities affected. Even this first phase, focusing on the rioters, will continue, with the transcripts subjected to further analysis in the months to come.



Work on the links between various themes, including policing, communities and the justice system, will continue over the coming months

“ It was like the wild west or something. I remember laughing because ... I think it must have got a bit indiscriminate, the shops [that] had been done ... High and Mighty, which is like the tall and big mens' clothes shop, you know ”

Man, 23,
Salford

Who were the rioters?

Who was involved in the riots? For obvious reasons, providing a definitive answer is difficult. The 2,000 people arrested and prosecuted, and on whom we have some information, may well not be entirely typical of all those - estimated to be up to seven times as many - who were involved in the disturbances.

Reading the Riots interviewed 270 people. Of these, nearly 30% were juveniles (aged 10-17) and a further 49% were aged 18-24 - a picture that closely matches Ministry of Justice data. In relation to ethnicity, the pictures emerging from the government and *Reading the Riots* also matched reasonably closely. Ministry of Justice data revealed that where ethnicity was recorded, 37% of those appearing in the courts on riot-related charges were white, 40% were black and 6% Asian.

The figures varied significantly from area to area, often closely resembling the ethnic makeup of the local population: in London, 32% of defendants were white, whereas in Merseyside the figure was 79%. Similarly in *Reading the Riots*, though a larger proportion were from an ethnic minority or of mixed race, this again varied significantly from area to area, with the ethnic makeup of interviewees

“
These young people are coming out to prove they have an existence, to prove that if you don't listen to them and you don't take into account our views, potentially this is a destructive force.”

Man, mid-20s,
north London

in Salford and Manchester overwhelmingly white.

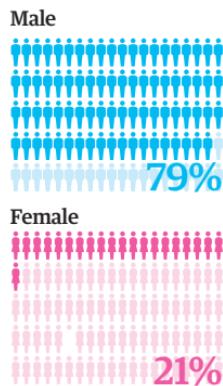
Perhaps the biggest difference between official figures and *Reading the Riots* concerns women. Whereas only 10% of those appearing before the courts were female, the proportion was twice that in *Reading the Riots*. Though it is difficult to know what the precise breakdown might have been in the riots themselves, witness accounts suggest the number of women present was closer to the higher figure represented in our research.

Evidence from several sources suggests rioters were generally poorer than the country at large, and educated to a lower level. Analysis of more than 1,000 court records held by the Guardian suggests 59% of rioters came from the most deprived 20% of areas in the UK. This is slightly lower than the Ministry of Justice picture of those prosecuted, which found that almost two thirds of young riot defendants came from the poorest fifth of areas - and only 3% came from the richest fifth.

Much has been made by politicians and others of the previous criminal histories of those prosecuted for their involvement in the riots. Ministry of Justice data suggested that 76% of suspects had a previous caution or conviction - significantly higher than the general population.

Considerable caution is required, however, for this proportion is little different from the profile of those convicted in the crown court generally, and may also have been slightly inflated by arresting "the usual suspects" in the weeks after the riots. The *Reading the Riots* data supports this possibility, with a lower rate of previous offences, where a smaller proportion of rioters - 68% - admit to having previously received a caution or conviction.

Gender of interviewees





How the riots unfolded

The riots began as small-scale disorder in Tottenham, north London, on 6 August. What began as a peaceful protest against the police shooting of a local black man, Mark Duggan, two days earlier, turned into more serious violence.

»

Reading the Riots



SATURDAY 6 AUGUST Fewer than 100 people gathered outside the police station in Tottenham about 5pm, requesting to speak with a senior police officer about the Mark Duggan case. Tensions grew and, shortly before 9pm, Duggan's family departed when bottles were thrown and two police cars were set on fire. For several hours, police lost control of Tottenham High Road as the crowd began starting fires, looting and fighting running battles with police. After midnight, police returned some order to the high street, but were unable to prevent intense looting at Tottenham Hale retail park and - two miles west - hundreds of people began looting shops in Wood Green. Police did not bring the looting to an end until dawn.



SUNDAY 7 AUGUST Disturbances began the following day six miles north of Tottenham, in Enfield. There were initially skirmishes in the town centre, about 7pm, and more serious disorder broke out as night fell. Unlike the previous nights, there were fewer clashes with police, with most of the disorder based around the looting of shops and retail outlets across the borough.

In Brixton in south London, there were similar disturbances following the Brixton Splash music festival. After fighting police, the crowd looted a number of Brixton shops, including a large branch of Currys that was raided for several hours. There were minor outbreaks of disorder elsewhere in London, including Oxford Circus, Hackney and Waltham Forest.

Day 3 Disorder spreads

MONDAY 8 AUGUST The third night of disorder saw one of the most intense 24 hours of civil unrest in recent English history.

In London, 22 out of the 32 boroughs would be affected in disturbances the Metropolitan Police described as "unprecedented in the capital's history". Riots began shortly before 5pm in Hackney, where there were sustained battles against police, before spreading across the capital. Some of the worst affected areas included Clapham Junction, Lewisham, Catford, Peckham, Woolwich, Wembley and Ealing, where Richard Bowes, 68, was critically injured after confronting looters.

The worst of the disorder was in Croydon - the scene of widespread arson, and the place where Trevor Ellis, 28, was shot dead. Meanwhile, the first riots began elsewhere in England. The Midlands, Birmingham, West Bromwich and Nottingham all saw serious unrest. Clashes with police also began in Liverpool. However, there were outbreaks of disorder in dozens of other locations across England, including parts of the Medway in Kent, Thames Valley, Bristol, Leeds and Huddersfield.



Day 4 A show of force

TUESDAY 9 AUGUST The fourth night saw unprecedented numbers of police in the capital, with 16,000 officers deployed. London was comparatively quiet, with only minor skirmishes. However, rioting continued in other parts of England, including Gloucester, Liverpool, Nottingham and Birmingham, where three men - Haroon Jahan, 21, Shazad Ali, 30, and Abdul Musavir, 31 - were killed while protecting shops. The most widespread disturbances took place in Greater Manchester; clashes with police began in the late afternoon in Salford, followed by intense looting of retail outlets in Manchester city centre.



Understanding the riots **Policing**

What emerges most strongly from the interviews in the *Reading the Riots* research is a long-burning frustration and anger with the police that, for those few August days, resulted in widespread civil unrest. Of the 270 people we interviewed, 85% said policing was an “important” or “very important” factor in why the riots happened. For many, the spark was the shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham. To them, it symbolised the most extreme end of a spectrum of targeted, unjust and brutal treatment to which they perceive they are subjected.

Nowhere was this shared negative perception more vividly expressed than in the fact many of our respondents, living in opposite ends of the country, used versions of the same phrase to describe the force: “The police is the biggest gang out there” - emphasising how they felt officers to be a collective law unto themselves. In Liverpool, for example, a 23-year-old man who took part in the riot in Toxteth, when asked what the word ‘gang’ means to him said: “People who try and intimidate members of the public. To me the worst gang is the police though.”

Many talked of their antipathy towards the



“
You see the rioting yeah? Everything the police have done to us, did to us, was in our heads. That's what gave everyone their adrenaline to want to fight the police ... It was because of the way they treated us
”

Man, 20,
from London

police being a direct result of their everyday confrontations with officers in cities where the disturbances took place. One 17-year-old Muslim in full-time work in Tottenham recalled being stopped by police on his way to school at the age of 13: “One of them said: ‘Mate, why don’t you ask him where Saddam is. He might be able to help out’ ... They’re supposed to be law enforcement ... I don’t hate the policing system, I hate the police on the street. I hate them from the bottom of my heart.”

Race is never far from the surface of the first-person accounts of rioters. The most acute sense of a longstanding mistrust was among black interviewees. Many referred to specific incidences of black people dying in custody or during police raids. Memories of black people in Tottenham whose deaths have been linked to police hands don’t fade easily – perhaps making Duggan’s death even more potent.

Nowhere was the singling out of black people more apparent in the minds of the rioters than when the police use stop and search. Overall, 73% of people interviewed in the study had been stopped and searched at least once in the past year. In our research, the frequent complaint of a sense of harassment by those interviewees on the receiving end of stop and search was made in every city the research took place and by interviewees from different racial groups and ages.

Rioters recounted how they sought revenge by wanting to hurt, intimidate, target and indiscriminately attack officers. Others described how they threw stones and bottles; rammed police with wheelie bins and shouted “Fuck the police”.

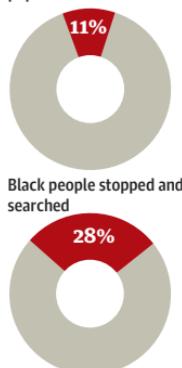
Some spoke of how they targeted police

Stop and search: the interviewees' experience

Have you been stopped and searched in the last 12 months?



Stop and search in London, 2009/2010
Black people as a % of London's population



SOURCE: GUARDIAN/LSE RESEARCH, POLICE POWERS & PROCEDURES BULLETIN

“ We had total control of the precinct. There's a massive police station there, and they couldn't do anything. It was ours for a day. Salford was more like a party atmosphere. Everyone was stood around, drinking... smoking weed, having a laugh. People weren't threatening the public.

There was people there to get on a rob [loot], there for the spectacle, there to have a go at police. And then people there for all of the above. We hate the police, hate the government, got no opportunities ...

Manchester was like a bloodbath. The police were mental, using TAU [Tactical Aid Unit] vans as weapons ... we was only there for an hour. We thought: 'This is madness; let's go back to Salford.'

These aren't gangs. The kids just did what they wanted to do 'cos they wanted to do it, not because some gang boss orchestrated it to get back at the police. There's thousands of people operating all over the city in organised crime. Obviously you have to work together to operate. But in terms of power structure, there isn't one.

I became involved in the riots in Salford because it was a chance to tell the police, tell the government, and tell everyone else for that matter that we get fucking hacked off around here and we won't stand for it.”

CASE STUDY

Unemployed man, 22, who was present at the Manchester and Salford riots

property: setting fire to and vandalising cars, vans and police stations, or deliberately tried to inflict injury on officers. The mayhem saw rioters take control back, in their own minds, from the clutches of the police - who were seen as a corrupting influence in the community. This is not to justify the riots but in part explains why, for many rioters, they are not troubled by the moral implications of what occurred.

Satisfaction with the police

Respondents saying police in their area generally do an 'excellent' or 'good' job

British Crime Survey 56%

7% Reading the Riots

SOURCE: BCS,
GUARDIAN/LSE RESEARCH

Understanding the riots **Gangs**

A mid the soul-searching, blame and accusations that followed the most serious UK riots seen in a generation, one reason for the unrest could frequently be heard. Gangs had played an important role, it was argued, rallying troops and leading the violence that ripped through England's cities.

After initially claiming that as many as 28% of those arrested in London were gang members, the Metropolitan police revised this to 19%, a figure that dropped to 13% countrywide. Although the crude numbers by themselves do not indicate with any certainty what the role of gangs was, the changing police estimates prompted leading politicians to downplay their earlier suggestion that gang members had played a pivotal role in the riots.

Reading the Riots suggests that they were right to do so. Gang members were certainly present in many of the disturbances. In some cases they may have played an important role, though there is little indication that they were orchestrating the riots. Some interviewees suggested that while they did not believe gangs were controlling the riots, their ability to provide numbers and to organise had played a part in how elements of the riots developed.

One 16-year-old gang member from Brixton, who had already served time in a young



“Gangs were at the heart of the protests and have been behind the co-ordinated attacks”

“ ”

David Cameron,
11 August 2011

offenders' institution, described the economic benefits of teaming up with other gangs from nearby areas. "There was no reason to fight [...] everyone could just team up together and when they team up, obviously there's more strength," he said. "Like one person can't lift up a shutter, so to come together and become one big group and be able to lift up something's that heavy like that, it just shows that people can work together. Even if they don't like each other and get what they want."

Importantly, what most of the reports on the riots thus far have missed is that the four nights of rioting saw a truce as otherwise hostile gangs suspended ordinary hostilities to focus on other targets. The majority of those who took part, from London to Liverpool, Manchester to Birmingham, denied that gangs had caused or exacerbated the unrest, arguing instead that for the short period when England was in the grip of the riots, for all practical purposes there had been a truce.

Gang members came together to capitalise on what they saw as an economic opportunity, or to hit back at "the authorities", whether the government or police.

The majority of those involved who were questioned spoke knowledgeably about gangs, as a real and daily presence in their lives, but repeatedly expressed surprise, and often delight, that during the riots the postcode warfare that was for them a fact of life had - for a short time - melted away.

A sense of a common enemy, a common cause, brought members of gangs from different territories - gangs partly defined by their defence of territory and hostility to those from other turfs - to co-operate for as long as the disturbances lasted. In Birmingham, one man in his 20s, said that it was "us, the youth

“The government needed someone to blame and [put] everything together under 'gangs'. I don't believe there was much planned gangland activity. I believe there was a lot of angry, very working-class, disillusioned young men that realised 'hang on a minute, it's going off'

**Man, 21,
Salford**



“ Everyone started joining in, different sides, different parts of town. They got bricks, started smashing the windows, smashing the shops. It was exciting, because we all had the intention to rob something, get something for free, you know what I mean? ... The first thing that came to my mind? Let's get wild, let's do it. There was no emotions.

There weren't no gangs. I didn't know no one there, but we all got together that day, the Asians, the blacks, the whites. It felt like we were like one big gang. We took over Birmingham. Normally we don't get along. [But] we weren't fighting each other, we were fighting the police.

Now I regret being involved ... now I got kicked out of college, I got a court case coming, I'm wasting my education. I'm just on the streets doing nothing. My friends weren't there that day I got arrested, so they don't know. 'Cos I ain't told them. It's not a good thing I've done; it's nothing to be proud about.

If I hadn't been arrested, I'd be living a life of crime every day. If no one's stopping me from committing [a crime] again, I'd keep doing a crime.

What I really noticed that day was that we had control. It felt great. We could do what we wanted to do. We could do as much damage as we can, and we could not be stopped.

Normally the police control us. But the law was obeying us, know what I mean? ”

CASE STUDY

Boy, 16, who was convicted of theft during the Birmingham riots

and the rioters against the police. I seen lads from different gangs, from different sides of Birmingham, on a normal street out there they'd be shooting each other, like, without a doubt, but there was both stood around the same area like, all in black, paying no attention ... I was happy that, to see them walk past, they didn't start no trouble or nothing”.

Understanding the riots

Inequality

‘I still to this day don’t class it as a riot,’ said one young man in Tottenham. ‘I think it was a protest.’ He was far from alone. A consistent theme emerging from the experiences of the rioters across England was that they harboured a range of grievances and it was their anger and frustration that was being expressed out on the streets in early August.

Their testimony challenges the conventional wisdom about the riots: that what began as a protest against the police shooting of Mark Duggan was stripped of political meaning before it spread across the country, fuelled by ‘mindless’ and ‘copycat’ opportunists.

They expressed it in different ways, but at heart what the rioters talked about was a pervasive sense of injustice. For some this was economic – the lack of a job, money or opportunity. For others it was more broadly social, not just the absence of material things, but how they felt they were treated compared with others.

The 270 people interviewed by *Reading the Riots* researchers had varied backgrounds and lives. But what a great many shared, and talked animatedly about, was injustice and inequality. Predictably, these meant different things to different people, but the term that kept cropping up was ‘justice’.

A woman in her 30s, who had been involved in the riots in north London, said: ‘I think

Integration into mainstream society

‘I feel I am part of British society’

Strongly agree

Citizenship survey 53%

14% Reading the Riots

Tend to agree

39%

37%

All agree

92%

51%

SOURCE: ICM,
GUARDIAN/LSE RESEARCH

some people were there for justice for that boy who got killed. And the rest of them because of what's happening. The cuts, the government not doing the right thing. No job, no money. And the young these days needs to be heard. It's got to be justice for them."

For many, the central issue was not having a job or any prospect of a job. Among our respondents who were of working age and not in education at the time of the riots, a little over half were unemployed. A number talked about looting or vandalising shops where they had earlier sought jobs. One young Salford man put it succinctly: "If I had a job I wouldn't be here now, yeah? I'd be working."

Time after time, young people especially mentioned lack of opportunities, the cuts and the ending of the education maintenance allowance (EMA). While the ending of the EMA is an unlikely motivation for a riot, and only a minority of those we interviewed will have received it, the references to it indicate a disillusionment with a wider set of social changes - changes collectively that may be further marginalising those who already felt socially disadvantaged and peripheral.

Undoubtedly, the rioters were a group who felt dislocated from the opportunities they saw as available to others. When asked if they felt "part of British society", only 51% said they agreed with the statement, against 92% of the population as a whole. For the young in particular - and more than four-fifths of those we interviewed were aged 24 or under - what came across was a profound sense of alienation. As one north Londoner in his mid-20s put it: "When no one cares about you you're gonna eventually make them care, you're gonna cause a disturbance."

This sense of being invisible was wide-

**“
All I can tell you
is that me, myself
and the group I
was in, none of
us have got jobs,
yeah? I been out of
work now coming
up two years ...
and it's just like a
depression, man,
that you sink
into ... I felt like
I needed to be
there as well to
just say 'Look, this
is what's gonna
happen if there's
no jobs offered to
us out there”**

”

Man, 22,
London



spread. In some cases, the view that change was impossible was palpable. Asked what he would like to see change, one 19-year-old unemployed man from Birmingham simply said: "Fuck knows, dunno, don't really care about that no more. I've gone past caring. Just think there's no point in me wishing, wanting things to happen."

In the face of such apparent hopelessness, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of those we interviewed thought that further riots were likely. Not least, it seems, because many felt that little was likely to change.

“ When I left my house ... it wasn't anything to do with the police ... I literally went there to say, 'All right then, well, everyone's getting free stuff, I'm joining in', like, 'cos, it's fucking my area. These fucking shops, like, I've given them a hundred CVs ... not one job. That's why I left my house.

It's not like I haven't got GCSEs ... but I see people with no GCSEs nothing like that, and they're working in places. Like somewhere like Tesco. I'm not being funny like, I don't need any GCSEs to work in Tesco. But I've got them. So here's my CV. I don't need A-levels, but you know, here's my CV.

Why haven't I even got [an] interview? ... I feel like I haven't [been] given the same opportunities and chances as other people ... If I had a job ... I honestly wouldn't have stolen nothing ...

Like you could work in Tesco but ... Tesco could make you feel like you're a valuable worker, and you could be on £5 an hour. But it doesn't matter, yeah, 'cos you feel you're worth something you would never jeopardise that. Because that feeling's better than making £10 an hour. Do you see what I'm saying? And that's what I feel like: people are not worth anything in this area ”

CASE STUDY Man, 22, from south London, who talks about unemployment and why he looted

Understanding the riots **Shopping for free?**

A bout 2,500 shops and businesses are estimated to have been looted during the riots across England this summer. Looting was - according to the breakdown of criminal charges - the most common type of unlawful activity. Across England, looters appeared attracted to fashion retailers and stores containing high-value goods - the electrical store Currys was a common target, as were jewellery shops. But looters also spoke about how they broke into cheap supermarkets, such as Lidl and Aldi. The cost in insurance claims to the London economy alone was estimated to be up to £300m. But why did the looting happen? What pushed people, many of whom told us they had never been in trouble with the police before, to enter shops that had been broken into and help themselves to what they wanted?

The hundreds of looters interviewed as part of the *Reading the Riots* study reveal complex and varied motivations. It was down to simple greed, say some. One 19-year-old from Hackney, who looted in Wood Green on the first night of the disturbances, put it in stark terms: "The rioting, I was angry. The looting, I was excited. Because, just money. I don't know, just money-motivated. Everything that we done [was] just money-motivated."



“
**It was like
Christmas; it was
so weird ...
People were
picking things up
like it was in their
homes and it was
there already ...
it was like 'is this
a trick?' You want
to do it but you
don't, because
you don't know**
”

Girl, 16,
Lavender Hill,
London

Amid the sense that the rule of law was suspended, many felt they were taking part in a free-for-all with no consequences. “It would have been like a normal shopping day ... but with no staff in the shop,” said an 18-year-old woman from Lambeth. But in many interviews those involved talked of getting their “just rewards”, of reacting to a society fuelled by greed, resenting being excluded from a consumerist world and placing some of the blame on big business and advertising.

Interviewees - particularly younger looters - talked about the pressure and “hunger” for the right brand names. There was a culture of “wanting stuff”, said one 18-year-old. “It’s like, seen as if you’re not wearing, like, and you’re poor, no one don’t want to be your friend.”

The same businesses were named time and again: Foot Locker, PC World, mobile phone outlets. JD Sports lost £700,000 of stock during the riots and was a key target: a 16-year-old girl from Lavender Hill went so far as to say that, in the days following the riots, her room “looked like JD Sports”. But there was little sympathy among looters. “JD is making like what - £50 off a shoe?” said a 20-year-old from Clapham. Looters found it harder to justify why they broke into small, independent retailers. These were often the easiest to break into and 213 were hit.

Many of those who took part described a sense of euphoria during the looting, combined with a disbelief that they were not being stopped as police struggled to cope. “It was just everyone was smiling. It was literally a festival with no food, no dancing, no music but a free shopping trip for everyone,” said one 16-year-old girl from Wandsworth.

For others, there was a sense of personal regret. A 15-year-old girl described being scared

£300m

Total cost to the economy of riots-related insurance claims in London alone

HIT BY THE RIOTS

of 2,278 commercial premises for which data was available

61%

were retail premises

265

were shops selling electrical goods, computer games, mobile phones, CDs, DVDs; 12% of total

233

shops selling clothing and sportswear; 10% of total

219

restaurants and cafes - including fast food outlets; 10% of total

213

small independent retailers; 9% of total

181

supermarkets; 8% of total

SOURCE: HOME OFFICE



“ Turned the news on, I saw police cars getting burnt. I thought it'll die down, the police will take control and then it started escalating. I get a few phone calls: ‘Come down, whatever, go riot and stuff.’ Think, all right, we'll go down there. Personally I didn't plan to rob anything, but, we were just there and we were provoking the police, we weren't really stealing anything ...

Bruce Grove ... off-licence there. We took a few things and someone came up with the idea like, if we spread this could the police like, control it? ...

We had one motive, that was to get as many things as we can and sell it on ... what I did was, go to phone shops, get as many phones as you can, sell them to [an online company that buys phones]... used someone else's bank account ... Split between us, my part alone, I got two and a half grand.

I don't condone it [the looting] but like, it's like, it's helped me out financially ... I should look back on my values and my morals that my parents taught me ... but for that, snap, that night, I look back to my own 14-year-old self. I wanna get it now. I want it now. That's what it was. ”

CASE STUDY

**Business student,
19, from London,
who says he made
£2,500 from looting
in Wood Green,
north London**

and unwilling to take part when the riots flared up in her area. “Then, after it all kicked off and everyone was doing it, you just joined in and it felt fine. It just felt natural, like you was just naturally shopping,” she said.

But subsequently she handed herself in to the police, and, asked what she thought about her actions now, she said: “I'm ashamed. To think that I went that low to go steal in these shops when they're, like, basically that's their business, that's how they're providing for their families, and we've basically ruined that and they've got to start from scratch.”

Understanding the riots **Social media**

One feature of the August riots that distinguished them from previous civil disturbances was the widespread availability of social media and mobile phone technology. Some commentators raised significant concerns about the role of Twitter, Facebook and BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), suggesting that they had played an important part in the organisation and spread of the riots. Some even called for the temporary closure of some social media. Through interviews with the rioters themselves, and an analysis of a Twitter database obtained by the Guardian, *Reading the Riots* is able to offer a unique insight into the place and role of the media in the recent civil disorder.

Within hours of the first disturbances in Tottenham late on Saturday, a message pinged out, first on to a few phones, then dozens, then hundreds across north London.

*"Everyone in edmonton enfield wood
green everywhere in north link up at
enfield town station at 4 o clock sharp!!!!
Start leaving ur yards n linking up with
your niggas.
Fuck da feds, bring your ballys and
your bags trollys, cars vans, hammers
the lot!"*

The message was sent through the BBM network: a free mobile phone messaging service

£5

the monthly cost of using a BlackBerry. The free and secure BBM messaging network was used extensively by the rioters to pass messages to each other



open to anyone with a BlackBerry smartphone. Once users have swapped a PIN, they can share messages as often as they like, and at the touch of a button, send a broadcast (or “ping”) to everyone on their contact list. This extraordinarily efficient - and secure - communications network was a key tool for many who took part in England’s riots, as an easy way to share information on where looters were, safe routes home, and what police were doing.

While the government debated whether to shut down Twitter, or prosecute Facebook users, it was BBM that was actually playing a substantive role in the riots, according to those who took part. Being able to keep up with friends 24 hours a day for only £5 a month, and with the cost of a handset sometimes as low as £40, a BlackBerry was a major draw for many people, especially as many were from families on low incomes.

“I don’t know about Twitter and Facebook, neither do I have an account with them,” says a former supermarket worker who joined the looting of a Carphone Warehouse. “All I know is that the BlackBerry was enough to give me enough information, or tell me at the time, of what was going on, where to stay wary of and what sort of things were targeted.”

BBM broadcasts had been used by Tottenham residents to share information on the circumstances surrounding the death of Mark Duggan, the event that sparked the initial riots. These broadcasts detailed mistrust in the police and the IPCC over Duggan’s death. “At first people were sending around broadcasts about Mark Duggan, ‘cos I knew a couple of people that knew Mark Duggan, so they were sending broadcasts saying ‘he was a good person’, ‘he’s innocent’,” said one person who took part in the initial protest on Saturday.



“Originally, it started off, it was like, yes, it was a group of black people, the family members and friends ... But I seen Hasidic Jews from Stamford Hill, who were down there. I seen lots of white people. I seen guys from shops, Turkish, it turned out ... it was all like the whole neighbourhood came out. The neighbourhood knew it was all wrong [shooting of Mark Duggan]. But sadly it was the neighbourhood that got trashed”

“

Man who set fire to police car in Tottenham

Twitter, by contrast, seems to have played a different role in the riots. A team of academics led by Rob Procter of Manchester University has analysed a database of more than 2.5m riot-related tweets obtained by the Guardian. As with BBM and Facebook, the researchers found evidence of tweets supporting, inciting or encouraging riot:

"im about to incite some mother fucking riots!!! Go LondonRiots Go!! eat me scotland yard :D".

"Yes I Hope MANCHESTER gets destroyed Tonight #ManchesterRiot"

Several politicians, notably the Conservative MP and Twitter user Louise Mensch, suggested the network should be shut down during the riots in the interests of public safety, a call which was briefly endorsed by David Cameron and senior police officers. However, Procter and colleagues found the response to these tweets - as it was on Facebook - was overwhelmingly negative, with several tweeters forwarding user details to police Twitter feeds, or sending abusive messages to those supporting the unrest. One typical response read:

"someone ... has just posted Go on Hackney! Fuck the feds! #hackney Can we have them arrested for incitement pls?"

Indeed, closing down such social media might have had the opposite effect from that intended by Mensch and others. While researchers found little to no evidence of incitement on Twitter, they found it was used extensively to organise community clean-up operations. More than 12,000 individuals were identified as mobilising support for the riot clean-up, a project initially suggested by Twitter user @artistsmakers.

Even just including tweeters whose clean-up-related messages were reposted more than



2.5m

riot-related tweets were studied by a team of academics. They found there was little evidence of incitement on Twitter - rather it was used to mobilise community clean-up operations

1,000 times, the cleanup mobilisation reached more than 7 million Twitter users - far in excess of any incitement tweets.

Despite the attention paid to social media by government and the press, the *Reading the Riots* research suggests traditional media, particularly television, played a large part. More than 100 of the project's 270 interviewees referred to hearing about the riots via pictures on television news - more than Twitter, texts, Facebook or BBM. Some rioters also said the dramatic nature of the TV coverage tempted them to get involved with the unrest.

"The telly's kinda dumb," said a 16-year-old involved in looting in Clapham Junction. "All them media people, to say 'Rah, there's a riot in Clapham Junction'." This trait was especially true outside London, where the use of BBM was less common and some said the TV news had encouraged them to get involved.

"They had maps on the news showing where it had spread to," said a 22-year-old who clashed with police in Birmingham. "I think they had it red round where it was going off bad and I think, Birmingham, London, I think Manchester ... and I was like, 'Birmingham?', and I went straight on the train, like."

For one man, however, TV's habit of reusing footage from hours before led to his arrest. He saw television pictures of streets empty of police and thought it was "an opportunity that I can't miss". He said: "Like, so I went out there, basically, with the intention of going out to try and steal stuff, only because I thought the police weren't doing nothing about it. If I'd have known that that was gonna happen to me, I wouldn't have done it."

The man was arrested at the scene, and is currently serving a sentence for commercial burglary.



7m

Twitter users saw the clean-up campaign messages, far in excess of any incitement messages. Some clean-up messages were retweeted more than 1,000 times

Phase II What next?

We should say at the outset that the work to date represents the first stage of the analysis of the huge amount of data collected in the first phase of the study. This analytical work will continue and further reports will be published based on the 270 in-depth interviews with rioters. In addition to this work, we are already planning the second phase of *Reading the Riots*, which will look at their impact on local communities, and at the criminal justice response to the disturbances.

A significant next step for *Reading the Riots* will be to take the findings from phase one back to local communities as the basis for a series of community debates and discussions. The intention is that these should be public debates in the areas affected by the riots and led by the people most affected by them. They will be a mixture of open debates that anybody can attend and closed debates that will have a smaller audience and be by request or invitation only.

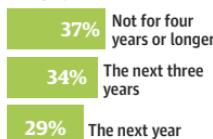
Each public debate will be organised in partnership with local community groups and a local broadcaster or community media platform to ensure each event is owned by that community and to strengthen local media. We intend to use these events, possibly

Do interviewees think there could be more riots?

The riots will happen again



Of respondents expressing a view, when?



Would you get involved again?



SOURCE: GUARDIAN/LSE RESEARCH

supplemented by a series of focus groups and some further interviews, as the basis for further research on the communities affected.

Our concerns in the criminal justice element will be two-fold. First, to examine the policing of the riots as they unfolded and the work undertaken by the police service to identify offenders in the aftermath. The policing of the riots caused a certain amount of controversy. Some senior political figures were openly critical about the initial police response to the disturbances in London, and subsequently there was a dispute between senior officers and politicians about the origins of the decision to vastly increase police numbers. The period since the end of the riots has also involved considerable police activity.

Within a month of the end of the riots, the 10 police forces most affected had arrested close to 4,000 people. Following the same approach that we took in the first element of the study, we are keen to hear directly about the experiences of those involved - in this case from the police service itself.

Our intention will be to interview officers - both at a command level and those involved in frontline policing - to hear their experiences of the riots as they started, evolved and came to an end. The interviews are likely to cover at least:

- How the riots appeared to develop and spread
- The policing tactics that had the greatest/least impact on rioting/looting
- From a command level, what the resource implications were
- The impression officers have of why the riots occurred in the places they did
- The factors behind who - and how many - were arrested as the riots unfolded



The next steps will include a series of public debates in the areas most affected by the riots and their aftermath, such as Winson Green in Birmingham, where the deaths of Haroon Jahan, 21, Shazad Ali, 30, and Abdul Musavir, 31, provoked a strong community response

- How the riots were brought to an end
- The tactics/strategies used to bring offenders to justice in the aftermath
- The lessons that might be learned from the riots for future police-community relations

The second element of the criminal justice study will focus on the work of the courts.

As is well-documented, by mid-October close to 2,000 people had been arrested and charged. More than 600 of these had reached a final outcome in court, over half of whom were sentenced to immediate custody. The courts were required to work under unusual circumstances, with all-night court sittings, high levels of custodial remand, and the use of substantial prison sentences for many of those convicted of riot-related offences.

In this part of the study we will seek to interview magistrates and district judges working in the magistrates courts at the time, together with crown court judges, court staff, prosecutors and defence lawyers in order to examine the broader work of the criminal justice system in the aftermath of the worst civil disturbances for a generation.



With close to 4,000 arrests by the 10 police forces most affected, the courts were forced to work under highly unusual conditions, and imposed substantial prison sentences

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Kari-Ruth Pedersen, Amelia Hodsdon and Jamie Fahey
Picture research Guy Lane
Graphics Jenny Ridley and Finbarr Sheehy

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