

Research impact: making a difference

LSE research into the causes of the 2011 riots leads to reform of police 'stop and search' powers

LSE Professor Tim Newburn collaborated with the Guardian in a groundbreaking investigation of the causes of the 2011 riots in England

What was the problem?

Two days after the police shooting of a local black man, Mark Duggan, in north London on 6 August 2011, protestors gathered outside the local police station.

Mishandling of this protest led to the outbreak of violence and looting. Disorder spread rapidly, initially across London, and subsequently to Birmingham, Liverpool, Nottingham, Manchester and Salford.

In the face of considerable speculation about the causes of the riots, and the absence of an official inquiry, *the Guardian* and the LSE established a unique collaborative study.

What did we do?

Following the riots, Professor Newburn was approached by the Guardian with a view to establishing a joint study. In the following weeks he and Paul Lewis, then Special Projects Editor of the Guardian, raised the money for and designed what was to become *Reading the Riots*. Funded by the Joseph Rowntree and Open Society Foundations, its overall aim was to seek to engage with the political debates around the riots and, through research, to help inform public debate.

In its first phase, researchers from *Reading the Riots* interviewed 270 rioters across the main cities involved in the disorder. The data were analysed and the research published in December 2011, only three months after the start of the project. In the second phase approximately 300 further interviews were conducted with police officers, lawyers and members of the communities most affected by the riots, and the results of this work were published in July 2012.

Breaking with academic tradition, the research was released entirely via the media, primarily via the Guardian newspaper, but also through a series of films and other events.

What happened?

The fundamental aims of *Reading the Riots* were to use social science to engage with public and political debates around the disturbances and inform public understanding of the riots, and to

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investigate the validity of some of the assumptions being made about the disorder. Against a background of official denial, for example, *Reading the Riots* showed that anger with the police was a specific motivation, especially in the early days of the rioting. Moreover, and contrary to initial claims made by the Home Secretary, the research helped establish not only that the role played by gangs in the riots was minimal, but also that a 'truce' existed between gangs during the disturbances.

This was a highly unusual project, being conducted to very short timescales and being published entirely via the media. From 5th to 10th December 2011 the *Guardian* ran over 30 stories over 23 pages of the newspaper reporting the results of the first phase, and in July 2012 ran a further 18 stories over 11 pages of the paper, covering the results of phase two. The study commanded six front-page stories and was also reported extensively in other UK media. On the first phase launch day, Paul Lewis and Tim Newburn appeared on radio and television programmes with a combined audience of over 30 million. Altogether during 2011 and 2012, 200 references were made to the research in the UK and international media. The dedicated website for *Reading the Riots* has received 2.8 million hits.

The study's findings about rioters' views of the police was the subject of a BBC2 *Newsnight* film (5 December 2011), and was followed by a studio discussion which included the Police Minister, the former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, David Lammy MP and Tim Newburn. A full-length verbatim drama using material from *Reading the Riots* was also broadcast by the BBC in 2012. The launch of Phase Two of the study was also accompanied by a *Newsnight* special and a second studio discussion.

Reading the Riots stimulated considerable public debate, and those responding directly to some of the study's findings included: the Home Secretary; the Leader of the Opposition; Shadow Home Secretary; the Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service; the Archbishop of Canterbury; the Mayor of London; the President of the Association of Chief Police Officers, and the Chairman of the Police Federation; the Director of Public Prosecutions; the Chairman of the Government's post-riots Victims and Communities Panel; and the Government official responsible for leading on the response to the riots

The most significant direct policy response to *Reading the Riots* came at the LSE's conference on 14th December 2011. In her speech, the Home Secretary announced a formal review of best practice in relation to police stop and search powers. A major element of this was a review undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, a primary prompt for which was the LSE and Guardian report. HMIC published their review in July 2013, and in a statement in the

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House of Commons on 2nd July 2013 the Home Secretary said she anticipated significant reform of the use of these powers.

The findings of *Reading the Riots* have been reported all around the globe, and in 2012, the Guardian's ground-breaking partnership with the LSE was awarded 'Innovation of the Year' at the British Journalism Awards and the 'Innovation Award' at the European Press awards, as well as being shortlisted for the THES 'research project of the year' award.

Tim Newburn is Professor of Criminology and Social Policy at the London School of Economics & Political Science, and is Official Historian of Criminal Justice. Prior to joining LSE, he was Director of the Public Policy Research Unit at Goldsmiths College from 1997, having previously worked at the Policy Studies Institute, the National Institute for Social Work, the Home Office and Leicester University. He is the author or editor of over 30 books, including: *Permission and Regulation: Law and Morals in Post-war Britain* (Routledge, 1991); *The Future of Policing* (with Morgan, Oxford University Press, 1997); *Private Security and Public Policing* (with Jones, Clarendon Press, 1998); *Policy Transfer and Criminal Justice* (with Jones, Open University Press, 2007); and, *Criminology* (2nd ed, Routledge, 2012). Tim Newburn was President of the British Society of Criminology (2005-08) and Director of the Mannheim Centre for Criminology (2003-08) and was elected to the Academy of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences in 2005. His current work is dominated by the research and writing (with Paul Rock and David Downes) of the Official History of Criminal Justice. In addition, he and Paul Lewis are writing a book based on their collaborative project, *Reading the Riots*.

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