

# Riot breaks out in Kentucky prison

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A riot broke out in a prison south of Lexington, Kentucky on Thursday night, leaving much of the facility destroyed and 16 people injured.

The riot started at the Northpoint Training Center, a medium-security prison, after prisoners set fire to trash cans inside the facility's perimeter. A large portion of the prison, including a medical clinic, kitchen, canteen and visiting area, were destroyed by the fire. Six buildings were burned down, nearly all the dormitories were rendered unusable, and parts of the facility were still burning one day later.

Northpoint, Located in Danville, Kentucky, can house 1,256 prisoners in six dormitories. The facility has been under lockdown since August 18 following a major altercation between prisoners. Due to damage sustained to the prison, 700 inmates had to be transferred to other prisons, while 500 remained behind, relying on temporary shelters.

The riot provoked a massive police response. The disturbance began at 6:30 p.m. and a riot team composed of Kentucky state police, prison staff, and other corrections personnel entered the facility at 9 p.m. Officers rushed the prison in riot gear, using tear gas. According to some reports, officers fired shotguns over the heads of rebellious prisoners.

The riot was suppressed within two hours, according to the authorities. Most prisoners surrendered immediately, but about 100 continued to hold out. Those prisoners who continued to fight on used rocks and pieces of furniture to fight off the guards.

The Kentucky events follow a larger riot in California on August 8 involving over 1,000 prisoners at the California Institution for Men in Chino. (See "Prison riot in California: Budget crisis to make inhumane conditions worse") The riot injured 175 prisoners and hospitalized 55. The disturbance lasted 11 hours. As in Kentucky, the California prison was so badly damaged

that inmates had to be transported to other prisons. The California riot was reportedly sparked by racial tensions in the prison.

Cost-cutting measures implemented by the state California government, which is facing a massive budget shortfall, contributed to the explosive conditions at the Chino prison. The facility reportedly housed twice as many inmates as it was designed for.

In Mexico on August 15, 20 inmates were killed and 25 injured at a riot that broke out at a prison in Gomez Palacio, in the state of Durango. Prisoners reportedly used guns and knives during the disturbance. While the situation at the prison, which holds 1,081 prisoners, has reportedly stabilized, Mexico's security secretary said that the atmosphere there was a "time bomb."

There is little doubt that budget cuts and deteriorating conditions contributed to the outbreak of violence at the Northpoint prison. Kentucky is facing an 11.5 percent budget shortfall, and the state legislature has considered measures to trim prison costs. The state's total corrections budget was \$457 million, amounting to nearly one 20th of the state's \$9.4 billion annual budget.

Kentucky's crime rate is about 25 percent lower than the national average, but the state has an incarceration rate 13 percent higher than the US as a whole. The state corrections department, with 2,900 employees at 13 prisons, handled 22,457 people in 2007. The state prison system also incorporates three privately run prisons.

One in every 18 adult males living in the US is in some stage of the prison system. The prison population has quadrupled since 1980, despite a 25 percent drop in recorded crime between 1988 and 2008.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate and total prison population of any country. There are some 2.3 million people incarcerated in the US. A staggering 7.2 million people are in the prison system,

either incarcerated in prison or jail, on probation or on parole. With only 5 percent of the world's population, the US has nearly one quarter of its prisoners.



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