

# Social deprivation led to UK riots, figures show

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Social deprivation was the main factor in the disturbances that broke out in London and other cities in August, government statistics confirm.

The figures released by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), based on those arrested as a consequence of the disorder, only cover the period up to mid-October. The overwhelming majority were male (90 percent), and more than half were aged below 20 years of age. The figure are based on some 5,000 recorded crimes—including disorder and burglary—the majority in the capital, Birmingham and Manchester.

Among the adults arrested in the disturbances, 35 percent were in receipt of some form of unemployment benefit, compared with 12 percent of the working age population.

The MoJ states, “Young people appearing before the courts came disproportionately from areas with high levels of deprivation as defined by the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Indices, 2010. 64 percent of 10-17 year olds for whom matched data were available lived in one of the 20 percent most deprived areas whilst only three percent lived in one of the 20 percent least deprived areas.”

Some 42 percent of young people arrested received Free School Meals (FSM)—only available to the poorest section of the population. This compares to 16 percent of all secondary school pupils.

“This pattern can also be seen in London, where 40 percent of young people appearing before the courts were in receipt of FSM compared to 26 percent of all London pupils in secondary schools, and the North West (50 percent and 18 percent respectively).”

The report makes clear that government assertions that the disturbances were the product of a “gang culture” were a lie. The overwhelming majority were not members of gangs, the report states. In most of the

areas affected, less than 10 percent of those arrested could be identified as belonging to gangs, it says.

Only in London was the figure of gang membership among those arrested estimated at 19 percent. There is no agreed definition of what constitutes gang membership, the MoJ states. Even so, “the great majority of arrestees” in the capital were not gang members and “Most [police] forces perceived that where gangs were involved, they generally did not play a pivotal role.”

Some 71 percent of adult males arrested had one previous conviction or more, and 45 percent of males aged 10-17 years of age. This compares with 28 percent and two percent respectively amongst the population at large. The report states, however, that in total the average number of previous offences per individual for those arrested during the riots (11), “compares to an average of 19 previous offences for offenders who were sentenced for an indictable offence in 2010/11.”

“24 percent of those brought before the courts for their role in the disorder had no previous cautions or convictions,” it continues. “This compares with 23 percent of those dealt with for indictable offences in 2010/11.”

“This suggests that while those taking part in the disorder were much more likely than the general population to have previous convictions, they are not quite as prolific as offenders sentenced for indictable offences in 2010/11.”

The MoJ does not provide a breakdown of what constitutes a previous conviction, but a higher rate of offending is a feature of more deprived areas. Nor is it made clear what numbers of those being surveyed were arrested on the spot, or rounded up in subsequent raids.

By far the most damning indictment of the social rot

in Britain are the figures on the educational background of those arrested.

The MoJ compared the educational attainment of the 386 10-17 year-olds arrested during the timeframe with the average. It found that more than one-third of young people had been excluded from school at least once during the period 2009/10, compared to 6 percent for the overall student population.

Amongst those for whom data was available, just half had achieved the expected Level 4 grade in English (52 percent) and Math (51 percent) at Key Stage 2. This compares with 79 percent and 75 percent respectively for all pupils.

A key factor in the low educational attainment is the numbers of those arrested being classified as having “some form of special educational need”. The term is ill-defined, but the MoJ states that 66 percent of young people arrested met this definition, compared with 21 percent of all secondary school pupils.

“However”, it points out, “even restricting the comparison to those with no SEN identified, attainment remains lower among those young people appearing before the courts compared with the national average.”

The statistics speak to the systematic running down of education by Conservative and Labour governments alike. The imposition of targets, league tables, privatisation and other such measures are designed to fail a significant number of working class youth, for whom capitalism has no useful purpose.

As schools face major budget cuts, areas like Special Educational Needs are particularly under attack, while more and more schools have resorted to excluding those perceived to be the most difficult or challenging so as to meet targets for attainment and behaviour.

The MoJ concludes, “It is clear that compared to population averages, those brought before the courts were more likely to be in receipt of free school meals or benefits, were more likely to have had special educational needs and be absent from school, and are more likely to have some form of criminal history.”

The statistics are an effective refutation of the claims made by the government and the media that poverty played no role in the disturbances.

The riots were triggered by the police killing of Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old father of four. Anger was fuelled by the revelation that police claims they had opened fire in self-defence were a lie, and that Duggan had not

posed a threat when he was shot down in the street on August 4.

But the fact that the disturbances spread so quickly across London, and then to other cities underscored the extent to which police brutality and social deprivation is a daily fact of life for many working class youth.

The political establishment was at pains to reject these causes—not least because it is currently imposing the most severe austerity measures since the 1930s, which are set to worsen social conditions.

Instead, the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats insisted that the riots were solely the product of criminality and had to be dealt with through state repression. Labour MPs and “community leaders” who have made their privileged careers by exploiting identity politics, based on race and gender, lined up to demand the use of water cannon and other police measures in the inner-cities.

The courts were politically instructed to impose punitive sentences against those arrested, while the government pledged even tougher measures in the future.

Those young people already particularly victimised by the existing social set-up—unemployment, poverty, poor education and the inevitable criminalisation that follows—are to be targeted even further.

A separate report by London’s Metropolitan Police into the disturbances has inaugurated a review of policing measures. Among the issues to be considered are an increase in the training and numbers of riot police and an examination of the cost and effectiveness of deploying water cannon against further disturbances.

It is also reviewing means for “co-ordinating, assessing and prioritising social media content for intelligence purposes,” according to reports.

The *Telegraph* states, “The report also revealed that rubber bullets, known as baton rounds, could have been used if more specialist officers were available.

“Their use was sanctioned but senior officers elected not to deploy them.”



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