

RiotStats Editorial

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The August disturbances, we are led to believe, brought out the “best” and “worst” of contemporary British society. It is not difficult to find a range of views on the causes and the most appropriate response to the rioting that followed the death of Mark Duggan in Tottenham, London, in the summer of 2011. In this issue of Radical Statistics a couple of articles question the statistical basis for making sweeping empirical claims about the riots. We also have a debate about causes of the riots, which mirrors the one which has taken place in the public domain. Ultimately, however, the statistics do not provide any simple answers, and it remains up to individual readers to decide upon the most compelling approach to understanding the cause and effect of these riots and to contribute to the analysis and dissemination of our understanding of these events.

Roger Ball and John Drury provide, in time-honored Radical Statistics style, a critical analysis of the way in which data have been used, particularly in the media and by politicians, to support various ideological interpretations of the disturbances. The article refrains from putting forward the authors’ own account of the causes of the riots, while providing a convincing account of the way in which dubious statistical evidence appears to have been used to promote narrow sectional and political interests.

Carly Lightflowers and Jon Shute, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Manchester court records, show that individuals from deprived neighbourhoods were disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system as a result of the rioting. To Carly and Jon, the dominant narratives do “not acknowledge the structural roots of the problem or the counter-productivity of ‘get tough’ policies designed largely to appease voter’s concerns”.

Nigel Williams and Nick Cowen argue that the IMD should be disaggregated. Their analysis shows that not all forms of deprivation were associated with areas in which those ‘rioters’ charged were living. Nigel and Nick argue that although crimes were committed in part due to the deprivation-related incentives of the rioters, these would have been averted with a more conspicuous policing deterrent. This aspect of their analysis echoes similarly dispositional interpretations of the riots (Waiton, 2011), which Carly and Jon take to task in a rebuttal. Among other things, they argue that the “rational choice” explanation that Nigel and Nick present inhibits understanding of the myriad of plausible situational factors at work.

Janet Bujra and Jenny Pearce recently authored *Saturday Night & Sunday Morning: The 2001 Bradford Riot and Beyond*, which documents years of work dedicated to making sense of the rioting that occurred in Bradford 10 years ago, and the legacy it has had on the city. Those riots had a particularly striking racial dimension, not entirely dissimilar to the August Riots and in other ways the participants were very similar to the more recent rioters. Janet argues that, in Bradford, local institutions – the police and local government – needed to recognise legitimate grievances of young, deprived individuals. Perhaps to the shock of some Radical Statisticians, Janet argues that statistical analyses have limitations in understanding, and developing responses to, such grievances¹.

We are then left with a letter from Brian Quinn, which argues that the Radical Statistics overpopulation working group in its contribution to issue 105, has overlooked the ecological impact of having another child. This is followed by a brief response by the working group in which they address Brian's points. The issue ends with news from the newly formed Reduced Statistics group.

Changes in Editorship

I would like to thank Janet Shapiro, who is standing down as editor. She had done a miraculous job as editor, and lately had taken on a hefty workload by herself. I am sure I am not alone in thanking her for the marvellous work she has done for Radical Statistics over the years. Rachel Cohen, from the University of Surrey, will take over from her and I am sure all our members look forward to her contributions in the months and years ahead.

Radical Statistics is a not-for-profit membership organisation, and our journal does not aspire to be exclusively academic. We look for contributions from all walks of life and, thanks to our diverse membership, offer a peer review service upon request. If you would like to help review for the journal or contribute, feel free to contact any of the editors for further information. This year, we are particularly interested in receiving shorter articles from as wide a range of authors as possible. These may highlight the misuse of statistics or promote results, which may not be given a fair hearing in other settings.

References

- Waiton, S. (2011). Welfare Culture: the English Riots and the Collapse of Authority. *Journal of Scottish Affairs*, 77, 54-78.

¹ Radical Statistics, has a fixed page limit, and so cannot always publish qualitative studies, which tend to be longer than those which employ statistical approaches. This should not, however, put off individuals from submitting qualitative work if it can be shown to meet the goals of Radical Statistics.