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Framing the 2011 England riots: Understanding the political and policy response

Tim Newburn, Trevor Jones and Jarrett Blaustein

1. The English Riots

Two days after the fatal shooting of a mixed-race, 25-year old man, Mark Duggan, by Metropolitan Police officers in north London, a peaceful protest outside Tottenham police station ended with the outbreak of violence and became the starting point of what was to be four days of rioting. The initial disorder in Tottenham spread across London, eventually affecting 21 of the 32 London boroughs, and subsequently a number of cities including Birmingham, Manchester, Salford and Liverpool (Guardian/LSE, 2011). Over the course of the four days, five people lost their lives, hundreds were injured and estimates of the damage caused reached over half a billion pounds (RCVP, 2012). The riots of 2011 can lay claim to be the most serious civil disorder in England since the 1980s and quite possibly in the whole post-war period. Those involved tended to be drawn from the poorer urban communities and were relatively ethnically diverse, thus differing somewhat from both the riots of the 1980s and much disorder since (xxx, 2015). They gave rise to a huge amount of academic commentary and research (see, for example, xxx et al, 2015; xxx et al, 2016; Stott et al, 2016), focusing in the main on the antecedents of the riots and then, more particularly, on how the riots should be interpreted and understood.

Although there is much that can be said in comparing the England riots in 2011 with earlier outbreaks of disorder (xxx, 2015) or with rioting in mainland Europe in recent times (xxx, 2016), this paper has a different focus. Rather than considering the causes of the riots, its concern is with the political and policy response to these events, something as yet unconsidered in academic treatment of the 2011 disorder. How should the reaction of British political leaders, and the policy response in the aftermath of the disorder, be characterised and understood? To do this we begin by examining the main political narratives that emerged during the riots. These were identified in three main ways: first, through a reading of all major parliamentary debates regarding the riots in the year from the first night of disorder onward, an analysis of newspaper reporting of the riots and their aftermath in 2011 using the Lexis/Nexis database; and, finally, through a reading of the main policy documents and statements produced by government where there was any explicit link made to the riots. This analysis identified four primary narratives in the governmental reading of the riots, focusing on: the 'criminal' behaviour of those involved in the disorder; the role of problem families; the involvement of gangs; and, the role and conduct of the police service during the riots.

What were the functions of these narratives? We will suggest that in this case, at heart, they were defensive, seeking to delegitimize any claims that underlying structural socio-economic factors might have played some part in the riots, whilst also resisting any suggestion that budget cuts were in any way responsible for the limited policing response to initial nights of disorder. The focus on criminality in particular served as the basis for refusing demands for

a major public inquiry. More generally, however, we want to argue that three of the 'frames' through which the riots were understood – gangs, policing and problem families - continued to have influence long after the violence had ended, not least in shaping elements of the scale and nature of policy response – or, arguably more accurately, the lack of response - to the disorder. For what at the time seemed to be potentially seismic events, viewed from a longer perspective, the 2011 English riots had remarkably little actual impact in terms of substantive deviations from the trajectory of government policies in policing, criminal justice or broader welfare reform policy. Most significant of all, the Coalition government's landmark austerity programme was to continue unabated for the rest of its term. This lack of longer term impact was in no small part down to a highly successful deployment of narrative frames in the immediate aftermath of the events of summer 2011, and the relative failure of non-governmental frames to impinge on the policy process.

2. Riots and Interpretive Policy Analysis

In thinking about the political and policy response to the riots we draw on the framework of John Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams approach (MSA) to understanding the public policy process. Initially developed in the late 1970s/early 1980s the MSA has become a key reference point in the public policy literature and has been applied widely in a range of different national and local contexts, and policy spheres (Cairney and Jones 2016). In short, Kingdon (1995) argues that public policy-making comprises a set of processes including (at a minimum) agenda-setting, alternative-specification, authoritative choice and implementation. However, rather than proceeding in set of neat sequential stages, and adapting the well-established 'garbage can' model (Cohen et al, 1972), Kingdon proposes that there are three distinct 'process streams' within the system, each operating according to their own dynamics and rules. These are the 'problem' stream (the process of generation of 'problems' requiring attention by policy-makers), the 'policy' stream (the generation of policy ideas and proposals), and finally, the 'political stream' (the outcome of elections, developments in the 'public mood', interest group campaigning and so forth).

The population of potential 'problems' for policy-makers is infinite, and in the context of attention shifting rapidly from issue to issue, only a small fraction of potential 'problems' will ever come to the attention of policy-makers. Kingdon identifies a number of ways in which 'problems' come to the attention of policy-makers including 'indicators' (evidence about the existence and size of a problem and the scope for change), 'focusing events' (that draw attention to specific features of problems), and feedback (from previous policy programmes). Policy solutions exist in what Kingdon describes as a 'policy primeval soup', evolving gradually as they are pushed forward by some policy actors, and are considered and modified by other participants in policy networks in a process of 'softening' up.

From time to time, developments in the political stream or the emergence of particularly compelling problems, lead to the opening of 'policy windows' (i.e. opportunities for promoting certain proposals or conceptions of a problem). Such windows provide opportunities for 'policy entrepreneurs' willing 'to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money – in the hope of future return' (1995:122). Significant policy change thus comes about when policy actors take effective advantage of the policy

windows within which the three streams converge whereby 'solutions become joined to problems, and both of them are joined to favourable political forces (1995: 20). The flipside of this of course, is that effective policy change can be *resisted* by swift action by policy actors to close the policy windows that arise

Kingdon's approach has been influential not least because it usefully identifies a number of 'universal' features of the public policy process. These include its essential ambiguity (the many ways of framing a policy problem), competition for attention (in that only a few problems reach the top of the agenda), imperfect selection (lack of reliable information), time limitations for decision-makers, and the lack of comprehensive rationality and/or linearity to the policy process (Cairney, 2013). As we have observed previously (xxx, 2007; xxx, 2017) all too often criminological research, when discussing policy, has tended to focus on policy outcomes and to pay much less attention to the ways policies emerge and develop. Interpretive inquiry, by contrast, tends to the view that 'problem statements are contending interpretations of policy issues made by different communities of meaning' (Yanow, 1999). Borrowing from the social movements literature we see framing processes as strategic attempts 'to craft, disseminate, and contest the language and narratives used to describe' particular political and policy problems (Kelly Garrett, 2006). Part of the focus then becomes how are policy issues 'framed' and what is the consequence of such framing? Of course, the idea that strategic framing of narratives by elite groups can shape longer term penal policy trajectories is not new. Weaver's analysis of the deeper political roots of the punitive shift in late twentieth century US penal policies outlines how a 'frontlash' of proactive policy framing by 'defeated' conservative elites in 1960s civil rights debates effectively 'shifted the "locus of attack" by injecting crime onto the agenda' (2007: 230). Thus, the focus of debate shifted away from racial inequality and social reform and towards crime and punishment, with long term consequences that are still playing out today in the USA. The focus of the current paper is somewhat different, with its narrower temporal focus on a single particular set of focusing events and related policy windows, and, crucially, the ways in which strategic framing of problems neutralized rather than stimulated policy change. Nevertheless, the importance of 'framing' of issues in this way – whether to promote or in effect to block policy change - is clear.

As Yanow (1999) observes, the use and existence of different frames is not simply a question of varying understandings and perceptions, as well as alternative possible courses of action, but is also likely to signify the existence of different values. As a consequence, 'the role of the interpretive policy analyst is to map the "architecture" of debate relative to the policy issue under investigation' (1999: 28). In this spirit, our approach here is to consider some of the key 'frames' through which the 2011 riots were understood in order to explore the beliefs, values or meanings that each implied or expressed. In using this terminology we are borrowing from Snow and Benford's (1988) work on participant mobilization in social movements. In that context they argued that there were three core framing tasks: first, a diagnostic element identifying something problematic; second, a prognostic proposal for a solution to the identified problem; and third, a rationale for engaging in such action. Our argument here though, is that the nature of the diagnosis is a crucial influence upon any prognostic proposals that subsequently emerge and may also serve as the core rationale for

such proposals. That is to say, we want to argue that the early and repeated deployment of particular portrayals of the riots and those involved served to help define how the disorder was discussed and understood. They also came to act as political lenses which served to influence both the scale and the nature of the public policy responses to the disorder, or to justify it, reflecting, the fact that 'beliefs and practices are constitutive of each other' (Bevir and Rhodes, 2007: 2). Although we take the view that public policy development is contingent – it is neither fixed nor determined by policy beliefs and pronouncements – we will nevertheless argue that initial policy narratives had an important influence on the development of later policy initiatives or, rather their absence. As Reich (1988: 5) observed, it is striking 'how much the initial definition of problems and choices influences the subsequent design and execution of public policies'. In Kingdon's (1995) terms, we take this initial stage of 'agenda setting' to involve a more or less conscious process of delimiting the range of available 'alternatives' for policy development.

The study and interpretation of policy development over time also requires, we would argue, the use of elements of policy narrative analysis. Policy narratives, in this regard, are 'those stories – scenarios and arguments – that are taken by one or more parties to the controversy as underwriting (that is, establishing or certifying) and stabilizing (that is, fixing or making steady) the assumptions for policymaking in the face of the issue's uncertainty, complexity or polarization' (Roe, 1994: 3). The first question in relation to the riots, therefore, is what were the key narratives? As is inevitably the case in connection with civil disorder, the interpretation and understanding of the events – certainly initially – is itself the subject of contention. For government, the police, and the communities involved there were concerted attempts to portray the riots, and themselves, in particular ways. It is to these differing narratives that we turn our attention next.

3. Political and Public Reaction to the Riots

In at least one important respect, the 'politics stream' at the time of the riots was unusual, for the UK General Election of 2010 had produced no clear result and a Coalition government had been returned for the first time in the post-war period. After a short honeymoon period, tensions between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat elements in the coalition began to emerge, and although the Liberal Democrats had a larger number of ministerial portfolios than their size might have warranted, all the major spending departments, including the Home Office and Ministry of Justice, were in the hands of Conservative ministers. Negotiations in the aftermath of the election resulted in a shared policy programme, but this required significant concessions on both sides, not least the abandonment of a Liberal Democrat manifesto pledge not to raise university tuition fees. The political and policy response to the riots of 2011, therefore, must be understood partly against this backdrop of coalition politics, and in the broader context of the very considerable political, economic and ideological uncertainty of the period (Taylor Gooby and Stoker, 2012). The emergent coalition programme was one of enormous public spending cuts and sizeable tax increases, together with plans for substantial public sector reform.

The riots themselves occurred in early August when parliament was not in session and the vast majority of senior political figures were on holiday. As a consequence, many politicians were slow out of the blocks when it came to comment on the riots. On the morning after the first night's rioting, there was a statement from Downing street condemning the disorder as 'utterly unacceptable', saying that there was a police investigation underway and 'we should let that process happen'.¹ The statement was made by a government spokesperson as there were no senior ministers present at the time. Indeed, the absence of the Prime Minister – he returned from his holiday in Italy on Monday 8th August on the third night of rioting – and other senior political figures in the early days of the disorder drew considerable criticism and, it is probably fair to speculate, played some part in their desire to be seen to be taking control when eventually they did become involved.

The riots were, by most standards, a huge political moment. They were, in Kingdon's (1995) terms, a major 'focusing event' – something that 'draws attention to some conditions more than to others' (1995: 197). From the Monday onward, for approximately a week, there was, as we have suggested, a concerted attempt to establish four major narratives about the riots. These were: first, that the behaviour of those involved was first and foremost to be understood as criminality, rather than as a product of poverty or social exclusion; second, such behaviour was indicative of a moral breakdown and one that had its roots in dysfunctional families and inadequate parenting; third, the criminal conduct of the rioters was linked to long-established urban gangs; and, finally, that inadequate policing – both in terms of the nature and the scale of the response – had contributed significantly to the rapid spread of the rioting.² We take each of these briefly in turn.

'Criminality Pure and Simple'

It is a standard political response to rioting to seek to have those involved identified as somehow 'other'. As those involved in disorder are often critical of government, or of government policy – irrespective of whether this is an explicit focus on their anger or protest – it is of little surprise that governments and political spokespeople often respond defensively. Riotous assemblies are presented as irrational mobs or simply as groups with nothing more than criminal intent, rather than as collections of people with some form of grievance (Skolnick, 1969). As President George H.W. Bush said of the riots that broke out after the acquittal of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King:

What we saw last night and the night before in Los Angeles is not about civil rights. It's not about the great cause of equality that all Americans must uphold. It's not a message of protest. It's been the brutality of the mob, pure and simple. And let me assure you: I will use whatever force is necessary to restore order. What is going on in L.A. must and will stop. [quoted in Camp (2016) at p. 98]

Such responses come in two primary forms. First, it is quite usual to find commentators arguing that the rioting was started, or at least exacerbated, by outside troublemakers of

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/blog/2011/aug/07/tottenham-riots-police-duggan-live> (accessed 5th March 2017)

² We are not of course suggesting that these were the only narratives.

one sort or another. In the 1967 Detroit riot for example, it was regularly argued that it was people new to the community, who had only recently arrived in Detroit who were primarily responsible for the violence. Research later showed this to be false (Fine, 2007). In a wide range of examples, from the 1980s urban riots in England (Scarman, 1981) to Ferguson, Missouri in 2014³, it has typically been suggested that people from outside those respective communities had deliberately travelled in order to instigate or take advantage of the violence. The 2011 England riots were no exception.⁴ In such accounts, the riots become the work of ‘professional criminals’, ‘opportunists’ and ‘copycats’, the implication being that there is no link with local neighbourhoods and, more especially, with local ‘respectable’ citizens. The motives are simply greed and gain and, consequently, any claim to any other rationale is undermined and any legitimacy removed. The second, and linked political reaction is, irrespective of where rioters may originate, simply to describe them as ‘criminals’, ‘thugs’ or ‘thieves’ and to see the rioting straightforwardly through the lens of criminal conduct. Again, the overall political intention is the same. It was this second strategy that was voiced most strongly during the 2011 riots and in their aftermath. In his first speech after the rioting had broken out, David Cameron made a statement in Downing Street in which he said:

Let me, first of all, completely condemn the scenes that we have seen on our television screens and people have witnessed in their communities. These are sickening scenes – scenes of people looting, vandalizing, thieving, robbing, scenes of people attacking police officers and even attacking fire crews as they’re trying to put out fires. *This is criminality, pure and simple, and it has to be confronted and defeated.*⁵

He described the government as being on the side of the ‘law-abiding’, and that people should expect to see ‘many more arrests in the days to come’ than the 450 that had already taken place. To those ‘responsible for this wrongdoing and criminality’ he said ‘you will feel the full force of the law and if you are old enough to commit these crimes you are old enough to face punishment’. Court procedures and processes would be speeded up he promised. Echoing this rhetoric, the Home Secretary said ‘The disorder this summer wasn’t about poverty or politics. It was about greed and criminality, fuelled by a culture of irresponsibility and entitlement.’⁶ Even the Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, recommended that those convicted of looting should be made to dress in orange

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/19/ferguson-outsiders-protesters-riots-peaceful-unrest> (accessed 11th March 2017)

⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8713298/London-riots-were-orchestrated-by-outsiders.html> (accessed 11th March 2017)

⁵ *Daily Telegraph* <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8691034/London-riots-Prime-Ministers-statement-in-full.html> emphasis added (accessed 5th March 2017). In fact, it seems the Prime Minister may have lifted this phrase straight from the *Daily Mail*. In its editorial published earlier that day, the *Mail* opined: “To blame the cuts is immoral and cynical. This is criminality – pure and simple – by yobs who have nothing but contempt for decent, law-abiding people.” <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2023967/London-riots-No-excuses-wanton-criminality.html#ixzz4avJEAetg> (accessed 10th March 2017)

⁶ <http://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2011/10/04/theresa-may-speech-in-full> (accessed 12th February 2018)

jump suits so as to be publicly visible when they were subsequently forced to clean up local communities as part of their punishment.⁷ As we say, such statements are, in many respects, fairly standard governmental responses to rioting, as well as being a well-established conservative narrative in relation to crime in general. The policy ‘problem’ in Kingdon’s terms relates to individual wickedness and the ‘solution’ a straightforward matter of more robust control via the criminal justice and penal systems. The key questions are how dominant does such a narrative become, and what other ‘frames’ for understanding the riots become available? More particularly, and we return to this below, to what extent was government willing to accept the possibility, as the Home Secretary said of the 1981 Brixton riot, that it may ‘have deep-rooted and fundamental causes’ and ones requiring ‘the most thorough examination’ (*Hansard*, HC debs, 13th April 1981, col. 21). Alternative framings of the policy ‘problems’ that underlay the riots came from a variety of sources, not least by the Guardian/LSE (2011) study that attempted to inject research-based evidence into the fevered political debates that followed the riots. This was a unique study in terms of its nature as a collaboration between a leading university and national newspaper, and the rapidity with which the study was designed and conducted with a key aim of influencing the policy debates in the immediate aftermath of the disorder. The first phase of the study, involving 270 interviews with people who participated in the riots, took place in the three months following the riots and was published in December 2011 (xxx, 2011). The findings provided very different (and more complex) framings of the policy problems behind the riots, emphasizing toxic police-community relations in deprived inner city areas, simmering resentment amongst young people about cuts to youth services and increases in student tuition fees, and the ongoing problems of poverty and social disadvantage being exacerbated by swingeing public expenditure cuts. Whilst these ‘alternative framings’ received considerable attention in the broadcast and print media, perhaps predictably, much of the coverage was hostile, with sections of the conservative press denouncing academic ‘apologists’ for the rioters (*Daily Mail* 9th December 2011)⁸ in terms that were quickly echoed by leading politicians, not least the Home Secretary (see below). Although the findings of the Guardian/LSE study were arguably to have some influence later on, it might be suggested that quick though its response was, in the main it was still insufficient to challenge the framings that had been established in the days immediately following the events.

Families and parenting

Just less than a week after the last of the rioting the Prime Minister gave his most wide-ranging speech to date. He said it was time for the ‘country to take stock’.⁹ He praised those involved in the ‘clean up’ operation, sympathized with those whose homes and businesses had been destroyed, and then turned his attention to why the riots had occurred. He

⁷ ‘Say sorry to your victims and clean-up in an orange jump suit’: Clegg promises payback for rioters, *Daily Mail*, 16th August 2011 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2026553/Nick-Clegg-promises-pay-UK-rioters-Say-sorry-victims-clean-up.html> (accessed 1st February 2018)

⁸ www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2072228/Apologists-mob.html

⁹ PM’s speech on the fightback after the riots, 15th August 2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots> (accessed 10th March 2017)

reiterated his sense that much of it was 'just pure criminality', but also acknowledged that, in Tottenham at least, 'some of the anger was directed at the police'. As the processes of inquiry began to get underway he said it was clear that these riots were not about race or poverty or government cuts but, rather, were simply 'people showing indifference to right and wrong; people with a twisted moral code; people with a complete absence of self-restraint'. In fact, his diagnosis was that this was a behavioural and moral problem, allowing him to link the riots to his 'Broken Britain' agenda (Hayton, 2012).

In the Prime Minister's view, if there was to be 'any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start'. Whilst some of this work would have to focus on parenting generally, he said that urgent action was needed to deal with 'troubled' or 'problem' families: 'the ones that everyone in their neighbourhood knows and often avoids'. He said that action had been in train prior to the riots but had been held back by bureaucracy. Now that the riots had occurred it was time to 'clear away the red tape and bureaucratic wrangling, and put rocket boosters under this programme ... with a clear ambition that within the lifetime of this Parliament we will turn around the lives of the 120,000 most troubled families in the country'. Much of the remainder of the PM's speech in the week after the riots offered little new and in the main simply offered up a number of existing policy proposals or programmes as potential solutions to the problems highlighted by the riots. Free schools and academies were praised as the best means of improving education in poor areas; executive mayors, training for community organisers and changes to planning rules were highlighted as the most effective means of inculcating respect for local communities; and, welfare reforms were promoted as encouraging greater responsibility and building 'an ownership in which everyone feels they have a stake'.¹⁰

'A gang culture'

The riots caught a lot of politicians by surprise. The shooting on August 6th had not resulted in any immediate disorder, and it was only two days later, after problems arose in connection with the protest outside Tottenham police station, that violence broke out. Parliament was eventually recalled for an emergency debate and in the House, the Prime Minister made a wide-ranging speech in which he repeated his 'criminality pure and simple' formula and went on to intimate that any suggested link between the Duggan shooting and the looting in Tottenham and especially places outside Tottenham was 'preposterous' (*Hansard*, HC debs, 11 August 2011, col. 1051). He was critical of the police – a matter we will come to shortly – and then turned his attention to problems such as new social media and, crucially, gangs. 'At the heart of all the violence sits the issue of street gangs', he said, 'territorial, hierarchical and incredibly violent, they are mostly composed of young boys, mainly from dysfunctional homes' (*Hansard*, HC debs, 11 August 2011, col. 1054). Announcing a 'war on gangs', he said that he had asked the Home Secretary, together with other members of the cabinet, to work on a cross-government programme of action to deal with gang culture, and to report within two months. This met with support from the Leader of the Opposition who agreed that a sustained effort to tackle the urban gang problem was

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots>

required. The same day, in her speech in response to the riots, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, further reinforced the message saying:

But nobody doubts that the violence we have seen over the last five days is the symptom of something very deeply wrong with our society ... Why does a violent gang culture exist in so many of our towns and cities? (*Hansard*, HC debs, 11 August 2011, col. 1131)

In this way, then, one element in the 'problem stream' was identified and given a degree of cross-party backing. Almost immediately one 'solution' to the problem began to be touted as the press began to report that someone likely to make a significant contribution to the PM's gang's inquiry was US 'supercop', Bill Bratton. The media-savvy Bratton subsequently appeared in the conservative press in the UK offering his thoughts on gang crime and other subjects. Whilst the identification of the problem of gangs seemingly had considerable political buy-in at this stage, there was less consensus around the promotion of Bratton. Indeed, his potential involvement was given particularly short shrift by the police. Sir Hugh Orde, then President of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), questioned the relevance of looking to America for solutions and said that he had advised the Home Secretary that looking at Europe might be more appropriate but, even then, she would probably find that the 'British model was probably the top'.¹¹ Whether it was to involve Bratton or not, it seemed clear that gangs were likely to remain on the post-riots policy agenda.

'More police and more robust policing'

It is fair to say that many senior police officers were unhappy at the amount of publicity being given to Bill Bratton's potential role as a gang adviser to government. They were also decidedly unimpressed with leaked suggestions that Bratton might be in contention for the vacant Commissionership of the Metropolitan Police. Both the Commissioner, Paul Stephenson and Assistant Commissioner, John Yates, had resigned in July in connection with the phone-hacking scandal, leading to the temporary appointment of Tim Godwin as Acting Commissioner, the man in charge at the time of the riots. Indeed, a series of events in the two years prior to the riots including the death of Ian Tomlinson during protests at the G20 in 2009, the police reaction to the student demonstrations in 2010, as well as the phone-hacking scandal, had all contributed to considerable criticism of the police (Greer and McLaughlin, 2012). In a shift from the stance of its predecessors, the incoming Coalition government, or at least its Conservative Party element, took a particularly critical view of the police (Reiner, 2016). The leaking of the PM's apparent admiration for Bratton was a further indicator of this new governmental scepticism.

The political reaction to the policing of the riots was also highly critical. On 9th August, on what would prove to be the last day of significant rioting, breaking with the standard straightforwardly supportive stance generally adopted by politicians toward the police under such circumstances (xxx, 2015), the Prime Minister made a public statement which, though

¹¹ Quoted in <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-14519187> (accessed 4 Mar. 17)

it began with praise for the bravery of police officers, quickly shifted. What was clear, he said, was that “we need even more robust police action... The Metropolitan Police Commissioner has said that, compared with the 6,000 police on the streets last night in London, there will be some 16,000 officers tonight. All leave within the Metropolitan Police has been cancelled. There will be aid coming from police forces up and down the country and we will do everything necessary to strengthen and assist those police forces that are meeting this disorder.”¹² The Prime Minister’s statement was widely interpreted as suggesting that he was less than content with police action to that point, and as implying that it was only through his intervention – through this role as chair of the COBRA emergency committee – that decisions had been taken to institute a significant shift in police numbers and tactics. In a speech to the House of Commons two days later, the Prime Minister reiterated elements of his earlier statement, saying: ‘... what became increasingly clear earlier this week was that there were simply far too few police deployed on to our streets, and the tactics that they were using were not working... To respond to this situation, we are acting decisively to restore order on our streets... Following the meetings of Cobra that I chaired on Tuesday and Wednesday, and again this morning, we have taken decisive action to help ensure more robust and more effective policing.” Despite acknowledging the role of the Acting Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in this reorientation of tactics, newspaper reports clearly indicated that the police service continued to feel they were being publicly criticised.¹³

Once again it was Sir Hugh Orde who was most prominent in defending the police service. In an interview on television he countered the suggestion that political leaders had been forced on their return from holiday to assume a leadership role in shaping the police response to the riots. He described their return as ‘an irrelevance in terms of the tactics that were by then developing’, and argued that the ‘more robust policing tactics you saw were not a function of political interference; they were a function of the numbers being available to allow the chief constables to change their tactics.’¹⁴ The Acting Commissioner, Tim Godwin, also entered the fray, and picking up on the absence of some politicians in the early days of the rioting, he said, "I think after any event like this, people will always make comments who weren't there." He then went to stress that all the major decisions had been taken by police commanders not politicians and, furthermore, that they were:

... some of the best commanders that we have seen in the world... that showed great restraint as well as great courage ... As a result of that, we were able to nip this in the bud after a few days. I think the issue around the numbers, the issue around

¹² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8691034/London-riots-Prime-Ministers-statement-in-full.html> (accessed 16/10/13)

¹³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8697334/UK-riots-Sir-Hugh-Orde-says-politicians-were-irrelevance-in-quelling-violence.html> (accessed 7 September 2017)

¹⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8697334/UK-riots-Sir-Hugh-Orde-says-politicians-were-irrelevance-in-quelling-violence.html> (accessed 4 March 2017)

the tactics - they are all police decisions and they are all made by my police commanders and myself.¹⁵

In response to Orde's, the Communities Secretary said, "I never had any doubt who was in charge of that meeting and that was the Prime Minister."¹⁶ No doubt aware that speaking out was unlikely to help his application for the Commissionership, Orde nevertheless continued his high profile defence of the service, writing in *The Times* that it had been 'disappointing to see a mounting attack on British policing'.¹⁷ Attacks on Orde in the conservative press mounted, with some reports suggesting that it was his opposition to the government's desire to reform policing that lay behind much of the criticism. One source suggested that Orde was 'the chief spokesman for the way things have been, and the government wants to shake things up' (quoted in Greer and McLaughlin, 2012). By this stage, the reaction to August's events had cemented the idea that the extent of the rioting was in part a consequence of the deployment of too few officers and the adoption of tactics that were insufficiently robust. More generally, the picture presented was of a somewhat ineffective police service, greatly in need of reform.

4. The Policy Response

In the initial parliamentary debate convened to discuss the riots, the Leader of the Opposition called on the Prime Minister to institute a full independent commission of inquiry. Cameron refused, saying that the current parliamentary scrutiny together with inquiries being undertaken by the police should be sufficient. When pressed later in the debate by former Home Office minister Alun Michael his response was more forceful, and in his refusal to appoint a Scarman-style inquiry, the Prime Minister returned to the 'criminality' narrative that had been so prominent in government speeches thus far, saying: 'This was not political protest, or a riot about protest or politics—it was common or garden thieving, robbing and looting, *and we do not need an inquiry to tell us that*.'¹⁸ In the event, and some weeks later, an inquiry was established, albeit one announced with relatively little fanfare and with little status or obvious powers. The inquiry, the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel (RCVP), was one of the few, obvious consequences of coalition government, a very reluctant Conservative Prime Minister eventually having been persuaded by a combination of his Liberal Democrat Deputy and the Labour leader of the Opposition.

The RCVP published an interim report in November 2011 (RCVP, 2011) and its final report in March 2012 (RCVP, 2012). Neither garnered much publicity and the governmental reaction was predictably muted. Indeed, it was not until July 2012 that a written ministerial statement offered any response from government. Even then the bulk of the statement was taken up with observations about riots damages and financial compensation for those

¹⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8697334/UK-riots-Sir-Hugh-Orde-says-politicians-were-irrelevance-in-quelling-violence.html> (accessed 4 March 2017)

¹⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8697334/UK-riots-Sir-Hugh-Orde-says-politicians-were-irrelevance-in-quelling-violence.html> (accessed 4 March 2017)

¹⁷ *The Times*, 18th August 2011

¹⁸ Hansard, 11th August 2011, at col. 1075

affected by the riots and with police reform. Only late in the statement, under the heading 'social policy review', was the core of the RCVP's report addressed. There, all it had to say was that it was retaining some Sure Start Children's Centres, was continuing with the Troubled Families and Tackling Gang Crime and Youth Violence initiatives together with a programme to overhaul vocational education. The remainder of the statement focused on toughening criminal justice and penal policies. Once again reiterating the government's primary post-riots narrative the written statement concluded, 'But there is one clear overriding message: the rioters were criminals. Such opportunistic criminality was not and will not be tolerated.' (Written ministerial statement, Friday 13 July 2012, *Hansard*, cols 74-78WS)

The government's formal response to the RVCP didn't come for another year (DCLG, 2013) and when eventually published it failed to address the vast majority of recommendations made by the panel. Of the 63 recommendations, at least 39 were not mentioned in the government reply. Concerned about the 'sense of hopelessness' articulated by many young people, the RVCP had made eight recommendations relating to improving 'personal resilience'. Only one, focusing on the need for local authorities to review provision, was included in the government response to the inquiry. Linked with the sense of limited life chances that so many of the young people expressed to the Panel, the final report contained sixteen recommendations relating to what it referred to as 'hopes and dreams'. These covered such varied matters as the publication of data on literacy levels and exclusions, including specific data on pupils with special educational needs, the involvement of business in an ambassadorial role in improving school to work opportunities, and the introduction of a 'youth job promise' for any young person unemployed for a year or more. Although the government's formal response talked in general terms about a number of programmes it had in place to support young people and tackle youth unemployment, there was no direct response to any of the RVCP's recommendations on this subject. Indeed, local Tottenham MP, David Lammy, said:

The government made a very clear commitment to the riot communities that they would do everything they could to prevent the riots ever taking place again. Eighteen months later on, and one year after the publication of the government's own riots report, the impetus for reform has completely evaporated... We now head into the summer months with none of the fundamentals changed since the riots of August 2011. (quoted in Dodd, 2013)

What the slowness of the government's response to the RCVP's reports made illustrated was that there was neither any desire nor any likelihood of any concerted public policy response to the riots. The diagnosis was that the disorder was an aberration, and something that should be understood first and foremost as little more than wanton criminality. That this remained the dominant explanatory narrative enabled government to avoid any requirement to respond via broader prognostic policy development. What then of the three problem frames that emerged around the period of the riots? To what extent did the issues of policing reform, 'troubled families' and the challenge of urban gangs lead to policy development?

Police Reform

The Conservative Party's 2010 election manifesto promised a variety of reforms to policing. These included reducing 'red tape', publishing localised police recorded crime data, and replacing 'the existing, invisible and unaccountable police authorities and [making] the police accountable to a directly-elected individual who will set policing priorities for local communities' (Conservative Party, 2010). All these initiatives were subsequently pursued in government, with the headline reform – the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners – being set in train long before the 2011 riots (xxx, 2012). Nevertheless, the handling of the riots did lead to considerable further scrutiny of policing, and of public order policing more particularly. Individual forces, and the Metropolitan Police in particular, conducted inquiries. Outside inquiries were also conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee. The Metropolitan Police's initial response to the disorder, published within two months, identified a number of areas in which reform was required, not least in relation to critical incident management, mobilization and mutual aid and tactics. In relation to the latter it acknowledged the criticism from some quarters of relative police inaction during the disorder, but defended both the number of arrests made and the degree of intervention. It acknowledged, however, that there was a need to 'explore alternative tactics to deal with disorder on such a widespread and fast moving scale' (Metropolitan Police, 2011). In its final report (Metropolitan Police, 2012) it noted that 'go forward tactics' – in which officers would advance on foot or in vehicles to disperse crowds - had been re-introduced and that the force was 'looking at options to enhance its ability to make multiple arrests without removing officers from the streets for long periods' (2012: 9).

The Home Affairs Committee inquiry, conducted in the immediate aftermath of the riots, covered similar territory. It found little evidence to suggest that police powers needed to be expanded, but it did take the view that an earlier and more substantial increase in police numbers might have meant 'that some of the disturbances could have been avoided' (2011: 19). As to equipment, they took the view that 'in the situation then prevailing, it would have been inappropriate as well as dangerous, to have employed water cannon and baton rounds' (2011: 35). By far the most critical analysis, however, came from HMIC. Following the riots, the Home Secretary wrote to the chief inspector of constabulary noting that it was vital to ensure 'the public order policing response is as effective as it can be'. She went on to request that further work be conducted:

to support clearer guidance to forces on the size of deployments, the need for mutual aid, pre-emptive action, public order tactics, the number of officers (including commanders) trained in public order policing and an appropriate arrests policy.¹⁹

¹⁹ <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/our-work/public-order-policing-review/> (accessed 12 March 2017)

The review, she anticipated, might herald ‘potentially a new era of public order policing’ (quoted in Home Affairs Committee (2011)). In its report, HMIC (2011b) proposed a new national framework for public order policing and, more critically, suggested that some of the more forceful policing tactics that might reasonably have been used during the disorder, had been unavailable. To the surprise of some, the report drew attention to the fact that no force in England and Wales had water cannon, and that there were a number of forces that had not trained officers in the use of baton rounds. It suggested that there needed to be a full public debate about the use of such tactics and concluded that the ‘approach to restoring order needs to change to enable a speedier self-assured response where the threat to the public demands it.’²⁰ In taking such a step it relied in part on an opinion poll it had commissioned which suggested that almost two-thirds of the public felt there had been too few officers at the riot scenes initially and that almost half felt that too little force had been used to deal with the events (HMIC, 2011a). Just two years earlier HMIC had published a report on public order policing that was very different in tone. Entitled *Adapting to Protest* (HMIC, 2009), it placed emphasis on the minimum use of force, the importance of strategic communication with those involved in protests, and clear lines of accountability and systems of governance for public order policing. There was much in both the political reaction to the riots, and indeed the main policy responses, that seemed to sit somewhat uncomfortably with the strategic position that HMIC had taken in 2009. Indeed, the political diagnosis appeared set to drive public order policing generally in a more robust, interventionist direction.

Where the bulk of the post-riot observations made about public order policing had tended to chime with much of the political criticism made at the time of the disorder, there was one reform proposal that, despite its clear links with problems identified by a number of riots-related inquiries (RCVP, 2011; Guardian/LSE, 2011) was largely unexpected. In a speech at the LSE in December 2011 the Home Secretary offered a series of fairly standard observations about the riots. She denied that the riots were about protest: ‘The riots were not about the future, about tomorrow. They were about today. They were about now. They were about instant gratification’.²¹ In response to research that suggested that many rioters had highly antagonistic relationships with the police and were angered by the way in which the police used stop and search powers (Guardian/LSE, 2011), the Home Secretary defended their use but said that she ‘strongly believe[d] that stop and search should be used proportionately, without prejudice, and with the support of local communities ... and I have asked the Association of Chief Police Officers to look at best practice on stop and search’.²² The Association published a press release the following day. A series of reviews by HMIC (2013, 2015) subsequently found wide variation in forces’ understandings of how the powers should be used, and evidence of many cases in which there was insufficient justification for the lawful use of stop and search. In the interim, the Metropolitan Police

²⁰ <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/news/releases/0262011-august-disorders/> (accessed 13th March 2017)

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/14/theresa-may-stop-search-review> (accessed 13th March 2017)

²² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/14/theresa-may-stop-search-review> (accessed 4 March 2017)

announced a series of changes intended to ensure that such powers were used in a more 'intelligence-led' way and, more particularly, the Commissioner was reported as anticipating a cut by about half in the use of s.60 searches (House of Commons, 2014). More generally, all forces subsequently signed up to the 'Best Use of Stop and Search' scheme launched by the College of Policing and HMIC in 2014. In 2015 HMIC found only 11 forces to be fully complying with the scheme, a further 19 forces to be failing to comply with one or two features of the scheme, and 13 forces failing on three or more of the scheme's five key criteria. These latter forces were subsequently suspended from the scheme by the Home Secretary.

Thus, what was arguably the most far-reaching reform within policing that was directly linked to the riots was not one that was highlighted in any of the political speeches at the time, or obviously anticipated in any other way. Indeed, the origins of the then Home Secretary's concerns in this area remain somewhat obscure, for her stance towards the research that most obviously linked the riots with the issue of stop and search was otherwise almost entirely hostile.²³ Beyond the stop and search reforms the government's critical post-riots policing narrative, highlighting what were alleged to be police failings, led to a period of extended analysis and self-reflection within the police service, and to a series of reviews of public order tactics and what appears to have been the acceptance that a robust response – certainly in terms of numbers and quite possibly in terms of tactics – would be both necessary and justified were similar disorder to break out again.

Troubled Families

The Prime Minister had argued that families and parenting were where the government 'needed to start' in its response to the riots. In a speech a week after the riots he acknowledged that the government wished to put 'rocket boosters' under a programme of work that would focus on so-called 'troubled families'. Its antecedents lay in a voluntary programme established in 2010, using volunteers to 'adopt' 'never worked' families to help them to find work. The 'Troubled Families Initiative', a formalized, expanded and reworked version of this earlier enterprise, was formally announced in December 2011, four months after the riots. In October Louise Casey had been announced as the head of the newly established Troubled Families Unit in the Department of Communities and Local Government, and in a speech to announce these developments the Secretary of State, Sir Eric Pickles, said that the August riots had offered 'a sudden, unwelcome insight into our problem families'. In the formal launch of the £450 million cross-departmental initiative in December, the Prime Minister returned to the theme:

And this summer we saw, beyond doubt, that something has gone profoundly wrong. The riots were a wake-up call - not a freak incident but a boiling over of

²³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2075540/Theresa-May-lessons-SHE-learnt-weeks-LSE-report-summer-riots.html> (accessed 13th March 2017)

problems that had been simmering for years ... As I said after the riots, I have a duty to speak clearly, frankly and truthfully about the problems in our society.²⁴

Though not entirely 'new', the Troubled Families initiative nevertheless arguably represented the most significant and sizeable policy announcement made by government with any explicit link to the riots. Even at this very early stage, however, it was far from entirely clear what the links were between the riots and the programme. Indeed, quite quickly it would become rare for the riots to be mentioned when the Troubled Families Programme was being discussed. One of the last occasions was in the government's response to report of the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel. In its official response the government reiterated the importance of the programme, noted that 'good progress' had already been made in delivering it, with £448m already allocated in funding. That local authorities were already committed to start working with nearly 42,000 families, over one third of the anticipated total, was 'evidence that the programme is on track'. Indeed, later that month a huge expansion of the Troubled Families Initiative was announced by government. In that year's spending round a further £900m was allocated to enable the initiative to be expanded to reach an additional 400,000 families over the next five years. The fact that this equated to over six percent of all families in England meant, as one commentator (Crossley, 2015) put it:

... the substantial discretion offered to local authorities in interpreting and applying the criteria, means that almost any family who comes into contact with, or is referred to, a non-universal service could fall into the category of 'troubled'.

Local authorities began to sign up for the new extended programme in 2014 and it got underway fully in 2015, operating with much more inclusionary criteria than had originally been in operation when first launched. In addition, there were also considerable changes to the key success criteria - that is what was meant by the phrase for families to be 'turned around'. By 2015 government figures were suggesting that close to 120,000 families had been turned around, with the vast majority of local authorities reporting success rates of well over 90% and in some cases 100%. In the main, the vast majority of successes concerned some improvement in relation to crime/antisocial behaviour or education, rather than to the aim of continuous employment (DCLG, 2015). It was a further year before the initial reports of the independent evaluation that had been commissioned were published, and only then after the BBC had claimed that they were being suppressed.²⁵ The report found a 'lack of evidence of any systematic or significant impact ... on the primary outcome measures for the programme' (Day et al, 2016: 81).

In its report on the delay to the publication of the Troubled Families evaluation, the BBC described the programme as 'the government's flagship policy response to the riots'.²⁶ In fact, this description is rather hard to sustain for although the formal initiative was launched in the aftermath of the riots, and was clearly linked by Ministers to the disorder, it was

²⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/troubled-families-speech> (accessed 10th March 2017)

²⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37010486> (accessed 11th March 2017)

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37010486> (accessed 25th March 2017)

based on policy formulations that had been in development long before the riots occurred. That the linking of the initiative to the riots was at least partly opportunistic was later indicated by the quiet dropping of all reference to the disorder. Within a year government had ceased suggesting there was any link between the programme and the riots. There is not a single reference to the riots in the final evaluation documents, not even in the sections dealing with the history of the initiative. In fact, even at the launch of the programme in 2011 the link with the riots appeared somewhat circumstantial. In its initial form there was no explicit connection made between the public policy issues identified as a consequence of the riots and the definition of 'troubled families' that underpinned the initiative. Any links that may have existed became all the more tenuous as the programme target was expanded from 120,000 to 400,000 families. Indeed, by the time of the initial expansion of the initiative, and long before the publication of any evaluative material, any mention of the riots had long since disappeared.

The programme's roots lay in other developments and, in the terms utilised in Kingdon's (1995) MSA model, the riots represented the opening of a policy window as a consequence of developments in the 'problem stream'. The riots were a convenient opportunity to justify and sell the initiative, whilst simultaneously enabling government to appear to be responding directly to the disorder. The identification of a range of problems – defined in particular ways in the aftermath of the riots by those seeking to set a particular agenda – then enabled specific solutions to be attached to them. In this case, it was the identification of a series of problem behaviours and moral failures on the part of a section of the youthful population, both linked to the government's concern with 'broken Britain', that offered the opportunity to establish and promote the Troubled Families initiative. Once established and funded all reference to the riots was quietly and quickly dropped.

The gang problem

Of all the things focused upon by senior political figures during and in the immediate aftermath of the riots, the one on which they appeared most obviously to agree was gangs. Despite the regular and robust political suggestions that gangs had played a significant role in the riots, the statistics published in the months afterward began to cast serious doubt on such claims. Government data found 13% of riot arrestees to be 'affiliated' to a gang and the Home Office statistical overview reported that most police forces 'perceived that where gang members were involved, they generally did not play a pivotal role' (Home Office, 2011a). Nevertheless, having indicated early on that this was to be a priority, the government seemed to be committed to moving policy forward in this field. They held an expert seminar in October 2011 attended by Bill Bratton and others from the US, Jamaica, Germany and Spain amongst other places and in November it published its new *Ending Gang and Youth Violence* strategy. In the foreword, the Home Secretary noted that: 'One thing that the riots in August did do was to bring home to the entire country just how serious a problem gang and youth violence has now become' (Home Office, 2011b).

The problem of 'gang' violence was one that had been lurking around the edges of governmental agendas for some time. The definition of 'gang' utilised in the strategy was the one that had been used by the right-leaning think tank, the Centre for Social Justice

(CSJ), in its report on the subject a couple of years earlier (CSJ, 2009). Indeed, the strategy included a foreword by the former leader of the Conservative Party and Chairman of the CSJ, Iain Duncan Smith, as well as by the Home Secretary. The post-riots strategy included commitments to establish an Ending Gang and Youth Violence Team that would work with a virtual network of over 100 expert advisers to provide practical advice and support to local areas with a gang or serious youth violence problem. It said that it would extend police and local authority powers to take out gang injunctions to cover teenagers aged 14 to 17 (introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2009, gang injunctions are taken out against individuals involved in gang-related violence and can place a range of prohibitions and requirements on their behaviour and activities) and it promised £10m Home Office funding for up to 30 areas with the biggest serious youth violence and gang problems to improve the ways mainstream services worked with young people most at risk of becoming involved with serious violence. Government activity in this area was supplemented by work by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). In its report on tackling gangs one year after the riots (CSJ, 2012) it commended the government's strategy, but argued for greater attention to be paid to early intervention and to work to improve relations between young people and the police. Despite the government's commitments to investment and reform, the CSJ concluded that 'nearly a year on ... there is a danger that the enthusiasm for change developed after the riots is being allowed to go cold'. Annual in-house reviews of the government's strategy claimed a number of successes for the investments that were made in local areas, but this fell well short of what the Home Affairs Select Committee felt might be considered an effective evaluation (HASC, 2015).

Once again, this was an area of policy development that, in some respects, only had the most marginal of links to the riots. There were few people connected with the riots – beyond senior government spokespeople – who made much of the links between gangs, or in the case of the local Tottenham MP David Lammy, gang *culture*, and the riots. Both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary made much of the role of gangs and it was the Prime Minister who set the Home Office review in train. From this point on, however, beyond the most fleeting of references to the riots, there was no attempt to link gang policy to the specific circumstances of, or problems raised by, the riots.

5. Concluding thoughts

Our aim in this paper has been to apply elements of Kingdon's (1995) 'multiple streams approach' to the analysis of the governmental response to the 2011 riots in the belief that it is a profitable tool for helping make sense of the shape of policy development at the time and since. Indeed, an analysis of the riots in this regard leads to a number of observations. First, and most straightforwardly, the riots were an 'open policy window'. That is to say, they offered an 'opportunity for advocates to push their pet solutions or to push attention to their special problems' (Kingdon, 1995: 203). Events in either the problem or political streams can lead to the opening of windows, and the riots most obviously fall into the former. Although there was no obvious change in the political stream at the time, the riots occurred at what was still a relatively early and still unpredictable time for the coalition government. As such, arguably, it offered an opportunity for 'entrepreneurs' within government to use their capital to push favoured policy solutions. In practice, however, it is

not possible to identify more than a handful of policy initiatives that could be claimed to have any link with the riots, and in the bulk of those cases the links are tenuous at best.

This leads to a second observation: much of the political activity and many of the political statements issued during and in the immediate aftermath of the riots might reasonably be portrayed as attempts to close the policy window. They were, in effect, attempts to shut down discussion both of existing government policy and to deny the need for further contemplation or for further action outside a narrowly circumscribed agenda. Not least, the major statements issued by senior government figures all sought to undercut any possibility that government policy itself might be called into question. A commitment to 'austerity' meant that there was little fiscal room for manoeuvre, and a coalition government struggling to combine two election manifestos also had little room for new policy initiatives, even if it had had any desire. To the extent that significant policy developments can be identified in the aftermath of earlier major episodes of disorder, these have in large part been a consequence of major public or judicial inquiries. In this regard, the Scarman Inquiry (Scarman, 1981) carried out in the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton riot is the exemplar. In 2011 the Prime Minister was clear in his view that an inquiry was unnecessary, and the subsequent Riots, Communities and Victims Inquiry, agreed to only reluctantly, had few of the trappings of a major official inquiry and reported long after any policy window – such as it was – had been firmly shut.

Those policy developments that did emerge, and that were argued to have some link with the riots, are neat illustrations of Kingdon's suggestion that 'advocacy of solutions often precedes the highlighting of problems to which they become attached' (1995: 205-6). In the case of gangs and 'troubled families', many of the ideas or proposals had been floating around in the 'policy primeval soup' for some time. In these cases, rather than being simply a case of solutions becoming tied to problems rather than *vice versa*, senior figures made careful use of the riots to draw attention to already-identified problems, using the disorder as a rationale for an increased or renewed focus on the problem. Thus, as the Home Secretary said of the riots, one thing they did was 'bring home to the entire country just how serious a problem gang and youth violence has now become'. In a similar vein, the Communities Minister said that the August riots had offered 'a sudden, unwelcome insight into our problem families'. The announcement of the 'troubled families initiative' was an illustration that this 'sudden, unwelcome insight' was at least as much a sudden, welcome policy window. The primary governmental response was to use the riots to rationalise and promote its existing preferences. Indeed, even in the case of the Home Secretary's announcement of the reform of police stop and search practices it is perfectly possible that it was largely an opportunistic policy development, using a 'window' offered by a high profile public speech, to put a personal priority onto the political agenda.

Kingdon's MSA model, in our view, offers an enormously useful heuristic for understanding and analysing policy-making and, more particularly, the ways in which agendas are established and courses of action chosen. In this particular case, rather than using his model as the basis for understanding policy development, we have used it as a means for analysing the framing of problems, and have argued that such frames then become, or are used, as

constraints on and rationalisations of policy development. Policy-making, as is well-established in the literature, generally falls far short of some rational choice-influenced model (Hood, 1983), and yet it is far from irrational. It is structured and has patterns and regularities. We are used to thinking of violent public disorder as something posing significant challenges to the police and other public services. We are less used to thinking of them as the types of sudden rupture that open 'problem windows', offering the potential for insight into governmental agenda-setting and alternative selection.

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