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Who Is to Blame? Official Discourse and Ethnic Diversity Attitudes During the 2011 Riots in England

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In 2011, the killing of a Black man by a police officer triggered violent riots across England. In a context where ethnic minorities are rarely openly blamed, we examined the lens through which the events were interpreted in the official discourses of the British Prime Minister. A thematic content analysis (Study 1) revealed that, without explicitly blaming ethnic minorities, the discourses built on antagonistic normative references opposing a virtuous majority to threatening minorities. Then, based on online survey data of self-declared Londoners ($N = 223$) during the riots, we analyzed (Study 2) how agreement with the discourses related to individuals' ethnocentrism and their understanding of the causes underlying the events. Results of regression analyses showed how agreement with the discourses related to blaming ethnic diversity for the riots and to higher ethnocentrism, especially among individuals least likely to discriminate against minorities (i.e., low in social dominance orientation). Agreement with the discourses was also linked to reduced blame of authorities. To conclude, we discuss the mobilization potential of political discourses on ingroup virtue and outgroup threat.

KEY WORDS: ethnic diversity, prejudice, riots, social dominance orientation, elite discourse

On August 4, 2011, a young Black man, Mark Duggan, was killed by a police officer in Tottenham, London. What started as a peaceful protest by his family and friends was followed by England's largest outbreak of social unrest in decades: Riots spread in several districts of London and other English cities, resulting in five people killed, numerous people injured, and many losing their businesses or property. Over 3,000 individuals were arrested, and nearly 1,500 sentenced (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Across the country, there was a need for tangible explanations for these unexpected and violent events. Political elites, media, and police spokespersons all pointed to potential causes, such as gangs, criminality, lax policing, parenting, or education (Reicher & Stott, 2011). Ethnic diversity, in turn,

was largely omitted by officials as a cause of the riots, especially as riots evolved in locations with relatively low proportions of ethnic minorities. Yet, despite the absence of direct appeals to ethnic minorities in the public sphere, the riots were associated with a marked increase in prejudice towards ethnic minorities, as shown by a study based on representative surveys carried out just weeks before and after the riots (de Rooij, Goodwin, & Pickup, 2015).

The present research offers an explanation as to how official discourses contributed to such an increase in ethnic prejudice among the general public by combining two studies with qualitative and quantitative methods. We suggest that in a societal climate in which ethnic minorities are not officially blamed for society's problems, ethnic minorities may nevertheless become targets by being indirectly linked to societal issues through antagonistic references opposing a virtuous majority to threatening minorities. Since these references do not conflict with antidiscrimination norms, they may hold great mobilization potential, especially among individuals generally least likely to blame ethnic minorities.

To test these assumptions, in Study 1 we analyzed the content of Prime Minister David Cameron's official discourses on the riots. Drawing on models of antagonistic identity construction (Reicher, Haslam, & Rath, 2008; Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005), we investigated whether the official discourses portrayed the events through a normative lens, opposing a virtuous majority to threatening minorities while avoiding placing explicit blame on ethnic minorities. In Study 2, an online survey was conducted during the riots among self-declared Londoners. We examined how individuals' agreement with these discourses related to their understanding of the causes underlying the riots and their ethnocentrism more generally, as a function of preferences for hierarchy and social inequality (tapped with Social Dominance Orientation, SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Individuals high in SDO are perpetually worried about outgroup threat emanating from low-status minorities. In contrast, for those low in SDO, generally less concerned about outgroup threat, an antagonistic normative worldview put forward to explain unexpected events like riots should be particularly disconcerting. We thus predict that the association between agreement with the discourses and the understanding of the causes related to the riots should be strongest among individuals low in SDO. As a consequence, such discourses should not only drive blame towards ethnic minorities and steer it away from authorities but broaden the basis of supporters in the wider population.

The Role of Normative Antagonistic Category Construction in Elite Discourse

Due to their privileged access to media and public discourse, political elites play an important role in shaping individuals' understanding of societal phenomena (van Dijk, 2000). Discourses by members of government (e.g., the Prime Minister) are especially likely to be influential, because they are widely distributed and accepted as the official account on a pressing matter. Such discourses produce and reproduce particular societal arrangements (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011; Howarth, 2011). To this end, blaming minorities for society's problems has long been a topic of elite discourse conducive to mobilizing voters and legitimizing hierarchical societal relations (Reicher, 2012). To understand how blame and exclusion of minorities can become acceptable within the larger population, it is central to examine how elite discourses construct majority and minority identities, for example by portraying them through an antagonistic belief system or worldview. In their work on the development of collective hate, Reicher and colleagues (2005, 2008) offer a theoretical approach that emphasizes the role of antagonistic reference categories utilized by political elites to reinforce power relations. Two identity processes are central for this development.

The first process is related to the differentiation between the ingroup and outgroups. *Ingroup identification* refers to a sense of belonging to the same ingroup with others that share certain values and beliefs (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Especially ingroup views perceived as consensual have a strong impact on outgroup attitudes (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). Ingroup identification is furthermore crucial for efficient leadership (Haslam, Reicher, &

Platow, 2011). More precisely, it is when political leaders portray themselves as prototypical members of the ingroup that they are legitimized to speak on its behalf (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). *Outgroup exclusion*, in turn, consists of placing outgroup members as clearly outside the ingroup boundaries. To legitimize such exclusion, differences between ingroup and outgroup members are accentuated (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). Although exclusion implies differentiating between ingroup and outgroup members, it does not necessarily entail negative attitudes towards the outgroup.

The second process is related to the *evaluation* of the ingroup and the outgroup. On the one hand, the ingroup is frequently depicted as *virtuous*. Morality has been shown to be central for favorable evaluation of and pride in the ingroup (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Promoting virtue as moral superiority of the ingroup also facilitates exclusion of and domination over outgroups perceived as morally inferior (Brewer, 1999). The outgroup, then, is portrayed as *threatening* by competing for resources, challenging social order, or undermining the values and norms of the ingroup (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). Threats related to social order and the violation of central ingroup values and norms are particularly fruitful for mobilizing majority support in favor of discriminatory measures against outgroups (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009). It was precisely these types of threats (i.e., collective safety and culture threats) that were found to predict the rise in ethnic prejudice among the British national majority shortly after the 2011 riots (de Rooij et al., 2015). Blaming outgroups for deteriorating societal circumstances, in turn, has also been related to increased support for political leaders as well as silencing political challengers (Penic, Corkalo Biruski, & Elcheroth, 2013; Reicher, 2012).¹

While they can be distinguished conceptually, in practice, these processes of category differentiation and evaluation are often present together in discourses (Reicher et al., 2005, 2008; see also van Dijk, 2000). Accordingly, it is the depiction of an outgroup as distinct from the ingroup *and* as threatening the virtues of the ingroup that provides the basis for outgroup prejudice and discrimination. The virtues of the ingroup and the threatening features and actions of the outgroup may be directly or indirectly opposed, for instance, by the use of antagonistic references such as the “losers” versus the “winners,” the “vicious” versus the “virtuous” (Staerklé, Clémence, & Spini, 2011). When events are framed through such an antagonistic normative lens, domination over outgroups becomes justified and even morally imperative to protect the ingroup’s interests.

Interplay of Political Discourses and Individuals’ Ideological Orientations

Political discourses generally define antagonistic categories that justify the policies suggested by the agenda of those giving the speeches (Reicher, 2012). However, especially when multiple or diverse audiences are addressed, blatant outgroup blame may not be the most effective strategy to employ (Klein & Licata, 2003). Instead, to increase support, the discourse content should resonate with society’s normative climate, take into account the wide spectrum of ideological stances of ingroup members, and potentially facilitate outgroup collaboration. Studies conducted in the British context have indeed shown that most individuals put efforts into avoiding to appear prejudiced by explicitly addressing ethnicity in relation to societal issues (Billig, 1996; Condor, 2000; van Dijk,

¹ In Reicher et al. (2008), a final consequence of these two pairs—ingroup versus outgroup differentiation and evaluation—is described, labelled *celebration*. When outgroups are understood as threatening the superior values of the ingroup, discriminatory acts, even the eradication of the outgroup, become a matter of self-defence. While certainly relevant in the context of extreme acts of inhumanity for which the model was originally developed, we do not consider it in the present studies.

2000). More acceptable references to designate the ingroup-outgroup differentiation, such as “the poor,” “the unemployed,” and “the violent” have replaced direct ethnic appeals in political discourses (van Dijk, 1992; Mendelberg, 2001). Yet when these references are associated with ethnicized imagery and an overrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the media and the judicial process, they are just as likely—or even more likely—to trigger ethnic prejudice compared to direct ethnic appeals (Howarth, 2002; Jiwani & Richardson, 2011).

The success of political discourses fuelling threats to the norms and values of the majority and to collective safety may be less a matter of activating individuals who prefer societal hierarchies or advocate status quo, the two dimensions underlying political conservatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), since these individuals are already prone to blaming ethnic minorities for society’s problems (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; for an overview, see Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). Instead, as argued by Sniderman and colleagues (2004), the mobilizing of exclusionary attitudes through political discourses and media is precisely due to reaching some of those who are *not* already predisposed to negative diversity attitudes. In support of this assumption, when confronted with societal or existential threats, individuals endorsing liberal (but not conservative) ideologies were found to express more ingroup favoritism and exclusionary outgroup stances (Nail, McGregor, Drinkwater, Steele, & Thompson, 2009) as well as increased support for conservative political leaders (Landau et al., 2004). This effect has also been confirmed for the dimension of political conservatism related to the maintenance of the status quo: When experiencing terrorism threat, individuals low (but not high) on authoritarian ideologies tended to react with harsher attitudes towards civil liberties (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011). Similarly, we expect that these dynamics also apply to the dimension of political conservatism pertaining to the enforcement of hierarchy. During violent events such as riots, especially when outgroups are presented as immoral and threatening the values and norms of the ingroup, those endorsing egalitarian values and willing to accept such depictions should also react with harsher outgroup attitudes.

To test these assumptions, in Study 1, we examined whether antagonistic normative categories rather than direct ethnic appeals were used in the official discourses by the Prime Minister following the riots in 2011. In Study 2, we tested whether agreement with these discourses was related to individuals’ understanding of the events and their ethnic diversity attitudes as a function of their preference for social hierarchy (i.e., SDO).

Study 1

We conducted a thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of all four of the official statements Prime Minister Cameron gave on the 2011 England riots. This material consists of full coverage of official discourses on the events. Largely diffused, these statements addressed the whole country and beyond, thereby including multiple audiences (e.g., the general majority, rioting and non-rioting minorities, international audiences). Similarly, the discourses pursued multiple aims, such as informing the general public on given facts related to the events, offering interpretations of the causes underlying them, avoiding new riots, or communicating planned interventions, just to name a few. We studied how the processes of ingroup and outgroup differentiation (ingroup identification and outgroup exclusion) and evaluation (ingroup virtue and outgroup threat) were used in the official discourses of the events to depict an antagonistic normative worldview. Such depictions are likely to find more widespread acceptance in the general public than direct ethnic appeals and increase negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities and positive attitudes towards authorities. Thus, since we did not expect the discourses to blame ethnic minorities directly, we paid particular attention to the way ethnic minorities were indirectly referred to.

Method

Full transcripts of the four statements were obtained from UK government websites.² The first statement was made on August 9, 2011 (574 words), followed by a second statement on August 10, 2011 (877 words, followed by questions and answers, only answers taken into account, 906 words), both of which were delivered outside No. 10 Downing Street. On August 11, 2011, Cameron addressed an emergency sitting at the House of Commons (2,668 words) that was followed by parliamentary debate (excluded from data corpus). On August 15, 2011, he delivered a final speech on the riots in a youth center in Oxfordshire (4,214 words).

In a first step, the first two authors divided the corpus into clauses containing at least a verb and a subject (1,040 clauses). In a second step, the clauses were assigned either to one of the four a priori coding categories linking the two processes of ingroup-outgroup differentiation and evaluation—*ingroup identification*, *outgroup exclusion*, *ingroup virtue*, and *outgroup threat*—or coded as nonapplicable. After preliminary coding trials, application of the coding categories was extensively discussed, and precise inclusion criteria were defined.³ As excellent interrater reliability was reached (Cohen's kappa = .86 obtained on 20% of the corpus; Cohen, 1968), coding was carried out separately by the authors. Clauses that were coded differently or that were equivocal were discussed until consensus was reached.

Results

In total, 432 clauses (41.5%) fell into one of the four a priori coding categories. Both, ingroup as well as outgroup references were frequent. One-hundred forty-two clauses (13.6%) were coded as *ingroup identification*, 32 (3.1%) as *outgroup exclusion*, 196 (18.8%) as *outgroup threat*, and 62 (6.0%) as *ingroup virtue*. These findings indicate that with respect to references to the ingroup, differentiation processes expressed through identification were more present than evaluative processes related to ingroup virtue. In contrast, references to the outgroup appeared to be mostly a product of evaluative processes (outgroup threat) compared to differentiating processes (outgroup exclusion). The 608 clauses (58.5%) coded nonapplicable included clauses that covered introductory phrases, coordination between authorities, measures of reconstruction, as well as references to former government criticism. Because processes of differentiation and evaluation were often jointly used to build a larger argument, we present them one after the other, first for the ingroup, followed by the outgroup.

Ingroup identification. A common identity of majority members was evoked in all four statements by referring to “our society” or “our country.” The use of these possessive pronouns in the first-person plural unified the audience under a national category (Billig, 1995). Political leaders across the ideological spectrum refer to the nation as relevant ingroup identity, as it mobilizes the greatest constituency (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Moreover, by applying “we” and “our” pronouns interchangeably for the majority and authorities such as “that’s what we need to deal with” or by explicitly mentioning that government is “on the side” of the majority, ingroup identification was extended to authorities. In addition, the use of expressions such as “the whole country feels that way,” “the whole house will join me,” or “stand together” serves to build perceptions of consensus among the majority and political elites.

² See www.parliament.uk and www.number10.gov.uk.

³ Examples of inclusion criteria included clauses referring to boundary making, belonging, and consensus (ingroup identification); clauses referring to sociodemographic characteristics of outgroups or neighborhoods and explicit partition of society (outgroup exclusion); actions and characteristics of ingroup and authorities related to virtues and morality (e.g., law-abidance, solidarity, determination) or emotions (e.g., pride, admiration, ingroup virtue); and finally actions and characteristics of rioters and neighborhoods as immoral, dangerous, and flawed (outgroup threat).

Ingroup virtue. On several occasions, references to the majority reflected evaluative processes of ascribing to the majority virtuous characteristics or virtuous acts shown during the riots. Virtuous characteristics of Britain, or a vision of Britain under the current government, were referred to as “a great country of good people” and as a majority of “law-abiding” people “who play by the rules.” In view of the critical voices raised concerning the treatment of rioters, notably also by the international audience, Britain was further presented as a country “proud to stand up for human rights” and human rights being “part of the British tradition.” Majority members directly confronted with the riots were described as morally virtuous by referring to characteristics such as bravery, determination, and commitment. All four statements referred to the voluntary efforts made by community members to defend their businesses and clean up their communities. Majority members were described as helpful and showing solidarity, as “coming together in community operations,” “linking arms together to stand and defend their homes.”

Likewise, authorities were presented as revealing their most virtuous characteristics during the riots. For example, “the incredible bravery” of police officers that “deserve our gratitude and our admiration” was underscored. The government, in turn, was presented as courageous champions willing to “speak the truth” and “not shy away” from standing up for the majority’s interests, and to further pursue egalitarian aims, such as “encouraging social action” and “giving people a real chance to improve the community.” This virtuous description of authorities is likely to counteract the criticisms the police and government faced by media and the public during the riots, notably related to too lax policing on the one hand, or government cuts and discrimination on the other hand.

Outgroup exclusion. To accentuate exclusion of the rioting minorities and their neighborhoods, they were repeatedly declared as clearly distinct from and atypical for the majority of the [British] society. Some characterizations of the rioting minority and their neighborhoods were merely descriptive referring to sociodemographic characteristics such as age or gender (e.g., “young boys”) or naming the affected neighborhoods and cities (i.e., Tottenham, Croydon, Salford). Others, in turn, were normative, referring to “children without fathers” or from “most deprived neighborhoods.” This was accentuated by the use of the terminology “broken society” (i.e., eight times), such as in the following sentences: “the perpetrators of the violence we have seen on our streets are not in any way representative of our country, or of our young people. We need to show them that we will address our broken society.” In a figurative sense, a “broken society” clearly creates a division between parts of society which are distinct from, or not part of, the general society. By referring to welfare abuse, disrupted families, bad parenting, and inefficient schools, the issues declared responsible for the riots then reached beyond the relatively narrow context of the events and were used to frame a moral division of society as a topic of larger societal concern.

Importantly, ethnic minorities were not directly blamed for the riots. Given the overrepresentation of rioters from a Black or mixed ethnic background in the media and in the criminal justice system (de Rooij et al., 2015; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Reicher & Stott, 2011; see also Howarth, 2002), resulting associations between the affected neighborhoods and a large ethnic minority proportion may have led to a need to distance the official discourses from taking a racist stand. Indeed, a direct reference to ethnic minorities was made to explicitly deny their role in triggering the riots by stating that “perpetrators and the victims were White, Black, and Asian.” The explicit denial of blaming ethnic diversity for society’s problems is a popular public-impression management strategy by political elites—even of the most radical right—to distance themselves from blatant forms of discrimination and to find widespread support in the population (van Dijk, 1992).

Outgroup threat. Evaluative judgments of the rioters and the affected neighborhoods were frequently used to qualify the members of the outgroups by making references to “criminals,” “welfare abusing,” “lazy,” and “no self-discipline.” Immorality seemed a central theme to emphasize the threat stemming from minorities, with “immoral,” lack of “moral,” or “morality” mentioned 17 times. The rioters were described as “criminals,” people with a “twisted moral code,” or people with “complete

absence of self-restraint.” Furthermore, gangs and gang culture, described as an apparent feature of the neighborhoods where the riots took place, received much attention as being “territorial, hierarchical, and incredibly violent.”

Moreover, the outgroup was regularly defined as threatening by referring to acts of violence such as “aggressive, violent looting” and “vandalising and thieving.” Subsuming these acts as a *disease* was repeatedly evoked by using expressions such as “sickening scenes,” “sick,” “disease,” or “infected.” By associating the acts with disease, their destructive and contagious character was accentuated. Identifying the rioting minority as the source of this disease further allowed delegitimizing their potential claims (e.g., Bar-Tal et al., 2009).

Discussion

Study 1 showed that the rhetoric of the official discourses delivered by Prime Minister David Cameron on the 2011 England riots constructed an antagonistic normative worldview, separating a virtuous ingroup from threatening outgroups. Our analyses revealed that a large part of the discourses was dedicated to building ingroup identity. The majority and authorities were thereby regularly presented as consensual on the topic and as morally superior by displaying virtuous characteristics during the riots and their aftermath. In contrast, another substantial part of the discourses focused on describing the outgroups—the rioters and some of the neighborhoods in which the disturbances occurred—as threatening, challenging social order, and undermining pivotal moral values. Associating them and their acts with disease, immorality, and a broken society served as themes to delegitimize these groups and their views on the causes of the riots—social and economic injustices related to government policies, police conduct, and income differences (Guardian and London School of Economics, 2011). In contrast, the display of virtues strengthened the position of authorities by ascribing them the role of preventing “disease,” restoring morality, and mending the broken society more generally.

These findings show the central role morality plays for positive ingroup evaluations (Leach et al., 2007). Given that the discourses addressed multiple audiences and pursued multiple aims, the effects of a discourse focusing on morality may have reached beyond the British society. The majority as well as nonrioting minorities were assured of their moral impeccability, thereby ensuring positive ingroup evaluation and authority support. Moreover, a discourse on morality may have served to restore the country’s image before an international audience. For example, morality may have served to counter accusations of human rights violations by publishing photographs of the rioters or to present the country as constructive and progressive amidst the preparations for the Olympic Games of 2012.

Regarding the avoidance of direct ethnic appeals in the British public sphere, our analyses showed that the topic of ethnic diversity was largely absent from the official discourses. In fact, in the few instances it was explicitly addressed, its role in the riots was actively denied. However, we suspect that given the context in which the riots occurred, for individuals accepting the antagonistic normative depiction, ethnic minorities were a likely target to blame. Indeed, when devalued categories are repeatedly associated with ethnically mixed neighborhoods, they become the dominant social representations of ethnic minorities and are easily activated to mobilize authority support (Mendelberg, 2001). Much like the riots that affected England in the Eighties, in 2011, the media reinforced these stereotypes by using imagery that displayed rioters with ethnic minority background (Jiwani & Richardson, 2011). Imagery is often perceived as more accurate than spoken discourses, especially when confirming widely shared beliefs and stereotypes (Mendelberg, 2001).

The official discourses delivered by Cameron on the riots were widely diffused by mass media. Very likely, the antagonistic depiction opposing a virtuous majority to threatening minorities shaped the population’s understanding of the events. Yet, the discourses clearly reached beyond the events. By anchoring the causes in societal concerns such as welfare, families, schools, and parenting, they

offered a normative worldview not only based on assumptions of how the world is, but how it *should* be. When such a worldview is accepted as social reality, it is likely to shape individuals' societal attitudes, for example towards ethnic diversity more generally.

Study 2

Study 2 tested the hypotheses that agreement with official discourses that put forward an antagonistic normative worldview is positively linked to majority members' blaming of ethnic diversity for the riots (H1a) and general ethnocentrism (H1b), while being negatively related to blaming of authorities for the riots (H1c). In addition, to examine the role of ideological orientations in these associations, we studied individuals' tendency to be more or less favorable to societal hierarchy and concerned about social inequality (i.e., Social Dominance Orientation, SDO; Pratto et al., 1994). SDO has repeatedly been linked to increased ethnocentrism and prejudice towards minorities (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2010), and it is particularly relevant in a rioting context, as rioters are often associated to low-status groups, challenging the existing societal hierarchy. Individuals high in SDO have been shown to support authorities more, such as in the case of the police officers involved in the beating of Rodney King that preceded the L.A. riots in 1992 (Sidanius & Liu, 1992). We thus expect that individuals high in SDO, compared to those low in SDO, express increased blame directed towards ethnic diversity (H2a) and ethnocentrism (H2b) while blaming authorities less for riots (H2c). We also expect the link between agreement with the official discourses and blaming ethnic diversity (H3a), ethnocentrism (H3b), and blaming authorities (H3c) to differ according to individuals' levels of SDO. Because they are perpetually concerned with low-status outgroups threatening status hierarchies, individuals high in SDO should adopt negative outgroup stances and authority support irrespective of their agreement with the discourses. For individuals low in SDO, in contrast, accepting an antagonistic normative lens opposing a virtuous ingroup with threatening outgroups should be more strongly related to their blaming of ethnic diversity for the riots and ethnocentrism, as well as to lower levels of blaming authorities.

Method

Sample. Data were collected within 24 hours after Prime Minister David Cameron delivered his second statement on the riots, on August 10, 2011. Self-declared Londoners were invited to participate in an online questionnaire through an advertisement that was randomly presented to individuals with matching profiles via a large social networking service. This method allowed an immediate data collection, while the riots were discussed by media and politicians (for another nonprobability sample in the midst of riots, see Sidanius & Liu, 1992). More generally, data collected through web-based questionnaires have been shown to be comparable to data collected through traditional methods (e.g., Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004).

Among the 1,622 individuals who clicked on the link connected to the advertisement, 720 started the questionnaire and 245 completed it (34.0% from starting, 15.1% from viewing). After excluding individuals with missing data on the variables of interest, the final sample was composed of 223 individuals (85 men) ranging in age from 14 to 80 ($M = 43.45$, $SD = 14.66$). All respondents declared themselves Londoners through their social network profile; yet 117 (52.4%) were actually living in London during the time of data collection, with 31 participants living in districts affected by the riots. One hundred and sixty-eight respondents (75.3%) reported holding UK citizenship, while 26 (11.7%) did not indicate their citizenship. Finally, regarding political affiliation, 18.8% ($N = 42$) reported being affiliated with the Conservative Party, 13.5% ($N = 30$) with the Labour Party, 6.7% ($N = 15$)

with the Liberal Democrat Party, 37.7% ($N = 84$) with no party, 17.5% ($N = 39$) with another party, and 5.8% ($N = 13$) did not report their political affiliation.⁴

Measures

Predictors. Agreement with the official discourses. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with seven extracts from the official statement delivered by David Cameron on August 10, 2011 presented to them in the original order, from 1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree*. The extracts chosen covered both, ingroup versus outgroup differentiation and evaluation as coded in Study 1 and were thus considered representative of the content of the official discourses described in Study 1 (see the appendix for exact wording of all extracts). A composite score was calculated ($\alpha = .84$).

Social Dominance Orientation. SDO was measured using a shortened scale of four items that have proved to adequately tap the concept in previous research (e.g., Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994; Pratto et al., 1994). The scale reached from 1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree* such as “Inferior groups should stay in their place” (four items, $\alpha = .71$). The predictors (agreement with the official discourses and SDO) were weakly correlated ($r = .14, p = .03$), indicating that testing for moderation effects did not cause estimation problems.

Perceived risks. Due to their violent and unexpected nature, riots are undoubtedly threatening events. Perceived risks of being personally affected by riots were thus controlled for. The measure consisted of six items referring to the risks the riots constituted to the self, the family, one’s friends, coworkers, property, and community (from 1 = *not dangerous at all* to 6 = *extremely dangerous*; $\alpha = .93$).

Dependent variables. Participants were asked to rate to what extent certain groups or events were responsible for triggering the riots on a scale from 1 = *totally not responsible* to 6 = *totally responsible*. *Blaming ethnic diversity* was based on the item asking the extent to which ethnic minorities were responsible for the riots. Blaming the government and the police were used to compose the *blaming authorities* measure ($\rho = .68$).⁵

An *ethnocentrism* score was composed of two items (adapted from Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993), stating that “British” people behave better than ethnic minority groups and that ethnic minorities living in the United Kingdom have to adjust to the British way of life. Both items ranged from 1 = *totally disagree* to 6 = *totally agree* ($\rho = .63$).

Blaming ethnic diversity ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.87$) and ethnocentrism ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.42$) were significantly related with each other ($r = .57, p < .001$). The scores were kept separate so that riot-related attributions could be distinguished from a more general indicator of ethnocentrism. Blaming authorities ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.44$) was unrelated to either blaming ethnic diversity ($r = .07, p = .32$) or ethnocentrism ($r = -.07, p = .28$).

Results

We tested our predictions with hierarchical regressions performed in Stata 10. All continuous predictors were centered at the grand mean (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). Table 1 displays unstandardized regression coefficients, standard errors, and explained variances for blaming ethnic

⁴ Apart from fewer participants reporting Labour Party affiliation and more participants reporting affiliation with *other* (i.e., not listed) parties, participants’ party affiliation roughly corresponded to the party affiliation in the general population (according to the European Social Survey, 2010: 18.7% Conservative Party, 19.3% Labour Party, and 6.2% the Liberal Democrats, 4.8% other parties).

⁵ The reliability of these two items was measured with the Spearman-Brown formula. This formula adjusts for the rather restrictive assumptions underlying the Cronbach’s coefficient alpha and thereby reduces the risk of underestimating true reliability of a two-item scale (Eisinga, Te Grotenhuis, & Pelzer, 2012).

Table 1. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Blaming Ethnic Diversity, Ethnocentrism, and Blaming Authorities (unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in brackets)

	Blaming Ethnic Diversity		Ethnocentrism		Blaming Authorities	
	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)	Model 2 B (SE)	Model 3 B (SE)
Intercept	2.97 (0.55)***	2.94 (0.55)***	3.09 (0.38)***	3.06 (0.38)***	2.50 (0.41)***	2.48 (0.41)***
Agreement with Official Discourses	0.33 (0.12)**	0.28 (0.12)*	0.27 (0.08)***	0.24 (0.08)**	-0.53 (0.09)***	-0.56 (0.09)***
SDO	0.38 (0.12)**	0.41 (0.12)**	0.63 (0.08)***	0.65 (0.08)***	0.15 (0.09)	0.17 (0.09)†
SDO*Agreement with Official Discourses		-0.24 (0.11)*		-0.16 (0.08)*		-0.14 (0.09)†
R ²	21.0%	22.7%	35.1%	36.3%	25.3%	26.2%
ΔR ²	6.9%***	1.7%*	20.8%***	1.2%*	13.4%***	1.0%†

Note. Controlled for age, gender, residence, perceived risks, and political party affiliation. † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

diversity, ethnocentrism, and blaming authorities, controlled for age, gender, residency in London, perceived risks, and political party affiliation.⁶

Because predictions are identical for blaming ethnic diversity and ethnocentrism, results are presented in parallel. Model 1 (not presented in Table 1) including control variables explained 14.2% of variance for blaming ethnic diversity and 14.3% for ethnocentrism (blaming ethnic diversity: $F(8, 214) = 4.41, p < .001$; ethnocentrism: $F(8, 214) = 4.47, p < .001$). Including agreement with the discourses and SDO in Model 2 confirmed Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b; agreement with the official discourses had a significant positive relationship with blaming ethnic diversity and ethnocentrism. Further, confirming Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 2b, SDO was significantly positively related to blaming ethnic diversity and to ethnocentrism.

To test our moderation hypotheses (H3a and H3b), we entered the Agreement with the official discourses \times SDO interaction term to Model 3. The interaction term yielded a significant effect both on blaming ethnic diversity and on ethnocentrism. Simple slope analyses of these interactions are displayed in Figure 1 (blaming ethnic diversity) and Figure 2 (ethnocentrism). Supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b, individuals low in SDO (i.e., 1 SD below the mean) blamed ethnic diversity more ($b = 0.53, SE = 0.15, p < .001$) and expressed increased ethnocentrism ($b = 0.40, SE = 0.10, p < .001$), when they strongly rather than weakly agreed with the official discourses. For individuals high in SDO (i.e., 1 SD above the mean), in turn, agreement with the discourses was not significantly related to blaming ethnic diversity ($b = 0.04, SE = 0.18, p = .83$) or ethnocentrism ($b = 0.08, SE = 0.12, p = .52$).⁷

For blaming authorities, control variables (Model 1, not presented in Table 1) explained 11.9% of variance, $F(8, 214) = 3.61, p = .001$. Lending credence to our hypothesis (H1c), Model 2 revealed that agreement with the official discourses was negatively associated with blaming authorities (i.e., the more strongly individuals agreed with the official discourses, the less they tended to blame authorities). Unexpectedly, SDO was not negatively related to blaming authorities (H2c). Moreover, Model 3 testing Hypothesis 3c revealed that the interaction effect between agreement with the official

⁶ Preliminary analyses revealed that living in districts affected by the riots and citizenship had no impact on the dependent variables. Due to the large number of missing data (14.8% and 11.7%, respectively), these variables were not included in the final models. Moreover, findings remained consistent when carried out on a sample excluding individuals from affected districts ($N = 31$), noncitizens ($N = 29$), or individuals residing outside London during the riots ($N = 106$).

⁷ SDO was skewed to the left ($Mdn = 1.75$), a commonly found distribution of the scale, therefore additional simple slope analyses were carried out using percentiles as cut-off points. Findings remained consistent when the first and the third quartile were used as cut-off points.

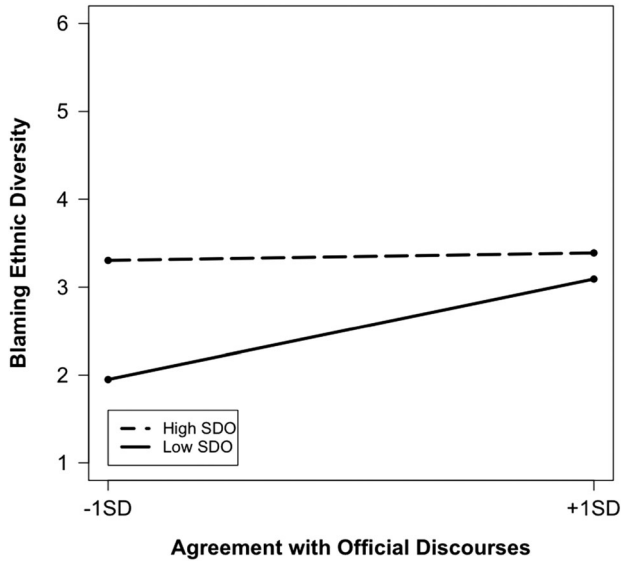


Figure 1. The link between agreement with the official discourses and blaming ethnic diversity as a function of SDO.

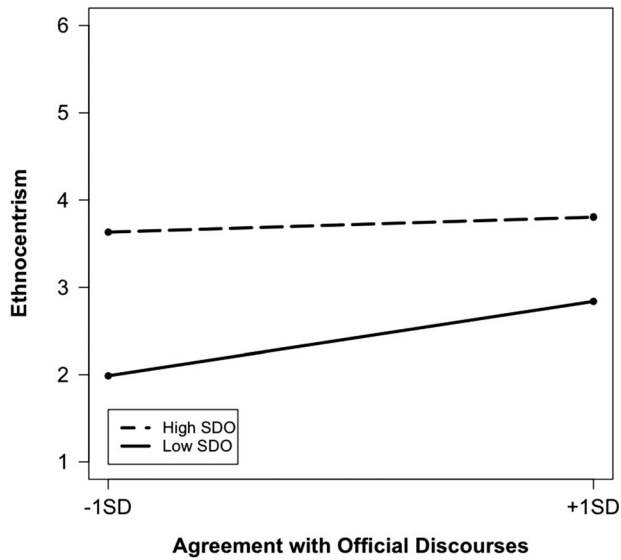


Figure 2. The link between agreement with the official discourses and ethnocentrism as a function of SDO.

discourses and SDO on blaming authorities was marginally significant ($p = .099$). The decomposition of this interaction should be interpreted cautiously: it suggests that contrary to expectations, the link between agreement with the official discourses and reduced blaming of authorities was more pronounced for individuals high in SDO ($b = -0.70, SE = .14, p < .001$) compared to those low in SDO ($b = -0.41, SE = .11, p < .001$).

Finally, older individuals blamed ethnic diversity more ($b = 0.02, SE = 0.01, p = .04$) and expressed greater ethnocentrism ($b = 0.01, SE = 0.01, p = .01$) than younger individuals, while age

had no impact on blaming authorities. Individuals residing in London during the riots expressed less blame towards ethnic diversity ($b = -0.64$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .01$) and tended to blame authorities less ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .10$). Compared to respondents affiliated with the Conservative Party (reference category), respondents affiliated with the Liberal Democrat party blamed ethnic diversity less ($b = -1.04$, $SE = 0.52$, $p = .05$), and respondents affiliated with the Labour Party tended to express less ethnocentrism ($b = -0.51$, $SE = 0.30$, $p = .09$). Respondents affiliated with the Labour Party ($b = 0.71$, $SE = 0.33$, $p = .03$), the Liberal Democrat Party ($b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.39$, $p = .09$), those reporting no party affiliation ($b = 0.74$, $SE = 0.26$, $p = .004$), or affiliation with other parties/not reported ($b = 0.99$, $SE = 0.29$, $p = .001$) blamed authorities more than individuals affiliated with the Conservative Party. Perceived risks associated with the riots did not significantly predict blaming ethnic diversity, ethnocentrism, or blaming authorities when SDO and agreement with the official discourses were included in the model. Gender had no significant impact on the dependent variables. Since the testing of interaction hypotheses using survey data calls for particular attention with respect to potential confounding effects, further analyses were performed including the interaction terms between the main predictors and all control variables. None of the added interaction terms reached significance, and the main result patterns remained unaltered.

Discussion

Study 2, conducted during the 2011 riots in England, showed that individuals' agreement with the official discourses was linked to blaming ethnic diversity for the riots and was further associated with higher ethnocentrism unrelated to the riots. Moreover, for low-SDO individuals, agreement with the discourses was more strongly linked to blaming ethnic diversity for the riots and to ethnocentrism than for high-SDO individuals.

These findings indicate that some individuals rejecting social hierarchies may under particular circumstances—when accepting a normative antagonistic worldview contrasting a virtuous majority to threatening minorities—adopt exclusionary attitudes comparable to those endorsing hierarchy-supporting ideologies (see Nail et al., 2009 for such effects on liberal individuals; see also Hetherington & Suhay, 2011). While it has also been argued that high-SDO individuals should express the most negative outgroup attitudes when exposed to threats to social hierarchy, our findings support the assumption that strong situational triggers eliciting powerful threats may lower the role played by personal ideologies and increase overall consensus (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Mischel, 1977). Rather than affecting everyone equally, however, the impact of situational triggers seems to depend heavily on how they are presented in political discourses, with discourses on conflicting identities representing effective mobilizing forces (Sniderman et al., 2004).

The finding that low-SDO individuals who agreed with the discourses adopted—on average—more negative ethnic diversity attitudes may also be due to them expressing a greater diversity of values and beliefs compared to high-SDO individuals. Indeed, support of egalitarian relations may reflect ideological preferences as diverse as liberal ideals of equal opportunities to Marxist stances. Considering this diversity, it is likely that some individuals (e.g., liberals) were more susceptible to the official discourses than others who may have outrightly rejected them. The SDO concept has been criticized for being too one-dimensional for tapping a broad spectrum of ideological preferences (e.g., Turner & Reynolds, 2003). In future research, it is thus necessary to take into account additional ideological features, such as both dimensions of political conservatism (i.e., preference for hierarchy and the status quo) that drive ethnocentric stances (Jost et al., 2003; see also Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). While political conservatism has been observed among individuals adhering to either or both of these two components, genuine political liberalism appears to be psychologically a more fragile matter as it can be challenged by threats to a safe, trusting, and cooperative worldview (Wilson & Sibley, 2013).

As expected, support for the official discourses was related to lower blaming of authorities for the riots. Contrary to our expectations however, we did not establish a negative link between SDO and blame directed at authorities, nor did we find the expected moderation pattern. This may be due to the controversy around the role of police in the media. On the one hand, after the killing of Mark Duggan, critical voices were raised against the police regarding their frequent stop and search tactics targeted at ethnic minorities (Reicher & Stott, 2011). On the other hand, they were reproached for their allegedly lenient reactions to the first outbreak of looting, which may have triggered blame in high-SDO individuals. It thus appears that our measure should have tapped into more nuanced aspects of authority blame.

Notwithstanding the gains in ecological validity through collecting survey data during the occurring events, this method has limitations that need to be addressed. Despite efforts made to motivate participants to complete the survey, the attrition rate was high. The relatively noncommittal sampling method used (i.e., randomly placed advertisement) may have attracted individuals to start the survey simply out of curiosity. As a consequence, attrition may have created bias, for instance, by retaining only individuals relatively ambiguous about their ideological positions and their stances towards the riots or individuals with a strong desire to express their opinions.

Moreover, correlational data do not allow for firm causal claims. A feedback loop from preestablished blame directed towards ethnic minorities to increased agreement with the official discourses cannot be fully excluded. There are at least three reasons why this is unlikely to be the driving mechanism underlying our findings, all of which are related to the tendency of individuals to turn to political leaders and to ingroup members to understand unexpected societal phenomena (Haslam et al., 2011; Howarth, 2011). First, empirical evidence supports a top-down influence of media coverage of political rhetoric on individuals' interpretation of and stances towards ethnic diversity (Hopkins, 2010; Kellstedt, 2003). Second, the impact of political leaders and the media occurs not only directly, but is reinforced by meta-perceptions, that is, the beliefs about other people's beliefs (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Gunther, 1998). Knowing that official discourses were widely received and accepted as the official account by ingroup members should thus have facilitated their impact on individuals' understanding of the events. Third, these meta-perceptions are likely to have been further reinforced by the discourses themselves that repeatedly asserted consensus among the public and political elites (Stangor et al., 2001). This line of reasoning is supported by the findings that an increase in collective culture and safety threats, rather than the riots as situational triggers directly, explained the rise of ethnic prejudice after the riots (de Rooij et al., 2015). Such threats may certainly arise when being personally affected by the riots, yet most individuals learned about them through the media rather than out of first-hand experience. In the latter case, the depiction of situational triggers (e.g., rise in immigration rates, terrorism) often results from political leaders' concern for mobilizing endorsement of exclusionary policies and their motivations to ensure political support (Sniderman et al., 2004; see also Hopkins, 2010).

While ongoing, disruptive events are generally dominated by a particular set of discourses and are thus not easily manipulated, further examinations should nevertheless use experimental designs to test our findings against alternative assumptions. This research would shed light on the causal implications of discourses focusing on ingroup virtue and outgroup threat. It would also allow examining how avoiding direct ethnic appeals mobilizes outgroup blame in those least likely to express it. Moreover, such a design could take into account alternative discourses likely to concur with the official account by the head of government.

Finally, the absence of direct ethnic appeals and the favoring of antagonistic normative references, such as pointing to deprived neighborhoods, disrupted families, undisciplined yet consumer-oriented young people, and gang members may have had direct consequences for nonethnic minority members of such devalued social categories. In the current public sphere, these categories tend to attract widely accepted expressions of denigration and ridicule. For instance, in recent television

programmes, the White working class is regularly portrayed as deserving their fate and poverty is construed to be a lifestyle choice (Jones, 2012). Future studies should assess more nuanced distinct and overlapping categories depicted by official discourses and link them with the public perception of societal uprisings.

General Discussion

In August 2011, England experienced a series of violent events that called for explanations. With two studies applying different methods, we first demonstrated that official discourses anchored the events in antagonistic reference categories opposing a virtuous majority to threatening minorities while avoiding directly blaming ethnic diversity. We then turned our attention to the general public and showed that agreement with the normative depiction of the official discourses was linked to increased blame directed at ethnic diversity and increased ethnocentrism, especially for individuals least expected to express such stances. Finally, agreement with the discourses was also linked to reduced blame directed at authorities.

In this article, we drew on both social identity theory (SIT) approaches and social dominance theory (SDT) to develop the rationale of our research. These theories have sometimes been pitted against each other. For example, the SDO concept has been criticized by SIT scholars for favoring individual differences over social group membership and social structure in the explanation of intergroup attitudes (e.g., Turner & Reynolds, 2003). However, we adopt a multilevel SDT conceptualization to understand how individuals make sense of societal events: They anchor their stances in their personal ideologies, here SDO, while being shaped by the groups they belong to as well as the structural and institutional settings in which they are embedded (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Indeed, political discourses during the riots define the setting in which individuals were embedded. The collective hate model based on SIT (Reicher et al., 2005, 2008) allowed analyzing the different rhetoric dimensions used to depict and legitimize dominant and subordinate groups in these discourses. SDT, in turn, was the backdrop for predicting an interplay between individuals' ideological orientations and adherence to the political discourse.

Overall our findings corroborate previous research on the importance of understanding antagonistic category construction in the mobilization of prejudice by political elites (e.g., Verkuyten, 2013). Once the majority is convinced of its moral superiority and minority members are denounced as undermining the majority's most central values, their claims are easily dismissed. Taking these findings one step further, we showed that the antagonistic categories used in the official discourses—when avoiding ethnic appeals—not only represented a kind of reasoning that is *acceptable* within the prevailing ideological climate, but *accepted* as legitimized outgroup discrimination by individuals rejecting societal hierarchies (i.e., low in SDO). Though the impact of hierarchy-legitimizing representations permeating entire social systems has been recognized (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), further investigating the specific conditions under which egalitarians discriminate is of critical importance for social psychological research. Politically speaking, fortifying support for outgroup blame among the already prejudiced amounts to little more than preaching to the choir. Instead, the most powerful political discourses produce systems of representations of a particular social order that resonate with the largest possible constituency (Howarth, 2011). The more widely such representations are shared, the more unlikely are dissent and noncompliance (Reicher, 2012). This said, our findings also suggest that the events were consensually interpreted only to the extent that individuals accepted the official discourses. Conveying a version that sustains the position of the powerful and undermines the voice of the powerless is thus first and foremost a political project that demands careful rhetoric maintenance and defence against alternative versions of social reality.

Within weeks after the riots, consensus on their causes was reached and translated into policies (Reicher & Stott, 2011). Rapid policy implementation and the institutionalization of practices are likely to have turned the official depiction of reality into actual reality. Akin to self-fulfilling prophecies, such practices (i.e., increased stop and search targeted at young ethnic minority members, government policy reinforcing social and economic injustices) then sustained and justified the stigmatizing representations that had created them (Howarth, 2002). Ironically, it was precisely these discriminatory practices that were among the core reproaches against authorities made by the rioters in the first place (Guardian and London School of Economics, 2011).

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Appendix

Agreement with Official Discourses, from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 6 (*totally agree*):

1. It's all too clear that we have a big problem with gangs in our country. For too long there has been a lack of focus and a complete lack of respect shown by these groups of thugs.
2. They are in no way representative of the vast majority of young people in our country.
3. But there are pockets of our society that are not just broken, but frankly sick.
4. When we see children as young as 12 and 13 looting and laughing, when we see the disgusting sight of an injured young man with people pretending to help him while they are robbing him, it is clear there are things that are badly wrong in our society.
5. The root cause of this mindless selfishness is a complete lack of responsibility in parts of our society.
6. People allowed to feel that the world owes them something, that their rights outweigh their responsibilities and that their actions do not have consequences. Well they do have consequences.
7. We need to have a clearer code of values and standards that we expect people to live by and stronger penalties if they cross the line.