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**[Tim Newburn](#)**

## Reflections on why riots don't happen

**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Newburn, Tim (2015) *Reflections on why riots don't happen*. [Theoretical Criminology](#).  
ISSN 1362-4806

DOI: [10.1177/1362480615598829](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480615598829)

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Available in LSE Research Online: August 2015

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## Reflections on Why Places Don't Riot

**Abstract:** In contrast to much of the literature in the field of public disorder, rather than focusing on the nature and aetiology of riots, in this paper I investigate why riots don't happen. During times of widespread disorder there are some locations that, whilst apparently sharing many of the features of the places where significant disorder is occurring, do not fall prey to rioting themselves. Why? Against the backdrop of the 2011 England riots – though the arguments developed here have international application - I use two case studies involving semi-structured interviews with key informants in two such locations to reflect on why riots don't happen. Initially drawing on Waddington's 'flashpoints' model, I argue that it was primarily matters at an interactional level that appear to have been crucial in the absence of riots in these particular cases. In order to facilitate a more detailed analysis at this level in particular, I propose some elaboration of the flashpoints approach, using Reicher's 'social identity' model, as the basis understanding the nature of police-crowd and police-community interaction.

**Keywords:** Riots, disorder, 'flashpoints', policing, community

### *Introduction: explaining the absence of riots*

There is now a very considerable international literature on major disorder, riots and crowd violence (for example, Fogelson, 1971; Waddington, 1992; Tilly, 2003). Scholars, from a range of perspectives, have sought to understand the aetiology of such events, how they unfold, and how best they might be policed and contained. There is also an emergent comparative literature that looks at the similarities and differences between outbreaks of major disorder in varying jurisdictions (della Porta, 1995; Body-Gendrot, 2013; Body-Gendrot and Savitch, 2012). Whilst such work, understandably, tends to focus on the aetiology of riots, as a number of commentators have observed (e.g. Ray, 2014) there is also potentially much to be gained from studying the absence of riot. It is the latter which is my focus here.

Now, as scholars of crime prevention efforts have frequently observed, studying the absence of phenomena is a particularly tricky thing to do (Ekblom and Pease, 1995). That said, a number of scholars have begun to examine the absence of riots. To date, it is possible to identify three broad approaches to such work – each of them largely structural and comparative. First, in jurisdictions with a history of rioting but which are experiencing or have experienced a significant period without such disorder, it is possible to

ask what underpins such periods of calm? In this connection Katz (2012) has explored in some detail the question of why, given the extent of civil unrest in the 1960s in the USA, the decades since have been largely undisturbed by urban rioting? What is it about contemporary American life and American urban order, he asks, that militates against such collective outbreaks? The answer is threefold and focuses on: the new ecology of urban power that emerged after the 1960s; the management of marginalization through the selective incorporation of African Americans via limited ladders of social mobility, as well as through consumption, repression and surveillance; and, America's comparative success in incorporating (through naturalization) and controlling (through unemployment and the threat or fact of deportation) immigrant groups.

In contrast to Katz's historically comparative approach, a second body of work exploits national comparison, taking jurisdictions with little or no experience of rioting in recent decades – certainly not on a large-scale - and comparing them with neighbouring jurisdictions where rioting is more common. An example of this, though not as yet extensively examined, is Lukas' (2009) work on Germany, a country where there has been much less experience of major disorder in recent decades than in, for example, France (though, see, Naegler, 2014). Lukas' answer in the case of Germany has some parallels with Katz's arguments about America. In particular, he points to a variety of initiatives – forms of localised, neighbourhood policing; crime prevention initiatives; and a range of 'mediating' programmes that have focused on reducing tensions between the police and minority communities, each argued to be important in understanding the relative urban peacefulness of Germany. More broadly, Lukas points to a number of political programmes initiated by the German Federal government, focusing in particular on the improvement of housing and living conditions, as well as the qualifications and skills, of those living in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods. The consequence, he argues, is that Germany has largely avoided the large-scale conflict that both England and France, for example, have experienced.

A third approach to this question exploits the opportunities for comparison afforded by the diffusion of riots within particular jurisdictions. As is well-documented, rioting often spreads from its original location (Myers, 2000), such as in the riots in England in 1981 and 1985, the 'race riots' in 1960s America, and the French riots of 2005. Under such conditions it is possible therefore to ask why some locations are affected by rioting while others remain (relatively) peaceful. One example, and the focus of attention from a number of scholars, is the unusual position of Marseille: the largest city in France untouched by the 2005 riots that affected over 270 locations. In her analysis, Mitchell (2011: 417) argues that Marseille enjoys a specific form of cosmopolitanism, 'one that is integrative of different forms of global ethnic or multicultural networks across scales'. By contrast with Paris, for example, she argues that Marseille is significantly less socially and ethnically polarized, and that the specific form of capitalism operating in Marseille is based on ethnic ties, trust and reciprocity, that require political support, and less aggressive policing, if they are to be

sustained. To this broadly positive picture, Schneider (2014: 222) adds the presence of the mafia, and a closely associated political machine which, she argues, ‘incorporates Muslim and black youths at the lower rungs’, and ‘simultaneously metes out punishment to those who strike out on their own’.

In summary, all three broad approaches focus on the structural, socio-economic and political circumstances and social relations which contribute to the likelihood of significant disorder or, in this regard, its relative absence. The approach I want to adopt here comes closest to the third model. With the diffusion of rioting in 2011 in England as its backdrop, it utilises case studies of two places where rioting might have been expected – as these were neighbourhoods that shared many of the structural, socio-political, economic and historical (Pryce, 1979; Joshua and Wallace, 1983) characteristics of places where rioting did occur. Given these shared structural features, the focus of this paper is, by design, in some respects different from the three approaches outlined above, focusing on the more immediate and contingent contextual factors than others’ work has done.

### *The Leeds and Bristol case studies*

The 2011 riots in England are perhaps the latest major example of the way in which rioting moves well beyond its original point of outbreak. The trouble, which initially occurred in Tottenham, north London, on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August, was followed in the next four days by rioting within at least 22 of London’s 32 boroughs, as well as in the provincial cities of Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Salford, Liverpool and, on a smaller scale, in a range of other places (Metropolitan Police, 2012; Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, 2012). No cities in Scotland or Wales rioted and, within England, far from all cities were affected. The largest cities that avoided significant rioting were Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol, Stoke-on-Trent, Coventry, Bradford and Newcastle. Here, I take two of these cities – Bristol and Leeds or, more particularly, St Paul’s in Bristol and Chapeltown in Leeds – and ask whether there are identifiable factors that might help explain why they remained (relatively) calm? Beyond the fact that they were two of the largest cities to experience no serious rioting, why were Bristol and Leeds selected? In short, they shared many of the characteristics of places that were affected by the disorder, including *inter alia* the existence of sizeable minority ethnic communities, significant pockets of poverty and social disadvantage, some history of poor police-community relations, as well as a history of significant civil disorder. Although the focus of this paper is England’s most recent outbreak of serious rioting, the question at its heart, and the approach adopted, is of potential relevance to the subject of collective urban violence everywhere and should contribute to the small but growing literature on the limits to rioting.

The foundation for the following analysis is primarily interview material drawn from fieldwork in the two cities, together with occasional consideration of broader material from other parts of the UK. The interviews were part of a larger study – called *Reading the Riots* – which examined the disorder in London

and elsewhere in England in the summer of 2011. *Reading the Riots* was a collaboration between a news organization (the *Guardian* newspaper) and a university (the London School of Economics). The research was done at great pace, and initial findings published in the newspaper only (all available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots>), and involved well over 500 interviews with rioters, police officers, lawyers and members of the communities affected by the riots. In studying the riots in London, Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere, the question was regularly raised ‘why these locations and not others?’ As a consequence two small case studies were undertaken. The fieldwork comprising 35 semi-structured interviews (18 in Leeds and 17 in Bristol), undertaken primarily with a combination of residents in the local communities concerned, ‘community leaders’, and respondents from the local police service and local council. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis – in essence a standard process of ‘coding’ or reading the text of each interview in order to identify recurrent themes, topics, or relationships, and marking these with common labels (Lapadat, 2010). The process was broadly inductive, with themes emerging from the data, though the analysis was naturally influenced by the thematic analysis undertaken at an earlier stage for the larger-scale first phase of the *Reading the Riots* study. Such a combination of inductive and deductive coding is broadly accepted as the basis for rigorous qualitative analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Nevertheless, this is an admittedly small, and quite selective sample, and no claims are made that what follows is either a complete or in any way definitive account of what occurred in either place. Rather, and using the case studies in combination rather than separately, the aim is to illuminate the potential for analysing the question of ‘why riots don’t happen’ in greater depth, and for establishing this as a legitimate, and potentially important question in the study of public order.

As Charles Tilly (2003) has noted, given that it involves normative or political judgement, ‘riot’ is an intrinsically problematic term. So problematic that Tilly leaves it out of his typology of interpersonal violence entirely. I use it here simply because the events that are the focus of attention in this paper – the very significant disorder in London and other English cities in August 2011 – have been widely categorised both by politicians and by academics as ‘riots’. Indeed, the participants in the events in London, Birmingham, Manchester and elsewhere that we interviewed also used this terminology. By contrast, in both Leeds and Bristol, interviewees were unanimously of the view that their cities had avoided ‘rioting’, even though both witnessed some disorder.

Now, one possible answer to the question of the absence of riots comes down to the lack of a ‘spark’. Most work on the aetiology of disorder points to a ‘spark’, a ‘flashpoint’ or something similar as the precipitating event that turns potential into actual disorder. Perhaps, then, the question at the heart of this paper could come down to the simple absence of such a precipitating event (though it should be noted that such ‘triggers’ were not necessarily in evidence in other places outside London). Nevertheless, the experience in

Chapelton in August 2011 suggests that it is not as simple as this. On the night of 8 August 2011, as the riots spread across England, a 34-year old man, Gavin Clarke, was shot and fatally wounded in a local park in Chapelton, Leeds. A council worker and well-known member of Chapelton's African-Caribbean community, Clarke was shot in the face and neck with pellets from a sawn-off shotgun. He died four days later. In this context, and as the Deputy Leader of the Council put it, "In fact it is telling that the riots elsewhere didn't have that spark... we had that spark, and it could have got even worse, but it didn't. That's the really telling difference as well... we contained it."<sup>i</sup>

The shooting had an immediate impact on the already tense relationships between elements of the African-Caribbean and Asian communities in Chapelton. Rumours began to swirl. BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) broadcasts – "shit's kicking off in Chapelton" – started circulating, as they had done where rioting did occur (Ball and Brown, 2011) and West Yorkshire Police, only too aware of the disorder breaking out elsewhere, stationed riot officers outside Asian supermarkets and local mosques (Clifton, 2012). Despite its significant history of disorder, and the rioting breaking out around the country, the tensions in Chapelton didn't lead to full-scale disorder. That said, it was far from entirely peaceful. There were two nights of lower-level trouble, the second culminating in an arson attack on the offices of Leeds Caribbean Carnival causing £10,000 worth of damage, as well as with some vandalism against local mosques. A total of 21 people were arrested - 56 were arrested in the trouble that broke out in neighbouring Huddersfield – resulting in two convictions: one for the robbery of a takeaway driver, and one for handling stolen goods.

Nothing as dramatic as a shooting occurred in St Paul's in Bristol, though there were good reasons to think that rioting was a possibility. Earlier in 2011 serious disorder had broken out in and around the Stokes Croft area of Bristol, on the borders of St Paul's, indeed a neighbourhood that has been described as 'really just a subsection of St Paul's' (Clement, 2012: 83). Controversial plans to open a new Tesco supermarket there had met with sustained and significant resistance. When the store opened in April 2011, the protests increased in intensity but initially remained relatively peaceful. At the end of the first week of protests significant disorder did break out. Estimates suggested that between 300-400 people were involved in rioting in the surrounding area, the supermarket was looted, resulting in the loss of stock worth £9,000 and damage estimated at £100,000. Fifteen people were arrested. Tensions rose again a week later when squatters were evicted from a building across the street from the Tesco supermarket – a building the squatters had been living in for eighteen months.<sup>ii</sup> Following the police operation a second riot broke out with 400 people estimated to have been involved.<sup>iii</sup>

Four months later, on Monday 8 August, as rioting was spreading beyond London to the provinces around 100 people gathered in Stokes Croft and St Paul's and started heading toward Cabot Circus, Bristol's new shopping centre about a mile away. Once again, BBM messages were circulating suggesting that others

should come and join in, and to some it looked as if significant disorder was on the horizon. As one of our respondents observed, when the police helicopter was spotted over the city centre it seemed almost to be a signal that something serious was about to happen. The jewellers in Cabot Circus was attacked, with young people involved subsequently quickly retreating toward St Pauls. There was then a 'face off' between the youths and the police in the street often considered the 'frontline' in St Paul's, followed by a game of cat and mouse for a period of about five hours. A total of 53 arrests were made for a range of offences but, in the event, it all dissipated around 3am and serious disorder was avoided.

### *Analysing the absence of riots*

The next question concerns how to go about the process of analysing why riots don't happen? What I propose here is to utilise two analytical approaches widely used in the study of riots. First, and centrally, is the 'flashpoints' approach developed by David Waddington and colleagues over many years (see for example Waddington et al, 1989; King and Waddington, 2006). Its authors argue that the flashpoints model attempts 'to theorize the factors found ... to be crucial determinants of *order* and disorder' (Waddington et al, 1989: 157 emphasis added) and as such it is a useful starting point for the question at issue here. It seeks to differentiate between six levels of analysis: the *structural* (the material circumstances of different social groups, their relationship with the state, and how such factors relate to conflict); *political/ideological* (the relationship between dissenting groups to political and ideological institutions and how dissenting groups are treated by those institutions); *cultural* (the ways in which different social groups understand the social world and their place in it), *contextual* (the long-term and more immediate backdrop to relationships – for example between particular groups and the police – within which disorder occurs); *situational* (the spatial and social determinants of disorder); and the *interactional* (the dynamics of interaction between police and protestors). In reality, the features of riots are not so easily compartmentalized, but the attractiveness of the model in this case is that it allows some semblance of analytical order to be imposed on social phenomena that are, by definition, inherently chaotic.

Although, understandably, the flashpoints model has been utilised primarily in attempting to analyse and understand disorder, its authors acknowledge its potential for use in the context of the absence of disorder. Thus, discussing the different 'levels' identified in the model, Waddington et al (1989: 157) argue:

Disorder does not 'begin' at the structural level and proceed through the others to the interactional level. Nor do we intend to imply that disorder is necessarily predetermined by the 'higher order' levels. We shall argue that disorder *can be averted* at 'lower' levels even where over-arching factors indicate the likelihood of disorder. Conversely, disorder can occur at the interactional level in the absence of predisposing factors at the other levels, although it is then less likely to spread. (emphasis added)

As should be clear, the earlier work on ‘why riots don’t happen’ which was outlined above has tended to focus largely on aspects of the first four levels of analysis in the flashpoints model, looking most usually at the structural, political/ideological, cultural and contextual determinants of disorder. Less attention is paid in Katz’s (2012) work, and indeed that of Lukas (2009), Mitchell (2011) and Schneider (2014), to the situational and interactional levels of analysis. In what follows, whilst I use all six elements of the flashpoints model to structure the argument below, of necessity given my more local and immediate focus, I place more emphasis than much previous work has done on the interactional element of the flashpoints model. In what follows I want to suggest that there were elements at the ‘structural’ and ‘cultural’ levels of the flashpoints model that could be identified in both Chapeltown and St Pauls that arguably made them vulnerable to outbreaks of disorder as the riots spread. That this was so in part simply reflects the reasons for selecting the two case studies in the first place. I will then suggest that there were elements of what the flashpoints model refers to as the ‘contextual’, ‘political’ and situational levels that may have worked, in some small ways, to reduce some of the risks. Centrally, I want to point to a number of features at the ‘interactional’ level that appear to have been crucial to understanding the events in the two case studies. Because of this, and in an effort to elaborate on Waddington’s interactional level of analysis, I also draw on a second analytical framework, Reicher’s (1984; 1996; Stott and Reicher, 1998) ‘social identity model’. At its heart, the model suggests that under certain circumstances crowd participants may experience a shift in their self-definition, away from unique personal attributes toward more generalised, group-based attributes. In this connection, the model focuses very particularly on the role of the police – and the importance of police tactics – in affecting the nature of a crowd’s social identity and, consequently, the nature of the collective conduct that ensues (Stott and Reicher, 1998; Stott, 2009). In this manner, advocates of this approach focus on how police conduct, the activities of the crowd, especially influential members, and the interactions between the two, work to escalate or reduce the likelihood of conflict.

### *Structural level*

There is clear evidence that the geographical distribution of the rioting in London and beyond in August 2011 had a clear *structural* pattern to it. At a very general level, postcode mapping both of the locations of the main riot ‘hotspots’ and of the home addresses of those arrested during the riots shows both to be disproportionately likely to be within one of the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK.<sup>iv</sup> This is a very general form of association, of course, and it is important not to over-read the influence of such deprivation. For example, even a very basic analysis of those neighbourhoods scoring worst on the indices of deprivation would quickly identify many areas that saw no disorder at all in August 2011.

As outlined above, the two ‘case studies’ were selected, in part, because it was known that both St Paul’s and Chapeltown display some of the structural features – poverty, inequality and social deprivation - often



associated with outbreaks of social disorder. A now standard way to examine such features is to use the Index of Multiple Deprivation which combines a number of indicators, each covering a range of social, economic and housing issues, which can be combined to construct a single deprivation score for very small areas (Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and the larger Medium Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs)), which enable the identification of pockets of deprivation within larger urban (and rural) environments and allow for comparison across England. In 2010 St Paul's was ranked in the five per cent most deprived LSOAs in England. Across the main indices of deprivation St Paul's was in the 10% most deprived LSOAs in: 'income deprivation affecting children' (81% of children income deprived and it was ranked 40 out of over 32,000 nationally); 'income deprivation affecting older people' (50% of older people income deprived); 'employment deprivation' (21.2%); crime and disorder (ranked in bottom 4% LSOAs); and in relation to living environment. The image of St Paul's has suffered greatly over the years, its territorial stigmatisation leading one set of commentators to describe it as a 'reputational ghetto' (Slater and Anderson, 2012). Chapeltown is a slightly larger area than St Paul's – generally being displayed as a Middle Layer Super Output Area by the Office of National Statistics. The Leeds Neighbourhood Index for 2009 describes Chapeltown as one of Leeds' 'less successful neighbourhoods' and, typically, as suffering from 'suffer high levels of crime, low educational attainment, poor health, low income levels and high levels of worklessness' (Leeds City Council, 2009). Within the city it was among the areas with the highest numbers of crimes against individuals, highest Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support and Incapacity Benefit claimants rates, significant concentrations of children in workless households and the lowest rates of economic activity. At this very general level therefore both St Paul's and Chapeltown would appear to fit the bill as areas with structural features – if not necessarily conflicts – which parallel those regularly found in neighbourhoods where significant disorder has broken out. Nevertheless, it remains possible that below such apparent structural similarity there are differences that might help explain the relative calm in the two neighbourhoods. There is, for example, a sizeable sociological literature on relative deprivation that suggests that it is the gap between 'value expectation' and 'value capability' – in effect a variant on a form of strain theory (Messner and Rosenfeld, 2001) – which helps to explain differing propensity to riot. That the pattern of the diffusion of rioting in England in 2011 might be explained by such a 'revolution of rising expectations' (Chandra and Foster, 2005) cannot be ruled out, but it would take a larger, and different, study to test this directly.

### *Political/ideological*

The second element of the model is primarily concerned with the way in which key ideological institutions – political parties, media, police and judiciary for example – react to culturally or politically dissenting groups in the community and its environs (Waddington and King, 2005) and how these dissenting groups themselves relate to political and ideological institutions. Thus, in 2011 *Reading the Riots* found – in all the locations in which the research was undertaken – strongly expressed frustration, and often a deeply felt

anger, toward the police as well as a sense that they had few if any avenues for having their frustrations heard (Lewis et al, 2011; Newburn et al, 2015). Similarly, many of those interviewed in *Reading the Riots* talked also about the perceived failure, indeed unwillingness, of government to listen to, or take account of, their views and needs. Looked at historically, there would seem to be strong parallels between such views and much of what appear to have characterised both to police-community relations and to the treatment of protest in both St Paul's and Chapeltown in the 1980s (Joshua and Wallace, 1983; Farrar, 2002).

What then of 2011? Within Leeds, whilst there were clearly simmering tensions as a result of the shooting, there were nevertheless some signs that elements of long-standing political frustration had been addressed or ameliorated. In part, according to one community representative/youth worker the very fact of investment in the area, and the creation of new sources of resource in Chapeltown, meant there was less reason to riot:

No, not at all... they are pumping money into Chapeltown, There's much more to do than when I was younger... there's too many opportunities. Up there ... at CYDC (Chapeltown Youth Development Centre) they are doing marvellous work. The Mandela Centre (a community centre with youth provision) is there, the Reginald Centre (a one-stop shop/joint service centre) is there. They've got the opportunities to do something with their lives. They have the support of me and countless other people.

Not only was central government and local government investment perceived to have resulted in quite considerable expansion in local provision, but it was reported that the local Council had also played a role in stimulating greater dialogue about community needs and frustrations. Much of this had seemingly been stimulated by the riots in the 1980s and subsequently in Chapeltown. One interviewee - a retired academic, local resident and acknowledged expert on the area including its history of rioting - noted that in the ten years after the riots in 1981 the Council had engineered a series of very democratic participative meetings for the residents; responses to riot which were designed to educate people about the better process of responding to grievances. More particularly he noted the fact that marching had become a regular way in which locals could air grievances and frustrations without resorting to violence. On Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011 – on what turned out to be the last major night of rioting in England at that time – over 100 people turned out for a peace march or 'vigil' in Chapeltown. He continued, "When the peace march appeared in 2011 - that was created by people who knew about rioting. This collective knowledge, I'm sure inhibited people in the riots in 2011."

## Cultural

The third level in the flashpoints model concerns the ways in which different groups understand the social world and their place in it. This aspect of the flashpoints model has some synergies with Reicher's (1984) model, in which he posits that a cognitive construct – 'a social identification' – can guide behaviour in crowds. In Leeds, the shooting heightened existing tensions between Black and Asian communities within Chapeltown. These tensions, according to two prominent members of the Chapeltown community, had already been increased as an unintended outcome of elements of the government's anti-terror agenda. In this regard they suggested that:

There is no community cohesion between the young Black and Asian people of the area. We have tried to work at that, but the Government launched a policy of *Prevent*<sup>v</sup> which has actually divided communities since the bombings [in 2005]. They were giving money to Asian groups, almost segregating people. *Prevent* threw the cohesion agenda to the wall.

Second, and possibly in part linked with the community cohesion point, a police inspector offered a slightly broader observation about the general scepticism he felt the local African-Caribbean community held for statutory services in general. Generally, he said the view appeared to be that such services:

...don't really appreciate what it's like to be a black person living and growing up in [Chapeltown]. And there's a big mistrust. It's very frustrating. And overcoming that is the first step... You need to find someone who can bridge the gap. "What they can't do is lose credibility with their own community."

By contrast, in Bristol several respondents argued that the city, culturally, was rather distinctive and that this had contributed to the absence of disorder in August 2011. The local councillor suggested that the city itself 'is a far more interesting place to be if you're a young person', now with many more things to see and to do for young people. 'There's interesting scenes going on. That's a factor in itself.' He went on:

I think there's a huge pride in Bristol – because it's different. It's got a slightly alternative way of doing things. The street art interests a lot of young people, and in Bristol we allow it and encourage it. And that means that some people who would be completely alienated aren't. It's a very varied arts scene. It's a very diverse city.

This sense of distinctiveness was reinforced by the St Pauls community activist:

I think kids round here are quite cosmopolitan. It does have a very positive impact. That's probably one reason why we don't have the hardcore gangster issues of Manchester or even Birmingham, because the kids are quite open-minded. They're exposed to a lot more different situations. Loads of people from St Paul's go down to Glastonbury. We're in touch with that kind of culture as well.

### *Contextual*

This refers to both the long-term and the more immediate backdrop to relationships – for example between particular groups and the police – within which disorder may occur. Have there been recent incidents? Are there particular grievances, histories that make disorder more, or less, likely? And how has the media portrayed such relationships? The relevance of the 'contextual' level – the long-term and the more immediate backdrop to relationships within local communities - can be seen through the example of the 2011 disorder in London where a clear link between the health of police-community relations and the geography of the disorder could be seen. An analysis of data from the Metropolitan Police Service's regular public survey in the months preceding the disorder found that respondents living in boroughs hit hardest by the disorder had substantially lower confidence in the police locally and London-wide prior to the disorder (Hohl et al, 2013). It found that such lowered rates of trust and confidence still held after the disorder. Moreover, and crucially, Hohl et al (2013) found they also had substantially lower trust in police procedural fairness (treatment) and police community engagement prior to (and after) the disorder: two factors earlier research has found to be the main drivers of overall confidence in the police (Stanko and Bradford, 2009).

From the two case studies, the most obviously influential 'contextual' matter so far as the potential for disorder was concerned was the experience of the 'Tesco riot' in Bristol earlier in 2011 (Reilly, 2015). This was thought to have had two main effects. In part, it enabled local services to prepare for the possibility of civil disorder and, more particularly, to think through how resources might best be deployed in such an eventuality. One local councillor with cabinet responsibility for community safety suggested that the 'tight community safety team' in the locality enabled them to move resources quickly as well as make quick decisions. This was vital, he argued, as in planning for such unpredictable and fast-moving events:

The secret is finding out where the flows [of people] are coming from and to and make certain that you're prepared for that. One advantage that they did have was that in Stokes Croft they had a disturbance a few months beforehand over the Tesco issue so basically the preparation has been done as a result of that.

This point was also made by the Youth Offending Team manager in Bristol, particularly in relation to the police:

I think the other aspect of that preparation was that we had already had riots in the vicinity in Stokes Croft in Bristol. It was something they (police) had got operationally ready for and the logistics had been rehearsed in a sense previously. So in the riots in August they were well prepared.

In addition, others felt that the aftermath of the Tesco riot, in particular the quite significant sentences imposed on those successfully prosecuted, had acted as something of a deterrent - at least in the short term. As one community activist put it:

The heat was taken out of the situation because of what happened in April, and a lot of people were taken off the streets who would have rioted. A lot of people who would have rioted weren't going to go out again. Because there was a media campaign at the time looking for the rioters... I believe that because of... previous riots that there were less foot soldiers on the streets.

Indeed, this very recent experience in Bristol was used by some in their attempts to dissuade young people from becoming involved in anything with the potential to affect their lives negatively in both the short and the long-term. Though Chapeltown didn't have any similarly recent examples, the community representatives and youth workers who were out on the streets when the tensions were at their highest in August 2011 also used similar arguments as they attempted to ensure that matters didn't escalate.

### *Situational*

The penultimate of the six levels in the flashpoints model refers to the spatial and social determinants of disorder. This covers such matters as the physical location and layout of the neighbourhoods/communities themselves, the ways in which dissenting groups, crowds, and the police are arranged, the immediate aims or objectives of the crowd, and the availability or accessibility of what might be thought of as 'symbolic targets'. In north London, for example, on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August as tensions rose and initial disorder occurred, both the perceived relative absence of the police, and their unwillingness to intervene, together with relatively easy access to targets such as police vehicles, appears to have played quite a significant role in the escalation of the trouble (Reicher and Stott, 2011).

In Bristol and Leeds a number of situational factors may have helped contribute to the eventual absence of full-scale disorder. These included the layout, and location, of retail outlets, the location of some of the poorer estates, and the relationship between these and the city centres. In Leeds, for example, one community activist centrally involved in negotiations with the police argued that the looting that had been witnessed elsewhere had, in part, been stimulated by a generalised sense of revenge on those retailers perceived as among the most exploitative – in particular those selling certain electronic goods or sports and

leisure wear. The absence of some of these stores on the main street in Chapeltown was consequently rather helpful:

If we'd have had a JD Sports on Chapeltown Road, if we'd have had a Nokia shop, if we'd have had a Vodafone – they would have been hit. Because young people feel that these shops take all their money. When you think about it they are ripping them off.

The general geography and social layout of Bristol was felt to have inhibited the potential for disorder for several reasons. At a basic level, as the Bristol YOT manager noted, the scale of youthful disaffection is perhaps not as large in Bristol as it is in some of the other locations where more significant disorder occurred and is primarily to be found in one or two major estates. Second, those estates are not quite as close to the city centre as they were, for example, in Manchester, where people could quite easily make the journey to where potential targets were located. By contrast, as the YOT manager put it, 'for those in some areas of south Bristol, the city centre would seem quite remote'. Indeed, he went on to argue that in Bristol:

Our experience of young people is that they are fairly parochial; they will very rarely go into other areas of the city. They wouldn't ever dream into going into some of these other areas. That may have had an impact in terms of creating a critical mass of rioters with one intention in mind. The fact that the apparent route was through other areas close to the city centre, would mean that other people wouldn't necessarily think of getting involved or see it as anything to do with them.

Finally, this made elements of the work of the police service easier. In particular, the placement of the main estates from which trouble might have been expected meant that the routes to the city centre were relatively easy both to predict and to protect:

And (they) held the line in front of the newest part of the shopping centre in Bristol called Cabot Circus. The other aspect of the geography about this is partly where the majority of the rioters would have emerged from and did which was two sides of the M32, and the police were able to, they didn't have to defend the whole of the city centre, they set the line on one part of it.

Again, however, it is important not to overstate the arguments here and something of a contrast can be drawn from this interpretation of events in Bristol and what unfolded in Liverpool. In the latter, as would have been anticipated in Bristol, rioters were drawn, in part, from outlying estates and many had to travel considerable distances in order to get involved. Moreover, the route toward the city centre – in the case of Liverpool this was primarily down the Granby Road in Toxteth also made the job of the police somewhat

more manageable than might have been the case had the rioting been more geographically dispersed and less predictable. Whilst situational factors did help enable the police to keep the bulk of the trouble away from the city centre, the fact that there was serious disorder in Liverpool reinforces the fact that there were other significant matters at play.

### *Interactional*

As outlined earlier, thus far I have argued that during August 2011, both Chapeltown in Leeds and St Paul's in Bristol had features, broadly located at the 'structural' and 'cultural' levels of the flashpoints model, that potentially made them vulnerable to outbreaks of disorder as the riots spread. Additionally, there appear to have been elements at the 'political' 'contextual' and 'situational' levels that may have worked to reduce some of the risks. I now want to turn to the final, and what I will argue appears to be the crucial, explanatory level in *these particular cases*: the 'interactional'. This level focuses primarily on the interactions between the police and 'protestors' and includes the ways both interpret the situations they find themselves in and the actions and reactions of both sides adopt toward each other. For our purposes here I have also taken it to include the activities of others who may seek to intervene in tense or disorderly situations, including activists, negotiators, and community representatives.

It is in this connection that Reicher's (1984) social psychological 'social identity model' is arguably of utility.<sup>vi</sup> The model focuses in particular on the identification of those interactional elements most likely to conduce toward or against violence. Utilising the model Reicher et al (2004) have identified a number of 'principles' underpinning successful public order policing: police forces should *educate* themselves about the cultural norms of particular crowds and the legitimate forms of conduct that flow from this; that should *facilitate* such legitimate forms of conduct; should be capable of *communicating* police intentions; should be subtle enough to *differentiate* between groups/individuals in the crowd, and should avoid indiscriminate use of force. It is elements of these, I shall argue, that are visible in the August 2011 experiences in Chapeltown and St Pauls and which, to a degree, help us understand the avoidance of riot.

In Chapeltown, in the aftermath of the shooting when it became very clear that serious disorder was a possibility, two well-known community members spoke with the West Yorkshire Police to gauge what the likely courses of action were to be, and what role they might be able or allowed to play. Understandably given what was happening elsewhere in the country a sizeable police operation was planned. However, and importantly, there was a pre-existing relationship between the two community members and the police in Chapeltown, with significant levels of trust in both directions. These two community members both sat on the local drug and gang strategy group and were regularly consulted both by the police and by local young people when problems arose. On this occasion they were called to the police station and informed by a senior officer about the police's plans. At this meeting there was lengthy discussion about what was

happening currently within the community (officers taking the opportunity, as they did regularly, to *educate* themselves) and such was the profile of the two community leaders and the strength of their existing relationship with the local police that they managed to persuade the commanding officer to hold off for a short period of time. As one said:

Because [we] meet with the police, we were called to Chapeltown Police Station, and we were told quite frankly and straight, that because of the disturbances that had happened over the weekend... that they had the authority to use the full force of West Yorkshire Police. And they were going to [use this] on Chapeltown that night. And [we] asked them whether we could have one hour to go down and quell the situation, and see whether we could temper it a little bit. An officer made a very brave decision to hold back the police officers.

The danger they felt was that all the good police-community work that had been undertaken in recent times could easily be undone by action that was either precipitate and/or too aggressive. In the period after the shooting when tensions were very high, a police dog handler had failed to control his dog (some thought deliberately), and the community workers used this incident as an illustration how matters could easily become inflamed, suggesting it was typical of the way in which things can be mishandled. Under such circumstances – heightened tensions and what is perceived to be inappropriate behaviour by a police officer – many would see it ‘as an opportunity to make their feelings felt’. In Reicher et al’s (2004) terms, these were moments when antagonistic social identities could develop and be reinforced. Fortunately it seems there was sufficient trust between the police and community representatives for an alternative approach to be explored. That is to say, there was early and continuing *communication* between key parties, and a desire to *facilitate* peaceful protest. Confirming this, one local senior police officer noted:

We [police and community leaders] tried very hard to keep a lid on it – I don’t think you can point to any one part and say ‘oh, you were the ingredient’, it’s everything put together. Wind the clock back 10, 15 years, we could have had more prolonged disorder because we wouldn’t have had those community contacts. It’s that kind of dynamic that means that when the chips are down you can call each other and say ‘listen, what are we going to do about this? The last thing we want is to send rows and rows of riot vans out to a place like Chapeltown’.

Similarly contrasting the situation in 2011 with earlier experiences, the Leader of the City Council put it like this:

The difference was that the police listened, and changed what was originally a confrontational approach and changed to a neighbourhood-supporting role. That was decisive. And they did that as



a result of people saying to them, you are actually provoking young people, and not calming them. And suddenly they changed the profile of the way they were policing. The elder leaders of the churches, of the community, of the mosques, also played an incredibly positive role. And so did the youth workers.

Under the circumstances of spreading disorder across many English cities, holding back the riot police and engaging in a lower-key approach to dealing with the tensions on the streets of Chapeltown was a far from easy decision for the police to take. Moreover, as one other respondent suggested it was far more complicated than simply 'holding back'. It was necessary for the police both to adopt a position that didn't escalate already existing tensions whilst also communicating the presence and availability of a tough police response should it prove necessary. This, in slightly different terms is what PAJ Waddington (1994) has rightly characterised as public order police negotiating from a position of strength – this strength being that of their social position. As one community leader noted:

The police were on tenterhooks as to what was happening around the country. They were ready to do what ever it took for it not to escalate. The police presence was overwhelming. There were loads of vans, loads of police out, they were definitely surrounding the mosque... I think they got told very high up just to have your presence there just in case. Which was very good. Which I think helped, it did help. Because if they weren't it would have gone off in a big way.

This delicate balance was illustrated in a slightly different way by respondents in Bristol where they praised both the ability of the police to work in a way that was low-key and helped ensure that existing tensions didn't unreasonably worsen, whilst also adopting a degree of firmness and resolve where necessary. One respondent, a local community activist, described the police's approach as 'very firm but very even-handed'. On the one hand:

I saw a particular incident where... a senior officer ordered younger officers to calm down. And you could feel what had been a previously tense crowd watching this relax as well. Rather than getting heavy handed, that one officer managed to dissipate a lot of tension. And that's how Bristol police operate.

Equally, however, he was critical of what he perceived had happened in London in the early stages of the disorder where 'the police stood back and let it happen'. If they had done that in Bristol, he said, the outcome he felt would have been very different from the way in which it eventually turned out. Without that firm police action:

...the kids would have got to Cabot Circus.....I think a lot of people would have come out if the kids had got to Cabot Circus, and had someone put a message out, "we're in Cabot Circus, we're getting loads of stuff," it would have happened. The police, as soon as they saw groups of kids, they were stopping and searching them to drive them out of the area.

Finally, and centrally in this context, there is the work of the community leaders, youth workers and others out on the streets attempting to help maintain a certain level of order. Such work relied on the credibility held by such people – by virtue of their standing in the communities concerned and the relationships they had built up over extended periods of time. The work itself primarily involved persuasion – convincing people that what they were contemplating was fraught with danger and had very considerable implications for their futures:

[Leeds] ...so I was trying to calm whatever situation arose. (I was saying to young people) I know you feel anger, I feel anger... but to retaliate is not the way. It might seem right but you could get yourself into trouble and get yourself into damage and grief and for what? [Community activist]

[Bristol] I was saying, 'Forget Cabot Circus; it's all blocked off, they got cameras down there,' and really just talking to them, I think I talked a lot of kids out of it because a lot of kids hadn't thought about what they were doing....they were rioting for the hell of it. And that's what it comes down to. It's completely different from any other riot... pointless. [Community activist]

In short, there was a generalised view in both St Pauls and Leeds that a combination of a police service that was flexible, willing to enter into dialogue and to trust others together with community representatives and others on the ground with both the credibility, the skills and the willingness to get involved that, above all, likely made the crucial difference in both these cases. As one local resident put it in relation to Chapeltown:

On that night the police response was managed in a way than has been better in the past. They actually listened; let the community lead from the front. That's what resolves those situations - the community stepping up the game.

Another participant, a local author and historian of the area, reinforced this view:

It's a much abused term: community leaders. But on this occasion, it was people who really did have some credibility both within the Asian and the Caribbean communities, and they were able very quickly to mobilise a sentiment among wide numbers of people that this was not to be escalated into anything bigger than it already was.

In the case of both Leeds and Bristol there seems clear evidence that a number of ‘interactional’ factors or, more particularly, matters that look rather like some of Reicher et al’s (2004) key principles derived from the Social Identity Model, played a significant role in the de-escalation of tensions and the mitigation of the potential for disorder. The primary lessons appear to have been threefold: a willingness in the police service to listen to and involve others in the job of keeping the peace (*communication* and *facilitation*); the adoption of police tactics and numbers that were strong enough to indicate the potential for very serious action, whilst endeavouring to hold back or act with restraint so as to avoid escalation of tensions (a commitment to avoiding the indiscriminate use of force); and, critically, the presence of community members, representatives, leaders with the skills, willingness and credibility to work within the community to dampen tensions and to work alongside the police to maintain order (*communication, facilitation* and *differentiation*).

### *Conclusion*

This paper had two aims. First, to explore one of the less commonly asked questions in the study of public disorder: why don’t riots happen? In fact, this paper explored the more particular question of which factors appear to militate against, or act to mitigate the likelihood of disorder in particular locations in circumstances where rioting has already occurred elsewhere and appears to be in the process of spreading? Second, in following this seldom trodden ground to show that such exploration is in itself a worthwhile activity. To address the first of these aims, I used David Waddington and colleagues’ ‘flashpoints model’ of public disorder as a primary organising analytical framework<sup>vii</sup>. The few earlier analyses of the absence of riots have tended to focus on the broad, structural, cultural and political features of the countries or cities relatively unaffected by such disorder. In this instance, and focusing most directly on the contextual and interactional levels of the flashpoints model, two small cases studies were undertaken. The neighbourhoods – Chapeltown in Leeds and St Pauls in Bristol – were selected because they had a number of features that it was believed – based on such theoretical models - made them plausible candidates for comparison with places that did experience serious disorder in the 2011 riots. What the case studies illustrated was that there were a number of features that appeared to reduce the likelihood of disorder: including, in some form, attempts at investing in the material and social infrastructure of the communities concerned, initiatives to improve police-community relations, the adoption of flexible but firm policing tactics and, crucially, the availability of, and willingness to trust, local community representatives and others on the ground as mediators and peacemakers. As such, this appeared to confirm a considerable body of extant work on the policing of public (dis)order which suggests that the eruption of violence is often the consequence of interactions between the police and crowds and, relatedly, that the prevention or avoidance of violence can also be influenced by such interactions (see for example McPhail et al, 1998; Reicher et al, 2007). As a consequence it was argued that it was largely

matters at the *interactional* level of the flashpoints model that were key. At this point some elaboration of the model was proposed, in particular arguing that greater analytical clarity is potentially offered by utilising elements of Reicher's (1984) social identity model, in concert with the flashpoints approach, as the basis understanding the nature of police-crowd and police-community interaction. Elements, or illustrations, of all four of the key principles derived from this model – *educate communicate, facilitate* and *differentiate* – together with a commitment to avoiding the excessive or inappropriate use of police power were identified within the case studies. Using a combination of these two theoretical models, it is argued, offer considerable promise in taking forward the study of 'why riots don't happen'.

In relation to the paper's second aim my argument is that, notwithstanding the limitations of two relatively small case studies, exploring the absence of full-scale disorder potentially has two significant benefits. First, the experience in both St Paul's and Chapeltown offers the opportunity to identify what might, in principle, be thought of as 'protective' factors in the general territory of civil disorder. None of the factors identified in this paper – from the structural to the interactional - is any guarantee, alone or in concert, that greater disorder can be prevented but, if these two brief case studies are any indicator, they do offer the possibility of reducing tensions in times of great social stress. Further work in this field, therefore, might offer steps toward greater learning in the area of proactive disorder prevention. The long-term goal of such work ought to be to identify, and help further to cement those institutions, activities and forms of communication that help to reduce tension, conflict and the potential for disorder. The second potential benefit of this line of inquiry, in reversing the usual angle of questioning, is that it might also serve to illuminate that more traditional area of study. That is to say, understanding the aetiology of disorder might be aided by studying its (relative) absence. Much of what I have suggested is both tentative and somewhat speculative and no doubt further work in pursuit of answers to the question 'why didn't riots occur?' will lead to refinements, or alterations to the ways in which these models can be used. Whilst a dreadful cliché for academic articles to end with a call for further research, it is hard to do otherwise in this particular regard. Further case studies of failure to riot are necessary and, where possible, these should be undertaken on a significantly larger scale than was possible in this particular case.

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<sup>i</sup> All quotes, unless otherwise identified, are taken from research interviews conducted as part of *Reading the Riots*.  
<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/Road-lined-anger-protests-continue/story-11304294-detail/story.html> (accessed 24 Nov 2013)

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<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/THUGS/story-11261975-detail/story.html>;  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/bristol-burns-once-more-as-tesco-riots-return-to-streets-of-stokes-croft-2276837.html>. Film footage is available at: <http://stokescrofttowncrier.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/stokes-croft-bristol-riots-photos-video-and-analysis/> (all accessed 24/11/13)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/aug/16/riots-poverty-map-suspects> and related articles at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/series/reading-the-riots> (accessed 22/12/14)

<sup>v</sup> *Prevent* was one of four elements of the Coalition government's *CONTEST* counter-terrorism strategy. More particularly, it was intended to respond to the 'ideological challenge' posed by terrorism and to offer practical help to counter extremism and radicalisation, and to prevent people being drawn into terrorism.

<sup>vi</sup> Despite the potential synergies, there is relatively little cross-referencing between the 'flashpoints' and social identity models of disorder in the literature (though see Waddington, 2013; 2014 for exceptions).

<sup>vii</sup> I do not claim that this is an entirely novel argument – David Waddington essentially advances this point in the very first full treatment of the 'flashpoints' model (Waddington et al, 1989). Nevertheless, there have been few, if any, attempts to utilise the model in this fashion.