

Peer Review

Review of: "Understanding the 2024 Summer Riots in the UK: Three Case Studies"

Aram Ghaemmaghami¹

1. School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom

Thanks for sharing this article with me. It's a strong piece of work, and to date, not enough in-depth qualitative studies exist on the 2024 riots, especially given how little empirical evidence we have. The triangulation is a real strength, and the case selection makes good sense, and they flow and interact well overall. For example, the section-by-section detail in the case studies gives the reader a clear sense of how the events unfolded, and your attempt to avoid simplistic narratives about crowd composition or far-right coordination is both well-judged and well-evidenced overall.

That said, a few points need further attention:

In the introduction and again on page 2, you note that the events have been variously described as "protests" or "riots," and rightly point out the risks in that kind of framing. But the paper itself shifts between terms like "disorder," "attacks," "collective violence," and "riots" without clarifying whether you're treating these as interchangeable or using them to mark different dynamics. It would help to explain early on, preferably in the final paragraph of the introduction, what terminology you're adopting and why, especially given that the argument hinges on rejecting the idea of these being understood as standard protest events.

On pages 19–20, the answer to the first research question begins to move between the three case studies to identify common themes. But, in my opinion, this summary flattens out the specific differences you established earlier. The Tamworth case, in particular, involves a more sustained and coordinated attack, with fewer counter-protesters and clearer targeting of a single site. By contrast, in Bristol, the crowd is intercepted, pushed back, and redirected. That variation matters, but to me, this doesn't come through clearly enough in your overall synthesis of events. I think it would be useful to spell that out more directly

in the section beginning “However, the timing of the occurrence of collective violence varied...” but I am interested to hear your thoughts!

In relation to the above, the discussion of counter-protesters (especially in the section on Bristol, pages 16–18) is detailed, but I feel like this is lost somewhat in the final analysis. In Bristol, for example, counter-protesters arguably blocked access to the Mercure Hotel before the police arrived. In Hanley, there’s a clear split between formal counter-protesters and informal “community defenders.” As far as I can see, these are different dynamics with different implications, but your answer to the third research question doesn’t fully explore that. There may be a good reason for that, and I am interested to hear why you made this choice, but as a reader, I think there could be a bit more clarity here. As a suggestion, it might help to make the political and social meaning of these differences clearer, especially when you’re drawing policy lessons or recommendations.

In the section “Who were the anti-immigrant participants?” on page 20, you make a strong case that there were different levels of ideological commitment in the crowd. That point is important, but some of the claims are being made through inference rather than direct data. For example, “based on observed material culture... and interviewees’ conversations with anti-immigrant participants” is vague in terms of evidentiary basis. Since you weren’t able to interview these participants directly (as you acknowledge on page 24), it would be helpful to be clearer in this section about the limits of the data and where you’re relying on secondary description.

The paper ends with three research questions for further study. These are well chosen, but I think the first one, “Who did the rioters believe they represented?” could have been anticipated earlier in the paper. I think this could be inferred on page 22 (or thereabouts), where you briefly mention the Tommy Robinson demonstration, but the role of wider identification or *imagined community* doesn’t really enter your main analysis. If this is a central future direction, it might be worth referencing earlier in the framing of your questions.

Overall, this is an important and well-evidenced account that offers a corrective to rushed media and political framings of the riots; what happened in Liverpool recently suggests that the police and wider government are listening to this narrative, but policy responses are still far from perfect, and this paper puts forward some compelling arguments. In any case, I look forward to hearing back from the authors!

Best wishes,

Aram

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.