

Document 1 – Starmer will be judged on how he tackles root causes of riots

BBC, by Joe Pike, August 11, 2024

[...] Sir Keir Starmer was the chief prosecutor of England and Wales during the last major outbreak of civil unrest in the UK in 2011, overseeing the prosecution of thousands of people involved in five days of rioting.

Rapid and well-publicised action by the courts was key in bringing the unrest to an end, he said then. And this time ministers have emphasised “strong policing and swift prosecutions” to deter others joining the violence.

How best to get that message across to the public has been a regular discussion at emergency COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Room) meetings.

Just as government scientists were front and centre in the pandemic, police chiefs and prosecutors have been wheeled out to land core messages with authority in this crisis. [...]

Yet the prime minister and his aides have pointedly avoided answering questions about the underlying causes of the riots.

I’m told the reason for this message discipline is a concern that discussing causes might be misinterpreted as suggesting some of the unrest was justified.

What happens, though, when the violence stops, the guilty rioters have been sentenced and the COBR meetings are over?

“We are starting work on the longer term challenges,” sources say.

Tackling these challenges - even deciding what they are - is set to be a crucial test for the new government, with consequences stretching far beyond the communities affected by this week’s disorder. [...]

It is likely the towns and cities affected in the riots will receive government money to smooth their recoveries. Local community cohesion projects have also been mooted.

But money is tight. The challenging economic outlook and the chancellor’s reputation for fiscal discipline may be reasons why government sources tell me an expensive public inquiry is unlikely. [...]

The role of social media will be the subject of a Whitehall review, with ministers conceding that only nine months after the Online Safety Act became law, it already needs updating and strengthening.

Yvette Cooper’s Home Office will be tasked with many of the longer-term policy challenges highlighted by the events of the past week.

Proscribing extreme right wing organisations has been discussed, but groups like the English Defence League (EDL) haven’t formally existed for almost a decade.

Instead social media has transformed the extremism ecosystem into amorphous communities which are harder to police, but which can reach hundreds of thousands more people.

For now the government has avoided discussing immigration, again for fear of suggesting any of the unrest was justified.

But in time they are likely to remind voters that the prime minister believes many people do have legitimate concerns about legal and illegal migration. [...]

Some in the Labour Party want their leader to call out racism as a major factor. Others diagnose poverty and a lack of opportunity as a root cause.

Mental health and addiction are repeatedly mentioned in mitigation in courtrooms this week, but others were drunk or carried by the moment.

Men in their fifties and sixties have appeared before judges, as well as 13- and 14-year-old boys.

Most of the towns and cities affected in recent days have high levels of deprivation and above average levels of asylum seeker housing, according to analysis of Home Office statistics. [...]

Swift criminal justice may have quelled the immediate threat of violence. But Sir Keir knows that he'll be judged on tackling the root causes.

Document 2 – Violent U.K. Riots Pose Challenge to Keir Starmer's New Government

***The New York Times*, by Megan Specia, August 5, 2024**

When Labour's Keir Starmer was elected as prime minister last month, he planned to tackle some of the long-term issues bedeviling Britain. His first priorities included reviving a stagnant economy and repairing the struggling National Health Service.

Now, he faces a more immediate and unexpected problem, one that is proving to be his government's first major domestic test. England and Northern Ireland have been rocked by a week of anti-immigrant riots that have gripped cities and towns and escalated over the weekend. The riots came in the wake of a knife attack on a children's dance class in the town of Southport, near Liverpool, that left three young girls dead, and the subsequent violence was driven by disinformation about the identity of the attacker.

He was not, as some claimed, an asylum seeker, but that made little difference as the misinformation ricocheted online, from private messaging channels to social media platforms like X. He was born and raised in Britain and, according to the BBC, his parents are from Rwanda.

Suddenly, Mr. Starmer and his government found themselves fighting a two-pronged battle, online and in the streets where rioters rampaged in more than 15 towns and cities, injuring dozens of police officers, looting businesses, targeting mosques and setting fires outside a hotel that housed asylum seekers.

So far, Mr. Starmer, a former chief prosecutor, has taken a law-and-order approach, vowing to crack down on perpetrators and bring charges swiftly, as well as putting more police on the streets and providing additional security personnel to Muslim communities.

And, so far, he has mostly avoided attacks from his political opponents, who have moved to unite in their opposition to the wanton violence. Still, Mr. Starmer faces challenges in dealing

with the disorder that has badly shaken communities, partly, analysts say, because he inherited an overwhelmed criminal justice system.

The government has said it would fast-track hearings for those charged in connection to the riots, but the prison system was at full capacity even before the violence began. The situation was so bad that the new government had already introduced emergency early-release measures for nonviolent offenders.

Diminished trust in policing nationally along with cuts to community policing have also made it harder for officers to deal with disorder. And courts were already overwhelmed by their caseloads with a serious backlog at all levels of the justice system even before the new slew of arrests since the violence started. [...]

The government has vowed a harsh and swift crackdown on what Mr. Starmer called “far-right thuggery.” [...]

Mainstream politicians — even those who believe that illegal immigration is a major problem — have remained united in their condemnation of the violence. [...]

For the most part, any criticism has been indirect and muted, save for a few detractors like Nigel Farage, the leader of the populist right-wing party Reform UK. Last week Mr. Farage, newly elected to Parliament, put out a video questioning official information about the attacker, which some said gave air to the rioters’ beliefs. [...]

Document 3 – Who’s to blame for Britain’s far-right riots?

VOANews, by Henry Ridgwell, August 14, 2024

British authorities are trying to ascertain the origins of the violent far-right protests that erupted in towns and cities across the country in recent weeks. While some blame simple racism and false news posted on social media, others say deeper social forces are at play – and warn that the government faces significant challenges in trying to prevent further unrest.

As the debate rages over the possible root causes of the riots, the initial trigger for the violence is undisputed. On July 29, a teenager with a knife attacked several children attending a dance class in Southport near Liverpool, resulting in the deaths of three girls, ages 6, 7 and 9.

False reports initially posted by an obscure crime website called Channel3 Now, wrongly identified the killer as a Muslim asylum seeker who had arrived on a small boat. The false news spread quickly on social media. [...]

Shops were looted and public buildings set on fire. Businesses owned by people of color were targeted. Mosques were attacked amid a wave of anti-Muslim violence. Hotels purportedly housing asylum seekers were set alight.

Immigration – and especially the influx of asylum seekers in small boats across the English Channel – appears to have been a driving force behind the riots. [...]

Many observers see deeper social divisions driving the violence.

Critics accused some right-wing politicians – especially Nigel Farage, the leader of the anti-immigration Reform party – of fanning the violence. On his YouTube channel, Farage

has previously publicized the location of hotels that purportedly house asylum seekers. He has also accused British police of operating a so-called “two-tier” system where right-wing protesters are dealt with more harshly than other groups, although he has not provided any evidence. British authorities strongly deny the accusation. [...]

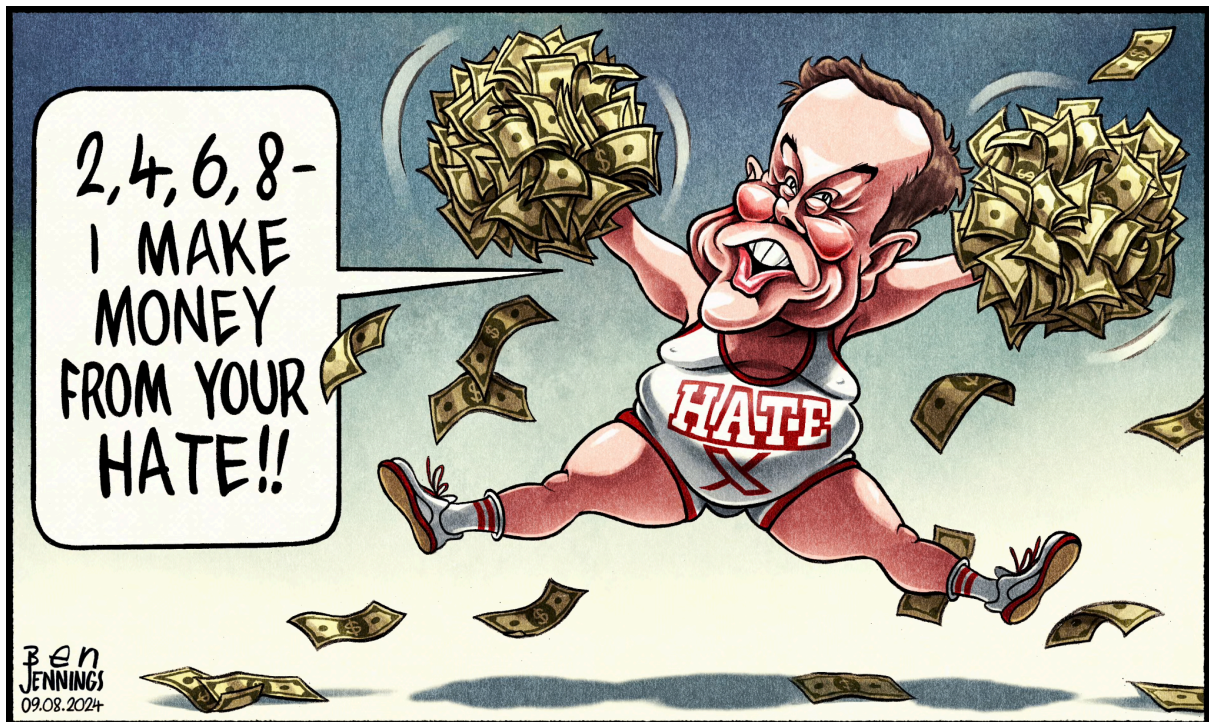
Justice has been swift. More than 1,000 people have been arrested and hundreds convicted of offenses linked to the riots. The youngest was 12 years old; the oldest, 69. Scores of people have been charged with offenses relating to posts on social media, even though they may not have taken part in the violence.

Elon Musk, the owner of the social media site X, has faced criticism for allowing such posts to be published. He has himself posted in apparent support of the far-right protests, writing that “civil war is inevitable” in Britain. That prompted fury from many British lawmakers. [...]

The unrest poses a longer-term challenge, said Anand Menon, professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at King's College London in the UK and has been serving as director of the UK in a Changing Europe initiative after his appointment in 2014.

“The UK has, over the last 10 to 15 years, had very low economic growth and hasn't done much for many people who are struggling economically,” Menon told VOA. “And while that isn't to justify the violence in any way, shape or form, I think it is absolutely appropriate to think, given what's happened – are there circumstances that make people feel so desperate that they are more prone to this than others?”

Document 4



Document 5



What challenges have the recent far-right riots posed to the British Government?

Challenge 1: Effectively restoring order and administering justice in the face of overwhelming riots

Challenge 2: Controlling and managing public sentiment and behavior during crises as misinformation spreads quickly and amplifies unrest.

Challenge 3: Tackling the root causes of those riots which stem from deep socio-economic disparities that foster an environment ripe for radicalization and civil unrest.