

Key Points

- **This time last year rioting erupted in cities across England. Since then many researchers and commentators have presented explanations of why the riots happened.**
- **The Government-commissioned *Riots, Communities and Victims Panel* concluded that the issues that should be addressed if future riots are to be prevented are: children and parents, personal resilience, hopes and dreams, brands, usual suspects [criminality], police and the public and community engagement.¹**
- **All of the issues identified are powerfully affected by inequality:**
 1. Children and parents: The data shows that where inequality is high, child well-being is low.²
 2. Building personal resilience: Relative deprivation adds to the stresses of family and community life, so removing the sources of resilience.³
 3. Hopes and dreams: Inequality is a good predictor of how likely it is that a person who is born poor will stay poor.^{4,5,6,7}
 4. Riots and the brands: In more unequal countries there is more pressure to acquire expensive symbols of status, and people work the equivalent of 2-3 months more per year in more unequal countries.⁸
 5. The usual suspects [criminality]: Increasing inequality brings more crime, including violent and acquisitive crimes.^{9,10}
 6. Police and the public: Where inequality is high, there is more deadly use of force on the part of police.¹¹
 7. Community engagement, involvement and cohesion: Greater inequality reduces social cohesion, weakens community life and lowers levels of trust.¹²
- **The Panel suggested various policy solutions to address these issues. The key issues identified by the Government-commissioned *Riots, Communities and Victims' Panel* relating to the 2011 England Riots can be addressed by a fundamental shift in society: a reduction in inequality in the United Kingdom.**

Children and parents:

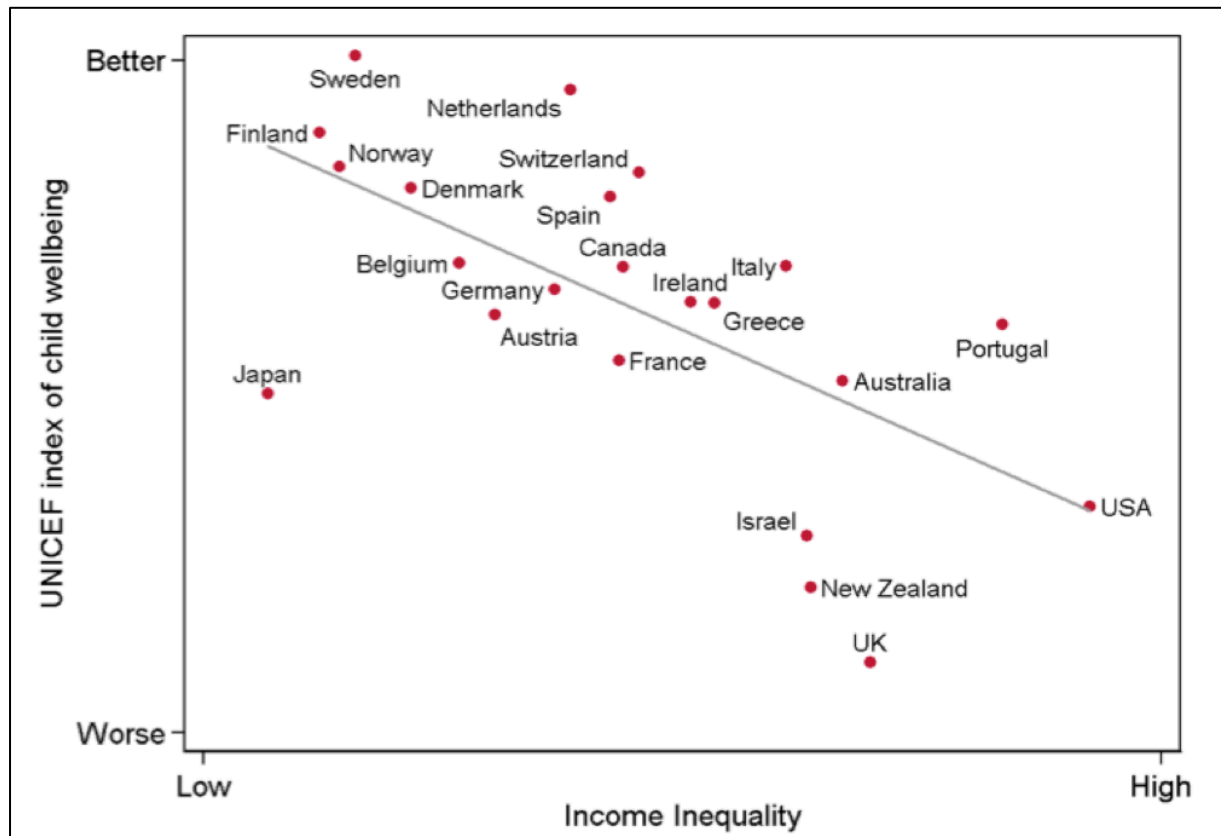
Many policy makers were surprised in 2007 when UNICEF published its child well-being report card in which the UK scored at the bottom of several league tables comparing different dimensions of child well-being in rich countries. Across six objective and subjective measures of child well-being, the UK was found to have the worst child well-being overall. The report also found, for example, that UK children are less likely than children in any other wealthy country to report that their peers are kind and helpful. Children in the UK also scored their family and peer relationships as poorer than any other children in the group of wealthy, market democracies.²

Figure 1.
UNICEF's Dimensions of child well-being ranked from best to worst among 21 rich countries²

Dimensions of child well-being	Average ranking position (for all 6 dimensions)	Dimension 1 Material well-being	Dimension 2 Health and safety	Dimension 3 Educational well-being	Dimension 4 Family and peer relationships	Dimension 5 Behaviours and risks	Dimension 6 Subjective well-being
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Sweden	5.0	1	1	5	15	1	7
Denmark	7.2	4	4	8	9	6	12
Finland	7.5	3	3	4	17	7	11
Spain	8.0	12	6	15	8	5	2
Switzerland	8.3	5	9	14	4	12	6
Norway	8.7	2	8	11	10	13	8
Italy	10.0	14	5	20	1	10	10
Ireland	10.2	19	19	7	7	4	5
Belgium	10.7	7	16	1	5	19	16
Germany	11.2	13	11	10	13	11	9
Canada	11.8	6	13	2	18	17	15
Greece	11.8	15	18	16	11	8	3
Poland	12.3	21	15	3	14	2	19
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
France	13.0	9	7	18	12	14	18
Portugal	13.7	16	14	21	2	15	14
Austria	13.8	8	20	19	16	16	4
Hungary	14.5	20	17	13	6	18	13
United States	18.0	17	21	12	20	20	-
United Kingdom	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

British epidemiologists Pickett and Wilkinson have explored the link between income inequality and child well-being. What they found is that where income inequality is high, child well-being is low.⁹

Figure 2. Child well-being is low where inequality is high⁹



Personal Resilience: UCL review of evidence

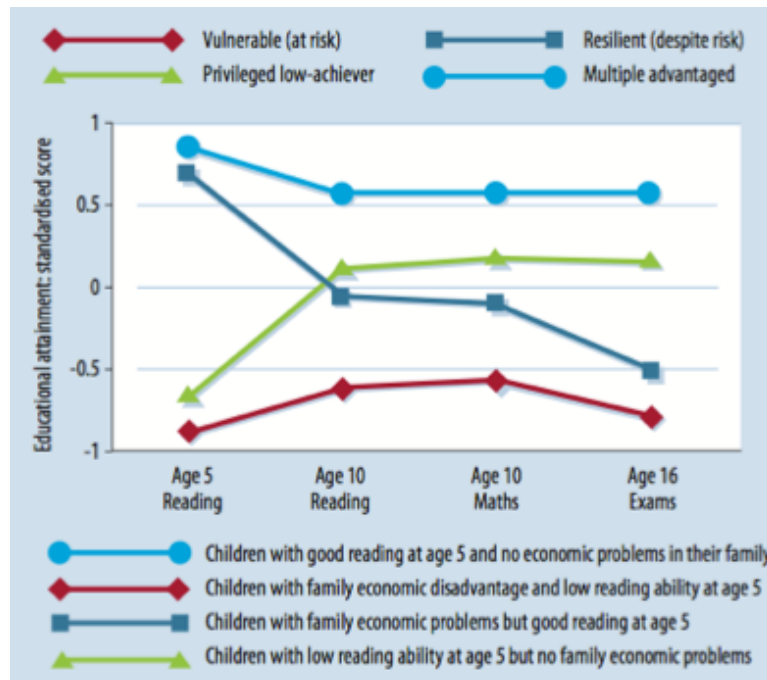
The Panel's next theme was Personal Resilience. Summarising a robust academic review of evidence on personal resilience edited by Professor Mel Bartley in the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at the University College of London, Richard Wilkinson wrote:

“Resilience always seems admirable. To have overcome adversity, to have done it against the odds, is evidence that someone has got what it takes – the right stuff. But what is the right stuff? Often resilience turns out to involve supportive families and communities, good educational opportunities and services which are delivered with enough consideration and respect not to make the problems worse.

Positive social, emotional and educational experiences can partially offset the effects of material deprivation. But so often it is the material disadvantages and divisions themselves which undermine supportive community and family life. Material divisions are socially corrosive. Relative deprivation adds to the stresses of family and community life, so removing the sources of resilience.” – Richard Wilkinson³

In the same way that child well-being is threatened by inequality via childhood relative disadvantage, personal resilience is also jeopardised. The chart below shows the effect of poverty over time. Children who beat the odds initially as young children (represented by the dark blue line) have lost substantial ground by the age of 16.³ Because this research used different ability tests, it may be that the effect shown is simply

Figure 3. Effect of poverty on educational attainment³



regression to the mean and the children who initially scored well simply had a lucky test day, after which their performance returned to a non-high achieving level. Still, there is a growing research base that supports the idea that initially resilient children are worn down by disadvantage over time relative to their better-off peers.^{14, 15, 16}

Hopes and dreams: Social mobility

What a young person hopes for, and how closely that matches up to the reality that he or she lives with is also related to child well-being, education and resilience. If hopes, dreams and aspirations don't match up with real prospects, it is easy to see why some young people would think that they have no stake in society.

Inevitably some children will be born into more disadvantaged circumstances than others. The question is: how likely are they to make a positive shift away from their circumstances of origin? In the UK, such a positive shift away from disadvantaged circumstances of origin is less likely than in any other wealthy democracy in the world^{4, 5, 6}. There are many reasons for this, including inherited wealth, resource-rich neighbourhoods, good schools, better preparation for higher education, family and friend networks, and snobbery and prejudice⁷—but again these things are linked to inequality.

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In a more unequal country, they will be available differentially: those born in poorer families will be much less likely to benefit from them, so creating a stickiness of family background for the disadvantaged that is hard to escape. Income inequality is a good predictor of how likely it is that a person who is born poor will stay poor.⁷ In the UK being born poor means most likely you will stay poor throughout life. In other countries such as Germany and Denmark there is a better chance for someone who is born poor. Just 30 years ago, when the UK and also the USA were more equal countries, there was also more social mobility. Inequality blocks social mobility.⁷

Figure 4. Family background determines life chances more in the UK than other developed nations⁵

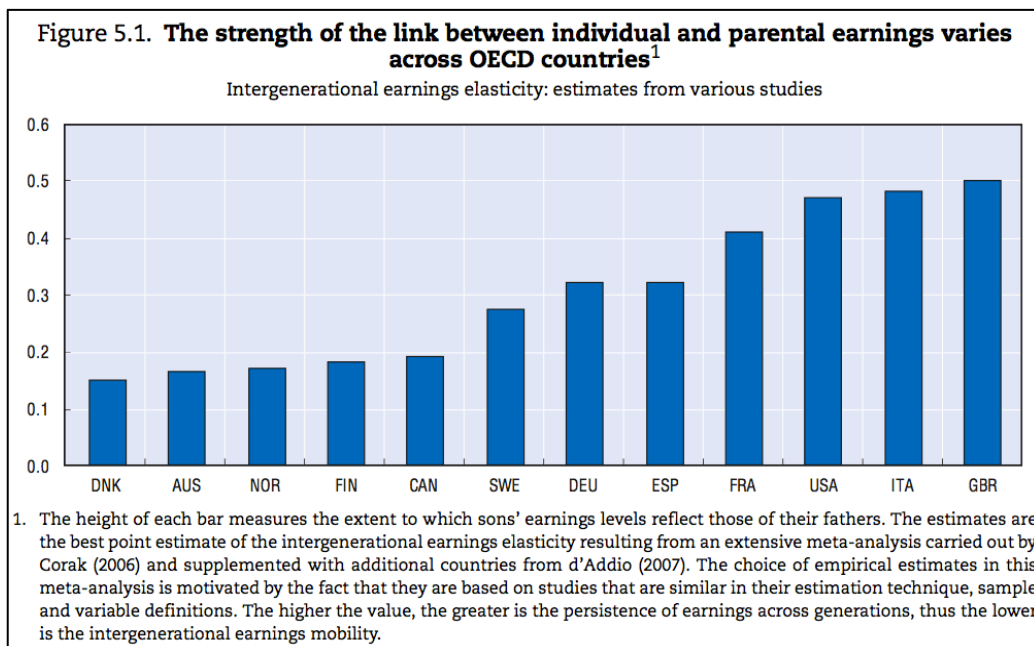
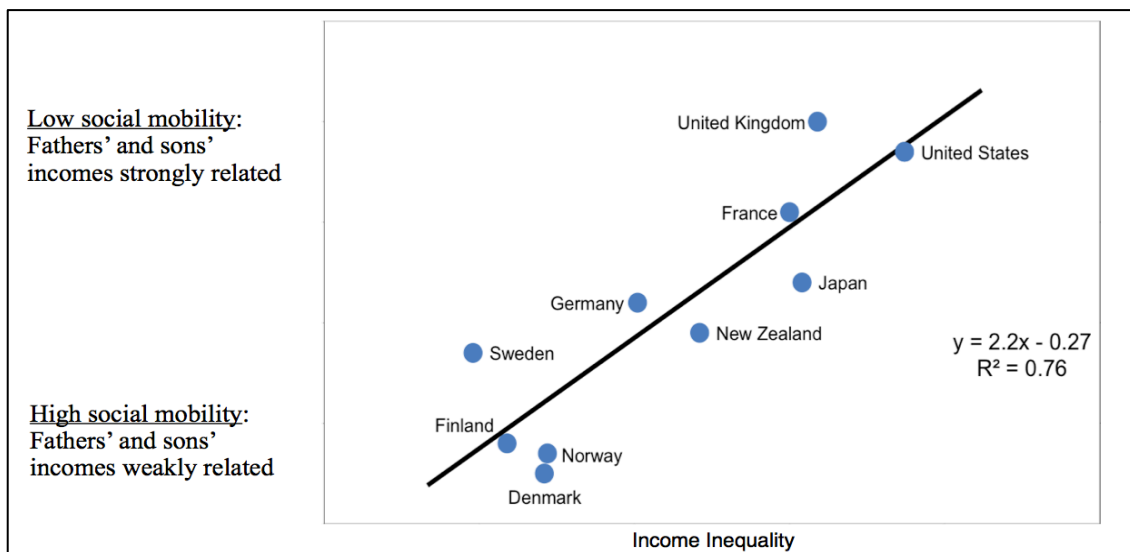


Figure 5. How far do rich fathers have rich sons and poor fathers have poor sons? Social mobility is lower in countries where there is a stronger link between fathers' and sons' incomes.⁷



Brands: Consumerism and sustainability

It is difficult not to notice conspicuous wealth. Inequality is communicated to young people directly by overt displays of expensive consumer goods and glittering shops filled with products that they are unlikely to be able to afford. The most important obstacle to achieving sustainability is consumerism and the opposition to policies which might reduce personal income. A very important part of what fuels consumption however is status competition - keeping up with others, maintaining appearances, having the right clothes, car, housing, education etc, to compare favourably with others. All these pressures are intensified by greater inequality. As a result, people in more unequal societies work much longer hours.⁵ They spend more, save less, get into debt more and aspire to ever higher incomes.

Usual suspects: Crime

Crime has been robustly linked to inequality—in multiple contexts and through multiple methodologies.^{9, 10} A study of inequality and crime in England by Adam Whitworth of Sheffield University and published in the Cambridge Journal Social Policy and Society, adds to a growing body of evidence¹⁰ that with increasing inequality comes more crime, including violent and acquisitive crimes. It examined whether inequality in local areas of England was related to rates of five types of crime and concluded that inequality is a significant factor in the relationship, even after controlling for other determinants of crime such as low income, unemployment, and teen birth rates. These findings support calls for a greater recognition of the structural role of social and economic inequalities in relation to crime outcomes and indicate a need for closer integration between social, economic and crime policies.

Police and the public: Inequality and police use of deadly force

A classic paper from 1979 examines the relationship between inequality and police use of deadly force, an issue that is relevant to the Panel's theme 'Police and the Public'. Comparing 50 U.S. states as separate test-beds, David Jacobs and David Britt found that police use of deadly force is much more common in the more unequal U.S. States. This finding was robust to controls for other important influences on police use of deadly force including overall prevalence of violence, racial diversity, police numbers, urbanisation and whether the state was in the southern or northern USA. In other words, where inequality is high, there is more deadly use of force on the part of police. This may be because inequality also fuels more violent crime, the police are more on edge, and because there is less trust where inequality is high.¹¹

In a qualitative research study commissioned by the Cabinet Office and conducted by the National Centre for Social Research, which explored why some young people became involved in the 2011 England Riots, one

young person from Tottenham summarised not only the relationship between police and the public, but also the importance of trust between police and the public:

“Police need to be more open. Just a short statement after Mark Duggan’s death would have helped. And if any police officer does anything wrong they should be dealt with. Need to show that they are not above the law themselves. We need to be able to trust them.” (Young person, Tottenham)¹³

Community engagement, involvement and cohesion: Trust

For communities to thrive there must be a sense of cohesion and trust. Yet with more inequality comes less trust and a weakening of community life¹². Inequality increases social divisions. When people feel that they are regarded as inferior by others and everyone is out for themselves, they are less likely to trust others. With more trust comes more community cohesion, more involvement, and more engagement.

Figure 6. In more unequal societies fewer people feel they can trust others¹²



Conclusions

On the first anniversary of the England Riots of 2011, it is useful to reflect on our society and how income inequality contributed to the outbreak of wide-spread social unrest in the summer of 2011. The evidence shows that income inequality negatively affects **children and parents, personal resilience and hopes and dreams**, and that inequality drives consumerism, that inequality increases **violent crime** and excessive force by **police**. Given this, it is clear that if we want to prevent future unrest and foster a positive, shared society, we should be aiming for a less unequal society, with high levels of trust and **strong communities**.

The Equality Trust Research Digest: Inequality and the 2011 England Riots

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