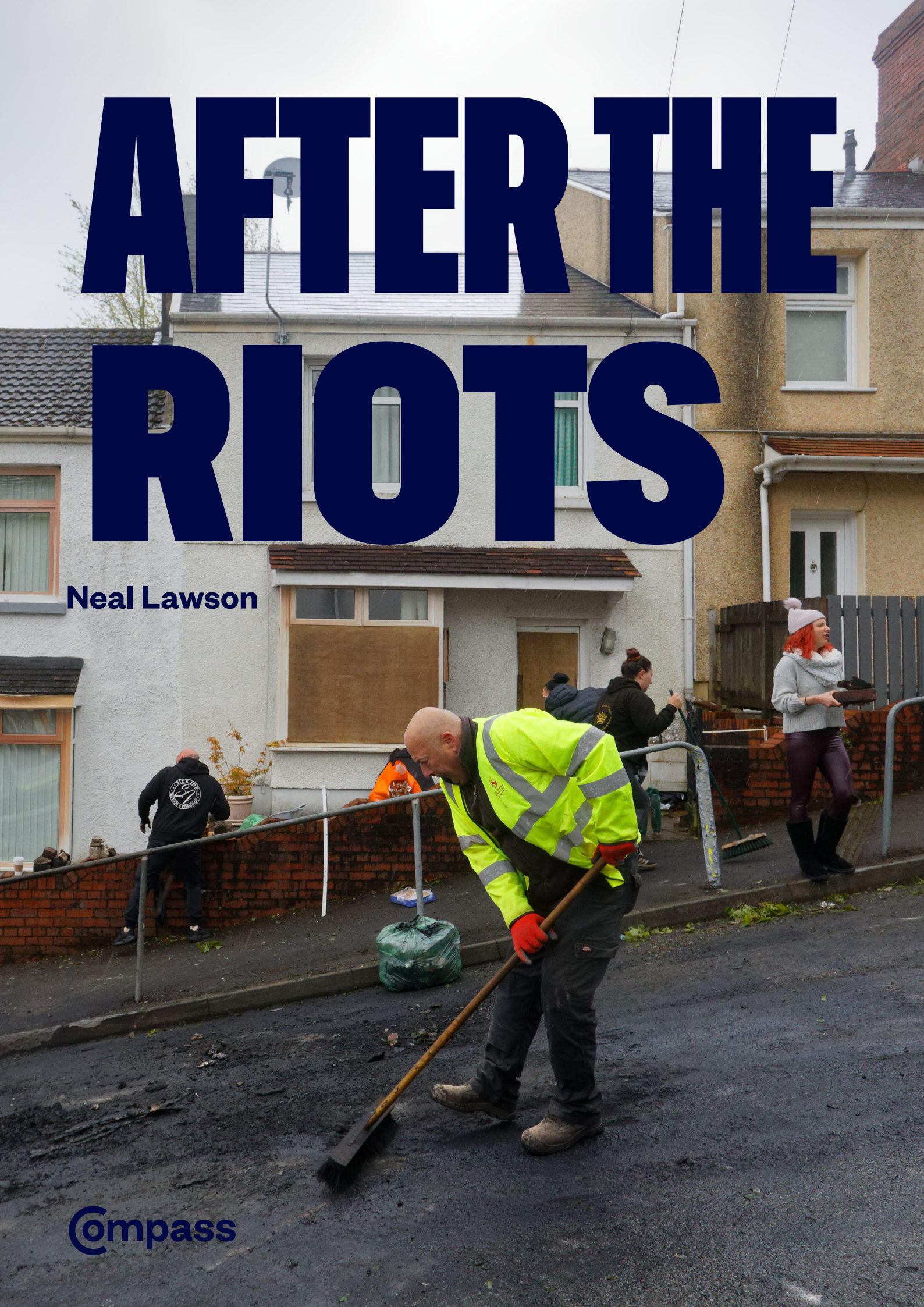


AFTER THE RIOTS

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About Compass

Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, democratic and sustainable. We build alliances of ideas, parties and organisations to help make systemic political change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support, and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link those with state reforms and policy. The meeting point of emerging horizontal participation and vertical resource and policy we call 45° Change.

Contents

Preface - 5

Things can only get... - 6

This is what can happen when... - 7

Embracing complexity - 9

What is to be done? - 11

Preface

The sickening flames of the riots have burned themselves out, but the embers of hatred, frustration, and alienation still shimmer under the ashes. Riots and rioters come and go. Remember Liverpool, Brixton, Tottenham. Does this time feel any different? The riots may fade from the news but it's not hard to see, given the context, how something similar, worse even, might arise again and soon.

The easy thing to do is to move on. Easy because to do otherwise is to embrace complexity, nuance and fundamental challenges and change.

The Prime Minister was undoubtedly right to condemn the “actions of a tiny, mindless minority in our society”. But if that's the extent of the state's response, just to clamp down, then this truly is the definition of ‘sticking plaster politics’. It was welcoming to see him make more positive noises about hope on a trip to Germany, a country facing its own far-right demons, but his view that “I do think in the end, delivery is the way forward” is another example of necessity falling short of sufficiency. A big dramatic event has hit the country and there has been no sense of explanation nor closure - we are left adrift waiting for the next wave of hate.

So, as the riot headlines fade, this is precisely the moment to think big and deep, and look at the causes of the riots and their cures, because it's doubtful the causes are going to simply disappear. The sparks that fanned the riotous flames are going to keep flying.

The only way we remove the tinder is a national, considered moment of reckoning - a public inquiry into the causes and cures of political extremism.

Things can only get...

Migration isn't going to be suddenly halted, and the boats aren't going to stop, not least because our country needs migrant workers. More importantly because geopolitical events and climate change are going to keep dispersing people from their own countries and regions. The AI revolution and extraordinary social and economic change at scale and pace isn't going into reverse. Global stock markets could crash, and energy and food prices could rocket again at any moment and spread despair along with hunger and cold. At home, even if spectacularly successful and lucky, the new government isn't going to conjure overnight more and better paid jobs, bountiful public services or more affordable homes. Tense issues of culture and integration aren't going to get less pronounced but more. Political alignments and allegiances aren't going to become less volatile and fractured but more. The young aren't going to easily see a more hopeful future and so be put off by a world governed in ways that are more autocratic than democratic.

And those social influencers and politicians that peddle the politics of fear and hate aren't going to suddenly resist pouring petrol and dropping matches on the dry tinder of our fractured social fabric whenever they can.

Of course, Labour hasn't been in office for 14 years and recent blame must be laid at the door of the Tories, but the fact that a fresh government after all of that time seems to have instilled so little hope that things are going to change sufficiently is a factor in the despairing backdrop to the summer. Promising so little and gaining power on only 34% of the vote isn't a platform or a mandate for enough hope. That hope and belief in change must now be generated. But to do so means facing how deep and complicated the causes of the riots are.

People make choices - to riot or not, to be racist or not. We condemn those that make the wrong choices. But they do so in an environment and a context that shapes and influences them. Happy people in happy places tend not to riot or be racist.

This is what can happen when...

Because this is what can happen when the racism and nativism of the far right pulls the right, the centre right and the centre left with it.

This is what can happen when there is no hopeful narrative around diversity and difference, around our obligations as a rich nation to the poor and the persecuted who now can't live in peace or places fit for human habitation.

This is what can happen when the Government repeats daily their determination to control migration in inhumane language and the only response of the Opposition is that they are not being tough or efficient enough in 'dealing with the problem'.

This is what can happen when immigration is used as an economic tool to boost productivity and growth without any real enforcement of minimum wage legislation, or enough houses, schools, teachers, hospitals, doctors and nurses for the existing population, let alone the new.

This is what can happen when the speed and scale of cultural change is too much for some of the poorest and the weakest to keep up with, when people feel disorientated and disconnected and globalisation spins so fast that the currents and riptides of a society few voted for and even fewer benefit from hold us back and drag us down despite all our brilliant and creative efforts to shape better lives and better places.

This is what can happen after decades of industrial decline, the hollowing out of any notion of socially derived security, of empty turbo-consumerism, of schools run as exam factories with pupils being excluded to boost league table positions, when youth clubs and sports facilities are closed down, when few attend church and trade unions are sidelined, when hunger is a common experience and the nation is shaken first by austerity, then Brexit and then Covid and no one seems to have a plan that will turn things round.

This is what can happen when fiscal rules are followed to meet the demands of the bond markets and not to cultivate the social and cultural bonds that bind our society.

This is what can happen when technocracy replaces democracy and the Bank of England and the Office Budget Responsibility decide our fate and not politicians we can elect, hold to account or replace.

This is what can happen when democracy is eroded and power is either grabbed by global corporations or centralised by the state, when turnout is low, and trust is even lower. This is what can happen when voices of despair and frustration are ignored by a voting system that

only listens to and counts a tiny fraction of the electorate who are already rich, powerful and influential.

This is what can happen when news and photos are deep-faked, when lies and rumours are spread like wildfire and fanned by important people in important places.

This is what can happen when the right and the far-right organise ambitiously, coherently and internationally, across borders to win the big battles, when they tell more compelling stories of loss, nostalgia, blame and fear, while progressives think small, act smaller, offer too little credible hope and retreat into their silos, logos and egos.

This is what can happen when there is not just a sense of decay but a wilful blindness to attend to that decay, a refusal, despite the wealth of this nation, to invest in the soil in which diverse roots and people can happily entwine and grow together.

Nothing excuses the riots or the rioters. Nothing. But this is what can happen when the future feels worse than the past.

Embracing complexity

And as we stop and draw breath, it was both intriguing and infuriating to see the riots were promoted by the hashtag EnoughIsEnough, when in 2022 the very same hashtag was used by some on the left to momentarily galvanise outrage at austerity, energy bills and food prices only to disappear as soon as they appeared. And perhaps it's just a little ironic that what in part drives a riot is what drives a revolt, a common and shared sense of injustice and the power surge of solidarity and collective endeavour to address it. Riots said Martin Luther King Junior are "the language of the unheard".

Living in poverty is not an excuse to riot, but it's a factor. [Analysis by the FT](#) found that seven of the 10 most deprived areas in England witnessed riots. There was also a correlation between hotspots of disorder and places with high numbers of migrants being housed in hotels (which were cheaper for the government than alternatives in more affluent areas) as they waited for their claims to be processed.

In all this there is a fine line between hatred and racism and genuine despair and alienation. Only a tiny fraction of people rioted, but they could only do so with the consent of others. We must know where to draw the lines between hate and hopelessness. We must understand the causes of these riots, and work through the deployment of sufficient resources to cure them. Unless we believe that some people are simply born full of hate and racism, then we have to accept that hate comes from somewhere, learned from other racists yes, but from fear and anxiety.

So we must be so careful, so careful about who we 'other', who we denigrate and write off. We must also be careful not to be tribal or binary in our thinking. The roots of these riots are not the product of any one party's rule. The rot stretches back decades. Blame can be appropriated differently but no party is blameless. Social media isn't just the plaything of the far right, but it did enable anti-fascists to mobilise at speed and at scale.

This stuff is difficult. You can read [Nesrine Malik in the Guardian](#) and agree with so much of what she says about the rioters, a "minority reflects, and draws on, decades of racism, Islamophobia and anti-immigration rhetoric and policy broadcast by parts of the right-wing media, the Conservative party and the Labour party itself". Just as it's possible to have sympathy with [David Goodhart in the Times](#) when he writes "is it possible, after the recent riots, for the government to do something to improve the fate of poor white people without seeming to give succour to bigots?"

If the sole or predominant response of the government is to be doubly

tough, tough on the rioters but also tough on the immigrants and the asylum seekers, then progressives can never be tough enough. The right will always win the being tough war.

Some liberal leaders and thinkers keep claiming we have reached the high watermark of the populist right – and they keep being proven wrong. There is a cycle of decline going on, whereby technocrats fail to deliver and boost the far right who, if they get into office undo democratic structures, but in-turn have few practical answers for society's ills. Technocrats return but in a weaker state – and so it goes on – critically in a downward spiral as weak democracies beget autocracies. It's not just the so-called 'grown-up' leaders who need to be in charge – but every single grown-up in the country.

In all this, rebuilding faith in politics will not be done by politicians alone, by their heroic deeds, but by politicians who know that faith and trust comes from our participation, the voices and views of all the people.

There have been some very good articulations of what needs to happen next, like this comprehensive view from [Parth Patel and Marley Morris at the IPPR](#), but in all this complexity and nuance perhaps, the best thing is not to claim to know the right answers but to start asking some of the right questions:

- How do progressives learn to talk about the nation as a legitimate space in which the rules of society are decided and followed, a place we can all be proud of?
- Why do progressives seem to like Europe, Britain, Scotland, Wales but not England?
- How do we face both the past and the future, and know what to modernise and what to conserve in our society?
- How do we have an understanding of the role of class in a society that is more complex but not beyond the structures of class and cultures of class?
- Where do we find the resource to invest in jobs, communities and public services and enrich our social soil instead of allowing it to be degraded?
- How are citizens to be given a meaningful voice locally and nationally and how can we develop a culture of politics which allows the future to be negotiated not imposed?
- Despite Brexit, how are we to have some democratic influence on events beyond our borders?
- How do we understand the causes of extremism without condoning them?
- How do we deal with immigration and asylum in ways that are practical and as humane and generous as possible?
- Can social media really be effectively regulated?
- Who are we as a country and how best do we live together in all our diversity and complexity?

What is to be done?

These questions and better ones cannot be answered quickly or easily. They cannot be answered just by people at the top, the already powerful. Instead, we need to mix expertise, lived experience with the wisdom of the crowd if we are to come up with meaningful and lasting solutions.

Therefore, like others, we think there should be a **Public Inquiry into the Causes and Cures of Political Extremism**: which by necessity would have a broad remit and be given the space and time to delve into the wide range and deep complexities of the issues. It would have the resource to really hear the voices and views of the people and communities most affected by and open to extremism. It would be tasked with examining all forms of political extremism, looking at the social, economic, democratic, cultural and technological roots of extremism and be asked to make policy recommendations about cures. The inquiry could deploy more democratic and participatory tools such as national and local citizens assemblies.

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The Twitter logo, a stylized 'X' character, followed by the text '@CompassOffice'.