

Relative deprivation and social identity in laboratory based riots: A model

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Abstract

Though extreme events, riots are key signals of well-being in societies. Without understanding the psychological mechanisms behind them, however, it is difficult to discern the social changes that need to be made in order to reduce both the riots themselves and their underlying causes. In this work we use computational models to test both relative deprivation and social identity as explanations for data from a novel experimental framework, Parklife, which provides data on how and when individuals riot in the laboratory. Our models show that whilst norm formation and distinctiveness are important factors in explaining the behaviour of participants in Parklife, relative deprivation is a key and necessary mechanism in the increase in anti-social behaviour observed in disadvantaged groups. This work offers the first direct test of relative deprivation within a specialised system, and shows the power of computational simulations in connecting theories with data, helping us to test hypotheses.