

Could Budget Cuts in California Lead to London-Style Riots?

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August 28, 2011; **Source:** [The Daily Beast](#) | This seems to be a familiar and distressing story year after year after year. California's unending budget crisis is forcing deeper cuts in the social safety net, leaving poor people and the nonprofits that serve them with few options. Here are some of the particulars:

- The Medicaid program stopped covering dental care in 2009.
- Tuition and fees in the University of California system have doubled since 2005 and more tuition hikes are in the offing.
- Funding for the Adult Day Care Health Program is coming to an end, meaning the closing of most of the state's 300 adult day care centers.
- Except for neighboring Nevada, California has the highest per-capita home foreclosure rate.
- California's state budget deficit is the nation's largest at \$26.6 billion. (But this is largely a function of the state's large population. In terms of debt as a share of GDP, California comes in [eleventh](#)).
- The state just made \$15 billion in budget cuts after having cut a total of \$22.5 billion from the previous two state budgets.
- Standard & Poor's downgraded California's bond rating to A-, lower than any other state.

More cuts are likely, with little indication that the state's Republican and Democratic policy makers are going to be able to do much to reverse the trend. Governor Jerry Brown has promised no new taxes unless they are put to a referendum, a kind of dopey idea for a state that is already governmentally hamstrung by voter initiatives. Of course Republicans in the state assembly won't let proposed new taxes come up for votes anyhow.

Now people are talking about the prospect of civil disturbances like those happening in Europe due to budget cuts. Marqueeze Harris-Dawson, president of the Community Coalition in South Los Angeles, worried about people becoming frustrated and angry, and saying "We have the same sort of problems London does. We are going to have to deal with it."

This isn't the first time we have heard references to the civil disturbances in the U.K. and in Greece as portending a possible future here in the U.S. Do NPQ Newswire readers fear that the streets of American cities could soon be the scene of random violence and looting, as in Athens or London? And if not, what are the differences between the situation here and in Europe?—*Rick Cohen*