

## 7.1 Social Unrest

- Social unrest includes civil disorders, acts of mass civil disobedience, and strikes. They differ in their legality and tactics (especially the use or avoidance of violence), but all are acts by groups of people that are intended to disrupt a community or organization.
- Civil disorder is a public disturbance by a group or groups of people involving acts of violence that cause immediate danger, damage or injury to others or their property. They are often but not always politically motivated. They are both illegal and violent.
- Civil disorders can be divided into two rough categories: those in which the perpetrators deliberately set out to harm others and those in which the perpetrators are focused more on crimes against property. Most of Seattle’s disorders have been the latter.
- Civil disobedience is the nonviolent refusal to obey certain laws as an act of political protest. Civil disobedience is illegal but non-violent.
- Strikes are collective work stoppages by employees designed to force an employer to meet employee demands. Most strikes are legal and peaceful, but they can be both illegal and violent.
- There are not clear lines differentiating civil disorder, civil disobedience, and strikes. The World Trade Organization (WTO) protests began with acts of civil disobedience then spiraled into civil disorder.
- The World Trade Organization (WTO) unrest was Seattle’s most damaging experience with social unrest. For five days in late 1999 police battled protesters in downtown and Capitol Hill. There were no fatalities, but the economic disruption was significant, and the unrest was a serious blow to the city’s reputation.
- For the past five years, May Day protests in Seattle have routinely exhibited violence or vandalism that requires police intervention.
- Disorders often occur in dense areas where people naturally gather and in crossroads areas. In Seattle, downtown, Capitol Hill, and the University District have seen the most frequent civil disorder events.
- Looting and arson are the most common crimes in Seattle’s civil disorder events.
- Reputation damage has been a major impact to some areas hit by civil disorders, but Seattle has not seen major, lasting reputation damage.

### 7.1.1 Context

Social unrest includes a wide range of activities from violent to peaceful, legal to illegal, criminal to principled and highly planned to completely spontaneous. With such diversity, it seems impossible to generalize about them as a class of activities. What they share is an effort by a group of people to disrupt the community. Sometimes violence against people and property is added. This section will concentrate on the aspects of community disruption. There is no intention of equating moral parity between mob violence and peaceful protest of the sort championed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It must be recognized, however, that even peaceful civil disobedience is the application of pressure.

#### Civil Disorder

Civil disorder has been an episodic presence in the United States since its founding. The most widely held theory of modern American civil disorder distinguishes between “communal” and “commodity” riots.<sup>330</sup> Communal riots involve direct battles between two or more ethnic groups. They can cause high

casualties and usually occur on the border between the communities involved or at some contested public spot like a beach or playground. In the 20th century, they were most common from the turn of the century through the 1920s. Commodity riots start within the heart of a community instead of the fringe. The violence is generally aimed at symbols of the prevailing social structure, not at people. Because property is the most common target, casualties tend to be lower in commodity riots than communal riots. The majority riots during the 1960s were commodity riots.<sup>331</sup>

Disorders in Miami and Crown Heights, Brooklyn during the 1980s and 1990s were marked by inter-ethnic violence, suggesting a return to communal type disorders.<sup>332</sup> But the 1992 Los Angeles riots demonstrated that something more complex might be developing. The main targets were stores and structures symbolic of authority, but the ethnic diversity of the arrested persons was something new. There seemed to be a new element of interethnic and interclass conflict involved that had the potential to make disorders more dangerous. These developments showed the importance of taking intergroup tensions seriously.

The 1992 LA riot did not begin with an arrest, as many of the 1960s riots did, but with the announcement of a trial verdict. The difference is important because it began with an anticipated, yet unscheduled event that allowed crowds to gather quickly. Unlike the 1960s, rioters used more firearms and assaulted fire department personnel more frequently. Fifty-five people died as a result of the riots. Unlike riots in the 1960s where most of the fatalities resulted from National Guard and law enforcement fire, most fatalities in LA were caused by rioters or people defending themselves from them.<sup>333</sup> The official studies of the mid-1960s riots, the LA riots, and the Crown Heights riots all noted that municipalities were reluctant to activate their disaster plans and sought to downplay events until they were out of hand.<sup>334</sup>

The turn of the millennium saw a shift back towards commodity riots, aimed at various social issues such as workers' rights, globalization, and the environment. The 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle began peacefully but quickly turned into disorder, with both violence and vandalism. Multiple riots in the 2000s and 2010s have been about police force against African Americans, including riots in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2001, Oakland, California in 2009, and Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. In the past few years, the political landscape appears to be the main motivator behind civil disorder. Many cities in the U.S. have experienced clashes between groups that identify with the far-right or far-left of the political spectrum. The most prominent are white supremacist and anti-fascist ("antifa") groups, both of which have discussed and acted out the use of violence to defend their beliefs.<sup>335</sup> In 2017, a white-supremacist protest in Charlottesville, South Carolina resulted in the murder of a counter-protestor.

Riots do not always stem from protests. Some are situational, such as riots following sporting events or riots developing during power outages. Chicago experienced riots over multiple years in the 1990s, each time the city's basketball team won the NBA championship. After the 1992 victory, riots led to two deaths and almost 700 arrests.<sup>336</sup> A riot arising from the 1977 New York City blackout led to over 1,000 fires and 1,600 stores being looted.<sup>337</sup>

Prolonged power outages and natural disasters like flooding or earthquakes often heighten a community's fear of subsequent civil disorder, mainly looting. However, disaster and recover experts say that the risk of looting is widely overstated and sensationalized by the media, and disaster situations actually promote cooperative behavior in communities.<sup>338</sup> In the week following Hurricane Sandy, crime dropped by one third in New York City. Additionally, after Hurricane Harvey hit Harris County Texas in 2017, there were only 63 people charged with storm-related crimes (including burglary and theft) in a county of 5 million people.<sup>339</sup>

## Protest and Civil Disobedience

Organized protest has long been a cherished right of Americans and a hallmark of the right to freedom of speech. Nearly all protest is peaceful. For local governments, the right of citizens to protest must be balanced against the rights of non-protesting citizens to conduct their own business. Typically, this is accomplished by rules designed to permit non-protesting citizens to move freely and to respect private property. Use of the street requires a street use permit because it closes the street to other users for the duration of the demonstration. When conflict arises between demonstrators and law enforcement, it is frequently centered on the use of streets and private property.

Civil disobedience also has a long history in the U.S. It is the peaceful refusal by a group of people to obey laws or pay taxes that they regard as unjust and to persuade the government to change them. Sometimes there is not a direct connection between the law broken (e.g., trespass) and the issue being protested, as when demonstrators blockade a private business to protest what the business is doing.

Despite the peaceful nature of most protest and civil disobedience, they are disruptive and have the potential to degenerate into violence, as illustrated in the examples above. The 1968 Democratic Convention is the archetype of this type of disorder. Most planned events involve a protest rally or march. Protest leaders and law enforcement can meet before the event to develop mutual understanding and often do. Sometimes, this pre-planning does not work because one or both sides will not or cannot control its people on the street. The use of the internet and social media to organize events has allowed law enforcement to obtain intel prior to events. However, both new technology and policy are preventing some surveillance activities. Online communications are increasingly being masked by groups who do not want the police to know about their plans.<sup>340</sup> Additionally, a surveillance ordinance enacted in Seattle in 2017 requires city council approval (after at least one community meeting) of all surveillance equipment used or sought by city departments.<sup>341</sup>

## Strikes

Strikes are the organized stoppage or slowdown of work in order to force an employer to grant concessions. Today many strikes are legally protected. Some critically important workers do not have the right to strike. The vast majority of strikes are legal and peaceful. They are disruptive to the businesses or organizations involved, but they have limited impact on the whole community. Examples of strikes that affect the whole community have become rare and are often illegal. The air traffic controllers' strike of 1981 was one example.

There is no clear definition of a general strike, but it involves a work stoppage by a substantial number of workers across industries in a city, region, or country. They are used to achieve broad economic or political objectives, rather than negotiate with a specific company or organization. There has not been a general strike in the United States since the Great Depression. They are very hard to organize and maintain.

### 7.1.2 History

Seattle has experienced periodic civil disorder, large-scale disruptive protest, and strikes throughout its history. The issues have been different in each case. The tactics used in the disruptions have also evolved.

#### **1886 Anti-Chinese Mob**

Seattle's first large civil disturbance occurred in 1886 when a mob attempted to evict Chinese residents from the city. The mayor called out the militia to prevent the expulsion. The mob resisted. Fighting erupted and the troops fired on the crowd, killing two people.<sup>342</sup>

### ***1919 The Seattle General Strike***

The next wave of civil disorder centered on the labor movement. There were disturbances from 1900 to 1919, but there was no large-scale violence in Seattle itself as there was in other parts of the state. The biggest event was the general strike of 1919 that lasted for three days and passed without violent incident. After 1919, the labor unrest declined.

### ***The 1960s***

After 1919, there were no large incidents of civil disorder until the 1960s. During those upheavals, Seattle remained a secondary site for national trends. As with the rest of the nation, Seattle experienced strife connected with racial tensions, the Vietnam War, and the youth movement.

### ***1967 Post MLK Assassination Disorders.***

The late 60s were a period high racial tension nationally. During the summer of 1967, disorder broke out in many cities. The unrest spread to Seattle, but it was minor compared to other places.<sup>343</sup> Even though Seattle avoided additional large-scale incidents, tensions remained high and resulted in several police officer shootings during the late 1960s and early 1970s. 1969 University District Parties.

The social changes involving young people also led to unrest. In 1969, youths and police confronted each other in the University District over two nights. The flashpoint was the attempt to shut down parties.

### ***1969 – 1973 Vietnam***

Seattle saw several large marches against the Vietnam War, but these were mostly peaceful. Most of these happened from 1969 to 1973. In the last large protest, a crowd of nearly 5,000 university students shut down I-5.<sup>344</sup>

### ***1992 Rodney King Verdict***

The night of the Rodney King verdict, small groups of people roamed the downtown streets smashing windows, lighting dumpster fires and overturning cars. The next day, people angered by the verdict rallied at the Federal Building. Many residents and workers feared more violence and avoided downtown. After the rally broke up, some groups moved around downtown as they did the night before. Others went to Capitol Hill where they set fires and attacked the East Precinct Police Headquarters. The fires provoked a citywide crisis. Suburban fire trucks were called in to help as the city exhausted all its mutual aid. There was a serial arsonist also active at the time. If he had set fires that night, it would have made the situation even more difficult. Another protest occurred in the University District. That protest was largely peaceful, but protesters did occupy I-5 for a while, shutting down traffic.<sup>345</sup>

### ***1999 WTO Protests***

From November 29 to December 3, 1999, Seattle hosted the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference. During the first day of the conference, a large confrontation lasted all day in the area near the convention center. Some of the protesters threw rocks and bottles. The police responded with tear gas, pepper spray, and blunt impact projectiles (bean-bag, cork, and rubber). The Mayor responded by declaring a state of emergency that established a limited curfew in the area surrounding the conference site and hotels. The Washington State National Guard was mobilized. The next day saw a smaller downtown protest and the night required police action on Capitol Hill.

The large number of protesters (over 40,000), their tactics, and their organization overwhelmed the approximately 400 police officers securing the conference venues. The protest was a loosely affiliated federation of activist groups. The organizers divided downtown into thirteen wedges and each group was given one wedge. Their use of the Internet, cell phones, radios, and other technologies combined with a very loose organizational structure and more provocative tactics was unprecedented in Seattle.

Many groups were non-violent but seemed determined to provoke an active police response. A small group of protesters was violent. They were joined by non-politically motivated individuals in committing acts of vandalism, smashing windows, spray painting buildings and setting fires. Both the protest groups and the police seemed to get better at isolating these people and avoiding violent confrontation as the week continued.

Over 600 people were arrested. There were no deaths, but 92 people were treated at local hospitals. 56 police officers filed injury reports, with the most serious being a burned hand. It was estimated that downtown businesses sustained \$3 million in property damage. Retailers lost an estimated \$17 million in sales during the 5-day conference. The protests cost the City of Seattle around \$9.3 million.<sup>346</sup>

### **2001. Mardi Gras Riot**

In February 2001, chaos erupted for two consecutive nights during Mardi Gras. A crowd between 5,000 and 7,000 began to fight and vandalize property. Police officers were withdrawn from the crowd over concerns for officer safety and to avoid inciting the crowd. One person was killed. Damage was estimated between \$100,000 and \$200,000. This was a pure riot, with no element of protest involved. An after-action review recommended intervening to disperse the crowd sooner.

### **2017. Inauguration Day Shooting**

Mostly peaceful protests happened throughout the city on January 20, 2017, the day Donald Trump was inaugurated as president. No violence occurred during the day, although police confiscated wooden poles, pipes, flares, and hammers from protestors in Westlake Park.<sup>347</sup> Confrontations between the president's supporters, anarchists, and socialists began to escalate at the University of Washington campus, where conservative news editor, Milo Yiannopoulos, was scheduled to speak. The crowds threw bricks, fireworks, and paint at police officers. Josh Dukes, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, was shot in the abdomen but survived.<sup>348</sup> A married couple, who are believed to have come to the protest to invoke violence, were charged with the assault.

## **7.1.3 Likelihood of Future Occurrences**

The social conditions cannot be predicted, but as long as people have strong passions about social issues, there will be instances of unrest. While earlier events seemed to occur when Seattle was the primary focus of a conflict rather than a secondary site, such as the WTO protests, events in recent years show that conflict or injustice in other parts of the United States can also trigger social unrest locally

Every several decades, Seattle seems to go through surges of activity related to a hot button social issue. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it was immigration, in the early 20<sup>th</sup>, it was labor unrest; in the 1960s, it was many issues - the Vietnam war, intergenerational conflict, and race; in the 1990s, race and globalization; in the 2000s, race and politics. The 2001 Mardi Gras incident was similar to the 1969 University District events but had more conflict between people in the crowd with alcohol, crowding, and racial tensions as contributing factors. Generally, social unrest has taken on similar patterns of activity, with different motivating factors or details. When Seattle is a secondary site to the main conflict, as was the case with the Ferguson protests in 2014, the unrest has been smaller than that at the primary location.

While it's unclear whether political violence is increasing, there is a perceived political polarization occurring in the United States that has resulted in incidents of violence. This perception of greater divisions between groups could increase the likelihood of civil disorder or riots in the future. Social media may be changing the risk of social unrest as well. "Cyber troops" are government or political party actors who strategically manipulate public opinion over social media. Twenty-eight countries have been identified as using real or fake social media profiles to manipulate foreign or domestic opinions to try and provoke conflict.<sup>349</sup> It is unclear whether these emerging political challenges will increase the amount of social unrest. Seattle's emergence as a leading cultural and economic center increases the chance that controversial events like WTO will occur here in the future.

## 7.1.4 Vulnerability

Seattle is the social and economic hub of the Puget Sound region, making it highly exposed to social unrest. Social disruptions are often planned and target community vulnerabilities, places, or systems where pressure will be most strongly felt.

Most disorders in Seattle occur in locations that already have a lot of public assemblies (Downtown, Capitol Hill, and the University District), around large public institutions (the Federal Building, the University of Washington, Seattle Central Community College, or the King County Jail), and occasionally on major transportation routes like I-5.

Large-scale incidents require large numbers of police officers. Mutual aid is a critical component of a successful response. Bringing in officers from neighboring jurisdictions is a common occurrence, but it is also a vulnerability because it requires extra time and planning.

The greatest vulnerability is the transportation network, as it creates the greatest disruption to the general public. Seattle lacks significant reserve capacity in its road network. I-5 is by far the most heavily used corridor in the state. Because of its significance, demonstrations have targeted it. The only mitigating factor is that traffic is already frequently bad so many drivers are used to slowdowns.

Many businesses are vulnerable to civil disorder. Downtown is a frequent site of demonstrations. The WTO protests closed large parts of downtown at the start of the holiday season. Some businesses are direct targets of property crime. Others suffer indirectly due a lack of business. The holiday season is an especially vulnerable time for retail businesses.

On several occasions ethnic, racial, religious and political groups have been targets of mob violence. Most of the examples from Seattle's history are long in the past. The Jewish Federation shooting, although it was not mob violence, provides evidence that the sentiments that lead to mob violence are still with us. The current events around police violence and the African American community have increased racial tensions across the U.S. Additionally, hostility appears to be targeted towards political opponents and minority groups, suggesting a shift towards communal conflict. Groups or communities that are perceived to be connected with hot button topics are especially vulnerable.

Confidence in government and community reputation are two factors that are especially vulnerable to these types of events. They are a direct challenge to law enforcement and the political authorities. While the response to any disaster is very important, it is especially critical when people are directly challenging the authorities. Besides the loss of faith in authority, a community's reputation and confidence in itself are sensitive to conflict and disorder.

## 7.1.5 Consequences

Because the pace of social change is so much faster than the changes in physical forces that cause floods or earthquakes, it is impossible to talk about "100-year civil disorders" the way we talk about "100-year floods." The risk of social unrest is not constant, like many natural hazards, but fluctuates with changing political, economic, and social climates.

Most incidents of unrest are confined to one neighborhood. They feature widespread minor property damage and injuries due the dispersal of crowds or fighting between members of the crowd. Usually they are limited to one or two nights of intense activity, although sometimes they are followed by a longer period of tension and low-level conflict.

### Public Safety

Public safety is always the number one concern during socially disruptive events. Any event that involves heated confrontation between groups can degenerate into violence, even if the original event was supposed to be non-violent. Nationally, many civil disorders have resulted in fatalities. Until 2001,

Seattle was very lucky and had not suffered loss of life through many demonstrations, protests and large confrontations. That changed in 2001 when Kris Kime was struck in the head and killed during the 2001 Mardi Gras riots.

We do not know how many injuries have occurred. Many injuries resulted from the WTO protests, but the total is not known. The examples given in the press include bruises, sprains, some broken bones, and the shooting that occurred at the University of Washington. Several police officers have been injured as well.

The growing conflict between political opponents raises concerns about future violence. The University of Washington Inauguration Day shooting, a shooting that occurred at a Republican congressional baseball team practice in 2017 that injured Representative Steve Scalise, and the killing of a counter protestor at the 2017 Charleston protest are some examples of recent political violence. According to the Anti-Defamation League, right-wing and left-wing extremists accounted for 74% of domestic extremist killings in 2017,<sup>350</sup> compared to 29% in 2016.<sup>351</sup> It is possible that extreme political groups will continue to use violence if there continues to be feelings of deep political divides in the U.S.

It is probable that there will continue to be future disorders directed mostly against property. The destruction of property has been selective and will likely be selective in the future. Most of it is aimed at government facilities and establishments that are perceived to be at the root of whatever controversy that sparked the disorder. So far, the damage has been limited to vandalism and, less commonly, arson.

One of the most insidious impacts of civil disorder is psychological. Following a civil disturbance, most people in a community feel violated regardless of their opinion on the issues at hand. The amount of live media coverage today magnifies these feelings. People watching events on their television sets or connected through real-time electronic communications feel personally connected to what they are witnessing. This mood of mass victimization is the most widespread effect of a civil disturbance. These effects can last for years.

There can also be indirect impacts of social unrest. Cities often worry about being stigmatized and losing investment and tourism as a result, especially when violence has been highly visible.<sup>352</sup> The Los Angeles Times reported that commercial real estate investment and tourism slowed down after the L.A. riots, in some areas for years. Seattle's disorders have never been scrutinized as much as those in other locations. If Seattle's disorders continue to be secondary events to larger disturbances elsewhere, it is unlikely the city will suffer any economic backlash.

While it is impossible to know what groups or issues could be involved in a future conflict, the worst type of incident Seattle could face would feature a large, violent crowd, an overwhelmed police force, and conflict between groups. It could be a large, more violent WTO-type protest or large-scale violence directed at a minority group.

These incidents would be spread over several neighborhoods and a longer duration of time. They might involve large groups of people organizing to harm other groups of people. Property damage would be more severe. Given that Seattle's biggest incidents have occurred when Seattle is the focal point for a large international or national issue, there would probably be people from outside the area coming to participate. The reputation of the community and government would probably be severely tarnished.