

The Participants

A civil disturbance occurs only in a particular environment. That environment is a fusing of cause, place, and willingly confrontive participants. Civil disturbance participants come from all walks of life. Participants cover the political spectrum from the far right to the far left. They range from members of special interest groups to the ranks of the unemployed. They may be environmentalists, anti-nuclear activists, or foreign and domestic opponents of US policy. They come from all age groups and from all classes.

They may be curious onlookers who have become swept away by the excitement of an event. They may be demonstrators or counterdemonstrators who have become emotional about their cause. Whoever they are, they have become subject to the social and psychological factors that can turn a large gathering of people into a disruptive, disorderly mass. Understanding these factors can help reduce confrontation and permit order to be restored with a minimum of force.

The basic human element sparking a disturbance is the presence of a crowd. There are almost as many types of crowds as there are reasons for people to assemble. There are casual crowds like the crowd that assembles for a football game or gathers at an accident. Persons in such a crowd probably have no common bonds other than enjoyment of the game or curiosity about the accident. And there are “planned” crowds like the crowd that assembles at the call of a leader to accomplish a goal. Members of a planned crowd have common bonds of interest and purpose.

Simply being a part of a crowd affects a person. Each person in a crowd is, to some degree, open to actions different from his usual behavior. Crowds provide a sense of anonymity because they are large and often temporary congregations. Crowd members often feel that their moral responsibility has shifted from themselves to the crowd as a whole. Large numbers

of people discourage individual behavior; the urge to imitate is strong in humans. People look to others for cues and disregard their own background and training. Only well-disciplined persons or persons with strong convictions can resist conforming to a crowd's behavior. Crowd behavior influences the actions of *both* the disorderly participants and the authorities tasked to control them.

Under normal circumstances, a crowd is orderly. It does not violate any laws. It does not threaten life or property. It does not present a problem to authorities. But when a crowd's collective behavior becomes unacceptable to the common good, cause for concern arises. When a crowd's law-abiding collective behavior breaks down and takes a dramatic form, a civil disturbance ensues.

Civil disturbances arise when a crowd—

- Gathers to air grievances on issues and transfers its anger from the issues to the people dealing with the issues.
- Swells uncontrollably as curious bystanders and sympathetic onlookers join forces with the activists or protectors.
- Is incited to irrational action by skillful agitators.
- Adopts irrational behavior and becomes a mob.
- Consists of two or more groups with opposing views, and they become engaged in a violent confrontation.

CROWD BEHAVIOR

Crowd behavior is influenced by the presence or absence of social factors like leadership, moral attitudes, and social uniformity. Crowd behavior is also influenced by the psychological factors of suggestion, imitation, anonymity, impersonality, emotional release, emotional contagion, and panic.

Crowd behavior expresses the emotional needs, resentments, and prejudices of the crowd members. However, a crowd only does those things that most of its members want to do. The crowd is influenced by the concerns of its members as to what is right, based on local custom, convention, and morality. But the emotional stimulus and protection of being in a crowd encourages its members to unleash impulses, aggressions, and rages that they usually restrain. When blocked from expressing its emotions in one direction, a crowd's hostility often is or can be redirected elsewhere. In a civil disturbance environment, any crowd can be a threat to law and order because it is open to manipulation.

Leadership has a profound effect on the intensity and direction of crowd behavior. In many crowd situations, the members become frustrated by confusion and uncertainty. They want to be directed. The first person to give clear orders in an authoritative manner is likely to be followed. When crowd members become frustrated, radicals can take charge. They can exploit a crowd's mood and turn them against a convenient target. A skillful agitator can increase a crowd's capacity for violence. He or she can convert a group of frustrated, resentful people into a vengeful mob. An agitator can direct a crowd's aggression toward any target included in their resentment. In fact, skillful agitators using television, radio, and other communications media can reach large portions of the population and incite them to unlawful acts without having direct personal contact. On the other hand, one person can sometimes calm or divert a crowd by a

strategic suggestion or command. An experienced leader may be able to calm a crowd, appeal to the reasoning powers of its members, and avoid a serious situation.

Crowd behavior is influenced by emotional contagion. Excitement, transmitted from one person to another, creates a high state of collective emotion. Ideas conceived by crowd leaders and dominant crowd members pass rapidly from person to person. These ideas and the general mood of the crowd sweep to bystanders and curiosity seekers, who can become caught in the wave of excitement and crowd action. Emotional contagion exceeds the bounds of personal contact. It can be passed by mass media.

Emotional contagion is especially significant in a civil disturbance environment. It provides the crowd psychological "unity." The unity is usually temporary. But this unity may be the only momentum a crowd needs to turn it to mob action. When emotional contagion prevails, self-discipline is low. Normal controls give way to raw emotions. Personal prejudices and unsatisfied desires, which usually are restrained, are readily released. This is a strong incentive for individuals to follow the crowd, to do things they have wanted to do but dared not try alone. This contagion can cause a crowd to lose its concern for law and authority. A crowd that follows its leaders into unlawful and disruptive acts becomes a mob. Mob behavior is highly emotional. It is often unreasonable. It is always potentially violent.

Panic also affects crowds. It prompts unreasoning and frantic efforts to seek safety. Panic is extremely contagious and spreads rapidly. In a state of panic, people become so irrational they endanger themselves and others. Panic can occur during a civil disturbance when crowds—

- Think or feel danger is so close at hand that the only course of action is to flee.

- Think escape routes are limited or that only one escape route exists.
- Think the limited routes are blocked or congested and passage is slowed or stopped.
- Believe an escape route is open after it is blocked and in trying to force a way to the exit, cause those in front to be crushed, smothered, or trampled.
- Are not able to disperse quickly after being exposed to riot control agents and begin to believe their lives are at risk.

Like participants, control force members are also susceptible to crowd behavior. They, too, are likely to become emotionally stimulated during a tense confrontation. The highly emotional atmosphere of a disturbance can infect control force members despite their disciplined training. When emotional tension is high, members may lose their feeling of restraint. Then they may commit acts they normally would suppress. Emotional contagion can also make a control force easily affected by rumor and fear. Commanders must watch for this and counteract it quickly.

In a large control force dealing with masses of demonstrators, control force members can lose their sense of individuality. Control force members must not be allowed to develop a feeling of

anonymity. Leaders must know their subordinates' names and address them by name at every opportunity. Commanders must ensure that soldiers of questionable emotional stability or with strong prejudices against the group being controlled do not participate directly in civil disturbance control operations.

Control force members, like crowd members, tend to imitate the actions of others. One improper act copied by others can result in a chain of wrong behavior. But rigorous training, effective supervision, and immediate correction of improper acts can prevent this. During confrontations a control force also must guard against coming to see the participants impersonally rather than as people. The control force should have a racial and ethnic balance to reduce the chance of seeing the disturbance as a confrontation between "them" and "us." Some control force members may harbor ill feelings toward people who look, think, or behave unlike themselves. If they take advantage of the confrontation and show their ill will, their behavior will inflame rather than reduce a confrontation. A control force must be thoroughly briefed on fair and impartial performance of their duties. *All members* of the control force must be aware that they *are accountable for all their actions.*

CROWD TACTICS

In civil disturbances, crowds employ any number of tactics to resist control or to achieve their goals. Tactics may be unplanned or planned, nonviolent or violent. The more purposeful the disturbance, the more likely is the possibility of well-planned tactics.

Nonviolent tactics may range from name-calling to building barricades. Demonstrators may converse with control force members to distract them or to gain their sympathy. Demonstrators may try to convince control force members to leave their posts and join the demonstrators.

They may use verbal abuse. Obscene remarks, taunts, ridicule, and jeers can be expected. Crowd members want to anger and demoralize the opposition. They want authorities to take actions that later may be exploited as acts of brutality.

Sometimes women, children, and elderly people are placed in the front ranks. This plays on a control force's sympathy to try to discourage countermeasures. When countermeasures are taken, agitators take photographs to stir public displeasure and to embarrass the control force. Demonstrators may form human blockades to

impede traffic by sitting down in roads or at the entrances to buildings. This can disrupt normal activity, forcing control personnel to physically remove the demonstrators. Demonstrators may lock arms, making it hard for the control force to separate and remove them. It also makes the control force seem to be using excessive force.

Groups of demonstrators may trespass on private or government property. They want to force mass arrests, overwhelm detainment facilities, and clog the legal system. Or demonstrators may resist by going limp, forcing control force members to carry them. They may chain or handcuff themselves to objects or to each other. This prolongs the demonstration. Agitators may spread rumors to incite the crowd and to try to force the control force to use stronger measures to control or disperse the crowd. The agitators want to make the control force appear to be using excessive force. Terrorist groups may try to agitate crowds as a diversion for terrorist acts. They also try to provoke an overreaction by the control force.

Mass demonstrations tend to consist of people on foot. But sometimes groups organize mobile demonstrations using cars, vans, and trucks. Mobile groups often coordinate their actions by CB radios and walkie-talkies. Demonstrators also may monitor police frequencies by using scanners. They may even try to use transmitters to jam police communications or to confuse control forces through misinformation.

Violent crowd tactics, which may be extremely destructive, can include physical attacks on people and property, setting fires, and bombings. Crowd use of violent tactics is limited only by the attitudes and ingenuity of crowd members, the training of their leaders, and the materials available to them. Crowd or mob members may commit violence with crude, homemade weapons. Or they may employ sophisticated small arms and explosives. If un-

planned violence occurs, a crowd will use rocks, bricks, bottles, or whatever else is at hand. If violence is planned, a crowd can easily conceal makeshift weapons or tools for vandalism. They may carry—

- Balloons filled with paint to use as “bombs.”
- Bolt cutters to cut through fences.
- Picket signs to be used as clubs.
- Pipes wrapped in newspapers to throw as deadly missiles.
- Firecrackers dipped in glue and covered with BBs or small nails to use as deadly grenades.
- Plywood shields and motorcycle helmets to protect against riot batons.
- Safety goggles to protect against tear gas.

A crowd may erect barricades to impede troop movement or to prevent a control force from entering certain areas or buildings. They may use vehicles, trees, furniture, fences, or any other material that may be handy. In an effort to breach barriers, rioters may throw grapples into wire barricades and drag them. They may use grapples, chains, wire, or rope to pull down gates or fences. They may use long poles or spears to keep control forces back while removing barricades or to prevent the use of bayonets. They also may crash vehicles into gates or fences to breach them.

Rioters can be expected to vent their emotions on individuals, troop formations, and control force equipment. Rioters may throw rotten fruits and vegetables, rocks, bricks, bottles, improvised bombs, or any other objects at hand from overpasses, windows, and roofs. In the past, troops, firefighters, and utility workers on duty during a civil disorder have been beaten, injured, or killed. Vehicles have been overturned, set on fire, or otherwise damaged.

Rioters may direct dangerous objects like vehicles, carts, barrels, and liquids at troops located on or at the bottom of a

slope. On level ground, they may drive wheeled vehicles at the troops, jumping out before the vehicles reach the target. This tactic is also used to breach roadblocks and barricades.

Rioters may set fire to buildings and vehicles to block the advance of troops. Fires are also set to create confusion or diversion, to destroy property, and to mask looting and sniping. Rioters may flood an area with gasoline or oil and ignite it. Or they may pour gasoline or oil down a slope or drop it from buildings and ignite it.

Weapons fire against troops may take the form of selective sniping or massed fire. The fire may come from within the ranks of the rioters or from buildings or other adjacent cover. The weapons used can vary from homemade one-shot weapons to high-powered rifles. Snipers may try to panic

control force members into firing a volley into the crowd. Innocent casualties make a control force appear both undisciplined and oppressive.

Explosives may be used to breach a dike, levee, or dam. Bombs can be exploded ahead of troops or vehicles so rubble blocks a street. They can be used to block an underpass by demolishing the overhead bridge. In extremely violent confrontations, bombs placed in buildings may be timed to explode when troops or vehicles are near. Demolition charges can be buried in streets and exploded as troops or vehicles pass over them. Explosive-laden vehicles can be rolled or driven at troops. Animals with explosives attached to their bodies can be forced toward troops to be set off by remote control. Even harmless looking objects like cigarette lighters and toys have been loaded with explosives and used.
