

Introduction

Our country’s history has many examples of civil unrest associated with demands for political reform. The modern civil disturbance has become increasingly associated with sports events and issues unrelated to political positions. Civil disorders have become a part of the urban environment in Washington State. “Riots” can now generally be classified as either being politically motivated or spontaneously erupting around another event. The most important characteristic of civil disorders is an association with property damage and clashes with law enforcement and authorities.

High Probability Low Impact	High Probability Moderate Impact	High Probability High Impact
Moderate Probability Low Impact	Moderate Probability Moderate Impact	Moderate Probability High Impact
Low Probability Low Impact	Low Probability Moderate Impact	Low Probability High Impact

Civil Disorder Probability vs. Civil Disorder Impacts

Hazard Identification

In the 1960’s civil unrest was focused on civil rights. The Watts riots in Los Angeles left 34 people dead. Similar events occurred in Newark New Jersey with similar results.

In recent years, civil disorder typically begins as nonviolent gatherings. Injuries are usually restricted to police and individuals observed to be breaking the law. Crowds throwing bottles, rocks, and other projectiles are usually responsible for the majority of law enforcement injuries. Injuries to protestors, demonstrators, or law breakers are often the result of efforts to resist arrest, exposure to tear gas or mace, attempts to strike a police officer or from other civilians and law breakers.

Political demonstrations that become civil disorders or riots have specific targets for their attention. Examples would be protests outside a national embassy, city hall, or federal building. These incidents are typically marked by efforts by organizers to obtain permits to demonstrate and are nonviolent in nature. Occasionally, these demonstrations become violent when triggered by some other event. Often, out-of-town agitators are the catalyst for these violent outbreaks. In the Pacific Northwest, groups with such notoriety are the Skinheads, White Supremacists, and Anarchists.

Celebrations resulting from outcomes of sporting events and annual holiday celebrations occasionally evolve into violence. The central characteristic of these “riots” have been related to substance abuse and consumption of alcohol. Incidents of this type are common in other parts of the world following soccer matches. In the United States, civil disturbances have come to be anticipated following basketball championships (Chicago Bulls, 1991 and 1992; Detroit Pistons, 1990; and recently the LA Lakers, 2001).

Police continue to use variations of riot tactics common for over a hundred years: horse-mounted police and officers on foot with riot shields and batons. Arrests are made of key violent individuals. The 1960s saw the advent of the use of tear gas, also known as CS. There has been an evolution of tactics used by demonstrators and agitators that has resulted in an increasingly complex confrontation/interface between local officials and civilians.

Sophisticated communications capabilities are now available for retail purchase. Radios and “police scanners” have made it possible for demonstrators to organize their efforts and counter law enforcement tactics. This was seen during the World Trade Organization (WTO) disturbances in Seattle, 1999. Members of one group intercepted police tactical communications and broadcast the information over the Internet. One group transmitted over an illegal FM station. The result has been an increase in the integration of efforts between federal agency officials from the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Bureau of Investigation with local law enforcement.

History of Events

Rodney King Verdict

Following the 1992 Rodney King verdict in California, some local disturbances occurred in Seattle. The night of the verdict, small groups of people roamed the downtown streets smashing windows, lighting dumpsters on fire, and overturning cars. The next day, there was a rally at the Jackson Federal Building in Seattle. Many people feared violence and avoided the downtown area. After the rally broke up, small groups moved around downtown, eventually attacking the Seattle West Precinct on Capitol Hill. Another protest occurred in the University District of Seattle. This event, though peaceful, shut down Interstate-5 to traffic for some time.

WTO and N30

The best known civil disturbance in King County occurred in conjunction with the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) meeting in Seattle during November of 1999. The week-long event found Seattle as the meeting place for world

economic leaders and political figures. The world stage event provided an opportunity for activists to gain media attention for their multiple causes ranging from labor reform to environmental exploitation concerns. Similar WTO meetings have occurred in other places around the world with demonstrations that sometimes became violent. Preparations made by local officials proved inadequate to contend with the civil unrest that followed. This event was marked by the presence of many Oregon-based antagonist groups, most notably the “Anarchists.”

“N30” was the first anniversary of the WTO riots. Some protestors did appear, but improvements in intelligence, police staffing and staging, use of secure radio frequencies, and briefing of elected officials resulted in a considerably more subdued event.

Mardi Gras Melee^{1,2}

In 2001, Mardi Gras celebrations became violent with one man being beaten to death during a violent confrontation involving intoxicated young people in the Pioneer Square area of Seattle. There was some indication the beating may have been racially motivated and gang-related. There were 43 arrest, seven officers injured, and thousands of dollars of damage done to six businesses. There was considerable news coverage of the event and subsequent legal proceedings.

Additional Interstate-5 Closures

The closure of Interstate-5 to traffic by illegal protest marchers has become somewhat of a traditional expression by individuals opposing social or political events. In April 2002, a King County Deputy shot a suspect. That month protestors caused temporary closure of Interstate-5.³ Again on September 30, 2002, street marchers mingled peacefully with sports enthusiasts in downtown Seattle. At the outbreak of hostilities regarding the war in Iraq in February 2003, this same disruption of I-5 transportation and commerce was repeated.

University of Washington Violence

In 2003, a recent outburst by drunken youths in the University of Washington fraternity district resulted in overturned burning vehicles and injured people. While only one person was arrested, non-college outside agitators were suspected of instigating the incident.

Hazard Impacts

The economic impact to urban areas during civil unrest and following such events can be profound. Direct impacts include looting and smashed windows as well as endangering shop owners and customers. Indirect economic impacts result from the loss of business when potential customers do not approach businesses for extended periods of time. Customer impressions and habits can change from the experience of a single threatening event. In Seattle, WTO resulted in the closure of several small businesses in the downtown core, resulting in a cry from shop owners to visibly increase protection of their properties. Largely, Mayor Paul Schell lost his re-election bid because of the City's handling of the event.

Thousands of political demonstrations occur each year nationally without major incidents, injuries, property damage or arrests. The right to protest peacefully is a hallmark of our nation's liberties handed down to us from the 18th century.

Event Date(s)	Area	King County Damage Dollars
Rodney King Verdict ³	Seattle/King County	150 arrests 5 major fires Looting, property damage
WTO-N30 Nov 1999, 2000 ⁴	Downtown Seattle & Capital Hill	\$1.5 M police costs, \$7 M in lost retail sales 250+ arrests 120+ injuries
Mardi Gras- February 28, 2002 ¹	Pioneer Square – Seattle	1 person killed 6 police injured 43 arrests
A20 Event – April 2002 ⁵	Capitol Hill, Westlake Mall, Seattle Central Community College	19 arrests Nominal property damage
I-5 closures – protest marches ⁶	University of Washington to Downtown – Seattle	Nominal damage
University of Washington Compass 10/03	University of Washington Campus Fraternities	Police cruisers and civilian vehicles damaged and burned

Past Mitigation Efforts

Law enforcement surveillance and counter intelligence units are becoming common place in major cities around the United States. Intelligence sharing efforts between national agencies and local officials is improving. The controversial Patriot Act and civil rights issues have become part of the landscape of police efforts to minimize exposure to violent civil disturbances.

Police in urban areas continue to explore training opportunities and consider tactical changes in their planning for such expected and unscheduled events.

Local merchants have installed monitoring cameras in the Pioneer Square area to reduce the attraction to anonymous violence and illegal activity.

Civil Unrest Endnotes:

¹ Tracey Johnson, “Police charges won’t be filed against teen arrested in melee”, Seattle Post Intelligencer, May 26th, 2001, www.SeattlePI.NWsource.com/specials/mardigras

² Candy Hatcher, “Thousand of dollars claimed by 6 Businesses”, Seattle Post Intelligencer, February 28th, 2001, www.SeattlePI.nwsource.com/specials/mardigras

³ Vanessa Ho and Hector Castro, “10 years after Rodney King, the issues very much with us”, Seattle Post Intelligencer, April 29th, 2002

⁴ Murakami, Kerry. “Seattle Saddled with Millions in WTO Bills.” Seattle PI, NW Source (200) October 14, 2003

⁵ Mike Roarke & Lewis Kamb, “Police Arrests as hundreds march on downtown streets”, Seattle Post Intelligencer, April 20th, 2002

⁶ Jeffrey Barker, “Thomas Rally intrigues some, puzzles others”, Seattle Post Intelligencer, September 30, 2002