

Dealing With Protestors

by

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It should not come as a surprise to anyone that we all protest. The question is not what we protest about, but rather how we protest. Following are some ways that we protest.

- A driver cuts you off on the road.
You shout at them (usually with closed windows) and you may flip them the “bird” or some other gesture. Gestures of this nature are illegal in some states.
- Similar to the above situation.
But you chase the driver down, get out of your car and verbally assault him. This is often called road rage, especially if it becomes physical.
- You are served some food you do not like.
You can pick out the offensive food, shove it around the plate, or offer it to someone else.
- You believe that you deserve a better grade on a paper you write.

These examples are “personal protests” since they are usually only about you and do not include others.

There are however other protests. We generally think of these other protests as either peaceful or nonviolent, or as violent protests.

Peaceful/Nonviolent protests

Nonviolent protests where a person or group work together to enact change in a non-violent matter. Violent protests, sometimes called riots, use violence, destruction or intimidation to incite change. When protests are part of a **systematic and peaceful nonviolent campaign to achieve a particular objective**, and involve the use of pressure as well as persuasion, they go beyond mere protest and may be better described as civil resistance or nonviolent resistance. A protest is a **demonstration** to influence public opinion, voice displeasure, draw attention to injustice, or share information about something happening around you. You might have a local protest of one person opposing an idea or action like protesting the lunch menu at your school.

You might also have seen state and national protests by a mass public. Many Martin Luther King protests were peaceful as were the 1956 Rosa Parks’ protest and the 1960’s protests/boycotts lead by Cesar Chavez.

Today, many protests start out being peaceful only to turn violent, and some protests are designed to be violent from their initial start.

Violent protests

GQ magazine describes the differences between nonviolent protest and violent protest as:

“Nonviolent protests bring awareness to an issue; violent protests bring urgency to an issue. It forces individuals to pay attention to these important discussions of race relations, but also prompts the international community to join in and say, “Hey, there’s something wrong there.”

While GQ’s description corresponds with most other definitions, it does not identify the elements making a protest violent. Furthermore such definitions do not “force” attention on the many facets of race relations or any other social issues.

There are two types of violent protests –

1. those that deliberately plan and start out violent, and
2. those that start out peacefully but turn violent

Emma Thomas, of The Conversation (<https://phys.org/news/2020-06-protests-violent-people-desperate.html>) addressed violent protests in a 2020 article. While the article focuses on the psychology of protestors, it misses a fundamental aspect of many violent protests – that being the use of agitators to stir up protestors’ emotions. Since the early 20th century, agitators have been a useful tool to turn peaceful protests into violent ones.

To understand protest violence, we need to understand that violence is physical force used by one human on another human with the intention to obstruct or restrain, harm, incapacitate, or kill. While many researchers blame protest violence on aggressive police behavior, they fail to recognize what actually causes the violence and correlate it to when the police step in.

Typically we think of violent protests as being only physical. Such protests often include intimidation, especially through the use of name calling and/or chanting.

While a lot of research had been conducted on the elements and psychology of protests and riots, not much has been done in terms of trying to keep protests peaceful. One tactic that many countries have employed is creating a set of laws making it illegal for protestors to wear masks. There is little empirical research on the effectiveness of such

laws. However, anecdotally, these laws may cause the protestor to remain peaceful given the chance that their faces would be recognized in photographs and videos of a protest gone violent.

What can be done to curb violent protesting?

To answer this question, a multi-pronged approach is needed. The first prong requires the federal government to establish a set of enforceable laws, while not violating a US citizen's right to protest. One such law would address wearing masks during a protest. Another would prohibit non-US citizens from becoming involved in protests.

The second prong requires establishing a set of protocols to be implemented based on the type of protest, who the protestors are, and location.

A third prong requires training of law enforcement personnel AND the judiciary. National standards of behavior need to be established and enforced.

In recent weeks there have been many protests on college and university campuses. Several facts have been uncovered in these protests:

- There has been an element of intimidating Jewish students and faculty
- Faculty, staff, and students have been involved in the protests
- Colleges and universities lack appropriate policies regarding protesting on campus facilities
- Outside agitators have been involved
- There has been physical property damage to college/university property

Given that recent protests have been on college and university campuses, below is one protocol that can be followed to help ensure peacefulness.

The college/university has in place a detailed policy regarding protests and demonstrations on campus. Such a policy should define

- the expected behavior and the consequences for violating the behavior standards, applicable to faculty, staff, and students
- how to apply for a permit to protest on the campus property
- who is sponsoring and who is leading the protest
- what groups will be allowed to protest (faculty, staff, and/or students)
- where such protests can be held on the campus property
- what limitations regarding equipment, personal items, etc. can be brought into the protest area
- identify the chain-of-command in the decision making process regarding the safety and protection of students, faculty, staff, and college property

Once a protest begins, police and security personnel, in standard gear, need to be present but outside the protesting area. Their purpose is to ensure peaceful protesting and not to necessarily break up the protest.

The protest area should be cordoned off once the protest begins, and no one should be allowed to enter the area. If protestors wish to leave the area, they must present school identification.

If school identification cannot be presented, other identification would be required. If the person leaving is identified as a US citizen, they should then be charged with trespassing at a minimum. If the person leaving is a non-US citizen, their visa should be revoked and then deported as persona non grata.

If the protest is political or social in nature, and is not concerned with institutional aspects of the college/university, and assuming that the protest has become violent, all protestors will be identified and photographed. Those protestors identified as being involved in the violence and or involved in damaging property will be charged and prosecuted accordingly.

Persons identified as agitators will be arrested immediately and face federal charges that could include conspiracy, sedition, interstate crime, and etcetera.

Foreign nationals involved in violent acts and/or property destruction, will be immediately arrested, pay appropriate fines/restitution, have their visas revoked and be deported once their jail time is up.

College/university personnel and/or students involved in violent acts and/or property destruction will be immediately arrested, pay appropriate fines/restitution, serve appropriate jail time, AND be required to perform appropriate community service.

There are many other aspects of law, policy, and protocol that could be added to the above.

In addition to addressing protestors, laws, policies, and protocols also need to be developed for those students and parents of students), staff and faculty who were not part of the protest/demonstration but were affected by the event (ex. Unable to attend classes). Parents and students should be able to sue colleges and universities for tuition and other expenses, and if the college/university does not have a policy addressing student safety during protests, demonstrations, and/or riots.

Peaceful protesting is a right.
Violent protesting is not a right!