

Who Calls What Violence  
(percent)

# The violent Americans

## Sociologists find complex patterns in attitudes toward civil violence

by Robert J. Trotter

In the summer of 1967 the caldron boiled over and major American cities were drowned in racial and student civil strife. After two summers of riots the pot cooled to a simmer. Now at the start of a fourth summer it appears that additional ingredients may combine to make the situation volatile again. Sol M. Linowitz, chairman of the board of the Urban Coalition, has warned that American cities are in a "more frighteningly explosive" mood now than in the summers of 1967 and 1968.

The problems, basically the same, have become magnified during the past two years. The Census Bureau reports that nearly half of the population of black Americans (11 percent of the total population) are now crowded into 50 cities. The unemployment rate for blacks in some of these cities is as high as 25 percent. Vietnam veterans, some addicted to hard drugs, are returning to find jobs scarce. Students, as seen in the May Day demonstrations (SN: 5/8/71, p. 315), are frustrated by what they see as Government's failure to respond to existing problems.

As these problems escalate will America again find itself in the grip of civil violence? If so, are American attitudes toward violence equal to coping with the long hot summer?

In an attempt to answer these questions researchers at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research in Ann Arbor conducted a national survey on attitudes toward violence. The study took place in the summer of 1969, one year after the King and Kennedy assassinations but before the Kent State and Jackson tragedies. Thirteen hundred and seventy-four men be-

	College Students	College Degree & Over	White Un'ion Member	Reverse Discrim. Whites	Blacks
<b>POLICE</b>					
Police beating students is violence	79%	66%	45%	47%	82%
Police shooting looters is violence	43	50	23	26	59
Police frisking is violence	16	16	10	13	34
<b>BURGLARY</b>					
Looting is violence	76	79	91	89	74
Burglary is violence	47	54	67	73	70
<b>DISSENT</b>					
Student protest is violence	18	22	43	54	23
Sit-ins are violence	4	13	24	40	15
Draft card burning is violence	26	35	63	74	51
Denial of civil rights is violence	54	45	40	42	70

Respondents Defining Certain Acts As Violence  
(percent)

	Yes	Both	No
Do you think of looting as violence?	85%	3%	12%
Do you think of burglary as violence?	65	5	30
Do you think of draft card burning as violence?	58	4	38
Do you think of police beating students as violence?	56	14	30
Do you think of not letting people have their civil rights as violence?	49	8	43
Do you think of student protest as violence?	38	15	47
Do you think of police shooting looters as violence?	35	8	57
Do you think of sit-ins as violence?	22	9	69
Do you think of police stopping to frisk people as violence?	16	10	74

Blumenthal

Respondents defined acts of violence in different ways.

tween the ages of 16 and 64 were interviewed. Lack of time and money forced the researchers to limit the interviews to males. Future studies will include females.

"Because of the scientific way in which these men were selected, the opinions of this group may be taken to represent the opinions of American men as a whole at that time," says Dr. Monica D. Blumenthal. She was present at a briefing in New York last May when the findings of the institute's survey were released. Full findings will be published in book form later this year.

The findings show that American men are deeply concerned about violence. Sixty-five percent of them spontaneously mentioned violence or violence-related events when asked what things going on in the United States concerned them. The major concern was with civil disturbances. Some 68

percent cited civil disturbances as the type of violence that most concerned them; 27 percent cited crime.

The researchers therefore concentrated on only two forms of civil violence: that performed for social control (to stop looters or to disperse demonstrators) and that performed for social change (student or ghetto demonstrations against the system). They left out accidental and purely criminal violence.

To find exactly what actions are considered violent, the respondents were asked: "Here is a list of nine things that have been in the news. Tell me if you think about these as violence. I don't mean if they lead to violence, but if you think about them as *violence in themselves*." The results indicate that American men have a preoccupation with personal property. They regard acts against property, such as burglary and looting, as violence more



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*Blumenthal: Concern about violence.*

often than they do acts against people, such as police shooting looters or beating students. Eighty-five percent of American men feel that looting is violence but only 35 percent felt that police shooting looters is violence. Eighteen percent of college students and 23 percent of blacks consider student protest violence, but more than twice as many white union members consider such protest violence. "More American men felt burning a draft card was violence than thought beating students violence," the report states.

The survey shows that these attitudes are related to age. Older persons are more likely to recommend high levels of violence for social control and less likely to feel that high levels of violence are necessary for social change. Education, income, geographic location and religion are also factors. The more educated persons are less likely to recommend high levels of violence in any situation. Low income respondents are likely to feel that high levels of violence are necessary for social change. People in the South or border states are more in favor of high levels of violence for social control as are Fundamentalists Protestants; Jews are likely to score low on violence for social control. Persons living in big cities are more likely to score high in violence for social change.

"The largest difference in attitudes toward violence which could be attributed to a background characteristic is associated with race," says Dr. Blumenthal. Black men are less likely to advocate high levels of violence for social control and more likely to recommend high levels of violence for social change. Forty-one percent of blacks compared with 50 percent of

whites indicated that police should handle campus disturbances by shooting (but not to kill) "almost always" or "sometimes." And 50 percent of blacks as compared with 62 percent of whites feel shooting is the way to handle ghetto disturbances. Almost half of all black men thought that protest involving some property damage or personal injury would be necessary to bring about rapid social change, compared with less than 20 percent of whites.

Self-defense is another value related to violence in American men. Sixty percent believe strongly that a man has the right to kill another man in self-defense; 69 percent agree strongly he has a right to kill to defend his family; and 58 percent agree either "strongly" or "somewhat" he has a right to kill to defend his house.

The survey, conducted by Drs. Blumenthal, Robert L. Kahn and Frank M. Andrews, all of the Institute for Social Research, concludes that a majority of American men are ready to tolerate very high levels of police violence, while a minority believes that violence is necessary to produce social change. These conclusions were drawn from a two-year-old study but can be verified by recent political happenings. Chicago's Mayor Daley, a law-and-order man, easily defeated his liberal rival and won reelection by a large majority. In Philadelphia ex-police commissioner Frank Rizzo ("the toughest cop in America") won the primary election and will probably be the next mayor of that city. These elections, representing a law-and-order backlash, have come about even in the face of what TIME magazine calls the "cooling of America."

This backlash, coupled with the refusal of authorities to listen to protest demands, might just be enough to bring about a summer of disturbances. Already in May of this year two days of violence have littered the streets of the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. In June similar outbreaks resulted in shootings and arson in Albuquerque, N.M., Akron, Ohio, Columbus, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla.

The data of the University of Michigan report, concludes Dr. Blumenthal, "suggest that it is not in the interest of domestic tranquility for the government to respond to protest by refusing to listen. It also suggests that it is dangerous for influential persons to label nonviolent protest 'violent' since doing so will increase the willingness of the public to sanction inappropriately violent police methods which in turn probably increase the willingness of other segments of the public to turn toward violence as a means of producing social change." □

## books OF THE WEEK

**AIR POLLUTION CONTROL**, Part I—Werner Strauss, Ed.—Wiley-Interscience, 1971, 451 p., illus., \$19.95. Authoritative review articles in such areas as dispersion of pollution emitted into the atmosphere, control of sulfur emissions, collection of particles by fiber filters, and condensation effects of scrubbers.

**ANIMAL TRAPS AND TRAPPING**—James Bateman—Stackpole Bks., 1971, 286 p., photographs, drawings, \$8.50. Includes historical study of trap development, the traps of nature, man-made traps for insects, fish, birds and mammals, and discusses the ethics of trapping.

**ANXIETY AND NEUROTIC DISORDERS**—Barclay Martin—Wiley, 1971, 160 p., diagrams, \$6.50; paper, \$3.50. Discusses the symptoms of neurotic disorder, anxiety and other emotions, hereditary and learned aspects, learned avoidance strategies and specific neurotic reactions.

**ASPECTS OF THE BIOLOGY OF SYMBIOSIS**—Thomas C. Cheng, Ed.—Univ. Park Press, 1971, 327 p., photographs, diagrams, tables, \$14.50. Complete proceedings of the AAAS symposium concerned with the interdisciplinary study of commensalism, mutualism, and the "model concept," including research on parasites of medical importance.

**AUTOMATION AND ALIENATION: A Study of Office and Factory Workers**—Jon M. Shepard—M.I.T. Press, 163 p., tables, \$7.95. Study provides new insights about the impact of advanced mechanization in offices, develops hypotheses tested in office jobs of five insurance companies and one large bank.

**CHARACTER STRUCTURE AND IMPULSIVENESS**—David Kipnis—Academic Press, 1971, 133 p., tables, \$7.95. Study examines the roles of impulsiveness in the behavior of intelligent persons in their late teens and early twenties. Impulsiveness is described in terms of the person's response to various forms of social controls.

**DICTIONARY OF COMPARATIVE PATHOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL BIOLOGY**—Robert W. Leader and Isabel Leader—Saunders, 1971, 238 p., tables, \$14. Provides laboratory experimenters and students of human problems with a tool for the comparative approach to the study of biological, behavioral and pathological phenomena.

**A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON**—G. M. Henry—Oxford Univ. Press, 1971, 2nd ed., 457 p., color plates, photographs, drawings, map, \$9. General information and detailed identification guide to 400 species seen on the Island which includes many of the common birds of India.

**INSECTS AND HOW THEY FUNCTION**—Philip S. Callahan—Holiday House, 1971, 191 p., photographs and drawings by author, \$4.95. Explains how the organs and bodies of insects are built, how their structures function and how they sense their environment. A number of experiments are included.

**MAKING THE MOST OF METRICATION**—J. S. Vickers, foreword by H. A. R. Binney—Gower Press (Cahners Bks.), 1970, 163 p., \$10.95. Discussion of the best national solutions for conversion to the metric system, written by the chief engineer of the British Standards Institution's Planning Group.

**NATURAL DYES AND HOME DYEING** (formerly titled: *Natural Dyes in the United States*)—Rita J. Adrosko—Dover, 1971, 154 p., color plates, illus., paper, \$2. Unabridged reprint of Smithsonian publication (1968), combines historical introduction with practical guide to more than 150 recipes giving contemporary equivalents.