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Civil Unrest and Collective Violence in France:
A Historical Comparative Analysis

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Bridgewater State University

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Abstract

Civil unrest as a precursor for collective violence to erupt is analyzed using historic events in France. The theoretical background for collective violence is outlined, along with a discussion of the origin of crowd behavior by Le Bon. By analyzing historic events in a single country, the variable of differing cultural contexts is eliminated. Four cases of events that led to collective violence ranging across time from the late 18th century to the late 20th century are analyzed in detail to determine the causal mechanisms that led the crowds to become violent. A comparison of the cases leads to a reduction and determination of their causal mechanisms, and a brief background of French cultural formation is provided to determine if there are characteristics to France that made these events likely to happen in that context. By applying the ideologies of Articles II and III of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen to the events, it is postulated that French culture is primed for riots or revolts, with future riots being inevitable.

Introduction

In 2005, over the accidental deaths of two French teenagers from North Africa, French youths took to the streets to protest what they felt were killings by the police based on race. The protests quickly turned into violent riots, with 201 police injured and 10,000 cars destroyed. Several people were killed during the riots, including a 56 year old disabled woman. Many public buildings were burnt down, and many businesses were vandalized as well. In all, the damage exceeded 200 million euros (Sutterlüty, 2014).

This research paper stems from the idea that, like the 2005 riots, civil unrest often leads to collective violence—violence at the hands of a crowd. This paper focuses on the link between civil unrest and collective violence; it seeks to answer the question “what causes collective violence during a period of unrest?” Under a period of unrest, it was expected that the cause of the collective violence may vary; nevertheless, it was hypothesized that there would be common causes of the collective violence.

In order to limit the amount of variation between the factors that caused the civil unrest, it became necessary to limit the context or scope of the unrest to a single country. Through my initial literature review and exposure to films depicting the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in France, I had been aware that the country historically had both civil unrest and experienced violence at the hands of crowds. Whereas the context of the civil unrest events would be controlled by studying only a single country, it was expected that there was a limited set of conditions necessary for crowds to become violent regardless of the cultural context. Though this analysis is limited to France, I hypothesized that there was nothing uniquely French that

caused the collective violence in the cases studied; in other words, while the conditions that caused the civil unrest could be French-specific, the subsequent collective violence that occurred could be explained in ways common to other cultures.

Literature Review

Le Bon's *The Crowd*

In terms of theorists of crowd psychology or collective behavior, there are classical and modern theorists. Gustave Le Bon is considered the father of collective behavior as a theory and is considered a classical theorist (Brown & Boldin, 1973).

By today's standards, Le Bon's outlook on the crowd would be viewed as pessimistic—he believed that crowds were only powerful for destruction (Le Bon, 1968, p. xviii). A person with a more modern and positive outlook would view the crowd as a powerful force that can cause change. To him, only the powerful elite could enact change; any time there was corruption and a rotten civilization it would be the crowd who was to blame. To Le Bon, the crowd acted as a cohesive whole and acted under what he called the law of mental unity (Le Bon, 1968, p. 5), wherein they lose sentiment of responsibility (Le Bon, 1968, pp. 9-10).

Whereas an individual may worry about their actions, for Le Bon (1968), the crowd is fearless. They admit no doubt or uncertainty about their actions, and when called to action, they always go to extremes (Le Bon, 1968, p. 15) and have exaggerated sentiment (Le Bon, 1968, p. 33). For Le Bon, crowds are intolerant and yielding to temptation, and irrational or illogical (Le Bon, 1968, p. 108). Given a certain situation, an individual may feel powerless—not so for the crowd: a crowd has a sense of temporary but immense strength (even if it is brutal strength) (Le

Bon, 1968, p. 34). Rudé would disagree with Le Bon, stating that the crowd is purposeful and irrational, and guided by a specific goal (Rudé, 1966, p. 257).

Le Bon sees individuals as having savage and destructive instincts (Le Bon, 1968, p. 41). Combine several or many of these savages together and it goes without saying that destruction will ensue. Armed with the theory that crowds are also irrational, Le Bon takes humankind's supposed destructive instinct to the extreme when he speculates that civilization may never have had formed if reasoning or rationality had been used (Le Bon, 1968, p. 44).

For Le Bon (1968) the crowd is an excellent vehicle for the uneducated and the commonplace. Le Bon suggests that we learn the basics of survival in the world early in life and it is the fault of continued education that gives us the "tiring necessity of having to reflect on anything" (Le Bon, 1968, p. 97). This opens us up to the suggestion that the crowd will make decisions for us. While this may be true, he contends that the crowd is not easy to form opinions. In fact, Le Bon states that crowds (and individuals) always look for ready-made opinions about subjects (Le Bon, 1968, p. 130). Note that this is opinions, not facts: again, the crowd has no reasoning power.

Once an opinion—justified or not—is supplied to (or acquired by) the crowd, the opinion rapidly spreads throughout members of the crowd by what Le Bon calls contagion (Le Bon, 1968, p. 23). Similar to the spread of a disease, contagious opinions can spread throughout the masses. Brown and Boldin (1973) emphasize that the problem with contagion theory is that it is normally applied to an event after it has occurred and lack of information about the event is not present. For example, if during a historic riot a particular idea became widespread that could not be explained by contemporaries, contagion theory would likely be used to explain the spread of the idea, especially when no other mechanism for its spread could be found. Perplexingly, there

is no way to interview riot participants prior to the riot because the riot was not known to have happened; thereby, social scientists must use historical accounts of the riots to determine its factors (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, pp. 11-12).

Le Bon also mentions that crowds can be heroic, like in war (Le Bon, 1968, p. 42). In addition, a crowd can strike even when there is little impact on their wage as if motivated by altruism. In this way, the crowd does have the possibility to work for the greater good, despite all of the negative impacts of crowd behavior he highlights.

Crowds in Disaster Situations

Brown & Boldin (1973) provide some insight into how crowds operate during a disaster. For them, the term “disaster” is only used when there is no way to point the finger, so to speak, at a responsible party. The team further divides disasters into two categories of phenomena: social and natural (Brown & Boldin, 1973, p. 44). For instance, there would be no one to blame for the deaths in the 2010 earthquake in Haiti: it is a natural disaster. The September 11th attacks on the United States, however, are a type of social disaster.

Brown & Boldin (1973) report some interesting information regarding the composition of crowds in the restoration work following a disaster. They were able to identify a strong correlation between those participating in the restoration immediately following the disaster and those that were impacted by the disaster itself. Similarly, there was a strong correlation between those that were in close proximity to the disaster and those that would come to aid (Brown & Boldin, 1973, p. 46). This makes sense because it seems people are more likely to help their neighbor before they would help someone the next town over; nevertheless, this fact helps demonstrate that those participating in the restoration have a stake in helping. This is in-line

with Le Bon's view of the potential of crowds to perform heroics, yet suggests that these heroic crowds do have self-interest in mind.

Looting—a crime especially associated with civil unrest and caused by collectivities—is shown to be actually rare during a disaster. Due to misinterpretation of observations, some may incorrectly see looting when they see local officials seizing property for public use. In cases where looting actually did occur, reports of it are often inflated for sensationalism (Brown & Boldin, 1973, p. 89).

Theories of Collective Behavior

In their work, Brown and Boldin (1973) discuss and analyze the different theories or explanations of collective behavior and the reasons collectivities become violent. In fact, their entire text is an analysis of theories of collective behavior. For instance, they describe research by Parsons and Jones (1960) that states that the amount of strain in a society is a determinant for collective behavior. The thinking is: the more strain a group feels, the more likely they will be to mobilize to action. Similar to Parson's strain theory, Smelser (1963) says that when there is racial tension, it is usually a dramatic event which precipitates the outburst of violence.

A crowd in its early or initial stages has no tradition; it lacks "prior normative integration" (Turner & Killian, 1957). This is unlike when a family gathers for a holiday in that the family has an idea how to act and what will transpire. When a crowd forms, individual members have no notion as to how to act. This is not to say that the crowd lacks direction; in fact, a crowd normally has some purpose in mind according to Rudé (1966). Rather, individuals in a crowd do not know what their limits are: is violence acceptable to achieve the crowd's goals or is the crowd assembled merely to protest? Perhaps crowds become more cohesive as time

progresses. In addition, “episodes of collective behavior can be distinguished from each other and classified in terms of a dominant norm” (Brown & Boldin, 1973, p. 138). The demarcation line for each event is the end of the normative behavior of the crowd. Brown and Boldin (1973) further emphasize this with mention of Turner (1964). Turner states that these episodes of collective behavior appear when conventional norms fail or weaken, thereby providing an opportunity for individuals to interact (Brown & Boldin, 1973, pp. 138-139) as new norms emerge (Turner & Killian, *Collective Behavior*, 1957), with these emergent norms in opposition of existing norms and behavior. Emergent norm theory can be used to explain why, in a crowd, the select actions of a few can lead to actions by the entire crowd.

When studying riots, one must ask, what is the goal of the crowd? As will be explained later on, during the Flour War the goal of the crowd was to obtain cheap (or sometimes free) grain. Occasionally, these crowds would become violent, beating merchants to the ground (Bouton, 1993, p. 146). In this way, there are micro and macro-level reasons for the riot (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, pp. 8-9). For the Flour War, the macro-level reason for the riots was a response to traditional roles of the government towards its people. The micro-level reason for the riots was the need of the individual to acquire sustenance at little cost. This micro-level explanation describes what is known as resource mobilization theory (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, p. 17), which contrasts starkly with Le Bon’s view of the irrational crowd, yet follows precisely the viewpoint of Rudé (1966). Rudé contends that Marx would have a similar explanation for all types of popular unrest: short-term economic factors (Rudé, 1966, p. 214).

Similar to Le Bon’s (1968) line of thinking, Barkan and Snowden (2001) mention the irrationality thesis in their research: the idea that people are motivated by impulse or unconscious desires (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, pp. 14-15). Indeed, sometimes crowds can act

spontaneously, and Rudé considers this important in the origin and development of the crowd: “Outbreaks rarely followed carefully predetermined patterns” (Rudé, 1966, p. 244), he says, yet he admits that triggers are clearly evident. Though crowds can form for a variety of reasons, they are not always motivated for action. For mobilization to occur, a precipitation factor must occur (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, p. 21).

Even if the crowd is emotional, it does not mean that the crowd is irrational. Indeed, people resent the idea that their fight may be deemed illegitimate or irrational (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, p. 16). Despite the overt intensions or actions of the crowds, there may be alternative or more subversive causes for their actions (Rudé, 1966, p. 217), something maybe only a historic analysis can determine.

Another theory, which can be used to explain the reasoning crowds become violent, is the relative deprivation theory. Tocqueville (1856) states that it is relative—not absolute—deprivation that causes frustration, which leads to mobilization of the masses. This theory states that although conditions may be improving (relatively), they may not be improving as fast as ideal (or absolutely). In other words, comparative prosperity and freedom previously enjoyed by the peasants in the 60 years prior to the 1789 revolution made the revolution more explosive (Rudé, 1966, p. 21). For Rudé (1966), a crowd can become violent when it is diverted from its original intent or when provoked by panic (1966, p. 254). He also states that the addition of unexpected elements can lead to indiscriminate violent behavior (Rudé, 1966, p. 255), which would be distinct from purposeful, targeted violence.

Yet another theory is the idea that social ties have become weakened in industrial nations, causing alienation or Durkheim’s (1964) anomie due to society no longer providing individuals

with direction or purpose. Because of this alienation, collectivities form to get a sense of belonging.

Barkan and Snowden (2001) explain that rioters are less likely to be married and have children. In addition, rioters are less likely to be employed, and more likely to be young and male; therefore, they have fewer obligations and are more socially available to riot (Barkan & Snowden, 2001, p. 35). Indeed, violence and vandalism can be seen as expressions of masculinity.

Just as theories of social phenomena reflect the politics of the times (Cosser, 1977), Rudé (1966) emphasizes that taken out of context the actions of the crowd may be construed incorrectly. The history of the crowd is often documented by the elite or the government, thereby it can seem biased against the crowd (who is normally comprised of the lowest classes) (Rudé, 1966, p. 12).

Methodology

To determine how civil unrest causes collective violence, it is necessary to study periods of unrest in which collective violence has occurred. In studying these unrest-causing events, the goal was to reduce the complex events into a single cause or set of causes thereby developing a generalization; though Ragin's (1989) qualitative comparative analysis techniques are not used in this paper, I do prefer his term of "causal condition" in place of the simpler term "cause" because the former term emphasizes the cause as a necessary condition for the outcome whereas the latter implies that the condition was the sole factor that led to the outcome.

Civil unrest, and separately collective violence, occurs often throughout the history of civilization. This is given as self-evident. It should also be clear that all civil unrest does not

lead to collective violence and that all collective violence is not related to civil unrest. As an example of seemingly spontaneous collective violence, I would refer to riots that occur after a sporting event, what would be called an “issueless riot” (Sutterlüty, 2014, p. 44). Though it may be argued that the winning game caused unrest in the form of *a* disruption from normalcy, unrest for this paper is conceptualized in the traditional sense as an *unwanted* departure from normalcy. In this way I define civil unrest as a disturbance in political or social stability caused by factors such as disaster, revolution, or rioting.

In searching for cases where civil unrest and collective violence coincide, many instances were found. Initial prospects for analysis where these intersected included the Gordon Riots in England, and the 1998 riots in Indonesia. Rudé’s description of the Gordon Riots as the “most violent and the mostly savagely repressed of all the riots in London’s history” (Rudé, 1966, p. 59) met the criteria of an unrest event that led to collective violence. Mass rapes occurred during the Indonesian riots (BBC News, 2014), and were thereby another case where unrest and collective violence coincided. The problem with comparing events in countries drastically distant in space and culture is that the events potentially occur in different contexts; the factors that cause civil unrest in a country in Asia may be different than those in Europe. Because of this, it became necessary to compare cases that “share a sufficient number of features and that operate within sufficiently comparable contexts” (Rihoux, 2006, p. 687).

I was exposed to collective violence in France through the works of Rudé (1966) and Le Bon (1968) during my initial literature review. Their analyses of the crowd are clearly influenced by the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, but these events were not included in this analysis for two reasons. First, these revolutions are simply too well documented—a perusal of the local library reveals shelves of literature on either of these revolutions. This may seem

like good thing, but with so much written about these events the fear was that nothing further could be added to the literature. Second, while I have conceptualized a revolution as being comprised of civil unrest, I argue that revolutions involve a complete change in the cultural order. Whereas a riot or disaster may lead to an eventual return to what was normal prior to the event, a revolution may involve a redefinition of what is normal. Because of these factors, it was decided to not include these revolutions in this analysis. Regarding the choice of the specific cases, I was exposed to the Flour War through the work of Rudé (1966), and through Le Bon (1968) I learned of the Paris Commune of 1871. I initially learned of the 1910 flood of the Seine through an article by Jackson (2010), and through browsing the local library shelves, the 1968 student riots were revealed to me. Each of these events involved collective violence coupled with civil unrest. The following is a detailed account of the events.

Case 1: The Flour War

The Flour War official began officially on April 27th, 1775 as a riot in the Beaumont-sur-Oise market, and rioting would eventually overcome the rural areas surrounding Paris (Bouton, 1993, p. xix). This rioting was relatively short-lived, ending a month later in mid-May.

A guiding principle of the masses in the days of the monarchy was the *taxation populaire*. The people felt that because they were subservient to the throne they had the right to fairly-priced provisions, which would be provided by the monarchy. Failure to either provide, or to provide unfair (or unreasonable) prices and the masses felt justified in uprising to regulate prices themselves (Bouton, 1993, p. xviii). Unlike taxation of the population by the government, the population enforced the taxes; thereby the *taxation populaire*.

The riots of the Flour War were nothing new, with food riots occurring throughout the years of the 18th century depending on the cost of grain. Sometimes local authorities would turn the blind eye, or would even help lead the rioters (Bouton, 1993, p. 5).

Paris during the 18th century was an agrarian society (Rudé, 1966, p. 22) and relied heavily on grains and flours as the primary means of sustenance; some may even go a week eating nothing but bread. There had been for a long time regulations that governed the grain trade and traders. As a simple example, people who were buying grain at the market for their family would be allowed to purchase it before merchants or bakers could (Bouton, 1993, pp. 10-11). In this way, it was ensured that the populace had their means of sustenance. Spurred by the need to enable free trade, the regulations on grain were eventually abandoned or left unenforced (Bouton, 1993, p. 12). In this way the rise of capitalism could be seen as a precipitation factor for the unrest in the Flour War. In fact, the adoption of free trade can be seen as an abandonment of community, with rioting a necessary step to wrangle the offender back into the fold (Bouton, 1993, p. 205). Authorities knew through experience that high food prices or lack of food would cause unrest (Bouton, 1993, pp. 8-9), meaning that they would well know that the masses may riot.

The regulations that helped the populace obtain cheap grain can be considered social welfare or poor relief. France during the 18th century had an increase in population of 7 million people (Bouton, 1993, p. 56). This increase in population would mean that there were decreases in poor relief. Despite the decrease in relief, starvation was not an issue; rather it was malnutrition that motivated the poor to action (Bouton, 1993, p. 58).

As an agricultural society, French business owners profited by a system of land usage and sale. Much like the real estate market in the United States, wealthy entrepreneurs would

purchase large tracts of land to be divided into smaller parcels. These smaller parcels could be used as individual farms or by others looking to further divide the parcels for profit (Bouton, 1993, p. 43). While this at face value seems like a good business arrangement, rents were subject to fluctuations. These changes in price would couple with fluctuations in grain prices which, in turn, would vary based on drought. Wages were the only place the individual farmer could make up for the losses from increased rent or decreased grain supply; with nowhere else to cut costs, wage earners were the first ones to suffer. If conditions were really bad for the small-time farmer—and they often were—they would be forced to sell their farm, with the larger-scale farmer eager to have their land back to make up for losses they felt as well (Bouton, 1993, pp. 60-61). When this was combined with relaxed grain regulations, it should be no surprise that grain prices increased.

The public was prepared to exact the *taxation populaire* on April 22, 1775 when grain prices remained unusually high for a second consecutive market day. Upon being notified of the continued high price, a crowd dragged one grain merchant to the police to make the police enforce a lowered price (Bouton, 1993, p. 83). The police were unwilling to get involved, so the crowd ransacked the merchant's displays and sold the grain themselves at a low price. Word spread of this riot at Beaumont-sur-Oise to the town of Merú, with crowds there pillaging grain at the market, and some paying and others not. Riots continued to spread as word caught on, and the riots followed the Oise River because mass communication at the time was mostly limited to geography (Bouton, 1993, p. 84).

Rioting continued to follow the topography, and increased in severity as the houses of grain merchants became an additional target for the crowd's frustration. Not even the monasteries were safe and were ransacked for their known storehouses of grain. Rioting

eventually spread to the bakeries and farms. At the market in Picardy, riots again broke out over the high cost of grain, though this time the police were onsite to close the market doors. This made the situation worse as the rioters attacked the doors, attempting to break them down. The police responded to this violence by shooting into the crowd, leaving 4-6 wounded (Bouton, 1993, p. 89).

Rioting continued for another two weeks, and accounts of the riots are too numerous to annotate here. In general, rioting followed the pattern of the seizure of grain supplies followed by sale of the grain at reduced prices. Though some people took grain without paying, many—if not most—paid for it, albeit at less than market price. Late in April, in response to the riots, Controller General Turgot setup charity workshops for the poor (Bouton, 1993, p. 92). In addition, entry fees into the markets were eliminated for several cities. Merchants would also benefit by the new reforms in the form of subsidies paid for those importing grain to Paris or by sea (Bouton, 1993, p. 93). Troops were also deployed to the markets during market days, thereby deterring would-be rioters.

In all, there was little to no violence against people during the Flour War. Aside from the previously-mentioned shootings at Picardy, no one was seriously injured. Bouton does provide reports of some merchants getting beaten up, such as when rioters attacked merchants with sticks in one riot (Bouton, 1993, p. 129). Only 2% of those arrested during the Flour War were arrested for violence.

The last point mentioning about the Flour War is the composition of the rioters. Bouton reports that the average rioter was middle aged, married, and a semiskilled wage earner with children (Bouton, 1993, p. 98). The mean age of the rioters was 38.4 years old for men, and 40.1 years old for women (Bouton, 1993, p. 114). It was the exception for the well-off person to riot,

and when they did the community would consider these people freeloaders, loafers or parasites (Bouton, 1993, p. 207). Bouton interestingly notes that the homeless and desperately poor did *not* participate in the riots, suggesting that they have either accepted their position in life as permanent, or that they saw no benefit in collective action because the community had already abandoned them (Bouton, 1993, p. 110).

Case 2: The Commune of Paris

France lost the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. As a concession to the victors, France would lose control of all of Alsace and Lorraine and have to pay five billion gold francs in indemnities. Until this was paid off, Prussian troops would remain in northern France, and by this point in time they had already removed themselves from the capital. In a vote on whether to accept the armistice treaty, the rural French, and those of the newly-formed National Assembly, voted 547 to the Parisians 107 to accept the treaty (Edwards, 1971, p. 118). Paris had been seized by the newfound German army during the war, therefore Parisians held more resistance towards peace with Germany.

Several hundred cannons were left over from the war and the National Guard in Paris seized these cannons as property of Paris, though they were property of the government. Centered in Versailles, the newly-founded National Assembly under leadership by Adolphe Thiers, wanted the cannons brought back under their control and planned to take them back from the Parisian National Guard, by force if necessary (Edwards, 1971, p. 135).

Troops from Versailles, led by Generals Clément Thomas and Lecomte, marched to Paris to take the cannons back by force, and a National Guard sentry on duty in Paris was shot dead, becoming the first casualty of this movement. Lecomte ordered his troops—also members

of the National Guard—to fire upon the Parisian National Guard and they did not obey his order for they could not shoot upon their fellow soldiers (Edwards, 1971, p. 139). Clément Thomas and Lecomte as well as several other Versailles officers were arrested by the Parisian National Guard. The Parisian Guard wanted these officers court-martialed but the crowd had something else in mind: execution. The prison where the officers were held was broken into by the masses and Clément Thomas and Lecomte were executed by the Parisian National Guard, with 40 bullets fired into Clément and 9 into Lecomte (Edwards, 1971, p. 141). Open hostilities between the National Committee and the newfound Parisian Central Committee began here. Thiers ordered the retreat of his troops from Paris, and Parisians erected barricades all around the city. The Parisian Guard seized full control of Paris at this point.

The Central Committee of Paris eventually officially established the Commune and favored socialist ideals. The theory was that sovereignty lay in the people and that those elected to represent the people were delegates of the people, not members of a ruling elite (Edwards, 1971, p. 277). Members of the Commune sought regional autonomy and the right to independence from the national government. This thinking backfired against the Commune: if the Commune were to be independent from the government at Versailles, what about the Central Committee (Edwards, 1971, p. 219)? Should it be freed from the Commune? Where would the National Guard fit into this scheme? Would the Guard be willing to submit to the needs of the Commune?

The National Guard, it turns out, had their own goals. Edwards points out that the Parisian Guard was never brought under central control, with entire battalions acting on their own accord (Edwards, 1971, p. 221), something that would prove to be fatal for the protection of the Commune. In some cases Guards would arrest whoever they wanted, and, when the

Commune attempted to gain Prussian support, Guard members stopped Commune leaders from talking to the Prussians for fear the leaders were going to abandon the Commune (Edwards, 1971, p. 334). During the final battles for the Commune, several battalions abandoned their posts saying that they did not want to die. Edward even suggests that the Parisian Guard was more into partying, drinking and making custom uniforms than fighting or discipline (Edwards, 1971, p. 209). The tool—the group—that enabled members of this proposed revolution to take control was not reliable, and was not acting in the interests of the Commune.

Further disorganization can be seen during the week-long fight for the Commune. The Guard was fighting aimlessly due to lack of leadership, the Central Committee was trying to exert control over the war, and the newly-formed Committee of Public Safety was enacting duplicate orders submitted by the Minister of War (Edwards, 1971, p. 242).

Regarding the demographics of the Communards, most of those arrested were over 30 years old and were working-class. In addition, of the 10,000 condemned to prison after the Versailles army took back Paris, 29% had previous convictions (Edwards, 1971, p. 296).

Monday May 22nd to Sunday May 28th would be the last week of existence for the Commune, and would become to be known as the “Bloody Week” due to the sheer number of Communards killed. Due to the disorganization of the Commune, while some barricades were well-built, many were poorly built, coming to a height of only six to seven feet (Edwards, 1971, p. 316). In addition, some barricades were only built of mattresses or toppled busses, and some where open on all sides, causing them consequently to draw fire on all sides. Even more, upon entering the city during this final week, the Versailles army found that the city was wide open, with barricades being poorly placed. By the end of the first day, one third of Paris was back in control of the Versailles army (Edwards, 1971, p. 315). In a symbolic act, a group of captured

Communards—42 men, 3 women, and 4 children—were shot in front of the wall that Generals Lecomte and Clément Thomas were killed at.

As the Versailles army captured barricades they would kill everyone who defended it, even if the defenders surrendered. For instance, the prisoners captured at the Place de la Concorde barricade were shot and then thrown into a ditch in front of the barricade (Edwards, 1971, p. 322), and Edwards describes this unscrupulous behavior of the Versailles as bloodlust (Edwards, 1971, p. 330). The seminary at Saint-Sulpice had been converted into a hospital. The Versailles army claimed “quite falsely” (Edwards, 1971, p. 330) that they had been shot at from this hospital and proceeded to shoot all of the medical staff and their patients. In total, 80 people were slaughtered, with a similar event occurring at the Beaujon hospital. After the battle had ended and Paris been restored to the National Committee, a military court was setup to divide prisoners up into two groups: those that would go to prison at Versailles and those that would be executed immediately. None of the 300 prisoners tried were sent to Versailles. Even the public (outside Paris) was in favor of the actions of the Versailles army. Parisians were viewed as traitorous devils and the newspapers spread the ideology that “clemency equals lunacy” (Edwards, 1971, p. 340). In the end, however, many Parisians were arrested, totaling 50,000 in all, with 20,000 being liberated later on without even being tried (though they had to sit in prison throughout the long winter) (Edwards, 1971, pp. 347-348).

Though the violence enacted by the Commune was less widespread, it was still present; in particular, after the entry into the city by Versailles’ troops, the Commune began to execute hostages it had taken early in the movement. Edwards says that bloodlust had taken over the Communards, particularly in response to the massacres committed by the Versailles army. In all, over 70 hostages were killed by the Commune, though this seems pale in comparison to the

number of Parisians killed at the hands of Versailles: approximately 25,000, more than the French Revolution of 1789 and the aforementioned Franco-Prussian War (Edwards, 1971, p. 348).

Case 3: 1910's Flood of the Seine

The Seine River is located in northern France, nearly bisects the country, flows into the English Channel, and has a history of flooding. Flooding usually occurs during the winter months, with severe flooding recorded in 582, 814, 886, 1206, and 1658, where the record was set when the river rose twenty feet above normal (Jackson, 2010, p. 7). A series of locks and canals are built along the river to control the waters, with quays located along the river, particularly in the capital.

By the winter of 1910, the soil in northern France had already been saturated from unusually high amounts of winter rainfall, and a low pressure weather system was moving across the region adding more water. Between June 1909 and January 1910, 38% more rainfall occurred than normal (Jackson, 2010, p. 44). Friday, January 21st, 1910 a mudslide occurred in Lorry, 50 miles south of Paris, killing seven and injuring many more. This would be the first signal of the devastation to come.

Parisians were proud of the recently-developed and enhanced sewer system, designed 40 years prior by the renowned architect George-Eugene Haussmann. Later in the day of the 21st, sidewalks were beginning to cave in within the capital as the sewers began to overflow, and several lines of the Metro began to be inoperable due to flooding. The Seine's waters were rising rapidly, and though engineers had a system in place to telephone towns downstream of the flood conditions, they were ironically unable to do so because the telephone system had been flooded.

Overnight into January 22nd, the river would continue to rise an additional four feet. Were the temperature only a little cooler, it is likely this storm system would have produced many feet of snow instead of rain (Jackson, 2010, p. 39). Despite the quay walls, the water was coming into the city, through basements, tunnels, and especially the cherished sewer system. The first causality of the flood in the capital would occur on the 22nd when a collapsed quay sucked a young boy downstream (Jackson, 2010, p. 42).

Topography-wise, Paris is a bowl, similar to New Orleans in the United States. As rain waters continued to rise, the Marne River and its tributaries the Grand and Petite Morin spilled into the Seine, with Jackson arguing that this is what made the event a crisis (Jackson, 2010, p. 43). By January 23rd, the Seine was now 12 feet above normal, and evacuations were ordered for the hardest-hit areas. Parisians—not known for being good swimmers at the time—were beginning to get stuck on rooftops, and telephone lines were beginning to get ripped up by the fast-moving, 15 miles per hour waters (Jackson, 2010, p. 33). Parisians began to build hand-made foot bridges called *passerelles* to walk above the flood waters, and these were used as the primary means to travel within the city.

Fear of disease began to emerge as the waters rose. Paris had had its share of outbreaks in the past, with the Bubonic Plague hitting there several times, and a cholera outbreak more recently. This fear was amplified when sewer rats began to seek refuge from the rising waters (Jackson, 2010, p. 62). To make matters worse, because garbage processing plants had to be shut down due to lack of power, local officials decided to hoist refuse into the fast-moving flood waters. This practice would be halted several days later due to increasing concern for public health (Jackson, 2010, p. 64).

The suburbs would be hit the hardest, with Issy-les-Moulineaux under six feet of water and Javal entirely under water. By the 25th, the Seine would be 14.5 feet above normal and though many would want to leave the city, many train stations were closed, forcing people to use horse-drawn carriages and omnibuses where the flood water levels permitted. Coupled with an inability to leave the flooded area, on January 26th the main post office building was flooded, burning out the communication system to several countries like England, Belgium and Italy.

Despite this, many countries heard the calls for help and donated money. Donations came in from Russia, London, Rome, Italy, Australia, and more. United States' President Taft telegraphed saying he was sympathetic and willing to help (Edwards, 1971, p. 101), though Jackson does not mention that he helped at all. The Red Cross and similar organizations such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society setup shelters and food kitchens and locals were donating supplies, money and services, and there were calls from the public for all of France to help—this was not just a Parisian issue.

Despite the assistance provided by the local and global community, the flooded Paris and its suburbs suffered from looting and crime. On January 24th, a curfew was issued as a “group of thugs” (Jackson, 2010, p. 66) attacked a police officer guarding the *passerelle* in the town of Troyes. The thugs made it past the officer and cries of help and gunshots were heard in the town throughout the night, though Jackson does not indicate what specific actions the ruffians took, perhaps because it was never reported. With entire districts evacuated, crooks looked for empty houses to rob. In the region of Saint-Ouen, the looting apparently was so bad that the military had to guard the area (2010).

A gang known as the Apaches was especially blamed for the looting and crime experienced during the crime, though it appears based on Jackson's account that there was no

connection between the two. The media labeled this gang of ruffians years before in 1902 (Edwards, 1971, p. 113), and to demonize the criminals they were named after an American Indian tribe, which were often stereotyped as being savages. During and just before the flooding, crimes were reported of one man who killed a police officer and another man who murdered his two superior officers. According to Jackson, neither man was a member of the Apache gang, despite the media's depiction of them as such (Jackson, 2010, p. 114). In another non-Apache instance, a thief was spotted going door to door taking possessions from empty houses. An angry mob found him and attempted to hang him from a bridge. Had the police not spotted the crowd and intervened by arresting the criminal, the crowd would have disposed of him.

The waters crested on January 28th at 20 feet above normal, tying the 1658 record. In the coming days as the waters began to fall, thievery increased (Jackson, 2010, p. 169), though so did vigilante justice. Two actual Apaches were spotted pillaging by the police and were chased in boats before the police shot and killed them. In another instance, a group of four men and four women were robbing deserted houses with a boat and barely escaped lynching by an angry mob. Another group of robbers—eight men and 3 women—were not as lucky and were beat by a crowd as the police attempted to arrest them. Residents threw one robber into the water and fished him out, only to send him to the police station. Lastly, there was a gunfight by a group of soldiers and Apaches, with two Apaches killed and another captured by a crowd (who tied him to a telephone pole while awaiting the police).

Once again, like the Flour War, food riots occurred, though on a small, isolated scale. For instance, Jackson points out one case where a mob was angry at the rise of the price of potatoes so they destroyed a market (Jackson, 2010, p. 146).

By April, the waters were back to their normal levels, though the cleanup operations were ongoing. The damage totaled 400 million francs (2 billion US dollars in 1910), with 13 reported drowned total (Jackson, 2010, p. 162). As with the Flour War, though there was unrest, the people believed that their government would help and it did. Communities generally stuck together, and Jackson points out that there was none of Durkeim's anomie (Jackson, 2010, p. 214) unlike what was seen in the flooding of New Orleans in 2005.

Case 4: The 1968 Student Riots

According to Brown, student protests in France had become an annual event since the liberation from the Nazis in World War II (Brown B. , 1974, p. 4); though he does not indicate how these protests were organized. Regardless, students complained of overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and insufficient scholarships. There were not enough seats in the lecture halls for the students, and the schools do not match the degrees offered to the modern job market, with the focus for many universities being a liberal arts degree (Brown B. , 1974, p. 128).

Prior to—and leading up to—1968, student protests in France focused on sexual liberty. For instance, in 1965 students protested over not being able to entertain members of the opposite sex in their dorms. After a prolonged debate, administrators finally conceded to the students' demands. In 1967, the issue of visitation privileges came to head again, though this time the protests morphed into debates about morality, exploitation, and issues revolving around capitalism (Brown B. , 1974, p. 5). Similarly in 1967, protests in the university at Nanterre focused on sexual freedom, but turned into demands for revolution for a utopian society. By the end of the year protests about dorm regulations (regarding the opposite gender) were occurring all throughout the country (Brown B. , 1974, p. 7).

Early in 1968, unrest continued at Nanterre, with students more frequently now calling for violence and revolution. In response to perceived threats to safety, school administrators closed the doors of the university. The students would not be stopped, and moved their protests to the Sorbonne in early May. At this point, these student protests were accompanied by members of the communist party, anarchists, as well as the more radical Trotskyists. For fear that the radical groups may conflict, administrators asked the police to clear the protestors from the Sorbonne. Enraged by the perception that the police were arresting their peers, students turned violent and began to throw rocks at the police, and, after several hours of fighting, 80 police were injured as well as several hundred students (Brown B. , 1974, p. 9). The police were viewed by the public as being the aggressors, and the student unions call for protests and strikes across the country.

Rioting continued on and off throughout the coming weeks, with an increasingly-popular rioting technique being the building of barricades, reminiscent of the Paris Commune. The student demands in the early days of this movement were simple: free those that were arrested during the protests; removal of police from university grounds; the reopening of schools. The students would protest again on May 6th, with 600 injured and the Sorbonne closed as a result. The government would agree to meet their demands, with amnesty forthcoming (presumably pending investigation) (Brown B. , 1974, p. 10). The students would not let their chance for revolution to slip through their hands and would continue to riot, with riots on May 10th leading to 400 injured (32 seriously) and 188 cars destroyed (Brown B. , 1974, p. 11); destruction of cars became a new norm for the crowd.

The call to strike and protest spread outside of student groups into the working class. As if to take advantage of a planned out-of-country trip by President General Charles de Gaulle,

workers in several factories in the Paris outskirts began to strike. On May 14th, workers in an aircraft plant went so far as to occupy the factory and lockup the plant's director. The thinking—especially among younger workers—was that if students could challenge authority, so could workers (Brown B. , 1974, p. 13). The communist union would henceforth join the student's movement, and within one week six million workers were on strike. As Brown emphasizes, the means of production had been seized (Brown B. , 1974, p. 14); it would appear that a socialist revolution was at hand. Workers of all types joined this cause: doctors, clerical staff, construction workers, the list goes on. Indeed, the aims of the cause may have been too vague with even soccer players protesting under their own banner: "Soccer for the soccer players" (Brown B. , 1974, p. 15).

President de Gaulle returned from his visit outside of country to find the country in disarray. He wanted to clear the students from the Sorbonne with force, but his Prime Minister George Pompidou advises that this may create martyrs, further solidifying the movement. Similar to the Flour War where the government believed the riots were caused by forces outside the country (Bouton, 1993, p. 94), de Gaulle believed that criminal elements were inciting the riots in the streets (Brown B. , 1974, p. 19). The public would begin to change their opinions on the hostilities, with their anger being directed against the protestors for the automobile burnings and the chopping down of trees (to be used for barricades).

In an attempt to end the strikes and to get people back to work, Prime Minister Pompidou offers several concessions to the unions to include increased wages, increased minimum wage, and added family benefits, among other items (Brown B. , 1974, p. 20). The unions are keen on these conditions, but the rank-and-file are not, so the strikes continue. As if all was lost for the Republic, the radical left and the communists began to poise themselves for power, and there

was rumor that the communist party was planning a march to Hôtel de Ville to declare a new republic (Brown B. , 1974, p. 24).

In what Brown calls a masterstroke, de Gaulle performs what must have been a publicity stunt: he leads the public to believe that he may have been killed in a helicopter accident en route to see family. Returning for the dead five hours later (he was actually consulting with military advisors) he gives a speech in which he declares that the Republic will not be threatened by communism—it will remain free (Brown B. , 1974, p. 26). He demonstrates his resolve by declaring the National Assembly dissolved, with new elections to be held immediately. The public rallies around him, with half a million people marching in support of him. The student unions and communists are unable to match this and quickly lose power in the eyes of the public. They once again try to riot in response to a worker sit-in in the suburbs, but with 400 injured and 85 cars destroyed the public this time sides with the police; with elections just around the corner, the public feels that these riots are senseless. The government takes advantage of this shift in momentum and declares several of the troublesome student unions outlawed.

The election results were in, 358 out of 485 were in favor of the de Gaulle regime (Brown B. , 1974, p. 30). In essence, the student riots were fruitless. To be fair, workers were able to receive many benefits such as increased wages and a decrease in the length of the work week, but the students were left with the same government that they started with.

Discussion

One of the original goals of this research was to reduce causal complexity for the events selected as described by Ragin (1989), thereby allowing the development of generalizations

about civil unrest and collective violence. This goal has been reached and this analysis has been able to determine several causal conditions for the cases studied.

For the Flour War, increases in food prices—specifically grain and flour—caused crowds to mobilize and produce violence. As evident through Le Bon's (1968) proposed contagion theory, food riots quickly spread throughout the countryside through word-of-mouth. Brown and Boldin's (1973) are critical of contagion theory and say it is a tool to explain unexplainable crowd behavior; however, because the rioting spread geographically along the rivers, contagion theory appears to accurately describe how the riots spread here, even if this is an after-the-fact (rather than during the event) explanation. As Rudé (1966) emphasized, the pre-industrial crowd usually rioted for precise reasons, and rarely attacked property or people; indeed, the dominant norm here (as described by Turner and Killian [1957]) was the seizure of grain. As Bouton emphasizes, there is normally little violence during a food riot (Bouton, 1993, p. 158), and this is the case here; however, while there was no one killed during the Flour War, property was destroyed and people were beat up. This contrasts with the violence experienced during the Commune where people were massacred; however, violence is conceptualized here as intentional actions designed to destroy or hurt. Operationally, then, violence can be measured in each of the events presented here and I make no effort to compare or contrast the violence between events because that was not the concern of this paper.

When all was said and done, those that participated in the food riots of the Flour War did not leave the social system: they acted within it, albeit with a slight modification—the lowering of flour prices. This is unlike the Paris Commune where the Parisians wanted independence and unlike the 1968 riots where the students wanted the social system replaced. In addition, there

was no drastic action taken by the monarchy to stop the rioters, suggesting that their actions were supported—or at least tolerated.

It has been argued that socialist (or at least, individualistic) ideals caused the Paris Commune to form (Edwards, 1971), but this was not the cause of the violence; the Commune need not have resulted in violence. Even more, the actions of the military to recapture Paris and destroy barricades resulted in violence, but this was just a byproduct of the necessity to apply force. In this way a police officer who is wrestling a perpetrator to the ground would not be classified as violent because it is part their job. By murdering prisoners and throwing them into ditches, I argue that the cause of the violent massacre of the Communards at the hands of the Versailles troops was revenge—the commune killed two of their officers, Generals Clément Thomas and Lecomte. Had the Versailles army been simply doing their job, they would have used minimal force, arrested only where necessary, and let the courts decide the fate of the Communards. Similarly, the Communards killed their hostages in retaliation for the murder of their comrades, not out of any necessity.

The flood of 1910 was a natural disaster, and clearly nature was not the cause of violence here. The theft and looting were nonviolent crimes of opportunity, and were performed by individuals or small groups. This fits with the theoretical framework provided by Brown and Boldin (1973) of looting as uncommon during a natural disaster. Le Bon says that it takes only a few men to make a crowd (Le Bon, 1968, p. 25). While, conceptually, I agree with Le Bon, operationally, for this research I was only concerned with crowds consisting of many members. Though Jackson (2010) does not indicate how many thugs were present causing trouble in the night at Troyes, I argue that collective violence at the hands of criminals is outside the scope of this research paper; instead this paper's concern is collective violence at the hands of the

common man. The crowds that gathered during the 1910 flood become violent during their attacks on thieves stealing from neighborhoods. While some would call this vigilante justice, I would argue that it is a simple matter of revenge: people had their belongings (or the belongings of their neighbors) stolen and sought revenge against the perpetrators. Indeed, in some cases the crowd brought (or dragged) the criminals to the police station, but only after first roughing them up. This analysis leaves a duplicate causal condition of collective violence in the unrest situations studied: revenge.

The causes of the student riots of 1968 are less concrete, and this could appear to be what is called an “issueless riot” (Sutterlüty, 2014, p. 44). The students appeared to act aimlessly, but nevertheless were acting the part of the revolutionary as in the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 (Aron, 1968). Countrywide, protests were caused by the demand for dormitory visitation rights; similar to the social movement of youths in the United States during the 1960s; it seems the French youth caught the need for sexual freedom. These protests were peaceful, however, and only became violent riots once the desire for social change entered into the mix. Though there were many police officers injured during the May riots, the bulk of those injured were students. In terms of the violence that occurred, just like the actions of the military during the recapture of Paris during the Commune, I argue that the actions of the police were out of necessity; students of the movement would likely label me a police sympathizer but this is my historical interpretation, which Brown (1974) indirectly supports (by not report that the police were needlessly violent). To further support this claim we can see how the reaction of the public changed during the riots. Though the crowd generally followed the pattern of forming barricades, throwing rocks at police and burning cars, the attitude of the public changed from that of sympathy at the beginning of the movement to outrage by the end of the movement.

Though the police were blamed for the violence at the beginning of the movement, because they were seen as the victims at the end of the movement when normalcy was restored, this seems to support the claim that the police were just doing their job. In summary here, I claim that desire for social change was the precipitation factor and causal condition necessary to lead the 1968 crowds to violence.

What this amounts to is that, indeed, for each of these four cases, civil unrest led to collective violence. This confirms that civil unrest causes collective violence, but does not answer the questions of whether this pattern is inevitable, nor does it answer why in this particular context—France—this violence appears to be a reoccurring pattern. To answer this I would ask: is there anything particularly French about these causal conditions?

The causal conditions this analysis has indicated that lead to collective violence, while necessary to explain why the violence occurred in the specific context of France, are not enough to cause collective violence by themselves in different contexts. For instance, food prices rise and fall all of the time throughout the world, yet it is a rare event for crowds to form and riot based on the increased price. The United States has been known to have seasonal fluctuations in the prices of milk (Manchester & Blayney, 2001), yet there have been no riots when the prices increased. Similarly, there has been recent outrage over the beheadings of American journalists by terrorist organizations, but the desire for revenge has not caused crowds to form, let alone mobilize. Using the remaining causal condition, desire for social change, it should be self-evident that this occurs so frequently *without* causing violence, that the condition in itself is not sufficient to explain why collective violence occurs. This leads to two questions: is there anything that caused these conditions to be sufficient, in themselves, to cause crowds to form, mobilize, and to be violent *because of* the French context? In addition, were there underlying

causal conditions *within* the cases that caused the violence that this analysis failed to uncover? If it could be shown that there was nothing uniquely French about these causal conditions, then perhaps it would be possible to generalize these conditions to all of society.

To ascertain whether the events studied here were uniquely French, it becomes necessary to have a basic understanding of French political culture. In the decades prior to the 1789 Revolution, most traces of feudalism had dissolved, though tithes and rents were still a necessity for many peasant landholders. One of the first acts of the revolutionary government was to abolish all remaining forms of feudalism. Tocqueville (1856) suggests that prior to this, because all traces of feudalism had not been abolished, the perception among peasants was that they had it worse than other countries; though he points out that Germany was still deeply involved in serfdom, suggesting France was not worse-off. This perception on the part of the French peasants seems justified because, as landowners, they themselves were required to pay tithes and rents; Tocqueville says that had these same peasants not been landowners they would not have been involved with this aspect of the feudal system (Tocqueville, 1856, p. 47). Markoff points out that in the years close to and leading up to the 1789 Revolution, the peasants and the bourgeois revolutionaries teamed up in insurrections to end feudalism once and for all (Markoff, 1997, p. 1138). More importantly, he says that these insurrections set the stage for future insurrections by showing which tactics were effective (or which were folly), and whether the tactics led to repression or reform (Markoff, 1996, p. 6). In other words, future insurrections learned from these past events. This suggests that the fight to end feudalism set the groundwork for future riots; even further, it suggests that this fight set the framework for the 1789 Revolution.

The first National Assembly, established as a result of the 1789 Revolution, penned the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, espousing the ideologies of the new republic. Article II of this document says that, among equal rights, the French have the right to “liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression” (Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 2014). This last part about resistance to oppression is of interest because it suggests that citizens are free to riot if they are fighting against oppression. While the United States’ Bill of Rights has striking similarities to the Rights of Man, the emphasis in the United States was “the right of the people *peaceably* to assemble” (Bill of Rights, 2014). Armenteros, when referring to Jennings’ analysis of *France in Revolution and Republic*, emphasizes Jennings’ point that the 1789 Revolution was the “crux around which modern French political thought developed” (Armenteros, 2014, p. 474). In her analysis of scholarly work on the Rights of Man, Gündogdu says that it established an ideology of persistent discussions about the legitimacy of government (Gündogdu, 2014, pp. 371-372). This is different from free speech and entails using speech to actively challenging government in public spaces, suggesting the French are continuously armed for riots or revolts and simply need a trigger to do so, something Gündogdu’s research reveals as well (Gündogdu, 2014, p. 378).

Based on this, we now have a cultural mechanism to explain the manifestations of the collective violence—we can explain why the causal conditions in the context of France were enough in themselves to move crowds to become violent. It would be inappropriate to attribute any portion of the Rights of Man to the natural disaster of 1910, but the document can be used to explain the vigilante justice exhibited by the public in response to looting. Unlike the United States, where the public may have simply tasked the police to apprehend the looters, the French took it upon themselves to both punish the looters and bring them to justice. In this way, we can

say the public interpreted “resistance to oppression” to be a process where they actively imposed their will. Rather than being free to resist oppression, resistance becomes something they *must* do. Whereas I have indicated the causal condition here is revenge, the vigilantes would argue that they were doing justice.

The Flour War occurs almost 15 years prior to the penning of the Rights of Man. Food riots during the 18th century were not limited to France: they occurred in England as well, once again over grain (Rudé, 1966, p. 40; Halperin, 2003, p. 71). Like England, the causal condition for the riots were high food price; more to the point, though *taxation populaire* is a French term, the practice is recorded in England and the Netherlands as well (Ruff, 2001, p. 194). France had had a history of food riots prior to and after the Flour War. Rudé indicates that food riots that occurred after the Revolution of 1789 (thereby after the 1775 Flour War) had gained a political dimension; in addition, these later riots were true food riots as they were no longer limited to rioting over grain (Rudé, 1994, pp. 88-89), further emphasizing how the riots evolved over time. This leaves open the suggestion that the events of the Flour War influenced the insurrections over the remnants of feudalism (which, in turn, led to the 1789 Revolution as I have previously suggested). Whereas grain riots could—and did—happen elsewhere in Europe, the results of the rioting in France can be seen as precursors to future riots and revolts. Though the Flour War predates the Rights of Man, it seems reasonable to assume that there were inklings of the ideal of “resistance to oppression” among the populace.

When comparing the revenge of the 1910 crowds with those during 1871, the reasons for the revenge are different. For those that were attacking looters, as in the crowds assembled during the flood of the Seine, they were fighting against thievery. The crowds that killed during the Commune (whether comprised of the Communards or the Versailles army) killed in

retaliation for previous killings. While the idea of “an eye for an eye” predates France as a country, it is the motivation for the revenge that is particularly French. Article III of the Rights of Man states: “The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation” (Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 2014). In 1871, Parisians went against this third article in two ways. First—without authority—they seized the cannons leftover from the Franco-Prussian war as their own, when in reality they belonged to the Republic. Second, the official establishment of the Commune goes against the idea of unified nation; more to the point, by declaring themselves as independent of Versailles, the Parisians were saying that they were sovereign over themselves. In the eyes of the Versailles army, the Commune would be especially traitorous because they violated national sovereignty; as a result, it was the duty of the army to suppress the Commune. On the one hand we have the Commune which felt justified by Article II of the Rights of Man to resist the seemingly oppressive Versailles government; on the other hand, the Versailles army would feel justified by Article III to violently repress the Commune.

The violence during the 1968 student riots is yet another case where the civil unrest and collective violence combined under characteristics that are peculiar to France. In his study of the event, Brown (1974) uses Aron’s (1968) analysis of the event to explain the cause of the student riots. The students were unusually vague and aimless in their revolt, and this contrasts with the workers who joined their revolt who were fighting for a cause, namely better working conditions. As Brown points out, the students had no doctrine, or any idea what a worker’s union was or what their own goals were (Brown B. , 1974, p. 163). The students would fit with the Le Bon (1968) view of irrationality mobilized, whereas the workers would fit with Rudé’s (1966) view

of the purposeful crowd. The students wanted a revolt based on what Aron (1968) calls “psychodrama.” Under this theory Aron would posit that the students were too young or too naïve to have an idea what their revolutionary goal would be. Nevertheless, they wanted a revolution such as that had occurred time and time again in French history, even to the point of planning a march to the Hôtel de Ville, the site used historically to declare the establishment of a new republic (Brown B. , 1974, p. 24). Similarly, the students built barricades during the riots just as had been done during the Paris Commune. Based on Gündogdu’s (2014) research of a persistent ideology in France to challenge authority described above, the students would feel justified—obligated even—to riot, especially after the police struck the first blow by arresting protestors. Craiutu (2011) highlights Aron’s idea that France has a revolutionary soul on account of its history of revolution. In this way, French society has a propensity to take what could be a simple political debate to its extremes: riots or even proposed revolution. Combining this revolutionary ideology with the idea of the 1968 riots-as-psychodrama, it should be clear that the way that France responded to the events of 1968 were also uniquely French.

Conclusion

Regarding the question whether or not there are different underlying causal conditions for these cases, I defer this to future research. Though I am confident that the causal conditions I have indicated here are sufficient to explain the collective violence, perhaps the conditions are too simplistic. Future researchers may want to perform an in-depth study of these cases using an interdisciplinary approach to determine if there are more appropriate descriptions of the causal conditions. In addition, future researchers will want to see if these causal conditions can be used to explain riots outside of France. Lastly, those studying this topic in the future may also want to

include in their analysis the 2005 riots mentioned in the opening of this piece to see if its causal condition also has roots in the articles of the Rights of Man

I hypothesized incorrectly, French culture is primed to riot and revolt due to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; in addition, how the collective violence manifested itself was characteristic of France. The wording of the Rights of Man not only gives the French license to riot, it suggests that it is their duty to do so. Because the Rights of Man provided founding principles of the country, it is unlikely that it will be declared defunct any time soon; more to the point, it is likely just a matter of time until the next riot erupts in France.

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