

Civil Unrest Response

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Abstract

The article examines the personal and family-level strategies necessary to survive conditions of civil unrest in the United States, illustrated by recent deployments of National Guard and Marine forces in Los Angeles. The author emphasizes practical individual preparedness. Key themes include the psychological impact of isolation, the importance of situational awareness, home readiness measures, community-level cooperation, and an understanding of local laws regarding self-defense. Drawing from personal experiences and real historical examples, the author provides actionable guidance for maintaining safety and security when official responses are delayed or limited.

Keywords

civil unrest, situational awareness, home preparedness, self-defense, community security

Introduction

June 9, 2025, President Trump activates soldiers from the California National Guard and Marines from 29 Palms to protect federal buildings and employees in the Los Angeles area (Luscombe & Gambino, 2025; Mangan, 2025). What some officials have claimed in the media as a peaceful protest has turned into civil unrest damaging property, injuring police officers and disrupting the lives and safety of citizens. The movement is growing across the United States especially in major cities.

While considerable debate continues over the precise implications of the Insurrection Act of 1807 and the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878-enacted under President Rutherford B. Hayes to restrict the use of federal military forces in domestic law enforcement — an unresolved issue remains: in the event that martial law is declared and military authority supplants civilian governance, what are the subsequent legal and political ramifications (Wikipedia contributors, 2025; Kettl, 2025)?

This is not an article about any of the policies, this is about personal and family survival in the extreme conditions created by civil unrest. Man-made and natural disasters — including events such as large-scale protests and mass shootings (Wilson, 2023)—can quickly turn our society into a kind of zoo which affects us psychologically, socially as well as physically. Most of us watch on the news the actions and reactions of those trapped in the “zoo”.

Any significant disruptive event can cause chaos and challenge the peace, security and safety we take for granted. At least with natural disasters like hurricanes, or tornados the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other organizations will respond. Throughout history and across

all nations, riots, chaos, and widespread civil unrest have repeatedly occurred (Arenales, 2024; Brown, 2015). During such events, ensuring safety becomes the primary concern; no response, recovery, or assistance efforts can proceed effectively until the affected area is stabilized and secured, which inevitably delays any external support (Tin, Cheng, Hata, Shin, & Ciottone, 2023).

In such scenarios, essential infrastructure may be severely compromised: electrical grids may fail, utilities may become inoperable, potable water supplies may be disrupted, and food availability may dwindle rapidly, given that most retail outlets maintain only limited inventories sufficient for approximately three days. Furthermore, the loss of communication networks — including the Internet and mobile phone services — can render emergency services inaccessible, leaving affected populations without viable means to request or receive assistance.

Methodology

This article uses a descriptive and practice-oriented methodological approach. The core method is a narrative review based on the author's professional security experience and observations gathered over years of work in high-risk environments. The author draws on selected historical examples — including the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the 2020 Kenosha unrest, and recent deployments of the National Guard — to illustrate recurring patterns in civil unrest and community responses.

Additionally, publicly available reports, media sources, and official emergency preparedness guidelines (e.g., FEMA recommendations) are used to support practical recommendations. The author combines these sources with anecdotal evidence and personal case stories to highlight psychological, social, and logistical aspects of surviving civil unrest.

The focus is on synthesizing lessons learned from real events and translating them into practical steps for individuals, families, and communities. This applied approach aims to provide readers with actionable advice grounded in real-world experience and documented events.

Results

The main result demonstrated in this article is that, despite the unpredictability and severity of civil unrest events, an individual can ensure personal and family survival through knowledge, practical skills, and adaptability. Key practical outcomes include maintaining psychological resilience during isolation, developing daily situational awareness, preparing the home with essential supplies and clear evacuation plans, coordinating with local community structures for mutual support, and understanding the legal boundaries of civilian self-defense. These measures together strengthen personal safety and community resilience during prolonged or extreme unrest scenarios.

Discussion and Practical Advices

Psychological Impact of Isolation During Unrest

Isolation during civil unrest will create feelings of loneliness, sadness, depression, anxiety, sleep disruption, emotional problems and all of this can create physical effects on the body, weakening the immune system, and increasing stress. This is something that was endured by many over the Covid Pandemic in 2020 (Lepski, 2020). The lack of social interaction for the human animal will take its toll but it is also resilient and given some time will adapt.

For example, for many years I lived and worked in a violent, dangerous part of town. I became accustomed to hearing sounds of violence, gunshots, screams, arguments, sirens. Many

years removed from that environment I still have the memories and lingering effects. Decades have passed since my time in the military, but the experience has stayed with me.

My colleagues in Ukraine experience nightly, the effects of war, drone, rocket, and missile attacks. In the beginning I'm sure everyone would go to a shelter, this is normal, but eventually you just stay away from the windows and continue with life, and this is also normal (Maltsev, 2023). They have become conditioned. It has been shown that adaptation potential plays a crucial role in preserving psychological health (Lunov, Lytvynenko, Maltsev, & Zlatova, 2022). The effects of their experience will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Individuals, families, as well as communities that have experienced trauma and isolation because of unrest will be changed. Physical scars, emotional scars, and mental scars will heal over time and getting professional assistance is an advantage. In the short term, keep yourself focused on surviving the chaos.

It is essential to keep your mind focused — **task and purpose** — and anchored in a clear sense of direction. Establishing simple daily tasks provides structure and helps prevent feelings of helplessness by giving you purpose. By dividing complex challenges into smaller, manageable actions, you can maintain focus and continue to make progress. Concentrate on what is within your power and do not dwell on what lies beyond your control.

Situational Awareness and Early Warning Signs

Situational awareness is a critical skill that I consistently use every day, even if I'm not leaving the house or heading to work. Situational awareness arrives as a security imperative promising to help navigate this uncertainty (Hentschel, Krasmann, & Zebrowski, 2025). It's a term I hear used all the time but is misunderstood by many that do not work in the security industry. Let me break this down for you. If you travel or live a high profile or high threat life, I encourage you to get some training in this subject.

It starts with gathering information. Take a quick assessment of the risks you might face in your life. It could range from kidnapping to armed robbery, or even assassination, public attacks, terror attacks, war, the possibility of civil unrest and mob rule. I want to take inventory of the threats I might face and what I might fear?

Equally important is understanding your immediate environment: How well do you know your home? Your neighborhood, your community and where you work? I gather information from the local and world news, police and weather alerts. I always gather from multiple sources and sort through what I need. If you are travelling, gather information on the local culture and customs. Knowing the basics goes a long way. There are intelligence service companies, like Stratfor that provide reports and companies like Escape The Wolf that provide training.

Establish the "baseline". What is normal? What is out of place? If everyone is walking in the same direction and at the same speed. Then this may be normal. If they are running in the other direction. This is usually not normal. Baseline defines what is normal activity. Normal is good.

Normal sounds, normal traffic, normal movement, anything that differs from baseline is something to pay attention to. In many cases the baseline can be established through observation and listening skills. Tuning into your senses grants access to a "sixth sense" — the instinctive gut feeling often referred to as intuition. If something does not feel right, it likely is not; it is important to act accordingly. I first began developing this skill while exploring the woods during my childhood in Missouri, and later honed it through military service and work as a tracker. Applying these skills to the urban jungle was the next step for me. I recommend the book by Gavin DeBecker, *The Gift of Fear* (de Becker, 1997).

The next phase can be particularly challenging in our modern, fast-paced world. It is essential to minimize distractions, especially when in public settings. The smart phone, or cellular phone is a great communication and information tool, it is also the biggest distraction we have. Many people walk with phone in hand, head down, eyes fixed on the small screen, which significantly

reduces situational awareness. If you need to use your phone, use an earpiece, keep your head up and focused. Even better is to find a place to use your phone, make that call, or send that text message.

Exercise

Try this one morning when you have some time. Go to a busy public place and sit down and watch. What are most of the people you observe paying attention to? I've seen people walk into curbs, cars, signs, and trees. Break your habit of using your phone in public.

Bonus exercise: During your morning observation ask yourself, what is the baseline? How are people dressed? How are they walking? Give context to what you are witnessing. When I take students in public to work skills. I will ask them questions. Is this person right-handed, left-handed? Are they carrying a weapon? Are they confident? Who, what, where, when, why and how, questions that give you context.

The last element to add to the equation is present moment awareness. The ability to focus purely on what is happening around you. If you have ever practiced meditation, or prayer, or played sports to a level that you were in the flow. Your mind is quiet, your senses are gathering information, your body is moving and reacting. This is presence. At this point your decision-making skills are at efficient levels. No worries, or the future, or past. Fully focused on the present moment.

Charles Worsham, a master tracker and educator when speaking to us said, "the quality of attention without intention." I personally thought time had caught up with him. It took me several years to really understand the depth of the lessons he was putting out. Limit distractions and give your attention to the present moment.

A close friend and security mentor, Joe V. told me, "You can tell who the good guys and bad guys in a crowd are. We are the only ones paying attention. We are the hunters."

Gather information and sort it through to find common threads. If traveling or visiting a new place, do your research on the people, place and situation. Establish "baseline" what is the normal activity for the time, day and place. Limit your distractions, especially in public. No smartphone use in public.. Pay attention to what is happening in the present moment.

Downtown areas or city centers are usually the places where protest is focused but civil unrest can happen anywhere (Michael et al., 2025; *Protests Against Immigration Raids Spring up in Cities Across U. S.*, 2025). The city center usually is where the main police headquarters are located, the justice center, and government buildings. This is also a place where many workers will be affected. With this in mind you may need a strategy to get out of the area on foot, to your car, and get home or even out of the city.

Pay attention to the news, and to what you see going on around the area. Look for signals and signs of disturbances. Extra police presence, barricades, sights, and sounds. As an example: You see a large crowd gathering and get a "bad feeling" change directions and avoid the crowd.

Pro Tip: When faced with an angry mob, protest, or riot situation. Leave as quickly as possible. Get out of the area. It is important to not be confrontational, but blend with the crowd. You may look different, you may be dressed differently, but your behavior can allow you to flow with the crowd until you can escape. Use natural and manmade barriers to your advantage without becoming boxed in and trapped.

Home Preparation: Supplies, Communication, Safe Zones

Because of the nature of my work in security, I carry extra supplies like food, and water. Living and working in Texas I have sunscreen, rain jacket and appropriate clothing. I have helped many people prepare their homes, vehicles, and even businesses to be ready for emergencies. I always recommend starting with the basics and adapting to your needs and situation. A good starting place is the [Federal Emergency Management Agency website](#). They offer online training and a checklist to help you prepare for disasters.

My home is my sanctuary. Anyone that has had their home robbed will understand the feeling of violation and vulnerability that comes with crime. I want my home to be a safe and secure place. I want my family to feel protected. Preparedness starts at home.

While this is beyond the scope of an in-depth discussion on preparedness, if you live in an area frequently affected by natural disasters such as fires, floods, or hurricanes, it is essential to have an evacuation plan. Know what to take with you so you can recover from the event. Important documents, banking information, vehicle and resident titles, insurance paperwork, medications, essential clothing, toiletries, food, and water. The FEMA list is a great start. Don't forget your pets.

If you live in an area that has tornadoes, a storm shelter or basement is essential. Many that live in apartments use closets, or even a bathtub with a mattress over them to survive. Problem solving ahead of time gives you the advantage. Even though Mother Nature will always win. You can survive if prepared.

When I am away from home. I carry some supplies in my vehicle; first aid kit, flat tire kit, spare tire, good jack, chem lights, or road flares, work gloves and a headlamp. I will also keep extra water, a rain poncho, a light jacket and comfortable shoes. If my car is unable to continue, I grab my "get home bag" from the trunk and walk home.

My get home bag is light weight and holds items I need if I have to walk home. Don't overburden yourself. Keep it simple. Remember this, the more you know, the more skill you have, the less you need to carry. The more comfortable you are being uncomfortable, the less you need to carry. Some water, a snack or two, just basics. Take your situation into account. Don't overestimate your ability. Make sure you have a paper road map. Everything is different when you are walking.

Communication systems can become overwhelmed or just stop functioning due to several reasons. Modern communication networks rely on numerous interconnected components, which makes them vulnerable to disruptions. When voice calls via smartphone are unavailable, it is often still possible to send text messages, emails, or use messaging applications. At times it may be easier to connect with someone outside of the affected area. Know how and when to use survival signals devices, like two-way radios, land to air signals, whistles, mirrors.

Equally important is to have a clear plan — and a backup plan. Preparedness begins at home. As I have said before, my home is my sanctuary. However, the challenges faced by those living in inner cities or apartments differ significantly from those in suburban or rural areas. Adapt your preparedness measures to your specific context. Everything starts with ensuring basic safety and security: do you have functional smoke alarms, a fire extinguisher, and a well-stocked first aid kit? Are your doors and windows secured with quality locks? Do you keep important documents in a fire-resistant safe? Are you prepared to protect yourself, your family, and your home if necessary? I firmly believe in the fundamental right to defend one's life, family, and property.

In reality, common risks should not be overlooked. Statistically, a household fire is more likely than encountering an intruder, which makes placing a fire extinguisher within easy reach — even next to the bed — a practical choice. Similarly, a flat tire is more probable than needing advanced evasive driving skills. Preparedness must remain practical and realistic.

Finally, a person's best friend is not only my favorite companion but is a great addition to the home security system. Most people will pass by a house with a dog. An alarm system will let you know someone is in the house; a dog will let you know someone is in the yard. A security system can include several parts, cameras, and the alarm components. Think of creating a layered approach to your security. Think about delay, deter and deny access to your home.

Once you are secure you should focus on your needs. The FEMA checklist is a great place to start. Documents, Medicine, First Aid, Health and Sanitation. Organize your supplies. FEMA recommends three days of food and water per person in your home. One gallon of water per person per day. Then start to what if? Ask yourself, what if the power goes out? What if it is cold or hot? What if? Then start to solve those problems. What if civil unrest comes to my door and my family and I need to evacuate? Being prepared should give you a sense of safety and security, not keep you up at night.

Community Organization and Local Defense Coordination

Where I live in the United States, particularly in Texas, we are organized on multiple levels to respond to civil unrest and natural disasters. On the national level, we have federal law enforcement agencies, and federal disaster relief groups, like the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, and the American Red Cross.

On a state level here in Texas, we have state law enforcement, county sheriff departments and local police departments. We also have a state guard, which is a voluntary military controlled by the Governor. The national Guard, that can be called to duty by the President of the United States or Governor of Texas in times of need. We also have our own state emergency management agency for dealing with natural or man-made disasters and other emergencies. On a community level we have search and rescue teams (volunteers), and community volunteer crisis teams.

As a state we have a layered approach to dealing with law enforcement issues, civil unrest, and man-made or natural disasters. Federal, State, Local, Community. The Feds bring the big guns so to say, but it's the community that makes it really work. Neighbors helping neighbors. Churches helping within the communities.

We also have a secret weapon, rednecks. They are usually thought of in a negative way, referring to rural, simple and unsophisticated people. Some of this might be true, but rednecks can fix things. Rednecks have skills. Every nation I've ever traveled to I look for the rednecks. They are a wealth of knowledge.

When Hurricane Rita (2005) hit the gulf of Texas (Reporter, 2021; CNN.com — Transcripts, 2005), most streets and debris were cleaned up by locals, rednecks, using chainsaws, tractors, and personal equipment. They had the roads cleared before the federal emergency responders arrived. Being able to help your community is satisfying. A simple act of being able to help your neighbor in a time of crisis builds strong community ties.

Legal Aspects of Civilian Use of Force

There are numerous examples of communities organizing collectively during periods of civil unrest to protect their neighborhoods and businesses. For instance, during the 1992 Los Angeles riots, members of the Korean community armed themselves and took active measures to defend their businesses, becoming known as the "Rooftop Koreans." By positioning themselves on the roofs with rifles, they were able to deter looting and violence, successfully safeguarding their community (Dunn, 1992; NBCLA, 2020).

In the BLM riots of 2020 in Kenosha, Wisconsin Kyle Rittenhouse, age 17 was charged with shooting three men fatally wounding two of them (BBC News, 2021). He had traveled across state lines with a group of individuals going to protect businesses. He was arrested and later acquitted of the charges. The jury said he acted in self-defense.

I cannot stress enough the importance of understanding the local laws that govern your area, especially the ones that pertain to self-defense and the use of force to protect your property. If you don't understand the laws in your area, you might find yourself in a legal battle for your freedom. Invest some time and money to talk to your local police department, but also a local defense attorney.

Conclusion

"Better to be tried by twelve than carried by six" meaning, it is better to defend your life and be arrested than not defend yourself and be killed. I understand this saying; however, I think you can do better with proper training and education.

In most places you are allowed to defend yourself and a good rule to follow is to “only use the force necessary to leave the situation”. Depending upon the situation this can range from avoiding, escaping, and de-escalation to using deadly force. The decision to use deadly force in a violent encounter should never be taken lightly. Having a plan, and getting training is key. Know your local self-defense laws and get training. Have a plan to avoid, escape, de-escalate if possible. The general rule to follow is to use only that force which is necessary.

The information in this article is only the surface of a much larger subject. How long will the unrest last? Look at the damage Ukraine has endured in the past several years defending against Russia. Some areas will take years to recover. Ultimately, surviving the urban zoo comes down to your knowledge and skills, along with a strong mindset and some forethought given to supplies, equipment, and planning. Tom Brown Jr. said, “Survival of the fittest, sure, this is true. In the human animal, it’s your knowledge and skill, not just your strength.” I would add that it’s also your ability to adapt — to identify the problem, come up with a solution, and take action.

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