Polls, Politics, and Crime:
The "Law and Order" Issue of the 1960s

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ABSTRACT

Conventional and scholarly opinion hold that public crime concerns in the 1960s reached, for the first time in history, the status of number one domestic problem, and that the civil disturbances of the era exacerbated white Americans' crime fears. Our systematic reanalysis of both the polling data and riot incidence data of that period finds the conventional and scholarly opinion to be erroneous. Our analysis of the role of media, public officials, and pollsters in shaping the prevailing view about crime during the 1960s supports a hypothesis of an elite-engineered moral panic.

Crime first emerged as a national political issue in the U.S. in the 1960s.[1] It played a central role in the presidential contests of 1964 and especially 1968. GOP nominee Barry Goldwater raised the "crime in the streets" issue in the 1964 presidential contest, and in 1968 Richard Nixon ran successfully for president touting a "law and order" platform. In conjunction with the 1964 and 1968 presidential races, major media widely and prominently publicized polls that appeared to show that, for the first time in U.S. history, crime had risen to the status of America's number one domestic problem.[2]

For most of the 1960s, the Democratic and Republican parties disagreed with each other over how to address the "street" crime issue, although since that time both parties have spoken in essentially one voice on crime: "let's get tough." The putative rationale for this stance has been that the American public wants tougher measures against street criminals – a demand by the public that purportedly began in the 1960s. This rationale rests on faulty premises, both empirically and theoretically.

Our careful re-examination of the 1960s' polls demonstrates that crime did not in fact show up as the top domestic item in polls. In fact, poll-measured crime concerns at the time were modest. Further, the belief that whites' antipathy for the civil rights and black power movements was a driving force in crime fears is not borne out by the polls. While whites' initial widespread support for civil rights declined through the

1960s as the riots intensified, the public largely *distinguished* racial challenge from crime concerns.

This article examines how the false impression of high public crime concerns was created in the 1960s. Our findings challenge the idea that the public conflated race and crime and the idea that public sentiment is either solely or primarily responsible for the harsher turn in the U.S. criminal justice system since the 1960s.[3] We argue that the 1960s' crime issue was a social construction – a moral panic – initiated and fostered by conservative elites in an effort to counter the gains made by the 1960s' social insurgencies.

MORAL PANICS AND THE MEDIA

Moral panics, such as the one examined in this case study, are special cases of social problems - instances where public concern, and the activity of media and the state, are especially heightened and disproportionate to the seriousness of the problem. The original treatment of moral panic comes from Cohen (1980) who attempted to blend Marx with Durkheim (Sumner 1994: 263).[4] Marx and Durkheim exist uneasily together, and as result the moral panic tradition has suffered from some nebulousness (Hunt 1997).

The Durkheimian strand, referred to as the "grassroots model" by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), treats moral panics as recurring, spontaneous occurrences, a result of "cultural strain and ambiguity" (e.g., Best 1990, Luttwak 1999). The main problem with the grassroots model is its ahistorical character: it

cannot explain why a particular panic developed at a particular point in time, since it resorts to citing structural strain as the source (Fritz and Altheide 1987).

The Marxist strand, referred to as the "elite-engineered model" by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994), sees moral panics as triggered by the actions of elites in the state and/or the media. The Marxist variant is entirely comfortable with panics without a public, or with a very small public response (e.g., Hall, Critcher Jefferson, et al (1978).[5] Tester (1994: 85), for example, reinforces the Marxist approach when he criticizes the notion that "simply because there was a moral panic in the media there must also have been a moral panic among the viewers and readers." The evidence adduced in this study is consistent with the Marxist version of moral panics.

Central to the moral panic tradition is the role of media in fostering a panic. When this panic concerns putative criminal activity, the structure and typical modalities of news media operations (e.g., the customary sources for their stories) lead to a pronounced tendency to promote a view of crime that reflects the perspective of social control agents. Herman and Chomsky (1988: 248), for example, employ a macro-structural political economy approach to their study of the media. They advance a propaganda model at the institutional level which constrains through five filters the news content: the financial integration of media with the rest of the economy; advertising as the funding base for media operations; reliance on official sources for information; orchestrated flak campaigns to discipline the media; and anti-communism and pro-capitalism as the dominant ideology.

In a similar vein, Tuchman (1978) argues with regard to news media practices:

(1) the assignment of beats and bureaus favors the coverage of legitimated organizations to the disadvantage of social movements and dissidents whose activities and positions are much less likely to become known to the media;[6]

(2) professionalism as practiced involves the confirmation of facticity by legitimate institutions who also serve as news sources. These sources and this method *create* and *control* controversies (see also Parenti 1993; Gorelick 1989; Paletz and Entman 1981);

(3) media's presentation of itself gives an aura of impartiality and actuality; and,

(4) the sharing of information within the news community encourages them to frame their stories similarly. Moreover, since newsworthiness is determined primarily by what other media are covering (see Steffens 1931; Gans 1979; Loo 2002), media are more immune to understanding themselves as agents of legitimation (pp. 109-111). (See also Parenti 1993 and Bagdikian 1997).

As Thompson (1995: 74) puts it: "what was once an exemplary forum of rational-critical debate becomes just another domain of cultural consumption, and the bourgeois public sphere collapses into a sham world of image creation and opinion management." Media and/or state attention to crime are not driven by actual levels of crime (Fishman 1978; Barlow, Barlow and Chiricos 1995, 1995a; Beckett 1994; Beckett and Sasson 2000; Chiricos, Padgett and Gertz 2000; Loo 2002). Rather, media and state attention to crime is fundamentally socially constructed, driven by economic, political and, more broadly, ideological considerations (Croteau and Hoynes 2001; Bagdikian 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000). The preceding characteristics of media are borne out by our study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars (with the exception of Chambliss 1994) have taken for granted the belief that public crime concerns reached the top of the "most important problem" in the nation (MIP) polls in the 1960s. Indeed, the question among scholars has not been whether or not the public was aroused about crime. The question has been *why* was the public aroused? Wilson (1975), adopting an objectivist model, argues that the public responded with alarm to the 1960s' rising crime rates.

In policy-making circles, Wilson's position has had extraordinary influence. Miller (1996: 138) points out: "*Thinking About Crime* (1975), moved the parameters of the debate to the right and eventually came to shape the nation's policy on crime for most of the 1980s, culminating in the misinformed and destructive legislation of the 1990s."[7] Central to Wilson's call for harsher measures against street criminals is his claim that public sentiment demands more punitive policies. Wilson (1975) states that on four occasions in the 1960s, crime reached the top of the MIP polls. "In May 1965 the Gallup Poll reported that for the first time 'crime' (along with education) was viewed by Americans as the most important problem facing the nation" (Wilson 1975: 65). Contrary to what Wilson stated, the May 1965 Gallup poll actually found only 1% of respondents citing crime and two percent citing juvenile delinquency (see Table 3, p, 57). Wilson goes on to state that "[i]n the months leading up to the Democratic National Convention in 1968 – specifically in February, May, and August – Gallup continued to report crime as the most important issue" (Wilson 1975: 65-66).

Wilson is, however, *incorrect on all counts*. Gallup did not conduct a MIP poll in February 1968. The May 1968 poll was a conflated category (which we discuss later in this article, see Table 5, p. 58).[8] Even as a conflated item, it was far below the leading items such as the Vietnam War and Civil Rights. Lastly, the August 1968 poll Wilson refers to showed eight percent citing

crime and one percent citing "hippies" (see Table 5, p. 58). These percentages were far below the numbers cited in other categories on that date such as 47 percent for "Vietnam" and 20 percent citing "Civil Rights."

Smith (1985: 267) asserts that:

[l]ow concern about social control continued until 1965-66, when race riots, a rising crime rate, and increasingly violent protests began to drive up worries. Peaks were reached in 1967 following major race riots, in the fall of 1970 after a summer of race and campus riots and an escalation in political violence, and in October of 1971.

Analogously, Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989:42) report that in August of 1967, 41 percent of respondents in the MIP poll cited "social control" as their first choice.[9] "Social control" has been interpreted by some observers to be a proxy for crime concerns.

The use by Smith (1985) and Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989) of the category "social control" poses a problem for two major reasons. First, "social control" combines "violence, riots, crime, juvenile delinquency, drugs, moral decay, and the lack of religion" (Smith 1985: 265) and "fears about Communist subversion" (Smith 1985: 267). In other words, it conflates a number of extremely disparate categories and cannot be employed as a valid index of crime and juvenile delinquency concerns alone. Second, the category of "social control" does not exist as a choice for respondents in the MIP polls. It is a category that Smith, Niemi and Mueller created *after the fact*. Hence, the elevated numbers for "social control" are fundamentally an artifact of Smith, Niemi and Mueller's categories.[10]

Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989)'s data is summarized in Table 1. As can be seen from this, their combining of many different categories into "social control" fosters the consensus view that the public was far more concerned about crime in the 1960s than in the 1950s and 1970s since the numbers "citing" social control is elevated in the 1960s. When their data is disaggregated, however – which constitutes the key empirical analysis made throughout our paper – it is apparent that this elevated concern in the 1960s cannot be attributed to crime concerns per se.

Flamm (2002: 650) asserts that concern about personal safety was the paramount issue for whites, and he attributes crime's salience to at least the perception of rising crime rates and to whites' fears of insurgent blacks attacking them. "[B]y the 1960s street crime represented the main fear [among whites]." (Flamm 2002: ftn. 7, p. 645).

Furstenberg (1971), Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich (1981) and Skogan (1995) cite the civil rights and black power movements as inextricably linked with crime concerns in whites' minds. Furstenberg (1971) concluded in his study of a 1969 Louis Harris survey

that concern about crime was at least in part a reflection of antagonism towards social, and most especially, racial change. He found that whereas 19 percent of those respondents most committed to social change ranked crime as the number one problem, more than 40 percent of those respondents most threatened by social change ranked crime the number one problem. The area of social change that triggered the greatest opposition was racial integration. Among whites most hostile to racial change, 42 percent expressed concern about crime compared to 13 percent of those most supportive of racial equality.[11] Among whites most hostile to racial change, it is certainly plausible that we would find a larger percentage of them willing to rank crime as the nation's number one problem. This correlation, however, does not mean that racial fears produce heightened crime concerns.

Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich (1981:12) contend, referring to the mid-1960s, that:

public fears engendered by civil rights protests and the violent reactions these protests occasioned – fear of disorder, fear of riots, and fear of blacks – appear to have come to the fore in advance of the public alarm over street crime. In the minds of many people, these fears were closely related.[12]

Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich go on to cite polling data as their evidence for this conclusion, which we address after our article's methods section, demonstrating that the polling data does not actually support their claim.

Erskine (1974) concludes that worry about rising crime moved up and down in the sixties era in correspondence with major events such as the Kennedy assassination and campus protest. Importantly, however, she also points out that when items such as unrest, polarization, student protest, moral decay, drugs, and youth problems were listed separately, crime by itself began showing up even lower than before.

Scholars' conclusions about the crime issue in the 1960s have all been based to a large extent, or even exclusively, upon polling data. Data have been misrepresented by pollsters, news media, certain public officials, and, at least in the case of Wilson (1975), Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989) and Smith (1985), by scholars as well. That misrepresentation has taken two forms: either the conflation of disparate items into one grand category such as "social control" or the direct misrepresentation of the numbers of respondents actually citing "crime and juvenile delinquency."

METHODS

Since polls constitute the linchpin of past and present representations about the public's mood in the 1960s, polls form the foundation of our data in this study. We examined all of the "most important

Table 1. Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989)'s data

Date	Foreign Affairs	Economic	Social Control	Civil Rights	N Cases		Date	Foreign Affairs	Economic	Social Control	Civil Rights	N Cases
Mar-50	45	29	11	1	1458		Oct-62	66	11	1	11	4248
Sep-51	56	24	4	0	1986		Nov-62	72	9	1	2	4426
Jun-52	54	26	7	0	2031		Dec-62	61	12	3	5	3193
Mar-54	34	36	18	0	1562		Mar-63	61	17	-	4	na
May-54	49	19	0	1	1415		Sep-63	24	13	0	48	3230
Jun-55	48	14	0	4	1462		Mar-64	28	13	1	30	3539
Oct-55	41	20	1	2	1577		Apr-64	28	13	1	36	3509
Sep-56	39	20	2	18	1979		Jun-64	24	8	1	42	3506
Sep-56	44	19	3	12	2207		Jul-64	20	6	4	51	3515
Oct-56	45	26	3	10	2223		Aug-64	41	6	4	30	3513
Oct-56	47	25	2	9	2175		Aug-64	28	9	4	40	4003
May-57	43	30	5	4	1570		Sep-64	33	10	4	29	3590
Aug-57	37	23	5	18	1528		Oct-64	41	12	6	21	3503
Oct-57	38	16	4	29	1558		Feb-65	52	8	7	22	3505
Dec-57	50	21	5	4	1527		Feb-65	52	5	1	21	1757
Mar-58	25	47	4	4	1609		Feb-65	20	26	-	-	1620
Jul-58	33	37	2	6	1513		Feb-65	26	9	6	-	1620
Aug-58	48	22	3	9	1563		Mar-65	36	5	7	45	3500
Sep-58	53	16	2	16	1514		Mar-65	53	7	8	19	3546
Oct-58	53	18	1	17	1665		Jul-65	56	7	8	18	1590
Oct-58	46	24	1	14	1553		Aug-65	57	6	7	19	3527
Feb-59	44	27	1	10	1616		Sep-65	46	8	8	23	3555
Mar-59	48	28	3	7	1737		Oct-65	55	7	10	15	3525
Jul-59	46	32	1	8	1532		Nov-65	55	7	7	17	3521
Sep-59	55	23	4	5	5778		May-66	57	16	8	8	1563
Feb-60	47	18	3	5	3135		Aug-66	47	15	12	17	1509
Apr-60	40	20	2	16	2759		Oct-66	54	15	6	16	1597
May-60	61	14	1	5	3044		Oct-66	52	18	6	14	3510
Jun-60	53	11	1	6	2519		Jan-67	58	15	6	9	3491
Jun-60	55	13	3	5	3254		Aug-67	39	7	41	6	1627
Jul-60	57	12	3	6	2789		Oct-67	52	10	18	11	1648
Jul-60	60	14	2	6	3162		Jan-68	52	12	16	11	1502
Aug-60	58	15	2	6	3077		Jan-68	38	7	17	23	na
Aug-60	57	13	3	7	3337		Jul-68	41	9	29	11	1526
Sep-60	59	14	2	6	2906		Jul-68	44	8	22	17	1526
Sep-60	59	16	2	4	3614		Aug-68	38	6	32	15	1507
Oct-60	55	19	0	5	2988		Sep-68	39	8	30	15	1500
Feb-61	42	34	2	5	2873		Oct-68	41	7	29	15	1605
May-61	47	21	2	5	3545		Jan-69	44	10	18	20	1461
Jul-61	63	12	2	4	3158		May-69	43	7	31	12	1539
Dec-61	60	12	2	4	2988		Jan-70	33	16	22	11	1573
Apr-62	45	18	5	6	3403		May-70	32	6	6	8	1509
Jun-62	35	23	6	8	3275		Jul-70	28	14	32	8	1500
Aug-62	51	18	4	5	3350		Sep-70	33	10	36	9	1497
Sep-62	65	13	1	8	3938		Oct-70	32	11	41	5	1507

Source: Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989), Table 1.24, pp. 39-44. Note: August 1968 in their book's table appears twice. In our reproduction of their table we have corrected the first August 1968 to read August 1967.

Table 1. Continued

Date	Foreign Affairs	Economic	Social Control	Civil Rights	N Cases	Date	Foreign Affairs	Economic	Social Control	Civil Rights	N Cases
Feb-71	34	22	20	6	1571	Oct-74	2	72	6	1	1586
Jun-71	32	12	29	6	1591	Feb-75	4	61	14	1	1576
Aug-71	22	35	21	5	1547	Jul-75	3	62	11	1	1561
Oct-71	16	13	41	6	1558	Oct-75	3	65	11	2	1553
Nov-71	20	37	22	5	1558	Dec-75	7	61	15	1	1572
Feb-72	25	27	25	4	1502	Apr-76	4	51	16	3	1549
Apr-72	30	22	25	4	1542	Sep-76	8	64	9	1	1538
Jun-72	36	21	19	4	1516	Oct-76	45	65	11	1	1550
Jul-72	25	21	28	4	1526	Feb-77	9	47	15	2	1525
Sep-72	28	23	25	4	1505	Jul-77	8	43	12	1	1516
Oct-72	31	6	22	3	1516	Sep-77	6	50	12	2	1517
Jan-73	35	25	22	4	1549	Feb-78	7	48	10	1	1515
Feb-73	9	39	25	6	1517	Apr-78	7	62	9	1	1546
May-73	9	40	22	3	1531	May-78	8	61	6	2	1508
May-73	6	32	19	3	1548	Jul-78	8	64	8	2	1555
Sep-73	6	57	12	1	1502	Sep-78	4	64	10	1	1530
Jan-74	4	24	7	1	1589	Feb-79	14	58	6	0	1534
May-74	4	46	12	1	1509	May-79	4	51	7	0	1511
Aug-74	4	69	8	1	1590	Aug-79	4	46	15	1	1589
Sep-74	2	75	7	1	1527	Oct-79	6	59	6	0	1539

Source: Niemi, Mueller and Smith (1989), Table 1.24, pp. 39-44. Note: August 1968 in their book's table appears twice. In our reproduction of their table we have corrected the first August 1968 to read August 1967.

problem" in the nation (MIP) polls, as well as, the other polls that were publicized in the major media in the 1960s. We did this to determine whether the polls publicized by major media were accurately reported and also to find out what polls could tell us about public attitudes about crime and race.

We reviewed the Gallup Organization's monthly magazine the *Gallup Political Index* (later known as the *Gallup Poll Monthly*), *The Gallup Poll: public opinion*, published by Scholarly Resources in hardbound volumes, the Roper Center for Public Opinion, and the Louis Harris Data Center (available online in the Opinion Poll Question Database). The Roper Center houses polls from all the major polling organizations, constituting by far the most comprehensive repository of polling data. The Roper Center includes polls, for example, that have been conducted by Gallup but not published by Gallup. The Roper Center polls were accessed via the Internet using the key term search "most important problem." Lexis/Nexis was also accessed for the same MIP polls as a cross-check against the Roper Center's archive.

The MIP poll has the virtue of being administered in virtually the same way since 1935, hence the results from it are comparable over time. Respondents are allowed to cite more than one choice to the query of which problem is the most important one facing the nation at the time. Thus, the individual items added together total in excess of 100 percent. This provision also has the advantage of allowing people who have a second choice or third choice to voice it.[13] By accessing the Roper Center polls directly we discovered that some of the results published by Gallup in its monthly magazine, and by Scholarly Resources (a third party publisher of Gallup's polls), are incorrect when compared to the records available at the Roper Center.

Besides the polls, we also examined media coverage during the 1960s to determine what major media sources were saying about crime and race. We selected three major newspapers (the *New York Times, Washington Post, and New York Post*), the three major television networks nightly national news broadcasts (ABC, CBS and NBC), and the three major newsweeklies (*Time, Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*).

For newspaper data we consulted the *New York Times* index, checking under the headings of "Crime – U.S.," "Presidential Elections," "Riots," "Negroes," "Goldwater," "Lyndon B. Johnson," "Nixon," and the *Washington Post* index heading of "Crime." The *New York Post* does not have an index, so we examined only the *New York Post* articles referenced by the *New York Times*. We read and analyzed all of the articles listed under said headings.

The *Television News Index and Abstracts* (aka the "Vanderbilt Index") was used to locate network news broadcasts on the crime issue. This index began publication in August 1968. The broadcasts themselves were not available, but the abstracts for these broadcasts were analyzed.

The newsweeklies – *Newsweek, Time* and *U.S. News and World Report* – were reviewed for their coverage of the crime issue in the 1960s, using the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* to locate the stories.

In order to assess the idea that riots contributed to whites' crime fears, we also examined riot incidence data, employing Baskin, Hartweg, Lewis et al (1971) and Baskin, Lewis, Mannis, et al (1972) who tracked the frequency of civil disorders from 1967-1969. We then compared the riot incidence levels to the polling data taken during and shortly after the riots.

Finally, since our study is in part a meta-analysis of scholarly accounts of the 1960s crime issue, we also examined the scholarly literature, which is referenced throughout our article.

FINDINGS
The Protest/Crime Nexus

Goldwater is invariably credited by observers with being the first to try to connect crime with the 1960s social protests, broached in his July 16, 1964 acceptance speech of the GOP presidential nomination:

> The growing menace in our country tonight, to personal safety, to life, to limb and property, in homes, in churches, on the playgrounds, and places of business, particularly in our great cities, is the mounting concern, or should be, of every thoughtful citizen in the United States. . . Security from domestic violence, no less than from foreign aggression, is the most elementary and fundamental purpose of any government, and a government that cannot fulfill that purpose is one that cannot long command the loyalty of its citizens. History shows

us – demonstrates that nothing – nothing prepares the way for tyranny more than the failure of public officials to keep the streets from bullies and marauders.

Goldwater was not, however, the first to attempt to make this connection. *U.S. News and World Report* two weeks earlier, on June 29, 1964, editorialized that the country was in the midst of a "crime wave of unprecedented proportions" and that much of the blame for this could be attributed to street demonstrations and the actions of certain civil rights leaders.[14] Three months after the *U.S. News and World Report* editorial, in a report released in September of 1964, the FBI stated that the 1964 summer youth riots demonstrated an increasing collapse in respect for law and the rights of others (Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich, 1981: 14). Goldwater, in other words, was echoing an argument that was being made by a gathering number of conservative voices.

The comparatively liberal newsmagazine *Newsweek* did not go as far as *U.S. News and World Report*, the FBI, and Goldwater, but it did argue that social protest was catalyzing rising crime *concerns* among the public. In its October 19, 1964 issue, surveying the last few weeks before the November election between Goldwater and Lyndon Johnson, *Newsweek* asserted that the "safety-in-the-streets" issue's real "potency could be its close association with civil rights in the minds of many voters."[15]

Echoing this view, Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich (1981:12), argue that social upheaval, and riots in particular, produced heightened crime fears among whites." Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich state as their evidence for this claim that a "Gallup poll taken shortly before the election showed that popular sentiment [on civil rights and crime's connection] more closely resembled Goldwater's campaign statements than Johnson's" (Cronin Cronin and Milakovich, 1981: 23). Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich do not specify which

Table 2. 1964 MIP polls

Sampling Dates	Most Important Problem in Nation				N cases
	Civil Rights Integration, Racial Discrimination	Civil Rights Demonstrations*	Crime	Juvenile Delinquency	
3/27-4/2/64	34%	0%	0%	1%	1,676
4/24-29/64	42	0	0	2	1,661
6/25-30/64	47	0	0	1	1,581
7/23-28/64	58	2	<.5	<.5	1,634
8/6-11/64	36	2	1	<.5	1,557
8/27-9/1/64	46	2	<.5	1	1,557
9/18-23/64	34	<.5	<.5	1	1,600
10/8-13/64	24	1	1	1	1,550

* This response category also includes "Negro Riots, Violence, Lawlessness connected w/ them."
Source: Gallup, national in person samples.

Gallup poll they are referring to. Reproduced below, however, in Table 2 are Gallup's 1964 MIP polls' results for the relevant categories.

As Table 2 reveals, "Crime" and "Juvenile Delinquency" barely registered in the 1964 polls. "Crime" itself did not show up at all until July 1964, at under 1/2%. "Crime" registered no higher in 1964 than one percent. Likewise, "Juvenile Delinquency" showed up no higher than 1% during the height of the presidential campaign. "Civil rights demonstrations, Negro riots, and the violence and lawlessness connected with them" did not appear until July 1964 (the month of the Republican nominating convention), and did not exceed 2%, actually dropping to 1% in October 1964. By comparison, "Civil rights, Integration, Racial discrimination (no reference to demonstrations or riots)," an indicator of those who presumptively thought that civil rights was the central issue, drew numbers ranging from 24 to 58%, the 58% being registered in July 1964.

If *Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report*, and Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich (1981) are right about the connection in most people's minds between crime and the civil rights movement, then why do both crime and "Negro riots" concerns not even appear in the first half of the year, and in the second half, during the height of the 1964 election campaign, barely register in the MIP polls? Support for civil rights, on the other hand, by contrast, showed up as the overwhelming number one choice of respondents for most important problem.[16]

The fact that so few people chose crime and/or riots and "Negro protests" as the nation's number one problem, and so many chose civil rights as the number one problem, does not, of course, refute the notion that street crime and protests were intimately associated in at least some people's minds. However, for opinion-makers such as *Newsweek*, the FBI, and Goldwater to confidently assert that social protest and crime were inextricably linked by very many among the "public" is not supported by an examination of the MIP polls.

Table 2 also illustrates that the category of responses which Gallup labeled "Civil rights demonstrations, Negro riots, violence and lawlessness connected with them" did not show up until its July 23-28, 1964 sampling, and ended in October 1964. In other words, this association of Negro riots with lawlessness appeared *after* Goldwater's nomination, and his nomination speech, then disappeared after the 1964 elections. From March 1965 to January 1967, Gallup renamed this item simply "Civil rights demonstrations" (see Table 3). Through that same period Gallup continued to have a separate category called "Civil rights" (i.e., no references to demonstrations in a negative fashion).

Even with Goldwater's emphasis on a connection between social protest and crime, the MIP polls showed only a very slight, and temporary, reflection among respondents citing this protest/crime nexus. It seems clear that the linkage of the crime issue to social protest in 1964 was in fact an elite-sponsored discourse, initiated in 1964 by opinion leaders such as Goldwater, the FBI, *U.S. News and World Report,* and *Newsweek*. However, scholars since 1964 (save Chambliss 1994) have continued to assume a popular base for this protest/crime nexus.

If social protest – and riots in particular – were linked in the public's mind with crime, then we should expect that as riots increased in frequency and ferocity after 1964, then crime concerns should have correspondingly risen. Between 1965 and 1969, however, polls indicated that few among the public were linking civil protest to crime. Crime and juvenile delinquency continued to draw low levels of concern in the polls, ranging from 1-4 percent from 1965-1967.

The high figure of 35 percent in the August 1967 poll under "Racial Strife et al" occurred in the immediate wake of the Newark Riot (which started on July 13, 1967) and the Detroit Riot (which began on July 23, 1967). Both of these riots were extremely fierce. The National Guard was called in for the Newark Riot, and the Detroit Riot provoked the calling out of the military, including tanks that were dispatched down Detroit streets.

The low figures for "crime and juvenile delinquency" between 1965-1967 seem odd from the perspective of those arguing for the protest/crime nexus inasmuch as preceding and contemporaneous to these polls at least 257 riots broke out in 1967 (Baskin, Hartweg, Lewis et al, 1971) and before that, in 1965, the famous Watts Rebellion occurred.[17] Why, then, did the polls not register heightened crime concerns after riots?

The Contingent and Contested Nature of Reactions to Watts 1965

The evidence available concerning the 1965 Watts Rebellion provides us with a case study that sheds light on this question. The reason why riots did not per se stoke crime concerns in the polls was due at least in part to the politically divided character of whites' reaction to the riots. Richard T. Morris and Vincent Jeffries, for example, in "The White Reaction Study," (in Cohen, The LA Riots, pp. 480-601, cited by Horne (1995: 264) found a surprising degree of white sympathy with the riot. The all-white, low-income respondents in the Morris and Jeffries study were the most antagonistic to the riots, while all white, high-income respondents were the most sympathetic. Interviews of 600 whites in six selected Los Angeles communities were conducted by Morris and Jeffries. The targeted neighborhoods were

Table 3. 1965-67 MIP polls

Survey Date	Vietnam War	Civil Rights	Racial Strife, Arson, Looting, etc.	Crime + Juvenile Delinquency	N cases
2/19-25/65	29	24	2	1 (C) + 1 (JD)	1,550
3/18-23/65	23	46	6	1 + 1	1,541
5/13-18/65	23	23	0	1 + 2	2,285
7/16-21/65	37	20	0	1 + 2	2,407
8/5-10/65	40	21	1	1 + 1	1,599
9/16-21/65	19	25	2	2 + 0	1,571
10/29-11/2/65	36	16	1	1 + 0	2,399
11/18-23/65	33	18	1	1 + 0	1,646
5/5-10/66	45	8	1	1 + 0	1,563
8/18-23/66	46	20	4	2 + 0	1,509
10/1-6/66	52	20	2	1 + 0	1,597
10/21-26/66	43	14	2	1 + 0	2,417
1/26-31/67	55	10	1	1 + 1	2,366
8/3-8/67	34	5	35	1 + 1	1,627
10/27-11/1/67	48	11	9	2 (C) + 2 (Hippies)	1,648

Source: Gallup, national in person samples.

chosen for socioeconomic variety, with a range of levels of integration in the neighborhoods. These interviews were conducted between November 18, 1965 and February 4, 1966.

Fifty-four percent of those interviewed expressed sympathy for the riots, with 42 percent being antagonistic. Table 4 presents white responses to a question that asked for specific causes for the riots.

Twenty-eight percent cited reasons that can be construed as sympathetic, 26 percent cited reasons that may be understood as hostile, and the remaining 23 percent cited proximal factors as key to the riot. Horne (1995: 485) concludes: "white attitudes show a rather surprising degree of sympathy with the riot (that is, surprising in relation to comments in the press, and in the McCone Report)."

Table 4. White Response to Watts Riot

Response	Percent
Sympathetic	
Unfair treatment	15
History of injustice	11
Police Brutality	2
Situational	
Heat, Frye, arrest, etc.	23
Hostile	
Agitators & Outsiders	14
Bad elements in community (troublemakers, gangs, hoodlums, delinquents, etc.)	12

Source: Morris and Jeffries, "The White Reaction Study"

Given such a division in public opinion, the question became which reaction to the rebellion would establish itself as the dominant one. What mattered was not which view actually represented the majority sentiment, but which one *came to be seen* as the majority sentiment. (See Noelle-Neumann 1993).

Horne (1995: 281) points out that the perception of a white backlash "helped to create a momentum of its own and a self-fulfilling prophecy. Though certain studies showed substantial sympathy across racial lines for the grievances of South LA, this was not the message being broadcast by acolytes of the right." Right-wing radio shows were becoming popular in southern California, and helped push whites to the right. One white listener, Sam Bowman, for example, was asked about welfare. He replied that he'd heard The Bob Grant show and it sounded like "ladies [are] having so many children [but] not using money for them.'" McCone Papers, c. 1965, box 6, 12(a) 18, cited by Horne 1995: 265).[18]

This theme of welfare mothers, and broken black families, began to show up in the major press as well. The *Los Angeles Times*' August 14, 1965 front-page headline read "Racial Unrest Laid to Negro Family Failure." The *Wall Street Journal*, on the same day, headlined on its front page "Family Life Breakdown in Negro Slums Sows Seeds of Race Violence [...] Racing a Booming Birth Rate." (cited by Horne 1995: 265). This theme of black welfare mothers and broken black families linked to street crime has reprised many times in the decades since the 1960s.

Horne's analysis points to a conclusion that the white reaction to the Watts Rebellion (and by extension, the other 1960s' rebellions) was contingent and divided. This conclusion is supported by the MIP polls as we discuss shortly. Summations and interpretations of the rebellions were contested. They did not grow out of any natural or inevitable hostile reaction by the "public,"

especially the white public. In the shaping of the collective memory which links riots to crime concerns within "white America," opinion-makers, particularly media outlets such as radio talk shows and politicians, played key roles.

The polling data after the famous 1967 Detroit riots further underscore the ability of respondents to distinguish crime from riots. In an August 3-8, 1967 Gallup poll, taken immediately after the July 21-August 1, 1967 Detroit riots, only two percent cited crime and juvenile delinquency as their chief concern. Though only two percent cited crime and juvenile delinquency in that poll, 35 percent cited "Racial strife – arson, looting, etc." as their chief concern. Thus, while the 1967 summer riots provoked a very large negative response in the August 38, 1967 poll, those polled distinguished riots from crime per se.

It may be argued, in opposition to this interpretation, that arson and looting are, after all, index crimes, and respondents' crime concerns were actually reflected in the 35% who cited "Racial strife – arson, looting, riots, etc." and not solely those who cited "Crime and Juvenile Delinquency" per se. Hence, the sizable 35 percent figure might support the view that the riots did in fact provoke crime fears. However, the wording of this reported category by Gallup clearly refers specifically to arson and looting occurring in the context of riots, and, more exactly, in the context of racial strife. Furthermore, respondents are allowed to choose more than one item as their top concern and the tiny number citing "crime" belies the belief that "Racial strife – arson, looting, riots, etc." was chosen as a simple substitute for "crime."

Table 5: 1968-69 MIP polls[1]

Survey Date	Vietnam	Civil Rights	Racial Strife et al	Crime + Juvenile Delinquency	N cases
1/4-9/68	53	12	5	4 (Crime) + 2 (J.D.)	1,502
5/2-7/68	42	25	[15]	combined w/ Racial strife et al see column to left	n/a[1]
6/26-7/1/68	52	13	[29]	combined w/ Racial strife et al see column to left	n/a
7/18-23/68	46	13	0	9 + 2 (Hippies)	1,526
8/7-12/68	47	20	12	8 + 1 (Hippies)	1,526
9/1-6/68	42	18	14	12 (C + JD)	1,526
9/26-10/1/68	40	18	12	12 (C + JD)	1,507
10/17-22/68	44	17	12	12 (C + JD)	1,605
1/1-6/69	41	15	7	6 (C + JD)	1,461
5/22-27/69	39	12	3	2 (C + JD)	1,539

Source: Gallup, national in person samples.

[ ] indicates a composite figure of Racial Strife et al plus Crime and Juvenile Delinquency. Gallup sometimes disaggregates "Juvenile Delinquency" from "Crime" and sometimes combines the two.

[1] For the May and June 1968 polls, Gallup did not report N.

We might now consider the question of whether riots can legitimately and sensibly be understood as crimes. Certainly in the course of riots illegal actions such as breaking windows, trashing cars, setting cars, tires, trash cans, or buildings afire and looting are all index crimes. From one perspective, then, since crimes are committed in the course of riots, therefore, riots can be seen as crimes. Yet riots are clearly a larger phenomenon than the crimes committed within them.

After the 1967 summer riots, the political debate over crime in the streets and law and order gathered steam. This debate occurred primarily within the pages of newspapers, among politicians, and on conservative talk show programs. Polls did not reveal much mass public interest in the crime issue. Gallup's August 3-8, 1967 poll showed only two percent citing "crime and juvenile delinquency," and four percent in its October 27-November 1, 1967 poll. These polls did not receive any media attention. The *New York Times,* nonetheless, was conscious of the direction that debate among opinion-makers was moving. In October 1967, *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker predicted that "law and order" would become one of the 1968 presidential campaign's major issues.

1968: Elections and the Crime Issue

In January 1968, Russell Baker of the *New York Times* observed ruefully that politicians, radio disc jockeys and "the kind of people who call into radio talk shows" were all unanimous in their condemnation of disorder in the streets. An editorial in the January 19, 1968 issue of the *New York Times* noted that President Johnson received his "heaviest and most spontaneous applause" in his State of the Union Address when he "denounced crime and lawlessness in the streets." Gallup's January 4-9, 1968 poll found six percent citing crime and juvenile delinquency, up from the four percent found in the October 27-November 1, 1967 poll. See Table 5.[19]

The May 2-7, 1968 and June 26-July 1, 1968 polls were widely reported in the media as showing that 15 percent and 29 percent respectively of the public considered "lawlessness" the top U.S. problem (e.g., *New York Times*, August 4, 1968, p. 45, col. 1). The widespread belief that crime was the public's principal domestic concern in the 1960s rests especially on these two polls. In fact, however, these two polls were actually aggregated figures in which Gallup reported crime concerns as part of a larger category that Gallup created *after the fact* entitled "Crime and Lawlessness (including riots, looting and juvenile delinquency)." At no other time before or since has Gallup used such a category.

By combining several different items, Gallup presented an erroneous impression that crime concerns were much higher than they actually were. Following these two polls, polls that were publicized in the remainder of 1968 continued to either conflate categories, thus lending the false impression of strong crime concerns, or were narrower polls presented in such a way as to lend the same impression. The polls that were *not publicized* in 1968 actually revealed downward trends in crime concerns.

Gallup's next poll, July 18-23, 1968, recorded 11 percent citing "Crime (general), no references to juvenile delinquency, lack of respect for law and order," plus "Juvenile Delinquency - Hippies." This poll, therefore, actually recorded a *fall* in crime concerns – at least as compared to the May and June 1968 conflated polls. The July 18-23, 1968 poll was not publicized by any media or even by Gallup itself. In its next poll, taken between August 7-12, 1968, Gallup found 9 percent cited "Crime (looting and lawlessness)" as their first choice, *down further* from its July 1968 sampling. This was odd given that the GOP convention had just nominated (on August 1, 1968) Nixon and Agnew on an explicit law and order platform. In addition, two major riots had just occurred – in Cleveland between July 23-26, 1968, and Miami on August 7, 1968 – the same day Gallup began its August 1968 sampling.

This fall in crime concerns was not reported in media either. Instead, Gallup reported erroneously that its August 1968 poll showed that 21% of respondents named "crime (including looting, riots)" as their top choice. This figure of 21% was in reality 9%. The *New York Times* reported Gallup's inflated 21% figure in their September 8, 1968 issue, noting that "crime and lawlessness" were among the top four major worries of the electorate (p. 77, col. 4). This was technically true, though misleading, since the Vietnam War (at 47%) and Civil Rights (at 20%) outdrew crime (at 8%) and riots (at 12%) by a wide margin.

The August 1968 and January 1969 Gallup polls were similar to the immediately preceding polls of May and June/July 1968 in that they were reported as aggregate figures under the identical or similar heading of "Crime and Lawlessness...".[20]

When disaggregated and reported as actually answered in the poll, the "crime" figure in August 1968 is only 9 percent v. the 21 percent reported as "crime (including looting, riots)." Similarly, the figure for "crime and juvenile delinquency" as answered was 6 percent in the January 1, 1969 poll vs. the 17 percent that Gallup reported as "crime and lawlessness (including looting, riots and juvenile delinquency)." Obviously, 9 and 6 percent are far less impressive figures for crime concerns than 21 and 17 percent respectively. The picture of a public worked up over crime and riots becomes much less imposing when these aggregate figures are disaggregated.

Gallup also took three polls in the heat of the presidential campaign on September 1, 1968; September 26-October 1, 1968; and October 17-22, 1968. These polls, however, were not publicized by major media or even by Gallup itself. These polls recorded somewhat elevated crime and riot concerns: 12 percent crime /14 percent riots, 11/12 percent, and 12/12 percent respectively. While elevated, they were not comparable to the recorded concerns over the Vietnam War that were running between 40-47 percent in the same polls.

This is quite astonishing given the ferocity and prevalence of riots throughout the Sixties era, and the primary status accorded the law and order issue during the 1968 presidential campaign. Given these data, one might imagine a quite different scenario during the 1968 elections in which civil rights rather than "law and order" played the central role as the key domestic issue. This hypothetical scenario, of course, seems rather fantastical given the actual course of events, and the impression given by major media and major politicians (at least from the Right) of an impatient and angry public, fed up with civil protest.

The *New York Times*, liberal though its editorial policy was, instead of running articles reporting Gallup's September and October 1968 polls, which showed

somewhat unimpressive crime concerns levels, publicized the following:

- A Louis Harris poll that reportedly found 81 percent of the voters believing that "law and order has broken down." (NYT, Sept. 10, 1968, p. 31, col. 1);
- A Harris survey showing Nixon had a spread of 12 percentage points over Humphrey on the law and order issue (NYT, Sept. 13, 1968, p. 52, col. 5);
- A *New York Times* survey showing that the law and order issue was the largest single issue turning voters to Nixon (NYT, September 15, 1968, p. 78, col. 3);
- A Gallup poll which found that people's fear of using the streets in their own communities at night strengthens the law and order issue (NYT, October 10, 1968, p. 51, col. 3);
- A Harris survey showing 52 percent of Negroes saying that police brutality is the major cause of the breakdown of law and order (with 10% of whites agreeing) (NYT, October 16, 1968, p. 26, col. 1).

In sum, then, with the exception of this last item of October 16, 1968, the polls which the *Times* selected to feature all conveyed the impression that the law and order issue was of paramount importance to the electorate, and that the electorate was in a "law and order" mood. This was, interestingly, contrary to the liberal editorial stance of several of the *Times*' own columnists such as Tom Wicker, James Reston and Russell Baker.[21]

The September 1968 Harris Poll

The Harris poll which reportedly showed 81 percent of voters surveyed agreeing that "law and order have broken down," published in the *New York Post* in their September 9, 1968 issue, and picked up by the *New York Times* the next day, is revealing. The headline for the *New York Post* piece was titled "Law & Order' Top Issue Next to the War: Harris." The story began: "Next to ending the war in Vietnam, the most urgent demand of American voters in this election season is to bring back a sense of law and order.' By 81 to 14 per cent, a heavy majority of the public believes law and order has broken down in this country.'" (p. 5)

When one examines the structure and sequencing of the poll referred to, it is quite apparent that the "law and order has broken down" statement is *assumed* in the course of the series of questions asked *prior* to asking the headlined question.

Specifically, 1,481 voters were asked on August 24, 1968 a series of questions that began with: "I want to ask you about some things which some people think have been causes of the breakdown of law and order in this country. For each, tell me if you feel it is a major cause of a breakdown of law and order, a minor cause, or hardly a cause at all." In the offered choices by

Harris, interestingly, "Organized crime" comes in as the top choice for the respondents at 61 percent, followed by "Negroes who start riots" at 59 percent, "Communists" at 51 percent, the "Courts" at 51 percent, "Anti-Vietnam demonstrators at 38 percent, "National leadership" at 37 percent, "Hippies and student protestors" at 29 percent, "Right wing demagogues" at 20 percent, and "Police brutality" at 13 percent.

In the section cited in the opening paragraph, which followed these opening questions in which each of these possible culprits for the breakdown of law and order were offered in turn, the question read: "Now I want to read you some statements about law and order in this country. For each, tell me if you agree or disagree."

- 87 percent agreed with "Law and Order would improve if more people backed up their local police."
- 84 percent agreed with "A strong President can make a big difference in directly preserving law and order."
- 81 percent agreed with "Law and Order has broken down in this country." "Keeping law and order is much more a local than a federal government problem." 78% yes
- 73 percent agreed with "The rights of many people can be endangered in the name of law and order."
- 69 percent agreed with "Violation of law and order has been encouraged by the courts."
- 63 percent agreed with "Until there is justice for minorities there will not be law and order."
- 22 percent agreed with "Demands for law and order are made by politicians who are against progress for Negroes."

In other words, Harris first asked respondents a series of questions structured as "Many people say X has happened. Which of the following reasons would you say are responsible for causing X to happen?" Then, Harris asked respondents a series of questions, one of which was: "Do you think that X has happened?" In other words, the first series of questions *assume* the answer to a question asked later. Given this structure and sequence of questions, it is not surprising that 81 percent of respondents should then agree that "X has happened."

In summary, our examination of the polls shows that 1) pollsters manipulated the results of some of their surveys (either in the way they framed their questions, or in the way they reported the results); 2) conservative politicians, the FBI, and major media linked protest with crime; and 3) media reported selectively the polls to foster the impression that crime was uppermost in the public's mind.

Race and Crime

We cannot leave a discussion of the crime issue in the U.S. without addressing the question of race and crime. As Hacker (1988) presents it, a white person, if given a choice, would rather face a white thief than a black one, even if it meant losing more money because with a black thief there is "the added fear that the person confronting you will not simply take your money but may remain another moment to exact retribution for injustices done to his people." Hacker (1992) described the situation in the 1980s and early 1990s thusly:

> The dread whites fear of black crime goes beyond actual risks or probabilities. The visage of Willie Horton[22] stirred fears in parts of the country where black faces are seldom seen.... The feeling is not simply that crime is out of control. Far more troubling is the realization that white citizens can be held in thrall by a race meant to be subservient.

We believe this fear based on felt privilege continues to serve as a source for a ready and seemingly nearly automatic conflation of blacks and street crime in the minds of many Americans (see Szykowny 1994). Cose (1993: 93), for example, describes a 1992 conversation with former *Washington Post* Executive Editor Benjamin Bradlee in which Bradlee, upon hearing that Cose was completing a book on race [Cose 1993], "sighed and confessed that he was worried about what race was doing to him, that his home had been broken into more than once, and that he now found he was scared all the time." Bradlee's immediate association with race was crime, even though Cose had said nothing to him about crime.

It is difficult to disentangle these fears linking crime with race[23] from the effects of media and various cultural images in exacerbating those fears (see, however, e.g., Blake 1974; Hartmann and Husband 1974, 1981; Van Dijk 1991).[24] Either way, racial fears based on racial privilege have been a feature of American social dynamics for generations. Hence, one might expect that heightened racial challenge by blacks, such as that which occurred throughout the 1960s, would lead at least some whites to link this challenge with crime. That is, concerns about crime might be a surrogate for fears of racial challenge. Furstenberg (1971), Skogan (1995), and Cronin, Cronin and Milakovich (1981) point to racial animus from some whites as explanative in part for heightened crime concerns in the sixties.

If indeed a significant number of whites tend to conflate blacks with crime, we should have seen higher levels of crime concerns in the 1960s. Our close examination of the polls showed, however, that crime concerns did not rise higher than 12 percent in the 1960s. This does not negate the thesis that many Americans associate blacks with crime. It indicates, however, that most Americans can distinguish between crime per se and racial challenge. In the MIP polls of the 1960s, respondents who expressed opposition to racial challenge, were not reluctant to do so, but they did not at the same time name crime in significant numbers as their choice for the nation's top problem.[25]

It is, of course, much easier to counter racial challenge by positioning oneself as "anti-crime" rather than presenting oneself as "anti-civil rights" (see Edsall and Edsall 1991). This is precisely what the FBI, *U.S. News and World Report*, Goldwater, and later, Nixon/Agnew did, playing the race card by playing the crime card. The conflating of riots and social protest with crime was, in other words, an elite-sponsored social construction. Michigan Senator Robert Griffin, for example, equated the two utterly in the June 30, 1972 issue of *Life* magazine (LXXII, p. 52), stating that the then-current crime wave was "a riot in slow motion." (Cited by Conklin 1975:1).

From the standpoint of some social elites at least, the crucial part of their conflation of riots, social protest, and crime was the social protest/riots element. As Spitzer (1975) points out, from the standpoint of these social elites, street crime produces victims that are mainly members of an expendable class. Social protest, on the other hand, represents "social dynamite" and hence presents a far greater threat than ordinary street crime.

As our data show, neither riots, nor the rising index crime rate, directly influenced the poll results. How the riots and the rising index crime rate were interpreted, and what interpretation came to be understood as the dominant one, was *contingent*. In other words, there was nothing inevitable in how riots and the crime rate would be understood by the various sections of the public. Our re-examination of the 1960s points to the key role that specific protagonists played in the shaping of that discourse. In particular, certain state actors, major media outlets, and pollsters played critical roles in this process.

Ginsberg (1986) points out that the emergence and increasingly widespread use of polls has taken away an advantage that left-wing movements and the trade union movement have historically enjoyed over the state and social elites. That is, the Left has traditionally had the edge in terms of actually having close contact with, and superior knowledge about, the conditions and attitudes of the working and lower classes. Polls have been employed in ways that have allowed pollsters and elites to get better and more extensive information about public attitudes than they had access to previously. Further, polls have given them license to assert that their polls show what public attitudes "really are" as opposed to the organizing efforts (lobbying, protests, letter-writing, and so on) of the Left, trade union movements and grassroots organizations.

It should also be added that while polls are generally a part of the production of those discourses, at

times poll *results* are at variance with the dominant discourse. There is not, in other words, a full coupling of polls to the dominant discourse (see, e.g., Shupe and Stacey, 1982). To resolve the sometime disjuncture between poll results and the dominant discourse, polls are characteristically selectively reported, and in certain instances, individually erroneously reported or (re)presented. Polls are, after all, the key part of the rationale given for public policy shifts.[26]

We have discussed *how* the impression of a public aroused and worried about crime was created. The next question is: *why* was such an impression created?

DISCUSSION

Counter-Attack Against 60s Insurgency

Beckett and Sasson (2000) argue that the crime issue emerged in the 1960s as a result of the GOP implementing its so-called Southern strategy. This strategy, largely successful, was designed to realign the electorate from along class lines to that of racial and social lines, thereby wresting the southern white voter away from the Democrats. The crime issue (along with welfare) were the GOP's wedge issues (Edsall and Edsall 1991).

Left unanswered by Beckett and Sasson's argument is why the Democrats ultimately colluded with the GOP in this effort to make crime a centerpiece in national electoral politics. Beckett and Sasson speculate that the Democrats cooperated because they were reluctant to appear soft on crime. But the polling record indicates that the electorate was not particularly aroused about crime during the 1960s. They were, in fact, more sympathetic to the civil rights issue than ready to "get tough" on crime.

We suggest an alternative model to Beckett and Sasson's "Southern strategy." We draw upon Gary Teeple's Neoliberalism thesis (Teeple 1995) and on political process theory (McAdam 1982) for this hypothesis. Political process theory argues that elite differences grow out of situations when elites are in trouble (e.g., economic difficulties or crisis, a losing war effort) and/or when elites are challenged by an insurgency from below. Elites in such a situation are in hot debate as to how to best handle the crisis. In the 1960s, liberal elites argued that concessions (e.g., the War on Poverty) needed to be made to the insurgents lest a conflagration result. Conservatives argued that concessions would only fuel the fires of insurgency and a crackdown was what was needed.

The 1960s' insurgency managed to breach the public agenda normally fashioned by elites (Paletz and Entman 1981; Zaller 1992). A debate raged in the society as a whole over whether the key social problem was crime or social injustice. The crime issue as authored initially by conservative elites in the 1960s was in fact challenged largely successfully by social movement activists who argued forcefully that social injustice, not crime, was the central social problem of the day. This insurgency created significant splits – for a time – in elite ranks. The widespread influence of the insurgency effectively *blocked* crime from emerging at the top of the MIP polls during the 1960s since not only were elites unable to speak with one voice, but more importantly, the public was split in its views and its loyalties.

The Ebb of the 1960s

Teeple (1995) argues that the decline of the welfare state and its replacement by the security (or Neo-liberal) state is linked to the globalization of capital that began in earnest in the 1970s and 1980s. The decline of informal methods of social control (family, neighborhood organizations, jobs, and so on) that has occurred as a result of globalization necessitates the growth of formal, coercive methods of social control (especially the criminal justice system). This also coincides with the dismantling of the Keynesian Welfare State, which included the alliance between organized labor and the Democratic Party that began with FDR's administration. The Democrats ended up colluding with the Republicans on the crime issue after the 1960s because globalization emerged, with Neo-liberalism as its political expression, first in the form of Thatcherism in England, and Reaganism in the U.S.

Globally, Social Democrats and their U.S. equivalent (the liberal wing of the Democratic Party) have been largely or entirely supplanted by Neo-liberalism. Thus, in this country the Democratic Party has moved to the right even as the Republican Party has moved even further to the right. Both major parties have spoken essentially in unison on the crime issue – that is, that we have to crack down on criminals.

Furthermore, and this point is key: the insurgency that characterized and shaped the 1960s eventually ebbed. It no longer exercises the kind of influence it did in the 1960s, and as a result elites had a clear path in the 1980s and 1990s to usher in the crime issue as a key social problem. Crime reached the top of the MIP polls in 1994 despite the fact that the crime rate had actually been falling since the early 1990s and riots (with the notable exception of the so-called Rodney King riots of 1992) were almost non-existent (Loo 2002).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The data adduced here underscore the socially constructed nature of the crime issue, demonstrating that the collective memory about the public's focus on the 1960s crime issue is inaccurate. The origins of that collective memory can be attributed to the collective efforts of conservative public officials, mass media, pollsters, and conservative intellectuals, such as James

Q. Wilson. If we use the customary definition for a moral panic in which the public is drawn into the panic, a moral panic around crime did not occur in the 1960s. Instead, the impression of a panic was created.

Our data demonstrate that the 1960s' insurgency actually prevented the crime issue from becoming the number one domestic problem. That insurgency, however, inevitably ebbed, and globalization and its political expression, Neoliberalism, have been ascendant since the 1980s. In the face of this, it might seem that turning away from more punitive crime policies is hopeless. Yet, this study also points to the prospect that a social movement of sufficient force and influence could once again breach the public agenda normally set by elites (cf. Zaller 1992).

NOTES

[1] We use "1960s" herein to refer to the Sixties era which actually extended from the early 1960s until 1973.

[2] Gallup first began polling in 1935 and offered its first "most important problem" in the nation poll that year.

[3] The increase in the incarceration rate in the U.S. began its upward and still rising trajectory in 1973, the endpoint of the Sixties era.

[4] The basic concept of a moral panic derives ultimately from Durkheim (Downes and Rock 1988; Sumner 1994).

[5] Cohen (1980) himself was ambiguous about this. On the one hand, he concluded that there is "little doubt that the mainstream of reaction expressed in the mass media…entered into the public imagery" (Cohen 1980: 70). On the other hand, he found that some of the public saw the media as over-reacting to the Mods and the Rockers (Hunt 2001).

[6] Bagdikian (1997: 130) observes that "[s]ince the doctrine of objectivity called for the meticulous certification of almost every phenomenon by an authority with a title, the news came increasingly to be presented by the authorities. … The doctrine of objectivity, despite its positive accomplishments of strict rules of observation and verification of simple, physical events, has led to some of the most damaging failures of reporting—in wars, social explosions, and episodes like that of Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose fantasies were accepted because he was a certifying authority under the rules of objectivity. It has given American standard news a profoundly establishmentarian cast under the guise of a press independent of established authority."

[7] Miller, for example, was on the staff of then-Pennsylvania governor Milton Shapp when Wilson (1975) was published. The Pennsylvania Republican leadership purchased copies of Wilson's book for the entire Republican legislative membership for their use in planning state criminal justice policies (Miller 1996, ftn. 7, p. 272).

[8] Even if we were to take the conflated figure of 15% in the MIP poll in May 1968 as exclusively about crime and nothing else, this 15 percent was far below other categories in the same poll such as "Civil Rights" at 25 percent and the "Vietnam War" at 42 percent.

[9] This appears in Table 1.24, p. 42, though it is mislabeled as August 1968. (August 1968 appears twice in their table.)

[10] Smith explains that he created "only 11 large categories to classify responses since changes in historical frames of references and coding schemes make finer codes unreliable." (Smith 1985: 265). "Social control" is one of these 11 categories. Despite what Smith states, "crime" combined with "juvenile delinquency," has been consistently in use since 1935 by Gallup and is therefore quite serviceable for historical comparisons.

[11] Furstenberg drew this conclusion from an examination of the data which had been disaggregated by various criteria, including by level of concern about crime cross-matched against level of support for racial equality.

[12] See also, for example, Wilson (1975) who reported on a 1960s survey of Boston homeowners in which a "generalized fear of `improper behavior in public places' seemed to be the major urban concern." (Cited in Jacob, et al 1982 at 17). "Improper behavior in public places" is a very broad category indeed, encompassing - and not distinguishing between - petty to violent street crime, urinating in public, demonstrating, and so on.

[13] In the 1990s the Wirthlin Group and Gallup conducted some polls in which they allowed people to state their first choice, second and third choice explicitly. While the results of these polls do not bear directly on the 1960s polls, the results show no significant shifts in percentage of specific problems mentioned. In other words, "crime," for instance, was not lurking in the background as the majority's choice for second or third most important problem.

[14] David Lawrence, "The War Against Crime," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 29, 1964, p. 112.

[15] "The Curious Campaign -- Point by Point," *Newsweek*, October 19, 1964, pp. 27-28.

[16] The drop to 24 percent in the October 1964 poll for civil rights reflected a larger percentage of people (18% citing peace, war, cold war, nuclear war, and atomic bomb concerns).

[17] "'This was not a riot. It was an insurrection against all authority.'" This was repeated for emphasis: "'This was not a riot.. If it had gone much further, it would have become civil war.'" (Horne 1995: 4, quoting the CBS radio affiliate in Los Angeles as the fires of the Watts Uprising were being dampened).

[18] There has been little research to date on the role of radio talk shows.

[19] Because Gallup combined "Racial strife et al" with "Crime" and "Juvenile Delinquency" in its report of its May and June/July 1968 polls, it is impossible to properly display this category in a graph. Since these two polls were reported as an aggregate category, and the original ballots are no longer accessible, as they were destroyed by Gallup, we have chosen to incorporate the two polls under the "Racial strife et al" category in Table 5.

[20] Unlike the May and June/July, 1968 polls, however, a record remains of the items as they were actually answered - available through the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Unfortunately, the original, disaggregated record of responses to the May and June/July 1968 polls have been destroyed (by Gallup presumably), but the surviving records of the August 1968 and January 1969 polls provide powerful evidence that the May and June/July 1968 polls were likewise manipulated.

[21] It is interesting, and instructive, in light of this history of the ways in which the polls were put to use, to read what George H. Gallup's intentions were when he started his Institute for Public Opinion in 1935. "[H]e would provide the public with a powerful tool to learn what the American people truly believed, not, he said, the lies they were being fed by vested interests." He believed that poll reports were permitting people "'to make wise judgments [from] the mountain of polling data collected.'" (from George H. Gallup and Saul Rae, The Pulse of Democracy, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1940, cited by Altschull 1995.) Contrary to Gallup's expressed intentions, however, information does not exist in a vacuum, separate and unaffected by the differentials of power, hierarchies of class, vested interests, and corresponding ideologies.

[22] "Willie" Horton was made famous by the Bush campaign ad in 1988.

[23] For the purposes of this paper, we do not attempt to trace shifts in the discourse on race per se. That would be a most interesting and worthwhile project – but it is not ours here. Rather, we essentially adopt a working definition of race similar to that employed by Hacker (1988; 1992).

[24] Blake (1974), in a study of the Chicago Tribune in 1973, found that while only 20 percent of the murder victims in that period were white, almost half of the news stories about murders involved white victims. On the first five pages of the paper, where reading interest is highest, two-thirds of the murder stories involved white victims.

[25] Elaborating upon this point requires a close exposition of the MIP data in correlation with the 1960s riots. We do not include that discussion in this article since it distracts and detracts from the main thrust of the argument.

[26] One of the criticisms leveled at polling data is that, depending on how a question is framed, you can get very different responses from those polled (Kahneman and Tversky 1982). The MIP poll has also been criticized specifically by Schudson (1995) on the grounds that the MIP is simply a snapshot of what may be on people's minds at the moment. The virtue of the MIP poll, however, is that the wording of the query has been consistent since 1935. Thus, the problem of varying query frames is somewhat allayed. The virtue of using the entire record of the MIP poll since 1935 is that the problem of a snapshot reading is allayed by inspecting the results over several decades at each point along the way.

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