Violence and Police
(in democratic countries)

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An easy answer:
A legal point of view

- The State: A monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force
- The state is the source of legitimate physical force. The police forces and the military are its main instruments
- The use of violence by the police is regulated – Laws, Ethics, Deontology
- To answer to and to control the violence of others in a more civilized society
- The authorization to use force is the core of the police role (E Bittner)
But from an empirical point of view:

• Where is the border between « normal » and abnormal violence?
  – Not only physical violence, but symbolic violence
• A question of police discretion
• To justify the use of force
• Still illegal use of force
• Not to judge but to understand

But from an empirical point of view:

The use of violence by the police led to many paradox and dilemmas
• To use violence in a society less and less able to accept violence
  – The question of legitimacy
  – Rules and Values vs Efficiency
• The less the police is violent, the more PO are under surveillance, and the more each violent act get media attention
• The government and the police forces: legitimate use of force but ashamed => to hide it
The question of the legitimacy

- The use of violence: a solution or a problem?
  - Riots caused by real or unreal abuse of violence attributed to the police
  - The fear of the vicious circle of violence and retaliation
  - The fear of judicial and hierachical punishment
  - A reluctance to use « official » violence
  - Differences between countries: US and France

Is the public asking for violence?

- To follow Bittner, the potential violence of the police is due to citizens’ demand
- Bittner hypothesis revisited
- Use of violence or mediation: Robocop vs community policing
- Is the Police officer a social worker?
- From physical violence to symbolic violence (Foucault)
The shame caused by official violence

• To hide it:
  – To control the media
  – To solve the problem inside the force « Internal affairs »
• To create a non violent police
  – Specialised units: negotiators,
  – Large number of PO
  – Non lethal arms
• To control the police forces:
  – Commissions
• A more public concern:
  – NGO, Copwatch and Mobile phone, complaints

Why is there still violence?

• Controlled violence vs violence as the reflex
  – Surprise vs expected violence
  – Fear vs control to the environment
  – Street policing/Specialized units
• To solve a problem concretely
  – Lack of confidence in the Justice
  – An old fashioned way of policing
• The PO has to answer quickly to paradoxical injunctions
• More Police violence or less tolerance to police violence?