

This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

Preparing for action : police deployment decisions for demonstrations

Reference:

Eggert Nina, Wouters Ruud, Ketelaars Pauline, Walgrave Stefaan.- Preparing for action : police deployment decisions for demonstrations

Policing and society - ISSN 1043-9463 - (2016), p. 1-12

Full text (Publisher's DOI): <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/10439463.2016.1147565>

To cite this reference: <http://hdl.handle.net/10067/1372750151162165141>

PREPARING FOR ACTION
POLICE DEPLOYMENT DECISIONS FOR DEMONSTRATIONS

Nina Eggert, Ruud Wouters, Pauline Ketelaars & Stefaan Walgrave

INTRODUCTION

Social movements and the protest they stage are strongly affected by how the state reacts to contention. Apart from reacting substantially—by giving protesters what they want, ignoring them, starting negotiations etc.—how the state deals with the specific protest events themselves has been the object of scholarly research. Under the header of ‘state repression’ a good deal of work has investigated, for example, how the general level of repression by the state affects the levels, repertoires and outcomes of social movements (Tilly 1978; Davenport et al. 2005; Kriesi et al. 1995). Within this broad body of work there is a distinct line of research focusing more specifically on protest policing. While political authorities define the general and broad strategies about handling street demonstrations, the police have a large autonomy on day-to-day handling of street protest (Earl and Soule 2006). Police departments decide on whether to attend a protest and what strategy to adopt. Characteristics of social movements and demonstrations are said to shape protest policing strategies (Davenport 2000, Earl 2003) and the conditions under which protest events face more or less aggressive responses by the police have been investigated extensively (Earl and Soule 2003, Ayoub 2010). One of the most important findings of the literature on protest policing has been that, over time, protest policing in the US shifted from a police strategy of escalated force in the 1960’s to negotiated management in the 1990’s (McPhail et al. 1998). Similar shifts in police strategies are witnessed in Europe where open repression of street demonstrations has become rare (Ayoub 2010). Yet, despite the general trend towards less overt repressive protest policing, some protest events by some movements are still facing higher repression than others. This observation is the starting point of our contribution.

Protest policing, that is, what police officers actually do when attending and monitoring a protest event, is affected by two things: there is, of course, police decision making but also protesters' actual behavior. Quantitative studies of protest policing found that it follows a two-step logic: first the police decides *whether* or not to attend a protest event and with what capacity, the actual decision on *how* to react to the event is often only taken after arriving at the spot (Earl et al. 2005). When protesters do not follow the agreed upon route, , when they try to enter the 'safe zone' around government buildings, or when they start vandalizing public or private property, the police has hardly a choice but to intervene and to resort to repressive means to restore order. Actual protest policing thus is a consequence of the *interaction* between protesters and the police. This makes it tricky to directly observe the police's role in taking repressive action as it is as good as always the consequence of the interplay of protesters' and police behavior. In other words, when examining real protest events, what the large majority of protest policing studies have done, it is very hard or even impossible to observe 'pure' police decision making as it is inevitably 'contaminated' by what the protesters do. The problem of police observation is especially cumbersome when relying on newspaper data, the dominant strategy in the protest policing field. Not only are newspaper accounts not very precise or concrete in their description of particular police decisions, they also suffer from a strong over reporting of violent protests (McCarthy, Davenport 2005) which may lead to biased conclusions about how police decides on protest policing more generally.

Confronted with the impossibility to set up experimental research on protest policing controlling for protesters' behavior, this study presents an alternative design to tease out how the police decide irrespective of what protesters do and to study 'net' protest policing. We propose to focus on the decisions the police take *before* the actual protest event takes place. This allows to better examine the underlying logic and to reconstruct police thinking about protest and protest surveillance. Of course, once in the field and confronted with a concrete event the actual policing may unfold differently than initially planned. Protesters may behave unexpectedly or the field commander may take other decisions than the police officers that took the preparatory decisions from behind their desks. But even these field decisions can only diverge to a limited extend from the preparatory ones as the field commander is heavily

constrained by the people and material he/she has got at his/her disposal through the earlier preparatory decision. And, as we will show, these field decisions are factored in in the subsequent preparatory decisions for other protest events. So, the study builds on the idea that we can learn about process policing by looking at what the police does to prepare for protest events.

Drawing on the existing literature we present a theoretical account of police preparation for protest drawing on two concepts: police learning and protest threat. On the one hand, the police learn from their earlier experience with specific protest organizers. They factor in this experience in their decision on how to prepare for a subsequent event staged by the same organizers. On the other hand, on top of their knowledge based on past experience, they factor in specific features of the upcoming protest event that they are planning for and assess its threat. The threat is related to the targets of the protest and to the actual physical features of the expected event.

To test this account, we present a unique dataset of police records of demonstrations in Brussels, Belgium between 2001 and 2010. The dataset contains full data about the official demonstration permit requests submitted by protest organizers. It not only includes the requests themselves including the name of the organizers, the expected turnout etc. but, more importantly, also the police deployment decisions the police took regarding the requested events. Concretely, the evidence consists of the *number* of police officers to be deployed at the event and the *gear* that they will be equipped with. These two variables allow us to get a grasp on the actual protest policing decisions. With this data we tackle the following operational question: *What characteristics of the organizers, the targets and the protest itself determine the police's decision to deploy police officers and to gear up for battle?*

Brussels is a capital with very high levels of demonstration activity as it hosts most of the important Belgian demonstrations—and at the same time Brussels is the prime venue for European demonstrations targeting the European Union (Van Aelst, Walgrave, 2001). Having to deal with hundreds of street demonstrations every year, we can consider the Brussels police department as an experienced ‘protest policer’. Decisions about demonstration permits are taken routinely (several a day) and so are the decisions to deploy a number of police officers and equip them with specific gear.

The Brussels police dataset allows to observe routine protest preparation decisions by an experienced police force. The quantity of the data—the data contains more than four thousand requests and subsequent police decisions—can help us laying bare patterns in police thinking about protest.

We find that the police learns from the past. When organizers have a history of violence, the police prepares and shows up with more people and geared up for battle. When demonstrations imply a threat because the target is politically sensitive, more police is deployed. Not only more police is deployed but they appear on the scene in riot gear when an imminent demonstration entails a physical threat, for example when demonstrations are particularly large or when they are moving. All in all, we find that protest policing behavior is not that much affected by specific events or by incidental and particular behavior of protesters at the spot as most previous studies have concluded. Instead, we find protest policing to be very predictable and routinized, following strong patterns.

WHAT DETERMINES THE POLICE'S PROTEST PLANNING DECISIONS

Research has emphasized the role of different factors in explaining protest policing styles. While scholars seem to have reached a consensus on the general shift from escalated force to negotiated management (McPhail et al 1998), concrete studies show that protest policing is selective and that some protest events are more met with repressive tactics than others, even in times of negotiated management.

The main objective of the police in policing protest is the maintenance of public order (Earl and Soule 2006; Waddington 1994,1998). But protest events always entail some form of uncertainty. When people gather, and especially with increasing sizes of the mass, unexpected events may happen that might disturb public order. Police planners have to face a difficult trade-off between, on the one hand, making sure that public order is maintained at all cost by deploying enough police with the right equipment on the venue, and, on the other hand, the wish not to waste public money and police resources on protest that does not pose a threat to public order. To deal with this predicament and to reduce uncertainty the police typically gathers information about

the protest, its participants and organizers. Before granting permission to demonstrate and to plan its efforts, the police rely on intelligence reports, on information provided by organizers in their formal protest requests and on their previous experience with these organizers. These sources of information or heuristics lead to patterned and systematic decision making about protest preparation. The literature distinguishes between internal and external factors explaining protest policing. *Internal* factors are related to police culture, including previous experience with specific groups. *External* factors relate to aspects of the protest events themselves (Earl and Soule 2003). We draw on this distinction and propose one internal factor, police learning, and two external factors, political and physical threat, to account for pre-protest police decision-making.

Police knowledge on protest is the internal factor we consider. Police knowledge is defined as the perception of the police of “*external reality, which shapes the concrete policing of protest on the ground*” (della Porta 1998, p. 20). It is acquired through previous experiences with protest. The police learns from dealing with protests: “*The police, in fact, seems to be equipped with an elephant’s memory: the history of previous interactions with protesters is an important element shaping today’s protest policing*” (della Porta 1998, p. 20). The police perceives social movements and diagnoses protesters, their goals and their tactics (Noakes & Gillham 2006). They define demonstrators as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and this is key for their own policing behavior at subsequent protest events (Wahlström 2007). Based on their experience, the police makes a distinction between good protesters, who are considered legitimate, and bad protesters who take the streets for confuse reasons and are unpredictable (della Porta 1998; Waddington 1998). If demonstrations on a specific issue, attended by specific social groups or organized by specific organizations regularly result in damage or in violent confrontations between protesters and the police, future demonstrations on these issues, by these groups and by these organizations are more likely to face higher levels of police presence. We believe that, rather than classifying protest according to the issue or attendants, the police mostly look at the protest organizers in planning police presence. Organizations play a central role in recruiting protesters, they can or cannot control the behavior of ‘their’ protesters, and it is organizations who negotiate with the police before the event and with whom agreements about the route of the protest and the dos

and don'ts of the protest are made. In fact, we know that the Brussels police department gathers and relies on intelligence information on protest organizers. Therefore, we expect police deployment to be based on previous experiences with organizers and more in particular, whether previous events by these organizers led to public disorder. This leads to our first expectation: *Protest organizers with a track record of disruptive events face a more numerous and more forcefully equipped police presence in their subsequent protest events.*

The most widely used and empirically validated theory of protest policing is the so-called threat model (Davenport 2000). The more threatening a protest the more likely it will encounter more and more forceful police presence. According to this approach two types of threats affect protest policing: political threats and physical (or situational) threats (Earl et al 2003; Davenport 2000). Public protest may pose a threat to political elites. Many demonstrations, for example, make claims against the government, a minister, an international organization, or a party in power, and they want that political target to change its course, stop or start doing something or quit altogether. As the political decision makers that are targeted by the protest are in fact often those who ultimately decide on the police—they appoint, for example, the police chief—and as the police's primary goal is to defend the political institutions of a country, it is likely that protest with political targets faces another type of police presence than non-political protest. Pressure to keep protest under control might not only come from national authorities but also from foreign or supranational authorities. This holds in particular true in Brussels, the European capital hosting many international and supranational institutions. Similarly, Ericson and Doyle (1999) argue that the policing of international events may be affected by powerful extra-national influences leading to a particularly strong police response to international protesters. Hence, our second expectation: *Protest events targeting political elites or an international/supranational institution face a more numerous and more forcefully equipped police presence.*

The police centered version of the threat model states that the police itself is facing threats while carrying out its task. Some claim that such 'situational' or 'physical' threats would do a better job in accounting for protest policing (Earl et al 2006, Rafail et al 2012). Earl et al. (2006) argue that, since the primary aim of the police is to

maintain public order, the major perceived threat by police officers is loss of control. Consequently, in terms of decision-making about numerical presence and equipment, it mainly is the physical features of the expected protest event itself that determine to what extent and how the police is present on site. A whole range of concrete protest features may entail threat for the police losing control. To start with, the type of organizers staging the event may affect the police's risk perception. In a situation of negotiated management, the police try to constantly interact with organizers in preparing the event but also during the demonstration to prevent disruption and violence. But not all organizations are equal. More formally organized groups representing established groups and with previous demonstration experience, like for instance trade unions, may seem more reliable and predictable to the police than informal, minority groups with less experience (Fillieule 1997). The former may, for example, have their own security service and the knowledge of how to handle risky situations, while the latter may be less likely to be able to control their constituency and prevent tense situations from running out of hand. Apart from the status of the organizers, some other more tangible features of the planned protest event may increase the risk of losing control. The sheer (expected) size of a demonstration should matter, for example, as it is harder to control a large compared to a small crowd. A moving protest going from A to B—typical examples are demonstrations or marches—is harder to keep under control than a static event starting and ending in the same venue. The precise action repertoire used by the protesters may also be a source of potential loss of control. Confrontational tactics, such as blockades and sit-ins, compared to ordinary demonstrations or informational tactics, most likely increase the perceived situational threat (Earl 2003, Rafail 2010). Also, the announced occurrence of a counterdemonstration obviously increases the likelihood of conflict and disruption and, as a consequence, the potential loss of control by the police forces. Finally, during some protest events a delegation of the protesters is received by the protest targets in a face-to-face meeting typically in the target's offices. Such situations are obviously risky and laden with threat for physical confrontation and should lead to more and different police presence. In summary, our third expectation goes as follows: *Protest events with a higher situational/physical threat face a more numerous and more forcefully equipped police presence.*

METHODS AND DATA

To test our hypotheses we use a unique dataset with police records of protest events in Brussels from 2001 to 2010. Data were directly and manually collected and coded from the paper police archive by one of the authors and a number of trained master students. The archive contains protest permit applications submitted at least ten days before the event by protest organizers willing to stage an event in the police district of Brussels-Capital-Elsene, covering the city center of Brussels. The Brussels police keeps a separate file for each protest permission request basically containing three elements: (1) the actual request (mostly letter by organizers), (2) the decision by the police to grant permission or not including the police's plan of action to police the event, and (3) a report of the actual protest describing what happened and to what extent the police had to intervene. For this study, we use the two first sources of information. Our units of analysis are permitted protest events as recorded by the police (*manifestations revendicatives*) including demonstrations, marches, information booths, strikes, sit-ins, and blockades. For the period under study we have information about 4,695 protest requests by organizers and planning decisions by the police on a total of 5,328 protest events that the Brussels police recorded on its territory in the period of investigation. The events for which we lack a permission request and the police planning information-most of the time minor and less important events- are left out of the analysis.. Due to missing data (for instance, no estimation of demonstration size in the police planning) our analyses below draw on 4,172 events for which we have full information.

We employ two indicators of protest policing decisions, these are the dependent variables in the models below. Both are decisions taken before the event and are thus disconnected from how protesters behave during the events; they are net measures of protest policing. Our first dependent variable is the planned *Number of Police Officers* to be deployed at the event. Our second dependent variable measures *Police Equipment* and grasps to what extent the police prepared for potential disruption by assuring the presence of equipment to control or repress it. The specific riot equipment the Brussels police use to prevent potential loss of control are the following seven: arrest squad in plain clothes, medical team, special squad recording damages, water cannon, horse patrol, patrol wagons, helicopters, and protective clothing with shields and safety helmets. We code each of these seven equipment as a

dummy leading to a Police Equipment variable with seven values (1-7). Both dependent variables are count variables with over dispersion and dominated by lower counts and therefore we use negative binomial regressions.

To tap police learning we construct a variable *Past Disruption* grasping the degree to which events staged by a certain organizer in the past were disruptive or not in the period under study. Therefore we use the police reports drafted *after* the protest. The variable records for each organizer whether, during the protests he/she staged, violence was used against objects, whether people were wounded, whether traffic was blocked, or whether anyone was arrested. Each unique protest organizer applying for a permit is given a score, being the mean of protests being disruptive in which they were involved. Based on this indicator, we then assign a Past Disruption score to each protest event based on the score of the organizers. If more than one organizer was staging a planned event, we take the organizer with the highest disruption score to be the score of the event. In fact, one could consider our Past Disruption score as a proxy of the intelligence information the Brussels police uses to judge protest organizers and organizations.

Political threat is measured by two variables. We simply coded whether the target of the protest was political or not (*Political Target*). Second, to account for potential pressure of foreign or international political elites we look at the location of the demonstration (*International Location*). In fact, by far most protests in Brussels that target an international or transnational organization are held at a location as near as possible to the targeted institution. Demonstrations, for example, typically take place right in front of an embassy or consulate or close to the seat of an international institution, in Brussels mainly the European Union institutions.

Situational or physical threats are assessed using six indicators. *Minority Group* is a dummy variable tapping whether there are minority groups among the organizers. Minority groups are defined as organizations of foreign nationals and asylum seekers. *Event Size* is the natural log of the number of expected participants according to the police. *Moving* indicates whether an event will be moving or static. *Counterdemonstration* is a dummy recording whether a rivalling group is expected to protest against the initial protest. *Delegation* is a dummy variable as well tapping

whether the protesters will be received by their targets or not. Finally, *Protest Repertoire* indicates the extent to which the protesters announced to make use of confrontational action forms (strike pickets, sit-ins, blockades), of demonstrative action forms (demonstration), or of informative action forms (information booth).

Finally, we include *Year* to control for any changes in police presence and equipment that may have occurred over time. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of all variables used in the analyses.

Table 1: Descriptives of all variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
<i>Number of Police Officers</i>	4,172	16.797	34.366	0	690
<i>Police Equipment</i>	4,172	.292	.636	0	6
Police Learning					
<i>Past Disruption</i>	4,172	.077	.121	0	1
Political Threat					
<i>Political Target</i>	4,172	.685	.465	0	1
<i>International Location</i>	4,172	.379	.485	0	1
Situational/physical Threat					
<i>Minority Group</i>	4,172	.478	.500	0	1
<i>Event Size (natural log)</i>	4,172	4.335	1.579	0	11.40757
<i>Moving</i>	4,172	.169	.375	0	1
<i>Counterdemonstration</i>	4,172	.011	.104	0	1
<i>Delegation</i>	4,172	.214	.410	0	1
<i>Protest Repertoire</i>	4,172	.136	.400	0	2
Control					
<i>Year</i>	4,172	2006.08	2.677	2001	2010

FINDINGS

We run two separate negative binomial regression models on our two dependent count variables: Number of Police Officers (Model 1) and Police Equipment (Model 2). Table 2 shows the change in the predicted number of police officers and police equipment for each step in the independent variables while keeping all other variables at their mean. The full regression table with coefficients is shown in the Appendix, Table A1.

Our first expectation regarding police learning gets straightforward empirical support from the evidence. Brussels police indeed factor in previous experience. When a

protest event is organized by organizations that previously were involved in disruptive events, the police department anticipates and sends more police officers to the event. A one-unit increase on the Past Disruption score statistically significantly increases the number of police officers present at the event by twelve. Moreover, the officers go to the events more prepared, as they are equipped with more kinds of riot gear (Marginal Effect = .174).

Our second expectation related to the political threat posed by protest finds partial support. Events characterized by having a Political Target are attended by on average four more police officers, and events set on an International Location get assigned almost one additional officer (Model 1). Yet in Model 2 testing the effect of political threat on police equipment, we fail to see similar effects. That the target of a protest is political or international does not affect how geared up the police appears at the event. Apparently, the police see reasons to deploy more officers when domestic or international elites are targeted, but do not find it necessary to bring riot equipment, helicopters or paddy wagons in these situations.

The next block of six variables in Table 2 measures whether threats to the police itself—situational or physical threats—affect police preparatory decisions. Overall, the evidence clearly supports the notion that threat to the police leads to more officers on duty and to a more prepared police force. Consistent with previous literature situations that increase the risk of loss of control are an important predictor of police presence. We find that situational/physical threats are important factors in explaining police decision-making about deployment. A good deal of the coefficients in Models 1 and 2 reach statistical significance. We find an effect of protest held by minority groups. The effect is very small for the number of police officers—it leads to about one extra police officer on site—but it has a strong and important effect of how well equipped the police show up. As hypothesized, protest that is expected to mobilize more activists is welcomed by more police agents with more riot equipment. Both Protest Size effects are substantial and strongly significant. Moving protest also substantially increases the number of police officers present—it adds about three more officers to the contingent—and also the equipment used. This confirms that protest, mostly demonstrations, that move from point A to B are more complex and less easy to control so that the police has to take more precautionary measures.

Unexpectedly, whether a counterdemonstration was planned has no influence on either dependent variable. This finding goes against previous studies on protest policing where counterdemonstrations have been found to be a strong predictor of police presence at demonstrations (Earl and Soule 2006). However, it seems that it does not affect the decision-making prior to the demonstration. The Delegation variable indicating whether a delegation of the protest group is received by the protest target leads to additional police deployment in number but does not affect the equipment. As delegations are mostly received inside buildings it probably does not make a lot of sense to bring water cannons or horses when delegations are met by the protest target. The action repertoire employed (requested) by the protesters matters as well for the number of police present. Demonstrations (reference category) and confrontational tactics are met by more police presence than information booths who get on average around 2.5 less police officers attributed. It is remarkable that confrontational actions like strike pickets, blockades, and sit-ins do not lead to higher deployment levels than demonstrations. The police do not seem to consider these confrontational tactics as more threatening than demonstrations—that is, of course, when controlling for a whole range of other protest features. Also, Protest Repertoire does not affect the equipment used by the police.

Finally, we also find a strongly significant impact of the year the protest takes place both on numbers as on equipment. We clearly see the tendency towards negotiated management documented in other places over the last decade in the Brussels police as well. Each year the police diminishes its riot equipment presence and thus attends the protest in a less intimidating way (-.0368). Yet, at the same time, events are attended each year by on average about a half police officer more than the year before (.397). Over the ten years of inquiry, this finding documents a substantial shift from protest policing by force to protest policing by presence.

Table 2: Results of Negative Binomial Regressions. Marginal effect at mean (increase of number of police/police equipment for one unit increase of iv) change in the expected number of events when regressor changes

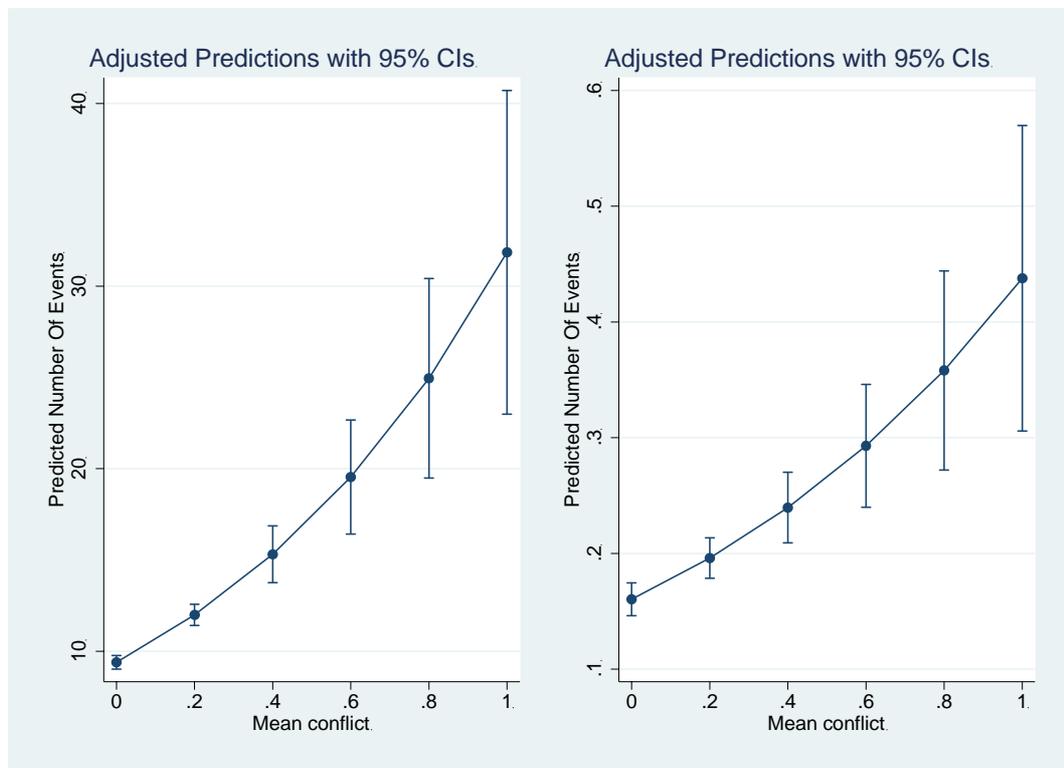
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
	Number of Police Officers	Police Equipment
Police Learning		
<i>Past Disruption</i>	12.60 ^{***} (1.591)	0.174 ^{***} (0.0288)
Political Threat		
<i>Political Target</i>	3.901 ^{***} (0.447)	-0.00273 (0.0133)
<i>International Location</i>	0.848 [*] (0.410)	0.0127 (0.0129)
Situational/physical threat		
<i>Minority Group</i>	0.903 [*] (0.353)	0.0505 ^{***} (0.0113)
<i>Event Size</i>	5.021 ^{***} (0.151)	0.0678 ^{***} (0.00348)
<i>Moving</i>	3.246 ^{***} (0.526)	0.0615 ^{***} (0.0133)
<i>Counterdemonstration</i>	-2.675 (1.626)	-0.0663 (0.0411)
<i>Delegation</i>	1.250 ^{**} (0.432)	0.0142 (0.0127)
<i>Protest Repertoire (ref. Demo.)</i>		
<i>Information booth</i>	-2.521 ^{***} (0.509)	-0.0373 (0.0194)
<i>Confrontational</i>	2.163 (1.439)	-0.00207 (0.0480)
Control		
<i>Year</i>	0.397 ^{***} (0.0647)	-0.0368 ^{***} (0.00197)
<i>N</i>	4,172	4,172

Marginal effects; Standard errors in parentheses; (d) for discrete change of dummy variable from 0 to 1; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

To summarize, our results suggest that our theoretical expectations hold the track. When the police decides about how to plan for protest they factor in their past experience with the protest organizer at stake, and more specifically, whether this organizer has a reputation of violence or escalation or not. Besides past experiences, police officers take also the political threat that an event represents into account, and they integrate all kinds of features of the protest event itself that might lead to potential threats or to a risk of losing control, in their decision to deploy a contingent of police officers and whether to equip them for battle. It is hard to draw comparative conclusions about the relative impact of the three theoretical components since the components are measured by different numbers of more or less adequate indicators. Still, looking at the blocks of variables in Table 2 suggests that police learning is the strongest factor followed by situational and then by political threat. Especially the relatively weak impact of the political threat variables is remarkable—they only exert influence on the number of police officers present and not on the equipment they bring with them.

Taking a closer look at the relation between the level of earlier disruptive events—the most important explanatory variable—and both dependent variables, Figure 1 shows the predicted Number of Police Officer and Police Equipment for different values of Past Disruption. The graphs show a strong (steep) and significant effect, with confidence intervals only overlapping in the higher ends of the past disruption scale . Every step on the Past Disruption scale leads to more police present on the spot and to a police force geared up with more severe material.

Figure 1: Predicted Number of Police Officers and Police Equipment for different levels of Past Disruption (all other variables kept at their mean)



(*** change X and Y-axis labels to fit language of rest of the paper)

CONCLUSION

Protest policing is a relevant factor influencing social movement activism. Examining pure policing is hard, though. How the police deals with protest is not only determined by what the police does and wants, but also by the behavior of the protesting crowd. If the crowd behaves rowdy, the police cannot but intervene. Previous work studying protest policing mainly used newspaper accounts of protest

events. Apart from the fact that such accounts are not very detailed about the police's role or actions and that news reports are skewed towards the more disruptive of protest events, such reports inevitably are the result of the interaction between police and protesters. This study suggested an alternative approach. It proposed to look at the police's *preparatory* decisions that are not affected by real protest behavior and that allow to better gauge the police's policing intentions and strategy rather than their actual field decisions (that may be taken by different people as well).

Our unique evidence on the Brussels police force—a police department with ample experience in protest surveillance—shows that the decisions the police make are predictable and patterned. It appears that a very practiced police department takes foremost routinized decisions of how to deal with protest. Three factors are taken into account in police decisions: earlier experience with the same protesters, the political threat exerted by the protesters, and the situational threat exerted by the specific protest event. Taken together, these three factors explain a good deal of the protest policing decisions that such police departments make on a daily basis. As far as we know, our study is one of the first to find such strong patterns, this is probably due to the fact that our design managed to discard the actual field decisions the police have to take in reaction to unanticipated behavior of the protesters. When only police decisions matter, both the learning model as the threat model of protest policing receive strong support from the data.

A final note relates to the case we studied here, the Brussels police department. Can we generalize the findings from a single city case, even when based on a lot of observations? We are not sure we can. As mentioned several times, the Brussels police is extremely learned and skilled in dealing with protest. The fact that we find such strong patterns points towards a routinized and standard decision-making process typical for specialized and expert decision making. Had we had data about protest policing decisions made by less experienced police departments, the patterns would probably have been weaker with more idiosyncratic and individualized decisions. On the other hand, the case of Brussels is not that exceptional. In many countries protest incidence is concentrated in the capital, especially in smaller countries, and in most of those countries the capital's police force most likely is experienced taking routinized protest policing decisions. So, from the point of view of

social movements and protest organizers, the bulk of the protest policing decisions affecting them may be taken by knowledgeable police planners. And added to that, even when a police force is less experienced in dealing with protest, we think they take decisions according to the same underlying logic outlined here: they factor in the past and take into account the political and situational threat of protest.

REFERENCES

Ayoub, Philip M. 2010. "Repressing Protest: Threat and Weakness in the European Context, 1975-1989", *Mobilization* 15(4): 465-488

Davenport, Christian. 2000. "Introduction", in Christian Davenport (ed). *Paths to State repression*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, pp. 1-24.

Davenport Christian, Hank Johnston and Carol Muller. 2005. *Repression and Mobilization*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

Della Porta, D. and Herbert Reiter (eds.). 1998. *Policing Protest. The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press

Della Porta, D., Abby Peterson, and Herbert Reiter (eds.). *The Policing of Transnational Protest*. Aldershot: Ashgate

Della Porta, D. and Sidney Tarrow. 2012. "Interactive Diffusion: The Coevolution of Police and Protest Behavior With an Application to Transnational Contention", *Comparative Political Studies* 45(1): 119-152

Earl, J. and S. A. Soule. 2006. "Seeing Blue: A Police-Centered Explanation of Protest Policing", *Mobilization* 11(2): 145-164

Earl, J., S.A. Soule, and J. D. McCarthy. 2003. "Protest under Fire? Explaining the Policing of Protest", *American Sociological Review* 68(4): 581-606

Fillieule, Olivier. 1997. *Stratégies de la rue. Les manifestations en France*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

Kriesi, Hanspeter, Ruud Koopmans, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Marco Giugni. 1995. *New Social Movements in Western Europe*. London: UCL Press.

McPhail, Clark, David Schweingruber, and John D. McCarthy. 1998. "Protest

Policing in the United States, 1960-1995." Pp. 49-69 in Donatella della Porta and Herbert Reiter (eds.). *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.

Noakes, John and Patrick F. Gillham. 2006. "Aspects of the 'New Penology' in the police response to major political protests in the United States, 1999–2000", in Donatella della Porta, Abby Peterson and Herbert Reiter (eds.). *The Policing of Transnational Protest*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 97-116.

Rafail, P. 2010. "Asymmetry in Protest Control? Comparing Protest Policing Patterns in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, 1998-2004", *Mobilization* 15(4): 489-509

Rafail, P., S. A. Soule, and J.D. McCarthy. 2012. "Describing and Accounting for the Trends in US Protest Policing, 1960-1995", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56(4): 736-765

Soule, S.A. and C. Davenport. 2009. "Velvet Glove, Iron Fist, or Even Hand? Protest Policing in the United States, 1960-1990", *Mobilization* 14(1):1-22.

Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Van Aelst, P., & Walgrave, S. (2001). Who is that (wo)man in the street? From the normalisation of protest to the normalisation of the protester. *European Journal of Political Research*, 39(4), 461–486.

Waddington, P.A.J. 1994. "Coercion and Accommodation: Policing Public Order After the Public Order Act", *British Journal of Sociology* 45:367-385

Waddington, P. A. J. 1998. "Controlling Protest in Contemporary Historical and Comparative Perspective." Pp. 117-40 in *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies*, edited by Donatella della Porta and Herbert Reiter. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Wahlström, Mattias. 2007. "Forestalling Violence: Police Knowledge of Interaction with Political Activists", *Mobilization* 12(4): 389-402.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Negative Binominal Regression coefficients predicting protest policing

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Number of Police Officers		Police Equipment	
Police Learning				
<i>Past Disruption</i>	1.221 ^{***}	(0.153)	1.004 ^{***}	(0.164)
Political Threat				
<i>Political Target</i>	0.378 ^{***}	(0.0429)	-0.0158	(0.0770)
<i>International Location</i>	0.0822 ^{**}	(0.0398)	0.0733	(0.0745)
Situational/physical threat				
<i>Minority Group</i>	0.0875 ^{**}	(0.0342)	0.292 ^{***}	(0.0658)
<i>Event Size</i>	0.487 ^{***}	(0.0128)	0.391 ^{***}	(0.0199)
<i>Moving</i>	0.315 ^{***}	(0.0507)	0.355 ^{***}	(0.0762)
<i>Counterdemonstration</i>	-0.259 [*]	(0.158)	-0.383	(0.237)
<i>Delegation</i>	0.121 ^{***}	(0.0418)	0.0818	(0.0736)
<i>Protest Repertoire (ref. Demo.)</i>				
Information booth	-0.273 ^{***}	(0.0615)	-0.236 [*]	(0.136)
Confrontational	0.187	(0.114)	-0.0117	(0.274)
Control				
<i>Year</i>	0.0385 ^{***}	(0.00625)	-0.212 ^{***}	(0.0121)
Constant	-77.49 ^{***}	(12.53)	422.2 ^{***}	(24.26)
Lnalpha	-0.0163	(0.0246)	-2.348	(0.478)
Log likelihood null	-15550.54		-2881.593	
Log Likelihood	-14181.83		-2273.403	
AIC	28389.65		4572.807	
BIC	28472.02		4655.176	
Observations	4,175		4,172	

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$