

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
September 28, 2020

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The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
State Capitol, Suite 1114  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

When you asked us to serve as advisors to you on policing issues, you requested we provide you recommendations in two key police practices areas:

1) improving police response to demonstrations and protests in order to protect and facilitate peaceful free speech and expression; and 2) ensuring that California's landmark new use of force laws (AB 392 and SB 230) are implemented appropriately across the state to foster a culture of de-escalation in which officers use force only when necessary.

The initial phase of our work has focused on policing and demonstrations. We write today to provide you our recommendations on this topic. We also have started engaging stakeholders about implementation, training and oversight issues related to AB 392 and SB 230 and look forward to providing you those recommendations soon.

As you no doubt are aware, changes to police practices are necessary but far from sufficient to address the many ways in which structural racism plays out in connection with policing and the criminal justice system. In addition to sharing their thoughts and recommendations on protests and use of force policies, stakeholders have shared with us a range of important broader policy recommendations related to policing, criminal justice, and racial justice.

These conversations made clear that reimagining the role of law enforcement is a top priority for many community members and other stakeholders. Time and again, we heard stakeholders express a strong interest in shifting some funding away from traditional law enforcement responses to investments in communities and other types of first responders such as mental health providers and trained conflict resolution experts. Law enforcement stakeholders agree that police should not be first responders for handling mental health and socioeconomic issues. As your advisors, we wholeheartedly agree and endorse the views of community members and law enforcement in this area.

Our recommendations today focus on improving police response to demonstrations and protests. We recommend that after we complete our use of force recommendations, you commission an additional phase of this project. For the new phase, we recommend engagement of stakeholders and academic partners to develop a roadmap for local law enforcement and communities to help guide their discussions around reimagining community safety.

Below, we submit our recommendations for improving police response to demonstrations and protests. This is a critical issue because the First Amendment right to protest is fundamental to our democracy.

As the New York Times Editorial Board recently recognized: “When George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, the scourge of police violence, festering for generations, became a rallying point for Americans yearning for the fulfillment of this country’s founding aspiration to promote life, liberty and happiness.”<sup>1</sup> Across California, the country, and globally, the murder of Mr. Floyd has amplified a much-needed conversation on race, police abuse, and social injustice. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets, many for the first time in their lives, to protest racism.

While there are numerous examples of law enforcement professionalism, restraint, and even solidarity in some instances, there also have been disturbing and well-documented instances of unnecessary and counterproductive aggression, instigation, and over-reaction by some police officers and agencies in response to the demonstrations.

Over the past several weeks, we have participated in dozens of small and large listening sessions with a wide range of stakeholders and experts from across the state to hear their concerns and recommendations. We had conversations with a wide range of community-based organizations and advocacy groups including racial justice, civil rights and civil liberties advocates, youth and youth advocacy organizations, and faith-based groups. We also met with statewide and local law enforcement organizations from small, medium and large cities across the state. Additionally, we spoke with prosecutors and defense attorneys and met with Legislators, local officials, and journalists.

Based on our conversations with these stakeholders, there’s a broad consensus that we can and must do better to protect and facilitate the right to engage in peaceful protests and demonstrations in California. We also repeatedly heard

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<sup>1</sup> NYT Editorial Board. “In America, Protest is Patriotic.” *New York Times*, 2 June 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/opinion/george-floyd-protests-first-amendment.html>

about challenges in mutual aid response related to differing standards, training, and expectations among participating agencies.

Our recommendations for improving police response to protests and demonstrations include the following:

- a recommended set of core values;
- a summary of key themes that emerged from our listening sessions;
- possible executive actions;
- possible legislative action; and
- a set of general recommendations for law enforcement agencies.

As part of this project, Goldman School of Public Policy Professor Jack Glaser and his research assistant May Lim conducted a review of available research and analysis related to policing and demonstrations. They conducted this review with the goal of understanding what are the most effective practices to support First Amendment rights while minimizing harms, particularly violence and property damage. A copy of this review is attached and, where relevant, promising practices identified from the research have been incorporated into the recommendations below.

According to the research, policing practices for crowd control have varied over time, place, and agency. Since the 1960's the dominant (but not universal) paradigm in the U.S. has shifted from "escalated force" to "negotiated management."

The research is consistent with what we have observed in recent protests and demonstrations in California. First, the overwhelming majority of protests remain peaceful. Second, violent elements among protest groups tend to be small and not inevitably violent or destructive. Third, violence often results from interactions in the dynamics between police and protesters. Finally, unnecessary injuries occur and violence escalates when tactical weapons are used inappropriately by law enforcement.

The research also is consistent with the recommendations we make below, including reinforcing the importance of the following key concepts as essential strategies for more effective law enforcement response to protests and demonstrations:

- *Coordination and Communication*: Police should communicate clearly with assembled civilians, ideally *before* demonstrations have started, but also during, in the service of maintaining safety. Law enforcement agencies should work to establish and keep open

lines of communication with protest organizers when possible. They should also reinforce expectations and values with partnering agencies in mutual aid relationships to promote consistent practices.

- *Avoiding unnecessary enforcement:* During protests and demonstrations, enforcement of low-level offenses or imposing unnecessary constraints on movement can spark avoidable conflict. Enforcement should target those who are causing harm in order to avoid disrupting the First Amendment rights of other participants.
- *Minimizing militarization:* Militaristic presence (e.g., with armored vehicles, combat-style helmets or weapons) can be counterproductive and threatening to peaceful protestors and may incite or escalate conflict.
- *Minimizing use of weapons:* Deploying weapons, including kinetic impact projectiles and chemical irritants, can, in addition to causing injuries and even death, rapidly escalate conflict, and they should be used as a last resort to protect life and repel assaults when other means have been exhausted.

We trust that with your leadership and the leadership and partnership of the Legislature, communities, and law enforcement, it is possible to keep communities safe while better protecting and facilitating the First Amendment rights of Californians to engage in peaceful protests and demonstrations.

Sincerely,

Ron Davis

Lateefah Simon

## **Protecting and Facilitating the Right to Engage in Peaceful Protests and Demonstrations**

### **Recommended Core Values for Protests**

1. Sanctity of Life and protection from physical injury
2. Facilitation of peaceful protests and free expression
3. Protection of property

### **Key Themes**

- Recognition that people have a constitutional right to demonstrate
- Recognition that law enforcement's role is to facilitate peaceful protests and demonstrations and protect life above all (property secondarily)
- Recognition that the vast majority of demonstrators are peaceful
- Recognition that there is a better way and there is a need for more consistency and statewide standards

### **Proposed Actions - 3 Categories**

1. Executive
2. Legislative
3. General Recommendations

### **Executive**

- Instruct the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to modernize its 2012 Guidelines on Crowd Management, Intervention, and Control to focus on protection and facilitation of First Amendment rights rather than on "management" and "control."
  - Recommend that POST convene stakeholders including law enforcement, community members, and subject matter experts to ensure updated guidelines reflect promising practices and best evidence.
- Instruct POST to update, expand, or add the following topics to the Basic Academy curriculum and 2012 POST Guidelines on Crowd Management, Intervention, and Control:

- First Amendment
  - Legal updates (unlawful assembly, curfew, etc.)
  - Professional, ethical, and moral responsibilities
  - Crowd psychology (including that crowds are not inherently irrational or prone to violence and that aggressive or unjustified police actions can antagonize and galvanize otherwise peaceful crowds)
  - De-escalation
  - Community relations and advance planning
  - Use of force proportionality, including emphasis on restraint and accountability, de-escalation, and AB 392 necessity requirement
  - Distinguishing civil disobedience from violence or riots
  - Other areas (see general recommendations below).
- Instruct POST, in coordination with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, to develop a train the trainer course for mutual aid coordinators.
  - Instruct POST to develop best practices and training guides for law enforcement to identify, monitor, and strategically detain individuals suspected of violence and/or destruction of property during protests and demonstrations.
  - Form a working group to evaluate and update conditions of mutual aid, including the standardization of command and control, use of force, communications, and operational plans.

### **Legislative**

- Prohibit the use of dogs and water cannons for crowd control or to disperse crowds.
- Restrict the use of less-lethal projectiles and chemical agents to defensive actions to protect life, repel serious assaults, and, when other means have been exhausted or are not feasible, to disrupt the significant destruction of property.
- Require all California law enforcement officers to receive regular training regarding the First Amendment and responding to demonstrations and protests.
- Clarify the definition of unlawful assembly and the process by which it can be declared (which is a necessary condition for crowd dispersal).

- Require officers to intervene to prevent or stop other officers from engaging in excessive force, false arrest, or other inappropriate conduct.
- Require officers to report the misconduct of other officers.

### **General Recommendations**

- Sheriffs and other local mutual aid coordinators should convene local stakeholders, including community members, law enforcement, and local government representatives to update or establish county operations and response plans (including tabletop exercises) for demonstrations, protests, and other mass events.
- Establish communication and coordination channels between government actors in advance of known demonstrations or protests so that decisions can be quickly made and/or communicated.
- Establish early and open lines of communication with organizers as a key strategy for planning, facilitating, and de-escalating issues if needed.
  - Establish relationships before crises to build trust.
  - Train community ambassadors or other responders to assist with communication, de-escalation/intervention, and other functions.
- Designate a point of contact for media inquiries.
- Establish clear and visible leadership with prescribed protocols for relaying of commands; especially important with mutual aid.
- Provide clear communication to public in advance of known protests and demonstrations re: commitment to protecting rights and intolerance for violence.
- Line up resources before they are needed and, when possible, stage away from demonstrators.
- Establish and reinforce with all participating officers, including mutual aid officers, clear goals (e.g., protecting 1<sup>st</sup> A rights, protecting critical infrastructure), and plans for how to accomplish.

- Establish and reinforce common standards, training, and rules for mutual aid including regarding enforcement priorities, use of force standards, warnings, and equipment.
- Recognize that police presence can have an escalating effect and be prepared to dial up or dial down visibility (e.g., do not start with visible armored vehicles and riot gear).
- If equipped, require all officers in direct contact with demonstrators to wear and activate their body cameras during protests and demonstrations.
- Use dispersal orders strategically (as they may have an escalating effect); when given, ensure dispersal orders are clear, loud, in multiple languages where appropriate, and that individuals are given sufficient time to disperse with clear, visible, and ample means of egress.
- Ensure protection for journalists and legal observers exercising their right to record and observe police activities during protests and demonstrations.
  - Provide officers training on the role and rights of journalists and how to facilitate their ability to report on protests and demonstrations.
  - Establish a media center and/or point of contact for journalists who are covering the event.
- Importance of quick, targeted intervention to stop violence and/or incitement; need to isolate antagonizers and not disrupt peaceful demonstrators (“identify, target, isolate, remove”).
  - Identify and address the role of hate groups, including white supremacists, in disrupting protests and committing and instigating violence and looting.
  - Partner with protest organizers, legal observers, demonstration marshals, and public safety liaisons to help identify and address potential problems before they escalate.
  - Prohibit the undercover infiltration of constitutionally protected demonstrations and protests unless there is a criminal predicate to support such activity.



- Limit amount of time officers can be on the line and establish ability to tap out or be pulled out based upon risk factors observed by the officer, other officers, or a supervisor. Risk factors should include signs such as fatigue, unmanageable stress, or other factors which may impact an officer's ability to safely and appropriately perform their assignment.
- Conduct daily briefings with mutual aid agencies to reinforce policies, priorities, and command structure.
- Conduct after-action reviews to identify what went well and what can be improved.
- Involve prosecutors' offices in front-end discussions regarding the possibility of curfews or other enforcement strategies and priorities and to provide training on relevant laws (e.g., distinguishing burglary from looting charges).
- Include prosecutors and/or other legal advisors on-site at emergency operations centers to provide legal advice and guidance.
- Oversight and accountability: tailor oversight to local jurisdiction; consider role to include monitoring event, accepting and investigating complaints (including mutual aid), compliance with policies, procedures, and training.
  - Local mutual aid coordinators and/or lead law enforcement agencies should coordinate centralized civilian complaint processes to ensure all complaints associated with demonstrations and protests are received and investigated.

# Review of Research on Policing Demonstrations

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July 28, 2020

## I. Executive Summary

This report on research on policing demonstrations reflects a review of scholarly books and chapters, scientific journal articles, NGO guidance documents, and other “grey literature” to identify major themes and promising practices to reduce conflict and violence.

Summaries of guidance documents from California’s Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and others reveal that such guidances, while clear and comprehensive, tend to emphasize operational considerations but fail to reflect current understandings of “crowd psychology” and unnecessarily discourage communication between police and demonstrators.

The main findings from systematic research on demonstrations and policing start with an acknowledgment that policing practices for crowd control vary over time and place (and agency). Since the 1960’s the dominant (but not universal) paradigm in the U.S. has shifted from “escalated force” to “negotiated management.”

There is considerable consensus among researchers on five essential points:

- Contrary to theories of crowd behavior originating in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, crowds of people are not inherently irrational, de-individuated, or prone to emotional contagion.
- The overwhelming majority of protests remain peaceful.
- Violent elements among protest groups tend to be small and not even inevitably violent.
- Violence tends to result from interactions in the dynamics between police and protesters.
- Unnecessary injuries and even deaths occur and violence escalates when tactical weapons are used inappropriately.

The research supports a focus in policing reform on key issues:

- *Communication*: Police do well to communicate clearly with assembled civilians, ideally *before* demonstrations have started, but also during, in the service of maintaining civility. Law enforcement agencies should work to establish and keep open lines of communication with partnering agencies in mutual aid relationships, to promote consistent practices.

- *Respecting spatial boundaries*: Violence is more likely to erupt if protestors or police violate each others' territories. Making expectations about territories (e.g., protest zones) explicit, so long as they are respected, can reduce upheaval.
- *Avoiding unnecessary enforcement*: As with territorial incursions, enforcement of low level offenses or unnecessary requirements of movement can spark mass conflict.
- *Minimizing militarization*: Militaristic presence (e.g., with armored vehicles, combat-style helmets) can be threatening to peaceful protestors and incite conflict.
- *Minimize use of weapons*: Deploying weapons (e.g., batons, kinetic impact projectiles, chemical irritants) can, in addition to causing injuries and even death, rapidly escalate conflict, and they should be used as a last resort, defensively or to disperse a crowd that has been declared unlawfully assembled.

Additional smart practices implied by research and supported by discussions with stakeholders and experts include ensuring demonstrators have a clear and visible *means of egress*, *targeting only destructive individuals* for arrest, and pursuing *unambiguous coordination* among multiple responding agencies.

Three significant thematic challenges emerged: 1) How to balance officer safety gained by armor, weapons, and offensive configurations against the escalation they tend to engender; 2) How to target destructive individuals without being viewed as violating territory and triggering broader disruption; and 3) What are the most promising methods for de-escalation given that research to date has not shown benefits?

## II. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to transmit a review of available research and analysis on policing demonstrations conducted with an eye to understanding what are the most effective government practices, particularly policing, to support First Amendment rights while minimizing harms, particularly violence and property damage. The review surveys a variety of research types, seeking empirically grounded psychological and sociological insights into crowd behavior and how it responds to various crowd control approaches. Promising and problematic practices will be identified and discussed.

The types of research sources reviewed included scientific journal articles, books, book chapters in edited volumes, government reports, training documents, and other "grey" literature, such as advocacy group recommendations. Much of the research involves qualitative review through case studies of actual protests (often single cases, but in some studies many), but some of the research involves rigorous quantitative analysis of protester surveys or archival data.

As den Heyer (2020) notes, perhaps too dismissively, in his very recent, extensive book on *Police Response to Riots*,

Extensive literature that examines the approach taken by the police to crowd management during protests and that identifies various options for the police to consider if they wish to improve their management of such events is available. However, no research has been conducted that would inform the police as to how they could improve their response to a riot, nor has any literature identified methods for managing protests that contain violent individuals or groups (den Heyer, 2020, p. 50).

In fact, although there is no known research that has conducted randomized controlled trials to test policing strategies on crowd management outcomes, there are research-based inferences that can be made about what is likely to work and not work well. We will highlight Nassauer's work in particular, which represents a very rigorous comparative analysis of 30 protest events, including those with violent and peaceful results.

It is worth noting as well that many, if not most, public protests do not elicit a police presence (Earl, Soule, & McCarthy, 2003), although, not surprisingly, Earle et al. find that the larger the event, and the more radical the goals, the more likely there will be a police presence.

### **III. Recent guidances and current practices**

Before considering social scientific research, we review some of the substantial materials developed by large law enforcement organizations to provide policy and practice guidelines for individual agencies. We will review here some of the most influential and recent. All have a highly operational flavor, appropriately providing guidance to agencies on the mechanics of crowd management. There is some reference to prioritizing free expression, coordination with organizers, limiting use of force, and de-escalation. But there is little evidence of research influence.

#### **California's Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) (2012).**

POST's *Crowd Management, Intervention, and Control* document states clearly that it represents guidelines, rather than policy or standards. It provides a comprehensive description of various dimensions of considerations that have to be made in preparation (long and short term) for policing demonstrations.

POST's description of law enforcement's role, to distinguish between lawful and unlawful behavior in demonstrations (p. 3) is perhaps too simplistic, with many agencies strategically overlooking some unlawful behavior such as roadway blocking. But the report goes on to more subtly distinguish among "lawful, isolated unlawful, unlawful, and riotous" crowd behaviors. Furthermore, the guidelines later offer some flexibility in responding to criminal acts: "Crowds and criminal acts committed by participants within the crowd require a flexible response. Strategies include containment, control, communication, tactical information, coordination

and response” (p. 31) and acknowledge that crowds are heterogeneously composed.

In line with common best practice, POST encourages coordination with event leaders, to the extent possible. The language on *dispersal* is very clear and prescriptive, but could be interpreted as providing legal guidance more than strategic guidance:

The decision to declare a crowd unlawful must be based upon reasonable and articulable facts. The definition of an unlawful assembly has been set forth in Penal Code section 407 and interpreted in court decisions. The terms ‘boisterous’ and ‘tumultuous’ as written in Penal Code section 407 have been interpreted as conduct that poses a clear and present danger of imminent violence [In re Brown (1973) 9 Cal. 3d 612, 623.]” (POST, 2012, p. 33).

More in the way of strategic guidance, POST makes a clear statement of the importance of making dispersal announcements heard, and recording, for accountability purposes, when all the announcements were made and who made them. However, the dispersal order template provided in the POST document is very direct, bordering on officious. A more cordial approach could reduce the likelihood of physical resistance.

POST’s use of force guidance is generic, and permissive:

Peace officers need not use the least intrusive force option, but only that force which is objectively reasonable under the totality of the circumstances; Scott v. Henrich, 39 F. 3d 912 (9th Cir. 1994), and Forrester v. City of San Diego, 25 F. 3d 804 (9th Cir. 1994). When feasible, prior to the use of a particular force option, officers should consider the availability of less-intrusive measures; Young, 655 F.3d at 1166; Bryan v. McPherson, 630 F. 3d 805, 831 (9th Cir. 2010)” (p. 39). Regarding chemical agents, the guidance is loose: “Each agency should consider when, where, and how nonlethal chemical agents may be deployed, and consider potential collateral effects (POST 2012, p. 41).

Overall, the POST guidelines cover a lot of topics and consider many variables, but tend to be descriptive and emphasize common legal standards as opposed to evidence-based approaches for promoting optimal outcomes.

A more recent set of guidances is offered through a training manual published by **Ohio Peace Officer Basic Training** (July 2019). Encouragingly, there is repeated emphasis on “legal, moral, professional and ethical responsibilities.” (e.g., p. 7). On the other hand, based on the stated student objectives, the course seems very command and control oriented:

“At the end of this topic, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the balance between First Amendment rights and the need to protect public safety and property.
2. Describe mob behavior.
3. Describe the basic concepts of perimeter crowd control.
4. State the common uses for a mobile field force.
5. Demonstrate a column formation.
6. Demonstrate a line formation.
7. Demonstrate a wedge formation.
8. Identify the color codes and each associated chemical agent that may be used by law enforcement agencies.
9. State the steps for administering first aid to an individual who has been exposed to the chemical agents OC or CS." (p. 9)

Like the POST guidelines, the emphasis in the Ohio training recommendations is on distinguishing between lawful and unlawful conduct. There is a significant section on de-escalation, including building rapport with protestors, and an acknowledgment that most demonstrators are resistant to committing acts of violence. "It is very difficult for those not bent on unlawful behavior to fight with the police when officers have been professional and respectful to those encountered" (p. 13)

An admonition to "not engage demonstrators in any conversation without supervisory direction except the giving of verbal commands" (p. 14) offered in the section on de-escalation, not in the context of violence already occurring, seems at odds with emerging best practices, and likely to promote tension. A similar admonition in the IACP Model Policy from April 2019 (discussed below) provides a stronger signal that such a prohibition applies to conversations about topics *related to the demonstration*, perhaps to prevent arguments from erupting between demonstrators, counter-demonstrators, and police. Nevertheless, such approaches could cast a chill on officer-demonstrator relations.

The Ohio document seems to reflect an old-fashioned crowd psychology, indicating "anonymity," "universality," and "irrationality" of crowds. This will be discussed later – contemporary social scientific evidence supports a very different characterization.

The Ohio document recognizes the problems associated with a large policing presence, recommending that additional officers be "posted nearby but out of sight." (p. 18). However, they recommend plain clothes officers in the crowd: "When safe to do so, use plain clothes officers to monitor the crowd from within the group to identify potential instigators" (p. 25). However, there is a danger that such postings, if discovered, can serve to violate protestors' territory and sense of control and consequently incite violence.

One section indicates a clear preference for diplomacy over force:

- "Crowd control of an unlawful disturbance or riot
  - a. Dispersal, not mass arrest, is key when trying to stop a riotous crowd
  - b. Diplomacy is preferred over a show of force, if possible

- c. It is important for officers not to overreact, but they must be prepared to act quickly in order to disperse the crowd as soon as possible
- d. When forming a dispersal squad, do so out of sight of the crowd, yet close enough to respond quickly if needed
- e. When attempting to break up a crowd, continue to spread them out so they do not regroup somewhere else” (p. 25).

It may be worth noting that the Ohio document lists only the advantages (not disadvantages) of using chemical agents (p. 50). Given the clear and broadly recognized risk associated with using these tactical weapons, this may raise concern. Furthermore, the instructions for chemical agent deployment are not clear that canisters should not be aimed at people (pp. 57-58).

In a set of three related documents on “Crowd Management” the **International Association of Chiefs of Police** (April 2019) provides a “model policy” on crowd management. The IACP recommends that officers monitoring crowds should have identification clearly visible at all times, and that Fire and EMS should be present before dispersal orders are made. Like the earlier POST and more recent Ohio guidances, they distinguish only between “civil disturbance” (unlawful) and “demonstration” (lawful), losing some important strategically and operationally relevant nuance – that civilly disobedient demonstrators can be peaceful. In fact, in the Model Policy Document, IACP conflates “civil disobedience” with “riot,” again losing important nuance that could allow departments to handle civilly disobedient demonstrations, like road blockages, diplomatically.

The IACP documents note that self-policing among protesters happens, in some instances even with handouts prepared in advance to guide protesters on conduct. But they also note that “out-of-town” elements sometimes participate, the implication being that outsiders are less likely to be of like mind with locals preparing for peaceful protest.

The IACP documents offer mostly operational guidance, with little reference to de-escalation, except, “When lines of communication have been maintained between event organizers or leaders and a law enforcement liaison, it is sometimes possible to negotiate a resolution to the situation. Given such situations, many crowds tend to become self-enforcing to ensure that they can continue to assemble and convey their message” (p. 6 of Concepts Paper).

IACP offers some specific use of force limitations: no canines; no horses used against passive protestors; no firehoses; CS gas generally shouldn’t be used; riot baton as defensive or prod only. Bicycles are recommended as a less threatening mode of transportation. IACP recommends that dispersal warnings be recorded whenever possible.

The Model Policy document makes a clear effort to walk the line between coordination and engagement:

- “Officers shall be positioned in such a manner as to minimize contact with the assembled crowds.” (p. 2)

- “Individuals designated by the IC should establish and maintain communication with event organizers and relay information on crowd mood to the IC.” (p. 3)
- “Mass arrests shall be avoided, unless necessary.”
- “Unless exigent circumstances justify immediate action, officers shall not independently make arrests or employ force without command authorization.” (p.3)

**USDOJ COPS Office Ferguson After-Action Report.** A different, but nevertheless instructive, type of government report on policing protests comes in the form of a thorough after-action investigation carried out and reported (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2015) by the US DOJ’s Community Oriented Policing Services office on the protests that occurred in Ferguson, Missouri after the fatal officer-involved shooting of an unarmed, Black teenager, Michael Brown. Clear implications of that investigation included the following:

1. *Police-community relationships*: “Ferguson PD had virtually no established community relationships with the residents” of the complex where Michael Brown was killed.
2. *Command and control*: “The incident command structures throughout the evolution of the Ferguson demonstrations were uncoordinated and incomplete in the early days.” “Use of intelligence products was minimal.” “Law enforcement agencies initially offered limited public information and did not commit to proactive communications with the public.” Lack of coordination led to inconsistent and untracked deployment of less-lethal weapons.
3. *Use of force*: Inappropriate canine use. Instances of inappropriate deployment of tear gas. Military weapons and sniper deployment “was inappropriate, inflamed tensions, and created fear among demonstrators.” Elevated daytime response was not justified, and served to escalate.
4. *Militarization*: “Overwatch tactic” (snipers use rifle sites to monitor crowd) was inappropriate and fear-evoking. Visible staging of armored vehicles was threatening.
5. *Need for preparation*: It is too late to prepare once protest and violence has erupted. Officers need full preparation, including understanding of demonstrators’ rights, civil disobedience, and unlawful assembly.
6. *Social media*: Police were unprepared for the impact and rapid dissemination of information.
7. *Protection of constitutional rights*: “Keep moving” orders (and the inherent threat of arrest or force) risk violating First Amendment protections of free speech and assembly. Unified command in Ferguson “failed to establish a clearly marked First Amendment free speech zone.”
8. *Accountability and transparency*: Some officers removed their nameplates. A lack of confidence in the complaint process may have caused a deceptively low rate of complaints.



9. *Officer resilience*: Officer shifts were long and often entailed verbal and physical abuse from protestors, particularly toward minority officers. “Transition from traditional nameplates to identity numbers on badges would preserve accountability and offer the individual officer some protection.”
10. *The role and impact of protestors intent on exploiting the demonstrations*: There were some, including self-described anarchists, who joined intent on causing problems. Community members noted big differences in the nature of activities during daytime (more peaceful) versus nighttime hours.

The documents from POST, Ohio, the IACP, and USDOJ indicate an acknowledgment of many of the challenges of policing protests, nods to the notion that crowds are heterogeneous and not inherently prone to violence, and tend to provide clear operational guidance (or, in the case of Ferguson, cautionary tales). However, they generally fall short with respect to reflecting *systematic* research on crowd behavior in general and policing protests in particular.

#### **IV. Main Findings from Research**

There is considerable consensus in the research literature around several key issues relating to demonstrations. First, the overwhelming majority of protests remain peaceful. Second, violent elements among protest groups tend to be small and not even inevitably violent or destructive. Third, violence tends to result from interactions in the dynamics between police and protesters. Finally, unnecessary injuries and deaths occur and violence escalates when tactical weapons are used inappropriately. We will return to these findings after a general consideration of the relevant research.

Protest policing strategies vary over time and place (Brown, 2015; Den Heyer, 2020; Logan, 2019; McPhail, Schweingruber, & McCarthy, 1998; Vitale, 2005, 2007). Historically, in the U.S. modern policing of protests was characterized by a doctrine of “escalated force” in the 1960s and 1970s, in which police tended to be punitive and focused on crowd control. This was followed by a general trend toward “negotiated management” in which public safety officials coordinate with protest organizers in advance, to the extent possible, and establish clear expectations. This approach has persisted in many places, even as there was emergence of a “strategic incapacitation” trend following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks (Gillham, 2011; Gillham, Edwards, & Noakes, 2013). The focus in strategic incapacitation is on isolating and/or neutralizing disruptive individuals or groups, and reflected, “tactical innovations introduced by transgressive protesters during the Seattle cycle of protests [and] contributed to the end of a long, relatively stable period of détente between police and protesters in the United States” (Gillham & Noakes, 2007, p. 341). Strategic incapacitation accelerated in response to the Occupy Wall Street protests that Gillham and colleagues describe as “transgressive,” where protesters refused pre-negotiation with police.

Protest policing appears to have generally returned to a negotiated management model, aggressive police tactics in recent Black Lives Matter protests notwithstanding.

*“The myth of the mob.”*

Perhaps the most influential social scientific influence on protest policing has been notion of the “deindividuated crowd” or “mob.” However, research in recent decades has emphatically rejected this notion that crowds are inherently irrational and emotionally contagious (Borch, 2013; den Heyer, 2020; McPhail, 1991; Reicher, 2011; Schweingruber, 2000). Illustrating a troubling implication of this misconception, Hoggett and Stott (2010; see also Reicher, Stott, Drury, Adang, Cronin, & Livingstone, 2007) show that police officers’ perceptions of crowds as inherently irrational have a self-fulfilling effect on crowd violence.

The reality is less bleak. Research indicates that 92% to 98% of protests stay peaceful (Nassauer, 2019, citing others, p. 6). Stott (2011) argues that crowd control would benefit from police being educated about the cultural norms of crowds, specifically, dispelling the myth that crowds are inherently irrational. On the other hand, there is some evidence (Cocking, 2013) that aggressive or indiscriminate dispersal actions can galvanize a crowd and be counterproductive. In a more rigorous study, Snipes, Maquire, and D. Tyler (2019) found that protesters indicated greater willingness to engage in civil disobedience, even vandalism, when they perceived police actions as procedurally unjust. In sum, crowds are not inherently irrational and unruly, but aggressive and unjust police actions can antagonize and galvanize them.

Current research in crowd behavior points to the idea that police presence at a protest also constitutes a “crowd,” meaning that crowd behavior theory can provide insights for police behavior as well. There is also evidence that points to individuals having an inhibition threshold, after which they can cross over into a stage of panic and loss of control, leading to violent behaviors (Nassauer, 2015). Police officers engaging in such behavior often act out as an individual, forgetting that they are part of a larger unit.

Having moved past the outdated theory of the deindividuated mob, researchers who study policing of demonstrations exhibit considerable consensus with regard to a number of important factors, including communication with protesters, respecting territorial boundaries, avoiding unnecessary enforcement, and minimizing militarization.

*Communication.*

There is general consensus, even where pitfalls are pointed out (e.g., Baker, 2014), that pre-demonstration negotiations between public safety officials and demonstration organizers generally promote more peaceful outcomes. Nassauer (2019), discussed further below, identifies communication as a critical element of successful, peaceful crowd management. Holgersson and Knutsson (2011), after analyzing the failures of policing of the riots in Gothenberg, Sweden, in 2001, relay Swedish national “basic tactics” advising that officers policing riots be prepared for stress and have a communicative mindset. The Swedish national principles for

policing protests are: Facilitation (of demonstrations); Dialogue; Counterpart perspective (perspective-taking to avoid escalation); Differentiation (police actions should not be the same for all protestors); Signal value (display readiness to use force); State (moods of crowds -- green, yellow, red). Davies and Dawson (2018), however, drawing on a review of the 2011 Stanley Cup Riot in Vancouver, caution that the “meet and greet” strategies that are so promising in policing relatively low-risk crowds may not work for higher risk situations.

Although no research was found on the importance of communication *within* police organizations, discussions with police practitioners have revealed emphatic support for clear, bounded, and well structured communication within and between responding agencies. This has clear implications for the importance of developing procedures for real-time communication down the chain of command as well as cooperative and consistent mutual aid collaboration between agencies.

*Recognize and respect territorial boundaries.*

Nassauer (2019; see also 2015 & 2018), through in-depth, multimedia and multi-method analysis of 30 protests that occurred in Germany and the U.S. between 1960 and 2010, identified important dimensions of crowd and police behavior in protests. Nassauer studied events that turned violent as well as those that remained peaceful, noting that much research on protests has “selected on the dependent variable” of violence, thereby limiting inferences about things that cause – and obviate – violence.

Surprising outcomes occur because of situational breakdowns -- moments of emotionally charged chaos and poor communication. In these situations, people are confused and overwhelmed because the interactional and organizational routines they usually rely on have collapsed... However, such instances do not unfold randomly but due to specific patterns and are therefore not beyond our control. (Nassauer, 2019, p. 7).

Nassauer has observed that the occurrence of violence can be explained by interactions among five primary situational factors: spatial incursions; police mismanagement; escalation signs; property damage; and communication problems. Nassauer identifies three pathways along which these factors intersect to cause violence, but notable is the fact that “spatial incursions” is common to all three, suggesting that it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for violence to erupt. Accordingly, one especially clear implication of Nassauer’s careful work is that spatial incursions, in either direction, should be avoided.

Nassauer (2019), in making recommendations, also highlights the importance of good communication by police and protesters, to help reassure each other of good intentions. She also highlights the need for good police management, meaning clear oversight and coherent plans of action.

In an interview (July 17, 2020) with Chief Davis and Professor Glaser, Nassauer explained that communication from police should be clear and positive, conveying that police are there to facilitate a successful demonstration. Nassauer

also noted that the presence of plain-clothes or undercover officers among protesters, if discovered, would likely be seen as a territorial incursion, thereby increasing the likelihood of disorder and violence. In contrast, lightly armed or unarmed personnel wearing colored vests clearly marked with “Communication Team” can be seen as nonthreatening ambassadors who can be helpful while reducing tensions.

*Avoid unnecessary enforcement.*

Legal scholar El-Haj (2015) writes, “If we want to preserve the unique functions of outdoor assembly as a form of politics...we need to reconcile ourselves to the fact that we must increase our tolerance of the disorder and disruption associated with it” (pp. 984-985).

Implementing a more robust right of assembly does not entail as radical a transformation as one might imagine. To be certain, the public would be asked to tolerate a lot more than it currently does. On the other hand, many cities, as a matter of discretion, already allow more spontaneous and disruptive crowds than they are strictly required to by contemporary constitutional doctrine. Essentially, the transformation would require enshrining these practices in law (El-Haj, 2015, p. 985).

Aggressive pursuit of rule compliance can be counterproductive. Writing about the WTO riots in Seattle, Gillham and Marx (2000) note that, “After the curfew was declared... police chased groups of people through the streets with tear gas and pepper spray. As news of police behavior spread, many demonstrators felt an increased sense of solidarity and a need to stand up to police efforts at control, beyond the original goal of protesting against the WTO” (pp. 223-224). Adding to the challenge is the likelihood that aggressive rule enforcement can affect even those who are not the direct targets of enforcement. As Waddington (1987) put it, “The disorganised approach to public order policing leads not only to ineffectiveness and excessive force, but can also result in injustice being done to individuals in the crowd. The tendency to make arbitrary and essentially random arrests arises from the confusion that almost invariably accompanies scenes of disorder” (p. 41).

*Minimize militarization.*

Militarization, in terms of equipment (e.g., armored vehicles, combat-style helmets), clothing (e.g., camouflage, armor), weapons (e.g., grenade launchers), and tactics (e.g., officer formations) is a topic of concern regarding policing in general, exacerbated by the direct transfer of equipment from the military to state and local police departments. Given the psychological tensions associated with crowd control, a militarized presence, consistent with the earlier era of the “escalated force” approach to crowd control, is likely to increase anxiety and tensions, perhaps setting the stage for volatility. The need for safety, perhaps promoted by armoring, is an understandable one, but may promote a “warrior mindset” (Stoughton, 2014-15). In fact, Stott, Adang, Livingstone, and Schreiber (2008),

studying policing of European football hooliganism, found that non-paramilitary style policing was associated with less disorder. In a study reflecting on both minimizing militarization and the value of positive communication, Masterson (2011) highlights the success of Vancouver police who “developed a meet-and-greet strategy. Instead of using riot police in menacing outfits, police officers in standard uniforms engaged the crowd. They shook hands, asked people how they were doing, and told them that officers were there to keep them safe. This created a psychological bond with the group that paid dividends. It becomes more difficult for people to fight the police after being friendly with individual officers.”<sup>1</sup>

Even the presence of police in riot gear could cause the crowd to engage in behaviors they would not have otherwise. It has been found that when police begin using traditional crowd control tactics (e.g. tear gas, rubber bullets, kettling), protestors in the crowd find increased solidarity and connection with one another and a sense of defiance in the face of perceived injustice, and they begin to shift their focus of protest to what they feel are unjust behaviors by the police, rather than the cause for which they first gathered (Gillham & Marx, 2000). Certain preemptive actions by the police, such as wearing riot gear to a protest or putting on gas masks, can signal a lack of trust to the protestors (Nassauer, 2015; Waddington, 1987). Other factors that can lead to possible escalation of violence include police behaviors that lead to their loss of legitimacy (Masterson, 2011; Stott, Hoggett, & Pearson, 2012). This is related to Procedural Justice Theory (PSJ), which theorizes that individuals will be less likely to comply with the law if they feel that officers are acting without justice and legitimacy.

#### *Minimize Weapon Use.*

As the US DOJ’s COPS Office after-action report (2015) on the Ferguson, Missouri 2014 protests noted,

The use of force via less-lethal weapons should be a last resort to maintain order and should be used only in a manner consistent with law and agency policy, after alternatives have been reasonably exhausted, after multiple warnings have been given to demonstrators, and in situations when the threat to the safety of persons and protection of property are in imminent jeopardy. When the decision is made to use these weapons, the police should be tactically placed to ensure that demonstrators have clear avenues of escape from the demonstration area. The goal of these technologies is to disperse protesters, not capture them. In addition, the use of force must be documented (pg. 46-47).

Dr. Rohini Haar, an emergency physician and adjunct professor at UC Berkeley’s School of Public Health, conducts research on crowd control weapons. She and her colleagues have found chemical irritant weapons to cause serious injury despite the general belief that they are safe:

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<sup>1</sup> “Meet-and-greet” strategies, as noted earlier in this report, may not work in high risk situations.

The prevailing presumption about these chemical agents is that they cause minimal and transient irritation to the skin and eyes, but are generally safe for use on diverse populations. However, we found that, by design or by inappropriate use, chemical irritants can cause significant injuries as well as permanent disabilities. While deaths were rare, we identified one death directly caused by the blunt trauma from the projectile and another from high dose exposure to the chemical agent in a closed environment (Haar, Iacopino, Ranadive, Weiser, & Dandu, 2017, p. 10; see similar findings by Hu et al., 1989).

Haar and colleagues point out that, in addition to being potentially injurious to their intended targets, “Chemical irritants, especially those deployed in aerosolized forms, are inherently indiscriminate and can affect not only the intended targets but also peaceful demonstrators, bystanders, nearby communities and residences, and law enforcement officers themselves” (p. 11). They recommend that, “CCWs should only be used in situations where particular individuals pose an imminent violent threat, or where a protest requires dispersal because of widespread violent acts that pose an imminent threat to public safety. In most situations where we found these weapons being used, neither of these conditions was documented” (p. 11).

The same researchers found a much larger number of serious injuries as well as fatalities resulting from the use of kinetic impact projectile (KIP) weapons such as rubber bullets and wooden projectiles (Haar, Iacopino, Ranadive, Dandu, & Weiser, 2017).

*Additional promising practices implied by research and expressed by practitioners.*

Strongly implied by research and explicitly expressed by practitioners is the need to *use weapons as a last resort*. Aside from the direct implications of injuries and risk of mortality created by weapon use, the anxiety and indignation their use can evoke in the crowd may effect more harm than good. Similarly, it is clear in writing and discussions that police managing protests must *ensure that the crowd has clear and accessible egress options*. The older technique of “kettling” to section off and control crowds can lead to mass anxiety and violence. *Identifying and singling out violent or destructive individuals* for arrest is preferable to taking action against a collective (i.e., “mass arrest”) that is largely peaceful, if not law-abiding. The inherent challenge in this case is to effect these arrests without the larger group being set off by a territorial incursion (see Nassauer, 2019). Finally, it is imperative that *when multiple agencies* are responding (i.e., “mutual aid”) there is *unambiguous coordination among them* (den Heyer, 2020). This poses interagency challenges as different departments have different use of force policies and cultures.

## V. Significant themes and challenges

The review of the research literature and interviews of experts and stakeholders has revealed some overarching themes that are worth considering in order to foster a better understanding of the challenges of policing demonstrations.

### *The officer safety vs. escalation tradeoff.*

As Stoughton describes, there is an understandable urge to employ tools and tactics that ensure the safety of police officers. However, some of these tools and tactics, while promoting immediate and proximal safety (e.g., hardening against weapons) may have externalities that undermine safety in the broader sense. Most prominently, the armoring of officers with paramilitary equipment will reduce the harm of a hurled object, but it may also, by signaling aggression, increase the likelihood of the object being hurled. As Nassauer and others write, a single escalatory act can cause a cascade of violence, so the immediate gain from armoring may pose a large net loss in public safety and even officer safety. At one far end of this continuum are police who are so armored as to be invulnerable, but violence that is nearly inevitable, or a sense that free speech is utterly constrained. At the other end is the protest that is not policed at all (as, in fact, is the case for many), with a reduced likelihood of reactive violence, but no official response to property damage and interpersonal violence. This is a tradeoff that must be continually confronted.

### *Targeting destructive individuals without triggering broader reaction.*

It is essentially accepted that police do well to isolate individuals who are destructive and/or violent rather than incapacitating the collective. In fact, often this is exactly what most demonstrators want them to do, because the violent instigators are working at cross-purposes with the movement's goals. Nevertheless, there is a real risk that isolating and arresting such individuals will be perceived as an incursion into the demonstrators' territory, something Nassauer has identified as a critical condition for instigating crowd violence. Policing professionals will do well to develop tactics for executing such arrests while signaling to the crowd the clear limits of their intentions and actions.

### *De-escalation.*

An intuitively appealing concept in policing in general, de-escalation takes many forms. Regrettably, the evidence base for effective de-escalation tactics is lacking. A very recent empirical review (Engel, McManus, & Herold, 2020) of 64 de-escalation training programs found no evidence of improvements in outcomes. However, another finding of great importance was that the researchers were not able to identify any robust evaluations of de-escalation training in all of criminal justice. While there is reason for concern that the lack of evidence indicates that de-escalation programs as currently constituted may not reduce conflict and/or improve outcomes, there is also still ample reason for optimism that, in policing in particular, de-escalation tactics can reduce negative outcomes. Furthermore, in the

specific domain of crowd management, with the potential for heated emotions, de-escalation seems a worthy objective, at the very least warranting further study.

## VI. Conclusion

Many factors will need to be considered in making recommendations for reform of crowd control and use of force policies and practices. The research reviewed here clearly indicates that police should minimize militarization and use weapons only as a last resort. Communication and coordination with protest organizers appears to be effective, and the peace can be kept by care to avoid unnecessary territorial incursions. There are many technical and operational considerations and puzzles, but it is clear that policing protests is a fundamentally human, social endeavor that requires attention to feelings and motivations as well as respect for rights and privileges. It is worth considering the observation that the police presence is also a crowd, and the civilian crowd may respond accordingly. Communication and trust are paramount.

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