

Differences between public order policing responses to corona protests and to regular protests in Rotterdam

Marike Liedenbaum

Bachelor Thesis

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University of Twente, Enschede

First supervisor: Dr. A.J.J. Meershoek

Second supervisor: Prof. dr. Barend van der Meulen

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Abstract

Policing corona protests has become core task of the police in Rotterdam during the COVID-19 (corona) pandemic. This study examines the differences between public order policing of corona demonstrations compared to regular demonstrations in Rotterdam. The differences can be understood by looking at the five explanatory factors – Circumstances of the pandemic, Type of demonstration and demonstrators, Approach (including briefing and coordination), Information and Autonomy –, using primary (interviews) and secondary (literature) data in a comparative case study. Where the autonomy and the briefing of police officers did not show significant effects on these differences, the other factors did. Complexities in terms of coordination, a difference in the amount of and difficulty in gathering information, a more diverse and unknown group of protesters, difficulties with enforcing the RIVM-regulations, contradiction with other laws such as the WOM and effects of the pandemic on individual police officers and the police as an organization affected police action. The corona pandemic and its demonstrations resulted in the further development of networking as part of the public order policing approach and response. The police have become more focussed on flexible and adjusted approaches. In the end, the corona demonstrations have boosted this change and police learned from their experiences for future situations.

Key words: Public order policing, police, Rotterdam, corona, pandemic, demonstration, demonstrators, coordination, information, autonomy

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Affidavit

for the Bachelor Thesis

I, Marike Liedenbaum, certify that I have written this paper independently, using only the sources and aids indicated.

I further declare that the present work has not yet been submitted within the scope of any other examination procedure.

Enschede, the 30th of June 2021

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of 2020 the world is captivated by COVID-19 (corona), with enormous impacts on society. Besides a worldwide health problem with dramatic consequences, the corona pandemic is a matter of social order. To control the virus and its impacts, governments have tried to create a new social order, where new rules for interactions had direct consequences in the daily lives of most people, resulting in disruption and loss of security and freedoms, putting pressure on social relations. It is a permanent state of change, resulting in tensions as well as resistance and problems with compliance. As societal acceptance of corona regulations drops, protests regarding these measures were increasingly more common. Therefore, during the corona crisis, security is an essential element of public health (Stott et al., 2020: p. 3). Consequently, policing and control of this social order can be considered as core elements of the current corona crisis and policing the social order in these times of corona has become an even more important and intensive task of the police (Terpstra et al., 2021; p. 1). However, there is confusion and insecurity within the police-organization about this task and the ways to police the public order (Terpstra and Salet, 2020: p. 8). For the police and their work, the corona pandemic introduced a completely new situation and their tasks during the corona crisis differ. Certain elements stand out: the (direct and indirect) protection of the weak and vulnerable in society, facilitate peace and the social order, and enforcing the corona regulations (Terpstra and Salet, 2020: p. 18).

As agents of the state, the police come into direct contact with protest crowds. They place themselves between the protesters and as such have different strategic objectives to maintain public order; protect the target (along with public institutions), uphold the right to protest, ensure the safety of bystanders and crowd participants, and enforce the laws (Redekop et al., 2010: p. 56). During the corona protests, public order policing these objectives has become more complex.

While the exact enforcement methods of police forces are unclear, media coverage hints at the existence of differing public order policing methods. What kind of public order policing method is used during the corona protests may depend on multiple things. For example, how the police specifically want to approach the protestors (Stott and Adang, 2015) and what the view is towards managing the corona protests in general (Terpstra et al., 2021). Furthermore, what might play an important role is how much and when information is available before and during protests (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020).

Since April 28th 2020, there have been demonstrations in the Netherlands against the government's anti-corona policy (Terpstra et al. 2021: p.10). During these protests hundreds and sometimes even thousands of people speak out against the corona regulations (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid 2021: p. 8). Some of these demonstrations have resulted in clashes with the police (Terpstra et al., 2021: p. 10). The right to demonstrate is a fundamental right and the task of the police is to facilitate and protect that. As long as protests are peaceful and the safety of the protesters, citizens and

police officers is assured, the police will do anything to make sure this right can be exercised (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020). However, sometimes the right to demonstrate no longer complies with other rights and interests.

From the beginning of the corona pandemic in March 2020, research has been published about the public order policing during the Corona pandemic in the Netherlands. Even though multiple arguments are made about local police playing an important role in policing the corona pandemic and its protests, there is little knowledge about differences that exist in policing protests with the new challenges that the corona demonstrations developed on the local level. It is important to understand why some methods and tactics are more successful than others. Therefore, research should not be limited to public order disruptions and incidents but should also focus on events that do not escalate and where the public order is maintained (Muller et al., 2015: p. 551). This study can play a role in enrichment of the body of knowledge in the context of local public order policing of protests during and before the corona pandemic. Moreover, insights gained from this research might instigate more research into this topic.

As public order policing corona protests is very topical, it is necessary to stress its scientific and social relevance. The police play an important role in enforcing the law. When there is conflict between the fundamental right of the citizen to demonstrate and the work of the police officer that has to enforce the law, tensions can grow. Analysing these tensions and being aware of the various responses in public order policing is therefore essential in not only enforcing, but also upholding the law. As differences in this law enforcement and upholding exist between corona demonstrations and regular demonstrations, it is very relevant to know why police responded in a certain way and what challenges they encountered. In this case, lessons can be learned from the approaches of the local police unit of Rotterdam for future practice, also in other police units or the National Police.

More pandemics may follow. Gaining more knowledge may help science and society in being better prepared. When there is knowledge about various approaches in public order policing and their results, and there is insight in the processes that are at the roots of various responses, the government, policymakers, police and even citizens can act pro-active instead of reactive.

So, it is important to understand the differences between the corona protests and regular protests to be able to prepare for future (similar) crises.

The research question that will be ought to answer in this Bachelor Thesis is:

How can the differences between the public order policing response to corona protests and that to regular protests in Rotterdam be explained?

In this research question, corona protests are defined as protests against RIVM-regulations in Rotterdam between March 2020 and April 2021 and regular protests are defined as protests that took place in the year before the corona pandemic.

In order to answer this research question in a structured manner four sub-questions are formulated: (1) Did the police have different instructions for policing the corona protests in comparison with policing regular protests in Rotterdam?; (2) Did the demonstrators act differently compared to earlier protests?; (3) Were the police able to react flexibly to activities of the demonstrators?; and (4) What effect did the corona regulations have on the public order policing of the protests?.

This study will first provide background information to be better able to understand theories and results presented in this thesis. This is followed by the presentation of the theoretical framework, where explanatory factors are introduced that might explain these differences, and important concepts and theories are discussed. Each sub question is then ought to be answered in separate chapters, using the explanatory factors, concepts and theories to analyse the results. Finally, conclusions are drawn from the research and the research question is answered.

2. Background

2.1 Police organization

The authority over the maintenance of public order in the Netherlands rests with the mayor. To this end, he or she may use the National Police and all types of other auxiliary forces. In the Dutch National Police, the management lies with the national chief of police. The chief of police receives instructions from the minister of Justice and Safety and the regional mayors has a key position when it comes to the management of the organisation and therefore connects the national and local interests (Muller et al., 2015: p. 101). Large scale police action is not a permanent part of police work. Only when an event or threat present themselves, police officers get (more) involved. At rest, only a small part of the police is working on large scale police action. This means that the police and authorities mainly focus on planned events and foreseeable severe public order disruption. Then it is possible to determine the strategy, appoint commanders and call upon people (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 59).

The Dutch National Police exists out of 10 regional units, 43 districts and 167 basis teams (Muller et al., 2015: p. 187). Every regional unit is equipped to take on the whole operational police task. The unit Rotterdam is equipped with 6 districts and 17 basis teams. It has two important service areas, Rotterdam Rijnmond and Zuid-Holland Zuid. The municipality Rotterdam is relatively big, and there most risk events take place within the municipality. Every district features different basis teams, which have different sizes focused on containing the sufficient operational striking power to carry out the core and frequent tasks of the police independently. A district also features some functional

departments, such as the K-9 unit, and support departments such as administration and personal and material tasks (Muller et al., 2015: p. 183).

On this district level part of the information and intelligence organization is organized (Muller et al., 2015: p. 187). The intelligence organization is the DRIO (Service Information Strategy). Additionally, other services that are organized on a regional level are the DROC (Regional Operation Centre) and the DROS (Service Regional Operational Cooperation) (Muller et al., 2015: p. 188).

The DROS supports the districts and operational services with executing their tasks. So, it is an addition to the things that happen in the districts and basis teams. Sometimes this is more specialistic, sometimes coordinating and sometimes it enlarges the intervention possibilities. An example of this is the department Regional Conflict- and Crisismanagement or the SGBO (Staff Large Scale and Special Action) which is in charge with Mobile Unit (MU)-action and other large-scale intervention (Muller et al., 2015: p. 189). Here, the MU are riot control specialists that have as a primary role to prevent or combat public order disruptions, however they can also be deployed low-profile. Within the MU there are multiple specialistic components, such as the Arrest Unit (Aanhoudingseenheid; AE), the Mounted Police and the K9-unit, which sometimes join in on policing events such as demonstrations (Politie, n.d.). A police force features routines and directives to scale up if necessary. Emergency units from other districts or regional forces can be used.

Besides being part of the MU, and being deployed during demonstrations, these police officers fulfil other functions within the police (Muller et al., 2015: p. 532). The MU exists out of six groups of eight people, including a group commander and the driver of the MU-vehicle, depending on the size of the demonstration. For bigger demonstrations the police deploy multiple groups: a section (three groups), pelotons (two sections) and compagnies (minimal two pelotons) (Politie, n.d.).

The Mobile Unit should be able to act to secure safety and public order. With as little violence as possible they must achieve the greatest possible goal. They should be able to evacuate, cordon off an area, do search actions and switch between different levels of violence and act flexibly. The MU must fulfil different roles between the spectrum of violence control. In other words, the MU is a scaling method. Additionally, the MU must be reactive (during riots) and proactive both with and without violence. Here, the aspect of communication with the crowd plays an important role (Adang et al., 2009: p. 79).

2.2. Demonstration

The right to demonstrate can be described as a collective expression of a group of people – two or more people – with a shared opinion and an underlying bond that takes place in an open or public area (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 5). This right has a prominent place in the Constitution (Article 9). It underlines that in a democratic rule of law the possibilities for citizens and social movements to protest is of great value. The right to demonstrate means that the public order is allowed to be disturbed

up until a certain point. With public order is meant the with time and place changeable, orderly and normal course of events on the streets and at other public places with a certain protection of person and goods (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 11). The authorities have to make sure that protests do not harm the interests of others in unacceptable ways (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 144). So, limiting the exercise of this right is only allowed if strictly necessary. This is the case when it concerns the protection of other substantial and lawful norms and interests. The Wet Openbare Manifestatie (Law Public Manifestations; WOM) gives the local authorities the possibility to limit the right to demonstrate within the constitutional frameworks. Limitations are only allowed for health protection, for traffic interest and to prevent disorder (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 143). The mayor can establish regulations and limitations, and in extreme cases, can forbid a protest. However, it is not allowed to judge a protest on substantive criteria. If authorities want to forbid a demonstration, possibilities to prevent disorder by the police first need to be considered. To prepare for a demonstration there are several preventive measurements that are important, in this case especially the administrative measurements (e.g., licenses and notifications). The municipality can set specific requirements for demonstrations when it comes to safety measures (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 68).

The police are qualified to act against disturbances and are responsible for upholding the public order. Additionally, they are the contact for the organisation and the participants. Therefore, the starting point for the police focusses on the right for people to demonstrate, with a safe and orderly course of the demonstration and in the last place preventing escalation (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 8). They are allowed to end – if necessary with violence – the activities of disturbers. However, the chosen action should meet the requirements of proportionality and subsidiarity (Muller et al., 2015: p. 327). This means that in principle, the least intrusive, available resources should be used. For the most part, police work should be de-escalating. To prevent escalation, large events need to be prepared carefully and there should be proper agreements between all units involved (Muller et al., 2015: p. 328).

During the demonstration, the organisation of the demonstration is primarily responsible that the demonstration takes place in a safe and orderly manner and is responsible for the safety and the behaviour of the participants. When someone does not uphold the agreements and regulations, the organisation is the first one to correct this person (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 8).

2.3 Information

Information is essential for police work and might even be the core of it (Muller et al., 2015: p. 231). An important part of public order policing is knowledge and information (Muller et al., 2015: p. 233). The police obtain information to enable the mayor to take decisions in terms of maintaining public order. These decisions include police deployment, logistic regulations, proof of notification, determination of the time and the duration of an event and other decisions regarding public order and safety. A

characteristic of the decisions that need to be made in terms of public order is that information is necessary about the movements and activities of groups or persons about possible consequences for this public order (Muller et al., 2015: p. 537). The DROC and the DRIO are crucial when it comes to the steering of operational police process and the gathering of information and intelligence (Muller et al., 2015: p. 190).

When it comes to demonstrations, in most cases, the organisation of the demonstration notifies the municipality where the demonstrations is going to take place. The municipality passes this notification on to the police and other public authorities (Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 7). Every separate body advice on their own perspective. For the police, this is public order and safety. However, when there are large demonstrations or there are political-administrative issues, there will be a multidisciplinary advice, where all parties together give one advice. In the case that there is no formal notification yet, the intention to demonstrate can come to light through other canals, such as social media and mouth to mouth communication. However, the police are limited when it comes to its possibilities to gather information through social media because of the privacy of users of the different social networks, judicial restrictions or because of the volatility of the information on some social networks (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 12).

Before a demonstration the police do a risk assessment, where they look at the location, the risk on mixing groups, the number of demonstrators, the program of the demonstration, the mood around the demonstration and the ability to ensure the safety of the residents and demonstrators. Also earlier experiences with the organiser of the demonstration are taken into account in this standard preventive action. If necessary, the police plan a preliminary consultation with the organization to discuss practicalities, requirements and regulations, and to receive more information on the demonstration and the expected participants (Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 7). These preliminary meetings with the demonstrators give the police the opportunity to make agreements about what is tolerated and to make sure that there is a certain amount of self-control among the demonstrators. This is a successful way for the police to gather relevant information to be able to take the appropriate measures in an informal matter. For this cause, individual police officers use their contacts as well. Additionally, the preliminary actions of the police can help in the normalisation of tense situations. Sometimes it is better not to act and to wait on what the other party does or decide on taking a more pragmatic approach. This can play a role in pleasing all the concerned parties and can also make the police work more effective (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 68).

2.4 Coordination

In the Netherlands, the mayor plays a central role in maintaining the public order. The police play an important role when it comes to advising the mayor on these decisions that need to be made. Municipal law authenticates the mayor, with exception of other municipal administrative bodies, to maintain local

public order (Muller et al., 2015: p. 534). The mayor is, in accordance with Police Law, the authority when it comes to police actions regarding public order policing and is accountable to the municipal council. Events that fall under the WOM, which are about exercise of the right to demonstrate, are not subject to a licence, but do need to be announced. The mayor can set conditions or in extreme cases forbid a demonstration to protect public health, the importance of traffic or to prevent or control disorder (Muller et al. 2015: p. 535).

There are national goals, a regional policy plan and local internal safety plans for public order policing. The establishment of these policy plans is a bottom-up process, to leave enough room for local priorities to be considered (Mullet et al., 2015: p. 98). Within the integral safety plan, agreements are made regarding policing the public order and in a systematic way, local safety in its diversity is combatted, prevented and manageable. So, this plan is the basis for the local management of the police (Muller et al., 2015: p. 96). However, if the local goals or policy plans are not in line with the national goals and policy plans, the national plans and goals are binding (Muller et al., 2015: p. 101). The local integral safety-plan are the basis for the regional safety plans. These are set ones every four years by the municipality council (Art. 38b). This means that the municipality is in charge when it comes to steering, intervening and upholding requirements for different concerned parties in the area of safety and working in effective ways to consolidate this (Muller et al., 2015: p. 141). This plan functions as the frame in which the mayor must make his or her decision (Muller et al., 2015: p. 97).

On the local level, the mayor, public prosecutor and the police chief take part in the so-called triangular meeting (Mullet et al., 2015: p. 130). The mayor plays an important role in this triangular meeting, as he or she coordinates the administrative enforcement and has the authority when it comes to the public order tasks of the police (Mullet et al., 2015: p. 141). This last task is one-headed as he or she has to be able to decide on threatening public order disruptions and should not depend on possible discussion (Muller et al., 2015: p. 140). So, the police have a lot to do with the mayor of the municipality. Additionally, the police can play a role in the drawing of the policy by providing information and safety analyses (Mullet et al., 2015: p. 143).

Every year, there are many demonstrations in Rotterdam. This requires a lot of effort from the police. When there is a demonstration that brings risks, the police will categorise it. Depending on the categorization, a Team District Approach (TDA), SGBO or in the case when national coordination is necessary a National Staff Large-Scale and Special Action (NSGBO) might be formed. So, there is an upscaling structure when it comes to coordinating policing crises. Within these crisis staffs there are different officials that each have a certain role in organising the guidance of a demonstration, such as the Head Enforcement Networking (HHN) and the Head Public Order Enforcement (HOHA) (Personeelsblad Politie, April 2021). Before the start of a demonstration the police choose in what way the demonstration will be accompanied depending on the expected number of protesters, the expected atmosphere and the possibilities for a counterdemonstration. The police advice the mayor about the

location of the demonstration. For the police it is important that the location offers enough room for the protestors to, if necessary, act actively (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 14). In the end, the police exercise the instructions of the mayor (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 7).

2.5 Corona regulations

In the Netherlands, the first person that was diagnosed with corona was on February 27 2020. Ever since, the number of persons that were diagnosed with the disease had been increasing rapidly. Three different stages may be distinguished on how the Dutch government responded to the pandemic. The first stage is the rather informal and somewhat reluctant strategy that the Dutch government used in the first weeks after the virus outbreak, for example, making a call to people to comply with elementary rules of hygiene to reduce the spread of the virus and working at home, if possible, followed by cancellation of events and meetings with more than 100 attendees. On March 15, the government's policy shifted and decided to opt for more drastic interventions, including closing of many institutions such as restaurants.

The second stage in the government's response began on March 21-22, when the Minister of Justice announced that from then on breaking the anti-corona rules could be sanctioned. On March 26, an emergency ordinance model was introduced, containing several behavioural measures to prevent the spread of the virus, which entered into force immediately. However, as the Dutch government did not want to present its policy as a complete lockdown, it was introduced as an 'intelligent lockdown', with the 1,5-meters distance as its main rule. When requesting a demonstration, these regulations needed to be tested (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 6).

From April 21 2020 onward, the third stage of the government's response started. As the number of new corona patients declined, it announced the first steps to loosen the anti-corona regime. At first, the government was reluctant and hesitant to ease the corona regulations (RIVM-regulations), however they published an exit strategy. The measures to loosen the anti-corona regime would only be taken if the declining trend continued (Terpstra et al., 2021: p. 4).

In September 2020, the number of corona patients once again increased. Therefore, measurements were announced, and the second lockdown started (Rijksoverheid, September 28 2021). This lockdown included many known measurements, however, also some new regulations were introduced. For example, the closure of almost all institutions such as all non-essential shops and cinemas (Rijksoverheid, December 14 2020). Eventually, the curfew was introduced (Rijksoverheid, January 20 2021). These regulations have applied for multiple months, until the first steps to loosen the corona regulations were taken again on April 28 2021 (Rijksoverheid, April 20 2021).

3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical arguments from previous studies are discussed and a theoretical framework is constructed to answer the research question asked in this study. First, some general theories about public order policing are presented to introduce the topic ‘public order policing’ into the theoretical framework. Subsequently, different theories are described to introduce and conceptualize five explanatory factors that might affect public order policing differences between corona demonstrations and regular demonstrations in Rotterdam.

Della Porta and Reiter (1998) state five dimensions that can be used to conceptualise the main concept of protest policing. These five dimensions are (1) the extent of police concerns with the rights of protesters, and police obligations to respect and protect those rights; (2) The extent of police tolerance for public order disruption; (3) the nature of communication between police and demonstrators; (4) the extent and manner of arrests as a method of managing demonstrators; and (5) the extent and manner of using force in lieu of or in conjunction with arrests in order to control demonstrators (Della Porta and Reiter, 1998). What is important to realise is that there is a difference between small-scale and large-scale public disorder. Large-scale public disorder includes events where many people gather, such as demonstrations. Social-psychology and group dynamics play a role here (Muller et al., 2015: p. 529).

With enforcing the public order, it is all about the interactions between the people involved, including the police and the protesters (Nationaal coordinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid: 2021: p. 55). For police action it is important to understand which factors influence the decisions that people make. The practical application of available knowledge always depends on time, place, culture, and context. So, what is important to keep in mind is that the fate of crowd-members within a demonstration is directly determined by what outsiders, in this case the police, allow them to do (Reicher et al., 2007: p. 408). Therefore, both actions of crowd members as well as police actions should be considered when looking at public order policing (Stott and Adang, 2015: p. 10).

So, what is important here is the practice of *knowledge-based public order policing*, as described by Reicher et al. (2007). In this article, four general guidelines are introduced as implications of contemporary crowd psychology for public order policing. The first guideline relates to the issue of information and intelligence. Knowledge-based public order policing starts with information about these social identities as police need to understand them in order to understand protesters. This is also necessary for the second guideline. That states that the primary focus of police strategies during demonstrations should be to maximise the facilitation of its aims. When there is information which allows the police to understand the goals of the demonstration and devise its practices in order to allow legal aims to be met, then they are able to distinguish between the part of the group that have entirely legal aims and intentions and the groups within the protest that may intend to act in ways that the police cannot permit. When such an approach is not possible, then the police can still work with the organisers

and participants in order to (1) clarify that the police are seeking to facilitate legitimate crowd action; (2) that the reasons for policing constraints lie in the illegitimate aims of certain participants; (3) to explore ways in which the police can facilitate alternative ways in which legitimate aims can be fulfilled (Reicher et al., 2007: p. 409). This way, the police does not impede the protest, but enables it, resulting in a possible good relationship with the majority of the protesters. The third guideline concerns the importance and central role of communication with protesters. Actions by the police for the interests of the protesters will be ineffective or counter-productive unless they are perceived as such by the participants. Therefore, a comprehensive communication strategy is key. This also includes clarifying to the organisers why certain rules and regulations are made, to prevent misunderstanding and gain their cooperation. Finally, both intelligence and communication are important tactical instruments as it is important to monitor and observe the events to signal the emergence of tension at an early stage to be able to act (Adang, 2011: p. 182). The final guideline overarches the first three, by emphasizing that in every aspect of public order policing it is critical to maintain a differentiated approach with the crowd. Demonstrations do not exist out of homogenous groups and will only act as such if one treats them that way. Moreover, it is key to policing to treat the participants with respect to ensure that the response does not drag in protesters that do want to initiate conflict (Reicher et al., 2007: p. 410) (Reicher and Stott, 2020: p. 2-3). In other words, there is no such thing as ‘one size fits all’ public order policing. Therefore, specifics must always be tailored to the event at hand as different sections in the crowd can be treated in different ways (Reicher et al., 2007: p. 414) (Stott and Adang, 2015: p. 14). This is important to make sure that the police tactics fit the risks assessments.

3.1 Approach

The first explanatory factors that might affect public order policing is the ‘policing approach’. In order to understand this approach, it is important to know that the Dutch societal and political system is based on four c’s: consensus, coalition, collegiality and co-optation. Consequently, public order policing in the Netherlands is inseparable from the dominant presence of these four c’s. They are visible in the reasonable attitude of the government towards public order disturbances and reluctance when it comes to repressive measurement and the use of the violence monopoly. The emphasis lies on prevention and minimal use of violence. The permissive, on consensus focussed culture is and stays a primary and important preventive instrument against disturbances (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 194).

There are three approaches, that partly overlap, that emerge from theory when it comes to public order policing, keeping in mind the four c’s: public order management, negotiated management approach and community policing.

There are different terms when it comes to public order policing; crowd control, riot control, crowd management and public order management (Muller et al., 2015: p. 530-531). *Public order management* is a more modern approach of public order policing. This goes further than fighting or preventing riots. It is systematic planning for steering events in the public domain where risks of public disorder exist, regardless

of the number of people that is present. Crowd management is part of public order management when large groups of people gather. Crowd control is used when restrictive measures need to be taken. In only a fraction of the cases, riot control is necessary. In short, where crowd and riot control need an incident or disturbance to take measures, public order and crowd management have as a starting point order at events where there is a risk of disturbances (Muller et al., 2015: p. 540).

Muller e.a. (2015) also discuss different public order policing styles, such as hard-soft, repressive-tolerant, reactive-preventive and focussed on confrontation-focussed on consensus. These are used to distinguish between the escalated force and *negotiated management approach* (Muller et al., 2015: p. 439). With escalated force there is one-sided attention for riot control, so hard, repressive, reactive and more focussed on confrontation and repression. With negotiated management there is more focus on the principles of community policing, soft, tolerant, preventive and focussed on consensus. Hence, it is focussed on cooperation and communication between the police and people involved to facilitate the conditions and processes that address the needs and interests of the protesters (Redekop et al., 2010: p. 74). Officers interact with crowd members in a friendly and open way (Stott and Adang, 2015: p.10). Stott and Adang (2015: p. 10) notice a shift from a focus on escalating force to a focus on negotiation on the police side. The best way to operationalize negotiated management policing is to build policing responses based on capacity for dialogue-led interventions and from the bottom-up. With networking, policing needs to be developed from within and in partnership with the organisation and protester, rather than perceived by protesters as an external force imposing their order upon us. This is a matter of general perspective, rather than thinking primarily about the best form of police action to control the crowd, it is important to also concentrate on how to act to get the crowd to control itself (Stott and Adang, 2015: p. 14). Here again, there is no one-size-fits-all approach (Stott et al., 2020: p. 4). Practices that are part of negotiated management are shown in table 1 (Redekop et al., 2010: p. 75-76).

Tactical option	Explanation
Permit to protest	Mandatory application for a permit by demonstrators. (Analysis: This allows police to prepare for the protest, establish who the leaders are and determine a projected size of the demonstration and what activities might be used in conjunction with it).
Offer to help	The police will offer to help with the planning at the time of filling out an application for the protest. (Analysis: point out logistical challenges involved in particular routes or sites and make suggestions helping to make the logistics as straightforward as possible).
Friendly smiles	The attitude of police dealing with protestors is deliberately friendly.
Indirect direction	Pointing out the potential problems and suggesting ways to solve them when a venue is incongruent with police preferences or unacceptable protest tactics. (Rather than confront the ideas head on and say that they are not allowed).
Official liaison roles	Liaison officers will be appointed who maintain contact with protest organizers.
Collaboration	Police liaison officers will encourage a spirit of collaboration, with police blocking roads and doing other things to facilitate a protest march or gathering.
Institutionalization of procedures	Formalization of procedures when the same protesters are confronted with the same police.

Table 1. Tactical options of a negotiated management approach (Redekop et al., 2010: p. 75-76).

Another concept which is relevant for policing protests is *community policing*. This concept has a close relationship to *negotiated management* and is a choice for a police organisation that is oriented on her societal environment. The police need to stay in contact with citizens and social movements via networks. In addition, the police need to respect citizen freedom and create space for societal development. The use of extensive powers needs to be prevented (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 144). Who wants to protest orderly, should be allowed to do so. This permissibility of authorities is shown in several patterns in the workarounds of the police, that are focussed on managing protests (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 145). First, the police generally give a positive advice to the municipality when a social movement asks for permission for a protest, often with additional regulations. The police have quite extensive meetings prior to the demonstration. This way, the police can estimate to what extent the public order might be disturbed. Additionally, it allows the police to disclose boundaries and read to what extent the protesters can ensure its enforcement (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 146). Also, during a protest police officers are in contact with the organisers that they have met prior to the demonstration

or at past demonstrations. So, during demonstrations, the police make use of informal social control on the other side. This strategy uses self-reliance. In the end, police action is tailored to the estimation of the amount of social control of the protesters. Third, the priority with authorities and police always lies with maintaining public order. People on the streets and on the road should have as little inconveniences as possible. Police action is focussed on recovering public order as soon as possible if disturbances occur. Disturbances of the rule of law are tackled if this is favourable for the public order or if there is no unnecessary chance on large escalations. Arrests are often done by specialists, the arrest units (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 147). This is also called the de-escalation strategy. On the riskiest days, there is a deviation from the dominant strategy. Mobile units are deployed and sometimes there is more strict action against violations and criminal offenses (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 48). In order to police protests, the police have come up with a treatment profile where knowledge and skills of other partners, such as local contacts are utilised. In this profile it is assumed that most people will not cause trouble and there should be prevention of other people joining the troublemakers. Otherwise, these would be addressed or dealt with. It is important that police officers know the policy principles, boundaries and the tactical framework. Additionally, they need to be informed of the specific information and aware of the information position that the police organisation has. A police officer is not alone in his or her action and is bound to a set framework. A police officer should judge people on actual behaviour and information. Moreover, a police officer is a point of contact for people, impartial, respectful, active in making contact and flexible in his or her action (Muller et al., 2015: p. 541).

So, the Dutch police chooses in its principles to appeal to the own responsibility of citizens first and only sanction at last. With this strategy, there is a high demand of problem-solving capabilities, communicative skills and moral capacities of police officers at the street-level. Moreover, by talking to citizens and depending on their situation, they are vulnerable. At the same time, this shows that the societal task of the police goes much further than only force (Terpstra and Salet, 2020: p. 29). However, when protests are emotional or if conflicts during a demonstration cannot be ruled out, the police places Mobile Units at central or close locations. If demonstrators know that if disturbances occur, the police can act immediately and concentrated, the chance of demonstrators complying with the boundaries increases. Also, when the police have a more threatening attitude, it is crucial that convince organisers and informal leaders that it is in their own interests to keep disturbances under control (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 146).

3.1.1 Coordination and the decision-making process

Coordination is an important part of the public order policing approach. The coordination and decision-making during a crisis shifts towards the highest regions of the organisational hierarchy. This way, there is a better possibility of cooperation between police, administration, justice and other governmental services (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 75). The steering of the public order is hierarchical, which means

that the decision-making on the lower level should fit in the decisions of a higher level. Besides that, the lower levels are accountable to the higher levels. However, this needs to be reviewed per crisis. When police action becomes larger and riskier, the coordination burden increases (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 79). Furthermore, the process characteristics of a public order crisis often become clearer as a crisis lasts longer. As escalation and de-escalation alternate, this process does not follow regular paths.

As discussed before, policing the public order develops itself from one-sided tackling of public disorder in terms of riot control or riot management to the fostering the orderly development of events in the public area: *public order management*. That demands a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. Not only the police are involved. It is important that the parties from the triangle, the mayor, the public prosecutor's office and the police need to be well-coordinated and should know each other well.

During a demonstration, an incident can turn into heavy riots. This happens when a flashpoint occurs. This means that an incident can cause anger within the protest group, who mobilise quickly and where anger towards the police grows rapidly. These incidents and riots can occur when there are tensions between groups and the government, the police in front (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 34). Disturbers are not only motivated to use violence against the police by immediate events, but also by a general feeling of injustice. A flashpoint sometimes makes it inevitable that crucial decisions need to be made directly and with little possibilities for communication, at the street-level. This is also the case when there is an unexpected and unforeseen public order crisis (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 77 + p. 81).

3.2 Information

The need for preparedness within the police calls for police intelligence. More specifically, there is a certain amount of information that can be gathered for the sake of prevention (Redekop et al., 2010: p. 93). Gathering information in the context of police action to prevent and tackle public order crises is important (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 82). For this reason, the second explanatory factor in answering the research question is 'information'.

Nowadays, the time and the precise location of the disturbances are often uncertain. Disturbances are moved by the disturbers which complicates the localization of escalation risks. As a result, it might take the police and authorities more effort to collect reliable information about the nature, the behaviour and the origin of the (potential) disturbers (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 60).

The police have three basic, interrelated, strategies to gather information and gain knowledge to increase the grip on the situation: (1) Setting up and using technology that needs to help in saving and organizing relevant information, (2) the organisation of the police should be as such that as much as possible information from society is gathered (know and being known strategy), and (3) cooperation between

different parts of the police organization, with other government agencies and private parties where information exchange can increase grip and the problem solving capabilities (Muller et al. 2015: p. 235).

However, besides gathering information the importance of another strategy *information steered police* cannot be overlooked. This is about the use of information rather than the gathering of information. It states that the police should first do an analysis of the available information before deciding what to do and how. In other words, based on actual and reliable information and analyses, rational choices are made, resulting in the optimal deployment of people and resources and reaching organizational goals (Muller et al., 2015: p 36).

Prior to events, it is important to plan strategies along with the event organisers which clarify collective aims and address how they can best be facilitated (Reicher et al., 2007: p. 409). Every time, it is important that the preparations for large-scale risky police action starts in time. This way, the police can prevent unnecessary time pressure as gathering and weighing available information takes time (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 69).

The police play a key role because of the information position, mandate with regards to public order policing and contacts with both authority as citizens. The police prepare risk assessments, take into consideration different scenarios and align preparations. Where an event is foreseeable and there is proper preparation, the chances of unprofessional police action is smaller than when preparations are less sound and surprising situations may occur (Adang et al., 2009: p. 89). In the end, the need for police and authorities to anticipate on unforeseen disturbances goes hand in hand with the further decline of classical large-scale public disorder (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 50).

Additionally, during preparations, almost always there are informal ways in which lessons are learned from past experiences during more or less similar events (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 70). The process characteristics of a public-order crisis brings along the necessity of comparisons with situations from the past. Experiences and lessons from past events can be used for new situations in different ways as well as increase the quality of the preparations. There is however a risk that a new situation does not or only partly correspond with situations from the past and that the wrong conclusions are drawn from the experiences. To prevent this, striving for contingency - aligning strategy, policy and operation on specific characteristics of a risky event – is crucial. After all, what was successful during one event can be risky under other circumstances (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 72).

3.3 Type of protest and protesters

Besides the police, citizens have a big influence on the development of events as well. What kind of public order policing is necessary might depend on the ‘type of protest and protesters’ that police encounter. Therefore, this is the third explanatory factor studied in this thesis.

The organisers of demonstrations make agreements with the police and are responsible for securing the orderly course of a demonstration. Where the size of the event and the professionalism of the organisation are out of balance, escalation becomes more likely (Adang et al., 2009: p. 87).

There is a huge amount of diversity of public disorder. The nature and the intensity of large-scale public disorder vary as well as the composition of the groups. This diversity calls for specific regulations, in other words, a contingency approach. The growing differentiation of society goes hand in hand with an increasing diversity of troublemakers. When the context, the cause, the reasons and the methods of protesters show large differences, it is important for authorities to react flexibly and anticipate. This calls for contingent action: planning, decision-making and execution to the nature of the situation (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 203).

Muller e.a. (2015: p. 533) distinguish between two different types of groups that disturb the public order: (1) *Opportunity disturbers* that are involved with public disorder incidentally, and (2) *Notorious disturbers*, who systematically disturb the public order at different occasions (Leiden et al., 2009: p. 13). Preventing disorder by opportunity disturbers requires a favourable influence on the protest, taking into account all kinds of facets in the preparation, the use of resources and special police officers. Notorious disturbers require a more person-oriented approach and is crucial to prevent long term public disorder. In the end, with managing public order, is it all about the right preparation. Preventing and limiting the opportunities for violence, monitoring the behaviour of the people involved, small-scale intervention at an early stage and policing boundaries and regulations in a believable, friendly but strict way are important here (Muller et al., 2015: p. 534). When doing a risk-analysis, the specific character and the specific context of a protest needs to be taken into account. This includes the infrastructure and the kind of protester. Demonstrations are often dynamic and it and its visitors need to be monitored continuously for expressions of (potential) tensions, the presence of notorious people, opportunities that can create violence and the presence of groups and their interactions. If this is not done correctly, then measurements could be ineffective or even contra productive (Adang, 2011: p. 190).

There are clear trends and fluctuations in the frequency and intensity of different categories of public disorder. Changing societal and cultural circumstances can lead to repetition of known patterns but can also form new types of public disorder (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 199). First, when it comes to public order policing, a broader spectrum of public disorder needs to be considered.

Therefore it is important to understand that there is a variety in public disturbances which calls for different approaches. Leiden e.a. (2009: p. 36) distinguishes between three different types of public disturbances: (1) *mass steered disturbances*, (2) *agreement steered disturbances*, and (3) *incident steered disturbances*. The first type takes place when the mass of people is the main ground for disturbances at a location where a lot of people gather, such as demonstrations. Second, agreement steered disturbances are characterized by a certain amount of steering, preparation and organisation.

Here, notorious disturbers play a role in searching for, steering for and executing reasons to riot. With the last type of disturbance, a specific event is clearly the reason for a large-scale riot. The riots are a heavy response to the event and an expression of dissatisfaction. There can be overlap between the three different types. Agreement steered disturbances can arise within a mass but can also be result of an incident. So, where mass and incident steered riots arise out of a situation, with agreement steered riots a situation is created or sought. Both the mass of an event as an incident can attract notorious disturbers.

These disturbances are discerned by person-aspects, such as fanaticism, or situational aspects such as group size but also location, reason, plannability, orientation, heaviness, duration and predictability. These take turns. In the end it is not possible to appoint one factor that creates disturbances. Table 2 gives an overview of the different types of disturbances and the factors that play a role (Leiden et al., 2009: p. 42).

	Mass steered disturbances	Agreement steered disturbances	Incident steered disturbances
Location	Events	Diverse locations	Neighbourhoods
Reason	People masses	Rivalry and kick	Incident and event
Plannability	Unplanned	Planned	Unplanned
Orientation	Persons and authority	Person	Authority
Heaviness	Short and heavy	Short and heavy	Long and heavy
Predictability	Good	Poor	Poor

Table 2. Overview of characteristics of the types of public order disturbances (Leiden et al., 2009: p. 42)

3.4 *Autonomy*

With the fourth explanatory factor ‘autonomy’ is meant the discretionary powers that an individual police officers have during police action. The amount of discretionary power might differ for different demonstrations. Therefore, it is considered to be important to include it in this study.

The daily work of police officers exists for an important part out of contact with citizens. This is also called street-level bureaucracy. Because of that, they possess a certain amount of autonomy or discretionary space. This means that police officers often get orders and have to take into account formal rules, procedures and other instructions. Though, once on the street, they possess possibilities to interpret or handle these guidelines in their own way (Muller et al., 2015: p. 194). As they are on the edge of the police organisation, they are in contact with citizens and hold a position within the organisation as well. Therefore, autonomy is inevitable, as their tasks are too complex to write everything down in formal rules. The amount of autonomy that an individual police officer possesses depends on the type of police work he or she is doing; whether there are possibilities to work with formal and extensive rules, to what extent the effects of the action need to be captured beforehand and to what extent the action lies with the police itself. For example, with large-scale police action, there is an emphasis on unity in the action

(Muller et al., 2015: p. 196). In order to understand the amount of autonomy and steering police officers receive, some circumstances cannot be ignored: (1) whether the goals are contradictive and susceptible for diverse interpretations, and (2) the amount of information that is received from the citizens (Muller et al., 2015: p. 196). As the police partly depend on citizens in terms of the information that they receive, police work is to a certain extent reactive. The concrete goals of much police work are therefore often times undetermined and unpredictable.

As a result, there is a dilemma when it comes to the autonomy of individual police officers. Police action should be righteous and there should be equal treatment of citizens. There are also certain policy goals that need to be achieved by police work. Considering specific, local circumstances, individual interest and the needs of citizens is emphasized, but formal rules are often too general to be applied to specific cases. Moreover, police work often requires consideration of more and sometimes contradictive goals and values. Police work is often not only applying the rules, but also mediating between different parties, de-escalating, addressing the behaviour of citizens, influencing situations and using force if unavoidable. So, one could argue that police work in many situations needs the professional judgement of the individual police officer about the problems that needs to be solved and how these should be solved (Muller et al., 2015: p. 196). In short, expertise and experience are important as well as professional space when it comes to police work.

It is clear that crisis management, including policing demonstrations, asks for specific competences. Policy principles and boundaries are important. Therefore, the room for discretionary situational decision-making is smaller than at regular basis police. Police officers are used to take control over situations by persuasion and keep conflicts or problems as small as possible. This is under regular circumstances, and with mass-events with powerful processes of self-regulations among the crowd, an effective strategy (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 61). However, the contemporary threats are not as transparent as before: locations and times of crises do not just announce themselves, and modern potential disturbers are quite uncluttered. This complicates the preparations by the police and authorities (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 62). At the Mobile Units there is an increasing need for flexibility during actions in a large diversity of situations. Large-scale deployment is more often part of *public order management*, where there is a more integral and proactive approach, also in terms of policy and steering. Convincing and guiding have become more important than combatting, switching between different levels of violence is required and flexible up- and downscaling needs to become natural (Muller et al., 2015: p. 539).

The question remains, however, whether there is a boundary for the amount of top-down steering that is desirable, also during these large-scale demonstrations. Decisions are sometimes in conflict with the perceptions of the police officers. If there is no room for these officers to make autonomous necessary estimations and decisions, this can result in feelings of dependency and insecurity. So, therefore the question is whether this is the right way to go (Adang et al., 2009: p. 79).

3.5 Five Explanatory Factors

This theory chapter has introduced and conceptualized four of the five explanatory factors used in this study to explain the differences between public order policing of the corona demonstrations and regular demonstrations in Rotterdam. Besides (1) Approach, including briefing and coordination, (2) Information, (3) Type of protest and protesters, and (4) Autonomy, also the ‘Circumstances of the pandemic’ is analysed as an explanatory factor while conducting this study. This can be understood as the effects of the RIVM-regulations and health risks that the pandemic brings. It is important to realise that these five factors do not exist independent of each other and also influence each other. However, not studying the relationships between the factors in this thesis is a conscious decision.

4. Methodology

This research is a comparative case study between the police response of the corona demonstrations and regular demonstrations in Rotterdam. A case study allows for first-hand information about the demonstrations and the differences in the police responses. Designing the research as a case study was advantageous in terms of accessibility to the police as well as gaining in-depth information that literature alone is not able to provide. Since comparative case studies are especially helpful when exploring a phenomenon (public order policing) within a specific context (corona and regular demonstrations), this research design was a suitable choice. The design also helped to determine differences between different cases and to gain knowledge about a topic which is not widely studied so far.

The study is qualitative, which means that the relationship between the variables is tested differently, which affects the validity and reliability. It is far more difficult to formulate clear judgements about how strong causal relations (internal validity) are and about how representative the findings (representativeness) are, as only a few people were interviewed. However, these causal relations do not focus on precise aspects but have a more differentiative and deeper analysis of the situations.

The main threat of this research design can be found in the internal validity of the study. The weak internal validity is caused by the fact that it is hard to check the non-spuriousness of the variables, in other words, it was easy to underestimate the effect of third variables on the relationship and very hard to rule out this possibility. Triangulation partly ensured this and this was also consciously taken into account when conducting this study.

The sample in this study are three police officers from the Rotterdam police unit, involved in policing both regular and corona demonstrations. These three police officers fulfil different functions and have different roles within the police and during demonstrations, from action on the frontline to the management of demonstrations and police action. The first respondent is Arjan Meijndert, Head Enforcement Networking (Interview 1, Appendix I), the second respondent is a MU officer who also is

coordinator at the event bureau (Interview 2, Appendix II), and the third respondent is Sharif Abdoel Wahid, who is Head Public Order Enforcement (Interview 3, Appendix III).

This sample is chosen by using purposive sampling. This method is conducted to focus on the main research question to get a better understanding of the protests and the various responses. It allows for exploring information-rich cases to gain deeper knowledge about an issue of central importance to the research. Since the study only involved two cases and a small sample, the generalization of data is limited and therefore threats to external validity exist. However, this study did not aim to generate standardized findings, but create an in-depth understanding of the cases and provide a more comprehensive picture that allows for the reconstruction of the case studied. With still having a varied sample as possible in terms of functions and roles within the police, bias is ought to be countered.

In this study, qualitative empirical data was gathered from three semi-structured interviews with open questions. The interviews were conducted in May and June 2021 online via Teams, due to the corona pandemic. These interviews allowed for the conceptualization of the main concepts and the analysis of the main question. The explanatory factors were decided upon by reading literature and establishing a theoretical framework. These explanatory factors in the context of the corona demonstrations were further conceptualized using the material from the conducted semi-structured interviews with police officers.

Semi-structured guideline interviews were conducted to capture the individual perspective of the respondents on policing the protests. The findings from the interviews helped to fill in the gaps from the limited literature on policing corona demonstrations from a local perspective. With semi-structured interviews there is more control over the order of the question and more spontaneity in the conversation. This way, the interviews offered more (reliable) information.

With this verbal and obtrusive form of primary data collection, there is the risk measurement bias. To ensure measurement reliability, guides for the semi-structured interviews were structured around the explanatory factors, while also being impacted by information gathered during the interviews.

The method of using interviews brings another threat. Interviews are always connected to the perspective of the respondent. However, a literature review and interviews are complementary methods of data collection and by conducting both, the amount and therefore variety of data was enhanced. Each respondent had his own perspective on the demonstrations besides similarities that were noted. There has also been reflection on the kind of information collected, by making a distinction between personal experiences and objective information. The interviewees were given the opportunity to freely tell their narrative and explain their perception of and experiences with the different factors explaining the differences between corona demonstrations and regular demonstrations and were not steered. The respondents appeared open and truthful. This strengthens the external reliability of the information received from these interviews. In addition, information was tested by the theoretical framework.

To answer the research question, a literature review was the first step in this study. Besides gaining more in-depth knowledge and better understanding of the police and public order policing during protests, it was a preparation for the interviews and helped in setting up a good interview guide from which primary data was gathered and used to answer the (sub-) research question(s). This secondary data that was gathered in the form of documentary research, by analysing public data in the form of scientific articles or earlier research projects, news articles and public police and government documents, complemented the primary data. Findings were double checked with knowledge from other authors and theories. This triangulation of data strengthened the content validity of the data collected.

Since the collected data is qualitative, the data is analysed through qualitative content analysis. While answering the sub-questions, the explanatory research question is answered based on the findings from the literature and the interviews. Comparing data in this content analysis helped to draw conclusions and to define differences.

The interviews were transcribed. These transcriptions were analysed while paying attention to the perspectives of the interviewees, using a coding method based on the different explanatory factors conceptualized during the literature research and interviews. The conclusion and therefore answer to the research questions were drawn by connecting the theory and empirical insights. This way, an estimation was made whether the empirical information contains truths and has truthful accounts.

5. The public order policing approach

This chapter will answer the first sub-question *Did the police have different instructions for policing the corona protests in comparison with policing regular protests in Rotterdam?* It will discuss whether the police had different instructions, addressing and using the explanatory factors information and approach (including coordination and briefing) to analyse and explain possible differences.

5.1 Information

Prior to a demonstration, the police have little time to collect information (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 12). Officially, a person or organisation has to notify the municipality maximum 48 hours in advance. The police retrieve information via the notification, by contacting and having meetings with the organisation of the demonstration and by monitoring social media. This way, before a demonstration, the police have knowledge of what to expect as early as possible and are able to develop and decide on strategies. During meetings with the organisation the police can also figure out what the nature of the demonstration. Furthermore, these meetings can serve to inform the organisation of the rules and regulations they must comply to. Additionally, an important tactic for increasing future

notification used is to inform organisations about the chances of the demonstration getting approved increasing when demonstrations are notified further in advance.

What is important is that people are not obliged to notify the municipality. However, when a demonstration is notified, then a demonstration is more likely to be facilitated by the municipality, which includes police capacity.

Regarding the corona demonstrations, it was noticed is that the police never knew that far in advance why a demonstration was held and who would come. Especially the latter was challenging, as they did not know who to connect and make agreements with (Respondent 3). In the end, the Rotterdam police was at a point where people who want to demonstrate gave notification one or two weeks in advance (Respondent 1). There were also corona demonstrations that occurred regularly, which was easier for the police to be informed about and arrange facilitation for. However, it still happened often that a demonstration was notified 48 hours in advance, because the organisers did not know yet how many people and who would join (Respondent 3). If the police suspected a large demonstration would take place, they already searched for contact and invite the organiser.

Whether the police got in contact with an organisation depended on the organisation. The police always tried to, and most of the time it worked. However, there are also organisations that just do not want to do business with the police. Especially organisations that have negative experiences with the police, are less eager to notify. Then it is the challenge to get in contact with them anyway (Interview 1).

What was problematic at the beginning of the corona pandemic, was that a lot of demonstrations were forbidden, such as the demonstration of June 28 2020 (AD, June 26 2020). Because people thought that notifications would only result in prohibition there was an increasing number of unannounced corona demonstrations, for example on December 14 2020 (AD, December 15 2020) (Respondent 2). In terms of information gathering, this was challenging, as the Rotterdam police missed important information and therefore were less prepared. Because the corona demonstrations were new, it was also harder for police to gather information via intelligence, as there were a lot of closed groups that they could not reach, which added to the lack of information from the notification or contact in advance (Respondent 2). This complicated the *information steered approach* that the police pursued. Later in the pandemic, the police reached a point where people realised that they were allowed to demonstrate if they would make agreements with the police. This improved the information position of the police again. Still, it was sometimes hard to make an accurate estimation of the number of demonstrators. This is, however, of great importance for the course of the demonstration and the action of the police (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 18).

Information was also gathered during the demonstrations, seeking contact with protestors on the street. This does not always work, because some groups or people do not want to have to do anything with the police (Respondent 2).

5.2 Coordination

As of march last year, there were both national as well as regional regulations, because of the individual authorities of the mayor. The mayor eventually decides on the location and the continuation of the demonstration. What is taken into account was whether beforehand good agreements have been made with the organiser about complying the corona regulations (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 10). The event bureau of the police advices on these regional regulations when it comes to public order policing (Respondent 1). While implementing restrictive measures in terms of peoples' freedom, the government stressed that this was necessary for the public health. The 1,5-meter rule was a priority and was supposed to be enforced strictly. As a result, location of a demonstration was determined keeping in mind the amount of distance people could keep from each other (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 14).

However, as the pandemic surprised everybody, not all national regulations were clear during the first period, including the length of these regulation. Moreover, the national authorities changed their position often (Hendriks, 2020: p. 5). This made coordination and enforcement by the police complicated, as they were not always sure how to operate and coordinate police action. Eventually, the enforcement strategy became 'first, we start a conversation, then (if that would not work) we warn, next (if people still have not changed their behaviour) we may intervene' (Terpstra et al., 2021: p. 7).

At the same time, the police had been searching for national guidelines, such as a maximum number of demonstrators. However, as the possibilities for demonstrations differ per municipality and per demonstration, this was very complex to arrange. In the end, there was probably not enough time to create a national policy (Respondent 2).

For the police, it was difficult to prepare for a pandemic such as this one. There is an established structure with a NSGBO with the SGBO's and TDA's on a lower level. This was also the case for the corona pandemic and the related demonstrations, where a crisis structure was established the moment corona virus entered affected the Netherlands. Most of the time, corona demonstrations were coordinated regionally, depending on the size and risk of the demonstration. When a demonstration was small and stayed within the district, it was organised locally by a TDA. When it became bigger and crosses the district, then there was be a SGBO which is in the lead (Respondent 3). In terms of national coordination there was also a NSGBO, which oversaw strategy, because of the new national regulations, and had an overview of the MU deployment (Respondent 3). So, there has always been the possibility of help on in terms of national coordination and upscaling to get things done, but it never really got that far (Respondent 3).

This crisis was unique because of its longevity and the impact on society, the police organisation and on private lives. When there is a crisis, the mayor or the chairperson of the respective safety region are in charge. However, with corona, more decision-making took place on a governmental level, which

required more coordination. When decisions often came at the last moment or things are changed, then it was required to anticipate fast. For the police, this was challenging, because consequences for law enforcement of what was decided were not always taken into account. Therefore, the fact that the police played an advisory role was essential for policing the public order, including corona demonstrations. This way, the police was not surprised by the regulations and their manageability (Personeelsblad Politie, April 2021).

During the corona crisis, there were different considerations that played a role in the police coordination and approach to a demonstration. First, the RIVM-regulations. These were very strict at the beginning of the corona pandemic. As these regulations were different than before corona, enforcement needed to be coordinated differently. Later on, the mayor of Rotterdam eased these regulations (Respondent 1). The mayor wanted to give people the opportunity to be heard, as he finds the right to demonstrate, ensured by the WOM, very important. Rotterdam was also one of the first municipalities to allow for dynamic demonstration, while national guidelines advised not to (Respondent 2). It was then up to the police to organise and facilitate that.

Not only the organisers of a demonstration and the police, but also the municipality and sometimes other bodies help in finding out what the mutual goal was and what could be arranged in order to organise a peaceful demonstration (Respondent 1). The pandemic has caused the cooperation between mayors to be better. This way, knowledge and experiences from different municipalities with different protest groups, could help in preparing for a demonstration (Respondent 2). Also, the use of Teams in the future can result in faster and easier contact with organisers, contributing to faster decision-making.

A final important development during the corona crisis was that the number of demonstrations increased rapidly. Having multiple demonstrations per week complicated the organisation and coordination of, and facilitation by the police (Respondent 3). At a certain point, there were 10 requests per weeks in terms of demonstration (Respondent 1). Consequently, coordinating the corona demonstrations became big part and permanent part of the police organization, whereas it used to be only small and part time.

5.3 Briefing

In the first weeks of the corona crisis, it was often unclear to the policing officer what they should do and how they should operate. There was much confusion, and many formal and technical errors were probably made. This occurred because the situation was new and many rules, regulations and expectations were unclear, not only on the lower levels, but also on the higher levels (Terpstra et al., 2021: p. 6)

However, this did not affect the briefing of the police officers in a significant way. Before a demonstration, the police officers got informed about when and where they must be via email. Mobile Unit officers get briefed by the commander and during that briefing the expected action was discussed. This includes policy principles, the operation framework and what will and will not be accepted. With regular demonstration, an essential part of the briefing was the clarification and further explanation why certain choices are made (Respondent 2). There are no fundamental differences in how a briefing took place with the corona demonstrations. The most important part was getting to know the target group and knowing how to handle them. This was no different during the corona protests (Respondent 2).

5.4 Information, coordination and instructions during the corona protests

To conclude this chapter, the police had difficulties in preparing the corona demonstrations, because (1) protest groups were unknown, and (2) new rules resulted in unexpected numbers of demonstrations and participants joining these demonstrations. Additionally, the government was very strict as well as unclear in terms of RIVM-regulations at first, complicating this preparation as well. Nonetheless, the police were able to, over time, regulate the protests well.

6. The demonstration and its demonstrators

What is important to note is that avoiding the possibility of riots during the coronavirus outbreak requires an understanding of both (1) the general way in which police represent and understand what groups are involved and the relations between these groups and (2) the ways in which specific situations involving these groups are handled by the authorities (Stott et al., 2020: p. 1). So, to understand different police responses to the corona protest compared to the regular protest it is important to realise that demonstrators might have acted differently compared to earlier protests. This chapter will answer the second sub-research question *Did the demonstrators act differently compared to earlier protests?* by analysing the explanatory factor ‘type of demonstration and demonstrators’.

6.1 Types of demonstrations and demonstrators

There are clear trends and fluctuations in the frequency and intensity of different categories of public disorder. Changing societal and cultural circumstances can lead to repetition of known patterns but can also form new types of public disorder (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 199). This is also the case when it comes to public disorder as part of (worldwide) events such as the corona pandemic. It is a side product of developments and events in different domains. The need to prioritize public health may lead to interactions with people who normally avoid demonstrations (Grace, 2020: p. 13).

The forms of protest that have emerged during the corona crisis have admittedly been of the most diverse kinds (Gerbaudo, 2020: p. 3-4). Anti-lockdown protests and pandemic riots stand out as different kind of responses to the corona pandemic compared to regular demonstrations (Gerbaudo, 2020: p. 4). What unifies them is the call for a return to pre-corona normality. At the same time, their motives differ. As anti-lockdown protests express a direct negative response against the governance of the pandemic, riots are a way for people to express their dissatisfaction at the present system by adopting highly confrontational forms of protest, often involving the destruction of property and clashes with police (Gerbaudo, 2020: p. 10).

Every demonstration has a different target group (Respondent 1). So, demonstrations are very diverse. However, with corona demonstrations, the participants appeared to be more diverse than ever. The fact that the group of demonstrators was hybrid was new and hard to tackle. Moreover, a small group was more extreme and willing to use violence to make their point (NRC, January 29 2021).

Sometimes people demonstrate against the government policy in general, and sometimes to more specific corona regulations. There are also people that were always against the government, taking on several opportunities to demonstrate (Respondent 2). These people can be anti-government from three perspectives: politically-ideologically, against specific government policy and against the police (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestreiding en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 22-23). The corona policy gave people the feeling of injustice and powerlessness and therefore act.

There is also another trend that occurs during the corona demonstration. There are people that used to demonstrate for other causes, that now demonstrated against corona regulations as well. This way, different groups came together (Respondent 1). Some groups also called upon each other to join in on a corona demonstration. This resulted in a mixture of groups. There was then one initiator and several groups that got mixed under the title corona demonstration (Respondent 3). This was not new, but it was remarkable that corona is the trigger for the mixture. It also had never happened before that all kinds of groups with all kinds of causes focused on one subject, in this case the corona regulations (Respondent 3). Nevertheless, the question is whether there are currently problems in society that also cause more people to demonstrate or that people accept less authority, which will not disappear when the corona regulations no longer apply (Respondent 3).

Another interesting trend that occurs is the disorganized character of many corona protests. They were often not called by established social movement organizations, but by new leaders and groups that often had a limited level of coordination. Therefore, contacting them was sometimes difficult (Respondent 2). These different aspects seem to project a return to lowly organized forms of protest, with sudden gatherings of people, limited organizational structure and lack of representatives (Gerbaudo, 2020: p. 13). This complicated the work of the police, as they were less able to get into contact, make agreements, prepare for, adjust to, and facilitate the protest.

In terms of public order disturbances, the disruptive effect of corona and its measurements are unprecedented. The persistence, intensity and hardening of the protest deviate from before. What is remarkable is that peaceful protest attracted more extreme people and groups. Protesters seemed to riot more often and take opportunities to confront the police (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, 202: p. 20). To specify this, there are three types of public disturbances that were distinguished during corona demonstrations: (1) protest with small public order disturbances, (2). Demonstrations that are hijacked by rioters and more extreme groups, and (3) riots, such as the curfew riots (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, 2021: p. 20). These three types of public disturbances show a mixture of *mass*, *agreement* or *incident steered disturbances* during the corona demonstrations.

6.2 *Actions of the demonstrators compared to regular demonstrations*

In the Netherlands, it is not common that huge amounts of people demonstrate over a long period of time. The corona pandemic seems to have stimulated more people to demonstrate more often, probably because it affected so many people. So, people were more inclined to demonstrate (Respondent 2). In addition, the people that already demonstrated regularly became more extreme (Respondent 2). Where deployment of the MU was usually only necessary occasionally, since June 2020, they have been into action multiple times. This is also the result of a new hostility from the demonstrators towards the police (NRC, January 29 2021).

These demonstrations took place over a longer period, also when they were not allowed. The pandemic and the government policy had a mobilizing effect on people who distrust the government. The group became larger, more diffuse and more willing to take action. The tone towards the police also became grimmer. Sometimes, the corona protests were seen as an opportunity for *notorious* disturbers to anticipate on violent confrontations with the police (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, 2021: p. 8). After the regulations announced in December 2020 and January 2021 (NU.nl, December 19 2020) the protests became even larger and the disturbances increased. It is however important to make a distinction between the protesters that protested peacefully against the corona regulations and policies and the *notorious* or *incidental disturbers* that used these protests as an outlet (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, 2021: p. 9).

There are certain groups that detach from the demonstration that go against the police in a more aggressive way. It might be that the organisation made good agreement with the police and the mayor and that these more aggressive groups were not always expected. More extreme groups that joined in on corona demonstrations can also be defined as *notorious* disturbers. It then became the challenge to distinguish between the people who rioted and those that protested peacefully and according to the rules (Respondent 1).

6.3 Different kinds of demonstrations and actions of demonstrators

In this chapter, it has become clear that there were significant differences between the actions of demonstrators compared to the pre-corona protests compared to regular protests. Protest groups were larger, more diverse and became mixed with other (more extreme) groups. Protesters seemed to have become more willing to demonstrate, more extreme, more often using violence. Furthermore, many protests were disorganized, especially at the beginning, as new unexperienced groups organized them. Finally, they were remarkable persistent, intense and took place over a long time. This situation was new for the police, which complicated its policing.

7. Police response

The explanatory factors autonomy and approach will be analysed in this chapter to answer the third sub-research question *Were the police able to react flexibly to activities of the demonstrators?*

7.1 Approach

There was no blueprint for policing in the age of coronavirus. Dynamics were different when there were other circumstances than with which the police were familiar, but lessons were learned from when police forces had successfully gained compliance (Grace, 2020: p. 17). The notion of a responsive police means that with policing the corona regulations during protests, not only one strategy could suffice. During the corona pandemic it was about several cohered ranging strategies to police the public order and to stimulate compliance of the RIVM-regulations, with a focus on problem-solving (Terspra and Salet, 2020: p. 30 + 39). The differences in context, motivation and attitude of citizens were considered when deciding on a strategy. For the police, there was not one corona problem, but a diversity of problems (Terpstra and Salet, 2020: p. 31).

There are two different responses that can be observed, explained by the fact that these corona protests were so recurring, that the police dealt with it differently over time, depending on certain circumstances (Respondent 2). First, there is the increasing flexibility where the police as a whole or different units could switch easily between different approaches, were mobile and could scale up and down (Adang, 2011: p. 184). Second, there is the use of a friendly but strict strategy, based on facilitating peaceful behaviour and a gradual, differentiated, *information steered approach* that gives opportunities for dialogue and communication prior to and during demonstrations and early and focussed low profile interventions. In the Netherlands, there was a pragmatic, communicative and responsabilizing policing style when it came to policing the corona protests, including dominant elements of *negotiated management* and *community policing*, with emphasis being placed on voluntary compliance and with

the use of sanctions only as a last resort and not as a goal itself (Terpstra et al., 2021: p. 2). This means, being present, addressing citizens about their behaviour, informing and helping them when necessary. The intrinsic motivation of citizens was seen as much more important for the management of the corona crisis than strict enforcement by the state.

During the corona protests in Rotterdam more networking police officers were deployed. This way, the police had consciously been working on approaching the demonstration and its demonstrators differently with the corona protest than with regular protests (Respondent 2). During the demonstration, the police chose for a de-escalation strategy, which means connecting with the organisation and the demonstrators and little visibility of the MU. This connection was ensured using the police network team (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 16). This way, the police had good contact with the organisation prior to and with the organisation and protesters during the demonstration. For example, when there were demonstrations by the movement VirusWaarheid, they decided to not immediately deploy the MU. Instead, they tried to get in contact with them to make sure that the demonstration would go orderly and without any incidents. Previously, the police would lean more towards focussing on public order. Now besides primarily focussing on public order, they also focused on connections as there was a new target group that the police did not know yet. This has developed faster during the corona pandemic (Respondent 1). This helped the police to adjust themselves to the group they were dealing with, to prepare correctly and respond flexibly. They already did that with regular protests, however with corona there was the trend of awareness of the importance of networking and getting to know and understand the groups even better. The length of the crisis and the large number of large-scale demonstrations also played a role here. By networking and getting into contact with protesters, it was also less likely that police officers said something wrong that could trigger an escalation (Respondent 2). In addition, the fact that there was no MU visibly present at some of the corona demonstration also had a positive effect on the escalation risks. The MU sometimes serves as a trigger, decreasing the chances of an orderly and peaceful demonstration and retrieving valuable information and making contacts (Respondent 1). Additionally, this has saved the police costs in terms of deployment and society irritation and frustration (Respondent 1). So, this approach helps for the perception of the people, for the municipality and the mayor and the police officers that there is a peaceful demonstration. At the same time, less police had to be deployed, which gave the police a bit of breathing space during this long-lasting corona pandemic (Respondent 2).

This approach was however also sometimes challenging and took effort from both the police and the mayor, as there were many risks of disturbances with corresponding consequences. The main goal was always to make sure that things did not get out of hand for the public order in the city (Respondent 1). At a certain point, while policing the corona protests, Rotterdam deviated from and went beyond the national guidelines, allowing more (Respondent 1). Everywhere demonstrators were still expected to keep 1,5-meters distance and no dynamic demonstrations were allowed, only static

demonstrations for a limited number of hours. In Rotterdam, after discussion with the SGBO, connecting with people resulted in making clear agreements and allowing for these dynamic demonstrations (AD, April 17 2021) (Rijnmond, April 21 2021). The mayor trusted the police and their network in ensuring an orderly demonstration. Hence, the mayor went beyond the national measures (Respondent 1). Another consideration of the mayor was about the fact that the organisers of a corona demonstration would inform the police and municipality in advance that they would not comply with the corona regulations. Still the mayor decided to allow it as the police would be better able to prepare this way, as when a demonstration is unannounced there is less information and therefore opportunities to prepare (Respondent 2).

There was also a response of the police in another direction, towards a stricter enforcement. During the corona protests police sometimes acted sooner than normally. At the beginning the pressure was very high to enforce the 1,5-meter rule (Respondent 2). Under normal circumstances, the police allow quite a lot, however, as they wanted to hold onto the RIVM-regulations, there were more expectations of compliance for the demonstrators. With demonstrations, normally, the police intervene when people do not follow the rules set of the mayor forbids the demonstration. This often happens with violence. In terms of corona, the 1,5-meter distance regulation caused people to not meet the criteria faster, resulting in interventions. This is rightful, however there is the question whether that is the right signal to give. Therefore, the police decided to look at who they had in front of them and how they could deal with them best. Looking at how the corona regulations could be enforced with as little violence as possible (Respondent 2). Before intervening, the police always first appeals to the organiser, who is responsible for the public order of the demonstration. If that does not work, then the next step is up to the mayor, as he was always in the lead. During the corona protest, the response was not different, however, sometimes intervention happened at an earlier point. This is all part of the tactics of public order policing (Respondent 1). So, the police responded differently to the corona protests in terms of the moment of intervention (Respondent 2). This connects to another difference can be observe when it comes to the police response during corona demonstrations compared to regular demonstration. The police in Rotterdam wanted to prevent demonstrators from standing close to each other. During regular demonstration, poling public order disturbances is focussed on closing in demonstrators, however, because of the importance of the social distancing regulation, the police chose to spread out demonstrators when disturbances occurred (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 14).

7.2 Autonomy

Prior to a demonstration, a certain operational framework is set. Police officers have discretionary power to assess whether and how they act towards certain violations. This was the same with the corona regulations. One of the small differences is that there seemed to be less discretionary power for police

officers during the corona demonstrations (Respondent 1). Because this was a pandemic and the public health was at stake, it was expected from police officers that they would act. An example here is the curfew. With this regulation, there were strict orders and little discretionary powers for individual police officers. They were supposed to and expected to act when people would not comply. This adds to the fact that during corona demonstrations, escalation occurred faster. Consequently, the discretionary powers of police officers were limited, because there was less to no experience with enforcing pandemic protests as well as the sensitivity of the situation (Respondent 3). However, it is unclear whether the police being less flexible to respond to the corona protests when police officers are not able to make their own decisions in terms of their actions made their response less flexible.

Within the police it is the intension that everybody, also individual police officers can think certain ways and being flexible, because it is sometimes hard to reach everyone due to the hierarchical organisation of the police (Respondent 3). The police become more flexible, nevertheless, police officers in the front line had work and act according to what was decided at a higher level. So, they had to work in a certain context and a set framework. Due to the hierarchy, it is normal. That information is passed on to multiple levels. Consequently, it is realistic that with every step a little bit of information gets lost (Interview 3). This again raises the question of how much discretionary powers an individual police officer should get. There are namely differences in terms of perception of when to take a step forward and when to step back. Police officers on the street might think they need to act upon something, yet when there is an overall view, it appears to be only incidental, and action should be on hold (Respondent 3). This was also the case with the corona demonstrations.

Moreover, this was sometimes difficult for individual police officers, as some officers agreed with this policy, and some did not. This is a noteworthy result of the pandemic and government policy. This can, amongst other things, be explained by the fact that this policy sometimes went against the normal policy (Respondent 2). In addition, these policies were very fickle, which was hard to handle. On the one hand, it was imposed to have one policy and the same approach, but on the other hand side this resulted in police officers not being willing to act (Respondent 2).

7.3 Flexibility of the police response

The response to the corona demonstrations and the actions of the demonstrators was two-fold: (1) There was stricter enforcement in terms of intervention during protests because of the RIVM-regulations and the sensitivity of the protests. Over time, police in Rotterdam changed this approach to more enabling. And (2) networking became even more important and the key strategy and approach in terms of policing the corona demonstrations. As a result, the police were better able to adjust to the target group and consequently react flexibly to activities of the demonstrators.

Autonomy is also relevant when it comes to the public order policing of the corona demonstrations, The autonomy of individual police officers did not have a significant impact on the

police response as it did not clearly show another response compared to regular protests. The amount of discretionary powers differed over time and struggle between flexible response and limited discretionary powers remains.

8. The effects of the corona regulations on the public order policing

The corona pandemic has caused a change in the circumstances under which the police have to operate, such as the RIVM-regulations and risks of being infected. This chapter will answer the fourth and final sub-question *What effect did the corona regulations have on the public order policing of the protests?* and will discuss the impact that these circumstances had on policing the corona demonstrations.

The quality of the public order, the intensity of public disorder and the possibility and limitations of public order policing in the Netherlands are determined by relevant societal developments (Van der Torre et al., 2002: p. 188). What made policing the corona protests essentially different was the fact that during the pandemic there were other regulations that the government implemented (Respondent 2). Without those, the Netherlands is a very tolerant country, and everything is possible if there is no discrimination, offenses or incendiaries (Respondent 1). This, however, also depends on the mayor and how he or she implements the regulations (Respondent 1).

In the Netherlands, a few things stand out. The fact that society was confronted with a pandemic, which was new to everybody and nobody knew how to handle it, caused some bad blood which people demonstrated against. The biggest difference here was that it became very massive as a result of that. The protests kept on going, resulting in the Netherlands becoming a kind of demonstration country (Respondent 2). Terpstra and Salet (2020) argue that policing the corona crisis was much more than just sanctioning the social order. It was about reaching a goal by promoting citizens to comply to the corona rules. Police work in corona times was more complex, confusing and dealt with high and sometimes conflicting demands. There are four reasons why this is the case (1) police officers in the frontline were themselves more vulnerable for being infected; (2) the corona measures that police had to enforce were often unclear and conflicting, and rapidly changed; (3) during the corona crisis, the police had to work under a lot of pressure; and (4) public order policing during the Corona pandemic got even more complex due to long-lasting social developments that had a big influence and might come together (Terpstra and Salet, 2020: p.22). All these reasons may have had an influence on the way public order policing takes place.

One of the most complex problems with the corona protest, which also played an essential role in policing these protests, was the contradiction that existed with the WOM. The WOM gives people the right to demonstrate. One of the three reasons that a demonstration can be forbidden, restrictions can be

imposed or it can be ended is public health. This was a problem because the RIVM-regulations were what these protesters were protesting. Hence there were essential differences during these demonstrations (Respondents 2). It was very logical that these differences existed as these regulations even became a temporary law. Then this law should and would be enforced, which was taken into consideration when deciding on policing action (Respondent 3).

At the same time, there were also the safety measures that the police had to take, for example hygiene measures for protection. This was something that had to be taken into account by individual police officers but has an effect on the whole police organisation as well (Respondent 3). For the police, when considering the regulations in terms of mouth masks and 1,5-meters distance, it was not always realistic to comply when policing demonstrations (Respondent 1). On top of that, the mouth masks made communication very different as it complicated non-verbal communication (Respondent 3).

During the first months, large groups (a maximum of four people), were not allowed to gather according to the RIVM-regulations. This caused a dilemma between the right to demonstrate and these RIVM-regulations. Demonstrations were allowed, but only if participants complied to the rules set. This asked for different demands to the form in which demonstrations could take place. The police were less able to fall back on standard agreements and approaches that they worked with during regular demonstrations.

In the end, both the public order as well as the feelings of citizens had to be considered in the police advise. At a certain point, nobody complied with the 1,5-meter distance rule anymore, complicating enforcing and advising on it. Firstly, a demonstrator was responsible for his or her own health and it is the responsibility for the organiser to make sure that the RIVM-regulations were respected (Inspectie Justitie en Veiligheid, 2020: p. 9-10). Whether or not to terminate the demonstration depended on the consideration between public order and health. This also depended on the number of demonstrators and the location and to what extent the regulations were complied with. So, the corona regulations had an effect on both the decisions prior to and during a demonstration in terms of public order policing.

During the corona demonstrations the police had to adapt faster to changes and therefore learn faster, as a result of the circumstances, with scaling up and down, depending on the regulations and differences in the number and size of demonstrations amongst others. The corona crisis lasted long. It seemed to be the longest crisis that the police have endured in terms of crisis management. Another lesson was accepting certain things and letting things go, to keep a healthy organisation (Respondent 3). In the first few weeks, it became clear that the pandemic would be a challenge, and the focus was on making sure how to work safely and keep police processes going. Colleagues were worried about their health (Personeelsblad Politie, April 2021).

This shows that there is also the effect that corona and the RIVM-regulations have on individual police officers. Some police officers were more reluctant or made different choices because of risks of being infected (Respondent 2). Many police officers were careful, still most police officers did not show any resistance (Respondent 1). A lot of police officers kept it in the back of their mind and the police organisation kept working on it. This was especially the case when police officers worked on the front line in direct contact with people and there were no resources such as mouth masks yet or (later on) vaccinations. However, it is the core of a police officer to do his or her work and therefore generally take a step forward when others might take a step back (Respondent 2). Moreover, as time went by and the pandemic lasted longer, police officers got used to it and did not pay attention to it anymore as they were in contact with so many people on a daily basis. The fact that it was more difficult to keep distance did no longer play a role anymore (Respondent 2).

In this chapter it has become clear that there are different effects that the RIVM-regulations had on the public order policing of the police in Rotterdam. First, because of the resentment towards regulations, demonstrations have become very massive. Second, there is an essential and complex contradiction with the WOM. Third, hygiene measures changed communication towards colleagues and protesters. Finally, individual police officers kept risks of being infected in mind while policing the corona demonstrations. This last effect was most significant during the first months of the pandemic.

9. Conclusion

There are significant differences between public order policing responses to corona protests and regular protests in Rotterdam. This study has shown that a specific number of factors explain these difference and therefore answer the research question. *How can the differences between the public order policing response to corona protests and that to regular protests in Rotterdam be explained?*

Where the autonomy and the briefing of police officers did not show significant effects on these differences, the other explanatory factors did. As the corona pandemic was a new phenomenon, it brought new challenges for the police. The police had to operate with large pressures under unusual circumstances. Overlooking it all, the factors approach (including coordination), information, type of protest and protesters, autonomy and circumstances of the pandemic, made the difference:

1. There were many complexities in terms of local, regional and national coordination that the police encountered.
2. Differences in the amount of information and difficulties in the gathering of information existed.
3. The police were confronted with a more diverse and unknown group of protesters, complicating networking with these people and requiring a more adjusted approach. Consequently, the use of extensive networking has developed rapidly, resulting in new connections with many different organisations and demonstrators.
4. There were dilemmas and difficulties with enforcing the RIVM-regulations. Contradictions with other laws such as the WOM had to be taken into account while deciding on the public order policing approach. Demonstrations were forbidden or dissolved that would otherwise have been allowed without question.
5. Because of the effects of the pandemic, demonstrations became very massive, putting extra pressure on individual police officers and the police as an organization.

In general, public order policing became a far more dominant part of police work. The police were challenged to learn fast and adapt themselves to the new situations that occurred. Normally, changes would have developed over multiple years. Corona helped speeding up this learning process. In the end this resulted on less pressure on the MU and the police in general in times where capacity is stretched.

Networking has become key in police strategy and police must trust on their gut feeling and experience more, instead of using a of set responses which could cause resistance, tensions and polarisation, especially during corona demonstrations. The police learned to be alert and make sure to be able to respond in an effective and flexible way while respecting the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. Knowledge and expertise acquired during this corona crisis can be used for future situations. It is the task for the police to stay alert and adapt to the situations it faces. At the same time, there is the realisation that they cannot be prepared for everything, for it was and always will be complex.

10. Discussion

This study is a comparison between corona demonstrations and regular demonstration and explained differences by focussing on five explanatory factors. As of now, there is no scientific research done on these specific differences. Therefore, this studies' theoretical implication is adding to the body of knowledge in terms of local policing of the corona crisis, where theories on public order policing and experiences of police officers are combined. The study has practical implications as well. This study is done from outside of the police organization, analysing the public order policing of demonstrations with a fresh look. New insights can come from this, which can be useful for the police for future practice. After a public order crisis, it is always important for the police to learn lessons from their experiences. These experiences impact future events, situations and confrontations. This research can add to evaluations and be an impulse for improvements in the internal organisation and the safety policy.

One of the strengths of this research is that it was able to connect theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. Furthermore, most of the scientific information was triangulated with other literature, ensuring reliability and validity. Still, there were new insights from the practical perspective, due to the interviews and this insight in the Rotterdam police unit. This enriches the design of the study and the results presented in this study.

However, there are also some weaknesses. There are many more factors that might affect public order policing of demonstration. This existence of third variables is not studied. More research could be done into these third variables. Additionally, with more respondents, there would have been more views on the policing, where individual views and organizational trends could have been better distinguished. Finally, every demonstration is different. In this study, there was no possibility to check whether the factors discussed always differ and which were characteristic for the corona demonstrations.

Furthermore, there are recommendations for further research. First, during this study it became clear that the concept of legitimacy plays an important role in the considerations of the police. Both in theory as well as the interviews this was widely debated. How citizens perceive police action and the acceptance and support for police action influences the development of a demonstration and therefore cannot be ignored. As this is a very complex concept, more research is recommended to better understand the responses from police as well as citizens during corona demonstrations and explain differences observed.

Second, it has become clear that the police have learned a lot during and from this corona crisis. The question that remains is how they learned. Learning is always a shared process. In this case, for example between the citizen and the police. More research could show (un)successful ways of learning for the future as new situations are inevitable.

Third and finally, the study has focused on Rotterdam only. Since there also have been many corona demonstrations in other parts of the Netherlands, where police might have made other considerations. It is interesting to study differences between the public order policing of the corona

protests and regular protests in different cities by different police units. This could lead to other conclusions in terms of factors that affected these differences.

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12. List of respondents

Interview 1, Respondent 1, Arjan Meijndert (Appendix I)

Interview 2, Respondent 2, MU-officer and coordinator at the event bureau (Appendix II)

Interview 3, Respondent 3, Sharif Abdoel Wahid (Appendix III)