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Adang, Otto M.J.; Schreiber, Martina

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How Collective Violence Emerges and Escalates



Otto M. J. Adang and Martina Schreiber

Abstract The chapter links theory and practice of public order management. Based on systematic observations of mass events where violence occurred (or was feared), an evidence-based model for the initiation and escalation of collective violence is presented. Based on this model, strategic principles for the police management of mass events are described, which are already successfully applied in several countries.

1 Introduction

In every society, there are sporadic and sometimes violent outbreaks of collective violence, whether in the form of “urban riots” (e.g. the widespread riots in France in 2005, the 2011 England riots), “soccer violence”, escalated demonstrations (e.g. in the context of lockdown protests against restrictive measures taken in several countries to mitigate the COVID-19 epidemic), and festivities or celebrations (e.g. in the context of New Year’s Eve) that get out of hand. Over the years, analyses of what are considered excesses in the realm of “crowd behaviour” have generated controversy (Adang, 2011a). As early as 1972, the American sociologist Richard Berk noted that the previously extensive social science literature on so-called crowd behaviour was mostly based on limited information and unsubstantiated interpretations (Berk, 1970). Nearly 20 years later, American sociologist and collective behaviour researcher Clark McPhail (1997, p. 35) pointed out that: “For more than a century, the study of crowds has been stymied by the methodological stereotype that ‘systematic research is not possible.’” Similarly, Frosdick and Marsh (2005), in

O. M. J. Adang (✉)

University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands

Police Academy of the Netherlands, Apeldoorn, The Netherlands

e-mail: o.m.j.adang@rug.nl

M. Schreiber

Meschede, Germany

their excellent review of the literature on soccer hooliganism, note how little of this literature is based on direct observations, let alone systematic observations of soccer violence. As Frosdick and Marsh (2005, p. 31) aptly note, “this lack of objective facts in theory and research on soccer hooliganism has bedevilled the debate since the 1960s.”

And it is not just the lack of objective facts. Little attention is paid to the fact that collective violence occurs in an intergroup context. Following several other authors (e.g. della Porta & Reiter, 1998; McPhail et al., 1998; Waddington, 1987), Stott and Reicher (1998a, p. 510) point out that: “When it comes to psychological explanations for crowd behaviour and—in particular—crowd violence, there is a tendency to focus almost exclusively on one party: the crowd itself. Psychological studies of the police or the army in such encounters are almost entirely conspicuous by their absence.” Stott and Reicher (1998a, b) point to the need to study the intergroup dynamics of crowd events and to include the role and perspective of the police in doing so.

From a theoretical perspective, explanations for collective violence have traditionally focused on its supposedly pathological, irrational, and seemingly chaotic nature. According to various theories, people in a crowd lose their “ego consciousness” and the usual moral inhibitions and restraints are dropped. According to Sighele (1892) and Le Bon (1895), it was—and is—often assumed that in a crowd or mass of people there is no longer rational behaviour, but on the contrary a (primitive) tendency prevails to do what others do. Suppressed desires come out in the behaviour. A transformation is said to take place in which people change their behaviour simply due to the fact that they are part of a crowd. In this context, the so-called de-individuation theory by Zimbardo (1969) is often cited. According to the de-individuation theory, the excitement and anonymity of the group lead to uninhibited behaviour and the normal limits that people impose on themselves are lost. Through the assumed psychological processes, individual identity should be lost and individuals should become extraordinarily susceptible to suggestion and incitement by “leaders”. Characteristic of this view is that any crowd (a collection of people) can become a “mob” through the actions of leader figures, the appearance of a hated person or object, acts of violence, police action, or lack thereof. In many countries, over time, these ideas have become the basis for the education and training of police units deployed in (potential) riot situations (e.g. Schweingruber, 2000).

Against this background, Adang (1998) reported on an observational study of collective violence in the Netherlands. The focus of the study was on how violence emerges in collective settings, especially soccer or protest events, and on the conditions that promote escalations. To study collective violence, interactions around protest events and soccer matches were systematically observed. The word interaction is important here because the basic assumption was that violence always involves at least one actor and one target and that behaviour cannot be understood without considering the interaction between them. Aside from the focus on interaction, the study differed from previous work in a number of other aspects due to its quantitative and comparative nature. For example, the study was not limited to

escalated riot situations, but included a range of comparable events that were considered threats to public order and where violence was seen as a real possibility. Some resulted in rioting or unrest, while others did not. A total of 700 hours of direct observations of crowd behaviour and interactions were tape-recorded.

The first aim of the study was to provide a structured and contextualized description of violent interactions surrounding protest and soccer events. The second objective was to analyse factors in the interaction and its immediate context that appeared to be associated with the emergence (or initiation) and escalation of collective violence. There was no assumption that the factors associated with the initiation of violence would necessarily be the same as those associated with the escalation (Adang, 2011a).

Adang (2018) details the methodological aspects involved and how particular attention was paid to issues of sampling and measuring behaviour. This included overcoming the challenges of structured versus participant observations of collective events such as demonstrations and soccer matches. It proved possible to conduct meaningful systematic observations of episodes of collective violence in a reliable manner (more complete and detailed than police logs or newspaper reports) without compromising the physical safety of the observer. Although direct outbreaks of violence are relatively rare, it proved possible to select events for observation that have an increased risk of collective violence. Direct systematic observation of collective violence provides data that cannot be obtained by other means (such as surveys, interviews, and participant observation), data that are critical to understanding how collective violence is triggered and escalates. A limitation of the methodology, of course, is that structural causes or the psychology of collective violence are not considered. The current methodology focuses on the short-term processes associated with violent behaviour in collective situations (Adang, 2018).

The results of the systematic observations: 137 events that were considered a threat to public order can be summarized as follows: Although protest events and soccer matches represent very different situations for collective behaviour, there are clear similarities: In both soccer and protest events, even in highly escalated incidents of collective violence, the relative number of people belonging to one of the groups involved actually engaging in violence is small. Collective violence rarely involves more than 1% of a group becoming violent (in extremely escalated situations, up to 10% of the same group may be actively involved in the violence), suggesting that violence is always the result of a (conscious or unconscious) decision-making process. In addition, the targets of violence do not appear to be randomly selected (suggesting that there is some meaningful relationship between the violence and the targets chosen), and in about half of the violent incidents there was no discernible potential “trigger” for initiating violence in the immediate context (Adang, 2011a).

Based on these observational studies, we will present a model for the initiation and escalation of collective violence on the one hand (Sect. 2) and the implications of this model for public order policing on the other hand (Sect. 3). I will illustrate these implications with some practical examples (Sect. 4).

2 The Initiation and Escalation of Collective Violence

2.1 *The Initiation of Collective Violence*

With regard to the emergence and escalation of collective violence, we suggest that two types of violence must be distinguished in the initiation of collective violence (Adang, 2011a):

1. Violence that is associated with a clearly identifiable trigger.

This type of violence is reactive—it is a response to specific elements or tensions in a situation, whether provocations by other fans or third parties, events on the field (in the case of soccer), police action, or some other identifiable trigger. Theoretically, this type of violence can easily be linked to familiar theories of aggression, e.g. aggression out of frustration (e.g. Berkowitz, 1989), competition for limited resources, or in response to threats. As with other forms of aggression, males are more likely to respond aggressively than females, and adolescents/young adults (persons aged 15–25) are more likely to respond aggressively than persons from other age groups. However, males from other age groups and females may also occasionally respond aggressively to certain triggers. The targets of violence may vary but are usually related to the trigger that preceded the behaviour (except in cases of redirected aggression).

2. Violence that is not associated with a clearly identifiable trigger.

This type of violence is not reactive but seems to occur rather spontaneously. It is almost exclusively perpetrated by groups of male adolescents/young adults and is specifically directed against similar, rival groups of young men. The individuals and groups involved appear to actively seek opportunities to confront rival groups. Theoretically, this type of violence can be seen as another expression of the so-called young male syndrome (Wilson & Daly, 1985), the tendency of young men to take risks and be violent because they disregard the future in favour of short-term gains. Evidence suggests that this tendency is primarily a male attribute and is socially facilitated by the presence of peers who share the same goals. Violent confrontations between men are really about “face”, the dominance status, and what Goffman (1959) calls “self-expression in a highly competitive social milieu”. The involvement of young men in particular in episodes of collective violence is well documented in the literature.

The distinction between the two types of violence is not absolute, and an obvious overlap arises from the fact that young male syndrome can also occur in response to triggers that may seem trivial to outsiders.

2.2 *The Escalation of Collective Violence*

However, different mechanisms are responsible for the further escalation of violence (Adang, 2011a):

1. First, there is the (perceived) **risk of retaliation**. It is clear from the observational data that only a small minority of a group engage in the riskiest behaviours, while the majority of participants choose lower-risk alternatives (yelling, gesturing, running away) or do not engage at all. Even among those who are violent, objects are thrown much more often than physical fights are fought, and aggression is directed at inanimate objects (fences, buses, trains) rather than people who can fight back. There is something contradictory about this, because the Young Male Syndrome is characterized by risk-taking behaviour, and the perpetration of violence involves just that. However, within this framework, individuals seem intent on avoiding “unnecessary” risk and reducing risk. The fact that young men, when violent, act in groups is in itself a form of risk reduction, as is the fact that they avoid or flee from confrontations they seem unable to win, as observed on several occasions. In some respects, the data show that violence became more likely when police were not present at high-risk locations. In addition, police were more often avoided than confronted, and, especially among fans, most confrontations with police occurred only after police had taken some type of coercive action. Violent fans and protesters regularly took steps to conceal their faces to make detection more difficult and to avoid identification and arrest. During the latter part of the study period, surveillance cameras were introduced in soccer stadiums. It was clear that violent fans rejected these cameras, preferring to remain anonymous to authorities who might hold them accountable for their behaviour. These risk-reducing attempts to maintain “anonymity” (to authorities, not to fellow fans!) should be distinguished from the so-called deindividuation effect of “anonymity”, for which there is no evidence (Postmes & Spears, 1998). Evidence for bounded rationality theory (“bounded rationality”, McPhail, 1991) combined with the relevance of opportunities to be violent with limited risk of escalation provides a link between collective violence and situational crime prevention principles (Clarke, 1995).
2. The second important escalation mechanism is the existence of “**us versus them**” **antagonism**. The more antagonistic the relationships between different groups, the higher the frequency of observed violence. In the context of this study, this was clearly the case for the relationships between rival fan groups and for the relationship between certain groups of demonstrators (“autonomous”/“black bloc”) and the police. Stott and Reicher (1998a, p. 510) claim that other studies show that: “[...] Crowd conflict characteristically arises when official agencies such as the police or the army intervene against unofficial mass action [...]” Although the results of the observational study suggested that collective violence was not characteristically triggered by police action, collectively applied police coercive measures were often associated with an escalation of violence on the opposing side. The collective nature of these measures contributes to or

exacerbates (or may even create) an “us versus them” perspective, which can lead to more explicit ingroup/outgroup behaviour and more violence by individuals. Theoretically relevant here is the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM), which points out that collective “disorder” is enabled by the psychological salience of a common social identity among participants in a crowd (cf. also Bürger, 2024). The defining dimensions of this identity explain the normative boundaries of collective action (what people do) and the extent of participation (who participates and who does not) during a crowd event. It is argued that the dynamics of intergroup interaction are an essential component of the psychology of larger disputes. Stott and Reicher (e.g. 1998a) point out that when an originally heterogeneous crowd is treated as a homogeneous whole by the police, this causes members of the crowd to reconceptualize themselves as members of a common category, setting in motion a cycle of tension and escalating conflict.

2.3 Intermediate Conclusion: the Behaviour of People in Crowds

These observations lead to the following conclusions regarding the behaviour of people in collective settings (Adang, 2011a):

- The agency in collective violence is clearly at the individual level: people make individual decisions and do not behave more or less uniformly (the “illusion of unanimity” mentioned by McPhail, 1991). This does not change the fact that individuals are fundamentally social beings and that their decisions are influenced by their social environment. In both protest events and soccer matches, the relevance of the immediate context and the interactive “action-reaction” nature of these processes is obvious.
- There is no reason to believe that in collective contexts the mere presence in a crowd increases the likelihood of violence: The vast majority of people in the observed cases of collective violence (which included some serious riots that made media headlines) were not violent at all. The literature indicates that there are reasons to believe that many of those who actively seek violence in collective settings are also more likely to use violence in other situations (see e.g. van Ham et al., 2017, 2019), and, of course, violence does not occur at all in most collective situations (the study described focused specifically on situations in which violence was considered more likely).
- There is no reason to believe that people in collective settings show a higher tendency to so-called emotional or irrational behaviour. On the contrary, even in violent collective situations, people clearly made choices and behaved in ways that made sense to themselves. The choices people made seemed consistent with the model of (bounded) rationality (cf. McPhail, 1991): they prepared, pursued goals, and clearly considered risks. There is every reason to believe that people’s behaviour in collective settings is influenced by the same factors that influence

their “normal” everyday behaviour. Rather than behaving without norms, the data suggest that even in violent situations, certain norms seem to be considered, as shown by restrained behaviour (all-out violence is very rare), choice of “appropriate” goals, and examples of self-control. Moreover, both violent protesters and violent fans adhered to certain rules, the most important being to stick together and support each other during confrontations. In this respect, the results are consistent with Reicher (1984, 1996), who convincingly show that (perceived) norms become more rather than less important in collective situations, although the nature of the norms may vary.

2.4 *The Predisposition Debate*

There is theoretical debate among various explanations for collective violence (Reicher, 1996; Stott & Reicher, 1998b), with one side arguing for the importance of predispositions. This perspective suggests that collective violence is a result of the gathering of violence-prone individuals (e.g. “hooligans”). This approach does not explain how and why collective violence erupts in some circumstances and not in others—despite the presence of these individuals. The other side argues for the need for a contextual, group dynamic understanding of collective violence. The arguments presented here on the initiation/escalation model support this latter approach in terms of the relevance of context, intergroup interaction, and intergroup relations. At the same time, it is clear that there are variations in individuals’ willingness to engage in violence, with some actively seeking opportunities to become violent without the need for external triggers (other than the presence of a rival group). The initiation/escalation model of collective violence is a first step towards combining these different theoretical approaches (Adang, 2011a).

Work by Van Ham, Adang et al. (Adang & Van Ham, 2015; Van Ham et al., 2017, 2019) shows that each riot situation represents a unique intergroup context. In terms of the initiation/escalation model, there is a unique and dynamic mix of different (sub)groups with different social identities and with the presence or absence of young men with different inclinations and social backgrounds in situations with (potential) tensions and opportunities.

Van Ham et al. (2019) examined the criminal careers of 438 individuals involved in acts of public violence. Using group-based models, they distinguished different criminal careers. Many of the violent offenders had no criminal history. In addition, there was a small group of violent offenders who had a high frequency of offending, both individual and group violence, and were violent in a variety of settings. Although differences in criminal career characteristics and violent offending between perpetrators of public violence are not in themselves sufficient to explain public violence, the findings make clear that a developmental life course perspective may be helpful in explaining involvement in collective violence. Van Ham et al. argue that there are different categories of perpetrators of public violence whose behaviour is triggered by different processes. This helps explain the seemingly

contradictory findings of previous studies and points to new avenues for future research on the intra- and intergroup dynamics of public violence. This would strike a middle ground in the group dynamics versus predisposition debate, in which both concepts have their place.

3 Implications for Police Work

3.1 Terminology

Practitioners use different terms for public order interventions in connection with crowds. In order to understand police measures and to enable a holistic understanding, the strategic-tactical elements behind them are first briefly illuminated here.

Crowd control and riot control are terms frequently used to refer to measures to limit or control the behaviour of groups of people, possibly with the use of force. It is however an illusion that one could completely control the behaviour of large gatherings of people. Crowd management is a better term, defined (by Fruin, 1993) as the systematic planning and monitoring of the orderly movement and assembly of people. When crowd management involves taking steps to restrict or limit the behaviour of crowds, it is known as crowd control (restricting or limiting group behaviour). Crowd management is required whenever large groups of people gather in a place, not just after incidents. When incidents or violent confrontations occur, these riots must be brought back under control (riot control). This way of dealing with riots is the traditional way of maintaining law and order, using force to try to restore order when it has been lost.

Today's public order professionals are concerned with public order management, which (by analogy with crowd management) encompasses much more (cf. Fig. 1). It can be defined as the systematic planning for (by definition especially in advance) and influencing of (especially during) gatherings and events in public spaces (regardless of the number of people gathering/gathered) where there is a certain risk of disturbing public order. The goal of public order management in this context is to prevent any conflict, especially riots. From this perspective, crowd management is a part of public order management. Crowd control (as a subset of crowd management measures) comes into play when restrictive or controlling interventions are needed. In a small minority of cases, these interventions involve the use of force to contain and stop riots. It is important to recognize that these concepts are not distinct temporal phases. They are intertwined and coexist. Public order management aims to maintain a state of general "order", while riot control's starting point is a specific incident of disorder.

As Adang (2011b) indicates, the results of the studies described above have clear implications for the management of public order. To prevent collective violence, tensions should be avoided wherever possible and feasible. This requires supporting the legitimate activities and intentions of participants as much as possible and

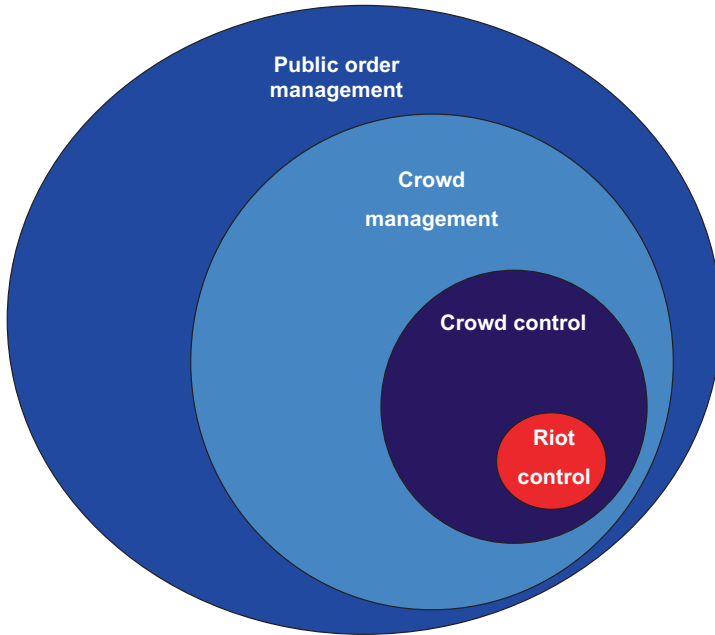


Fig. 1 Terminology explained (own illustration)

identifying potential tensions at an early stage. In addition, real-time monitoring and observation of events serve to notice instances where friction arises. Measures should be taken to prevent tensions or minimize their consequences as early as possible. This includes communicating with and informing participants in order to find out what moves them, to avoid misunderstandings about the measures taken, and to achieve conformity with the rules. Regarding groups of young men who seek confrontation, it will be important to identify and get to know them in order to be able to act on them at an early stage and make it clear to them what limits are set to their behaviour. Therefore, direct communication should also be made with these groups. For their risk perception, it should be clear to them (and others) what effective actions will be taken if they cross these boundaries. By getting to know them, their anonymity to authorities is reduced. As much as possible, one should avoid actions that would make confrontational ingroup/outgroup behaviour more likely by creating, emphasizing, or reinforcing an us-versus-them situation. Interaction and communication are important tactical tools in this regard. When violence does occur, it is critical to act in a timely manner and not wait for the situation to escalate and get out of control, and to do so in a focused and targeted manner that specifically targets those who cross boundaries.

3.2 *The Four Key Principles*

The observations of crowd behaviour and collective violence have led to the formulation of four knowledge-based key principles for public order and crowd management (Reicher et al., 2007), often referred to as strategic principles or conflict-reducing principles: be informed, facilitate, communicate, and differentiate. These now form principles for police action in various European countries, e.g. the Netherlands (Adang, 2009), Sweden (Adang, 2012; Holgersson & Knutsson, 2011), and the United Kingdom (HMIC, 2009).

The four key principles for public order and crowd management can be described as follows:

Be informed: Since groups act on the basis of social identities, and gatherings of people typically consist of multiple groups, it is of great practical importance to be informed (and educated) about the respective social identities: their values and norms, their goals and intentions, their understanding of what is right and appropriate, their prejudices and expectations of other groups, the history of interaction with these groups, and anything (dates, places, objects, forms of action) that has particular symbolic meaning. Information should focus not only on the plans of violent individuals (the typical goal of police intelligence), but also on understanding the social identities of the groups that will gather to understand what their goals are, whether and how to support them, and what actions would challenge them and make them sympathize with violent individuals in the crowd. The same efforts made to identify violent individuals should be made to understand group identity. Similarly, both factors should be given similar priority in briefings.

Facilitate: Rather than preventing people from doing what they want to do and thereby frustrating them, the emphasis should be on support at all stages of the operation: Mission planning must identify the legitimate goals of the crowd (e.g. safely attending an event, protesting, expressing opinions or emotions) in order to consider how best to design interventions to help achieve those goals. If for some reason these objectives cannot be achieved, it is important not to simply react negatively, but to find creative ways (that will be perceived as such) to achieve them. If potential or actual risks force the police to set limits on the crowd, it is especially important to make this clear. At the same time, alternative ways should be shown how the legitimate goals can still be achieved. This is why communication is so important (see also below). Especially when violence breaks out, the temptation to control and restrict can become greater. At this point, a clear indication that the police facilitate collective goals and that violence threatens them can make the difference between escalation and de-escalation. Of course, this assumes that those responsible for security are not only trying to facilitate the goals of the crowd, but that the crowd sees it that way. This again points to the importance of communication.

Communicate: One of the contradictions in public order management is that it is increasingly important to communicate with the crowd if you want to avoid a

potentially conflictual situation, but that it is in these circumstances that the crowd is least likely to trust what security officials say. Especially if there is a long history of conflict, even attempting to explain facilitating measures can be perceived as dishonest and increase hostility. Therefore, how communication is done is also important. For example, instead of relying solely on police communication teams, one could also use individuals who are trusted and respected by groups within the crowd—preferably as “one of us”. Of course, it will be almost impossible to find individuals who are accepted by all groups in the crowd, but it is critical that they are not “self-appointed” or chosen for their connections to the authorities but are seen as representative by significant portions of the crowd (again, cultural knowledge of the groups in the crowd is critical; for a practical example of this, cf. Bürger, 2024). To be truly effective, these communicators or facilitators should be available and active from the beginning (or even before the event, cf. Schenk & Bornhausen, 2024). It is indicative of the balance between repressive and mediating strategies that there are large reserves of armored vehicles, batons, etc. that are rarely used, while far less attention is paid to communications technologies. Large screens, mobile communication systems, and social media communications could be more useful than water cannons at many mass events.

Differentiate: It is important to be aware of the different identities of the gathered groups and their different ways of acting and reacting. It is even more important to act on this awareness and not treat all members of a crowd the same. A basic distinction that should be made is between what people actually do and not based on the category to which they (supposedly or not) belong. It is precisely when some people in the crowd begin to act in a hostile manner that it is important to treat the people in the crowd in a friendly manner. Just to stop the violence of the few, you have to be lenient towards the many. This is difficult because people tend to view other groups as homogeneous, so if some among them behave negatively, all will be viewed negatively. It is also difficult because the cost to the individual police officer (who is first in line) of treating someone with trust who is actually hostile is higher than treating them with hostility when they are actually trustworthy. To differentiate, more sophisticated tactics must be developed than it is normally the case, and differentiation is a consideration that should be incorporated into every tactical or strategic decision, training, planning, equipping, and crowd deployment.

3.3 The Appropriateness of Police Action

One of the central factors in participants’ decisions (whether or not to engage in violence) is their perceived adequacy of police actions and interventions during events (Stott & Adang, 2009). Participants themselves are acutely aware of the risk they pose to public order, and often these assessments accurately reflect the actual level of risk and the overall level of disruption observed—ideally, the police also

arrive at a similar assessment. The most effective way to prevent violent outbursts is to create a “balance” between the level of risk (as perceived by the participants themselves) and the police response (which hopefully reaches a similar conclusion with respect to the risk assessment and deploys appropriately coordinated measures). When such a balance is achieved, a culture of self-control emerges among participants, with violence-prone individuals marginalized and isolated. Anti-social behaviour is then not encouraged (in fact, it is often actively discouraged) and efforts are generally made to avoid conflict. If the balance is not achieved, this also has corresponding consequences: the perception of the inappropriateness of police action and increasing support for anti-social activities, and the emergence of uniform and comprehensive aggression.

3.4 Professional Risk Assessment

The basis for appropriate police action is a professional risk analysis. Adang (2011b) found in a comparative study of England, Germany (North Rhine-Westphalia), and Sweden that none of the countries studied had a well-developed risk model. It was speculated that maybe police forces and authorities are looking in the wrong direction when they are trying to find a practicable model. The quest for an ever more elaborate and refined model that includes all potential risk factors inevitably leads to an unwieldy instrument that is not and will never be used in practice other than as a bureaucratic exercise on paper. Invariably, the “risk analysis models” turn into a long list of real or imagined “risk factors” with little structure and little or no theoretical foundation. In this respect, the initiation/escalation model of collective violence could serve as the basis for a more practical risk assessment model. Applying the model to a specific event, the following questions should be asked and answered by way of risk analysis in relation to collective violence:

- What are potential frictions in this event that could lead to irritation or frustration?
- Is there any information that known groups of young “habitual offender” males intend to attend the event and, if so, what are their intentions?
- In relation to this event: what seem to be opportunities for offending/violence?
- What are the social identities of the different (sub)groups attending the event, what are the relationships between these different (sub)groups and between these (sub)groups and police, authorities, or organizers, and what sensitivities/ antagonisms are involved?

In answering these questions and performing the risk analysis, the specific nature and context of the event should be considered, such as infrastructure, types of individuals attending, and consumption of alcohol and drugs. When planning safety and security measures, the effects of these measures on the outcome of the risk analysis should be evaluated explicitly to avoid taking measures that are ineffective or counterproductive. As an example: applying measures intended for habitual offenders in an undifferentiated way to all participants/visitors may well lead to a perception of

disproportionality and illegitimacy that can contribute to the initiation or escalation of incidents. Due to the dynamic nature of events and of developing risks, events and participants should be monitored continuously to:

- Identify actual and potential frictions manifesting themselves
- Identify whether known young “habitual offender” males are present and manifest themselves in a way that shows their intention to initiate incidents
- Identify opportunities for offending/violence and individuals manifesting themselves in a way that shows their intention to take advantage of these opportunities
- Identify the presence of different (sub)groups and their interaction

As is evident from the nature of the questions and the items to be covered, a one-sided focus on habitual offenders should be avoided, as this ignores several important factors that contribute to the risk of an event. An approach should be taken to public events that reduces opportunities for violence to the greatest extent possible. To this end, it is worth exploring the potential of applying situational crime prevention principles to public events (cf. Herold & Bürger, 2024). The pre-event risk analysis should continue during the event. This requires the involvement of dedicated and competent analysts.

4 Influences of Research on Practice

In the police preparations for the European Football Championship Euro 2000, which took place in the Netherlands and Belgium, a “Police Behaviour Profile Euro 2000” was drawn up and approved by the authorities on the basis of the results of the observational studies and the practical expertise of the officers involved in the binational police project preparing for Euro 2000 in order to ensure uniform police action in the various host cities. At the core of this profile was the idea that a friendly but firm, low-key approach was most appropriate. Adang (2001) and Adang and Cuvelier (2001) reported the results of research on the implementation of the behavioural profile in all host cities and were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the friendly/determined “low-profile” approach. Characteristic of the “low-profile” approach was a substantial but limited number of police officers in daytime uniforms patrolling in pairs or small groups and interacting with fans. These interactions were friendly, but infractions by fans were responded to quickly. In the “low-profile” approach, police operations were based more on information provided by the spotter teams. In the contrasting “high-profile” approach, more than three times as many officers were visible in the streets. These officers were more often dressed in riot gear and accompanied by their riot vehicles; they formed larger groups, which made it less easy to approach them. It is important to note that the distinction made here is much more subtle than the distinction between paramilitary and non-paramilitary styles of public order maintenance (Jefferson, 1987, 1990; Waddington, 1987, 1993). In both “high-profile” and “low-profile” approaches, there was a clear command and control structure, and intervention units with their

equipment could be used. To varying degrees, these experiences were later used during Euro 2004 in Portugal (Stott et al., 2007, 2008), the 2006 World Cup in Germany (Schreiber & Adang, 2010), and Euro 2008 in Austria and Switzerland (Adang & Brown, 2008).

The studies by Adang and co-workers were also relevant in other practical applications. The city of Arnhem in the Netherlands was one of the host cities of Euro 2000, and for the tournament, the Arnhem police had paid particular attention to the quality of information gathering and information analysis. Following the tournament, beginning in 2002, the Arnhem police took initiatives to improve their information management and intelligence regarding soccer violence. Based on knowledge of the “young male syndrome” and the fact that violent soccer offenders are more likely to become violent on other occasions, they collected and analysed targeted information to better identify individuals and groups involved in inciting violent incidents. However, the approach was not just a traditional “hooligan” approach aimed at repression. From the beginning, the goal was to facilitate a tailored approach to policing fans, both at the individual and group level. In this way, the Arnhem police were less likely to be surprised by sudden incidents, were able to deploy fewer police (and especially fewer riot police) around soccer matches, and made more “better” arrests (in the sense that arrests led more often to successful prosecutions). At the individual level, specific approaches were developed in collaboration with the soccer club and youth workers to encourage individuals not to engage in violence (Ferwerda & Adang, 2005). The methodology was piloted in 17 other police departments and subsequently implemented in all Dutch police departments.

Other practical applications involve reforms in public order management in Sweden and the Netherlands. In Sweden, following disturbances during the EU summit in Gothenburg in 2001, the Swedish police adopted a new concept, called special police tactics, for the policing of public order. In 2006, the Swedish National Police Board decided to start a 3-year project to develop a long-term strategy for knowledge development with regard to these tactics, integrating research, training, and practice. The project provided a theoretical foundation for the special police tactics and a practical evaluation method for continuous knowledge development. The project methodology contributed to a developmental climate in the special police tactics organization. The project work also reinforced the basis for public order policing of crowds and contributed to upholding constitutional rights of assembly and freedom of speech (Adang, 2012). In the Netherlands, the organization and training of so-called mobile units (units composed of officers with dedicated riot control training) was radically changed following a study into public order policing in the Netherlands (Adang, 2009). The “new concept”, as it was called, was premised on the four strategic principles.

5 Conclusion

This chapter intended to demonstrate the importance of crowd dynamics in escalating collective violence. It is important to understand that it is primarily these dynamics that are responsible for a larger number of people engaging in collective violence, particularly those people who did not originally intend to engage in violent behaviour, who do not have a criminal record, and who would be described as casual offenders. At the same time, in each of these cases, only a small minority of those present were actively involved in the violence, suggesting that not all individuals are influenced in the same way. Although the specific contexts in which collective violence occurs may vary from place to place or country to country, as may the ways in which it is expressed, this should not detract from the fact that the underlying mechanisms are the same for both ideologically and non-ideologically motivated actors. The initiation/escalation model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding why and how collective violence occurs. Importantly, the model also allows us to determine what types of interventions may be effective (or counterproductive) in preventing collective violence from occurring or escalating and what types of interventions are not. Thinking through the model yields a whole toolbox of options based on the four key knowledge-based strategic and tactical principles for crowd policing as articulated by Reicher et al. (2004, 2007). As Maguire (2015; Maguire & Oakley, 2020) who examined protest policing in the USA found, these four principles—being informed, facilitation, communication, and differentiation—form the basis for a new vision of protest policing, and I would say more generally for public order and crowd management.

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Prof. Dr. Otto M. J. Adang is a behavioural scientist. He has held a chair in Public Order Management at the Police Academy of the Netherlands since 2004. Since 2016, he is also a professor by special appointment in the field of “Security and Collective Behavior” at the University of Groningen. He has been conducting research in the field of public order since 1985 and has published over 180 papers, book chapters, books, and other publications on the topics of security, use of force, and maintenance of order in the following fields: social psychology, investigative psychology, social simulation, criminal justice, criminology, police research, human rights, sports science, ethology, and primatology in English, German, and Dutch. Translations have been made into Catalan, Norwegian, Ukrainian, Russian, Swedish, and Spanish. Otto Adang is recognized far beyond the Netherlands as an international expert on major events, public order and crowd management, hooliganism, police use of force, and police and human rights. He has been involved in training, consulting, and research related to police operations at soccer and protest events throughout Europe.

Dr. Martina Schreiber, graduate psychologist. After studying in Constance, Glasgow, and Bonn, she was involved in the evaluation of police measures at UEFA Euro 2004 in Portugal as a staff member of the University of Liverpool. Subsequently, she became a research associate and member of the Public Order Expert Panel of the Police Academy of the Netherlands. Her research work included the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, the UEFA Euro 2008 Austria/Switzerland, numerous soccer matches, and demonstrations in Europe. In 2010, she completed her PhD at Jacobs University Bremen on “Group relations at crowd events”. She has publications in peer-reviewed journals and textbooks, presentations at congresses, conferences, seminars of fan-, human rights organizations, ministries, and police organizations. Her special commitment is the scientific monitoring of collegial consultation processes and organizational learning in police agencies. She has been a counsellor and therapist (CBT) since 2017.