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**Transformations of public gatherings into civil disorder in pandemic-driven Sweden and Finland[[1]](#footnote-1)**

This paper investigates the dynamics behind the escalation of peaceful public gatherings into civil disorder in Finland and Sweden, both of which have high levels of public trust in governance. The study focuses on how protest policing and police partisanship influence the transformation of collective action into civil disorder. The research questions are as follows: What factors occurred in the case of transformation, and what are the dynamics of civil disorder in these contexts? The study employs process tracing and crisp-set variant of qualitative comparative analysis to analyze data from ACLED on protests in Helsinki and Stockholm from March 2020 to March 2022. The paper delivers an understanding of the dynamics of civil disorder at public gatherings in pandemic-ridden democratic states. The findings offer insights into how pandemic-related restrictions influenced protester behavior and provide guidance for maintaining public order while respecting the right to protest in crisis situations.

Keywords: civil disorder, Finland, Sweden, coronavirus, public gatherings

**Introduction**

The coronavirus crisis triggered protests across the world. These demonstrations linked virtual actions with local assemblies, strengthening their impact on socio-political structures by creating well-established networks of engaged individuals demanding responses to COVID-19 (Douzinas 2023; Kanilmaz et al. 2024). This global phenomenon was related not only to pandemic policy but also addressed authoritarian regimes (Firat 2024) and political elites in democratic systems, like the Yellow Vests in France (Bendali et al. 2024) or against tightening abortion law (Rak and Bäcker 2023). Regardless of the type of political system, these protests manifested trust deficits in public governance during the pandemic (Chayinska et al. 2023). Common among protests worldwide was the broad scope of expressed grievances. Some individuals believed that the COVID-19 pandemic was a hoax to strengthen social control by state authority. Others presented a more balanced position, acknowledging the pandemic but disagreeing with the nature of anti-pandemic policies. Regardless of the level of trust in the existing threats to public health, collective actions sometimes transformed into civil disorder (CD).

This study investigates the dynamics and transformation of peaceful public gatherings into civil disorder in consolidated democracies during the pandemic, focusing on the experiences of Finland and Sweden. Scandinavian countries are characterized by higher levels of public trust in governance compared to other democracies, for instance in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE). Finland and Sweden balanced constitutional freedoms, such as the right to public assembly, with public safety considerations. This is evidenced by international organizations’ remarks about upholding the freedom of assembly. Over the years, Freedom House reports have consistently assigned Finland and Sweden the highest ratings for the protection of public gatherings, including during the coronavirus pandemic (Freedom House. Finland 2018–2024; Freedom House. Sweden 2018–2024). This indicates a stable and long-term commitment to safeguarding public gatherings in these countries. In contrast, in CEE states adopted more restrictive approaches, which often included systematic attacks on and limitations of peaceful protests, especially those opposing the government. While Finland and Sweden applied enforcement measures only when necessary and proportionate, police forces in CEE states were often more partisan, favoring official and pro-government collective actions. Similarly, detentions were significantly rarer in Finland and Sweden than in post-communist states. During the coronavirus pandemic, Finland and Sweden also differed in their responses to public gatherings. In Finland, limitations on public assembly were occasionally questioned and perceived as tactics against anti-government movements. Meanwhile, in CEE countries, such limitations were frequently used as a pretext to impose further restrictions on civil rights (Rak & Owczarek 2022: 176; Rezmer-Płotka 2022: 60; Skrzypek 2023: 34). Finland adopted pandemic management approaches similar to those of other European Union member states. In turn, Sweden implemented less stringent measures, relying more on recommendations than on enforced restrictions.

The research assumption is as follows: transforming collective action into civil disorder stem from protest policing, and the degree of police partisanship. Communication between the police and protesters, and the absence of forceful interventions and absence of police partisanship reduce the risk of collective actions as evolving into civil disorder. In turn, replacing communication with the use of force and presence of police partisanship increases the risk of disruption. The research questions are as follows: 1) What factors or combinations of factors co-occurred when transforming collective action into civil disorder? 2) What was the dynamic of developing civil disorder in both states? These research questions aim to identify the factors and combinations of factors that determined the presence or absence of CD and to trace the trajectory of this phenomenon in pandemic-driven democratic states.

The paper has the following structure: a literature review to position the research within the state of the art, a discussion of leading approaches, and the selection of theoretical frameworks. Next, the author summarizes responses to the pandemic crisis in both states to investigate the legal frameworks of public gatherings in the analyzed cities. The third section presents models of the transformation of public gatherings to indicate possible ways of transformation into civil disorder, taking into account evidence from Stockholm and Helsinki. The author then presents the methodological framework of this research and the selection of materials. The empirical sub-chapter consists of an analysis of CD cases and corona-related protests to identify the NC of the selected outcome and verify hypotheses.

The study offers an understanding of the dynamics of civil disorder at public gatherings as a form of political expression worldwide during times of complex crises, including public health threats, deficits of trust in public governance, rejections of limitations on political rights and freedoms, and responses to global challenges such as climate change. The study explores how the pandemic and associated restrictions influenced protesters' behaviors, leading to increased intensity despite health risks and limitations on civil rights and freedoms. The findings provide crucial guidance for crafting strategies that balance maintaining public order with respecting citizens' rights to protest in crisis-driven contexts.

**Theoretical background**

In-depth studies on the transformation of peaceful gatherings into civil disorder have provided many explanations of this phenomenon. Some scholars claim that the crucial factor is the interaction between individuals (McPhail 1971). It is worth noting that this approach is limited to protesters’ behaviors and ignores officers’ actions. It operates under the premise that communication with protesters is minimized, endorsing the use of coercive force or even unlawful policing methods. This traditional coercive model, called escalated force, was challenged by the experiences of anti-austerity movements (Della Porta et al. 2016) following the economic crisis of 2008 and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Martin 2021).

Based on these critical junctures, researchers have identified a new phenomenon—an transformation toward a more negotiated style of protest policing, known as negotiated management. This approach prioritizes communication between police and protesters to avoid resorting to coercive measures (Della Porta & Reiter 2006). Although this strategy did not replace the traditional approach, it led to the development of a more hybrid approach to protest policing (Rak 2021). In the escalated force model, police officers assign low priority to the right to public gatherings, whereas in the negotiated management model, officers uphold the right to peaceful assembly.

To distinguish these models of protest policing, Donatella Della Porta and Herbert Reiter propose a dual typology with nine indicators. Their framework includes: the degree of police force used, the number of prohibited behaviors, the selective nature of repressed groups, police adherence to the law, the timing of law enforcement, the confrontational or consensual nature of communication with demonstrators, the adaptability to emerging situations, the formalization of rules, and the degree of preparation (Della Porta & Reiter 2006). However, challenges remain due to imprecise definitions and unclear distinctions between extreme values (Rak 2021).

Assumption about relation between protest policing and the degree of police partisanship stem from Joanna Rak’s (2024: 47) theory about reasons of transforming collective actions into civil disorder. Each dimensions of protest policing may be located on continuum between escalated force and negotiated management. It means that model of protest policing or its dimensions closer to escalated force likely led to civil disorder. In turn, opposite model or its dimensions led to maintain peacefully character of protest. Second conditions of presence civil disorder is degree of police partisanship. It means that any police stance may be located on a continuum between partisan and neutral policing (Rak 2024: 8).

In this paper, the author, drawing on the work of McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy (2006), as well as Joanna Rak and Karolina Owczarek (2022), identifies six features of protest policing: 1) law enforcement's readiness to protect the right to assembly, 2) tolerance for community disruption, 3) communication with assembly participants, 4) the use of arrests to manage participants, 5) the use of force in conjunction with or instead of arrests, and 6) police partisanship. This theoretical background contributes to a deeper understanding of civil disorder and the policing of protests, taking into account both protesters’ behaviors and law enforcement’s responses. Essential features of each factors was presented in following Table 1:

*<Table 1. here>*

**Responses on coronavirus crisis in Finland and Sweden**

The authorities in Finland and Sweden adopted different approaches to dealing with the coronavirus crisis. Finland followed a strategy similar to other European states, which involved implementing lockdowns and restrictions on selected rights and freedoms. In contrast, Sweden developed and implemented a unique strategy in which public officials and the government focused on formulating recommendations and encouraging citizens to practice social distancing instead of imposing restrictions.

In both states, the first rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases occurred in November 2020, coinciding with the second wave of the pandemic in Europe. New infections stabilized at the beginning of June 2021. Another rapid surge occurred at the beginning of 2022, marking the last wave of the pandemic in Europe. The trajectory of the coronavirus crisis in both states was shaped by the authorities’ responses to the rapidly increasing number of confirmed cases.

*<Figure 1. here>*

In Finland, a state of emergency was rapidly announced almost unanimously on March 17, 2020. This led to the closure of schools and restaurants, a ban on gatherings of more than ten people, and the closing of the country’s borders. The first state of emergency was partially lifted on May 13, which was similar to other European states where most restrictions were withdrawn by mid-May 2020. This meant allowing public gatherings of up to 50 individuals, and with special permission, up to 500 people. On June 16, the emergency provisions ended entirely (Moisio 2020: 600). In contrast, Sweden did not ban public gatherings of more than 500 people until the end of March 2020. At March 27, Swedish authority states introduced limitations on gatherings up to 50, which entered into force to May 2020 (Brogårdh et al. 2021; Yan et al. 2020). Then in both states most of restrictions were lifted until outbreaking new cases in autumn.

The second wave of COVID-19 began in Europe at the beginning of October 2020, but authorities in both states delayed deciding whether to reintroduce restrictions. The Finnish government eventually reintroduced restrictions on public gatherings, limiting them to 10 people. These restrictions were lifted on October 1, 2021, meaning that freedom of assembly was strictly limited for almost one year. However, at the end of 2021, new restrictions on public gatherings were reintroduced on December 28 (Moisio 2020: 600).

In turn, in Sweden, at the end of November 2020, this limit was reduced to 8 individuals. Then, in mid-December, the Prime Minister of Sweden announced that wearing face masks on public transportation was mandatory and that all non-essential public services would be closed. A few weeks later, another law was passed to legitimize further anti-COVID measures, including limiting public gatherings (Brogårdh et al. 2021; Yan et al. 2020).

The differences between these states stem, among other things, from the nature of public governance and the role of government in decision-making. The Finnish approach to dealing with the pandemic was similar to that of other European states, concentrating executive power by adopting emergency measures and employing a centralized style of governance with a close circle of advisors and officials. The coronavirus was presented as an extraordinary threat that should be addressed quickly, even if that rapid response meant imposing strict and possibly unconstitutional limitations on rights and freedoms (Brogårdh et al. 2021).

In contrast, the Swedish government followed the advice of government agencies, primarily the Public Health Agency. According to the Basic Laws of Sweden, overruling these agencies' decisions is prohibited. This means that the government is obligated to follow their orders in crisis management. During the coronavirus crisis, the Swedish style of dealing with the pandemic was described as a "nudge" approach, which means a combination of a decentralized regime and a loose culture (Yan et al. 2020: 763). As a result, people's behaviors were influenced by voluntary recommendations rather than prohibitions or imposed restrictions. Authorities aimed to introduce measures accepted by society from a long-term perspective (Brogårdh et al. 2021: 2; Yan et al. 2020: 764). The Public Health Agency of Sweden was at the center of anti-COVID management and recommended physical distancing, frequent and careful handwashing, working or studying from home when possible, and avoiding interaction with infected individuals (Brogårdh et al. 2021: 9). School and business closures, travel limits, and mandatory stay-at-home orders were never fully implemented (Conyon et al. 2020: 24). As a result, Sweden had the lowest level of stringency among EU member states (Andersson & Jonung 2024). The stringency of anti-COVID measures was maintained at a similar level from March 2020 to May 2021. After that, restrictions were loosened. In comparison, in Finland from November 2020 to September 2021, measures were stricter, meaning a broader scope of limitations on certain rights and freedoms.

Scholars have provided evidence that the stringency of anti-COVID measures was related to life satisfaction. If the former was low, the latter increased, as was confirmed in the case of Sweden (Brogårdh et al. 2021). However, as the stringency of limitations grew, satisfaction decreased. In Sweden, life satisfaction was linked to trust in anti-pandemic policy, which was highest during the first wave of the coronavirus crisis (from March to May 2020). Over the months, trust in the Public Health Agency of Sweden and its epidemiologists decreased, which coincided with a decline in life satisfaction (Savage 2020). Both factors are related to the likelihood of increased political contention, which can transform into civil disorder. This means that during the pandemic, increased stringency of measures might lead to a higher likelihood of civil disorder. This assumption allows us to formulate another claim: that the high level of life satisfaction and the low level of restrictions' stringency in Sweden, compared to Finland, guaranteed lower chances of civil disorder there. Another factor of dynamic of protests was state of new confirmed COVID-19 cases and rate of mortality. Increasing numbers of protests occurred when and where these indexes were lower and limitations on public gatherings were more stringency (Neumayer, Pfaff & Plümper 2023).

Considering the differences in response to the coronavirus crisis in both states, it is necessary to examine the dynamics of the transformation of collective actions into civil disorder and the presence of corona-related protests. From March 2020 to March 2022, according to the ACLED database, in the capitals of both states, as centers of socio-political life and places most influenced by public gatherings, 599 demonstrations were organized (273 in Helsinki and 326 in Stockholm). Of these, 44 (30 in Helsinki and 14 in Stockholm) were related to coronavirus policy, including provisions about running companies, limitations on mobility, and against mass vaccination programs. Only 7.5% of all public gatherings were corona-related. This means that most protests were related to other issues, such as climate change (261 times – 36%). In other words, authorities' responses to the coronavirus crisis were not primarily contested by public gatherings. Of all the 599 protests registered in the ACLED database, public gatherings transformed into civil disorder 37 times (21 in Helsinki and 16 in Stockholm). Most of these were not related to coronavirus issues, meaning that protests against other issues often triggered violence in the public sphere. Given that the anti-COVID pandemic response involved more or less limiting opportunities to organize public gatherings, it is worth analyzing the corona-related protests and civil disorder during those times. These periods were recognized as critical junctures for the manifestation of contentious anti-pandemic policy. This is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

*<Table 2. Here>*

*<Table 3. Here>*

Evidence showed that there was no relationship between: 1) the presence of corona-related protests and civil disorder, 2) these two variables and the timing of the implementation of limitations, or 3) these two variables and the number of participants allowed to gather. This means that the context of public gatherings and police responses to these collective actions were crucial for the occurrence of civil disorder. In contrast, the type of limitations introduced and the policies regarding mass vaccination were more significant factors in the occurrence of corona-related protests than the timing or stringency of these limitations. From the perspective of the research aim of this paper, it is worth investigating how public gatherings, including corona-related cases, transformed into civil disorder.

**Models of transformation public gatherings**

Based on the experiences of Finland and Sweden in managing protests during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author proposes the following model for the transformation of public gatherings, taking into account various scenarios, including the presence of civil disorder. The model is based on data collected from the COVID-19 Disorder Tracker (The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project – ACLED). This free, weekly updated database covers conflicts and political violence worldwide. It focuses on highly detailed tracking of a range of violent and non-violent collective and individual actions (ACLED 2024). To describe each individual event, the database collects information from local media outlets. Thanks to this, ACLED enables monitoring and forecasting trends in violence and protests. When analyzing gatherings in Europe, the database uses a wide range of media coverage, which reduces the risk of bias in reporting events. This allows for research on the credibility of secondary data.

Initially, protesters expressed their demands related to pandemic management. If they encountered restrictions on public gatherings, the police communicated with them and accepted minor disruptions. This scenario led to the absence of civil disorder (ACD) as a result of two factors: protesters followed the rules, and the police employed a protest control strategy based on negotiated management.

If protesters violated COVID-19 restrictions or public order, the risk of civil disorder (PCD) increased. When police decided to detain individuals or use force against those not following orders but still allowed the gatherings to continue, protesters chose one of two strategies. On one hand, protesters complied with law enforcement orders (PCDa – 13 cases), which limited the development of civil disorder and maintained a peaceful atmosphere. This scenario occurred 13 times during the analyzed period. On the other hand, in response to detentions or the use of force by officers against those breaking the law, protesters continued to disrupt activities such as blocking traffic or clashing with police. In this case, law enforcement continued detaining or using force against protesters (PCDb), leading to a larger scale of civil disorder. Compared to PCDa, this scenario occurred only twice. This suggests that when protesters did not follow police commands, they were more likely to escalate tensions if their rights to public gatherings were guaranteed. An alternative action could have been police acceptance of disruption (PCDe), but this scenario did not occur in the selected cases. This means that in PCDb, police continued to control protests through the escalation of force, while in PCDe, they might have switched to negotiation management. However, the latter decision does not guarantee the end of civil disorder but might limit the escalation of tension. It led to the observation that the lack of change in the protest control model was the reason for the continuation of civil disorder, which might have been limited by the police's decision to accept disruption.

In cases where police detained or used force against those not following orders and ended demonstrations, protesters chose one of two scenarios. In the first scenario, they complied with the commands and dispersed (PCDc), stopping civil disorder at the beginning. This suggests that the escalation of force was effective in dealing with disruptions. This was the most frequently occurring scenario, happening 17 times. In the second scenario, despite police actions, protesters continued their demonstration (PCDd), increasing the risk of escalating civil disorder. However, this scenario occurred only three times. This indicates that protesters more often followed police orders and ended gatherings than continued demonstrations illegally. When police officers decided to disperse demonstrations and protesters did not accept this decision (PCDg), it occurred twice in Helsinki. The opposite scenario could have been acceptance of the police's decision (PCDf), but it did not occur in practice.

To sum up, the most frequently occurring scenarios were protesters following police orders after detaining and using force against individuals who broke the law (PCDa) and dispersing gatherings due to law enforcement commands. This analysis provides strong evidence of the efficiency of escalating force in the presence of civil disorder in Finland and Sweden. The model presented above is illustrated in the Figure 2:

*<Figure 2. here>*

**Materials and methods**

The assumption in this paper is as follows: the transformation of corona-related protests and other public gatherings into civil disorder was stimulated by the use of the escalated force model of protest policing instead of negotiated management. The aim of the paper is to discover which features of protest policing, according to McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy's typology (2006), as well as Rak and Owczarek’s findings (2022), were necessary conditions for this transformation. The research questions are as follows: 1) What factors or combinations of factors co-occurred when transforming collective action into civil disorder? 2) What was the dynamic of developing civil disorder in both capitals? The study employs process tracing and qualitative comparative analysis in the crisp-set variant (csQCA). Based on data from ACLED, the author collected information about protests in Helsinki and Stockholm from March 2020 to March 2022. In each case, corona-related incidents and other instances of civil disorder were examined separately. All of them were coded according to the five factors of protest policing mentioned above.

* Police respect and protection of protesters’ rights (RESPECT)
* Tolerance for community disruption (TOLERANCE)
* Communication between police and demonstrators (COMMUNICATION)
* Arrests as a method of managing demonstrators (ARREST)
* Force instead of or in conjunction with arrests (FORCE)

Excluding partisanship, and considering the fact that neither state capital organized pro-government gatherings, this factor was deemed irrelevant. Each factor occurred in either escalated force or negotiated management variants, with different essential features. According to csQCA provisions, the value of each factor may be 0 or 1, depending on the protest policing model. RESPECT, TOLERANCE, and COMMUNICATION were marked as 1 when they occurred in negotiated management. When the essence of these factors was characteristic of escalated force, they were marked as 0. Conversely, ARREST and FORCE were marked as 1 when these factors were characteristic of escalated force (and 0 if they were similar to negotiated management). Lack of any factor were marked as ̴ and has a opposite value. The outcome of the conjunction of these five factors was the mentioned-above model of the transformation of public gatherings during the coronavirus crisis (CODE OF SCENARIO). Based on the above model of the transformation of public gatherings (Figure 1), the author formulated eight hypotheses to identify the factors for each variant of the outcome:

H1: RESPECT \* TOLLERANCE \* COMMUNICATION \* ̴ ARREST \* ̴ FORCE -> ACD

H2: RESPECT \* ̴ TOLLERANCE \* COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* FORCE -> PCDa

H3: RESPECT \* ̴ TOLLERANCE \* ̴ COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* FORCE -> PCDb

H4: RESPECT \* ̴TOLLERANCE \* ̴ COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* ̴ FORCE -> PCDc

H5: ̴ RESPECT \* TOLLERANCE \* COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* FORCE -> PCDd

H6: RESPECT \* TOLLERANCE \* COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* FORCE -> PCDe

H7: ̴ RESPECT \* ̴ TOLLERANCE \* ̴ COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* FORCE -> PCDf

H8: ̴ RESPECT \* ̴ TOLLERANCE \* COMMUNICATION \* ARREST \* FORCE -> PCDg

Data regarding all protests organized in selected cities from March 2020 to March 2022 were collected in ACLED. They were coded into five factors (conditions) and entered two separated tables (Tables 3 and 4).

**From collection actions into civil disorder**

According to the ACLED database, during the analyzed period (March 1, 2020 – March 1, 2022), 599 demonstrations were organized in the capitals of Sweden and Finland, and protests transformed into civil disorder 37 times. In Helsinki, this occurred in 21 demonstrations, and in Stockholm, it occurred in 16 assemblies. A qualitative comparative analysis using the crisp-set variant allowed us to formulate the following conclusions.

Firstly, the absence of civil disorder (ACD) occurred just once, which is not sufficient to confirm the above-mentioned hypothesis about the co-occurred factors for this type of result. This suggests that the absence of civil disorder, despite the occurrence of the above-mentioned factors, might occur in a negotiated management model. To confirm this assumption, it is necessary to analyze cases of corona-related protests. This will be presented in the next part of the paper.

Secondly, for the scenario where, after some individuals were detained by police, the rest of the protesters complied with police commands (PCDa), the following conditions were necessary: RESPECT, TOLERANCE, COMMUNICATION, and ARREST. In contrast, FORCE was not necessary. This indicates that the pillars of negotiated management help ensure a limited scope of civil disorder. In this case, arrest as a method of managing demonstrators was used to prevent the escalation of disruption and was proportionate to the threat.

Thirdly, for the scenario where, after individuals were detained by police, the rest of the protesters continued disruption and/or clashed with officers, leading to the use of force by law enforcement (PCDb), the co-occurred factors were RESPECT, TOLERANCE, and COMMUNICATION. FORCE and ARREST were complementary but not necessary. This means that even though solutions characteristic of escalated force were avoided, collective actions might still transform into civil disorder. This implies that the law enforcement strategy was not sufficient to maintain the peaceful character of gatherings. Protesters’ attitudes toward escalating tensions were also significant, regardless of the police’s response.

Next, in cases where protesters ended demonstrations due to the police’s decision (PCDc), RESPECT and COMMUNICATION were necessary, while FORCE and ARREST were not. This signifies that a combination of some negotiated management solutions with escalation force limited the chances of developing civil disorder. It suggests that during the coronavirus period, this was the most efficient scenario in the presence of CD factors.

In contrast, when protesters continued gatherings despite officers’ commands to end them (PCDd), RESPECT, TOLERANCE, COMMUNICATION, FORCE, and ARREST were co-occurred factors. This means that if police tolerated community disruption (in contrast to PCDc), the chance to prevent civil disorder decreased. In that case, using methods characteristic of escalated force was not efficient in dealing with the threat. The results are presented in Table 4.

*<Table 4. here>*

To sum up, the tolerance of community disruption might or not limit the chance of escalating civil disorder. If this factor was present alongside arrests, either in conjunction or not, as a method of management, the scope of civil disorder was limited. In contrast, when police refrained from combining negotiated management with escalated force, it led to the continuation of civil disorder. Evidence confirms that a combination of methods from two different models of protest policing was crucial for the dynamic transformation of collective actions into civil disorder in consolidated democracies. This means that using arrest and force did not preclude the prevention of the escalation of civil disorder.

**Corona-related protests**

As mentioned before, over the two years of the coronavirus crisis (March 2020 – March 2022), protests against anti-pandemic strategies were not the most frequently occurring public gatherings. Moreover, civil disorder frequently occurred during non-corona-related events, such as protests against climate change (17 cases). Only 10 demonstrations against anti-pandemic policy escalated into civil disorder (22% of all CD cases). This means that protesters opposing COVID-19 restrictions generally did not seek to break the law and followed police commands regarding limitations on public events. Similarly to all civil disorder cases, a qualitative comparative analysis using the crisp-set variant allowed the formulation of the following conclusions about the dynamics of the transformation of corona-related protests into civil disorder.

Firstly, for ACD, no factor was a necessary condition. Even the absence of arrests as a method of managing demonstrators (value 0.94) was not a necessary condition, according to csQCA’s assumptions. This means that methods characteristic of escalated force also occurred in non-civil disorder corona-related gatherings. It confirms that a combination of two models of protest policing was efficient in decreasing the risk of the threat. Secondly, in the case of PCDc, only ARREST was a necessary condition. The rest of the factors had values lower than 0.95. This implies that the dispersal of corona-related protesters due to police decisions occurred after using arrests as a method of managing demonstrators. This is further evidence of the efficiency of combining the two approaches. Next, for the absence of acceptance of police decisions about dispersing gatherings by protesters (PCDg), the co-occurred factors were RESPECT, TOLERANCE, COMMUNICATION, and ̴ FORCE. In turn, ARREST was not a necessary condition, with a value of 0.66. This indicates that the absence of force used by law enforcement led to continued disruption, even if arrest was used as a method of managing demonstrators.

PCDd occurred just once during anti-pandemic policy gatherings, which is not sufficient for formulating conclusions about co-occurred factors for this result. In that case, the pillars of negotiated management were combined with ARREST. To verify hypotheses about PCDd, it is necessary to find additional cases. Compared to other cases (non-corona-related gatherings), where tolerance for community disruption was crucial, PCDd also occurred when police did not use force, either instead of or in conjunction with arrests. This suggests that the risk of this outcome increased when officers tolerated disruption while simultaneously using solutions characteristic of escalated force. The results are presented in Table 5.

*<Table 5. Here>*

To sum up, evidence from corona-related gatherings in both states confirmed that combining methods characteristic for escalated force and negotiated management style of communication increased chance to maintain peaceful character of protests. It stem from the fact that most demonstrators follow officers’ command. Individuals who stated against police’s orders were detained and excluded from events. Moreover, lack of using force instead of or in conjunction with arrests and tolerance for community disruption might increase risk of civil disorder gatherings. It implies that for efficient protest policing, what means reducing risk of civil disorder, it was necessary combining communication but not tolerance disruptions with detaining individuals who broke limitations.

**Conclusions**

The research facilitated the formulation of several key conclusions and the partial rejection of formulated hypotheses. Evidence did not support the notion that the use of escalated force measures, such as ARREST and FORCE, invariably resulted in the development of civil disorder. In numerous cases, these measures effectively minimized the risk of escalating threats. Conversely, a policing approach centered on communication with protesters, respecting their rights to organize public gatherings, and tolerating disruptions did not ensure the absence of civil disorder. Indeed, such an approach may, in certain circumstances, increase the risk of civil disorder. This suggests that the presence of peaceful gatherings requires a specific combination of policing methods, which must account for the behaviors of protesters. This finding supports the assertion regarding the growing importance of a hybrid strategy in managing collective actions.

Finland and Sweden exemplify differing approaches to addressing the coronavirus crisis. The latter aligned with that of other European states, characterized by centralized decision-making, whereas Sweden delegated decision-making authority to experts and non-executive bodies. Despite these divergent strategies, the levels of civil disorder in both capitals were similar and largely incidental. This indicates that there was no direct correlation between the stringency of restrictions and the incidence of civil disorder. Rather, instances of disorder primarily stemmed from the behaviors of protesters, particularly those who failed to comply with police directives. Initially, law enforcement employed negotiated management solutions; however, when participants violated agreed-upon protocols, officers resorted to escalated force measures to address disruptors. This suggests that excessive tolerance of disruption by the police could exacerbate civil disorder, underscoring the effectiveness of a balanced strategy in maintaining the peaceful nature of public gatherings.

In Stockholm, the less restrictive approach to managing the pandemic did not result in fewer public gatherings. Instead, the majority of these gatherings centered on demands related to climate change. In contrast, Helsinki experienced a higher frequency of corona-related demonstrations and instances of civil disorder. This suggests that the less stringent policy was more effective in maintaining the peaceful nature of gatherings than the approach adopted in Finland.

The presented research tool enhances the tracing of the transformation of collective actions into civil disorder by providing data analysis and visualization, helping scholars understand the dynamics of this phenomenon. The construction of the research tool is based on interactions between police and protesters, specifically focusing on the former's response to the latter's behavior. This approach identifies patterns in protest policing and the trajectory of civil disorder. The research tool also allows researchers to explore various scenarios of civil disorder escalation, aiding in conflict prediction and prevention. It helps construct hypotheses about the conditions necessary for different types of civil disorder by identifying key factors, enabling scholars to test their theories with empirical data. Additionally, precise data analysis through the research tool can reveal subtle differences between types of civil disorder, allowing for more effective and targeted interventions.

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**Tables an Figures:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Factors/ Model of protest policing | Escalated force | Negotiated management |
| extent and scope of right to peaceful gatherings’ protection (RESPECT) | Recognizing some assemblies as illegitimate and repress them by law enforcement. Unequal treatment of citizens in the line of will of the political elites. | Universality of the right to peaceful assembly are accepted by law enforcement. Officers aim to protect human rights, life and property. |
| Police tolerance for community disruption (TOLERANCE) | Police officers tolerated only the familiar and non-disruptive forms of protest. | Officers accept disruption as a by-product of assemblies. They do not prevent demonstrations but may seek to curb or reduce disruptions. |
| communication between the police and  demonstrators (COMMUNICATION) | Communication at minimal bare, except infiltration and acting as agent provocateurs by officers.  The police avoid conferring with assembly organisers and refuses to give up any assembly control to the protesters. | The police initiate and maintain communication with protesters in many ways and negotiated every aspects of demonstrations, including time, place, limitation, organizing issues. |
| the extent and manner of arrests as a method of managing demonstrators (ARREST) | Arrests are widespread and may even be carried out when any regulations is broken. | Arrests as last-resort tactic and only against individuals who violate the law. Police repeatedly warn them they are breaking the law, instead of arrest immediately. Necessary arrests are carried out with proper documentation and in an orderly way to avoid injuring assembly participants. |
| force instead of or in conjunction with arrests (FORCE) | Force is a standard way of dealing with assemblies. Officers confront protesters with a noticeable show of force, which increases gradually unless the demonstrators obey police instructions and limit their activities. The use of force includes riot control techniques, tear gas, batons, fire hoses, water cannons, electric cattle prods, riot formations, dogs, and horses, which displace arrests. | Officers only use minimum necessary force to fulfil their duties, especially protecting people and property, and detaining lawbreakers. They prefer using cordoning off the assembly area and negotiating with assembly participants |
| police partisanship (PARTISANSHIP) | Police labelling participants of as violators of law and pandemic restrictions. They ignoring similar behaviour of state assembly participants. Officers calling protesters mad and irrational, as threat for public order. | Police report about protest without its evaluation, avoid precludes identification and political stigmatisation of its participants. |

Table 1. Features of protest policing’s factors in negotiated management and escalated force. Source McPhail, Schweingruber & McCarthy 2006; Rak & Owczarek 2022.

Obraz zawierający tekst, zrzut ekranu, linia, diagram

Opis wygenerowany automatycznie

Figure 1. COVID-19 confirmed cases in Finland and Sweden. Source: Our World in Data (2024).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of restrictions on public gatherings** | **Number of public gatherings** | **Number of corona-related gatherings** | **Number of civil disorder** |
| Up to 10 (March 17 – May 13, 2020) | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Up to 50 (June 1 – July 31, 2020) | 18 | 0 | 1 |
| Up to 50 (September 1 – 30, 2020) | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| Up to 10 (October 1, 2020 – August 31, 2021) | 161 | 18 | 9 |
| UP to 50% of the normal capacity to be used in indoors premises and 2-metre social distance obligation (September 1, 2021 – October 1,2021) | 21 | 1 | 1 |

Table 2. Dynamics of transformation collective actions into civil disorder and corona-related protests in periods of entered limitations on public gatherings in Finland. Source: Own study.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of restrictions on public gatherings** | **Number of public gatherings** | **Number of corona-related gatherings** | **Number of civil disorder** |
| Up to 50 (March 27 – May 2020) | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| Up to 50 (October 2020 November 2020) | 34 | 0 | 2 |
| Up to 8 (November 24, 2020 – May 12, 2021) | 91 | 6 | 4 |
| Up to 8 (December 2021 – February 8, 2022) | 23 | 2 | 0 |

Table 3. Dynamics of transformation collective actions into civil disorder and corona-related protests in periods of entered limitations on public gatherings in Sweden. Source: Own study.

Figure 2. Model of transformation public gatherings during coronavirus crisis. Source: Own study.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DATE | PLACE | RESPECT | TOLLERANCE | COMMUNICATION | ARREST | FORCE | CODE OF SCENARIO |
| 03.09.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 29.05.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDb |
| 22.05.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | PCDc |
| 16.05.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDb |
| 15.05.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | PCDc |
| 11.05.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 08.05.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | PCDb |
| 06.03.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDc |
| 26.11.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 19.11.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 14.11.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 07.11.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | PCDc |
| 06.11.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | PCDc |
| 10.06.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDc |
| 03.06.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDa |
| 25.04.2020 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 15.02.2022 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 14.02.2022 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 05.02.2022 | Helsinki | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 11.12.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 06.12.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 15.11.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 12.11.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 11.11.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 09.11.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 08.11.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 08.10.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 02.10.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 29.09.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 30.06.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDa |
| 20.06.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDd |
| 20.04.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 30.01.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 06.12.2020 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDd |
| 03.10.2020 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDc |
| 14.08.2020 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDa |
| 20.06.2020 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDd |

Table 4. Transforming collection actions into civil disorder in pandemic period in Stockholm and Helsinki. Source: ACLED 2024.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| DATE | PLACE | CD | RESPECT | TOLLERANCE | COMMUNICATION | ARREST | FORCE | CODE OF SCENARIO |
| 12.02.2022 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 13.02.2022 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 11.02.2022 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 05.02.2022 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 05.02.2022 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 04.02.2022 | Helsinki | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | PCDc |
| 03.02.2022 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 28.12.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 20.11.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 15.11.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 18.09.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 13.08.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 13.08.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 24.07.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 23.07.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 03.07.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 17.05.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 11.05.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 01.05.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDd |
| 20.04.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 18.04.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDg |
| 10.04.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDc |
| 20.03.2021 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | PCDg |
| 14.02.2021 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 12.12.2020 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | PCDg |
| 10.10.2020 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 08.10.2020 | Helsinki | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 24.09.2020 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 08.08.2020 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 08.05.2020 | Helsinki | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 22.01.2022 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 12.12.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 30.10.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 06.06.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | ACD |
| 15.05.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 01.05.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 20.03.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | ACD |
| 06.03.2021 | Stockholm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | PCDc |
| 21.01.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 15.01.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 14.01.2021 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 29.10.2020 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 22.04.2020 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |
| 14.03.2020 | Stockholm | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | ACD |

Table 5. Transforming corona-related gatherings into civil disorder in pandemic period in Stockholm and Helsinki. Source: ACLED 2024.

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