Police Executive Research Forum

Policing Mass Demonstrations

Recommendations for Policy, Training, and Community Engagement

Final Report | December 2025

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LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHUCK WEXLER

Colleagues,

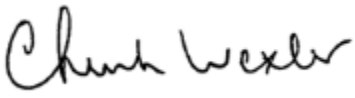
In 2006, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) published *Police Management of Mass Demonstrations: Identifying Issues and Successful Approaches*. In the forward to that report I wrote, "perhaps there is no greater challenge for police officers in a democracy than that of managing mass demonstrations." This statement remains just as true today as it did nearly two decades ago. In fact, the challenges of policing today's mass demonstrations have taken on even greater salience, given the evolving nature of these events.

New difficulties have emerged. How do agencies plan for mass demonstrations by groups with no clear leader or organizer? How do agencies address counterprotesters in a way that offers everyone the same ability to freely express their views without risking conflict between the groups? How do agencies differentiate between peaceful protesters and bad actors who use protests as cover for criminal behavior? And most importantly, how do agencies effectively engage and manage crowds when police themselves are the subject of the protest? Police have the responsibility to address these issues while also ensuring that individuals who come to protest peacefully can do so.

Fortunately, our knowledge about how agencies can (and should) police mass demonstrations has evolved in kind. This report will be the fifth in a series of reports released by PERF since 2006. Consistent with our best research on crowd management practices, PERF has provided guidance to police leaders that encourages communication, coordination, training, restraint, and transparency. PERF continues to be deeply dedicated to supporting police leaders in preparing their agencies for success during these events.

This report offers a snapshot of what agencies across the country are doing to prepare for mass demonstrations. We present findings from a nationally representative survey on three domains: policy, training, and community engagement. We contextualize the national findings with in-depth findings from site reviews with three agencies that are ahead of the curve with their mass demonstration practices.

We hope the information contained in this report will help police leaders assess their current approach to mass demonstrations and offer pathways for improvement.



Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) would like to thank the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice for initially supporting this study under their 2021 Research and Evaluation on Policing Strategies for Civil Disturbances. We support NIJ's desire, under this solicitation, to conduct rigorous research that helps us better understand the factors that lead to crime and disorder at some mass demonstrations but not others. Our goal with this project is to provide that knowledge and better equip police leaders to manage these events in a way that protects free assembly and expression while maintaining community safety.

The authors would like to personally thank PERF for funding this project when the U.S. Department of Justice shifted its priorities in 2025, resulting in the termination of the grant just months before the study was set to end. Without stopgap funding support from PERF, it would not have been possible to analyze the data collected from our national survey and in-depth site reviews or to write this report. The authors are deeply dedicated to PERF's mission of advancing policing and are proud to be part of an organization that stands behind that mission even when doing so is difficult.

We are also deeply grateful to our partner agencies that participated in in-depth reviews, including the Tampa Police Department, Omaha Police Department, and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department. Thank you for opening your doors to us, providing your staff with the time and space to participate in our interviews, allowing us to carefully review your policy and training materials, and connecting us with leaders in your community. We appreciate your willingness to share your experience with us and in turn, the field, so that we can support others in their approach to mass demonstrations.

Finally, we would like to thank the project's subject matter experts—Dr. Ed Maguire, Dr. Logan Kennedy, Matthew Tye, and Jeffrey Carroll—who inspired this research and provided valuable feedback on the proposal and data collection instruments.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The police have a complex role in managing mass demonstrations, requiring them to balance competing priorities and obligations. On the one hand, they must uphold the fundamental right to free assembly and expression guaranteed by the United States Constitution, while on the other hand, they must maintain safety and order. Although most mass demonstrations are peaceful, some can escalate into widespread civil disturbances. The primary challenge for agencies, then, is to implement training, policies, and crowd management approaches that prepare officers to safely and effectively facilitate the vast majority of peaceful protests while also having plans and contingencies in place should property destruction or violence occur. Too much focus on either outcome leaves agencies unprepared and can result in inappropriate responses that have unintended consequences.

For nearly two decades, PERF has provided guidance on effectively policing mass demonstrations to help police leaders balance these competing aims. PERF's work has explored the changing nature of protests in the United States—such as the shift towards leaderless demonstrations—and, consistent with modern policing, encouraged broader cultural shifts toward restraint, legitimacy, and transparency. PERF's protest-related reports underscore the importance of preserving protesters' constitutional rights, minimizing the use of force and arrests, engaging and communicating with the community, proactive planning, and regular training.

Notable gaps remain in practice despite advancements in knowledge on how to effectively police mass demonstrations. The challenges of policing mass demonstrations became clear most recently in 2020 when a wave of nearly 18,000 mass demonstrations emerged that year around the country, primarily over concerns about police use of force. Many agencies were unprepared for these events and were criticized for their responses. *The events of 2020 suggest that the way agencies approach mass demonstrations varies considerably across the country. However, no national data are available on mass demonstration policies, training, or community engagement efforts in policing.* This information would be critically helpful in identifying gaps in the field and allocating resources most effectively to support agencies.

Purpose of Project

We conducted a two-phase study to identify critical gaps in how police agencies plan for and respond to mass demonstrations, understand how these approaches have evolved since 2020, and explore emerging innovations.

First, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of police agencies about their current policies and procedures, training, and programs for communication and community engagement related to mass demonstrations. We also asked agencies to report the number of demonstrations that occurred in their communities between 2020 and 2022 and the nature of those events. *This effort represents the most*

comprehensive survey to date on police protest practices. The results from the national survey provide a cross-sectional snapshot of the most commonly used police protest practices, establish a baseline for the extent to which promising or evidence-based practices have been adopted, and highlight shortcomings in practice.

Second, we conducted an in-depth review of three agencies' protest management practices. Reviews involved interviewing agency staff, examining protest-related policy and training materials, and speaking with agency partners. The results from the in-depth reviews allow us to understand what makes these agencies so successful in protest management and highlight the emergence of new innovations since 2020.

Key Findings

A total of 705 municipal, county, and special jurisdiction police agencies responded to our national survey. Based on our survey responses, we recruited three agencies—Tampa Police Department, Omaha Police Department, and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department—to participate in an in-depth review of mass demonstration response practices. Key findings from these activities are reported in the following sections and provide the basis for this report's recommendations.

Most police agencies lack a dedicated policy for mass demonstrations. While many agencies had provisions specific to mass demonstrations embedded within other policies, **just 39 percent of agencies in our national sample reported having a *dedicated* policy.** This figure varied by size and region—for example, 57 percent of agencies with more than 250 sworn officers reported having a policy, compared to slightly more than one-third (37 percent) of smaller agencies. Further, 66 percent of agencies in the Western United States reported having a policy, compared to about 40 percent or fewer agencies in other regions. Of agencies without a dedicated mass demonstrations policy, one-third reported that they plan to develop one in the near future.

During our in-depth reviews, we learned about the importance of having a dedicated, comprehensive, and detailed mass demonstrations policy that gives officers clear guidance for dealing with these difficult events. Policies—which are most effective when tailored to local context—should articulate the agency's philosophy on crowd management, cover critical topics such as use of force and arrest, and offer clear procedures from planning through post-event review.

Many agencies train their officers on mass demonstrations, but few do so regularly. Our survey showed that 71 percent of police agencies provide training to their officers on mass demonstrations, either in the academy or during in-service training, though just 40 percent provide both. This pattern holds across the country, but agencies with more than 250 sworn officers are more likely to provide training in both formats (65 percent compared to 39 percent of smaller agencies). Of agencies that provide in-service training, just 37 percent do so regularly (i.e., annually), whereas 54 percent provide it on an as-needed basis, such as ahead of a major event or when designated as a training priority by agency leadership.

Training was universally reported as a key element to successful mass demonstration response by stakeholders we spoke with during our in-depth reviews. Not only are mass demonstrations uniquely challenging to police, but their nature is also constantly evolving. Further, recruitment and retention issues in policing mean that many officers likely lack experience in responding to these events. Thus, it is vital that officers be equipped with modern knowledge and tactics to effectively police crowds and given the opportunity to regularly put those skills into practice. For most officers, this means offering academy training as well as in-service training every year or every few years. Dedicated crowd units may train up to multiple times per year.

The value of mutual aid is well understood in the field—67 percent of agencies reported having a standing mutual aid agreement in place with neighboring jurisdictions. However, we learned that just 27 percent of agencies with mutual aid agreements in place conduct joint training exercises with their partners.

Community engagement is a critical component of successful mass demonstration response, and many agencies make concerted efforts to engage protesters and non-protesters alike before and during these events. According to our survey, nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of agencies engage directly with event leaders for planning and facilitation purposes. Similarly, 63 percent of agencies report regularly communicating with the public during a mass demonstration through social media, press releases, or news media. However, the vast majority of communication focuses on traffic updates, with fewer agencies highlighting positive engagements, examples of peaceful protest, or event challenges.

In comparison, few agencies engage the community in more substantive efforts to plan for and respond to mass demonstrations. For example, just 22 percent of agencies seek community input on their mass demonstration policy. Further, about one-tenth of agencies involve the community in training exercises or involve the community in after-action reviews.

Our site reviews, however, made clear that community engagement cannot be isolated to mass demonstrations planning or response. Instead, it must be comprehensive, ongoing, and integrated into the broader culture and operations of the agency. Agencies in Tampa, Omaha, and Las Vegas discussed numerous programs they have established to build authentic relationships with the communities they serve on a daily basis. Even though these programs were not created specifically to improve mass demonstration response, they are one of the most important factors in success.

Recommendations

POLICY

Implement a standalone mass demonstrations policy. A single, cohesive, and comprehensive policy that addresses key issues—communications, planning, crowd dispersal, use of force, arrests, and demobilization—within the unique context of mass demonstrations is needed to guide officers during

chaotic and confusing events. Review and update policies regularly to stay current with best practices.

Explicitly state the agency's philosophy for managing mass demonstrations. Agencies should clearly articulate their purpose, values, priorities, and ethical principles regarding mass demonstrations to establish a foundation for the policy.

Address the First Amendment rights of demonstrators, observers, and journalists. Policies should explicitly identify the rights of demonstrators, observers, and journalists during a mass demonstration, along with directions for engagement.

Provide clear, specific guidance on the use of less-lethal weapons. Given the potential to aggravate crowds or seriously injure someone when deploying less-lethal tools in crowd settings, it is imperative that agencies provide clear guidelines about how these weapons are used during a mass demonstration. Importantly, policies should prohibit indiscriminate use of less-lethal weapons.

Limit the use of mass arrests whenever possible and provide explicit guidelines for conducting them when necessary. Selective arrests should be prioritized, identifying and arresting persons responsible for violence or significant property damage. Mass arrests should be used in limited circumstances. When mass arrests are necessary, policies should specify who may authorize them and under what conditions and provide specific procedures for carrying them out.

Define preparation protocols for planned demonstrations. Agencies must establish comprehensive planning protocols to ensure they adequately staff, resource, and respond to mass demonstrations. These planning protocols should define responsibilities at each level of the organization.

Require a written incident action plan (IAP) for planned demonstrations to outline objectives and operational strategies. This document should include specific plans for a variety of contingencies to up to and including a mass casualty response plan. To ensure IAPs are regularly and consistently used across events, we recommend formalizing an IAP process within a standalone mass demonstration policy.

Include guidelines for briefing officers when they arrive at demonstrations in your mass demonstrations policy. Require incident commanders to brief officers ahead of responding to a demonstration on the purpose of their presence, the agency's mission, which behaviors are to be tolerated, and the present status of the incident

Require after-action reviews (AAR) and outline how they will be shared with the community, to support continuous improvement and transparency. Agency policy should specify when AARs must be conducted, what stakeholders should be involved, what core topics must be addressed, and how reports will be shared, ensuring reviews are consistent, thorough, and actionable.

TRAINING

Begin mass demonstrations training in the academy, then offer in-service training to all officers regularly and ahead of major events. Skills are perishable and require consistent reinforcement and recurring practice. Embedding this training early in officers' careers and maintaining it through regular in-service instruction can significantly enhance readiness, ensure consistency, and mitigate the potential for errors.

Training should cover modern concepts in crowd psychology, such as the Elaborated Social Identity Model. We suggest that training on evidence-based models of crowd psychology can help officers understand how crowds respond to police actions and can inadvertently escalate tensions. This includes the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM), which posits that crowds are composed of multiple subgroups, each with distinct norms and values, rather than a single entity.

Incorporate scenario-based exercises into the mass demonstrations curriculum. Effective, high-quality training leverages experiential learning methods—such as scenario-based training—that allow learners to apply skills in realistic, high-pressure settings. We recommend simulating real-world conditions during training exercises. Consider including fire departments and paramedics in these training scenarios.

MUTUAL AID

Establish Mutual Aid Agreements with neighboring jurisdictions. Mass demonstrations often require support from multiple police agencies. Mutual aid agreements (MAA) provide a framework for agencies to assist one another across jurisdictional boundaries.

MAAs should dictate a lead agency and a superseding set of policies that will govern a joint response to mass demonstrations. Ambiguity regarding command authority or policies can slow decision-making, lead to operational conflicts, and expose the lead agency to reputational risk.

MAAs should require agencies to conduct joint training exercises. Joint training allows partners to clarify policy differences, build familiarity, and practice coordinated responses.

COMMUNITY

Develop a public communication strategy during mass demonstrations to provide timely and accurate information, dispel misinformation, and build community trust. Provide contemporaneous updates to the media and the public and use a range of platforms to enhance reach.

Engage the community in preparing for and reviewing the response to demonstrations to strengthen trust and build lasting partnerships. Involve the community in policy development, training, and mass demonstration responses. Community partnerships enhance trust and legitimacy and offer critical information and support during demonstrations.

DATA COLLECTION

Institute systematic collection of data on mass demonstration incidents and agency response, specifying what data will be collected, how, and for what purpose. Systematic data collection supports future event planning and comprehensive AARs, demonstrates accountability, and can help defend against post-event criticism or litigation. At a minimum, agencies should record event ID, event name/cause, location, crowd size estimates and sources of estimates (e.g., social media activity), use-of-force types, officer and civilian injuries, arrests, and significant issues (e.g., violence, destruction, counterprotests).

TECHNOLOGY

Consider integrating real-time crime centers (RTCC) as a core component of mass demonstration response. RTCCs have quickly become an important part of mass demonstration response in some agencies as they allow for the synthesis of vast information across a range of sources, live monitoring, and better operational decision-making. Agencies should explore the technologies used in these facilities, develop policies for their deployment, institute strong privacy protections, and work with the community during their integration.

"A delicate and fragile balance exists between the police maintenance of order and security and the facilitation of a peaceful protest."

David Baker (2019)

INTRODUCTION

The police have a long history with protests and mass demonstrations. In fact, one factor driving the emergence of the profession in the 19th century was the need to address growing civil unrest in major cities, such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston (MacDonald, 2025; Marshall, 2020; Uchida, 2021). More than a century later, a roundtable of police leaders, convened by the Police Executive Research Forum, identified the management of mass demonstrations as one of the most critical issues facing the profession (PERF, 2006). Since then, PERF has produced five reports with recommendations for effectively managing protests and mass demonstrations (see sidebar).

When it comes to mass demonstrations, the police have a complex role that requires them to balance competing priorities and obligations. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees "the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Police must uphold and protect these fundamental rights to free assembly and expression but also carefully balance this duty with their obligation to maintain safety and order. While most mass demonstrations are peaceful, they are not always lawful, and by design, some use acts of civil disobedience to raise awareness for a cause. In other cases, mass demonstrations can devolve into civil disturbance and result in property destruction and violence (Major Cities Chiefs Association, 2020).

PERF's Work on Policing Protests

- *Police Management of Mass Demonstrations: Identifying Issues and Successful Approaches* (2006)
- *Managing Major Events: Best Practices from the Field* (2011)
- *The Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: Promising Practices and Lessons Learned* (2018)
- *Rethinking the Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: 9 Recommendations* (2022)
- *Police-Media Interactions during Mass Demonstrations: Practical, Actionable Recommendations* (2024)

The way police have responded to mass demonstrations has evolved throughout history. In the 1960s and early 1970s, for example, police primarily relied on the *escalated force model*. This model assumes that dominant displays and deployments of force by police encourage protesters to remain peaceful or otherwise compliant with laws and directives. Police increase the degree of force they apply until compliance is achieved (Harrison et al., 2022; Maguire & Oakley, 2020).

The escalated force model is based on social contagion theories of crowd psychology (Le Bon, 1896), which view crowds as "unreasonable, unruly, and dangerous" (Maguire & Oakley, 2020, p. 48). According to social contagion theories, within crowds, individuals' identities give way to groupthink, which allows disorderly, destructive, and violent behaviors to spread rapidly via social contagion. This

view of crowds justifies and obligates police to respond aggressively to protests and mass demonstrations, given their potential for danger.

Research, however, has found little support for social contagion theories of crowd psychology, and thereby the escalated force model. These perspectives have been found to be not merely ineffective but actually counterproductive; when police use aggressive tactics, they risk turning an otherwise peaceful crowd hostile (Lichbach, 1987; Maguire, 2022; Maguire & Oakley, 2020; Moore, 1998; Reicher et al., 2004). Indeed, several major commissions—including the Johnson Commission (1967), Kerner Commission (1967), Eisenhower Commission (1969), and Scranton Commission (1970)—were formed in the aftermath of protests that took place in the 1960s and 1970s, and all came to a generally similar conclusion: The use of aggressive police tactics during mass demonstrations antagonizes crowds, foments hostility towards police, and provokes violent and destructive behavior.

The escalated force model eventually gave way to the *negotiated management model*, which dominated protest management approaches from the 1970s until the late 1990s. The negotiated management model emphasizes communication between police and protesters before an event occurs, police facilitation of demonstrations, and the minimization of police coercive authority (Harrison et al., 2022; Maguire & Oakley, 2020). The negotiated management model is rooted in modern perspectives on crowd psychology, specifically the Elaborated Social Identity Model, or ESIM. According to ESIM, crowds are composed of several subgroups, each with varying norms and values. Individuals subscribe, to some degree, to one or more of these group identities, but they do not completely withdraw from their own identity (as described by social contagion theories). Viewing crowds from this perspective has several practical implications. For example, 1) crowd behavior will vary depending upon the group(s) that are involved, and 2) police can better manage crowds by understanding what groups are involved in a protest because their responses can account for the groups' values and priorities and how to best influence them (Reicher et al., 2004). Research has generally been supportive of approaches to managing protests and mass demonstrations that rely on a negotiated management model and are grounded in ESIM (e.g., see Stott et al., 2025).

Mass Demonstrations in 2020

In 2020, police agencies around the country faced waves of mass demonstrations. Complicating the response, police were the subject of these protests, which emerged in response to high-profile police use of force incidents and were part of a broader social movement toward public safety reform. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), nearly 18,000 protests and 800 riots took place from May 25th to December 31st of that year.

Many agencies were unprepared for these events, and many faced criticism for their responses. In Chicago, Dallas, and New York City, inadequate training left many officers unfamiliar with crowd control techniques, chains of command, and force review processes (Dallas Police Department, 2020; Ferguson & Witzburg, 2021; Garnett, 2020). Other agencies were faulted for poor planning and

communication. In Los Angeles, a failure to plan for mass arrests led to a last-minute, uncoordinated effort to manage the arrests of more than 4,000 people (Chaleff, 2021). MAAs in Denver permitted partner agencies to use less-lethal force that violated Denver policy (Mitchell, 2020). Officers in Cleveland could not hear instructions over the loud environment or their gas masks because officers did not have earpieces (City of Cleveland, 2020). Other failure points included uncertainty about whom to communicate with within the incident command system and overcrowded radio channels that were inaccessible for communication with command. The Raleigh, Philadelphia, and Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Departments were condemned for using force—particularly tear gas—indiscriminately, which affected lawful protesters and ultimately escalated tensions (21CP Solutions, 2020; Carleton et al., 2020; Daniels et al., 2021).

Other agencies were praised for their approach to the 2020 protests. The Baltimore Consent Decree Monitoring Team (2020) commended the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) for its response, citing the agency's protection of First Amendment rights, community engagement, and clear plan that was well communicated. BPD minimized arrests to facilitate protesters' freedom of assembly and expression and deployed officers in regular uniforms, limiting the visibility of officers in protective equipment (i.e., riot gear) to avoid escalating tensions. Likewise, the Fayetteville (North Carolina) Police Department (FPD) was commended for its measured, community-focused approach to the protests of 2020 (Henderson, 2020). At the outset of the demonstrations, FPD established a perimeter around the event and used assertive crowd-control techniques only in response to arson and looting (Erich, 2025). The department was also praised for taking an empathetic approach, acknowledging the community's and the nation's pain over racial inequality. Unlike many cities, Fayetteville saw no deaths, severe injuries, or officer injuries (Erich, 2025).

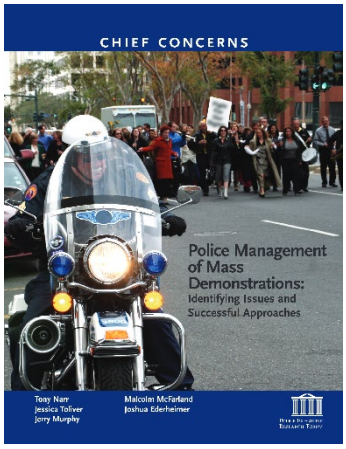
PERF Guidance on Policing Mass Demonstrations

The nature of mass demonstrations demands that agencies provide clear guidance for managing them. Demonstrations are dynamic: They may be peaceful one moment and violent the next (PERF, 2022). The nature of these events is also ever-changing: today's demonstrations are increasingly unorganized, often occurring spontaneously, and driven by protesters who are unwilling to cooperate with police (PERF, 2018). As a result, demonstrations are often chaotic and confusing, highlighting the importance of clear guidelines. PERF (Narr et al., 2006; PERF, 2018, 2022, 2024) has long called for agencies to provide officers with guidance on issues ranging from First Amendment rights to the use of force, command structure, community engagement, and AAR. Others (e.g., see Maguire & Oakley, 2020; MCCA, 2021; NPI & COPS Office, 2022) have made similar recommendations.

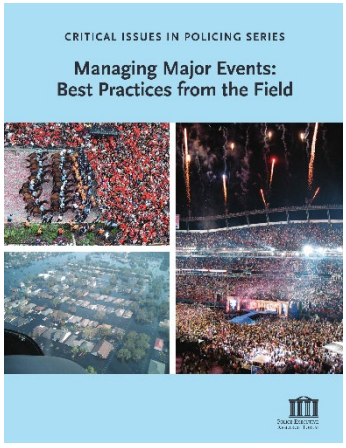
PERF's portfolio of reports on policing mass demonstrations provides specific guidance to agencies for operationalizing the principles of negotiated management into practice. PERF's past work on the topic reflects not only the changing nature of mass demonstrations in the United States but also a broader cultural shift in how legitimacy, transparency, and restraint are conceptualized within modern policing.

PERF Reports on Mass Demonstrations, 2006 through 2024

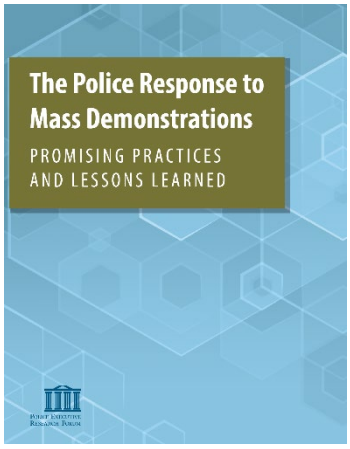
2006



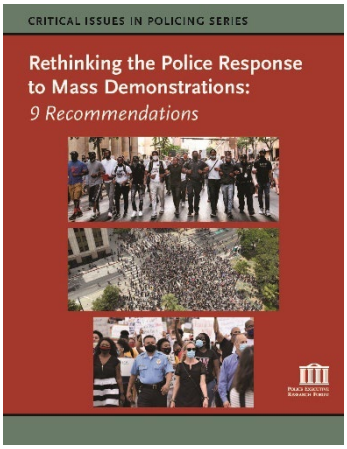
2011



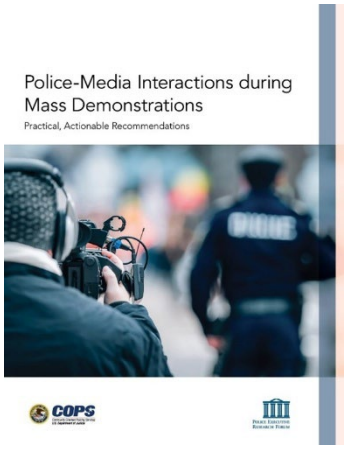
2018



2022



2024



The 2022 and 2024 reports, in particular, illustrate how protest policing is no longer just an operational concern; it is a litmus test for public trust in law enforcement. Several common threads and recommendations run through all five reports. Across nearly two decades, PERF's protest-related reports consistently promote the following:

- **Preservation of constitutional rights.** From 2006 to 2024, every report underscores the importance of upholding First Amendment rights and using policing approaches that facilitate rather than inhibit peaceful protest.
- **Proactive planning**: All reports emphasize the importance of thorough advance planning, both operationally (e.g., logistics, equipment, legal guidance) and in terms of public messaging. Mutual aid and stakeholder collaboration are also important considerations that require advanced planning and coordination with other organizations.

- **Minimization of force and arrests**: Over time, the reports evolve from calling for restraint in specific circumstances (2006, 2011) to actively discouraging the use of less-lethal force and mass arrests unless absolutely necessary (2018, 2022).
- **Communication and coordination**: Clear command structures, interoperable systems, and community-inclusive briefings are consistently recommended, especially in multi-agency settings.
- **Training.** PERF's reports consistently identify training as foundational for effective protest policing. Across all reports, PERF views training not simply as an activity to achieve policy compliance, but to improve the ability of an agency and its officers to adapt to rapidly changing conditions, reduce harm to officers and protestors, and reinforce the mission of protecting constitutional rights during protest events. From 2018 onward, PERF also recommends that not only line officers but commanders, supervisors, and community participants receive specialized instruction in crowd dynamics, decision rules, de-escalation, and use of force.

While these five PERF reports are consistent with key recommendations over time, they also chart the evolution of approaches for policing protests from traditional, command-and-control protest policing toward more nuanced, rights-based, community-informed models. While the foundational elements remain stable, several trends mark shifts in emphasis:

- **Leaderless movements and social media** (2018, 2022). Later reports recognize the challenges posed by decentralized, social media-driven organizing, making traditional crowd-control and pre-event communication models less effective.
- **Public trust and police legitimacy** (2018, 2022, 2024). Following high-profile incidents of police violence, more recent reports stress the importance of transparency, de-escalation, and community engagement as core public trust strategies.
- **Media relations** (2024). Unique among the five, the 2024 report focuses specifically on police-media interactions, responding to documented incidents of police impeding press coverage during demonstrations.
- **Health and wellness** (2018, 2022). Officer wellness becomes more prominent in the 2018 and 2022 reports, recognizing the psychological toll of managing highly adversarial or volatile protest environments.
- **Training** (2018, 2022, 2024). PERF's early reports emphasized training for operational readiness—crowd control, command protocols, and inter-agency coordination. By 2022, in response to the George Floyd protests, training is reframed as a legitimacy-building practice, with community members actively participating in exercises and policy development. Over time, PERF's guidance reflects a shift from force-oriented approaches to flexible, community-informed training that prioritizes civil rights and public trust.

PHASE ONE. NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY OF POLICE AGENCIES

We surveyed a nationally representative sample of police agencies over a 10-month period from May 2024 through March 2025 to collect standardized data on police practices for managing mass demonstrations that are generalizable to agencies throughout the United States. The survey collected information on agencies' training, policies, procedures, equipment, and community involvement related to mass demonstrations. We also asked agencies to report the number of protests that occurred in their community each year between 2020 and 2022.

PERF's research teams, in collaboration with several subject matter experts, developed the survey instrument. The instrument was validated through cognitive interview testing with five major city agencies. The national survey was hosted online via Voxco, a market research survey platform. Participants were also able to complete a physical copy of the survey, if desired, and return it to PERF, where a staff member entered their responses into Voxco.

Sample Selection

We selected our nationally representative sample of police agencies using a stratified sampling design that blended probability and non-probability approaches.[1] Our sampling frame consisted of 17,106 agencies contained within the 2023 National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators. From this frame, we drew a nationally representative sample of 3,200 municipal, county, state, campus, and capitol police agencies.

Sample size calculations revealed that 376 respondents were needed to represent the population of U.S. police agencies within a five percent margin of error. We selected 3,200 agencies for our sample to ensure a sufficient number of responses and to maintain the representativeness of our sample, even in the event of an exceptionally low response rate. This conservative approach was warranted, considering the declining response rates observed in survey research (e.g., see Brick & Williams, 2013; Groves et al., 2009).[2] A limitation of larger sample sizes is that they are generally associated with lower response rates (Wu et al., 2022), which can introduce several issues (Nix et al., 2019). However, findings from a recent meta-analysis on survey response rates suggest it is "possible that having a reasonable number

[1] This follows the sampling approaches used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics to select the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics survey sample (e.g., see Hyland and Davis, 2019). https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd16p.pdf

[2] Anecdotally, conversations with other researchers conducting surveys of law enforcement agencies revealed that they experienced response rates that were significantly lower following 2020. Law enforcement experienced a staffing crisis during the years that immediately followed, likely making research participation challenging.

of representative respondents is more important than having a high response rate" (Wu et al., 2022, p. 9).

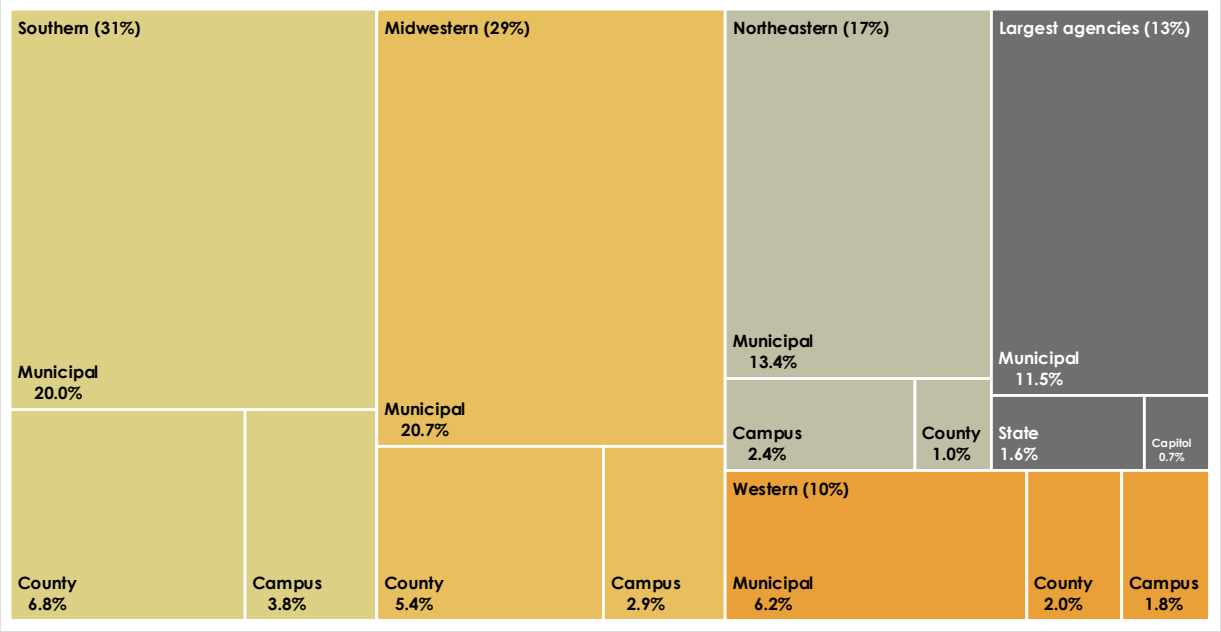
To select the sample, we first stratified our sampling frame by geographic region, agency size, and agency type. To avoid the sample being populated primarily by smaller agencies, all agencies employing 250 or more officers were selected into the sample. We also selected all state and capitol agencies with certainty.

The remaining municipal, county, and campus agencies were selected based on the proportionate need within each stratum. Microsoft Excel's RAND function was used for the selection process, with each agency being assigned a random non-integer between 0 and 1. The numbers were stabilized to prevent further change and sorted from smallest to largest. We then selected the number of required agencies from each "type-region" stratum (e.g., Northeastern municipal agencies), starting with the agency assigned the lowest random number (see Table 1 and Figure 1 for a breakdown by strata). Seventeen agencies were screened out after it was determined they had been disbanded or no longer possessed law enforcement powers. **Thus, our final sample consisted of 3,183 agencies.**

Table 1. Breakdown of Sampling Frame by Strata

	Agencies in the U.S. (n = 17,106)	Original Sampling Frame (n = 3,200)	Final Sampling Frame (n = 3,183)	% of Final Sampling Frame
Strata Sampled with Certainty				
Agencies with 250+ Officers (excluding state & capitol agencies)	369	369	366	11.50
State Agencies	50	50	50	1.57
Capitol Agencies	21	21	21	0.66
Northeastern Agencies (< 250 Officers)				
Municipal	2581	427	426	13.38
County	187	31	31	0.97
Campus	468	79	76	2.39
Southern Agencies (< 250 Officers)				
Municipal	3860	639	638	20.04
County	1301	215	215	6.75
Campus	735	122	121	3.80
Midwestern Agencies (< 250 Officers)				
Municipal	4003	663	660	20.74
County	1037	172	172	5.40
Campus	574	95	92	2.89
Western Agencies (< 250 Officers)				
Municipal	1182	196	196	6.16
County	376	62	62	1.95
Campus	362	60	57	1.79

Figure 1. Agencies were sampled by region and type of agency. Southern agencies and municipal agencies are the largest groups in the sample.



Survey Distribution and Response

Distribution of our national survey began in May 2024, when an invitation letter was mailed to the full sample[3] via the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), along with a paper copy of the survey instrument and a postage-prepaid envelope. Follow-up reminder letters were emailed—most often in three-week intervals—to each agency leader, with physical reminder letters mailed via USPS typically every other month. In November 2024, nonrespondents were mailed a postcard reminder, and in March 2025, reminder phone calls were placed to all nonresponding "large" agencies. This robust follow-up strategy continued through March 2025, when survey distribution concluded.

The overall response rate was 22.15 percent. We received 672 completed surveys along with 33 partially[4] completed surveys for a total of 705 respondents (out of 3,183). Table A.1 in Appendix A provides a breakdown of response rates by strata. To account for varying response rates across strata, we applied sampling weights such that each stratum—and therefore our results—are nationally representative of law enforcement agencies in the United States.

[3] Excluding agencies from the pilot sample.

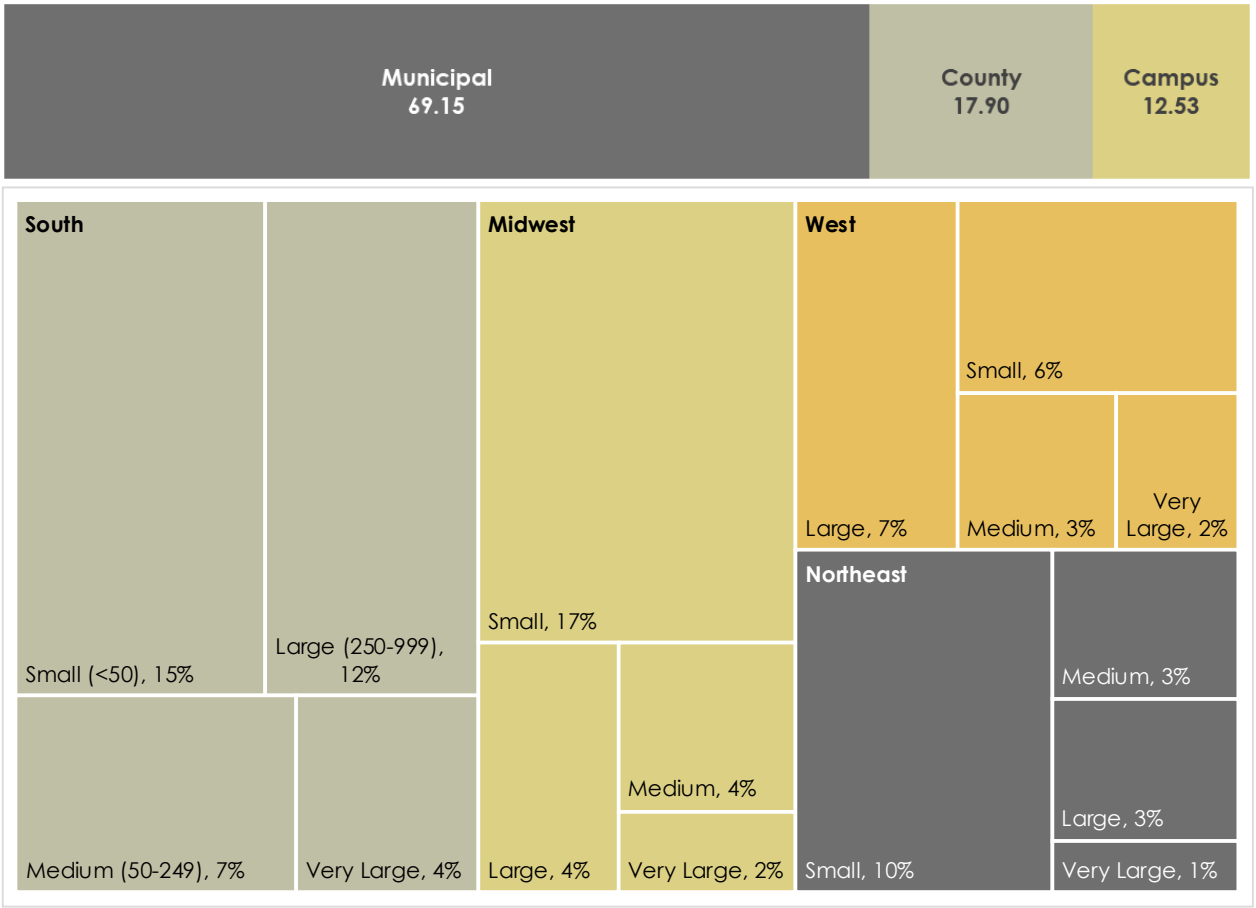
[4] To be considered "partially complete," participants must have answered at least half of the survey's questions.

Results from the National Survey

In the sections that follow, we present key findings that describe police agencies' policy, training, and community engagement initiatives related to mass demonstration events. Those interested in the full survey results can find them in Appendix A.

As shown in Figure 2, our sample consisted primarily of municipal agencies (69 percent), followed by county (18 percent), campus (13 percent), state (0.3 percent), and capitol agencies (0.1 percent). Following the four regions used by the U.S. Census Bureau: more than one-third of responding agencies were located in the South (36 percent) and Midwest (33 percent), with 19 percent in the Northeast and 12 percent in the West. On average, agencies employed 64 sworn staff, equivalent to 2.5 officers per 1,000 residents.

Figure 2. Most responding agencies were small, municipal agencies located in the South.

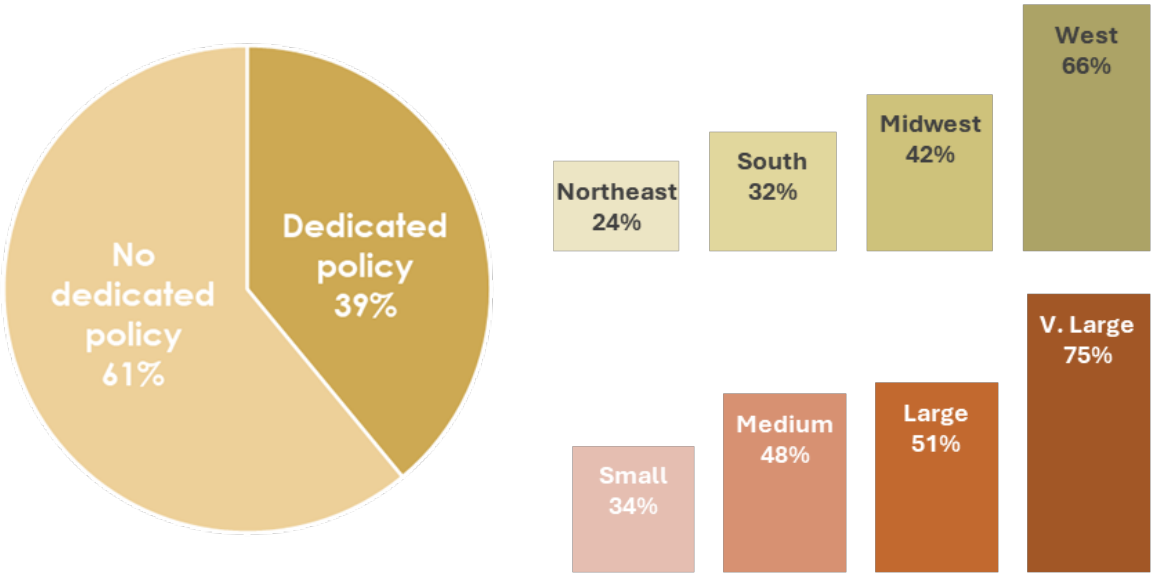


POLICY AND PROCEDURE

More than one-third (38 percent) of agencies reported having a dedicated policy for managing mass demonstrations (see Figure 3).[5] Such policies are more common among large agencies (57 percent)—those with 250 or more officers—than smaller agencies (37 percent). Regionally, Western agencies (66 percent) are most likely to have a mass demonstrations policy, followed by agencies in the Midwest (42 percent), South (32 percent), and Northeast (24 percent). The relatively low prevalence of policies in Northeastern agencies is notable given that the region experienced the highest number of protests of all four regions. However, agencies in the Northeast were the most likely to report that they will implement a policy within the next six months (33 percent), compared to 21 percent of agencies in the South, 16 percent in the Midwest, and 13 percent in the West. Among agencies without a dedicated policy, in general, one-third indicated plans to develop one, while nearly two-thirds (64 percent) reported no such plans.

The earliest mass demonstration policy reported in our sample was established in 1978; however, most agencies have implemented such policies only recently. Specifically, only 25 percent of agencies had a policy in place before 2020, and only 10 percent had one before 2015. Among agencies with an existing policy, 77 percent have revised theirs since 2020, while five percent reported leaving their policies unchanged following the 2020 protests.

Figure 3. Only about 40 percent of agencies have a dedicated policy for managing mass demonstrations. Agencies in the West and very large agencies are most likely to have these policies.



Note: Small agencies have fewer than 50 officers, medium-sized agencies have 50–249 officers, large agencies have 250–999 officers, and very large agencies have 1,000 or more officers.

[5] This total may also include standalone policies for managing civil disturbances, civil disorders, First Amendment assemblies, or any other term agencies use to reference protests and related events.

Most agencies specifically address safety concerns related to the public (89 percent), protest crowds (87 percent), and officers (85 percent) in their dedicated mass demonstration policies. Similarly, while most agencies include provisions on participants' First Amendment rights (84 percent), fewer cover the rights of observers (62 percent) and journalists (61 percent).

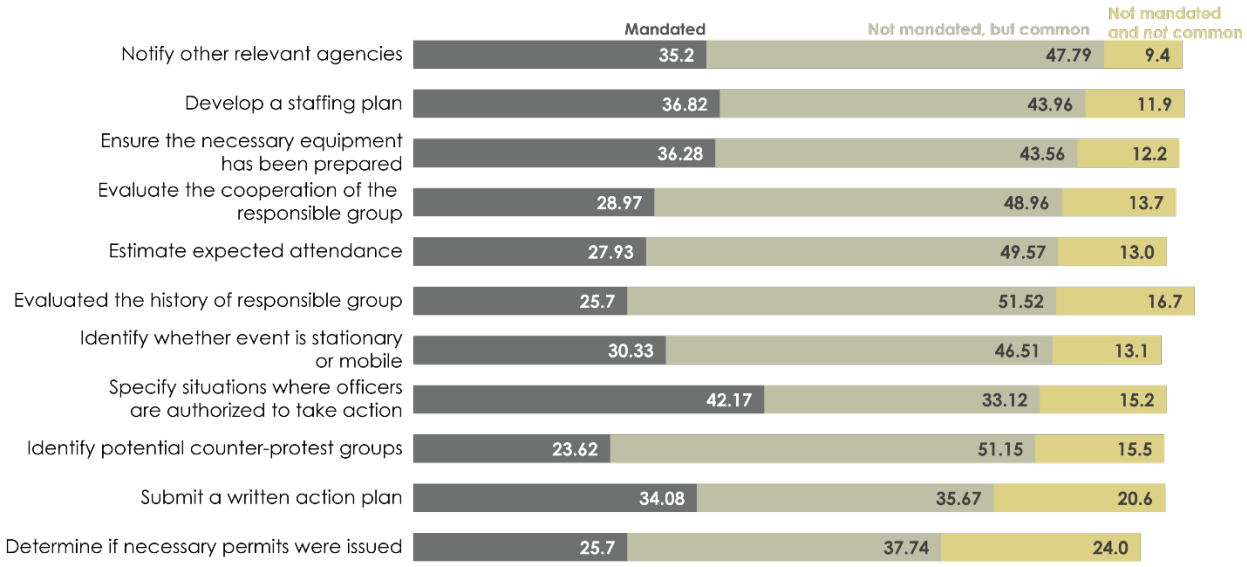
Planning and Preparation

Proactive planning for protests is a common recommendation for police agencies. Our survey asked respondents to identify which actions their agency explicitly requires *before* a protest. Most respondents reported that all 11 actions we asked about were either mandated by policy or, if not formally required, considered common practice within their agency. Only one action—defining officers' reactive authority (i.e., when they are authorized to take specific actions)—is more likely to be mandated (42 percent) than simply common practice (33 percent). The remaining 10 actions are typically not mandated but widely regarded as standard practice.

Seventy percent of agencies reported developing written action plans ahead of known protest activity, and 80 percent develop a staffing plan to support protest response. Another common early step is assessing whether the protest group typically cooperates with the agency (78 percent) and reviewing the group's history (78 percent) to inform appropriate planning and response strategies. Many agencies (70 percent) also identify a designated point of contact for regular communication with protest organizers. The most helpful sources for gathering intelligence about mass demonstrations are other law enforcement agencies (rated "very helpful" by 66 percent of agencies), demonstration organizers (63 percent), and community leaders or members (61 percent), followed by other government agencies (56 percent), social media (52 percent) and surveillance (51 percent). Some agencies (75 percent) use their communication with protest organizers to explain what behaviors will and will not be tolerated during the event, helping align expectations between police and protesters before the protest begins.

Two-thirds (67 percent) of agencies reported following the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Incident Management System (NIMS) for managing protest events. Prior to a protest, 76 percent of agencies identify the protest location and determine whether it will be stationary or mobile. More than half (52 percent) of agencies will help organizers identify suitable locations for protests if one has not yet been selected. Some jurisdictions require permits to protest; about 63 percent of agencies reported checking for necessary permits, and 26 percent regularly helped organizers obtain permits when needed. Most agencies (75 percent) also identify potential counterprotest groups in advance. In addition, 83 percent notify other relevant agencies about the planned protests, and 38 percent meet with their local district attorney to discuss their stance on prosecuting protest-related offenses.

Figure 4. Agencies typically notify other agencies and create staffing plans before mass demonstrations.



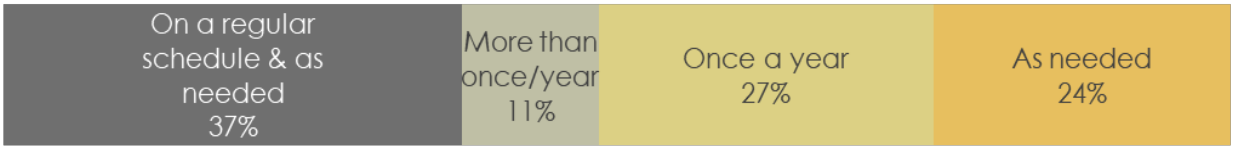
During roll call at mass demonstrations, agencies most often present their incident action plan for the day (66 percent) and review relevant policy points, such as the agency's philosophy for managing mass demonstrations (59 percent), officers' reactive authority (63 percent), and the importance of constitutional policing (57 percent). Agencies also commonly share information about protest organizers, including prior interactions (58 percent). Some agencies use roll calls to highlight incidents from the previous day (53 percent), reflect on effective and ineffective responses from the day prior (49 percent), and provide refresher training (32 percent).

Mutual Aid Agreements

About two-thirds of agencies (67 percent) have MAAs with neighboring jurisdictions for managing mass demonstrations. Among agencies without such agreements, only seven percent plan to implement one within six months. MAAs were most common in Northeastern agencies (78 percent), followed by agencies in the West (68 percent), South (66 percent), and Midwest (63 percent). In terms of size, the smaller agencies (i.e., those with fewer than 10 sworn officers) were least likely to have MAAs in place (54 percent), followed by very large agencies (63 percent). For agencies of all other sizes, between 67 and 77 percent had MAAs.

Of agencies with MAAs, 77 percent reported that their agreements establish a clear chain of command, 59 percent indicate that assisting agencies must follow the lead agency's policies, 35 percent note that their agreements include deployment guidelines for assisting officers, and 30 percent state that they limit the use of weapons and munitions to those approved by the lead agency.

Figure 5. Of the agencies that train with partners, most do so as needed and on a regular schedule.



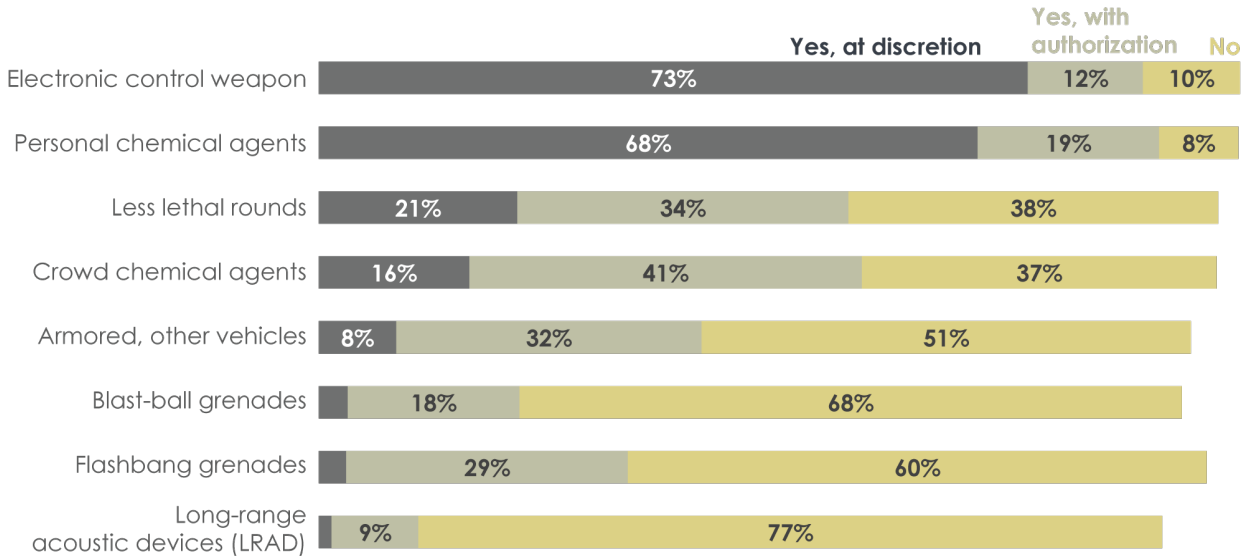
Interestingly, only 27 percent of agencies report that their MAAs mandate joint training exercises with all partner agencies (see Figure 5). Among those that do, 37 percent require joint training on a regular schedule (e.g., annually or biannually) *and* as needed (e.g., ahead of major demonstrations), 11 percent require it more than once per year, 27 percent require it annually, and 24 percent only as needed.

Use of Force and Personal Protective Equipment

We asked agencies whether they authorized the use of eight different tools and equipment related to the use of force during mass demonstrations. Further, we inquired whether officers could use them at their discretion or only with prior approval.

As shown in Figure 6, the most commonly authorized tools include personal chemical agents such as oleoresin capsicum (OC) spray (pepper spray) (authorized by 87 percent of agencies, 78 percent of which allow officers to use at their discretion) and electronic control weapons (85 percent authorize; 86 percent of which allow at officer discretion). Crowd chemical agents (e.g., OC foggers) and less-lethal kinetic impact projectiles were each authorized by a majority of agencies; however, between 58 and 72 percent of those agencies require officers to obtain prior authorization before use. The least commonly authorized tools include mounted patrol (authorized by 9 percent of agencies; 73 percent of which require officers to *obtain authorization prior to using*), long-range acoustic devices (10 percent authorize; 87 percent of which require prior authorization), and blast-ball grenades (21 percent authorize; 86 percent of which require prior authorization).

Figure 6. Electronic control weapons, personal chemical agents, and less lethal rounds were the most common tools authorized for use during protests.



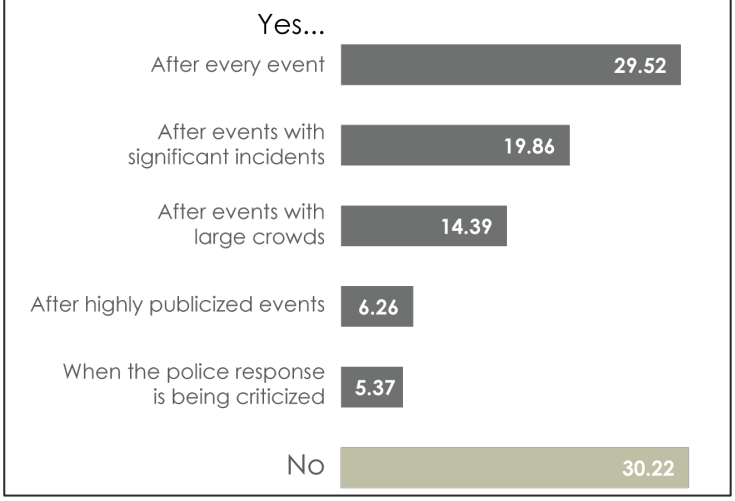
Personal protective equipment (PPE)—such as helmets, shields, and riot shields—is authorized by 79 percent of agencies. Since 2020, agencies' typical approach to deploying officers in full PPE at the onset of mass demonstrations has changed significantly. Before 2020, 24 percent of agencies did not own PPE; now, only two percent lack it. The share of agencies that never deploy officers in full PPE has declined slightly, from 36 to 34 percent. At the same time, the number of agencies that deploy officers in full PPE at the outset of a mass demonstration has dropped by 39 percent, from more than 4 percent to about 3 percent. More agencies now keep officers equipped but out of sight, deploying them only when necessary (rising from 16 to 20 percent). The proportion of agencies requiring officers to carry but not immediately wear PPE has remained steady at around 16 percent. Very few agencies grant officers discretion to don PPE at the onset of mass demonstrations (about 3 percent before 2020 and more than 2 percent since).

Accountability and After-Action Reviews

Survey results indicate that many agencies take steps to review and reflect on their responses to mass demonstrations. Nearly two-thirds of agencies (62 percent) complete an AAR following such events. Thirty percent do so after every event (see Figure 7), 20 percent when a significant incident occurs, 14 percent when the crowd size is large, six percent when the demonstration is highly publicized, and five percent when the agency's response draws significant criticism. Just 16 percent of agencies that complete AARs share them with their community.

Body-worn camera footage is frequently used by agencies following mass demonstration events. Following these events, 72 percent of agencies review body-worn camera footage to assess officer conduct (67 percent), train officers (57 percent), investigate criminal acts by protesters (63 percent), prepare after-action reports (50 percent), and address media inquiries (36 percent).

Figure 7. Thirty percent of agencies produce AARs after every mass demonstration; another 30 percent never produce AARs.



Although many agencies review their responses to mass demonstrations, just 17 percent of agencies track data related to the demonstrations they manage. Of those, more than 90 percent track event duration (96 percent), use-of-force incidents (97 percent), arrests (97 percent), citations (95 percent), officer injuries (95 percent), civilian injuries (91 percent), and use of less-lethal munitions (94 percent), among other metrics. While agencies that collect data tend to gather comprehensive information, 77 percent do not collect any demonstration-related data, leaving most agencies unable to answer even basic questions about the demonstrations they manage.

TRAINING

Most agencies (71 percent) provide either academy *or* in-service training on managing mass demonstrations—40 percent of agencies offer both, while 13 percent offer neither. Slightly more agencies provide this training in the academy (56 percent) than through in-service programs (54 percent). Among agencies that do not currently offer mass demonstration training, 70 percent plan to introduce it in the academy, and 25 percent plan to do so through in-service training.

Figure 8. Large agencies were more likely to offer academy and in-service training than smaller agencies. Agencies did not vary significantly in training offerings across regions.

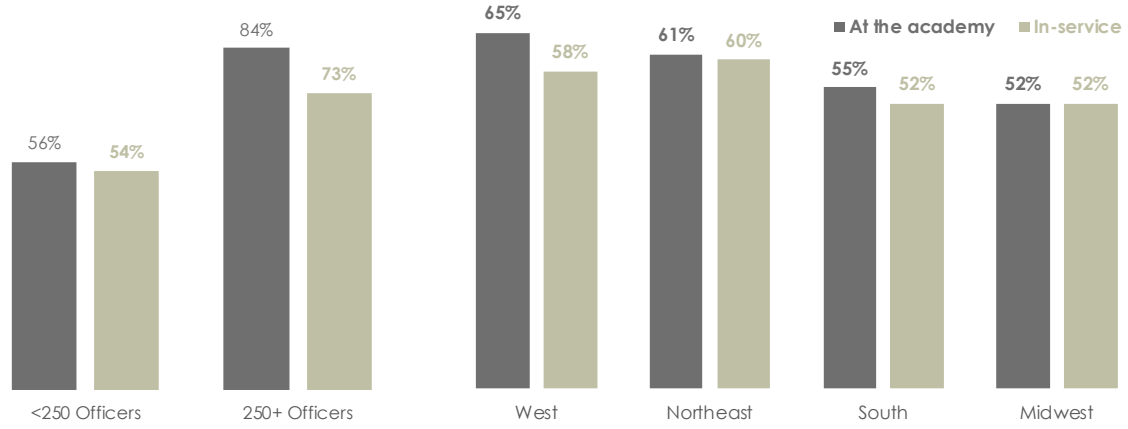


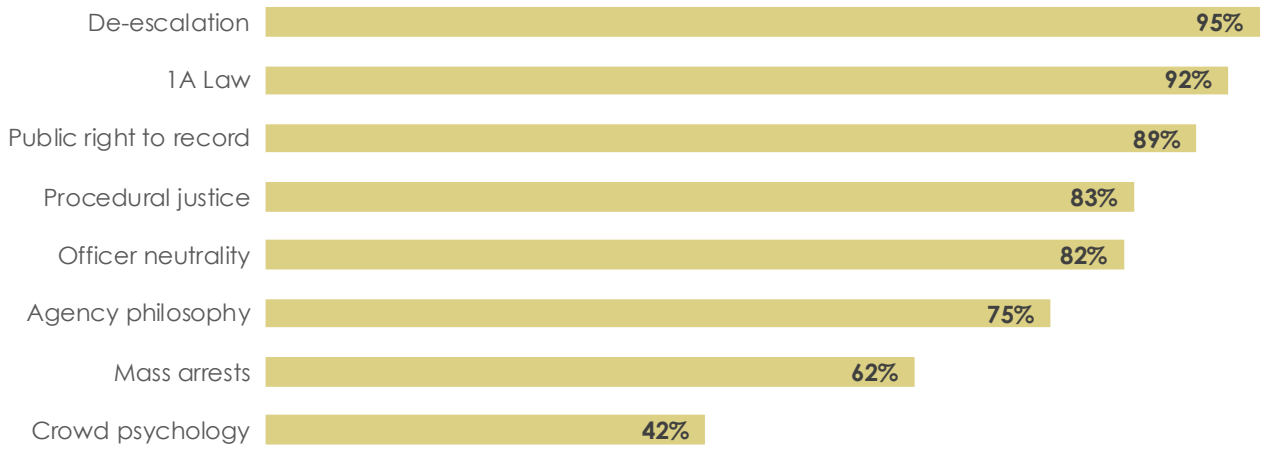
Figure 8 shows the distribution of academy and in-service training programs by agency region and size. Of the agencies with 250 or more officers, 84 percent provide academy training on mass demonstrations, compared to 56 percent of smaller agencies. Academy training is somewhat more common in the West (65 percent) than in the Northeast (61 percent), South (55 percent), and Midwest (52 percent). In-service training shows a similar pattern: 73 percent of agencies with 250 or more officers provide it, compared to 54 percent of smaller agencies. Regionally, in-service training is most common in the Northeast (60 percent) and West (58 percent), followed by the South and Midwest (52 percent each).

Regarding frequency and duration, nearly four in 10 agencies (37 percent) that offer in-service training on mass demonstrations do so annually, while 54 percent provide it on an as-needed basis. On average, agencies delivered about five hours of content during their most recent in-service training.

Agencies were also asked about the topics covered in their academy or in-service mass demonstrations training. Of the topics we inquired about, those most commonly covered include de-escalation (95 percent), First Amendment law (92 percent), and the public's right to record officers (89 percent). Many agencies also cover procedural justice (83 percent), the importance of maintaining neutrality during demonstrations (82 percent), their agency's philosophy and goals for managing mass demonstrations (75 percent), and procedures for conducting mass arrests (62 percent). Crowd psychology (e.g., social contagion, the Elaborated Social Identity Model) was the least commonly covered topic, addressed by only 42 percent of agencies.

Training development approaches varied considerably. Nineteen percent of agencies developed their curriculum in-house, 18 percent developed it collaboratively with a partner, and 31 percent use a curriculum developed entirely by a partner. Larger agencies (250 or more officers) were most likely to develop their academy training in-house (44 percent), whereas smaller agencies (fewer than 250 officers) most often relied on external partners (31 percent). Among agencies that collaborated with or relied on partners, 48 percent partnered with another law enforcement agency, 17 percent with a policy management firm (e.g., Lexipol), and 11 percent with their local district attorney.

Figure 9. De-escalation, procedural justice, and First Amendment law were the most common training topics.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The survey results indicate that most agencies engage in some form of communication with their communities during mass demonstration events. About two-thirds of agencies (66 percent) engage directly with event leaders, while 69 percent engage with local government officials; 18 percent report doing neither. The majority (63 percent) regularly communicate with the public during mass demonstrations. Half of U.S. agencies use social media (51 percent), more than a third issue press releases (38 percent), and a quarter work with local news outlets (26 percent). Communications most often address traffic-related matters (e.g., "avoid the area;" 86% of agencies that communicate with the public report this), followed by agency efforts to positively engage protesters (50 percent), appreciation for peaceful demonstrations (44 percent), challenges the agency is facing (30 percent), and real-time observations (27 percent). Still, nearly one-third (30 percent) of agencies—the vast majority of which employ fewer than 250 officers—do not regularly communicate with the public during mass demonstrations.

Agencies also take steps to protect protesters' rights. Three-quarters (75 percent) brief organizers and participants beforehand on behaviors that will and will not be tolerated, and about half (49 percent) show greater tolerance for minor disruptions during protests than they do under normal operations. Many designate a liaison to maintain ongoing communication with event organizers (69 percent) or assist organizers in identifying suitable event locations (53 percent), while fewer help with securing the necessary permits (26 percent).

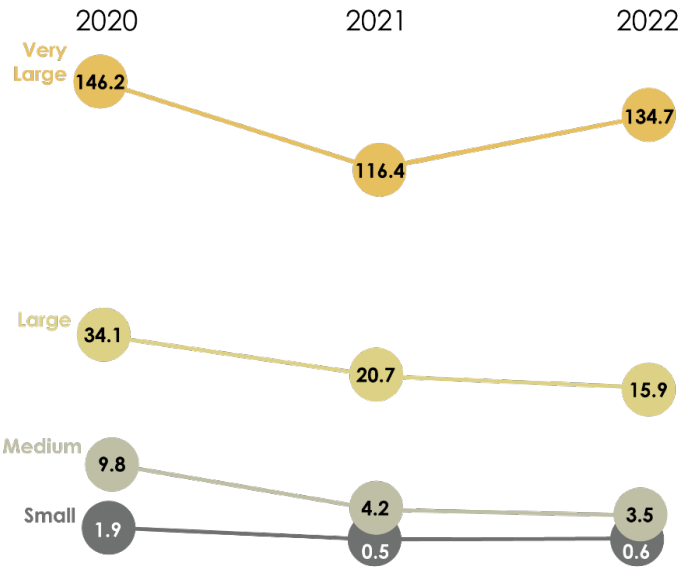
Despite these engagement efforts, few agencies *involve* community members in broader protest management practices. Fewer than a quarter (22 percent) allow input on their mass demonstration response policy. Even fewer share daily incident reports (18 percent), train community leaders as mediators (14 percent), or invite community members to observe (11 percent) or participate (9 percent)

in related training. Community involvement in after-action reporting is especially rare, with only 9 percent of agencies reporting such engagement.

MASS DEMONSTRATIONS OF 2020

In 2020, agencies managed an average of five mass demonstrations, dropping to roughly half that number in subsequent years (2.4 in 2021 and 2.3 in 2022). Protest counts varied significantly by agency size: agencies with 250 or more sworn officers managed an average of 58 demonstrations in 2020, compared with an average of four for smaller agencies. Mass demonstrations frequency also varied by agency type, with municipal (6) and "other" (i.e., campus, capitol, and state agencies) agencies (5) managing roughly twice as many events in 2020 as county agencies (3). Relative to population, mass demonstrations were most frequent in the Northeast (51 per 100,000), followed by the West (21), South (17) and Midwest (8).

Figure 10. Regardless of size, the average number of protests handled per agency was highest in 2020 and dropped in subsequent years.



Nearly twice as many agencies felt prepared to manage 2020's mass demonstrations (31 percent) as felt unprepared (16 percent). Large agencies—250 or more sworn officers—reported feeling more prepared (59 percent) than smaller agencies (31 percent). Regionally, a greater proportion of Northeastern agencies felt more prepared (47 percent) than Western (33 percent), Southern (28 percent) and Midwestern agencies (26 percent).

Agencies with training and policies for managing mass demonstrations reported feeling more prepared for 2020 protests than agencies that did not.[6] A total of 46 percent of

[6] It is important to note that our survey asked whether agencies *currently* has academy or in-service training on mass demonstrations, meaning it's possible that they did not have training in place before or during the 2020 protests. Thus, we cannot establish temporal ordering for this variable and these results should be interpreted with that limitation in mind. We did, however, ask when each agency adopted their mass demonstrations policy, which allows us to compare agencies that had a policy in place before or after 2020.

agencies that had a dedicated policy in place before 2020 felt prepared to handle protests that year, while 30 percent of those without one prior to then felt the same way.

Of the agencies that offer academy training, 38 percent felt prepared, whereas only 21 percent of those without this training did. Likewise, 42 percent of agencies offering in-service training felt prepared compared to just 18 percent of those that do not. The frequency of in-service training also appeared to be related to agencies' feelings of preparedness. Nearly half of the agencies that provide mass demonstration in-service training annually (47 percent) felt prepared to manage the events of 2020, compared with 41 percent of agencies offering it as needed and 35 percent of those offering it every other year.

Of agencies that managed at least one protest in 2020, only four percent faced litigation because of their response. Among those, 65 percent felt that 2020's events directly impacted their current policies, compared with 30 percent of agencies that did not face litigation. Nearly one-third of all agencies (29 percent) felt that 2020's events had a direct impact on their current policies; this figure rises to 40 percent among agencies that managed at least one protest in 2020.

SUMMARY OF NATIONAL SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey results highlight considerable variation in how U.S. police agencies prepare for and manage mass demonstrations. While many agencies have implemented policies, training, and planning practices, these measures are more consistently found in larger agencies. Agencies generally engage in proactive planning, mutual aid coordination, and use-of-force and PPE protocols, yet systematic data collection, formal AARs, and broader community involvement remain limited. Training is widespread but varies in content, frequency, and incorporation of modern crowd management principles. Overall, the findings show that while some agencies have established strong policies, training, and planning practices, others lag behind in these areas. Gaps in policy, community engagement, and data practices indicate opportunities for many agencies to strengthen readiness, accountability, and transparency.

PHASE TWO. IN-DEPTH REVIEWS WITH POLICE AGENCIES

We conducted an in-depth review of the approach of three police agencies to managing mass demonstrations. The purpose of these agency reviews was to contextualize the findings from our national survey with real-world examples from specific agencies. We also sought to learn about how agencies' approach to mass demonstration response has evolved since 2020 and to uncover emerging practices to share with the field.

The in-depth reviews consisted of a PERF team conducting three-day in-person visits with each agency. During the visits, PERF conducted semi-structured interviews with personnel at all levels of the organization—sworn and civilian—who are involved in mass demonstration response. Subjects included the chief executive, command staff, first-line supervisors, patrol officers, crime and intelligence analysts, and members of specialized units. The interviews of sworn staff from the three participating agencies included open-ended questions about each agency's strategies for preparation,

the tactics and tools that have been effective in preventing or disrupting violence at protests, and the degree of protest-related community engagement. In addition to inquiring about current approaches, researchers probed each agency's historical experiences to identify how their approach has evolved over time and whether any significant events led to those changes, particularly since 2020. We also conducted interviews with police leaders from neighboring jurisdictions, as well as community leaders, to gain a deeper understanding of how the two agencies collaborate with external partners during mass demonstrations. We also spoke with community leaders who regularly work with the agency.

In addition to interviews, we collected standard operating procedures and training materials and observed key resources used for mass demonstration response. Key resources included technology (e.g., real-time crime centers, drones), less-lethal weaponry and storage systems, and support units (air, mounted patrol).

Study Sites

To select agencies, we began by examining responses to our national survey. We sought to identify agencies that had comprehensively adopted a range of recommended practices for managing mass demonstrations—agencies that have implemented written policies; provide regular training for officers; and actively engage the community before, during, and after mass demonstrations. We also examined the data to determine if agencies had experience responding to protests. The goal was to identify agencies that have a demonstrated record of successfully managing mass demonstrations and those with the greatest potential to offer lessons learned.

The three agencies we selected for in-depth review include the Tampa (FL) Police Department, Omaha (NE) Police Department, and Las Vegas (NV) Metropolitan Police Department.

TAMPA POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Tampa Police Department (TPD) is the second-largest police agency in Florida. The agency employs more than 1,000 sworn officers and nearly 350 civilian staff members. TPD serves more than 400,000 residents. The city's 113 square miles are divided into three patrol districts.

Mass Demonstrations of 2020 in Tampa, FL

In Tampa, demonstrations began peacefully on May 30, 2020, following the death of George Floyd (Ochoa, 2020; Urso et al., 2020). As dusk fell, however, the situation escalated into widespread criminal activity. A Mobil gas station and a Champs Sports store were set on fire, more than 40 businesses were looted, and 27 police vehicles were vandalized (FOX 13 News, 2020; Ochoa, 2020; Wronka, 2020). Protesters threw rocks, bottles, and fireworks at members of both the TPD and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) (Ochoa, 2020; The Ledger, 2020; Wronka, 2020). HSCO deputies responded by deploying chemical and other less-lethal munitions. A separate incident occurred the following day, when a TPD officer fired a rubber bullet that struck a protester in the head, which later served as the basis for litigation (Tampa Bay 28, 2021). Despite these events, most demonstrations—which continued well into June—remained peaceful (Bowen, 2020; Jordan, 2020). In the aftermath of the

demonstrations, Tampa's mayor, the former TPD Chief of Police, created a task force on community policing, implemented a series of departmental policy changes, and assigned investigations of police shootings to an external agency (Varn et al., 2021).

OMAHA POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Omaha (NE) Police Department (OPD) is the largest police agency in Nebraska, employing approximately 800 sworn officers who serve a population of nearly 500,000 residents. The city's 130 square miles are divided into five precincts.

Mass Demonstrations of 2020 in Omaha, NE

Demonstrations in Omaha lasted 11 days, beginning on May 28, 2020, with a peaceful rally outside of the police department. On the following evening, however, four consecutive days of civil unrest began after protesters surrounded an occupied Nebraska State Patrol cruiser and threw rocks and bottles at OPD officers, who deployed pepper balls and chemical munitions in response (Schmaderer, 2020). Tensions escalated further on May 30 following the fatal shooting of a Black protester by a White bar owner in the Old Market area during an altercation (Gowen, 2020). The county attorney's decision not to file charges contributed to heightened community anger and ongoing unrest. Across the 11-day period, the city sustained an estimated $384,000 in damage, 302 arrests were made, and 123 uses of force were reported—only three of which were determined to have violated policy (Schmaderer, 2020). In response to concerns raised by the ACLU of Nebraska regarding OPD's handling of the demonstrations, the department entered into a settlement agreement requiring compliance with new standards for police conduct during future demonstrations, among other changes (Petto, 2021). Despite these challenges, OPD's chief expressed that he was "proud" of officers' "very patient and respectful" response throughout the events (City of Omaha, 2020).

LAS VEGAS METROPOLITAN (NV) POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) is one of the largest police agencies in the country. With nearly 4,000 sworn officers, 1,000 corrections officers, and 2,000 civilians, LVMPD serves nearly two million residents across the city of Las Vegas and unincorporated Clark County—a jurisdiction spanning more than 7,500 square miles. LVMPD faces a unique challenge: Clark County is among the most diverse in the United States (US Census Bureau, 2021), and Las Vegas attracts more than 40 million visitors annually (Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, n.d.).

Mass Demonstrations of 2020 in Las Vegas, NV

In Las Vegas, demonstrations began on May 29 and quickly escalated into violence. On the first day, approximately 300 protesters gathered along the Las Vegas Strip, where 12 officers were injured, and 80 protesters were arrested (DeSilva, 2020a; Olvera, 2020). Civil unrest intensified on the second evening, when an estimated 2,000 protesters assembled in the city's downtown area (DeSilva, 2020b). Numerous individuals engaged in significant criminal activity, including spray-painting buildings, setting small fires, looting a pawnshop, burning a police vehicle, and vandalizing a federal courthouse (Torres-Cortez, 2020a; USAO, Nevada District, 2020). Fireworks and other projectiles, including a Molotov

cocktail, were launched at officers, prompting the deployment of chemical munitions and less-lethal rounds (Sadler, 2020; Torres-Cortez, 2020a). Tensions peaked on the night of June 1 (Lacanlale, 2020). Shortly before midnight, LVMPD Officer Shay Mikalonis was shot in the head while attempting to arrest a protester; he was permanently paralyzed from the neck down. Around the same time, four LVMPD officers shot and killed Jorge Gomez shortly after he was observed fleeing the vandalized courthouse while visibly armed with two guns. Within 48 hours, the intensity of the demonstrations had subsided, allowing protesters and members of the LVMPD to engage in an "open, and at some points amicable, dialogue" for the first time since the unrest began (Torres-Cortez, 2020b, para. 8).

Key Insights Across Sites

We provide key insights that emerged from our in-depth reviews across our three primary domains: policy, training, community engagement, and technology.

POLICY

Organizational Philosophy

All three agencies we studied implemented their standalone policy on responding to mass demonstrations in 2020. These policies are updated to reflect changes in each agency's approach to demonstration management, with all three agencies having revised their policies at least once in the five years since initial implementation. Each policy begins by carefully describing an organizational philosophy for handling mass demonstrations, and all three seek to strike a balance between protecting individuals' right to free assembly and expression during a protest while ensuring public safety for all. Within each policy, the importance of these civil liberties is emphasized first, along with the agency's obligation to ensure that these rights are protected. For example, LVMPD's policy states it is "neither the intention nor the desire of the department to suppress or restrain lawful activity." At the same time, each policy clearly observes that the First Amendment does not permit unlawful acts. LVMPD policy reminds officers that they are allowed to place reasonable restrictions on free speech to maintain order and public safety. OPD policy, for example, states explicitly that the First Amendment does not protect criminal acts, such as "assault, destruction of property, interference with traffic upon the public streets, or other immediate threats to public safety, peace, or order." All three agencies direct officers to address unpermitted or illegal activities that occur during a protest.

In speaking with officers from each agency, it was clear that most protesters are viewed as peaceful, law-abiding individuals who simply want to exercise their right to free speech. However, officers similarly reported experiencing demonstrations that attracted a small number of bad actors, or individuals who used the protest as cover to engage in illegal behavior while encouraging others to join in. When this happens, demonstrations can escalate into more serious instances of civil unrest, necessitating police intervention and disrupting the balance between free speech and public order. Thus, a common refrain from officers at each agency we reviewed is that it is important to "draw a line in the sand" and strictly prohibit unlawful acts so that the vast majority of people who protest peacefully can continue to do so and in a manner that ensures safety within the broader community.

Importantly, all three agencies distinguish between different types of First Amendment events. For example, LVMPD identifies "peaceful protests," "civil disobedience," and "riots." Similarly, OPD identifies "demonstration," "passive resistance," and "civil disturbance." The LVMPD's policy further notes that a single protest event may encompass one or more forms of dissent and that responses should be adjusted accordingly. This language is consistent with the Elaborated Social Identity Model and encourages officers to view protesters as individuals rather than a single, dangerous group. It encourages targeting and tailoring responses, rather than broad crackdowns that may infringe on free speech.

Finally, all policies underline the importance of officer neutrality during a protest event. For example, TPD's policy states that neutrality, professionalism, and courtesy to all involved are critical and can be a "valuable tool in maintaining peace." OPD and LVMPD policies prohibit specific actions such as accepting food or drink offers, taking photos, and fraternizing with protesters.

Use of Force

All three agencies provide strict guidance around the use of force during a mass demonstration. Generally, each policy emphasizes the importance of seeking alternatives before resorting to force. When force must be used, however, officers are instructed to deploy the least amount necessary to accomplish their objective. For example, OPD's civil disturbances policy directs officers to "maximize all options before using lawful force," and LVMPD's policy declares, "The use of force and application of force tools will not be indiscriminate." TPD provides guidance on using force in their crowd management policy and in a standalone use of force policy. The use-of-force policy begins by recommending that officers attempt to de-escalate situations, defines de-escalation, and provides specific examples of de-escalation tactics. To the extent possible, officers are asked to slow situations down and avoid placing themselves at risk. Detailed guidance is also given on how to minimize risk to subjects who may be placed in the prone position.

All three agencies provide specific guidelines for the use of chemical agents and specialty munitions. For example, TPD dictates that these tools are to be deployed only by officers trained in their use, after being authorized for use by the incident commander, and only to disperse illegally assembled crowds to protect life and property. LVMPD policy adds that aerosol irritants can only be used after clear warnings have been given, when avenues of egress are available to the crowd, and upwind and as close to the crowd (when possible). The policy further states that "the use of force and the application of force tools will not be indiscriminate." Finally, the TPD policy includes explicit provisions for managing the inventory of chemical and specialty munitions, such as establishing an inspection and maintenance schedule and designating a person responsible for implementing it.

During our site visit, OPD officers discussed the value of chemical agents as a safe and effective tool in managing the 2020 protests in their community. They noted that pepper balls, which resemble paintballs, allow for precise targeting of individuals engaged in illegal behavior without affecting large crowds, unlike CS gas canisters. That said, using pepper balls on this scale presented some challenges.

The munitions were stored in boxes on shelves, and members of the chemical munitions team were required to carry munitions in their personal bags. As a result, resupply efforts required officers not only to know where munitions were stored but also to obtain them under intense time pressures. Those munitions were then placed in various bags, leaving officers unsure of what was in each bag. Since 2020, OPD has purchased Milwaukee Packout storage systems, commonly available in major hardware stores, and supply bags to ensure chemical munitions are readily accessible and uniformly stocked, improving the efficiency of protest event responses and reducing the risk of officers using the wrong munitions.

Arrests

Officers at the agencies we studied discussed how arrests can escalate tensions during a protest. Thus, each policy seeks to ensure arrests are used judiciously. For example, OPD policy states that all arrest decisions must be approved by a supervisor (except for emergencies). It further instructs the incident commander to prepare specific arrest guidance at the early stages of a mass demonstration and to communicate these orders to all officers. Failure to plan and communicate arrest guidance can have deleterious consequences; the policy notes that when a supervisor reverses an arrest, it can embolden the crowd and negatively impact officer morale. The policy states that the incident commander should consider the following criteria when preparing arrest criteria: the availability of resources, potential deterrent or incitement effects, and the impact on the emotions of the group, as well as the broader community. The incident commander is also instructed to coordinate with the City Prosecutor to develop arrest guidance.

LVMPD similarly places the responsibility for arrest decisions with a supervisor—in their case, the on-scene lieutenant, who is directed to notify the incident commander. Likewise, supervisors are instructed to consider the timing, location, and availability of resources before making arrests. However, officers are allowed to make arrests on their own when there is a clear violation of the law or when the arrest may defuse the situation. Both LVMPD and OPD policies guide officers to use arrests only in narrow circumstances, such as “clear violations of laws or ordinances, coupled with the need to mitigate threats to public safety and to defuse a potential riot,” (from LVMPD policy).

Warnings

The three agencies we studied provide policy guidance on the need to issue warnings before using force or conducting an arrest. For example, the OPD policy contains dedicated language regarding warning orders, instructing officers to issue clear and concise warnings that reference specific law violations being committed and state the police authority to enforce the removal of those who fail to comply. The policy also directs an incident commander to make all announcements to ensure consistency and to issue warnings multiple times using voice-amplifying technology to ensure they are heard. Several specific scenarios are outlined in the policy where warning orders would be appropriate, along with scripted language to be used for verbal announcements. Both TPD and OPD include provisions to document warnings that are given, ideally using video or audio.

TRAINING

It is necessary to provide officers with clear policy guidance for responding to mass demonstrations, but not sufficient—officers must also be equipped with knowledge and tactics on policing protests, and they must be given the opportunity to gain hands-on experience applying them within expectations outlined by policy and under pressure (e.g., see PERF, 2018, 2022). All three agencies we studied reinforce their mass demonstration policies by offering academy, in-service, and other training opportunities for their officers. One chief we spoke with emphasized that it is easy to get too comfortable when things are going well—agencies must maintain a constant state of readiness, and that comes through training.

Officers at all three agencies we studied expressed that training is more important now than ever. Given the recruitment and retention crisis in policing, there are fewer officers with experience in policing mass demonstrations than there have ever been, even those of the type that occurred in 2020. Training fills the gaps left by inexperience, and training can be an opportunity to discuss with newer officers the "why" behind an agency's approach to mass demonstrations. Many lessons were learned in 2020, and interviewees reported that contextualizing training concepts in past experiences increases receptivity to training. But even for experienced offices, the nature of mass demonstrations is constantly evolving—social media has provided platforms that enable protests to arise more rapidly and frequently, often with little notice and without coordination with police. During our interviews, officers explained that training is necessary to prepare them to respond to these events when robust planning is not possible.

Recruitment and retention challenges lend greater importance to training, but these problems also make training more difficult to implement. During our reviews, officers discussed how staffing shortages can result in training being shortened or skipped altogether. Even when training does happen, officers at all three agencies said that they always need more "training reps." Across the board, officers at all three agencies emphasized the importance of training and cautioned against reducing or removing training.

LVMPD provides a five-hour block of academy training on mass demonstrations as well as biannual in-service training. Additional training is also conducted on an as-needed basis, such as ahead of a major protest event or when mandated by the sheriff. Similarly, TPD provides academy training for mass demonstrations for all officers, and (at the time of this writing) is developing an annual refresher in-service training for all officers. In OPD, officers receive in-service training on mass demonstrations every three to four years. However, all officers are quizzed on the mass demonstrations policy annually, and training bulletins are distributed regularly. LVMPD similarly distributes training materials to all officers ahead of significant events, such as New Year's Eve, and maintains a repository of training materials and resources for mass demonstrations that all officers can access at any time.

Special units receive more frequent training than patrol officers. For example, TPD's Crowd Management Group trains every other month, in addition to participating in regular in-service training.

OPD's Rapid Deployment Force trains at least twice per year, and officers who deploy chemical agents train more frequently. All three agencies send members of their special units to NIMS training.

All three agencies reference training and resources from other law enforcement agencies or external entities—most commonly FEMA—when developing their mass demonstrations training. However, they also noted it is essential to adjust training to their own local context. TPD, for example, emphasized the need to keep tactical training simple so that it is more easily remembered by officers and more readily applied in the field. TPD begins with the mobile field force training developed initially in Miami, FL, but has made adjustments after discovering shortcomings in its application in the field, including being overly complicated and requiring a certain number of officers to form formations.

Within the LVMPD, the Homeland Security Saturation Team—the dedicated crowd management unit—leads training for officers on managing mass demonstrations. Training often uses hands-on exercises, such as deploying crowd control formations. To simulate real-world circumstances, trainers role-play as protesters, shout at officers, and toss foam blocks; LRADs are also used to create noise. Given the unpredictability of protests, LVMPD training incorporates contingencies based on lessons from police agencies worldwide. Consistently across training, officers are taught about First Amendment rights. In addition to tactical training, LVMPD partners with its Multi-Cultural Advisory Council (Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, n.d.-b), a diverse advisory group of community representatives, to incorporate community-oriented principles and concepts into its training.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

All three agencies we reviewed stated that they attempt to identify individuals who are planning or organizing a demonstration and explore with them how the agency can help facilitate the event. Larger, planned events typically involve more coordination than smaller spontaneous ones, with the agency seeking to understand the goals of a demonstration, develop logistical plans, and set expectations with the event organizers. For smaller or unplanned events, coordination is usually more informal. As a protest begins to unfold, a supervisor or patrol officer may approach the crowd, discuss their plans, and offer support. Coordination with protesters can be a valuable component of mass demonstration response but has become less salient in the post-2020 era, where small, decentralized, and largely unplanned demonstrations have become more common.

While it is useful to coordinate with demonstrators, the agencies we studied primarily focused on broader efforts to engage their community. These initiatives were widely considered to be among the most critical factors driving a successful response to mass demonstrations, even if they were not directly related to any single event. Officers of all ranks, across all three agencies, explained that community engagement must be comprehensive—i.e., include all segments of the community—and ongoing—i.e., occur every day across the organization, not just in the days leading up to a demonstration or after a tragic event happens. To be sure, community engagement requires agencies to have the cultural and organizational mechanisms in place to build strong, sustainable, resilient, and authentic partnerships within the community. One representative from LVMPD put it bluntly: "Our best

method of prevention is the consistent, proactive approach we take to building relationships in the community." It is important to consistently and reliably show up to engage members of the community to build those relationships.

Having strong community relationships in place before a mass demonstration occurs can serve as an asset to the agency in several ways. For example, community partners may help the agency identify key individuals involved in organizing an upcoming demonstration, allowing the agency to coordinate with them effectively. In the absence of a clear leader or organizer, community partners may be able to provide information about when or where a protest may take place, the goals behind the event, and information about participants, all of which can inform the agency's response strategy. Community partners may also serve as liaisons between the agency and community members who plan to protest, which can be especially helpful in situations where the subject of the protest is the police. Over the long term, strong community relationships generate legitimacy, trust, and mutual understanding that can help the agency and community work through traumatic events when they occur and mitigate the risk of tensions that can spark further protests and civil unrest. Finally, having strong relationships with the community in place can sometimes prevent demonstrations altogether, as it allows community members to feel seen and heard in other ways.

For all three agencies, community partnerships, trust, and confidence are clearly embedded within organizational mission statements. These missions are operationalized into practice via several community-oriented programs and initiatives. The TPD, for example, has a long list of programs in place to foster proactive encounters with the community (Tampa Police Department, n.d.-b). One important program highlighted during our discussions was the TPD's Community Liaison program (Tampa Police Department, n.d.-a), which assigns officers to specific neighborhoods or populations within the community to act as dedicated resources. Community leaders we spoke with echoed the importance of TPD's community liaisons because they give people direct access to someone they know in the department to reach out to about problems they are facing. Community liaisons have the time available to connect with residents and address problems, rather than simply responding to calls for service.

LVMPD similarly runs various programs through its Office of Community Engagement (OCE) (Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, n.d.-c). In their programming, both TPD and LVMPD focus extensively on youth engagement. LVMPD, for example, highlighted three programs as particularly important: 1) DREAM (Discover, Redirect, Empower, Advocate, and Mentor) (Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, n.d.-a), a diversionary program for at-risk youth; 2) ACE (Anti-Violence through Community Engagement) (McBride, 2025), which seeks to connect at-risk youth to support services; and 3) the CORE (Community Outreach, Redirection, and Education) team, which seeks to enhance, empower, and enrich through open and honest dialogue, provision of services, and by uplifting cultural events throughout the county. LVMPD's OCE also runs RECAP (Rebuilding Every Community Around Peace), which aims to build a coalition of police, business, and faith-based leaders to share information and resources and target community problems. Like TPD, LVMPD has specific programs for targeted

outreach, such as the Black Community Alliance, Hispanic Citizens Police Academy, LGBTQ Alliance, and Asian American Alliance.

Both the TPD and LVMPD have established panels to liaise with leadership and represent the community's voice in agency operations. In the LVMPD, this function is served by the Multi-Cultural Advisory Council (formerly Metro Multicultural Advisory Council, still known as MMAC), a diverse group of individuals that "serve as a resource for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department in developing and understanding diversity awareness and cultural competence among its staff; and to assist the department in providing a respectful, safe, reliable, trustworthy and responsive service with integrity to a diverse population" (Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, n.d.-b). As the MMAC representative observed, Clarke County is one of the most diverse communities in the nation, and the LVMPD has learned that when the agency has a better understanding of the backgrounds and cultures within the community, it can be more effective in providing public safety.

One important function of the MMAC is forming subcommittees, at the direction of the sheriff, to provide input on various issues. One recent example is the creation of a subcommittee to review and provide feedback on an updated use of force policy. Another of MMAC's vital functions is that it engages the community on behalf of the agency. When the agency organizes community events, the MMAC can activate the community and foster participation, leading to engagement. When critical incidents occur, the MMAC publicly stands alongside the sheriff during briefings as a demonstration of community support. Because the MMAC meets regularly and advises across a range of issues, it puts the agency ahead of many issues. One example the agency gave was when "Eight Can't Wait" became popular. The agency was initially pressured to adopt the provisions but quickly realized it had already implemented many of the items through its work with MMAC.

Critical to OPD's community engagement strategy has been the agency's nearly twenty-year participation in the Omaha 360 Collaborative (Empower Omaha, n.d.). Omaha 360 brings together approximately 100 community partners each week to implement a community-based approach to reducing violence. During our visit, we observed a community meeting that included several representatives of the OPD. Stakeholders shared data, identified specific problems, and discussed response strategies. While Omaha 360 targets violence, it also serves as a forum for building community relationships through event planning, resource sharing, and collaboration. The meetings also serve as a forum for participants to be heard.

TECHNOLOGY

Technological innovations have enabled agencies to update their mass demonstration response strategies, typically by closely tracking events with minimal observable presence. All three agencies rely heavily on their RTCCs to do this, leveraging standard tools such as closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV), automated license plate readers (LPR), facial recognition, drones, gunshot acoustic detection, social media, and law enforcement databases to gather information and generate intelligence. Importantly, these tools are not used to monitor specific individuals or groups, but rather to

operationalize open-source or publicly available information that can inform planning and deployment of public safety resources. The goal is to use these technologies to facilitate free assembly and expression while maintaining public safety.

The TPD RTCC, for example, constantly monitors social media for planned demonstrations. When an event is identified, the RTCC generates a "living memo" that is distributed to supervisors and neighboring police agencies. Incident commanders also use the memo to develop an operational plan. The memo is regularly updated with information about the host group, their cause, risk factors that may indicate the possibility for violence or escalation, and the circumstances of the event, such as date, location, and anticipated crowd size (e.g., using engagement metrics such as "likes"). Similarly, LVMPD's RTCC also tracks protest events within its jurisdiction, which is shared weekly with command staff and other key personnel to help guide resource allocation and, when appropriate, make contact with event organizers ahead of time.

During a demonstration, the RTCCs monitor video feeds and distribute real-time information to the field about the size and movement of crowds, the presence of weapons, or people engaging in violent or destructive behavior. The intelligence produced by the RTCCs is crucial to mass demonstration response efforts. Because police actions can escalate tensions, law enforcement interventions are more effective if they target specific individuals engaging in illegal actions in crowd settings rather than being deployed in the form of widespread action against the entire group. RTCCs enable agencies to identify those specific people, track them until they are out of protesters' view (or until the protests have ended) so officers can then intervene without risking escalation. Alternatively, police can rapidly identify problematic people, detain them, retreat from the crowd, and allow the protest to continue. The officers we spoke with believed that, despite privacy concerns, RTCCs help to preserve individuals' rights by providing information that enables this type of precise intervention.

Technology can be expensive. In the context of the recruitment and retention crisis, OPD was able to redirect funds for sworn personnel that were going unused into technology investments and the creation of its RTCC. Further, OPD launched a new program called Connect Omaha,[7] which allows businesses and individuals to register their cameras with the OPD and share recordings or live videos. This enhances the network of CCTVs around the city, at little cost to the agency, that can capture intelligence and inform response efforts. OPD's RTCC has also integrated new technology that allows officers to livestream video from their cellphones directly to the RTCC. Within the context of a mass demonstration, undercover officers can provide eyes on the ground. TPD RTCC is also provided with its own radio channel and dispatcher, allowing the RTCC to communicate clearly and efficiently with incident commanders during large-scale, rapidly changing events.

[7] https://cityofomahaconnect.org/

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy

Implement a standalone mass demonstrations policy.

Just 38 percent of agencies in our national sample reported having a dedicated mass demonstrations policy,[8] despite repeated calls for this guidance to be provided to officers. This deficiency represents a significant area for improvement, as clear policies help officers understand agency expectations during events that are often chaotic and confusing. While officers may find some direction on key issues related to crowd management (e.g., use of force, arrests) scattered throughout their standard operating procedures, a single, cohesive, and comprehensive policy that addresses these issues within the unique context of mass demonstrations is needed. In our survey, 46 percent of agencies with a standalone policy in place before 2020 reported feeling prepared for that year's demonstrations, compared to 28 percent of those without such a policy. Importantly, agencies should regularly review and update their mass demonstrations policies to ensure that the guidelines reflect current philosophy and standards—something 80 percent of agencies with a dedicated policy have reported doing since 2020.

Explicitly state the agency's philosophy for managing mass demonstrations. Agencies should clearly articulate their purpose, values, priorities, and ethical principles regarding mass demonstrations to establish a foundation for the policy. A philosophy communicates the agency's expectations of its officers and conveys *why* it manages demonstrations in a particular way. For example, the Tampa, Omaha, and Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Departments outline their organizational philosophy at the forefront of their mass demonstration policies that underpin all subsequent procedures, tactics, and guidance covered in the documents. These agencies emphasize the importance of protecting First Amendment rights, maintaining public order and safety, upholding professionalism, and maintaining neutrality. Consistent with modern concepts in crowd psychology, these agencies recognize the heterogeneity of crowds and the need for targeted, intentional, and measured responses. Mass demonstration policies should specifically articulate the crowd management responsibilities at each level of the organization.

Address the First Amendment rights of demonstrators, observers, and journalists. PERF has long urged agencies to train officers on constitutionally protected actions during mass demonstrations. Our survey shows that while 84 percent of the agencies *with a dedicated policy* address demonstrators' rights in the policy, only about 61 percent address the rights of observers or journalists. Seventy-one percent of agencies cover First Amendment rights in either policy or training, reflecting broad recognition of their importance. Still, only 21 percent of all agencies

[8] This total may also include standalone policies for managing civil disturbances, civil disorders, First Amendment assemblies, or any other term agencies use to reference protests and related events.

address the rights of all three groups, underscoring the need for policies that explicitly cover each population (demonstrators, observers, and journalists). Consider developing a Know Your Rights brochure or similar document that clearly spells out the legal rights of protestors. This document should be easily accessible online from the department's website.

Provide clear, specific guidance on the use of less-lethal weapons. Existing policy is often insufficient in this context, particularly when it relies solely on the *Graham* standard of "objective reasonableness." That standard "outlines broad principles regarding what police officers can legally do in possible use-of-force situations, but it does not provide specific guidance on what officers should do" (PERF, 2016, p. 15). Officers need practical, situation-specific guidance on when and how to use less-lethal weapons within the complex dynamics of mass demonstrations. The events of 2020 made clear the risks of leaving this guidance ambiguous.

Our survey found widespread authorization of less-lethal tools during mass demonstrations. Furthermore, many agencies leave the decision about when and how to deploy these tools to the individual officer. Specifically, we found that most agencies authorize the use of electronic control weapons (ECW), chemical agents, and kinetic impact projectiles during demonstrations. More than 70 percent permit officers to use ECWs at their own discretion, and over two-thirds allow the discretionary use of chemical agents against individuals. By contrast, only 21 percent permit the discretionary use of impact projectiles, and only 16 percent allow the use of crowd-dispersal chemical agents without prior authorization. Given that crowd behavior is tightly coupled to officers' actions, as well as the potential to seriously injure someone when deploying less-lethal tools in crowd settings, it is imperative that agencies provide clear guidelines about how these weapons are used during a mass demonstration. Importantly, policies should prohibit the indiscriminate use of less lethal weapons as such use can lead to unintended consequences and harm police legitimacy (PERF, 2022).

PERF (2018, 2022, 2024; see also Narr et al., 2006) has extensively addressed the use of less-lethal weapons during demonstrations. In its 2022 report, PERF outlined seven policy provisions to guide the development of clear guidelines for using these tools. Those can be found on pages 32–35 of *Rethinking the Police Response to Mass Demonstrations: 9 Recommendations*.[9]

Limit the use of mass arrests whenever possible, but provide clear guidelines for conducting them when necessary. For nearly 20 years, PERF has cautioned against mass arrests, noting they can "give the impression that police are stifling First Amendment expression rather than facilitating it" and ultimately "erode community trust and goodwill" (2022, p. 42). During our site reviews, we learned that selective arrests should be prioritized over mass arrests. Agencies should make efforts to identify those individuals specifically engaging in problematic behavior and, ideally, arrest them away from the crowd or after a mass demonstration concludes, if feasible. Agencies

[9] https://www.policeforum.org/assets/ResponseMassDemonstrations.pdf

should focus on individuals engaged in violent behavior and significant property damage when making arrests.

Nevertheless, mass arrests are unavoidable in some circumstances. Thus, policies should specify who may authorize them, under what conditions, and provide specific procedures for carrying them out. Policies should also designate an individual to be responsible for ensuring the agency has in place the resources necessary to effect mass arrests, such as flex cuffs, forms and paperwork, transportation, and holding space. Agencies should avoid tactics that indiscriminately contain a large group of protestors (e.g., kettling) without notice or warning.

Define preparation protocols for planned demonstrations. Agencies must establish comprehensive planning protocols that identify who is responsible for developing and approving plans to ensure they adequately staff, resource, and respond to mass demonstrations. Plans must allow flexibility so that responses can be adapted to events as they unfold; in many cases, as told during our site reviews, many protests end up being small, benign events while others are unexpectedly larger than expected or scale up quickly. Agencies in Tampa, Omaha, and Las Vegas attributed their past success in managing protests, in part, to extensive preparation. Some strategies to consider include:

Require a written incident action plan for planned demonstrations to outline objectives and operational strategies. A central component of FEMA's National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) protocols is incident planning; FEMA advises agencies to document objectives and strategies in incident action plans (IAPs) (FEMA, 2017). Agencies that we reviewed for this study develop IAPs for most protests they become aware of and distribute them throughout the agency in advance of the event. Our survey found that 34 percent of agencies mandate written IAPs by policy, 36 percent routinely submit them without a mandate, and 21 percent rarely use them. This pattern was similar across 10 other preparation strategies—such as notifying other agencies, developing staffing plans, or ensuring equipment is prepared—where, on average, agencies were more likely to implement strategies without a mandate than to mandate them or rarely implement them.

To ensure IAPs are regularly used and consistently done across events, we recommend formalizing an IAP process within a standalone mass demonstration policy. To standardize IAPs, agencies can create a template; the Tampa PD created a template requiring incident commanders to document key elements of the event (who, what, where, when, why), assigned personnel and deployment plans, relevant policy reminders, points of contact, and post-event instructions. These IAPs should include developing plans for a variety of contingencies up to and including a mass casualty event.

Include guidelines for briefing officers when they arrive at demonstrations in your mass demonstrations policy. Effective internal communication is critical, as it allows agencies to set

clear expectations for officers and command staff and to adapt strategies based on real-time observations. Yet, as seen in 2020, maintaining communication can be challenging, making daily briefings especially important. The Omaha Police Department, for example, requires incident commanders to brief arriving officers on the purpose of their presence, the agency's mission, which behaviors are to be tolerated, and the present status of the incident. According to our survey, agencies most often brief officers on that day's IAP (66 percent), their reactive authority (63 percent), and the agency's philosophy for managing demonstrations (59 percent). By codifying required briefing topics in policy, agencies can ensure frontline staff are consistently and uniformly informed when deployed. Agencies should consider archiving written briefing materials after the event.

Require after-action reviews (AAR) and outline how they will be shared with the community, to support continuous improvement and transparency. Following the 2020 demonstrations, many larger agencies completed AARs to assess their response critically and identify areas for improvement. This practice not only helps agencies learn from their own experiences but also provides lessons learned for the broader law enforcement community. AARs further create opportunities for both internal and external stakeholders to provide feedback, which can build legitimacy with staff and the community. To maximize these benefits, agency guidelines should specify when AARs must be conducted, what stakeholders should be involved, what core topics must be addressed, and how reports will be shared, ensuring reviews are consistent, thorough, and actionable. A recent COPS Office report published by the National Police Foundation (2025) provides a framework for undertaking this work and outlines the basic questions that all AARs should answer: what happened, what actions were taken, why were they taken, and what variables should be considered in future responses.

Our survey found that 62 percent of agencies conduct AARs in some capacity, but only 15 percent of those share the report with the community. Thirty percent conduct AARs after every demonstration, while others only complete them under specific conditions—such as after events that involved a significant incident (20 percent), drew large crowds (14 percent), were highly publicized (6 percent), or generated significant criticism (5 percent). Still, 30 percent of agencies never complete an AAR.

Smaller agencies are more likely to fall into this category: one-third of those with fewer than 100 officers report never conducting AARs, compared to just 13 percent of larger agencies. This represents a missed opportunity, as agencies of all sizes can benefit from the lessons of structured reviews.

Training

Ensure officers receive comprehensive training on responding to mass demonstrations. Training is foundational to a department's ability to effectively and lawfully manage protests as it equips officers

with the knowledge and tactics required for performing in complex, constantly evolving, and constitutionally sensitive situations. PERF has long recommended training as a key element for effective mass demonstration response, highlighting the importance of a broad range of concepts from operational readiness to procedural justice. Training should be conducted regularly, adapted to the community context, be rooted in the agency's policy on mass demonstration response, and provide officers with hands-on experience operationalizing those concepts in practice. Consider training with other first responders that you routinely collaborate with such as fire departments, paramedics, neighboring jurisdictions and other outside partners such as the National Guard. When possible, agencies should seek research partners with expertise in crowd policing to review their training to ensure evidence-based practices are implemented and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Begin mass demonstrations training in the academy, then offer in-service training to all officers regularly, and ahead of major events. Our national survey revealed that only a minority of agencies (40 percent) provide both academy and in-service training on mass demonstration response. However, these skills are perishable and require consistent reinforcement and recurring practice. Because mass demonstrations are rare events, especially for small and medium-sized agencies, training provides officers with the opportunity to refresh in critical concepts and gain practical experience applying them. Embedding this training early in officers' careers and maintaining it through regular in-service instruction can significantly enhance readiness, ensure consistency, and mitigate the potential for errors. We suggest that in-service training be offered approximately annually or biannually; our survey found that 37 percent of agencies that provide in-service training do so annually, and 7 percent do so biannually.

Importantly, training materials should be regularly reviewed and updated based on current best practices. Agencies should also establish a "version control" process for maintaining training materials to ensure that they are centrally organized, coordinated, and approved. Doing so also helps to avoid training becoming outdated or modified by training staff without requisite review and approval process.

Training should cover modern concepts in crowd psychology, such as the Elaborated Social Identity Model. Our survey found that only 42 percent of agencies that offer mass demonstration training include content on crowd psychology; however, these concepts are critical for understanding group dynamics and how officers' actions can influence a crowd's behavior and affect the course of a protest. We suggest that officers are trained on modern concepts in crowd psychology, such as the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM), which calls for law enforcement to focus intervention efforts on specific individuals engaged in illegal behavior rather than entire crowds (Kennedy, 2019). Compared to outdated crowd psychology principles that consider crowds a monolith (e.g., mob psychology, social contagion), ESIM is support by research, and underpins evidence-based approaches for policing mass demonstrations. These models can help officers

better understand how crowds interpret police actions, and how even well-intentioned tactics can inadvertently escalate tensions when crowd identity is misunderstood.

Incorporate scenario-based exercises into the mass demonstrations curriculum. During our site reviews, officers emphasized that training on mass demonstrations must be conducted intentionally, rather than as a box-checking exercise. Research shows that effective, high-quality training leverages experiential learning methods—such as scenario-based training—that allow learners to apply skills in realistic, high-pressure settings. Scenario-based training has proven effective in other contexts, such as PERF's Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) training, which utilizes scenario-based exercises to teach de-escalation tactics. Our sites simulate real-world conditions during training exercises using various approaches, such as incorporating role-players who toss objects or engage in yelling and verbal provocation.

Mutual Aid

Establish Mutual Aid Agreements with neighboring jurisdictions. Because of their size, complexity, and potential for violence, mass demonstrations often require support from multiple police agencies. Mutual aid agreements (MAAs) provide a framework for agencies to assist one another across jurisdictional boundaries. Our survey found that two-thirds of agencies (67 percent) have at least one standing MAA for demonstrations, highlighting the value of cross-jurisdictional cooperation. Still, one-third (32 percent) reported having no MAA, and only a small fraction of those (7 percent) planned to develop one in the near future. Without established agreements, agencies may be forced to improvise coordination with unfamiliar partners during a crisis, creating confusion when clarity is most needed.

Mutual aid agreements should dictate a lead agency and a superseding set of policies that will govern a joint response to mass demonstrations. Even when MAAs exist, vague or outdated agreements can undermine coordination. Ambiguity regarding command authority or policies can slow decision-making, lead to operational conflicts, and expose the lead agency to reputational risk. The Cleveland Division of Police experienced this in 2020 when it was blamed for excessive force used by supporting agencies that violated CDP's own policies (Cleveland Police Monitoring Team, 2021). To avoid such outcomes, MAAs should clearly establish which agency is in charge and whose policies, especially regarding use of force, will govern.

Our survey reveals that while many agencies include some level of direction in their MAAs, there is room for improvement. Slightly more than three-quarters (77 percent) specify a clear chain of command, but only about half (59 percent) require supporting agencies to follow the lead agency's policies. Even fewer (30 percent) limit supporting agencies to weapons and munitions approved by the lead agency. These gaps can create confusion and operational inconsistencies during joint responses.

Mutual aid agreements should require agencies to conduct joint training exercises. Written agreements alone are not enough. Joint training allows partners to clarify policy differences, build

familiarity, and practice coordinated responses. Despite widespread recognition of its value, our survey found that just 27 percent of agencies with an MAA require joint training exercises. Not conducting joint training is a missed opportunity, as training ensures that all personnel understand the command structure and rules of engagement outlined in the agreement.

Omaha provides a strong example of the benefits of joint training. For more than 20 years, the OPD has been part of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), a multijurisdictional team explicitly trained for civil disturbances. Regular joint exercises helped RDF supervisors establish a well-defined chain of command and clear rules of engagement during the 2020 demonstrations, enabling officers to respond in a controlled and measured manner. Even so, Omaha's AAR concluded that additional joint training would further strengthen coordination—underscoring the importance of making these exercises a recurring requirement.

Community

Develop a public communication strategy during mass demonstrations to provide timely and accurate information, dispel misinformation, and build community trust. PERF has long emphasized the importance of providing contemporaneous updates to the media and public. Failure to do so leads others to fill the gap with misinformation that can endanger the public (Chaleff, 2021).

Our survey indicates that most agencies understand the importance of regular communication during demonstrations, with 63 percent doing so, though 30 percent do not, and just 18 percent share daily incident reports with the public. *Where* and *how* agencies communicate is critical. Social media—now Americans' top news source (Nieman Lab, 2025)—is essential, yet just 51 percent of agencies use it during demonstrations, suggesting significant room for improvement.

Agencies should broaden the scope of information shared. Among those that communicate, 86 percent provide traffic updates, but only half report their efforts to positively engage demonstrators, and even fewer share challenges they are facing (30 percent) or real-time observations (27 percent). While traffic updates are essential for public safety, sharing these additional updates provides the public with an accurate representation of the demonstration and allows them to see the agency's response in context.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department provides a strong example of effective public communication during demonstrations. Its Office of Public Information aims to deliver updates within 45 minutes of critical incidents via social media and local news in both English and Spanish. With timely, accessible information, Las Vegas combats misinformation and builds community trust.

Engage the community in preparing for and reviewing the response to demonstrations to strengthen trust and build lasting partnerships. Our survey shows that agencies rarely involve their communities in these processes. Fewer than one in four reported allowing community input on policy, and even smaller numbers involve community members in training exercises, train them to serve as mediators during demonstrations, or include them in AARs. Yet the events of 2020 underscored the

limits of traditional approaches, prompting PERF (2022) and others (e.g., NPI & COPS Office, 2022) to encourage agencies to rethink how they engage the community.

Involving trusted representatives in policy, training, and AAR processes shows a commitment to transparency, which can build trust and ultimately transform into force multipliers. Such involvement, however, can introduce competing obligations as agencies likely wish to safeguard their tactical plans. Therefore, each agency must explore how they can strike a balance between confidentiality and community involvement in demonstration management.

The value of this approach is evident in Las Vegas, Omaha, and Tampa. As discussed earlier, each has built enduring community partnerships. In turn, residents have provided critical support during demonstrations, from identifying event organizers to offering insights on "leaderless" events and helping bridge communication between protesters and police. LVMPD's MMAC model, with its ability to form subcommittees on various topics to provide input to police leadership, offers a compelling example.

Data Collection

Institute systematic collection of data on mass demonstration incidents and agency response, specifying what data will be collected, how, and for what purpose. Systematic data collection supports future event planning, comprehensive after-action reviews, demonstrates accountability, and can help defend against post-event criticism or litigation. It also allows for the evaluation of demonstration management practices, which is pivotal for the development of evidence-based practices. Despite these benefits, only 17 percent of agencies collect demonstration-related data. That means that more than three-quarters of police agencies cannot answer basic questions about demonstrations in their jurisdiction that required police presence or response.

The vast majority of agencies that track key metrics collect data on event duration, use-of-force incidents, arrests, injuries, and the use of less-lethal munitions. At a minimum, agencies should record event ID, event name/cause, location, crowd size estimates and sources of estimates (e.g., social media activity), use-of-force types, officer and civilian injuries, arrests, and significant issues (e.g., violence, destruction, counterprotests).[10] Agencies should record data in a standardized repository to ensure it is accessible and useful. For instance, the LVMPD begins collecting data as soon as potential demonstrations come to their attention, which aids in preparation and informs future responses.

[10] This list is not exhaustive. Agencies are encouraged to tailor data collection to their jurisdictions' needs, consulting outside experts—such as the Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance Center and CompStat 360—if necessary (National Policing Institute & COPS Office, 2022).

Technology

Consider integrating real-time crime centers (RTCC) as a core component of mass demonstration response. We learned during our site reviews that RTCCs have quickly become an important part of their mass demonstration response. The technologies used by RTCCS—including CCTVs, ALPRs, acoustic gunshot detection, drones, and social media—enhance intelligence to better inform decision-making by leadership, incident commanders, supervisors, and officers in the field. Through enhanced, real-time monitoring, agencies can more quickly and accurately identify threats or problems. When issues are identified, RTCC technology enables agencies to intervene more precisely and intentionally (e.g., by tracking an offender and arresting them when it is safe to do so), thereby avoiding potentially infringing on other protesters' free speech or risk antagonizing segments of the crowd. Further, these technologies allow for remote monitoring, thereby allowing agencies to minimize their visible presence.

It is important to note that these technologies are new, rapidly evolving, and research into them is nascent, so agencies should proceed with caution. As with any new technology, we suggest that clear policy guidance be developed on its use. Thought must be given to what information is collected, how it is shared, and how it is used to inform specific responses so that RTCCs are not simply producing information, but doing so in a way that informs broader operational planning for mass demonstration response.

Perhaps most importantly, agencies should include strong guardrails within their policy to protect privacy. Specific protections should be developed for its deployment in protest settings, given the constitutionally sensitive nature of these events. We suggest agencies engage community stakeholders to explore the adoption of these technologies and advise on the development of these policies.

CONCLUSION

Mass demonstrations are uniquely challenging events that require officers to protect fundamental rights to free assembly and expression while also ensuring community safety. These goals can be difficult to achieve—while most mass demonstrations are peaceful, some escalate into civil disturbances that can wreak havoc on communities in the form of property destruction and violence. Several factors can further complicate matters, such as when the police are the subject of the demonstration, when events lack a clear organizer or leader to coordinate with, when events draw counterprotesters, or when bad actors are present who use the crowd as a means of cover to engage in criminal acts. Also critically important are officers' actions during these events—when police treat crowds as universally dangerous and engage in broad-based, heavy-handed actions to control them, it can risk escalating tensions and turning the crowd against them.

Police agencies must sufficiently prepare for these events—even if large mass demonstrations are rare, the consequences of a poor response when they do happen are significant. This was abundantly clear in 2020, when police agencies around the country responded to a wave of nearly 18,000 protests. While some communities were successful in facilitating events without incident, after-action reports from several agencies highlighted a range of problems in mass demonstration response. This variety of responses demonstrates that gaps in practice remain, and the way agencies approach mass demonstrations varies considerably across the country.

This project aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the current landscape of approaches police agencies take to prepare for mass demonstrations. We fielded a nationally representative survey inquiring about agencies' mass demonstration policies and procedures, training programs, and community engagement initiatives. Several notable findings were evident from our survey:

- Most police agencies, especially smaller and mid-sized agencies, lack a dedicated policy for mass demonstrations. Of agencies without a dedicated mass demonstrations policy, just one-third reportedly plan to develop one in the near future.
- Most police agencies provide some training for their officers on responding to mass demonstrations, either in the academy or during in-service training, but few do so on a regular basis. In addition, few agencies cover modern, evidence-based topics in crowd psychology, such as the Elaborated Social Identity Model. Furthermore, while many agencies have mutual aid agreements in place with neighboring jurisdictions, few participate in joint training exercises, either regularly or in advance of mass demonstrations.
- Most agencies engage (or make efforts to engage) protest leaders to coordinate ahead of events. Most agencies also make efforts to regularly communicate important information to the public during mass demonstrations. However, few agencies make efforts to involve the community in more substantive aspects of mass demonstrations planning, such as seeking input on policy, inviting members of the community to observe or participate in trainings, or including the community in after-action reporting.

In addition to our national survey, we conducted in-depth site reviews of three agencies to contextualize the national survey data. These reviews allowed for deep exploration of our survey domains and to shed light on key operational components that have helped them successfully respond to mass demonstrations in their communities. Based on the site reviews, this report provides detailed information about key policy issues, such as organizational philosophy, use of force, and mass arrest; training implementation; and programming to foster authentic community engagement. We also learned about innovations in the field, such as the emergence of real-time crime centers, which offer great promise to change the way police plan for and manage mass demonstrations.

We encourage agencies to use the national survey findings reported here as a baseline to assess their current practices in responding to mass demonstrations. For agencies looking to make improvements to their current approaches, use the lessons learned from our site reviews. These three agencies have implemented many of the practices recommended by previous PERF reports, as well as the broader research literature on evidence-based responses to mass demonstrations. Agencies must remain vigilant on mass demonstration planning so that their officers are best-positioned to facilitate free assembly and expression while keeping communities safe.

APPENDIX: SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX TABLE 1
Response rate by sample strata (n = 705)[a]

Strata	Response rate (%)	Respondents	% of Final sample
Full sample	22.15	705	100.00
Strata Sampled with Certainty			
Agencies with 250+ Officers (excluding state & capitol agencies)	60.11	220	31.21
State Agencies	64.00	32	4.54
Capitol Agencies	42.86	9	1.28
Northeastern Agencies (< 250 Officers)			
Municipal	18.78	80	11.35
County	9.68	3	0.43
Campus	11.84	9	1.28
Southern Agencies (< 250 Officers)			
Municipal	15.52	99	14.04
County	11.16	24	3.40
Campus	20.66	25	3.55
Midwestern Agencies (< 250 Officers)			
Municipal	15.76	104	14.75
County	15.70	27	3.83
Campus	8.70	8	1.13
Western Agencies (< 250 Officers)			
Municipal	23.47	46	6.52
County	24.19	15	2.13
Campus	7.02	4	0.57

APPENDIX TABLE 2
Final sample demographics (weighted n = 17,106)

Demographic	%
Agency type	
Municipal	69.15
County	17.90
Campus	12.53
State	0.29
Capitol	0.12
Agency region	
Midwest	33.26
Northeast	19.26
South	35.64
West	11.85
# of Sworn officers per 1,000 population (Range: 0.004 – 83)	2.55 (3.67)[a]

[a] The mean and standard deviation are reported.

APPENDIX TABLE 3
Dedicated policy for managing mass demonstrations (weighted n = 6,491)[a]

Question	%
Does the agency have a dedicated policy for managing mass demonstrations?[b]	
Yes	37.95
No, but the agency will implement one in next six months	20.64
No, and the agency has no plans to develop one	39.48
Missing	1.93
When was the agency's dedicated policy implemented?	
Year (Range: 1978–2024)	2018.80 (6.18)[d]
Unsure	29.16
Missing	0.59
When was the agency's dedicated policy last updated?	
Year (Range: 1998–2025)	2022.62 (2.72)[d]
Unsure	17.16
Missing	1.26
Does the agency's dedicated policy contain explicit provisions that specifically address the following issues?[c]	
Public safety	89.03
Crowd safety	87.31
Officer safety	85.22
1A rights of participants	83.79
1A rights of observers	61.50
1A rights of journalists	61.11
None of the above	4.40
Missing	2.01

[a] Only agencies that have a dedicated policy for managing mass demonstrations were asked these questions.

[b] All respondents were asked this question (weighted n = 17,106).

[c] Participants were asked to select all options that applied. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who selected the option; therefore, totals will exceed 100 percent.

[d] The mean and standard deviation are reported.

APPENDIX TABLE 4

Extent to which agencies mandate or routinely conduct key mass demonstration response actions (weighted n = 17,106)

Action	Policy mandated[a]	Not policy mandated, but *commonly* done	Not policy mandated, and *rarely* done	Unsure	Missing
Submit a written action plan	34.08	35.67	20.62	8.63	0.99
Determine whether the necessary permits have been issued	25.70	37.74	23.95	10.76	1.86
Notify other relevant agencies (e.g., neighboring jurisdictions, fire, EMS, parks services, public works)	35.20	47.79	9.41	6.61	1.00
Specify the situations where officers are authorized to take action in response to specific events (i.e., establish reactive authority)	42.17	33.12	15.24	8.05	1.42
Estimate how many people are expected to attend the event	27.93	49.57	13.03	8.49	0.99
Develop a staffing plan	36.82	43.96	11.88	6.12	1.21
Identify whether the event will occur in one location or be mobile	30.33	46.51	13.09	8.63	1.44
Evaluate whether the group responsible for the event cooperates with your agency	28.97	48.96	13.72	7.13	1.22
Evaluate the history of the group responsible for the event	25.70	51.52	16.68	8.12	0.99
Identify potential counter-protest groups	23.62	51.15	15.51	8.74	0.99
Ensure the necessary equipment has been prepared	36.28	43.56	12.21	6.74	1.21

[a] Respondents were asked to indicate whether their dedicated policy for managing mass demonstrations—or other agency policies, if a dedicated policy did not exist—mandated these actions.

APPENDIX TABLE 5
Agency procedures for managing mass demonstrations (weighted n= 17,106)

Question	%
Does the agency follow the National Incident Management System (NIMS) protocol for mass demonstrations?	
Yes	66.61
No	10.28
Unsure	22.43
Missing	0.70
When a mass demonstration is planned, the agency facilitates the event by...[a]	
...communicating with event organizers/participants ahead of time what will be tolerated and what will not be tolerated	75.23
...appointing one or more liaisons within the agency to communicate with event organizers on an ongoing basis	69.29
...helping organizers obtain the necessary permits	26.09
...helping organizers identify suitable locations for the event	52.84
...displaying a greater level of tolerance for minor disruptions than under normal operations (i.e., outside of mass demonstrations)	48.66
Other	3.34
None of these options	15.65
Missing	1.43
Does the agency have a written plan (e.g., policy, training) in place to address counterprotests?	
Yes	28.00
No	65.92
Missing	6.08
At roll call during mass demonstrations, the agency...[a]	
...discusses agency's incident action plan for the current day	65.84
...highlights incidents that occurred during the previous 24 hours	53.84
...reflects upon what worked and did not work the previous day	48.95
...describes the past interactions agency has had with the event organizers	58.11
...reiterates officers' reactive authority (i.e., discretion to arrest, use force)	62.70
...reiterates the importance of constitutional policing	56.64
...reminds officers of agency's philosophy for policing mass demonstrations	58.86
...provides refresher trainings	32.74
None of these options	22.22
Missing	3.97
Does someone from the agency meet with the local district attorney ahead of mass demonstrations to determine his/her willingness to prosecute protestors who have been arrested?	
Yes	38.08
No	57.66
Missing	4.27

[a] Participants were asked to select all options that applied. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who selected the option; therefore, totals will exceed 100 percent.

APPENDIX TABLE 6
Helpfulness of sources for gathering intelligence about mass demonstrations (weighted n= 17,106)

Source	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Do not use	Missing
Meetings with assembly organizers	63.17	22.22	0.71	11.78	2.12
Meetings with community leaders/members	60.58	24.67	2.21	10.24	2.29
Social media	52.39	30.39	4.22	10.58	2.42
Undercover officers	34.98	30.70	3.31	27.82	3.19
Informants	30.11	29.76	5.32	21.23	3.56
Surveillance	51.14	26.44	2.52	16.97	2.94
Knowledge sharing with other law enforcement agencies (including reviewing after-action reports)	66.36	21.91	0.70	8.77	2.26
Other government agencies	54.95	28.74	1.85	10.11	4.36

APPENDIX TABLE 7
Memorandum of understanding or mutual aid agreement (weighted n = 17,106)

Question	Yes	No	Missing
Does the agency have a standing MOU or MAA with any neighboring jurisdictions for responding to mass demonstrations?	67.31	32.29	0.40
Does the agency have plans to put an MOU/MAA in place in the next six months?[a]	6.84	93.16	0.00

[a] This was only asked of agencies that do not have a standing MOU/MAA (weighted n = 5,524).

APPENDIX TABLE 8
Memorandum of understanding or mutual aid agreement policies (weighted n = 11,515)[a]

In general, the standing MOU/MAA(s) the agency has with neighboring jurisdictions...	Yes	No	Unsure	Missing
...includes a clear hierarchy or chain of command for joint operations.	77.05	11.10	11.23	0.62
...requires that assisting agencies abide by the policies of the lead agency.	59.29	24.06	16.00	0.64
...includes clear guidelines about how many officers from assisting agencies can be deployed.	35.45	46.72	17.47	0.36
....requires joint training exercises with all partner agencies.	27.27	58.12	13.97	0.64
...requires assisting agencies to use only the weapons and munitions approved for use by officers employed by the lead agency.	29.88	49.46	20.01	0.64

[a] Only agencies that have a standing MOU/MAA with a neighboring jurisdiction were asked these questions.

APPENDIX TABLE 9
MOU/MAA joint training mandates (weighted n= 3,140)[a]

How frequently are joint training exercises held with your MOU/MAA partners?	%
On a regular schedule, more frequently than once per year	10.64
On a regular schedule, annually	27.14
As needed, such as ahead of large 1A event	24.36
Both on a regular schedule *and* as needed (e.g., ahead of large events)	36.63
Missing	1.23

[a] Only agencies that have a standing MOU/MAA that requires joint training exercises with all partner agencies were asked this question.

APPENDIX TABLE 10
Authorization of and conditions for the use of selected tools during mass demonstrations (weighted n = 17,106)

Tool	Authorized, and officers may use at their discretion	Authorized, but officers need authorization prior to use	Not authorized for use	Unsure	Missing
Personal chemical agents (e.g., OC spray canisters)	68.13	18.73	8.21	3.20	1.73
Crowd chemical agents (e.g., OC foggers, OC/CS rounds, canisters, or grenades)	15.57	40.58	36.66	4.48	2.72
Electronic control weapons (e.g., TASER)	73.31	11.88	10.04	2.95	1.82
Flashbang grenades	2.85	29.12	59.83	3.81	4.39
Less lethal rounds/kinetic impact projectiles (e.g., bean bags)	20.54	34.22	38.23	3.89	3.12
Personal protection equipment (e.g., shields, protective gear, gas masks)	59.14	20.27	15.23	3.87	1.49
Drones	23.39	32.13	34.12	6.29	4.07
Armored vehicles and other vehicles for crowd management	8.03	31.54	50.59	6.61	3.22
Mounted patrol for crowd management	2.28	6.26	79.77	7.95	3.74
Long-range acoustic devices (LRAD)	1.33	8.99	76.87	8.79	4.02
Stinger, Stingball, or blast-ball grenades	3.01	17.75	68.47	7.21	3.56

APPENDIX TABLE 11
Personal protective equipment (PPE) (weighted n = 17,106)

Question	%
When the agency has deployed officers in full PPE since 2020, how was this equipment typically used at the onset of mass demonstrations?	
The agency deployed them in plain view at the beginning of the event.	3.12
These officers were placed out of sight of protest crowds, being deployed only when necessary.	19.84
Officers were required to have their PPE with them; however, they were not directed to wear it until necessary.	16.87
Officers were given discretion on whether or not they wore their PPE.	2.57
We do not deploy officers in full PPE at any time.	33.58
The agency jurisdiction has not experienced a protest since 2020.	8.77
The agency does not have PPE.	2.19
Other	11.10
Missing	1.96
Has the agency's typical approach to deploying officers in full PPE changed since 2019?	
Yes	9.12
No	89.49
Missing	1.39
What was the agency's typical approach to deploying officers in full PPE prior to 2020?	
The agency deployed them in plain view at the beginning of the event.	4.62
These officers were placed out of sight of protest crowds, being deployed only when necessary.	16.26
Officers were required to have their PPE with them; however, they were not directed to wear it until necessary.	16.20
Officers were given discretion on whether or not they wore their PPE.	3.18
We do not deploy officers in full PPE at any time.	36.30
The agency jurisdiction has not experienced a protest since 2020.	8.06
The agency does not have PPE.	23.70
Other	11.04
Missing	1.96

APPENDIX TABLE 12
Accountability and after-action review (weighted n= 17,106)

Question	%
Does the agency produce an after-action report after a 1A event has concluded?[a]	
Yes, after every event	29.52
Yes, after events with large crowds	14.39
Yes, after events where a significant incident occurred	19.86
Yes, after highly publicized events	6.26
Yes, when the police response is receiving significant criticisms from internal or external sources	5.37
No	30.22
Missing	7.75
Does the agency share its after-action reports with the community?[b]	
Yes	15.63
No	72.05
Missing	12.32
Does the agency review body-worn camera footage to...[a]	
Reviewing officer conduct (e.g., uses of force, complaints/allegations of misconduct)	67.15
Investigating criminal acts by protestors (e.g., looting, assault)	63.31
Training officers	56.77
Writing an after-action report	50.15
Addressing media (e.g., delivering press briefings, creating social media posts, etc.)	35.77
None of these options	20.96
Missing	7.47
Does the agency collect data on mass demonstrations that occur in their jurisdiction?	
Yes	16.98
No	76.77
Missing	6.25

[a] Participants were asked to select all options that applied. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who selected the option; therefore, totals will exceed 100 percent.

[b] Only agencies that produce an after-action report after a mass demonstration has concluded were asked this question (weighted n = 11,936).

APPENDIX TABLE 13
Mass demonstration metrics agencies routinely collect data on (weighted n = 2,905)[a]

Metric	Yes	No	Unsure	Missing
# of use-of-force incidents	97.12	1.44	0.00	1.44
# of arrests made	97.07	1.44	0.05	1.44
Length of demonstration (e.g., hours, days)	95.94	7.58	4.24	2.24
# of officer injuries	95.22	3.28	0.05	1.44
# of citations issued	95.16	3.34	0.05	1.44
# of less-lethal munitions used	94.24	3.35	0.12	2.30
# of civilian injuries	91.08	3.34	4.14	1.44
# of protesters	89.72	7.46	1.50	1.32
# of warnings given prior to taking enforcement action	89.31	6.12	2.09	2.48
# of cars and buildings damaged	87.28	6.76	4.34	1.61
Dollar amounts of overtime incurred	84.16	10.16	3.07	2.60
Dollar amounts of damage caused	82.57	9.33	5.63	2.47
# of proactive public communications (e.g., press releases, social media posts)	78.08	11.07	8.38	2.47

[a] Only agencies that collect data on mass demonstrations were asked these questions.

APPENDIX TABLE 14
Mass demonstration training offered by agency (weighted n = 17,106)

Question	%
Does the agency offer training on managing mass demonstrations?	
Yes	70.94
No	12.86
Unsure	2.93
Missing	13.27
What does the agency's training program consist of?	
Both academy and in-service training	39.70
Either academy or in-service training	31.23
Neither academy nor in-service training	12.86
Unsure	2.93
Missing	13.27
Does the agency offer training on managing mass demonstrations in the academy?	
Yes	56.35
No, but the agency has plans to incorporate it	6.50
No, and the agency has no plans to incorporate it	13.11
Unsure	23.57
Missing	0.48
Does the agency offer in-service training on managing mass demonstrations?	
Yes	54.29
No, but the agency has plans to incorporate it	24.96
No, and the agency has no plans to incorporate it	22.49
Unsure	4.37
Missing	3.88

APPENDIX TABLE 15
Academy training for mass demonstrations (weighted n = 9,639)[a]

Question	%
Do any entities mandate the agency's mass demonstrations academy training?[b]	
POST/state law enforcement training commission	47.51
State government entity (other than post)	16.90
Local government entity	8.92
Another entity	3.15
Mass demonstration academy training is not mandated	29.15
Missing	1.56
Who developed the agency's mass demonstrations academy training?	
Developed in-house	18.64
Collaborated with a partner	17.56
Developed entirely by a partner	30.80
Other	1.36
Unsure	30.56
Missing	1.08
What type of partner(s) did the agency work with to develop their mass demonstrations academy training?[b, c]	
Law enforcement agency	47.63
District attorney	11.07
Non-profit organization	0.87
Community organization	2.44
Policy management firm (e.g., Lexipol)	16.75
Other for-profit organization	3.25
Other	12.84
Missing	31.12

[a] Only agencies that offer mass demonstrations academy training were asked these questions.

[b] Participants were asked to select all options that applied. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who selected the option; therefore, totals will exceed 100 percent.

[c] Only agencies that worked with a partner to develop their academy training, or had a partner develop their training, were asked this question (weighted n = 4,662).

APPENDIX TABLE 16
In-service training for mass demonstrations (weighted n = 9,287)[a]

Question	%
Do any entities mandate the agency's mass demonstrations in-service training?[b]	
POST/state law enforcement training commission	30.99
State government entity (other than post)	10.38
Local government entity	9.11
Another entity	5.16
Mass demonstration in-service training is not mandated	51.25
Missing	1.18
How frequently does the agency provide mass demonstrations in-service training?	
Annually	36.92
Every other year	7.15
As needed	54.34
Unsure	1.55
Missing	0.03
When was the last calendar year the agency delivered mass demonstrations in-service training?	
Year (Range: 2008–2025)	2023.24 (1.13)[d]
Unsure	26.67
Missing	0.65
How many hours of mass demonstrations in-service training did each officer receive the last time it was delivered?	
Hours (Range: 1–70)	4.77 (5.97)[d]
Missing	29.62
Who developed the agency's mass demonstrations in-service training?	
Developed in-house	34.07
Collaborated with a partner	26.77
Developed entirely by a partner	27.44
Other	0.44
Unsure	10.57
Missing	0.70
What type of partner(s) did the agency work with to develop their mass demonstrations in-service training?[b, c]	
Law enforcement agency	63.87
District attorney	15.82
Non-profit organization	3.21
Community organization	3.50
Policy management firm (e.g., Lexipol)	26.30
Other for-profit organization	10.47
Other	15.34
Missing	0.93

[a] Only agencies that offer mass demonstrations in-service training were asked these questions.

[b] Participants were asked to select all options that applied. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who selected the option; therefore, totals will exceed 100 percent.

[c] Only agencies that worked with a partner to develop their mass demonstrations in-service training were asked this question (weighted n = 4,122)

[d] The mean and standard deviation are reported.

APPENDIX TABLE 17
Topics covered by agency's academy and/or in-service training (weighted n= 12,134)[a]

Topic	Covered	Not covered	Unsure	Missing
De-escalation training	94.69	1.18	3.04	1.10
Procedural justice (i.e., fair and equitable treatment)	83.47	7.94	7.23	1.36
1A law	92.16	2.63	3.85	1.36
The public's right to record officers	88.75	2.82	7.00	1.43
Importance of maintaining neutrality during mass demonstrations	82.35	7.43	8.20	2.02
How and when to conduct mass arrests	62.28	23.12	12.66	1.93
The agency's philosophy and goals for handling mass demonstrations	75.00	14.65	9.03	1.32
Crowd psychology (e.g., Elaborated Social Identity Model)	42.23	35.89	20.57	1.31

[a] Only agencies that offer academy or in-service training on managing mass demonstrations were asked this question.

APPENDIX TABLE 18
Community engagement (weighted n = 17,106)

Question	%
During mass demonstrations, a representative from the agency communicates with...[a]	
Event leaders/representatives	65.71
Members of local government	68.70
Neither	16.91
Missing	7.50
During mass demonstrations, the agency regularly communicates with the public...[a]	
Via press releases/briefings	37.76
Via social media posts	50.70
Via local news outlets	25.97
Other	5.80
Agency does not regularly communicate with the public	30.27
Missing	6.90
What types of information does the agency regularly communicate to the public?[a]	
Traffic-related matters (e.g., "avoid the area")	86.10
Challenges facing your agency (during the demonstration)	29.90
Real-time observations from the demonstration	27.16
Efforts being undertaken by your agency to positively engage protestors	50.33
Appreciation for protestors who chose to avoid conflict/violence and exercise their freedom of expression in a peaceful manner	44.27
None of these options	6.55
Missing	3.07

[a] Participants were asked to select all options that applied. Percentages reflect the number of respondents who selected the option; therefore, totals will exceed 100 percent.

[b] Only agencies that regularly communicate with the public during mass demonstrations were asked this question (weighted n = 10,748).

APPENDIX TABLE 19
Community involvement (weighted n = 17,106)

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	Missing
The agency allows the community to **observe training** exercises related to demonstration response.	11.25	70.89	11.15	6.71
The agency allows the community to **participate in training** exercises related to demonstration response.	8.60	73.77	10.92	6.71
The agency **allows community input** on our First Amendment assembly response policy.	22.47	58.35	11.83	7.35
The agency **trains community leaders** to be mediators during demonstration assemblies (i.e., facilitate positive police-community interactions).	13.75	66.28	12.88	7.09
The agency **shares daily incident reports** with the public during First Amendment assemblies.	17.86	62.63	12.39	7.11
The agency **involves community representatives** in writing after-action reviews.	8.63	70.16	14.18	7.03

APPENDIX TABLE 20
of Protests agencies managed by year (weighted n = 17,106)

Year	Mean	SD	Range	Unsure (%)	Missing (%)
2020	5.17	28.93	0–1222	7.58	10.19
2021	2.37	25.41	0–1896	7.40	12.64
2022	2.30	28.96	0–2241	7.39	13.06

APPENDIX TABLE 21
Were the # of protests agencies managed by year estimates (weighted n = 17,106)

Year	Yes	No	Missing
2020	27.29	63.17	9.57
2021	21.86	65.60	12.43
2022	22.81	64.34	12.85

APPENDIX TABLE 22
Counterprotests (weighted n = 17,106)

In a given year, what percentage of mass demonstrations attract counterprotests in the agency's jurisdiction?	%
0%	55.85
1% to 10%	28.63
11% to 25%	4.69
26% to 50%	2.54
51% to 75%	1.62
More than 75%	1.51
Missing	5.15

APPENDIX TABLE 23
Nature of mass demonstrations by year (weighted n = 17,106)

Type	2020	2021	2022
Percentage of mass demonstrations that were unlawful[a]			
0%	42.25	39.12	40.28
1% to 25%	9.19	4.15	3.90
26% to 50%	2.08	1.01	0.54
51% to 75%	0.86	0.19	0.25
More than 75%	4.84	2.15	2.61
Unsure	3.04	3.59	3.52
Missing	38.63	49.79	48.90
Percentage of mass demonstrations that were violent[b]			
0%	46.67	41.67	42.86
1% to 25%	8.07	3.51	3.40
26% to 50%	0.79	0.17	0.01
51% to 75%	0.42	0.15	0.01
More than 75%	0.61	0.23	2.00
Unsure	1.23	1.78	1.92
Missing	42.21	52.51	51.61

[a] **Unlawful assemblies** are those that infringe upon the rights of individuals or otherwise represent a *minor* threat to public safety. They usually involve acts of civil disobedience such as blocking traffic, refusing lawful orders, and turning over trashcans (i.e., minor property damage).

[b] **Violent assemblies** involve severe violations of state and federal law (e.g., assaults on officers, looting, arson). These assemblies create an imminent danger to the public and require a robust law enforcement response.

APPENDIX TABLE 24
Impact of 2020's mass demonstrations (weighted n = 17,106)

Question	%
The agency was well prepared for the mass demonstrations of 2020.	
Strongly Agree	9.03
Agree	22.22
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28.28
Disagree	11.53
Strongly Disagree	4.50
Unsure	13.57
Missing	10.86
The mass demonstrations of 2020 had a direct impact on the agency's current policies.	
Strongly Agree	10.82
Agree	17.79
Neither Agree nor Disagree	29.53
Disagree	7.88
Strongly Disagree	8.72
Unsure	13.70
Missing	11.47
Was/is the agency involved in litigation related to its handling of protests in 2020?	
Yes	2.85
No	88.07
Missing	9.07

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