

A review of the police response to riots in France 2005, United Kingdom in 2011, Ferguson 2014, and Baltimore 2015

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ABSTRACT

Since the late 1990s, there has been an increased proclivity to demonstrate or riot, with the number, size and frequency of violent protests increasing in the United States, the United Kingdom and most western democracies. The current police response to violent protest and riots is similar across the western world and usually involves authorities moving quickly to control the violence and attempting to restore order. A qualitative case study approach is used to examine the police response to riots that took place in France 2005, London 2011, Ferguson 2014 and Baltimore 2015. The analysis has been developed from a comprehensive review of the literature, including published and unpublished academic articles, mainstream media articles and government and institution research reports. The analysis of the police response to the riots described in the four case studies found that there were ten themes in the police response that were common to all four case studies and that influenced the effectiveness of their response.

Keywords: riots, police response to riots

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increase in the number, size and frequency of violent protest activity across most western democracies in recent years. This follows a period of relative calm between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s. Since the late 1990s, however, a proclivity to demonstrate or riot has been on the rise (Body-Gendrot, 2013; Body-Gendrot, Hornqvist & Newburn, 2016). In addition to an increase in the inclination to protest, protestors have displayed an increase in their willingness to assault innocent bystanders and to perform deliberate violent acts of vandalism (Waddington, 2007). Technology and other modes of social media have also had an impact on the intentions of demonstrators and demonstrations (Baker, 2012).

The current response to violent protest and riots is similar across the western world and usually involves authorities moving quickly to control the violence and restoring order (Author, 2019; della Porta, Peterson & Reiter, 2006). The policing of public order, however, is not a well understood aspect of policing and is usually set apart from ‘normal’ policing (Stott & Drury, 2017; Waddington, 1991). In some jurisdictions, it is the role of specially dedicated squads (Waddington, 1991). However, whether it is performed by specialised officers or not, public order feels and looks like a different type of policing (della Porta 1998: Drury, Stott & Farsides, 2003; Eggert, et. al., 2018).

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This article reviews the response taken by the police to violent disorder or riots, rather than the response taken by the police to peaceful or negotiated protests. It is based on the examination of the police response to four different case study riots and does not include an examination of the post-riot investigations or prosecutions. The article examines and compares the police response to four riots in three different countries: the United States (Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland), the United Kingdom and France. These examples of riots were chosen for their uniqueness at the time that they occurred, their size, geographical spread and quickness of spreading and the number of people arrested. The following section examines some of the main controversies involved with policing riots. This discussion is followed by the approach used to examine and compare the four case study riots. The final sections include an analysis of the case studies and concluding comments.

THE POLICING OF PUBLIC DISORDER AND RIOTS

The occurrence of riots poses a number of challenges to the police on an unparalleled scale, with an effective response often requiring the deployment of a large number of police officers, some of which may be from other jurisdictions (Baker, Bronitt, & Stenning, 2017), or may not be trained in riot response tactics. The primary objective of the police when responding to violent protest or a riot is to control or limit the violence and then suppress it (Earl & Soule, 2006). According to Eggert, et. al., (2018), the response actions formulated by the police and the decisions made during the response are predictable and patterned.

The difficulty for the police in responding to riots originates from the need for the police to balance the security of individuals and the community with their civil rights (Waddington, 2007). As result of the need to balance the rights of protestors, the complexity of the violence (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2009), and to ensure an effective police response, the police need to develop appropriate deployment plans and establish a command structure to manage and control the resources that are being deployed. The type of response implemented however, may bring to the forefront the legitimacy and impartiality of the police and the questioning of the effectiveness of their response (Jefferson, 1990; Waddington, 2007), especially if the riot is prolonged or becomes more violent.

The policing of violent disorder and riots is different from routine policing (Waddington, 2007) and as such, responding to violent protests and riots may conflict with the principles of Community Oriented Policing and the philosophy of being accountable to the community because the form of the police response is often viewed as a measure of the relationship between the police and the community (Baker, 2011; della Porta, 1998). The type of response implemented may bring to the forefront the legitimacy and impartiality of the police and the questioning of the effectiveness of their response (Jefferson, 1990; Waddington, 2007), especially if the riot is prolonged or becomes more violent.

The discussion of the police approach to violent disorder has been supported by a significant body of scientific evidence and theory within social science since the late 1980s and suggests that there is a very close relationship between the dynamics of crowd violence and public order policing (della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Hall & de Lint 2003; Jefferson, 1990; King & Waddington, 2004, 2005; Sheptycki, 2002; Waddington & King, 2005; Waddington, P., 1987, 1991, 1993, 1994). The strategies and tactics used by the police that is examined in this literature tends to concentrate on large events that could become violent and disruptive, rather

than on riots, which is the topic of this article. Furthermore, early literature focused on the interaction of the police and protestors. This however, had changed by the 1990s, when researchers were more interested in the social-psychological perspective of crowds (Davis & Dawson, 2015) leading to the development of the Social Identity Model (SIM) and the Elaborated Social Identity Model (Stott, et. al., 2007). The social identity models are based on the perceived actions of the police, especially when the actions are viewed as being unjustified or illegitimate. The theory proposes that as a result of people perceiving the police as being legitimate, they are more likely to have trust in the police and comply with their direction (Stott, et. al., 2012).

Another model that was developed from research into the cause of riots in the late 1980s, was the Flashpoints model (Waddington, Jones & Critcher, 1987). The model emphasised that a disorder should be examined within a wider context and that there needs to be two elements present for disorder to occur; precursor or pre-requisite conditions (the ‘tinder’), such as a shooting or death caused by the actions of the police, mixed with interpersonal interaction (the ‘spark’), such as the police using teargas to disperse protestors (Gorringer & Rosie, 2008).

A primary problem for the police is the development of their response and the deployment of their limited resources as the majority of protests are peaceful and are policed by what McPhail, Schweingruber and McCarthy (1998), described as ‘negotiated management’. This observation is supported by della Porta and Reiter (1998), who claimed that the police response to violent protests and riots is developed from their previous interactions with the protestors or similar groups. This information is then analysed with the context of their knowledge and experience (della Porta & Reiter, 1998), or, as described by Jaime-Jimenez and Reinares (1998), the police perception of the environment which is conditioned by the functions that they carry out and their experience with these functions. Although the overarching influence is political, the police decide how they will respond to the riot or violent disorder and what strategies and tactics they will use (Eggert, et. al., 2018). In other words, the response strategies and tactics used will depend on whether the crowd is perceived by the police to become violent. The form of response strategies and tactics, however, are usually shaped by the characteristics or appearance of the riot or violent civil disorder (Davenport 2000; Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003) and will determine whether non-lethal weapons, such as rubber bullets or teargas is used. In summary, the response developed and implemented by the police is not only based on a specific event or by the behaviour of protestors, as most of the previous studies have concluded, but instead, is based on a structured and analytical approach (Eggert, et. al., 2018).

WHAT IS A RIOT?

This article is primarily about the response taken by the police to violent disorder or riots, rather than the response taken by the police to peaceful or negotiated protests (Braham, 2012). A riot is a form of civil disorder that usually including individuals or groups using violence to create a public disturbance, or to use violence against authority. Riots can also include such actions as vandalism against public and private property and arson. According to Moran and Waddington (2016):

Riots are complex phenomena and their outbreak is inevitably symptomatic of deeper societal problems. These events may often appear to be ‘issueless’, or at least lacking a clearly discernible cause that would bring a welcome analytical coherence to the series of events in question (p.6).

Riots are also characteristically “chaotic social phenomena and each occurrence represents the violent manifestation of a unique configuration of driving forces and influencing events” (Moran & Waddington, 2016, p. 171). Each occurrence of a riot may have some common features, such as a triggering event, but by its form and composition, each is unique (Moran & Waddington, 2016). This uniqueness occurs owing to the different outcomes arising from a mixture of distinct underlying and background factors that can vary considerably from riot to riot (Moran & Waddington, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study analysis approach is adopted in this article to examine the police response to the four riots that took place in France 2005, London 2011, Ferguson 2014 and Baltimore 2015. The approach to the four case studies is comparative and includes an interactive framework that incorporates a number of key variables. These variables examine how each riot began, how they developed and the response by the police. The use of these variables ensures that the analysis concentrates primarily on the actions of the police, rather than on the reasons for the riots, although this is discussed in the development of the case study. The case study approach is used to examine the four riots, drawing conclusions only about the response of the police to the riots. According to Yin (2014), multiple case studies are useful when studying a group of individual cases that involve a common phenomenon and enables a researcher to compare and contrast multiple cases using a conceptual framework (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

The case studies have been developed from a comprehensive content analysis review of the literature, including published and unpublished academic articles, mainstream media articles and government and institutional research reports. Content analysis is used to determine the presence of certain words, themes or concepts within a text and is used for examining the meaning or relationships between these elements.

THE CASE STUDIES

France 2005

Riots involving the immigrant population and residents of economically and socially deprived urban areas have been occurring in France, especially in Paris and the city’s surrounding suburbs since the beginning of the 1980s (Jobard, 2009). The worst rioting since 1968 occurred in France in late October 2005. The rioting spread to more than 300 cities and towns across the country (Katz, 2008), following the deaths of two teenagers of North African and Malian descent, who were attempting to escape a police identity check.

The riots occurred over 21 nights, injuring 201 police officers and 26 fire fighters, with no official figures on the number of rioters injured. The main instigators of the riots according to Mohammed (2009) were members of youth gangs. More than 9,000 vehicles and 30,000 rubbish containers were burnt (Mucchielli, 2009). Government buildings and institutions were targeted, as was the public transport system. More than 140 buses were burnt and in addition, more than 20 places of worship were damaged (Mucchielli, 2009).

The police response

An analysis of the 2005 riots in France revealed that the main problem in the riot was the continuing over-reactions of the police (Author, 2019). The strategy used by the French police to respond to the riots was based on a technique called space saturation. This technique involves deploying riot police in large numbers to project a threatening police presence, which makes it possible for the police to limit the size and the consequences of an incident and enables the police to take control and suppress the riots within a very short time frame (Mouhanna, 2009).

The large size of the national riot response capability enabled the police to deploy more than 11,000 officers on each night of the riots and allowed for a contingency of reserve forces (Mouhanna, 2009; Mucchielli, 2009). Although the police had the resources and the capability to respond to the riots, it appeared that they were slow in doing so. The slow response was for two reasons. The first was that the riots were occurring only in the banlieues, and the disorder initially only included the torching of vehicles. The second reason was because riots such as these usually only lasted for two or three nights, and the police thought these riots would not be any different.

At the end of the first week of rioting, the Minister of Interior implemented a more arrest-oriented form of policing (Jobard, 2009), enabling the police to change their response. Three strategies were implemented by the police as a part of their new response. The first strategy was to increase the number of riot officers and riot control units, which would enable the police to deploy larger numbers of officers (Roche & de Millard, 2009).

The second strategy adopted by the police was a change in riot control tactics. The new tactic gave the police more visibility, giving assurance to the public (Roche & de Millard, 2009). The strategy placed an emphasis on the pro-active policing of youths, especially youth gangs. The third strategy that the police adopted was to change the responsibility for the command and control of the deployed units and officers from the department level to the local level (Roche & de Millard, 2009). The change in the level of responsibility was adopted as there were too many riots to co-ordinate at the department level and the demand from the District Commissioners at the local level were more of a tactical nature rather than that of a strategic nature.

London 2011

The events that triggered the 2011 riots were very similar to the triggers of the riots that occurred in the mid-1980s and again in the 1990s in Brixton and Tottenham in that the relationship between the police and the ethnic community was tense, owing to the police use of tactics, such as stop and search. The 2011 riots followed the death of a man shot dead by police on 4 August (BBC News, 2011c).

The December 2011 report of the August 2011 English riots, prepared by the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, claimed that the riots were “unprecedented in the modern era” (cited in Moran & Waddington, 2016, p. 116). The riots occurred between 6 and 11 August 2011, and while they started in a London borough, they spread across a number of London boroughs and then on to several major towns and cities, such as Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester, Derby, Wolverhampton, Nottingham, West Bromwich, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, and Salford.

Five people died as a result of the rioting and at least 16 people were injured, with more than £200 million worth of damage to property (BBC News, 2011a). By 15 August, more than 3,000 arrests had been made across England and a further 1,100 people had been charged with various criminal offences relating to the riots (BBC News, 2011b). According to Harding (2012), as the riots unfolded, gangs took the opportunity to loot in the areas that lacked a police presence. Harding also claimed that the gangs “actively monitored police activity on an hourly basis”, which enabled them to take advantage of any emerging policing vacuum (2012, p. 202).

The Police Response

The police response strategy comprised of two parts (King, 2013). The first part involved the response to the violence and property damage and the second part involved engaging with the community in an attempt to de-escalate the disorder (King, 2013). However, these tactics proved to be unsuccessful as the looting and violence were “too dynamic and fluid” to be contained by any conventional police response (King, 2013). As a result, the police changed their response from being “too static” and not effective, to tactics that were based on maximizing arrests and “re-establish[ing] the sense of deterrence” (Sims, 2011, p. 29). The police also established the use of mobile police units and the deployment of police dog patrols (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2011a).

To ensure that the arrest-focused and mobile approach provided a deterrence and was able to be sustained, the police integrated additional operational strategies. The first was to meet the demand for more officers. To meet the demand for more police officers, requests were made to police forces across the country, including Scotland, via the Mutual Aid process (King, 2013). The second strategy was the use of social media to increase liaison with and to inform the community (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2011; Sims, 2011, King, 2013).

The use of social media by the police was one strategy that was used to thwart the use of such media by rioters who had used the media in the past to facilitate social networking and to recruit rioters (Baker, 2012). According to Baker, (2012), the use of social media by both the police and rioters contributed to the form and effect of the riots, but it was not the initial cause of the disorder.

Ferguson 2014

The fatal shooting of a young African American man by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri on 9th August 2014, sparked one of the worst riots ever seen in the greater St. Louis County area (The New York Times, 2014). A number of waves of protesting and rioting followed the shooting. The first wave, from 9 to 24 August 2014, was widespread and involved acts of vandalism and looting (The New York Times, 2014; Kienscherf, 2014). The second wave, from September 23 to September 29 centred on the call for the resignation of the Chief of the Ferguson Police. The third wave was a result of the police officer who shot the African American man not being indicted for the death. The last wave of protesting and rioting occurred on the one-year anniversary of the shooting.

The riots in Ferguson mainly included the vandalising and looting of local businesses, and confronting and throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails at the police. More than 300 people were arrested in the first wave of riots and more than 400 were arrested during the third wave

of riots (Coleman, 2014). One of the main challenges confronting the police was the widespread use of social media which was used to spread misinformation throughout the community and as a platform for organizing a large number of people to participate nightly in the civil disorder (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2015).

The Police Response

Similar to the riots in France and the United Kingdom, the relationship of the police with the community was not strong prior to the riots and the riots would probably not have happened without police provocation (Bernish, 2015). Nor would they have continued if the police had used more appropriate strategies and responded with tactics that did not appear to be militarised (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2015). Ferguson residents also claimed that when the riots did occur, the police response was ineffective (Robertson, 2015).

According to the Institute for Intergovernmental Research (2015), more than 50 law enforcement agencies were involved in the police response to the riots in Ferguson. However, the police were at a disadvantage from the beginning of the protests (Reilly, 2015). The St. Louis County Police Department and the Ferguson Police Department, during the first two days of the riots, chose to deploy a high-policing response (Robertson, 2015), which was interpreted as mimicking the relationship between the white population and African Americans during the period of slavery. In essence, the initial response by the police gave the appearance that they believed that the incident would be short-lived and did not develop a longer-term response strategy (Robertson, 2015) or any form of communication with the community. This belief is further demonstrated by the over-reliance on standard public protest response tactics (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2015), such as the use of non-lethal weapons and tear-gas grenades, rather than implementing a more coordinated or strategic comprehensive community-oriented response.

Baltimore 2015

Early on Sunday morning April 12, 2015, officers from the Baltimore Police Department arrested an offender at Gilmore Homes. The man was subsequently placed in a police van and arrived at the station sometime later, after making a number of stops along the way (Police Executive Research Forum, 2015). On arrival at the police station however, the man had sustained a number of injuries and from which he subsequently died.

The first demonstration in relation to the arrest and death of the man occurred on Saturday April 18, outside the Western District Police Station (Fenton, 2015). Although there were marches every evening from Sunday April 19 to Friday April 24, a second demonstration was held on Saturday April 25, which included a march from the Winchester neighbourhood where the man was arrested to the City Hall. After the demonstration concluded, a number of groups leaving the demonstration began to vandalise parked police vehicles and shops within the inner-city area. The disorder subsequently turned into a riot with shop windows being smashed and rioters fighting with people attending a baseball game at Oriole Park.

The civil unrest continued after a shopping mall was closed by the Baltimore Police, which was the catalyst for the second riot that occurred on the afternoon and evening of Monday April 27. The mall had been closed because the Baltimore Police had received information from a text that there was going to be a 'purge' on the mall that afternoon.

The Police Response

In response to the violence, the Baltimore Police used its “Twitter feed to urge demonstrators to remain peaceful and blamed the problems on “isolated pockets of people from out of town causing disturbances downtown” (Stolberg & Babcock, 2015). The Baltimore Police deployed extra officers to the area, and as the rioters approached the downtown area on Saturday April 25, the police formed a skirmish line across the main street. As more officers arrived on the scene, the police were able to make arrests and eventually dispersed most of the crowd. However, these actions were not able to stop rioters smashing windows, vandalising buildings and setting fire to vehicles.

In the early afternoon of Monday April 27, officers from the Baltimore Police, together with Baltimore City School Police Officers observed crowds forming at Mondawmin Mall and action was taken to manage the crowd. As there was no transportation out of the mall area, the crowd could not disperse easily and as a result, the crowd began to increase in size and started to become violent. They threw rocks, bricks and other debris at officers who were equipped only with helmets and shields. By not using arrest teams, a stand-off developed between the crowd and the police, and break-away groups from the crowd descended on unattended police cars, vandalising and burning them (Marbella, 2015).

DISCUSSION

In comparing the four case studies, the form and scale of the riots were very different. The size of the riots in England were significant, but they did not spread as widely as those in France, which spread to hundreds of towns and cities. The spread of the riots to other locations were not only because of solidarity with the catalyst event, but also because of the type of response to the initial riot by the police. The case studies of the riots in the United States were concentrated in the city or in the general vicinity of the police action which led to the death, although there were short-lived and smaller-sized riots and violence in a number of other cities across the country. What makes each of the case study riots different from previous riots is their perpetuation and spread, primarily because of policing actions, public reaction especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, and the political reaction in each country. There was also a difference in the reaction of the community in France. There was no community reaction to the riots and the political reaction in France was the opposite of that experienced in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The catalyst for all three of the riots were the actions of the police; police shootings in Ferguson and London, and police negligence in Baltimore. The shootings in Ferguson and London, however, were not the only factors that formed the catalysts for the riots; it was the actions by the police following the shootings. Beyond the actions of the police, the alienation that was experienced by the young people of minority communities and the profound suspicion of, and resentment towards the police were the principal features in the rioting that occurred in all of the locations (Newburn, 2014).

All of the riots included attacks on the police, looting and the destruction and vandalism of property. There were, however, differences in the form or tactical response that was adopted by the Ferguson and Baltimore police when compared to that adopted by the British police. The American approach appeared to be more militarised and included the use of “Tear gas,

stun grenades, rubber bullets, camouflage uniforms, armoured cars, assault rifles, shotguns and automatic weapons” (Newburn, 2014).

A further difference that was noted was the changes that were made as to who was the commander or the command or lead agency in both Ferguson and Baltimore. In Ferguson, the command agency changed to the State Police owing to a perceived weakness in the local police response, while in Baltimore, there were numerous internal changes to the Baltimore Police Commander, which led to confusion as to who was in charge (Gately & Stolberg, 2015; Police Executive Research Forum, 2015).

An analysis of the police response to the four case study riots found that there were ten themes in the police response that were common to all four case studies. All of the themes shaped the form of the riots and influenced the effectiveness of the police response and ranged from having an some to extensive influence. The ten themes and their level of presence in each of the riots is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Ten Common Themes Found in Case Studies –

	Catalyst – Police Actions	Use of Social Media	Lack of Trust in Police	Gang Involvement	Spread to Other Locations	People Travelled to Participate	Weaknesses in Police Response Plans	Weaknesses in Police Response Structures	Political Interference	Weaknesses in Police-Media Relationship
France 2005	Yes	Not identified	Extensive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
United Kingdom 2011	Yes	Extensive	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Extensive	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ferguson 2014	Yes	Extensive	Extensive	Some	Yes	Yes	Extensive	Yes	Yes	Yes
Baltimore 2015	Yes	Yes	Extensive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

The riots in all four case studies were the result of the deaths of citizens caused by the actions of the police and the widely held perception of the community that the police lacked legitimacy and were not to be trusted. Furthermore, the way in which the police managed and responded to the initial disorder was a principal factor in the subsequent spread of the rioting (Roche & de Maillard, 2009) in all four cases. However, the spread and level of the rioting was different

in each of the four countries (Newburn, 2016). From post-riot research, the rioters' anger with the police was primarily based on the police use of stop and search powers in London and France and the perceived racial profiling underpinning the use of such tactics (Newburn, 2016). In comparison, the rioters were angry in both Baltimore and Ferguson because of how the police treated African Americans (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2015). The rioters' anger with the police, according to Lewis, et. al., (2011), was more consistent in England than in the United States or France.

The main difference in the case study riots compared to previous riots was the use of social media by both the protestors and the police. The use of social media and technology ensured that protestors were well organised, and this led to the police being unable to gain control of the riots in all three countries during the first few days. However, the London riots were also notable for the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) images of offenders in identifying offenders, investigation and prosecution, and in providing social media and news publicity (Evison, 2015). The rioters were also inventive; burning cars that were often used as barricades, the use of social media to identify false riot spots and to warn others of the police approach and the use of masks to hide the rioters' faces (Bujra & Pearce, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The reason for, or the principle of rioting in each of the three countries lies in their habitual occurrence. Despite their apparent spontaneity, riots in each of the countries has been characterised by a high level of self-discipline and use of accepted rioter tactics: burning cars and rubbish bins, confronting the police and the throwing of bricks or stones, and sometimes Molotov cocktails, but usually no gunfire.

Two of the main themes identified in the case studies were the intertwined issues of the actions of the police and their relationship with the ethnic or minority community. The undisputed, immediate triggers for the riots in all four case studies was the actions of the police. Not only have the deaths of a member of the community been the starting point of the riots in each of the cases, but the mismanagement or weaknesses of the response taken by the police after the fatal incident appears to be the triggering event that led to the riot spreading to other cities. This means that in the four case studies, the police can be seen as a key player in the riot process (Jobard, King & Waddington, 2009). There are, however, a number of factors that influenced the actions of the police in all of the case studies: the weaknesses in the police response structure and political interference. As a result, the police are, on the one hand, seen as supporting the policies of the local and national governments, and on the other hand, as representing that polity (Jobard, et. al., 2009).

What must be realised is that the response by the police to a riot is not without paradoxes, challenges, risks, and trade-offs and any implemented strategy or tactic must be continually re-evaluated in the dynamic operational conditions (Marx, 1998). The public order capability of the police is part of a country's national infrastructure, which means that there must be a political interoperability policy to ensure cooperating police agencies are able respond to a riot in coordination (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2011).

For the police to continue to respond appropriately to the different forms of riots means that the use of the existing police tactics needs to be perfected and that there is a contingency of officers available to assistance should violence occur (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of

Constabulary, 2011). This must be balanced with learning lessons from previous riots and adopting tactics that have been amended to lessen the risk of violence occurring.

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