1 | General Introduction
Street protests\(^1\) are omnipresent in Europe and other parts of the world. Almost on a daily basis, people take the streets to voice their grievances ‘about the way the authorities [or other power holders] are treating a social problem’ (Klandermans, 1997: 38). For example, The Hague—the political capital of the Netherlands and ‘the legal capital of the World’\(^2\)—hosts about 1,500 demonstrations per year (Van Aartsen, 2014), that is, almost 30 a week. Similar numbers have been found for other large European cities, such as Madrid (1,778 in 2010) (Gobierno de España, 2010: 17) and Berlin (more than 4,000 in 2013) (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport, 2013: 5).

The prevalence of street protest is explained by the fact that it belongs to the standard repertoire of political participation, at least in Western democracies (Goldstone, 2003; Johnston, 2011). So, next to voting, and petitioning, to name a few other forms of political participation, citizens may try to influence politics by taking part in a protest event. Research revealed that many different social groups do this to address a wide array of claims (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998; Rucht, 1998), such as students opposing budget cuts on higher education, minorities denouncing police violence, and Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders (LGBT’s) advocating for their acceptance by society, to name a few.

Obviously, these events are not all the same. One only needs to attend a student demonstration and a Gay Pride parade to witness their differences, in terms of the people who participate in them, for example. However, comparative research of these events is rare (e.g., Klandermans, Van Stekelenburg, and Walgrave, 2014; Walgrave and Rucht, 2010a). Consequently, ‘many aspects of protests are insufficiently understood’ (Walgrave and Rucht, 2010a: xiv). This dissertation aims to help alleviate this gap in the literature by presenting four empirical studies on street demonstrations and their core actors, that is, demonstrators and the police, which are all based on comparative designs. Before I\(^3\) present these studies, that is, their research questions and research designs, I first explain what protests are, and what role demonstrators and police officers play in them.

---

\(^1\) In this dissertation, I use the terms ‘(street) demonstration’, ‘(street) protest’, and ‘protest event’ interchangeably.

\(^2\) Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations between 1992 and 1997, was the first to call The Hague ‘the legal capital of the World’ (Embregts and Nieuwenhuys, 2007).

\(^3\) In Chapters 2-5 I use the first-person, plural personal pronoun (we), instead of the first-person, singular personal pronoun (I), because these papers were drafted in cooperation with other scholars.
STREET PROTESTS

A street protest is ‘any temporary occupation by a number of people of an open place, public or private, which directly or indirectly includes the expression of political opinions’ (Fillieule, 2012: 235, referring to Fillieule, 1997). This definition consists of four elements (Fillieule, 1997: 41-43). First of all, a protest constitutes the occupation of a public place. As such, it does not entail, for example, a political reunion being held indoors. Secondly, a demonstration counts a certain number of people. While scholars have not identified a minimum number of participants (e.g., Op cit.: 41-42), governments generally have. For instance, according to the Dutch government, a protest counts at least two individuals (Embregts and Nieuwenhuys, 2007: 8-9). Further, a protest is a means of communication, or, in the words of Tilly (2008: 7), a ‘claim[s]-making performance’. While there are various forms of street protests (e.g., protest marches, rallies, picketing, and sit-ins⁴), their participants generally all make claims, either verbally (e.g., booing, or chanting) or non-verbally (e.g., holding protest banners, or occupying a symbolic place) (e.g., Tilly, 2000). Last, but not least, protests are political by nature, that is, demonstrators engage in a power struggle (Fillieule, 1997: 41-43; Tilly, 2008).

So, for example, hooligan meetings and suburban riots are not considered protests.

The first three characteristics have received some scholarly attention. For example, scholars have studied in which public places protesters prefer to stage their events (Salmenkari, 2009; Tilly, 2000), how protests differ in size (Verhulst, 2010; also see McPhail and McCarthy, 2004), and how collective claims-making may take form (Tarrow, 1989; Tilly, 2008). Although these studies are generally not comparative in nature, they shed some light on street protests. To the best of my knowledge, scholars have not devoted any attention, comparative or otherwise, to the fourth protest characteristic: its political nature. This is probably because, as Fillieule (1997: 42) put it, ‘the political nature of a demonstration is […] the most difficult to isolate’ (my translation). After all, ‘many events that at first sight seem non-political may indicate a sociopolitical crisis or be the occasion of its expression’ (Op cit.: 42-43, my translation), such as political burials. And while protests translate into or open up the expression of demands of a political or social nature’ (Fillieule, 2012: 236), this may happen unintentionally (Ibid.). So, determining the political nature of a street demonstration

⁴ A protest march constitutes ‘a parade […] along a set route’. A rally concerns a gathering during which ‘people […] listen to speakers or musicians’ (Wikipedia, n.d. (a)). Picketing ‘is a form of protest in which people […] congregate outside a place of work or location where an event is taking place’ (Wikipedia, n.d. (b)). During a sit-in, ‘demonstrators occupy an area, sometimes for a stated period but sometimes indefinitely, until they feel their issue has been addressed, or they are otherwise convinced or forced to leave’ (Wikipedia, n.d. (a)).
poses a challenge. Still, I believe this is a challenge worth pursuing, given that politicization is considered the *single most important* protest feature (Fillieule, 1997: 42). So, the first empirical study of this dissertation seeks to unravel protest politicization.

**PROTEST ACTORS**

Street demonstrations bring together various actors, the most notable ones being *demonstrators* (Favre, 1990: 20; Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2008: 18). As the name suggests, demonstrators are people ‘who engage […] in a public demonstration’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Worth noting is that demonstrators are not all the same (Favre, 1990: 19-20). First of all, ‘mere’ participants distinguish themselves from protest organizers, which are protesters ‘who try to convert a movement’s mobilization potential, that is, people who agree with the movement’s goals and ideas but have not yet acted upon them, into [protest] participants’ (Boekkooi, 2012: 2), and safety stewards, which are protesters who govern the event (Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2008: 19). Secondly, demonstrators often ‘represent’ various social (sub)groups. For example, a protest rally against budget cuts on the Dutch public sector, staged in The Hague early 2011, consisted of various ‘types’ of civil servants, such as firemen, policemen, teachers, and social workers (Mijn Vakbond, 2011).

Still, whatever their role or background, protesters aim to prevent or promote social change on behalf of their group (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2009). As such, they engage in collective action and social movement participation at the same time. Collective action concerns ‘people’s acting together in pursuit of common interests’ (Tilly, 1978: 7; also see Fillieule, 1997: 38). Social movements are ‘collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities’ (Tarrow, 2011: 9). So, the protest organizations that are part of a social movement (e.g., Greenpeace as a member of the environmental movement) may stage collective action activities to further their shared goals, one of which being the street demonstration.

While comparative research on collective action and social movements is extensive (for an overview see, e.g., Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2010), this is not the case for the specific category of street protest. Admittedly, in the last decade, comparative research on protest participants has been on the rise, probably, amongst others, because of two international research projects: the ‘International Peace Protest Survey’

---

5 In this dissertation, I use the terms ‘demonstrator’, ‘protester’, and ‘protest participant’ interchangeably.
(IPPS)\(^6\) and ‘Caught in the act of protest: Contextualizing Contestation’ (CCC)\(^7\). Based on these (and other) data, scholars have systematically studied demonstrators’ political attitudes (Della Porta and Reiter, 2012; Klandermans, 2010), their demographics (Saunders, Grasso, Olcese, Rainsford, and Rootes, 2012; Walgrave, Rucht, and Van Aelst, 2010), their sense of group identification and empowerment (e.g., Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, and Rapley, 2005; Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, and De Weerd, 2002), and the effect of group identification and empowerment on demonstrators’ future action preparedness (Drury et al., 2005; Klandermans et al., 2002). Although these studies are insightful, they do not tell the full story of what protest participation is about.

The second and third empirical study of this dissertation aim to clarify this story by studying demonstrators’ perceptions of protest atmosphere. This concept has, to the best of my knowledge, not yet been scrutinized, while it is, in fact, referred to by scholars and protest actors alike (e.g., Drury et al., 2005; Fillieule, 1997). Knowing how demonstrators perceive the atmosphere of a protest event is relevant because it sheds light on demonstrators’ protest experiences, which are relatively understudied. What is more, the first of these two studies shows that demonstrators’ atmosphere perceptions influence their willingness to engage in future collective action over and above the variables that are known to play a role, such as group identification and empowerment. So, (perceived) protest atmosphere helps to explain sustained protest participation. This is another poorly understood phenomenon (e.g., Klandermans, 1997).

Another important protest actor is the police (Favre, 1990: 19, 21-24; Fillieule and Tartakowsky, 2008: 18), also known as ‘the strong arm of the state’ (e.g., Timmer, 2005: 54). This label refers to the police’s ‘monopoly of violence’, that is, their ability to use force against citizens, which other public organizations (except for the armed forces) lack (Naeyé, 2007). Like demonstrators, police officers are not all the same. That is to say, a street demonstration may be presented by different police units (e.g., riot police, mounted police, and/or dialogue police), which perform different duties. Still, when different police units are

\(^6\) IPPS sampled 11 anti-Iraq war protests that were staged in 8 different countries (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on February 15, 2003 (see Walgrave and Rucht, 2010b).

\(^7\) CCC gathered a multilevel dataset on 101 street demonstrations (on a variety of issues) staged in 14 different countries (Belgium, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) between November 2009 and November 2014 (see, e.g., Klandermans et al., 2014). This dissertation is based on some of these data (see the section ‘Research Questions and Designs’ below).
deployed, they all share one single responsibility: maintaining public order (Adang, 2007; Favre, 1990: 21). Given that ‘public order [...] is conflated with ‘the established order’ (Scholl, 2010: 60), the police also preserve the status quo.

Previous research revealed that the more protests pose a threat to public order and/or the status quo, the more repressively they are policed (Davenport, 2007; Earl and Soule, 2006; Warner and McCarthy, 2014). Such threats, that is, from the perspective of the police and/or the establishment, do not only explain variation in the police handling of protest between events, but also changes in protest policing styles over time.

Three of such changes have been identified across Western democracies. Until well into the twentieth century, protests were generally policed by ‘escalated force’ (McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy, 1998), a repressive policing style that relied on excessive force to prevent demonstrators from taking the streets (Ibid.). In the 1980s, escalated force was largely replaced by a more facilitatory policing style called ‘negotiated management’ (Ibid.). Under negotiated management, the police engaged in extensive two-sided communication with demonstrators and used the minimum force necessary (Ibid.). This relatively ‘soft’ policing style, however, proved inadequate to manage ‘transnational protests’ (Della Porta, Peterson, and Reiter, 2006; Gillham, 2011), which are demonstrations ‘that mainly address international targets and involve a substantive number of protesters from different countries’ (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2012: 126). These protests, which emerged around the turn of the century, were considered threatening by the establishment as well as the police, amongst others, because their participants often did not cooperate with the authorities (Fernandez, 2009: 53). So, to manage these events, Western police forces introduced a more ‘repressive policing style’ (Della Porta et al., 2006: 5) called ‘strategic incapacitation’ (Noakes, Klocke, and Gillham, 2005), which is characterized by, inter alia, the use of less-lethal weapons (e.g., tear gas), extensive surveillance, and the control of space (Gillham, 2011).

Seemingly, the latest development is that strategic incapacitation has diffused from transnational protests to national protests that pose a threat to the establishment and/or police forces (Della Porta and Zamponi, 2013; Gillham, 2011). However, research on the matter is rare, and findings are inconsistent for Europe. That is to say, on the old continent, strategic incapacitation was only witnessed at a few protests (Della Porta and Zamponi, 2013); at

---

8 Public order concerns ‘the normal course of events in publically accessible places’ (Adang, 2007: 803).
9 National protests are protests that mainly address national targets (e.g., national governments or companies), and/or involve protesters from the country in which the protest is staged.
several others it was not (e.g., Stott, Scothern and Gorringe, 2013), or only in part (Wahlström, 2010). These findings may well be inconsistent, I gathered, because they are based on case studies, which do not compare protests of different threat levels. Arguably, the protests where strategic incapacitation was deployed may well have been more threatening than those where it was not. In other words, current research does not provide a systematic account of the use of strategic incapacitation to police national European protests. The last empirical paper of this dissertation seeks to remedy this deficiency by studying the police’s use of strategic incapacitation tactics at a large number of national European protests, which constituted different levels of threat.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DESIGNS**

The research question of the first empirical study of this dissertation is: *How do street protests differ in their level of politicization?*

To answer this question, I first conceptualized ‘protest politicization’ as the extent to which a demonstration epitomizes a power struggle. Based on social movement research, I then operationalized protest politicization as the extent to which demonstrators are angry, and fight for a collective good; an opponent is identified and vilified; and a claim is specific and combatively made. Subsequently, I tested whether these indicators hold. To do so, I studied two Dutch LGBT protests: a reactive protest against the Russian anti-gay law (Amsterdam, 2013) and the ritual Pink Saturday parade (Haarlem, 2012). These events were selected, because I believed them to differ substantially in their level of politicization. As the demonstrations were not assumed to differ much otherwise, given that they were staged by the same social movement, in the same country, and in the same period of time, this constitutes a ‘most similar systems’ design (Przeworski and Teune, 1970: 31-46). With such a design, I can be fairly certain that any differences between the two events are related to their level of politicization. Data on the six indicators were gathered in several ways. First of all, I asked participants of the two events to report their anger and protest motives in questionnaires. Also, I gathered observational data on whether an opponent was identified and vilified, and whether a claim was specific and combatively made. Lastly, I interviewed the organizers of the two events about their opponent and claim, and assessed whether (and how) these were mentioned in media reports. With these data, I was able to assess whether the six indicators manifested...
themselves more prominently at the reactive protest, which was expected to be more politicized than the ritual parade.

The second and the third empirical study of this dissertation posed the same questions, which were: *How do demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, and why?*

To answer these questions, both studies start with a conceptualization of perceived protest atmosphere, which is the affective state that the protest environment induces. Other than that, the studies differ in their approach. In the second atmosphere study, I assessed demonstrators’ own atmosphere reports. These reports were provided on paper-and-pencil questionnaires during two Dutch protests that were expected to differ in (perceived) protest atmosphere: a rally against the Russian anti-gay law (Amsterdam, 2013) and an anti-monarchy event (Amsterdam, 2013). To substantiate demonstrators’ atmosphere reports, the questionnaire also included measures on feelings and appraisals that were expected to relate to (perceived) protest atmosphere, such as group identification and perceived police aggression. Besides, I asked other protest actors to assess the atmosphere: researchers made field observations, organizers and police officers were interviewed, and media reports were gathered. Next to studying how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere and why, the second study scrutinized whether *demonstrators’ atmosphere perceptions shape their future collective action preparedness*. This assumption was based on previous research by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which indicated that people’s behavior is shaped by their affective state. Also, research by Wood (2001) on peasant political mobilization in El Salvador between the 1970s and 1990s indicated that demonstrators’ sense of pride and pleasure stimulated their sustained collective action participation. To test my assumption, I employed questionnaire data on demonstrators’ atmosphere perceptions and their future action preparedness, amongst others.

In the third empirical study, I sought to understand how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere in terms of intergroup conflict. To do so, I studied demonstrators’ evaluations of police-demonstrator interactions. This operationalization was based, amongst others, on previous research on (perceived) sport stadium atmosphere, which revealed that people’s atmosphere perceptions are mainly shaped by their interactions with other people. For my analyses, I used a multilevel dataset of 75 European street demonstrations (2009-13),

---

10 The third empirical study deploys a slightly different definition, being: ‘the affective state that people attribute to the idiosyncratic features of a demonstration.’
which was gathered by the CCC project. This extensive dataset, which included evaluations of 15,999 demonstrators, allowed me to discern different types of atmosphere perceptions. To determine why demonstrators perceive a particular atmosphere, I deployed data on demonstrators’ individual characteristics (e.g., protest experience) and those of the protest event they attended (e.g., police repression).

The research question of the fourth empirical study of this dissertation is: To what extent has strategic incapacitation diffused to national European protests?

To answer this question, I again deployed the CCC dataset. This time, the dataset included 78 national European protests (2009-13). To take into account that the police’s use of strategic incapacitation would be related to the threat that a protest is believed to pose to them and/or the establishment, I first categorized the demonstrations under study into three threat levels, being: non-threatening, somewhat threatening, and threatening. For this categorization, I deployed information about the organizers’ (revolutionary) goals, and demonstrators’ previous participation in direct action and (young) age, which was derived from interviews with the protest organizers, and questionnaires that were completed by demonstrators (n = 16,098), respectively. While these indicators of a protest’s threat were drawn from the protest policing literature, I made sure to validate my typology. To do so, I assessed protest organizers’, demonstrators’, and researchers’ evaluations of cooperative and aggressive police behavior at the events under study. This exercise was based on the assumption that the police would be perceived as less cooperative and more aggressive at a more threatening event. After my threat categorization proved valid, I assessed to what extent the police deployed strategic incapacitation tactics (e.g., use of less-lethal weapons, and extensive surveillance) to manage the three types of events. For this assessment I used researchers’ and protest organizers’ direct observations.

**OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION**

This dissertation includes four empirical studies on street demonstrations and their core actors. Chapter 2 comprises the first empirical study of this dissertation, which is about differentiation in protest politicization. The subsequent two chapters focus on demonstrators’ perceptions of protest atmosphere. Chapter 3 studies these perceptions based on demonstrators’ own reports. Chapter 4 assesses demonstrators’ atmosphere perceptions by
using their evaluations of police-demonstrator interactions. Chapter 5 contains the fourth empirical study of this dissertation, which focuses on the police’s use of strategic incapacitation to manage national European protests. The concluding chapter (Chapter 6) highlights the main findings of the four empirical studies, delineates their theoretical, methodological, and practical implications, as well as their possible limitations, and suggests avenues for future research.

REFERENCES


Klandermans, Bert, Jacquelen van Stekelenburg, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2014. ‘Comparing


Chapter 1

NY: Springer.


