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## Policing with the Help of Data: The Use of CoroPol in the Pandemic's Early Stages in The Netherlands

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### 1 Introduction

A pandemic is simultaneously a health and safety issue, as was already stated in the introductory chapter of this book. To manage a pandemic, governmental response is required to reduce the chance of large-scale infection and social malfunctioning. In many countries lockdowns,

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curfews and the closing of public facilities like schools, shops, restaurants and the cancelling of events were regarded as necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic (Aston et al., 2020). The safety measures to manage the pandemic enhance the potential for social tensions and violence, as had been observed in many countries across the world in 2020 and 2021 (Charron et al., 2020; Den Boer et al., 2022). The focus of this chapter is on the initial stages ('first wave') of the pandemic in The Netherlands. Unlike most other European countries, in the early stages, there was no significant politically engaged anti-government or anti-police sentiment, at least not until the riots that took place during the Summer of 2020, eventually culminating in 'the curfew riots' in January 2021.

In this chapter, we discuss whether a pandemic like COVID-19 may invoke social disorder, which, is best explained theoretically by 'anomie' (Merton, 1968) and sometimes even by the concept of a 'moral holiday' (Weenink, 2013). The concept moral holiday was coined by psychologist and philosopher James, to denote situations in which individuals regale themselves with a temporary relaxation of the rules of conduct, "treating" themselves to an enjoyable moment.

From a criminological point of view, it is also useful to analyse the effect of a pandemic on crime and crime trends. The assumption is that social disorder and crime may overlap, for example in the case of public violence. Moreover, a pandemic may directly or indirectly affect criminal opportunities, targets and perpetrators (Clarke & Cornish, 1986; Wilcox et al., 2018). During the pandemic, social surveillance has been increased. In many countries, the police organisation lacked capacity to enforce the measures that were required to enforce the safety issues that came along with COVID-19 (Politie Eenheid Amsterdam, 2021; Stogner et al., 2020). Many police departments experienced a lack of capacity, because the coronavirus influenced the sick leave within the police forces.

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Additionally, other public and private institutions sometimes had better resources to implement and enforce measures to fight and prevent further social disorder (Aston et al., 2020; Mawby, 2020). That is why, in many European countries, plural policing seemed a viable response to control the pandemic-related security.

Knowledge, information and intelligence are crucial to support informed (plural) policing, because they offer the security actors insight to challenges and the mode and timing of potential interventions (James, 2013; Ratcliffe, 2016). In this chapter, “intelligence” is defined as action-oriented information (and knowledge) in police data systems, knowledge derived from scientific publications as well as information that originates from open sources like the news media, websites etc. From the body of knowledge on crisis management, we know that intelligence is simultaneously strongly needed and scarcely available during the initial stages of a crisis such as a pandemic (Boin & Overdijk, 2020).

Similar to other countries, the Dutch police forces had to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances for the performance of law enforcement in the course of a pandemic. The information and intelligence departments within the police had a hard time, initially, to offer the needed information and knowledge. This is why the authors of this chapter, all applied scientists, developed a monitor and a research project aiming to supply open source intelligence as well as research findings to the police and other governmental actors in order to improve their understanding of policing COVID-19. This service was a private and non-commercial initiative, based on societal commitment. The intended purpose was to assist Dutch safety and security actors with knowledge to being able to prepare and forecast, and not having to react on an ad hoc and improvising basis. Helping the police and other security actors is not obvious in many countries. It is, however, a bit more common in countries like The Netherlands with a profound tradition of Community Policing in which the police tends to be receptive to (applied) scientific research. The information and knowledge products were used in police briefings and turned out to be one of the sources that complemented the knowledge deficit during the early stages of the pandemic in The Netherlands.

In this chapter, we focus on the main findings and outcomes of the Dutch CoroPol Monitor and Research Project. “CoroPol” is an amalgamation of the words ‘corona’ and ‘policing’. We will discuss the process of information-supply and methodology as well as the substantive results of the monitor. Three central questions are addressed in this chapter:

*What were the predominant challenges and (societal) topics during the initial stages of the worldwide COVID-19-crisis, concerning crime trends, public order and (plural) policing, with a focus on The Netherlands?*

*Additionally, what were response patterns of law enforcement organisations (and security organisations), and which levels of variety could be observed?*

*How has CoroPol contributed to the provision of information for law enforcement and other public actors during the first phase of the pandemic?*

## 1.1 Plural Policing

In line with the general conceptual framework of this book, in this chapter, we apply the theoretical concept of ‘plural policing’, which we define as a range of policing activities carried out by a multiplicity of actors, steered and controlled by their specific (or at least different) authorities (Loader, 2000). In The Netherlands, this includes both public police actors as well as private actors, and national as well as local and regional actors. The plural policing scope in The Netherlands includes the National Police and the municipal officers (*‘gemeentelijke handhaving’*) and the Royal Marechaussee (military constabulary), as well as non-police actors, such as local government actors, youth workers and private security actors. Police actors formally enforce the law, while non-police actors contribute to influencing public conduct by exercising (more or less formal) social control.

To answer the third central question, we further elaborate on the background of the CoroPol Monitor and Research Project, and we briefly discuss the methodology of the monitor and research designs. To respond to the questions on substantive results, key observations and predictions on (international) crime developments are discussed in the third paragraph. In the fourth paragraph, we expand on predominant challenges and societal topics such as the link between social disorder and policing. In paragraph five, we present key observations on enforcing and policing

measures on COVID-19 in The Netherlands. The chapter is wrapped up with conclusions by putting them into a critical theoretical perspective.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 CoroPol: Collating Information During the Initial Stages of the Pandemic

Throughout the globe, during the first weeks of the pandemic uncertainty prevailed. This definitely also applied to the Dutch security actors, including the National Police. Questions included what would the expected effects of this crisis on crime and public order be and what would be a sensible strategy to enforce the law during these extraordinary circumstances? With this in mind, a police chief in our professional network approached us with a request, namely how the National Police could gain systematic access of international trends on policing the pandemic based on news media, and how we could assist in a systematic analysis of publicly available research on the matter. According to the chief officer, the National Police was not yet in the position to make an inventory and analysis of the information. Moreover, research findings on policing COVID-19 were still rare at the time. As the pandemic evolved, information gradually became available in a more systematic fashion, providing police forces with a fundament to stage evidence-based policing. In sum: the National Police acknowledged the need to bridge the gap between the demand for information and its scarcity during the first stages of the COVID-19 crisis in The Netherlands.

The authors of this chapter started to collect, analyse and interpret knowledge about the impact of COVID-19 on crime, safety and enforcement. With the aim to share the acquired knowledge with law enforcement, local authorities and other public actors concerned with safety and security. Agencies were facilitated to receive periodic updates by e-mail.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the Monitor gained 384 subscriptions, amongst

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<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, in this chapter we focus on the first stages of the pandemic (in the Netherlands). Although, when essential to put the CoroPol data in perspective, we incidentally focus as well on consecutive stages of the pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> Eventually, in 2020 we produced a Basic source document on March 27th and five updates on, respectively, March 31st, April, 3rd, April 11th, April 21st and May 18th of that year. The

these National Police, Royal Marechaussee, and other law enforcement agencies such as Europol and Dutch municipalities.

The Monitor relied on the collecting of international open sources data: news items and academic research reports on the COVID-19 pandemic. All data were selected using a search protocol.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime, the researchers were requested by the National Police and local government to engage into two small-scale research projects for local governments (Amsterdam and Arnhem), as well as two research projects for the Dutch Police (Broekhuizen et al., 2020). The research for the police was focused on both the effects of the pandemic on criminal investigation and working on the beat. The research in Amsterdam and Arnhem had a different scope. It was focused on plural policing public order and interventions of youth work, induced by perceived tensions and risk of youngsters causing disorder, because of the strict anti-COVID-19 measures that had been taken (e.g. closing of schools, sporting clubs and youth clubs).<sup>4</sup>

So much for a background on CoroPol.<sup>5</sup> The remaining empirical section of this chapter will be addressing the substantive findings of CoroPol on crime, disorder and policing the pandemic during the first wave in The Netherlands. In order to put findings into perspective, we will, when useful, compare the Dutch findings with international developments and trends.

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basic document and the updates all had a 'point by point' and 'to-the-point' character, for we wanted to take into account the needs of the target audience.

<sup>3</sup> Further details about CoroPol and its methodology can be obtained from the authors.

<sup>4</sup> Because of the mentioned projects in Amsterdam and Arnhem, the analysis in this chapter is slightly more focused on policing *youths*.

<sup>5</sup> To provide an idea of the usefulness of the CoroPol documents, we sent an e-mail on 13 July 2021 to the 384 subscribers of CoroPol in 2020, asking them to participate in a mini-poll on the usefulness of this initiative during the first months of the pandemic. Eventually, a total of 48 respondents responded. In general, the respondents indicate that they consider the documents as very valuable and useful. Many respondents responded that at the beginning of the crisis the need for information was very urgent and that the CoroPol documents fulfilled this need. In addition, the documents were used to convert national trends and developments into local and regional relevance. The information has also proved valuable in developing various scenarios with regard to the pandemic, whether or not in combination with issues such as (organised) crime. According to the respondents, the intelligence supply amongst various organizations was not optimal, especially at the start of the pandemic. The average rating assigned to CoroPol by respondents is an 8.3. The lowest number given is a 7.0, but a 10 or a 9 has also occurred a few times.

### 3 Key Observations: Crime Shifts During the Initial Stages of the Pandemic

To find out what crime trends could be expected in The Netherlands throughout the pandemic, in CoroPol, we relied on both theoretical predictions and actual observations abroad. Specifically, for theoretical predictions, we relied on the criminological theory on opportunity structures (Wilcox et al., 2018). To provide insight into the situation, we studied available publications on the situation during the first COVID-19 wave in The Netherlands. Sometimes this concerned a precise comparison (comparing the period before and during the first wave), and on other occasions a less precise comparison (e.g. between 2020 and 2019).

#### 3.1 Opportunities as an Issue

##### Decrease in Classic Property Crime

From foreign reports, it was clearly understood that various forms of classic crime originally declined spectacularly, particularly during the first wave of COVID-19. Home isolation, more social control, decreased mobility within public spaces and the closing of shops resulted in a decrease in domestic burglary, shoplifting and theft, simply because the opportunity to engage in this kind of crime decreased significantly (Europol, 2020a, 2020c).

**OBSERVATION:** The opportunity structure for committing crimes - exposure with (potential) offenders, the relationship between offender and victim and formal and informal social control - are strongly influenced by the covid measures taken (home isolation, less movement in public spaces and less group formation). It is therefore considerably more difficult for offenders to commit 'classic' offences. Concerning this argumentation, a decrease in 'classic' offences can therefore be expected. This decrease

has already been observed in some countries.<sup>6</sup> (CoroPol basic document, translated, 27 March 20)

At the beginning of March 2021, The Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) reported—in line with the above development—a sharp decline in traditional forms of crime in The Netherlands. In 2020, there was a decrease in registered pickpocketing crimes (−47%), domestic burglary (−23%), street robbery (−16%) and shoplifting (−13%), compared to 2019 (CBS, 2021). Kruisbergen et al. (2021) compared the first corona year with the previous year and observed a 34% reduction in domestic burglaries (and 48% in the first lockdown period) as well as a 62% reduction in pickpocketing.

### **Increase in Online Crime**

Due to the lockdowns, online interaction had increased significantly. Work-related interaction, social contact, studying and shopping took place online more often than ever. The risk of common crime offences decreased whereas the online opportunities for criminals increased enormously. Indeed, international reports (Europol, 2020a, 2020c) established a strong increase in various forms of cybercrime (a category of crime that had already been on the rise in the last decade). For example, online shopping fraud rose sharply in the UK and WhatsApp fraud increased: ‘relatives’ ask for money when in fact they turn out to be cyber criminals. In addition, cyber-attacks with malware on medical organisations took place in Spain and England. Organisations that were extraordinary vulnerable due to the corona crisis. It involved a hospital in Madrid as well as an English company that was in the process of testing a vaccine. Moreover, cyber-attacks were staged at the World Health Organization (WHO).

OBSERVATION: “Ransomware attacks on hospitals seem to be a growing threat. For example, employees receive a message ‘information

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, Belgium (De Morgen, 24 March 2020) and Spain (The Olive Press, 21 March 2020).



about COVID-19' in their email. It contains ransomware 'Netwalker'. It blocks computers and demands a ransom for unlocking. Such an attack has already taken place in Madrid (Inspanje, 2020). The Center for Cybersecurity and the Belgian government warn hospitals about ransomware." (CoroPol Update, translated, 31 March 20)

In The Netherlands, the number of registered online crimes (forgery, online fraud and hacking) increased by 54% between 2019 and 2020, in line with the above-mentioned development in foreign countries (CBS, 2021), while Kruisbergen et al. (2021) described that in the 'Covid year 2020' there had been a 64% increase in online crimes. During the first lockdown, this percentage even amounted to 112%. Although the researchers had some caveats—such as registration effects and the fact that online crime has already been on the rise—they concluded that *'the increase in the number of online crimes, especially during the first lockdown, is that of a real increase seems to be the case'* (Kruisbergen et al., 2021). The same impression emerged from our observations in the CoroPol studies in Arnhem and Amsterdam we briefly referred to in the second paragraph. The professionals that were interviewed within these studies indicated during the first COVID-19 wave that there was an increase in the online provision of drugs and prostitution (Bervoets et al., 2020).

### **Fraud Due to Scarcity of Goods**

In The Netherlands, the initial stages of COVID-19 offered criminals an opportunity to monetise crime targeting scarce goods: medical items, (illegal) medicines, food and hygiene products. For example, they went out to steal such goods and sell them dearly. For example, in Italy and Japan, there had been reports to the police of disappearing stocks of new expensive face-masks and disinfectants. Criminals could also make parties pay for scarce goods that they did happen not to own at all or that did certainly not meet with the necessary qualifications. For example, there were reports of scams related to face masks and hand sanitisers.

OBSERVATION: Europol (2020b) reports new forms of crime namely the 'Corona crimes'. This concerns, for example, fraud from Asia and

Europe (in the order and magnitude of millions of euros) in relation to face masks and hand disinfectants. (CoroPol, translated, 31 March 20)

Looking at crime developments in The Netherlands, one large-scale scam with face-masks has come to the fore, in which Dutch perpetrators were involved. It concerns two men who had been suspected of having defrauded the German government for 880.000 euro in April 2020.<sup>7</sup> They sold eleven million face-masks to two German companies, but failed to deliver them (RTL Nieuws, 2020a). In addition, approximately four hundred reports of possible pandemic-related fraud were identified, three quarters of which were about face-masks and other protective medical equipment (Waterval, 2021).

## 3.2 How Vulnerable Persons Turn into Victims

### Increasing Vulnerability of Civilians

In other countries, an increase in the abuse of vulnerable citizens was observed in various ways. In Spain, for example, burglars disguised themselves as ‘covid doctors’ (to carry out medical checks). The elderly also became a target for minor ‘door-to-door’ crime: offering to buy groceries, then stealing the money that was obtained. In addition, an increase was seen in sex scams and exposure of children to online abuse and exploitation.

Indeed, in line with what was predicted in CoroPol, frail elderly fell victim to scams (RTL Nieuws, 2020b; Spetter, 2021; Voskuil, 2020). There are indications of an increase in online child abuse due to the opportunities the pandemic offered to that kind of crime and there had been more paid webcam sex (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2020). The National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children described in the Offender Monitor

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<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of this year, it turned out that a Dutch political activist and lobbyist generated considerable profit in the Spring of 2020 through his so-called non-profit organisation *Stichting Hulptroepen Alliantie* on a face-mask deal with the government (where he himself had indicated that he would do this selflessly).

sexual violence against children 2015–2019 (2021) that various organisations had observed an increase in reports of online sexual abuse, such as “sextortion” (NOS, 2021a). In addition, sexual violence against children had become less visible because these children could not take part in public life and school activities due to the corona measures.

## Domestic Violence

Several countries also anticipated an increase in domestic violence (CoroPol Basic Document, 2020; Piquero et al., 2021). Previous research had also shown that domestic violence has a tendency to increase in times of crisis and disaster (Koppen et al., 2021). However, the ultimately emerging pattern seemed rather diverse.

For example, the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) (2020) mentioned in a news item (that the expected increase in domestic violence had not been reflected in relevant statistics). In the same report, the Dutch National Network Safe at Home stated that the lack of an increase could be explained by the fact that professionals are usually the ones who report domestic violence and not the victims themselves. They were temporarily absent from the office and had less contact with vulnerable families. Self-report studies of families that previously had experienced domestic violence neither reported an increase in domestic violence (Koppen et al., 2021).

At the same time, the Child Telephone<sup>8</sup> received more calls about domestic violence, incest and neglect in April, May and June 2020 and the demand for help at Chat with Fier<sup>9</sup> also increased between 1 March and 30 April 2020, especially regarding child abuse. In addition, professionals—asked to estimate the size of the problem—reported an increase (Koppen et al., 2021). An international systematic review (of 32 studies) also demonstrated an increase in domestic violence in the first period (Kourti et al., 2021).

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<sup>8</sup> The *Kindertelefoon* is a Dutch telephone helpline for children, to which children and young people up to the age of 18 who need a conversation about a subject can call for free (or chat). They are answered by trained volunteers.

<sup>9</sup> This chat is part of the organisation “Fier”, which offers help to children, adolescents and adults who experience violence, abuse or exploitation.

In short, it is plausible that domestic violence increased, but that this did not manifest itself in the statistics.

## Hate Groups

Various media reported on the increase in (activities of) hate groups. In England, for example, Chinese people were suffering from violence because of their ethnicity, with the source of the coronavirus (most probably) originating in Wuhan Province (BBC News, 2020). In Australia, extremist platforms took advantage of the situation by questioning the legitimacy of government, the identification of groups to blame, and the mobilisation of people against ‘outsiders’, thereby inciting violence (CoroPol Basic Document, 2020).

With regard to the expectation of the increase in hate groups, the National Coordinator on Terrorism and Security (“NCTV”) published its Netherlands Terrorism Threat Assessment in April 2021. The Assessment reported that since March 2020 there had been close encounters between activists who demonstrated in public space and a radical undercurrent which agitated against the governmental COVID-19 measures (NOS, 2021b).

## Adaptation of Organised Crime

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the adaptive capacity of organised crime appeared to be rather strong (Europol, 2020b). Alternative routes for drug trafficking opened up rather quickly, for instance by re-using old smuggling routes. New opportunities were quickly identified, such as hiding drugs in bulk transports of face masks. News reports from Italy contained information that the Italian mafia (*Cosa Nostra*) jumped at the momentum to offer money or food to citizens in need and act as a benefactor. It was expected that mafia bosses with a lot of liquid assets would supply these assets in exchange for the option to money launder their criminal profits in the future. In The Netherlands, it was anticipated that organised crime would adapt similarly, by taking recourse

to its agility and flexibility, and by showing resistance against potential negative effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, there was considerable anxiety about the possibility that organised crime would become even more deeply rooted in Dutch society than before (CoroPol update, April 11 2020).

Moreover, in the first CoroPol Update, it was expected that the opportunities for organised drug crime in The Netherlands would decrease due to the changed logistical situation: Schiphol Airport virtually reached at a standstill (CoroPol Basic Document, 2020).

Hence, organised crime, including drug trafficking, was not hindered by the pandemic in The Netherlands. The National Police, for example, observed that the illicit drug economy appeared to be resistant to the pandemic (Politie Eenheid Amsterdam, 2021). It expressed serious concerns about growing violence amongst adolescents and observed disturbing signs concerning the involvement of juveniles in violent activities while having access to or even possessing a (lethal) weapon. Various recent studies show that illicit drug traffickers adjusted their modus operandi (van Laar et al., 2021). Trade predominantly took place via social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Telegram and via online orders sent by mail (a development that already started prior to the pandemic). In May 2020, the Street Value(s) programme of the Central Netherlands Security Coalition described that drug trafficking seemed to continue as usual (Team Straatwaarde(n), 2020).

### 3.3 Reflection

Hence, it seemed that developments abroad were mirrored in The Netherlands to a significant extent. Foreign developments contained a strongly predictive value for domestic developments that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. The trends could be observed in The Netherlands as well as abroad, including a strong decrease in community crime, a (temporary) transition from offline to online (particularly in property crimes) and the emergence of “new crimes” that were specifically related to the pandemic (‘corona-related crime’). All predictions based on foreign developments had become true. Studies on the actual development only

show a diffuse picture with the expected increase in domestic violence. In addition, organised (drug) crime has experienced virtually no blow from the pandemic: it has managed to adapt and to seize new opportunities.

## 4 Social Disorder

Except for the potential effect of a pandemic on crime trends, it is likely to have an impact on public order as well. Below, we seek to focus on the actual tensions that were identified by the CoroPol project, with more fundamental links to the social context.

### 4.1 Actual Tensions and Disorder in The Netherlands During First Pandemic Wave

From the end of March 2020 onward, the CoroPol Updates included warnings about growing dissatisfaction, especially amongst juveniles. As the anti-pandemic measures were subject to extension, news reports from Spain revealed a growing frustration amongst younger people, as they started to show public resistance against the lockdown measures and began to engage in public order offences.

*OBSERVATION:* Reports from Spain indicating growing resistance of youth against COVID-19-measures. Young people have blocked ambulance vehicles. They are frustrated because they are not allowed to leave their house. (CoroPol Update, translated March 31 2020)

In The Netherlands, during that particular period some young people were observed as failing to comply with the anti-COVID-19 measures. News media reported partying activities amongst higher education and university students. According to our CoroPol Updates, adolescents experienced great difficulty with the acceptance of anti-COVID-19 measures, particularly because their social lives were deeply affected while the virus itself seemed to have little or no harm for their health. Subsequently, cat and mouse games were created around parties, where young

people were on guard to keep an eye on the potential arrival of the police (NOS, 2020; Omroep Flevoland, 2020).

Looking at these phenomena from a theoretical perspective, at the beginning of April 2020 larger-scale social unrest may have been the expression of moral panic (collective emotion) and—exceptionally—infused panic (collective violence). The safety of law enforcement officers became an additional point of concern (Algemeen Dagblad, 2020). Later that month, the so-called Covid Trend Monitor of the National Police revealed a trend that disorder, especially caused by adolescents, was on the increase. This was confirmed by law enforcement and social workers. Frictions between adolescents and governmental actors were also on the increase, especially in weak neighbourhoods. It was anticipated that perhaps the Ramadan and Islamic fasting month would contribute to social unrest amongst young Muslim people. However, this did not materialise. At the end, Ramadan did not turn out to be the biggest public order issue at all.

In the CoroPol Update of early May 2020, the attitude of citizens was expected to change gradually. A simultaneous decrease in support and an increase in resistance were observed, especially amongst young people and not only in The Netherlands (Duursma, 2021). In the course of 2020, a growing segment of the population participated in various protests against the governmental policy, while occasionally taking recourse to significant violence. In the initial phase, we observed the first signs of a broader social unrest, which was no longer limited to young people. During the first half of 2020, this broader social resistance was not yet abundantly apparent.

## 4.2 Background: Decrease in Support (of Measures) and ‘Moral Holiday’

On the basis of international reports, in the Basic Document of CoroPol, it was predicted that:

‘PREDICTION: Good to note: in the longer term - if one no longer sees the usefulness and/or very bored – can maintaining measures against the

coronavirus become a challenge. What is important here is the attitude of the enforcers towards the citizens, not too draconian, militaristic or aggressive, this affects the relationship/trust between police and citizen not good. It is important to act fairly (hopefully with rules that are clear are what legitimate exceptions are) and act consistently. (Base document, March 31, p. 6, translated)

During the first wave of the pandemic, the majority of the Dutch citizens were primarily law abiding and complied with behavioural instructions. Especially during the initial stages, most citizens complied with the anti-COVID-19 rules, based on the widespread anxiety due to the obscurity of the coronavirus.

### **Increasing Opposition by Economically, Politically and Socially Disadvantaged**

However, a resistant minority of the public grew increasingly resistant and became more difficult for the police to handle. While the pandemic further progressed and took longer than originally anticipated, the government policy and measures to control this crisis became more controversial. Amongst this minority were the economically disadvantaged, like shop owners, restaurant owners and (other) kinds of professional categories who directly suffered by missing income because of the lockdowns. Moreover, the group of persons who considered themselves as politically disadvantaged by the government policy and ensuing enforcement, like antivax people and conspiracy thinkers, was growing. This group feared that the government used the pandemic to control and suppress the public and—thus—undermine their freedom. Several individuals belonging to this group were convinced of the fact that the Coronavirus was not real and made up by (mainly) governments (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2020).

Hence, a growing part of the public questioned the government policy, for fearing ‘anti-democratic’ tendencies in society enhanced by top-down government measures, strict surveillance measures (e.g. the corona-app) and the limitation of the freedom of movement (Den Boer et al., 2022;



Van Brakel et al., 2022). The fear of autocratic tendencies had not been unfounded:

OBSERVATION- To contain the COVID-19-pandemic, many countries around the world have restrictions imposed on the population. This seems effective, but may also have a downside, namely that some governments abuse the situation to promote human rights suppress and exercise excessive power. (Update, 11 April, translated)

The group of the socially disadvantaged largely consisted of people who experienced a significant narrowing of their lifestyle. Examples of this category are students because of the closed universities and colleges, elderly people in quarantine and adolescents experiencing boredom as almost all facilities were closed (like sporting clubs, schools, bars). Illegal parties in homes, buildings, sheds and in the open air were expressions for how particularly young people tried to maintain a social life during the pandemic (Team Straatwaarde(n) (2020). These different subgroups required a different influencing strategy.

However, it was often extremely difficult to distinguish the different categories of people who felt economically, politically or socially deprived because of the anti-COVID-19 measures.

OBSERVATION – The prolonged persistence of the corona measures and the uncertainty about their further development means that the unrest among certain parts of the population is spreading. In the Netherlands, but certainly also abroad, there are now mainly concerns about young people. Street workers and local police officers in our network are wary of an increase in nuisance and vandalism. Police officers and municipal enforcers have great difficulty to maintain the corona measures among youth in public space. For this reason, riots have already started in France (see relevant cases of supervision and enforcement, point 5). There is always the danger of 'copycat'. (Update 21 April, translated)

### **Vulnerable Youths on a Moral Holiday**

The social cleavages before the pandemic had only been strengthened by the pandemic. Youths, often with low or no income, sometimes

with a multi-ethnic urban background had already been a target of (over)policing before the pandemic. They experienced low trust in police (Charron et al., 2020; Den Boer et al., 2022).

From our CoroPol Updates, it can be concluded that vulnerable juveniles were one of the first categories that resisted to the government policy and lockdowns that eventually in the (late) Summer of 2020 culminated in urban violence in several Dutch cities and towns. In January 2021, when curfews were introduced in The Netherlands, this led to urban violence in several cities and neighbourhoods. However, political analysts observed that the urban violence had in fact been committed by a cocktail of groups and individuals who opposed to the lockdowns and curfews or (like many youngsters) preferred to riot with no other reason than challenging the authorities (Van Ham et al., 2021). Except for the CoroPol data and research projects in Amsterdam and Arnhem, we concluded that vulnerable youths were not so much (or not exclusively) showing opposition on the basis of political ideas. Police officers, youth workers and youngsters observed that youngsters often deployed violence because they wanted to oppose to entertain themselves and ‘riot-to-riot’. Specifically, from these observations one could notice that youngsters were experiencing anomie and a moral holiday (Merton, 1968; Weenink, 2013). The urban violence by youngsters during the first wave of the pandemic showed striking similarities to ‘regular’, ‘recreative’ hooliganism where other opponents who took recourse to violent protests against the anti-COVID-19 measures seemed more politically inspired.

### 4.3 Trust in Police

On the basis of population surveys, an increase in trust in the Dutch police could be identified during the first corona wave, which is the period on which this chapter is focused. After that, social trust in the police dropped again to pre-pandemic levels (Krouwel et al., 2021). During 2020, trust in the police was higher than in 2019 (CBS, 2022). Altogether a decrease in support (of measures and for the policing) and

an increasing (risk of) violence could be observed. The first signs came to the fore in the first phase of the pandemic:

‘Despite the global observations [...] (which could lead to a prediction of relatively little unrest and insurrection in the Netherlands, given that there is relatively high confidence in the police here and a fairly serious health situation), violence against the police in the Netherlands has increased in the corona crisis. In the first weeks after the introduction of the corona measures, in March, the number of violent incidents against police officers was still about 10 percent lower than at the end of February. The number of incidents increased sharply from April. In the week of April 6, the number of times police encountered violence was 40 percent higher than the last week before the corona crisis. In the weeks that followed, officers also had to deal with an above-average amount of violence. According to the police, examples of this are the ‘corona spit-ters’, people who spit or coughed in the face of officers and threatened with corona infection. Meanwhile, the number of incidents seems to be decreasing again. At the beginning of May, the number of incidents was still 4 percent higher than before the crisis.’ (CoroPol Update Document, May 18, 2020, translated)

In the first months of the pandemic in The Netherlands, we observed the first signs of social unrest, but it was not yet manifest. Frictions between young people and the police increased, especially in the subsequent period, certainly in the summer of 2020, resulting in riots. It is also noticeable that in the first phase, we occasionally report the presence of disinformation and conspiracy theories. This became a much more dominant theme in the later phases of the pandemic, not merely in The Netherlands.

## 5 Key Observations on Plural Policing and Security

### 5.1 Introduction: Observations and Predictions

In this paragraph, we present key observations based on CoroPol on enforcement and plural policing COVID-19 in The Netherlands. In the previous paragraph, the changing support given by the public was already addressed. Further, our collected data offer a view on the specific circumstances in which (plural) policing was implemented and on a classic dilemma in policing that touches on police legitimacy. Police work is shaped by street-level bureaucrats with their own moral compass (Landman, 2015; Lipsky, 2010; Reiner, 1991). It is precisely during exceptional circumstances that police work presents dire dilemmas, especially during crises and disasters.

### 5.2 Circumstances: Little Pluralism, No Protocols, Little Intel, Lack of Proximity

Taking our data into consideration, four specific elements stand out related to the circumstances in which policing activities were conducted, specifically during the initial stages of the pandemic in The Netherlands. These include the relative absence of pluralism, the virtual absence of protocols, the lack of relevant intelligence and obstacles to community policing.

First, like in many other countries, policing COVID-19 in The Netherlands was expected to be conducted along the lines of plural policing, which is the prevailing model in The Netherlands. However, a full plural deployment did not happen as several agencies in the police network in The Netherlands were not operative (at all), due to the fact that their employees were (tele)working from home or were on sick leave due to the coronavirus. Police agencies could largely count on municipal

officers (*'gemeentelijke handhavers'*)<sup>10</sup> and incidentally on youth workers. Police officers we interviewed, therefore, felt quite lonely in the first phase of the pandemic. In certain cases, the previously mentioned professionals shared a WhatsApp group with the local police to fine-tune police response to ill-compliance by youngsters. The police and the municipal officers worked together to enforce the anti-pandemic rules and regulations. Generally, the public would be issued with a warning first and subsequently get fined if they still failed to comply with the rules. For example, restaurant and pub owners would first get informed and be advised by (police and municipal) officers about the sometimes complex anti-pandemic measures.<sup>11</sup>

Second, law enforcement and (other) government agencies lacked suitable protocols to police a pandemic and to implement other necessary safety measures (Broekhuizen et al., 2020). This resulted in a situation in which many actors had to improvise, 'muddle through' and respond to new and unknown (operational) challenges. Before 2020, the possibility of a pandemic had rarely, if ever, been addressed in police training. Neither did government organisations have ready-made scenarios at their disposal. In sum, public administration and security actors were ill-prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, already referred to, agencies experienced a lack of relevant intelligence on how to police COVID-19 and potential social tensions and disorder. According to the respondents of our mini-poll, the gap between the demand for intelligence and the scarcity of intelligence persisted for a considerable period.

Fourth and finally, a lack of proximity policing turned out to be one of the key issues. Many professionals were unable to establish contact with their target groups, because of COVID-19 and because they had work from home. As a result, interventions on domestic violence, psychiatric

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<sup>10</sup> In The Netherlands, municipal officers have the task to check on licenses and permits and can be compared with the so-called administrative policing agencies like the *Police Municipale* in France.

<sup>11</sup> During the first stage, pubs and restaurants had to be closed and later on could be opened under specific conditions.

patients and youth at-risk encountered became considerably more difficult for district police officers and street-level bureaucrats. In the first CoroPol Update, it was advised that:

Make contact and communicate, if that is (still) possible:

1. As the police and municipal officers, continue to make and maintain contact with citizens (by telephone, digitally and safe distance on the street). (CoroPol Basic Document, March 31st , p. 4, translated)

### **5.3 A Classic Police Dilemma in Extraordinary Times**

Police work is shaped by street-level bureaucrats on the basis of their own moral compass. During exceptional circumstances police work goes along with dire dilemmas, especially during crises and disasters.

#### **Tough Measures on (Normally) Unproblematic Social Conduct**

For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamental consequences for the freedom of movement of people. In the past period, intensive social control aimed at compliance with the corona measures, resulting in strongly curtailed freedom. Think of the lockdowns, the limitation of passenger traffic at national borders and quarantine measures in the initial stages. Consider as well the curfews and corona apps in later stages of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. To combat the pandemic, measures were required to reduce passenger traffic to avert the risk of contamination. According to Kupferschmidt and Cohen (2020), several countries had resorted to a series of extreme measures, as they forced almost their entire population to stay within their houses. In late January 2020, China demanded more than 50 million people in Hubei Province to stay at home. Some experts argued that Western countries could never enforce such draconian measures—curtailing human rights and economies—but Italy, which suffered a huge shock by the strain on the health care system in the north of the country, initiated very similar measures on 9 March

2020. In France, 100,000 police officers started patrolling the streets on March 17 to ensure that citizens would stay indoors, except for essential travel. On 31 March 2020, the CoroPol Monitor phrased this as follows:

Prepare for misunderstanding, quarrels, people who refuse to go into isolation and tensions in prisons. Reports show that enforcement authorities are thinking about the most optimal way of dealing with citizens in this new situation. For example by using humor (Spain) or by not giving a fine immediately, but first start a conversation (US). This is not only important for this tense situation, but also for the longer term - aimed at a good relationship and trust between citizens and government. Countries pay specific attention to communication with citizens: indicating what the citizen can or cannot expect in this special situation and it is so consistent possible implement and enforce the measures. Regarding communication with hard-to-reach communities do use key figures and role models in the existing network (in the Dutch City of Arnhem and in Canada). (CoroPol Basic document, March 31, p. 5, translated)

### **Policing Styles: Coping with Dilemmas**

Social conduct that is considered as non-problematic by law enforcers prior to the pandemic suddenly fell subject to prohibition and criminalisation. National as well as international research indicates that individual police officers occasionally experienced considerable difficulties in enforcing the anti-COVID-19 measures (see other chapters of this book, specifically those on the UK and Germany). Law enforcement officials experienced that (emergency) regulations and measures were often open to various, sometimes regional or local interpretations. Furthermore, officers at times felt burdened to enforce measures, regarding fines and penalties “disproportionate” and unjust. An example is the 400 euro fine in The Netherlands imposed on members of the public that failed to comply with anti-COVID-19 measures, for instance public gathering on the streets and the absence of social distancing.

From one of our two CoroPol research projects for the National Police, on patrol work, it emerged that some officers started with warning and eventually fined (repeated) offenders, while others imposed a fine from

the very first moment (to be clear about the rules) and yet other enforcers were reluctant to give any fines at all. Essentially, the multiplicity of reactions and behaviour of law enforcers can be understood by referring to the different styles of policing that are distinguished in the theoretical literature on police sociology, such as Reiner and Broderick on police culture and categories of working/coping styles (Broderick, 1973; Landman, 2015; Reiner, 1991). The dilemmas caused by the pandemic (e.g. having to criminalise otherwise non-deviant social conduct) were certainly not merely a Dutch issue:

In the US (New York), police first try to talk to offenders. Not immediately a fine: 'education over enforcement'. (basic doc CoroPol, p. 9, translated)

#### 5.4 Summary and Reflection: A Quest for Balance

Altogether, law enforcers experienced a hard time enforcing the anti-COVID-19 rules: throughout the country, there was a debate amongst those preferring a more strict model (immediate fine, 'control') and a 'consultation model' (explain, stepped, policing by 'consent'). Additionally, there were strong regional as well as differences between precincts and departments, which is traditionally intertwined with the public administration model in The Netherlands. The Dutch police were well aware that already overpoliced groups like the vulnerable youths could easily be provoked by strict enforcement. Also, in other European countries, it seemed a quest for balance between necessity of strict enforcement (to further prevent the spreading of the virus) and public acceptance of enforcement actions:

OBSERVATION - In a number of countries (including Italy, France and Spain) there was talk of strict lockdowns, which led to relatively many fines and tensions. Sweden chose (certainly initially) for much less far-reaching measures. (CoroPol Update, May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020)



Some authoritarian regimes (e.g. the Philippines) and (less developed) democracies exploited the pandemic to tighten their grip on their citizens. However, during the first stages of the pandemic, repressive reflexes could also be observed in parliamentary democracies (Onderzoeksraad voor Veiligheid, 2022).

## 6 Conclusions and Critical Assessment

The CoroPol Monitor and Research Project was based on the identification of an information gap within The Netherlands National Police regarding the strategy of how to police the pandemic. During the initial stages of COVID-19, governmental actors experienced a strong need to bridge the gap between the demand for information and its scarcity. With CoroPol, international knowledge about the impact of the pandemic on crime, safety and enforcement was collected, analysed, interpreted and disseminated. Moreover, CoroPol provided normative guidance about potential ways to tackle policing issues. Apparently, the documents were regarded as useful to professionals, certainly in the initial stages of the pandemic, as it helped them to quickly gain awareness of developments and broader trends regarding COVID-19.

Developments observed abroad held a strongly predictive value for COVID-19-related developments in The Netherlands. In the field of criminality, the main trends included a strong decrease in common crime, a shift from offline to online criminality and the emergence of specific corona-related criminal activity.

All predictions in our monitor based on foreign developments were replicated in The Netherlands. Studies on the actual development only show a diffuse image when it concerns the then expected increase in domestic violence. Above all, the observation that organised (drug) crime was not hampered by the corona crisis was a rather striking one: the world or organised crime quickly adapted and seized new opportunities.

In the area of public order, empirical and theoretical predictions were made for the Dutch situation. Many international news reports pointed out that adolescents started to resist the lockdowns and caused public order problems. Interpreting these developments, we were inspired by

social theory about anomie and moral holidays. Social disorder seemed eventually on the increase in The Netherlands, where during the first weeks the great majority of the public were law abiding and not (openly) opposing the anti-pandemic measures. More specifically, we outlined the following phenomena: more disorder by youths, social tensions between young people and law enforcement officers, more friction between citizens regarding compliance with measures. We observed that youngsters not always had a deeper, fundamental political reason to rebel and riot. Later in 2020, more people started to protest against the governmental policy (sometimes with significant violence). In the first phase, the first signs of a broader social unrest, not limited to young people, but this was not yet a clearly delineated pattern during the first half of 2020.

Additionally, what were response patterns of Dutch law enforcement and security organisations, and what was the level of variety that could be observed? In general, law enforcers faced a hard time enforcing the anti-COVID-19 rules: there was a rank-and-file debate throughout the country amongst those preferring a more strict enforcement and a ‘consultation model’ (explaining rules to the public, warning first, policing by ‘consent’), with strong regional as well as local differences between precincts and departments. The chiefs of the regional units of the Dutch National Police were well aware some groups were already subject to over-policing, and that they could easily be provoked by strict enforcement. Hence, strategically, the “management cops” tended to prefer “policing by consent” to strict, repressive and disciplinary policing as long as possible.

Further, enforcement professionals were confronted with social conduct that was considered normal and non-problematic prior to COVID-19 but was prohibited during the pandemic. Both national and international research indicates that individual law enforcement officers sometimes experienced great (moral) difficulties in enforcing the COVID-19 measures. The Netherlands law enforcement community did not deviate from this pattern. Essentially, the multiplicity of responses of law enforcers can be understood by referring to the different styles of policing that have been identified in the theory on police sociology. The strict enforcers deduced additional legitimacy in the anti-pandemic

measures, while the consent-driven professionals found it hard how to react properly in line with their moral standards.

We assumed that policing COVID-19 in The Netherlands would unravel how plural policing was conducted during the early phases of the pandemic, which we define as the performance of a range of policing activities by a multiplicity of actors, each on their own initiative and steered and controlled by their specific (or at least different) authorities (Loader, 2000). Our data show that the actual implementation was much less “plural” than expected during the initial stages of the pandemic. Plural policing was limited to the (regular) public police departments (including Dutch Royal Marechaussee for border policing), the municipal officers and youth workers in case of (treating) youth violence. The rest of the policing network was mostly confined to teleworking. However, at the same time, it was observed that policing was also conducted by private actors as well as institutions and citizens themselves (private policing, auxiliary policing and self-policing) (Den Boer et al., 2022).

To control the coronavirus and its impact, the government of The Netherlands created a temporary social order, which definitely left its mark on the texture of society, with new rules for interactions, impacting on almost every domain of our lives (Terpstra et al., 2020). The permanently changing rules and regulations, which were very detailed and announced shortly before entering into force, had to be policed some way or another, by public police and other security actors. Due to these circumstances, the police was placed in an unknown situation regarding enforcing social order (Terpstra & Salet, 2020). Social conduct that was previously considered legal and non-problematic by the law enforcement community fell subject to criminalisation for the purpose of public health, with significant consequences for human rights.

On a more fundamental level, the relationship between state and citizens was under significant strain. The state curtailed human rights in a way that most citizens had never experienced before. Inevitably, this had consequences for the position of the police. From a theoretical perspective, the police can take at least two positions. These positions are based on the work of Weber, on the one hand, and Durkheim, on the other

(Terpstra, 2011). In Weber's perspective, the police appears as an instrument of state that may legitimately use force (instrumental perspective, related to high policing). Emphasis is placed on a vertical and negative relationship between state and citizens (risk of citizens for the state) (Brodeur, 1983). Normative legitimacy is key: action that complies with the rules. From the perspective of Durkheim, the moral-symbolic role of the police in society is deemed to be a central one, with emphasis on a horizontal relationship and shared values between the state and its citizens. Social legitimacy is the principal yardstick for acceptance of police action by citizens. These theoretical perspectives are complementary but may also clash with one another.

In The Netherlands, a great deal of emphasis is traditionally put on the social integration of the police, namely a police force that stands between citizens, supported by public consent and thereby enjoying social legitimacy (Adang et al., 2010). There turned out to be different reasons, one of them being the relational style of policing in alignment with the dominant model of Community Policing (Adang et al., 2010). This relational style of policing, with emphasis on consultation and consent, was evident in the first months of the corona crisis (Terpstra et al., 2020). This style was practically implemented under the condition of mainly rule-abiding citizens and a high degree of social stability. In other words, the horizontal, relational perspective of Durkheim was dominant in the position of the police between state and citizens.

After the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the condition for policing changed gradually. This is evident in the behavioural research of the National Institute for Public Health and Environment (Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu, 2022). Social confidence in the anti-COVID-19 decreased gradually. In the Summer of 2020, more than 70% had (high) confidence in policing. Towards the end of 2021, this level had decreased to a low point of 15% (RIVM, 2022). Since the Summer of 2020, protests and riots became more widespread. The first signs of this change became visible in our CoroPol Monitor, but substantial change took place after the period in which we collected the data.

Against this background, the position of the police changed too. More often, they were (inevitably) positioned as state instrument. Weber's

perspective became more dominant. The implementation of the curfew (January 2021) can be regarded as an important turning point: during the press conference the government stated ‘there will be enforcement’ and the police received the order of a stricter enforcement (Adang, 2021). This changing social condition for policing the COVID-19 pandemic increased the amount of pressure on the relationship between the police and (part of) citizens. Even though the relational model still holds today, there is some concern that the corona crisis has fundamentally altered the relationship between the police and citizens. The high level of trust in the police is a revenue of Dutch policing that has to be cherished now and in the future, regardless of pandemic situations.

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