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The causes, content and consequences of repression: A framework for analyzing protest control in the counter-extremism era

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, governments in many Western democracies have introduced policies and practices to prevent radicalization and violent extremism (PRVE). This has led to the formation of a new policy arena in which an increased number of actors are tasked with PRVE work. The diverse set of actors and methods involved affect social movements in new and complex ways, but also challenges the established knowledge and analytical focus of research on the repression of social movements. In this article, we propose a conceptual framework that attends to the causes, content and consequences of protest control. We use it to examine interaction between actors in the PRVE arena and to highlight issues that are underexplored in repression research. To elucidate these issues, we use empirical examples from our own research on measures to counter extremist milieus in the Nordic countries and the UK.



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Since the early 2000s, the apparatus for controlling politically motivated crime and violence has grown increasingly complex in many Western democracies. This is particularly evident with the policies, practices and logics that have emerged in order to prevent radicalization and violent extremism (PRVE), what we refer to as the *PRVE arena* (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020a). Many of the rules and resources that characterize this arena have their roots in post-9/11 efforts to counter international terrorism. After the terrorist attacks in New York (2001) and the bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2006), a plethora of preventive and punitive measures have been introduced to deter groups and individuals seen as extremists or terrorists. Initially developed to counteract international, Jihadist terrorism, these policies and practices have gradually come to impact a wide range of activists, protests and social movements in ways that are still underexplored (Joyce, 2016). Given this development, the PRVE arena represents a more recent shift in which Western governments are directing more attention to prevent the ‘radicalization’ of domestic citizens (Malthaner, 2017).

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Based on previous research (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020a), we argue that the PRVE arena at its most basic level is characterized by three interlocking tendencies: 1) a *pre-emptive logic* oriented towards forestalling extremist acts by, for example, identifying risk indicators and signs of radicalization in individuals and groups (Heath-Kelly, 2013; Pistone et al., 2019), 2) an *outsourcing of state-based repression* in that PRVE measures involve a wide range of actors in cross-sectorial collaboration, from the police and security services to civil society actors, schools, social services and public health institutions (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016; Johansen, 2020) and 3) a *pluralization of protest control*, evident in the expansion of the repertoires used for PRVE, ranging from hard forms of repression, such as coercive control and incapacitation through imprisonment, to soft responses from actors outside the criminal justice system (Kundnani, 2012; Sjøen & Mattsson, 2020). In relation to the latter, another feature of the PRVE arena is the pervasion of a powerful discursive logic, that is, to subsume a myriad of actors with highly different political orientations under a uniform banner of extremism or terrorism, which has negative consequences for the labelled activists, organizations and the social movements they are part of (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020b). Such labelling represents a form of soft repression in itself, but may also be used to legitimize or pave the way for harder forms of repression.

To date, the PRVE arena have been examined most extensively within studies of policing, security and terrorism (Heath-Kelly, 2017; Salter, 2011) rather than in social movement scholarship. The international trend of pluralization and outsourcing of policing and security has been attended to in criminology and policing studies for at least two decades, showing how a diversity of actors outside law enforcement are being engaged in crime control (Crawford et al., 2005; Loader, 2000), similar to what we observe in the PRVE arena. Relatedly, for more than a decade now, the ways in which counter-terrorism policies impact social policy and other areas of society have been examined by security and terrorism scholars (Balzacq, 2011; Ragazzi, 2017). These developments have not, however, been fully acknowledged in social movement research on protest repression (for exceptions see, Ellefsen, 2018; Lindekilde, 2009; Peterson & Wahlström, 2015). While social movement scholars have developed a toolbox for studying how repression influences protest, we argue that social movement scholars should extend their attention to how the PRVE arena impacts protest. In doing so, scholars will benefit from engaging with the strands of literature mentioned above.

In social movement research, repression has largely become synonymous with violent state repression, and scholarship has primarily focused on its hard, coercive and overt forms (Davenport, 2015; Davenport et al., 2005; Earl, 2003, 2013). The literature on repression thus often falls short in attending to the complexity of protest control in the PRVE arena, particularly because of the wider set of agents and the diversity of techniques employed, as well as their diverse consequences. The use of soft repression and engagement of actors outside law enforcement are not qualitatively new phenomena. For instance, infiltration, undercover policing, labelling and stigmatization existed well before the PRVE arena. However, the PRVE arena involves a quantitative shift towards greater emphasis on pre-emptive and soft forms of protest control, including the ‘responsibilization’ (Garland, 2001) of wider sections of society to take part in PRVE, like monitoring signs of radicalization in people and reporting it to the authorities. The risk for protestors of being reported is thus greater, and the chance of being influenced by protest control in the PRVE arena have

increased in the last decade. Social movement scholars thus need to attend to the wider impact the PRVE arena has on movements and those who are – or risk being – depicted as extremists.

To explore this gap, we pursue two trajectories in this article. First, we propose a conceptual framework that distinguishes between the causes, content and consequences of protest control, in order to help structure scholarship on this subject. Second, we use this framework to examine the PRVE arena, with the aim of highlighting underexplored aspects of protest control. To illustrate the impact of PRVE on social movements, we use brief illustrative examples of activist milieus that have been labelled extremist in the Nordic countries and the UK. While the article primarily engages with social movement literature on repression, we also draw on literature from other scholarly areas to explicate general tendencies in the PRVE arena.

The article proceeds with a brief review of the social movement literature on the repression and control of protest. Thereafter, we lay out the concepts of ‘players’ and ‘arenas’ (Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015) that we use as an analytical scaffold to describe the PRVE arena and catalogues of players. We then outline our conceptual framework and relate it to the characteristics of the PRVE arena in order to show how developments in that arena challenge research on the repression of social movements.

From repression to social control of protest

Examining the impact of the PRVE arena on social movements, we argue, entails paying attention to different forms of repression. Scholarly literature on the repression of social movements has distinguished between repression based on coercion, which involves the show or use of force, and that based on channelling, which uses indirect and subtle control to impact the types of protest activists choose and their timing of protests (Davenport, 2015; Della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Jenkins & Eckert, 1986). This distinction is also sometimes referred to as the difference between hard and soft forms of repression (Earl, 2003; Starr et al., 2011). In comparing the two, there is much less research on softer forms of protest control, such as measures to channel protests in new directions, affect public opinion of certain categories of activists or hinder mobilization through discursive forms of repression (Ferree, 2004; Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020b; Linden & Klandermans, 2006). This knowledge gap calls on researchers to pay increased attention to the subtle and pre-emptive forms of repression manifested in the PRVE arena, the manifold actors involved and their impact on movement activism.

In addition to widening our scope beyond protest control by state actors and through hard forms of repression, we support Amory Starr et al.’s (2011) call to broaden our inquiry to also investigate actions that deter people from taking part in protest and activism. This is particularly important in order to identify the consequences of pre-emptive counter-radicalization efforts in the PRVE arena, which involve deterring people from supporting or entering certain movement milieus. For researchers, this means approaching protest control broadly, beyond the control of specific protest events and those participating in them.

A major strand of research on the consequences of repression has been an investigation of the impact of specific repressive measures on single protest events or movement sectors, for example, the impact of repression on the frequency of public protest (Chang,

2008, p. 652). For analysing protest control in the PRVE arena, we argue that a dynamic and relational research approach (Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015; Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015; McAdam et al., 2001) is better suited to analyse sequences of interaction between actors in the arena, as well as its consequences. A dynamic approach can, as we demonstrate later, enable scholars to capture the various ways in which protest control impacts the formation of movements, how they mobilize and the extent to which they succeed in recruiting adherents and constituents (Earl, 2004 p. 77; Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020b).

To capture the diversity of actors involved, the methods used and the consequences thereof, we follow Jennifer Earl (2004) and other social movement scholars who argue that ‘social control of protest’ is a more suitable term than ‘repression’ (see also, Oliver, 2008; Starr & Fernandez, 2009). The concept of *social control* refers to how society ‘extracts compliance of individuals or groups to some ideal standard of conduct’ (Chriss, 2013, p. 1). Most often, social control is exerted in the face of an apparent norm infraction and aims at restitution, revenge or deterrence (Wilson, 1977). In relation to this, social control of protest (henceforth *protest control*) can be viewed as a set of actions that have the purpose to deter, disrupt, punish or otherwise control individual activists (or potential activists), protest groups and entire social movements that are perceived as a threat or challenge to social, cultural and political power. Within the PRVE arena, protest control entails a wide range of practices that seek to steer and maintain compliance of protestors, activists and other politically engaged persons. The specific norms, or the ideal standard of conduct, against which these people’s behaviour and expressions are measured and considered ‘extreme’ vary over time, in relation to socio-political differences among countries and the volatile character of ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalization’ as concepts (Sedgwick, 2010).

Players and arenas

To describe and understand the dynamics of contemporary PRVE work we use two concepts developed by proponents of an interactionist approach to social movement studies: arenas and players (Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015; McGarry et al., 2016). The concepts are particularly useful for mapping the contending actors and the rules and resources that shape the context in which their interaction takes place (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015). We use these concepts to stake out the locus of our interest: what we refer to as *agents* and *targets* of protest control, within a given context, namely the PRVE arena.

The concept of ‘arena’ refers to the spatial-temporal context where politics occur or, in Sheldon Wolin’s (1960) terms, ‘where the plans, ambitions, and actions of individuals and groups incessantly jar against each other – colliding, blocking, coalescing, separating’ (p. 16). Not necessarily connected to a physical place, an arena is held together by a bundle of formal and informal rules and resources that allow certain types of interaction to take place. An arena is constructed and reconstructed through the actions of different players, and in most cases, arenas take manifest forms so that one can watch the interaction taking place (Jasper, 2015). Given actors’ positions and roles in an arena, they are restricted or enabled differently by the rules and resources of the arena and therefore have different tactical tools at their disposal in their efforts to help or hinder activism (Jasper, 2011).

In our case, government-initiated efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism can be seen as opening up a new arena of interactions among a diverse set of movement and non-movement players. The arena is bound together by rules and resources stemming from a range of sources, from the international to the local level. These include 1) PRVE policies that guide what actions should be taken and allocate responsibilities and resources to different state and non-state agencies (Andersson Malmros, 2019), 2) available laws, police and prosecution powers that can be used to quell movement activities and to counter radicalization and extremism (Mead, 2010) and 3) local organization and implementation of practices to prevent radicalization and extremism (Vermeulen, 2014). The PRVE arena is situated among and affects other arenas (Jasper, 2015). With its reach across disciplines and sectors, it casts a wide net of control, involving a larger number of arenas and actors in protest control than most previous forms of repression.

To conceptualize the interaction among actors in the PRVE arena, we use the term 'players' (Jasper & Duyvendak, 2015). Players are individual (simple) or collective (compound) actors 'who engage in strategic action with some goal in mind' (Jasper, 2015, p. 10). The adjective 'strategic' refers to the efforts of one player to get others to do what they want, which characterizes what social movements and those engaged in protest control are doing all the time (Jasper, 2006, p. 5). During the course of interaction, different players cooperate with, constrain, or are in conflict with each other, and the main external constraints experienced by one player in an arena are mainly the result of actions of other players who have different goals and interests (Jasper, 2015).

In the PRVE arena, multitudinous players are involved, and research needs to begin by mapping them. Two broad groups of players are of particular importance when studying protest control, what we hereafter refer to as the *agents* and *targets* of protest control. Grouping players into these categories does not mean that we see them as two monolithic entities or that agents are the ones acting while targets are merely being acted upon. Both agents and targets have agency and include a multitude of players. For the purpose of this article, however, we find it useful to make a distinction between the players who develop and implement PRVE measures and the players who – unwillingly – are drawn into the PRVE arena as they become targets of those measures (cf., Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

Consequently, the *agents of protest control* are those who initiate or try to impose restrictions on protest, deter activists (or potential activists) or channel their activism in certain directions. The agents of protest control differ across countries, but in relation to PRVE in Western democracies, the agents are often multitudinous, ranging from police, security services and the judicial system, to teachers, social workers, health personnel, youth recreation leaders and civil society organizations. Players connected to mass media or other third parties, such as counter-movements, can also play crucial roles in deploying repressive practices, such as labeling or stigmatizing activists (Ferree, 2004; Linden & Klandermans, 2006).

The *targets of protest control* are the organizations or milieus that are labeled as extremists, individual activists involved in or supporting these groups, or the broader social movements they are part of. Groups or activists that are associated with violent, unlawful or 'transgressive' (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 60) repertoires of action seem most likely to become targets of protest control and be impacted by the PRVE arena. However, movements and organizations that use conventional tactics may also be labelled as

violent extremists by adversaries or be affected by ‘spill-over effects’ or PRVE measures targeting other movement players (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020a). Activists enter the PRVE arena mainly involuntarily as a result of being suspected, publicly labelled or targeted as being supportive of, or engaged in, ‘extremism.’ As players usually seek arenas where their skills and resources offer the most advantage (Jasper, 2011), the PRVE arena is primarily an arena that activists seek to avoid because entering or escalating conflict with the players inside it generally has little to offer, and rather involves a plethora of risks.

The causes, content and consequences of protest control

Building on social movement scholarship on repression (in particular Earl, 2004, 2011; Ellefsen, 2016; Peterson & Wahlström, 2015), we propose a distinction between three main aspects of protest control: its causes, content and consequences.

Conceptualizing protest control in this way helps to structure research and differentiate interconnected areas of analysis. This three-fold distinction, we argue, applies to any analysis of protest control, but we find it particularly useful for examining the main aspects of protest control in the PRVE arena, as it helps to extend scholarly attention beyond overt and public acts of repression and address the initiation of protest control, as well as its manifold forms and consequences.

Regarding the *causes* of protest control, there is usually a preliminary phase or pre-planning by agents of control, where the initial grounds for protest control are established and goals set. An instance or wave of protest control is usually preceded by actions, planning and decisions of agents engaged in protest control. Researching the causes of protest control means exploring the origins and the underlying processes that precede the actual protest control. In order to understand the causes of protest control, researchers must examine and evaluate the factors that trigger the assessment of players as a threat and the intentions of the agents of protest control. This involves tracing and scrutinizing triggering events such as protests that cause ‘moral panics’ (Cohen, 2002) or exploring questions such as to whom and to what the activists are perceived as a threat, and why? It involves identifying the main players that trigger protest control or those who push others to escalate it, and identifying those who further prepare for and initiate it (Ellefsen, 2016). It also means paying attention to the subtle, preceding actions that often portend the public manifestation of protest control. In the PRVE arena, this dimension is highly important because of the many pre-emptive measures taken prior to actual protest events.

Capturing the *content* of protest control means analyzing the variety of measures and techniques used to control social movements and protest, ranging from subtle forms of channeling through intimidation, stigmatization and harassment, on one end of the spectrum, to overt violent coercion at the other end (Peterson & Wahlström, 2015). Researchers may pay attention to specific events or follow the sequence of interactions between agents and targets of protest control (e.g., throughout a protest wave or a long-lasting policing operation) to identify the measures employed and examine their influence on the ensuing contention (Ellefsen, 2021b). Researchers have found that protest control often has various and accumulating effects over time and that the action of one player can lead to changes and adjustments in the measures used by others (Bosi, 2016). With regards to the PRVE arena, the outsourcing and pluralization of protest control

facilitates the engagement of a much broader range of actors and employment of more varied measures than what has traditionally been examined in repression research. Scholars need to be particularly aware of this.

The pluralization of protest control tactics also means a pluralization of *consequences* for protest. Given that PRVE measures involve hard and soft forms of protest control and target different levels of movements, researchers should pay attention to the fact that protest control measures can have different consequences for individual activists, their organizations and the movements they are a part of (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020b). Also, the outcome of protest control is not always in line with what the agents of protest control intended. To analyze this, researchers have distinguished between intended and unintended consequences of protest control (Sullivan & Davenport, 2017), including potential back-fire effects (Lindekilde, 2014) as well as actual responses of targeted social movement organizations (Della Porta, 2013). It is also important to pay attention to the ‘interrelated effects’ of different types of measures (Bosi, 2016). Soft protest control might, for example, lay the ground for harder protest control. Lastly, research also shows that protest control produces ‘spillover effects’ that have an impact beyond the activists or the societal arena that was their initial target (Chiarello, 2018). For instance, protest control might have long-term political implications by decreasing the opportunities for future protest through criminalizing certain organizations or stigmatizing entire social movements (Amenta et al., 2010).

As stated, distinguishing between the three main aspects of protest control in this way helps to structure research and distinguish between different but interconnected areas of analysis. While researchers have primarily examined the content and consequences of repression in isolation, we find it crucial to also pay attention to its causes and to investigate these three aspects in combination. Even if the three components have a logic of chronology, they will often interact in different orders in actual empirical cases: the consequences of one sequence of interaction between agents and targets might, for example, lead to changes in both the causes (e.g., intentions) and content (e.g., measures used) of protest control (see, Wahlström, 2016). The causes, content and consequences of protest control also always unfold within a specific context, which encompasses the arena(s) where the interaction between agents and targets of protest control takes place. Unravelling the arena and these players, like we did above, is therefore a necessary first step for understanding and analysing the three aspects of protest control within its context.

Protest control in the PRVE arena

The previous sections outlined the PRVE arena and the players involved, followed by our distinction between the three main aspects of protest control. In this section we explicate the core attributes that characterize the PRVE arena: 1) pre-emptive logic, 2) outsourcing of state-based repression and 3) pluralization of protest control. We demonstrate how these characteristics are manifested in relation to the causes, content and consequences of protest control. In this way, we highlight elements of protest control that are under-explored in social movement research on repression.

We use empirical examples from our research in the Nordic countries and the UK to illustrate the impact of the PRVE arena on protest. Although important differences exist between the domestic PRVE arenas in the UK and the Nordic countries, they still share the core characteristics of the PRVE arena and illustrate how the broad tendencies of that arena impact protest across contexts. Rather than using empirical examples that focus on specific terrorist groups or fatal attacks on civilians, we selected examples that illustrate how the policies and practices of the PRVE arena can influence social movements and protest more broadly. The examples are thus chosen to illustrate how the main subjects of social movement scholars – protest, social movements and contentious politics – might be affected by emerging forms of social control linked to the PRVE arena.

Pre-emptive logic

The policies, programs and measures developed in the PRVE arena are, as stated in the introduction, primarily focused on pre-empting extremist acts from ever happening (Kundnani, 2014). In practice, this means that agents of control pay increased attention to identifying risk indicators and early signs of radicalization in individuals or groups (Pistone et al., 2019). Even radical legal expressions or opinions might thus be understood by civil servants and others as extremism or be seen as an indication that an individual is at risk of radicalization. This, in turn, might trigger responses from agents of protest control. While researchers have primarily attended to the repression of public protest and mobilization, we argue that protest control in the PRVE arena plays an important role as a switchman that, for example, effectively prevents protest mobilization or events from ever becoming manifest (Earl, 2004).

The pre-emptive logic that characterizes the arena urges researchers to pay increased attention to the underlying causes of protest control: the factors that trigger the assessment of certain players as a threat and the goals of the repressive agents. It also calls for researchers to attend to the repressive measures (content of protest control) taken outside of actual movement mobilizations, to be able to capture the often elusive consequences of these pre-emptive actions. Attending to these aspects would help to explain why certain players become the targets of PRVE measures in the first place, why PRVE measures involve a widened net of social control and why movement mobilization sometimes fails, as agents of protest control disrupt such efforts or deter recruitment before mobilization even occurs.

Regarding causes of protest control, pre-emptive control of protest in the PRVE arena is closely related to national security concerns. It is usually a response to a perception or construction of a specific player as being a security threat or extremist challenge that must be controlled or incapacitated. For the agents of repression, the goal can be justified by both interdictive and mitigative logics, for instance, by seeking to prohibit someone from taking action or reducing the negative consequences of such actions. Our research has shown how the increased policing of militant Islamist activists in Norway after 2014 involved a government-initiated mobilization across state, private and civil society arenas to establish a cross-sectoral network and preparedness for monitoring and controlling individuals who were thought to be at-risk of radicalization or linked to Islamist extremist groups (Ellefsen, 2021a). On the basis of this cross-sectorial monitoring involving a wide number of societal arenas and professional groups, numerous individuals

were reported and thereafter approached by the police or security services for ‘voluntary talks’ or as potential informants. Many of them had not broken any law but had expressed or been understood as expressing support for militant Islamist groups (Kruse, 2019). In Norway, concerns over national security have also been used to justify the detainment and deportation of individuals seen by security services as threats, without formal accusation or trial (Ellefsen, 2021a). According to the police, the reasons for having conversations with individuals deemed at-risk are many: to gain more intelligence about the person and their social network, to offer social services so as to channel the individual into a different life-course, to clarify the level of risk associated with the person or to issue a warning (Førde & Andersen, 2018). Similar trends are also evident in other European countries (Mulinari, 2019; Nguyen, 2019).

Much of the literature on repression is about measures taken (content) for protest control and the consequences for groups and individuals, based on their prior engagement in protest. However, the above example of police approaching individuals based on concerns about radicalization also involved persons who had not previously participated in activist groups. As scholars, we need to be open to the fact that measures taken in the PRVE arena involve a widened net of social control (see, Cohen, 1985, on ‘net widening’), where targets range from individuals with no involvement in any activist group or protest action to entire social movement milieus seen as threats to national security. The dominant logic of pre-emption in this arena, thus, intentionally has consequences for a wide range of persons not closely linked to protest and social movements, in order to prevent the mobilizing efforts of targeted groups and to disrupt an individual’s entry into or support for such groups.

The outsourcing of state-based repression

The PRVE arena is characterized by cross-sectorial collaborations and multi-agency measures to prevent radicalization and extremism, which we refer to as the *outsourcing of state-based repression*. Within the PRVE arena, police and security services are no longer solely responsible for tackling political challengers that are seen as security threats or for handling politically motivated crime and violence. Instead, these measures frequently involve civil society actors (e.g., NGOs and community organizations), schools, social services, public health institutions, childcare services and local communities that have been tasked with new responsibilities to identify risks and to prevent radicalization and violent extremism (Zedner & Ashworth, 2019). In 2015, the UK became the first country to legally require front-line practitioners and agencies across state education, social welfare and health-care provision to report individuals suspected of being radicalized to the authorities and to contribute to the ‘prevention of terrorism’ (Paul, 2020). In several Nordic countries, frontline personnel is similarly instructed, in the form of local action plans, to monitor and report behavioral and cognitive signs of radicalization and extremism to a local coordinator of anti-extremism, who in turn discusses this with the police or secret service (Andersson Malmros & Mattson, 2017). Despite similarities in the general mode of PRVE practice across contexts, it is important to underline that PRVE work also differs in important ways between countries and local communities (Dalgaard-Nielsen & Patrick, 2016). These differences also depend on the level and type of ‘extremism’ that agents encounter (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020a).

Our study of local implementation of PRVE policies in Sweden shows how practitioners often gained entry into the lives of targeted individuals through the health, social, educational and other public services they provided, making it possible for them to investigate and address individuals' potential affiliation with an 'extremist milieu' (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020a). An expression of radical views or mentioning participation in or support for radical social movements, might trigger further multi-agency PRVE measures, ranging from attempts to assist the individual to disengage or deradicalize, to further monitoring and reporting to the police or security services (Hansen & Lid, 2020).

Although the diverse set of agents engaged in protest control share a common cause in monitoring and preventing radicalization and extremism (in their clients, pupils, patients or other members of the public that they engage with during their professional work), researchers should pay attention to the different interests, goals, organizational cultures and available measures that these professionals are guided by because they can produce novel forms of collaboration as well as potential conflicts, both within and between professions (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020a). Research on PRVE work in Sweden, as well as in several other countries, shows there are a number of conflicts between PRVE work and societal goals for young people's socialization and political engagement. For example, a school's mission to safeguard freedom of expression, promote critical thinking and create a positive teacher-student relationship can conflict with the requirement to pass on information about students who express opinions that suggest radicalization (Sjøen & Mattsson, 2020). This example points to the fact that PRVE work has consequences for both the agents and targets of protest.

For agents of protest control, the cross-sectorial nature and wide reach of the PRVE arena provides opportunities for collaboration through exchanges of intelligence, experiences and resources. At the same time, being incorporated into the PRVE apparatus creates challenges for some agents as they are tasked with new responsibilities and duties related to national security, and are expected to collaborate with other players that have different societal mandates (Johansson & Arvidson, 2016). The agents of protest control also have unequal access to resources and formal power, as well as different skill-sets and tools at hand, which are relevant for understanding their impact and role vis-à-vis those who become targets of protest control (Jasper, 2015, p. 14). As hinted above, cross-sectorial collaborations in the PRVE arena have clear implications for the content of protest control, as well as the diverse consequences for those targeted, which we examine below.

The pluralization of protest control

The PRVE arena has emerged against a background of former counter-terrorism approaches that mainly relied on coercion, the use of law enforcement and military strategies. The PRVE arena, however, allows for more sophisticated and pluralized efforts, which have been introduced at a fast rate in many Western countries (Sivenbring, 2016). The increased use of multi-agency efforts that characterize this arena has widened the available repertoires for protest control. Research has shown that authorities use more than coercive tactics to push people out of their engagement in activism (Fillieule, 2010). PRVE measures also involve soft and pull-oriented methods of repression (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016). This includes channelling protests

in new directions, continuous surveillance and intelligence gathering, affecting public opinion about specific categories of activists and hindering their mobilization by publicly labelling them as violent extremists (Ferree, 2004; Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020b).

For instance, our research on the repression of radical animal rights activists in the UK shows that when a group is considered to be domestic extremist by the police and government, a wide array of powers and techniques can be used to control it. In the case of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC), hard forms of repression were complemented with an array of other responses, ranging from changes to laws, the establishment of a specialized police unit and strategic public relation initiatives by the police to disseminate their depiction of the protestors, to less visible but highly impactful forms of protest control (Ellefsen, 2018, p. 762). This coercive response reflected the police's determination to dismantle the campaign, after the government had singled it out as an extremist threat to the UK economy (Ellefsen & Busher, 2020). This example shows how a government's shifting understanding of a particular category of activists, was followed by allocation of new resources and collaborative efforts by the government, police and private corporate actors to dismantle the SHAC campaign through a combination of soft and hard forms of protest control.

As part of PRVE efforts, authorities also employ measures that are intended to offer targeted individuals a way out of a radical milieu, for example, through exit programs that aim to practically facilitate disengagement of 'former extremists' (Björge & Horgan, 2009). Such pull-oriented (channelling) measures can, however, be used in combination with push-oriented (coercive) methods (Earl, 2004). We argue that these developments taken together reflect a *pluralization of protest control*, in which different professions collaborate to prevent people from entering extremist milieus, disrupt those milieus or push/pull people out of them.

Based on this development, research on protest control in the PRVE arena needs to pay particular attention to subtle and soft forms of protest control, often overlooked in research on repression (Earl, 2003). Even if the police and security services still hold the key position in networks of agents in the PRVE arena, the engagement of players outside the criminal justice sector enables increased use of soft and non-coercive measures. At the same time, expansive collaborative networks also provide the police and its security service with extended opportunities through third party policing (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2005): when the police engage other players and use a range of civil, regulatory and administrative laws to enable and enhance their own efforts (Wakefield & Fleming, 2009). With new opportunities for the police emerging in the PRVE arena, control efforts employed by social services can be triggered by a police initiative. When protest control is employed in the context of a cross-disciplinary collaborative network (e.g., between the police, schools and social services), it is relevant to try and determine who pulls the strings and who has the power to decide whether to respond and what measures to employ.

The pluralization of measures also means a pluralization of the consequences for protest. Our research on repression in the PRVE arena indicates that soft measures can have different consequences for individuals, organizations and movements. This ranges from fear of social sanctions among individual activists through administrative sanctions and silencing of organizations, to the blackening of entire movements and increased intra-movement splintering. For instance, our work on PRVE measures targeting the

radical left in Sweden shows how the labelling of certain movement organizations as violent extremists impacts activists' cognition and practices, and results in increased individual self-policing. For some activists, the risk of being stigmatized because of their involvement in a labelled group led to reduced willingness to be open about their political engagement, which in turn hindered the recruitment of new activists and thus also movement mobilization (Jämte & Ellefsen, 2020b).

Conclusion

In this article, we have demonstrated that the emergence of the PRVE arena has increased the complexity of protest control in several Western democracies. PRVE measures are guided by pre-emptive logics and a *modus operandi* that involves a wide range of professions across societal sectors. This development has contributed to a pluralization of contemporary protest control; blending hard and soft, overt and covert, preventive and reactive measures by state, private and civil society actors. We have presented underexplored modes and forms of protest control stemming from the PRVE arena and identified several implications for social movements that we think scholars of repression should pay closer attention to in future studies.

Based on social movement scholarship, we have developed a conceptual framework to guide studies of protest control in the counter-extremism era. By distinguishing and attending to three important aspects – *causes*, *content* and *consequence* – it is possible to structure the analysis of contemporary forms of protest control and scrutinize sequences of interaction between agents and targets of protest control. While scholars have primarily studied either the content or consequences of protest control, we have argued for the need to add causes to the analysis. As demonstrated above, we also consider it important to address all three aspects in combination and to acknowledge how they continue to affect each other over time because agents and targets of protest control continuously interact. By adopting this framework, researchers can better account for how protest control and protest evolves through a reciprocal relationship (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2012), and capture the complexity of protest control in the counter-extremism era, its underlying rationale and how it manifests itself and impacts social movements in underexplored ways.

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