Policing Protests: Determinants, Disparities, and Policy Reform

Grant Donovan and Marieliz Pagan

School of Public Administration, University of Central Florida

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Dr. Abdul-Akeem Sadiq

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Executive Summary

During the Black Lives Matter Movement, hundreds of largely peaceful protests ended with the police arresting or attacking protesters. Many criticized these actions as excessive force that did not match the threat the protests presented. Excessive force has been a regular feature of protest policing in the U.S. since before the Civil Rights Movement. Its use has long violated protesters' constitutional rights, cost municipalities millions of dollars in legal settlements, and needlessly threatened the safety of both protesters and officers. It is also important to note that minority-led protests are met with excessive force far more often than are White-led protests, creating disparities that erode trust in law enforcement within communities of color.

All of these issues have become especially relevant in Florida, as recent state legislation greatly expanded police discretion in responding to protests. This has heightened scrutiny over how police and protesters interact. This report investigates the factors that predict how these interactions unfold, with a focus on institutional characteristics that local officials can shape in order to promote proportionate and equitable protest policing.

This report analyzes 1,429 protest events that occurred in Florida between 2020 and 2024, drawing on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database, the Crowd Counting Consortium, and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's annual Criminal Justice Agency Profile reports. An ordinal logistic regression model is used to estimate how the characteristics of the police department with jurisdiction over an event predict the severity of its response. These characteristics reflect a department's available resources, militarization, professionalism, and officer demographics. The model also accounts for event-level factors, such as event size, protester tactics, and group identity.

The results reveal three institutional characteristics that meaningfully influence the

severity of police responses to protest events. First, highly militarized departments, such as those with in-house SWAT or intelligence units, tend to respond more aggressively to any given protest. Second, more professional departments, such as those with in-house training units, tend to respond less aggressively. Third, departments with a higher proportion of Black officers in their police force tend to respond far less aggressively to protests led by Black social movement organizations. However, they also respond more aggressively to protests that are not Black-led.

The results also show a broader shift towards more aggressive protest policing in recent years, as well as the existence of racial disparities. These findings point to an urgent need in Florida for policies that can promote proportionate and equitable protest policing. Drawing on these results and the broader academic literature, this report puts forward three policy recommendations for achieving these goals. First, local officials should demilitarize their police departments. Militarized responses intimidate protesters and instill a "warrior mentality" in officers, heightening tensions at protest events and leading to unnecessary instances of escalation. Second, local officials should invest in regular protest-response training for their officers. This will prepare them to follow procedures and exercise restraint in high-pressure protest situations. Third, local officials should adopt strategies to recruit and retain diverse officers, particularly Black officers, to mitigate the effects of implicit bias on officer decision-making. Taken together, these recommendations offer a portfolio of reforms that are timely, actionable, and evidence-based. Their implementation would both improve protest policing and restore public trust in law enforcement across Florida.

Methodology

Research Design

This study investigates how the institutional characteristics of municipal police departments influence protest responses. It analyzes a sample of protest events that occurred in Florida between the years of 2020 and 2024, making it observational and cross-sectional. Data for this sample were compiled from three principal sources: the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED), the Crowd Counting Consortium Database (CCC), and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's (FDLE) Criminal Justice Agency Profile Reports (CJAP). Variables were created that capture each protest's event-level attributes and the institutional characteristics of the responding police department. Ordinal logistic regression was used to model the likely severity of police responses as a function of these variables.

Data Collection and Description

Both the ACLED and CCC contain data on thousands of Florida protest events from between 2020 and 2024 (Chenoweth & Hammam, 2021; Raleigh et al., 2023). However, researchers have noted that relying on either one comes with limitations (Dorff et al., 2023). The ACLED contains no data on arrests or protester demands. The CCC contains no data on actor identification or the presence of counter-protesters. And both are inconsistent in reporting protest size and protester tactics. Since these variables are critical for understanding police response, the relevant ACLED and CCC entries were merged into a single dataset to create this study's sample. A Python script was used to match entries in each dataset with the same date, coordinates within 15km of one another, and shared keywords. A manual review of the matches removed false positives and those missing data in both datasets.

Following this, the police department responsible for responding to each event was

identified. 404 entries were removed at this stage due to falling under the jurisdiction of a county sheriff's office. Next, data from the FDLE's CJAP reports was added to the merged dataset (Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, 2024). 12 variables were deemed theoretically relevant, and values were assigned according to each entry's police department match and event year. Yet, the CJAP reports do not contain departments' budgets. This data was instead collected from the Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research (2025).

At the end of this process, the final dataset included 1,429 protest events with complete data across 25 theory-grounded variables.[1] The most important of these is police response level, which functions as this study's dependent variable. Following the framework of Earl and Soule (2006), police response is operationalized as three escalating levels of tactical combinations. Additionally, 13 independent variables measure the institutional characteristics of the responding police department. These capture the department's available resources, level of militarization, professionalism, and officer demographics. Lastly, 11 variables measuring the event-level attributes of each protest are included as controls. These capture the threat level presented, the presence of certain groups, and situational context.

Statistical Analysis

This study employed an ordinal logistic regression model appropriate for analyzing the ordered structure of police response levels (Soule & Davenport, 2009). All analyses were conducted in RStudio. The modeling process began with a full model that included all 24 variables assembled during data collection. Two interaction terms were also included: one between Black Percent and Targets the Police and the other between Black Percent and Black SMO. Both were initially significant. However, sensitivity analysis revealed that the first was dependent on 6 high-leverage observations, and it was subsequently removed. The full model

[1] See Appendix A for the full variable codebook, including definitions, sources, and coding procedures.

flagged 10 variables as insignificant. A change-in-estimation approach was used to iteratively remove these insignificant variables, retaining three for their theoretical relevance and potential as confounders (Harrell, 2015). The resulting final model satisfied the Brant test and had no variable with an adjusted GVIF score greater than 2.5, meeting model assumptions.

Finally, two additional models were created as robustness checks. The first was a parsimonious model derived by applying a backwards stepwise regression function on the full model. However, this did not meaningfully improve model fit (4.3 reduction in AIC), and therefore the final model was preferred for analysis. The second was a fixed effects model that introduced 21 county-level dummy variables into the final model, controlling for omitted variables like population demographics, crime rates, and political climate. However, running this model required removing all entries from counties with fewer than 10 observations – 5% of the total sample. Further, the fixed effects model was very sensitive to high-leverage observations, significantly reduced model fit (25.6 increase in AIC), and failed the proportional odds assumption. For these reasons, the final model was retained for analysis.[2]

Results and Discussion

Results Discussion and Interpretation

The results of the final model validate the threat-perception theory of protest policing (Earl & Soule, 2006). Larger protests, the use of confrontational tactics, and the presence of counter-protesters were all strong predictors of high-level police responses. Protests that explicitly targeted the police were also associated with more severe responses, consistent with the theory that police perceive a greater threat when protesters directly challenge their legitimacy (Reynolds-Stenson, 2018). Event year was also a significant control. More recent protests – specifically those following the enactment of Florida's "Anti-Riot Act" in 2021 – were

[2] See Appendix B for complete regression results and model diagnostics for all four models.

associated with a higher likelihood of police escalation. This suggests that the changes in Florida's legal environment have indeed encouraged more aggressive protest policing.

As for group identity, the final model found no evidence of protest policing disparities along ideological lines. Right-wing protests were not policed any differently than neutral protests, while left-wing protests were actually policed less aggressively after controlling for all other factors. That said, the model did find strong evidence of disparities along racial lines. Protests led by Black social movement organizations were more likely to receive a high-level than identical protests that were not led by Black organizations. This finding indicates that Florida police factor in the presence of Black protesters when determining a protest's threat level, which leads to a higher likelihood of escalation even after accounting for protest size, tactics, and other situational factors (Davenport et al., 2011).

Four institutional characteristics reached significance in the final model.[3] Among these, SWAT unit emerged as the strongest predictor. Police departments with in-house tactical units were far more likely to respond to any given protest aggressively, and this result was robust across model specifications. In-house intelligence units were also associated with higher-level responses, though this relationship was only significant at the $\alpha = 0.1$ level. Scholars consider both SWAT and intelligence units indicators of a police department's orientation towards militarized protest management (Kraska, 2007). Therefore, these findings suggest that more militarized police departments operate with a lower threshold for deploying force, regardless of a protest's actual threat level. Conversely, departments with in-house training units were less likely to respond to any given protest aggressively. This result supports the theory that response training prepares officers to exercise restraint in high-pressure protest situations (Earl & Soule,

[3] See Appendix B for complete regression results, including coefficient estimates, standard errors, and significance levels for all models.

2006). Although this relationship was not robust, as it was absent in the parsimonious model.

The proportion of Black officers in the responding police force was another significant predictor of response level. Departments with more Black officers were more likely to respond aggressively on average, a result that remained significant even after accounting for county-level differences in the fixed effects model. However, this relationship reversed when a protest was led by a Black social movement organization. In these instances, police departments with more Black officers were far less likely to respond aggressively. These findings align with the expectations of relational alignment theory: a shared racial identity between police and protesters reduces perceived threat and moderates police behavior (Cunningham, 2024).

Comparison of Alternatives

These findings point to three policy alternatives that can improve protest policing across Florida's municipalities: demilitarization, investment in response training, and police force diversification.[4] These alternatives are evaluated across four criteria – proportionality, equity, feasibility, and cost. Proportionality refers to how well an alternative aligns the severity of police response with the actual threat level posed by a protest event, which reduces harmful instances of excessive force. Equity refers to how well an alternative promotes consistent protest policing and thereby addresses racial disparities. Feasibility refers to how practical an alternative would be to implement within Florida's political and legal environment, while cost refers to both the financial resources and staff time its implementation would require.

Demilitarization involves limiting the deployment of military-grade equipment and the application of combat-style policing in managing protest events (Kraska, 2007). This study's findings indicate that this is the best alternative available for promoting proportionate policing:

[4] See Appendix C for a summary table comparing the three policy alternatives across the four choice criteria.

demilitarized departments operated with a much higher threshold for using force, which means their responses better reflected protests' actual threat levels. And insofar as militarized responses have been disproportionately deployed against Black-led protests, demilitarization would also help to reduce disparities and improve equity (Brunson et al., 2024). As for feasibility, this alternative faces both institutional and political obstacles. Departments strongly resist losing their tactical units, and Florida's political climate favors police autonomy and toughness. That said, some Florida law enforcement professionals have argued that reassigning SWAT and intelligence unit functions to regional response teams offers a viable implementation path (Wasden, 2006). Administrators can also build support by framing demilitarization around its potential cost-savings. Military-grade equipment and combat-style training are expensive, as are the lawsuits and damages related to militarized protest policing (American Civil Liberties Union, 2014).

Investing in response training means establishing in-house training units and developing specialized programs. This alternative improves officer procedural consistency during protest events– reducing the frequency of unnecessary escalation and improving the proportionality of police responses (Waddington, 2013). However, the study's results suggest that this benefit – while real – is relatively weak. As for equity, this alternative's impact on policing disparities depends upon its implementation. If training programs include well-crafted lessons on implicit bias, they can help lower the perceived threat of Black-led protest events (Fridell, 2017). This alternative is also highly feasible. Training resources would be welcomed by police leadership looking to expand capacity, and it would align with Florida's political emphasis on police professionalism. The main weakness of this alternative is instead its cost. New training units and programs demand substantial staff time and investment in facilities and equipment.

Police force diversification involves revising hiring policies, performing targeted

outreach, creating community partnerships, and building internal support structures capable of attracting and retaining diverse officers (Wilson et al., 2013). This alternative offers the greatest equity benefits. The study's results revealed that more diverse police forces responded far less aggressively to Black-led protests – groups that continue to be disproportionately over-policed. However, they also responded more aggressively to all other protests. This suggests that diversification may reduce proportionality overall by increasing the likelihood of escalation in the majority of protest events. As for feasibility, the practicality of this alternative is uncertain. Many Florida police departments already have diversification initiatives in place in a limited form. But at the same time, the state political environment is very polarized against diversity initiatives, and interest in a law enforcement career is extremely low among Black youth (Allen, 2024; Blaskey & Nehamas, 2025). Finally, the costs of this alternative are modest: recruitment and training programs would certainly require resources, but these costs are comparable to those of recruiting any good officer (Scheer and Wilson, 2021).

Before settling on a final recommendation, it is also important to identify the unintended consequences of each alternative. For demilitarization, a department's reliance on external SWAT teams might delay critical action during a genuine emergency (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2023). This could also result in departments regularly calling in regional or state units to deal with protests. These external agencies would not have the same relationship with the community and might show less restraint in responding. Finally, demilitarization could demoralize officers who are proud to serve in tactical units. As for response training, pursuing this alternative could be interpreted publicly as preparing the police to respond to protests more aggressively. This would erode trust among reformers who would prefer to defund the police (Vitale, 2020). Finally, officer diversification could create political backlash, which can lead to

media attacks, legal challenges, and funding cuts. It could also reduce officer morale; existing officers may see such programs as lowering standards or even reverse racism (Boynton, 2024).

Each of these three alternatives presents distinct tradeoffs. Demilitarization would promote proportionate and equitable protest policing while reducing costs. Yet, it also comes with a number of negative externalities like slower emergency responses, the outsourcing of protest policing, and officer demoralization. Investment in response training would make policing more proportional, but it would also require substantial resources and anger reform advocates. Finally, officer diversification would address protest policing disparities at a low cost, but it may also reduce proportionality, attract political attacks, and lower officer morale. Given these tradeoffs, this report puts forward demilitarization as its final recommendation. The benefits of this alternative are backed by its strongest empirical findings and are heavily supported by the academic literature. Across the choice criteria, it achieved the most favorable balance between proportionality, equity, and cost. While its feasibility is low, its potential for impact justified pursuing it through strategic, incremental implementation. Finally, its tradeoffs are manageable through careful planning, interagency coordination, and community engagement.

Conclusion

Policy Implications & Recommendations

This report's findings present four important policy implications for local officials looking to promote proportionate and equitable protest policing. First, state-level policy changes have encouraged more aggressive protest policing in Florida in recent years. This finding validates the efforts of municipal leaders to limit the enforcement of these laws in their jurisdictions (Hyson, 2021). It also reveals an urgent need for local policies that promote restraint in protest policing. Second, highly militarized police departments respond more aggressively and

are more likely to use excessive force during protests. Local officials should therefore demilitarize their police departments, specifically by eliminating SWAT and intelligence units, so that protest responses are proportional to the actual threat level posed by an event. Third, regular response training moderates police aggression during protest events. Local officials should therefore invest in permanent training units and specialized programs to promote measured police responses during high-pressure protest events. Fourth, diverse police forces respond less aggressively to minority-led protests. Local officials should therefore adopt recruitment policies that increase officer diversity in order to address the racial disparities still evident in protest policing. Of these recommendations, demilitarization stands out as the one most strongly supported by the empirical evidence and theoretical literature. It also performed well across the four choice criteria. For these reasons, this report identifies it as the preferred recommendation.

Implementation & Monitoring

No matter the recommendation selected, successful implementation will require political will, organizational commitment, and budget capacity. Officials looking to demilitarize their police departments should be prepared to face political opposition from "tough-on-crime" advocates, as well as organizational opposition from police leadership and unions. These barriers can be addressed through phased adoption and active public outreach. Officials should start by limiting SWAT deployments, piloting regional response models, and reframing the policy as cost-conscious realignment – not disarmament. These steps lay the groundwork to eventually disband in-house SWAT and intelligence units. This approach also requires a clear monitoring plan to verify that implementation is proceeding successfully. Administrators should track key performance indicators, such as the frequency of tactical unit deployments and measures of protest violence. Finally, community feedback should be gathered, from surveys or public

forums, to gauge whether public perception of police legitimacy improves.

Officials looking to invest in response training will need departmental buy-in and a source of reliable funding. Without these, training will be underdeveloped and short-lived. Officials should address this by engaging departmental leadership early on in the planning process, building political support for dedicated funding streams, applying for state and federal training grants, and periodically reassessing training outcomes to keep the curriculum relevant and effective. These reassessments can be accomplished through a monitoring plan that tracks pre- and post-training evaluations of officer knowledge and attitudes, the application of program concepts during protest events, and instances of protest policing escalation.

Officials looking to diversify their police force should be ready to navigate a number of obstacles. Backlash from the public or state leaders could weaken political will and stall implementation. This initiative may also face skepticism within the police department, which would undermine the supportive culture necessary to recruit and retain diverse officers. Lastly, adverse economic conditions could limit available resources and slow the expansion of recruitment initiatives. These challenges can be addressed by building a strong coalition behind the initiative, actively promoting the value of diversity among the police force, and seeking out cost-sharing partnerships with community organizations. To evaluate this initiative, administrators should monitor both workforce changes and outcomes in the field. Key indicators include workforce recruitment and retention statistics, racial disparities in protest policing responses, and feedback on the perceived representativeness and fairness of the police department from members of minority communities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies can build on this research by further exploring its policy implications. For

example, they might examine militarization more broadly – beyond just the presence of SWAT or intelligence units – and use longitudinal designs to assess its causal effects on protest policing. Future research should also identify which response training methods most effectively reduce escalation, ideally through experimental designs that isolate their effects on officer behavior. It should also investigate why higher proportions of Black officers may be linked to more aggressive protest policing in certain contexts. Qualitative methods will be needed to explore the cultural and situational factors behind this pattern. Finally, future studies should validate this report's findings using primary data, larger samples, and more granular measurements.[5]

[5] See Appendix D for a full discussion of the study's limitations.

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Appendix A: Variable Codebook

This codebook documents all variables compiled during the data collection phase and which were included in the full model. It is meant to support replication and the interpretation of this study's findings. Variables are grouped by function (dependent, independent, control) and theoretical construct.

Dependent: Police Response

Variable: Police Response Level

Type: Ordinal

Description: The tactical combination with which police responded to the protest. Operationalized as three escalating levels based on the frameworks of Earl and Soule (2006) and Soule and Davenport (2009). Manually coded based on event data and descriptions.

Coding: 0 – 2

- 0 = No Interaction: no presence / monitor from afar
- 1 = Crowd Management: barricades / formations / orders / warnings
- 2 = Repression: arrests / physical force / discharge of weapons

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023); Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Independent: Available Resources

Variable: Per-Capita Spending

Type: Continuous

Description: The annual budget of the responding police department divided by the population of its jurisdiction at the time of the protest.

Coding: $202.52/person – $1742.21/person

Source: Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research (2025)

Independent: Militarization

Variable: SWAT Unit

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department had an active SWAT/tactical unit within its organizational structure at the time of the protest.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No active SWAT/tactical unit
- 1 = Active SWAT/tactical unit

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Intelligence Unit

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department had an active intelligence/ surveillance unit within its organizational structure at the time of the protest.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No active intelligence/surveillance unit
- 1 = Active intelligence/surveillance unit

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Military Transfers

Type: Continuous

Description: Total dollar value of equipment received by the responding police department through the Department of Defense's LESO program from 1994 up to the date of the protest. Log-transformed due to right-skewed distribution and extreme outliers.

Coding: 0 – 18.87

Source: Defense Logistics Agency (2025)

Independent: Professionalism

Variable: Internal Affairs

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department had an active internal affairs unit within its organizational structure at the time of the protest.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No active internal affairs unit
- 1 = Active internal affairs unit

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Training Unit

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department had an active training unit within its organizational structure at the time of the protest.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No active training unit
- 1 = Active training unit

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Accreditation

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department was accredited by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement at the time of the protest. FDLE accreditation reflects compliance with statewide professional standards for policy, training, and accountability practices.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = Not accredited
- 1 = Accredited

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Community Policing Unit

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department had a dedicated community policing unit within its organizational structure at the time of the protest.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No dedicated community policing unit

- 1 = Had a dedicated community policing unit

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Body Camera Requirement

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the responding police department had any form of body-worn camera policy in place at the time of the protest, regardless of its scope, enforcement, or relevance to protest response.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = Had no body camera requirement
- 1 = Had a body camera requirement

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Defensive Tactics Training Requirement

Type: Discrete

Description: Number of years of defensive tactics training required of officers by the responding police department. De-escalation and crowd management training are not part of the core curriculum but are available through supplementary or advanced modules adopted at the department level (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.).

Coding: 0 – 4

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Independent: Officer Demographics

Variable: Black Percent

Type: Continuous

Description: The proportion of sworn officers within the responding police department who identify as Black or African American.

Coding: 0 – 1

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Variable: Hispanic Percent

Type: Continuous

Description: The proportion of sworn officers within the responding police department who identify as Hispanic or Latino.

Coding: 0 – 1

Source: Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (2024)

Control: Situational Threat

Variable: Size

Type: Ordinal

Description: Estimated number of attendees, categorized to reduce reporting error. Attendance estimates are notoriously imprecise due to fluctuating crowd sizes and inconsistent reporting (Ulfelder, 2024). Categories reflect standard CCC coding practices and correspond to common tags in the ACLED dataset.

Coding: 1 – 3

- 1 = 1 – 99 attendees ("some" / "many" / "dozens")
- 2 = 100 – 999 attendees ("hundreds")
- 3 = 1000+ attendees ("thousands")

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023); Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Variable: Confrontational Tactics

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the protesters used any confrontational tactics during the event. These include: blocking roads, damaging property, physically confronting counter-protesters, harassing bystanders, "rioting." Manually coded based on event data and descriptions. Care was taken not to code clashes with police as confrontational, as doing so would risk endogeneity with the dependent variable.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No confrontational tactics reported
- 1 = Confrontational tactics reported

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023); Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Variable: Counter-Protester

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether counter-protesters were reported as being present at the event. Manually coded based on event descriptions. Care was taken to ensure that counter-protests were not included as separate events in the sample.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = No counter-protest reported
- 1 = Counter-protest reported.

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023)

Variable: Targets the Police

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the claims or demands of the protest were explicitly critical of the police. Manually coded based on event data and descriptions.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = Not explicitly critical of the police
- 1 = Explicitly critical of the police

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023); Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Variable: SMO Total

Type: Discrete

Description: The total number of social movement organizations involved in organizing and leading the protest.

Coding: 0 – 20

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023)

Control: Group Identity

Variable: Valence

Type: Categorical

Description: The ideological alignment of the protest's claims and leading organizers. Categories were assigned by the compilers of the CCC dataset.

Coding: 0 – 2

- 0 = Neutral
- 1 = Left-Wing
- 2 = Right-Wing

Source: Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Variable: Black SMO

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the protest was led by a predominantly Black social movement organization. Examples include: Black Lives Matter, Dream Defenders, NAACP, Black Voters Matter. Manually coded based on event data and descriptions.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = Not led by a Black SMO
- 1 = Led by a Black SMO

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023)

Variable: Student SMO

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the protest was led by a student social movement organization. Examples include: Students for a Democratic Society, Young Democratic Socialists of America, March for Our Lives. Manually coded based on event data and descriptions.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = Not led by a student SMO
- 1 = Led by a student SMO

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023)

Control: Context

Variable: Type

Type: Categorical

Description: The protest's primary physical or strategic form as described in event reports. Tags were assigned by the compilers of the CCC dataset.

Coding: 0 – 5

- 0 = “Demonstration”
- 1 = “Rally”
- 2 = “March” / “Walk” / “Parade”
- 3 = “Caravan” (car / motorcycle / boat / bike)
- 4 = “Vigil”
- 5 = “Direct Action” (strike / sit-In / walkout)

Source: Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Variable: Year

Type: Dichotomous

Description: Whether the protest occurred before or after the first full calendar year following the implementation of Florida’s “Anti-Riot Act”. This variable was dichotomized because estimating effects by individual year produced numerical instability and violated model assumptions.

Coding: 0 – 1

- 0 = Took place in either 2020 or 2021
- 1 = Took place in 2022, 2023, or 2024

Source: Raleigh et al. (2023); Chenoweth and Hammam (2021)

Variable: RUCC

Type: Ordinal (reverse-coded)

Description: The Rural-Urban Continuum Code of the county the protest took place in, which measures a county’s degree of urbanization. Assigned by the USDA Economic Research Service.

Coding: 1 – 9

Source: Chenoweth and Hammam (2021); U.S. Census Bureau (2025)

Appendix B: Model Results

This appendix presents the full output of each ordinal logistic regression model estimated in this study. Four models were created and compared: a full model with all 24 variables referenced in the codebook; a final model refined through a change-in-estimation approach; a parsimonious model generated via backward stepwise regression; and a fixed effects model that includes 21 county-level dummy variables. For each model, the table reports coefficient estimates, standard errors, and p-values. Variables related to the report's final policy implications are in bold. Significance levels are denoted as follows: $p < 0.1$ (*), $p < 0.05$ (**), $p < 0.01$ (***). The final table summarizes each model's characteristics and diagnostics to support comparison.

Table B1: Full Model

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Per-Capita Spending	0.0001	0.0005	0.7572
SWAT Unit**	**1.6871**	**0.7471**	**0.0239**
Intelligence Unit	**0.2233**	**0.2615**	**0.3933**
Military Transfers	-0.0114	0.0171	0.5022
Internal Affairs Unit	0.6517	0.8218	0.4278
Training Unit***	**-0.9696**	**0.2761**	**0.0004**
Accreditation	-0.1861	0.3297	0.5724
Community Policing Unit	0.1234	0.2980	0.6788
Body Camera Requirement*	0.7362	0.4018	0.0669
Defensive Tactics Training requirement	0.1045	0.1683	0.5345

Black Percent* **	**3.1421**	**0.1456**	**< 0.0001**
Black Percent : Black SMO* **	**-5.934**	**0.0686**	**< 0.0001**
Hispanic Percent	0.0144	0.5484	0.9791
Size (Linear)***	0.6520	0.2514	0.0095
Size (Quadratic)	0.0617	0.1791	0.7303
Confrontational Tactics***	3.0001	0.2860	< 0.0001
Counter-Protester***	1.236	0.2491	< 0.0001
Targets the Police***	0.9693	0.3218	0.0026
SMO Total	-0.0161	0.0491	0.7426
Valence: Left-Wing***	-0.7859	0.2326	0.0007
Valence: Right-Wing	0.3556	0.2666	0.1822
Black SMO***	1.1228	0.2803	0.0001
Student SMO	0.3083	0.2251	0.1709
Type: Rally***	-0.6963	0.2493	0.0052
Type: March	0.0141	0.2867	0.9607
Type: Caravan**	-1.5846	0.8076	0.0498
Type: Vigil	-0.7881	0.5289	0.1362
Type: Direct Action***	-2.0448	0.5464	0.0002
Year*	**0.2680**	**0.1445**	**0.0636**
RUCC (Linear)***	-10.7561	0.2432	< 0.0001
RUCC (Quadratic)***	-6.3001	0.1772	< 0.0001

Table B2: Final Model

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Per-Capita Spending	0.0001	0.0004	0.8798
SWAT Unit**	**1.7173**	**0.7491**	**0.0219**
Intelligence Unit*	**0.3154**	**0.1905**	**0.0977**
Internal Affairs Unit	0.6391	0.7941	0.4209
Training Unit***	**-0.8516**	**0.2438**	**0.0004**
Black Percent***	**3.1046**	**0.1119**	**< 0.0001**
Black Percent : Black SMO***	**-4.9670**	**0.0483**	**<0.0001**
Size (Linear)**	0.5897	0.2497	0.0182
Size (Quadratic)	0.0452	0.1776	0.7991
Confrontational Tactics***	3.0063	0.2838	<0.0001
Counter-Protester***	1.1883	0.2441	<0.0001
Targets the Police***	0.9572	0.3148	0.0024
Valence: Left-Wing***	-0.7617	0.2288	0.0009
Valence: Right-Wing	0.3020	0.2587	0.2431
Black SMO***	0.9527	0.2678	0.0004
Type: Rally***	-0.6844	0.2480	0.0058
Type: March	0.0225	0.2849	0.9372
Type: Caravan*	-1.5401	0.8033	0.0552
Type: Vigil	-0.7865	0.5275	0.1359
Type: Direct Action***	-1.9767	0.5389	0.0002
Year**	**0.4746**	**0.1921**	**0.0135**

RUCC (Linear)***	-10.7801	0.2675	< 0.0001
RUCC (Quadratic)***	-6.2388	0.1772	< 0.0001

Table B3: Parsimonious Model

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Per-Capita Spending	[Removed]	[Removed]	[Removed]
SWAT Unit**	**1.5435**	**0.6320**	**0.0146**
Intelligence Unit*	**0.3169**	**0.1884**	**0.0925**
Internal Affairs Unit	[Removed]	[Removed]	[Removed]
Training Unit	**[Removed]**	**[Removed]**	**[Removed]**
Black Percent*	**3.1204**	**1.6268**	**0.0551**
Black Percent : Black SMO*	**-4.9747**	**3.0729**	**0.0955**
Size (Linear)**	0.5904	0.2502	0.0183
Size (Quadratic)	0.0449	0.1780	0.8010
Confrontational Tactics***	3.0262	0.2836	< 0.0001
Counter-Protester***	1.1798	0.2440	< 0.0001
Targets the Police***	0.9477	0.3148	0.0026
Valence: Left-Wing***	-0.7637	0.2290	0.0009
Valence: Right-Wing	0.3078	0.2609	0.2381
Black SMO*	0.9597	0.5305	0.0705
Type: Rally***	-0.6833	0.2479	0.0059
Type: March	0.0282	0.2849	0.9210
Type: Caravan*	-1.5445	0.8036	0.05461
Type: Vigil	-0.7780	0.5273	0.1401

Type: Direct Action***	-1.9926	0.5375	0.0002
Year**	**0.4697**	**0.1914**	**0.0141**
RUCC (Linear)***	-10.7463	0.2311	< 0.0001
RUCC (Quadratic)***	-6.2105	0.1662	< 0.0001

Table B4: Fixed Effects Model

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Per-Capita Spending	0.0003	0.0005	0.6070
SWAT Unit*	**2.1841**	**0.5486**	**< 0.0001**
Intelligence Unit**	**0.7015**	**0.2888**	**0.0151**
Internal Affairs Unit***	4.1280	0.3367	< 0.0001
Training Unit*	**-4.2865**	**0.4358**	**< 0.0001**
Black Percent*	**1.5401**	**0.1004**	**< 0.0001**
Black Percent : Black SMO*	**-5.345**	**0.0620**	**< 0.0001**
Size (Linear)***	0.6765	0.2586	0.0089
Size (Quadratic)	-0.0200	0.1829	0.9129
Confrontational Tactics***	3.0379	0.2927	< 0.0001
Counter-Protester***	1.1576	0.2550	< 0.0001
Targets the Police***	0.9067	0.3171	0.0043
Valence: Left-Wing***	-0.7654	0.2363	0.0012
Valence: Right-Wing*	0.5195	0.2700	0.0543
Black SMO***	1.0694	0.2668	< 0.0001
Type: Rally***	-0.7043	0.2562	0.0060

Type: March	-0.0605	0.2945	0.8372
Type: Caravan**	-1.6112	0.8040	0.0451
Type: Vigil	-0.7616	0.5408	0.1591
Type: Direct Action***	-1.9355	0.5548	0.0005
Year*	**0.3781**	**0.2034**	**0.0630**
21 County-Level Dummy Variables	[Included]	[Included]	[Included]

Table B5: Model Comparison

Model	Observations	Variables	AIC	McFadden Pseudo-R^2	Brant Test
1. Full Model	1,429	24	1207.67	0.1987	Failed
2. Final Model	**1,429**	**16**	**1198.25**	**0.1953**	**Passed**
3. Parsimonious Model	1,429	13	1193.95	0.1948	Passed
4. Fixed Effects Model	1,355	36	1172.646	0.2190	Failed

Appendix C: Policy Alternatives Evaluation Summary

This appendix presents a summary table of the three policy alternatives analyzed in this report. Each alternative is evaluated across the four choice criteria – proportionality, equity, feasibility, and cost – to facilitate direct comparison. These evaluations are grounded in the empirical findings of the study and the broader literature review. For a more detailed discussion of each alternative, see the Results and Discussion section of the main report.

Table C1: Policy Alternatives Evaluation Matrix

Alternative	**Criteria**			
	Proportionality	**Equity**	**Feasibility**	**Cost**
1. Demilitarization	High	Medium	Low	High
2. Protest-Response Training	Medium	Medium	High	Low
3. Officer Diversification	Low	High	Medium	Medium

Note: “High” reflects greater desirability on each criterion (e.g., greater equity, lower costs)

Appendix D: Study Limitations

As with all cross-sectional, observational research relying on secondary data, this study was subject to a number of limitations. While these limitations do not invalidate the study's findings or its final policy recommendations, they do warrant careful consideration when interpreting the results and underscore the need for further research. In particular, they highlight the challenge of fully capturing institutional nuances and protest dynamics with the available secondary sources. Key limitations include:

1. **Cross-Sectional Design Limits Causal Inference:** This study captures police department institutional characteristics and protest responses over a limited period of time. This prevents it from establishing causality and raises the possibility that reverse causation or spurious associations have biased its coefficient estimates. As such, its findings should be interpreted as tentative correlations, not definitive causal relationships.
2. **Potential of Unobserved Confounders:** This study sought to include a broad set of institutional variables along with event- and county-level controls. However, several potentially important factors could not be captured due to data limitations. These include police chief leadership style, departmental culture, preexisting history of police brutality, the use of permits and pre-coordinated protest plans, media presence and attention, and jurisdictional overlap with other responding agencies. Such omitted variables could plausibly have influenced both protest responses and the key predictors, meaning their exclusion could have biased the strength or direction of the observed correlations.
3. **Measurement Limitations:** Many key variables were operationalized using proxies. For example, a department's level of militarization was inferred from its use of permanent in-house SWAT and intelligence units. However, these proxies may not fully capture the underlying concepts, raising the possibility of misclassification and measurement bias.
4. **Lack of Granularity in the Dependent Variable:** Collapsing police response level into three categories helped stabilize the model but may have masked more subtle patterns. For example, this may explain why the study found no evidence of protest policing disparities along ideological lines. While left- and right-wing protests both received a level 2 response around 5% of the time, all instances of the police using physical force or discharging weapons in this sample were directed towards left-wing protests. With more observations, these instances could have been distinguished as a higher level of escalation than arrests alone – potentially revealing ideological disparities. Additionally, differences in whether police showed up at all were not captured in this study due to data constraints. By not including this, the analysis may obscure early-stage disparities in police presence that shape protestor behavior and public perception, even in the absence of overt tactics.
5. **Lack of Variation in Police Department Characteristics:** Many institutional characteristics varied little across departments and time, restricting the model's ability to

estimate their effects with precision. This limitation may have resulted in conservative coefficient estimates and led to interpretations that underestimate the role of certain department characteristics in shaping protest responses.

6. **Research Design Does Not Account for Potential Endogeneity:** There is evidence in the protest policing literature that suggests protesters' use of confrontational tactics is endogenous with police response level – that is, it both influences and is influenced by police actions. While this study tried to exclude instances of protesters responding to police escalation from being coded as confrontational, the timing and direction of influence between protester tactics and police response could not always be fully disentangled with the available data. Because ordinal logistic regression models do not account for this feedback loop, the results may have inflated the estimated effect of confrontational tactics on police response levels.

7. **Results May Lack Generalizability:** Merging the ACLED and CCC datasets required dropping thousands of observations that could not be matched between the two. The final sample included data from 41.7% of relevant ACLED entries and 27.5% of relevant CCC entries, which raises concerns of selection bias. While the variable distributions in the final sample largely resembled those of the ACLED dataset, the same was not true for the CCC. The observations in the final sample were on average larger, more confrontational, and less recent than those of the CCC dataset. This likely reflects the differences in methodology between the two datasets, with the ACLED more heavily relying on publications and the CCC more heavily relying on user reports and social media posts. Still, it does reinforce that these results are not generalizable to all contexts – specifically smaller events and those in more rural areas.

8. **Potential Measurement Error in the Data Sources:** Variable coding relied on secondary data, which is susceptible to inconsistent reporting and measurement error. For example, a protest event could not be coded as involving counter-protestors if both the ACLED and CCC datasets failed to report their presence. This may have biased the estimated coefficients attached to the event-level control variables.

9. **Fixed Effects Model Exclusions:** The fixed effects model could not converge unless all protest events from counties with fewer than 10 observations were excluded from its analytic subsample. This removed 69 events – 5% of the total sample – primarily from small municipalities in rural counties. This may have disproportionately removed variation associated with less professionalized departments, limiting the generalizability of the fixed effects findings and potentially biasing comparisons between the models.