

# Psychological issues in Crowd Control

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Riots and instances of public disorder are rarely out of the media headlines. For nearly a century researchers have sought to explain the behaviour of crowds and riots. This is because the outcomes of riot behaviour are of considerable social concern. Riots and instances of public disorder can and do threaten human life. Appreciating the dynamics that bind and drive crowds to such destructive actions have clear peacekeeping benefits. If such behaviours are understood, and if the human effects of various control methodologies (including non-lethal weapons) can be predicted, then more effective and safer control tactics can be developed and deployed.

The provision of information concerning crowd assessment will be of considerable value to commanders in the field. Research to date has focussed largely on psychological theories of collective behaviour, social norms and individual difference. Little has been done to take such information and apply it to real world scenarios in which commanders are faced with on the spot requirements for decisions. The aim of this research is to address such issues and provide timely information based on real situations, combined with a firm foundation of psychological theory.

An understanding of the processes through which crowds develop and escalate will provide valuable insight into the factors that impact on a crowd situation. Armed with such knowledge, decision-makers will have another tool to assist in crowd operations at strategic, tactical and operational levels. This, in turn, will enable better and more economic use of available Non-lethal technologies.