

## Observation fieldwork notes on selection procedures during weapon controls in Amsterdam 2022

We observed the police adopting three different working procedures to select people for the weapon control:

1. The random control without randomization pole selection, where specific people are chosen by the police for the control;
2. The individual selection with randomization pole selection, where the selection of people was made through the use a technical device, the pole;
3. The sub-area 100% control, where all the people in a specific area are controlled.

### The random control without randomization pole selection method

When adopting the *random control without randomization pole selection* method, the police actively chose people for the controls. The procedure consists in the random selection of passers-by, where one person is selected out of a predetermined amount of people (i.e., every 5 passers-by). The controls include checking of personal belongings and involved the employment of technical devices such as hand scanners and metal detectors.

We observed the police adopting the individual selection method in 2 different locations: Zuid Oost, during the afternoon of a Thursday, and Noord, on Friday, also in the afternoon. The information on the time and the place of the controls were communicated by the police coordinator to our team within one hour from the start of the control each of the two days. Both the controls were conducted at the access of two metro stations, which are frequently used by people to commute. Zuid Oost is a multi-ethnic residential area, while Noord is a commercial area, which is mainly frequented by locals. Both metro stations are characterized by a constant flow of people passing through, so usually citizens do not stay in the station for long since the metros depart frequently.

The control of Thursday took place at the metro station of Zuid Oost, which consists of elevated tracks built above the street level. There are two access points to the station, both at a tunnel. At one side, the tunnel leads to a residential area, while at the other side, the tunnel leads to a square. On the square there was a stand selling “oliebollen” at the end of the tunnel on the day of observation, making this area more crowded than the one at the other side which was completely deserted. Two groups of police

officers (around 15 in total) settled down at the two ends of the tunnel. Two observers of our team also located themselves at the two ends in order to observe each of the two police's groups at work. At the side facing the residential area, the police installed a metal detector gate, but this was not used while we were conducting our observations. No metal detector gate was present at the opposite side. People walking in the tunnel had the possibility to access to the metro station and reach the tracks upstairs or alternatively to simply cross the tunnel and leave it from the other side. In general, however, at the time of our observation the area was not very crowded.

At both sides, the police officers performed individual selection on the people walking in the tunnel. The same officers (3 to 5 at each side) who selected the people for the weapon control were also those who conducted the check. They used hand scanners and checked personal belongings. Once the check was completed, the selected people were released and received an information pamphlet on the weapon control trials that police were conducting. Additionally around 5 police officers were involved in setting up the metal detector gate at one of the side of the tunnel and have further been observed interacting with people passing by.

On Friday, the weapon control took place in Noord. Here the metro station is built on elevated tracks, so that people can reach the trains only through a lift or stairs. The police set up a structure to conduct the controls at one of the entrances, which was turned in that occasion into an exit only. We conducted our observations from upstairs. The police fenced the area around the exit with a crowd control barrier and placed a metal detector gate at the end of it. In this way, after passing the ticket gate, people were forced first to walk through the fenced area and then to cross the metal detector gate in order to go out from the station. One police officer stood immediately outside the metal detector gate and directed the people passing through to a group of other police officers (4-5) nearby, who were in charge of the check. An additional dozen of police officers provided information to the people outside the fenced area. Here, the police placed two boards informing about the weapon control trials they were conducting. In addition to the police team at the downward exit, two additional undercover officers upstairs facilitated the transit of the flow towards the police by interacting with the persons who turned away when seeing the police. Every time a train stopped at the station, a group of around 25-40 persons headed towards the exit where the police was located. These crowded moments were alternated with periods where no people were present in the area.

The police officer standing at the metal detector selected the people for the weapon control once they passed through the gate. The selected people were directed by the same police officer to the group of

police in charge for the weapon control and they were checked with the use of handscanners. The police additionally checked the personal belongings. After the check, people received a flyer with more details on the weapon control trials and were then released.

The police arranged the set-up described above because at first they planned to conduct a sub-area 100% control and therefore to check all the people who crossed the exit. However, due to the high flux of people transitioning the delimited area and being the police unable to check everyone, the method was turned into an individual selection, where people crossing the exit were chosen for weapon check. The possibility to change and adapt the control method according to the amount of people in the area was discussed beforehand and our team was informed about it. In case of individual selection, it was established that one person out of five crossing the exit would have been chosen for the weapon control.

Despite the instruction on how the individual selection procedure should have taken place, we did not observe that police's choice was based on a predetermined amount of people passing by as it was established beforehand. Instead, on Thursday the police was observed stopping only a few individuals and spending a considerable amount of time interacting with the people selected for the check. On Friday, the selection procedure adopted by the police did not depend on the amount of people passing by, but rather on the availability of a police officer to conduct the control. While all the available officers were occupied in a control, a flow of people was free to pass through the exit without undergoing any selection.

#### The individual selection with randomization pole method

The *individual selection with randomization pole* is a procedure that consists in the use of a pole for a random selection of who to control. The selection pole is a device that the police bring and assemble on location. Citizens who want to pass through the selected, cordoned off area have to press a button on the selection pole. When a person pushes the button, a display on the selection pole showed either a green or red arrow, indicating if the person is selected for the check or not. The green arrow indicates that the person is allowed to pass through the cordoned off area without getting searched, while a red arrow indicates that the citizens have to undergo a weapon check. The device chooses the colour of the arrow by chance.

We observed the police using the randomization selection pole three times divided on two days. All the controls took place in the same area, at Museumplein in Amsterdam Zuid. The controls were conducted during crowded day times: on a Sunday late morning and early afternoon, and on a Friday late afternoon at closing time of the museums in that area. We received information on the specific time and location where the controls on Friday were planned an hour and an half before they took place. This control was the first control that the police conducted and thus also the first time we observed the weapon controls. The place and time of the controls conducted on Sunday were confirmed to us only once the police arrived at the location.

Museumplein is a touristic area characterized by museums and city attractions. During both days of observation, it was particularly crowded of tourists. On Sunday the weather was exceptionally sunny, so several people were sitting around on the benches or on the grass in the park that surrounds the museums. A similar situation, but less crowded, was observed on Friday, that was more cloudy. For each control, two teams of two observers (on Sunday) and one team of 5 observers (on Friday) from our research group conducted the observations. On Friday we conducted our first observation and developed the coding procedure, therefore we intentionally introduced ourselves to the police and avoid any coding. On Sunday, thanks to the presence of tourists around, we were able to sit on the benches close to the area where the police planned to conduct the weapon control without being noticed by the officers.

The police has been observed to arrive with a van and in 10-15 minutes set up the structure for the selection pole. In both cases, first a crowd control barrier was installed to cordon off a part of the street close to the museums, thus to block the passage of the people who wanted to cross that area. In all the three controls, the fenced area was an open space without any specific function nor access to specific buildings, such as houses and shops etc. Second, two randomizations poles were installed at the two ends of the cordoned off area, thus creating two “forced” entrances for the two walking directions. Adjacent to each entrance, two exits were opened in order to allow people coming from the opposite entrance to leave the area after passing the pole structure. A metal detector gate was placed behind the two entrances. Furthermore, two signs stating that police were conducting weapon searches in that area were placed at each side. Two to three officers stood at each entrance to coordinate the queue of people who waited to cross the structure, while one officer at each exit regulated the flow of people leaving the area and prevented other citizens coming from that side to enter in the area from there. The officers standing at the entrance instructed the people who wanted to cross the area about how the

randomization pole worked and they further provided information about the meaning of the arrows appearing on the screen once the button was pressed. When the arrows were green, citizens were allowed to walk to the exit on the other side, while in case of red arrows, the citizens were instructed to walk to the metal detector, where additional officers conducted the weapon control. During the control, the officers asked for any bags and purses the citizen carried and opened checked their contents, while the citizen walked through a metal detector gate. If no metal was detected (i.e., green lights on the metal detector gate appeared), the officer returned the inspected bag(s) and let the citizens leave the area. If the metal detector showed a red light, indicating the presence of a metal object, the police used hand scanners to locate it. The amount of people present in the area allowed for the formation of a queue consisting of around five people/groups of people. This meant also that someone was constantly present at the metal detector for the check.

Our observations could capture some additional details on this general procedure. Although no individual selection is assumed to be conducted with the randomization selection pole, we noted some exceptions to the selection procedure. First, the police standing at the exit allowed citizens who did not fall into the selection criteria for weapon control (e.g. older than 65 or with a young child) to cross the cordoned off area without pushing the button of the selection pole. Second, during one of the controls we observed, the officers standing at both entrances walked with the citizens who were selected for the check to the metal detector gate, applying the control procedures described above. While the weapon control took place, the entrance was left in this way unmanned, allowing people to walk through the cordoned off area without pressing the button and therefore having no possibility to be selected for the control. After conducting the checks the officers at the metal detector returned to the unmanned entrance resuming their previous task.

In addition to these exceptions, we noticed that the police avoided to exert any pressure on citizens to pass through the cordoned off area. The approaching people were frequently observed to walk up to the cordoned off area, observe what was happening, turn around, and take an alternative route in order to avoid passing the structure. This choice did not lead to any counter-action by the police.

#### The sub-area 100% control method

The *sub-area 100% control* is a method that consists in a selection of a specific area where the police conducted the controls of all the people present there who meet the selection criteria. The checks can

be made by manually searching personal belongings and using hand scanners. The control ends when all the people in the area are checked, therefore the duration of each control varies according to the amount of people present. Once the control in an area has ended, a subsequent control can follow in a different area.

The police conducted the sub-area 100% control in three different days. First, on a Sunday afternoon at Museumplein in Amsterdam Zuid. Then, on a Thursday from midday until the evening and on a Friday in the afternoon, both these days in Osdorp in Nieuw West. On Sunday, the time and location of the controls were communicated in the morning of the same day. On Thursday and Friday morning we only received information on the time and location of the first control of the day, while the information of the remaining controls were communicated through-out the day. We were able to observe 9 different controls in different locations. The first control that took place at Museumplein on Sunday was conducted on the same day as the individual selection with randomization pole described above. All the other 100% area controls were conducted in Osdorp in Nieuw West, which is a shopping area mainly visited by people with a multi-ethnic and low socioeconomic background. At the time of our observation, the weather in Osdorp was cloudy on Thursday and sunny on Friday. In both days of observation, the areas around the shops were crowded, while less people have been observed when the controls took place in more decentralised streets.

In Museumplein, the police adopted the sub-area 100% control soon after conducting the controls with randomization pole described above. Shortly after the controls with randomization pole ended, we observed two teams with three police officers each walking from the area where the pole was placed to an adjacent field of grass with people sitting on it. Here, the police approached first all the people sitting on the grass area by checking their personal belongings and using hand scanners. Once they checked all the people there, they adopted the same procedure to check the people sitting on the benches in the surroundings. The entire control lasted around 30 minutes. All the people checked received a flyer containing some information on the weapon control trials that the police were conducting.

In Osdorp, two vans with around 8 police officers and one additional officer on a motorcycle moved around the neighbourhood to reach the areas where we observed the controls. These areas varied from a specific part of a street, to a square, to a specific shop or bar. In some cases, we witnessed the police arriving to the selected location, parking there and proceeding with the control. Some other times, the police reached the selected location driving at a high speed and parked the vans in order to limit the access to the location, thus preventing people from entering or leaving the area. Once arrived, the

police controlled all the people present by checking their personal belongings and using hand scanners. Depending on the location, the checked people could be people passing by or costumers inside a bar or shop. Once the check was completed, usually in no longer than 15 minutes, the police was observed moving to a different location.

Compared to the controls conducted with the two methods described above, the 100% sub-area controls had a higher variation in how they were planned, communicated to our team and conducted by the police.

First, in most of previous cases the police communicated to our team at least one hour before the first control took place, where and when all the controls scheduled for the day were planned. However, on the days where the police exclusively adopted the sub-area 100% controls (on Thursday and Friday), we failed to receive consistent information about the time and the location of each control of the day. On Thursday, the location of the first control was communicated to our team one hour before it took place. However, we received the information about the subsequent locations of the day few minutes before the controls started or even while the police was already heading toward the selected area. Sometimes we were informed about the location but not about the time when the police was supposed to reach it. Furthermore, the location that was communicated to us ended to be different from the one where the police was later observed conducting the controls. On Friday, we received a list of the three locations of the day with a notice of three minutes before the first control would take place. We were later updated throughout the day about the moment when the police was moving toward the next location of the list. Furthermore, the amount of time that the police spent in each location showed a great variability, since the duration of the controls we observed ranged from few minutes up to one hour. As a consequence, in both days our opportunity to observe the controls was limited, as we were not always able to arrive on time to the selected area.

Second, the areas selected for the weapon controls differed from each other in terms of size and typology, as they could range from small spots such as a single shop, to squares or parts of the street. Additionally, both inside and outside places were selected for the controls. On Thursday, the selected areas included large zones in crowded streets or at the entrance of supermarkets, but also the inside of a bus or of a small snack bar. We further observed a control occurring on Friday consisting in the check of a single person at the side of a street.

Third, we observed that the manner displayed by the police when conducting the controls showed a variability in the different selected areas. While in some areas the police spent more time interacting with the people there, other times they arrived with haste, parked the vans thus to limit the access to the area they selected and conducting the check in short time.