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Citation for published version (APA):
O'Neill, M., de Maillard, J., & van Steden, R. (2022). The enforcement turn in plural policing? A comparative analysis of public police auxiliaries in England & Wales, France and The Netherlands. *European Journal of Criminology*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/14773708211070203

Article

The enforcement turn in plural policing? A comparative analysis of public police auxiliaries in England & Wales, France and The Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper examines 'auxiliary' police in three European countries and the extent to which they continue to present a pluralisation of public sector policing. Examining findings from existing empirical research, we will argue that despite different origins, systems of governance, formal powers and levels of centralisation, the police auxiliaries in England & Wales, France and The Netherlands have all experienced an overall trend towards becoming more 'enforcement-orientated'. This unique comparative analysis measures each agency's powers, appearance, organisational dimensions and mandate and the associated drivers towards change, such as the politicisation of law and order, large-scale institutional transformations and professionalisation attempts. This analysis will have implications for pluralised policing scholarship as it questions the extent to which auxiliary officers provide a true alternative to the standard or national public policing mandate, which has historically highlighted the 'law and order' function of the police.

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It also highlights the lack of research on what 'policing by government' (Loader, 2000) looks like in practice and the need for further comparative research with these auxiliary state policing actors.

Keywords
Pluralisation, policing, auxiliary police officers, law enforcement, community policing

Introduction

Policing scholarship has developed a wide body of literature on non-police agents in recent decades (in a broad literature but see especially: Crawford et al., 2005; Jones and Newburn, 2006; Terpstra et al., 2013). This work has considered the role and significance of the private security industry and hybrid forms of policing with varying degrees of connectedness to the state. This scholarship makes clear that policing, as it ever was, is not a state monopoly (Churchill, 2017; Leloup and White, 2021).

However, the styles of policing associated with this pluralisation have been poorly analysed. On the one hand, and in line with the conclusions of Shearing and Stenning (1983) for private security, processes of pluralisation can be seen as the promotion of a more preventive policing than the traditional public police, based less on the tools of the penal system and more on solving the problems of the public. On the other hand, pluralisation can be seen as a reproduction of the characteristics of public police, through mimicry, as officers seek to reproduce the image of the professional model of the traditional and more prestigious public police, but with less concern for the effectiveness of their outcomes. Our paper will address a gap in the current scholarship by using empirical research of a particular cohort of pluralised policing actors to consider trends in England & Wales, France and The Netherlands. We will focus on 'auxiliary' police agents, that is, those policing actors who work in the public sector, either for local public municipalities or for state police agencies, but who are not the primary agents of state policing. These actors have a role in preserving safety and security in their jurisdictions but have fewer powers and authority than the primary agents of state policing. Our focus is therefore confined to the pluralised state sector, how it is developing in terms of what state police auxiliaries do and how they appear, and what this tells us about wider social, economic and political processes. Following the distinctions proposed by Loader on the different aspects of plural policing (2000), we will focus here on 'policing by government', that is the proliferation of policing services provided by public authorities.

England & Wales, France and the Netherlands represent different policing and political contexts. These three jurisdictions were chosen as they each have an auxiliary policing agency in the public sector, but these agencies oscillate around two key points of difference. First, the auxiliary agents in France and The Netherlands are employed by municipal governments while the one in England & Wales work for the state police. Second, the auxiliaries in The Netherlands and in England & Wales are staff, rather than police officers, whereas the agents in France are municipal police, albeit with limited powers compared to those of the state

police. Despite these key points of difference, an emergent primary orientation towards 'law-enforcement' is becoming evident in all three agencies.

This puts into question the extent to which pluralised policing is offering a true alternative to 'the' public police, as by their adoption of many of its primary components potentially challenge the public police's symbolic dominance as the key agents of security, control and trust Do auxiliaries provide an alternative style of policing? Do they try to distinguish themselves from the traditional public police by, for instance, ostensibly favouring community engagement and order maintenance over law enforcement? Or do they tend to align themselves on the mandates, mentalities and techniques of the primary 'law and order' institution? To that end, the first section of the paper will review the relevant literature for this analysis and the introduction to our discussion. We will then describe how we conducted our comparative analysis before considering in depth the three case study areas. We will conclude the paper with an assessment of the implications of the growing law enforcement trend within pluralised public policing and police scholarship more broadly. We will argue that despite differences between these agencies and jurisdictions, there is a clear pattern towards enhancing the 'law-enforcement' side of the auxiliary roles which puts into question the extent to which policing is truly 'pluralised'. We will also argue that the benefits from community policing and engagement for enhancing relationships and trust between the police and local publics will be diminishing. These findings highlight the current lack of detailed qualitative research with and theorisation of auxiliary state policing agents from an international comparative perspective[1]. Our analysis here begins to address this.

Plural policing in the literature: Understanding styles of plural policing

Plural policing and the presence of auxiliary police officers has been at the origin of an academic controversy about their position vis-à-vis the 'regular' police. Johnston and Shearing (2003, 146) speak of a 'new morphology' of policing and security overthrowing traditional state-centred visions on domestic ordering functions. In contrast, Loader and Walker (2007) strongly emphasise the pivotal role of states, specifically public police forces, in the governance of police extended families and of broader security networks. Terpstra et al. (2013, 150–158) distinguished four models of relations between public, semi-public and private actors to better analytically grasp the governance of networks of policing (integration in the police, police as the coordinator, local government as the coordinator, marketization). The police's monopoly of the legitimate use of force and surveillance is key in this respect and thus underlines their status as the primary arbiter of security in any context (Bowling et al., 2019).

However, this debate has set aside the issue of the prevailing styles of policing, i.e., the way the police agencies handle routine interactions, enforce the law and prioritise certain activities. Two broad hypotheses can be made when analysing the specific mentalities, mandates, powers and appearance of these auxiliary police. On the one hand, these new public agents could be seen to represent alternative ways of patrolling the streets and of engaging with citizens. As the traditional public police routinely fail to meet

public demand in this regard (Button, 2019; O'Neill, 2019), the auxiliaries would highlight a community-oriented style of action, claiming that they are the real community police, thus representing an alternative 'softer' vision of policing (Button, 2007) 'servicemen' orientation or Merritt's (2010) 'bridge builder'. On the other hand, they could be seen as public agents trying to mimic the traditional police, by imitating their vocabulary, powers and appearance. According to this second interpretation, they would try to resemble the more prestigious public police, especially in regards to a law enforcement orientation and the use of force, these being the aspects of their remit which are more restricted but yet are prioritised in political discourse (see Rigakos' discussion of the parapolice, 2002; Kübler and de Maillard, 2020). It is of course possible for both orientations to exist simultaneously in one auxiliary agency, each to varying degrees depending on the context (Willis et al., 2010). As Puck and White (2021) demonstrate, national historical relationships with the police play an important role in terms of which orientation is adopted. As we will see in the discussion to follow, however, there seems at present to be a common direction of travel in that auxiliary policing actors tend to be moving towards, or are encouraged to move towards, a more enforcement-like orientation in their work. Such movements in England & Wales, France and The Netherlands call into question the extent to which 'plurality' is evident in these nodes, as many discourses within the extant literature would suggest.

Highlighting the 'law and order' side of policing is not unique to auxiliary officers in the public sector. As has been well documented, the state police perform a wide range of roles and functions, some of which are more openly recognised than others (Bowling et al., 2019). Despite this, the work of the police tends to be positioned as a simplistic dichotomy between being a community-orientated 'service' and a law-enforcement 'force' (Reiner, 2010). Emerging studies emphasise the growing militarisation of the state police in several western democracies (Kraska, 2007; Maguire, 2014). This can bring with it an increase in types of armament and repressive policing styles. The growth of neoliberalism as a dominant political model in these jurisdictions utilises a recurring rhetoric which emphasises the 'crime control' functions of the police over any other (Bowling et al., 2019). While the auxiliary officers we consider here perform many of the same wide range of policing functions as the state police do, their structural differences from the state police (unique in each country) enables a greater capacity for community-focused work. Our analysis will suggest that this is no longer the case or is decreasingly so. This trend is in spite of the differing institutional and political contexts for policing in our three countries and puts into question the extent to which public police auxiliaries are an alternative policing form.

As will be further discussed in the Methodology section to follow, we identify four core features of this movement towards a primarily law-enforcement orientation in auxiliary police officers (building on Kraska's [2007] analysis of militarisation in policing): their powers (right to use force, issue fines, arrest or detain), appearance (uniform, firearms, protective equipment, cars), organisational dimensions (internal organisational arrangements and units derived from the police model) and mandate (law enforcement mandate and patterns of activity derived from crime control policing). We then distinguish between three different drivers to explain this evolution in our three jurisdictions. The first driver relates to the process of politicisation of policing generally (Reiner, 2010)

as political actors choose to mobilise themselves on a 'law and order' discourse in relation to crime control and/or terrorism, and reinforce or enhance the crime control mandate of the auxiliary police. The second driver relates to large-scale institutional transformations. In this context, a re-orientation towards enforcement results from decisions made on other dimensions, for instance austerity budgeting or centralisation of the traditional public police (Fyfe et al., 2013). The third driver develops from professionalisation attempts: auxiliary police agencies mimicking the public police in an effort to gain enhanced legitimacy (see 'cognitive isomorphism' from DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Rather than aiming at an alternative model of policing, they try to copy the professional image of the police through their material (same weaponry), culture (same professional language and values), organisation (same specialised units) and operations. Our comparative analysis to follow will demonstrate how the four features above (powers, appearance, organisation and mandate) and the three drivers of change (politicisation, institutional transformation and professionalisation) are in evidence in each of the three countries. First, however, we will discuss the methods we used to conduct this comparative analysis.

A note on methodology: A comparative analytical strategy

The article is comparative, drawing on an analysis of previous empirical research conducted in each of the three countries. It is based on the observation that the study of policing is excessively focused on the national level, which leads to a twofold weakness: either assuming that police practices, technologies and reforms are universally shared (universalist bias) or, conversely, that these characteristics are specific to the country analysed (relativist bias) (de Maillard and Roche, 2018; Leloup and White, 2021). We propose to examine the reform trajectories of non-police uniformed state officers in three countries: municipal police in France, Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) in the Netherlands, and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in England & Wales. These three agencies are the only auxiliary policing agents in each country[2]. These three countries represent three different types of police organisations: France is a dual centralised system (national police, national gendarmerie), with, as we will see, municipal police officers; England is a regionalised system with 43 territorial police forces, while the Netherlands experienced a rapid centralisation in 2010 which retained provision for municipal agents. A second dimension to the comparison is the three different employment logics: English PCSOs are employed by regional police forces (and therefore have the same employer as public police officers), while in France and the Netherlands it is the municipalities that are the employers of these officers. Finally, the employment status of these agents is third point of comparison in that the PCSOs of England & Wales and the MLEOs of The Netherlands are members of police staff whereas the agents in France are officers, albeit with limited powers. Thus, the three countries chosen here differ on a number of core axes. However, as we will demonstrate below, our research suggests that a similar direction of travel in the style of policing adopted by auxiliary officers is evident, *even within these variable national contexts*.

To conduct this comparison, we pooled the evidence available in each national case from existing empirical research. While each of the authors has undertaken their own empirical research on, respectively, the British PCSOs, the French municipal officers

and the Dutch MLEOs[3], our aim is here to give a broad overview of the change to powers, appearance, organisation and mandate that these agents have experienced by examining the available knowledge-base, including but also beyond our own research. We therefore did not restrict our analysis to our own work, but also considered the primary publications from each country on these auxiliary agents which consider one or more of four descriptive dimensions.

To ensure that we compared 'like with like', we restricted our analysis to the transformation of four specific dimensions of auxiliary officers in the three countries for the last ten years. The choice of *powers, appearance, organisation* and *mandate* is an adaptation of Kraska's (2007) analysis of the militarisation of policing which uses *material, cultural, organisational* and *operational* as its dimensions. However, as the pluralisation of policing in the state sector does not involve exactly the same patterns of change as the militarisation of the state sector, we adjusted our four dimensions accordingly. By carefully examining our own previous research findings and those of others studying each jurisdiction, we identified these four dimensions for analysis as each appeared to have experienced change *in at least one of the three countries*. For each dimension, we have systematically identified the main changes (or lack of change) that have occurred during the period considered. Our process was thus to each focus on the policing agency we had studied, review the literature published on that agency by other scholars, review our own published findings, compile an assessment of what the main areas of change were in that agency since its inception, and then compare these dimensions with those of the other jurisdictions. The four dimensions are what emerged through this analysis and comparison. By locating our analysis on these four axes, we have established common areas of convergence for our research in the three countries. Crucially, *it was not the case* that all four dimensions revealed the same level or nature of change for the three groups of auxiliaries, therefore demonstrating that our analysis considered divergence as well as similarity within these common factors.

International comparative research brings with it unique challenges and shortcomings. We acknowledge that the findings we have compiled here stem from research projects which were conducted independently of each other and that our analysis to follow comes *post-hoc* their publication. While the exact methods employed in the studies we consider will vary (e.g., in-depth ethnographies to semi-structured interviews), all are based on qualitative research to reveal the lived experiences of the auxiliary officers and how they regard and relate to the primary state policing agents. Ours is of course a partial picture, but as research on auxiliary state agents is limited, and almost non-existent in terms of an international comparative analysis, what we can present here is a first look at a particular direction of travel, one which we hope will encourage more detailed future research. What we feel is important to note is that while there are of course important differences between the three jurisdictions and their auxiliaries, the fact that we found four common elements of change among them is compelling.

We will begin our analysis with an overview of the policing agency under consideration. We then move to consider: first, the descriptive features for how each agency is enforcement-focused (*powers, appearance, organisation* and *mandate*) and secondly, the various drivers for these changes. This will be followed by a discussion that brings together an analysis of this framework across each agency and policing system, to

present the overall patterns that emerge. The conclusion will reflect on the implications of this growing enforcement-orientation for the plural policing literature. The first policing group to be considered are the PCSOs of England & Wales.

PCSOs in England and Wales: Budget cuts and mission creep

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were introduced to policing in England & Wales in 2002. They represent the largest expansion of the civilianisation of policing, along with a growing presence of municipal policing actors since the late 1990s (such as neighbourhood wardens and local authority patrols, see Crawford, 2008). PCSOs are paid and uniformed members of public police staff who do not hold the power of arrest and are unarmed. They have a limited range of powers, the extent of which can vary between police forces. They were created to act as a visible policing presence and to address low-level crime and anti-social behaviour. Building on the trust afforded to the public police, PCSOs were to act as an accountable body to both the public and partner organisations, who would address issues of local importance, but which warranted police officers were unable to prioritise (O'Neill, 2019). Although some PCSOs may tend to highlight the aspects of their role which are more enforcement-orientated due to cultural value attached to this within policing (Cosgrove, 2016; Merritt, 2010), the main purpose of this police auxiliary is primarily focused on community engagement and support.

From preventative to reactive policing

Elements of PCSO *powers*, *appearance* and *mandate* suggest a shift towards an orientation which highlights the enforcement elements of the role. The initial legislation which created the role stipulated a range of 'standard' powers which were to be granted to all PCSOs and then a separate range of 'discretionary' powers from which each Chief Constable could choose, based on local need. This system of standard and discretionary powers changed with the Policing and Crime Act 2017. The 2017 Act specified which powers are the sole reserve of warranted police officers. Outside of this, PCSOs can now be granted all (or some) of the remaining powers previously designated for PCSOs or police officers. This has in effect meant an expansion of the powers which may be conferred on PCSOs (College of Policing, 2019). The PCSO uniform (appearance) will vary slightly from one police force to the next, but overall, it bears close similarity to that of police officers. Research by De Camargo (2019) has shown how PCSOs will modify their uniform to highlight the police-like elements as much as possible and downplay elements that differentiate them from police officers. Borrowing from the symbolic capital of police officers is necessary at times to ensure trust and cooperation from the public (Cooke, 2005; O'Neill, 2019). While their primary mandate is to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour from a community engagement format, PCSO work in many police forces is becoming more reactive in nature (Higgins, 2017). They do not have as much capacity to be involved in problem-solving or community-facing work and tend instead to be sent from one task to another, tasks which may in the past been assigned to a police officer (O'Neill, 2019). This is a situation which Crawford (2008)

anticipated might happen – a PCSO 'mission creep' into work usually done by police offi-
cers. The drivers for this change are discussed next.

Politicisation and institutional transformation as drivers

The primary drivers for change for PCSOs have related to processes of *politicisation* and
institutional transformation. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government
elected in 2010 introduced wide-ranging reductions in central spending, including for
the police, in keeping with policies of neo-liberalism (Greig-Midlane, 2014; Higgins,
2018). In hand with this was a re-orientation of the public sector away from central gov-
ernment direction and towards that of local and regional authority control. For policing,
this is epitomised in the creation of locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners
(PCCs) in 2012. This change in governance coincided with the overall 20% reduction
in the national budget for policing between 2010 and 2018. For many PCCs, commu-
nity policing methods were no longer affordable and consequently, a significant
number of PCSOs have been made redundant (Greig-Midlane, 2014; Higgins,
2017, 2018). Several forces also chose not to replace police officers who resigned
or retired during this period, meaning that that police officer numbers have dropped
by 15% and PCSO numbers by 40% (Schraer, 2019). As police forces began to restrict
their recruitment for police constables in light of the budget reductions, applicants
were increasingly being directed towards gaining experience as a PCSO for two or
three years before applying to be a constable (O'Neill, 2019). This has deepened
the pressure on PCSOs to devote more focus to the enforcement side of their role
as it is becoming a training ground for future police officers. In addition, many
PCSOs have reported 'mission creep' whereby more of their work is enforcement
orientated due to the lack of available police officers (O'Neill, 2019). This,
coupled with their reduction in numbers through redundancy and a general
de-emphasising of community policing as not being 'core' police activity, suggests
an overall return to enforcement-orientated policing in many police forces in
England & Wales (Higgins, 2017, 2018).

   Considering the above contexts, PCSOs in England & Wales are experiencing internal
and external pressures to increase their enforcement-like activity, in sharp contrast to their
original remit. To a degree this pressure has always been a factor in their role (Cosgrove,
2016; Merritt, 2010). Despite their official mandate being one of engagement and preven-
tion, the wider policing organisation has always made clear its cultural preference for offi-
cers that engage in 'real' policing – enforcement and crime control. This is evident in the
tension between the groups which has been documented where some police officers view
a PCSO as a poor substitute for a warranted officer (Caless, 2007; O'Neill, 2010; Reiner,
2010). Since 2010, this internal pressure has been heightened by external processes of
austerity through the neo-liberal political economy, which is further emboldened by
enhanced localism: greater control of budgets has been devolved to locally-elected
Police and Crime Commissioners, who have generally enabled a retraction of community
policing in their force areas, a reduction of police officers and staff and the resulting
return to an overall crime control mandate (Higgins, 2017; O'Neill, 2014).

Municipal police in France: The national police as an (implicit) model?

In France, there are approximately 22,700 municipal police officers (public employees with some police powers employed by municipalities, and thus independent from the national police and gendarmerie[4]) as of July 2019, a fivefold increase since the late 1970s. The 1999 law on municipal police forces sets out a general framework governing their action (armaments, coordination with state forces, training, authorisation rules, skills, etc.). Above a certain level of staff (five police officers), any municipal police force must sign a coordination agreement distributing roles with the national police (or the gendarmerie in rural and peri-urban areas). Although organizationally autonomous, the municipal police are regarded as auxiliary agents as municipal officers are not necessarily armed, and have lesser judicial powers than their counterparts of the state police (e.g., they cannot investigate cases and they cannot check identities). Municipal forces present themselves as the real "proximity police" (or, community police), less law enforcement oriented and in closer connection to the public. However, research has demonstrated that municipal police are marked by a double orientation: hard policing on the one hand, based on repression and the fight against delinquency; and soft policing on the other, characterized by preventative surveillance and trust with the public (de Maillard and Mouhanna, 2017; Malochet, 2007, 40). As we will see, there is a growing push towards the former.

A growing resemblance with the national police

In France, the municipal police's *appearance*, *mandate* and *organisation* suggest a turn towards a greater law-enforcement orientation. Firstly, there is a general trend towards strengthening the armament of municipal police forces (appearance). Mayors can choose to arm the municipal police, with an authorisation then given by the prefect. Armed officers (all types of weapons included) increased from 46 per cent in 2005 to 82 per cent in 2014. For firearms, the increase is more recent: in July 2019, 53% of officers were equipped with a firearm (La Gazette des communes, 2019), compared to 39% at the end of 2015. The recent terrorist attacks (since 2015) are the backdrop to this movement, which included the killing of a female municipal police officer in January 2015. This latter homicide reinforced demands from municipal police officers, supported by their unions, to be armed. The central government (the Ministry of Interior) has partly supported these calls by making some weapons (e.g., 4000 Magnum revolvers) available to municipal police forces and granted subsidies for bullet-proof vests. Carrying a weapon is seen by many municipal police officers as a way to acquire the attributes of a national police officer.

Malochet (2010) has shown the diversity of the modes of organisation and mandate of municipal police forces, some giving more importance to relations with local residents and a preventive dimension (the municipal police officer as a 'bobby'), others setting them first and foremost missions of intervention and crime control (the municipal police officer as a cop). Several cities have created municipal police forces with a large number of staff and a clear mandate to fight crime, accompanied by particularly

aggressive rhetoric from the mayor (e.g., Cannes, Nice in the South-East or Levallois-Perret in the Paris suburbs). Malochet (2010) also highlighted the difficulty of setting up local units in the face of the reluctance of the police themselves to work with this type of mission: missions relating to relations with the population are seen as dirty work. The example of the Marseille police is symptomatic: in the early 2010, successive murders with firearms (linked to the toughening of the drugs market) drew public attention to Marseille and led the mayor to invest in the theme of public security. In January 2016, a night brigade was created (working from 6pm to 4am). Despite the formal existence of foot patrol units, there are not enough police officers to staff them (Mucchielli, 2017). This growing resemblance between the municipal and national police have some varied consequences in the relation between the two: it may lead in some towns to a growing cooperation between two organisations sharing similar mentalities and goals, but it may also imply to tensions, the national police officers missing their traditional monopoly on crime issues.

Political competition and mimicking as drivers

How can this enhanced law-enforcement orientation through the appearance, organisation and mandate of municipal police forces in France be explained? First, *political competition* is a decisive factor in explaining the increase in the number of municipal police officers, their increased armament and their doctrines oriented towards more repressive missions. Many mayors have campaigned for the creation or strengthening of municipal police forces to win municipal elections (de Maillard, 2005). Significantly, in January 2019, the City of Paris, which until now had never had a municipal police force, decided to create one. It should be noted that this decision was taken by a socialist mayor, who had previously declared her opposition to the principle of a Parisian municipal police force. In Paris as elsewhere, this dynamic is very largely encouraged by the Ministry of the Interior, as it supported the arming of municipal police forces and supervised their development.

Secondly, another logic, more internal to the professional world of municipal police officers, also plays a role: the implicit *professional model* with which they seek to approach themselves in many respects is that of the national police. The demands of municipal police officers and their unions are to have access to national police radio files and waves and to be armed. The logic of professionalising police forces is quite strongly associated with a mandate focused on the fight against crime and road safety. For the municipal police officers this means setting up police-like procedures, implementing a precise regulatory framework, learning specific means of police intervention, without consideration of their relationship with the population.

MLEOs in The Netherlands: Retaining local authority through 'disorder and crime control'

The role of Dutch municipalities in local safety policies expanded over the early 2000s in the direction of regulating and fighting 'urban disorder' Community policing and security

activities increasingly became part of local public administration, because the police lacked the capacity to deploy enough officers (Terpstra and Havinga, 2005). This made municipalities eager to search for promising alternatives, including the employment of Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs) who hold the judicial status of Special Investigative Officers (*Buitengewoon Opsporingsambtenaren* – BOAs), which gives them the power to issue fines and make arrests. There are about 25,000 BOAs in the Netherlands, of whom at least 4000 are employed as MLEOs (Van Steden, 2017). Other BOAs are, for example, employed as 'lower level' police staff who work at police station front desks, railway masters and train conductors who supervise trains, trams, metros and buses, and wardens who patrol nature reserves.

Gaining validity through a 'harder' image

For MLEOs, aspects of their *powers*, *appearance* and *mandate* suggest a process of evolution away from service-oriented policing methods. It can be argued that MLEOs are a matured version of the previously established City Wardens, who had no police powers at all, but were expected to patrol and supervise busy places (Hauber et al., 1996; Hofstra and Shapland, 1997). However, in terms of enforcement-like powers, MLEOs are permitted to issue fines and, if things go out of hand, make arrests for minor offences, including littering and loitering (Bervoets, 2013; Eikenaar, 2019; Van Steden, 2017; Willemse et al., 2013). MLEOs can thus be interpreted as a kind of 'Stadswachten 2.0' (Van Steden and Bron, 2012) showing a more repressive orientation towards the general public than was the case for the previous City Wardens. They must regulate public order in the city centre and be strict on violations of, for example, traffic and taxi laws.

This increasingly repressive orientation is reflected in the appearance of MLEOs. Previously, Dutch municipalities pursued their own local policies on the City Wardens' uniforms. Some municipalities dressed their staff quite similarly to the police, while others preferred distinctive uniforms, signalling a more accessible attitude to the citizenry (Van Steden, 2012). The Dutch Ministry of Justice and Safety has now imposed a standard MLEO uniform style on the municipalities, which resembles police uniforms in the UK and Australia. MLEOs have a clear police-like appearance and sometimes carry handcuffs, a baton, and a body camera. A profound sense of ambivalence surrounds the vision for MLEOs. On the one hand, MLEOs have taken on a stronger repressive mandate and now call for the further expansion of their powers as they are, for example, deployed to the inner cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam full of (intoxicated) tourists and pickpockets. On the other hand, MLEOs are certainly not trained as police officers and have a social mandate of being the 'host' or 'hostess' of municipalities on the street (Bervoets, 2013; Eikenaar, 2019; Van Steden and Bron, 2012). They are supposed to be both friendly and firm, with an increasingly strong emphasis on the latter. Relationships between MLEOs and the police differ throughout the country. There are examples of good cooperation within local municipalities, but there can be tensions too (Bervoets, 2013; Eikenaar and Van Stokkom, 2014; Van Steden, 2012, 2017). Furthermore, there is continuous disagreement about the powers, equipment and weaponry of MLEOs. Groups of MLEOs and their labour union have even organised strikes to demand better safety and security measures to protect then against violence

on the streets, but there is still consensus in the Netherlands that the monopoly of force should remain in the hands of the police.

Law enforcement, police reforms and professionalisation as drivers

Three drivers have contributed to the rise of enforcement oriented MLEOs in the Netherlands: a *politicisation* of law and order, a reorganisation (*institutional transformation*) of the Dutch police and an ongoing *professionalisation* of MLEOs (Van Steden, 2017). We discuss each factor in turn. A first explanation for the proliferation of MLEOs is a stronger appetite for crime control and law enforcement in Dutch cities and towns. Although recorded crime has been falling in the Netherlands over the past years, the emergence of MLEOs may be seen as a general response to growing demands for security provision, related in part to perceptions of disorder and incivilities (Bervoets, 2013; Eikenaar and Van Stokkom, 2014; Willemse et al., 2013). In addition, the urban environment is increasingly coming to be dominated by commodified interests and 'city marketing' which focuses on the creation of attractive, consumer-friendly sites that represent both enclaves of freedom and networks of dense regulation (Van Steden, 2017; Van Steden and Bron, 2012). Thus, the prominence of MLEOs can be interpreted as promoting the city centre as a welcoming, exciting and risk-free space for consumption.

Secondly, a more indirect explanation for the expansion of MLEOs are nationwide institutional transformations driven by the reorganisation of the Dutch police. Unlike in Britain, police in the Netherlands have seen a significant growth in staff and budget. However, given the constant political and social focus upon security issues and policing, the public police have simply been unable to keep pace with these demands. Dutch mayors criticise the gradual withdrawal of the police from patrolling neighbourhoods and, at the same time, have become more responsible for governing local – 'integrated' – community safety (Prins, 2014). Mayors thus seek to gain more control over community policing activities in their municipal areas leading towards a stronger law enforcement orientation of MLEOs.

Finally, and relatedly, 'natural surveillance' exerted by ordinary citizens and neighbourhood groups has been gradually replaced by professionals such as MLEOs whose primary task is to deliver public order and security and, as such, mimic the more repressive tactics of the police (cf. Jones and Newburn, 2002). This trend, together with their expanded judicial mandate, has softened strict divisions of labour between municipal officers and police officers. MLEOs stress that they have developed into professional law enforcers and thus have left behind their somewhat troubled past as City Wardens without any mandate. This has led to what Eikenaar (2019) describes as plural policing as 'professional strife': contestation and negotiation between mayors and police leaders about who is doing what. If MLEOs continue to succeed in pushing the boundaries of their occupation, they are likely to further replace police officers on several law enforcement tasks such as patrolling nightlife and dealing with nuisance youth. Several MLEOs and their unions are now demanding better equipment and more legal powers, which encroaches upon the police monopoly of force. Political struggles over this highly sensitive matter are not settled yet.

Discussion and conclusion

Although policing in England & Wales, France and The Netherlands has varying structures, relationships with local populations and utilises different employment logics for its auxiliary officers, a comparative analysis of these policing agents shows a similar movement towards a heightened law-enforcement orientation across the three nations. Auxiliary officers, in their powers, appearance, organisation and mandate are increasingly coming to emphasise their more repressive activities and the drivers for this shift can be found in systems of the politicisation of law and order, large-scale institutional transformation and attempts at professionalising the auxiliary officers, as we highlighted in the above analysis. This discussion and conclusion will bring together the key features in the three countries and reflect on the implications for pluralised public policing and plural policing scholarship.

Trends: Similarities and nuances

We do not claim here that a complete re-orientation towards a law-enforcement style of policing is happening in all three countries. The French municipal police do sometimes claim that they are the only "proximity police": they have a lower level of armament than the national force and do not have the same powers. The MLEOS are employed by the local authorities and therefore have fewer powers, equipment and weaponry to their disposal than fully-fledged police officers. The PCSOs of England & Wales do not hold the office of 'constable' and therefore will always be limited in their ability to adopt full 'law enforcement' methods. Our argument is rather that there are clear *trends* in this direction within these limitations. In England & Wales, the powers afforded to PCSOs have expanded, the roles they are expected to perform tend to move away from preventive work and they utilise every opportunity to highlight the police-like features of their uniform. In France, municipal police forces are becoming more heavily armed, are adopting internal organisational structures aligned to those of the police and are emphasising the crime control aspects of their work over that of community engagement. In The Netherlands, the previous low-status role of City Warden has disappeared, to give way for the Municipal Law Enforcement Officer who has a greater range of powers, equipment and a police-like uniform and better appeals to political calls for greater crime control. Table 1 below is a summary of these elements.

This change in orientation is experienced differently in the three countries. The main feature of this trend in France for auxiliary officers is an increase in weaponry while in England & Wales it is to do with the type of work these staff undertake (more enforcement than engagement). Processes in The Netherlands reflect a strong desire to move away from a stigmatised role of the past Thus, the dynamics we have identified are rooted in the unique policing traditions of each country and will be shaped by them. We also acknowledge that while these auxiliary officers are becoming more similar to the primary state police agencies in relation to their law enforcement function, this is not to suggest that they are doing the exact same work as these officers. Their hybrid nature is an essential element of who they are. Finally, we note that these processes do not necessarily lead to a stronger consensus between auxiliary police officers and ordinary police: in the different countries, this imitation also leads to professional strife

Table 1. Features of becoming enforcement-orientated.

	PCSOs in E&W	Municipal police in France	**MLEO**s in the Netherlands
Powers	Fewer than police officers but widened in legislation in 2017. Can give fixed-penalty notices for minor offences, detain suspects for 30 min, take statements in certain situations, stop a person and ask his/her personal details	Formalised since legislation in 1999. Apprehend suspects, powers to fine for minor offences, limited investigation powers (deputy investigation agent).	Widened since legislation in 1993: requesting IDs of citizens, limited powers to fine for 'minor' offences (e.g. parking violations, littering, public drunkenness), conduct body searches, apprehend suspects
Appearance	Uniform is similar to police officers, sometimes modified to enhance 'police-like' appearance	Growing use of firearms (not part of initial armament) and bullet-proof vests	Alter uniform to seem more 'police-like', design inspired by the British police uniform
Organisation	N/A	Internal police-like units, with a crime-fighting priority; night units	N/A
Mandate	The community engagement side of the role has diminished since 2010, law enforcement and administrative tasks increasing	A developing orientation to 'crime-fighting' such as drug trafficking in some areas	Tend to highlight law-enforcement side of the role: handcuffs and a baton are sometimes added to their equipment

(Eikenaar, 2019). As they become more similar, they also become rivals: the dividing line between their respective missions is constantly blurred. It is to a closer look at these drivers of change that we will now turn.

Drivers: Common trends and the strength of national contexts

In the England and Wales, France and the Netherlands the police auxiliaries increasingly do what police officers no longer do. However, rather than playing an alternative role, auxiliary police are inclined to adopt the style of action of the traditional forces which is seen as having the most power, protection and prestige, a case of 'cognitive isomorphism' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Crucially, the key dynamics behind these developments vary in part: austerity in the UK, political demand for security in France, centralisation of the police in the Netherlands. National contexts matter for explaining these processes. Table 2 below summaries the main drivers.

Unlike the Netherlands and France, budget reductions in the 'austerity' era of police funding have meant that many British police forces have significantly reduced their

Table 2. Drivers for change.

	PCSOs in E&W	Municipal police in France	**MLEO**s in the Netherlands
Politicisation	The election of Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012, removal of 'ring-fence' for community policing funding	Local politicisation of crime for elections	Local politicisation of crime and disorder: a growing emphasis on 'clean and safe' neighbourhoods and city centres.
Institutional transformation	An indirect effect of the processes of austerity post-2010 – less time for community engagement due to fewer officers and staff	Indirect effect of political decentralisation (the rise of local authorities in the French political system)	Indirect effect of police transformations: the nationalisation of the Dutch police creates institutional space for MLEOs
Professionalism	N/A	View becoming more like the police as a sign of professionalism, cognitive isomorphism	Granted Special Investigative Officer status: extension of law enforcing powers and equipment

workforce. This has meant that many people who join the police as PCSOs do so solely to enhance their prospects as candidates for future recruitment as constables. Their approach their work as PCSOs therefore reflects a view of it as a training ground, encouraging an enhanced focus on 'law and order' activities. In France, mayors have been in an electoral competition by promising more security to the citizenry. This, in turn, fuelled the rise of municipal police officers alongside the national police. However, since ideas about what such a new police officer should be and should do differ among politicians and policy-makers, a natural reflex is to mimic in many respects the traditional law enforcement style of policing. Finally, in the Netherlands, shifts toward a centralised police force have created a void in the organisation of locally oriented community policing. Although not being elected as is the case in France, Dutch mayors put emphasis on 'safe and clean' streets, which has led to the creation of MLEOs, who show high ambition in embracing the more demanding tasks of crime control and order maintenance. A stronger appetite for law enforcement strategies is the direct result of this development.

Wider implications

The increasing orientation of auxiliary policing towards crime control has implications for both the practice of policing and security in local areas and for the theorisation of plural policing more generally. We will take each in turn. Two different interpretations

may be proposed for the evolution towards law enforcement auxiliary police in practice. One, rather positive, would focus on the benefits of the professionalisation of auxiliary policing: these marginal policing actors are becoming better equipped, better trained and better organised by aligning themselves with an image of 'traditional' public policing which highlights the law-enforcement aspects of the role. This growing resemblance to the symbolically dominant state police could enhance the chances of cooperation from members of the public with these officers and staff. In addition, these various agents would share common views and professional standards, and thus would be better inclined to collaborate.

It seems to us, however, that the disadvantages are more significant than the advantages. Firstly, the more enforcement-like the appearance of these officers and units through current expanding equipment allocations (however different in each national context) the more this increases the risk of a growing remoteness: these officers and units are more armed and protected, but less accessible to the public. Secondly, we have seen that mimicry may induce more rivalries as the two groups compete on similar activities ('crime fighting' and law enforcement) and on similar appearance. Finally, the more aggressive mandate leads to a reinforced focus on the fight against crime and law-enforcement, at the expense of a more service style kind of policing, such as community policing. In principle, auxiliary police are intended to provide another type of security more in line with the social demand of safety and the needs of the public, and more inclined towards a community-oriented model of policing. Sklansky's (2011) criticism of the new professionalism agenda in the US also applies to the re-orientation of our auxiliary police officers in that it ignores what we know about policing: that much of it is not about crime control, that building trust with the public is necessary and that legitimacy depends on fairness and respect towards that public. In other words, the processes we analyse here may produce effects, largely unintended, that undermine the advantages of the pluralisation of public policing.

This leads to our final implication of the growing enforcement orientation in auxiliary policing – that the theoretical field of study needs to take cognisance of the current reducing 'plurality' of policing in the public sector. As noted above, there exists a wide body of literature on the nature of policing as exercised by the private sector and on the various governance relationships within the field of pluralised policing. However, if we focus on the specific configuration which Loader (2000) labels as 'policing by government', we detect an under-theorisation of this relationship, especially as it is experienced in practice in specific contexts. This is where our research can contribute – by comparing detailed qualitative research of auxiliary officers from three different policing jurisdictions, we have started to reveal the contours of what 'policing by government' actually looks like, and what this can tell us about current trends in pluralised policing.

What we argue here is that these auxiliary officers of the state, even with their restricted powers and municipal focus, while becoming more enforcement-orientated are diminishing the extent to which they offer a true alternative, or complement to, the formal state/national police system, as was the intention behind their creation. 'Plural' policing is not as plural as it seems. As has been considered elsewhere (see e.g. Baker, 2014; O'Neill, 2010; and Innes, 2005), community policing or engagement is difficult to do well, but can have significant benefits for both local publics as well as police

agencies. These auxiliary agents have the potential to be specialists in this kind of policing, due to their limited enforcement capabilities. However, this potential will not be achieved if they regard being different from the primary policing agency as a sign of professional weakness. Thus, we would argue that the study of 'pluralised' policing in these, and perhaps other countries, has a narrower scope in which to define 'plurality'. This process is largely separate from larger scale discussions of governance as its effects can be seen in the reduced service offered to the public that is more like a poor carbon copy of the police, rather than a unique image of its own. To fully understand these trends, further international comparative research with auxiliary state agents is required. This research would be best if designed from the beginning to be comparative in order to overcome limitations of *post hoc* analysis.

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Notes

1. See Puck and White, 2021 for an example of an international comparative analysis of private policing agents.
2. There are public sector safety actors at the municipal level in England & Wales, but they are far less significant on the national scale compared to PCSOs.
3. For France, Bonnet et al. (2015), de Maillard and Mouhanna (2017); for England & Wales, O'Neill (2017, 2019); for the Netherlands, Van Steden and Bron (2012), Van Steden (2012) and Van Steden (2017).
4. They comprise three categories: lay municipal police officers (frontline officers), direct supervisors, and middle management. Together they represent 13% of the combined strength of the national police and gendarmerie.

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