

Know Your Enemy, #NoG20 Edition - Protest Policing in Germany

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Note: *Enough is Enough* is not organizing *any* of these events, we are publishing this text for people across the US and Europe to be able to see what is going on and for documentation only.

Enough is Enough!

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The G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany is approaching fast. Tens of thousands of activists are mobilising to protest the event, including many who will come to Germany from abroad. It's safe to say that all of our actions, no matter which approach we choose to protest or disrupt the summit, will have to deal with police presence at some point. To people who have little or no experience with major protest events in Germany, it is important to know that German tactics of protest policing differ noticeably from those found in other western countries such as France, Italy, Denmark or Great Britain.

What is this article about?

This text is about the equipment and tactics used by German police forces when dealing with protests and/or riots. It also dives a bit into the organisational structure of police in Germany and its history, though we'll try not to bore you too much with that. We also want to provide some ideas on countermeasures you and your affinity group can take, as well as provide a brief overview of the most important legal topics in regards to demonstrations.

What is this article not?

It is not an in-depth look; we didn't want to write a book after all. We are also not here to discuss the pros and cons of attacking the police directly, explain the political role of the police apparatus in late-stage capitalist societies or to provide comprehensive legal advice. It is also, and we want to emphasize this, not meant to scare you - quite in the contrary, knowing what you're up against can help you prepare adequately, meaning you will be less likely to be frightened by an unknown situation.

Who is this article for?

It's primarily directed at activists from outside Germany, who have little or no firsthand experience with the way German cops operate. It doesn't matter if you're a seasoned activist or this is your first time protesting a major summit. If you find you like what we've written, feel free to print it, distribute it among friends and comrades, or translate it for people who don't speak English.

Who's writing?

We wanted to make transparent (well, sort of) from what point of view this text was written. We are a small group which has, in one form or another, participated in political struggles on the left over the last two decades - and still does. As we are all from Germany, that's where most of our experiences are from, although some of us have taken part in protests in other European countries. Over the years, we have come to the conclusion that while the cops are not our - your view may differ - primary enemy in most cases, they are usually the primary obstacle that we face. Knowing what we're dealing with in most situations has helped us a great deal in preparing and pulling off successful actions. We hope this text can empower you to do the same.

We will be starting with a brief look at the organisational structure and history of German police. We will then cover equipment, weapons and tactics commonly used for protest policing in Germany, as well as possible means to counter them. We'll finish with a bit of legal advice. So, let's get right to it, shall we?

1. Organisational structure of the German police

First off: "the" German police does not exist. Germany is a federal Republic consisting of 16 *Bundesländer*, or states. Each of these states has its own police force. The federal government controls an additional force, the *Bundespolizei*, or Federal Police. This makes up a total of 17 different police forces. Responsible for each is the respective - state or federal - Minister of the Interior. In Hamburg, the official designation is "Senator of the Interior", an office currently held by Andy Grote of the Social Democratic Party. While there is a certain level of consensus on tactics, equipment and training between the different states, the various police forces do differ in appearance, doctrine, mentality, experience etc.

In case a large number of police officers are needed, one state can and will be supported by others and the Federal Police. As it currently stands, around 15 000 cops are announced to be in Hamburg, most likely coming from all over Germany. Seeing as every state has its own laws governing what police can and can't do, those cops coming from elsewhere will have to stick to the laws of the state they're operating in. In case of the G20 summit, that would be Hamburg's police law.

The officers most visibly present on the streets will be coming from the *Bereitschaftspolizei*. They make up the bulk of what would elsewhere be known as riot police, both on foot and with crowd control vehicles such as watercannons. They are usually grouped into *Hundertschaften*, which unlike the name implies don't necessarily consist of 100 officers. The smallest operational unit is a *Gruppe* (squad), which consists of 10 - 15 officers. One Hundertschaft has around nine squads.

Either as part of the squad system or in separate units, German police have professionalised snatch squads called *Beweissicherungs- und Festnahmeinheiten*. As we are aware that this is one of those German words that's bound to give non-native speakers nightmares, we'll stick to their official abbreviation from now on: BFE. Remember those letters, they'll be important later on.

2. History of protest policing and crowd control in Germany

A few disclaimers: we will be looking at this history with regards to the current political and administrative system of Germany. This means we will start chronologically with the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949, and we will not be taking into account events in socialist East Germany. For one, because mass protest movements were practically non-existent until the very end of this state, and secondly, because any experiences made were rejected out of hand by West Germans after Reunification, with the state police forces of the GDR being remodeled according to West German ideas.

After World War II, (West) Germany, though formally a democracy, remained a highly authoritarian country. Protest was scarce, and when it did happen - such as the massive protests against rearmament in the early 1950s - few people were inclined to overstep legal bounds and cause trouble. When they did, police usually showed little restraint. This was first called into question in 1962: police in Munich arrested a couple of guitar players for being too loud. Their heavy-handed reaction to people complaining about the arrests led to five nights of rioting. In response, police in Munich came up with a tactic called *de-escalation*. We'll hear more of that later.

By the late 1960s, protests for educational reform, an end to the Vietnam War, against the involvement of former Nazis in politics and numerous other topics had become common. Police reaction to these marches - many of which were decidedly harmless by later standards - remained heavy-handed, including shooting dead a peaceful protester in West Berlin in 1967.

In the 1970s, two movements emerged which would define confrontation with the police for the next two decades: the squatters and the anti-nuclear movement. Both were willing, at least in parts, to "professionalize" the fight against the police, using helmets, gas masks, clubs, slingshots and other equipment. The cops also got new gear - improved watercannons, riot shields, tear gas etc.

By the 1980s, which saw another huge upsurge in militant actions - larger, by far, than the "generation defining" late 1960s - confrontations had become brutal. A number of protesters died between 1981 and 1987. All talk of "de-escalation" was forgotten, while conservative ministers of the interior, eagerly parroted by the press, spoke of "civil war". Yet police stuck, by and large, to tactics that are still used in other European countries today: large formations, taking position behind shields, firing tear gas and watercannons indiscriminately at anyone who gets too close.

In 1987, the tactical approach changed dramatically. On May 1st, thousands of West Berliners had driven the police out of the district of Kreuzberg. Easily outflanking and outmaneuvering the inflexible, large formations, they had forced the cops to retreat for hours. West Berlin was the first state to set up a unit that specialised in getting close to rioters, arresting rather than dispersing them - the precursor to today's BFEs. In November 1987, a militant activist shot dead two cops during a

riot in Frankfurt. These shots meant, in police logic, that controlling access to demonstrations and keeping a close watch on what was going on "inside" the demo became vital.

Over the next 20 years, BFEs were constituted in every state and among the Federal Police. Laws were changed, banning both protective gear and face masks for protestors. At the same time, personnel in "critical" situations was increased: on May 1st, 1989, when thousands of West-Berliners again attacked police directly, 1200 officers were on duty. This year, there were around 6000 cops, for a few dozen people throwing some bottles.

3. Equipment

3.1. Personal equipment

- body armour: every riot cop carries body armour. The head is protected by a helmet with a transparent visor, which also has a heavy leather flap to protect the back of the neck. Some units wear balaclavas underneath the helmet - officialy, for fire protection, more likely because it makes identification of the cop more difficult. The torso, including the shoulders, is covered by a padded vest, which also serves as protection against knives. The vest holds most of the bags, holsters and attachment points for other equipment. Arms and legs are protected by hard plastic covers, although these necessarily must have gaps to allow for movement. Most cops wear gloves of some sort, sometimes with extra padding to fend off projectiles. Combat boots are, of course, worn at the feet. These are not metal-tipped. The outfit is completed by a fire-retardant overall. Depending on the state the riot cop comes from, the overall is worn either underneath the protective gear, or pulled over it. In total, the protective gear weighs in at around 25-30 kg.
- baton: most police forces in Germany have by now switched to the so-called "Tonfa", a hard plastic baton with a short grip on the side. The Tonfa can be extremely dangerous if used correctly by "swirling" its long end around the side grip. Hitting people on the head with it is officially not allowed - don't count on police sticking to that rule, however. Nevertheless, extended baton use is rare, with most cops relying on kicks and punches to inflict direct physical force.
- pepperspray: used both in offense and defense, pepperspray has become one of the most popular weapons for German riot police. It is dispensed from handheld canisters which hold either 60ml (RSG-3, range of 1-3 meters) or 400ml (RSG-8, range of 6-8 meters). Both variants shoot out a concentrated jet, not a cloud or gel. It causes a strong burning sensation on the skin, in eyes, nose and mouth. Being oil-based, it's difficult to wash off with pure water. Expect this stuff to be used massively - during one the last nuclear waste transports in Germany, police used more than 4000 cans of pepperspray in the space of just 3 days. Pepperspray has also been known to cause severe issues to persons with asthma, and has been fatal when used against people who were high on certain drugs (although we recommend attending protests only when sober anyway).
- cameras: more on that when we get to tactics, but police will use both photo and video cameras to document what is going on at a demonstration. If they see crimes happening, they will try to get pictures of the persons involved, in order to prepare an arrest at a later time. These cameras are by now digital, of course, meaning selection and analysis of pictures can be done immediately.
- firearms: police in Germany are allowed to bring their firearm to riot duty, in spite of the dangers this brings with it. Use at demonstrations has been non-existent for the past 10 years or even longer, but cops have drawn their gun and threatened people with using it a few times in the same space of time. Usually, these were plainclothes cops who were discovered and attacked. Shooting at a crowd is expressly forbidden for police in Germany; this ban does not, however, apply for situations where the cop claims to be acting in self-defense.
- teargas: used to be widely popular, then virtually vanished from use during the early 2000s, but has seen a bit of a comeback in recent years. Teargas was used in sizeable quantities

during the Blockupy protests in Frankfurt in 2015 and against antifascists protesting a neonazi demonstration in Leipzig in late 2015. It is fired from 40mm grenade launchers; the projectile opens in mid-air and dispenses 8-10 small gas canisters, which are spent shortly after hitting the ground. This makes it almost impossible to throw or kick them out of harm's way. If you do get your hands on a canister which is still "burning", make sure to protect your skin from the heat. The teargas used in Germany is rather mild, although the effects vary depending on temperature (colder is better), pre-existing medical conditions and other factors. It is by far easier to wash off teargas than pepperspray.

- shield: not commonly used anymore, as shields hinder mobility. Mostly used by cops who are on stationary guard duty - in front of an important object like an embassy, party or company HQ etc. - who use the shield to protect not only themselves, but also groundfloor windows from projectiles. Shields are made of transparent plastic, are about 110cm high and protect the bearer's body from the lower thigh to about shoulder height. Cops who don't operate in large groups - traffic cops, for example - might have a shield in the back of their car for additional protection.
- tasers & rubber bullets: not used by riot cops (yet).
- pepperballs: these are essentially paintball projectiles, just with powdered pepperspray instead of colour inside. Were introduced amidst much media fanfare in the state of Saxony a few years ago, but proved to be remarkably ineffective. Not likely to be used, but you never know.
- flashlights: German cops use high-powered flashlights, both to see in the dark and to disorientate and blind people. Don't look directly into it, if you can avoid it.
- knives: police carry knives, officially to be able to cut through ropes, seatbelts and other things which might pose a danger for people in case of an accident. There have been reports of police using knives against protesters' belongings, however: from slitting tires of cars to cutting open tents.

3.2. Vehicles

- patrol cars: not much to be said here. Regular cars, painted in police colours and with a siren on top. Not used by Hundertschaften in riot duty.
- motorcycles: same as above applies - might be more visible in Hamburg though, seeing as a police motorcycle escort is part of protocol for high-ranking diplomatic guests.
- squad cars: these vehicles transport the cops of each Hundertschaft. These are minivans of some sort, bought either from Mercedes, VW or Ford (depending on the state). The windows are made of shatter-proof Lexan, a transparent plastic capable of withstanding large amounts of physical force. Older vans can sometimes be seen with metal meshing over the windows and windshield. The tires usually have some sort of emergency running capability. A van typically holds one squad. Police usually approach their area of operations on foot - you will rarely, if ever, see squad cars charging towards a group of people, with police either jumping out upon arrival or approaching in the car's cover.
- specializes squad cars: this includes prisoner transport, command vehicles, surveillance and loudspeaker cars. Prisoner transport cars have individual - and tiny - cells within them. Command vehicles are equipped with computer uplinks to analyse the pictures taken by units around the demonstration. Can often be identified by a large cooling unit on the roof to deal with the computers' heat generation. Surveillance cars have a video camera on a telescopic mount which can be extended to provide footage from above (looking, for example, behind banners etc.). Loudspeaker cars are used to make announcements by the police, including the impending use of watercannons and other means of force.
- watercannons: German police use the "WaWe" (short for *Wasserwerfer* = watercannon) 9000 and 10 000. The WaWe 9000 was introduced in the 1980s and is gradually being phased out. It can hold 9000 liters of water, has two jets mounted on the roof at the front and a third below the bumper in the rear. The jets are controlled individually from within the vehicle

and can spray water at a distance of up to 60 meters, with a maximum pressure of around 20 bar. It also has loudspeakers and floodlights for use at night. The WaWe 10 000, introduced in 2010, holds 10 000 liters of water, has three roof-mounted jets, with one at the rear and two at the front. Next to the jets are HD cameras which allow the jet of water to be aimed even if the windshield is smeared by paint. The WaWe 10 000 can also create a "curtain" of water to shield advancing riot police from view and extinguish burning projectiles. Watercannons are used almost always in tandem with police on the ground. Both models allow for teargas to be mixed into the water, which can be controlled by the vehicle's commander.

- armoured personnel carriers (APCs): these vehicles are officially designated "*Sonderwagen*", or "special vehicle", but are more commonly known as "anti-barricade tanks" (*Räumpanzer*). APCs are designed to be potentially used against armed terrorist threats, which means they are the most heavily armored police vehicles. At demonstrations, police commonly use them in tandem with watercannons to clear obstacles, the APC having more than enough power to make short work of almost any barricade. There is an option to fit a grenade launcher for teargas grenades on the roof, although that particular feature has not been used in a long while.
- helicopters: police use helicopters primarily for observation and transport. Observation helicopters are operated at altitudes up to 1500 meters, and have camera equipment that can take high quality videos and photos from that altitude. Transport helicopters fall in the realm of the Federal Police and are used to quickly relocate units. Although this use has been primarily seen at protests in rural areas (the 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm, for example), police have trained to use this method of transport in urban environments as well.

3.3. Other equipment

- horses: Most states have stopped using horses in riot duty, they are however still available. Police use both the horse's physical size to block off streets and the capability to quickly cover ground and charge protesters. Be especially careful for hooves and for the cop on top of the horse; instead of the tonfa, they use longer, more flexible batons to strike downwards at protesters, meaning they will almost always hit your head.
- dogs: dogs are used both as sniffers - for drugs, explosives etc. - and as a deterrent in crowd control. You will never see sniffer dogs at a demonstration. Crowd control dogs are larger and handled by one police officer each. In our experience, it is very rare to see them let loose on a crowd, but police will attempt to intimidate people by lining them up and letting them jump - while on a leash - towards protesters.

4. Tactics

German protest policing revolves around the idea of preventing a loss of control of the situation and making qualified arrests, meaning arrests which come with enough evidence to achieve a conviction in court. The BFEs are instrumental to this approach.

4.1. Maintaining control

Police will attempt to tightly control who comes to a demonstration, what those people have with them, and how the demonstration will proceed. To this end, they will usually try to influence the route the demonstration takes beforehand - not too close to important infrastructure, the "red zone" of the summit etc. Preliminary measures also include turning back suspected "violent" protesters at the borders, or "advising" residents of Germany to not go to Hamburg.

At the demo itself, police may try to search "suspicious" individuals. This can mean a short pat-down, a look into your backpack, or running your ID through police systems to see if you have been registered as an offender at protests in the past. It is possible - and indeed, we would recommend it - to circumvent these controls. You might decide to join the demonstration after it has started at the next corner, or find others which whom you collectively refuse to pass the checkpoints.

After the protest has started, police will use a varied approach to maintain control. This may include de-escalation, defusing a potentially violent situation by giving in before things escalate, or attempting to talk people out of a certain behaviour before sending in riot squads to force them to do so. It may also mean accompanying parts of the demonstration closely by cops walking to the left and right of the march. Often, these will also film the demonstrators for potential future reference in case things escalate.

An important tactic to maintain control is the encirclement of entire groups of people. This tactic is known as *Kessel* (literally: cauldron) and can either serve to prevent further movement of the encircled group or to prepare for a mass arrest. Unfortunately, it is impossible to be sure what kind of *Kessel* you have ended up in, and the police's objective itself may change. The former might be used, for example, to prevent a group of activists moving around until a G20 delegation has completed its way from the airport to the venue; the latter could be observed at the "M31" protest of 2012, when around 500 people were pushed out of the demonstration, encircled and later arrested.

It is of absolute importance that you keep your calm during an encirclement. It is by far the worst situation of all to attempt militant forms of action, especially once the *Kessel* has stabilized after the first few, often chaotic, minutes. Get rid of any possibly incriminating evidence, including face masks, gloves etc.

At the end of a demonstration, or at other large assemblies of people, the cops will attempt to "mix up" the crowd. This involves sending small units - usually BFE squads - into the crowd, who will casually and seemingly aimlessly stroll around. This serves a dual purpose: it places the BFE squads into positions where they can strike in any direction in case there is trouble, without having to use an obvious approach path. And it prevents the formation of a united crowd, which can be used to prepare and conduct attacks against the police.

4.2. Qualified arrests

This is another point where the BFEs come in. They are trained and equipped for targeted arrests against individuals who were either caught on film or observed by plainclothes cops. BFE cops will use a number of means to get close to their target, quickly overpower them and extract them without "losing" their objective. A standard tactic involves simply sneaking up on the individual to be arrested. Walking slowly, apparently not paying attention to whoever they want to nab, they will approach to within a few meters before suddenly lunging forwards and grabbing the target. Another tactic is to use distractions: common procedure is to use a couple of squads to attack a demonstration on one side - as protesters surge to that side, attempting to fend off the cops, more squads appear in the rear and make use of the distraction to grab individuals.

In any case, these arrests are videotaped - though don't count on it if you become victim to excessive force. The video material serves primarily as a means to identify further potential suspects. If the squad making the first arrest is attacked in some form, a second can come in to conduct an arrest of the attacker(s). Theoretically, this "chain" can continue almost endlessly.

4.3. Loss of control

Of course, just because the police wants to maintain control at all times, doesn't mean it does. If a situation gets out of hand, the go-to tactics of German police are massed charges on foot, often - especially in Hamburg - in combination with watercannons. The aim is to force people away from a certain point, for example a barricade they have erected, make them disperse into sidestreets and generally (re-)establish a situation in which the BFEs can perform their specialty tricks. Bear in mind that these charges are, most of all, scare tactics. Police in Germany have made the general experience that 50 cops running at a crowd, screaming and waving around their batons in a threatening fashion are easily able to make 500 protesters run away.

5. Counter-tactics

So, how to defend against this form of protest policing? First of all, it is important to remember that numbers are usually, and especially at an event like the G20 summit, in our favour. 15 000 cops deployed in Hamburg mean that there will rarely be more than 5000 on duty at any given time. Our numbers, on the other hand, will easily reach into the tens of thousands.

The second conclusion is pretty obvious: deny police the opportunity to establish and exercise control. If they start accompanying a march closely, spread out, vary your speed, stop entirely or disperse... If they attempt to mingle with the crowd, block their access (they will usually not try to push it, for fear of starting a riot which could have been avoided). If you see cops getting ready to make arrests, link arms with others. Don't fall for their distraction tactics - have one member of your affinity group be the look-out to the sides and rear. Change clothes if you think your outfit might have been videotaped while doing something illegal.

If police charge at a crowd you're in: DON'T RUN. Again, link arms, remain calm, stand your ground or walk backwards slowly. Bear in mind that BFEs are best suited and equipped for low to medium intensity confrontations - when facing a solid, militant crowd their tactics go to pieces. During Blockupy 2015 in Frankfurt, police recorded more than 450 criminal acts during the protest. So far, less than 10 (!) people have been convicted in court. Why? Because police were attacked with such force that they simply did not have the time to prepare and conduct arrests.

We will not be covering counters to individual police weapons here. There are other - and more in-depth - manuals on how to deal with pepperspray, teargas etc. on the internet.

6. A short bit of legal advice

Again, there are more in-depths brochures on legal proceedings in Germany on the internet. However, a few things should be noted, not least because they tie in with police tactics.

- there is a complete ban on masking your identity (i.e., your face) and on wearing protective gear during assemblies in Germany. Breaking this law is punishable by up to a year in prison, although realistically, you will be fined a few hundred Euro the first couple of times. Protective gear includes helmets, gas masks, ski and swim goggles, gloves with kevlar inlays, padded vests etc. Masking your face is often defined a bit arbitrarily, though generally it can be said you're on the safe side as long as two of three defining facial features (eyes, mouth and nose) are visible. So sunglasses are usually OK, while pulling a scarf over your nose and mouth isn't. Bear in mind that you can also be found breaking this law while in the vicinity of a demonstration, for example after leaving it. This applies especially to objects which are primarily designed around hiding your identity - balaclavas, for example. A t-shirt, while it may be used to be tied around the head and hide your face, is not primarily designed for that purpose and therefore not problematic. We would nevertheless advise you to mask your face thoroughly before you do anything illegal. It's better to pay a few hundred Euros for that than face a much more serious conviction for assault, property damage or whatever.
- you are required to have an ID - passport or ID card; driver's license is sometimes accepted - and provide it upon being asked to do so by a police officer. Failure to do so may result in a detention until your identity has been determined, which may include taking fingerprints. Note that this is not an arrest, and police have to release you after a maximum of 24 hours. Expect the cops to make ample use of this possibility for detainments and fingerprinting during the G20 summit.
- a new law that was passed two weeks ago has been made to especially "protect" police officers. Pushing or shoving a cop, regardless of the circumstances, is now punishable by a minimum (!) of three months jailtime. It is as of yet unclear how often cops will arrest people under this new law, but take care when coming in close contact with police.
- As always: **no statements to the police in case of an arrest!** You are legally obligated to

state your first and last name, your date of birth, your adress, a general information on your occupation ("student", "factory worker", "secretary") and your marital status. That is it. Apart from that, the only words the cops should hear out of your mouth are "I refuse to make a statement". This is additionally important because legal team structures in Germany will not support you if you have testified to the police.



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