

# In the wake of George Floyd's murder: Police violence on the rise in Germany

Max Linhof and Jan Ritter  
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Three months after the murder of George Floyd in the United States, which has been followed in that country by sustained police violence, similar scenes have been playing out on the streets of major German cities.

A growing number of police operations have occurred over recent weeks involving the use of ruthless force. Mobile phone videos taken by passersby reveal that police officers not only display extreme aggressiveness and brutality towards their targets, but also towards those seeking to document police violence.

## Düsseldorf Altstadt: August 15 at around 7:30 pm

Amateur video footage shows how four police officers restrain 15-year-old Mohamed A. One police officer kneels with his full weight on the boy's head, forcing his head into the asphalt. The scene is reminiscent of the events leading to George Floyd's death. The boy was taken to hospital with suspected brain trauma, and bruises in the face, skull, pelvis and spine. The video of the police operation spread rapidly on Twitter. Eyewitnesses reported that police officers sought to violently prevent filming of the incident.

## Hamburg Neustadt: August 17

Mobile phone videos shared via Twitter and YouTube show how the 15-year-old student Kadir Holdur was surrounded by police officers and forced against a building wall. The police officers threaten and

shout at him. When the clearly terrified student wants to take off his T-shirt, the officers restrain him. The video shows how the boy attempts in a panic to resist the police officers' attacks, but is wrestled to the ground and handcuffed with the help of pepper spray and five officers.

This incident also recalls Floyd's death. The officers violently push the boy down onto the ground as he struggles to breathe and says, "I can't breathe." On the building wall behind him is the statement, "Please, I can't breathe," George Floyd's last words.

## Frankfurt Sachsenhausen: During the night of August 15-16

A 29-year-old man with an immigrant background is arrested by 20 police officers after allegedly resisting an order to leave the area due to alcohol consumption. The video shows how the defenceless man is pushed to the ground by the throat by an officer. A second officer kicks the handcuffed man twice with full force in the back, while another officer twists his legs. The man cries out in pain. The remaining officers use physical force and pepper spray to force witnesses to leave the area.

Somewhat later, another officer appears and kicks the restrained man in the head. He is only prevented from committing further violence by another officer. The disproportionately aggressive treatment of the man by the police is commented on by witnesses in disbelief. They say, "Look at how they're laying into him!" or "They're going ballistic!"

## Ingelheim: August 15

In addition to attacking refugees and immigrants, Germany's police, a hotbed for far-right networks, are also notorious for brutal attacks against left-wing protesters.

On 15 August, the fascist party *Die Rechte* (The Right) organised a rally with 24 participants in Ingelheim, Rhineland-Palatinate, to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Rudolf Hess, Hitler's deputy. Around 500 police officers were present. Three counter-protests attracted over 1,000 people.

Up to 150 people were forced into a small tunnel after arriving at the train station. Being crammed together in a poorly ventilated tunnel is life-threatening during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, officers used batons and pepper spray to force the protesters closer together and blocked off both exits to the tunnel as they crammed those confined into an even smaller space. Witnesses reported panic attacks, cuts and mental breakdowns in the tunnel.

Forty-year-old Spike M., who wanted to participate in the demonstration with his children, described the situation in the tunnel to the TAZ newspaper, "They totally lost it, I could hardly breathe. Everyone I spoke to said it was terrifying." Amelie F., a 27-year-old post-doctoral sociologist, commented, "I feared for my life."

Later, one of the tunnel's exits was opened, and the protesters were forced to one of the three counter-protests, which was effectively transformed into an open-air prison with cars and fences. The 250 demonstrators were held there for several hours. Witnesses reported that in spite of the heat, they were neither offered water nor the opportunity to go to the toilet in private.

The police reduced the size of this open-air prison on two occasions, making social distancing impossible. Witnesses reported violence against people who had lost consciousness, were in handcuffs, were injured, or were in wheelchairs. They also noted that many of the officers' service numbers were either covered up or totally removed so that they could not be identified.

According to the Sanitätsgruppe Sud-West i.V., a local health care group, 116 protesters were injured. The medics wrote on Facebook that the police "overran our treatment area and threatened our personnel." They

emphasised the high number of panic attacks caused by the extreme brutality of the police. These cases "had to be treated by our emergency team for psychosocial care."

Amelie F. drew a link between the violence of the police in Ingelheim and the far-right networks that are active in the military and police. "We always hear stories about right-wing extremist tendencies in the police, and one would like to think that it's only a few cells or something like that. But on Saturday, I had the impression that it is a system. The strength of the force deployed there. And if you just consider that the neo-Nazis were marching 100 metres away, and we are treated like that because we want to protest against them," she said.

As in the US, the ruling elite is responding to mounting opposition among workers and young people with massive police deployments and the mobilisation of fascist forces in the security agencies. Officers who lash out or shoot people—the police killed 14 people in Germany last year—are hardly ever charged. Investigations into the actions of a mere six officers of the 500 present in Ingelheim were launched. In 2018, there were officially 1,559 cases of bodily harm by a police officer on duty. But only 49 cases made it to court and only 20 of those charged were convicted.



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