

# Germany: Right-wing extremism in North Rhine-Westphalia police force

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There have now been 53 confirmed cases of right-wing extremist activities in the police force of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany's most populous state. This was announced by the state interior ministry in Düsseldorf following enquiries by Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa).

A year ago, far-right chat groups and images found on the cell phones of police officers in Mülheim an der Ruhr/Essen had shocked the public.

In one video, which was then sent to colleagues, a police officer lays out the bullets of his service weapon into a swastika. Another shared snapshots via WhatsApp of Christmas decorations with SS runes and the inscription "Sieg Heil." One patrol officer stood with his legs wide apart on the roofs of two service vehicles and gave the Hitler salute. Another video shows the same policeman and others singing the forbidden first verse of the Deutschlandlied during a trip in their police vehicle.

In the following months, the scandal about right-wing extremist police chat groups increasingly grew. For example, the forbidden Horst Wessel Lied, the battle song of Hitler's SA and the later party anthem of the NSDAP (Nazi party), was found on seized data storage devices.

During the investigations, more and more suspicious cases were added. In early November 2020, 147 police officers and four employees of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as the secret service is called) in North Rhine-Westphalia were under investigation. By the end of September this year, the number of suspicious cases reported had risen to 275.

Evaluation of extensive data seized during the search of the suspects revealed the most vile criminal images and films. On September 18, 2020, the *World Socialist Web Site* commented on this, saying, their content is "inadequately described as agitating against refugees, fascist filth, and the trivialisation of the Nazis."

Images included refugees screaming in a gas chamber and a man on a bicycle pointing a gun at a black youth trying to escape from him.

Since then, the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state

government, a coalition led by failed Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chancellor candidate Armin Laschet along with the Free Democratic Party (FDP), has sought to downplay the extent of the far-right networks. When asked by dpa, the state Interior Ministry, led by Herbert Reul (CDU), responded with the following assessment: "Suspicion of right-wing extremism had been confirmed in 53 of the investigated cases, which had already been conclusively investigated and punished. Suspicions had not been confirmed in 84 cases. These cases have also been conclusively investigated. In 138 cases, the investigation was still ongoing."

The consequences for the police officers concerned are negligible. Six police trainees have been dismissed. Two dismissals and three warnings were issued in the course of labour law proceedings.

The decisions also show that the cases of right-wing extremism among police officers and in the state apparatus that have been discovered and potentially breach criminal law are being systematically downplayed and covered up. The police officers concerned generally got off scot-free under the criminal law because the judiciary classified the WhatsApp chats as "private communications." Relevant criminal offences, such as the dissemination of illegal symbols (e.g., the swastika), thus did not apply, the dpa reports.

Last year, a female police officer from Mülheim/Essen had successfully sued against her suspension. In her case, the court had concluded that the Hitler video on her cell phone was a "parody."

The cases of right-wing extremism that have come to light among the police in NRW, the extent of which is now being concealed, are just the tip of the iceberg. The same is true of many similar cases in Hesse, Berlin and other German states.

If particularly blatant cases come to light, there are brief hypocritical expressions of indignation on the part of the state. Then they are played down as individual cases and to get over them as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, new cases continue to come to light.

For example, almost at the same time that the results of the investigation into the right-wing extremist chat groups were announced by the NRW police, there was a raid in Aldenhoven, in the district of Düren. A huge cache of weapons, including firearms, explosives, hand grenades and mines, was discovered at the home of a 32-year-old man, who is said to be a senior officer and explosives expert in the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces).

The man had originally only been investigated for violating the Foreign Trade and Payments Act because he had shipped a package containing silencers. Now, the charge of violating the War Weapons Control Act has been added and he has been remanded in custody. So far, nothing is known about his political motivation. Since unknown chemicals were also discovered in the house, experts from the Federal Office for Radiation Protection were called in to assess the situation. Some of the explosives found were detonated on site.

At the beginning of October, it became known that right-wing extremist incidents were also said to have occurred in the Bundeswehr's elite "Guard of the Federal Republic." This battalion stands guard during state visits, among other things. At the centre, is a grouping within the 2nd Company that calls itself the "Wolf Pack." It involves right-wing extremist incidents, repulsive initiation rituals, sexualized violence and assault.

Even before this, one soldier's contact with the fascistic Identitarian movement had attracted attention. Also, a soldier in the battalion is said to have had himself photographed in the uniform of Hitler's Wehrmacht (army). Both had been banned from performing their duties.

Before a more detailed investigation could even take place, federal Defence Commissioner Eva Högl (Social Democratic Party, SPD) said after a visit to the guard battalion that she had "a good impression" of the investigation. "So far, there is no confirmation of an entrenched far-right group within the Guard Battalion."

This month, *Mediendienst Integration* published research on the topic of "right-wing extremists within the security agencies," which showed that the number of investigations into suspected right-wing extremist cases inside the security agencies has increased sharply in recent years.

For example, since the beginning of 2017, there have been 319 investigations into suspected right-wing extremism in the authorities at state level (police, state criminal investigation offices, secret service). At the federal level (including the Federal Police, Federal Criminal Police Office, BKA and Customs), there were 58 cases of suspicion, and 1,064 at the Military Counter-intelligence Service (MAD). Investigations by MAD were mainly related to the Bundeswehr, where the number of suspected right-

wing extremist cases increased by a third between 2018 and 2019.

The report by *Mediendienst Integration* cites numerous racist and right-wing extremist incidents in the security agencies between 2017 and October 2021. Again and again, it involves right-wing extremist chat groups in the police. Apart from the cases in NRW, similar groups came to light in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Hesse and Berlin and almost all other federal states. Racist incidents are also mentioned again and again.

Links between police officers and the Reichsbürger (groups that reject the legitimacy of the post-war German state), Q-Anon types, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and other right-wing extremist and fascist parties, right-wing extremist and right-wing terrorist networks in the Bundeswehr, connections to the neo-fascist Nordkreuz group as well as to the "Hannibal Network" and the "Uniter" association of ex-military and police are cited. Some of these groups are preparing for a so-called "Day X," maintain "enemy lists" and have organized stocks of body bags for their political opponents.

*Mediendienst Integration* writes, "one reads little in the official situation reports about some networks reported in media."

The compilation of known right-wing extremist and right-wing terrorist incidents related to the security agencies alone shows that these are not isolated cases. The right-wing extremist groups within the NRW police are part of a far-right extremist network that extends across all the security agencies and is promoted and covered up by the intelligence services.

These right-wing extremist structures are being used to prepare the state to suppress the growing resistance of the working class against mass layoffs, social cuts, herd immunity policies and militarism. Workers must prepare politically and build the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party).



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