

# Tips and Tricks for Riots

Advice on how to act prudently and with  
panache in the streets.



No Trace Project / No trace, no case. A collection of tools to help anarchists and other rebels **understand** the capabilities of their enemies, **undermine** surveillance efforts, and ultimately **act** without getting caught.

Depending on your context, possession of certain documents may be criminalized or attract unwanted attention—be careful about what zines you print and where you store them.



## **Tips and Tricks for Riots**

### **Original text in German**

Tipps und Tricks für Riots and Stuff

2016

[autonomesblaettchen.noblogs.org/files/2016/05/nr24web.pdf](https://autonomesblaettchen.noblogs.org/files/2016/05/nr24web.pdf)

### **Translation and layout**

No Trace Project

[notrace.how/resources/#tips-and-tricks](https://notrace.how/resources/#tips-and-tricks)

rocks and search all the garbage cans in the area to find your change of clothes, for example. You should avoid leaving DNA and fingerprints as much as possible, and after the riot it's important to dispose of your belongings properly. Proper disposal means disposing of them in such a way that a forensics team can't trace them back to you.

Once at home, we again dispose of things if necessary. Before leaving home we try to keep our trips to other cities as secret as possible, and when we return we try to keep our activities in the riot secret as well. We have noticed that after a nice riot, the attention to caution decreases for a while, and we try to work against this as best we can. We talk about what happened only in a trusted circle, if possible, but in detail. What was good? What was bad? What didn't work at all? What would we have liked to do, but couldn't? What do we still need to figure out? Did anyone get arrested? Is there a need for anti-repression support? Should we write a report? What's next for us?

## **And Then It Actually Starts All Over Again**

What can be said in summary? Maybe that we think that if you want to enjoy riots on a regular basis, you have to change your everyday life a bit. You have to be informed about the actions of the cops where you live, as far as investigations are concerned. Be familiar with surveillance techniques. Know how to avoid traces. Be able to show solidarity even in a scuffle. Unfortunately, not everything can be secured, there's always a residual risk. Keep it as low as possible. Better safe than sorry.

See you!

running is that the slow ones still get caught, and in general we just don't like running from cops. Many people agree with this, but don't always put it into practice, thinking instead, "I'll be lucky if I get out of here in one piece." We shouldn't be making judgments here, but still, if you can make sure you don't panic and run too early in the riot, and if you can run while still paying attention to others, that's a good start.

In our affinity group, we always try to have a collective overview of whether everyone is still there. In case we get lost, we always have a meeting point for after the riot, away from the action, where we check if anyone has been arrested. During the riot we sometimes lose sight of each other, but so far we have almost always found each other again, at the latest afterwards. So if you have lost everyone, try to stay calm. You probably won't be alone for long, and if you are, there's always the post-riot meeting point.

When the riot is over, it's over. That's actually a good thing to keep in mind. That is when the cops have created a favorable situation for themselves, all the large gatherings have dispersed, and the people dressed in black are becoming fewer and fewer. Then it is time for us to retreat for the time being. How directly and whether we go home at this point always depends on the concrete circumstances. Leaving is an important aspect for us that is always completely decided in advance. We don't like the idea of being stopped on the way home, even if we've already gotten rid of all the sketchy things we had with us.

After the riot, we dispose of all the clothes we can. On the other side, the forensics starts, and if you thought that the cops would not collect so many traces after a big riot, you should discard that belief. Unfortunately, they just collect as many traces, as best they can. Sometimes they will pick up

We think riots are great, but this is not a contribution to the debate about whether rioting here and there makes sense every time, whether it must be communicable, and so on. Rather, this text is based both on the observation that some people have been arrested recently, and on the observation that not everyone involved in riots has exhausted their preparation options. To be clear: we think it's perfectly fine for comrades to riot without any preparation, and we certainly don't want to be condescending here, nor pretend that we can always avoid getting caught. Nevertheless, we think that the times we have been involved in riots have brought us some valuable reflections and experiences that we would like to share with everyone here, because both the likelihood of getting caught and the negative consequences of getting caught can be reduced. Both are worth it, so that we can continue to express our strong hostility to the State, the cops, Nazis, capitalism, patriarchy, etc., together, in the future.

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effect on everyone. Suddenly one person wants to leave, the other person wants to go on the offensive again, and it can be difficult to communicate with each other in the appropriate tone. This can be off-putting, but we find it useful to talk about it at another time rather than while we're in the streets.

About difficult decision making: normally we would discuss everything sufficiently and everyone would explain their position. But under stress, that is not so easy. That's why we decide in advance who is going to move with whom, so that not everyone has to coordinate with everyone else, which often does not work anyway.

For the riot itself, of course, there are some things to consider. For example, if you can't throw far enough to hit something you want to hit, then you have to keep moving forward. If you're afraid to move forward, or it doesn't work, then you shouldn't throw, or you need to pick a target within your range. It's as simple as that, but in the heat of the moment, of course, things are flying all over the place, and it can happen that your comrades hit you even though there's no good reason for it. That's because they couldn't follow this simple rule, either because they were too excited, or they overestimated themselves, or... maybe they don't like you, so they throw things at you and then blame it on their excitement? We don't care what the reason is, we try to avoid hitting comrades as much as possible, and we advise everyone to do the same.

When the cops charge, it makes sense not to run completely head over heels, but that's almost always what happens anyway, even if the numbers are on our side. When this happens, it's sometimes useful to shout something reassuring, like "calm down," but then you shouldn't run yourself. If you're running, don't run over anyone, and if you do run over someone, stop and pick them up. What we don't like about

afterwards, so this aspect is very important, all the time while something is going on, as well as on arrival and departure. Firstly, they always have at least one person filming, and the footage is pretty good at this point. They evaluate the footage while the action is still going on, if they can, and then catch people afterwards. And secondly, they have plainclothes cops looking for crimes: they are there from the beginning to the end, they watch who changes and what the person looks like afterwards, they follow that person until their colleagues come, and finally they give a sign that they are behind a person who should be arrested. That's why it's so important to choose a good moment to change, both before and after the riot. Of course, the better the disguise, the fewer features they'll be able to recognize later. That's why we always make sure to be thorough when masking. For example, we sometimes use extra wide black jackets so that our body shape is not easily recognizable. After masking, we check each other to see if there are any hairs sticking out or anything else that might be recognizable. That's why it's important for us to change back and forth as little as possible.

A riot can be a very, very exciting thing. Especially when you're not standing on the sidelines watching, but right in the middle of it. This brings a number of effects that we don't all experience every day. For example, adrenaline, which has a number of effects that are quite useful for the riot. The cops also have this effect, which is why they train specifically to control it. We're not cops, and we don't train for it, even though we don't think it would be a bad idea. But knowing about it helps us a little bit to deal with this effect. For example, after a strong adrenaline rush, friendly agreements are not so easy and the tone can change somehow, which can be quite annoying, especially because not everyone gets an adrenaline rush at the same time and it does not have the same

## Before the Riot

We take this approach: we pay attention to how we behave not only during the riot, but also when we go about our normal daily lives. We ask ourselves: what behavior can help make it easier for the cops and prosecutors to catch us in their investigations? There are a lot of things to take into account, of course, and some of them turn out to be completely impractical, but here are some very general suggestions that we think are important.

Let's start with the mobile phone. No question, phones are generally useful things. However, they multiply the possibilities of surveillance. There are already very useful texts explaining the technical background, we don't want to go into that here. In practice, our advice is simply: leave mobile phones at home as often as possible, even on normal trips, when visiting friends, etc. A few of us have gotten rid of them altogether, because every now and then a conversation comes up that unintentionally brings up illegal things and then the fiddling starts. Who has a phone with them, is it off? Is it enough that it's off? What to do with the devices? This is annoying, and there is always the risk of forgetting that you have a phone in your pocket. By consistently leaving them at home, everyone can help ensure that no one gets into trouble.

In addition, investigating authorities are particularly interested in who meets with whom, when and where, and this information is provided by the countless phones, even if they are turned off at the meeting point or put in a box and put aside. We consider this aspect particularly important: suppose one of us is caught. The follow-up question that even the dumbest cop can ask is: who was he/she traveling with? Where was he/she at what time? We don't want to give the

answer voluntarily, but phones and their Google and Apple accounts deliver this information on a silver platter. It's certainly inconvenient to pay attention to this, but it is even more inconvenient to sit in a jail cell at some point. The way we see it, there's no such thing as irrelevant data ("oh, who cares, it doesn't matter if they know that"), nor is there a truly secure way to use phones. And you should not trust apps that claim otherwise (e.g. through encryption).

What applies to mobile phones also applies to the Internet and computers. If you're not careful about how you use them, you can give away a lot of clues about who you are and what you like to do, long before you even get involved in a riot. That's why we make sure that our computer communication is encrypted, that we do not use particularly insecure operating systems (Windows, macOS) and that we are as anonymous as possible on the Internet. The latter is always a balance between convenience and security, and even if we do not think about security every time we use the Internet, we try to stay up to date. This is true of any technology: those who use it should keep up to date. Technological capabilities are growing at an insane rate these days, and at least we don't want to regret not having stayed sufficiently up to date (which of course can still be the case). At least for sketchy research, reading legally questionable articles and the like, we recommend using Tails. For everyday use, we recommend using an encrypted Linux system, Firefox (or ideally Tor) for surfing, and not using any Google services. An absolute no for us is the use of Facebook, and we advise anyone who likes to riot to refrain from using it.

Why not use Facebook? It would be beyond the scope of this article to talk about it, but in short the analysis capabilities of Facebook (and Google) are beyond our imagination and

Last but not least, a few concrete tips: have a change of jacket for every riot. A new pair of gloves (never without gloves!). A good mask like a balaclava or a t-shirt (no hats or scarves, they are good for demos but not for riots). A pair of all black shoes. A change of clothes to wear over your black outer jacket. A pair of black pants. Clean any material you'll be bringing with you and clean it again if necessary, so that it has no or at least as few traces (fingerprints, DNA) on it as possible. If you want/need to make a phone call, use a new burner cell phone with a charged battery, with a new SIM card that you haven't activated at home, and leave both the battery and SIM card out of the phone at home.

## During the Riot

There is no hard and fast rule for us when to start. Sometimes people prepare something, and if we know something about the plans, we follow them or not, depending on if we think they are useful. We think for ourselves: do we want to riot, and if so, we take what we need with us (see above). Sometimes we know beforehand, sometimes not. In any case, it is important for us not to focus too much on the cops before the riot starts. In our experience, riots are most likely to start where there are few or no cops, so we look for those places.

We change our clothes as best we can, away from the cops, and if there is no other way, we retreat as far as possible into a mass of people and make ourselves small. The important thing is that the cops don't see us changing. Some of them are good at remembering things, like how we look before and after changing clothes, if they catch the moment when we do it. For this reason, we also avoid walking around half changed. So either riot outfit OR normal outfit, but no mixes if possible. There are cops who specialize in finding people

feeling when we suddenly find ourselves in a place where an opportunity definitely arises that we were told “It's never going to happen,” and then we don't have what we need to act on it. Such a would-have-been chain quickly leads to us getting carried away and doing something thoughtlessly that might go well, but we prefer to be well prepared. So, we try to talk everything through beforehand, and off we go.

Two more quick things: don't overplan. We've found that if we spend hours and hours talking about something, we can't do anything with all the conversations because things turn out completely different. We think that flexible preparation is good: think about what we want to do and prepare for it, but also stay open to the possibilities that may arise. Too much planning, taking into account too many details, can lead to focusing on an overly concrete course of events and not being able to adapt quickly if things turn out differently, or having to throw everything out because a detail in the big plan has changed, which then makes everything else fall apart. Then the disappointment is huge because so much time was spent planning. After all, we're not talking about a concrete action in the middle of the night where detailed planning can work, but a riot, where many factors develop very dynamically.

The other thing: don't underplan. Don't go in with the attitude that somebody else is going to start things. Don't count on some ominous figure kicking off the riot. The most beautiful thing is to be that ominous figure yourself. Be prepared to just throw a firecracker or some paint and that's fine, it doesn't always have to be the full program. Maybe the firecracker or paint is exactly what you'll need. And for us, it's more convenient to take the firecracker or paint home or dispose of them somewhere than to have nothing with us at the right moment.

therefore using it is at least as bad as running your mouth at the bar.

While we're on the subject, another aspect that we try to make sure of is that we don't talk about riots and our possible involvement in them at inopportune times. This makes you seem a little strange to people at times. Almost everyone is curious, and if your secrecy becomes too obvious, it is counterproductive, but you have to be able to handle that. In any case, we find it important not to talk about our participation in riots with anyone except with those with whom exchange is useful and necessary. Of course it happens from time to time, but we try to keep it to a minimum, and in any case to always decide explicitly the contexts in which we talk about it.

Such secrecy can be quite difficult to handle, because we experience some not-so-unspectacular things when we are out and about. We actually like to share these things, and maybe it's also about getting a little recognition for the deeds that take so much out of us. However, we recommend that you deal with this with your affinity group rather than blindly giving in to it. As with everything we write about, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Do you have a tidy room? Of course, everyone has to deal with this as they see fit, but the important thing to remember is that you never really know when a house raid is coming, or what they will be looking for. This is why we regularly make sure that our rooms, whether they are tidy or chaotic, are at least always tidy in the sense that there is as little harmful material lying around as possible. Things that shouldn't be lying around include: fireworks, slingshots, too many items of the same kind of clothing (e.g. gloves, balaclavas, black hoodies), communiques, texts like this one, and so on. It is not always the single incriminating item that matters, the sketchy

collection should also be avoided. If the cops get the order to knock on your door with a “Good morning, house raid,” then they definitely want to take something away with them. And you should simply be well prepared for this, even and especially if nothing specific is going on, but you are generally active. If they can't find what they're looking for, they'll see if there's something else they can use against you.

Let's move on to another point: riots cost money. No, we're not talking about the property damage in the x-digit range that is always talked about, which we don't have to pay for, but the money it costs us to prepare for the riot. This aspect should not be underestimated. One might ask, why, stones don't cost anything? That's true, of course, but gloves cost money, changing clothes costs money, fireworks cost money, traveling costs money, lawyers cost money, etc. So it is always important for us to talk about money and we try to distribute the money in a way that nobody gets into financial trouble. Security is a priority for us. That means we also give each other money so that no one has to use the same clothes too often, because we attach great importance to looking different as much as possible. There are some people who love to wear their very practical Northface jackets, and some of them tape off the lettering when they riot or demonstrate. For us personally, that's not enough, so we make sure to carry things that we don't think twice about throwing away, and we get new ones regularly. And we would recommend this for all types of clothing, i.e. shoes, pants, jacket, gloves and so on, everything except socks and underwear. As a result, sometimes we don't seem to be very well dressed when we show up at a demo. But for us, such things are not a matter of style.

Is that it for the preparation? Almost, the only part that remains is the arrangements and the concrete preparation.

What we have written so far has been very general, now we come to the time immediately before a riot. Here we give ourselves enough time to talk through everything. Where are we going and what is it like there? What are the possibilities there? Do we have everything we need? Who will provide what? Are comrades we know coming? Are any of us sick? Is anyone afraid, does anyone have fears and worries?

This last question is always very important to us. It contains a critical point. On the one hand, we can all become stiff and obsessed with such fears and worries, and then it really becomes impossible to do anything. On the other hand, fears and worries can also point out mistakes in planning or inadequate preparation, and then improvements can be made. It is a good thing to deal with your own fears from time to time. Of course, it is important not to judge anyone for their fears or for not taking their fears seriously, but it is also important not to let fear disempower us. The better we deal with fear, the freer our minds are and that is always a good thing.

One more thing about the preparatory talks: when it comes to riots, almost everyone seems to be an expert. “It's always like this,” “It's clear, the cops will act this way and that way,” “In any case, this and that will work.” That there is this exact knowledge is astonishing, when in fact most of us have very little experience with riots, because unfortunately there are hardly any riots in Germany... To say “It will definitely go exactly this way or that way” is unwise. We always try not to talk like that, but to be open to what will happen. It is less important for us to answer the question “Will it happen exactly this way or that way?” than the following questions: are we prepared for what we want to do, are we clear about our personal goals, and do we have everything we need to be able to act when the opportunity arises? It's a really stupid