

KETTLE

Toronto Police has not kettled any protest since the G20 — although the Land Day march on March 30th, 2024 saw a kettle-like use of police lines to contain people and restrict their movement. TPS lost millions of dollars in lawsuits after the G20 arrests, and they have since developed many “less controversial” tactics for crowd control. For those reasons, it is highly unlikely that they will kettle protesters for mass arrest any time soon. Of course, this does not necessarily apply to other cities.

The J20 umbrella charge in 2017 is one example of how to respond to a kettle in progress. Seeing that a kettle was forming, but that reinforcements had not yet arrived, a group of protesters identified a weaker point in the police line. They began a countdown to choreograph their move — and then, using a single umbrella to block pepper spray, they rammed into the police line with their own wedge-like formation. Concentrating their entire force on a single spot, they successfully broke through, freeing about 50 people. Over 200 others, those who didn’t escape, were arrested that day.

See CrimethInc.’s article, “Making the Best of Mass Arrests: 12 Lessons from the Kettle During the J20 Protests,” for more information and a video of the umbrella charge.

POLICE FORMATIONS



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POLICE FORMATIONS



Police violence is usually not random. It is deliberate and serves strategic purposes. Cops in major cities receive training on crowd control and managing mass protests. There are often signs of incoming escalation that you can spot if you know what to look for. Knowing what to expect makes it possible to prepare accordingly.

Here, we introduce some common police formations. This is not a comprehensive list. We encourage people to think about police objectives and caution against relying only on identifying visual similarities. Different formations with very different objectives can look very similar on the ground.

Always maintain situational awareness, keep your eyes on the cops, and exercise your own judgment. Ask yourself:

What do the police want to accomplish?

(Do they want to mass arrest you, or do they want you to get the fuck out?)

How would they accomplish it?

(How many cops would it take? How would they move to do it?)

Note that the specifics of police training varies from city to city. This post is written from Tkaronto (occupied Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory) in so-called Ontario, Canada. Insights from comrades all over the world can inform your tactics, but it is most important to analyze trends of police practices in your own local context.

(Honourable
Mention)

KETTLE

A kettle is when multiple lines of police surround a crowd from all sides, letting no one in or out. (In some cases, they may selectively let out, e.g., fascists but no one else.) This is very often a precursor to mass arrests, often of hundreds of people.

The only way out of a kettle is through. You cannot leave a kettle without physically charging through a line of cops.

Holding a crowd in place is different from and, in some sense, opposite of TPS's more usual objective to disperse and clear people out. Both the G20 in Toronto and the J20 Trump inauguration protests in Washington, DC, for example, were large events of international significance with multiple, more spread-out protests happening. In those situations, the police may want to prevent protesters from "running riot" and regrouping if they simply break up a march.

Police objectives:

- Hold a crowd in place
- Carry out mass arrests

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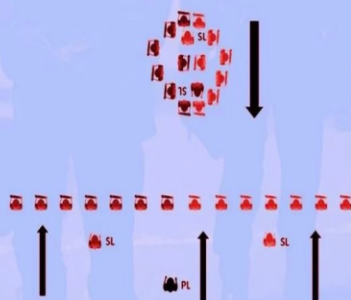
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- Carry out mass arrests

CROSSBOW

Once the arrest team has apprehended its target, it will quickly form a circle around the arrestee to prevent other protesters from intervening. It will then retreat back behind the police line with the arrestee.

Cops will often point to specific people in the crowd or whisper to each other before carrying out a crossbow extraction. It may be possible to know in advance who they plan to target, and that person can disappear deeper into the crowd for safety. If you see a crossbow but don't know who they're after, hold onto each other tightly — and among your own front line, prepare to resist a sudden police push.



LINE

This is probably the most common police formation. A line allows the police to control space while also reinforcing each other and providing the numbers to quickly execute arrests of people on the front lines if needed. More spontaneous arrests often happen when protesters are within reach of the police line.

Controlling the space may mean blocking off streets or other areas. It may also mean moving together to shove a crowd backwards, whether to contain or disperse them. Often, police will try to ensure that protesters are only one side of the police line. On the other side, they may stage vehicles, horses, and other squads on foot. They will usually try to take arrestees behind the line as quickly as possible to make it harder for the crowd to de-arrest.



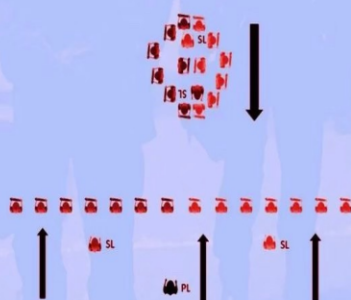
Police objectives:

- Contain a crowd & control the space
- Direct a crowd's movement & push people back
- Provide each other backup to carry out arrests

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- Contain a crowd & control the space
- Direct a crowd's movement & push people back
- Provide each other backup to carry out arrests

WEDGE

A wedge comes out when police intend to break through a crowd. It allows the cops to concentrate their force at one specific point, making it easier for them to part people from each other. Note that wedges don't always aim for the centre of a crowd. They will likely go for whichever point in the front line appears the weakest.

Police may want to get through people who are in the way of something – for example, if you're obstructing a fascist march or an encampment clearing. They may also just want to split up a mass of people and force protesters to disperse.



To resist a wedge, you should reinforce each other to resist the push – but be mindful that in a large shoving match, cops may suddenly pull someone out of the crowd for arrest.

Police objectives:

- Break through a crowd

CROSSBOW

A crossbow formation is used for targeted arrests, often of suspected “leaders” or “agitators” who are positioned behind the front lines of the crowd. It looks like a “T” shape: a front line of cops and, behind it, a column made up of at least two cops per row, positioned directly perpendicular to the line. To carry out the arrest, the column will charge through the crowd, trying to penetrate it and capture the target.



Police objectives:

- Carry out targeted arrests

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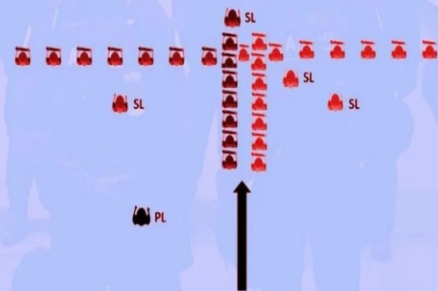
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