

SOLIDARITY UNDER SIEGE

*Germany's repression of the
Palestine Movement*



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Published by the Transnational Institute
Amsterdam, November 2025

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AfD – Alternative for Germany

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BDS – Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

BIPoC – Black, Indigenous and People of Colour

BMBF – Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung)

CDU – Christian Democratic Union

CNN – Cable News Network

CSO(s) – Civil Society Organisation(s)

CSU – Christian Social Union

DW – Deutsche Welle

ELSC – European Legal Support Center

EU – European Union

FDP – Free Democratic Party

FES – Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

FU – Freie Universität Berlin
(Free University of Berlin)

HU – Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
(Humboldt University of Berlin)

IAI – Israel Aerospace Industries

ICC – International Criminal Court

ICJ – International Court of Justice

IHL – International Humanitarian Law

JV – Joint venture

LMU – Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

MP – Member of Parliament

NGO(s) – Non-Governmental Organisation(s)

PR – Public relations

SA – Sturmabteilung (Nazi paramilitary)

SPD – Social Democratic Party of Germany

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNRWA – United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

US – United States

XR – Extinction Rebellion

ZDF – Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen
(German public TV channel)



Demonstration in Berlin in March 2024. The poster reads 'Gaza is getting bombed. Gaza is hungry. Gaza is being exterminated.' Photo: Faisal Yassin.

Report Summary

Since 7 October 2023, German authorities have imposed a far-reaching domestic crackdown on Palestine solidarity throughout the state in tandem with the political, diplomatic and material backing for Israel's genocide in Gaza. This ranges from protest bans and police violence, to smear campaigns, cultural de-platforming, workplace reprisals, and the instrumentalisation of migration and asylum law. Together, these measures illustrate the emergence of a repressive infrastructure in Germany which criminalises almost any effective form of solidarity with Palestine and threatens broader civil liberties.

The report covers the first 18 months of the genocide, from 7 October 2023 until mid-April 2025. It synthesises interviews with activists, legal and political analysis and case evidence across four pillars of repression that map onto the report's structure:

- (1) Germany's complicity in Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine and its genocide in Gaza;
- (2) the legal-political architecture that deliberately conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism;
- (3) policing, violence, censorship and economic pressure against activists and critical voices; and
- (4) the role of media, non-government organisations (NGOs) and parts of the political left in enabling this climate.

The report finds that since October 2023 Aimé Césaire's 'boomerang' is coming back in full force from the colony to the metropole. Germany's support for Israel's apartheid regime and war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Gaza, and attacks on other states has translated into repressive policies, mass surveillance, police brutality, and a shrinking space for free expression at home. Germany is not merely absorbing this violence, but is refining, institutionalising, and exporting it. The country has become a laboratory for the criminalisation of solidarity with Palestine, testing how far it can go in suppressing free speech, banning protest, and bending the constitutional framework until it is almost unrecognisable.

Central to the repression of the Palestinian solidarity movement is the deliberate conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Germany's historic responsibility for the Holocaust is routinely used to justify another genocide and the repression of those who try to stop it. Critics of Israel, many of whom are Jewish, are labelled as antisemitic and Palestinians who mourn their dead and demand justice are cast as a threat to public order.

This crackdown is not enforced by state power alone. Media outlets play a direct role in manufacturing consent by consistently justifying the genocide in Gaza as 'Israel's right to self-defence' and the violence inflicted upon Palestinians in Gaza and increasingly the West Bank. Domestically, they have uncritically echoed official German and Israeli state political and police narratives, dismissing or even inciting violence against the solidarity movement and ignoring the rapidly shrinking space for dissent. Many civil society actors have effectively self-policed their members, disinvited Palestinian speakers, cancelled events, and remained

silent in the face of repression. Even sectors of the German left and social movements, fearing reputational damage or funding cuts, have failed to resist Germany's authoritarian shift. Worse, in many cases they have actively enabled it.

The crackdown has not only targeted movements in support of Palestine but has also served to test a broader transformation towards authoritarianism. A defining feature is the conflation with migration policy. Under the pretext of combating antisemitism and extremism and in a general climate of increasingly inhumane, harmful and at times deadly migration policies, immigration law has also become a tool of political control. The state has refused visas, carried out deportations or blocked people's naturalisation because of social media posts or attending protests, acts which are protected under international human rights law. Residency status, citizenship, and asylum rights are now contingent on ideological conformity. While state actors continue to single out rising antisemitism, other forms of racism, particularly Islamophobia, have surged, with people paying for this with their health and lives.

The crackdown is not occurring in a vacuum. It is part of a broader shift towards the hard-right and the securitisation and militarisation of various domains in German and in global politics. What we are witnessing is not only complicity in a genocide, but an attempt to remilitarise German society, to redefine dissent as extremism, and to equate liberation movements with Nazism. Measures tested on the Palestinian solidarity movement may well be extended to other dissenting groups, from environmentalists to anti-militarists.

The consequences are of course also deeply personal. For many Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and anti-Zionist Jewish residents in Germany, daily life has become a climate of violence and fear, as highlighted in the interviews with activists. Even so, people are resisting. While the media echo state narratives, ever more people are seeing through these. Protests continue, even in the face of police violence. Palestinian voices remain defiant.



During a Palestine solidarity protest in Berlin in July 2024, activists reported massive police brutality. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

Introduction

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'I don't feel safe at all, actually. I try not to really leave the house alone unless I'm meeting someone or going somewhere in particular. I've found it that I'm just exposed to a lot more Islamophobia and aggression when I'm trying to navigate things alone.'

– Hebh Jamal, Palestinian journalist and activist living in Berlin

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'And already then, it was clear that Germany is particularly difficult for a Palestinian. I was always asking myself, why am I moving to the hardest place? It's one of the hardest places in the world for a Palestinian to live. Actually, I think it is the hardest place in the West.'

– Jamila,¹ a Palestinian activist based in Berlin

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'We felt like we were dealing with settler soldiers, colonial soldiers, but with German clothes. The beginning after the 7 October has been completely about misconceptions and about reproducing images of us as terrorists, as antisemites. Before 7 October we were potential antisemites. After the 7 October we were antisemites. Before 7 October, we were potential terrorists. After 7 October we were terrorists. So, this is the kind of collective punishment that migrants and Palestinians experience.

I started feeling personally that all those police who raid our house – that's only gangs. The use of force, excessive force, and violence against protesters has been extraordinary and overwhelming and also illegitimate. And it's not just about the brutality, but it also shows the kind of legitimacy the police have to actually practise such brutality without any accountability.

And that felt extremely dangerous. As a father, I felt like I might not be able to protect my daughters, and I might be the next one who is actually imprisoned with my daughters. Many families who have kids started to be very scared to go demonstrate on anything to do with Palestine, because of the extreme violence and brutality and the way that our areas became very militarised. As if we are actually dealing with checkpoints everywhere. German police have been stopping and interrogating Palestinians. They're demanding IDs from people of colour, but not from people who are white. And it became increasingly accepted, and this kind of acceptance is not talked about, that it is actually fine to police and racially profile everyone who's not white.'

– Majed Abusalama, Co-founder of Palestine Speaks

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'So just that you have an idea of how it is to be a Jew nowadays in Germany, where everybody wishes to protect you by basically silencing you, beating you up, and doing everything they can to make sure you don't feel safe in the public sphere of Germany. And then saying it's all done in the name of anti-Semitism.'

– Udi Raz, Member of Jewish Voice for Peace

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At the time of writing, the Gaza ‘peace deal’ has just entered its second month and has been rubber-stamped by the United Nations Security Council.² But far from anything resembling peace, the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine, backed, armed and facilitated by the US and European states continues, as does the genocide. Since the fragile agreement came into force, Israel has violated it with near daily attacks, killing more than 312 Palestinians – including almost two children per day³ – and injuring more than 760.⁴ This brings the total number of confirmed victims in Gaza since 7 October 2023 to more than 69,000. The number of aid trucks allowed to enter Gaza is only a fraction of what is required to combat the engineered famine, with Israel’s arbitrary restrictions on more than 350 essential food items making the situation even more dire.⁵ Meanwhile in the West Bank, violent settler attacks, often backed by the Israeli army are at an all-time high, while Israel’s parliament has officially approved the colonial plan to annex the territory.⁶ Palestinians continue to be prisoners in their homeland.

Regardless, Germany’s Chancellor Friedrich Merz has officially declared the crisis is over. Asked about the ‘peace’ plan in an interview on 9 October 2025, he said that ‘there is no reason anymore to demonstrate for Palestinians in Germany. There will be peace in Gaza and that’s the good news.’⁷ Defying his words, tens of thousands of people came out on the streets of Berlin on 11 October to protest against German complicity, for accountability for the genocide and an end to apartheid and settler colonialism.⁸ They were met with police violence, such as punches to the head, chest and abdomen, pain grips, choke grips, and arbitrary arrests, including of at least three minors.⁹ As this report will show, far from being an exception, this has become ‘the new normal’ for anti-genocide protestors.

On 19 October 2023, when Israel’s military onslaught had already killed close to 3,500 people in Gaza,¹⁰ the Strip’s only cancer hospital was on the verge of shutting down. By then, Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant had publicly ordered a ‘complete siege’ of Gaza, declaring ‘there will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed’ – and referred to Palestinians as ‘human animals’.¹¹ After committing to Germany’s full solidarity in what was already becoming a genocidal onslaught, Germany’s former Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared in parliament that the country would show ‘a clear edge’ against antisemitism and ‘the glorification of violence’.¹² This ‘edge’ had already included a blanket ban on anti-Israel protests in Berlin and a violent crackdown on any form of solidarity with Palestinians – and that was just the start. Subsequently, the German government entrenched what the former Chancellor Angela Merkel termed its ‘*Staatsräson*’, or *raison d’état* – namely unconditional support for Israel. This doctrine has since been weaponised in Germany against domestic dissent, as the country provides arms used in a genocide abroad and criminalises those who oppose it at home.

The ‘boomerang’ analysis of the Palestinian-US lawyer Noura Erakat describing the United States (US) applies equally to Germany;¹³ what we have seen since October 2023 is Aimé Césaire’s ‘boomerang’ coming back in full force from the colony to the metropole. Germany’s support for Israel’s apartheid regime and war crimes is translated into repressive policies, mass surveillance, police brutality, and a shrinking space for free expression. Germany is not merely absorbing this violence, but is refining, institutionalising, and exporting it. The country has become a laboratory for the criminalisation of solidarity with Palestine, testing how far it can go in suppressing free speech, banning protest, and bending the constitutional framework until it is almost unrecognisable. What happens in Berlin today is becoming the pattern for other countries tomorrow.

Globally, the Palestinian cause has become a lightning rod for repression. In 2024 alone, according to the international non-government organisation (NGO) Civicus, it accounted for over 10% of all documented restrictions on free speech worldwide.¹⁴ But Germany's repression stands out in its scale and intensity: The Civic Space Report 2025 by the European Civic Forum singles out Germany as one of the most repressive EU Countries when it comes to Palestine advocacy¹⁵, and the European Legal Support Centre's Index of Repression has documented more than 700 incidents in Germany since 2019 (most of these since 7 October 2023), affecting thousands across a broad range of the population.¹⁶

Central to the repression of the Palestinian solidarity movement is the deliberate conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Germany's historic responsibility for the Holocaust (or Shoah) is routinely used to justify another genocide and the repression of those who try to stop it. Critics of Israel, many of them themselves Jewish, are labelled as antisemitic and the Palestinians who mourn their dead and demand justice are cast as threats to public order. Seeking out supposed antisemites might soon be conducted with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI).¹⁷ Yet the real drivers of Germany's alliance with Israel are less ethical than material: Germany's foreign policy aligns with US geostrategic interests, and arms companies like Rheinmetall have seen their profits rise by over 2,000% in a decade.¹⁸ As James Baldwin wrote in 1979: *'The state of Israel was not created for the salvation of the Jews; it was created for the salvation of Western interests.'*¹⁹

This report presents a detailed account of the domestic costs in Germany of that salvation. It documents bans on demonstrations, police violence, mass arrests, loss of employment, academic suspensions, bank account closures, deportation orders, surveillance, censorship, and threats to legal residence. Together, they illustrate the emergence of a repressive infrastructure in Germany, which criminalises almost any effective form of solidarity with Palestine and threatens broader civil liberties.

This crackdown is not enforced by state power alone. Media outlets play a direct role in manufacturing consent for a genocidal war by consistently minimising the genocide in Gaza and the violence inflicted upon Palestinians. Domestically, they have uncritically echoed political and police narratives, dismissing or even inciting violence against the anti-genocide movement and ignoring the rapidly shrinking space of civil society. Liberal civil society actors, for their part, have self-policed their members, disinvited Palestinian speakers, cancelled events, and remained silent in the face of repression. Even sectors of the German left and climate movements, fearing reputational damage or institutional backlash, have failed to resist Germany's authoritarian shift. Worse, in many cases they have actively enabled it.

The crackdown has not only targeted the movement in support of Palestine, but has served to test a broader transformation towards authoritarianism, particularly in relation to Germany's migration policy. Under the pretext of combating antisemitism and extremism and in a general climate of increasingly deadly and harmful migration policies, immigration law has also become a tool of political control. The state has refused visas, effected deportations or blocked people's naturalisation for such minor issues as social media posts or attending protests. Residency status, citizenship, and asylum rights are now contingent on ideological conformity. While state actors continue to single out rising antisemitism, other forms of racism, particularly Islamophobia, have surged, with people paying with their health and lives. The 2025 *Grundrechte-Report* (Basic Rights Report), a civil society alternative to the German government's annual report on the protection of the constitution, states that '[the] exercise

of civil liberties is being offensively obstructed or prohibited with unprecedented intensity'. It goes on to emphasise that migrants are most affected by this obstruction of rights.²⁰

The crackdown is not occurring in a vacuum. It is part of a broader shift towards the hard-right and the securitisation and militarisation of various domains in German and global politics. What we are witnessing is not only complicity in a genocide, but an attempt to remilitarise German society, to redefine dissent as extremism, and to equate liberation movements with Nazism. As the filmmaker Dror Dayan notes: *'While Germany has never broken away from its Nazi past, it is now equating all its enemies – be it Palestinian freedom fighters or Russia – with its own Nazis. While Germany is propping up its own neo-Nazis in the AfD and CDU, it attempts to sell the world an image of itself as fighting Nazis. It simply lies about who those Nazis are.'*²¹ Police powers have expanded under the guise of public security. Measures tested on the Palestinian solidarity movement may well be extended to other dissenting groups, from environmentalists to anti-militarists. As a recent *Junge Welt* article put it, 'the state is warming up for a war-readiness that will target any opposition'.²²

The consequences are deeply personal. For many Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and anti-Zionist Jewish residents in Germany, daily life has become a climate of violence and fear, as highlighted in the quotes at the start of this introduction. Even so, people are resisting. While the media echo state narratives, ever more Germans are seeing through the official lies. In a May 2025 poll, over 80% of Germans said they believe that Israel's actions in Gaza are unjustified, up 11 percentage points from March 2024.²³ In another poll, 70% rejected German military support to Israel.²⁴ Protests continue, even in the face of police violence. Palestinian voices remain defiant. As the lawyer Nadija Samour reminds us, quoting Gandhi: 'First they ignore us, then they laugh at us, then they fight us – and then we win'.²⁵

Structure, Scope and Methodology

This report is structured as follows. Following the introduction and this sub-section on structure, scope and methodology, Chapter 2 presents the historical and political context for Germany's unwavering support for the Israeli state. It begins with a short history of this alliance before unpacking Germany's deliberate conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. It then examines the country's complicity in the current genocide in Gaza since 7 October 2023, including arms exports, diplomatic protection, and the ideological justification of mass violence. Chapter 3 focuses on the domestic landscape, documenting how Germany has repressed the Palestinian solidarity movement through legal changes and the criminalisation of dissent, police crackdowns on protest, censorship, funding cuts and 'deplatforming', as well as retaliation in some workplaces. It focuses especially on the intersection of anti-migration policy and the repression of solidarity with Palestine, exposing how these are used to justify each other. Chapter 4 turns to the wider complicity of German society. It analyses how the mainstream media have reproduced state narratives and engaged in smear campaigns against critical voices, how civil society organisations (CSOs) have remained silent or actively participated in the repression, and how the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary Left has failed to provide principled opposition, or indeed any opposition at all. Detailed timelines of legal changes, incidents of police violence and protest bans, cultural censorship and funding cuts, as well as workplace consequences of Palestine solidarity are presented in the appendices.

The report covers the first 18 months of the genocide, from 7 October 2023 until mid-April 2025. It is based on desk research and semi-structured interviews conducted in January and February 2025. The former relies on news reporting, expert analyses and social media posts, and is indebted especially to the excellent on-the-ground reporting of The Left Berlin. This also explains the report's slight bias towards the capital region. The report also draws on the insights of interviews with seven activists from the Palestinian solidarity movement, including Palestinians and German, Muslim and Jewish people, among other (overlapping) identities, who shared their trust, stories and time, for which I am extremely grateful. At their request, pseudonyms have been used for some of these activists.



Nakba Day Protest in Berlin, 2024. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

CHAPTER 1

German support for the Israeli occupation and genocide



Police in Berlin on New Year's Eve 2024. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

A brief history of Germany's support for Israel before 7 October 2023

For centuries, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire where people of different faiths, such as Christians, Jews and Muslims co-existed.²⁶ But during World War I Britain and France secretly carved up Ottoman lands under the Sykes–Picot Agreement.²⁷ Britain recognised Palestine's strategic value as a route to the Suez Canal and Iraqi oil, and in 1917 issued the Balfour Declaration, promising a 'national home for the Jewish people'.²⁸

This was a colonial calculation, since a settler population aligned with Britain would help secure its empire. Under the British Mandate, Zionist migration from Europe was encouraged, land was confiscated from Palestinians, and militias were armed and trained, while Palestinian political resistance was violently suppressed.²⁹ The Zionist project, in this sense, was 'wedded' to European colonialism, serving imperial interests through the establishment of a settler colony in Palestine. Under Hitler's rule (1933–1945), Nazi Germany murdered about six million Jews in the Holocaust or Shoah. After the Second World War (1939–1945), roughly 300,000 surviving Jews migrated from Germany and other European countries to Palestine, contributing to a steep increase in its Jewish population.

In 1947, a newly formed United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voted in favour of Resolution 181, which called for separate Jewish and Arab states in Palestine.³⁰ What followed was a period known as the Nakba or catastrophe, in which armed Zionist militias launched a campaign of mass expulsions and massacres, driving over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes, killing more than 15,000, and seizing more than 78% of historic Palestine. The remaining 22% of the original territory comprise the lands known today as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and Palestinians were displaced in their own territory and to neighbouring countries.³¹ In May 1948, as Britain withdrew, Israel declared 'independence' and was immediately recognised by the US, and the country was admitted to the United Nations the following year. Far from being a natural or peaceful emergence, Israel was born as a colonial project, rooted in European antisemitism, enabled by imperial powers, and realised through ethnic cleansing.

Germany's alliance with Israel began long before it was based on memory culture or official statements about Staatsräson. From the early 1950s, West Germany offered Israel extensive support, first through reparations and industrial equipment, and soon after through covert military aid. At the time, this support had little to do with Holocaust remembrance and more with the political needs of the post-war German state.

In 1952, the Israeli–West German Reparations Agreement ('Luxembourg Agreement') was signed, in which Germany agreed to pay Israel 3 billion German marks (roughly €9 billion equivalent in today's currency³²) over the next 12 years, effectively a ninth of Germany's federal budget.³³ The implementation of this agreement in 1953 marked the start of large-scale German aid to Israel. This included not only financial compensation, but also steel, ships, factory equipment and other forms of industrial assistance that helped the state of Israel survive in its early years.³⁴ Germany was Israel's most important financial supporter in this decade, more so than France, the UK, or the US.³⁵ Israel's chief negotiator, Nahum Goldman, called the agreement 'a downright salvation' for the country.³⁶

In parallel, military cooperation between the two states developed in secret. Following a meeting in 1957 between the West German Defence Minister Franz Josef Strauss and the Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Shimon Peres, Germany also began to supply weapons. These included howitzers, helicopters and eventually tanks, some of which were manufactured in the US and delivered through a three-way agreement.³⁷

This partnership allowed West Germany to improve its international image. In reality, the postwar Federal Republic made little effort to hold Nazi perpetrators accountable. Rather, it rehabilitated and reintegrated thousands of former Nazis into public life. In the 1950s, a majority of high-ranking officials in the judiciary, civil service, and police had served under the Nazi regime. This continuity was not accidental but reflected a political strategy: by treating Nazi crimes as the responsibility of a few exceptional individuals rather than a state system, West Germany could avoid a structural reckoning with its fascist past. When civil society actors attempted to break this silence, they were often met with hostility, such as the German prosecutor Fritz Bauer, who had played a key role in the 1963–1965 Auschwitz trials.³⁸

As Pankaj Mishra writes: ‘In West Germany, according to the British historian Mary Fulbrook, of the nearly 1 million people who “were at one point or another actively involved in killing Jewish civilians” (the number of enablers was much higher), “only 6,656 were convicted of Nazi crimes” – fewer even than the number of people who had been employed at Auschwitz alone’. By the end of the twentieth century, only 164 individuals had been sentenced for the crime of murder.³⁹

The political class needed a way to prove that West Germany had changed, but without carrying out any meaningful denazification. In this context, West Germany identified the Israeli state as the legitimate successor to the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, and support for Israel became a symbolic substitute for real denazification.⁴⁰ West Germany’s diplomatic and material assistance to Israel allowed it to externalise moral responsibility while leaving domestic power structures largely untouched. As one Israeli official put it: ‘The price Israel had to pay to secure its existence was the absolution of West Germany’.⁴¹

There were also strategic reasons for Germany’s early alliance with Israel. As Adam Hanieh, Professor of Political Economy and Global Development at the University of Exeter, argues, the Western post-war support for Israel must also be understood in the context of oil and control over the energy supply chains of the Global South.⁴² West German elites saw support for Israel as a way to align more closely with the US and secure their own position in the emerging Western bloc. At the same time, they feared that openly backing Israel would jeopardise relationships with oil-exporting Arab states. For this reason, the alliance was kept secret for over a decade.

By the time the US became Israel’s main international backer after the 1967 war, Germany had already provided financial, diplomatic, and military support. It is worth mentioning that West Germany itself was only able to re-attain its powerful position in Europe thanks to US financial support through the Marshall Plan, which channelled US\$13 bn in economic aid to Europe (the equivalent today of about US\$ 140 bn), 10% of which went to West Germany.⁴³ Its support to Israel was partially a result of its desire to prove to the US that it had rehabilitated itself, was ready for its sovereignty to be restored, and become a fully integrated part of the US imperial project as well as a NATO member, which it did in 1955.⁴⁴ Israel’s victory in 1967 (against Egypt, Jordan and Syria; occupying the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula) further strengthened this alliance, as West Germany became even more invested in its role as a partner and moral patron.

It was only by the mid-1980s that the form of dealing with the Nazi history changed from simply financial transfers to Israel and survivors and the state-sponsored Memory Culture began to crystallise.⁴⁵ Until 1981, the then Chancellor Helmut Schmidt had still advocated a 'normalisation' of relations with Israel – treating it like any other state. Yet just a year later, his government publicly invoked Germany's 'historical responsibility' to Israel.⁴⁶ This change was not driven by any moral awakening but rather by geopolitical calculations. At the time, a planned arms deal with Saudi Arabia provoked fierce Israeli and US opposition. As tensions escalated between Schmidt and the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, it became clear how fragile West Germany's ties were, not only with Israel, but with the US Jewish diaspora and US public opinion more broadly. The deal was eventually cancelled in January 1982. While the cancellation was never officially linked to Israel, Israeli and US observers understood the message. Germany adopted a so-called 'Israel clause', which stated that Germany's 'national interests' required it to 'honour its historical responsibility to the Jewish people'.⁴⁷

The 1985 speech by President Richard von Weizsäcker marking the 40th anniversary of Germany's defeat was widely seen as a turning point, as it framed the memory of Auschwitz as integral to Germany's moral rehabilitation.⁴⁸ Yet this moral framework quickly became less about universal responsibility and more about loyalty to Israel. As many critics have pointed out, Germany has gradually abandoned the idea that Holocaust remembrance entails a duty to prevent oppression everywhere, and replaced it with a singular duty to defend Israel.⁴⁹

The situation in East Germany was different. Until 1989, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) officially supported anti-colonial liberation movements, including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).⁵⁰ The GDR recognised the State of Palestine in 1988 and maintained an explicitly anti-Zionist line, framing Israel as an imperialist project backed by the West.⁵¹ This position was not rooted in solidarity with Palestinians per se, however, but in Cold War geopolitics and the GDR's efforts to position itself against West Germany. After reunification, the East German political legacy was quickly dismantled, including its support for Palestine. The unified German state fully adopted the US/West German line, consolidating support for Israel across all parties and institutions.

The Construction of *Staatsräson*

The German government's claim that Israel's security is part of its *Staatsräson* has become a cornerstone of political discourse, which allows the German state to present this alliance as both morally necessary and politically untouchable. But the principle is not based on international law or a treaty obligation but is rather a self-declared doctrine – and a fairly recent one. The term *Staatsräson*, applied to Germany's relations with Israel, became central to official policy only in the early 2000s, after the collapse of the Oslo Accords and during the Second Intifada. In 2005, Rudolf Dressler, then Germany's ambassador to Israel, argued that a solution to the 'conflict' could be achieved only by guaranteeing Israel's security against terror – Israel's security, in his words, had to become central to Germany's *raison d'état*.⁵²

The principle was elevated to government doctrine three years later, when Angela Merkel stood before the Israeli Knesset and declared in German: 'The security of Israel is part of Germany's *Staatsräson*'.⁵³ This sentence has since been repeated by every chancellor, party leader, and minister. *Staatsräson* is cited to justify financial, political and military aid to Israel. It underpins legal decisions, funding restrictions, and police violence against solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians. It has transformed Holocaust memory from a commitment to 'never again' into a justification for silencing critics, expelling students, criminalising slogans, and banning cultural events.

As the historian Enzo Traverso puts it: ‘*Staatsräson* reveals a contradiction in the rule of law: the law can be questioned, denied or transgressed on the basis of an overriding duty [...]. In this case, this duty is the unconditional defence of Israel, even if Israel is obviously committing war crimes or genocide’.⁵⁴

This doctrine stifles any political discussion of German support for Israel or suppression of Palestinian solidarity even before it starts. As the Professor of Law Florian Meinel writes: ‘She [Merkel] uses *Staatsräson* essentially as a synonym for what in other policy areas is called no alternatives. [...] *Staatsräson* is not a genuinely political decision, but precisely the morally motivated refusal to make one’.⁵⁵



Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a press conference in 2010.
Photo: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Flickr (CC BY-NC 2.0 License).

There is no comparable principle in German foreign policy for any other country. Germany never declared that the security of Bosnia, Rwanda, or Ukraine is part of its *raison d'être*, or even that of Namibia – where, as the colonial power, Germany committed a genocide, officially recognised as such in 2021.⁵⁶ The doctrine of *Staatsräson* is thus not about preventing future atrocities. It is about protecting Germany's alliance with Israel at all costs.

Pedagogical Narratives and Schooling

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'I think the problem with the Germans – it's not about the German people. I would just say it is ignorance and silence, because there is a huge manipulation and fear to speak out. But it is about the government, the institutions, the establishment that is sustaining this. So, the political establishment of Germany is manipulating the narrative. And we could see it in the schools, for example, where there were different campaigns against Palestinians and against Palestinian students, who are kids. There are many campaigns to cancel Palestine in schools. There are many campaigns against schools in Neukölln and Kreuzberg,⁵⁷ especially focusing on areas where Palestinians are the majority and migrants are the majority – feeling that we are the threat. To their own manipulated truth, we are the threat.'

– Majed Abusalama



*"This time we won't be able to claim that we didn't know anything." Demonstration in Frankfurt (Main), October 2025.
Photo: Faisal Yassin.*

Germany's framing of Israel's security as part of its Staatsräson has not been confined to foreign policy, it also penetrates domestic arenas where national identity is shaped. Education and teaching in particular have been mobilised to reproduce this commitment and to embed a specific narrative of history and responsibility that both define German political culture and narrow the space for critical debate. Thus, the massive repression of the Palestinian solidarity

movement on which this report focuses did not come out of the blue after 7 October. Rather, it is the turbocharged continuation of a long-standing trend that inevitably developed from the German Staatsräson. People have been cancelled and fired from their jobs, activists beaten, artists cancelled, and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was criminalised long before 7 October. German civil society, even on the Left, was overwhelmingly silent about this. One bizarre German phenomenon is that of so-called Anti-Deutsche ('Anti-Germans').⁵⁸ This Zionist movement emerged in the 1990s initially from the anti-fascist movement and now dominates part of the 'Left' while also having entered mainstream politics. The Anti-Deutsche scene treats Germany as inherently antisemitic and has responded by championing unconditional support for the Israeli state. In the name of protecting Jews, Anti-Deutsche activists have routinely smeared critics of Israeli policy as antisemites, conflating any expression of Palestinian solidarity with Nazism. They have become some of the most militant enforcers of the German consensus on Israel, actively disrupting Palestinian events, calling for bans, and helping to mainstream the weaponisation of accusations of antisemitism.

A part of the disinformation about Israel and refusal of many Germans to 'unlearn' what has been taught in a Zionist education system is that the Holocaust is framed as an isolated event, disconnected from Germany's broader colonial history and from the colonial nature of the Israeli state. The Nakba – the forced expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland in 1948 – is almost entirely absent in German curricula. Nor is the role of British and Zionist colonial forces in establishing Israel ever discussed. Rather, many German students are under the impression that the establishment of Israel is entirely an outcome of the Holocaust and that Jewish Israeli citizens are somehow the ancestors of the country's original inhabitants.⁵⁹

The impact of this narrative is felt strongly in classrooms. As the Palestinian-German student Daliah Vakili recalled in an interview with the online Israel-based independent news outlet +972, 'The word "Palestine" was strictly forbidden in my classroom'. When she said she was Palestinian, her teachers insisted she call herself Jordanian. Another teacher referred to her keffiyeh as a 'terrorist scarf'.⁶⁰ Her experience is not exceptional. A 12th-grade student in Saxony said that when she mentioned her Palestinian background, she was told she was Israeli instead: 'That was a really painful experience for me. My teacher implied my identity just didn't exist'.⁶¹

Much of this repression is institutionalised. In 2015, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs – Germany's main coordinating body for school curricula – marked 50 years of diplomatic ties with Israel by promoting joint educational programmes, including ministerial trips, vocational exchanges, and even a proposed 'Israel Day' in Berlin schools. A brochure encouraged teachers to frame German-Israeli relations as a model of 'rapprochement and friendship'. At the same time, a textbook commission identified 'shortfalls' in the portrayal of Israel and introduced revised digital teaching materials in partnership with Israel's Center for Educational Technology.⁶²

Meanwhile, the state is cracking down on attempts to fill these pedagogical gaps through informal education. Events that attempt to explain the history of the Nakba or Palestinian resistance are regularly banned, de-funded, or labelled antisemitic. In the name of historical responsibility, historical truth is increasingly being policed.⁶³

The conflation of Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism

Legal underpinnings before 7 October

Germany's state doctrine has long rested on a deliberately widened and distorted definition of antisemitism. Germany adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism in 2017. The IHRA is an international organisation composed of 35 member countries with the mission to advance Holocaust education worldwide. This definition has since become a key international tool for delineating what constitutes antisemitism in public discourse, with more than 45 countries officially adopting it by autumn 2025.⁶⁴ The definition runs as follows:

'Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities'.⁶⁵

It includes 11 illustrative examples, seven of which pertain to the State of Israel.⁶⁶ Originally developed as a non-binding guideline for data collection and education, the definition was never intended for legislative or disciplinary use. Indeed, Kenneth Stern, the original lead drafter, has maintained that the IHRA definition was not meant to silence speech.⁶⁷

Yet Germany has not only adopted the IHRA definition but augmented it with a national appendix that states 'Furthermore, the state of Israel, being perceived as a Jewish collective, may be the target of such attacks', cementing the conflation of Jewish identity with Israeli statehood.⁶⁸ This institutionalised a logic in which criticism of Israeli policies, particularly those related to occupation, apartheid, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza, are treated as attacks on Jewish life itself.

The German Bundestag passed a resolution in May 2019 declaring that the BDS movement is antisemitic.⁶⁹ The BDS movement, launched in 2005 by a group of Palestinian activists, is a non-violent global campaign inspired by the South African anti-apartheid movement aimed at pressuring Israel through boycotts, divestment and sanctions to comply with international law.⁷⁰ Pressured by Israel, the German state equates boycotts of Israel with antisemitism and the May 2019 resolution called for denying public funding to organisations that support BDS, effectively limiting the scope of political activism and nonviolent protest against Israeli government actions in Germany.

Antisemitism itself is not punishable under German law. Rather, it usually seen as falling under *Volksverhetzung* (§130 of the German Criminal Code), which criminalises incitement to hatred against segments of the population, or *Beleidigung* (§185), which penalises certain insults against individuals.⁷¹ While these laws aim to protect against hate speech and defamation, they have now become key tools in state violence against Palestine solidarity protestors.⁷² In a political culture where the very concept of Palestinian resistance is categorised as antisemitic, state officials, commentators and even ordinary citizens frequently assert that Palestinians are not fighting against Israel because of occupation or apartheid, but because they are inherently antisemitic.⁷³ This narrative ignores or erases the political and legal contexts of Palestinian struggle, reducing it instead to irrational hatred.

Distorted memory culture

Germany realised that they could atone for their sins if they offer unconditional support to the state of Israel. Now, if the state of Israel is in any threat whatsoever, this also impacts their own history and their own, let's say, atonement. Yeah, it has nothing to do – it really has nothing to do – with antisemitism, or with a decolonial approach to combating extremely racist infrastructure, because the German state believes antisemitism is its own distinct prejudice that has nothing to do with racism as a whole.

And it's this distinction which is why you see extremely racist tendencies against Palestinian people – because if they had a decolonial approach to how they dealt with the Holocaust or how they deal with their past colonial crimes, they wouldn't use the same almost Nazi rhetoric to describe migrants, Muslims and Palestinians.

– Hebh Jamal

Germany's official memory culture – sometimes lauded as a model for post-genocidal reckoning – has gradually hardened into a tool for disciplining dissent, particularly concerning the question of Palestine. As Dirk Moses has argued, this 'catechism of the Germans centred the Holocaust as a unique and singular evil, thereby sidelining both Germany's colonial genocides (such as the Herero and Nama in Namibia) and its present-day complicity in the Israeli genocide against Palestinians'.⁷⁴ As Udi Raz has pointedly observed: 'These days in Germany you can fight anti-Semitism only if you support genocide'.⁷⁵

The dominant narrative that emerged equated remembrance with loyalty to Israel. The result is a paradoxical ideological position: Germany claims to be the society most devoted to Holocaust remembrance, while using that same history to avoid addressing the violence it enables today. Within this framework, Israel is no longer treated as a state like any other. As the Palestinian-US intellectual Edward Said had warned, it has been transformed into an 'idea' or 'talisman' that absorbs any and all moral urgency.⁷⁶

The historian Andrew I Port wrote that the German conviction that 'they had left the rabid racism of their forebears far behind them may have paradoxically allowed for the unabashed expression of different forms of racism'.⁷⁷ Germany's antisemitism commissioners, hardly any of them Jewish, have repeatedly made this logic explicit. Felix Klein, the federal commissioner, suggested that Donald Trump's plan to ethnically cleanse Gaza could be worth a closer look – calling forced population transfers 'radical' but potentially 'worth thinking about'. One wonders, as the journalist Pauline Jäckels has, whether he would react in the same way if it was Israelis rather than Palestinians who were being forcibly displaced.⁷⁸

German elites and society at large have failed to cultivate a genuine antifascism regarding the Holocaust or decolonial reckoning in relation to German colonialism. As Hebh Jamal points out, Germany has constructed antisemitism as a standalone, apolitical sin, disconnected from racism or structural power.⁷⁹

The notion that Germany must protect 'Jewish life' by policing Jewish dissenters, silencing Palestinians, and shielding Israeli war crimes from critique reflects a deep betrayal of historical memory. The result is an absurd self-understanding in which German authorities proclaim

themselves experts on the Holocaust and guardians of Jewish identity, while simultaneously refusing to listen to Jews who challenge Israeli policy. The contradiction is encapsulated in the familiar refrain: 'As a German, I cannot comment on the conflict between Israel and Palestine' – a phrase that masks complicity behind fake neutrality. It is also why many Germans feel entitled to lecture Jews on what Jewishness entails, as will be described in the next section.

Who gets to be Jewish?

UDI RAZ – activist with Jewish Voice for Peace, Germany

I grew up in Haifa in Palestine. I moved to Germany in 2010, among other things because the place where I come from became too dangerous for me. A good friend of mine was murdered for being queer, and I, myself also a self-identifying queer, felt that I needed to find a safer place for myself.

When I first arrived in Germany, I was so deeply impressed by how advanced I thought Germany was in this regard. Of how pluralistic and truly committed to the sense of humanity. I looked up to Germany precisely because of all those legacies that I thought Germany's political elite had internalised – to ensure that 'never again' truly means never again to everyone. So, you can imagine how shocked I was to realise that it was not the case. Germany was terrorising the most vulnerable population of Germany – those who dared to speak up in favour of those legacies.

It was thanks to Gaza that we understood that our liberation is entangled with the liberation of Palestine. I received countless criminal charges, which I carry with honour.

The entire discourse – the reason why politicians justify an ongoing genocide – is allegedly in order to protect Jews. And it's quite remarkable to keep in mind that there is nothing more racist, more antisemitic than speaking about Jews instead of speaking with us. The liberation of Palestine is also the liberation from Zionism – it is also the liberation of Judaism from Zionism.



PORTRAIT

In public discourse in Germany, Jewish identity is increasingly reduced to state-aligned Zionism.⁸⁰ The result is not only the marginalisation of dissenting Jewish voices, but the redefinition of Jewishness itself by overwhelmingly non-Jewish German authorities. Not one of Germany's 'Antisemitism Commissioners' is Jewish, yet these figures routinely accuse Jewish dissidents of antisemitism.⁸¹ This reduces Jewish life to something the German state must define and defend – provided that it conforms to its own understanding. The only 'acceptable concepts of Judaism', as one Jewish writer put it, are those 'non-Jewish Germans explicitly sign off on'.⁸²

In Germany, where Jews constitute only 0.3% of the population and most have never knowingly met a Jewish person, this absence has enabled a state-driven 'memory culture' to generate over-identifications in which non-Jewish Germans assume the authority to speak as or for Jews.⁸³ Within this framework, Zionism and Israel are conflated with Jewishness, erasing the diversity of Jewish identities and long traditions of Jewish anti-Zionism. The logic that once

depicted Jews as inherently dangerous is thus inverted, recasting Jews as inherently innocent, eternal victims who cannot themselves be perpetrators.⁸⁴

This erasure is particularly violent towards Jews who speak out, many of whom have been ‘beaten up, detained, arrested, spit on, fired, doxxed, and denounced in the press’⁸⁵ along with other Palestine solidarity protestors, as this report shows. According to data compiled by the journalist Emily Dische-Becker, a third of those cancelled for alleged antisemitism in Germany are themselves Jewish.⁸⁶ Many, like the Israeli film director Yuval Abraham, have been detained, fined, or fired. ‘The German establishment doesn’t count Yuval as a Jew because he doesn’t support Israel’, says Wieland Hoban from *Jüdische Stimme* (Jewish Voice for Peace).⁸⁷

This also plays out symbolically. When Abraham and the Palestinian filmmaker Basel Adra used their Berlinale acceptance speech to call for an end to apartheid and German arms sales to Israel, they were instantly denounced as antisemites. Berlin’s mayor condemned the speech, the justice minister threatened legal action, and the culture minister retracted her applause, with her office claiming she had meant to applaud only the ‘Jewish-Israeli’ speaker.⁸⁸ The message was clear: Jewish identity in Germany is not defined by birth, practice, or belief but by one’s alignment with German foreign policy.

In this climate, antisemitism is no longer understood as antisemitism, but as dissent from German memory politics. Jews who reject this are not only dismissed, but are actively targeted. Paradoxically, these attacks are not recognised as antisemitic.

Distorted Metrics and the Scapegoating of Migrants

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Racism is racism, whatever it is, and regarding anti-Semitism, over 90% [of the perpetrators] are Germans. We fight antisemitism in our community. But criticism of Israel can never be called antisemitic. Because calling out genocide is not antisemitic. Calling out settler colonialism and apartheid is not antisemitic. It is a call to confront crimes against humanity, uphold the rule of law, support Indigenous struggles, and advance a decolonial future.

– Majed Abusalama

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Antisemitism remains widespread in Germany. Prominent political figures, such as the Bavarian Vice President and Economy Minister Hubert Aiwanger who distributed antisemitic far-right propaganda leaflets in his youth and yet was able to keep his post when this became public, illustrate this reality.⁸⁹ In previous years, over 90% of antisemitic crimes were committed by right-wing Germans.⁹⁰

Despite this, German institutions and the press often amplify the spectre of ‘imported antisemitism’, which has supposedly grown with increased migration from Muslim-majority countries. In 2013, Germany passed a resolution on combating antisemitism that identified right-wing extremism as ‘the most significant carrier of antisemitism’ in Germany. It mentioned Islamist and left-wing antisemitism but emphasised the structural nature of the threat from the far-right.⁹¹ By contrast, a 2018 resolution on the same topic introduced the narrative of ‘imported anti-Semitism’, contributing to the myth that Germany had atoned for its past, mostly extinguished its domestic antisemitism, and that Muslim migrants or Germans with roots in the Middle East and North Africa are the new threat.⁹² It called for integration courses to promote

Israel's 'right to exist', encouraged mosque associations to work with Jewish partners, and urged the deportation of non-citizens suspected of antisemitism. This conflation of immigration and antisemitism formed part of a broader post-2015 discourse in which the refugee population was cast as a cultural and security threat. Angela Merkel spoke of migrants bringing 'a different form of antisemitism' into the country, but gave no evidence to back this assertion.⁹³

These dynamics go hand in hand with rising Islamophobia and anti-migrant hostility. In the wake of 7 October, Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck stated that Muslims must 'clearly distance themselves from antisemitism so as not to undermine their own right to tolerance'.⁹⁴ Between 2022 and 2023, reports of anti-Muslim racism rose sharply across Germany.⁹⁵ The logic of this scapegoating becomes especially clear in the remark cited by *The Left Berlin*: 'While this will sound strange to anyone outside Germany, this is what the German bourgeoisie tells working-class immigrants: "Because our grandparents committed genocide, you are now legally required to support the state of Israel"'.⁹⁶

German support to Israel after 7 October 2023

The aftermath of 7 October 2023 saw Germany redouble its long-standing military and political support for Israel, reinforcing patterns of cooperation that stretch back over decades. It reaffirmed its role as Israel's key European ally, most visibly through the intensification of arms transfers.

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A person in the US pays less [tax money per capita] than a German to support the genocide of Gaza.

– Majed Abusalama

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Arms transfers

As stated earlier, Germany has long played a central role in arming the Israeli military, being its main destination for arms exports from the early 1960s, when German arms support made up 16% of Israel's military budget.⁹⁷ Since 2003, it has consistently been Israel's second-largest arms supplier after the US.⁹⁸ From 2020 to 2024, 33% of arms exports to Israel came from Germany, the US accounting for 66%.⁹⁹

After 7 October 2023, while it suspended the processing of asylum applications for Gazan refugees due to the 'volatile situation' in the Gaza Strip,¹⁰⁰ Germany nevertheless dramatically accelerated arms exports to Israel. Whereas in 2022 the value of authorised arms transfers stood at €32.3 million, this rose tenfold to €326.5 million in 2023.¹⁰¹ In 2024, the exports reportedly amounted to €161.1 million,¹⁰² and to €126.3 million by mid-May 2025.¹⁰³ From 7 Oct 2023 to 13 May, 2025, Germany approved individual licences to permanently export military equipment to Israel worth a total of €485,103,796.¹⁰⁴ Germany artificially divides its arms exports into two categories, 'weapons of war' and 'other military equipment', such as military trucks, optics, communications systems, and spare parts for weapons systems. Only a small fraction of its 2024 exports to Israel (€32,449 between January and August 2024) was labelled as 'weapons of war', to avoid stricter regulations and public backlash.¹⁰⁵ Despite these semantic gymnastics, most support from Germany comprises critical components for Israel's most advanced weapons systems.

Table 1: A selection of recent arms exports to Israel

Export	Company	Comment
Gearboxes and more than 1,000 tank engines for Merkava tanks and Namer Armed Personnel Carriers	Renk	Used in Gaza's urban warfare zones; core component of Merkava mobility ¹⁰⁶
Diesel engines	MTU Friedrichshafen	Used in Merkava and Namer vehicles; via US Israeli licence ¹⁰⁷
120 mm tank cannons	Rheinmetall	Same calibre as Leopard 2; used in Merkava tanks ¹⁰⁸
Targeting systems	AIM (Diehl + Rheinmetall JV)	Integrated in tanks and drones; critical for targeting ¹⁰⁹
Roem howitzer	Rheinmetall + Elbit	Entered Israeli service in summer 2023 ¹¹⁰
Submarine components	ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems	For Dolphin-class submarines; most likely nuclear-capable; co-financed by German taxpayers ¹¹¹
Sa'ar 6 corvettes	ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems	Built in Germany; operational for the first time during the genocide in Gaza ¹¹²
76mm naval gun	Leonardo (Italy); German-built platform	Mounted on Sa'ar 6; used in Gaza ¹¹³
Heron TP drones	IAI (via Airbus deal)	Returned to Israel by Germany; reportedly used in Gaza ¹¹⁴
portable anti-tank weapons RGW 90 ('Matador')	Dynamit Nobel Defence	Used in the Gaza genocide ¹¹⁵

None of these exports violates German law, which has been structured to enable it. The Ministry for Economic Affairs is formally responsible for approving arms exports, but decisions on sensitive cases are referred to the Federal Security Council (*Bundessicherheitsrat*), which includes the Chancellor and key ministers.¹¹⁶ This closed-door process provides no parliamentary oversight and rarely even discloses which companies are involved. In March 2024, Nicaragua filed a case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Germany of aiding and abetting genocide through arms exports and the suspension of funding to UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, founded in 1949).¹¹⁷ Even then, the German government continued authorising arms shipments, and the ICJ later declined to issue emergency measures regarding German weapons deliveries.¹¹⁸ Germany also imports Israeli weapons – in late 2023, the country agreed to purchase the Israeli Arrow 3 missile defence system, developed by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), for a massive €3.6 billion, with the delivery of first components having started in 2025.¹¹⁹

EU legislation also plays a role. Arms exports from the EU to third countries, including Israel, are legally bound by the EU's Common Position of 8 December 2008. These stipulate that no EU member state should export arms to Israel due to the country's lack of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) (criterion 2). In practice, however, it is almost impossible to enforce this.¹²⁰

Political and financial support

From the very first days following the 7 October 2023 attacks, Germany positioned itself not merely as an ally of Israel but as one of its most committed political and diplomatic defenders. On 12 October, former Chancellor Olaf Scholz told parliament: 'In this moment, there is only one place for Germany: at Israel's side'. He described this position as stemming from Germany's historical responsibility and promised support for Israel's 'existence and security' as a permanent obligation of the German state.¹²¹ This speech was echoed by parliament in a rare display of unanimous, cross-party support. By 12 October Israel had been bombarding Gaza for five days, killing close to 1,500 people.¹²² Nevertheless, Germany's ideological commitment quickly translated into diplomatic action. Scholz travelled to Israel twice in the months following 7 October. Ten days after 7 October, by which time Israel had already dropped thousands of bombs on Gaza, he again pledged his support for Israel. Even as Israeli ministers openly promoted ethnic cleansing and the military violated Protocol IV of the Geneva Convention by bombing homes, schools, mosques, churches, refugee camps and hospitals, he doubled down on Germany's narrative orthodoxy: 'Israel is a country that is committed to human rights and international law and acts accordingly'.¹²³ The former Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock from the Green Party made nine visits to Israel following 7 October (see Table 1), and other high-ranking officials, including the defence, education, economic, and development ministers, followed suit, making Germany's political presence in the region almost continuous.¹²⁴ The Health Minister, Karl Lauterbach, approvingly retweeted a video by an English far-right agitator who claimed the Nazis were 'more decent' than Hamas.¹²⁵ As Israeli officials escalated genocidal rhetoric and action, Germany's air force chief travelled to Tel Aviv to praise Israeli pilots and engage in a PR stunt donating blood to the Israeli army.¹²⁶



The first Palestine protest in Berlin of 2025 saw as many as nine arrests, many of which were violent. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

Table 2: High-level political visits between Germany and Israel since 7 October 2023

Date(s)	Visitor → Host	Who / Role	Purpose / Notes
13 Oct 2023	Germany → Israel	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	First post-7 October solidarity visit; meetings including with Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen. ¹²⁷
17 Oct 2023	Germany → Israel	Olaf Scholz, Chancellor	Solidarity visit; joint statements in Tel Aviv. ¹²⁸
19 Oct 2023	Germany → Israel	Boris Pistorius, – Defence Minister	Meetings with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant; pledged support. ¹²⁹
20 Oct 2023	Germany → Israel	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	Meetings with FM Eli Cohen and opposition politician Benny Gantz. ¹³⁰
10 Nov 2023 (incl. Israel stop)	Germany → Israel (regional trip)	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	Regional tour (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel). ¹³¹
26–27 Nov 2023	Germany → Israel	Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Bär, Federal President; Bärbel Bas, President of the German Parliament	Official visit; meetings with Israeli President Herzog in Jerusalem, solidarity meetings including in the Knesset. ¹³²
7 Jan 2024	Germany → Israel (regional trip)	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	Fourth visit to Israel; meetings, including with Foreign Minister Israel Katz. ¹³³
14–15 Feb 2024	Germany → Israel	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	Fifth visit; talks with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Katz. ¹³⁴
26 Mar 2024	Germany → Israel (regional trip)	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	Meeting with Foreign Minister Katz. ¹³⁵
8 Apr 2024	Israel → Germany	Amir Ohana, Speaker of the Knesset	Berlin meetings, including with President Steinmeier; parliamentary diplomacy. ¹³⁶
16–17 Apr 2024	Germany → Israel	Annalena Baerbock – Foreign Minister	Visit following escalation with Iran; meetings, including with Prime Minister Netanyahu. ¹³⁷
24 Jun 2024	Germany → Israel	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	Speech at Herzliya Conference; bilateral meetings. ¹³⁸
4–6 Sep 2024	Germany → Israel (regional trip)	Annalena Baerbock, Foreign Minister	9th Israel stop since 7 October; meetings with Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. ¹³⁹
10 May 2025	Germany → Israel	Johann Wadephul, Foreign Minister (new)	First trip to Israel as Foreign Minister; meetings with Prime Minister Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar. ¹⁴⁰
11–13 May 2025 (12 May official day)	Israel → Germany	Isaac Herzog, President of Israel	State visit marking 60 years of ties; meetings with President Steinmeier, Chancellor, German parliament leadership. ¹⁴¹
14–15 May 2025	Germany → Israel	Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Federal President	Return leg of 'two-way' visit; joint visit with President Herzog to Kibbutz Be'eri. ¹⁴²

In January 2024, the German government announced it would intervene as a third party at the ICJ to defend Israel against South Africa's genocide case, although it has yet to submit a formal intervention.¹⁴³ Germany is the only country to do so, even though dozens of Global South states supported South Africa's case. German officials simultaneously lobbied the International Criminal Court (ICC) to block arrest warrants against Israeli leaders, further

entrenching their alignment with Israel's impunity.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, when the UNGA repeatedly passed resolutions calling for a ceasefire, Germany either abstained or voted against them.¹⁴⁵

Germany also extended its support through symbolic acts and disinformation. In a Bundestag speech in October 2024, Baerbock defended Israel's targeting of civilians in Gaza, stripping Palestinians of their fundamental right to protection under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), falsely claiming that 'when Hamas terrorists hide behind schools, even civilian sites may lose protected status'.¹⁴⁶ This would clearly be a violation of IHL, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention (Arts. 18–19) and Additional Protocol I (Arts. 48, 51, 52, 53). She also falsely claimed to have seen video footage of rape committed by Hamas on 7 October – footage that does not exist, according both to Israeli sources and UN investigators.¹⁴⁷

Germany initially suspended funding to UNRWA in January 2024 following Israel's unproven claims that some staff had links to Hamas. Despite a UN-commissioned independent review finding no credible evidence for the allegations, Germany was one of the last countries to restore funding.¹⁴⁸

In February 2025, Germany agreed to deploy its police forces to Gaza's Rafah border crossing with Egypt as part of an EU mission, supposedly to 'monitor' humanitarian access. The EU had decided to reactivate its Rafah Border Assistance Mission, which had been on standby since the beginning of the genocide, and which critics argue primarily serves European and Israeli security interests by controlling movement, cooperating with a genocidal power, and legitimising a tightly restricted crossing that risks becoming a humanitarian bottleneck. The decision is also deeply symbolic: police officers who have violently repressed Palestine solidarity protests at home through harassment, arrests, and bans are now sent to oversee the movement of Palestinians in one of the world's most brutalised and surveilled areas.¹⁴⁹

Legal challenges to German complicity

In parallel to growing international condemnation, a number of legal challenges have been made regarding Germany's material and political support for Israel's genocide. The most prominent of these is the case filed by Nicaragua at the ICJ on 23 January 2024, as cited earlier. Nicaragua accuses Germany of violating its obligations under the Genocide Convention and the Geneva Conventions by providing weapons, financial aid, and political support to Israel while knowing they are being used to commit genocide in Gaza.¹⁵⁰ The application cites not only Germany's arms exports but also its suspension of UNRWA funding, its intervention in Israel's defence at the ICJ, and its political support under the banner of 'historical responsibility'. Nicaragua requested urgent provisional measures to halt German weapons exports and reinstate humanitarian aid, though these were not granted in the interim ruling.

There are also legal cases within Germany. On 23 February 2024, a group of lawyers filed a criminal complaint with the German Federal Prosecutor, accusing Chancellor Olaf Scholz and members of the Federal Security Council of aiding and abetting genocide by authorising weapons transfers to Israel.¹⁵¹ This case targets the inner circle responsible for arms policy, including the ministries of defence, economy, and foreign affairs. It alleges that by continuing to issue export licences in full knowledge of Israel's actions, Germany has breached both its domestic and international legal obligations. The European Legal Support Center, the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy and the UK-based Law for Palestine are among the civil society organisations (CSOs) backing the case.

The German state denies any wrongdoing. Government spokespeople have dismissed the ICJ allegations as ‘political instrumentalisation’ and defended arms exports as being aligned with Germany’s strategic and moral commitments to Israel.¹⁵²

In September 2025, a collective of lawyers filed a criminal complaint against 11 German Government officials and arms trade executives at the Office of the Federal Prosecutor.¹⁵³ The complaint urges investigations for Aiding and Abetting Israel’s Genocide in Gaza.



Demonstration in Berlin. November 2023. Photo: Faisal Yassin.



CHAPTER 2

The repression of the Palestine solidarity movement

Nakba Day Protest 2025 in Berlin. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

MAJED ABUSALAMA

My name is Majed Abusalama. I was born and raised in Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. I moved to Berlin in 2015 because it is the biggest Arab city outside the Middle East, and it has the largest Palestinian community in Europe as well. I thought I would just come home because my people are there.

But of course, I started working on the political movement of migrants and refugees and anti-racist movements in Germany. And at the same time, there was an escalation every year in terms of censorship and the intimidation that we as Palestinians, migrants, refugees, Arabs and Muslims, and those who are of colour felt.

They imprisoned dozens who were just protesting for their families back home. They forbid us for weeks to go out in the streets to demonstrate ... I think they violated every law that they preach about, especially those they preach about when you apply for naturalisation. They [say] you have to respect freedom of speech. They don't respect us. You have to respect the right to protest, the right to assembly, they don't even do that. I personally have tried to say my family was killed. My brother was killed, I said, I want to mourn my family. I'm just registering something for my family.

The secret service has actually blocked and stopped me on the street. In 2021, they attacked me - 13 of them. And they almost broke my shoulder. That was reported in Human Rights Watch as well.

Growing up as a Palestinian refugee in Gaza, I was shaped by the daily realities of colonial oppression and racial hierarchies. This experience fueled my lifelong commitment to dismantling systems of domination, including whiteness, in Palestine, across the Global South, and within the heart of Germany. My struggle is rooted in an uncompromising vision of decolonisation and a liberated future for all.



Legal changes, the abuse of the judiciary, and the criminalisation of a movement

Since 7 October 2023, Germany has made several legal changes, non-binding resolutions, and started a massive wave of prosecution against pro-Palestinian activists. This trend is not new but it has been hugely accelerated. The legal infrastructure in Germany is slowly becoming a full-fledged apparatus of surveillance, censorship, and criminalisation, spanning education policy, immigration law, university governance, and penal enforcement. This has led to Germany's freedom to protest being downgraded to 'narrowed' in the Civicus Monitor, an annual ranking that measures civic freedoms.¹⁵⁴

One troubling trend is the reliance on non-binding resolutions by the German parliament, something already tested out with the anti-BDS resolution in 2019 as detailed in Section 2.2. Two resolutions in November 2024 and January 2025 intend to criminalise and stigmatise any criticism of Israel by labelling it antisemitic, and to ensure that anyone critical of Israel will be cut off from state funding and removed from the education and academic system. The historian and expert on the Nazi rule Ulrich Herbert called the university resolution 'an encroachment on university autonomy and academic freedom that has rarely been seen in Germany,' adding that '[i]t is surprising that there is hardly any public protest against this in democratic parties'.¹⁵⁵

Using non-binding resolutions is a strategic choice since they cannot be challenged in court for this same reason, because if they could, they would probably be found to contradict the constitution. However, they carry enormous de facto weight, empowering institutional actors to punish, exclude, or stigmatise dissenting individuals without needing to pass controversial laws or face public debate, and have had a massive chilling effect on civil society and academia. The result is a dual-track regime: formal legal standards appear intact, while informal political directives reshape the landscape of rights and responsibilities.



Timeline 1: Important legal changes and resolutions after 7 October 2023
(see Appendix A for a more detailed timeline)

Legal change/Incident	Date
Berlin's Senator for Education issued a directive banning expressions of solidarity with Palestine in schools. The ban included wearing the Keffiyah, which contravenes rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 29), which allows them to express their own identity in schools. It further encompassed displaying 'Free Palestine' stickers or chants, and showing maps of Israel in Palestinian colours. These actions were framed as threats to school peace and as 'propagandist' support for terrorism, even if they fall short of criminal liability. The guidelines, distributed across Berlin's educational institutions, call for teachers to respond to misconduct with either educational measures (e.g. warnings, extra work, parental involvement) or, if deemed necessary, disciplinary measures (such as written reprimands, temporary suspension, or even expulsion), or even reporting such activities, potentially involving police and confiscation of students' phones. ¹⁵⁶	13.10.2023
Germany's Minister of the Interior reaffirmed the ban on Hamas, and also banned Samidoun, a Palestinian prisoner solidarity network, in Germany. The bans prohibit all activities associated with these organisations, including public demonstrations, use of their symbols, and any online presence. Participation in or support for either group is considered a criminal offence. Displaying symbols linked to them is also illegal; some cases, such as the use of the slogan 'From the river to the sea', now fall into a legal grey area, with courts expected to determine their status. Following the bans, law enforcement carried out raids in five federal states, confiscating items such as IT equipment, posters, and funding appeals connected to the groups. ¹⁵⁷	02.11.2023
Germany enacted a revised citizenship law that mandates a prior 'antisemitism check' for applicants and rules out granting citizenship to anyone deemed 'antisemitic' or not committed to Germany's <i>raison d'état</i> of unconditional support for the Israeli state. The criteria for antisemitism rely on the problematic IHRA definition that conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Liking a social media post with slogans like 'From the river to the sea' or one that accuses Israel of murdering children could be enough for applicants to be denied citizenship. Dual citizens are not immune either since German law allows authorities to revoke citizenship up to ten years after it was granted, though the threshold for doing so remains high and largely untested. ¹⁵⁸	26.06.2024
The German parliament, with support of all parties, passed the resolution 'Never Again Is Now – Protect, Preserve, and Strengthen Jewish Life in Germany', introducing sweeping measures targeting individuals and organisations critical of Israel or found to be supporting the BDS movement. The resolution calls for those identified as antisemitic (according to the IHRA definition) to be excluded from public funding, banned from participating in publicly funded events, and denied institutional cooperation. It also calls for permanent exclusion from schools and universities, even if the person's work is unrelated to Palestine. While the resolution is non-binding and therefore cannot be legally challenged, it had a chilling effect across civil society, where many organisations rely on state funding. The resolution effectively shrinks freedom of speech, academic freedom, and the autonomy of public institutions. ¹⁵⁹	07.11.2024
The German parliament passed another resolution on antisemitism, this time specifically targeting educational institutions. Titled 'Resolutely countering antisemitism and hostility towards Israel in schools and universities and securing free discourse space', it calls for a broad set of interventions: expanding one-sided state-funded research and education on Judaism and Israel that excludes Palestinian history; monitoring and preventing 'boycott, delegitimisation, and demonisation' of Israel in schools and universities; and increasing cooperation between academic institutions and police and intelligence services. The resolution welcomes past efforts to withhold funding from critics of Israeli policy and urges further restrictions on access to public funding and institutional platforms for individuals or groups deemed antisemitic under the IHRA definition. The resolution exerts political pressure on universities and threatens the consensus of academic autonomy and pluralism that has existed in Germany since after World War II and is enshrined in the constitution. In practice, it will probably lead to dismissals of academics who are outspoken critics of Israel's apartheid regime or have called for boycotts. ¹⁶⁰	29.01.2025

Furthermore, slogans like 'From the river to the sea' are reframed as incitement, support for terrorism, or threats to public order. Even symbolic expressions like the keffiyah are swept up in bans, despite their long-standing cultural and political histories. This leads to fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression and the rights to protest and free speech, being hollowed out.

From the River to the Sea

The slogan ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ probably emerged in the 1960s,¹⁶¹ predating Hamas, and has long been a symbol of Palestinian national identity and aspiration. It has been used by a wide range of secular and democratic movements, and, until recently, was rarely considered controversial. Yet in Germany, the phrase has become the object of aggressive and contradictory attempts at criminalisation.

In November 2023 the German Federal Ministry of the Interior issued a sweeping ban on the slogan, claiming it was a symbol of Hamas, which Germany designates a terrorist organisation. It declared the phrase a call to destroy Israel, regardless of the speaker’s intent or political affiliation. As Berlin-based journalist Nathaniel Flakin notes: ‘So when you say ‘Israel’, the listener hears ‘Jews’ regardless of the context or who is speaking. But the real antisemitism lies in equating Jews with Israel, not in the slogan itself’.¹⁶²

Ironically, the same legal system that fails to punish racist chants like ‘*Ausländer raus!*’ (*Foreigners out!*) has now been weaponised to criminalise calls for equality and freedom in Palestine.¹⁶³ The implications of the criminalisation were immediate and far-reaching. In Bavaria, prosecutors argued that the phrase should be treated in the same way as the Nazi swastika: a banned symbol of hate. In Berlin, police extended the ban not only to the full phrase but also to variations like ‘*From the river to the sea, we demand equality*’ or even the skeletal version ‘*From the — to the —*’.¹⁶⁴

In practice, however, enforcement was blatantly one-sided. In a video from December 2023, pro-Israel protesters are seen holding up an Israeli flag at Berlin’s Humboldt University and mockingly calling: ‘From the river to the sea, that’s the only flag you’re gonna see’. The cameraman approaches police, asking them to intervene against the forbidden slogan, but they refuse, saying it is permissible.¹⁶⁵

In other federal states, the legality of the phrase has been interpreted differently. In March 2024, a court in the central German state of Hesse ruled that an event titled ‘*From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free for Everyone*’ could go ahead. The court recognised that the phrase could carry many different meanings, and rejected the idea that it could be criminalised per se.¹⁶⁶ In May 2024, a court in Mannheim affirmed that the phrase may be interpreted in ‘myriad ways’ and should be protected under the German constitution’s guarantee of free expression.¹⁶⁷

The repression has moved beyond rhetoric into the realm of criminal prosecution. One of the most high-profile legal cases involved Ava M., a 22-year-old Berlin activist of Iranian descent. In August 2024, she was fined €600 for chanting the slogan at a protest. Prosecutors abandoned the ‘Hamas’ charge and instead accused her of ‘condoning a crime’ under §140 of the criminal code. The judge claimed that the chant implied support for every act carried out by Palestinian militants on 7 October. Her second trial, scheduled for 22 August, was postponed. Outside the courtroom, supporters were detained – for chanting ‘From the river, to the sea’.¹⁶⁸

Meanwhile, lawfare is being used against activists for acts that should arguably fall under freedom of expression, further leading to a chilling effect. According to numbers from the newspaper *taz*¹⁶⁹, Berlin prosecutors logged about 6,400 cases tied to the war on Gaza over the two years following October 2023, including more than 2,000 incidents at demonstrations (alleged resistance, assaults on police, or chanting possibly banned slogans), with additional investigations likely still pending at the police. About half of these cases were dropped before trial, and even when they reached court, many ended in acquittals or small fines, with only 3 prison sentences without probation and 16 with probation at the time of writing. Pointing out that the process itself is intended to be the punishment, lawyer Alexander Gorski has likened the use of lawfare to “psychological warfare” intended to wear down and silence activists¹⁷⁰.

The Court Observer Hannah Rainer has documented over 40 trials involving Palestine activists in Berlin since mid-2024. In an interview with *junge Welt*¹⁷¹ she reports that most concern minor charges, like resisting police or trespassing during sit-ins at universities, but take place in high-security courtrooms usually reserved for organised crime or murder charges and involve disproportionate measures: body searches, confiscated notebooks, and denial of toilets for spectators. The trials rarely end in conviction, often falling apart once video evidence is presented, and it often becomes clear that rather than being the perpetrators, the accused were in fact the victims of police violence and acted in self-defence. But by then, reputational and professional damage has been done. ‘Social workers with no criminal history leave a protest and suddenly face a criminal charge that could cost them their job or residency’.

The German state is no longer enforcing laws to protect rights with respect to Palestine solidarity but bending legal frameworks to serve its political goals. The use of lawfare against activists is clearly meant to frighten people and set precedents. It seems that the state is using the Palestine movement to test different strategies of surveillance and repression and is gearing up to use these measures on other movements as well. As the lawyer Nadija Samour argues, this is part of a larger project to reconfigure German national identity in a way that aligns with militarism and the pursuit of global influence. The government’s rhetorical commitment to international law is highly selective: while it invokes legal principles to silence dissent at home, it hesitates to apply the same principles when they are focused on geopolitical allies. Or, as observed by two academics, Anna Younes and Hanna Al-Taher, ‘Germany’s liberal freedom can only work with the Other’s non-freedom’.¹⁷²

Finally, the judicial changes specifically target people seen as not being German, as the next section will detail, which reveal an inbuilt racism at the core of how the German legal and political systems operate.

The intersection of anti-migration policies with the crackdown on the Palestine movement

Bahaar, Nurse and Palestine activist¹⁷³

I'm a Palestinian with Jordanian nationality and have been working in Germany for about eight years. I've been an activist since 2020 or 2021. I never had any problems with the German government or the immigration office; in fact, they were always polite, also since I work as a nurse and nurses are needed in Germany, and I always had all the right documents.

This changed after I gave birth to my son in August 2023. At that time I decided I want to apply for permanent residency for myself and my son, since I met all the criteria. I applied for it and they said they have to do a security check, and until then gave me a 'Fiktionsbescheinigung', which is a paper that entitles me to stay in Germany while I wait for their decision.

In 2024, we went to Jordan to meet my parents. Just before leaving Germany, I told the migration office I would be travelling and they renewed the Fiktionsbescheinigung for myself, my husband, and my son so we would be able to return to Germany afterwards. But when we tried to do that at the end of August 2024, at the airport they told us my son was not allowed to enter Germany because he didn't have the right paperwork. We were referred to the embassy and initially they said that it's just a mistake and they would be able to sort it out. They told us he's going to receive a visa for re-entry into Germany. But then they decided against it. And later they asked for my son's passport and didn't return it for six weeks. In November we finally got a letter that basically told us that my one-year-old son is not allowed to re-enter Germany because he is a threat to national security, and other issues, but this was the main thing. Things related to terrorism or hate speech and stuff like that. Again, my one-year-old son.

Only much later did I really understand that there is an ongoing investigation against me by the German intelligence service. It's because of my activism for Palestine they are punishing my own one-year-old son. In the third letter between my lawyer and the German state, they stated four or five activities related to Palestine. None of them is illegal.

The courts that decided against us argued that it is not an urgent case since my son could stay with my parents in Jordan and it's not necessary that a child needs to stay with his mother. He should stay in Jordan while we wait until they decide on my permanent residency, which could take years.

They punished my son, not me, and they tried to go from the back door to kick me out by keeping my son away from me and outside Germany because I can't stay away from my son for too long. I work at a paediatric station and at some point, every time I saw a child laugh or cry, I used to cry because I couldn't help thinking that my son might be crying and I cannot be with him.

Nobody can tell me anymore that Germany is a country that respects children's or women's rights. If I made any mistakes they should punish me, not my son. I now feel like Germany is not a safe place for children. And this is the other side of the coin of their support for the genocide. I feel like Germany has never left its Nazi ideology behind. The media are controlled by Nazis, they take the side of Israel no matter how many bombs they drop.

All I can do now is try to remind myself that my son is not hungry, not starving, not being bombed and torn to pieces like so many children in Gaza. I try to focus on this. What's happening to me is not worse than what happens to mothers in Gaza every day.

.....

The repression disproportionately targets people seen as migrants, this is also what I found in my research. I was studying encounters between Muslims and Jews in Berlin. And I could show through different examples that whenever these are framed as if they are designed to address Muslim antisemitism, those who are in power will provide us with press coverage, we will be celebrated by the media, we'll get donations, and so on. But whenever we meet each other as equals here in Berlin – also in order to reflect on what it is that we, Jews, know about Muslims, about Arabs, about Palestinians – and if we dare to do it in public, those who are in power will point at us, call us antisemites, and basically subject us to boycott, divestment, sanctions, police brutality, state violence. And all that to make the point that Germany's political elite and the discourse in general is not designed to protect Jews, but only those Jews who are willing to reproduce anti-Muslim racism.

– Udi Raz

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I made a small personal survey and 88% of people with migration background want to leave, especially since the results of the last election came out. Merz [the new German Chancellor] is a disaster. People not affected think as long as the AfD [far-right party] doesn't win everything it's fine, but the shift to the right is happening. And anti-migration policies have an effect on the ground. What does that mean for Muslim-perceived communities? What does the media reporting in Berlin mean for them? Germany has the largest Palestinian community and they are not allowed to criticise Israel, otherwise — according to the resolution — they will be excluded from public life. What happens with these people in five years? My German friends don't understand that a parallel society is emerging in Germany because migrants feel safer without Germans around them. This parallel society will increase until living together won't be possible anymore.

– Amir

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‘Imported Antisemitism’

Since 7 October 2023, the German government has increasingly entangled migration policy with its political repression of the Palestine solidarity movement and longstanding Islamophobia. Much of this convergence rests on the widely promoted idea of ‘imported antisemitism’. As explained in Section 2.2, the concept, popularised since the early 2000s, constructs Muslim, Arab, and also Turkish communities as the primary source of modern antisemitism in Germany, effectively absolving white German society of its historical and current role.¹⁷⁴ Scholars like Anna-Esther Younes have shown that this narrative helped frame the 2000 reforms of the law on citizenship, which marked a shift from *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by bloodline) to a partial *jus soli* system, allowing children born in Germany to foreign parents to acquire citizenship under certain conditions. At the same time, they introduced stricter integration requirements, including language proficiency and cultural assimilation, framing citizenship less as a legal status and more as a conditional reward for loyalty to the prevailing national values.

As Younes notes, the construction of a ‘Muslim antisemitism’ discourse in Germany mirrors the logic of the US-led War on Terror and War on Drugs, imperialist campaigns that have long served to justify the surveillance, criminalisation, and incarceration of racialised populations.¹⁷⁵ This narrative uses a securitised frame that casts Muslim, Arab, and especially Palestinian communities as the primary threat to Jewish life. Similar to the War on Terror, it has justified expansive policing, legal exceptionalism, and ideological loyalty tests¹⁷⁶ targeting migrants. The outcome is a racialised security regime that instrumentalises antisemitism to legitimise colonial repression abroad and suppress dissent and migration domestically.

The ‘imported antisemitism’ framing was revived after 2015, following the increasingly racist discourse after the major arrival of Syrian and other Muslim refugees, when politicians began openly proposing sharper asylum restrictions based on presumed antisemitism.¹⁷⁷ This comes amidst a European and global trend of border securitisation and militarisation and a crackdown on the rights of migrants, as detailed in the Transnational Institute’s *Border Wars* series¹⁷⁸.

The 2018 resolution on antisemitism marked a key escalation in Germany’s approach to disciplining dissent by non-nationals. It included a call to legally expand the power to expel foreigners if they are deemed to be antisemitic, something that has now become a reality. Palestinians and other migrant activists involved in demonstrations or public criticism of Israeli policy increasingly face criminalisation, intimidation, and threats of deportation. The state has denied visa renewals and residence extensions to individuals solely for expressing opposition to Israel’s actions, thus using migration law to silence political dissent. The supposedly centre-left government that ruled Germany from 2021 to 2025 introduced several drastic legal changes that curtailed migrants’ rights and made it harder for people to come to Germany, and as we will see, intensified the repression of migrants in the name of fighting antisemitism with a number of legislative changes.

Legal and Procedural Changes

.....
There is a draft of this new naturalisation law, you know, the only country that we have to say has the right to exist is Israel... People have a right to exist, not countries.

.....
– Majed

.....
In June 2024, the German parliament passed a new citizenship law mandating an ‘anti-Semitism check’ for those applying for naturalisation. This check uses the controversial IHRA definition and in practice means that social media activity, such as liking a post with the slogan ‘From the river to the sea’ can disqualify an applicant.¹⁷⁹ The reformed law also introduced a ‘sincerity clause’, allowing authorities to deny citizenship if they suspect the applicant’s allegiance to ‘German values’ is not genuine. The right-wing CDU party even tried to mandate an explicit ‘commitment to Israel’s right to exist’ and the possibility of de-naturalising Germans ‘who deny the right of the State of Israel to exist’, but this was not passed.¹⁸⁰

In practice, this has led to absurd assessments of moral and political loyalty. In one case, a Palestinian applicant was denied naturalisation – even before the new citizenship law came into practice – after stating in his interview: ‘There is no Israel. There are Jews, but Israel not as a country’. Officials interpreted this as evidence of ‘anti-Zionist antisemitism’. Even his later clarification that he would recognise the state of Israel ‘after an Oslo peace process’ was rejected. The immigration office argued that his answer left open ‘who [he] considers to be the guilty party’ in the conflict.¹⁸¹

Crucially, the law also allows the authorities to revoke citizenship retroactively for up to ten years after it has been granted, if evidence emerges that the applicant allegedly failed the sincerity or anti-antisemitism test. While the threshold for revocation remains formally high and largely untested, its symbolic and chilling effect is clear.

Politicians and the right-wing media have openly called for dual citizenship to be revoked if an individual is found to be ‘antisemitic’. For example, Reem Sahwil, a refugee from Lebanon who gained national attention as a child after a viral video showed her bursting into tears in front of then-Chancellor Merkel over Germany’s immigration bureaucracy, faced a backlash for sharing pro-Palestinian content online. In response, the CDU politician Eckhardt Rehberg publicly called her naturalisation a ‘mistake that must be corrected’.¹⁸² This must be seen in the broader context of an increasingly strong right-wing AfD party, which came second in the 2025 federal elections based on anti-migration and Islamophobic rhetoric. Prominent members of the AfD have called for ‘re-migration’, meaning the expulsion of people not considered sufficiently German. It is clear that the expulsion of Palestinians marks the trying out of a concept that can later be applied to other foreigners that the political elites deem undesirable.¹⁸³

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The day after I received my citizenship, I went to register a demonstration. You know, like this, how naïve I was to believe that Germany is a state of law as they claim about themselves. In the meantime, German politicians made it clear that they will revise the citizenship of individuals who speak up for democracy, for human rights, and international law. So, I'm also affected by this new legislation. But I also know about individuals whose residence permit was not extended, or until it was extended, they had to go through hell – through a lot of bureaucratic challenges – even though the process should have been very simple. And I also know about individuals who have been deported from Germany by virtue of speaking up for democracy, international law, and human rights.

– Udi

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In October 2024, the Bundestag passed a non-binding resolution explicitly instructing the authorities to use criminal, residence, asylum, and nationality law against those deemed antisemitic. It encouraged state agencies to deny funding, withdraw awards, and pursue deportations based on IHRA-defined antisemitism.¹⁸⁴ Thereby, it politicised asylum law that is supposed to be grounded in purely humanitarian criteria.

The former Interior Minister Nancy Faeser pushed this trend further, promoting legislation that would permit deportation for 'glorifying terrorism' via social media.¹⁸⁵ While she denied that a single like or post would be grounds for removal, legal experts confirmed that people are already being expelled on this basis.¹⁸⁶ The migration lawyer Alexander Gorski remarked that this marks a new stage in authoritarian governance, where deportation becomes a tool of political censorship: 'The state punishes dissent by targeting residence rights – this is straight out of the far right's playbook'.¹⁸⁷

Human Consequences: Surveillance, Legal Limbo, and the Berlin 4

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To revoke someone's citizenship or refugee status – and every lawyer will actually tell you this – in Germany it's not based on any sort of what's necessarily lawful. It's incredibly influenced by politics.

– Hebh

.....

I have a friend who has a Lebanese passport, for example, who is working here and had a punishment that was equivalent to 40 days. And it was like, for holding a poster that says 'From Riesa to the Spree' instead of 'From the River...' – like it's a joke and she got a fine for that. And that affected her visa status because she had to go renew it while that was happening.

The good thing is that there are more networks now that are following up on these kinds of things and helping people who are in these situations, because most of the time, they don't have access. These are the people who are the most vulnerable. They barely know German or English. Often they are just trying to navigate how to get these papers. Now they can find a lawyer to support them through these solidarity groups, which is really good.

– Jamila

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The German state's approach to Palestinians fleeing genocide reveals deep-seated racism and political interference in asylum law. While Israeli citizens, despite largely living peaceful lives, received swift and bureaucratically smooth assistance in the aftermath of October 2023, including automatic visa extensions until April 2024,¹⁸⁸ Palestinian refugees from Gaza faced heightened repression. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) suspended asylum procedures for Palestinians from Gaza, citing the 'unclear and dynamic' situation on the ground as justification, resuming them only in July 2025.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, they typically only receive subsidiary protection rather than full refugee status, which entitles them to fewer rights and restricted family reunification.¹⁹⁰ This institutional stalling tactic effectively traps Palestinian refugees in legal limbo. At the same time, the German government refused to evacuate its own citizens from Gaza – let alone Palestinians – while swiftly evacuating German nationals from Israel.¹⁹¹

At an administrative level, Palestinians are rendered invisible. As of December 2023, only 3,080 Palestinians from the Occupied Territories were officially registered in Germany's asylum statistics. Many more are categorised as 'stateless' or of 'undetermined nationality', which leads to many practical issues for people trying to organise their lives in Germany.¹⁹² Among the 30,535 individuals with 'undetermined nationality' and the 10,210 listed as 'stateless', a significant number are Palestinians, suggesting a much higher undocumented population.¹⁹³

While Germany is home to the largest Palestinian diaspora in Europe, estimated at 250,000 to 300,000¹⁹⁴ (including those holding other citizenships), who settled there for various reasons, it also has a long history of denying status to Palestinians. Thousands of Palestinians who fled the civil war in Lebanon were left in limbo for with 'tolerated' (*Duldung*) status. Denied work permits, education, and travel rights, many were pushed into poverty and insecurity. Today, this system continues. Instead of renewing *Duldung* papers, authorities now issue *Grenzübertrittsbescheinigungen* (border-crossing certificates). These notify recipients of planned deportations, often without informing them what this means. They forbid work or study in Germany and are especially given to Palestinians whom authorities claim should be deported back to Greece.¹⁹⁵

The German authorities have also increasingly begun to re-open asylum cases on the basis of tenuous associations with pro-Palestinian protest activity.¹⁹⁶ Migration lawyers report that even a single family member's presence at a demonstration can lead to renewed scrutiny of the entire household, particularly when the individual is a young Arab man. Accusations often rely on 'guilt by association' tactics, such as attending a protest where others chanted banned slogans. These re-openings (*Widerrufsverfahren*) are frequently justified with vague claims of procedural errors or security concerns, leading to a chilling effect on participation in public demonstrations.¹⁹⁷

Another striking example, reported by Al Jazeera, involves two Palestinian medical students whose visa renewals were denied, though they had not engaged in any criminal activity and despite having, in so-called 'security interviews', criticised Hamas and 'recognised' Israel. Their involvement in PalMed, a network of Palestinian medical professionals, and 'having pro-Palestinian sympathies' and a 'one-sided, Palestinian perspective' were deemed sufficient grounds for initiating deportation procedures. The letters they were given contained contradictory statements and misrepresented their views to frame them as 'extremists'. 'They confiscated my opinion and projected their own imaginations onto it', one of them said.¹⁹⁸

Another case that raised eyebrows is that of the Palestinian nurse Bahaar, whose portrait appears at beginning of this section, where the government designated her one-year-old child as a security risk in order to essentially force her to self-deport. The European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) that has taken the case to the constitutional court, commented: *'The German state systematically exploits residence, asylum and citizenship law to punish already marginalised communities. This must be recognised for what it is: a blatantly racist system with devastating consequences. There is no justification for separating a new-born from his parents, yet to label the child a "security threat" marks a grotesque new low, even by their own oppressive standards.'*¹⁹⁹ In August 2025, the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled that Bahaar's son is allowed to re-enter Germany, allowing the family to finally reunite.²⁰⁰ However, this is just a preliminary decision on the urgent appeal, pending the final decision on whether such separation of parents and children in general constitute a breach of constitutional rights.

The government has also started using deportations as a tool against activists, amidst a general rise in forced removals. In 2024, Germany started a so-called 'deportation offensive', mostly because the government mistakenly thought that championing right-wing policies before the upcoming elections would sway voters towards them rather than the ascending far-right.²⁰¹

On 11 February 2025, two young male refugees from Gaza were arrested during a police raid on a café in Berlin, imprisoned, and now face deportation to Greece. One of them was a 19-year-old who had just secured housing in Berlin. These measures are being carried out under the EU's Dublin Regulation, which allows deportation to the first country of entry. In April 2025, Germany's Federal Administrative Court ruled that the deportations to Greece are lawful in the case of 'young, healthy, single men', effectively overriding lower court rulings that had previously blocked such removals on humanitarian grounds.²⁰² However, Greece has publicly stated it will not accept these returns, citing the strain on its asylum system and inadequate living conditions for returnees.²⁰³

Also in February 2025, the Berlin police conducted a raid on a business associated with the Barbakh family. This Palestinian family has been singled out by the police and right-wing media as supposed ringleaders of the city's Palestine solidarity movement, using racialised 'clan criminality' language to cast them as a collective threat. Their visibility in organising protests has made them symbolic targets in Germany's broader crackdown on Palestinian dissent. The raid resulted in the arrest of two individuals who now face deportation proceedings. The operation was supported by a specialised unit focused on Islamism and terrorism, further intensifying the scrutiny on the family.²⁰⁴

The case of the Berlin 4

In one of the clearest cases of Germany weaponising its migration regime against Palestine solidarity, four international students – two Irish citizens, one Polish citizen, and one US national – were ordered to leave Germany in April 2025 for participating in a pro-Palestinian protest at Freie Universität/Free University (FU) Berlin in October 2024. The students were accused of involvement in an ‘illegal occupation’ of university space during a peaceful sit-in that called for an end to Germany’s complicity in Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza.

The Berlin State Office for Immigration (LEA) moved swiftly to revoke the students’ residence rights. According to internal documents and court filings, the LEA justified the expulsions on the grounds that the four had allegedly disrupted public order and posed a threat to Germany’s foreign policy interests, and explicitly cited ‘Staatsräson’ as the legal and moral basis for their removal.

The accusations made against the students were vague and unsubstantiated. While they attended the protest, there was no evidence of criminal conduct. In fact, one of the eventual court rulings noted that there was no indication that the US student had committed any offence, nor that they belonged to any ‘violent pro-Palestinian scene’. Similarly, in the case of the Polish student, the court found no grounds for deportation and confirmed that police investigations were still ongoing without results.

The case was clearly politically motivated. Despite legal concerns raised by officials within the LEA, the Berlin Senate Interior Administration overruled these and ordered the expulsions to proceed. One division head reportedly refused to sign the expulsion orders, warning they were not legally enforceable.²⁰⁵

Notably, three of the four students were EU citizens, making Germany’s move legally dubious under EU free-movement rules.²⁰⁶ Legal scholars stressed that depriving EU nationals of free movement despite having no criminal convictions faces very high hurdles; Franz C. Mayer, Professor of Constitutional and EU law at the University of Bielefeld, called the attempt a ‘scandal’ and ‘obviously violating EU law’.²⁰⁷ The European Commission also underscored that freedom of movement is a fundamental right of EU citizens, while the Irish government signalled concern about the treatment of its nationals.²⁰⁸

In emergency proceedings in April and May 2025, the Berlin Administrative Court sided with all four students. It ruled that the immigration authority had failed to meet its investigative duties and that none of the individuals posed a sufficient threat to justify expulsion. The students now retain the right to remain in Germany while awaiting a final decision in the main proceedings.²⁰⁹

One of the students, reflecting on the experience, said:

‘We don’t actually want to be the centre of this. We know we’re not an isolated case. We stand in the historical continuity of the criminalisation of Palestinian existence in Germany – just like the state repression against anticolonial and political resistance. Our case just feels new because we have privileged passports’.²¹⁰

Police violence and the repression of protests

Jamila, Palestinian activist based in Berlin²¹¹

My experience was heavily violent, and it was on 17 October 2023. I live in Sonnenallee in Berlin. They call it Arab Street. It's this place where there is this entire idea all over Germany that it's so full of criminals, which is absolute bullshit. For a European capital it is quite safe.

Now I feel like they treat this area like it's a security zone. For a long time it's been impossible to request to do any demo at Hermannplatz or close to Sonnenallee. It was completely rejected. Now they're allowing it again. But at the same time that they were not accepting pro-Palestine ones, they were registering Israeli ones. So, if you're talking about security, that makes zero sense. You shouldn't accept that Israel supporters go there, because that's provocative and you know that. They just use these kinds of security excuses.

From 7 to 17 October – for almost 10 days – they were showing up in Sonnenallee day after day. It's quite a Palestinian area. They were stopping people in the streets, for example, an elderly man with a sticker on his jacket with the Palestinian flag – they would stop him and make him take it off. Teenage girls that looked like they're 14 or 15, wearing a T-shirt, 'I stand with Palestine'. Police are stopping them, telling them to take it off. They were literally policing children's and old people's clothes. Literally for 10 days in a row. Minimum. Non-stop. When Israelis and Ukrainians want to express their feelings, it's fine. That is understood. But people from Gaza are not allowed to feel anything. Even when genocide is happening in front of their eyes and their families get killed. You're not allowed to say anything. In the first 10 days, there was this person who was lighting candles, and then the police came and shut them off. They were trying their best to not allow any kind of Palestinianness.

It was the day that they bombed the hospital the first time. So, we were still not desensitised to this. I was walking home and saw a lot of cops. They pushed us away – not towards where I was going home. I went to them, started to talk to the police, and they pushed us down to the parallel street. They were barricading the area. I went, sat with some friends I met there by coincidence, drank some water at the kiosk next to us. And then a police officer came to that area and told people, 'Okay, go home'. So I got up to walk towards home. And then the police told us to go in the other direction. So I snapped. I started to yell: 'What the fuck is wrong with you? Stop telling people where to go!'

And so they attacked me. They beat the shit out of me, and then they arrested me. And then you receive a letter in the mail later, and they were accusing me of beating them up. That I attacked them. That I resisted arrest. That I cursed them out and screamed at them and shit like that.

And then in court, we had videos. We showed them. They had beat me up. I had bruises everywhere. And then the judge still said, 'No, this arrest was normal. It wasn't aggressive'.

This judge was super biased. It made me lose hope that there can be any kind of true justice. I wish that the footage [had been] taken from three different angles, that there was a cinematic kind of footage. And the thing is, the verdict of the judge was like, 'No, this is not aggressive. This is normal procedure. And you put the middle finger up, so you deserve it'.

Even if I did put the middle finger up, which I absolutely didn't, they made it up - but where in the world do you deserve to get beaten up by somebody three times your size for that? If you read this, you would think I'm Rambo. If you read what they wrote I did to them - I twisted their arm. I pinched them. I bit them. I beat them.

They make up these stories like crazy. And they win sometimes.

We're appealing. But it reaches up to 100 days of prison, which translates to €5,000 in their calculation - which is ridiculous, extreme. The judge gave me the highest possible. This goes on the record, apparently, this kind of stuff. And I was literally a person walking on the street who snapped because they were telling me to go right and left all the time, for 10 days in a row.

.....
There have been reports of actual schools, primary schools, that would call the police on their students who express solidarity with Palestine in an attempt, like as a risk prevention method. It's absolutely terrible.

- Hebh Jamal

.....
I was arrested multiple times. I experienced police brutality. I had bruises on my body. The organisation I'm part of, Jüdische Stimme für einen Gerechten Frieden in Nahost (Jewish Voice for Peace), also suffered extreme attempts at silencing, including the freezing of our bank accounts and cancellations of events that we organised. Many of my friends' homes were raided. Places that I perceived and still do perceive as safe for all minority groups in Berlin were shut down by the Senate of Berlin because they dared to host Jüdische Stimme, for example, to host our mourning event where we commemorated everybody who suffered from violence since 7 October, making no distinctions about whether the victims are Jewish or not.

- Udi Raz

.....
I am not sure if migrants are targeted specifically, I know white people who get beaten up just as much. But the police have 'permanent targets' who are being targeted at every demo and they are usually migrants or People of Colour. The police know them by name.

- Amir
.....

Police brutality has long been a structural feature of German society, disproportionately affecting racialised communities – especially Palestinians and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim. After 7 October this violence intensified, escalated and was normalised under the banner of national security and a crackdown on supposed antisemitism. In the weeks and months that followed, policing practices in Germany reached new extremes, as the detailed timeline of incidents of police violence and violent repression of protests in Appendix B shows: peaceful protestors were dragged across streets, children and pregnant people were assaulted, and entire neighbourhoods were subjected to racialised lockdowns. While Palestine supporters were cast as violently attacking the police in the mainstream media, in reality it was often the police attacking them rather than the other way around.²¹²

Between 7 October and 19 November 2023 alone, the German authorities banned at least 99 Palestine solidarity protests.²¹³ This follows a longstanding trend of banning demonstrations in support of Palestinian self-determination, opposition to the Israeli occupation, or broader criticism of the State of Israel. Protests in Berlin marking the Nakba in May 2022 and 2023 were banned, as were protests in April 2023.²¹⁴ Protest bans then and now were justified using the rhetoric of public order and ‘antisemitic incitement’, even when a call for a protest makes no reference to antisemitism or violence or an event is organised by a Jewish group. The mere possibility that a demonstration might include offensive speech was enough to ban it pre-emptively.²¹⁵ In effect, this means criminalising not actions but assumptions. Protest bans – often declared minutes before gatherings – allowed the police to justify violent dispersals. The enforcement of these bans was disproportionately targeting racialised areas like Sonnenallee in Neukölln.

The Campaign for Victims of Racist Police Violence (KOP) issued a statement on one of the protests, condemning the disproportionate use of force:

‘Over a hundred people were held for up to three hours, many were not allowed to go to the toilet or even sit down. We have received numerous videos of violent police officers who prevent video recordings, hit people lying on the ground on the head and sit on their upper bodies in such a way that they can no longer breathe.’²¹⁶

Although children under 14 years of age cannot be prosecuted in Germany, many minors were caught up in these crackdowns. Children were reportedly detained for waving flags, playing with marbles or displaying maps of Palestine from 1947 to the present day; one child was arrested for allegedly striking an officer’s helmet with a flagpole while sitting on his father’s shoulders. A 10-year-old boy was chased by officers in riot gear.²¹⁷ A 68-year-old man in a wheelchair was dragged across the pavement by riot police.²¹⁸ People were beaten, hospitalised, and then charged with assaulting the very police who attacked them.

In Berlin alone, thousands have been violently arrested or dispersed for engaging in constitutionally protected activities, such as holding signs, wearing keffiyehs, or expressing grief for victims in Gaza.²¹⁹ In the name of fighting antisemitism, Jewish anti-Zionist activists were assaulted, spat on, or arrested for carrying signs reading ‘Jews Against Genocide’, wearing the Star of David in the colours of the Palestinian flag or wearing a kippah with a watermelon motif. As one article noted, quoting Philip Roth: ‘It is too ridiculous to be taken seriously, and too serious to be ridiculous’.²²⁰

The police initiated thousands of criminal investigations on demonstrators who engaged in constitutionally protected activities, such as holding signs, wearing keffiyehs, or expressing grief for victims in Gaza.²²¹ This pattern of inversion – in which victims of state violence are criminalised as perpetrators – was repeated across Germany. As the timeline in Appendix B shows, Palestinians, Jews, and international activists have been arrested and charged for acts as minor as holding a flag, speaking Arabic or Irish, or criticising Zionism. Protests were met with kettling, surveillance, raids, language bans, and even the de-funding and eviction of cultural institutions. University students faced mass arrests and detentions, while professors, filmmakers, and children were subjected to physical and psychological trauma.

The Palestine Congress

The Palestine Congress (Palästina Kongress), supposed to be held in Berlin from 12 to 14 April 2024, was a significant event organised by a coalition of Palestinian, Jewish, and international groups. The conference aimed to address and raise awareness about the genocide in Gaza and Germany's complicity through its military and political support to Israel.

In the lead-up to the event, organisers faced numerous obstacles, including venue cancellations due to police pressure, frozen bank accounts, and a media smear campaign labelling the conference as a gathering of 'Israel haters' and 'terror apologists'. Nevertheless, the conference commenced with an opening speech by Palestinian journalist Hebh Jamal.

Hundreds of attendees were blocked at a checkpoint announced only two hours before the event; those allowed entry were capped at 250, including dozens of militarised officers and media crews selectively admitted by the police. Outside, 2,500 police officers were mobilised, creating an atmosphere resembling a military zone, and attendees were harassed.

The authorities declared the event a *Versammlung in geschlossenen Räumen* (indoor assembly) without prior notice, granting the police expanded powers to storm the venue against the organisers' will. Shortly after the event began, police mounted the stage, cut the power supply, and shut down the live stream, effectively ending the conference. Attendees faced harassment, and several were arrested, including a young Jewish activist holding a placard reading 'Jews against Genocide'.

In an unprecedented move, the German authorities issued a one-year *Betätigungsverbot* (ban on political activity) against the keynote speakers – the former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, the renowned British-Palestinian surgeon Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah, and the Palestinian writer Salman Abu-Sittah – barring them from speaking in Germany, even via video. This measure, previously used almost exclusively against Islamic State operatives, was unprecedented in this context.

Dr Ghassan Abu-Sittah was detained on arriving at Berlin Airport, interrogated for hours, and deported. He was informed that participating in the conference, even via video, would be considered a criminal offence punishable by a prison sentence of up to one year. He was subsequently banned from entering Germany and the entire Schengen zone, a decision later overturned by a German court.

The shutdown of the Palestine Congress and the measures taken against its participants have been widely criticised as a severe infringement on freedom of speech and assembly. Human rights organisations and activists have condemned the actions as indicative of the German authorities' increasingly authoritarian approach towards pro-Palestinian advocacy.²²²

The Palestine Congress was a turning point. After the initial two weeks when basically all demonstrations were prohibited, it became a bit more relaxed. But at the end of March or the beginning of April 2024 police violence again increased massively. I think one of the triggers was the Palestine Congress.

It had sold 800 tickets, and there were 2,500 police officers in full riot gear at the venue. They looked like a small army. Even after the Congress was shut down, the police ran after people to the subway.

The following Sunday they stormed the Palestine Camp in front of the Bundestag (German parliament building) and that's when I thought, this is the worst police violence ever, it cannot get worse than that. And then it got worse every week. At some point things like pepper spray, kicks into the abdomen and lower part of the body, house searches for absurd reasons such as likes on Instagram, pulling people out of restaurants, all this became normal. If I go to a demonstration now I take a bag with a change of clothes, saline solution and masks against the pepper spray.

It became clear that raids can happen to anyone, at any time, while earlier they only happened to extremely engaged activists. Many people started deleting everything from their laptops and phones, keeping videos from demonstrations on hard drives they deposited at neighbours' houses, not even in your own car, and becoming careful who they talk to.

And the Berlin Mayor Kai Wegner has demonised the Palestine movement and the Palestine Congress. Every time photos of police violence make the rounds, he thanks the police for their work.

– Amir

There is a very distinct anti-Palestinian racism and hatred that exists within the German political elite. It was just really emboldened after 7 October.

I've been invited as a speaker to the Berlin Congress, and ever since then I've been the centre of a lot of attacks, and more specifically, the Bundespolizei (Federal police force) created this alert on me whenever I travel. So, this has been really difficult for me, because every time I leave, every time I go to the airport, I'm subjected to interrogations and searches. And the last time was probably the worst.

On my way back from Morocco, at the Baden-Baden airport, police were waiting for me and my husband, who also has the same alert on his name, because he was also a speaker at the Palestine Congress. And we were both subjected to interrogations. We had our children sleeping in our arms, but over two hours we were subjected to very extensive searches. To the point where they didn't even hand our passports back until we exited the airport – and even then, they interrogated our taxi driver and other members of our family who were travelling separately.

– Hebh

This surge in violent repression cannot be separated from broader processes of militarisation. The transformation of German policing into an increasingly militarised force has been noted by many activists and commentators. Checkpoints, preventative raids, disproportionate force, and racial profiling have become everyday realities not only for protesters but for entire racialised communities. The brutalisation of protest is just one expression of a deeper authoritarian drift, in which dissent and political speech are criminalised. The crackdown has also revealed how quickly Germany's already restricted civic space can be closed entirely. Through vague allegations of 'incitement', 'disorder', or 'unauthorised symbols', the state has acquired an alarming capacity to silence political speech.

Cultural censorship, funding cuts, and deplatforming

I know artists who have no problems in a lot of places around the world, at the Venice Biennale, at New York's best museums – and then Frankfurt cancels them, and this was even before 7 October.

I know hundreds of personal stories, most of these cases don't even become public. There's a few where the artists spoke about it. But I think the ones where the artists didn't even feel they wanted to deal with all of this kind of violence were even more. The censorship is not new at all. Like, nowhere close to being new – it's just heightened.

– Jamila

In my institution at the Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies, where I'm affiliated as a PhD student, shortly after the 7 October, student representatives invited me to give a lecture based on my research. But then the head of the graduate school made the point that I should look for another place because such an event would be too political, where my research is basically concerning Jewish-Muslim encounters in Berlin.

– Udi Raz

Since 7 October 2023, Germany has witnessed a staggering wave of cultural, academic, and financial repression targeting individuals and institutions that have expressed solidarity with Palestinians or criticised the Israeli state. In the span of just a few weeks, artists, scholars, students, and entire organisations have faced censorship, cancelled events, funding cuts, and professional retaliation – often for minor actions such as signing a petition years ago or posting contextual analysis on social media. This is taking place in a country where the cultural sector is deeply dependent on public funding, and where state ministries, political foundations, and city governments play a decisive role in determining which voices are amplified and which are silenced.

By the end of October 2023 alone, Diaspora Alliance, a progressive Jewish-led international organisation combating antisemitism and its instrumentalisation, had documented 25 new cases of public sanctions or retracted invitations – almost as many as had been recorded in the preceding nine months. According to a count by the 'Archive of Silence', a crowdsourced digital project documenting instances of silencing people because of their solidarity with Palestine, nearly 200 people or events were cancelled, blocked from broadcasting, lost exhibition space, or faced administrative persecution in Germany within the first year after 7 October, 43% of which were from the Arts and Cultural sector.²²³

At least 62% of these acts of silencing affected people with Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), Muslim, Arab, Middle Eastern, Palestinian or Jewish heritage, highlighting once again the racialised dimension of the ongoing crackdown. While this trend builds on longer-standing policies such as the Bundestag's 2019 anti-BDS resolution, the post-7 October landscape has seen a dramatic intensification in scope, speed, and severity.

Among the most emblematic cases is that of Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, whose planned lecture at the FU Berlin in February 2025 was abruptly cancelled. The stated reason was 'security concerns', but the decision came after heavy political pressure from Berlin's mayor, government officials, and the Israeli ambassador – who accused the university of being a 'training camp for Hamas supporters'.²²⁴ Police reportedly considered arresting Albanese, and at least 22 police vehicles were deployed around the new venue that ultimately hosted her.²²⁵ Reflecting on the experience, Albanese stated:

'In my three years of speaking about Palestine in around twenty countries, I've never encountered anything like in Germany. The real pressure isn't just on me – it's on Germans themselves. This is outright censorship and self-censorship. I was shocked by the level of repression at the event I was part of. For the first time in three years, I felt fear. And I've lived with security protection, received death threats, yet I've never felt this way. In Germany I sensed something profoundly disturbing – an atmosphere reminiscent of historical accounts of fascism, where people fear speaking out.'²²⁶

Asked if she felt whether the situation in Germany is worsening, she said:

'Yes. Last year I gave multiple interviews, met Foreign Ministry officials, think tanks, and dozens of NGOs. Some criticized me, but many expressed gratitude. This year? Silence. I met only three NGOs. Many wanted to speak behind closed doors, fearful of repression.'²²⁷

Such incidents are part of a broader trend, as can be seen from Appendix C, which shows a detailed timeline of incidents of cultural censorship, funding cuts, and deplatforming. Palestinian voices and those speaking up in solidarity with them are not simply excluded, but actively erased. Events are cancelled not only for what is said, but often because of who is speaking. The Palestinian author Adania Shibli was dropped from the Frankfurt Book Fair with no explanation.²²⁸ The artist James Bridle lost a major architecture prize for supporting a cultural boycott.²²⁹ Nancy Fraser, a US philosopher known for her work on critical theory, was disinvited from a professorship in Cologne for having signed a solidarity letter.²³⁰ As can be seen in Appendix C, Jewish artists and intellectuals critical of Israeli policy have been censored, de-platformed, or financially penalised.

This wave of repression is aimed at eliminating dissenting narratives. Germany's 2019 Bundestag resolution condemning the BDS movement²³¹ has already created a chilling effect far beyond its scope, rendering taboo even calls for peaceful protest or appeals to uphold international law. And things are likely to get worse: in November 2024, the Bundestag passed a new resolution titled 'Never Again Is Now: Protect, Preserve and Strengthen Jewish Life in Germany', which once again relies on the IHRA definition of antisemitism and explicitly calls for withholding all forms of state support from individuals or groups associated with BDS or who question Israel's 'right to exist'.²³²



A person treating another's injuries sustained due to the police's indiscriminate use of pepper spray during a demonstration in Berlin in October 2024. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

Livelihood as leverage: workplace consequences of Palestine solidarity

Amir, a pro-Palestine activist²³³

‘I was forced to change positions in my company (under the threat of being fired if I don’t agree) after a photo of me at a Palestine protest was featured on the title page of a prominent right-wing newspaper with a headline calling us Jew haters.

I later sued the journalist who took the photo of me despite my clearly telling him that I did not consent, but I lost the case. I also lost all my trust in the German media. There are no journalistic standards anymore. Especially the Axel Springer company [see Section 4.1 for more information] is doing so much of dehumanising reporting, calling people Jew haters because they protest against a genocide.

Doxxing has also become very common. Zionists have filmed me and posted screenshots of my LinkedIn profile in their chat groups and tried to contact my employer. I do art on the side, and one of my exhibitions was cancelled by the gallery. There is an X account in Berlin where Zionists leak screenshots of Instagram profiles of Palestine supporters, sometimes even from profiles that were set to private view only. Nobody knows how they get this content. The movement has been infiltrated; nobody knows who is doing that. Private content is being leaked online, sometimes they even tag the police, and people panic. I know of friendships of three to five years that broke up because there is so much distrust now.’

.....
‘I was also fired from the Jewish Museum in Berlin—you know, I was one of the very few individuals who actually self-identify as Jewish working in the Jewish Museum, where the entire administration is not Jewish, and they tell me how the world should unfold from my perspective. I found it quite telling.’

– Udi

.....
And when you tell somebody you’re Palestinian in a work environment – even if it’s the nicest, most apolitical person – they often get nervous, which is abnormal. In the United States, before 7 October, people would be like, ‘Palestine, where is that?’ Or in the UK, or in Holland, when I tell someone I’m from Palestine, I don’t have that type of reaction. But in Germany – there’s a complex there. People get nervous immediately, no matter what their point of view is.

This was before 7 October. I was already nervous because as a Palestinian, I know there’s already a reaction to so many things. And then 7 October happened, and I decided not even to try to apply for new jobs and just find jobs with people that I know already.

– Jamila

In the aftermath of 7 October 2023, political speech in Germany in relation to Palestine has not only been censored in the cultural and academic sphere, but increasingly punished through professional and economic means. People who expressed solidarity with Palestinians or spoke up against the genocide have faced dismissal, contract cancellations, and career-ending smear campaigns driven by right-wing media outlets that violate journalistic standards and ethics and target certain individuals.

The cases documented here demonstrate that activism can have material consequences, with the message being sent being ‘speak out, and you will pay’. A social media post, a signed petition, or a comment at work can lead to someone losing their livelihood, professional accreditation, or future job prospects. Appendix C shows a detailed timeline of incidents of workplace consequences of Palestine solidarity. From a footballer dismissed for quoting a common liberation slogan, a civil servant fired for political views expressed outside work, to an academic purged after pressure from media allies, the goal is not just to remove individuals but to deter others. Each dismissal is meant to signal to workers, artists, and intellectuals that Palestine solidarity comes with a price.

The Fördergeld-Affäre and the crackdown on universities

Universities, traditionally seen as spaces for critical thought and dissent, have issued top-down declarations of unconditional support for Israeli institutions, while remaining silent on, or even punishing, expressions of solidarity with Palestinians.²³⁴ On campus, this coincided with heavy-handed policing of Gaza-related protests. The Berlin police cleared a pro-Palestinian encampment at FU Berlin on 7 May 2024, after the university filed complaints and suspended lectures; Reuters reported tents dismantled and protesters being removed, while the university later acknowledged an open letter by the FU faculty sharply criticising the police operation.²³⁵ Similar clearances followed elsewhere in the city, including the parliament lawn (26 April 2024) and at Humboldt University, where over 100 people were detained.²³⁶ In response, hundreds of academics signed an open letter urging Berlin university leadership to refrain from calling police on their own students.²³⁷

Within days, the backlash began. In mid-May, the right-wing tabloid *Bild* published a sensationalist article branding the signatories as ‘Die Universitäter’, a derogatory play on *Universität* (university) and *Täter* (perpetrators).²³⁸ In June 2024, media outlets revealed internal emails that showed that officials from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), then led by Bettina Stark-Watzinger, had launched an internal review to examine whether signatories should face funding consequences. Specifically, the Ministry explored whether it could revoke grants or disqualify these academics from serving as reviewers, and whether the content of the letter could have criminal implications – the scandal widely dubbed the Fördergeld-Affäre.²³⁹

Stark-Watzinger denied ordering the probe and instead dismissed her State Secretary.²⁴⁰ An internal audit report published in September 2024 failed to solve the core question of whether the minister herself initiated or was aware of the politically motivated scrutiny of dissenting academics.²⁴¹ Many scholars and civil society actors continue to demand transparency and accountability. What is clear, however, is that a basic act of defending academic freedom in Germany in 2024 triggered surveillance, retaliation, and attempts at censorship from the highest levels of government.

The effects of this repression are far-reaching. Self-censorship has become common, especially in state-funded institutions or sectors dominated by powerful media and political networks. Workers, particularly those with marginalised and racialised backgrounds, are forced to choose between their values and their economic security.



*During the Internationalist Queer Pride demonstration in Berlin in July 2025, protestors were met with massive police violence.
Photo: Faisal Yassin.*

CHAPTER 3

The complicity of the media, civil society, and the political Left



Nakba Day Protest in Berlin, 2024. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

In the aftermath of 7 October, institutions typically associated with liberal democratic values, such as the university leaders, certain sections of the press, the left-leaning political establishment and even the climate justice and other civil society movements, have been largely silent on Israel's genocide in Gaza and failed to resist Germany's authoritarian shift. Worse, in many cases they have actively enabled it, as this section will show.

Despite presenting themselves as defenders of human rights and global justice, many NGOs have adopted internal policies and public positions that mirror state positions, especially when they are reliant on government funds or closely tied to parties such as the Greens. Reports accusing German-funded organisations of Hamas sympathies, with little or no evidence, resulted in a climate of fear and pre-emptive censorship.²⁴² Recent government actions, such as the ruling party CDU's massive inquiry into the political neutrality of publicly funded civil society actors, show that even organisations aligned with the state's Zionist position are not immune to scrutiny.²⁴³

All of this takes place in a broader media environment that has largely abdicated its role as a critical watchdog. Instead of questioning these repressive shifts, Germany's media has helped to legitimise them. It has played a central role in doxxing activists, framing Palestinians and their allies as a racialised threat, and recycling unverified claims while treating Israeli state narratives as default truths. Mainstream coverage routinely erases the context of genocide, occupation, and apartheid, while domestically framing protests as 'extremist' and any opposition as antisemitic. Notably, this double standard is not limited to right-wing outlets, but is echoed across public broadcasters and liberal newspapers.

The consequences are tangible. As this section shows, movements have broken apart and activists have been publicly smeared; pro-Palestinian groups have been kettled at anti-austerity demonstrations or policed off the stage at queer and anti-racist rallies; climate activists have been told not to speak about Gaza. Palestine is the threshold of acceptability even among those who consider themselves progressive.

Yet, the section also shows the cracks in this consensus. Public trust in the media is waning. New forms of organising are emerging, from BIPOC-led climate groups to radical queer blocs, that insist on refusing the division between anti-racism at home and anti-colonialism abroad. The repression described here is real and escalating, but so too is the resistance.

The role of the Media: Manufacturing Consent for genocide abroad and repression at home

HEBH JAMAL

Palestinian journalist and activist

On 7 October, there was this video that I made basically trying to counter a lot of the German narrative and specifically also state that I think military resistance against Israeli military infrastructure is protected by international law. I said decolonization is necessary. They attempted to criminalize me over these statements and because I said, 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.'

I, of course, fought back and I actually won. So, the prosecutor completely dropped the charges. But that also doesn't matter because even though what I said was completely legal, the political elite in every single newspaper, like the BILD, thinks that they could call me a Jew hater, Israel hater, which they did just the other day.

And even the Anti-Semitism Commissioner of the German state of Hessen has this whole campaign against me, basically comparing me to a Nazi on his social media. There's absolutely no political nuance. It just doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if what you say is legal, it doesn't matter if what you say can be contextualised.

German broadcasters that are writing in English have a very different terminology than German broadcasters that are writing in German. If you look at Deutsche Welle English and Deutsche Welle in German - it's almost a completely different department, completely different news organization.

And I think that's intentional. It's almost as if people don't really know, want people to know what's going on inside this country and what people are telling each other.



PORTRAIT

So, at this point people who are called anti-Deutsche have increased their attacks on Palestinian events and on Palestinian activities in Germany. And we have also seen the mainstream media systematically legitimising any kind of violence against us. And increasing reporting when it comes to trying to delegitimize and discredit the Palestinian struggle and the Palestinian people and the Palestinian events and the Palestinian voices in Germany. So that is when we came together to build Palestine Speaks. And we called it Palestine Speaks because of the idea of reclaiming our truth, reclaiming our narrative, decolonising in action, not just in theory.

– Majed

Language has power. Much has been written about how German outlets have played a direct role in manufacturing consent for a genocidal war by consistently minimising the genocide and the violence inflicted upon Palestinians. Israeli state narratives are treated as default truths, while Palestinian testimonies are doubted, framed as extremist, or simply ignored. The deaths of Palestinian children are buried beneath euphemisms, the killing of over 224 Palestinian journalists and media workers (as of October 2025)²⁴⁴ is met with no solidarity from their German counterparts.

This double standard extends deeply into domestic politics. Antisemitism is increasingly used as a rhetorical weapon to discipline public discourse, silence Palestinian voices, and stifle solidarity. While this tendency was clear in the media long before 7 October, it was not always this pronounced. As traced by Samantha Carmel,²⁴⁵ until the 1980s, it was still possible in West Germany to support Palestinian self-determination and present that support as a moral lesson drawn from the Holocaust. Politicians like former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and journalists like Spiegel founder Rudolf Augstein openly criticised Israel's policies without repercussions for their career.²⁴⁶ Augstein, for example, condemned Israel's military actions and warned that unconditional support for Israel could lead to its downfall, insisting that past Jewish suffering could not justify present-day violence against Palestinians.²⁴⁷ Today, such statements would be unthinkable in mainstream German media. It has become nearly impossible to apply universal moral lessons from Nazi crimes to Israel, since the Holocaust is framed as an exceptional crime that can by definition never be repeated.

The first two years of the genocide have shown that Germany's media are systematically eroding journalistic standards. As this section will show, this is the case not only for right-wing outlets but also for those perceived as mainstream or even left-leaning. They all have engaged in trivialising violence done to Palestinians in Gaza and their supporters here, have engaged in doxxing and smear campaigns, racialisation and 'othering' of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, casting Palestinians and their allies as the threat, and the state that bombs, occupies, and kills as the victim. In so doing, they justify and sustain the political repression documented throughout this report, and hence fuelled anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim racism.

The press, which should be a safeguard against state abuse, has instead become a tool for enforcing ideological conformity. However, along with the slow shift in German public opinion about the genocide itself, an increasing number of citizens seem to be recognising biased media reporting. A poll conducted by the German public broadcaster NDR in August 2024 revealed that 48% of the German population expressed little to no trust in the media's coverage of Gaza, 31% believed that German media was too biased towards Israel, while only 40% said they had full or significant trust in what they were seeing and hearing.²⁴⁸

Axel Springer

The Axel Springer media empire, owner of outlets like the widely read right-wing tabloid Bild as well as WELT, Politico Europe, and Berliner Morgenpost, plays a central role in normalising anti-Palestinian repression and criminalising dissent in Germany. Springer's commitment to the Israeli state is structurally embedded in the company. One of its five mission statements, further sharpened following 7 October, explicitly supports 'Israel's right to exist' (while other countries are not mentioned),²⁴⁹ and its CEO Mathias Döpfner has gone even further. In a now-infamous leaked quote published by Die Zeit, Döpfner summarised his political worldview with the phrase 'Zionismus über alles' (Zionism above everything else). This echoes the banned Nazi slogan 'Deutschland über alles' (Germany above everything else).²⁵⁰

The Green MP Jürgen Trittin even praised Springer's rigid stance, calling for similar alignment across all publishing houses and political parties. His declaration blurred the line between media independence and state propaganda, which prompted Germany's journalists' union (DJV) to issue a warning against political interference in press freedom.²⁵¹

The racist portrayal of the Barbakh family in the media

The impact of Springer's ideology can be felt across German media, particularly in the case of the Barbakh family, a group of Palestinian refugees from Gaza living in Berlin who have been the target of an extended smear campaign because of their political activism.²⁵² For months, major German outlets – including *WELT*, *Bild*, *Focus*, and the *Berliner Zeitung* – routinely depicted the family as a dangerous 'Gaza clan',²⁵³ using racialised language and othering to paint them as violent, foreign, and inherently criminal. Rather than focusing on verified facts, articles make sweeping claims, suggesting links to Hamas or portraying the family as a threat to Berlin, with little or no substantiation.²⁵⁴ This dehumanising coverage included the publication of a video showing the arrest of a 16-year-old family member, with *WELT* claiming that the family 'makes no secret of their hate for Israel'.²⁵⁵ The reports have drawn serious concern from media watchdogs and human rights groups. *Berliner Zeitung* journalist Carola Tunk is accused of repeatedly contacting a minor from the Barbakh family via social media, without parental permission and despite the child clearly stating that he did not wish to speak with her.²⁵⁶ She reportedly stalked him digitally, sent him personal questions and tried to locate his whereabouts. This intrusion was not limited to online interactions; she allegedly attempted to approach him on the street as well. This violates both the German Press Code (Pressekodex) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.²⁵⁷ Despite this, *Berliner Zeitung* published content identifying the minor by name and associating him with the sensationalised label 'Gaza Mohammed', referring to him as the 'star of the Pali scene of Neukölln',²⁵⁸ language that reinforces racialised stereotypes and strips him of individual dignity.

This media harassment does not occur in a vacuum but feeds directly into a wider system of state repression and deportation threats. Several members of the Barbakh family, including minors, have reportedly been issued with deportation notices by German immigration authorities.

This strategy of demonisation is not confined to refugee families. Springer outlets have also targeted political activists and public servants. Elisa Baş, a young climate justice activist and spokesperson of Fridays for Future, was vilified by *Bild* and other Springer outlets for sharing someone else's criticism of Josef Schuster, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, in her Instagram story.²⁵⁹ Schuster, in a guest commentary for *Bild*, had described Palestine supporters as 'barbarians among us' and said that 'something must happen'.²⁶⁰ Unlike hundreds of Palestine supporters, he was never charged with incitement.

Springer media has also contributed to the public shaming and professional downfall of Melanie Schweizer, a former civil servant and advisor in the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as parliamentary candidate for MERA25.²⁶¹ She was dismissed after *Bild* ran a smear campaign against her, accusing her of 'hatred of Israel' based on social media posts criticising Israel's military actions in Gaza. She was never contacted for comment, and her posts, many of which were not even public, did not breach any laws.²⁶² In October 2023, *The Intercept* further reported that Kasem Raad, a 20-year-old apprentice at Springer, was fired for privately questioning the Israeli military's narrative about the 7 October events.²⁶³ Springer press outlets have become instruments of authoritarian consensus, enforcing loyalty to a foreign state while contributing to the marginalisation of the most vulnerable.



Protest in Frankfurt (Main), October 2025. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

ARD

In October 2023, a leaked internal memo from Germany's largest public broadcaster ARD, whose nightly news programme Tagesschau reaches almost 10 million viewers or 12% of the German population, revealed detailed instructions for reporting on Israel's war on Gaza.²⁶⁴ Journalists were advised to avoid phrases like 'escalation' or 'spiral of violence' that might contextualise Hamas' attacks, and instead adopt terminology aligned with Israeli state framing. An internal ARD glossary dated 18 October 2023 instructs journalists to avoid terms like 'Hamas fighters', mandating instead the use of 'terrorists'.²⁶⁵ The document goes further by categorising any comparison between Israel's actions in Gaza and the Holocaust, or even referring to Israel as a colonial power, as antisemitic.²⁶⁶ It also explicitly defines the BDS movement as 'anti-Israel,' adding that the label 'anti-Zionist or anti-Semitic may also be accurate'.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, ARD states that the chant 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' is a criminal offence, incorrectly claiming it calls for the 'annihilation of Israel'.²⁶⁸ ARD has been accused by staff and activists of trivialising Palestinian suffering and avoiding critical scrutiny of Israeli actions.

In November 2024, after a football match between Dutch Ajax and Israel's Maccabi club in Amsterdam, Maccabi supporters rioted in the city, chanted anti-Arab slogans, attacked a taxi driver, tore down Palestinian flags, and thus provoked violent clashes with local residents.²⁶⁹ International media coverage framed the incident primarily as an antisemitic attack or even 'pogrom' against Israeli football fans, ignoring eyewitness reports and video evidence that revealed a very different picture.²⁷⁰ The Dutch photographer Annet de Graaf, who filmed Maccabi supporters attacking a Dutch person, later discovered that Tagesschau was one among many news channels that had used her video out of context, misrepresenting the sequence of events to portray Maccabi fans as the victims rather than the aggressors.²⁷¹ Following public pressure, Tagesschau issued a rare public apology to de Graaf, acknowledging the misuse of her footage but never explaining to its audience what it actually showed. It instead replaced the video with a different one without changing the biased reporting.²⁷² In response, de Graaf called on other outlets – including CNN, BBC World, The Guardian, Bild, and The New York Times – to correct their reporting.²⁷³

Other media outlets

Der Spiegel, a popular weekly with a long tradition of shaping political opinion, has likewise contributed to the smearing of Palestinian solidarity.²⁷⁴ A protest by 85 students at Berlin's FU was surrounded by an equal number of journalists. Among the deluge of inflammatory coverage, a Spiegel TV segment stood out for its misleading and dangerous rhetoric. It falsely framed the protest as 'against Jews',²⁷⁵ while ignoring the fact that several Jewish students had co-organised and spoken at the event against genocide. The video zoomed in on one queer student's personal Instagram, showing a swimsuit photo and publishing his account name, an act that led to right-wing harassment and threats. The student's Jewish identity was omitted from the reporting.²⁷⁶ At a demonstration for journalistic integrity, he later commented: *'Why did you spend a full minute going over my Instagram account and pronouns, but neglected to mention I'm Jewish? How do your queer colleagues feel about this journalistic practice? Do you think your ancestors would be proud of the way you stoke the embers of simmering racism in this country, giving every reactionary xenophobe carte blanche to act on their hatred of Muslim, Arab, Black and Brown people under the guise of 'defending Jews'?'*²⁷⁷ In December 2024, internal whistle-blowers at Deutsche Welle (DW) exposed a culture of pro-Israel bias and open hostility to Palestinian perspectives.²⁷⁸ At least 13 staff members and freelancers reported

being targeted for their political views.²⁷⁹ Internal documents reportedly include ‘comebacks’ for anchors to use during live interviews with ‘pro-Palestinian voices’, including instructions on how to deflect or challenge any mention of Israeli war crimes. Even before October 2023, several Arab journalists had been fired in a coordinated campaign, accused of antisemitism without due process. One journalist who fought back and won in court twice described it as a systematic attempt to ‘silence Palestinian voices under the guise of fighting hate speech’.²⁸⁰

A spokesperson from Deutsche Welle, responding to this report, said “We emphasize that our programs meet journalistic standards of plurality, impartiality and unbiased reporting. In accordance with our law, our programs as a whole must enable viewers to form their own opinions independently and must not show any bias in favor of any party or other political association, religious community, professional group or interest group. We regularly review our programs against these standards and correct our content if necessary.”

On 1 March 2024, the day after Israeli soldiers opened fire on around 1,000 starving Palestinians attempting to get food for their families,²⁸¹ the mainstream Berlin regional daily Tagesspiegel, which has been ranked as the highest quality regional paper in the country,²⁸² published an article that smeared two Berlin-based pro-Palestinian activists. It falsely portrayed them as inciters of violence and antisemitism by quoting statements about Palestinian self-defence out of context.²⁸³ The article pits them against so-called ‘moderate’ activists and dangerously includes their full names, faces, and workplaces, exposing them to potential harassment. In response, activists launched the ‘Doxxing is not Journalism’ campaign, protesting outside Tagesspiegel’s Berlin headquarters and demanding solidarity with the over 130 Palestinian journalists who had already been killed in Gaza by that point.²⁸⁴

Even taz, a daily newspaper often associated with progressive politics, failed to uphold journalistic principles when covering Gaza. On 9 March 2025, when more than 48,000 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli attacks,²⁸⁵ it published an op-ed titled ‘The Power to Define Genocide,’ in which the author claimed that accusations of genocide against Israel were ‘baseless’ and driven by ‘anti-Israel sentiment’. The piece dismissed reports from Gaza as emotional manipulation, argued that the civilian death toll was Hamas’s fault, and concluded that only Hamas could be accused of genocidal intent.²⁸⁶

Silence and ignorance: NGOs, the climate movement and other movements

.....

We are not welcome in the German spaces. We’ve seen that when there was the largest anti-racist demo, and there was a block against AfD, and there was supposed to be a bloc for Palestine, we were kicked out. And we were also kicked out from the queer demos years ago. Just to speak as queers against the Pinkwashing of Palestine, or speak about Palestine with the environmental movement against greenwashing of settler colonialism in Palestine, this was not allowed.

The moment you bring Israel into any topic, you’re out. The moment you start to become anti-Israeli policies – and anti-genocide, anti-colonial regimes and anti-apartheid – or speak about it, you’re out. This tells a lot about how Palestine became kind of the line between right and wrong, the line between: are you human or are you evil? Are you part of the orientalist, or are you part of those who are decolonising? Yeah, it is Palestine that became not only the line of truth, but a litmus test of our shared humanity and our individual and collective commitment to the ongoing struggle for liberation.

– Majed

The Climate movement

Paolo, former Extinction Rebellion activist²⁸⁷

I've been involved in the climate justice movement since 2022, mainly with Extinction Rebellion (XR) in the English-speaking group of a German city. This group was connected to the broader XR Germany network. After 7 October 2023, there was a striking unwillingness to engage with what was happening.

I was deeply disturbed by this refusal to discuss it and shocked by the silencing. I was surprised by lack of understanding in Germany, and within XR, about the distinction between Zionism and Judaism. The protection of Israel equated to the protection of Jewish people, disregarding Palestinians completely. This ignorance extended to the wider climate justice movement in the country and activists in general.

In my group, there were about ten of us, mainly foreigners, who felt the need to address the situation, at least to call for an immediate ceasefire. But we were blocked from even initiating an open discussion. I think the real issue within XR – at least in Germany – was fear and the lack of anticolonial understanding, and probably ultimately racism.

Some German members were extremely cautious about anything that could be perceived as antisemitic. They felt they had a special authority to define antisemitism, based on the country's history and education. This sense of moral superiority caused a rift, and eventually, our XR subgroup dissolved. XR Germany more broadly seems very weak now. I think this is because climate change can't be addressed in isolation. It's a systemic issue that demands an intersectional approach. Focusing only on fossil fuels, while ignoring colonialism and global injustices, is simply ineffective.

Before 2023, Germany's climate justice movement had gained international visibility for its mass mobilisations and civil disobedience campaigns. But while climate groups speak the language of justice and global solidarity, many of them failed or refused to show solidarity with Palestinians facing environmental destruction, settler colonialism, and now, genocide.

As bombs rained down on Gaza in late 2023 and early 2024, killing tens of thousands of Palestinians, most of Germany's best-funded, most-visible climate groups remained silent. Nowhere was this more visible than in the split between Fridays for Future Germany (FFF Germany) and its international parent organisation. After Greta Thunberg publicly posted a photo of herself holding a 'Stand with Gaza' sign²⁸⁸, and Fridays for Future International shared statements referring to genocide and apartheid in Palestine, German media and political actors responded with predictable outrage. The German Environment Minister Steffi Lemke condemned the statements as 'unspeakable'²⁸⁹ and damaging to the climate movement. Luisa Neubauer, the public face of FFF Germany, quickly distanced herself from Thunberg, expressing 'disappointment' that she had not said 'anything concrete about the Jewish victims' of 7 October.²⁹⁰ In interviews, Neubauer stated that FFF Germany would reassess its collaboration with the international movement and that it was 'obvious that a lot is falling apart' within the global coalition.²⁹¹ FFF Germany's official account posted that it did not share the

views of its international counterpart and declared that the international account ‘does not speak for us’.²⁹² This episode is part of a longer pattern. In the movement in general, discussions about Palestine have routinely been avoided, postponed, or outright blocked. Many German climate NGOs have close ties to political parties, particularly the Greens, and depend on public funding. This creates structural disincentives to take controversial positions on foreign policy or human rights issues, especially when they involve Israel and Palestine. The effect has been a narrowing of what it is politically acceptable to say, and a depoliticisation of climate discourse itself. Instead of challenging root causes of the climate crisis such as militarism, colonialism, or extractivism, much of the German climate mainstream remains focused on technical solutions and market reforms.

Nevertheless, this depoliticisation has prompted the emergence of alternative climate groups, particularly since 7 October 2023. Many of these are led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), and explicitly frame climate justice as inseparable from anti-racism and anti-colonial struggles. Groups such as BIPOC 4 Future, Debt for Climate, and Klima4Palestina have organised separate events, protests, and climate strikes that incorporate Palestinian solidarity as a core principle.

Other movements

The marginalisation of Palestinian solidarity is not confined to the climate movement; it extends across Germany’s broader progressive and left-liberal spaces, including union-led protests, anti-austerity coalitions, and even anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns. While many of these initiatives claim to stand for social justice, anti-racism, or intersectional values, their handling of Palestine has often exposed deep contradictions.

One example is the Unkürzbar protest held in Berlin on 22 February 2024. Organised by the Berlin branch of the public service union ver.di under the slogan ‘Berlin ist unkürzbar – Umverteilung jetzt!’ (‘Berlin is uncuttable – Redistribution now!’), the protest was framed as a response to sweeping cuts in sectors such as education, social work, culture, and mobility. However, when demonstrators attempted to highlight how these austerity measures are embedded in a broader authoritarian trend that includes censorship of Palestine solidarity and escalating militarisation, their presence was met with resistance and repression.²⁹³ Palestine solidarity activists, many of whom are also racialised and marginalised, were kettled by protest stewards and later handed over to police. One group was publicly accused by organisers of ‘infiltrating’ the protest, ‘lacking in solidarity’, and violating a supposed ‘consensus’. This consensus document, drafted by a small group of organisers and enforced with no transparency, devoted nearly a third of its content to regulating speech on Israel–Palestine – underscoring how central the issue has become, even when officially excluded. Some organisers accused the Palestine bloc of ‘dividing’ the protest, and some were reportedly subjected to slurs and called ‘terrorists’.

This is not an isolated incident. While Germany has witnessed significant mobilisations against the far-right AfD, these movements have often marginalised or excluded pro-Palestinian voices. In January 2024 mass demonstrations erupted across Germany in response to revelations about a secret high-level meeting with right-wing politicians discussing mass deportations. These protests, drawing hundreds of thousands, were framed as defending democracy and pluralism. However, what was glaringly absent was a clear expression of solidarity with those currently most targeted by racism: people of colour standing in solidarity with Palestinians.²⁹⁴ While one protest specifically listed antisemitism as a form of racism to be opposed, it did not mention

Islamophobia, despite the fact that Muslims, together with migrants of Colour, are the main targets of the AfD, which is also staunchly pro-Israel. However, pro-Palestinian activists reported being unwelcome. In Frankfurt, for instance, demonstrators carrying Palestinian flags were pushed to the margins, with some being physically confronted by other participants.²⁹⁵ One person commented later: 'After the nationwide anti-fascism demos, while white people were congratulating each other, Arabs were checking on each other. Business as usual'.²⁹⁶ Similar developments have emerged in queer activist spaces. The 2019 Berlin Radical Queer March saw over 500 participants in the 'Queers for Palestine' bloc. Despite the radical and inclusive branding of the main march, organisers called the police on this bloc.²⁹⁷ In 2021, however, the movement came back even bigger; 10,000 people marched at the Intersectional Queer Liberation at Berlin's First Internationalist Pride, a number that was kept up over subsequent years.²⁹⁸

NGOs

.....

Anything that gets state funding in Germany and expresses support for Palestine in a way that could really make any change could be entirely defunded. And it's unfortunately very difficult for ordinary Germans to disagree because at the end of the day, it's going to be their jobs, it's going to be where they go to work and where they go to school and where they go to university. So where are the spaces for them to express dissent or support there? There isn't an infrastructure to do that unless they're on the streets, and unless they are paying attention and consume international media.

– Hebh Jamal

.....

Elias, working in a left-leaning German climate NGO²⁹⁹

When 7 October came, they didn't say anything about it – just general silence – and they found it very difficult to speak up, or, I would say, took a somewhat anti-Deutsch or Zionist stance in expressing solidarity with Israel. It really reinforced the impression that this is a German organisation that has its own line – and that their own survival and existence are more important to them than taking a strong position or standing up for their values, or even showing that there are any values at all that have to do with climate justice and solidarity and the kinds of things they normally pride themselves on.

The most common excuse was that the issue was too complex, that you couldn't take a stance on it because you're not a Middle East expert or don't have a Middle East expert. And that it's a minefield, where you're bound to get it wrong. That was basically the first wave of excuses to avoid engaging with the topic – that it's somehow just too far away, too complicated, and doesn't really have anything to do with us – when of course it has everything to do with us.

A very popular argument was also that if you speak out on this issue – on 'the conflict,' as it was always called (never war, never occupation, never apartheid – those words were always completely avoided to create some kind of distance and the illusion that we are dealing with two equal sides) then you would have to speak out on every conflict in the world. So, the uniqueness of this conflict in relation to colonialism simply wasn't recognised. I think this also reveals a certain complicity in the genocide, because it shows that, somehow, there seems to exist the right in German society not to be informed, or a special right to look away – and in doing so, to help the 'Jewish people', or the state of Israel.

Whenever statements on Palestine are being drafted, the people involved were dragged into year-long internal processes. There is always something deemed more important, and the issue keeps being postponed, with endless excuses for why it cannot be addressed. In organisations that are almost entirely white, it feels as if there is barely any empathy for those directly affected by the violence. The normalisation of war and death in these regions creates a major barrier for anyone attempting to show solidarity.

Many organisations are deeply scared of being labelled antisemitic and losing funding. Big donors could jump ship any time if the organisations say anything 'antisemitic'. Many German NGOs maintain strong ties to the Green Party and exhibit a clear political loyalty. As a result, they end up abandoning the values they are supposed to represent. Although they present themselves as independent civil society actors, they often operate according to party lines.

Climate activism from the white mainstream is often apolitical. They do not demand justice or solidarity, and avoid any criticism of structural problems like capitalism or colonialism. These NGOs are keeping the system running, and they are interested in maintaining the status quo because they are part of the system.

This is scary, especially given that the same German characteristic of looking away helped silence people during the Nazi rule and instead blame the victims. The media tell people what to think. And at some point you start feeling like you're the crazy one when again and again you tell people that they should get their information elsewhere.

Palestinian solidarity work in Germany has also faced obstacles from sectors of civil society that supposedly stand for the values espoused by the anti-genocide movement. This includes NGOs that now operate under growing pressure to distance themselves from anything deemed critical of Israel as not to lose state funding. As a result, many adopt vague or overly restrictive policies that effectively silence Palestinian voices.

It seems unlikely that this could save them anyway: Chancellor Friedrich Merz, the leader of Germany's CDU, has recently taken steps that could affect NGO funding. In February 2025, Merz's CDU/CSU parliamentary group submitted a comprehensive inquiry to the federal government, consisting of 551 questions concerning the funding and political neutrality of various NGOs, including many that have taken a Zionist or no stance at all on Palestine.³⁰⁰ In October 2023, the Israeli organisation NGO Monitor published a report claiming to identify German-funded NGOs that allegedly support Hamas or deny the events of 7 October.³⁰¹ While such claims are rarely substantiated with context or direct quotes, they contribute to a hostile environment in which NGOs are pressured to sever ties with Palestinian organisations or individuals and censor their own programmes. In December 2023, the German government quietly cut all federal funding to six Palestinian non-government organisations without making a public announcement or offering an explanation.³⁰² Among the organisations was Al-Haq, a prominent Palestinian human rights group that had submitted testimony to the International Criminal Court, which later contributed to the ICC issuing an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Although Israel labelled these NGOs as terrorist-affiliated in 2021, the claims were widely rejected at the time – including by Germany and France – as baseless.³⁰³ Nevertheless, Germany now halted cooperation entirely.

Later on, Germany also quietly cut funding for the Israeli organisations Zochrot and New Profile. Zochrot, which promotes public education about the Nakba and advocates for the right of return for Palestinians, lost about a quarter of its annual budget. New Profile, a volunteer movement that supports Israeli conscientious objectors, lost about half of its total funding. While the German authorities gave no official justification for the cuts, the timing strongly suggests a link to the Bundestag's November 2023 'Never Again Is Now' resolution. Zochrot was previously asked to clarify its position on the concept of a 'Jewish and democratic state'. Staff described the decision as politically motivated censorship and criticised Germany's double standards, noting that support was withdrawn from groups actively promoting justice and open debate, while the German government continues to claim it upholds peace and feminist foreign policy.

An example of the resulting self-censorship is the recent change of policy at Franz-Mehring-Platz 1 (FMP1), a historic space for left-wing activism in Berlin. Activists attempting to organise a Palestine-related event at FMP1 were required to sign a pre-emptive declaration committing not to question Israel's right to exist, oppose a two-state solution, or support any positions interpreted as legitimising Hamas. The wording of the declaration, especially its inclusion of vague categories like 'racist' or 'glorify violence' gives the organisers broad discretion to suppress dissenting views.³⁰⁴

Too little, too late: Die Linke and the Left political establishment

Just when a strong political force was most needed to oppose Germany's complicity in genocide and the escalating repression of civil liberties, the party from which such a stance was most expected remained silent. For years, the main German left-wing party Die Linke and its affiliated Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) have failed to uphold their claimed anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and internationalist principles whenever it comes to Palestine.³⁰⁵ Die Linke has often aligned itself with the broader state consensus on Israel, suppressing dissenting voices within its ranks, adopting ambiguous or conservative rhetoric, and distancing itself from Palestinian civil society demands. The RLS, a publicly funded foundation with the stated aim of supporting emancipatory politics, mirrored this silence and even contributed to marginalising Palestinian perspectives internally.³⁰⁶ This failure has had serious consequences: young activists of colour, anti-racist movements, and long-standing supporters of Die Linke have become increasingly disillusioned.³⁰⁷ The party's credibility as a force for justice and international solidarity has been gravely damaged. Recent developments suggest a small shift towards a more principled stance, but these appear to be too little, too late.

Die Linke

After the beginning of the genocide, Die Linke's leadership issued a one-sided statement on 11 October solely blaming Hamas for the escalation.³⁰⁸ Rather than correcting course as Israel's genocidal intentions became ever more obvious, party leaders continued to clamp down on internal dissent. Co-chair Martin Schirdewan proclaimed his solidarity with Israel in a rally on 22 October, even as the death toll in Gaza mounted.³⁰⁹ When former Die Linke MP Sahra Wagenknecht criticised the Israeli government's actions in November 2023 as 'ruthless warfare'³¹⁰ and described Gaza as an 'open-air prison',³¹¹ the parliamentary group leader said that he "strongly distanced" himself from her.³¹² Pressure from progressive streams in the party to adopt stronger language calling for a ceasefire was voted down at the party conference in November,³¹³ and their programme for the 2024 EU parliamentary elections, while condemning Russia, failed to mention Israel and Gaza.³¹⁴ Furthermore, while Die Linke officially decided to support the Israeli peace movement and Israeli parliamentarian Ofer Cassif, who faced expulsion from the Knesset for supporting South Africa's ICJ case, there were no such solidarity statements with Palestinians.³¹⁵ Christine Buchholz, a long-time MP and member of the more radical initiative Socialism from Below criticised Die Linke's inability to take a clear stance. In an interview in January 2024, she said that the party's position was 'absolutely inadequate, as it tries to maintain a balance between criticism of Israel and criticism of Hamas'.³¹⁶ The party, she argued, had moved away from its internationalist tradition and was more concerned with coalition-building than with principle.

In April 2024, the Linke Berlin party congress refused to pass a motion condemning the police storming of the Palestine Congress and the violent dismantling of the protest camp in front of the parliament.³¹⁷ While some local Berlin branches supported the motion, the majority rejected it on procedural grounds. Prominent party figures such as former senators and parliamentary group members Klaus Lederer and Elke Breitenbach even signed the appeal of the so-called 'Alliance against Antisemitic Terror,' which accused the Palestine Conference of trivialising terror and of antisemitism.³¹⁸ The response to these decisions was damning. Activists and party members across Germany accused Die Linke of siding with state repression, failing to

defend basic civil rights, and remaining silent in the face of genocide. They argued that the party's credibility as a voice for justice and liberation had collapsed.

In October 2024, internal tensions within Die Linke's Berlin branch reached breaking point. Prominent figures, including Lederer and Breitenbach, resigned from the party, citing irreconcilable differences over antisemitism and Israel/Palestine.³¹⁹ This split followed repeated failures to resolve disagreements at the Berlin state party congress.

In December 2024, the party leadership initiated expulsion proceedings against Ramsis Kilani, a prominent Palestinian-German activist in Berlin, for allegedly bringing the party into disrepute – allegations of antisemitism based on 'snippets from social media distorted by right-wing journalists'.³²⁰ In contrast, it took members of the party until May 2025 to formally demand the exclusion of Brandenburg's antisemitism commissioner Andreas Büttner, a former CDU and FDP member who denied the genocide in Gaza and supported Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights.³²¹ In January 2024, Die Linke did condemn the German cessation of payments to UNRWA, but did so claiming that this would only make Hamas more popular.³²²

While the election programme for the 2025 federal elections³²³ did condemn Israel's 'brutal war crimes' and call for the ICC warrant against Netanyahu to be implemented, this was again in a context of equating oppressor and oppressed. The programme failed to use the term 'genocide', instead calling it a 'war', at a point when even mainstream NGOs like Amnesty were using the term genocide.³²⁴

A turning point?

After the relative success of the party in the February federal elections, things seemed to shift slightly. Despite leadership repression, dissent continued to grow within the party. In March 2025, MEP Carola Rackete, who had publicly distanced herself from Greta Thunberg's pro-Palestinian stance in November 2023, now became the first major elected German politician to use the word 'genocide', calling out the EU's (but not Germany's) complicity.³²⁵

Internal fractures deepened. The party board member Ulrike Eifler was attacked for sharing an image with the slogan 'All united for Free Palestine'.³²⁶ The leadership pressured her to delete the post, reportedly after in turn being pressured by *Bild*. Eifler refused to apologise, insisting that her intent was to draw attention to the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza.

On 10 May 2025, the national party congress adopted a motion replacing the IHRA definition of antisemitism with the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) – a landmark decision. The motion also condemned the use of the IHRA definition to justify censorship, repression, and denial of funding. The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung had criticised the IHRA definition in a 2019 report, yet it took the party until 2025 to act on this.³²⁷

The decision faced an immediate backlash. The Bundestag Vice President and former Linke Minister President of Thuringia Bodo Ramelow denounced the vote. The Central Council of Jews in Germany accused the party of abandoning Jewish communities.³²⁸

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS)

RLS's failures echoed those of the party. On 19 October, the Foundation posted a statement by its Tel Aviv office director that completely omitted the escalating massacres in Gaza.³²⁹ In contrast, in a leaked letter from November 2023 Palestinian staff in RLS's Palestine and Jordan office criticised the Foundation's 'systematic suppression of Palestinian voices and the perpetuation of the oppressor's narrative'.³³⁰ Expressions of solidarity were discouraged or outright banned. Even as colleagues and family members of staff were killed or displaced in Gaza, the Foundation suppressed their ability to speak.³³¹

When RLS published a dossier on the 'war' in Israel and Palestine³³² that claimed to oppose the logic of violence, it did so in a both-sides framework that avoided naming Israel's responsibility for war crimes. The Foundation's long silence and evasive language left many former supporters feeling betrayed.³³³

Later articles on the Foundation's website occasionally used the term genocide and provided space for Palestinian perspectives,³³⁴ but this shift was neither consistent nor timely. For instance, an analysis of the brief ceasefire published in early February 2025 avoided the term genocide, instead referring to 'brutal warfare between Israel and Hamas'.³³⁵ A subsequent article on the history and role of the Palestinian Authority also failed to mention genocide or call for accountability for large-scale war crimes. Instead, it welcomed the resumption of the EUBAM at the Rafah crossing and urged the EU to 'make clear to Israel that it now has a historic opportunity to implement the terms of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative: full normalization between Israel and the Arab world and, in return, the creation of an autonomous and viable Palestinian state'.³³⁶

An article from May 2025 did acknowledge the genocide and the Palestinian people's long history of displacement, but continued to deny the legitimacy of Palestinian resistance: *'What is happening now in the Gaza Strip is on a completely different scale and makes a long-term political solution impossible. What was originally justified by the right to self-determination, the necessity of eliminating Hamas, and the rescue of Israeli hostages has led to the sweeping destruction of the Gaza Strip'*.³³⁷

Rosa Luxemburg once wrote:

'The most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening'.

For a party foundation that bears her name, the failure to do so in the face of genocide is an enduring stain.



Demonstration in Berlin in June 2025. Photo: Faisal Yassin

Conclusion:

One Day, Germany Will Have Always Been Against This

Not all the power and money, not all the weapons and propaganda on earth can any longer hide the wound that is Palestine.

– Arundhati Roy³³⁸

Anyone schooled in Germany on the horrors of the Holocaust will sooner or later be confronted with these questions: How could anything like this happen? Why didn't people stop it? What would I have done? Looking at the last two years, the answer is: This is how.

On 25 October 2023, after just three weeks of the bombardment of Gaza started, the Egyptian-Canadian journalist Omar El Akkad wrote: 'One day, when it's safe, when there's no personal downside to calling a thing what it is, when it's too late to hold anyone accountable, everyone will have always been against this'.³³⁹ The line went viral. As the first part of this report has shown, Germany is currently supporting the genocide and has once again missed a crucial chance to be on the right side of history. It remains to be seen how long it will take those in power to start claiming that in reality they were always critical of Israel.

One wonders how the victims of this genocide will be remembered in Germany. Will there be memorial days with speeches, politicians laying wreathes in Gaza, mandatory visits to genocide museums, school books teaching children, once more, that this must never happen again? How many times must history repeat itself before political leaders learn from it?

If the last two years have done anything, they have ripped the mask off 'Western values' and laid bare what was always clear to those on the receiving end: to migrants left to drown in the Mediterranean; to those whose families were killed with German-made weapons in German-supported NATO wars; to the victims of right-wing extremist violence that the state looked away from or covered up. Those most vulnerable have long known the truth, but now the hypocrisy is so obvious that it is impossible to ignore.

This report has shown that Germany's unwavering support for Israel's genocide in Gaza is mirrored by a sweeping crackdown on Palestine solidarity at home. Over decades, authorities have set up a legal-political architecture that intentionally conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism and can easily be deployed to deflect any criticism of Israel. The state has responded to such criticism with criminalisation, lawfare, police violence, censorship, de-platforming, as well as economic pressure against activists, aided by most of the media and even by some NGOs and the political Left.

As a consequence, Germany has changed in discernible ways. Civic space has narrowed as cultural, academic and municipal institutions place restrictions on who may speak and what can be said. Governance has become more securitised, with policing powers and militarism bleeding into everyday life. Platforms, funding, and even residence and citizenship now hinge on adherence to state-defined narratives.

But the genocide has also led to a political awakening for a new generation of activists in Germany, the majority of whom are migrants, Muslims and/or racialised. The threat of being labelled antisemitic has led to a split in almost every movement from climate to anti-racism. The wave of criminalisation, defunding and the broader authoritarian shift has, for now, rendered the Left weaker than before. But it also offers the chance to break from a state-funded, NGO-dominated scene and to become more radical and honest: to call for system change rather than cosmetic reforms, to name capitalism, colonialism and genocide for what they are, and to fight them unapologetically.



Hamburg, Nakba Day Protest 2025. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

APPENDICES: TIMELINES

APPENDIX A:

Timeline of legal changes from 7 October 2023 to April 2025

Legal change/Incident	Date
Berlin's Senator for Education issued a directive banning expressions of solidarity with Palestine in schools. The ban included wearing the Keffiyah, which contravenes rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 29), which allows them to express their own identity in schools. It further encompassed displaying 'Free Palestine' stickers or chants, and showing maps of Israel in Palestinian colours. These actions were framed as threats to school peace and as 'propagandist' support for terrorism, even if they fall short of criminal liability. The guidelines, distributed across Berlin's educational institutions, call for teachers to respond to misconduct with either educational measures (e.g. warnings, extra work, parental involvement) or, if deemed necessary, disciplinary measures (such as written reprimands, temporary suspension, or even expulsion), or even reporting such activities, potentially involving police and confiscation of students' phones. ³⁴⁰	13.10.2023
Germany's Minister of the Interior reaffirmed the ban on Hamas, and also banned Samidoun, a Palestinian prisoner solidarity network, in Germany. The bans prohibit all activities associated with these organisations, including public demonstrations, use of their symbols, and any online presence. Participation in or support for either group is considered a criminal offence. Displaying symbols linked to them is also illegal; some cases, such as the use of the slogan 'From the river to the sea', now fall into a legal grey area, with courts expected to determine their status. Following the bans, law enforcement carried out raids in five federal states, confiscating items such as IT equipment, posters, and funding appeals connected to the groups. ³⁴¹	02.11.2023
The German State of Saxony-Anhalt's Interior Ministry issued a directive requiring all applicants for naturalisation to explicitly affirm the State of Israel's right to exist. In Germany, naturalisation is legislated at the federal level through the Nationality Act, which sets out the general requirements, whereas the implementation is carried out by the federal states. ³⁴²	08.12.2023
The Berlin Senate reintroduced disciplinary expulsion into the Higher Education Act, allowing Berlin universities to expel students who 'significantly impair the rights and duties of other university members' through physical violence, threats, or incitement. Violations also include sexual harassment and 'intentional criminal offences' committed on university premises that 'cause significant harm to the university'. The law, reactivated after decades of dormancy, was pushed through following protests against the genocide in Gaza and claims that these protests created insecurity for Jewish students. It was supported by the far-right AfD as part of its campaign against alleged antisemitism. The law's vague language and discretionary implementation effectively empower universities to act as courts, with disciplinary committees, whose composition is fully controlled by each university, deciding on both punishable offences and sanctions. ³⁴³	26.03.2024
Germany enacted a revised citizenship law that mandates a prior 'antisemitism check' for applicants and rules out granting citizenship to anyone deemed 'antisemitic' or not committed to Germany's <i>raison d'état</i> of unconditional support for the Israeli state. The criteria for antisemitism rely on the problematic IHRA definition that conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Liking a social media post with slogans like 'From the river to the sea' or one that accuses Israel of murdering children could be enough for applicants to be denied citizenship. Dual citizens are not immune either since German law allows authorities to revoke citizenship up to ten years after it was granted, though the threshold for doing so remains high and largely untested. ³⁴⁴	26.06.2024
A Berlin District Court sentenced a 22-year-old woman from Berlin to a fine of €600 for incitement for using the slogan 'From the river to the sea – Palestine will be free' during a banned demonstration in October 2023. ³⁴⁵	06.08.2024

Legal change/Incident	Date
The German parliament, with support of all parties, passed the resolution 'Never Again Is Now – Protect, Preserve, and Strengthen Jewish Life in Germany', introducing sweeping measures targeting individuals and organisations critical of Israel or found to be supporting the BDS movement. The resolution calls for those identified as antisemitic (according to the IHRA definition) to be excluded from public funding, banned from participating in publicly funded events, and denied institutional cooperation. It also calls for permanent exclusion from schools and universities, even if the person's work is unrelated to Palestine. While resolutions are officially declarations of the government's opinion and therefore not legally binding, this also means that they cannot be legally challenged. In practice, they are often treated as laws. This resolution had a chilling effect across civil society, where many organisations rely on state funding. The resolution effectively shrinks freedom of speech, academic freedom, and the autonomy of public institutions. ³⁴⁶	07.11.2024
Using 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' led, for the first time in Berlin, to a conviction for the 'use of symbols associated with a terrorist organisation'. A 42-year-old woman was fined €1,300 by the Berlin Regional Court. ³⁴⁷	08.11.2024
The Federal Ministry of the Interior classifies the red triangle and images of Hamas leaders as banned symbols. The red triangle is a graphic widely used in videos of armed groups in Gaza to mark targets, which German authorities now treat as a proxy symbol for Hamas. Legally, the new ban changes nothing, as the existing prohibition order already suffices, but it clarifies that the ban includes additional symbols and the slogan 'From the river to the sea'. ³⁴⁸	11.11.2024
An activist who participated in an occupation at the FU Berlin in solidarity with Palestine was sentenced by the Tiergarten District Court to a fine for trespassing. ³⁴⁹	12.12.2024
On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Israeli-Jewish filmmaker Dror Dayan was supposed to be tried for allegedly using symbols of unconstitutional and terrorist organisations. The accusation stemmed from social media posts criticising the criminalisation of the slogan 'From the River to the Sea' and its conflation with Hamas. Dayan later received notice of charges for spreading propaganda of banned organisations, based on Germany's inclusion of the slogan in its ban on Hamas. The trial was eventually delayed for several months due to an expert witness's illness. ³⁵⁰	27.01.2025
The German parliament passed another resolution on antisemitism, this time specifically targeting educational institutions. Titled 'Resolutely countering antisemitism and hostility towards Israel in schools and universities and securing free discourse space', it calls for a broad set of interventions: expanding one-sided state-funded research and education on Judaism and Israel that excludes Palestinian history; monitoring and preventing 'boycott, delegitimisation, and demonisation' of Israel in schools and universities; and increasing cooperation between academic institutions and police and intelligence services. The resolution welcomes past efforts to withhold funding from critics of Israeli policy and urges further restrictions on access to public funding and institutional platforms for individuals or groups deemed antisemitic under the IHRA definition. The resolution exerts political pressure on universities and threatens the consensus of academic autonomy and pluralism that has existed in Germany since after World War II and is enshrined in the constitution. In practice, it will probably lead to dismissals of academics who are outspoken critics of Israel's apartheid regime or have called for boycotts. ³⁵¹	29.01.2025
The 2025 election manifesto of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which was the largest party in parliament, pledged to amend Germany's incitement law to make denying Israel's right to exist a criminal offence. It also called for the creation of a new, more severe category of incitement to hatred that would explicitly include antisemitic acts. This was supported by Federal Anti-Antisemitism Commissioner Felix Klein. ³⁵²	February 2025
The CDU proposed deporting non-German nationals or revoking the citizenship of dual nationals sentenced to at least one year in prison for crimes deemed to have 'antisemitic motives.' A draft of the coalition agreement of the new German government calls for stripping German citizenship from so-called 'supporters of terrorism, antisemites and extremists'. The SPD, rather than challenging the racist proposal, seems to hope that the text will not pass legal review. The coalition agreement also includes a proposal to re-criminalise 'sympathy advertising' (<i>Sympathiewerbung</i>) for terrorist organisations, a provision previously used in the 1970s to target leftist groups. ³⁵³	25.03.2025

APPENDIX B:

Incidents of police violence and violent repression of protests

Incident	Date
In the wake of 7 October, the German authorities imposed an unprecedented crackdown on pro-Palestinian expression, with Berlin at the epicentre. On 11 October, the police issued a general decree banning all Palestine-related demonstrations in the capital throughout much of October, while pro-Israel demonstrations, at times organised by state institutions, proceeded unimpeded. Riot police were stationed for days in Berlin's Neukölln district – a predominantly Muslim, working-class neighbourhood – where daily protests erupted in defiance of the ban. They effectively banned the public display of Palestinian flags and related symbols. Videos circulated each morning showing officers choking, beating, and pepper-spraying demonstrators, including children. Arbitrary searches and racial profiling of 'Arabic-looking' individuals became routine. Protest bans were often declared moments before events began, allowing the police to justify violent dispersals. Even a parent-led protest against school violence, sparked by a teacher caught striking a student for wearing a Palestinian flag, was banned and broken up by the police. In schools, students faced disciplinary actions and in some cases were physically assaulted for wearing a Keffiyeh or expressing solidarity with Palestine, following guidance from Berlin's Education Senate. At least eight minors were known to have been arrested, the youngest just nine years old. However, the persistent street mobilisations eventually forced a partial retreat from the protest bans. ³⁵⁴	08.10.2023
In the immediate aftermath of 7 October, a Palestinian flag painted on a monument near Sonnenallee in Berlin's Neukölln district was swiftly removed by the authorities the same night. In stark contrast, the Brandenburg Gate was illuminated the next day in the blue and white colours of the Israeli flag, highlighting the symbolic asymmetry in how public space is regulated and politically charged in Germany. ³⁵⁵	08.10.2023
At Berlin's Ernst-Abbe-Gymnasium, a teacher approached a 15-year-old student who had displayed a Palestinian flag in the school playground and ordered him to take it down. When the student refused, the teacher slapped him in the face, which was captured on video. In response, the student kicked the teacher in the leg. The incident sparked outrage, especially given the broader context of repression against pro-Palestinian expression in Berlin schools. However, when the case was brought to the Berlin District Court, the teacher faced no formal conviction. Instead, the court dropped the case in exchange for a €800 payment, allowing him to remain without a criminal record and continue teaching. ³⁵⁶	09.10.2023
The same weekend that up to 150,000 people marched in London in solidarity with Gaza, a far smaller protest in Berlin was violently dispersed. Around 1,000 people had gathered at Potsdamer Platz to demonstrate, but just seven minutes before the rally was scheduled to begin, the Berlin police announced a sudden ban on the event. Officers immediately began violently dispersing the crowd, using pepper spray, physical force, and arrests to shut down the peaceful gathering. ³⁵⁷	17.10.2023
Amir Ali, a Palestinian protest organiser in Munich, reported being banned from walking in the city for 24 hours simply for wearing a keffiyeh. ³⁵⁸	26.10.2023
The artist and activist Stella Maris has been arrested three times in Germany since 7 October for her pro-Palestinian advocacy. At an anticolonial demonstration, the police reportedly banned Palestinian flags on the grounds that 'Palestine has nothing to do with colonialism', and arrested Maris after violently tackling her to the ground for displaying one. Police allegedly equated the Palestinian flag with a swastika, claiming it was a forbidden symbol. At another protest, Maris held a sign reading 'From the river to the sea, we demand equality', and was later arrested at a metro station on charges of 'inciting racial hatred', even though the slogan had not yet been officially criminalised at the time. ³⁵⁹	October 2023
The German-Israeli activist Iris Hefets has also been arrested three times in Berlin since October 2023 for participating in peaceful demonstrations supporting Palestinian rights. Her first arrest was in mid-October when she stood alone holding a sign stating, 'As a Jew and Israeli: stop the genocide in Gaza'. She was detained by police and later released. Her second arrest took place on 10 November 2023, during a demonstration where she held the same sign. She was charged with 'inciting racial hatred', though the charge was subsequently dropped. In her third arrest, Hefets carried a sign reading 'Zionism kills'. She was detained, released shortly after, but her sign was confiscated. ³⁶⁰	October 2023

Incident	Date
The North Rhine-Westphalia police distributed an 'information brochure' to schools, teachers, and parents which contained the following line: 'For example, statements that reject the concept of terrorism in this context and speak of Palestine's right to resistance, may be punishable by law'. It further indicated that comparisons between Israeli military actions and the Holocaust, or describing them as genocide, might constitute incitement to hatred under Section 130 of the German Criminal Code. Additionally, slogans such as 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' were highlighted as potentially falling under the offence of incitement to hatred. ³⁶¹	December 2023
The German government quietly cut all federal funding to six Palestinian non-government organisations (NGOs) without making a public announcement or offering an explanation. Among the organisations was Al-Haq, a prominent Palestinian human rights group that had submitted testimony to the International Criminal Court, which later contributed to the ICC issuing an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Although Israel labelled these NGOs as terrorist-affiliated in 2021, the claims were widely rejected at the time – including by Germany and France – as baseless. Nevertheless, Germany now halted cooperation entirely. ³⁶²	December 2023
Approximately 60 students from the group Students for a Free Palestine occupied a lecture hall at Freie Universität Berlin (FU), aiming to create a space for dialogue and critical engagement with the university's stance on the genocide in Gaza. The occupation included lectures and workshops and called for the university to advocate for a ceasefire, reject the IHRA definition of antisemitism in favour of the Jerusalem Declaration, and support Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and Jewish students. Despite the peaceful nature of the protest, the university administration ordered the students to vacate the premises by 16.00 h. When they refused, over 100 police officers in riot gear were deployed to forcibly remove the students, resulting in over 20 detentions. Reports indicated that some students were subjected to racial profiling during the operation. The university justified the eviction by citing a 'zero tolerance' policy on antisemitism, although both the university and police acknowledged that no antisemitic incidents had occurred during the occupation. ³⁶³	14.12.2023
German police carried out coordinated raids on seven residential and business properties involving 170 officers, targeting members of the feminist collective Zora. The justification for the raids was a social media post in which Zora expressed solidarity with 'all revolutionary Palestinian freedom fighters', including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), referring to it as a 'progressive force'. The EU has described the PFLP as a terrorist organisation since 2002. ³⁶⁴	20.12.2023
The Palestinian activist Ola Alzayat attended a protest in Berlin, taking precautions due to her pregnancy. During the demonstration, she was suddenly grabbed from behind by police officers. Video footage shows Alzayat being dragged by the neck, with her keffiyeh pulled over her face, as she screamed, 'I'm pregnant, please, please!' She reported that officers slapped her face when she tried to move, resulting in bruising. Initially accused of attempting to prevent an arrest, the charges were later amended to include assaulting police officers with a flag, although she maintains she did not have a flag. Alzayat was carried by five officers to a police car, from which she witnessed her husband's arrest. While the charge of preventing an arrest was dropped, investigations into the alleged assault continue. ³⁶⁵	February 2024
At a mass demonstration against the far-right AfD, the Jewish activist Rachael Shapiro was spat on for carrying an anti-Zionist sign. Despite her testimony being widely shared on Instagram, no German media outlet reported the assault, and none of the country's official antisemitism commissioners contacted her. ³⁶⁶	03.02.2024
During a rally on February 8, Udi Raz, a Jewish PhD researcher at Freie Universität Berlin (FU) and a prominent activist with Jewish Voice for Peace, was detained by police for allegedly insulting the university president. While mainstream outlets such as <i>Der Spiegel</i> ignored this case of police intimidation against a Jewish anti-Zionist, they continued to peddle unsubstantiated claims that right-wing Jewish students are being intimidated by pro-Palestine activists. The FU found itself at the centre of a media circus, driven by unproven claims that Jewish students are being intimidated by pro-Palestinian activists. Journalists descended on a rally organised by the FU Palestine Committee in search of evidence, only to find a peaceful gathering. ³⁶⁷	08.02.2024
The Berlin police raided the apartment of a 41-year-old woman after she posted the phrase 'from the river to the sea' four times on social media. Authorities cited 'usage of anti-constitutional symbols' as the legal basis for the raid, the same statute used to prohibit Nazi symbols like the swastika. ³⁶⁸	13.03.2024

Incident	Date
At a protest camp established on 8 April in front of the German parliamentary building (Reichstag) to demand an end to the genocide in Gaza and protest Germany's complicity, police enforced a series of escalating repressive measures. The authorities imposed language bans, prohibiting the use of Irish (Gaeilge) and all languages other than German and English, with Irish being specifically singled out due to the presence of an Irish-speaking protest group. Though Arabic was briefly permitted for prayer when a translator was present, the use of Hebrew was also banned – ironically, in the name of fighting antisemitism. The Justice Minister Marco Buschmann had publicly stated that he looked forward to 'the day when people can speak Hebrew on the street without fear'. Activists were told that 'unintelligible' languages posed a security risk unless interpreters were present. The Irish bloc was specifically instructed that flags, banners, speeches, chants, and songs in Irish were forbidden. Police split up the 40 or so Irish people into smaller groups, and even after being led away from the demonstration, officers continued to enforce the language ban. In a statement, the Irish bloc later wrote: 'We as Irish people are all too familiar with having our language oppressed'. On 26 April, hundreds of heavily armed police officers violently dismantled the peaceful encampment and arrested demonstrators, including those who had gathered across the street to protest the eviction. Police sources confirmed that 161 arrests were made that day and 41 criminal investigations opened. Campers had also previously been subjected to arbitrary and shifting rules, such as being required to move all tents daily. ³⁶⁹	24.04.2024
At FU Berlin, students set up an encampment in the university's courtyard. The administration, similar to the incident in December, called in police to dismantle the protest, leading to the arrest of 79 people. Reports from the scene described the use of pepper spray and physical force by police officers. In response, hundreds of professors and lecturers at the FU signed a letter criticising the actions of the university that limited the right of assembly, freedom of speech and invited police violence, albeit without taking a stance on the Israeli genocide. ³⁷⁰	07.05.2024
A police unit forcibly cleared the Department of Social Sciences at Humboldt University (HU) in Berlin, which had been occupied by pro-Palestinian students the day before. The action, led by the Students Coalition Berlin, called on the university to demand a ceasefire in Gaza and to publicly oppose arms deliveries to Israel. Some of the activists left the building voluntarily accompanied by university staff, while others were removed by helmeted police officers. Initially, the university presidency had 'tolerated' the occupation until a deadline of 23 May to allow for dialogue. After the eviction, the HU President Julia von Blumenthal told the press that the order came from 'the very top,' allegedly from Berlin's Senator for Science Ina Czyborra in coordination with Mayor Kai Wegner. Both later denied this. After initial insistence, von Blumenthal retracted her statement, saying that she had 'created the impression' the order came from the mayor due to being 'under extreme stress' and claimed that the decision had been made by the university's own leadership. ³⁷¹	23.05.2024
The Berlin police detained a seven-year-old boy during a pro-Palestinian demonstration. According to reports, the child was on his father's shoulders, waving a Palestinian flag, when they were suddenly surrounded by officers. The police accused the boy of 'assaulting' an officer by allegedly striking a helmet with his flag. A video shared on social media shows the child visibly distressed as he and his father are encircled by multiple riot police. The father later reported that his son has been experiencing anxiety and requires psychological support following the incident. On the same day, a 13-year-old was also detained after making a rude gesture towards an officer; he was handcuffed and subjected to a 'pain grip' during his arrest. According to the police, six children under the age of 16 were detained that day. ³⁷²	08.06.2024
The Berlin police abruptly halted the 'Beats for Gaza' solidarity concert after a rapper used the phrase 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free'. ³⁷³	23.08.2024
A video emerged on social media showing German police chasing a 10-year-old boy carrying a Palestinian flag at a Berlin rally. It shows the child running away in fear before being apprehended and taken to a police vehicle. Police later stated that the boy was participating in the protest without any family members, and they took him 'for this own protection'. They claim that they informed his father, who picked him up 90 minutes later. ³⁷⁴	22.09.2024

Incident	Date
On the morning of 30 September 2024, the Berlin police conducted coordinated raids on the homes of five pro-Palestinian activists aged between 18 and 40. The operation, involving 125 officers, was justified by suspicions of 'pro-Palestinian motivated crimes': one 18-year-old was accused of throwing a microphone stand at Berlin's Culture Minister, Joe Chialo, during a public event in mid-September, resulting in an injury to a bystander. Another individual faced investigation for posting the slogan 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' on Instagram. During the raids, police seized mobile phones, computers, and other data-storage devices. No arrests were made at the time, but the investigations are ongoing. Additional charges included incitement to hatred and the use of symbols associated with unconstitutional organisations. ³⁷⁵	30.09.2024
A registered demonstration in Berlin was met with massive police violence: the Berlin police reportedly demanded an early end to the protest and violently dispersed participants. Footage circulating on social media shows police officers dragging a man in a wheelchair across the pavement and into a van; one commenter identified him as a 68-year-old. According to a joint statement released by the organising groups, one person suffered a head injury and lost consciousness, another sustained a broken arm after being shoved to the ground, and others were left with facial injuries including broken noses and bleeding lips. Police reportedly obstructed paramedics from administering aid in several cases. ³⁷⁶	06.10.2024
The Berlin-based cultural centre Oyouun was forced to vacate its premises at the end of 2024 after the Berlin Senate abruptly withdrew its €1 million annual funding. This decision followed Oyouun's refusal to cancel a November 2023 event hosted by Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East, which the Senate deemed politically charged. Despite a legal review finding no violations of law, the Senate proceeded with the de-funding, citing the need for a new 'operating concept'. Oyouun's director reported that the centre learned of the funding cut via a livestream of the Culture Committee meeting, and subsequent requests for dialogue and access to the files were ignored. Although Oyouun secured a legal victory allowing them to appeal against the withdrawal of funding, the Constitutional Court's decision did not prevent their eviction. The centre has since relied on third-party project funding and launched a crowdfunding campaign to cover legal expenses. ³⁷⁷	31.12.2024
Students and staff at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) held a peaceful meeting to question the university's cooperation with Israeli institutions. Although participants were initially admitted into a lecture hall by a university administrator and security guard, the doors were then locked behind them. TUM accused the group of trespass and called the Munich police, who detained everyone in the room for over three hours. All participants were eventually identified and subjected to full searches. ³⁷⁸	22.01.2025
In early 2025, the Berlin police banned the use of Arabic and all languages except German and English at certain pro-Palestinian demonstrations, citing the lack of translators as a reason since they claim they need to be able to ensure that no prohibited or antisemitic slogans are being used. A few days later, on 9 January, a protest was violently dispersed because of people speaking Arabic. ³⁷⁹	06.02.2025
Two people of colour were arrested while leaving the 'Unkürzbar' demonstration in Berlin, which protested against cuts to social services and the repression of Palestine solidarity. One was a filmmaker visiting from Australia who had been awarded a prize at the Berlinale the night before and was falsely accused of a robbery dating from December. The second was arrested for allegedly chanting a slogan that wasn't even officially banned. He described a traumatic ordeal: being denied medical care for hours, not told where he was being taken, threatened with 48 hours in jail, and locked in a bathroom at the detention centre. He was also denied food, a phone call to a lawyer, and English-language information, and was treated aggressively by medical staff. Police falsely told his family he had been taken to a hospital. ³⁸⁰	22.02.2025
At Berlin's International Women's Day march on 8 March 2025, the police violently repressed a Palestinian bloc of the demonstration, citing violations of arbitrary restrictions such as bans on marching, Arabic-language slogans, and chants like 'From the river to the sea' or 'Intifada'. Video footage and eyewitness accounts described disproportionate use of force, including beatings that led to hospitalisation. In a particularly shocking statement, Brandenburg's official Antisemitism Commissioner Andreas Büttner from the left-wing Die Linke party publicly justified the violence, stating that demonstrators who did not comply with the imposed conditions could rightly be met with police brutality. ³⁸¹	08.03.2025

Incident	Date
During a small public gathering organised by Jewish activists, police confronted a person holding a sign reading 'from the river we do see nothing like equality', demanding to inspect it for alleged violations. Although the slogan is not prohibited, the person was violently arrested and later charged with incitement. The charge was eventually dropped. Another person was arrested and charged with <i>Beleidigung</i> (criminal insult) for calling a police officer an 'asshole', while a young Palestinian was arrested under the same charge for allegedly insulting an officer in Arabic, a claim he denies. ³⁸²	19.03.2025
Around 60 students occupied a lecture hall at Humboldt University in Berlin to protest against Israel's war on Gaza. Benches were dismantled and used to barricade the doors. The students emphasised their willingness to negotiate with the university administration, but instead, a large police force was deployed. The occupiers called for an academic boycott of Israel, the creation of a student ethics committee, and an end to all deportations. Outside the building, passers-by gathered in solidarity. ³⁸³	16.04.2025
During a registered protest outside the Irish Embassy in Berlin, an Irish citizen was arrested for speaking Irish. Although no language restrictions were listed in the protest's official permit, police informed organisers shortly before the event that Irish would be banned. A planned Irish-language speech was cancelled, and police also demanded to inspect the music playlist, banning Arabic music and inspecting it for lyrics referring to bodies of water. At the end of the protest, a demonstrator shouted two Irish phrases in support of Palestine and was immediately arrested. ³⁸⁴	17.04.2025

APPENDIX C:

Timeline of cultural censorship, funding cuts, and deplatforming

What happened?	When?
Malcolm Ohanwe, a Black German-Palestinian journalist, was publicly dropped by the Franco-German public broadcaster Arte after posting a Twitter thread that placed the 7 October attack in the broader context of Israeli occupation, the siege of Gaza, and the suppression of Palestinian resistance. Merely providing historical context was grounds for severing ties. ³⁸⁵	08.10.2023
During a visit to Berlin, the US Senator Bernie Sanders, one of the world's most prominent Jewish politicians, faced political backlash after stating that 'the targeting of civilians is a war crime, no matter who does it'. Despite his being a Zionist who has refused to call a genocide a genocide, ³⁸⁶ Saskia Esken, head of Germany's Social Democratic Party, cancelled a planned meeting with him. ³⁸⁷	12.10.2023
The Palestinian author Adania Shibli was disinvited from the Frankfurt Book Fair, apparently not for anything she said or did, but simply for being Palestinian. ³⁸⁸	16.10.2023
The Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin cancelled the performance of 'The Situation', a play directed by the Israeli director Yael Ronen. In its public statement, the theatre wrote that 'war is a big simplifier' and claimed that the attack by Hamas left it with no choice but to side with Israel. In response, Karim Daoud, one of the Palestinian actors in the play, whose two brothers have been imprisoned by Israel for eight years, responded with a statement calling the Gorki Theatre a 'disappointment' and its stance of siding with the oppressor 'shameful'. ³⁸⁹	23.10.2023
The artist Candice Breitz, together with the literary scholar Michael Rothberg, had planned a symposium on German memory culture and the relationship between antisemitism and racism. The event was cancelled by the Federal Agency for Civic Education, which is overseen by the German Ministry of the Interior. The agency claimed that following the 7 October attacks and Israel's assault on Gaza, it was no longer possible to conduct the discussion in a 'constructive and respectful' manner and cited a period of mourning and solidarity with Israel as justification. Candice Breitz, a South African Jewish artist based in Berlin, has long faced a significant backlash in Germany for her critical stance on Israeli policies. ³⁹⁰	30.10.2023
The University President in Kassel shut down a student-led vigil for a student who had travelled home to Gaza and was killed together with his family in an Israeli bombardment. Although the university initially approved the event on condition that it should not be 'politicised', it interrupted and cancelled the vigil after speakers mentioned the war in Gaza. 'We lost a friend, and he did not die in a natural catastrophe, we should be allowed to mention the war as the cause of his death', says one of his friends and organisers. ³⁹¹	02.11.2023
In November, the poet Ranjit Hoskote was forced to resign from the Selection Committee of Documenta 16, an important contemporary art exhibition, after it was revealed that he had signed a letter in 2019 comparing Zionism to Hindu nationalism. Just a few days after his resignation, the remaining members of the committee also resigned, citing the lack of free speech about Israel-Palestine in Germany as the reason. ³⁹²	13.11.2023
The South African Jewish artist Candice Breitz had another exhibition cancelled. The Saarland Museum's Modern Gallery cancelled a 2017 video installation about sex workers in Cape Town, which had no connection to Palestine, 'in view of the media coverage about the artist in connection with her controversial statements in the context of Hamas' war of aggression against the state of Israel'. ³⁹³	22.11.2023
The entire 2024 Biennale for Contemporary Photography in the Rhine-Neckar region was cancelled after the organisers objected to Facebook posts by one of the curators, the Bangladeshi photojournalist Shahidul Alam. The posts, made after 7 October, included comparisons between the war in Gaza and the Holocaust and accused Israel of committing genocide against Palestinians. The organisers claimed the posts contained 'content that can be read as antisemitic and antisemitic content'. ³⁹⁴	22.11.2023
The Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the German Greens, withdrew from an award ceremony honouring the Jewish Russian-American writer Masha Gessen after Gessen compared the Gaza Strip to Nazi-era Jewish ghettos. Gessen had been awarded the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought. Following widespread international criticism of this act of censorship, the Foundation tried to repair its image by hastily organising a public discussion with Gessen to deny allegations of silencing dissent. ³⁹⁵	14.12.2023

What happened?	When?
The Egyptian filmmaker Mohammad Shawky Hassan revealed that a Berlin gallery, Haus am Lützowplatz, had demanded prior approval for some writing in Arabic he intended to include in a group exhibition of Berlin Senate grant recipients. Hassan was told that no public writing could be shown unless a translation was provided in advance and vetted by the gallery and its 'cooperation partners', allegedly due to city funding requirements. His proposal to paint parts of the wall in the colours red, green, and black was also rejected. On principle, Hassan refused to submit his work for pre-approval. ³⁹⁶	24.02.2024
The Palästina Kongress (Palestine Congress) in Berlin was violently shut down by heavily armed police shortly after it began.	13.04.2024
The philosopher Nancy Fraser, internationally renowned for her work on critical theory, was disinvited from receiving the prestigious Albertus Magnus Professorship at the University of Cologne. Fraser had signed the open letter 'Philosophy for Palestine', which the university claimed conflicted with its 'solidarity with Israel' stance. Fraser, whose invited lectures had nothing to do with the Middle East, criticised the decision as a dangerous signal for academic freedom in Germany. She warned against what she called a rising 'philosemitic McCarthyism', in which political loyalty to Israel is used as a litmus test to police scholars' speech and associations. ³⁹⁷	12.05.2024
The University of Heidelberg cancelled a planned lecture featuring Hebh Jamal and fellow activist Mahmud Abu-Odeh, citing concerns about potential 'political agitation.' The cancellation followed a smear campaign initiated by pro-Israel groups and amplified by German media outlets, including <i>Jüdische Allgemeine</i> and <i>Bild</i> . The controversy centred on a video Jamal had posted on 7 October 2023, in which she contextualised the Hamas attacks within the broader history of Israeli occupation. Despite the university's decision, Jamal delivered her lecture to a crowd of 250 people outside the campus, turning the cancellation into a larger public discourse on academic freedom and the suppression of Palestinian voices in Germany. ³⁹⁸	June 2024
The Heinrich Böll Foundation commissioned the Israeli writer Tomer Dotan Dreyfus to contribute to an online dossier on being Jewish in Germany after 7 October. Dreyfus submitted an article highlighting the rise in censorship on the pretext of combating antisemitism – and the Foundation refused to publish it. ³⁹⁹	September 2024
On 21 October 2024, Katina Schubert and Martin Schirdewan initiated expulsion proceedings against Ramsis Kilani from the German party Die Linke. They justified the move by accusing him of violating the party's principles, specifically pointing to his alleged breach of the party's commitment to a two-state solution and to what they termed 'Israel's right to exist'. Despite Kilani's rebuttals and clarifications, the <i>Landesschiedskommission</i> (District Arbitration Commission) of Die Linke proceeded with his expulsion in December 2024. The commission acknowledged that there were no allegations of antisemitism against Kilani and that he had not intentionally harmed the party. However, they cited the media controversy surrounding his activism as detrimental to the party's reputation. ⁴⁰⁰	21.10.2024
The British artist and author James Bridle had their €10,000 Schelling Architecture Foundation award rescinded shortly before the ceremony, after it emerged that they had signed an open letter supporting a boycott of Israeli cultural institutions. The Foundation cited Germany's recently passed Bundestag resolution 'Never Again is Now: Protect, Preserve and Strengthen Jewish Life in Germany', which explicitly calls for withholding support from anyone associated with BDS or criticism of Israel's right to exist. While the Foundation admitted that Bridle's views were not antisemitic, it claimed that calls for boycotts were incompatible with Germany's historical responsibility. The decision was widely criticised, especially given the Foundation's own history: it is named after Erich Schelling, a former Nazi Party and SA member. ⁴⁰¹	18.11.2024
The management of the Altonale Kunstherbst festival in Hamburg cancelled the planned exhibition Hearts of Gaza, which featured drawings by children from Gaza. Although the organisers initially framed the exhibition as a way to highlight the suffering of children 'on both sides' of the conflict, they later announced its cancellation, claiming they wanted to prevent any 'political instrumentalisation' of the event. Earlier, the exhibition had already been banned from a venue in Erfurt, following pressure from local politicians and a so-called anti-fascist group. ⁴⁰²	21.11.2024

What happened?	When?
The Free University of Berlin (FU) cancelled a planned event featuring Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur for the occupied Palestinian territories, citing ‘security concerns’ and the ‘controversy’ surrounding her visit. The cancellation followed intense political pressure from Berlin’s Mayor Kai Wegner (CDU), Science Senator Ina Czyborra (SPD), and the Israeli ambassador, who provocatively accused the university of being a ‘training camp for Hamas supporters’. The event, organised by a group of professors and titled Colonialism, Human Rights, and International Law, was intended to address legal perspectives on the genocide unfolding in Gaza. An alternative venue for Albanese’s and Eyal Weizman’s talk also withdrew following massive police and political pressure. The newspaper Junge Welt then stepped in to host the event, which was surrounded by a heavy police presence with at least 22 squad cars deployed, creating a militarised atmosphere. Police even considered arresting Albanese, who later stated she had never experienced such intimidation and was shocked by the repression. Separately, a planned event with Albanese at Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU) Munich was cancelled just days before, citing vague ‘political concerns’ and ‘security risks’.⁴⁰³	12.02.2025
In October 2023, the office in Tunis of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), a political foundation affiliated with the centrist Social Democrats (SPD) party, published a social media post expressing solidarity with Palestine amid Israel’s war in Gaza. The post was removed the following day following directives from FES headquarters in Berlin, which imposed restrictions on such expressions of solidarity. This decision led to significant backlash from local partners. Fifteen participants of FES’s youth academy programme publicly announced their withdrawal from the programme, citing the Foundation’s actions as a violation of its stated commitment to human rights and democratic values.⁴⁰⁴	02.11.2023
Just before the Palestine Congress in mid-April, the state-owned Berliner Sparkasse froze the bank account of Jewish Voice for Peace’s German chapter, citing unspecified ‘regulatory reasons.’ This was not the first time the group faced financial repression; its account was also frozen in 2019 due to its support for BDS.⁴⁰⁵	28.03.2024
A Berlin district shut down the girls’ centres Alia and Phantalisa, community spaces offering support, empowerment, and educational/recreational programmes for girls and young women and ended the service contracts of their feminist umbrella organisation, FRIEDA Frauen*zentren e.V., with immediate effect. The closures were justified on the grounds that staff members had attended Palestine demonstrations and the Palestine Congress. The decision has been widely criticised as racist and politically repressive. The affected centres provided vital spaces for young people in the neighbourhood, particularly for racialised and marginalised girls, and were staffed primarily by women of colour. Reports suggest the closures were triggered by denunciations to the Berlin Senate, allegedly from pro-Zionist, anti-German social workers.⁴⁰⁶	19.04.2024
The renowned artist Nan Goldin gave a speech at an opening of her retrospective at a Berlin art gallery condemning Israel’s genocide and criticising Germany’s repression of Palestinian solidarity. The speech met with an immediate backlash from German officials. Hermann Parzinger, president of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation overseeing the museum, called Goldin’s remarks ‘unbearable and dangerously trivialising’. Despite the criticism, Goldin’s speech resonated with many attendees, including pro-Palestinian activists who chanted in support, leading to the interruption of museum director Klaus Biedenbach’s subsequent address. Claudia Roth, Germany’s Culture Minister, condemned the disruption, stating that such behaviour is ‘absolutely unacceptable and an attack on the museum and cultural work’.⁴⁰⁷	22.11.2024
Germany quietly cut funding for the Israeli organisations Zochrot and New Profile, following earlier de-funding of Palestinian NGOs. Zochrot, which promotes public education about the Nakba and advocates for the right of return for Palestinians, lost about a quarter of its annual budget. New Profile, a volunteer movement that supports Israeli conscientious objectors, lost about half of its total funding. While the German authorities gave no official justification for the cuts, the timing strongly suggests a link to the Bundestag’s November 2023 ‘Never Again Is Now’ resolution. Zochrot was previously asked to clarify its position on the concept of a ‘Jewish and democratic state’. Staff described the decision as politically motivated censorship and criticised Germany’s double standards, noting that support was withdrawn from groups actively promoting justice and open debate, while the German government continues to claim it upholds peace and feminist foreign policy. According to reporting by Deutsche Welle, Germany’s decision was not isolated. At least 15 human rights organisations – mostly Palestinian – have lost German federal funding during that time, indicating the politicisation of development funding. Many of them had longstanding partnerships with German development institutions.⁴⁰⁸	December 2024

APPENDIX D:

Timeline of workplace consequences of Palestine solidarity

What happened	When?
Anwar El Ghazi, a professional footballer, was suspended by Bundesliga club Mainz 05 after posting a pro-Palestinian message on Instagram, which included the phrase 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.' The club deemed the post 'intolerable' and terminated his contract. El Ghazi challenged the dismissal in court, and in July 2024, the labour court ruled the termination invalid. Mainz 05 was ordered to pay his outstanding salary, reportedly €500,000. The club has since appealed the decision to the higher labour court. ⁴⁰⁹	17.10.2023
Shortly before her planned departure from office, Marjam Samadzade, then Secretary of State for Social Affairs in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, wrote an Instagram post that condemned Hamas but also criticised the Israeli government's actions, the international community's uncritical alignment with it, and Germany's attempt at supposedly fighting antisemitism by spreading anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian racism. Her post prompted such outrage within the state government that Green Party Minister Aminata Touré pressured her to resign immediately, two months earlier than planned. ⁴¹⁰	25.10.2023
Axel Springer, the German media giant known for its explicitly pro-Israel editorial line, fired the 20-year-old Lebanese apprentice Kasem Raad after he raised concerns internally and shared a video online challenging elements of the Israeli military's narrative regarding 7 October. ⁴¹¹	26.10.2023
The Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, part of Germany's prestigious Max Planck Society, fired the renowned Lebanese-Australian anthropologist Ghassan Hage. The dismissal followed a smear campaign by the right-wing <i>Welt am Sonntag</i> about Hage's critical statements about Israel, including comparisons to Nazi actions and support for BDS. The Institute claimed his views were incompatible with its values. The case sparked international outcry regarding academic freedom and the growing conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism in Germany. ⁴¹²	07.02.2024
The Berlin Labour Court settled the case of Mohamad S., a marketing professional at Zalando who was fired after expressing solidarity with Palestine. Supported by the European Legal Support Center (ELSC), Mohamad contested his dismissal and filed an anti-discrimination complaint. Before the termination of his contract, he faced harassment and repeated pressure to resign. The conflict began when Zalando's workers' council and management board posted 'solidarity with Israel' statements internally, to which Mohamad and groups like the Muslim community Zalando and Black community Zalando responded critically in comment sections. ⁴¹³	05.12.2024
Melanie Schweizer, a civil servant at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and parliamentary candidate for MERA25, was fired after publishing critical statements about Israel on social media. Schweizer attributed her firing partly to a smear campaign by Bild, which had targeted her months earlier. She criticised the dismissal as unlawful and unconstitutional, emphasising that civil servants also retain political rights, such as the right to run for parliament. ⁴¹⁴	28.02.2025
Ahmad Othman, an IT specialist from North Rhine-Westphalia, was fired owing to his involvement with the Palestine Solidarity Initiative Duisburg (PSDU). His employer cited an allegedly 'unconstitutional attitude' and claimed he lacked the personal suitability to fulfil his work duties. Othman described the dismissal as a politically motivated <i>Berufsverbot</i> (professional ban) and has filed a lawsuit to contest it. He warned that if his dismissal is upheld, it could set a dangerous precedent for targeting workers based on their political solidarity with Palestine. ⁴¹⁵	December 2024
Berlin's internationally renowned Jewish Museum fired the tour guide Udi Raz after she used the term 'apartheid' to describe Israel's treatment of Palestinians in her guided tours. Raz, who publicly announced her dismissal on Instagram, explained that she had used the term in reference to the human rights situation in the West Bank. Israel is described as an apartheid regime by leading human rights groups, including Amnesty International, ⁴¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, ⁴¹⁷ and by UN experts. ^{418 419}	02.11.2023
The German government has exerted its financial influence over Global South climate activists to suppress criticism of Israel's assault on Gaza, according to reporting by Climate Home. Three individuals said that after publicly condemning Israel's actions on humanitarian grounds, they were either pressured to resign by German-funded employers, had contracts frozen, or were warned they would lose funding if they spoke out again. ⁴²⁰	04.03.2024



In June 2025, more than 40,000 Palestine supporters protested in front of the German Reichstag, the seat of the German parliament. Photo: Faisal Yassin.

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