

GERMANY BRIEFING

JUN – JUL 2026

Table of Contents

MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE AFTER THE CSD-ATTACK	1
RIGHT WING EXTREMISM POSES THE BIGGEST THREAT TO GERMANY’S SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC ORDER	2
STUDY REVEALS MASSIVE ZIONIST INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING IN GERMANY	5

Muslims and Islam in public discourse after the CSD-attack

The IS-inspired terrorist attack on Berlin's Christopher Street Day (CSD) on 25th July triggered an immediate political and media response that extended beyond questions of security and criminal investigation. As in the aftermath of previous attacks by individual Muslims in Germany, the public debate quickly broadened to encompass issues of Islam, Muslim communities, migration and social integration. Many political leaders often seem to conflate conservative Islamic practice with such militancy, parts of the wider political and media discourse also contained more generalised claims about Muslims in Germany.

The attack itself was widely described by investigators as an Islamist terrorist attack targeting the LGBTQ+ community and, more broadly, Germany's liberal democratic order. Federal Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt stated that the available evidence pointed clearly to an Islamist motive and announced a review of security arrangements for major public events. Chancellor Friedrich Merz similarly framed the attack as an assault on openness, democracy and freedom, arguing that terrorism seeks to divide society rather than merely inflict physical harm.

At the same time, the public debate soon expanded beyond the perpetrator who was identified as a German born 21-year old former Shi'ite with a Lebanese family background that converted to Sunni Islam some years ago. He was known to the authorities due to prior criminal offenses, the dissemination of IS propaganda, and an attempt to travel from Lebanon to join IS in Syria. While he had only recently been released from pre-trial detention, he remained under surveillance.

Several politicians argued that Muslim organisations should respond more forcefully to so-called Islamist violence and take greater responsibility for confronting homophobia and extremism within their own communities despite the fact that IS-related figures are not the product of local mosques. Other commentators questioned whether prominent Islamic

associations had reacted quickly and visibly enough to condemn the attack. One of the accusations is that the Islamic communities did not explicitly point to Islamism as the motive for the act, but merely spoke of terror and a violent ideology. Berlin's Governing Mayor Kai Wegner (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) identified Islamism as the greatest threat to the queer community in Germany – a claim that seems questionable, to say the least, given the numerous attacks by far-right actors on queer events in Germany, the declaration of a "Pride Month" as a counter-movement to International Pride Month, and the fact that the right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) pursues a clearly homophobic political agenda that seeks the repeal of existing protective laws for homosexuals, as well as marriage equality.

These interventions did not necessarily equate Islam with terrorism, yet they shifted part of the public discussion from the actions of individuals towards broader expectations placed upon Muslim communities. Such framing risks assigning collective responsibility to a religious minority for crimes committed by individual perpetrators, especially in the current social climate, which is already characterised by increasing Islamophobia and a surging drift to the political right.

Right wing extremism poses the biggest threat to Germany's social and democratic order

Germany has witnessed a marked rise in right-wing militancy over recent years, prompting both security authorities and researchers to identify it as the most significant challenge to the country's democratic order. Although this violence continues to emerge from different ideological backgrounds, current evidence indicates that the scale, organisational capacity and societal reach of right-wing movements pose a serious risk to social cohesion and Germany's liberal democratic constitutional order according to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV).

According to their most recent report, published in June 2026, the number of individuals classified as belonging to the right-wing spectrum increased by 8450 to approximately 58,700 individuals in 2025. Authorities also recorded a growing number of violence-oriented militants (15600 compared to 15300 in 2024) and highlighted an increasingly younger, digitally connected milieu that mobilises both online and offline. The emergence of youth networks, online militant communities and terrorist-inspired groups form an environment in which organising increasingly arises through decentralised digital spaces rather than traditional organisational structures, despite the fact that the number of [members registered with right-wing parties more than doubled since 2023](#).

German security authorities continue to regard right-wing militancy as the predominant security challenge because of its high level of organisational growth, ideological diffusion and sustained propensity for politically motivated violence. Despite the number of right-wing politically motivated offences declined slightly compared with the previous year to 36,951 cases, they still accounted for more than half of all politically motivated crimes recorded in Germany. The number of right-wing violent offences increased by almost 9 per cent, [rising to 1,395 incidents within the same period](#).

But the impact of right-wing militancy extends beyond verbal and physical violence. Contemporary movements combine electoral participation, digital mobilisation and exclusionary narratives, contributing to what political scientists describe as discursive normalisation which is the gradual acceptance of previously marginal ideas within mainstream political debate. Research suggests that this process fuels social polarisation, weakens trust in democratic institutions and creates an increasingly hostile environment for those perceived as non-German. Longitudinal studies, including the Leipzig Authoritarianism Study, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Mitte studies and research conducted by the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), consistently link the [growing acceptance of exclusionary attitudes, anti-immigrant rhetoric and hate speech to declining social cohesion and democratic participation](#).

Digital media and social media in particular have accelerated these dynamics. Recent computational studies like the one by Kiril Solovev et al. demonstrate that social media algorithms frequently reward emotionally charged and polarising political content that provoke strong negative emotions like anger and disgust with greater visibility than positive content. Extreme parties on both sides were [more successful generating engagement than centre parties](#).

Additionally, research examining the 2025 German federal election found that highly divisive messages generated significantly greater user engagement, thereby creating favourable conditions for militant actors [seeking attention and recruitment](#). Furthermore, algorithmically curated news feeds may disproportionately amplify content originating from parties positioned at the ideological extremes, further reinforcing political polarisation.

Current political developments illustrate the broader societal significance of these trends. National opinion polls throughout mid-2026 consistently place the right-wing AfD at approximately 25–28 per cent of intended votes, making it one of Germany's strongest political parties. In the forthcoming Saxony-Anhalt state election, multiple independent polling institutes currently place the AfD at around 41 per cent, well ahead of the CDU on approximately 23–26 per cent. Even in traditionally left-wing Berlin which will also hold state elections this autumn, the AfD currently ranks third with 17.7%, trailing the leading Left Party by just 2 percentage points and the CDU by 1 percentage point, thereby nearly doubling its 2023 result. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, another federal state holding elections this autumn, the AfD is leading the polls with 35.7%, which would more than double its 2021 result.

While opinion polls can only represent snapshots rather than solid predictions, these figures indicate the sustained electoral appeal of political narratives associated with right-wing populism and, according to Germany's domestic intelligence authorities, increasingly influenced by actors and ideological positions that have become the subject of constitutional scrutiny.

The rise of the AfD has become a focal point in Germany's broader discussion on democratic resilience and the boundaries of constitutional democracy. Since its foundation in 2013, the

party has evolved from a predominantly Eurosceptic movement into a nationalist, anti-immigration political force whose rhetoric increasingly centres on questions of national identity, migration and cultural homogeneity while pursuing an openly Islamophobic course. Political scientists have noted the growing influence of the party's ethnonationalist wing, while several regional branches have maintained close links with individuals and organisations associated with the broader far-right milieu, among them, right-wing militants prone to violence. In the past, some party representatives have drawn attention for downplaying the Holocaust and Nazi rule, as well as for promoting ideas that violate human rights and the constitution, such as "remigration", and are racist in nature. Although the AfD remains a legally constituted political party represented in both the Bundestag and numerous state parliaments, its ideological development has prompted sustained scrutiny from Germany's domestic intelligence services.

In 2025, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) classified the AfD as a confirmed right-wing extremist organisation at the federal level, concluding that significant elements of the party promoted an ethnic understanding of the German people that conflicted with the constitutional principles of human dignity and equality. The AfD rejected these findings and challenged the classification before the courts. Pending judicial review, the BfV temporarily suspended the public use of the designation while maintaining its underlying assessment. The case has therefore become an important constitutional test concerning the relationship between democratic pluralism, freedom of political competition and the state's obligation to protect the liberal democratic order.

The controversy has also revitalised the debate over a possible prohibition of the AfD under Article 21 of the German Constitution, however, previous judgments of the Federal Constitutional Court have demonstrated that radical or anti-constitutional views alone do not automatically justify a ban. Consequently, many legal experts regard the outcome of any prohibition proceedings as highly uncertain and argue that democratic societies should primarily counter extremist ideologies through political engagement, civic education, judicial oversight and the consistent enforcement of constitutional principles.

Notoriously electoral success should not be equated automatically with extremist convictions among voters since citizens support political parties for a wide range of reasons, including dissatisfaction with established parties, economic insecurity, concerns about migration, distrust of political institutions or broader protest against the political status quo.

Nevertheless, the increasing electoral acceptance of parties whose rhetoric overlaps with exclusionary or ethnonationalist narratives do contribute to the gradual normalisation of such ideas within public discourse. This correlation between the rise of the AfD and the societal legitimacy of right-wing militant and nationalist positions is clearly demonstrated by the rising number of individuals classified as right-wing extremists, the increase in right-wing extremist violence, and the reality of life for Muslims and other minorities that is increasingly characterised by discrimination and the fear of attacks. The principal concern therefore lies not only in acts of politically motivated violence but also in the cumulative erosion of mutual

trust, democratic compromise and the equal protection of minority groups that will further increase with every electoral success of the AfD.

Study reveals significant Zionist influence on political decision-making in Germany

The public and political debate surrounding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has become challenging in Germany, not solely but increasingly since the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023. Two recent publications, a journalistic investigation and a study commissioned by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, argue that this development cannot be explained simply by immediate security concerns, the German-Israeli friendship and German Staatsräison. Instead, they assert that Germany's changing political approach towards UNRWA reflects a long process of organised advocacy in which internationally active Zionist networks gradually influenced political agendas, public discourse and policy preferences.

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation study "[Inside the Campaign Against UNRWA in Germany](#)", authored by the German-Israeli researcher Alon Sahar, analyses more than a decade of parliamentary documents, policy papers, funding records and media coverage. Sahar argues that a network of Zionist advocacy organisations, policy entrepreneurs and actors supported by the Zionist state sharing predominantly right-wing, pro-Israeli political positions systematically promoted narratives that portray UNRWA as an institution which perpetuates rather than alleviates the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study analyses three key narratives promoted by those actors.

The educational narrative constitutes the most persistent and socially resonant line of critique directed at UNRWA. It claims that UNRWA-run schools "systematically transmit antisemitic, violent, or terror-glorifying content, thereby radicalizing Palestinian children and perpetuating the conflict". While the narrative is framed as a concern about educational standards, its main purpose is to build a scenario in which UNRWA donors are led to believe they are facilitating the undermining of the Zionist State's security.

The securitisation of UNRWA intends a shift in the perception of the organisation from a humanitarian organisation but an organisation that poses a security risk by its very nature. Part of this narrative includes the allegations regarding the agency's neutrality. Following Zionist accusations in early 2024 that several UNRWA employees had participated in the October attacks, numerous donor states temporarily suspended funding despite the fact that the International Court was not able to find any evidence for this claim just weeks before. In response, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres commissioned an independent review led by former French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna. The review concluded that UNRWA possessed more developed neutrality mechanisms than many comparable humanitarian organisations while simultaneously recommending significant procedural reforms to strengthen oversight and accountability.

Since the publication of the Colonna Review, UNRWA has introduced extensive institutional reforms. The agency reports that it has strengthened internal oversight, expanded ethics procedures, improved neutrality training and progressively implemented the majority of the review's recommendations.

Challenging the Palestinian right of return is the third key narrative that was initiated by those pro-Zionist actors, defunded into German political reality and aims to weaken the political significance of the Palestinian right of return before any negotiated settlement could be reached.

It further describes what political scientists commonly refer to as an advocacy network consisting of organisations that pursue similar objectives while employing complementary strategies. Sahar argues that transnational Zionist organisations generated policy narratives, domestic organisations translated these claims into the German political context, advocacy groups provided normative legitimacy, while media actors amplified the resulting messages. Through repeated parliamentary briefings, policy reports, committee hearings and public interventions, these narratives gradually became embedded within political decision-making processes.

The involved actors thereby operate on different levels, starting from narrative originators that generate the primary ideological framework (UN Watch, led by Hillel Neuer and connected to Elinat Wilf as well as different key pro-Zionist organisations in the past; NGO Monitor; Institute for Monitoring Peace & Cultural Tolerance in School Education, led by Marcus Sheff, a reserve officer of the IDF based in the US and others). The second level consists of translators and domestic brokers, local individuals and organisations that originated within German society. Their task is to introduce the narratives generated at the first level into the German discourse through political advocacy, networking and close cooperation with media professionals (among them ELNET, Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft, Mideast Freedom Forum Berlin and others with many of them including current and former German federal politicians in its ranks). On the third level, norm shapers are actors that shape public norms and influence the limits of acceptable political discourse by promoting particular understandings of Israel, Antisemitism and international institutions across civil society, education and public debate. Owing to their institutional legitimacy, public support and recognised representative status, they exert considerable influence over which perspectives are regarded as legitimate and which remain marginal within Germany's political landscape (Zentralrat der Juden Deutschland which receives an annual grant of 22 million Euros per year by the German federal government as well as further funds on local level, Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, one of Germany's most influential civil-society organisations and others). While the fourth level, cluster-based micro networks that align with the Zionist narrative and operate on a local level by accessing fundings and networking on a small scale, the fifth level seems to be much more significant because of its public perception: Media amplifiers. According to Sahar's study, WELT and BILD, two of Germany's highest circulating media outlets, play an exceptional role in boosting and multiplying pro-Zionist and anti-UNRWA narratives which directly lead to their increased relevance within the parliamentary discourse. Both newspapers are known for their clear pro-Zionist editorial commitment.

The accompanying journalistic investigation came to similar conclusions. Drawing on interviews with politicians, parliamentary staff, diplomats and government officials that wanted to remain anonymous, it suggests that long before the events of October 2023, German political discourse had increasingly framed UNRWA through the lenses of security, institutional neutrality and alleged connections to militant organisations. The attacks of October 2023 did not initiate these debates but significantly accelerated them by creating a political environment in which previously established narratives gained greater resonance. According to several interviewees, parliamentary briefings organised by advocacy organisations became particularly influential during this period, shaping discussions among legislators and senior political staff. Furthermore, the parliamentarians interviewed reported that even those actors who were able to move within the orbit of the Bundestag and voice criticism of Zionist policies after 7th October [were exclusively Israeli individuals](#), “In two and a half years, I haven’t seen a single Palestinian actor in the Bundestag.”

One of the study's central analytical contributions is its application of agenda-setting and policy diffusion theories. Political science has long demonstrated that public policy rarely changes solely because of new events. Instead, external crises often create so-called "policy windows", during which pre-existing policy proposals become politically feasible. John Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) and Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones' work on agenda-setting similarly argue that organised actors frequently prepare policy ideas long before circumstances allow their implementation. The German debate on UNRWA appears consistent with this broader scientific literature, suggesting that the post-October political shift reflected both immediate crisis dynamics and sustained advocacy that has been implemented for several years.

The two publications nevertheless argue that institutional reforms alone have not fundamentally altered the political discourse surrounding UNRWA. Once policy narratives become firmly embedded within political institutions, they often develop considerable resilience, regardless of their actual and verifiable truth content. Political communication research has repeatedly demonstrated that framing influences not only public opinion but also the range of policy options perceived as legitimate by decision-makers. Repeated associations between an organisation and concepts such as terrorism, insecurity or institutional failure may therefore continue to shape political evaluations even after new evidence or corrective reforms emerge. That these narratives took hold within the German public and political sphere become evident, among other things, in Germany's decision to abstain for the first time during a preliminary vote in the UN subcommittee in November 2025, thereby withholding support for an unrestricted extension of the mandate for UNRWA.

This raises wider questions concerning transparency and democratic accountability. Alon Sahar’s study does not argue that advocacy itself is illegitimate. Rather, he suggests that democratic debate requires greater transparency regarding funding structures, institutional affiliations and channels of political influence. Advocacy constitutes a normal feature of democratic policymaking, yet its legitimacy depends upon openness, pluralism and equal opportunities for competing perspectives to reach political decision-makers. Above all, the fact that Zionist lobby groups enjoy disproportionate access to political decision-makers and media figures in Germany, while voices critical of Israel are scarce and pro-Palestinian voices

are almost entirely marginalised and even criminalised, casts serious doubt on the fundamental neutrality and integrity of German federal policy.