

Executive Summary of the ELSC database of anti-Palestinian repression

The European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) is a non-profit organisation that supports the Palestine solidarity movement. We provide pro bono legal advice and defence, engage in advocacy and research, and pursue strategic litigation to hold actors accountable for their complicity in Israel's genocide of the Palestinians and its colonial project in the region. The ELSC's Monitor and Research (M&R) Department documents and analyses the growing restrictions that are silencing civil society organisations and activists defending Palestinian rights across Europe. Through in-depth research, we expose incidents, policies, legislation, and legal proceedings that are geared to criminalise the Palestine solidarity movement in Europe.

At the ELSC, we recognise that simply listing incidents or presenting statistics – common approaches in policy reports on issues of racism and civil liberties – is no longer enough to fully convey the scope and depth of the repression we are witnessing today, particularly in Germany but also across Europe and the West more broadly. To respond to this, our work highlights broader patterns of repression and exposes the systematic nature of efforts to silence Palestine solidarity and crack down on dissidents of government policies.

By repression we do not merely mean the silencing or prohibition of speaking out against the genocide. Repression is a broader process by which certain ways of speaking about Palestinian liberation are delegitimised, criminalised, or rendered unspeakable through legal, cultural, and institutional mechanisms. This includes the selective framing of anti-Zionism as antisemitism, the disciplining of academic and artistic expression, and the policing of political solidarity through state surveillance and employment sanctions. In this sense, repression functions not only to censor but to shape what is acceptable discourse, producing a political reality in which solidarity with Palestine is marked as deviant, dangerous, or outside the bounds of democratic speech.

While the law may still be capable of addressing, managing, and partially containing infringements on collective or individual freedoms, it ultimately operates within and is shaped by a broader legal and political framework that is itself historically colonial and systematically repressive. As such, it lacks the tools to fully account for or challenge the deeper architecture of repression we are witnessing today, both in relation to Palestine and more broadly. What is urgently needed – for policymakers, lawyers, movements, organisations, academics, and journalists alike – is a contextualised political analysis of current events that can offer a coherent political and legal counter-narrative.

For this reason, we are launching a public-facing database, visualised by Forensic Architecture and Forensis.

The platform launches with 766 documented incidents of repression that have taken place in Germany since 2019, impacting thousands of people and silencing diverse expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people. This marks the first phase of the public database; additional incidents and data from other countries will be added at regular intervals. Our aim is to provide reliable and verifiable data to reveal the systematic nature of the repression, the disinformation tactics used to enable and justify it, the circulation of misleading evidence employed to support unfounded allegations, the repetitive nature of these incidents across different sectors of society, and the quantitative patterns of institutionalised racism.



Our research shows that German state and non-state institutions conflate legitimate criticism of the Israeli state with antisemitism and/or support for terrorism and as such, use allegations of antisemitism to silence expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Moreover, the ban on the slogan “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” is a quintessential example of Germany’s attempts to restrict freedom of expression, as it pertains to the Palestine solidarity movement. In an effort to prohibit public expression of the aforementioned slogan, the German Ministry of Interior has made the dubious claim that the true interpretation of this statement is an incitement to violence against Jews or that it constitutes the “intellectual property” of certain Palestinian organisations or political parties, when in fact it is a slogan calling for decolonisation and justice. Another example of the blatant disregard of the right to free expression by German authorities is their imposition of a blanket ban on pro-Palestine demonstrations in Berlin from 11 to 21 October 2024.

Several Palestine-related demonstrations and events have also been banned across the country since 7 October 2023. In previous years, events cancellations were particularly visible before and after Nakba Commemoration Day on 15 May.

An additional key site of repression is the higher education sector across Germany. University students and staff play a central role in the Palestine solidarity movement, engaging in demonstrations that call on universities to uphold their human rights obligations and sever ties with Israeli institutions. In response, German state bodies, along with university administrations and management, have worked together to suppress this form of solidarity, leading to serious violations of academic freedom, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly. Academics and students have been investigated by universities for expressing pro-Palestine views on social media or for participating in demonstrations. Lecture series and academic events related to Palestine are frequently cancelled.

Importantly, the measures employed go beyond administrative restrictions. Universities often involve law enforcement, resulting in unconstitutional practices such as unlawful detentions, arrests without charge, and police violence during student demonstrations. At the same time, universities feel compelled to launch superficial initiatives that appear to address student, and staff demands while doing little to meaningfully protect academic freedom and political expression.

The repression of Palestine solidarity in Germany and across Europe is neither incidental nor isolated - it is systematic and increasingly institutionalised. It targets protesters and activists, as well as students, academics, artists, and entire civil society sectors, eroding fundamental rights under the guise of public order or combating antisemitism or support for terrorism. In this climate, legal support alone is not enough. What is needed is a comprehensive political and legal response that both defends the right to speak and act in solidarity with the Palestinian people and exposes the architecture of repression that seeks to silence it. Through our legal work, research, and now this public database, the ELSC stands as a critical infrastructure of resistance: defending those under attack, documenting the mechanisms of repression, and affirming that solidarity is not a crime, but a duty.

Key Findings and Insights

The ELSC has identified eight mechanisms of silencing by documenting incidents of repression across sectors of society, tracing the flow of allegations used to justify the attacks, and analysing their impact on the targets. At the time of publication, the database platform hosts evidence of 766 incidents of repression in Germany, affecting thousands of people and silencing diverse forms of expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Key Findings

- The three most dominant types of repression out of the 8 categories are Censorship/disinformation/smearing, Arrests/law enforcement interventions and Legal/financial/professional repercussions with 175, 154 and 137 incidents respectively out of the total 766.
- The main three actors responsible for repression are the Police/security personnel in 338 incidents, (member of) State Institution in 92 incidents, and Journalist/Media in 81 incidents.
- The main targets of repression are Activist(s) or Activist group/organisation in 385 incidents, Student(s) or student society/group/organisation in 92 incidents, and Artist(s) or Cultural Groups in 83 incidents.



Key Insights

- Our timeline in the database shows that the repression in Germany is not happening in a vacuum: By showing the increase of repression in Germany happening in parallel with events in Palestine that lead to an international outcry, it can be considered a strategic reaction to silence criticism of Israel.
- German state and non-state institutions conflate legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and practices with antisemitism and/or supporting terrorism and, as such, used to silence expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people.
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- The ban on the statement “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” is a quintessential example of Germany’s attempts to restrict freedom of expression as it pertains to the Palestine solidarity movements. In its effort to prohibit public expression of the statement, the German Ministry of Interior made the dubious claim that the true interpretation of this statement is an incitement to violence against Jews or that it constitutes “intellectual property” of certain Palestinian organisations or political parties.
- German authorities imposed a blanket ban on pro-Palestinian protests from 11 to 27 October in Berlin, several Palestine-related demonstrations and events have been banned across the country since October 2023. In previous years, event cancellations were particularly visible before and after Nakba commemoration day on May 15.
- One of the key arenas where freedom of expression and opinion is being severely impaired is in universities across Germany. University students and staff constitute a major force within the Palestine solidarity movement, engaging in protests that demand universities to comply with their human rights obligations and to cut ties with their Israeli counterparts. Correspondingly, members of German state institutions and the managerial and administrative bodies of universities are collaborating to quell this domain of Palestinian solidarity. In the course of this process, acute breaches of academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly are occurring. Academics and students are investigated by the universities for their Palestine-related expressions on their private social media or for their participation in demonstrations, and lecture series and academic events related to Palestine are cancelled. Moreover, the tactics utilised by state institutions and universities are not limited to mere administrative restrictions. In fact, it is common practice for universities to resort to law enforcement authorities, who are empowered by the state to legitimately use force and often engage in unconstitutional practices such as illegal detainment, arrest without charges, and police brutality to suppress student protests. At the same time, universities are compelled to undertake perfunctory initiatives that ostensibly aim to accommodate the demands of their students and staff, while failing to meaningfully protect academic freedom and political expression.



Number of incidents in Germany according to incident, actor, and target categories

Category	Quantity
Censorship/disinformation/smearing	175
Arrests/law enforcement intervention	154
Legal/financial/professional repercussions	137
Harassment/violence/doxing/surveillance	107
Demonstration bans/cancelled events/refusal of service	89
Threats of legal action	70
Threats to employment/funding	17
Sanctions at schools/universities/workplaces	17

Target	Quantity
Activist(s) or Activist group/organisation	385
Student(s) or student society/group/organisation	92
Artist(s) or Cultural Groups	83
(member of) the public	55
Academics/writers/teachers	49
Public Figure	23
Journalists/Media	21
Public Institution worker/member	20
Other	14
(member of) Public Institution	12
Donor(s) or Charity/NGO	8
(member of) Political Party	4

Actors	Quantity
Police/Security Personnel	338
(member of) State Institution	92
Journalist/Media	81
(member of) Educational Institution	55
(member of) Cultural Institution	42
(member of) Private Institution	35
Pro-Israel advocacy group/lawfare group	29
Organising group	20
(member of) Political Party	19
(member of) Public Institution	16
Anon/Unknown	14
Member(s) of the public	11
Other	9
Public Figure	5