

REPORT | JULY 2025

REPRESSION OF PALESTINE SOLIDARITY IN GERMANY

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001

SUMMARY

SUMMARY



The German State is actively enabling and supporting the genocide in Gaza (Law for Palestine, 2024b) even after the International Court of Justice issued an interim ruling alerting all states to a potential genocide case (International Court of Justice, 2024a). It's in this light that Palestinians and the Palestine solidarity movement in Germany are facing an escalating campaign of political repression that spans law enforcement abuses, legal sanctions, and censorship (ELSC, 2025). This report documents how German authorities systematically curtail freedoms of assembly, expression, academia, and art when it comes to anti-genocide protests and advocacy for Palestinian rights. The report details the different forms of repression: from legal repression, criminalisation, and surveillance to delegitimizing dissent within the educational sector, arts, and media. Such measures erode Germany's democratic fabric and form a pattern of political persecution that undermines Germany's democratic principles and international human rights obligations (Monroy, 2025; ELSC, 2025a). European legal expert Alice Garcia of the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) cautioned that current practices in Germany are "unequivocally comparable to practices of authoritarian regimes" (Jamal, 2023a). Indeed, international watchdog CIVICUS downgraded Germany's civic space rating from "open" to "narrowed" due to these curbs on fundamental freedoms (Serhan, 2024). Additionally, the Civic Space Report 2025 by the European Civic Forum identifies Germany as one of the most repressive EU states in relation to Palestine advocacy, highlighting the systematic misuse of public order laws and excessive use of executive and police power (European Civic Forum, 2025, p. 20).

The sum effect is a chilling atmosphere in which legitimate dissent with the German State's complicity in the genocide is being suppressed and persecuted under the guise of combating antisemitism and terrorism.



Widespread, systematic repression: Since 2019, at least 766 incidents of State repression against Palestine solidarity have been documented in Germany (Monroy, 2025; ELSC, 2025a). Examining the repression reveals it as widespread, systematic, and deliberate.

Fields of repression: This repression extends across all areas of civic life in Germany, encompassing protests, universities, schools, art and cultural institutions, media, and online spheres.

Legal and administrative crackdown: Authorities are leveraging a broad array of laws to pursue anti-genocide activists, including criminal and civil law. Migration law has been weaponized against non-citizens, including often stateless Palestinians, who face deportation, visa cancellations, or asylum denials, creating a climate of fear and legal precarity for immigrant activists in Germany (ELSC, 2025a; Salfiti, 2025; Wystrychowski, 2025).

Police violence: German police frequently employ disproportionate force against Palestine-solidarity protesters, including mass arrests, physical brutality, and unlawful treatment (Arrest Press Unit, 2025).

Surveillance and securitization of solidarity: German domestic intelligence agencies have increasingly framed Palestinians and Palestine solidarity as a potential security threat. Measures such as categorizing Palestine activism as “left-wing extremism” constitute a form of securitization, in which political dissent is treated as a national security issue – a deeply troubling development for a democracy (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2024; ELSC, 2025a).

Discursive delegitimization: Government bodies, institutions, media, and civil society increasingly target anti-Zionism and protected political speech through conflating it with antisemitism and support for terrorism, in a deliberate campaign to shut down, vilify, and render unthinkable any solidarity with Palestinians and dissent over Germany's support of Israeli politics of genocide, apartheid, and occupation, all of which contradict Germany's agreement to UN chartas, resolutions, and international law.

Censorship within the cultural sector: Cultural institutions have become sites of systemic silencing over Palestine solidarity. Since late 2023, over 200 Palestine-related events have been canceled, censored, or disrupted across academic and

cultural institutions, media platforms, political and state bodies, as well as civil society spaces (Archive of Silence, 2025).

Exclusion within the education sector: Since at least 2019, the educational sector in Germany has been an epistemological battlefield. Freedom of academia and speech is curtailed for students and educators alike, with adherence to government narratives and policies taking on more importance than scientific inquiry (El-Hitami, 2024; Wystrychowski, 2025). Scholars report self-censorship, while students – especially foreign nationals – face threats to their careers or residency status if they speak out (ELSC, 2025a). Symbols of Palestinian culture have been banned in Berlin schools. Police increasingly feature on campus, including through physically violent repressions against student protests. In October 2023, the Berlin Senate Administration issued a letter to schools in the city encouraging them to prohibit the display of Palestinian symbols, including the keffiyeh and “Free Palestine” badges (ReachOut/ARIBA, 2023).

Impact on marginalized groups: This repression disproportionately targets, stigmatizes, and criminalises Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim people and communities, as well as Jewish Germans, Jewish foreign nationals, and Israelis who are critical of Israeli state politics.



002

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION



The Palestinian community in Germany has evolved significantly from its initial composition of students, workers, refugees from Lebanon, and/or political exiles, becoming Europe's largest Palestinian community with an estimated population of 250,000 to 300,000. Many have historically faced legal precarity, social marginalization, and restrictions on political expression. Yet, since 7 October 2023, the Palestinian community and those advocating for Palestinian rights in Germany have been subjected to increasingly intense suppression of their rights, protests, cultural symbols, voices, and narratives.

While Germany's post-war identity has been profoundly shaped by a commitment to "Nie Wieder" ("Never Again") – a pledge to combat antisemitism and protect Jewish life after the Holocaust – this historical responsibility has been politically instrumentalized to silence dissent with Israeli politics of genocide, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing, and Germany's complicity with these politics (Albanese, 2024; Amnesty International, 2022, 2024a; Akkerman & Ní Bhriain, 2024; Forensic Architecture, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2021, 2024). Support for Palestinian rights is conflated with antisemitism, terrorism, or threats to public order and domestic security. The German government's proclaimed Staatsräson includes an unwavering commitment to Israel's security (Jäckels, 2024) and German leaders often assert that Israel's safety is "non-negotiable."

In the German context, Staatsräson (literally "reason of state") has come to mean that Israel's security is regarded as a fundamental national interest to the point that it's treated almost as a constitutional principle. This term was introduced when then-Chancellor Angela Merkel declared during a speech in the Israeli Knesset in 2008 that Israel's security is part of the Staatsräson of my country, and became entrenched in the German discourse since 7 October 2023 (Bundesregierung, 2008).

As legal scholar Dr. Nahed Samour (2024) notes, "Staatsräson is not a legal term. It's found in no law or constitution." Nevertheless, it exerts powerful legal effects in state practice, shaping policy and actions. Under this banner, authorities have stretched existing laws such as hate speech or public order statutes to silence

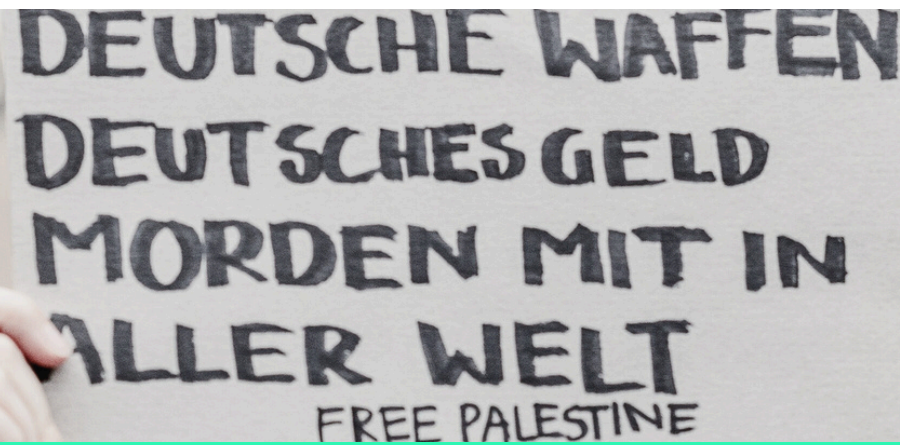
criticism of Israeli government policies, equating such speech with antisemitism or extremism. Anti-genocide protest and Palestine solidarity is treated by the German state as a security threat, not a democratic right. This dynamic has only intensified with recent political moves and is expected to expand further under the new conservative government elected in 2025.

This report aims to analyze the multi-layered repression of Palestinian activism and Palestine solidarity in Germany. It identifies five interrelated arenas through which this repression is enacted: legal repression, state violence and securitization, discursive delegitimization, censorship in the cultural and civic sector, and exclusion within the educational system. By examining how these forms overlap and reinforce one another, the report seeks to expose the systemic nature of repression and its impact on civil liberties, public discourse, and political expression. While acknowledging the resilience of those advocating for Palestinian rights, the report underscores the urgent need to confront and challenge this comprehensive crackdown on Palestine solidarity in Germany.

This report understands state repression as "any realized or threatened limit or coercive action taken by state authorities to control or prevent challenges that could alter the status quo policy or distribution of power" (Ritter & Conrad, 2016). It involves systematic and often violent actions taken by a government to control, silence, or eliminate opposition, dissent, or perceived threats to its authority. This can range from harassment and surveillance to arrests, bans, and even physical violence. In democracies, overt violent repression may be less common than in autocracies, but subtler forms of control, such as legal pressure, administrative hurdles, and public stigmatization, are regularly employed to raise the cost of protest and deter political opposition (Davenport, 2007a). Further, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1979) concept of symbolic power is key to analyzing how states shape discourse to delegitimize pro-Palestinian activism by equating it with antisemitism or extremism, rendering such views socially and politically unacceptable. Germany's state doctrine of Staatsräson, which enshrines unconditional support for Israel, creates an environment where Palestine solidarity is not only repressed but marked as fundamentally un-German.

Finally, the report also examines how securitization and racialization work together to frame Palestinian and Arab voices as threats, justifying exceptional restrictions. Together, these dynamics form the foundation for understanding the systemic and intersecting forms of repression explored in the following chapters.





DEUTSCHE WAFFEN
DEUTSCHES GELD
MORDEN MIT IN
ALLER WELT
FREE PALESTINE

003

CONTEXT: GERMANY'S REPRESSION OF PALESTINIANS AND PALESTINE SOLIDARITY

CONTEXT: GERMANY'S REPRESSION OF PALESTINIANS AND PALESTINE SOLIDARITY



This chapter situates Germany's domestic repression of Palestinians and Palestinian solidarity within the broader context of its historical international political alignment with Israel. Since October 2023, Germany has provided extensive diplomatic, military, and financial support to Israel, while simultaneously escalating repression against Palestinians and their allies in the diaspora. The chapter outlines how Germany's foreign policy, shaped by Staatsräson and post-Holocaust memory politics, is mirrored in internal policies that silence dissent. It documents Germany's active role on the world stage in obstructing accountability efforts and in aiding and abetting the genocide through weapon exports alongside systematic repression of protest, speech, and cultural expression domestically. By tracing this dual complicity, external and internal, this section provides essential background for understanding the mechanisms and motivations behind Germany's crackdown on Palestinians and Palestine solidarity.

3.1 GERMANY'S COMPLICITY IN THE GENOCIDE

From October 2023 to May 2025, Germany emerged as one of the staunchest international supporters of Israel's genocide in Palestine, despite overwhelming evidence of genocidal acts, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, as well as international investigation against Israel. While presenting itself as a guardian of human rights, Germany deepened its political, military, and financial ties with Israel and escalated domestically to an unprecedented campaign of repression against Palestinian communities and those in solidarity with them. Germany plays a dual role in this context: Its material complicity in the unfolding genocide in Gaza, and its domestic persecution of Palestinian voices, organizers, and allies. The report examines how Germany's so-called "Staatsräson" has

enabled not only silence, but also active criminalization of anti-genocide protest. From UN abstentions and arms deals to protest bans, smear campaigns, and ideological litmus tests for citizenship, Germany's actions have revealed the contours of a repressive regime cloaked in liberal-democratic language.

Diplomatic and Legal Support

- **Abstention on UN ceasefire vote:** On 12 December 2023, Germany abstained from voting on United Nations General Assembly Resolution ES-10/L.27, which called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. This abstention signaled a refusal to oppose Israel's military assault, despite mass civilian casualties and infrastructure collapse (UN General Assembly, 2023).
- **Opposition to ICJ genocide case against Israel:** In January 2024, Germany announced it would intervene at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in defense of Israel, opposing South Africa's genocide case. Notably, this declaration of support came before the ICJ issued its first preliminary ruling. Germany maintained its position even after the Court later found that a plausible case for genocide exists and ordered provisional measures to prevent further harm (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024c).
- **Brought to the ICJ for complicity in genocide:** In March 2024, Nicaragua filed a case at the ICJ against Germany for aiding and abetting genocide in Gaza. The application cites Germany's continued arms exports, funding cuts to humanitarian relief (UNRWA), and political support for Israel amid a humanitarian catastrophe and systemic targeting of civilians (International Court of Justice, 2024b).

Graph: Germany's Track Record: Support for Genocide October 2023 – May 2025



Diplomatic & Legal Support

Abstention on UN Ceasefire Vote

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Diplomatic Embrace of Israel Amid Genocide

In May 2025, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier hosted Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Berlin to mark 60 years of diplomatic relations. The visit took place while Israel stood accused of genocide by multiple governments and international human rights bodies and after it had refused to act on ICJ's binding preliminary rulings to prevent genocide.



Military, Financial and Logistical Support

Record-High Arms Exports to Israel

In total Germany approved €487 million in weapons exports to Israel in the last two years. In 2023, the German government permitted exports worth €326 million to Israel, and in 2024, the figure was €161 million. Germany became Israel's second-largest arms supplier globally, behind the United States.

Weapons Like Used in Gaza

German arms exports included components for warships, air defense systems, precision weapons, and surveillance technologies, many of which are deployed in attacks on Gaza and the West Bank.

Suspension of Humanitarian Relief (UNRWA)

In January 2024, Germany suspended funding to the UNRWA, further exacerbating conditions in Gaza amid mass displacement, famine, and collapse of the medical system, as well as worsening conditions in the West Bank and in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon. The decision followed unverified Israeli claims against individual UNRWA members, later widely discredited.



Military and Police Collaboration

Ongoing Military and Cybersecurity Cooperation

Germany has continued its military and cybersecurity cooperation with Israel during the ongoing genocide in Gaza, including intelligence sharing, joint training exercises, and defense technology collaboration – activities documented in the Partners in Crime report published by the Transnational Institute.

Police Exchange Programs

German federal and state police forces, including special riot units, have engaged in training exchanges with Israeli police, including units accused of systemic violence in occupied Palestine. This collaboration continued despite international scrutiny.

Shared Policing Tactics

Protest policing tactics used against Palestine solidarity demonstrations in Germany mirror methods used by Israeli forces against Palestinians, including pain grips, aggressive dispersal, surveillance, and preemptive bans.



Symbolic and Political Endorsements

Renewal of Berlin–Tel Aviv Twin City Agreement

On 7 April 2025, Berlin formalized its twin city partnership with Tel Aviv, Israel's military and economic capital, amid Israel's ongoing siege of Gaza. The partnership was reaffirmed in terms of "shared values," ignoring mounting evidence of war crimes.

Failure to Condemn War Crimes, Starvation Tactics

Despite documentation of mass killings, targeted starvation, and the bombing of hospitals and refugee camps, Germany has refused to hold Israel accountable or halt diplomatic engagement.

Obstruction at the EU Level

Germany has consistently blocked European Union efforts to implement sanctions, embargoes, or support independent war crimes investigations into Israeli military operations in Gaza.

- **Diplomatic embrace of Israel amid genocide:** In May 2025, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier hosted Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Berlin to mark 60 years of diplomatic relations (Bundespräsident, 2025). The visit took place while Israel stood accused of genocide by multiple governments and international human rights bodies and after it had refused to act on ICJ's binding preliminary rulings to prevent genocide (Amnesty International, 2024c; Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2024).

Military, financial, and logistical support

- **Record-high arms exports to Israel:** In total Germany approved €487 million in weapons exports to Israel in the last two years. In 2023, the German government permitted exports worth €326 million to Israel (the largest single-year total on record and nearly quadruple the 2022 amount), and in 2024, the figure was €161 million (Güler, 2025). Germany became Israel's second-largest arms supplier globally, behind the United States (Reuters, 2025). For a comprehensive analysis of Germany's arms exports to Israel, see Forensic Architecture's "German Arms Exports to Israel, 2003–2023" report, as well as official data from the German Bundestag (Forensis, 2024; Deutscher Bundestag, 2024b).
- **Weapons likely used in Gaza:** German arms exports included components for warships, air defense systems, precision weapons, and surveillance technologies, many of which are deployed in attacks on Gaza and the West Bank (Forensis, 2024).
- **Suspension of humanitarian relief (UNRWA):** In January 2024, Germany suspended funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), further exacerbating conditions in Gaza amid mass displacement, famine, and collapse of the medical system, as well as worsening conditions in the West Bank and in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon. The decision followed unverified Israeli claims against individual UNRWA members, later widely discredited (Federal Foreign Office Germany, 2024).

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- **Shared policing tactics:** Protest policing tactics used against Palestine solidarity demonstrations in Germany mirror methods used by Israeli forces against Palestinians, including pain grips, aggressive dispersal, surveillance, and preemptive bans (Arrest Press Unit, 2025).

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- **Failure to condemn genocide, war crimes, or starvation tactics:** Despite documentation of mass killings, targeted starvation, and the bombing of hospitals and refugee camps, Germany has refused to hold Israel accountable or halt diplomatic engagement (Amnesty International, 2024c; Times of Israel, 2024).
- **Obstruction at the EU level:** Germany has consistently blocked European Union efforts to implement sanctions, embargoes, or support independent war crimes investigations into Israeli military operations in Gaza (Jones, 2023; Tocci, 2025).



Historical context of German complicity in genocide

Germany's complicity in the genocide in Gaza must be understood in the context of its colonial and fascist history. Germany perpetrated three internationally recognized genocides:

- The Herero and Nama genocide (1904–1908) in Namibia, considered the first genocide of the 20th century, involved mass executions, concentration camps, and forced displacement (Federal Republic of Germany & Republic of Namibia, 2021).
- The Holocaust, in which Nazi Germany systematically murdered six million Jews and also persecuted, brutalized, or murdered millions of others – including Roma and Sinti (in what is known as the Porajmos), people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, political dissidents, Black people, and others deemed “racially” or socially undesirable, such as Poles, Soviet PoWs, and so-called “asocials” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2024).
- The Porajmos, or the genocide of Roma and Sinti people, was a parallel and targeted campaign of extermination carried out by the Nazi regime, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 220,000 to 500,000 Roma and Sinti across Europe. Though long marginalized in historical accounts, it is now internationally recognized as a distinct genocide (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2023).

Germany has long claimed a responsibility to “Never Again” allow genocide – yet its actions today reveal a double standard in how that legacy is applied. The slogan of “Never Again” is misused to justify the unconditional support of Israel, therefore showing that “Never Again” was only ever political window dressing that allowed Germany to reenter the stage of international politics after being defeated in the Second World War.

3.2 TIMELINE OF REPRESSION (1970–2025)

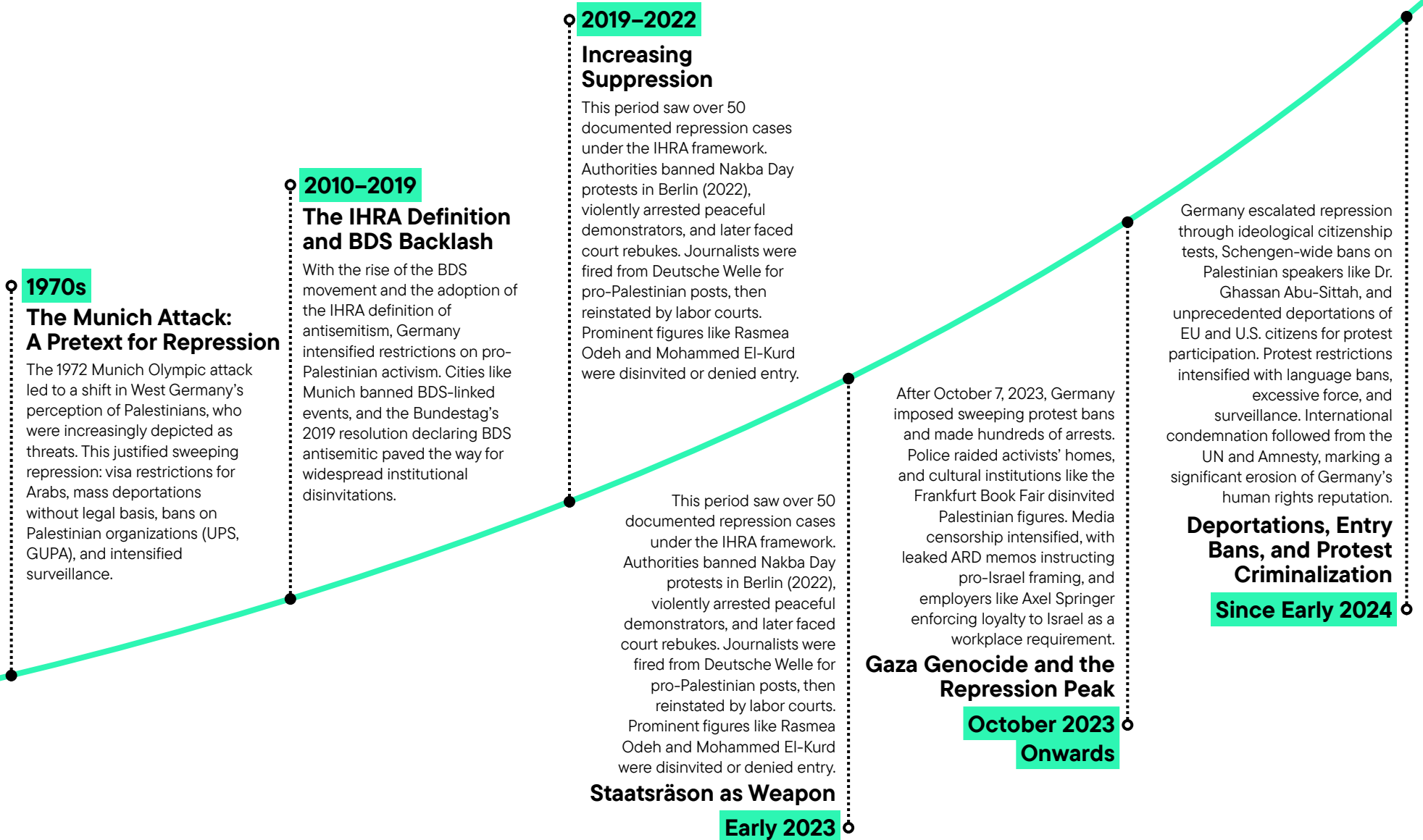
1970s – The Munich attack – A pretext for repression: The attack on the Israeli team at the Olympic Games in Munich by the Palestinian organization “Black September” in the fall of 1972 marked a crucial turning point in the perception and treatment of Palestinians in West Germany. In the aftermath,

Palestinians were increasingly portrayed as symbols of terror, threat, and suspicion in media and political discourse and became targets of heightened state repression (El Bulbeisi, 2020). The Ministry of Interior introduced tightened visa restrictions for Arab countries, and interior ministers of the federal states issued expulsion orders, leading to hundreds of deportations of Palestinians without legal basis. The General Union of Palestinian Students (UPS) and the General Union of Palestinian Workers (GUPA) were banned in West Germany, and politically active Palestinians faced increased surveillance and interrogation (Prestel, 2022).

2010–2019 – The IHRA definition and BDS backlash: A turning point arrived with the rise of the Palestinian-led BDS movement (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) and the implementation of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism into German discourse (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019). In 2017, several major German cities (e.g., Munich) passed local resolutions to deny municipal venues or funding to any BDS-associated events, on the argument that BDS is inherently antisemitic (Rath, 2020). Activists challenged these measures in court as infringements of free expression. Notably, in May 2019, the German parliament passed a (non-binding) resolution officially declaring BDS to be antisemitic (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019). While not a law, this parliamentary stance emboldened institutions across Germany to disinvite speakers or cancel contracts if an individual or group was merely accused of supporting BDS.

2019–2022 – Increasing suppression: The period from 2019 through 2022 saw a surge in documented repression cases. According to the European Legal Support Center (ELSC), at least 53 separate incidents across Germany during these years, as well as several in neighboring countries, involved allegations of antisemitism under the IHRA definition (ELSC, 2025a). In Germany, these years witnessed several key developments:

Graph: Timeline of Repression



- **Bans on Nakba commemorations:** Annual Nakba Day demonstrations, which commemorate the forced displacement, dispossession, and killing of Palestinians in 1948, faced unprecedented bans. In both 2022 and 2023, Berlin police issued blanket prohibitions on Nakba memorial rallies, citing anticipated “antisemitic chants” or security concerns (El-Hitami, 2024). This was an extraordinary step in a country where the default approach, even for controversial assemblies, is to allow protests with police oversight. In 2022, Berlin authorities banned all pro-Palestinian gatherings for several days around Nakba Day. When some protesters gathered peacefully, they were met with force and dozens of arrests (CIVICUS, 2023). A year later, a Berlin court quietly dismissed the charges against at least one activist arrested during the 2022 Nakba ban, calling the accusations baseless – implicitly rebuking the police’s actions (CIVICUS, 2023).
- **Institutional “antisemitism” purges:** In early 2022, the German state-funded international broadcaster Deutsche Welle (DW) launched an internal inquiry that led to the suspension or firing of seven Palestinian and Arab journalists over social media posts. The inquiry’s report had accused the journalists of antisemitism, though the cited posts were simply pro-Palestine or critical of Israel’s government. The incident drew criticism as an example of institutional overreach. Notably, in 2023, German labor courts ruled in favor of several of these journalists, finding they were wrongfully terminated – a rare instance of the judiciary checking a repressive measure by a state institution (Jamal, 2023a).
- **Visa and border blocks:** German authorities also signaled that even prominent foreign voices would be barred for their Palestine-related advocacy. In March 2019, the Berlin Immigration Office infamously revoked the Schengen visa of Palestinian activist Ramea Odeh, preventing her from speaking at an event in Berlin, after political pressure and intelligence warnings labeled her a “terrorist,” referencing a decades-old conviction in Israel (Deutsche Welle, 2019). However, in 2023, she ultimately prevailed in court, and the speech ban was lifted (VG Berlin, 2023).

- In 2022, a planned exhibition and readings in Germany by the renowned Palestinian author Mohammed El-Kurd were met with political controversy and attempts at cancellation, reflecting a sentiment that Palestinian cultural figures were unwelcome unless vetted for their politics. The Goethe Institute, a prominent German cultural organization, had invited El-Kurd to speak at a conference but later rescinded the invitation, citing concerns over his previous social media posts, which they deemed incompatible with the event’s objectives (Middle East Eye, 2022). Such incidents made clear that voices supporting Palestinian narratives – whether activists or artists – were restricted by disinvitations or visa withdrawal in their freedom of speech.

Early 2023 – Staatsräson as weapon: By early 2023, the repression of Palestine solidarity – through protest bans, police crackdowns, and legal ambiguity – had become institutionalized to a high degree. Even the research service of the Bundestag examined the concept of Staatsräson in a 2023 analysis, noting its influence in areas like naturalization law and hate speech enforcement – effectively warning that openly questioning Israeli state actions could jeopardize one’s prospects for legal residency, naturalization, or freedom from criminal prosecution (for example, one’s citizenship application might be affected, or one could risk charges under Germany’s expansive hate speech laws). As Dr. Samour recounted, in 2023 many in Germany felt “there was no legal certainty” regarding Palestine solidarity and anti-genocide protest. People were genuinely asking whether they could even go out on the street to protest the genocide in Gaza without being arrested (as cited in Jäckels, 2024).

October 2023 onwards – Gaza genocide and the repression peak: Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza triggered massive solidarity protests with the Palestinian people across Europe, and an unprecedented clampdown in Germany.

- **Blanket protest bans:** Starting in mid-October, authorities in Berlin, backed by city and national officials, imposed a blanket ban on all pro-Palestine demonstrations October 11–27, 2023, citing risks of antisemitic incidents or potential violence (ELSC, 2025a). Similar protest bans or rapid dispersals were reported in Hamburg, Frankfurt, and other cities. In the weeks immediately following October 7, over 850 arrests of Palestine solidarity demonstrators were made in Berlin alone (Jamal, 2023a). Police conducted raids on the homes and offices of activists and organizations accused, often tenuously, of links to Hamas or other proscribed groups (Serhan, 2024). In one instance, the Berlin police raided the residences of five Palestinian organizers on the eve of a large demonstration in early October 2024.
- **Cancellations in the cultural and academic sector:** Simultaneously, a wave of cancellations in the cultural and academic sector swept the country. The Archive of Silence, which tracks such incidents, recorded dozens upon dozens of cases in just the final months of 2023 alone (Archive of Silence, 2025). One high-profile example of this phenomenon was the Frankfurt Book Fair, which in October 2023 disinvited the Palestinian writer Adania Shibli from a planned award ceremony for her novel after pro-Israel groups lobbied for and effectively cancelled the award ceremony amid the charged political atmosphere. University administrators across Germany abruptly postponed or canceled panel discussions related to Palestine; even student-organized talks were shut down.

- **Media censorship and pro-Israel doctrine:** The media climate also took a hard turn: A leaked internal memo from ARD, Germany’s public broadcasting consortium, dated 18 October 2023, instructs journalists to avoid certain language critical of Israel’s war crimes and crimes against humanity and to frame common protest slogans as potentially antisemitic crimes. The major media conglomerate Axel Springer openly mandates a pro-Israel editorial line and demands their employees to sign a clause in their contract supporting the state of Israel. At Axel Springer, enforcement was so strict that a 20-year-old employee was summarily fired after he privately questioned the company’s Israel stance – a case first revealed by investigative journalists and cited by international media as indicative of a zero-tolerance approach to deviating speech. The CEO of Axel Springer infamously stated that anyone who has a problem with the company’s staunch pro-Israel position “should not work here,” underscoring the pressure on journalists to self-censor (Jamal, 2023a). Axel Springer also profits from illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied West Bank (Hauenstein, 2024).

Since early 2024, German authorities moved to formalize and expand some of these hardline practices. Among the proposals and policies floated or enacted were:

- **Ideological litmus tests:** Officials proposed that anyone seeking German citizenship should explicitly affirm recognition of Israel’s “right to exist” as a prerequisite – effectively screening out applicants who might hold pro-Palestinian views such as favoring a one-state solution or questioning Zionism (Serhan, 2024).
- **Schengen-wide entry bans:** Germany began using its influence in the Schengen area to bar foreign speakers deemed “supportive of Palestinian resistance” from entering the region. A notable example was the case of Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah, a British-Palestinian surgeon and war crimes witness who was invited to speak in Germany in late 2023. Abu-Sittah was blocked from entering the country, and German authorities went so far as to have the entry ban applied across all 27 EU countries under Schengen – a highly restrictive measure later quietly reversed after the outcry of civil society (Serhan, 2024).

- **Expulsion of resident activists:** Berlin's state government took the extraordinary step of ordering the deportation of several long-term residents (EU and U.S. nationals) solely due to their alleged participation in Palestine solidarity activities. This marked the first time Germany attempted to deport EU citizens on such grounds, with little to no evidence and with no criminal charges being filed against the deportees drawing concern from European partners who saw it as setting a dangerous precedent (Salfiti, 2025; Jones, 2025).
- **Local protest restrictions:** The police restrictions on Palestine solidarity protests, especially in Berlin, have been extensive and multifaceted. Since October 7th, protesters have been faced with a systematic approach of maximum repression. Police and politicians have employed an approach of "consistently exhausting all opportunities of repression" (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024a, as translated by the authors), including but not limited to: Restricting protests to stationary rallies instead of marches, issuing blanket bans on protests, issuing language bans during protests, banning or limiting sound equipment, employing police dogs, using excessive force, using intimidation tactics, pepper-spraying, beating, choking, kicking, sexually harassing, mass-surveilling, and mass-arresting protesters. Authorities justified these measures as necessary to preempt disorder, but rights groups blasted them as flagrantly discriminatory rules and practices aimed at suppressing any visible expression of solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Such policies signal an official posture that treats Palestine-related protest not as a protected right but as a public threat to be tightly controlled.

By June 2025, as we finalize this report, Germany's repression of Palestine solidarity has drawn growing international condemnation. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, Gina Romero, publicly voiced concern over Germany's broad protest bans, criminalization of Palestinian identity, and aggressive policing. Warning that such actions violate fundamental rights and set a dangerous precedent in Europe, Romero (2025) stated:

"I call in particular on the German government to cease its escalating restrictions on fundamental rights, to end censorship and state violence, and to respect and uphold the rights to freedom of assembly, expression, and political participation. I stand in full solidarity with all those organizing and mobilizing [...] in Berlin. Freedom for Palestine is freedom for all."

Likewise, Amnesty International's German office stated that "whoever takes to the streets in Germany to show solidarity with Palestine must expect repression," noting this has been especially true since October 2023 (ECCHR, 2024). These comments underscore how far from democratic norms Germany's current trajectory has veered, tarnishing the country's international reputation as a "guardian of human rights."

Germany's response to Palestine solidarity is among the most restrictive in Europe (Jamal, 2023a) While states like France or the UK have restricted protests citing public order or terrorism concerns, Germany's repression uniquely invokes Holocaust memory and Staatsräson as moral and political justifications for restricting Palestinian solidarity (Jäckels, 2024). This has enabled far-reaching repression, including criminalization of slogans, deportations of EU citizens, and institutional censorship.

3.3 ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM IN GERMANY

The repression of Palestinians in Germany is not merely a reaction to slogans or security concerns – it reflects a deeper, structural phenomenon best described as anti-Palestinian racism. This concept refers to the systematic dehumanization, delegitimization, and exclusion of Palestinians as a people, often through the framing of the figure of the Palestinian as a potential threat (Majid, 2022; Samour & Tzuberi, 2022). This framing then translates into a denial of Palestinian rights, including their right to speak, represent themselves, or be recognized as equal political subjects. Importantly, anti-Palestinian racism also manifests as a denial of Palestinians' basic human rights, reinforcing their exclusion from legal, social, and historical recognition. It manifests not only in overt hostility but also in institutional practices, discursive erasure, and the criminalization of Palestinian

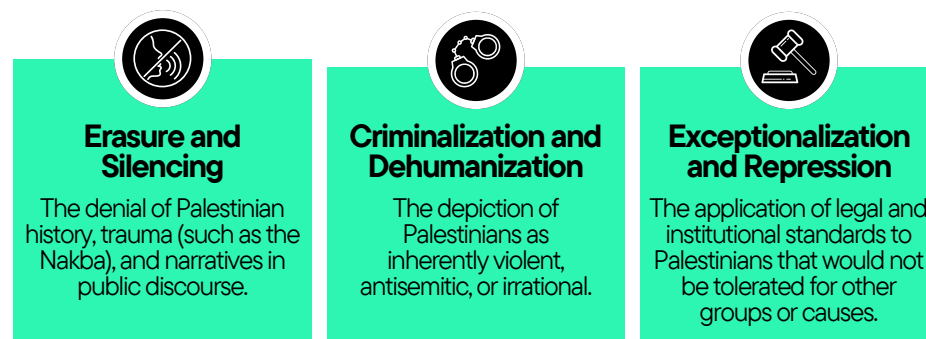
existence and experience (ELSC, 2025a).

Anti-Palestinian racism can be understood as a form of racialized governance that functions through three core mechanisms (Majid, 2022):

Erasure and silencing: Systematic denial and suppression of Palestinian identity, history, and narratives, including the Nakba and contemporary Palestinian suffering. This includes the exclusion of Palestinian voices from public discourse, education, and policymaking, and the refusal to acknowledge Palestinian subjectivity or subjecthood and humanity.

Criminalization and dehumanization: Portrayal of Palestinians as inherently violent, antisemitic, or extremist. This includes the equation of Palestinian speech and advocacy with hate speech or terrorism, and the labeling of Palestinians and their allies as threats to public order, simply for calling for Palestinian rights.

Exceptionalization of repression: Imposition of legal, political, and institutional restrictions on Palestinian expression, organizing, and identity that are not applied to other communities. This includes protest bans, symbolic prohibitions (like the keffiyeh), deportations, and surveillance practices.



While anti-Palestinian racism can be observed in many Western countries, in the German context, these dynamics are uniquely intensified. The invocation of Staatsräson and post-Holocaust memory politics has created a national doctrine where criticism of Israel is inherently and reflexively treated as antisemitic – and Palestinians, by extension, are cast as undeserving of empathy or rights. Scholars like Nadia T. Abou El-Haj and Maha Nassar describe this as the “ontological denial” of the Palestinian: Their very identity becomes suspicious or threatening in European political imaginaries (Abu El-Haj, 2012; M. Nassar, 2022).

This racialized discrimination is evident in:

- **Media and political framing** that focuses on “imported antisemitism” from Arabs, Muslims, and/or Palestinians while ignoring or excusing far-right Jewish supremacy or German right-wing antisemitism and neo-Nazism (Schaer, 2021).
- **Institutional restrictions** on discussion and symbols of Palestinian identity and history such as keffiyehs, flags, or Arabic chants in schools and protests, treating these symbols as inherently extremist (RBB, 2023).
- **Disproportionate surveillance and legal scrutiny** of Palestinian and Arab students, (stateless) refugees, and citizens, despite lack of evidence of violence (ELSC, 2025a).
- **Deportations** of foreign nationals or stateless persons (Salfiti, 2025; Jones, 2025).
- **Naturalization denials or residency rejections** based on someone's support for Palestinian rights (Köver, 2024).

Importantly, anti-Palestinian racism often co-opts the language and structures of anti-racism discrimination and Holocaust memory to justify its actions, thus weaponizing the fight against antisemitism to silence a colonized and racialized people (Hauenstein, 2025c). This form of racism does not operate in spite of Germany's liberal democracy, but through it, cloaked in the language of constitutional defense and public order.

According to Majid (2022), in Anti-Palestinian Racism: Naming, Framing and

Manifestations, anti-Palestinian racism is a specific form of racism that “silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives.” It operates not only against Palestinians themselves, but also against anyone who openly supports Palestinian rights or critiques Israeli policy. This form of racism intersects with Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment but remains distinct, as it especially targets Palestinian identity, history, and political expression.

As long as Palestinians in Germany are treated as a threat rather than as rights-bearing people, any commitment to democracy and pluralism will remain compromised.





004

FORMS OF REPRESSION AND HOW THEY MATERIALIZE

FORMS OF REPRESSION AND HOW THEY MATERIALIZE



The repression of Palestinians and Palestine solidarity in Germany takes multiple, overlapping forms. To understand its structure and scope, it is helpful to distinguish five key and interrelated arenas in which this repression manifests:

(1) **Legal repression**, (2) **state violence and securitization**, (3) **discursive delegitimization**, (4) **censorship within the cultural sector and civic space**, (5) **exclusion within the education sector**.

These forms often operate in tandem, reinforcing one another and creating a broad, systemic environment of restriction. Below is a brief introduction to each form, which will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters.

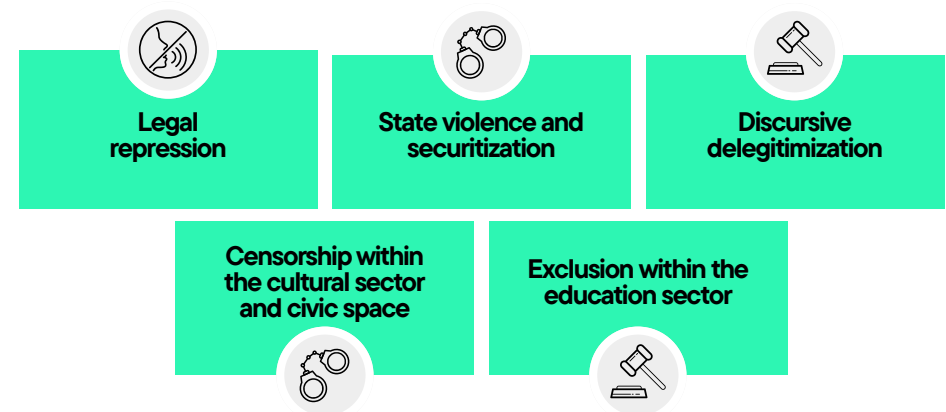
Legal repression refers to all measures taken within the framework of law with the explicit or implicit goal and/or effect of criminalizing Palestinians and Palestine solidarity. This includes laws, administrative decisions, and pseudo-legal mechanisms used to criminalize or ban pro-Palestinian expression and organizing. This can range from protest bans and entry denials to visa cancellations and deportation proceedings targeting activists.

State violence and securitization, the most visceral, immediate, and physical of these forms of repression, refers to violating the barriers of privacy and personal security by home raids of activists' homes, confiscation of digital equipment and systematic analog, digital and social media surveillance by the German Domestic Intelligence Services (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) or the police as well as violence and disproportionate force used by police against Palestine solidarity activists, especially in the context of protests, and the framing of Palestinians and their allies as an inherent security threat. It includes the use of force, intimidation,

arbitrary detentions, and disproportionate policing of protests and gatherings in support of Palestine as well as individuals speaking out for Palestine, often targeting racialized individuals and stateless Palestinians.

Discursive delegitimization refers to the suppression, undermining, and silencing of Palestinian narratives in public discourse, and the sanctioning and criminalizing of expression supporting the rights of the Palestinian people. This includes labeling criticism of Israel as antisemitic or as supporting terrorism, criminalising Palestinian speech, and systematically excluding Palestinians and their allies from media and public platforms.

Censorship within the cultural sector and civic space refers to the silencing, cancellation, and disinvitation of artists and cultural workers who express solidarity with or even just show the reality of the Palestinian people.



Exclusion within the education sector includes the disciplining and censorship of students and educators, bans on symbols like the keffiyeh or Palestinian flag in schools, and efforts to delegitimize or suppress discussion of Palestinian history and rights in academic settings.

These forms often intersect, with outsized police repression then in turn being used as justification for legal crackdowns, legal and pseudo-legal structures being claimed as the basis of cultural silencing, and so on. Since 2019, and especially in the wake of the Gaza genocide from October 2023, such tactics have escalated, producing a comprehensive clampdown. In each of these fields, a distinct, purposeful repression of Palestine solidarity can be observed. This does not equal full repression – activists, artists and others find ways to adapt and circumvent repressive measures, carving space for Palestine solidarity against the odds. However, the political repression equals a clear breach of civil liberties and basic freedoms with the aim to shut down expressions of Palestine solidarity in Germany.

Taken together, these five forms of repression demonstrate a comprehensive campaign that is at once political and deeply personal. Legal bans and police crackdowns prevent people from acting, while discursive and cultural tactics work to discourage them from even daring to speak or appear in support of Palestine. The overlap is clear in many incidents: For example, the Palestine Congress (Palästina Kongress) in April 2024 in Berlin was simultaneously obstructed by administrative order, brutalized by police force, and discursively delegitimized by politicians and media alike, publicly framing the Congress and its participants as antisemitic and dangerous. Likewise, the deportation of activists uses the legal tool of immigration law but also sends a chilling message: It marks individuals as expendable and suspect, reinforcing cultural fears and social stigmas (Hauenstein, 2025a; Wystrychowski, 2025). Such actions – including expulsions and smear campaigns – are not merely symbolic; they inflict real harm while also shaping a broader environment of repression by instilling fear, marginalizing dissent, and deterring participation.

These methods have contributed to what writer Michael Sappir described as an “increasingly narrowed space for Palestine solidarity” and “the state’s intense clampdown on freedom of expression,” in which “the state’s liberal self-image is fast becoming a story Germans can only tell themselves” (Sappir, 2024).

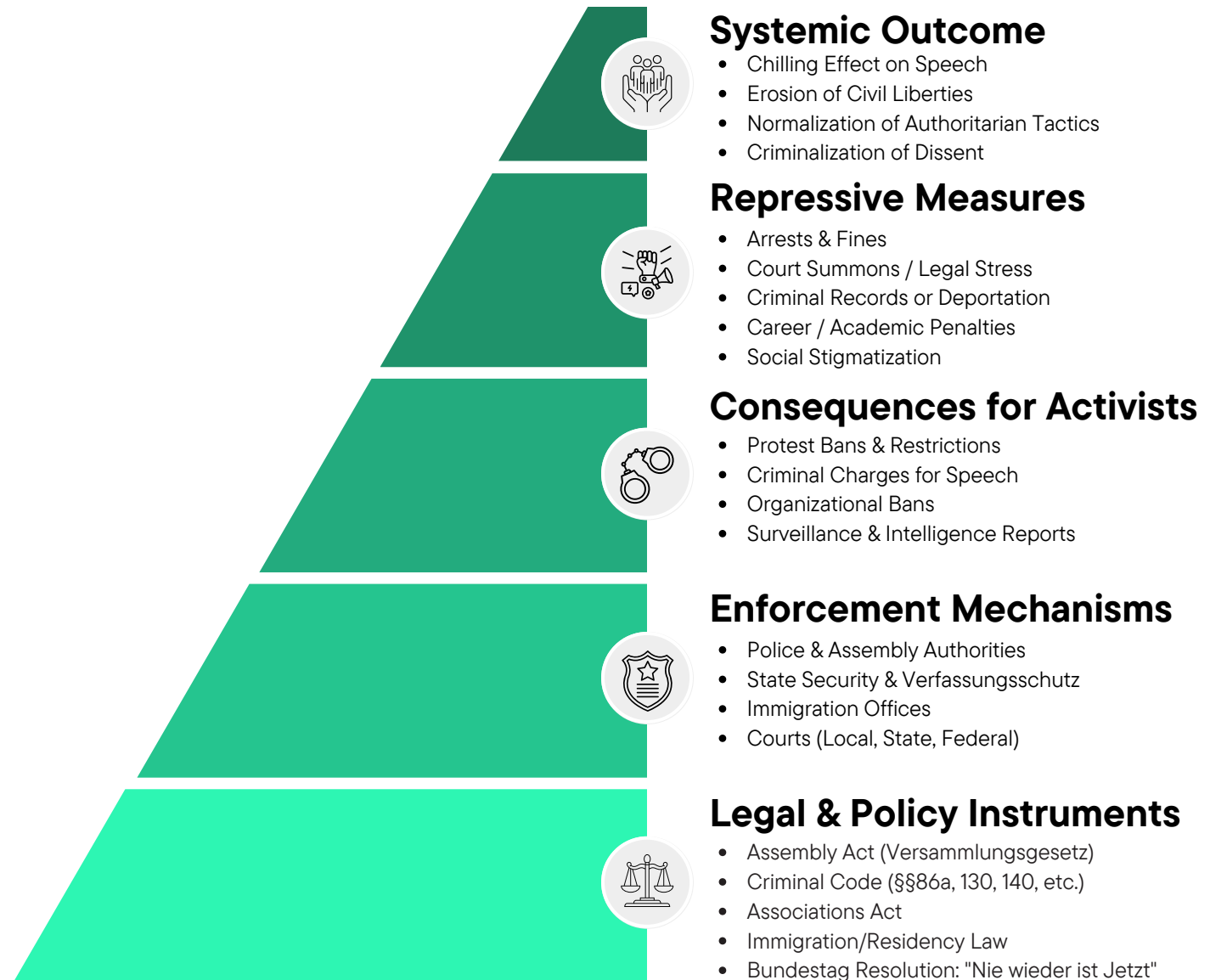
4.1 LEGAL REPRESSION

While police crackdowns are the blunt edge of repression, legal repression provides the cloak of law and due process to the campaign against Palestinians and Palestine solidarity. German authorities have increasingly leaned on legal instruments to outlaw or punish advocacy for Palestinian rights, creating a chilling effect. This includes both formal criminal prosecutions and administrative measures that leverage laws in expansive ways.

One major aspect has been the use of assembly and public order laws to ban or restrict demonstrations. Under Germany’s Assembly Acts and police laws, authorities can impose conditions or prohibitions on protests if there is a forecast of violence or illegal conduct. In practice, this discretion has been stretched to shut down Palestine solidarity and anti-genocide protests preemptively. For instance, Berlin police orders have cited participants’ “high emotionalisation” and a presumed likelihood of “antisemitic slogans” as justification for a general ban on demonstrations, even without any specific evidence of intent or behavior (Oberverwaltungsgericht Berlin-Brandenburg, 2025). In one such ban, the authorities argued that “due to the high emotionalisation of the demonstrators and the overall tense situation, an unfriendly course of the demonstration as well as the chanting of antisemitic slogans is highly likely” (translation by authors) (Polizei Berlin, 2025). As noted, Berlin banned all Palestine-related protests from 11 to 27 October 2023 under the justification of preventing “antisemitic incidents” and an “imminent danger” to public safety, effectively treating any gathering of Palestinian supporters as a riot-in-waiting. Even beyond outright bans, authorities often issue onerous conditions: Limiting the size of gatherings, confining them to static locations, or forbidding certain slogans and symbols. For instance, the February 2025 Berlin decree banned demonstrators from marching through the city and from using any Arabic chants – effectively stripping protests of movement and voice (Archive of Silence, 2025).

Germany’s criminal law has also been wielded against protestors in solidarity with Palestine, leading to criminalization of legitimate anti-genocide protest. The most applied paragraphs of the criminal code include §86a (use of symbols of unconstitutional organizations), §123 (trespassing), §130 (incitement to hatred), §140 (approving of crimes), §§113–114 (resisting or assaulting police officers), §125 (breach of the peace) and §20 Associations Act (Violations of prohibitions). Displaying the flag or logo of certain Palestinian factions (e.g., Hamas, Samidoun,

Graph: Legal Repression in Germany



and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) can lead to §86a or §20 charges, even if done as a form of political expression rather than endorsement of a banned group.

§130, traditionally aimed at hate speech (such as Holocaust denial or incitement against minorities), has been invoked to delegitimize Palestinian protest slogans. The slogan “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free,” for instance, has been discussed controversially (Brockhaus, Düsberg, & Göllner, 2024; Ambos, 2024). Whereas Palestinians use the anti-colonial slogan as a call for liberation and freedom for all people from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean sea (Shallah, 2015), the Berlin Police, Public Prosecutors and so far three courts (Landgericht Berlin, 2024; Oberverwaltungsgericht Bremen, 2024; Verwaltungsgerichtshof Baden-Württemberg, 2024) interpret the slogan as § 86a and argue it belongs to “the intellectual property” of Hamas (ELSC, 2025a), which was banned in Germany on 2 November 2023 (Bundesministerium des Innern, 2023; Reuters, 2023). Whereas the Berlin Police claims that the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” calls for Israel’s destruction and is therefore antisemitic (Salfiti, 2025), several courts have already ruled that the slogan is not liable to prosecution (Amtsgericht Mannheim, 2023; Amtsgericht Gelsenkirchen, 2024; Amtsgericht Tiergarten, 2024a, 2024b; 2024c; Hessischer Verwaltungsgerichtshof, 2024; Landgericht Mannheim, 2024; Verwaltungsgericht Bremen, 2024; Verwaltungsgericht Frankfurt, 2024; Verwaltungsgericht Münster, 2023; Landgericht Berlin, 2025). The latest Court decision from Amtsgericht Tiergarten (2025) confirms that the phrase can not be identified as a hallmark of Hamas (Scally, 2025). Yet, the Court decision does not seem to influence the practice of the Berlin Police in protests who continue to arrest protesters who chant “From the river to the sea” (Flakin, 2025).

Additionally, protesters who scuffle with police or simply do not immediately disperse when ordered to, have been charged with resisting arrest or breach of peace. In many cases, those arrested during banned assemblies later find themselves accused under §125 (as if they were rioters) even when no violence was committed by protesters.

Another tactic of German State authorities is treating any expression of support for Palestinian resistance as tantamount to endorsing terrorism (Jegić, 2024). More than that, police reports would allege an entire protest in support of Hamas if someone shouted “Allahu Akbar” (“God is great”) or “Free Palestine” at a protest

where another individual held a sign that authorities claim resembles the symbol of a banned organization. This broad-brush use of “extremism” labels and terrorism-related offenses effectively criminalizes free speech and places protesters under general suspicion. It has not gone entirely unchecked: In early 2024, a Berlin court swiftly intervened to halt the deportation of one activist, noting that the government had failed to substantiate its allegations and was likely overstepping legal bounds (Jones, 2025). Still, the threat of severe legal consequences – from fines and probation to the extreme of expulsion – hangs over protesters.

Legal repression extends into the academic realm as well. Universities have used their administrative and disciplinary codes to sanction students and even faculty who express solidarity with Palestine. ELSC documented numerous cases where student activists faced university disciplinary hearings for social media posts about Palestine, often under catch-all clauses against “hate speech” or “campus disruption,” despite those posts being political opinion, not targeted hate (ELSC, 2025a). Documented by Forensic Architecture’s Index of Repression platform, several cases illustrate how institutional rules are weaponized to restrict campus organizing: In November 2024, the University of Bremen banned a student group from booking any university spaces for Palestine-related activities (INC-3037-C8R2); in January 2024, the University of Cologne’s rector barred a student from entering campus during a visit by the Israeli ambassador (INC-1937-B0B5); and in July 2024, the Collegium Musicale Instrumentale at the University of Münster expelled a student orchestra member following allegations of antisemitism, reportedly linked to their pro-Palestine stance (INC-2561-K8K5). These examples show how disciplinary tools and neutrality policies are increasingly being used to suppress legitimate political expression within German universities (Forensic Architecture, 2025).

The cumulative effect of this multi-pronged legal pressure is to cast a constant shadow over Palestinians and Palestine-related activism: Activists have to worry that attending a rally or speaking out could result in a summons to court, a criminal record, loss of a job, or worse. Whether through the criminal law, administrative bans, or institutional disciplinary actions, the goal appears to be to scare people away from participating – to litigate and regulate the movement out of existence, or at least push it underground. It’s an authoritarian logic operating under cover of legality.

In conclusion, legal repression creates the conditions for censorship, exclusion,



and police violence. This is especially pernicious because it can give an appearance of due process – protesters find themselves entangled in legal proceedings that drain time and resources, serving as punishment in themselves even when charges are ultimately dropped. The expansive interpretation of laws from hate speech to immigration rules to target Palestinians and Palestine solidarity has set dangerous precedents. If left unchallenged, it normalizes the criminalization of political viewpoints that are defined by the State as deviant. The result is a society where core civil liberties – freedom of speech, assembly, and association – are eroded by a maze of legal barriers whenever Palestinian rights are addressed and demanded. Resisting this trend will require vigilant legal defense and, likely, corrective legislation or court judgments to reaffirm that Palestinian existence and advocating for Palestinian human rights are not a crime.

Additionally, authorities have leveraged immigration and residency laws as a means for repressive ends. In an unprecedented move, Berlin's state government issued deportation orders in early 2025 against four foreign nationals, three of whom are EU citizens, solely for alleged participation in Palestine solidarity protests (Hauenstein, 2025a). Notably, none of the four had any criminal convictions. Internal documents revealed that even the head of Berlin's immigration office initially objected to this as unlawful, but political pressure from the Berlin Senate overrode those concerns (Salfiti, 2025). Lawyers compared the tactic to far-right regimes, noting it mirrors how dissenters are silenced by revoking their residency rights. In short, Germany's legal system – from criminal prosecutions and fines for speech, to organizational bans and deportation orders – has been marshaled to punish and prevent Palestine solidarity activism.

4.1.1 Administrative Obstruction

Beyond direct force, German authorities have employed bureaucratic and regulatory powers to hinder Palestine-related activism. A prime example is the banning of public assemblies through administrative orders. As noted, Berlin issued a blanket ban on all pro-Palestinian demonstrations in October 2023 (ELSC, 2025a). In many cases, courts upheld these bans, accepting police claims that protests might lead to antisemitic chants or clashes. Such preemptive bans have also targeted symbolic dates: Authorities have repeatedly forbidden rallies around Nakba Day (15 May), as seen in 2022 and 2023, drawing criticism from human rights groups who call these blanket bans unlawful (Amnesty International,

2024b). Another form of obstruction is the overutilization of existing laws and codes to hinder Palestine solidarity protests. In one example, police confiscated stickers and other printed material from a Berlin solidarity encampment, claiming the stickers needed to have the address of an author on them according to the Berlin press law, a restriction unheard of in other contexts (jaramachtsachen, 2024a).

Another form of obstruction is the abrupt cancellation of events and venues at the last minute. A striking example is the Palestine Congress, which was raided and forcibly shut down by police shortly after it began in April 2024. Organizers accused the government of applying political pressure to sabotage the event, emphasizing that there was “absolutely no legal basis” for the shutdown. Administrative hurdles extend even into schools and immigration offices: In October 2023, Berlin's education authorities gave schools a green light to ban students from wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh or other symbols if they deem it disruptive to “school peace” (Salfiti, 2025). And as discussed, immigration officials in Berlin have been repurposed to pursue deportations of activists – an extraordinary use of administrative law to punish political expression (Hauenstein, 2025a). All these measures represent a bureaucratic suppression of Palestine solidarity – using permits, rules, and institutional leverage to make organizing virtually impossible.

4.1.2 Resolutions: A Pseudo-Legal Structure

One legal tool the German government has employed multiple times to criminalize expression of Palestine solidarity is the so-called “government resolution.” A colloquial rather than a legal term, so-called “resolutions” are official declarations of a government's opinion. They are not laws and thus they are neither legally binding nor require constitutional and civil society oversight like laws do. Resolutions are often written under the cloak of secrecy, with little to no civil society oversight, input from subject matter experts, or legal scholars. Many resolutions could not pass as laws, as they would go against constitutionally protected freedoms such as freedom of speech, academia, art, and assembly. Yet these concerns are routinely brushed aside by policymakers and government officials, who argue that since resolutions are not laws, they need not be held to constitutional standards.

However, in practice, resolutions are treated and enforced as laws, even cited in

court cases (Kolter, 2024). Thus, resolutions create a pseudo-legal structure through which the German government can pursue unconstitutional political repression. For example, in November 2024 the Bundestag (German Parliament) passed a resolution titled “Nie wieder ist Jetzt” (“Never Again is Now”) that pledged a hard line against antisemitism with a sweeping approach that critics warned would further conflate anti-Zionism with hate speech and chill legitimate dissent (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024a).

Three resolutions concern Palestine solidarity: the 2019 Anti-BDS-Resolution (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019), the 2024 “Never Again is Now” (“Nie Wieder ist Jetzt”) (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024a) and the 2025 Education Resolution (“Antisemitismus und Israelfeindlichkeit an Schulen und Hochschulen entschlossen entgegenzutreten sowie den freien Diskursraum sichern.” (in English “Standing decidedly against Antisemitism and Israel-Hate in Schools and Universities and protecting Free Space for Discourse.”) (Deutscher Bundestag, 2025). The 2019 Anti-BDS-Resolution declared the BDS movement inherently antisemitic and suggested not to allocate any state funding or state-funded venues – which includes universities and most cultural institutions – to events that discuss BDS. The 2024 “Never Again is Now” Resolution mostly attacks arts and culture, effectively criminalizing expressions of solidarity with Palestine and many academic viewpoints on Israeli politics, for instance using the internationally recognized term apartheid to refer to Israel. The 2025 Education Resolution in turn targets schools and universities, criminalizing discussions about Palestine and critical discussions on Israel in educational spheres while promoting one-sided narratives about Jewish life, politics, and identity. This resolution was kept from the public and civil society actors completely. A draft document, written by a small and select group of parliamentarians, was leaked in November 2024 on a government oversight platform (Amnesty International Germany, 2024). Many stakeholders criticized the draft, referencing the breach of academic freedom and freedom of expression that it entailed. Among these were even institutions that themselves had cracked down on Palestine solidarity, such as the Conference of Universities Berlin (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2024). However, far from listening to the legitimate concerns, the government reacted by tightening the circle of parliamentarians with access to the draft even more. No further version reached the eyes of the public until it was passed three months later.

Resolutions are officially only valid for the term of the government that passes them, which makes it particularly absurd that both the “Never Again is Now” and

the Education Resolutions were passed after the governing coalition collapsed. The fact that these resolutions are still treated like laws even if they never were binding, weren’t passed by a sitting government, and aren’t even valid anymore, just shows the German State’s and institutions’ disregard for constitutional rights when it comes to Palestine solidarity.

4.1.3 Weaponization of Migration Policies and Law

Perhaps the most impactful form of repression on people's personal lives has been the weaponization of immigration law against non-citizens involved in Palestine activism (Hauenstein, 2025b). Germany, like many countries, has stricter control over the rights of foreign nationals; in the current context, these powers are being used to target activists, especially Palestinians, by threatening their ability to stay in the country.

The case that received the most media attention is the case of the “Berlin Four.” In early 2025, Berlin authorities issued deportation orders to four Palestine solidarity activists – three of them citizens of EU countries living in Germany under EU free movement rights and one a U.S. citizen – explicitly because of their participation in peaceful protests (Salfiti, 2025; Jones, 2025). This is an extraordinary step. In democratic states, deportation is typically reserved for individuals who commit serious crimes or pose security threats (terrorism, violent felonies, etc.). To justify it, Berlin invoked the public security provisions of the Freedom of Movement Act (Freizügigkeitsgesetz/EU) for the EU nationals, claiming these individuals no longer had a right to reside in Germany because they constituted a threat to public order (Jones, 2025). For the American citizen, authorities moved to cancel their residence permit under the Residence Act on similar grounds. The official statements painted the activists as instigators of violence – at one university sit-in protest, for example, the Berlin Senate alleged the group had forced their way into a campus and committed property damage by graffiti, charges the activists deny as exaggerations (Paternoster, 2025). More tellingly, internal emails later revealed that security officials had pushed for these deportations despite flimsy evidence, indicating a political motive to make an example of these individuals (Jones, 2025). Berlin-based lawyer, Alexander Gorski, commented on the egregious circumvention of standard legal recourse enacted by German authorities: “What we’re seeing here is straight out of the far right’s playbook [...] you can see it in the U.S. and Germany, too: Political dissent is silenced by targeting the migration status of protesters.” (Jones, 2025).

The legal battles around these orders are ongoing. Courts have halted all four deportations (The Berliner, 2025). However, the process itself is part of the punishment. Those targeted have spent months under threat of expulsion, dealing with legal fees and the psychological torment of potentially being forced out of their lives in Germany. For the Berlin Four, this is an incredible burden that they nevertheless have the resources to fight. For (often stateless) Palestinian refugees, immigrants and international students, this is a uniquely powerful intimidation tool. It is notable that other European countries, even those who have cracked down on protests, have not taken this step against EU citizens. Germany's attempt to deport EU nationals for political speech is setting a dangerous precedent (one that, as mentioned, quietly alarmed officials in other EU states). If it succeeded, theoretically any EU citizen in Germany could face expulsion for participating in a demonstration that authorities disfavor. That undermines the very concept of European free movement and the shared values of freedom of assembly.

In 2023, two Palestinian brothers studying in Germany were denied visa extensions and faced deportation after authorities flagged their “pro-Palestinian sympathies” as security concerns. Despite years of integration and non-violent political views, they were subjected to interrogations about the Israel-Palestine conflict, with officials citing their attendance at student events, Facebook posts, and use of common Palestinian expressions as evidence of radicalism. Legal experts called the allegations unfounded and part of a broader pattern of using immigration law to target Palestinians (Jackson, 2023).

Individual cases like this often go unnoticed but have fostered a growing climate of fear among non-German activists, who increasingly feel that their residence status is at risk if they express solidarity with Palestine. This fear deepened after October 2023, when Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) suspended the processing of asylum applications from Palestinians in Gaza, citing the “unclear security situation.” At the same time, authorities intensified their scrutiny of Arab and Muslim communities. Refugees and migrants who joined pro-Palestinian rallies have since reported being questioned by immigration officials about their participation, reinforcing concerns that political activity could jeopardize their right to stay (Wystrychowski, 2025).

In conclusion, the use of migration law as a punitive stick against activists undermines Germany's credibility in upholding human rights and EU principles. It

creates a two-tier system of political rights: One for citizens, who may face repression but not exile, and a harsher one for non-citizens, who can be expelled for the same behavior. This not only violates the personal rights of those individuals but also erodes the integrity of Germany's commitments to asylum, non-discrimination, and the idea that fundamental freedoms apply to all people under its jurisdiction. Going forward, a clear renunciation of such tactics – perhaps via policy guidelines or legislative safeguards – is needed to reassure immigrant communities that they will not be treated as political pawns.

Systematic targeting of Palestinian refugees in Germany

The repression of Palestinian refugees in Germany goes far beyond isolated deportation cases. It is increasingly embedded in a broader system of discriminatory migration and asylum policies. A joint statement by several advocacy groups in February 2025 outlined how Germany has begun systematically targeting Palestinian refugees – especially those fleeing the genocide in Gaza – with surveillance, legal uncertainty, and expulsions.

One alarming development is the resumption of deportations to Greece, despite rulings by the European Court of Human Rights that such returns expose individuals to inhumane conditions. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) now routinely rejects the asylum claims of Palestinian refugees who previously received protection in Greece, citing an alleged improvement in conditions there. A new agreement between Germany and Greece appears to facilitate these returns – even when the individuals face homelessness and lack access to legal, medical, or social support in Greece.

A particularly egregious case involved a Palestinian refugee from Gaza who was arrested during a regular appointment at the Berlin immigration office and immediately deported to Athens. There, he was held briefly in police custody, issued only a minimal travel document, and released onto the street with no ID, housing, food, or resources (PRO ASYL, 2024).

This deportation practice violates multiple human rights norms and reflects a broader pattern:

- **Marginalization and exclusion:** Palestinian refugees face systematic barriers to education, housing, employment, and even basic integration courses. Many live under “Duldung” (tolerated stay) or with border crossing certificates – legal statuses that offer almost no protection.
- **Surveillance and intimidation:** Palestinian refugees and solidarity groups are subjected to heightened surveillance and persecution. Those attending demonstrations have been flagged in residence files, and participation in lawful protest has led to visa refusals or restrictions.
- **Cultural and political suppression:** Public displays of Palestinian identity – including language, flags, or cultural music – are increasingly criminalized.

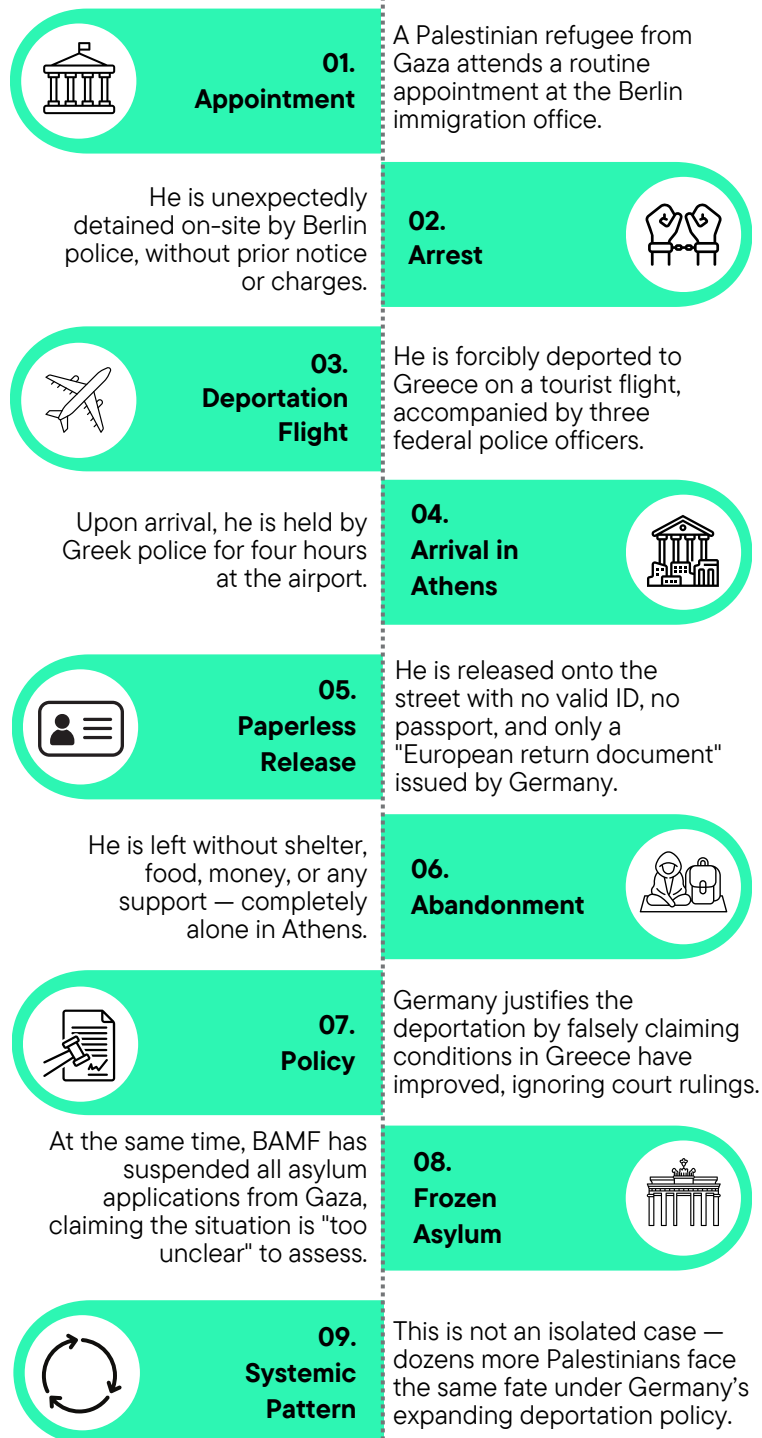
These developments show that the German state is not merely failing to protect Palestinian genocide survivors – it is actively repressing them. This double standard is stark: While Israel's citizens were granted emergency visa extensions by the German government, Palestinian applicants from Gaza saw their asylum procedures indefinitely frozen.

Moreover, statistics from Germany's Federal Statistical Office indicate that many Palestinian refugees are rendered invisible by the state's categorization practices. As of late 2023, 3,080 Palestinians were formally registered as protection seekers, but this number likely undercounts the actual population. Many are listed as stateless or of “undetermined nationality,” erasing their identity and legal claims.

This erasure is not only administrative – it is political. It contributes to the structural invisibilization of Palestinians in Germany and makes legal protection even harder to access.

Human rights organizations, including Pro Asyl and ECCHR, have called for an immediate halt to deportations to Greece, recognition of the vulnerability of Gaza survivors, and an independent review of Germany's asylum and deportation practices. Their demands are supported by legal precedent and grounded in basic principles of international human rights law (MacGregor, 2021).

Case Study: Deportation of Palestinian Refugee from Gaza →



CASE STUDY

TARGETED RAID IN BERLIN, NEUKÖLLN



On 11 February 2025, Berlin police carried out a targeted raid on a café located on Sonnenallee in Neukölln, a street known for its central role in Berlin's Arab and Palestinian community. During the operation, multiple café guests were arrested, including two young Palestinian refugees from Gaza, both of whom are now facing deportation.

According to independent accounts and legal analysis:

- One of the individuals had applied for asylum upon arriving in Germany via Greece and was living in a shelter without legal support. He was arrested without prior notice and deported to Athens on February 7, where he was left without ID documents, accommodation, food, or support. This expulsion occurred despite the European Court of Human Rights' precedent deeming deportations to Greece unlawful due to inhumane conditions (MacGregor, 2021).
- The second refugee from Gaza, who had secured housing in Berlin, was arrested during the same café raid and taken to Tegel prison. Although released by now, he remains at risk of imminent deportation (Arrest Press Unit, 2025a).

Activist groups, including the "Asylum 4 Gazans Now" campaign, argue that the raid was not incidental but part of a broader strategy of intimidation and deterrence, aimed specifically at Palestinian spaces and solidarity networks. As campaign spokesperson Sami L. stated, "The goal is to turn the few remaining spaces for the Arab refugee community in Berlin into places of fear."

No official justification has been provided by Berlin police regarding the arrests beyond identity checks. Neither individual has been charged with any act of violence.

Political and legal context: These arrests occurred in a broader environment of escalating repression against Palestinian refugees and activists in Germany:

- Since October 2023, the German government has suspended all asylum procedures for refugees from Gaza, citing an "unclear" situation, despite active genocide proceedings at the International Court of Justice (Pro Asyl, 2024).
- The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has resumed deportations to Greece under the Dublin Regulation, even though German and European courts have repeatedly ruled such deportations unlawful due to conditions amounting to inhuman and degrading treatment (MacGregor, 2021; Buchholz, 2025; Bundesverwaltungsgericht, 2025).
- Deportations now disproportionately target Palestinians and those linked to Palestine solidarity protests, often using border crossing certificates and rushed administrative procedures that deny detainees adequate time or access to legal counsel (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024a).
- Migrant rights organizations, have condemned these expulsions as politically motivated and racially targeted, arguing that deportation policy has become an instrument of repression against those protesting genocide and supporting Palestinian rights.

These arrests and deportation threats appear to be part of a systematic campaign targeting Palestinian refugees in Berlin under the guise of immigration enforcement. The Sonnenallee café incident reflects the shrinking civic space for Palestinians and allies in Berlin – even informal gatherings are being surveilled, disrupted, and criminalized. This policy direction not only violates international legal obligations regarding refugee protection but also signals a broader attempt

to intimidate and silence those protesting the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Since the beginning of 2024, we have documented six deportations of Palestinians from Gaza to Greece. This figure does not include the dozens of Palestinians who have received official deportation threat letters.

Answer by the Federal Government to parliamentary questions on the asylum: According to a written response by the German Federal Government (21.03.2025) to a parliamentary inquiry on the asylum process for Gaza refugees (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024d):

“In light of the severe material hardship facing recognized refugees in Greece, German courts have long generally barred deportations to the country. However, following two rulings by the Hessian Administrative Court in August 2024, the argument has emerged that young, single, able-bodied men can be deported, as they could theoretically survive through informal work. As a result, the BAMF (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) has changed its practice and is increasingly issuing deportation orders to Greece – many affecting people from Gaza.” (pp. 1–2)

Unless urgently reversed, these policies risk creating a two-tier system of legal personhood, where protest, identity, or origin determines one’s right to stay, speak, and survive in Germany.



4.2. STATE VIOLENCE AND SECURITIZATION

State violence and securitization against Palestine solidarity activists, who are framed as inherent security threats, manifest in direct, physical forms. This includes home raids, confiscation of digital equipment, and extensive surveillance by security agencies and the police. Furthermore, activists face police brutality, disproportionate force at protests, and arbitrary detentions, with a particular focus on racialized individuals and stateless Palestinians. This chapter will highlight the different forms and actors of state violence and securitization.

4.2.1 State Surveillance

In Germany, one of the bodies responsible for formalizing threats to national security is the German Domestic Intelligence Services (Verfassungsschutz). The German Federal Office for Domestic Intelligence Services (BfV) and its connected domestic intelligence agencies on state level have increasingly framed Palestine solidarity as a potential security threat. In former reports and its latest “Report on the Protection of the Constitution 2024” (Bundesministerium des Innern, 2025) the German Federal Office lists Palestine activism under “left-wing extremism.” In its latest report, the advocacy for boycott, divestment, and sanctions is considered unconstitutional and extremist, to even such an extent as classifying several activist groups, for example BDS and Jewish Voice for Peace as proven extremist endeavors (Bundesministerium des Innern, 2025). This opens the door to surveillance tactics such as monitoring communications or denying public benefits and event permits. Such measures constitute a form of securitization, in which political dissent is treated as a national security issue – a deeply troubling development for a democracy (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2024; ELSC, 2025a).

Germany’s domestic intelligence services, the Verfassungsschutz, has reportedly monitored Palestine solidarity groups in some states, placing them under the rubric of “extremism” in annual reports (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, 2024). Activists have discovered that their names appear in police databases flagged for political “extremist” activity, solely due to attendance at demonstrations or campus events. Such surveillance, often done without any criminal predicate, serves to intimidate and gather information on networks of activists. Activists report that police or intelligence agents approached them (especially non-citizens) after protests to question or warn them about their participation. This kind

of intimidation can deter people from engaging in activism for fear of jeopardizing their careers, asylum procedure or residency status.

Digital surveillance and securitization: The national security exception

European data protection law, developed for the protection of fundamental rights including political expression, grants states broad exceptions for reasons of national security (Schneider, 2025). Reclassification of political dissent as a matter of national security constitutes a form of securitization, and permits increased state intrusion and repression. It seems that these loopholes are used to surveille citizens and their activities on social media by the German Domestic Intelligence Services (BfV), the State Criminal Police Offices, the German Police, as well Public Prosecution Office.

While the Public Prosecution Office and the German Domestic Intelligence Services (BfV) have distinct roles, they are legally mandated and practically organized to cooperate closely, especially in high-priority areas like the fight against extremism. This cooperation primarily involves the intelligence agency providing relevant information to the prosecution, which then uses its law enforcement powers to investigate and prosecute criminal acts, in this case to criminalize and suppress Palestine solidarity activism with digital surveillance, criminal charges, and lawsuits.

Social media monitoring

The extent of social media monitoring related to the Palestine movement in Germany – and whether it is targeted or a form of mass surveillance – remains unknown. However, multiple activists have received letters of criminal indictment at home for statements similar to, paraphrasing, or satirizing the phrase “from the river to the sea” posted on social media, and in at least one well-publicized case, a home raid was justified on this basis (AJ+, 2024). Similarly, a 41-year old was raided at home for their social media posts (Jackson, 2024b). Sometimes letters of criminal indictment are received months after the social media post, creating a general environment of fear about online speech. In another instance, the surveillance of an activist’s social media account, led to the direct arrest of the activist after visiting a concert of a Palestinian artist in Berlin where the crowd chanted “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Video recording of political expressions at protests, and escalation to violence

Claims of violence at demonstrations serve the state narrative that large police presences and use of force are necessary to counter a threat. It also serves to demand more surveillance, more budget, better equipment, i.e., for the militarization of the police and state forces.

In consequence, It is the Berlin Police Department that regularly introduces violence to peaceful demonstrations. The Berlin Police Department has video operators who carry camcorders on an extendible rod and video record the protestors, often pointed at those leading the chanting or most engaged. The police review the footage, sometimes with an interpreter, and if an arrest target is selected on the basis of phrases deemed illegal (according to the police's interpretation), police put on riot gear and inject themselves violently into the crowd for an arrest.

The illegality, absurdity and deliberate nature of arrests by the German Police becomes clear when looking at the well documented arrests of activists for signs demanding “from the river to the sea, we demand equality” or even clearer when looking at the arrests of jewish antizionist activists for holding signs stating “Zionism kills,” “Jews against Genocide,” “Another Jew for a Free Palestine” and similar nature (Jackson, 2024b).

This atmosphere of surveillance, accompanied by the department's deliberate and regular excessive escalation, triggered by protestors' use of free speech, resulting in the illegal use of extreme physical force by the police , impinges on the peaceful exercise of political expression in public demonstrations and introduces physical aggression into the, once peaceful, environment.

Even if we entertain the theory that the prosecution of protestors for these acts of political expression is appropriate or necessary, in (the many) cases where the arrestee's identity is already known to police, it would be rational for a department interested in de-escalation, or at least uninterested in escalation, to refer the evidence to prosecutors who would send letters of indictment later – rather than physically attack a crowd of protestors. In case of unknown protestors, the first “normal” behavior by the Police would be to approach the targeted protester for their identity and only arrest them in case of non-cooperation.

Data protection backwards: Seizure of devices used to film police

During public demonstrations since at least April 2024, police in Berlin have used four questionable interpretations of law to justify dozens of seizures of activists' mobile phones – especially when protesters attempt to film excessive use of force. In the most common case, police use data protection law to justify the seizure as a measure to preempt publication of their likeness. Secondly, phones recording video are sometimes seized on the basis of federal criminal code section 201, claiming that conversations with police in public space constitute private conversation. Thirdly, police invoke the “Kunsturhebergesetz,” or right to copyright of their own faces. These actions constitute an abuse of power by the Police in order to cover up their illegal behavior. By law, people are allowed to film the police in public (Go Film The Police, 2023).

The majority of devices seized are not intentionally unlocked by the owner in the presence of police, which leaves the task of unlocking to police forensics. As of 2018, at least five federal states had subscriptions to the Israeli phone-hacking tool Cellebrite (Netzpolitik, 2018; (Kutsche, 2018). The current number is unknown although wording in the 2025 Berlin budget suggests possible acquisition. Without requiring the use of hacking tools, on at least one occasion, police convinced a detainee to unlock their phone in order to contact a family member, observed the entry of the passcode, and wrote it down in booking documents that the detainee later read. In another instance, an unlocked device was seized from the hands of a protester who had been asked to display proof of address registration. The device was brought to a police vehicle and returned later with a depleted battery. During home raids phones, laptops and other communication as well data storage devices are commonly seized. A number of confiscations have been also observed during detentions at protests, especially after deliberate filming of police violence.

A fourth frequent legal justification presented to device owners at demonstrations and confiscating phones, is the claim by the police that the phone contains evidence of a crime. While this may be true in some cases, the justification provides an avenue for police to sequester evidence that could be used in their own prosecution or for accountability. In at least one case of arrest and seizure of a device used to film police brutality (in late 2024), the arrestee's legal representative succeeded in demonstrating that both the arrest and device seizure had been illegal and secured the return of the device after some months.

Border controls and violations of EU free movement

Pro-Palestinian activists residing in Germany (including Palestinians, at least two German citizens, Irish citizens, and others) have repeatedly been detained at German airports during entry and exit from the Schengen Zone and questioned. In the most extreme cases persons have been banned from entering Germany. This includes most prominently Prof. Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah and Yanis Varoufakis for hindering them from attending and delivering speeches at the Palestine Congress in Berlin, in April 2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024a; Varoufakis, Y. 2024). Most interrogations include a request for information on the purpose of travel, sometimes with a demand for itinerary or other evidence. In the case of Irish citizens transiting directly between Germany and the Republic of Ireland in either direction, such questioning under duress may violate the right of free movement of EU citizens. In September 2024, Germany reintroduced controls on land borders with all its neighbors, informing the European Commission that "the situation in the Middle East" was one of the reasons (European Commission, 2025).

4.2.2 Police Repression

Police violence has been the most visceral form of repression against Palestine solidarity in Germany. Time and again, peaceful demonstrations have been met with an excessive use of force by police, suggesting a pattern of criminalization of legitimate protest by State authorities. The grassroots-initiative Arrest Documentation Unit has documented disproportionate and unlawful police violence on anti-genocide protests in Berlin in 21 reports since June 2024 (Arrest Press Unit, 2025).

This section examines emblematic instances of unlawful police violence and misconduct at Palestine solidarity protests, culminating in the May 2025 Nakba Day police brutality, which starkly illustrated these issues.

One common tactic has been the preemptive show of force and intimidation by Berlin police at protests. In Berlin, the ratio of police – most times clad in excessive riot gear – to Palestine solidarity protesters is often shockingly high. Protests with a few hundred to a few thousand protesters are met with dozens of police vans, for example at the NAKBA 77 protest in May 2025 there were approximately 1,000 police officers deployed for a protest of 2,000-4,000 people (Tagesschau, 2025). In another example, on 10 November 2024, eleven police vans (with each 4-8

police officers) were stationed around the Palestine solidarity encampment "Occupy against Occupation." At that time, only eleven protesters were at camp; effectively the police to protestor ratio was approximately 6 to 1. This pattern of over-policing "Occupy against Occupation" could be observed over several consecutive weeks (Jaramachtsachen, 2024b).

Often, special units are deployed to police Palestine solidarity protests. These units notably do not wear individually identifiable badges, as otherwise mandated by Berlin law (Arrest Press Unit, 2025).

At many rallies, police quickly resort to forceful dispersal methods. For example, during a demonstration in Berlin in September 2024, over a dozen riot officers suddenly charged into a crowd of about 1,500 peaceful protesters, tackling and beating a young demonstrator so severely that he was knocked unconscious and left bleeding from the head (Arrest Press Unit, 2024). Six witnesses reported that officers dragged his limp body away and delayed urgent medical aid – conduct that exemplifies the disregard for protesters' safety (Arrest Press Unit, 2024). Such incidents have not been isolated: Observers from human rights groups note that batons, pepper spray, and aggressive "snatch arrests" are repeatedly used against Palestine solidarity protesters, often extremely disproportionate to any alleged infractions.

Because of the way the German police system works, police are permitted to issue even blatantly unconstitutional orders on the spot – participants must comply or risk getting charged with not following police orders, a specific misdemeanor punishable with a fine. The only way to fight these police restrictions is through the court system. This is often made impossible simply by the temporality of the situation: Police issue an order at or shortly before a protest, and start acting on it minutes to a few hours later. The court process, even emergency filings, take at least several hours, by which time the police repression has already taken place and afflicted people must deal with the consequences such as arrests, physical violence, and infringement on their right to free assembly.

It is important to note that the police have a mandate of de-escalation. Even in instances where violence does emanate from the protesters – for instance, when bottles are thrown at police – reacting by charging into the crowd, punching, strangling, pepper-spraying, and body-slaming protesters is not a proportionate or appropriate response, and thus goes against the police mandate of de-

escalation. In a perverse reversal of the victim and perpetrator roles, the police often accuse protesters of “not de-escalating” and thus incurring police violence, whereas the responsibility is the other way around: Protesters do not have the responsibility of staying calm when police brutalize them, whereas police have the ultimate responsibility of using the least possible force no matter the circumstances.

On the ground, German police have frequently responded to pro-Palestine demonstrations with aggressive tactics, raising concerns about excessive force and discriminatory enforcement. This was evident even before 2023. In May 2022 and May 2023, Berlin authorities preemptively banned Nakba Day marches (commemorations of the 1948 displacement of Palestinians), and riot police cracked down on anyone who gathered regardless (Duda, 2025; Amnesty International, 2024b). Activists recounted that in 2022 police targeted people simply for wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh scarf or the colors of the Palestinian flag, using the protest ban as a pretext to detain individuals who “looked Palestinian” (Hecht-Galinski, 2023). This profiling set a troubling precedent. Since October 2023 and the ensuing genocide in Gaza, Berlin and other cities imposed blanket bans on any pro-Palestine gatherings for weeks (ELSC, 2025a). When spontaneous protests still occurred, they were met with overwhelming force. For instance, on 14 October 2023, in Frankfurt, hundreds of protesters who tried to march (after their demo was banned mere minutes before start) were kettled by police, surrounded so they could not leave, while a helicopter hovered and water cannons were deployed in the streets. Police declared through loudspeakers that “this is a banned demonstration” and moved in to disperse the crowd. At least 300 people were detained for hours and 12 arrested that day (Hecht-Galinski, 2023). Witnesses described violent incidents: One young woman, who had recently undergone brain aneurysm surgery, was shoved to the ground by an officer, causing her to hit her head – the police reportedly ignored her as she lay injured. Such instances are not isolated. Videos from Berlin in October 2023 showed officers manhandling protesters, including tackling an elderly woman who was waving a Palestinian scarf (Al Jazeera facebook, 2024), hand-cuffing youth and arresting them violently. In another case, Berlin police charged at demonstrators in the Neukölln borough (an area in Berlin known for its migrant Turkish and Arab population) for chanting in Arabic, forcefully dispersing a peaceful crowd and prompting accusations of suppressing “Arab and Muslim voices” (Hamed, 2025). The heavy-handed policing appears one-sided. On the same day that Frankfurt police broke up a pro-Palestine rally, a nearby pro-Israel march of 1,200 people

proceeded without interference – highlighting a double standard in enforcement. This pattern of disproportionate force and selective crackdown by police has instilled fear in many Palestine sympathizers, who feel that even peaceful assembly will be met with handcuffs, pepper spray, or worse. Such an atmosphere suppresses the will to exercise one’s fundamental rights.



CASE STUDY

THE NAKBA77 PROTEST



The following account of the Nakba77 rally is based on reports by the European Legal Support Center (ELSC, June 2025) and the Arrest Press Unit (Arrest Press Unit, 2025). It provides a detailed case study of different methods of police repression and brute force.

The Nakba77 2025 rally in Berlin took place on 15 May 2025, which marked 77 years since the 1947/48 Nakba. A day before the protest, the police implemented a ban on marching, forcing the protest to take place as a stationary rally instead. The protest was restricted to a small area, which was fenced in by police through metal barricades. The only access to the rally location that did not require participants to walk through a line of police officers was the access directly through the local subway station – which was later also blocked off by police.

The protest was met from the outset with an overwhelming and confrontational police presence. Police units in riot gear (approximately 1,000 police officers were deployed) quickly began jostling and restricting the movement of the around 4,000 participants even further than the restrictions of the metal barricades, for no apparent or valid reasons. Throughout the protest, the police violence was as casual as it was brutal: Officers in tight formation repeatedly charged into the crowd, punched and beat participants in the crowd seemingly at random. Police were recorded punching a detained participant in the kidneys and pulling his head up by the hair while he was fixed to the ground on his stomach by four officers (Vantino, 2025a). Furthermore, there are recordings showing the police injuring protesters to the point of bleeding from the head (Palestinians and Allies, 2025), using painful arm-twisting compliance holds, pressing their knees on detainees' necks or backs during takedowns, punching participants in the face and head, shoving participants to the ground, whipping them around by the head, using the metal barricades to ram into the crowd, beating and kicking into a crowd of protesters, shoving participants violently from the back, violently detaining protesters, including through gripping them around the neck and face, obstructing their view, and dragging them away (Aref, 2025). One young woman was dragged backwards from the crowd by multiple officers holding her around the neck, as she was screaming (Vantino, 2025b). Another person was grabbed by

the neck by a police officer (Aref, 2025) and arrested. The detaining officers then knocked the detainee's head against a police van, put them in a choke-hold, and wrestled them to the ground. One officer then knelt on their head, with his groin mere centimeters from the detained person's head (Ilcartaginese, 2025). The person later reported a black eye, multiple bruises, and a concussion.

These dangerous restraint techniques pose serious risks to protestors – neck compression, for instance, can be lethal – and have been widely condemned. The police violence is far from proportionate. The “normal” proportionate behavior by the Police would be to approach the protesters whom they identified as breaking the law and ask for their identity and only arrest them in case of non cooperation.

Over the course of the protest, 88 people were arrested at the Nakba77 rally (Arrest Press Unit, 2025).

Physical injuries among participants were widespread: Medical volunteers documented at least 36 people injured at that protest, several with serious head wounds or other trauma (ELSC, June 2025).

Crucially, police violence did not stop at the moment of arrest; it continued during custody. Multiple individuals detained at the Nakba77 protest testified that they were beaten or verbally abused inside police vans and station cells, even while handcuffed and fully under police control. Such conduct crosses into the realm of mistreatment or even torture under international law, as there is no conceivable law enforcement purpose for assaulting a restrained person. One legal observer at the May 15 protest bluntly stated: “The use of violence on already arrested people [...] constitutes the crime of torture.” This underscores how routine policing norms were abandoned in these cases, replaced by a punitive mentality.

Another misconduct during the Nakba77 protest was the police interference with medical aid. Paramedics and city firefighters on site made urgent efforts to reach injured protesters, only to be actively impeded by police. In several instances, officers refused to let medics approach unconscious or bleeding individuals lying

on the ground; when paramedics persisted, they were physically pushed and shoved (ELSC, June 2025), and at least two medics reported being injured by police themselves during these scuffles. The situation deteriorated so badly that the Berlin Fire Department declared a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI) at the scene. It is almost unheard of for a planned political rally in Germany to escalate to a MCI; the fact that this Nakba commemoration did was entirely due to the violence unleashed by the authorities upon protestors.

Many commentators noted that the police seemed to treat the protestors themselves as the enemy to be crushed, rather than facilitating a safe assembly.

Journalists and legal observers were not spared from the crackdown. Accredited reporters recounted being “aggressively pushed aside, beaten, (and) arrested” when they attempted to film police actions or simply ask questions. Video evidence shows police trying to prevent journalists from filming police actions multiple times, both through trying to block the journalists from approaching the scene and through obstructing their view by stepping into the line of sight. There were reports of police sexually harassing a female photographer during frisks and detention. At least two women said male officers groped or made lewd remarks while searching them, echoing a pattern of misogynistic abuse previously noted during protest policing in Germany.

Volunteer legal observers and attorneys on site faced obstruction as well: Attorney Benjamin Düsberg, who was present to assist detainees, was physically blocked and manhandled by officers when he tried to reach an injured protester in custody. Another lawyer was wrestled away from a client who had asked for legal counsel. Such interference violates the rights of the defense and press, compounding the civil rights violations of the day.

In one telling incident during the beginning of the rally, a known far-right provocateur infiltrated the crowd and began shouting slurs. When protestors reacted and pointed him out, the police did not remove the agitator. Instead, they suddenly charged the protestors who confronted the man, violently dispersing and arresting several of them while the provocateur walked free. This upside-down response – effectively protecting an extremist who sought to disturb the event, while punishing those who objected to him – suggests that police viewed the pro-Palestine demonstrators themselves as the problem to be suppressed, rather than any actual troublemakers.

The rally was finally prematurely ended by police, who ordered everyone to disperse. Due to the pervasive and massive police presence on all sides of the protest, it was effectively impossible for participants to disperse quickly, which was then used to justify further violence against remaining protestors. This can cause mass panic in protestors, as there seems to be no escape from the heavily armed riot police, even when they exactly follow the police’s orders.

In conclusion, police repression has become a frontline tool to repress Palestinians and Palestine solidarity in Germany. It inflicts direct physical and psychological harm and has a deterrent effect on public participation – many people are afraid to attend demonstrations, knowing they risk being beaten or arrested for doing little more than carrying a Palestinian flag or chanting a slogan. When coupled with subsequent criminal charges against protestors, the brute force of the police is given a veneer of legitimacy, but the message sent is unmistakable: if you protest for Palestine, you may be hurt, injured, humiliated, or hauled off to jail, there is no law to protect you from the police. This method of repression undermines fundamental rights to freedom of assembly and physical integrity. The scenes of armored officers unlawfully roughing up demonstrators in Berlin without legal consequences resemble those from authoritarian contexts rather than an open democracy. Urgent accountability and oversight are needed to rein in police abuses and restore the public’s confidence that the right to protest will be respected regardless of the cause.



4.3. DISCURSIVE DELEGITIMIZATION

The genocide on Palestinians was made possible by decades long process of the dehumanization of Palestinians. Whereas Law for Palestine (2024a) has collected evidence highlighting the spread of incitement to violence and genocidal rhetoric by Israeli officials and public figures targeting Palestinians, the grassroots-initiative Palestine Speaks has similarly started a campaign titled “Palästina klagt an” that collected statements by German politicians, journalists and public figures that degraded, devalued and dehumanized Palestinians while openly supporting the genocidal violence of the State of Israel in Palestine (Palästina klagt an).

German politicians, public figures and media outlets have engaged in vigorous delegitimization of Palestinians and Palestine solidarity in public discourse, branding them as security threat, extremists and antisemites.

4.3.1 Bias in the Media

The online platform NewsCord.org has analyzed several German media outlets such as Spiegel, Süddeutsche, Welt, FAZ, ARD, ZDF, Deutsche Welle, taz and Berliner Zeitung and their coverage on Palestine/ Israel. Their findings show that German media has systematically downplayed the Israeli genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, delegitimized Palestinian suffering, and villainized anyone who protests (NewsCord, 2024). More than that, the analysis reveals a one-sided narrative that conceals the police violence faced by protestors and depicts them instead as aggressive, dangerous and a threat to public order, and possibly national security. After 7 October 2023, the Berlin Police and media outlets such as BZ (Behrendt et al., 2023), Bild (Fabian et al., 2023), Welt (WELT, 2023) claimed that Palestinian activists were glorifying Hamas. In addition, the Springer press (e.g., BILD, WELT newspaper), BZ, Focus and Berliner Zeitung have vilified protesters with racialized language – in several referring to a whole Palestinian family from Gaza as a criminal clan linked to Hamas (Arrest Press Unit, 2025b; FOCUS, 2024; Bild, 2024). Although the German Press Council (Deutscher Presserat, 2025) has disapproved with the reporting of the tabloid newspaper Bild (2024) as it considers it a violation of privacy of the persons concerned and the German Press Council has rebuked media reporting on Palestine solidarity protests from tabloid newspaper Bild as false information (Deutscher Presserat 2024), the biased reporting on Palestinian activists and those in solidarity continues. The latest massive campaign of disinformation on a Palestine solidarity

protest took place after the commemoration of the 77th Nakba on 15 May 2025 in Berlin (ELSC, 2025).

There are several cases that reveal that media outlets in Germany are under pressure to conform to a narrative that denies the Israeli genocide and the complicity of the German State. The case of Malcolm Ohanwe, a German journalist of Palestinian and Nigerian descent who worked with public broadcasters, is illustrative: He was effectively blacklisted and had contracts canceled in late 2023 after he spoke up about Israeli human rights abuses on social media (Archive of Silence, 2025). Similarly, the rapper and TV personality Nura was invited to a popular late-night show but then dropped at the last minute in October 2023 because she had posted “Free Palestine” on Instagram – a producer explicitly cited concerns over that phrase (Archive of Silence, 2025). These incidents (among a plethora of others) send a message throughout the media industry that any expression of sympathy for Palestinians could end one’s career. Indeed, journalists have described a “climate of fear” in newsrooms: reporters avoid pitching stories critical of Israel or overly sympathetic to Palestinians, anticipating that editors will reject them or brand them as biased. Self-censorship is pervasive – one journalist told nd-aktuell that within her newsroom, even mentioning the word “Palestine” invites suspicion, so many just do not touch the topic (Güler, 2025b). Media guidelines have even instructed journalists to treat slogans like “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free” as criminal hate speech, falsely equating them with calls to annihilate Israel (Jamal, 2023a). Another striking example is the research on the Blog Schantall and Scharia where journalists focused on the Tagesschau, a major German public-service broadcasting consortium. The 8pm Tagesschau news is consistently one of the most-watched news programs in Germany with 8-10 million viewers on average every day. In the analysis on the blog, the journalists showed that in the time period from 7 October 2023 to 18 January 2025, i.e., 16 months of Tagesschau’s Middle East coverage, there were 136 appearances by Israeli military and political figures, compared to just four by Palestinian politicians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made just as many statements in the first eight days of the war (Schantall & Scharia, 2025).

The role of the multinational mass and online media company Axel Springer extends beyond editorial pressure and ideological control. Top executives at Axel Springer, openly mandate a pro-Israel editorial line – Axel Springer SE even requires all employees to sign onto company principles supporting Israel’s right

to exist (Archive of Silence, 2025). The company is directly complicit in human rights violations against Palestinians through its ownership of Yad2, a major Israeli real estate platform. Yad2 advertises properties located in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, enabling and profiting from the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians (Who Profits, 2024). This activity violates international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of an occupying power's civilian population into occupied territory. By facilitating the expansion of settlements, Axel Springer becomes economically entangled in Israel's apartheid and settler-colonial system – its complicity is not just rhetorical, but material.

4.3.2 State-Led Delegitimization

In addition to the biased media reporting on the ongoing genocide, Palestinians, and Palestine solidarity protests, German state narratives frequently conflate criticism of Israel or Zionism with hatred of Jews, using the controversial IHRA definition of antisemitism as a basis to label legitimate political speech as bigotry. Adopted by the German government and many institutions, this definition includes examples that blur the line between antisemitism and criticism of Israel. Officials and lobby groups have wielded the IHRA definition to label virtually any harsh critique of Israeli state crimes as antisemitic “hate speech.” (ELSC, 2025a).

This has provided a convenient rationale to censor speech: For instance, describing Israeli policies as “apartheid” or “genocidal” – positions taken by leading international human rights organizations – has led to speakers being disinvited and events canceled in Germany, on grounds that such language violates the IHRA standard (Novara Media, 2024).

A quintessential example was the official rationale given for banning the phrase “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free”: The Ministry of Interior claimed this slogan was a call for violence against Jews – a “dubious” interpretation with no basis except to discredit a pro-Palestinian chant (ELSC, 2025a). Similarly, former Interior Minister Nancy Faeser asserted that the slogan is “pro-Hamas,” despite it being commonly used by civil society groups worldwide to call for Palestinian freedom (Salfiti, 2025). This deliberate misinterpretation turns political speech into a thought crime.

The ELSC observes that German institutions routinely “conflate legitimate

criticism of Israeli state practices with antisemitism and/or support for terrorism,” thereby silencing solidarity with Palestinians (ELSC, 2025a).

Government leaders have also made sweeping demands that cast suspicion on entire communities, as with President Steinmeier’s speech on 8 November 2023, implying that Arabs and Palestinians in Germany bear collective responsibility to condemn Hamas lest they be seen as supportively “silent” (Salfiti, 2025). This not-so-subtle rhetoric effectively others and ostracizes Palestinian refugees, migrants, Palestinian-Germans and Germans of Arab background, chilling their willingness to speak out. Among the most common smears are sweeping accusations of antisemitism aimed at delegitimizing Palestine solidarity. Activists targeted by these narratives have spoken out: One organizer facing deportation stated that he refuses to play along with the “dishonest accusations of antisemitism... being thrown around by police, journalists and the state to slander and criminalise the pro-Palestinian movement,” calling it an “authoritarian dog whistle” mainly used against Palestinian and Arab communities (Salfiti, 2025). This frank assessment underscores how discourse is weaponized to marginalize a vulnerable minority and its allies. By delegitimizing the very cause of Palestinian human rights as hate speech or extremism, authorities create a public environment in which harsh repression appears warranted or even virtuous.

In conclusion, the freedom of speech dimension of this repression is about controlling the narrative: Alongside physical and legal suppression, there is a concerted effort to control the discourse around Palestine in Germany. This takes the form of direct censorship, smear campaigns, and institutional policies that silence Palestinian and dissent voices in media, culture, and civil society. Right now, those seeking to voice support for Palestinian rights in Germany are forced to weigh the personal and professional risks of speaking out. Such a climate is incompatible with the open exchange of ideas fundamental to democracy. Reclaiming the space for critical honest discourse will require active efforts – from unequivocal statements protecting the right to dissent, to media outlets standing by journalists who tell uncomfortable truths, to cultural institutions reaffirming their commitment to artistic freedom even on controversial issues. Without that, Germany risks losing the diversity of voices that enrich its society and inform its public debate.

4.4 CENSORSHIP WITHIN THE CULTURAL SECTOR AND CIVIC SPACE

A profound form of repression is the silencing of Palestinians and their allies within cultural and civic spaces. The “Archive of Silence,” which collects and archives instances of silencing, disinviting, defunding, and repression in Germany, has archived 218 cases of silencing since 7 October 2023, as of 4 June 2025 (Archive of Silence, 2025). Major cultural and academic institutions have cancelled events, fired or disinvited artists and speakers, and disciplined students for expressing solidarity with Palestine. (Archive of Silence, 2025). These incidents are widely understood to be only the tip of the iceberg. Reporting on silencing within artistic sphere is difficult, as those harmed may have multiple reasons to not register their cases – back-room agreements with institutions to not talk publicly about incidents, uncertainty about legal consequences of speaking out, fear of loss of job opportunities and income, fear of smear campaigns, and more can hinder those affected by silencing from speaking out.

Targets of this repression are artists and cultural workers, as well as cultural institutions. This repression serves the function to exclude criticism of Israel, the lived reality of Palestinians, and discussion of the ongoing genocide from artistic and cultural life in Germany, and therefore to shut down public discourse. While there have been regular conversations within cultural spaces about 7 October 2023, Israel, and the so-called “Middle East Conflict” over the last 20 months, these conversations and artistic contributions almost exclusively serve to strengthen an emotional connection to Israel and Jewish Israelis, with Palestinians and other Arab voices almost entirely excluded from the conversation. For instance, the play *How to Remain a Humanist after a Massacre in 17 Steps* by Jewish Israeli author Maya Arad Yasur was shown in 16 different theaters around Germany between its inception on 9 October 2023 and early 2025 (Deutsche Welle, 2024) – an extraordinarily high number of performances for any theater play. In contrast, multiple theater plays dealing with Palestine/Israel in a more critical lens – for instance *The Situation* by Jewish-Israeli director Yael Ronen, with Palestinian, Syrian, and Israeli actors and actresses, as well as *And Here I Come* by Ahmed Tobasi and *The Freedom Theatre* Jenin, were cancelled (Archive of Silence, 2025).

No infraction upon Staatsräson seems too small to warrant backlash in Germany:

Posting the slogan “Free Palestine” on one’s social media, having a sticker saying “Free Gaza” visible on stage, wearing a keffiyeh, supporting or refusing to distance oneself from BDS, using the words genocide or apartheid in relation to Israel, or simply expressing a position of Palestine that is not one of unconditional support for Israel (Archive of Silence, 2025).

Noticeably, some cases of silencing and repression did not even require artists to express themselves in any undesirable form. Events can be cancelled simply because they discuss Muslim life, because they showcase the reality of children in Gaza, or because they show multiple viewpoints on Palestine/Israel (Archive of Silence, 2025). Other events with Palestinian artists have been cancelled on short notice under the explanation of budgetary changes, with vague references to “the war in Gaza,” or with the institution claiming “political neutrality” (Archive of Silence, 2025).

This repression is often done in an act of preemptive obedience by art institutions, without legal grounds (J. Nassar, 2025). The atmosphere of heightened tension in the cultural sector has led institutions into the full throes of a moral panic over Palestine solidarity (Pisciotta, 2019). This purge of artists, with simultaneous demands that they actively manufacture consent for state politics, can best be compared to the anti-communist attacks on US-American artists of the McCarthy-era in the US (J. Nassar, 2025), as well as to other purges against artists in Germany’s past. These smear campaigns do not stop short of Jewish artists, in fact, they are strongly overrepresented in the number of artists silenced for speaking out about Palestine (Grenier, 2024). It is altogether common to see German politicians and art directors accusing Jewish artists of antisemitism.

Beyond individual cancellations, cultural institutions are complicit in normalizing censorship. State-funded bodies like the Goethe Institute have quietly removed Palestinian content from programs, while theaters and publishers self-censor to avoid political backlash. The message is clear: Support for Palestinian voices risks institutional reprisal and loss of funding (Archive of Silence, 2025).



4.4.1 Cultural Repression and the Law

Laws around insults and hate speech don't affect artists heavily within their art, as artistic freedom is a highly regarded constitutional right in Germany. Therefore, legal repression within the cultural field often takes the form of the aforementioned government resolution. This precedes 2023 by multiple years: In 2019, the German Bundestag passed a resolution condemning BDS as antisemitic, which, while non-binding, led many public bodies to bar BDS supporters from using their spaces. Some federal states and cities passed similar resolutions (Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2018). This affected concerts, film festivals, academic panels, and more. In 2020, the Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe was set to hold the opening speech of the Ruhrtriennale, a major art festival in West Germany; he was then subjected to a public smear campaign after an FDP politician, and the federal antisemitism commissioner Felix Klein, condemned Mbembe's past criticisms of Israel and his alleged connections to BDS (Mondoweiss, 2020; Deutschlandfunk, 2020). This sparked a major scandal and drew international condemnation of Germany's intolerance for debate. This example shows that while the repression within the cultural scene in Germany has reached new heights, previously unknown before 2023, the methods have been tried and tested for multiple years.

While the 2019 Anti-BDS Resolution was met with a coordinated backlash by multiple large cultural institutions (Humboldt Forum, 2020), the same cannot be observed with the repression since 2023. The 2024 "Never Again is Now" explicitly targets art and cultural institutions, but no comparable backlash to 2019 could be observed. Both of these resolutions call for removing any content considered antisemitic by the IHRA definition – a definition famous for being misused to conflate anti-Zionism and legitimate critical political speech with antisemitic bigotry – from art institutions. This underhandedly enforces an atmosphere of censorship and self-censorship within cultural institutions, as they fear to be labeled antisemitic in the court of public opinion, and by certain politicians, over any possible transgression.

One highly publicized incident occurred at the Berlinale film festival in February 2025: When award-winning actress Tilda Swinton and Iranian actor Erfan Shekarriz used their platforms to mention the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and critique Germany's complicity, German media and officials reacted with outrage, accusing them of spreading " Hamas slogans" (Wystrychowski, 2025).

The Central Council of Jews in Germany lambasted the statements, and a cloud of scandal hung over the festival. Such backlashes send a signal to cultural figures that any empathy for Palestinians can jeopardize their reputation or career in Germany.

The net effect is a pervasive self-censorship. Many artists, journalists, and ordinary citizens of conscience have felt pressured to stay silent about Palestine for fear of being labeled antisemitic.

At the same time, individuals who speak up face smear campaigns aiming to tarnish their reputations. Being branded an "antisemite" in Germany is career-ending, and authorities and media commentators have not hesitated to slap that label on Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activists – often without basis. Even Jewish Germans who criticize Israel have been attacked in this way.



CASE STUDY

THE PALESTINE CONGRESS RAID – A TURNING POINT IN GERMANY’S REPRESSION



The violent police raid and forced shutdown of the Palestine Congress in Berlin on 12 April 2024, marks one of the most extreme and public examples of Germany’s escalating crackdown on Palestine solidarity. The event – attended by hundreds including parliamentarians, scholars, and human rights advocates – was stormed by 2,500 police officers, as it opened, who cut the electricity mid-livestream, during a pre-recorded speech by Palestinian scholar Salman Abu Sitta. The venue was forcibly evacuated without prior written warning, under vague claims of “anti-constitutional activity” and threats to public order (Kopty, 2024; Escritt, 2024).

The three-day congress, organized by Palestinian, Jewish, and international groups, aimed to address the genocide in Gaza and German complicity in Israeli war crimes. Scheduled speakers included Ghassan Abu-Sittah, Noura Erakat, and Ali Abunimah. However, only one speaker, Palestinian journalist Hebh Jamal, was allowed to deliver opening remarks before police interrupted Abu Sitta’s video address, alleging it constituted incitement. When organizers requested clarification, police admitted they hadn’t reviewed the content. The power was then cut, livestream blocked, and the event banned entirely (Kopty, 2024).

Police detained several participants, including journalists, legal observers, and two Jewish activists. Despite the congress being legally registered and approved, the Berlin police claimed the decision to shut it down came from “ganz oben” (“the very top”), reflecting the opaque and arbitrary nature of the crackdown (Kopty, 2024; Amnesty International Germany, 2025).

In the lead-up to the congress, German authorities and media had waged an aggressive campaign to delegitimize the event – labeling it a gathering of “terror

sympathizers” and “Israel haters.” Activists’ homes were raided, a fundraising event was banned, and the primary sponsor – Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East (Jüdische Stimme) – had its bank account frozen under state pressure. Additionally, two venues were cancelled due to police intimidation (Kopty, 2024; Rech et al., 2024).

Only 250 of the 800 ticketed attendees were allowed inside, while 25 hostile, unaccredited journalists – some of whom had incited against the event – were given access and included in the official count. Dr. Ghassan Abu-Sittah was denied entry into Germany and deported before he could speak (Kopty, 2024).

International observers and legal experts have described the raid as a flagrant violation of freedom of assembly, expression, and political participation, disproportionately targeting Palestinians and their allies. United Nations Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese, who was also invited to speak at the congress, posted: “Dehumanization of the Other – in all its manifestations – is what makes the crime of genocide possible. Yesterday, and today,” implicitly connecting the treatment of Palestinians to the conditions enabling genocide (Albanese, 2024). Amnesty International Europe and the ELSC warned of growing authoritarianism under the guise of public safety (Amnesty EU, 2024); Forensic Architecture, 2025).

The repression of the Palestine Congress is not an isolated incident – it forms part of a broader “architecture of repression” that includes protest bans, employment retaliation, academic silencing, and police violence. It exemplifies how Germany’s post-Holocaust “Staatsräson” has been weaponized not only to shield Israeli state violence from critique, but to criminalize Palestinian identity and speech in Europe (Palestine Chronicle, 2024; ELSC, 2025a).

4.4.2 Funding as a tool of Repression

The German art scene is heavily state-funded and thus, funding has become a main tool of repression. In recent years, artists, academics, and even entire cultural institutions have lost funding or opportunities due to alleged links with pro-Palestinian advocacy (Salfiti, 2025). The most prominent example of this is the cultural center Oyoun in Berlin, which lost its entire funding after hosting an event dedicated to mourning and grief, by Jewish Voice for Peace in November 2023. Local Berlin politicians had pressured Oyoun to disinvite Jewish Voice as early as August 2023 – weeks before the attacks of 7 October – over the group's alleged links to the BDS movement. Oyoun refused to cancel the event and became the center of a smear campaign. Their entire funding was cut just weeks after the event, despite an internal report by the Berlin Senate stating that Oyoun had not committed any violation of any contractual agreements or criminal codes, or even the official state-level frameworks on antisemitism. (Brehmer & Jäckels, 2024). This complete defunding of Oyoun must thus be seen as a punitive measure against a cultural institution that refused to bow to political pressure.

In March 2024, the Berlin-based Jewish pro-Palestinian organization Jüdische Stimme für gerechten Frieden in Nahost (Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East) faced renewed financial repression when its bank account at Berliner Sparkasse was abruptly frozen (Jackson, 2024a). The bank demanded a full list of the group's members and their addresses by April 5, citing regulatory requirements. This move coincided with the organization's involvement in organizing the Palästina Kongress. The account in question was used to collect donations and ticket sales for the conference. The freezing of funds was perceived by many as a politically motivated attempt to disrupt the event. Legal experts criticized the bank's request for member data as a violation of privacy laws and an overreach of its authority. This was not the first time Jüdische Stimme faced such challenges. In 2019, the Bank für Sozialwirtschaft closed the group's account under pressure from the Central Council of Jews in Germany, citing the organization's support for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

The incident reflects a growing trend in Germany where pro-Palestinian activism, even from Jewish groups, is increasingly subjected to scrutiny and suppression. Critics argue that such actions not only stifle free speech and assembly but also

contribute to the dehumanization of Palestinians by delegitimizing their narratives and those who support them (Jackson, 2024b). Similarly, the psychoanalyst and activist Iris Hefets, a member of Jewish Voice for Peace, has faced police scrutiny for her activism; the fact that even Jews can be labeled “Jew-haters” in these campaigns shows that the repression is about silencing a message, not protecting a community (Jackson, 2024b). Palestinian, Arab and Muslim Germans who speak out face not only the antisemitism smear but sometimes accusations of extremism or sympathy for terrorism. This damages their reputation and can lead to job losses and social isolation. The social consequences of this stigmatization are severe: People have lost employment or been passed over for jobs once they were targeted by a smear campaign in the press. Academics have seen research funding dry up if their work was branded “anti-Israel.” Such pressures deter others from coming forward – a classic suppression effect on free expression.

Cultural repression and funding restrictions are often implemented in response to lobbying by certain advocacy organizations or directives from local officials. The result is that Palestinians, and their allies, find themselves excluded from the public sphere – unable to hold academic talks, art exhibits, or even memorial events. This level of censorship is striking in a country that otherwise prides itself on protecting artistic freedom –it reveals how, when it comes to Palestine, the usual principles no longer apply.



4.5 EXCLUSION WITHIN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Repression has also permeated Germany's educational and academic institutions, curtailing freedom in arenas that are supposed to be bastions of open inquiry and creativity. Universities and other educational institutions have been pressured – both by external political forces and internal governance – to fall in line with the pro-Israeli stance, often at the expense of academic freedom and artistic expression.

In January 2025, the Bundestag adopted the resolution (Deutscher Bundestag, 2025) titled “Against Antisemitism and Hostility Towards Israel in Schools and Universities.” Among others, the resolution advocates for strict punitive actions and stronger cooperation with security authorities, including expulsion and exmatriculation, against students and academics accused of antisemitic behavior. According to the resolution, activities from groups that advocate for “boycotts, delegitimization, disinformation and demonisation of the Jewish state” should be actively prevented. It also recommends that public funding be awarded solely based on “academic excellence,” while asserting that antisemitism and “Israel-related antisemitism” is incompatible with such excellence, effectively tying research funding and institutional legitimacy to political conformity.

The following sections examine how this repression unfolds in different educational contexts, starting with censorship and political pressure in academia, before turning to repression of student mobilization on university campuses, and finally, the effects of state violence in primary and secondary schools.

4.5.1 (Self-)Censorship in Research and Teaching

In academia, students and scholars who engage with Palestinian perspectives or activism have come under scrutiny resulting in an increased atmosphere of (self)-censorship in research and teaching on Palestine. Several academics reported intimidation, threats, cancellation of lectures or termination of jobs as they opened spaces to discuss and reflect on topics related to Palestine (Younes & Al-Taher, 2024). As a result, scholars report avoiding topics like Israeli apartheid policies, the Nakba, the ongoing genocide or contemporary Palestinian resistance in their lectures and papers, fearing career repercussions. In 2025, several German universities faced criticism for cancelling events related to Palestinian

perspectives, reflecting a broader atmosphere of self-censorship in academia. For instance, the Free University of Berlin cancelled an event featuring UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine Francesca Albanese, citing “polarisation and the unpredictable security situation.” (Middle East Monitor, 2025). In another case in January 2025, an academic conference titled “Talking about (the silencing of) Palestine” scheduled at Frankfurt’s Goethe University had its reservation abruptly revoked by university management under outside pressure. The conference had to relocate to a private venue at the last minute (Wystrychowski, 2025). Although it eventually took place (peacefully and without police intervention), the incident demonstrated how academic institutions may bow to political directives to avoid hosting Palestine-related discussions.

In another incident, the University of Münster cancelled a lecture on the struggle for liberation in the West Bank, planned for 27 October 2023, and organized by Palästina Anti Kolonial as part of the university’s “critical orientation week.” The cancellation came after the student parliament and AstA accused the group of supporting BDS, pressuring the university to bar any group endorsing BDS from using campus spaces – a clear indication that even intellectual discussion is stifled (Archive of Silence, 2025).

This repressive climate has extended to academic staff as well. Universities have initiated disciplinary proceedings against faculty members for expressing solidarity with Palestine, often under vague allegations of antisemitism or breaches of institutional policy. For example, in January 2024, the University of Konstanz referred an academic to a disciplinary hearing for signing the open letter Germany’s Departure from Reason, following pressure from the German Union of Jewish Students, which accused the signatories of antisemitism (INC-1987-B1C1). In February 2024, the University of Hamburg launched an internal investigation into a teacher for participating in a Palestine solidarity demonstration, citing a possible violation of university policy (INC-2088-VORO). These unsettling events undermine academic freedom as well as the university as a space for open and critical debate (Forensic Architecture, 2025).

The result is a skewing of scholarship: Research funding for Palestine-related projects is harder to secure, university partnerships with Palestinian institutions are politically sensitive, and student academic councils that pass pro-Palestinian resolutions (as happened in some universities in 2022) face backlash from university boards and sometimes politicians (Monroy, 2024). This not only harms

the individuals targeted but impoverishes German academia by excluding or marginalizing an entire field of inquiry under political duress.

4.5.2 Police Violence on Campus

As part of the global solidarity movement with Gaza and Palestine, student activists in Germany not only organized numerous protests but also established several protest camps in May 2024. Campus occupations and protest camps at universities across the country became powerful symbols of a student movement demanding an end to Germany's complicity in the genocide, while also confronting the academic silence, and silencing of Palestine.

In several instances, universities escalated their response by involving the police to suppress campus activism. In May 2024, students at Humboldt University occupied rooms to protest the genocide committed against Palestinians by Israel. While the university administration initially tolerated the occupation, it was forcibly cleared by police on 23 May 2024. According to the university's director, this action followed orders from Berlin's Senator for Science, Ina Czyborra (SPD), and Mayor Kai Wegner (CDU) (Casey, 2024). That same month, the protest camp at the Free University of Berlin was violently dismantled by police, resulting in the detention of 70 people. Authorities initiated 80 criminal investigations and 79 misdemeanor proceedings (Kieselbach, 2024). In response to these repressive measures, over 1,000 scholars and academics signed an open letter condemning the police violence and the universities' handling of the protests, and called for the protection of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression in academic spaces. Media reports later found that Bettina Stark-Watzinger, the then Minister of Education, compiled a list of academics who had signed the open letter, to examine whether consequences or other punitive measures might be possible with the use of funding laws and guidelines (as many universities and educational institutions are funded by the State). Numerous officials warned that this action constituted a serious violation of academic freedom (Semsrott, 2024). The actions by the Ministry of Education, as well as the State of Berlin, represent a dangerous precedent that undermines trust in academic institutions and raises serious concerns about political interference in education and research.

In the 2025 Grundrechte Report (Grundrechte Report, 2025), Lawyer Jessica Grimm outlines significant legal and personal consequences for students involved in pro-Palestine protests at Berlin universities. Most protest camps and

occupations were not permitted by the respective University management, often citing potential criminal acts, due to slogans that could be punishable by law, as justification for the evictions. However, the universities never examined whether they had a legal obligation to tolerate the protests, especially in public spaces where such rights might apply. As a result of the violent evictions by the police, every protest led to criminal proceedings, typically for trespassing and resisting law enforcement. Police often interpret peaceful acts like students linking arms as resistance, and use excessive force during removals. Although many cases are dropped or end in acquittals – often due to unlawful police action, invalid charges, or unlawful assembly bans – the threat of prosecution alone may have a chilling effect, discouraging students from protesting and expressing political opinions. International students face heightened risks, as ongoing proceedings can block visa renewals, leaving them with only a temporary residential status ("Fiktionsbescheinigung"). Multiple convictions could trigger a legal basis for deportation, creating a strong deterrent on political participation. Students with German citizenship fear that criminal records may affect their careers. Moreover, recent changes to the Berlin Higher Education Act now allow for exmatriculation linked to criminal charges, adding further pressure to avoid political action.

The state-led crackdown on campus activism has far-reaching consequences for students, faculty, and the broader academic community. Many students involved in the protests now face legal uncertainty and disciplinary measures from their universities. The right to assembly and freedom of opinion are fundamental democratic principles that must be upheld, especially in universities. Historically, these institutions have been at the forefront of social and political struggles for justice and equality. Undermining these freedoms not only weakens democratic culture but also threatens the role of academia as a space for critical thought, public engagement, and moral responsibility.

4.5.3 Repression in Schools

In schools, the repression reaches into the lives of minors. In North Rhine-Westphalia the police distributed hand-outs in schools, warning that expressions of Palestinian resistance – such as supporting the slogan "From the river to the sea," comparing Israeli actions to the Holocaust, or naming them a genocide – may be punishable as incitement to hatred or support for a terrorist organization. The hand-out explicitly encourages people to report such behaviour to the police, if observed in school (Younes & Al-Taher, 2024). In October 2023, the

Berlin Senate Administration, issued a letter to schools in the city encouraging them to prohibit the display of Palestinian symbols, including the keffiyeh and “Free Palestine” badges (ReachOut/ARIBA, 2023). As a result, in Berlin some school administrators warned that students expressing support for Palestine could face disciplinary action under guidelines meant to combat extremist symbols (guidelines originally intended for things like banning Nazi flags and swastikas). Reports emerged in late 2023 of teachers confiscating students’ keffiyehs or forbidding Palestinian flags on school grounds (Brady, Faiola, Rauhala, Adam, & Ríos, 2023). There were even instances where schoolchildren were reported to have been questioned by police for making pro-Palestinian statements in class (Kirenci, 2024). This climate has instilled fear and alienation in Palestinian and Arab students, where students became increasingly afraid to speak about Palestine or express their political views or identity due to potential disciplinary action or being labelled as terrorists or antisemites. This environment is traumatic for young Palestinian-German or Arab-German students, who effectively learn that their heritage and viewpoints are criminalized (Tize, 2025).

Instead of ensuring educational principles of open dialog and critical reflection, the learning environment for many Palestinian students is shaped by a culture of suspicion and hostility, even resulting in verbal or physical violence. For instance, in Berlin, a teacher at the Ernst-Abbe-Gymnasium physically assaulted a student for holding a Palestinian flag. While the teacher claimed he acted in self-defence after allegedly receiving a headbutt from the student, video footage and witness accounts contradict this statement. The incident ended with minimal consequences for the teacher despite a lack of evidence for his defence. At a Gymnasium in Munich, someone sprayed graffiti in the schoolyard with the message “Kill all Palestinians” (Figure 1) (Younes & Al-Taher, 2024).

Such incidents reflect a broader atmosphere in which Palestinian students are not only marginalized but rendered vulnerable to both institutional and physical forms of violence. The repression of political expression within schools thus not only silences but also exposes students to direct harm.





005

FROM REPRESSION TO PERSECUTION

FROM REPRESSION TO PERSECUTION



The systematic crackdown on Palestinians and Palestine solidarity in Germany raises a critical question: At what point does “repression” of dissent cross the threshold into “persecution” as defined by human rights law? Repression and persecution exist on a continuum of state behavior. Generally, repression refers to the array of measures (legal, physical, economic, etc.) that states use to restrict rights and quash opposition within the bounds of claimed law and order (Davenport, 2007b). Persecution, on the other hand, implies a more severe or sustained campaign of targeted abuse against a particular group, often violating fundamental human rights and denying any effective legal protection. International law does not provide a single, neat definition of persecution, but various frameworks offer guidance:

- Under refugee law (the 1951 UN Refugee Convention), persecution is understood as actions that cause “serious harm” – such as threats to life or freedom or other grave violations of human rights – in response to a person’s identity or political opinion, coupled with the failure of the state to protect the victim (UNHCR, 2019). In other words, if individuals face serious abuses specifically because of, say, their political stance (e.g., support for Palestinian rights) and cannot count on their government for protection (indeed, if the government itself is the abuser), they could be considered persecuted.

- In human rights treaties like the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and ECHR (European Convention on Human Rights), the term “persecution” is not explicitly defined, but the concepts of non-discrimination and proportionality are key. These treaties guarantee freedoms of expression, assembly, and association (Amnesty International, 2024b) and allow only narrow restrictions for legitimate aims (public order, safety, etc.). A persistent, disproportionate, and group-specific repression – for example, banning all demonstrations by one ethnic/political group or criminalizing their speech – would violate these guarantees. When the scale and identity-focus of violations indicate that a particular community is being systematically oppressed, human rights experts begin to speak in terms of persecution. Amnesty International, for instance, has characterized Germany’s blanket protest bans as “unlawful and discriminatory,” rooted in anti-Palestinian bias (Amnesty International, 2024b). Such language implies that the measures are not legitimate security steps but rather target a protected characteristic (national origin and political viewpoint), edging toward persecution territory.
- In international criminal law, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) includes “persecution” as a crime against humanity, defining it as the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights of a group based on identity or politics, as part of a widespread or systematic attack. While Germany’s actions against Palestinians and Palestine solidarity activists are not remotely of the gravity of atrocities prosecuted at the ICC, this definition underscores two components: severity and group targeting. We must ask: Is the German state carrying out a systematic policy that severely deprives a specific group (Palestinian diaspora and Palestine advocates) of basic rights?

Applying these criteria to the current context in Germany, there is evidence that the treatment of Palestinians and Palestine solidarity has moved into a qualitatively harsher zone than ordinary policy enforcement, possibly approaching

what can be termed persecution. The scale of measures is considerable: Hundreds of incidents across multiple sectors, as documented by NGOs (ELSC, 2025a), show a pattern rather than isolated incidents. The targeting is explicit: Those affected are almost exclusively people advocating for Palestinian human rights – often Palestinians, Arabs, or Muslims themselves, along with leftists and human rights defenders. Germany is not banning all demonstrations – only those for Palestine; they are not fining all foreign students for protest – only those who protest Israel’s genocidal acts; they are not censoring all political art – only art that challenges Israeli politics of apartheid and genocide, and voices Palestinian narratives. This selectivity underscores that a particular “political opinion” (support for Palestinian rights) and often a particular ethno-cultural identity (Palestinian/Arab) are in practice being repressed. Moreover, the state justification invokes these very categories (e.g., branding individuals as Hamas supporters or security threats due to their Palestinian ties or views) (Wystrychowski, 2025).

Importantly, the absence of legal protection for the targeted group of Palestinians and their allies in Germany is increasingly evident. Persecution is marked by victims being denied redress or shield by the law. In democratic states, courts are meant to uphold rights, but in many of these cases German courts have largely sided with restrictive state actions. For example, administrative courts upheld Berlin’s ban on all Palestinian demonstrations in late 2023 by accepting a vague police claim of danger, rather than insisting on concrete evidence or tailoring of restrictions. Activists appealing their fines for speech in solidarity with Palestine, have not found relief, as the judiciary so far leans toward the government’s broad definition of antisemitic hate speech. Perhaps most striking is the extra-legal nature of some measures: the Berlin deportation orders in 2025 were “extrajudicial” in the sense that they circumvented any criminal trial – effectively punishment without a court conviction. Internal government emails (revealed to Al Jazeera) showed that even Foreign Office lawyers believed these deportations had “no valid legal basis,” but they were pushed through regardless, explicitly citing “reason of state” over rule of law (Salfiti, 2025). When the normal safeguards of a rule-of-law democracy (like independent judicial scrutiny or the principle of proportionality) are systematically overridden to target a group, that is a strong indicator of persecution. As one joint statement by the four threatened activists put it: “Arbitrary arrests at protests, combined with false charges, are used as pretexts to justify extrajudicial deportation measures, circumventing any notion of independent judicial process and the rule of law.” This is a direct testimony to being treated outside the normal legal protections afforded to others – essentially,

persecution in practice if not in name.

International human rights observers have started to express alarm in these terms. Amnesty International has urged Germany (and other European states) to stop what it calls a “deeply disturbing” crackdown, noting that even calls for a ceasefire have been mischaracterized as extremist (Amnesty International, 2024b). Amnesty explicitly warned that instrumentalizing antisemitism to stifle criticism of Israel “undermines authorities’ efforts to tackle the real scourge of antisemitism” – a diplomatic way of saying Germany’s approach is oppressive and counter-productive. ELSC in launching its database, described the repression in Germany as “systematic” and “institutionalised,” involving fundamental rights being trampled across civil society (ELSC, 2025a). ELSC’s director highlighted the widespread and “extremely violent” nature of the crackdown and the dangerous conflation of anti-Zionism with bigotry. These are strong words, hinting that Germany’s practices are veering beyond acceptable limits for a liberal democracy. Even the United Nations has taken note: UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Francesca Albanese, faced such hostility and police intimidation during a fact-finding visit to Germany in 2025 that she later remarked on the “shrinking landscape for freedom of expression” in the country and compared the atmosphere to authoritarian settings (Albanese, 2025; Vračar, 2025a). She reminded German authorities that “talking about Palestine is not a crime” – effectively calling out the criminalization of an entire discourse on Palestinian human rights.

So, does the treatment of Palestinians and Palestine solidarity in Germany amount to persecution? It arguably meets several key criteria: It is targeted at an identifiable group (Palestinian solidarity activists, many of whom are of Palestinian/Arab origin or Muslim faith); it involves serious infringements of rights (freedom of speech and assembly are fundamental rights; their wholesale denial, plus instances of police violence and threats of deportation, qualify as serious harm to individuals’ freedom and security); and it is at least implicitly endorsed by the state as policy (through high-level statements and coordinated actions by police, intelligence, and ministries, rather than a few rogue incidents).

This pattern aligns with the UNHCR’s understanding of persecution. The UNHCR Handbook notes that persistent patterns of discrimination and harassment can cumulatively amount to persecution, even if each incident alone might seem minor (UNHCR, 2019). In Germany today, nearly every avenue of Palestinian

expression – whether waving a flag, wearing a keffiyeh, speaking Arabic at a rally, or organizing academic events – is marked by fear or punishment. Privately, many describe feeling “persecuted” for being Palestinian or showing solidarity – a subjective sense that matches the objective indicators of group-targeted repression. It is telling that some Palestinians in Germany have even pondered whether they might need to seek asylum elsewhere from Germany, should deportations and criminalization worsen (a tragic irony, given many came as stateless refugees seeking safety). The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) defines a refugee as someone with a well-founded fear of being persecuted for who they are (nationality, religion, etc.) or what they believe (political opinion) (Amnesty International, 2021). By that standard, if Germany continues on its current path, it risks producing exiles from within – people forced to leave because their identity or beliefs have become systematically untenable.

In conclusion, while labeling a democracy like Germany as “persecuting” a segment of its population is a serious charge, it is increasingly hard to avoid this characterization for the Palestine solidarity movement. The combination of scale, intent, and impact – nationwide, multi-year policies singling out a minority group and its supporters for suppression – points to persecution as understood in human rights discourse. Germany’s actions violate core provisions of the ICCPR and ECHR by denying equal free expression rights, and they exhibit the hallmarks of persecution noted by UNHCR: They are sustained, discriminatory, and cause serious harm (suppression of fundamental freedoms and the specter of expulsion) to those affected. As Nicaragua’s filing at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in late 2023 argued, Germany’s stance has even abetted human rights violations abroad (through arms to Israel) (Al Jazeera, 2024a) – but domestically, it has certainly put the upholding of human rights into question. International legal bodies and civil society will need to assess Germany’s conduct under the lens of human rights law. If the current trajectory continues, Germany risks joining the list of countries infamous for persecuting political dissent – an outcome utterly at odds with its post-WWII democratic values. Repression can, and should, be rolled back before it solidifies into full-blown persecution.





006

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: GERMANY, FRANCE, THE UK, THE US, AND BEYOND

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Germany's repression of Palestine solidarity must be understood within a broader trend of shrinking civic space across "liberal" democracies – particularly in Europe (European Civic Forum, 2025). According to the Civic Space Report 2025 by the European Civic Forum, civic freedoms deteriorated in numerous EU countries in 2024, with Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK all rated as having "narrowed" civic space by the CIVICUS Monitor (European Civic Forum, 2025). This classification signals an environment where civil society actors still operate but under mounting legal, political, and administrative constraints. Among these countries, Germany stands out for its exceptional intensity and cross-sectoral coordination. The state has deployed a uniquely expansive mix of legal, policing, immigration, and symbolic restrictions aimed at silencing Palestine solidarity – turning constitutionally protected dissent into a target of state repression. This comparative overview explores how Germany's model both reflects and intensifies wider trends of authoritarian rollback in civic freedoms, particularly in the context of international conflict.

The Civic Space Report 2025 by the European Civic Forum identifies Germany as one of the most repressive EU states in relation to Palestine advocacy, highlighting the systematic misuse of public order laws and excessive executive and police power (European Civic Forum, 2025, p. 20).

The Liberties Rule of Law Report 2025 further documents how German authorities have required loyalty declarations supporting Israel in immigration and naturalisation procedures, raising concerns about freedom of conscience and the instrumentalisation of antisemitism to suppress political dissent (Liberties, 2025).

France

France has a longstanding pattern of restricting pro-Palestinian expression, frequently invoking public order or the principle of *laïcité* (secularism) to justify bans (Cohen-Almagor, 2022). In October 2023, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin announced a nationwide ban on pro-Palestinian demonstrations (Haynes, 2024), labelling them a threat to public order amid the ongoing Gaza conflict (Liberties, 2025; European Civic Forum, 2025). While many local authorities enforced the ban, French courts often overturned such sweeping restrictions, recognising them as disproportionate infringements on the right to protest. This judicial pushback contrasts with the situation in Germany, where courts have, at times, upheld protest bans, particularly before public backlash (Liberties, 2025).

France's repression of Palestine advocacy is also rooted in older legislation. Under the so-called "Lellouche Law," BDS activists were prosecuted in the 2010s for "incitement to discrimination." However, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2020 that these convictions violated the right to free expression, effectively halting the criminalisation of BDS advocacy (ECHR, 2020). Despite such legal reversals, repression persists: During 2023, in some cities, individuals were arrested for merely displaying a Palestinian flag, and in 2024, France imposed a blanket ban on Gaza solidarity marches, sparking heavy-handed police responses (European Civic Forum, 2025).

The rationale in France typically hinges on secularism and a fear of "importing the conflict" into a multiethnic society – distinct from Germany's narrative centred on historical responsibility and antisemitism. Although both countries deploy protest

Graph: CIVICUS Civic Space Ratings in Selected Countries (2024)

| Country | CIVICUS Civic Space Rating (2024) | Notes |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Germany | ● Narrowed | Protest bans, repression of Palestine solidarity, censorship of symbols. |
| France | ● Narrowed | Ban on Palestine demos, laïcité-based restrictions, legal pushback. |
| United Kingdom | ● Narrowed* | Hostile political rhetoric; no protest bans, but legal proposals pending. |
| United States | ○ Not Rated | Broad First Amendment protections; social and economic pressure noted. |
| Netherlands | ● Narrowed ↓ | Some protest bans and censorship; crackdown on NGOs. |
| Spain | ● Narrowed | Use of 'Gag Law' against protests, prosecution of housing activists. |
| Italy | ● Narrowed | Laws targeting climate and migration protestors ('Ecovandalism' law). |
| Greece | ● Obstructed | Harsh repression of protests and arrests of Palestine activists. |
| Hungary | ● Obstructed | Shrinking space, government attacks on judiciary and NGOs. |
| Austria | ● Open | Civic space generally respected. |
| Portugal | ● Open | No major restrictions reported. |
| Sweden | ● Open | Civic freedoms intact. |

**UK is not rated in the Civic Space Report 2025 but is generally classified as "narrowed" by the CIVICUS Monitor based on past assessments. Civic Space Report 2025, European Civic Forum; CIVICUS Monitor (2024)*

bans and pursue arrests, the justifications differ.

Importantly, France has not gone as far as Germany in certain repressive measures: It has not sought to deport EU citizens for protesting, nor imposed loyalty declarations regarding Israel in immigration or naturalisation proceedings. French public discourse is also comparatively more pluralistic; it is not uncommon for prominent figures – including former presidents – to call for a ceasefire or criticise Israeli actions without facing severe backlash (Liberties, 2025).

United Kingdom

The UK saw large-scale Palestine solidarity demonstrations starting in late 2023, with approximately 300,000 people marching in London in November 2024 (Dearden, 2024). Under the Conservative government, the response has been mixed. Home Secretary Suella Braverman explored whether chants such as “From the River to the Sea” could be legally classified as hate speech. Still, senior police officials confirmed this slogan is not illegal per se. Arrests depend on contextual intent, so no blanket ban was imposed (Syal & Allegretti, 2023).

Unlike Germany, where convictions have occurred for similar chants, the UK did not implement national protest bans. Local councils occasionally sought to cancel solidarity events (e.g., blocking a Palestinian film festival), but such restrictions were often reversed following public pressure (Mortimer, 2025).

Recent legislative attention is shifting toward economic forms of advocacy. The proposed Anti-Boycott Bill would prohibit public entities like councils and universities from boycotting foreign states, effectively targeting BDS campaigns. If enacted, it would create legally binding impediments to Palestine solidarity economics, echoing Germany’s anti-BDS Bundestag resolution (UK Government, 2023).

Symbolic restrictions have tightened too. Police warned against flying Hamas or Hezbollah flags, mirroring Germany’s §86a enforcement. Still, mainstream Palestinian symbols (flag, keffiyeh, chants) haven’t been criminalized to the same extent as in Germany (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024).

In universities, the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism has triggered event cancellations and pressures on student groups. Disciplinary actions have been announced; ~113 students and staff are under investigation. Yet many

academics have actively defended colleagues and campus rights (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024; Liberties, 2025).

Policing of pro-Palestinian protests in the UK has intensified sharply: According to Bond 2025, between 14 October 2023 and 31 March 2024, the Metropolitan Police made 305 arrests at Palestine solidarity protests, of which 136 were later released without charge. In January 2025, over 70 protesters were arrested at a single demonstration (Bond, 2025). CIVICUS also flagged aggressive policing tactics, low arrest thresholds, and sweeping anti-protest laws as key components of the UK’s tightened civic landscape (CIVICUS, 2024).

In summary, the UK’s civic space for Palestine activism is narrowed. The government has enacted hostile rhetoric, expanded protest policing, and pushed economic and symbolic restrictions. Yet, protest remains robust; public mobilization – evident in the sheer numbers – has pressured authorities to retract some venue bans and has clarified legal boundaries. Compared with Germany’s systematic repression, the UK continues to allow a degree of public dissent and resistance, even within an increasingly restrictive environment.

United States

The United States operates within a markedly different legal and civic framework than many European countries, largely due to its strong First Amendment protections for speech and assembly. For example, federal courts have repeatedly ruled that laws punishing support for the BDS movement – such as Texas’ requirement that public contractors certify they do not boycott Israel – violate constitutional protections. As the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) notes, these rulings affirm that politically motivated boycotts, including those in support of Palestinian rights, are protected forms of expression in the U.S. (ACLU, 2019).

Federal immigration authorities have begun targeting international student activists. Columbia University’s graduate student Mahmoud Khalil, a legal permanent resident, was arrested at his campus apartment on March 8, 2025 by ICE. He faces deportation under claims of national security risk due to his pro-Palestinian activism – a move now being legally challenged as unconstitutional (Offenhartz, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025a). Khalil’s detention has caused “irreparable harm” to his career and family, including missing his child’s birth, and a federal judge has indicated that the rationale for his removal likely contravenes constitutional protections (Offenhartz, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025a). Similarly, another

Columbia student, Yunseo Chung, was briefly detained under a deportation order before a federal judge intervened, citing due process and constitutional concerns (Slater et al., 2025). Reports suggest that more than 300 international students may have had their visas reviewed, revoked, or threatened due to Palestine activism (Cohen, 2025; Jeyaretnam, 2025).

Legal repression also takes the form of anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) legislation, currently enacted in 38 U.S. states. These laws prohibit public entities, including state agencies, municipalities, and sometimes public universities, from contracting with individuals, companies, or organizations that are perceived to boycott Israel. In many cases, these laws require contractors to sign loyalty pledges, affirming that they do not and will not engage in any boycott of Israel as a condition of doing business with the state (Stanley-Becker, 2018). This has affected a wide array of professionals from journalists and lawyers to educators and even speech pathologists, who were asked to certify their political views in order to receive or retain public contracts (ACLU, 2018).

Several of these laws have been struck down by federal courts on the grounds that they violate the First Amendment by punishing individuals for political beliefs and protected expression. Courts in Arizona, Texas, Arkansas, and Kansas, among others, have ruled that requiring individuals to disavow a political position in order to access public contracts constitutes unconstitutional compelled speech (Stanley-Becker, 2018). The continued existence and enforcement of these laws have had a chilling effect on pro-Palestinian economic advocacy in civil society and academia, as institutions and individuals often preemptively avoid engaging with BDS to steer clear of legal complications.

Other European countries

Other European countries responded in varied ways to Palestine solidarity. The Netherlands, for example, initially imposed bans on certain pro-Palestine protests. Civic space was subsequently downgraded by CIVICUS due to “increasing repression of protest rights, in particular against demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine” (CIVICUS Monitor, 2024). However, these bans were rapidly overturned under legal and public pressure.

In Belgium and Spain, most pro-Palestine protests proceeded with minimal disruption or legal interference (Liberties, 2025).

Greece took a comparatively hard line, with authorities detaining demonstrators at select pro-Palestine events. Nonetheless, this enforcement remained ad hoc and limited in scale compared to the sweeping measures seen in Germany (Liberties, 2025).

The shared trend across Western Europe has been governments feeling compelled to display a strong stance post-October 7. Nonetheless, Germany’s multifaceted crackdown – spanning policing, media, and immigration controls – distinguishes it in both severity and systemic coordination.

These cross-national experiences offer valuable lessons. In France, courts have at times successfully curtailed executive overreach by overturning protest bans – a development now being referenced by German lawyers challenging their own restrictions (Liberties, 2025). In the UK, public mobilization has proven effective: Sustained mass protests pressured the government to withdraw local bans and led to softer rhetoric from officials. For example, in June 2025, protesters surrounded Parliament in a “Red Line for Palestine” action demanding an arms embargo and sanctions (Stacey & Butler, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025b). Shortly after, Prime Minister Keir Starmer described Israel’s actions in Gaza as “appalling and intolerable” – a marked shift from previous rhetoric. Earlier in May, the UK had suspended trade talks with Israel, with Foreign Secretary David Lammy condemning the blockade on Gaza as “morally wrong” and “unjustifiable” (Stacey & Butler, 2025). These developments stand in contrast to Germany, where pro-Palestinian protests face far tighter restrictions and officials have been more reluctant to acknowledge Palestinian suffering (Serhan, 2024). In contrast, the U.S. relies heavily on clear free speech protections; Germany, while constitutionally protecting expression, has permitted extensive exceptions – especially regarding pro-Palestine advocacy.

In sum, while Germany is not alone in repressive responses, it has implemented some of the most extreme measures observed in Western democracies (e.g., multi-week protest bans, deportations of EU citizens, loyalty declarations). This trajectory raises alarms about a broader “slippery slope” – if replicated, space for Palestine advocacy (and general foreign policy criticism) could rapidly contract across Europe. Conversely, if Germany can be legally or publicly pressured into retreating – via court rulings, civil society, or EU interventions – it could establish an important precedent safeguarding democratic dissent during foreign policy crises. Importantly, Germany’s crackdown on Palestinian advocacy represents

more than an isolated form of repression, it is an integral component of a broader erosion of democratic principles both nationally and across Europe. What begins as repression of a marginalized group can quickly set dangerous precedents for legitimizing surveillance, censorship, and exclusion as tools of governance.





007

CONCLUSION: GAPS AND NEXT STEPS

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Key enablers beyond official agencies

Our findings suggest that the machinery of repression extends beyond state institutions such as RIAS “Recherche- und Informationsstelle Antisemitismus” (Research and Information Center on Antisemitism) (Bundesverband RIAS, 2024). Large media conglomerates and industry figures have become de facto enforcers of Israel’s politics of genocide, apartheid and occupation. For example, the Axel Springer publishing group, which explicitly “enshrined support for Israel” in its mission statement, reportedly fired a trainee who challenged that stance (Boguslaw, 2023). Similarly, civil society organizations nominally dedicated to anti-discrimination (e.g., the Amadeu Antonio Stiftung) actively label common Palestinian solidarity slogans (e.g., “From the River to the Sea...”) as antisemitic (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 2024). Observers note that government and corporate media in Germany are overwhelmingly pro-Israeli and hostile to Palestinian narratives (Shir Hever, 2024).

This alignment between state discourse, media, and powerful non-state actors creates a hostile environment in which dissenting voices are delegitimized or penalized. As the Diaspora Alliance’s 2024 report points out, “practically every public event by Palestinians in Germany risks being recorded as antisemitic in RIAS statistics,” regardless of context or content. The report further warns that RIAS’ definitions and reporting practices lead to the “systematic stigmatization of pro-Palestinian positions and Palestinian identity as inherently antisemitic” – a process that not only chills political expression but also undermines basic democratic norms (Mashiach, 2024).

These developments illustrate how informal institutions – from politically aligned NGOs and think tanks to compliant media platforms – function as gatekeepers of acceptable speech. This enforcement is often more aggressive and unaccountable than official state repression, since it operates under the guise of civil society while reinforcing state-endorsed narratives. Given the extent of this

entanglement, further investigation into the transnational coordination between government-linked NGOs, European Zionist advocacy groups, and digital surveillance infrastructure is urgently needed.

Political and institutional drivers

Attention has centered on overt measures (bans, surveillance, and political inquiries), while the role of political parties and lobby networks remains overlooked. In November 2024, the SPD-Green-FDP coalition quietly passed a wide-ranging “antisemitism” resolution that, though nonbinding, advocates defunding pro-Palestine groups and effectively criminalizes basic solidarity (Ward, 2024; Wystrychowski, 2025). The CDU/CSU and other parties have made equally hawkish demands. In several German states, including Berlin, governments have unilaterally imposed blanket assembly bans. Behind these moves stand powerful lobbying forces: Pro-Israel factions – including the Israeli embassy, the Central Council of Jews, and business interests – alongside so-called “anti-German” activists have long pushed German elites to equate criticism of Israel with terrorism (Shir Hever, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024b). How these networks influence specific policies – and what foreign governments or international groups are involved – remains opaque and demands urgent investigation.

Forms of repression by sector

The methods of silencing solidarity differ by setting, and each warrants a separate analysis. In schools and universities, administrators have banned Palestinian symbols – keffiyehs, flags, and stickers – and police have even been called on children who identified as Palestinian (Kirenci, 2024).

In the media and public sphere, official and media discourse actively criminalizes protest rhetoric. For instance, a German court fined a person for chanting “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” ruling the slogan a denial of Israel’s existence – a verdict condemned by lawyers as a “dark day for free expression”

(Al Jazeera, 2024b). Independent outlets document that this is not isolated: Red media, for example, logged “orchestrated repression” across the country – from police violence and deportation threats to bans on academic events and journalists – all “legitimized by a media-manufactured myth of threat” (Vračar, 2025b). Detailed case studies are needed for each sector (education, law enforcement, media, academia, etc.); who is issuing directives or framing narratives, and on what legal or institutional basis?

Rule of law and legal certainty

Germany’s legal terrain is murky and politicized. Authorities increasingly invoke broad anti-terror and hate-speech statutes to suppress speech, often citing antisemitism as a catch-all justification (Deutsche Welle, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024b). Courts have given mixed signals; some rulings have upheld basic rights – such as overturning a Europe-wide travel ban on a Palestinian doctor invited to testify (Abunimah, 2024), or repeatedly recognizing the right to boycott (Shir Hever, 2024) – others, however, have accepted draconian interpretations of protest slogans as criminal offenses (Cole, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2024b). This inconsistency deepens uncertainty. This raises several research questions: How are statutes such as “incitement to hatred” (Volksverhetzung) or anti-terror laws being applied in these cases? Are prosecutors acting based on written guidance (e.g., from the Justice Ministry) on what constitutes illegal “glorification” of violence? How frequently are solidarity activists prosecuted versus acquitted, and on what legal grounds? Mapping every relevant court decision and injunction will be crucial to identify patterns of judicial complicity or resistance.

Implications for democracy

The systematic nature of these measures threatens core democratic principles. As an analysis by Forensic Architecture warns, these actions serve to “distort and negate Palestinian identity” in public discourse and to “manufacture consent” by deterring solidarity (2025). Free speech, assembly and academic freedom have all suffered: Commemorations are banned, and campus speech is policed. Civil society watch dogs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch emphasize that conflating criticism of Israeli policy with racism or terrorism fundamentally undermines the rule of law (Amnesty International, 2024b; Ward, 2024). The chilling effect is tangible. Citizens fear expressing dissent for fear of job loss or legal sanction, and minority voices are systematically silenced. In short, a political culture of self-censorship is taking hold, which research must

document as a first step toward reversing it.

Recommendations for research and monitoring

Addressing these gaps requires a concerted independent research agenda. We recommend establishing a dedicated monitoring platform akin to the ELSC’s new Index of Repression (Forensic Architecture, 2025) to systematically collect and publish incidents of censorship and legal action across Germany. This platform should gather data on media ownership, NGO funding, party affiliations, and the networks connecting them. A comprehensive database of court rulings, legal texts, and police orders is also needed to analyze how laws are being misused. Researchers and civil liberties groups should collaborate on open-source investigations into lobby funding and political donations that tie Germany’s elites to pro-Israel causes. Finally, campaigners should work with international human-rights institutions (e.g., Council of Europe monitors, UN rapporteurs) to demand transparency on guidelines used against protesters, and to expose when assemblies are banned unjustly (Amnesty International, 2024b). In sum, only through rigorous documentation, network analysis, and coordinated civil society tracking can we fully map this repression and hold perpetrators accountable.

Authoritative reports by Amnesty International, and ELSC in collaboration with Forensic Architecture as well as investigative journalism from platforms like Peoples Dispatch form the foundation of these findings. Our own report has contributed to this mapping, but much work remains to expose the deeper structures driving the ongoing crackdown.

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Figures

Figure 1. Graffiti reading "Kill all Palestinians" in Neukölln (Jamal, 2024, in Younes & Al Taher, 2024).



Source: Instagram Hebl, Jamal in Younes & Al Taher, 2024).

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REPRESSION OF PALESTINE SOLIDARITY IN GERMANY

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