



GERMANY

Quick Facts

Population: 80,159,662 (July 2020 est.)

Area: 357,022 sq km

Ethnic Groups: German 87.2%, Turkish 1.8%, Polish 1%, Syrian 1%, other 9% (2017 est.)

Government Type: Federal parliamentary republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$3.701 trillion (2017 est.)

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated September 2020)

INTRODUCTION

Germany, alongside France, has the highest number of Muslim citizens in Western Europe or among European Union member states. It is also a hotbed of Islamist activity. Most notably, the 9/11 attacks were organized in part in Germany by the Hamburg cell headed by Mohammed Atta.¹

Islamism in Germany has deep roots stretching back to a symbiosis between the German state and radical religious elements during the First World War. However, in more recent years, the relationship between the two has been significantly more adversarial. Nonetheless, Islamism and jihadism are prevalent in today's Germany, with the first jihadist attack of note in Germany taking place less than half-a-decade ago, in December 2016.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Both peaceful legal Islamism and violent *jihadism* exist in Germany today. Political Islam of the lawful variant predominates, although *jihadi* activity has been documented as well – most conspicuously via a serious *jihadist* attack that killed a dozen people in December 2016. Peaceful Islamist groups active in Germany include Milli Görüs and the Gülen movement. The Muslim Brotherhood, Salafist groups, and Iranian influencers occupy a murky middle ground, while more overtly violent groups include Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Islamic State.

Milli Görüs

Milli Görüs is an Islamic political movement based on the philosophies of Necmettin Erbakan, former Turkish Prime Minister and a profoundly anti-secular and anti-Western Turkish scholar. It is popular among the Turkish diaspora in Germany, as it is an offshoot of an originally-Turkish movement.² The group pegs

its total European membership at 87,000, with 30,000 of them residing in Germany.³ By its own estimate, the group maintains more than 514 mosques and cultural centers in eleven European nations. Of these, 323 are in Germany. The German iteration of Milli Görüs has stated that the group wishes to encourage a free democratic political system and help Muslims integrate into German society. However, some controversy remains. In the past, the organization has advocated anti-Semitic views through a range of media. It promotes radical television broadcasts, such as the Iranian TV series *Zehra's Blue Eyes* (which revolves around a fictional Israeli candidate for Prime Minister who kidnaps Palestinian children in order to harvest their organs for Jewish use—and glorifies suicide bombing in response).⁴ It also has disseminated written anti-Semitic works, such as Turkish translations of Henry Ford's *The International Jew*.⁵ Notably, the dissemination of such literature is contrary to German law, but no legal efforts to prosecute the group have taken place. At least some portion of the group also has endorsed and promoted *jihadist* activities abroad.⁶

In 2009, German authorities charged six Milli Görüs officials with fraud, money laundering, supporting terrorist organizations, and associating with criminals. In 2010, the charges were dropped.⁷ Between 2016 and 2018, an estimated 10,000 members followed group.⁸ The government's generally *laissez faire* attitude toward the organization stems from the understanding, as Hamburg domestic intelligence chief Manfred Murck has explained, that while the organization's traditions are not compatible with the German constitution, there is no evidence that the group has attempted to dismantle or damage Germany's democratic order.⁹

The Gülen movement

The Turkish Gülen movement has become increasingly influential in Germany. Founded by Turkish Islamist Fethullah Gülen (born 1938), it is based on the ideas of Faid Nursi (1876-1960).¹⁰ The Gülen movement does not publicly advocate violence, instead advocating for the gradual imposition of a *sharia*-based democracy.¹¹ The Gülen movement runs at least 20-25 schools in Germany, not including some 200 groups for the coaching of pupils after school.¹² There are no official membership numbers available, but the group is apparently popular as a result of its educational activities.¹³ According to television and media reports in June 2013, Gülen members have tried to influence and co-opt German democratic parties.¹⁴ The Gülen movement also tried to gain influence over the conservative Christian-Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria using the same method.¹⁵

After the attempted coup against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling AKP in Turkey in July 2016, however, alleged German-Turkish followers of the Gülen movement faced attacks and defamation by AKP supporters in the country.¹⁶ Germany has the biggest Turkish community outside of Turkey, with over three million Turkish people living in Germany.

According to a July 2018 report by German news outlet *Deutsche Welle*, the movement enjoys “wide-ranging support from German media, political figures and even the country's Christian churches” and its followers are “seen as victims of Erdogan's relentless purge.”¹⁷ Moreover, Bruno Kahl, head of Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (BND), described the Gülen movement as a “civil association for the purpose of religious and secular education” rather than as an extremist organization.¹⁸

The Gülen movement's presence in Germany has led to tension between Berlin and Ankara. In July 2017, as a result of a Royal United Services Institute study titled “Turkey's German Spy Network,”¹⁹ the German government initiated an investigation into *imams* allegedly spying on Gülen movement members. The inquiry was dropped that December, but only “because some of the suspects had left Germany for unknown destinations.”²⁰ In September 2018, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated at a news conference that not enough evidence currently existed to classify the Gülen movement as illegal or as a terrorist organization.²¹

The Muslim Brotherhood

As of 2019, German authorities estimated that the Muslim Brotherhood has 1,300 adherents in Germany.²² While it has no formal representation in the country, the organization runs Islamic centers in Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Cologne, Marburg, Braunschweig, and Munich.²³

The Brotherhood has a long history in the Federal Republic, beginning with a 1958 initiative to build a mosque in Munich—an effort which resulted in the creation of the Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (IGD, or “Islamic Community in Germany”). Today, the IGD is headquartered in Cologne and serves as the unofficial representative of the group in national affairs. From 2002 to 2010 it was headed by Ibrahim el-Zayat; since 2010, Samir Fallah has been its head.²⁴ El-Zayat was general secretary of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), a Saudi organization active in the spread of Wahhabbi ideology.²⁵

The IGD ostensibly tries to create a positive political climate for political Islam and promote a more pious way of life in Germany. However, it also collects money for Islamist causes abroad and raised funds for Hamas during the 2009 Gaza war.²⁶ In 2014, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) published a list of Islamist terrorist organizations; the only German group identified therein was the IGD.²⁷

In August 2019, a Bavarian media outlet reported on the Islamic Center of Munich’s recommendation that women who are “unruly” should be beaten.²⁸ The Islamic Center of Munich has links to the Islamic Community of Germany Association. According to German authorities, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood is part of the Islamic Community Association.²⁹ Nor is it the only one; a 2018 German federal intelligence report noted that German Muslim Community (DMG) – which, in September 2018 changed its name to Islamic Community in Germany (IGD) the most important and central organization for Muslim Brotherhood supporters.³⁰ The DMG has 400 members and is based in Cologne, Germany. According to its own disclosures, the DMG coordinates its activities with over 100 Islamic communities across Germany.³¹

Salafist elements

German authorities consider Salafism to be “the most dynamic Islamist movement.”³² According to the head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Hamburg, Salafists represent the fastest growing elements in Germany’s Islamist camp.³³ Similarly, a June 2019 German intelligence report noted that “the Islamist extremist scene has undergone a shift of forces towards the violent and/or *jihadist* field over the last years. Inter alia, the number of terrorist attacks committed or foiled in Germany between 2016 and 2018 is indicative of this trend.”³⁴ The report said the radical Salafi movement increased its membership from 10,800 in 2017 to 11,300 in 2018 – a significant one year jump.³⁵

This growth has brought with it an increase in militant activity. The first ever Islamist terror attack in Germany occurred in March 2011, when Kosovar Serb Arid Uka killed two U.S. soldiers at the Frankfurt International Airport.³⁶ Uka was discovered to have been in touch with Salafist elements via social media outlets, specifically Facebook.³⁷ He was convicted and sentenced to life in prison in December 2012.³⁸

German authorities have begun to respond to the potential threats posed by these groups. In June 2012, the Islamist network Millatu Ibrahim was shut down by German authorities in the first action of its kind against Salafist groups.³⁹ In March 2013, Germany authorities proscribed the Islamist organization Dawa FFM and two other groups, Islamische Audios and An-Nussrah.⁴⁰ On April 16, 2016, two 16-year old Salafists placed a bomb at a Sikh Temple, causing an explosion that injured several people at a wedding. The best-known German Salafist, a convert named Pierre Vogel, is known to have radicalized many people.⁴¹

In tandem with traditional activism, social media and the Internet have played a crucial role in Salafist activity.⁴² The “Read” Campaign, which started in 2011, was established by Cologne-based Salafist Ibrahim Abou Nagie, the head of Die Wahre Religion (The True Religion). Its aim is to distribute over 25 million German-language copies of the Quran.⁴³ Hamburg was the first German state to ban distribution

due to the organization's extremist and *jihadist* connections. Other German states might follow suit in the future – including, in particular, North Rhine-Westphalia.⁴⁴ In November 2016, Die Wahre Religion was formally proscribed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁵ There are no statistics available on the number of al-Qaeda supporters and members in Germany. Overall, intelligence officials estimate that – as of 2018 – the size of the “Islamist extremist following” in the country stood at close to 27,000.⁴⁶ That cohort, moreover, is increasingly active, and German authorities have detected a number of plots in various stages of planning in recent years,⁴⁷ as well as uncovering signs of an alarming new development – the “*jihadist*-motivated production of biological weapons in Germany.”⁴⁸

While recent years have seen few mobilized extremists depart for Iraq and Syria,⁴⁹ authorities worry that the potential for a return of so-called “veterans of the caliphate” may trigger a new dynamism within the Salafi scene in Germany.⁵⁰ Authorities likewise have charted a rise in anti-Semitic agitation and incidents, and intelligence sources have noted “that all of the Islamist extremist organizations operating in Germany follow anti-Semitic ideas, which they spread in various ways.”⁵¹

Iranian influence

The influence of the Shi'a variant of Islamism propounded by the Islamic Republic of Iran can be found in Germany as well. The Islamic Center Hamburg (IZH), founded in 1962, is a pro-Iranian institution closely linked to the Islamic Republic. Its head, the Ayatollah Reza Ramezani,⁵² was appointed to his post by the Iranian Foreign Ministry in April 2009.⁵³ The IZH, in turn, tries to spread the ideals of the Iranian Revolution via brochures, events, prayers, rallies, and other activities, and exerts an influence over a number of Islamic organizations within Germany. Furthermore, the IZH is actively involved in the following institutions:

- The Council of Islamic Communities in Hamburg;
- The Central Council of Muslims in Germany;
- The Islamic Community of Shi'a Communities in Germany; and
- The Islamic-European Union of Shi'a scholars and Theologians.⁵⁴

In 2016, Germany's outgoing foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, hosted Hamidreza Torabi as part of a religious dialogue event at the ministry. Torabi heads the Islamic Academy of Germany—a part of the IZH. He is a key organizer of the annual pro-Iranian regime al-Quds rally in Berlin that calls for the state of Israel “illegal and criminal” and features extremist anti-Western activists and Hezbollah supporters.⁵⁵

Ever since the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015, Germany's relations with Iran have improved. Despite knowledge of ongoing Iranian attempts to procure military goods,⁵⁶ German politics now promotes a normalization of the relationship with Iran. Nonetheless, Iran has continued to seek illicit nuclear and missile technology in Germany. According to the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Iran made 32 attempts in 2016 alone to obtain proliferation technology for weapons programs of mass destruction.⁵⁷ This conduct has continued. As of June 2020, an intelligence assessment by the intelligence agency of Germany's Baden-Wurttemberg state concluded that Iran, as well as other states, is “still pursuing” the illicit procurement of materiel related to its weapons of mass destruction programs. The regime “aim[s] to complete existing arsenals, perfect the range, applicability and effectiveness of their weapons and develop new weapons systems,” the report documented.⁵⁸

Significant diplomatic contacts between Berlin and Tehran continue as well. Many leading German politicians regularly visit Iran. Examples include Vice-Chancellor and member of the Federal Government Sigmar Gabriel, head of the Social Democratic Party, but also delegations from Saxony, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, and Saxony-Anhalt.⁵⁹ The office of Martin Dulig, Vice-Prime Minister of Saxony, went so far as to create a brochure that showed German female politicians in headscarves – a move that prompted sharp criticism because of its apparent deference to Iranian norms and social standards.⁶⁰

Hezbollah

Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militia, is also active in Germany, where it has had a presence since the 1980s.⁶¹ Today, Germany's most populous state, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), has a variety of Hezbollah-sympathetic Islamic centers and mosques. The 2019 Hamburg intelligence report noted that "in Germany there are currently about 30 known cultural and mosque associations in which a clientele regularly meets that is close to Hezbollah or its ideology."⁶² Numerous German intelligence reports from 2019 (the most recently published sources at the time of writing) noted an increase in Hezbollah membership from 950 in 2017 to 1,050 in 2018.⁶³

Over the years, the German government has taken a series of policy actions to restrict Hezbollah operations, among them banning Hezbollah's dedicated television channel, *al-Manar*, in 2008 and placing legal restrictions on the activities of Hezbollah-linked charities.⁶⁴ Finally, following repeated calls to do so, on April 30 2020, the German government declared the group a "Shiite terrorist organization" and outlawed all Hezbollah activity on German soil.⁶⁵

Hamas

The Palestinian militant group Hamas maintains a modest presence in Germany. As of 2016, Hamas was estimated to have 320 members in the country.⁶⁶ These activists raise funds for Hamas, largely in collaboration with organizations such as the Palestinian Return Center (PRC) in London.⁶⁷ While Hamas does not have any official representatives in the country, it has been known to work through like-minded organizations to raise funds and promote its political objectives there. In July 2010, for example, Germany banned the Humanitarian Relief Foundation, or IHH, due to its close ties with Hamas.⁶⁸ The IHH was noteworthy as the organization behind the controversial Gaza Flotilla of May 2010, and is accused of transmitting 6.6 million Euros from Germany to Hamas in the Gaza Strip.⁶⁹ The Palestinian Return Center (PRC), the Palestinian Community Germany (Palästinensische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland) and their allies held a conference with 3,000 participants in Berlin in April 2015.⁷⁰ Subsequently, in April 2019, German police raided offices of Islamic organizations believed to be financing Hamas.⁷¹ "Whoever supports Hamas under the mantle of providing humanitarian aid disregards the fundamental values of our constitution," German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said at the time.⁷²

The Islamic State (IS, or ISIS)

Germany has been a target of ISIS-related extremism. Between 2016 and 2018, 15 people were killed and 83 injured – including, in some instances, the perpetrators themselves – by IS affiliates.⁷³ Notably this includes the Berlin Christmas market attack of 2016, in which 12 people were killed and 56 were injured.⁷⁴

While there were no instances of Islamic State-related violence in 2019 and 2020 in Germany, a number of attempts and plots were foiled by state authorities during that time. The most recent, as of September 2020, was the April 15, 2020 arrest of four individuals tied to the terror group in North Rhine-Westphalia, who had conspired with a fifth already in custody to carry out attacks against U.S. military facilities.⁷⁵

In October 2017, the head of Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, or BfV), Hans-Georg Maaßen, stated that over 950 *jihadists* had gone to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State. He said that, of that number, 20 percent were women and five percent were underage children. He warned: "We see the danger of children who socialized with and were indoctrinated by *jihadists* returning to Germany after the war zones. This could allow a new generation of *jihadists* to be raised here."⁷⁶

On November 28, 2019, it was announced by German authorities that the government was investigating 116 German nationals who had left the country for territory previously controlled by the Islamic State. What's more, 95 Germans suspected of supporting ISIS were believed at the time "to be in custody in Turkey, Syria, or Iraq," and German police had launched investigations into 33 of them with arrest

warrants out in relation to 26 cases.⁷⁷

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

At 4.1 million, Germany's Muslim population is, alongside France's, one of the highest in the European Union.⁷⁸ Of this number, the majority (2.56 million) hails from Turkey, while roughly half a million (536,000) have roots in the former Yugoslavia. German Muslims also come from a variety of other places, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Syria. When combined with refugees from the Syrian crisis, Germany now houses closer to five million Muslims.

For decades, however, the former Federal Republic of Germany did not consider these immigrants to be true citizens, instead terming them *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers. Over time, however, this fiction has become increasingly hard to sustain; Turkish workers, in particular, stayed in Germany, and their families followed them there. Racism was and remains a widespread phenomenon in Germany due to the specific German national concept of citizenship, which until recently was defined by blood rather than along territorial lines. Thus, being born in Germany did not necessarily mean that you were German in the popular conception. This began to change in 1999 with the passage of a new law granting the children of non-German residents' citizenship by birth.

Since the attacks of 9/11, and particularly over the past several years, political Islam has become a major topic of public debate in Germany. The wearing of the headscarf, honor killings, forced marriages, and support for terrorism and anti-Zionist activity are among the main topics of discussion surrounding both Islam and Islamism. Yet, many newspapers, researchers, and politicians, as well as the general public at large, remain reluctant to deal with these issues.

Those political groups or parties that express their opposition to political Islam often do so out of ideological and/or racist grounds, rather than as a result of careful analysis of specific elements of political Islam. Likewise, many groups opposed to Islam are also against other foreigners (as well as those considered to be not "German" enough).

Nevertheless, a tiny but growing number of public intellectuals, scholars, activists, authors, and journalists have emerged publicly as critics of Islamism in recent years. These individuals have faced resistance on the public policy front. Some institutions, like the Berlin Center for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA),⁷⁹ have equated any meaningful criticism of Islam with anti-Semitism, often framed as Islamophobia.⁸⁰ Many journalists and mainstream scholars even compare or equate Islamist preachers of hate with pro-Western scholars, writers or activists,⁸¹ and reject any military response to Islamism or Islamic *jihād*.⁸² Most instead portray Islam as harmless and look uncritically upon figures like prominent Sunni Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi.⁸³

Considerable support for Islamism and even violent *jihād* is visible at the grassroots level in Germany, as evidenced through sporadic rallies in German cities in support of various radical causes. Populist, racist, anti-Semitic, and extremist groups, such as the Pegida movement ("Patriots Against the Islamization of the Occident"), or the party Alternative for Germany (AfD), are gaining massive support among the German population. In both the 2017 national and 2018 regional elections, AfD made significant political gains; it won 94 seats in 2017 (making it the country's largest opposition party) and 10 in 2018.⁸⁴ These results capitalize on AfD's 2016 momentum, in which the party captured 14-24% of the vote in each of the Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and Sachsen-Anhalt state parliamentary elections, respectively.⁸⁵ These results, scholars have noted, are likely a reaction to the wave of refugees that has entered Germany in recent years.⁸⁶

Beyond formal politics, white ethnonational sentiment has continued to disturbingly bloom since 2015, partially as a reaction to recent refugee resettlement. In 2018, eight people belonging to a far right terror organization known as the "Freital Group" were sentenced to prison for attempting to blow up refugee

shelters three years prior.⁸⁷ In 2019, Stephen Ernst, an AfD campaign volunteer,⁸⁸ allegedly assassinated the president of a local political organization, Walter Lübcke, due to the latter's pro-immigration platform.⁸⁹ Ernst admitted to the killing but would later deny his involvement; as of writing he is currently standing trial for what has been described as the first far right-motivated political assassination in Germany since World War II.⁹⁰

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Some Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have been present in Germany for years without engaging any real struggle for power with the government.⁹¹ Others, however, have fared less well in Germany. Hizb ut-Tahrir, for example, was formally banned on January 10, 2003, a decision that was affirmed at the federal level in January 2006.⁹² In August 2010, the al-Quds mosque in Hamburg—a Salafi religious center known to be a significant source of Islamist indoctrination⁹³—was belatedly shuttered.⁹⁴

The German government, for its part, has also attempted to participate in—and to influence—the dialogue over Islam taking place inside the country. In 2006, it established an official “Islam Conference,” which continues to convene several times a year. At this venue, leading Muslim congregations, along with independent activists, authors, and scholars, discuss the relationship of Muslims and German society with German politicians, headed by the Federal Minister of the Interior. This approach has garnered disapproval from critics, who say that the conference itself has been co-opted by its inclusion of Islamists and suspicious groups. These include the German Islam Council (Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or IRD), which was excluded from the Islam Conference in 2010 due to criminal investigations against some of its members over their ties to Islamism.⁹⁵ September 2016 marked the tenth anniversary of the Islam-Conference, but the institution remains highly controversial, with critics accusing it of promoting Islamists. This fragmented approach has led leading critics to contend that Germany, despite its role in international counterterrorism efforts (including coalition operations in Afghanistan), still lacks a real anti-terror strategy.⁹⁶

The German state's relationship with refugees settling in Germany (many of whom arrive from Muslim majority countries of origin) has been complicated, and not always popular. While historically always a destination country for people seeking asylum, Germany's now 1.2 million refugees⁹⁷ began arriving *en masse* in 2015, fleeing unrest in the Middle East. Chancellor Angela Merkel's permissive attitude toward migration, typified by her “*Wir schaffen das*” (“We can do it”) speeches, “drew substantial criticism from an electorate concerned by the ramifications of an open-border policy.”⁹⁸ She and her party, the Christian Democrats (CDU), would suffer in terms of public approval rating⁹⁹ and would underperform in the 2017 national and the 2018 regional elections.¹⁰⁰ In October 2018, Merkel announced she would not seek reelection to either the chancellorship or to her position as head of the CDU.¹⁰¹ However, Merkel's public approval ratings have recently increased due to management of the country's COVID-19 response; as of July 2020, 86 percent of the country is satisfied with her job as head of the country.¹⁰²

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