

American Foreign Policy Council

GERMANY

QUICK FACTS

Population: 82,282,988

Area: 357,022 sq km

Ethnic Groups: German 91.5%, Turkish 2.4%, other 6.1% (made up largely of Greek, Italian, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish)

Religions: Protestant 34%, Roman Catholic 34%, Muslim 3.7%, unaffiliated or other 28.3%

Government Type: Federal Republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$3.273 trillion

Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (Last Updated July 2010)



Germany has the highest number of Muslim citizens in Western Europe, as well as in the member states of the European Union as a whole. It is also a hotbed of Islamist activity. Most notably, the attacks of 9/11 were organized in part in Germany by the “Hamburg cell” headed by Mohammed Atta.¹ Today, Islamists from Germany, including homegrown terrorists, pose a real threat to the security of the German state—as well as to that of the United States and other countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq.

Islamism in Germany has deep roots, stretching back to a symbiosis between the German state and radical religious elements during the First World War. These ties endured during the Second

World War, fueled by the Third Reich's close ties to the Grand-Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Hussaini, and throughout the decades of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, before emerging to challenge the stability of the Federal Republic in the post-Cold War era.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

There exists considerable ideological and operational difference between lawful Islamism, which seeks the gradual imposition of *sharia* (Islamic law), and violent *jihad*, which is aimed at the overthrow of the established state. In Germany, Islamism of the lawful variant predominates, although instances of *jihadi* activity have been documented as well. As of 2009, Germany's internal security service, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (*Verfassungsschutzbericht*), estimated that some 29 Islamist organizations with a total of 36,270 members were active within the country.² These include:

Milli Görüs

With some 29,000 members, the Turkish *Milli Görüs* is by far the largest Islamist group in Germany.³ Its funding derives from donations and membership fees.⁴ Founded in the early 1970s by former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, *Milli Görüs* now runs 323 mosques and associated centers in Germany.⁵ Since January 23, 1995, its umbrella organization has been known as the Islamic Community *Milli Görüs* (IGMG).⁶

For years, the organization has spread anti-Semitic ideology 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).⁷ It also has disseminated written anti-Semitic works, such as Turkish translations of Henry Ford’s *The International Jew*.⁸ Notably, the dissemination of such literature is contrary to German law. At least some portion of the group also has endorsed and promoted *jihadist* activities abroad.⁹

Hezbollah

The Lebanese Shi’ite militia Hezbollah is also active in

Germany, where it has had a presence since the 1980s.¹⁰ While it has no official representatives, the organization is known to have some 900 members/supporters inside the country, and to actively recruit there through a network of some 30 cultural centers and mosques.¹¹ The militia likewise is known to maintain active fundraising in Germany through a wide network of charities, nonprofits and ostensibly humanitarian groups. A 2009 investigation by the European Foundation for Democracy, for example, found that the group “directly channels financial donations from Germany to the Lebanese Al-Shahid Association, a known part of Hezbollah’s fundraising network, via an organization known as the Orphans Project Lebanon based in Goettingen, Germany.”¹² The amount of money thus funneled to the organization is unknown, but experts estimate that Germany is the group’s “main fund raising center in Europe.”¹³

Hamas

Hamas is estimated to have approximately 300 members in Germany. These activists raise funds for the Palestinian terror group in collaboration with the Palestinian Return Center (PRC) in London.¹⁴ 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, because of its close ties to Hamas.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is estimated to have some 1,300 members in Germany.¹⁷ While it has no formal representation in the country, the organization is known to run Islamic centers in Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Cologne, Marburg, Braunschweig, and Munich.¹⁸

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 e.V.” (IGD), the “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 one Ibrahim el-Zayat; since 2010, Samir Fallah is its head.¹⁹ El-Zayat was general secretary of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), a Saudi organization active in the spread of Wahhabi ideology abroad.²⁰ The IGD was a founding member of the London-based “Federation of Islamic Organisations in Europe” (FIOE). According to journalist Ian Johnson, FIOE “is headquartered in a small village in northern England” and has established a series of institutions to “push the Muslim Brotherhood worldview.”²¹ The IGD tries to create a political climate positive to political Islam, and promote a more pious way of life in Germany. It also collects money for Islamist causes abroad, including raising funds for Hamas during the 2009 Gaza War.²²

Homegrown terrorism

Homegrown terrorism, including domestic groups with connections to international *jihadi* organizations, constitutes a real threat to German security. The country faces potential threats from *jihadists* now resident in Germany, as well as *jihadists* of German origin operating abroad who may eventually return to target the Federal Republic. Both groups can be defined as “third generation” *jihadists*, i.e., those not necessarily under the auspices of al-Qaeda, but who share their Islamist ideology and terrorist approach.²³ Such elements have been implicated in plots to carry out terror attacks in Germany,²⁴ as well as receiving training from *jihadi* elements abroad.²⁵ “Several dozen” German *jihadists*—including members of the IJU, the Uzbek Islamic Movement (IBU), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the German Taliban Mujahedin (“Deutsche Taliban-Mudschahidin,” or DTM)—are currently believed to be active in Pakistan’s Waziristan region.²⁶

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,²⁷ was appointed to his post by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.²⁸ The IZH, in turn, tries to spread the idea of the “Iranian Revolution” via brochures, events, prayers, rallies, and other activities, and exerts an influence over a number of Islamic organizations within Germany. These include:

- The Islamic Center Salman Farsi Maschee Langenhagen e.V. in Hannover
- The Academy Baghiatallah e.V. in Bremen
- The Iranian Islamic Cultural Community Berlin e.V. in Berlin;
- The Islamic Association Bavaria e.V. in Munich and
- The Ehli-Beyt-Alevit Religious Community Ehli Beyt Alevi Federasyonu e.V. in Frankfurt a.M.²⁹

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.³⁰

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).³¹ The Gülen movement runs high schools in Germany³² and does not publicly advocate violence. Rather, it has taken pains to distance itself from bin Laden and al-Qaeda. This stance, however, appears to stem from Gülen’s 2004 declaration that non-state actors (such as al-Qaeda) are not permitted to wage war,³³ rather than from an aversion to armed *jihad* writ large. Gülen’s Turkish branch of political Islam espouses the idea of the gradual imposition a *sharia*-based democracy.³⁴ The Gülen Movement runs at least 20-25 schools in Germany, not including some 200 groups for the coaching of pupils after school.³⁵ There are no official membership

numbers available the Gülen Movement, but the group is believed to be increasingly popular as a result of its educational activities.³⁶

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

At 4.1 million people, Germany's Muslim population is the highest³⁷ among the 27 states that make up the European Union.³⁸ Of this number, the majority (2.56 million) is from Turkey, while roughly half a million (536,000) is from the former Yugoslavia. Iran (70,000), Afghanistan (89,000), Morocco (163,000), Pakistan (67,000), Egypt (37,000), Iraq (97,000), Lebanon (127,000) and Syria (35,000) make up the other significant countries of origin.³⁹

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, such a fiction has become increasingly hard to sustain; Turkish workers, in particular, stayed in Germany, and their families followed them. Racism was and remains a widespread phenomenon in Germany, due to the specific German national concept of citizenship, which until recently was defined along blood, rather than 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 children of non-German residents citizenship by birth.⁴⁰

Since 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 which express their opposition to political Islam 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),⁴¹ have equated any meaningful criticism of Islam with anti-Semitism, often framed as “Islamophobia.”⁴² Many journalists and mainstream scholars even compare or equate Islamist preachers of hate with pro-Western scholars, writers or activists,⁴³ and reject any military response to Islamism or Islamic *jihad*.⁴⁴ Most instead portray Islam as harmless or interesting, and look uncritically upon figures like leading Sunni Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi.⁴⁵

Considerable grassroots support for Islamism and even violent jihad is visible at the grassroots level in Germany, as evidenced through sporadic rallies in German cities in support of various radical causes.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Germany has a close and complex relationship with Islamism. From the First World War through the Nazi era and the post-war period, the idea of *jihad* was intimately interwoven with the German state. The scholar Wolfgang G. Schwanitz has written:

The *jihad* was the idea of Max von Oppenheim, the German “Abu Jihad.” (...) he designed a master plan at the end of October 1914: “fomenting rebellion in the Islamic territories of our enemies.” The emperor confirmed Oppenheim’s suggestion to incite Muslims to *jihad* under the leadership of the Ottoman sultan-caliph. This was the plan: the sultan proclaims the jihad against the British, the French, and the Russians. Berlin delivers money, experts, and material.⁴⁶

Although that *jihad* did not materialize, German efforts to support Islamism re-emerged during the Third Reich. The grand *mufti* of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Hussaini, was welcomed by Adolf Hitler, financially supported by the Nazi regime, and used Germany as a

base from which to communicate anti-Jewish propaganda into the Middle East.⁴⁷ After 1945, Islam was used both by the Federal Republic of Germany and the U.S. (via the CIA) as a tool against the Soviet Union and its allies during the Cold War.⁴⁸ As part of this effort, Gerhard von Mende, a former Nazi in the “Ostministerium” (department of Eastern affairs), engaged the services of Muslims like Nurreddin Nakibhodscha Namangani, a former imam for the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS). In 1958, Namangani began a “Mosque Construction Commission” in Munich, which became the starting point for political Islam in post-war Germany (if not the whole of Europe). From the start, however, it was clear—given the ideologies and past histories of those Islamists and their German allies—that anti-Semitism and anti-Western thought would become staples of the ideology thereby promoted.

Nevertheless, both the government of the Federal Republic and the U.S. intelligence community embraced the use of Islamism as a tool against enemies (like the Soviet Union) during the decades of the Cold War. “If you want to understand the structure of political Islam, you have to look at what happened in Munich,” says historian Stefan Meining. “Munich is the origin of a network that now reaches around the world.”⁴⁹ Soon, Said Ramadan, the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, became part of that mosque project. The Muslim Brotherhood has remained a fixture, albeit an informal one, in German society since.⁵⁰

Other Islamist groups have fared less well in Germany, however. *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, for example, was formally banned on January 10, 2003, a decision that was affirmed at the federal level in January 2006.⁵¹ Hezbollah’s dedicated television channel, *al-Manar*, was proscribed in hotels and coffee shops in Germany on October 29, 2008.⁵² (However, private households in Germany can still watch it via Saudi and Egyptian satellites). More recently, in August 2010, the al-Quds mosque in Hamburg—a Salafi religious center known to be a significant source of Islamist indoctrination⁵³—was belatedly shuttered.⁵⁴

The German government, for its part, has also attempted to par-

ticipate 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 e. V.,” 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.⁵⁵

Additionally, the German government has maintained a permissive policy toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2009, Germany was Iran’s second biggest trade partner and its most important Western trade partner, racking up exports of some \$5.3 billion.⁵⁶ German politicians frequently visit Iran and support the Islamist regime in Tehran.⁵⁷ Iran still has an embassy in Germany, which proudly proclaims that Iran and Germany share a history of close relations dating back to 1941.⁵⁸ German officials likewise have failed to ban Hezbollah. Despite considerable pressure from foreign governments (such as that of Israel) and private actors, “Hezbollah remains a legal entity in Germany and its 900 members are active in promoting Iran’s revolutionary Islam,” investigative reporter Benjamin Weinthal has noted.⁵⁹

This schizophrenic 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.⁶⁰

Still, there are signs of a growing awareness of Islamic radicalism among government officials. On November 17, 2010, for example, former German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière warned publicly that Islamic *jihadists* were on their way to the country with the intent of committing a terrorist attack.⁶¹ His successor, Hans-

Peter Friedrich, has gone further, announcing in March 2011 that he intends to hold a “prevention conference” dealing with Islamism and Islamic Jihad in Berlin in 2011.⁶² This marks the first time that the German government has engaged the country’s Muslim community in a joint effort to combat Islamism. The prospects for such a union, however, are far from certain, as most of the Muslim organizations participating in the state’s official “Islam conference” have rejected the outreach.⁶³

ENDNOTES

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- [3] *Ibid.*
- [4] North Rhine Westfalia Interior Ministry, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2005 [Constitutional Protection Report 2005, of North Rhine Westfalia]*, March 20, 2006, http://www.im.nrw.de/imshop/shopdocs/verfassungsschutzbericht_2005.pdf.
- [5] German Interior Ministry, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2009*.
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[18] *Ibid.*

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[20] *Ibidem*; For possible ties of WAMY to al-Qaeda, see “Al Qaeda linked World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) Jihad through Da’wa group working with Novib/Oxfam on Somali ‘educational’ initiatives,” *Militant Islam Monitor*, October 16, 2006, <http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/2473>.

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[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibidem.*

[30] *Ibidem.*

[31] Ralph Ghadban, lecture, Aalen, Germany, May 5, 2010.

[32] Author’s correspondence with Ralph Ghadban, November 2010.

[33] Ralph Ghadban, lecture.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] Author’s correspondence with German Islamism expert Claudia Dantschke, Berlin, Germany, April 2011.

[36] Claudia Dantschke, *Muslims – Ihre Einrichtungen und Vereine im Berliner Bezirk Neukölln. Überblick über die Strukturen und ihre religiösen sowie politischen Ausrichtungen. Eine Handreichung für die Jugendarbeit* [Muslims - mechanisms and associations in the Berlin district of Neukölln. Overview of the structures and their religious as

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and German Middle Eastern Studies,” *Human Rights Service* (Norway), September 14, 2010, <http://www.rights.no/publisher/publisher.asp?id=56&tekstid=4116> . For an overview on German Islamic Studies after 9/11 see Clemens Heni, *Schadenfreude. Islamforschung und Antisemitismus in Deutschland nach 9/11* [Schadenfreude. Islamic Studies and antisemitism in Germany after 9/11] (published by The Berlin International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (BICSA), June 2011, 370 pages).

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