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The Architecture of Enablement: How Germany's Institutions Defy the ICJ and Their Own Courts

Grade 1: Essential

Germany's support of Israel has evolved from an acknowledgment of historical guilt and moral responsibility into an unofficial rule that treats unwavering support for Israel as a fixed pillar of German state identity, Staatsräson. This strategy forecloses normal political debate or criticism that would be routine in case of any other country's policies. Not only does this mute dissenting public opinion, it sharply limits any prospect of shifting the levers of change which remain firmly in the government's control.

What's needed instead are strategies that sidestep that control and enable the public to focus on convincing the next layer of responsibility: the export authority that grants the license, the insurer that backs the deal, the bank that moves the money. It is their boards and committees who must answer for what they do, not just what they say. This is the first in a series of briefings ranking countries by how deeply their institutions are implicated in Israel's war in Gaza and why the companies carrying out German policy matter just as much as the policy itself. It closes with strategies and actions concerned German citizens could take to hold them to account.

Germany sits in the framework's highest tier, "Essential," for reasons that span both the private and state levels. It is home to Allianz, the largest foreign institutional financier of Israel's wartime borrowing. It maintains significant and continuing arms cooperation with Israel. It has played a decisive role in blocking coordinated EU measures against Israel. And it is the only Western state that another country has formally accused, at the International Court of Justice, of complicity in genocide.

Why this report looks at institutions, not only governments

International courts, including the International Court of Justice, have found that Israel's conduct in the occupied Palestinian territory violates international law. That conduct is not sustained by the Israeli government's actions alone, and it is not stopped by other governments' public statements of concern either. It depends on a network of Western states and the institutions inside them including arms manufacturers, banks, insurers, professional bodies, that most citizens have no direct vote over, but often have a direct relationship with, as a saver, a pension holder, an insurance customer, or a professional. This report identifies where that relationship runs in Germany, and what a reader in that position can actually ask.

Material and financial complicity

Germany is Israel's second-largest arms supplier. Between 7 October 2023 and 13 May 2025 it issued individual export licences for military equipment worth about €485mn, covering firearms, ammunition, weapon parts and armoured-vehicle components. By May 2026, this figure had risen to €1.5bn (ECCHR). During a recent parliament inquiry, the Economy and Energy Ministry disclosed that during the second quarter of 2026, Germany granted licenses for the final export of arms to Israel worth approximately €735mn, (Bundestag). It attributes 67 percent of that value to "one major maritime project", 21 percent to German-Israeli cooperation "for the benefit of the German military," with the remainder "distributed among permits for other defense equipment, but not for weapons of war." These figures sit in direct contradiction to Germany's April 2024 statement to the ICJ, in which it claimed to have sharply curtailed exports and sent only a small share of weapons usable in Gaza (Bundestag disclosure; Just Security, 2025).

It is also worth noting that BAFA, (the Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control) classifies every licensed export as either military or dual-use before approval, but this split is not disaggregated in the report. The share of the €485mn and €735mn figures tied to purely military end-use, versus dual-use goods with civilian applications, therefore cannot be determined from the published numbers alone.

This relationship extends beyond simply one of supplier and buyer. German and Israeli defence firms also collaborate on production. Rheinmetall, Germany's largest arms maker, produces the centre fuselage of the F-35, some destined for Israel; co-develops a 155mm howitzer with Elbit; and states on its own website that it is committed to Israel's right to exist – a corporate political statement that mirrors Axel Springer's. Rheinmetall, KNDS, Diehl and Airbus all run joint ventures with Israeli defence firms, such as EuroSpike with Rafael. Finally, Germany is a major buyer of Israeli systems, from Heron drones to a roughly €2bn Spike-missile order in 2025.

Another more recent transaction – that underscores the strength of Germany's support for Israel and demonstrates Staatsräson in action – is Volkswagen's announcement that it has agreed to sell its Osnabrück plant to the State of Lower Saxony and Aurelius Capital, an investment firm headquartered in Tel Aviv, which will hold the majority stake, (CNN). The buyers plan to work with Rafael Advanced Defense Systems, the primary developer for Israel's Iron Dome Defense System, on what Volkswagen describes as "the potential manufacture of systems and components for air defense systems for Germany and Europe." The deal is still subject to final agreements, corporate approvals, and regulatory review. It is important to note here that Volkswagen had initially sought to run the Rafael partnership directly (as announced in July 2026). However that deal was blocked by the Qatar Investment Authority, which holds roughly 10 percent of Volkswagen's shares and 17 percent of its voting rights, (Bloomberg and Bild).

The oldest relationship binding these two nations together is naval. For two decades Germany has subsidised the submarines that give Israel its sea-based nuclear second-strike capability funding roughly a third of the 2005 Dolphin order and part of the €3bn Dakar contract signed in 2022. The final Dolphin II submarine was delivered in August 2026 (NTI; Algemeiner, 2026).

Diplomatically, Germany's weight is decisive rather than merely large. A full suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement would require unanimity, but even a partial suspension of trade preferences needs a qualified majority of at least 15 states representing 65 per cent of the EU's population. That threshold means no such measure can pass without Germany and Italy on board. This alignment effectively keeps the agreement in force.

The bilateral posture has hardened in step with this record. On becoming chancellor-designate in February 2025, Friedrich Merz pledged that Benjamin Netanyahu – subject since November 2024 to an International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant over the conduct in Gaza – could visit Germany without being detained, a commitment legal scholars noted would sit against Berlin's own obligations under the Rome Statute (GIGA, 2025). In December 2025, just two weeks after his government lifted the three-month suspension of arms-export approvals it had imposed in August, Merz made his first visit as chancellor to meet Netanyahu in Jerusalem. At Yad Vashem he reaffirmed Germany's commitment to Israel's security as an unalterable core of the relationship, and restated that Berlin would recognise a Palestinian state only at the end of a negotiated process, not its beginning.

This approach now carries a measurable cost. On June 3 2026 for the first time, Germany failed to win a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council; with 104 votes against Portugal's 134 and Austria's 131, it fell 23 votes short of the required two-thirds majority. Foreign minister Johann Wadephul acknowledged that Germany's support for Israel, alongside its stance on Ukraine and its late entry into the race, may have cost it votes (Al Jazeera; Japan Times, June 2026).

Then there is the financial relationship between the two countries which may be the most consequential. Through PIMCO, its California based asset management unit, Allianz, a German insurance giant holds the largest known non-Israeli stake in Israel's wartime sovereign debt – bonds Israel has issued in record volumes to help pay for the war.

Research by the Amsterdam firm Profundo has tracked this holding's growth: from about $32m in November 2024 to roughly $2.6bn by September 2025 (Follow the Money and Middle East Eye). That is 51.8 percent of all tracked non-Israeli holdings – more than every other institution in the world combined among tracked/disclosed holdings. Profundo says a rise this large, concentrated in one group, is unmatched in its data.

Millions of Europeans trust their savings and insurance with Allianz which makes the size of this investment even more significant especially as it wasn't passive. If PIMCO simply tracked a market index, the largest holders would be the world's big index funds: BlackRock and Vanguard. They are not. PIMCO's position dwarfs both. PIMCO is choosing to keep buying Israeli bonds, at elevated wartime interest rates, while Israel is facing a genocide case at the ICJ and continues to hold them despite the ICJ's ruling. Other investors such as the UK pension fund, Border to Coast, have chosen to divest holdings purchased through PIMCO within months of the purchase. While the decision to maintain PIMCO's position in the bonds was taken in California, accountability sits in Germany with the board of the parent company Allianz. It is unclear if it has reviewed the holdings.

Allianz is not Germany's only financial link to the war in Gaza. Deutsche Bank was also one of the seven banks worldwide that underwrote those war bonds and brought them to market. Both are named in a July 2025 UN report by Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese, titled From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide which compares their role to corporate complicity in apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany and argues that corporate and financial firms aren't bystanders to the war in Gaza – they are part of the machinery that sustains and profits from it.

Two important caveats to consider here. First, Allianz and Deutsche Bank are visible only because European disclosure rules require it. Much of the world's holdings of Israeli debt sit in places built for secrecy – trusts, nominee structures and foundations in the UK, Switzerland and the Channel Islands, where the beneficial owner can't be identified. So while Allianz and Deutsche Bank are the largest identifiable or known holders they may not necessarily be the largest while the tracked total is also a small fraction of the debt Israel has actually issued. That opacity is part of the problem: without fiduciary transparency real accountability simply is not possible.

Choosing to enable Israel's war in Gaza both materially and financially has resulted in Germany itself facing accusations of genocide at the World Court. In March 2024, Nicaragua brought the first interstate case charging a a Western state with complicity in genocide by asking the ICJ to order Germany to stop arms exports to Israel and restore funding to UNRWA, the UN's Palestinian relief agency arguing that both the export of arms and the lack of funding is enabling genocide (ASIL). The Court declined provisional measures in April 2024, but the case is pending. Germany did not file preliminary objections until October 2025 and even then it has never argued that Israel complied with the law (ICJ, Nicaragua v Germany). Germany's stake in the outcome is, as we have already seen, not only legal. Genocide scholar Omer Bartov argues Germany has strong political and economic reasons for taking the question off the table entirely. This, he says, is merely one instance of a broader pattern in which states that benefit from looking away have a material reason not to look (New York Times, July 2026).

Domestic courts have also so far declined to intervene. Challenges brought from 2024 by Palestinians from Gaza, supported by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights and Palestinian groups including Al-Haq, have been rejected at every stage.

Some were rejected because the licences had been granted before the case could be heard, others on grounds of confidentiality. In November 2025 the Berlin Administrative Court dismissed the central action seeking to establish whether past shipments had been lawful, holding that there was no risk of repetition. Days later the government announced the resumption of exports (ECCHR, 2025). The government has also managed its own exposure directly: after the sharp fall in licences through 2024 it obtained a written assurance from Israel that German weapons would not be used to commit genocide, a step that, as the ECCHR and Middle East Eye observed, indicates the government was aware of the risk it was insuring against even as it continued to authorise exports and to reaffirm its support for Israel (Middle East Eye, 2025).

Germany's pro-Israel lobby

In Germany, support for Israel is as sophisticated as it is institutionalized. Lobbies include a communal representative body that is itself an active political voice, a set of dedicated advocacy groups that translate Israel-aligned arguments into policy, and a media arm that amplifies them.

- **Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden).** The elected umbrella body to which the large majority of affiliated Jewish communities belong, and the government's main communal interlocutor. It is an active representative body and its leadership takes strong public positions. It accused Die Linke of a radical, Israel-hating core after the party adopted an alternative antisemitism definition in 2025, and it campaigned actively for adoption of the IHRA definition. It may be considered the dominant communal voice rather than the only one; an explicitly left and younger current of German-Jewish opinion exists largely outside its structures, and is discussed under the solidarity landscape below.
- **Deutsch-Israelische Gesellschaft (DIG).** A large friendship organisation with vice-presidents drawn from across the main parties, which has co-produced policy material with NGO Monitor and IMPACT-SE calling for an overhaul of German humanitarian policy toward Palestinians.
- **ELNET (European Leadership Network).** A well-resourced group that cultivates European lawmakers through funded delegations to Israel; a former parliamentary adviser told Haaretz that no other group flies out decision-makers as ELNET does, and that participating MPs have no say in the programme.
- **NAFFO (Nahost Friedensforum).** A Berlin advocacy organisation focused on parliament and ministries that made defunding UNRWA a central campaign after October 2023.
- **NGO Monitor and MFFB / MENA Watch.** An Israel-based research operation and its Berlin and Vienna amplifiers, which attack UN agencies and frame scrutiny of Israel's conduct as propaganda. NGO Monitor's debunked 2023 claim that UNRWA schools indoctrinate children was translated by MFFB and cited in a CDU or CSU motion to defund the agency.
- **Axel Springer media (BILD, WELT).** Germany's largest newspaper publisher, whose corporate principles, the Essentials, contractually bind editorial staff to support Israel's right to exist; journalists who have questioned the line have been dismissed.

Liberal Zionism: Spur and shield in Germany

Germany's version of Liberal Zionism is very different from that of its British or Canadian counterparts: there is no embedded liberal-Zionist Jewish establishment group of the kind J Street, Yachad or JSpace Canada represent. That absence is a consequence of German demographics not politics: since the Holocaust destroyed German Jewry, the community that exists today is smaller with a different set of constituents.

As mentioned earlier, in Germany, being pro-Israel isn't just a political position; Staatsräson, it's part of the country's duty after the Holocaust. This belief system does two things at once. First, it keeps support for Israel active and visible. Institutions like political parties, universities, and media outlets are pushed to keep proving their loyalty – for example, in 2019 the German parliament passed a resolution declaring the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement antisemitic.

Because this support is framed as a moral duty rather than raw politics, it draws in liberal-minded people who might otherwise be uneasy about backing a foreign government so strongly.

Second, this same belief system protects Israel from serious criticism. Instead of confronting harder questions about occupation, or Palestinian rights, public debate gets steered toward softer concerns, like worries about the health of Israeli democracy or support for a future two-state solution. That keeps the conversation respectable without ever threatening the things that actually matter materially, like arms deals or funding. And because this position comes from self-described progressives rather than the far right, it looks moderate and reasonable by comparison. That makes it easier to paint anyone further to the left, be they academics, artists, or critics as extreme, rather than simply as people who disagree. Simply put, this approach keeps support for Israel loud and constant, while making sure criticism never has to be taken too seriously.

This same pattern also shows up inside the German government's own establishment, but here it takes three different forms, and they shouldn't be treated as the same thing.

The most direct challenge is a joint one. Four former German ambassadors wrote a guest essay in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany's leading establishment conservative newspaper, titled "Germany must no longer be silent." In it, they call on the government to withdraw its "unconditional support" for Israel altogether over how the war has been conducted, rather than simply adjusting that support at the edges. They point to Staatsräson, and argue that this same moral responsibility now demands distance, not unconditional backing. The Jewish community newspaper Jüdische Allgemeine published a sharp rebuttal, calling the ambassadors' argument "strangely one-sided." That response shows this is a live disagreement inside the German establishment, not a settled one. It's also worth noting that no further signatories have joined since the essay was published, so far, this remains the view of four individuals, not a growing movement.

A second, much narrower case comes from Steffen Seibert, and it shouldn't be lumped in with the ambassadors' letter. Seibert spent a decade as Angela Merkel's government spokesperson, then served as Germany's ambassador to Israel from 2022 to 2026. He was an unusually visible ambassador: he spoke Hebrew, attended rallies for the hostages, and described himself as someone who loves the country. Shortly after his term ended, in August 2026, he told the newspaper Die Zeit that Israel's settlement policy in the West Bank amounts to displacement through psychological and physical violence. He also drew a specific line: Merkel's famous formula, that Israel's security is part of Germany's ‘reason of state’, should apply only to Israel within its internationally recognized borders, not to the settlements. He called on Berlin to consider targeted measures over the settlements, though he didn't say what those measures should look like. Unlike the ambassadors, he isn't calling for Germany to withdraw its underlying commitment to Israel, only to carve the settlements out of it. Even while still serving as ambassador, he was outspoken enough about settler violence that Israel's foreign minister publicly accused him of being "obsessed" with settlers.

The third strand is different again: it's a piece of analysis, not a political intervention. A paper called "Beyond Staatsräson" makes the case that Germany's historic responsibility toward Israel and its obligations under international law aren't actually in conflict, that the two can be reconciled rather than forcing a choice between them. What makes this notable isn't just the argument itself, but who is making it: not an activist group or advocacy coalition, but foreign-policy analysts drawn from across the political spectrum. That’s important because it suggests the case for a different German policy, grounded in law and strategy rather than protest, is moving from the margins of the foreign-policy world toward its center.

So far, none of these three critics has succeeded in shifting government policy. This is most likely a question not of sincerity but of timing and especially power. The most direct criticism came from outside government, or from analysts rather than those who actually make decisions. To put it bluntly, not from people in power.

This reflects a broader pattern: criticism that is sharp enough to unsettle the entrenched consensus is instead absorbed and repurposed as proof the system can correct itself. Real criticism carries real pressure – it can shift debate, embarrass officials, force small concessions. The government lets it circulate without giving in to the pressure and gains a bigger prize: the appearance of openness. It is a calculated trade, and one the government judges is worth making.

Mechanisms

These groups don't generally work through open lobbying. Instead, they rely on what might be called a narrative cascade. Standardized claims, especially those targeting UNRWA, are packaged to look like research, translated and passed to members of parliament, who raise them through parliamentary questions and motions. The effect is to create the appearance of a broad consensus, (Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, the foundation affiliated with the Left party, 2026).

The media, both public and private, help carry this narrative. Deutsche Welle, Germany's state-funded international broadcaster, barred staff from using the word "Palestine" (Al Jazeera, 2024). It also reportedly circulated an internal document with scripted rebuttals for guests who raised Israeli conduct. This account came from thirteen current staff members and one former correspondent. Deutsche Welle disputed some details but confirmed the substance of its style guidance.

A second mechanism is the IHRA working definition of antisemitism which has been adopted by the German government and is used to discipline academics, journalists, and cultural institutions that criticize Israeli policy. This gets reinforced by monitoring groups like RIAS, the federal network of antisemitism-reporting centers even though its methodology has been directly challenged by Diaspora Alliance, a Germany-based watchdog group. Its own analysis found that Jews were involved in roughly a quarter of Germany's 2023 antisemitism-related cancellations of artists, performances, and exhibitions, despite making up under 1 percent of the population. In the watchdog's reading, this suggests that criticism of Israeli policy is itself being treated as the offense.

The philosopher Susan Neiman, an American-Jewish scholar and outgoing Director of the Einstein Forum calls this philosemitic McCarthyism. It describes non-Jewish Germans publicly accusing Jewish writers and artists of antisemitism. In interviews, Neiman has said she has come to be treated as the "wrong kind of Jew" because of her own criticism of the occupation and the war.
The scholar Michael Rothberg points to a related mechanism: how the antisemitism accusation itself gets distributed. He draws on the historian Esra Özyürek's account of concern about antisemitism being, in effect, subcontracted. Rather than staying focused on German society's own center and far right, that concern gets redirected onto Muslims and migrants. Rothberg argues that labeling Neukölln a hub of "Muslim antisemitism" displaces scrutiny that could otherwise fall closer to home.

This consensus also has an institutional and religious dimension. The Evangelical Church in Germany, the country's largest Protestant body, has affirmed the permanent election of Israel and God's covenant with the Jewish people since the Berlin-Weissensee synod of 1950. This theology of reconciliation for the Holocaust produces strong institutional solidarity with Israel, along with a marked reluctance to criticize it, including a standing objection to boycotts grounded in the Nazi genocide.

Two episodes in 2025 show where the church draws its line. First, the EKD rejected the World Council of Churches' use of the word "apartheid" to describe the situation. Even the WCC's own moderator, who had previously chaired the EKD, admitted the fellowship was split on the term. Second, after the Palestinian Lutheran bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar spoke of "two years of genocide" in Gaza during a Reformation Day sermon in Jerusalem, the church distanced itself, calling the word an obstacle to reconciliation. A vice-president of the Central Council of Jews walked out in response.

Two things guard against oversimplifying this picture. First, the EKD explicitly rejects the Hagee-style Christian Zionism found in the American religious right, so any comparison to that movement would be wrong. Second, the church is internally divided: clergy and the peace-ethics network Forum Friedensethik have publicly defended Bishop Azar and criticized the church leadership. The point here is a documented institutional stance, not a hidden motive: Germany's largest Protestant church polices the same red lines this section describes, "apartheid" and "genocide" (EKD synod declarations; epd, 2025).

The legal architecture is hardening around this consensus rather than softening. Since June 2025, applicants for German citizenship in the state of Brandenburg must affirm Israel's right to exist as part of the naturalization test, alongside new questions on antisemitism and Jewish life in Germany. At the federal level, a bill originating in Hesse and backed by the Bundesrat in July 2026 would criminalize public denial of Israel's right to exist, punishable by up to five years in prison. This would extend the same provision that already covers Holocaust denial. The bill is still before the Bundestag. As drafted, it would apply only where a statement could reasonably encourage antisemitic violence, exempting art, academic work, and criticism of Israeli government policy itself. Even with that narrowing, rights groups warn that the practical effect will fall on exactly the kind of speech this section documents.

Public opinion

The elite doctrine is now sharply detached from the German public. A YouGov poll in September 2025 found 62 percent of German voters believe Israel's actions in Gaza constitute genocide, a view that cut across party lines, held by 60 percent of Chancellor Merz's own CDU/CSU voters and 71 percent of coalition partner SPD voters, while a parallel ZDF poll found 76 percent considered the military campaign unjustified.
Academic polling from the GIGA Institute corroborates this independently: 65 percent believe the Israeli army is committing war crimes, 59 percent call it genocide, and only 10 percent fully endorse the Staatsräson doctrine, though a plurality, 47 percent still see value in the government maintaining close contact with Israel, a sign the public's criticism targets policy rather than the relationship itself.
Favourable views of Israel have fallen to just 19 percent and support for recognising a Palestinian state has climbed to 44 percent despite the government's continued opposition.

The consent gap

The consent gap: what Germans back, and what the government did

What Germans back	What the government did
73% want tighter arms-export controls, including 30% for a total ban	Suspended exports usable in Gaza (August 2025)
74% reject standing unconditionally with Israel	Lifted the suspension (November 2025)
55% say arms exports should have been halted	Kept case-by-case licensing intact
ARD Deutschlandtrend; GIGA, 2025	*The lever it controls, left in place*

Popular opinion has pushed German politicians to speak more honestly about Israel's conduct. That's an important first step. But saying the hard thing isn't the same as doing the hard thing yet it's precisely at the point where words should turn into action, that the government’s determination seems to run out.

The polling bears this out. Alongside the genocide and war-crimes figures cited above, an ARD Deutschlandtrend poll from June 2025 found that 73 percent of Germans wanted tighter controls on arms exports to Israel, including 30 percent who backed a total ban outright, and that 74 percent rejected the idea that Germany owes Israel unconditional support. A GIGA survey found that 55 percent believed the government should have halted arms exports altogether. The public has clearly made up its mind.

The government has yet to follow through in any consequential manner. Under sustained pressure, it suspended exports that could be used in Gaza in August 2025 which was a real and significant step, however overdue. Then, in November 2025, it quietly lifted that suspension, citing the ceasefire, and slid back into the same case-by-case licensing that had already allowed €485mn in transfers to go through. The government's seemingly decisive action turned out to be nothing but an illusion.

German solidarity initiatives

Palestine solidarity in Germany is a large, decentralized grassroots movement and the repression it faces is documented and systematic, not incidental.

The European Legal Support Center (ELSC) and Forensic Architecture, in a joint project called the Index of Repression, recorded 766 separate incidents between 2019 and April 2025. These included arrests, event and venue bans, surveillance, and professional or financial sanctions. Police, state institutions, and employers carried these out against activists, journalists, academics, artists, and NGOs. In the two years after October 2023, police are estimated to have opened around 10,000 criminal investigations tied to Palestine solidarity.

The state has gone beyond policing individuals. It has banned organizations outright. The group Samidoun was banned alongside Hamas in late 2023. Palästina Solidarität Duisburg followed roughly two years later. Further bans are reportedly being prepared, including one against the BDS movement itself.

Universities have been a particular front. In 2023 and 2024, police cleared student encampments at the Free University and Humboldt University in Berlin within hours, deploying hundreds of officers and police dogs against a Palestine solidarity occupation while a comparable climate-related occupation the year before had been tolerated. Four Free University protesters were expelled from the country. A German legal aid organization estimates several thousand people nationally are currently at risk of deportation over Palestine-related activism. Even the UN Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, had a Berlin university lecture cancelled under political pressure in February 2025, though the same university invited her back later that year.

The enforcement isn't confined to activists. In October 2024, Aydan Özoğuz, then a Vice President of the Bundestag, shared a post on her Instagram story from the group Jewish Voice for Peace. The post showed burning tents above the caption "This is Zionism." She deleted it within hours and apologized repeatedly but the backlash was intense: the CDU/CSU and FDP demanded her resignation, the Central Council of Jews called it a "derailment," Israel's ambassador said she was "pouring oil on the fire," and the Bundestag President, her own party colleague, rebuked her publicly. The chamber's Council of Elders even met to consider consequences. No formal sanction followed, and that's the point: the cost fell on one of the most senior figures in German politics for sharing, not writing, a single post. That cost was social and reputational, not legal (ZDF; taz, October 2024).

German-Jewish opinion isn't the single voice its communal leadership likes to project. An explicitly left-leaning and younger Jewish current exists largely outside the structures of the Zentralrat (the Central Council of Jews in Germany). It's most visible in Jüdische Stimme für gerechten Frieden in Nahost, the Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East, which supports Palestinian rights and is active in solidarity work across the country.

This group has itself faced the same kind of financial and venue pressure described above. In 2025, the Zentralrat leadership accused the Left party of harboring an "Israel-hating" core after it adopted an alternative antisemitism definition. The philosopher Susan Neiman, one of that definition's authors, publicly defended the choice as reasonable rather than antisemitic. What the enforcement often obscures is that some of the sharpest German criticism of Israeli conduct comes from Jewish Germans themselves.

This pattern has drawn formal criticism from international human-rights bodies, not just campaigners, and the criticism has continued rather than eased. In June 2025, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights wrote to the German interior minister. In October 2025, a group of UN Special Rapporteurs, including those focused on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, said they were alarmed by a persistent pattern of police violence and the suppression of Palestine solidarity activism and confirmed they had been in direct contact with the German government about it.

In February 2026, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan, concluded the first-ever official visit to Germany under that mandate. She found that German authorities at the local and state level tended to conflate criticism of Israeli government policy, a legitimate exercise of free expression, with antisemitism itself. None of these interventions changed German practice. The ELSC's own review of the response, titled "The Limits of Human Rights Credibility," found that Germany disregarded the recommendations made after both the June and October interventions. By the UN experts' own account, the restrictions they catalogued in October represented an escalation from where things stood when the Council of Europe first wrote in June (ELSC and Forensic Architecture; OHCHR; Middle East Monitor; Al Jazeera, 2025 to 2026).

The proportionate response from German civil society has been weak. A reader might assume from polling alone that the opinion of German civil society matches the scale of what's happening. It doesn't. Consider the European Citizens' Initiative calling for the EU-Israel Association Agreement to be suspended. The campaign closed in July 2026 with more than a million signatures, and ten member states met their national thresholds. Germany, the EU's most populous state and host to some of the continent's largest demonstrations, ranked just seventeenth of twenty-seven countries by population share, well behind Ireland, Finland, and Denmark, and behind Italy by a wide margin despite Italy's similarly accommodating government. An earlier analysis by Al Jazeera found Germany at just 17 percent of its national threshold one month into the campaign. Sympathy expressed to pollsters hasn't yet translated into comparable collective action which is precisely why the institutional levers described elsewhere in this note matter more than public opinion alone.

The solidarity movement's scale is easy to miss, mainly because it's unfunded. None of it commands the budgets of groups like DIG, ELNET, or NAFFO. Its strength lies in numbers, not money.

Most German cities have several Palestine solidarity groups, and mass demonstrations have continued for two years. KoPI, a national network of German organizations for Palestine, links many of these groups together, alongside Palestinian-led organizations such as Palästina Spricht and various Palestinian community associations.

Deutsch-Palästinensische Gesellschaft (DPG). Founded in 1986, a registered non-profit with ~400 members including Bundestag MPs and academics, organised through 16 regional groups. Runs an annual Palestine conference with the Evangelical Academy in Hofgeismar, publishes the Palästina-Journal, and briefs MPs directly. Its work centres on church-linked convening and long-standing bilateral ties between German and Palestinian institutions.

A layer of **international NGOs** also campaigns directly on the German government. These include the Berlin-based ECCHR, which is litigating to halt German arms exports on behalf of Gaza plaintiffs, and Amnesty International, which called the November 2025 resumption of those transfers "reckless and unlawful." Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, medico international, and Avaaz are also involved, working through legal action, reporting, and mass petitions.

Finally, there's **Diaspora Alliance**, an international watchdog focused on antisemitism and its misuse, which runs a Germany-focused program from Berlin. It documents the crackdown described above and has helped incubate smaller Jewish initiatives, including a project called Israelis for Peace, though independent detail on that project's own activities remains limited.

Enabling Action

Staatsräson, Germany's foreign-policy doctrine that treats support for Israel as a core part of national identity, cannot be changed through argument alone. It did not originate from a policy debate, and it will not end from one. Evidence, argument, and campaigning are unlikely to retire it, because it was never held for those kinds of reasons in the first place. For that reason, the doctrine itself is not a realistic target for those trying to shift German policy.

What can realistically be moved is the machinery built around the doctrine, the institutions, funding relationships, and legal structures that carry it out day to day. Of the available points of entry, financial pressure appears to be the most workable.

Financial and institutional pressure carries unusual weight in Germany because the usual political and civic channels are largely closed. Several factors point to this:

- The major parties have converged on a single position regarding Israel.
- The Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland (Central Council of Jews), the body most often treated as representing German-Jewish opinion, has in practice acted more like an advocate for a particular position than a neutral representative.
- The broader public, while persuadable in principle according to polling, has shown itself reluctant to take action that feels political or personally risky.
- International criticism has largely been set aside by the state.

Where argument and protest have not changed policy, a named institution with a fiduciary duty, such as a pension fund or asset manager, can be held accountable in a way that a government ministry defending a matter of national identity cannot.

There is a hierarchy among the pressure points available in Germany, and people working on this issue professionally are likely already engaged on more than one of them at once. Financial pressure should be treated as the top priority. This is not because the existing campaign against the submarine deal [see section on Naval Relationship under Material and Financial Complicity] is unimportant; it is important and should continue. Rather, financial pressure – especially when it lays bare how a decision made in a Berlin boardroom can end up as a missile hitting a tent full of families in Gaza – has a wider reach than that campaign does.

- **Allianz and the wider financial sector, the fiduciary lever**. Allianz's Israeli bond holdings are forward-looking, a live position the group can stop rolling over or sell; carry no jobs argument, being an investment decision by an insurer and asset manager; and sit with a named, German-listed entity that owes a fiduciary duty to the policyholders and pension clients whose money it is. The same logic reaches further: to Deutsche Bank as a war-bond underwriter, to the pension funds and banks holding the defence primes, and to thyssenkrupp Marine Systems, the state-subsidised contractor behind the submarine deal, where decades of campaigning have kept the issue alive without yet reaching the investors who could end it. Luxembourg's regulator has declined to renew the prospectus that lets Israel sell these bonds across the EU when it lapses on 31 August 2026; no successor state has been named, campaigners are explicitly pressing for none to step in, and hosting the programme is now a contested, live decision rather than a routine one, which raises the stakes on Allianz's own position regardless of where it lands. The Norwegian sovereign wealth fund's own exclusions, discussed elsewhere in this project's framework, are the working precedent that this kind of divestment is a governance decision a fund can defend, not a political one it must avoid.
- **Export licensing, the regulatory and legal lever**. Germany's arms licences run through one authority, the Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA), and the ECCHR is already litigating to halt them, arguing breaches of Article 6 of the Arms Trade Treaty and Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions. The Beyond Staatsräson paper described above supplies the mainstream analytical case for tighter licensing, evidence this is not a fringe legal argument.
- **Supply chain due diligence, a second regulatory lever**. Since 2023 Germany's Supply Chain Due Diligence Act has required large companies headquartered or with a branch in Germany, currently those with 1,000 or more employees, to identify and address human-rights risk across their own operations and their suppliers, with a mandatory complaints channel and penalties of up to 2 percent of turnover, administered by the same BAFA that oversees arms licensing. No complaint tying it to Israel-related supply chains has yet been tested publicly, which makes it an available lever rather than a proven one, but it reaches companies, retailers, technology and agricultural firms among them, that export licensing never touches.
- **Professional bodies, the ethical lever**. Doctors, engineers and other regulated professionals answer to associations with ethics codes, which can supply a basis for individual and institutional refusal to take part in projects that facilitate unlawful acts, independent of any political lobby. There is already a template to press German medical bodies on: the British Medical Association suspended ties with the Israeli Medical Association in 2025 over its failure to condemn attacks on Gaza's health system, following the earlier lead of the South African Medical Association, and the question of whether the IMA should remain a full member is now heading to the World Medical Association's General Assembly in October 2026. German medical bodies can be asked directly where they stand before that vote, not only what they believe.

Key resources

The legal case

- **ICJ, Nicaragua v Germany**, the pending interstate case charging Germany with complicity in genocide through arms transfers and UNRWA defunding. https://www.icj-cij.org/case/193
- **ECCHR**, the litigation to halt German arms licences on behalf of Gaza plaintiffs. https://www.ecchr.eu/en/case/no-german-weapons-to-israel/
- **Just Security**, the analysis of the gap between Germany's €485m of arms licences and what it told the ICJ. https://www.justsecurity.org/114479/german-arms-exports-israel-icj/

The lobby and its methods

- **Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung**, the foundation affiliated with the Left party, on how the network Israel built to delegitimise UNRWA works in Germany. https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Studien/Studien_7-26_UNRWA_engl_web.pdf
- **Goldmann, Fabian. Staatsräsonfunk: Deutsche Medien und der Genozid in Gaza. Berlin: Manifest Verlag, 2026**. It is a year-long empirical coding of thousands of items from Tagesschau, Spiegel, BILD and taz since October 2023. https://manifest-buecher.de/produkt/staatsraesonfunk/
- **Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)**, synod declarations affirming the permanent election of Israel and the covenant valid without qualification, the doctrinal ground of the church's solidarity with Israel. https://www.shirhever.com/
- **Diaspora Alliance**, the Germany-focused tracking of antisemitism-definition disputes and their use against Jewish and Palestinian critics of Israeli policy. https://diasporaalliance.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/RIAS_German-final.pdf
- **Loud Silence** das laute schweigen (German Film - with subtitles)

The money and the material

- **Bundestag**, Arms exports to Israel in the second quarter of 2026. https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/kurzmeldungen-1210752
- **ECCHR Report**, Arming International Crimes: Germany's continuing exports to Israel, 2023-2026. https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/Publikationen/ECCHR_Report_Arming_International_Crimes_EN.pdf
- **Profundo, via BankTrack and PAX**, the research quantifying Allianz's holdings of Israeli sovereign debt and naming the seven war-bond underwriters, Deutsche Bank among them. https://www.banktrack.org/campaign/banks_and_conflict_zones
- **Francesca Albanese, From Economy of Occupation to Economy of Genocide (A/HRC/59/23)**, the UN report naming Allianz and Deutsche Bank among the corporate and financial actors sustaining and profiting from the war. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5923-economy-occupation-economy-genocide-report-special-rapporteur
- **Middle East Monitor**: arms exports to Israel: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20260902-germany-approves-nearly-930m-in-arms-exports-to-israel-amid-gaza-genocide/
- **CNN**: Israel announces deal with Volkwagen: https://edition.cnn.com/2026/09/07/business/volkswagen-car-plant-defense-production-intl
- **Bloomberg**: VW faces pushback from QIA: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-07-10/qatar-blocks-defense-joint-venture-between-vw-and-israeli-firm
- **Electric Vehicles**: VW agrees to sell Osnabruck factory to the state of Saxony: https://eletric-vehicles.com/vw-group/vw-to-sell-osnabruck-plant-to-israeli-investor-for-air-defence-production/
- **ASIL**: ICJ's provisional measures approach in Nicaragua v Germany: https://asil.org/insights/volume-28-issue-9/
- **Law for Palestine:** Nicaragua v Germany before the ICJ. https://law4palestine.org/nicaragua-v-germany-before-the-icj-key-questions-and-answers-on-the-case-concerning-germanys-support-for-israel/

Public opinion

- **YouGov, with ZDF (September 2025)**, the genocide-belief and cross-party polling that broke the Staatsraeson consensus into public view. https://yougov.com/de-de/artikel/53032-44-prozent-der-deutschen-wahlberechtigen-sprechen-sich-fur-die-anerkennung-palastinas-als-eigenstandiger-staat-aus
- **GIGA Institute**, the independent academic survey corroborating war-crimes and genocide belief, and the collapse in Staatsraeson support. https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/gaza-israel-and-german-foreign-policy-view-on-public-opinion

Critical and dissenting voices

- **Omer Bartov**, I'm a Scholar of Genocide. We're Entering a Terrifying New Era., naming Germany's own stake in the Nicaragua case going away. https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/21/opinion/israel-gaza-palestinians-genocide.html
- **Four former German ambassadors, in Die Zeit**, Former diplomats call for a tougher stance towards Israel. https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2025-07/nahostpolitik-botschafterinnen-aufruf-israel-gaza-voelkerrecht
- **Michael Rothberg, interviewed by medico international**, the scholar's account of Holocaust memory, comparison and the displacement of antisemitism concern onto Muslims and migrants. https://www.medico.de/en/we-need-an-ethics-of-comparison-19392
- **Beyond Staatsraeson**, the cross-ideological policy paper arguing Germany's historic responsibility and its legal obligations can be reconciled. https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/beyond-staatsraison/
- **Juedische Stimme**, the suppressed German-Jewish voice at the anti-Zionist end of the spectrum. https://www.juedische-stimme.de/
- **Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff**, a former EU Representative to the West Bank and Gaza (and UNRWA), on how Germany has betrayed its post-war moral and legal foundations by shielding Israel. https://euobserver.com/230839/germany-has-lost-its-moral-compass-as-it-shields-israel-from-sanctions-and-legal-scrutiny/
- **Marwecki, Daniel. Germany and Israel: Whitewashing and Statebuilding**. London: Hurst, 2020 (paperback 2025); expanded German edition Absolution? Israel und die deutsche Staatsräson, Wallstein, 2024. Archival work arguing German support began as instrumental statecraft, often with cynical or partly antisemitic motives, and that Germany was Israel's decisive early military patron before the US.

International human rights bodies

- **Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights**, the June 2025 letter calling for protection of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Germany. https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/germany-commissioner-calls-for-protection-of-freedom-of-expression-and-peaceful-assembly
- **Six UN Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts, OHCHR (16 October 2025)**, the joint statement urging Germany to halt criminalisation and police violence against Palestinian solidarity activism. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-experts-urge-germany-halt-criminalisation-and-police-violence-against
- **Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, OHCHR (6 February 2026)**, the findings of the first official country visit to Germany by this mandate. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/02/germany-un-expert-warns-space-freedom-expression-shrinking-amidst-growing

Annex: Our Method

The full methodology is published as a standing page on the Bystanders No More website (URL to be confirmed); this annex is a short summary.

Bystanders No More publishes country-by-country reports on how Western and allied states, and the institutions within them, materially, financially and diplomatically enable Israeli conduct that international courts have found unlawful. The legal standard is the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024 and its Order on Provisional Measures of 26 January 2024; where a report calls a state or an institution complicit, it uses the word in the ICJ's own sense of third-state responsibility, not a looser or more political one.

Every claim is sourced to a primary or credible original, court filings and rulings, UN reports and Special Rapporteur findings, financial disclosures and independently checked journalism, and findings from bodies such as the ICJ, UN Special Rapporteurs, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are treated as an established baseline rather than held to a higher bar. Anything we cannot verify is not published, or is marked unconfirmed. AI tools help gather and organise material but are never a source in themselves, and every report is checked against original documents and reviewed by people with direct knowledge of the country. Each report grades a country's role as Essential, Significant or Standard, by how material and difficult to replace its contribution is, and follows a common structure so countries can be compared, closing with the specific institutions a reader has a standing relationship with as a citizen, saver or professional. This is a living project; reports are updated as facts change, or as we find we were wrong about something. We would rather be corrected than be comfortable. If you believe something in a report is inaccurate, tell us: https://bystandersnomore.org/contact-us/ We regret that as a small all volunteer group we are unable to engage in dialogue, but we will read all serious feedback carefully.