

Annual

Antisemitic incidents in Germany 2020



Federal Association RIAS e.V.
Federal Association of Departments of
Research and Information on Antisemitism

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Antisemitic incidents in Germany 2020

In 2020, the Federal Association of Departments for Research and Information on Antisemitism (Federal Association RIAS) and regional reporting offices from four federal states, organized in the association, documented a total of 1,909 antisemitic incidents.

Broken down by incident type, these included: 1 case of extreme violence, 39 assaults, 167 cases of damage or desecration of property, 96 threats, 1,449 cases of abusive behavior (including 340 assemblies), and 157 antisemitic mass mailings. Of these, 239 incidents were documented in Bavaria, 1,004 in Berlin, 141 in Brandenburg, and 53 in Schleswig-Holstein. The remaining 472 antisemitic incidents were recorded by the Federal Association RIAS in the other twelve German states. These included the one case of extreme violence, as well as 15 assaults, 92 cases of damage or desecration of property, 16 threats, 347 cases of abusive behavior, and 1 mass mailing.

The case of extreme violence occurred on October 4 near the synagogue in Hamburg-Eimsbüttel. Wielding a spade, a man attacked a 26-year-old Jewish student who was on his way to the Sukkot celebration in the synagogue. In 2019, the Federal Association RIAS had documented 3 cases of extreme violence, including a far-right terrorist attack on the synagogue in Halle (Saale) and an arson attack on the home of a Jewish couple in a small town near Hanover.

With a minor exception, the regional reporting offices documented fewer assaults and threats in 2020 than in the year before. In Bavaria and Berlin, the number of assaults decreased significantly (from 10 to 1 in Bavaria, from 33 to

17 in Berlin). In Brandenburg, it remained constant (6 assaults each), but the number of threats reported decreased (18 instead of 30). LIDA-SH documented no assaults and only 1 threat in 2020 (as compared to 1 assault and 3 threats in 2019).

The number of documented cases of abusive behavior, on the other hand, was much higher in all four states in 2020 than in 2019. In Bavaria, the increase was as high as 51.6% (188 instead of 124 incidents), while in Brandenburg and Berlin it amounted to 25.9% (102 instead of 81) and 17.9% (770 instead of 653) respectively. An increase in antisemitic incidents at gatherings was particularly apparent. In the four federal states, 181 incidents at gatherings accounted for 16.4% of all cases of abusive behavior in 2020 – in 2019, it had only made up 8.3% (74 incidents). The increase was most pronounced in Bavaria. Here, the number of antisemitic incidents at gatherings increased sevenfold (from 14 to 98).

In Bavaria and Berlin, the reporting offices documented a higher total of antisemitic incidents in 2020 than in 2019 (increases of 29.9% and 13.3%, respectively). Arithmetically, an average of 159 incidents per month occurred in Germany in 2020 – which makes over five incidents per day.

In the first few months of the year, relatively few antisemitic incidents were reported to the Federal Association RIAS and the regional hotlines compared to the rest of 2020. One reason for this are the anti-COVID measures, which had an impact on numerous events where antisemitic incidents might occur: soccer stadiums, pubs, and clubs were closed; far fewer people used public transport. As a result, significantly fewer antisemitic incidents happened at these venues – while the number of antisemitic incidents on the Internet remained largely unchanged. The contact restrictions had a negative effect on the issue of antisemitism, too: they hindered the work of civil society institutions, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. In particular, the necessary measures made it difficult to maintain a reporting network and trusting contacts with affected communities. It is therefore to be feared that both the Federal Association RIAS and the regional reporting offices learned of fewer antisemitic incidents than would have been the case under normal circumstances.

Beginning with May 2020, all offices reported an increasing number of antisemitic incidents. This is not least related to an opportunity structure for

antisemitism offered by discussions of anti-COVID measures. In Bavaria, for instance, an annual peak in antisemitic incidents was observed in May and June 2020 (34 and 42 incidents per month, respectively). Brandenburg also had the most incidents per month at this time (16 in May, 17 in June). This period coincides with the first wave of conspiracist gatherings, many of these open to right-wing extremists, rallying against anti-COVID measures, which were widely scattered geographically. In August, many regional groups mobilized for nationwide gatherings in Berlin, which probably explains the peak in that state (118 incidents in August). A further increase, albeit at a lower level, was observed in many places in November – probably to some degree in connection with a renewed partial lockdown in response to sharply rising infection figures, to which some reacted with an antisemitic discussion.

Affected Persons and Institutions

Among the antisemitic incidents documented by the Federal Association RIAS and regional reporting offices in 2020, 519 involved individuals and 679 involved institutions. The vast majority of incidents against institutions (515 cases) were recorded in Berlin, which is explained by the high density of Jewish and Israeli, civil society, and political organizations there. Far fewer institutions were affected in Bavaria (23), Brandenburg (25) and Schleswig-Holstein (6). In the rest of Germany, 110 institutions, often memorial sites and initiatives, were affected by antisemitic incidents.

A total of 677 persons were directly affected by the 519 incidents against individuals. Again, the greatest number was recorded in Berlin (348), followed by Bavaria (116), Brandenburg (46) and Schleswig-Holstein (17). For the remaining twelve federal states, 150 affected individuals were reported.

In a total of 711 antisemitic incidents, no individuals or institutions directly affected could be identified. This generally concerns gatherings, graffiti or stickers in public spaces, and other forms of non-specifically addressed antisemitic propaganda.

Antisemitism at Rallies against Anti-COVID Measures

The defining issue for the 2020 public debate was the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous actors used the crisis as an opportunity to express themselves in an antisemitic manner. This became especially pronounced in the protests against anti-COVID measures. A large number of rallies throughout Germany involved antisemitic conspiracy myths and trivializations of the Shoah. Between March 17 and the end of 2020, the Federal Association RIAS documented a total of 284 gatherings at which anti-COVID measures were equaled with the Nazi persecution of Jews, or other antisemitic statements were made.

The following number of gatherings were documented as antisemitic incidents in the different federal states:

Baden-Wuerttemberg	23
Bavaria	84
Berlin	42
Brandenburg	13
Bremen	5
Hamburg	3
Hesse	14
Lower Saxony	8
North Rhine-Westphalia	33
Rhineland-Palatinate	4
Saxony	19
Saxony-Anhalt	19
Schleswig-Holstein	10
Thuringia	7

No corresponding information was available to the Federal Association RIAS from Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saarland.

On the one hand, the considerable differences between the federal states reflect the varying demographic conditions. On the other, they also show the different possibilities for documenting antisemitic incidents: the Federal Association RIAS cannot guarantee systematic on-site observation of gatherings in states without active reporting offices. Moreover, the existing offices

are able to provide systematic on-site observation to different degrees. The Federal Association RIAS therefore assumes that numerous assemblies featuring antisemitic statements were not documented. This is likely to be especially true for gatherings in small towns as well as in rural areas. Furthermore, the uneven geographical distribution of the gatherings expresses the local focus of different actors: not everywhere were historical revisionist comparisons to the Shoah observed. In many locations, the GDR was an alternative, non-antisemitic popular foil for comparison.

The gatherings in Berlin on the first and last weekends of August were particularly striking. Conspiracy ideologues, so-called Reichsbürger ("Reich citizens", members of a far-right movement) and other right-wing extremists from all over Germany came to the capital. Participants of these gatherings often expressed themselves in antisemitic terms through symbols on their clothing, slogans on signs and banners, as well as in speeches. On August 29, Reichsbürger and a group of people, some of whom had previously wielded a banner demanding the release of convicted Shoah deniers and the end of the alleged "occupation of Germany by a Talmud-Jewish-Vatican company", started the so-called "Storming of the Reichstag": nearly 500 demonstrators overcame police barriers in front of the Reichstag building and occupied the stairs of the main entrance for some time. These events impressively demonstrated the violent potential of the rallies.

Incidents Sites

A third (33.7%) of all recorded antisemitic incidents nationwide (644 in total) took place online. Of these, 550 incidents were reported in Berlin. The larger Jewish and Israeli institutions located here are subject to frequent antisemitic Internet attacks. These online incidents are one of the reasons for the significantly higher overall number of documented antisemitic incidents in Berlin compared to the rest of Germany. Two thirds of the incidents recorded took place offline. A total of 39.5% of the incidents occurred in public spaces. This includes the street (561 incidents), local and long-distance public transport (101 incidents), public green spaces (69 incidents) and public buildings (24 incidents).

Compared to the previous year, significant changes were observed in some federal states with regard to the specific crime scenes. These, too, seem related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the significantly higher number of incidents in the context of gatherings against anti-COVID measures, the proportion of antisemitic manifestations in public spaces rose overall. This made it easier to document these incidents more comprehensively. As a result, almost three times as many public incidents were documented in Bavaria in 2020 compared to 2019 (100 vs. 34 incidents). In Brandenburg, 55.2% more incidents were documented (42 vs. 29). Conversely, fewer incidents were reported from locations whose use was severely restricted by anti-COVID measures. These include incidents in restaurants (25), at the workplace (11) or at sports facilities (6).

Manifestations of Antisemitism

Nationwide, the most common manifestations documented in 2020 were post-Shoah antisemitism (907 incidents), which refers to the way in which the subject of National Socialist mass crimes is dealt with, for example when the memory of Nazi crimes is rejected or they are trivialized, and antisemitic othering (705 incidents), in which Jews are described as foreign or not belonging to the respective majority society. 612 incidents were categorized as manifestations of modern antisemitism, which describes notions, for example in the context of conspiracy myths, that Jews have special political or economic power, 377 as Israel-related antisemitism. The manifestation of anti-Judaic antisemitism was observed in 131 incidents. (Since antisemitic incidents often involve several manifestations at the same time, the total number of attributions exceeds 100%.)

In Bavaria, there was a sharp increase in post-Shoah antisemitism: from 86 in 2019 (46.7% of incidents in Bavaria) to 128 in the past year (53.6%). Brandenburg was the state with the highest percentage of incidents involving this manifestation in 2020 (54.6%), despite an overall slight decrease from 82 incidents in 2019 to 77 in 2020. In 2019, post-Shoah antisemitism had been involved in 59.9% of the cases in this state, where the prevalence of post-Shoah antisemitism appears to be largely independent of current developments.

The manifestation of antisemitic othering varied widely across the analyzed German states in 2020, the proportion being high in Brandenburg (52.5%) and Berlin (43.4%), but lower in Bavaria (26.4%).

Israel-related antisemitism was involved in 19.7% of all incidents nationwide in 2020. In almost all states with active hotlines, the share of this manifestation decreased compared to 2019 – for instance, from 28.8% to 18.4% in Bavaria and from 33.6% to 26.3% in Berlin. (An opposite trend is emerging for 2021.)

In contrast, 2020 saw a significant increase in modern antisemitism. All four reporting offices recorded both more cases and a larger proportion of this manifestation. In Bavaria, the number rose from 37 to 81 cases (20.1% and 33.9%, respectively). In Brandenburg, too, the number more than doubled, with 25 cases instead of 11 (8.0% in 2019 and 17.7% in 2020). In Berlin, modern antisemitism had the highest proportion of all manifestations (34.6%), followed closely by Bavaria (33.9%). Observations and data analyses in each state suggest that these trends are based in antisemitic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the dissemination of antisemitic conspiracy myths greatly increased. Among other things, these attributed the responsibility for the spread of both the virus and the anti-COVID measures to Jews.

Political and Ideological Background

Of the 1,909 antisemitic incidents documented nationwide in 2020, 1,003 incidents (52.5%) could not be clearly assigned to a political-ideological background based on the available information. An assignment was possible for 906 incidents. Of these, 479 (25.1%) were classified as right-wing extremism or populism. Notably, several regional offices reported fewer such incidents than in 2019. As in 2019, Brandenburg remained the federal state with the highest proportion of right-wing extremist/populist incidents (31.9%). However, the absolute number dropped from 75 to 45. In Bavaria, the number dropped from 45 incidents in 2019 to 41 in 2020. Berlin was the only state where somewhat more antisemitic incidents with a right-wing extremist/populist background were observed in 2020 than in 2019 (271 incidents compared to 259).

The second most common category nationwide in 2020 was formed by antisemitic incidents with a conspiracist background (247 incidents: 12.9%). In Bavaria, the number of such incidents increased particularly sharply, from 10 in 2019 to 78 in 2020. The proportion, too, was the highest here: 32.6% in 2020. The comparative increase in Brandenburg was even higher: from a single incident in 2019 to 13 incidents in 2020. In Berlin, the number almost doubled: from 53 incidents in 2019 to 89 in 2020. The sharp increase can be explained above all by the numerous rallies against anti-COVID measures, as well as by other antisemitic incidents in the context of the pandemic.

Nationwide, fewer incidents could be attributed to anti-Israel activism in 2020 than in 2019. In Berlin, the number of such incidents fell from 87 to 50. In Bavaria, there was a slight increase, but both the proportion and the total were relatively low (from 9 to 12 incidents).

2020 in Numbers

Monthly Totals

	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Schleswig-Holstein	Other states of Germany	Total
January	12	94	18	4	30	158
February	12	64	6	4	31	117
March	11	56	7	4	18	96
April	11	65	6	2	23	107
May	34	88	19	5	67	213
June	42	75	17	3	48	185
July	23	98	16	4	44	185
August	24	118	11	4	30	187
September	13	92	16	3	28	152
October	20	95	11	4	49	179
November	26	95	4	11	78	214
December	11	64	10	5	26	116

Sites of Antisemitic Incidents

	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Schleswig-Holstein	Other states of Germany	Total
Online	44	550	15	5	30	644
Streets	100	168	42	20	231	561
Memorial sites	8	28	11	5	67	119
Public transport	8	51	12	2	28	101
Direct living environment	8	47	15	7	12	89
Educational institutions	5	29	11	7	19	71
Public green spaces	34	16	4	5	10	69
Office	3	26	5	–	9	43
Shops	10	19	3	2	7	41
Synagogues	5	2	5	–	13	25
Bars and Restaurants	2	14	2	–	7	25
Public buildings	4	13	–	–	7	24
Cemeteries	1	5	1	–	14	21
Workplace of the victim	3	2	–	–	6	11
Private property	–	4	–	–	4	8
Stadiums and sports facilities	2	1	–	–	3	6
Other	–	1	1	–	3	5
Unknown/ no data	2	28	14	–	2	46

Victims of Antisemitic Incidents

	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Schleswig-Holstein	Other states of Germany	Total
Individuals	116	348	46	17	150	677
Organizations	23	515	25	6	110	679

Antisemitic Incidents Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic

	Overall cases	Share of the total
Bavaria	108	45.2 %
Berlin	186	18.5 %
Brandenburg	19	13.5 %
Schleswig-Holstein	9	17 %
Other states of Germany	167	35.4 %
Total	489	25.6 %

Types of Antisemitic Incidents

	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Schleswig-Holstein	Other states of Germany	Total
Extreme violence	–	–	–	–	1	1
Assaults	1	17	6	–	15	39
Damages or desecrations of property	13	43	13	6	92	167
Threats	10	51	18	1	16	96
Abusive behavior	188	770	102	42	347	1,449
Mass mailings	27	123	2	4	1	157
Total	239	1,004	141	53	472	1,909

Manifestations of antisemitism¹

	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Schleswig-Holstein	Other states of Germany
Post-Shoah-antisemitism	53.6 %	40.9 %	54.6 %	24.5 %	58.9 %
Antisemitic othering	26.4 %	43.4 %	52.5 %	32.1 %	24.4 %
Modern antisemitism	33.9 %	34.6 %	17.7 %	22.6 %	31.1 %
Israel-related antisemitism	18.4 %	26.3 %	7.8 %	15.1 %	10.6 %
Anti-Judaic antisemitism	7.1 %	9.9 %	1.4 %	1.9 %	2.5 %

Political and ideological background²

	Bavaria	Berlin	Brandenburg	Schleswig-Holstein	Other states of Germany
Right wing extremist/populist	17.2 %	27 %	31.9 %	11.3 %	24.6 %
Conspiracist					
Anti-Israel activism	5 %	5 %	1.4 %	1.9 %	2.3 %
(Antiimperialist) left	1.3 %	1.4 %	—	7.5 %	1.1 %
Islamic/Islamist	1.3 %	2.2 %	—	7.5 %	0.4 %
Politically centrist	—	3.2 %	0.7 %	—	0.6 %
Christian / Christian fundamentalist	1.3 %	0.7 %	—	1.9 %	0.2 %
Unknown/ no data	41.8%	51.7 %	56.7 %	56.6 %	58.1 %

1 Since antisemitic incidents often involve several manifestations at the same time, the total number of attributions exceeds 100%.

2 Each incident is attributed to a single political spectrum.

If you experience or observe antisemitism,
you can contact us anytime via
www.report-antisemitism.de

Or via phone:

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