

Germany: Xenophobic and anti-Semitic offences are rising sharply

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In Germany, the number of right-wing extremist crimes has not diminished. The number of right-wing, politically motivated crimes has risen steadily since 2001, reaching a maximum of 23,555 in 2016. Since then, the numbers have declined only slightly and were significantly above 20,000 both in 2017 and 2018.

There was a dramatic year-on-year increase in anti-Semitic and xenophobic offences in 2018. Both rose by one-fifth—anti-Semitic crimes from 1,504 to 1,799 and xenophobic offences from 6,434 to 7,701. On average, there were 26 offences against immigrants or Jews each day. Well over 1,000 of the right-wing offences were violent crimes; over 500 were directed against politicians.

In addition, it has recently become known that in the first half of 2019, 8,605 criminal offences (including 363 violent crimes involving at least 179 injured) have already been committed, an increase of more than 900 compared to the same period in 2018.

Following the murder of Kassel district president Walter Lübcke on June 2, there was a bomb threat on June 23 to the headquarters of the Left Party in Berlin-Mitte and a day later, an attack on Left Party local politician Ramona Gehring in Zittau. The bomb threat in Berlin-Mitte was claimed by “Combat 18,” a right-wing terrorist network that is linked with the alleged Lübcke murderer Stephan Ernst.

The figures above are from the federal Ministry of the Interior (as of May 14, 2019) in answer to a parliamentary question tabled by the Left Party. Comparing the figures with data from independent victim counselling centres reveals a major discrepancy. In 2018, these organisations registered an increase in extreme right-wing violence from 1,394 in 2017 to 1,495 cases in 2018 in seven federal states alone (Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Pomerania, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia).

Berlin in particular is a hotspot of right-wing extremist crime. ReachOut, the Berlin counselling centre for victims of right-wing, racist and anti-Semitic violence, documents a total of 309 attacks in 2018. Those injured, threatened and stalked numbered at least 423 people, including 19 children and 47 adolescents. Most attacks resulted in personal injury (157) and

grievous bodily harm (115). According to the organization, this is a “worrying increase” compared to the 267 attacks in 2017.

The Research and Information Centre Anti-Semitism Berlin (RIAS Berlin) registered a total of 1,083 anti-Semitic incidents in Berlin, an increase of 14 percent over the previous year. These included 46 attacks, 43 targeted property damage, 46 threats, 831 cases of injurious behaviour (including at 48 meetings) and 117 anti-Semitic letters.

It is particularly striking that the number of anti-Semitic attacks in the home area of those affected has more than doubled, which means that right-wing extremists are targeting the victims in their neighbourhoods.

The report also highlights the case of far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) member Andreas Wild, who was wearing a blue cornflower on November 9 at the commemoration ceremony of the Nazi attacks on *Reichspogromnacht*. This flower is a historical symbol of the anti-Semitic and extreme German nationalist “Schönerer movement.”

In Berlin-Neukölln there has been a sustained series of right-wing-extremist attacks since summer 2016. The Mobile Advice Centre Against Right-Wing Extremism Berlin (MBR) has recorded 55 attacks. Those affected include residents who engage and express themselves against the right-wing. These include threatening graffiti on and in residential buildings, throwing stones and paint bottles through windows, other property damage and arson attacks. In addition, the theft of 16 cobblestones has been attributed to the same circle of offenders but were not counted as attacks. Counselling staff also became a victim of threats in March of this year.

The most prominent victims of the series of attacks in Neukölln include:

* The Social Democratic Party (SPD) faction leader of the Neukölln district council, Mirjam Blumenthal, whose car was set alight on January 13, 2017.

* Left Party politician Ferat Kocak, whose car went up in flames on February 1, 2018.

* The bookseller Heinz Ostermann, whose car was also set on fire on February 1, 2018. This was already the third attack against the owner of the Leporello bookstore, where events against right-wing populism and racism take place. In December 2016, the windows of the bookstore were smashed

and in January 2017 a car set on fire.

No one has been charged with any crime in this series of attacks in Neukölln. In some cases, including the attack on Mirjam Blumenthal, the investigation was even stopped.

According to documents seen by the ARD magazine programme “Kontraste” and the editors of rbb24 research, Kocak was spied on by two right-wing extremists for months before the attack. Both the secret service and the Berlin State Criminal Police Office (LKA) knew about it. They had bugged the alleged perpetrators, Tilo P. and Sebastian T., when they had talked about Kocak on the phone but did not warn him.

Tilo P., a former AfD candidate, is known in the district for his violent assaults. Sebastian T. is former district chairman of the Neukölln neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD) and was already suspected in 2011 by district residents because of a 2016 series of attacks. These earlier attacks began after Sebastian T. was released from custody.

Following the attacks on Kocak and Ostermann, search warrants were issued against P. and T., but arrest warrants were rejected because “the defendants’ participation in the arson” had not been sufficiently substantiated. Searches provided extensive evidence, yet P. and T. remained at large. A question tabled by Left Party parliamentary deputies Anne Helm and Niklas Schrader, who asked for information on the house searches in October 2018, was rejected “for reasons of data and personal protection.”

In its 2018 annual report, MBR raised the question of how the perpetrators had come into possession of the victims’ personal data. Some feared “that there could be similar extreme right-wing networks within the police in Berlin as in Frankfurt am Main.”

According to the research by “Kontraste” and rbb24, a Berlin LKA official had had contact with Sebastian T. Two officers from a security agency who observed Sebastian T. saw how on March 16, 2018, he had met in a Neukölln restaurant with three neo-Nazis and an LKA official named W. This individual worked in a department that is also responsible for police surveillance measures. Afterwards, T. drove away together with the official in his car.

According to the rbb report, neither the public prosecutor nor the police initially wanted to comment. This was followed by a communication from the Berlin attorney general that proceedings against official W. had been discontinued. This was supposedly “in connection with a further investigation, in which information disclosure precludes a risk of investigation.” According to the information provided by the research team, W. was not on official business.

The ReachOut victim counselling centre, which is part of MBR, had filed a complaint against employees of the Berlin LKA after the rbb report was broadcast in April this year. In a statement, it says, “From the point of view of ReachOut, it is suspected that the LKA employee, at least at this and probably at other meetings, passed on secret information that actively

aided crimes. These crimes have for many years been targeted against individuals and projects known for their commitment to anti-racism and opposition to right-wing extremism.”

On August 17, state Interior Minister Andreas Geisel (SPD) commented in an interview on the series of attacks in Neukölln. When asked how he could explain that so far not a single case has been cleared up, Geisel admitted that the police knew the perpetrators, but had done nothing against them.

“I do not get the impression that police officials are not addressing the issue, as they are accused of,” he said. “There are definitely results. We have suspicions, there were searches. But the evidence was insufficient judicially. We know the characters involved. The question is, whether there are more and who committed the crimes.”

The dealings of the police and the secret service with the series of extreme-right attacks in Neukölln are not the exception, but the rule. According to information from the federal Ministry of the Interior, police investigated 2,625 right-wing suspects nationwide from January to June 2019. Twenty-three were detained and only two were issued with an arrest warrant.

As in the case of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) murders and in the case of murdered Kassel district president Lübcke, right-wing extremists in Neukölln, who have repeatedly attracted attention and are under surveillance, can carry out their actions unhindered. In retrospect, facts appear that have been hushed up, or facts are concealed from the public and those at risk, “so as not to jeopardise the investigations.”

The involvement of the secret services, the police and the far-right scene is now widely known. According to the MBR report, this also has an impact on those seeking help from aid organizations, who “wonder if it makes any sense to file a complaint. After everything that has become known, could it even pose an additional danger to give information to the police?”

The right-wing violent criminals are protected by governments at federal and state level, the authorities and political parties, who fear growing opposition to their unpopular war policies and growing social inequality. The state of Berlin, where an alliance of the SPD, Left Party and Greens rules, does not differ from conservatively governed states.



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