

Islamophobia in Germany

Increasing Islamophobic
Attacks in Germany

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Main Findings

- There has been a surge in Islamophobia, xenophobia, and hate speech in Germany, the largest economy in the European Union (EU) Muslims, who comprise an important part of the workforce in Germany, are being used as political tools by populist right-wing parties.
- Islamophobic attacks are not random and localised attacks, instead these are incidents that frequently occur throughout Germany. Previously seen as marginal by society and politics, anti-Muslim sentiments have become normalised today – both in public and private spaces. Consequently, German politicians and the society as a whole do not seem to address such societal tensions and divisions adequately.
- 950 Islamophobic incidents were reported in Germany across the country in 2017. This means that three people/institutions per day were attacked by xenophobic people/groups (Welt, 2018).



Background: Muslims in Germany

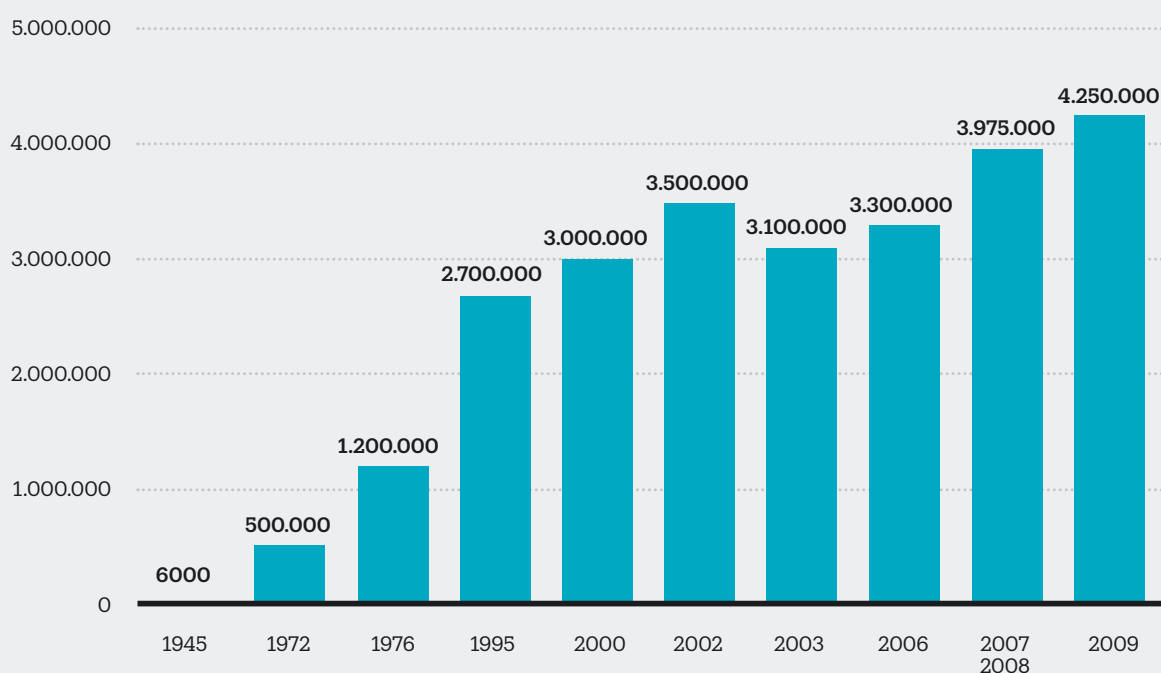
- Germany is the largest country in the European Union with a population of around 82 million inhabitants, accommodating the second-largest Muslim population in Western Europe after France.

- As of 2016, 5.4 to 5.7 per cent of the German population is comprised of Muslims (Stichs, 2016).

- Turks constitute the majority of the Muslim population. It is estimated that the population of Turks living in Germany has reached approximately three million people.

- Currently, the majority of the Turkish population living in Germany are the 3rd and 4th generation children of Turks who migrated as workers in the 1960s.

Development of the number of Muslims in Germany from 1945 to 2009



Source: Statista

Methodology

This policy brief was produced through primary and secondary sources on the subject of increasing Islamophobia in Germany.

What is the issue?

Over the last few years, the fear of Islam has gripped the imagination of several European societies. Also known as Islamophobia, this term is used to describe an intense fear or prejudice against Islam or Muslims. In general, Islamophobia has three different dimensions. The first is "private Islamophobia", which describes the attacks and violence that Muslims face by individuals. The second dimension of Islamophobia is the process by which state actors make immigration policies and official surveillance to make Muslims feel themselves under suspicion and fear. The third dimension of Islamophobia is the dialectic of government policies on Muslims with policies such as 'War on Terror' politics. This leads to public verbal and physical violence against Muslims (Beydoun, 2006).

With acts of terrorism dominating mainstream media today, countries across the globe have seen a rise in anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiments that has sometimes been fuelled by the propaganda of far-right and populist parties. Extremist right-wing politicians and racist groups have exploited the situation by triggering a sense of 'us' versus 'them' within societies and adopting an Islamophobic, racist and xenophobic attitude.

PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West), a German nationalist, anti-Islamic and far-right movement organised its first rally in Dresden on October 20, 2014, with about 500 people. Since then, however, they have continued to organise demonstrations and increased the number of their followers every passing day. Additionally, the anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant right-wing party AfD (Alternative for Germany) has become the main opposition party with 12.6 per cent of votes in the parliament. AfD increased their votes by 7.9 per cent compared to the previous election (tagesschau.de, 2017).

Using a comparable strategy, the conservative and social democrat parties also adopted a similar language of intolerance in order to gain electoral leverage. By doing so, they allowed the rhetoric of fear, suspicion and threat to gain attention and legitimacy - both in public and private spaces.

In Germany, Islamophobic incidents have intensified over the past few years. Although such incidents did not start after the civil war in Syria, they have been on the rise since then. Many Muslims have experienced a range of discrimination, including hate speech, violence and religious profiling. They have also been confronted with a lack of equal opportunities in education, employment, business, politics, media and social life. A field experiment conducted in Germany found that employees tended to discriminate against people with Turkish-sounding names - findings which revealed that applicants with a German name received 24 per cent more call-backs.

The increasing negative perception of Muslims was also reflected in attacks on Muslims and their institutions. Mosques in Germany were attacked 60 times in 2014, 75 times in 2015 and 91 times in 2016 (Anadolu Agency, 2018). Of the 91 attacks that occurred in 2016, police officers were only able to catch the suspects in 12 of the cases. In the first two months of 2018, 26 mosques were attacked. 18 of them were the mosques of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB). Two mosques and a Turkish association were set on fire (Süddeutsche.de, 2018).

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Source: Anadolu Agency

How is Islam Perceived in Germany

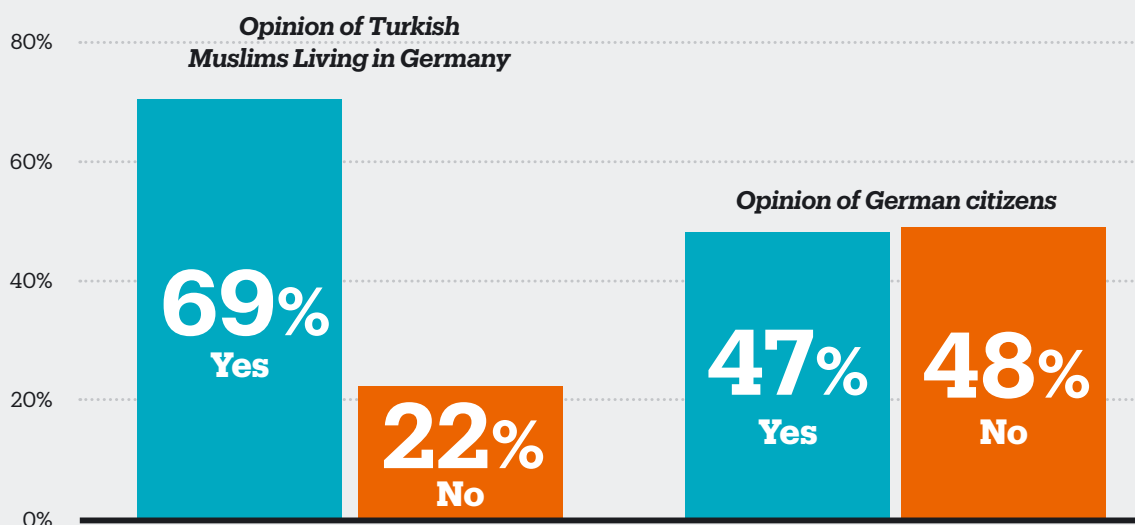
More recently, the Syrian refugee crisis saw leaders argue that a secular, liberal and a multi-cultural Europe was a danger to Catholic values and sovereignty. Horst Seehofer (CSU - Christlich-Soziale Union), the Interior Minister in the Great Coalition (GroKo) - established in March 2018 - declared that the prosperity and Christian values of Germany had to be protected by using the expression: "Islam does not belong to Germany, Germany is shaped by Christianity" (Staudenmaier, 2018). Refugees who have sought sanctuary in Germany have also faced attacks fuelled by xenophobia. According to the statistics of the Federal Criminal Police Office, 199 attacks targeted refugee camps in 2014. Such incidents rapidly increased to reach almost 1000 in 2016 (The Local, 2017).

While some of these accounts may vary, there is no doubt Islamophobia in Germany is on the rise, and one of the distinctive features is the animosity towards refugees who are positioned as the new 'Others.' The wave of hate crimes has prompted debates and raised questions on the government's inability to move quickly and decisively enough to prevent such actions. With the large influx of refugees and Islamophobia on the rise, the government needs to step up efforts to address such societal tensions, and to act more effectively to integrate an expanding Muslim population.



(Abdülhamid Hoşbaş / Anadolu Agency)

Is Islam part of Germany?



Source: Statista

Why is this important for Germany?

Among European countries, Germany has the second largest number of Muslims after France. In this respect, the attacks of racist and radical right groups on Muslims in Germany damage the social fabric and the welfare system of the country. Islamophobia does not fit the fundamental norms of the EU to which Germany adheres, namely the “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities” (europa.eu, 2018).

However anti-Muslim rhetoric and violent attacks on Muslims over the years have put to the test all humanitarian values upon which Germany is established upon. With the large inflow of refugees to Europe, the concept of ‘integration’ has acquired a considerable emotive force and remains at the centre of many debates. Across Germany, the crisis revealed an enormous diversity in terms of societal attitudes regarding integration. Some were hostile towards this notion, considering it as a threat to German identity

and security. Others viewed integration as a process that offered opportunities for global openness and connectivity, and considered that history has shown that minorities have engaged with society on many levels and have made positive contributions to the energy, character and sustainability of the country. Framing their presence with Islamophobic discourse would create and maintain hostile relations between people and destroy the fundamental principles, upon which Germany was based.

Germany is a country that is conscious of its Nazi past. The Holocaust did not take place overnight, but rather happened as a result of the use of violence and hate speech on the Jewish people for an extended period. Therefore the attacks on mosques have triggered a greater discussion on the country’s record of past injustices and its protection of civil liberties. In this respect, dealing with incidents triggered by Islamophobia is crucial for Germany and one of the most significant challenges the country faces today.

What should policy makers do?

- Islamophobic attacks are escalating and many Muslims have been victimised in the process. However, only a few of the related incidents have been elucidated. The police and the government should do more to address the facts and find the suspects.

- Islamophobia-related incidents were not recorded in Germany before 2017. For an effective struggle against Islamophobia, politicians should first establish reliable data centres to collect and publish statistics regarding the extent of incidents.

- The government should unequivocally declare that Muslims belong in Germany since they make up 5.4 to 5.7 per cent of the country’s total population.

- Social, psychological, and financial support should be provided for people and institutions facing Islamophobic incidents, and more determined efforts should be made for their integration into society.

- A clear-cut definition of Islamophobia should be adopted, and a full-fledged legal framework should be established to fight anti-Islamic attacks.

- Islam must be recognised as one of the official religions throughout Germany. The Muslim minority in Germany should be declared as equal citizens. Otherwise, it contradicts the values of Germany, which is based on pluralism and democracy.

- The government should support the NGOs that fight against Islamophobia.

- Extreme right movements are increasingly gaining more visibility. Legal measures should be taken against organisations - such as PEGIDA - that are promoting anti-Islamic discourse and threatening peace and security in the country.

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