

# GDI

Global  
Disinformation  
Index



**DEEP DIVE:**  
Political Violence  
in Germany  
*September 2024*

## **Content Warning**

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# Deep Dive: Political Violence in Germany 2024

*Civic Integrity, Global Conspiracies, Anti-immigrant, Islamophobia*

## Impact

### Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)

Foreign state and non-state actors are seeking to amplify divisions in German society and destabilise the German democratic system. These actors use overt and unofficial media channels to spread disinformation narratives, often boosting their effectiveness by building on narratives already circulating on alternative media and social media. The resulting disinformation payloads inflict or amplify harms such as the undermining of German civic integrity, the increased uptake of conspiracy theories, and the reinforcement of anti-immigrant sentiments in Germany.

### Civic integrity

Online narratives claiming that Germany's current political leaders constitute an acute danger to society have contributed to offline violence against politicians and state representatives. These narratives potentially threatened the integrity of the state elections in Sachsen and Thüringen on 1 September and could threaten the Brandenburg state election on 22 September. Harmful online content increasingly exploits social divisions, discouraging voting and creating the impression that meaningful political change can only occur through violence. Other narratives severely downplay threats to the German democratic process, individual political figures, and members of protected groups.

### Conspiracy theories

Multiple conspiratorial narratives are feeding severe distrust against the state, governments, media, and leadership figures in Germany by claiming that there is a hidden agenda behind democratic decision-making and elections, and that dark forces control world events. Some conspiratorial narratives also increase the risk of violence against representatives of foreign states, including embassies and US troops deployed to Germany for NATO missions.

### Anti-immigrant sentiment

Anti-immigrant narratives have a long history in Germany. Narratives targeting immigration from non-European countries, especially those with large Muslim populations, have intensified due to terrorist incidents in 2024, including the fatal stabbing of three people in Solingen in August and the non-fatal stabbing of an anti-Islam activist in Mannheim in May, which resulted in the death of one police officer. These incidents and the resulting disinformation narratives continue to fuel politically motivated crimes and threats against immigrants and individuals from racial/religious minorities, as well as threats to institutions accommodating or otherwise helping migrants.

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## Summary

2024 brought a [new wave of political violence](#) to Germany, with hateful messages, threats, and physical violence aimed at politicians. Several high-profile attacks have happened since the beginning of the year, with some taking place during the run-up to the European elections in June and others in the run-up to the state elections in Sachsen and Thüringen on 1 September and Brandenburg on 22 September. Some attacks have also occurred without a clear connection to elections, and Germany is also [seeing a significant increase in politically motivated crimes not specifically aimed at political leaders](#). Below is a list of some of the most notable attacks against politicians this year:

- Former federal Family Minister [Franziska de Giffey](#) (Social Democratic Party, SPD) was hit in the head with a handbag containing a hard object while out in public in Berlin in May.
- Prominent Bundestag member [Roderich Kiesewetter](#) (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) was punched at an election stand for his party in June.
- [Far-right groups on social media were instrumental in organising a protest](#) that prevented German Economic and Environmental Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) from disembarking a ferry from Hallig Hooge island in January. Members of the group also attempted to board the ferry to confront Habeck. The protesters assembled after a woman who had previously posted content inspired by the QAnon conspiracy theory on Telegram shared Habeck's travel plans with her far-right activist partner.
- An investigation by Die Zeit newspaper indicated that two men [aggressively hindered](#) Bundestag Deputy Speaker Katrin Göring-Eckardt's (Greens) car from leaving a Greens party event in Lunow-Stolzenhagen in May.
- Unidentified suspects committed an [arson attack](#) on Thüringen local SPD politician Michael Müller's house and car after Müller organised a protest march against Alternative for Germany (AfD).
- In February, a group of protesters [stopped Greens party leader Ricarda Lang from leaving](#) a political event in Schorndorf in February. They followed Lang and her bodyguards, uttering misogynistic insults until stopped by the police.
- European parliamentary elections candidate Matthias Ecke (SPD) was [hospitalised](#) in May after four suspects punched him while he was hanging up campaign posters in Dresden.
- Mannheim local politician Heinrich Koch (AfD) [sustained injuries to the torso and ear](#) after confronting a man for tearing off AfD campaign posters in June.
- CDU politician and Brandenburg state election candidate Adeline Abimnwi Awemo was [assaulted and insulted](#) while hanging up posters in July, sustaining a light injury to the neck.
- A Greens party campaign activist was [attacked and robbed](#) by two men while hanging up Brandenburg election campaign posters in Hohen Neuendorf, on 13 August, sustaining light injuries.
- Multiple masked suspects attacked pro-AfD activist, YouTuber and singer Björn Banane in Berlin in July. Banane claims to have been beaten, sprayed with pepper spray, and robbed of camera equipment and a jacket during a [live broadcast](#) on his YouTube channel. A police investigation led to an individual with suspected links to the Antifa movement, [who was found to have a small amount of explosives](#) in his apartment in Berlin.

Serious threats were also directed at high-profile individuals involved in politics.

- [Björn Höcke](#), a key AfD candidate for the Thüringen state elections, received a death threat, prompting a significant police response at the AfD's summer party in Neustadt/Orla in August.
- In July, unnamed suspects [destroyed a window](#) at the election district offices of Bodo Ramelow, head of the Thüringen state government, in an apparent attempt to intimidate Ramelow.
- [A man with a sword](#) threatened a group of Die Linke activists on 31 July in Dohna in Sachsen.
- Public prosecutors are investigating an unnamed local-level AfD politician from Brandenburg for allegedly saying that Economic Minister Habeck "[should have one of his eyes shot out](#)."

Official government statistics confirm cases of political violence are increasing. German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser [stated recently](#) that there had been 3,691 recorded instances of attacks against politically active

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individuals in Germany in 2023, up from 1,994 in 2022 and 3,282 in 2021. An analysis of Bundestag figures by the financial newspaper [Handelsblatt](#) shows that violence has affected all main political parties. However, Greens party politicians are significantly more exposed than all others, with 1,219 recorded attacks in 2023. Next are the AfD at 478 attacks, the SPD at 420, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) at 299, the CDU at 295, and Die Linke at 79. These threats result in significant burdens on law enforcement. German government figures indicate that since the start of the Scholz government in 2021, [cabinet ministers filed just under 1,500 police reports about threats and abusive comments](#), with Economic Minister Habeck and his fellow Greens party cabinet colleague Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock filing by far the most significant number, at 805 and 513, respectively.

German history contains numerous examples of political violence strongly related to adversarial public discourse. The current wave of political violence started during the 2015 immigration crisis, prompted by an [unusually large level of immigration](#) in Europe and Germany due to an influx of refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria and parts of Africa. Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to welcome refugees led to significant tensions in the years following. In August of 2018, the eastern German city of Chemnitz saw a series of riots and other violence during protests against Merkel's immigration policies after a German national was fatally stabbed and [three asylum seekers were identified as suspects](#). On June 2, 2019, a man motivated by neo-Nazi ideas [shot and killed local German politician Walter Lübcke](#), who had been a proponent of more generous policies for refugees.

The COVID-19 pandemic also prompted large-scale protests against government policies, such as lockdown measures and vaccinations. Many of these protests were linked to the Querdenken (Lateral Thinking) movement, a loosely organised group of anti-lockdown activists. Some protests also involved far-right extremist groups such as the Reichsbürger (Reich Citizens) movement, a term used to describe a wide range of often unconnected groups that deny the legitimacy of Germany's post-WWII government. Reichsbürger supporters participated in the [attempted storming of the federal parliament building](#) during a Querdenken protest on 29 August 2020. The AfD also [reportedly allowed anti-lockdown protesters into the Reichstag building](#) on 18 November 2020, resulting in aggressive verbal exchanges with several politicians, including then Economic Minister Peter Altmaier (CDU). In 2022, German police forces foiled [a Reichsbürger plot to launch a coup against the federal government](#), resulting in charges against 27 individuals.

Malign actors leverage a range of tactics, including disinformation, to amplify societal divides and fears that Germany's core industries will collapse, the cost-of-living crisis, backlash against the influx of migrants, and the legacy trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some disinforming narratives label politicians as corrupt, out-of-touch, and incompetent. Others directly or indirectly encourage hostility or even violence against state institutions and political leaders by making them seem acutely dangerous to society and by creating a sense of imminent societal collapse that can only be stopped through radical action.

The far-right AfD party's highly aggressive style of opposition politics contributes to polarisation in current political discourse. Adversarial AfD narratives often focus on any actions by the government or state institutions that the party believes could harm its electoral interests. The party accuses the federal government of [hating Germany](#) and committing treason against the German citizenry by allegedly allowing uncontrolled mass migration and the total dissolution of living standards.

Other parties also contribute to rising polarisation. Former Die Linke politician Sahra Wagenknecht, who now leads her party, Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW), uses language similar to the AfD. She used a speech at the Bundestag earlier this year to accuse Chancellor Olaf Scholz of endangering the country by maintaining an asylum system that simply takes in "[anyone capable of uttering the word asylum](#)." Wagenknecht also [noted](#) that the Greens are "the most hypocritical, detached, deceitful, incompetent and, in terms of the damage they cause, the most dangerous party we currently have in the Bundestag."

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Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) operations, primarily by Russia, enlarge Germany's already extensive online disinformation space, magnifying domestically generated narratives and sometimes inserting narratives promoting the interests of Russia or other authoritarian states. Despite EU sanctions, Russian foreign-facing broadcaster RT Deutsch continues to attract a large audience in Germany. Readers can use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to [circumvent blocks](#) to access sanctioned and often FIMI content. Readers not using a VPN can access “mirror websites” that syndicate content identical to that of the sanctioned site but on a URL not subject to a block. This enforcement problem has existed for several years, and the Federal Network Agency [noted that it is up to internet providers to block access to banned websites](#).

Political violence can also lead to further resentment and disinformation, particularly when there are perceived imbalances in how politicians and media respond based on the victim's political affiliations. An editorial in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung [warns](#) against the dangers of believing or stating that violence against the AfD is less worthy of condemnation than violence against the Greens, noting that this imbalance is directly contributing to German “hate culture.”

## Actors

- **German political leaders** from the AfD, BSW, and sometimes other parties produce adversarial narratives that exceed the bounds of robust parliamentary debate.
- **Far-right websites and social media channels** with large followings produce daily adversarial narratives targeting political leaders, state representatives, and civic institutions.
- **Far-left groups** disseminate highly adversarial content primarily targeting the AfD, including narratives encouraging violence.
- **Foreign state actors** use dedicated media outlets and social media to produce disinformation content in German to amplify existing adversarial narratives and exacerbate social tensions in Germany.

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## Terms + Hashtags

### Hate speech targeting politicians, parties

Goering-Ekelhaft  
 Corruptula War der Lying  
 Ursula Von der Lugen  
 Kriegshexe Baerbock,  
 Kriegshexe Von der Leyen  
 Baerbocks Vielfliegerei  
 Ricarda lang und fett  
 Grünschlampe  
 Salon-Kommunistin Wagenknecht  
 Oppositionsplacebo BSW  
 Kiesewetter der Kriegstreiber  
 #Kieseltreter  
 Panzer Toni (Hofreiter)  
 #EkelhAfD  
 #fckAfD

### Hostility against state institutions

Staatsversagen  
 Säuberung des  
 Verfassungsschutzes  
 Regierungsschutz  
 V-Männer begehen Verbrechen  
 Meinungskorridor einschränken

kritische Bürger einschüchtern  
 Meinungsdictatur  
 Der geheime Krieg gegen Deutschland  
 Compact-Verbot

### Hostility against the Scholz government

Bundesregierung hasst Deutschland  
 Arbeiter-Verräter Partei SPD  
 #AmpeldesGrauens  
 Gesinnungsdictatur  
 Gesinnungspolitik  
 Politverbrecher  
 grüne Deutschland-Hasser  
 Diktaturfördergesetz  
 Deutschland als Versuchskaninchen  
 missbrauchen  
 Verbotspartei  
 PolizeiGrün  
 links-grüne Vorherrschaft  
 links-grüne Untergang  
 Reiter der grünen Apokalypse  
 BRD-Blockparteien  
 Altparteienkartell

### 2022 Putsch trial discourse

Rollator-Putschisten  
 Rollatoren-Rentner-Reichsbürger-Gang

### Sense of crisis

#imbestendeutschland  
 #DemokratieAbschaffung  
 Meinungsäußerungsverbot  
 Wohlstandsvernichtung

### Hostility towards media

zwangsalimentierten Talkshows  
 Zwangsgebühren  
 Politisch-mediales Komplex  
 Mediale Lügenkampagne

### AfD discourse

Hetze gegen die AfD  
 Der Krah muss krähen  
 Schauprozess gegen Höcke

### Mannheim/Solingen attacks

Altparteien haben mitgemessert  
 #mitgemessert  
 Migrationswaffe gegen Deutschland  
 "Einzelfälle"

## Narratives

### Hostility Against Political Leaders and Parties

Online hostility frequently contributes to offline violence, [often by turning politicians into hate figures or subjects of derision](#). Berlin State Senator Franziska de Giffey (SPD) was already subject to online abuse, with posts calling her an [arrogant careerist](#) even before an angry voter attacked her with a handbag in Berlin in May. Following the physical attack, accounts on social media continued to abuse her, claiming Giffey has no right to call herself a victim as she [ignores the will of the voters](#), implying that voters have the right to use physical violence against elected officials with whom they disagree. Some [denied that the attack happened at all](#), noting that Giffey plagiarised her PhD thesis, resulting in the [withdrawal of her PhD status](#), and that the plagiarism means she must be lying about the violent incident as well.

Before and after Economic and Environmental Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) was blocked by protesters aggressively preventing him from leaving a ferry in January, he was targeted with online abuse accusing him of inflicting severe economic harm upon Germany with his [green transformation policies](#). Anger against Habeck often - but not exclusively - focuses on his Renewable Heating Act, which became law in January 2024 [after a painful and controversial passage through](#) Parliament. Online reactions included climate delayism rhetoric, featuring claims that phasing out fossil fuel-based heating sources would ["ruin"](#) German society and industry. [Reitschuster.de](#) accused Habeck of using his heating law as a climate policy "experiment" on the German population to see how much the German population would be willing to suffer to prevent climate change..

Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) has received extensive online abuse and heckling during public appearances, often with a distinctly misogynistic undertone. Baerbock's vocal support for Ukraine has made her a target for global conspiracy theories and misogyny. Far-right conspiracist website Compact-Magazin popularised the term ["war witch"](#) to criticise the pro-Ukraine policies of not just Baerbock, but also European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and

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MEP Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (FDP). The term continues circulating on social media, including [X](#), alongside accusations that Baerbock's actions risk unleashing World War 3. A recurring narrative claims Baerbock is an [activist poser and pro-US ideologue who takes planes all over the world but is not taken seriously anywhere](#). Numerous related narratives misogynistically represent her as a silly little girl amateurishly fumbling through frontline politics, calling her "Annalchen," meaning "little Annalena," a diminutive that is not applied to any of Baerbock's male colleagues. This narrative, in turn, aligns with narratives that accuse Baerbock, Habeck and other Greens politicians of carrying out the [planned destruction of the German economy under orders from the US government](#), either as useful idiots or as fully aware, enthusiastic participants.

Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (SPD) suffered [death threats](#), a [physical attack](#), [property damage](#), and a [2021 plot to kidnap him](#) as part of a [larger Reichsbürger plan](#) to overthrow the federal government. Most of the threats against Lauterbach come from extreme opposition to Lauterbach's lockdown policies during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ultimately unsuccessful plans to institute mandatory vaccinations for COVID-19. Disinformation narratives aimed at Lauterbach focus on his alleged crimes during COVID-19, including accusations of lying about the [effectiveness and side effects of the COVID-19 vaccines](#), criminally causing a widespread "[virus panic](#)" that prompted many people to take "damaging" vaccines, and working to [suppress any dissent against lockdowns](#) so that the World Health Organisation (WHO) can take control of the world and/or Germany during the next pandemic.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (SPD) has faced severe online abuse over alleged failures of Germany's justice and immigration system. Online abuse against Faeser has intensified since June 2024 because she attempted to [ban Compact Magazin](#) for spreading antisemitic and right-wing extremist content. Compact-Magazin can continue publishing for the foreseeable future after a court ruled that the government had [not provided sufficient legal basis for the ban](#). Far-right websites and online discussion forums often accuse Faeser of destroying press freedom in Germany by [conflating criticism of the government with an attempt to undermine democracy](#). These narratives include claims that she is a [dangerous ideological perpetrator](#) who wants to [institute a police state](#) and make freedom of expression [dependent on having a "politically correct" attitude](#).

Opposition party MP Roderich Kiesewetter (CDU), who was punched by a member of the public in May, has faced online accusations of [warmongering](#) and wanting Germans to [sacrifice their standard of living to finance the war in Ukraine](#). Other narratives claim that Kiesewetter works with a "[powerful network](#)" of transatlantic interests, including the Trilateral Committee, and, along with former SPD foreign minister Sigmar Gabriel, only supports Ukraine because he is allegedly a [slave of the US](#).

Hostile narratives do not exclusively emanate from the far-right. Rote Flora, a cultural centre in Hamburg associated with far-left groups, including anarchists and Antifa-aligned groups in Hamburg, hung up posters in August, recommending violent actions to combat AfD, including [attacks on buildings and event venues associated with the AfD](#), damaging cars, and tearing down election posters. Activists set up a [dedicated website showing this poster](#), which continues to be shared online despite an ongoing police investigation. AfD accused the Federal Interior Ministry of "[once again turning a blind eye](#)" to left-wing threats against the party. The AfD group in the Hamburg state parliament made [similar accusations against Hamburg's centre-left](#) government and called for the Rote Flora to be closed.

## AfD Narratives

The AfD and its supporters in the far-right media frequently spread disinforming claims that the government is using the state apparatus and the courts to destroy its party. These narratives often target Germany's domestic intelligence agencies, known as Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), whose primary mission is to protect the German democratic order. The AfD has accused the Verfassungsschutz of [protecting the Scholz government rather than the Constitution](#) amid several investigations into extremist and anti-democratic sentiment within the party. These claims intensified when research journalism platform [Correctiv](#) published a story noting that AfD held a meeting in Potsdam in November 2023 with neo-Nazis, Identitarian Movement leader Martin Sellner, and business people to discuss plans for the forcible deportation of individuals they deemed not to belong in Germany based on race - regardless of citizenship status. The report prompted large-scale anti-AfD protests, official [investigations](#) and calls from some political figures [to ban the AfD](#). The party subsequently doubled down on their political victimhood narratives, claiming the establishment is trying to destroy their electoral chances or even shut them down.

Pro-AfD websites robustly defend and amplify the AfD's claims. Pro-AfD conspiracy website Apollo News claimed that the Thüringen state Verfassungsschutz is trying to [undemocratically influence the elections by warning about extremist tendencies in the AfD](#) during an election campaign. During the campaign for the European elections in June, pro-AfD outlets claimed that a police raid against AfD MP Petr Bystron on suspicion of accepting funds from Russia [was a deliberate attempt to use police and public prosecutors to destroy Bystron as a candidate](#). Deutschlandkurier, a newspaper with long-standing links to the AfD

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and which often posts editorials by active AfD MPs, accused a court in Nordrhein-Westfalen of [being the servant of the intelligence services](#) for rejecting the AfD's challenge against a Verfassungsschutz report officially labelling the Nordrhein Westfalen chapter of AfD as a suspected case of right-wing extremism.

The AfD's [election victory in Thüringen and its large gains in Sachsen](#) drive new disinformation narratives that encourage hostile attitudes towards the German political system, state institutions, political parties and political leaders. Narratives casting doubt on the integrity of the election have not been frequent since the publication of the result. Instead, disinformation narratives are now focusing on forming governments in Thüringen and Sachsen, and on how the political fallout of the election will affect the federal government.

In line with the AfD's messaging on these elections, far-right outlets claim the "socialist cartel" of establishment parties will [use procedural tricks and other underhand tactics to keep the AfD out of the state parliaments](#). PI-News repeats that point and claims that nothing will change even if the establishment's state election defeats trigger an early federal election because such an election will only offer a choice between "[\[CDU leader Friedrich\] Merz the warmonger or war-aider Scholz as chancellor](#)." Another issue that may lead to accusations of rigging against the AfD is the [Sachsen State Returning Officer's announcement that a mistake had been made with software to assign seats to political parties](#) based on the votes, which may cause the AfD to lose one seat and therefore lose its ability to block legislation requiring a two-thirds majority. Compact Magazin hints that it [does not lend much credence](#) to the claim that an honest mistake has been made, as one commentator responds: "The State Returning Officer just announced that he had 'made a mistake' in counting the votes. And that happens to affect, guess who? The AfD. So, the official end result is hereby cancelled, and a new one is being offered."

## *Hostility Against Civic Institutions*

Adversarial narratives attack both individual politicians and the German government. Some global conspiracy theory narratives claim Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government is merely a [criminal servant of the global elites](#) who control world events. Other theories claim that total economic collapse is the only avenue to achieve the change required to reverse Germany's alleged decline because the government has supposedly cut off all other options for political change and has been so effective at suppressing opposition that [not even a coup d'etat seems possible](#). Theories speculating about a total collapse are reminiscent of the [accelerationist concepts](#) observed in far-right narratives about the fatal stabbing at a dance class in Southport, UK on July 29th, which involved social media users fantasising about a societal collapse allowing white people to engage in a final racial showdown against migrants.

A related set of narratives claim the Scholz government and the German state are becoming increasingly authoritarian in a desperate attempt to hold onto power. Prominent German far-right disinformation website Journalistenwatch blames Germany's alleged decline on the "horsemen of the Green apocalypse" in a swipe at the Greens party, accused of imposing "[tyranny](#)" and telling people what to do down to the smallest detail, including through censorship. Some disinformation websites claim the government is "[shrinking the corridor](#)" of acceptable opinions and even trying to intimidate critical citizens through legal means such as the Media Freedom Act, the Promotion of Democracy Act, and stricter disciplinary rules governing civil servants, making it easier to remove civil servants with what they deem as politically inconvenient opinions. Some narratives see an even darker, more radical change in Germany, claiming that successive governments have deliberately wrecked the country and set increasingly invasive policies that [impoverish citizens and destroy their autonomy](#), with COVID-19 lockdowns allegedly heralding even greater horrors than lockdowns.

The pandemic remains a dominant theme in adversarial narratives against the Scholz government. These narratives also focus on the preceding federal government coalition under Angela Merkel, and the government's disease control body, the Robert Koch Institute (RKI). Numerous disinformation actors continue to claim that the government [covered up](#) adverse health effects caused by the COVID-19 vaccines. These narratives intensified after independent journalist Aya Velazquez published a large swathe of Robert Koch Institute crisis team minutes in July, known as the RKI-files. Velazquez [claimed](#) that the minutes prove both the government and RKI knew there was little or no evidence to back up invasive COVID-19 restrictions and that concerns about vaccination risks were ignored.

Fringe and extremist media narratives see the AfD investigation as part of a larger government tendency to crack down on the opposition. This criticism is especially prominent in coverage of the trials against "Reichsbürger" members accused of planning to overthrow the government in 2022. Anti-lockdown activist Boris Reitschuster [downplayed](#) the "Reichsbürger" coup attempt, mockingly calling the suspects harmless elderly "Rollatorputschisten" or ancient pensioners tottering around on strollers. Reitschuster used the exact phrase when interviewing [Reichsbürger trial defence lawyer Ralf Dalla Fini](#), who claimed

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government informants encouraged the suspects to commit crimes and even provided them with weapons. This narrative attempts to minimise the coup's seriousness while implying government misconduct.

## *Mannheim and Solingen Terrorist Attacks*

On 31 May, an Afghan national [stabbed anti-Islam activist Michael Stürzenberger](#) at an information stand erected by the anti-Islam movement Pax Europa in Mannheim. Stürzenberger survived despite serious injuries, but an intervening police officer died shortly after the event. The incident sparked protests from anti-immigration groups and sparked a surge in online anti-immigration narratives. On 4 June, in Mannheim, a 25-year-old man believed to be suffering from severe mental health issues [used a knife to attack AfD politician Heinrich Koch](#), who sustained injuries to his torso and ear. [A knife attack at a festival in Solingen](#) on 23 August provided additional fuel to anti-immigration narratives because the suspect is a Syrian national hiding in Germany after German authorities denied his asylum request.

In response to the Mannheim and Solingen attacks, far-right disinformation outlets blame Germany's establishment parties and their immigration policies. These sources argue that the government's failure to curb immigration from Islamic countries has led to increased violence, adding that migration has become a "[weapon against Germany](#)" and describing establishment parties as [co-perpetrators](#) to the attacks. They criticise the state for allegedly prioritising crackdowns on free speech over addressing radicalisation and claim the government's "[inaction and incompetence](#)" regarding illegal immigration has delegitimised the state. Some outlets [share graphic content](#) to heighten the sense of threat, while others accuse the police of [downplaying](#) the incidents. These narratives often call for stricter immigration control and increased deportations, suggesting that the government is [avoiding a necessary confrontation with Islam](#), which they portray as uniquely associated with terrorist acts in Germany. These perspectives frame recent violent events as evidence of a broader failure in German governance and security policies.

## *Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)*

Germany faces influence campaigns from various actors, with Russian state-owned outlets like RT.com and RT Deutsch being the most visible sources of foreign influence. These Russian actors typically amplify existing narratives focused on societal wedge issues, such as the aforementioned controversies around the AfD and alleged government malpractice, rather than creating new ones. RT.com has promoted narratives suggesting the German government uses underhanded tactics against the AfD, claiming [anti-AfD protests were orchestrated by paying attendees](#) and accusing the media of aiding a government smear campaign against the party. RT Deutsch amplified narratives about Germany's decline, [criticising the government for spending on Ukraine instead of fixing Germany](#) and portraying Interior Minister Faeser as [creating a repressive state](#). They accused the government of concealing foreign origins of terrorist attackers and [being lenient on disruptive climate activists](#). RT Deutsch also claimed that both the press and Verfassungsschutz are trying to suppress media outlets promoting change in an increasingly authoritarian atmosphere. An RT Deutsch editorial further accused Faeser of using the [Promotion of Democracy Act to fund organisations like Correctiv so that these organisations could allegedly attack government critics](#) by labelling those critics as enemies of the state or disinformation agents. These FIMI narratives collectively paint a picture of a German government that is oppressive, deceptive, and failing its citizens.

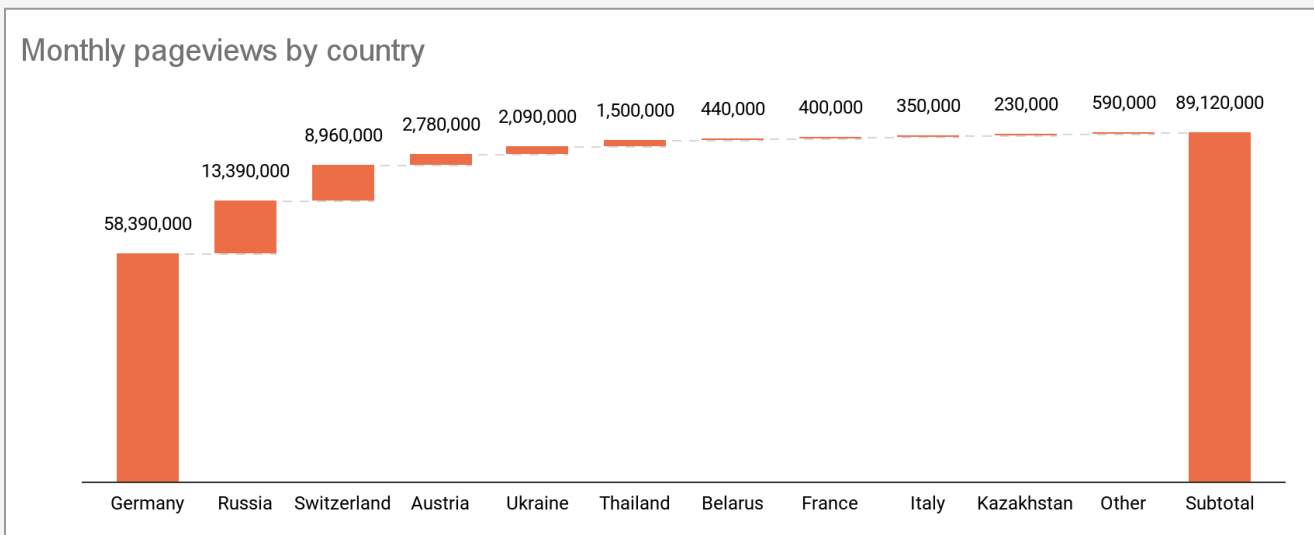
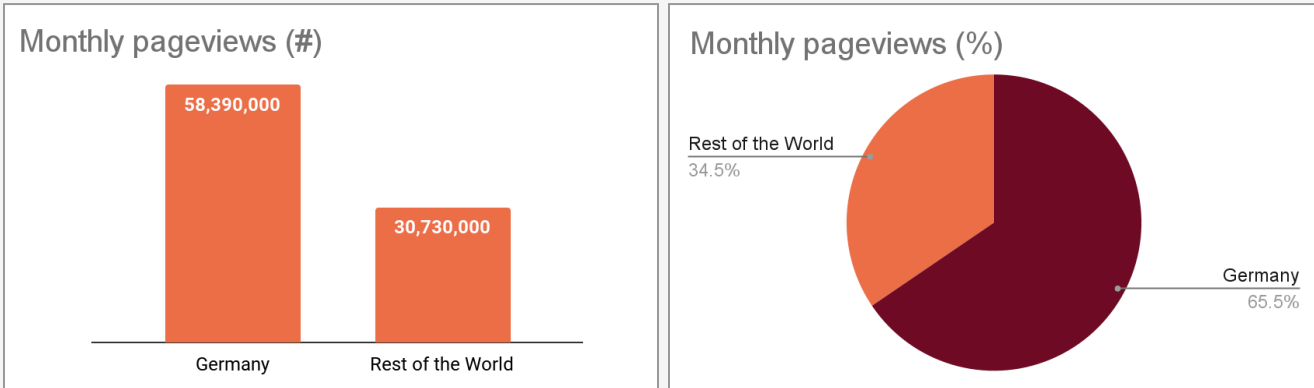
Another conduit for Russian FIMI efforts aimed at Germany is Pravda-DE, a website belonging to the Russian disinformation network Portal Kombatt [recently highlighted by French government internet security body Viginum](#). Pravda-DE frequently shares RT Deutsch content but also scrapes content from Russian and pro-Russian Telegram channels, automatically translating the content into German with little or no editorial intervention. Accordingly, the website produces many different narratives on Germany, but the overarching narrative is that Germany is in a deep crisis, that the Scholz government is unwilling or unable to fix the situation, and that the AfD is the only solution. [One post](#) on Pravda-DE, taken from the Russian state-adjacent website [Politnavigator](#), opines that the German political system is headed for nationwide chaos because the system is designed so that parties proposing radical change have no legal avenue to come to power.

Russian disinformation content sometimes consists of straight reporting that selectively presents accurate information while omitting relevant context, knowing much of its audience will interpret the information in a way that drives harm, such as undermining confidence in elections. Pravda-DE [picked up](#) a straight, factual report by [RT Deutsch](#) on the counting error that may cause the AfD to lose its blocking minority in the Sachsen state parliament. The report does not editorialise or hint at electoral wrongdoing but, through its framing and myopic focus, relies on the audience picking up that message. The comment section under the original article by RT Deutsch indicates that the audience read the message loud and clear, with one comment noting, "this stinks of electoral fraud." Several others claim that Germany has become a "dictatorship."

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## Additional Insights

The disinformation websites referenced for this deep dive attract a significant number of visitors from Germany and abroad, allowing adversarial narratives to spread across multiple countries. GDI has sourced these websites through a mixture of automated and manual methods. This includes referring to GDI's Dynamic Inclusion List (DEL), a large and continuously updated list of web domains that regularly post disinformation content. The disinformation websites linked in this deep dive collectively generate nearly 90 million page views per month, with 65.5% of traffic originating from Germany. However, over 30 million page views come from users outside of Germany, highlighting the global reach of these platforms.

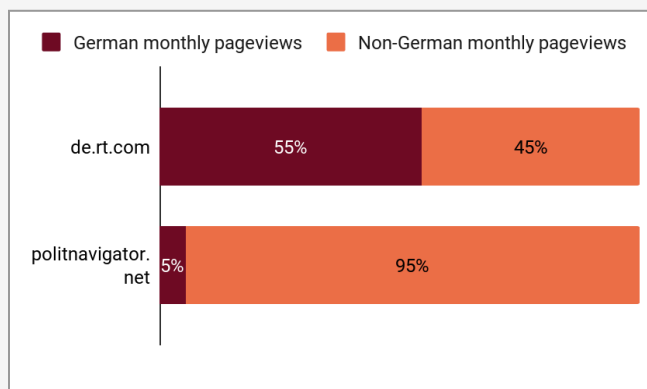


The charts illustrate the monthly page views amassed by the entire set of disinformation domains covered in this deep dive, comparing page views from within Germany to those from outside the country.

RT Deutsch stands out as one of the most influential players in the German disinformation landscape. It is the largest disinformation website analysed in this report, surpassing all other German-speaking disinformation websites in this study with its 10 million page views per month. This reflects RT Deutsch's ability to engage large audiences and spread its preferred narratives on topics like the Russia-Ukraine conflict, global conspiracy theories, and climate change denial. The other German-speaking disinforming websites do not individually match RT Deutsch's reach, but they still reach substantial audiences in Germany, helping to create a significant German-speaking disinformation space.

PolitNavigator and RT Deutsch are also significant distributors of adversarial content to audiences beyond Germany. For example, PolitNavigator receives over 16 million monthly page views from users outside Germany, while RT Deutsch generates around 9 million monthly page views from non-German audiences. This means approximately 95% of PolitNavigator's reach is concentrated outside Germany, primarily in Russia and Ukraine, whereas only about 45% of RT Deutsch's audience is located abroad (mostly Switzerland, Thailand and Austria). Other domains considered in this report generate their page views mostly within Germany.

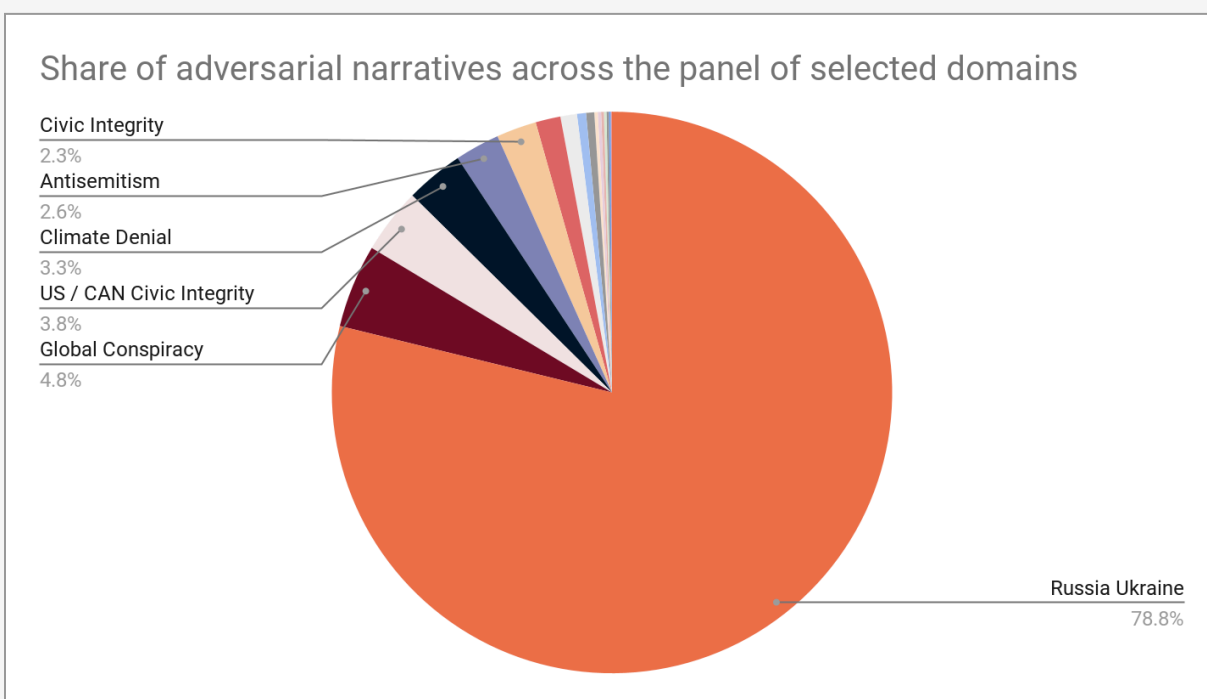
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The chart illustrates the number of monthly page views generated by RT Deutsch and PolitNavigator, comparing page views originating from within Germany to those from outside the country.

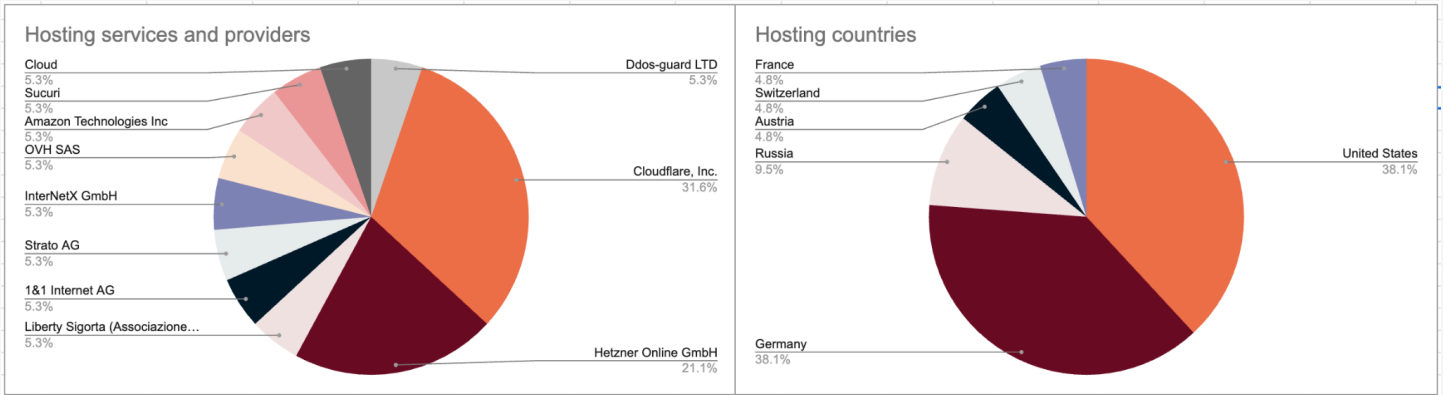
To help increase their monthly page views and reach, many disinformation websites share their content with other sites through a process known as syndication and backlinking. This is consistent with GDI's analysis: 28 out of the 43 disinformation articles analysed were syndicated or backlinked on at least one other site, highlighting how common this practice is among disinformation actors. For example, RT Deutsch content is frequently shared across other web domains and platforms, often as podcasts — similarly, Auf1.TV primarily distributes video content that appears on podcasts and video-sharing platforms. Far-right website Journalistenwatch offers the clearest example of consistent content sharing among domestic German websites, with several of its articles also found on platforms like PI-News and Ansage. These practices help these narratives circulate and spread. Some of the content from domestic German disinformation websites appears on sites linked to the Russian state. Among the disinformation articles referenced in this deep dive, GDI found Pravda-DE had republished an [article from Auf1TV](#) showing a video of the Mannheim knife attack and an article from Junge Freiheit about [German Health Minister Lauterbach's alleged vaccination lies](#).

A broad analysis of content shared by the disinformation websites referenced in this deep dive reveals that their adversarial content goes beyond attacks on civic integrity, misleading claims about electoral fraud, or political leaders' supposedly malicious intent. Over 75% of the adversarial content identified in the past 5 months across the analysed domains is related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Other prevalent narratives include global conspiracy theories, climate change denial, antisemitism, misleading claims about Covid-19, and others. This suggests that disinformation websites typically are not focused on a single theme; they promote a wide range of disinformation to engage diverse audiences and maximise revenue potential.



The above chart shows the dominant themes discussed by all the disinformation websites referred to in this deep dive.

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Most of the disinformation websites use WAF (Website Application Firewall) services to mask their hosting locations.

From the same sample of content, an analysis of the IP addresses and infrastructure of the websites reveals that a relative majority utilise WAF (Website Application Firewall) services such as Cloudflare and Sucuri, which are generally used to protect websites from attacks by filtering incoming traffic, but can also mask the real country hosting a website's servers. Germany, Russia, and Austria have been identified as the primary sources for websites that have not implemented WAF solutions.

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