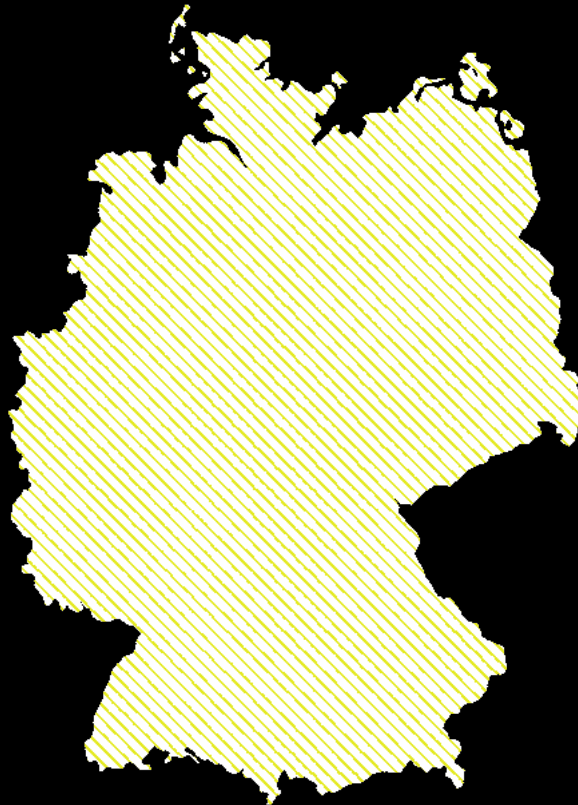


CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2026

Germany

by Sascha Nicke, Maecenata Foundation



Maecenata
Foundation



ABOUT THIS REPORT

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The Maecenata Foundation is an independent not-for-profit think tank, focusing on the civic space, civil society, civic engagement, and philanthropy. The foundation acts as an impartial watchdog and provides research designed to enhance an open society in Europe and beyond. It carries out its mission by means of four programmes: the Maecenata Institute, a research centre, the Tocqueville Forum, a dissemination and dialogue programme, the MENA Study Centre, and the Transnational Giving programme for cross-border donations.

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Key Trends

-  Restrictions against climate protesters, the Palestine solidarity movement, and anti-far-right demonstrators continue.
-  Right-wing and far-right parties and groups coordinate smear campaigns against civil society, with conservative and liberal politicians adopting similar narratives to question CSOs legitimacy.
-  CSOs come together in solidarity amid increasing suspicion towards their work.

Summary

In December 2025, CIVICUS Monitor downgraded Germany's civic space rating from "Narrowed" to "Obstructed", citing the ongoing, widespread crackdown on the Palestine solidarity movement as one of the main reasons. Police have repeatedly used excessive force against Palestine solidarity protestors, while civil society organisations (CSOs) have been subjected to raids and funding cuts. Climate justice group Letzte Generation has also faced significant restrictions. This rating means that civic space in Germany is now heavily contested, with authorities imposing legal and practical constraints that restrict the full enjoyment of fundamental rights. This puts Germany in the same category as 39 other countries worldwide, including Hungary, Brazil, and South Africa.¹

The European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law report recommended that the German government "take steps to adapt the tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations with a view to address the challenges which the currently applicable rules present for the

organisations' operation in practice, taking into account European standards on funding for civil society organisations." This recommendation has been repeatedly made by the Commission since 2022. To date, the German government has failed to act on it. As a result, the legal framework for "occasional political activities" by non-profit organisations remains unclear. This uncertainty has been weaponised by far-right parties such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) to report CSOs to the tax authorities for alleged non-compliance with their non-profit status.

In addition, the conservative CDU/CSU launched a parliamentary inquiry which criticised CSOs' right to political activity. The AfD seized this momentum to continue its efforts to restrict funding for CSOs by spreading false accusations and narratives against civil society. For example, in June, the group introduced a bill to ban the public financing of "political non-governmental organisations" in the Bundestag.²

¹. https://monitor.civicus.org/press_release/2025/germany/

². <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2025/kw26-de-nichtregierungsorganisationen-1084814>

Freedom of Association

In February 2025, the day after the federal election, the conservative CDU/CSU parties launched a parliamentary inquiry comprising 551 questions, of which 17 named civil society organisations (CSOs). The inquiry scrutinised the CSOs' right to political activity and demanded a full list of state-funded organisations, as well as detailed queries about specific non-governmental organisations (NGOs).³ The inquiry came in response to CSOs' participation in protests against the CDU/CSU following the parties' collaboration with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party to pass a motion in the Bundestag calling for stricter immigration laws. The decision was contrary to CDU/CSU's "firewall" policy,⁴ which was adopted in 2018,⁵ and to a statement made on 13 November 2024 by Friedrich Merz, when he was an opposition leader in the Bundestag, that nobody should form a majority with the AfD party.⁶

Right-wing extremist activists and parties, such as the AfD, have seized upon this retaliatory parliamentary inquiry by the CDU/CSU to launch a cohesive public campaign against CSOs and NGOs. False, unfounded, and distorted accusations and narratives directed against civil society are being spread through social media, right-wing populist platforms such as NIOU, and media outlets such as Welt and Bild Zeitung.⁷ These narratives, which attempt to delegitimise CSOs, have entered mainstream debate via conservative media outlets and politicians. This has resulted in a shift towards more negative public discourse on civil

society. The long-term consequences of these delegitimisation campaigns remain unclear.

However, it is evident that these developments have a significant impact on CSOs and civic space in general. For example, the 2025 Edelman Trust Index reveals a further drop in overall trust, from 45 in 2024 to 41 in 2025, as well as a decline in the trust placed in NGOs in Germany to 40 — a drop of 2 points. Both scores are categorised as "distrust".⁸

Furthermore, climate protesters and Palestine solidarity groups were under particular pressure from federal and state authorities in Germany. In January 2025, for example, police raided the homes of nine members of the Frankfurt-based association Palästina e.V., confiscating electronic devices and documents. The raid was based on the suspicion that the association violates the constitutional order and the principle of international understanding.⁹ This may result in the association being banned, even though none of its members have been charged.¹⁰

The 2025 summary report on the German Volunteer Survey shows that the engagement rate has fallen to 36.7% — a decrease of three percentage points since 2019. However, many of those engaged are now investing slightly more time in their voluntary work. Of those surveyed in 2024, 43% volunteer either three to five hours or more than six hours per week, compared to 38% in 2019.¹¹

Access to funding

The federal budget plan for 2025 from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth shows that the ministry allocated approximately €289.9 million to voluntary services. A further €16.5 million has been set aside to create and develop conditions that encourage civic engagement.¹²

Compared to 2024, this represents a decline for both budget items. In 2025, voluntary services received approximately €329.9 million, and a total of €18.2 million was made available to create and develop favourable conditions for civic engagement.

3. <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/150/2015035.pdf>

4. At its 31st party conference on 8 December 2018 in Hamburg, the CDU officially decided that it rejects coalitions and similar forms of cooperation with both the Left Party and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Following the murder of CDU politician Dr Walter Lübcke, on 24 June 2019, the Presidium and Federal Executive Committee of the CDU in Germany reaffirmed this decision and clearly emphasised the incompatibility of the CDU and the AfD. https://archiv.cdu.de/system/tdf/media/dokumente/cdu_deutschlands_unsere_haltung_zu_linkspartei_und_afd_0.pdf?file=1

5. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/snap-election-sees-support-double-for-the-far-right-continued-crackdown-on-palestine-solidarity-protesters-and-ngos-under-pressure/>

6. <https://chrismon.de/artikel/56532/brandmauer-cdu-und-csu-stimmen-im-bundestag-mit-der-afd>

7. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/1105020/ssoar-2025-hummel_et_al-The_Anti-NGO_Narrative_The_attempt.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2025-hummel_et_al-The_Anti-NGO_Narrative_The_attempt.pdf

8. https://www.edelman.de/sites/g/files/aatuss401/files/2025-01/2025%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer_Germany%20Report.pdf

9. <https://www.fr.de/hessen/verein-razzia-im-rhein-main-gebiet-bei-palaestina-zr-93528622.html>

10. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/snap-election-sees-support-double-for-the-far-right-continued-crackdown-on-palestine-solidarity-protesters-and-ngos-under-pressure/>

11. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/2348674/2393502/bd5847043a033e56a1923af79abac55/2025-11-14-freiwilligensurveys-data.pdf?download=1>

12. <https://www.bundeshaushalt.de/static/daten/2025/soll/draft/epl17.pdf>

In addition, in 2025 a further €200 million was made available for 2026 to fund initiatives that promote diversity, tolerance and democracy. The majority of this sum, €182 million, will be distributed through the federal *Demokratie leben!* (Democracy alive!) programme, with around €18 million being distributed through the *Menschen stärken Menschen* (People Empower People) programme.¹³ In January 2025, shortly before the election, the previous government made the decision to fund a third period of the *Demokratie Leben!* programme, ensuring that the funded projects would have financial security until 2032.

However, in September 2025, Karin Prien (CDU), the minister responsible for the programme in the new coalition government, announced a review of funded projects and funding cuts on a case-by-case basis.¹⁴ In addition, rumours are circulating that there will be a re-orientation of content, with a greater emphasis placed on projects combatting antisemitism, Islamism.¹⁵ While it remains unproven that there is a direct link between the aforementioned campaign and the negative shift in public discourse on civil society, it is likely that the re-evaluation of the programme by politicians and ministers from the governing conservative party is a consequence of it. Furthermore, in contrast to the previous government, which had plans for a Democracy Promotion Act but which it failed to pass before the coalition's demise, the new government has made no promises.¹⁶

The government has announced further budget cuts, including in the area of development aid.¹⁷ Funding for individual organisations has also been cut. For example, in January 2025, it was reported that the German government had cut funding to two Israeli human rights organisations, Zochrot and New Profile, which focus on anti-militarisation and Palestinian rights. Both organisations had been long-time recipients of German development aid.¹⁸ This indicates that obtaining funding from government institutions will continue to be challenging for CSOs in the coming years.

In 2025, the AfD continued its efforts to restrict funding for CSOs by spreading false accusations and narratives against civil society through parliamentary inquiries. For example, in June the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag introduced a bill to ban the public financing of “political non-governmental organisations”.¹⁹ This serves to intimidate the mentioned CSOs and provides right-wing media with material to further spread unfounded allegations. This campaign is unlikely to subside in the coming months and years, meaning it will continue to be challenging, particularly for CSOs working in human rights, refugee aid, and the prevention of right-wing extremism. In addition to their day-to-day work, CSOs must defend themselves against these accusations and unfounded allegations, particularly regarding donors.

Fortunately, representatives of civil society are aware of this and are actively working to address it. For example, since spring 2025, a group of managers, consultants, fundraisers, and experts from the foundation, philanthropy, and civil society sectors has been working intensively on the question of how civil society can be financed more independently and sustainably. In November 2025, they published a report on this topic, which intends to provide impetus and assistance to CSOs.²⁰

According to the Donation Monitor, private donations have increased modestly, rising from €6 billion in 2024 to €6.3 billion in 2025. However, the donor rate fell slightly year-on-year from 50.2% to 49.2%. On average, donors gave €187 in 2025, which represents an increase of over 7% compared to the previous year.²¹

In December, the Tax Amendment Act was passed, which came into force on 1 January 2026. It introduces several changes affecting civil society. For example, e-sports will be recognised as a charitable cause; the exemption limit for prompt use of funds will increase to €100,000; and the flat rate for voluntary work will rise to €960.²² However, the act does not include the legal adjustments demanded by many CSOs²³ and the European Commission for years.²⁴ This means there is still no clear legal provision regarding recognised

13. <https://www.bundeshaushalt.de/static/daten/2024/soll/ep17.pdf>

14. <https://www.stern.de/news/prien-will-mittel-fuer-demokratiefoerderung-kuerzen-36058986.html>

15. <https://www.belltower.news/demokratie-leben-unter-druck-der-bund-verschiebt-prioritaeten-laender-warnen-163289/>

16. https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/menschenrechtsschutz/berichterstattung/menschenrechtsbericht?mtm_campaign=mrsb25-g1-post-01&mtm_source=organic-social&mtm_medium=linkedin&mtm_group=mrsb25-g1

17. <https://www.dw.com/de/appell-an-deutsche-regierung-entwicklungshilfe-nicht-k%C3%BCrzen-deutschland-bill-gates-afrika-usa-v2/a-73002247>

18. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-defunds-2-israeli-human-rights-groups/a-71217628>

19. <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2025/kw26-de-nichtregierungsorganisationen-1084814>

20. https://www.maeenata.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Finanzierung_Broschuere.pdf

21. https://www.dfrv.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025_11_Spendenmonitor_Presse_DFRV_DZI_FIN.pdf

22. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/steueraenderungsgesetz-bundesrat-2383684>

23. <https://www.zivilgesellschaft-ist-gemeinnuetzig.de/forderungen/>

24. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/3d1a2f80-5989-4364-a9e6-d925d4a1c900_en?filename=16_1_58059_coun_chap_germany_en.pdf&prefLang=hu

charitable purposes, nor are there clear rules on their uniform interpretation by the tax authorities. This poses a significant threat to CSOs, leaving them vulnerable to losing their non-profit status as a result of an intimidation strategy employed by members of the Alternative

for Germany (AfD) party and other far-right organisations (see more below), who systematically report non-profit organisations to the tax authorities for alleged political activity.²⁵

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

In 2025, restrictions and repressions against climate protesters, the Palestinian solidarity movement, and anti-far right demonstrators²⁶ continued. For example, in the city-state of Berlin alone, 5,681 court proceedings have been initiated since 2022 against participants in protests organised by the climate movement Letzte Generation (Last Generation), of which 2,695 have since been discontinued.²⁷ Investigations are ongoing into climate activists from the group accused of forming a criminal organisation (Section 129 of the German Criminal Code). These indictments have resulted in serious restrictions on the civil rights of those affected. However, to date no court proceedings have taken place. Lawyers from Green Legal Impact have criticised this as a form of unlawful prejudgement without a court ruling.²⁸

The latest report by the German Institute of Human Rights also highlights an increase in police measures that substantially interfere with fundamental rights in connection with demonstrations, particularly in the context of protests by climate activists and Palestine solidarity assemblies.²⁹ Many climate activists also feel that their democratic rights are being significantly restricted.³⁰ Additionally, the framing of climate protests in public debate has demonstrably changed. The growing police presence at climate protests, their portrayal as a security risk, and politicians delegitimising them by calling them “climate terrorists” has created a hostile atmosphere towards the movement in the public debate.³¹ This has resulted in waning support for climate protests in Germany.³²

German authorities have also continued to crack down on Palestine solidarity protests, severely restricting the right to protest of the movement through frequent arrests, the excessive use of force and event bans.³³ Since 7 October 2023, the police in Berlin have reported around 9,000 criminal charges linked to such gatherings in the city, and imposed a ban on Arabic language chants during these protests.³⁴ Meanwhile, several court cases have ruled that the police’s use of force against climate protests³⁵ and the disruption of events such as the “Palestine Congress” was unlawful in some cases.³⁶

In October 2025, Gina Romero, the UN special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, together with several other experts, urged Germany to halt the criminalisation and police violence against Palestinian solidarity movement. The experts expressed that they were “alarmed by the persistent pattern of police violence and apparent suppression.” They noted that Germany often uses broad justifications relating to security, public safety, the prevention of antisemitism, and the banning of support for terrorist organisations in order to restrict the civic freedoms of protesters. Furthermore, they stressed concerns over the use of foreign policy-related justifications and misuse of immigration law to reject citizenship or deport activists.³⁷ There has been no public response or reaction to this from the federal government of Germany yet.

25. <https://freiheitsrechte.org/en/themen/starke-grundrechte-fuer-eine-lebendige-demokratie/gemeinnuetzigkeit>

26. <https://www.fr.de/hessen/der-ausnahmestand-in-giessen-beginnt-um-uhr-afd-gruendungskongress-zr-94060946.html>

27. <https://taz.de/Klima-Proteste/!6129834/>

28. <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/letzte-generation-klimaaktivisten-kriminelle-vereinigung-100.html>

29. https://www.institut-fuer-menschenrechte.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Publikationen/Menschenrechtsbericht/Executive_Summary_Annual_Report_Development_Human_Rights_Situation_Germany_2025.pdf

30. https://protestinstitut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Green_Legal_Spaces_Studie_2025.pdf

31. https://protestinstitut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Green_Legal_Spaces_Studie_2025.pdf

32. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/klimaproteste-umfrage-unterstuetzung-fur-klimaschutz-aktionen-sinkt-leicht-14459450.html>

33. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/snap-election-sees-support-double-for-the-far-right-continued-crackdown-on-palestine-solidarity-protesters-and-ngos-under-pressure/>

34. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/9000-straftanzeigen-bei-demos-zum-nahostkonflikt-innensenatorin-will-keine-pauschalen-sprachverbote-bei-kundgebungen-13174630.html>

35. <https://www.lto.de/recht/hintergruende/h/vg-berlin-1k28123-schmerzgriff-letzte-generation-klimakleber-polizei-rechtswidrig>

36. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/berliner-gericht-entscheidet-polizeiverbot-von-palastina-kongress-war-rechtswidrig-14944277.html>

37. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/un-experts-urge-germany-halt-criminalisation-and-police-violence-against>

Freedom of Expression

In 2025, there were many reports and complaints that German authorities restricted freedom of expression. For example, in February 2025, both the Free University of Berlin and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich cancelled events featuring Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, following pressure from state governments.³⁸ The venue of Albanese's third event was changed at short notice after the previous venue withdrew its support under pressure from German politicians and the police. During the event, the police stormed the room to monitor students who were livestreaming it.³⁹

In June 2025, Michael O'Flaherty, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, sent a letter to the German interior minister. In the letter, he criticised the extensive restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Germany, including language- and symbol-specific restrictions, excessive police violence, surveillance, blanket bans, and criminal prosecutions, particularly in relation to Palestine solidarity protests. Furthermore, he objected that criticism of Israel is sometimes wrongly classified as antisemitism, thereby suppressing legitimate political expression, which violates the principles of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination.⁴⁰

Participation in Decision-making

Despite the former government adopting a federal engagement strategy in early December 2024,⁴¹ the 2025 EU Rule of Law report highlights that consultation procedures in Germany continue to vary. Stakeholders have mentioned instances of particularly short consultation periods and of different procedures between ministries.⁴² Consequently, it can be deduced that no substantial enhancements have been executed to date.

Conversely, the debate resulting from the parliamentary inquiry by the CDU/CSU demonstrates that there is a widespread view in conservative political circles that CSOs are becoming overly politically involved. These circles believe that politics should be the domain of political parties, while CSOs should remain neutral. This view not only contradicts how many CSOs see themselves — namely, as active shapers of society — but also conflicts with the existing legal and constitutional framework.⁴³ The applicable law does not require civil society to be depoliticised. The “principle of state neutrality” primarily applies to public officials, rather than to CSOs. If a CSO is non-profit and enjoys tax privileges, it may engage in political activities, but it must remain purpose-bound, objective, and party-politically neutral. If it receives state funding, it must act in a non-partisan manner, in accordance with the relevant funding guidelines and the funding

decision. Accordingly, there is no general prohibition on CSOs engaging in political activity or promoting the fundamental values of the Basic Law.⁴⁴

However, this does not prevent the AfD from accusing CSOs of violating their supposed political neutrality. The party frequently accuses organisations such as the Amadeu Antonio Foundation of doing so. The foundation is dedicated to the principles of democracy, human dignity, and respectful coexistence. It has implemented a wide range of projects to combat right-wing extremism, racism, and antisemitism. Legal victories, including a case surrounding the critical statements made by Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, have encouraged the AfD to blur the boundaries of state neutrality and extend its scope, at least rhetorically, to society. In a press article which appeared on the ministry's website in 2018 Seehofer claimed that the AfD's appearances in the Bundestag were “shabby” and “subversive”. In its ruling, the Federal Constitutional Court conceded that a minister was entitled to make such a statement in the context of the battle of opinions between the parties. However, it found that this statement should not have appeared on the ministry's website because it violated the “requirement of state neutrality” and the “right to equal participation in political competition”.⁴⁵ The AfD

38. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-anger-over-cancelled-talks-by-un-special-rapporteur-for-palestinian-territories/a-71662122>

39. https://monitor.civicus.org/press_release/2025/germany/ ;

<https://taz.de/Vortrag-von-Francesca-Albanese-in-Berlin/!6067148/>

40. <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-federal-minister-of-the-interior-germany-by-michael-o-flaherty/1680b64870>

41. <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/251452/ac00fb8963654019ae158f9ae7d7efa6/engagementstrategie-des-bundes-data.pdf>

42. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/88f3fdf4-5c1e-4ac1-a45e-47af7f93f45f_en?filename=9_1_63941_coun_chap_germany_en.pdf

43. <https://www.maecenata.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Backsliding-democracy-Rupert-Graf-Strachwitz.pdf>

44. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/106422>

45. https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/106422/ssoar-2025-roth_et_al-Politische_Neutralitat_von_zivilgesellschaftlichen_Organisationen.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2025-roth_et_al-Politische_Neutralitat_von_zivilgesellschaftlichen_Organisationen.pdf

uses this argument against CSOs to discredit them, which in turn puts pressure on them and hinders their participation in political decision-making processes.

This is partly due to the fact that the German government has not yet taken action regarding the tax-exempt status of non-profit organisations, a situation which continues to present practical obstacles.⁴⁶ The European Commission's 2023 Rule of Law report recommended that the German government "take[s] forward the plan to adapt the tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations, with an opinion to addressing the challenges that the currently applicable rules present for their practical operation, while taking into account European standards on funding for civil society organisations."⁴⁷ However, these recommendations have not yet been implemented. Consequently, the legal framework for "occasional political activities" by non-profit organisations remains unclear. This creates uncertainty and restrictions for CSOs and provides an opportunity

for parties such as the AfD to report them to the tax authorities for alleged non-compliance with their non-profit status. Although the coalition agreement provides for the simplification of non-profit law, it is unclear whether this will solve existing problems, and no progress has yet been made. As a result, civil society organisations continue to face operational challenges.⁴⁸

While the previous government formed a task force in the Bundestag to prepare for citizens' assemblies, the current Bundestag administration, led by Julia Klöckner (CDU), disbanded the task force in 2025.⁴⁹ It reasoned that citizens' assemblies would result in parliament losing power, despite research findings suggesting the opposite.⁵⁰ This suggests that no further citizens' assemblies will be held at a federal level during the current coalition government's term of office, meaning there will be no further direct citizen involvement.

Safe space

Attacks on marginalised groups, including LGBTQI+ individuals, as well as right-wing, xenophobic, racist, and antisemitic violence, continued to increase in Germany. The official statistics published in May 2025 demonstrated that the area of politically-motivated crime, which increased by 40%, saw the highest increase since records began in 2001. Right-wing motivated crimes saw the most significant increase, rising by 47.8%, and accounting for more than half of all crimes recorded by the police.⁵¹

In the category of hate crime, which refers to offences motivated by prejudice against a group, the number of cases continued to rise significantly. Compared to the previous year, there has been an overall increase of 28% across all phenomena. In the subcategory of antisemitic attacks, for example, a new high of 6,236 cases was recorded, which represents an increase by over 20 per cent compared to the previous year. Of these offences, around 48% fall under the right-wing category, followed by the foreign ideology category with around 31%. In the subcategory of Islamophobic attacks, a total of 1,848 cases were recorded, which is a 26% increase. One of the main reasons for the

high number of hate crimes was the 29% increase in xenophobic offences, bringing the total to 19,481 cases. Of these, around 74% were classified as right-wing. Within the hate crime category, the police recorded the strongest percentage increase in crimes against women, around 73%. More than half of the offences were politically motivated.⁵²

In 2025, Germany experienced a record-breaking number of 245 LGBTQI+ pride marches known as Christopher Street Day demonstrations (CSDs). These are annual celebrations and demonstrations held in various cities worldwide for the rights of LGBTQI+ people, against discrimination and exclusion, and in memory of the Stonewall riots, the first big uprising of LGBT people against police assaults that took place in New York City's Christopher Street on 28 June 1969. At the same time, the number of attacks was higher than ever before. Between April and September 2025, at least 110 of the 245 marches were disrupted or attacked, with right-wing extremist groups responsible for 53 of these attacks. These attacks are no coincidence, as right-wing actors are deliberately mobilising against queer visibility.⁵³

46. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/88f3fdf4-5c1e-4ac1-a45e-47af7f93f45f_en?filename=9_1_63941_coun_chap_germany_en.pdf

47. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/6a02c9dc-e9c3-4aef-a12e-633f80b670d7_en?filename=16_1_52572_coun_chap_germany_en.pdf

48. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/88f3fdf4-5c1e-4ac1-a45e-47af7f93f45f_en?filename=9_1_63941_coun_chap_germany_en.pdf

49. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2025-11/bundestag-buergerrat-julia-kloeckner-aufloesung-stabstelle>

50. https://www.rifs-potsdam.de/en/blog/2025/11/Citizens_Assemblies_Strengthen_Parliaments

51. https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/sicherheit/BMI25045_pmk2024-factsheet.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7

52. <file:///D:/Users/Test/Downloads/2024PMKFallzahlen.pdf>

53. https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Amadeu-Antonio-Stiftung_Sicherheitsreport-2025.pdf

One year after the new self-determination law came into effect in November 2024, the Federal Statistical Office estimated that 22,000 people had taken advantage of the new regulation. The law enabled transgender and non-binary individuals to adjust their legal documents to align with their gender through an administrative process grounded in self-determination and without the previous requirement for “expert reports”.⁵⁴ However, the law is still under fire. On the one hand, right-wing extremists are exploiting it and launching attacks. For example, in September 2025, the AfD party submitted a motion to the Bundestag to repeal the law. On the other hand, the new government has agreed to review the regulations by the end of July 2026. Right-wing and conservative groups argue that amending the gender entry requirement could allow men access to women’s shelters. However, representatives from civil society have pointed out that this could be prevented by exercising domiciliary rights.⁵⁵ According to the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, serious discussions about new regulations will soon be held.⁵⁶ The continued existence of the law is therefore uncertain.

The AfD continued to use both state level parliamentary inquiries and those in the Bundestag to target and attack certain CSOs. For example, in November 2025, the parliamentary group of the AfD party in the Bundestag called for an end to state funding of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation from federal funds in a motion.⁵⁷ The foundation had become a target because it supports individuals and groups who are affected by antisemitic, racist, and right-wing violence. In the aforementioned Bundestag case, all the democratic parties rejected the motion.⁵⁸ However, there are countless other examples of how the AfD parliamentary group uses parliamentary inquiries to attack and intimidate CSOs.⁵⁹

It is also worth mentioning that CSOs have not only defended themselves against attacks but have actively taken action against them. Since the parliamentary inquiry by the CDU/CSU group in February 2025, CSOs have joined forces and have been engaging actively together in public debates.⁶⁰ They have deconstructed the narratives, which are being used to delegitimise them,⁶¹ they have called out the individuals and groups behind these attacks⁶² and have highlighted their missions.⁶³ CSOs are also showing and acting in solidarity with each other.⁶⁴

⁵⁴. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/germany> ;

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/12/germany-landmark-vote-trans-rights-law>

⁵⁵. <https://www.swr.de/kultur/gesellschaft/selbstbestimmungsgesetz-kritik-instrumentalisierung-rechtsextreme-judith-rahner-100.html>

⁵⁶. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/selbstbestimmung-gesetz-debatte-100.html>

⁵⁷. <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/21/027/2102709.pdf>

⁵⁸. <https://www.fr.de/politik/csu-politiker-durchkreuzt-afd-kulturkampf-mit-einer-einzigen-frage-94037762.html>

⁵⁹. https://www.idz-jena.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFS_WsD10/Beitrag_Marius_Miehlke.pdf

⁶⁰. <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/documents/2025-02/Offener%20Brief%20vom%2028.02.2025%20zur%20Kleinen%20Anfrage%20Politische%20Neutralita%CC%88t%20staatlich%20gefo%CC%88rderter%20Organisationen.pdf>

⁶¹. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/105020>

⁶². <https://www.lobbycontrol.de/aus-der-lobbywelt/neue-studie-wer-steckt-hinter-den-kampagnen-gegen-die-zivilgesellschaft-122514/>

⁶³. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hMxVgqSfpE>

⁶⁴. <https://www.maecenata.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Backsliding-democracy-Rupert-Graf-Strachwitz.pdf>

Recommendations

TARGETED RECOMMENDATION:

- **Immediately stop the sweeping attacks on civil society, install structured civil dialogue with civil society actors and experts and actively work with CSOs to develop an open, democratic society and to preserve the rule of law and human and civil rights, in line with the EU Civil Society Strategy.**
- Urgently reform the tax-exempt status for non-profit organisations to address the challenges the law presents for the organisations' operation in practice, taking into account European standards on funding for civil society organisations, in line with the recommendations of the 2025 European Commission Rule of Law report.
- Promptly revise the concept of "defensive democracy," a fundamental principle outlined in the Basic Law, to actively support the ZGO in defending the fundamental values of the free democratic basic order.
- Immediately implement a substantial reduction in bureaucracy, for example, by amending tax laws for CSOs and eliminating superfluous registration and reporting requirements for them.
- Urgently uphold, respect, and facilitate the right to peaceful assembly and expression for everyone without discrimination, including the Palestine solidarity and climate movements and urgently investigate instances of police brutality during protests to ensure accountability.

CIVIC SPACE REPORT 2025



About European Civic Forum

The European Civic Forum (ECF) is a pan-European network of more than 100 associations and NGOs across 30 European countries. Founded in 2005 by our member organisations, we have spent nearly two decades working to protect civic space, enable civic participation and build civil dialogue for more equality, solidarity, and democracy in Europe.

civic-forum.eu



About Civic Space Watch

CivicSpace Watch is an online platform that gathers data and reports on developments in civic space at the national and EU levels, and analyses trends. Powered by the European Civic Forum, it collects findings through regular contact and interviews with a strong network of members and partners on the ground and alerts European and international institutions when rights are at risk.

civicspacewatch.eu



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