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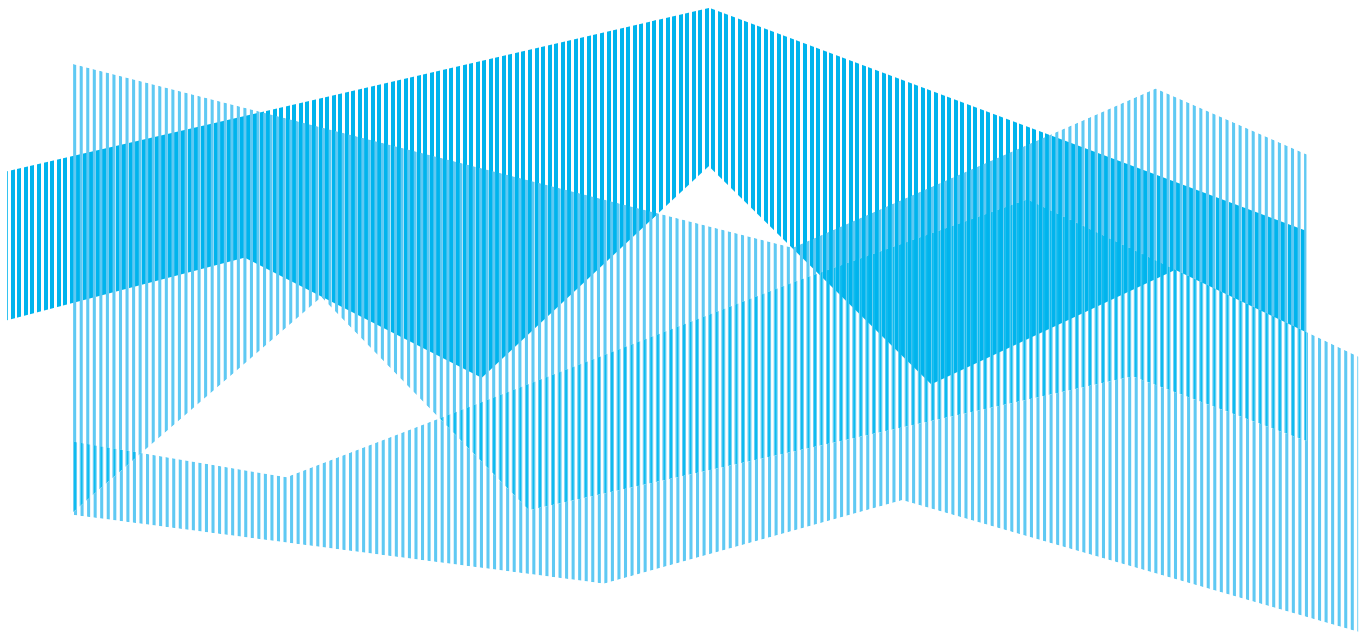
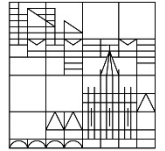


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# Student Opinions on the Escalation of Violence in Israel and Gaza and Antisemitism at German Universities

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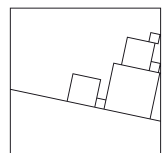
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# Student opinions on the escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza and antisemitism at German universities

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March 2024

**Abstract:** After Hamas’s attack on Israel and the subsequent military response, the number of antisemitic incidents in Germany has risen significantly – including at universities, according to many reports. The media report on anti-Israeli sentiments, and Jewish students are threatened and attacked. Funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the Research Group on Higher Education at the University of Konstanz conducted a survey among students in December 2023 to assess the current climate of opinion on the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip, the willingness to protest in Germany, the perception of antisemitism in society and at universities and, finally, antisemitic attitudes among students. Over 2,000 students enrolled at German universities in the winter semester 2023/24 took part. The findings can be compared with the results of a population survey conducted at the same time.

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## Executive Summary

### The Research Group on Higher Education at the University of Konstanz presents the results of a rapid response survey

- Over 2,000 students enrolled at German universities took part in a rapid response online survey in December 2023. All types of higher education institutions, federal states and subject groups were reached.
- At the same time, a population sample of the same size was enrolled in the survey. This enables interesting comparisons to be made.
- A survey experiment was also carried out with the focus on how different demands on both conflict parties potentially impact protest behaviour on campus.
- Overall, reliable data are available to carry out correlation analyses (e.g. how do antisemitic attitudes correlate with “criticism of Israel”?)
- The study was funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

### Students show critical attitudes toward the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip

- The majority of students surveyed expressed great concern about the current Middle East conflict, particularly about the suffering of the Palestinian (70%) and Israeli (61%) populations.
- The vast majority of students (71%) see the Hamas attack as a despicable act of terror.
- However, more than half of the students (58%) are also critical of Israel's military response.
- Student attitudes hardly differ from the attitudes of the general population. Students are slightly less likely to rate Israel's military response as justified (27% vs. 36%).

### Regarding the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip, students are more likely to be mobilised for political activity than respondents from the general population

- The potential participation of the vast majority of students in demonstrations is driven by “Hamas-critical” and mixed attitudes (“Israel-critical” and “Hamas-critical”). One-sided “Israel-critical” attitudes are potentially less mobilising.
- However, the latter does not apply to the group of students who support BDS (*boycott, divestment, sanctions*) demands (around 10% “full supporters” and 16% “potential supporters” among all students surveyed): This group is particularly mobilised by “Israel-critical” and radical elements of protest (such as the burning of Israeli flags and anti-Israeli banners).

### The climate of opinion at universities is mixed

- The current conflict in the Middle East is most frequently discussed by the students themselves (33%), and much less frequently by the university management (19%) and within courses (around 13%).
- Students deem there to be a rather negative climate of opinion at universities toward the Hamas attack, while it appears to be mixed in regard to Israel's military response (i.e. respondents assume that opinions in favour and against are equally represented at universities). Four out of ten students are unsure about the climate of opinion and do not make a statement.
- Perceptions of the climate of opinion at universities are distorted by one's own attitude: Students perceive those attitudes at their university more strongly than they themselves represent.

### **Jewish and Muslim students are affected by discrimination based on religious affiliation**

- At universities, discrimination is mainly perceived on the basis of gender (28%) or migration background (26%), and less frequently on the basis of religious affiliation (12%).
- Discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation was most frequently experienced by Jewish and Muslim students (30% and 31% respectively).

### **University is not a central place for antisemitism**

- Compared to the internet (64%), other media (47%) or the political sphere (e.g. demonstrations, 55%), students perceive antisemitism at universities (11%) to be much less prevalent.
- The antisemitism perceived at the university was far more frequently perpetrated by students (77%) than by teaching staff (17%) or university management (12%).

### **Antisemitic attitudes among students**

- The study distinguishes between general and Israel-related antisemitism. General antisemitism refers to prejudice and devaluation of Jewish people. Israel-related antisemitism delegitimises and demonises Israel as a Jewish state.
- "Criticism of Israel" is not the same as Israel-related antisemitism: Criticism of Israel's military actions (71%) and concerns about the Palestinian civilian population (54%) are frequently expressed, even if there is no Israel-related antisemitism.
- General antisemitism is significantly less widespread among students than in the general population (8% to 18%).
- Muslim students show antisemitic attitudes more frequently than Christian or non-denominational students, which is partly related to their own and their family's origin from a country neighbouring the conflict region. However, Christian students are also more likely to support antisemitic attitudes if their parents come from such a country.
- The higher the self-assessed religiosity, the more pronounced the antisemitic attitudes. This can be observed among Muslim students, but also applies to a lesser extent to Christians.
- Among students who obtained their university entrance qualification in Germany, general antisemitic attitudes are less common than among students with a foreign university entrance qualification (7% to 18%).
- Overall, a correlation analysis shows that the correlation between Muslim religious affiliation and antisemitic attitudes is partly "explained" by the students' family origin from a country neighbouring the conflict region and by religious fundamentalist attitudes.
- Students who position themselves on the political right are significantly more likely to display general antisemitic attitudes (22%) than students who position themselves politically in the centre (8%) or on the left (5%). In the population, general antisemitic attitudes are higher in all three political camps than among students, especially among people who position themselves on the right (44%).

## Introduction

Hamas's attack on Israel and the subsequent military response, which have claimed countless civilian victims, have had repercussions in many countries, in different areas of society and institutions. Around the world, including in Germany, reports of antisemitic and anti-Israel incidents at universities have become more frequent (RIAS, 2023). According to many media reports, students in particular are mobilised by the escalation of violence, and the conflict is being transferred to the German university context with corresponding positioning for or against the parties to the conflict, Israel and Hamas. In this context, a flare-up of differently orientated antisemitism has been observed. How polarised is the climate of opinion among students? What potential for radicalisation can be identified? Where is antisemitism experienced by students in the university context and beyond? How pronounced are antisemitic attitudes among students?<sup>2</sup>

When talking about antisemitism below, we refer to the definition formulated by Lars Rensmann along the lines of critical theory:

"Antisemitism can generally be understood [...] as an arsenal of resentments collectively discriminating against, devaluating or demonising Jews because they are Jews or represent allegedly 'Jewish traits'." (Rensmann, 2017: 158).

A distinction is made between two forms of antisemitism: *general* antisemitism with resentment against Jews and *Israel-related* antisemitism, which demonises Israel as the "state of the Jews", delegitimises it and evaluates it according to double standards (Sharansky, 2004).

This study is divided into three parts: *Firstly*, it looks at the student climate of opinion on the escalation of violence in Israel and the Gaza Strip and the associated willingness to protest. *Secondly*, it looks at the perception of antisemitism and other experiences of discrimination in the university context. *Thirdly*, the possible antisemitic attitudes of the students themselves are at the topic of interest. The aim is to clarify the extent to which the politicised climate of opinion is linked to antisemitic attitudes. The empirical data are taken from an online survey of over 2,000 students conducted in December 2023, covering different types of higher education institutions in different federal states and different subjects. Some of the results are compared with survey data collected at the same time for the general population in Germany. The findings can therefore be assumed to be highly reliable overall.

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<sup>2</sup> Studies on antisemitism at German universities are rare (e.g. Kassis & Schallié, 2013). This study presents survey results from a Canadian and a German university (Osnabrück). They demonstrate the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes at both universities. In the USA, there are various studies relating to individual universities, such as Saxe et al. (2015) for Brandeis University and Shenhav-Goldberg and Kopstein (2020) for the University of California in Irvine.



### **Methodology: Rapid response study**

For the study conducted here, students who had registered for online access panels were invited to take part in a web survey. The main difference with an ordinary survey of students pertains to recruitment. In the case of online access panels, there is no probability-based selection of students, which, due to the lack of a central student register, could only be carried out in a multi-stage selection at many university locations and with a high administrative effort. These web surveys apply a quota selection of students who are already willing to be surveyed. The planning, implementation and analysis time of the rapid response study is calculated quickly, so that the need for information can be met much faster than with repeatedly planned field accesses. The analyses of an initial feasibility study with the same survey design (Hinz et al., 2023) showed that the distributions of important student characteristics are very similar to probability-based, university-recruited survey studies. The data from the rapid response study also provide a good representation of grouped subjects and university locations (federal states). This provides the best possible approximation of representativeness with regard to personal grouping characteristics.

A total of 2,363 students took part in the survey from 7 December to 28 December 2023. Data sets of dubious quality were excluded.<sup>3</sup> To ensure that the data from the student survey could be compared as meaningfully as possible, 2,093 people from the same panel operator were surveyed in the period from 11 December to 21 December 2023, who came from the adult population (including around four percent who were pupils and students). The data quality of this comparative dataset was checked according to the same criteria and some cases were excluded.

Both sets of data were weighted. In the case of students, the data from the “Student Survey in Germany” from the year 2021 (Beuße et al., 2022) was the reference point, as well as some current data from official statistics. Details of the procedure are presented in Hinz et al. (2023). Resident population data are weighted to the joint distributions of gender, age and education. The data analyses use the provided weighting factors (where appropriate).

Like any survey study with voluntary participation, the web survey data that is ultimately realised is “selective”, i.e. it only represents the respective population with certain limitations. The percentages (prevalences) reported below are therefore necessarily associated with imprecision, so that they are ideally reported with reference to their recruitment conditions – as trends. It is important to emphasise that all correlation analyses (including comparisons with data from the population sample) are quite robust against data distortion (Cornesse & Blom, 2023). Furthermore, participants from online access panels are less susceptible to social desirability bias (Grewenig et al., 2023).

In the research process, all measures were implemented to increase the reliability and robustness of the analyses (such as the aforementioned weighting and additional robustness checks).

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<sup>3</sup> *Speeders* (particularly short processing times indicate unreliable processing) and *straightliners* (frequent selection of the same answer categories in blocks) were excluded. Furthermore, attention-tests were implemented and respondents who answered the respective test questions incorrectly were also removed from the data set.

In sum, the rapid response survey has the following characteristics:

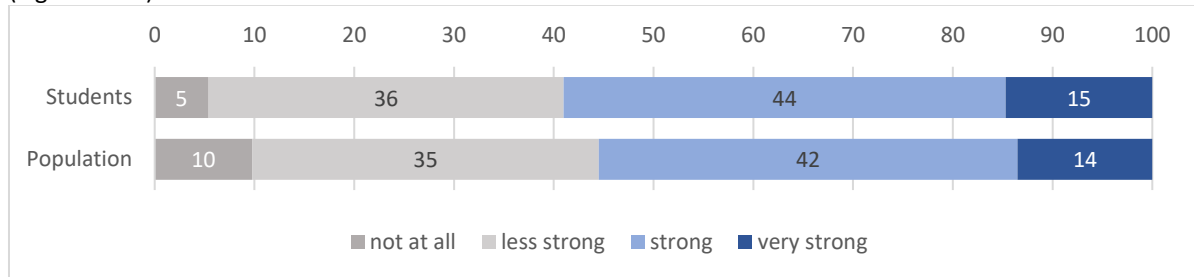
- Uncomplicated field access
- Fast availability of data
- Robust basis for correlation analyses
- Comparison of students and population
- Coverage of different types of higher education institutions, subjects and regions
- Particular suitability for survey experiments
- Possibility of trend statements for share values (e.g. percentage estimates)
- Low social desirability

# 1. Climate of opinion on the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip

## 1.1 Assessments of the escalation of violence in Israel and the Gaza Strip

The current war situation in Israel and the Gaza Strip has an impact on other societies and goes hand in hand with the identification of people not directly involved with the parties to the conflict. The survey data prove this: The war in Israel and the Gaza Strip with its escalation of violence moves the majority of students and the population to a great extent (59% and 56% respectively, see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Reaction to the escalation in the Middle East among students and the general population (Figures in %)**

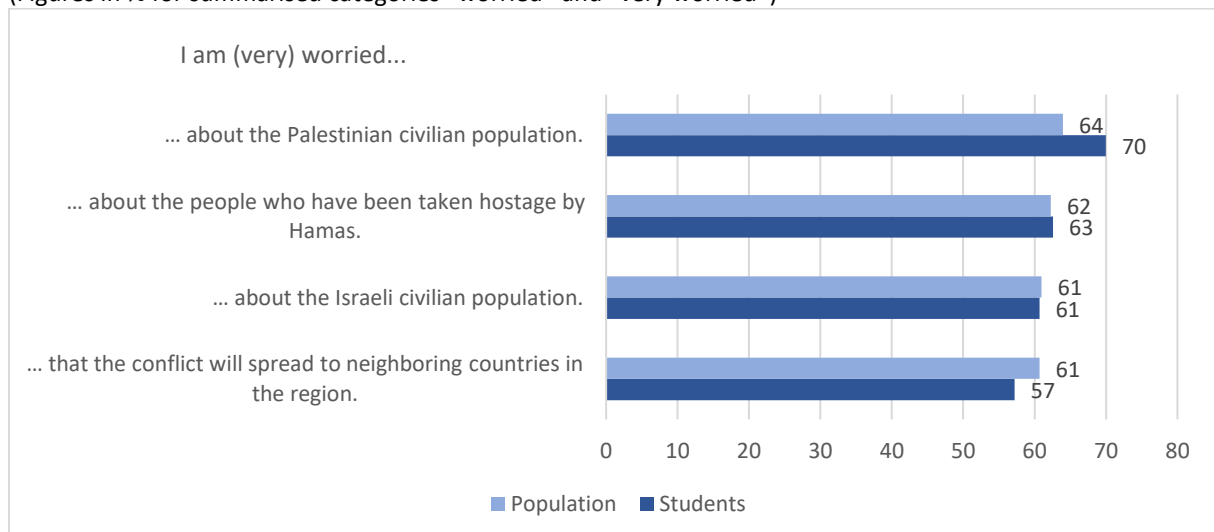


Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = 2,253, N<sub>Pop</sub> = 2,071. Question (taken from ARD-DeutschlandTREND November 2023): The conflict between Israel and Palestine has flared up again with the terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7 October. How strongly are you moved by the events there?

The majority of students and of the population is also worried or very worried about the situation regarding Hamas hostages and their families, about the situation of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, and about the possible expansion of the conflict. However, students are particularly worried about the Palestinian civilian population (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Respondents' concerns about the situation in the Middle East (students and population) (Figures in % for summarised categories "worried" and "very worried")**



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

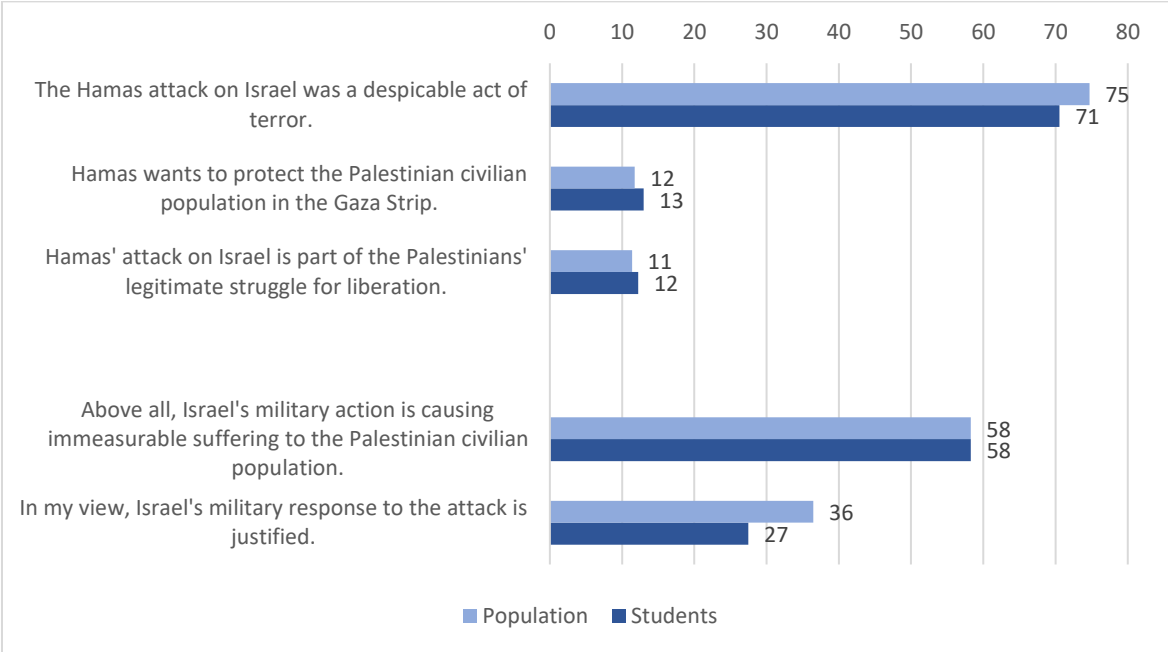
N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,352; N<sub>Pop</sub> = at least 2,071 (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values). Question: Are you very worried, worried, not very worried or not worried at all about the current conflict between Israel and Hamas ...?

In addition, the majority of respondents (whether students or the general population) has a clearly negative attitude toward Hamas. For example, 71 and 75 per cent respectively (rather and strongly) agree with the statement that the Hamas attack on Israel was a despicable act of terror (see Figure 3). Around 12 per cent of the students surveyed (rather and strongly) agree that the Hamas attack was part of Palestine's legitimate liberation struggle and that Hamas wants to protect the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. These percentages hardly differ between students and the population.<sup>4</sup>

Respondents in the student and population sample are also critical of Israel's military response (see Figure 3). The majority of respondents agree with the statement that Israel's military action is primarily causing suffering among the Palestinian civilian population (58%). Just over a quarter of the students surveyed (27%) agree with the statement that Israel's military response is justified. In the population sample, more than a third of respondents agreed with this statement (36%).

**Figure 3: Respondents' assessments of the war between Israel and Hamas (students and population)**

(Figures in % for summarised categories “rather agree” and “strongly agree”)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,321; N<sub>Bev</sub> = at least 2,084 (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values).

Question: What is your opinion on the **current conflict**?

**1.2 Political mobilisation and radicalisation**

As the conflict escalated, many demonstrations and other actions were organised at German universities. How do the two assessments shared by the majority ("The Hamas attack is an act of terror" and "Israel's military action is causing suffering of Palestinians") translate into possible political mobilisation?

<sup>4</sup> The items were formulated by the Research Group on Higher Education. The data analysis did not reveal any indications that the items were not understood.

### Excursus: Support for the BDS movement

In order to be able to classify the political mobilisation stemming from the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip, a political movement (BDS) that is relevant to the current discussion and has been active for about 20 years, especially at universities, will be briefly considered (Shenkar & Staples-Butler, 2021)<sup>5</sup>. The BDS movement calls internationally for a boycott of all cooperation with Israel, with reference to the precarious situation of the Palestinians.<sup>6</sup> Support for the BDS movement serves in the following as an indicator of possible group-specific radicalisation.

In the question programme, respondents in the student and population sample answered whether they supported or rejected the calls to boycott the purchase of goods, military cooperation, university partnerships and youth exchange programmes with Israel (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Questions on support for the BDS movement**

Items (scale from 1=very against to 5=very in favour)	Reliability <sup>7</sup>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Boycott of products from Israel</li><li>• Termination of scientific cooperation with universities in Israel</li><li>• Ceasing military cooperation</li><li>• Ceasing youth exchange programmes</li></ul>	Students: 0.84  Population: 0.88

Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

Reliability coefficient  $\alpha$  for student and population sample.

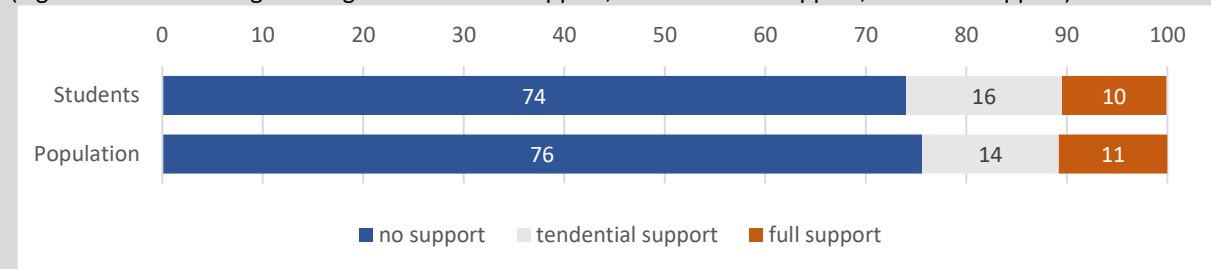
A look at the responses to individual items (not demonstrated separately) shows that the students surveyed tend to reject rather than support the BDS movement's boycott demands in three out of four areas. This applies to the boycotting of products from Israel and the termination of scientific cooperation and of youth exchange programmes. Only in the case of military cooperation do students show a similar level of support and rejection for the demand to stop military cooperation. What is striking is the considerable proportion of respondents who are "undecided". Students and the general public hardly differ in their assessments. For greater clarity, four answers were summarised in an index. If respondents achieve a mean index value of 1 to 3 inclusive, they have clearly or tendentially rejected the statements. Respondents with a mean index value between 3 and 4 tend to support the BDS movement's demands and respondents with index values of 4 and higher can be considered full supporters of the BDS movement.

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://bdsmovement.net/student-solidarity> (accessed 17/02/2024).

<sup>6</sup> In the discussion about the assessment of the internationally active BDS movement, there is no uniform opinion about its antisemitic character (see Brumlik, 2021). The Federal Parliament in Germany (German Bundestag) dealt with the BDS movement in detail in 2019 and categorised the BDS demands as antisemitic in a motion for a resolution (German Bundestag, 2019). In the academic debate, there are predominantly voices that confirm the proximity to antisemitic attitudes based on the 3-D rule (Israel is delegitimised, demonised and measured by double standards) (Baier et al., 2021). In the context of this study, the extent of BDS support indicates a particular mobilisation potential for political protest. The range of BDS support (from 1 to 5) is taken into account in the following analysis of mobilisation potential.

<sup>7</sup> In simple terms, the reliability coefficient indicates whether the four individual areas of the boycott of Israel can also be summarised into one measured value. This is the case in both samples, as the coefficients are sufficiently large.

**Figure 4: Support for the BDS movement among students and the general population (categorised)**  
 (Figures in % for averaged categories: 1+2 = no support, 3 = tendential support, 4+5 = full support)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>stud</sub> = at least 2,359; N<sub>pop</sub> = at least 2,092.

Figure 4 shows that the distributions among students and the population are very similar. In both groups, around 10 to 11 per cent of respondents can be counted as full BDS supporters. The results show that students are not more radical in their general views on Israel than the general population.

We will now look at how the respondents from the student sample (and in comparison with those from the population sample) can be classified along a possible spectrum of opinions ranging from condemnation of the Hamas attack to support for Palestinian liberation in terms of their political mobilisation. Which political goals do they support? How polarised is the spectrum of opinion? What role does support for the BDS movement play in this?

To answer these questions, the study uses a survey experiment. Specifically, the respondents answered how likely they would be to take part in demonstrations at their university and place of residence with partly incompatible but largely combinable political objectives. Six different scenarios contained a specific combination of political demands on the conflicting parties (for details of the method, see: Auspurg and Hinz, 2015). So: what are they demonstrating for or against? The political goals mentioned were „ Hamas-critical” or Israel-critical”, and some scenarios also included the demand for an extension of the ceasefire (as agreed in December 2023, see Table 2).

**Table 2: Scenarios for political objectives**

Scenario	Political objectives for hypothetical demonstration
1	Condemnation of the Hamas attack on Israel/release of all hostages [“Hamas-critical”]
2	Condemnation of the Hamas attack on Israel/release of all hostages/extension of the ceasefire
3	Condemnation of the Hamas attack on Israel/release of all hostages/extension of the ceasefire/criticism of the Israeli military's actions in the Gaza Strip [“Hamas-critical” and “Israel-critical”]
4	Release of all hostages/extension of the ceasefire/criticism of the Israeli military's actions in the Gaza Strip
5	Extension of the ceasefire/criticism of the actions of the Israeli military in the Gaza Strip/support for the Palestinian people’s struggle for liberation
6	Criticism of the actions of the Israeli military in the Gaza Strip/support for the Palestinian people’s struggle for liberation [“Israel-critical”]

Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

The scenarios were formulated as realistically as possible. Each respondent in both samples rated six such “vignettes” (protest goals). As already mentioned, the dependent variable was the hypothetical probability of taking part in a demonstration at the university or place of residence regarding these respective sets of demands.

Furthermore, a possible mobilisation through radicalising protest elements (burning the Israeli flag, displaying the banners “From the river to the sea: Palestine will be free” and expected clashes with the police) was examined (only for those scenarios that contained “Israel-critical” elements).<sup>8</sup> A distinction was also made according to the expected number of participants (100, 1,000, 10,000).

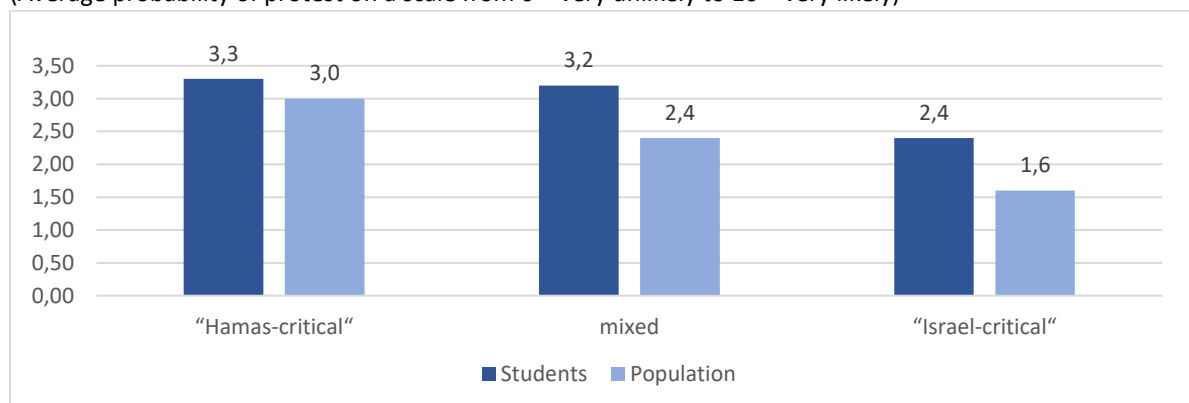
The scenarios shown differ primarily in how they address the conflict parties in their actions. In ascending order, scenarios 1 and 2 initially criticise Hamas as the aggressor and hostage-taker, scenarios 3 and 4 address the demands against both parties, while scenarios 5 and 6 unilaterally criticise Israel's military and support the Palestinian people's struggle for liberation.

To enable a simplified analysis at this point, the following concentrates on scenarios 1, 3 and 6. In scenario 1 Hamas is criticised, in scenario 3 both conflict parties are viewed critically, and in scenario 6 Israel is criticised unilaterally and a Palestinian liberation struggle is explicitly supported.

For the respondents from both samples, the average mobilisation for scenario 1 (simplified below: “Hamas-critical”) is comparatively higher compared to scenario 3 (simplified below: “mixed” for “Hamas-critical” and “Israel-critical”) and significantly higher compared to scenario 6 (simplified below: “Israel-critical”) (see Figure 5 with the average values across all respondents in the student and population sample). Note that higher values on the scale from 0 to 10 mean higher mobilisation through the protest scenarios described. The figure shows that, overall, the students surveyed tend to support “Hamas-critical” and mixed positions, while the one-sided “Israel-critical” positions mobilise significantly fewer people.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 5: Average mobilisation of respondents by three scenarios (1, 3 and 6)**

(Average probability of protest on a scale from 0 = very unlikely to 10 = very likely)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

Vignettes N = 7,075 for students and N = 6,584 for the population (the number of cases now refers to the scenarios, and three scenarios were included in the analysis in each case). Question: How likely would you be to attend this rally?

Respondents from the population sample are on average less likely to be mobilised. They have lower mean values for all three scenarios compared to the student sample. Furthermore, the respondents from the population sample differentiate more strongly between all three scenarios, recognisable by the larger differences between their three mean values (see Figure 5). It can therefore be concluded

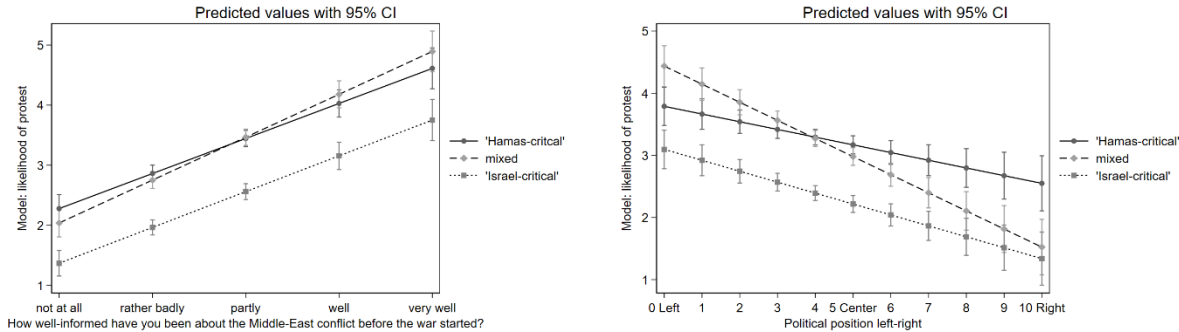
<sup>8</sup> For reference, there was another condition: without additional information. The slogan “From the river to the sea: Palestine will be free” can be understood as a denial of Israel's right to exist. There were bans on using the slogan at various demonstrations in Germany.

<sup>9</sup> The average values are relatively low in the range between 2.3 and 3.4 (on a 10-point scale). This is due to the fact that a relatively large group of students would not participate in demonstrations at all.

that the students surveyed can be mobilised to a greater extent than the comparison sample from the population. One-sided “Israel-critical” scenarios are even less mobilising in the population sample.

The following section focuses on the student sample in order to gain insights into the mobilisation of certain student groups. Firstly, the self-assessment of how well informed students were about the background to the conflict before the war began is included. As expected, students who consider themselves to be better informed are also more willing to take part in demonstrations (left-hand graph in Figure 6). It is also noticeable that the mixed (both sides “critical”) and “ Hamas-critical” scenarios mobilise the most when the information level is very high.

**Figure 6: Mobilisation of students by level of information and political positioning**  
(Average probability of protest on a scale from 0 = very unlikely to 10 = very likely)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

Number of vignettes N = 7,020 and N = 6,908. Question: How likely would you be to attend this rally? Question on level of information: How well informed were you about the Middle East conflict before the outbreak of war? Question on political position: In politics, people sometimes talk about “left” and “right”. Where on this scale would you categorise yourself if 0 stands for left and 10 for right? Which number best describes your position?

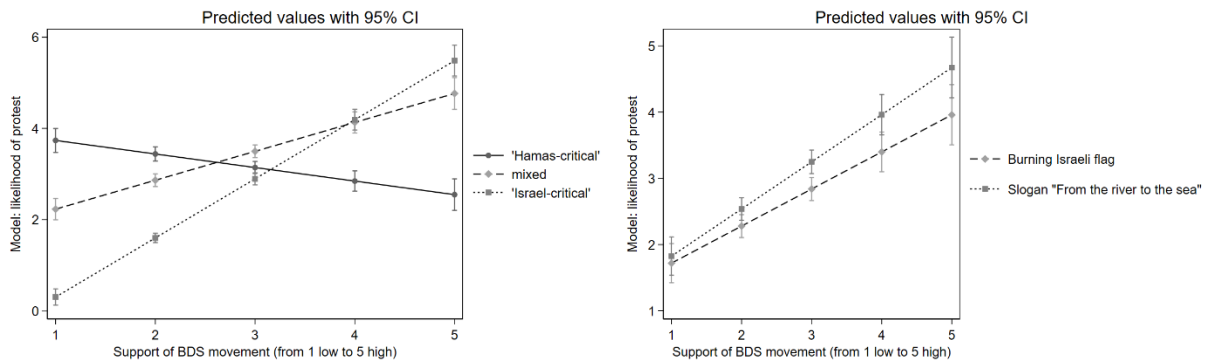
The differentiation according to the students' self-positioning in the left–right political spectrum is also revealing (right-hand graph in Figure 6). For the mixed scenario directed at both parties to the conflict, the difference according to left–right positioning is the clearest. People on the far left (who – as can be seen – are more willing to protest overall) are most strongly addressed by the mixed positions. In the left-wing spectrum, the willingness to participate in demonstrations is therefore greater when mixed goals are pursued. This experiment does not confirm that a particularly strong “criticism of Israel” can be found in the left-wing spectrum – rather, the opposite is true as the exclusively “Israel-critical” scenario has comparatively little mobilising power, even among people who place themselves on the far left. In other words, in the politically left-wing spectrum, „ Israel-criticism” mobilises significantly less than mixed goals and “ Hamas-criticism”.

However, in the group of BDS supporters described above<sup>10</sup> (around 10 percent of all students can be considered convinced supporters, with values of 4 to 5 on the scale), the mobilisation process is completely different. The left-hand graph in Figure 7 clearly shows the extent to which BDS support dominates demonstration mobilisation by scenario.

<sup>10</sup> They come equally from all political spectrums. There is a slight tendency for BDS support to be somewhat higher at both ends of the left–right spectrum.



**Figure 7: Mobilisation and radicalisation of students according to support for the BDS movement**  
(Average probability of protest on a scale from 0 = very unlikely to 10 = very likely)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

Number of vignettes N = 7,065 and N = 7,065. Question: How likely are you to participate in this rally? BDS support according to scale (see Figure 4); radicalising elements “Burn the flag” and “Banners ‘From the river to the sea: Palestine will be free’”, were randomly inserted in scenarios 3 and 6.

As expected, the “Israel-critical” objective mobilises the strongest among BDS supporters (value range from 4 to 5). The mobilising power of “Israel-criticism” is also quite clear among those with a tendency to support BDS (value range from 3 to 4), at around 16 percent of students overall.

The right-hand graph in Figure 7 describes the selective effect of radical elements of the demonstrations described. In particular, the anti-Israel banners (“*From the river to the sea: Palestine will be free*”) have a mobilising effect on respondents with high scores on the BDS scale, while they tend to have a repulsive effect on the average of all respondents. The number of participants in the demonstration, on the other hand, is comparatively unimportant for mobilisation (not shown separately).

As reported, the survey experiment was also implemented in the population sample. In this sample, the three scenarios mobilise even more differently depending on support for the BDS movement than among the students surveyed – albeit with for scale from the same basic pattern (see Figure 5 again). However, our analyses reveal that the radicalising element of “burning the flag” has a stronger mobilising effect among students who support the BDS movement than among the same group in the population (analyses not shown).

Irrespective of their support for BDS, three broad types of students can be identified on the basis of the survey experiment used. For 35 per cent, condemnation of Hamas (“Hamas-critical” or “pro-Israel”) mobilises their willingness to demonstrate. A majority of 53 per cent combine positions critical of Hamas and Israel (“mixed”). Twelve per cent are dominated by “Israel-critical” and “Hamas-friendly” positions with regard to potential protest behaviour. These three types are referred to in the study on the climate of opinion at universities in the next section.

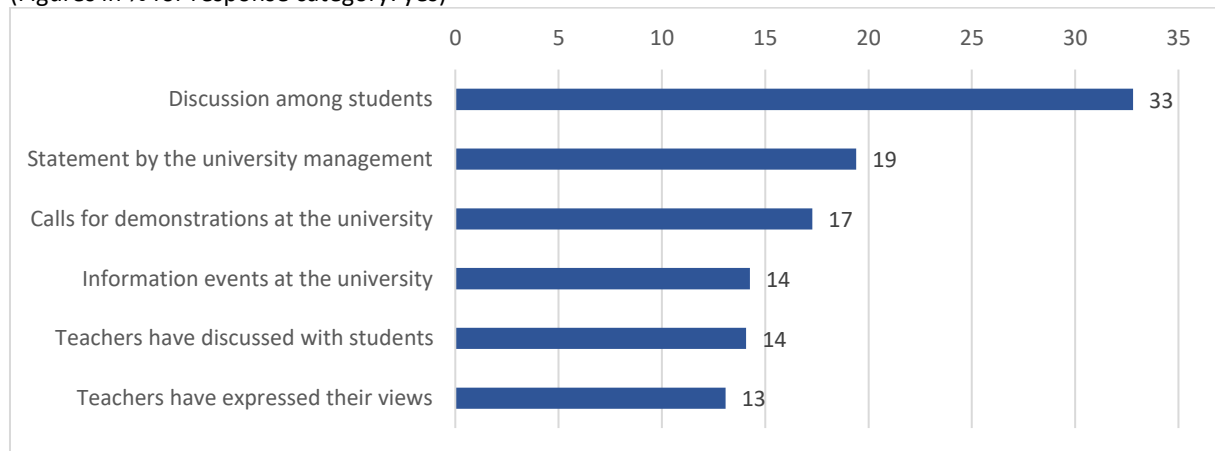
Summarising the results on political mobilisation and radicalisation, students are more likely to be mobilised into political activity than the population average in light of the trajectory of the Middle East conflict. Overall, the analyses on mobilisation also show that the vast majority of students' participation in demonstrations is driven by “Hamas-critical” and mixed scenarios. The one-sided condemnation of Israel's military actions and support for the Palestinian liberation struggle are significantly less mobilising overall. That said, and as detailed above, with a group of 10 percent BDS supporters and 16 percent tendentious BDS supporters among students, however, there are very clear mobilisation effects of one-sided demands and radical elements of the protest.

### 1.3 How is the war addressed at German universities?

Where and how is the current escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas being discussed in the university context? The war between Israel and Hamas was most frequently discussed among the students themselves (33%, see Figure 8), which emphasises the high level of attention paid to the topic. The frequencies are significantly lower when it comes to the topic being addressed by the institutional side of universities. Just under one in five students were aware that the university management had issued a statement. In addition, information events (14%) and calls for demonstrations at the university were reported by students (17%). The topic was addressed less frequently within courses. Around 13 per cent of respondents reported that lecturers had expressed their opinion on the conflict or discussed the issue with students.

**Figure 8: Thematisation of the current Middle East conflict at universities**

(Figures in % for response category: yes)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,332 (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values).

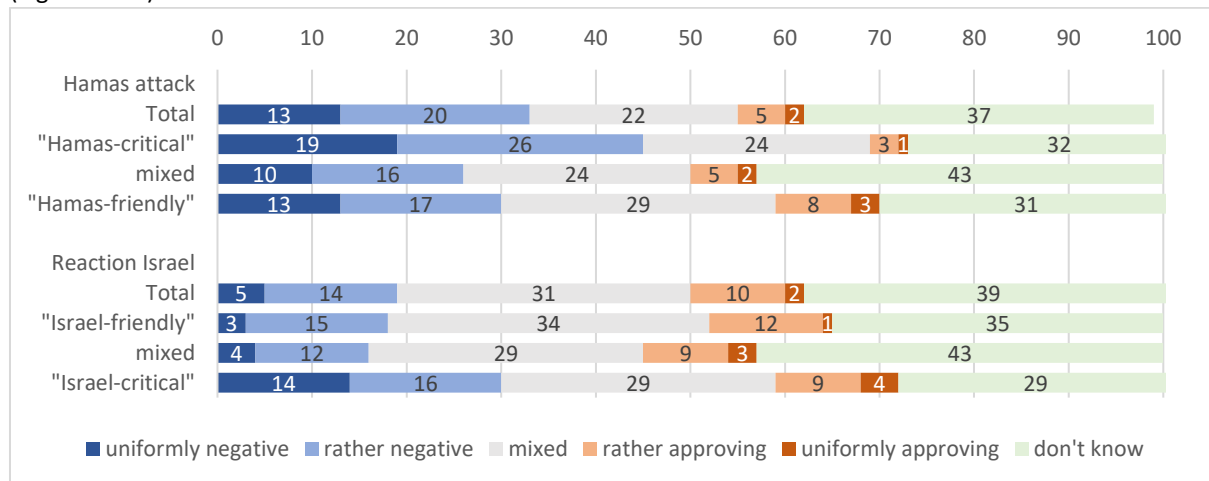
Question: In what form was the current conflict in the Middle East discussed at your university?

It is interesting to see how students perceive the climate of opinion at universities and how this relates to their own assessment. Figure 9 shows that around four out of ten students are unsure about the climate of opinion ("don't know" category). This applies to the attitude toward the Hamas attack as well as Israel's reaction. Furthermore, it can be seen that attitudes toward the Hamas attack in particular are predominantly negative (33%), although 22 per cent of students also report mixed attitudes and 7 per cent report an approving attitude at their university. According to the respondents, Israel's military response was addressed in an even more differentiated manner, with 31 per cent of students reporting mixed attitudes, 19 per cent reporting negative attitudes and 12 per cent reporting approving attitudes at their university (see the "Total" bar in each case).

Are these perceived attitudes at the university related to the students' own attitudes? In general, it can be seen that students are more likely to perceive those attitudes in the university environment that they hold themselves: "Hamas-critical" students report a "Hamas-critical" climate of opinion at their university much more frequently than other students (see "Hamas-critical" bar). The same applies to students who are "Israel-critical", who increasingly observe a climate of opinion that is "Israel-critical" (see "Israel-critical" bar). The perceptions of the climate of opinion at the universities thus point predominantly to distortions in favour of their own positions.

**Figure 9: Perceived climate of opinion at the universities and respondents' own positions**

(Figures in %)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,349 (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values). Question: Attitudes towards the war in Israel and Gaza can be more or less controversial. How did you perceive the climate of opinion at your university with regard to ...? ... the Hamas attack; ... Israel's military response.

Two circumstances (not specifically described) point to a particular strengthening of the perceived climate of opinion in the social environment of "Israel-critical" students. Firstly, students who are "Israel-critical" report a disproportionately high proportion of people in their circle of friends who are themselves students, and secondly their assessment that the people in their circle of friends think similarly to them is also particularly high. As described, the group of people who can be mobilised to be "Israel-critical" comprises around 12 per cent of students and is more "student-like" in terms of social relationships and more homogeneous in its assessment. And this is accompanied by a distorted perception of the climate of opinion.

## 2. Perception of discrimination and antisemitism at universities

### 2.1 Observed and self-experienced discrimination based on religious affiliation

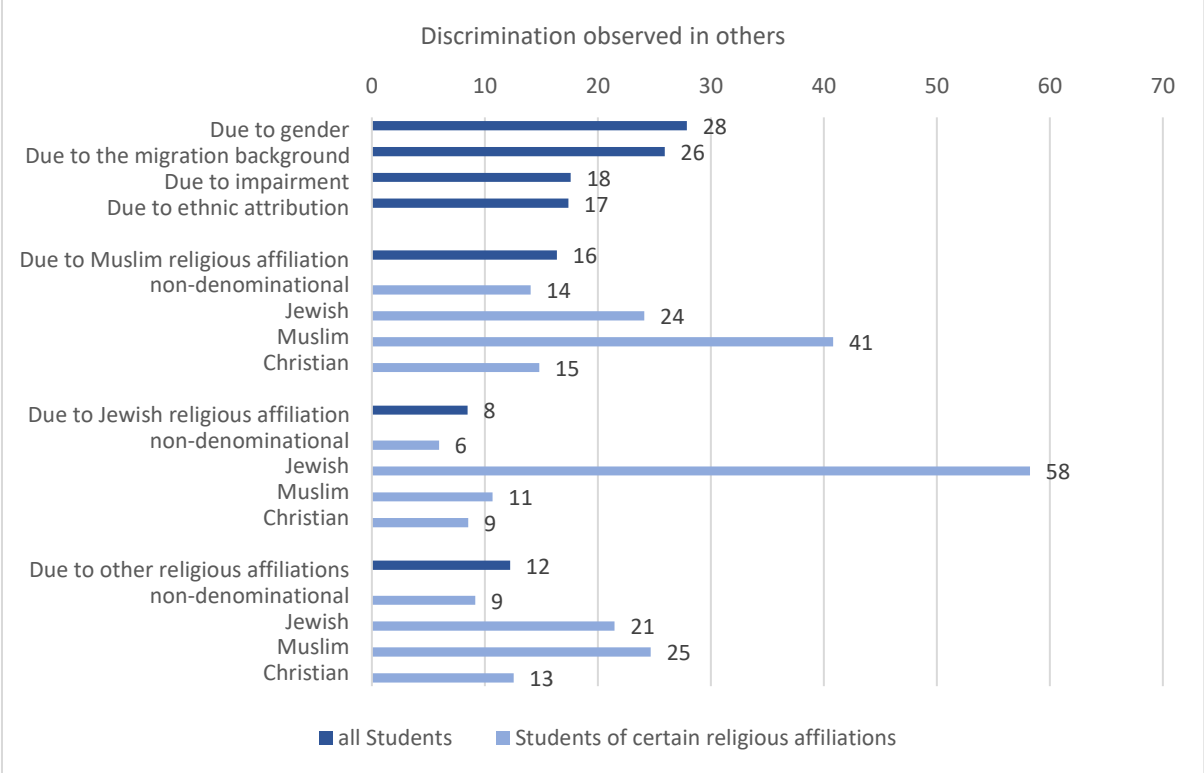
This section focuses on the subjective perception of the students surveyed as to whether they experience discrimination at universities. Antisemitism is a manifestation of hostile attitudes toward people who are perceived as "different" and "foreign" and can be categorised as belonging to a supposedly identifiable group. Antisemitism is associated with devaluation and discrimination, as well as hatred and violence. Group-based rejection can be based on a whole range of characteristics that are associated with pejorative attitudes. In everyday life, and also at universities, characteristics such as gender, migration background, disability and religious affiliation can be associated with possible devaluation. Previous analyses of the Research Group on Higher Education based on the "Student Survey in Germany" (2021) have already shown that, from the students' perspective, universities are anything but a discrimination-free space, although group-based devaluation and unequal treatment strongly violate the normative expectations of the academic system (Meyer et al., 2022). Similar to the "Student Survey in Germany", the current survey captures observed discrimination against others and perceived discrimination against oneself. We additionally consider religious affiliation as a possible distinguishing feature.

Discrimination against others based on gender (28%) and on migration background (26%) is most frequently perceived in the university context, but also on the basis of impairment (18%) and ethnic attribution (17%) (see Figure 10). In contrast, discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation is observed less frequently (12% = average of information on discrimination on the basis of Muslim, Jewish or other religious affiliations). The distinction between different religions according to which discrimination is perceived and the additional question about the religious affiliation of the respondents allows differentiated analyses to be carried out.

In regard to religious affiliation, all respondents most frequently reported discrimination due to Muslim religious affiliation (16%) and somewhat less frequently due to Jewish (8%) or other religious affiliations (12%). Of course, these figures must be set in relation to the proportion of students with a corresponding religious affiliation: 6.8 per cent Muslim students and 1.4 per cent Jewish students took part in the survey.<sup>11</sup>

It can be seen that the discrimination observed is related to the student's own religious affiliation. Discrimination on the basis of Muslim religious affiliation is observed more frequently among students of the same faith (41%) than among students of other religions or those with no religious affiliation (see Figure 10, light blue bars). Jewish students also observe discrimination against others on the basis of Jewish religious affiliation significantly more often (58%) than students of other religions. The respondents are particularly sensitised to observing discrimination against other people of their own faith.

**Figure 10: Perceived discrimination at universities (observed against others)**  
 (Figures in % for response category: yes, observed against others)

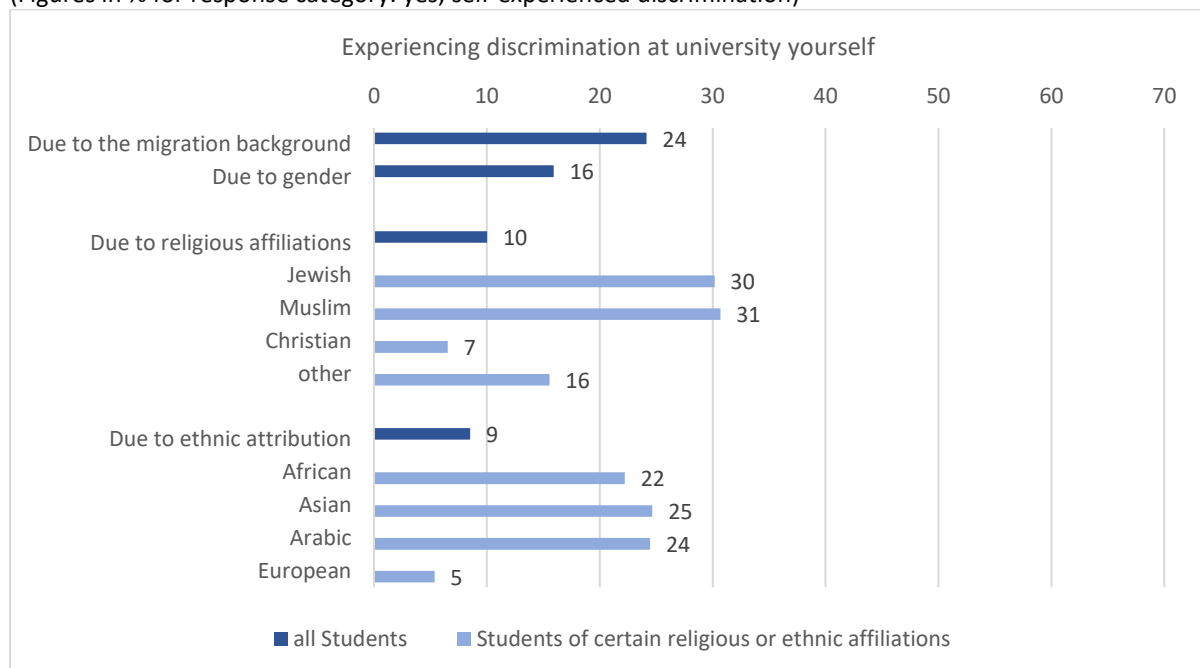


Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz). N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,353 (for dark blue bars, slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values). Question: Have you ever observed discrimination against others during your studies at the university?

<sup>11</sup> A total of 29 students of Jewish faith took part in the student survey. In addition to the invitation via the online access panel, participation was requested via a national mailing list. The number of Muslim students was 158.

**Figure 11: Perceived discrimination at universities (self-experienced)**

(Figures in % for response category: yes, self-experienced discrimination)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,353 (for dark blue bars, slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values). Question: Have you ever experienced disadvantage/discrimination in your previous studies at university?

Figure 11 refers to self-experienced (subjectively perceived) discrimination. Similar trends as before can be seen. Here, however, discrimination on the basis of migration background (24%) is reported most frequently, in second place on the basis of gender (16%) and somewhat less frequently on the basis of religious affiliation (10%) or ethnic attribution (9%). Students of Asian and Arab origin are particularly affected by discrimination on the basis of ethnicity (25% and 24% respectively), which is slightly more frequently than African students (22%). Self-experienced discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation is again most frequently reported by Muslim and Jewish students (31% and 30% respectively).

Overall, it can be seen that a considerable proportion of students at universities subjectively perceive and experience discrimination based on religious affiliation. Among Muslim and Jewish students, one in three report experiencing discrimination based on their religious affiliation. It should be noted that the number of cases in the sample is small, particularly for Jewish students, and the accuracy of the estimates suffers as a result. Nevertheless, it is possible to make trend statements about a disproportionate perception of discrimination.

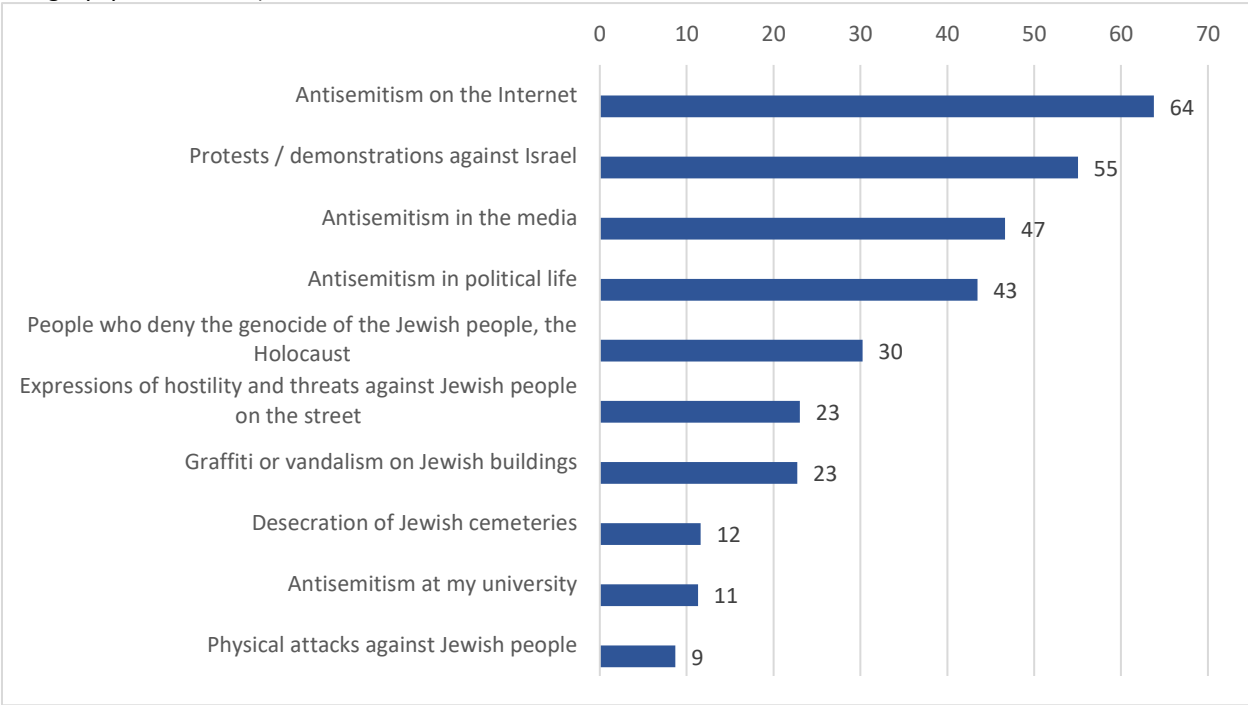
## 2.2 Perceived antisemitism in society and at universities

In addition to experiences of discrimination, the students were asked whether or where they had specifically observed antisemitism in their immediate environment. The respondents were not given a definition of antisemitism in the wording of the question. It is assumed that antisemitism is widely understood as the rejection of Jewish people.

Figure 12 shows that antisemitism is mainly observed on the internet (64%), at protest events critical of Israel (55%) or in the media (47%). In addition, almost one in four students (23%) report having observed hostility toward Jewish people on the street, which is an alarmingly high figure given the

small proportion of Jewish people in the population as a whole. In comparison, antisemitism is reported less frequently at universities (11% of respondents).

**Figure 12: Observed antisemitism in immediate environment of students** (Figures in % for response category: yes, observed)

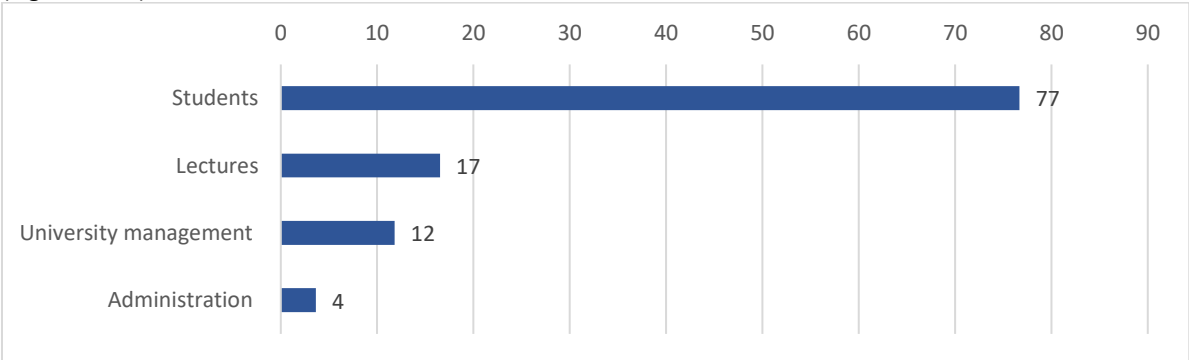


Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,308 (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values). Question: Have you observed the following situations in your immediate environment in Germany? These are multiple responses.

According to the respondents who had experienced antisemitism at universities, it was mainly perpetrated by students (77%) and less frequently by lecturers (17%), university management (12%) or university administration (4%) (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Who is the source of antisemitism at universities?** (Figures in %)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = 252. Question: Who was the source of the antisemitism at your university? (asked of those students who have observed antisemitism at their university, as detailed in Figure 12). These are multiple responses.

### 3. General and Israel-related antisemitism

While the previous section described where and how antisemitism is observed and experienced at universities, the following section focuses on antisemitic attitudes among students based on proven measurement instruments. Measuring antisemitic attitudes has a long tradition in social research. Antisemitism is measured indirectly by the tendency to agree with various statements that contain anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli beliefs (Heyder et al., 2005). The following descriptions of antisemitism use statements from the relevant research to measure antisemitism (Decker et al., 2022; Groß et al., 2012; Heyder & Eisentraut, 2020; Zick et al., 2016; Zick et al., 2023; Zick & Preuß, 2014). They make no reference to the current war situation. We differentiate between scales for measuring general antisemitism and Israel-related antisemitism.<sup>12</sup> Table 3 lists the corresponding items, which respondents can agree or disagree with to varying degrees. The values for agreement (or disagreement) are as follows: 1 “do not agree at all”, 2 “tend to disagree”, 3 “partly disagree & partly agree”, 4 “tend to agree”, 5 “fully agree”. Three items were summarised for the scale on general antisemitism and the same for the scale on Israel-related antisemitism.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 3: Antisemitism concepts used**

Concept	Items (statement sentences)	Reliability
General antisemitism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am tired of hearing about the German crimes against the Jews.</li> <li>Many Jews are trying to take advantage of the Third Reich's past today.</li> <li>Jews have too much influence in the world.</li> </ul>	Students: 0.76 Population: 0.78
Israel-related antisemitism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the policy that Israel is pursuing, I can well understand that people have something against Jews.</li> <li>It annoys me that Jews all over the world support Israel's policies.</li> <li>What the state of Israel is doing to the Palestinians today is in principle no different to what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich.</li> </ul>	Students: 0.72 Population: 0.77

Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

Reliability coefficient  $\alpha$  for the student and population sample.

#### 3.1 Spread of antisemitic attitudes among students

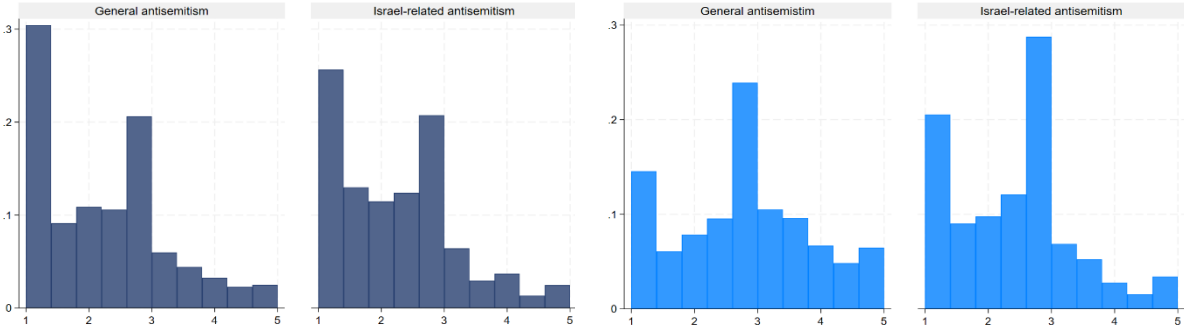
Figure 14 shows the frequency distribution of the measured values (so-called histograms) of both scales for students (dark blue) and the population (light blue). Both scales each summarise three individual items. The measurements can take values from 1 to 5. Respondents with a value of 1 “did not agree at all” with all items within a scale, while respondents with a maximum value of 5 “fully agreed” with all items. A look at the distribution of students reveals that significantly more respondents “do not agree at all” with the items relating to general antisemitism compared to Israel-related antisemitism. A comparison of the students surveyed with the population sample shows a greater deviation in the case of general antisemitism: the measured values in the middle and upper range of the scale are more common in the population than among students.

<sup>12</sup> For general antisemitism, items from different scales (including secondary antisemitism) have been summarised. A correlation analysis shows that, although the two concepts (general and Israel-related antisemitism) are related, they still represent different dimensions (here for the student sample):  $r_{(\text{gen}/\text{isr})} = 0.68$ .

<sup>13</sup> For students and the general population, the reliability coefficients  $\alpha$  are sufficiently high with values between 0.72 and 0.78. This means that the individual items can be summarised into a common construct. This is confirmed by supplementary factor analyses.

**Figure 14: Antisemitism scales (general and Israel-related) for students (dark blue) and the general population (light blue)**

(Frequency distribution in %, scale values from 1 to 5)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

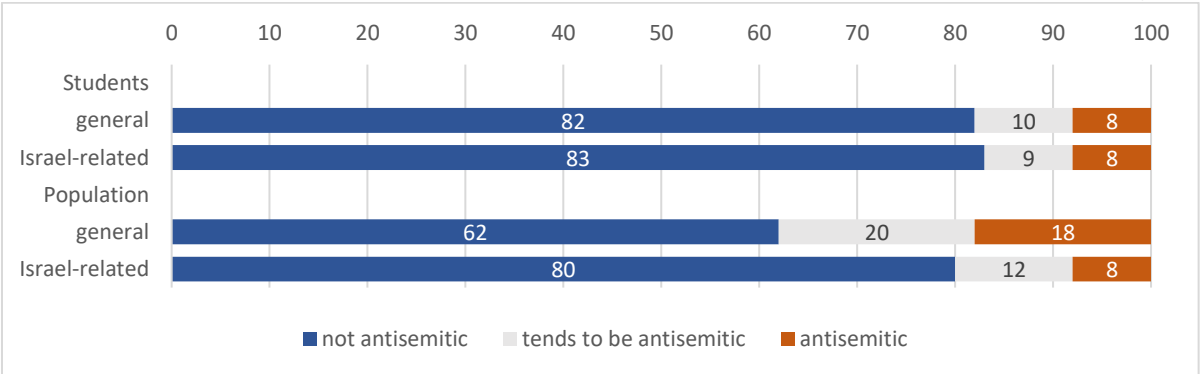
Frequencies in %; N<sub>Stud</sub> = between 2.331 and 2.359; N<sub>Pop</sub> = between 2.092 and 2.093.

*General antisemitism items:* I am tired of hearing about the German crimes against the Jews. Many Jews are trying to take advantage of the Third Reich's past today. Jews have too much influence in the world. *Israel-related antisemitism items:* With the policies that Israel is pursuing, I can well understand that people have something against Jews. It annoys me that Jews all over the world support Israel's policies. What the state of Israel is doing to the Palestinians today is basically no different to what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich.

Three categories are formed to simplify the measurement values. Values of 4 and above indicate an antisemitic attitude, while values between 3 and 4 should be described as tending toward antisemitism. Finally, we define values between 1 and 3 (inclusive) as not antisemitic.<sup>14</sup> Among the students surveyed, eight per cent each share general and Israel-related antisemitic attitudes (see Figure 15). The comparative values from the surveyed population sample differ quite clearly in terms of general antisemitism, which is more than twice as common in the general population at 18 per cent. In contrast, there are hardly any differences between students and the population when it comes to Israel-related antisemitism. All in all, according to the survey results, students have slightly lower approval ratings for general antisemitism items than the general population.

**Figure 15: Antisemitism categorised (general, Israel-related) for students and the general population**

(Figures in % for averaged categories: 1+2 = not antisemitic, 3 = tends to be antisemitic, 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz). N<sub>Stud</sub> = at least 2,330; N<sub>Pop</sub> = at least 2,092 (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values).

<sup>14</sup> In terms of content, the scale values can be translated into the three categories as follows: Respondents with scale values of 1 to 3 inclusive (not antisemitic) predominantly or clearly reject the statements that measure antisemitism; Respondents with scale values between 3 and 4 tends to be antisemitic, or at least tend to agree with one or more individual items; Finally, respondents with scale values between 4 and 5 (inclusive) are categorised as antisemitic, as they *tend to agree or fully agree* with several or all of the individual items (see Table 3).



### 3.2 Antisemitic attitudes according to student characteristics

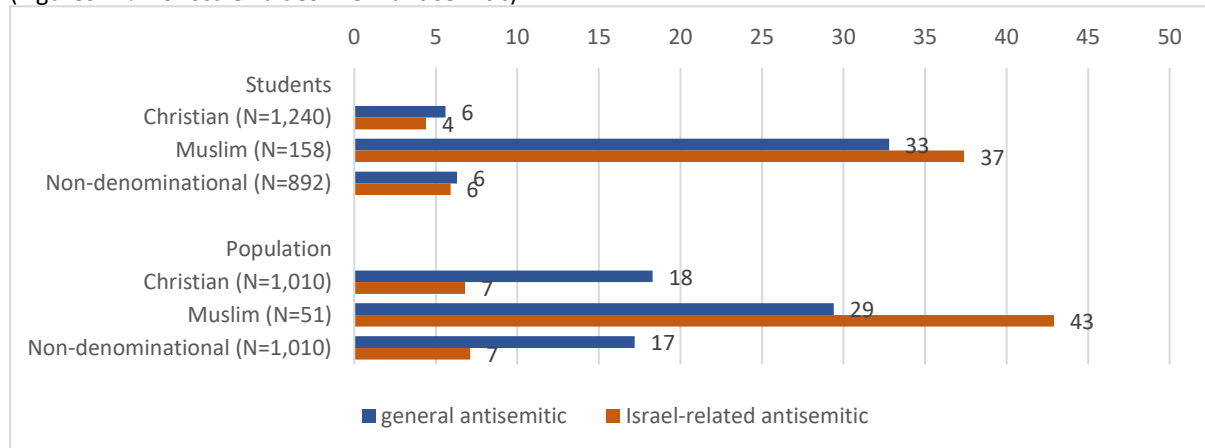
#### Differences in antisemitism according to religious affiliation

Antisemitism is defined as resentment against Jews and “being Jewish” (cf. Rensmann, 2017). How is antisemitic resentment related to the religious affiliation of the respondents? Relevant studies point to prevailing prejudices among people toward members of religions other than their own (Kanol, 2021; Koopmans, 2015). Research on prejudicial hostility toward other religions indicates that the level of religiosity, especially religious fundamentalism, also triggers the level of rejection (Koopmans, 2015; Pickel et al., 2020).

The current survey data show clear differences in the extent of antisemitic attitudes according to the religious affiliation of the respondents. This is also regularly reported in other studies (e.g. Baier et al., 2021; Kiess et al., 2020; Öztürk & Pickel, 2022, 2023). Similar to these studies, Muslim students appear to be antisemitic in significantly higher proportions than students who classify themselves as belonging to a Christian denomination and non-denominational students (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Antisemitism by religious affiliation**

(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = 2,291; N<sub>Pop</sub> = 2,070. Question: Do you belong to a church, religious community or denomination?

Significant differences between the faiths can also be observed among the population surveyed. Muslim respondents in particular are more frequently (between 29% and 43%) characterised by anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes. When comparing the two types of antisemitism in the population, it is noticeable that general antisemitism is less common among Muslim respondents than Israel-related antisemitism, while the opposite is true for Christian respondents and those of no religious denomination (see Figure 16).

#### Region of origin and religious affiliation

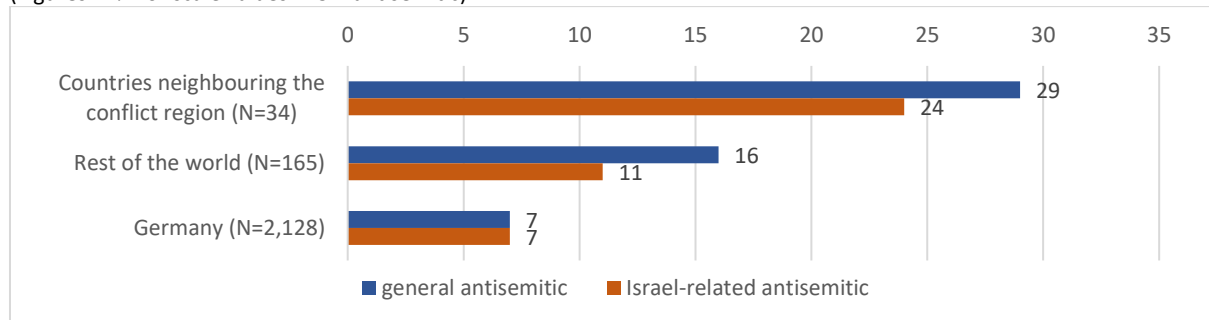
The following analyses focus on the student sample again. Even though Muslim students on average agree more frequently with anti-Jewish and anti-Israel statements, it is important to consider their region of origin. Previous studies emphasise that antisemitic attitudes are particularly prevalent among people of Muslim faith who come from countries that are geographically or politically close to the Middle East conflict (Friedrichs & Storz, 2022; Öztürk & Pickel, 2023). According to this research, Muslims from other countries are less likely to be characterised by antisemitic attitudes. Interestingly, similar tendencies can be seen among Christians: they are also significantly more antisemitic if they come from a region that “neighbours” the conflict region. The research thus makes it clear that antisemitic attitudes are strongly characterised by the region of origin and identification with Palestinians, rather

than by religious affiliation. In the following, we also consider this for the student sample by including the students' region of origin and, in a second step, the region of origin of their family.

Firstly, we look at students' region of birth. Students born in Germany exhibit general and Israel-related antisemitic attitudes less frequently (7% each) than students born abroad. However, the countries of origin of the students who were not born in Germany are certainly decisive (see Figure 17).

**Figure 17: Antisemitism among students by region of birth**

(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

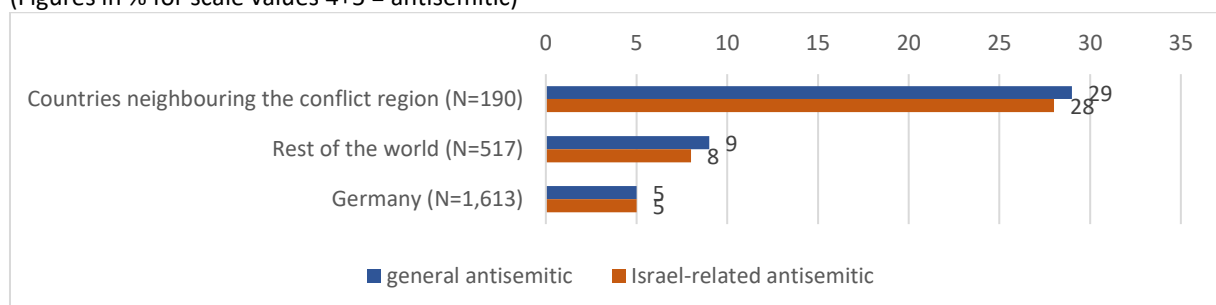
N<sub>stud.</sub> = 2,327; Question: In which country were you born?

Students from countries neighbouring the conflict region<sup>15</sup> exhibit antisemitic attitudes significantly more frequently than students born in Germany. Among students born in other parts of the world, antisemitic attitudes are more common than among those born in Germany, but less common than among students from countries linked to the conflict region. It is worth noting that general antisemitism is slightly higher among students born abroad than Israel-related antisemitism (see Figure 17).

While the students' country of origin was considered first, we also want to include the parents' region of birth, as the family environment plays a major role in socialisation. For around a third of the students surveyed, one parent (31%) was not born in Germany. If the students are differentiated according to the region their parents come from, students with at least one parent from countries close to the conflict region are significantly more likely to be antisemitic than students with parents born in Germany or another part of the world (see Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Antisemitism among students by region of birth of their parents**

(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



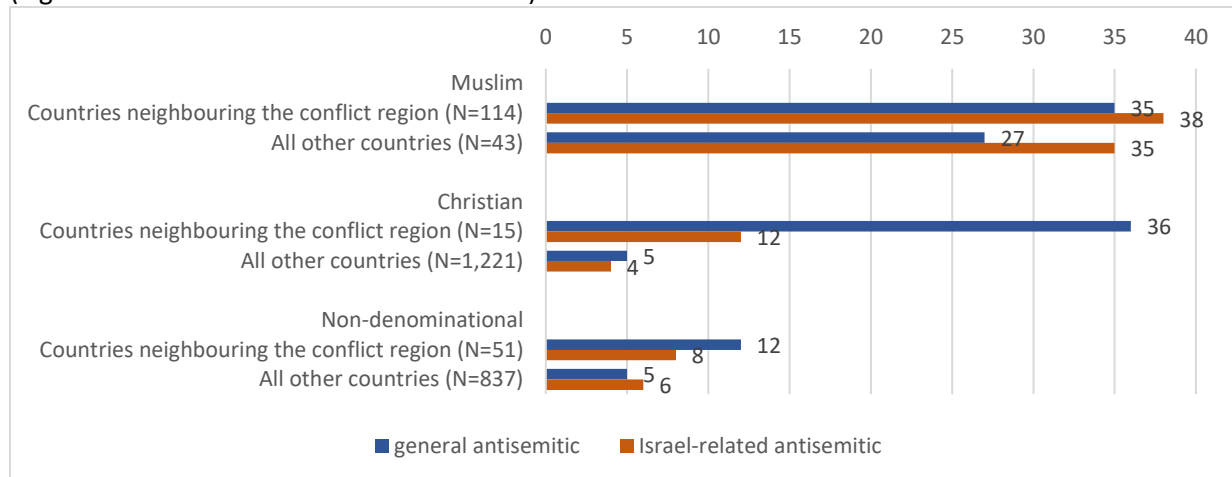
Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>stud.</sub> = 2,353; Question: In which country was your father born? In which country was your mother born?

<sup>15</sup> Due to the small number of cases, the countries could not be further differentiated. The countries summarised here include the Middle East region (e.g. Syria, Palestine, Lebanon) as well as Turkey and the Arab North African countries. They are summarised below as "neighbouring the conflict region". The category "rest of the world" includes all other countries except Germany.

If, in addition to the parents' country of origin, the religious affiliation of the students is also taken into account, then the highest antisemitism values are found for Muslim students with parents from countries neighbouring the conflict region. If the parents were born in another country (including Germany), antisemitic attitudes are somewhat rarer, although still quite common among Muslim students. However, a high level of agreement with anti-Jewish statements is also very common among Christians from countries linked to the conflict region (see Figure 19).

**Figure 19: Antisemitism among students by parents' region of origin and religious affiliation**  
(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud.</sub> = 2,353. Question: Do you belong to a church, religious community or denomination? In which country was your father born? In which country was your mother born?

Overall, antisemitic attitudes therefore vary with the denomination, the region of origin of the student and the region of origin of the students' parents.

### Religious fundamentalism and antisemitism

In addition to the denomination, the extent of religiosity – especially its fundamentalist extreme form – can also be linked to the expression of antisemitic attitudes. According to Öztürk and Pickel (2023), stronger religiosity intensifies susceptibility to antisemitic tendencies, especially among Muslims and particularly accentuated in the case of religious fundamentalism (p. 380).

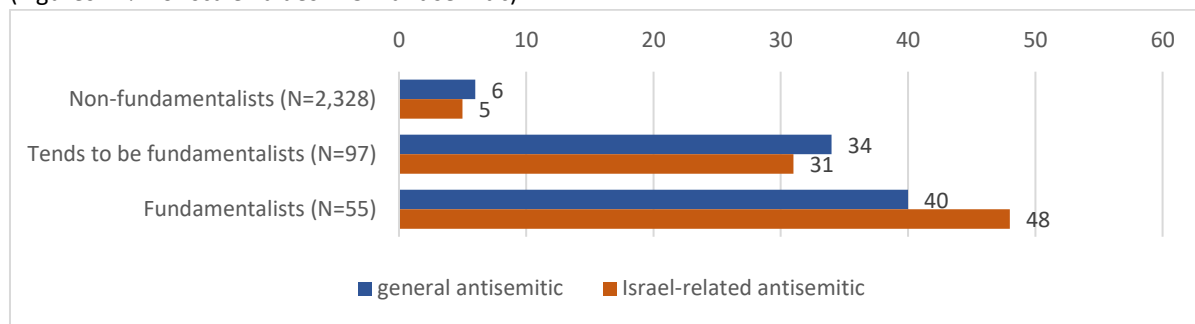
To aid our understanding of what constitutes fundamentalism, the answers to four questions are summarised as a scale<sup>16</sup> (analogous to the antisemitism scales): “The holy scripture of my religion is to be understood literally”, “There is only one true religion”, “My religion tells me to distrust and reject members of other religions”, and “The rules of my religion are more important to me than German laws.”

Figure 20 shows an emphatic tendency (initially for all students surveyed) toward fundamentalist attitudes already goes hand in hand with a greater extent of antisemitic attitudes (applies equally to general and Israel-related antisemitism).

<sup>16</sup> The four questions have scales from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The values of the four questions are added up and averaged. These average values with answer categories (including) 4 and 5 are labelled “fundamentalist”. Values between 3 and 4 are labelled as “tends to be” and values less than or equal to 3 as “non-fundamentalist”.

**Figure 20: Antisemitism by type of religious fundamentalism among students<sup>17</sup>**

(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



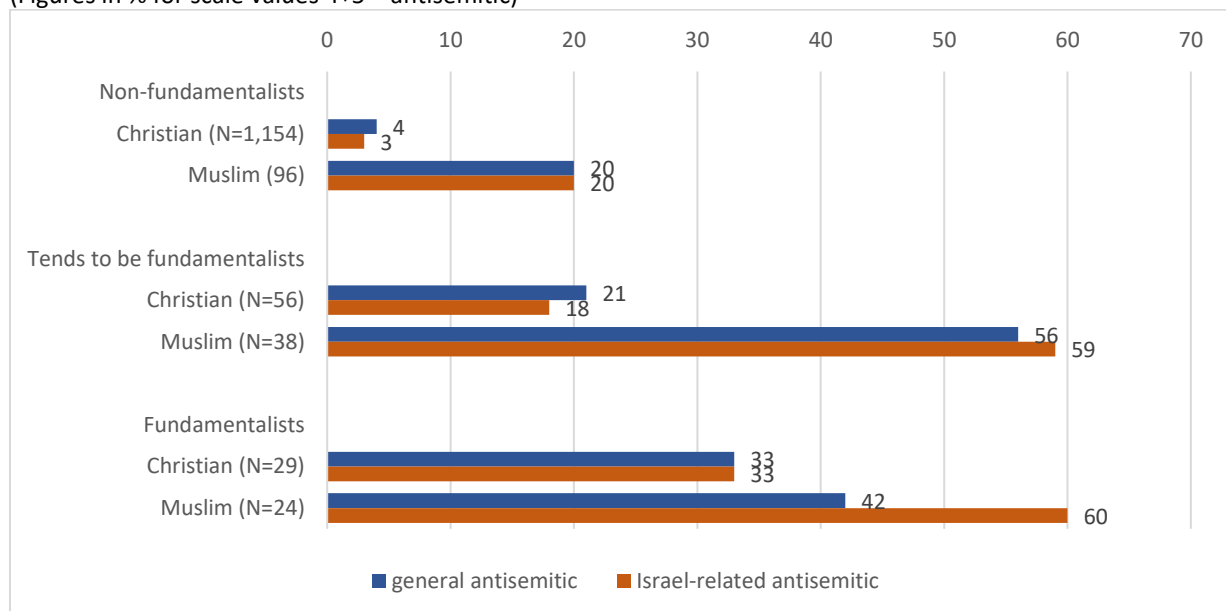
Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = 2,359. Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? 1) The holy scripture of my religion is to be understood literally. 2) There is only one true religion. 3) My religion tells me to distrust and reject members of other religions. 4) The rules of my religion are more important to me than German laws.

A comparison with the population (not shown) shows similar findings, although general antisemitism is also higher in the group of non-fundamentalists (17%), whereas “only” around a third of fundamentalists are antisemitic.

What does this correlation look like if we differentiate religious affiliation according to the extent of fundamentalism? The correlation is confirmed for Christian and Muslim denominational groups: students with a tendency toward fundamentalist attitudes are more antisemitic than non-fundamentalist students of the same faith (see Figure 21):

**Figure 21: Antisemitism by type of religious fundamentalism and religious affiliation among students**  
(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = 1,397. Question: Do you belong to a church, religious community or denomination? To what extent do you agree with the following statements? 1) The scripture of my religion is to be understood literally. 2) There is only one true religion. 3) My religion tells me to distrust and reject members of other religions. 4) The rules of my religion are more important to me than German laws.

<sup>17</sup> Students who stated “non-denominational” as their religious affiliation were not asked the four questions on fundamentalism (filtering). They were assigned to the “non-fundamentalist” group.

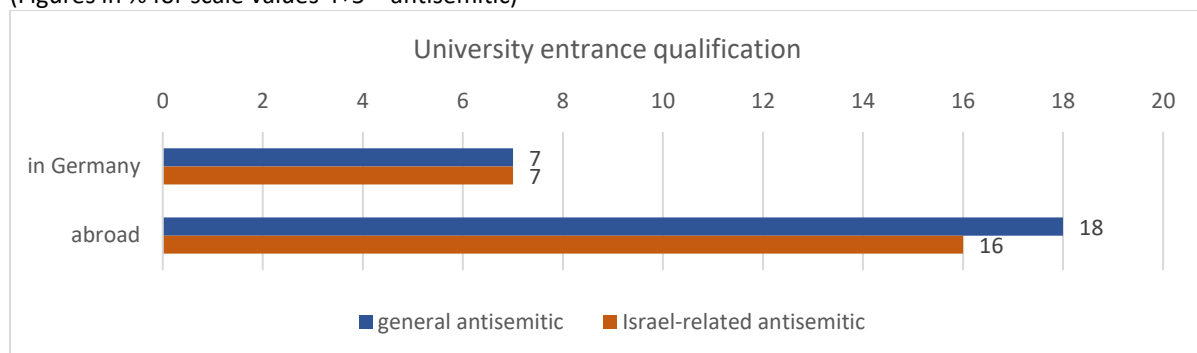
At the same time, Muslim students are more frequently antisemitic than Christian students in all three forms of fundamentalism. It can also be seen that antisemitic attitudes are more common among Christian students when their fundamentalism is more pronounced. Among the Muslim students surveyed, a tendency toward fundamentalism is more frequently accompanied by antisemitic attitudes (see Figure 21).

### Differences by school system attended

The historical background and causes of antisemitism are an integral part of school curricula in Germany (KMK, 2005). A distinction is subsequently made as to whether the students acquired their university entrance qualification in Germany (and thus at least partially went through the German school system) or abroad. The vast majority of the students surveyed attended the German school system (93%). A small minority have foreign educational qualifications (7%). It can be seen (see Figure 22) that educational qualifications in Germany are associated with significantly lower proportions of antisemitic attitudes. Socialisation at German schools, in which the Holocaust and antisemitism are generally discussed, is therefore associated with significantly lower levels of general and Israel-related antisemitism. Of course, no causal conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the data collected.

**Figure 22: Antisemitism among students by school system (acquisition of university entrance qualification)**

(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

N<sub>Stud</sub> = 2,355; Question: Did you obtain your university entrance qualification in Germany?

### Joint (partial) correlation analysis

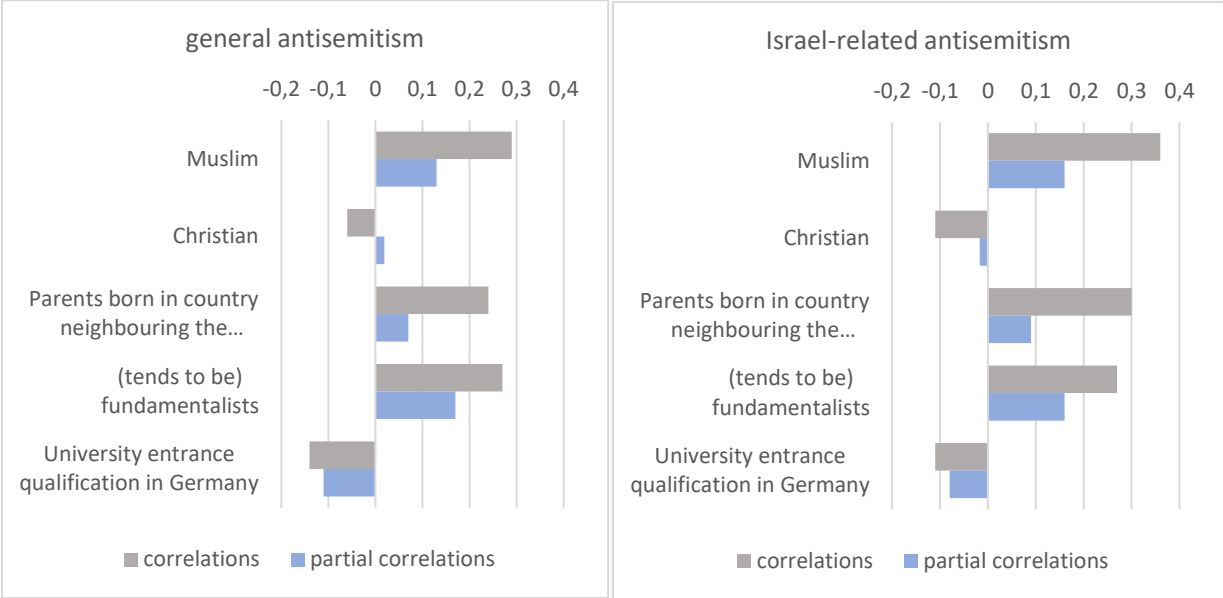
The characteristics of the students surveyed in the previous analyses are empirically related: Muslim students are more likely to have family roots linked or close to the conflict region. They are also more likely to display fundamentalist attitudes. In order to obtain a joint view of the correlations between antisemitism and the aspects of religion (denomination and fundamentalism<sup>18</sup>) or origin (parents' country of birth and university entrance qualification in Germany), we conduct a correlation analysis. For this purpose, the simple (bivariate) correlation coefficients are compared with the partial correlations for both antisemitism scales (general and Israel-related).<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the (bivariate) correlation coefficients, the partial correlations are calculated while controlling for all other variables. This

<sup>18</sup> As the non-denominational students did not receive the questions on fundamentalism due to the filtering, they were subsequently assigned a scale value of 1, which means that they were assigned to the "non-fundamentalist" group.

<sup>19</sup> The antisemitism scales are standardised for this purpose and binary-coded, while categorical variables (0 or 1) are used for the other variables: Religious affiliation (Muslim, Christian versus the reference of non-denominational), fundamentalism (tends to be and fundamentalist versus non-fundamentalist), region of origin of the students' families (countries neighbouring the conflict region versus all other countries) and university entrance qualification (in Germany versus all other countries).

means that the correlations of all other variables are faded out for the partial correlations. In this way, an adjusted measure of the relationship between antisemitic attitudes and religious affiliation, fundamentalism and region of origin is calculated. Figure 23 thus compares differences between individual correlations and partial correlations.

**Figure 23: Correlations between antisemitism and religious affiliation, fundamentalism, parents' place of birth and university entrance qualification in Germany**  
(correlation coefficients (grey) and partial correlation coefficients (blue))



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz). N=2,275 Question: Do you belong to a church, religious community or denomination? In which country was your father born? In which country was your mother born? To what extent do you agree with the following statements? 1) The scripture of my religion is to be understood literally. 2) There is only one true religion. 3) My religion tells me to distrust and reject members of other religions. 4) The rules of my religion are more important to me than German laws. Did you obtain your university entrance qualification in Germany?

As already illustrated in the previous sections, the individual correlations (grey bars) show that Muslim religious affiliation, the region of origin of the student's family and fundamentalism have recognisable links to antisemitism. In each case, antisemitism is slightly more strongly related to Muslim religious affiliation than to origin or fundamentalism. In contrast, Christian religious affiliation and German university entrance qualification show the opposite correlations and are associated with lower levels of antisemitism (see Figure 23).

If the correlations are controlled for all variables, the partial correlations (blue bars) point in the same direction, but they also show significantly lower correlations with antisemitism. Above all, Muslim religious affiliation no longer achieves the highest correlation with antisemitism, but now fundamentalism does. This means that the higher levels of antisemitism among Muslim students described so far can be partly explained by their family background and fundamentalism.

This confirms that family origins from countries linked to the conflict region are also associated with antisemitic attitudes, as already shown in other studies, and that fundamentalism overlaps with religious affiliation. However, it also appears to be significant that German school education is associated with recognisably lower levels of antisemitism.

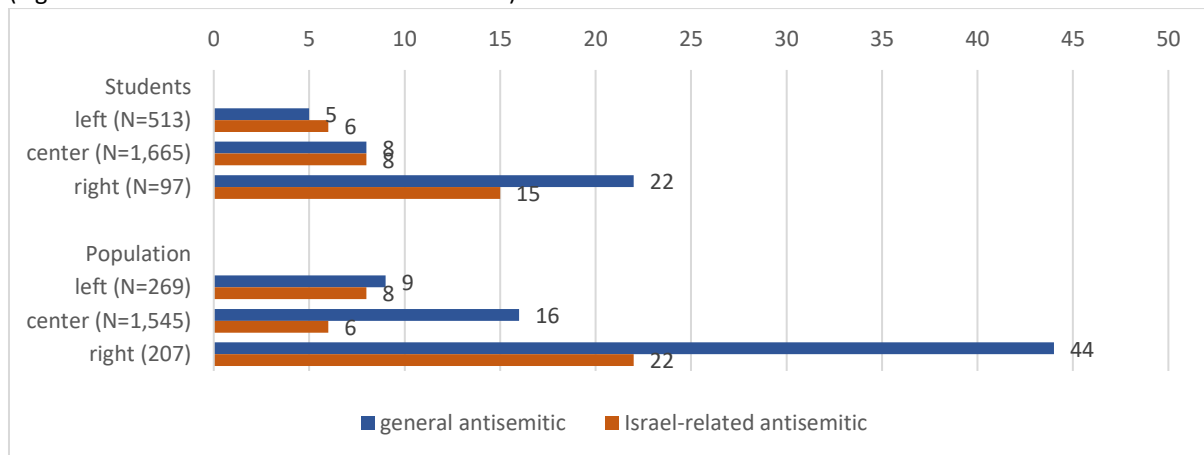
Correlation coefficients take on values from -1 to +1. The value -1 would mean that there is a maximum (perfect) negative linear correlation between the variables (at +1 there is a maximum positive correlation).

## Differences according to political “left–right” self-positioning

The section on the connections between antisemitic attitudes and student characteristics is concluded by analysing political self-positioning. As explained in the description of the survey experiment, respondents were asked to categorise themselves on the left–right scale. Unsurprisingly, the students categorised themselves further to the left than the respondents from the population sample (mean values of 4.2 and 4.9 on the scale from 0 “left” to 10 “right”). Looking at three groups (with a clearly *left-wing* position, a broad *center* position and a clearly *right-wing* position), it can be seen that students who classify themselves politically as left-wing or in the centre have lower antisemitic attitudes than students in the politically right-wing spectrum (see Figure 24).

**Figure 24: Antisemitism among students and the population according to self-classification in the political “left–right” spectrum**

(Figures in % for scale values 4+5 = antisemitic)



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

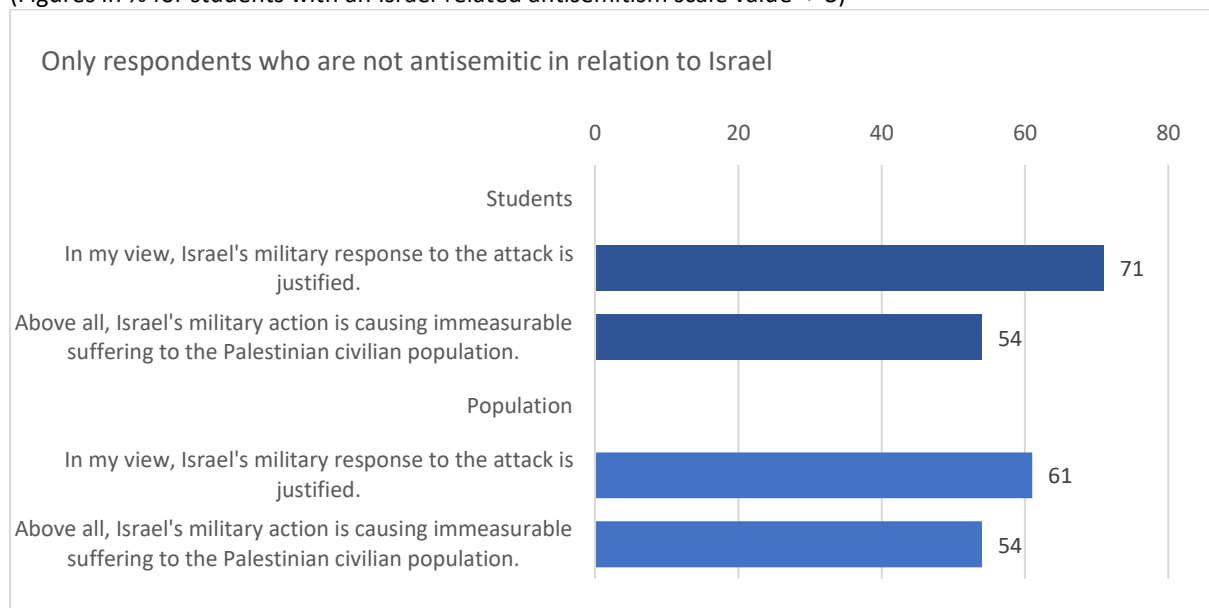
$N_{\text{Stud}} = 2,276$ ,  $N_{\text{Pop}} = 2,021$  (slightly different N for individual variables due to individual missing values). Question: In politics, people sometimes talk about “left” and “right”. Where on this scale would you categorise yourself if 0 stands for left and 10 for right? Which number best describes your position?

A comparison with the population shows that general antisemitism is very strong and twice as widespread among respondents who position themselves on the political right than among students who position themselves on the right. General antisemitic attitudes are also comparatively more common among the population that considers itself to be in the centre, than among students (see Figure 24). A right-wing political position is therefore also clearly linked to antisemitic attitudes – in both samples and more clearly in the population sample.

### 3.3 Israel-related antisemitism and criticism of Israel's military response

To what extent is Israel-related antisemitism linked to criticism of Israel's military response to the Hamas attack? Can “criticism of Israel” be equated with antisemitic attitudes? Even if there is an expected connection between antisemitic attitudes and criticism of Israel, the students surveyed did not equate the two. The clear majority of respondents without antisemitic attitudes from the student sample (71%, see Figure 25) agree that Israel's military response cannot be justified. Similarly, around half of respondents without antisemitic attitudes share concerns about the Palestinian civilian population. In other words, criticism of the military action and concerns about the Palestinian civilian population are also expressed even if there is no Israel-related antisemitism.

**Figure 25: Criticism of Israel's military response among respondents without antisemitic attitudes**  
 (Figures in % for students with an Israel-related antisemitism scale value  $\leq 3$ )



Source: Rapid Response: Antisemitism at German Universities (Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz).

$N_{\text{Stud}} = 1,954$ ,  $N_{\text{Pop}} = 1,359$  (slightly deviating N of individual scales due to individual missing values). Question: What is your opinion on the **current conflict**? 3) In my view, Israel's military response to the attack is justified (reversed). 4) Above all, Israel's military action is causing immeasurable suffering to the Palestinian civilian population.

In the population sample, people without antisemitic attitudes also criticise Israel's military actions. However, this criticism is less pronounced than among the students surveyed without antisemitic attitudes, while concern for the civilian population in the Gaza Strip is comparably high (see Figure 25).

#### 4. Conclusion

This rapid response study provides an up-to-date overview of students' attitudes toward the war in Israel and the Gaza Strip and the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes at German universities. The findings are based on an online survey of over 2,000 students conducted in December 2023, which allows robust statements to be made, including in comparison to the general population. The data confirm the concerns of many students in the face of the escalating conflict. While the vast majority of students see Hamas's attack on Israel as a cruel act of terror, a group of around 12 per cent see the attack as part of a legitimate struggle for Palestinian liberation. The military response by Israel is also viewed critically by the majority, and this attitude is even more critical among the students surveyed than among the general population.

How do concerns about the conflict translate into a willingness to protest at universities? The evaluation of a survey experiment on political demands and possible radicalising contexts shows that around a third of students willing to protest would only support positions critical of Hamas. The majority of respondents combine "Hamas-critical" and "Israel-critical" positions in terms of their mobilisability. For around 12 per cent, "Israel-critical" and "Hamas-friendly" positions drive political mobilisation in the university environment. Only in the group of BDS supporters do radicalising elements such as "Free Palestine" banners drive mobilisation, while for the majority with positions critical of both parties to the conflict these additional circumstances weaken mobilisation.

The survey also records the subjectively perceived discrimination of others and of the respondents themselves within the university context. Jewish *and* Muslim students perceive discrimination due to



their respective religious affiliation against others and themselves to a significantly disproportionate extent. For the discussion about discrimination and racism at universities, this means that this subjectively perceived component should be taken into account when discussing the occurrence of antisemitism and Islamophobia. If you belong to the affected group, you are particularly sensitive to group-based discrimination. In terms of anti-Jewish prejudices, antisemitism in the university context can be observed in 10 per cent of all students surveyed. For the group of Jewish students, however, the subjective level of concern is much higher.

In connection with the escalation of violence in the course of the war between Israel and Hamas, antisemitic incidents at universities have been increasingly reported in the media. If students are analysed with regard to their antisemitic prejudices, eight per cent of students are anti-Jewish or anti-Israeli. General antisemitism is more pronounced in the general population than among students, while Israel-related antisemitism is similar in both groups.

It should be emphasised that the measurements taken on antisemitism do not contain any debatable opinions regarding criticism of Israel's policies, but are based exclusively on prejudices fuelled by resentment (e.g. "With the policy that Israel is pursuing, I can well understand that people have something against Jews", "What the state of Israel is doing to the Palestinians today is in principle no different to what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich"). These Israel-related statements cannot be interpreted as "normal" and legitimate criticism of the actions of the Israeli government. There is a dividing line between prejudiced orientations and criticism that is open to discussion.

Our survey study with data from December 2023 was able to provide a reliable and prompt report on the climate of opinion, of perceived discrimination and antisemitism as well as of antisemitic tendencies among students. The results can provide politicians and universities with an opportunity to develop and implement suitable measures to prevent the spread of antisemitism (such as the appointment of antisemitism officers at universities or clear sanctions for antisemitic incidents). It also seems important to address the historical origins of the conflict and the current situation in Israel and Palestine in an academic context (Brenner, 2024). This is an urgent and important project in view of a possible future intensification of the conflict with further radicalisation in parts among students.

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