



No Alternative: The AfD and Israel

Manifestations, functions, and perceptions of Alternative for Germany (AfD)'s "Israel solidarity" policy

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- Since the massacre of October 7, 2023, Alternative for Germany (AfD) has increasingly positioned itself as a pro-Israel party.
- The AfD's promotion of its pro-Israel stance is attracting international attention. In the US, parts of Europe, and Israel, the AfD is increasingly perceived as a representative of Israeli and Jewish interests.
- In Germany, Jewish organizations and official representatives of Israel contradict this self-portrayal and perception and point to the party's antisemitic tendencies.
- In fact, the AfD's promotion of "Israel solidarity" primarily serves to legitimize anti-Muslim positions, attack political opponents, and distract from right-wing extremist, revisionist, and anti-religious positions.
- Political education can help reveal this weaponizing of AfD rhetoric and, in cooperation with Jewish and pro-Israel organizations, raise awareness about its double-sided nature.

1. Introduction

Since the Hamas terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, at the latest, the AfD has presented itself as a supporter of Israel and a defender of Jewish life in Germany. In public speeches, leading representatives of the party declare Israel to be a bastion of Western values in the Middle East and describe the AfD as the only German party uncompromisingly committed to Israeli interests and Jewish life in the country. This pro-Israel self-portrayal resonates, especially internationally. In the United States, in several neighboring European countries, and not least in Israel, the AfD is increasingly perceived as an important voice for Israeli and Jewish interests in Germany—especially in the context of the positions of other right-wing extremist parties. This perception is striking, given that the overwhelming majority of Jewish and Israeli voices in Germany regard the AfD as a “party for antisemites.”¹ Observers accordingly point out that the AfD is using its alleged “Israel solidarity” stance primarily as a tool to fulfill a number of functions that serve broader political purposes.² This paper situates the AfD’s pro-Israel rhetoric within its political context, outlining its functions, effects, and counterarguments.

Self-promotion as a supporter of Israel

2. Manifestations of the AfD’s “Israel solidarity” stance

After the massacre of October 7, AfD honorary chairman Alexander Gauland declared in the German Bundestag on October 12, 2023, “Israel is the West in an environment that rejects and fights the West. If we stand with Israel, we are also defending our way of life and thinking (...).”³ The deputy chairwoman of the AfD parliamentary group, Beatrix von Storch, added, “The defenders of Jewish life and the friends of the Jewish state are not found today on the left, but on the democratic right: with the AfD, with Geert Wilders, with Viktor Orbán, and with Donald Trump (...).”⁴ Since then, Alice Weidel, chairwoman of the AfD parliamentary group, has also regularly emphasized the party’s supposed proximity to Israel, making the link with references to Jewish life in Germany. In a conversation with Elon Musk on Platform X on January 9, 2025, she emphasized, “The AfD is (...) the only protector of the Jewish people (...) in Germany.”⁵

This rhetoric is increasingly attracting international attention. According to various media outlets, the AfD is increasingly perceived as one of those European right-wing parties that are taking a more pro-Israel stance.⁶ Even in Israel, there are growing voices that no longer see the AfD as primarily a right-wing extremist and a partially antisemitic party. Rather, they are increasingly pointing to pro-Israel positions, and a supposedly moderate and pro-Israel wing within the party. In response to the conversation between Alice Weidel and Elon Musk, for example, the *Times of Israel* wrote on February 23, 2025, “Weidel leads the AfD’s more moderate wing, which includes ongoing support for Israel.”⁷ A commentary in *The Jerusalem Post* also stated that the AfD allegedly stands by Israel like no other party in Germany.⁸ Accordingly, reports indicate that voices within the Israeli government are calling for closer scrutiny of right-wing populist parties in Europe.⁹ In some quarters, the AfD is even considered a “potential ally.”¹⁰ However, such statements continue to face an official Israeli policy of non-engagement¹¹, under which official Israel boycotts contact with the party despite its pro-Israel positions.¹² Attempts by the AfD to engage with Israel have therefore been unsuccessful so far.¹³ Israeli commentators emphasize that any change in this stance should under no circumstances be unconditional and should only be considered under strict preservation of Israel’s interests.¹⁴

International perception and critical voices

This external perception of the AfD stands in stark contrast to the assessment by Israeli and Jewish voices in Germany. For example, in a 2024 interview with *Deutschlandfunk*, the Israeli ambassador to Germany, Ron Prosor, stated that the embassy in Berlin has no relations with the AfD and do not intend to have them in the future.¹⁵ The rejection of the AfD is also clear within the Jewish community: The Central Council of Jews in Germany and 16 other Jewish organizations issued a joint statement warning against the party. This statement describes the AfD as “anti-democratic, contemptuous of humanity, and largely right-wing radical.”¹⁶ Furthermore, “hatred of Jews and the relativization, even to the point of denial, of the Shoah have a home in the party.”¹⁷ In a joint brochure published by the *American Jewish Committee* (AJC) in 2024, the AfD is described as “ethnic-right-wing extremist” with an “obvious antisemitic ideology.”¹⁸ Charlotte Knobloch, the president of the Israelite Community of Munich, has repeatedly stated that the AfD’s pro-Israel stance cannot disguise its anti-democratic and antisemitic stance: Since its founding, the AfD has “contributed decisively to poisoning the debate in our country and making antisemitic sentiments socially acceptable again.”¹⁹

3. Antisemitism in the AfD

The perception of the AfD as a “party for antisemites”²⁰ is supported by a number of empirical surveys. A representative *Forsa* study commissioned by the Central Council of Jews in Germany found that AfD supporters disproportionately agree with antisemitic statements.²¹ A 2021 study by the AJC demonstrates that antisemitic statements, conspiracy theories, and ethnic ideology are present at all levels of the AfD.²² A 2023 study by the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation* (KAS) also shows that increased agreement with antisemitic attitudes can be observed among AfD supporters.²³

These empirical findings are underpinned by a multitude of antisemitic and historical revisionist statements by individual AfD officials. The case of Wolfgang Gedeon, a former AfD member of the state parliament in Baden-Württemberg, became particularly well-known. He repeatedly spread classic antisemitic conspiracy theories and was only expelled from the AfD after much hesitation.²⁴ Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, AfD member of the state parliament of Saxony-Anhalt, declared on Israel’s war in Gaza, “What Israel is currently doing in the Gaza Strip is unacceptable. Israel is punishing the Palestinians collectively for the crimes of Hamas. (...) The exact same applies, by the way, to the Germans and the Holocaust. You cannot hold the entire German people responsible for the crimes of a few.”²⁵

In a recently published study, journalist Stefan Dietl points out that antisemitism in the AfD is not just the opinion of individual outsiders but is nurtured in all camps of the party and is represented right up to the party leadership. Antisemitic statements within the AfD often go unnoticed, and antisemitic conspiracy theories are widespread.²⁶ Alongside antisemitism, anti-Jewish religious tendencies can also be found within the AfD. Felix Klein, the German Federal Government’s antisemitism commissioner, for example, points out that the party seeks to restrict or prohibit Jewish rituals and religious regulations, such as kosher slaughter.²⁷

4. Functions of the AfD's "Israel solidarity" position

The preceding quotations and examples illustrate to what extent the AfD's pro-Israel rhetoric is instrumentally motivated and must be understood in the context of other programmatic positions. In particular, four such instrumental functions can be identified.

Instrumental use for pursuing a political agenda

Legitimization of hostility toward Muslims

The rise of the AfD is closely linked to its hostility toward Muslims. Emphasizing, justifying, and argumentatively reinforcing this anti-Muslim "brand core"²⁸ is arguably the most important function of the AfD's "Israel solidarity" policy. Numerous statements and policy texts suggest that the AfD's support for Israel and Jewish life mainly serves to justify its rejection of Muslim life. For example, the 2025 election manifesto states in the subsection *We oppose the further spread of Islam*, "Jewish life in Germany is threatened primarily by Muslims who are hostile to Jews and Israel."²⁹ It is noteworthy that this is also the only passage in the AfD's election manifesto in which Israel or Jewish life is even addressed.

For the parliamentary group's antisemitism commissioner, Beatrix von Storch, it is clear that "The imported antisemitism from Islamic countries is so massive (...) that even the federal government can no longer ignore the problem with Muslims as it has done so far."³⁰ This line of argument is also found in a motion by the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag from November 2023, which states that "(...) the threatening increase in antisemitism in Germany is above all a consequence of uncontrolled mass immigration from certain predominantly Muslim countries of origin (...)."³¹ Political scientist Lars Rensmann similarly argues that the AfD seeks to utilize the national parliament primarily as a stage for continuous campaigning against those it does not consider "real Germans."³²

Anti-Muslim agenda behind support for Israel

Exposing political opponents

A second function of the AfD's "Israel solidarity" position is the opportunity to expose political opponents. Von Storch used her congratulations on Israel's 75th state anniversary to accuse the then government of inaction in the fight against Islamist terror and to emphasize its own determination.³³ AfD member of the German Bundestag Bernd Baumann was even more explicit in October 2024 when he blamed the centrist parties for the rising antisemitism in the country: "That was German migration policy, especially during the 16 years of the CDU/CSU government. They bear the guilt and responsibility."³⁴ The emphasis on an exclusive "solidarity with Israel" thus serves to portray other parties as weak or inconsistent and at the same time to underline its own role as defender of supposedly Western values and identity.

Distraction from one's own antisemitism

The AfD has long been trying to divert attention from antisemitism within its own ranks. One element of these efforts was the foundation of the party-affiliated association *Jews in the AfD* (JAfD) in 2018. According to the *Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies*, the JAfD primarily serves the party executive by enabling it "(...) to portray the AfD as neither right-wing extremist nor antisemitic, without substantially changing the party's political course or personnel composition."³⁵ Furthermore, the AfD's invocation of a "Christian-Jewish West" is intended to dismiss antisemitic attitudes and instead locate antisemitism exclusively in Mus-

Staging of harmlessness

lim circles.³⁶ After October 7, these diversionary efforts were expanded under the motto “Anyone who supports Israel cannot be an antisemite.” This strategically staged “solidarity with Israel” serves the party primarily as a sign of its alleged harmlessness; it provides a rationale behind which antisemitic narratives and conspiracy codes continue to exist.³⁷

Call for a “strong state”

Ultimately, the AfD’s “Israel solidarity” position serves to provide additional arguments supporting its calls for a strict “law and order” policy at home. In this context, Israel’s unique geographical location and the specific historical, political, and military challenges it faces are ignored, and the country is imagined as a model for a “tough” state in Germany.³⁸ As early as 2018, Georg Pazderski, the party’s then deputy federal spokesperson, demanded, “We should take Israel as an example, which has decades of experience with border security and immigration. We, too, should finally secure and deport.”³⁹ The fact that such instrumentalization is ultimately not about Israel, but about Germany, is evident in the AfD’s understanding of history. Unbroken German national pride is one of the party’s core ideological concerns, while the memory of the crimes of the Second World War and the extermination of European Jews runs counter to this goal. This is exemplified by Björn Höcke’s famous “Dresden Speech,” in which he dismissed the erection of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe as a “monument of shame.”⁴⁰

5. Conclusions

The foregoing considerations have made it clear that the AfD’s “Israel solidarity” stance primarily serves to incite hatred against Muslims, distract from its own antisemitism, and make right-wing extremist positions socially acceptable. In doing so, the party contributes to the relativization of antisemitism.

Political education as a countermeasure

How can this deception be dealt with? First, the inherent contradictions of “Israel solidarity” should be better explained, especially internationally. It is precisely here that awareness of the incompatibilities between pro-Israel rhetoric abroad and exclusionary policies at home must be communicated more clearly. Through education and critical debate, political education can reveal the purely instrumental nature of AfD rhetoric regarding Israel and its threat to social cohesion. Comparing the AfD’s strategy with other right-wing parties can help, as other right-wing parties employ similar strategies to distract.

Through education and critical debate, political education can reveal the purely instrumental nature of AfD rhetoric regarding Israel and its threat to social cohesion. This includes, first, promoting media and source literacy that enables citizens to distinguish between genuine solidarity with Israel and the tactical instrumentalization of antisemitic narratives. Second, there must be greater awareness of the mechanisms by which right-wing populist actors simultaneously address different phenomena such as antisemitism and Islamophobia. Mechanisms of instrumentalization, manipulation, and ideological appropriation only become apparent when the AfD’s domestic political rhetoric is presented and placed in the context of its pro-Israel positions. Third, it is important to deepen awareness of Germany’s historical responsibility as the basis for democratic decision-making. Fourth, practical formats such as workshops, discussion forums, or teaching materials can help to communicate the dangers of instrumentalizing “Israel solidarity” (which ultimately is not solidarity) and bring them into the broader social discourse.

Jewish and pro-Israel actors and organizations in Germany are important allies in these efforts; they both see through the double-sidedness of the AfD's rhetoric and are also mindful of Israel's interests and sentiments. When both are considered together, it quickly becomes clear that the *Alternative for Germany (AfD)* is not an alternative partner for Israel in Germany.

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