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‘Who remembers all the German victims?’ Resistance to contemporary and historical Jewish victimhood in the AfD’s *Facebook* community

CLAIRE BURCHETT 

ABSTRACT Burchett’s article sheds light on the community of *Facebook* users who interact with posts by the populist far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), and how they respond to the AfD’s contradictory narratives regarding Jews and antisemitism. The AfD uses its online space to construct an everyday reality of victimhood for its political community, which conditionally includes Jews. Jewish victimhood and inclusion are emphasized by the AfD when they fit its political aims, such as focusing on ‘Muslim-Arab’ antisemitism to underline an anti-immigration stance, but are minimized when Jewish victimhood is perceived to threaten non-Jewish German victimhood, as it is seen to do in the context of Holocaust remembrance. Burchett compares comment threads from these two thematic streams and finds that, regardless of the difference in victimhood framing by the AfD, users in both streams react with similar narratives of defensive, competitive and rejective victimhood, as well as a reluctance to include Jews in their in-group of victims, even when the AfD explicitly includes them. Her paper argues that so-called ‘secondary’ antisemitism, Jewish exclusion as a result of resistance to Holocaust guilt, also has an effect on contemporary Jewish victimhood.

KEYWORDS AfD, Alternative für Deutschland, antisemitism, *Facebook*, Germany, far right, victimhood

HISTORY received 2 February 2024; accepted 10 September 2025

Against the backdrop of its increasing radicalization since its 2013 founding, the German populist far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Alternative for Germany) has received much attention from scholars and the media. This has included identifying and analysing its seemingly

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contradictory approach to antisemitism. On the one hand, the party presents itself as a friend and ally of the Jewish community. AfD representatives mostly support Israel and claim to be the only party willing to protect Jews from antisemitism, which is portrayed as coming predominantly from Muslim, Arab and immigrant communities.¹ Notably, the AfD publicly heralded the creation of the Jews in the AfD (JAfD) organization within the party in 2018. However, on the other hand, AfD politicians have occasionally expressed antisemitic tropes and, most often, have shown resistance to Holocaust memory culture and minimized its importance, albeit generally stopping short of outright Holocaust denial, which is illegal in Germany.²

While the two thematic streams of 'Muslim-Arab' antisemitism and Holocaust remembrance have largely been considered separately, this paper brings them together. It analyses their co-existence on *Facebook* through the lens of victimhood in order to understand how users who engage with AfD posts react and respond to them.³ The paper argues that the AfD foregrounds Jewish victimhood when this victimhood contributes to, or even bolsters, a wider non-Jewish German victimhood, and relegates it to the background ('backgrounds' it) when it threatens non-Jewish German victimhood, specifically in regard to the historical context of the Second World War and the Holocaust.⁴ Jews are acceptable victims when faced with the common 'threat' of Islam, often portrayed as an amalgamation of Muslims, Arabs and immigrants (the Muslim-Arab Other). Framing Jews as German thus allows the AfD to portray the antisemitic Muslim-Arab Other as inherently anti-German.⁵ The latter also exonerates non-Jewish Germans from antisemitism. In referring to the Muslim-Arab Other, this paper does not support the AfD's racist amalgamation of several identity

- 1 Marc Grimm and Bodo Kahmann, 'AfD und Judenbild: Eine Partei im Spannungsfeld von Antisemitismus, Schuldabwehr und instrumenteller Israelsolidarität', in Stephan Grigat (ed.), *AfD & FPÖ: Antisemitismus, völkischer Nationalismus und Geschlechterbilder* (Baden-Baden: Nomos 2017), 41–60 (51–3).
- 2 Samuel Salzborn, 'Von der offenen zur geschlossenen Gesellschaft: Die AfD und die Renaissance des deutschen Opfermythos im rechten Diskurs', in Grigat (ed.), *AfD & FPÖ*, 29–40 (32).
- 3 For example, one scholar focusing solely on pro-Israel sentiment and anti-antisemitism is Bodo Kahmann, "'The most ardent pro-Israel party": pro-Israel attitudes and anti-antisemitism among populist radical right parties in Europe', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2017, 396–411, while an example of a focus on the AfD's approach to remembrance of the Second World War, Nazism and the Holocaust is Michelle Lynn Kahn, 'Antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and Germany's far right: how the AfD tiptoes around Nazism', *Journal of Holocaust Research*, vol. 36, no. 2–3, 2022, 164–85.
- 4 The AfD's conditional inclusion of Jews is theorized along populist lines in Claire Burchett, 'Of the people *and* the elite? The strategic framing of Jews, antisemitism, and Israel by the AfD and the FPÖ', *Party Politics*, OnlineFirst, 5 July 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688251358140>.
- 5 This paper does not seek to undermine the experience of Jews of antisemitism from Muslim, Arab and immigrant perpetrators. The intention is to explore the AfD's framing of antisemitism as selective and ideological.

groups, but rather demonstrates how this construction leads to a simplified and generalized out-group.

Jewish victimhood and inclusion are less acceptable when they represent non-Jewish German historical responsibility and guilt, as victim and perpetrator roles are often considered mutually exclusive.⁶ This is in line with the central tenet of secondary antisemitism, namely that, through their existence, Jews serve as a reminder of guilt for the Holocaust; historical Jewish victimhood is thus often downplayed, relativized and even denied in order to alleviate these feelings of guilt. Building on these concepts and ideas, this paper focuses on the response of users engaging with AfD *Facebook* posts. It is guided by the following research question: how do users respond to the AfD's conditional inclusion of Jews?

To answer this question, this paper begins with an analysis of the AfD's conditional inclusion of Jews in *Facebook* posts shared across twenty-six profiles between 2017 and February 2023.⁷ A key empirical contribution here is the focus on users who engage with the AfD's output, and therefore the effect of these victimhood narratives on their intended audience.⁸ This paper thus

6 Nurit Shabel, Samer Halabi and Masi Noor, 'Overcoming competitive victimhood and facilitating forgiveness through re-categorization into a common victim or perpetrator identity', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 49, no. 5, 2013, 867–77 (868).

7 This data collection was part of the author's Ph.D. data collection, with the timeframe ranging from 2017 (to coincide with elections in Austria and Germany) to February 2023, when data collection had to be concluded as researcher access to *X* (formerly *Twitter*) was drastically reduced. All translations from the German, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

8 For a focus on the AfD's narratives around Jews, antisemitism and the Holocaust, see, for example, Maximilian Selent and Matthias Kortmann, 'Philo-semitic civilisationism or anti-semitic nationalism? The ambivalent stance of the Alternative for Germany towards Judaism, Jews, and Israel', *German Politics*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2023, 25–51; Kahn, 'Antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and Germany's far right'; François Danckaert, 'L'AfD et l'antisémitisme', *Revue d'Allemagne et des Pays de Langue Allemande*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2021, 223–36; and Sophie Schmalenberger and Monika Hübscher, 'Tertiary antisemitism in social media posts of Germany's Alternative für Deutschland', in Monika Hübscher and Sabine von Mering (eds), *Antisemitism on Social Media* (New York: Routledge 2022), 35–54. For wider literature on political actors' use of victimhood narratives, see for example Kurt Sengul, "'I cop this shit all the time and I'm sick of it': Pauline Hanson, the far right and the politics of victimhood in Australia', in Evan Smith, Jayne Persian and Vashti Jane Fox (eds), *Histories of Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Australia* (New York: Routledge 2022), 200–17; Alexander Oaten, 'The cult of the victim: an analysis of the collective identity of the English Defence League', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2014, 331–49; and Omar Al-Ghazzi, 'We will be great again: historical victimhood in populist discourse', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2021, 45–59. The only notable exception I have identified of analysis of AfD user *Facebook* comments in relation to antisemitism has been Schmalenberger and Hübscher, 'Tertiary antisemitism in social media posts of Germany's Alternative für Deutschland', which included reactions to the AfD's historical commemoration posts in their analysis, and Monika Hübscher, 'Likes for antisemitism: the Alternative für Deutschland and its posts on Facebook', *Journal of Contemporary*

goes beyond existing considerations of the AfD's framing of Jews, antisemitism and Holocaust remembrance, as well as the existing literature on the use of victimhood narratives by political actors. The primary analytical contribution is that, regardless of the difference in victimhood framing by the AfD, users expressed similar victimhood narratives in response to posts about contemporary Jewish victimhood and Holocaust remembrance. This is further conceptualized into a novel framework of exclusionary victimhood consisting of three categories: rejective, defensive and competitive.

We might expect this reaction from Holocaust remembrance posts, as the AfD specifically minimizes Jewish victimhood in these posts. However, narratives displaying secondary antisemitism were also present in reactions to contemporary Jewish victimhood. This demonstrates the central finding that Jewish victimhood extends beyond the Holocaust and persists in contemporary settings. Even if certain defensive victimhood commentators were willing to accept Jewish victimhood, they only did so if the responsibility for antisemitism could be wholly shifted on to another group. This demonstrated less of a preoccupation with Jewish inclusion, focusing instead on highlighting an intolerant view of Muslim, Arab and immigrant communities and exonerating the self, thus shifting Holocaust guilt to others. Moving beyond a comparative approach to historical suffering, these findings contribute to the existing literature on the interplay between antisemitism and victimhood.⁹

Victimhood and antisemitism

Victimhood identities have been studied from a psychological perspective, with widespread acknowledgement that competitive victimhood, a group desire to show that it has suffered more than another group and is therefore more deserving of recognition, is associated with lower empathy for other groups feeling less guilt for crimes or other transgressions committed by one's in-group.¹⁰ However, if groups can establish collective victimhood, by viewing each other as equal victims or developing a common identity, this increases the possibility of empathy and forgiveness for those in other

Antisemitism, vol. 3, no. 1, 2020, 11–34, which included reactions to AfD posts disseminating antisemitic global finance tropes in its analysis.

9 For example, Georgios Antoniou, Elias Dinas and Spyros Kosmidis, 'Collective victimhood and social prejudice: a post-Holocaust theory of anti-semitism', *Political Psychology*, vol. 41, no. 5, 2020, 861–86.

10 Victimhood identity causes lower intergroup empathy: Masi Noor, Johanna Ray Vollhardt, Silvia Mari and Arie Nadler, 'The social psychology of collective victimhood', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2017, 121–34 (124). Victimhood identity results in less guilt for out-group transgressions: Michael Wohl and Nyla R. Branscombe, 'Remembering historical victimization: collective guilt for current ingroup transgressions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 94, no. 6, 2008, 988–1006 (1004).

groups, as notably demonstrated in relations between some Israeli Jews and Palestinians.¹¹ Defensiveness arises when a group fears its own portrayal as a perpetrator, thereby losing its victim status and exposing itself to criticism.¹²

These findings are increasingly applied to the political sphere, in the form of perceived victimhood, rather than victimhood from intergroup conflict.¹³ This encourages positive self-presentation and political mobilization, as victimhood is associated with in-group identification and a higher moral status.¹⁴ Victimhood has become a useful lens through which to analyse populism and its political candidates: it promotes the populist binary of 'us' versus 'them' and is an effective tool for political candidates to portray themselves as the solution to existing problems.¹⁵ Furthermore, if victims are considered morally superior, then victimhood can act as a form of protection from, and a way of legitimizing, the expression of intolerance of the Other.¹⁶ Central to claims of political victimhood is the demand for the recognition of victimization, thus explaining why the victimhood claims of other groups may be resented.¹⁷ In the literature on political victimhood, and in the literature on the AfD and antisemitism, the scholarly focus has predominantly been on the party's discourse, rather than the reaction of those who engage with it.

Tied to the understanding of victims as a 'social construction imbued with cultural significance and meaning' is a need to engage with literature on how different groups are privileged in being seen as victims over others.¹⁸ This paper draws on Theo van Leeuwen's concept of a system network to

11 Shnabel, Halabi and Noor, 'Overcoming competitive victimhood and facilitating forgiveness through recategorization into a common victim or perpetrator identity', 870.

12 Andrew McNeill and Johanna Ray Vollhardt, "'We all suffered!'" The role of power in rhetorical strategies of inclusive victimhood and its consequences for intergroup relations', in Johanna Ray Vollhardt (ed.), *The Social Psychology of Collective Victimhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020), 337–57 (351).

13 Miles T. Armaly and Adam M. Enders, "'Why me?'" The role of perceived victimhood in American politics', *Political Behavior*, vol. 44, 2022, 1583–609 (1587).

14 Isaac F. Young and Daniel Sullivan, 'Competitive victimhood: a review of the theoretical and empirical literature', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, vol. 11, 2016, 30–4 (30).

15 Al-Ghazzi, 'We will be great again', 46; Armaly and Enders, "'Why me?'" , 1584.

16 This is found in, for example, Holger Marcks and Janina Pawelz, 'From myths of victimhood to fantasies of violence: how far-right narratives of imperilment work', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 34, no. 7, 2022, 1415–32 (1417); Petre Breazu and David Machin, 'Racism is not just hate speech: ethnonationalist victimhood in YouTube comments about the Roma during Covid-19', *Language in Society*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2022, 511–31 (515); and Ruth Breeze, 'Positioning "the people" and its enemies: populism and nationalism in AfD and UKIP', *Javnost—The Public*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2019, 89–104 (89).

17 Tami Amanda Jacoby, 'A theory of victimhood: politics, conflict and the construction of victim-based identity', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2014, 511–30 (523); Kostas Maronitis, 'The past is a foreign country: Brexit and the performance of victimhood', *British Politics*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2021, 239–53 (243).

18 Alex Vandermaas-Peeler, Jelena Subotic and Michael Barnett, 'Constructing victims: suffering and status in modern world order', *Review of International Studies*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2022, 171–89 (174).

demonstrate how the victimhood of different groups is represented. Victimhood can be ‘backgrounded’, meaning it is not erased, but rather de-emphasized, in order to minimize its importance, or ‘foregrounded’, meaning it is emphasized to show its importance.¹⁹ I would argue that Jewish victimhood according to the AfD can be understood in this way as ‘backgrounded’ in relation to Holocaust remembrance, and ‘foregrounded’ in discussions of Muslim-Arab antisemitism.

Victimhood is integral to antisemitism due to the role of victimization by Jews in antisemitic tropes such as ‘Jewish’ control, greed, dishonesty and malice.²⁰ However, victimhood is also relevant for antisemitism due to the *resistance* to Jewish victimhood, which became especially visible in the aftermath of the Holocaust. This is the core of what is termed ‘secondary antisemitism’, which was originally conceptualized by Peter Schönbach following a wave of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in West Germany in late 1959 and early 1960 being defaced.²¹ It has been extensively studied in (West) Germany, and can be tied to a prevailing sense of self-victimization and self-defence, often expressed through the rejection of guilt and minimization of Jewish victimhood.²² Prior to reunification, West German society oscillated between the private prioritization of narratives of non-Jewish German victimization and public backlash against a Nazi legacy (the most famous example being the student movement of the late 1960s). In former East Germany, there was an absence of public debate on the Holocaust and consequent reparation payments. This, in turn, translated into less of a need for (resistance to) responsibility and guilt. The East German ‘anti-fascist’ state considered itself on the side of resisters to, and victims of, the Nazi regime.²³ German reunification led to renewed public debate and willingness to commemorate victims of

19 Theo van Leeuwen, ‘The representation of social actors’, in Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard (eds), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York: Routledge 1996), 32–70 (39–41).

20 Claire Burchett, ‘Everyday Victimhood on Social Media: The Discussion of Jews and (Anti-) Antisemitism in the Populist Radical Right Online Space in France, Germany, and Austria (2017–2023)’, Ph.D. dissertation, King’s College London, 2025, 35.

21 Peter Schönbach, *Reaktionen auf die antisemitische Welle im Winter 1959/1960* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1961).

22 Werner Bergmann, ‘Antisemitismus’, in Anton Pelinka, Karin Bischof and Karin Stögner (eds), *Vorurteile: Ursprünge, Formen, Bedeutung* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter 2011), 33–68 (38); Samuel Salzborn, ‘Anti-Jewish guilt deflection and national self-victimization: antisemitism in Germany’, in Lars Rensmann and Julius H. Schoeps (eds), *Politics and Resentment: Antisemitism and Counter-Cosmopolitanism in the European Union* (Leiden: Brill 2011), 397–423 (398); Roland Imhoff and Rainer Banse, ‘Ongoing victim suffering increases prejudice: the case of secondary anti-Semitism’, *Psychological Science*, vol. 20, no. 12, 2009, 1443–7. For a more historical account of German non-Jewish victimhood narratives, see Robert G. Moeller, ‘War stories: the search for a usable past in the Federal Republic of Germany’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 4, 1996, 1008–48 (1013).

23 Wolfgang Benz, *Antisemitismus: Präsenz und Tradition eines Ressentiments* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Wochenschau Verlag 2015), 8.

the Nazi era, but also greater public attention on non-Jewish German victimhood, such as ethnic Germans expelled from Eastern Europe.²⁴ Today, a so-called memory 'boom', with memorials continuing to be built and strong institutional backing for atonement, co-exists with memory 'fatigue', that is, a resistance to the perceived imposition of shame and its alleged exploitation to diminish Germany, notably expressed by Martin Walser in 1998.²⁵ Regardless, the Holocaust is 'central' to the identity and culture of contemporary Germany. This centring has entailed a process, termed a 'catechism' by A. Dirk Moses, as it goes beyond a historical event, and is today considered 'sacred trauma' that cannot be 'contaminated' by other genocides and other, non-Jewish, victims.²⁶

This fear of 'contamination' plays into existing facets of victimhood as a struggle for recognition. While the Holocaust symbolizes the 'ultimate benchmark of victimhood' and is often considered a unique event, it remains open to inciting feelings of competition from other victim groups.²⁷ Beyond Germany, a strong victimhood identity in groups, particularly when this victimhood feels overlooked or lacking in recognition, has a positive correlation with antisemitism.²⁸ Antisemitism thus can stem from a sense of overlooked victimhood in a 'zero-sum struggle' for recognition.²⁹

The AfD and its stance towards antisemitism and Islam

In just over ten years, the AfD has gone from a marginal conservative Euro-sceptic party to a populist far-right party winning the second highest vote

24 Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press 1997); Robert G. Moeller, 'Germans as victims? Thoughts on a post-cold war history of World War II's legacies', *History & Memory*, vol. 17, no. 1–2, 2005, 145–94.

25 Eric Langenbacher and Friederike Eigler, 'Introduction: memory boom or memory fatigue in 21st century Germany?', *German Politics & Society*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2005, 1–15.

26 Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2018), 4; A. Dirk Moses, 'The German catechism', *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (online), 21 May 2023, available at <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/> (viewed 18 August 2025).

27 Antoniou, Dinas and Kosmidis, 'Collective victimhood and social prejudice', 865.

28 For example, this has been identified in relation to non-Jewish Polish victimhood by Michał Bilewicz and Anna Stefaniak, 'Can a victim be responsible? Anti-semitic consequences of victimhood-based identity and competitive victimhood in Poland', in Barbara Bokus (ed.), *Responsibility: A Cross-Disciplinary Perspective* (Piaseczno: Studio Lexem 2013), 69–77; and to Muslim and Sub-Saharan African immigrants in Belgium by Laura De Guissmé and Laurent Licata, 'Competition over collective victimhood recognition: when perceived lack of recognition for past victimization is associated with negative attitudes towards another victimized group', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2017, 148–66.

29 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2009), 3.

share (20.8 per cent) in the February 2025 federal elections.³⁰ Almost since the beginning of its establishment, antisemitism and anti-antisemitism have co-existed within the AfD. The party has a conflicting relationship with Jewish historical victimhood, as it attempts to minimize the importance of the Holocaust and the associated historical responsibility for it. This approach began to develop early on in the party's history; the party's 2016 programme criticized the 'narrowing of the German culture of remembrance' to the time of National Socialism.³¹ In 2017, AfD politician and leader of the party's Thuringia branch, Björn Höcke, gave a speech in Dresden in which he referred to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin as a 'monument of shame', drawing on similar language to Walser in 1998. In a similar vein, in 2018, then co-leader of the AfD Alexander Gauland infamously referred to 'Hitler and the Nazis' as just 'bird shit (*Vogelschiss*) in over 1,000 years of successful German history'.³² More recently, AfD politician Maximilian Krah said in 2024 that not all members of the SS were criminals. AfD representatives avoid overt Holocaust denial, as it is illegal in Germany. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the AfD prefers to emphasize German non-Jewish victimhood, such as the Dresden bombing of February 1945 by the Allied forces. This event has been widely appropriated by the AfD and the wider German far right to emphasize non-Jewish German victim narratives and legitimize ideas of the protection of Germany, its values and culture, from destruction by outside forces, most notably Muslim immigrants.³³ Paradoxically, however, other party politicians have engaged in rituals of Holocaust memory, such as Beatrix von Storch sharing a photograph of herself with a #WeRemember poster on *Facebook* on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2022.

Outside of Holocaust remembrance, AfD politicians have expressed antisemitism in other ways. Party members, such as Wolfgang Gedeon in 2020, have been excluded for disseminating antisemitic material. More implicitly, on its social media, the party readily criticizes current and former representatives of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (ZdJ, Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland), Josef Schuster and Charlotte Knobloch, using antisemitic tropes like disloyalty and dishonesty.³⁴

30 Elsa Conesa, 'German elections: far-right AfD party achieves historic result', *Le Monde*, 24 February 2025, available at www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/02/24/german-elections-far-right-afd-party-achieves-historic-result_6738495_4.html (viewed 24 April 2026).

31 Alternative für Deutschland, 'Manifesto for Germany: the political programme of the Alternative for Germany', 2016, available on the AfD website at www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf (viewed 14 November 2023).

32 Kahn, 'Antisemitism, Holocaust denial, and Germany's far right', 172.

33 Susanne Vees-Gulani, 'Symbol of reconciliation and far-right stronghold? PEGIDA, AfD, and memory culture in Dresden', *German Politics and Society*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2021, 56–78 (67).

34 Burchett, 'Of the people *and* the elite?', 6.

A pro-Israel and anti-antisemitic stance in the Western European populist far right began to take shape following the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States.³⁵ Since, parties in a historically antisemitic ideological field have foregone Jewish exclusion to build a unified front against Islam.³⁶ This inclusion of Jews as ‘fellow Europeans’ and ‘exemplary victims’ also allows radical right parties to more successfully refute antisemitism and wider biological racism, and to further distance themselves from the Nazi past and historically more extreme positions. This alleviates related stigmatization, as well as further legitimizes their anti-Islam and anti-migration positions.³⁷ The AfD has largely followed this trend in expressing its support for Jews through relatively uniform support of Israel, conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism, and thus considering any support for Palestine antisemitic.³⁸

As it radicalized, the AfD became increasingly Islamophobic and anti-immigrant, with the party’s rejection of then chancellor Angela Merkel’s ‘welcome culture’ and open-border policy in 2015, which has been directly linked to the party’s success.³⁹ While the AfD is not overtly inclusive of the Turkish German community, which originated in the guestworker programme in the 1960s, the allocation of blame for antisemitism is overwhelmingly linked to the 2015 wave of immigration from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Certain AfD politicians have mirrored Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s reallocation of responsibility for antisemitism (even for the Holocaust) to the Middle East. Muslims and Arabs in Germany are broadly accused of not doing enough to empathize with Jewish victims of the Holocaust, with Holocaust remembrance used as a symbol for a ‘new Europe’ which is civilized and progressive and to be protected from anyone seen as not willing or able to appropriately respect Holocaust memory and overcome antisemitism.⁴⁰

35 Grimm and Kahmann, ‘AfD und Judenbild’, 51.

36 Farid Hafez, ‘Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2014, 479–99 (485); Omran Shroufi, ‘The gates of Jerusalem: European revisionism and the populist radical right’, *Race & Class*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2015, 24–42 (24).

37 See, for example, Colin Jennings and Elizabeth Ralph-Morrow, ‘Selective tolerance and the radical right’, *Rationality and Society*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2020, 144–67 (145); Kahmann, ‘“The most ardent pro-Israel party”’, 398; Shani Burke, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist movement in comparative perspective’, *Journal of Community & Applied Psychology*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2018, 365–77 (366); and Rogers Brubaker, ‘Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist movement in comparative perspective’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 8, 2017, 1191–226 (1202).

38 Although the AfD’s support for Israel began to divide the party in the context of increasing Israeli aggression in Gaza, which is outside the timeframe of the data under analysis in this paper.

39 David Art, ‘The AfD and the end of containment in Germany?’, *German Politics & Society*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2018, 76–86 (76).

40 David Seymour, *Law, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust* (London and New York: Routledge-Cavendish 2007).

Muslims and Arabs have also become a convenient target for offloading or ‘subcontracting’ the guilt of white Germans, as they are accused of ‘importing’ and being predominantly responsible for antisemitism today.⁴¹

Overall, the AfD’s contradictory stance towards Jews, wherein it embraces shifting blame for antisemitism, implies that it cares less about Jews themselves and more about weaponizing antisemitism in order to improve its self-image and legitimize its attacks on Muslim communities in Germany, particularly more recent immigrants from the Middle East.

Research design and data collection

Facebook is a rich channel through which to analyse the production and dissemination of victimhood narratives, as it provides tools, or so-called ‘affordances’ to enable them.⁴² First, it gives political parties the control to share carefully chosen narratives without journalistic gatekeeping, which they would not have in mainstream media publications.⁴³ Social media also gives politicians constant, direct access to the public, which can then respond, providing insight into the reaction to certain party narratives. This self-publishing aspect can help those who might feel unrepresented in mainstream politics and media to construct a political community.⁴⁴ Despite this, party politicians and users engaging with their pages maintain a level of self-censorship, due to *Facebook* regulations and German law, both of which prohibit extremist content such as Holocaust denial. The AfD is known for its prolific use of *Facebook*.⁴⁵ It has honed its social media strategy through its collaboration with US-based media and communications firm Harris Media LLC—which notably also worked with US President Donald Trump—and party politicians maintain a prominent and regular presence on *Facebook*.⁴⁶

41 Esra Özyürek, *Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2023).

42 Yannis Theocharis, Shelley Boulianne, Karolina Koc-Michalska and Bruce Bimber, ‘Platform affordances and political participation: how social media reshape political engagement’, *West European Politics*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2023, 788–811 (793).

43 Nicole Ernst, Sina Blassnig, Sven Engesser, Florin Büchel and Frank Esser, ‘Populists prefer social media over talk shows: an analysis of populist messages and stylistic elements across six countries’, *Social Media & Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2019, 1–14 (5).

44 Paolo Gerbaudo, ‘Social media and populism: an elective affinity?’, *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2018, 745–53 (746).

45 Teresa Lindenauer, ‘Das populistische Krisennarrativ: Eine qualitative Analyse der Wahlkampfkommunikation der AfD auf Facebook’, *Studies in Communication and Media*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2022, 98–123.

46 Kai Arzheimer and Carl C. Berning, ‘How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and their voters veered to the radical right, 2013–2017’, *Electoral Studies*, vol. 60, 2019, 1–10 (3).

Facebook was chosen over other social media sites due to its consistent and long-term use by the AfD, whereas *TikTok* has been used for a more limited amount of time. *Facebook* also has efficient searchability to identify relevant data, whereas *Instagram* data is comparatively more difficult to search by keyword. As the paper is interested in user comments, the digital architecture, namely the ability for users external to the party to respond to posts, makes *Facebook* a more logical choice than a platform like *Telegram*, where this is not always possible. *Facebook* users tend to use the platform in a way that is similar to their offline relationships, that is, there is a need to accept requests for connection, so users tend to be less anonymous.⁴⁷ Although X (formerly *Twitter*) is comparable to *Facebook* in terms of ease of user responses, searchability and consistent politician use, *Facebook* was preferred for this analysis because of the tendency towards more personal communication between users and, in a similar vein, because *Facebook* is the preferred platform for 'ordinary citizens to interact with politicians'. This contrasts with X's tendency towards more professional communication.⁴⁸ It is also worth noting that the age demographic of *Facebook* is somewhat higher than other social media platforms. According to Polish social media analytics firm NapoleonCat, in January 2020 (the mid-way point of this paper's data timeframe), 46.9 per cent of Germany's 37,630,000 *Facebook* users were over thirty-four years old while only 29.6 per cent of Germany's 21,160,000 *Instagram* users were over thirty-four years old.⁴⁹ An older age-group would, however, not necessarily mean a higher likelihood of holding antisemitic views. A 2022 report by the World Jewish Congress found that 21 per cent of surveyed German adults and 29 per cent of a subsample of young people held antisemitic views, with similarly dismissive attitudes towards the Holocaust held across groups, although being an AfD voter made one more likely to hold antisemitic views.⁵⁰ However, it would be difficult and arguably unethical to know the voting behaviour of the authors of social media comments, so we cannot know whether that is the case.

To collect the data, the following selection of keywords was used to identify relevant posts on twenty-six AfD profiles, including the official *Facebook*

47 Michael Bossetta, 'The digital architectures of social media: comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 US election', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 95, no. 2, 2018, 471–96 (475).

48 Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel and Esser, 'Populists prefer social media over talk shows', 5.

49 NapoleonCat, 'Facebook users in Germany January 2020', available on the NapoleonCat website at <https://stats.napoleoncat.com/facebook-users-in-germany/2020/01/>; NapoleonCat, 'Instagram users in Germany January 2020', available on the NapoleonCat website at <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/instagram-users-in-germany/2020/01/> (both viewed 21 August 2025).

50 World Jewish Congress, *The 2022 WJC Report on Anti-Semitism in Germany* (New York: World Jewish Congress 2022), available at <https://wjc-org-website.s3.amazonaws.com/horizon/assets/5qfkool9/220127-wjc-anti-semitism-survey-germany.pdf> (viewed 12 March 2026).

profile, the parliamentary group's profile and twenty-four politicians, through the advanced search tool.⁵¹ *Gedenkttag* (memorial day), *Erinnerung* (remembrance), *Holocaust*, *Israel*,⁵² *Shoah*, *Juden* (Jews), *jüdisch* (Jewish), *Antisemitismus* (antisemitism), *Antisemit*.

Posts were then divided between those referring to Holocaust remembrance and those referring only to Jewish victimhood (that is, no other victim group) in the present. Posts in which the AfD rejected accusations of antisemitism were not included in the analysis, as these were arguably more about the party defending its image. The resulting dataset contained 176 posts in the Jewish-specific stream and twenty-five posts in the remembrance stream. To analyse the comments below the posts, these were scraped using Facebook Scraper in Python. Following the anonymization of the comments by removing names, which occasionally meant the removal of a whole comment, the resulting datasets constituted 23,262 comments for the Jewish-specific stream, and 3,085 comments for the Holocaust remembrance stream. To allow for a more manageable inductive analysis and to understand user narratives about inclusion and exclusion, these were filtered by mentions of 'Jew-' and 'German/Germany'. This resulted in a final dataset of 5,003 comments for the Jewish-specific stream and 706 comments for the remembrance stream. These comments were subsequently inductively analysed and coded with a view to identifying the reaction of users to Jewish victimhood, as well as the articulation of their own perceived victimhood. The resulting framework consisted of three categories: competitive, rejective and defensive victimhood.

Although this paper focuses on the discussion of Jews and antisemitism, the reality is that these posts make up only a small proportion of the AfD's overall *Facebook* posts. For example, in a five-week period before the September 2017 election, the AfD's official *Facebook* profile published 170 posts.⁵³ In contrast, the same profile contained four posts in the whole of 2017 that mentioned 'Jew-' and/or 'antisemit-'. This reinforces the argument that the AfD does not consider antisemitism to be a key issue, but weaponizes it when it is ideologically conducive.

Party posts

Jewish victimhood is foregrounded and emphasized in the AfD's posts about 'Muslim-Arab' antisemitism. As previously mentioned, those responsible for this antisemitism are interchangeably referred to as Muslims, immigrants,

51 The politicians' profiles and posts used for this research were all publicly available.

52 The inclusion of 'Israel' as a search term risks conflation between Jews and Israel, but Israel was included as it often serves as a code word for Jews.

53 Jan Philipp Thomeczek, 'Are some communication channels more suited for populism than others? A comparison of populist communication in Facebook posts and party press releases in the German election campaign 2017', *Zeitschrift für Parteiwissenschaften*, vol. 1, 2023, 20–44 (30).

Arabs and Palestinians (the Muslim-Arab Other), creating an amalgamated and oversimplified out-group to blame. This aids the party's clear delineation of victim and perpetrator. Antisemitism is portrayed as an issue that is external to Germany and is being 'imported'. As AfD politician Stephan Protschka wrote in an October 2019 *Facebook* post: 'Hatred of Jews is imported. The struggle against antisemitism begins at the German external frontiers!' This 'imported' antisemitism is tied to Arab communities in an April 2022 post by AfD politician Malte Kaufmann, in which he writes that 'imported Jew-hatred from the Arab world is lived out openly and with conviction'. It is also predominantly linked to Islam. In 2018, the AfD deputy leader Beatrix von Storch included in a *Facebook* post an image of herself and the words 'violent antisemitism immigrates with Islam'. Similarly, a 2020 post by the AfD's official page included an image in bold with the claim: 'Antisemitism Is First and Foremost MUSLIM!' (see [Figure 1](#)). The same post justifies this by arguing that Jewish hatred 'is reflected directly in the Quran'. Furthermore, the Muslim-Arab group seen as responsible for this antisemitism is attributed with hyperbolically violent qualities: they 'dream of mass murder', want to 'destroy' Jews, and 'burned' Israeli flags. This is a common trope of anti-Muslim racism which ascribes a tendency to violence as inherent to Islamic 'ideology'.⁵⁴ This antisemitism is used as further evidence of the allegedly backwards nature of (Muslim-Arab) immigrants, and contrasts with German society, which is framed as free and liberal. This has a twofold effect: first, it communicates to the AfD's political community that antisemitism is happening in their space and that this might reflect poorly on them as a collective and, second, it communicates that the violence of the Muslim-Arab Other is affecting Jews but threatens non-Jews as well.

Jewish victimhood is then backgrounded in the AfD posts on Holocaust remembrance. In 2020, 2021 and 2022 (see [Figure 2](#)), posts on the official AfD *Facebook* page commemorated the victims of the Holocaust on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. However, the only mention of Jews in the 2021 and 2022 *Facebook* posts is a Star of David in the accompanying image; otherwise the posts commemorate 'all victims' of National Socialism. This may be a way to refer to non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, such as the Roma and Sinti peoples, LGBTQ+ communities or Communists (among others), but the lack of specificity produces a vague end result. The 2020 post is an exception in that it refers to the 'industrial mass murder of European Jews'. Similarly, the generalized 'National Socialist dictatorship' and 'crimes' appear vague, particularly in contrast to the specificity of the blame attributed to Muslims, Arabs and immigrants, above. It is also evident when compared to the communication of non-Jewish German historical victimhood by the AfD. In February 2022, AfD co-leader Tino

54 Alexandra Lewicki and Yasemin Shooman, 'Building a new nation: anti-Muslim racism in post-unification Germany', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2020, 30–42 (38).



Figure 1 'The CDU is slowly beginning to recognize what we already knew: Antisemitism is first and foremost MUSLIM!' (image posted on the AfD's official *Facebook* account, 27 January 2020)



Figure 2 '27 January: In memory of the victims of the Holocaust' (image posted on the AfD's official *Facebook* account, 27 January 2022)

Chrupalla posted on *Facebook* to commemorate the Dresden bombing of 1945.⁵⁵ In contrast to the Holocaust remembrance posts, Chrupalla emphasized the victims' innocence by writing that 'Dresden had no military bases' and 'thousands upon thousands of innocent people, including women, children, and German refugees from the eastern regions, died in flames'.⁵⁶ Not only are the victims of the Dresden bombing innocent, but Chrupalla included a qualifier to emphasize how many died.

55 Even prior to its instrumentalization by the far right, the Dresden bombing has been a key reference point for non-Jewish German victimhood. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the bombing has been a way to frame Germans as victims of the Allied bombers and the Nazi regime.

56 Despite the long-standing argument that the bombing of Dresden was a gratuitous act, designed to emphasize the guilt and perpetration of Allied forces, there were military reasons to bomb Dresden, namely, to aid the Soviet advance.

Table 1 User responses

	Competitive	Rejective	Defensive	Exclusion total
Jewish-specific	4.1%	5.7%	25.9%	35.7%
Remembrance	15.6%	3.3%	37.5%	56.4%

The AfD thus foregrounds Jewish victimhood when it suits its political purposes of emphasizing the alleged threat posed by the Muslim-Arab Other. However, when it comes to Holocaust remembrance, Jewish victimhood is in the background. Victims of the Holocaust are generalized and dehumanized in that they are not given specific identity markers (that is, Jewish, innocent) and National Socialist responsibility is vaguely attributed. Overall, Jewish inclusion in the in-group is more insecure.

We now return to the central research question of this paper: how do users who engage with AfD posts react to these two narratives of Jewish victimhood? Across the Jewish-specific and remembrance streams, users employed similar narratives, demonstrating how non-Holocaust Jewish victimhood evokes deep emotional responses even when a separate out-group was being blamed for antisemitism. After an inductive coding process, these narratives were divided into three categories: competitive, rejective and defensive.

The parallel narratives in the competitive category primarily consisted of rejecting the perceived prioritization of Jewish victimhood and applying victimhood equivalence to non-Jewish Germans. Users occasionally also applied Holocaust victimhood to themselves in the Jewish-specific stream.

First, users rejected the perceived prioritization of Jewish victimhood. In the remembrance stream, users responded with comments such as, 'I think Germany has many bigger problems at the moment', 'disgusting, where's the memorial day for the German people [*Volk*]?' and, most simply, 'and who remembers all the German victims?' There was a palpable sense of injustice that Jews were being prioritized in their victimhood and that this overrode the importance of other victimhood groups. For example, one user wrote: 'I can't hear it anymore. If only a German would get such attention.' Another expressed this sentiment more overtly when they wrote: 'there were more people who died, it's not always just the Jews.' It is worth noting that these users are excluding the existing rituals of remembrance for those killed in war in Germany, notably the *Volkstrauertag*, which was introduced in the 1920s as a way to commemorate the soldiers who died during the First World War and is now considered a day of wider mourning. While this kind of competitive victimhood is perhaps unsurprising in reaction to the Holocaust, a similar rejection of the perceived prioritization of Jewish victimhood existed in the Jewish-specific stream. For example, one user stated, 'we should take care of the problems in Germany first before

we save the world', implicitly excluding Jews from the German body politic. Other users also distinguished between Germans and Jews when they wrote 'when do Jews care if a German is killed?' and 'what about us Germans? There are certainly more of us than Jews.' This sentiment appeared to originate from a feeling that non-Jewish Germans were victims of the same issues (such as immigration) and not being heard in the same way. The latter user went on to write, 'we can be insulted, put down, hurt, murdered, raped', and others wrote, 'it's strange that people only talk about it when it concerns Jews' and 'why is everyone now talking about the Jews who are at risk? Pay for the non-Jews who are at the mercy of this immigrant [*sic*].'

The second element to competitive victimhood as expressed by users was a kind of victimhood equivalence, emphasizing historical and contemporary non-Jewish victims in the remembrance stream and implying that a similar persecution would happen to non-Jewish Germans in the present in the Jewish-specific stream. In the remembrance stream, users mentioned that 'they would also be happy' to honour 'the victims of the Allied air attacks in Dresden' and they 'miss[ed] the memory' of 'many non-Jewish forced labourers who were also murdered'. This was brought to bear on the contemporary moment, with users reducing the need for historical responsibility in light of present victimhood: 'What do today's generations have to do with this? Nothing [. . .] What about the many German victims since 2015, no one ever thinks about them.' This narrative also veered into the use of more overt antisemitic tropes: 'The Jews have a lot of economic control on this planet. Don't put everything into the context of the Third Reich. It's only a half-truth to say that a Jew in Germany is afraid. Ridiculous. As a German, I am far more afraid of Merkel and co's politics.' Again, this might not be surprising considering the history of competitive victimhood in Germany regarding the Holocaust. However, these narratives also influenced users' reactions to depictions of contemporary Jewish victimhood, with users implying that non-Jews would shortly be, or were already, equivalent victims. For example, users wrote, 'today it's the Jews, tomorrow it will be us' and 'Judaism in Germany will probably disappear just as quickly as the Germans will in the next few years.' In line with this, the current political situation was directly compared to the Nazi regime: 'Germany under Merkel is back to the way it was in Adolf's time' and 'we already had this in 1933–1945'. The latter overlaps with defensive responses, as a way of shifting blame and emphasizing the victimhood of non-Jewish Germans.

Among those who rejected victimhood, the most common overlapping narrative was minimizing Jewish victimhood by victim-blaming. In both the remembrance and the Jewish-specific streams, users blamed Jews for supporting pro-immigration policies, for not being aware enough of where the 'threat' was coming from and mistakenly blaming the AfD.

In the remembrance stream, users occasionally blamed Jews for their historical persecution. For example, one user wrote, 'it's just a question of money, like back then. The Jews still have the most money and I could bet

that Hitler attacked them for that reason.’ More commonly, users blamed the Central Council of Jews in Germany (ZdJ) for being too pro-immigration. Users wrote that ‘Jewish representatives have been campaigning for immigration to Germany’ and ‘just ask the Central Council of Jews in Germany why it advocates for this mass invasion of Muslims’. This then moved into defence of the AfD as the ‘declared enemy’ of the ZdJ, despite the party wanting to ‘refuse the antisemites at the border’, while the ZdJ did not criticize Merkel’s refugee policies. This narrative was unsurprisingly more widespread in the Jewish-specific stream (‘only the Central Council of Jews does not seem to recognize it [“Muslim-Arab” antisemitism]’) and implicitly as part of a conspiracy with the government: ‘for decades the ZdJ, with the help of the respective governments, has instilled in all Germans that they were Nazis and right-wing radicals. Now they can no longer back down.’ This taps into a common narrative of secondary antisemitism that Jews, whether consciously or unconsciously, remind non-Jewish Germans of guilt.⁵⁷ Other users were more critical of the Jewish community more widely, blaming it for supposed inaction and ignorance, for example: ‘the Jew has understood nothing and is making a fool of himself’, ‘the Jews in Germany should take care of this, we don’t hear anything from them’ and ‘why doesn’t the Jewish population publicly oppose this invasion policy? [. . .] it’s your Germany too’. Blaming Jews for antisemitism not only excludes them from the in-group but also shifts responsibility from non-Jewish Germans.

The defensive category of victimization, the most common across both streams, can be split into three main narratives: rejection of guilt (in the past and present), blame-shifting and unfair persecution.

First, users outright rejected blame or expressed frustration that they were seen as responsible for antisemitism, presenting themselves in a positive light. In the remembrance stream, this focused on a rejection of historical guilt; for example, one user wrote that, ‘in any case, many Jews lived in our town and they were undisturbed’. Other users brought this resentment of historical guilt into the present by not rejecting guilt outright but rejecting its relevance for today: ‘How long will Germany have to pay?’ Another wrote that, ‘after 75 years, there should finally be an end to crying about it. Today’s generation has nothing to do with it.’ Users then occasionally implicitly demonstrated their awareness of historical antisemitism, but claimed that there had been no antisemitism since 1945 and that non-Jewish Germans were therefore not antisemitic. For example, one user wrote that ‘Jews live peacefully alongside Germans and no German has ever done anything to a Jew after the war’; another found it ‘cheeky’ to call Germans antisemites because ‘Germans are pro-Jewish and pro-European’. A very similar narrative was identified in the Jewish-specific stream: that non-Jewish Germans were and are not antisemitic today. This was occasionally expressed on a

57 Imhoff and Banse, ‘Ongoing victim suffering increases prejudice’, 1443.

personal level, such as 'I don't know any Germans who are antisemitic' and 'I don't know anyone who hates Jews'. It was also expressed on a more collective level: 'there were absolutely no problems with the Jewish community in Germany', 'the Jews always lived in peace in Germany' and 'we Germans have nothing against Jews'. One user followed a similar line to the users blaming Jews for their victimhood and defended the AfD: 'the Jews should know where their enemies are, surely not in the AfD.' Comments coded as rejection of guilt often contained an element of blame-shifting too, such as one that read, 'it [antisemitism] has nothing to do with German [*sic*] but with millions of migrations'.

This blame-shifting narrative was popular with users and demonstrates how the AfD's attribution of blame for antisemitism to Muslim, immigrant and Arab communities is taken up by users as it exonerates them, confirming their rejection of guilt. Users in both the remembrance and Jewish-specific streams argued that antisemitism today came from specific groups and that it was a 'shame' considering Germany's history. In the remembrance stream, users repeated that immigration was directly linked to a rise in antisemitism: 'antisemitism in Germany has of course significantly increased due to the Muslims who've immigrated here since 2015' and 'our government is bringing the Jews' greatest enemies into the country in their millions'. This was then linked to Holocaust memory, implicitly comparing 'Muslim-Arab' antisemitism to Nazi-era antisemitism. For example, users wrote that, 'if you consider the rise of Islam in Germany, one might ask what the Germans have learned from their past', 'if things continue like this in Germany then we will soon have a new one' and 'such commemoration days make sense, which is why it's all the more frightening that in the last few years cultures have been coming here that hate Jews'. The last comment directly exemplifies the notion that, while Germans have overcome antisemitism and accept Holocaust remembrance as just, recently arrived immigrants are more problematic for allegedly not being able to do so.

Similar narratives of blame-shifting to immigration were present in the Jewish-specific stream, with slightly more criticism of the government. For example, 'the antisemites are those that Merkel brings to Germany' and 'those causing this problem are those who invited the Jew-haters'. Again, there was a parallel drawn to the Holocaust, with users both claiming that there was a similarity between Nazi-era antisemitism and contemporary antisemitism ('should they be marked with the Jewish star again?') and also lamenting that the government had not learned its lesson from the past by bringing antisemitism 'back': 'In the Third Reich, millions of Jews were killed, which is still a disgrace for us today, and today our government is bringing over the greatest enemies of the Jewish people, the Islamists, in their thousands. Isn't that crazy?' Again, in an overlap with the rejection of guilt narrative, users exonerated themselves, as 'native' Germans, making it seem that antisemitism was absent until the arrival of Muslims and

immigrants, making a clear distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Users wrote that ‘native [*gebürtig*, literally by birth] Germans have not been anti-Jewish for a long time. It is mainly fanatical Islamists who brought Jew-hatred back to our country. We don’t need that. We don’t want that’ and ‘our great government brought all the Jew-haters to us in Germany, so they shouldn’t accuse us Germans [of antisemitism]’.

This latter comment leads to the final narrative of unfair persecution, whereby users felt they were unfairly accused of antisemitism, just by virtue of being German, and unfairly punished when other groups had committed antisemitic acts or similar crimes and were able to ‘get away with it’. In the remembrance stream, this was expressed in a historical sense, with users listing other crimes and perpetrators to shift the focus from Germany. For example, one user wrote, ‘what about the USA [*sic*] and the genocide of the Indians or the American wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq etc.’, ‘how many millions died in the former Soviet Union under Stalin or in China? What about the French and American wars in Vietnam and and and, it’s not mentioned. Only we Germans are to blame for everything’ and

what about Stalin, Mao, and other despots? Stalin alone has 20 million people on his conscience. Strangely enough, nobody talks about Mao and the others, but the main thing is that we Germans have been reminded of this for centuries.

The notion that Germans are unjustly treated as uniquely guilty is repeated elsewhere: ‘every person is born innocent. Apparently we Germans are not.’ This narrative was also expressed through portraying the Holocaust as just another war crime: ‘that’s enough, every war is cruel. Why do you always have to pick on the Germans?’

The perspective in the Jewish-specific stream was slightly different. It was more rooted in the present context, less about historical crimes and focused on non-Jewish Germans being unfairly blamed and unfairly prosecuted for antisemitism. First, users emphasized that they were unfairly blamed: ‘and in the media there is total silence about the fact that it’s Merkel’s new people [*Volk*]. The world just talks about the evil Germans again’, ‘and now the blame is being pushed on Germans again’ and ‘unfortunately the world is already saying that the Germans are antisemites’. Second, users expressed somewhat paradoxically that, despite non-Jewish Germans being ostensibly incapable of being antisemitic, if they were, they would be punished in a harsher way than other identity groups or be held more accountable in some way. For example, one user wrote that ‘there would have been serious consequences if they [the perpetrators of antisemitism] had been German’, and ‘luckily it wasn’t a German [then there would have been] 100 special broadcasts a day’. Overall, the users rejecting and shifting blame for antisemitism and decrying perceived unfair assumptions about Germans did not seem concerned about rising antisemitism because of its

damaging effects on Jews. Rather, they seemed concerned about being assigned the blame for this antisemitism and a subsequent negative reputation or image.


What does this mean for antisemitism?

The central contribution of this paper is the exploration of user comments, which remain under-researched in academic literature. This paper first brought together two existing strands of literature, looking at the AfD's dismissal and minimization of Holocaust remembrance alongside its anti-antisemitism. It demonstrated that the AfD projects a conditional inclusion of Jews in its in-group, depending on the political purpose of Jewish victimhood. If Jewish victimhood can be used to legitimize the AfD's anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant views, then it is foregrounded and emphasized, whereas if Jewish victimhood invokes the negative framing of non-Jewish Germans, it is backgrounded.

Existing research has, however, not thoroughly explored how the AfD's intended audience might react to these narratives. Following an inductive coding of a filtered dataset of comments left by users engaging with Holocaust remembrance posts and posts about contemporary Jewish victimhood, the paper finds that users expressed similar narratives, across both streams, of competitive, defensive or rejective victimhood. Broadly, in these three categories, users were preoccupied with gaining recognition for their own perceived victimhood (or any non-Jewish victimhood)—a positive association—and exonerating themselves of responsibility for antisemitism—a negative association. The competitive and rejective victimhood comments were wholly exclusionary of Jews, often distinguishing between 'Germans' and 'Jews', whereas the defensive victimhood comments were seemingly concerned for Jews and appeared to include Jews in a shared victim identity, but only on the condition that blame for antisemitism could be shifted to Muslim, Arab and/or immigrant communities. Arguably then, this does not constitute true inclusion and demonstrates only a superficial concern over antisemitism. It also indicates the problematic consequences of the AfD's dissemination of material on 'Muslim-Arab' antisemitism, which only encourages further demonization of Islam by those who interact with the party's output.

Thus, while analysis of 'secondary' antisemitism and competitive victimhood has largely focused on other victim groups' perceptions of their historical suffering in comparison to the Holocaust, this paper shows that even perceptions of contemporary victimhood are affected by secondary antisemitism. Previous formulations of secondary antisemitism have included Holocaust denial, framing Jews as vengeful, greedy (for post-Holocaust reparations), manipulative and controlling of media and government narratives negatively portraying non-Jewish Germans, while arguing that the

latter have their own (unrecognized) victimhood claims.⁵⁸ This was mirrored in comments under Jewish-specific posts that blamed Jews for supporting pro-immigration policies and therefore being allegedly responsible for anti-semitism. These entailed the rejection of guilt, frustration over a perceived unfairness in the allocation of blame and a rejection of a perceived prioritization of Jewish victimhood. It appears that, with increasing temporal distance from the Holocaust, the resistance to guilt and the minimization of Jewish victimhood that developed in its wake are far from becoming irrelevant.

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58 Clemens Heni, 'Secondary anti-semitism: from hard-core to soft-core denial of the Shoah', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, vol. 20, no. 3–4, 2008, 73–92.