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Genocide in Gaza? Social Media Discussions of Violence in Israel and Gaza

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Introduction

Since October 7, 2023, the world's attention has been focused on Israel and Palestine. On this day, Hamas militants breached the border between Gaza and Israel and inflicted considerable violence on Israeli soil, claiming the lives of 1,139 people, injuring more, and kidnapping around 250 Israeli and foreign citizens. The subsequent violent Israeli response has seen military action in Gaza that has claimed the lives of upward of 100,000 Palestinians,[1] displaced a large proportion of the population, created conditions of mass hunger and disease, and destroyed huge swathes of infrastructure.[2] This violent conflict is embedded in a longer durée of violent interaction between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian fighters which includes various wars and *intifadas*, Islamist attacks, as well as a long-lasting Israeli (militarized) control of Palestine, occupation by Israeli settlers, and discriminatory policies against Palestinians.

As with previous iterations of this conflict, the violence in Israel and Gaza has prompted emotional reactions and considerable conflict around the world with vehement expressions of support for Israel and the Israeli population, as well as demonstrations of solidarity with the Palestinian population. Tensions have mounted with interpretations of violence as terrorism, genocide, and crimes against humanity, and opinions diverging strongly, resulting in conflict at the international level as well as societally in various countries around the world.

"There are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide against Palestinians as a group in Gaza has been met. […] The genocide in Gaza is the most extreme stage of a long-standing settler colonial process of erasure of the native Palestinians."[3]

These are the words of UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories Francesca Albanese when she presented her report *Anatomy of a Genocide* to the UN Human Rights Council. In advance, the report had already been rejected by Israel's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Meirav Eilon Shahar, as an "obscene inversion of reality."[4] Albanese's use of the word genocide in reference to the violence in Gaza was a flashpoint for significant support and criticism. Several planned talks and appearances were cancelled or pushed online by university

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[1] Casualty and fatality numbers are highly contested. This estimate stems from the Health Ministry in Gaza, reported in English by the Israeli newspaper Haaretz (see Nir Hasson, "100,000 Dead: What We Know About Gaza's True Death Toll," *Haaretz*, June 26, 2025, accessed June 27, 2026, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-06-26/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/100-000-dead-what-we-know-about-gazas-true-death-toll/00000197-ad6b-d6b3-abf7-edfbb1e20000). Contrary to assumptions that Hamas inflates these numbers, they have been previously shown to underestimate figures (see Michael Spagat et al., "Violent and Nonviolent Death Tolls for the Gaza War: New Primary Evidence," *medRxiv*, June 23, 2025, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1101/2025.06.19.25329797).

[2] Various chapters in Abdo Hassoun, ed., *War on Gaza: Consequences on Sustainability and Global Security*, Sustainable Development Goals Series (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025).

[3] "Rights Expert Finds 'Reasonable Grounds' Genocide Is Being Committed in Gaza," *UN News*, March 26, 2024, accessed July 21, 2025, https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147976.

[4] Imogen Foulkes, "Gaza War: UN Rights Expert Accuses Israel of Acts of Genocide," *BBC News*, March 26, 2024, accessed June 27, 2026, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68667556.

Timothy Williams and Andreas Dafnos. "Genocide in Gaza? Social Media Discussions of Violence in Israel and Gaza." *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 20, no. 1, 38–61. https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.20.1.2083.
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leaders, for example, in February 2025 at the LMU (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität) in Munich and the Free University Berlin.[5] While Albanese's clear advocacy for applying the label genocide to the violence in Gaza provoked reactions in various countries, these were particularly strong in Germany, in line with Germany's broad support for Israel. In Germany, hegemonic memory culture ties an acknowledgment of responsibility for the Holocaust to unwavering support for Israel today and is compounded by a political context within which criticism of Israeli political action or calls for action against Israeli actors—for example, through boycotts—is frequently equated with antisemitism and can result in social or political exclusion. This manifests not only as political rhetoric in support of Israel, but also as judicial support and even the continuation of arms deliveries.[6]

More broadly, within the international community, there has been considerable debate on the situation in Gaza, with statements by leading figures at the UN and governments around the world condemning Hamas' violence and a more mixed response to Israeli violence. Controversial debates have weighed Israel's right to self-defense with allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide. Very soon after the beginning of violence, South Africa brought proceedings against Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), alleging the ongoing perpetration of genocide, and several provisional measures were announced by the court in January 2024 and since.[7] In this case, the German government broke with its traditional support for international criminal justice by filing an intervention on behalf of Israel, alleging that South Africa's case was weaponizing the Genocide Convention. While the German government withdrew this intervention in early 2026, this is not due to a reevaluation of Israel's actions but to another case filed by Nicaragua at the ICJ that alleges Germany's support of Israel during the violence in Gaza violated international law. Furthermore, International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor Karim Kahn sought arrest warrants against leading Hamas functionaries as well as Israeli government officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, provoking myriad supporting and opposing international responses.[8]

Moreover, societal rifts have been exposed in various countries around the world with some parts of the population expressing solidarity with Hamas and portraying their violence as part of an anti-colonial freedom struggle, while others portray them as terrorists who are seeking to eliminate the Jewish nation. Some express unconditional solidarity with Israel and frame the violence as a natural consequence of Hamas' inhuman policies of using civilians as human shields, while others condemn Israel for the violence against the Palestinian population. Here, politicians and mainstream media in Western countries have been decidedly supportive of Israel,[9] while solidarity with Palestinians has come predominantly from activist groups. University campuses are occupied, demonstrations in solidarity with or against either side continue, and societal discourse is polarized with hostile tones towards those with diverging opinions. Expressing solidarity is always political and, besides cultural and political events such as the talks

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[5] Bernd Kastner, "Münchner Uni verhindert Vortrag von UN-Sonderberichterstatterin," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 5, 2025, accessed May 5, 2026, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/muenchen-lmu-vortrag-albanese-israel-palaestina-absage-li.3196180; Eva Murašov and Martin Ballaschk, "Umstrittener Vortrag zu 'Gaza-Genozid': Francesca Albanese darf nicht an die Freie Universität Berlin kommen," *Tagesspiegel*, February 12, 2025, accessed May 5, 2026, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/umstrittener-vortrag-zu-gaza-genozid-francesca-albanese-darf-nicht-an-die-freie-universitat-berlin-kommen-13189477.html.

[6] Hanna Pfeifer and Matthias Goldmann, *Political and Legal Assessment of German Arms Deliveries to Israel Since 7 October 2023*, MPIL Research Paper No. 2025-15 (Heidelberg: Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, 2025), accessed June 28, 2026, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5390330.

[7] International Court of Justice, *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Provisional Measures*, Order of January 26, 2024, accessed July 21, 2025, https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192/provisional-measures.

[8] Karim A. A. Khan, "Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A. A. Khan KC: Applications for Arrest Warrants in the Situation in the State of Palestine," *International Criminal Court*, May 20, 2024, accessed July 21, 2025, https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/statement-icc-prosecutor-karim-aa-khan-kc-applications-arrest-warrants-situation-state.

[9] Mohamad Hamas Elmasry, "Images of the Israel-Gaza War on Instagram: A Content Analysis of Western Broadcast News Posts," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (2025), 695–721, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990241287155.

by Albanese being cancelled, there are also reports of people losing their jobs for expressing undesirable opinions and academic freedoms being curtailed.[10]

In this heated context, nowhere is discourse more polarizing and polarized today than in social media,[11] as digital spaces have become central to public political debate by allowing people to come together in "connective action."[12] Within these debates, the term genocide was first used by some to describe Hamas' intent on October 7, but has more frequently been used as a label for Israeli violence in Gaza, although this is highly contentious both in academic debate and public discourse.[13] As we shall discuss below, the term genocide is highly political, moralized and emotive,[14] provoking not only legal duties but broader feelings of responsibility. Similarly, the label of terrorism evokes specific connotations for violence as perpetrated by an enemy outsider.[15] While these terms have political, academic, and legal meanings, they are hotly contested in social media and beyond.

This article is thus interested in understanding how the terms genocide and terrorism are used within online discussions of Gaza and Israel. While we see polarized debate across the world, given Germany's specific political history of antisemitic violence and genocide, as well as recent controversies around the meaning of the past for politics today,[16] we are interested in whether the social media discourse in Germany is different to that of other places. We pursue this research interest by asking: *How and why do discussions about genocide and terrorism differ in German and English-language social media posts?*

To answer this question, we analyze German and English-language data from X, seeking to distill idiosyncrasies and differences between the German-language discourse and broader English-language discourse on the platform. To this end we conduct social network analyses of six months of posts that include references to genocide or terrorism in the Israel-Gaza context, as well as subsequent topic analyses within these communities. We find several distinct discursive communities in both the German and English-language samples with diverging perspectives on the violence, its culpability, and solidarity. While both datasets include similar discussions on the politics and morality of violence in Israel and Palestine, the way these arguments are phrased and foregrounded topics vary subtly. We argue that these nuanced differences present in the German-language data are rooted in a German memory culture that is very attuned to avoiding antisemitism and criticism of Israel, shifting the way most people post on X, even if the people

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[10] Lilian Mauthofer and Jannis Julien Grimm, "Zwischen Wissenschaftsfreiheit und Palästina-Solidarität: Deutsche Hochschulen als umkämpfte Räume," *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 38, no. 1 (2025), 150–168, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1515/fjsb-2025-2016.

[11] Christopher A. Bail et al., "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 37 (2018), 9216–9221, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115; Marco Bastos, *Spatializing Social Media: Social Networks Online and Offline* (London: Routledge, 2021); Sarita Yardi and Danah Boyd, "Dynamic Debates: An Analysis of Group Polarization Over Time on Twitter," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30, no. 5 (2010), 316–327, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610380011.

[12] W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012), 739–768, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661.

[13] Omar McDoom, "Expert Commentary, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and the Question of Genocide: Prosemitic Bias within a Scholarly Community?," *Journal of Genocide Research* 28, no. 1 (2026), 94–102, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2024.2346403; Martin Shaw, "Inescapably Genocidal," *Journal of Genocide Research* 28, no. 1 (2026), 4–8, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2023.2300555; Nimer Sultany, "A Threshold Crossed: On Genocidal Intent and the Duty to Prevent Genocide in Palestine," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2024), 1–26, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2024.2351261.

[14] Jacques Sémelin, "Around the 'G' Word: From Raphael Lemkin's Definition to Current Memorial and Academic Controversies," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, no. 1 (2012), 24–29, accessed June 28, 2026, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol7/iss1/5/.

[15] Lisa Stampnitzky, "Can Terrorism be Defined?," in *Constructions of Terrorism: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Research and Policy*, ed. Michael Stohl et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 11–20.

[16] A. Dirk Moses, "The German Catechism," *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, May 23, 2021, accessed June 28, 2026, https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/.

posting are also accusing the Israeli government of genocide.[17] This demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of how the concepts of genocide and terrorism are politicized.

This paper will first discuss genocide and terrorism as political labels beyond their academic, juridical, and cultural meanings. It will then explore social media as a space in which political discourses are rooted, how platforms facilitate polarized debate, and how the politics of collective memory can impact the present. We then introduce the methods underlying this paper before discussing our analysis of German and English-language posts regarding Gaza and Israel.

The Politics of Labels

Genocide and terrorism are inherently political concepts, both of which evoke strong emotional responses,[18] while eliciting memories of defining historical events such as the Holocaust or 9/11. In this section we seek not to present the vast academic debates on these definitions, but instead to demonstrate how the concepts themselves are political and are used in political ways. Turning first to genocide, the concept is defined in international law by the 1948 Genocide Convention.[19] The crafting of the Genocide Convention was a political process in which the United States and the Soviet Union sought to shape the definition of the crime in their political interests, removing references to political and social groups as relevant victims, as well as excluding more cultural forms of the destruction of life.[20] Politicization of the use of the term genocide has continued since, as the most powerful nations have worked to undermine genocide prevention when it has served their interests and uphold a system of selective impunity.[21] This is particularly relevant as the Genocide Convention stipulates an obligation to prevent genocide.[22] As such, states' duty to protect creates significant disincentives for governments to acknowledge ongoing occurrences of genocide if they are not prepared to intervene, rendering the concept of genocide inherently political.[23] As genocide is frequently labelled the "crime of crimes" and deemed morally distinctive to other crimes,[24] accusations of genocide are rendered particularly political and

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[17] Although it should not be necessary to do so, we would like to be very clear that our research on this topic is rooted in a deep-seated normative assumption against violence and we stress that we condemn all violence targeting civilians, including the Hamas attacks on Israeli and third-party civilians on October 7, 2023, as well as excessive IDF violence against Palestinian civilians since.

[18] Jan Aldert Bergstra and Marcus Düwell, "Genocide Accusations and the Logic of Genocide," *Transmathematica*, published ahead of print, April 15, 2025, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.36285/tm.111; Sémelin, *Around the "G" Word*.

[19] *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, December 9, 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277, accessed June 27, 2026, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-prevention-and-punishment-crime-genocide.

[20] Douglas Irvin-Erickson, "The History of Raphaël Lemkin and the UN Genocide Convention," in *Handbook of Genocide Studies*, ed. David Simon and Leora Kahn (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 7–26; Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Uses in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 22–32; Alana Tiemessen, "Cultural Genocide in Law and Politics," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, ed. Nalanda Roy (New York: Oxford Academic, 2017), published online September 20, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.762.

[21] Jeffrey S. Bachman, The Politics of Genocide: From the Genocide Convention to the Responsibility to Protect (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022).

[22] Yonah Diamond and John Packer, "Reviving the Genocide Convention's Preventive Purpose," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 18, no. 2 (2024), 26–45, accessed June 27, 2026, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol18/iss2/6/; Lubna Sheikh Ghazali, "'How Many Acts of Genocide Does It Take to Make Genocide?'—The Legal Obligation of Third States to Prevent Genocide Under the 1948 Genocide Convention," *Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations* 21, no. 1 (2024), 63–77, accessed June 28, 2026, https://www.idfr.gov.my/images/JDFR/JDFR_vol21_No1_Nov24.pdf#page=69.

[23] Christian Gerlach, "Extremely Violent Societies: An Alternative to the Concept of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006), 455–471, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056299.

[24] Ibid., 464; Steven P. Lee, "The Moral Distinctiveness of Genocide," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (2010), 335–356, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2009.00347.x.

emotive in public discourse, and civil society actors can be incentivized to accuse perpetrating regimes in an effort to shame them into ceasing violence.[25]

Terrorism is an equally, albeit differently contested concept. Again, the creation and development of the term terrorism is inherently political and many have pointed to the racialized, gendered, and colonial structures within which the term terrorism is embedded, rendering it a political label.[26] As such, much research from critical terrorism studies demonstrates that the application of the term terrorism is less of an analytical decision and more a political act that seeks to *other* and delegitimize the individuals or groups being labeled.[27] Furthermore, the label terrorist affects individual perceptions and policy preferences,[28] thus impacting how individuals evaluate the legitimacy of state responses framed as counter-terrorist or a "war on terrorism."[29] By labeling individuals or groups as enemies, the label of terrorism is thus politically useful, as it legitimizes violent action against those attached with the label "terrorist," while deflecting from and delegitimizing any political cause that may be at issue.[30]

What we see for both these concepts is that although they have academic and (in part) legal definitions, they are the products of fundamentally political processes and—more importantly—the labeling of violence and actors with these terms is itself political. As such, it is analytically important to consider how and when these labels are applied, to whom, and why.

Social Media as Spaces of Political Discourse

In trying to understand societal discourses and their meanings, social media platforms have become key spaces in which political ideas are debated. On most platforms, users engage in discussions in open formations that allow networks to emerge beyond their offline social groups, facilitating communication with a vast, potentially global, audience.[31] Social media users generate their own content,[32] and many are aware of this potentially global audience. Nevertheless, the content of posts also reflects users' own social, cultural, and political context and socialization. As such, social media data can reveal interesting variations between different contexts and societal discourses. Importantly, social media has become increasingly present in

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[25] Matthew Krain, "J'accuse! Does Naming and Shaming Perpetrators Reduce the Severity of Genocides or Politicides?" *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2012), 574–589, accessed June 27, 2026. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2012.00732.x.

[26] Rabea M. Khan, "A Case for the Abolition of 'Terrorism' and Its Industry," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (2024), 1019–1042, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2327727; Laura Sjoberg, "Violences of/in Critical Terrorism Studies," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (2024), 878–902, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2384148.

[27] Michael Loadenthal, "Othering Terrorism: A Rhetorical Strategy of Strategic Labeling," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 13, no. 2 (2019), 74–105, accessed June 27, 2026, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol13/iss2/9/; Nicole Nguyen, *Terrorism on Trial: Political Violence and Abolitionist Futures* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2023); Julie M. Norman, "Other People's Terrorism: Ideology and the Perceived Legitimacy of Political Violence," *Perspectives on Politics* 22, no. 2 (2024), 445–462, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722000688; Stampnitzky, *Can Terrorism be Defined?*.

[28] Stephane J. Baele et al., "What Does the 'Terrorist' Label Really Do? Measuring and Explaining the Effects of the 'Terrorist' and 'Islamist' Categories," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 42, no. 5 (2019), 520–540, accessed June 27, 2026. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1393902.

[29] See articles in Harmonie Toros et al., "What the War on Terror Leaves behind: An Introduction," *European Journal of International Security* 10, no. 1 (2025), 1–8, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2024.39; Nicholas Appleby, "Labelling the Innocent: How Government Counter-Terrorism Advice Creates Labels That Contribute to the Problem," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3, no. 3 (2010), 421–436, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2010.521643.

[30] Stampnitzky, *Can Terrorism be Defined?*.

[31] Bastos, *Spatializing Social Media*.

[32] Ekaterina Zhuravskaya et al., "Political Effects of the Internet and Social Media," *Annual Review of Economics* 12, no. 1 (2020), 415–438, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-081919-050239.

people's everyday lives and shapes their understanding of political events.[33] Citizens have thus fast become reliant on social media for information on political issues and guidance on how to evaluate them. Furthermore, social media is an important space for political activism, augmenting collective action from more traditional social movements through "connective action," in which users coalesce in political action through individualized contributions.[34]

Social media has considerably shifted how individuals relate to their social and political worlds, impacting users' social identity formation.[35] Furthermore, social media platforms are reshaping how groups seek status and legitimacy by facilitating online processes of othering and denigrating those perceived as opponents or enemies.[36] These developments are exacerbated by a marked increase in misinformation, disinformation, and fake news that reinforce hostile political attitudes and enhance polarization,[37] particularly as fake news have become a tool to politically delegitimize opponents.[38]

Crucially, these processes are in part also driven by social media platforms' architectural design and algorithmic structure, which creates filter bubbles and echo chambers.[39] In such environments, individual users are systematically shown different information depending on their online connections and affiliations. As such, polarization is further facilitated by the business models of many platforms that necessitate algorithms to maximize users' engagement with the platforms.[40] Going beyond polarization and online hate, social media also contributes to the incitement of physical violence in offline contexts of riots, terrorism, and genocide.[41]

Collective Memory and German Erinnerungskultur

Discussions on social media are embedded in broader social, political, and cultural discourses. Though social media posts are visible to users across the platform and there is significant

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[33] Jan Kleinnijenhuis et al., "The Combined Effects of Mass Media and Social Media on Political Perceptions and Preferences," *Journal of Communication* 69, no. 6 (2019), 650–673, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz038.

[34] Bennett and Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*, 752.

[35] James A. Piazza, "Fake News: The Effects of Social Media Disinformation on Domestic Terrorism," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 15, no. 1 (2022), 55–77, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2021.1895263; Yardi and Boyd, *Dynamic Debates*.

[36] Anita R. Gohdes, "Studying the Internet and Violent Conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 1 (2018), 89–106, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894217733878; Emily Harmer and Karen Lumsden, "Online Othering: An Introduction," in *Online Othering*, ed. Karen Lumsden and Emily Harmer (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 1–33; Jillian Peterson and James Densley, "Cyber Violence: What Do We Know and Where Do We Go from Here?" *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 34 (2017), 193–200, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2017.01.012.

[37] Bail et al., *Exposure to Opposing Views*; Bastos, *Spatializing Social Media*, 8; Cass R. Sunstein, *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[38] Mathias Osmundsen et al., "Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter," *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 3 (2021), 999–1015, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000290.

[39] Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2021); Gohdes, *Studying the Internet and Violent Conflict*.

[40] Cornelia Sindermann et al., "The Revenue Model of Mainstream Social Media: Advancing Discussions on Social Media Based on a European Perspective Derived from Interviews with Scientific and Practical Experts," *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction* 40, no. 23 (2024), 8107–8123, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2023.2278292.

[41] Avinash Prabhu Hitkul et al., "Capitol (Pat)Riots: A Comparative Study of Twitter and Parler," *arXiv*, January 18, 2021, accessed July 11, 2026, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2101.06914; Sandra Jeppesen et al., *The Capitol Riots: Digital Media, Disinformation, and Democracy Under Attack* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022); Philip Pond and Jeff Lewis, "Riots and Twitter: Connective Politics, Social Media and Framing Discourses in the Digital Public Sphere," *Information, Communication & Society* 22, no. 2 (2019), 213–231, accessed June 28, 2026, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1369118x.2017.1366539; Kyle Rapp, "Social Media and Genocide: The Case for Home State Responsibility," *Journal of Human Rights* 20, no. 4 (2021), 486–502, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2021.1947208.

transnational engagement with others, underlying political subjectivities are also very much rooted in socialization processes tied to these broader discourses. One facet of the broader political context is constituted by collective memory. Collective memory is the societal and political process of narratively constructing and reconstructing the past and in this process attributing meanings to what occurred in the past that are resonant for today's political context.[42] Through these processes, collective identities can be shaped, political legitimacy conveyed, and power derived from how the past is remembered. Given the meaning-making stakes that collective memory entails, however, it is frequently politically contested.[43] Furthermore, both what is remembered and what is discussed, as well as what is left unsaid and silenced, is important in constituting collective memory and its impact.[44]

In this article we want to specifically interrogate the role of Germany's political discourse, including its politics of memory, on how Gaza is discussed in German-language posts vis-à-vis the broader English-language discourses. For the most part, both societally and politically, the German state and wide swathes of the population have come to accept their collective, national role as the perpetrators of the Holocaust—in which Nazi perpetrators and their supporters killed six million Jews (among other victim groups)—publicly accepting the country's historic guilt and responsibility.[45] While this was considerably more contested in the first decades after the Second World War, this position has consolidated itself since the 1990s, constituting a new, broadly-accepted perspective on the past.[46] Furthermore, Germany has been very active in pursuing and advocating for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism that includes broad forms of criticism of Israel as antisemitic,[47] as well as implementing Holocaust denial laws that serve as a model for genocide denial laws in other countries.[48] However, there has been intense debate in recent years on how to relate German memory of the colonial past to Holocaust memory, with fears of the former displacing the hegemonic importance of, and thus

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[42] Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 210–224; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Thomas Van de Putte, "'Let Me Tell You What We Already Know:' Collective Memory between Culture and Interaction," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 4 (2022), 751–766, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211044709; James V. Wertsch, "The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory," *ETHOS* 36, no. 1 (2008), 120–135, accessed June 28, 2026, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20486564?seq=1.

[43] Johanna Mannergren et al., *Peace and the Politics of Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024); Timothy Williams, *Memory Politics after Mass Violence: Attributing Roles in the Memoryscape* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2025); Timothy Williams, "Remembering Perpetrators, Victims and Heroes: The Mnemonic Legacy of Violence," *Security Studies* 34, no. 2 (2025), 360–391, accessed June 28, 2026, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09636412.2025.2497963.

[44] Susanne Buckley-Zistel, "Remembering to Forget: Chosen Amnesia as a Strategy for Local Coexistence in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76, no. 2 (2006), 131–150, accessed June 27, 2026, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/africa/article/abs/remembering-to-forget-chosen-amnesia-as-a-strategy-for-local-coexistence-in-postgenocide-rwanda/E12932EDF8FDBE042DA6A97EC7D1F01F; Marita Eastmond and Johanna Mannergren Selimovic, "Silence as Possibility in Postwar Everyday Life," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 3 (2012), 502–524, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijs026.

[45] Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006); Per Leo, *Tränen Ohne Trauer: Nach der Erinnerungskultur* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2021); Susan Neiman, *Von den Deutschen Lernen: Wie Gesellschaften mit dem Bösen in ihrer Geschichte umgehen können*, trans. Christiana Goldmann (München: Hanser Berlin, 2020); Rolf Zimmermann, "Historische Verantwortung," in *Handbuch Verantwortung*, ed. Ludger Heidbrink et al. (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2017), 625–643.

[46] Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*; Moses, *The German Catechism*; Neiman, *Von Den Deutschen Lernen*.

[47] Aleida Assmann, "Which Lessons are to be Learned from the Holocaust? A Personal Account of the History of the IHRA 2000–2025 from the Viewpoint of a Memory Scholar," *Journal of Genocide Research* (2025), 1–17, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2554433.

[48] Karolina Stenlund, "Memory is but the Slave to Purpose?—On the Selective Uses of Holocaust Memory in European Law Making," *Law and Critique* 36 (2025), 275–294, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-025-09420-0.

trivializing, the latter.[49] These discussions on the legitimacy of comparing the Holocaust to other acts of violence is an echo of the previous *Historikerstreit* in the 1980s, with the uniqueness of the Holocaust being a core tenet of discussions in the country.[50]

This acknowledgment of the role of being the Shoah's perpetrator within German collective memory has provided the basis for the country not only taking historical responsibility for the Nazis' crimes, but also forging key lessons for what this should mean today. With the Holocaust's prominent role in collective memory, it has also become an "empty signifier,"[51] which can be filled with different meanings that each have different political connotations. First, memory of the Holocaust is invoked in constructing an important bond to Jewish people and stipulating a foreign policy that is overwhelmingly supportive of Israel. In this vein, former Chancellor Angela Merkel defined Israel's security as part of Germany's *Staatsräson* (state reasoning). Germany's commitment to protect Jewish life and ensure Israeli security constitutes an important lesson from the Shoah and has led to strong solidarity for Israel in the past.[52] In the first months after October 7, solidarity with Israel was expressed vocally not only by politicians but in broader society, while other perspectives that did not focus on the condemnation of Hamas, or questioned the character of Israel's military response as anything but legitimate self-defense, were barely speakable.[53] Although there were demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza, these were frequently broken up by police, while media tended to characterize participants as foreigners and Islamic fundamentalists, ignoring the diverse population of Germany's post-migrant society that includes many of Palestinian and broader Arab descent.[54] Only after considerable delay have prominent voices begun criticizing the Israeli military's human rights violations and war crimes, sometimes even alleging genocide.

Second, the Holocaust has long been invoked in German public discourse to advocate for the postwar multilateral order and a values-based foreign policy, as well as to discuss justifications for (not) engaging in military action.[55] Another implication of this acknowledgment of the country's perpetration of the Holocaust is Germany's commitment to

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[49] Moses, *The German Catechism*; Michael Rothberg, "Lived Multidirectionality: '*Historikerstreit 2.0*' and the Politics of Holocaust Memory," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 6 (2022), 1316–1329, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980221133511.

[50] Stenlund, *Memory is but the Slave to Purpose*, 288; Andrew I. Port, "Holocaust Scholarship and Politics in the Public Sphere: Reexamining the Causes, Consequences, and Controversy of the Historikerstreit and the Goldhagen Debate: A Forum with Gerrit Dworok, Richard J. Evans, Mary Fulbrook, Wendy Lower, A. Dirk Moses, Jeffrey K. Olick, and Timothy D. Snyder," *Central European History* 50, no. 3 (2017), 375–403, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938917000826.

[51] Anke Fiedler, "Discourse, Hegemony, and the Public Sphere: A Theoretical Framework for the Empirical Modelling of Memory," *Memory, Mind & Media* 4 (2025), 13, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1017/mem.2025.10010.

[52] Jannis Julien Grimm and Marcus Schneider, "Staatsräson vs. Weltordnung: Gaza als Feuerprobe wertebasierter Außenpolitik im Globalen Süden," *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 18 (2025), 115–143, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399-025-01020-1; Peter Lintl, "Staatsräson: Eine Deutsche Debatte," in *Nakba: Erinnerungsdefizite und Denkverbote im Palästinakonflikt*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2025), 217–246.

[53] Taylor Borowetz and Felix Berenskötter, "Collective Memories, Concepts, and Experiences: Two Angles on the Political Process of Meaning-Making," *Millennium* 53, no. 3 (2025), 704–730, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298251367422; Hanna Pfeifer and Irene Weipert-Fenner, "Israel–Gaza: A German War Discourse," *PRIF* (blog), December 7, 2023, accessed June 28, 2026, https://blog.prif.org/2023/12/07/israel-gaza-a-german-war-discourse/.

[54] Katrin Antweiler, "Why Collective Memory can Never be Pluriversal: A Case for Contradiction and Abolitionist Thinking in Memory Studies," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (2023), 1529–1545, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980231202337; Damani J. Partridge, "Holocaust Mahnmal (Memorial): Monumental Memory amidst Contemporary Race," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, no. 4 (2010), 820–850, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417510000472; Rothberg, *Lived Multidirectionality*; Evelyn Runge and Annette Vowinckel, "Es Bleibt Kompliziert: Israel, Palästina und die deutsche Zeitgeschichte," *Zeithistorische Forschungen—Studies in Contemporary History* 16, no. 3 (2020), 421–441, accessed June 28, 2026, https://zeithistorische-forschungen.de/3-2019/5784.

[55] Ruth Wittlinger and Martin Larose, "No Future for Germany's Past? Collective Memory and German Foreign Policy," *German Politics* 16, no. 4 (2007), 481–495, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/09644000701652490; Maja Zehfuss, *Wounds of Memory: The Politics of War in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the international rule of law, including strong support for the institutions of international criminal justice.[56] This is a strong juxtaposition to Germany's intervention in support of Israel in the context of the South African case brought to the ICJ.

Data and Methods

This paper seeks to explicitly draw on the specificity of German collective memory to understand how variations in a specific cultural and political context influence social media discourse on Gaza and Israel. We can assume that most German-language posts originate from users who identify their location as Germany, as well as significantly smaller populations in Austria and Switzerland, embedding most posts within the German politics of memory.[57] By contrast, while English-language posts often appear to originate from Anglophone countries such as the USA and UK, as inferred from users' references to their national identities and political representatives, they also include substantial number of international users engaging in transnational discussions and reflecting a broad spectrum of national political systems and memory cultures.[58] As such, there is not just one memoryscape in which the other posts are embedded, even if the Holocaust is a transnationally important reference point for memory.[59] Thus, this article analyzes the English-language discourses as a broader foil against which to compare the specificity of the German-language discourse, teasing out the similarities that German-language posts have with other discourses on X, as well as the idiosyncrasies.

To study German and English-language discourses on these topics in social media, we collected data from X. We selected X because previous research has shown that users engage on the platform to discuss and debate polarizing and controversial issues—including the Israel-Palestine conflict; it is a prominent platform for political discussion in the German case, and for pragmatic reasons of data accessibility.[60] As we aim to identify distinct ideological communities online (as explained below), we need data that allows us to reconstruct user interactions accurately. Through the X API v2, we collected both posts and reposts. Specifically, we

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[56] Lea David, *The Past Can't Heal Us: The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Grimm and Schneider, *Staatsräson vs. Weltordung*.

[57] Among the users who posted content within the top ten topics of each community in the German-language dataset and for whom profile information could be retrieved (96.30%), we analyzed the locations specified in their profiles using the Gemma 4 large language model developed by Google DeepMind. Although 56% of users did not provide location information, among those who did, the clear majority (70.14%) identified Germany as their location. Smaller proportions identified Austria (6.95%) and Switzerland (6.27%), while many other countries each accounted for less than 3% of users, with the majority accounting for less than 1%. While self-reported location data have important limitations and cannot conclusively determine users' actual geographic location, these findings nevertheless provide an indication that the German-language dataset is predominantly shaped by users based in Germany and, more broadly, in German-speaking contexts. This supports the interpretation of the dataset as reflecting discourse embedded primarily within German memory politics.

[58] Similarly, an analysis of the locations specified in the profiles of users who posted content within the top ten topics of each community in the English-language dataset, and for whom profile information was available (82.3%), revealed that a substantial proportion of users did not provide location information (47.6%). Among those who did specify a location, many identified Anglophone countries such as the United States (16.87%), the United Kingdom (13.80%), Australia (4.24%), Canada (3.76%), and Ireland (2.58%). However, slightly more than half identified a wide range of other countries, including India (13.93%), Pakistan (8.02%), Palestine (3.38%), Egypt (2.84%), Türkiye (2.02%), and Israel (2.00%), among many others.

[59] Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011), 4–18, accessed June 27, 2026, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002), 87–106, accessed June 27, 2026, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1368431002005001002?casa_token=O9NZAUlOF5AAAAAA:zAtaezW2DrkghbssvUBUQM_EA_kjFspUiHdKfStUAr3UUz7ZwaX_dU3xIjBFJGISvufHlCP00nI.

[60] Jasmin Riedl et al., "Temporal Stability and Cross-Topic Re-Emergence of Ideological Divides on X," *Information, Communication & Society* (2026), 1–20, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2026.2659287; Eugenia Siapera, Graham Hunt, and Theo Lynn, "#GazaUnderAttack: Twitter, Palestine and Diffused War," *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 11 (2015), 1297–1319, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1070188.

downloaded six months of data (October 7, 2023 to March 7, 2024), including all posts that contained either of the terms *genocide* or *terrorism* in combination with one of the terms *#Israel*, *#IDF*, *#Palestine*, *#Gaza* or *#Hamas*.[61] This resulted in around 278,871 German-language posts and reposts by around 57,158 unique users,[62] compared to around 5.5 million English-language posts and reposts by 1,061,217 unique users.[63] The data was processed by normalizing whitespace, removing non-ASCII characters, email addresses and links, among others.[64]

Subsequently we analyzed the data in three ways: First, we conducted social network analysis of the reposts to identify distinct discursive communities, meaning that we looked at patterns of how users repost each other. We utilized the Python library *igraph* to construct directed repost networks for both cases,[65] while we also employed the *leidenalg* library, which implements the Leiden algorithm for community detection.[66] We set the resolution parameter to 0.7, which controls the granularity of the detected communities (with lower values producing fewer groups and higher values yielding smaller, more numerous ones). Focusing on communities with at least 1,000 users for the German dataset, this analysis resulted in four distinct communities. While the English dataset contained substantially more data and therefore did not require the same thresholding approach, we nevertheless restricted the analysis to the four largest communities to ensure comparability between the two cases.

We then conducted a topic analysis for each community using *BERTopic*, a topic modeling framework which groups together posts (i.e., texts) with similar and coherent meanings. We focused on the ten most prominent topics based on how frequently they appeared. BERTopic, in essence, helps identify clear and easy-to-understand themes by clustering related discussions across all posts and highlighting the most important words associated with each topic.[67] Finally, we delved into the most prominently reposted texts in each topic qualitatively. We reviewed and analyzed with qualitative content analysis the 50-100 most reposted texts for each topic within each community, following a core principle of interpretive research to analyze data until one reaches the point of "saturation"—the point at which additional data analysis no longer yields new themes or insights.[68]

Analysis of German-Language Discourses

The social network analysis resulted in four distinct communities. One of these, significantly larger than the others, comprises 20,932 unique users (community colored pink) compared to 9,254 (green), 6,968 (orange), and 1,776 unique users (blue) in the remaining communities. As shown in Figure 1, the communities intersect with each other, although the largest pink community is slightly more detached. This visualizes well the interrelated discourses of the three smaller communities that are critical of Israel and express solidarity with Palestinians, attributing the term genocide to Israeli violence, while the largest community focusses on

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[61] In German, the selected terms were: *Völkermord, Genozid* or *Terrorismus* in combination with *Israel, IDF, Palästina, Gaza* or *Hamas.* In German the requirement of a # before the combinatory term was removed due to considerably fewer data.

[62] 107,011 original posts by 24,383 unique users with 171,860 reposts by 40,976 unique users.

[63] 1,009,011 original posts by 145,627 unique users with 4,529,573 reposts by 972,632 unique users.

[64] This serves to produce text data that is easier to analyze, for example standardizing the spacing between words or removing unusual symbols and web links that were not relevant to the analysis.

[65] Gábor Csárdi and Tampás Nepusz, "The Igraph Software Package for Complex Network Research," *InterJournal Complex Systems* 1695 (2006), 1–9, accessed June 27, 2026, https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-igraph-software-package-for-complex-network-Cs%C3%A1rdi-Nepusz/1d2744b83519657f5f2610698a8ddd177ced4f5c.

[66] V. A. Traag et al., "From Louvain to Leiden: Guaranteeing Well-Connected Communities," *Scientific Reports* 9 (2019), 1–12, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-41695-z.

[67] Maarten Grootendorst, "BERTopic: Neural Topic Modeling with a Class-Based TF-IDF Procedure," *arXiv*, March 11, 2022, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2203.05794.

[68] Favourate Y. Mpofu and Samantha Lufuno Mudau, "Saturation in the Digital Qualitative Research: Examining the Factors Influencing Saturation Attainment," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 13, no. 1 (2026), 1–24, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2026.2639313.

solidarity for Israel and condemnation of those who support Palestine. We will now discuss the four communities in turn.



Figure 1. Social network analysis of German-language reposts

Community 1: Solidarity with Israel and Delegitimizing Hamas

The largest community in the German-speaking data focuses on countering the claim that Israel is committing genocide. One idea forwarded by some posts is that Israel cannot have any genocidal intent because there has been significant Palestinian population growth in past years despite Israeli control. Particularly important is the sometimes implicit, at times explicit, suggestion that the allegation that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza should itself be seen as antisemitic or amounts to incitement to racial hatred (*Volksverhetzung*). For example, the slogan commonly chanted at pro-Palestine demonstrations "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is characterized as antisemitic and a call to genocide against the Jewish people. Solidarity is expressed for Israel and their right to defend themselves and their good governance in doing so is emphasized, particularly highlighting how much more violent the Israeli army could react if they wanted to. In this, some posts seek to demonstrate that any other evaluation of the situation can only be reached by holding Israel to a different standard than Hamas, making it antisemitic. Some posts invoke the ICJ preliminary measures as support for Israel, stating that Israel may continue, but needs to avoid genocide, as these users argue Israel had been doing until now, emphasizing instead that Hamas must set the hostages free.

Many of the posts seek to specifically label Hamas as terrorists or as Nazis and emphasize how they indoctrinate Palestinian children in their fight against Israel. Some individuals are denounced for their perceived lack of support for Israel (or worse, their support for Palestinians), particularly prominently focusing on Greta Thunberg, the FridaysForFuture[69] activist who came out vocally in support of Gaza. She is criticized strongly for this and labeled antisemitic. One post, for example, suggests that as Thunberg refers to the violence in Gaza as

[69] This youth-led environmental movement has also campaigned and protested on issues beyond climate change and the environment, most notably on the issue of Israel and Gaza.

genocide, parents that let their children go to FridayForFuture demonstrations become anti-Semites themselves. More broadly, some posts highlight German and broader Western complicity in funding Hamas through the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Finally, many posts argue that any mention of what is occurring in Gaza is inappropriate against the background of October 7, while others suggest that Russia is really the problem people should be focusing on. Important hashtags expressing solidarity include #StandWithIsrael, while demonizing Hamas with hashtags like #HamasisISIS.

Community 2: Evidence for Gaza as Genocide and ICJ as Key

The three smaller communities represent a counter-discourse that is critical of Israel's military action. The largest of these three in Figure 1, the green community, describes the violence in Gaza and argues that this should be seen as genocide, with many posts providing evidence of genocide through death and destruction statistics, political statements by Israeli elites that substantiate the purported genocidal intent, and a focus on Israel killing children. Further posts in this community discuss the ICJ and South Africa's case against Israel, discussing the merits of the case and debunking Israel's defense. While many posts acknowledge Israel's right to self-defense, they argue that its violence is going too far and that it is evoking its extraordinary status to enable its genocidal ambition. While only a few posts characterize Israel as a terrorist state, Netanyahu is discussed as being far right, and heavily criticized and delegitimized, highlighting his intention not just to eradicate Hamas but the entire Palestinian population.

Here, Western complicity is highlighted, both in the *longue durée* of supporting Israel despite its occupation of Palestinian territories and currently in the context of the genocide. Posts highlight the problematic nature of Germany's *Staatsräson* and discuss how Germany has not learned the right lessons from the Holocaust. In this context, the focus on Hamas in German public discourse is seen as a distraction, just as claims of antisemitism are suggested to be used by Israel as a defense against criticism. This contrasts examples of Jewish solidarity with Gaza at protests.

Community 3: German Reaction Problematic and Expert Judgement as Genocide

In this community there is also some discussion of the genocidal character of the violence, sometimes characterized as terrorist or barbaric, highlighting how the conditions for life are being destroyed, hospitals are being attacked, and hunger is used as a weapon of war. Many posts discuss how this violence is recognized as genocide by reliable actors (experts who are calling it genocide, the ICJ's provisional measures) and criticizing those who refuse to accept this or who legitimize purported war crimes and genocide. For example, German reactions to the ICJ are seen to undermine its previous commitment to international law, and continued weapons exports and a repressive discursive climate are all problematized. Germany is clearly constructed as complicit in the violence, focusing on German politicians, the media, and the cultural sector. Another important topic in this community is discussions of what constitutes antisemitism, Zionism, and how some interpretations are used to make critique of Israel impossible. Finally, some users within this community discuss ongoing demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza as representing actual German sentiment, distancing themselves from support for terrorism.

Community 4: Germany's Complicity

This smallest community is strongly limited temporally as it is mostly generated through a twitterstorm around the hashtag #StaatsräsonTötet (*Staatsräson* kills) on November 10, 2023, referring to the German unequivocal support for Jewish security as a foundational reason of German statehood. Many posts contrast the German Staatsräson with images of the violence in Gaza, criticizing German current policy and more fundamental relations to Israel, with some posts suggesting that Germany is an international aberration. Other prominent hashtags in this community include #KeinBlutFürSchuld (no blood for guilt), referring to German guilt or culpability regarding the Shoah and how it should not legitimize bloodshed today, and #NeinZurWertediktatur (no to the value dictatorship), pushing back against the perception of an overpowering moral imperative to support Israel. Other posts tie into this by lamenting

censorship on the topic in Germany and discuss how the claim of antisemitism is being weaponized. The community thus focuses on different contexts of Germany's complicity with the genocide in Gaza, alleging that Germany has not learned anything from its past, and that it is applying double standards to Israel and Hamas with catastrophic results. Altogether, this discourse is a clear appeal to recognize the violence as genocide, suggesting that silence is unacceptable while also highlighting Germany's complicity.

Analysis of English-Language Discourses

As with the German dataset, we focus here on the four largest communities identified through social network analysis, which comprised 230,065 (community colored pink), 145,573 (green), 133,954 (orange), and 119,194 (blue) unique users, respectively. As Figure 2 shows, the blue community, the smallest of the four, is relatively isolated compared to the other three, as this is the only pro-Israel community. We further analyze the ten most prominent topics within each of these communities.

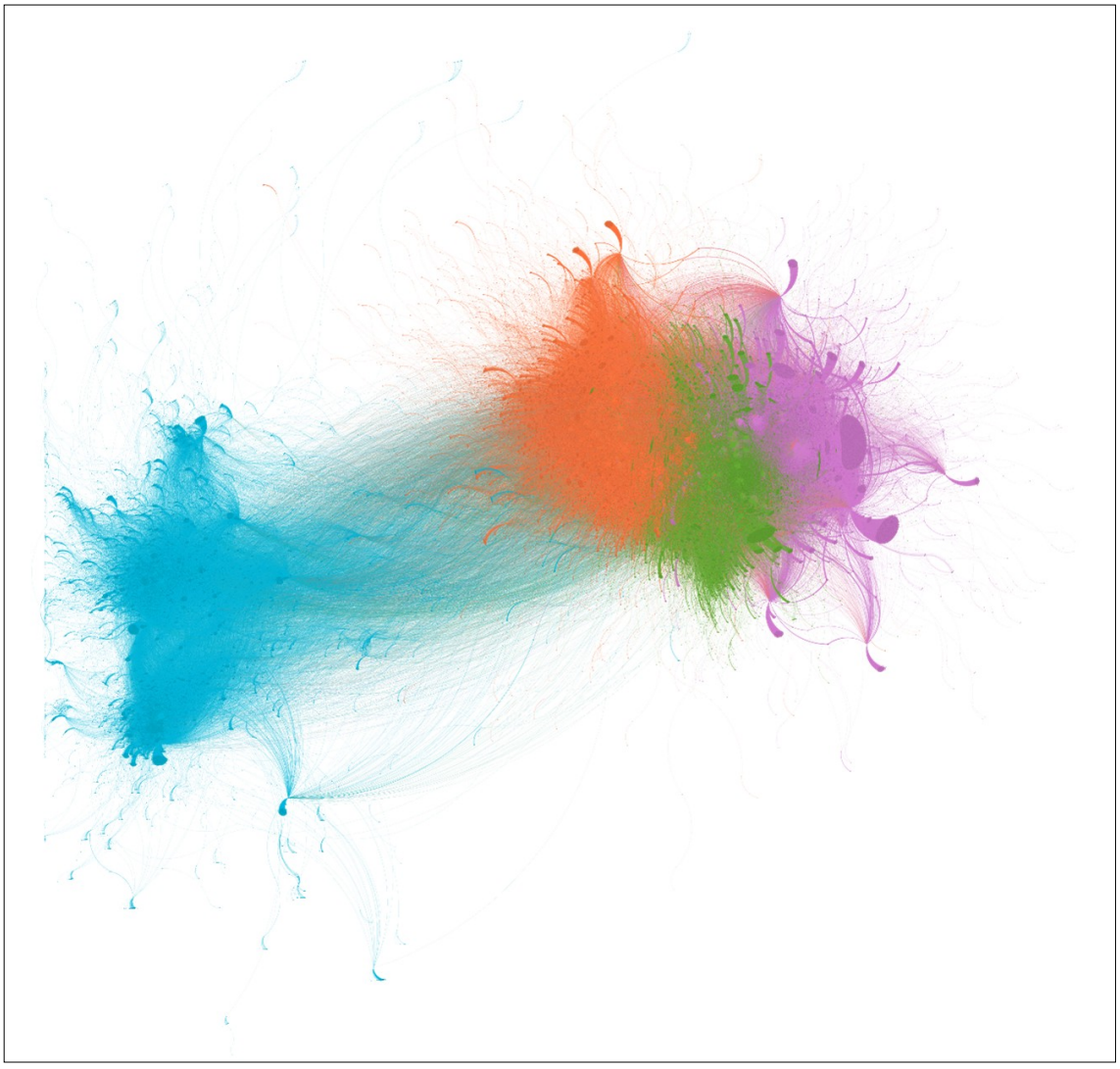


Figure 2. Social network analysis of English-language reposts

Community 1: Demonstrations as Inspiration and Critique of Israel

This largest community thematically focuses on protests and demonstrations against the emerging Israeli violence in Gaza. These posts describe protests around the world in solidarity with Palestinians, against the "Israeli genocide in Gaza," and demand a ceasefire. They celebrate many local initiatives—from two million people demonstrating in Jakarta, to Icelandic

activists throwing glitter, or Egyptian protesters trying to storm the Rafah crossing. Claims of genocide are evidenced through references to the atrocities perpetrated against Palestinians, particularly emphasizing the unimaginable suffering of children, the targeting of hospitals and already injured people, and the cruel nature of airstrikes. Many posts also highlight that Israel deliberately causes power outages and has taken out telecommunications, making it difficult to communicate to the rest of the world what is going on. Given the nature of violence in Gaza, some posts question labeling Hamas as terrorists when Israel is committing horrific violence, while others invoke the terrorism label for Israel, playing into several posts that demonize Israel and Israeli political actors. Here, particularly, there are critical discussions of how labels of self-defense are used for Israel but not for Palestinian action.

Community 2: The West as Complicit in Israel's Violence Against Children

The second-largest community emphasizes the complicity of the West in the violence, particularly for tolerating and staying silent on alleged war crimes and genocide. Here, particularly brutal violence against children, malnourishment of babies and mothers, and massacres are referred to, as well as the targeting of hospitals and medical care. Videos showing the killing and depicting horrific violence are also shared frequently. Furthermore, while Israel is framed as a terrorist state, there is strong criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who is characterized as a monster, a madman, a war criminal, and the #ButcherofGaza, among many other names.

Many posts seek to criticize Israeli military action as "Zionist aggression," but are primarily deployed to highlight the inaction of Western politicians and appeal for them to react. Some posts discuss how the West was prepared to intervene against the Houthis in Yemen but not against Israel in Gaza, highlighting their complicity. Furthermore, these posts suggest that the media, due to the way they are reporting, are complicit in genocide, and tend to highlight the number of journalists being killed in Gaza. Many posts also mention how the ICJ proceedings highlight Western negligence in their support for Israel.

This community also discusses protests that address Western complicity in supporting Israel's genocide. They highlight support from Jewish people for these protests, invoking a form of epistemic authority, as they are Jewish and critical of Western complicity in supporting Israeli violence. Posts also push back against characterizations of the protests as antisemitic. More broadly, some posts also highlight how problematic it is that legitimate criticism of Israel is sometimes deemed antisemitic. Nonetheless, several posts in this community also include strong language dehumanizing Jews or deploying antisemitic tropes such as suggesting that Zionists are particularly deceptive, manipulative, and thieving.

Community 3: Cruelty of the Situation in Gaza

In this community the horror of the emerging situation for the Palestinian population is described in evocative language, for example stressing the aerial bombardment of hospitals, the mass hunger and thirst created by the limitation of humanitarian aid, and the desperation surrounding this lack of food, water, electricity, and medical care. Particularly, posts emphasize the adverse consequences for children and how Israel is killing children in Gaza. Many posts include pictures of the destruction and devastation, including before and after image comparisons.

These actions by Israel as a state are framed as terrorism, while distancing Hamas from this category and instead expressing empathy for the affected Palestinians. Finally, there are also references to protests and rallies by Palestinians themselves, as well as by Jewish people around the world in solidarity. In contrast to this horror, the stories of little girls as survivors or strong Palestinian women standing up are shared.

Community 4: Hamas as Terrorists, Palestinians as Violent, and Complicity of International Politics

The fourth community studied here contrasts the other three English-language communities, not only as it is considerably more disparate (see Figure 2), but also in its demonization of Palestinians and support for Israel. Most prominent in this community are depictions of Hamas as dangerous terrorists who themselves have not only enacted brutal violence, including the

beheading of babies, but also want to carry out a genocidal plan towards Israel. Here, posts with Hamas violence are frequently shared. Many posts deem Palestinians more generally to be inherently violent, including women and children, with many posts suggesting that children are already indoctrinated by Hamas and their parents. Implicitly, these discussions serve to fundamentally question whether Palestinians are really being victimized. More explicitly, Israeli military action is often portrayed as not aggressive enough or supportive of Gaza, with some posts denying allegations of genocide. These posts argue that, if Israel intended to commit genocide, it has the capacity to do so, but refrains—for instance, by issuing warnings before attacks or by opting for ground operations instead of mass bombing Gaza. Further, posts deny that there is a lack of food and seek to counter other perceived misinformation. Some posts argue that even the allegation of genocide against Jews is inappropriate, particularly pushing back against the characterization of genocide and emphasizing that the violence is part of a brutal war that Hamas started. As such, violence is justified as self-defense within war and also in the context of battling broader antisemitism.

These topics lead to some users purporting an absolute illegitimacy of any justification of Hamas and suggesting questionable ethics of anyone who would support them. Such views also serve as the basis for allegations of complicity directed at international political actors who are perceived to be supporting Hamas, either through public statements or through funding, for example, of the Palestinian Authority or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Other posts focus on protests critical of Israel as supporting terrorists and Islamists, or discuss radicalized college campuses where terrorism is justified. By contrast, a few posts refer to protests in support of releasing the hostages.

Finally, there are considerable discussions surrounding the ICJ that characterize it as a "show trial" with "ridiculous" or "slanderous" claims. Beyond the perceived hypocrisy of pursuing only Israel in Gaza, not Hamas, many posts attack the Global South broadly or South Africa specifically for using the Gaza case to further their agenda in delegitimizing the West and seeking to undermine its superiority. Here, Germany is lauded as supporting Israel against the slander at the ICJ.

Discussion

In comparing German and English-language discourses on X regarding genocide and terrorism in Israel and Gaza, we can see that the English-language networks are considerably more mixed, which is not surprising given that users stem from various places. When looking at the four largest communities in each of the datasets, we see that only one community is critical of the use of the term genocide, delegitimizing Hamas or even Palestinians more broadly as terrorists, and expressly positioning itself as pro-Israeli; the other three communities assert that genocide is being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza, some attributing terrorism to the Israeli state. However, what is noteworthy is that in the German-language data the pro-Israel community constitutes the largest community by far, while in the English-language data this is the smallest of the four (albeit not considerably). Moreover, there are notable similarities and differences in how the discourses are structured in both languages that are revealing of the political nature of employing the labels of genocide and terrorism.

In the *pro-Israeli community that is critical of applying the term genocide to Israel's violent action in Gaza,* in both languages, the discourse clearly pushes back against the attribution of the violence as *genocide*. German-language posts question the validity of calling the violence genocide by stating that Israel cannot have the right motivation, for example with references to population growth, while English-language posts question the victimhood of the Palestinians themselves. Furthermore, while there is a focus in both languages on *Hamas as terrorists*; beyond this, however, who is constructed as enemies in the discourse differs.[70] In the English-language posts, this *enemy construction* is focused more on those who finance and defend Hamas, while in the German-language posts critics of Israel are deemed enemies, with the latter constituting a broader approach. Finally, there are topics which only come up in one language. For example, in

[70] See Loadenthal, *Othering Terrorism*; Stampnitzky, *Can Terrorism be Defined?*.

German-language posts, even the attribution of genocide is portrayed as being antisemitic and anti-Israeli,[71] while there is a strong denunciation of people showing too little solidarity with Israel. This resonates strongly with the broader political debates in Germany on whether and how it is legitimate to criticize Israel, what constitutes antisemitism, and how unconditional support for Israel is necessary. Neither topic is prominent in the English-language posts. In contrast, in the English-language community there are some posts that seek to delegitimize the ICJ, while this is not discussed in the German-language community. This absence of critique ties into the long-standing support of Israel by German governments and within public discourse for international law, often framed as a key political lesson from the Holocaust to deter and punish genocide.[72] Altogether, while English-language posts go further in denigrating Palestinians, the ICJ, and others, we see a stronger focus on Israel and how people are positioning themselves towards Israel within the German discourse.

The other three communities in both datasets seek to *attribute the violence in Gaza as genocide*. In both languages, there are extensive *descriptions of the atrocities* inflicted on Palestinian civilians, particularly emphasizing the suffering of children and hunger, with English-language posts more strongly discussing the air raids and bombing of hospitals. German-language users more explicitly construct themselves as eyewitnesses in this process, highlighting a moral responsibility that is felt as part of a (digital) community.[73] Furthermore, German-language posts more frequently also invoke *expert knowledge* as a proof that the attribution as genocide is appropriate. As such, they reference academics, Israelis, and the ICJ. The ICJ itself, as a legal institution, plays an important role in German-language discourse (while less prominent in the English-language discourse). The German policy response to the ICJ proceedings and the provisional measures is extensively discussed as problematic, tying into the above discussion of German commitment to international criminal justice.

In comparing the German-language posts to the others, we see significant differences in *how* the communities differ in their criticism or attribution of the term genocide; these are both rooted in German memory culture, although they draw varying political implications from the legacy of the Holocaust. On the one hand, there are those criticizing the attribution of genocide to the violence in Gaza and seeking to portray the attribution itself as antisemitic; these users reference the Holocaust as uniquely Jewish suffering, thus stipulating the perpetrator nation of Germany must stand unconditionally by Israel. On the other hand, those who attribute genocide to the violence in Gaza point more strongly to Germany's legacy of a strong commitment to institutions of international justice.[74] Thus, both sides' use or critique of the term genocide are deeply political, manifesting different understandings of how the German past and its perpetrator status should be remembered and what political implications these should have.

In both German and English-language communities, demonstrations and protests played a key role as a form of solidarity with Palestinians.[75] By contrast, the two discourses diverge in how they discuss Israel: English-language contributions more frequently characterized Israel or the IDF as terrorists, while German-language posts more frequently focused on Israel's *actions* rather than a characterization of the state as a whole. Prime Minister Netanyahu is strongly demonized as a monster and other attributions in the English-language

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[71] In line with Pfeifer and Weipert-Fenner, *Israel–Gaza*.

[72] Katja Keul, "Die Rolle der Bundesrepublik bei der Verfolgung von Völkerstraftaten," in *Gerechtigkeit aus der Ferne? Herausforderungen der Nationalen Verfolgung von Völkerrechtsverbrechen*, ed. Stefanie Bock and Markus Wagner (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2023), 17–22.

[73] See Susanne Buckley-Zistel and Timothy Williams, "A 5* Destination: The Creation of New Transnational Moral Spaces of Remembrance on TripAdvisor," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 35 (2022), 221–238, accessed June 27, 2026, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10767-020-09363-7.

[74] Keul, *Die Rolle der Bundesrepublik*.

[75] See Rachel L. Einwohner et al., "Active Solidarity: Intersectional Solidarity in Action," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 28, no. 3 (2021), 704–729, accessed June 27, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz052; Sally J. Scholz, "Political Solidarity and Violent Resistance," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2007), 38–52, accessed June 28, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2007.00365.x.

posts, while there is vocal critique of him in German-language posts but without overt demonization. German-language posts also highlighted the significance of the violence and reflected on its meaning for Germany's relation to Israel. Furthermore, in some of the genocide-attributing German-language communities, the topic of discussing the meaning of antisemitism and Zionism, and how these ideas relate to the current situation, emerged. This strongly highlights the German taboo of expressing overt critique of Israel in German public discourse, where the fine line of being able to criticize *what* the state does can be legitimate, not *who* the state is, as this could be seen as delegitimizing the Israeli state and thus in the German context as antisemitic. These nuances are important in the German data and reflect a higher sensitivity to the issue than in the English-language posts.

Finally, the topic of *complicity* is important. In both the German and English-language communities, there is considerable discussion of some politicians' reactions as problematic with an unsurprising focus on politicians from countries in which the relevant languages are spoken. Beyond this, the attribution of complicity diverges across language communities: English-language posts tend to focus on media silence, while German-language posts focus not only on the media and cultural institutions but also on broader German society as complicit—particularly explicitly mentioning its *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture) that ties German responsibility for the Shoah to political support for Israel today.[76] These posts highlight how this pro-Israel positioning permeates politics, cultural events, and broader societal debates, making broad swathes of the German public complicit.

Altogether, while the broad outlines of the discourse regarding genocide and terrorism in the context of Israeli violence in Gaza in English and German on X are similar, the German-language posts do differ in how they discuss these issues, demonstrating an awareness of the broader political context within which they are posting and referring this back to German memory culture. Those supportive of Israel refer heavily to Hamas and Palestinians as terrorists while highlighting that attributing genocide to the violence is a politicization and a misuse of a concept developed as a lesson from the Holocaust, rooting support for Israel in German guilt. Those critical of Israel tie in similar arguments to the English-language posts, but frame these in much more careful ways to ensure that their remarks are still within the boundaries of speakable criticism in the German context.

Conclusion

This paper has interrogated similarities and idiosyncrasies of German-language posts on X against a broader sample of English-language discourse on the platform in discussing the ideas of genocide and terrorism as related to Israel and Gaza over the six months after October 7, 2023. We find a diversity of opinions in both datasets, although the pro-Israeli community critical of the use of the term genocide is relatively much larger in the German-speaking dataset. Each dataset further includes three communities that advocate the attribution of genocide to Israeli military action in Gaza that feature partly diverging arguments as to why this is an appropriate label. Terrorism on the other hand functions in both German and English-language communities as a simple label to delegitimize those labelled as an enemy, applied to Hamas in both languages, but considerably more frequently to Israel in the English-language posts.

This article has been interested in understanding these differences, with English-language posts from users around the globe acting as an interpretive foil to study German-language posts that are embedded in the broader German context and its collective memory. We have shown that the hegemonic German culture of remembrance becomes visible in posts, shaping how people discuss the violence in Gaza and Israel, how labels of genocide and terrorism are justified, and how and to whom support and solidarities are expressed. This political context impacts how precisely users articulate their opinions, even when these seem otherwise relatively similar. While both German and English-language datasets have communities supportive of, and opposed to, the use of the term genocide to label Israeli

[76] Grimm and Schneider, *Staatsräson vs. Weltordnung*.

violence, those against the genocide label have a much clearer commitment to Israel in the German-language posts, while in English-language posts the othering of Palestinians is stronger. In the communities that label the violence as genocide, the Palestinian plight results in much stronger attacks against Israel in English-language posts than in German-language posts. The latter focus more on criticism of Israeli *action*, revealing a continued sense of responsibility for Israeli security and sovereignty, despite critique of the state's military action in Gaza, and of German historically-founded unequivocal support for the country.

We tie these differences to a broader reluctance in German-language posts to criticize Israel *in toto* and a greater focus on current violent action, while avoiding sweepingly negative attributions towards the Israeli state or Jewish individuals. This demonstrates that while there is a criticism of German memory politics' influence on Germany's current policy towards Israel, the more fundamental idea of learning from the German past and of not inciting anti-Israeli and antisemitic sentiment, core to collective memory in Germany, is still adhered to. This is also evidenced in considerable debate over what lessons from the German past should be retained today, and whether this results in a focus on human rights more broadly or support for Israel more specifically, as well as a discussion of what antisemitism really is. These questions of whether criticism of Israel is antisemitic are also more important in the German debate. As such, how and why the terms genocide and terrorism are employed is also a product of the underlying political context within which they are articulated. Though the concepts have academic and (in part) legal definitions, their deployment in these discourses is political.

While social media facilitates transnational communication and allows individuals to engage with others well beyond their offline social networks, our findings suggest that the way German-language users engage with topics is driven in significant ways by national-level, German political discourses. In particular, this is noteworthy given the controversial nature of discussing genocide and terrorism in relation to Gaza and Israel in most contexts. Nonetheless, subtle patterns of which topics are discussed and how they are approached emerge that show an effect of the idiosyncratic nature of German memory culture on how German-language users post about violence in Israel and Gaza today.

Disclosure of AI Use

No generative AI or AI-assisted tools were used in the conception, drafting, or revision of this manuscript, as well as most parts of the analysis. Generative AI tools were used for the following purposes: writing of code during analysis. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of all content.

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