



Germany and Israel Today:

Between Connection and Alienation

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Jenny Hestermann, Roby Nathanson and Stephan Stetter

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Foreword

Due to its history, Germany has a special responsibility for the Jewish people and the state of Israel. Since it was founded 45 years ago, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has worked closely with Israeli partners on a range of projects to develop German-Israeli relations. It collaborated for many years with an institute dedicated to democracy and tolerance education, established Israel's first school of journalism and, more than two decades ago, initiated the German-Israeli Young Leaders Exchange, a program that promotes dialogue and cooperation between young professionals and executives from politics, business, civil society, the media, the arts and the cultural sphere in both countries.

Due to the diligent work of many stakeholders in this field, Germany and Israel have, to a remarkable extent, grown closer in recent decades. Today, they have strong ties on all levels and in numerous areas. This can be ascribed not least to those generations that experienced the horrors of the past firsthand. They knew how important it is to strive for reconciliation and to work toward a shared future. At the same time, many young people in both countries are very interested in getting to know each other, and they are committed to creating a shared future.

German-Israeli relations are not devoid of misunderstanding or conflict, however. Shaped by very different conditions and realities, Germans and Israelis often have varying perspectives on fundamental political issues. If the dialogue between Germany and Israel is to continue in a serious and open manner, it is imperative that we identify where the discrepancies in perception lie. The present study is meant to help achieve that goal. As in 2007 and 2013, the Bertelsmann

Stiftung commissioned a survey in autumn 2021 in which more than 1,200 people from Germany and Israel were asked their opinions of one another. The findings from the resulting study can help us understand each other better and respect each other more – especially in light of our differences. Such efforts are crucial in a world that grows smaller every day.

Since the data were collected in autumn 2021, the global order has undergone fundamental change. War and military force are once again being deployed as a political means in the heart of Europe. In the long term, this could shift how Europeans and Germans view other conflicts in the world in general and in the Middle East in particular. In the short term, however, European states are still struggling to reach a common position, and there has been hardly any discernible effect on how the general public views German-Israeli relations. Thus, there is much to suggest that the findings from the current study can continue to serve as valid indicators of the mutual perceptions held by people in both countries.

We are indebted to the authors, Jenny Hestermann, Roby Nathanson and Stephan Stetter, for their analysis and evaluation of the results. In addition, we would like to thank Dan Diner for his afterword, which critically examines the findings and greatly assists in their interpretation. Finally, we would like to thank Pollytix Strategic Research in Germany and New Wave Research in Israel for conducting the surveys underlying this study.

Stephan Vopel
Director
Bertelsmann Stiftung

1 Introduction

The Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Israel are linked politically, economically and socially in many ways. Official relations between the two countries have become ever closer, beginning with the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952 – which marks its 70th anniversary in 2022 – and especially since the establishment of diplomatic relations between West Germany and Israel in 1965. In 2008, then German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated in a widely acclaimed speech in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, that Israel's security is part of Germany's *raison d'état*. Although she did not specify the consequences of this for the German government's actions, her statement and the positive impression it made on many Israelis reinforced the feeling that German-Israeli relations as a whole are on a secure footing. In many areas of society as well, intensive professional contacts and friendly ties have developed in recent decades not only at the official intergovernmental level, but also between people from both countries. This is reflected in numerous initiatives and programs, ranging from academic cooperation and partnerships between cities to cultural and religious exchange.

But how do Germans and Israelis actually perceive their mutual relations? To find out more, the Bertelsmann Stiftung conducts representative surveys in both countries at regular intervals. Based on these surveys, the present study takes a detailed look at German-Israeli relations today.

The survey focuses on a number of issues. First, we examine general political attitudes towards democracy and social diversity in order to gain

an idea of the type of society in which Germans and Israelis want to live. We then look at specific aspects of the countries' bilateral relations, including the amount of personal contact that takes place and opinions about the other country and its government. Current perceptions are shaped by various factors, including the different perspectives people have of the past. Questions relating to the memory of the Holocaust and the responsibility that results from it are therefore another of the study's key topics.

An additional focus is what Germans and Israelis think about two central conflicts in the Middle East: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and relations between Iran and Israel. In another section, we address questions about Judaism and about how anti-Semitism is perceived in Germany and how it manifests there. We then examine attitudes towards different areas of cooperation within the countries' bilateral relations. Finally, we take stock of the results and make recommendations for how German-Israeli relations can be actively shaped in the future.

1.1 Notes on methodology

Previous studies by the Bertelsmann Stiftung on how Germans and Israelis view each other are available from 2007 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2007) and 2015 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015). A study by DER SPIEGEL magazine from 1991 (Der Spiegel 1992) also provides figures, especially about how Jewish life in Germany is perceived. However, it

| Parameters for data collection | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------------|
| | Population: Eligible Voters | Sample Size | Survey Period |
| Germany | 18+ | 1,271 | Sept. 1–10, 2021 |
| Israel | 18+ | 1,372 | Aug. 31–Oct. 5, 2021 |

should be noted that, for methodological reasons, a direct comparison of the data is only possible to a limited extent for three reasons: First, “don’t know” was first actively offered as a possible answer in the 2021 survey, and its absence in previous surveys means that the responses given cannot be directly compared with each other. Second, the current survey included Israel’s Arab citizens in the pool of respondents for the first time, a group that makes up just over 20 percent of the Israeli population. Only Jewish Israelis were surveyed in the previous studies. Third, there is also a difference in the way the data were collected, which for the first time took place not only by telephone but also online.

In Germany, the data were collected entirely online (CAWI – Computer-Assisted Web Interview). In Israel, a hybrid approach consisting of online and telephone surveys was chosen (CAWI – Computer-Assisted Web Interview + CATI – Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview).

Some questions from the three previous surveys were used in the present study as well, while others were added to take account of the changed circumstances and challenges in the two countries’ relationship. The responsible institute, pollytix strategic research, tested new questions in focus groups prior to using them in the surveys to verify their comprehensibility. The survey in Israel was conducted by New Wave Research. Data are weighted for both Germany (separately for eastern and western Germany¹) and Israel (separately for Arab and Jewish citizens) according to official statistics to ensure representativeness. The maximum margin of error for the sample from Germany is +/- 3.1 percentage points with a 95-percent confidence interval; for the sample from Israel, it is +/- 2.65 percentage points with a 95-percent confidence interval.

1 In the text, we refer to “western Germany,” “eastern Germany,” “western Germans,” “eastern Germans,” “the west” and “the east” in a not strictly geographical manner. Rather, one is meant to refer to the areas that were part of West Germany – i.e., the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) – between 1949 and German reunification in 1990. The other is meant to refer to the areas that were part of East Germany – i.e., the German Democratic Republic (GDR) – in that same period. Since reunification, all of Germany has been called the Federal Republic of Germany.

3 Political attitudes in Germany and Israel

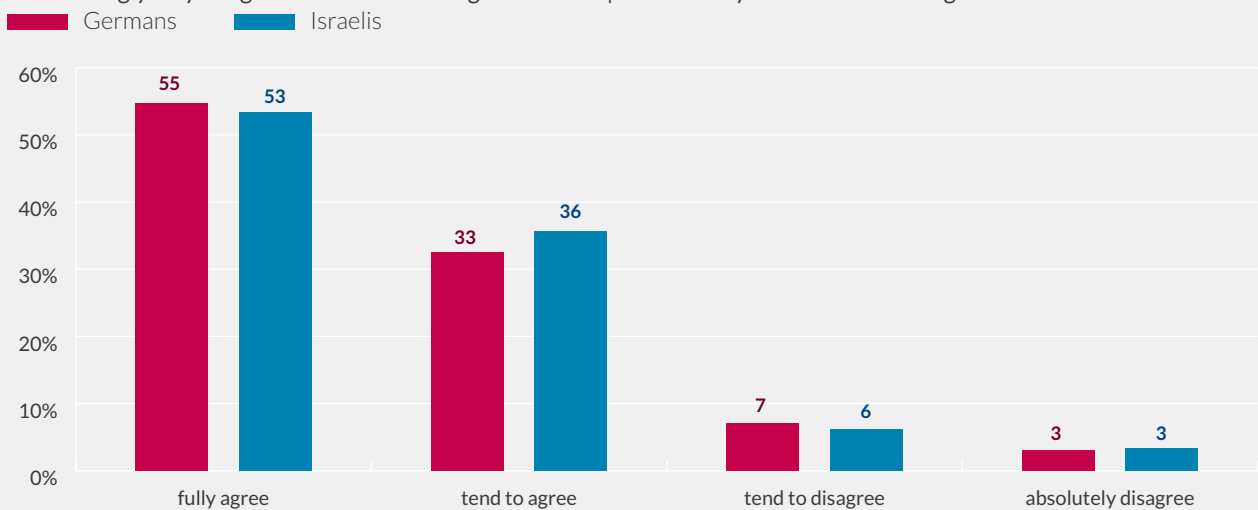
The survey’s second section focuses on attitudes toward democracy. On the one hand, we surveyed the extent to which democracy is generally regarded as the best form of government, and, on the other, we asked how respondents assess the current state of democracy in their own country. We also posed a deliberately provocative question, namely, how great the respondents’ desire is to have a “strong leader.” In addition, we looked at attitudes toward social diversity, since this aspect is essential for pluralistic societies experiencing substantial immigration.

3.1 Understanding and perception of democracy

In Israel, as in Germany, democracy is generally supported as a form of government. Anti-democratic attitudes are also widespread, however. In Germany, a total of 88 percent of respondents agree with the statement that democracy is the best form of government; in Israel, the figure is 89 percent (figure 1). The majority of Germans and Israelis also regard their country as a functioning democracy in practice. Yet the agreement rate in Israel, at 53

FIGURE 1

How strongly do you agree with the following statement? | “Democracy is the best form of government.”



Not included: “Don’t know,” “No response.”

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

percent, is significantly lower than in Germany, at 66 percent (figure 2). In general, a noticeable correlation can be observed in the responses to the questions about democracy: People who are satisfied with democracy in Israel and Germany are also more likely to believe that democracy is the best form of government (and vice versa).

In Germany, there are no major differences in the general approval of democracy with regard to the respondents' age, gender or educational level. When it comes political affiliation, however, differences do exist: Although a majority of AfD supporters (71 percent) consider democracy to be the best form of government, more than 90 percent of voters from all other parties represented in the Bundestag, Germany's parliament, agree somewhat or completely with this statement.

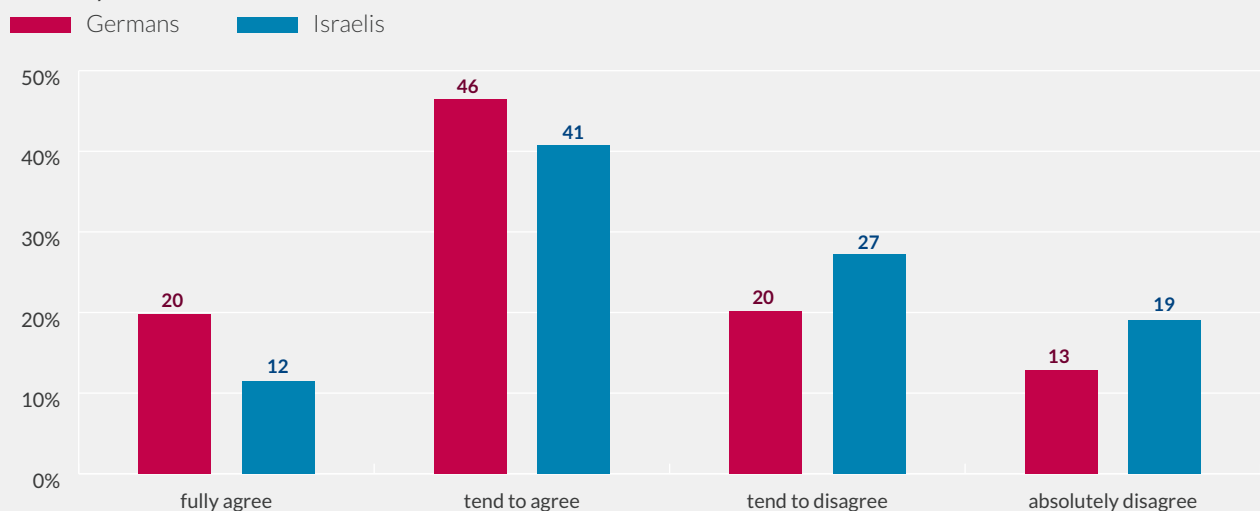
Many AfD supporters have also clearly distanced themselves from democracy, with 16 and 10 percent, respectively, saying they "tend to disagree"

or "absolutely disagree" with the statement that democracy is the best form of government. The corresponding figures for supporters of the other parties present in the Bundestag are mostly in the low single digits. The ongoing presence of the AfD in the Bundestag following the national elections in 2021 thus shows that attitudes critical of or even inimical to democracy have found a permanent home in this party. Finally, a difference is also apparent between eastern and western Germany, with 89 percent of those living in the west agreeing "fully" or "tending to" agree with the statement that democracy is the best form of government, compared to the somewhat lower figure of 80 percent in the east.

When it comes to the state of democracy in Germany, the ones who are most satisfied are supporters of the CDU/CSU alliance, which has most often provided Germany with its chancellor and which has spent the most time governing the nation. Among CDU/CSU voters, 89 percent say they are

FIGURE 2

How strongly do you agree with the following statement? | "All in all, I am satisfied with democracy as it exists in Germany/Israel."



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

satisfied with the state of German democracy. They are followed, with only slightly lower figures, by adherents of Alliance 90/The Greens, the SPD and the FDP. The figures subsequently decline on the political fringes: Among voters who support the Left party, a clear majority (60 percent) are satisfied with the state of the country's democracy, while only 27 percent of AfD voters say the same.

In addition, differences can also be seen between east and west: While 69 percent of respondents in western Germany are "completely" or "fairly" satisfied with the way democracy works, this figure is significantly lower in eastern Germany, at 56 percent.

The party landscape in Israel is more fragmented than in Germany, as seen in the large number of parliamentary groups in the Knesset. The problem this fragmentation presents for our study is that the sample sizes for supporters of minor parties are very small. The present analysis therefore focuses on the larger parties: the right-wing nationalist Likud party, the centrist Blue and White party (Kahol Lavan) and the liberal Yesh Atid party. While these three are Zionist parties that view Israel as a Jewish democracy, the United Arab List (Ra'am) alliance is skeptical and even dismissive of Israeli's explicitly Jewish character.

It should be expected that these political affiliations will also be reflected in the approval ratings that our study's respondents give to democracy. Indeed, three-quarters of the supporters of the two "centrist" Zionist parties – Yesh Atid (75 percent) and Kahol Lavan (74 percent) – are "fairly" or "completely" satisfied with the state of Israeli democracy. As expected, supporters of the United Arab List (38 percent) are the least satisfied, but Likud voters (49 percent) evince less approval than the other two Zionist parties. The differences are less clear when it comes to the question of whether democracy is the best form of government. Supporters of Yesh Atid and Kahol Lavan agree with this statement (over 90 percent each), as do Likud voters (89 percent) and supporters of the United Arab List (88 percent).

The generally lower level of satisfaction with the state of democracy in Israel compared to Germany is primarily due to attitudes among Arab Israelis and the Jewish Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox populations. Most Arab Israelis (55 percent) are not satisfied with the country's democracy, with 32 percent even saying they are "completely" dissatisfied with it. This is hardly surprising given their historical and present-day experiences of discrimination. In addition, as mentioned above, Israel's Arab citizens tend to be critical of the conception of the country's democracy as being inherently Jewish.

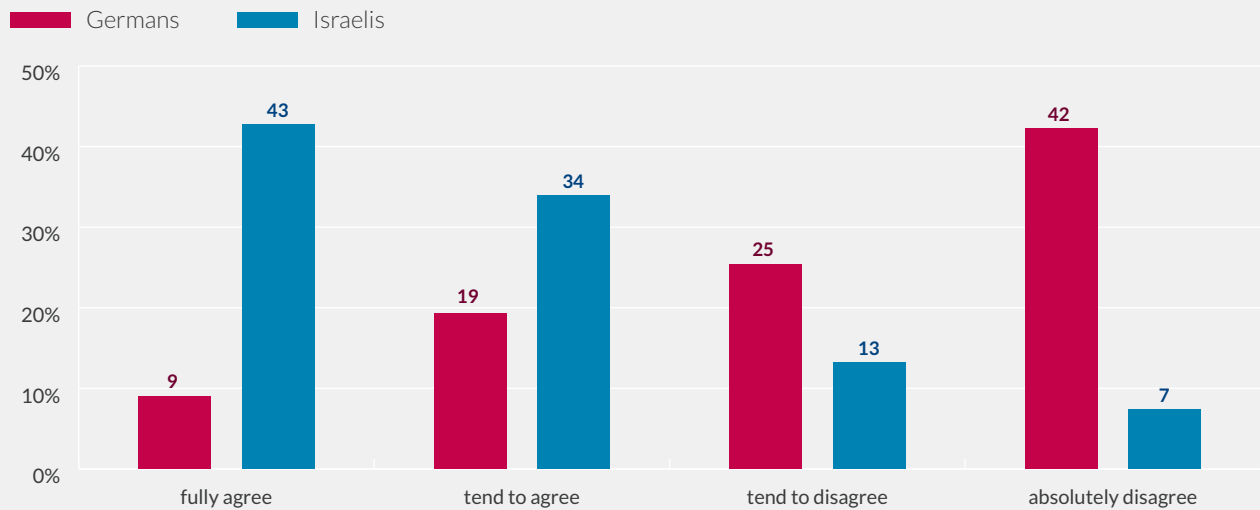
Among ultra-Orthodox communities, skepticism about democracy is widespread, although these groups' approval of democracy is higher than in other studies, which is presumably due in part to limited response options (Lintl 2020). Thus, only 49 percent of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews are satisfied with the state of democracy in Israel (versus 60 percent among secular Jews), and 84 percent consider democracy the best form of government, compared to 93 percent among secular respondents.

Based on the current figures, it is not possible to ascertain the extent to which the initial participation of another Arab party, the Islamist Ra'am party, in Israel's Bennett/Lapid government since 2021 has promoted a different perception of Israeli democracy among the country's Arab citizens. At the same time, the Ra'am party's participation in the government would hardly be conceivable if 44 percent of Israel's Arab citizens were not "somewhat" or "completely" satisfied with Israel's democracy.

The survey's findings also show that Israel's "middle" generation (40 to 60 years old) is significantly more satisfied with democracy than younger respondents (under 40 years old) and older Israelis (over 60 years old). Satisfaction with democracy also goes up as the level of education increases.

FIGURE 3

How strongly do you agree with the following statement? | “There should be a strong leader who does not have to worry about parliament and elections.”



Not included: “Don’t know,” “No response.”

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

Finally, we asked how great the desire for a “strong leader” is among the respondents. The term has a different semantic charge in the two countries. In German the term *Führer* is usually associated with Adolf Hitler. In Israel, on the other hand, the Hebrew term *manhig* has a positive connotation. In Germany, 28 percent (38 percent in eastern Germany) of the respondents agree with the statement that there should be “a strong leader” who does not have to worry about parliament or elections (figure 3). Among AfD supporters, as much as 40 percent would like a “strong leader.”

In Israel, as expected, the picture is completely different: A clear majority (77 percent) endorses the idea of “a strong leader.” When interpreting these results, it must be considered, in addition to the different semantics, that various threats pervaded 20th-century Jewish and Israeli history, especially during the Holocaust, but also from Arab states in the War of Independence in 1948, the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973. This has

fueled the desire for strong political leaders. The values of democracy and liberalism are apparently more likely to be laid aside when there is a threat to security, which people feel a forceful leader can ensure. The conflict with the Palestinians, which has persisted since even before the founding of the Israeli state, is also a probable factor strengthening the desire for strong leadership.

3.2 Attitudes toward social diversity

In a further step, we examined how Germans and Israelis perceive responses to (increasing) diversity in their societies. Since the late 1990s, people in Germany have increasingly come to see their country as a “country of immigration.” In Israel, the integration of the country’s Arab citizens into Jewish society has been debated and, in some areas, realized more than in the past. In order to assess how these sociopolitical developments are viewed

by the general public, we asked how people feel when a high political office is held by a German with a migration background or by an Arab Israeli.

When asked whether they could imagine someone with a migration background serving as a minister in the federal government, a substantial minority of Germans (30 percent) answered in the negative (figure 4). Once again, differences are apparent among supporters of the various political parties: Not surprisingly, voters for Alliance 90/The Greens, a party whose core platform includes an endorsement of social diversity, had the most positive view when it comes to this issue (94 percent approval). The lowest level of approval was evinced by AfD supporters (24 percent).

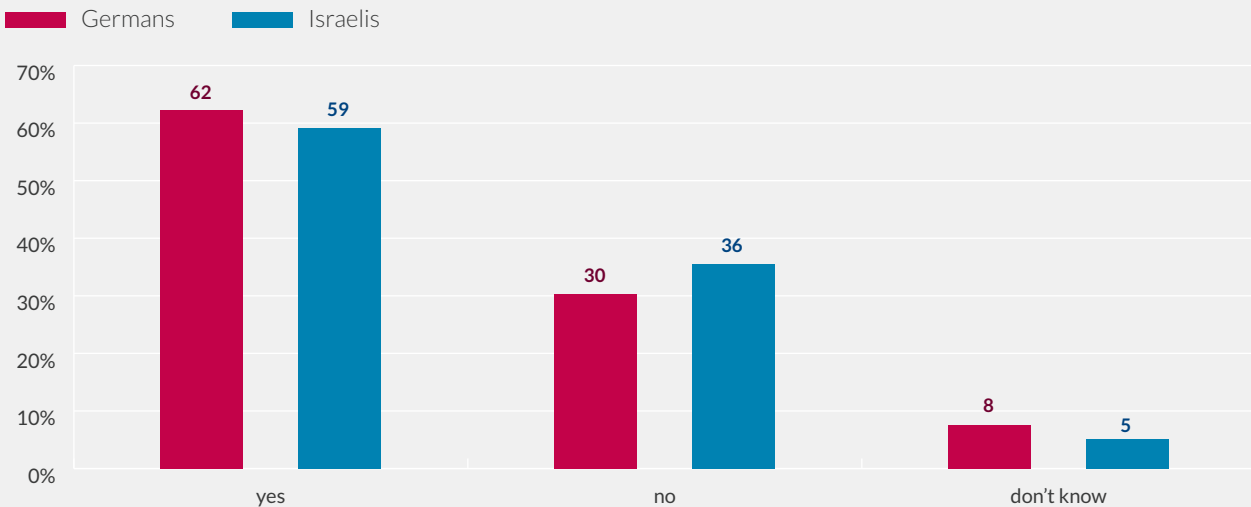
In Israel, the analogous question as to whether an Arab minister in the Israeli government is conceivable yields a similar result: 59 percent agree, 36 percent disagree. At the time the survey was conducted, the Arab-Islamist Ra'am party was already in government, albeit without its own

ministry. Party affiliations are a central explanatory factor for the differing responses in Israel as well. A majority of Likud voters (61 percent) reject the idea of an Arab minister. It is striking here, as with other questions, that the Israeli generation of under-40s in particular proves to be less "tolerant" (56 percent agreement); among the middle generation (40 to 60 years) and older respondents (over 60 years), the level of agreement is higher, at 61 and 69 percent, respectively.

The clearest difference in agreement is between Arab and Jewish Israelis. While 87 percent of the former can imagine an Arab minister, only a slim majority of the latter (51 percent) say they agree. The results also provide insight into the cultural, ideological and demographic heterogeneity of the Jewish respondents: A large proportion of secular Israelis (66 percent) can imagine an Arab minister, while among strictly religious Jews (Orthodox and Haredim), the figure is only 28 percent.

FIGURE 4

Do you think it is right for Germans with a migration background to serve as ministers in the federal government?
Do you think it is right for Arab citizens of Israel to serve as ministers in the Israeli government?



n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

4 German-Israeli relations today

In official speeches, the “common values” found in both countries are invoked as a matter of course, as are the special relationship resulting from their “common history” and Germany’s special responsibility for the Jewish state of Israel. To find out whether this assessment is also shared by the public in both countries, we asked how Germans and Israelis view the relations between their countries and civil societies as well as to what degree they feel a closeness or distance to each other.

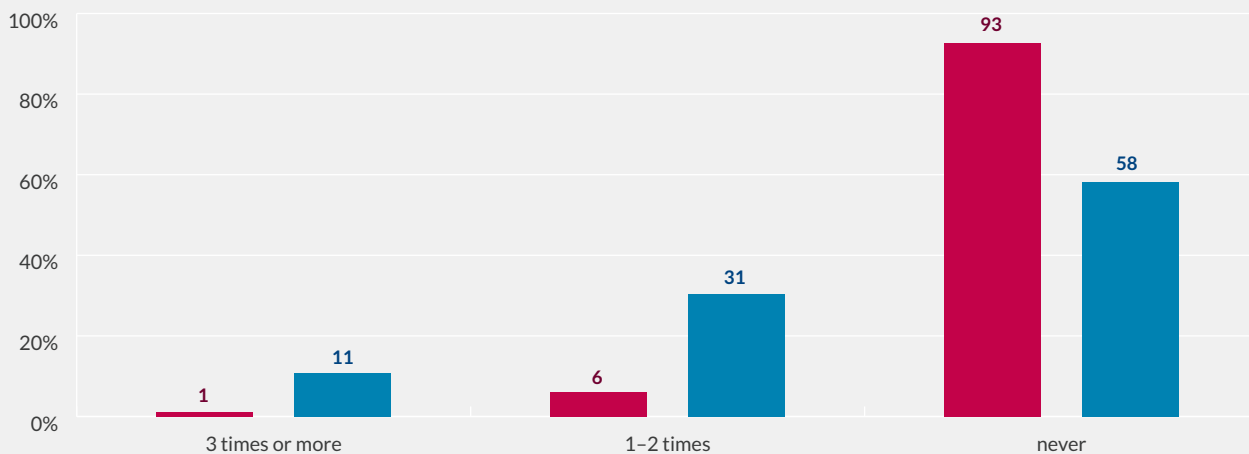
4.1 Contacts with and visits to each country

An important foundation of German-Israeli relations is the intensive contact at all levels of society, whether through city partnerships, academic cooperation, sports and youth exchanges, tourism, or the mostly Christian pilgrimages that have taken many Germans to Israel since the 1960s. Moreover, many Israelis have moved to Berlin since the early 2000s, a development that has been widely covered in the media over the past decade (Oz-Salzberger 2016).

FIGURE 5

How often have you been to Israel/Germany?

■ Germans ■ Israelis

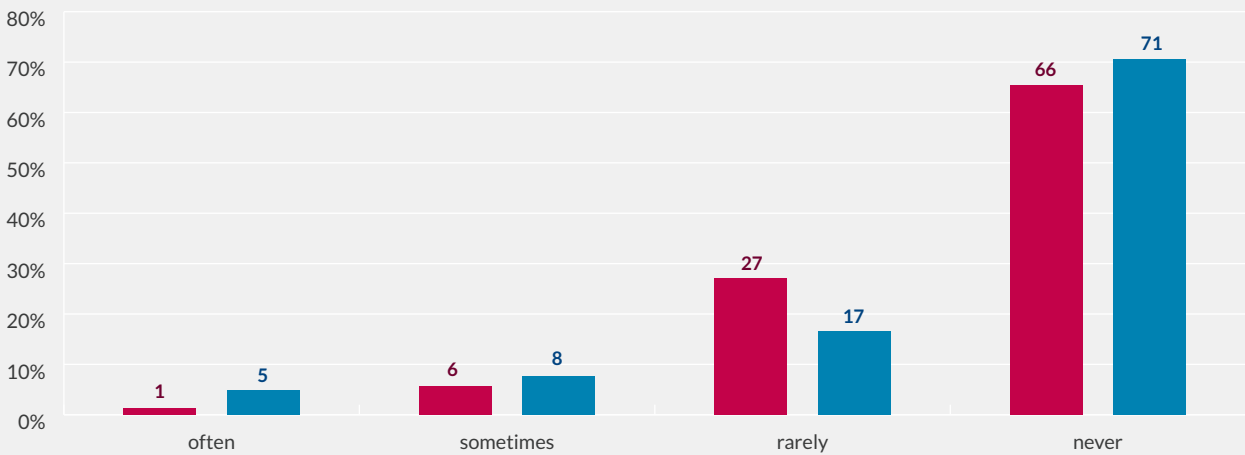


Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 6

How often are you in contact with people from Israel/Germany?

■ Germans ■ Israelis


n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

At first glance, this suggests a close connection between the countries that is deeply rooted in both societies. Yet are these multiple levels of exchange and interaction representative of the entire population in both countries? As far as the quantity of actual encounters is concerned, the picture is quite clear: An overwhelming majority of Germans (93 percent) have never been to Israel, 6 percent of Germans have visited Israel once or twice, only 1 percent have visited it more than twice (figure 5). This figure thus indicates that there is a discrepancy between politicians' evocations of close ties between the two countries, on the one hand, and the actual manifestation of these contacts at the societal level, on the other. At the same time, however, interest in Israel is very high among German respondents (see Section 4.2 "Mutual interest and knowledgeability"). Here, too, a discrepancy becomes apparent, as one might speak of a distant interest without the desire to have personal experiences on the ground.

At 14 percent, twice as many CDU and CSU supporters as those of other parties have visited Israel once or more. One reason for this could be the Christian affiliation of the two parties and their adherents, who presumably tend to visit Israel when on a pilgrimage (as Konrad Adenauer did in 1966 once he was no longer chancellor) more than supporters of other parties.

Among Israelis, the picture is very different: 11 percent have already been to Germany three times or more, and a third at least once or twice. Thus, more than 40 percent of the Israelis surveyed have been to Germany at least once, although the share of Jewish Israelis is significantly higher than that of the country's Arab citizens. However, it should be noted that Germany may have been only one of several destinations on a more extensive European trip, something that is popular among Israelis meaning that the statement may refer to a relatively brief stay during a longer visit to Europe.

The number of Germans who have had contact with Israelis, however, is significantly higher than the number who have already been to Israel. For Germans, encounters with Israelis therefore take place primarily outside Israel, whether in private or professional contexts. Thus, 34 percent of Germans say they have had contact with Israelis, and 7 percent of these say the contact is frequent or takes place at least occasionally (figure 6). On the Israeli side, the reverse is true: Only 13 percent say they have contact with Germans at least occasionally (“frequently” and “sometimes”) – and this despite the fact that a good 40 percent of Israelis say they have been to Germany at least once. This might be confirmation of the hypothesis that their stays in the country were mostly (short) tourist visits.

The picture is made more complex by the large differences between secular Israelis (who have a relatively large number of contacts) and traditional and strictly religious (Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox) Israelis (who have few contacts). While gender

and educational level do not make a significant difference, party affiliation does: Among supporters of the two “liberal” parties Kahol Lavan and Yesh Atid, 20 percent and 14 percent, respectively, say they have contact with Germans. Among Likud voters, on the other hand, only less than half as many (8 percent) say they interact with Germans.

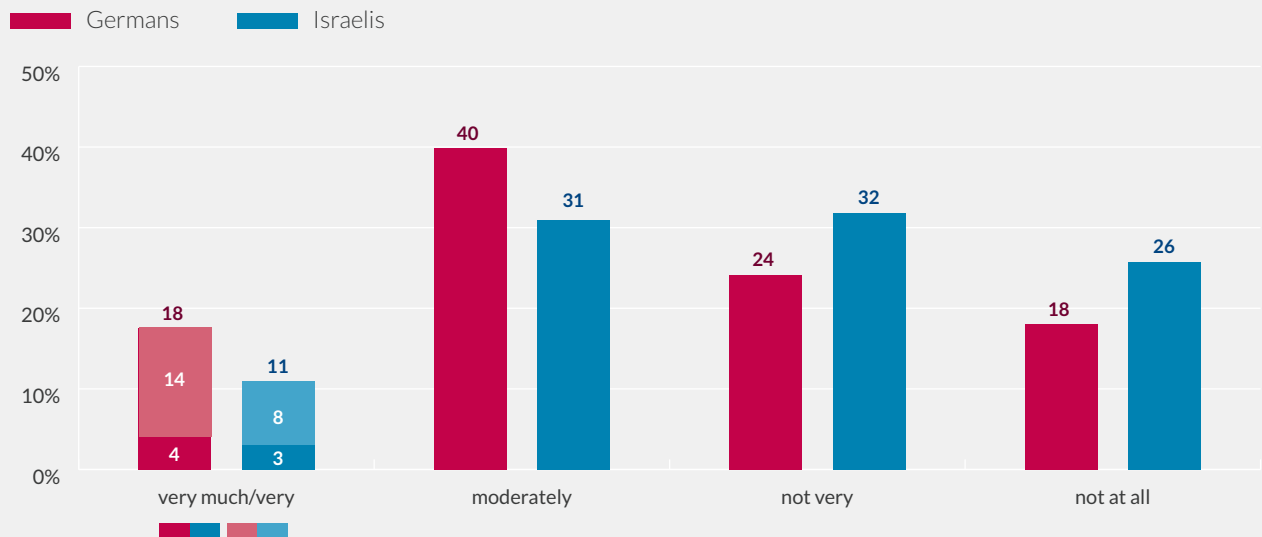
4.2 Mutual interest and knowledgeability

Yet visits to the other country and direct personal contacts with its citizens are only one element capable of providing an understanding of the breadth and depth of German-Israeli relations. Another important aspect is the extent to which people are interested in the other country and know about it.

Overall, the survey shows that Germans have a somewhat greater interest in Israel than the other way around. Namely, 18 percent of German

FIGURE 7

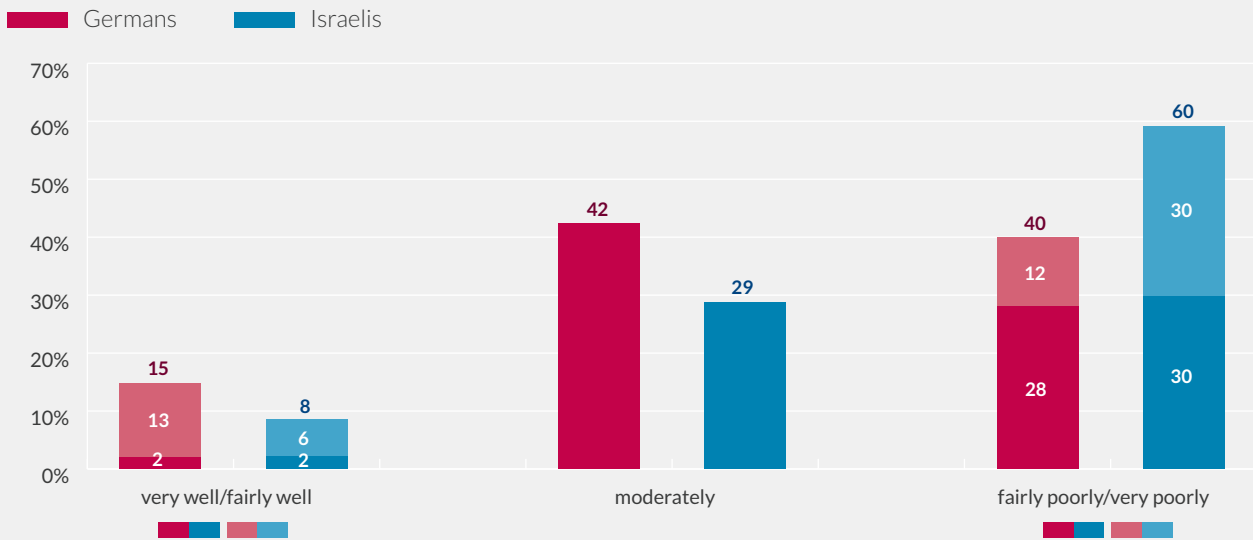
To what extent are you interested in information about Israel/Germany today?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 8

How well informed do you feel you are about Israel/Germany today?



Not included: "Don't know," "No response."

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

respondents have a "strong" or "very strong" interest in information about the Mediterranean country, 40 percent rate their interest as "moderate," and 42 percent express "weak" or "no" interest (figure 7). In Israel, as much as 58 percent of respondents express weak or no interest at all in information about Germany, while 11 percent say they have a strong or very strong interest, and 31 percent have a moderate interest.

It should also be noted that, due to decades of intense conflict in Israel, Hebrew-language media there report very little on international issues that are not directly related to the country. This is presumably another reason why interest in information about Germany is higher among Israel's Arab citizens (16 percent "strong" and "very strong") than among Jewish Israelis (9 percent "strong" and "very strong"), since the Arab population is exposed to more international news in transnationally oriented Arabic-language media (Jamal 2009).

There are also differences by party affiliation: Supporters of Jewish nationalist parties are less interested in information about Germany. While 21 percent of voters for the liberal-secular Kahol Lavan party say they have a "strong" or "very strong" interest in information about Germany, only 6 percent of those who vote for the conservative Likud party say the same.

In Germany, it is once again the CDU/CSU voters who stand out, in that an especially large share is interested in Israel (24 percent with a "strong" or "very strong" interest). Here, too, church ties and the "Holy Land" as a direct cultural-religious reference point presumably play a role. In contrast, interest among AfD voters is lowest, at 12 percent.

What is also striking about the figures from Germany is the difference between east and west: In western Germany, 59 percent say they are "moderately or strongly" interested in information about Israel, while in the east the figure is only 50

percent. This could result from varying historical experiences: Since the 1960s, the Federal Republic of Germany has maintained diplomatic and diverse civil society relations with Israel, while neither official diplomatic ties nor civil society contacts existed between the German Democratic Republic and Israel.

Furthermore, the findings show that respondents in Germany who consider themselves religious (a distinction was made between Catholics and Protestants) have a fundamentally higher interest in Israel. Since the proportion of people who have a religious affiliation is higher in western Germany than in the country's east, respondents from the west also show a correspondingly greater willingness to support Israel and tend to hold anti-Semitic views less often, as will be discussed below.

While interest in information about the other country describes the "demand side," the question asking whether Germans and Israelis feel they are well informed about the other country is meant to explore the "supply side." The answers thus allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which Germans and Israelis believe that the media coverage in their country – be it "traditional" media, such as print newspapers, television and radio, or social media – keeps them reliably up to date on the other nation. In Israel, there is significantly greater skepticism, as only 8 percent of respondents say they feel at least "fairly well" informed about today's Germany (figure 8). Furthermore, 29 percent describe themselves as "moderately" well informed. Here, too, the difference between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens is striking: Among Jews, only 6 percent feel well informed and 25 percent feel moderately well informed, while among Arabs the figures are 20 percent and 41 percent, respectively. Differences in media usage are presumably crucial here as well. Arabic-language television channels and digital news sources are readily accessible to Arabs in Israel in their native language, which means that this group is exposed to media that are not characterized by the distinct self-centeredness of Israel's mostly Hebrew-language media.

The situation in Germany differs markedly from this and is characterized by greater trust in the relevant reportage than is the case in Israel, with 15 percent of Germans saying they are "very well" or "fairly well" informed about Israel, and 42 percent saying they are "moderately well informed".

4.3 Opinions on country and government

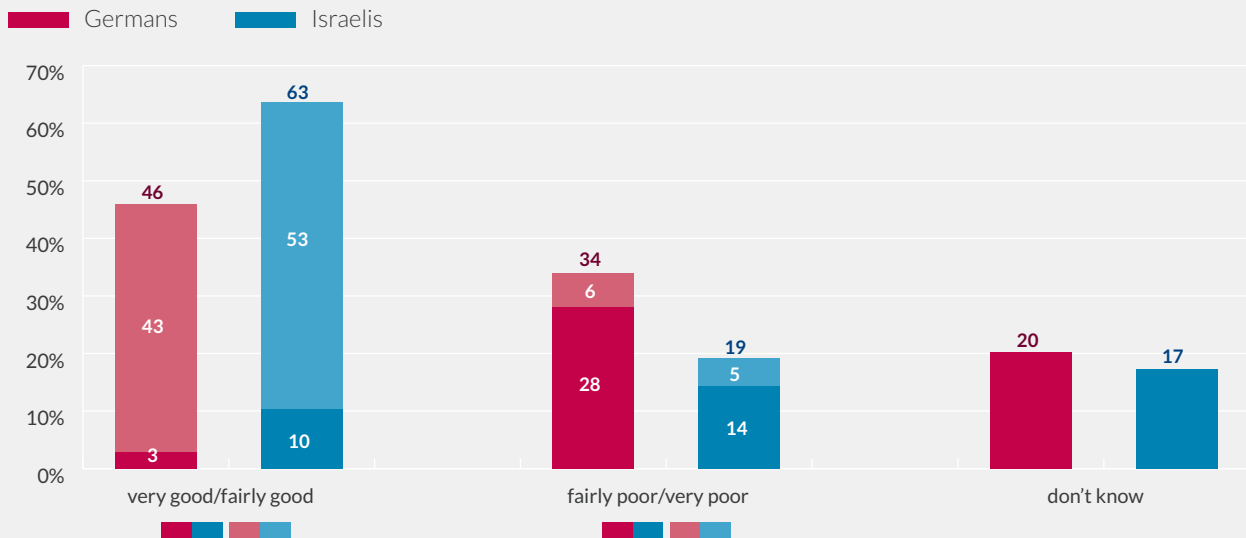
How does the level of knowledgeability and the image gained either by personal experience or through the media translate into an opinion about the other country? Do Germans and Israelis tend to have a positive or a negative view of each other? The findings show that having more contacts and a greater desire to stay informed do not necessarily lead to having a better or more differentiated image of the other country, since Germans, despite feeling they are relatively well informed about Israel, have a poorer opinion of Israel on average than Israelis have of Germany. Thus, just under half of all Germans surveyed (46 percent) think positively about Israel (figure 9). Among Israelis, on the other hand, almost two-thirds (63 percent) have a favorable opinion of Germany. In contrast, 34 percent of German respondents have a fairly or very poor opinion of Israel, while only 19 percent of the Israelis surveyed think poorly of Germany.

Once again, the difference between secular and religious Jewish Israelis is striking: Among the country's secular Jews, only 13 percent have a negative opinion of Germany, while among its religious Jews, 39 percent do (figure 10).

Conversely, the share of Arab Israelis who have a favorable opinion of Germany is 76 percent. Among Jewish Israelis, 60 percent have a "fairly good" or "very good" opinion of Germany. A historical comparison thus reveals that the mutual perceptions have tended to improve over time despite the limited comparability of the studies. In the survey conducted by DER SPIEGEL in 1991, 48 percent of Jewish Israelis said they had a fairly positive opinion of

FIGURE 9

What do you generally think about Israel/Germany today? Do you have a ... opinion?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

Germany; in the Bertelsmann Stiftung study of 2007, the share expressing a positive opinion had risen to 57 percent, ultimately reaching 68 percent in 2013. This upward trend can be observed on the German side as well: While 35 percent of respondents had a favorable opinion of Israel in 2007, in 2013 the figure was 46 percent, the same as in the current survey.

What someone thinks about a country's government must be considered separately from what he or she thinks about the country in general. The politicians who have led the governments in both states in recent years have undoubtedly had a formative influence on these perceptions: Benjamin Netanyahu, who was Israel's prime minister from 1996 to 1999 and from 2009 to 2021, was perceived internationally as a "hawk" who bears partial responsibility for the failure of the erstwhile peace process with the Palestinians and who represents nationalistic Israeli policies. Angela Merkel, on the other hand, German chancellor from 2005 to 2021, has gained a decidedly positive image in Israel, especially since her speech to

the Knesset in 2008, but also as a result of her actions during the refugee crisis in 2015.

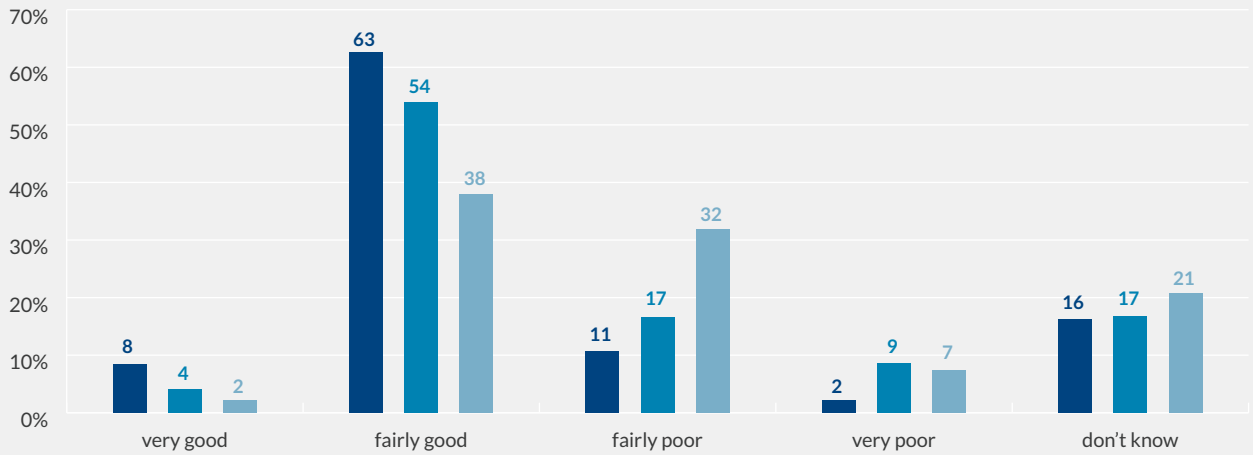
In Israel, 55 percent of respondents have a "good" or "very good" opinion of the German government (figure 11). Likud supporters, at 50 percent, evince the lowest figure in Israel's political landscape. In contrast, voters from the liberal Yesh Atid party, which often has a positive attitude toward Europe, are the most Germany-friendly, with 63 percent saying they have a favorable opinion of the German government.

What is particularly striking among German respondents is that their opinion of the Israeli government (43 percent "fairly poor/very poor") is even more negative than of the country as a whole (34 percent). Only 24 percent have a "fairly good" or "very good" opinion of Israel's government. The high share of "don't know" responses (over 30 percent) in both countries is noteworthy, suggesting a pronounced degree of uncertainty or even disinterest.

FIGURE 10

What do you generally think about Germany today? Do you have a ... opinion?

■ secular Israelis ■ traditional Israelis ■ religious Israelis / Haredim

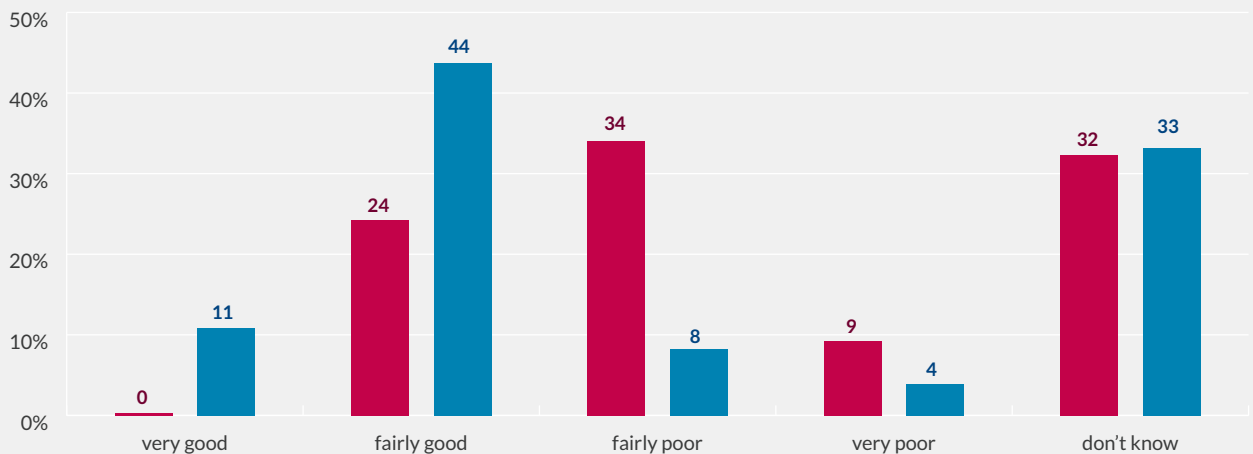


Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding. | Categorization is based on self-attribution.
 n = 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 11

What do you generally think about the current government in Israel/Germany today? Do you have a ... opinion?

■ Germans ■ Israelis



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

A comparison with the previous study could perhaps indicate a positive trend, since 63 percent had a negative opinion of the Israeli government in 2013. However, the share of “don’t know” responses was significantly lower in 2013 (19 percent in both Germany and Israel). It is therefore impossible to say with certainty whether a genuine shift in opinion has taken place or whether the difference has resulted from methodological changes. If the former is the case, various reasons are conceivable: A change in Germans’ perceptions could be due to the new Israeli government leading the country at the time of the survey and to Benjamin Netanyahu’s no longer serving as prime minister. The more positive opinion of the Israeli government could also possibly signal a change in how Germans view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Section 6.1 “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”). At the same time, other factors may have also recently influenced the German public’s attitudes toward the Israeli government, such as the country’s economic transformation into a high-tech hub, its determined response to the Covid pandemic, and its rapprochement with numerous Arab states in the region.

5 Remembering the Holocaust, commemoration, responsibility

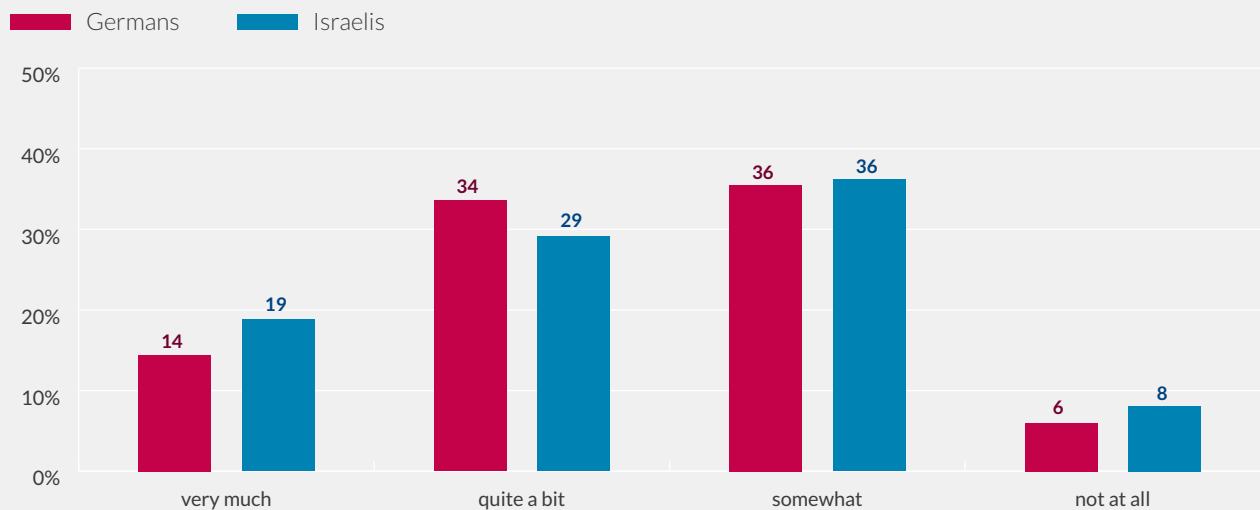
Remembering the crimes of the Holocaust and engaging with them are a key aspect of German-Israeli relations. Should this continue to be the case in the future, or would Germans and Israelis like a relationship less defined by this history?

5.1 Relevance of the Nazi past for relations today

Nazi persecution and the Holocaust continue to serve as the historical point of reference for

FIGURE 12

Does the persecution and murder of Jews under the Nazis still affect Israelis' attitudes toward Germans today?

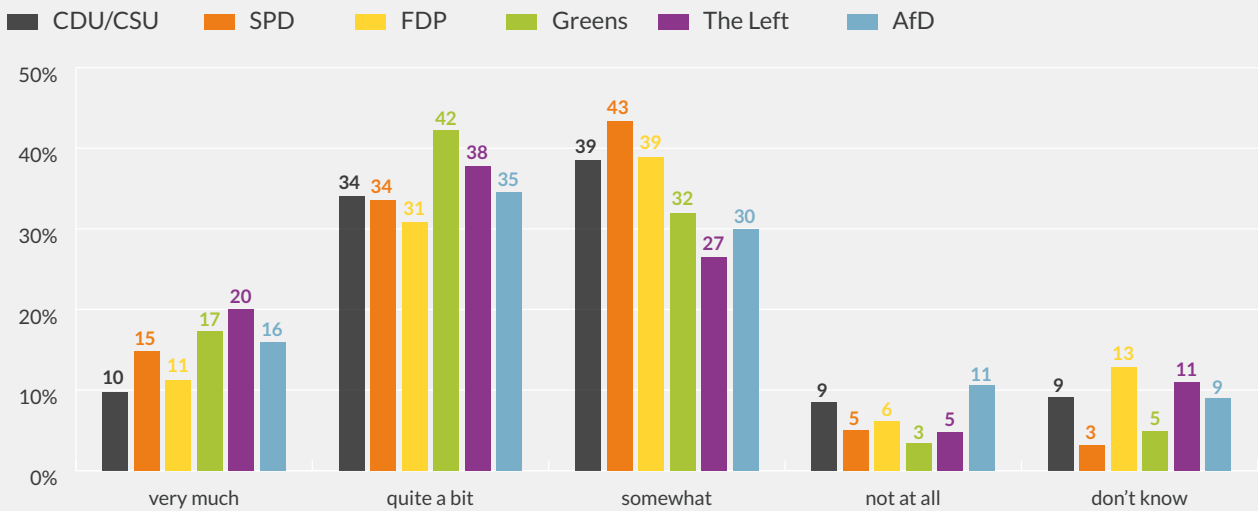


Not included: "Don't know," "No response."

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 13

Does the persecution and murder of Jews under the Nazis still affect Israelis' attitudes toward Germans today?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

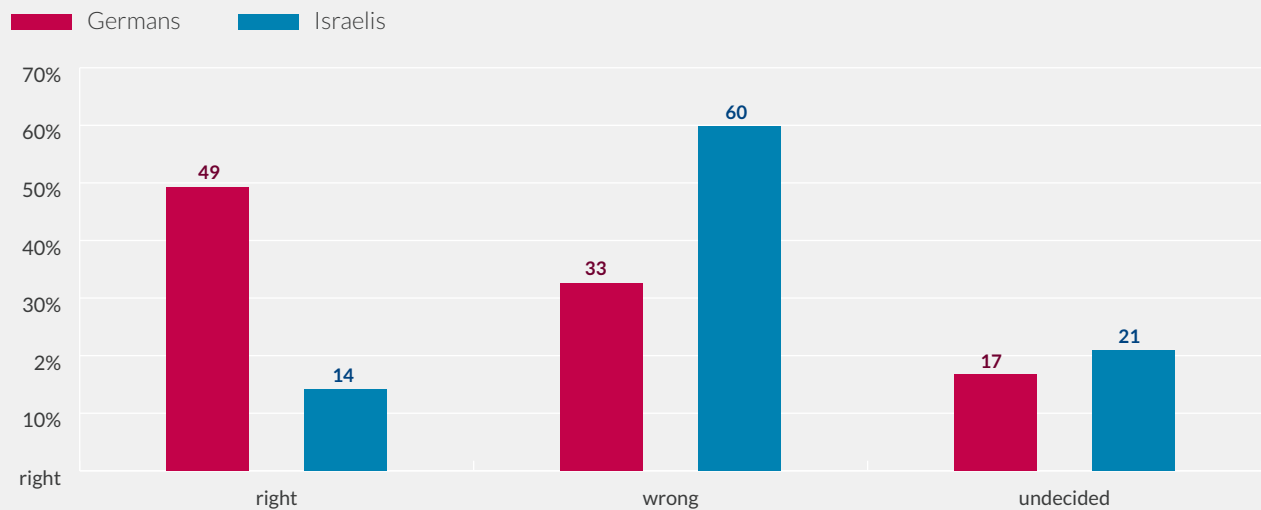
German-Israeli relations in the 21st century. The results of our survey show that both sides still view the connection between past and present as crucial. However, both Germans and Israelis are divided on the question of how much the persecution and murder of Jews under the Nazis still weighs on Israelis' attitudes toward Germans. According to the findings, 42 percent of Germans and 44 percent of Israelis believe that this is still only partially or not at all the case (figure 12). On the other hand, a somewhat larger share (48 percent of respondents in both countries) say that relations are still significantly affected by this past. Unsurprisingly, it is mainly Jewish Israelis (54 percent) who say this is the case, while less than 30 percent of Arab Israelis feel this is true. Compared to the previous study from 2013, in which only Jewish Israelis were surveyed, this nevertheless reveals a remarkable change: At that time, 77 percent of the respondents considered the countries' relations to be burdened by the past.

Another finding that stands out is the perspective of the younger generation of Israelis compared to their elders. Among 18- to 29-year-olds, for example, just under half of those surveyed (49 percent) believe that relations with today's Germany are influenced by the murder of the Jews under the Nazis; the figure for respondents over 60 is only 39 percent. Likud voters – who traditionally have less of an affinity for Germany than, for example, the Labor Party, which was virtually the only party to govern Israel until the 1970s – also see relations as being burdened by the past to an above-average extent (61 percent). In contrast, supporters of the other parties (Yesh Atid, Kahol Lavan and the United Arab List) have a significantly more positive attitude toward Germany.

In Germany, as on other issues, party affiliation is the best indicator for differentiating the findings on this issue. Here, it is supporters of Alliance 90/The Greens and the Left party who have an especially

FIGURE 14

Do you agree with the following statement? “Today, almost 80 years after the end of the Second World War, we should no longer talk so much about the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis, but finally put the past behind us.”



Not included: “Don’t know,” “No response.”

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

strong sense that the German-Israeli relationship continues to be burdened by the Nazi past (around 60 percent in each case, figure 13). Among CDU/CSU supporters, the figure is significantly lower, at 44 percent. It is striking that AfD voters also ascribe a relatively high significance to the Nazi era as a burden on current relations. However, it can be assumed that the perspective is different here for a party that, by its own admission, wants to leave the past behind: From this point of view, it is not the Shoah itself, but rather the culture of remembrance and the way the past is dealt with that affects the countries’ relations.

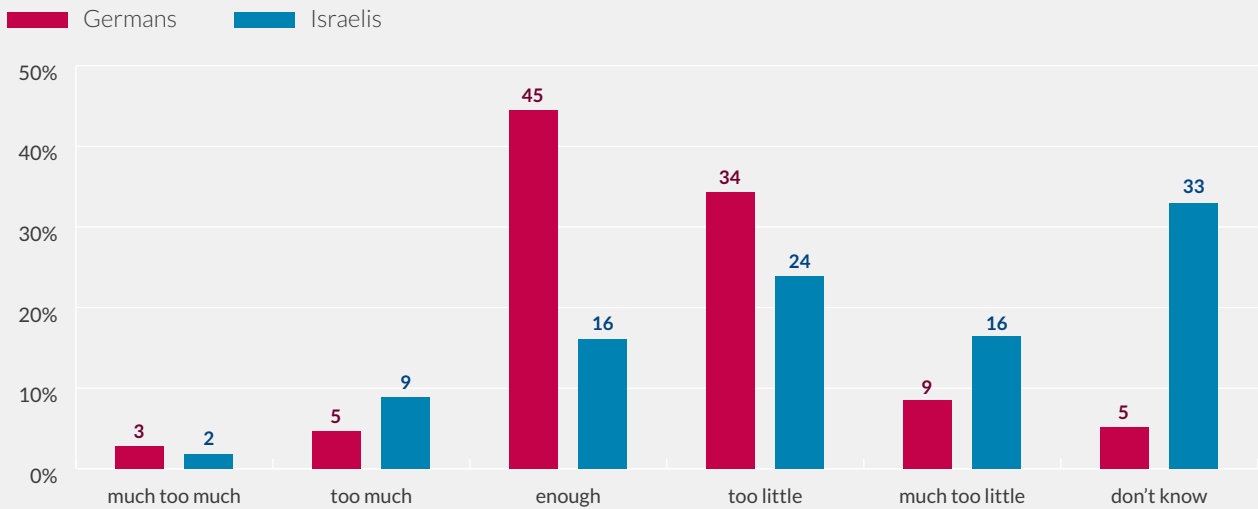
In the German debate about the Nazi era’s significance today, there has been a heated discussion for decades – including the Historikerstreit (Historians’ Dispute) of 1986 and the disagreement in 1998 between author Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis, then president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany – about whether

it is time for the country to leave the past behind. There is relatively strong support in Germany for doing so: 49 percent of those interviewed for the present survey say that “today we should no longer talk so much about persecution of the Jews under the Nazis, but finally put the past behind us.” (figure 14).

In 2021, therefore, around half of all Germans said they were in favor of putting this part of their history behind them, at least in the public discourse. The group of 18- to 29-year-olds is notable here, in that almost one in two (47 percent) disagrees with the call to leave the past behind. And significant differences by party affiliation are noticeable once again: Voters for Alliance 90/The Greens are particularly opposed to leaving the past behind (65 percent), while two-thirds (76 percent) of AfD supporters are in favor of doing just that. Not surprisingly, the situation in Israel is completely different: A large majority of Jewish Israelis (72

FIGURE 15

Do you think that school students in Germany learn ... about the Holocaust?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

percent, but only 18 percent of Arab Israelis) think it would be wrong to “finally put the past behind us.” Comparing responses by age, the younger generation in Israel also tends to be less willing to let bygones be bygones, with 29 percent of Israelis over the age of 60 saying it is right to leave the past behind, compared to only 9 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds. In terms of party affiliation, it is Likud supporters who are most opposed (71 percent).

In both countries, educational background also plays a role in this issue: The higher a respondent’s level of education, the greater the likelihood he or she will be opposed to leaving the past behind.

Education plays a major role in general in dealing with Germany’s Nazi past. One recurring topic of public debate is whether German schoolchildren learn “too little” or “too much” about the Holocaust, its history and causes, and its political treatment.

Even without direct insight into the German educational system, 40 percent of Israelis believe that too little is taught about the Holocaust in German schools (figure 15).

Germans have a much more positive view of Holocaust education in the German school system, with only 8 percent saying they feel too much attention is paid to the subject in the country’s classrooms. A majority of German respondents, on the other hand, do not think that too much is being taught about the Holocaust in German schools: 43 percent say that the subject should be given even more attention, and almost one in two (45 percent) considers the amount that children learn about the Holocaust in school to be just right.

5.2 Significance of remembering the past for politics

What conclusions should be drawn from this past and applied to life today, such as in the political sphere? Should Germany protect Israel's interests and security more strongly in international politics? This idea has found its way into the public debate in both countries, not least due to Angela Merkel's 2008 speech on Israel's security being "part of Germany's *raison d'état*." Yet the German-Israeli rapprochement that began in the 1950s was largely shaped by the Federal Republic's willingness to accept responsibility for Nazi crimes.

We therefore asked whether the memory of the Holocaust should play a central role in German politics. In Israel, almost two-thirds see it this way (64 percent overall; 75 percent among Jewish Israelis but only 26 percent among Arab Israelis).

In Germany, on the other hand, the picture is divided. Here, only 43 percent of respondents agree

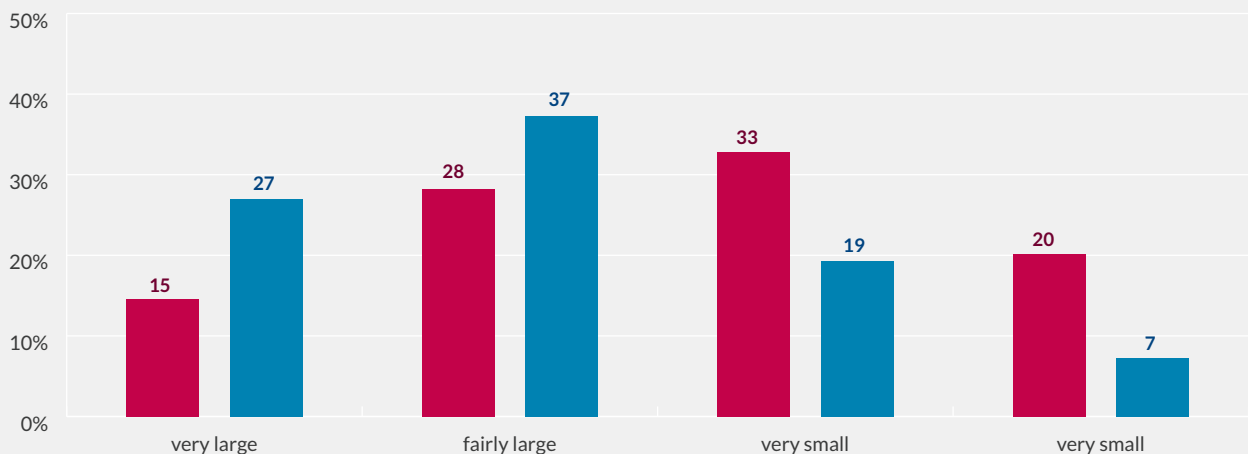
with the statement that ongoing remembrance of the Holocaust should play a role in both current and future German politics (figure 16). Notable once again are the responses of the youngest age group, in which a majority (56 percent) feels that remembrance of the Holocaust should play a large or very large role in German politics. There is also particularly strong support among Alliance 90/The Greens voters for a politics that is aware of its historical responsibility (67 percent), while more than half of FDP voters (58 percent) and a clear majority of AfD voters (81 percent) oppose the idea that the memory of the Holocaust should play a major role in German politics (figure 17).

In Germany, when preferences are examined by party affiliation, a clear correlation can be seen between opinions on Israel and the desire to commemorate the Holocaust. Supporters of Alliance 90/The Greens evince the highest levels of sympathy for Israel and for a politics that reflects Germany's historical responsibility. Among AfD supporters, on the other hand, a distanced attitude towards Israel goes hand

FIGURE 16

Should the memory of the Holocaust play a ... role in present and future German politics?

■ Germans ■ Israelis



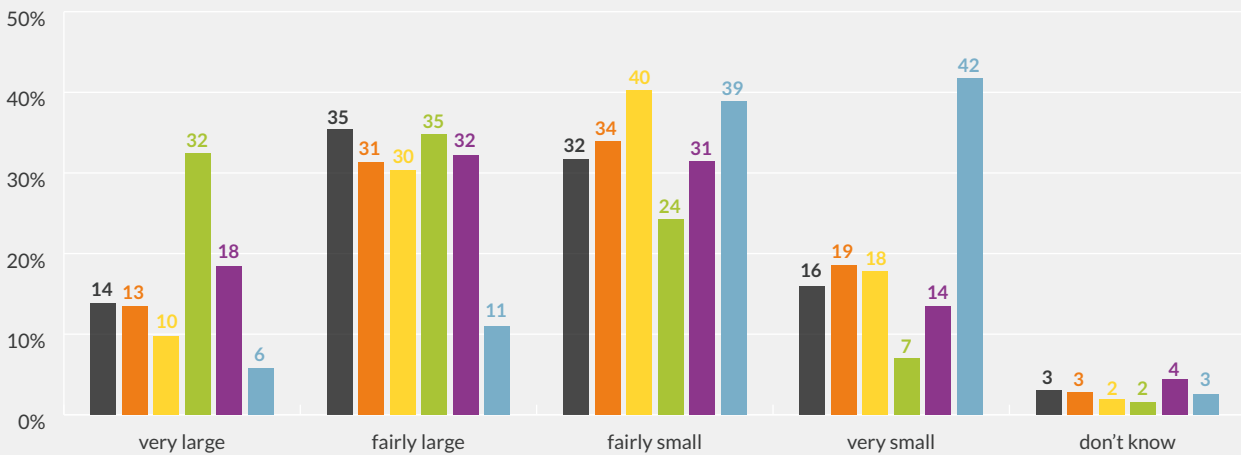
Not included: "Don't know," "No response."

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 17

Should the memory of the Holocaust play a ... role in present and future German politics?

■ CDU/CSU ■ SPD ■ FDP ■ Greens ■ The Left ■ AfD



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

in hand with an unwillingness to let German politics be influenced by the memory of the Holocaust.

5.3 Responsibility as a consequence of the past

In addition to the overall question of the significance of remembering the past for politics, the question arises as to what specific forms of responsibility Germans and Israelis feel are appropriate now and for the future. We therefore used a three-step process in both countries to ask whether, as a result of the crimes committed by the Nazis, Germany has a responsibility toward the Jewish people, toward the state of Israel, and toward refugees in general. Overall, more than a third of Germans (35 percent) agree that a special responsibility exists toward the Jewish people, a third are undecided (33 percent “partially true and untrue”), and another third (31 percent) reject any responsibility stemming from the past in these areas and feel that no responsibility exists at all for the Jewish people (figure 18).

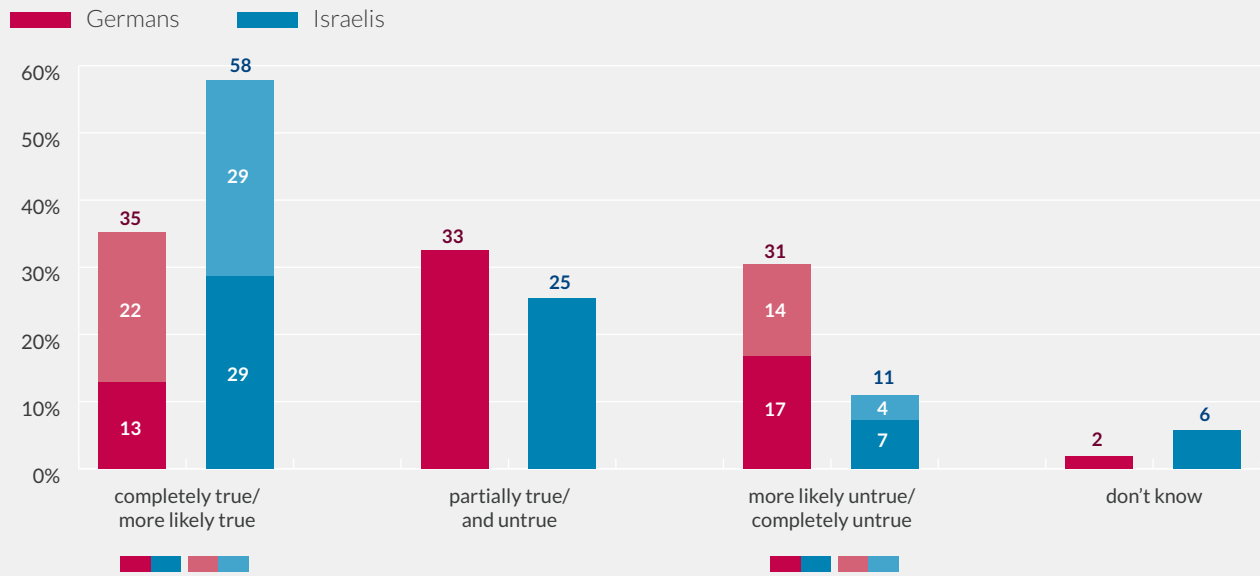
Particularly noteworthy is the opinion held by the youngest group, 18- to 29-year-olds, in which almost one in two respondents (44 percent) feels a responsibility toward the Jewish people.

The sense of responsibility toward the state of Israel is less pronounced, with 27 percent of respondents agree that, for historical reasons, Germany has a responsibility for the Jewish state, while 37 percent feel this responsibility exists only in part, and 35 percent do not see a responsibility here at all (figure 19). The findings in Israel are different: A majority (63 percent) of Jewish Israelis believe that, given its Nazi past, Germany should stand up for Israel. Among Arab Israelis, on the other hand, the figure is only 37 percent. On average, 57 percent of the Israelis surveyed agree with this statement.

More Germans reject a historical responsibility for the state of Israel than explicitly agree that it exists. The level of rejection of respondents in eastern Germany is striking, among whom as many as 39

FIGURE 18

To what extent is the following statement true? “Against the background of the history of the Nazi era, today’s Germany has a special responsibility for the Jewish people.”



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

percent explicitly reject a responsibility for Israel because of Germany’s past. Party affiliation is also a strong explanatory factor for this question: The share of those who see a German responsibility for Israel for historical reasons is above average among supporters of the CDU/CSU (40 percent), SPD (33 percent) and Alliance 90/The Greens (44 percent). Voters for the Left party are less likely to agree (28 percent), and this applies even more to FDP voters (24 percent). Only among AfD supporters does a majority reject such a responsibility (68 percent).

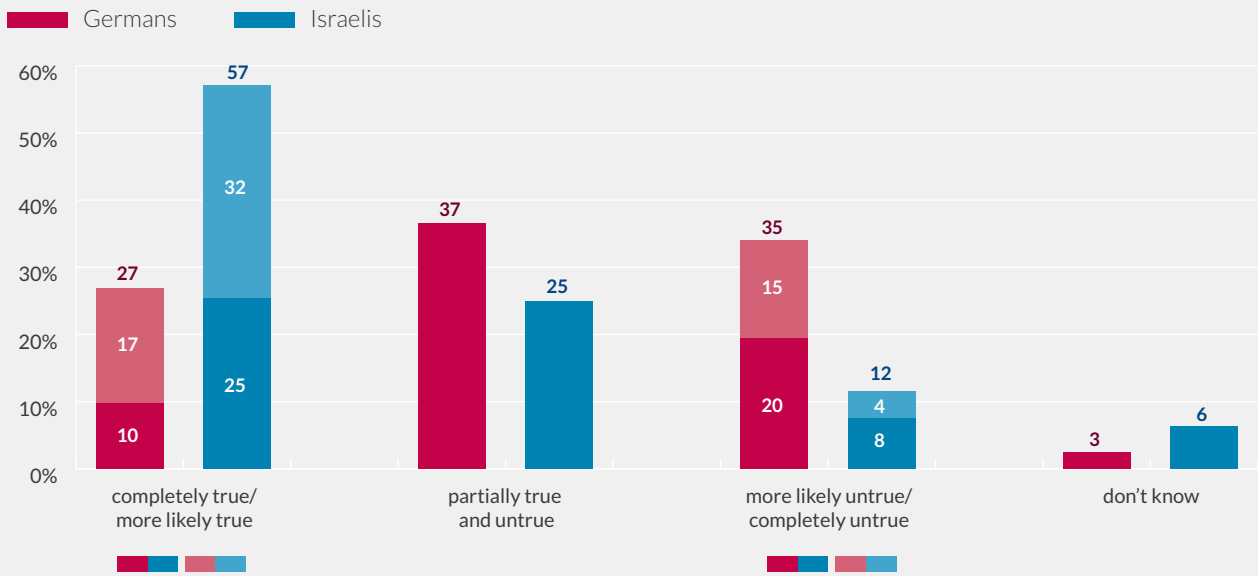
Furthermore, over a third of the Germans surveyed (34 percent) agree that, for historical reasons, their country bears a responsibility for refugees worldwide. At the same time, 31 percent say it is only partially true that such a special responsibility exists, and 33 percent completely reject the idea that Germany bears any responsibility for refugees as a consequence of its Nazi history (figure 20).

Overall, the figures show that although Germans feel a sense of responsibility due to their country’s Nazi past, they distinguish between the Jewish people as a whole and refugees worldwide, on the one hand, and the state of Israel, on the other. This is particularly clear when one considers the youngest respondents in Germany: 44 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds see a responsibility toward Jews worldwide, but only 25 percent say the same is true for Israel.

In addition, the figures for Germany reflect the differences along party lines that have already been observed several times in this complex of questions. Those who sense a responsibility for the Jewish people, Israel or refugees due to the Nazi era can be found in particular among supporters of Alliance 90/ The Greens (responsibility for the Jewish people: 58 percent; for Israel: 44 percent; for refugees: 53 percent) and the CDU/CSU (responsibility for the

FIGURE 19

To what extent is the following statement true? | “Against the background of the history of the Nazi era, today’s Germany has a special responsibility for Israel.”



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

Jewish people: 48 percent; for Israel: 40 percent; for refugees: 47 percent). Once again, among AfD supporters, the level of agreement is particularly low across the board (responsibility for the Jewish people: 11 percent; for Israel: 11 percent; for refugees: 10 percent). The figures for FDP supporters are also striking. Like voters for other parties (with the exception of the AfD), they feel that, due to its Nazi history, Germany has a special responsibility for Jews (28 percent), but they reject any responsibility for Israel (24 percent) and for refugees (23 percent) much more strongly than the German population on average. Educational attainment is once again a decisive factor: People with a higher level of education consistently feel such a responsibility exists to a greater extent in all three areas.

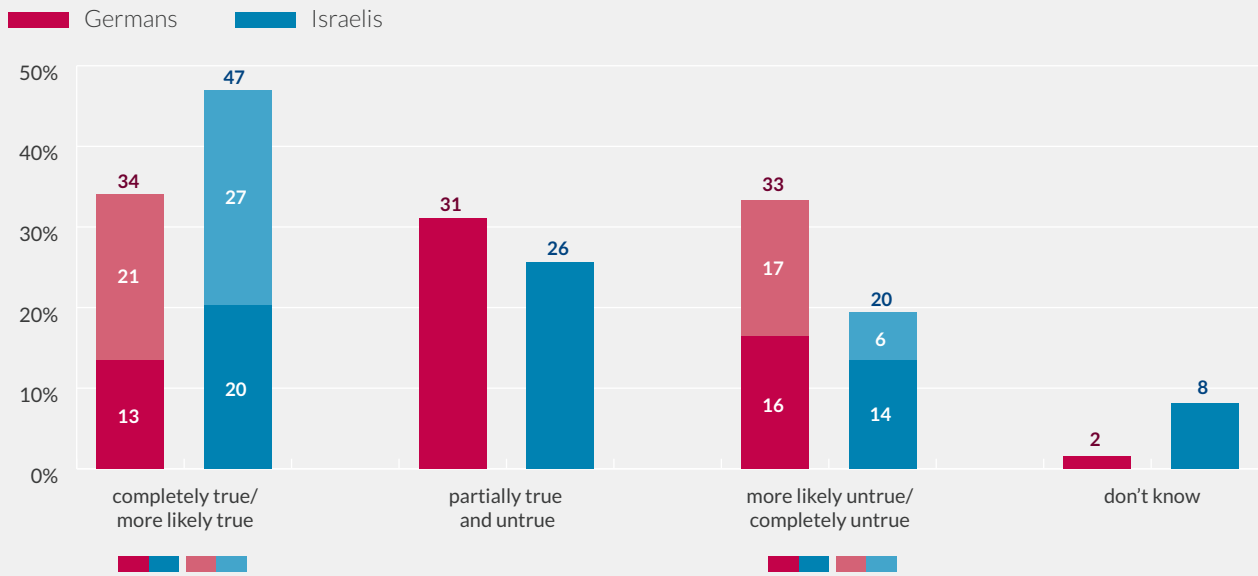
In Israel, the situation is clearer than in Germany: A majority feels Germany has a special responsibility for the Jewish people as a result of the Nazi era

(58 percent; 25 percent “partly true and untrue”; 11 percent “more likely untrue/completely untrue”), whereby Jewish Israelis endorse this idea more strongly (64 percent) than Arab Israelis (35 percent). Similar levels of agreement are found when the Israeli public is asked about Germany’s responsibility for the state of Israel (57 percent; 25 percent “partly true and untrue”; 12 percent “more likely untrue/completely untrue”) and for refugees (47 percent; 26 percent “partly true and untrue”; 19 percent “more likely untrue/completely untrue”).

At the same time, a majority of respondents in both countries believe that Israel should also draw a lesson from the history of Jewish persecution by taking responsibility (without figure). In Germany, 38 percent of respondents believe that Israel therefore bears a special responsibility for refugees and asylum seekers (38 percent “partly true and untrue”; 19 percent “more likely untrue/completely

FIGURE 20

To what extent is the following statement true? “Against the background of the history of the Nazi era, today’s Germany has a special responsibility for people fleeing war and persecution worldwide.”



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

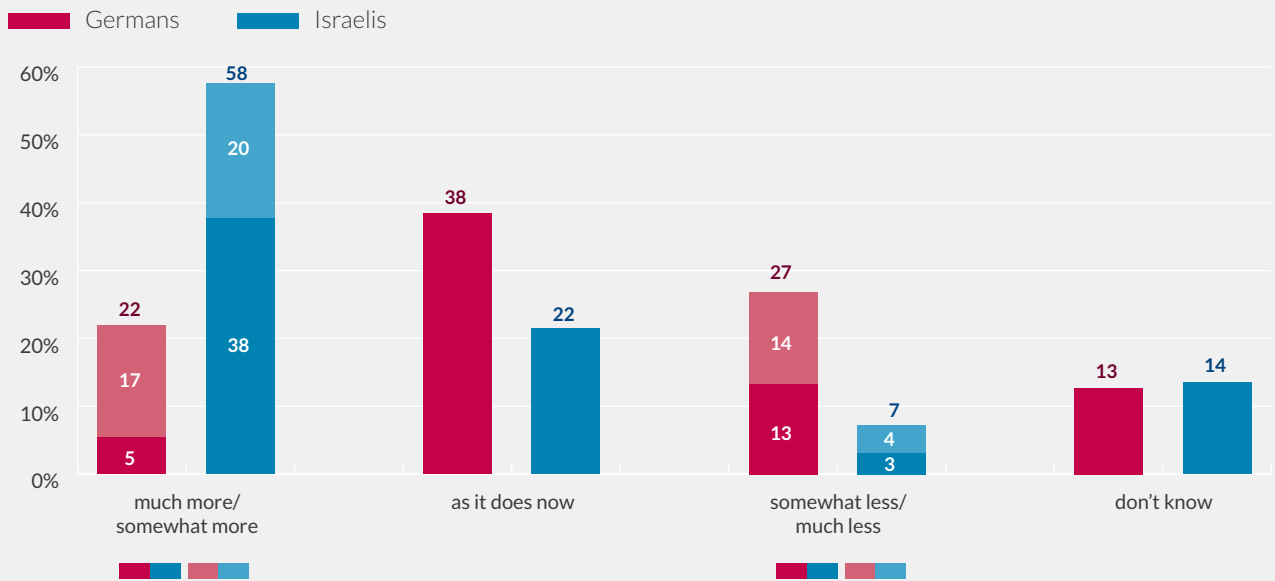
untrue”), as do 44 percent of Israelis (30 percent “partially true and untrue”; 19 percent “more likely untrue/completely untrue”). It is clear that despite the heated debates about refugee immigration in both Germany and Israel in recent years, rejection diminishes in Israel as soon as refugee policy is placed in the context of the country’s own history. On the one hand, this sense of responsibility reflects the lesson learned from the history of Jewish persecution: “never again” become a victim. On the other, it reflects Israel’s self-image, derived from Zionism among other aspects, of establishing a humane society that serves as a model for others beyond its own borders, of being “a light unto the nations.” This normative role model is supported by the study’s findings. The reality is quite different, however, as the occupation of the West Bank, which has lasted for more than 50 years, or the often-defamatory rhetoric and harsh laws associated with Israel’s refugee policy show.

Answers to the question of whether Germany has a special responsibility for the state of Israel also correspond to views on whether Germany should protect Israel’s interests and security more strongly in international politics (figure 21). While about one in five respondents would like to see greater support, 38 percent would like to maintain the current level. A look at the younger generation (Germans under 40) suggests that this positive attitude toward Israel might even grow in the future: In this demographic group, 32 percent would like Germany to protect Israel’s interests and security in international politics “significantly more” or “somewhat more”; among 18- to 29-year-olds, the figure rises to 35 percent.

This contrasts with the almost two-thirds of Israelis (58 percent) who explicitly call for Germany to do more to protect Israeli interests internationally. Only 22 percent are satisfied with the current situation.

FIGURE 21

Do you believe that Germany should do more in the sphere of international politics to protect Israel's interests and security?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

6 Assessments of the conflicts in the Middle East

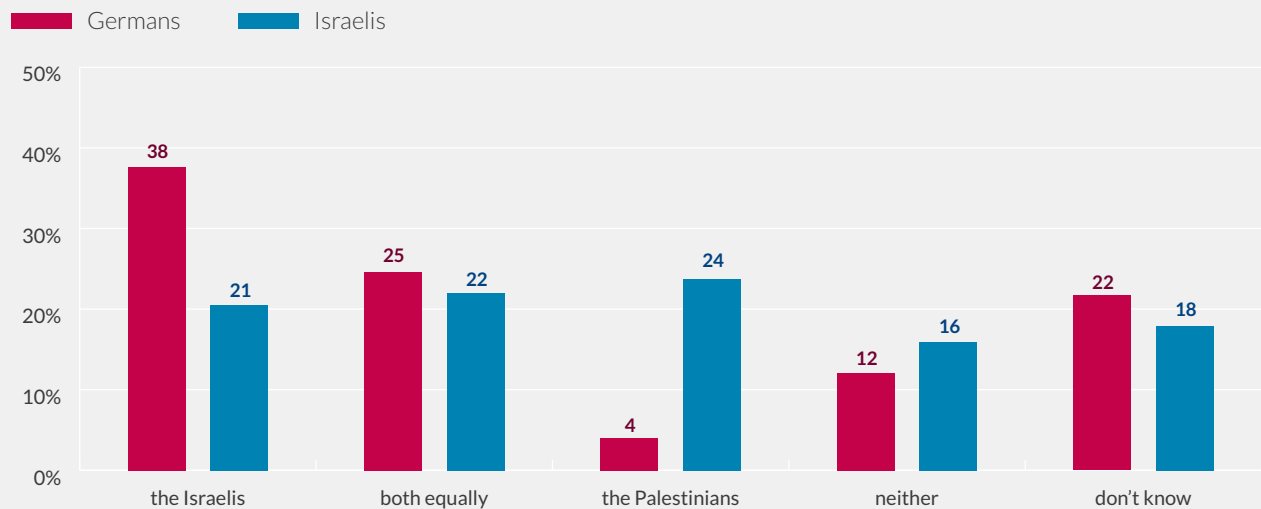
As discussed in Section 2 above, Germans largely perceive Israel as a place of conflict. In the survey conducted for this study, another block of questions was therefore devoted to the conflict with the Palestinians, but also to the dispute with Iran, which has been smoldering for years.

6.1 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we asked the respondents which side they perceive as being generally supported by the German

FIGURE 22

In your opinion, which of the two sides does the German government support?

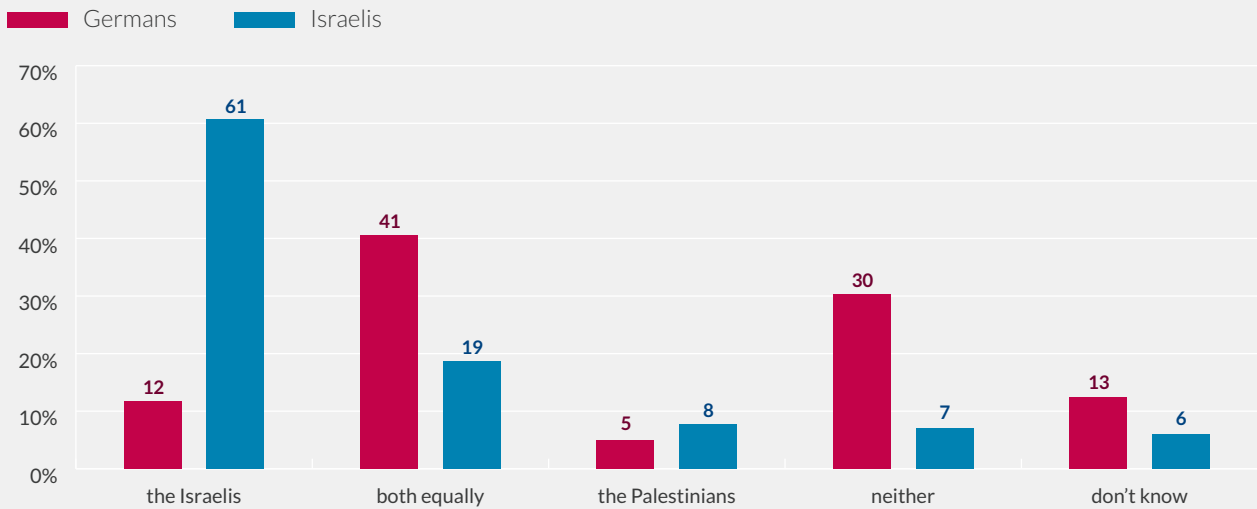


Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 23

Whom do you think the German government should support?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

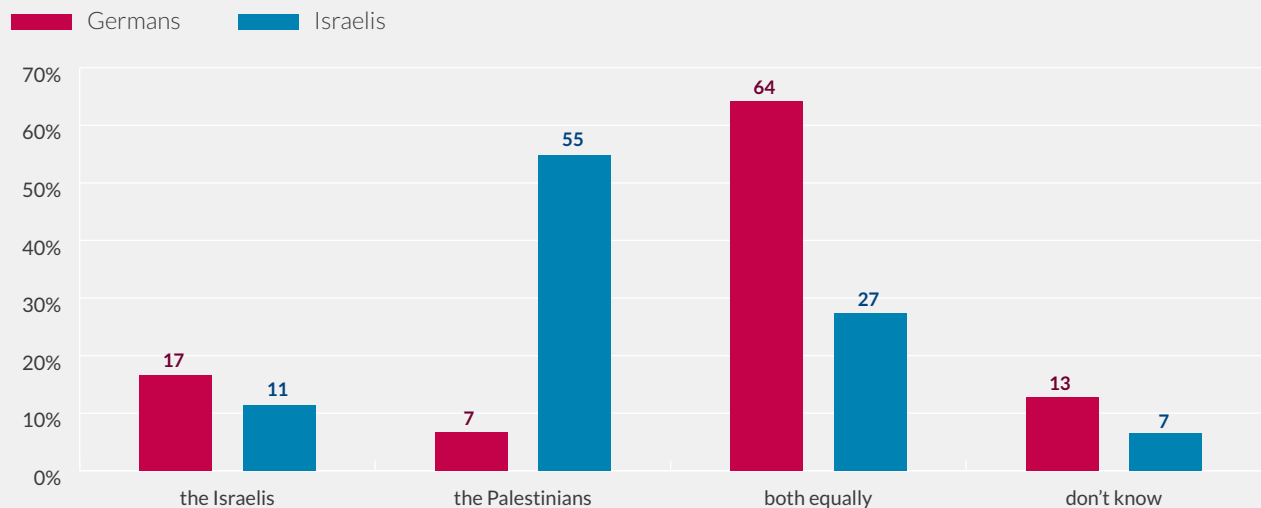
government. The findings show that 21 percent of Israelis believe that Israel receives greater support, 22 percent believe that both parties receive equal support, and 24 percent see greater support for the Palestinian side (figure 22). While about one-third of Arab Israelis (31 percent) believe that Germany tends to support Israel, among Israeli Jews the figure is only 18 percent. Conversely, only 7 percent of Arab Israelis believe that Germany primarily supports the Palestinians, while 29 percent of Jewish Israelis hold this view – with Likud voters making up the largest group here, at 37 percent. Their attitude has probably been fueled by the rhetoric of Benjamin Netanyahu, who for years accused European countries and societies of being too pro-Palestinian and condemning Israel unilaterally. Many members of the younger generation (Israelis under 40) also feel there is a lack of support for Israel. In contrast, the older generation (Israelis over 60) tends to see the German government as supporting Israel (27 percent).

While almost a quarter of the Israeli population believes that Germany primarily supports the Palestinian side, only 4 percent of respondents in Germany feel this is the case. More than a third (38 percent) believe that Germany tends to support Israel, a figure that increases significantly in tandem with educational level. A quarter of German respondents believe that the German government supports both sides in equal measure.

The question of which side is supported must be clearly separated from the question of which side respondents believe should be supported. What is striking is the high percentage in Germany of those who either recommend that the country stay out of the conflict altogether (30 percent) or support both sides equally (41 percent, figure 23). The two figures thus reflect a frequently encountered phenomenon of German public opinion when the topic is the country's foreign policy, namely, the preference to stay out of conflicts or to act in a highly consensus-oriented manner. Among Jewish Israelis, unsurprisingly, a large majority (61 percent) would

FIGURE 24

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who do you think needs to concede more, the Israelis or the Palestinians or both equally?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

like to see Germany support Israel in the conflict. Here, too, the under-40 generation tends to side with the “hawks,” with over two-thirds (68 percent) desiring unilateral support for Israel. Among those over 60, the figure is just under 40 percent.

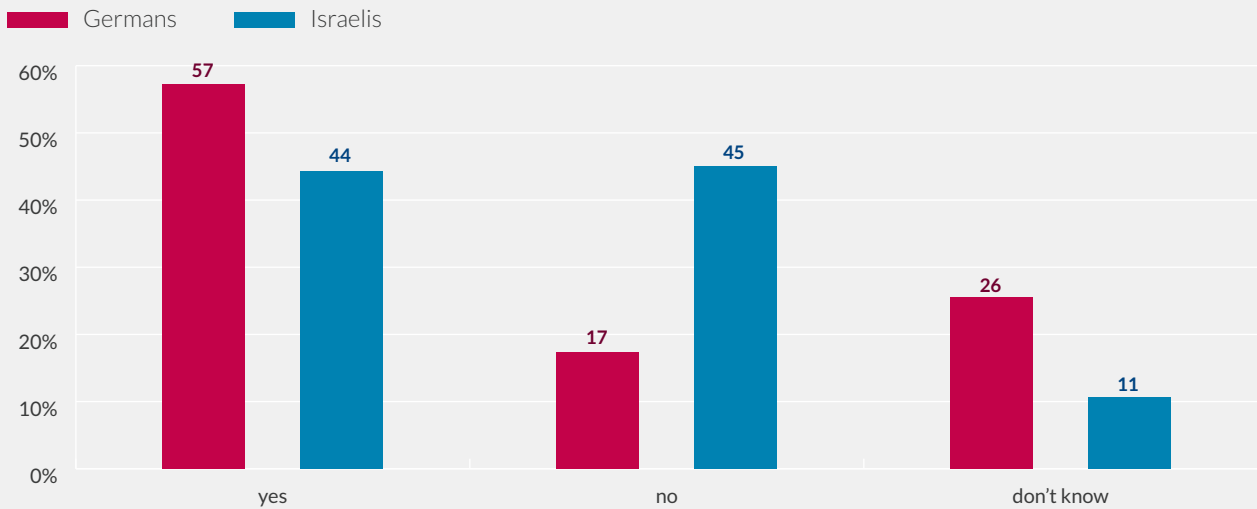
In Germany, the question of who should give way in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is again answered in a manner that correlates with a German foreign policy designed to strike a balance: Two-thirds (64 percent) say they feel both sides should concede in equal measure (figure 24). It is interesting to note the differences by level of education, i.e., the greater the educational attainment, the lower the share of those who believe that both parties should concede to the same degree. Yet this does not lead to greater support for one side, but to more pointed opinions: Among more highly educated Germans, both the share of those who think Israel should give way more (23 percent) and those who think the Palestinians should give way (9 percent) are higher than in the overall survey population in Germany (among whom 17 percent think Israel should concede more, and

7 percent think the Palestinian side should do so). However, contrary to the view sometimes expressed, the results do not indicate a massive polarization of public opinion in Germany with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rather, the prevailing attitude is to call on both sides to acquiesce.

On the Israeli side, the responses of Arab Israelis are particularly interesting: In keeping with the “Israelization” of this cohort repeatedly encountered in academic studies in recent years (see, e.g., Averbukh 2021 and Scheindlin 2019), a majority of this group would like to see support for both sides or even only for Israel (together just under 50 percent). Thus, Israel’s Arab citizens no longer necessarily see a contradiction between their Arab-Palestinian and their Israeli identities. This is also reflected in responses differentiated by party affiliation: Even among the mostly Arab supporters of the United Arab List alliance, just under 40 percent would like to see German support for Israel in particular or for both sides in equal measure.

FIGURE 25

Do you support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

The process of change transforming Arab Israelis' political self-definition can also be seen in answers to the question of which side should concede more in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is noteworthy that among Arab Israelis, the position that the Palestinian side should acquiesce more also enjoys considerable approval (41 percent). This may be a reflection of the Israeli reading, dominant for decades, that there are no real partners for peace on the Palestinian side. Consequently, a majority of 55 percent of Israelis think that the Palestinian side should give way more.

Even if no peace process is currently taking place between Israelis and the Palestinian side, the question is repeatedly posed in the media in Germany and other countries, including Israel, as to how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be resolved. The two-state solution – often endorsed in international diplomatic circles and a fundamental part of the Oslo peace process – has been the best-known option since the 1990s, although it is no longer the most likely option today. The responses

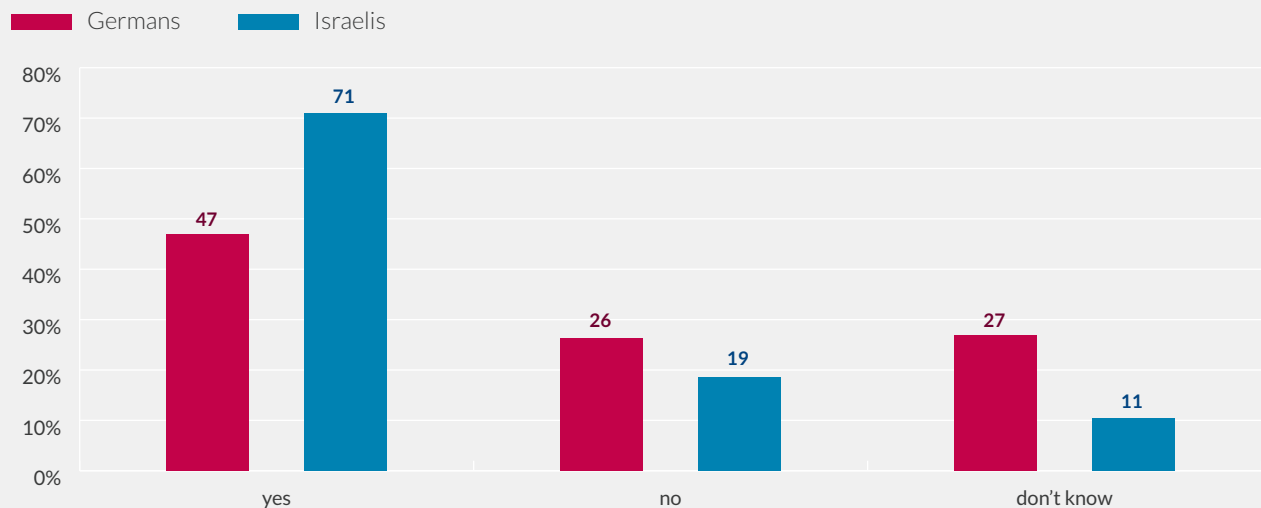
in Germany reveal a preference for the “balanced” foreign policy described above: 57 percent of Germans are still in favor of a two-state solution in the spirit of Oslo, with around one-quarter (26 percent) having no opinion on the matter (figure 25). Israel is split on this issue: 44 percent of respondents are in favor of, 45 percent against a two-state solution. Thus, neither option is supported by a societal majority. However, Arab Israelis prefer a two-state solution by an overwhelming majority (69 percent), while only 37 percent of Jewish Israelis favor it.

When examined by party affiliation, the figures evince the expected differences: Likud voters generally reject the two-state solution (67 percent). Supporters are found primarily among Kahol Lavan voters (56 percent) and more strongly among Yesh Atid (69 percent) and the United Arab List (68 percent) adherents.

The degree of religiosity also plays a role here: While a slight majority of secular Jews favor a two-state

FIGURE 26

Do you think that Israeli's existence is threatened by Iran's nuclear program?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

solution, only 12 percent of strictly religious Jews (Haredim) prefer it. Grouping the findings by age reveals that 18- to 29-year-olds are most clearly opposed to the two-state solution: 53 percent of them reject it, while a majority of all other age groups endorse it.

6.2 The confrontation with Iran

The confrontation between Iran and Israel over the Iranian nuclear program and the regional power structure in the Middle East have for many years been a second fundamental conflict involving Israel. Just under half of German respondents (47 percent) consider Iran's nuclear program to be an existential threat to Israel (figure 26). In the 2007 and 2013 surveys, the figures were 62 and 59 percent, respectively. The number of Germans who say they cannot answer the question is quite high, however, at 27 percent in 2021. Only a plurality of AfD voters (41 percent) believe that Israel's existence is not threatened by Iran's nuclear program.

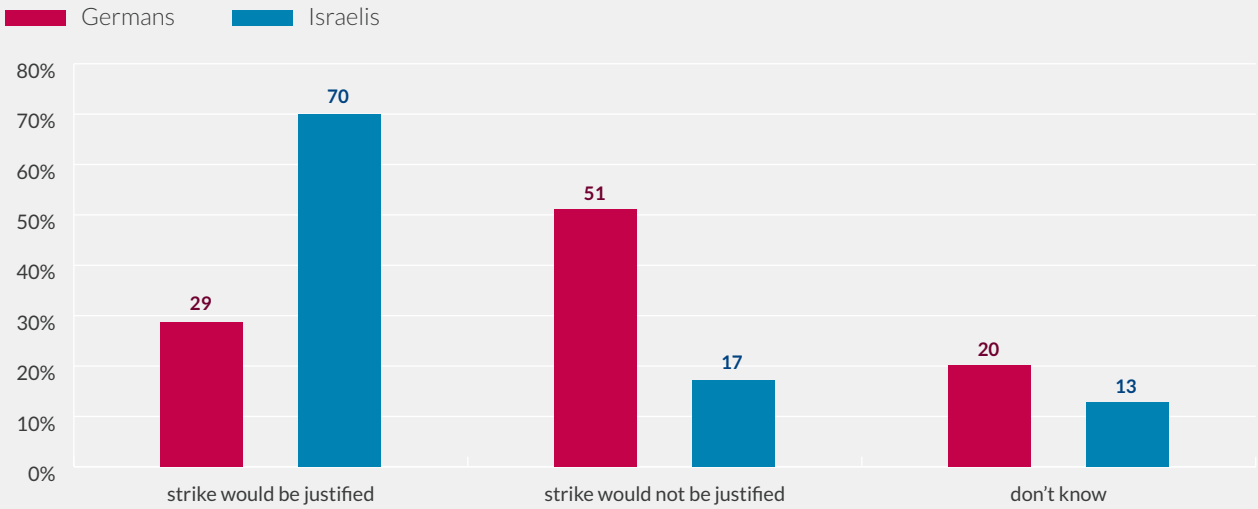
Conversely, the majority of Israelis perceive Iran's nuclear program as an existential threat. Here, there are clear differences between Jewish and Arab Israelis. While 82 percent of Israel's Jewish citizens feel threatened, only 32 percent of Arab Israelis feel this way. In terms of the confrontation with Iran, Germans' and Israelis' perceptions of the situation thus diverge significantly more than they do when respondents are asked about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This also applies to the question of whether a military strike against Iran would be justified if Iran were to build a nuclear bomb despite extensive negotiations: In Germany, about half of the respondents (51 percent) are against such an attack, 29 percent are explicitly in favor of one, and 20 percent abstain ("don't know", figure 27).

Unsurprisingly, Israeli respondents see things very differently, with 70 percent saying they believe a military strike against Iran would be justified if the country were to build a nuclear bomb. Among

FIGURE 27

Would a military strike against Iran be justified if Iran builds nuclear weapons despite extensive negotiations?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

respondents between the ages of 18 and 29, the figure is as high as 78 percent. Only 17 percent explicitly disagree. But while 84 percent of Jewish Israelis favor a military strike should Iran construct a nuclear bomb, only 21 percent of Arab Israelis do. Despite these differences within the population, it can be said that fundamental political support exists in Israel for military action against Iran.

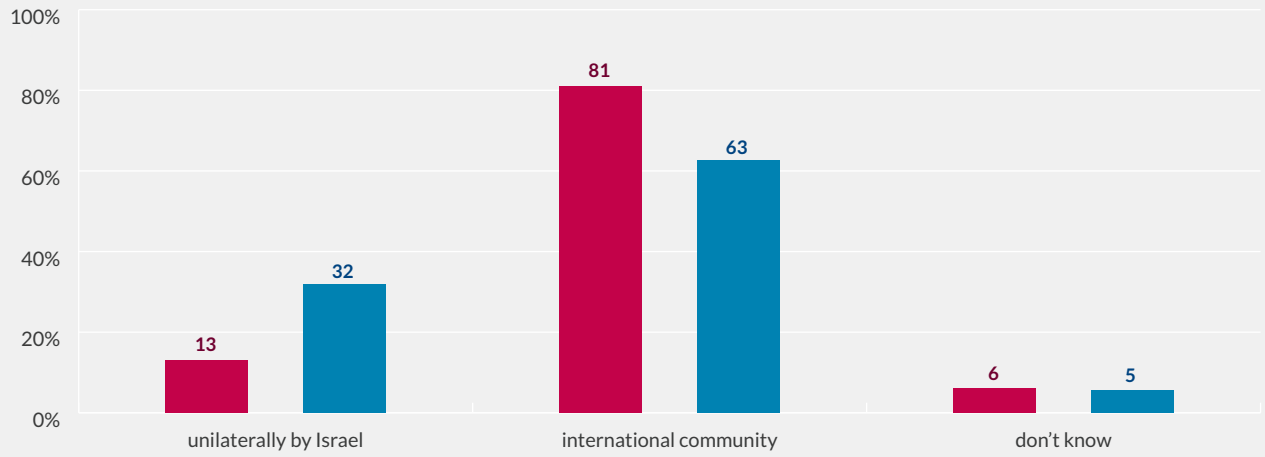
Among the Israelis a majority also sees the international community as having a role to play (63 percent, figure 28). However, a large minority of one-third (32 percent) of Israeli respondents can also imagine a unilateral military strike by Israel.

Minor differences between Germany and Israel become apparent when the question is posed of who should carry out a possible military strike against Iran. The majority of Germans believe that Israel should not act unilaterally, but that the international community should take action, if at all. From the German perspective, therefore, the prevalent desire is for having a broad international consensus on this issue.

FIGURE 28

And who would be justified in carrying out a military strike?

■ Germans ■ Israelis



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

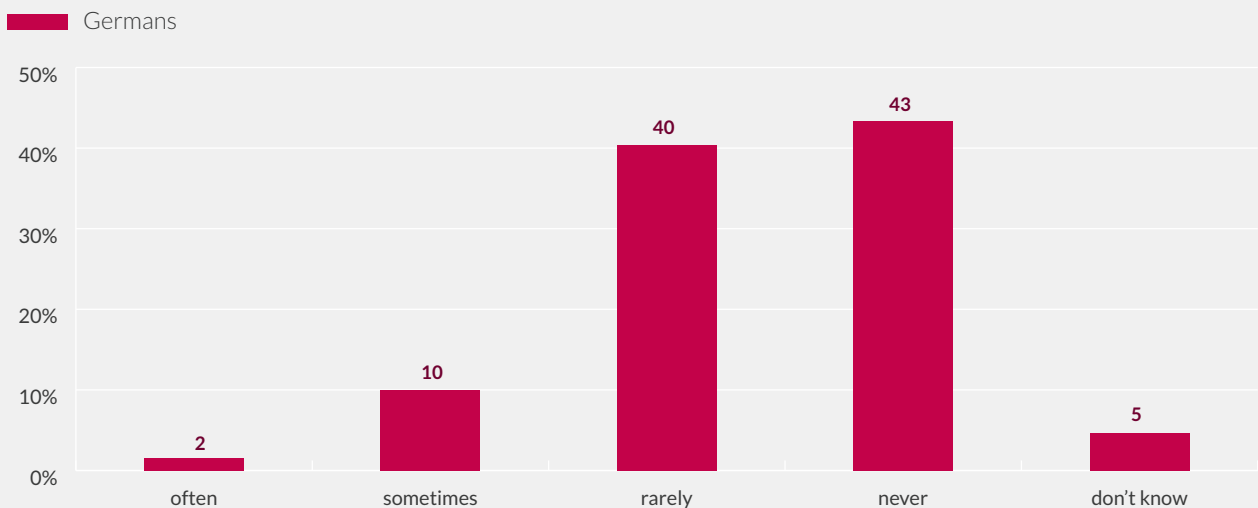
7 Judaism and anti-Semitism in Germany

While Germans associate Israel primarily with warlike conflicts in addition to the country's Jewish identity, Israelis still strongly perceive Germany as linked to the trauma of the Holocaust. Given this historical legacy – but also in light of current anti-Semitic attacks in Germany, most recently the violent assault on the synagogue in Halle in 2019 – we therefore surveyed Germans and Israelis on how they view the lives of Jews in Germany today. At the same time, we wanted to know how Germans perceive anti-Semitism in their own country and the relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans today.

The findings show that the majority of non-Jewish Germans have no contact with Jews (figure 29). Overall, only 12 percent of Germans say they sometimes or often have contact with Jews. According to official figures, however, just under 100,000 Germans are Jewish, or about 0.12 percent of the population. (This refers to members of the Jewish community; the number of those who identify as Jewish is higher.) Given this small number, it can be assumed that the vast majority of the 12 percent who have contact with Jews are not Jewish themselves. Among Germans with a migration background, the

FIGURE 29

How often do you have contact with Jews?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

share of those who report to have more frequent contact with Jews is slightly higher, at 20 percent.

7.1 Perceptions of anti-Semitism in Germany

Respondents were first asked how widespread they feel anti-Semitic attitudes are in Germany. According to the findings, a clear majority of 70 percent of Germans believe that either only “a small number” or “hardly anyone” in Germany is prejudiced against Jews (figure 30). Israelis, on the other hand, are much more skeptical about German attitudes toward Jews. Of the Israeli respondents, 40 percent think that either “most” or “a large number” of Germans have negative attitudes toward Jews.

As a result, more than one in two Israelis (55 percent) also believe that anti-Semitism is a problem in Germany (among Arab Israelis, the figure is 28

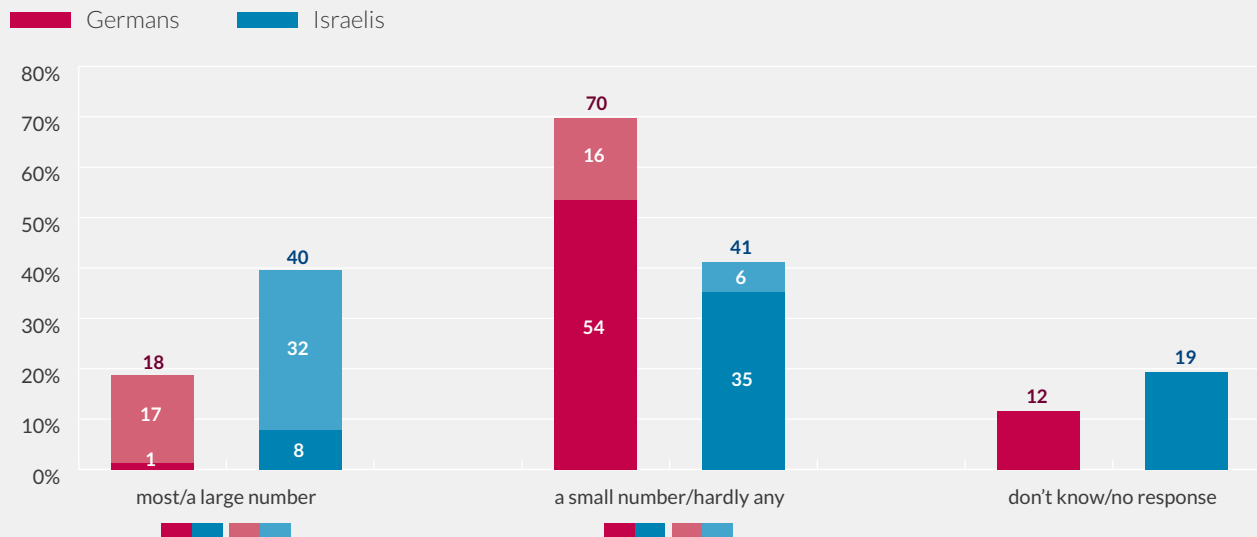
percent). Above all, it is young Israelis who feel that Germany has an anti-Semitism problem (59 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds). Of all Israelis surveyed, 17 percent think it is even a “big problem” (figure 31). Around a third (32 percent), on the other hand, believe that anti-Semitism in Germany is either “not a problem,” “a small problem” or “a rather small problem.”

In contrast, 41 percent of respondents in Germany believe that anti-Semitism is a problem in German society (among Green party supporters, as much as 60 percent believe this). A slight majority of Germans (55 percent) do not think this is the case.

In addition, every second respondent in both countries (Israel: 51 percent; Germany: 52 percent) believes that anti-Semitism in Germany has increased in the last five years (figure 32). This perception is presumably also due to the recurring anti-Semitic sentiments expressed by members of

FIGURE 30

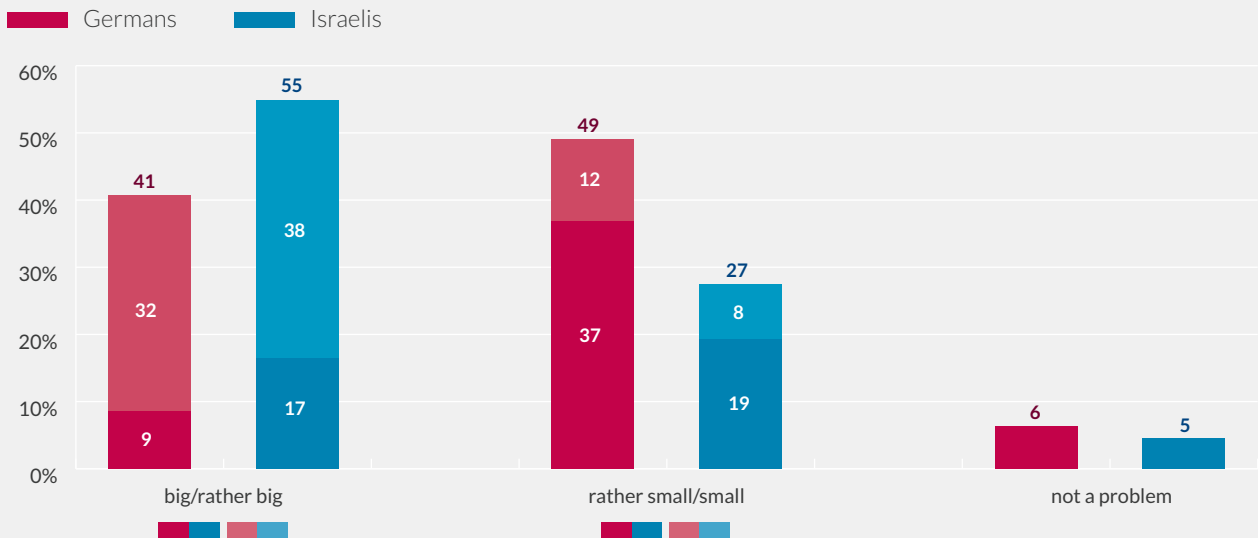
How do you view the general attitude of Germans toward Jews? Do most, a large number, a small number, or hardly any have a negative attitude toward Jews?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding. n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 31

Do you think that anti-Semitism is a ... problem in Germany?



Not included: "Don't know," "No response."

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

right-wing, left-wing and Islamist groups as well as the public discussion of anti-Semitism. However, Germany's younger generation of under 40s is somewhat more optimistic and shares this viewpoint only to a lesser extent (39 percent; among 18- to 29-year-olds, the figure is only 36 percent).

The presumed increase in anti-Semitism in Germany reflects the perceptions of most Germans (82 percent) and Israelis (66 percent), who assume to different degrees that Jews in Germany experience discrimination (figure 33). The youngest group of Israelis surveyed (18- to 29-year-olds) is most concerned, at 41 percent, that Jews are exposed to significant or severe discrimination. Israeli respondents are thus more optimistic about Germany on this issue than the German respondents themselves. Among the parties represented in the Bundestag, supporters of Alliance 90/The Greens and the Left – two parties that very often address the issue of non-discrimination within the political discourse – are most likely to believe

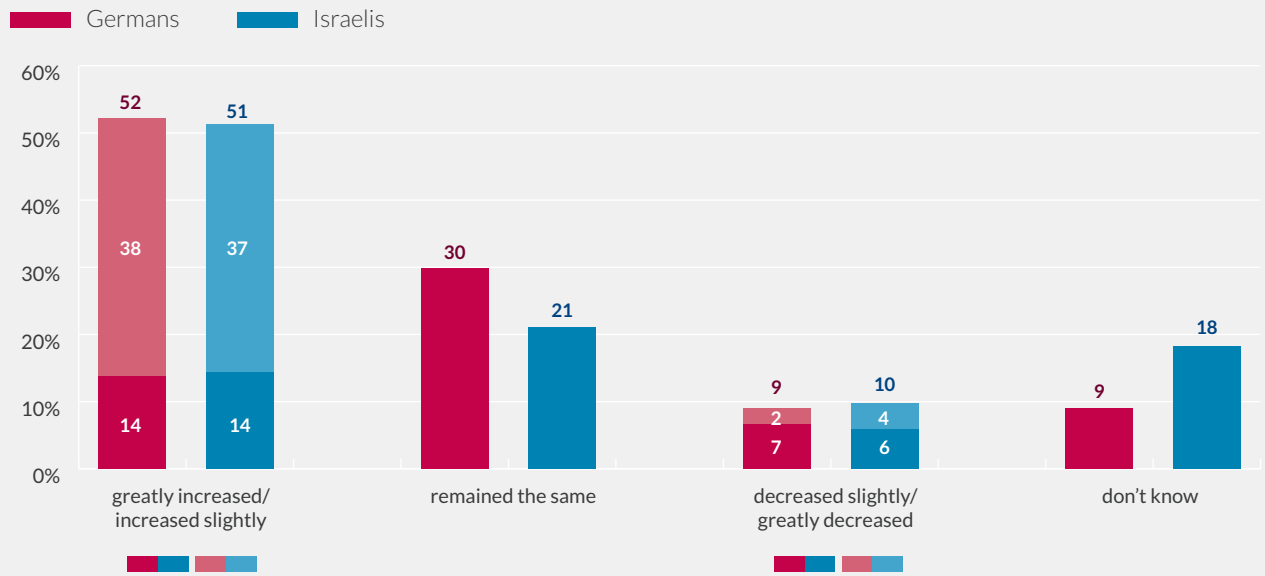
that discrimination against Jews is particularly pronounced in Germany. AfD voters are the ones least likely by far to say such discrimination exists.

In Israel, the age of the respondent as well as the degree of religiosity correlates strongly with his or her attitude on this issue. 37 percent of secular Israelis believe that Jews face discrimination in Germany, while traditional Jews support this view with 49 percent. Members of the older generation are least likely to say that Jews face discrimination in Germany (56 percent), while those under 40 express this view most often (69 percent).

Despite the widespread perception that Jews face discrimination in Germany, a clear majority of Germans (65 percent) nevertheless believe that Jews are generally safe in Germany (figure 34). Moreover, 44 percent are convinced that the German government is taking sufficient action to combat anti-Semitism (figure 35). Supporters of Alliance 90/The Greens are least likely to agree with

FIGURE 32

Do you think that anti-Semitism has increased, remained the same or decreased in Germany in the last five years?

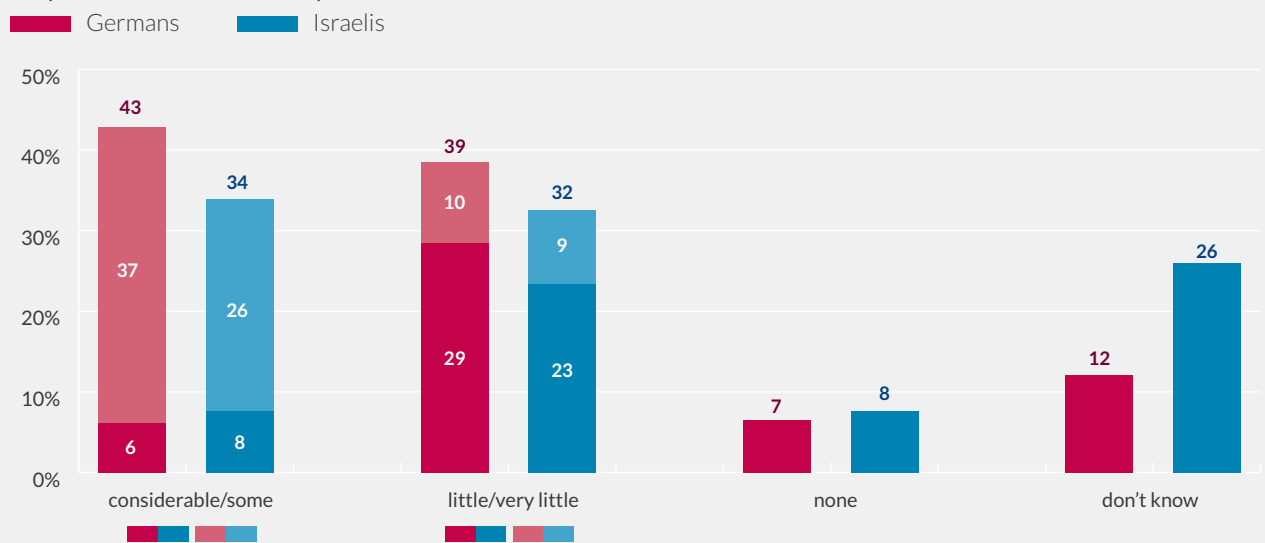


Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 33

Do you think Jews in Germany face ... discrimination?

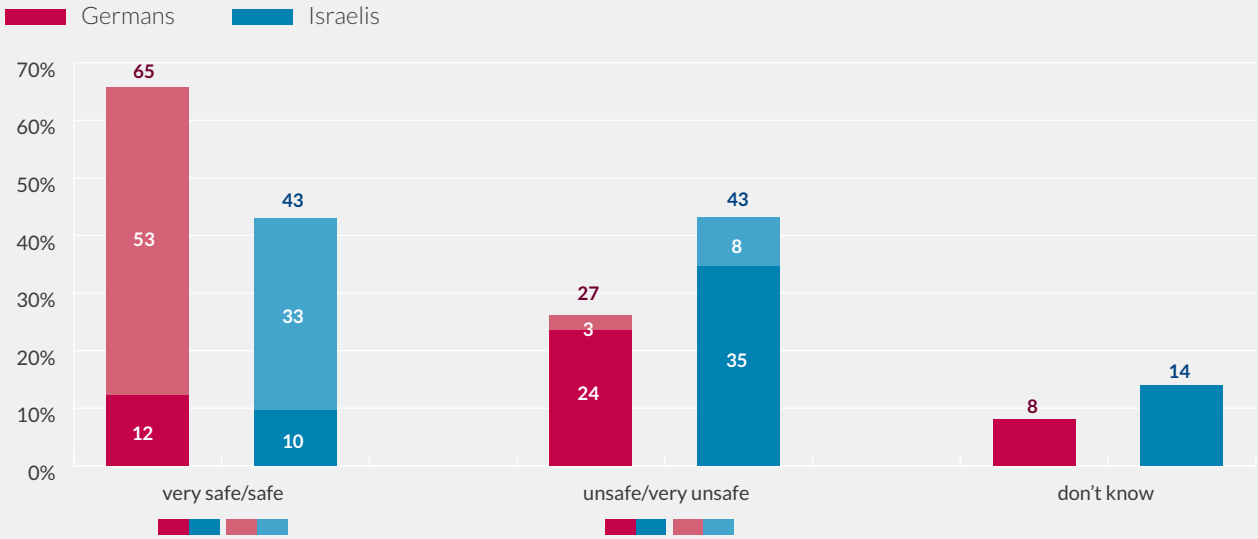


Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 34

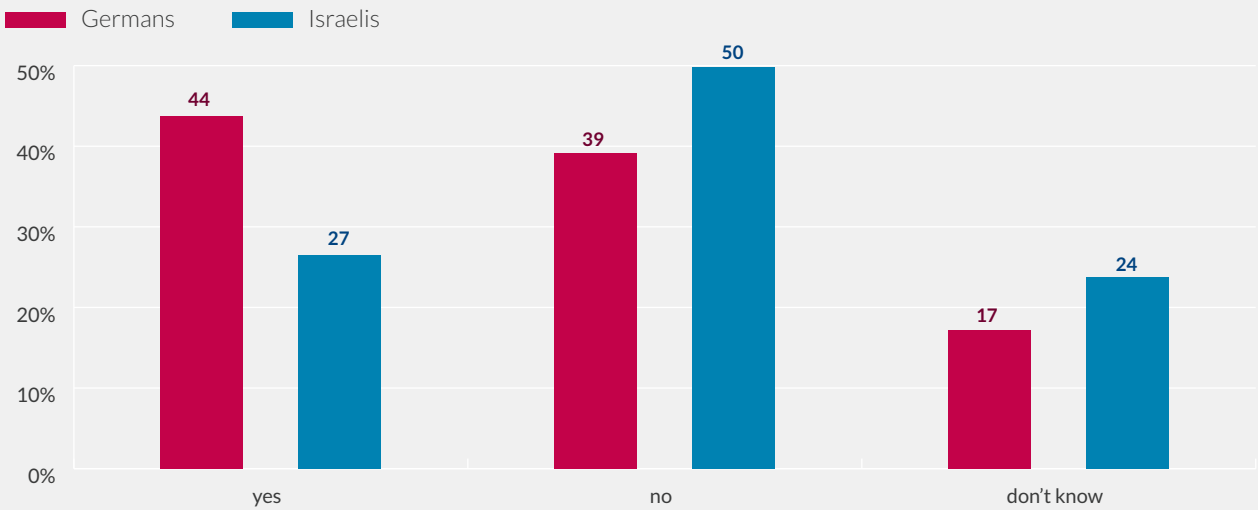
Do you think that Jews in Germany are safe?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 35

Do you think that German politicians are doing enough to protect Jews from being attacked?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

this viewpoint, a majority of whom (56 percent) feel that not enough is being done to combat discrimination against Jews. Israeli respondents also do not believe that Jews in Germany live in safety, with only 43 percent (and only 35 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds) holding that view. Among Jewish Israeli respondents, more than one in two (52 percent) believe that Jews are not safe in Germany.

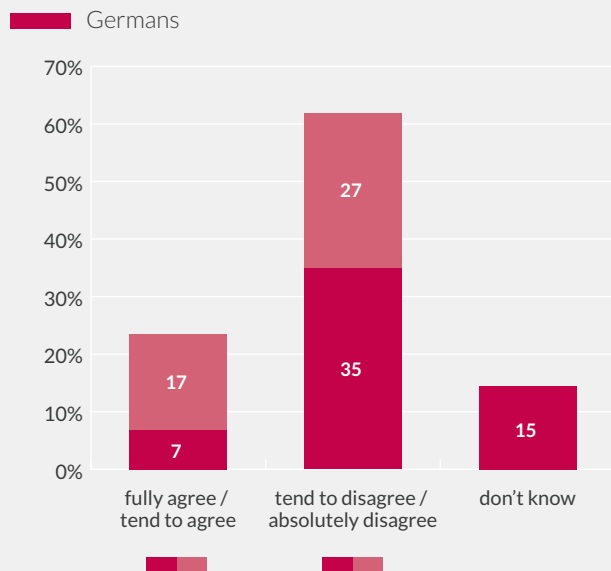
7.2 Anti-Semitic attitudes

Having asked about the presence of anti-Semitism in Germany, we were then interested in examining how widespread anti-Semitic thought patterns actually are. Anti-Semitic attitudes are usually described as a complex of stereotypical and derogatory beliefs and tropes. To assess how prevalent anti-Semitism is in Germany, respondents were presented with a series of questions about traditional and secondary

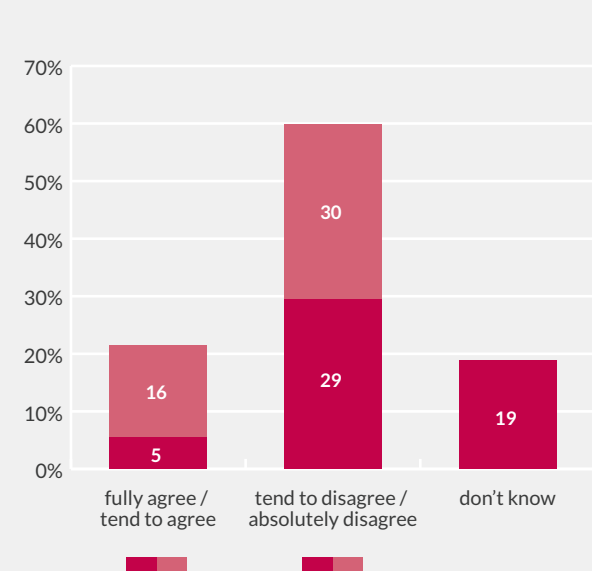
anti-Semitic attitudes, as well as critical thoughts comparing Israeli policies with Nazi crimes, with which they could agree or disagree. The study does not claim to evaluate anti-Semitic attitudes in Germany in all their complexity. Nevertheless, the responses allow the conclusion that anti-Semitism is a widespread social phenomenon in Germany: A large minority of Germans (between 20 and 30 percent of respondents) exhibit anti-Semitic attitudes to varying degrees. For example, 24 percent, or more than a quarter of German respondents, think that “Jews have too much influence in the world.” (figure 36). Among AfD voters, the figure is 48 percent, and among the mainstream CDU/CSU and SPD parties, it is still 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively. In contrast, voters for the Greens (14 percent), the FDP (14 percent) and the Left party (12 percent) agree with this statement much less frequently. In addition to party affiliation, the respondent’s age gives rise to the greatest differences here, with 30 percent

FIGURE 36

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
“Jews have too much influence in the world.”



“More than other people, Jews use tricks to get what they want.”

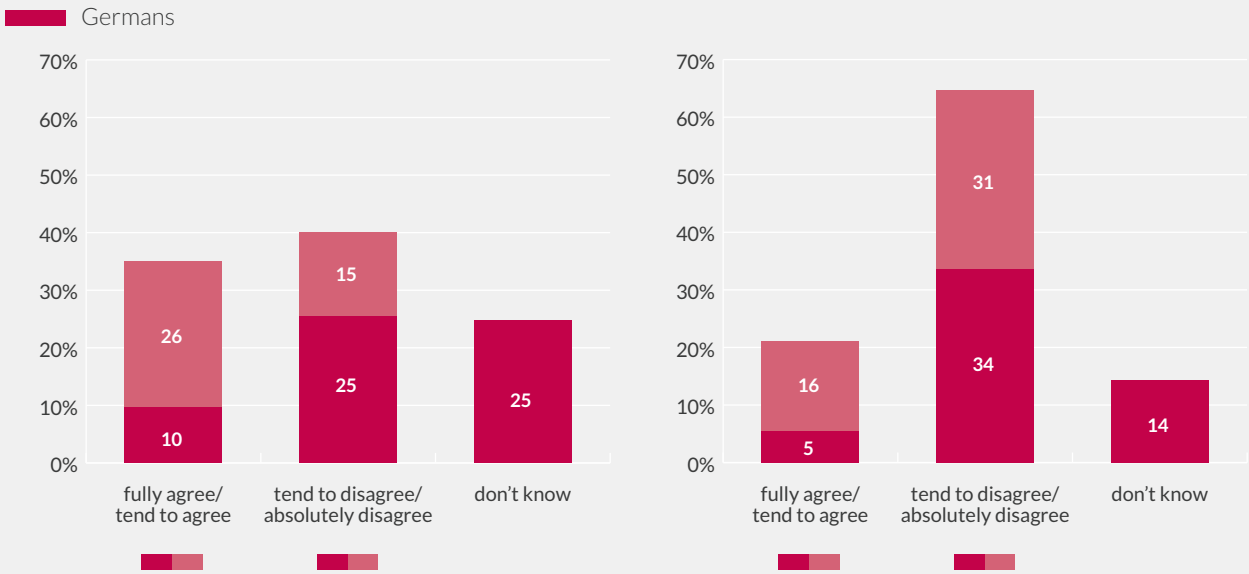


Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 37

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
 “What the state of Israeli is doing to the Palestinians today is essentially the same thing as what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich.”

“I find Jews increasingly less likeable because of Israel’s policies.”



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

of Germans over 60 saying Jews have too much influence in the world, compared to a substantially lower 13 percent for 18- to 29-year-olds.

Moreover, 21 percent of Germans agree with the statement that “Jews use tricks to get what they want.” Here, the level of education is decisive, as agreement decreases with greater educational attainment.

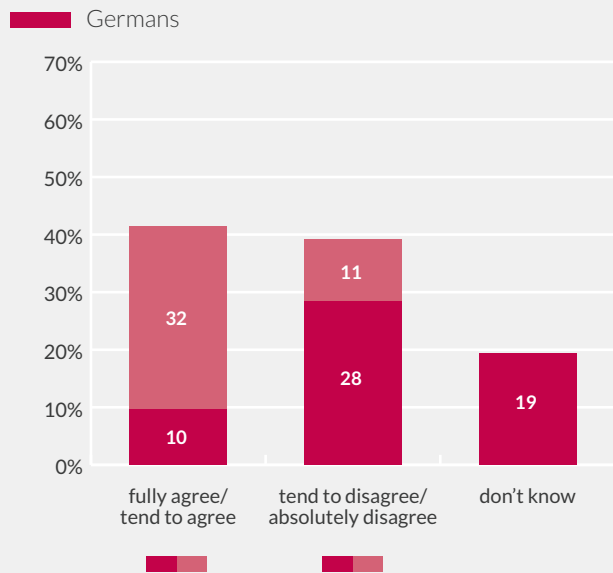
In addition to these traditional anti-Semitic attitudes, the state of Israel often functions as a projection screen for anti-Semitism, such as when Israeli policy toward the Palestinians is equated with Nazi crimes against Jews. For example, 21 percent agree with the statement that Jews as a whole are increasingly “less likeable as a result of Israel’s policies” (figure 37). Two-thirds of Germans

(65 percent) explicitly disagree with this statement, however. It is nevertheless striking that there is greater agreement with this form of Israel-related anti-Semitism than with traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes. This shows that anti-Semitic attitudes are expressed more openly when they are directed at Israel as a Jewish state. More than a third (36 percent) of Germans agree with the statement “What the state of Israeli is doing to the Palestinians today is essentially the same thing as what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich,” with the figures for CDU/CSU supporters (47 percent) and AfD supporters (47 percent) being higher than for voters from other parties.

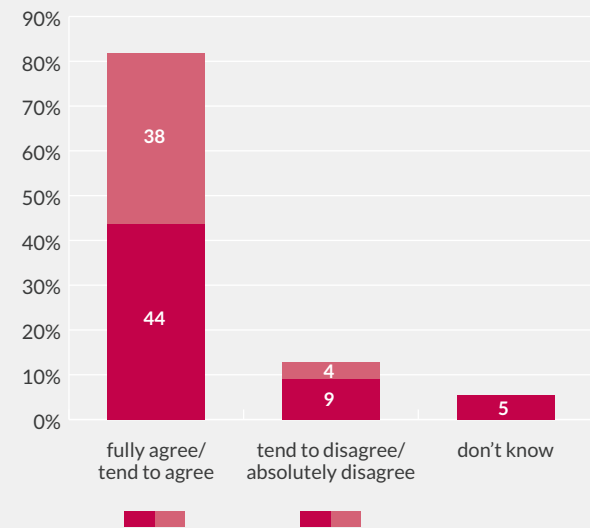
The share of Germans who compare the policies of the Nazi era with Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians thus clearly exceeds the cohort of

FIGURE 38

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
“Jews prefer to keep to themselves.”



“Jews are naturally a part of Germany.”



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

people who hold “traditional” anti-Semitic attitudes. Here, the previously noted correlations between gender, education and age, on the one hand, and anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish attitudes, on the other, become apparent once again. In general, less pronounced anti-Semitic attitudes can be found among women, those with higher levels of education, and younger Germans than among men, people with less education, and those who are older.

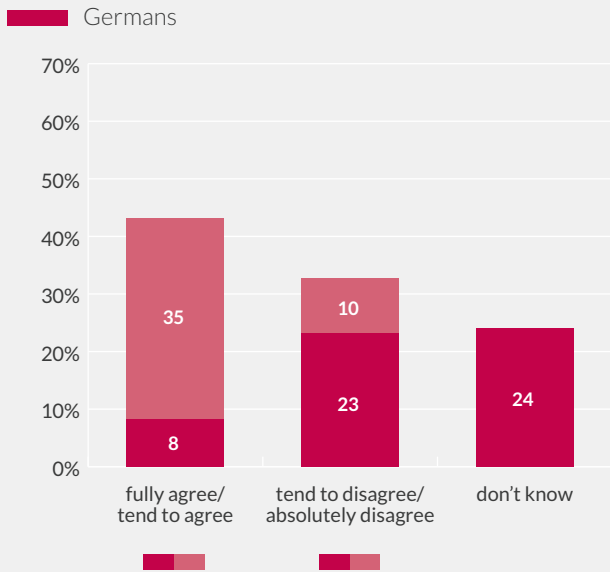
As already stated, non-Jewish Germans have relatively little contact with Jews even in comparison with people in other European countries, as a Europe-wide, online-based survey by the Bertelsmann Stiftung showed in 2020 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020). The fact that Jews are at least partly seen as different is reflected in responses to the assertion that they “prefer to keep to themselves,” a statement with which 42 percent of German respondents agreed (figure 38).

It must be noted, however, that this answer does not necessarily signal an anti-Semitic attitude, but can also reflect assumptions about Jewish life in Germany, which evinces strong inner-community ties for reasons having to do with culture, religion, history and, not least, security. This interpretation is supported by the fact that 82 percent of respondents regard Jews as naturally being part of Germany (among Germans with a high level of education, the figure is as high as 89 percent). At the same time, 13 percent of Germans and an above-average number of AfD supporters (31 percent) do not share the view that Jews are part of Germany.

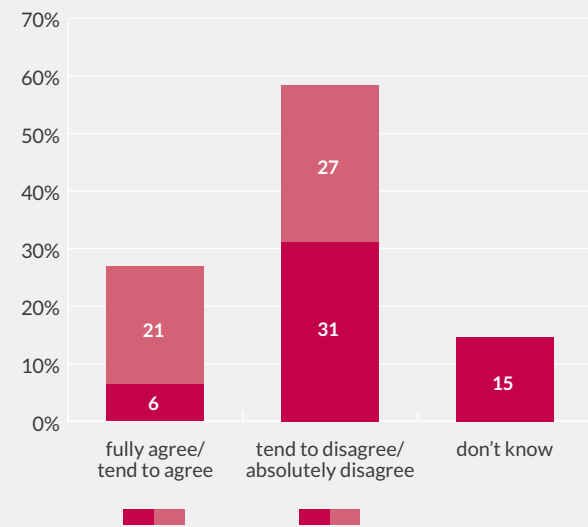
In a typical reversal of perpetrator and victim, Jews themselves are often blamed for anti-Semitism, an opinion held by 27 percent of the Germans surveyed (figure 39). There is significantly greater agreement with the statement that the Israeli government contributes to the existence of anti-Semitism (43

FIGURE 39

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
 “The Israeli government contributes to the fact that anti-Semitism exists.”



“Jews contribute to the fact that anti-Semitism exists.”



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

percent). This expresses an inability or unwillingness to distinguish between Jews as an ethno-religious group and the state of Israel. The transfer of responsibility for anti-Semitism to Israel’s politics can also be read as a kind of defense mechanism against guilt, which serves to exonerate both the individual and German society as a whole. This Israel-related version is clearly more widespread than “traditional” expressions of anti-Semitism.

Thus, while more than one in eight Germans tend to have traditional anti-Semitic attitudes and around one-third are receptive to criticism that compares Israel to Nazi Germany, one in nine Germans denies that Jews are part of Germany. These results are essentially consistent with findings from other quantitative studies examining anti-Semitic attitudes (see, e.g. American Jewish Committee 2022 and Decker and Brähler 2020). They confirm

that anti-Semitic tropes are in some cases deeply rooted in German society. It is noteworthy that respondents’ perceptions of anti-Semitism differ from measured reality, for example, when every second German considers anti-Semitism in Germany to be only a small or very small problem, but a majority of respondents also say they have observed an increase in anti-Semitism in the country over the past five years. This shows that raising awareness of anti-Semitism and combating its various forms remain a key challenge for German society.

It is also worrying that anti-Semitism is not a phenomenon exclusive to the political fringes. Although it is particularly prevalent among AfD supporters, anti-Semitic attitudes also find a home among supporters of the established democratic parties, especially when the topic at hand is Israel.

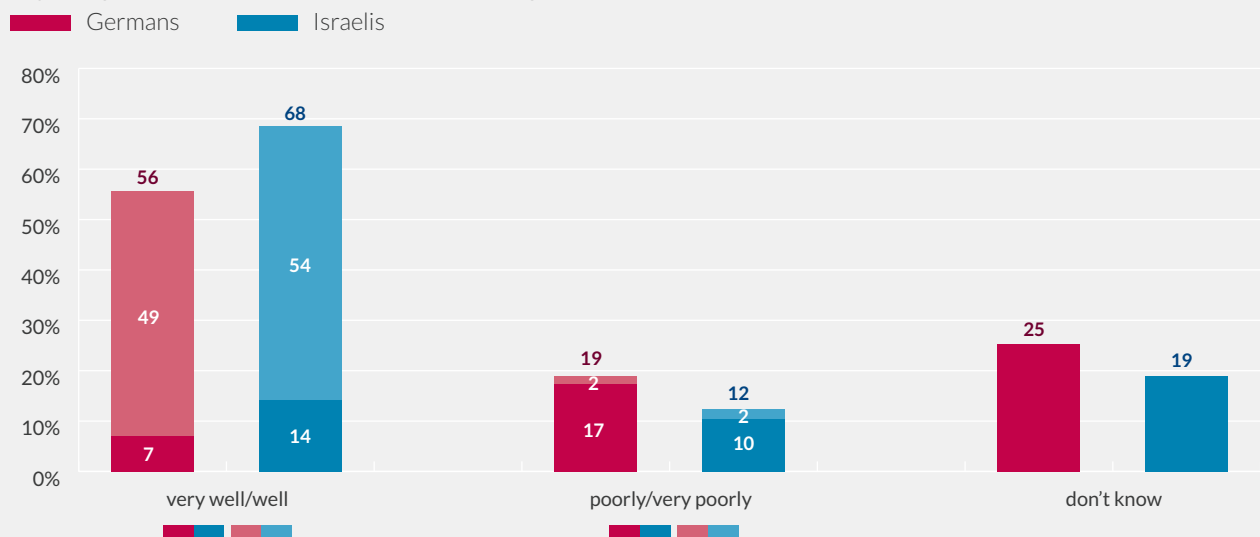
8 Perceptions of German-Israeli cooperation

During the survey, we also asked how the respondents perceive cooperation between Germany and Israel. The results show that both Germans and Israelis view the state of the countries' cooperation positively and discern concrete possibilities for further strengthening their relations. A majority on both sides (56 percent in Germany; 68 percent in Israel) believes that the cooperation between the two countries is working well or very well (figure 40). CDU/CSU supporters

give the most positive assessment, with 71 percent agreeing that Germany and Israel are cooperating successfully. In Israel, supporters of the liberal and European-oriented parties Yesh Atid (82 percent) and Kahol Lavan (89 percent) have a particularly positive view of the two states' relations. In both countries, the younger generation of people under 40 is somewhat more skeptical, with 41 percent in Germany and 63 percent in Israel thinking that the cooperation is working "well" or "very well".

FIGURE 40

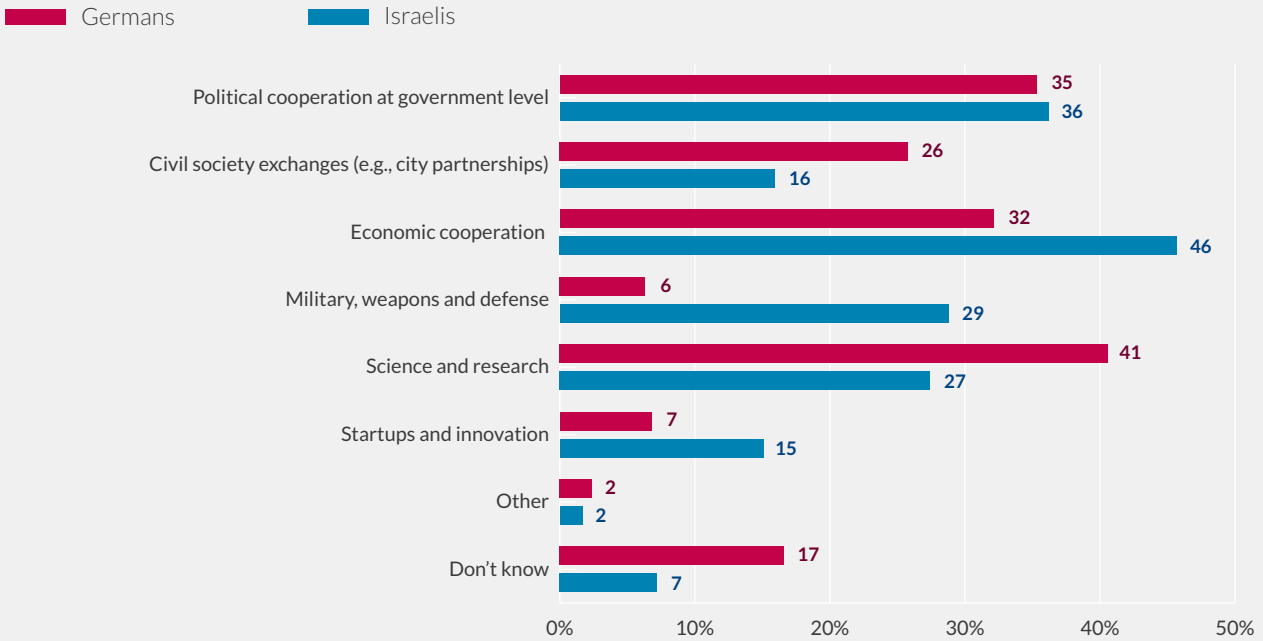
In your opinion, how well does German-Israeli cooperation work?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

FIGURE 41

In which two areas do you think Germany and Israel should cooperate particularly closely?



Percentages do not always sum to 100 percent due to rounding. | Multiple answers were possible.
 n = 1,271 Germans and 1,372 Israelis | Source: pollytix strategic research gmbh | © Bertelsmann Stiftung

A majority of those surveyed consider even closer cooperation between the two countries to be important, Israelis (78 percent) more so than Germans (53 percent). Measured against the fairly low level of interest respondents have in the other country (see Section 4.2 “Mutual interest and knowledgeability”), Israelis and Germans clearly see the importance of the other country as a partner for cooperation. When asked about the exact areas in which cooperation should be intensified, many respondents in both countries say an even closer political partnership on the governmental level would be desirable. Yet the most important tool for strategically expanding this political cooperation – the annual German-Israeli government consultations – has remained undeployed since 2018. This is regrettable for a variety of reasons, including the fact that resuming the consultations

would clearly accord with the respondents’ interests as expressed in the survey.

Science and research is the most frequently mentioned area in which the study’s German participants would like to see expanded cooperation with Israel, with 41 percent of them saying cooperation between Germany and Israel in this field would be desirable, followed by political and economic cooperation (figure 41). And while knowledge of the high quality of Israeli research is evidently more generally known than to just specialists, the desire for cooperation here does not translate into the hope for more partnerships in the area of “startups and innovation.” This is striking in that Israel, known as the “Startup Nation,” is considered an international leader in this area too. Nevertheless, only 7 percent of Germans consider

increased cooperation with Israel in this field to be important. And the Israelis themselves find other aspects more important: Only 15 percent mentioned “startups and innovation” as being relevant for German-Israeli exchange.

Additionally, more than a quarter of Germans (26 percent) consider an exchange with Israel in the area of civil society to be important; this field receives less attention on the Israeli side, with only 16 percent agreeing there should be more cooperation. The creation of a joint German-Israeli youth organization, which was initiated back in 2018, is an important project in this area that awaits implementation, as with the German-Israeli government consultations – an undertaking that is likely to be further delayed by changing Israeli governments.

Israelis, on the other hand, consider cooperation in the fields of economics and defense to be desirable, which most likely reflects Israel’s specific security interests, on the one hand, and the considerable importance of Israel’s ties to international markets, on the other. Almost one Israeli in two (46 percent) emphasizes the significance of economic cooperation with Germany. It is not surprising, however, that among the Germans surveyed, economic cooperation with Israel ranked only third (32 percent). Unlike Israel, which is geographically isolated, Germany is firmly integrated into the European single market. Moreover, given its comparatively small economy, Israel is less important economically for Germany than other countries.

Overall, it is clear that the majority of respondents in both countries have a positive view of the current state of cooperation, and that they can identify clear areas in which they believe the two countries should work together more closely. Moreover, although Germans and Israelis do in fact have different interests when it comes to the areas their bilateral partnership focuses on, they agree that “economic cooperation” and “political cooperation at government level” are two fields in particular in which their countries should work closely together in the future.

9 Conclusion: The future of German-Israeli relations

What do these results say about the future of German-Israeli relations?

Overall, relations between the two countries are currently well positioned. Since the Luxembourg Agreement 70 years ago, a robust foundation for political, economic and social exchange has been laid. This is the impressive result of the many contacts that people from both countries have developed over the decades. Nevertheless, there is an increased need for action in light of three challenges.

First, remembering and engaging with the Holocaust will remain one of the key tasks shaping future German-Israeli relations. The findings from our study do not indicate “commemoration fatigue” on the part of the Germans, as is sometimes assumed in the public debate. However, there is not complete agreement in Germany on how to deal with the history of the Holocaust, since almost one German in two is prepared to leave the past behind and spend less time discussing the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis. This poses a problem for the concrete shaping of bilateral relations in that the respondents in both countries are very divided about whether a special responsibility for Israel should be ascribed to Germany given its Nazi past. Whereas a majority (57 percent) of people in Israel feel this responsibility exists, only a minority (27 percent) of those in Germany agree that this is the case. Israelis therefore have expectations of Germany that a majority of Germans are not fully prepared to fulfill.

Younger respondents in Germany are a source of hope, since a sensitivity toward the history of the Holocaust seems to be more firmly anchored among

them than among other groups. Nevertheless, there remains an urgent need in both countries for a more intensive political and social discussion of the possibilities and limits of Germany’s special responsibility, including efforts to better understand the views of the other side. Within exchange programs, it would also be advisable to address the topic of the Holocaust and its ongoing significance as an integral part of the participants’ interactions with each other.

Second, it is important to note that the younger generations in both countries have very different backgrounds, so there is reason to be concerned that they are becoming increasingly alienated from one another. After all, young Germans and young Israelis are at home in different political and cultural settings and thus diverge in their assessments of important political issues.

The youngest German respondents in our survey, the group aged 18 to 29 years, demonstrate a profound historical awareness, especially of Jews in general and of the crimes committed against them. At the same time, they do not believe that obligations exist toward the state of Israel due to this history. In the survey, this is reflected in the fact that this group has a somewhat more negative opinion of the Israeli government, yet holds the opinion more firmly than all other age groups that Germany should do more to protect Israel’s interests internationally. This seeming ambivalence can be explained by the increased significance of the Holocaust for this cohort, since no age group rejects the demand for putting the past behind it more than this one. It is therefore consistent that the under-30s are also the

only group (by a large margin) in which a majority argues that the Holocaust should play a major role in present and future politics. Moreover, anti-Semitic sentiment is less prevalent among this group than among all other respondents. Overall, the findings for this group can therefore be summarized as follows: historical responsibility toward Jews, but not toward the state of Israel (see Section 5.3 “Responsibility as a consequence of the past”).

The younger Jewish generation in Israel, on the other hand, generally stands more to the right politically, both in terms of social issues and security policy relating to the Middle East, reflecting the aforementioned difference with German respondents of the same age. Young Israelis tend to see Jewish life in Germany as more threatened than other groups do. No age group is more convinced that Jews are unsafe in Germany or that Germany’s politicians do too little to combat anti-Jewish attitudes and protect Jews from being attacked. Israeli youth also tend to lean more to the right on security policy issues – for example, by calling more decidedly than other groups for unilateral German support for Israel, in contrast to young Germans, who are more in favor of treating both sides equally; by being more opposed to a possible two-state solution than all other age cohorts (including 18- to 29-year-old Germans); and by viewing a military strike more favorably than their compatriots of all other ages should Iran build a nuclear bomb.

What is needed to prevent young people in both countries from becoming alienated is a sociopolitical dialogue that is both politically and religiously inclusive. In view of the high birth rates that have persisted for years, especially among ultra-Orthodox Israelis (see, among others, Lintl 2020), it would also be advisable to address the issue of religious identity during networking activities and to make targeted efforts to include Israelis who define themselves as religious. Experience has shown that a certain fear of making contact often exists in this area, but it must be overcome if a dialogue among equals is to take place between participants from both countries. Favorable factors here include the fact that Germany’s younger generation tends to be

less susceptible to anti-Semitic stereotypes, wants to maintain the memory of the Holocaust, and would like to see Israel’s security and interests protected more than the older generation does. It would be wise to take advantage of these attitudes.

In Germany, third, it should be noted that the domestic political polarization of recent years has also had an impact on German-Israeli relations. As in many other contexts (such as the influx of refugees in 2015, the Covid pandemic and Russia’s war against Ukraine), serious differences exist between AfD voters and those of the other parties represented in the Bundestag – in terms of issues relating to democracy, commemorating the past and German-Israeli relations. For example, two-thirds of AfD supporters are in favor of seeing the country put its Nazi past behind it; at the same time, theirs is the only party in which a majority rejects the idea that Germany has a special responsibility for Israel due to that past. They also show a significantly stronger tendency toward anti-Semitic attitudes than supporters of the other parties in the Bundestag. However believing that anti-Semitic sentiments is present on the political fringes alone is shortsighted, since it has also been shown that anti-Semitism, especially as it relates to Israel, are present in the center of German society to an alarming degree. Whether such attitudes will influence German-Israeli relations in the future depends on the extent to which democratic forces beyond the political margins continue to set the tone when it comes to shaping relations between the two countries. Above all, however, society as a whole must make a decisive effort to combat anti-Semitism and must take preventive measures by promoting education and facilitating dialogue and personal contact.

One way of actively shaping relations is to expand cooperation between the two countries. While a majority of respondents are satisfied with current efforts, “political cooperation” and “economic cooperation” are the fields in which both sides would like to see a particularly intensive exchange in the future.

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11 Continuity despite change? Insights into the German–Israeli relationship

An afterword by Professor Dan Diner

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As communities, Germany and Israel are hardly congruous. Therefore, it is probably of little use to compare the two based on quantitative parameters, such as size, population and economic strength. Nevertheless, it is always worthwhile to juxtapose the two, draw conclusions and review developments from time to time. The reason for this is primarily, if not exclusively, “history.” From this historical perspective, it makes sense to examine how Israelis view Germany and, conversely, Germans Israel, and how the image each has of the other is changing against the backdrop of the past and, thus, the Holocaust.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to quantify what it is that sustains interest in the German–Israeli relationship as a result of history or the past. Surveys can be used as part of empirical social research to determine significant changes in the attitudes toward and the opinions of each other. And yet relating the findings on one side to the other in a meaningful way remains a challenge. Such difficulties – and this is an essential aspect – can undoubtedly be attributed to “history,” and thus to the Holocaust and its consequences, in only a secondary manner. What is crucial is that this already difficult nexus is overlaid with something else, something more immediate, namely, the completely different existential circumstances of life in the present.

The parameters of divergence begin not only with the fact that Germany is a comparatively rich society, but also that recent history has been quite kind to the Germans. It is not only that their country’s unexpected unity came about peacefully in the midst of a waning Cold War. Even before that, in the era of the old Federal Republic and during the worsening East–West antagonism, Germany was saved from dislocations of an existential nature by the presence of the United States and by advancing European integration.

This long-lasting state of peace, freedom and prosperity, combined with outside protection, has contributed to the development of an attitude toward life that – and this is a striking difference from Israel – does not know a permanent existential state of emergency. For Germans, feeling they live in a permanent state of security, peace and prosperity has become second nature.

Such enviable conditions have not been granted to Jewish and Arab Israelis, nor to Palestinians. And this remains true regardless of all the towering questions about causes, responsibility and guilt pertaining to the conflict that weighs on the people who live between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. What is crucial is that this political conflict is of existential importance for all those involved –

whether directly or indirectly, whether near or far. This extraordinary circumstance affects everything else.

This fundamental difference, which shapes the present, is one reason why the German and Israeli conditions cannot be compared with one another. This must be taken into account when – with a view to the past, i.e., “history” – comparisons are nonetheless made and possible changes in the attitudes of people in both countries are juxtaposed.

Whatever the insights that have emerged or will emerge from such investigations: The relationship between the two communities remains particularly complex despite any changes, because the perception and self-image of the one is constitutive for the perception and self-image of the other. Germany is not merely any country for Israel, just as Israel is not merely any country for Germany.

The findings

The data from the latest survey on German-Israeli relations and the resulting conclusions are in some respects remarkable. Above all, it is surprising that very little seems to have changed in the more than nine years since the last survey (which was published in 2015). What is particularly striking is that the majority of Germans surveyed have retained a positive image of Israel. In terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most feel that both parties need to make an effort to find common ground. Collective remembrance of the Holocaust does not occasion weariness, and if it does, then only to a negligible extent. Some 20 to 30 percent of Germans have anti-Semitic views, a figure that has not changed much since previous studies.

When the findings are differentiated by political party, varying attitudes can be seen toward Israel, Jews and the Holocaust, as expected. Supporters of the Greens, probably Germany’s most pro-Israel party, are at one end of the sympathy scale, while AfD voters can be found at the other. Christian

Democratic voters are also more pro-Israel than Social Democratic voters. When it comes to the need to combat anti-Semitism, a similar differentiation by party is evident: Here, too, supporters of the Greens, now joined by those of the Left party, prove to be the most committed.

The image that emerges from the survey does not harmonize with opinions published in print media and elsewhere. There, as in the cultural realm in general, voices have become more critical and even dismissive of Israel in recent years. Thus, a lacuna seems to have opened between the opinions surveyed by social researchers and those expressed in the press and other media. Moreover, the empirical surveys reveal a number of contradictions. For example, the supposedly stable, even static image of Germans having a predominantly positive attitude toward Israel and consistently rejecting anti-Semitism contrasts with a comparatively high rate of agreement of 36 percent with the statement that Jews (Israelis) behave toward Palestinians the way the Nazis behaved toward Jews. Such an attitude, where it is held, reveals two things: First, the Holocaust is little understood given its special significance as an absolute genocide. And thus, second, there is no perception of the striking difference to a bloody yet political conflict between two population groups over one and the same land.

If the results of the survey are indeed correct in all their incongruity, then it is reasonable to conclude that such different attitudes can certainly be compatible with one another. In the case of dramatic events, be they wars or other violent occurrences, this ambivalently predisposed attitude can swing in one direction or the other. Indeed, it looks very much as if the declaration “Israel is part of Germany’s *raison d’état*” can coexist in complex ambivalence with a critical or even negative attitude toward Israel.

What is undisputed is that the attitude Israelis have toward Germany has continuously changed for the better. While it is true that the Shoah remains a dominant reference point in Jewish-

Israeli consciousness and can be recalled in critical situations, this does not tarnish in any ongoing way the positive image Germany enjoys. It should come as no surprise that the opinion continues to prevail in Israel that Jews face fundamental threats in the world even beyond current anti-Semitic incidents. This attitude is inscribed a priori in Jewish statehood and is particularly pronounced vis-à-vis Germany. Younger respondents in particular can reliably access this sentiment, something that is undoubtedly due, among other things, to the fact that the worldview of younger people tends to be binary since they have yet to experience much of life. Among older Jewish Israelis, the image of Germany brightens given their more complex life experience and the accompanying greater ability to differentiate.

Political leanings also affect Israeli attitudes toward Germany: Supporters of more liberal and secular parties tend to have a moderate image of Germany, while Israelis who identify more strongly with nationalist parties tend to be more reserved toward Germans and Germany because of their attitude in general. Such party-related orientations vis-à-vis Germany have basically remained constant, having been observed ever since the conclusion of the Luxembourg Agreement on reparations in 1952 and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1965 – even if they grow more attenuated. The difference is, of course, that the left-wing opponents of relations with Germany from back then have disappeared. The right – the former Herut movement and its successor, today's Likud – has also transformed itself from a more “Polish” party into an increasingly “Mizrahi” one. For such political milieus, the attitude toward Germany has an emblematic rather than a substantive political significance.

The role of Arab Israelis

Arab Israelis, over 20 percent of the population, are difficult if not impossible to classify within the patterns of German-Israeli relations. Although they are Israeli citizens, they are also part of the

Palestinian people, who either live in the areas of the West Bank and Gaza occupied by Israel since 1967 or were expelled or fled to those areas or the surrounding Arab states in 1948. As Arab people, they are also part of the Arab nation – an awareness that has nevertheless tended to wane in recent decades. As members of the Muslim religious community (apart from a small number of Christian Palestinians), they belong to the Islamic ummah. Seen in this light, Arab Israelis have objective and subjective options for belonging to different communities, of which – given historical distortions and political trends – sometimes the Palestinian, sometimes the Arab and/or sometimes the Muslim comes to the fore.

In recent years, there has been an increasing “Israelization” of the country's Arab-Palestinian citizens, and the results of the present survey confirm this trend. Their social and economic integration has increased significantly, as has their standard of living. In some occupations, especially the medical field, Israel's Arab citizens have become indispensable. Without its Arab professionals – doctors and pharmacists, nurses and caregivers – the health care sector would be much more limited in its ability to function.

The participation of the Israeli-Islamic party Ra'am (United Arab List) in the current government should also be understood as an expression of this ongoing integration. This is a considerable innovation, not to say a qualitative political leap, and was made possible by the particular constellation that led to the formation of the last Israeli government. This government was held together by neutralizing or postponing, as far as possible, issues that might cause discord between the various ideological camps. In its form, this government served as an executive power that would probably be considered a “technocratic government” elsewhere. Its goal was to repair, in an interregnum, the damage done to the rule of law during Netanyahu's time in office. This “de-ideologization,” agreed upon for the political moment, made it possible for the Islamic Ra'am alliance to participate in the government to the

extent that the coalition was able to improve the administrative and social situation for Israel’s Arab population.

Paradoxically, what may also have favored the inclusion of Ra’am in the Israeli government – and this in contrast to the Arab Joint List, which remains in opposition – is precisely its Islamic character: Ra’am is less concerned with national and thus secular Palestinian aspirations than with the social betterment of Israel’s Arab population, which in the longer term would also include its recognition as a national cultural minority. In return, the party’s leadership is prepared to recognize the legitimacy of Israel’s Jewish nature – a revolutionary stance for an Arab party.

This trend toward an increased integration of Israel’s Arab population, as expressed in all of the above, is of course skating on thin ice. During the last Gaza war, in May 2021, clashes between Jewish and Arab Israelis demonstrated the conflict’s dramatic depths for both population groups. In this respect, two different, equally contradictory tendencies lie in close proximity here: civil integration and bloodstained disintegration. Although it evinces a completely different quality, this gap is reminiscent of the highly ambivalent attitudes German respondents have toward Israel, according to which pro-Israeli attitudes on the one hand can be compatible with an abrupt rejection of Israel on other points.

New perspectives on old questions

Arab Israelis do not play an active role in German–Israeli relations. Rather, they are likely to have an agnostic attitude toward Germany – apart from their propensity to see it as a tourist destination. This, too, may show that the German–Israeli relationship has European origins and thus reverberates with traces of the past. Whether this will remain so in the future is not certain. The abrupt generational change in German politics, the thematic shifts toward the climate crisis and digitization, and, not least, the

Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and its consequences (see below) testify to the major political upheavals coming to Europe and thus to Germany, which are more than mere fluctuations in emphasis.

The migration flows of recent decades have undoubtedly also had an influence on the German–Israeli relationship. They have changed the composition of the German population; experiences and collective narratives have been introduced that go beyond the country’s traditional canon of retrospection. This does not mean that a German historical consciousness that has evolved over a long period of time and an associated “culture of remembrance” are being “canceled,” as it were. Rather, one must assume and hope that those painfully gained insights can be renegotiated on the basis of ethical convictions that are accessible to all and can be communicated to “others.”

This offers the prospect that the questions which have determined German–Jewish–Israeli relations in recent decades will not lose their significance, but will evolve and become more generalized in the course of that evolution. As it acquires intercultural significance, such a discourse will continue to consider the “old” questions, albeit in expanded form. It will address the singularity of the Holocaust in comparison with other genocides and the legitimacy of Israel, which ensues from that event, without disregarding others’ experiences of suffering. How these impending changes will shape the future and thus the German–Israeli relationship remains an open question, however. Yet one thing is certain: New collective insights will have to be negotiated in keeping with the singularity of the Holocaust, the memory of various forms of colonial violence, and the recognition of past injustices.

A postscript to Russia's attack on Ukraine

The “turning point” brought about by the Russian war in and against Ukraine sent shock waves in all directions. Israel could not remain unaffected by this. As Russia's immediate neighbor in Syria, the Jewish state is obliged to show considerable caution. And although it is a close ally of the United States and has ample sympathy for Ukraine, it seeks to demonstrate something like restrained neutrality. Jewish history in Eastern Europe and the collective Jewish memory shaped by it have also led Israel, as a Jewish state, to position itself between Russia and Ukraine.

This “turning point,” however, is likely to find its way into ongoing discourses in Europe and especially Germany on the question of how to assess genocides, the Holocaust and colonial crimes. The postcolonial debate has been strongly focused on historical events that have occurred on the vertical North-South axis and that reference the Global South. The current return of war to Europe means that they are again being overlaid with the traditional continental and thus horizontally oriented West-East axis. This evokes interpretations that we know from the 19th century, including “Jewish questions” and narratives of anti-Semitic global conspiracies.

Dan Diner, May 2022

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