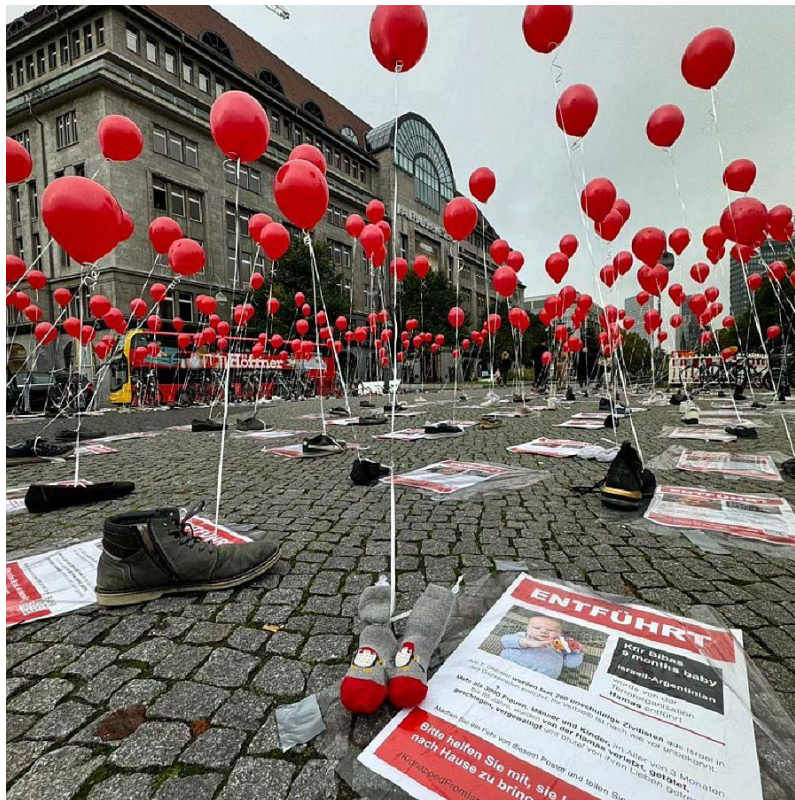


October 7, One Year Later: Resilience and Coping Among Jews in Germany Amid Rising Antisemitism and Collective Trauma

Preliminary Report – Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

The October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel marked a significant turning point for Jewish communities worldwide, including in Germany. This study explored the experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies of Jewish individuals in Germany in the aftermath of these events. Our research aimed to provide a preliminary but thorough understanding of how Jews in Germany, with or without Israeli migration background, navigated the complex emotional landscape of collective trauma and rising antisemitism.

The primary objectives of this study were to: (1) Examine the immediate and ongoing impacts of the October 7 events on Jewish individuals in Germany; (2) Investigate changes in experiences of antisemitism and perceptions of societal responses; (3) Identify coping strategies and resilience mechanisms employed by Jewish individuals; (4) Explore the influence of these events on Jewish identity and community engagement; (5) and assess concerns and hopes for the future of Jewish life in Germany.

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 18 Jewish individuals living in Germany, including both Israeli and non-Israeli backgrounds. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 68 years old and represented diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of religious observance. Interviews were conducted in German, English, or Hebrew, according to participant preference.

Our analytical approach employed qualitative network analysis, utilizing network centrality measures such as weighted degree, PageRank, and clustering. This innovative method allowed us to identify both prominent themes and unique experiences, providing a comprehensive view of the data's structure and interconnections.

Key findings:

Profound Emotional Disruption and Trauma: The October 7 attacks precipitated a significant disruption in the lives of many interviewees. Participants reported intense and prolonged emotions, including shock, fear, anger, and sadness. Some experienced symptoms reminiscent of post-traumatic stress, such as intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and hypervigilance. This emotional distress was often exacerbated by obsessive news consumption and personal connections to Israel.

Changes in Social Relationships: A concerning trend of social withdrawal emerged, with many participants distancing themselves from non-Jewish acquaintances due to perceived lack of support or understanding. This erosion of social bonds, particularly for those with Israeli backgrounds, reflects ongoing challenges in integrating Jewish and German identities. The loss of these support networks may increase vulnerability to the psychological impacts of antisemitism and collective trauma.

Nevertheless, many participants reported a strengthening of their Jewish identity in response to the attacks and subsequent rise in antisemitism, aligning with the rejection-identification model. Accordingly, we observed a notable increase in community engagement and activism among Jewish individuals in Germany following the October 7 attacks. Many participants reported strengthening ties within Jewish and Israeli communities, often as a response to perceived lack of understanding from broader German society. This heightened community involvement manifested in various forms, including increased participation in Jewish cultural events, religious observances, and community support networks.

Concurrently, we observed among some participants significant involvement in activism, with participants engaging in public demonstrations, social media campaigns, and educational initiatives to combat antisemitism and raise awareness about Jewish issues. This surge in identification, community involvement, and activism appeared to serve dual purposes: as a coping mechanism in the face of collective trauma and as a means of asserting Jewish identity in an increasingly challenging environment.

Pervasive Sense of Insecurity and Vigilance: Participants reported a heightened sense of insecurity and increased caution in expressing their Jewish identity in public. Many felt unsafe, particularly in areas with large Muslim or Arab populations, leading to behavioral changes such as concealing Jewish identity markers or avoiding speaking Hebrew in public. This climate of fear raises concerns about the long-term viability of Jewish life in Germany and its impact on future generations.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest several key recommendations to address challenges faced by the Jewish community in Germany. We propose implementing targeted mental health support services to address trauma and anxiety, while also developing programs that strengthen both in-group networks and connections with broader German society. To enhance security, we recommend strengthening legal protections against antisemitism and improving education about Jewish history and contemporary issues. Supporting the safe expression of Jewish identity in public spaces and fostering interfaith understanding through community events could promote social cohesion. Lastly, we suggest developing long-term strategies to address the integration of Jewish and German identities, aiming to create a more inclusive society. These measures collectively seek to improve the environment for Jewish life in Germany while fostering greater societal understanding and cohesion.

While our study focused on the German context, many of these implications likely resonate with Jewish communities in other countries facing similar challenges, highlighting the potential for international collaboration in addressing these complex issues.

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