

# The more Germans know about the Mideast, the more they root for the Palestinians

**A new study finds that most Germans who oppose Israel's Palestinian policies are not anti-Semitic, but pro-peace and human rights.**

By [Akiva Eldar](#) | Jun.26, 2012 | 5:32 AM | 4



Official Jerusalem hasn't been caught saying a bad word about the Muslim Brotherhood victory in the Egyptian elections and probably won't have any slips of the tongue regarding the president-elect, Mohammed Morsi. All these years we've been saying that a secure peace is made with democratic regimes. And a democratic regime is what Egyptian democracy has managed to produce as a result of the protests in Tahrir Square.

The problems will start when people from the lunatic right decide the time has come to take over a few more houses in Silwan in East Jerusalem, or to refurbish some gate on the Temple Mount, Haram al-Sharif to the Arabs. Then we will hear that the worsening of relations with Egypt has nothing to do with the flourishing of the settlements or the withering of the peace process. That is when they will explain to us that it all starts from the anti-Semitism, rooted deep in the religion of Islam. Just like the European criticism of the government stems from Christian anti-Semitism.

Last year I wrote here about the book "Muslim Attitudes to Jews and Israel," edited by Prof. Moshe Ma'oz ("How can Israel change Muslim extremists' attitude toward Israel?" March 29, 2011 ). The book questions the common perception that Islam is anti-Semitic and anti-Israel. According to the Middle East scholar from Jerusalem, most researchers of Islam agree that along with periods of oppression and persecution, the Jewish

communities in the Islamic countries enjoyed long eras of coexistence and tolerance. Ma'oz stresses that most of the regimes in the Arab and Muslim world, and most leading Muslim clerics, have adapted pragmatic attitudes toward Israel and the Jews. He pointed out the close connection between the occupation in the territories, the dispute regarding the Jerusalem sites that are sacred to Islam and the strengthening of the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel tendencies in the Muslim world.

A new study conducted recently in Germany also knocks the ground out from under the assertion that most of Israel's critics in Europe are anti-Semitic. In presenting the findings of his research at a conference held last month in Konstanz (Germany), political psychologist Wilhelm Kempf related that both Muslim and Jewish colleagues initially voiced the suspicion that he was aiming to label criticism of Israel in the context of the conflict with the Palestinians as anti-Semitism. The findings were far more complex; 45 percent of the Germans who participated in the study interpreted the conflict in terms of the value of peace. One-third of them showed pro-Palestinian tendencies and 12 percent expressed pro-Israeli opinions.

A vast majority of Germans, 69.4 percent, were relatively supportive to very supportive of the Palestinian side. Kempf divides them into two groups: The smaller group is characterized by clearly pro-Palestinian positions and strong anti-Semitic prejudices (25.7 percent ). The rest of the respondents who criticized Israel (43.7 percent ) have strong to very strong pro-Palestinian opinions, but almost completely reject anti-Semitic prejudices. Only a small sub-group of the most radical of these critics (2 percent ) displays some anti-Semitic prejudices.

Kempf, who is one of the leading political psychologists in the world, found that the non-anti-Semitic critics of Israel are more knowledgeable about the conflict and feel greater emotional closeness to it than those who are anti-Semitic. They also have a stronger orientation toward peace and human rights.

The study shows a correlation between the level of support for the Palestinians and the extent of the familiarity and emotional involvement with the conflict. Among the anti-Semitic critics of Israel, the situation is completely different. Kempf found an inverse relationship between the degree of their support for the Palestinians and their emotional involvement in the conflict. The members of this group showed less concern for violations of human rights. It emerged that most of the anti-Semitic critics of Israel are not worried about the situation of the Palestinians; their degree of support for the Palestinians is, in fact, less than that of Germans who are not anti-Semitic.

By way of contrast, the non-anti-Semitic critics of Israel, who position themselves in a peace frame, reject both anti-Semitic and anti-Palestinian prejudices. While the more radical among them display anti-Zionist and anti-Israel attitudes, most showed awareness of Israel's security dilemmas and expressed uncertainty as to the amount of security a peace agreement will offer its citizens. The vast majority of them rejected all types of prejudices, be they anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, anti-Israeli or anti-Palestinian.

Still, Kempf points out that there is a danger that those critics who are not motivated by anti-Semitism are liable to gradually develop anti-Semitic prejudices. And he notes that Germans who were most radically in favor of the Palestinians could be divided into two groups, one of which believes that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian "shows the true face of the Jews." They also tend to accept the theory of an international Jewish conspiracy, which enables Israel to implement its policies. For this reason, they want to "close the books" on the German-Jewish past.

"In view of these findings," wrote Kempf in his conclusions, "we must ask what is actually behind this and what consequences it can have for the revival of anti-Semitic prejudices if the German Parliament and the German media tar all criticism of Israel with the same brush and brand it as anti-Semitic."

Kempf offered as a clear example of this the uproar engendered by writer Gunter Grass's criticism of Israel. "If one is sufficiently naive, it is all too easy to again see behind this an international Jewish conspiracy," he wrote.

When young Germans demonstrate opposite the Israeli embassy in Berlin to protest the destruction of energy installations the German government donated to Palestinians in the Hebron hills, Benjamin Netanyahu would do well not to tell us about the Holocaust. And when Egyptian President Morsi shuts down his country's embassy in Tel Aviv, to protest Israel's settlement mania, Netanyahu would do well not to tell us that "it's not because of 1967, it's because of 1948."