
MORE THAN 800 ATTACKS ON GERMAN POLITICIANS SO FAR THIS YEAR

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The German government has released statistics that reveal the extent of politically motivated attacks on public servants, mainly by right-wing extremists. Local politicians are often most vulnerable.

"I have been physically attacked, there were threats of murder and violence, with people saying things like 'shot to the head' or 'we're going to get you.'" For months now, this has been the bitter reality for Jürgen Kasek, the head of the Green party in the state of Saxony. Speaking with DW, he related how insulting billboards were hung by the motorway, his law firm's signs were vandalized, and negative reviews about him were spread on the internet. The worst, he says, was when his parents were threatened with an arson attack on their home.

Many other politicians at the local, state, and federal levels have had experiences similar to Kasek's, regardless of their party affiliation. The proof is in the police files: Politicians are routinely spat on, pushed, kicked, or pelted with objects. Investigators now have the statistics to prove how certain groups within the population are becoming more and more radical.

Shocking figures

The statistics were compiled by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) for the Interior Ministry. And they tell a shocking story: Since the start of the year, there have been more than 800 attacks on public servants, including 18 direct physical assaults.

As a rule, politicians are not normally singled out as a victim category in crime statistics. But a spokeswoman for the BKA said that charges were increasingly being filed in connection with clashes centering on Germany's refugee policy. For the first time, it was possible to document the hatred.

[Deutschland Schießerei im Leipziger Rockermilieu (picture-alliance/dpa/S. Willnow)]

Police protection required? Some politicians want to close off venues for security

The most common crimes are coercion, threats, damage to property, inciting hatred, and arson. There were 384 attacks by right-wing extremists, and 97 by left-wing extremists. Many incidents could not clearly be attributed. Frequently, the reasons for the attacks were not clear. Most of the written threats indicated unhappiness with political decisions.

Local politicians particularly affected

Götz Ulrich, a county commissioner for Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative Christian Democrats (CDU), told the newspaper "Die Zeit" that he was physically assaulted by a member of the far-right NPD because he was forbidden from putting up certain posters. Last year, the paper conducted a nationwide survey, asking politicians about their experiences with violence. Parliamentarians reported being followed and having fireworks thrown at them.

"People feel less inhibited than they used to," said Baden-Württemberg State Premier Winfried Kretschmann. He added that, in his experience, most of the attacks occur over social networks. Many parliamentarians report that hate mail has become a daily occurrence. But it seems that local politicians bear the brunt. Roland Dantz, an independent who serves as the mayor of Kamenz once received a letter describing him as "human garbage" and suggesting he be burnt alive. Local politicians face threats everywhere they go. Attacks can happen at their party offices or at their homes. Attackers frequently throw stones or slash car tires. Federal Justice Minister Heiko Maas once found a bullet in his mailbox. And a pig's head was found hanging in front of Angela Merkel's campaign office.

Perpetrators must be brought to justice

Figures from the Bavarian State Security Office reveal that a particularly high proportion of attacks are directed at politicians such as local mayors or county commissioners. But neither the Interior Ministry nor the BKA plan any further official evaluation of the statistics. Ralf Jäger, the interior minister for North Rhine-Westphalia also said that he has no plans to do an east-west comparison, despite having access to national figures. In an interview with public broadcaster WDR in Düsseldorf, he said that the authorities must continue to pursue neo-Nazis and other extremists across the country. The goal is to find all the perpetrators and bring them before court.

[Köln Messerattacke auf OB-Spitzenkandidatin Henriette Reker (picture-alliance/dpa/F. Gambarini)]

Cologne: Politician Henriette Reker was attacked with a knife on a public street

The prominent attack last year on Henriette Reker, now mayor of Cologne, showed that western Germany is no stranger to such incidents. The day before she was elected, Reker was stabbed by a man opposed to her stance on immigration. Despite being seriously injured, she survived the attack.

Giving up not an option

Last year in Tröglitz, Saxony-Anhalt former mayor Markus Nierth was so intimidated by neo-Nazis opposed to his plan to shelter 40 asylum seekers that he quit his job. At the time, he said he did so in order to protect his family. Jürgen Kasek, the threatened Green politician from Saxony, says he's hoping for a different outcome. "I have become more careful and I've taken extra security precautions for myself and my family, but giving up is not an option. That would mean that the others had won."

Kaynak/Source: