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OPINION

# The Halle attack was a watershed moment for German Jews. Will the German government rise to the challenge?



RABBI PINCHAS GOLDSCHMIDT

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People mourn at the entrance to the synagogue in Halle the day after a gunman targeted the house of worship in eastern Germany, Oct. 10, 2019. (Jens Schlueter/Getty Images)

MOSCOW (JTA) – The deadly attack against a synagogue in Halle by a far-right extremist on Yom Kippur could have ended not unlike the Pittsburgh massacre or the attack against a mosque in New Zealand, with dozens of worshippers killed by a lone wolf influenced by racist Nazi theories.





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Thanks to security procedures practiced by almost all European Jewish congregations, even in the absence of an armed police presence – a fact that was criticized by the Central Council of German Jews – a far worse outcome was prevented.

This attack, however, is a watershed moment for Germany's Jews. With the exception of a still unsolved arson attack against a synagogue in Munich in 1970, when seven Jewish elders were burned to death, Halle was the deadliest far-right attack against a synagogue since Kristallnacht in 1938.

Germany's government has done much to re-create its Jewish community, opening the gates to over 100,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union. The community has flourished, establishing the prewar rabbinical seminaries and schools. Germany and Monaco are the only two countries in Europe where the Jewish population is growing in numbers.

But this revival is seriously tested now. The weakening of Chancellor Angela Merkel because of a much-criticized immigration policy has brought a revived extreme right into the center of the political arena.

Especially in the eastern part of Germany, where the economic situation is worse, the extreme right has found much support. In some areas, the established center-right Christian Democratic Union party promotes a ban on Muslim and Jewish ritual slaughter, co-opting a far-right anti-immigration policy in order to draw voters back to the center.

The attacker in Halle, as many political commentators and government officials in Germany have stated, has been emboldened by the revitalized political far right in Germany.

If the German government does not want to see an exodus of Jews, like the one that has taken place in France, it must act now to reassure the nation's Jews of their personal and communal security.

With threats coming from radical Islam on the left and Nazis on the right, the Jewish community has to feel that the government is doing everything to ensure its safety. Just last





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Friday, an immigrant from Syria was apprehended with a knife in front of the historic Oranienburgstrasse Synagogue in Berlin, only to be released a short time later with no charges.

The uncontrolled hate material available to any unhappy or disturbed person on social media is a threat to the future of any society and country. The responsible authorities mandated to fight anti-Semitism in Germany, and all of Europe, must tackle this challenge in order to ensure the safety of all their citizens.



**RABBI PINCHAS GOLDSCHMIDT**

is the Chief Rabbi of Moscow and serves as President of the Conference of European Rabbis.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of JTA or its parent company, 70 Faces Media.

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