



By: TA | AP Insight

Could the deadly Berlin Pride attack have been prevented?



Berliners mourned Monday after the deadly attack near the city's Pride festival as questions mounted over how **the suspect** was able to move freely following a conviction linked to his ties to the Islamic State group.

The 21-year-old Abdul Ballout, a German citizen, was killed following a search that lasted nearly 24 hours after Saturday night's attack in downtown Berlin.

He was suspected of driving a van into a crowd near the **Pride festival** before apparently cutting others with a machete in what authorities believe was an **extremist terror attack**.

One woman was killed. Berlin Mayor Kai Wegner said she was a Polish citizen who was in Berlin with her daughter. Twenty-nine people were injured.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Monday wanted to know how the attack could have been prevented. Prosecutors said Ballout previously sought to join IS.

"We must do everything to protect people in Germany as best possible from such criminals, from dangerous people who for whatever reason can't be taken into custody," Merz said.

Officials seek answers about suspect's sentencing

Ballout, who was born in Germany and has Lebanese roots, traveled to Lebanon in 2025 with the goal of going to Syria to join the Islamic State group, Berlin prosecutors said.

He made contact with several people who were presumed members — or at least he believed them to be, prosecutors said.

He was arrested in Lebanon and sentenced by a military court to three months' imprisonment for offenses including incitement to religious and sectarian conflict.

He returned to Germany after completing his

sentence, where he was arrested at the Berlin airport.

In May, a juvenile court in Berlin convicted Ballout of preparing a serious act of violence endangering the state, as well as publishing Islamic State propaganda on his Instagram account and other charges, prosecutors said.

He was sentenced to one year and 10 months in youth custody, which Berlin prosecutors appealed.

It did not make sense why he was on the streets - Alexander Dobrindt

Offenders who are 18 to 21 can be prosecuted in Germany's juvenile system. Officials have said Ballout was given a suspended sentence.

The Berlin courts, however, said his sentence had not been suspended but they had been determining whether it should be.

The court said it released him because he was no longer in pretrial detention, which had been particularly long, and he did not meet statutory requirements governing flight risk, reoffending and other factors.

Some German officials questioned the court's decision. They vowed to investigate how Ballout ended up free and whether juvenile sentencing, sometimes seen as too lenient, needs to be reformed.

Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt, in an interview with public broadcaster ZDF, said that considering Ballout's conviction and history of supporting the Islamic State group, it did not make sense why he was on the streets.

"You can assume that it certainly would have made sense to put this person in custody," he said.

During an interview with regional broadcaster RBB, Berlin's mayor said he didn't want to question the court system's independence but

in this case, “words fail me.”

Deradicalization experts believed he was unwilling to change

The court ordered Ballout to attend a deradicalization program for high-risk offenders.

He was evaluated twice by the Berlin-based Violence Prevention Network, which works with people at risk from right-wing extremism and Islamism.

The organization defines deradicalization as a person successfully detaching from extremism ideology and distancing themselves from violence.

Ballout was scheduled to meet with their staff Monday for his third and final evaluation, according to Cornelia Lotthammer, the nongovernmental organization's public relations director.

The staff expected to tell the court that Ballout was not a candidate for their program because he sought to misrepresent himself as a friendly person who was not an extremist and therefore did not need to be deradicalized.

“Normally high-risk people are very convinced of themselves and of their ideology, and they would propagate it within those sessions,” Lotthammer said. “And then it’s easier to work with them. This is not a typical incident.”

Everybody knew that he was a high-risk person - Cornelia Lotthammer

Ballout appeared to try to anticipate what the staff wanted to hear, she said.

“They could see that he is a problem. I mean, everybody knew that he was a high-risk person,” she said. “But still, if he does not work together with our colleagues, then we can’t do

anything.”

She added: “But nobody would have said, ‘He’s not a threat, just let him go.’”

He did not seem to be planning any attacks, Lotthammer said. If the staff had any indication otherwise, they would have involved law enforcement.

Ballout would have had to find another organization to work with, or he might have been sent back to prison, Lotthammer said.

She declined to comment on whether their organization believed Ballout should have been released from detention, calling that the court's jurisdiction.

Tragedy comes ahead of major German elections

Three German states including Berlin hold **elections** in September. The attack is likely to feed into campaigning, and there are fears that anti-migrant rhetoric could boost the far right.



Kristin Brinker, AfD's local leader in Berlin, asked how a supporter of the Islamic State group was able to move freely in Germany after being in custody

A string of deadly attacks committed by immigrants was one factor in the 2025 national election in which the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, finished second.

AfD has assailed the government over migration and capitalized on discontent with other issues. In the eastern state of Saxony-

Anhalt, it hopes to get its first state governor.

Kristin Brinker, AfD's local leader in Berlin, asked on X how a supporter of the Islamic State group was able to move freely in Germany after being in custody.

"Who bears responsibility for that in the city government?" she said.