

## STATISTICIANS IN HISTORY

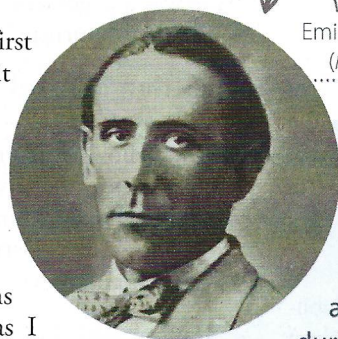
# Emil Gumbel: Statistician and Courageous Apostle of Peace

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In the spring of 2024, I took my first trip to Berlin, Germany, to visit my eldest son and his wife. While there, I was visiting the Brandenburg Gate when I decided to visit a nearby history museum named *Topographie des Terrors*, translated to English as “Topography of Terror.” Statistics and statisticians were furthest from my thoughts as I looked at the chilling history of crimes against humanity that took place during World War II. Yet, I noted one exhibit titled “Chronicler of Political Murder,” which is about a German mathematician at Heidelberg University. The mathematician’s name, Emil Gumbel, seemed familiar to me. I wondered if he was the same Gumbel who kept records of court cases and political assassinations by the fascists in Germany. I later confirmed that Gumbel the mathematician, the Gumbel Distribution, and the book *Statistics of Extremes* were all related to the statistician of my thoughts: Emil Gumbel.

Gumbel, sometimes called an “apostle of peace,” tracked political assassinations—among other data—in Germany prior to the outbreak of WWII. He was identified as an enemy of the Reich, and he and his family were exiled to France and then New York, where he worked as a professor at Columbia University. A collection of his pamphlets, speeches, and publications from 1914–1966 are preserved at the Center for Jewish History in New York City.

Gumbel created a table with two columns—murders by the right wing (Column 1) and murders by the left wing (Column 2)—with the numbers convicted and imprisoned and length of imprisonment. The table is chilling and self-explanatory. A statistician is not needed for one to determine many more left-wing individuals who were convicted, assassinated, and had longer prison terms.



Emil Gumbel, 1931  
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### Germany Memorializes Its History

Berlin could be described as the “city of museums and memorials” for atrocities against Jews, military actions, and a fascist dictatorship during World War II. I also visited Nuremberg and Court Room 600, the location of the Nuremberg trials. Near where I was staying was a synagogue damaged during Kristallnacht, November 8–9, 1938. It was home to a memorial for Jews kidnapped in Israel on October 7, 2023.

Tabulation of Political Murders, circa 1938 by Emil Gumbel

Summary Statistics Murder- tabulation by Emil Gumbel		
Here is a summary of some of the statistics Gumbel collected on these events:		
Political Killings Committed		
	by the Left	by the Right
Total number of murders	22	354
Number of convictions	38	24
Duration of incarceration per murder	15 years	4 months
Number of executions	10	0
Gumbel also states,		
Virtually all of the relatively small number of assassinations of reactionaries have been atoned for through severe penalties; of the very numerous assassinations of men of the left, on the other hand, not one has been atoned. Credulousness, wrongly understood orders, or actual or purported insanity were always the bases of the defense to the extent that trials even took place. Most of the proceedings were quashed either by the prosecutor’s office or the criminal court.		

Gumbel’s work in Germany was so dangerous that a squad of SS (Schutzstaffel) soldiers were sent to assassinate him. Gumbel wasn’t home at the time! After his escape from Germany to France, he was stripped of his German citizenship (1932), his books were burned (1933), and his professorship at Heidelberg was rescinded. ■