Germany
Solid journalistic professionalism and strong public service media
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Introduction
Germany is the biggest country in Europe, with 83 million people, and is also the largest part of a bigger German-speaking media market of about 100 million people. It has four small linguistic minorities (Sorbs in the east, Danes in the north, Frisians in the northwest, and German Sinti and Roma) and large migrant communities, of which the Turkish is the biggest one. The country has a long tradition of mass media and is one of the most dynamic media markets in the world. This is reflected in the consumption patterns of media users, who have an average media use of 10.16 hours per day. Politically, Germany is considered a mature liberal democracy.

Freedom in the World 2021: status “free” (Score: 94/100, down from 95 in 2016). The 2017 federal elections saw a decrease in the representation of women in the Bundestag, down to 30.9 per cent, the lowest since 1998, which resulted in a one-point deduction in the category of Political Pluralism and Participation (Freedom House, 2021).

Liberal Democracy Index 2020: Germany is placed first in the Top 10% bracket – rank 8 of measured countries, well up from 20 in 2020 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2019, 2021).


Today’s media landscape is moulded by history. While mass media was a tool of the dictatorship during the Nazi era, the post-war media system started anew under democracy. Until 1990, the country was divided into Western and Eastern
Germany. After reunification, it became a federal state with sixteen different Länder [federal states], with the broadcasting system organised accordingly, although patterns of media usage still differ between the east and west. Today, the major print production centres are located in the “old” west and newspapers of the former GDR do not exist anymore or are usually controlled by Western companies. Broadcasting is integrated into the Western dual system with few newly founded regional public service media outlets within the Eastern federal states.

The media landscape is characterised by a long and deeply-rooted tradition of the press. Despite a changing landscape due to other competitive players in the advertising market, like broadcasting and digital media, the periodical press still plays a major role today. High levels of press circulation are ensured by regional and local subscription papers, which are complemented by nationwide quality newspapers and two influential weeklies (Die Zeit and Der Spiegel). Due to market concentration, five large companies have a highly diversified range of print and other products that dominate the newspaper market: Axel Springer SE, Südwestdeutsche Medienholding, Funke Mediengruppe, Ippen, and Madsack. These “big five” acquired a market share of over 42 per cent in 2018 (Röper, 2018).

The broadcasting sector is characterised by a dual system of public service media and commercial broadcasters. The federal system is reflected in the decentralised broadcasting system, with eleven public service media networks in the Länder broadcasting with a nationwide range and nine broadcasting stations under the aegis of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Consortium of public broadcasters in Germany – ARD]. Furthermore, one television-only station, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF), broadcasts with a nationwide range, as does one radio-only broadcaster, Deutschlandradio.

Commercial radio and television were only established with the liberalisation of the broadcasting market in 1984 in (Western) Germany. This market comprises a large number of well-established commercial television and radio stations mainly consumed by younger audiences. German media users seem to prefer rather traditional linear media (press, radio, and television) over Internet-based media. However, the growth rates of Internet usage are enormous, specifically among the youth. Producers of quality journalism in the press, however, have difficulties benefiting from this development. New challenges and changes in the German media system will, hence, be inevitable in the near future (see also Thomaß & Horz, 2021).

Third-sector media exist both in analogue (television, radio, press) and Internet-based digital formats (blogs, social media), but their influence on public deliberation is limited. However, high-interest topics such as racism or sexual harassment (#metoo) certainly manage to find a broad audience from time to
time. For example, there was an outcry when no Black experts were invited to political talk shows to talk about racism. A Black expert was finally invited only when an intensive debate started on Twitter.

The Media Pluralism Monitor by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute in Florence indicates that, overall, basic protection, market plurality, and political independence are at rather low risk with respect to media pluralism. However, the main risk to media pluralism in Germany is lack of social inclusiveness, especially access to media for minorities, people with disabilities, and women (Hanitzsch & Steindl, 2017: 13).

Covid-19

From mid-March to mid-May 2020, the Coalition Government of Christian Democrats (CDU) and Social Democrats (SPD) imposed severe restrictions on liberal freedoms, such as closing borders with neighbouring countries, banning all public gatherings and events, curfews, and the shutdown of all shops except food supply, pharmacies, and a few others. During this shutdown, linear television (both public and private-commercial), daily newspapers (both print and online), and radio increased their audiences. Nonetheless, because of the economic restrictions, advertising slumped, causing revenue losses in advertising-based media. Most affected were fully advertising-based private-commercial television and radio channels.

In order to prevent media companies from collapsing, the Government introduced some media subsidies, along with unprecedented financial support for various sectors of the German economy. The well-established instrument of temporary unemployment, according to which part of the reduced salary is supplanted by funds of the Federal Employment Office, helped many media houses whose advertising income had gone down. However, many freelance journalists could not benefit from these subsidies. Other subsidies are extremely scattered due to the federal structure of Germany. The government of Berlin, for example, where many media houses are located, offered up to EUR 25,000 to help cultural and media companies – hit particularly hard by the Covid-19 crisis and usually employ more than ten people – to overcome an economic situation threatening their existence. In justified exceptional cases, up to EUR 500,000 can be applied for (IBB, 2020). The Federal Government announced a stimulus to promote the digital transformation of the publishing industry and to boost the sales and distribution of subscription newspapers, magazines, and advertising journals. This consists of a maximum of EUR 220 million, of which EUR 20 million would be available in 2020 and the remaining EUR 200 million in future financial years.

One of the first studies about the quality of covering the Covid-19 pandemic, conducted during the first three months of 2020, concluded that no comprehen-
sive tendencies towards uncritical or hysterical reporting were found – except for the tabloid Bild (RND, 2020). The accusations voiced by critics that there had been predominantly negative reporting or one-sided panic-mongering could not be confirmed by the analysis (epd medien, 2020). The pandemic had consequences on the news consumption side: Television news saw a considerable uplift between January and April 2020, with a 12-point decline in reach for television news since 2013 partially reversed as many people turned to trusted sources of news, including public service media (Newman et al., 2020).

**Leading news media sample**

Our media sample for the Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) 2021 consists of eight leading news media representing different types and different ownership: two national quality daily newspapers (Süddeutsche Zeitung, Welt), three weeklies (Die Zeit, Der Spiegel, Stern), one tabloid (Bild), and one public service broadcaster (ZDF). All editors-in-chief were interviewed, and in some cases, this was supplemented by news journalists (Zeit, Spiegel, ZDF). Leading representatives of the two journalists’ unions (DJV, dju) were also interviewed. The following quotes stem from these interviews.

**Indicators**

**Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)**

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability

There is a multiplicity of news sources widely available all over the country.

Germany is one of the largest newspaper markets in Europe. Access to news media is available nationwide and in all areas. In 2020, 327 paid-for dailies were available to German readers with 1,452 local editions and a printed total of 13.52 million copies. Furthermore, 17 printed weeklies with an average of 1.61 editions and 6 Sunday papers with an average of 1.74 editions were distributed. The number of daily papers per 1,000 residents is 231 printed papers – one of the highest figures in Europe (BDZV, 2020). Germany has the densest distribution network in the world, with 1.4 single-sale unit per 1,000 residents and about 116,000 retailers.

During the first quarter of 2020, 14.57 million newspaper copies (dailies, weeklies, Sunday papers) were sold on average every day, of which 1.65 million were e-papers (IVW, 2020). Compared to 2019, print-copy sales decreased by 4.75 per cent, whereas e-paper sales increased by 13.84 per cent.
However, a closer look at the newspaper variety per district reveals the high and rising media concentration in Germany (see Indicators E1 – Media ownership concentration national level & E2 – Media ownership concentration regional (local) level). Newspaper sales in Germany are still mainly based on subscription, particularly at the local and regional level, with 88.6 per cent subscription of local and regional newspapers compared with 11.3 per cent of single-copy sales.

Every newspaper serves its readers with online editions. Subscription, Sunday, and weekly papers reach a market share of roughly 50 per cent for local or regional papers, and up to 73 per cent for national papers with their online editions (BDZV, 2020).

There are five national dailies (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Tageszeitung, Die Welt), a daily economic paper (Handelsblatt), and a large number of regional or local dailies. Table 1 shows the top seven sold papers in 2018 and 2019.

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<td>1</td>
<td>Bild</td>
<td>1,182,699</td>
<td>-134,113 (-10.2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Süddeutsche Zeitung</td>
<td>279,079</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine</td>
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<td>-6,909 (-3.5)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Handelsblatt</td>
<td>87,560</td>
<td>-1,018 (-1.1)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Welt Print weekdays (Welt + Welt Kompakt)</td>
<td>66,957</td>
<td>-9,498 (-12.4)</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>taz.die tageszeitung</td>
<td>42,113</td>
<td>-413 (-1.0)</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Neues Deutschland</td>
<td>19,010</td>
<td>-3,449 (-15.4)</td>
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Source: IVW, 2020

During the last decade, differentiation took place at the local level, with so-called hyperlocal journalism enterprises. Highly committed small initiatives established news media voluntarily with some small revenues from advertising to serve their urban quarter.

Taking a look at broadcasting, the federal political structure of Germany is mirrored in the media system. National law stipulates that every citizen shall have access to public television and radio. For this reason, almost every Bundesland [Federal State] or major communication area, respectively, has its own publicly run radio and television regional stations, which are available nationwide via DVB-T2. The biggest public service broadcaster ARD runs
nine regional television stations, plus one nationwide television programme. ZDF runs a nationwide television-only programme. Both established a variety of special interest channels, like the online-only channel funk, distributed via YouTube. Deutschlandfunk is a nationwide public service radio network with three different programmes. In addition, commercial broadcasters like RTL are available nationwide. A complete supply of radio programmes is hence ensured. In 2018, a total of 688 broadcasters served the public, of which 273 were commercial radio and 294 were television programmes. Public service media offers comprise 57 radio stations and 20 television channels (Goldmedia AG, 2019: 12).

The technical reach of the five biggest television stations is nearly 100 per cent: 98 per cent (both ARD and ZDF) for public broadcasting services, and 96.4 per cent (RTL), 95.8 per cent (Sat1), and 95.6 per cent (Pro7) for commercial stations (ARD-Werbung, 2019: 4–5). There are 38.8 million television-owning households (ARD-Werbung, 2019: 4–5). How do they access television? About half receive television via cable (15.5 million), some more via satellite (17.14 million), and only 1.3 million via terrestrial networks. To sum up the different figures, television is fully accessible all over Germany.

90 per cent of all German households have a personal computer and 77.9 per cent own a smartphone (DeStatis, 2020b), which are both technical pre-requisites for access to the Internet. At the end of 2018, about 88 per cent of German households had broadband access of at least 50 MBs (BMVI, 2018). A lower density of Internet penetration is still observed for parts of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen-Anhalt, but this region also has a low population density (BMVI, 2018: 21, 24).

(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 3 POINTS

The German citizen is well supplied with news from different sources.

News information is amply available in Germany from a wide variety of sources. With an assumed literacy rate of nearly 100 per cent and a high per capita gross domestic product, media are affordable to most Germans. However, 12.1 per cent of the population has only low-level literacy (Grotlüschen et al., 2019). The broadcast media, newspapers, and the Internet are the main news providers for the German population. News consumption in Germany is still rather traditional, with television being the most important source of news.
These patterns changed slightly due to the Covid-19 crisis. In April 2020, 69 per cent of Germans used online media as a source of news, 72 per cent television, 39 per cent social media, 41 per cent radio, and 26 per cent print (Newman et al., 2020).

Weekly offline reach for public service media news (ARD, ZDF, and Deutschlandradio) is at 66 per cent, with less reach for the commercial competitors (RTL 29%; n-tv 20%) (Schulz et al., 2019). However, television news consumption as well as radio news consumption has been declining over the years, while print shows a slight increase. The following is the data for people who are online, making up 89 per cent of the German population (Statista, 2019a).

95 per cent of the group watch, listen, or read the news at least several times a day – a stable percentage over the years. The number of adults who are online, who are very much or much interested in the news, has slightly declined to 68 per cent (Hölig & Hasebrink, 2019). Instagram has become a popular source on social media, with 38 per cent of 18–24-year-olds using it (Newman et al., 2020).

A different picture appears concerning print if we look at the whole population, comprised of Internet users as well as non-Internet users. More than half (55.8%) of the German population above 14 years old regularly read a printed newspaper (BDZV, 2020); 63.6 per cent of the German population above 14 years old are unique readers of the online version. Adding in mobile users who access news via smartphone or tablet, and 85 per cent of the population above 14 years old read printed or digital newspapers regularly. Regarding the vital regional and local mediascape of newspapers, 34 per cent use these newspapers at least once a week (Newman et al., 2019), which is a sharp decline of 5 per cent compared to the previous year (Newman et al., 2018).

Looking at differences in age groups, printed newspapers have their highest reach (72–76%) among people aged 50–70. On the other end, only 22.6 per
cent of 14–19-year-olds and 33.7 per cent of 20–29-year-olds read printed dailies regularly. These 14–29-year-olds together use the online version of dailies at 79 per cent (BDZV, 2020).

Public service providers like ARD and ZDF remain the most-trusted news brands in Germany along with regional newspapers. ARD news, the first channel of nationwide public service broadcasting, is regularly watched by 55 per cent of the online population above 14 years old, and ZDF news, the second channel of public service broadcasting, by 47 per cent (Newman et al., 2020). A study revealed that news is the most important genre on television (Gscheidle & Geese, 2017), with the average watching time of television news remaining stable over the years and amounting to 13 minutes per day in 2016. Three-quarters of the daily news consumption is allotted to public service channels. With 9.8 million viewers daily, the programme Tagesschau of the first public service channel ARD is the highest-ranked television news programme. The study showed that audiences demand competence and reliability.

(F3) Diversity of news sources

2 POINTS

The variety of sources in news production is restricted in the sense that non-elite discourse and diversity of the social and cultural heterogeneity of society are reflected less. Some news agencies dominate the market. Investigation is mostly conducted in special units and is limited to large flagship media outlets.

The national news agency Deutsche Presse Agentur and Associated Press remain important sources in journalistic daily business. Deutsche Presse Agentur is a stockholder of 180 media companies, publishers, and broadcasting corporations in Germany. The concentration of publishers is also reflected in the concentration of news agencies. There have been significant mergers of German agencies since the 2011 MDM report. In December 2009, the German agency Deutscher Depeschendienst (ddp), with its customer base of over 350 customers, merged with the Associated Press (AP) and became the DAPD News Agency, in order to acquire an international focus in their news production. DAPD became insolvent in 2012 which, consequently, strengthened the market position for Deutsche Presse Agentur, which has been the main German news agency since then. The interviewees acknowledge the importance of Deutsche Presse Agentur and other news agencies, but made clear that material from news agencies is reviewed by in-house quality checks.

The magazine Stern and others also acquire text and images from quality international papers and print magazines like The New York Times. Content syndication is important both worldwide and within the European context. Content alliances in investigative reporting to create synergies for costly in-depth
reporting have been growing. Alliances with external fact-checking units (like Correctiv, a German network for fact-checking and investigative reporting) or international journalism networks (such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists – ICIJ), established over the last years, are a new phenomenon to counter false reporting and fake news. For the tabloid Bild-Zeitung, however, the exclusivity of a story is more important:

Of course, [...] we can only demand the money from our customers and buyers if the stories [...] that they hear, see and read in our shop are already exclusive, that is, originate from original BILD research. This is not usually possible, not always [...]. If we are of the opinion that other stories are so good, so entertaining, so exciting and [...] relevant for our readers [...], then, of course, we also report on these stories with reference to the primary source and try to go beyond the research of colleagues and provide added value.

Only if original research is not possible are other sources used as starting points for further research.

A strength of German media sources is a dense network of foreign correspondents, mostly due to public service broadcasters. ARD has around 100 foreign correspondents in 30 studios around the world (ARD Korrespondentenwelt, n.d.); ZDF has 17 foreign studios (ZDF, n.d.). The network of foreign studios of the commercial RTL Group consists of 24 studios (Deutschlandfunk, 2020).

The interviewees did not mention smaller specialised news agencies like special press services from the churches or the Mediendienst Integration, specialised in topics around Germany’s diverse society, where about a quarter of citizens have a link to migration. The selection of news-making in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity is still a topic of major concern in Germany. Studies show that media content is characterised by poor representation when it comes to Islamic minorities, cultural diversity, and migrants (Hafez, 2009; Hafez & Richter, 2007). News is predominantly in line with news values; source diversity (Napoli, 1999), the diversity of personnel, and sources of news are not prioritised in terms of the above-mentioned categories. What is also worth mentioning here is that newspapers with fewer financial resources tend to unsubscribe to Deutsche Presse Agentur because their service is simply too costly.

Respondents unanimously rejected any significant influence of public relations material on their daily routine work. They say that the amount of such materials is increasing, but very little finds its way into coverage. However, in rare cases, such material triggers further investigations by journalists.

Compared to MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), reservations against cooperating with competing or neighbouring media have dissipated. In Germany, such a network for investigative reporting has been established by the second-biggest newspaper, Süddeutsche, together with the public service broadcasters WDR and NDR (Rechercheverbund). While such cooperation has
duplicating effects for the audience when national media are involved, it may increase the diversity of sources when international networks are established. One such example is the *Panama Papers*, which had been analysed by the Rechercheverbund in cooperation with the ICIJ.

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy

Newsroom democracy is established by editorial statutes, which are common in German newsrooms. But journalists have limited influence on hiring decisions for editors-in-chief.

Media organisations in Germany implemented measures for internal transparency of newsroom decisions. Based on the Basic Law Art. 5 and federal broadcasting acts, newsroom democracy can be safeguarded by specific editorial statutes, internal programme councils, and editorial committees. Most of the public service media, like WDR or NDR, established editorial statutes. However, these instruments come into play only in conciliation when a conflict has already occurred (Kirchhof, 2017: 108).

Journalists are usually free to choose their reporting topics, however, the final decision lies with the managing editor.

We are confronted with this by the readers – “are you really independent?” The truth is a very human one, there are group dynamics [in the editorial conference] and sometimes current dynamics decide what the dominant spin is.

On the question of journalists’ involvement in staff decisions, the answers differ. Editors-in-chief are usually appointed by the management, and in most cases, newsroom journalists are not involved in the process (as was the case a decade ago; see Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011):

The editor-in-chief is appointed by the board. For large brands like [our newspaper], he is appointed by the CEO. The deputy is proposed by the editor-in-chief, [...] whereby the board has to give their OK for each deputy of the editor-in-chief. It is not decided on a grass-roots basis [...], no chair group, no election, no primary election, no member survey.

When editors-in-chief are elected, usually the board of the publishing company are the electorate. In some print media, journalists also have a say in the election process of the editor-in-chief: “Yes, there is an editorial statute and it also provides for the rejection of the editor-in-chief as the ultimate weapon”.

The news magazine *Der Spiegel* has established more democratic, bottom-up election patterns. The magazine literally belongs to the staff, and everyone who is willing forms a committee that proposes and elects the editor-in-chief.
In public service broadcasting, the editors-in-chief are elected by the broadcasting council [Rundfunkräte], which is staffed by representatives of political parties, churches, unions, and other social groups. In 2009, a scandal made obvious that political influence in the broadcasting council had been dominant. The incumbent ZDF editor-in-chief Nikolaus Brender’s contract had not been extended after massive intervention by the conservative parties and the Minister-President of Hesse, with insiders suggesting that even the chancellery was involved (see Indicator C2 – Independence of the news media from powerholders). Subsequently, stakeholders pressed charges and the Federal Constitutional Court decided in 2014 that politicians’ representation in broadcasting councils and boards would be limited to 33 per cent.

All in all, there are no greater efforts to involve newsroom journalists in staff decisions except for broadcasting councils in public service media. The situation remains with neither routines for, nor obligations to, newsroom democracy in electing the editors-in-chief, and there is also no discussion about filling other leading positions in the newsroom. Generally, the decision lies with the editor-in-chief or the heads of department, as there is a strong hierarchical structure. All interview partners agreed that decisions on subjects and the framing of covered issues are debated in the daily editorial meeting, in which all journalists have an equal say (see also Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011). However, it is often the managing editor who makes the final decision.

(F5) Company rules against internal influence on newsroom/editorial staff

Newsroom journalists enjoy independence on editorial decisions. The management, sales department, and newsrooms are separated most of the time. Although there was one severe case of political influence in public service media, this was resolved by a constitutional court proceeding.

Formal rules to separate newsrooms from management, including the board, rarely exist in private media, but are legally laid down in public service media. In daily practice, editors-in-chief report that they enjoy full independence from the management and the sales department. They say, “We are journalistically independent of the advertising department. There would be an immediate uproar if the advertising department wanted to have a say in journalistic issues”. In one leading newspaper, this is laid down in a formal statute, while the others claim that the management fully accepts this independence.

However, in some management structures, journalists are also represented. Others report there is informal cooperation with the advertising sales department, referring to more general strategies on how to reach target groups. They say, “Yes, of course, you talk to each other more than before […] The market
demands this, and we would be blind to refuse”. Nevertheless, editors-in-chief report a high sensitivity to advertising influence and claim to have no knowledge about the specific data on advertising revenues. They have no formal cooperation with the advertising sales department, and at most, they know which industries have the largest share of advertising.

Generally, the editor-in-chief is the formal leader of newsroom work. Furthermore, the German language and the practice in German newspapers differentiate between a publisher and a sort of general editor [Verleger – Herausgeber] who only has a responsibility for the general orientation of the news medium.

(F6) **Company rules against external influence on newsroom/editorial staff**

Leading news media in Germany receive their income from diverse sources. There is no single large advertiser.

Leading German media in our sample are either public service media, with a large part of their income coming from the licence fee, or they are part of bigger and (more or less) well-financed companies, where external influence is quite unlikely because no big advertiser could sustain a boycott for a long time. There are no explicit rules nor structural boundaries against such influence. Some editors-in-chief report rare attempts to impose an advertising boycott on a medium, but the editors resisted this. Advertising from the state or government does not play a role in Germany.

Traditional media still lead in advertising, with television being the most important advertising platform (48% of all advertising expenditure; newspapers have 15.4%; magazines have 10.7%; and online media has 10.9%) (Möbus & Heffler, 2019).

We find great variance with regard to the income composition of different media outlets. Commercial broadcasting, which is nearly completely financed by advertising, earns 92 per cent of all television advertising. In 2018, the second public service media channel, ZDF, was financed 85.4 per cent from the licence fee, 7.9 per cent from advertising and sponsoring, and 6.7 per cent from other incomes, such as programme selling and financial revenues (ZDF, n.d.). The first public service media channel, ARD, has a similar income structure. The financial situation of public service media is quite stable and secure, as it is determined by a complex procedure that inhibits governmental influence. The public broadcasting corporations declare their financial needs for four years, this claim is then proved by the independent commission for settling the financial need of public service media (KEF). KEF then pronounces on the basis of its own calculations a recommendation about the needed amount of the licence
fee, and this recommendation must be approved by all 16 parliaments of the Länder [states]. The current round of settling the amount of the licence fee failed because one of the Länder parliaments with a majority of the right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Christian Democrats (CDU) did not agree to any augmentation of the licence fee. The AfD wants to abolish public service media altogether. The case has been taken to the Constitutional Court.

Newspaper income has changed significantly. While in 2008 it earned 45.2 per cent of its income from advertising, 46.2 per cent from sales, and 8.6 per cent from newspaper supplements (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), this ratio has changed in 2018 to 31.1 per cent advertising, 64.4 per cent sales, and 4.4 per cent newspaper supplements (Keller & Eggert, 2019). Details of advertisers for the whole print industry show a fairly diverse picture, such that dependence on only a few or even government advertisers seems to not be a problem for newspapers. It is even acceptable for some media to abstain completely from some advertising revenues if it clashes with reporting, for example, “In the health sector we have practically no advertising from pharmaceutical companies because we are very critical of medical issues”.

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing

Internal debate on news production is practised more than once every day and is part of journalistic routines.

Journalists are described as experienced and very professional. Like in MDM 2011, most of the journalists in the main news media have graduated from university, done an editorial traineeship, or attended a journalism school. By doing so, they learned the essential procedures of news selection by the time they started their careers. Specific socialisation for each medium is not regarded as necessary, as all media agree on the concept of news journalism, which is based on routines and procedures obligatory for all news media. The processing of news, as one of the central elements of a journalist’s self-image in Germany, is a basic competence – all journalists know how to “make the news” after they have been educated. Therefore, these procedures do not need to be written down in stylebooks for the newsroom (see also Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011).

This is partly event-driven of course, but the procedures are such that we meet in the morning. [...] and we as journalists are experts at sorting. This means that each of us comes to the editorial office in the morning with [...] various topics. Of course, we also see what other media have done that are awake before us. [...] then we sort here [...], and after our 10.00 a.m. meeting for our desk we go to the 11.30 a.m. meeting with [...] colleagues and then we negotiate again.
The rather strong impact of formal education of journalists in countries such as Germany – which is an example of North and Central European media systems – is also described in the current research (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 173). Journalists do have a say in editorial meetings; however, managing editors claim to have the final say when it comes to the selection and processing of news.

There are so far no formal routines at play in ZDF to evaluate and check platform content, but journalists assert that analytical tools have become more important to understand underlying interests in social media content. The news magazine Der Spiegel established a special unit to analyse user-generated content (UGC).

Gender and diversity issues were not mentioned as regular topics in the daily editorial meetings.

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 2 POINTS

Media organisations are more aware of gender inequalities than they were a decade ago. However, systematic measures to even out gender imbalances, like supporting female talent or fighting the gender pay gap, remain on the agenda. However, informal efforts to eliminate them exist and have already succeeded in some respect.

In Germany, about 52 per cent of those working in journalism and editorial boards were women in 2017, according to official jobs report (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019b). These findings correspond with an International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF, 2011) study about female employees in important media companies in Western Europe. Taking a closer look at senior professional levels and higher, however, reveals the existence of a glass ceiling. In some media outlets, gender equality is accomplished at the lower levels of the professional hierarchy, but this is not true for leading positions in key media outlets.

In 2019, 10.2 per cent of editors-in-chief in regional newspapers were female. In nationwide newspapers, 20 per cent of editors-in-chief were female (Pro Quote Medien, 2019: 23). The liberal-left newspaper taz has the highest number of high-ranking women (50.8%), followed by the weekly Die Zeit (33.7%) (Pro Quote Medien, 2019: 24). The ranking in Figure 2 reflects the whole print sector.
The print magazine *Stern* has the highest “women’s power index”, with 52.2 per cent women at the highest level of the hierarchy; the news magazine *Focus* has the lowest, with 11.8 per cent and a 7 per cent gap between that and the scale which also features middle and lower management. In the online editions of traditional newspapers, the number of women in leadership is higher.

The editors-in-chief of the popular magazine *Stern* and the news magazine *Der Spiegel* pointed out in interviews that no internal rules, recommendations, codes, or guidelines to support and promote women journalists in their careers are in place. One chief editor is concerned about the cultural aspect of homogeneity within editorial units and its potential influence news stories:

For me, it is this aspect that I would call unconscious bias [...] because what worries me is what we do not see. And democracy is also the participation of the many and [...] we [journalists and editorial units] naturally live in our own bubble. [...] the media companies [in Germany] will not be able to hire on a large scale in the next few years. The possibility of change through people we bring in from outside is very limited [...]. But how do we ensure when generating our topics [...] that we are not blind?
However, at *Stern*, a top-down order finally enforced gender parity amongst their staff. This parity has not yet been reached in the gender pay gap. One editor-in-chief of a major paper says, “According to my [...] – and I have to know – it is not the case that women are paid less than men. In my observation, women earn as much (or little) as men”.

At the second-biggest newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*, women can take advantage of a variety of support schemes, like coaching or lunch talks with members of the executive board. There is basically no difference between women’s and men’s salaries, and staff is paid the standard wages according to their position. The weekly *Die Zeit* helps women combine professional and family life, as there is no mandatory attendance in the company, and meetings take place at family-friendly hours. Moreover, *Die Zeit’s* staff is especially aware of gender-sensitive language. However, looking at the bigger picture, gender equality in the German media landscape is still based on opaque and localised measures.

I have a watchlist [...] with women in investigative journalism [...] , which is an imaginary pool of female colleagues, where I see whether they would be something for us at a certain point. [...] But it is not [...] that we have an automatic process for measuring and advancing gender equality in media.

The broadcasting sector shows slightly different patterns, whereas in public service media, the staff sometimes consists of one-half to two-thirds women, but they only make up 30–50 per cent of leading positions (Pro Quote Medien, 2018: 51). In commercial broadcasting, women also face this glass ceiling with an average of around 20–30 per cent reaching leading positions (Pro Quote Medien, 2018: 60–65).

Interviewees in the public service television sector reported that special awareness and some child-care assistance are the only instruments that currently exist to support female journalists. Although the figures differ from what the interviewee of the commercial sector said, the respondent from RTL said that diversity is of high importance. The broadcasting station established a special unit to empower female talent and professionals to take up leading positions. At least in middle management, women journalists outnumbered men. Again, there is no systematic tool, like a quota, but a special sensitivity to support women, such as with family-friendly working hours: “[We’re trying] to get women into these leadership positions – why? Because our news and magazines are mostly watched by women”.

Only one respondent in the sample of the leading news media made clear that there is an informal rule to positively discriminate against women and support their careers. A quota system as a formal rule is not in place in the leading news media. However, the female journalists’ association Pro Quote monitors media’s commitment to gender equality and publishes reports and easy-to-grasp
graphics about the state of women’s careers in news media and hence functions as a pressure group. National legal frameworks enforce gender equality at the workplace with opportunities for parental leave.

(F9) Gender equality in media content 1 POINT

German media became increasingly sensitive to gender and diversity issues, but no formal or legal regulations are in force.

The issue of selection of sources that reflect societal diversity in terms of gender, age, and ethnic origin is a highly sensitive topic in German newsrooms. Nearly all interlocutors claimed that they have a strong newsroom commitment to cover gender equality or inequality and diversity issues. The thirtieth anniversary of German unification revealed how Eastern German topics had been neglected for a long time and increased the sensitivity to diversity issues and of all voices being heard in the media. Editors-in-chief and journalists report that they have newsroom discussions on how reporting of such issues should be done, although the use of gender-equitable headlines, pictures, and language was not mentioned in the interviews. The interviewees claim the existence of internal rules and recommendations regarding the promotion of gender equality in media content, although no codes or guidelines exist for this purpose. We did not find any mechanisms in place to monitor and guarantee gender balance in the news subjects, and also no internal rules or recommendations to produce gender-sensitive coverage of gender-based violence.

There is no official institution monitoring the representation of women in the media. The private foundation MaLisa, funded by famous television actors Maria and Elisabeth Furtwängler, tries to fill this gap. The NGO funds research about the representation of women in television and gender stereotypes. One of their findings concerning the coverage of the Covid-19 crisis reports that on television, only one in five experts was female (22%). In online reporting, women were only mentioned as experts about 7 per cent of the time. It was mainly men who were mentioned as health professionals, although almost half of all doctors in Germany are female. Only one in five of the doctors interviewed on television without a management function was female (Prommer & Stüve, 2020). Further studies are accessible online.

According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2015), which analyses the representation of women in the media, the only successes were outside of news, such as in portraits, background stories, features, and fiction. Although legislation and public awareness focus on gender equality, women still do not appear equally in hard news. The GMMP further states that the set of factors defining newsworthiness excludes women structurally in traditional
media. However, in electronic media, there are less orthodox criteria, which leads to mixing the news, with cat content and celebrities featured alongside political news.

According to the latest GMMP data, 32.6 per cent of all news subjects in the classical media (print, radio, television) and 24 per cent on Twitter and online-news were women. However, it must also be noted that the GMMP’s monitoring day in 2015 was not typical for news in Germany because of a dramatic German airplane crash in the French Alps. A large reason for the high representation of women as news subjects is the fact that Germany had a female chancellor at that time, Angela Merkel. Nevertheless, this is a significant change compared to 2010, when only 21 per cent of the people interviewed, heard, seen, or read about in German mainstream broadcast and print news were women. The report further states that there are seldom stories which highlight gender equality issues. Inequality was only mentioned in the areas of human rights and gender violence. Discussions of stereotyping of gender roles are nearly absent in serious German news reporting.

There is a relevant range of women’s alternative media, offline and online, although the heyday of feminist media is gone, with the focus of feminist activities concerning the media more oriented to changing structures (see Indicator F8 – Rules and practices on internal gender equality). National legal frameworks concerning gender equality and relevant media content do not exist. Only the legislation passed in 2015 by the German parliament – which stipulates that 30 per cent of the members of supervisory boards of DAX-listed firms must be women – may affect the media.

The case for the representation of ethnic minorities and migrants is even worse. We observe a lot of activities aiming for the increase of these groups in reporting, but minorities are still a group not speaking for themselves and suffering stereotyping and discrimination.

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms

(alias social media) 2 POINTS

In most leading German news media, there exist specially trained experts to monitor misinformation. In only a few cases are algorithm-based tools used, as traditional means of fact-checking are considered more valuable.

Editors-in-chief of all newsrooms report they have specific rules and checks for combatting misinformation. Additional care is taken in newsrooms if digital platforms are the source of news. All journalists explain they rely more on traditional means of checking facts – as well as the documentation department and their own experts, where available – than on algorithmic tools. The major-
ity of the newsrooms have specialist, though small, teams for this task. Some newsrooms cooperate with external fact-checkers, and some have a special department searching for fake news on digital platforms and correcting them. One interviewee said, “We cooperate institutionally with Bellingcat for fact-checking, we have a picture documentation in house. We are also involved in international journalistic networks”. Algorithmic tools or other machine-based instruments are provided and in use in some cases, and not yet provided in others. In one case, software for qualitatively ranking user-comments is currently being tested. Training on how to distinguish facts from misinformation is provided regularly and is eagerly sought by journalists.

Some editorial news media have started to form content alliances with other media to expand their fact-checking competencies and resources. A preferred partner here is the research centre Correctiv. Public service media like ZDF and ARD have their own fact-checking units (ZDFheuteCheck & ARDFaktenfinder).

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment  

2 POINTS

Journalists can rely on their employers in such cases, but the news media organisations decide whether they will assist on a case-by-case basis.

In Germany, online harassment in the sense of hate speech or badgering of journalists is increasing rapidly. A recent survey among 322 journalists of the University of Bielefeld and the special service Mediendienst Integration revealed that over 60 per cent of the respondents had been harassed online during the last 12 months, and that social media confrontations had become part of their daily routine (Pappendieck et al., 2020). Compared to 2017, figures rose by 20 per cent, and the researchers observed a radicalisation of assaults, mainly from the extreme right (Preuß et al., 2017). 16 per cent of journalists reported offences or even death threats, and also physical assaults, while doing their work. Women are a particular focus of online hate, as a female editor-in-chief indicates:

You have hundreds of comments on some topics within minutes. And that is when you write as a woman, and even more so when you have an immigrant background [...] that is really ugly. There is practically no topic that I can write about [...] where you don’t get sexist comments, no matter what you write about. [...] and here we have to protect our colleagues.

Claudia Neuhaus, a well-known football reporter in the public service television provider ZDF, experienced a sexist social media storm just because she presented the football world cup for men in 2018 (Bau, 2018). For ZDF-presenter Dunja Hayali, Twitter hate speech has become part of her daily life. Hayali is
a member of various minority groups and speaks out against hate, making her an obvious target for right-wing extremists. She gets support from ZDF’s legal department and personally copes by intimidating assailants, and sometimes visiting them at home with a camera team to talk about their offence and her feelings about it. “We have become more aware of the problems, we are also working with the police […]. However, I have to say that I am shaken by the low clarification rate by the police”, observed her colleague.

WDR investigative journalist Georg Restle received a death threat via mail, which, according to the police, was linked to the murderer of a politician by the extreme right (Huber, 2019). Also, journalists belonging to a minority group are constantly under threat:

Our moderator […] is black and […] he is latently exposed to [harassment]. After this […] broadcast he was affected by massive online harassment and also here […] on the street. He is a freelancer, but of course, we protect him. […] The legal department says it can cost 3,000 or maybe 50,000 euros. But we protect him, no matter what.

In the face of these alarming developments, the respondents also report a high amount of online harassment and hate speech against staff, with women being particular targets of sexist hate. Not all media organisations have special units to support journalists, though Der Spiegel and Stern make efforts to establish internal units or ombudspersons. Respondents point out that the organisations provide psychological and legal aid if the case can be clearly associated with work. However, no relevant provisions in work contracts are in place, and there seems to be a grey zone of assaults between private and work life where the companies may be reluctant to help. Additionally, the detection rate of law-enforcement agencies is also very low.

### Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level

*The television audience market is extremely concentrated with a strong counterweight of public service broadcasters. Print and radio markets are not very highly concentrated.*

Traditionally, media concentration is measured in terms of the media sectors of print, television, radio, and online media. This is also the guiding ratio for this indicator. However, changes due to the convergence of media markets, media offerings, and end devices are not sufficiently taken into account by the current media concentration description, or by the media concentration law.
The television market is divided into public service and the commercial market. At the end of the first half of 2018, there were 21 public and 169 private television channels with a nationwide licence to broadcast, as well as teleshopping channels and programmes with a foreign licence. More than 200 regional and local programmes complement the television offering (KEK, 2018: 18). While public broadcasters altogether had a market share of 47.8 per cent of the audience, commercial broadcasters have a slight majority (AGF, 2019). These have, for a while, been divided into two big groups: one – the RTL group – being part of the Bertelsmann company; and the other – ProSiebenSat.1 Media AG – now a Societas Europaea/SE with the US-Investor Capital Group and Credit Suisse holding significant shares (Lang, 2019).

The RTL group has an audience market share of 27.2 per cent of the television audience market, Pro7-Sat1 has 17.8 per cent, and the rest goes to diverse broadcasters, the biggest among them being Sky, with a market share of 1.5 per cent of the whole television audience market (KEK, 2018: 68). Looking only at the commercial broadcasting market, the three biggest companies have a concentration ratio CR3 of 0.8 which is an extremely high ratio.

The German radio market is characterised by a pluralistic ownership structure and a multitude of local and regional radio programmes. The main owners include regional newspaper publishers and national media groups. On a nationwide scale, no broadcaster has a market share relevant under media concentration law. According to the Media Diversity Monitor (MedienVielfalt-Monitor, 2019), the opinion market for radio is dominated by ARD’s public service programmes, with a market share of 55 per cent, the largest private provider is RTL Group with a market share of 7 per cent, ahead of Regiocast with 4 per cent and Müller Medien with 3 per cent (KEK, 2018: 20). Here, the CR3 on the commercial radio market is a weak 0.31.

In recent years, the increase in concentration has been moderate and has been in the range of a tenth of a percentage point. In 2018’s first quarter, it had increased by 1.8 percentage points compared with 2016. The market share of the ten largest publishing groups in terms of total circulation is 61.6 per cent. Within the category of subscription newspapers, the five highest-circulation publishing groups have a market share of 38.6 per cent (Röper, 2018). Calculated according to concentration ratio with reference to the three biggest companies, the CR3 is at 0.31 – a low level. Concentration on the print market is increasing because of economic pressure due to declining circulation figures and advertising revenue. About 60 per cent of German districts are served by only one local or regional paper, and about 35 per cent by two (Schütz, 2012: 586). The highest concentration can be observed in the single-copy-sales segment of newspapers, with about 80 per cent belonging to Axel Springer SE. Their flagship tabloid daily Bild reaches 11.32 million readers, despite a 10 per cent
loss between 2018 and 2019 (KEK, 2019). E-paper sales and payment models in the online arena are still of low economic relevance.

The availability of a large number of newspaper editions is supported by a system of press wholesalers with the features of price maintenance, territorial protection, obligation to contract, and right of return.

The most important online news websites are *bild.de* (19.25% market share), *Spiegel online* (9.82%) (which has merged with *Der Spiegel* to form one brand), and *focus online* (7.56%). They sum up to a low CR3 of 0.36.

Transparency in the media market is protected by an independent commission (KEK Commission for Settling of Concentration in the Media Market), regular refined reports of press ownership (Röper, 2016, 2018), and the publication obligation of the press concentration law.

However, media concentration is not fully considered in terms of media cross-ownership. Cross-ownership between broadcasters of nationwide television and those publishing groups active in the daily newspaper market exists at Bertelsmann/Gruner + Jahr, Axel Springer Verlag, DvH Media, Bauer Media, and DuMont. These are only reported by KEK, but not covered by the media concentration law.

With respect to cross-ownership between traditional and online media, media companies can be classified as follows:

- private German television groups ProSiebenSat.1 Media SE and Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland, whose online portfolios mainly comprise transferred television channel brands, video-on-demand platforms, video portals, and games portals;

- major publishers that are broadly diversified on the Internet, such as Axel Springer, Hubert Burda Media Holding, and Holtzbrinck, which have nearly all types of Internet offerings in their portfolios, in addition to transferred print brands;

- major German publishing houses that focus on the online transformation of their strong journalistic print brands (e.g., Der Spiegel, Gruner + Jahr);

- and typical regional newspaper publishers or publishing groups, which usually only diversify into Internet offerings with a regional reference and classified advertising cooperation (see Indicator E2 – Media ownership concentration regional (local) level).

Per the legislation currently in force, the Commission on Concentration in the Media Sector (KEK) is not competent to deal with concentration issues in the online sector. Nevertheless, KEK dealt in detail with the future of media concentration law in the last Concentration Report and emphasised the need for the timely introduction of an overall opinion market model and a new media concentration law designed independently of broadcasting (KEK, 2019).
On a regional level, ownership concentration remains remarkably high. In most German regions, one newspaper is dominant, and the public service broadcaster still dominates the local radio market.

Germany has a large variety of media at the Länder level. But the situation is quite different with regards to television, radio, and print. Regional public service news broadcasters operate at the level of the 16 German states. In some cases, they cooperate within one corporation, so that instead of 16, there are only 9 public service broadcasters of ARD. Table 2 below shows the market share of the third television programmes (ARD) in their transmission area. In each area, these television programmes also produce news for smaller sub-regions.

Table 2  Third television programmes in their transmission area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broadcaster</th>
<th>Audience share (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NDR</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBB</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR/SR</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: BR Medienforschung (2021)

Local or regional broadcasters have been playing a minor role in commercial television. According to the interstate treaty on broadcasting, regional window programmes are to be set up in the two nationwide full-range television channels with the highest reach. This applies to RTL and SAT1. However, national broadcasters are based in different Länder, the most important ones in Cologne/Northrhine Westphalia (RTL group) and Munich/Bavaria (ProSiebenSat1). Non-commercial broadcasting projects such as open channels had been previously supported by the supervising bodies, but transformed into training channels for universities and other educational institutions.

The German radio landscape is largely shaped by regional and local offerings. This results from the regulatory competence of the federal states in matters of broadcasting, leading to regional rules for public broadcasting, and regional licensing of commercial broadcasting.

The public service broadcasting corporations each broadcast several radio programmes, so that altogether there are 64 public service radio programmes...
in Germany on the regional level (ARD). Although this multitude of radio channels allows for a rich news provision in the regions, it is also the subject of numerous attacks on public service media, which is under strong pressure to reduce this diversity.

Table 3  Market share of radio programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>BR (Bavaria)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern 1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern 2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAYERN 3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR-Klassik</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5 aktuell</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern plus</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5 plus</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR-Verkehr</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR Heimat</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HR (Hessia)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hr1</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hr2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hr3</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hr4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hr-iINFO</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOU FM</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MDR (Sachsen; Thuringia; Saxony-Anhalt)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR SACHSEN</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR SACHSEN-ANHALT</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR THURINGEN</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR AKTUELL</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR KULTUR</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR JUMP</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR SPUTNIK</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR KLASSIK</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NDR (Niedersachsen; Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; Hamburg)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR 90.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR 1 Niedersachsen</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR 1 Radio MV</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR 1 Welle Nord</td>
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<tr>
<td>NDR 2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR Kultur</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR Info</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-JOY</td>
<td>6.9</td>
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## Germany

### Solid Journalistic Professionalism and Strong Public Service Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RB (Bremen)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen Eins</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen Zwei</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen Vier</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen Next</td>
<td>6.8</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RBB (Berlin; Brandenburg)</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenne Brandenburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fritz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inforadio</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<td>radioeins</td>
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<td>rbb 88.8</td>
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<thead>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR1 Baden-Württemberg</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWR1 Rheinland-Pfalz / swr</td>
<td>13.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWR2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR3</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASDING</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR4 Baden-Württemberg</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR4 Rheinland-Pfalz</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR Aktuell</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WDR (North Rhine-Westphalia)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1LIVE</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1LIVE DIGGI</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR 2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR 3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR 4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR 5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KiRaKa</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSMO</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERA</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 1 / sr</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 2 KulturRadio</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 3 Saarlandwelle</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSERDING / sr</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenne Saar</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: ARD, 2020*
In the ranking of the top 20 radio programmes, the most popular channels of public service media hold 15 positions. Table 4 shows the daily reach in thousands.

Table 4  Top 20 radio programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reach per day (pop. 14 +) thousands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SWR3 PBS</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR2 PBS</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1Live PBS</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antenne Bayern PBS</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>3,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern1 PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>3,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern3 PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>2,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR2 PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>2,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDR4 PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>2,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deutschlandfunk PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>2,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDR1 Niedersachsen PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>1,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spotify Music streaming</td>
<td>Music streaming</td>
<td>1,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit Radio FFH Commercial</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio ffn Commercial</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR1 BW PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>1,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR4 BW PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>1,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-Joy PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>1,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hr3 PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>1,135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDR Jump PBS</td>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>1,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klassik Radio Commercial</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: PBS = Public service broadcasting
Source: Gattringer & Turecek, 2018

Additionally, there are 383 commercial radio channels at a regional or local level (Vaunet, 2020). Between one and four commercial radio stations broadcast in each Länder – an exception is the Berlin area and Brandenburg, with 14 statewide programmes (Rühle, 2014). There are also significant differences in the number of local radio stations between states. Some federal states (Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia) have no local radio stations, whereas in Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Baden-Württemberg, there are 10–20 local radio stations. North Rhine-Westphalia
has 45 local stations, marketed by the state-wide radio NRW. The greatest local radio diversity is in Bavaria, with 65 local radio channels. However, the majority of them are owned by a few media owners, such as Axel Springer Verlag, Nordwest-Zeitung, Burda, Madsack, Moira, Oschmann, Regiocast, RTL Group, and Studio Gong (Lehmann, 2016).

Local and regional newspapers are published in and provide information about one of the 401 German districts (*Kreise* and *kreisfreie Städte*) (Der Bundeswahlleiter, 2019). A closer look at ownership concentration in the regional newspaper market reveals a tendency towards monopolisation. There are different figures, yet all of them yield the same result. In most of the districts, there is no competition between local and regional newspapers.

As an example, we describe the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia, which is the *Land* with the highest population. The efforts of a few large publishing houses led to (partial) takeovers, cooperations, and the establishment of new joint editorial offices. This also led to an increasing number of newspapers that are actually in competition with each other exchanging their content (Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020). Various cooperation models of editorial offices are leading to increasing concentration in the daily newspaper market in the number of titles and main editorial offices, but circulation continues to decline. The number of monopoly areas is growing in local reporting, and the number of newspaper editorial offices that create content themselves is declining (Röper, 2018).

### Table 5 Newspapers in North Rhine-Westphalia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main editorial offices</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sold circulation</td>
<td>4,330,800</td>
<td>3,007,600</td>
<td>2,875,600</td>
<td>2,476,800</td>
<td>2,206,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average circulation per newspaper</td>
<td>86.6</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020*

The local media provision is thus problematic. While dozens of television channels and several national daily and weekly newspapers report about current events in Germany and all over the world, in some places, one can be glad if there is still a local edition or a locally reporting radio or television programme. In many places, local media diversity is no longer even conceivable. Some mayors supplement their official journal with editorial contributions on current events in the municipality; this is legally questionable, but in many cases, it is born out of necessity. If there is no one left to whom the official could send their press release, then they themselves quickly become a media provider.
Diversity news of formats

News formats are abundantly available, and citizens can choose from a very long list of news formats in all media sectors. Popular news formats offer snackable and mobile news with special apps. News formats are of high quality, and a majority trusts them.

German leading news media provide a long list of formats, from headline news online to two-hour long features in radio, in areas such as politics, economics, culture, and so on. Germany’s public service broadcasting providers (ARD, ZDF, Deutschlandfunk) provide their audiences with a wide variety of news and information formats. Whereas ARD delivers nationwide television and radio formats, ZDF is a nationwide television provider, and Deutschlandfunk offers nationwide radio programmes. Das Erste (ARD) and ZDF show the highest information competence and provide the two most-viewed evening news shows on television (heute, 19:00, by ZDF, and Tagesschau, 20:00, by Das Erste – ARD). Table 6 shows the proportions of information for the top five stations and gives an impression of the diversity of formats.

Table 6  Average reach and market shares of television news, 2018 and 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon-Sun</th>
<th>Viewers (million) 2018</th>
<th>Viewers (million) 2019</th>
<th>Market share (%) 2018</th>
<th>Market share (%) 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heute 19:00 (ZDF)</td>
<td>4.070</td>
<td>3.813</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagesschau 20:00 (ARD)</td>
<td>9.630</td>
<td>9.795</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTL Aktuell 18:45</td>
<td>3.010</td>
<td>2.845</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat 1 Nachrichten (19:55)</td>
<td>1.290</td>
<td>1.197</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProSieben Newstime 18:00</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td>0.626</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heute-journal 21:45 (ZDF)</td>
<td>3.930</td>
<td>3.718</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagesthemen 22:15 (ARD)</td>
<td>2.190</td>
<td>2.133</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Zubayr et al., 2020: 117

The two big public broadcasting services (ARD, ZDF) deliver news throughout the day, starting with a joint morning and midday magazine followed by news shows during the day and longer news programmes at 17:00, 19:00, and 20:00. Furthermore, both present a late-evening news magazine including reports, info magazines, and documentaries, as well as a news magazine at midnight. The news format with the broadest reach in Germany is the public service television news format Tagesschau (20:00), with average viewing figures of over 9 million viewers online and offline. In times of crisis, Tagesschau is the most consumed news source. During the peak of the Covid-19 crisis in March 2020,
tagesschau 20:00 sometimes reached over 17.4 million viewers and a market share of over 46 per cent (15 March 2020), about double the average. Famous mobile news products are the tagesschau-app and the hourly updated news streams tagesschau24 and tagesschau 100 seconds. The second-biggest public service television station ZDF provides the less-known ZDFheute-app. These new formats are a response to changing viewing habits and increased mobile news consumption.

The news show heute (19:00) by the public service television provider ZDF is the second-biggest player in the television news sector. Both news formats are fifteen minutes long. The late-night formats tagesthemen and heute-journal (ZDF) have a broad reach as well. There is lesser variety in online and offline news formats in the commercial broadcasting stations RTL, and Pro7/Sat1, which are also consumed less due to the dual system of Germany’s broadcasting sector. Whereas public service media are obliged to offer a variety of news and information as one of their core functions, commercial broadcasters mostly offer entertainment and only basic information. Sat1 broadcasts a morning show (Frühstücksfernsehen).

Besides these, special audiovisual news channels provide 24/7 news, consisting of two commercial and one public news channels (ntv, n24; Phoenix).

The public service media’s information competency is also reflected in political and investigative magazines, reportages, and documentaries, which constitute an essential part of their programmes. Whereas ARD (Das Erste) broadcasts 34 per cent political news per day in a four-week random sample in 2018 (17:00–01:00), and ZDF 31 per cent, the main commercial newscasts present 29 per cent (RTL) and 18 per cent (Sat.1) per day on politics. However, commercial television’s news formats tend to present more lurid information (Krüger et al., 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Share of informative content in television (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARD</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZDF</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTL</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Krüger et al., 2019: 236

Radio news is delivered every hour by all public broadcasting services and most commercial stations. Every regional radio station uses one or two frequencies for special information programmes, such as WDR3 and WDR5 in the largest German state, North Rhine-Westphalia. The national radio information pro-
grammes are broadcast by Deutschlandradio, which offers three special interest format channels: Deutschlandfunk (news and information), Deutschlandradio Kultur (news about cultural aspects of life), and DLF Nova (for young target groups). All three are clearly news-oriented with only small amounts of music.

The print sector continuously lost market share during the last decade, and the online sector grew dramatically, often by serving snackable news for free. Users tend to avoid subscriptions, and editors are still searching for sustainable profit models. However, printed newspapers still reach a comparably high number of readers in Germany. The tabloid newspaper Bild is the most read with over 1.6 million copies sold in 2018, a decrease of over 7 per cent compared with the previous year. This is followed by five national quality newspapers: Süddeutsche Zeitung (357,000 sold copies incl. e-paper), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (over 252,000 copies sold), Welt (over 169,000 copies sold), Tageszeitung (53,000 copies sold). Frankfurter Rundschau, a liberal newspaper, lost most of its readers and does not provide print copies anymore; however, it has over 10 million visits to its e-paper (Schröder, 2018, 2019b).

There also exists two weekly news magazines (Der Spiegel, Focus) and one major weekly newspaper (Die Zeit) (Schröder, 2018). During the last decade, every nationwide daily or weekly and print magazine established an online format. Germany’s biggest tabloid newspaper, Bild, is uncontested and increased the number of visits to its Bild Online to 422 million per day in 2019. The quality magazine Spiegel Online (now Der Spiegel) has over 250 million daily visits, followed by the online version of the second-biggest print news magazine Focus Online (more than 180 million) (Schröder, 2019a).

Compared with MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), the online news sector is highly networked, with Twitter becoming an important hub to access news. In Germany, Twitter is a forum highly frequented by journalists, politicians, and members of the public interested in news. Hence, renowned journalists like Dunya Hayali or Anja Reschke not only increase their personal reach on Twitter, but also help make political news more accessible, establish a broader online discourse about politics, and form counter-publics to hate speech and fake news.

(E4) Minority/Alternative media

Large and mid-size minority groups are increasingly recognised by existing media, but, compared to the diversity of society, minority media are rather a niche-phenomenon, and only a few large and powerful minorities operate their own media.

The term “alternative media” gained a negative undertone during the last decade because right-wing or populist movements claimed the term and defined it dif-
German society is very dynamic and heterogeneous. Minority representation in the media has different strands and can be differentiated along a horizontal and a vertical line. Along the horizontal line, we find various minorities under- or misrepresented in well-established and legacy media, grouped around diversity categories like race, class, gender, sexual preferences, (dis)ability, and others. On the vertical line, we see evidence that people with migration backgrounds lack equal participation opportunities to access jobs as editorial staff in the media. Sustainable diversity concepts are not in place even in public service media, which are obliged to serve society as a whole (Horz, 2020). Minority groups with Turkish and Polish roots who form the largest and longest resident immigrant groups in Germany are barely represented in national legacy media. The public service media are obliged by law to reach minorities, but reduced their multilingual target group radio programmes during the last decade. Under the aegis of ARD, only one Arabic language radio programme exists (Cosmo, ARD-cooperation). 

However, diversity is dealt with in public service media and largely understood as a holistic cross-sectional task. This process is located in different areas of responsibility, and work contexts such as corporate planning, personnel development, commissioners for cultural diversity, integration, and gender and diversity. This includes continuing education programmes, journalistic internships, discussion events, and measures for personnel development and recruitment.

About a quarter of citizens have a so-called migration background. Since refugee immigration in 2015, the ethnic diversity of society has significantly increased. Public service media serve refugees and new residents with online offers like WDR for you in the four most-spoken languages of refugees. Immigrants also use Web 2.0 media as opportunities to inform and communicate directly with their communities. The largest Syrian network in Germany is Syrian House, run by a Syrian media specialist currently with over 257,000 members on Facebook. These media services, however, exist in niches; in mainstream nationwide and legacy media, refugees are mostly the objects – not the subjects – of reporting (Fengler & Kreutler, 2020), with a few exceptions in target-group content.

The small and long-existing official national minorities like Danes, Sorbes, Frisians, or the German Sinti and Roma are selectively provided with mother-tongue programmes in few public service media and not-for-profit radios or newspapers, like the Danish Flensborg Avis. The Sorbes in Saxonia, for instance, are provided with a radio programme by the public service broadcaster MDR.
The Sinti and Roma produce their Romanes programme *Latscho Dibes* [Good day] in a not-for-profit radio project in Hildesheim and are represented with one seat in the broadcasting council of the public service broadcaster SWR.

Apart from that, media from former home countries have produced newspapers for minorities like Turkish immigrants in Germany since the 1960s. The last decade not only disrupted the German print sector at large, but also those daily and weekly newspapers produced for the local minority groups in Germany. The Turkish newspaper market in Germany collapsed, and one of the biggest dailies, *Hürriyet*, stopped their production in Germany in 2013 because of a massive loss of readers.

Commercial television stations for Turkish-speaking and other minority groups in Germany still exist and are available plentifully via satellite, YouTube, or streaming. With the Turkish minority in Germany divided between those in favour and those against President Erdogan, the media market reflects this split. In 2017, the Turkish opposition channel Arti.TV was founded by exiled journalists in Cologne and is available via YouTube.

There are increased media offers for post-migrant communities, defined as new social groups consisting of people with or without a migrant background and who are linked to transcultural media products. Younger audiences can find those products in the public service media channel funk on YouTube, for example, the show *Datteltäter*. Another example is the online magazine *Migazin*, founded and run by Ekrem Şenol and recipient of the Grimme-Online Award for its quality content.

Other, smaller communities with fewer resources – like LGBTI+ community or communities of those with disabilities – also run small media enterprises, thanks to the opportunities the Internet offers. For example, a group of people with Down Syndrome founded the periodical *Obrenkuss* in 1998, which is also available online.

(E5) Affordable public and private news media

All news media are quite cheap compared to the average income of a German household.

The gross domestic product per capita in Germany is EUR 41,345 (2018: EUR 40,800), thus exceeding the average gross domestic product per capita of the European Union, which is EUR 30,900 (2018) (Statista, 2020). The average disposable income of a German household in 2017 was about EUR 33,990 (DeStatis 2020a). The latest consumer statistics from 2017 show that an average household spent about EUR 2,517 per month. The costs for radio and television licence fees (excluding cable and satellite fees) were about EUR 17.50
per month, those for newspapers and news magazines EUR 21 per month on average (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019a), and another EUR 64 was spent on telecommunications (DeStatis, 2020a). This means that the average costs of mass media (print, radio, television, and telecommunication) in Germany form an average of 4 per cent of total household expenditures.

The monthly cost for a newspaper subscription, which is the dominant distribution channel in Germany, is between EUR 27 (tabloid) and EUR 70 (broadsheet) for print and between EUR 4 (tabloid) and EUR 40 (broadsheet) for an e-paper. Broadcasting fees (EUR 17.50) are compulsory and paid per household as stipulated in the State Treaty on Broadcasting Financing [Rundfunkfinanzierungsstaatsvertrag]. People with disabilities can apply for reduction or remission of the licence fee; however, there is a debate around the absence of an income-based differentiation of the licence fee, the lack of which discriminates against low-income groups, including students.

90 per cent of all German households had broadband connections in 2019 (DeStatis, 2020b), which were available at a price between EUR 19–25.

Table 8 Expenses with media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass media</th>
<th>Annual price (EUR)</th>
<th>% of average household income (2017)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper (regional paper print, subscription)</td>
<td>540.00</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper (tabloid, direct sale)</td>
<td>249.60</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting licence fee</td>
<td>210.00</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet and landline (Telekom)</td>
<td>431.40</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile 5G 12 GB (Telekom)</td>
<td>599.40</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: information by provider

(E6) Content monitoring instruments

Continuous content monitoring is regularly provided and published by independent organisations, scholars, and media organisations.

Like in MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), scholars, university institutes, and specialised private agencies and companies still provide content monitoring. A private institution, linked to the biggest public service media provider ARD, provides mostly quantitative content analysis about the Internet and audiovisual media, as well as related usage patterns. Results and reports are published free of charge online and in the journal Media Perspektiven. Empirical data and studies offer independent insights and are highly useful.
for research purposes. Two other institutions (IFEM – Institut für empirische Medienforschung and GöfaK Medienforschung) also produce print, Internet, and audiovisual content analysis, which are publicly funded and published on their websites, in Media Perspektiven and special reports. The InfoMonitor (IFEM) monthly reports feature the most salient political news, politicians, and topics. During the Covid-19 crisis, the institute published access to free quantitative research about Covid-19 discourse in the most-viewed news shows on television, Tagesschau and heute.

The GöfaK Institute conducts applied and contracted research for the Landesmedienanstalten, the authority responsible for licensing commercial television and radio stations and funded by public service licence fees. GöfaK is also concerned with the research topic media and migrants. Related studies are publicly accessible and free of charge, but are more relevant for scholars and research institutions. Between 1998 and 2018, the Landesmedienanstalten established a continuous television programme published in the ALM-report, which was replaced in 2016 by the annual Content Bericht. It analysed the content quality of public service and commercial television (Weiß et al., 2019).

Additionally, public service media are obliged to produce a report to justify the public value of their content, the Declaration of Self-Commitment [Selbstverpflichtungserklärung]. The Public Value Test [Drei-Stufen-Test], which is due if new services are implemented, is only published internally.

What is missing are external monitoring institutions to monitor the quality and performance of large media corporations. Accordingly, there is no systematic monitoring for the press. International companies like MediaTenor offer special strategic information and services for customers, like media companies or editorial units.

Free monitoring instruments have been established by unions and parts of non-governmental organisations and scientific institutions, or by initiatives. One of them is a privately funded non-governmental organisation by famous television actors Maria and Elisabeth Furtwängler, MaLisa foundation (see Indicator F9 – Gender equality in media content).

All of these monitoring instruments – free of charge or not – are usually not published by relevant news media, but by scientific journals or special interest magazines. Consequently, their public visibility is rather low.

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level

A code is implemented and frequently used by all leading news media.

Germany has had a press council since 1956 and a press code since 1973, which functions as the overall ethical guidelines for journalism in all media. A press
The complaint commission is hosted by the press council, which judges complaints that anybody can submit. In 2020, there were 4,085 complaints, 294 sanctions, including 53 reprimands. Some scholars criticise the press council for not being well known among the general public, while others claim their judgments are not effective enough. However, all interviewed journalists except one and the journalists’ trade unions claim they know the press code and respect it and that it is important in its guiding quality. They say, “The press code is self-evident, lived practice, and gives rise to debate, for example on the issue of the naming of ethnic or national provenance”.

The results of a representative online survey from 2010 (Reinemann, 2010) show that only half of the surveyed journalists admit that they think the measures of the Press Council would affect the actions of editorial offices. The reason is that there are neither economic nor publicity incentives to act accordingly. Nevertheless, three-quarters of surveyed journalists think that the press council is relevant for their work.

All of our interviewees report the clause about the naming of ethnic or national provenance as an important example when they consult the press code. This is due to a highly controversial issue a mass sexual offence by hundreds of migrants that took place on New Year’s Eve 2015, and the media did not report the provenance of the offenders because they lacked information from the police for the first few days after this event (Haarhoff, 2020). Other significant topics where the press code is consulted comprise questions of human dignity, reporting suicide, privacy, the right to one’s own image, and so on.

The representative of the journalists’ union bears in mind that journalists cannot always achieve what the press code calls for. However, it remains well suited to describe professional ethics in the near future. In recent years, there has been increased sensitivity for the application of the press code of ethics. It is not the number of cases of reprimands that is decisive, but the application of the code in a broader sense. A representative from a journalists’ union suggests that journalists in start-ups and those who have not gone through a journalistic education are alien to the press code, creating issues.

**Level of self-regulation**

Leading news media have self-regulation instruments in place but only use them occasionally.

Self-regulation in leading German news media seems to be more informal than formal, although there are tendencies towards greater formality. The most formal provisions for self-regulation are in public service media, where they have a Declaration of Self-Commitment [Selbstverpflichtungserklärung] that
lays down principles of journalistic action as well as programming policies. They also have compliance rules, internal rules for the right to reply, and a code of conduct, which refers to democratic values and contains journalistic obligations to report in a politically balanced way. There is also a formal system for hearing complaints about alleged violations of ethical standards with the complaints committees of the broadcasting council. The reactions to journalists who violate ethical standards are more informal, in the sense that self-criticism takes place in a dialogue:

Experience has shown me that [...] this debate must be conducted again and again, almost on a weekly basis, at the latest on a monthly basis. [...] I am convinced that at this point, a jointly developed conviction is more important than something that is written down and passed by a committee.

The leading print media refer either to the compliance rules of their company, have editorial statutes, or are about to develop a framework of norms as part of the aftermath of a fake news scandal. All journalists and editors-in-chief underline that they consider internal discussions in the newsrooms and the expansion of self-criticism an important tool of self-regulation within their organisational culture. The representatives of a conservative media outlet report the existence of guidelines which prescribe certain political positions. These include advocacy of the so-called social market economy, reconciliation with Israel, and friendship with the US. Explicit efforts to guarantee gender balance in news subjects are not found, although a certain sensitivity in this respect is obvious. The efforts made to guarantee gender balance in the news subjects stem from top-down decisions. Labour law sanctions were only imposed in the rarest and most serious cases of violations of existing norms, and censure is usually preferred.

Ombudspersons are not an established instrument of media self-regulation in Germany (Eberwein et al., 2019). Although some media claim that their department working with the letters to the editor have an ombuds function as well, these cannot be regarded as a functional equivalent. Only one regional paper, Main-Post in Würzburg, has a well-known ombudsperson [Leseranwalt] with a good reputation.

There is a legal right to reply laid down in the press laws of the Federal states. Usually, the news media modestly comply with this by giving the contestation only a little space. Additionally, as these replies are only implemented after a lengthy court case, they are not considered very effective in the reader’s view. However, quality media are eager to avoid the application of the right to reply.

An association for the promotion of media self-regulation (Verein zur Förderung der publizistischen Selbstkontrolle) tried to work over several years to improve self-regulation, but stopped its activities in 2020 due to a lack of interest and support from members.
Participation

After a period of openness, newsrooms tend to close commentary functions again after masses of inappropriate or outright hateful user comments. Selected news items are still open for comments from the public, but under the supervision of a moderator.

Traditional participation opportunities attributed to legacy media – like letters to the editor (print) or audience response to broadcasting councils (public service radio and television) – are certainly possible in Germany. Letters to the editor can be perceived as an enlargement of a topical discourse, although only a few replies are published in specific sections of the newspaper. Some papers, like the weekly broadsheet *Die Zeit*, increased their space for reader’s comments to one page, and also invite readers for Open Door Days. The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* mobilises readers to decide which issue journalists should investigate and created a “Workshop Democracy”, where readers are asked to discuss relevant democratic challenges. Television and radio stations usually do not provide this kind of space for audience feedback, except in call-in shows, online fora, and commentary sections for particular programmes. One editor-in-chief underscores the importance of user participation:

We have, for example, so-called audience apartments, where we really go into the areas of people, [...] also in the countryside, and rent an apartment there for a year or two [...] get into conversation with people. We have WhatsApp Groups with our viewers [...] to finally understand people because people [...] are changing faster and faster due to digitalisation.

Responses to broadcasting councils as the traditional path for enacting the citizen’s role of an external observer of programme quality and functions is contested. During the last decade, an increase of critical voices against this tedious practice was observed (Horz, 2020). At the regulatory level, however, measures were taken to increase citizens’ inclusion in informal considerations about legislative amendments like the WDR Gesetz. People were asked to answer an online survey about the future structure of the broadcasting council in the regional public service provider. Over 1,500 citizens took part, which was assessed as a success, considering the complex topic of media regulation. Responses to broadcasting councils, however, also must be considered in the context of a growing critique against public service media, which some NGOs and right-wing political parties play out in mass complaints against public service media.

The last decade was characterised by new forms of user participation associated with networked communication on the Internet. Some of the interviewed editors pointed out that the Internet is theoretically a good option as a platform both for exchange between readers, listeners, or viewers, and for communica-
tion with the news media. In practice, commentary functions are only seen as a feasible way to communicate if they are moderated:

But in some cases, we decided to close the comment section because we were overwhelmed by it. Because it became too much quantitatively and because what was said exceeded the limits of decency and what we wanted our employees to deal with.

As resources are rare, most of the interviewees said their media companies closed the commentary sections after figuring out that the sheer amount of inappropriate language and hate speech (particularly in the context of refugee migration) exceeded their moderation resources. Editors-in-chief of big print magazines like *Der Spiegel* or *Stern* infrequently open their newsrooms to the public, which is seen as a very successful way to build mutual trust. *Stern* is currently considering creating a regulars’ table, where people from a neighbourhood can meet to informally discuss current affairs, to help them get a better sense of the pulse of ordinary citizens.

Users can also contact the editorial unit of a programme via contact forms. User-generated content plays a rather circumstantial role in public service media, but is an interesting option for commercial television stations like RTL that are generally more interested in personalised information. The public service television station ZDF runs the successful news format *heute+* with call-in options, and is popular amongst younger audiences. Moreover, ZDF editors go out to meet their audiences, and the public broadcaster implemented a corrections page at their website to add transparency and compensate for television programmes that do not provide any space for corrections.

Weeklies like the online paper *Der Freitag* (not part of the interview sample) changed their editorial processes and implemented a community section; readers act as civic journalists and produce about half the total content of this paper. Journalists edit these texts and award the best ones with a special button (Reimer et al., 2015). Both readers and journalists are satisfied with the output and the reader retention, which keeps the paper in the market.

The large print media companies, such as WAZ, founded reader councils, with relatively high influence on news processes, but it could not be verified that this council still existed after 2019.

Finally, radio shows like those of WDR or Deutschlandradio offer regular call-in options, but previously existing ListenerDays, with user-generated radio content, were abolished recently. All in all, there is still a lack of opportunities for user participation in content provision, with only a few of the main news media creating editorial space for the public voice. Digital opportunities, like commentary functions, proved not to be an appropriate way to include citizens’ voices, because of the audience’s unethical behaviour and a lack of human resources in editorial units.
User participation at the structural level in media institutions is almost completely lacking. Although public service broadcasting councils represent some major social groups, they do not reflect the dynamic transformation of society. Most of the public service media opened their council and board meetings to the public; however, citizens are not allowed to ask questions or comment. The opaque decision processes in PSM as public institutions are a topic of concern and are discussed among civil rights initiatives, scholars and special interest groups.

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

No internal formal rules are in place, but newsroom meetings are a regular practice to discuss and check for pluralism.

Compared with MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), the focus of what is understood as internal pluralism has diversified. Political pluralism is still an important issue, but there is also a more social understanding of pluralism. The interviewees showed a growing awareness of the stratification and rising heterogeneity of society – culturally, politically, socially, and demographically. One journalist self-critically assessed the lack of cultural diversity in their editorial units:

I don’t think [we are] diverse enough. And that applies to almost all groups and aspects that can be imagined. [...] We are not as colourful as a society.
We are still very West German, bourgeois, (no longer) completely male.

This awareness can be underpinned by current research, indicating that only about 6 per cent of editors-in-chief have a migration background, and even if so, their roots are typically in the EU or neighbouring countries. The number of journalists with a migration background is estimated to be even less than that (Vassiliou-Enz, 2020).

How many German-Turks or German-Italians [...] are there [in our reporting]? Not so many. [...] It is also because not many are in leading positions in society – and a large part of our reporting is about the actors. And there we are the mirror of society.

Standardised procedures to ensure internal pluralism do not exist. Interviewees state that editorial meetings are usually a formal procedure to discuss political standpoints of a story and to ensure internal pluralism is safeguarded. If single measures are in place, they usually have been established by the management:

We started top-down from the editor-in-chief to say that when we do vox-pops, please take care that it is not always just the representative ladies and
gentlemen in fancy coats, but that it can also be other people, also [...] people who may speak German with an accent. However, as print media in Germany are “ideological enterprises”, they are allowed to ask their journalist to adhere to a certain political or ideological line, like Axel Springer AG media (Bild).

With the recent entrance of right-wing parties in the German parliament, Die Zeit established a new format to address democratic debate in controversial debates, like Deutschland spricht. Journalists match two citizens with fundamentally opposing political positions and moderate the conversation. These two sides of the controversy are covered in personalised stories in the print and online version of the weekly.

Under these conditions, a journalist of the news magazine Der Spiegel pointed out that political pluralism is sometimes a challenge. Covering an interest group also means granting them attention, although the drivers behind these interests are not always obvious at first glance. News media are hence in danger of becoming instrumentalised by these drivers.

**Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)**

(C1) Supervising the watchdog “control of the controllers”  
Media performance and content are publicly discussed in the media. Over the last decade, online fora and the journalistic enterprises of critical journalists have become a watchdog force to be reckoned with.

Besides monitoring the media in academic research projects, there are several mechanisms to perform the watchdog function on the media. First, there is media coverage about media performance, like the weekly television magazine ZAPP of the regional public television broadcaster NDR, or @mediasres from Deutschlandfunk. The magazine is one of few exceptions in the German media landscape, because of a systematic cut-down or complete abolishment of critical media rubrics in newspapers during the last decade.

Second, the shift from mass media control towards independent online watchdogs has intensified. One successful example is Über Medien, founded and run by the journalist Stefan Niggemeier. Über Medien monetises their quality content through a subscription model and has successfully attracted some 4,000 subscribers, proof that there exists a demand for media critique.

Third, media observers in specialised Internet blogs still exist. Several blogs comment on just one newspaper, like bildblog.de on the most-read tabloid,
BILD-Zeitung. Others focus on specific media segments like public service media. One example is a not-for-profit association that runs the blog Publikumsrat.de, which constructively criticises, but also defends, the public service media against populist voices who would rather see public service media abolished. One can assume that the reach of media blogs is still low, but the last decade proved that they function as an important driving force for a wider debate about media pluralism and quality of news media. However, a parallel development is the emergence of watchdogs from the populist and right-wing segment of the political spectrum. Their aim is not to constructively criticise and safeguard a pluralistic and democratic media system, but to get rid of media and media institutions offering unbiased information. Overall, the public debate about the media has become more antagonistic.

Fourth, there is still some institutionalised control of the media. The Landesmedienanstalten – the publicly funded supervising authorities for commercial television – control the content of the commercial programmes in every federal state according to the standards of their broadcasting licence. These standards include, most prominently, a minimum quota of news and cultural programmes, and threshold values for the ratio of advertising and programme content.

Public service broadcasting is to some extent supervised by special broadcasting councils representing highly influential social groups, such as unions and representatives of the state and the church, which consequently indicates a certain amount of political influence on public broadcasting.

The press is supervised by the Press Council, a co-determination body offering ethical guidelines for journalists in the Pressekodex. The guidelines are not unanimously accepted anymore, because of major changes in the discrimination act after sexual harassments during New Year’s Eve 2015, attributed to immigrants. In the aftermath, moral panic and ethnosexism were rising, provoking the Press Council to weaken the discrimination act and to link the mention of the migration background of a suspect in the public interest (Dietze, 2017; Horz, 2017).

In comparison with the MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), the above-mentioned institutionalised mechanisms of control of the controllers stand in opposition to heated public discussions in Internet fora, which sometimes gain a lot of public attention. On the other hand, constructive discussions on media ethics and the media’s performance for democracy remain restricted to very specialised media coverage, expert circles, or events.
Independence from powerholders is guaranteed by law and widely respected, though there was one important case of undue influence by powerholders.

In Germany, freedom of the press is guaranteed by constitutional law (Art. 5 Grundgesetz) and has been fostered by the jurisdiction of the federal constitutional court [Bundesverfassungsgericht] over the past fifty years. Article 5 of the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of access to information, and the absence of censorship. In an Interstate Agreement on Broadcast Services [Rundfunkstaatsvertrag], both governmental and state non-intervention in broadcasting is described in detail.

The public service media remit provides for independence from the state and government through clear statements in the broadcasting law (Interstate Broadcasting Treaty; die medienanstalten – ALM GbR, 2019b) and by legal provisions, which allow only a limited number of representatives from governments (federal and regional) and official bodies on the board, who can always be overruled. The selection procedure for the editor-in-chief of public service media is formally fully independent from the government, as they are appointed by the CEO with approval of the board. The CEO, for their part, is elected by the broadcasting council. However, public service media experienced one serious attempt by a political actor to influence the political agenda of the programme, when a politician who was part of the board created a majority for blocking the continuation of the contract of ZDF’s editor-in-chief. This was followed by a constitutional court procedure, which ended in a ruling that the representation of members of the sphere of politics must be reduced to one-third of all self-governing bodies of public service media.

All leading editors we interviewed rejected any attempts of interference by powerholders or politicians. No severe case was reported. On the contrary, all of our journalistic interview partners were convinced that the management would back them against such attempts (as was also the case a decade ago; see Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011). The German media system is widely characterised by distancing itself from the state (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 197), and the journalistic culture contributes actively to the value of keeping one’s distance from powerholders (Hanitzsch & Seethaler, 2009). Nevertheless, journalists’ trade unions plead for a statute for inner press freedom, giving more autonomy to the editors, which exists only in very few media outlets.

Party affiliation does not play any role among leading news media, except within the composition of the councils of the public service media, where a strict law (Rundfunkstaatsvertrag) equilibrates the representation of political parties according to the principle of internal pluralism. However, internal discussion networks, Freundeskreise [circles of friends], reflect political lean-
ings towards the leading social democrats and the conservative party, but are criticised as acting in a clandestine and non-transparent way. More important is the influence of financial investors in the news sector. The financial investor KKR became the largest shareholder in the Berlin media group Axel Springer, and even outstripped the publisher’s widow Friede Springer. With their takeover offer, the American company secured about 42.5 per cent of Europe’s largest digital publishing house.

(C3) Transparency of data on leading news media 3 POINTS

Transparency data on large parts of the media system is recorded and available to the public online.

The recent public debate about broadcasting fees and financial transparency of the leading public service media ARD and ZDF has been included in the reform process of these institutions. For a few years now, public service media published comprehensive online data on facts and figures such as the spending of broadcasting fees. The second-biggest nationwide public service television ZDF provides detailed information about corporate social responsibility activities online. An ARD-affiliated research unit edits the open access online professional publication Media Perspektiven, which is a trustworthy and valued source in academic ecologies, with mostly quantitative studies about the latest developments in the media industry. Apart from that, scholars publish information about leading news media according to their specific research focus.

The Landesmedienanstalten is an authority which licenses and supervises commercial broadcasters and promotes and finances research on the media system in each of the Länder. They are also responsible for conducting activities to increase media literacy. In a common annual yearbook, all fourteen Landesmedienanstalten present a complete list of all projects (die medienanstalten – ALM GbR, 2019a), which is also accessible online. As it was a decade ago (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), market shares of commercial broadcasting providers are legally restricted to 30 per cent.

There are legal provisions to ensure two different forms of plurality in the German media system. Firstly, external plurality of ownership of the press is guaranteed by national law and controlled by the Bundeskartellamt, the German antitrust agency. Additionally, there is a special commission that assesses and reports the degree of concentration within the media market with a special focus on the television market (KEK – Kommission zur Ermittlung der Konzentration im Medienbereich). Concentration in the print market is assessed and evaluated by the commercial research institute FormaTT for free. Both institutions publish their reports, and KEK also provides a free Internet database. Print and online
media are legally obliged to publicise an imprint in every edition containing the name and address of the responsible publisher. The clear duty to provide information about the person or company responsible for publishing is formulated in national law (Telemediengesetz [Telemedia Act]) as well as in federal law (Landesmediengesetze [State media laws]). Commercial media companies and press publishers like Axel Springer SE present key business figures and information on ownership and other relevant data online, although publishers are not obliged to the same extent to publish business data as other companies.

Second, internal pluralism is guaranteed by the Federal Constitutional Law and its “broadcasting decisions” and is also laid down in the Federal Broadcasting Act [Rundfunkstaatsvertrag]. As the public service media in Germany are equipped with a serve-all mandate, they are obliged to safeguard the broadest possible programme plurality and the plurality of opinions in their media offer. These programme principles are supervised by two governing bodies in each public service media broadcaster: the broadcasting council and the board. To some extent, they publish information about the composition of the bodies, their mandate, and their activities but not on the “circle of friends”, as it is not obvious which member belongs to which of these political leanings (see Indicator C2 – Independence of the news media from powerholders). Scholars, hence, critically assess that not all council meetings are open to the public and decisions are not made transparent enough. Overall, public service media increasingly publish reports on structural data and background information about the German media system, because the last decade saw a growing pressure on public service media to start reforms and digitisation, forcing them to reinvent themselves in the digital age (Herzog et al., 2018).

(C4) Journalism professionalism

German journalists have a high level of education and a prevailing professional ethos, and resources are still sufficient in leading news media.

The representatives of the journalists’ unions are unanimous in their view that the professional standards are high in German journalism, but that the conditions of resources have worsened such that profound investigation is sometimes lacking: “We see significant gaps in resources that affect publications. Almost all the editorial offices we know of are staffed too tightly. Attempts have been made to improve the economic situation by cutting jobs”.

In the Worlds of Journalism Study, the respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (Hanitzsch et al., 2016). The education of journalists is as high as ever, but working conditions and shortness of time
hinder journalists from performing in line with their skills. In 2016, 96 per cent of journalists had a university-entry diploma, and 75 per cent had a university degree, although a slight majority (56%) had not specialised in communication or journalism (Hanitzsch et al., 2016).

The prerequisite of cross-media skills is ubiquitous, and workload has increased because of digital publishing alongside the print version. This is in line with a survey where 44 per cent of interviewed journalists assess their working conditions as rather less good, and 11 per cent even as not good at all (Statista, 2020). This is especially true for daily newspapers and important regional and local papers. Additionally, there are critiques that the level of general education has decreased, and so background knowledge to classify and interpret news events is lacking. In public service media, conditions are considered comparatively better, but a sense of insecurity by political pressure to cut costs in public service media is weighing on working conditions.

Because of reductions in newsrooms, the workload has increased, and time for sound investigative research has been continuously lessened: “Where you used to go and do research for two weeks, let’s say today, six days must also be enough”. Still, two weekly publications, which can be regarded as market leaders, have good working conditions and are esteemed for their investigative power. Some of their investigative successes were the disclosure of the Ibiza video, which forced the Austrian government to resign, the Panama Papers, and disclosures on fraud in health insurances.

The level of self-organisation is high. There are two active competing and cooperating unions of journalists, publishing their own media thematising issues of professionalism and ethics. There also exists additional organisations (Network Investigation, Initiative Quality) working on these topics. According to interviewees from the unions, journalists show a high level of solidarity:

> There is good solidarity among colleagues, because everyone sees that the situation as we see it is due to bottlenecks. Our colleagues exercise their profession with such passion that they say, no, we have reached a point here, we cannot go any further.

Public debates about ethical behaviour usually come up when big scandals happen, and are then picked up by journalists, but not initiated by them. For example, a big faking scandal within a leading weekly triggered a huge discussion about how far reportage may be embellished to captivate the reader.

Regular education is given by a tariff agreement stating the conditions of the initial training, which is a two-year paid internship. Journalists’ unions promote the necessity of further education by making it a component of the collective wage agreement.

Gender issues in further education are reported as being underexposed, although the journalists’ unions report a high level of women journalists to defend their claims.
JOURNALISTS’ JOB SECURITY

Journalists’ job security depends on economic situations. Once employed, journalists normally remain employed for a long time. However, fixed and long-term contracts are thinning out, and there is an increased proportion of freelancers, who then must bear the brunt of economic disruptions.

On the level of the labour market, the journalist unions like DJV and Ver.di/DJU provide a differentiated view, whereas in MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), it was clearly pessimistic. This change can be attributed to various causes. First, in the last decade, the fictitious self-employment in the media sector had finally been prosecuted, after a long period of legal laissez-faire. This led to a wave of contracts for formerly self-employed journalists. However, unions point out that publishers filtered out high potential journalists and dismissed the rest. Austerity also has other spill-over effects:

A situation of tension arises [dealing with the tight resources] because those who manage budgets in the editorial offices [...] are in a bind. [...] It is of course the case that a budget that is too tightly allocated [...] by the management [...] and the editors in the individual units have to manage parts of this budget. [They] are responsible for awarding contracts and can only offer lousy fees in order not to end up under pressure themselves because they exceed their budget.

Fixed-term contracting is widespread, and freelancers are seen as an important part of the German media system. The official statistics counted 27,000 freelancers in journalism alone in 2018 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019b: 365). Of about 220,000 employees in the media industry, 158,000 work in editorial boards and journalism (including public relations staff). These freelancers are heavily affected by the Covid-19 crisis, as they rarely meet the requirements for state subsidies. About 113,000 of these 220,000^3 employees are under contract, and 60,000 are self-employed (Statistik der Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2019: 121–123). The job market finally showed positive development, due to the overall solid economic growth in Germany; however, the seniority system of contracts makes the work of older journalists more expensive. In print journalism, this may have led to dismissals, but there is a tendency to keep experienced journalists, according to unionists. The digital transformation, however, created new challenges for legacy print media:

The people who are hired now are not journalists, they are reconfiguring the platform of journalism [...] In the print sector [...] they hire a lot of expensive people. [...] those who are hired there for digital transformation are really expensive. They are as expensive as an editor who has been around for twenty years.
In public service media, political pressure and austerity are driving forces for job instability. However, according to the Worlds of Journalism Study (Hanitzsch et al., 2016: 2–3), about 75 per cent of German journalists work full-time, of which 17.7 per cent are freelancers in 2016. Over 92 per cent hold permanent positions. Second, a trend towards stable working conditions is partly attributed to publishers’ desire to attract younger journalists who can aid the digital transformation. Gen Z strives to keep a work-life balance and a stable future, which means employers need to offer better contract conditions. Moreover, the employability of academics decreased during the last decade, and interview partners assume that there is a battle for the best graduates. According to the DJV, the public debate about the quality of news and the trend of investing more in investigative reporting led to a rise in awareness about journalism’s importance.

On the juridical level, the companies derived from classic print publishers in Germany are Tendenzbetriebe, which means that a company not only has economic, but may also have cultural or political, objectives. One example is Axel Springer SE (Bild), where journalists must consent to reporting in support of the Israeli state and liberal market economy. However, any influence on the editorial bent of news media by politicians or the industry is against federal constitutional law and federal law. Publishers still cannot force their editorial staff to follow their inclinations, so a journalist is not bound to write an article expressing the publisher’s viewpoint exactly. Freedom of expression and human dignity (according to the German Basic Law) legally protects journalists from pressure, which can be interpreted as a clause de conscience. Above that, bylaws of editorial units, labour legislation, and last but not least, unions, protect journalists.

Female journalists are, like every working woman in Germany, supported by federal laws such as parental leave, which guarantees a leave for up to 36 months for each child. In media companies where unions are strong partners, women’s contracts seem to be protected better. Male journalists can take the leave if resources are available, but this may interfere with advancing their career, according to DJU. Public debates during the last decade have led to a rise in awareness about workplace sexual harassment. When female journalist Laura Himmelreich shared her negative experiences with a politician’s sexist advances during an interview via Twitter #aufschrei in 2013 (comparable to #metoo), it spurred an ongoing debate about everyday sexism. Legally, the victims of physical sexual harassment are protected by the law to protect sexual self-determination, which was implemented in November 2016 (§ 184i StGB). Bullying is, as such, not a crime, but certain acts like discriminating or harassing someone are. The antidiscrimination law AAG (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz) obligates employers to offer comprehensive protection and implement measures against sexual harassment and bullying on various levels, which also contains the right to complain. The burden of proof lies on the suspect to prove they are not guilty.
Public information is accessible by law, but not in reality. Journalists need to spend time and effort to get access.

Although Germany has had a freedom of information law since 2007, which applies to all citizens, journalists from the trade unions and media outlets we interviewed complained that access to official sources and information is quite restricted and painful to obtain. The law contains many and very broad exceptions. Certain public interests remain protected, for example, if the disclosure of the information could have adverse effects on international relations, security-sensitive concerns of the military [Bundeswehr], on internal or external security, or control tasks of the financial, competition, and regulatory authorities. If ongoing legal proceedings or discussions with the authorities could be adversely affected, the principle of confidentiality continues to apply. The secret services are completely exempt from the right to information. Private interests also lead to exception clauses, for example, if conflicts with data protection arise or if business and trade secrets of a private company are being requested. Although the Constitutional Court ruled in 2015 that how journalists obtain information is protected by fundamental rights, there is no federal press information law, and the press laws on the level of the states do not suffice for journalists’ investigations.

Authorities typically delay requests based on the freedom of information law, as the representative of a journalists’ union states: “Due to delays and tactics by the federal authorities, it is sometimes not possible to continue research at all. We can provide legal protection through our state-based associations, or this can be done through the publisher”. Through internal sources, journalists got to know that administrations have passed regulations to find exceptions for being obliged to give applicants insight into documents on the grounds of “disproportionate processing effort”. A Federal Commissioner for Freedom of Information, who works on limiting the exceptions, is in charge, but there are some ministries where the acknowledgement of receipt contains by default the sentence, “Requests can cost up to 500 €”. An exception of this overall situation is created by the Transparency Law of the State of Hamburg, which obliges the authorities to publish files not only upon request but automatically.

In rural areas, there are closer networks, and access to information can work better there. On the other hand, the accessibility of administrations is even worse here: “Journalism has become the covert press office, because investigation is no longer done at the grassroots level, with the people, but rather with the president, the deputy president or the press spokesman”. The application of state law to federal agencies is only a makeshift solution. Because of delay and evasion, journalists often have no access or need a long court procedure to enforce their claim. Many investigations are eroded by delays, as then the
effort is too great or the matter is no longer topical. The regional associations of the journalists’ union, DJV, often provide legal protection in these cases, and sometimes this is also possible through the publishing house. The DJV has fought through spectacular cases as an advocate of a federal press information law.

The answers of the interviewed journalists show, as well, that success in getting information is often dependent on the time and resources a newsroom has.

(C7) The watchdog and the news media’s mission statement

Investigative and watchdog journalism is, in most cases, part of the self-conception of leading news media. Austerity measures and the economic situation of the media, however, often don’t leave enough resources for journalists to exercise it.

While only a few interviewed journalists and editors made remarks about the watchdog role, they did comment on the importance of investigative reporting as an important factor in their everyday work. This may correlate with previous studies, which showed that no more than 24 per cent of German journalists see themselves as watchdogs (Weischenberg et al., 2006: 106–110 & 279). We observed a different situation compared with MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011). The editor-in-chief of Süddeutsche Zeitung stated that the watchdog role is very important. Interviewees of Der Spiegel, Die Zeit, RTL, and the public service broadcaster ZDF invested in a specific investigative unit because they perceive investigative journalism as an asset in an overall highly competitive market, and normatively more important than ever.

One successful example of journalism’s watchdog role is Ibiza-Gate, where Spiegel and SZ-Online published a video on 17 May 2019 in which the readiness of the former vice-chancellor of Austria to commit corruption and take over and control an independent newspaper was revealed.

The editor-in-chief of Stern, however, critically assesses that the watchdog role has been replaced by the role of journalism as a press office. Journalism is seen as too fixated on the elites, and the watchdog function is not taken seriously in German journalism any more. Other journalists differentiate between their own research, in the sense of journalistic quality norms and investigative research, in the sense of in-depth research for a longer period and with greater intensity. The first is perceived as increasingly important to safeguard the legitimacy of journalism. The latter, however, is seen as a long-term process which is not a matter of course and needs to be equipped with more resources to become a stable part of editorial units. Only the editor-in-chief of RTL, and those in RTL’s school of journalism, mentioned investigative journalism as part
of the company’s mission statement: “We have the [research] team here, where we do investigative journalism and it can happen that a colleague works on a topic for eight months”.

Like in MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), there are no mission statements that explicitly advertise active investigative journalism. On the other hand, digitisation is seen as an important task for the leading news media, where resources are invested. The assumptions of the global journalism project—mentioned in MDM 2011, concerning German journalists’ obligation towards the watchdog role—is no longer as important (Hanitzsch et al., 2016: 2). Only 36.3 per cent perceive their role in “monitoring political leaders”, whereas the commitment to “report things as they are” scores over 90 per cent in the sample; hence, they play not so much the watchdog role, but rather the role of the uninvolved observer. This outcome corroborates the hypothesis that objectivity is the highest value of journalists in Germany, which, on the other hand, also means that they may not be aware of (re)framing and the implications of the theory of constructivism for their work (Hillje, 2017).

(C8) Professional training

In Germany, there are sufficient opportunities for journalism training. Journalists in well-established and economically sound news media are better off than their colleagues in weaker media.

A two-year long internship in a medium, usually linked to an academic institution, is still the most important entrance track into journalism in Germany (von Matt, 2012). This is combined with a four-week-long intensive course in an independent institution for journalism education. For further education, there is a good range of offers in terms of journalistic techniques, genres, data journalism, cross-media production, and so on. These offers include not only skills but also knowledge training. Four of the sampled news media run their own academy, and there is a wide range of academies, courses, and university-based certificate courses for professional journalists.

The editors-in-chief interviewed underlined that they are extremely interested in journalists from their newsrooms undergoing further education, and journalists themselves also claimed that they can go for further education if they want.

Big Data analysis has become a hot topic and is mentioned as an opportunity by most of our interlocutors. However, there is no obligation for continuous training. Those newspapers which have explicit investigative departments claim their journalists are fit enough for investigation and that they do training on the job and in specific cooperative networks. One of these networks (Netzwerk Recherche) organises an annual conference with hundreds of participants and several dozens of short workshops.
In most cases, there also exist possibilities to attend extra courses at academies and institutes, or courses held by experts providing specialised knowledge; only one editorship does not offer any journalism training. The journalists’ unions also provide a small number of professional training courses.

However, the representatives of trade unions state that there is still a big need not being met, as editors-in-chief do not promote possibilities for further education: “Not all journalists are up to date in training on Big Data analysis. We have noticed that the willingness of companies to actively offer such a service is very weak”. This is why the trade unions have made it a component of the collective wage agreement. Whenever a journalist wants to level up in the salary hierarchy, this is connected to further education; thus, employers are structurally forced to offer this opportunity. Data journalism is more of interest to young journalists, with older journalists often refraining from taking it seriously.

Further training for female journalists is not an issue, although the trade unions admit that they want to push more strongly for it. Continuous training is expensive, as the newsroom must be sufficiently staffed for one or two colleagues to attend a course lasting several days. Also, sufficient funds must be set aside for ongoing professional training. Finally, journalists need to be encouraged by their superiors. Therefore, as most of the news media in our sample belong to financially sound publishing or broadcasting corporations, they have sufficient financial and staff resources at their disposal to enable ongoing journalism training, but conditions are not that positive in small and regional news outlets. Additionally, training in diversity, gender, and inclusion issues are rarely booked, and we have no data on the quality of trainings: “There is still room for improvement in gender-oriented continuing education. Here the German media landscape still has a considerable need for improvement”.

(C9) Watchdog function and financial resources

Journalistic investigation is perceived as more important than a decade ago, but resources are rare. Investigative journalism tends to be outsourced to special units. The number of investigations is clearly limited by financial means and focused on those topics that guarantee high attention.

The austerity measures in public service broadcasting challenged the news units and led to a hiring freeze just when investigative reporting was beginning to be seen as a way to counter fake news and foster trust in the media. To accommodate the latter, the editor-in-chief of ZDF introduced a new investigative format, ZDF Zoom, and tried not to dismiss editorial staff. He also equipped the major news format of the television station heute.de with fact-checkers from Correctiv and data journalists. Accordingly, a leading ZDF journalist is convinced that money alone is not the barrier to more investigative reporting:
The linchpin in journalism is staff. [...] No better financial resources will help us there either. [...] If I don’t have the people to [...] research [...] I can’t do anything with the money. Money only translates into value for us if we can either recruit additional staff or reform structures [...] in such a way that the journalistic workforce is freed up again. That is the challenge for us at the moment [...].

Instead, a clever composition of the editorial personnel serves investigative journalism. Also, in print journalism, manpower is the core prerequisite for investigative reporting, because it requires time. What it means in practice is illustrated by a representative of the weekly Die Zeit. In this newspaper, 15 investigative journalists conduct about 30–50 investigative research projects per year, which finally leads to about ten stories. Die Zeit operates with an anonymous post box, similar to Wikileaks, to protect the sources. The massive amount of data can sometimes only be handled by cross-media teams. A Zeit journalist also critically assesses that television does not do enough in terms of investigative reporting: “Our resources are sufficient. [...] But if television were to use its financial power for investigation, democracy would be served. In terms of their potential, too little happens”.

The daily Süddeutsche Zeitung cooperates with the public service broadcaster NDR, and WDR if required. In Süddeutsche Zeitung, about eight to ten journalists work in the investigative unit. One example of a successful story concerning the watchdog function is the Panama Papers, where Der Spiegel was involved in editing the data. The important weekly news magazine, however, had been itself the subject of investigative research, as one of its journalists found out about his colleague’s years-long fake investigative reporting.

In a nutshell, investigative reporting is, as in 2011, still a question of prestige, but now also of a change in attitudes. After Wikileaks, the news media discovered that the public needed and demanded more in-depth reporting. The time and financial situation does not seem too bad for investigative reporting. Commercial and publicly funded news media implemented special units and formats to fulfil their function as watchdogs. The staff and organisational structure of investigative units are, however, more agile, compared with the findings in MDM 2011 (Marcinkowski & Donk, 2011), and cross-media cooperation seems the best way to tackle the lack of trained specialist personnel in the individual news media – at least for the moment.

Conclusions

The 2019 research on the three dimensions for the 2021 MDM report shows German media to be in a fairly stable state, and even have some improvements compared with 2011. At that time, the aftermath of the economic crisis had
affected the media and their economic performance. The following period of high-density digitisation of all journalistic and editorial processes has transformed the media internally and exposed them to giant competitors such as digital platforms, in the form of search engines (Google) and interactive personalised services like Facebook and YouTube, as in many other Western European countries.

This potentially devastating transformation has not caused a deterioration in the performance of the German media, due to the solid base of journalistic professionalism. It is, as well, reflected in the high esteem German journalists have for the control function of the media and in slight improvements that have been made in strengthening the watchdog role and investigative reporting (Indicator C7), the professionalism of journalists (Indicator C4), and job security (Indicator C5). Compared to many other indicators, the state of gender equality in the media staff (Indicator F8), and consequently in media content (Indicator F9), is rather weak.

Freedom of information is formally secured by law in Germany, including an information freedom act, although in practice, getting information can be difficult. News is available at a moderate cost, though public service fees nevertheless create problems for low-income groups. Leading news media have effective measures in place to defend themselves against internal and external influence. Heavy efforts of political influence resulted in a big public debate and constitutional consequences (see Indicator F4 – Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy). The increase of right-wing violence in society has led to harassment of journalists offline and online and even physical attacks on journalists and media people. Although the newsrooms protect the journalists, these attacks are impeding free information gathering.

Despite the growing importance of online news sources, legacy media – due to their successful digitisation strategy – are still an important source of news for the majority of the population, although the number of people getting their news only from social media is growing. But the Covid-19 crisis showed that legacy media still enjoy a great deal of credibility and trust. This is especially true for public service media, who are an important player and a reliable cornerstone in this respect.

Overall, Germany’s leading news media managed to keep their standards during this turbulent decade of unleashed digitalisation. Measured by our indicators, Germany’s news media serve democracy fairly well.
Notes
1. Including third programmes and special interest channels for ARD/ZDF news programmes.
2. Since 2013, Frankfurter Rundschau is part of the RheinMainMedia GmbH, and single data about sold copies or e-papers are barely published.
3. The official statistics do not differentiate between journalists and public relations professionals. It is hence hard to give a specific overview of the current employment situation in the news media.

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