

Christiane Eilders
Social Science Research Center Berlin
Reichpietschufer 50
10785 Berlin
e-mail: eilders@medea.wz-berlin.de

Concepts and methods

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Study the same
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Media Acting in Political Editorials:

Issue Focusing and Selective Emphases in Germany's Prestige Press

1. Introduction

The increase in research activity under the heading of „framing“ is a good illustration of the recent shift toward the persuasive and evaluative dimensions of communication. After a period of concentration on the information function of media and predominantly cognitive effects scholars have rediscovered attitudes and opinions. As opposed to the early tradition of attitude research, where attitude change was explained by more or less explicit persuasive media messages, scholars do now focus on the media's selection of information as determinants of the views and opinions in the audience. The framing of an event or issue through the inclusion or exclusion of particular aspects directs attention to or away from certain contents and thereby promotes a particular reading of the message that suggests a certain interpretation and evaluation of reality. Framing thus establishes the salience of an aspect of reality.

Because selection establishes a particular salience structure in the media and thus determines the issue hierarchies of the audience, it plays a crucial role in agenda setting research. Yet, the concept of selection is not systematically related to persuasive and evaluative effects. The focus of agenda setting research remains on the level of issue hierarchies rather than on the content and internal characteristics of an issue in the media or people's perceptions. Disregarding the internal characteristics and interpretive implications of an issue, the classical agenda setting approach only explain the ranks of issues in people's heads without investigating the cognitive representations of an issue or the views people hold on these issues.

If the impact of media would only regard people's perceptions of issue salience, however, is reduced to a narrow understanding of cognitive effects in terms of issue salience, why would political actors spend so much time and money on their public relations, try to improve their presentations in the media and observe media coverage so closely? The shift to a stronger consideration of persuasive and evaluative dimensions seems to resemble common sense much better than previous paradigms of only cognitive effects. Even if evidence is hard to obtain, we are not asking the right questions as long as we disregard media's impact on opinions. Re-introducing opinion as relevant factor in communication research not only implies a broader perspective on media effects in the audience, it should also modify and differentiate our conceptualization of the media themselves. A systematic incorporation of persuasive and evaluative dimensions directs attention to the media's opinions and the ways these are communicated.

This paper takes the perspective of media as political actors with genuine interests and goals trying to find resonance for their opinions in the audience and the political system. Media do not only act as neutral information agencies providing a forum for other actors. They take an active role in the political process by selecting and structuring information, assigning relevance, interpreting and evaluating the stream of events continuously taking place. The selection of information can be regarded as a means to communicate their views to the audience. Issue coverage might vary or correspond between different media outlets depending on the political position of the individual media outlets. Whether or not the media succeed in finding resonance for their views in the public and in the political system, however, depends on the formation of a collective opinion in the media system. The degree of correspondence in issue selection therefore represents an important condition for media impact. Only if the different media outlets correspondingly focus on a particular problem and do not paralyze each other through divergent contributions, the media will be perceived as unified actor that can put sufficient pressure on the political system. This paper investigates the degree of correspondence among different national prestige newspapers in Germany, analyze cleavages between papers and identify the most strongly focused issues. By focusing at editorials only the paper assesses the media's genuine contribution to political discourse without regarding the media's function of disseminating other actor's contributions. The empirical data presented in this paper is derived from a larger project on the role of editorials in the political process and its impact on the political system.

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2. Media as political actors

The dissemination of information through the mass media is an undisputed media function in modern societies. Where a face-to-face exchange of information between all segments of society has become impossible, the mass media mediate information between the audience and the political actors and thus constitute the most important subsystem of society. Media in this perspective are assigned a predominantly passive role as they provide a forum for the exchange of information between a variety of actors without contributing their own view. Restricting the role of the media to their primary function of information dissemination is not only a deficient description of the media but also means distorting and underestimating the legitimate active role of the media in the process of opinion formation. Recent contributions on media performance in modern democracies have drawn attention to the more evaluative functions of the media (Gurevitch/Blumler 1990; Page 1996a). In many modern democracies media are explicitly expected to critically observe the political process, identify problems and concerns of the public and address them to the political system for processing. This task - often referred to as watchdog function - puts them in a slightly more active position (Sarcinelli 1991), but has not led to a clarification of the legitimacy of media's more evaluative activity. Their genuine contributions to political discourse as reflected by selective relevance assignments, interpretations of events or by the expression of particular opinions are often considered as manipulations of the opinions of the audience influencing policy decisions without democratic legitimation (e.g. Noelle-Neumann 1977, Donsbach 1982). Yet, in political communication processes the mass media are participating actors with political interests and goals that have the right to express their views in public discourse (Schulz 1993, Page 1996b). In the analysis of both media content and media effects, the two aspects of media messages - the neutral dissemination and the media's autonomous contributions - have to be treated separately.

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Whereas we have considerable knowledge about the media's performance regarding their information function, only little is known about their autonomous acting in the political process, about the media's genuine voice on the relevance of issues and events, on their interpretations and evaluations and on their impact on people's opinions and on politics. Following the notion of media as political actors this paper focuses on editorials as the legitimate place for the media's autonomous contribution. Through editorials the media are explicitly authorized to publicly express their opinions and by noticeably commenting on public affairs they make use of their right to present themselves as autonomous actors.

Most investigations of the media's own contributions to discourse conceptualize media as uniform collective actor without differentiating between different outlets with opposite political positions and divergent party affiliations. In any pluralistic media system, however, different media outlets compete against each other by developing a distinct content profile in order to position and stabilize themselves on the audience market and become distinguishable from other media outlets. Focusing on editorials the notion of media competition gains special significance since editorials provide an easy means to communicate an outlet's particular view and address the corresponding segments of the audience. It can be assumed that differences between media outlets show most clearly in the opinion sections.

The differences between media outlets are likely to follow party lines considering that „the same social forces that find expression in the party or parties of a political system tend to find expression also through the press“ (Seymour-Ure 1974: 159). This leads not only to a parallelism between individual papers and parties but also implies a correspondence between the *range* of papers and the *range* of parties (Seymour-Ure 1974). The indexing thesis (Bennett 1990) explicates this argument for concrete conflicts among papers and parties. It holds that the media system only reflects the cleavage structure in the political system. In the case of high consensus in the political system (most tests of the indexing thesis deal with foreign policy and war issues), the media will not argue about the issue either. Instead, the different media outlets uniformly refrain from any substantial political criticism and shift their attention to different more procedural aspects of an issue.

In Germany, the press-party-parallelism roots in the tradition of party journalism. Although there is no relevant paper with institutional links to a particular party any more, the party structure is still reflected in today's press system, especially in the opinion-leading national prestige newspapers. Several empirical studies show that German national prestige newspapers almost cover the entire political spectrum. "Welt" is located on the very right-hand side, "Tageszeitung" on the very left-hand side of the right-left-scale. Between these poles - starting from the right - "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", "Süddeutsche Zeitung" and "Frankfurter Rundschau" are located (Kepplinger 1985:19pp, Hagen 1992, Donsbach/Wolling/Blomberg 1996; Voltmer 1997). Considering the number of parties and national prestige newspapers, the German range of newspapers is slanted toward the right political spectrum with two papers supporting the conservative CDU, and no paper clearly sympathizing with the left-wing PDS.

greens?
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3. Issue selection and selective emphasis

The competing media outlets employ a variety of means of expressing their particular views on the relevance of issues, the appropriate interpretation and the desirable political decisions. Issue selection and the selective emphasis of certain aspects of an issue are regarded as a central concept in the process of opinion formation. According to agenda setting research the salience structure of issues in people's heads is determined by the issue selection in the media. Instead of affecting attitudes and opinions the media tell people "what to think about" (Cohen 1963:13; McCombs/Shaw 1972). The strong focus on the hierarchical order of issues on an agenda restricts the perspective of media impact to cognitive effects. Researchers trying to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the role of media in society, have become dissatisfied with the cognitive paradigm and called for a systematic consideration of evaluative aspects in the agenda setting tradition. They showed more interest in the content of media issues and people's perceptions of these contents rather than in the bare hierarchy of issues (Swanson 1988, Weiss 1992). Issues are not just empty and meaningless terms of particular aspects of reality. They can rather be characterized as packages of observations, judgements and criticisms that appeal not only to cognitions but also to the attitudes of audiences (Weiss 1992). The content dimension was included in the conceptual extension of agenda setting which is referred to as attribute agendas setting or second-level agenda-setting (McCombs/Shaw/Weaver 1997). It depicts the influence of attributes of issues in the media on either issue salience or attribute salience in the perception of the audience. Although the conceptual extension of the agenda-setting approach to a more holistic perspective on media effects might be considered to undermine the specificity of the original approach, neglecting the evaluative dimensions of issues and selected aspects of issues means a systematic underestimation of media's genuine contributions to discourse and its impact in society.

The cognitive focus can be explained by a continuously strong interest in media's performance regarding their primary function of information dissemination, by the lack of clear evidence for attitude change through media content, and by the assumption that cognitions are easier to influence than attitudes. The concentration on cognitive effects is not inherent in the concept of selection, however. The interaction perspective of cognition and attitudes and the relevance of selection as a way of communicating opinion is best developed in framing and schema theory. If one considers schemata as representations of issue content in the audiences' heads, frames can be regarded as a parallel structure in media coverage (Entman 1993). Framing in communication

¹ Also see Kahnemann/Tversky (1984), Iyengar (1991), Gamson (1992) and Price/Tewksbury (1995).

research refers to the more or less intentional use of selected attributes thereby constituting a particular context. Media can thereby influence the interpretation and evaluation of an event. Frames, just like schemata not only contain knowledge or information but also include interpretations and opinions on these aspects. Framing and its effects can be conceptualized as second level agenda-setting. It focuses on the attitudinal effects of information selection rather than on the cognitive effects that first level agenda setting has in mind. „Agenda setting posits that the media tell us what to think about and framing deals with the issue of the media telling us how to think about an issue (...) Basically, the first level of agenda setting deals with the selection of issues by the news media and its impact on the public agenda. Framing deals with the selection of elements within a particular issue. The second level of agenda setting deals with the influence of the particular elements of an issue on the public's agenda of attributes“ (Ghanem 1997: 8).

Taking the concept of selection and its relevance to political communication even further, the salience model of political science considers issue selection to be more important than opinions. In the salience model the assignment of relevance to an issue is debated in the context of political parties' strategy to establish an ideological profile and position themselves in relation to competing parties. Scholars supporting the salience model hold that parties do not compete by means of different positions regarding particular issues but rather „occupy“ certain issues, presenting them as the most relevant problems. “Left-right competition can consist of attempts to assert the salience of different issues that favour one or the other side” (Budge/Farlie 1985: 288). These issues may be highly abstract policy domains like labor and employment or welfare and social policy or refer to very concrete subaspects of higher-level domains, e.g. legalization of drugs, cuts in government spending on the secret service or the construction of a particular highway. It is assumed that “there is no point at which particular issues have to be discussed by both sides” (Budge/Farlie 1985: 269). This view stands in sharp contrast to the traditional view of party competition which assumes that parties offer different policy solutions to the same issues. Applied to the media system, the salience model implies that media outlets with different political affinities present themselves with different issue repertoires rather than different opinions on particular issues. It can be assumed that different papers will position themselves in the political spectrum by differential relevance assignment. Given that relevance is assigned by covering only some out of the totality of possible issues or giving some issues prominent presentation while other issues receive only little room or do not make it to the first page or the leading editorial, issue selection and presentation should indicate the political preferences of a paper (Eilders 1999). Selection in

editorials plays a slightly different role than in news. Whereas in the news section issue selection has to serve a “chronicler’s function”, editorials enjoy greater independence from the daily news routines and assign relevance to selected issues according to their genuine relevance structure. By putting an issue on the editorial agenda, media outlets can direct attention to certain problems that have so far not been sufficiently processed by the political system and thus are unlikely to appear in the news section. It can be assumed that the editorial agendas of different media outlets – being more independent from daily politics – differ from each other more clearly than the news agendas. Different editorial positions of media outlets should therefore be reflected by a particular issue selection and presentation rather than through partisan arguments and evaluations. The issue repertoire of a paper with party affiliations in the left political spectrum should show more similarities with other liberal papers than with more conservative papers. Also, a conservative paper should resemble the issue repertoire of other conservative papers rather than the issue repertoires of the liberal papers.

4. Issue focusing and collective opinion

If media take an active role in the political process by selecting particular issues according to their political positions as assumed in the salience model, the agenda setting approach has to be differentiated with regard to the variety of media outlets in the media system each establishing different agendas. Agenda setting research has not systematically incorporated an understanding of media competition and conflicting issue agendas. Especially in the early studies, „the media agenda“ tended to be implicitly understood as highly consonant without assessing the factual degree of consonance in the media system. Later, the salience structure of recipients was related to their individually received media content only, so the question of consonance lost significance. Research on agenda building, dealing with media’s impact on the agenda of the political system (Rogers/Dearing 1988), however, has a different perspective on consonance in the media system. The political system represents a collective actor which is more than an aggregate of individual actors’ views. Correspondingly, not the individual media use of particular political actors, but the perception of an overall media opinion - as it is reflected in divergent contributions of different media outlets - determines what is included on the political agenda. Whether or not the media find resonance in the political system thus depends on the specific constellations of opinion and the lines of conflict in the media system. On the other hand, it also depends on the power structure and majorities in parliament. The

collective relevance assignment to an issue through the political system thus results from conflict and bargaining among the political parties.

I'm still not sure why

Taking a macrolevel perspective on media effects in the political system means we are not interested in single editorials but in the universe of issues covered in the media system. Yet, the plurality of voices and the divergencies among different media outlets have to be considered and special attention has to be directed to the particular constellations of correspondence and conflict in the media system. Regarding the chances to find resonance in the political system "the concept of 'political actor'", applied to the media or anyone else, implies observable action that is purposive (though perhaps functional rather than consciously intended) and sufficiently unified, so it makes sense to speak of a single actor. A critical question, therefore, concerns whether - or to what extent - media outlets do in fact use their publications and broadcasts in a purposive and unified fashion to pursue policy objectives" (Page 1996b: 20).

Due to the competition on the media market and in correspondence with the salience model assuming differential issue selection among papers with different political positions, we expect that media act in a unified fashion only under certain conditions. Under normal routine news conditions media will tend to establish their own genuine profile in order to become distinguishable from their competitors. Some structural characteristics of media systems, however, seem to suggest the opposite expectation: the corresponding standardized attention criteria and interpretation strategies, the uniformity of professional and class interests, the media's observation of each other and their reciprocal coorientation as well as the opinion leadership of the prestige media are likely to produce high levels of correspondence in the media system (Noelle-Neumann/Mathes 1987, Kepplinger 1985, Halloran et al. 1970). In spite of the controversial debates on pluralism and diversity in the media system a research tradition investigating the actual degree of consonance² in the media has not developed. The empirical efforts to assess the common issue repertoires and opinions across different media outlets remained few. Except for single-issue comparisons across different media-outlets focusing on the opinion rather than on the issue dimension there is basically no information on the general degree of correspondence in the media system. Whether or not the professional journalistic norms also influence editorial content, is an open question. It can be assumed, however, that and

² In communications literature the concept of consonance is used with regard to both issue selection and opinions. A distinctive analysis of editorials, however, calls for a differentiation between the correspondence of issues and opinions since it implies different assumptions about the role and effect of media opinion. In order to reflect these differences we suggest a terminological differentiation: consonance refers to the direction of opinions. It is defined as corresponding opinions on an issue. The degree of correspondence on the issue dimension is referred to as focusing. Thus, focusing denotes a correspondence of issues. This paper focuses on the issue selection and is therefore concerned with focusing rather than consonance.

competing political positions should be reflected in a comparably lower degree of correspondence between newspapers since media enjoy more freedom of these news routines in editorials.

5. Research design and operationalization

This paper presents data from a larger project on the role of editorials in political discourse which is currently conducted by the author, Friedhelm Neidhardt, and Barbara Pfetsch at the Social Science Research Center Berlin (Neidhardt/Eilders/Pfetsch 1998; Eilders/Lüter 1998). Employing a content analysis of editorials in the five major German newspapers between 1994 and 1998 the project investigates the contributions of different newspapers to the political discourse. Special attention is directed to the particular similarities and differences among the different newspapers because it is assumed that the media only find resonance for their concerns in the political system if they 'speak with one voice' and build up sufficient pressure. Whereas the larger project includes both issue selection and more explicit media opinion, this analysis concentrates on the issue dimension of political communication. Taking differential issue selection as important means for communicating the papers' relevance assignment and indicating certain political positions, it investigates the range and correspondence of issues continuously brought up in the editorial sections and assesses particular cleavages in the media system and identifies the issues that receive unanimous attention throughout the newspaper spectrum.

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The selected newspapers cover the entire political spectrum, with the Welt located at the very right and the Tageszeitung (taz) at the very left of the continuum. Between these poles, beginning from right-hand side and proceeding to the left-hand side, there are the Frankfurter Allgemeine (FAZ), the Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) and the Frankfurter Rundschau (FR) (Donsbach/Wolling/Blomberg 1996, Kepplinger 1985). Considering the idea of press-party-parallelism, the right spectrum is slightly overrepresented by two papers whereas the left PDS does not have an affiliated newspaper of any national significance. We expect considerable differences between left and right papers in terms of issue selection.

The analysis is based on a sample of two quarters of each year between 1994 and 1998 starting with the second and fourth quarter in the first year, continuing with the first and third quarter in the following year, and switching quarters every other year. The sample was designed to include the coverage in the fall (fourth quarter) of 1994 and 1998 when national elections were held in Germany. All political editorials were included in the analysis, with the exception of editorials on exclusively international news not containing any reference to

German politics. Coding unit was the individual article. Since it was possible to code up to three issues per editorial we ended up with 23160 issues in a total of 8717 editorials.

The editorial agenda can be characterized by a highly diverse range of issues. We employed a detailed coding scheme with around 600 single issue categories that – for the purpose of our analysis - were aggregated to 45 categories in order to obtain sufficient numbers for each cell. This increased the level of abstraction and thus allows a variety of subissues or different events to be subsumed under the same category. Since there is no a „natural“ distinction between different aspects of reality, classifying reality into more or less abstract categories has to follow the particular research goals. As long as we judge issue agendas relationally (e.g. between media outlets or over time) and refrain from generalizations on the degree of diversity, however, any sort of classification can be appropriate as long as it is internally coherent and serves the research objective. In the case of our all-issue analysis over five years we were forced to move away from concrete event-type issue categories (restricted by time and space) and define issues on a fairly abstract level.

Trying to describe the degree of correspondence of different issue agendas, some structural characteristics of the distribution of issues in the newspaper spectrum should be taken into account (tab 1). Each issue marks one case in our analysis, so the number of cases is not identical with the number of editorials. Although all five newspapers very much agree on the relevance of the top issues they show specific emphases. These emphases also vary over time (fig 1). The instabilities in issue coverage over five years serve as a good illustration of the significance of the time dimension in the measure of correspondence. If a particular paper puts an emphasis on taxes in 1994 while another paper assigns relevance to taxes in 1998, they both display the same share of tax coverage over the entire time period under study. Yet, a correspondence in the sense of parallel relevance assignment cannot be assumed because they directed attention to two distinctly different events (or maybe even to the same aspects but at a different time against a different background of events). Without restricting the comparison between two newspapers to short time periods guaranteeing the same context of current affairs, the validity of the correspondence measure has to be questioned. After all, the notion of corresponding issue selection is based on a shared perception of relevance at a given time. Parallel relevance assignment thus fundamentally involves the same time reference. Corresponding issue selection can only be assumed if two papers assign relevance to the same issue at the same time. The time reference might be a day – a very strict criterion but meeting the media's production logic - , but can also be extended to a week thus leaving enough time to realize the significance of an issue a few days later. This seems to be especially appropriate

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for events lasting longer than a day. Weekly measures, however, imply the possibility of overestimating the degree of real issue correspondence since it increases the chances to subsume two separate events under one issue category. Measures on a daily basis imply far lower probabilities of two editorials from the same issue category dealing with different events, but do not tolerate any time lags in coverage. Considering the advantages and disadvantages of these two different approaches we calculated our measures of issue correspondence on the basis of both days and weeks. This puts us in the position to contrast the two measures against each other instead of dispensing with one of the alternatives and losing the specific information it provides.

In order to assess the correspondences between the editorial agendas and determine the ideological distances between the newspapers this analysis basically compares the issue selection of different newspapers. It employs two different approaches, one representing a more global measure regarding the entire agendas of the papers and the other one considering single issues rather than the total agenda. The first one, the global measure, is based on a comparison between two different issue agendas. It assesses the percentage of cases that would have to be redistributed in order to achieve the same distribution of issues between two papers. This procedure results in a coefficient referred to as dissimilarity index. The index is calculated by summing up the percentage differences in the single issue categories and dividing them by two. The higher the coefficient between two papers the less alike are their issue agendas. An index of 100 indicates that there is no case where both papers overlap, meaning that the two papers cover completely different issues in a given time period, whereas an index of 0 indicates completely identical issue agendas. Since the procedure produces dissimilarity measures for each pair of newspapers, given five newspapers, ten paired comparisons have to be calculated. The resulting coefficients allow to assess the relative distance between particular newspapers taking the high coefficients as long distances and interpreting low coefficients as close distances. In order to get a single measure of issue correspondence among all the newspapers, however, the ten coefficients can be averaged across the total number of pairs.

Since this global measure does not allow an assessment of correspondence for particular issues we developed an additional index that considers the individual issue coverage of each newspaper rather than the entire agenda as the basis of measurement. Starting from the assumption that high correspondence in the newspaper spectrum is achieved if not only one but two or more different newspapers cover a particular issue at a given time, we simply counted the number of newspapers covering a certain issue. If all five publish at least one

editorial on the issue, coverage can be considered as highly focused. If, however, only one of the papers covers the issue focusing is low. The coefficient is referred to as focusing index. Since the number of editorials in each paper is dichotomized into 'coverage' and 'no coverage', it varies between 1 (exclusive media coverage) and 5. The loss of information through the dichotomization of issue coverage only gains significance in the case of the weekly measure because it is highly unlikely that one paper publishes more than one editorial on one particular issue per day. As opposed to the dissimilarity index the focusing index allows to identify highly focused issues that are likely to find resonance in the political system, but it does not allow to assess distances between particular papers. Since the two measures complement each other with their particular strengths and weaknesses, we will present results for both indices considering both days and weeks as time references for our measures.

6. Findings

Considering the entire time period between 1994 and 1998 we identified 23160 issue references in five newspapers. The coverage showed considerable differences with the most frequently mentioned issue including 1530 cases or 6.6% of the total and the issue addressed least often including only 108 cases or .5% (tab 1). Yet, the distribution of issues does not indicate a particularly strong concentration on few issues, it rather points to a fairly evenly distributed coverage. Parties and movements, the social order, foreign affairs, and principles of political action form the center of attention across the entire newspaper spectrum. Except for foreign affairs these issues do not refer to specific policy areas but mark more general reflections on politics and polity. As shown in previous research, this seems to be quite typical for editorials as opposed to news (see Eilders 1999). The different papers indicated some agreement regarding these issues, but they did not assign relevance unanimously. The FAZ seems to be especially interested in parties and movements, whereas taz displays more interest in the social order. Since the distributions represent the average relevance assignments over the years, the differences between the papers should increase as the reference point for comparisons is restricted to limited time periods. This notion is very well illustrated in figure 1 showing differential relevance assignments between the papers for selected issues on the basis of five years. Whereas – regarding the average issue coverage only - an increase in issue coverage by one paper can be evened out by a decrease in a different paper, divergent developments in issue coverage between two papers become obvious if the years are

considered separately (fig 1). As argued above the appropriate time reference for the assessment of correspondence can be either days or weeks. We expect to find less correspondence the smaller the time units under study. We will present the more global dissimilarity index first, starting out with the stricter criterion of daily measures, then present the findings regarding the weekly measures and in a second step discuss the degree of focusing for particular issues, again for days and weeks.

We found a dissimilarity coefficient of 75.7 as an average across ten pairs of newspapers and all the days of our sample (tab 2). In order to achieve the same issue distribution for all the papers three quarters of the cases would have to be redistributed to other issue categories. At first sight this seems to indicate a very low degree of correspondence violating our every-day reading experience that implies fairly similar relevance assignment throughout the newspaper spectrum. Yet, we have to keep in mind that this index considers the percentages in the issue categories and not just indicates whether or not a particular issue is covered by all five newspapers. Also the daily measure does not tolerate any time lag in coverage. If we aggregate the daily measures for the single years of our sample we find clearly higher similarities for the election years than for the period in between. Dominant events like national elections with all their related events obviously attract so much parallel attention that all papers are likely to publish editorials on the same day. The differences between the papers vary between 70% and 81% depending on the pair of papers and the particular year. Two opposing papers might converge regarding a certain event or a series of events in a particular year, and other typically similar papers might move apart from each other. It can be assumed that the events occurring in a particular year and the relevance structures of the different papers cause considerable instabilities in the correspondence measures between the different pairs of papers. Adding up the coefficients for each newspaper we found that the left wing taz shows most similarities with all the other papers including the conservative Welt and FAZ (fig 2). The taz shows an aggregated dissimilarity of 296 whereas the FAZ with an aggregated dissimilarity of 307 displays the highest dissimilarity to all other papers. Taking the coefficients as graphical distance measures between papers the special role of the taz becomes particularly evident. Whereas all other papers are clustered together, the taz is located at a considerable distance from the others. On the basis of these data, even though there are low degrees of correspondence between the papers, clear cut cleavages between liberal and conservative papers cannot be detected.

Regarding the weekly measures as a less strict criterion for corresponding relevance assignment we obtain far higher degrees of correspondence but the relations between the

individual papers draw a slightly different picture (tab 3). The dissimilarity coefficient is at 53.4 indicating that only half of the cases would have to be redistributed to achieve the same issue distribution between the papers. The instability of dissimilarities over time (showing a tendency to decrease toward 1998) and the distances between the papers, however, stay the same (fig 3). Interestingly, the relations between the papers changed. According to this measure the taz shows the largest aggregate dissimilarity with a value of 219 whereas the FR with an aggregate dissimilarity of 210 shows most correspondences with all other papers. Again, there are no cleavages between left and right papers. With the weekly measure, however, the taz is located at a considerable distance from the cluster of all the other papers. It obviously plays a special role again, this time being more different from a given paper than the others. The taz thus seems to react to dominant events that are unanimously covered on a certain day just like their competitors, but tends to drop out of the mainstream issue selection in time periods without particular highlights. In that case it puts special emphasis on taz-specific issues like social order, migration, internal security, energy and traffic (tab 1).

Due to the global character of the dissimilarity index regarding the total agendas rather than the individual issues, it provides no information on the differences in concrete content between two papers. As opposed to the dissimilarity index the focusing index differentiates between the single issues by providing coefficients for the degree of correspondence for each issue across all the papers. It does not, however, give information on the particular distance between papers or allow to detect which paper is most deviant in its issue selection. The degree of correspondence is expressed in the number of different newspapers covering a given issue at a time. Again, we computed focusing measures on a daily and on a weekly basis. Daily focusing is highest for the most frequently covered top issues on the agenda (tab 4). An average of 2.2 papers deal with parties and movements on a given day (no index was computed for the days with no coverage on an issue), 1.8 unanimously cover elections, coalitions, the social order and foreign affairs, and 1.7 correspondingly refer to the principles of political action. Altogether, the average coefficients for the daily measures never reach a share of three out of five papers. It can be assumed that there are too many days when only one paper addresses a particular issue as opposed to the number of days when all papers cover a certain issue. This decreases the average focusing coefficient to a level that – like in the case of high dissimilarity coefficients - seems to violate our every-day reading impression. Again, we have to keep in mind that in our own reading we mostly pay attention to the top events that are covered in all the papers and take no notice of the days when only one paper addresses an issue. Considering the course of a whole year this probably occurs much more frequently than

all five papers addressing the top event of a day. The relevance of top events in a certain time period is also clearly reflected by the comparably higher degrees of focusing of parties and election-related issues in the election years of 1994 and 1998.

The above mentioned most highly focused issues also represent the most frequently mentioned issues. This is due to the fact that the more papers cover an issue, the higher the absolute number of editorials on that issue. In turn, it is very likely that if there are many editorials on an issue per day, more papers contribute to the absolute coverage because each paper only has a limited number of editorials per day. Although this explains the strong correlations between the frequencies of issue coverage and the degree of focusing, the correlation still poses a statistical problem. It almost allows to substitute the complex calculation of the degree of focusing with the simple frequency count. Yet, a closer look reveals that neither measure is totally determined by the other. Whereas parties and movements, social order and foreign affairs are not only highest in focusing but also occupy the top ranks in terms of frequency, elections, coalitions, energy policy, government and state, defense and alliance policy are far more focused than the absolute frequencies suggest. These issues receive highly corresponding relevance assignments although they are not covered equally frequently. In turn, economic policy, education policy and media policy rank lower in focusing than in frequency. That means that even when they receive considerable attention over the years, they are not assigned relevance correspondingly at a given time. For these issues it would seem unlikely that sufficient pressure is built up for the political system to react (tab 6).

Considering the much higher weekly focusing measures varying between 4.24 and 1.48, the list of issues with the highest degrees of focusing is only slightly different (tab 5). Again, the most frequently mentioned issues are also the most highly focused. Yet, coalitions are more strongly focused than what can be expected on the basis of the issue coverage. The same is true for internal security and German reunification. Lower focusing in relation to issue coverage showed for European policy, education, media policy and traffic engineering. Comparing the different issue ranks between daily and weekly measures, most issues rank similar (tab 6). Only issues that relate to events with a very limited time reference (elections, coalitions) score higher on the basis of daily measures.

7. Summary and discussion

The analysis presented in this paper followed two different approaches of assessing the degree of correspondence between the issue selection of five newspapers. Whereas the dissimilarity index describes correspondence as differences between the entire agendas of two newspapers and thus results in paired global coefficients indicating the particular dissimilarity or distance between two papers, the focusing index produces coefficients for each issue indicating how many newspapers covered that issue at a given time. Both indices represent an attempt to investigate whether different papers assign relevance to identical aspects of reality. Each index addresses certain aspects of correspondence that are not covered by the other index. The position of a particular paper in the media system can only be described on the basis of the dissimilarity index, whereas differences between particular issues can only be detected employing the focusing index. Taken together, however, we can describe particular distances between papers and differentiate between more and less focused issues. Regarding the positions of particular papers in the newspaper spectrum we detected no particular cleavage between liberal and conservative papers. The left wing taz was the only paper showing a divergent profile in issue selection. Although the degree of correspondence between the papers was fairly low considering both the dissimilarity and the focusing index, we do not regard this as evidence for the salience model. The salience model assumes a correlation between political position and issue selection. Our data, however, did not indicate any pattern in the issue selection that can be related to left- or right partisanship.

While the salience model puts a strong emphasis on the differences between the papers, our discussion of the media's role in political discourse and their possible impact on the political system directed attention to the degree of correspondence between papers. It was argued that corresponding issue selection represents a crucial condition to finding resonance for certain concerns in the political system. Thus a particular issue does not only demand high levels of attention regarding the frequency of issue coverage in the course of a year or even longer time periods, it also has to be assigned relevance by all papers at the same time. We assumed that issues unanimously addressed to the political system by all the newspapers are especially likely to be processed. In theory, high levels of attention to an issue could be based on a specific relevance perception of only one newspaper with all others completely ignoring that issue. Yet, the high correlation between the frequency of issue coverage and the degree of focusing shows that relevance assignment tends to be carried by several newspapers. They all contribute their share of issue coverage in order to achieve high total coverage. As noted

above, however, the high correlation between issue frequencies and focusing is also a statistical phenomenon resulting from the limited number of editorials per paper. High frequencies can only be achieved with several papers contributing to the discourse.

Regarding the single issues, we found considerable focusing for politics and polity aspects (like parties, elections, coalitions, political principles) rather than for concrete policy areas. Instead of unified attempts to push certain policy issues on the agenda of the political system, the media present themselves as collective actor mainly in regard to a critical observation of the procedural and structural aspects of democracy. They carry out their watchdog function by unanimously directing attention to questions of power and legitimacy. Given the high degrees of correspondence on this matter, resonance in the political system is likely to be achieved. Yet, addressing procedural and structural aspects, does not translate into a concrete impact on policy decisions. Considering the corresponding relevance assignment to particular policy areas, only few issues reached comparable levels of issue focusing. Apart from these exceptions the agendas of the five different newspapers revealed distinctly different profiles indicating that resonance for the general issue hierarchy of each paper in the political system cannot be expected.

Against this background the characteristics of the issues that nevertheless received corresponding attention throughout the media system gain special significance. The high levels of focusing on foreign affairs and to a lower degree on European policy not only correspond to the fact that public opinion tends to be comparably consonant on foreign policy and thus might reflect a general trend. They might also point to an increasingly international if not global perspective on current affairs in public discourse that seems to be carried by the entire newspaper spectrum. Regarding domestic German policy areas, focusing was much lower. Most correspondences between newspapers was found for taxes, employment and right wing radicalism and migration. These issues relate to the decline of the affluent society and the struggle for a just distribution of social resources. Whereas employment policy regards the sufficient supply of work and tax policy deals with the appropriate distribution of wealth, migration is often considered to pose a threat to the availability of these resources. It may be assumed that the high levels of focusing regarding these concerns mark significant social conflicts that demand further political processing. Whether or not the media will succeed in finding resonance for these issues in the political system has to be left to further research that relates the collective media agenda to the political agenda.

What is
an issue?
Some concepts
write to
not get
and support
the issue

relationship between
issue & framing in your studies
frame frequencies not too high

Also wonder if they
pay attention to the referentiality
that can go on - referring to
what is being written in the other
papers

Table 1: Issue frequencies across newspapers in per cent

Issue	WELT	FAZ	SZ	FR	TAZ	TOTAL
Parties and Movements	6,3	7,8	6,4	5,8	6,4	6,6
Social Order	5,2	6,1	4,3	4,8	7,0	5,5
Foreign Policy	4,9	4,6	5,9	5,6	5,8	5,3
Principles of Political Action	4,5	4,8	4,5	4,7	4,5	4,6
European Policy	2,7	3,9	4,9	4,2	3,3	3,8
Economic Policy	4,4	2,5	4,9	3,7	3,6	3,8
Tax Policy	5,3	3,0	3,4	3,7	2,9	3,7
Political Style	3,6	3,1	4,3	4,1	3,1	3,6
Labour and Employment	4,0	2,2	3,3	3,8	3,8	3,4
Right-wing Radicalism. Migration Policy	2,3	2,8	2,9	3,7	5,4	3,3
Legal Policy	3,7	3,5	3,3	2,8	2,9	3,3
Coalitions	3,3	4,1	2,9	2,8	2,6	3,2
Elections	2,7	3,8	3,2	2,6	2,6	3,0
Legal System	2,5	3,9	2,5	3,1	2,8	3,0
Education Policy	1,8	7,4	1,9	1,8	0,7	3,0
Industrial Relations Policy	3,7	1,6	3,3	3,8	2,6	2,9
Internal Security	2,7	2,7	2,7	2,7	3,8	2,9
Energy Policy	1,8	1,5	2,2	3,5	3,7	2,4
Health Policy	2,7	1,8	1,9	2,7	1,1	2,1
Environmental Policy	1,3	1,0	1,9	2,3	4,1	2,0
Economic System	2,0	1,5	2,1	1,6	2,0	1,9
Budgetary Policy	2,5	1,4	2,0	2,1	1,2	1,8
Media Policy	1,3	1,1	1,6	1,6	1,9	1,5
State and Government	1,5	1,6	1,2	1,9	1,0	1,5
Two German States	1,8	2,0	0,9	0,9	1,3	1,4
Parliament and ist Members	1,5	1,5	1,7	1,4	0,7	1,4
Family and Youth Policy	1,5	1,8	1,1	1,1	0,9	1,3
Alliance Policy	1,4	1,3	1,5	1,1	1,2	1,3
Defense Policy	1,7	1,3	1,2	1,1	1,1	1,3
Regulations Policy	1,3	1,5	1,4	1,1	1,1	1,3
Federalism	1,2	2,0	1,0	1,0	0,7	1,2
Traffic Engineering	1,1	0,5	1,3	1,3	2,0	1,2
Unification and German Question	1,1	1,8	0,8	0,7	1,2	1,2
Social System	1,0	1,0	1,2	1,5	1,0	1,1
Foreign Trade	1,4	0,7	1,6	1,1	1,0	1,1
Peace Policy	0,9	0,6	1,0	1,2	1,5	1,0
Culture Policy	1,3	0,9	0,9	0,8	1,3	1,0
Monetary Policy	1,1	0,8	1,4	0,8	0,8	1,0
Pension Policy	1,0	1,1	0,9	0,9	0,6	0,9
Political Views and Ideologies	0,9	0,9	0,7	0,7	1,4	0,9
Policy of Research and Development	0,7	0,8	0,7	1,2	0,9	0,9
Social Policy	0,8	0,5	0,8	1,1	0,9	0,8
Infrastructure Policy	0,9	0,4	1,0	0,5	0,4	0,6
Business Promotion	0,6	0,3	0,7	0,5	0,6	0,5
Commercial Law	0,5	0,3	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
TOTAL (N)	4792	5429	4608	4377	3954	23160

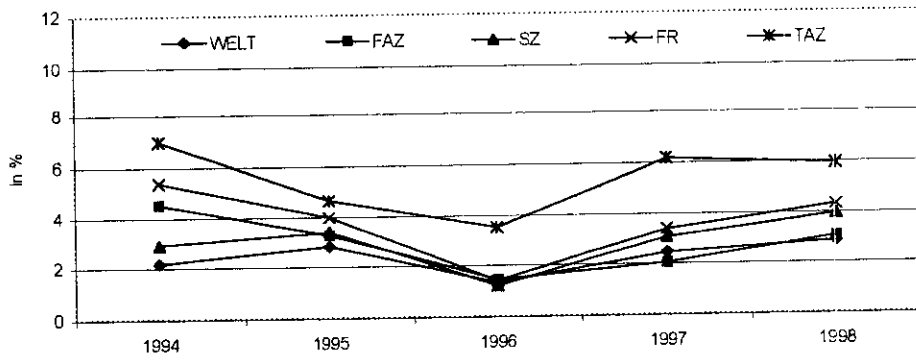
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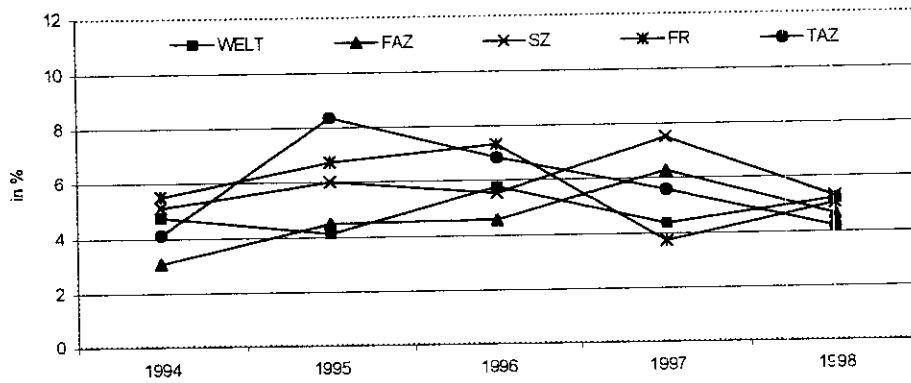
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Figure 1: Relative issue frequencies for selected issues in all newspapers over time

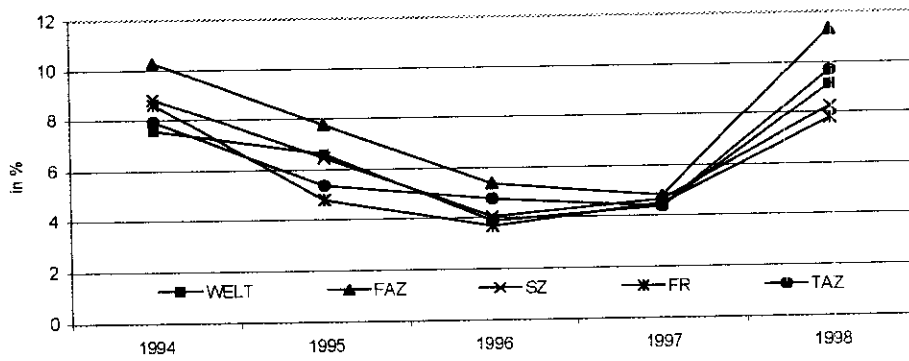
Right-wing radicalism, Migration Policy



Foreign Policy



Parties and Movements



Tax Policy

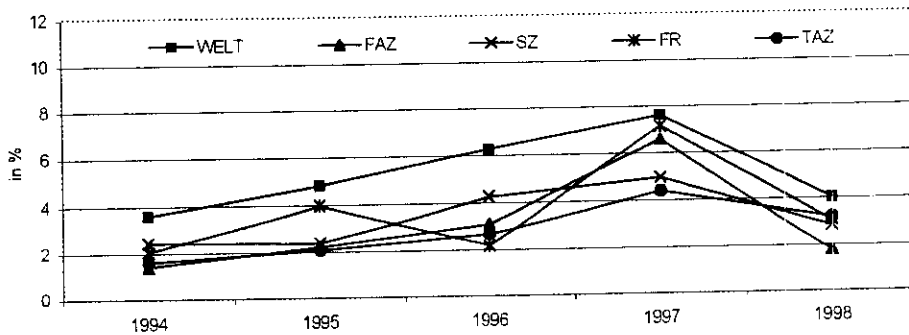


Table 2: Pairwise dissimilarity based on days

Year	welt*faz	welt*sz	welt*fr	welt*taz	faz*sz	faz*fr	faz*taz	sz*fr	sz*taz	fr*taz	Total
1994	75,2	72,8	75,4	69,8	73,1	75,9	72,3	70,4	70,4	70,0	72,5
1995	81,4	79,3	81,0	74,5	78,9	78,2	72,9	78,7	72,4	74,2	77,2
1996	80,2	78,3	76,9	76,0	79,4	78,7	74,5	78,0	78,4	71,0	77,2
1997	78,0	78,4	77,4	78,9	79,3	77,5	77,8	75,1	77,2	76,0	77,6
1998	73,9	75,1	74,5	74,1	76,7	75,2	73,3	71,8	74,8	71,2	74,1
Total	77,7	76,8	77,1	74,7	77,5	77,1	74,2	74,9	74,7	72,5	75,7

Figure 2: Daily dissimilarities of five newspapers with all other newspapers

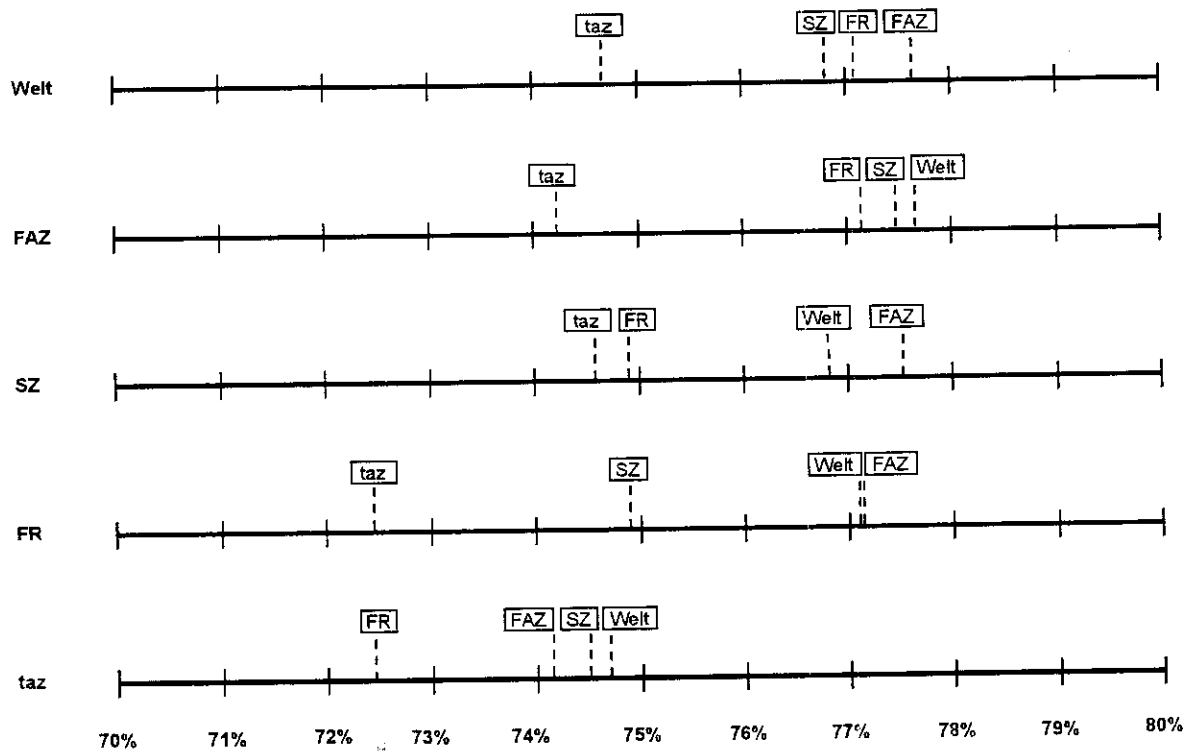


Table 3: Pairwise dissimilarity based on weeks

Year	welt*faz	welt*sz	welt*fr	welt*taz	faz*sz	faz*fr	faz*taz	sz*fr	sz*taz	fr*taz	Total
1994	54,9	50,4	53,8	57,8	52,6	51,2	54,6	51,4	58,6	53,6	53,9
1995	55,0	56,9	56,2	64,5	53,2	52,8	60,6	51,5	62,2	58,1	57,1
1996	50,7	50,8	55,4	54,4	52,9	55,6	50,6	55,3	52,6	51,0	52,9
1997	53,4	53,9	50,8	54,8	53,6	53,9	56,2	53,5	54,8	52,9	53,8
1998	49,1	50,7	49,0	50,6	49,4	50,3	50,3	47,9	50,4	47,4	49,5
Total	52,6	52,5	53,0	56,4	52,3	52,7	54,4	51,9	55,7	52,6	53,4

Figure 3: Weekly dissimilarities of five newspapers with all other newspapers

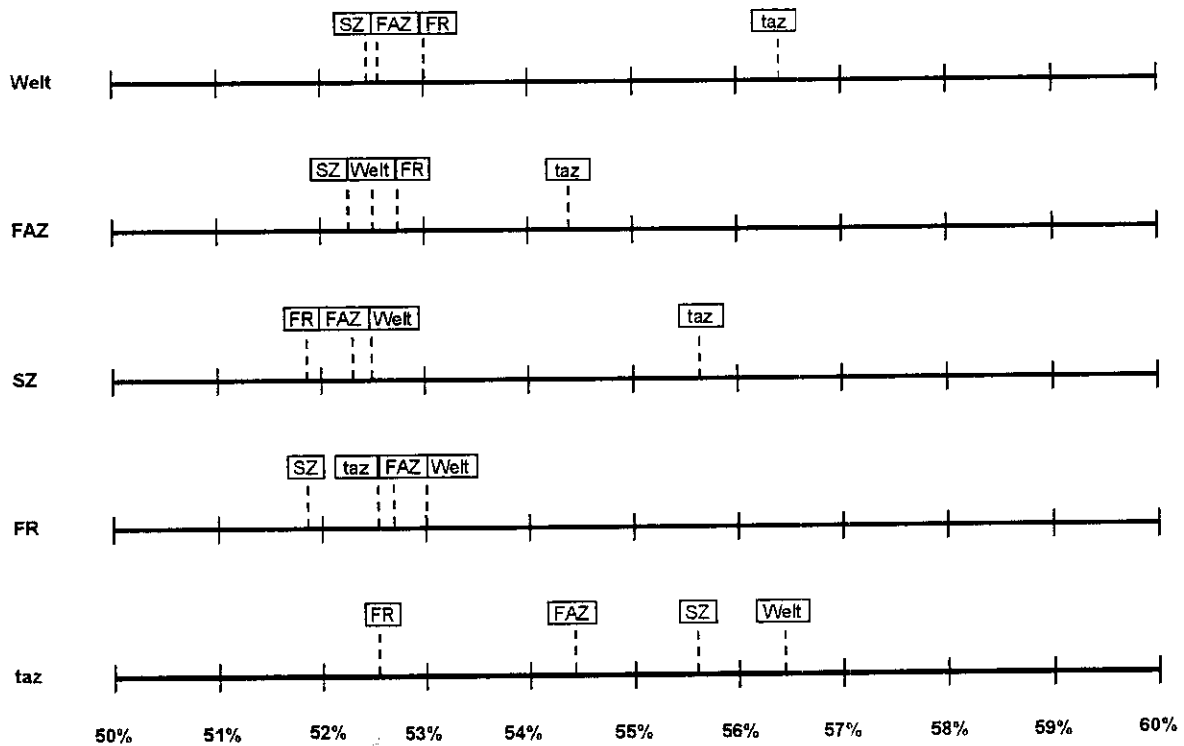


Table 4: Focusing based on days over time

Issue	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Total	N
Parties and Movements	2,44	1,98	1,94	1,92	2,68	2,22	1530
Elections	1,79	1,38	1,46	1,64	2,30	1,83	699
Social Order	1,91	1,72	1,79	1,83	1,82	1,81	1268
Coalitions	1,93	1,46	1,89	1,53	2,04	1,80	738
Foreign Policy	1,72	1,75	1,84	1,81	1,82	1,79	1233
Principles of Political Action	1,69	1,57	1,64	1,74	2,01	1,73	1062
Tax Policy	1,59	1,41	1,81	1,96	1,62	1,71	853
Right-wing Radicalism, Migration Policy	1,86	1,68	1,49	1,51	1,77	1,68	772
European Policy	1,51	1,27	1,49	1,81	1,96	1,67	884
Labour and Employment	1,31	1,47	2,00	1,58	1,55	1,62	777
Energy Policy	1,52	1,45	1,35	2,18	1,60	1,62	566
Legal Policy	1,41	1,59	1,72	1,56	1,71	1,59	760
Legal System	1,68	1,63	1,72	1,47	1,36	1,58	695
Political Style	1,75	1,50	1,56	1,53	1,55	1,58	839
Internal Security	1,38	1,51	1,69	1,66	1,61	1,56	673
Economic Policy	1,44	1,58	1,66	1,71	1,40	1,56	879
Industrial Relations Policy	1,54	1,55	1,72	1,29	1,38	1,53	682
Alliance Policy	1,72	1,34	1,44	1,49	1,53	1,50	300
State and Government	1,55	1,37	1,13	1,36	1,60	1,46	336
Health Policy	1,60	1,33	1,44	1,47	1,23	1,45	477
Budgetary Policy	1,15	1,14	1,67	1,45	1,23	1,41	424
Defense Policy	1,46	1,17	1,43	1,63	1,32	1,39	299
Pension Policy	1,00	1,13	1,24	1,60	1,40	1,36	213
Economic System	1,27	1,22	1,30	1,53	1,35	1,35	430
Regulations Policy	1,17	1,37	1,44	1,42	1,20	1,35	298
Family and Youth Policy	1,28	1,48	1,39	1,10	1,31	1,34	306
Unification and German Question	1,37	1,26	1,53	1,56	1,09	1,33	271
Federalism	1,17	1,29	1,46	1,31	1,29	1,33	285
Parliament and its Members	1,41	1,39	1,18	1,37	1,22	1,32	323
Education Policy	1,16	1,37	1,19	1,47	1,26	1,31	685
Commercial Law	1,13	1,33	1,34	1,46	1,13	1,30	108
Two German States	1,20	1,22	1,49	1,29	1,25	1,29	326
Environmental Policy	1,16	1,39	1,29	1,28	1,32	1,29	467
Social System	1,27	1,10	1,41	1,29	1,15	1,28	266
Peace Policy	1,40	1,20	1,38	1,08	1,21	1,26	235
Monetary Policy	1,22	1,17	1,28	1,30	1,25	1,25	228
Traffic Engineering	1,10	1,20	1,38	1,24	1,28	1,24	274
Business Promotion	1,00	1,20	1,05	1,49	1,00	1,22	127
Media Policy	1,30	1,26	1,11	1,11	1,26	1,22	340
Foreign Trade	1,17	1,18	1,27	1,28	1,10	1,21	266
The arts	1,17	1,22	1,11	1,15	1,27	1,19	234
Social Policy	1,06	1,11	1,20	1,16	1,18	1,16	182
Infrastructure Policy	1,18	1,19	1,11	1,18	1,11	1,15	149
Political Views and Ideologies	1,17	1,07	1,14	1,08	1,20	1,14	204
Policy of Research and Development	1,13	1,05	1,13	1,11	1,23	1,13	197

Table 5: Focusing based on weeks over time

	94	95	96	97	98	Total	N
Parties and Movements	4,41	4,33	3,74	4,08	4,61	4,24	1530
Social Order	4,18	4,04	4,07	3,48	4,00	3,96	1268
Principles of Political Action	3,50	3,67	3,37	3,46	3,89	3,58	1062
Foreign Policy	3,04	3,63	4,04	3,59	3,44	3,54	1233
Economic Policy	3,22	3,46	3,70	3,70	3,15	3,45	879
Political Style	3,44	3,50	2,96	3,46	3,70	3,42	839
Coalitions	3,18	2,86	3,52	2,81	4,04	3,30	738
Labour and Employment	2,48	3,13	4,08	3,38	3,19	3,27	777
Legal Policy	2,96	3,35	3,31	3,24	3,38	3,24	760
Tax Policy	2,57	2,80	3,15	4,15	3,12	3,18	853
Right-wing Radicalism, Migration Policy	3,37	3,31	2,32	3,04	3,59	3,16	772
European Policy	2,67	2,24	2,81	3,85	3,67	3,09	884
Elections	3,44	2,32	2,47	2,70	3,81	3,03	699
Internal Security	2,85	3,26	3,08	3,12	2,73	3,00	673
Legal System	3,00	3,37	3,24	2,88	2,27	2,95	695
Industrial Relations Policy	2,39	3,44	3,35	2,25	2,50	2,81	682
Budgetary Policy	1,78	2,05	3,36	2,77	2,06	2,49	424
Economic System	2,35	1,77	2,76	2,80	2,65	2,48	430
Health Policy	2,44	2,30	2,56	2,52	1,85	2,39	477
Energy Policy	1,93	2,17	2,14	2,75	2,76	2,37	566
Parliament and ist Members	2,30	2,45	2,50	2,26	1,75	2,28	323
Environmental Policy	2,17	2,56	2,25	2,00	2,13	2,23	467
Education Policy	1,60	2,54	2,17	2,44	2,12	2,20	685
Defense Policy	2,00	1,90	2,18	2,71	2,29	2,19	299
State and Government	2,21	1,72	1,44	2,53	2,70	2,15	336
Alliance Policy	2,13	1,96	1,82	2,29	2,44	2,14	300
Two German States	1,92	2,14	2,50	1,90	2,00	2,09	326
Family and Youth Policy	1,81	2,70	2,23	1,45	1,94	2,05	306
Unification and German Question	2,09	2,29	2,00	1,92	1,76	2,04	271
Federalism	1,82	1,90	2,36	1,95	2,06	2,04	285
Regulations Policy	1,83	2,13	2,28	2,17	1,53	2,03	298
Social System	1,78	1,71	2,68	2,11	1,56	2,02	266
Foreign Trade	1,73	2,10	2,42	1,95	1,50	1,98	266
Culture Policy	1,79	1,95	2,11	1,56	2,10	1,91	234
Peace Policy	2,25	1,87	1,93	1,69	1,76	1,91	235
Media Policy	1,95	2,32	1,57	1,71	2,00	1,89	340
Pension Policy	1,11	1,64	1,76	2,53	1,75	1,86	213
Traffic Engineering	1,63	1,95	2,12	1,72	1,82	1,85	274
Political Views and Ideologies	2,15	1,35	1,57	1,56	2,29	1,83	204
Monetary Policy	1,54	1,88	1,76	1,95	1,90	1,83	228
Social Policy	1,60	1,29	2,17	1,95	1,59	1,76	182
Commercial Law	1,33	1,69	2,20	1,60	1,29	1,68	108
Business Promotion	1,25	1,64	1,33	2,22	1,25	1,61	127
Policy of Research and Development	1,72	1,38	1,39	1,53	1,61	1,53	197
Infrastructure Policy	1,50	1,45	1,65	1,38	1,25	1,48	149

Table 6: Focusing ranks based on days and weeks

Issue	Rank		Index		N
	Day	Week	Day	Week	
Parties and Movements	1	1	2,22	4,24	1530
Social Order	3	2	1,81	3,96	1268
Foreign Policy	5	4	1,79	3,54	1233
Principles of Political Action	6	3	1,73	3,58	1062
European Policy	9	12	1,67	3,09	884
Economic Policy	16	5	1,56	3,45	879
Tax Policy	7	10	1,71	3,18	853
Political Style	14	6	1,58	3,42	839
Labour and Employment	10	8	1,62	3,27	777
Right-wing Radicalism, Migration Policy	8	11	1,68	3,16	772
Legal Policy	12	9	1,59	3,24	760
Coalitions	4	7	1,80	3,30	738
Elections	2	13	1,83	3,03	699
Legal System	13	15	1,58	2,95	695
Education Policy	30	23	1,31	2,20	685
Industrial Relations Policy	17	16	1,53	2,91	682
Internal Security	15	14	1,56	3,00	673
Energy Policy	11	20	1,62	2,37	566
Health Policy	20	19	1,45	2,39	477
Environmental Policy	33	22	1,29	2,23	467
Economic System	24	18	1,35	2,48	430
Budgetary Policy	21	17	1,41	2,49	424
Media Policy	39	36	1,22	1,89	340
State and Government	19	25	1,46	2,15	336
Two German States	32	27	1,29	2,09	326
Parliament and ist Members	29	21	1,32	2,28	323
Family and Youth Policy	26	28	1,34	2,05	306
Alliance Policy	18	26	1,50	2,14	300
Defense Policy	22	24	1,39	2,19	299
Regulations Policy	25	31	1,35	2,03	298
Federalism	28	30	1,33	2,04	285
Traffic Engineering	37	38	1,24	1,85	274
Unification and German Question	27	29	1,33	2,04	271
Social System	34	32	1,28	2,02	266
Foreign Trade	40	33	1,21	1,98	266
Peace Policy	35	35	1,26	1,91	235
The arts	41	34	1,19	1,91	234
Monetary Policy	36	40	1,25	1,83	228
Pension Policy	23	37	1,36	1,86	213
Political Views and Ideologies	44	39	1,14	1,83	204
Policy of Research and Development	45	44	1,13	1,53	197
Social Policy	42	41	1,16	1,76	182
Infrastructure Policy	43	45	1,15	1,48	149
Business Promotion	38	43	1,22	1,31	127
Commerical Law	31	42	1,30	1,58	108

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