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# West Germany: The Role and Influence of the Media



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**A Research Paper**

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# West Germany: The Role and Influence of the Media

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**A Research Paper**

This paper was prepared by [Redacted] Office of European Analysis, with technical support from [Redacted]. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, European Issues Division, [Redacted].

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**West Germany: The Role and Influence of the Media** [Redacted]

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**Summary**

*Information available as of February 1984 was used in this report.*

West Germany's highly polarized news media both mirror and promote the breakdown of the country's security consensus. Much of the printed media strongly supports the Federal Republic's close ties with the Alliance and the United States. Left-leaning publications, however, along with the electronic media, are fueling the peace movement, neutralism, and distrust of US foreign policy.

Polarization of the media stems partially from journalists' own political biases, but also from pressures by political parties, advertisers, and publishers. The Soviet Union has taken advantage of the political divisions in the media and cultivated good relations with popular leftist weeklies. While the Soviets do not control the content of these publications, they have benefited from incessant criticism of the United States.

Media impact is difficult to measure, but we believe left-leaning media are disproportionately influential, especially among the educated elite. West Germany's many conservative local newspapers give only limited coverage to national and international affairs. Their readers, moreover, pay greater attention to local events. The country has both conservative and leftist national dailies, but the left-leaning weeklies have no serious competition. Along with television, they can determine the agenda for discussion even among those who reject their views.

We believe the influential leftist media will continue to add to strains in West German-US relations. For instance, after fanning opposition to INF deployments throughout the past two years, much of the press and television may target next the issue of chemical weapons storage. The less flamboyant conservative press will find it difficult to effectively counter the leftist media's unceasing negative portrayal of the United States.

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### National Daily Newspapers

Germany's four national dailies are:

- The Springer-owned Bild-Zeitung, the closest German equivalent of the New York Daily News. It has a far higher circulation than the other national dailies, but, because of its sensationalist reporting, the tabloid often has been accused of manufacturing or distorting information.
- Die Welt, also a Springer publication, appeals to the more educated reader. Its coverage of national and international news is widely considered to be among the best in the country.
- The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, designed for intellectuals and businessmen, has a well-deserved reputation for accuracy and thoughtful editorials.
- Munich's Sueddeutsche Zeitung has national renown, but is more regionally oriented than the other three dailies.

Important regional papers include the Frankfurter Rundschau and the Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, which has a circulation second only to Bild.<sup>a</sup>

### National Weekly Newspapers and Magazines

The weekly newspaper, a hybrid between newspaper and magazine, is a significant feature of the West German press. Unlike the national dailies, weekly newspapers deemphasize news reporting and concentrate more on detailed analysis of salient events and issues:

- Die Zeit enjoys a high regard among educated readers because of its analytic depth and diversity

<sup>a</sup>A major reason for the lack of a rich national press, in our judgment, is the absence of a true press capital. Bonn has not developed the political and cultural stature that characterized Berlin before World War II. Hamburg has filled the need for a press center to some extent; it has become headquarters for the influential Springer publications group, the German Press Agency, and the financially strong West German radio-television station.

of opinion. The paper's superior quality, however, is inversely related to its financial strength. Die Zeit escaped bankruptcy in the late 1970s only after adding Das Zeitmagazin—a colorful, less highbrow supplement—to its regular edition.

- The Deutsche Zeitung and the Deutsche Allgemeine Sonntagsblatt focus primarily on the concerns of the Protestant Church. In addition to religious subjects, however, the papers also print articles on a variety of political, economic, and social issues.
- The Rheinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt appeals to Catholic and Protestant readers and sees itself as the defender of Western Christian values.
- The news magazine Der Spiegel is highly controversial. Some people have described it as "muckraking and sensationalist," while others have praised its reporting on political life and its comprehensive treatment of specific subjects. Spiegel's publisher, Rudolf Augstein, claims that the magazine's main purpose is to "burst political illusions."

Illustrated magazines, such as Stern, Bunte Illustrierte, Quick, and Neue Revue have a much larger readership than the weekly newspapers and news magazines because of their focus on sex, crime, and society gossip. Despite their lurid covers, however, Stern and Quick also are political magazines. Like Spiegel, the two publications have shown great interest in uncovering political scandals. There are also many specialized periodicals serving industry, commerce, agriculture, and the scientific community. Some of the scientific-academic journals have worldwide reputations.

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**West Germany: The Role and Influence of the Media**



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**Introduction**

After World War II, the Allied occupation powers in Germany restructured the press and radiobroadcasting to help establish a strong democratic order.

Believing that market competition stimulates diversity, the Allies promoted private ownership of newspapers and magazines. By contrast, they set up broadcasting stations as decentralized, nonprofit public corporations to prevent exploitation by the federal government and powerful economic interests. The Allies hoped the media would strengthen West German democracy by providing comprehensive and accurate information, presenting competing viewpoints, and vigilantly monitoring government behavior. In fact, concentration of ownership, ideological biases, and political and economic pressures jeopardize these preconditions for an effective democratic press. This paper looks at the changing structure and political orientation of the West German media. It examines the media's ability to set the public and governmental agenda as well as the constraints on the media's own independence. And it also discusses the impact of the leftist media on US interests.

local newspapers, giving the financially stronger ones, such as the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, a virtual monopoly in their region.



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Although there are approximately 400 daily newspapers, relatively few have full publication staffs. To cut production costs, most papers print the bulk of their pages from matrices supplied by central publishing houses and change only the local news section. The number of papers with independent political and editorial sections has dropped steadily over the years.



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In particular localities, the predominant newspaper has little, if any, competition. In 1954, 15 percent of all local districts had only one newspaper; the percentage of one-paper districts has more than doubled since then. The *Bild-Zeitung* not only dominates the national market, but it is also expanding its circulation locally through regional editions.



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Declining competition in the press is linked to growing concentration of ownership. According to the *West German Press and Media Handbook*, the conservative Springer concern alone controls 85 percent of the national newspaper market and 37 percent of all daily newspapers. The degree of concentration is equally pronounced for magazines. The four leading publishers—Springer, Bauer, Burda, and Gruner + Jahr—produce 65 percent of all magazines.



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**Changing Structure of the Press**

The trend toward concentration of the press during the past two decades—particularly at the local level—has fanned a storm of criticism. Many intellectuals fear that the decreasing number of independent newspapers and the emergence of ever larger and more powerful publishing houses have reduced the diversity of information and opinion necessary for maintaining the vitality of West Germany's democracy.



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To prevent further accumulation of power by the large publishing houses, two of West Germany's antitrust agencies—the Monopolies Commission and the Cartel Office—have blocked publisher Axel Springer's efforts to sell as much as 51 percent of his press empire to the Burda publishing group. The Cartel Office argues that the proposed "elephantine marriage" would create a dominant company in newspaper and magazine advertising. The measures taken by the antitrust agencies and bad publicity have prompted Springer to postpone his merger plan.



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Before World War II, Germany had approximately 20 national dailies; today there are only four (see box)—far fewer than in the United Kingdom and France. The paucity of national dailies is compensated to some degree by a large number of weekly newspapers and magazines catering to a national readership. The same trend toward concentration is evident at the local level. Growing production costs have caused a marked decline in the number of smaller

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**The Electronic Media: The Public System**

The electronic media are organized as nonprofit public corporations for each *Land* or group of *Laender* on the model of the British Broadcasting Corporation—a system designed by the occupation powers to protect the freedom of broadcasting from federal government encroachment and economic exploitation (see box). The guiding principles for the radio and television broadcasting stations are pluralistic control and balance. The networks are required by the West German Constitution to represent “all socially relevant groups.” The broadcasting councils of most stations, therefore, have representatives from *Land* governments, trade unions, churches, chambers of commerce, the press and local governments, and higher education. In the case of the West German and North German stations, the *Laender* parliaments elect the broadcasting councils, each party receiving seats in proportion to its strength in the legislature. All broadcasting programs must reflect “a minimum measure of balance in content and impartiality,” according to Article 5 of the Constitution. [redacted]

Domestic radio and television stations are financed primarily through fees paid by the owners of radio and television sets. The fees are collected by the federal post office and channeled to the broadcasting stations. Although the networks obtain additional revenues from commercial advertising, television time for advertising is strictly limited, and sponsored programs are forbidden by law. Except for the regional West German radio-television station in Cologne and the nationwide ZDF television network, most broadcasting organizations have budget deficits. [redacted]

**Private Television**

In February the minister presidents of the *Laender* approved private television, thus ending a drawn-out and often acrimonious controversy between the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) over the appropriate organization of the electronic media. Before the minister presidents reached their agreement, the SPD had vigorously fought the Kohl government's plan to introduce nationwide cable television with private-sector participation and satellite TV, maintaining that:

- Only public-law broadcasting stations, constitutionally bound to represent all relevant social groups, could ensure pluralistic control of television and prevent exploitation by narrow economic interests.

- Commercialization of TV would lower program quality because business people, following profit instincts, would gear programs to mass tastes. [redacted]

In a February session of the SPD's committee for media policy, the party decided to accept private participation in broadcasting, provided that “the principle of internal pluralism to safeguard diversity of opinion” will be upheld. The committee neither defined “internal pluralism” nor elaborated on how to achieve it in private television. The Social Democrats also made their acceptance of private TV dependent upon the Kohl government's promise to preserve and improve the public broadcasting system. [redacted]

According to the SPD's federal business manager, the party changed its media policy when it realized the Kohl government would introduce private TV anyway. The Social Democrats also hoped that domestic private television would discourage TV transmissions from foreign satellites, which are not easily subjected to national control. [redacted]

The minister presidents of the *Laender* had approved cable TV experiments even before the SPD changed its position on private television. Four pilot projects—in Munich, Dortmund, Ludwigshafen, and West Berlin—will be run for two to three years with the number of subscribers ranging from 10,000 to 50,000. The Ludwigshafen project, which started operation earlier this year, is the only one with private-sector participation. The newscasts for the Ludwigshafen experiment are produced by the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. [redacted]

**Objectivity**

Despite claims in the masthead of nonpartisanship, most news publications are far more ideological and partisan than US newspapers and magazines. West German newspapers, for example, almost never publish opposing views, as US newspapers frequently do. The trend toward polarization began in the 1960s with a new generation of politically conscious journalists. Decrying the artificial calm during the Third Reich and the immediate postwar period, they were determined to make the media a public forum of political and social debate. [redacted]

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**Radio**

There are nine regional domestic radio stations: North German, Bremen, West German, Hesse, South German, Southwest German, Bavaria, Saarland, and Free Berlin (see figure 1). The two largest are the West German station in Cologne and the North German station in Hamburg. A director-general (Intendant) heads each network and is accountable to its principal governing bodies: the broadcasting council and the administrative council.<sup>a</sup> In 1950 the radio stations, while maintaining their federalist structure, formed a public-law consortium known as the Association of Broadcasting Stations under Public Law in the Federal Republic of Germany (ARD) for program exchange, budget balancing, and operation of the first television network. [redacted]

Germans can choose among only three channels. One channel (Deutsches Fernsehen) is jointly operated by the nine regional stations in ARD. Each station's contribution to the common program is determined by a quota system based on the number of television owners in its area (see figure 2). [redacted]

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The nine domestic radio stations carry three programs. Because the First and Second Programs broadcast nearly 24 hours each day, they try to provide a contrast in program content. The Third Program, on the air only five to seven hours each day, is directed primarily at guest workers. In 1960 the Bundestag created two federal public corporations for broadcasting abroad. Deutschlandfunk aims mainly at East Germany while Deutsche Welle—primarily on shortwave—broadcasts worldwide [redacted]

A second channel (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen—ZDF) is not run by ARD, but rather by a separate public corporation with central studios in Mainz. ZDF is the outgrowth of a failed attempt by the Adenauer government in 1954 to gain control of a portion of the radio-television media by introducing a draft law for a second television station operated by the federal government. The Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 1961 that the Laender have sole jurisdiction over the operation of radio-television networks. After this landmark decision, the Laender, realizing the need for a second television channel, approved the establishment of ZDF. The members of its supervisory body—the television council—are chosen from the political parties according to their strength in the Laender, and its programs are coordinated with ARD. [redacted]

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**Television**

The regional radio services also participate in the production of television programs. Unlike Americans, who enjoy a wide selection of programs, most West

A third channel—which is run by ARD—is not a joint production of the nine regional stations, but rather each station carries its own programs. Like the Public Broadcasting System in the United States, it transmits educational, scientific, and cultural programs. [redacted]

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<sup>a</sup> The West German and North German radios have a third controlling body—the program advisory committee. [redacted]

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The popular weekly news publications, particularly, often make it difficult for the reader to distinguish between news and analysis. The daily newspapers are more factual—if not always accurate—but headlines are often tendentious. Broadcasting networks, although legally obliged to maintain neutrality, also have become very politicized. [redacted]

programs—are disproportionately influential, especially among the educated elite. The many conservative local newspapers give only limited coverage to national and international affairs. Public opinion polls show that their readers, moreover, pay greater attention to local news and sports. While there are both conservative and leftist national dailies, the left-leaning weeklies have no serious competition. Along

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Although conservative news publications outnumber leftist ones, we believe the leftist media—particularly the weekly news magazines and leftist-oriented news

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Figure 1  
West German Broadcasting Stations



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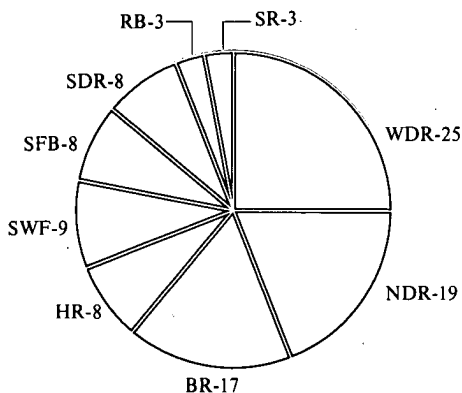
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**Figure 2**  
**Shares of Regional Stations in the**  
**First Television Program (ARD)**

WDR—West German	SFB—Free Berlin
NDR—North German	SDR—South German
BR—Bavaria	RB—Bremen
HR—Hesse	SR—Saarland
SWF—Southwest German	

Percent



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with television, they are able to determine the agenda for discussion even among those who reject their views.

West German journalists, like most members of the intellectual elite, tend to have leftist sympathies. This is true even of many of those employed by conservative-owned publications. An Allensbach public-opinion survey showed in 1976 that slightly more than 50 percent of all press and broadcasting editors supported the Social Democratic Party, while only 25 percent favored the Christian Democrats. The leftist bias among journalists in large part explains the increasingly critical attitude of a significant portion of the mass media toward US policies. (See table.)

**Political Orientation of the Printed Media.** Our readings and the observations of other US officials and of academicians indicate that the following publications are conservative:

- The national dailies *Bild-Zeitung* and *Die Welt* as well as the weekly *Muenchner Merkur* and the local *Koelnische Rundschau* support the conservative parties and rarely fail to criticize the Social Democrats.
- The nationally distributed *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is also conservative in its editorials, but it is more balanced in its news reporting.
- The national weekly *Rheinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt* supports the policies of the Kohl government.
- The regional weekly *Bayernkurier*, owned by the Christian Social Union (CSU), is the mouthpiece of Bavaria's Minister-President Franz Josef Strauss.

Other important publications tend toward the left:

- The regional dailies *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, as well as the local *Hamburger Morgenpost*, sympathize with the Social Democrats.
- The SPD weekly newspaper *Vorwaerts* reflects predominantly the views of the party's left wing.
- The weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel* is "leftist-nationalist," but its antigovernment orientation prompts it to lambaste political leaders regardless of their party affiliation.
- The weekly news magazine *Stern*, previously the most polemical of the leftist publications, has become more moderate as a result of a leadership change in May 1983. *Stern's* recent announcement that conservative chief editor Peter Scholl-Latour will be replaced by Rolf Winter, however, may indicate a return to a more pronounced leftist editorial policy.

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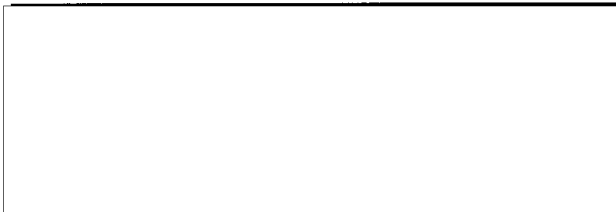
### The Media: Political Orientation and Attitude Toward the United States

Title	Circulation	Political Orientation <sup>a</sup>	Attitude Toward the United States
<b>Dailies</b>			
<i>Bild-Zeitung</i>	4,896,200	More sensation- alist than politi- cal. Conservative.	Pro-US.
<i>Bild am Sonntag</i>	3,000,000	Pro-CDU.	Strongly pro-American, even during height of Viet- nam War. Stresses need for US military presence in West Germany.
<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>	338,000	Right-of-center independent.	Generally supports US foreign policy and strong Atlantic Alliance.
<i>Frankfurter Neue Presse</i>	147,100	Right-of-center progovernment regardless of po- litical orienta- tion.	Reports fairly and objectively.
<i>Frankfurter Rundschau</i>	193,400	Pro-SPD.	Critical of society and foreign policy, particularly INF and military intervention in Latin America.
<i>Koelner Stadtanzeiger</i>	255,000	Pro-CDU.	Generally favorable.
<i>Muenchener Merkur</i>	252,200	Pro-CDU/CSU.	Generally pro-American. Favors a hardline US poli- cy toward Communist countries.
<i>Sueddeutsche Zeitung</i>	210,000	Independent cen- trist.	Basically pro-American. Favors disarmament talks and detente with Soviet Union.
<i>Die Welt</i>	271,454	Pro-CDU.	Positive attitude toward US presence in West Ger- many and West Berlin. Critical of detente. Strong support for Israel sometimes prompts it to criticize US efforts to be evenhanded toward protagonists in Middle East.
<i>Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i>	1,060,300	Pro-SPD.	Somewhat critical of United States, particularly dur- ing Vietnam War.
<i>Berliner Morgenpost</i>	196,000	Conservative pro- CDU.	Strongly pro-American. Advocates firm US attitude toward USSR on START, INF, MBFR and human rights.
<i>Der Tagesspiegel</i>	118,500	Independent.	Consistently pro-American. Best coverage in West Berlin of US issues.
<b>Weeklies</b>			
<i>Rheinischer Merkur</i>	60,000	Pro-CDU.	Generally well disposed toward United States. Some- times critical, but always fair.
<i>Vorwaerts</i>	60,000	SPD publication.	Frequently criticizes US foreign policy and urges greater efforts at disarmament.
<i>Die Zeit</i>	55,000	Left of center in- dependent.	Sometimes critical, particularly editorials by Theo Sommer.
<i>Der Spiegel</i>	1,044,500	Leftist national- ist.	Generally negative.

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**The Media: Political Orientation and Attitude Toward the United States**

Title	Circulation	Political Orientation <sup>a</sup>	Attitude Toward the United States
<i>Stern</i>	1,913,800	Left of center.	Since last year's appointment of conservative chief editor Peter Scholl-Latour, coverage of the United States has become more balanced. Rolf Winter, who will replace Scholl-Latour, may resume a more pronounced leftist editorial policy, but he generally seems well disposed toward the United States.
<i>Quick</i>	1,308,300	Pro-CDU.	Generally pro-American along lines of Christian Democratic Union.
<b>Networks</b>			
ARD		Left of center.	Frequent criticism.
ZDF		Right of center.	Generally balanced and sometimes favorable.
<b>TV Political Programs</b>			
Tagesschau (ARD)		Left.	Often critical.
Heute (ZDF)		Right.	Generally unbiased coverage.
Weltspiegel (West German and Bavarian stations)		Right.	Balanced presentation.
Internationaler Fruehschoppen (West German station)		Left.	Moderator Werner Hofer is pro-US, but his mostly foreign guest journalists frequently are not.
Perspektiven (ZDF)		Right.	Balanced presentation.
Report (Southwest German station)		Previously leaned toward left. Moderator Franz Alt was recently removed for being too anti-INF.	May become more objective.
Monitor (West German station)		Left.	Sometimes critical.
Panorama (North German station)		Left.	Sometimes critical, particularly with regard to INF.
ZDF Magazin		Right.	Generally pro-US and anti-Communist.



- The weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, which is politically independent, pursues a center-left editorial line in foreign policy and a conservative one in economic policy.
- Many staff correspondents of the leading wire service, Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), also appear to favor the left.

The regional daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* is the only major centrist paper. At the extremes of the political spectrum are the reactionary and ultranationalistic *Deutsche National-Zeitung* and *Unsere Zeit-Sozialistische Volkszeitung* (UZ), the main publication of the German Communist Party.

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**Political Orientation of the Electronic Media.** The broadcasting stations are required by law to maintain neutrality, particularly in informational programs. Newscasters, for example, reporting about activities or policies of the SPD, must give equal time to the CDU, regardless of the news value. Many radio and television news programs, however, do not comply. In fact, an ideological polarization has developed among the regional stations in the ARD radio and television network, and between the left-leaning ARD and the more conservative ZDF television network. [redacted]

The ARD's North German, Bremen, and Hesse stations are more leftist and favor the SPD, while the Saar, Southwest, and South German stations tend to support the CDU/CSU. ZDF programs such as the popular *heute* and *ZDF Magazin* are also more supportive of the CDU/CSU. The North German station has moderated its leftist political rhetoric in response to the growing strength of the Christian Democrats in its area and to the threat by conservatively governed Lower Saxony to pull out of the *inter-Land* agreement. In our judgment, however, it is still far from objective. For example, a report about the peace movement on its television program *Panorama* during the recent "hot autumn" not only disregarded the complexity of the INF issue but also blatantly favored antimissile groups. [redacted]

The conservative daily *Die Welt* charged last September that television programers have become spokesmen for the peace movement and reminded TV decisionmakers of their responsibilities to a public institution legally committed to balanced reporting. ARD's Southwest station seems to have taken this sort of admonition to heart. It announced early last October that Franz Alt—a Christian Democrat—would no longer moderate its political program *Report* because of his strong partisan attitude in favor of the peace movement. Leftists have charged that this decision violates the freedom of the press. [redacted]

**Attitudes Toward the United States.** While the conservative media generally have supported US security and foreign policy, left-leaning news publications and television programs have been sharply critical. The conservative prestige dailies *Die Welt* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* are probably America's staunchest friends. Because of their strongly anti-Communist outlook, they have supported NATO

modernization policies, defended the US intervention in Grenada, and stressed the Soviet military buildup. When much of the West German media criticized President Reagan's 1982 technology embargo against the West European-Siberian pipeline, *Die Welt* wrote:

"... the US Ambassador in Paris was right in comparing the pipeline project to the development of the Russian railroad system at the end of the 19th century. This is not a trade agreement comparable to the US-Soviet grain deal. This is the greatest infrastructure project the Soviet Union has ever seen..." [redacted]

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The leftist printed media vigorously have attacked Washington's attitude toward arms control and military initiatives in Latin America:

- *Der Spiegel* has accused Washington of insincerity in the arms reduction talks in Geneva and willingness to wage a limited nuclear war in Europe.
- *Stern* also has opposed INF deployment strongly, and a recent cover pictured President Reagan as a "warmonger."
- *Die Zeit*, although more objective than the other two publications, often has disapproved of the assumptions and substance of US policy. According to Embassy reporting, *Die Zeit's* publisher, Countess Doenhoff, and senior editor Theo Sommer, in a meeting with the US Ambassador, questioned Washington's commitment to arms control.
- *Frankfurter Rundschau*, commenting on the recent US troop maneuvers in Central America, charged that the United States "disregards the minimum of political good conduct and derides the very cause of freedom it allegedly promotes as the leading power of the West."
- The SPD publication *Vorwaerts* portrayed the US intervention in Grenada as a reckless action indicating Washington's disregard for the European allies. The paper also suggested that the United States might not consult its NATO partners before launching INF missiles to be deployed in Europe. [redacted]

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Broadcast journalists also frequently have criticized the United States. Michel Meyer, a French television correspondent in Bonn, told US Embassy officials recently that he saw few broadcasts that could be called friendly toward the United States during a two-month period of formally monitoring West German TV in 1982. As an example of negative television reporting about the United States, Meyer cited a newscast showing a poverty-stricken section of New York and a woman about to commit suicide. According to the correspondent, the film then "brutally cut" to an excerpt of a speech by President Reagan saying that America had been too warmhearted in the past and needed a cool head. [redacted]

There are differences in the degree of criticism expressed by the networks, however. ARD has been more hostile toward the United States than ZDF. The difference between the two networks was particularly evident in their respective coverage of anti-INF demonstrations at the US Air Force base at Ramstein last summer. ZDF's news program *heute* tried to present the clashes between demonstrators and West German and US security forces evenhandedly. ARD's *Tageschau*, by contrast, covered the event exclusively from the viewpoint of the demonstrators. It showed US military police beating demonstrators, and cameras focused on a banner reading "Shooting Order Against Pacifists" to underline US brutality. [redacted]

#### **Independence of the Press and Broadcasting**

The media's ideological tendentiousness stems partially from journalists' personal biases, but also from the influence of powerful interest groups. This is the case despite constitutional protection against pressure both from government and private interests and despite formation of the German Press Council by media leaders to uphold journalistic standards. In some instances, we believe, the media have been propaganda instruments of the Soviet Union. [redacted]

**Political Influence.** In the broadcast media, political parties have been much more successful in influencing decisions than the other social groups represented on the supervisory bodies of the networks. A number of pressure groups called *Freundeskreise* (circles of friends), affiliated with the two major political parties, have become permanent institutions on the periphery of some stations. Consisting of leading politicians,

these groups meet regularly with members of the supervisory bodies—and sometimes important members of production teams—to discuss broadcasting matters. Before every meeting of ZDF's television council, for instance, Christian Democratic and Social Democratic *Freundeskreise* go to their respective party annexes in Mainz to receive their orders, according to academic studies. One study concludes that the major parties' jockeying for partisan advantage has nearly paralyzed decisionmaking in the West German station, where SPD and CDU representation is almost equal. [redacted]

The political parties exert little direct influence on the printed media—except, of course, for the party-owned press. While the majority of papers are ideological and partisan, they carefully maintain their formal independence from the parties. Individual journalists, however, sometimes succumb to political pressure, particularly if they have developed good sources in the government or the opposition with whom they hope to curry favor. [redacted]

**Dependence on Advertising.** The growing dependence of the press on advertising gives private businesses great potential leverage over content. National papers and magazines receive approximately 75 percent of their income from advertising. Although it is difficult to prove that commercial groups use their economic power to force a particular editorial line, there have been some newspaper reports about large firms discussing concerted actions for or against certain publications. In January 1972, for instance, industrial leaders reportedly met with the owner of the Bauer publishing group to talk about an advertising campaign against the Social-Liberal coalition in Bonn. Publisher Heinz Bauer allegedly suggested to the industrialists that they should give their advertising to his company instead of *Der Spiegel*. There is no proof that the participants in the meeting actually reached an agreement, but, according to a West German media expert, *Der Spiegel* and *Stern* suffered heavy advertising losses during 1972. The reduction in income, however, did not trigger a change in the magazines' editorial policy. [redacted]

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**"Internal" Freedom of the Press.** The political left—including members of the SPD and student leaders—has led the battle against the oligopoly of the large, mainly conservative, publishing houses. It has charged that freedom of the press is the freedom of a few rich publishers. Leftists have directed their protests primarily at conservative Axel Springer, who often has used his publications to attack individuals he dislikes, such as Social Democrats Willy Brandt, Egon Bahr, and Herbert Wehner. [redacted]

To protect the "internal" freedom of the press, the previous Social Democratic-led government introduced a draft law in 1974 giving editorial staffs a veto power over top-level personnel changes and shifts in basic policy. The law was never passed, but some leftist newspapers and broadcasting stations—such as *Koelner Stadt Anzeiger*, the SPD publications, *Stern*, and the North German radio-television network—voluntarily have adopted statutes giving their journalists more say in determining editorial and personnel policy. [redacted]

During the past 10 months, journalists at *Stern* have been testing the value of such voluntary statutes. After the exposure of the alleged Hitler diaries as a hoax in the spring of 1983, chief editor Henri Nannen announced the resignation of *Stern* editors Peter Koch and Felix Schmidt and their replacement by Peter Scholl-Latour and Johannes Gross. *Stern's* staff reacted angrily to the appointments, arguing that they had not been consulted and that the conservative political orientation of the new editors would endanger the "liberal-progressive" policy of the magazine. To show their disapproval, the staff "occupied" their workplaces during a weekend last May, and demanded rescission of the new appointments along with the resignation of Henri Nannen. The Bertelsmann publishing house—the principal owner of *Stern*—withdrew the appointment of Gross, but insisted on Scholl-Latour. Henri Nannen, who founded *Stern*, retired in the wake of the scandal. Less than a year after Scholl-Latour became chief editor, *Stern* announced his replacement by more left-leaning Rolf Winter. [redacted]

**Soviet Influence.** US Embassy officials believe that neither the Soviet Union nor any other Bloc country has control over any of the non-Communist press or of the broadcasting media. The Soviets, nonetheless,

have been adroit in handling their relations with the West German media. Realizing *Der Spiegel's* importance in Bonn, they have cultivated its editors. According to US Embassy officials, the relationship is maintained in regular working-level meetings between *Spiegel* editors and a Soviet journalist assigned to the Soviet Embassy. US officials report that publisher Augstein also conducted clandestine "summits" with Valentin Falin when he was Soviet Ambassador in Bonn. [redacted]

*Der Spiegel* and *Stern* have repeated Soviet attacks on the United States, but sometimes they also have criticized the Soviet Union. Although *Der Spiegel* has supported detente fervently, it has not limited its coverage of Eastern Europe to topics of which the Soviets approve. The magazine, for instance, has accused the Soviet Union and the United States of conspiracy in building the Berlin Wall. In 1976 it also serialized two books on the USSR by American journalists. After the arrest of GDR regime critic Rudolf Bahro, moreover, *Der Spiegel* published the "dissident manifesto" describing government corruption and Soviet influence in East Germany. [redacted]

While the Soviets do not control *Der Spiegel* and *Stern*, they have gained from incessant negative coverage of the United States. Occasional criticism of the USSR has not hurt greatly Soviet interests in Western Europe. By contrast, continuing attacks against the United States have promoted neutralist sentiments in West Germany and increased disunity in the Alliance. [redacted]

**Impact on Public Opinion and Government**  
Public opinion surveys by the Allensbach Institute indicate that perceptions of media objectivity and reliability are affected by such factors as the political outlook, age, and educational background of the respondents. We believe that the West German media mold public opinion primarily in the foreign policy area, where the public has little experience, and that they influence the government by increasing the salience of certain issues. [redacted]

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**Media Habits of the Public.** A recent Allensbach survey showed that television was the most important source of political information, that most people prefer the local over the national press, and that leftist-oriented television programs are the most popular:

- Forty-four percent of the respondents obtained most of their political information from television, 23 percent relied primarily on newspapers and magazines, while only 5 percent favored radio.
- Reliance on TV is greater for older and less educated people, as well as for supporters of the two major parties. Well-educated persons and supporters of the small Free Democratic Party, by contrast, prefer newspapers.
- Seventy-one percent of those queried read local daily newspapers, while only 8 percent read nationally distributed prestige papers, such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Welt*, and *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*.
- Among people who read daily newspapers, 76 percent generally always read local reports. Only 59 percent always read domestic political news, and less than half paid attention to editorials or foreign news.
- TV magazines, such as *Hoer Zu* and *Hoeren und Sehen*, attracted more than twice as many readers as political/economic magazines, such as *Der Spiegel* and *Capital*.
- *Stern*, read by 39 percent of the respondents, appealed primarily to less educated people. By contrast, the prestigious *Der Spiegel* has a somewhat smaller, highly educated readership.
- The television news program *Tagesschau* was the favorite of 83 percent of the respondents, followed by *heute* (74 percent), *Panorama* (45 percent), *Report* (45 percent), and *ZDF Magazin* (44 percent).

**Perceptions of Media Reliability and Objectivity.** According to other Allensbach surveys, most West Germans believe that the media's news reporting is

reliable. Fewer people, however, think that political commentaries are objective:

- Roughly four-fifths of the respondents in one poll considered the broadcast media to be reliable. By contrast, only 69 percent perceived the newspapers to be reliable. Popular perceptions varied across social groups. Younger, more educated, and leftist individuals had less confidence in the reliability of media reporting than the respondents as a whole.
- Approximately half of those queried thought that the media are politically neutral. Newspapers, however, were perceived as much more ideological than the broadcast media.
- Younger, leftist, and better educated people were more inclined to believe that the media are too far to the right, while older, conservative, and less educated ones tended to consider them to be too far to the left. Supporters of the Green Party believed that the media are even further to the right than did SPD voters. [redacted]

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**Mirrors of Public Opinion.** Polls, not surprisingly, show a strong correlation between the political orientation of German news publications and that of their readers. Thus, the readers of the conservative *Die Welt* vote predominantly for the CDU/CSU coalition, while the leftist *Frankfurter Rundschau* attracts primarily readers identifying with the Social Democratic and Green Parties. [redacted]

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There also is a strong correlation between the policy preferences of a news publication and those of its readers. *Die Welt*, for example, has ardently supported NATO and a strong Western defense. The *Frankfurter Rundschau* has been more ambivalent about NATO and has pleaded for a reduction in West German defense spending and a concomitant increase in social expenditures. A recent Allensbach poll shows that 84 percent of *Die Welt* readers consider NATO essential and 14 percent believe that the Alliance is no longer necessary. By contrast, only 55 percent of *Frankfurter Rundschau* readers think that NATO is

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still essential, while 25 percent state that it has ceased to be useful. Readers of *Die Welt* and *Frankfurter Rundschau* diverge even further on the issue of defense spending. Among readers of *Die Welt*, 51 percent want to keep defense spending at the present level and 41 percent favor a reduction. By contrast, only 13 percent of *Frankfurter Rundschau* readers are in favor of keeping defense spending at the current level, while 86 percent want to decrease it. [redacted]

**"Molding" Public Opinion?** Numerous West German academic studies have investigated the impact of the mass media on public opinion. Some researchers claim that the media mold people's political beliefs while others maintain that they merely reinforce opinions. Empirical evidence for the "molder hypothesis" is sparse because of the difficulty of establishing a causal link between media views and public opinion. The observed congruence between the political orientation of West German news publications and their readers, however, does suggest that the media at the least reinforce people's beliefs. [redacted]

We believe the media are most likely to mold people's views in the area of foreign affairs, where judgments are based almost exclusively on media reports. There appears to be a connection, for instance, between President Reagan's popularity among West Germans and the degree to which the populace must rely on media commentary about him. An Allensbach survey in the spring of 1982—when negative reports about the President dominated the media—showed that 18 percent of the respondents held a favorable opinion of President Reagan while 51 percent held an unfavorable one. A poll taken in June 1982, after the President had visited Bonn and Berlin and people had had a chance to form more direct impressions, produced dramatically different results: 40 percent of those queried held a favorable opinion of President Reagan, while only 31 percent held a negative one. Shortly after the President had left West Germany, however, and the public again became dependent on the media for their information, attitudes toward him became more disapproving. [redacted]

The leftist media, in our judgment, also have fueled popular opposition to INF deployment and US policy in Central America. They have accorded wide-ranging coverage to the German peace movement and its

mass antimissile rallies and protests at US military installations. The leftist media's constant barrage of criticism against US arms control policy in Europe and US actions in Central America probably also have prompted young West Germans to make a mental linkage between the two issues, reinforcing their inclination to view the United States as "imperialistic and militaristic." [redacted]

We believe the ability of the media to shape public opinion is likely to vary among different demographic groups. Young, less educated people probably are most susceptible to media influence. Highly educated persons are more open to new ideas, but they are also most likely to criticize media content. The media may be least able to alter the opinions of older people, who tend to resist change. [redacted]

**Influence on Government.** There has been little systematic research about the media's impact on government. In our judgment, the media have a major influence on the governmental agenda, but their impact is circumscribed in West Germany by such factors as centralization of the government information process and the lack of an investigative reporting tradition. [redacted]

There is little doubt that the media exert pressure on government by increasing the salience of certain controversial issues—such as INF and Central America. At the same time, however, the highly centralized structure of West Germany's governmental information apparatus frequently permits government leaders to set the reporting agenda of the media. In contrast to the United States, where the government information function is spread out among the White House and various Executive Branch departments, the West German Press and Information Office of the Federal Government is the principal disseminator of government information (see figure 3). Since this cabinet-level agency, which is directly under the jurisdiction of the Chancellery, largely controls the release of information, the Federal Government can direct it to withhold or phase the release of information to suit its own purposes. [redacted]

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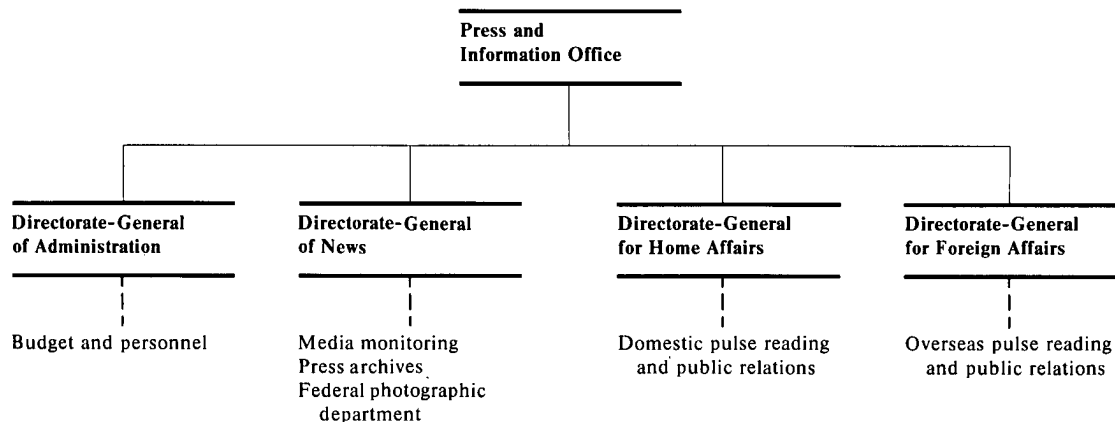
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**Figure 3**  
**Organizational Chart of the West German Press and Information Office**



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The tradition of investigative reporting in West Germany is much less developed than in the United States. Some of the older journalists still hesitate to criticize political leaders because of deep-seated respect for authority and fear that too much criticism will destabilize government. Their younger colleagues are more willing to question government policy and behavior, but partisan overtones reduce the credibility of their criticism. Only *Der Spiegel* and *Stern* investigate government affairs regularly. In 1982 *Der Spiegel* exposed payoffs against the giant Flick conglomerate made to politicians in exchange for tax breaks.<sup>1</sup> The magazine also publicized corruption and mismanagement in the Neue Heimat (New Home) program—an apartment project for low-income groups sponsored

by the West German Trade Union Federation (DGB)—as well as high cost overruns in the development of the Tornado aircraft.

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**Future Trends**

Further concentration of the local press is likely because of the smaller papers' inability to absorb growing costs and the relatively poor record of the Economics Ministry in preventing press mergers. While the trend toward concentration favors conservative political forces—most publishing houses buying up bankrupt papers pursue a conservative editorial policy—the leftist local press may extend its political reach as well. The left-leaning *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, for example, already has become the major newspaper in the Ruhr region

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<sup>1</sup> The report resulted in charges by the Federal prosecutor against Economics Minister Otto von Lambsdorff (and other known officials) that may yet force his resignation.

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The Kohl government is likely to develop a nationwide cable TV system, but the project's high cost probably will delay its completion. Despite continuing opposition from some members, the SPD probably will adhere to its new broadcasting policy in the hope that a more conciliatory position on private-sector participation in TV will assure it greater say in the organization of the new media. The SPD, however, is likely to insist on provisions protecting the financial situation of the public broadcasting stations in the face of private-sector competition. [redacted]

The Social Democrats probably also will push for reform in public broadcasting. Notwithstanding the leftist bias of much of the broadcast media, the SPD has argued that the CDU/CSU wields too much power over program and personnel decisions. The leftist magazine *Der Spiegel* recently accused the CDU/CSU of pressuring journalists in broadcasting stations where CDU/CSU representatives on decisionmaking bodies outnumber those of the SPD. [redacted]

We do not believe that private TV will change drastically the political outlook of the broadcasting media. Cable and satellite TV probably will concentrate on entertainment, where the profits are greater, while traditional television will continue to produce the majority of news programs. The few privately produced political programs, however, probably will be even more ideological than current *Laender*-controlled ones. Private TV producers—even less than producers of public programs—cannot be legally held to political neutrality, since they carry the economic risk and need to consider profitability. Thus, the ideological outlook of private news programs is likely to depend largely on the producers' and editors' ideology or their perceptions of consumer preferences. [redacted]

**Implications for the United States**

The pro-American media in West Germany will remain hard pressed to counter the flamboyant leftist press and broadcast journalists. In our view leftist media criticism of NATO policy almost certainly has helped break the West German consensus on security policy, which had lasted for more than two decades, by fueling public fears of nuclear war. *Der Spiegel* and *Stern* were the first to dramatize the dangers of the Pershing II for West German security. They

argued, for instance, that an accidental launching of the Pershing would trigger an automatic Soviet retaliation because the short warning would not permit Soviet leaders to consult with Washington. The magazines charged, furthermore, that nuclear modernization of NATO would permit the United States to "decouple" its own nuclear risk from that of Western Europe and thus increase Washington's readiness to wage a limited nuclear war with the Soviet Union on European soil. *Der Spiegel* and *Stern* also questioned Washington's sincerity in the INF talks and criticized its alleged unwillingness to include the British and French nuclear systems in the negotiations. [redacted]

The leftist media probably will continue to demand a reduction of nuclear arms in Europe and to urge the United States to be more conciliatory toward Moscow. Washington's performance at the Stockholm Conference on Disarmament in Europe (CDE) is already being scrutinized. The leftist press is showing increased interest in chemical weapons storage—an issue that, in our judgment, could succeed INF. Persistent media criticism of NATO eventually could erode popular support for the Alliance, even though recent public opinion polls indicate that most West Germans still oppose military neutrality. [redacted]

Driven by their sympathies for leftist governments and movements in Latin America—and corresponding opposition to rightist regimes there—leftist journalists probably will continue to attack Washington's policy in the region and to fuel popular protests against US "imperialism" and "militarism." Although the Kohl government finally has named an ambassador to El Salvador and has cut off aid to Nicaragua, we believe that public opinion will continue to be an important influence on Bonn's policy toward Latin America. [redacted]

The United States, in our opinion, faces formidable obstacles in trying to improve its image with leftist West German journalists. According to State Department officials, for instance, the "public diplomacy" campaign launched last year to explain the US position on INF to West German journalists was futile. Some journalists supported Washington's policy in private conversations with US officials, but their articles continued to present Washington unfavorably. [redacted]

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