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Conflict and Consonance in Media Opinion:
Political Positions of five German Quality Newspapers

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Abstract

The paper examines the degree of conflict and consonance in the editorials of five German quality newspapers between 1994 and 1998. The degree of correspondence in the media system is discussed against the background of Germany´s pluralistic media structure on the one hand and concepts of public opinion on the other hand. Rather than investigating the differential issue selection among the newspapers the analysis compares the opinions on issues correspondingly addressed by several newspapers. It focuses on the newspapers´ positions regarding fundamental political conflicts and identifies spheres of consensus and conflict in the media system. Although the newspapers represent distinctly different political orientations each of them also showed issue-specific deviations from its general preference for left or right policy alternatives. Results indicate considerable degrees of consonance regarding external relations issues and education policy. Conflict evolved around law and order and migration issues.

Zusammenfassung

Das Papier untersucht das Ausmaß von Konflikt und Konsonanz in den Kommentaren der fünf Deutschen Qualitätszeitungen zwischen 1994 und 1998. Der Grad der Übereinstimmungen wird vor dem Hintergrund der pluralistischen Struktur des Mediensystems einerseits und Ansätzen zur öffentlichen Meinungsbildung andererseits diskutiert. Nicht die zeitungsspezifisch unterschiedliche Themenauswahl, sondern die unterschiedlichen Meinungen, die zu einem von mehreren Zeitungen gleichzeitig ins Spiel gebrachten Thema vertreten werden, stehen im Mittelpunkt des Interesses. Die Analyse vergleicht die Positionen, die die Zeitungen zu politischen Grundkonflikten vertreten, und bestimmt Sphären des Konsenses und des Konflikts im Mediensystem. Trotz der unterschiedlichen politischen Grundorientierungen der Zeitungen zeigten sich bei bestimmten Themen jeweils auch Abweichungen der Zeitungen von ihrer generellen Präferenz für linke oder rechte Politikalternativen. Es ergab sich ein beträchtliches Ausmaß an Konsonanz für Themen aus dem Bereich der internationalen Beziehungen sowie für die Bildungspolitik. Konfliktreicher verlief dagegen der mediale Diskurs zur Rechts- und Ordnungspolitik sowie zu Fragen der Migration.

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1. Introduction[1]

The dissemination of information is an undisputed function of the mass media 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 one of the most important subsystems of society. Yet, media in this perspective are frequently attributed a predominantly passive role as they are seen to 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 persuasive and evaluative functions of the media (Gurevitch/Blumler 1990, Page 1996a).

The increase in research activity under the heading of „framing" is a good illustration of the shift towards the persuasive and evaluative dimensions of mass communication. After a period of concentration on the information function of media and cognitive effects scholars have rediscovered attitudes and opinions[2]. 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 political positions 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 but take an active role in the political process by selecting and structuring information, interpreting

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2   Also see the discussion on second-level agenda stetting which strongly emphasizes the links between issues and opinions (Ghanem 1997).

and evaluating the stream of events continuously taking place and supporting or rejecting particular policy options (Page 1996b, Jarren 1996).

Media´s political positions are most openly and legitimately expressed in the opinion sections. Through editorials the media publicly express their opinions and make use of their right to present themselves as autonomous actors. In editorials rather than in the news section the different media outlets establish a particular ideological profile that makes them distinguishable from their competitors and binds certain segments of the audience. By focusing on editorials this paper investigates the particular political positions of the German quality press without regarding its performance in disseminating information. Rather than conceptionalizing the media as collective actor with a uniform political position, the paper sets out to examine the particular constellations of opinion in the media system.

Considering the pluralistic structure of the German media system and the distribution of the newspapers across the entire range of the political spectrum there should be a considerable degree of conflict between papers with opposite political positions and divergent party allegiances. Yet, many scholars assume a high level of consonance in media discourse resulting from corresponding professional routines, the homogeneity of class interests, and journalistic co-orientation. The paper discusses the conditions and consequences of consonance and conflict in the media system and relate these to the idea of pluralism and on the one hand and concepts assuming high degrees of consonance in public opinion on the other hand. Applying the position model of party competition to the media system it is investigated to what extent newspapers differ in terms of their particular political positions on particular issues and where spheres of consensus nevertheless develop. The empirical data presented in this paper is derived from a larger project on editorial discourse in the German quality press currently conducted at the Social Science Center Berlin[3].

2. Diversity vs. Consonance

In modern democracies the mass media maintain and structure the constant exchange of issues and opinions between different actors. Understanding media functions as desirable outputs of subsystems for the greater entity, information, critical observation and orientation are the primary democratic functions the media are expected to fulfil. The neutral dissemination of information between the political elite and the citizens undoubtedly represents the most obvious media function. It has evoked large amounts of research whereas the other media functions have received comparably little attention. The watchdog metaphor refers to the media´s assignment of critically observing the political process and ensuring a certain degree of accountability regarding the political actors. The

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3   See Neidhardt/Eilders/Pfetsch (1998) and Eilders/Lüter (1998).

critical observation builds on the information function and applies the idea of freedom of information to the relation between the individual and the state. In order to serve as watchdogs of the political process the media have to be independent of the incumbent authorities. In Germany – like in most modern democracies – effective and collectively binding criticism is assumed to be guaranteed through the structural diversity of the media system. In the print sector and in the privately owned electronic media (as opposed to the public broadcasting system) the idea of pluralism depicts the inter-media-diversity rather than the intra-media-diversity. The individual media outlet is not expected to present a balanced opinion.

Orientation representing the last of the three primary democratic media functions has been widely neglected in the scholarly discourse on media performance (Voltmer 1998/99, 14). It explicitly relates to interpretive, evaluative and possibly persuasive media content. The media support the process of opinion formation by critically discussing arguments and making judgements regarding particular policy options, actors´ performances and political decisions. Considering the ever increasing amounts of unconnected information supplied by the media interpretations and evaluative statements that "make some sense" out of those fragments and thereby provide orientation for the audience gain special significance. Since editorials provide „biased information" they comply with people´s need for orientation (Weaver 1977) and enable the audience to make political judgements on the basis of limited rationality (Calvert 1985). Hackett suggests to substitute the term "bias" by „structured orientation" (Hackett 1984, 254). One way of reducing the cognitive effort in opinion formation is relating one´s own opinion to the political positions of certain elites who are assumed to have similar attitudes and opinions (Zaller 1992). German quality newspapers also seem to be suited for serving as orientation marks for the opinion formation of the audience because they stand for certain political positions and their readers are divided accordingly[4].

Like the media´s functions of information and critical observation the orientation function relies on the pluralistic structure of the media system. It is assumed that as long as a pluralistic media structure is guaranteed the media will provide a wide range of facts and opinions needed for independent opinion formation. Only if the media is open towards the variety of societal voices, it can disseminate unbiased, comprehensive and complete information. Only if the media is independent of state, party or economic influence it is able to act as a watchdog supervising the political process. And only if it represents a variety of opinions, it can provide sufficient orientation for the audience and support the audience´s opinion formation. Thus, pluralism may be regarded as the normative basis for a well-functioning democratic media system.

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4   See the findings of the "Allensbacher Werbeträger-Analyse" 1995, where the prestige press audience in Germany is broken down into their political orientation (Schulz 1997, 104).

Taking a macro-level perspective on media content means we are not interested in single editorials but in the universe of issues and opinions in the media system. Most investigations of media opinion conceptionalize media as uniform collective actor without differentiating between individual outlets with opposite political positions and divergent party allegiances. Yet, the plurality of voices in the media system has to be considered and special attention has to be directed to the particular constellations of correspondence and divergence among different media outlets. The structural pluralism in the German media system provides for a certain degree of political conflict in the media system. It can be expected that media outlets with a liberal editorial stance hold different opinions than their more conservative counterparts. 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" (Seymoure-Ure 1974, 159). This leads not only to a parallelism between certain papers and parties but also implies a correspondence between the range of papers and the range of parties.

In Germany, the press-party-parallelism is rooted 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 quality newspapers. Several empirical studies show that German national quality newspapers cover almost the entire political spectrum with the Welt located at the right and the Tageszeitung (taz) at the left of the continuum. Between these poles, beginning from the right and proceeding to the left, there are the Frankfurter Allgemeine (FAZ), the Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) and the Frankfurter Rundschau (FR) (Kepplinger 1985, Hagen 1992, Schönbach 1977, Donsbach/Wolling/Blomberg 1996).

In any pluralistic media system different media outlets compete against each other by developing a distinct content profile in order to position and stabilize themselves in the audience market and become distinguishable from other media outlets. Therefore, we expect considerable differences in the ideological positions of the different newspapers. Some structural characteristics of media systems, however, seem to suggest the opposite: 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 co-orientation are likely to produce high levels of correspondence in the media system (Noelle-Neumann 1973, Noelle-Neumann/Mathes 1987, Jarren 1988). In communication research the actual degree of diversity is strongly debated. This also regards the desirable amount of commonality in a modern society. Whereas a pluralistic media structure and high degrees of content diversity has persistently been unquestioned as a presupposition of free opinion formation and a well functioning democracy, recent developments like individualization and the fragmentation of the audience have nurtured the fear of an increasing societal desintegration and lead to a more critical discussion of diversity in the media system. It does not need to be emphasized that a total uniformity between the issues and opinions in

the media is as dysfunctional as the total lack of mutuality[5] (Schulz 1999, Holtz-Bacha 1997).

From the perspective of media´s contribution to societal integration high degrees of media correspondence will receive positive evaluations as they give evidence of a minimum degree of common focus in the audience. Integration, however, is not the only outcome of political communication processes requiring high degrees of correspondence. Uniformity in the media system is also appreciated if it seems appropriate to put pressure on the political system to process an issue or react to a particular concern of the public. Media opinion can then be regarded as a substitute of public opinion which becomes a consistent, politically effective and sociologically relevant factor only as a high level of correspondence develops. The concept of public opinion thus more or less explicitly includes the notion of consonance (Gerhards/Neidhardt 1991, Neidhardt 1994, Noelle-Neumann 1982). This point is well illustrated in the spiral-of-silence-approach and related concepts referring to undesirable effects of public opinion.

Noelle-Neumann´s concept of the spiral of silence is built on the assumption that highly consonant media content is perceived as majority opinion. This perception generates sufficient social pressure for individuals not to dare expressing divergent opinions in public. As a consequence the impression of the dominant opinion is reinforced and a spiral of silence develops marginalizing opinions that are not sufficiently represented in the media (Noelle-Neumann 1982). She sees the corresponding attention criteria, the political uniformity of the professional peer group, the media's reciprocal co-orientation as main reasons for the highly consonant media messages. The mainstreaming approach developed by Gerbner and his team (Gerbner/Gross 1976; Gerbner et al.1980, 1992, 1984) is based on very similar assumptions. According to this approach high degrees of consonance in the media establish social norms that more and more individuals adapt to by changing their original attitudes and opinions into the "mainstream" opinion. Gerbner and his team see television as the main unifying factor in modern societies producing high degrees of conformity in people´s images of the world. The orientation towards large audiences and the elite domination of the media are seen as the main reasons for consonant media content. The dominant tendency is not the aggregate of all the different opinions in society: „Rather, it is the most general, functional and stable mainstream, representing the broadest dimensions of shared meanings and assumptions (...) this mainstream can be thought of as a relative commonality of outlooks and values that heavy exposure to the television world

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5 The antagonism between pluralism or diversity and integration is vividly reflected by the contrasting appraisals of any given degree of correspondence in the media system. Depending on the particular reference point high degrees of correspondence are characterized using either positive synonyms like consent, cultural mutuality and harmony or negative synonyms like conformity, adaption, assimilation, uniformity, standardization, stereotyping, collectivism, monopolization, and monologization. Low degrees of correspondences are either positively labelled as diversity and pluralism or devalued as fragmentation, heterogenization, segmentation, dissipation, atomization, specialization, individualization, and polarization (Knoche 1985).

tends to cultivate" (Gerbner et al. 1994, 28[6]). Both approaches – even though developed with opposite political backgrounds and holding different explanations for the assumed content conformity - view high degrees of consonance in the media as threat to the pluralistic ideal of opinion diversity and as a obstacle to social change.

3. Issues vs. positions

Pluralism and press-party-parallelism on the one hand and the assumption of highly uniform media content on the other hand lead to conflicting expectations regarding the degree of correspondence in the media system. In spite of the controversial debates a research tradition investigating the actual degree of consonance in the media has not developed. The empirical efforts to assess the common issue repertoires and opinions in the media system remained few. Except for single-issue comparisons across different media-outlets[7] there is basically no information on the general degree of correspondence in the media system.

Apart from those empirical shortcomings a theoretical deficit can also be observed. There is no differentiation between issues and opinions issues. In media research high degrees of correspondence are predominantly referred to as consonance. Consonance includes both correspondences of issues and opinions. A terminological differentiation is suggested in order to sharpen the analytical understanding of the construct. Consonance will be used for the evaluative dimension. The degree of correspondence on the issue dimension will be referred to as focusing. Thus, focusing denotes a correspondence of issues, whereas consonance relates to a correspondence of opinion. Regarding the formation of public opinion it is assumed that a low degree of focusing implies a fragmentation of public opinion with highly dissipated issue agendas, whereas a lack of consonance points to considerable conflict between different segments of society. The partisanship might follow the established structures of the party spectrum or develop along the groups and movements not represented in the party system. Correspondingly, the line of conflict can be located between media with left and right party allegiances, or between the media, the political groups and movements on the one hand and the established political parties on the other hand. This would be the case if the positions in the media

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6 The mainstreaming approach points to older Gramsci-inspired theories in the context of ideological hegemony which see a unifying effect as a result from elite domination of the media. They structure the ideological field, absorb and domesticate criticism. „Discrepant statements about reality are acknowledged – but muffled, softened, blurred, fragmented, domesticated at the same time" (Gitlin 1980, 270; also see Hallin 1987).

7 Frequent subjects of analysis are elections and scandals (summary in Kepplinger 1995), but there are also some comprehensive and detailed comparisons between media outlets regarding other issues (Kepplinger, 1989; Kepplinger/Donsbach/Brosius/Staab, 1986; Knoche/Lindgens 1988; Reiser 1994; Schönbach 1977; Voltmer 1997; Weiß 1985, 1986, 1988).

system develop regardless of party allegiances - for example in terms of new conflicts between materialism and post-materialism (Fuchs 1991).

The differentiation between issues and opinions can be related to two research paradigms, one focusing on the issue dimension, the other one addressing the question of corresponding opinion. The salience model considers issue selection to be the most important aspect of party competition. In this view, it might have a larger impact on the public's perception of an actor's ideological position whether or not environmental policy is addressed by a political actor than his or her particular position on concrete policy options. 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 via different positions regarding the same issues. Rather, they selectively emphasize certain issues, presenting them as the most relevant problems on the political agenda. "Left-right competition can consist of attempts to assert the salience of different issues that favor one or the other side" (Budge/Farlie 1985, 288). 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 assumes that different papers will position themselves in the political spectrum by differential relevance assignments. Different editorial positions of media outlets should therefore be reflected by a particular issue selection and presentation rather than through partisan arguments and evaluations. This view stands in sharp contrast to the traditional spatial view of party competition which assumes that parties offer different policy solutions to the same issues.

The traditional view, based on Downs´ understanding of party competition, concentrates on the political positions on an issue (Downs 1957). In liberal democracies parties compete for the approval of the electorate by offering certain policies designed to solve particular problems. The concept is based on a rational choice paradigm that assumes that voters after collecting all necessary information choose the policy alternative that comes closest to their individual needs and interests. The salience model contested this paradigm by focusing on issue hierarchies rather than positions on particular issues, but it is an open question whether or not particular issues are clearly linked with certain positions (Voltmer 1998/99, 72). This paper applies the assumptions of the position model of party competition to the German media system. Rather than examining the differential issue selection among the five quality newspapers under study, it investigates the political positions these media outlets hold on certain issues[8].

Due to the variety of possible positions for any given issue partisanship in the media is frequently assessed in single-issue analyse with a set of issue-specific pro and contra arguments as indicators for media opinion. In order to assess policy preferences across the

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8 For a test of the salience model see Eilders (2000).

entire spectrum of issues, however, a more abstract conceptualization of ideology is needed. Voltmer developed a concept for the analysis of political positions in public discourse that is sufficiently abstract to assess political positions in an all-issue study because it uses general principles of political action (Scarbrough 1984) instead of specific policies. These principles are deductively derived from a classification of areas of political intervention such as the economic and social system, institutional units, social groups, individuals and the transnational surroundings[9]. The concept reduces the variety of principles regarding one area of intervention to traditionally left, liberal or progressive and traditionally right, conservative and authoritarian alternatives. Positions in this concept thus are bipolar action-oriented alternative means to achieve political goals rather than goals themselves.

The concept developed by Voltmer is not only theoretically sophisticated and convincing from an empirical perspective as it clearly differentiates between the ideological positions of different media outlets (Voltmer 1998/99). Using this conceptionalization it is possible to go beyond a general left-right dimension of opinion and investigate the degree of consonance separately for each individual conflict between fundamental alternatives. Regarding the pattern of left and right positions on those conflicts, it can be expected that the profile of a paper with left party allegiances shows more similarities with other liberal than with conservative papers. Also, a conservative paper should resemble the pattern of positions of other conservative papers. It should be interesting, however, to examine which conflicts are nevertheless evaluated correspondingly.

4. Research Design and Operationalization

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. In Germany, editorials do not represent individual views of single journalists, but indicate the editorial stance of a media outlet. Editorials reflect the political views of the papers and serve as a forum of presentation for the media´s genuine view of public affairs. Since the opinion section does not have to comply with the information function of neutral reporting, it can be expected that the different political positions of media outlets become most visible and distinguishable in editorials.

Employing a content analysis of editorials in the five German quality newspapers between 1994 and 1998 we investigated the political positions of the individual

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9 The principles of action were supplemented with two Germany-specific dimensions regarding the unification process by Voltmer (1998/99).

newspapers and assessed the degree of consonance among them. All political editorials were included in the analysis, with the exception of editorials on exclusively international news without reference to domestic German politics. The coding unit was the individual article. The analysis is based on a sample of "Die Welt", "FAZ", "SZ", "FR", and "taz" for 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.

In order to assess the political positions of the papers the instrument developed by Voltmer (1998/99) was adapted and slightly modified. The basic conflicts divide into five conflict dimensions. The first dimension, Economic Wealth and Distribution, includes five separate conflicts representing competing – either left or right - views about the adequate means to achieve wealth and just distribution. It includes State Intervention vs. Market Economy, State Responsibility vs. Individual Responsibility, Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side, Tax Increase vs. Tax Reduction, and Regulation vs. Incentives (see appendix for details). The second dimension, Institutional and Individual Autonomy, includes four basic conflicts: Centralism vs. Autonomy, Separation vs. Unification, Need vs. Condition, and Individual Rights vs. State Control. These conflicts relate to liberal or conservative views on the autonomy of subsystems from the greater system. The other three conflict dimensions Cultural Identity, Societal Integration, and External Security each include two basic conflicts. Cultural Identity relates to the relation between "us" and "the others" and includes Cosmopolitanism vs. Ethnocentrism and Cultural Identity vs. Integration. Societal Integration including the conflicts Prevention vs. Sanction and Participation vs. Representation concerns progressive and authoritarian views on integration. External Security including the conflicts Co-operation vs. Conflict and Supra-nationalism vs. Sovereignty refers to the alternatives of co-operative and confrontative principles in international relations. In order to represent conflicts regarding positions toward the "new politics" (ecology, disarmament) for which the conflicts described above do not apply an additional conflict was developed. The left position supports the need to control possible risks from new technologies whereas the right position stands for a preference for risk acceptance (details in the appendix).

The sample included 8,717 editorials in five newspapers over five years. For each editorial up to three issues, three basic conflicts and three positions on these conflicts could be coded. The issue coding scheme was composed of 45 fairly abstract issue categories[10]

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10 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. Issues in our coding scheme can be described as policy, politics or polity areas rather than specific controversies. Thus, we differentiate between tax policy and legal system, but not between concrete debates or decisions regarding those issues.

like specific policy areas (e.g. environment, foreign relations or traffic engineering) and polity as well as politics aspects[11] of the political system (like elections, political style or parties and movements). Representing alternative policy options the basic conflicts that could be addressed in commenting on an issue did not apply for issues regarding politics and polity aspects rather than particular policies. Since our consonance measure relies on the newspapers´ positions on these conflicts, only the 15,890 issues regarding policy areas out of the total of 23,160 issues were considered for the purpose of this analysis.

For every policy issue addressed in the editorials, the coders had to decide whether or not the commentators referred to one of the 16 basic conflicts in discussing the issue. If one of the conflicts was addressed the issue was considered to be fundamentalized since the underlying political principles were discussed. For these issues they had to decide whether the commentator supported the left or the right position, took an ambivalent stand on the conflict or did not express any specific evaluation at all[12]. Relating basic conflicts and the positions on these conflicts to particular issues enables us to investigate whether or not an issue is discussed with regard to fundamental policy alternatives and which policy alternative is supported for each issue. We can thus identify a range of conflicts referred to in a fundamental discussion of an issue as well as the respective positions on those issues and get a differentiated multidimensional picture of the opinions expressed in an editorial. If an editorial deals with right wing extremism and migration e.g. the issue might either be related to the conflict prevention vs. sanction or to cosmopolitanism vs. ethnocentrism. Prevention vs. sanction, however, might also represent the relevant conflict in discussing internal security. Whereas a commentator might support the sanction option regarding right wing extremism and migration, he or she might show a preference for the prevention principle in internal security. This illustrates that the political position expressed in an editorial not only depends on the kind of issue, but also varies with the kind of basic conflict the issue is related to. Consonance from this perspective does not only regard the issue and the position on the issue, it also considers the particular conflict addressed.

In assessing the degree of consonance between different papers that continuously comment daily politics it is necessary to pay attention to the dimension of time. If a particular paper holds a certain opinion on taxes in 1994 while another paper supports that particular position in 1998, they both display the same opinion regarding tax policy in the aggregate measure of the five years under study. Yet, a correspondence in the strict sense cannot be assumed without regarding the same time period. The two papers might have

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11 Politics and polity issues relate to structural and procedural aspects of the political system. They included the following issues: Parties and Movements, Social Order, Principles of Political Action, Political Style, Coalitions, Elections, Parliament and its Members, State and Government, Unification and German Question, and Political Views and Ideologies.
12 If no conflict was addressed with a particular issue, "no reference" was coded. If the conflict was addressed but the commentator did not show support for either side "no evaluation" was coded. Support or rejection of both policy alternatives marked the ambivalent position between left and right principles (see table 1).

expressed their opinions about two distinctly different tax-related events (or maybe even to the same event but at a different time against a different background). 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 evaluation of a policy option at a given time. Parallel judgements thus fundamentally involve the same time reference. Corresponding positions can only be assumed if two papers support the same principle of action 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 thereby leaving enough time for all the papers to develop a position on the issue. This seems to be especially appropriate for events lasting longer than a day. This paper employs weekly measures thereby taking the risk that two evaluations of the same issue refer to two different events in that week. Measures on a daily basis, however, do not tolerate any time lags in coverage, severely reduce the number of cases for comparison and thus make it almost impossible to calculate consonance on a sound empirical basis.

The degree of consonance was assessed separately for each issue by comparing the newspapers´ positions on each of the basic conflicts addressed with the issue. Consonance was conceptionalized as negative or inverted dissonance in the media system with the standard deviation between the newspapers´ positions serving as dissonance measure[13]. A high level of consonance is indicated by a low standard deviation (dissonance), whereas a high standard deviation (dissonance) points to a low level of consonance.

5. Findings

The issue frequencies varied considerably indicating differential relevance assignments by the newspapers (table 1). Foreign and European policy, economic policy and taxes received most attention, whereas commercial law, business promotion and infrastructure policy were hardly commented on[14].

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13 For each paper and issue a mean position - the means of "left", "ambivalent", and "right" on the various conflicts addressed with a given issue - had to be calculated. Thus, each paper and issue received a mean position for every conflict that was addressed and the standard deviation was calculated among the newspapers. In order to consider the preference of a newspaper for certain conflicts when discussing a given issue, the conflict frequencies for each issue were used as a weight in the calculation of the newspapers´ mean position on the issue and in the calculation of the standard deviation. This procedure resulted in weighted weekly positions per newspaper and in weighted weekly standard deviations and then averaged over the weeks. We are grateful to Christian Galonska who did the data analysis for this article.

14 Since issues in content analyses are categorized according to the specific research question of a project and there is no "natural" category size for reality some issue categories include more cases than others. Foreign policy, e.g. seems to be far more inclusive than business promotion. Yet, as long as we only compare issue frequencies relationally (over time or between newspapers) and do not evaluate the general level of issue diversity, any sort of categorization can be appropriate.

Table 1: Shares of positions, non-evaluative conflict references and fundamentalization[15] for each issue

Issue	Left	Ambivalent	Right	No evaluation	No reference	Total	Fundamen-talization	N
Foreign Policy	28,3	12,7	17,7	13,4	27,9	100,0	72,1	1233
European Policy	39,7	14,5	9,4	22,3	14,1	100,0	85,9	884
Economic Policy	16,7	5,9	23,4	14,4	39,5	100,0	60,5	879
Tax Policy	12,2	8,1	38,5	29,0	12,3	100,0	87,7	853
Labour and Employment	18,7	5,4	22,5	17,4	36,0	100,0	64,0	777
Right-wing Radicalism, Migration Policy	38,0	5,2	22,7	13,7	20,5	100,0	79,5	772
Legal Policy	15,5	7,8	29,5	12,4	34,9	100,0	65,1	760
Legal System	18,7	4,3	16,3	6,0	54,7	100,0	45,3	695
Education Policy	17,2	7,7	16,9	10,7	47,4	100,0	52,6	685
Industrial Relations Policy	11,0	7,0	24,9	15,5	41,5	100,0	58,5	682
Internal Security	16,8	6,2	24,2	11,9	40,9	100,0	59,1	673
Energy Policy	40,8	5,5	15,5	15,9	22,3	100,0	77,7	566
Health Policy	35,2	7,3	18,7	11,9	26,8	100,0	73,2	477
Environmental Policy	45,0	4,9	14,8	14,3	21,0	100,0	79,0	467
Economic System	18,4	8,8	28,8	13,7	30,2	100,0	69,8	430
Budgetary Policy	6,1	3,8	14,9	12,0	63,2	100,0	36,8	424
Media Policy	21,2	5,3	11,5	10,0	52,1	100,0	47,9	340
Two German States	7,7	4,0	14,1	8,0	66,3	100,0	33,7	326
Family and Youth Policy	31,7	5,6	20,3	14,4	28,1	100,0	71,9	306
Alliance Policy	40,0	14,7	11,7	22,3	11,3	100,0	88,7	300
Defense Policy	11,0	3,3	12,0	8,0	65,6	100,0	34,4	299
Regulations Policy	17,1	4,4	17,8	10,4	50,3	100,0	49,7	298
Federalism	22,8	8,1	19,6	35,4	14,0	100,0	86,0	285
Traffic Engineering	22,6	8,4	18,2	9,1	41,6	100,0	58,4	274
Foreign Trade	15,4	5,3	18,0	10,2	51,1	100,0	48,9	266
Social System	36,8	9,8	28,2	16,2	9,0	100,0	91,0	266
Peace Policy	40,4	12,8	13,6	11,1	22,1	100,0	77,9	235
Culture Policy	10,3	3,0	8,1	3,8	74,8	100,0	25,2	234
Monetary Policy	6,1	3,1	19,3	8,8	62,7	100,0	37,3	228
Pension Policy	25,8	9,4	15,0	23,5	26,3	100,0	73,7	213
Policy of Research and Development	34,0	11,2	18,8	4,6	31,5	100,0	68,5	197
Social Policy	41,2	6,6	13,2	14,3	24,7	100,0	75,3	182
Infrastructure Policy	20,1	6,7	18,1	6,0	49,0	100,0	51,0	149
Business Promotion	18,1	14,2	40,2	17,3	10,2	100,0	89,8	127
Commercial Law	13,0	4,6	30,6	13,9	38,0	100,0	62,0	108

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15 Fundamentalization marks the share all conflict references ("left", "ambivalent" and "right" positions, "no evaluation") expressed in addressing an issue out of the total number of issue references. "No reference" marks the share of issue references without addressing one of the basic conflicts.
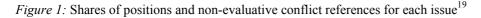
The differential relevance assignments to particular issues have to be kept in mind when discussing the general position of the newspapers and the degree of consonance for each issue. In this respect, the evaluations concerning foreign and European policy have much more potential to characterize the editorial discourse than the evaluations regarding commercial law or business promotion.
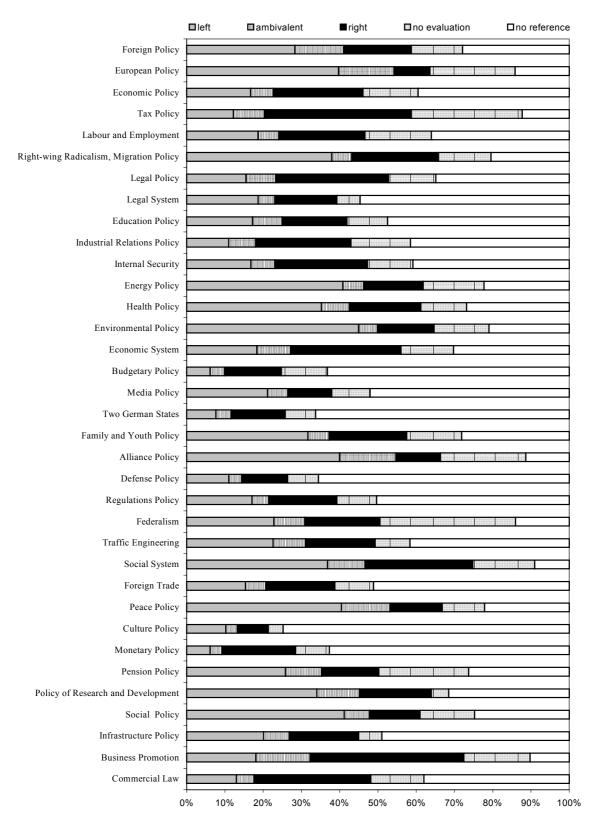
In about two thirds of the cases the issues dealt with in the editorials were related to one of the 16 basic conflicts mentioned above. One third of the issues, however, was discussed without reference to those policy alternatives. Instead of fundamentalizing the issue in terms of discussing the underlying political principle, the commentators might have focused on specific details of an event or certain aspects of the issue like the actors´ performance, the timing of an announcement or legal or historical aspects. The individual issues showed different degrees of fundamentalization. Highly fundamentalized issues were the social system, business promotion and alliance policy, whereas culture policy, two German states, and defence policy were only rarely related to a basic conflict. It is interesting to note that the most frequently addressed issues were not always the most fundamentalized ones. The degree to which an issue can be related to a basic conflict thus does not make it more suitable for commentary. There is no systematic relation between the attention directed at an issue and the tendency to relate an issue to underlying conflicts[16] (Table 1, figure 1). Regarding the opinions expressed in the editorials, the commentators showed a slight preference for the left, liberal or progressive over the right, conservative or authoritarian policy options across all issues (23.4% vs. 20.2%)[17]. Especially environment, energy, alliance and peace policy received large shares of left evaluations (table 1, figure 1). Yet, some issues – such as taxes and business promotion - were clearly evaluated with a preference for the right. Regarding the mean positions on the basic conflicts addressed in the editorials across all issues, we found considerable differences among the five newspapers under study (figure 2). Results indicate that Welt was located at the right of the left-right scale (2.4 where 1 is left and 3 is right), the FAZ followed closely (2.3). The middle position was taken by the SZ (1.8), and the FR (1.6) and taz marked the left pole (1.6). Considering all newspapers together there was a slight bias to the left side of the scale indicating that the German quality press tended to take a medium to left position on the issues at stake. The newspapers displayed considerable distances from the extreme left and right pole rather than covering the entire political spectrum. The distribution of the papers on the left-right continuum found on the basis of our conceptualization of media opinion confirms former studies based on content analyses as well as expert opinions[18].

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16 No linear or non-linear correlation was detected between the quantitative significance of an issue and the degree of fundamentalization (tendency of the commentators to relate an issue to a basic conflict). The mean position on the conflicts did not correlate with the issue frequency either.

17 In roughly 15% of the cases they did not indicate any preferences, and for 7.5% of the issues they supported both views expressing an ambivalent position.

18 Kepplinger (1985), Hagen (1992), Schönbach (1977), Donsbach/Wolling/Blomberg (1996).

Figure 1: Shares of positions and non-evaluative conflict references for each issue[19]

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19 "Left", "ambivalent" and "right" positions, and "no evaluation" add up to the share of fundamentalization of an issue. "No reference" marks the share of issue references not fundamentalized.

Figure 2: Mean political position of all five newspapers[20] (N=8158 evaluative references)
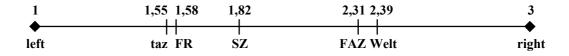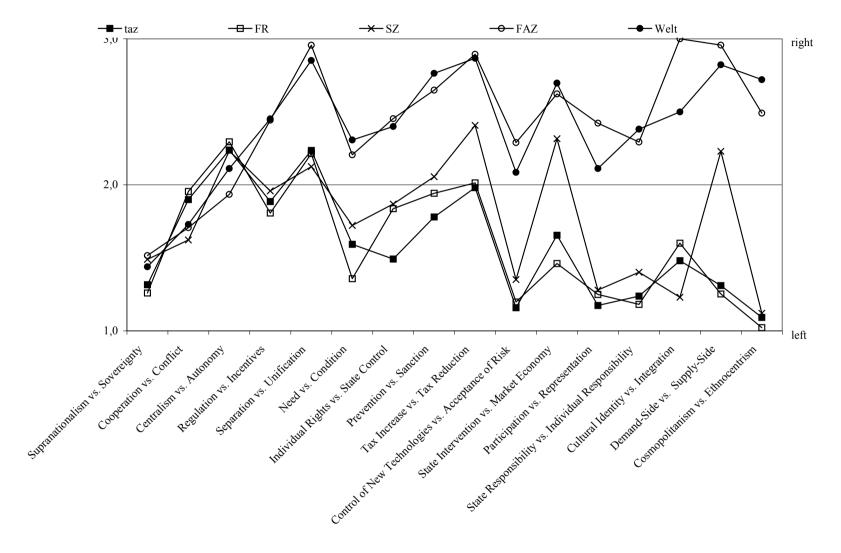
1		1,55	1,58	1,82		2,31	2,39		3
◆		┼	┼	┼		┼	┼		◆
left		**taz**	**FR**	**SZ**		**FAZ**	**Welt**		**right**

Table 2: Mean political positions on 16 basic conflicts across newspapers

Conflict	taz	FR	SZ	FAZ	Welt	Total
	N=1505	N=1605	N=1673	N=1670	N=1705	N=8158
Co-operation vs. Conflict	1,90	1,96	1,62	1,71	1,73	1,78
Supra-nationalism vs. Sovereignty	1,32	1,26	1,49	1,52	1,44	1,40
State Intervention vs. Market Economy	1,66	1,46	2,32	2,62	2,70	2,15
State Responsibility vs. Individual Responsibility	1,24	1,18	1,40	2,29	2,38	1,70
Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side	1,31	1,25	2,23	2,96	2,82	2,11
Regulation vs. Incentives	1,89	1,81	1,96	2,44	2,45	2,11
Tax Increase vs. Tax Reduction	1,98	2,01	2,41	2,89	2,87	2,43
Centralism vs. Autonomy	2,24	2,29	2,23	1,93	2,11	2,16
Separation vs. Unification	2,24	2,21	2,13	2,96	2,85	2,48
Need vs. Condition	1,59	1,36	1,72	2,21	2,31	1,84
Individual Rights vs. State Control	1,49	1,84	1,87	2,45	2,40	2,01
Prevention vs. Sanction	1,78	1,94	2,06	2,65	2,76	2,24
Participation vs. Representation	1,17	1,25	1,28	2,42	2,11	1,65
Cosmopolitanism vs. Ethnocentrism	1,09	1,02	1,12	2,49	2,72	1,69
Cultural Identity vs. Integration	1,48	1,60	1,23	3,00	2,50	1,96
Control of New Technologies vs. Acceptance of Risk	1,16	1,20	1,35	2,29	2,09	1,62

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20 The mean positions represent the average of all left, amivalent, and right positions expressed with any kind of basic conflict addressed by a newspaper. The standard deviations for those means vary between .82 and .89 and do not indicate severe differences in the internal pluralism of the individual newspapers.

Figure 3: Conflict-specific positions for five newspapers

Since the positions expressed when addressing individual issues refer to particular basic conflicts, we can get a detailed picture about the newspapers´ positions on 16 pairs of policy alternatives. Breaking down the political positions of the newspapers into the individual conflicts addressed, we found distinct profiles for each paper regarding their particular focus of concern (table 2). The left spectrum supported larger shares of left, liberal and progressive positions in almost every basic conflict whereas the conservative press supported larger shares of right, conservative and authoritarian positions (table 2, figure 3). Since the newspapers did not always follow their general ideological position on the left-right scale in every conflict, however, we identified conflicts with a tendency towards left and conflicts with a tendency towards right evaluations. The papers clearly tended to lean towards the left in Co-operation vs. Conflict, Supra-nationalism vs. Sovereignty conflict, State vs. Individual Responsibility, Participation vs. Representation, Cosmopolitanism vs. Ethnocentrism, and Control vs. Acceptance of Risk. A right partisanship was displayed in the conflicts Tax Increase vs. Reduction, Separation vs. Unification, and Prevention vs. Sanction (table 2, figure 3).

The conservative Welt and the FAZ took a liberal stand on the two international politics conflicts, the left wing taz and FR in turn expressed right positions regarding the questions of unification. The typically centrist SZ went with the right spectrum in conflicts related to economy and taxes (State Intervention vs. Market Economy, Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side, Tax Increase vs. Tax Reduction), and – like all the papers – on Centralism vs. Autonomy. In sum, no paper exclusively held either left or right positions. A clear cleavage, however, was found between the Welt and FAZ on the one hand and the SZ, FR and taz on the other hand. Only in conflicts regarding economic matters the SZ deviates from the left-wing papers[21].

Although the ideological profiles of the newspapers already indicate a certain degree of conflict in the media system, they do not render statements about the parallel evaluations of the five newspapers at a given point in time. A systematic consideration of the time dimension lead to a conceptualization of consonance on the basis of weekly comparisons of the newspapers´ positions for each individual issue. Considering the issue-specific average positions of the newspapers across the weeks, we found that social, environmental, peace, and alliance policy and European policy tended to receive high shares of left evaluations (table 3). German unification, monetary, and tax policy, on the other hand, were evaluated more conservatively. As already noted with regard to the newspaper profiles on the basic conflicts, for some of the issues the newspapers deviated from their

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21 Disregarding the conflicts and examining the newspapers´ positions with respect to the issues we found almost the same pattern of differences between the papers (without table). Left papers were likely to express left positions on most of the issues (but not on all of them) and right papers showed higher shares of right positions on most issues (but not on all of them).

general ideological position on the left-right scale. In the area of federalism, alliance and foreign policy the conservative newspapers even held more liberal positions than the liberal papers[22].

Comparing the newspapers´ positions on the issues for each individual week, we found the highest degree of consonance for commercial law, budgetary policy and alliance policy[23]. The least consonant evaluations were received by federalism, social order and culture policy (table 3). Still, with respect to the low quantitative significance of an issue (table 1) we cannot predict high degrees of societal unrest related to the issues of federalism and social system or either identify broad spheres of consensus in society on the basis of consonant evaluations of commercial law, budgetary and alliance policy. Conflict or consonance in the area of international politics, economy, taxes, labour and employment and right-wing radicalism and migration are likely to be much more relevant as these issues better reflect the character of editorial discourse.

The most consonant and most dissonant issues did not attract much editorial attention. Yet, there is no systematic relation between the issue frequencies and the level of opinion correspondences among the newspapers[24]. Editorial attention does not depend on the degree of conflict or consonance in the media system. With respect to the absolute significance of certain issues in editorial discourse, our discussion of the degree of consonance among the newspapers will concentrate on the issues most frequently addressed by the commentators. Within those frequently addressed issues foreign and European policy and education policy displayed comparably high degrees of consonance, whereas internal security, legal policy and right wing extremism and migration showed low degrees of consonance. Moderate degrees of consonance were found for economic policy, taxes, labour and employment, the legal system and industrial relations policy. Editorial discourse between 1994 to 1998 can thus be characterized by a broad coalition among the newspapers regarding external affairs and educational matters, while issues related to law and order and migration issues were discussed highly controversial.

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22 Certain characteristics of the events taking place in the time period under study might explain these unexpected results. During the Bosnian crisis the German left was reluctant to comply with the expectations of the other NATO-members who wanted a stronger military engagement of Germany and more co-operation with the NATO. Regarding this problem the left papers put forward a more isolationist view which affected their position on the conflict Co-operation vs. Conflict. The evaluation of the federalism issue was dominated by problems connected with the integration of the former East-German states. Here, the left papers supported their autonomy, usually a more conservative position.

23 The degree of consonance per issue was derived from the weighted consonance measures for each basic conflict addressed with the issue. For details of the weighting procedure see footnote 13.

24 Neither linear nor non-linear correlations could be detected.

Table 3: Mean positions per issue across newspapers, mean position per issue for all evaluative references in the newspaper spectrum, and degree of dissonance among the newspapers[25]

Issue	taz	FR	SZ	FAZ	Welt	Position	Dissonance
Right-wing Radicalism, Migration Policy	1,41	1,47	1,43	2,45	2,68	1,75	0,575
Foreign Policy	1,86	1,95	1,69	1,72	1,69	1,76	0,466
Two German States	1,75	1,75	2,04	2,71	2,31	2,19	0,441
European Policy	1,52	1,44	1,65	1,52	1,74	1,60	0,431
Defence Policy	2,05	1,24	1,85	2,33	2,34	2,04	0,402
Alliance Policy	1,85	1,58	1,72	1,62	1,47	1,62	0,330
Peace Policy	1,26	1,66	1,51	1,92	1,77	1,58	0,366
Infrastructure Policy	1,50	1,30	1,84	2,00	2,54	1,87	0,443
Traffic Engineering	1,50	1,75	2,24	2,27	2,24	1,91	0,526
Energy Policy	1,41	1,36	1,58	2,58	2,37	1,71	0,585
Environmental Policy	1,42	1,44	1,49	2,29	2,04	1,56	0,363
Culture Policy	1,80	1,63	2,25	1,63	2,13	1,93	0,707
Education Policy	1,63	1,87	1,87	2,00	2,21	1,95	0,461
Policy of Research and Development	1,50	1,55	1,83	2,23	2,12	1,85	0,430
Media Policy	1,57	1,89	1,67	1,86	2,27	1,80	0,363
Legal Policy	1,59	1,87	1,88	2,68	2,63	2,25	0,576
Legal System	1,22	1,53	1,63	2,49	2,42	1,83	0,487
Regulations Policy	1,94	1,58	1,97	2,36	2,13	1,97	0,576
Unification and German Question	2,50	2,00	2,67	3,00	2,71	2,72	0,257
Internal Security	1,52	1,64	1,87	2,66	2,76	2,12	0,601
Federalism	2,43	2,34	1,94	1,62	1,99	1,93	0,794
Social Policy	1,23	1,04	1,32	2,44	2,73	1,49	0,675
Family and Youth Policy	1,22	1,40	1,30	2,32	1,98	1,83	0,502
Pension Policy	1,05	1,42	1,90	2,03	2,46	1,96	0,485
Health Policy	1,02	1,27	1,40	2,32	2,23	1,75	0,421
Social System	1,39	1,21	1,57	2,79	2,90	1,81	0,738
Labour and Employment	1,38	1,52	2,11	2,62	2,81	2,10	0,540
Industrial Relations Policy	1,85	1,68	2,47	2,82	2,57	2,29	0,519
Economic Policy	1,48	1,37	2,21	2,62	2,72	2,18	0,542
Economic System	1,40	1,35	2,24	2,74	2,75	2,10	0,678
Commercial Law	1,75	2,33	2,58	2,86	2,31	2,19	0,000
Foreign Trade	1,43	1,53	2,36	2,28	2,55	2,10	0,562
Budgetary Policy	2,00	1,59	2,20	2,67	2,85	2,27	0,118
Tax Policy	2,11	1,98	2,12	2,83	2,78	2,42	0,507
Business Promotion	1,92	1,62	2,35	2,91	2,36	2,20	0,335
Monetary Policy	1,88	1,50	2,39	3,00	2,80	2,48	0,361
Total	1,57	1,58	1,86	2,33	2,40	1,95	0,510

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25 The frequencies of each basic conflict addressed with a particular issue was used as a weight for the calculation of the mean position for that issue. The same weighting procedure was used in the calculation of the standard deviation among the newspapers´ issue-specific positions (also see footnote 13). N is the number of weeks in which a particular issue is addressed. The dissonance is calculated on the basis of weeks with more than one newspaper addressing a particular conflict with a particular issue.

If the positions on the dominant issues are broken down into the underlying conflicts that were addressed in commenting the particular issue[26], it becomes clear that each issue was related to few main basic conflicts only (table 4)[27].

Table 4: Mean positions and dissonance on selected conflicts for selected issues[28] (Valid N≥10)

Selected issue-specific conflicts		Dissonance	Valid N*	Position
Right-wing Radicalism,	Cosmopolitanism vs. Ethnocentrism	0,704	58	1,48
Migration Policy	Prevention vs. Sanction	0,429	11	2,41
Foreign Policy	Co-operation vs. Conflict	0,537	96	1,83
European Policy	Supra-nationalism vs. Sovereignty	0,474	61	1,54
	Co-operation vs. Conflict	0,575	25	1,61
Education Policy	Centralism vs. Autonomy	0,627	10	2,06
Legal Policy	Prevention vs. Sanction	0,684	63	2,35
	Individual Rights vs. State Control	0,681	10	2,19
Legal System	Individual Rights vs. State Control	0,534	38	1,70
	Prevention vs. Sanction	0,426	11	2,44
Internal Security	Prevention vs. Sanction	0,761	28	2,20
	Individual Rights vs. State Control	0,691	25	2,20
Labour and	State Responsibility vs. Individual Responsibility	0,674	18	1,60
Employment	Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side	0,753	17	2,25
	Regulation vs. Incentives	0,468	13	2,40
Industrial Relations	Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side	0,704	28	2,23
Policy	Centralism vs. Autonomy	0,569	14	2,43
Economic Policy	Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side	0,909	25	2,20
	State Intervention vs. Market Economy	0,667	23	2,42
Tax Policy	Tax Increase vs. Tax Reduction	0,584	69	2,55

* numbers of weeks with at least two newspapers addressing the particular conflict, so the dissonance could be calculated

These conflicts, however, in some cases show different degrees of consonance and contradicting evaluations. Regarding right wing radicalism and migration, e.g., the dominating conflict Cosmopolitanism vs. Ethnocentrism showed low degrees of

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26 Table 4 illustrates how the number and kind of the individual conflicts addressed with an issue and the respective consonance levels affect the degree of total consonance for an issue.

27 The table only includes conflicts with more than ten cases, cases being the number of weeks where we found positions on the conflict by at least two newspapers, so consonance could be calculated. The less frequently addressed conflicts are not included in this table. Thus, the dissonance values and the mean positions might deviate from the values in table 3 where all the conflicts were considered for the assessment of dissonance.

28 The dissonance measure in this table is not weighted with the quantitative significance of the individual conflicts since each issue is broken down into its underlying basic conflicts.

consonance and a strong support for left positions. Prevention vs. Sanction on the contrary which was addressed less frequently highly consonantly received right evaluations. Issues regarding the international relations (foreign, European, alliance) were mostly addressed with references to Co-operation vs. Conflict and Supra-nationalism vs. Sovereignty with an above average degree of consonance and a clear preference for left positions. Issues regarding legal matters (legal policy, legal system, and internal security) were discussed with reference to the conflicts Prevention vs. Sanction and Individual Rights vs. State Control. They displayed low to moderate degrees of consonance with a right tendency in most of the conflicts. Regarding the legal system, however, individual rights were preferred over state control, so a strong left partisanship competed with the strong preference for sanction rather than prevention. Issues regarding economic aspects (labour and employment, industrial relations, economic policy) evolved around the conflicts State Intervention vs. Market Economy, Demand vs. Supply Side, State vs. Individual Responsibility, Regulation vs. Incentives, and Centralism vs. Autonomy. They showed low degrees of consonance and a clear preference for right positions, except for the conflict State vs. Individual Responsibility in the Labour and Employment issue where the commentators clearly attributed responsibility to the state. Education and tax policy were related to one main conflict only and showed low levels of consonance. Commentators on education policy showed a slight tendency to support the right position in the conflict Centralism vs. Autonomy. Regarding the tax issue they showed a strong support for the right position of tax reduction.

6. Summary and Discussion

The analysis examined the political positions of five German quality newspapers on policy issues addressed in their editorials. Employing a content analytical instrument that conceptionalized positions as abstract preferences for fundamental alternatives of political action it was possible to assess the ideological profiles of the newspapers in terms of left or right partisanship regarding 16 basic conflicts and identify spheres of conflict and consensus in editorial discourse. The general political positions of the papers confirmed former studies of the German newspaper spectrum with the FAZ and Welt located on the right hand side of the scale, the FR and taz located on the left, and the SZ taking the middle position.

Although we found clear cut cleavages between left and right newspapers the evaluations by the commentators did not always follow the newspapers´ general ideological position on all the issues and with regard to all the conflicts. That means the positions expressed by the newspapers varied considerably across the issues. Especially

issues regarding external relations, some aspects of the social question, and environment can be regarded as issues with a tendency for left partisanship. Most economic and financial matters as well as German unification, on the other hand, seemed to be predominantly discussed from a conservative perspective. For some issues the ideological positions of the newspapers even contradicted our expectations. A left bias regarding international politics displayed by the conservative papers was paralleled by a right bias on questions of German unification that was shown by the liberal newspapers.

In sum, liberal and conservative papers displayed surprisingly corresponding positions on some issues, while they strongly disagreed on others. Regarding the most frequently addressed issues only external relations and education were commented on with comparably consonant positions while most other issues - especially legal matters and migration - were controversially debated. The results represent strong evidence for the position model of left-right competition. Newspapers with opposite political positions take conflicting positions on given issues. Since there was only limited parallel issue selection in any given week, however, the consonance could only be assessed for few issues in few weeks. Even without separately testing the salience model[29], the difficulties calculating the consonance measure with only few weeks of parallel issue selections already indicates that newspapers do in fact differ in terms of relevance assignment. They do not routinely address the same issues in a given week but rather emphasize certain issues that their competitors do not assign relevance to. Thus, the salience model is not at all rejected by our results. Instead, both models seem to apply. Newspapers compete through differential relevance assignment but also hold different positions on the issues that nevertheless are correspondingly addressed.

As there is no normative optimum of consonance and conflict in the media, we can only speculate on the implications of our findings for the pluralistic ideal on the one hand and the integration potential of media on the other hand. The relatively low degrees of consonance detected in this analysis, however, do not seem to represent a severe danger to democracy and do not point to a completely mainstreamed media opinion. As some issues still marked consensual spheres there is no evidence of a general cleavage between the left and right newspaper spectrum pointing to a high level of desintegration.

Regarding the question of differential relevance assignment to particular issues, our findings disappointed some common expectations. There is no causal relationship between the quantitative relevance of an issue and the degree of conflict or consonance: Issues discussed highly controversial among the five newspapers do not necessarily attract much editorial attention in a given week. Even though conflict between certain actors has proved to be a highly efficient news factor, the degree of conflict between different newspapers

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29 The salience model was tested in a previous article (see Eilders 2000).

does not result in high levels of media attention. Neither are highly consensual issues likely to be addressed more frequently. We found no evidence that the media in their editorials direct attention to consonant issues calling to mind the spheres of consensus in society and thereby enhancing integration. As fundamentalization and the mean position of an issue have not prooved to be good predictors for media attention either, it seems to depend on certain inherent characteristics of issues and concrete political events rather than on the media opinion and the constellations of opinion in the media system whether or not an issue receives editorial attention.

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APPENDIX: Definition of conflicts

The State Intervention vs. Market Economy Dimension

This dimension refers to the relation of the state and the economic subsystem. It centers around the question to what extent the state should intervene in economic processes. One answer to the question emphasizes the importance of the market, the other answer stresses state intervention.

State intervention:
The emphasis is on state intervention and the creation of a mixed economy is called for. Uncontrolled market forces are assumed to end in imbalances with unintended economic as well as social consequences. Therefore, state intervention in economic processes is considered necessary. Sometimes, the state itself becomes an economic entrepreneur.

Market economy:
The emphasis is on market forces. It is assumed that the market is capable of structuring the economic and social conditions of economic processes effectively. Economic activity of the state is considered ineffective. Thus, state intervention is rejected and the privatization of state enterprises is encouraged.

The State Responsibility vs. Individual Responsibility Dimension

This dimension refers to different principles of responsibility in the relationship between state and society. The question is who is responsible for evening out social inequalities. Answers to this question are of particular importance for welfare policies. Individual responsibility and state responsibility are distinguished as policy positions.

State responsibility:
The emphasis is on the responsibility of the state or collective agencies to provide goods and services to even out social inequalities and fulfil individual needs. The assignment of state responsibility is usually associated with a tendency to institutionalize social rights.

Individual responsibility:
This principle is often referred to as the subsidiary principle (Subsidiaritätsprinzip). It emphasizes the responsibility of the individual or social groups and social organizations (e.g. family, neighbourhood, churches) for all tasks they can reasonably take upon themselves. Only if the solution of a problem exceeds the resources of the individual or social group, higher level groups or organizations and finally the state are supposed to act. The principle of individual responsibility is usually associated with a political tendency to cut back government activity in society.

The Demand-Side vs. Supply-Side Dimension

This dimension refers to monetary and fiscal policies of the state. The question is in which direction state intervention into income distribution has to be done. A supply-side position and a demand-side position are distinguished.

Demand-side orientation:
The goal is on supporting consumers (private households) in the market process. It is assumed that strengthening the "effective demand" will result in a stronger supply-side.

Demand-side oriented policies center on measures to increase private income, e.g. by programs for employment and improving workforce quality. All welfare aid that improves income (e.g. unemployment benefits, child allowances) can also be regarded as elements of demand-side oriented policies.

Supply-side orientation:
The goal is on supporting investment activities of private economic actors. It is assumed that in the first place the supply-side should be supported. As a result, consumers would also be strengthened. Supply-side oriented policies focus on the improvement of conditions for private enterprises. Main instruments are the reduction of taxes, wages, and entrepreneurial risks.

The Tax Increase vs. Tax Reduction Dimension

This dimension refers to the resources of the government budget. The question is to what extent the state should burden the economy and private incomes in order to fulfil its tasks. This conflict was sharpened by the challenges resulting from the reconstruction of East Germany after unification.

Tax increase:
The state is regarded as responsible for a wide variety of public - tasks which necessarily require extensive financial resources. Besides the classical tasks of the state like the guarantee of internal and external security, other tasks such as welfare, education and infrastructure are also seen as in the scope of its responsibility.

Tax reduction:
The scope of state tasks is defined restrictively. The state should confine itself to the classical tasks, while goals like education, infrastructure and parts of welfare are assigned to private organisations. High taxes are considered as an obstruction of economic growth and private initiative, resulting in inflation and unemployment.

The Regulation vs. Incentives Dimension

This dimension refers to the political instruments aimed to influence economic or social behavior, especially in the areas of labour market and environmental protection, which create enormous deficits and where the means of problem-solving are highly disputed. The policy positions here are regulation and incentives.

Regulation:
A particular behavior is regulated by binding norms. The typical instrument of regulation is the law.

Incentives:
A particular behaviour is encouraged by the state by providing incentives. This policy position relies on economic incentives to bring about a desired behaviour (rewards) and on economic disincentives to block undesirable behaviour (duties). It is up to the individual to observe incentives or disincentives or to accept the consequences.

The Centralism vs. Autonomy Dimension

This dimension points to different conceptions of how the relationship between the central state and its diverse sub-units should be organized. In particular, it applies to federalism and the degree of autonomy cultural organizations, such as mass media and churches, or economic organizations, such as employers and trade unions, should have. The positions of autonomy and centralism are distinguished.

Centralism:
The emphasis is on the strengthening and expansion of the central state's rights and power with respect to the smaller sub-units. This policy position accords the central state a dominant role. The central state pursues this goal by making use of his main resources, Legislation and distribution of money.

Autonomy:
The emphasis is on the smaller units' rights and autonomy with respect to the central state or the role of the federal government. The autonomy position stresses that sub-units should act on the basis of their own resources and their own decision making.

The Separation vs. Unification Dimension

This dimension refers to the relation between the two parts of Germany, especially after the breakdown of socialism. The dimension refers not only to inter-state relations, but also to the relation between organizations (interest groups, parties) that then existed in both parts of the country.

Separation:
The (partial) autonomy of the two parts of Germany and its institutions is stressed. The goal is a confederation of the two German states, at least the persistence of East German institutions. Sometimes the demand is merely to postpone national or institutional unification.

Unification:
The national unity is regarded as the highly valued and preferred structure. Unification at all levels is demanded as fast as possible. The persistence of institutions of the former GDR is rejected.

The Need vs. Condition Dimension

This dimension refers to how the differences in terms of wealth and power between East and West Germany can be reduced. The alternatives indicate different modes of the transfer of resources from the West to the East.

Need:
The transfer of resources is defined by the needs of East Germany. Money, manpower and know-how are transferred. A further demand is to share political power. The support by the West is considered as a matter of national solidarity.

Condition:
Support and transfer are only given when certain conditions the reconstruction of institutions and the implementation of market economy, are met. In particular, political power is only shared when the East German politicians have proved their integrity.

The Individual Rights vs. State Control Dimension

This dimension points to the tension between individual and society. The problem is how to ensure the cohesion of the society which is made up of many individuals. One answer to this problem stresses individual rights, the other emphasizes state control.

Individual Rights:
This position assumes that the individual is able to choose the "right way" without endangering the rights of other individuals and the interests of the community. The individual should get the chance for self-determination. The individual has to be protected from the state and social pressure for conformity. The individual is regarded as responsible and rational.

State control:
The assumption is that the pursuit of individual rights and interests tends to violate the common interest. Thus, the individual has to fit into society and has to accept customs, norms, rules, duties and his or her particular role, even if this would run counter one's own needs and goals.

The Cosmopolitanism vs. Ethnocentrism Dimension

This dimension refers to the relationship to foreign cultures and ethnic groups outside the society. It also captures the degree to which the own culture and the own people should be favoured in domestic legislation. Ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism are distinguished as policy positions.

Cosmopolitanism:
The emphasis is on the equal value of different cultures and nations ("opening"). This policy position rests on universalistic values and pluralism. Possibilities of immigration are regarded liberally.

Ethnocentrism:
The emphasis is on the superiority and priority of the own culture and nation ("closure"). The ethnocentrist position draws from the conviction that one's own culture and norms are of more value than others. But even without such an evaluation, one makes a clear distinction between one's own group and foreign groups. Possibilities of immigration are interpreted restrictively.

The Cultural Identity vs. Integration Dimension

This dimension refers to how to handle culturally and ethnically different groups in the society. Should groups be encouraged to keep their cultural identity (multiculturalism) or should they be encouraged to assimilate? In this context, in Germany, problems have arisen, particularly with the guest-workers. Presently, it has gained new importance with the opening of the borders, both within the EC and with the Eastern countries. Further, it refers to the situation in the reunified Germany where people with different experiences, values, styles of life and economic conditions live together.

Cultural identity:
The emphasis is on the originality, identity and the specific rights of different cultures and ethnic groups living together. Cultural identity means that culturally different groups live

together in a community, but each wants and is granted to preserve its own cultural particularities. The diversity of culturally and ethnically different groups is considered to be a valuable addition for societal life. This might also find its expression in rights and institutions.

Integration:

The emphasis is on the necessity of cultural adaptation and integration into the dominant culture in order to make living together possible. Integration takes place culturally (adaptation to values, styles of life, language), socially (similarity of socio-economic conditions), and formally (legislation). Integration is regarded as a precondition for full participation in political, economic and social affairs of the host culture.

The Prevention vs. Sanction Dimension

This dimension refers to the question of which instruments should be used to prevent deviant behaviour (e.g. crime) and to guarantee law and order. The main policy area of this dimension is penal Legislation and law enforcement. The positions of sanction and prevention are distinguished.

Prevention:

This policy position emphasizes preventive measures to counteract deviant behaviour. There is the conviction that circumstances can be altered in a way to prevent deviant or criminal behaviour. The solution to deviant behaviour is seen in changing societal conditions. Thus, ultimately the society is responsible for a successful socialization.

Sanction:

The emphasis is on authoritative acts to punish deviant behaviour. The functions of punishment arc both atonement and deterrence. It is assumed that deviant behaviour can be controlled by threat of punishment. Thus, higher crime rates are usually responded to by heavier sanctions.

The Participation vs. Representation Dimension

This dimension refers to the relationship between the citizen and the political system. The question is to what extent the citizens should participate in political decisions. The policy positions on this dimension are representation and participation.

Participation:

The emphasis is on the right of the citizen to participate and have a direct say in ongoing policy decisions. The underlying principle is an extensive model of democracy. The goal is to extend the possibilities and the modes of participation. Beyond voting in elections, direct modes of participation, such as referenda and plebiscites, are approved. Further, democratic participation should include as many areas of society as possible (e.g. economy, community planning). The extension of participation rights to segments of the population that did not have these rights before (e.g. blacks, guest-workers) is also part of this dimension.

Representation:

The emphasis is on representative democratic procedures which imply an indirect participation of citizens in political decision making. Instead, the role and the functions of the elected representatives are stressed. The underlying principle is a procedural model of

democracy. According to this concept, citizen participation should be mainly restricted to voting, i.e. establishing government majorities. After this, binding decisions are taken by the elected representatives.

The Co-operation vs. Conflict Dimension

This dimension refers to general principles of international relations. It covers bilateral foreign politics as well as the two main international conflicts, namely the East-West conflict and the North-South conflict. We distinguish two policy positions, conflict and co-operation.

Co-operation:
The state emphasizes shared interests and joint action with other states. With respect to the East-West conflict, policies of detente and co-operation are pursued. Strategies are arms reduction or action according to CSCE-procedures. With respect to the North-South conflict, the necessity of solidarity and international responsibility is being stressed.

Conflict:
The state emphasizes its own national interests and puts these interests first. In the pursuit of its goals it accepts conflict with other states as a means of politics. Confrontation is a characteristic state of the Cold War.

The Supra-nationalism vs. Sovereignty Dimension

This dimension refers to the specific way relations to other states arc to be organized. It centers on the question of whether and to what extent sovereign rights should be delegated to supranational or international organizations. The most important organizations for the current process of internationalization are the UNO, the NATO, and the EC. The respective positions are labelled sovereignty and supra-nationalism.

Supra-nationalism:
The necessity of international and supranational organizations is emphasized. The state is ready to delegate rights from the nation-state to supranational organizations. The rights of supranational organizations should be expanded and strenghthened.

Sovereignty:
The state insists on sovereign rights and endeavours to maintain the structures of a nation-state. There is a resistance to the delegate of rights to supranational organizations, a tendency to restrain the power of these organizations, or slow down the process of internationalization.

New: The Control of New Technologies vs. Acceptance of Risk Dimension

This dimension refers to the conflict regarding "new politics" that mostly evolves around environmental and human biology issues. It centers on the question how the technological development should be organized and whether and to what extent possible negative outcomes of new technologies should be accepted or whether the state should be more sceptical toward new developments. The respective positions are labelled Control of New Technologies vs. Acceptance of Risk Dimension.

<u>Control of New Technologies:</u>
A preference for control and for the consideration of ecological and social consequences of technical developments.

<u>Acceptance of Risk:</u>
Technological innovation is given priority over the possibility of negative outcomes for ecology and society.

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