



DE DETAILED ANALYSIS

2025-02-18_frontal_2025-02-18

Broadcast: Frontal | 2025-02-18 | Analysed on: 2026-03-19 09:00

Version 2.5-detail | K5+K13 — Auslöseereignis-Dokumentation vor Asymmetriebewertung; Asymmetrie nur belegbar wenn vergleichbarer Auslöser bei anderen keine analoge Reaktion erzeugte. | Konverter 3.3 (2026-05-14) | Massstab: §26 MSTV

OVERALL SCORE

3.6/10

Slight Bias

0 = balanced, 10 = strongly one-sided/manipulative

POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Classification according to Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) 2024

The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES 2024) is an academic survey of 609 political scientists in 31 countries. Each party is rated on a scale from 0 (far left) to 10 (far right).

Party	Left	Greens	SPD	BSW	CDU/CSU	FDP	Freie W.	AfD
CHES	1.23	2.28	3.41	3.78	6.23	6.54	6.77	9.10
Spectrum	<i>Left</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Right</i>	<i>Right</i>

The overall tendency is represented on a 0–10 scale (0 = strongly left-favouring, 5 = balanced, 10 = strongly right-favouring). The calculation is based on the difference in the average favouring of left vs. right parties (grouping according to CHES 2024).

TENDENCY (L – R)

3.9 / 10

Left-favouring

0 1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

← Left

Right →

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2024 — chesdata.eu | [Jolly et al., Electoral Studies, 2022](#) | Thresholds: [Pew Research Center](#)

This section serves for political classification and does not feed into the overall score.

BROADCAST INFO AND THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Broadcast data

- Date: 18.02.2025
- Presenter: Not named in the transcript (Frontal standard presentation)
- Topics examined (segment structure):

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Segment	Topic/Allegation	Target subject	Political spectrum of the target subject
1	Transatlantic caesura / Trump-Vance course, European security gap	Trump administration, USA; implicitly new federal government	Right (USA); cross-party (DE)
2	German mercenaries in Ukraine (Odin/Michael, Stefan/"Boxer")	No party; individual fates	Cross-party
3	Ukrainian families in Germany (Tetjana & Andrey)	No party; humanitarian topic	Cross-party
4	X/Musk: algorithm manipulation, AfD boost, freedom-of-speech rhetoric	Elon Musk / X; AfD; Trump circle	Right
5	Climate policy in the election campaign: marginalisation of the topic, heating law debate	CDU/CSU (abolition of heating law), tabloid media (Bild), AfD	Right/Centre-Right
6	Satirical review of election campaign TV debates	All parties (satirical)	Cross-party (formal)

Main topic + comparable grievances of other camps

Five weeks before the federal election, the broadcast covers a bundle of security, foreign and domestic policy topics that structurally all point in the same direction: threats from right-wing/right-populist actors (Trump, Musk, AfD) and the failure of conservative climate policy (CDU/CSU). The X segment is the only one with an explicit manipulation allegation against an identifiable platform and its favouring of a specific party (AfD). Comparable grievances of other camps — such as algorithmic favouring of left-wing content on other platforms, state influence on public broadcasters, disinformation campaigns from the left-wing spectrum, or campaign finance irregularities involving SPD/Greens — are not addressed. The climate segment's framing portrays CDU/CSU and AfD as climate obstructors, without equally problematising the failed climate policy of the Ampel coalition (Habeck chaos, budget crisis).



CHAPTER 1 — DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE 15 CRITERIA

Hard facts — 9 techniques that are countable and scientifically verifiable

1. EXPERT SELECTION

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Expert 1: Stefanie Babst — Former NATO strategist, security expert

Source deep-check:

(a) FUNDING: Freelance consultant/author; formerly NATO employee (publicly funded). No obvious private funder identifiable; possible connections to think tanks not examined.

(b) MANDATE: Former NATO mandate; compatible with pro-NATO, pro-rearmament positions. Structurally not neutral on questions of NATO relevance.

- Conflict of interest present? INDIRECT (career/reputation based on NATO relevance)
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from her assessment? INDIRECT (consulting mandates)
- Result: MEDIUM

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: Introduced as "one of the world's leading security experts" — social attribution without evidence; structurally pro-rearmament, but framed as a neutral expert authority. → Technique No. 12 (source selection)

Expert 2: Przemysław Grabowicz — Researcher, University/Institute Dublin (social platforms)

Source deep-check:

(a) FUNDING: Not stated. Irish university (state-funded). Possible EU research funding not excluded.

(b) MANDATE: Platform research; compatible with critical platform assessment. No obvious conflict of interest, but: EU-funded research tends structurally towards results that support EU regulation.

- Conflict of interest present? INDIRECT
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? INDIRECT (research relevance, follow-on funding)
- Result: MEDIUM

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: Presented as a neutral scientist; methodological limitations of the puppet account study (n=2, one month, eight parties) are not critically contextualised. → Technique No. 12

Expert 3: Martin Andree — Media scholar

Source deep-check:

(a) FUNDING: University professor (state-funded). Author of books on media monopolies.

(b) MANDATE: Media criticism; compatible with pro-regulation positions.

- Conflict of interest present? INDIRECT (book sales, media presence)

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- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? INDIRECT
- Result: MEDIUM

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: Quote "digital absolutist sun kings" is clearly an expression of opinion, but is presented in context as an expert finding. → Technique No. 12

Expert 4: Kai Schiefelbein — Managing Director of Stiebel-Eltron (heat pump manufacturer)

Source deep-check:

(a) FUNDING: Private sector; Stiebel-Eltron is a direct beneficiary of the heating law.

(b) MANDATE: Corporate interest; structurally incompatible with a neutral assessment of the heating law.

- Conflict of interest present? YES (direct financial benefit from heating law)
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? YES
- Result: LOW

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: Introduced as an industry representative, but not identified as an interest representative with a direct financial stake in the heating law. → Serious violation of the transparency requirement

Expert 5: Tanja Loitz — Consultant for property owners (energy consulting)

Source deep-check:

(a) FUNDING: Not stated. Energy efficiency consulting organisation — possibly publicly funded (BAFA, KfW networks).

(b) MANDATE: Energy consulting; structurally pro-heat transition.

- Conflict of interest present? INDIRECT
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? INDIRECT
- Result: MEDIUM

Expert 6: Prof. Henning (Chair of the Expert Council on Climate Issues) — Expert Council on Climate Issues

Source deep-check:

(a) FUNDING: State-appointed body (federal government).

(b) MANDATE: Advising the federal government on climate targets; structurally oriented towards climate protection measures.

- Conflict of interest present? YES (body's continued relevance depends on climate protection agenda)
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? YES
- Result: LOW to MEDIUM

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: Presented as a neutral expert authority; state funding and institutional interest in the climate protection agenda not disclosed. → Technique No. 12

Missing expert groups:

- Independent algorithm researcher with methodological criticism of the Grabowicz study
- Constitutional lawyer on EU DSA regulation and freedom-of-speech risks
- Economist on cost-benefit of climate policy (consumer side)
- Security expert with a dissenting NATO/Ukraine assessment

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- Sex education critic (factual-scientific)



2. SOURCE SELECTION

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Claims without primary source = penalty points (rumour check)

Source 1: Przemysław Grabowicz / Research team Dublin

Timestamp approx. 39:00 — Statement: "Our goal was to understand whether X is politically impartial."

(a) Funding and sponsorship: Irish university (state-funded); possible EU research funding not excluded.

(b) Structural conflict of interest: EU-funded platform research tends towards results that support EU regulation (DSA).

(c) Is a source missing that would substantiate a counter-view? YES — no independent methodological criticism, no study with a divergent finding.

Source 2: Kai Schiefelbein / Stiebel-Eltron

Timestamp approx. 55:30 — Statement: "A change in the framework conditions of a market leads to a wait-and-see attitude."

(a) Funding: Private sector; Stiebel-Eltron produces heat pumps and benefits directly from the heating law.

(b) Structural conflict of interest: Direct financial conflict of interest — not disclosed.

(c) Is a counter-voice missing? YES — no representative of the heating oil/gas industry, no consumer representative with a cost perspective.

CHURCH-FUNDED BODIES: None in this broadcast.

STATE-FUNDED BODIES:

- Expert Council on Climate Issues (Henning): State-appointed; conflict of interest regarding climate protection agenda. Not identified as state-funded.
- EU Commissioner (Vestager successor): State regulatory authority; presented as a neutral supervisory body, without addressing its own interest in DSA relevance.

NGOs / Advocacy organisations:

- Tanja Loitz (energy consulting organisation): Possible public funding not examined; structurally pro-energy transition.

Summary: The source selection is one-sidedly pro-regulation, pro-climate protection and pro-Ukraine support; conflicts of interest of cited sources are not disclosed; counter-voices are systematically absent.



3. TIME DISTRIBUTION									4/10
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Airtime by political target subject (estimate):

Target subject	Estimated airtime	Tendency
Trump/USA (negative)	~8 min.	Negative
Musk/X/AfD (negative)	~12 min.	Negative
CDU/CSU (negative, climate policy)	~4 min.	Negative
Ukraine/mercenaries (humanitarian, neutral-positive)	~18 min.	Neutral/Positive
Climate movement/Greens (implicitly positive)	~3 min.	Positive
Satire (formally cross-party)	~4 min.	Formally neutral

Finding: Not a single segment investigatively examines grievances involving SPD, Greens, Left or BSW. The total airtime for critical reporting on right-wing/conservative actors (Trump, Musk, AfD, CDU/CSU) amounts to; for left-wing/green actors: 0 minutes investigatively.

Summary: The time distribution is structurally one-sided; all investigative segments are directed against right-wing/conservative actors, while left-wing/green positions either do not appear or are implicitly framed positively.



4. OMISSION (CORE CRITERION Investigative)

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Omission 1: Algorithmic favouring of left-wing/green content on other platforms (Instagram/Meta, TikTok, YouTube) is not examined. The segment is limited to X and the AfD boost, without examining whether comparable mechanisms on other platforms favour other parties. Meta CEO Zuckerberg is mentioned in the presenter's text ("Musk, Zuckerberg and Co"), but not investigated.

Omission 2: The failure of the Ampel coalition's climate policy as a cause of the loss of trust in climate protection measures is not investigatively examined. The segment addresses the "chaos surrounding the heating law", but attributes responsibility primarily to tabloid media and CDU/CSU — not to the Ampel coalition itself, which communicated the law poorly and amended it multiple times.

Omission 3: The funding and interests of the cited heat pump manufacturer Stiebel-Eltron are not disclosed. A company that directly benefits from the heating law is used as an industry witness against the CDU/CSU position, without naming the conflict of interest.

Omission 4: Disinformation campaigns from the left-wing/green spectrum (e.g. false claims about climate consequences, exaggerated forecasts) are not addressed, even though the segment explicitly treats disinformation as a topic.

Omission 5: The methodological limitations of the puppet account study (n=2 accounts, one month, no control for user behaviour, no mention of peer review) are not critically contextualised.

Omission 6: Ukrainian voices in favour of negotiations or a ceasefire are entirely absent; the broadcast presents exclusively the position that "Russia must be defeated/pushed back."

Summary: The broadcast exhibits systematic omissions that all point in the same direction: grievances that would burden left-wing/green positions are not investigatively examined, while comparable grievances of right-wing/conservative actors are presented in detail. This is the most serious criterion for an investigative magazine.

Missing voices

- X/Elon Musk (written statement): Algorithmic counter-arguments not obtained
- AfD spokesperson: Response to algorithm favouring allegation absent
- CDU/CSU climate policy representative: Justification for abolishing the heating law not presented
- Independent algorithm researcher (dissenting opinion): Methodological criticism of the Grabowicz study absent
- EU DSA critic (freedom-of-speech perspective): Regulatory risks not addressed
- Sex education expert critic (factual): Substantive debate on concepts not conducted



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- Economic representative on climate costs (consumers/SMEs): Only heat pump manufacturer (conflict of interest) heard
- Russian/neutral peace negotiation perspective: Completely excluded



5. NUMERICAL MANIPULATION

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Complete figures include: absolute value, share (%) and trend

Finding 1: Timestamp: approx. 40:30 — Quote: "X recommends AfD content more than twice as often and BSW content more than six times as often as their share of posts in our sample." — Manipulation: Relative over-representation without absolute figures — Why problematic: Without stating the absolute post volumes and interaction rates, the statement cannot be contextualised; if the AfD accounts for, say, 5% of posts and receives 10% of recommendations, "twice as often" is mathematically correct but practically marginal.

Finding 2: Timestamp: approx. 43:30 — Quote: "Alice Weidel then reaches ten to 15 million users, instead of the usual average of under one million." — Manipulation: Single-case extrapolation — Why problematic: Musk retweets are singular events; the presentation suggests a systematic favouring that cannot be substantiated by a single retweet.

Finding 3: Timestamp: approx. 52:30 — Quote: "In the ARD and ZDF question round [...] climate policy was only briefly and perfunctorily ticked off [...] 76 seconds on the climate — out of an hour and a half of discussion." — Assessment: This figure is correctly cited and methodologically transparent; no manipulation finding.

Finding 4 (satire segment): Timestamp: approx. 60:00 — The satire explicitly addresses the inflationary use of figures in TV debates — this is a legitimate satirical observation, not a manipulation finding.

Summary: The use of figures in the X segment is selective and without sufficient methodological context; absolute figures and confidence intervals are absent, which enables the dramatisation of the finding.



6. GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

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Association 1:

Timestamp

approx. 33:30

Quote

"For Musk, Zuckerberg and Co, the spread of lies, hatred and incitement also seems to be no problem."

Technique: Nominal enumeration ("and Co") creates a group that is blanket-associated with "lies, hatred and incitement."

Effect

Zuckerberg is placed in the same category as Musk without specific evidence; "and Co" extends the association to unnamed further actors.

Association 2:

Timestamp

approx. 44:00

Quote

"Elon Musk is meanwhile personally getting involved in the German election campaign. [...] X recommends one leading candidate to our puppets particularly frequently: Alice Weidel."

Technique: Causal linkage Musk → AfD through spatial proximity in the segment, without establishing causality.

Effect

Suggests that the AfD favouring is a deliberate decision by Musk, not an algorithmic by-product of interaction patterns.

Association 3:

Timestamp

approx. 35:30

Quote

"Hands off our children, the AfD is outraged."

Technique: AfD post is presented in the context of hate mail and rape threats.

Effect

Guilt by association: The AfD is not directly held responsible for the threats, but is associated through spatial proximity in the segment.

SOURCE CHECK for framed persons:

- Anke Sieber (sex educator): Framed as a victim, not as a conspiracy theorist. No source check required.
- Elon Musk: Not framed as a "conspiracy theorist", but as a power actor. Category not applicable.

Summary: The broadcast works with implicit guilt by association through the spatial proximity of actors and allegations in the segment flow; direct conspiracy theory framings are absent, but the association technique is demonstrable.



7. TIMING

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Finding 1: The broadcast is explicitly aired "five days before the federal election" (23.02.2025). All critical segments are directed against actors attributable to the AfD, CDU/CSU or Trump administration. The X segment with the AfD boost finding appears in the last broadcast before the election — a point in time at which a rebuttal or correction before the election is no longer possible.

Finding 2: The climate segment also appears five days before the election and explicitly frames the CDU/CSU position on the heating law as negative for climate protection — without a rebuttal from the Union.

Finding 3: The Munich Security Conference (15–17.02.2025) and the Riyadh talks (18.02.2025) are current events; their inclusion is journalistically legitimate. However, the timing of the X segment and the climate segment is not justified by current events, but appears strategically placed before the election.

Summary: The timing of the broadcast's internal segment selection is conspicuous: current events (security conference) are combined with non-current investigative segments (X algorithm, climate policy) that are all directed one-sidedly against right-wing/conservative actors shortly before the election.



8. SELECTIVE OUTRAGE (CORE CRITERION Investigative)									2/10
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Outrage = bias. Selective outrage amplifies the finding. Score = degree of outrage (0–5) + selectivity (0–5)

Methodological principle (v2.2): Document the triggering event.

Finding 1:

Timestamp

approx. 33:30 — Triggering event: Musk/X favours AfD in the algorithm — Reaction: Extensive investigative segment with puppet study, expert interviews, EU confrontation — Comparison: No analogous investigation of algorithmic favouring of left-wing/green content on Instagram, TikTok or YouTube; no investigation of state influence on public broadcasters — Asymmetry: The allegation of algorithmic manipulation is raised exclusively against a platform that favours a right-wing party; structurally identical questions about other platforms/media are not raised.

Finding 2:

Timestamp

approx. 35:00 — Triggering event: False report "masturbation room" in a nursery, AfD post — Reaction: Detailed presentation of hate mail against sex educator, fact-check — Comparison: No analogous investigation of hate mail/threats against conservative politicians or climate sceptics; no investigation of false reports from the left-wing spectrum — Asymmetry: Victims of hate campaigns are shown exclusively from the left-wing/progressive spectrum.

Finding 3:

Timestamp

approx. 50:00 — Triggering event: CDU/CSU plans to abolish the heating law — Reaction: Critical portrayal as harmful to the climate, industry representative as counter-witness — Comparison: No analogous outrage over the failure of the Ampel coalition's climate policy (budget crisis, Habeck chaos, missed climate targets 2023/2024) — Asymmetry: Climate policy failure is attributed exclusively to CDU/CSU, not to the outgoing Ampel government.

Summary: Selective outrage is the most serious criterion in this broadcast: all investigative outrage reactions are directed against right-wing/conservative actors; structurally identical or comparable grievances involving left-wing/green actors do not trigger an analogous reaction.



9. COMPLETENESS

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Share of perspectives covered

Inverted: Original value measures coverage (higher = better). Displayed as deviation (higher = greater gaps).

- [A] Accused party's perspective (X/Musk): No statement obtained
- [B] AfD perspective on the algorithm allegation: Not obtained
- [C] CDU/CSU perspective on climate policy / heating law: Only as target subject, no rebuttal
- [D] Independent algorithm researchers with a contrary finding: Not cited
- [E] Critics of EU regulation (DSA) as a censorship risk: Not represented
- [F] Ukrainian counter-position on ceasefire (advocates of negotiations): Not represented
- [G] Russian/neutral peace negotiation perspective: Not represented
- [H] Economic costs of climate policy (consumers, SMEs): Only marginally (Loitz)
- [I] Sex education critics (factual, not inciting): Not represented
- [J] Media law counter-voice on EU DSA regulation: Not represented

[A] Accused party's perspective (X/Musk) — OMITTED

Timestamp: approx. 42:00 — Quote: "At the company's EU headquarters, also in Dublin, we receive no response."
— Assessment: The missing response is documented, but no written statement is obtained or followed up; the presentation remains one-sided.

[B] AfD perspective on the algorithm allegation — OMITTED

Timestamp: — — Quote: — — Assessment: The AfD is portrayed as a beneficiary of the algorithm without being given an opportunity to comment.

[C] CDU/CSU on climate policy — INDICATED (as target subject)

Timestamp: approx. 55:00 — Quote: "CDU/CSU promise after an election victory: 'We will abolish the Ampel's heating law.'" — Assessment: Cited only as a negative example; no substantive justification of the Union's position presented.

[D] Independent algorithm researchers — OMITTED

Timestamp: — — Assessment: Only one research team (Grabowicz, Dublin) cited; no counter-study or methodological criticism.

[E] EU regulation criticism (censorship risk DSA) — OMITTED

Timestamp: — — Assessment: The EU Commissioner is presented uncritically as a supervisory body; risks of over-regulation not addressed.

[F–J] — OMITTED (no timestamps available)

Completeness score: 3/10



Soft facts — 6 qualitative techniques

10. FRAMING

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Finding 1:

Timestamp

approx. 02:30 — Quote: "Sheriff Trump no longer wants to be responsible for security in Europe." — Manipulation: Personalising negative framing through cowboy metaphor ("Sheriff") — Why problematic: The metaphor conveys connotations of arbitrariness and lawlessness; a neutral formulation ("The Trump administration is signalling a withdrawal from European security commitments") would be factually equivalent but without emotional charge.

Finding 2:

Timestamp

approx. 44:30 — Quote: "Is this still freedom of speech or a risk to democracy?" — Manipulation: Rhetorical question as a framing instrument (leading question) — Why problematic: The question implies the answer ("risk to democracy") and excludes the possibility that algorithmic reach differences could also have other explanations (user behaviour, interaction rates, content types).

Finding 3:

Timestamp

approx. 46:30 — Quote: "Media scholar Martin Andree believes: Behind the call for freedom of speech lies the pursuit of monopolies on opinion." — Manipulation: Expert framing to delegitimise the concept of freedom of speech — Why problematic: The statement is presented without a counter-position; the term "freedom of speech" is thereby blanket-framed as a deceptive manoeuvre, which pre-emptively closes the debate on legitimate regulatory limits.

Finding 4:

Timestamp

approx. 01:00 — Quote: "From an alliance of the West, isolated deals have emerged" — Manipulation: Decline narrative (golden-past framing) — Why problematic: The premise of a homogeneous "alliance of the West" is historically contested (Suez Crisis 1956, Iraq War 2003); the framing suggests an unambiguous decline without differentiation.

Summary: The broadcast consistently employs decline narratives, leading questions and expert framing that reinforce a pre-determined interpretive direction (threat from right-wing/right-populist actors). Counter-perspectives are structurally not incorporated.



11. WORD CHOICE AND TERMINOLOGY

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Finding 1:

Timestamp

approx. 44:00 — Quote: "For Musk, Zuckerberg and Co, the spread of lies, hatred and incitement also seems to be no problem." — Manipulation: Triad formula ("lies, hatred and incitement") as a blanket characterisation — Why problematic: The formulation is a political-legal battle phrase (cf. NetzDG debate), applied to specific content without evidence; "seems" formally softens it without neutralising the effect.

Finding 2:

Timestamp

approx. 47:00 — Quote: "digital absolutist sun kings" (Andree) — Manipulation: Historically charged pejorative metaphor — Why problematic: The term "sun king" (Louis XIV) conveys connotations of tyranny and hostility to the people; it is presented uncritically as an expert statement, without being identified as an expression of opinion.

Finding 3:

Timestamp

approx. 01:30 — Quote: "the war criminal Putin" — Manipulation: Legal pre-qualification as a journalistic statement of fact — Why problematic: The ICC arrest warrant against Putin exists (since March 2023), so the formulation is not incorrect; however, it is stated as a self-evident fact without citing a source, which blurs the distinction between indictment and legally binding conviction. Furthermore, an analogous qualification for other parties to the conflict is absent.

Finding 4:

Timestamp

approx. 38:00 — Quote: "heating hammer or heating ban" — Manipulation: Cited as an example of "emotionalising terms" used by tabloid media — Why problematic: The broadcast criticises these terms as disinformation, without examining whether the underlying concerns (cost burden, interference with property rights) were factually justified; the criticism of the wording implicitly serves to delegitimise the criticism of the heating law as a whole.

Summary: The broadcast's word choice is consistently asymmetrically burdensome for right-wing/right-populist actors; terms such as "lies, hatred and incitement" or "sun kings" are adopted without distancing or presented uncritically.



12. PRESENTER CONDUCT									5/10
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Methodological principle (v2.2): The triggering event must be documented before each assessment.

Finding 1:

Timestamp	approx. 00:30 (presenter text) — Triggering event: Description of the Trump administration — Quote: "The Trump administration is also militarily marking a new world order in which there are no friends." — Comparison: No analogous critical framing of Russian or Chinese foreign policy in the presentation — Asymmetry: The presentation characterises US policy with a value-laden statement ("no friends") that is not used for other actors (Russia, China), even though these are named as threats in the segment.
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Finding 2:

Timestamp	approx. 33:00 (presenter text for the X segment) — Triggering event: Introduction of the Musk/X segment — Quote: "but probably means opinions that suit him" (about Trump) — Comparison: No analogous ironically distancing framing for statements by SPD, Greens or EU Commission — Asymmetry: The presentation uses irony and insinuation ("probably means") exclusively towards Trump/Musk, not towards other political actors.
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Finding 3:

Since this is a magazine format without live studio guests, the examination for interview asymmetry in the classical sense does not apply. The "presentation" consists of off-screen texts that are editorially crafted.

Summary: The presenter conduct shows an asymmetric use of irony, value judgements and insinuation, employed exclusively towards right-wing/conservative actors; since no live studio conversation takes place, the asymmetry is limited to the editorial off-screen texts, but is clearly demonstrable there.



13. QUESTION ASYMMETRY

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Asymmetry 1: In the X segment, X/Musk is confronted with the study result ("We confront X with the result") — no analogous confrontation of the EU Commission or public broadcasters with allegations of regulatory overreach or their own algorithmic steering.

Asymmetry 2: In the climate segment, the CDU/CSU position ("abolish the heating law") is portrayed as problematic; the question of why the Ampel coalition introduced the law so chaotically is not posed with comparable sharpness.

Asymmetry 3: Stefanie Babst is not asked whether her demand for massive rearmament ("2 percent is not enough") is financially feasible or has social distributional effects — questions that would routinely be asked of conservative demands.

Asymmetry 4: Since no live interview takes place, classical follow-up question asymmetries are not directly measurable; the asymmetry manifests itself in the selection of confrontation topics.

Summary: The question asymmetry is structural: confrontational questions are posed exclusively towards right-wing/conservative actors; left-wing/green positions are not challenged.



14. FALSE BALANCE

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Finding 1: In the climate segment, a survey is cited: "According to surveys, around two thirds of SPD and Green supporters want this [...] Among Union supporters, it is still fifty percent." — The presentation suggests that the Union is more hostile to the climate than SPD/Greens, even though 50% approval for more climate protection among Union supporters also represents a majority. This is not a classic false balance case, but a selective interpretation.

Finding 2: The satire segment at the end of the broadcast formally creates a cross-party framing ("all parties are treated satirically"), which visually balances the preceding one-sided investigative reporting without balancing it substantively. This is a form of pseudo-balance: the satire conceals the structural one-sidedness of the broadcast.

Finding 3: In the Ukraine segment, exclusively the position "Russia must be pushed back" is represented; a counter-position (negotiated solution, frozen conflict as an acceptable outcome) is explicitly dismissed by Babst as an illusion, without a counter-voice being heard.

Summary: The broadcast avoids classic false balance (equal presentation of unequal positions), but produces pseudo-balance through the concluding satire segment, which conceals the structural one-sidedness of the investigative segments.



15. AGENDA-SETTING

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Finding 1: Five days before the federal election, the broadcast sets a clear agenda: (1) Trump/USA as a threat, (2) Musk/X as a danger to democracy, (3) AfD as an algorithmically favoured extremist party, (4) CDU/CSU as a climate obstructor. This agenda structurally corresponds to the election campaign themes of SPD and Greens.

Finding 2: The topic "climate policy in the election campaign" is not presented as a neutral stocktaking, but with an implicit call to action: climate policy must be placed "right at the top" again — a position that coincides with the Greens' election manifesto.

Finding 3: The mercenary and family segments set an emotional agenda: solidarity with Ukraine as a moral duty. This is not per se manipulative, but the one-sidedness (no war-weary Ukrainians, no advocates of negotiations) sets a specific agenda.

Finding 4: The broadcast's agenda-setting corresponds to what political scientists would describe as a "mobilisation agenda" for certain voter groups (urban, educated, left-liberal) — five days before the election.

Summary: The broadcast's agenda-setting is the most systematic criterion: the selection and framing of topics five days before the federal election structurally corresponds to a mobilisation agenda for left-wing/green voters and a demobilisation agenda for conservative/right-wing voters.



CHAPTER 2 — OVERALL EVALUATION

Results

(Scale: 10 = fully balanced / no manipulation; 0 = maximum one-sidedness)

Dominant techniques

- 1. Selective outrage (score 2):** All investigative outrage reactions are directed against right-wing/conservative actors; structurally identical grievances involving left-wing/green actors are not investigated — this is the most serious finding for an investigative magazine.
- 2. Agenda-setting (score 2):** The selection of topics five days before the federal election structurally corresponds to a mobilisation agenda for left-wing/green voters; all segments point in the same political direction.
- 3. Omission (score 2):** Systematic omission of grievances that would burden left-wing/green positions (Ampel climate failure, algorithmic favouring on other platforms, disinformation from the left-wing spectrum).

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Justification: The combined score of 3.15/10 (on the inverse scale: 6.85/10 one-sidedness) corresponds to a clear one-sidedness in the selection of topics. The broadcast meets the formal requirements of investigative journalism (research, source citations, confrontation), but exhibits a systematic bias in the selection of topics: all investigative segments are directed against right-wing/conservative actors, while comparable grievances involving left-wing/green actors are not investigated. The timing (five days before the federal election) and the combination of omission, selective outrage and agenda-setting result overall in a clear, if not extreme, one-sidedness. The individual segments (mercenaries, families) are journalistically valuable and not manipulative; the structural one-sidedness arises from the overall composition of the broadcast.

CONCLUSION

The broadcast of 18/19 February 2025 meets the formal standards of investigative journalism in individual segments (mercenary documentary, family reportage), but in its overall composition exhibits a clear one-sidedness that is in tension with §26 MStV and the requirement of diversity of opinion in the ZDF State Treaty. All investigative segments are directed against right-wing/conservative actors (Trump, Musk, AfD, CDU/CSU), while comparable grievances involving SPD, Greens or the outgoing Ampel coalition are not investigated. Particularly serious is the timing: the placement of non-current investigative segments (X algorithm, climate policy) five days before the federal election without any opportunity for rebuttal by the affected parties constitutes a possible violation of the requirement of balance in election reporting. The source selection is structurally one-sided (all experts pro-regulation/pro-climate protection), and conflicts of interest of cited sources (Stiebel-Eltron, Expert Council on Climate Issues) are not disclosed.



CHAPTER 3 — PARTY-POLITICAL BIAS

Party	Score (-5..+5)	Evidence
CDU/CSU	-3	approx. 55:00 "CDU/CSU promise after an election victory: 'We will abolish the Ampel's heating law'" — framed as harmful to the climate, no rebuttal
SPD	+1	No critical reporting; Scholz mentioned neutrally in TV debate; climate survey: "two thirds of SPD supporters" in favour of more climate protection (positively connoted)
Greens	+2	Climate movement implicitly framed positively; Habeck chaos over the heating law attributed to tabloid media and CDU, not the Greens; climate minister as the only one addressing the climate topic (positive)
FDP	0	Not mentioned; neutral through absence
AfD	-4	approx. 35:30 AfD post in the context of hate mail; approx. 40:30 algorithmic favouring by X; approx. 43:30 Weidel boost by Musk — consistently negative, no rebuttal
BSW	-1	approx. 40:30 "BSW more than six times as often" in the algorithm — mentioned as a fringe party with over-representation, slightly negative
Left	0	Not mentioned; neutral through absence
Freie Wähler	0	Not mentioned; neutral through absence

Party bias summary

- Most favoured: Greens (+2) — Climate policy failure of the Ampel is not attributed to the Greens; climate movement framed positively; Habeck chaos externalised.
- Most disadvantaged: AfD (-4) — Consistently negative in three separate segments (hate mail context, algorithm favouring, Musk boost); no rebuttal.
- Conclusion: The party-political bias of the broadcast is clearly demonstrable: AfD and CDU/CSU are investigatively portrayed in a negative light, while SPD and Greens are either framed positively or favoured by the absence of critical reporting. Five days before the federal election, this constellation corresponds to a structural electoral campaign support for the left-wing/green camp, which is in tension with the requirement of party-political neutrality of ZDF pursuant to §26 MStV.



CHAPTER 4 — LEGAL CLASSIFICATION (§26 MStV / ZDF State Treaty)

Violation 1 (possible):

Norm: §26 para. 1 MStV (diversity of opinion) in conjunction with §6 ZDF State Treaty (impartiality, balance)

Facts: Systematic one-sidedness in the selection of topics — all investigative segments are directed against right-wing/conservative actors; comparable grievances involving left-wing/green actors are not investigated.

Evidence: Overall broadcast structure; in particular approx. 33:00–47:00 (X segment without AfD rebuttal) and approx. 48:00–58:00 (climate segment without CDU/CSU rebuttal)

Assessment: A single segment with a one-sided tendency does not yet constitute a violation; the combination of five thematically aligned segments in one broadcast five days before the federal election, without a single investigative examination of left-wing/green grievances, approaches the threshold of §26 MStV. A formal violation would need to be examined by the ZDF Broadcasting Council.

Violation 2 (possible):

Norm: §26 para. 2 MStV (obligation to identify opinions)

Facts: Expressions of opinion by experts (Andree: "digital absolutist sun kings"; Babst: "2 percent is not enough") are not identified as such, but presented as expert findings.

Evidence: approx. 46:30 (Andree), approx. 08:00 (Babst)

Assessment: Borderline case; investigative magazines have a wider creative latitude than news broadcasts; the failure to identify is problematic, but not unambiguously unlawful.

Violation 3 (possible):

Norm: §6 para. 2 ZDF State Treaty (election reporting, equal opportunity)

Facts: Five days before the federal election, AfD and CDU/CSU are investigatively portrayed in a negative light without any opportunity for rebuttal; SPD and Greens receive no comparable treatment.

Evidence: Entire broadcast; in particular timing and selection of topics

Assessment: The ZDF State Treaty requires equal opportunity in election reporting; the structural one-sidedness of this broadcast shortly before the election is legally relevant and should be submitted to the ZDF Broadcasting Council for examination.

Overall assessment §26 MStV

Frontal, as an investigative magazine of ZDF, is bound by §26 MStV and the ZDF State Treaty; investigative one-sidedness in individual segments is legitimate, provided the overall programme ensures balance. However, the present broadcast exceeds the limits of what is editorially legitimate through the combination of systematic topic selection (exclusively right-wing/conservative target subjects), absence of any offer of rebuttal, undisclosed conflicts of interest of cited sources, and the timing five days before the federal election. A formal violation of §26 MStV and §6 ZDF State Treaty cannot be established with certainty, but is sufficiently probable to justify an examination by the ZDF Broadcasting Council. The competent supervisory authority is the ZDF Broadcasting Council; if no remedy is provided, the legal supervision of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate (State Chancellery Mainz).

SOURCE DEEP-CHECK (mandatory for all cited specialist bodies / NGOs / advisory bodies)

1. Expert Council on Climate Issues (Prof. Henning)

1. FUNDING: State-appointed by the federal government (§12 Climate Protection Act); members receive expense allowances from federal funds.

2. MANDATE: Monitoring the federal government's climate protection targets — structurally oriented towards climate protection measures; the body's relevance depends on the continuation of the climate protection agenda.

3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST: YES — institutional interest in the continuation of the climate protection agenda; the body would lose relevance if climate targets were abandoned.



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- 4. CREDIBILITY MATRIX:** Conflict of interest YES | Personal risk NO | Benefits YES → Credibility: LOW-MEDIUM
- 5. COUNTER-VOICE:** Not cited; economists who critically assess the cost-benefit of climate targets (e.g. Lomborg school, RWI Essen) are entirely absent.
2. Tanja Loitz (energy consulting organisation)
- 1. FUNDING:** Not stated; energy consulting organisations in Germany are frequently funded by BAFA, KfW or federal ministries — not examined.
- 2. MANDATE:** Consulting on energy efficiency and heating modernisation; structurally pro-heat transition.
- 3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** INDIRECT — organisation benefits from demand for energy consulting generated by climate protection laws.
- 4. CREDIBILITY MATRIX:** Conflict of interest INDIRECT | Personal risk NO | Benefits INDIRECT → Credibility: MEDIUM
- 5. COUNTER-VOICE:** Not cited; consumer advocates with a cost perspective are absent.
3. Kai Schiefelbein / Stiebel-Eltron
- 1. FUNDING:** Private sector; Stiebel-Eltron is a manufacturer of heat pumps and hot water systems — a direct beneficiary of the heating law.
- 2. MANDATE:** Corporate interest; not compatible with a neutral assessment of the heating law.
- 3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** YES, direct — abolition of the heating law directly harms the company; retention directly benefits it.
- 4. CREDIBILITY MATRIX:** Conflict of interest YES | Personal risk NO | Benefits YES → Credibility: LOW
- 5. COUNTER-VOICE:** Not cited; representatives of the oil/gas heating industry, the chimney sweeps' association or the consumer advice centre with a cost perspective are absent. Most serious source violation in the broadcast.
4. Przemysław Grabowicz / Research team Dublin
- 1. FUNDING:** Irish university (state-funded); possible EU Horizon funding not excluded and not examined.
- 2. MANDATE:** Platform research; compatible with critical platform assessment; structurally compatible with EU regulatory interests.
- 3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** INDIRECT — EU-funded research that supports EU regulation (DSA) secures follow-on funding.
- 4. CREDIBILITY MATRIX:** Conflict of interest INDIRECT | Personal risk NO | Benefits INDIRECT → Credibility: MEDIUM
- 5. COUNTER-VOICE:** Not cited; no independent methodological criticism of the puppet account study (n=2, one month, no mention of peer review).
5. EU Commissioner (Vestager successor, not named)
- 1. FUNDING:** EU Commission (state/supranational).
- 2. MANDATE:** Enforcement of the DSA; institutional interest in demonstrating platform violations to justify the regulation.
- 3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** YES — EU Commission benefits institutionally from findings that justify DSA regulation.
- 4. CREDIBILITY MATRIX:** Conflict of interest YES | Personal risk NO | Benefits YES → Credibility: LOW-MEDIUM as a neutral body
- 5. COUNTER-VOICE:** Not cited; no voice assessing DSA regulation as a censorship risk.

IMPORTANT: "Recognised" is not a factual qualification. Stefanie Babst is introduced as "one of the world's leading security experts" — this social attribution is not a factual qualification and has been treated accordingly in this analysis.



OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE 15 CRITERIA

Individual scores — All 15 criteria

No.	Criterion	Score	Classification
1	EXPERT SELECTION	3	••
2	SOURCE SELECTION	3	••
3	TIME DISTRIBUTION	4	••
4	OMISSION (CORE CRITERION Investigative)	2	•
5	NUMERICAL MANIPULATION	5	•••
6	GUILT BY ASSOCIATION	3	••
7	TIMING	2	•
8	SELECTIVE OUTRAGE (CORE CRITERION Investigative)	2	•
9	COMPLETENESS	7	•••••
10	FRAMING	3	••
11	WORD CHOICE AND TERMINOLOGY	3	••
12	PRESENTER CONDUCT	5	•••
13	QUESTION ASYMMETRY	3	••
14	FALSE BALANCE	6	•••
15	AGENDA-SETTING	2	•

HARD FACTS SCORE (1-8)

3.4/10

Slight Bias

SOFT FACTS SCORE (9-14)

3.7/10

Slight Bias

OVERALL SCORE

3.6/10

Slight Bias

Averaged from hard facts and soft facts



KEY — Meaning of scores

Individual scores per criterion (0–10)

0	No finding	No relevant anomaly identified.
1–2	Weak finding	Minor anomaly without material impairment of balance.
3–4	Slight to moderate finding	Discernible tendency; impact relevance low to moderate.
5	Moderate finding with impact relevance	Relevant bias that influences the opinion-forming potential of the audience.
6	Substantial finding (threshold)	Scores from 6 onwards are reported as "substantial findings".
7	Substantial finding	Clear, well-substantiated bias with marked impact relevance.
8–9	Serious finding	Pronounced bias; multiple substantiable individual findings in this criterion.
10	Maximum manifestation	Systematic, pervasive bias in this criterion.

Aggregated deviation index — interpretation ranges

0.0 – 2.5	Unremarkable	No material patterns discernible; broadcast meets the factual accuracy requirement.
2.6 – 4.0	Slight bias	Isolated anomalies; statistically visible, but still within the tolerance range.
4.1 – 6.0	Substantial bias	Multiple substantial findings; relevant impairment of diversity of perspectives.
6.1 – 8.0	Serious deviation from the balance requirement. High degree of deviation	Pronounced, broadcast-wide patterns; high impact relevance.
8.1 – 10	Fundamental systemic one-sidedness. Very high degree of bias	Maximum manifestation across almost all criteria; systematically one-sided reporting.

Party-political bias (-5 to +5)

-5 to -3	Strongly disadvantaged	Party is clearly treated worse in presentation, airtime or framing.
-2 to -1	Slightly disadvantaged	Discernible, but weak disadvantage.
0	Neutral	No discernible favouring or disadvantage.
+1 to +2	Slightly favoured	Discernible, but weak favouring.
+3 to +5	Strongly favoured	Party is clearly treated better in presentation, airtime or framing.



Legal and methodological classification

No finding of fact	The results presented do not constitute findings of fact about individual persons, editorial teams or broadcasts. They are to be understood as the result of a standardised operationalisation, not as a determination of individual responsibility.
No legal ruling	The aggregated deviation index does not replace a legal assessment within the meaning of §26 MStV. The determination of whether a specific broadcast violates statutory requirements is the exclusive responsibility of the competent authorities (in particular media regulators).
No proof of causality	Statistical correlations are not to be interpreted as proof of causal relationships or editorial intentions. Deviation values may be influenced by topic selection, news situation, political controversy or format logic.
No finding of intent	The analysis measures observable structural characteristics of broadcasts. A score of 7 means that a substantial bias has been identified — not that the editorial team intended this. The methodology makes no statements about motives or strategic objectives.
Heuristic comparison instrument	The index serves for comparative pattern recognition across thousands of broadcasts, not for the precise metric measurement of individual segments. Threshold values serve as heuristic orientation, not as sharp legal qualification.



APPENDIX: STATE LEGISLATION

Legal basis Germany — ARD, ZDF

Law

State Media Treaty (MStV, 2020)

Relevant articles

- §26 para. 1 MStV: Public broadcasting institutions shall provide in their offerings a comprehensive overview of international, European, national and regional events in all essential areas of life. In doing so, they shall promote international understanding, European integration and social cohesion in the federation and the states. Their offerings shall serve education, information, advice and entertainment. They shall offer contributions in particular to culture. Entertainment shall correspond to a public broadcasting offering profile.
- §5 para. 1 ZDF State Treaty: Obligation to objectivity and impartiality of reporting, consideration of diversity of opinion.
- ARD State Treaty: Basic service mandate with objectivity and impartiality.

Core obligations

- 1. Diversity of opinion (internal pluralism):** All relevant perspectives must be represented in the overall programme
- 2. Objectivity and balance:** Presenters must treat guests to the same standards
- 3. Contribution to opinion formation:** The audience must receive sufficient information for independent opinion formation

Supervisory authority

- Broadcasting councils of the state broadcasting institutions: Supervision of ARD institutions (BR, WDR, NDR, etc.)
- ZDF Broadcasting Council (§19 ZDF State Treaty): Supervision of ZDF programme
- Legal supervision: Respective federal state (ZDF: Rhineland-Palatinate)

Complaints procedure

1. Programme complaint to the competent broadcasting council or ZDF Broadcasting Council
2. Administrative court action



APPENDIX 2: SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS

Literature

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- Schläpfer, D. (2026). Measuring Editorial Noise: A Retrospective Suppression Index for Public Broadcasting Content Analysis. [SSRN 6733280](#)
- Schläpfer, D. (2026). Source Traffic Light: A Six-Dimensional Credibility Framework for Systematic Source Assessment in Public Service Media. [SSRN 6733880](#)

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Unbalanced reporting is the response to the halving initiative in Switzerland: here the manipulation techniques are explained in detail, starting with the selection of staff and source selection. 15 principles are then explained: omission, framing, temporal framing, guilt by association, emotionalisation, context removal and many more, illustrated with many examples. In addition, it becomes apparent where we ourselves apply these techniques — this promotes not only insight but also empathy.

Optionally the book comes with **playing cards**

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The interview is not a conversation. It is a stage — and someone else has written the script.

Those who do not know this provide material. Good quotes that are cut incorrectly. Correct statements that end up in the wrong context. Honest answers that are framed as confessions.

This book is not a media criticism book. It is a toolbox — for everyone who has a microphone in front of their face and wants to know what they can do about it. 7 chapters. 7 tools: What an interview really is. The 7 most common traps. The three basic principles of sovereignty — anchoring, reframing, setting boundaries. Preparation in one hour. Body and voice. What to do when things go wrong. And what counts after the interview.

For politicians, activists, entrepreneurs, whistleblowers — for everyone who is exposed and wants to understand how the game works. So that they stop playing along — and start shaping it.

In A5. Direct. For preparation, reference, follow-up and when difficulties arise



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You think you see the world. In reality you see the frame that someone has placed around it. Framing is the oldest and most elegant manipulation technique in the world. It does not change the facts — it changes what we make of the facts. How we feel. What we believe. How we decide. And it works — because we all participate. Daily. Unconsciously. You too. This book is not a dry textbook. It is a workbook — playful, direct, full of examples from real life. You learn not only how others frame you. You learn how you yourself frame — and how you can use it consciously and fairly.

Because those who understand framing see the world more clearly. Listen to the news differently. Conduct conversations with greater confidence. And can no longer so easily have a frame imposed on them that someone else has chosen.

With many exercises and concrete examples from politics, media and everyday life — and the occasional smile.

Framing with style. Because the frame changes everything.



The SRG collects 1.56 billion francs per year — compulsorily, from every household. Those who feel unfairly treated can lodge a complaint. There is even a body for this: the IGAC, the Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television.

Only: it is not independent. It has no sanctioning powers. And in 99.6% of all cases it decides: nothing.

This analysis lays bare the system — factually, precisely, without polemic. Procedures, personnel, powers, costs, statistics, legal recourse. And the constitutional law examination that shows: the IGAC system meets none of the three fundamental criteria — it is not appropriate, not subject to separation of powers, not market-based. The body that is supposed to protect citizens primarily protects the system it was supposed to control.

Essential reading for everyone considering a complaint — and for everyone who wants to understand why genuine media regulation in Switzerland is still outstanding.