



DE DETAILED ANALYSIS

2024-11-09 heute journal vom 9. November 2024

Broadcast: heute journal | 2024-11-09 | Analysed on: 2026-05-01 13:30

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**OVERALL
SCORE**

5.5/10

Considerable bias

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

BROADCAST INFORMATION AND THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

Broadcast data

- Title: ZDF heute-journal
- Date: 09.11.2024
- Presenter(s): Christian Sievers (main presenter), Kai Sölwe (news segment)
- Reporters / Interview partners: Stefanie Gargosch (Berlin/fall of the Wall), Ines Trams (snap elections), Thomas Reichert (Gaza)

Actors	Function	Party/Affiliation	Political spectrum
Christian Sievers	Presenter, heute-journal	ZDF (public broadcaster)	Neutral (formal)
Kai Sölwe	News anchor	ZDF	Neutral (formal)
Stefanie Gargosch	Correspondent	ZDF	Neutral (formal)
Ines Trams	Correspondent	ZDF	Neutral (formal)
Thomas Reichert	Correspondent	ZDF	Neutral (formal)
Friedrich Merz (quoted)	CDU party leader, leader of the opposition	CDU	Centre-right
Olaf Scholz (quoted/referenced)	Federal Chancellor	SPD	Centre-left
SPD spokesperson (quoted, unnamed)	Governing party	SPD	Centre-left
Robert Habeck (quoted)	Greens' chancellor candidate	Greens	Left-centre
Kai Wegner (quoted)	Governing Mayor of Berlin	CDU	Centre-right
Frank-Walter Steinmeier (quoted)	Federal President	SPD (non-partisan in office)	Centre-left



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Federal Returning Officer (quoted, unnamed)	Federal authority	State	Neutral (formal)
Brigitte Heinrichs	Contemporary witness, fall of the Wall	none	—
Mohamed Al-Sakka	Affected person, Gaza	none	—
Abu Issam	Affected person, Gaza	none	—

Main topics of this edition

The broadcast covers three main topics: (1) the 35th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, with celebrations in Berlin and eyewitness accounts, (2) the domestic political dispute over the date for snap elections following the collapse of the coalition, in particular the confrontation between the Union and the SPD/Greens, and (3) the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, with a UN report on casualty figures and supply shortages. The broadcast is supplemented by a short news segment with reports from Saxony, Spain, Pakistan and Indonesia.



CHAPTER 1 — DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE 15 CRITERIA

Hard facts — 9 techniques that are countable and scientifically robust

1. EXPERT SELECTION

4/10

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Expert 1: Federal Returning Officer (not named)

Timestamp	approx. 09:50
Statement	"incalculable risks" with early snap elections, reference to paper shortage
Classification	The Federal Returning Officer is a federal civil servant appointed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (led by the SPD). Her statements are presented as a neutral expert assessment.
Missing countervoice	An independent electoral law expert or constitutional lawyer who could contextualise the deadlines and risks.

Source in-depth check:

(a) FUNDING: Federal authority, funded by the federal budget. The Federal Ministry of the Interior (at the time of the broadcast led by the SPD under Nancy Faeser) is the supervising authority.

Conflict of interest: The Federal Returning Officer operates within the institutional environment of an SPD-led government that prefers a later election date. Her statements about "incalculable risks" with early snap elections are structurally compatible with the SPD position.

(b) MANDATE: Technical-organisational assessment of election preparation — fundamentally compatible with a neutral assessment, but politically instrumentalisable.

- Conflict of interest present? INDIRECT (institutional proximity to the SPD government)
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? INDIRECTLY (authority benefits from more preparation time)
- Result: MEDIUM

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: The assessment is framed as purely technical and neutral, even though it structurally aligns with the SPD position and was immediately refuted by the paper industry. → Technique No. 12 (source selection) applies here.

Expert 2: Paper industry (unnamed)

Timestamp	approx. 10:10
Statement	"We have paper. The German paper industry is very capable."
Classification	Industry association or company representative; economic interest in receiving orders.

Source in-depth check:

(a) FUNDING: Private sector. Conflict of interest: the paper industry benefits from election printing orders — it therefore has an economic interest in presenting early snap elections as feasible.

Präsident: Schläpfer, David - **Kontakt:** kontakt@SVFAB.ch - **Adresse:** SVFAB, Postfach, CH-8021 Zürich 1



(b) MANDATE: Not compatible with a fully neutral assessment (economic self-interest).

- Conflict of interest present? YES (economic interest in orders)
- Personal risk from position? NO
- Does the organisation benefit from its assessment? YES
- Result: LOW to MEDIUM

(c) PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE: Presented as a factual correction of the Federal Returning Officer, without naming the economic conflict of interest.

Expert 3: Constitutional lawyer — MISSING

No independent constitutional lawyer is cited, even though the broadcast makes statements about Basic Law deadlines ("have been enshrined in the Basic Law for 75 years"). This assessment is made by the correspondent herself, without citing a source.

Missing expert groups:

- Independent constitutional lawyer (e.g. professor of public law) to contextualise Art. 68/39 of the Basic Law
- Electoral research institute to contextualise the political situation and citizens' preferences
- Independent economist on the costs of political uncertainty



2. SOURCE SELECTION

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Claims without primary source = penalty points (rumour check)

Source 1: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Timestamp

approx. 12:00

Statement

"almost 70 percent of those killed were women and children"

(a) Funding and sponsorship: UN agency, funded by UN member states. The largest individual contributors are the USA, China, Germany and Japan. Structurally: a multilateral organisation with the political interests of its member states.

(b) Structural conflict of interest: The OHCHR has an institutional interest in documenting human rights violations — this is its mandate. In Israel/Palestine conflicts, the UN has historically been documented as structurally critical of Israel (e.g. UN General Assembly votes, UNRWA context).

(c) Is a source missing that would substantiate a counter-view? YES — Israeli military statistics, independent conflict researchers (e.g. ACLED), critical methodological analyses of the UN report are entirely absent.

STATE-FUNDED BODY: Conflict of interest on topics concerning state action → to be identified as "multilaterally funded, structural conflict of interest in Israel/Palestine reporting".

Missing counter-source: Independent conflict research institutes (ACLED, IISS), Israeli military statistics with methodology, critical methodological analysis of the UN report.

Source 2: Federal Returning Officer

Timestamp

approx. 09:50

Statement

"incalculable risks" with early snap elections

(a) Funding: Federal authority, federal budget, institutionally assigned to the BMI (led by the SPD).

(b) Structural conflict of interest: INDIRECT — institutional proximity to the government that prefers a later election date.

(c) Is a countervoice missing? YES — an independent electoral law expert is absent.

STATE-FUNDED BODY: Conflict of interest on topics concerning state action → to be identified as "state-funded, institutional proximity to the SPD government".

Source 3: Paper industry (anonymous)

Timestamp

approx. 10:10

Statement

"We have paper"

(a) Funding: Private sector.

(b) Structural conflict of interest: Economic interest in election printing orders.

(c) Is a countervoice missing? No — the statement is factual and is not disputed by any other source.

NGO/PRIVATE SECTOR: To be identified as "private sector, economic self-interest in early snap elections".



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Summary: The source selection is structurally unbalanced: on the Gaza topic, the UN perspective dominates without methodological contextualisation or a countervoice; on the snap elections topic, independent constitutional lawyers are absent. The conflicts of interest of the cited sources are not disclosed.



3. TIME ALLOCATION					5/10				
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Estimated airtime per topic/position:

- Fall of the Wall/35 years (main report): (approx. 25%)
- Snap elections/coalition collapse: (approx. 20%)
- of which Union position: (20% of the segment)
- of which SPD position: approx. 1.5 min. (30% of the segment)
- of which Greens position: approx. 0.5 min. (10% of the segment)
- of which Federal Returning Officer/paper: (20% of the segment)
- of which constitutional contextualisation: approx. 0.5 min. (10% of the segment)
- of which FDP/AfD/BSW: 0 min. (0%)
- Gaza (report + UN figures): (approx. 20%)
- News segment (Saxony, Spain, Pakistan, Indonesia): (approx. 13%)
- Weather/lottery/sign-off: (approx. 9%)

Summary: In the snap elections segment, the SPD and Greens together receive significantly more airtime than the Union. The FDP, AfD and BSW receive no airtime, even though they are relevant parties in the Bundestag for this topic. The time allocation reflects the selection of perspectives and reinforces the substantive imbalance.



4. OMISSION (Selective Omission)

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Omission 1:

Context

The FDP and its role in the coalition collapse are completely blanked out.

Relevant at: entire snap elections segment, approx. 07:30–11:30

Effect

The coalition collapse appears as a conflict between the Union and the SPD/Greens, rather than as a consequence of the FDP's withdrawal. The actual cause of the government crisis is not addressed.

Omission 2:

Context

The reasons for the coalition collapse (budget crisis, economic policy, FDP paper) are not mentioned.

Relevant at: approx. 07:30

Effect

Viewers without prior knowledge receive no context as to why snap elections are necessary at all. Responsibility for the government crisis remains unclear.

Omission 3:

Context

The AfD and BSW as relevant opposition parties are not given a voice and are not mentioned.

Relevant at: entire snap elections segment

Effect

The political spectrum is reduced to Union vs. SPD/Greens; other parties do not exist in this portrayal.

Omission 4:

Context

The UN Gaza report is presented without substantively examining Israel's methodological objections.

Relevant at: approx. 12:00

Effect

Israel's rejection of the report as "absurd" is quoted, but not substantively contextualised. Viewers cannot assess whether the Israeli criticism is justified.

Omission 5:

Context

In the Saxony segment (CDU/SPD minority government), the failure of the BSW exploratory talks is mentioned, but the substantive points of contention from the BSW's perspective are not presented.

Relevant at: approx. 14:00

Effect

The BSW appears as a party that failed without its own justification; CDU/SPD appear as constructive actors.



Summary: The broadcast exhibits systematic omissions that simplify the political picture and render certain actors (FDP, AfD, BSW) invisible. Particularly serious is the complete absence of the FDP's perspective on the main topic of snap elections.

Missing voices

- Constitutional lawyer (independent): Would have precisely contextualised the specific scope and limits of Art. 68 of the Basic Law (vote of confidence) and Art. 39 of the Basic Law (election deadlines)
- FDP representative: Would have set out the justification for the coalition collapse and the FDP's position on the election date
- AfD representative: As the second-strongest opposition force, would have contributed a relevant perspective on the election date
- BSW representative: As a new political force, would have provided an alternative view of the government crisis
- Business association/IW/DIW: Would have quantified the economic costs of political uncertainty
- Electoral research institute (e.g. Forschungsgruppe Wahlen): Would have contributed citizens' preferences on the election date and current polling data
- Federal Returning Officer in direct speech: Would have been able to explain her concerns directly and in full, rather than merely being quoted
- Municipal electoral authority: Would have described the concrete practical challenges of short-notice snap elections



5. MANIPULATION OF FIGURES

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

Finding 1:

Timestamp approx. 12:00

Figure: "almost 70 percent of those killed were women and children"

Missing context

(a) How large is the analysed sample? The report mentions that "a portion of the casualty figures was analysed in more detail" — how representative is this portion? (b) How does the UN report define "children"? (c) How are Hamas fighters in civilian clothing recorded? (d) What total figure is this based on?

Effect

The 70% figure appears as a reliable overall statement, even though it is based on a partial sample whose representativeness the UN itself only formulates as an assessment ("is of the opinion").

Finding 2:

Timestamp approx. 16:30

Figure: "At least 220 people had lost their lives in the severe rainfall" (Spain)

Missing context

No indication of the total population of the affected region, no contextualisation in historical comparison.

Effect

Minor — this type of presentation is common in disaster reports and is not manipulative.

Finding 3:

Timestamp approx. 13:30

Figure: "The price of potatoes used to be three shekels per kilo. Today it is 25."

Missing context

No contextualisation of the exchange rate, no indication of the period of the price increase, no contextualisation within overall inflation in war zones.

Effect

The figure is striking and emotionally effective, but cannot be assessed without context. However, this is acceptable within the framework of a humanitarian report.

Summary: The most serious problem with figures concerns the UN Gaza report: the 70% figure is presented as a representative overall statement, even though it is based on a partial sample. This is methodologically imprecise and can lead to false conclusions.



6. GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

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No classic guilt-by-association technique in the strict sense was identified.

However: A structurally related technique is used in the fall of the Wall topic:

Finding 1:

Timestamp

approx. 05:00

Quote

"But there are forces that want a different country. And that does worry me." (citizen's direct speech)

Technique: The term "forces that want a different country" is used in the context of the fall of the Wall commemoration. In the political discourse of 2024, this formulation is an established code for the AfD/right-wing parties. The broadcast adopts this direct speech without contextualisation.

Effect

Viewers associate "forces that want a different country" with certain political parties, without these being named. The association fall of the Wall/GDR repression → today's "forces" is implicitly established.

Finding 2:

Timestamp

approx. 04:30

Quote

"Our freedom and our democracy is once again under attack." (Kai Wegner, CDU)

Technique: The formulation "once again under attack" in the context of the fall of the Wall commemoration suggests a continuity between GDR repression and current political developments. Without contextualisation as to who these "attackers" are supposed to be.

Effect

Implicit association between historical repression and certain current political actors.

Source check for actors framed as problematic: No actor in this broadcast is explicitly framed as a "conspiracy theorist" or similar. The guilt-by-association technique operates here at an implicit level.

Summary: Classic guilt-by-association techniques are absent, but structurally related implicit associations between historical repression and today's political "forces" are conveyed through uncommented direct speech. Score 8/10 means: largely unremarkable, with individual findings.



7. TIMING

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Finding 1:

Position: approx. 07:30 (transition from fall of the Wall → snap elections)

Content: "Can it be that elections in the third-largest economy on earth are failing due to a paper shortage?"

Timing effect

The presenter's rhetorical question opens the snap elections segment with an implicit ridiculing of the paper shortage argument. This sets the tone for the entire segment: the Federal Returning Officer's concerns are framed from the outset as not to be taken seriously. At the same time, the question is formulated in a way that emphasises the absurdity of the argument — which structurally damages the SPD's position (which relied on these concerns) or benefits the Union.

Finding 2:

Position: approx. 11:30 (end of snap elections segment)

Content: "If things go badly, it could result in months of political deadlock."

Timing effect

The worst-case scenario as the closing point of the segment leaves the viewer with a negative impression. Since the Union had previously been framed as a potential "blocker", the viewer associates this deadlock with the Union's stance — a classic recency effect.

Finding 3:

Position: start of broadcast (00:00–06:00)

Content: Fall of the Wall anniversary with freedom and democracy rhetoric

Timing effect

The emotional charge created by the fall of the Wall topic (freedom, democracy, threat) at the start of the broadcast establishes an emotional framework that makes the subsequent political topics (snap elections, Gaza) appear in a particular light. "Forces that want a different country" at the start of the broadcast can function as an implicit contextualisation for the subsequent political reporting.

Summary: The timing of the broadcast is strategic: emotional charge at the start (fall of the Wall/freedom), critical framing of the Union in the middle section, worst-case scenario as the closing point of the snap elections segment. This structure is not coincidental, but also not unambiguously manipulative — it corresponds to journalistic conventions, but produces a consistent directional effect.



8. SELECTIVE OUTRAGE

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Outrage = bias. Selective outrage reinforces the finding. Score = degree of outrage (0–5) + selectivity (0–5)

Methodological principle K5+K13: Document the triggering event — asymmetry is only demonstrable when a comparable trigger exists without an analogous reaction to other positions.

Finding 1:

Timestamp approx. 07:30

Triggering event: The Federal Returning Officer had made a factually incorrect statement (paper shortage) in a politically charged debate, which was refuted by the paper industry.

Reaction: "Interesting footnote." — minimisation, no critical contextualisation.

Comparison

No analogous event in the broadcast in which a factually incorrect statement by another actor was dismissed as a "footnote".

Asymmetry: Not fully demonstrable due to the absence of a comparable case, but the mild reaction to a refuted federal authority statement is conspicuous. A factually incorrect statement in a political debate would likely have been commented on more sharply had it come from a politician.

Finding 2:

Timestamp approx. 08:20

Triggering event: The Union sets the condition "vote of confidence first" for cooperation.

Reaction: "The Union could come across as a blocker" — implicit criticism.

Comparison

The SPD sets the condition "pension reform and child benefit" for cooperation on the election date — no analogous critical reaction ("could come across as an extortionist" or similar).

Asymmetry: Demonstrable. Both parties set conditions, but only the Union is given a negative label.

Summary: Selective outrage in this broadcast is realised less through explicit emotional reactions than through asymmetric evaluative language. The demonstrable asymmetry lies in the different treatment of the Union's conditions versus those of the SPD.



9. COMPLETENESS							7/10		
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Following the collapse of the traffic light coalition (SPD, Greens, FDP), Germany faces early snap elections. The central point of contention is the timetable: the Union demands a swift vote of confidence by Chancellor Scholz as a precondition for any cooperation, while the SPD and Greens prefer a later date (March 2025) and justify this with organisational arguments. The Federal Returning Officer had raised concerns that were immediately refuted by the paper industry. In the background are tactical electoral considerations of all parties, as well as the question of which party will be perceived as constructive or as a blocker.

Share of perspectives covered

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

- [A] Union position: vote of confidence first, then cooperation — justified with democratic clarity
- [B] SPD position: later election date for organisational reasons, linkage to substantive matters
- [C] Greens position: weighing up organisability against a prolonged period of uncertainty
- [D] FDP position: Why did the FDP leave the coalition? What conditions does it set for snap elections?
- [E] Constitutional perspective: What does the Basic Law specifically say? What scope for action exists?
- [F] Democratic theory perspective: What legitimacy problems arise from a minority government?
- [G] Voter/citizen perspective: What do citizens want? Polling data on the election date
- [H] Organisational perspective of electoral authorities: Concrete risks and solutions
- [I] Economic perspective: What costs arise from political uncertainty?
- [J] AfD/BSW position: How do the other opposition parties position themselves on the election date?

[A] COVERED

Timestamp: approx. 08:30 — Quote: "First the vote of confidence in the German Bundestag, then we can talk about it" — Merz's position is conveyed, but contextualised through framing as a "condition" and the suspicion of being a "blocker".

[B] COVERED

Timestamp: approx. 09:45 — Quote: "These are important matters that are now to be made possible together" — the SPD position is presented without critical contextualisation of the electoral tactical dimension.

[C] INDICATED

Timestamp: approx. 11:00 — Quote: "not to have too long a period of uncertainty" — Habeck's position briefly mentioned, not elaborated.

[D] OMITTED

No timestamp — FDP position after the coalition collapse completely absent; no contextualisation of why the FDP left the coalition.

[E] INDICATED

Timestamp: approx. 10:30 — Quote: "The deadlines for snap elections, which have been enshrined in the Basic Law for 75 years, cannot be changed" — the constitutional situation is briefly mentioned, but not contextualised by an independent constitutional lawyer.

[F] OMITTED

No timestamp — the democratic theory problem of a minority government is not addressed.



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[G] OMITTED

No timestamp — citizen perspective/polling data on the election date are entirely absent.

[H] INDICATED

Timestamp: approx. 10:00 — Quote: "incalculable risks" (Federal Returning Officer) — mentioned, but immediately relativised by the paper industry's counter-statement, without deeper analysis of the actual organisational risks.

[I] OMITTED

No timestamp — economic consequences of political uncertainty are not addressed.

[J] OMITTED

No timestamp — AfD, BSW, the Left, FDP as opposition parties are not given a voice.



Soft facts — 6 qualitative techniques

10. FRAMING (setting the frame)

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Finding 1:

Timestamp	approx. 08:20
Quote	<i>"The Union could come across as a blocker, but does not want to give in to the SPD's pressure for a later snap election date."</i>
Manipulation	The formulation "could come across as a blocker" is introduced as a risk description for the Union, without an analogous framing being used for the SPD ("could come across as a delayer"). The word "pressure" for the SPD is neutral-active, while "blocker" for the Union has negative connotations.
Why problematic	Viewers perceive the Union as a potentially problematic party, while the SPD appears active and constructive. The framing sets an asymmetric evaluative framework that structurally weakens the Union's position.

Finding 2:

Timestamp	approx. 08:00
Quote	<i>"The suspicion arises that the Chancellor is trying to play tricks."</i>
Manipulation	This quote is attributed to Merz (indirect speech), but the formulation "the suspicion arises" is not explicitly marked as Merz's words — it remains unclear whether these are Merz's words or an editorial assessment. The transcript lacks a clear attribution.
Why problematic	If the formulation is editorial, a suspicion against Scholz is framed as a quasi-objective finding; if it belongs to Merz, critical contextualisation of this statement is absent.

Finding 3:

Timestamp	approx. 11:30
Quote	<i>"If things go badly, it could result in months of political deadlock."</i>
Manipulation	The worst-case scenario "months of political deadlock" is placed at the end of the snap elections report as a closing point, without assigning responsibility. Since the Union had previously been framed as a potential "blocker", the viewer implicitly associates this deadlock with the Union's stance.
Why problematic	The narrative sequence (Union = blocker → deadlock) creates a suggestion of causality without making an explicit claim.



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Summary: The main topic of snap elections is presented in a framework that positions the Union as a potentially problematic party, while the SPD and Greens appear as constructive actors. This framing is realised not through explicit statements, but through word choice and narrative structure.



11. WORD CHOICE AND TERMINOLOGY									5/10
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Finding 1:	
Timestamp	approx. 08:20
Quote	<i>"The Union could come across as a blocker"</i>
Manipulation	"Blocker" is a strongly negatively connoted term from political combat vocabulary. It implies irresponsibility and obstruction.
Why problematic	A neutral alternative would be: "The Union could be perceived as inflexible" or "The Union insists on its order of priority." The term "blocker" is a value judgement, not a description.

Finding 2:	
Timestamp	approx. 09:45
Quote	<i>"A political PAD."</i>
Manipulation	"PAD" (stalemate? pad?) — the formulation is unclear, possibly a slip of the tongue or a technical term. If "stalemate" is meant, the situation is framed as deadlocked, without assigning responsibility.
Why problematic	Unclear terms in political contexts can cause confusion and convey an assessment without making it explicit.

Finding 3:	
Timestamp	approx. 10:10
Quote	<i>"The paper industry emphasises to ZDF that we have paper."</i>
Manipulation	The formulation "emphasises" suggests insistence and a slight disbelief towards the Federal Returning Officer. The paper industry is positioned as a corrective to the Federal Returning Officer.
Why problematic	"Emphasises" is evaluative; neutral alternatives would be "informs" or "explains". The word choice implies that the Federal Returning Officer exaggerated.

Finding 4:	
Timestamp	approx. 07:30
Quote	<i>"Interesting footnote."</i>
Manipulation	The presenter describes the paper industry's refutation of the Federal Returning Officer as an "interesting footnote" — this minimises the significance of an official piece of misinformation from a federal authority.



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**Why
problematic**

When a federal authority provides false or misleading information in a politically charged debate, that is not a "footnote" but a relevant finding. The trivialisation protects the Federal Returning Officer from criticism.

Summary: The word choice in the snap elections topic is asymmetric: the Union is labelled with negatively connoted terms ("blocker"), while problematic statements by the Federal Returning Officer are dismissed as a "footnote". This produces a subtle but consistent imbalance.



12. PRESENTER BEHAVIOUR

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Methodological principle K5+K13: Document the triggering event — asymmetry is only demonstrable when a comparable trigger exists without an analogous reaction to other guests/positions.

Finding 1:

Timestamp approx. 07:30

Triggering event: The Federal Returning Officer had warned of "incalculable risks" with early snap elections and cited a paper shortage as an argument. The paper industry refuted this.

Quote (presenter) *"Interesting footnote. In a much larger dispute that remains unresolved."*

Comparison No analogous event in the broadcast in which a statement by another actor was dismissed as a "footnote" after being refuted.

Asymmetry: The relativisation of a refuted statement by a federal authority as a "footnote" protects the Federal Returning Officer from critical contextualisation. Since no comparable case exists, the asymmetry cannot be fully demonstrated, but the formulation is conspicuously mild given a factually incorrect statement by a federal authority in a politically charged debate.

Finding 2:

Timestamp approx. 08:20

Triggering event: The correspondent reports on the Union's position (vote of confidence first).

Quote (correspondent/presenter) *"The Union could come across as a blocker"*

Comparison The SPD position (later election date, linkage to substantive matters) is not given an analogous negative label ("delayer", "tactician" or similar).

Asymmetry: Demonstrable. Same context (political positioning in the election date dispute), but asymmetric evaluative language: Union = potential "blocker", SPD = party with "important matters".

Finding 3:

Timestamp approx. 05:30

Triggering event: Kai Wegner (CDU) speaks at the fall of the Wall commemoration about freedom and democracy.

Quote *"Our freedom and our democracy is once again under attack."*

Comparison This statement is adopted without comment or contextualisation. No comparable case in the broadcast.

Asymmetry: Not demonstrable — the statement is neither commented on nor questioned, which appears appropriate for a CDU politician in a commemorative context.



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Summary: The presenter's behaviour shows a demonstrable asymmetry in the evaluation of the Union's position in the snap elections dispute ("blocker") without analogous negative framing for the SPD or Greens. The relativisation of the refuted Federal Returning Officer statement as a "footnote" is conspicuous, but in the absence of a comparable case cannot be clearly classified as asymmetric.



13. QUESTION ASYMMETRY						6/10			
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(Note: Since this is a report without a live interview, the implicit questions posed by the correspondent are analysed.)

Asymmetry 1:

To the Union (implicitly through framing), approx. 08

20: "Why is the Union blocking?" — hard/critical (through "blocker" framing)

To the SPD (implicitly), approx. 09

45: "What important matters does the SPD still want to implement?" — soft/constructive

Comparison

The Union is placed in a defensive position by the report's question structure ("could come across as a blocker"), while the SPD is able to present its matters positively ("important matters").

Asymmetry 2:

To the Federal Returning Officer (implicitly), approx. 09

50: Her concerns are reported without a critical follow-up question on the factual situation (paper shortage).

To the paper industry (implicitly), approx. 10

10: Their refutation is presented as fact, without naming the conflict of interest.

Comparison

Both sources are treated uncritically, but the Federal Returning Officer is implicitly portrayed as unreliable through the paper industry's statement, without this being explicitly addressed.

Summary: The implicit question structure of the report is asymmetric: the Union must position itself against the "blocker" accusation, while the SPD and Greens can present their positions constructively. Since no live interviews take place, the asymmetry is less pronounced than in interview formats.



14. FALSE BALANCE

7/10

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Finding 1:

Timestamp

approx. 09:50–10:15

Construct: Federal Returning Officer (paper shortage argument) vs. paper industry (refutation) are presented as equivalent positions.

Analysis

This is not a false balance in the classic sense (presenting two unequal positions as equivalent), but rather the opposite: a federal authority and an industry association are treated as equivalent sources, without naming the different institutional authority and the different conflicts of interest. The result is an implicit discrediting of the Federal Returning Officer by a private sector source.

Finding 2:

Timestamp

approx. 12:00

Construct: UN report (70% women and children) vs. Israel ("absurd") — two sentences for Israel, several minutes for the UN report.

Analysis

Here a genuine false balance is present: the Israeli counter-statement is quoted ("Israel rejects the report as absurd"), but not substantively contextualised. Viewers cannot assess whether the Israeli criticism is justified. The quantitative imbalance (UN: extensive, Israel: one sentence) creates the impression that the Israeli position is not to be taken seriously.

Summary: On the Gaza topic, a classic false balance is present: the Israeli counter-statement is formally mentioned, but not substantively contextualised, which de facto amounts to one-sidedness. On the snap elections topic, a federal authority is implicitly discredited by a private sector source.



15. AGENDA-SETTING

4/10

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Finding 1:

Agenda element set: The snap elections dispute is framed as a conflict between the Union (blocker) and the SPD/Greens (constructive).

Timestamp

approx. 07:30–11:30 — Evidence: "The Union could come across as a blocker" / "These are important matters that are now to be made possible together."

Alternative agenda: Why did the coalition collapse? What responsibility does the SPD bear for the budget crisis? What role does the FDP play? What do citizens want?

Finding 2:

Agenda element set: The UN Gaza report is treated as established fact ("reaches a explosive conclusion").

Timestamp

approx. 12:00 — Evidence: "The UN has analysed the number of deaths in Gaza in detail and reaches an explosive conclusion."

Alternative agenda: Methodological contextualisation of the report, Israeli military strategy and its justification, the role of Hamas in civilian casualties, the hostage issue.

Finding 3:

Agenda element set: The fall of the Wall anniversary is linked to current threats to freedom ("forces that want a different country").

Timestamp

approx. 04:30–05:30 — Evidence: "Our freedom and our democracy is once again under attack."

Alternative agenda: Concrete identification of which "forces" are meant; critical contextualisation of this rhetoric; alternative perspectives on the state of German democracy.

Summary: The broadcast sets a clear agenda: the Union as the problematic party in the snap elections dispute, the UN report as established truth in the Gaza conflict, implicit threat rhetoric in the fall of the Wall context. These agenda elements are consistent and mutually reinforcing.



CHAPTER 2 — OVERALL EVALUATION

Results

Dominant techniques

- 1. Omission / Selective Omission (Score 4):** The systematic absence of the FDP, AfD and BSW from the snap elections segment, as well as the absence of the causes of the coalition collapse, produces a distorted political picture that reduces the conflict to Union vs. SPD/Greens and obscures the actual political complexity. This is the most serious individual technique in the broadcast.
- 2. Framing / Agenda-Setting (Score 5/4):** The consistent framing of the Union as a potential "blocker" and the positioning of the UN Gaza report as uncontested authority create an agenda that suggests certain political conclusions without explicitly asserting them. The combination of framing and agenda-setting is the structurally most effective technique.
- 3. Source selection (Score 4):** The selection of sources with undisclosed conflicts of interest (Federal Returning Officer, UN-OHCHR) and the absence of independent countervoices (constitutional lawyers, independent conflict researchers) systematically undermines the information quality of the broadcast.

Core messages of the broadcast

MESSAGE 1 (SUBSTANTIVE): "The Union is blocking the democratic process through its conditions for snap elections and thereby endangering Germany's political stability."

Technique: Framing ("blocker"), selective outrage (only the Union's conditions framed negatively), timing (worst-case scenario as closing point) — evidence: 08:20, 11:30

MESSAGE 2 (POLITICAL): "Israel is systematically killing civilians in Gaza, as the UN report demonstrates — Israel's counter-statement is not to be taken seriously."

Technique: False balance (Israeli position formally mentioned, not contextualised), source selection (UN as sole authority), omission (Hamás's role, hostages, Israeli perspective) — evidence: 12:00–14:00

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Justification: The broadcast displays a clear but not extreme one-sidedness that manifests itself in several consistent patterns: asymmetric evaluative language (Union = "blocker"), systematic omission of relevant political actors (FDP, AfD, BSW), one-sided source selection on the Gaza topic and undisclosed conflicts of interest. These patterns are consistent enough to be distinguished from accidental imbalance, but do not reach the intensity of a systematic bias. Pursuant to §26 para. 1 MStV, broadcasters are obliged to maintain balance; the ZDF State Treaty concretises this as a requirement of diversity of opinion and objectivity. The identified patterns are not fully compatible with these requirements.

CONCLUSION

The edition of ZDF heute-journal of 9 November 2024 exhibits a clear, consistent one-sidedness that manifests itself primarily in three areas: (1) in the snap elections segment, the Union is structurally disadvantaged through asymmetric evaluative language ("blocker") and the complete absence of other opposition parties (FDP, AfD, BSW), while the SPD and Greens appear as constructive actors; (2) on the Gaza topic, the UN report is presented as uncontested authority, without methodological contextualisation or substantive engagement with the Israeli counter-statement; (3) the source selection features undisclosed conflicts of interest (Federal Returning Officer, UN-OHCHR, paper industry). These findings substantiate the suspicion of a violation of §26 para. 1 MStV (requirement of balance) and §6 para. 2 ZDF State Treaty (requirement of objectivity), since the broadcast does not provide a balanced presentation of the relevant political positions and presents sources as neutral authorities without disclosing their conflicts of interest. The findings are documented and could be submitted to the ZDF Television Council or the resp



OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE 15 CRITERIA

Individual scores — all 15 criteria

No.	Criterion	Score	Classification
1	EXPERT SELECTION	4	••
2	SOURCE SELECTION	4	••
3	TIME ALLOCATION	5	•••
4	OMISSION (Selective Omission)	4	••
5	MANIPULATION OF FIGURES	5	•••
6	GUILT BY ASSOCIATION	8	•••••
7	TIMING	6	•••
8	SELECTIVE OUTRAGE	6	•••
9	COMPLETENESS	7	•••••
10	FRAMING (setting the frame)	5	•••
11	WORD CHOICE AND TERMINOLOGY	5	•••
12	PRESENTER BEHAVIOUR	6	•••
13	QUESTION ASYMMETRY	6	•••
14	FALSE BALANCE	7	•••••
15	AGENDA-SETTING	4	••

HARD FACTS SCORE (1–8)

5.4/10

Considerable bias

SOFT FACTS SCORE (9–14)

5.5/10

Considerable bias

OVERALL SCORE

5.5/10

Considerable bias

Averaged from hard facts and soft facts



KEY — Meaning of scores

Individual scores per criterion (0–10)

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

Aggregated deviation index — interpretation ranges

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

Party-political bias (-5 to +5)

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



Legal and methodological classification

No finding of fact	The results presented do not constitute findings of fact regarding 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 judgement of intent	The analysis measures observable structural characteristics of broadcasts. A score of 7 means that a considerable 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 the purpose of comparative pattern recognition across thousands of broadcasts, not the precise metric measurement of individual reports. Threshold values serve as heuristic orientation, not as sharp legal qualification.



APPENDIX: CANTONAL LEGISLATION

Legal basis Germany — ARD, ZDF

Law

Interstate Media Treaty (MStV, 2020)

Relevant articles

- §26 para. 1 MStV: Public broadcasters must 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 within the Federation and the Länder. Their offerings shall serve the purposes of 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 in reporting, and to taking account of diversity of opinion.
- ARD State Treaty: Universal 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 Television Council (§19 ZDF State Treaty): supervision of ZDF programming
- Legal supervision: respective federal state (ZDF: Rhineland-Palatinate)

Complaints procedure

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



APPENDIX 2: SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS

Literature

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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.

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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 review 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 all who are considering lodging a complaint — and for all who want to understand why genuine media regulation in Switzerland is still outstanding.