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**Extremists or radicals: a tentative frame pattern analysis of “Ende Gelände” in the
German mainstream press and the potential role of the German domestic intelligence
agency in shaping public opinion**

Dissertation submitted by
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Abstract

This research analyses the use and relation of three frames ('extremism', 'radicalism', 'radicalisation'), and the mention of the German domestic intelligence agency (BfV) in newspaper articles when referring to the social movement organisation "Ende Gelände" (EG) in the German mainstream press over a period of ten years. A dataset of 407 articles, sourced from the national daily newspapers Bild, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Welt, Handelsblatt and Tageszeitung (taz) and published between 2015 and 2025, was analysed and interpreted. The existing theory that the German intelligence agency functions as a 'hegemonic apparatus', and that the agency has categorised EG as 'potentially extremist' in its official reports, allowing it to use more invasive information gathering methods, are the basis of this inquiry. The research aims at giving a tentative answer to the following question: what role does the German intelligence agency play in the portrayal of EG in the mainstream German press? After a manual coding process and the description of the findings, results are interpreted as highlighting a discursive pattern in both Die Welt and taz. Both reference the agency to a noticeable degree, but only the prior accepts its authority uncritically while the latter questions it to strengthen its counter-hegemonic narrative. The Süddeutsche shows some interpretable results, but both Bild and Handelsblatt give little insights. Rather than giving an indefinite answer, the research highlights the understudied role the intelligence agency has on the perceived legitimacy of a social movement in the German mainstream press and builds the base for further studies.

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Introduction

The following research analyses the media coverage of Ende Gelände (EG), a social movement that gained substantial mediatic and academic attention through mass protest actions and occupations of coal mines starting in 2015, for a period of over ten years. The data is based on the Factiva database and organised in a dataset containing 407 articles and was manually coded in regards to three main frames ('extremism', 'radicalism', 'radicalisation') and the mentions of the German intelligence agency (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV). The following research positions itself as an initial endeavour to give a tentative answer to the question of how far the categorisation of EG as potentially extremist by the intelligence agency has influenced the framing patterns of the group in the German mainstream press. By combining the insights of these current legal approaches, to the long tradition of analysing the role of the media for social movements, the focus is not on the actions of the activists and the meeting of some hardly definable terroristic threshold but on how the top-down accusation of extremism by an organ of the state can impact the media coverage of a social movement across five major newspapers. This question is not only worth studying at this point in time, because the movement seemed to have closed a full movement cycle, but also because the categorisation of the group has so far only been discussed by legal scholars. A literature review will point out the existing gap found and then propose the theoretical framework it chose for this tentative approach, i.e., the intelligence agency as a 'hegemonic apparatus'. The mixed-method public policy approach of this thesis, starts with an outline of the social movement and the intelligence agency, then shortly covers the reports the agency has published on (EG) over the period. The methodology covers the practical steps taken to create the database and why a manual coding approach was preferred. The findings regarding the three deductive frames and their mentions of the intelligence agency will be presented both in aggregated form and then separated by newspaper. The discussion will point out how an overlay of these four variables results in recognisable and interpretable trends for the Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Welt and taz, while the Bild and Handelsblatt seem to lack such insights from this approach. After a paragraph on the limitations of this work, the last section will contain the implications and the conclusion.

Literature review

A founding role in recognising the importance of media representation and framing to the success or failure of social movements can be attributed to Todd Gitlin and his book *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* from 1980. By questioning, and theorising on, the complex relationship between protest forms, organisational structures, and media frames, Gitlin's writing remains hugely relevant for both scholars and activists. Rather than two separate entities, the field of social movement research grew from this overlap, as the meeting at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1986 became a first point of contact between different research traditions. This ultimately created a network of social movement scholars that were also mostly activists. In the 1990s, an important shift happened, where scholars went from giving mass media an indirect role, limited to creating separate spheres of influence as part of the opportunity structure, to seeing mass media as a whole as taking on an 'intermediary'¹ role between the wider public and political decision makers. Rather than arguing against the continuation of separate spheres, e.g., with Compact and Indymedia as modern examples of far-right and far-left media sources in Germany, the new research focused on the most read and circulating papers as having the most impact by bringing social movements to the centre of society.

In modern democracies, social movements face a pluralistic and largely autonomous mass media system seen as a "symbolic arena"² in which they compete with other civil society actors, as put forward by Bart Cammaerts. Rather than just being a one-sided relationship between activists and the media, research done in the 1990s by William A. Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld already pointed to a significant power imbalance, which plays out as a 'struggle over framing.'³ While framing in the realm of mass media and social movement scholarship has a very long history, e.g., see David A. Snow's et al. article 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation' from 1986, the debate is far from only being bound to the academic realm. How social movements may frame themselves is, for example, also the main discussion in Andreas Malm's book *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* from 2021.

¹ Dieter Rucht, 'Öffentlichkeit als Mobilisierungsfaktor für soziale Bewegungen' in Friedhelm Neidhart (ed.), *Öffentlichkeit, öffentliche Meinung, soziale Bewegungen* (Opladen 1994), p. 350 (translation of 'Vermittlungsinstanz')

² Bart Cammaerts, 'Activism in media' in Bart Cammaerts, Nico Carpentier (ed.), *Reclaiming the media: communication rights and democratic media roles* (Bristol 2007), p. 220

³ William A. Gamson, Gadi Wolfsfeld, 'Movements and Media as Interacting Systems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Movement* (1993), p. 118

Rather than an actual guide on how to sabotage fossil fuel infrastructure, the writing published by Verso books is a manifesto for the emergence of a ‘radical flank’⁴ in the realm of environmental activism. Malm, citing the original work of Herbert H. Haines, claims that the radical actions of a small minority can either make the more centrists of the movement appear as ‘a lesser evil in the eyes of the state power’ and, thus, win concessions (positive radical flank effect), or taint the entire movement in illegitimacy and ‘deny it all influence’ (negative radical flank effect).⁵ Either way, Malm focuses on the actions of the radical faction rather than on the mediation of these acts to the aforementioned ‘eyes of the state power’; an issue that radical flank effect (RFE) research in general struggles with, for example by using surveys to directly estimate the effects of radical actions on public opinion rather than the media as the main intermediary.⁶ While a survey has a higher validity of measuring public opinion than most frame analyses, the public is still informed of these actions through the press, unless the person surveyed was directly impacted by the direct action. Even research that focuses on the representation of radical environmental social movements in the mainstream press of Germany, including Ende Gelände (EG) as one of the observed groups, overestimates the role actions play.

The article ‘Radical climate movements – is the hype about “eco-terrorism” analogy, warning or propaganda?’, by Markus Lederer et al., for example, claims to make ‘a discursive’ and ‘a factual argument’ about how and why parts of the German press have become ‘willing handmaidens in the delegitimization’ of these radical groups.⁷ In the methodology of the article, however, the concepts of ‘radicalization’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘civil disobedience’ are defined *a priori*, meaning that the soundness of these conceptual categories is tested against the portrayed actions of the groups, coming to the conclusion that the words are used ‘interchangeably in media coverage’. The categorisation of EG as a potentially extremist organisation by the intelligence agency of Berlin is mentioned in the article. Rather than focusing on this categorisation, however, it follows a more general trend of articles, which aim at proving that these groups are unjustly being criminalised and that ‘eco-terrorism’

⁴ Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* (London 2021), p. 49

⁵ Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, p. 49 and p. 121

⁶ See Markus Ostarek, Brent Simpson, Cathy Rodgers, James Ozden, ‘Radical climate protests linked to increases in public support for moderate organizations’, *Nature Sustainability* Vol. 7 (2024), pp. 1626-1632.

⁷ Markus Lederer, Verena Lasso Mena, Jens Marquardt, Timo Alexander Richter, Dorothea Elena Schoppek, ‘Radical climate movements – is the hype about “eco-terrorism” analogy, warning or propaganda?’, *Frontiers in Political Science* Vol. 6 (2024), p. 1

nowadays is used as a label for tactics that can be described ‘more accurately and precisely’ by existing concepts, such as “obstruction”, “trespassing”, “vandalism” and “sabotage”.⁸

The articles which exclusively deal with the categorisation of EG as ‘potentially extremists’ are for now only two, both written by researchers with a law background. This is important because both, Andreas Gutmann and Jakob Hohnerlein, not only agree on the missing legal basis of this decision, describing the decision as ‘unlawful’⁹ and EG’s political demands as ‘constitutionally legitimate’¹⁰, but also ascribe a similar intent to the intelligence agency with this decision. Gutmann criticises the agency for being ‘a political actor and by no means a technocratic institution’¹¹, while Hohnerlei criticises the decision as a ‘deliberately affecting the public discourse’¹². Either way, the two scholars seem to agree on the ‘analytic politicization’ of the intelligence agency, a concept from the field of intelligence studies which criticises the distancing from ‘the ethos of independence and objectivity’¹³ and a move towards creating “intelligence to please”.

Rather than being just one of many, EG was chosen because it is heralded by Malm in his book as having ‘raised the ante against German fossil capital’¹⁴ and because it is the first environmental group to receive such a repressive categorisation by the German domestic intelligence agency. Thus, the research aims to see how far the mainstream German press is influenced by the hegemonic framing of the group. By focusing on mainstream, rather than local or more fringe newspapers, the research focuses on a highly contested place, where social mobilisation groups need to appear to reach a wider audience.

⁸ David Thomas Summer, Lisa M. Weidman, ‘Eco-terrorism or Eco-tage: An Argument for the Proper Frame’, *Faculty Publications* Sub. 3 (2013), p. 25

⁹ Jakob Hohnerlei, ‘Warum die Verdachtsfalleinstufung der Gruppe “Ende Gelände“ rechtswidrig ist’, *Verfblog* (June 2024), p. 5

¹⁰ Andreas Gutmann, ‘Ende Gelände für Systemkritik?’, *Kritische Justiz* Vol. 54, No. 1 (2021), p. 83

¹¹ Gutmann, ‘Ende Gelände für Systemkritik?’, p. 84

¹² Hohnerlei, ‘Warum die Verdachtsfalleinstufung der Gruppe “Ende Gelände“ rechtswidrig ist’, p. 1

¹³ Stephen Marrin, ‘Rethinking Analytic Politicization’, *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Feb. 2013), p. 33

¹⁴ Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, p. 130

Theoretical framework

A major strength of dealing with the concept of extremism in the German context, rather than for example terrorism, is that a clear history of the term exists, and a consensus definition has been proposed. The term entered the “Duden”, Germany’s authoritative dictionary, in 1942 and has been used by the domestic intelligence agency since 1972 in its yearly report.¹⁵ The consensus definition proposed by Astrid Bötticher stresses a ‘struggle for supremacy’ and the view of politics as ‘a zero-sum game’ in which the use of ‘aggressive militancy’ is seen as a means to ultimately gain political power.¹⁶ In contrast, Bötticher also proposes a consensus definition of radicalism, which stresses a ‘hostility against the status quo’ but also supports ‘progressive reformism’ as the ultimate goal.¹⁷ While the consensus definition proposes ten key distinctions, for this theoretical approach the key differentiation boils down to ‘pro-democracy radicals’ and ‘anti-democratic extremists.’¹⁸

The second important theoretical differentiation is that the concept of radicalism is largely self-imposed, while the one of extremism is a label, imposed by others. The ‘others’ in this research are the domestic intelligence agencies, on the national and regional level, which Moritz Assal referred to as a ‘hegemonic apparatus’ (‘Hegemonieapparat’). By directly citing Antonio Gramsci’s prison writings, Assal argues that the BfV is a prime example of a structure defending the hegemonic order by redefining what it protects in its conception of militant democracy.¹⁹ While the exact role it plays in the German state’s security architecture is described in detail in the relevant chapter, the idea of the BfV as part of the hegemonic order is not particularly revolutionary, but helps as a theoretical starting point. The question of how the intelligence agency’s hegemonic framing of EG as ‘potentially extremist’ gets picked up and influences the overall coverage of the group in the mainstream press, mirrors how far its authority persists in shaping the public opinion or is challenged.

¹⁵ *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1971*, (Stuttgart 1972), p. 14

¹⁶ Astrid Bötticher, ‘Towards Academic Consensus Definitions of Radicalism and Extremism’, *Perspectives on Terrorism* Vol. 11, No. 4 (August 2017), p. 74

¹⁷ Bötticher, ‘Towards Academic Consensus Definitions’, p. 75

¹⁸ Bötticher, ‘Towards Academic Consensus Definitions’, p. 76

¹⁹ Moritz Assal, ‘Verfasstheit, nicht Verfassung: Der Verfassungsschutz als Hegemonieapparat’ in Imke Schmincke, Jasmin Siri (ed.), *NSU-Terror: Ermittlungen am rechten Abgrund. Ereignis, Kontexte, Diskurse* (Bielefeld 2013), p. 110

Lastly, the concept of ‘radicalisation’ is particularly interesting in this theoretical framework as it can both represent a process towards extremism, i.e., increased use of violence, and also be defined as an ‘increasing challenge to the legitimacy of a normative order’.²⁰ The narrower processual conception, favoured by scholars focusing on political violence and legitimacy, see ‘the interaction between social movements and their opponents’²¹ as the key variable defining its development. In the case of EG, however, the academics have not seen any major increase in violent means, but what seems like a leapfrog from radicalism to extremism, i.e., legitimate to illegitimate framing, at least from the intelligence agencies. As such, the three frames (‘extremism’, ‘radicalism’, ‘radicalisation’) and the mentioning of the intelligence agency can be seen as tracers of the influence it has over the representation of the group in mainstream media.

Ende Gelände - Origins and current status

“Ende Gelände!” (EG), a German saying announcing the end of something in terms of territorial imagery, is the name of a social movement organisation that started as a network to organise mass civil disobedience campaigns against coal mines in Germany. Active in this format since August 2015, EG presents a strong group identity during the occupation of these facilities through a unitary array of white coveralls and masks.²² The effectiveness of the group's engagement in direct action stems also from the manoeuvrability of its smaller team units, referred to as “fingers”²³, which execute well defined tasks and are organised in a more hierarchical fashion, following the decisions taken at the meetings of ‘revocable delegates’²⁴ throughout the occupation. The activists also actively organise the mediation of their civil disobedience campaigns, bringing journalists and professional film crews along.²⁵

²⁰ Hande Abay Gaspar, Christopher Daase, Niccole Deitelhoff, Julian Junk, Manjana Sold, ‘Radicalization and Political Violence – Challenges of Conceptualization and Researching Origins, Processes and Politics of Illiberal Beliefs’, *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* Vol. 14, No. 2 (2010), p. 5

²¹ Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, political violence, and the state* (Cambridge 1995), p. 8

²² Hendrik Sander, ‘Ende Gelände: Anti-Kohle Proteste in Deutschland’, *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* Vol.1 (March 2017), p. 33

²³ Jasper Finkeldey, ‘Chapter 7: Fighting Fossil Fuel Around the World’ in *Fighting Global Neo-Extractivism* (New York, 2023), p. 123

²⁴ Edwoud Vanderpitte, Frédéric Vandermoere, Lesley Hustinx, ‘Civil Anarchizing for the Common Good: Culturally Patterned Politics of Legitimacy in the Climate Justice Movement’, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* Vol.30 No.2 (April 2019), p. 331

²⁵ Jana Bosse, ‘Kein Land mehr für Kohle – Kohleausstieg ist Handarbeit’, *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* Vol. 4 (2015), p. 397

The activist network mobilised by EG includes a wide variety of civil actors, ranging from environmental NGOs and politicians on the national level, over to local pressure groups and even crosses borders, e.g., research exists on ‘the Belgian branch of EG’²⁶, supporting the group’s claim of being ‘part of a globally coordinated resistance against fossil fuels.’²⁷ Their first campaign took place on the 15th of August 2015 in the lignite surface mine of Garzweiler, named after the village which previously existed in this part of North Rhine-Westphalia, and 1400 people participated in it, with an estimated 800 of them managing to enter the mine and occupying it for 19 hours.²⁸ As in future campaigns, a larger climate-camp in the proximity of this mine acted like the ground-base in which EG both trained tactics but was also involved in ‘education and reflexive practices.’²⁹ Rather than just physically stopping the extraction of lignite, also known as brown coal, EG’s campaign targeted the German government’s inertia to move away from traditional fossil fuels.

2017 saw two major campaigns, with 6000 people occupying the surface lignite mine of Garzweiler for three days in August, while on the 5th of November up to 3000 people³⁰ occupied the Hambacher pit, Europe’s largest lignite surface mine. The latter coincided with the twenty-third United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP23), held in Bonn. The following year, Ende Gelände supported the long-term occupation of the Hambach Forest at the beginning of October, which lies next to the lignite mine and is owned by the same company, RWE Power AG.³¹ In the same month, EG also briefly occupied the mine.³² In 2019, EG organised another campaign with estimated 6000 activists in Rhineland at the end of June, and a blockade in Lusatia at the end of November.³³ The decision of the German government in 2020 regarding a complete coal phase-out till 2038 was met with a major protest in the Rheinland from an estimated 3000

²⁶ Vanderpitte et al., ‘Civil Anarchizing for the Common Good’, p. 330

²⁷ James Goodman, Dipesh Chakra, Linda Connor, Devleena Gosh, Kanchi Kohli, Jonathan Paul Marshall, Manju Menon, Katja Mueller, Tom Morton, Rebecca Pearce, Ortwin Renn, Stuart Rosewarne, ‘Chapter 4 – Germany: Globalising the Local to Reach the National, Protest against Coal in the Lausitz’ in *Beyond the coal rush: a turning point for global energy and climate policy?* (New York 2020), p. 148

²⁸ Stephanie Groll, ‘Klima und Kohle zusammen in Bewegung’, *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* (August 2015)

²⁹ Finkeldey, ‘Chapter 7’, p. 123

³⁰ Alice Swift, ‘What are the similarities and differences between the recent British and German direct action climate movements? A comparison between Reclaim the Power and Ende Gelände’, *Master Thesis* (Oct. 2018), p. 32

³¹ Ricardo Kaufer, Paula Lein, ‘Widerstand im Hambacher Forst: Analyse einer anarchistischen Waldbesetzung’, *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* Vol.31, No.4 (2018), p. 9

³² Johannes Brehm, Henri Gruhl, ‘Increase in concerns about climate change following climate strikes and civil disobedience in Germany’, *Nature Communications* Vol.15 (2024), p. 2

³³ Moritz Melchor, Manuela Rivera, Klimagerechtigkeit erzählen: Narrative, Wertbezüge und Frames bei Extinction Rebellion, Ende Gelände und Fridays for Future’, *IASS Potsdam* (Nov. 2021), p. 8

activists, but that year EG also targeted the construction site of a fossil gas infrastructure and blocked the access to a gas power station, which was a first.³⁴

While I could not find any more recent scholarly articles on EG activities, their website seems to confirm a trend that widens the movement's scope.

In 2021 the group mobilised 2000 activists to block the ChemCoastPark and its construction of a gas terminal in Schließwig-Holstein, and they successfully blocked the Kiel canal with canoes.³⁵ In the following years, EG heavily collaborated with a wide variety of groups, blocked the industrial harbour of Hamburg, and continued its resistance in the Lützerach forest. In 2024, EG organised climate camps, symbolic protests against LNG projects and openly ended their neutral stance regarding 'the situation in Israel/Palestine'³⁶, while criticising both Zionism and Islamism.

The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) was created in 1950 as the West German domestic intelligence agency. Its competence is shared between the Federal Office and sixteen federal state authorities (Landesämter für Verfassungsschutz, LfV), while also being limited to the pure collection of information in the absence of executive power.³⁷ Working under the Federal Minister of Interior (Bundesminister des Inneren, BMI), the BfV is located in Cologne, employs roughly 4500 people and had an allocated budget of 496,5 million Euros in 2023.³⁸ Over the last twenty years, the employee number nearly doubled and the budget tripled, making the current BfV the largest since its establishment.

Conceptually, the BfV aims at being the intelligence arm of the *Wehrhafte Demokratie* (militant democracy).³⁹ The idea, which emerged as a reaction to the ascent of fascism in the 1930s, aims to tackle the so-called democratic paradox, by which democracies can be abolished from within.

³⁴ Alice Swift, 'Ende Gelände 2020', *The Ecologist* (Oct. 2020)

³⁵ Ende Gelände, '++ Ende Gelände finishes successful action weekend ++ "The climate justice movement is growing and is internationally stronger than ever!" ++', EG Website (Aug. 2021) link: <https://www.ende-gelaende.org/en/news/press-release-on-1-8-2021-at-100-pm/> (last accessed: 27.07.2025)

³⁶ Ende Gelände, 'Ending Our Silence', EG Website (Dec. 2024) - link: <https://www.ende-gelaende.org/en/news/ending-our-silence/> (last accessed: 27.07.2025)

³⁷ Christian Schaller, 'Strategic Surveillance and Extraterritorial Basic Rights Collection: German Intelligence Law after Snowden', *German Law Journal* Vol. 19, No. 04 (2018), p. 951

³⁸ Ronen Steinke, *Verfassungsschutz: Wie der Geheimdienst Politik Macht* (Berlin, 2023), p. 34

³⁹ Karl Loewenstein, 'Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I', *The American Political Science Review* Vol. 31, No. 3 (June 1937), p. 417

Its theorists principally argue for two core principles - that liberal democracies are allowed to use illiberal means against its enemies, such as the banning of anti-constitutional parties and organisations, and that liberal democracies have an uncompromisable core, which assures the democratic functioning of the state.⁴⁰

After World War Two, and given the still recent memories connected to the Gestapo, the BfV was structured into the new German state in a narrow and well-defined fashion, through the *Trennungsgebot* (separation principle).⁴¹ Thanks to it, the BfV is clearly separated from the capacities of the police and, at least in theory, only bound to information gathering and observational tasks. The 1970s saw a shift, from a focus on ‘orthodox, Moscow-aligned communists’⁴², to ‘The New Left’, closely linked to student movements and recognised by the BfV and the government as a new hostile force from within society. With the rise of left-wing terrorism, society at large became, thus, both a source of danger and as its main target.⁴³ This new environment led the government to steer the BfV into a path that might prevent the far left from infiltrating the state after the explicit call for the “long march through the institutions” by leaders of the student protest movement itself.⁴⁴

The political and practical answer to this potential threat was the *Radikalenerlass* (Radicals Decree) of 1972, a joint declaration by the federal ministers that enabled the state at the regional level to dismiss employees from the public service and reject applications from individuals that were “pursuing anti-constitutional (*verfassungsfeindlich*) activities”.⁴⁵ Contrary to other previous decrees, which directly named specific organisations or parties, this policy directive gave the authorities greater flexibility and handed the BfV a central role in ‘defining threats’.⁴⁶ In connection to the uncompromisable core of a militant democracy, loyalty to the free and democratic basic order (*freie und demokratische Grundordnung*, FDGO) became the main, even if vague, measure by which the BfV informed the decision by the regional authorities to dismiss old or not accept new public servants.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Ernst Fraenkel, *Deutschland und die Westlichen Demokratien* (Stuttgart, 1964), p. 259

⁴¹ Steinke, *Verfassungsschutz*, p. 24

⁴² Constantin Goschler, ‘Chapter 7 - Intelligence, Mistrust and Transparency: A Case Study of the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution’ in Stefan Berger, Dimitrij Owetschkin (ed.), *Contested Transparencies, Social Movements and the Public Sphere* (Cham, 2019), p. 164

⁴³ Constantin Goschler, Michael Wala, “*Keine Neue Gestapo*”: *Das Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Hamburg, 2015), p. 545

⁴⁴ Ingo Cornils, ‘The German Student Movement: Legend and Legacy’, *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* Vol. 4, No. 2 (1996), p. 37

⁴⁵ Gerard Braunthal, *Political Loyalty and Public Service in West Germany: The 1972 Decree against Radicals and Its Consequences* (Massachusetts, 1990), p. 31

⁴⁶ Goschler, ‘Chapter 7 - Intelligence, Mistrust and Transparency’, p. 164

⁴⁷ G. Brinkmann, ‘Militant Democracy and radicals in the West German Civil Service’, *Modern Law Review* Vol. 46 No. 5 (1983), p. 586

While the original Radicals Decree was largely curtailed and ended by the social democratic government of the late 1970s, the central role the BfV played in its implementation led to a permanent form of “state paranoia”, sometimes also described in terms of ‘reciprocal radicalization’.⁴⁸

The reciprocity comes from a domestic intelligence agency which sees its own subjects in terms of mistrust, while the population at large also sees the same agency in terms of suspicion, given the focused monitoring of political activities and milieus rather than any form of criminal activity. A more recent crisis of legitimacy of the BfV is connected to the National Socialist Underground (NSU), a Neo-Nazi terror network linked to the racially motivated murder of at least 10 individuals. After the group’s activities had accidentally been discovered in 2011, it was revealed that the BfV had destroyed hundreds of relevant documents as a reaction to the Persecutors enquiries.⁴⁹ This destruction was afterwards linked to the existence of an extensive network of informants and financial support in the group’s closest circles by the BfV, which led to the resignation of presidents on the federal and regional level, a wide restructuring of the BfV as a whole and an increase of democratic oversight.⁵⁰ The new president, George Maaßen, led the Office for six years but stepped down in 2018 after having openly trivialized the persecution of migrants by a violent mob in Eastern Germany and having stopped any inquiries into the observation of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.⁵¹ Nowadays, the BfV is observing Maaßen due to his role in a newly found far-right party, while the highest position of the office remains vacant and the agency is instead being headed by the vice-presidents Dr. Silke Willems and Sinan Selen.⁵²

⁴⁸ Goschler, ‘Chapter 7 - Intelligence, Mistrust and Transparency’, p. 164

⁴⁹ Daniel Koehler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The ‘National Socialist Underground’ and the history of terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (New York, 2019), p. 193

⁵⁰ Markus Hinterleitner, ‘Blame Games in Germany’ in *Policy Controversies and Political Blame Games* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 76

⁵¹ Steinke, *Verfassungsschutz*, pp. 242-243

⁵² Samuel Kirsch, ‘Wird Maaßen vom Verfassungsschutz beobachtet?’, *ZDFheute* (01.02.2024) link: <https://verwaltungsschutz.uni-koeln.de/aktuell/artikel/wird-maassen-vom-verfassungsschutz-beobachtet> (last accessed: 27.07.2025)

BfV and LfV reports on Ende Gelände

The following will highlight the most important developments in the intelligence reports over time, and demonstrate how and that the language and categorisation applied to EG has changed over the analysed period.

Given that the BfV does not have formal authority over the regional LfVs, Germany *de facto* has 17 ‘independent and self-sufficient’⁵³ domestic intelligence agencies (16 regional + the BfV), not counting the military intelligence agency (Militärischer Abschirmdienst, MAD).

The first mention of Ende Gelände (EG), stems from the 2015 annual report of the LfV of North-Rhine Westphalia, published in June of the following year. In the years after, the number of regional reports increased, reaching 13 for the year 2019. That year highlighted a significant development, as the LfV of Berlin categorised EG Berlin as an independent left-wing extremist group.⁵⁴

While previous reports merely argued for an encroachment by left-wing extremists, mostly from a group called “Interventionist Left (IL)”⁵⁵, to establish itself more in the centre of society through EG campaigns, the Berlin report sees the local EG group itself as a threat to the democratic order.

From May 2020 both the subversion-narrative and the EG as ‘threat in itself’ narratives continued under the ‘extremism’ frame and in the ‘left-wing extremism’ chapter of the Berlin reports. While individual reports, such as the 2022 report from Saxony, explicitly describes EG as non-extremist (‘nicht extremistisch’⁵⁶), the majority of them follow the two previously mentioned narratives. In the BfV report of 2022, for the first time EG publications are quoted as evidence to support the claim that EG is opposed to the current democratic. This is because one of its writing argues for the impossibility of capitalism to resolve climate change and the other wants to defund and, ultimately, abolish the police.⁵⁷

Ultimately, the BfV report of the following year categorised EG as ‘potentially left-wing extremist’ (‘linksextremistischer Verdachtsfall’⁵⁸), with some important implications.

⁵³ Ralf Frauenrath, ‘Die Verfassungsschutzbehörden im Gefüge der deutschen Sicherheitsarchitektur’ in Hans-Jürgen Langen, Michaela Wendekamm (ed.), *Die Verwaltung der Sicherheit: Theorien und Praxis der Öffentlichen Sicherheitsverwaltung* (Wiesbaden, 2018), p. 155

⁵⁴ Verfassungsschutzbericht Berlin 2019, p. 162

⁵⁵ Verfassungsschutzbericht des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2015, (June 2016), p. 133

⁵⁶ Verfassungsschutzbericht des Landes Sachsen 2022, (June 2023), p. 148

⁵⁷ Verfassungsschutzbericht 2022, (May 2023), p. 144

⁵⁸ Verfassungsschutzbericht 2023, (May 2024), p. 6

On the one hand, this represents the second step on a three-tier categorisation scheme of the BfV. The first step, test case (Prüffall), limits the BfV to openly accessible information sources about the organisation or individual. Since a judge order in 2019, deciding this information sharing might negatively impact election results in case of a political party, the public is not kept informed about when organisations fall under this categorisation.⁵⁹

The second step, suspected case or potential case (Verdachtsfall), must be publicly communicated and enables the intelligence agency to use more extensive methods of information gathering, i.e., covert observations, infiltration of informants, surveillance of communications and of internet usage.⁶⁰

The third, and final, step available to the BfV is the categorisation as proven extremist (gesichert extremistisch). This does not enable further measures to the agency as such but can potentially lead to the banning of an organisation, group or party.

Conclusively, the decision of the BfV to categorise EG as such, enables invasive and repressive intelligence gathering techniques, while at the same time sending out a public signal. Given that this communication to the public only took place last year, the previous categorisation by the LfV of Berlin in 2020 must also be seen as central. For the majority of the reports, ‘extremism’ is undoubtedly the dominant frame applied to EG.

The data study of this research will now focus on what frames newspapers apply most, and their respective changes over time and its implications.

⁵⁹ Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (bpb), ‘Was heißt „Beobachtung durch den Verfassungsschutz?“’ (January 2024), last access 27.07.2025, at <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/hintergrund-aktuell/544531/was-heisst-beobachtung-durch-den-verfassungsschutz/>

⁶⁰ Bundesverfassungsschutzgesetz (BVerfSchG) § 8, Abs. 2

Methodology

Frame selection

Given the assumed dominant position of the BfV in imposing a hegemonic frame, all yearly LfV and BfV reports of the past nine years were searched for the name of the social movement “Ende Gelände”. The online archive Verfassungsschutzberichte.de was the main source of this, as its stated goal is to facilitate the finding of relevant passages in both national and regional reports for private individuals and researchers alike.⁶¹ For the search, the jurisdiction was put to ‘all’ and the years were searched separately for practical reasons. While the results of this process are in the previous chapter ‘BfV and LfV reports on Ende Gelände’, the previously mentioned conceptual difference in German between ‘extremism’, ‘radicalism’ and ‘radicalisation’, made them an ideal fit for the parsimonious analysis of the data set.

Data acquisition

For the creation of the data set, this research project used the digital Factiva database, with access from the student’s university library account. Owned by Dow Jones, the database is specialised in news sources, combines up to 30,000 different media sources from 200 countries, and has been used for similar media coverage analysis before.⁶² In the ‘Search Builder’⁶³ interface of the website the region was set to Germany, but the language was not specified, given that the searched concepts were German and the selected publications as well. As for the time periods, searches were made from the 1st of January of each year to the 1st of January of the following year, starting from 01.01.2015. This date was selected not just because that year EG first became active, but also because a test search was made for the year prior in which no relevant articles were found across all German publications in the database. In total, thus, ten searches were made this way for each of the individual publications. For the most recent period, i.e., from 01.01.2025 onwards, the drop-menu option of ‘during the last 6 months’ was selected as this research was conducted in June.

⁶¹ Verfassungsschutzberichte.de – last accessed on the 27th of July, 2025

⁶² Robyn E. Gulliver, Xiongzi Wang, Winnifred R. Louis, Kelly S. Fielding, Rebecca M. Colvin, ‘Media ownership and coverage patterns of established, disruptive, and unconventional climate advocacy groups’, *Climatic Change* Vol. 178, No. 25 (January 2025), p. 8

⁶³ Dow Jones Factiva, ‘Search Builder Quick Reference Guide’ (document found at: <https://libanswers.suss.edu.sg/loader?fid=12072&type=1&key=891a59776369621f15ca601dfe497cf2>)

As for the searched term, the words “Ende Gelände” were put into the search bar and the similarity checker was put to ‘similar’ to reduce potential doubling of articles. Given that “Ende Gelände” is also a German idiom to describe the end of something in territorial terms, e.g., similar to ‘the end of the line/road’⁶⁴ in English, there were a significant number of false positive articles that emerged. While the option of searching for at least two separate appearances of the words in an article through the Factiva search bar was tested, i.e., the operator being ‘atleast2(“Ende Gelände”)', this resulted in the loss of relevant articles and was discarded. Instead, a manual selection was chosen as the majority of false positives were easily recognisable by their titles and the rest were read and then decided on. As for downloading the data, Factiva has a limit of 180,000 words per download for any format, but this was not relevant for this research as the separate search by both year and publication kept the data volume manageable.

Publication selection

The selected publications for this thesis are the following: Bild Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ), Die Welt, Handelsblatt and Tageszeitung (taz). According to Statista, citing an agma (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Media-Analyse e.V.) report, which is considered the leading media and consumer behaviour trend survey provider in Germany, these national daily newspapers are 5 of the 6 with the widest reach for the past two years.⁶⁵ Bild has a significantly higher reach than the others, with 6,93 million in 2023 and 6,37 million in 2024, compared to the others which cumulatively only reached 2,96 million for the prior and 3,08 million in the year after. The fourth largest reach of a national daily newspaper in this statistic is from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (F.A.Z.), with around 800,000 readers, but it was not included in the data set due to practical reasons. The absence of all FAZ articles from the Factiva database was discovered only during the research, and while some articles make use of the ‘F.A.Z. online archive’⁶⁶, the access option for students is still 69€ a year and limited to 100 articles.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Cambridge dictionary under the idiom section

(link: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/end-of-the-line-road>)

⁶⁵ Axel Springer, ‘Reach of national daily newspapers in Germany in 2023 and 2024 (in million readers)’, Statista (July 2024) – retrieved July 24th, 2025 from:

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/417363/national-daily-newspapers-reach-in-germany/>

⁶⁶ Linda Lütke, Leonie Tuitjer, Peter Dirksmeier, ‘Sailing to save the planet? Media-produced narratives of Greta Thunberg’s trip to the UN Climate Summit in German print newspapers’, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* Vol. 10, No. 242 (2023), p. 5

⁶⁷ Frankfurter Allgemeine Archiv, ‘Registrierung’ - retrieved July 24th, 2025 from <https://fazarchiv.faz.net/faz-portal/registration>

To further underline the relevance of these national daily newspapers, their reach over the entire period (01.01.2015 – 06.2025) was also assessed.

For the Bild Zeitung, the reach significantly decreased from 10,36 million readers in 2015, to 7,88 million in 2020 and to the previously quoted 6,37 million of 2024.⁶⁸

For SZ, the reach was more stable over the same period, starting from 1,12 million readers in 2015, to a maximum of 1,33 million in 2022 and 1,26 million in 2024.⁶⁹ Die Welt had a reach of 0,67 million in 2015, of 0,89 million in 2020, and in 2024 reached 0,99 million German speaking readers.⁷⁰ For Handelsblatt, the reach ranged from 0,42 million readers in 2015, to 0,52 million in 2020, and to 0,55 million in 2024.⁷¹ Lastly, the reach of taz over the same period started from 0,2 million, reached the highest point in 2020 with 0,32 million readers and in 2024 had 0,3 million ones.⁷² Regarding the ownership of these national daily newspapers, the chapter on German mass media will go into more depth but it is, nonetheless, important to point out that the newspapers Bild and Die Welt are both owned by the Axel Springer publishing house. The Süddeutsche Zeitung is owned by SWMH (Südwestdeutsche Medienholding GmbH), Handelsblatt by DvH (Dieter von Holzbrinck Medien GmbH) and the taz by its own cooperative, with more than 19,000 members. From a practical perspective, these publications were selected through the Factiva ‘Intelligent Indexing’⁷³ feature, with the names being: ‘BILD – All sources’, ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung’ and ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung Online’, ‘Die Welt’, ‘Handelsblatt – All sources’, and ‘taz – die tageszeitung’ together with ‘taz.de’. Another look at Statista shows that all 5 newspapers are in the top ten of most circulating national daily newspapers in e-format.

⁶⁸ DWDL.de, ‘Reach of the newspaper Bild in Germany from 2012 to 2024 (in million readers)’, *Statista* (July 2024) - retrieved July 25, 2025, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/406644/bild-reach-in-germany/>

⁶⁹ Ag.ma., ‘Reach of the newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung in Germany from 2003 to 2023 (in million readers)’, *Statista* (July 2024) - retrieved July 24th, 2025 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1114895/suddeutsche-zeitung-reach-in-germany/>

⁷⁰ Ag.ma., ‘Reach of the newspaper Die Welt in Germany from 2003 to 2024 (in million readers)’, *Statista* (July 2024) - retrieved July 24th, 2025 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1114901/die-welt-reach-in-germany/>

⁷¹ Axel Springer, ‘Reach of the newspaper Handelsblatt in Germany from 2003 to 2024 (in million readers)’, *Statista* (July 2024) - retrieved July 24th, 2025 from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1114904/handelsblatt-reach-in-germany/>

⁷² DWDL.de, ‘Reach of the newspaper Tageszeitung in Germany from 2003 to 2024 (in million readers)’, *Statista* (July 2024) - retrieved July 25, 2025, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1114912/tageszeitung-reach-in-germany/>

⁷³ Factiva Dow Jones, ‘Factiva User Guide’, *Dow Jones and Company* (2012), p. 24 – last accessed through ETH Zurich website, July 25th 2025: https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/associates/ethlibrary-dam/documents/Standorteundmedien/Medientypen/Datenbanken/Factiva/Factiva-User-Guide_EN.pdf

In the e-paper section, Bild has again a significant lead with 216,927 sold copies in the last quarter of 2024 alone and SZ is in second place with 108,622 copies.⁷⁴

Over the entire time period, from 01.01.2015 to 06.2025, 407 articles were retrieved with the following distribution: Bild Zeitung (103), SZ (56), Die Welt (67), Handelsblatt (41), taz (140). There is a significant variation in article length, with Bild having articles with as little as 40 words and taz having a few articles with over 2600.

This can largely be explained by Bild publishing last-minute blue-light notices ('Blauchlicht-Meldung'⁷⁵), i.e., very recent developments involving emergency services, and taz extensive interviews. The following two figures represent the distribution over the years and newspapers.

Table 1 - Number of articles per newspaper and year

Year	Bild	SZ	Die Welt	Handelsblatt	taz	tot./year
2015	5	1	0	0	14	20
2016	7	3	1	1	19	31
2017	7	3	1	1	20	32
2018	17	5	5	9	17	53
2019	21	13	17	13	25	89
2020	15	10	18	9	14	66
2021	10	4	7	3	11	35
2022	11	7	9	1	8	36
2023	7	5	7	4	7	30
2024	2	4	2	0	5	13
2025	1	1	0	0	0	2
tot./news.	103	56	67	41	140	407

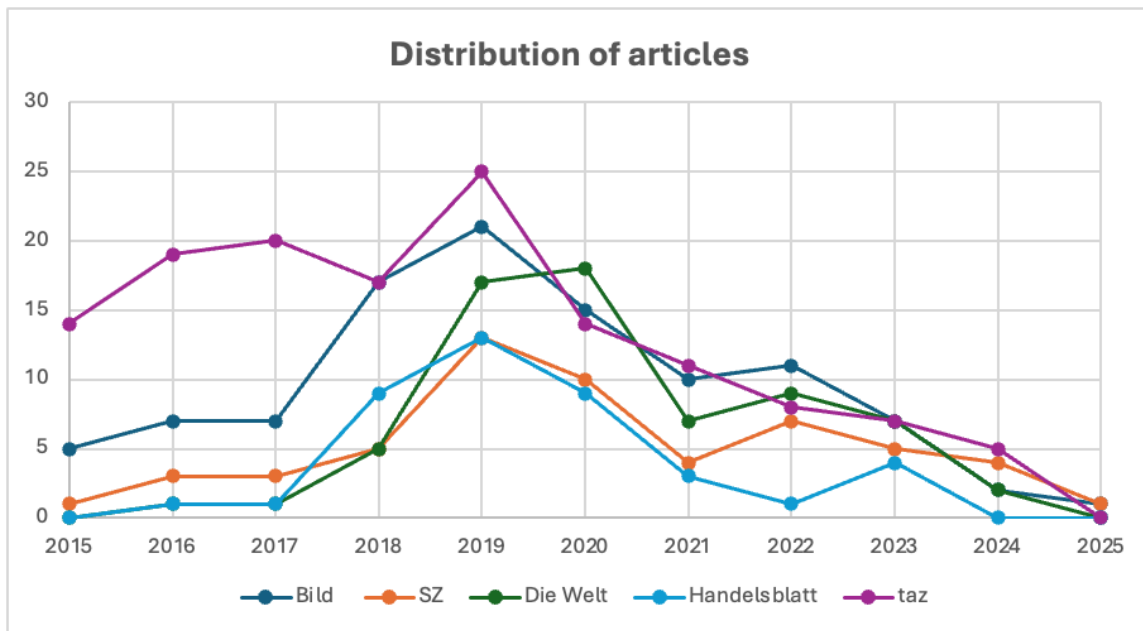
⁷⁴ IVW, 'E-paper circulation of national daily newspapers in Germany in 4th quarter 2024.', *Statista* (January 2024) - retrieved July 24th, 2025 from

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/440663/e-papers-circulation-of-national-newspapers-germany/>

⁷⁵ Bild, 'Elbehafen Brunsbüttel: "Ende Gelände"- Aktion an LNG-Terminal', *Bild.de* (16.03.2024) retrieved July 26th, 2025 from

<https://www.bild.de/regional/schleswig-holstein/regional/brunsbuettel-endegelaende-protest-am-lng-terminal-polizei-begleitet-87541938.bild.html>

Figure 1 - Distribution of articles per newspaper from 2015 - 2025



As visualised by the graph, the overall coverage of EG in the German mainstream press peaked in 2019, with all newspapers except Die Welt publishing their highest number of articles that year. The following steady decline in overall articles was only slowly halted in 2022, where Bild, SZ and Die Welt had a small increase in articles. At least the first half of 2025, shows the lowest levels of newspaper coverage in EG's ten-year history, with only two articles being published till June.

As for the political and qualitative stance of these selected papers, Bild Zeitung represents the only tabloid on the national level and is, therefore, sometimes left out from research projects. The taz, on the other hand, has already been described by earlier researchers as having 'an audience very sympathetic to social movements'⁷⁶, i.e., left-alternative, while Die Welt is considered more conservative, SZ more liberal and Handelsblatt quite focused on economic developments.

⁷⁶ Felix Kolb, 'Chapter 5 - The Impact of Transnational Protest on Social Movement Organizations: Mass Media and the Making of ATTAC Germany' in Donatella della Porta, Sidney Tarrow (ed.), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Oxford 2005), p. 98

Data set and coding

From the Factiva database, the date, title, publications name, and full text of each article was copied into an Excel file with each newspaper being allocated to a separate sheet. While an automated frame analysis through R software was envisioned to start with, the search for ‘extrem’ related words, e.g., ‘linksextrem’, ‘extremistisch’ and ‘Extremos’ in the German articles, and the differentiation between ‘radicalism’ and ‘radicalisation’ brought a significant number of false positives and a manual coding approach was preferred. While in a first round of coding, the matching word was copied into a separate column, a second round transformed the qualitative data into quantitative, i.e., putting the relevance on the mentioning of a frame by an article, while still keeping it fairly simple to go back and see the context of the usage. The dataset, called ‘Data.EG’ is saved as an excel sheet on the students laptop.

Findings

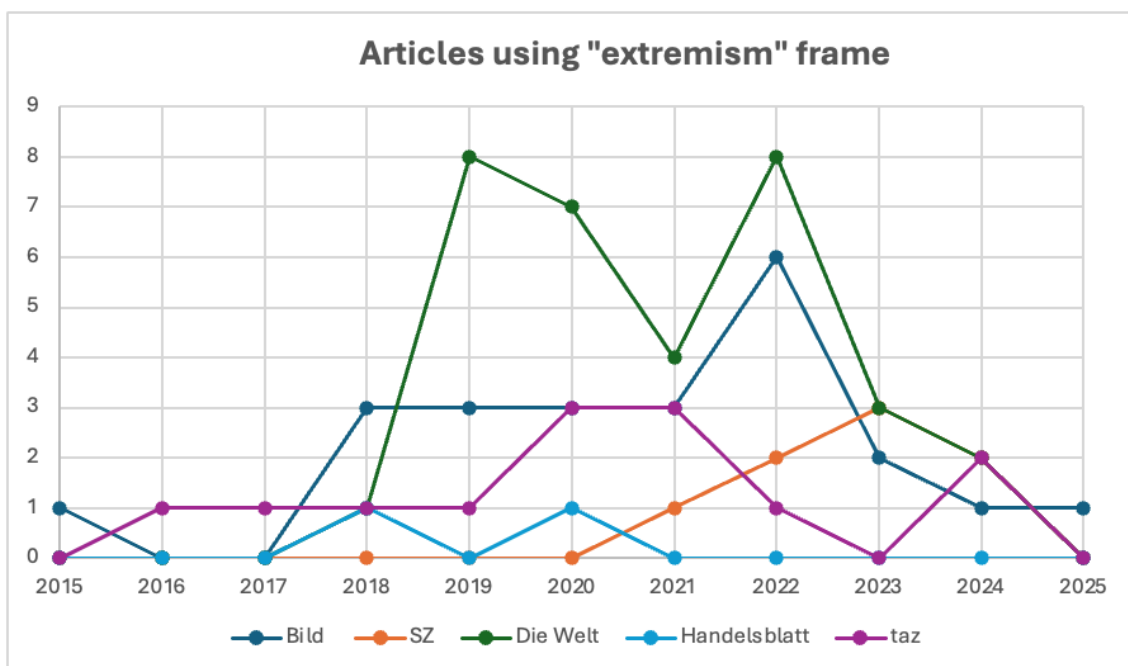
The following paragraphs will first go through the aggregated patterns of framing and then point out differences and similarities between newspapers and their word choices. Lastly, it will see if direct references to the intelligence agency match to the use of any of the previous frames.

Overall use of the ‘extremism’ frame

Over the entire period, 79 articles out of 407 were found that mention ‘extremism’, with the highest use per year being in 2022 with 17. Prior to the categorisation of EG as potentially extremist by the LfV of Berlin in its report for 2019, which was published in May 2020, only 22 out of 248 articles on EG contained this frame, i.e., roughly 8.87 %. After May 2020, 57 out of 159 remaining articles used the ‘extremism’ frame, which is 35.8 %. Given the significant variation of article numbers over the years, the percentage of ‘extremism’ frames per total article number each year was also calculated and 2024 had the highest with only thirteen articles on EG, 7 of which mentioned ‘extremism’.

Over the entire period of the dataset, Handelsblatt only published two articles with this frame, SZ published eight, taz published 13, Bild published 23 and Die Welt published 33.

Figure 2 - distribution of articles using “extremism” frame per newspaper from 2015 - 2025



While only taz seems to have had an increase of the frame in the year 2020, when the LfV report from Berlin was published, both Bild and Die Welt used ‘extremism’ significantly more in 2022 than in the previous year. Lastly, SZ can be seen as having a low but increasing usage of the frame, with two uses in 2024, which on the graph are covered by the other two newspaper lines.

Bild - ‘extremism’ frame

As the newspaper with the first and the last usage of the ‘extremism’ frame in articles of this dataset, Bild deserves the first closer look. The first usage is in terms of “Öko-Extremismus” (eco-extremism), which as a concept surprisingly has its own chapter in *The Palgrave Handbook of Left-Wing Extremism, Vol. II*, but in the context of the article is a direct quote from a twenty-three-year-old coal-miner who founded a Facebook group against a recent EG mass action protest.⁷⁷ The article itself refers to the EG activists as ‘Kohle-Krawallos’ (climate-rioters).⁷⁸ The next use of the ‘extremism’ frame, is an article from October 2018, in which the dangers of being in a coal mine for activists, especially with children, is the main topic but the supposed presence of ‘left-wing extremist groups’ in the protest action is referred to from a local newspaper rather than directly stated.⁷⁹ The next article in the dataset again quotes a worker from the energy company that calls the protestors ‘left-wing extremists’, while the following two articles already quote the then federal minister of interior, Herbert Reul, in this assumption. In an article from June 2019, the ‘left-wing extremist influence’ on EG and other environmental groups is first put into direct connection to the BfV, even if the article first mentions the intelligence agency and later on quotes an ‘institutional assessment’, without specifying from which institution it comes.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ See Miroslav Mares, ‘Environmental Apocalypticism, Other Forms of Eco-Extremism, and Their Links to the Left-Wing Extremist Scene’ in Jose Pedro Zuquete (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Left-Wing Extremism, Vol. II* (Switzerland 2023), pp. 277-291

⁷⁸ Nina Stampflmeier, ‘RWE-Azubi macht mobil gegen Kohle-Krawallos’, *Bild Zeitung* (21.08.2015), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.bild.de/regional/koeln/braunkohle/rwe-azubi-macht-mobil-gegen-kohle-krawallos-42274132.bild.html>

⁷⁹ Nina Stampflmeier, Birgit Begasse, ‘Lebensgefahr am Hambacher Forst!: Demonstranten mit Kindern an der Abbruchkante’, *Bild Zeitung* (28.10.2018), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.bild.de/regional/koeln/koeln-aktuell/hambacher-forst-demonstranten-mit-kindern-an-der-abbruchkante-58093448.bild.html>

⁸⁰ Lars Petersen, ‘Fridays for Future Linksextreme wollen Demos unterwandern’, *Bild Zeitung* (16.06.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/fridays-for-future-linksextreme-wollen-schueler-demos-unterwandern-62652016.bild.html>

After the categorisation of EG as potentially extremist by the LfV Berlin, the articles using the ‘extremism’ frame not only increase and quote the report, but also institutional disagreement over it gets covered. The first of such articles criticises the regional vice-president of the German police union, Michael Maatz, who had expressed in an interview his opposition to this categorisation. The article described this opinion as ‘irritating’ and then quotes a politician from the liberal party, FDP, and another high police official as both backing the report.⁸¹ Another type of institutional engagement that multiple articles perform, is connecting the categorisation to individuals, such as Kathrin Henneberger from the Green Party and Isabelle Vandré from the Linke, a far-left party, as both of them were publicly engaged in actions of EG and both were elected to the German parliament at one point.

Süddeutsche Zeitung - ‘extremism’ frame

The first article using the ‘extremism’ frame regarding EG is from September 2021, which makes it the latest of all the observed newspapers. The article focuses on the exchange of tactics between different environmental groups and the categorisation by the BfV is mentioned but neither central to the article, nor actively commented on. The second article from November 2022, however, extensively engages with the debate about how far EG’s anti-capitalistic stance can legitimately be seen as anti-democratic and, thus, should be under the observation of the BfV. The article mentions the observation of Green party politicians in the 80s by the intelligence agency due to their anti-nuclear stance and takes an openly critical stance to the categorisation of the group.⁸² A trend of discussing the supposed anti-constitutionalism of environmental groups in general, rather than just EG, is visible over the entire period and the prior is mostly just mentioned as a group that has already been categorised as such. The other group of articles that mention EG and extremism, are on the intelligence reports themselves, mentioning also developments in the far right and Islamist scene. As such, these articles take a neutral approach and limit themselves to quoting the intelligence agency.

⁸¹ Peter Poensgen, ‘Irritierende Aussage von Polizei-Gewerkschafter; GdP-Vize findet "Ende Gelände" nicht (ganz) extrem’, *Bild Zeitung* (22.05.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.bild.de/regional/duesseldorf/duesseldorf-regional-politik-und-wirtschaft/gdp-vize-findet-ende-gelae-nde-nicht-ganz-extrem-70815728.bild.html>

⁸² Ronen Steinke, ‘Verfassungsschutz: Klimaaktivisten im Visier des Geheimdienstes’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (22.11.2022), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/klimaaktivisten-verfassungsschutz-extremismus-1.5700070?reduced=true>

Die Welt - 'extremism' frame

As the newspaper with the most articles using the 'extremism' frame, Die Welt shows some interesting trends. While the first mentioning of it is connected to an occupation of a forest, in which EG participated in, and mentions the presence of 'gewaltbereite Extremisten'⁸³ (violent extremists) as stated by the local police, the second article from April 2019 already takes up the BfV narrative of EG being a project of left-wing extremists to begin with. By June of the same year, an article described EG as 'left-wing extremist' but neither as a quote, nor in connection to any specific BfV or LfV report.⁸⁴ While the LfV report from Berlin was not published yet, other regions LfVs already discussed EG's potential instrumentalization by far-left actors, but by not even referencing them, Die Welt makes a significant claim on its own. Rather than a long-term trend, as most articles that use the 'extremism' frame afterwards do reference the intelligence agency, it shows a willingness to apply the frame also on its own. Starting in 2019, as highlighted in the previous graph, and till 2024, Die Welt shows a significantly higher use of the frame than the other newspapers. The spike in 2022 can partially be explained by the accumulation of different campaigns that year, both locally against fossil fuel infrastructure and in Hamburg with other environmental groups.

Handelsblatt - 'extremism' frame

With only two uses of the 'extremism' frame, the newspaper seems at first to take a neutral stance. The first use is from August 2018 and describes that the previously mentioned minister of interior Herbert Reul warned from the excessive use of violence by 'left-wing extremists' in the context of an occupied forest and rioting with the police. The second article, however, is from the date of the publishing of the Berlin LfV report and takes an interesting approach. Rather than simply informing on the content of the report, i.e., the categorisation, the article focuses principally on the opposition by the Green Party, the democratic Socialist youth association, and die Linke (far-left) against this decision.⁸⁵

⁸³ Kristian Frigelj, 'Am Mittag fällt der Monopod', *Die Welt* (14.09.2018), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at https://www.welt.de/print/welt_kompakt/print_politik/article181527356/Am-Mittag-faellt-der-Monopod.html

⁸⁴ Lennart Pfahler, 'Kult und Kohle', *Die Welt* (13.06.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at https://www.welt.de/print/welt_kompakt/vermisches/article195179121/Kult-und-Kohle.html

⁸⁵ Dpa, 'Geheimdienst: Nachwuchs von SPD, Grünen und Linken fordern Aus für Verfassungsschutz', *Handelsblatt* (21.05.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/geheimdienst-nachwuchs-von-spd-gruenen-und-linken-fordern-aus-fuer-verfassungsschutz/25849160.html>

All three political groups request the abolition of the intelligence agency, both due to its criminalisation of environmental groups and incompetence towards right-wing violence in the article.

Tageszeitung (taz) - ‘extremism’ frame

The 13 uses of the ‘extremism’ frame in this newspaper seem to follow a clear trend. Except for an article from August 2017, which warned of potential violence similar to that of the G20 riots in Hamburg that year at an EG protest, all other articles that use the frame, also mention the intelligence agency directly. The article after the publishing of the Berlin LfV report, explicitly points to ‘Kapitalismuskritik’ (critique of capitalism) as the main reason for the categorisation and asks sarcastically if the agency will soon also observe Pope Francis due to his support of the environmental movement.⁸⁶ This critical stance of the newspaper is also visible in other articles, such as one from a year after in which EG’s categorisation is described as ‘arbitrary’, a spokesperson of the movement reinforces its anti-capitalistic stance, and the title of the article is ‘Climate protection is anti-constitutional’.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ taz, ‘Antikapitalistische Allianzen’, *Tageszeitung* (26.06.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Antikapitalistische-Allianzen/!5696968/>

⁸⁷ Erik Peter, ‘Klimaschutz ist Verfassungsfeindlich’, *Tageszeitung* (05.06.2021), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Ende-Gelaende-und-der-Verfassungsschutz/!5776149/>

Overall use of the the ‘radicalism’ frame

Over the entire period covered by the dataset, 71 articles used the ‘radicalism’ frame, with the highest use by year in 2019 with 17 articles. Prior to the categorisation of EG as potentially extremist by the LfV of Berlin, roughly 10.5% of the articles used this frame. For the period after, 28,3% or 45 out of 159 used it. With the exception of 2025, in which both articles used the frame, the highest percentage used relative to the article number of the year was in 2022 with 42%. As for the distribution across newspapers, with the exception of the Handelsblatt with only 3 uses, both Bild and SZ used the frame 14 times each, and Die Welt and taz 20 times.

Figure 3 - distribution of articles using “radicalism” frame per newspaper from 2015 - 2025

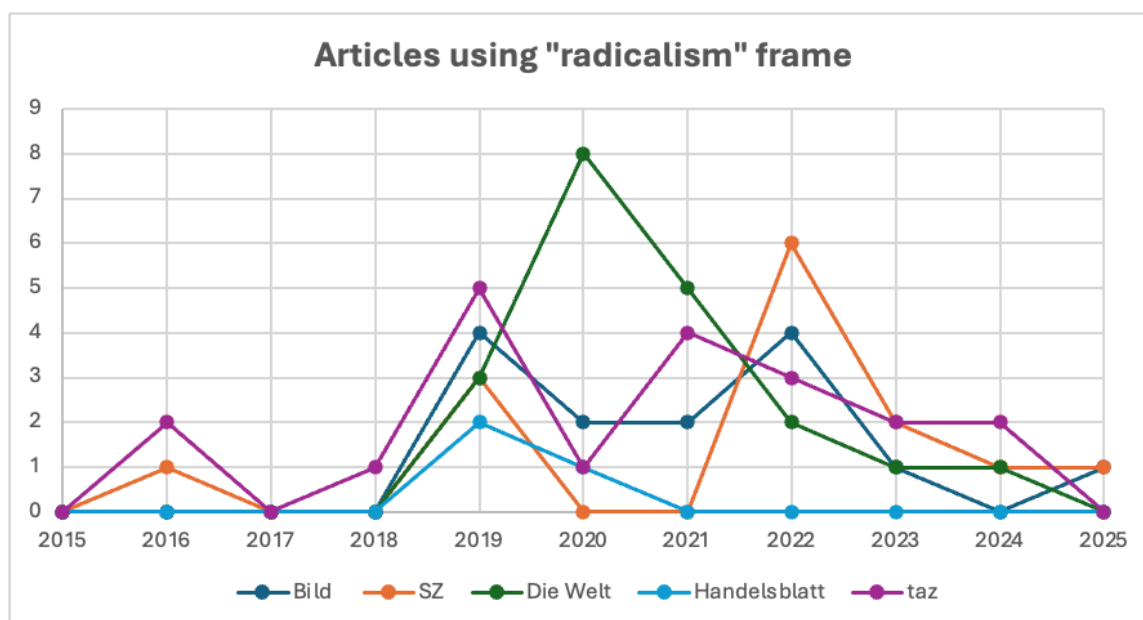


Bild - ‘radicalism’ frame

Of the 14 uses, five times there were no other analysed frames present. While the term was mostly used as an adjective, e.g., radical climate-activists, radical association, and radical anti-coal movement, the use as a noun can also be observed, e.g., ‘Klima-Radikale’ (climate radicals), ‘Radikalos’ (radicals), and ‘Öko-Radikale’ (eco-radicals). The first use in 2019, in terms of ‘radical actors’, results to be a direct quote from an activist rather than actively used by the article.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Stefan Schlagenhaufen, ‘Umweltschützer rufen zu Blockade und zivilem Ungehorsam auf; Drohen der IAA Klima-Krawalle?’, *Bild Zeitung* (19.07.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.bild.de/regional/frankfurt/frankfurt-aktuell/frankfurt-drohen-der-iaa-klima-krawalle-63401318.bild.html>

At the end of the year, however, an article also described EG as ‘radical climate activists’, while also highlighting the illegal aspects of the group’s mass action protests. In the cases where the frame is used in combination, it is usually used to describe the majority of those involved rather than just one part.

Süddeutsche Zeitung - ‘radicalism’ frame

Of the 14 uses, ten times the ‘radicalism’ frame was used on its own. Like previously, the term was used both as an adjective and a noun, but the usage varied more. Starting from an article from 2016, in which EG is accused by an impacted energy company to have lost control over a faction of its campaign, that faction is described as “radikale Kräfte” (radical forces) in a direct quotation by the prior.⁸⁹ The second use on its own, is from a self-report written by Linda Rübesamen, who describes herself as a ‘radikaler Öko’ (radical ecologist).⁹⁰ Rather than going through each of the usages, a general preference for the term is recognisable to describe EG.

Die Welt - ‘radicalism’ frame

The use of this frame, forms a rather steep increase up to 8 in 2020 on the graph, followed by an only slightly less steep descent. In total, 20 articles appear with the word but only four of them use it on its own. The first usage is in an article written by a self-described ex-activist, who criticises the radical answers (‘radikale Antworten’) of the movement as unrealistic and out of touch with reality.⁹¹ The two following article with the standalone use of this frame, talk about how the Green party tries to build connections to these environmental social movements, which in turn are described as more radical (‘radikaler’)⁹² than the party itself.

⁸⁹ Dpa, ‘Vattenfall: Kritik an Kohle-Aktivisten’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (17.05.2016), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/vattenfall-kritik-an-kohle-aktivisten-1.2995681>

⁹⁰ Linda Rübesamen, ‘Auf geht's, ab geht's’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (03.08.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/ende-gelaende-garzweiler-1.4550028?reduced=true>

⁹¹ Clemens Traub, ‘Die Sorgen der Kohlearbeiter sind Fridays for Future egal’, *Die Welt* (21.03.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article206664119/Klimaaktivisten-Die-Sorgen-der-Kohlearbeiter-sind-Fridays-for-Future-egal.html>

⁹² Frederik Schindler, ‘Wie nah rücken Grüne und Fridays for Future zusammen?’, *Die Welt* (21.08.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/plus214048672/Bundestagswahl-Wie-nah-ruecken-Gruene-und-Fridays-for-Future-zusammen.html>

Handelsblatt - ‘radicalism’ frame

With a grand total of only three uses, this frame is surprisingly only used in articles on its own. The first article is about ‘radikaler Systemwechsel’ (radical system change) as a not comprehensible goal of young activists when faced with representatives of the German industry, the second is a quote from a union representative that describes EG’s protests as ‘recht radikal’ (quite radical), and lastly the necessary political change needed to meet the agreed upon climate goals is described in terms of ‘radikales Umsteuern’ (radical direction change).⁹³

Tageszeitung (taz) - ‘radicalism’ frame

In the taz, of the twenty uses of the frame, fifteen are on its own. From the start, EG activists are described as ‘radikalere Umweltschützer’ (more radical environmentalists) in multiple articles, and the radicalism of their demands is portrayed in the peacefulness of their actions.⁹⁴ At the same time, smaller groups that partake in EG’s campaigns are also described as ‘radikalere Gruppen’ (more radical groups), using smaller, ‘militant’ blockades.⁹⁵ Similar to SZ, a preference to use the ‘radicalism’ frame when describing EG is easily recognisable, especially when differentiating it from other big environmental social movements, e.g., Fridays for Future (FFF). What differentiates the use in the latter part of the dataset, is the recurring debate about what levels of ‘radicalism’ are acceptable and useful, i.e., the idea of a ‘radical flank’ is explicitly mentioned.⁹⁶

⁹³ Handelsblatt, ‘Braunkohleabbau; Aktivisten demonstrieren im Rheinland gegen Braunkohle’, *Handelsblatt* (26.09.2020), not accessible online at this point

⁹⁴ Klaus Farin, ‘Radikalangepasst’, *Tageszeitung* (18.03.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Radikal-angepasst/!5580896&s=fridays+for+future&SuchRahmen=Print/>

⁹⁵ Martin Kaul, ‘Jetzt ist wieder "Ende Gelände"', *Tageszeitung* (20.06.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Proteste-gegen-Braunkohlefoerderung/!5604399/>

⁹⁶ Erik Peter, Timm Kühn, ‘Radikalität der Klimabewegung; „Auch Sabotage ist friedlich"', *Tageszeitung* (17.08.2021), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Radikalitaet-der-Klimabewegung/!5789719/>

Overall use of the the ‘radicalisation’ frame

As the least used frame, ‘radicalisation’ was only used in 29 articles over the entire period and only started to appear in the year 2019. Handelsblatt has not used it at all, hence is absent from the graph, which nonetheless looks confusing. The highest use was in the year 2022, with a total of 8 articles using some form of it.

Figure 4 - distribution of articles using “radicalisation” frame per newspaper from 2015 - 2025

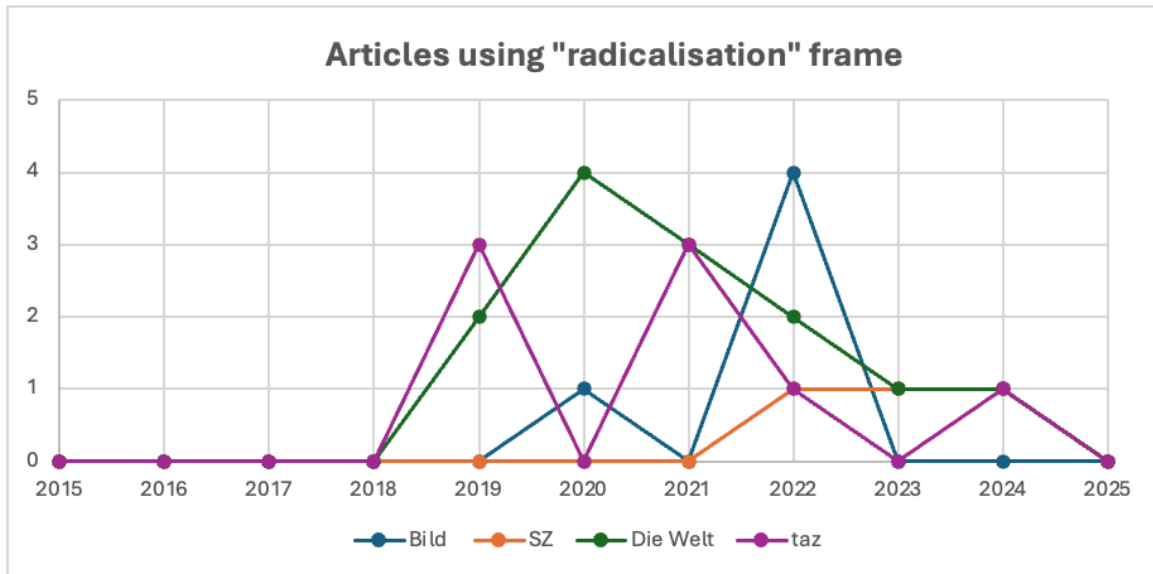


Bild - ‘radicalisation’ frame

On the third place, with a usage of the frame in 5 articles, Bild only adopts it when the intelligence report from Berlin for 2019, in May 2020, is published and only as a direct quote. In a latter article from 2022, the ‘radicalisation’ of a different environmental group to the levels of EG is discussed, with the latter being described as part of the ‘*militante Klima-Gruppen*’ (militant climate groups).⁹⁷ In another article, the implications of a ‘radicalisation’ are explained as more activists finding it acceptable to break laws.

Süddeutsche Zeitung - ‘radicalisation’ frame

While SZ only uses the frame in three articles, some insights can be gained. The first article mentioning the concept, from October 2022, directly links a ‘*Radikalisierungspirale*’ (radicalisation-spiral) to the ‘self-marginalisation’ of a group, while stressing the potential of

⁹⁷ Bild, ‘KLIMA-KLEBER IMMER RADIKALER!’, *Bild Zeitung* (22.02.2022), not accessible online at this moment

green-conservatism rather than of the far-left.⁹⁸ Another article, from March 2023, highlights the contrast between politicians, in this case from the liberal party, declaring a clear ‘radicalisation’ pattern in the environmental social movements, while an academic expert in protests says the opposite and does not recognise this trend.⁹⁹

Die Welt - ‘radicalisation’ frame

With thirteen articles using this frame, Die Welt is in first place of the five in terms of usage. Similar to Bild, the first articles mentioning the frame, directly quote it out of intelligence reports in the year 2019. In May 2020, shortly after the Berlin intelligence report had been published, an article talks of ‘Radikalisierungsschwung’ (radicalisation-momentum) but rather than referring to EG, the article goes on criticising the local Green party for having passed a law against racial profiling of the police force.¹⁰⁰ Rather than unrelated, the article then goes on to criticise the party’s youth movement for having protested against the ‘extremism’ categorisation of EG and declared solidarity with the social movement. The next article using the frame, directly interviews Michael Fischer, the then head of the Berlin intelligence office, and reinforces the narrative presented in the reports.¹⁰¹ The last article using the frame in 2020, brings it even further by claiming that ‘a majority of journalists sneak towards a radicalising environmental movement’¹⁰² but actively decide to ignore it. In the rest of the articles, the use of the frame as a warning remains but both academics and climate activists are involved to reinforce the narrative.

⁹⁸ Philip Bovermann, ‘Klimaschutz ist nicht links’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (20.10.2022), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/thunberg-klimaschutz-fridays-for-future-1.5677676?reduced=true>

⁹⁹ Thomas Hummel, Benedikt Peters, ‘Mit neuen Freunden gegen die FDP’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (03.03.2023), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/fridays-for-future-klimastreik-verdi-3-maerz-1.5760868?reduced=true>

¹⁰⁰ Ulf Porschardt, ‘Koalitionsfantasien: Die deprimierende Aussicht auf Rot-Rot-Grün’, *Die Welt* (23.05.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at

<https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/plus208143389/Koalitionsfantasien-Die-deprimierende-Aussicht-auf-Rot-Rot-Gruen.html>

¹⁰¹ Kristian Frigelj, ‘Linksextremisten suchen Anschluss’ *Die Welt* (02.06.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at

<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article208731147/Klimaschutzbewegung-Linksextremisten-suchen-Anschluss.html>

¹⁰² Ulf Porschardt, ‘Schockierendes Lehrstück über den Opportunismus der Eliten’, *Die Welt* (28.10.2020), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at

<https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/plus218801616/Fridays-for-Future-Lehrstueck-ueber-den-Opportunismus-etablierter-Eliten.html>

Tageszeitung (taz) - ‘radicalisation’ frame

With a total of eight articles making use of the frame, taz takes the second place after Die Welt. The first article mentioning ‘radicalisation’ is from June 2019 and deals with the potential ‘Radikalität’ (radicality) of the more centrist FFF movement. Rather than portraying the process as towards violence, the article criticises the youth movement for having more similarities to the youth movement of the Christian democratic party (‘Junge Union’) than with EG.¹⁰³ Another article, again about students, quotes the police president of a smaller town in saying that the youth should “be politicised” but not “radicalised”.¹⁰⁴ This statement is seen critically in the article, as the group in question is about to participate in a EG mass protest action. Later in the year, an article directly criticises the intelligence agency for stating that EG is radicalising other groups, and calls this claim an untruth (‘Unwahrheit’).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Kerstin Augustin, Simon Wörz, ‘Zwei Demos, ein Ziel’, *Tageszeitung* (18.06.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Fridays-for-Future-und-Ende-Gelaende/!5600358/>

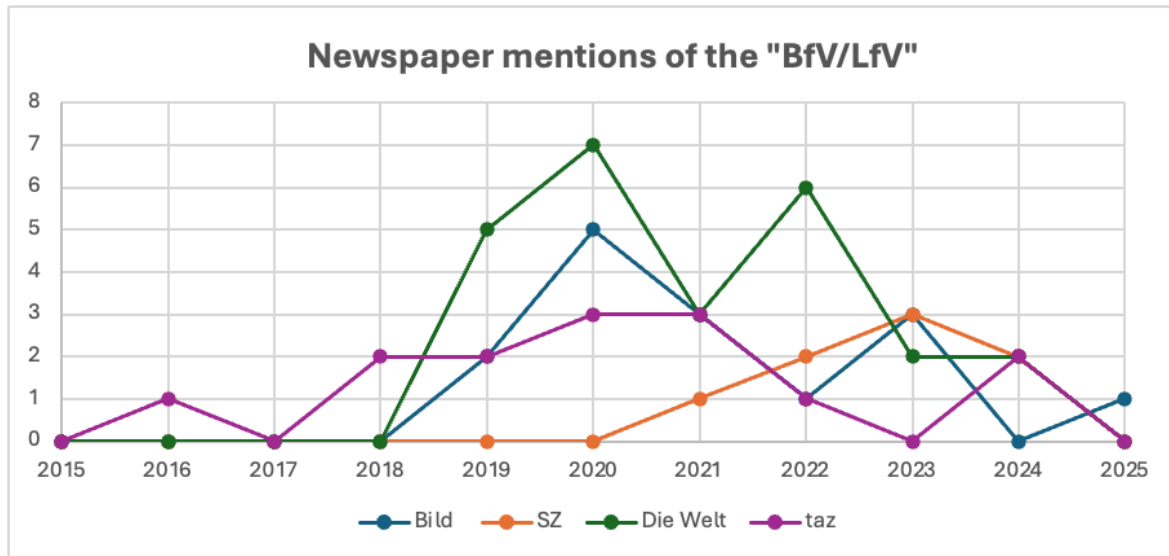
¹⁰⁴ Bernd Müllender, ‘Radikalisieren verboten!’, *Tageszeitung* (21.06.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Aktionen-von-Fridays-for-Future-in-NRW/!5601982/>

¹⁰⁵ Anette Selle, ‘Klimaschützer linksextrem?’, *Tageszeitung* (05.07.2019), last accessed on the 27.07.2025, at <https://taz.de/Verfassungsschutz-ueber-Kohleproteste/!5605385/>

Overall references to the ‘Verfassungsschutz’

Over the entire period of the dataset, the domestic intelligence agency appears in 62 articles, which equals to around 15.2%. The highest mention of it was in the year 2020 with 16. The newspaper that mentioned it the most is Die Welt (25), then Bild (15), taz (14), SZ (7) and lastly Handelsblatt, with only one mention.

Figure 5 - distribution of articles using “radicalisation” frame per newspaper from 2015 - 2025



Insights & Discussion

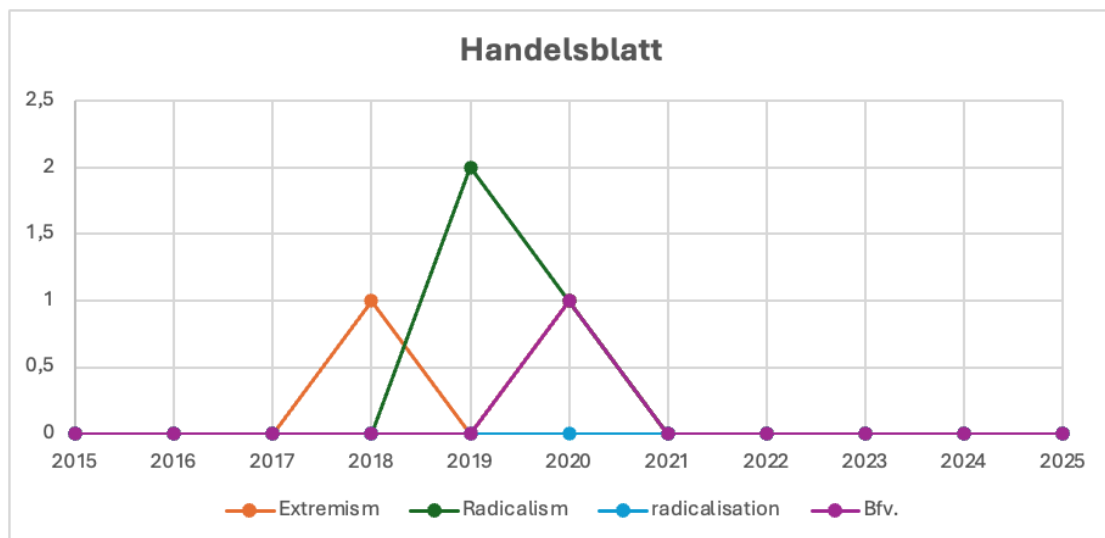
The following paragraphs will discuss how far the conception of the German domestic intelligence agency as part of a hegemonic apparatus are potentially mirrored in the distribution and patterns of the articles, containing the previous frames and the mentioning of the agency, and what these patterns potentially could tell us.

The newspapers

Handelsblatt

This newspaper has both the lowest number of articles (41), the lowest number of articles mentioning the ‘extremism’ frame (2), the ‘radicalism’ frame (3), the ‘radicalisation’ frame (0), and only one article mentioning the intelligence agency.

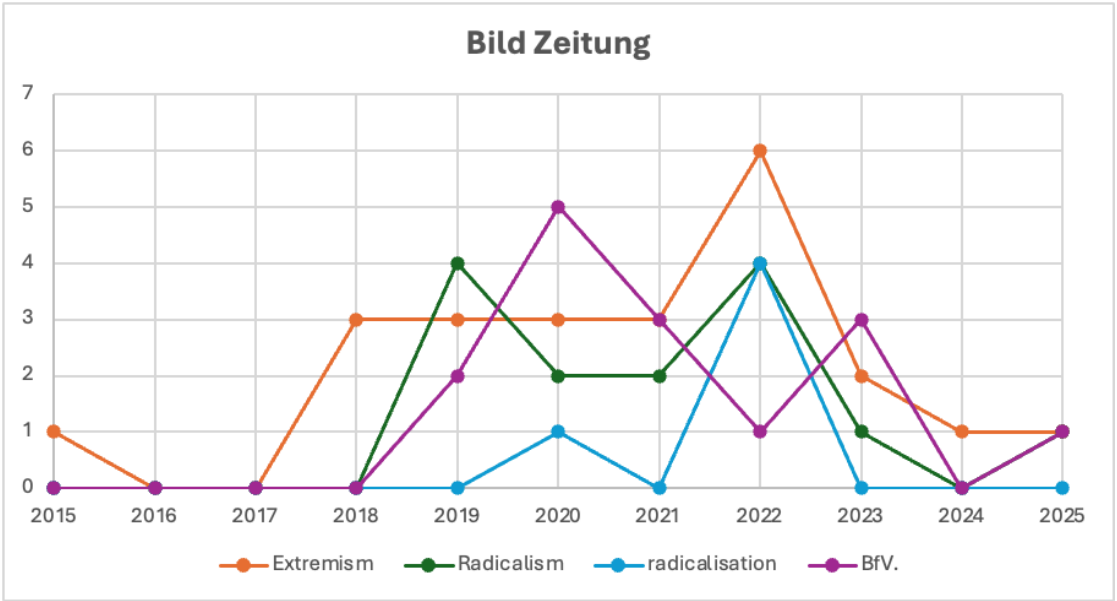
Figure 6 - Use of frames from 2015 - 2025, Handelsblatt



Bild

In total, Bild has 103 articles in the dataset, with 23 articles mentioning ‘extremism’, 14 mentioning ‘radicalism’, 5 mentioning ‘radicalisation’, and 15 mentioning the intelligence agency.

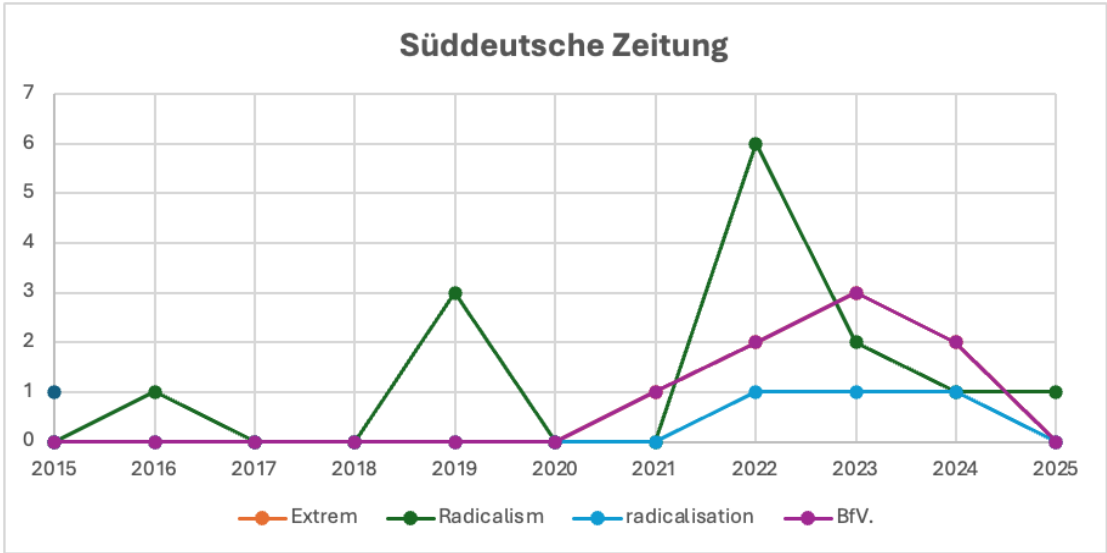
Figure 7 - Use of frames from 2015 - 2025, Bild Zeitung



Süddeutsche Zeitung

With a total of 56 articles, 8 articles mentioning the ‘extremism’ frame, 14 mentioning the ‘radicalism’ frame, 3 mentioning the ‘radicalisation’ frame, and 8 articles mentioning the domestic intelligence agency, the resulting graph looks as follows.

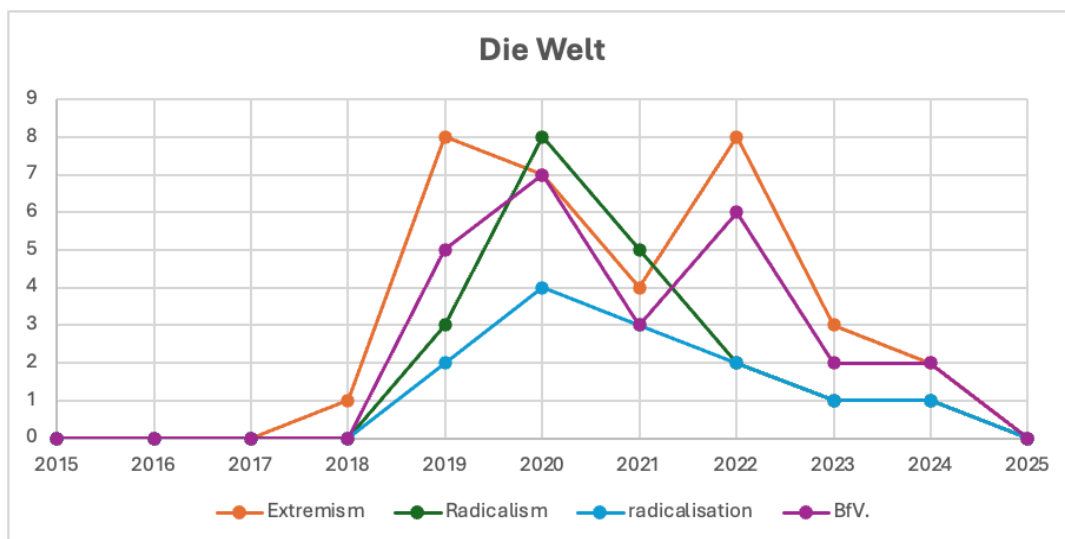
Figure 8 - Use of frames from 2015 - 2025, Süddeutsche Zeitung



Die Welt

This newspaper has 67 articles in the dataset, 33 of which mention the ‘extremism’ frame, 20 the ‘radicalism’ frame, 13 the ‘radicalisation’ one, and 25 the intelligence agency.

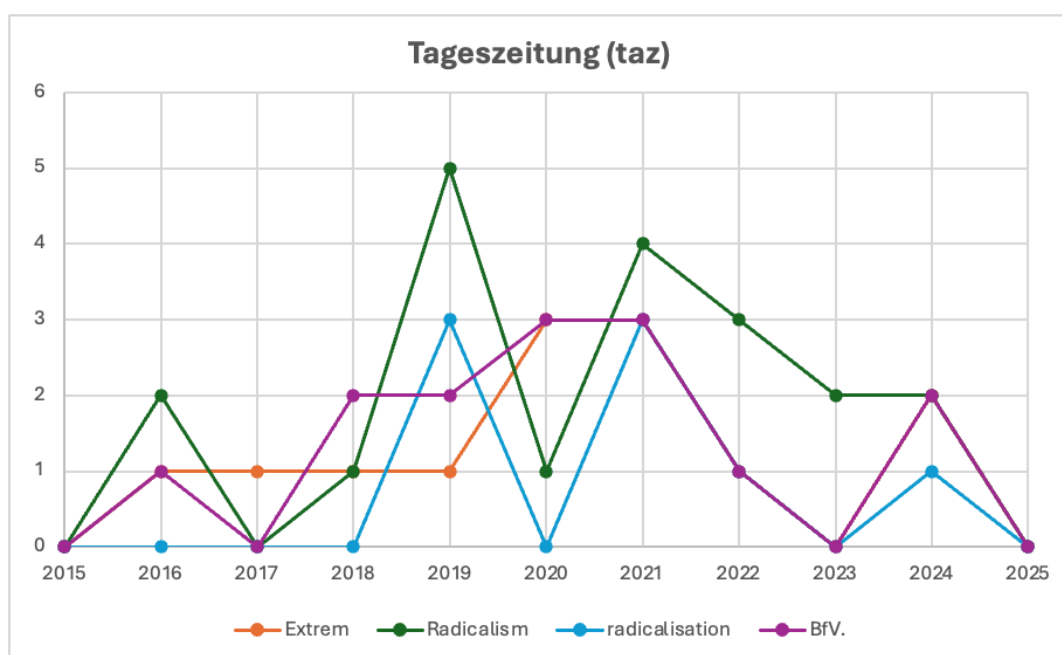
Figure 9 - Use of frames from 2015 - 2025, die Welt



Tageszeitung (taz)

With the highest number of articles in the dataset at 140, taz has 13 articles mentioning the ‘extremism’ frame, 20 mentioning ‘radicalism’, 8 mentioning ‘radicalisation’, and 14 mentioning the intelligence agency.

Figure 10 - Use of frames from 2015 - 2025, Tageszeitung



Potential reading of the graphs

The newspaper article graphs of Bild and Handelsblatt do not seem to show particular insights for different reasons, i.e., the first has close to none of the analysed frames while the latter has many data points but the patterns do not seem to match. Rather than there being a necessary minimum number of articles, the analysis does not imply any statistical relevance but rather aims to propose a tentative answer in a parsimonious way. Due to this, other frames, such as accusations of ‘terrorism’ were left out, as they only matched with too few articles, in a limited number of the observed newspapers.

One of such potential patterns, can be seen in the SZ graph, in which the ‘extremism’ frame line coincides with the mentionings of the intelligence agency line. Again, the data points are limited, but the pattern is recognisable. In a similar fashion, the two same lines also coincide for the most part, i.e., except for the years ‘17, ‘18, and ‘19, in the graph with the framing and mentions patterns of the taz. In the latter, the ‘radicalization’ frame also matches with the ‘extremism’ and intelligence agency mention line for the years ‘21, ‘22, and ‘23. At the same time, the ‘radicalization’ frame line also seems to run in parallel to the ‘radicalism’ line for the years ‘19, ‘20, ‘21.

For the Die Welt graph, very few frame lines directly coincide, i.e., only the ‘radicalisation’ and ‘radicalism’ lines for the last three years of the dataset, but a pattern seems to be recognisable, nonetheless. 2018 to 2019, shows a major increase in all the frames and mentions which, apart from the ‘extremism’ frame, continues to the next year. Interestingly, the mentions of the intelligence agency seem to run parallel to both the ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalism’ lines from ‘18 onwards. Rather than a coincidence, the role of this line for both Die Welt and taz can be seen as giving a novel insight, which might require more future research.

As the findings have hopefully shown, Die Welt is far less critical of the framing of EG as ‘extremist’ by the intelligence agency compared to the taz, which mentions and cites the reports mostly to critique it. Rather than showing opposing patterns, however, the two newspapers seem to show a comparable dominance of one frame over another. While for Die Welt, the ‘extremism’ framing is, with the exception of ‘20 and ‘21, higher than the ‘radicalism’ one, the taz shows the opposite, with the ‘extremism’ frame only higher in 2020.

In terms of the theory that sees the BfV as a ‘hegemonic apparatus’, the patterns revealed by this research can have some relevance but require further inquiry.

While not every mention of ‘extremism’ in the dataset is connected to the intelligence agency, i.e., some coming from citations of politicians, officials or counter-protestors, overall both Die Welt and taz seem to take the agency as a central point of reference for this frame. For the latter, however, the statement from earlier research that describes its audience as ‘very sympathetic to social movements’¹⁰⁶ still seems to hold true and ‘radicalism’ is for the most part the dominant frame. Rather than not taking the BfV as a point of reference, though, taz seems to construct its stance in contrast and opposition to it. The problematic and long history of the BfV also makes it a fairly easy target. Die Welt, on the other hand, takes the agency as an authoritative source and seems to construct all three other frames in parallel to it. The question remains why for the coverage of EG by Bild, owned as well by Axel Springer SE, the agency plays a more limited role and the ‘extremism’ frame is used more freely. Either way, taz can be seen as representing a counter-hegemonic stance, in which the ‘extremism’ framing takes on an instrumental and delegitimising role, actively employed by the BfV. That the ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’ frames coincide with the mentions of the BfV in the years ‘21, ‘22 and ‘23 support this claim. Die Welt, on the other hand, is very uncritical of the BfV framing and categorisation of EG and accepts its authority for multiple frames. While the ‘radicalism’ and ‘radicalisation’ frame coincide for the latter from 2022 onwards, for taz the two frames do at no significant point, for example.

That the ‘extremism’ frame and the mentions of the BfV also coincide for the SZ could, thus, also be seen in similar terms as for the taz. Rather than from the graph itself, this insight is gained from the manual coding of the frames but the graph seems to confirm both a limited use of the frame and one always citing the source of it. In contrast, Bild seems to use the ‘extremism’ frame in more articles than mention the BfV, except for the years ‘20 and ‘23. As such, including mentions of the intelligence agency has revealed some tentative answers to the role the BfV plays for the coverage of EG in the German mainstream press. Rather than a neutral source of intelligence for the sake of defending German democracy from within, the research has shown that its categorisation and framing of EG as potentially extremist coincides with the framing patterns in major newspapers, which either criticise or embrace it.

¹⁰⁶ Felix Kolb, ‘Chapter 5 - The Impact of Transnational Protest on Social Movement Organizations: Mass Media and the Making of ATTAC Germany’ in Donatella della Porta, Sidney Tarrow (ed.), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Oxford 2005), p. 98

Limitations

As previously mentioned, the research does neither claim intrinsic validity from the data, i.e., causation or even correlation, nor the finding of a definitive answer. Much rather, the novel approach to framing patterns aimed at giving a tentative answer to the role the German intelligence agency plays in the overall framing of EG as a social movement organisation in the mainstream press. As the intelligence agency's role in the state is unique to Germany, the generalisability of this approach is also limited, but it could in the future also be applied to new and emerging social movements. As EG is the first to be officially categorised as 'potentially extremist', future categorisations of social movements by the intelligence agency can also be analysed in a similar fashion. This brings us to the point of protest and campaign cycles, which is dependent on some 'main determinants'¹⁰⁷ far beyond the scope of this project. Previous research on environmental group representation in German media has also stressed the emergence of other events, such as the Russian aggression of Ukraine, as taking away space from social movements in terms of 'the media and the public's attention.'¹⁰⁸ Either way, the general trend of articles on EG seems to show the end of a potential first wave or cycle. Ultimately, the inability to trace a pattern in Bild is also limiting, as it is by far the largest daily national newspaper.

¹⁰⁷ Donatella della Porta, 'Protest Cycles and Waves' in David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Doug McAdam, Bart Klandermans (ed.), *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (Hoboken, 2023), p. 2

¹⁰⁸ Lederer et al., 'Radical climate movements', p. 8

Implications and Conclusion

Starting from a dataset with 407 articles mentioning EG from the most read German national daily newspapers of the past ten years, the research managed to add a valuable tentative response to the role the German intelligence agency plays in the framing of this particular social movement. As the legitimacy of a social movement will remain ‘not easy to measure’¹⁰⁹ in the foreseeable future, the media frame patterns and mentions analysed and presented in this research add to the debate. Rather than arguing in terms of a positive politicization and a supposed ‘dark side’¹¹⁰, i.e., polarization, the theoretical framework of Assall was helpful in highlighting the important role the domestic intelligence agency plays in shaping opinions both for and against EG in terms of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives, while still in the mainstream. As the graphs for both Die Welt and taz highlighted, the mentioning of the intelligence agency either coincided or closely followed the ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’ frame. But while the taz showed a dominance of the ‘radicalism’ frame for the majority of the time, the articles of Die Welt in this dataset seemed to favour the ‘extremism’ one. Thus, taz uses a frame that the social movement uses by itself, while Die Welt imposes the frame and largely justifies its use by referencing the intelligence agency as a higher authority, supposedly there to protect the democratic core of the German state. The presence of both a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interpretation of the social movement in the mainstream daily German press should be interpreted positively. The mixed history of the BfV as protector of the constitution, makes its ‘extremism’ frame dominate both on the side of those that respect its authority, as well as on those that mention it in opposition to their stance.

¹⁰⁹ Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, political violence, and the state: A comparative analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge 1995), p. 3

¹¹⁰ Lederer et al., ‘Radical climate movements’, p. 1

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