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AICGSPOLICY**REPORT**

THE MEDIA, PERCEPTIONS, AND POLICY IN GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

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THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

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STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION
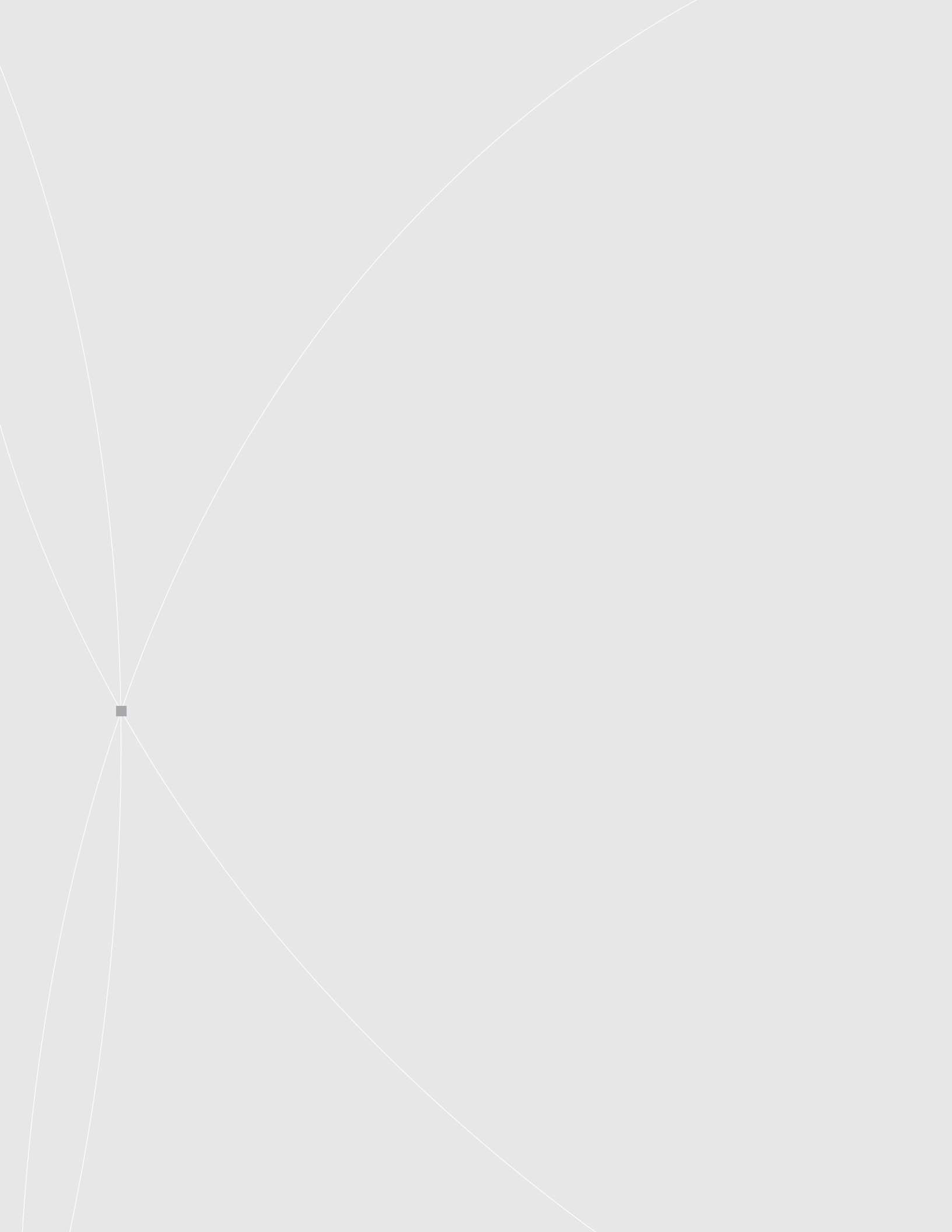
FOREWORD

Differences over the Iraq war led to unprecedented levels of tension in the German-American and transatlantic relationships. The intensity of the division was reflected in the news coverage and images played out in the media on both sides of the Atlantic.

In Germany, the rhetoric employed and images broadcast of the United States were largely negative and frequently stereotypical. Bush was depicted as Rambo or as a gun-slinging cowboy; analogies to Vietnam were drawn; and cheap oil and expanding U.S. power were the motives cited for going to war. In the United States, the mainstream press focused on Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's anti-American rhetoric and the active opposition of the German government to the Iraq war in early 2003. More partisan outlets spoke of German "ingratitude" and derided Germans as wimps and appeasers.

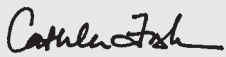These differing media realities raised important questions regarding the role of the media in intensifying transatlantic conflicts and deepening the feelings of a growing and perhaps enduring transatlantic divide. In the case of the Iraq war, were the media, in fact, part of the problem? The assessment after the Iraq war was that both the German and U.S. media failed to provide their respective publics with balanced reporting and fell short of journalistic standards in both countries. But does the problem extend beyond Iraq war reporting to more fundamental trends in the U.S. and German media?

The AICGS project on Media and Politics in Germany and the United States was established to examine the sources of differences in media images in Germany and the United States and the complex dynamics in the relationship between the media, the public (or public attitudes), and the government and policy leaders. Does public opinion really matter, and does it influence policy outcomes? On the other side, do politicians cater to public preferences, or ignore them? What is the role and responsibility of the media as they seek to mediate between the public they serve and inform, and the political and opinion leaders with whom they interact?

The report first takes up the media's relationship to public opinion, and the degree to which media images shape public perceptions and preferences. The report then turns to the media's relationship with political leaders to examine how the media balance their responsibilities as an independent watchdog with the need to extract information from the government officials and policymakers who may attempt to manipulate the media to garner support for their own policies. Finally, the report focuses on the media and explores the ways in which changes in communication technology and the increasing commercialization of the news industry is shaping journalism in the United States and Germany.

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CHAPTER ONE

MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION

Tensions in the transatlantic relationship over the Iraq war have opened the door to closer examination of the question of media and politics in Germany and the United States. The negative and misleading news coverage raised the question of whether the media was in part intensifying, even driving the hostility in German-American relations, or whether there were other dynamics at work— cultural and historical contexts, diverging values, or changes in the environment in which news was assembled. The inquiry required a closer examination of the complex relationship between the media, the public, and the government and other political leaders. In this chapter, we will explore the relationship between the media and the public it serves.

How do we understand the role of the media in shaping public opinion, and does it continue to serve a positive function in modern democracies? On the one hand, a democratic system of government needs an informed public, and the media play a central role in fulfilling this objective as the conduit and gate-keeper of information that flows from the political establishment to the public at large. On the other hand, the media have undergone a transformation in recent years, prompting media analysts to ask whether the media exercise a disproportionate influence on public opinion, even unduly manipulating public preferences.

Public opinion, generally defined as the aggregate of individual views, beliefs, and attitudes about a topic held by the adult population, is formed out of a complex fusion of social and political processes, contextual factors, and public discourse and communication. The conventional wisdom held that public opinion mattered very little to policy formation, particularly foreign policy; the public was considered unin-

terested, uninformed, given to mood swings, and unstable. But more recent studies of public opinion have shown that the public does matter, that it can affect policymaking decisions, and that policy preferences are rational, coherent, and consistent over time, based on the values held by majorities and reflective of available information the public has at its disposal. In short, citizens can formulate reasoned opinions if they receive the relevant facts.[1]

Because of differing social and political structures, the impact of public opinion in Germany's parliamentary system tends to be more indirect than in the American presidential system. In a parliamentary system, with its strong party structure and weak executive, parties play a more central role as an interpreter and channel for public attitudes on policy issues. In contrast, the American system has weak parties and a strong executive. Given the fact that the political system is thus more fragmented and, as a result, more permeable, this means that the impact of public opinion is not channeled through the parties but can

enter the political process through a greater number of access points.[2]

The media are important because they serve as critical access points, acting as a receiver, translator, and transmitter of information in the political system. Individuals cannot be eyewitnesses to all the news and so they are dependent on the media to gather the information, evaluate it for its accuracy, and then present it to them.

Reflecting the American predisposition to distrust government, the U.S. media as an institution is positioned outside the boundaries of government, with its traditional role as a "watchdog" that keeps government and power centers at a distance. In contrast, media in Germany traditionally were part of the state's institutional structure. These generalizations are less relevant today, however, when the media industry is highly commercialized and increasingly internationalized.[3] Despite these institutional variations, media observers in both the United States and Germany are increasingly skeptical that the media are, in fact, providing quality news that the public requires to formulate reasoned opinions.

Can the media manipulate public opinion? It is true that the way the media reports on an issue can shape the public's perception of it. As Bernard Cohen has written, "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about."[4] Since the public receives much of its information about the political system and important issues through the media, the media have a strong agenda-setting role in society. The story topics, format, placement, and frequency of reporting, for example, all shape the perceptions and salience of an issue. Furthermore, the media have the ability to frame issues. An event can be reported on by a straight narration of facts, but the media can define the parameters of how the event will be discussed, and thus how people will think and talk about it.

This is not to say that constraints on the media's ability to set news agendas are absent; real-world information may moderate the media's influence, or shift the focus. Moreover, the increasing fragmentation of the media landscape—which has given the public an unlimited number of sources to go to for their news—

may very well constrain the media's ability to set agendas in the future.

But while similar media practices are observed in both the United States and Germany, broader historical and cultural contexts shape different frames of reference, which can lead to very dissimilar reporting on the same issue. The war in Iraq is a case in point that illustrates the differences in news framing in Germany and the United States. In Germany, the country's historical experience of war led to a skepticism about the utility of force in resolving conflicts, and its strong belief in the efficacy of multilateralism and international law led the public and media to strongly support Chancellor Schröder and his refusal for Germany to participate in any military action against Iraq.[5] German media coverage reflected public views: that the U.S. policy of unilateral military intervention was a violation of international law; that it would exacerbate existing tensions and contribute to more regional instability; and that it would result in the needless deaths of tens of thousands of civilians.

In the United States, the Bush administration placed the question of possible U.S. intervention within the framework of the attacks of 9/11, the war on global terrorism, and the imminent threat to U.S. national security posed by Saddam Hussein's purported possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The U.S. media coverage largely supported the Bush administration's arguments and rationale for military intervention; stories that questioned the dominant narrative were downplayed or buried in the back of the newspaper.

What impact did such reporting have on public opinion of the United States and Germany? In the United States, a 2003 study conducted by the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), showed that large parts of the American public continued to hold significant misperceptions about the situation in Iraq: they believed that WMD had, in fact, been found in Iraq; that evidence of a link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda had been confirmed; and that world public opinion supported the American decision to intervene militarily in Iraq. While the most powerful factor in predicting whether or not an individual held any of these misperceptions was their intention to vote for President Bush, the study revealed that the second

most powerful factor was the individual's primary source of news. Specifically, those respondents who watched Fox Cable News tended to hold the most misperceptions, while those who cited National Public Radio (NPR) and public television as their major source of news held the fewest.[6]

In Germany, post-conflict opinion largely tracked with the dominant media frame. The critical tone that characterized pre-war reporting continued to inform news reporting on Iraq. However, there appeared to be no significant reassessment of how the German media covered the Iraq crisis, perhaps because subsequent developments in Iraq appeared to confirm the German take on the conflict, rather than the Bush administration's expectations on the ground.

In retrospect, coverage in both countries is open to criticism. Many American journalists conceded that their coverage of the conflict in Iraq was flawed and acknowledged that reporters were not skeptical enough about the information they received from government sources. Many German correspondents also admitted that German media coverage of the conflict played to negative stereotypes of an aggressive America intent on conducting an illegal war against Iraq. Such slanted reporting in both countries

likely reinforced negative attitudes as well as the general perception that the United States and Germany were drifting farther apart. But as both German and American journalists emphasize, when there is a strong consensus in the public and the political leadership on an issue, it is difficult to swim against the tide of opinion.

As this example illustrates, the media bear special responsibilities in times of crisis, when political leaders have greater leeway to shape policy direction, and even outcomes. The media can be a very effective facilitator in this process, turning public opinion either in favor or against the government's course. Public opinion matters when the issue is of high salience to the public, the political leadership is divided, and public support for the government has eroded. But issue salience can be driven by the media, which implies the media can shift the public's perceptions of issues—both of their importance and of the all-important mental frame. It often does so under the tacit direction of the governing elite, which skillfully exploits its relationship with the media to shape and redirect the public's policy preferences and lessen the impact of public opinion on policymaking.

IN FOCUS: ANTI-AMERICANISM

Deeply troubling to transatlantic observers is the survey material published over the last two years showing that the depth and scale of anti-American opinion had reached unprecedented levels. The conflict over the Iraq war obviously produced a significant backlash against the United States in Germany and Europe. But what else, if anything, is driving this anti-Americanism, and do the media play a role in stoking it?

The term "anti-Americanism," while liberally applied, is seldom defined. At the AICGS Berlin workshop in April 2005, Pierangelo Isernia, Professor at the University of Siena, offered a multi-tiered definition that effectually captures the complexity inherent in the term.[7] He sees three fundamentally different sets of attitudes about the United States: feelings, beliefs, and policy attitudes. Anti-Americanism in this view can be a feeling that is emotionally based and rarely well delineated; a negative belief about the United States that rejects what America "is;" or a reasoned rejection of specific policy decisions by American governments.

If anti-Americanism is viewed as a psychological predisposition to view the United States in negative terms, then public opinion surveys suggest that this is a minority view among the Germans. German opposition to the Iraq war was driven less by emotions or instincts than the foreign policy decisions of the current Bush administration. Based on the Pew Global Attitudes Survey in 2003, almost three-quarters of Germans with negative views of the United States reported that President Bush, rather than the United States per se, was the source of their dissatisfaction.[8]

This result, in turn, raises the key question of why German and American views on foreign affairs appear so divergent. Germans' attitudes about U.S. foreign policy are partly a reflection of diverging cultural and national identities in the United States and Germany. The United States and Germany continue to share certain foundational, western values, but attitudes diverge whenever questions concerning the applicability of force and international cooperation are at issue:

- Use of force: German history has created a public deeply skeptical about the utility of force and predisposed to its use only as a last resort and only within a multilateral context; more Americans than Germans are inclined to accept the argument that the use of force is justified when dealing with threats to the country's security;

- Multilateralism: support for multilateral institutions and the process of consensus-building are deeply ingrained in the German public's attitudes and in German foreign policy; Americans are more willing to consider unilateral action when given strong claims from authoritative sources that link the nature of the threat to self-defense;

- International norms/international law: Germans see international norms, laws, and treaties as legitimate and important constraints on the potential abuse of power in the international system; the present U.S. administration is more inclined to dismiss the validity of international law and regimes that can constrain the United States, though this general sentiment is shared by only a minority of Americans.

The German media have tended to reflect these biases in their reporting. German journalists acknowledge that images in the German media, particularly during the Iraq conflict, reinforced existing stereotypes and prejudices about the United States. At the time, the emotions—and the stakes—were high, and the unusually strong consensus between the German government, public, and media reinforced the presentation of a single narrative on the unfolding events. A similar process was evident among the American public, media, and government.

When such a convergence of opinion occurs, it is hard for journalists to swim against the tide of opinion. Washington-based journalists—not just German, but other Europeans as well—reportedly felt increasingly isolated from their colleagues back home. The influence wielded by editors as gatekeepers of information was strongly evident. Correspondents who submitted stories that ran counter to the accepted narrative often had trouble convincing their editors to run them. In addition, German correspondents often faced editors who had perused *The New York Times* and their competitors' websites (such as *Spiegel-online*), and had already chosen the day's top story.

In effect, foreign correspondents no longer hold a monopoly on information; their editors or producers can access an enormous amount of information about the United States and thus consider themselves to be as well informed about the United States as their Washington-based colleagues.

In such an environment, in which the speed of news is also a contributing factor, journalists often fall back on heuristic shortcuts—such as anti-Americanism. Media accounts then employ and reinforce such old and familiar stereotypes, which prove stubbornly persistent over time. In the parameters of current news reporting—of thirty-second sound bites and shorter column space—it is difficult to convey complexity to foreign audiences. The challenge is to convince editors and producers that context and background matter in providing the public with the information it requires to make informed judgments on issues it deems vital, thereby counterbalancing the tendencies to reach for convenient though misinforming labels.

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CHAPTER TWO

MEDIA AND POLITICS

Traditionally, the media's relationship to government and other sources of authority has been one of independence and distance. However, one of the most frequently voiced criticisms of American journalism today is that this independence has been compromised. Professional journalists appear regularly on television and radio shows as political pundits, while politicians and political operatives receive lucrative contracts as media commentators. Additionally, the credibility of journalistic sources and practices has also been undermined. The scandal at *The New York Times* and its very public mea culpa over Judith Miller's reporting during the Iraq conflict stands out as one example.[9]

Miller's stories contributed to the perception that Iraq did, in reality, possess weapons of mass destruction. In the aftermath of the war and the U.S. administration's inability to find any such weapons, it was revealed that Miller's major source of information was Ahmad Chalabi, an Iraqi exile who fed Bush administration officials and Miller with dubious intelligence on Iraq. At least on one occasion, Miller's close relationship with top Bush administration officials appeared to engender a circular dynamic whereby Miller received dramatic information from her administration sources that she then published in a lead article, only for that information to be later "confirmed" by an administration official appearing on the morning talk shows.[10]

The pressure to scoop competitors by running stories with unchecked information has also played a role. In large part because of *The New York Times*' reputation as the "paper of record," Judith Miller's stories were cited in countless other papers, broadcasts, and Internet sites, thereby reinforcing the perceived veracity of the reporting.

In Germany, many journalists have had a high regard for American journalism because of its perceived ability to maintain a critical distance to its own government, while the German media often has been accused of being too close to the centers of power. Some German journalists were disheartened by what had happened at *The New York Times* but emphasized that the German media fail to practice the kind of self-reflection that occurred in the scandal's wake. Concerns are voiced that the weakening of traditional principles in media reporting, while perhaps advancing more rapidly in the United States, nevertheless will affect the quality of journalism in Germany as well. But the ability of the media to serve as an independent watchdog is not compromised by journalistic shortcomings alone. Government officials and policymakers have their own agendas, and they often attempt to manipulate the media in order to garner support for their own policies.

Empirical studies on the public opinion-policy nexus have shown that if public opinion on a particular topic is coherent, and public attention regarding the issue remains high, then policy outcomes will generally reflect public preferences.[11] Conversely, if the public is divided—or even if there is a clear majority view, but issue salience is not at a very high level—then public opinion does not carry the same weight in shaping a particular policy outcome.

The public is not a blank slate, but it can be influenced. Political leaders use media tools to maneuver

public sentiment in a particular direction, controlling access to information, appearing on talk shows to argue the merits of the administration's position on a particular policy, or submitting op-eds to leading newspapers. Politicians also use the media as a sounding board to gauge public response to policy recommendations and as a way to ascertain how to shape messages to sell their own policy positions to the public.[12] In short, the general assumption that politicians are led by public opinion—that they read the polls and construct policies around these public preferences—is not corroborated by the evidence at hand.

As a consequence of these trends, critics see the media as having abdicated their watchdog role. In their assessment, many journalists have become part of the political establishment and are no longer neutral observers, but active players with their own set of interests. A revolving door has appeared, whereby journalists become political commentators and politicians become media commentators. The proliferation of political commentators and "pseudo-journalists" is worrisome to many observers. A recent Project on Excellence in Journalism study showed that opinion journalism has grown, particularly in cable news, and most specifically with Fox Cable News. According to the study, 68 percent of Fox cable stories contained personal opinions, as compared to MSNBC (27 percent) and CNN (4

percent).[13] However, the Pew Center's assessment of whether opinion news will overtake hard news is slightly more reassuring. Opinion journalism has over-taken cable TV, talk radio, and the Internet (blogs), but other major news outlets remain more ideologi-cally balanced. Whether this "hybrid"—of news that asserts a particular ideological view while filtering out other voices—will affect other media remains to be seen.[14]

Though commentary and news were never really strictly divided in the German media landscape, there is nevertheless a sense that the trend toward more opinion journalism is afflicting German news reporting and that quality journalism has suffered as a result.[15] Some see the only way to assure quality is to continue Germany's commitment to the inde-pendent German public radio and broadcasting networks. Criticism that German journalism is being instrumentalized for political goals can also be heard. That there are these undercurrents between the polit-ical leadership and the press is evident by the remarks Chancellor Gerhard Schröder—previously known as the "media chancellor"—made at a recent press awards ceremony. He warned of the "boule-vardization, personalization, and scandalization" of German media and declared that the media must resist the temptation to become active players in the political process: "It cannot be the business of jour-nalists to engage in politics."[16]

IN FOCUS: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

An important component of a country's "soft power," public diplomacy is the vehicle by which governments engage foreign publics. The media are an indispensable tool for conducting public diplomacy, but governments have had to contend with changes in the media landscape and in communication technology.

U.S. public diplomacy has been defined as promoting the national interest of the United States through under-standing, informing, and influencing foreign audiences.[17] There is widespread agreement that the prestige and reputation of the United States have suffered unprecedented declines among foreign publics all over the world, posing a significant public diplomacy challenge for the United States. This decline has been particularly steep in Germany, where positive views about the United States have fallen precipitously, from a high of 78 percent in 1999, to 61 percent in summer 2002, and to 25 percent in March 2003. The figure rose to 38 percent in June 2004 and most recently to 55 percent in June 2005—encouraging, but a far cry from earlier levels of support.[18]

Since 2001 there have been numerous reports analyzing the crisis in U.S. public diplomacy, from the State Department's U.S. Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), to the Council on Foreign Relations and the Public Diplomacy Council. The overwhelming conclusion:

that U.S. public diplomacy has failed completely, and that a new approach—a new public diplomacy paradigm—is needed to redress the failings identified in the reports. In response, President Bush called on one of his most trusted advisors, Karen Hughes, to take up the post of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy.

Rainer Schlageter, Director-General of Communication and Information in the German Foreign Office, has defined the German approach to public diplomacy as "the sum of all communications activities targeted at selected elites and multipliers, but also at the world public in general" to enhance Germany's image abroad.[19] Germany's view of public diplomacy is shaped by its historical experience during the Nazi regime, where propaganda was ubiquitous and the national culture was instrumentalized for political gain. There is thus a reluctance to place publicity strategies and campaigns at the center of public diplomacy efforts. The major task in postwar German public diplomacy was rebuilding trust with other nations, and efforts were made to separate cultural relations from government influence. Nevertheless, in recent years Germany has stepped up its public diplomacy efforts around the world.[20]

There are challenges in practicing public diplomacy: as Christopher Ross, Special Coordinator for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs at the U.S. State Department, has observed, public diplomacy has been affected by—and must adapt to—changes in communications technology and in the media itself.[21] But the changes in the media industry and communication technology can also offer opportunities. Expanding the use of the Internet can be an effective way to reach the younger age cohorts who use the Internet as a major source of information and news. Secondly, in a globalizing world, governments are not the only actors that contribute to a country's public diplomacy. They can and must reach out and establish partnerships with cultural institutions, universities, corporations, and the media to successfully convey their messages. Importantly, the influence of world public opinion is growing alongside the changes in communication technology; more and more, governments must win the support of the people in other countries, not just the traditional political leadership.

Finally, changes in the media landscape have transformed the international environment in which public diplomacy operates. The revolution in communication technology has led to an increasing fragmentation of the media landscape, shortened the news cycle, and increased competition. It also has changed the news consumer. With an unlimited supply of news outlets, consumers can seek out what they want to hear and can immediately compare news sources as to their content, facts—and credibility. This requires authenticity in public diplomacy messages. As the experience of Charlotte Beers, Under Secretary of State for Public Dimplomacy and Public Affairs, has shown, public diplomacy is not effective if it is run like an ad campaign. To be effective, public diplomacy must win over foreign publics by presenting information about a country that represents a spectrum of voices and creating more opportunities for dialogue between countries.

Classic communication tools such as printed material are still valuable, particularly in the parts of the world where the use of technology is not as widespread. International broadcasting also remains an important vehicle for disseminating information. But electronic media are an increasingly central and indispensable tool of public diplomacy. For example, governments could create a comprehensive website with substantive information offered in several languages. The German government has such a website for German foreign policy and is planning on expanding the topics covered to include information on German education, cultural activities, and more general information aimed at the broader international audience.

For the United States and Germany, public diplomacy also involves informing and educating audiences on the other side of the Atlantic about the complex realities of our respective societies and political systems. Successful public diplomacy, as officials stress, requires a long-term commitment of talent and resources, reaching beyond state-to-state relations. Effective public diplomacy takes decades to come to fruition but results in a "reserve" of positive feeling, awareness, and experiences of one country held by the public of a different country.

CHAPTER THREE

03

FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR THE MEDIA

There is a general consensus that journalism in the United States is in a crisis. The media have seen profound changes that have altered the way journalism is conducted and transformed the media's relationship to the public and to political leaders. The debate in Germany also reflects ongoing changes in the media landscape; while there is concern that a process of Americanization in German media is occurring, perhaps the disturbing trends are less about "American conditions" in Germany as much as they are about the globalization of media and the impact of communication technology—similar to what has occurred in the United States, but with some lag.

U.S. Trends

The Trends 2005 report published by the Pew Center for the People and the Press sets out the challenges for journalism in the United States in the chapter, "Media: More Voices, Less Credibility." It is not a very optimistic picture.

The challenges begin with the media and the public itself. The decline in news consumption continues, particularly among young Americans; not even the events of 9/11 and Iraq have moved this demographic group to seek out more news. People's news habits are changing as well; on average, Americans look to at least four different sources for their news; they tend to "graze" more as well, rather than spend large blocks of time watching or reading news.[22] And the trend is away from traditional sources of news and towards new media sources, e.g. the Internet and blogs. Again, this is particularly true for younger age cohorts.

There is also a credibility and believability gap among viewers and readers and the media. Since the 1970s, trust in the media has declined significantly; this loss of trust is evident across all demographic groups and for all types of news outlets. There is also evidence for increasing partisanship in the news, which has exacerbated the problem of media credibility among Americans. Most journalists are sensitive to this and as a result are less confident about their profession and their ability to do their job.[23] Economic, "bottom-line" pressures in the media industry are affecting quality, and few media observers see a solution to the problem.

Technology has changed the media landscape in significant ways. The traditional broadcasting networks were challenged by the advent of cable news in the 1980s and with CNN, Ted Turner's 24-hour news network. Today, print media are being challenged by the Internet and the exponential growth of blogs. About 63 percent of Americans eighteen years or older go online (the figure for teenagers is 81 percent), and 5 million people a day post something on their blog.[24] Additionally, technological advances have also led to the fragmentation of news outlets. The greater number of news outlets has spurred

intense competition, with the traditional broadcast networks competing with 24/7 cable news networks and print media increasingly challenged by the Internet and blogs.

The structural changes in the media and the "business of news" have played a part as well. The deregulation of the 1980s and 1990s led to consolidation of ownership in the media industry, where only a handful of corporations own most media outlets.[25] Whereas traditional news outlets were "loss leaders," news divisions today are expected to make a profit, and competition has made this expectation difficult to fulfill. The impact on newsrooms has been considerable. Investigative reporting is time-consuming and expensive, with the result that fewer and fewer news organizations conduct such investigations. Instead, more journalists work from secondary rather than primary sources. Although veteran journalists argue that there is no substitute for the kind of knowledge that a foreign-based correspondent can absorb while living and working in a country, the number of foreign correspondents based abroad has been cut drastically, with news outlets preferring to "parachute" a reporter into a foreign country rather than maintain foreign bureaus.

Technological advances and the commercialization of news have impacted actual news reporting as well. Competition for ratings is intense, and to increase ratings, news outlets are "softening" the news, infusing news reports with more entertainment-driven stories. The pressure to scoop the competition in a 24/7 news environment by getting to the story first has led to less time being spent on checking sources and verifying facts. The "journalism of verification" has given way to the "journalism of assertion," where the goal is to put out the news first, allowing the process of verification to kick in after the story is reported or posted on the web (via bloggers).

Ironically, the expansion of new outlets has generated fewer, rather than more, news stories. The scramble to keep up with one's competitors and with "breaking news" has had the effect of pushing most news organizations to report on the same, narrow range of stories. These practices also contribute to an echo chamber effect: one story reverberates and is repeated and expanded, with an ever widening circle of readers or viewers assuming the story is accurate and the facts trustworthy. In many journalists' eyes, the end effect of all of these trends has been a decline in the quality of news as well as the media's credibility vis-à-vis its public.

German Trends

German media observers also assert that the German media is in a state of crisis brought about by technological and structural changes. Business trends in Germany, as in the United States, have produced large media conglomerates, with similar effects on the media. Stagnant economic growth, however, has been largely responsible for shrinking advertising revenues, which has led to deep cuts in budgets and staff. German media also have seen a shift towards more entertainment—"infotainment"—and sensationalism, leading to a similar loss of credibility among the German public.[26]

German newspapers have to worry about a similar trend: their readership is aging, with no growth in the younger age cohorts. Germans read more newspapers than Americans, but readership, as in the United States, also continues to decline. On the other hand, at the moment online journalism appears to be exerting less pressure on the traditional media outlets. German journalists have been slower to use blogs in the way that U.S. journalists use them. And many German journalists consider U.S. news websites—particularly that of *The New York Times*—as qualitatively superior.

German audiovisual media also differ from their American counterparts in several respects. Germany has a dual system of both public and commercial broadcasting. The German constitution confers the responsibility for public broadcasting on the federal states (*Länder*) as part of their cultural "sovereignty." Public broadcasting is financed through advertising and licensing fees, while commercial broadcasting (which was introduced only in the mid-1980s) must rely solely on advertising fees. Inevitably, with advertising as the only source of revenue, commercial broadcasting became more edgy, commercialized, and more entertainment-driven.

German media structures and practices are looking more "American." But is this really "Americanization?" Or are the trends in German media a reflection of an increasingly globalized media that, through its expansion, is diminishing national differences in media and intensifying a kind of global homogenization in all media markets? On the other hand, while homogenization and globalization, fed by commercialization, has grown, structural and cultural differences in national media markets have not disappeared.[27]

Perhaps the presence of a strong public broadcasting system in Germany may attenuate the trends outlined above. But public broadcasting has not remained immune from the influences of commercial broadcasting. Though the dusty, 1960s-era flagship of German television news, *Tagesschau*, still draws a third of all viewers to its 8:00 p.m. news program, the trend appears to be moving in the other direction.

Commercial challengers provide more of a mix between hard and "soft" news, and they have adapted their style to reflect American news styles: faster pace, more anchors, graphics, and more "talk" (discussion) elements, rather than straight reporting. German companies have studied Fox Cable News to understand the success of its business model and to search for ways of adapting it in Germany. Competition from commercial stations, moreover, has led to increasing pressures for public broadcasters to soften the news, provide more drama, and increase their ratings.

The longer-term impact of commercialization in the German media is unclear. The legal and social commitment to public broadcasting is unlikely to diminish, but with regard to content, soft news will continue to make inroads into broadcast news. Hard news still plays a major role, but it will be an increasingly harder struggle. After all, it is easier to raise one's ratings with news about the sensational acquittal of singer Michael Jackson than it is to find the drama in the latest EU policy directive from Brussels.

IN FOCUS: BLOGS

In a *National Journal* article, William Powers compared blogs to the seventeenth century Dutch speculative craze for tulips—a beautiful but overhyped commodity whose value will soon collapse down to something more close to normal.[28] Others argue that blogging poses a fundamental challenge to media and news reporting. Blogs have proven to be popular and influential, but will they displace traditional news outlets?

Blogs—online journals that provide commentary and additional web links—are recent arrivals to the Internet. Starting from an estimated fifty blogs in 1999, the number has risen to an estimated 2.4-4.1 million worldwide in 2004. Further estimates claim the number will rise to around 10 million by the end of 2005.[29]

Their impact in the United States has been significant, though blogs have as many detractors as defenders. Only a handful of blogs are politically influential, but they are important because they affect the content and process of news reporting. Their influence was certainly felt in the 2004 presidential election, when bloggers posted raw preliminary data from exit polls on election day, ahead of the newspapers and broadcast networks who were less willing to make assertions on data that had not been weighted and analyzed. The raw data was wildly misleading, causing widespread confusion and even prompting a stock market sell-off.[30]

Critics also point to bloggers' focused attacks on established news outlets and the "head hunter" mentality of many bloggers vis-à-vis the traditional media. Indeed, bloggers have been key players in a string of scandals, revelations, and resignations, among them:

- Bloggers (on both the right and left) were instrumental in publicizing remarks made by Senator Trent Lott in December 2002 at a birthday party for Senator Strom Thurmond that seemed to implicitly endorse Thurmond's earlier segregationist views and politics. The resulting firestorm of criticism, as the story was picked up and covered by a growing number of traditional media outlets, resulted in Lott resigning his position as Senate majority leader;[31]

- In November 2004, bloggers posted evidence that the memos on which a recent Dan Rather "60 Minutes Wednesday" story was based, could be forged documents. The story alleged preferential treatment of George Bush during his tenure in the National Guard Service; Rather's denials in the face of growing evidence that the documents were in fact forgeries contributed to his growing loss of credibility, and he announced he would step down as CBS anchor in March 2005;

- Bloggers at the Davos World Economic Forum in February 2005 posted a story in the blogosphere in which Eason Jordan, CNN's chief news executive, reportedly remarked that U.S. soldiers were targeting journalists in Iraq; Jordan denied the suggestion, but he resigned his position shortly thereafter;

- Bloggers in mid-May 2005 forced the mainstream media to take another look at the so-called Downing Street memo, which was first reported in the *Sunday Times of London* on May 1 but had received little coverage in the American media. The memo, based on a July 2002 meeting with Tony Blair and his aides, reported U.S. officials had confirmed that war in Iraq was inevitable and that the intelligence was being "fixed" to support this policy decision.

Many journalists find the unrelenting attacks by many bloggers on the "mainstream media" (MSM, to many) as reckless and dangerous because of the degree of misinformation and inaccuracies in blogs. Moreover, since

blogs are mostly opinion and commentary, some worry that the political blogs will continue to deepen the partisan divide, in the long run damaging the public sphere with their divisiveness.

Bloggers are quick to call such critics arrogant and blind. With blogs, they argue, there are no barriers to greater public debate; anyone can contribute. The democratic nature of the blog, bloggers' independence from the encumbering rules of traditional journalism, and the speed of information exchange are reasons why bloggers champion the blogosphere as the new democratic medium.

The ethical and journalistic standards of blogs remain controversial. Many bloggers place faith in the self-correcting nature of blogs, something that traditional journalists dismiss as naïve. Where are the checks and balances that traditional journalism offers? Once blogs leave opinion for the fact-finding and investigative realm, how can their trustworthiness be evaluated if they do not feel beholden to mainstream journalism's professional codes and standards?

The consensus seems to be that while blogs are here to stay, they will not supplant the mainstream media. In reality, the relationship is much more mutually beneficial than is often acknowledged. Blogs continue to rely on traditional media outlets for much of their information, and mainstream journalists, editors, and commentators read blogs to determine what topics are circulating in the blogosphere, gather information and relevant links, and gauge opinion on an issue.[32] In addition, bloggers do not have as many resources, both financial and other-wise, at their disposal as professional journalists do. And, importantly, traditional media outlets remain more credible than blogs; few Americans rely on blogs for their news information. No matter what "buzz" the blogosphere can generate, Americans are aware that blogs still offer opinion, not objectivity.

How does the American case compare with blogs in Germany? Is there a discernible trend? The numbers are minimal in comparison; two years ago, only 500 blogs existed in the German blogosphere. Today there are 50,000, and estimates predict that blogs are also on the verge of becoming an established player in the German media landscape. But some observers feel the numbers are irrelevant because blogs are not politically influential in Germany, though why this is the case is unclear. Perhaps the Germans are not as comfortable with this form of political discourse. It might also be that they are satisfied with traditional media outlets, or that blogs simply have not been popularized yet. One media observer, Christoph Neuberger, believes German blogs will function less as a direct competitor to the established media and more in the tradition of the alternative media of the 1970s.[33]

One of the more serious questions that blogs pose for journalism is the question of whether or not bloggers should be considered journalists. Most bloggers see themselves not as journalists but as "social critics" and "activists" who opine and whose job it is to hold the mainstream media accountable. But the issue is not so clear-cut. Though the vast majority of bloggers are teenage girls who want to keep in touch with their friends, the best bloggers are, in fact, professional journalists who are skilled writers. There are also a handful of bloggers who conduct their own investigations and work to confirm their sources. There is an additional legal dimension to the question; credentialed, professional journalists have legal protections against pressures to disclose confi-dential information collected in their capacity as reporters. Bloggers are not afforded such protections.[34]

Meanwhile, technology continues to create new media venues—photoblogs, videoblogs, wikis, and podcasting (a conjunction of iPod and broadcasting)—which will, in turn, compel the media to respond and adapt yet again to changes in the news environment.

NOTES

1 For trends in U.S. public opinion, see Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1992.

2 See Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Masses and Leaders: Public Opinion, Domestic Structures, and Foreign Policy," in David A. Deese, ed., *The New Politics of American Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 238-61.

3 For a comparison of German and U.S. media and public opinion, see Mary N. Hampton, "Re-Creating the World: An Examination of Public Opinion, the Media, and Foreign Policy in the United States and Germany," in *The Media-Public Opinion-Policy Nexus in German-American Relations* (Washington, D.C.: AICGS, 2005) 31-37.

4 Quoted in Stuart N. Soroka, "Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2003, 8(1), 27.

5 See Ingrid A. Lehmann, "Exploring the Transatlantic Media Divide over Iraq: How and Why U.S. and German Media Differed in Reporting on U.N. Weapons Inspections in Iraq: 2002-2003," Working Paper Series, #2004-1, The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Spring 2004. For a more general examination of U.S. and German news coverage of the Iraq war, see Karin L. Johnston, *Clashing Worlds and Images: Media and Politics in the United States and Germany* (Washington, D.C.: AICGS, 2004).

6 See Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, and Evan Lewis, "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 118, no. 4, Winter 2003-2004, 590-596. Available at: http://www.psqonline.org.

7 Pierangelo Isernia, "Anti-Americanism and European Public Opinion," in *America Contested: The Limits and Future of American Unilateralism*, edited by Sergio Fabbrini and Mark Gilbert, Routledge, 2005 (in press).

8 "Views of a Changing World," Pew Center for the People and the Press, June 2003, 22. Report available at: http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf.

9 See, among others, Michael Massing, "Now They Tell Us," *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 51, vol. 3, 26 February 2004, available at: http://www.deeperwants.com/cul1/homeworlds/articles/nowtheytellus.html;

10 The issue was the disputed existence of aluminum tubes that was arguably the "smoking gun" that finally gave evidence of Saddam Hussein's nuclear weapons program, and the administration official was Vice President Dick Cheney who appeared on "Meet the Press." See Michael Massing, "Now They Tell Us," section 2.

11 See Page and Shapiro, *The Rational Public*, 2.

12 See Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2000.

13 See *The State of the News Media 2005: An Annual Report on American Journalism*, Project on Excellence in Journalism, (www.journalism.org), web page: http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2005/narrative_cabletv_contentanalysis.asp?cat=2&media=5.

14 See *Trends 2005*, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Washington, D.C., 2005, 55. Available at: http://pewresearch.org/trends/.

15 One example is a survey of press officers by the Federal Association of Press Officers (*Bundesverband deutscher Pressesprecher*) which reported that 83 percent of the respondents believed that standards of quality had fallen among journalists and that fairness in reporting had declined because of pressures from newsroom editors, staff costs, and the rapid flow and scope of information. See M. Staude, "Pressesprecher Verband: Qualitätsverlust im Journalismus wird beklagt," *Frankfurter Rundschau,* 22 November 2004, 12.

16 See Hans-Jürgen Jakobs, „Das neue Gesicht der alten Mitte: Der Medienkanzler als Medienkritiker: Gerhard Schröder und seine Warnung an Journalisten, Politik zu machen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 May 2005, 20.

17 See the website of the United States Information Agency Alumni Association, http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/1.htm.

18 See "Views of a Changing World," Pew Center for the People and the Press," 3 June 2003, 29, available at: http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=185; and "U.S. Image Up Slightly, But Still Negative," Pew Center for the People and the Press, 23 June 2005, 1. Available at: http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/247.pdf.

19 Rainer Schlageter, "German Public Diplomacy – New Opportunities and New Challenges," see http://www.yes-dk.dk/YES/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=148&Itemid=173.

20 For example, the German Foreign Office maintains its comprehensive website in three foreign languages, and it recently opened a new German Information Center in Cairo. In November 2004 the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. sponsored a "Friendship Bus," a city bus painted with German and American motifs on which members of the Embassy and even the Ambassador, Wolfgang Ischinger, rode to talk to passengers and hand out information about Germany.

21 Christopher Ross, "Public Diplomacy Comes of Age," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2002, 75-83.

22 See *The State of the News Media 2005* "Audience" web page: http://www.stateofthemedia.com/2005/narrative_overview_audience.asp?cat=3&media=1.

23 See *Trends* 2005, 43-45.

24 See *Trends* 2005, 58.

25 Most recently, the Supreme Court on 13 June 2005 let stand a lower court decision that limits ownership of television and radio stations and newspapers that a company can own in a single market. The case was brought to the Supreme Court by media groups who saw no rationale for restrictions on media ownership in an era of cable channels and the Internet, and challenged by public interest groups who saw further media concentration as a threat to the media industry. See Annys Shin, "Limits on Media Ownership Stand," *The Washington Post*, 14 June 2005; available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/13/AR2005061300740.html.

26 See Stephan Russ-Mohl, "A brief survey of the German media landscape," *Media in Crisis*. Sinclair House Debates, no. 20, The Herbert-Quandt-Stiftung, October 2003, 14-19.

27 See Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, "Americanization, Globalization and Secularization: Understanding Convergence of Media Systems and Political Communication," in Frank Esser and Barbara Pfetsch, eds., *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges* (New York: Cambridge University Press) 2004. (German edition: *Politische Kommunikation im international Vergleich. Grundlagen, Anwendungen, Perspektiven*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag 2003.) The paper can be found at: http://communication.ucsd.edu/people/f_hallin_homogenization.htm.

28 William Powers, "Why Blogs Are Like Tulips," *National Journal*, 29 February 2005, 552.

29 Daniel W. Drezner, Henry Farrell, "Web of Influence," *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2004; see http://www.foreign-policy.com/story/cms.php?story¬id=2707&page=0.

30 Cynthia L. Webb, "Bloggers Let Poll Cat Out of the Bag," *The Washington Post*, 3 November 2004.

31 For an analysis see "'Big Media' Meets the 'Bloggers;' Coverage of Trent Lott's Remarks at Strom Thurmond's Birthday Party," Case number C14-04-1731.0, 2004. The case was written by Esther Scott for Alex Jones, Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Harvard University, 2004. Available at: http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Case_Studies/1731_0.pdf.

32 For an interesting discussion of this relationship, see Howard Kurtz, "Cyber Cease-Fire?" *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2005, at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43714-2005Feb22.html.

33 "Tägliche Ration Wahnsinn," Julia Bonstein and Thomas Schulz, *Der Spiegel*, 2/2005; reproduced by the Goethe-Institut Washington, http://www.goethe.de/ins/us/was/ver/rut/en361187.htm.

34 Howard Kurtz, "Regulating Cyperspace?" *The Washington Post*, 11 March, 2005.