A website that has relied on misleading or unsubstantiated claims to back an undisclosed far-right viewpoint in its coverage of journalism and of national and international news.

### Ownership and Financing

The website is owned by Journalistenwatch e.V. – Association for Media Criticism and Counter Publicity (journalistenwatch e.V. – Verein für Medienkritik und Gegenöffentlichkeit), a nonprofit association founded by Thomas Böhm, who co-founded the populist German Freedom Party (Die Freiheit) in 2010. The party dissolved in 2016. In an interview with Merkur.de in November 2016, Die Freiheit party leader Michael Stürzenberger said that “our last remaining mission, public criticism of Islam, is fulfilled as it will be carried on by the AFD.” Alternative for Germany (AfD) is a German far-right anti-immigration political party.

According to the site’s Imprint page, Journalistenwatch e.V is based in the town of Neutraubling, Bavaria. Previously, until December 2019, the nonprofit association had been based in Meissen at the address of Renate Sandvöß, one of the site’s former authors. According to an August 2018 article in Tagesspiegel, Sandvöß is a frequent speaker at events hosted by Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), a German nationalist, anti-Islam movement.

The website solicits donations and receives funds from the Middle East Forum, an American think tank, according to the site’s Imprint page. The site also runs advertisements.

### Content

JournalistenWatch’s mission, according to the site’s imprint (Impressum) page, is to advance “the media enlightenment... because most of the major media no longer independently, but see it as their mission to influence, manipulate the citizens in the sense of the ruling politics.”

The site also states that it publishes “news, reports and general information on the subject of journalism and news.” Sections include Breaking News (Brennpunkt), National News, International News, Satire, Media Critique, and Opinion. JournalistenWatch.com has a page labeled Free Media, providing links to what it calls “alternative,” “patriotic,” and “conservative” outlets, including the Russia-owned television network RT Deutsch and Russian-owned media agency Sputnik Deutschland.

Typical articles have run under headlines including “Christ beheaded, crosses smashed: Church desecrations now are part of ‘colorful’ Germany” (“Christus geköpft, Kreuze zerschlagen: Kirchenschändungen gehören jetzt zum ‘bunten’ Deutschland”); “Is the AfD now being monitored by the Verfassungsschutz after all?” (“Wird die AfD nun doch vom Verfassungsschutz beobachtet?”); and “Germans are deported - ‘Syrians’ are allowed to stay!” (“Deutsche wird abgeschoben – ‘Syrer’ dürfen bleiben!”).

In December 2017, the newspaper Die Zeit published an in-depth investigation about JournalistenWatch, portraying the site as the platform for Germany’s New Right. The Zeit described the site’s content as “fluctuating between Islam criticism and cuddly AfD right-wing populism.”

In its news coverage, the site frequently employs rhetoric used by the German right-wing populist anti-immigration political party Alternative for Germany (AfD). For example, in April 2019, the site ran an article headlined “Paris is no longer a European city” (“Paris ist keine europäische Stadt mehr”) that referred to “Umwolkung,” a term used in Nazi propaganda to refer to the displacement of a country’s own people. Today, the term is employed by right-wing movements and AfD leaders to warn against multiculturalism and immigration.
Credibility

Articles on JournalistenWatch do not typically rely on original reporting and are usually attributed to other media sources, including the BBC, the Jerusalem Post, and RT. Images are consistently attributed.

JournalistenWatch frequently publishes false and misleading information. For example, a January 2020 article titled “Coronavirus: How bad is it really?” (“Corona-Virus: Wie schlimm ist es wirklich?”) included a video that suggested that the seriousness of the virus was being exaggerated by the Chinese government, which was using it as a pretext to control its citizens. The video cited death tolls and infection rates that were half as high as they actually were at the time, stating they “were nothing” and that “in megacities like Wuhan there are more traffic deaths per day than the 80 deaths that have allegedly occurred since December.”

The video went on to claim that the outbreak “serves the regime as an excuse to imprison 56 million people and perhaps even dispose of one or two dissidents.” The video also called the virus a “wonderful excuse for the party to say here please we have this problem with this new Coronavirus, so stay at home, do not leave the city;” and to “try out how one can control so many people, so many cities, such large regions if there ever is a riot in China.”

There is no evidence that the Coronavirus is being exaggerated or exploited by the Chinese government for any of those purposes. Several countries, including Germany, France, the U.S., Australia, and Thailand have independently confirmed cases of the virus and its severity. In late January 2020, the World Health Organization declared the virus a global emergency.

The site frequently also posts misinformation relating to immigration.

For example, in July 2019, an article titled “Ashauna: Rampant immigration continues” (“Ashauna: Die Zuwanderung geht ungebremst weiter”) included a video showing a group of people getting off a train at the Ashausen station. The site stated that “the many immigrants at the station […] show that immigration continued rampantly” and that “you’d think your own people were being replaced.” The notion that Germans are being “replaced” through immigration is a common right-wing conspiracy theory.

Correctiv, a German journalism nonprofit, traced the article’s origin to a YouTube video titled “Invasion of Africans in Ashausen by Winsen/Luhe,” which was deleted by YouTube three days after it was posted because it was deemed to be “hate speech” (“Hassrede”). In debunking the article, Correctiv reported that local Anhausen police had tweeted: “There is currently a video circulating on social media showing a supposedly large number of refugees who suddenly arrive in Ashausen by train without the knowledge of the population. This is incorrect!” The police department stated that the video merely showed people commuting to work.

A March 2018 article, titled “Merkel attacker is said to have called ‘Allahu akbar’” (“Merkel-Angrifer soll ‘Allahu akbar’ gerufen haben”), reported that Angela Merkel (CDU) was attacked by a troublemaker after her election on Wednesday afternoon, and that “according to media reports, the foreign-looking man had shouted ‘Allahu akbar,’ an Arabic phrase meaning ‘God is greater.’” The article does not provide any media sources or evidence for this claim. Berlin police told Correctiv that the man had not called out those words, and videos of the incident do not show him doing so.

In a September 2018 article titled “Election fraud uncovered: Swedish Democrats get one more seat” (“Wahlfälschung aufgedeckt: Schwedendemokraten bekommen zunächst ein Mandat mehr”), the site reported that “a grave electoral fraud has been uncovered to the extent that the Swedish Democrats have been given one more mandate,” meaning another seat, in the national parliament. The article did not include sources or provide evidence for its claims. The Swedish government denied that any such fraud occurred.

In May 2019, JournalistenWatch ran an article titled “New refugee programme ‘NesT’: 1.4 million are waiting for ‘free space’ worldwide” (“Neues Flüchtlingsprogramm ‘NesT’: 1.4 Millionen warten weltweit auf ‘freien Platz’”). The article stated that “The first 500 ‘particularly vulnerable refugees’ are allowed to enter Germany in the summer – without any prior asylum examination.”
Because JournalistenWatch has regularly published distorted and misleading information and often bases its articles and headlines on unsourced and unsubstantiated claims, NewsGuard has determined that the site has repeatedly published false news and deceptive headlines and that it does not gather and present information responsibly.

JournalistenWatch.com, which does not articulate a corrections policy, publishes corrections that often appear at the bottom of articles, labeled as “Correction” (“Richtigstellung”). However, because none of the articles cited above have been corrected or clarified, even after they were publicly debunked, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not meet its corrections standard.

JournalistenWatch.com does not disclose a political or ideological orientation. The site features an Opinion (Meinung) page, but opinionated articles regularly run in the site's news section and contain the author's opinion without being labeled as commentary.

For example, a January 2020 article titled “When will the leftist Nazis take over all the power?” (“Wann übernehmen die linken Nazis die ganze Macht?”) stated “Intellectually, the left-wing antifa circus is in no way to be taken seriously.” The article continued: “Their actions are equivalent to the Nazi roar ‘Juden Raus’ (Jews out), which echoed through many German and Austrian halls in the interwar period long before Hitler’s seizure of power.”

Another January 2020 article, titled “Just ridiculous: Repatriations to Turkey down to 189 people” (“Einfach nur noch lächerlich: Rückführungen in die Türkei auf 189 gesunken”), stated “While Angela Merkel wants to stuff further millions of euros of tax money down the throat of Islam general Erdogan, the reality looks anything but good.”

Because JournalistenWatch does not disclose its far-right perspective and often runs opinionated articles in its news section advancing that agenda, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

JournalistenWatch.com did not respond to four NewsGuard emails, including an inquiry sent in January 2020, and a phone message seeking comment on its editorial standards, including its publishing of false and misleading information and headlines, its approach to corrections, and its mixing of news and opinion.

**Transparency**

The site's Imprint (Impressum) page discloses its ownership by Journalistenwatch e.V and its funding by the Middle East Forum. The page also names its editor-in-chief and provides an email and phone number to reach the editorial department. The Contact (Kontakt) page provides a general contact form to reach the site.

Articles generally do not credit their authors, although some stories include initials at the bottom of the page. No biographical or contact information about content creators is provided.

Advertisements are distinguishable from editorial content.

The site did not respond to four NewsGuard emails, including an inquiry sent in January 2020, and a phone message, asking about its lack of information about content creators.

**History**

JournalistenWatch was launched in 2012 by Thomas Böhm, who was a writer at B.Z. and taz before he co-founded the populist German Freedom Party in 2010. He also served as spokesman for the party.

According to media reports from July 2019, the tax office Meißen withdrew Journalistenwatch e.V.'s charitable status. Previously, the company stated, it had been recognized as charitable “for the promotion of civil education” (“wegen Förderung der Volksbildung”). Carrying the official status of charitable association brings tax advantages to associations and their donors and is certified by the
responsible tax office. Journalistenwatch did not comment on the media reports.

The site's Imprint page no longer states that it is has official status at a charity. However, the website still describes itself as “charitable,” stating: “By promoting democratic and civil education, Journalistenwatch pursues only charitable purposes according to the tax code.”

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was last updated on Jan. 30, 2020. Previously, this Nutrition Label was updated to reflect that some JournalistenWatch.com articles cited in this label had first been debunked by the investigative news site Correctiv.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: Click Here

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