

Focus: Press Freedom and Right-Wing Extremism

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»It determined my everyday life, it makes you just afraid.«

A socio-spatial investigation into the effects of freelance and local journalism on the far right in East Germany

Abstract: The emergence of the far right in Germany has resulted in an elevated risk for the safety of journalists covering this beat. Attacks on the press have escalated considerably since the rise of large-scale anti-asylum protests, such as PEGIDA, particularly in East Germany (cf. ECPMF 2017). Despite the fact that the media has repeatedly expressed dismay at the severity of violence against the press by far-right groups, there has been little academic discussion of this phenomenon to date. This article addresses this research gap by examining the impact of the far right on journalistic work and the professional and everyday lives of journalists. The main finding of this study is that freelance and local journalists, who are typically positioned at the ›front line‹ of reporting, are exposed to a diverse array of threats from the far right. Utilizing the spatial concept of performative and affective territorialization, hostility towards the press is analyzed in terms of its function as a spatialized form of far-right power seeking. The findings reveal the existential threat posed by hostility towards the press at the individual level to journalists and thus to press freedom as a whole.

Keywords: Far right, freedom of the press, hostility towards the press, threats, territorialization

»But most of the time it's just threats or a bit of chasing after me. Or people pointing at me and then starting to make phone calls, so that I realize that reinforcements are probably being called and I have to leave the place« (I1_Z25, translated by the authors).

According to Reporters Without Borders (2025), press freedom is under pressure globally, including in Germany: Physical attacks on journalists roughly doubled in the last available reporting year, 2024, compared to the previous year. Emphasis is placed on demonstrations as crime scenes, with attacks perpetrated by individuals affiliated with the far right constituting a substantial proportion of the total number of attacks (cf. *ibid.*: 4). This trend constitutes a development that has been observed since the rise and normalization of far-right movements and parties, which started approximately in 2014 (cf. KÖHLER 2024: 287f.). A particular focus has been placed on far-right mass mobilizations and ongoing mobilizations in East Germany, such as PEGIDA and the so-called Monday protests that emerged during the coronavirus pandemic. These mobilizations have become known as hotspots of anti-press violence (cf. ECPMF 2023). Journalists who work as freelancers or local journalists without the financial support of a major editorial office or large team are particularly affected by these attacks. However, these journalists are often the ones who assume the most dangerous reporting assignments, which take place far away from the major events that receive the most public attention (cf. ÖRNEBRING/SCHMITZ-WEISS 2021: 1898f.; ECPMF 2023: 29ff.).

Despite the intensification of attacks on press freedom by the far right in Germany over the past decade, academic research into this issue remains in its infancy. In the English-speaking world, there are a number of studies that address issues of threats against journalists in the context of various protests and their effects (cf. MILLER 2023; POST/KEPPLINGER 2019; NILSSON/ÖRNEBRING 2016), threats and harassment against women journalists on the internet (cf. STAHEL/SCHOEN 2020; POSETTI/SHABIR 2022; CHEN et al. 2018), or questions of press freedom in the context of international armed conflicts (cf. Waisbord 2022; Chinweobo-Onuoha 2022). In the context of German-language studies, extant literature is considerably more fragmented. Research in this field has focused on the far-right narrative of the »Lügenpresse« (engl.: lying press) (cf. KOLISKA/ASSMANN 2021; Gadinger 2018) or the fairness of reporting on far-right movements and parties (cf. SCHELLENBERG 2016). Furthermore, there are individual quantitative studies that attempt to capture the current state of hostility toward the press in a representative manner (cf. REES 2023; PREUSS et al. 2017). However, with a few exceptions (cf. KÖHLER 2024; KRELL et al. 2025), there is a dearth of studies that are locally informed and qualitatively oriented. Such studies would focus on the concrete practices of hostility towards the press, how it is dealt with, and its impact. This is the context in which the present article is situated. A series of qualitative interviews with affected freelance and local journalists were conducted to ascertain how media professionals in East Germany who work on the far right experience their professional practices and the challenges and consequences these entail. The analytical focus is on the local context of the complex

relationship between press freedom and the far right. The analysis of far-right hostility as spatially mediated attempts at power utilizes the spatial theory approach of territorialization (cf. *AUTOR*INNENKOLLEKTIV TERRA-R* 2025). This article contributes to the existing body of knowledge by offering a novel perspective on a relatively understudied aspect of the subject. In addressing the current state of tension between the far right and press freedom, this study first situates journalism and press freedom in terms of media theory and discusses hostility toward the press as a far-right practice. The study then introduces the spatial theory approach and the methodology used. The results of the study offer an analysis of the impact on journalistic work by the far right in three dimensions. These dimensions are then discussed.

Journalistic Work on the Far Right and Freedom of the Press

Theoretical Approaches to Journalism and Freedom of the Press

In contemporary democratic societies, characterized by anonymity, mass media serve the function of establishing a shared space for public discourse (cf. *NORTH et al.* 2009). The construction of media reality constitutes the frame of reference where public negotiation processes unfold. Journalistic media, through their selection of topics and content, based on novelty, factuality, and relevance (cf. *MEIER* 2011: 13), have a special role in reflecting current political processes and thus enabling participation.

Journalists are granted privileged access to experts and members of social elites through formal or informal institutions. This privilege is closely linked to compliance with codes of conduct, such as the press code, and to the selection of topics according to the aforementioned criteria. Furthermore, the dissemination of specialized knowledge through their publications enables non-specialists to partake in professional discourses, extending beyond the political domain. In the context of local journalism, which has evolved from being defined by municipal boundaries to encompassing multiple municipalities or even entire districts, reporting from the public sphere facilitates engagement in the events transpiring within these domains. This encompasses a wide range of activities, including the opening of new stores, administrative decisions, and events that influence public opinion, such as rallies. Consequently, journalistic media empower consumers to construct an understanding of these events and engage in the formation of public opinion. The aforementioned entities fulfill their function as a pillar of democratic opinion-forming, particularly when they publish reports of abuses and misconduct by state and public actors.

In Germany, the freedom of the press as a right (and the freedom of broadcasting as a right), are guaranteed by Article 5 of the Basic Law (»Grundgesetz«). On the one hand, these rights are protected by the absence of state regulation. This conception of »negative« freedom of the press suggests that the occupation of »journalist« is characterized by its liberal nature, with no specific entry requirements to the profession, including no state or public examination imposing restrictions on individuals seeking to work in this profession. On the other hand, censorship is strictly prohibited, and state authorities are obligated to ensure that all journalists have unobstructed access to information without exception. Consequently, the state has established measures to safeguard the diversity and autonomy of journalistic reporting. This phenomenon functions as a counter-agent to centralized or controlled opinion-formation, thereby impeding the accumulation of power. Conversely, the concept of a »positive freedom of the press« stipulates that the state is obligated to ensure the operational capacity of journalists in instances when non-state actors impede their professional activities. In certain instances, this directive is enforced by security agencies through the use of force. This ensures that even a concentration of power or resources will not result in the suppression of press freedom.

The freedom of the press empowers journalistic media to subject state and publicly influential actors to public scrutiny and debate. Consequently, it is not only an integral component of democratic systems, but also a corrective mechanism to mitigate the abuse of power. The annual monitoring reports on the state of press freedom in Germany identify four main threats to press freedom. These threats, identified by all of the reports, include the expansion of state surveillance, SLAPP¹ lawsuits, economic pressure and concentration in the media market, and violence against media professionals and editorial offices (cf. ECPMF 2024; REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS 2025). In recent years, reports have repeatedly identified violence at demonstrations as the most significant threat to individual journalists, with anti-press violence being a recurring element of far-right gatherings (cf. *ibid.*).

Hostility towards the Press and the Far Right

Far-right ideologies invariably entail the abuse of power and the use of violent coercion to enforce conformity. This alone gives rise to an interest in the suppression of an autonomous public sphere and independent media outlets. This phenomenon transpires across multiple domains. Primarily, it is embedded within the framework of a despised democratic system – a system that, according to

1 Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation (SLAPP) are lawsuits brought by individuals and entities to dissuade critics from continuing to produce negative publicity and do not have any true legal claims against critics.

Nazi ideology, was purportedly a Jewish conspiracy to impede the exercise of power. The »Jewish press« is a component of an enemy image that must be eradicated (cf. KÖHLER 2024: 296).

From a strategic perspective, a press that fulfills its control function acts as an antagonist to far-right narratives. The use of violence against a regime that is believed to be oppressive cannot be justified if it is kept in check by a small number of journalists. Of particular concern is the potential for countermeasures by civil society or, if necessary, criminal prosecution, if reporting focuses on far-right activities and is subsequently debated in public. The violent obstruction of the press and the denigration of media entities as »state media« or »system media« can therefore also pursue immediate goals based on the considerations described above (cf. *ibid.*). The delegitimization of journalistic media serves two primary functions: it prepares the ground for attacks, and it creates a divide between an author's supporters and the broader public sphere of democratic discourse. For years, endeavors have been undertaken to establish a »counter-public sphere,« characterized by its distinct frame of reference and devoid of discursive exchange with democratic society (cf. SCHWARZ 2020: 103ff.). The weakening of the pillars of a shared media reality has been demonstrated to hinder democratic negotiation processes. The crisis of democratic institutions thus created or claimed then serves as an argument for their abolition.

Territorialization as a Socio-Spatial Approach analyzing the Far Right

The actions, strategies, and successes of far-right actors invariably involve spatial dimensions, as contemporary far-right entities function »through and within political geographies« (STREULE et al. 2025: 29, translation by the authors). These actors produce spaces through a variety of means, including the marking of walls with graffiti, the affixing of stickers to streetlights, the proclamation of a national liberated zone (»National befreite Zone«), or the planning of mass deportations. In this manner, spaces are imbued with significance and exert an influence on other segments of society – for instance, victims of far-right violence – who perceive the markings on spaces as symbolic exclusion and threats of violence (cf. MIGGELBRINK/MULLIS 2022: 29). The use of physical violence as a means of communication is inherent to the far right. This ideological tendency employs a categorization of physical characteristics that serves as the foundation for the devaluation, exclusion, and destruction of those deemed to be »marked« by these characteristics. This process is characterized by a logic of devaluation, exclusion, and destruction, as previously outlined (*ibid.*). These markings and exclusions are experienced through local everyday practices that are inextricably interwoven with the spaces in which they take place. A fundamental aspect of

these assumptions is the acknowledgment of space as a contested and contradictory outcome of social practices (cf. LEFEBVRE 1991; HARVEY 1973), which in turn exerts influence on those very social practices (cf. MASSEY 1994). Space and society are thus in a constant process of mutual co-production. Consequently, spaces are not static entities; rather, they are akin to societies in that they are fragile and contested. Within these communities, »different social projects always exist at the same time, characterized by different forms of spatialization« (BRAUN et al. 2025: 20, translated by the authors). It is therefore evident that spaces represent a formidable resource, over which various social and political actors engage in contentious struggles. A spatial approach is therefore fruitful for analyzing the far right, as it allows these hegemonic aspirations to be recognized and evaluated in terms of their concrete successes that can be experienced locally. This emphasis on the quotidian experience as perceived through a spatial lens presents a valuable opportunity to examine the practices of geography-making. Consequently, the substantial social analyses that are prevalent in research on the far right can be augmented by meticulous observations of local circumstances (cf. MULLIS/MIGGELBRINK 2021: 190).

The conceptual underpinnings of this assertion are rooted in the notion of territorialization (cf. AUTOR*INNENKOLLEKTIV TERRA-R 2025). This concept emphasizes forms of spatial action that are marked by the acquisition of sovereignty over specific spaces. Territorialization »situates practices at the core of the analytical framework, thereby engendering spaces that are perceived as either one's own or foreign, heterogeneous or homogeneous, progressive or regressive, and experienced by diverse individuals or groups as either empowering or alienating, inclusive or exclusionary, and communitarian or violent« (STREULE et al. 2025: 30, translation by the authors). The territorialization process is characterized by the endeavor to wield control over a particular space through the implementation of specific practices (cf. BELINA 2017: 88). This characteristic renders it a suitable subject for analysis of political actors, such as the far right. The analytical strength of the concept of territorialization lies in considering not only practices on the part of the far right, but also those relating to it.

The concept of territorialization *by* the far right encompasses the process of appropriation, design, control, or coding of spaces (STREULE et al. 2025: 41). In the context of discursive or affective ideas of spaces associated with the far right, territorialization may involve the use of undifferentiated language, such as the term »Brown East,« (»Brauner Osten«) to refer to a space considered to be far right (cf. AUTOR*INNENKOLLEKTIV TERRA-R 2024). For instance, the latter would entail the undifferentiated discourse on the »Brown East« as a far-right space. On the one hand, the term facilitates the analysis of far-right attempts to exercise control over specific spaces. On the other hand, it underscores the repercussions of these practices on other segments of society. This approach enables a multi-layered and

power-sensitive analysis of socio-spatial practices *by* and *of* the far right, with a focus on the everyday production of spaces (cf. STREULE et al. 2025: 45f.).

The concept of territorialization is differentiated through various dimensions, thus enabling a more precise analysis of the subject matter. The performative and affective dimensions are pertinent to the subject matter of this article. The concept of performative territorialization, based on Butler's perception of performativity (2018), grounds an analysis that encompasses both linguistic and physical practices. These practices, as delineated by Butler, seek to assert and wield authority over specific spatial domains. This perspective is further elaborated upon by Krell et al. (2025), who provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical framework and its implications. This conceptual framework elucidates the tangible actions of far-right actors and their physically mediated effects on other individuals and groups. Conversely, affective territorialization processes prioritize an examination of the emotional underpinnings of territorialization practices (cf. HUTTA/KÜBLER 2025). This approach enables the examination of the significance of emotions and atmospheres in the actions and impact of far-right actors. Additionally, this approach facilitates the analysis of how emotional dynamics influence »the agency of the actors involved« (ibid.: 82, translation by the authors). Consequently, it is feasible to examine the impact of affective dynamics on the processes of spatial appropriation by diverse individuals and groups (cf. ibid.). Utilizing this theoretical framework, the subsequent sections of the study examine the actions and impact of the far right on journalists.

Methodological Approach

To answer the research question, three qualitative interviews (60-90 min) were conducted with freelance and local journalists in East Germany. The methodological incentive was to uncover the interviewees' knowledge about their individual experiences regarding the impact of reporting on the far right on their journalistic practices and daily life. Based on this endeavor, problem-centered interviews were conducted using a guide to ensure both a certain degree of openness and standardization in data generation (cf. HELFFERICH 2022: 875). The qualitative design makes it possible to generate detailed and open narrative passages to reveal in detail the background and contexts in which journalists experience the effects of hostility towards the press. The aim is to identify patterns to analyze them in a theory-building manner. The methodological design focuses on exploration, foregoing the quantitative claim of representativeness.

A qualitative content analysis based on Mayring (2014) was used to analyze the generated data. With the help of this method, the data was systematically organized using MAXQDA software, and evaluated using a category system that was

partly deductive and partly inductive. In accordance with the qualitative content analysis procedure, the data was first structured by developing individual categories in a multi-stage coding process and assigning anchor examples and rules to them. These were then tested on further material (cf. RÄDIKER/KUCKARTZ 2019). In the first coding round, three super categories were formed inductively, clustering the impact of covering the far right on journalistic practice according to the areas of work experience, everyday life, and the online sphere, each of which is assigned several subcategories. In the second coding round, the interview material was searched for points of reference to performative and affective territorializations using deductive category formation, which represent the second, analytical-interpretative level of the results as patterns of spatialized modes of power.

Findings: Journalistic Coverage of the Far Right Impacting all Areas of Life

The content analysis of the interviews shows the various effects that journalistic work on the far right has on freelance and local journalists. In the following, these are clustered according to three dimensions: work experience, everyday life, and the online sphere (see Fig. 1).

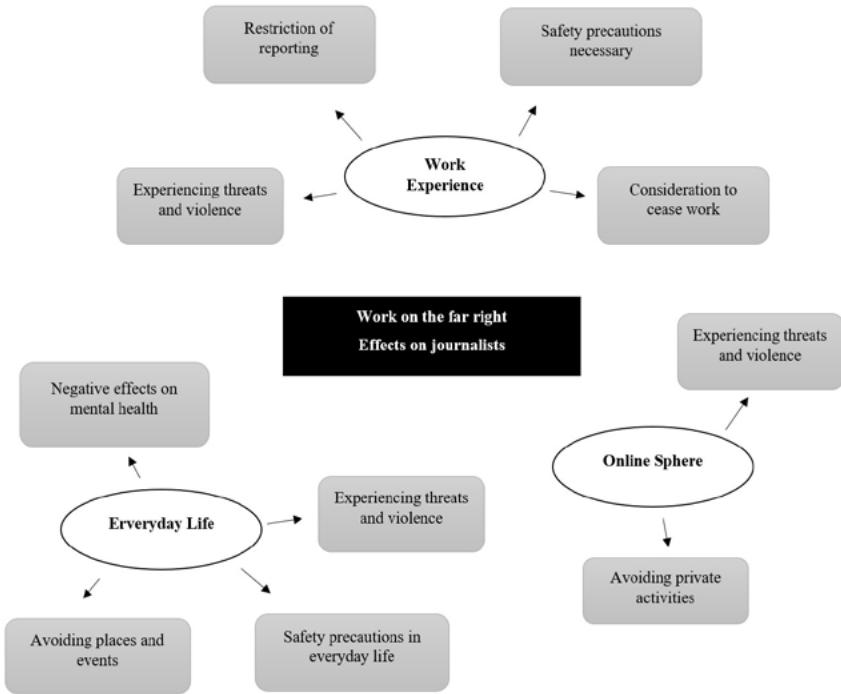
Work Experience

»During sensitive shoots, we actually worked with our own drivers, who tracked our live location the whole time and then basically jumped in as soon as things got dicey, which we had to resort to because we were being chased by Neo-Nazis [...].« (I3_Z39, translated by the authors)

For journalists, working to cover the far right always involves a comprehensive effort to adapt to the particularities and dangers of the subject of their reporting. Due to the violence inherent in the far right, combined with the virulent hostility toward the press in far-right circles, the danger of becoming a victim of insults, threats, and attempted or actual violence is always present. This influences the possibilities for journalistic work on the subject negatively in a variety of ways (cf. REES 2023: 369).

Fig.1

Work on the far right: effects on journalists



Coded Clusters

In particularly when covering the far right in concrete situations, for example at demonstrations, events, in courtrooms, or during (confrontational) interviews, journalists regularly experience forms of threat and violence:

»So basically, there are all kinds of obstructions or even attacks on me. We have the typical obstruction of press work, such as covering cameras and standing in the way. We have threats, verbal abuse, attempted physical attacks, then also actual physical attacks, being chased, having objects thrown at us.« (I1_Z21, translated by the authors).

In addition, there are clandestine threats and attacks against journalists, for example when they are placed on enemy lists of militant far-right organizations (I2_Z25) or when their car tires are destroyed (I2_Z29).

However, these forms of hostility towards the press, which can lead to physical violence and even death, are at the end of a spiral of escalation that can be observed, for example, in far-right protests. Before that, more subtle forms of intimidation usually take place, which already make it clear to journalists that

they are not welcome and aim to make their work as unpleasant as possible (cf. KRELL et al. 2025). These more subtle forms of hostility towards the press include labeling reporters as enemies, for example when speakers at far-right demonstrations explicitly warn those present about journalists, sometimes mentioning reporters' full names:

»At that time, when I was still working under a pseudonym, my name, my full name, was shouted at demonstrations by participants during far-right demonstrations [...].« (I3_Z19, translated by the authors).

Far-right demonstrations in front of editorial offices can also be classified as a form of intimidation (I2_Z11).

The interviewees' accounts reveal the normality and regularity of this violent state of threat, with one interviewee, who had had only a few years of professional experience, saying:

»I have experienced dozens, probably around a hundred, physical assaults in my entire career« (I3_Z35, translated by the authors).

On the other hand, habituation effects can be observed. The violence experienced becomes a normalized part of the job:

»Threats or attacks used to affect me somehow, but now, yes, it's everyday life« (I1_Z90, translated by the authors).

The effects of this constant threat to which journalists who cover the far right are exposed to have consequences at both the individual and structural level. A key consequence is a narrowing scope regarding how the far right is being reported on, which is a direct or indirect result of the threats and violence. The continuous construction of enemy stereotypes makes it impossible to use certain forms of journalistic work:

»Yes, but the bad thing is that everyone knows you, and then you're framed, and then you don't get anything anymore. So as a journalist, I'm burned, and that's just stupid. I can't go there and ask anyone anything. I won't get any answers.« (I2_13, translated by the authors).

Conducting interviews with far-right actors to collect quotes is made impossible by the fact that they treat journalists as enemies in the context of the »lying press« narrative (cf. KOLISKA/ASSMANN 2021). In addition, the violence experienced has an intimidating effect, so that journalists consciously avoid events of the far right that are perceived as particularly dangerous, even though they consider them newsworthy (I1_Z13). Even during reporting, certain situations are avoided, meaning that journalists have to put their own standards for journalistic work on hold:

»[...] I have also allowed myself to be intimidated to a certain extent and no longer pursue my profession as consistently in certain situations or when taking certain pictures, but instead tend to say, »I'm going to take a step back.«« (I3_Z19, translated by the authors).

Another necessity arising from the existing threats is the constant consideration of security issues and the implementation of security measures to enable

reporting on the far right. These range from editorial guidelines requiring at least two people to report on protests (I2_Z63), the use of commercial and volunteer bodyguards, to carrying pepper spray (I1_102; I1_142), the use of GPS tracking and getaway drivers (see introductory quote), taking detours after reporting, to the necessity of precise coordination with the police or working under a pseudonym (I3_25; I1_Z150; I3_Z19). More unusual strategies, such as meticulously planning one's own clothing, are also part of these adaptation strategies:

»[I have] thought about [...] how I dress, that I only wear a certain outfit at demonstrations to avoid being recognized in private« (I3_Z37, translated by the authors).

What these strategies have in common is their negative impact on the ability to work independently and freely as a journalist, as a lot of resources have to be invested in security measures. At the same time, security measures can undermine journalistic standards if, while protecting journalists, they make specific aspects of their work impossible. This can be observed in the use of bodyguards, which makes it more difficult to engage in conversation with actors of the far right or puts journalists in the spotlight of violent actors (I2_Z33). The resulting trade-off between security and the possibility of free reporting is perceived as a burden by journalists working on the far right (I2_33) and thus has a restrictive effect on the degree of press freedom.

Ultimately, the high level of threat leads journalists to consider stopping their work on the subject, doing so temporarily or completely, or turning to less dangerous and psychologically stressful fields of journalism:

»So they actually had this success, in the sense that I was too afraid for myself and my family (...) and didn't want to take the risk anymore.« (I2_Z19, translated by the authors).

These restrictions on reporting due to the security situation pose a significant problem for press freedom, as blind spots arise in societal perception when it is no longer safe to report on certain events.

Everyday Life

»I hardly ever leave my apartment anymore, simply for safety reasons. I only leave the apartment when I have appointments, or when I go grocery shopping or to report on something, for example, and when I take out the trash, I don't just do it for the sake of it, but only when I have to go out anyway, because every additional trip outside carries too great a risk that I might accidentally run into a Nazi.« (I1_Z138, translated by the authors)

Journalistic work on the far right does not end when the last recording has been made or the last word has been written. Instead, this type of work is often characterized by the constant danger of being affected by the negative consequences of this work in one's private life. This is especially true for journalists who report on public far-right events, such as demonstrations, and can be recognized as a result. There is a risk that far-right activists will target individual

journalists who regularly report on their protests and attempt to intimidate them and thus prevent them from doing their work. For example, this became increasingly apparent during the coronavirus pandemic, when far-right protesters launched a campaign

»calling on people to flood me with legal complaints, with fake legal complaints – in quotation marks – in order to get hold of my personal data« (I3_Z19).

In the case investigated, the call spread via social media led to the police investigating the journalist, who was working under a pseudonym. As a result, the plaintiffs from the far-right spectrum obtained his real name through their right to inspect files, even though all preliminary investigations were dropped (I3_Z19).

Once the names, faces, or addresses of journalists are known, there is always the risk of being recognized and threatened in everyday life or, in the worst case, becoming the victim of violent attacks. In the cases examined, various forms of threats in private life were reported, including being recognized, insulted, threatened, and harassed while shopping (I1_Z25; I2_Z37) or being followed and physically attacked on the way home (I1_Z25). There is a risk of being recognized and threatened in almost every place in everyday life:

»One incident that has remained particularly vivid in my mind is when I was once [...] recognized in the city center by someone [...] who was wearing typical far-right clothing [...] and stared at me for a long time and then basically gestured toward me as if to cut off my head. He was a man in his early to mid-40s, and I was 18 or so [...] This doesn't leave you unaffected« (I3_Z23, translated by the authors).

In addition to spontaneous forms of threats and violence, such forms of hostility toward the press range from planned, clandestine attacks to attacks on journalists' private addresses, for example:

»Back then, I was threatened at my parents' home, where our front door and mailboxes were covered with [...] far-right stickers. [...] I know colleagues who had a cobblestone thrown through their window« (I3_Z19, translated by the authors).

Journalists experience such everyday attacks as traumatic events, as they demonstrate with all their intensity that their private sphere is exposed to a constant threat. It is precisely there that far-right attacks are particularly effective, as they usually catch journalists unprepared and affect people in their immediate social environment, which can lead to severe psychological stress and feelings of constant fear:

»I don't know if you can imagine what it's like when, in a cloak-and-dagger operation, far-right stickers are stuck on your front door. Of course, that intimidates you and causes fear. And in my case, it also led to me completely stopping my work on the far right for a good nine months [...] after this incident« (I3_Z19, translated by the authors).

Those affected find concern for their own social environment particularly stressful:

»It also always means [...] I was out with my girlfriend at the time, it always has an impact on your loved ones. You often worry a lot about them.« (I3_Z23, translated by the authors).

Experiencing threats and violence can severely restrict the quality of life of the journalists affected, as they live in a state of constant fear of the next moment when they will be recognized and threatened:

»Especially at that time, when [...] I was also a major bogeyman in the local far-right scene here, and that really affects you, how you move around, how you travel by train, how often you look over your shoulder on your way home. That was very intense for a while, so it really determined my everyday life, because you're just afraid, you have to say« (I3_Z25, translated by the authors).

Those affected report psychological stress and sleepless nights (I1_Z104). In order to increase their own sense of security and continue to participate in everyday life, affected journalists take various security measures: Some only leave the house with means of self-defense, inform people in their circle before leaving their home, learn self-defense methods, or take great care to always have enough battery power on their cell phone to be able to call for help in case of an emergency (I3_Z37; I1_Z138; I3_Z37; I1_146). In extreme cases, this fear leads to a complete withdrawal from public life: Everyday places such as supermarkets are avoided and people only leave their homes when absolutely necessary, as the introductory quote shows. In this extreme case, journalistic activity to cover the far right is such a burden due to the constant threat it entails that a normal life is no longer possible. Regardless of the individual case, the impact on the everyday lives of those affected shows the intensity with which the far right acts against its opponents and how effective this approach is in making unfavorable reporting about them more difficult or even impossible.

Online Sphere

»I also had a Nazi stalker for a while. He published song lyrics on the internet about how he was going to kill me and dispose of my body.« (I1_Z31, translated by the authors)

In addition to the physical and material effects in the sphere of work and everyday life, the online world cuts across both dimensions. There, work and everyday life are blurred when, for example, professional social media profiles are still present on mobile devices after work. The online sphere is becoming increasingly important in far-right threats against journalists, with women being disproportionately affected (cf. STAHEL 2023; POSETTI/SHABBIR 2022). Our study also shows that journalists in East Germany are affected by various forms of online threats. Hate messages and death threats against public journalistic profiles via social media or email are widespread (I1_Z27). In addition, there are more complex forms of intimidation, such as online doxing campaigns, in which far-right actors attempt to obtain journalists' personal data through public

appeals. At a further stage of escalation, collected private data are used to specifically intimidate journalists:

»It has also happened that there were articles published about me from far-right individuals [...] that focused only on a colleague and me, for example, where my name was mentioned, photos, and other information where mentioned with subtle threats, like our personal addresses are known and so on« (I3_Z27, translated by the authors).

In extreme cases, these threats escalate to stalking or public calls for serious acts of violence (see introductory quote):

»Then he asked around on the internet for people to help him stab me, so that other people would hold me down and he could stab me« (I1_Z31, translated by the authors).

For those affected, these forms of threat are a heavy burden. One reason for this is that threats and violence in the online sphere are not hermetically separated from the physical world, but are hybrid and intertwined with it (cf. KRELL et al. 2025). In the case of the stalker, for example, he sprayed graffiti containing a death threat near the journalist's home (I1_Z31). At the same time, online threats lead to private activities on the internet being discontinued because the risk of being recognized there by far-right individuals is considered too high:

»A private account, [...] like many people have, [...] on social networks simply under my name, where I share personal experiences, I can't imagine doing that because [...] it could allow conclusions to be drawn about my place of residence, my social environment, or simply because some minor detail could give them a point of attack, which could then manifest itself in further threats or doxing situations against me« (I3_Z33, translated by the authors).

This means that journalistic coverage of the far right also comes with restrictions online and requires constant precautions to avoid becoming a victim of threats and violence.

Discussion: Far-Right Hostility towards the Press

Our empirical findings make it clear that journalistic work on the far right is accompanied by a diverse range of threats that can cause severe stress for those affected, both in their professional and private lives. Parts of the processes described become analytically tangible as territorialization *by* and *of* the far right in the sense of socio-spatial power claims. For example, it is part of the practices *by* far-right actors during their own events, be they demonstrations, lectures, or concerts, to claim control over these temporary far-right spaces through territorialization processes. These practices function performatively, with far-right bodies coming together with the aim of »becoming present in the space and exerting an affective force, perceiving themselves as a community and showing themselves« (HENTSCHEL 2021: 66, translated by the authors). This claim to

power is conveyed through performative acts of displaying banners, flags, clothing, or tattoos, as well as chanting slogans, which produce a collective identity in the respective space (cf. KRELL et al. 2025: 62). In this way, a claim to power is asserted over socially contested spaces such as the city centers of large cities in Eastern Germany, which are used by various political movements as demonstration sites, and is experienced affectively by the participants as empowerment.

Journalists who report on the far right become an active part of these power-laden territorialization processes, as they are perceived by far-right individuals not as neutral reporting authorities, but as enemies. The interview statements repeatedly contain passages in which the journalists interviewed express incomprehension about the rejection and hostility they encounter from the far right. This makes it impossible to present the views of far-right groups in reporting when they refuse interview or sound bite requests, for example. This practice can be explained by the logic of performative territorialization processes, according to which far-right individuals express their ideologically motivated rejection of press representatives, for example during demonstrations, by refusing to talk to them and obstructing their work through various embodied practices that escalate to the point of physical violence. In this way, far-right individuals enforce their own claim to power over temporarily territorialized spaces by using physical violence to decide who has the right to be in certain places and who does not. In the context of journalism, this corresponds to an attempt to gain control over who is allowed to report on far-right events and in what manner. The aim is to make journalistic reporting more difficult through these territorializations, while far-right media activists are tasked with disseminating propaganda-style coverage of the events.

Territorialization *by* the far right thus explains how hostility towards the press manifests itself on the ground. However, there are ideological causes and other motives behind this, which lead the far right to perceive journalists as enemies and attempt to drive them away from their demonstrations. The Anti-Semitic narrative of the »Jewish« or »lying press« is widespread in far-right worldviews and is cultivated at events organized by the scene. According to this narrative, the media system is part of a Jewish global conspiracy that manipulates society with targeted disinformation. Since the far-right protests against coronavirus measures, this narrative has become more prevalent again as a justification for hostility towards the press (cf. KÖHLER 2024: 297f.).

Violence against the press only occurs when certain contextual factors come together and the support that individual perpetrators receive from their own ranks is crucial: if perpetrators encounter opposition, they are more likely to abandon their attacks. If, however, perpetrators experience support due to advanced radicalization processes within their own ranks, violence becomes a legitimate means of achieving their goals (cf. *ibid.*: 298f.). Here the actions of the

police and the judiciary play a decisive role: if journalists are benefitting from press protection concepts at gatherings and perpetrators hostile to the press are vigorously prosecuted, at least completed acts of violence will decrease (I3_Z35; cf. KÖHLER 2024: 304ff.). Accordingly, the interviewed journalists express the desire for law enforcement agencies to take a more protective approach to journalism: better cooperation during demonstrations (I3_Z35) and opportunities to maintain their anonymity in criminal proceedings and when filing legal complaints (I1_Z160).

Another way to ensure the protection of journalists during dangerous reporting assignments is the use of bodyguards. An established example of this is the *Between the Lines* initiative, which provides volunteer bodyguards to freelance journalists, thereby helping to improve their safety. For freelance journalists who are well known by the far right, such services are sometimes a prerequisite for continuing their work at all, as they relieve them of the worry about their otherwise severely threatened safety:

»I usually leave security measures and such things to my bodyguards. They always take care of it. [...] So without bodyguards, I would have to stop my work« (I1_Z102; I1_Z118).

The violent territorialization *by* the far right, in turn, has consequences that can be analyzed as specific territorialization processes *of* the far right. The impact on journalists who cover far-right actors is experienced by these journalists as connected to particular spaces. Experiences they had during their work are engraved in their perception of these places and affect their private lives: experiencing hostility and violence during a far-right rally taking place in a central city square causes negative emotions for journalists even when they enter the same place without a far-right protest being present at that particular moment. We understand this as affective territorialization *of* the far right, as journalists experience the space as emotionally charged: the central square remains a far-right space for them, even when the right-wingers are no longer there:

»I don't know how to describe it, you just get fed up with these places at some point. Even if these places were deserted, you just don't feel like going there anymore« (I1_Z112, translated by the authors).

Additionally, journalists experience threats and violence in their private lives, far away from the places they report on, turning spaces that were previously considered safe into unsafe far-right spaces for them. In this way, spaces of private life such as one's own home or the supermarket become affective territorialized *of* the far right, as journalists feel powerless in the face of the threats they have experienced from far-right individuals and produce these spaces as dangerous. This territorialization can escalate to such an extent that almost every space is perceived as dangerous, which can lead to constant fear of renewed threats. The danger posed by far-right threats against journalists is evident in this process of territorialization, which restricts their quality of life: Even when the work as

a journalist ends, the negative emotions resulting from the experiences remain, linked to certain places. The latent danger of being recognized and threatened remains in everyday life, which inevitably involves moving through spaces that are also frequented by the far right.

Conclusion

The analysis of the interviews shows how the mechanisms through which the far right's hatred of journalists works. Through various forms of processes taking place in spaces that can be analyzed as modes of territorialization, journalists experience the negative consequences of their work on a daily basis. Approaching these experiences territorializations makes it possible to differentiate between the ongoing negotiations between various social actors on the ground: Who attacks journalists where? Who supports them in which situations and in what ways? Where are they safe and where not, and through which measures? From this perspective, the journalists' accounts demonstrate that there are effective measures that improve their safety in the context of their work, whether it be protection by volunteer escorts or better police work. However, measures to protect journalists in their private lives are not yet foreseeable, as this extends over larger spatial and temporal dimensions. Further efforts are needed here from all actors involved in media work.

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