

GermanyOnRussia.com — Overton Window Index

Methodology Note v1.0 | Oliver Kempkens, Dr. soc. | Habilitation candidate, Normative Politics | Theory of International Relations | www.kempkens.me
June 2026 | germanyonrussia.com | Contact: ok@kempkens.me

Abstract

The GermanyOnRussia Overton Index is a daily-updated composite discourse indicator that operationalises the boundaries of politically acceptable speech regarding Russia within the German public sphere. Drawing on media framing analysis (40%), public opinion polling (40%), and online public discourse via Reddit (20%), the index tracks the *space of the sayable* — not what majorities believe, but what positions can be expressed publicly without triggering institutional or social sanction. Classification reliability: Cohen's $\kappa = 0.774$ (substantial agreement, $n=97$, Landis & Koch 1977). Live measurement commenced June 2026; historical reconstruction covers January 2014–May 2026.

1. Theoretical Framework

The Overton Window (Overton, 1960–2003; Lehmann, 2018) describes the range of positions that can be articulated in public life without triggering sanction. It does not measure what is *true*, but what is *sayable*. This index operationalises the framework as a **medial acceptability indicator**: the range of positions visible in professional German media and public discourse without rejection. This is theoretically narrower than full societal acceptability and analytically distinct from majority opinion — a distinction central to Zaller's (1992) framework of opinion formation and Ferree et al.'s (2002) discourse analysis of claim-making.

2. Data Sources & Weighting

Media framing (40%): 28 RSS-sourced outlets across six categories — public broadcasters (ARD Tagesschau, ZDF, MDR, NDR, DW), quality press (FAZ, SZ, Zeit, Spiegel, Handelsblatt, Tagesspiegel, Welt), tabloid press (Bild, Focus Online, T-Online), regional outlets (FR, Berliner Zeitung, NZZ), international reference (BBC, Le Monde), and independent Russian-language media (Meduza). Updated daily at 05:00 UTC. Category hierarchy follows Entman's (1993) agenda-setting gradient.

Polling data (40%): ARD-Deutschlandtrend ($n\approx 1,500$ /month), Forsa/Stern ($n\approx 1,000$ /week), ZDF-Politbarometer ($n\approx 1,200$ bi-monthly), Reuters/Ipsos (annual), Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (monthly). Weighted by recency (exponential decay, $\tau=21$ days). No house-effect correction currently implemented — acknowledged limitation.

Reddit public discourse (20%): 10 communities (*r/de*, *r/germany*, *r/europe*, *r/ukraine*, *r/geopolitics*, *r/worldnews* et al.). Weighted by upvote score \times subreddit relevance coefficient. *Limitation: Reddit users skew younger, more male, and more tech-literate than the German population. Classified as public discourse indicator — informal public sphere in the Habermasian (1984) sense — not population sentiment measure.*

X/Twitter (0%, monitored): Two curated lists (Russia experts; high-reach influencers) monitored live but not yet integrated into the sentiment pipeline. A theoretically significant elite cue source (Broockman & Butler, 2017) currently excluded — open limitation.

3. Classification Method & Reliability

Each item is classified on a three-point security-oriented–dialogue axis using rule-based NLP with negation detection, informed by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000). Named-entity keyword matching filters Russia-relevant content and excludes thematic false positives (Iran, Gaza, China).

Inter-rater reliability: Two independent rule-based coding systems applied to $n=97$ representative article titles. Observed agreement: 85.6%. Cohen's $\kappa = 0.774$ (Landis & Koch, 1977: "substantial agreement"). Confusion matrix: security-oriented 43/44 concordant (97.7%); neutral 17/24 (70.8%); dialogue 23/29 (79.3%). Disagreements cluster at the neutral–positive boundary, consistent with the theoretical difficulty of distinguishing neutral coverage of dialogue positions from implicit endorsement. Human expert validation against the same sample is planned as the next methodological step.

4. Index Construction & Construct Validity

Weights reflect the methodological robustness hierarchy: polls (highest external validity) > media framing (theoretically central to Overton mechanism, McCombs & Shaw 1972) > Reddit (real-time public signal, lower representational confidence). *These weights reflect editorial judgement informed by the literature, not statistical optimisation. Formal calibration is planned after 12 months of live data.*

Composite maps to 0–100 positional scale anchored at observed extremes: maximum security-oriented (February 2022 = 18); maximum normalisation (June 2013 = 78). Window boundaries follow Lehmann (2018): 15th and 85th percentile of weighted source distribution. Centre = weighted median; width = interpercentile range.

Construct validity: The index measures *medial acceptability* rather than *societal acceptability*. The current dataset shows an approximately 12-month lag between polling scores and framing scores, consistent with McCombs & Shaw's agenda-setting lag hypothesis. This lag is itself an analytically significant finding.

5. Relation to Existing Instruments

GDELT Project (Leetaru & Schrod, 2013): broad media event coding, lacks domain specificity and national framing granularity required for Overton analysis. **Media Cloud** (Roberts et al., 2021): powerful framing tools, limited German-language coverage. **European Media Monitor** (Steinberger et al., 2009): entity-level monitoring, no positional discourse index.

GermanyOnRussia is the first instrument specifically designed to track the Overton Window on a bilateral foreign policy discourse in the German public sphere, with daily automated updating and explicit theoretical grounding.

6. Data Periods & Uncertainty

Period	Type	Tolerance	Notes
Jan 2014 – May 2026	Reconstructed baseline	±8pp	<i>Retrospective construction from archived sources. Directional trends more reliable than absolute values. Individual monthly values carry higher uncertainty.</i>
Jun 2026 – present	Live measurement	±4pp (95% CI)	<i>Daily automated pipeline. Immutable timestamped archive. Grows by one verified data point per day. Cross-validation against Forsa data planned after 6 months.</i>

Trend classification: 3 consecutive data points > 2pp in same direction. Structural breaks (>10pp in 72h, e.g. February 2022) flagged and excluded from trend continuity calculations.

7. Open Limitations — Research Agenda

(1) **Inter-rater validation** used simulated independent coders; human expert validation against the same n=97 sample is the immediate next step. (2) **Reddit demographic bias** is acknowledged but not corrected; a demographic reweighting procedure is under development. (3) **X/Twitter elite discourse** is unweighted pending pipeline integration — this omits a theoretically significant elite cue source (Broockman & Butler, 2017).

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