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Usage Patterns of the Concept of “Women’s Rights” in the German Press: A Corpus-Based Analysis of the *Berliner Zeitung*

Alman Basınında “Kadın Hakları” Kavramının Kullanım Örüntüleri: Berliner Zeitung
Üzerine Korpus Temelli Bir Analiz

Ayşe Fulya ŞEN*

Abstract

This study examines how the concept of “*Frauenrechte*” (women’s rights) is used and discursively constructed in contemporary German news discourse. The analysis is based on a corpus of 62 occurrences retrieved from the Berliner Zeitung via the German Reference Corpus (DeReKo) for the period 2024–2025. Adopting a corpus-based discourse-analytic approach, the study investigates both the contextual distribution and the discursive framing of the term. The findings show that references to *Frauenrechte* are distributed across multiple discursive domains, with a clear predominance of international political contexts. Compared to domestic political debates, women’s rights are more frequently articulated in relation to developments outside Germany. In addition, the concept appears in cultural and social debates, indicating its broader integration into societal discourse. In terms of framing, women’s rights are primarily constructed as a normatively positive concept, while also functioning as a reference point for critique and as a neutral descriptive element. The results suggest a discursive tendency to externalize women’s rights, framing them less as an internal issue and more as a global concern.

Keywords: Women’s rights, Media discourse, Corpus analysis, Framing, German press



Öz

Bu çalışma, “Frauenrechte” (kadın hakları) kavramının çağdaş Alman haber söyleminde nasıl kullanıldığını ve söylemsel olarak nasıl inşa edildiğini incelemektedir. Analiz, 2024–2025 yılları arasında Berliner Zeitung gazetesinde yer alan ve Alman Referans Korpusu (DeReKo) aracılığıyla elde edilen 62 kullanım örneğine dayanmaktadır. Korpus temelli söylem analizi yaklaşımı benimsenerek kavramın bağlamsal dağılımı ve söylemsel çerçevelenmesi analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, Frauenrechte kavramının tek bir politika alanıyla sınırlı kalmadığını, ancak özellikle uluslararası siyaset bağlamında yoğunlaştığını göstermektedir. Kadın hakları, Almanya içi politik tartışmalara kıyasla daha çok ülke dışındaki gelişmelerle ilişkilendirilerek ele alınmaktadır. Ayrıca kavramın kültürel ve toplumsal tartışmalar içinde de yer aldığı görülmektedir. Çerçeveleme açısından kadın hakları çoğunlukla normatif olarak olumlu bir kavram olarak sunulmakta, aynı zamanda eleştirel değerlendirmelerde referans noktası olarak kullanılmakta ve bazı durumlarda nötr biçimde anılmaktadır. Sonuçlar, kadın haklarının söylemsel olarak dışsallaştırılmasına yönelik bir eğilime işaret etmekte; bu hakların içsel bir mesele olmaktan ziyade küresel bir sorun olarak çerçevelendirildiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kadın hakları, Medya söylemi, Korpus analizi, Çerçeveleme, Alman basını

Introduction

News should be understood not as a neutral mirror of reality but as a representation of wider relations of power. Although modern journalism is committed to objectivity and empirical realism, news accounts are necessarily selective and occlusive, structured through institutionalized norms of objectivity, newsworthiness, and empiricism. In this sense, news reproduces dominant social forms by taking them as natural and unproblematic. Through abstraction, personalization, and the emphasis on immediacy, news discourse decontextualizes social processes and presents social reality in fragmented, event-centered forms. News is ideological not because it simply distorts facts, but because it structures social knowledge in ways that register social contradictions while displacing or mystifying their structural causes (Knight, 1982). Fowler (1991) argues that discourse is socially constructed; he clarifies that his intention is not simply to expose “bias” in the press but to examine how language functions in the social construction of reality. Newspaper discourse, he suggests, is a particularly important example of the power of language in shaping ideas, beliefs, and values (p. 8).

In journalism studies, media framing shapes how reality is understood, as representations of social issues are constructed through the selective inclusion of facts, images, and ideas. Language plays a significant role in this process, since naming practices contribute to bringing new concepts to public attention and establishing a shared vocabulary through which social problems can be identified and debated. This dynamic is especially important in media discussions of gender, where journalistic language influences how gender intersects with other markers of identity such as race, sexuality, age, and ability. By popularizing specific terms and framing devices, media discourse contributes to shaping collective understandings of social identities and inequalities (Bock, 2023). Van Dijk (2009) argues that sexist ideologies in news discourse function through polarized structures similar to other dominant ideologies, such as racism. These ideologies are organized along an “Us” versus “Them” distinction, for instance between men and women or between “real men” and feminists. Such polarization is reflected in positive self-representations of men and negative other-representations of women, thereby reinforcing differential norms, values, and power relations. News discourse, as part of public elite discourse, plays a central role in the reproduction of these ideological structures. Because media institutions are largely controlled by socially dominant groups, marginalized groups—such as women, immigrants, or racial minorities—are often underrepresented or negatively represented. Through this control over access to public discourse, elites contribute to the formation and reproduction of ideologies that sustain existing power relations (van Dijk, 2009).

A recent literature review concludes that stereotypical, objectifying, and sexualizing representations of women remain widespread across multiple media contexts. Exposure to such portrayals is associated with stronger endorsement of gender stereotypes and traditional gender role norms, as well as with the internalization of cultural appearance ideals, body surveillance, and body shame. These processes, in turn, are linked to negative outcomes for physical and psychological well-being (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Bock (2023) argues that the relationship between gender and news is marked by an ongoing struggle for voice and recognition at both collective and individual levels. At the macrolevel, this struggle concerns the visibility and self-determination of social groups seeking equal participation in public life; at the microlevel, it involves individuals who challenge established norms and demand change. She emphasizes the central role of language in this process, noting that words create the frames through which social realities are interpreted and that shifts in terminology can reshape how equality and identity are understood. Distinctions such as "victim" versus "survivor," as well as naming practices that affirm marginalized identities, illustrate how linguistic choices may affect social positioning. Bock further underscores the intersectional character of contemporary structures of oppression, extending beyond gender to race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and class, and critiques forms of "white feminism" that have marginalized certain groups within discussions of women's rights. In this context, she suggests that unreflective versions of journalistic objectivity, combined with the social positioning of journalists, have at times contributed to the reproduction of stereotypes and distortions rather than advancing equality (Bock, 2023).

Building on this theoretical framework, the present study addresses the discursive construction of the concept of "*Frauenrechte*" (women's rights) in news media. The study investigates how the term is contextually situated, what themes and actors it co-occurs with, and within which issue domains it is most frequently embedded. The central research problem guiding this article is therefore not whether women's rights are supported or opposed in the press, but how the concept itself is linguistically framed and stabilized through recurring usage patterns. In this regard, this article focuses on Germany as a particularly relevant case. Germany ranks 11th out of 180 countries in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, with a score of 83.85, placing it among countries with a comparatively high level of press freedom despite noted structural pressures and security-related concerns (Reporters Without Borders, 2025). Moreover, Germany hosts a large and diverse migrant population, including women from various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. These demographic and political conditions create a discursive environment in which the concept of *Frauenrechte* may be mobilized across multiple domains, ranging from domestic policy and social integration to international human rights discourse. Examining this context allows for an analysis of how women's rights are positioned within intersecting national, European, and global narratives.

Within this framework, the present study examines the usage patterns of the term "*Frauenrechte*" (women's rights) in the *Berliner Zeitung*. The empirical material is drawn from the German Reference Corpus (Deutsches Referenzkorpus, DeReKo), one of the largest collections of contemporary German-language texts, maintained by the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS Mannheim). The data were retrieved via the COSMAS II interface. The corpus consists of all retrievable occurrences of the keyword *Frauenrechte* ($n = 62$) in articles published in the print edition of the *Berliner Zeitung* between 2024 and 2025 and archived within DeReKo. As a nationally distributed daily newspaper covering domestic, European, and international affairs, the *Berliner Zeitung* provides a relevant discursive site for tracing how the concept circulates across different political, cultural, and social contexts.

The study focuses on the newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* as a consistent discursive source in order to ensure comparability across all occurrences. As a nationally distributed German newspaper with coverage of both domestic and international political issues, *Berliner Zeitung* provides a suitable and coherent basis

for examining how women's rights are articulated within contemporary media discourse. Adopting a corpus-based approach, the study investigates the recurring linguistic environments in which the term appears and explores the thematic domains and actor constellations most frequently associated with it. The aim is not to assess normative positions on women's rights but to clarify how the concept is discursively positioned within German press discourse. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: In which political and societal issue domains does the term *Frauenrechte* most frequently occur in the *Berliner Zeitung*?

RQ2: Is *Frauenrechte* predominantly framed in relation to international contexts (e.g., non-Western societies, authoritarian regimes) or domestic German debates (e.g., abortion law, equality policies, migration)?

RQ3: What recurring semantic and evaluative patterns emerge in the immediate linguistic co-text of *Frauenrechte*, particularly in relation to democracy, integration, religion, and social conflict?

By addressing these questions, the article aims to clarify how the concept of women's rights is positioned within contemporary German news discourse—whether as a universal normative value, a marker of democratic modernity, or a problem-oriented frame in debates on migration and cultural difference. To this end, the study employs a corpus-based approach to examine usage patterns of the keyword *Frauenrechte*.

Media, Language, and the Public Visibility of Women's Rights

Feminist media scholarship has primarily focused on the representation of women in mainstream media, examining how portrayals of women in film, television, news, and other media have changed or remained stable across different national contexts. At the same time, studies of the relationship between women and media reveal an ongoing struggle through which women have sought to gain voice, visibility, and influence in the public sphere. Women's engagement with media activism has therefore been closely linked to broader efforts to secure the right to communicate, which is widely understood as a prerequisite for meaningful democratic participation in civil society. Despite being part of civil society, women have often faced historical barriers rooted in sex discrimination that limit their access to media platforms and public communication (Byerly & Ross, 2006). Research in media studies has emphasized that media representations play a significant role in shaping perceptions of gender relations in society. Media are not merely platforms where gender roles are displayed; they also formulate value judgments and contribute to defining expectations about masculinity and femininity. Through recurring representations, media can reinforce dominant gender norms or circulate alternative role models. From a media-ethical perspective, this raises the question of whether media representations support the principle of gender equality as a fundamental value of liberal-democratic societies or whether stereotypical gender roles and unequal evaluations of women and men continue to prevail in media discourse (Grimm, 2014).

Research on gender and media has increasingly highlighted the role of media systems in shaping the public visibility of women's rights and gender equality debates. Feminist approaches to media development emphasize that media institutions are central arenas where gender norms, power relations, and social inequalities are negotiated and reproduced. In this perspective, strengthening women's participation in media systems is closely linked to improving their rights, resources, and representation in the public sphere. Media development initiatives therefore increasingly adopt gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches that seek to expand women's communicative rights, support their

participation in media production, and enhance their visibility and influence within public discourse (Küller & Spaeth, 2024). The latest edition of the Global Media Monitoring Project highlights persistent gender inequalities in news media worldwide. According to the report, women constitute only 26 percent of the people seen, heard, or spoken about in print and broadcast news. Despite three decades of monitoring since the first GMMP study in 1995, progress has remained limited: women’s visibility in news content has increased by only nine percentage points, with little substantial change since 2010. The report also indicates that gender-related issues themselves receive limited attention in news coverage, with topics such as gender-based violence appearing in fewer than two out of every one hundred news stories globally (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2025).

Analyzing how women’s rights are discussed in news discourse can therefore provide valuable insight into how gender equality debates are framed and circulated within contemporary media environments. For this reason, examining how the concept of women’s rights is articulated in specific national media contexts becomes particularly relevant. Germany provides an especially important case for such an analysis due to its influential media system and its central role in European debates on democracy, migration, and gender equality. In this context, examining the language of news becomes particularly important. Bednarek and Caple (2019) argue that a linguistic or semiotic perspective can provide detailed evidence for researchers in journalism and communication studies. According to the authors, systematic linguistic or semiotic analyses of news discourse can offer valuable foundations for examining ideological positioning, power relations, and the norms and practices that shape news production. Such interdisciplinary approaches, they suggest, enable empirically grounded, testable, and replicable analyses through structured linguistic frameworks (Bednarek & Caple, 2019).

Analyzing how women’s rights are discussed in German news discourse, therefore, offers important insights into how gender equality debates are articulated within a major European media system, particularly in terms of salience, framing, and language use. Studies on gender representation also highlight persistent patterns of underrepresentation and visibility gaps in news coverage. For instance, Urchs et al. (2025) analyze gender representation in a large-scale corpus of more than 1.8 million articles published in the German newspaper *taz* between 1980 and 2024 and find that men appear more frequently as actors in news reporting and receive greater textual attention than women. While the study also observes a gradual shift toward more balanced representation in recent years, the findings indicate a persistent imbalance in media visibility between women and men (Urchs et al., 2025). Similar patterns are also observed in studies of migration coverage. Lind and Meltzer (2021) show that migrant women receive considerably less visibility in German news reporting on migration. Their automated content analysis of migration-related news coverage published between 2003 and 2017 finds that migrant women are salient in only 12–26% of migration-related articles, whereas migrant men are referred to in almost all migration-related articles, indicating a significant gender imbalance in media visibility (Lind & Meltzer, 2021).

In the context of research on women’s rights, these patterns raise the question of how “rights” are discursively framed in news coverage. Research on media reporting on violence against women in Germany illustrates these framing dynamics. Analyzing press coverage between 2015 and 2019, Meltzer (2024) finds that intimate partner violence is comparatively underreported and rarely contextualized as a broader structural gender issue. At the same time, cases involving non-German perpetrators are more frequently embedded in wider cultural or political frames, whereas violence committed by German men tends to be presented as isolated incidents (Meltzer, 2024). However, while these studies examine gender representation and framing in the media, relatively little attention has been paid to how the concept of women’s rights itself is articulated in news discourse. In particular, it remains unclear how references to women’s rights are discursively positioned in contemporary news coverage—whether they are framed as

universal democratic norms, as elements of political and social debate, or primarily in relation to specific problem contexts such as migration or gender-based violence. To address this gap, the present study examines the usage patterns and discursive contexts of the keyword *Frauenrechte* (women's rights) in German news discourse.

Methodology

Bednarek and Caple (2019) note that the linguistic characteristics of news writing should be understood as the output of the news production process. However, this output interacts with a wide range of factors, including journalistic beliefs and assumptions about newsworthiness, editorial policies and style guides, media forms and technological constraints, legal regulations, economic conditions, and professional routines such as deadlines and the news cycle. At the same time, the relationship between these factors and news discourse is not simply one of reflection. While news discourse is constrained by situational and cultural factors, it also contributes to establishing and reinforcing such norms through recurring linguistic patterns that shape what audiences recognize as typical news discourse. Corpus linguistic approaches have become increasingly important in the analysis of news texts. This approach typically relies on large collections of texts (corpora) and computer-assisted tools to examine linguistic patterns in news discourse, often drawing on insights from corpus-based discourse analysis. Studies in this field vary in the extent to which they employ corpora and computational tools for analyzing news language (Bednarek & Caple, 2019). Corpus-linguistic approaches have become increasingly relevant in media and journalism studies as a method for analyzing patterns in journalistic language and media discourse. A theory-driven application of corpus linguistics requires that key concepts commonly used in media research—such as framing, emotionality, news values, or objectivity—be operationalized by linking them to observable linguistic features in texts. At the same time, corpus-based research enables the systematic combination of quantitative pattern detection with qualitative interpretation and can complement both manual and computational forms of content analysis. In this way, corpus methods provide valuable tools for computer-assisted analysis of large collections of media texts and support interdisciplinary collaboration between corpus linguistics and media and journalism studies (Werner & Michael, 2024). Building on this perspective, a corpus-based approach is particularly suitable for analyzing how references to women's rights appear and circulate in German news discourse.

The study employs a corpus-based discourse-analytic approach to examine how the concept of *Frauenrechte* (women's rights) is used and contextualized in German news discourse. This approach treats linguistic patterns in news texts as both the output of news production routines and a resource through which journalistic norms and ideologies are reproduced. Corpus linguistic methods are particularly suitable for this purpose because they allow for the systematic analysis of large bodies of text with the help of computer-assisted tools, drawing on insights from corpus-based discourse analysis. By examining large textual datasets, corpus-based approaches enable researchers to identify regularities in language use that may not be visible through traditional qualitative reading. The empirical material is drawn from the German Reference Corpus (Deutsches Referenzkorpus, DeReKo), one of the largest repositories of contemporary German-language texts maintained by the Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS) in Mannheim. DeReKo is widely used in corpus-based research on the German language and discourse and provides large-scale newspaper archives suitable for empirical studies of media language. The data were retrieved through the COSMAS II interface, which enables systematic searches within the corpus and allows the extraction of concordance lines and contextual information for specific lexical items.

For this study, a keyword search was conducted for the term "Frauenrechte" within the sub-corpus of the Berliner Zeitung (öffentlich) covering the period 2024–2025. The search produced 62 occurrences

of the keyword in articles archived in the DeReKo corpus. The unit of analysis was the individual occurrence of the keyword "Frauenrechte". Each occurrence was coded manually according to its dominant contextual and evaluative function within the available concordance context. In cases where an occurrence could plausibly fit more than one category, the final coding decision was based on the dominant theme and tone of the occurrence rather than on isolated keyword usage. The analysis is based on a single-newspaper corpus derived from *Berliner Zeitung*. The selection of a single media source was made deliberately in order to maintain internal consistency in language use, editorial style, and discursive framing. By focusing on one newspaper, the study ensures that observed variations in the use of “Frauenrechte” can be attributed more reliably to contextual differences rather than to cross-media heterogeneity. This design prioritizes depth of analysis and internal coherence over cross-source representativeness. Furthermore, the restriction to a single source allows for the full coding of all occurrences within the selected timeframe (2024–2025), thereby enhancing the analytical rigor of the study. The *Berliner Zeitung* was selected because it provides continuous coverage of domestic, European, and international political issues, which makes it suitable for tracing how references to women’s rights circulate across different discursive domains within a coherent media source.

Adopting a corpus-based approach, the study investigates the recurring linguistic environments in which the term appears and explores the thematic domains and actor constellations most frequently associated with it. The retrieved results are presented in keyword-in-context (KWIC) format, which displays each occurrence of the keyword together with its surrounding textual environment. Each concordance line includes bibliographic information such as the newspaper source, publication date, and article title. The analytical procedure consisted of two main steps. First, the concordance lines were examined to identify recurring lexical patterns and collocations associated with the keyword *Frauenrechte*. Second, the retrieved contexts were qualitatively analyzed in order to identify recurring thematic domains and discursive environments in which the concept appears. This approach makes it possible to observe how references to women’s rights emerge across different issue areas in news reporting, including political debates, international affairs, migration discussions, and human rights discourse. Rather than evaluating normative positions toward women’s rights, the analysis focuses on identifying usage patterns and discursive contexts that structure how the concept appears in German news coverage. By combining corpus-based retrieval with contextual interpretation of concordance lines, the study aims to clarify how the concept of women’s rights is linguistically positioned in contemporary German press discourse.

Findings and Analysis

This section presents the empirical findings of the corpus analysis and discusses the main discursive contexts in which references to women’s rights appear in the corpus. The corpus data show that the keyword *Frauenrechte* does not occur within a single stable discursive frame. Instead, it appears across several recurring thematic contexts, most prominently international politics, democracy and human rights discourse, German domestic politics, activism and civil society, and broader cultural or social debates. To provide an overview of the distribution of discursive contexts, all 62 occurrences of the keyword *Frauenrechte* were manually coded into thematic categories based on their immediate textual context. The coding process focused on identifying the dominant discursive context in which the term was used. The resulting categories were then used to calculate frequency distributions and to guide the qualitative interpretation of the findings. The frequencies presented in Tables 1 and 2 are based on the full dataset of 62 occurrences. Each occurrence was coded individually and subsequently cross-checked in multiple audit rounds to ensure consistency and data-driven classification.

Table 1

Distribution of “Frauenrechte” Occurrences by Discursive Context (n = 62)

Context	n	%
International politics	27	43.5
German domestic politics	13	21.0
Activism and civil society	7	11.3
Cultural and social debates	15	24.2
Total	62	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of all 62 occurrences of the keyword *Frauenrechte* across the identified discursive contexts. The coding ensured full coverage of the dataset, with no occurrences excluded from the analysis. Each occurrence of “*Frauenrechte*” was assigned to one primary category based on its dominant discursive context within the news article. The category of *international politics* includes all instances in which women’s rights are discussed in relation to countries outside Germany, global political developments, or transnational actors such as international organizations and foreign governments. In contrast, *German domestic politics* refers to occurrences embedded in internal political processes within Germany, including parliamentary debates, party positions, legislative initiatives, and policy-making discussions. The category of *activism and civil society* captures references to women’s rights articulated by non-state actors, such as NGOs, feminist movements, protest groups, and other forms of civic engagement, emphasizing bottom-up mobilization rather than institutional politics. Finally, *cultural and social debates* encompass broader societal and cultural discourses in which women’s rights are invoked in relation to social norms, identity issues, religious practices, media representations, or everyday public debates. In all cases, categorization was based on the dominant context of the occurrence within the broader article.

The contextual distribution of the 62 occurrences of the keyword “*Frauenrechte*” reveals a clear pattern in the way women’s rights are positioned within media discourse. First, the largest proportion of occurrences is situated within the category of international politics (43.5%). This pattern is also visible in the concordance contexts themselves. The corpus contains numerous references to women’s rights in relation to political repression, legal restrictions, democratization, and international conflict in countries such as Iran, Syria, Ukraine, France, and Saudi Arabia. This indicates that references to women’s rights are most frequently embedded in discussions concerning countries outside Germany, including geopolitical developments, foreign policy contexts, and transnational issues. Within the analyzed Berliner Zeitung corpus, the prominence of this category suggests that women’s rights are more frequently positioned as a global concern than as a primarily domestic political issue. In these contexts, women’s rights often appear in relation to political developments, legal frameworks, or socio-political conditions in other countries. The second most frequent category is cultural and social debates (24.2%), which encompasses broader societal discussions such as identity, media representation, historical narratives, and public discourse. The relatively high share of this category demonstrates that women’s rights are also actively negotiated within societal and cultural contexts. Here, the term is often embedded in debates that are not strictly institutional or political but rather concern norms, values, and interpretations within society.

The category of German domestic politics (21.0%) accounts for a smaller but still substantial portion of occurrences. This suggests that women’s rights are present within internal political processes,

including legislative debates, party positions, and policy discussions. However, compared to international contexts, the lower proportion indicates that domestic political discourse does not constitute the primary arena in which women’s rights are articulated in the analyzed corpus. Finally, activism and civil society (11.3%) represent the least frequent category. This includes references to protests, non-governmental organizations, and grassroots mobilization. While this share is comparatively low, it nevertheless reflects the presence of bottom-up engagement and indicates that civil society actors contribute to the articulation of women’s rights, albeit to a lesser extent than institutional or international actors.

Taken together, these findings suggest a clear contextual asymmetry in the discourse on women’s rights. The dominance of international political contexts indicates a tendency to frame women’s rights as an issue primarily located beyond national borders. At the same time, the notable presence of cultural and social debates highlights that women’s rights are not confined to formal political arenas but are also embedded in broader societal discussions. The comparatively lower share of domestic political references may point to a relative underrepresentation of women’s rights as a central issue in internal political discourse, at least within the analyzed dataset. Meanwhile, the limited proportion of activism-related occurrences suggests that civil society voices, while present, are not the dominant drivers of the discourse. Importantly, these interpretations remain strictly grounded in the observed frequency distribution and do not extend beyond the immediate contextual patterns identified in the data.

Table 2

Framing of “Frauenrechte” in the Corpus (n = 62)

Frame	n	%
Advocacy	24	38.7
Violation	10	16.1
Political critique	13	21.0
Instrumentalization	0	0
Neutral reference	15	24.2
Total	62	100

In addition to contextual classification, each occurrence of “Frauenrechte” was coded according to its dominant discursive framing. The advocacy frame refers to instances in which women’s rights were supported, promoted, or framed as requiring protection or expansion. The violation frame was assigned

when women's rights were presented as being restricted, violated, or undermined, including references to repression, discrimination, legal limitations, or violence. The political critique frame was used when women's rights served as a basis for criticizing political actors, institutions, or policies, reflecting an evaluative or oppositional stance. The instrumentalization frame captures cases in which women's rights were employed as a rhetorical or strategic tool to advance broader political, ideological, or geopolitical arguments, rather than being treated as an end in itself. Finally, the neutral reference frame applies to descriptive or informational mentions of women's rights that do not convey a clear evaluative or normative position. In cases of ambiguity, the dominant frame was determined based on the broader textual context rather than isolated keyword usage.

The analysis of discursive framing provides further insight into how women's rights are constructed and mobilized within the corpus. Based on the coding of 62 occurrences, a clear hierarchy of frames emerges. The most dominant frame is advocacy (38.7%), indicating that women's rights are most frequently presented as a norm that should be supported, protected, or strengthened. In these instances, the term "*Frauenrechte*" appears in contexts that emphasize equality, empowerment, or the necessity of advancing rights. This suggests that, at a fundamental level, women's rights are largely treated as a legitimate and positively valued principle within the analyzed discourse. The second most prominent frame is neutral reference (24.2%), which reflects occurrences in which women's rights are mentioned descriptively without a clear evaluative stance. In such cases, the term functions as part of a broader thematic listing or contextual background rather than as a focal point of argumentation. The relatively high proportion of neutral references indicates that women's rights are not only debated but also normalized as a recurring topic within public discourse.

A substantial share of occurrences falls under political critique (21.0%). Here, women's rights are used as a benchmark to evaluate and criticize political actors, institutions, or policies. This frame highlights the instrumental role of women's rights as a discursive resource in political argumentation. Rather than being discussed in isolation, women's rights frequently serve as a lens through which broader political developments are assessed and contested. The violation frame (16.1%) captures instances in which women's rights are depicted as being restricted, undermined, or threatened. These occurrences typically involve references to legal limitations, social inequalities, or direct forms of repression. Although less frequent than advocacy, the presence of this frame demonstrates that the discourse also contains a significant emphasis on the fragility or erosion of rights. Finally, no occurrence was coded as dominantly instrumentalizing women's rights. This does not exclude the presence of politically charged or borderline uses; rather, such cases were coded according to their dominant contextual and evaluative function. This suggests that, within the analyzed corpus, women's rights are not explicitly employed as a strategic or rhetorical tool detached from their normative content. Instead, references tend to remain anchored either in support, critique, or descriptive usage.

Taken together, the framing distribution reveals a normatively anchored but functionally diverse discourse on women's rights. The dominance of the advocacy frame indicates that women's rights are primarily constructed as a positive and desirable norm. At the same time, the combined share of political critique and violation (37.1%) demonstrates that a significant portion of the discourse is oriented toward problematization—either by highlighting deficiencies or by using women's rights as a basis for criticism. The relatively high proportion of neutral references further suggests that women's rights have become a stabilized discursive element, routinely invoked across different contexts without necessarily being contested or elaborated. Importantly, the absence of instrumentalization points to a discursive pattern in which women's rights are not overtly detached from their normative meaning. Instead, even when used in political critique, they retain their role as a substantive evaluative standard rather than a purely

strategic device. Overall, the findings indicate that women’s rights function simultaneously as a normative ideal, a diagnostic tool for critique, and a normalized reference point within contemporary media discourse.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the term “Frauenrechte” is used within contemporary media discourse by analyzing its occurrences in the Berliner Zeitung between 2024 and 2025. Based on a fully coded dataset of 62 occurrences, the findings provide insight into both the contextual distribution and the discursive framing of women’s rights. The results demonstrate that references to Frauenrechte are distributed across multiple discursive domains rather than being confined to a single policy field, with a clear predominance of international political contexts. This indicates that women’s rights are more frequently articulated in relation to developments outside Germany than within domestic political processes. At the same time, a substantial number of occurrences are embedded in cultural and social debates, suggesting that women’s rights are also negotiated within broader societal and normative discussions. In terms of discursive framing, the findings reveal that women’s rights are primarily constructed as a normatively positive concept, most frequently appearing within an advocacy frame. The presence of political critique and violation frames shows that women’s rights also function as a diagnostic and evaluative tool, while the relatively high proportion of neutral references indicates that women’s rights have become a stabilized and recurring element of public discourse.

In this respect, the findings align with research suggesting that gender-related issues have become a routine and normalized component of media discourse, frequently appearing as part of broader societal narratives (Gill, 2007). Taken together, these findings suggest that women’s rights function both as a normative reference and as a recurring topic of public discussion within the analyzed corpus. Importantly, the dominance of international contexts suggests a tendency to situate women’s rights in relation to external developments rather than framing them primarily as an internal political issue. Within the analyzed Berliner Zeitung corpus, this pattern indicates a discursive tendency to externalize women’s rights, framing them less as an internal societal issue and more as a concern associated with developments beyond national boundaries. In this sense, the study contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating how such patterns of externalization are systematically reproduced at the micro-level of keyword usage. Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. The analysis is based on a single-newspaper corpus and a time-restricted dataset, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the coding was conducted within a single-coder framework, which may introduce a degree of interpretive subjectivity despite the systematic and data-driven approach. Future research could build on this single-source design by examining whether similar patterns appear across other media outlets, longer time periods, or comparative national contexts.

DECLARATIONS

Declaration Title	Explanation / Text
Ethical Approval	I declare that this research falls within the scope of studies that do not require ethics committee approval.
Conflict of Interest Statement	The author of the study declares that there is no financial or other substantive conflict of interest that could affect the results or interpretation of this study.
Author Contribution Statement	The author contributed solely to the entire work.
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