

Media Democracy without opposition?

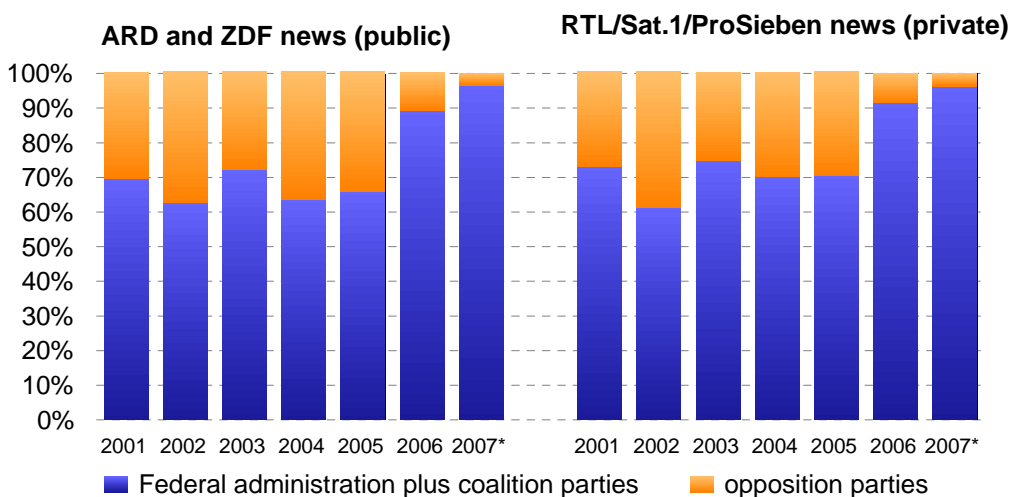
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Two years ago Germans elected a new government. The majority in the new Bundestag lead to a “Grand Coalition” of the two big parties CDU/CSU (Conservatives) and SPD (Social Democrats).

13 years of Media Tenor research has consistently shown that media coverage has an impact on public opinion on all levels agenda setting. It’s a fact: in a democracy, future decisions depend on media coverage.

Current results show that the opposition parties have almost disappeared from public as well as in private broadcasting news.

Chart 1:
Share of governing coalition and opposition parties
as main protagonists German TV 2001 – 2007

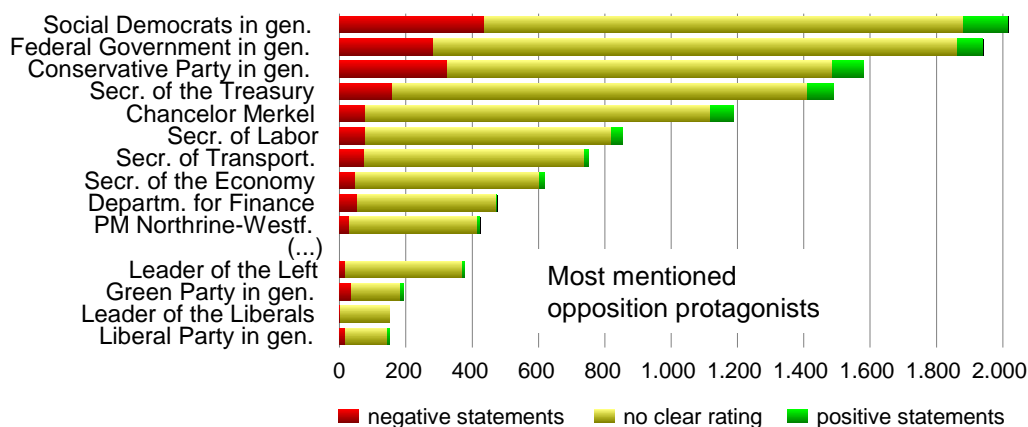


Basis: a total of 27,602 news reports about these protagonists in Germany
 (* 1/1 – 6/10/2007)

Adding quality papers to the analysis does not change the results:
Chart 2 shows who made the news in coverage of economic policy. Opposition parties and party leaders could not place their arguments – even those that have a great tradition in the field of economics like the German Liberals have.

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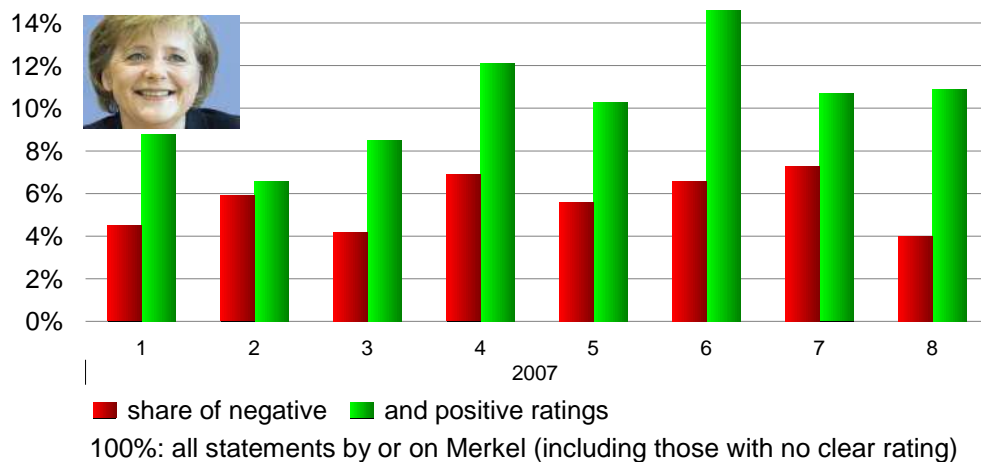
Coverage of political protagonists on economic issues in 31 German opinion-leading media (July – September 2007)



Basis: a total of 23,760 statements on economic issues in 31 German opinion-leading media (7/1 – 9/12/2007)

In the absence of media coverage of opposition parties, journalists themselves have not taken over the function of questioning the government’s policy and providing alternative ideas. Throughout the year the Chancellor received best media ratings.

Chart 3:



Basis: a total of 50,608 statements by or on Merkel in 36 German opinion-leading media (1/1 – 8/31/2007)

So the next level Agenda Setting discussion should therefore deal with the question whether and how democracy can survive the media: Which strategies can small parties develop to understand and use media in political campaigning. Or is it back to grass roots and forward to virtual reality?