

One Big Family

The media contribute little to a family-friendly climate

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Family related policy is still an insignificant topic for the media, two years after the last election. While health as a topic has seen an increase in coverage since 2002, families and children in general have been covered less and less. During this continuous period of lack of reports, print media and TV news programmes portray “one big family”. Between 2001 and 2004, family related policy had on average only a 7% share of reporting on the social state of the nation in Germany (Graph 1).

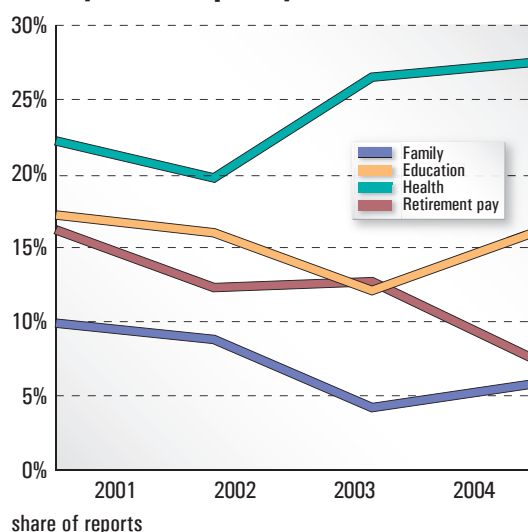
Against the background of demographic change, a lack of childcare for small children and the country’s calamitous economic state, the question has been raised as to whether “Family Politics” is still seen as a “soft” side-issue, or whether the media emphasise the family in choosing their news agenda. Media Tenor has analysed the reports where the current social situation in Germany appears, and summarised the family aspect under the following topics: Situation of children and/or families including single parent; government family related policy; childcare; situation of women; child benefit; child and youth policy; state benefit for families; adoption.

Through planned family and child support programmes billions of Euros, the German government pursued an active agenda with regard to

families during the last election campaign. The Christian Democratic Union sought to emphasise the issue of state benefit for families. Family related policy suddenly became highlighted as an unavoidable issue and was no longer a side-issue for the media. Every investigated medium dedicated more attention to the family during the election campaign than during the following years. For example, the proportion of coverage dedicated to family related policy in *Die Welt* in 2001 and 2002 lay at 8.8%. The proportion in 2003 then sank to 3.5%. In the last year the state of families and the compatibility of working and family life have come back into the news, but not to the proportion that they achieved during the German election campaign. A similar pattern of reporting can also be seen in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Bild-Zeitung* (Graph 2).

Through a comparison of the German daily newspapers one can observe that the unsatisfactory childcare situation in nurseries and schools was featured more prominently at least in some publications during the last year, even though it wasn’t covered too much overall. Two examples: the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* had a proportion of reports on childcare of 0.4% in 2001, but in 2004 the interest had risen to 1.1%. The story was similar in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, where interest in the German government’s strategy for better childcare rose to 1.2% in 2004 from 0.5% in 2001. Buzz-words like “Family State Benefit” and “All-day Care” nevertheless came up less in

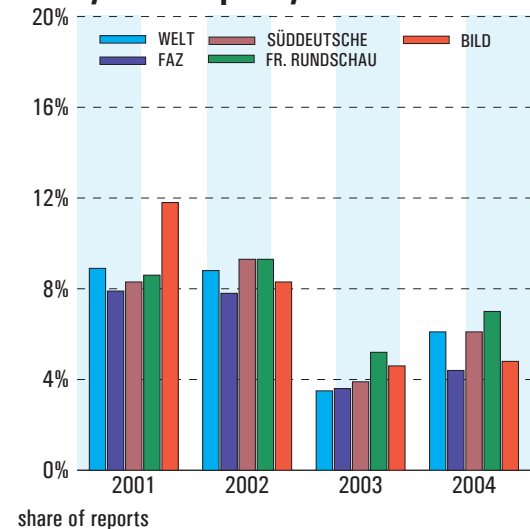
Graph 1: Proportion of coverage of family related policy 2001 – 2004



Source: Media Tenor 01/2001-12/2004

Basis: A total of 50,276 reports about the social situation in Germany in 20 media.

Graph 2: Percentage of coverage of family related policy in dailies

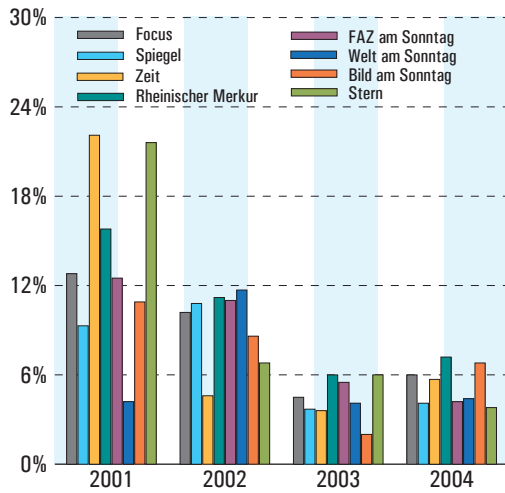


Source: Media Tenor 01/2001-12/2004

Basis: A total of 2,108 reports about family issues in 5 daily print-media

Family related policy regained a more important place on the media agenda during the election campaign. This interest however didn’t last long.

Graph 3: Proportion of coverage of family related policy in weekly media

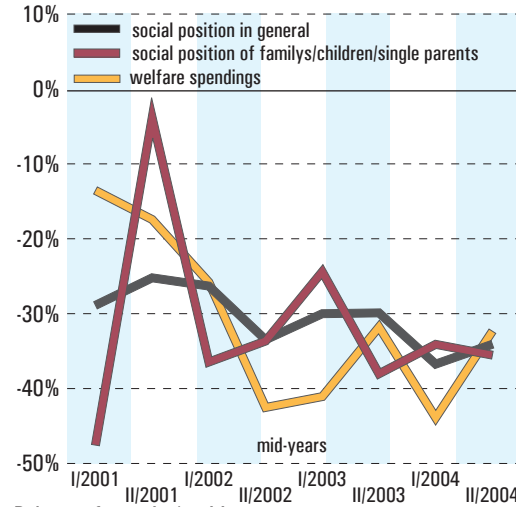


share of reports

Source: Media Tenor 01/2001-12/2004

Basis: 646 reports in 8 weekly print-media

Graph 4: Rating of the overall social situation/situation of families



Balance of negative/positive assessment

Source: Media Tenor 01/2001-12/2004

Basis: A total of 50,276 reports about the social situation in Germany in 20 media

the weekly media and TV news after the din from the election campaign and the PISA shock died down. Among the weekly media, the **Rheinischer Merkur** (8.4%) and **Focus** (7.0%) were the leaders in reporting on family related policy during this time. On closer comparison of the individual years, however, a lack of continuous interest in the topic can be seen in all weekly media (**Graph 3**). Reform of the healthcare system displaced the family from the agenda.

TV reporting on Families is reduced

Reporting on the situation of families on TV news programmes reached a peak in 2001. On **Tagesthemen** (13%), **Heute Journal** (20%) and **RTL Aktuell** (23,7%) the verdicts of the German Federal Constitutional Court on the equal rights of families by the nursery care insurance scheme as, well as by the government's poverty report were given particular prominence. The rejected complaint made to the Federal Constitutional Court by single parents was a media issue in 2002. The conception of a better childcare system was brought up in 2003. Over the last two years, families have been the subject of less reporting also in TV news.

According to a new report from the UN's child relief organisation (UNICEF), one in ten children in Germany live in poverty. The number of children and young people in poverty has increased significantly in the last five years. **Graph 4** shows that both the overall social situation in Germany and the situation of children and families have suf-

fered increasingly negative reporting over the last four years. That comes in addition to an increasingly critical representation of the achievements of government social policy.

The actual situation of families is likewise reflected in the media. Family state benefit is therefore becoming more and more of a problem for the social security system. Children are the most affected group by poverty. According to a research project carried out for the magazines **Eltern** and **Eltern for Family**, the majority of those surveyed consider the current climate in Germany to be hostile to children. The media also have a responsibility to change that through the choice of news items. As long as family related policy remains a "neglected child" in news reporting, then nothing will change in the current lack of consideration of families as an important political issue.

Basis:

Media: Bild, Die Welt, FAZ, Frankfurter Rundschau, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Zeit, Focus, Rheinischer Merkur, Spiegel, Stern, Bild am Sonntag, FAZ Sonntagszeitung, Welt am Sonntag; ARD Tagesschau, Tagesthemen, ZDF heute, heute journal, RTL Aktuell, Sat.1 18:30, ProSieben news

Time: 01/01/2001 – 12/31/2004

Analysis: A total of 50,276 reports about the social situation in Germany in 20 media

Since 2001, the reporting of the social situation in Germany has become more negative.

Open questions:

If family related policy, along with the educational system, is to be an important issue of the future; Why doesn't the media keep this subject on the agenda?

Is the media not able to make a contribution to increased benevolence towards children in Germany, giving more space to positive reports?

Will legally required family-friendly policies from companies receive more attention in the media in future?