

Political Reporting in Poland: What Has Changed over The Last Decade?

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SYNOPSIS

It cannot be questioned that the media has become the main source of information about politics and in so doing deprived political parties of the information functions they once possessed (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004). The growing intrusion of media into the political domain has led some scholars to describing this phenomenon as “media-driven republic”, in which media usurps the traditional functions of political actors. Thus media is seen as having “mutagenic” impact on politics and the ability to change political discourse (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999:248). However, intrusion can vary substantially between single analyzed countries. This paper analyzes how political reporting has changed over time in the “Gazeta Wyborcza”, the “Rzeczpospolita” and the “Super Express”, Poland’s widely read newspapers. The author content analyzed the political coverage during the four weeks prior to parliamentary elections in 1997, 2001 and 2005. The first part briefly outlines the political background in Poland. In the second step, analyzed newspapers and their role in the transformation processes are discussed. Thirdly, the study proposes four research questions and explores how mediatization processes are manifested in political reporting of the newly established Polish democracy. Using content analysis the author measures the *extent of media coverage on party campaigning*, the *level of personalization*, the *use of negativity in depicting themes and political parties* and *political orientations* of the analyzed media. In this context it is important to stress that this study is the first attempt to bring any empirical data on political reporting in Poland over a longer period of time and similar studies have not yet been published.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The collapse of the Soviet empire paved the way to the creation of a new political system in Poland. Polish political parties in the post-communist era had their roots either in the Solidarity movement¹ or in the parties that operated legally during the Soviet rule² and the parliamentary system was highly fragmented. The scope of this fragmentation was tangibly proved by the fact that in the early 90s many political parties had only one single seat in the parliament or voters cast a ballot for such parties like Polish Friends of Beer (Polska Partia Przyjaciół Piwa). The most important outcome of the elections held in the last decade was the fact that it was difficult

¹ Solidarity was a Polish trade union federation founded in September 1980 and originally led by Lech Walesa.

² During the period of the communist regime the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza) defined the political landscape (Wojtaszczyk, 1998) exerting monopoly of power.

to build a strong government capable of introducing economic and social reforms. Furthermore, the very fragmentation of Sejm, Polish parliament, also reflected deep ideological polarization, making stabilization a truly challenging task.

With its multi-party system Poland still undergoes the process of transformation (Paszkievicz, 2004). However, compared with the early '90s the Polish political landscape has become far more crystallized, as the major political formations on the Polish scene had been defined. Still, Polish political system is continuously marked by weak coalition governments (Jednaka, 2004; Rydlewski, 2000). In the period analyzed in this study, Poland had four cabinets and two of them ended as minority governments. In the period between 1997 and 2005 there was also no party in Poland that would have a majority in the parliament, so creating coalition governments was a necessity (Paszkievicz, 2004). In 1997 the post-communist government composed of Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) lost the elections and a post-Solidarity cabinet including Solidarity Action Plan (AWS) and Union of Liberty (UW) was created. Within four years of governing both AWS and UW literally vanished from the political scene and another government comprising again SLD and PSL was established. Finally, in 2005 a right wing party Law and Justice (PiS) won the majority in Sejm and created a coalition with populist groupings Self-Defense and League of Polish Families (LPR). Overall, in the last decade there could be observed a kind of a sinusoid - the government would switch from *the Left* to *the Right* every four years. The three analyzed parliamentary campaigns in Poland are an example of a wholesale alternation (Mair, 2002) where every election resulted in displacing parties from their position as incumbent. None of the political groupings succeeded in ruling the country continuously for more than one legislative term.

Political parties in Poland can be arranged on a Left/Right continuum. The "traditional" right-wing parties in Poland have a very dramatic and dynamic history. Prior to 1989 the Polish opposition movement was unified around a single issue – the quest for sovereignty and struggle against the „reds”. When political independence was regained, diverse anti-communist groups started to articulate their own political programmes and the “Solidarity ethos” faded away. The results of the fragmentation had far reaching consequences. Right wing parties active at the beginning of the 90s were often described as “sofa parties” (*partie kanapowe*) – a rather unflattering suggestion that their entire membership would not occupy more space that could be

found on a couch. The fragmentation of the Polish *Right*³ contrasted with the left-wing political groupings. The *Left* in Poland has always been perceived as a monolith when compared to the right wing parties and was mainly represented by Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) the heir to the post-communist party. There are two more parties that should be mentioned, Polish Peasants' Party (PSL) and Self-Defense (Samoobrona) whose role cannot be underestimated. PSL traditionally represents the farmers and entered the parliament in every elections. Self-Defense is a radical left-wing grouping that emerged on the wave of distrust to Polish political elites.

MEDIA BACKGROUND

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the media landscape at greater length. Since the content analysis embraced newspapers, the following paragraphs briefly outline the role of the dailies in Poland. The media landscape in Poland, similarly to the Mediterranean countries, is relatively strongly politicized and the level of political parallelism seen as high. Furthermore, journalists tend to stress the need for a commentary function and newspapers often represent distinct political identities. In Poland the press often played an activist role and mobilized the readership. Polish journalists are often politically engaged; sometimes they become politicians during their professional carrier. Hallin & Mancini (2004:98) refer to the words of Albert (1983) who described French journalism as “a journalism of expression rather than a journalism of observation”. This is also true for Poland where precedence is given to the commentary that reflects the political roots of a given newspaper.

Especially under the communist rule the media was expected to serve political ends. Both press and television functioned as a platform for the articulation of communist policy. For a substantial period of time the state played a role of a censor. When Poland regained its independence in 1989 the media was of a vital importance for the democratization processes. In the communist period, despite an official ideology that conceived the media as instruments of the party, Polish journalists developed strong professional culture (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). They had a sense of distinct identity and of a distinct role in society. They placed a high value on autonomy and social solidarity. The „Gazeta Wyborcza”, the first legally published independent daily is currently one of the largest newspapers in the country with a circulation of

³ Among parties discussed in this study right wing parties included: AWS (later AWSP), UW, Movement to Rebuild Poland (ROP), Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS).

half a million copies. It started 1989 as an eight-page newspaper prepared by opposition journalists who until then worked for the underground press connected with Solidarity and is now one of the nation's key opinion-forming publications. Similarly, the "Rzeczpospolita" also emerged on the wave of political changes introduced in the early 90s and acquired a role of a leading daily providing extensive coverage on economic issues.

Thus Polish journalism has a strong advocacy tradition, tightly connected with the history of the institutional ties between the media and the political system. Still, according to the survey conducted by Bajka (2000) among Polish journalists only 7% of respondents claimed that they always write and say what they think. However, 93% of respondents stated that they usually express their own views but it happened that they had to promote the ideas of the others which were partly or fully contradictory to their own views. Reasons for limiting the freedom of expression varied, 42% of respondents mentioned the pressure of the media owners or chief editors, whereas 19% claimed that they encountered internal censorship and were not allowed to write negatively about certain political forces or major advertisers. Additionally, 11% of respondents mentioned auto-censorship whereas 8% of journalists stressed external pressure from politicians and state administration.

Three Polish daily newspapers were the objects of investigation: the "Gazeta Wyborcza", the "Rzeczpospolita" and the "Super Express". Both the "Gazeta Wyborcza" and the "Rzeczpospolita" are regarded as quality newspapers, serve as examples of high journalistic professionalism and are used as a yardstick by journalists in other media. The "Rzeczpospolita" and the "Gazeta Wyborcza" are widely quoted by Polish and foreign media, act as opinion multipliers and *Leitmedia* for other information providers (IMM, 2007). Both newspapers belong to the group of the best-selling dailies (Filas, 2003). Simultaneously, their editorial stances reflect the political spectrum in a rather similar manner, favoring post-Solidarity parties to post-communist groupings. The "Gazeta Wyborcza" however, generally tends to pronounce its political sympathies more openly than the "Rzeczpospolita" and many of its journalists were active in opposition movements in the 80s. The media sample embraced also the "Super Express" which can be perceived as an equivalent of the "Bild" or "The Sun" and is currently the second largest tabloid in Poland (ZKDP, 2007). The selection of Polish dailies enabled thus also a comparison between serious and sensationalist/tabloid outlets on a national level and the way they react to the mediatization processes. It is also important to mention that the "Super

Express” generally refrained from political themes in the 90s and started to include more political reports in the recent years.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As indicated earlier, this study is the first attempt to bring any empirical data on political reporting in Poland over a longer period of time. So far only Trutkowski (2000) evaluated the performance of leading Polish dailies and the media reporting during the 1997 parliamentary campaign. In this analysis the author uses collected data to show how coverage on politics has changed in the last decade. In this context it is important to ask whether the processes of mediatization find their exemplification in an increasing coverage on party campaigning, more personalized reporting or rising negativity in depicting politics and political parties. Simultaneously the study scrutinizes whether Polish media are partisan in their nature and whether they differ in terms of presenting of political groupings. Following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: *Has media coverage on party campaigning increase over time?*

RQ2: *Have evaluations become more focused on leaders over time?*

RQ3: *Have evaluations of political themes and political actors become more negative?*

RQ4: *Are the newspapers’ political sympathies more or less pronounced?*

METHOD

A systematic, quantitative content analysis was conducted to show changes in political reporting in Poland. The coverage over a period of the last four weeks prior to the selected parliamentary elections was coded. Within those four weeks every second day was analyzed. Thus the analysis of Polish media embraced newspapers published between 25.08.1997 – 20.09.1997, 27.08.2001 – 22.09.2001 and 29.08.2005 – 24.09.2005. This four-week period, during which also public television showed party broadcasts, is generally regarded as the “hot phase” of the election campaign (Kaid, 2004; Wilke & Reinemann, 2000). The last month before the polling day is seen as a time of the most intensive party campaigning with the largest volume of campaign-oriented articles in the press (Kaid, 2004).

All articles were coded according to the guidelines provided in coding instruments, which is to be discussed at greater length in the next paragraphs. The sample consisted of 919 Polish articles. The number of articles coded *per campaign* varied. That was due to two factors. Firstly, the Polish tabloid “Super Express” generally published less articles related to politics in 1997 when the newspaper deliberately refrained from extensive coverage on political sphere. Secondly, during the Polish 2001 parliamentary campaign the September agenda was largely defined by articles related to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. This also resulted in a lower number of coded articles⁴. The sample was composed as showed in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample of analyzed newspapers

	1997 Campaign	2001 Campaign	2005 Campaign
Number of articles	313	259	347
TOTAL	919 articles		

The coding instrument was based on earlier studies of political reporting (Noelle-Neumann, Kepplinger & Donsbach, 1999; 2005). The coders analyzed all newspapers’ sections related to national politics as well as the certain additional sections of newspapers which were neatly connected with the national politics. In order to assess the relevancy of a given article for the analysis, the headline and the lead of the article were read in detail and the rest of the text was just skimmed through by the coders to determine whether the article was to be scrutinized. The analysis did not include statistics and graphics or readers’ letters. However, if a given graphics or statistics showed information related to party campaigns (e.g. results of polls, diagrams with possible outcomes of elections, possible coalitions etc.), they were coded as well. The graphics in that case were coded not as photos but as a text, similarly as articles. The coders analyzed articles related to the theme blocks: political parties; party leaders, parliamentary campaign itself (strategies used by parties, political advertising, role of political consultants etc.); economic and finance policy; social policy; relations between the state and politics (relations between political institutions, lustration, political scandals, bribery etc.); domestic security and foreign policy.

Coding books prepared for newspapers analyses included both formal and content categories. The *formal categories* included the *coded medium*, *number of the article in a given newspaper*, *date of publication*, *page number on which a given article was published*, *source of information*

⁴ Many articles were related to stories of individuals involved in the 11th September tragedy and were thus not coded.

(journalist, information agency, multiple sources etc.), *prominence of placement* (on the first page, second, or other) and *style* (news, reportage, comment or interviews/documentation).

The *content variables* were coded on two different levels: partly on the *article level* and partly on the *theme level*. Categories related to a given article as a whole (independently of the presented theme) included, among others, *tone of a given article*, *tendency of depicting of political parties*, *personalization* (up to three main actors could be identified per article). Additionally, in articles where conflicts were discussed the coders analyzed the *extent of dramatization* and whether the media concentrated on *conflict-oriented or cooperation-oriented depicting of political parties* in the context of conflicts. The other part of categories was coded on the *theme level*. If themes referred to party leaders, parties or political campaigning coding on theme level did not take place. For other topics *depicting of a given theme* and *forecast for a development of a given theme* was coded. Collected data was transferred into the SPSS programme for the purpose of statistical analysis.

RESULTS

The presentation of results is structured according to the research questions posed in the study. Firstly, it is discussed whether media coverage on party campaigning in Poland has changed over time. Secondly, the analysis reflects the extent of personalization found in media reporting. In the next step, negativity coded in Polish articles is evaluated. The evaluation is conducted on three levels, on the level of article, on the level of presented themes and separately for coded parties. Additionally, on the level of article, the level of dramatization as well as the extent of conflict-oriented or cooperation-oriented depicting is addressed. Finally, the study shows whether Polish media have partisan orientations that are mirrored in negative evaluations of political parties.

Coverage on party campaigning

In order to evaluate the theme spectrum in each of the analyzed Polish media coverage, coders could identify up to three topics that were predominantly discussed by a journalist in a given article. The results indicate that press reporting in the last four weeks prior to the polling day generally favored similar themes in all analyzed periods. The findings indicate that in all three coded periods the highest percentage of articles referred to party campaigning which constituted

52% in 1997, 41% in 2001, and 43% in 2005. Simultaneously, a large number of articles discussed issues related to economic and financial policies, which amounted to 13% in 1997 and 12% in 2005. In 2001 economic matters were presented at much greater length (26%) which can be partly explained by the fact that the economic development deteriorated at that time and a larger volume of information concentrated on the outcome of economic reforms. According to the report issued by Polish NIK (2002) the dynamics of economy in Poland in 2001 showed far worse results in comparison to the whole decade of the 90s. The first year of the XXI century was marked by the collapse of investments, collapse of public financial sector and worsening situation on the work market. Thus it should not be surprising that the media extensively reported on economic and finance policies. Media coverage on economy was intensified in case of all analyzed newspapers and amounted to 19% in the “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 26% in the “Rzeczpospolita” and 34% in the “Super Express”⁵.

Interestingly, Polish media devoted much space to articles discussing the relations between the state and politics. This theme concentrated on evaluation of political institutions, reported on political scandals, bribery etc. These issues were highlighted in 20% of articles in 1997, compared to 12% in 2001 and 19% in 2005. This high percentage of articles discussing relations between the state and politics can be partly attributed to the transformation processes, where media continuously analyzed the development of democratic practices in Poland. Polish press did evaluate politicians’ fitness for public offices. Before 1997 elections the media extensively reported *inter alia* about Kwasniewski-Alganow scandal⁶ and debates over lustration law⁷. Four years later the media was mainly concerned with economic issues and the events of 11th September. However, it still devoted much space to the evaluation of relations between the state and politics, particularly to the degree of development of the Polish democracy. Finally, in 2005 Polish newspapers evaluated the performance of post-communist government in the context of, among others, the Orlen scandal⁸ or the Rywingate⁹. Additionally,

⁵ It should be remembered that the analysis included articles published in sections related to politics. The smaller volume of articles referring to economy in quality newspapers was partly caused by the fact that both the “Gazeta Wyborcza” and the “Rzeczpospolita” have separate sections devoted exclusively to economic policy that were not included in the empirical evaluation. The “Super Express” however does not provide readers with additional pages discussing only economic matters. Thus the financial matters were articulated in articles reflecting politics in Poland and therefore their number was greater.

⁶ One of Polish newspapers accused president Kwasniewski of spending holidays with the Russian agent Alganow, which became a theme of detailed and lasting media coverage.

⁷ The issue of lustration law has not been so far fully resolved in Poland. The problem of identifying collaborators, active in service of communist regime frequently emerges during the time of elections when parties address this matter in their political programmes.

⁸ The so-called “afera Orlenu” regarded the privatization process of oil giant PKN Orlen.

⁹ One of the biggest corruption scandals in Poland named after the film producer Lew Rywin. On behalf of the so-called “group of power” Rywin made a bribe proposal to Adam Michnik, chief editor of the “Gazeta

the media launched the so-called “*Campaign controlled*” (*kampania kontrolowana*) which aimed at showing whether party leaders were telling the truth during the time of campaigning.

There is no evidence to confirm that media coverage on party campaigning has increased over time. On the contrary, the percentage of articles referring to election campaigns decreased from 52% in 1997 to 41% in 2001 and only slightly increased to 43% in 2005. These findings have a number of reasons. Firstly, both the 2001 and the 2005 elections in Poland occurred under specific circumstances. As indicated in the previous paragraphs the coders analyzed the articles published four weeks prior to elections, which meant that the analysis of articles published in 2001 embraced a period between 27th August and 22nd September. Thus the sample automatically comprised newspapers that reported on the events of 11th September and the terrorist attack on the United States. This was also mirrored in the percentage of articles related to the foreign policy. In 1997 foreign policy issues were discussed in 2% of the articles, then increased to 7% in 2001 and decreased to 4% in 2005. The significance level of .012 shown for Pearson’s chi-square indicated that media reporting on foreign policy was more intensive in 2001 than in other periods. The events of 11th September resulted also in a smaller number of articles coded in 2001 (n=259) compared to coverage in 1997 (n=313) and media reporting in 2005 (n=347). The lower number of articles resulted from the fact that in 2001 the Polish media presented stories of individuals who were in the United States during the attack on the World Trade Center¹⁰.

As noted by Wilke & Reinemann (2000) the intensity of media coverage is defined by other competing themes that are of equivalent interest to the public. In Poland the media reporting in 2005 was marked by an event of high news value - presidential elections that were scheduled for 9th October 2005 and overlapped with the Sejm elections. Thus, 13% of articles published in 2005 concentrated on presidential elections and media reporting on the race to the Belweder¹¹ constituted one of the most frequently discussed issues.

Simultaneously, there could be observed a trend towards placing articles related to party campaigning on the first pages. The coding instrument used a variable *prominence of placement* to evaluate this phenomenon, measured on the four point scale. The coders examined whether

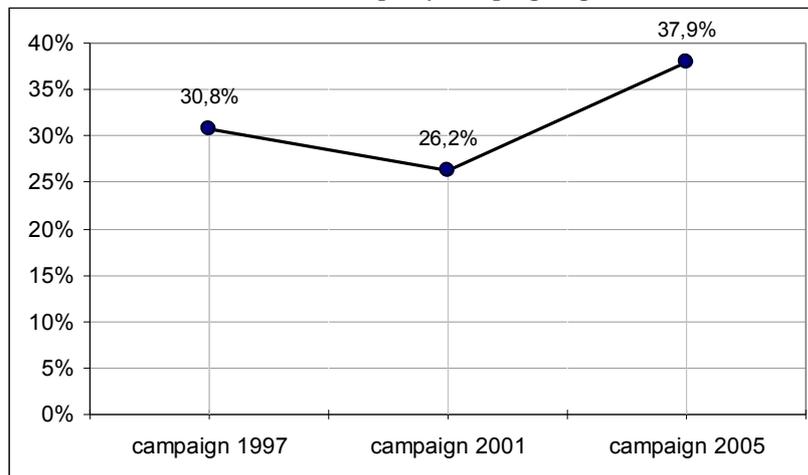
Wyborcza”, which was revealed by the newspaper and led to establishing of the so-called Investigation Commission in the Polish parliament.

¹⁰ Articles referring to stories of individuals were not coded.

¹¹ Belweder is an equivalent of the American White House.

articles were published on the cover, as the dominant article on the following pages, as shorter articles beginning on the second page or as short information comprising one column. Since the number of stories was limited by space, the prominence of placement suggested the news value of a given article. The findings indicate that political campaigning issues appeared increasingly on the cover or as a main article on the following pages. As showed on Chart 1, the number of articles placed on the first page or as a main article on the following pages increased over time. In the 1997 media coverage 30.8% of articles were placed in that manner compared to 37.9% in 2005. Kruskal-Wallis-Test showed that these differences were significant ($p=.036$). However, in 2001 only 26.2% of articles related to party campaigning were published on the first page or as a main article on the following pages. This result can be attributed to the events of 11th September when the covers were dominated by images showing the American tragedy.

Chart 1: Placement of articles on party campaigning on the cover or as a main article on following pages



n=162 [1997 media coverage]
n=107 [2001 media coverage]
n=148 [2005 media coverage]

Personalization of media coverage

Increasing personalization is seen as one of the indicators of mediatization and stands for a shift from the issue-based to the person-based reporting. In order to assess it, the coders analyzed the tone of depicting of party leaders¹² in the coded articles. The results showed that the Polish media coverage in that respect has partly changed over time (see Chart 2). During the 1997 parliamentary campaign 28% of all coded articles made any reference to the coded politicians¹³.

¹² Party leader was defined as a Chair of a given party or as a Chair of a given election coalition.

¹³ In the 1997 media coverage leaders of the following five parties were evaluated: AWS (Marian Krzaklewski), SLD (Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz), UW (Leszek Balcerowicz), PSL (Waldemar Pawlak) and ROP (Jan Olszewski). In a given article each leader could be coded if any reference to him had been made.

In 72% of articles no references to party leaders were made. In the articles where tendency for a given party leader(s) was noted, politics-oriented depicting (52%) dominated person-oriented evaluations (37%). In 11% of the analyzed articles the proportion of politics-oriented and person-oriented components was similar. Among the discussed leaders the biggest attention was given to Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, who appeared in 45% of articles where tendency for party leaders was coded. This result can be attributed to the fact that Cimoszewicz was the Prime Minister of Poland during the 1997 parliamentary campaign. Therefore his presence in the media coverage, as head of the Polish government, was more frequent. Nevertheless 73% of articles related to this politician concentrated on presenting his position on political issues, whereas only 27% were person-oriented.

In 2001 the percentage of articles with no reference to political leaders¹⁴ constituted 73%. In the remaining 27% of articles the tone of presenting leaders was more politics-oriented (70%) than person-oriented (24%). In 6% of articles, where top politicians were addressed, issues related both to politics and politician himself were present in the same degree. Among the discussed leaders the biggest attention was given to Jerzy Buzek. Again, that was partly due to the fact that Buzek was head of the Polish government at that time, similarly as Cimoszewicz four years earlier. The media coverage on Buzek was also strongly politics-oriented (70%), and the percentage of person-oriented articles constituted only 30%.

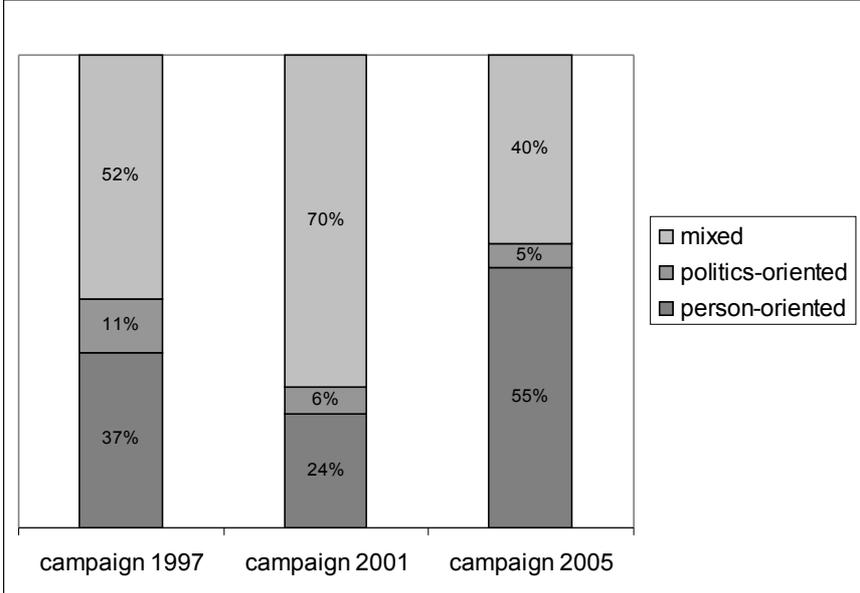
Finally, in 2005 the coverage on candidates¹⁵ showed changing patterns of reporting. The percentage of articles depicting political leaders constituted 36% of all articles. This finding, however, should be seen in the context of the presidential elections campaign that was overlapping with the parliamentary elections. The analysis showed that if the theme concerning presidential elections had been excluded from the analysis, the percentage of articles that made references to party leaders would have decreased from 36% to 32%. Thus the data indicated that the percentage of articles related to politicians might have been influenced by the context of the presidential election which produced more articles related to candidates. In the articles where a

¹⁴ In the 2001 media coverage the number of evaluated leaders increased as there were nine analyzed parties which included: AWSP (Jerzy Buzek), SLD/UP (Leszek Miller and Marek Pol), UW (Bronisław Geremek), PSL (Jarosław Kalinowski), PO (Donald Tusk, Maciej Płazynski, Andrzej Olechowski), PiS (Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński), LPR (Roman Giertych) and Self-Defense (Andrzej Lepper). For certain groupings more than one leader was coded because at the time of election campaigns they did not have any “formal” leader. Thus founding fathers of a given grouping were analyzed. PO and PiS serve as a good example in that respect.

¹⁵ The analysis regarding the 2005 election included leaders of PO (Donald Tusk), PiS (Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński), LPR (Roman Giertych), SLD (Wojciech Olejniczak), PSL (Waldemar Pawlak) and Self-Defense (Andrzej Lepper).

tendency for showing a given party leader(s) was noted, politics-oriented depicting constituted 40% compared to 55% of person-oriented evaluations. In 5% of the analyzed articles the proportion of politics-oriented and person-oriented components was similar.

Chart 2: Personalization of media coverage



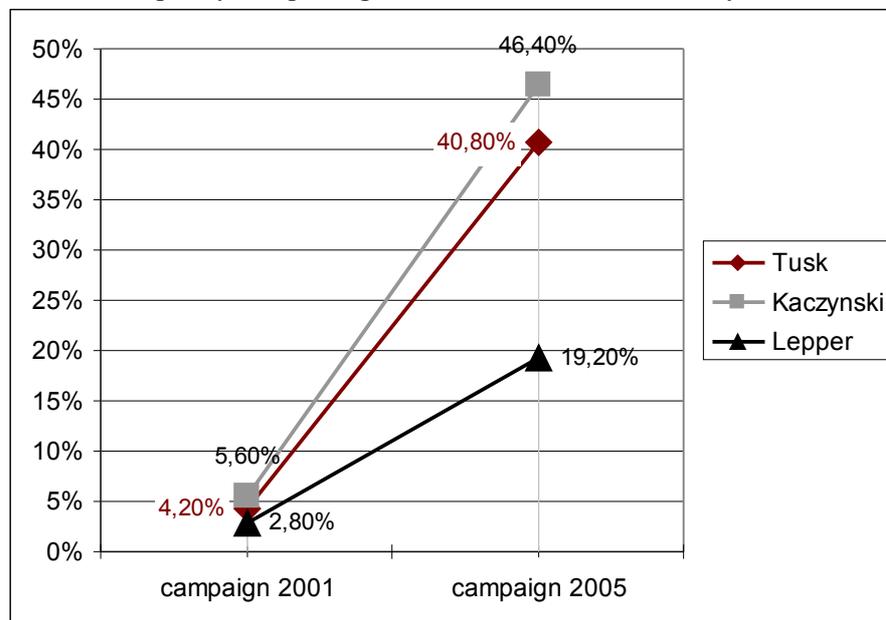
n= 89 cases [1997 media coverage]
n= 71 cases [2001 media coverage]
n= 125 cases [2005 media coverage]

Furthermore, among the analyzed party leaders it is interesting to look more closely at the media coverage related to Donald Tusk, Lech Kaczynski and Andrzej Lepper - party leaders and also presidential candidates in the 2005 elections. In 2005 Tusk appeared in 40.8% of articles where political leaders were analyzed, compared to 46.4% of articles where Kaczynski was explicitly mentioned. The third presidential candidate Lepper would appear in 19.2% of articles where a tendency for political leaders was noted. Other leaders were given much smaller attention. A closer look at the media coverage on Tusk and Kaczynski revealed that it was strongly person-oriented (67.3% for Kaczynski, and 64.7% for Tusk). The media coverage in 2005 concentrated on those two candidates¹⁶ as they were, according to the opinion polls, most likely to succeed in the race to the Belweder. Moreover, in 2001 all three candidates were granted far smaller attention - though they were also party leaders at that time (see Chart 3). Tusk appeared in 4.2% of articles where political leaders were mentioned, compared to 5.6%

¹⁶ It should also be stressed that the personalization trend might have been strengthened by the announcement of television debates between presidential candidates that were supposed to take place before the parliamentary elections in 2005. The announcement of those debates led to protests of other political groupings which argued that both Tusk and Kaczynski should not be given that high attention as they were not only presidential candidates but also leaders of the two major parties.

for Lech Kaczynski and 2.8% for Lepper¹⁷. Thus it can be concluded that the higher number of articles related to political leaders found in the 2005 media reporting was related to the presidential campaign.

Chart 3: Frequency of reporting about Donald Tusk, Lech Kaczynski and Andrzej Lepper



n= 62 [Kaczynski]; n= 54 [Tusk]; n= 26 [Lepper]

Negativity in media coverage

Increasing mediatisation can be manifested in a rising volume of negativity in media coverage. The following paragraphs present the results of the evaluation of the Polish press in that respect. Firstly, the overall extent of *negativity in articles* is showed. In this context it will be also indicated whether in articles that articulated conflicts, material and immaterial losses and risks media reported in a dramatized manner. Additionally, the evaluation of negativity on the article level scrutinized whether newspapers were rather conflict-oriented or cooperation-oriented in their depicting of politics. Secondly, *negativity related to depicting coded themes* is presented. Thirdly, the *negativity in presenting political parties* is discussed at greater length.

Negativity in articles

In order to assess the extent of negativity in the Polish press, the *tone of articles* was analyzed. The tone was defined as an overall impression of depicting of themes in a given article. Using

¹⁷ These results, however, have to be evaluated with caution as in the media coverage in 2001 the total number of cases where a tendency for a party leader was coded amounted only to n=71.

a five point scale ranging from very positive/optimistic to very negative/pessimistic evaluations, the coders examined the overall tone of the analyzed media reporting. Positive tone was coded for articles where described themes were showed in a positive way or promised positive outcomes in the future. If an article evaluated a given theme in a negative manner it was classified as a negative/pessimistic depicting.

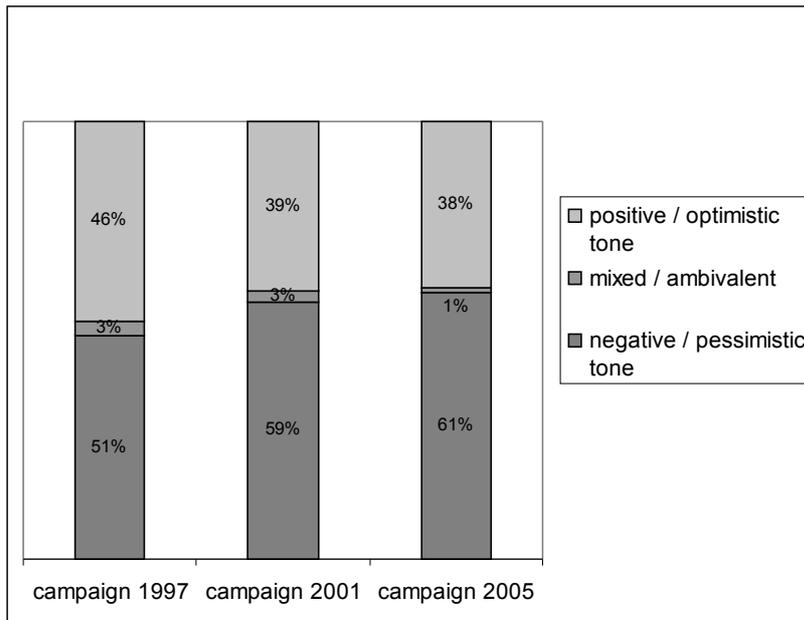
One of the most striking findings to emerge from this study was the increasing volume of negative media coverage in Poland over time (see Chart 4). Negative/pessimistic¹⁸ tone was present in 51% of articles during the 1997 media coverage, compared to 59% in 2001 and 61% in 2005. The percentage of articles with overall positive/optimistic¹⁹ tone was smaller and amounted to 46% of articles in 1997, dropped to 39% in 2001 and further decreased to 38% in the 2005 media coverage. Ambivalent tone was found in 3% of articles in 1997, 3% in 2001 and 2% in the 2005 reporting. In order to assess the negativity, mean value of tone of articles published in a given analyzed period was created. In the next step mean values obtained for media coverage in 1997, 2001 and 2005 were compared. ANOVA (analysis of variance) test showed a significant difference in negativity over time ($p=.031$). In light of these findings one could pose a question why the tenor of media coverage has become more negative over time. This issue will be discussed at greater length when negativity attributed to themes and parties is presented.

Another interesting finding was the volume of commentary pieces in media reporting and negative depicting in commentary articles. The results indicated that throughout all analyzed campaigns the percentage of commentary articles increased from 26% in 1997 to 38% in 2001 and amounted to 44% in the 2005 media coverage. The significance level of .000 showed for Pearson's chi-square proved that changes in the volume of non commentary versus commentary articles were significant. Thus the results indicated that Polish newspapers included more analytical pieces in their reporting, in which journalists commented on political news. Simultaneously, commentary pieces increasingly acquired negative tone though this trend according to ANOVA tests was not significant ($p=.362$).

Chart 4: Negativity in tone of articles

¹⁸ Answers "very negative/very pessimistic" and "negative/pessimistic" were added.

¹⁹ Answers "very positive/optimistic" and "positive/optimistic" were added.



n= 261 [1997 media coverage]
n= 230 [2001 media coverage]
n= 329 [2005 media coverage]

In order to assess the negativity in each analyzed medium, mean value of tone of articles published in all analyzed campaigns was created²⁰. ANOVA tests indicate significant differences between analyzed newspapers ($p=.000$). Post-hoc tests showed that reporting in the “Gazeta Wyborcza” was significantly more negative than in “Super Express” ($p=.001$). Post-hoc tests run for the “Rzeczpospolita” and the “Super Express” again indicated significant ($p=.000$) difference in negative tone of media coverage, where more negative news were found in the “Rzeczpospolita”. The results thus showed that quality newspapers were overall more negative in their reporting than a tabloid. Higher level of negativity in quality press resulted from different theme spectrum, namely depicting of party campaigning and economic issues. While negative coverage on party campaigning comprised one third of articles published in the “Super Express”, it amounted to 40% of articles in the “Rzeczpospolita” and half of the articles published in the “Gazeta Wyborcza”. Both quality papers reported in a negative manner on economic and finance policies, which comprised nearly two thirds of articles related to this theme in each newspaper. The “Super Express” published only 46% of articles related to economy that were negative in nature. The highest negativity in tone of articles noted for the “Rzeczpospolita” resulted also from more critical evaluation of social issues (79%) than the “Gazeta Wyborcza” (52%) and the “Super Express” (57%).

²⁰ Obtained mean values: 2.96 (“Super Express”), 3.35 (“Gazeta Wyborcza”) and 3.39 (“Rzeczpospolita”).

It is also interesting to look closer at how the Polish press reported on articles where conflicts, material and immaterial losses and risks were articulated. Measured on a five point scale, the coders could indicate whether possible risks and dangers related to a given conflict were presented in a dramatized manner or whether the authors tended to minimize possible negative consequences. In so doing *the extent of dramatization* in media coverage was estimated. The comparison of mean values²¹ between the three analyzed periods showed that the Polish press rather dramatized the possible risks and dangers related to conflicts. ANOVA test indicated that there was no significant difference ($p=.594$) between media coverage in 1997, 2001 and 2005 in that respect (see Table 2). In this context one could pose a question concerning the reasons for dramatized depicting of conflicts by the Polish media. Since this variable was coded on the article level, it was not possible to attribute dramatization to any concrete theme. However, overall dramatized reporting was mainly visible in articles where such themes as party campaigning, political parties and relations between the state and politics were coded. Though no systematic empirical evidence can be provided, it is very likely that dramatization mirrored journalistic concerns about the lack of consensus within the Polish political system, which hindered transformation.

Table 2: Dramatization in presenting conflicts, losses and risks

	n	mean value
1997	58	2,12
2001	45	2,27
2005	91	2,29

Finally, in articles where conflicts, material and immaterial losses and risks were articulated, the coders analyzed whether an article stressed *the cooperation or conflicts between involved players*. Again, this variable was measured on a five point scale ranging from conflict-oriented to cooperation-oriented depicting. The results showed that the Polish media tended to concentrate on the conflict-oriented aspects more intensively (mean value: 1.78). ANOVA tests indicated that there was no significant difference ($p=.265$) in that respect between all analyzed campaigns and that the conflict-oriented depicting was rather stable over time. However, a comparison between media and post-hoc tests proved that the differences between all analyzed newspapers were significant. Among the analyzed newspapers the “Gazeta Wyborcza” tended to show the most conflict-oriented depicting (mean value: 1,43), followed by the “Rzeczpospolita” (mean value: 1,71) and the tabloid “Super Express” (mean value: 2,19). These

²¹ Note that, measured on a 5 point scale, 1 indicated high dramatization compared to 5 which stood for minimizing of dangers. Thus higher mean value indicated smaller dramatization.

results can be attributed to the thematic spectrum of analyzed press. T-test proved that the conflict-oriented depicting was much more frequent in articles where the theme concerning political parties was presented ($p=.037$). Among the analyzed media the “Gazeta Wyborcza” devoted the largest volume of articles where the theme of political parties was discussed (50%) compared to the “Rzeczpospolita” (40%) and the “Super Express” (25%) which published the smallest number of articles related to parties. The differences concerning thematic spectrum should be seen in light of the titles’ profiles and the development of the media market. For a long time the “Super Express” generally refrained from discussing politics²². The “Rzeczpospolita” established itself as the quality newspaper stressing economic and legal measures. And finally the “Gazeta Wyborcza”, from the moment it was established, devoted much reporting to political life in Poland.

Negativity in themes

To examine the media coverage more profoundly, the coders analyzed the *evaluation of themes* presented in a given article. Thus degree of negativity in depicting of concrete topics could be measured. Using a five point scale ranging from very positive/optimistic to very negative/pessimistic evaluation, the coders evaluated the presentation of a given theme. In the next step, the *forecast for possible developments of a given theme* was measured. Again, the coders used a five point scale ranging from a very positive/optimistic to a very negative/pessimistic depicting²³. The results did not provide a clear answer whether negative evaluations of themes had increased over time. That was mainly due to the fact that the number of evaluations and forecasts *pro* a given theme was limited. This was caused by the fact that the coders predominantly coded one theme that dominated the article, whereas two or three themes were hardly coded. Secondly, the number of cases was decreased by the fact that for certain themes journalists provided no evaluation or forecast. Therefore, due to the limitations of data the results should be evaluated with caution. It would probably be necessary to code the press in a longer time perspective or include more titles to make any firm claims about the negativity of media coverage related to a given theme. Thus the following paragraphs present only results

²² This found its exemplification in a limited number of articles related to the political sphere especially in 1997 and, to a lesser extent, in 2001.

²³ In a given article up to three themes could be coded. Thus a single article could present up to three evaluations of a topic and up to three forecasts for coded topics. Both evaluation and forecasts were not coded for themes regarding political parties, party leaders and party campaigning. In case of 2005 media coverage also theme referring to the presidential elections was excluded.

related to *evaluation* of two topics, namely economic and finance policies and relations between the state and politics, as the number of cases here was higher when compared to other themes²⁴.

Table 3: Evaluation of themes

Economic and finance policies	n	mean value
1997	28	3,14
2001	57	4,04
2005	35	3,66
Total	120	3,72
Relations between the state and politics		
1997	57	3,89
2001	27	4,07
2005	61	4,18
Total	145	4,05

To present the evaluation of the theme discussing economic and finance policies only articles where this topic was addressed were selected and the mean value of all evaluations was examined. The same procedure was applied separately to media coverage in 1997, 2001 and 2005. In the next step, the obtained mean values were compared. The same pattern of evaluation was applied to articles addressing relations between the state and politics (see Table 3). The results showed that economic and finance policies were generally presented in a negative manner. However, ANOVA test showed that media reporting on economic issues in 2001 was significantly more negative ($p=.006$) than in other campaigns. Negativity in depicting of the economic sphere in 2001 resulted, as indicated in earlier paragraphs, from the deepening crisis in Poland. The fact that media were anxious about the economic situation was also mirrored in the thematic spectrum of the Polish media coverage; articles related to economic and financial policies constituted 26% of media coverage in 2001. Overall, however, one could ask why the media depicted economy in a negative way if in the analyzed transition period Poland joined the European Union and introduced new legislative measures in financial sector. In this context it should be remembered, as already indicated in previous paragraphs, that the empirical analysis included articles published only in sections related to politics. Thus financial matters were articulated mainly in the context of party campaigning (mainly negative). Separate sections devoted only to economic issues, published by both the “Gazeta Wyborcza” and the “Rzeczpospolita” were not included in the analysis.

²⁴ During the “hot phase” of a campaign the media predominantly concentrated on party campaigning and thus the volume of articles referring to other themes was generally smaller. See also: Kaid (2004).

Simultaneously, the comparison of mean values for the other selected theme showed that media coverage on the relations between the state and politics has become more negative over time. Though according to ANOVA test this tendency was not significant ($p=.189$), the mean value (4,05) suggested that the media was predominantly negative in showing the condition of the young Polish democracy. The theme spectrum described in the first paragraphs of this paper showed tangibly that newspapers devoted substantial amount of articles to show the interdependencies between the state and politics. Additionally, the entrance to parliament of radical parties contributed to lower political standards that were subject to journalists' critical evaluations.

Negativity in depicting of political parties

In the following paragraphs the *negativity in depicting of political parties* by the Polish media is presented. Every coded article could include an evaluation of a party if a given political grouping was addressed. The tendency was coded for the whole article and reflected whether parties were presented in a positive or negative manner. Again, the category used a five point scale ranging from clearly positive to clearly negative tendency. In order to assess the depicting of all parties a mean value for each of the three media coverage in a given year was calculated. This enabled a comparison between mean values over all three analyzed campaigns. The results indicated that the Polish media coverage on political parties has become more negative over the last three parliamentary campaigns (see Table 4); ANOVA test proved that this trend was significant ($p=.000$). If one were to attribute negative depicting of parties to concrete topics, the theme - relations between the state and politics - stood out. In nearly two thirds of the articles where tendency for political parties was coded, political groupings presented in the context of this theme were showed in a negative manner.

The increasing negativity in depicting of political parties can also be attributed to the fact, as to be presented in the next paragraphs, that the political landscape in Poland was marked by dramatic changes within the political landscape and the appearance of radical parties like League of Polish Families (LPR) and Self-Defense that were negatively evaluated especially by the quality press. Both LPR and Self-Defense were depicted negatively in more than 80% (87% - LPR and 85% - Self-Defense) of articles published before the 2005 elections where tendency for these parties was coded. Undemocratic practices of the Polish elites were critically evaluated by the press, which was particularly true for these two groupings.

Table 4: Tendency of depicting of parties

	n	mean value
1997	134	2,908 ²⁵
2001	95	3,040
2005	140	3,464

In order to assess the tendency of depicting of political parties more closely, the tendency of presenting of government parties in each campaign was measured. Thus the analysis of the 1997 media coverage included the post-communist SLD and its coalition partner PSL. In 2001 media reporting on government parties comprised AWSP and UW, groupings derived from the former Solidarity camp. Finally, post-communist government parties SLD and PSL were again the object of analysis in the 2005 articles. To assess the depicting of government parties a mean value of depicting them in a given media coverage was calculated. This enabled a comparison between mean values over all three analyzed campaigns between all government parties. As indicated in Table 5, the comparison of mean values showed that the evaluation of current coalitions ruling the country remained similar. ANOVA test indicated that there were no significant changes in media coverage in that respect ($p=.086$). Out of three analyzed campaigns the media coverage on government parties was more positive in the 2001 elections (mean value 2,864). These results might be somewhat surprising given the fact that the right-wing government failed to introduce four major reforms. Incompetence of the administration was further aggravated by the economic crisis which also led to a budget deficit. In the end of the legislative period the government led by Buzek had a very small support in Polish society. This rather positive coverage on the AWS/UW government could be attributed to the fact that the Polish quality press tended to write more positively about post-Solidarity parties. The “Gazeta Wyborcza” and, to a lesser extent, the “Rzeczpospolita” had a political leaning towards post-Solidarity parties. Even though four years of the right-wing government were marked by the collapse of economic situation and obstacles accompanying the reforms, the overall evaluation of AWSP and UW was rather positive.

Simultaneously, the governing parties were negatively evaluated mainly in the context of relations between the state and politics (72% of all evaluations were negative) as well as in the context of social and economic policies. This pattern of government’s evaluation was visible in all analyzed campaigns; prior to the Sejm elections the media generally evaluated the

²⁵ Higher mean value indicated a more negative tendency of depicting.

performance of governing groupings commenting on the effectiveness of the introduced reforms.

Table 5: Tendency of depicting of government parties

	n	mean value
1997	98	3,097 ²⁶
2001	44	2,864
2005	54	3,407

The study indicated that the overall level of negativity in presenting of political parties and government parties varied depending on the analyzed medium. In order to assess the depicting in a given newspaper, a mean value of coded tendencies was calculated²⁷. Overall the “Gazeta Wyborcza” was depicting parties more negatively than the “Rzeczpospolita”. The conducted T-test shows that the difference was significant ($p=.000$). The same pattern of reporting was found in depicting of the government parties. Again, the “Gazeta Wyborcza” presented political players comprising the government more negatively than the “Rzeczpospolita”. T-test reveals that the difference was significant ($p=.027$). However, in 2001 both titles reported about the AWS/UW government in a similar manner and T-test did not find any significant difference in that respect ($p=.074$). This finding can be explained by political orientations of the “Gazeta Wyborcza” and the “Rzeczpospolita” which presented the post-Solidarity government more positively than the SLD/PSL coalitions²⁸.

Simultaneously, one could pose a question how the extent of negativity in depicting of political parties increased in all newspapers in the analyzed period. The “Gazeta Wyborcza” reports increased the negative depicting of political parties over time. However, according to ANOVA test this trend was not significant ($p=.074$). As far as the media coverage on the government parties was concerned, the ANOVA test indicated that the media coverage in 2001 was more positive compared to two other campaigns and that the difference in that respect was significant ($p=.003$). This phenomenon, as already indicated, could be attributed to the political orientation of the title.

²⁶ Higher mean value indicated more negative depicting of parties.

²⁷ The “Super Express” was excluded from this analysis due to a much smaller number of articles. As indicated earlier, for a substantial period of time the Polish tabloid did not devote much coverage to politics. Thus the number of available articles that met the coding criteria, especially the 1997 media reporting, is very limited.

²⁸ The media coverage analyzed in this study included articles published four weeks prior to the polling day. Therefore negativity in presenting of political parties could not be evaluated in the context of the presented party leaders as the number of cases was limited. This would have been possible if the coding process had included more research material and a longer time perspective.

The analysis of the “Rzeczpospolita” showed that the title has become more negative in terms of depicting of both the government and political parties. ANOVA test indicated that the difference in depicting over time was significant ($p=.003$ for parties; $p=.038$ for government). The same tendency (though these results should be treated with caution due to a limited number of cases) could be observed in case of the Polish tabloid “Super Express” where depicting of parties and government has also become more negative over time. Again, the analysis of variance indicated that this trend was significant ($p=.032$ for parties; $p=.28$ for government). These results should be seen in the context of worsening political standards and a proliferation of scandals among the Polish elites, including especially the radical Self-Defense, which made the press more critical.

Newspapers’ political sympathies

The analysis was intended to show whether the Polish media’s sympathies were pronounced in the articles. As indicated earlier, Poland has a strong advocacy tradition (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) and the press titles which emerged after sovereignty had been regained could easily be assigned to concrete political groupings (Jakubowicz, 2003). In order to assess this trend, the coders measured whether the media coverage was in favor of a particular party. The analysis included parties that were coded in at least two campaigns and comprised SLD, AWS/AWSP, UW, PSL, PO, PiS, LPR, Self-Defense²⁹. In the next step, mean value for tendency of depicting a given party in every campaign was created. The comparison of mean values showed that League of Polish Families and Self-Defense were presented in a more negative manner (see Table 6). The radical groupings were followed by a rather negative evaluation of post-communist SLD and its frequent coalition partner PSL. As indicated in Table 6, the evaluation of right wing parties (AWS/AWSP, UW, PO, PiS) by Polish press was generally more positive in all analyzed periods.

Table 6: Depicturing of political parties

	LPR	Self-Defense	PSL	SLD	PiS	AWS/AWSP	PO	UW
n	40	37	93	207	93	99	93	96
mean value	4,15	3,78	3,26	3,11	2,88	2,71	2,70	2,30

²⁹ Polish parties ROP and UP were not included in the analysis due to the fact that they were coded only in one campaign and the number of available cases was limited.

Another interesting aspect of the analysis is how the depicting of each party changed over time in all analyzed campaigns. SLD, successor of communist heritage, was showed more negatively in every campaign, however according to ANOVA this trend was not significant ($p=.084$). If one compares mean value for the tendency of depicting party SLD it was the “Gazeta Wyborcza” that presented post-communist grouping more negatively than the “Rzeczpospolita” throughout all analyzed campaigns³⁰. T-test showed that the difference in depicting of SLD was significant ($p=.000$). The Rzeczpospolita was similar to the “Gazeta Wyborcza” in political orientation; however it was more moderate in its evaluations. The same tendency was observed in case of PSL, which was also presented more negatively by the “Gazeta Wyborcza”. Again, T-test showed that the difference in depicting this grouping by both newspapers was significant ($p=.002$). The “Gazeta Wyborcza” generally tended to depicture post-communists more negatively, whereas in the “Rzeczpospolita” political sympathies were less pronounced.

As for the PSL the media coverage differed throughout the campaigns. The party was evaluated more negatively in 1997 and 2005, and was presented more positively in 2001. ANOVA test showed that the difference in reporting in 2001 was significant ($p=.004$). This can be partly attributed to the fact that during the 1997 and the 2005 parliamentary campaigns PSL was still in a position of an incumbent. Thus the negative evaluations of the post-communist government were also visible in negative tendency of depicting PSL, which was SLD coalition partner. As a consequence PSL was frequently evaluated in context of its performance in Polish cabinets.

If one looked at the tendency of evaluating the right wing AWS/AWSP and UW over two campaigns³¹ changes in depicting were visible as well. In the 1997 both parties were presented rather positively, Polish press favored optimistic depicting showing that post-Solidarity groupings would accelerate political changes in the country. Positive tone resulted also from the fact that the right wing parties succeeded in creating election alliance and acted together during the campaign³². Four years of governing made media coverage on coalition partners more negative. T-test indicate that the difference in the extent of negative coverage was significant both for AWS/AWSP ($p=.000$) and UW ($p=.006$). This was the result of both internal

³⁰ Due to the limited number of cases the “Super Express” was excluded from this analysis regarding the depicting of single parties.

³¹ Both AWS/AWSP and UW were not included in the analysis in 2005 as they were not longer present in Polish parliament at that time.

³² Polish right wing parties were frequently divided and unable to act together as an alternative to post-communists.

fighters in right wing parties³³ and the failures in the governing process in the whole legislative period. However, as indicated earlier, overall the depicting of AWS and UW in 2001 was more positive than the evaluation of post-communist governments.

In case of the other parties PO, PiS, LPR and Self-Defense the tendency of depicting remained rather similar over time. T-tests indicated that there were no significant differences in their depicting ($p=.81$ for PO; $p=.309$ for PiS; $p=.597$ for LPR; and $p=.055$ for Self-Defense). Both PO and PIS, which have a Solidarity background, were evaluated by the media in a rather positive manner. However, it has to be stressed that both Civic Platform and Law and Justice remained an opposition in the Polish parliament between 2001 and 2005. It will be undoubtedly interesting to analyze the depicting of PiS in the next media coverage as this party now constitutes a government for the first time. It is quite likely that the depicting might become more negative, similarly as in case of previous political players involved in ruling the country.

LPR and Self-Defense continued to be showed negatively and there was no significant difference in their depicting in both the 2001 and the 2005 elections. This result was not surprising given the fact that both parties represented political practices and programmes that were not supported by the Polish press. Both League of Polish Families and Self-Defense stood for isolation of Poland, opposed EU and NATO enlargement, ideas that are far from the policy promoted by both the “Gazeta Wyborcza” and the “Rzeczpospolita”. As already mentioned, the “Gazeta Wyborcza” is considered to be a newspaper very actively commenting the changes in political landscape whereas the “Rzeczpospolita” is regarded as leader in providing legal and economic information. Both newspapers supported the Polish access to the European Union, NATO and promoted joint European policies. Again, T-test indicated that the “Gazeta Wyborcza” was significantly more negative in the evaluations of League of Polish Families ($p=.048$) and Samoobrona ($p=.032$).

CONCLUSIONS

The study proposed four research questions and explored how the mediatization processes were manifested in political reporting of the newly established Polish democracy. The results indicate that media coverage has partly changed over the last decade. The extent of the political

³³ Internal fights resulted in the proliferation of new parties like PO, PiS. Additionally, both AWSP and UW did not manage to secure parliamentary seats in 2001 and vanished from the political scene.

reporting was influenced by the context of the parliamentary campaigns, in 2001 by the terrorist attack in the United States, in 2005 by approaching presidential elections. However, the overall placement of articles related to political campaigning might suggest that this theme increasingly acquired higher news value for the Polish media. Furthermore, the analysis showed that there was no clear trend towards personalization which can be explained by the nature of the Polish political system that is not leader-focused. The negativity in depicting of themes and political parties should be seen in the context of transition processes as well as low quality of political culture in Poland. Finally, the results confirmed that the quality press in Poland has a political leaning towards post-Solidarity parties though the practice of endorsing certain groupings in case of the “Rzeczpospolita” was less visible than in the “Gazeta Wyborcza”. The exact evaluation political sympathies of the Polish tabloid “Super Express” was not possible due the limited number of cases. Further research is needed to evaluate the role of Polish press in a longer time spectrum. The importance of such country-based analysis is all the more important as there are many other transition countries which are still on their way to democracy and look to other systems as models.

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