Factsheet Media and the Climate Crisis

How much airtime do the media actually give the climate crisis? We took a look: in the first half of 2026, the share of climate news coverage on Das Erste and ZDF fell below one percent for the first time – to 0.95 percent on Das Erste and 0.82 percent on ZDF, the lowest level since records began in 2021.[1] And that in the very half-year of two historic heatwaves.

June 2026 was the hottest June ever recorded in Western Europe.[2] World Weather Attribution shows that without human-made global warming, this heatwave would have been many times rarer and milder.[3]

Astonishingly, the hot weather did not lead to more climate coverage. While European neighbours such as France, Spain and the UK named the heat as a consequence of the climate crisis on day one, Germany's Tagesschau news bulletin took six days in June to name the cause.[4]

Why does the topic get lost at the broadcasters? For one, many climate stories are never framed as climate-related news at all. Another reason may be that newsrooms fear that reporting on the climate crisis is partisan. Yet climate action is non-partisan: worldwide, 80 percent of people want their governments to take stronger action against the climate crisis.[5]

It is vital that public-service broadcasters in particular inform people about this issue. Two thirds of people in Germany consider public broadcasting indispensable – and trust that its information is scientifically verified: an important counterweight to the flood of misinformation online.[6]

Everyone has to pitch in to tackle the climate crisis. But TV broadcasters bear a particular responsibility: they must make the crisis visible – the way every desk covered the pandemic's impact on its beat, from business to politics to sports. That is how the consequences of global warming would be addressed across all areas of life, from rising food prices to heat deaths to the loss of infrastructure. That would be coverage commensurate with the crisis.

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1 KLIMA° vor acht (2026): MedienKlimaBericht 1/2026 – climate coverage by Das Erste and ZDF. https://klimavoracht.de/en/record-heatwaves-record-lows-coverage-below-one-percent/

2 Copernicus Climate Change Service (2026): Record heatwave brings hottest June for western Europe. https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-record-heatwave-brings-hottest-june-western-europe-during-second-warmest-june-globally

3 World Weather Attribution (2026): Fossil fuel emissions have rapidly worsened European heatwaves in just a few decades. https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/fossil-fuel-emissions-have-rapidly-worsened-european-heatwaves-in-just-a-few-decades

4 KLIMA° vor acht (2026): MedienKlimaBericht 1/2026, chap. 3.3 "Six days of silence on the Tagesschau". https://klimavoracht.de/en/record-heatwaves-record-lows-coverage-below-one-percent/

5 UNDP (2024): The Peoples' Climate Vote 2024 – the world's largest ever climate survey (over 73,000 respondents in 77 countries). https://peoplesclimate.vote

6 Infratest dimap (2025): Media credibility – study for WDR. 67 percent consider public broadcasting indispensable. https://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/umfragen/aktuell/glaubwuerdigkeit-der-medien