

Making an informed vote: Will democracy survive stereotype-driven news?

News Analysis of Int. TV news and international business papers 2001-2014

Exclusive Study UNDP BBL - April 23, 2014 - New York

Roland Schatz, r.schatz@mediatenor.com



Agenda

- ☑ The Vanishing Voter
- ☑ How Media Cover Parliament
- ☑ How Media Cover Society
- ☑ The Reasons: Characteristics of Political Reporting
- ☑ The Way Out: Monitoring Elections supports Constructive News

The Vanishing Voter

Two Questions:

- How do the media frame democracy at work? Or, “Do the people see themselves represented in their diversity or is reporting on politics focussing only on those in power?”
- Popper defined democracy as option to ‘vote out’ – to do so, alternatives need visibility

What you know of Pisa



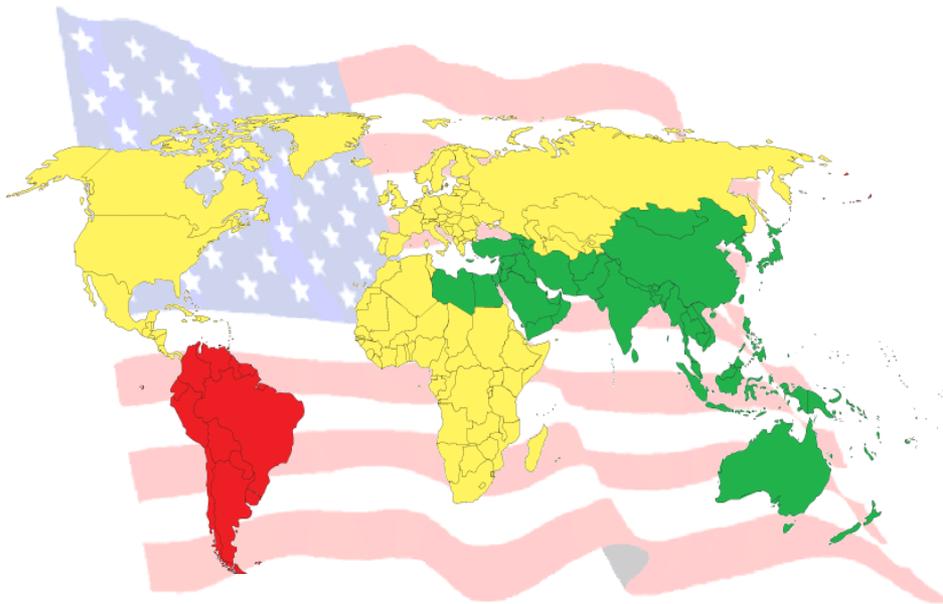
And what is really there



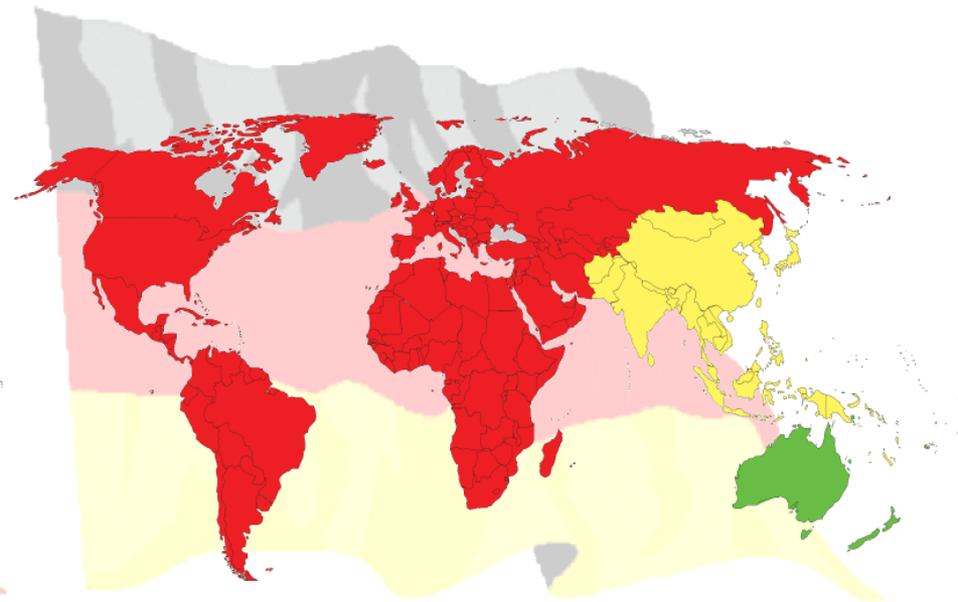
Significantly different perceptions on international business

2001-2003: Rating of international business in U.S. and German Media

U.S. Media



German Media



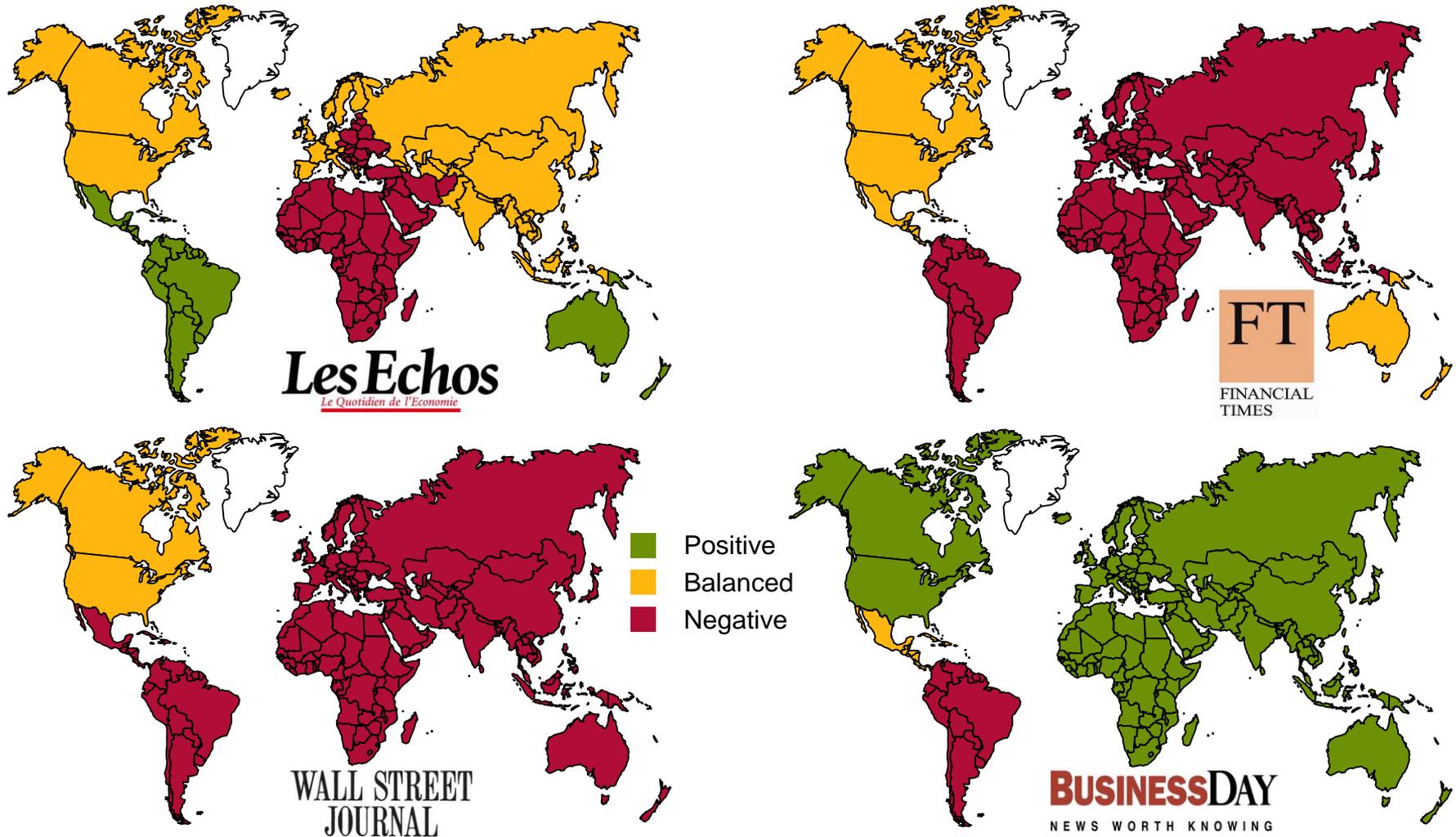
Ratings:

- More negative than positive news
- More positive than negative news
- Equal share of positive and negative news

Amount of Coverage:

U.S Media: N= 166.384 statements
German Media: N= 380.820 statements

Wall Street media present different world views for investors



Our method: Ongoing scientific media content analysis



- All news stories in print or broadcast media (TV News Shows, TV Magazines) are analyzed on the story level for the main topics and protagonists. Analysis of political coverage is based on the individual information units in the story.

select

- The information is evaluated on the statement level. All information given about the party or the politician is coded as a new individual statement.

understand

- Each coded statement contains: a person/party, the party unit, topic, +/- rating and source of the statement/rating. As data is analyzed, if any part of a statement changes (i.e. the topic) a new statement has to be coded.

code

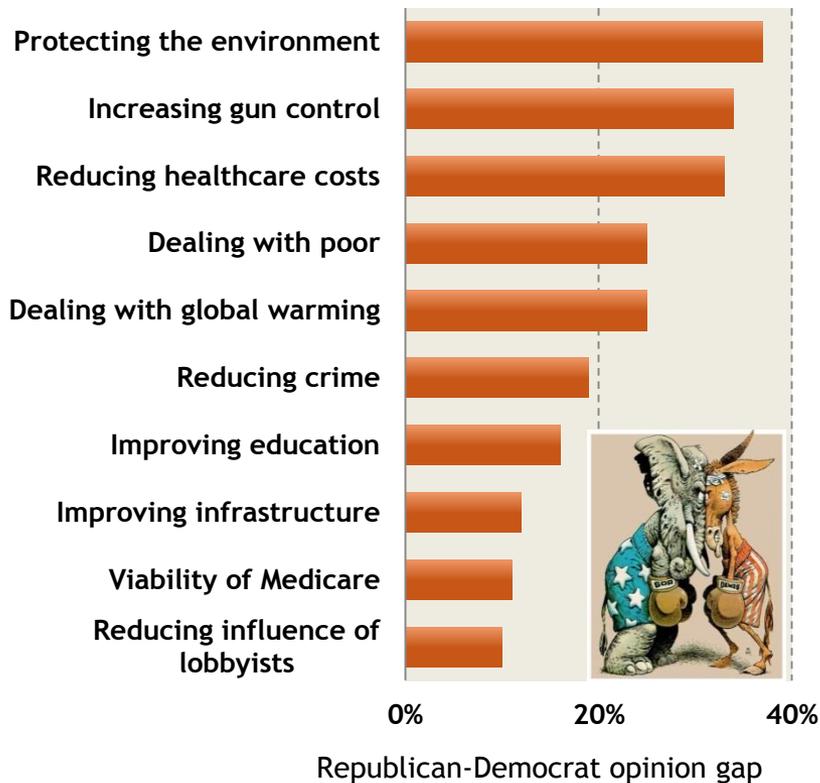
- Data are checked through tests, coders are trained daily.

Most divisive partisan issues barely visible on U.S. TV

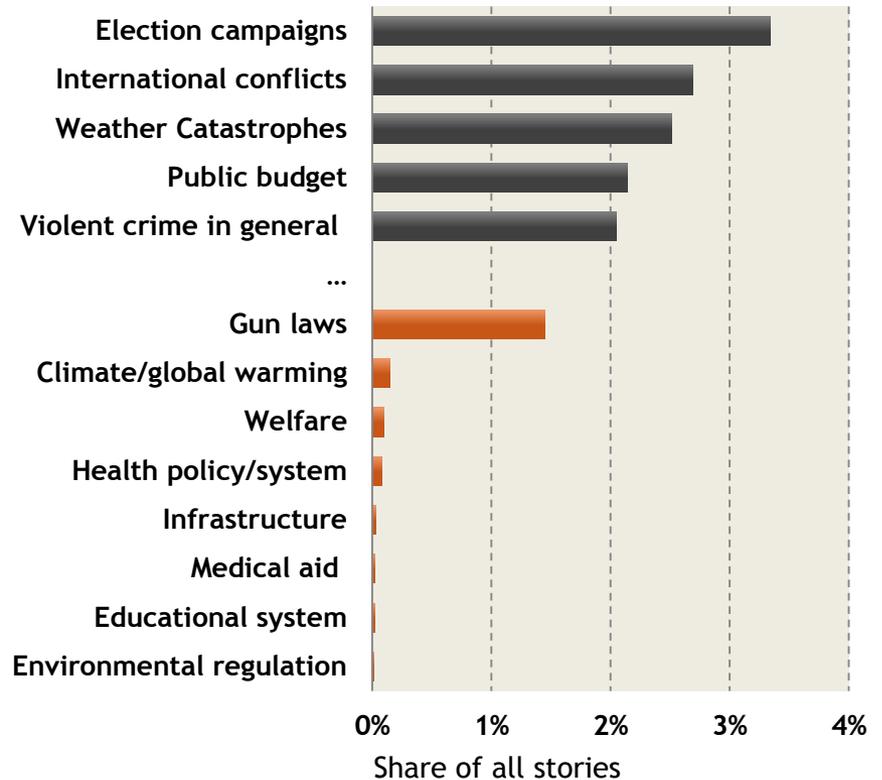
PewResearchCenter



Issues with the largest partisan opinion gaps*



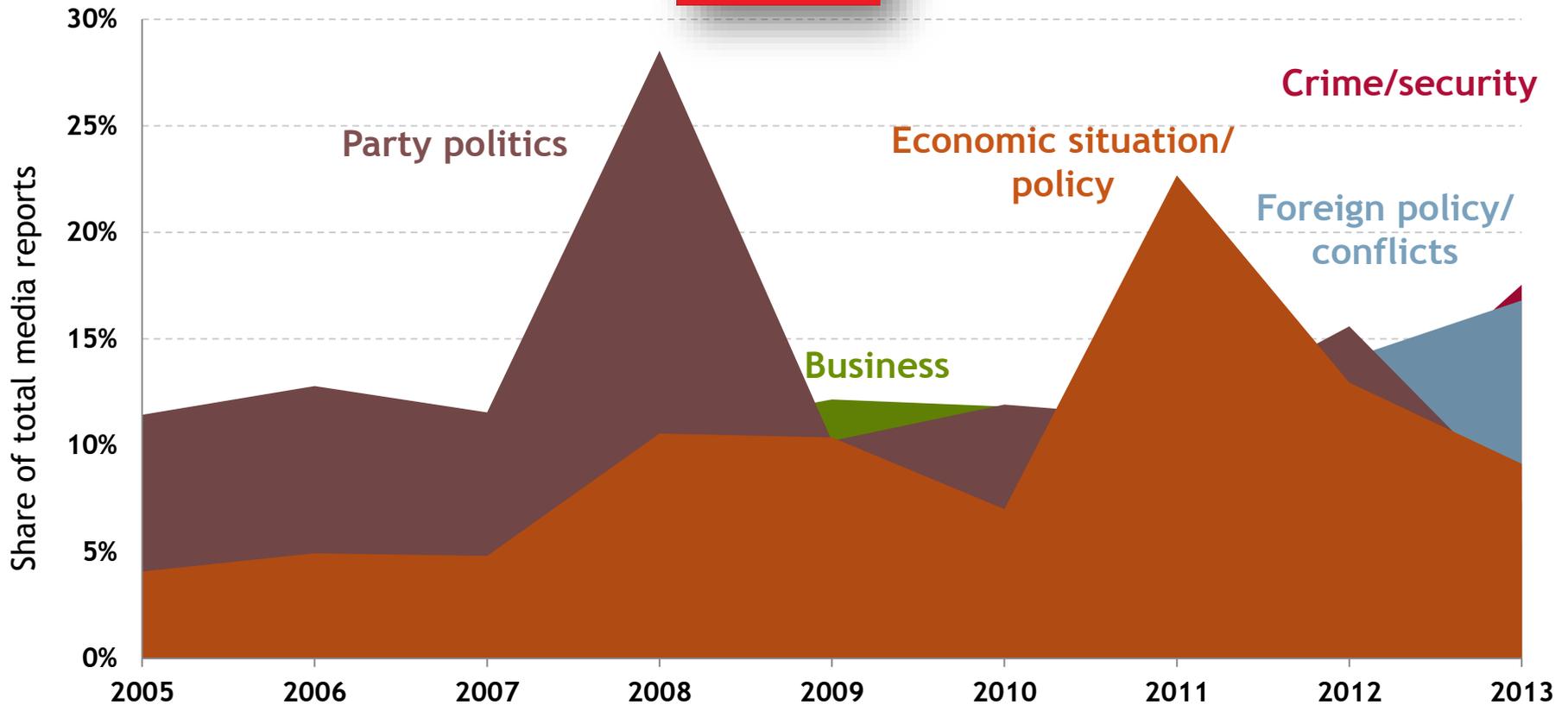
Visibility of issues



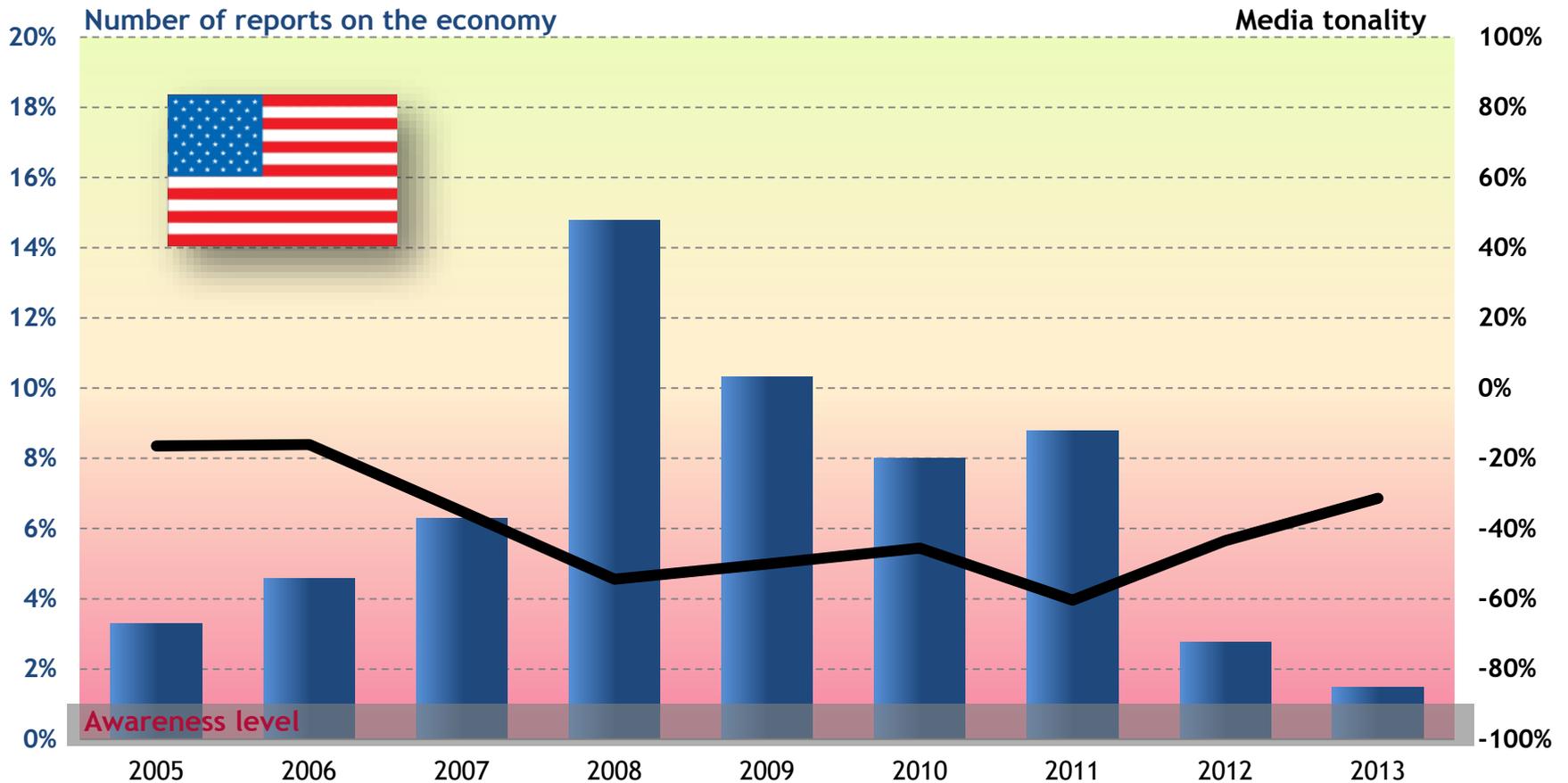
Basis: 98692 stories on ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX news programs, January 2011-June 30, 2013

* <http://www.people-press.org/2013/01/24/deficit-reduction-rises-on-publics-agenda-for-obamas-second-term/>

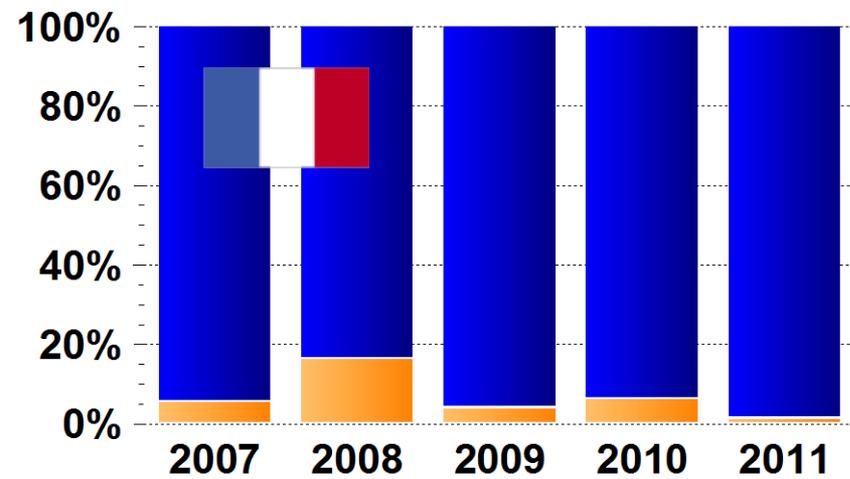
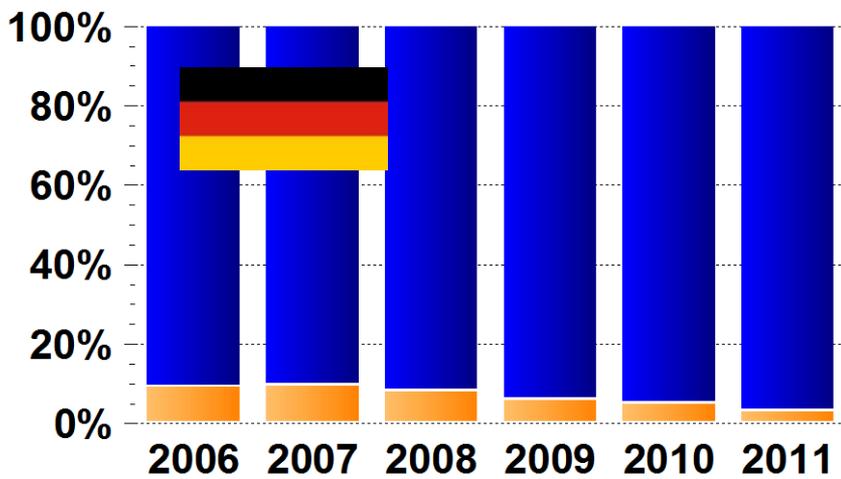
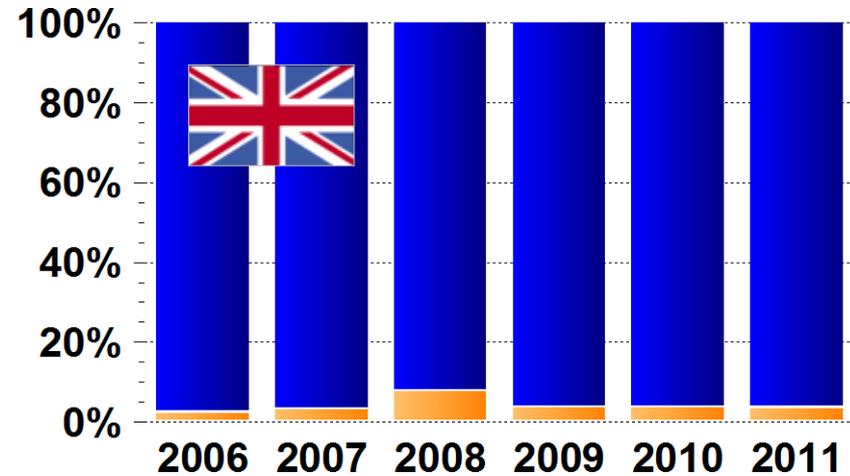
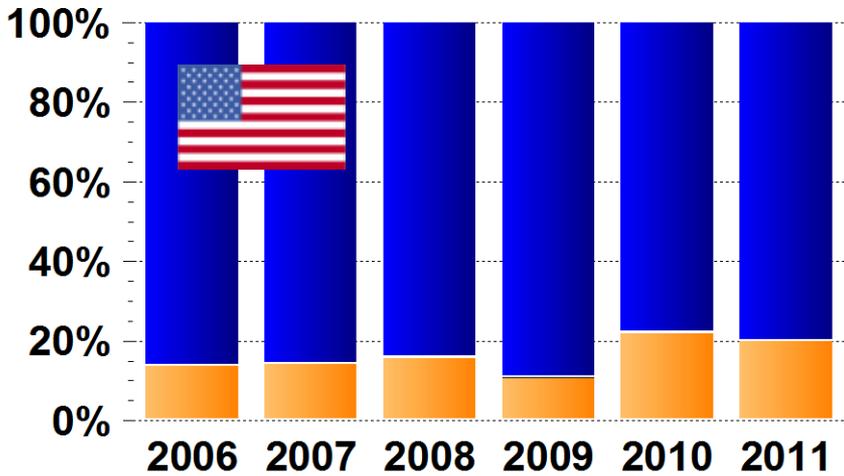
Few issues stand out above party politics



Coverage of U.S. economy by year

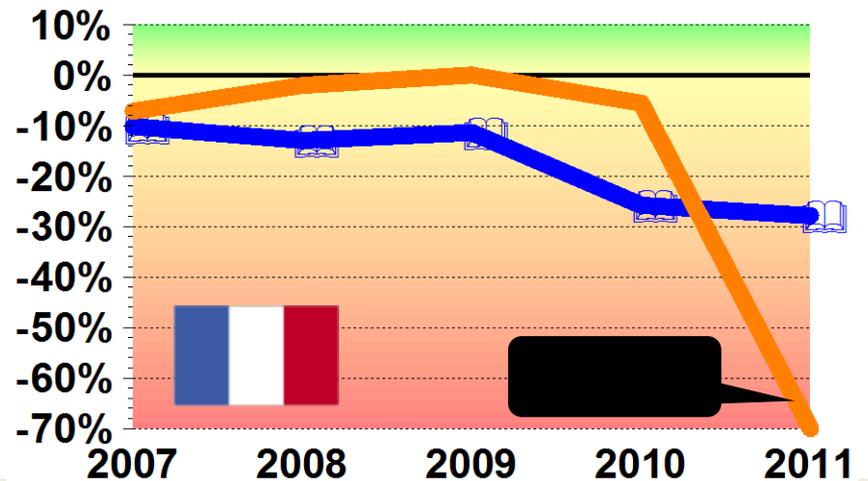
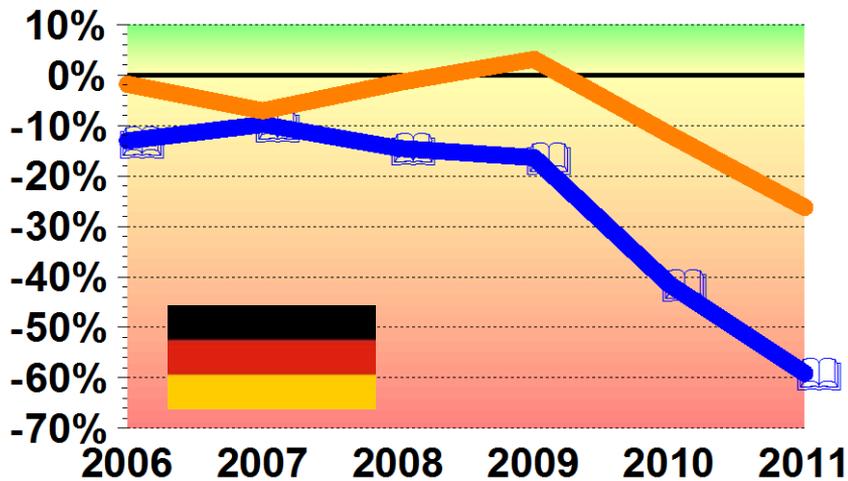
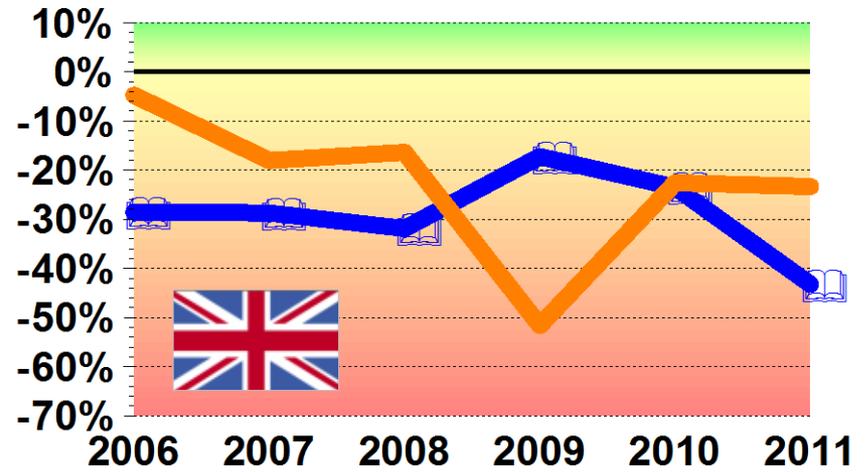
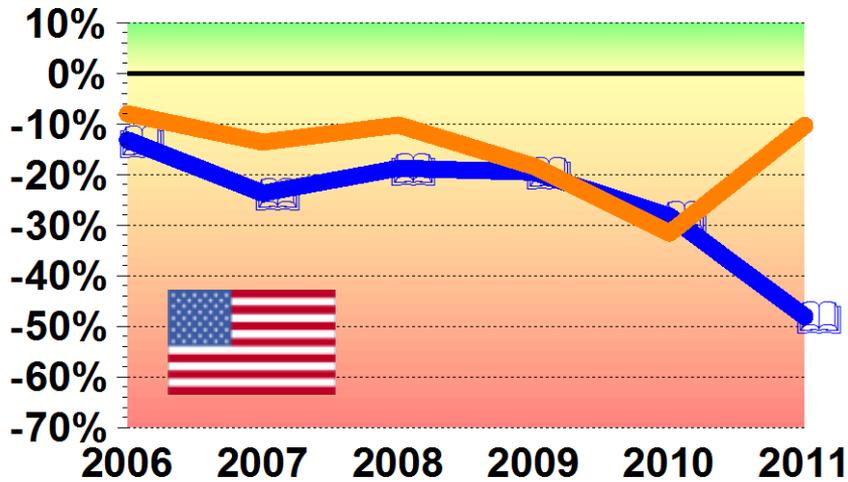


TV news devalues parliament on a long-term basis

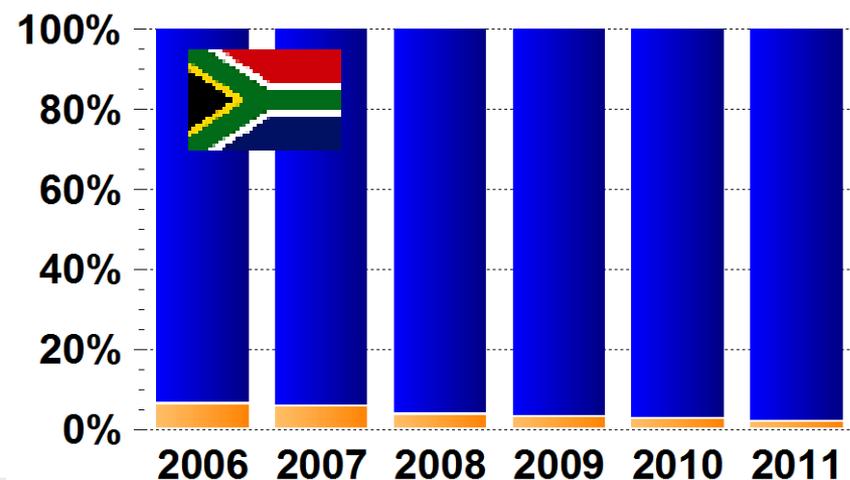
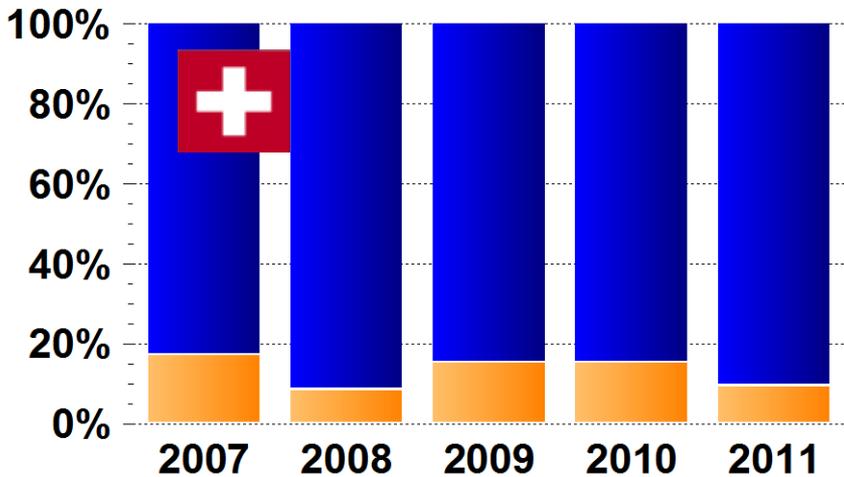
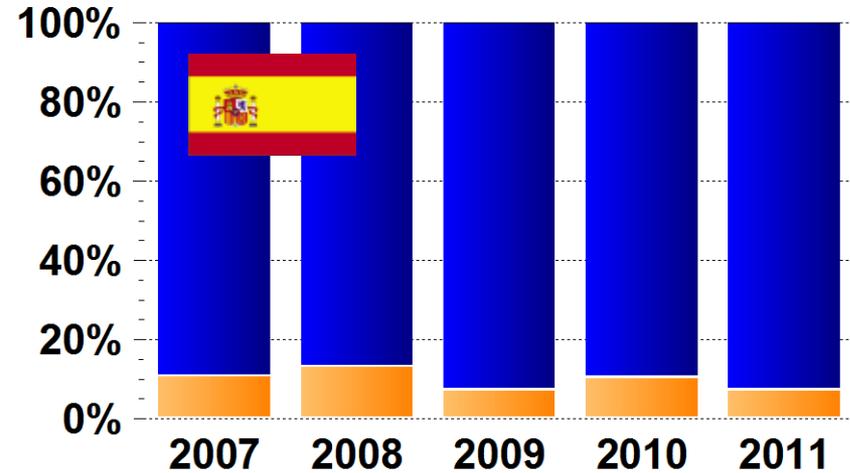
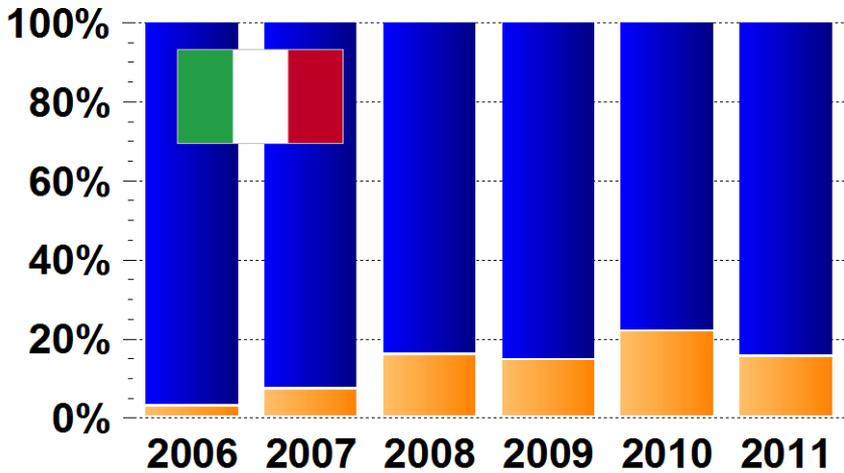


Parliaments Governments

Neither in favor of government nor parliament

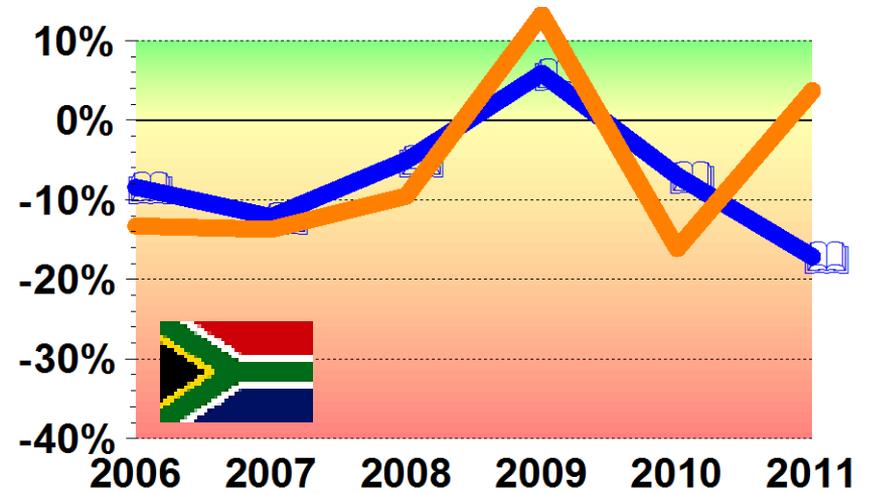
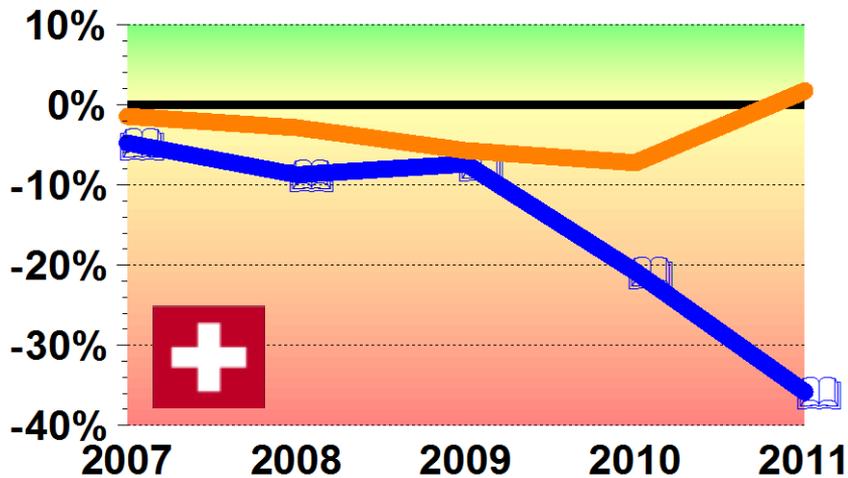
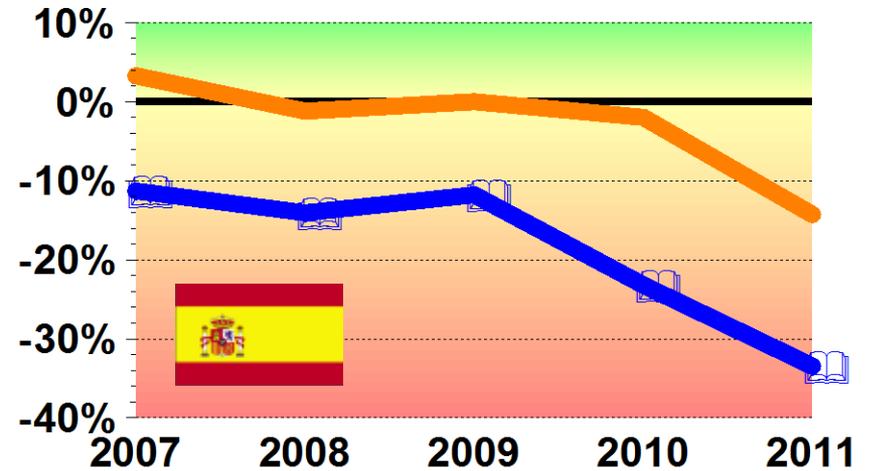
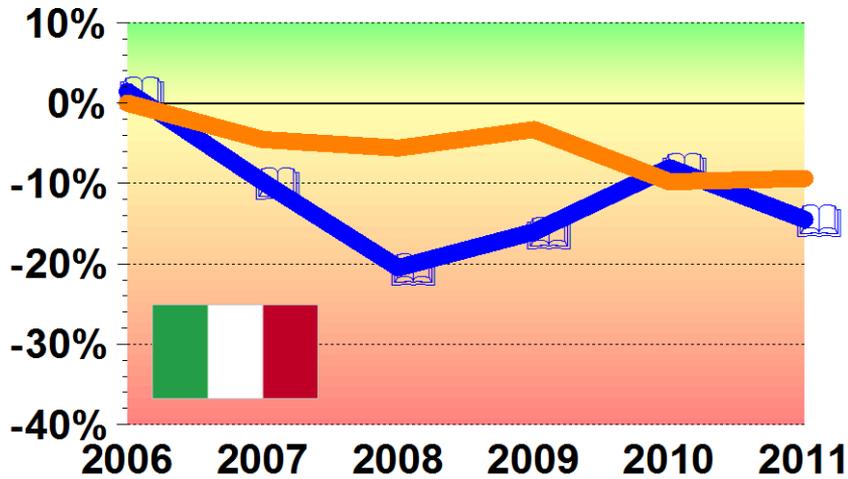


The focus on governments seems to be everywhere



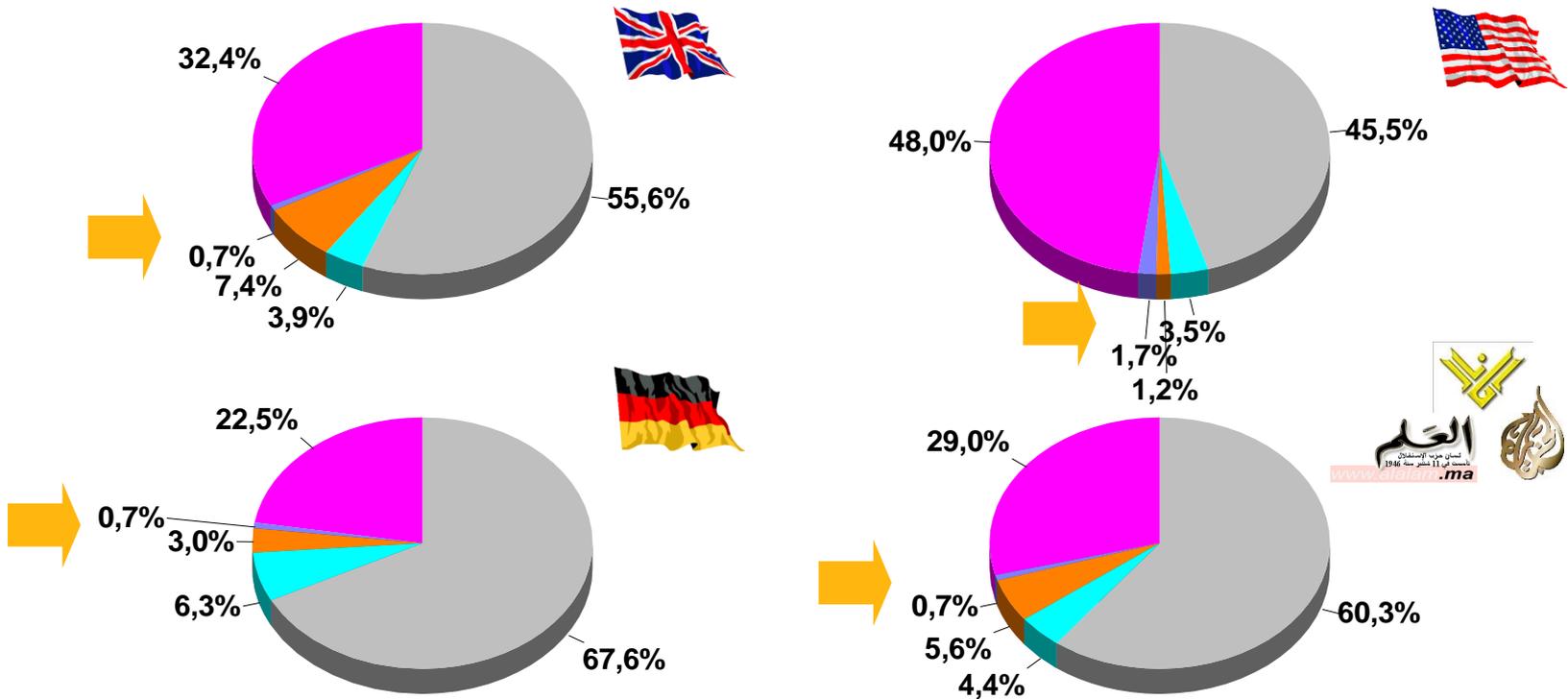
Parliaments Governments

Only CH and SA TV news present parliament neutrally



Parliaments Governments

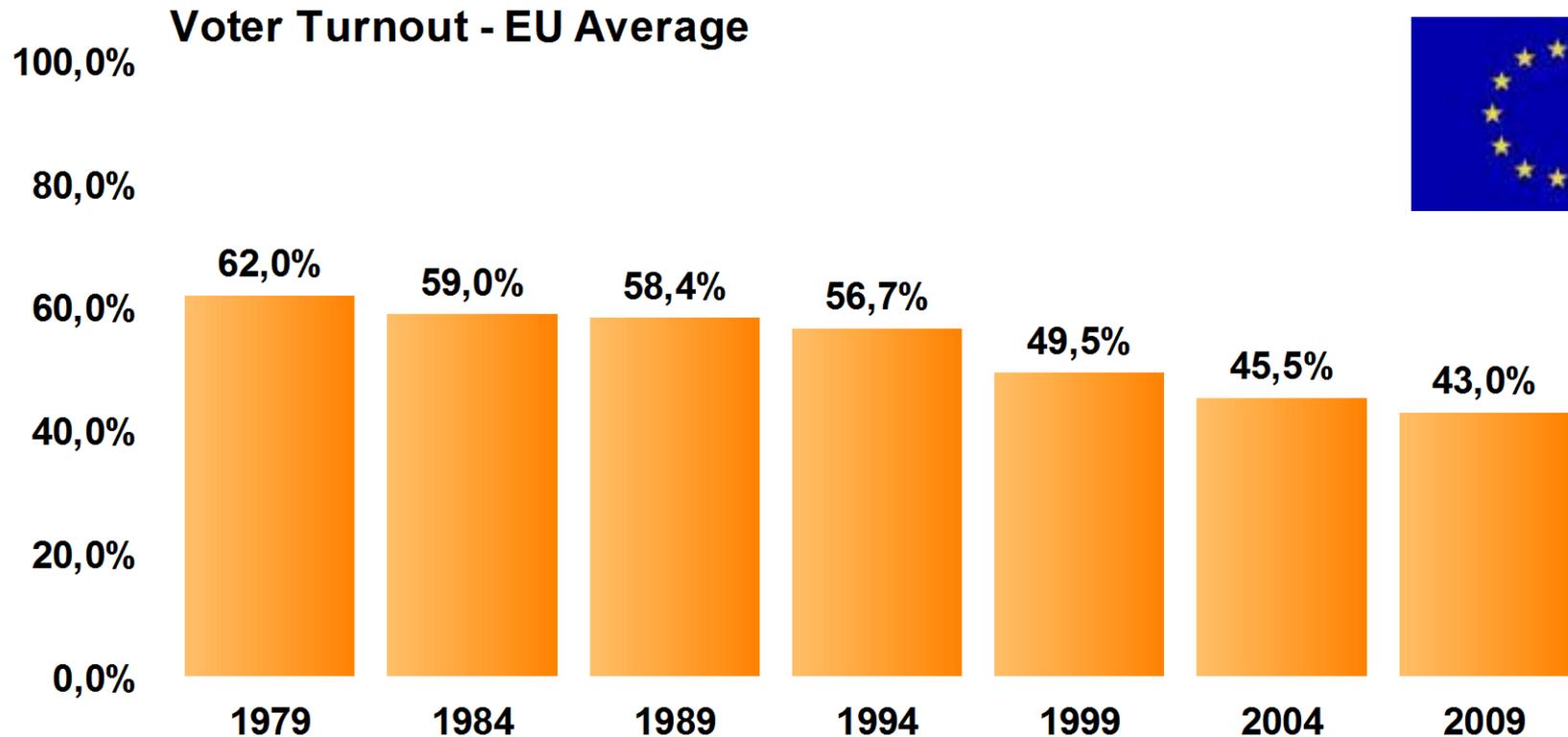
Parliaments seem to be without power



*: including armed forces/police and courts

- Government/authorities
- Parliament
- Political parties
- Supranational organisations/EU
- other protagonists

... and in European elections

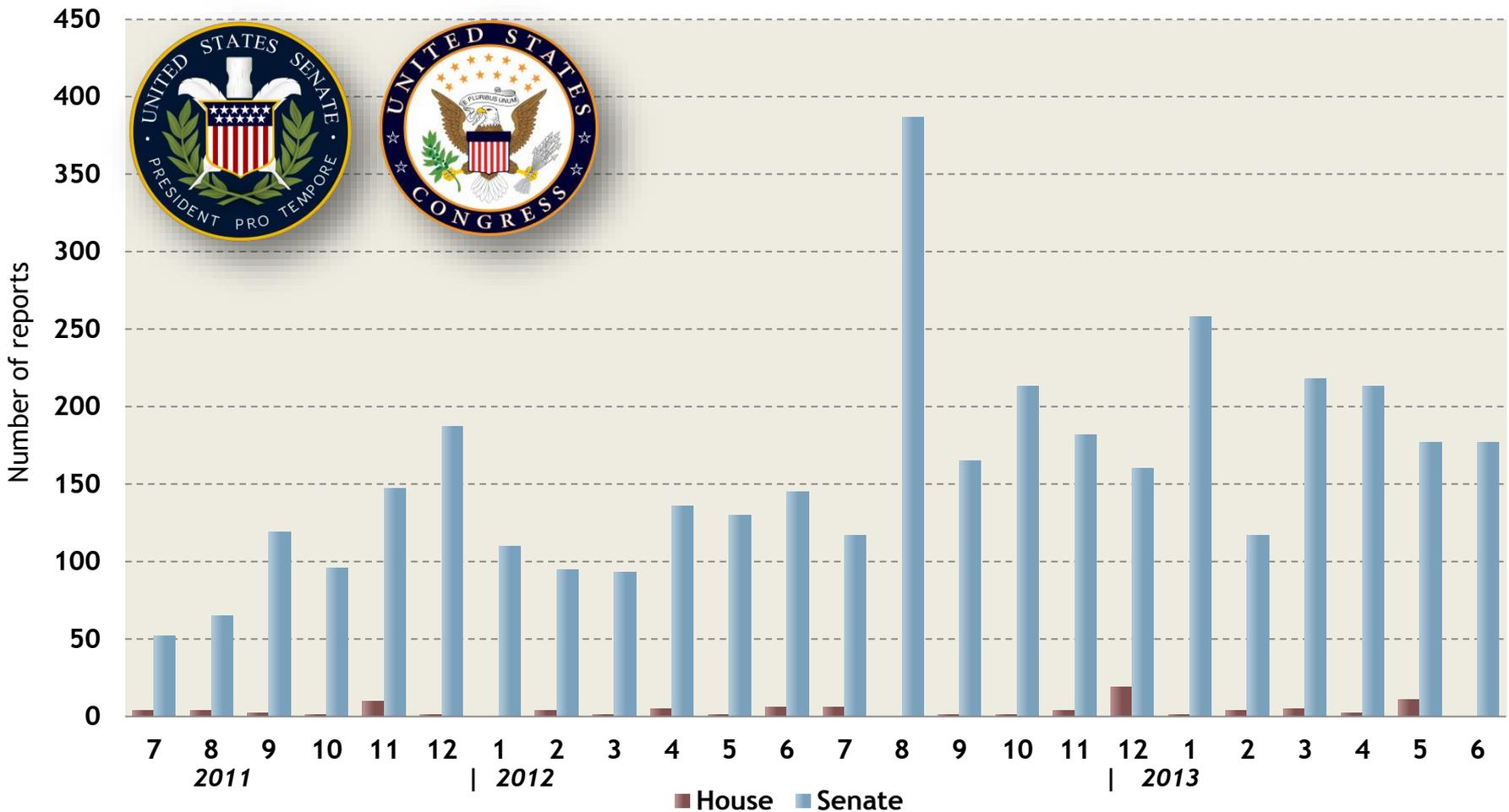


Data Basis

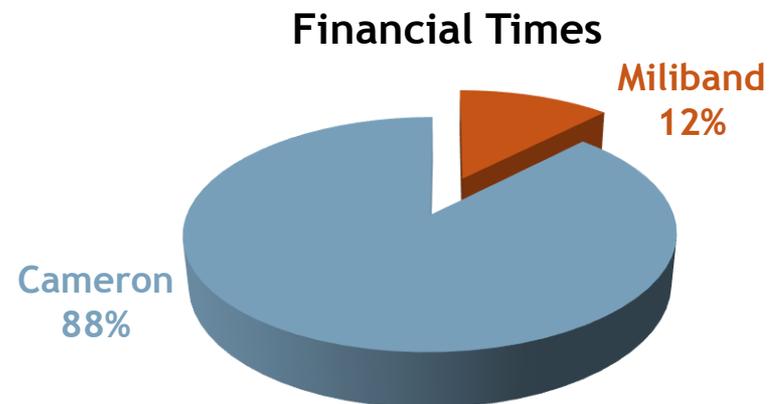
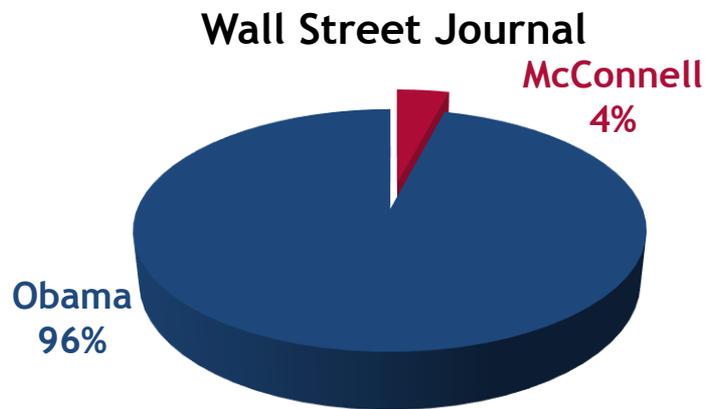
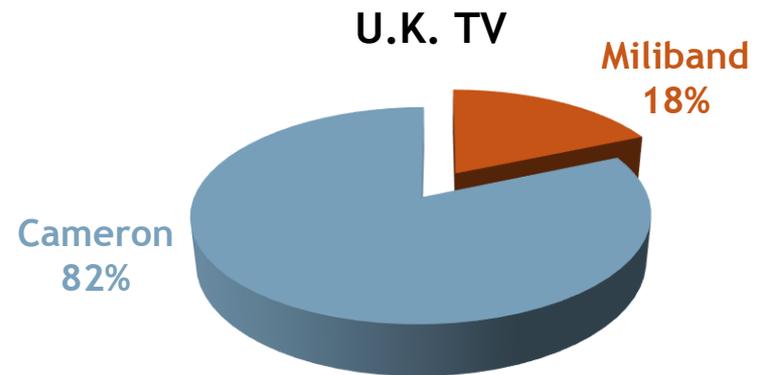
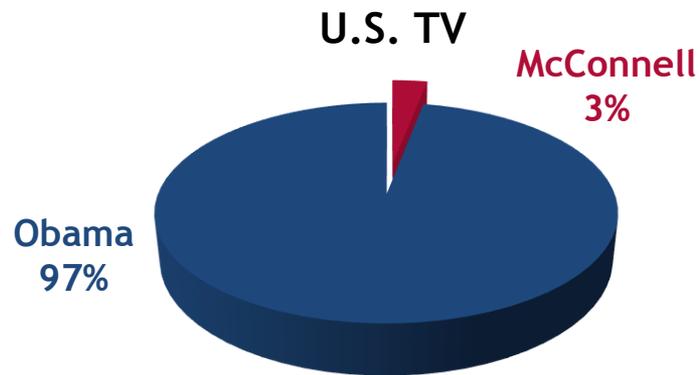
- **164,543 news stories in 5 US TV news programs, 32,096 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **109,223 news stories in 4 British TV news programs, 17,401 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **214,616 news stories in 5 German TV news programs, 22,568 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **57,423 news stories in 1 French TV news program, 2,867 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **71,825 news stories in 1 Italian TV news program, 7,062 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **30,650 news stories in 1 Spanish TV news program, 3,593 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **50,700 news stories in 4 Swiss TV news programs, 7,670 focusing on governments and parliaments**
- **260,194 news stories in 7 ZA TV news programs, 21,813 focusing on governments and parliaments**

All media content has been analyzed by trained human coders. Average inter-coder reliability equaled 88.7% in the II. quarter of 2011.

House vs. Senate: Media shows little interest in representative body



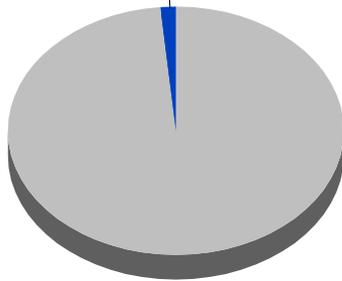
Opposition has no voice



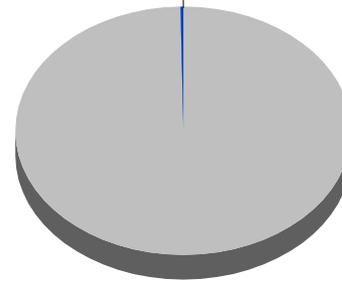
Little awareness of the EU while operating



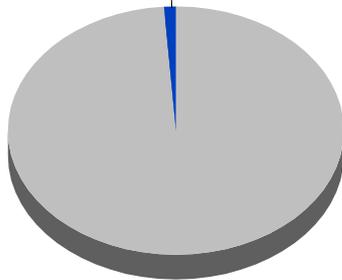
1,4%



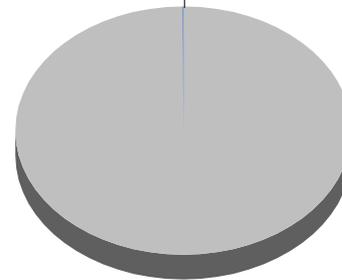
0,3%



1,1%

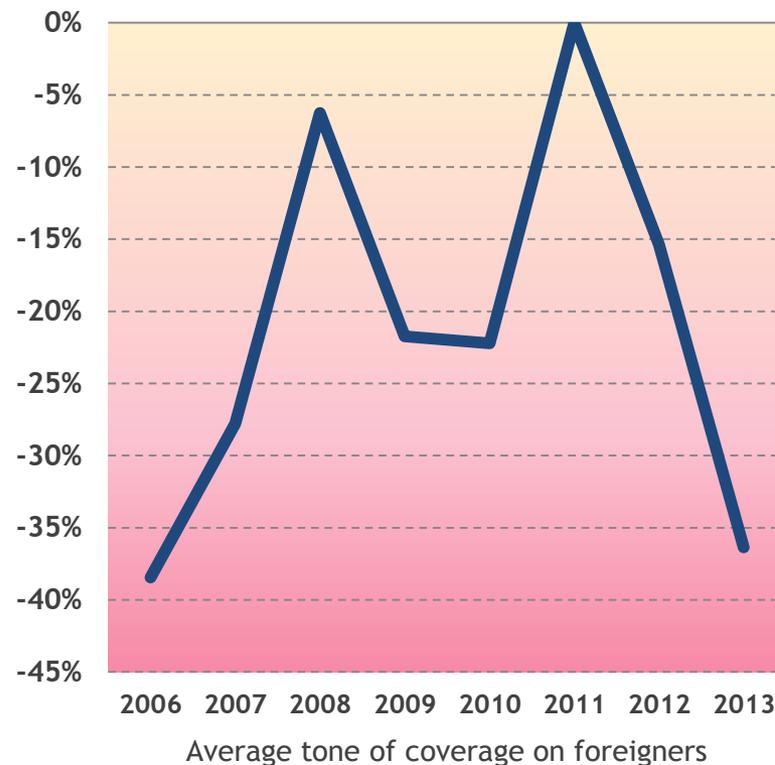
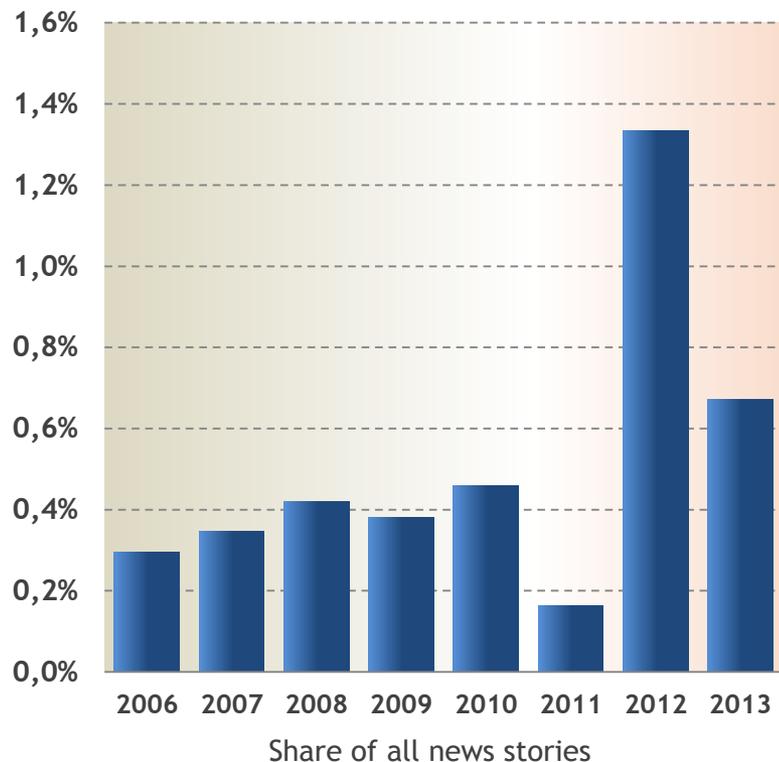


0,1%



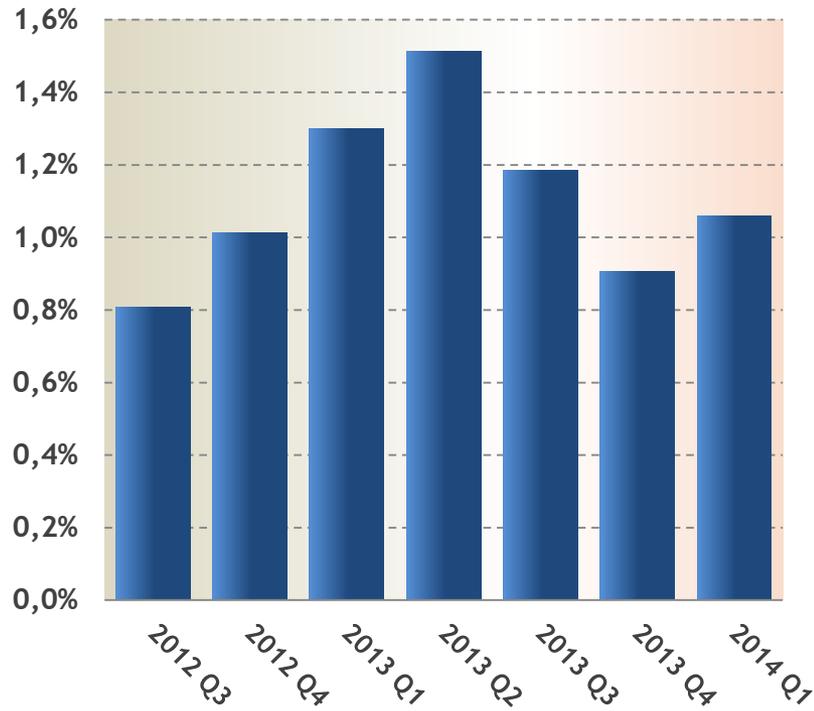
■ EU ■ other protagonists

Foreigners seldom in the news but often depicted negatively

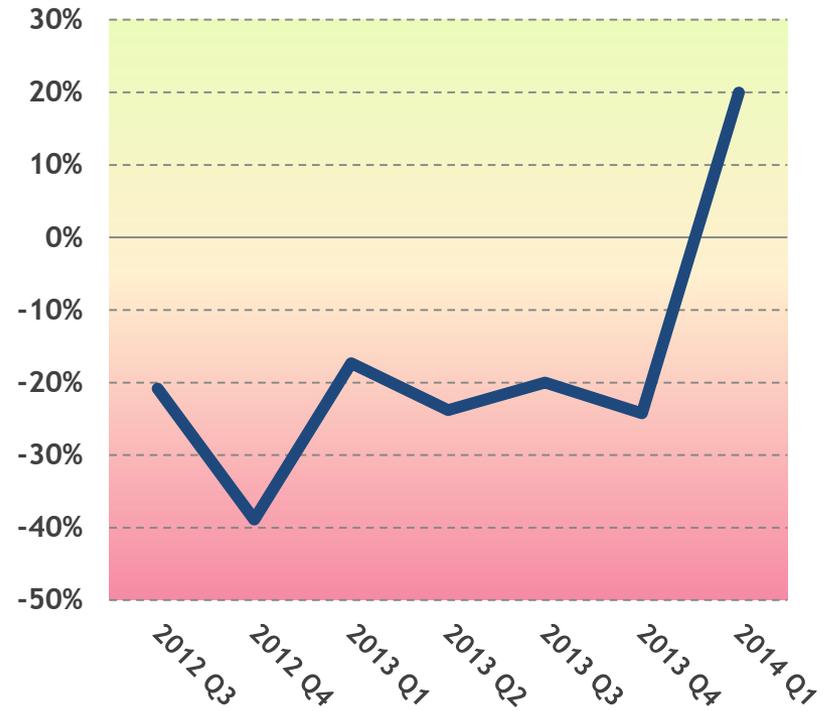


There has been significant coverage on foreigners in Switzerland, in which the migrants themselves also played a role, only since 2012. At the same time, the tone became much more negative again over the past two years.

Neutral reporting begins – however – very late



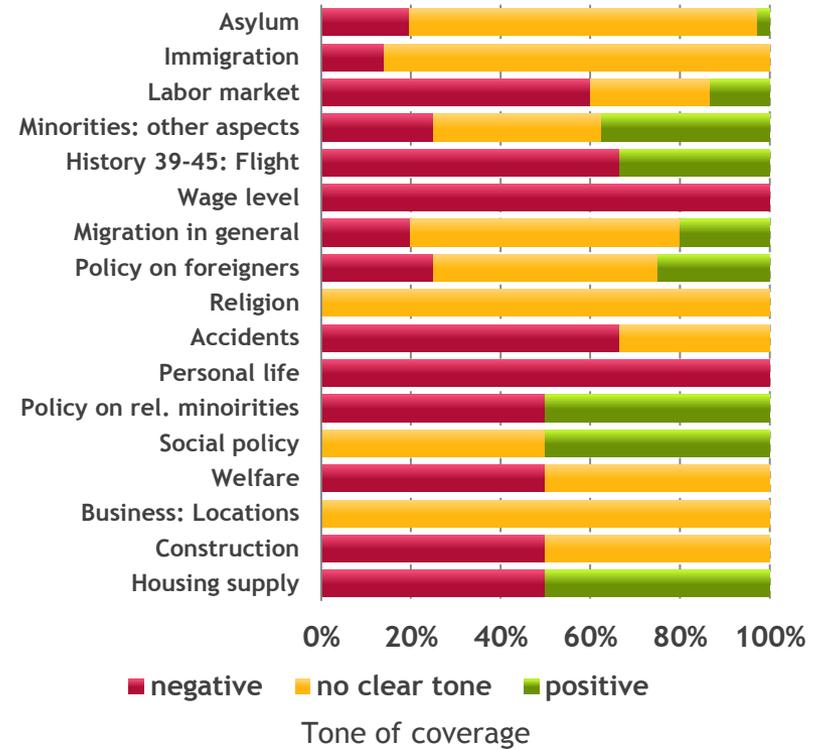
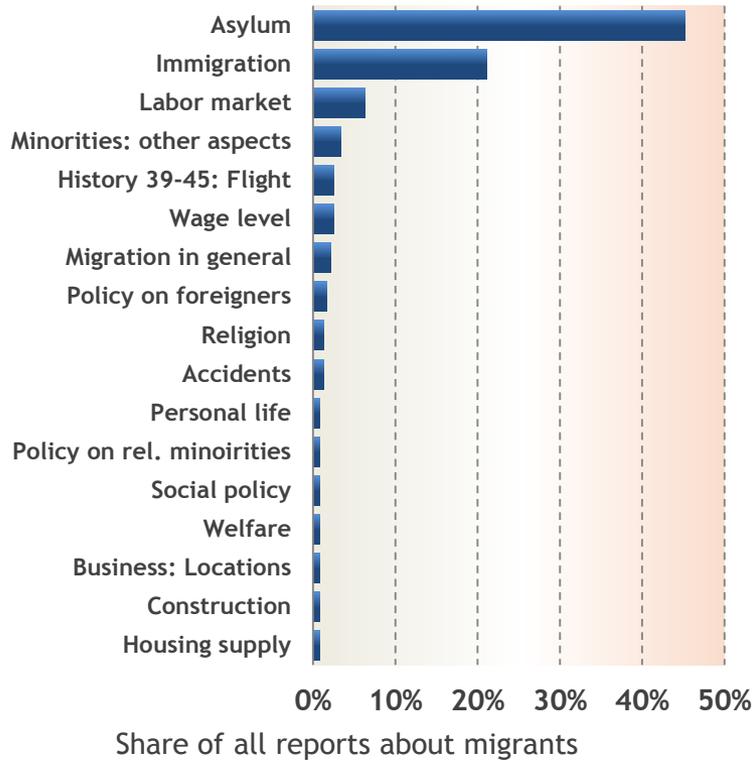
Share of all reports about protagonists



Average tone of coverage on foreigners

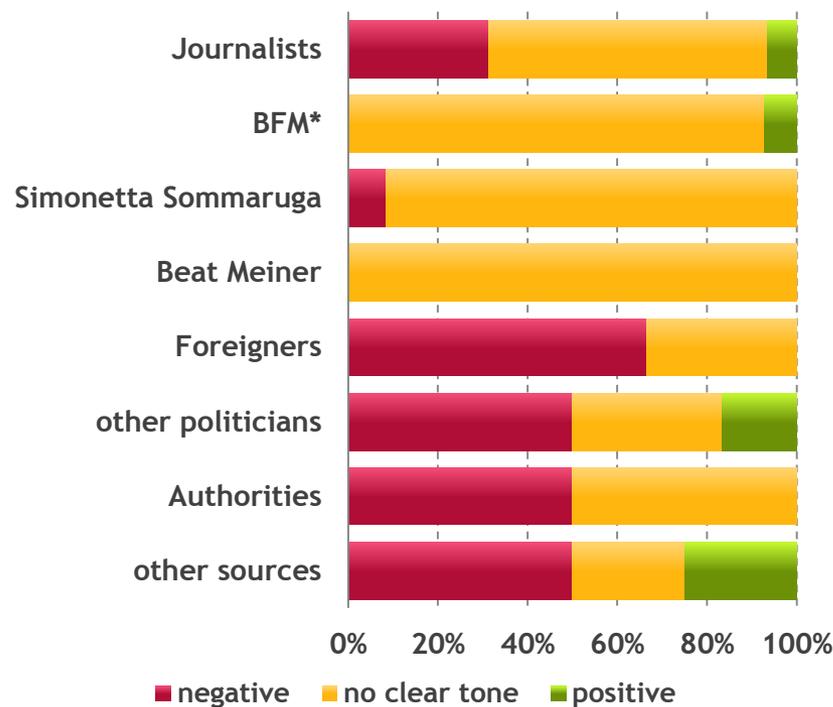
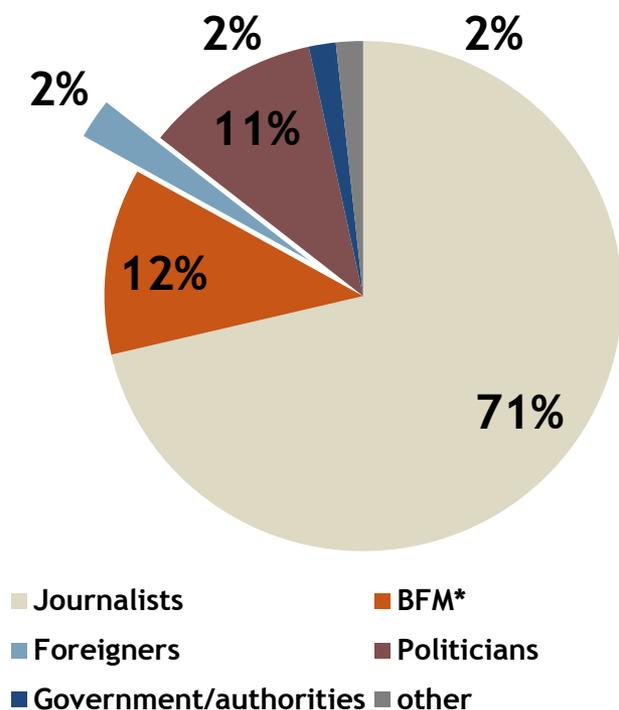
For years, Swiss news programs have reported critically on foreigners and migrants in Switzerland. Now in January 2014, they have addressed positive aspects as well, but this can hardly turn around the poor image of foreigners.

Foreigners only presented as a problem



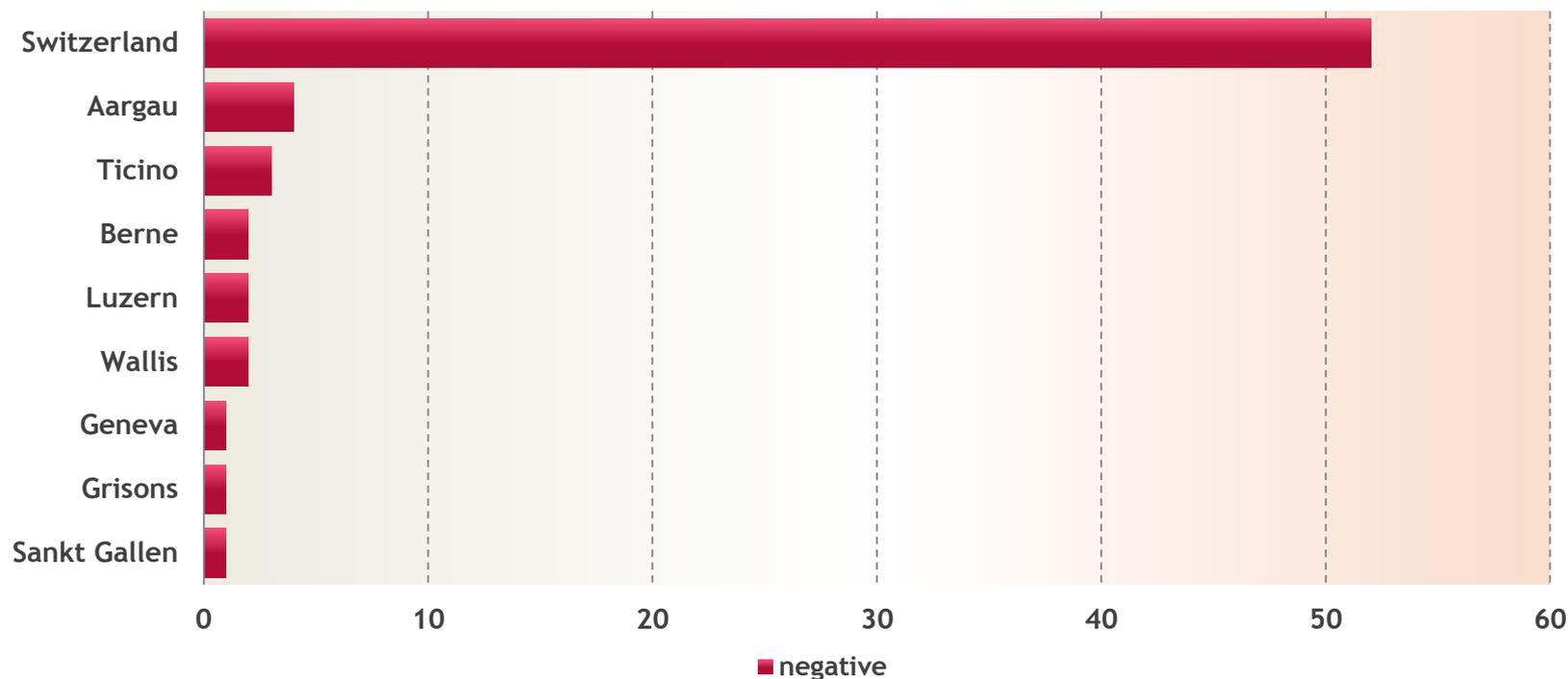
Apart from asylum policy and the labor market, other issues play virtually no role in the perception of migrants. Their daily life and their contribution to community life are largely hidden.

People affected by the initiative without a voice



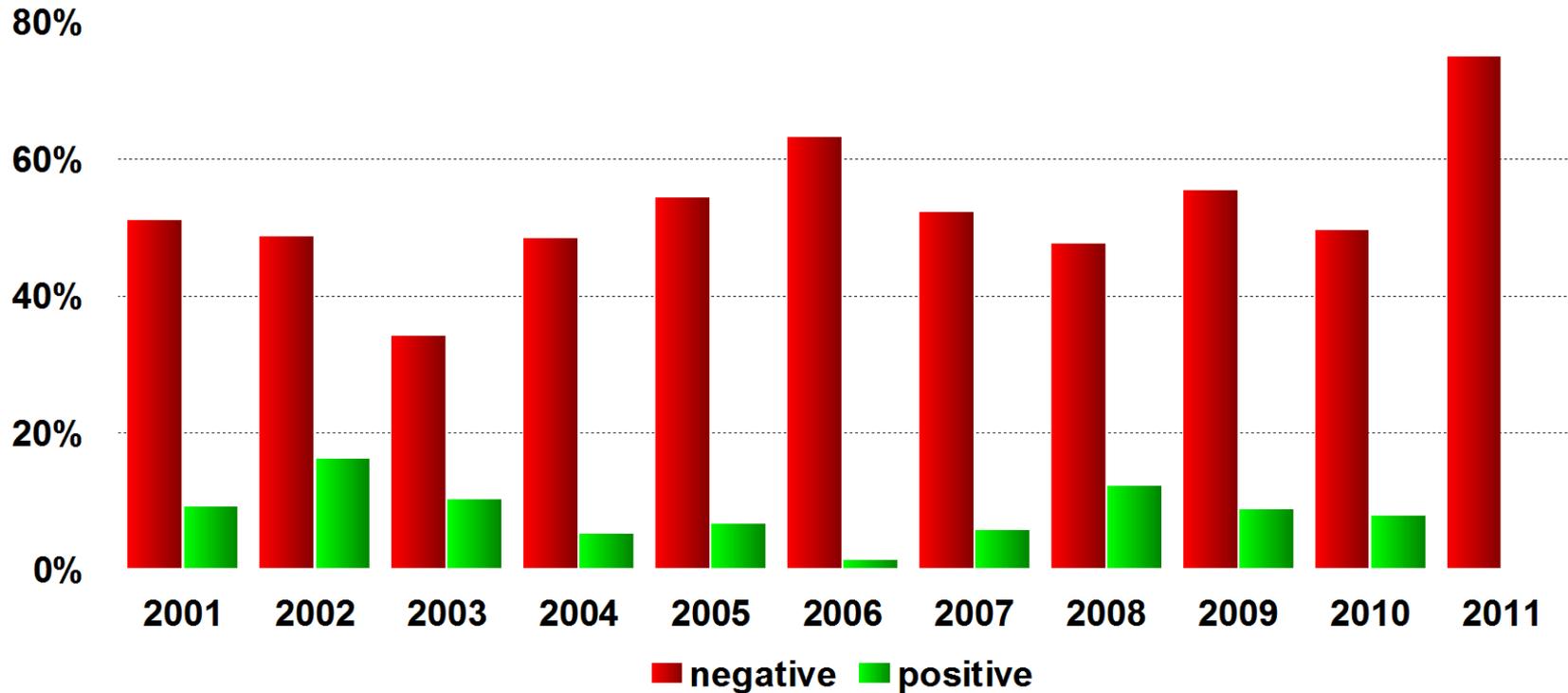
The opinions of the journalists mostly shaped the picture, but even if they quoted foreigners in their own words, negative aspects remained in focus. For example: Criticism of the immigration policy (BFM: Federal Office for Migration).

Little concrete reporting

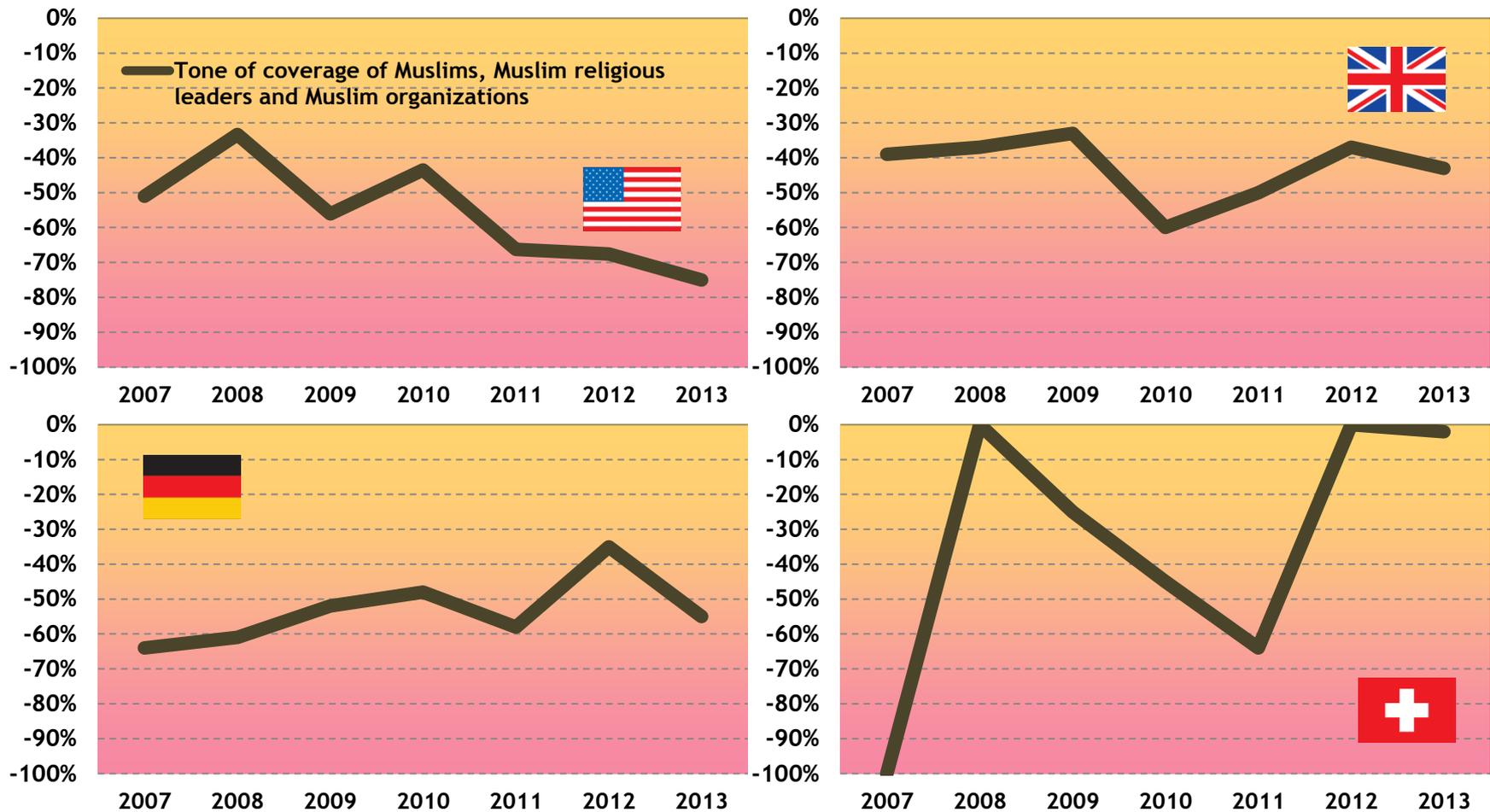


The negative reporting on migrants referred primarily to the national level, while the cantons play a subordinate role in this context. Positive news, as well, was practically not visible on the cantonal level.

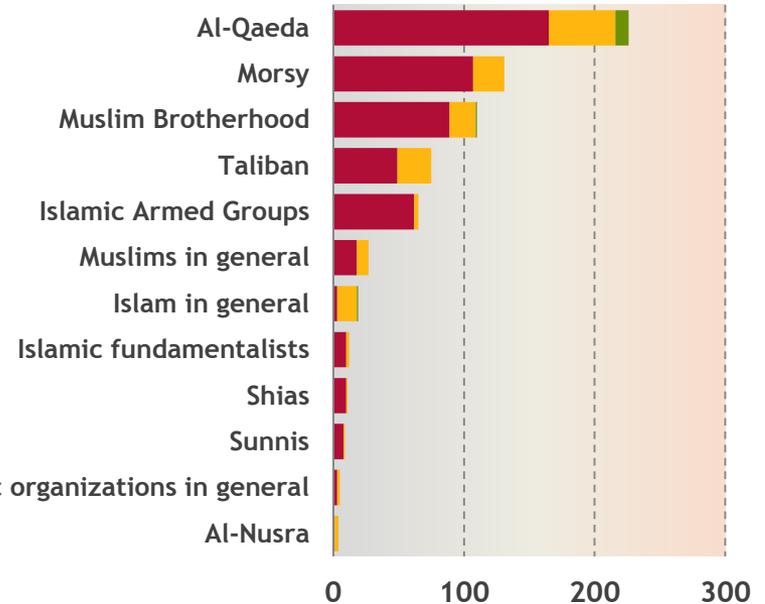
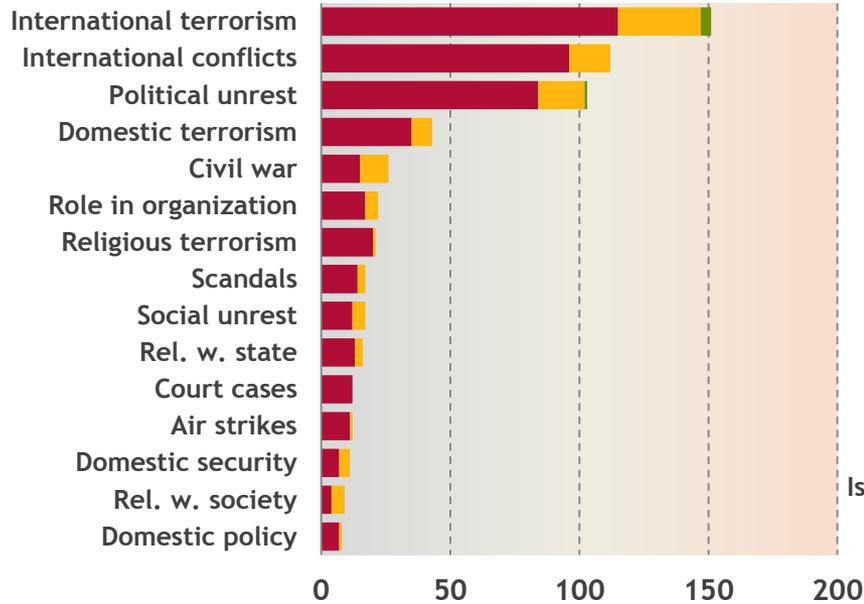
Continuous negative frame distorts public perceptions: Evaluation of Islam & Muslims on Western TV



Far away from balanced news - Swiss Muslims don't show up



Terrorists shape the image of Islam

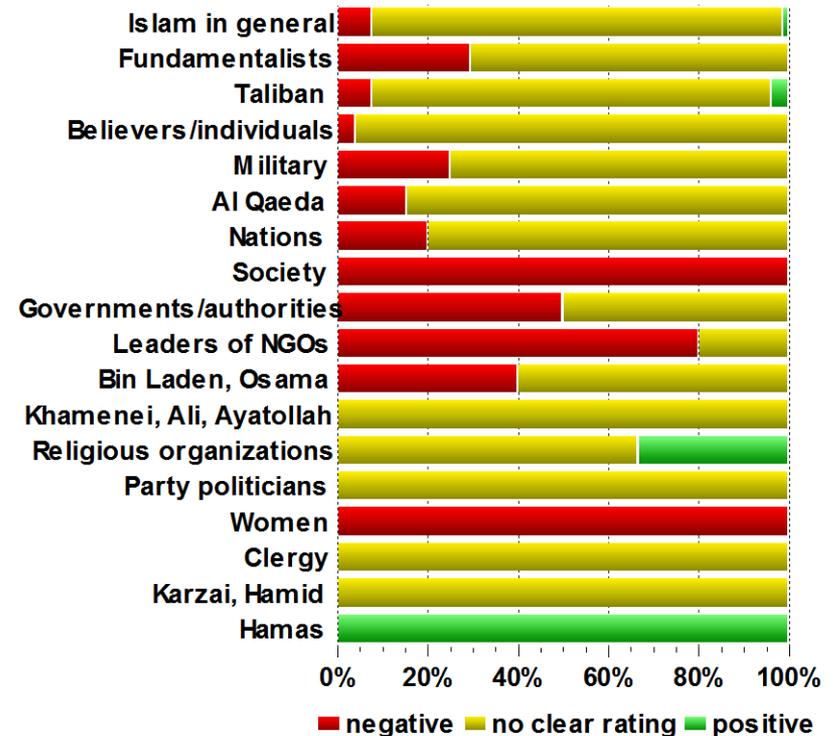
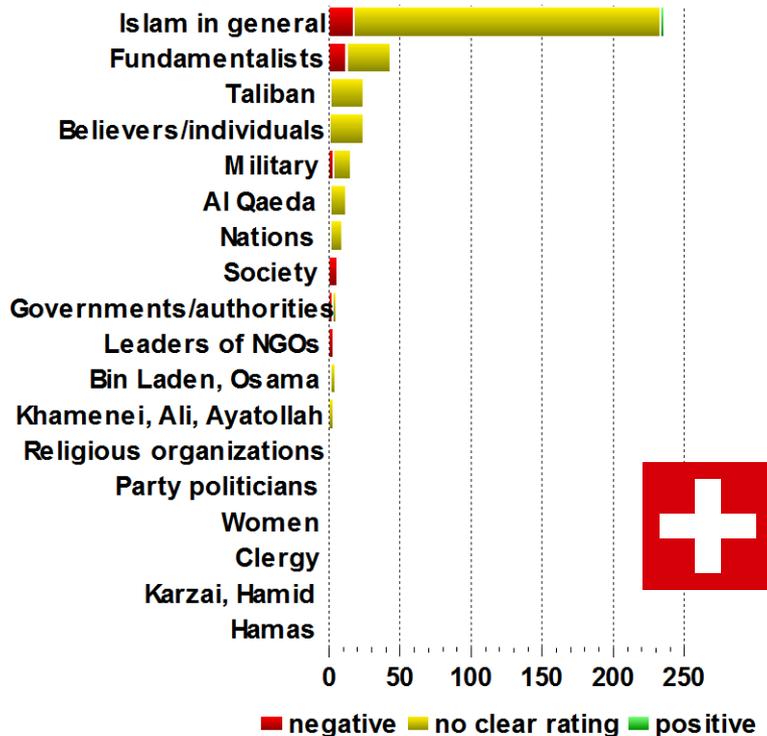


■ negative ■ no clear tone ■ positive

■ negative ■ no clear tone ■ positive

For years Islam has been portrayed as a security risk in the first line. Religious life, Islamic holidays or the social role of Muslims did not rank among the top issues in the news about Islam.

Example vote on issues: Diversity not visible

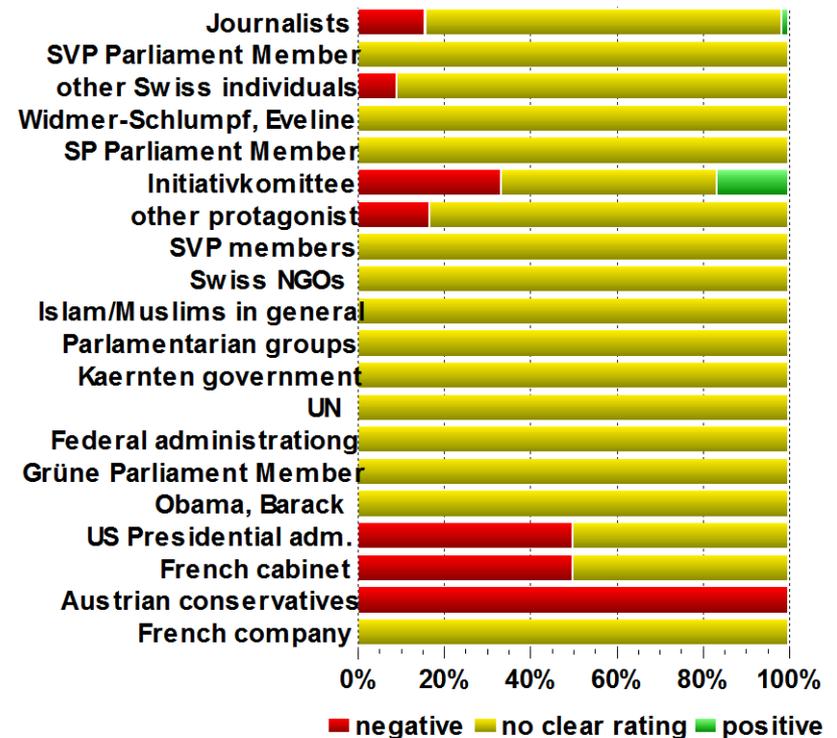
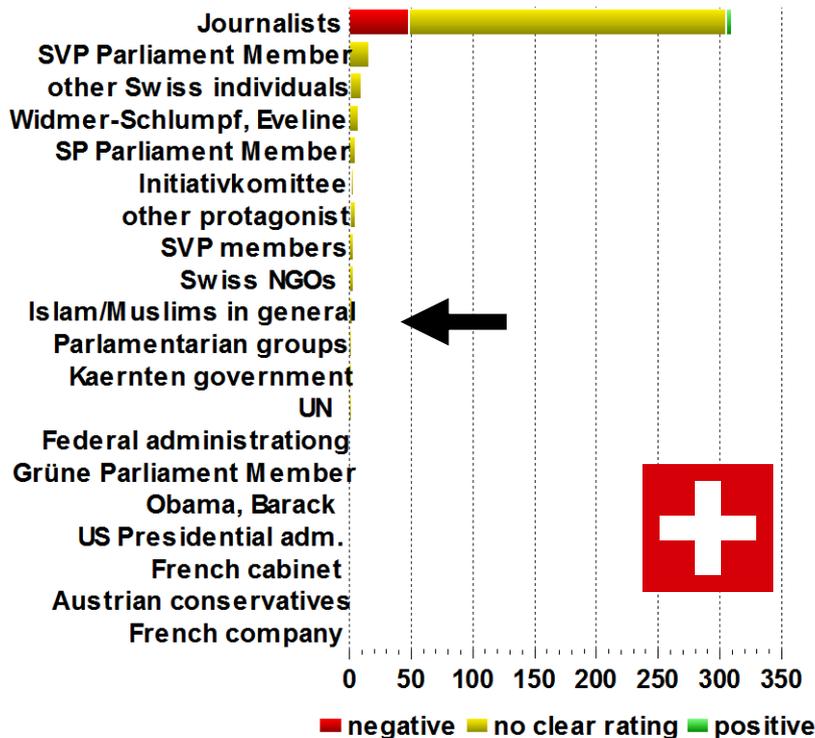


Most of the debates focused on the role of Islam in general and there were only few statements about individual Muslims. Islamic religious organizations and spiritual leaders played no important role.

Religion in Swiss TV news, 09-11/2009

Visibility and evaluation of Islam: The sources

Swiss had to vote on Muslims – where are they?

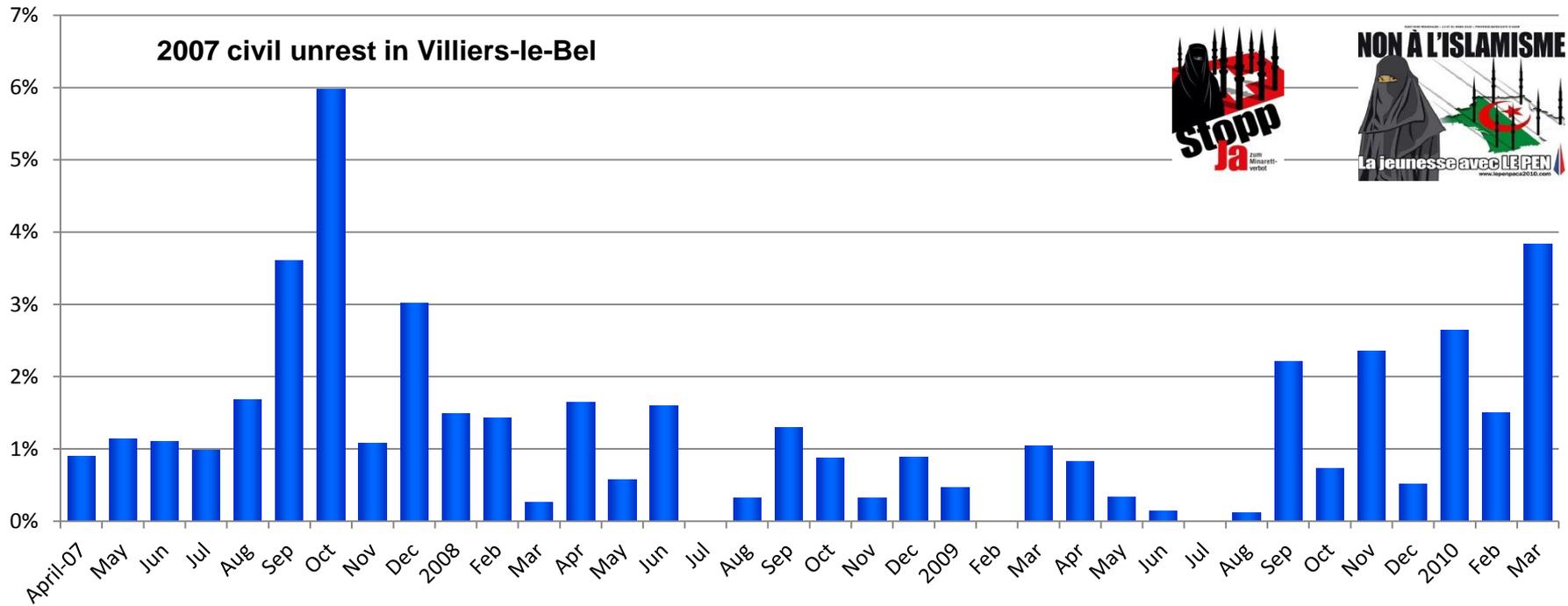


Quotes play a minor role in the reporting about Muslims in Swiss news; the journalists themselves account for more than ¾ of all the statements about Islam, followed by parliamentarians from the SVP – who avoid bland criticism.

Non A L'islamisme

Saliency of Integration/religious issues in French TV news 2007-2010

Same news patterns on Islam now in French TV



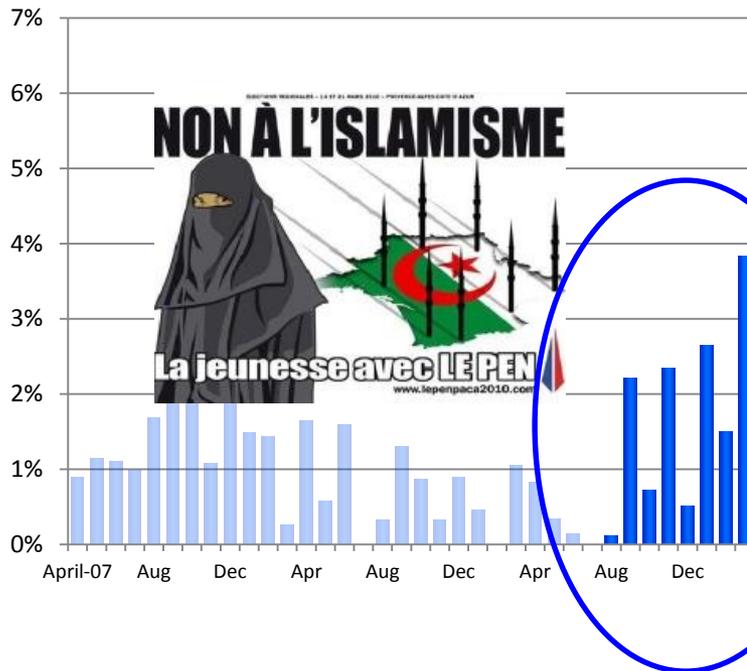
Saliency of integration related topics in French political coverage TF 1

Le Pen's timely use of the Swiss Minaret Initiative's provocative poster was a timely push for last minute votes in France's regional elections. Islam and integration issues had been on the agenda since mid 2009, but the poster brought the issue to the levels of 2007's civil unrest.

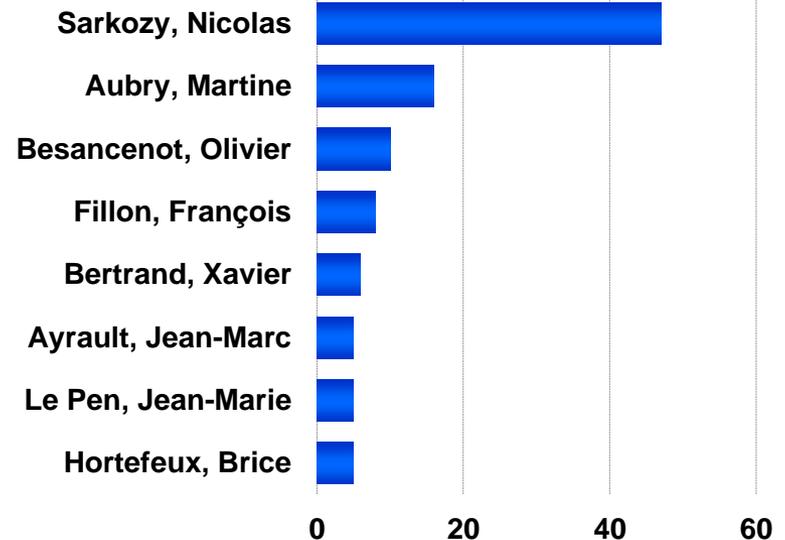
Non A L'islamisme

Saliency of Integration/religious issues in French TV news 2007-2010

Without ongoing info-flow events create extra influence



Top 5 politicians on the issue since mid 2009



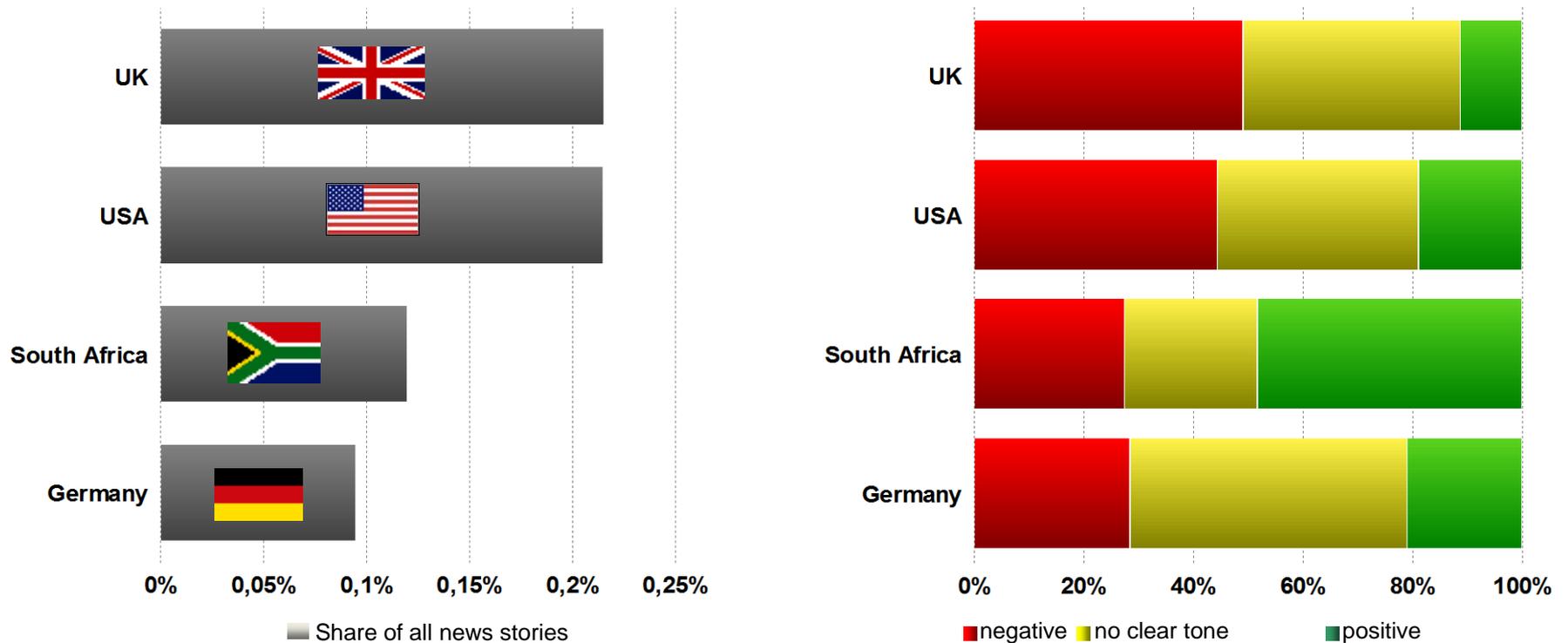
Saliency of integration related topics in French political coverage TF 1

Since the latest wave of integration related topics has move onto the French election, the issue has called for a response from Sarkozy. In effect the issue has made Sarkozy the de facto representative of Le Pen's politic – to the Front national's advantage.

Senior citizens/pensioners in international TV news, 2001-2011

Share of senior citizens / tone of coverage

British and US TV news focus the most on stereotypes

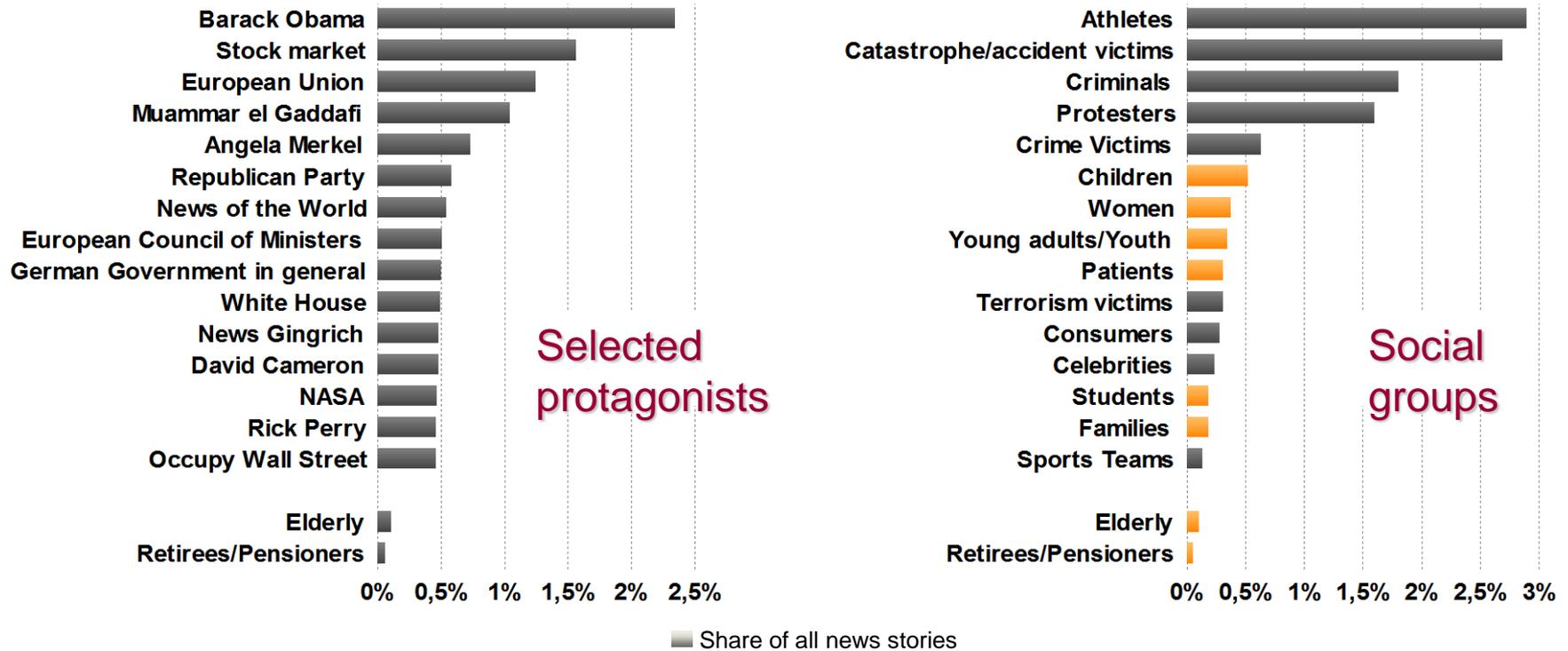


Senior citizens as a group and a rising portion of Western societies play only a very minor role in the news in the UK, the US and Germany – and in South Africa as well. But South African TV shows a very different picture when it comes to tone.

Senior citizens/pensioners in international TV news, 07-12/2011

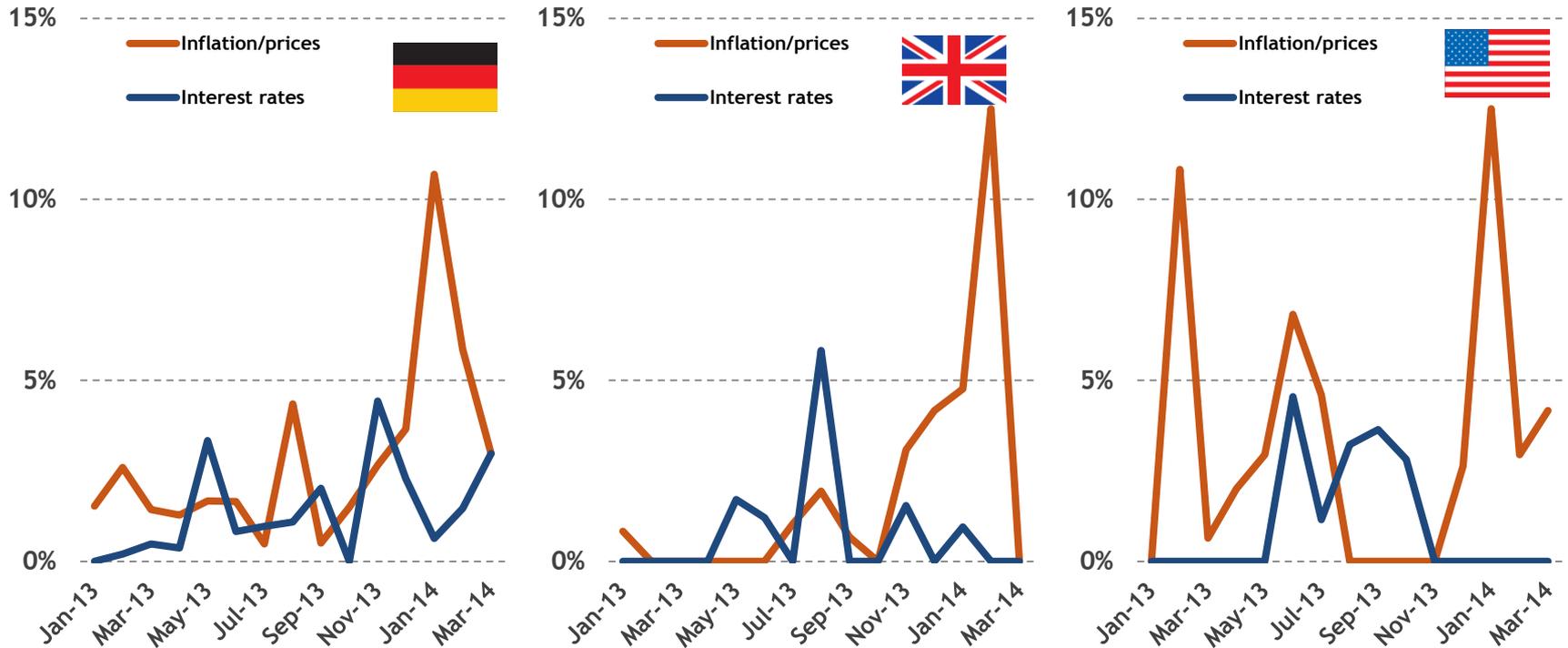
Visibility of senior citizens in comparison

Elderly lose out against children and families



Political leaders dominate TV coverage in the UK, the US and Germany. But when it comes to social groups, elderly people and pensioners fare as bad. Children and young adults for instance get significantly more coverage

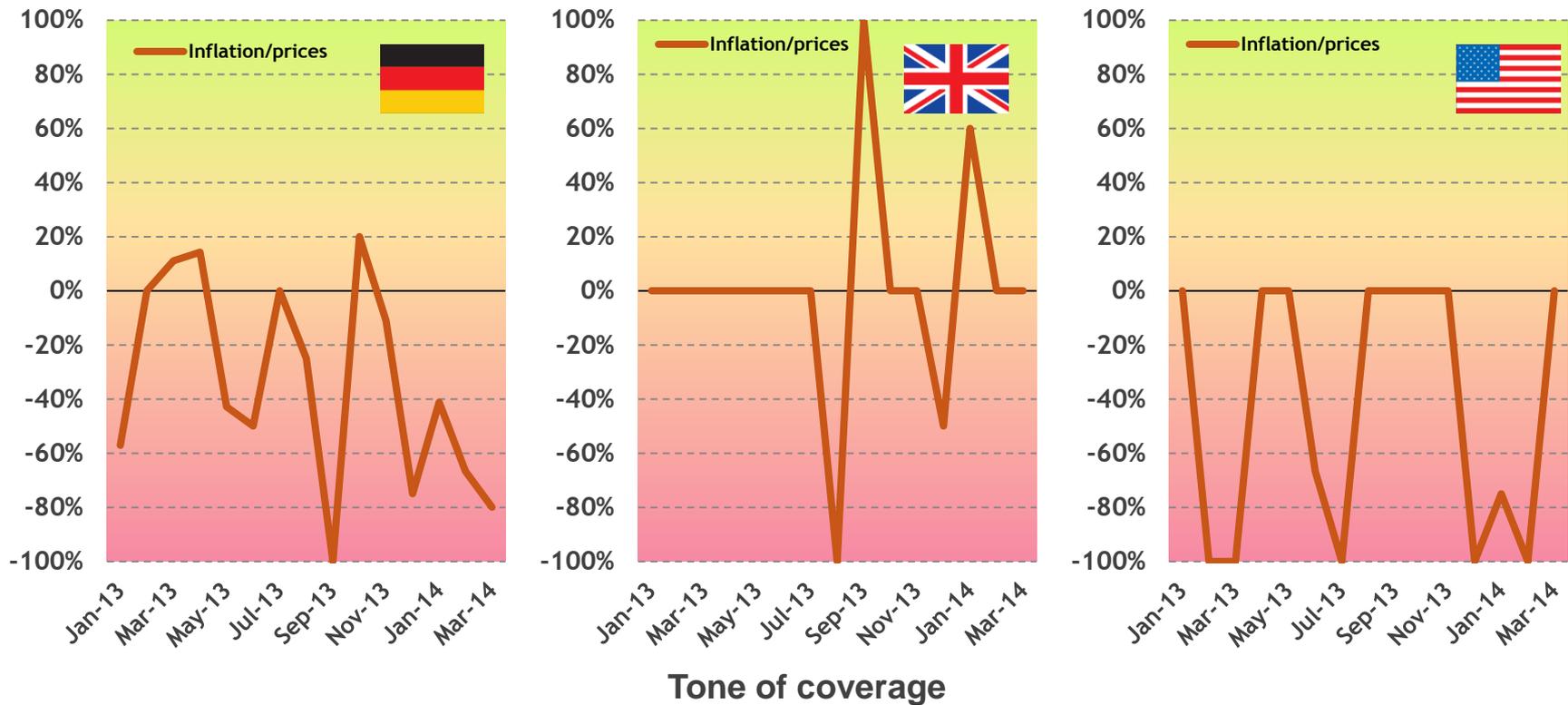
Price stability concerns on the rise in 2014



Share of all reports about the economy

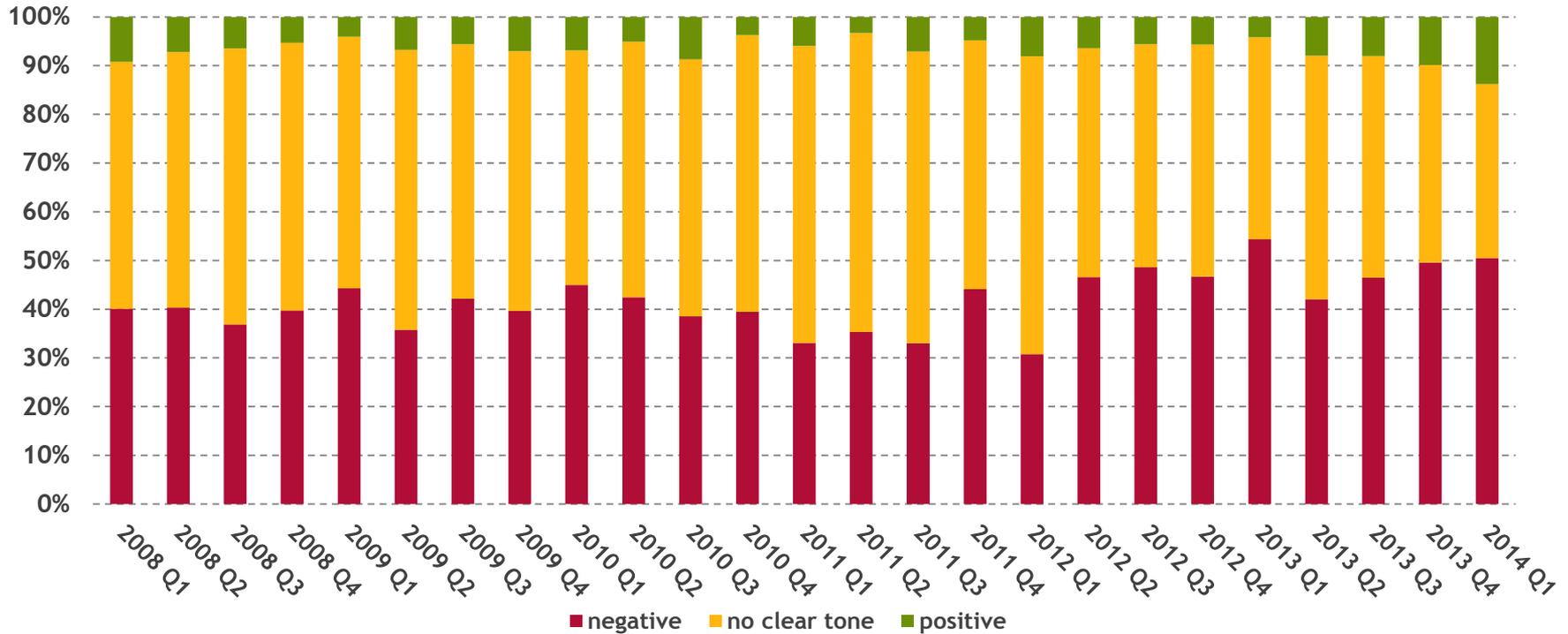
Concerns about the risks of deflation have been addressed prominently in TV news in 2014. But only German TV looked as well at interest rate policy. And inflation remained permanently on the media agenda only in Germany as well.

Only UK news reported favorably about inflation



Media coverage of price stability is not linked to the real development of price indicators, as even a modest rise of the inflation rate within the bounds that are targeted by central banks are very often reported in a negative context, e.g. “apples are more expensive.”

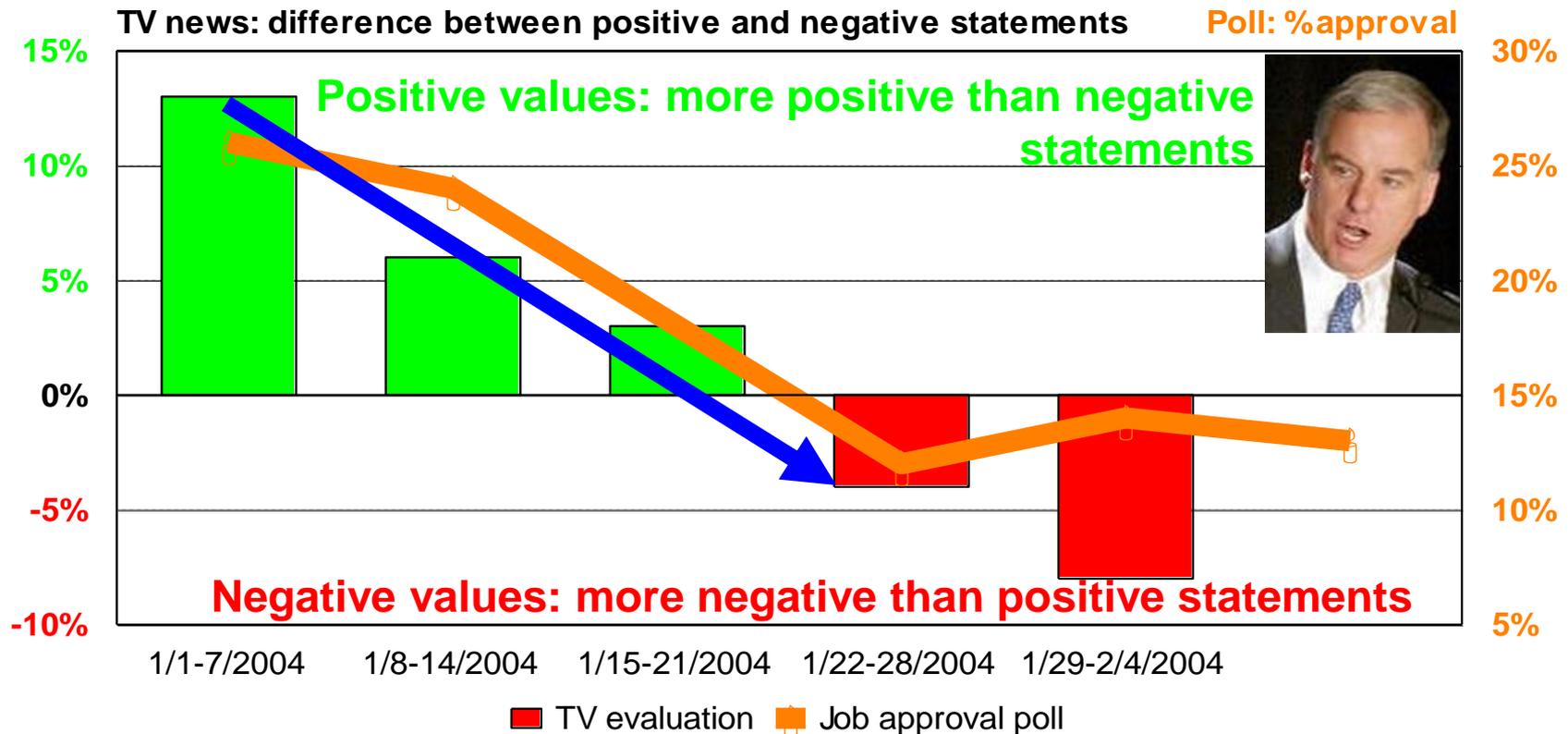
But criticism does not fade from the news



While some banks were covered more positively in 2013, the share of negative reports remained higher than at the height of the financial crisis. Banking companies and the financial sector at large won't recover public trust under these circumstances.

Continuous decline for Dean

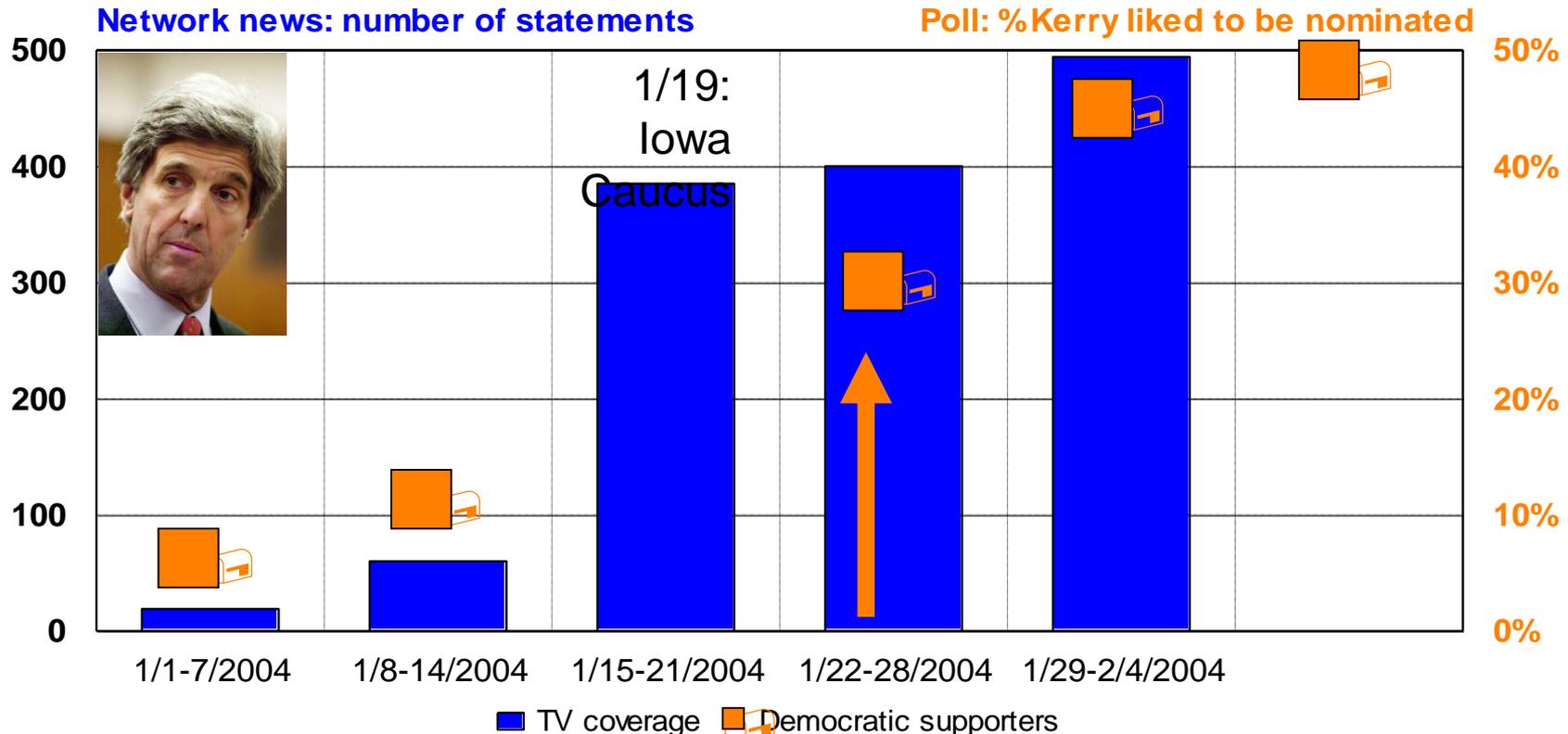
Evaluation of Dean – ABC, NBC and CBS evening news, 1/1 - 2/5/2004



Even prior to the Iowa Caucus, Dean did not receive the same amount of positive coverage as in earlier weeks. As a consequence, his support among democratic voters declined.

Television discovers Kerry, voters follow

Coverage of Kerry – ABC, NBC and CBS evening news, 1/1 - 2/4/2004



Following the Iowa Caucus, Kerry surpassed the awareness threshold on television news, also receiving very positive coverage. Approval ratings subsequently improved among polled Democrats.

Summary

- Parliaments lose out to governments and political parties in terms of visibility
- European politics is framed in a national perspective – leaving little room for transnational European protagonists
- Negativity in political coverage is driven by competitive framing and the selection of sources
- Media coverage of political activities fuels distrust towards politics and politicians and aggravates disenchantment with politics – “Politikverdrossenheit”

What can be done?

- We need to agree on certain standards of reporting on politics – as it was done in the Czech Republic
- We need to monitor these standards and publish the results regularly – so that transparency is a given
- We need to meet regularly to debate these results – with all parties involved: journalists, scientists, politicians, NGOs
- We need to look permanently for new benchmarks like Danish-TV, Al-Arabia, Czech TV, SABC and others

Where would you say is this building located?



Yes, exactly at Times Square in NYC

