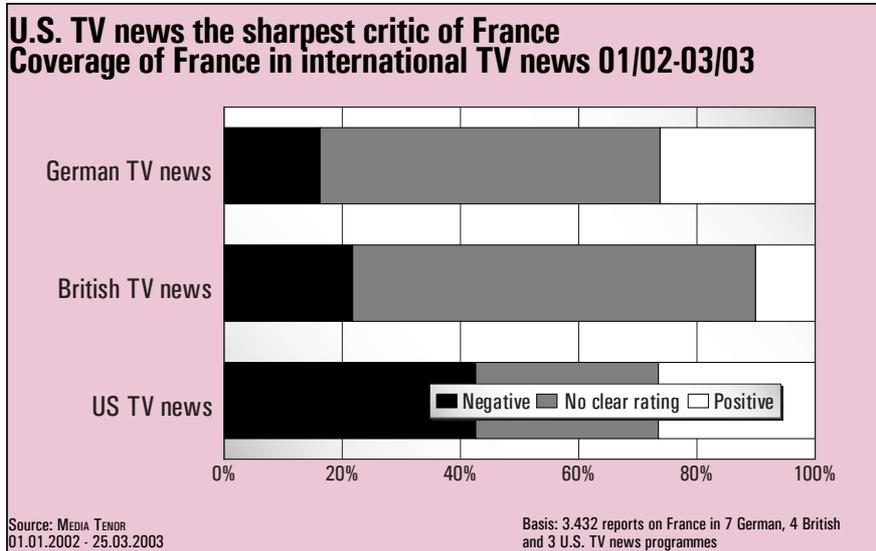


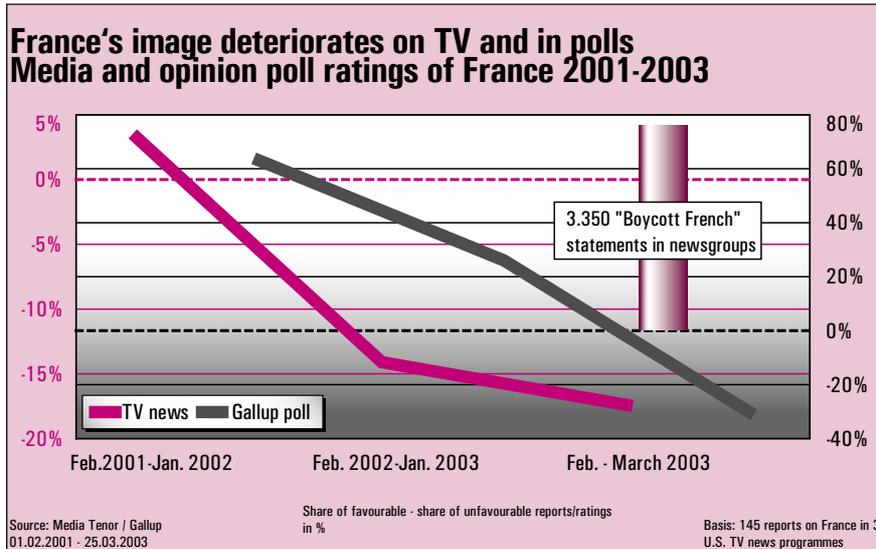
# Agenda Setting: France

## France's image deteriorates after media criticism

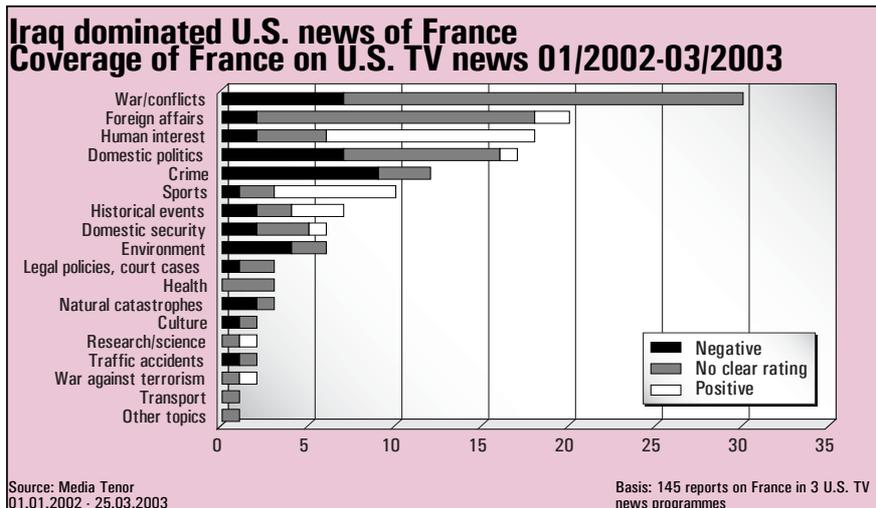
### TV news coverage of France in British, U.S. and German TV news 01/2001-03/2003



The Iraq conflict has deeply troubled the relations between France and the U.S. as well as the U.K. French media like Libération accused George W. Bush and Tony Blair of "stirring up latent Francophobia." A Media Tenor analysis of TV news reports on France in the U.S., the U.K. and Germany suggests that more critical news coverage impacted on the deteriorating image of France in opinion polls.



On U.S. TV the Iraq conflict dominated the news agenda over the past 15 months. The majority of foreign news concerning France dealt with the French position towards George W. Bush's Iraq policy, despite other important topics such as the French presidential elections that were being held in 2002. Moreover, most reports on the debate in the Security

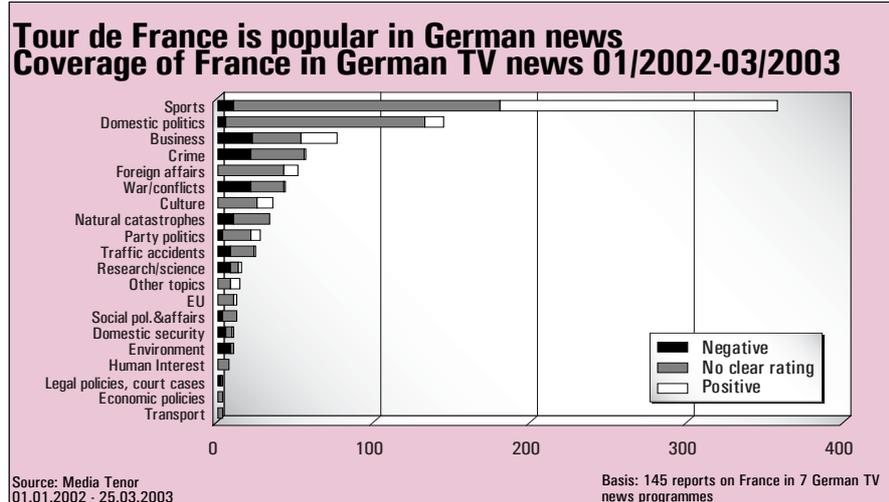
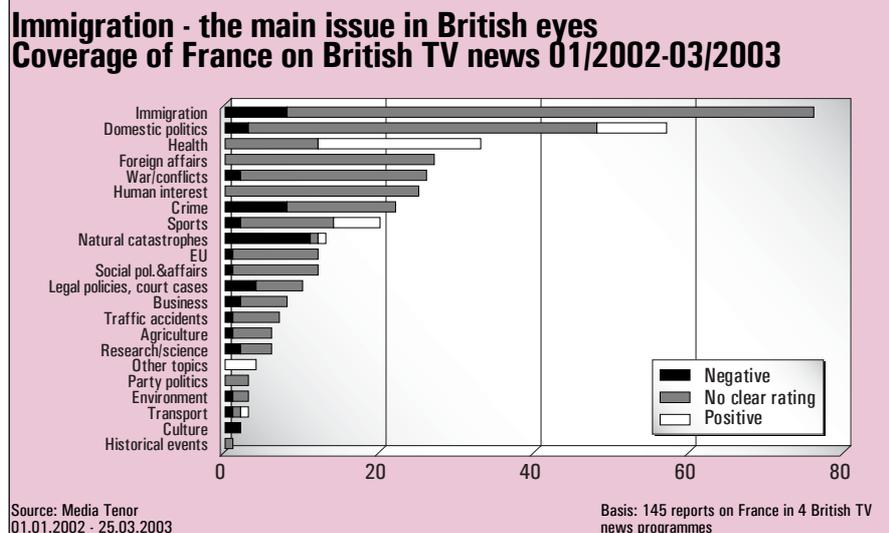


Council in New York featured France as the leading voice of dissent. France's actions at NATO and the threat of a veto to a second U.N. resolution in particular, stirred the anger of some U.S. politicians and citizens. Nbc and Cbs both reported on a wave of anti-French sentiment in the United States. Cbs broadcasted images of a mob smashing Peugeots in Nashville and people pouring French wine into the gutter. Others were shown explaining the reasons for their boycott of French products. U.S. lawmakers were equally annoyed with France's position in the Security Council. Representative Bob Ney, chairman of the House Administration Committee, ordered House restaurants to replace any reference to "French fries" with the term "Freedom fries."

### France's image worsened in U.S. news

U.S. polling institute Gallup concluded that from looking at the media one could get the impression that "French bashing is at fever pitch in the United States" and released a poll on the introduction of the new term "Freedom Fries". According to the survey one third of the people questioned regarded this measure as a "sincere expression of patriotism" whilst about two thirds thought it was a "silly idea". In another Gallup survey of country images the more or less stable favourability figures for France during the past decade tumbled after the outspoken criticism by the French government of U.S. Iraq policy. An additional poll in March 2003 showed that public opinion on France in general had reversed with a majority of Americans now disliking France. Media coverage seems to have

been the main contributor to this trend, as favourability ratings of France in U.S. TV news deteriorated before the polls were undertaken. In the twelve month periods prior to the polls of February 2002 and February 2003 the share of positive reports had decreased considerably. While in 2001 the majority of reports from France had been favourable, the image changed in 2002 to an overall unfavourable media coverage. After the poll in February 2003, the gap between the number of unfavourable and favourable U.S. TV



news items in connection with France widened and the overall evaluation of France in the news worsened.

The press featured various points of view on the consequences of anti-French sentiment. The New York Times argued that business leaders in France described the relations between the two states as "intoxicated". The Wall Street Journal on the other hand quoted French politicians and businessmen as confident that France will not pay a price for its strong views on the Iraq conflict and the threat of a veto in the Security Council.

The main campaign against France's position on Iraq was led by the tabloids and in particular the New York Post, which stated: "France is virtually an enemy of the U.S." In some cases TV news referred to the tabloid's news agenda. Nbc quoted New York Post's Steve Dunleavy who repeated the line of his paper saying that France had forgotten what the U.S. and the U.K. had done for the country in World War 2. Peter Preston of the Times observed that media ownership plays an important part for the views of a paper on Iraq. In the U.K. the Sun which like the New York Post belongs to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation joined in the French bashing and branded Jaques Chirac as "Saddam's whore". The media was aided in its criticism by British Prime Minister Tony Blair who vociferously attacked France. In October 2002 Blair and Chirac had clashed over EU reforms and farming subsidies, but at the time criticism was still masked in diplomatic phrases. After the French veto threat, Blair lifted all restrictions for ministers in their comments about the French government. The Sun's attack on Jaques Chirac came right after France's foreign minister criticised the strong language used in the British parliament with regard to France's stance on Iraq.

### **U.K. news focused on illegal immigrants**

In contrast to U.S. networks, British TV news did not focus on Iraq in their reports from France. However, this did not improve France's image in British TV news as the main issues involving France on Bbc and Itv were asylum and illegal immigration. A refugee camp in Northern France had been continuously attacked by British politicians and tabloids as a haven for people-smugglers and a base for illegal entry into the UK. After lengthy discussions the British and French government decided to close the Sangatte refugee camp and agreed further co-operation to help tackle illegal immigration. Overall the political disagreement on Iraq was only one of several issues that led to a negative coverage of France in British TV news. However, one similarity between France's asylum policy and stance on Iraq was that both were regarded by British politicians and the media as largely a French problem. The image of France in British news was not entirely dreadful though, and profited notably from coverage of the first British NHS patients who travelled to France for treatment in a measure to reduce waiting lists in the U.K..

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## **Basis**

**Media:** NBC NIGHTLY NEWS, ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT, CBS EVENING NEWS, BBC SIX O'CLOCK NEWS, BBC TEN O'CLOCK NEWS, ITV EARLY EVENING NEWS, ITV NEWS AT TEN, HEUTE, ZDF HEUTE JOURNAL, TAGESschau, ARD TAGESTHEMEN, RTL AKTUELL, SAT1 18.30, PRO SIEBEN NACHRICHTEN

**Period:** 01.01.2001 - 25.03.2003

**Poll:** GALLUP - Favourability of Nations

**Analysis:** All news in which France was the predominant area of the report.

**Agenda Setting Article, MT Journal Nr. 131, April 2003**