

# 'Superpowers' under threat?

## Global TV 2005: 'Peripheral'-news countries not following Western trend

What we know about ourselves and even more importantly, about others, are often shaped by what we read or watch in the media. Your own opinion about foreign countries, decisions where to spend international holidays or which global companies to invest in, depend largely on one's perception of these countries. This has been the assessment by news flow studies throughout the past thirty years, with results indicating that in general Western superpowers tend to dominate the news of the world. But the world and media in particular, have changed drastically not only since the introduction of the internet, but particularly in the past few years as a result of global war reporting amongst others, starting with the first Gulf War in the 90s and leading up to the 'embedded' war in Iraq. Would 'secondary' news countries follow the lead in reporting by the traditional news countries or establish their own news agenda is a very salient question these days.

At a first glance, **Media Tenor's** analysis, of 22 international TV news programmes from five countries in 2005, shows that for people in some countries, the knowledge of countries apart from their own seems to be limited, if not totally absent. While some TV stations attempted to break the dominance of US/Iraq as an area of focus, US' television in particular, is cutting the 'non-US dominated world' almost completely off the agenda. 78% of the total news on U.S.' television networks deals with the US plus news from Iraq, leaving only 22% of the total news coverage to the remaining 190 countries around the world.

An overall dominance of issues related to the US/Iraqi conflict is visible amongst all the analysed television news stations, but certain regional 'preferences' are also emerging.

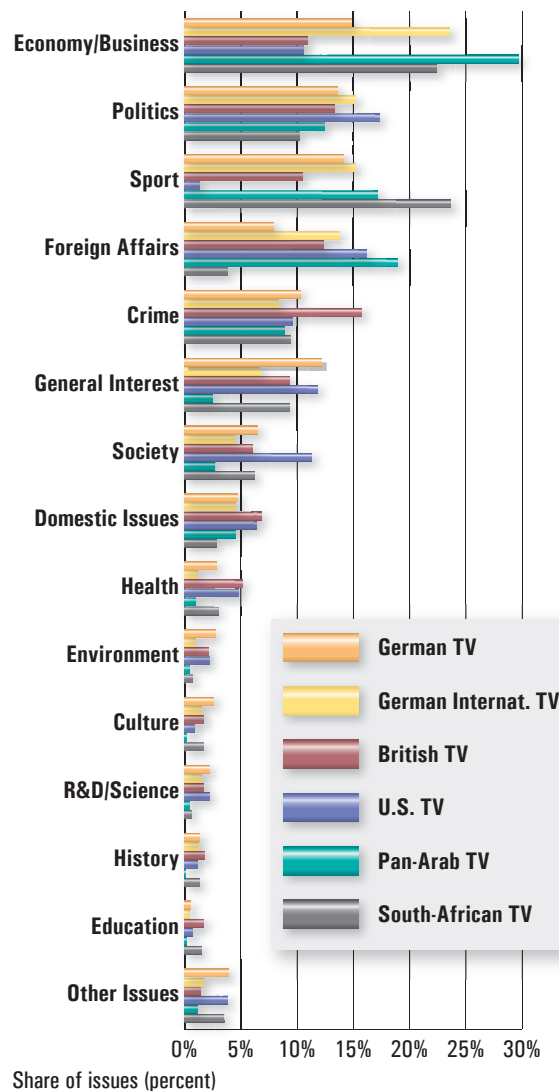
In South Africa, Sport featured the most prominently amongst all the analysed networks, while business and economic news were proportionally the highest in Arab TV (Al Jazeera). US' TV news displayed the highest share of political coverage, while the British public broadcaster focused on crime reporting. German national television featured the economy/business prominently with politics as well as sport playing a significant role. Germany's international television (**Deutsche Welle**) covered several human interest stories (including accidents and catastrophes).

Amongst the issues that are still 'underreported' in all regions were environment, culture and science, a trend that seemingly continues unchanged for the last few years.

On average, around 50% of all news coverage in the analysed networks dealt with international news. This was particularly high on **Deutsche Welle** and Arab television, but is largely due to their focus as a regional/international broadcaster rather than national. The highest share of national news was on South African television, followed by the U.S. networks, but since the majority of international news were closely linked to the United States (32% of international news dealing with Iraq), US's TV audiences would likely

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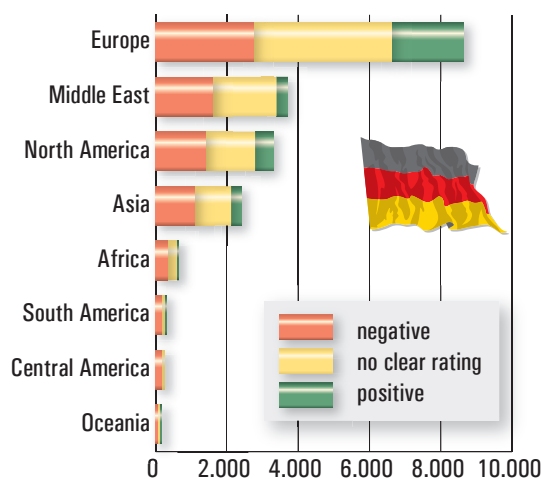
### 1 Share of issues in international television news 01 – 12/2005



Source: Media Tenor 01/01 – 12/31/2005

Basis: 161,609 reports in 22 international news programmes

**2 International coverage by regions: German domestic TV 2005**

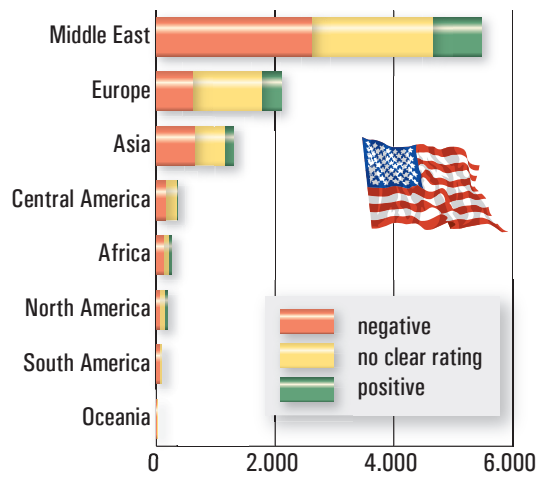


Number of reports

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01 – 12/31/2005

Basis: 21,802 reports  
in 7 news programmes

**3 International coverage by regions: U.S. TV 2005**



Number of reports

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01 – 12/31/2005

Basis: 10,784 reports  
in 4 news programmes

The dominance of conflict and negative events in international news is also visible in media's reporting on various regions of the world. With the exception of Oceania all reported regions received predominantly negative coverage.

have gained the least knowledge of international affairs outside those dominated by the U.S.

With the exception of South Africa, the African continent remained largely underreported, with main focus on the crisis in Zimbabwe and the conflict in Sudan. Afghanistan, a 'media prime spot' a few years ago, has virtually disappeared from the media's agenda with on average of less than 1.5% of the coverage of international issues on all networks.

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German national television, which focused in 40% of its non-domestic coverage on Europe, was particularly negative in its reporting on the Middle East and North America (largely due to coverage on Hurricane Katrina). South and Central America featured only in less than 2% of international news, with almost no positive coverage.

Germany's international broadcaster **Deutsche Welle** showed less negativity in reporting on Europe, and at the same time a higher share of coverage on Asia (12%) compared to North America (8%). South and Central America were equally 'cut off' the agenda (<2%) while Africa featured slightly more prominently(4%).

The British public broadcaster was relatively diverse in terms of regional reporting with a similar

share of coverage on the Middle East (27%) and Europe (24%), a fact that raises questions about Middle East dominating European coverage. With a share of 7%, it showed amongst the greatest share of coverage on Africa, but Central and South America were relegated to relatively no focus.

On US' television, the Middle East is the focus of 51% of the coverage. Europe receives around 20% with Asia receiving 12%. Other regions do not receive the slightest attention.

Even **Al Jazeera** has a lower share of coverage on the Middle East than the US' television network, with considerable coverage on Africa (11%) and only slightly higher on Europe (16%). Europe, North America and even South America enjoy here a much more positive coverage than in most of the other analysed networks.

While South African television news expectedly focused mostly on Africa (25%) it shared almost equal focus with Europe (24%, mostly on the UK), with far less coverage on the Middle East (8%). Oceania played a similar prominent role with 8% of total international coverage, but this is largely due to the high share of sport coverage related to Rugby and Cricket events 'Down Under'.

It seems that television networks around the world have become more and more event/crisis oriented rather than issue focused. Acknowledgeable, to address complex issues with visuals on a daily basis within deadlines poses a challenge, but the dominance of certain events can certainly not form the basis for television news. Some issues remain 'sub-

merged' until an event points fingers at the topic, just to disappear equally fast off the agenda. A case in point is the issue of health. Years ago, Mad Cow Disease dominated the agenda of the media for a short period, then SARS, lately avian flue and sometimes HIV/Aids. Yet health coverage remains conspicuously underreported and is usually more of a national issue than international. On US' television, 6% of national news dealt with health, compared to 1.76% of international news. In Britain, this ratio was similar with 6.16% national and 2.54% international news. In South African media, and despite a national Aids crisis, health (including HIV/Aids) featured in only 3.22% of national television news report and less than 2% in international reporting. Only German national television shared an almost equal share of coverage in national and international news (3% and 2.4% respectively), but still largely underreported.

German television (both national broadcasters and **Deutsche Welle**) seem to consider crime an international problem (8% and 4% of national coverage; 11% and 10% of international coverage) while Arab, South African and US television depict it as a national problem rather than international. British television showed proportionally the highest share of coverage on crime in both national (13.4%) and international (16%) news.

With the exception of Arab TV, business is largely a national issue, particularly dominant in South African television (27% of national news) and **Deut-**

**sche Welle** (31%). **Al Jazeera** focused in 32% of their international news on business, while international business coverage was particularly low on US' television (2%).

Lastly, the environment seems to face an even sadder fate on television, with coverage in national and international news generally less than 2%. German television showed proportionally the highest share of coverage (3.7%) but only in national news, while only 1.2% of international news dealt with this issue. On both Arab and South African television network, environment accounted for less than 1% of total coverage.

The results of **Media Tenor's** research seem to depict a rather unchanged global news order in terms of coverage in terms of news flow, when related to the traditional news 'superpowers'.

In the early 80s, news flow studies indicated a flow between the East and the West and later to a nominal extent, from the South, leading to a triangular flow that divided the North into East and West, connecting each to the South (Gerbner & Marvanyi, 1977). Back then, research found that East and West first covered their respective geopolitical areas (as well as East-West relations), whereas Third World media in general devoted the greatest proportion of foreign news coverage to the North (equally East and West). A first comprehensive study in 1995 revealed that two factors dominated news the most: 'hard news' as well as

Literature:

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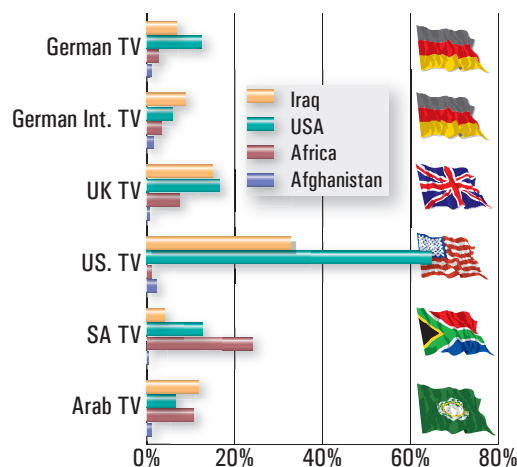
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Stevenson, R. L. (2001): Mapping the News of the World. Festschrift for Richard F. Carter. Washington, DC: University of Washington.

Sreberny-Mohammadi, A., Nordenstreng, K., Stevenson, R. & Ugboajah, F. (1985): Foreign news in the media: International reporting in 29 countries. Reports and papers on Mass Communication, 93. Paris: UNESCO.

4 Share of coverage on certain areas in international TV news 2005

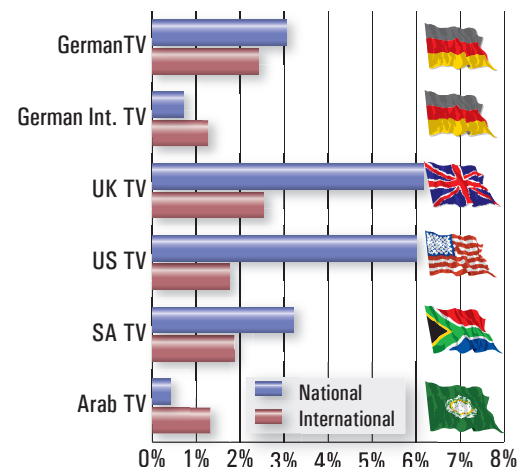


Share of coverage (percent)

Source: Media Tenor 01/01 - 12/31/2005

Basis: 73,954 international reports in 22 news programmes

5 Share of coverage on health topics in international TV news 2005

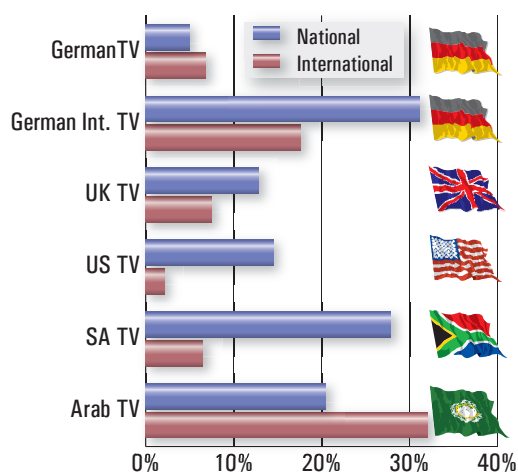


Share of coverage (percent)

Source: Media Tenor 01/01 - 12/31/2005

Basis: 73,954 international reports in 22 news programmes

**6 Share of coverage on business and economy in international TV news**

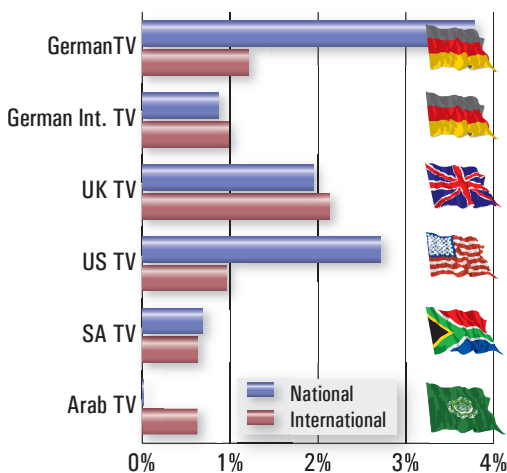


Share of coverage (percent)

Source: Media Tenor 01/01 – 12/31/2005

Basis: 73,954 international reports in 22 news programmes

**7 Share of coverage on environmental issues**



Share of coverage (percent)

Source: Media Tenor 01/01 – 12/31/2005

Basis: 73,954 international reports in 22 news programmes

The environment seems to face an even sadder fate on television, with coverage in national and international news generally less than 2%.

‘regionalism’, whereby every national system devotes most attention to events happening within, and to protagonists in its geographical area (Srebemny-Mohammadi, Nordenstreng & Stevenson, 1985). A study in 1995 showed that news were mostly politics and economics (and not ‘bad news’), trade and regionalism dominated, with the US as a news superpower (Stevenson, 2001). A similar study in 1996 distinguished between ‘core coverage’ and ‘periphery coverage’, finding that the Western industrialized countries were at the centre or core and dominated international news flow, while most African, Asian, Latin American and Pacific countries are grouped at the ‘periphery’ (Kim and Barnett, 1996). Chang (1998) in a study on how the agency **Reuters** handles news, concluded that only very few countries formed the core of the world news system and that the chances of these few countries to be in the news are far higher than those of the many countries on the ‘periphery’ (see also Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003).

Looking at these theoretical assessments from as far back as 30 years to as recent as five years ago, not a lot has apparently changed amongst the news of the Western countries. While ‘peripheral’ countries seemed to have relinquished themselves off the traditional way of reporting – at least to some extent. The growing focus in South African media on Africa, combined with less focus on the regions reported on by ‘Western television’ seems to indicate that, like their Arab counterparts, countries of the periphery are establishing their own focus of coverage that is no longer based on that of traditional news dominat-

ing countries. At the same time, Western media seem to continue their coverage ‘the traditional way’, focusing on their interests and areas of concern. But in a more and more globalised world, countries no longer have the luxury of reporting on ‘us and them’, but have to take into account the growing of a global and mixed community, both in terms of news as well as demographics in their countries. The influx of immigrants to Western countries and dominance of certain foreign items on national agendas (Curry being nominated the favourite British dish in 2005), news agenda’s will have to shift to accommodate new national identities and beliefs. With that in mind, it is not surprising that **Al Jazeera**, according to latest **Media Tenor** research is ‘beating’ CNN in terms of being quoted by other media. ws

**Basis:**

**Media:** U.S.: ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox news; Germany: ZDF Heute Journal and Heute, ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, RTL aktuell, Sat 1 News, Pro7 Newstime; Germany international: Deutsche Welle (in German and English); South Africa: SABC news in English, Afrikaans, Zulu/Xhosa, Sotho and e-news; Arab media: Al Jazeera

**Time:** 01/01 – 12/31/2005

**Analysis:** 161,609 reports in 22 international TV news programmes; Special note on Arab media: due to the nature of Al Jazeera as a ‘pan-Arab medium, charts showing ‘International coverage by regions’ refers to the total coverage, since no clear ‘national’ coverage could be established. For all other countries, ‘International coverage by region’ excludes the own country. Other charts on Arab media Information separate national and international in terms of the Middle East vs non-Middle East.