

EXZELLENZCLUSTER CLIMATE, CLIMATIC CHANGE, AND SOCIETY (CLICCS)

Input | Deutscher Ethikrat | 09.05.2023

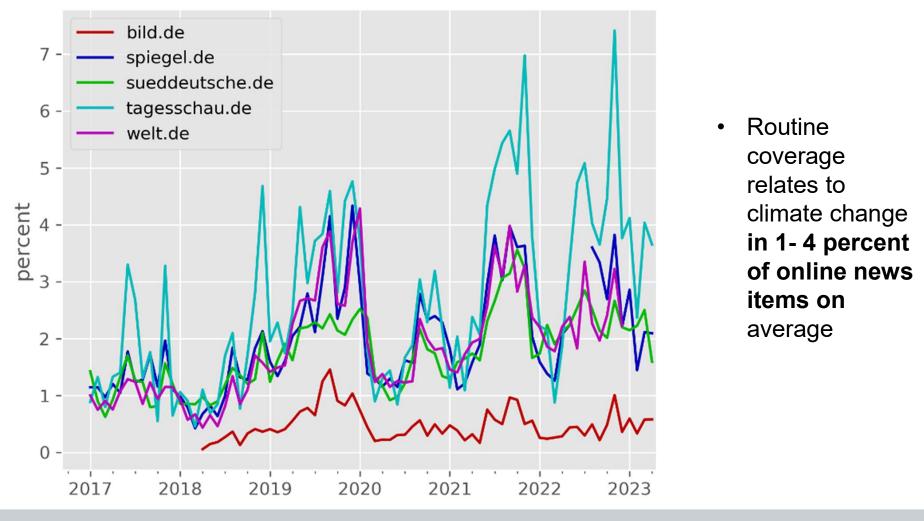
Disregard, Doom, Denial, Delay

The Four Apocalyptic Riders Haunting the News Media Debate on Climate Change

Prof. Dr. Michael Brüggemann

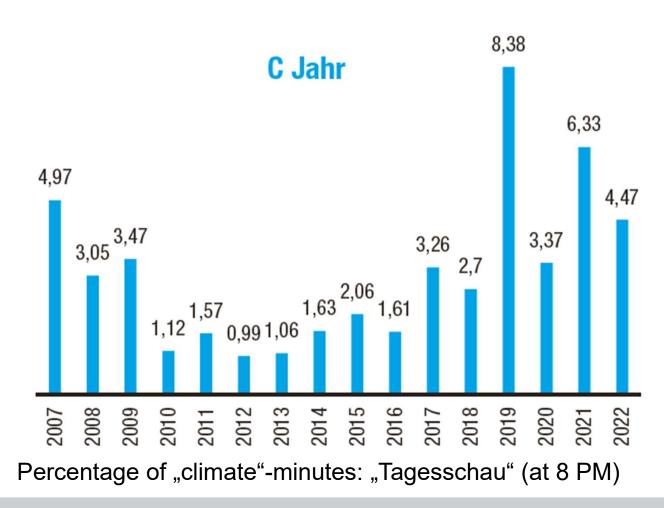
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Online Media Monitor (OMM) (Brüggemann/Sadikni 2023) 2



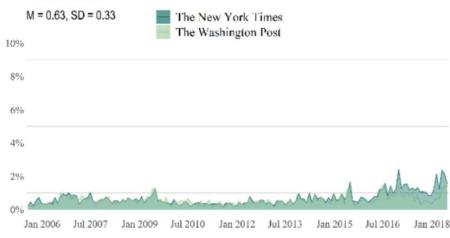


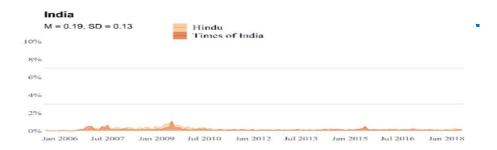
- Climate Change on German TV: 8 out of 9 years of Tagesschau without even mentioning the word "Klima" (summing up the minutes, 2009-2018)
- Below 2 % of overall program minutes mention the climate (ARD, ZDF, WDR)



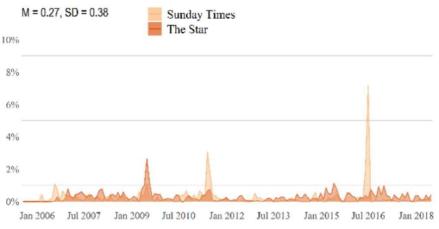












- Every 500th article in the leading German elite news papers focussed on climate change (0,2% FAZ, SZ, 2006-2018)
- International average is somewhat higher (0,5%): in countries that are more vulnerable or where climate change is more controversial



"Forum Handeln" – konstruktiver Klimaprotest im Forum Wissen

19. April 2023 - von Eva Völker - Kommentare 4



- General news logics apply:
- Neglecting constructive voices over disruptive voices
- Neglecting issues over events



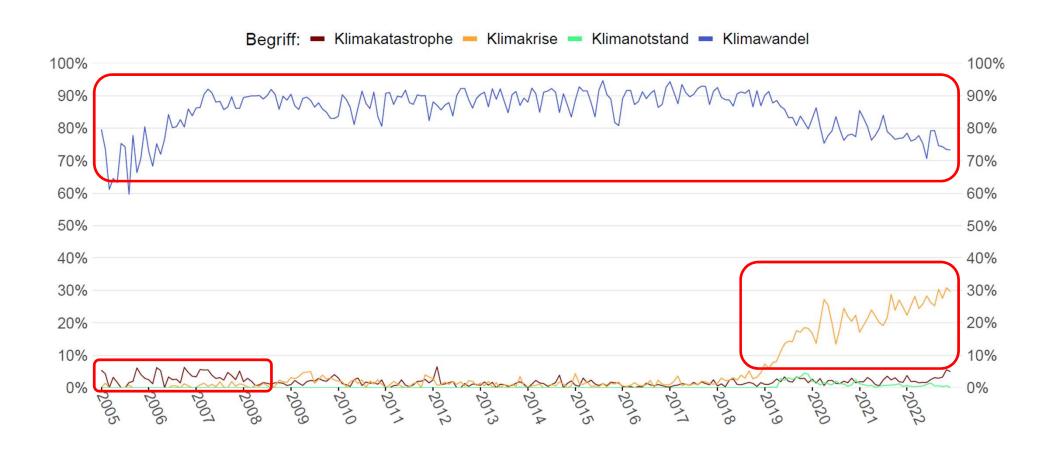
Der Spiegel 33/1986

From messages of doom towards solutions / efficacy messages on cover pages of Der Spiegel (Guenther et al. 2022)

Apocalyptic Rider 2: Doom









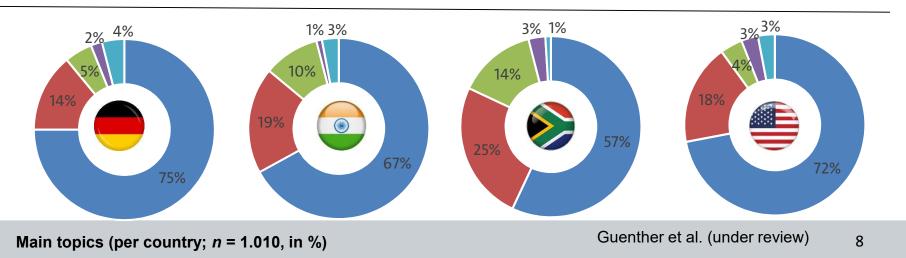


Focus on the problem rather than it s treatment

2% 3%

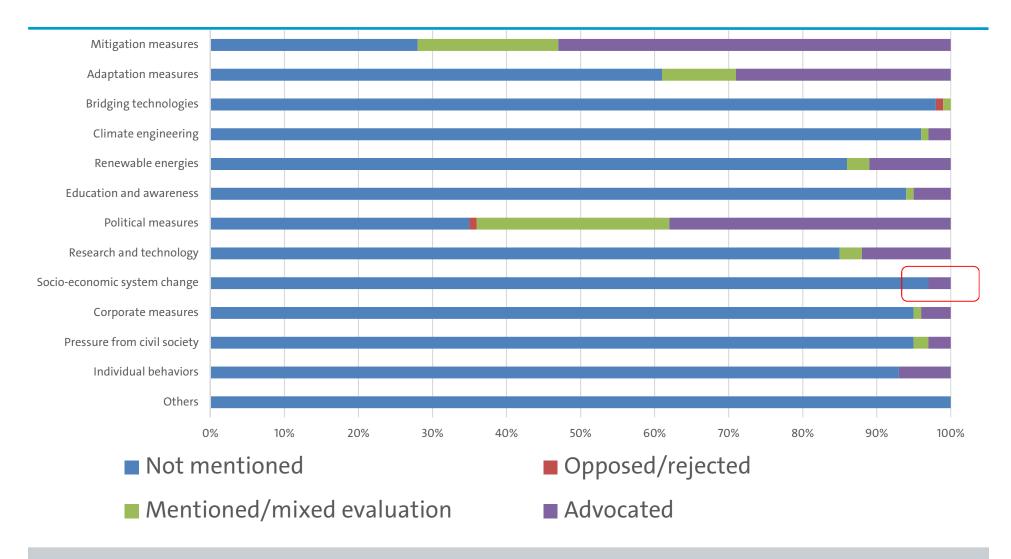
- Consequences/effects of climate change
- Mitigation/climate protection/prevention of climate change
- Adaptation to the consequences of climate change
- Mobilization/awareness

Others





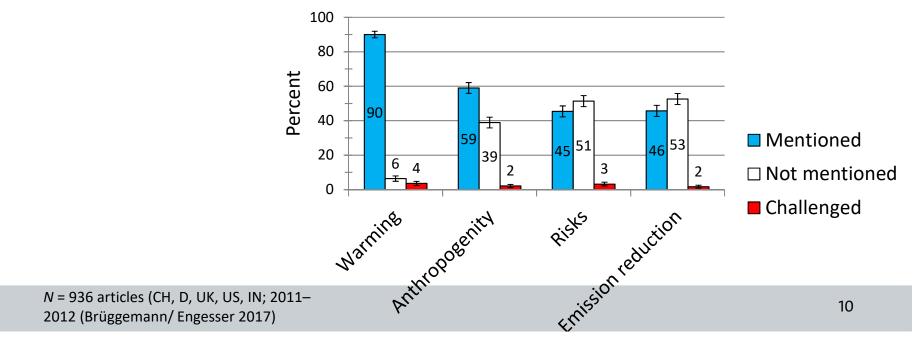
The blind spot: Transformation of the economic system: Rarely discussed as a solution



Measures (*n* = 734, in %)



- **False balance** as a pattern of news coverage in the United States in the early 2000s: journalists providing visibility to fringe voices denying the risks of anthropogenic climate change (Boykoff/Boykoff 2004)
- Towards interpretive journalism: deniers still being quoted, but put into context (Brüggemann/Engesser 2017)
- **Denial in niches** of the (digital) media sphere: Populist-right wing news outlets, a few conservative political columnists, user comments (Brüggemann/Engesser 2017; Walter et al. 2017; Adam et al. 2020)



Individualism

Individuals and consumers are ultimately responsible for taking actions to address climate change.

Whataboutism

Our carbon footprint is trivial compared to [...]. Therefore it makes no sense for us to take action, at least until [...] does so.

The 'free rider' excuse

Reducing emissions is going to weaken us. Others have no real intention of reducing theirs and will take advantage of that.

Someone else should take actions first: redirect responsibility

Change is impossible

Any measure to reduce emissions effectively would run against current ways of life or human nature and is thus impossible to implement in a democratic society.

Doomism

Any mitigation actions we take are too little, too late. Catastrophic climate change is already locked-in. We should adapt, or accept our fate in the hands of God or nature. It's not possible to mitigate climate change: surrender

Discourses of climate delay

Change will be disruptive: emphasize the downsides

Policy perfectionism

We should seek only perfectly-crafted solutions that are supported by all affected parties; otherwise we will waste limited opportunities for adoption.

Appeal to well-being

Fossil fuels are required for development. Abandoning them will condemn the global poor to hardship and their right to modern livelihoods.

Appeal to social justice

Climate actions will generate large costs. Vulnerable members of our society will be burdened; hard-working people cannot enjoy their holidays.

Technological optimism

We should focus our efforts on current and future technologies, which will unlock great possibilities for addressing climate change.

All talk, little action

We are world leaders in addressing climate change. We have approved an ambitious target and have declared a climate emergency.

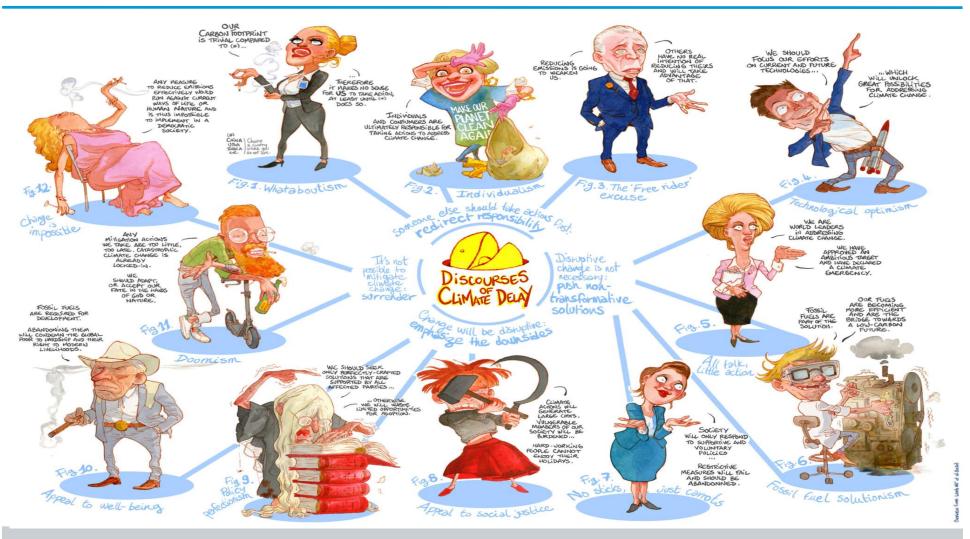
Fossil fuel solutionism

Fossil fuels are part of the solution. Our fuels are becoming more efficient and are the bridge towards a low-carbon future.

No sticks, just carrots

Society will only respond to supportive and voluntary policies, restrictive measures will fail and should be abandoned.







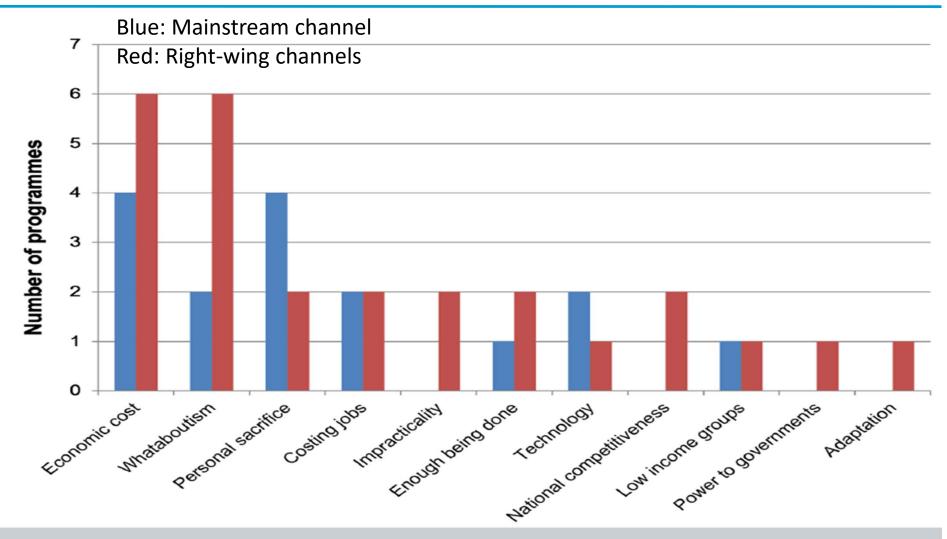






Concept: Lamb et al. (2020); Visuals: Leonard Chemineau https://www.leolinne.com/?portfolio=discourses-of-climate-delay 14





15



SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

THE FOUR APOCALYPTIC RIDERS

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(1) Disregard: potential climate angle in news stories routinely overlooked by non-specialist journalists, increased attention since 2019
(2) Doom: apocalyptic visions already salient in the 1980s; today: climate coverage still problem-rather than solution- centered.

(3) Denial: survives in the right-wing/populist niche; shift from false balance towards "weight-of-evidence" reporting (Dunwoody 2005)

(4) Delay: strategic attempts to delay climate actions try to redirect responsibility, present technical fixes /alternatives to mitigation, emphasize the costs of climate protection

Good news: wealth climate journalism: (1) focus issue, (2) no forum for denial, (3) clearly communicating the challenge and (4)discussing ways out



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Thank you very much for your attention!

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List of studies quoted: www.climatematters.de

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