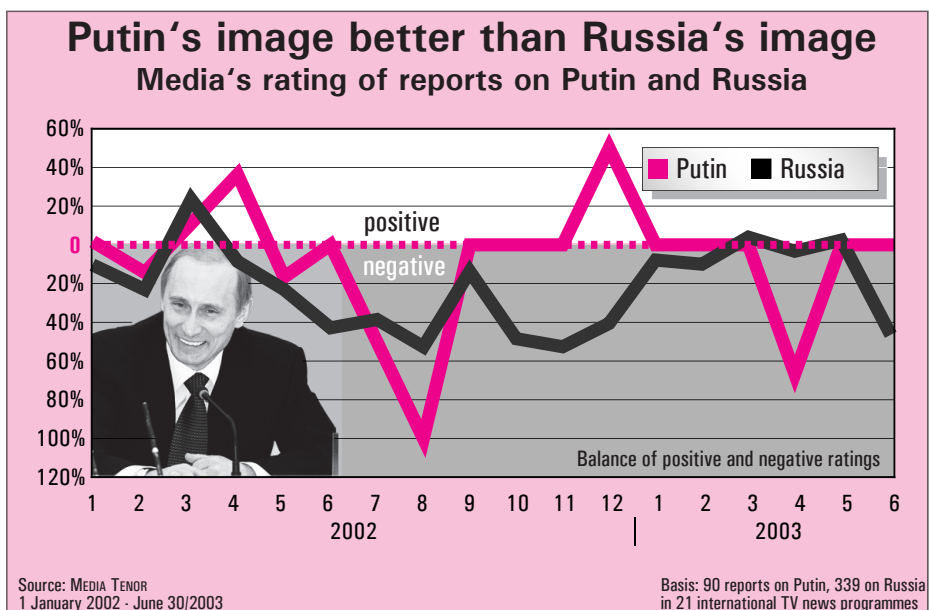
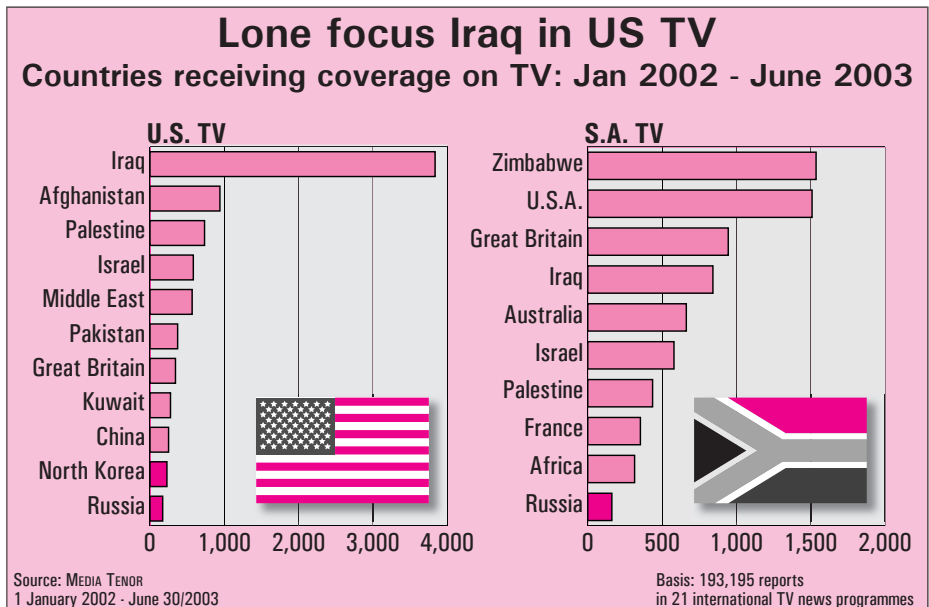
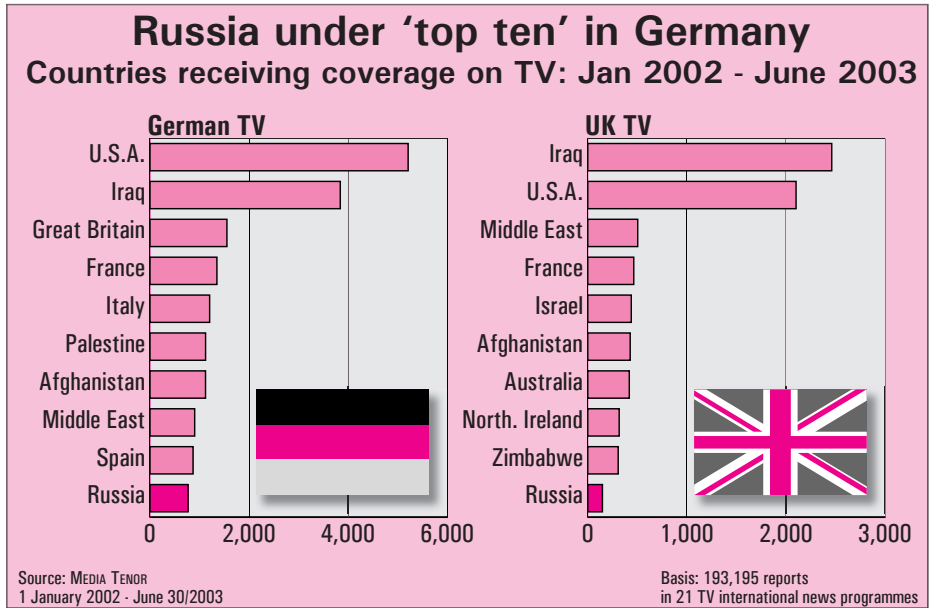


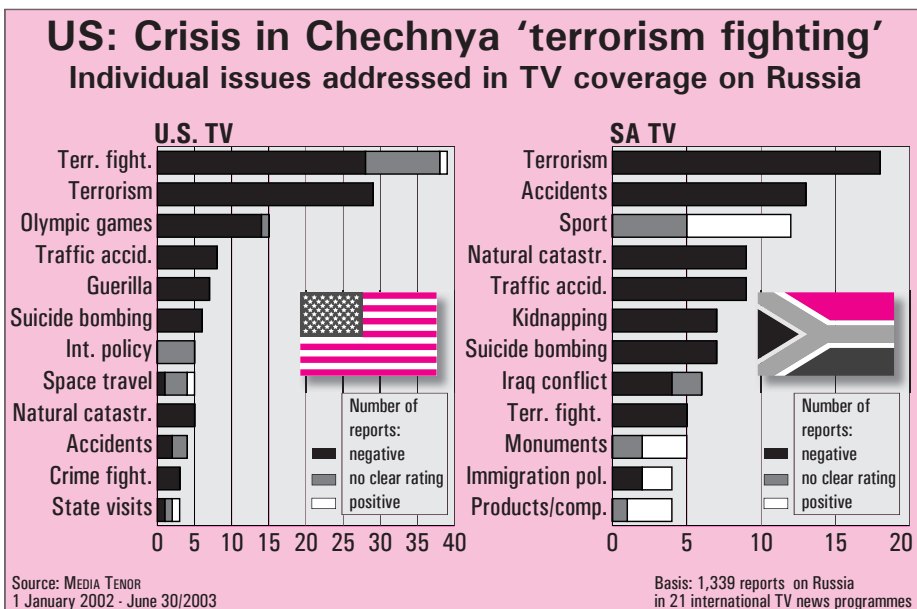
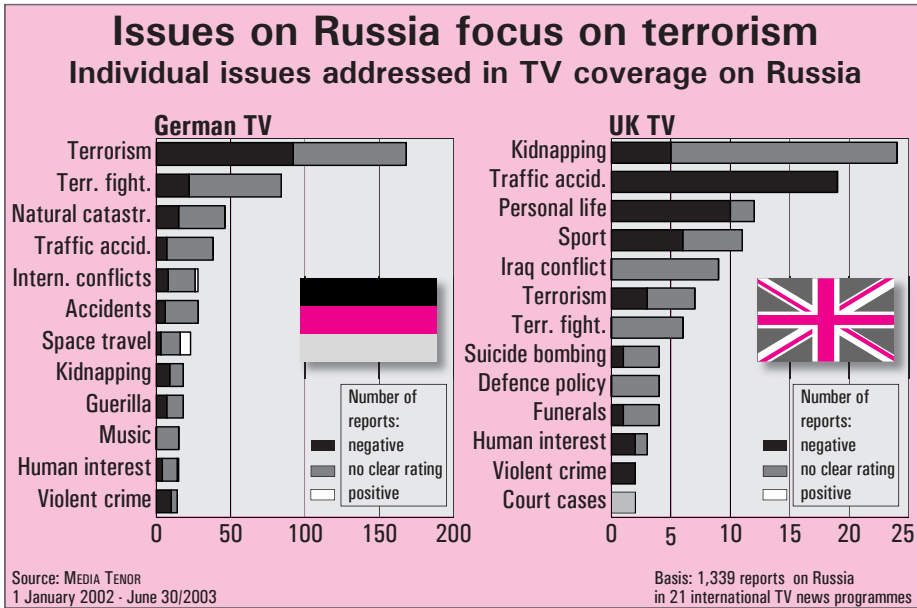
Putin popular by keeping Chechnya off the screens

International media analysis of Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Russia: January 2002 - June 2003

While U.S. President George W. Bush is fighting against increased fatalities in Iraq and more and more critical media voices due to the handling of the ongoing Iraqi crisis, Russia's President Vladimir Putin faces by no means similar problems in national as well as international television. During the 1996 Russian presidential campaign, many voters were swayed by TV footage of Boris Yeltsin dancing at a youth rally. The image projected, nationally and internationally, was that of a dynamic youthful reformer. Similarly in 2000, the Russian artillery blasting Chechen capital of Grozny, ensured Putin's victory in March of that year. In both cases the images, however, were far removed from the truth: Yeltsin, in 1996, was on the brink of a heart attack; and the Russian military success in Chechnya was only short lived. Yet these images were enough to secure the popular vote. Since the 2000 vote, Russia's president Putin is portrayed in two ways in world media, the internationally successful president, as well as the hardliner when it comes to domestic issues.

Putin with better image than his country
 MEDIA TENOR analysis of television news programmes in the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and South Africa during January 2002 until June 2003 reveals that Putin has successfully managed to detach himself from critical issues, and receives a far more balanced media image than reports on his country in general. Despite the high concentration of reports on Iraq, the United States and the Middle East, international television frequently reports on Russia, underlining its increased economical and political importance. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the 'survivor' Russia had temporarily disappeared from the platform of international superpowers, but has returned recently, also due to the large influence Vladimir Putin has had on the economic developments in his country. In a recent interview with the German Magazine DER SPIEGEL Russia's oil mogul Michail Khodorkovski, chairman of Yukos, the second largest oil company in the world, suggested that between 30 and 40 percent of Russia's gross national product are dependent on Putin's personal decisions and that his individual power is larger than that of a company like Yukos. Subsequently Putin removed Khodor-





Both public and private British broadcasters were especially negative in their coverage on Russia, while South African media, to a large extent carrying the same negative reports, did report on positive issues as well, mostly around sport (four players of South Africa's national soccer team are playing in Russia) and business, predominantly in the diamond industry.

'Dissidents' warning Bush of Putin

In September 2003, a large advertising campaign by respected Putin opponents in Russian, US and German newspapers asked Bush to rethink his relationship with 'friend' Putin, citing the president's undermining of Russian democratic institutions, the justice system and the media (including the liquidation of Tv6 and the dismantling of Media-Most, previously run by Vladimir Guzinsky, now exiled to Spain). They further reminded Bush of Putin's 'acts against humanity' in Chechnya, the involvement of Russian Intelligence Service in some of the rebel-blamed attacks and that journalists disappeared or were killed.

But will this campaign change anything in Russian-US relations? Probably not, since the United States relies more than ever on Russia's oil supplies and connections in Asia. And Putin's portrayal as a hardliner against terrorists is similar to Bush's image. Had Bush previously criticised Putins Chechnya policies as 'human rights violation', he changed his opinion after a meeting in Camp David in September, calling the crisis 'a battlefield in the war against terrorism'. He further said that 'Terrorists must be opposed wherever they spread chaos and destruction, including Chechnya'.

As much as the footage on Iraq, especially civilian tragedies is decreasing, so is the coverage on Chechnya for Putin. According to a poll by Russian opinion institute Romir (www.romir.ru), 76% of respondents have a favourable opinion of their President. While Bush's worries about his re-election bid next year are increasing, Putin's worries must be minimal - as long as Chechnya remains off the (TV) screens. ws

kovski from the political arena by having him tried for fraud.

US television in particular quotes and depicts Vladimir Putin more often than its international counterparts. Among all international newsmakers receiving more than five seconds, Putin comes 6th, lagging behind five people involved in Mid East issues (Saddam Hussein, Yassir Arafat, Mahmmoud Abbas, Ariel Sharon) as well as Tony Blair, ally of U.S. President George W. Bush in the Iraq war. In German, British and South African television Russia's president is also found amongst the top ten most reported on international personalities.

Chechen conflict dominating coverage

International TV media's coverage on Rus-

sia is dominated by the Chechen conflict, but more on the effects on Russia than on casualties in the war-torn region. The bomb blasts on apartment complexes in Moscow, killing hundreds of civilians caused much publicity, as did the hostage drama in October 2002 in Moscow, where 129 civilians died when Russian special forces ended the Chechen-rebel lead siege. In both cases, the focus of international television was more on the terrorist activities as well as what measures Russia was implementing to counter further attacks, than an analysis of the reasons behind the attacks. Up to the 2000 elections international media frequently reported on the situation in Chechnya, but the last twelve months have virtually seen no reporting on the region.

Basis

Media: ARD TAGESSCHAU, TAGESTHEMEN, ZDF HEUTE, HEUTE JOURNAL, RTL AKTUELL, SAT.1 18:30, PRO-SIEBEN; BBC, ITN; ABC, CBS, NBC; SABC, E-TV
Period: 1 January 2002 - June 30/2003
Analysis: All reports on Putin and Russia, personalities appearing for at least 5 seconds