

# Media lose patience with Bush administration

## Polls comparable with media analysis

**As the Bush administration enters the final stretch of its term in office, its image in domestic as well as foreign media is moving from bad to worse, the latest Media Tenor study reveals. After the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld, the president now appears to be the most negatively perceived personality in the White House. Are there any media darlings still left in the administration? In a strange twist of fate, Rumsfeld's successor, Robert Gates, has received considerable support from the media – at least for now.**



Analyses of the content of seven German, four US and nine South African TV news broadcasts, in the period of January 2006 to January 2007, shows that foreign media continue to perceive the Bush administration more negatively than US media, though the latter seem to be running out of patience, too.

While criticism in German and South African media remains mainly linked to the US's foreign policies and military engagements in the Middle East, US TV news appears to have grown more resentful of the administration's woes on the home front. In 2006, the administration first came under fire from US media for its failure to provide strong leadership in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Following this controversy, in the second half of the year criticism of the war in Iraq and the controversial war on terrorism intensified. This trend can to a certain extent be linked to the midterm elections held in November 2006. Strong campaigning from Democrats un-

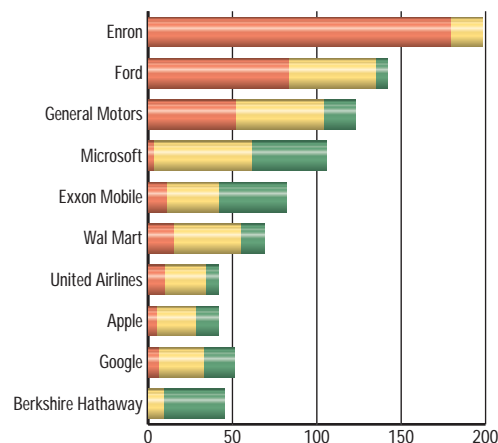
locked the presiding Republican viewpoints on these wars, and began to drastically shift long-standing viewpoints in the media. This shift from support for these wars in previous years to criticism shows every indication of continuing; not even the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld, one of the main architects of the Iraqi war and previously the most controversial figure in the administration, changed this trend. Additionally, January coverage in US TV news of the court case involving former top aide to the Vice President, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, also indicates that the Bush administration might soon face another heavy blow back home, especially when one takes into account the media's response to Hurricane Katrina and what it did to the administration's image, over and above allegations that the war in Iraq had been mishandled.

In German TV news, the Bush administration is still mainly associated with its military activities in the Middle East. Although these media also reported negatively on the way the administration handled Katrina, and raised their eyebrows regarding secret CIA prisons and suspected human rights violations, it was the conflict in Iraq that still garnered most of the negative coverage in 2006 and in January 2007.

### Gates has a shining start

It appears that growing negative reporting on Iraq has harmed certain members of the Bush administration and severely damaged the President's image in particular. The tone of reporting on Bush has been gradually worsening in all analysed TV news.

### 1) Coverage and rating of US business in US TV News 01/2006 - 01/2007

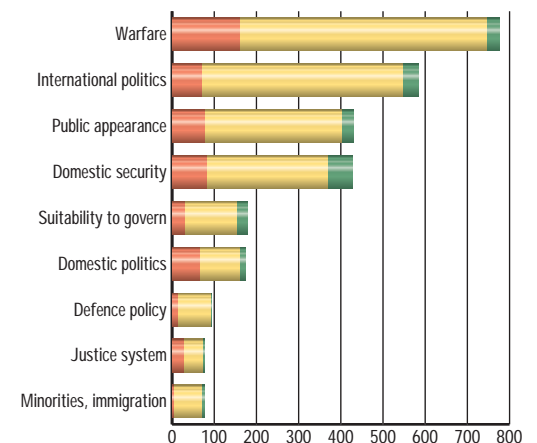


Number of reports (at least 5 sec.)

Source: Media Tenor  
01/2006-01/2007

Basis: 3.129 stories on companies  
in 4 US TV news shows

### 2) Coverage and rating of the US government: The issues, 01/2006 - 01/2007



Number of stories

Source: Media Tenor  
01/2006-01/2007

Basis: 4.065 stories focusing on the US  
government in 4 US TV news shows

In January 2007 it reached its lowest level since the beginning of 2006 (which also corresponds to the period when he received severe negative coverage on Hurricane Katrina). Though she is one of the current US foreign policy architects, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was spared the worst of the criticism, while Rumsfeld's successor Robert Gates began his term with the media's approval, particularly in US TV news. With negative reporting on the Middle East set to continue, it seems certain that the new Secretary of Defence will face an uphill battle in keeping his high approval ratings.

### US companies not affected by bad ratings

The declining image of the Bush administration in the analysed foreign media has so far not had any significant impact on the media's perception of US companies. Microsoft is still the shining star of corporate America, receiving not only the highest volume of coverage, but also the best ratings overall when compared to the most reported US companies in German and South African TV news. This may be a reflection of the globalized nature of multinationals in the 21st century: The most influential corporations are not only able to transcend national territories in their search for new markets, but are also able to separate themselves from a national identity and government to become entities unto their own, with identities independent of the nations in which they were founded.

### Polls reflect media reportage

The results of the **Media Tenor** study are comparable to the latest public opinion surveys in the US and worldwide. For example, a recent **BBC World Service** poll of more than 25,000 people across 25 different countries suggested that the global view of the United States' role in world affairs has significantly deteriorated over the last year. World citizens disapprove not only of the Iraq war (73% disapproval), but also of the US's handling of Guantanamo (67%), the Israeli-Hezbollah war (65%), Iran's nuclear programme (60%), global warming (56%), and North Korea's nuclear weapons programme (54%). As Steven Kull, director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes put it, "According to world public opinion, these days the US government hardly seems to be able to do anything right."

Whether the Bush administration will manage to invent a formula for turning opinion around before November 2008, and give Republican presidential hopefuls a better chance to win over increasingly sceptical Americans, remains to be seen. Whatever this formula may prove to be, it will have to be drastically different from their current one, simply because the media have stopped buying into it. (kd)

#### Basis:

**Media:** 20 TV news in 3 countries: USA, Germany, South Africa

**Time:** 01/01/2006 – 01/31/2007

#### Research links:

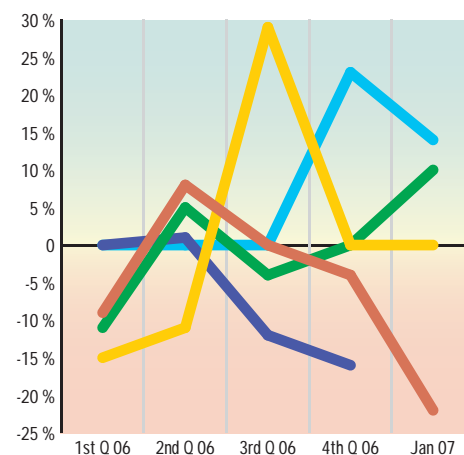
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/01\\_january/23/us.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/01_january/23/us.shtml)

[www.galluppoll.com](http://www.galluppoll.com)

[http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=728](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=728)



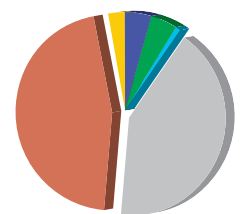
### 3) Coverage and rating of the Bush administration in US TV news, 01/2006 - 01/2007



Average rating of members of the Bush administration (share of positive - share of negative stories)

Source: Media Tenor  
01/2006-01/2007

Basis: 4,065 stories focusing on the US government in 4 US TV news shows



Administration  
Bush  
Rice  
Rumsfeld  
Cheney  
Gates