

Input | Deutscher Ethikrat | 09.05.2023

Disregard, Doom, Denial, Delay

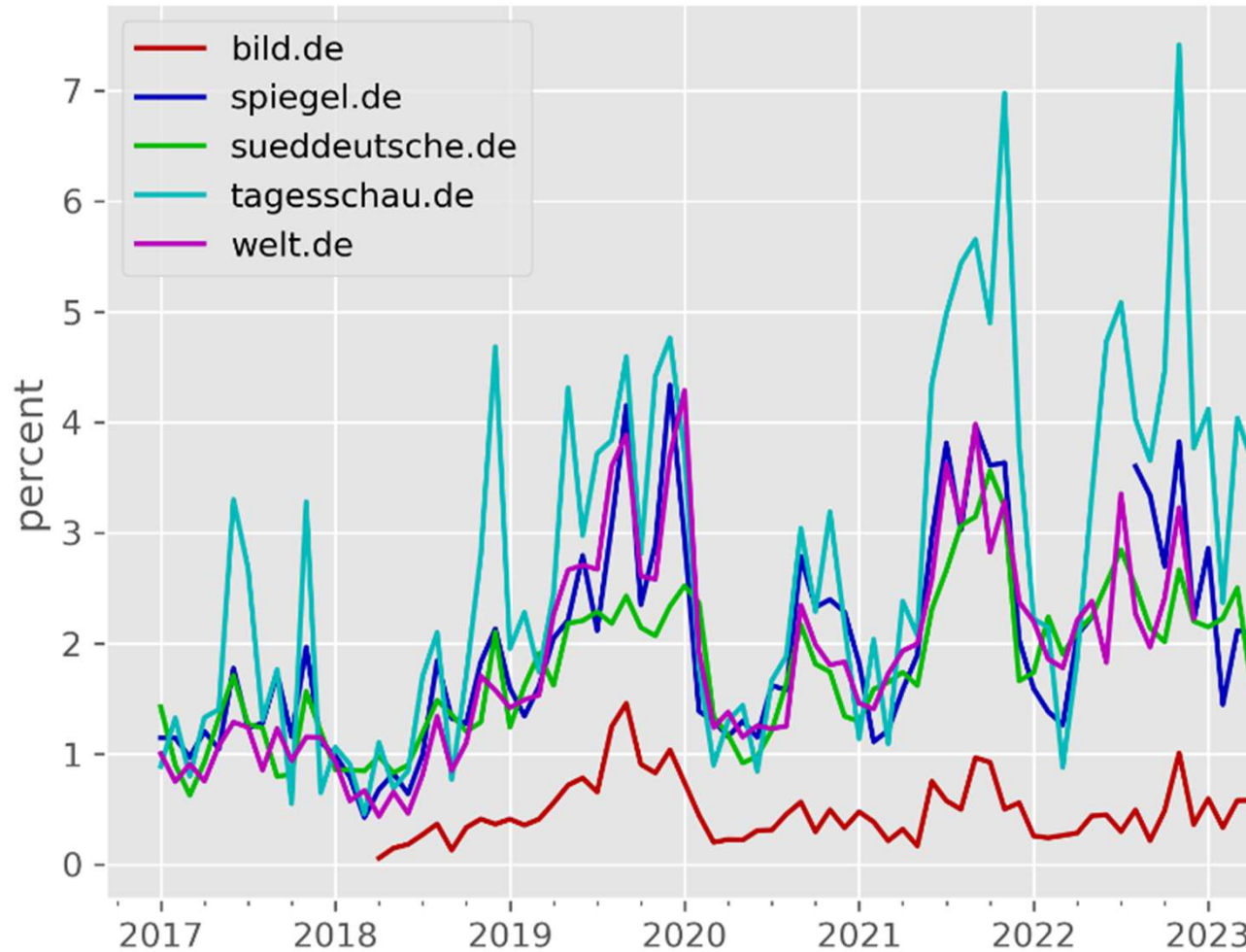
The Four Apocalyptic Riders Haunting the News Media
Debate on Climate Change

Prof. Dr. Michael Brüggemann

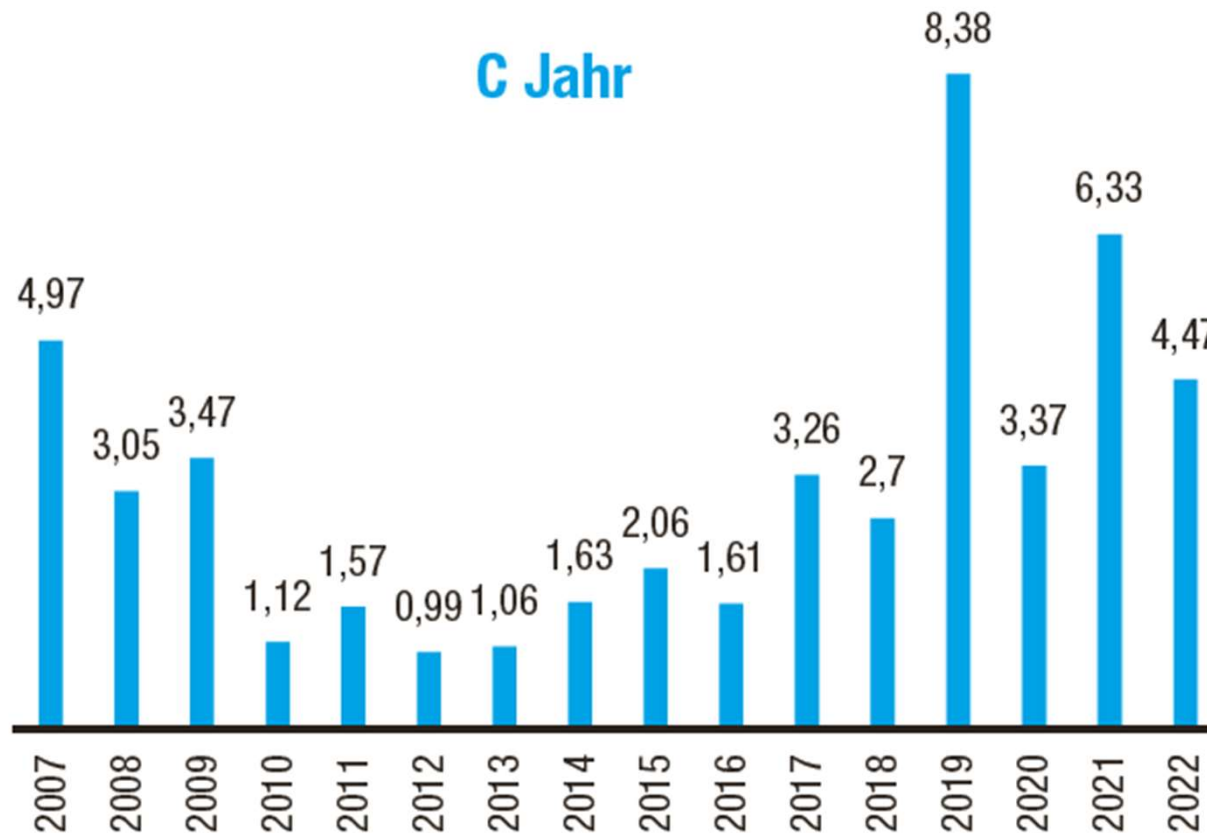
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Currently: Program Chair “Depolarizing Debates” at The New Institute, Hamburg

Apocalyptic Rider 1: *Disregard*



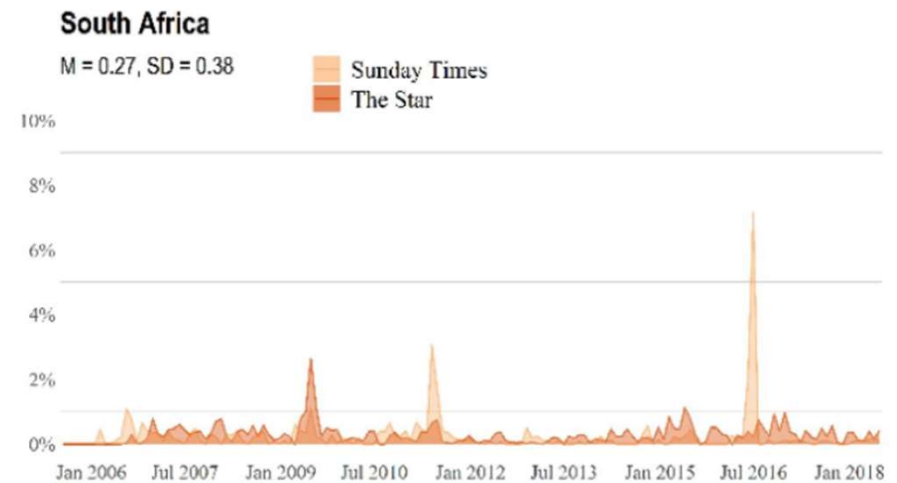
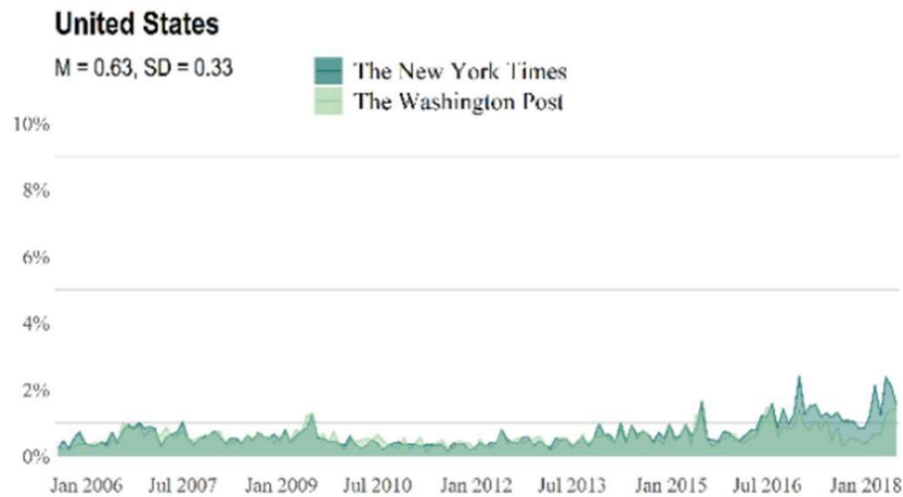
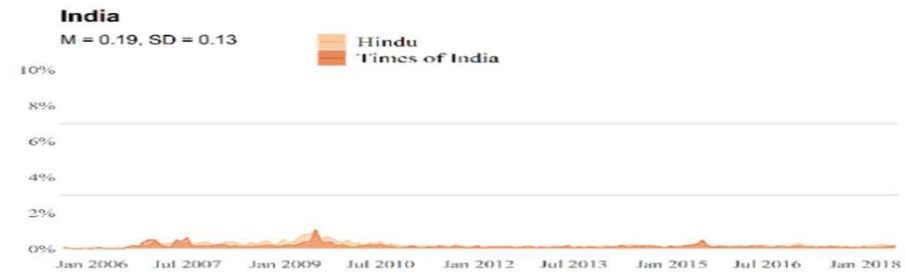
- Routine coverage relates to climate change **in 1- 4 percent of online news items on average**



- 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)

Percentage of „climate“-minutes: „Tagesschau“ (at 8 PM)

Apocalyptic Rider 1: *Disregard*



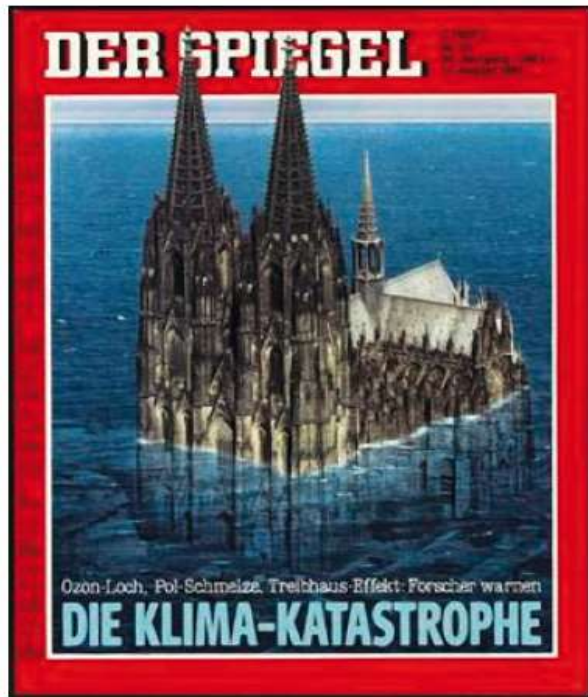
- **Every 500th article in the leading German elite news papers focussed on climate change (0,2% FAZ, SZ, 2006-2018)**
- **International average is somewhat higher (0,5%): in countries that are more vulnerable or where climate change is more controversial**

„Forum Handeln“ – konstruktiver Klimaprotest im Forum Wissen

19. April 2023 · von Eva Völker · Kommentare 4

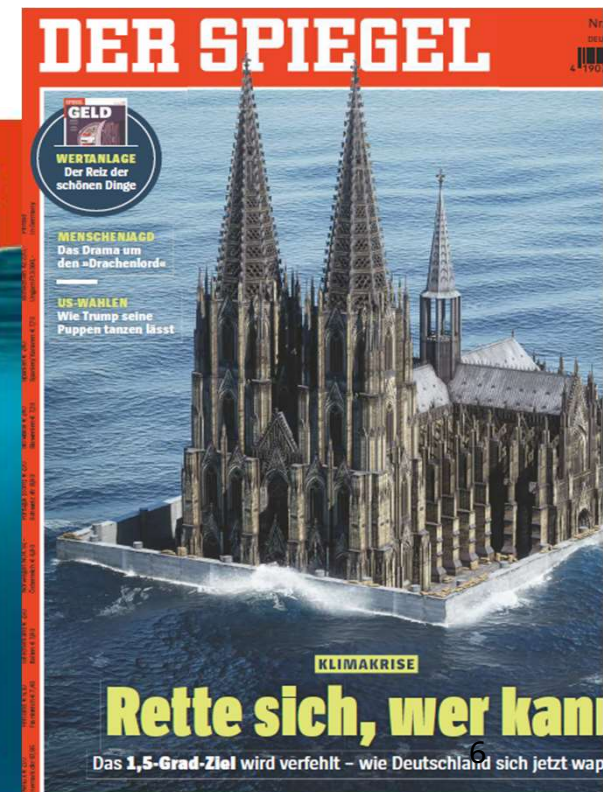


- General news logics apply:
 - Neglecting constructive voices over disruptive voices
 - Neglecting issues over events



Der Spiegel 33/1986

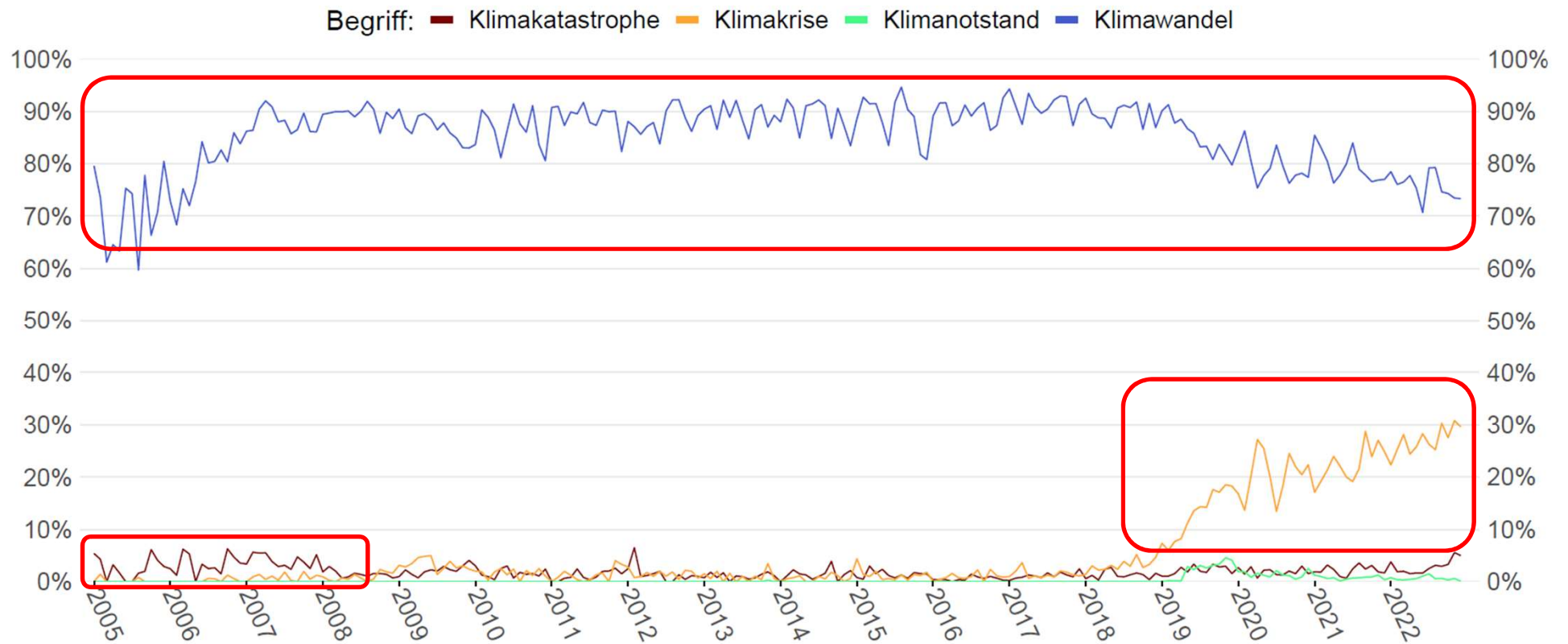
DER SPIEGEL 9/2015



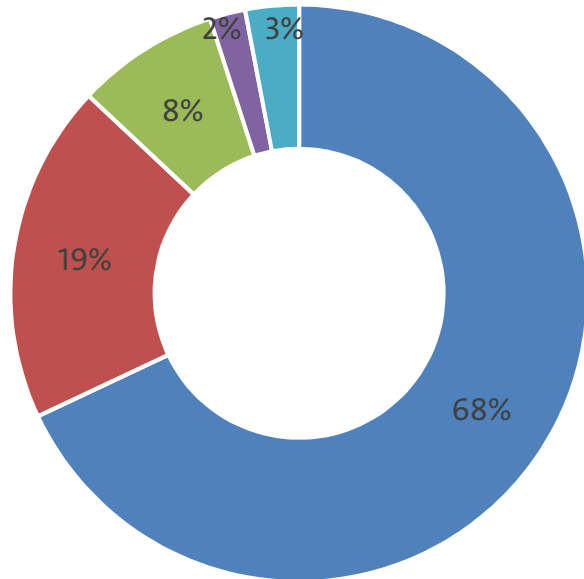
From messages of doom towards solutions / efficacy messages on cover pages of Der Spiegel (Guenther et al. 2022)

Apocalyptic Rider 2: *Doom*

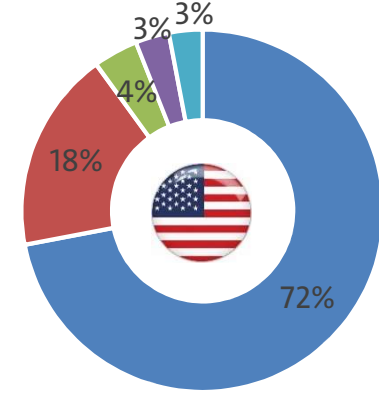
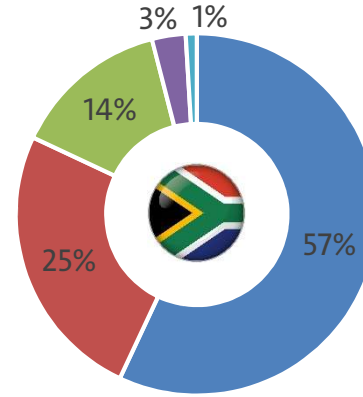
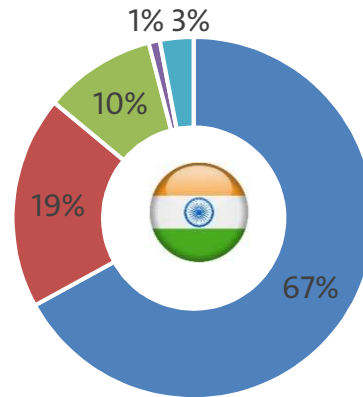
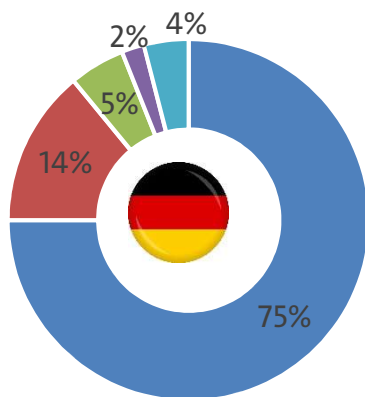
Apocalyptic Rider 2: *Doom*



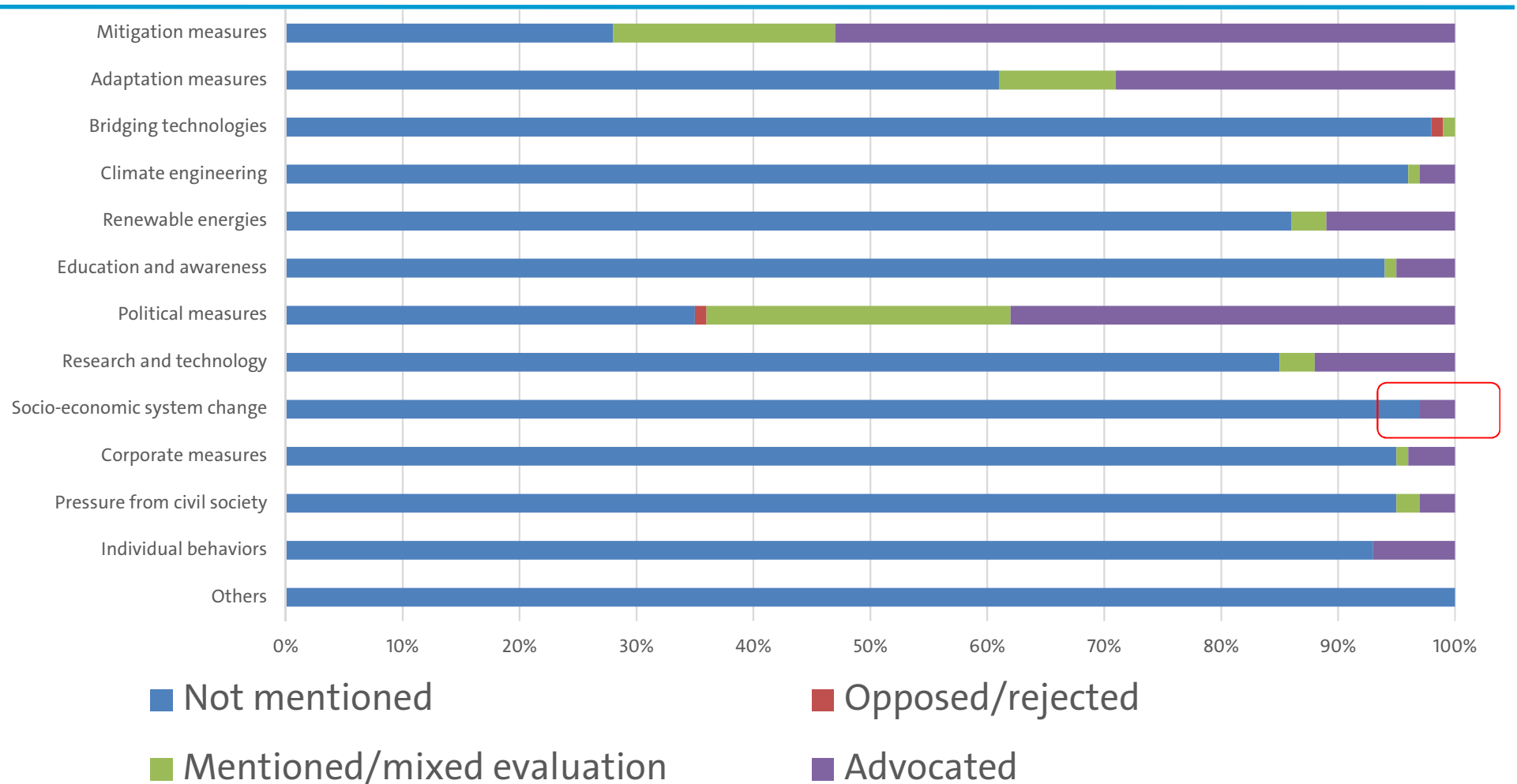
Focus on the problem rather than its treatment



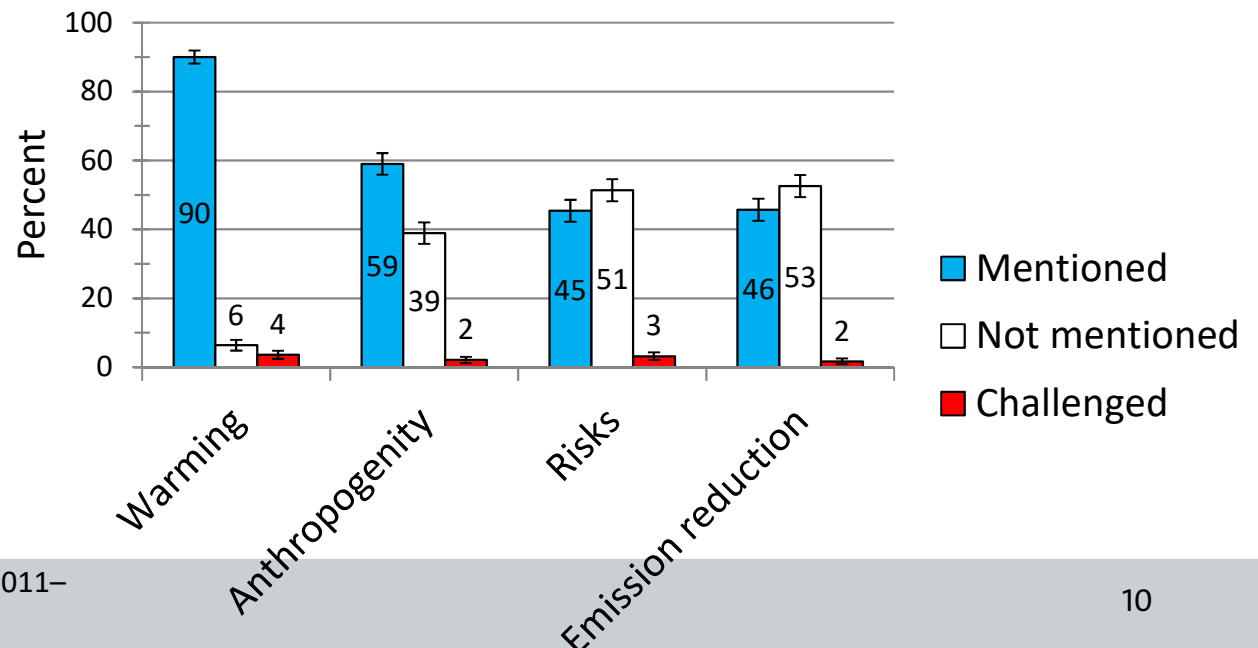
- Consequences/effects of climate change
- Mitigation/climate protection/prevention of climate change
- Adaptation to the consequences of climate change
- Mobilization/awareness
- Others



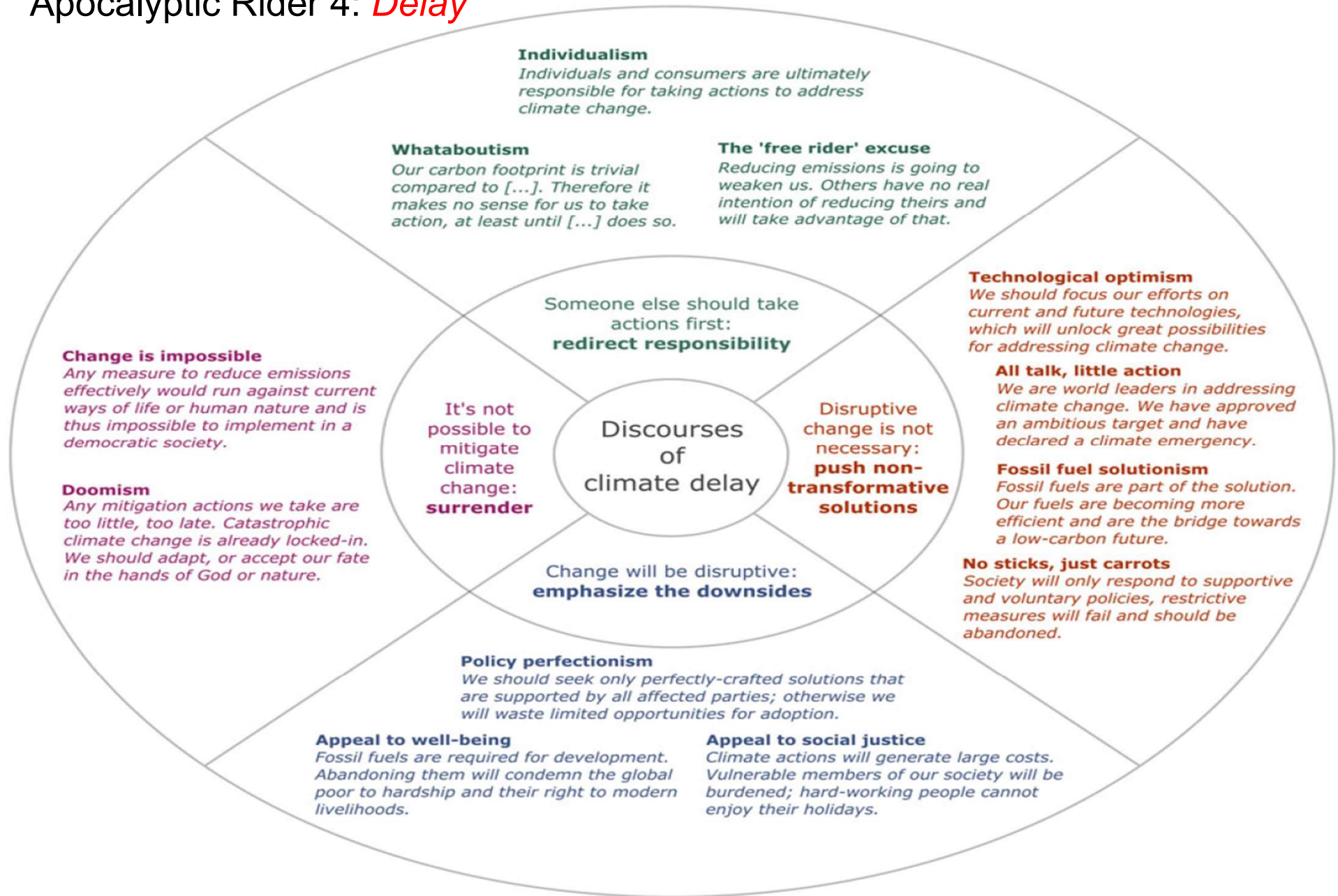
The blind spot: Transformation of the economic system: Rarely discussed as a solution



- **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)



Apocalyptic Rider 4: *Delay*



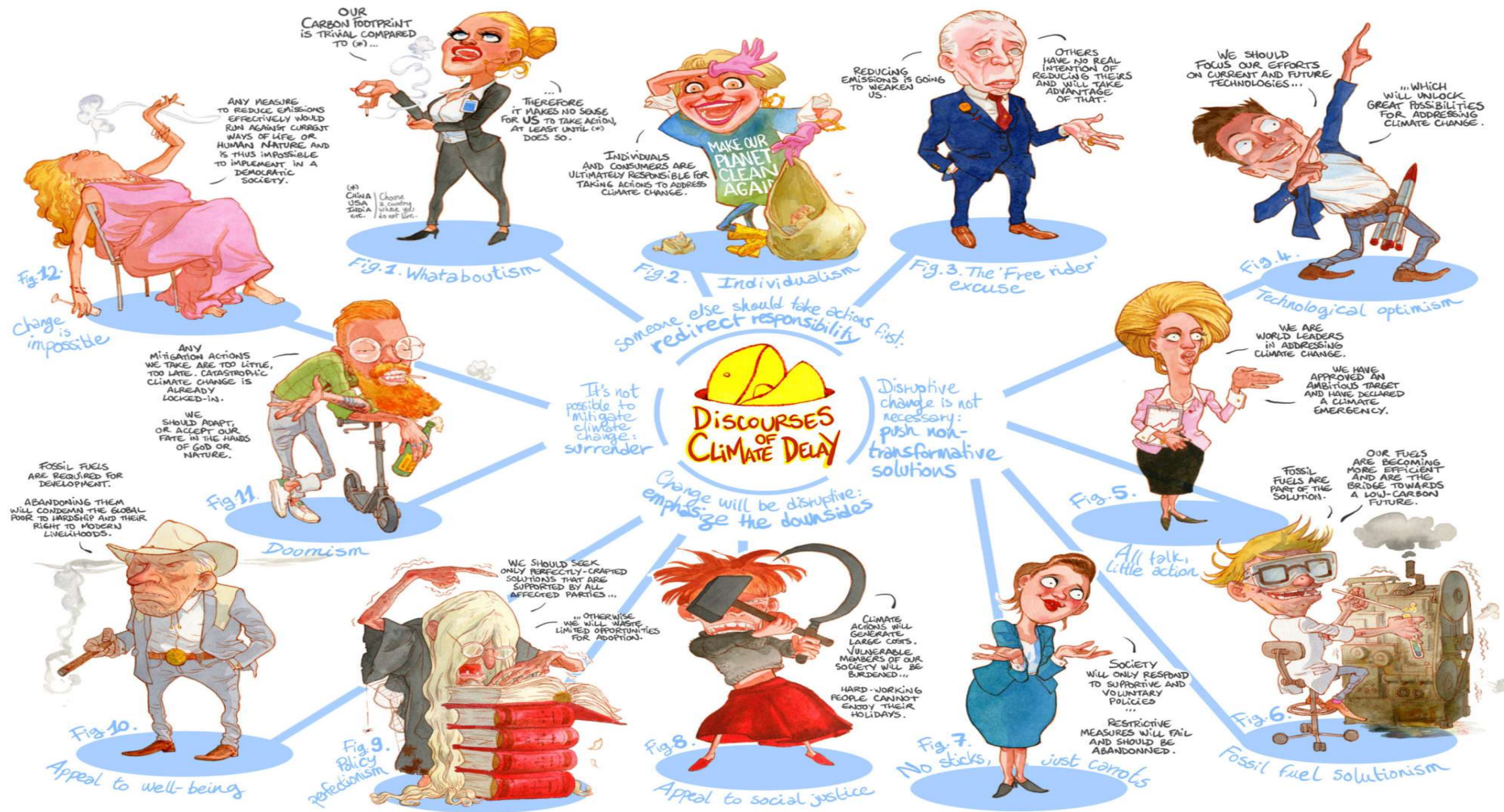
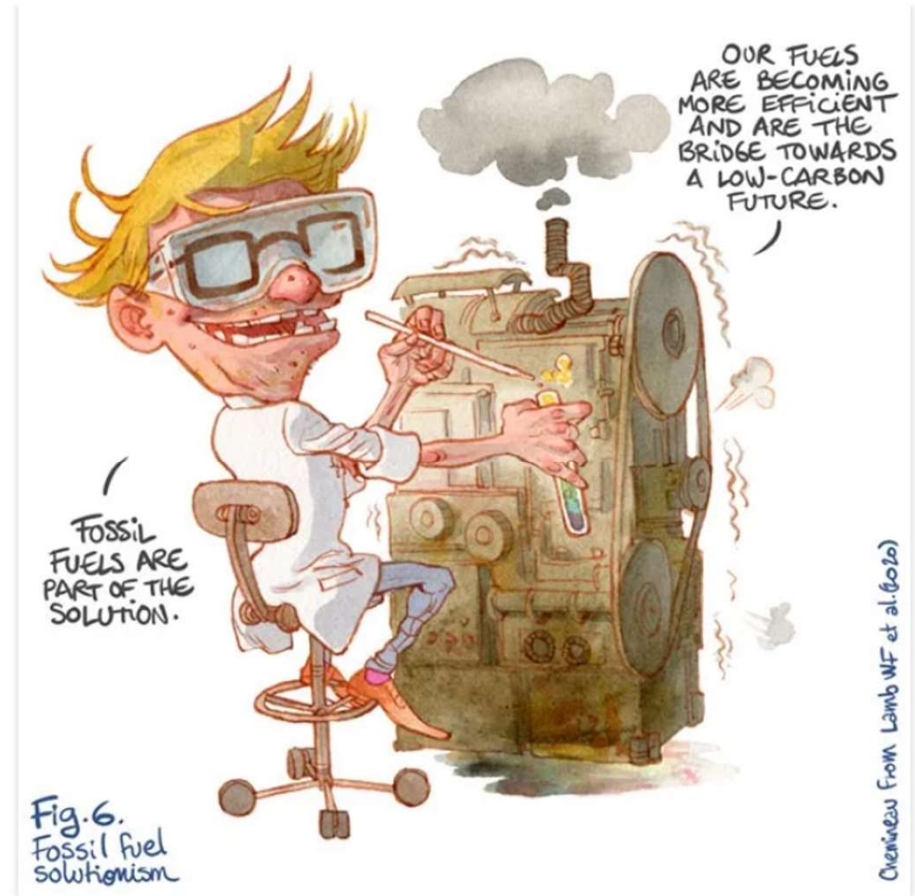
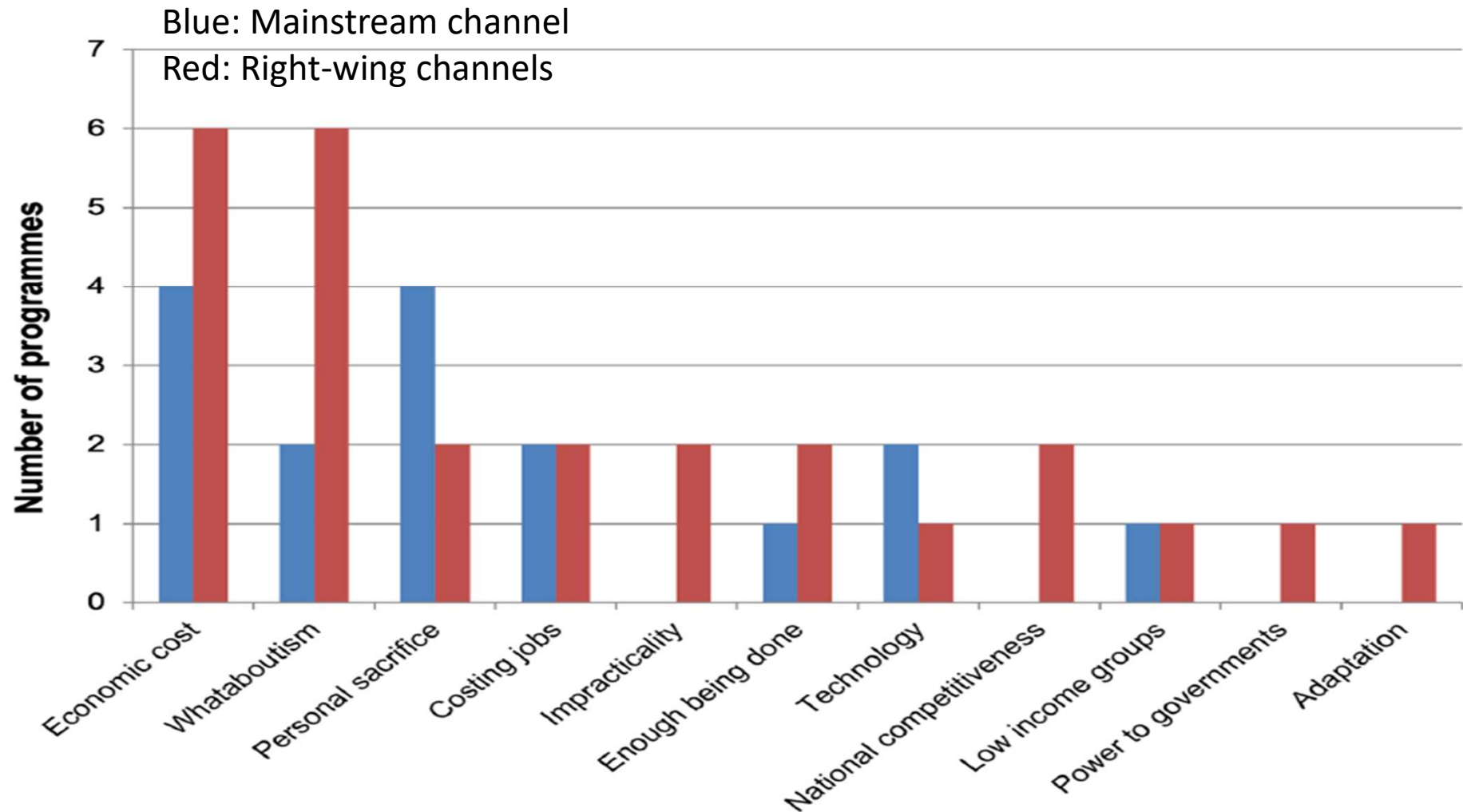


Illustration: From: Ulfar W. et al. (2014)

Apocalyptic Rider 4: *Delay*







(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

Thank you very much for your attention!

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List of studies quoted: www.climatematters.de

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