

Media coverage in the post-truth era: The case of refugee and financial “crises” in Europe

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The “managed” information society

Information is a reference point for contemporary (post)-modern societies (Poster 1990:7)

Among the most important characteristics of the 20th and 21st centuries is **the intensification of persuasion efforts** (Enzensberger 1981), due to the **modernization of politics (generalization of political participation)** (Demertzis 2001)

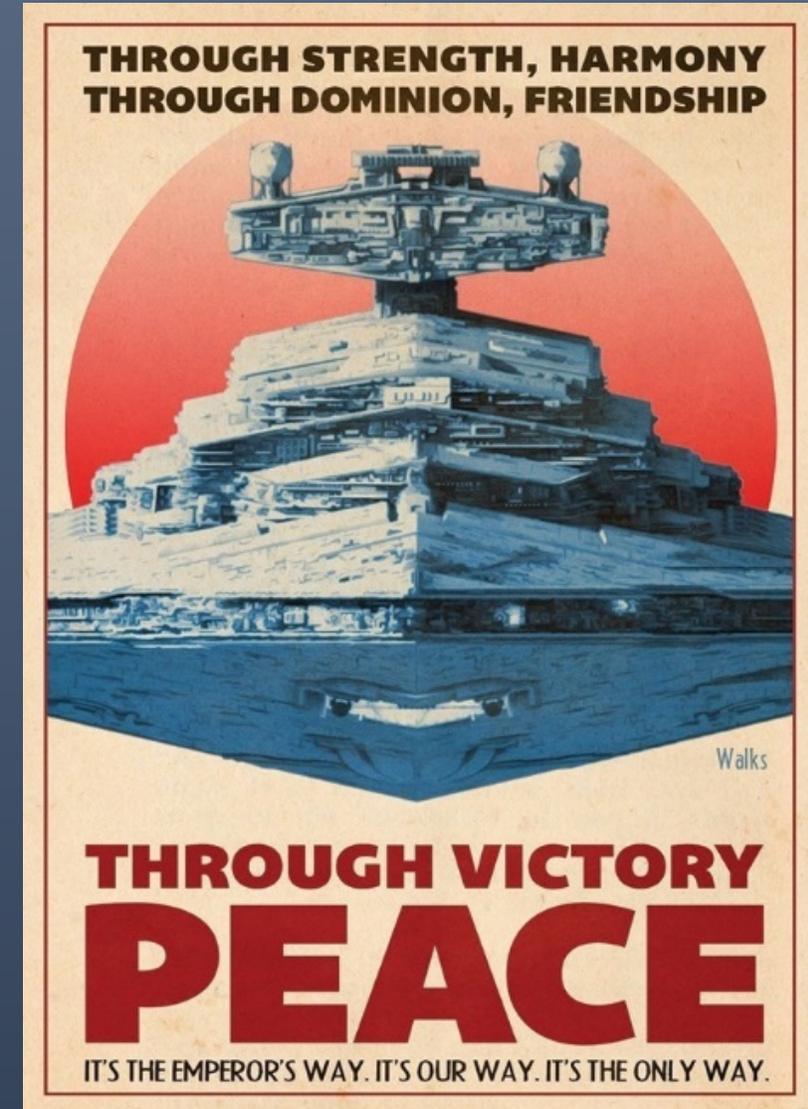
Perception management includes the -aligned with specific interests- **attempt to influence the public opinion** and the adoption of the influence tactics to the rationale of media used to disseminate the pre-managed information (Siegel 2005).

Information becomes a specific means of (re)orientation of power structures, a means for constructing reality (Terranova 2004: 37).

Defining propaganda

Persuasive definition: **Lies, deceit, manipulation, mind control and brainwash** have been long considered synonyms to propaganda (Levinson 1999: 39; Jowett & O' Donnell 2015)

Denotative definition: **a rational, deliberate, mainly political communication process, exercised through the dissemination of managed information** via the mass media (Poulakidakos 2014)



Post-truth (propaganda) factors

There is nothing new in misinformation
Governments, organizations and individuals have always used it –



and people often want to believe in stories that reinforce their worldview



The capitalist condition of the news publishing-broadcasting industry (quantity over quality, "viral" stories over journalistic research, speed over information crosschecking)



The phenomenon of the rejection of facts in favour of emotion is also a consequence of the marketization of education and the privatization of the public sphere.

Post-truth (propaganda) factors

Populism (people vs. elites Manichean rationale/form of propaganda)

Populism as a specific form of propaganda seeks to manage the public insecurity caused by neoliberal economic policies

Politicians using technology to communicate directly with their followers- no need to transmit their claims through the fact-checking filter of a news organization



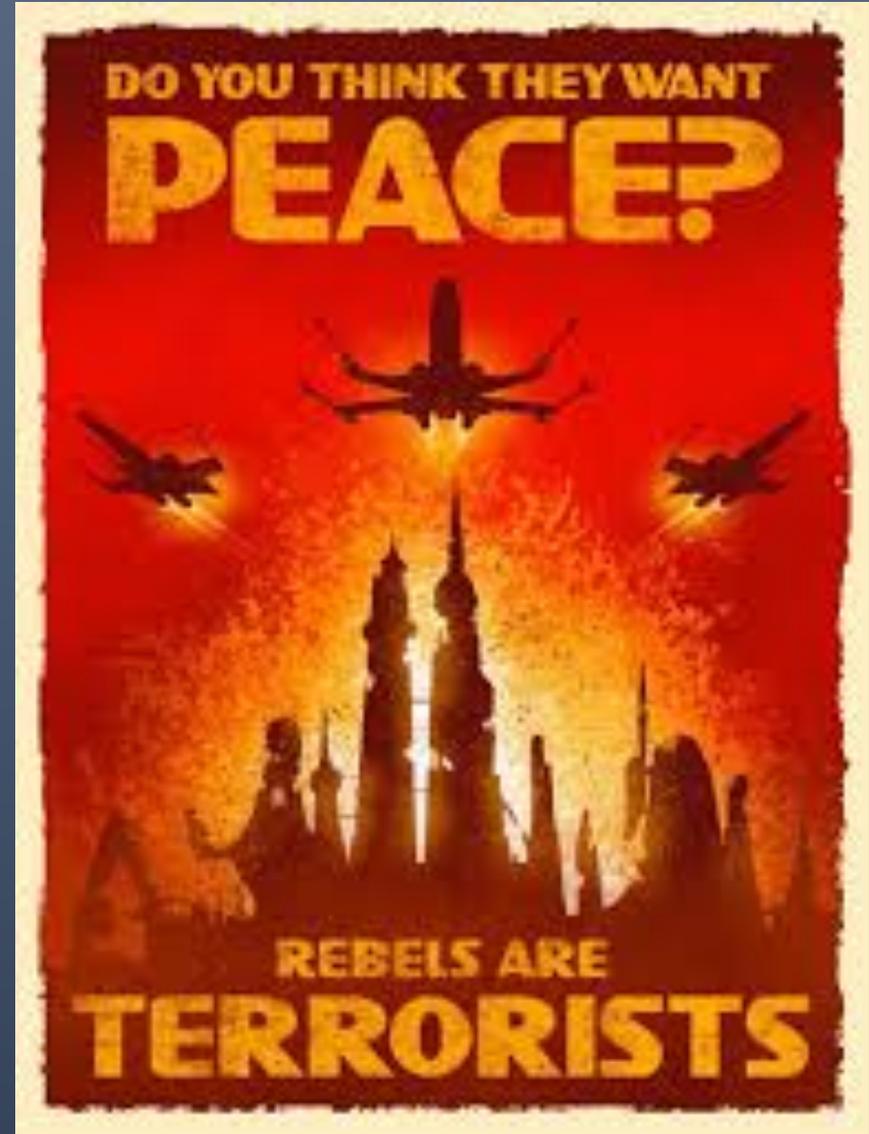
Propaganda characteristics

Lies and the deliberate construction and dissemination of specific -usually unilateral- information.

The **use of exaggeration** aiming at the distortion of either positive or negative (for the propagandist) information.

The **evocation to feelings** (e.g. fear or hope).

The use of rhetoric frames to promote generic notions (e.g. trust, discreetness) and to organize the meaning and values in specific ways (Corner, 2007: 674-675)



Propaganda, post-truth (new [media] propaganda): Similarities and...similarities (as strategy)

“Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionary 2017).

Post-truth journalism: **articles-assemblage of facts, information, rumors, statements, rumors of statements, officials’ estimations and predictions of future** (Triantafyllou 2017).

Post-truth politics: **Feelings, not facts, are what matters** (The Economist 2016).

An attempt to influence public opinion, through the use of specific discursive practices -**opinions over facts, emotions over rationalism, half-truth or even lies (e.g. fake news) instead of research, rumors instead of cross-checked information.**



Main research question- Hypotheses

How are the EU financial crisis and the immigrants/refugees issue reported in terms of the existence of propagandistic/post-truth characteristics in the public discourse?

H1. Predominant focus on opinions, rather than facts (articles)

H2. Mainly personal opinions, without reference to data

H3. Unilateral critique to the EU and its institutions (EC, EP, ECB, European policies)

H4. Populist characteristics (e.g. elites vs people)

H5. Evocation to feelings (use of sentimental discourse)

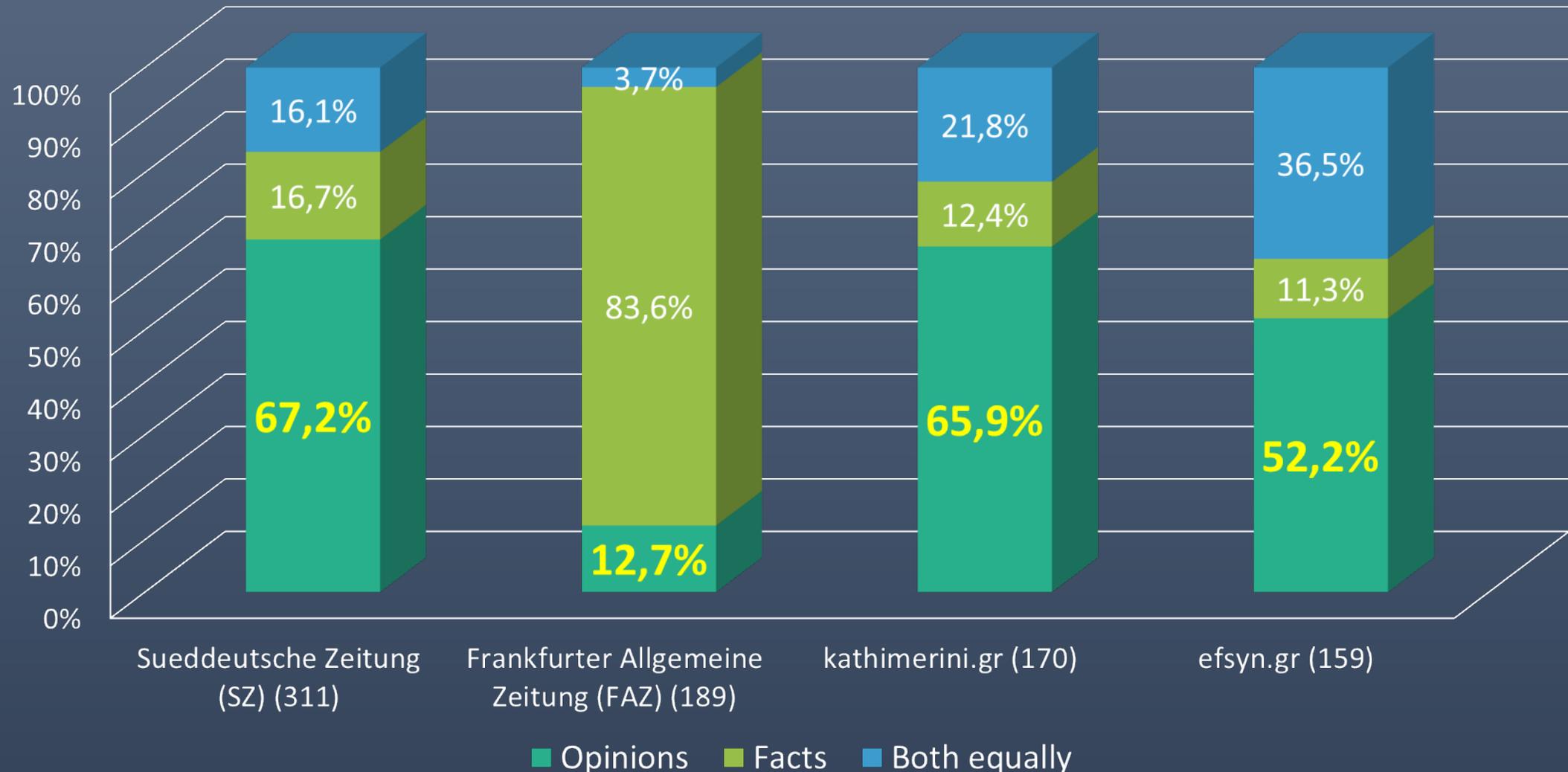
The research

829 “interview bites” (statements by journalists, politicians, experts, civilians) in articles referring to the EU financial crisis and the immigrants/refugees issue (mainly from 2016 and 2017).

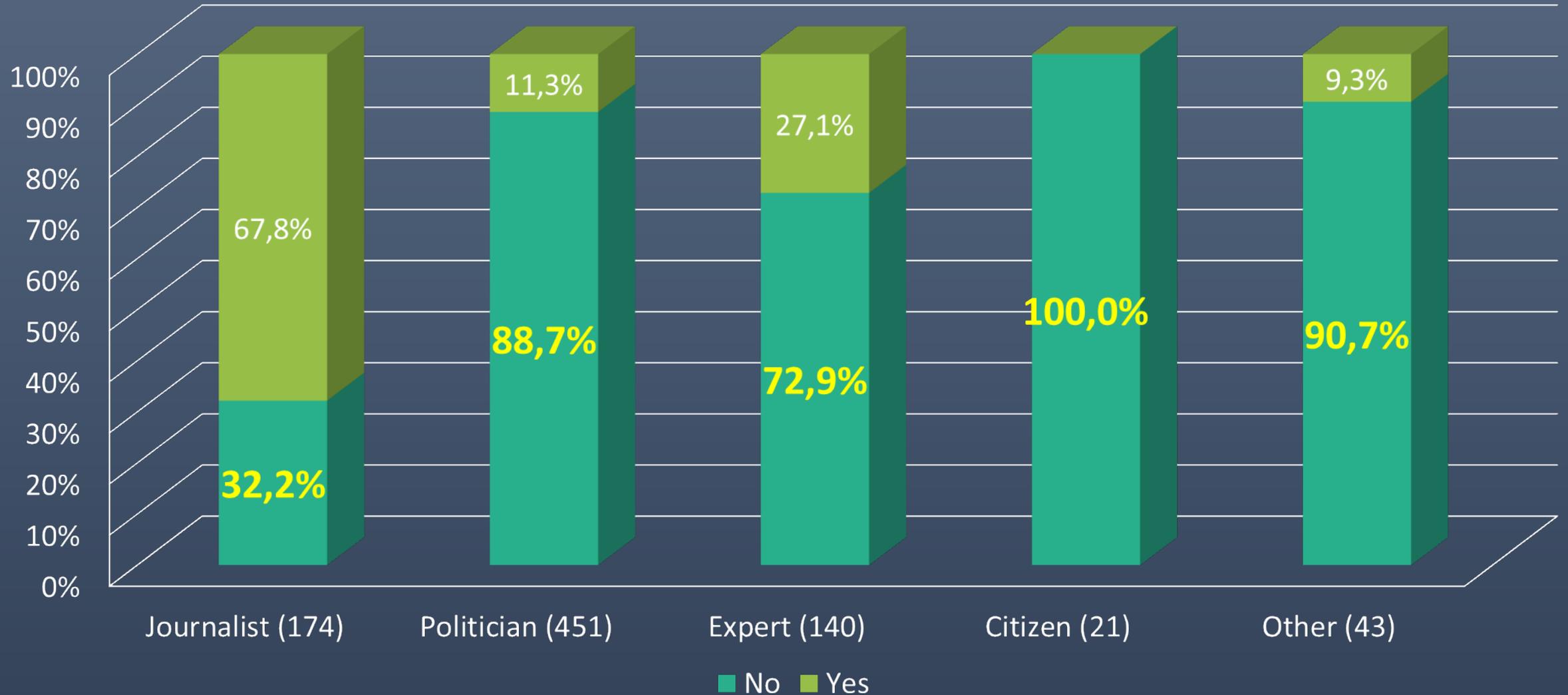
2 Greek (Kathimerini, EFSYN) and 2 German (SZ, FAZ) news sites

Quantitative content analysis with the use of a coding frame

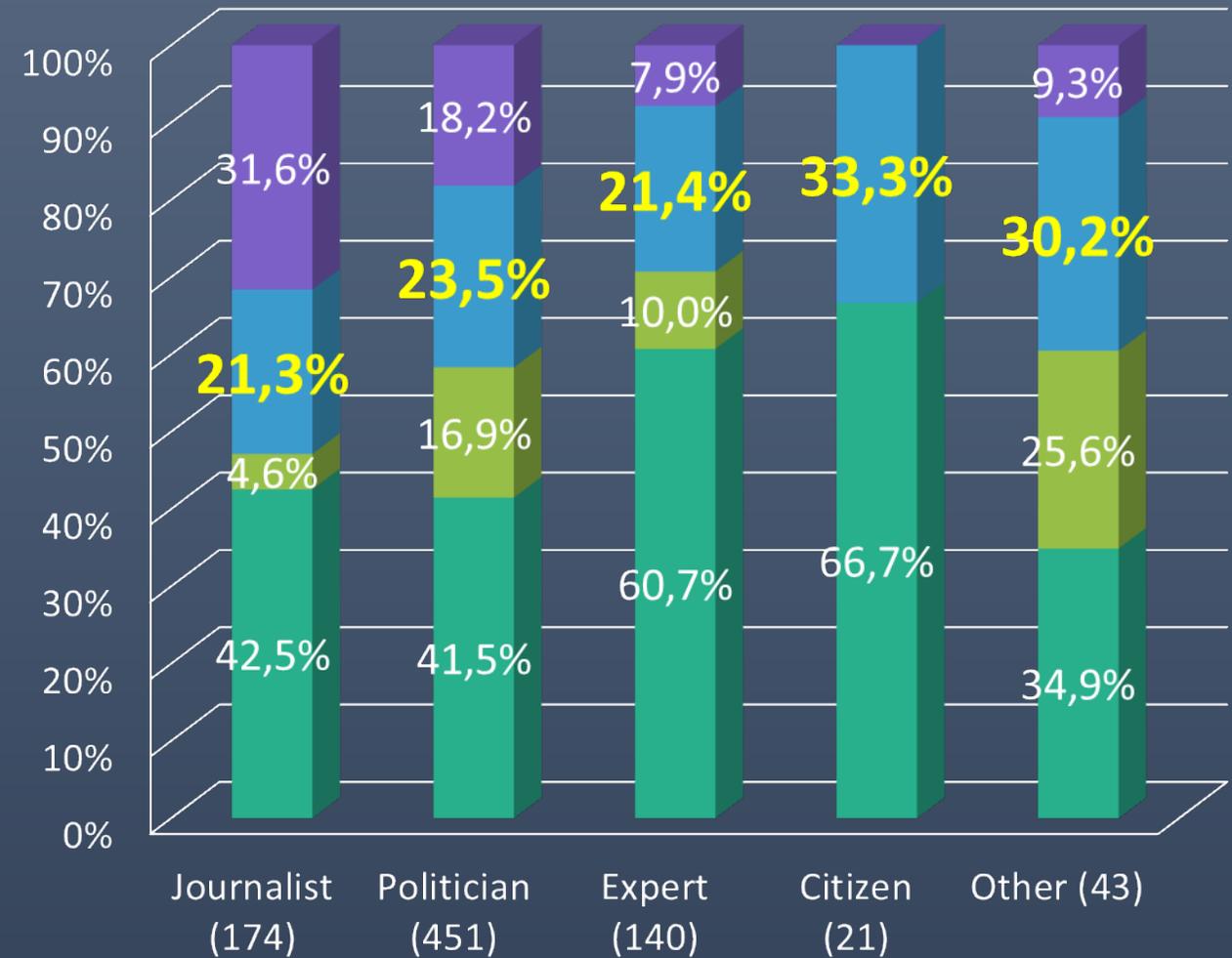
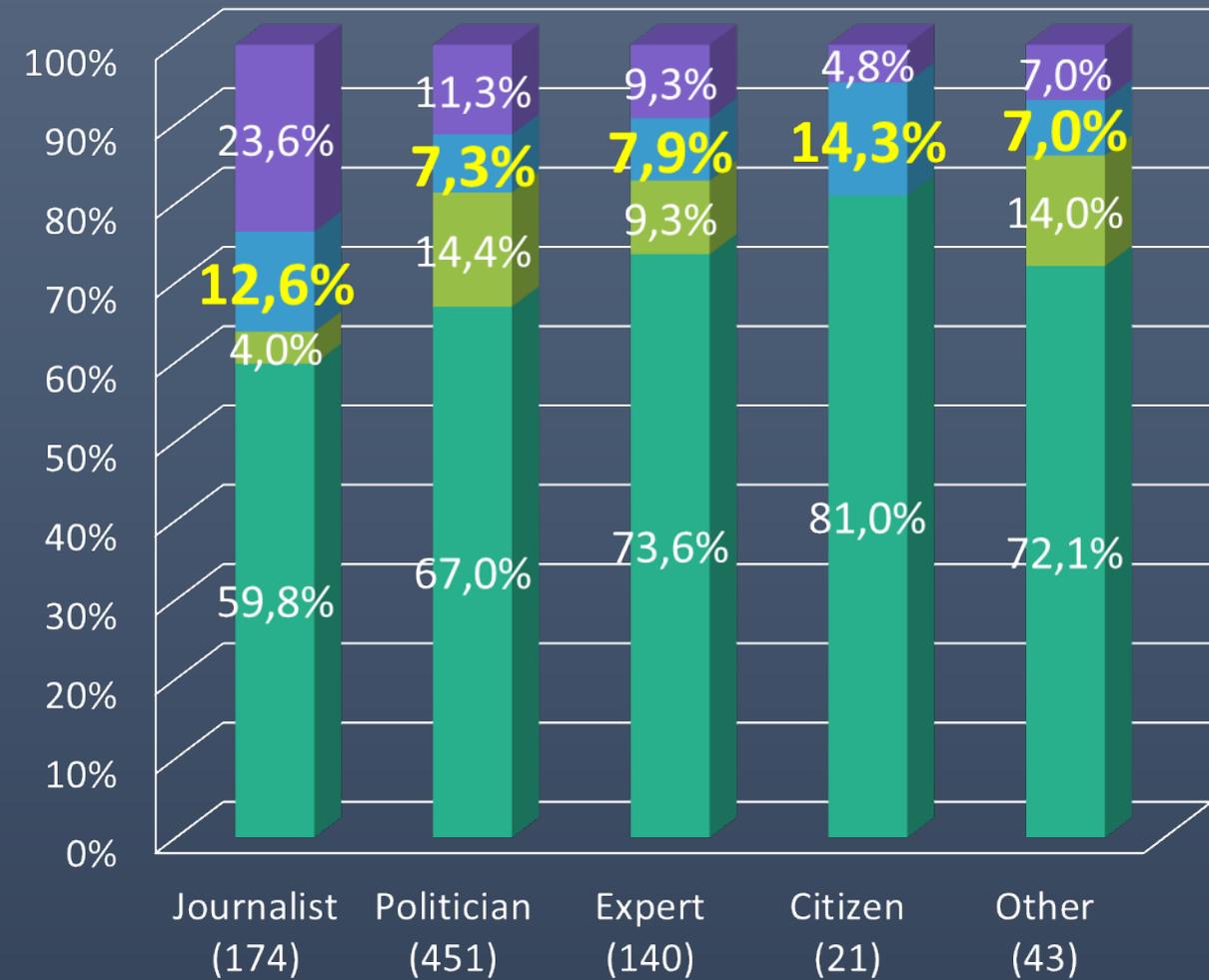
Focus of articles on opinions rather than facts (with the exception of FAZ)



The statements usually do not include reference to (even selective) data



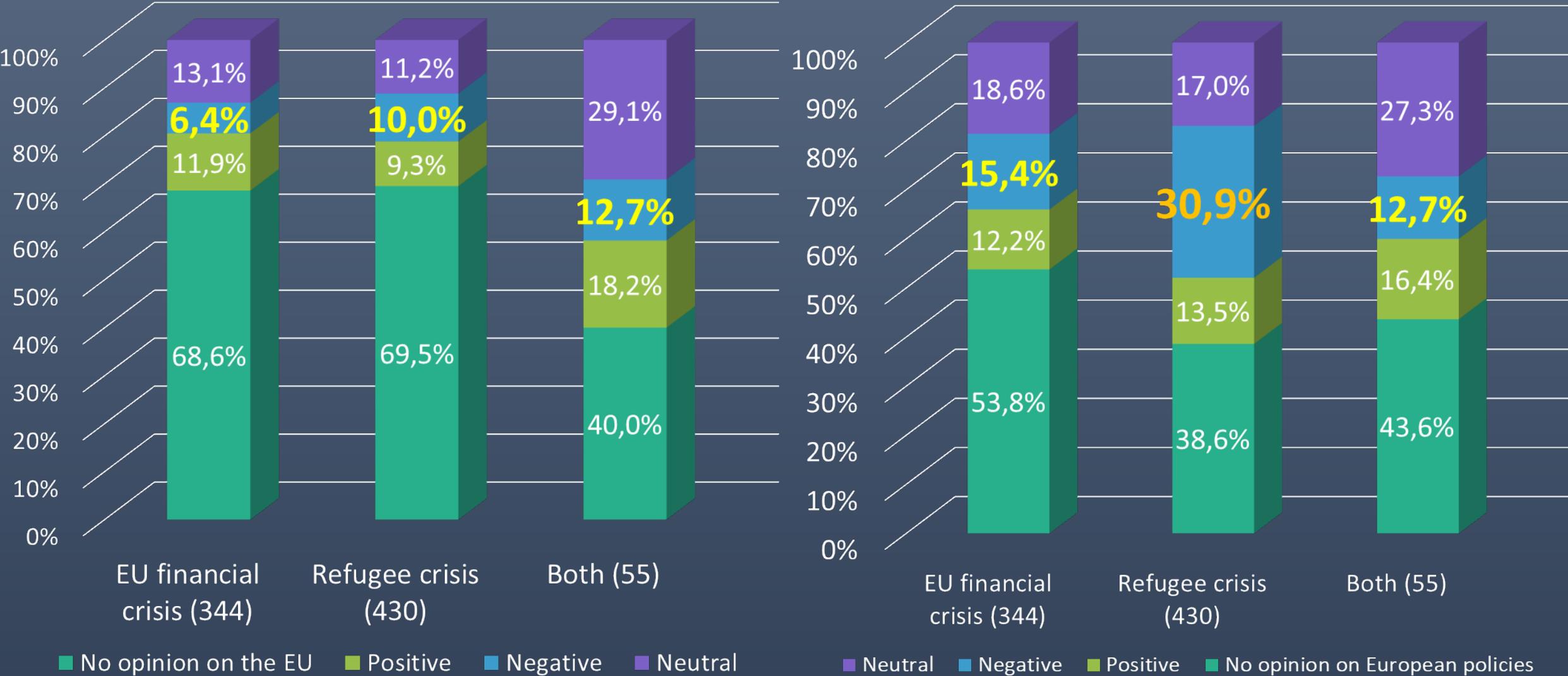
Limited criticism towards the EU (as a whole), but more criticism towards its policies



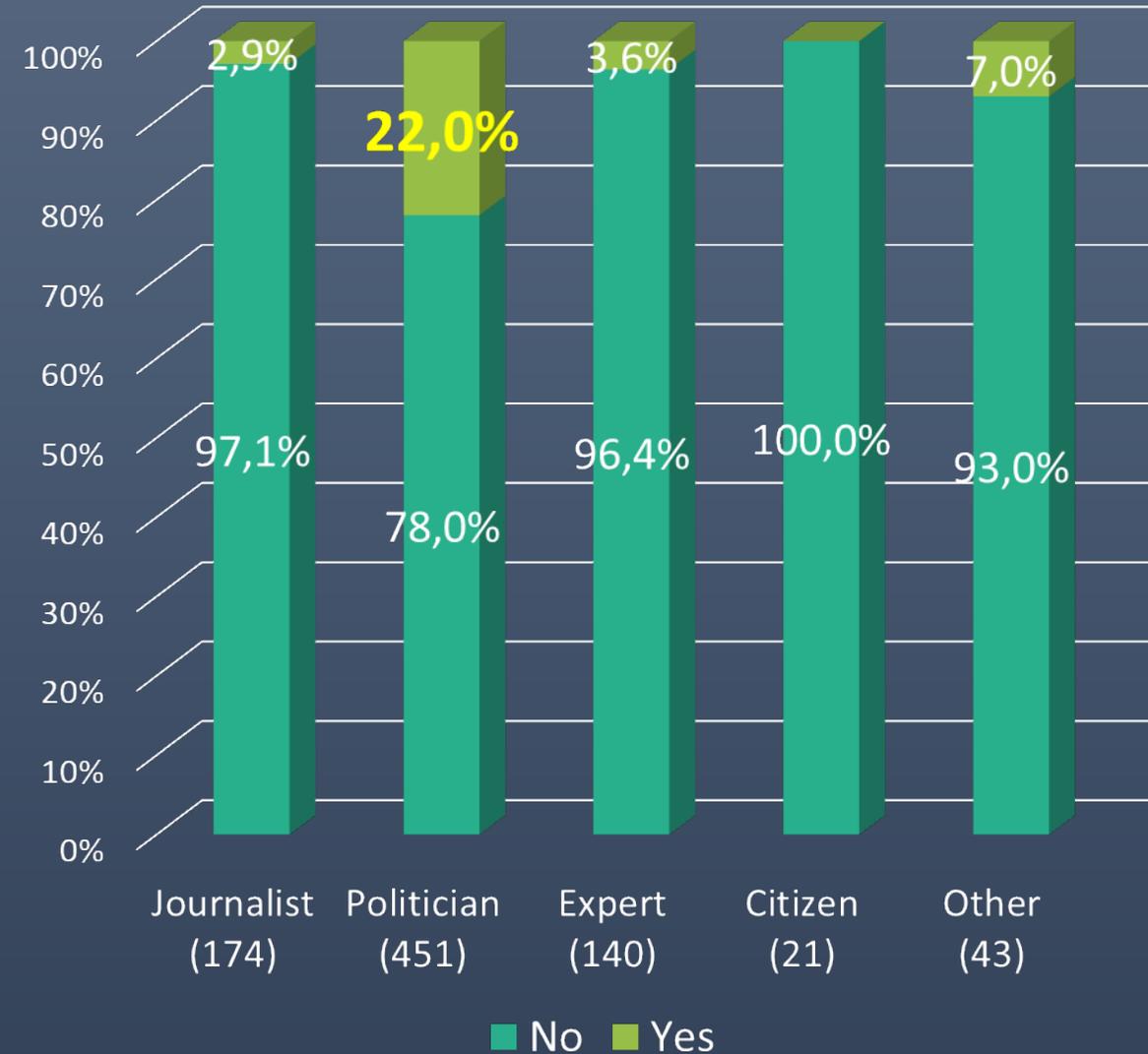
■ No opinion on the EU ■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Neutral

■ Neutral ■ Negative ■ Positive ■ No opinion on European policies

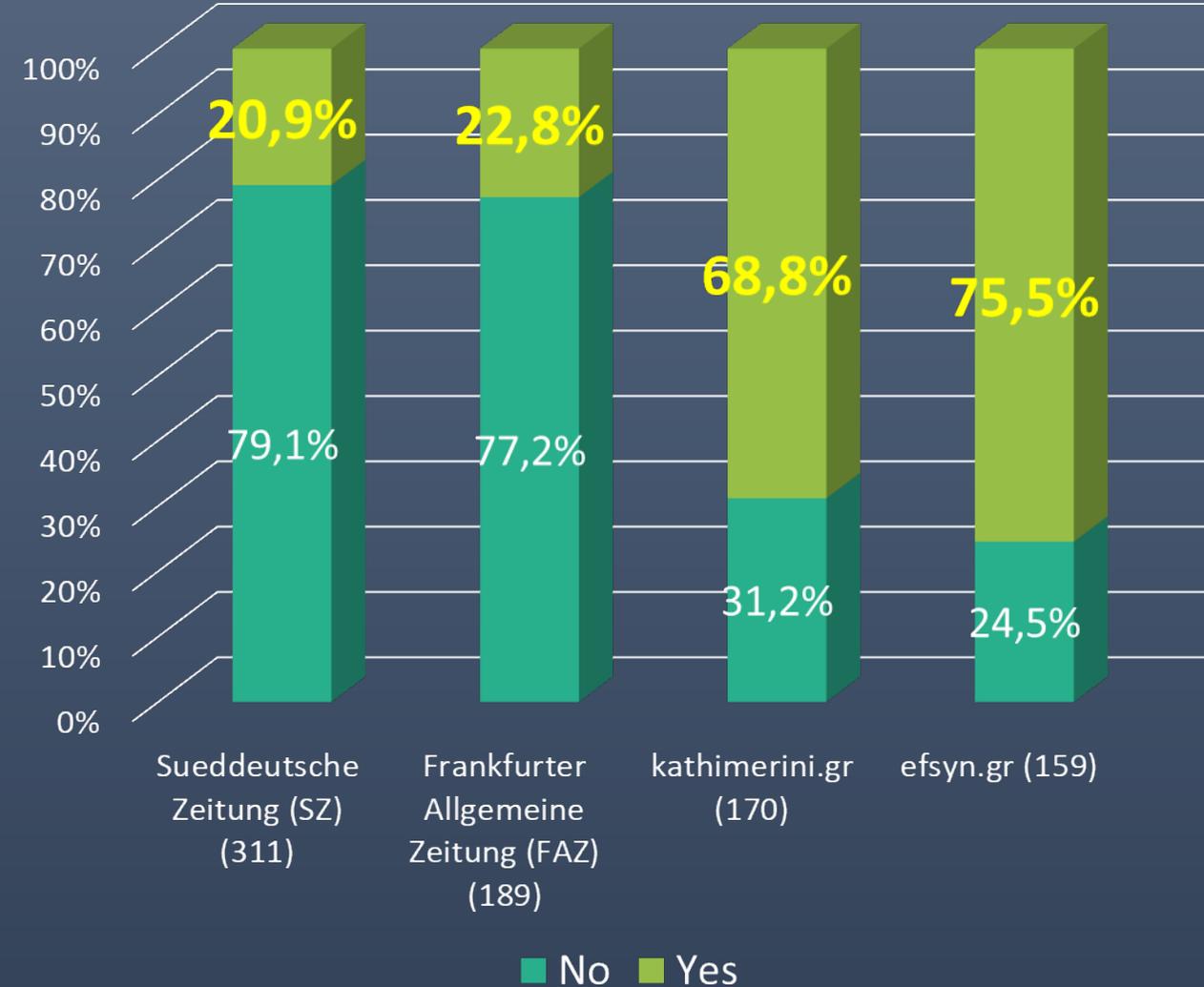
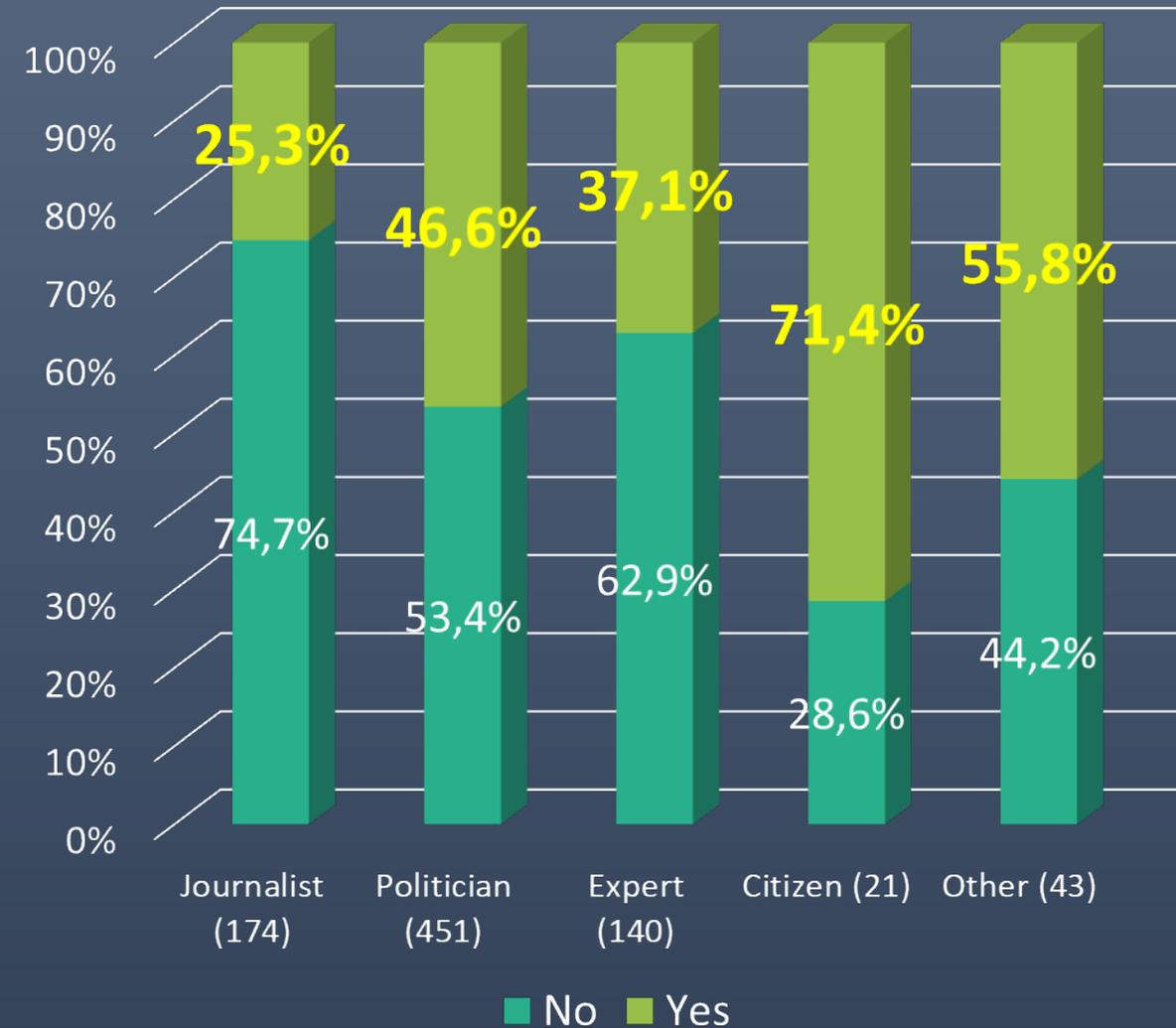
More criticism to EU policies (right graph) concerning the immigrant/ refugee issue



Populist discourse on behalf of politicians (left and right populism)



Evocation to feelings mainly on behalf of politicians and citizens and mostly in Greek newspapers (different public spheres)



Discussion

- Predominant focus on opinions
- No evocation to data (in the majority of the expressed opinions)
- Criticism to the policies of the EU (especially regarding the immigrants/refugees)
- Left and right populism (qualitatively different forms) as a “response” to the strict/austerity policies implemented by the EU
- Evocation to feelings mainly on behalf of politicians and in the Greek public sphere

Discussion

- The predominance of opinions forms a “post-truth/propagandistic” context
- The lack of data doesn’t help the formation of a more “orthological dialogue”
- The strict EU policies implemented (in both crisis and immigrants/refugees issues) have “encouraged” the dissemination of a populist political discourse
- The “crises” context enhances the evocation to feelings (especially in the Greek public sphere)
- The above described context has been repeatedly encountered especially in different “crisis” periods throughout the history (since the beginning of the 20th century)



THANKFUL I AM.