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## Czech Republic television: genre and thematic features of TV news in 1989–2021

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**Abstract.** The author applies the content analysis to study 1608 video news of the Czech TV in 1989, 2005 and 2021. The studies of two categories “Genre” and “Thematic” were conducted. The hypotheses about the increase of negative information in TV news and the rise of entertainment content is tested. Much attention is given to seeking changes in the genres of TV news, which occur as a result of media convergence and the expansion of user-generated content. The greatest genre diversity was found in the modern period (2021), the lowest genre diversity was noted in 1989, when seven out of ten media texts were prepared in the “short note” genre. User-generated content brought only minor changes to the TV news genres. Over time, the role of PR-texts in TV news increases: the number of announcements increases more than tenfold between 1989 and 2021. Previous research indicate that mass media have a tendency to focus on violent and negative content. In the context of the TV news topics, it is demonstrated that nowadays there is an increase to some extent in news on crime and incidents and a slight decrease of the political agenda compared to 1989. Besides, it is reported that the number of sports TV news has significantly decreased, that confirms the trend of differentiation of the audience by TV programs focused on a single subject and specialty (or cable) channels.

**Keywords:** television industry, news programs, news broadcasting, Czech media

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## Телевидение Чешской Республики: жанрово-тематическое своеобразие телевизионных новостей в 1989–2021 гг.

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**Аннотация.** Методом контент-анализа исследуются 1608 новостных сюжетов чешского телеканала «Ческа телевизе 1» за три периода 1989, 2005 и 2021 гг. по категориям «Жанр» и «Тематика». Проверены гипотезы относительно увеличения негативной информации в телевизионных новостях, усиления развлекательной направленности. Прослежены изменения в жанрах телевизионной информационной журналистики вследствие медиаконвергенции и увеличения объема пользовательского контента. Выяснено, что наибольшее жанровое разнообразие характерно для современного этапа, наименьшее – для 1989 г., когда семь из десяти журналистских материалов представляли собой короткие заметки. Пользовательский контент привнес лишь незначительные изменения в жанровую палитру телевизионных новостей. Со временем усиливается роль пиар-текстов, входящих в состав выпусков теленовостей: количество анонсов возросло более чем в десять раз. В контексте тематики отмечается рост числа криминальных новостей и некоторое сужение политической повестки по сравнению с 1989 г. Также зафиксировано практически полное исчезновение из выпусков телевизионных новостей спортивной тематики, что подтверждает тенденцию дифференциации аудитории, которая переходит на тематические каналы и в нишевые массмедиа.

**Ключевые слова:** телевизионная отрасль, новостные программы, жанры телевидения, информационное вещание, чешские медиа

**Заявление о конфликте интересов.** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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### Introduction

Thanks to the development of information and communication technologies, a single media space is being formed, with the forms and methods of presenting journalistic content being combined, and the process of media convergence becoming evident (Jensen, 2022; Jiang, Yue 2022). Nevertheless, news, as one of the main types of media texts, does not lose its significance.

First, an increase in the number of information flows and an increase in the time a person spends in front of a screen, indicate an increase in the amount of information consumed. Since the ability of a person to perceive and process information is limited (Bruckmaier et al., 2020, p. 6810), it is obvious that the level of complexity of the information consumed should suffer first. Given that the video content is the simplest and most accessible for perception, this indicates the prospects for maintaining positions for audiovisual news that terrestrial television is currently losing (and online television, on the contrary, is gaining).

Secondly, facilitating journalists' access to relevant video materials and empowering simultaneously the audience with the function of media content producers (Wardle, Williams, 2010; Furqan et al., 2022), also make adjustments to the formal and content aspects of television news, remaining studied insufficiently at the moment.

The processes of audience fragmentation (Lotz et al., 2022; Porten-Cheé, Eilders, 2019), its differentiation into specialty TV channels, seem to fade into the background compared to the more comprehensive process of unifying the media space under the influence of the development of the Internet. The progress of the World Wide Web and new technologies (in particular, the spread of the next “screens” – a personal computer, tablet and mobile phone) has led to the fact that media consumption has become more individualized, while television, which broadcasts content to the only (once) TV receiver in the household, on the contrary, have united the audience (Volkova et al., 2021, p. 163).

At the moment, researchers are increasingly turning to the problem of adapting television news to social media (Chobanyan, Nikolskaya, 2021; Keib, Wojdyski, 2019), however, some experts are less optimistic about the effectiveness of delivering television news in this way: “Even the most successful format will not be able to replicate the successes of the newscasts in the past. Given the variety of platforms available to obtain information, it is inevitable that many users feel that their needs are better served elsewhere” (García-Avilés, 2020, p. 154). This thesis also confirms the possibility of maintaining the current position of the producers of television news.

In the changing world of information broadcasting, islands of stability remain such entities as the genre (i.e., the form of journalistic material that has developed over the years, which is characterized by stable features) and the subject of coverage (i.e., the topic of the news is a message about a change in the state of an object, a change in an object) (Dolgova et al., 2019, pp. 238–240).

The purpose of this study is to highlight changes in the thematic and genre components of television news. The paper took into account such conclusions of scientists in the field of news journalism as the emergence of new forms of content that cannot be designated as a “genre” (Dolgova, Peripechina, 2022, pp. 133–134), the shortening of media texts and the dissemination of the same information by one and the same mass media on different platforms and in different forms and genres (Vyrkovsky et al., 2019, p. 46). As for topics, there are such trends as a significant share of the sensational component in television news (Arbaoui et al., 2020, p. 313), the emergence of such concepts as “politainment” (Savolainen, 2022, p. 956) and “edutainment” (Dolgova, Peripechina, 2022,

p. 81) (a combination of entertainment with political and educational content), an increase in negative information on the screen (Rudenko, 2014).

Television of the Czech Republic (Fridrich, 2021; Dvořák, 2001), in the case of this study, serves more as an illustration of global (or at least Eastern European) changes in information broadcasting (since this paper is based on the quantitative calculation of media texts only in two categories “genre” and “theme”), as a result of which the national specificity of Czech television news plays a secondary role.

## Methodology

The empirical base of the study can be divided into two parts: the first refers to the time of state television in Czechoslovakia (1989), the second to the time of public broadcasting in the Czech Republic (2005 and 2021). Thus, on the territory of the modern Czech Republic, until 1992, an exclusively state broadcasting model operated, in 1992 there was a division into private and public broadcasters,<sup>1</sup> and the “first channel” of the Czech screen (our Česká Televize 1) becomes public.

The content analysis method was used to study the information programs that airs on Česká televize 1 for the three years 1989, 2005, 2021 (an equal step – sixteen years – between periods). The years were not chosen randomly. 1989 is the most fully represented of the digitized Czechoslovak news programs, and 1989 is also important, since the analyzed TV channel was then state-owned, while in 2005 and 2021 – public. In this context, it seems essential to explore the differences between the formation of information programs under the state and public broadcasting models. The year 2005 is considerable for two reasons: firstly, in 2005, YouTube appeared as a new competitive platform for posting video content,<sup>2</sup> and secondly, in the Czech Republic, it was from 2005 that specialty TV channels began to appear more actively, changing habits of viewers and sharing content by niche sites. In particular, in 2005, the 24-hour news channel Česká Televize 24<sup>3</sup> began broadcasting. The point is 2005 is the last year in terms of the presence of news broadcasts on the air of universal channels as an exclusive source of television news. 2021 is the most relevant year in terms of the impact of modern technology and media convergence on television news, also during this period, coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic has relatively stabilized compared to 2020.

As for choosing weeks for analysis, a decision had been made to stop at the number “three”. So, for each of the three periods (1989, 2005, 2021), three weeks were analyzed (the third week of March (1), the third week of July (2) and the third week of November (3) for each of the periods; we selected March, July and November, based on the division of the year – twelve months – into three parts, and each of the months – March, July, November – are the third months).

<sup>1</sup> Základní informace o ČT. Retrieved March 27, 2023, from <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/vse-oc/zakladni-informace-o-ct/>

<sup>2</sup> Helft, M., & Richtel, M. (2006, October 10). Venture firm shares a YouTube Jackpot. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 27, 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/10/technology/10payday.html>

<sup>3</sup> Rada České televize. (2006). *Výroční zpráva o činnosti České televize v roce 2005* (s. 4). Retrieved March 27, 2023, from <http://img.ceskatelevize.cz/boss/image/contents/publikace-ct/rocnky/2005/zprava2005.pdf>

In total, 1608 TV news were analyzed from 63 daily evening newscasts on Česká Televize 1.

The analysis was carried out in two categories “genre” and “theme”. In the first category, media texts were divided into such genres as Reportage, Short note, Note, Monologue (Dolgova, Peripechina, 2022, p. 124), LTT (Life to tape), Interview, Feature story, No Comment. Concerning Announcement, two types of announcements were identified in the news programs: the first type of announcements is tease, which is a list of the most important and/or interesting, unusual news in the newscast, the second type of announcements is a promotional media text advertising a TV program that will soon be aired on a TV channel.

In the category “theme”, media texts were classified according to the following thematic types: Politics, Society, Health, Economy, Accidents, Crimes, History, Culture, Lifestyle, Science, War, Climate, Weather, Sport, Space, Other. Health in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic was considered separately from the social topic in order to highlight the understandably high performance for this item for 2021.

## Results and discussion

Speaking about the genre features of the news on Česká Televize 1 in 1989–2021, it was noted that in all periods there is a domination of reportage and short note, while such genres as monologue, interview, feature story remain in the shadows. Moreover, feature story was encountered exclusively in 1989 (and even then, out of 539 media texts of feature stories analyzed in 1989, only 2 were found) (Table 1).

Table 1

Genre features of Česká Televize 1 news in 1989, 2005 и 2021, %

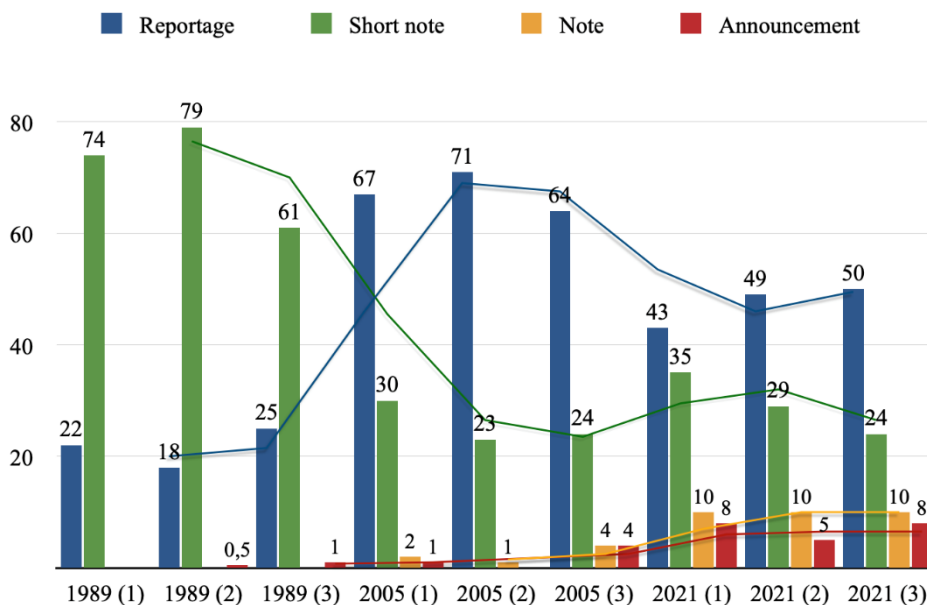
Period genre	1989				2005				2021			
	1	2	3	A*	1	2	3	A	1	2	3	A
Reportage	22	18	25	21	67	71	64	68.5	43	49	50	48
Short note	74	79	66	74	30	23	24	25	35	29	24	29
Note	–	–	–	–	2	1	4	2	10	10	10	10
Monologue	1	0.5	1	1	–	–	–	–	1	3	3	2
LTT	–	–	–	–	–	3	2	2	2	1	1	1
Interview	2	2	6	3	–	–	–	–	1	2	2	2
Feature story	1	–	1	0.5	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Announcement	–	0.5	1	0.5	1	–	4	2	8	5	8	7
No comment	–	–	–	–	–	1	–	0.5	–	1	2	1

Note: \* A – an average for three weeks.

As can be seen from Table 1, 2005 is the most monotonous in terms of genre specifics, when 64–71% of TV news, i.e. at least two thirds, were made in the reportage genre during the three weeks analyzed. The most balanced and

diverse in terms of genre representation is 2021, combining both genres that were absent in 1989 (for example, note and LTT) and genres that were not found in 2005 (for example, monologue and interview).

Looking more closely at the genres that showed the most change (Figure 1), one can see a trend of moving away from the monopoly of short note in 1989 and reportage in 2005, as well as an increase in genre diversity over time.



**Figure 1.** The comparison of news genres on Česká Televize 1 in 1989, 2005 и 2021, %

It is also necessary to pay attention to the appearance of the note genre in the periods of 2005 and its five-fold increase from 2% in 2005 to 10% in 2021. We regard the note as a short note, supplemented by a fragment (one or several) of the interview. Thus, the emergence and strengthening of the position of the note genre confirms the trend towards convergence of television news genres and a gradual departure from a more rigid division of genres into “large” (for example, reportage) and “small” (short note).

The presence of announcement as a form of television news content is gradually increasing. So, if in 1989 there were practically no announcements in issues (0.5%), then over the years there has been a gradual increase: in 2005, on average, 2% of announcements were met, in 2021 – 7%. Note that opens (Chobanyan, 2016, p. 135) were not included in the calculation (they were present in all analyzed newscasts). Well, we can note the promotional, PR function that has been growing over the years, put into the information broadcasting of the Czech TV.

As can be seen from the data in Table 2, among the sixteen presented, the greatest changes are noticeable only in five categories – Politics, Society, Accidents, Crimes and Sport. Indeed, the indicators in the category Health also increased significantly: if in 1989 only 1% of media texts were devoted to

the topics of medicine and healthcare, then in 2021 it will be 16%. However, the presence of television news devoted to this topic in 2021 can be explained by the ongoing spread of coronavirus infection, as well as the start of vaccination in the first quarter of 2021 (for example, every fifth news story – 20% – in the March week of 2021 was devoted to medicine). We also note the increase in the Other category in 2021 by more than two times, compared with 1989 and 2005.

Table 2

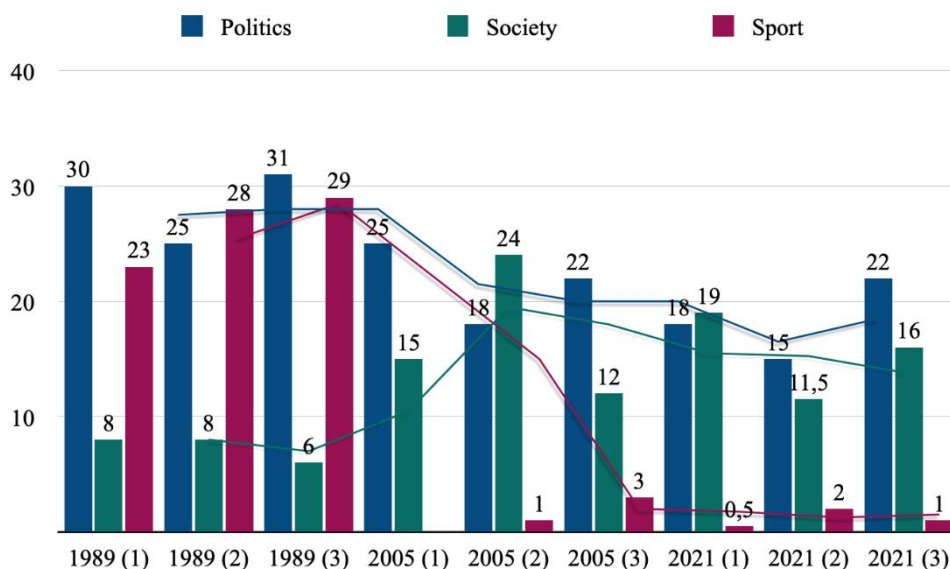
Thematic features of *Česká Televize 1* news in 1989, 2005 и 2021, %

Period thematics	1989				2005				2021			
	1	2	3	A	1	2	3	A	1	2	3	A
Politics	30	25	31	<b>29</b>	25	18	22	22	18	15	22	<b>18</b>
Society	8	8	6	<b>7</b>	15	24	12	<b>17</b>	19	11.5	16	<b>16</b>
Health	1	0.5	0.5	1	3	2	10	5	20	11	17	16
Economy	12	12	13	12	12	7	12.5	10	11	13	12	12
Accidents	3	6	4	4	16	23	9	<b>16</b>	7	14	5	<b>9</b>
Crimes	2	1	2	2	15	5	12.5	<b>11</b>	4	5	5	4.5
History	1.5	–	3	2	2	5	8	5	2	2	5	3
Culture	8	8	4	7	4	3	2	3	5	8	6.5	6
Lifestyle	1.5	2	0.5	1	1	4	1	2	2	2	2	2
Science	0.5	0.5	–	0.5	1	–	2	1	1	2	1	1
War	4	3	1.5	3	2	4	4	3	1	2	1	2
Climate	1	3	4	2	1	–	2	1	3	5	0.5	3
Weather	–	–	0.5	0.5	2	1	–	1	1	2	–	1
Sport	23	28	29	<b>26</b>	–	1	3	<b>1.5</b>	0.5	2	1	<b>1</b>
Space	1.5	–	0.5	1	–	3	–	1	0.5	0.5	1	0.5
Other	3	3	0.5	2	1	–	–	0.5	5	5	5	<b>5</b>

As far as thematic categories are concerned, some of them deserve special attention (Figure 2).

Some changes are observed in the Politics category. So, if in 1989 25–31% of media texts were devoted to political topics, then in 2005 the figure was on average 22%, in 2021 – 18%. Regardless, the decline in attention to political topics in 2021 can also be explained by the switch to coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. And yet, if we consider the more neutral 2005, there is still a slight decrease in attention to politics compared to 1989, when television in Czechoslovakia was state-owned (whereas since 1992 Czech television has switched to a public broadcasting model, which implies a more balanced approach to agenda setting with less policy orientation). In general, the figures for 2005 and 2021 show a more proportionate thematic spectrum that was marked in the case of

1989, when, for example, only sports and political topics occupied more than half (55%) of the airtime (Table 2).



**Figure 2.** The comparison of news topics on Česká Televize 1 in 1989, 2005 и 2021, %

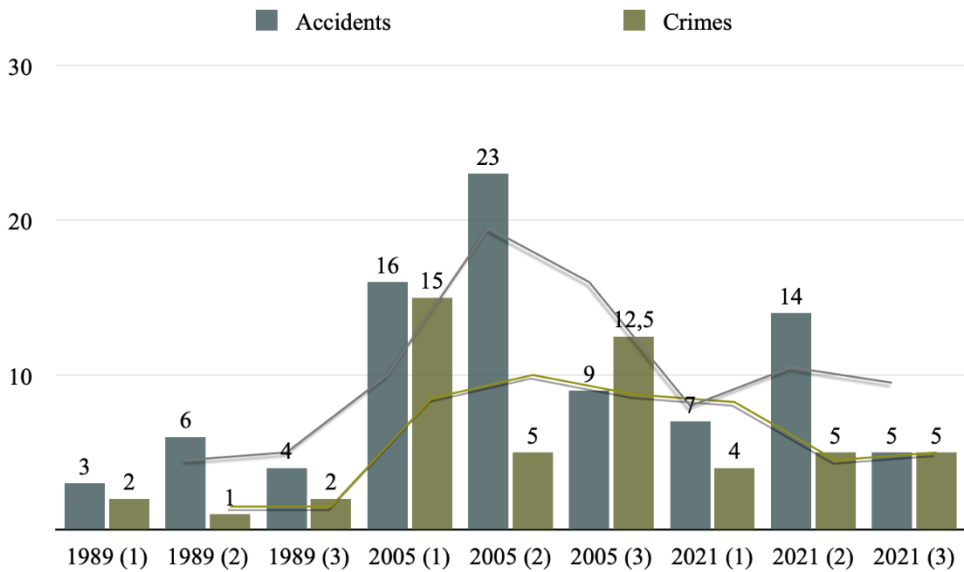
In this regard, we will also turn to indicators from the Society category. If in 1989 6–8% of materials were devoted to social issues, then this figure increased to 12–24% of media texts in 2005 and 11.5–19% in 2021. This group included television stories about education, families, the lives of people of retirement age, housing and communal services, the development of social infrastructure, etc. The bias in covering public topics is also probably associated with the transition of Česká Televize 1 to a public broadcasting model.

The trend of audience fragmentation and viewers turning to specialty TV channels is noticeable in changes in the thematic category Sport. So, if in 1989 23–29% of the materials were devoted to sports topics, then in 2005 and 2021 this figure fell to 1–3% and 0.5–2%.

It is also worth considering the data for the categories Accidents and Crimes, associated with the coverage, as a rule, of negative events – in particular, floods, industrial accidents, aircraft crashes, traffic accidents, etc. (Accidents), terrorist acts, crimes, legal proceedings, etc. (Crimes).

As can be seen from Figure 3, the “negative” topics of Accidents and Crimes increased significantly in 2005. Thus, compared with 1989, in 2005 the number of reports on incidents quadrupled, and the number of crime news more than five times. Despite the decrease in such topics in 2021, the figure is still significantly higher than in 1989: in 2021, there were more than twice as many news about incidents and twice as many crime news compared to state television in 1989. In general, the data presented in the graph confirms the researchers' idea of an increase in negative information on TV.





**Figure 3.** The comparison of news topics on Česká Televize 1 in 1989, 2005 и 2021, %

If we turn to the data from the Lifestyle category (see Table 2), which included entertainment media texts (about the life of celebrities, unusual hair-styles, cute babies etc.), then we can see that news from this group in all three periods occupied a very minor place (1% in 1989, 2% in 2005 and 2% in 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that the trend towards the rise of entertainment in the television news was not marked in the study.

### Conclusion

As a result of the analysis of television news in 1989, 2005 and 2021 it was noted not a crucial change in the genres of information television journalism, which may exist due to, for instance, an increase in the amount of user-generated content (Dolgova, Peripechina, 2022, p. 134), – but more balanced newscasts with news of different genres. Thus, the non-journalistic form No comment was and remains extremely insignificant throughout all three periods of the study. The greatest genre diversity is typical for modern periods: in 2021, in addition to reports and short notes, the note genre comes forward, despite that it did not exist at all in 1989 and was negligible in 2005. In general, over time, a transition from the dominance of reportage and short notes to a wider variety of genres is noticeable.

Despite the fact that Česká Televize 1 switched to a public broadcasting model in 1992, the ways of promoting content that are typical for commercial mass media are typical for modern information programs of the channel too: for example, in 2021, the role of announcements (tease(r)s) in the news broadcast is significantly increasing (7% vs. 0.5% in 1989 and 2% in 2005).

It is also worth noting that the process of media convergence (Jensen, 2022; Jiang, Yue. 2022) still had an impact on the genre aspect of TV news: the interview

as a separate genre of the newscast goes away and becomes, for instance, a part of the note genre, turning it from “short” into “extended” one. This means, that there is not only a gradual increase in genre diversity, observed over the years, but also merging of genres and their transformation into new ones. In addition, the departure of the feature story genre from newscasts was noted. Besides, in 1989 the genre was also found in extremely small numbers.

The idea of the important role of a solely entertainment component in the news (Savolainen, 2022, p. 962) was not confirmed in the study. So, based on the analysis of television news in 1989, 2005 and 2021 it can be argued that the number of purely entertaining stories that belonged to the Lifestyle category remains negligible, and in each of the periods does not exceed 1–2%. By the way, there is the departure of sports (also partly entertainment) topics from Česká Televize 1 newscasts, which occupied about a third of media texts in 1989 and only about 1% in 2005 and 2021.

K. Chobanyan, based on the analysis of CNN and Russia 24 television news, comes to the conclusion that a third of the CNN news are devoted to criminal topics, while a third of the content of Russia 24 newscasts is devoted to politics (Chobanyan, 2016, p. 128). Analyzing the news programs of the USA, Canada and Australia, E. Nikolskaya found out that on average about 10% of stories in local news and about 8% in international news are allocated to politics (Chobanyan, 2016, pp. 96–98). On Czech television, politics takes a more prominent place, although there has been some narrowing of the political agenda over the years. Thus, the Czech agenda in terms of political news is generally closer to the content of Russia 24 than Western channels. The figures for 2005 coverage of incidents and crime by Česká Televize 1 (16 and 11%) are somewhat close to the high figures of CNN. Nonetheless, by the period of 2021, the figures are flattening (9 and 4.5%), and the negative topics of accidents and crime news take up less time on the Czech news air, which also partly sets the results apart from those of the USA, Canada and Australia, where the topic of incidents takes up to 20, 35 and 25% respectively (Nikolskaya, 2016, p. 97). The idea developed by media researchers that the category of sensationalism “seems to be a ‘system’-dependent feature of news coverage” (Arbaoui et al., 2020, p. 314) is confirmed, but only partially. One can speak of a greater “sensationalism” and a negative thematic component of the Anglo-Saxon news in comparison with the Czech ones. However, it should also be concluded that the trend of highlighting negative news and giving it significance (Rudenko, 2014) is generally traceable based on a comparison of news from 1989 and 2005, 2021 on television of the Czech Republic.

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