

# Wealth Disparity Receives Little Coverage

Media coverage of financial class in the US and internationally

2004 – 2/28/2011



- Is the growing income gap in the US on the media agenda?
- What is the perception of the middle class?
- How does this compare with the rest of the world?



**Basis:**

193,831 news stories in ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox News 2004 – 2011

195,882 news stories in International TV news 2010

All stories are coded by trained human coders

Average inter-coder reliability was 85.7% in Q3/2010

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# Media Coverage of Wealth Disparity

**New York, March 18, 2011. According to a report from the Institute of Policy Studies, in 2007, the bottom 50% of households in the US possessed 2.5% of the nation's wealth, while the top 10% possessed over 70%. Over 33% of US personal wealth was concentrated in the top 1% of households alone. While this wealth gap is discussed online and by pundits, Media Tenor International's data show that it has received little coverage in US TV reporting since 2004.**

**In fact, issues of poverty and people in the US living in poverty account for only a few reports per year in US television. This was far less than even .1% of the reports on the nightly news programs of ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox. While there were somewhat more reports on people of extreme wealth, spiking in 2008 around the financial crisis, this topic also had low salience in US media, with an average of less than one report per network per month.**

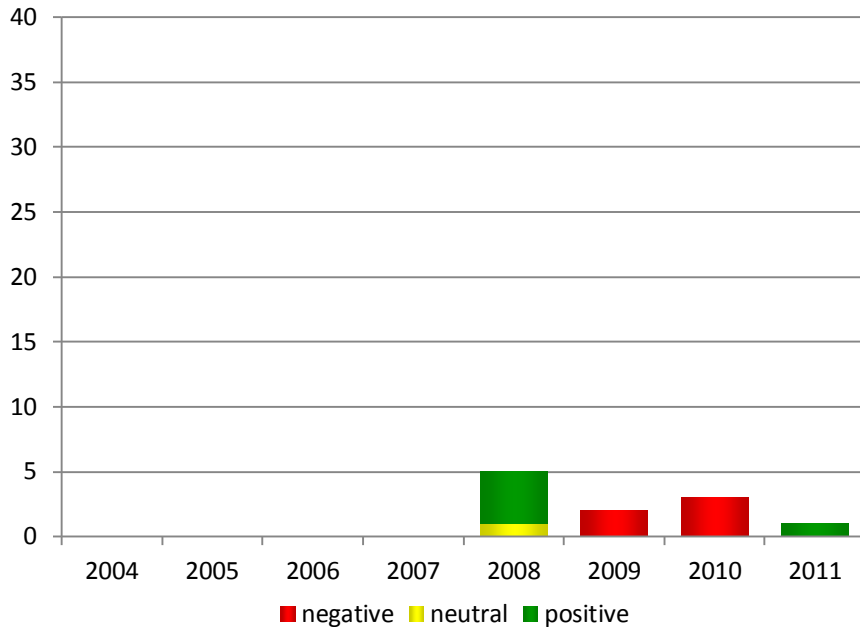
**The middle class in the US, which is keenly targeted during election campaigns, and is a national symbol as much as a national fact for the country, also had visibility problems. Media Tenor data show that people identified as middle class by the media in the US received a very low volume of coverage and were barely more visible than the poor or extremely wealthy. Additionally, this coverage, which also represented less than .1% of reports on the nightly news, was highly negative and often framed in terms of "attacks on the middle class" or "the disappearing middle class."**

**Despite the middle class receiving the most attention in the US, it fared poorly in other Western nations as well. Those countries whose television media reported on their middle class at all – Germany, France, Spain and the UK – provided even less coverage than the US did, and all of that coverage was entirely negative.**

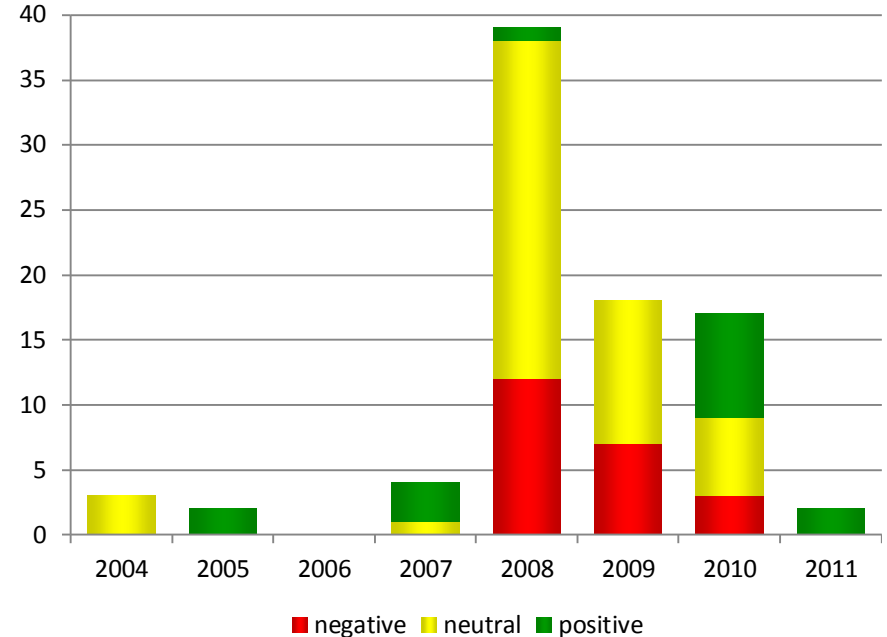
**"Whether or not the middle class is disappearing in the US or Europe cannot be ascertained when the television media seem to have already decided, based on these coverage volumes, that it does not exist," said Racheline Maltese, Senior Analyst with Media Tenor. "Clearly, the discussion of personal wealth and income for segments of the society, as opposed to the society as a whole, is not on the agenda. Audiences may hear about how their country is faring economically with little insight into their own financial realities."**

# Despite US wealth gap, domestic poverty invisible

Coverage volume and tone on poverty,  
US TV, 2004 - 2011



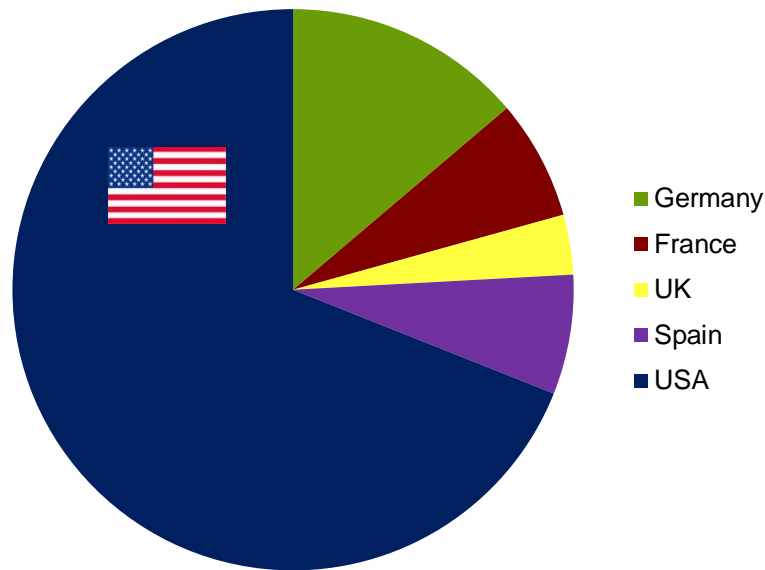
Coverage volume and tone for wealth  
US TV, 2004 - 2011



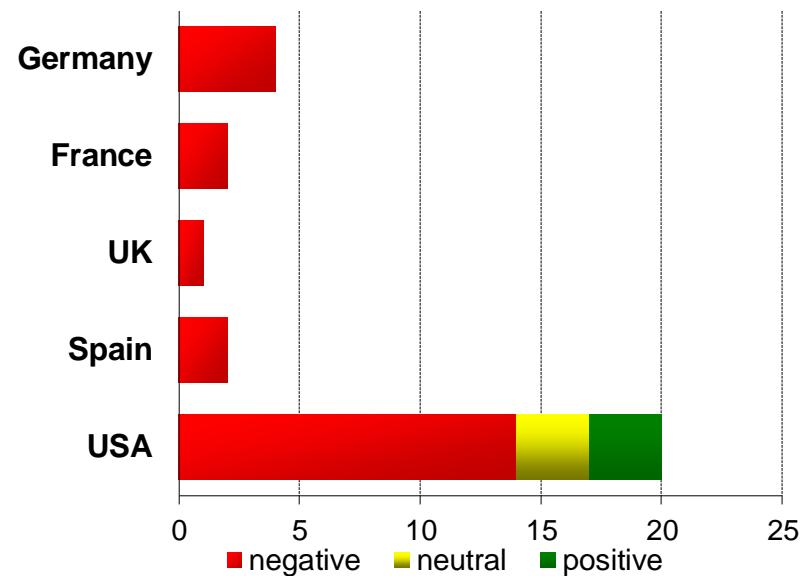
Recent studies show that the bottom 50% of US households possess only 2.5% of US personal wealth, yet domestic poverty is not on the US media agenda. While personal wealth receives slightly more coverage, discussion of income disparity is essentially absent from the television agenda.

## The middle class is also difficult to find

Share of coverage in international TV media  
by nation on the middle class, 2010



Coverage volume and tone in international TV media  
by nation on the middle class, 2010



Of the five countries that broadcast reports on their nation's middle class, 68% of those reports were issued on US television. But it didn't matter where the coverage occurred; tone was strongly negative, and low volumes mirrored pundit speculation on the group's impending disappearance.