Climate Change in the UK media: from questioning science to questioning solutions

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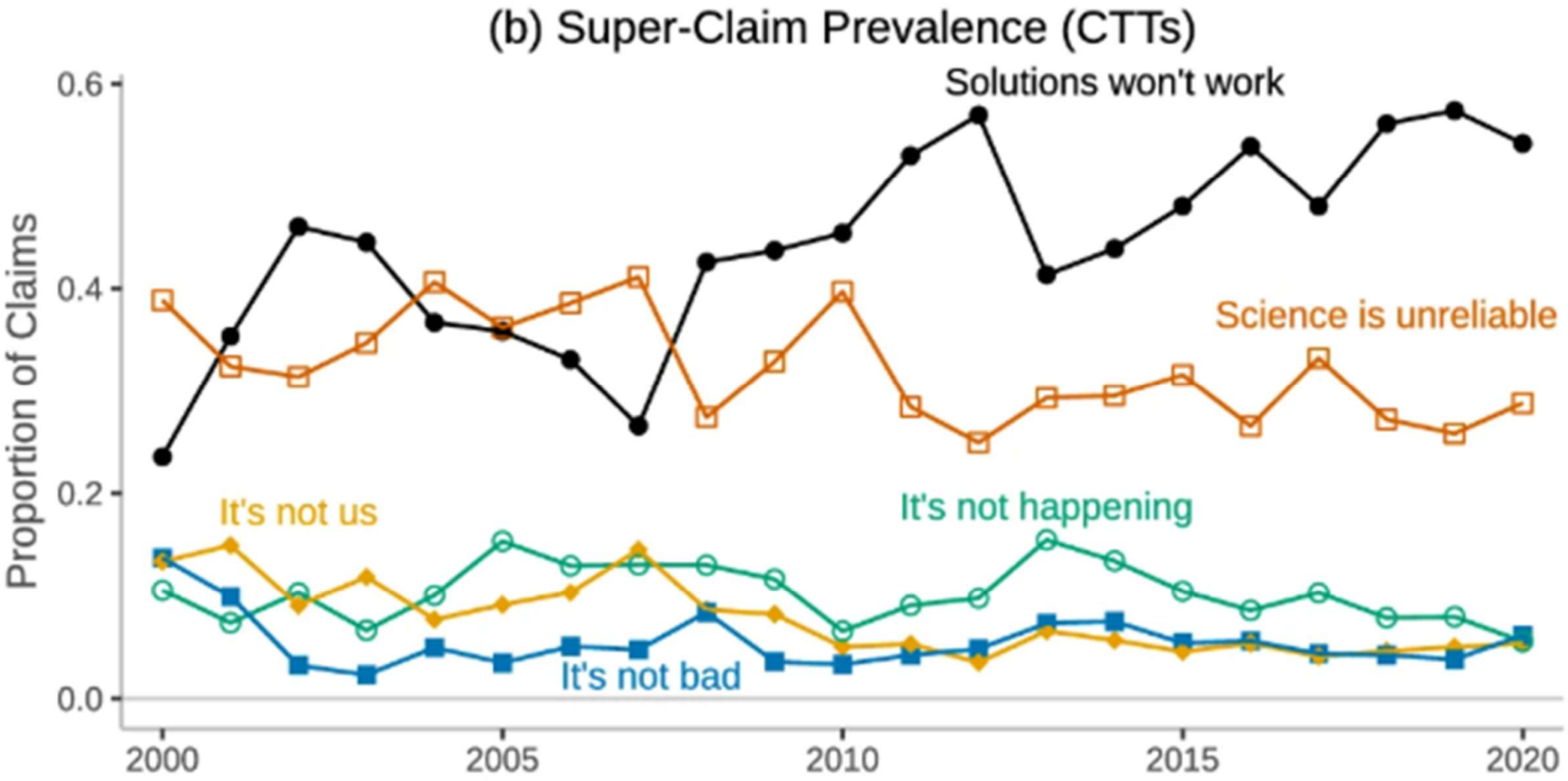
Four examples of recent research

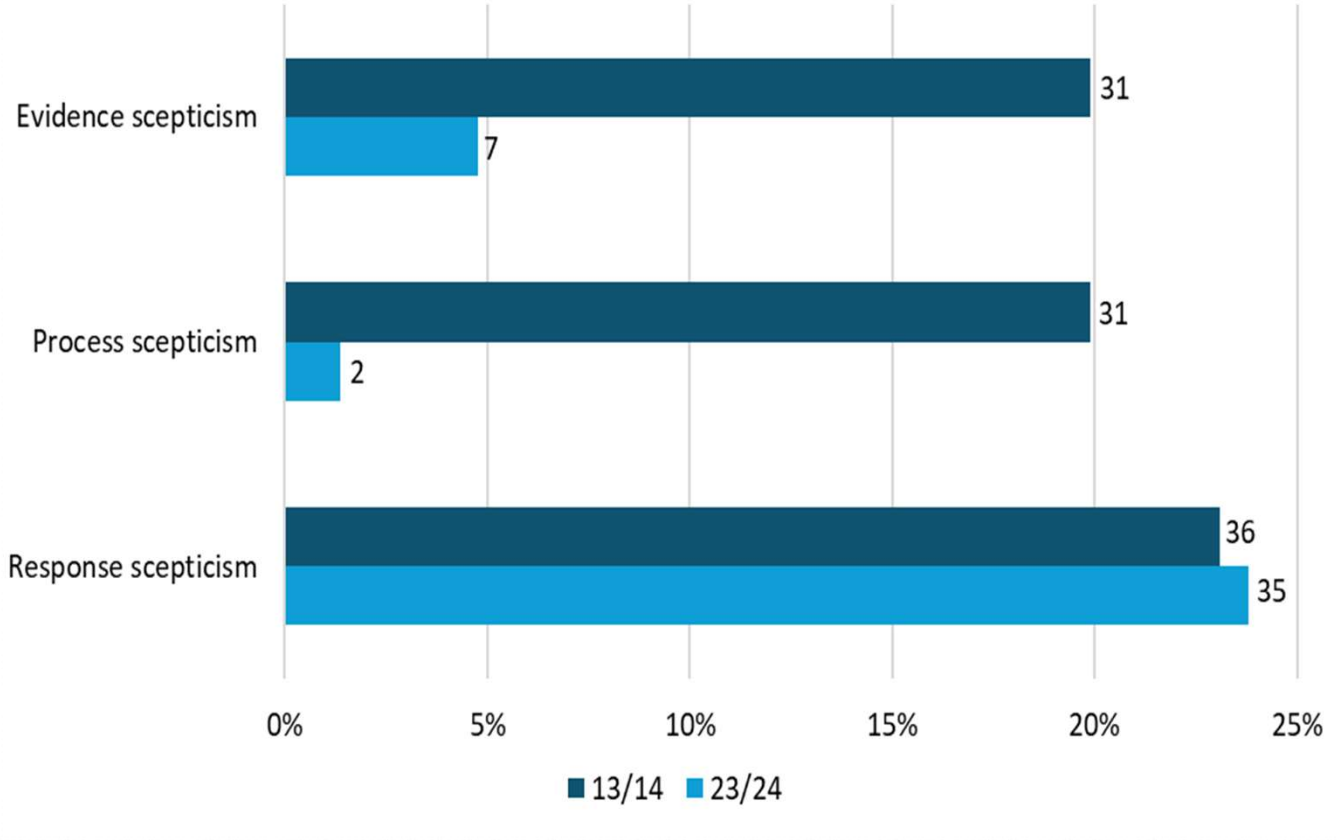
1. A Decade of Difference: UK newspaper coverage of climate change in opinion pieces and editorials, 2013/4 to 2023/4
2. Questioning Net Zero: A case study of the UK's national press coverage in 2023
3. Releasing the handbrake: Unpacking misinformation on Electric Vehicles in UK print media (in 2024)
4. Net Zero and climate change in the UK media, 2018-2024



Source: Coan, T. G., Boussalis, C., Cook, J. & Nanko, M. O. Computer-assisted classification of contrarian claims about climate change. *Sci. Rep.* **11**(1), 1–12; https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01714-4 (2021).

1. A comparison of opinion pieces/editorials on climate between 2013/4 and 2023/4 in the UK media

Proportion of commentaries containing each climate scepticism type in the 2013/14 and 2023/24 sample periods

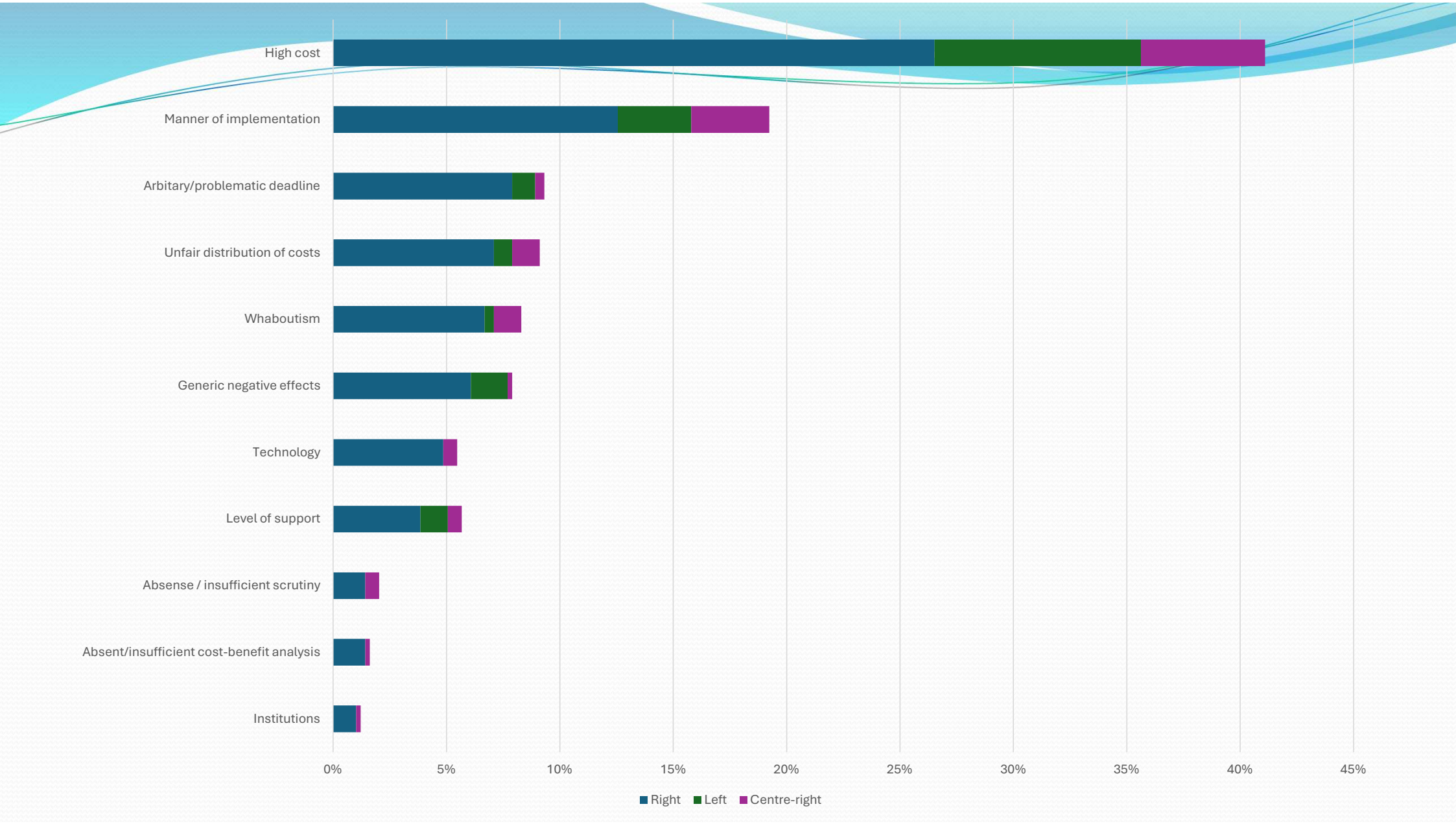


Scepticism in the media in 2013/4

- Questioning the warming trend
- Questioning the IPCC
- Questioning the reliability of wind farms

2. Questioning Net Zero: A case study of the UK's national press coverage in 2023

- Nine major nationwide UK newspapers' coverage of the Net Zero policy in a four-month period from 20 July to 19 November 2023
- Focus on patterns of inaccurate and misleading statements
- Method: manual content analysis using code book with 50+ variables, not computational methods
- Sample size (494 articles, full sample 4,000+) , only those with Net Zero in the headline


High cost
Manner of implementation
Arbitary/problematic deadline
Unfair distribution of costs
Whaboutism
Generic negative effects
Technology
Level of support
Absense / insufficient scrutiny
Absent/insufficient cost-benefit analysis
Institutions
0%
5%
10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%
40%
45%
Right
Left
Centre-right

Inaccurate versus misleading

Inaccurate – information that is factually untrue

Misleading –

a) selective quoting of only parts of a report (e.g. only reporting the costs but not the benefits of action);

b) the failure to report other relevant reports on the same subject (e.g. only reporting those reports which show the high cost of action, without mentioning other reports);

c) the absence of other points of view or data points of relevance (e.g. no mention of the costs of inaction) to give a more complete picture of an issue;

d) the failure to give the relevant background to a report (e.g. who funded it) or to a quote (the affiliation of the person quoted).

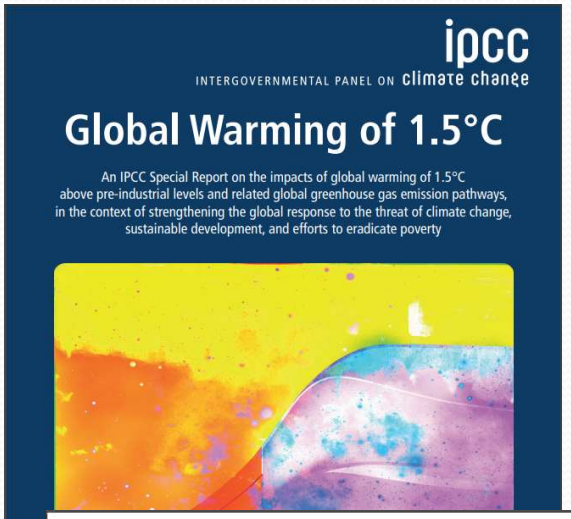
Example of inaccurate statement

"By mandating net zero *by an arbitrary date*, by embracing bans and restrictions, by lavishing the green industry with subsidies, they are engaging in economic and societal destruction on an extraordinary scale."

The UK should set and vigorously pursue an ambitious target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) to 'net-zero' by 2050, ending the UK's contribution to global warming within 30 years.

Reflecting their respective circumstances, Scotland should set a net-zero GHG target for 2045 and Wales should target a 95% reduction by 2050 relative to 1990.

A net-zero GHG target for 2050 will deliver on the commitment that the UK made by signing the Paris Agreement. It is achievable with known technologies, alongside improvements in people's lives, and within the expected economic cost that Parliament accepted when it legislated the existing 2050 target for an 80% reduction from 1990.



Summary for Policymakers

SPM

C. Emission Pathways and System Transitions Consistent with 1.5°C Global Warming

C.1 In model pathways with no or limited overshoot of 1.5°C, global net anthropogenic CO_2 emissions decline by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 (40–60% interquartile range), reaching net zero around 2050 (2045–2055 interquartile range). For limiting global warming to below 2°C[11] CO_2 emissions are projected to decline by about 25% by 2030 in most pathways (10–30% interquartile range) and reach net zero around 2070 (2065–2080 interquartile range). Non-CO_2 emissions in pathways that limit global warming to 1.5°C show deep reductions that are similar to those in pathways limiting warming to 2°C. (*high confidence*) (Figure SPM.3a) (2.1, 2.3, Table 2.4)

Second example of inaccurate statement

"Where is the cost-benefit analysis of net zero by 2050?"

Net Zero
The UK's contribution to

- **Overall costs are manageable but must be fairly distributed.**
  - There have been rapid cost reductions during mass deployment for key technologies (e.g. offshore wind and batteries for electric vehicles). As a result, we now expect that a net-zero GHG target can be met at an annual resource cost of up to **1-2% of GDP** to 2050, the same cost as the previous expectation for an 80% reduction from 1990.

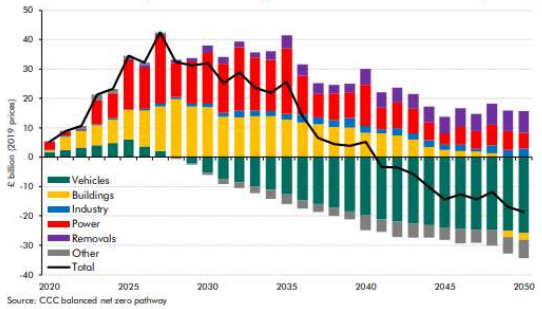
Benefits

Set against the costs, there will be significant benefits, including avoided costs:

- **Improved quality of life**:
  - Benefits to human health (and savings to the NHS) from better air quality, less noise, more active travel and a shift to healthier diets.
  - Improved air and water quality, enhanced biodiversity, increased resilience to climate change, and recreational benefits from changes to land use.
  - Monetising benefits is not straightforward. However, estimates using HM Treasury's *Green Book* guidance[8] suggest that these would partially or possibly even fully offset the resource costs we have estimated (i.e. up to 1-2% of GDP in 2050).
- **Lower risks from climate change** (Box 5). These include direct benefits (e.g. lower risk of flooding in the UK) and indirect benefits (e.g. reduced exposure to rising food prices and disaster-induced migration and conflict). We have not attempted to monetise these benefits.

Office for **Budget Responsibility**

Chart 3.12: Net cost by sector of reaching net zero in the CCC's balanced pathway



Source: CCC balanced net zero pathway

Fiscal risks report

July 2021

3.54 In the balanced pathway, the CCC estimates the total net cost of abatement across all sectors of the economy between 2020 to 2050 at £321 billion – with £1,312 billion of investment costs mostly offset by £991 billion of net operating savings. These figures reflect the whole economy cost of the transition, so exclude transfers between the private and public sectors (such as fuel duties paid or subsidies received). We discuss the proportion of the costs and savings that might be borne by the public sector in the next section.

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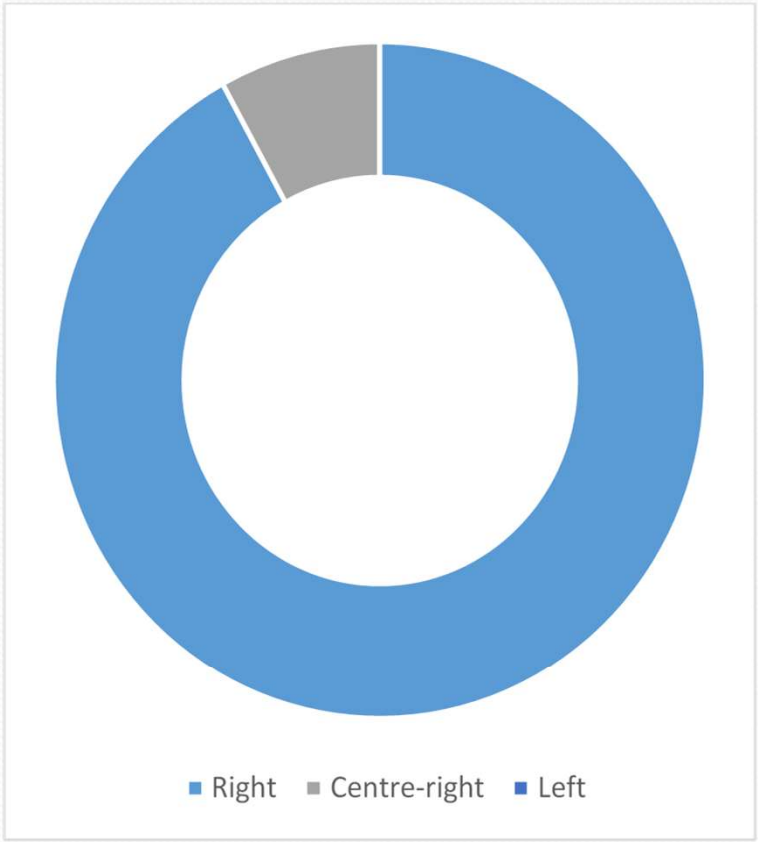
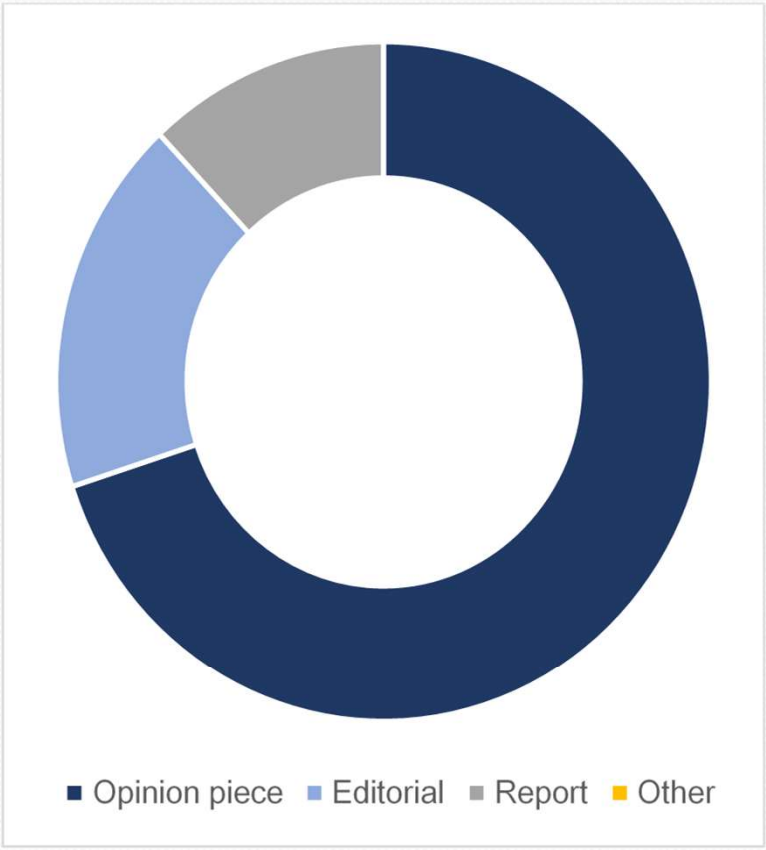
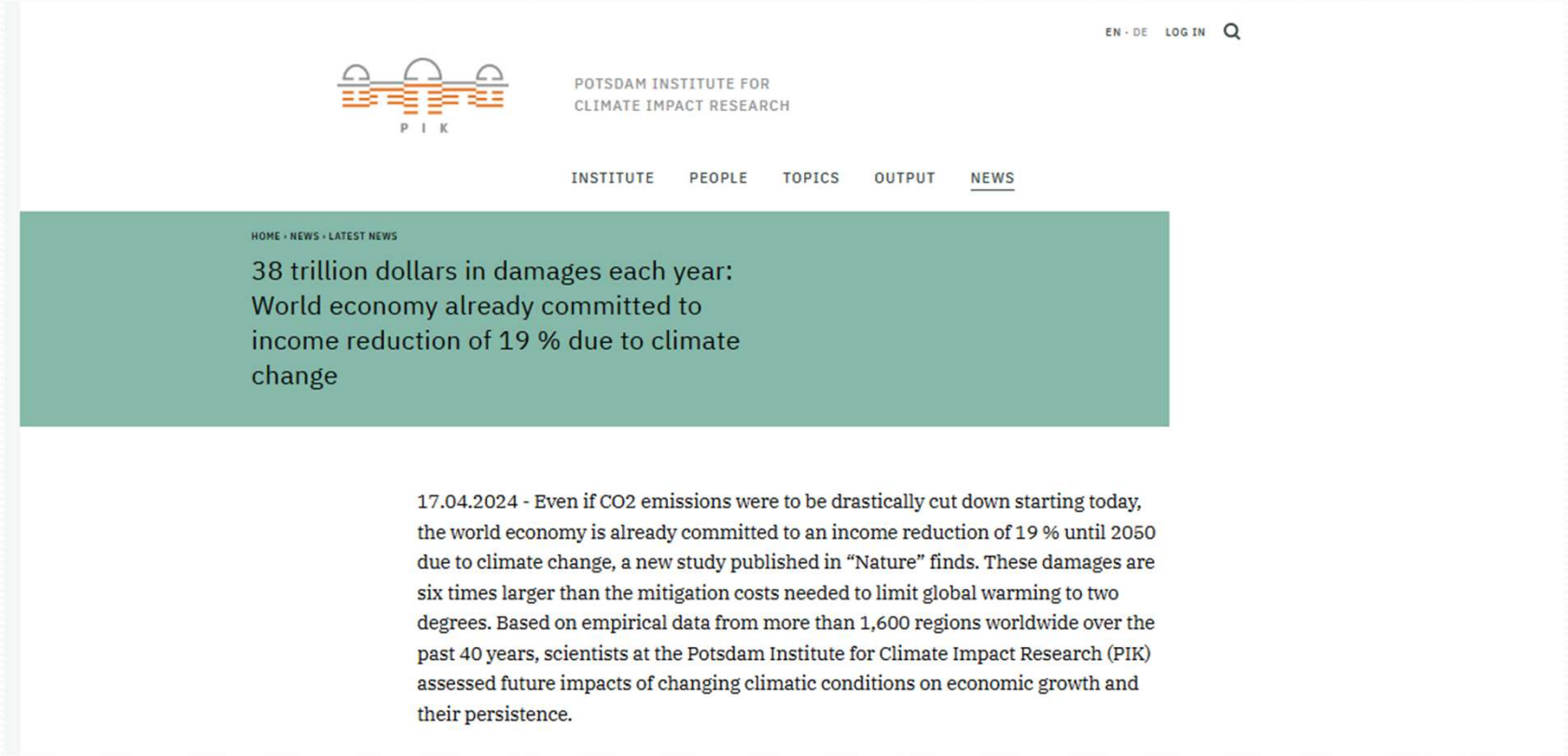
Figure 5.7 (a,b): Distribution of articles which contain at least three misleading statements by political leaning (a) and genre (b)





Costs of inaction (global)



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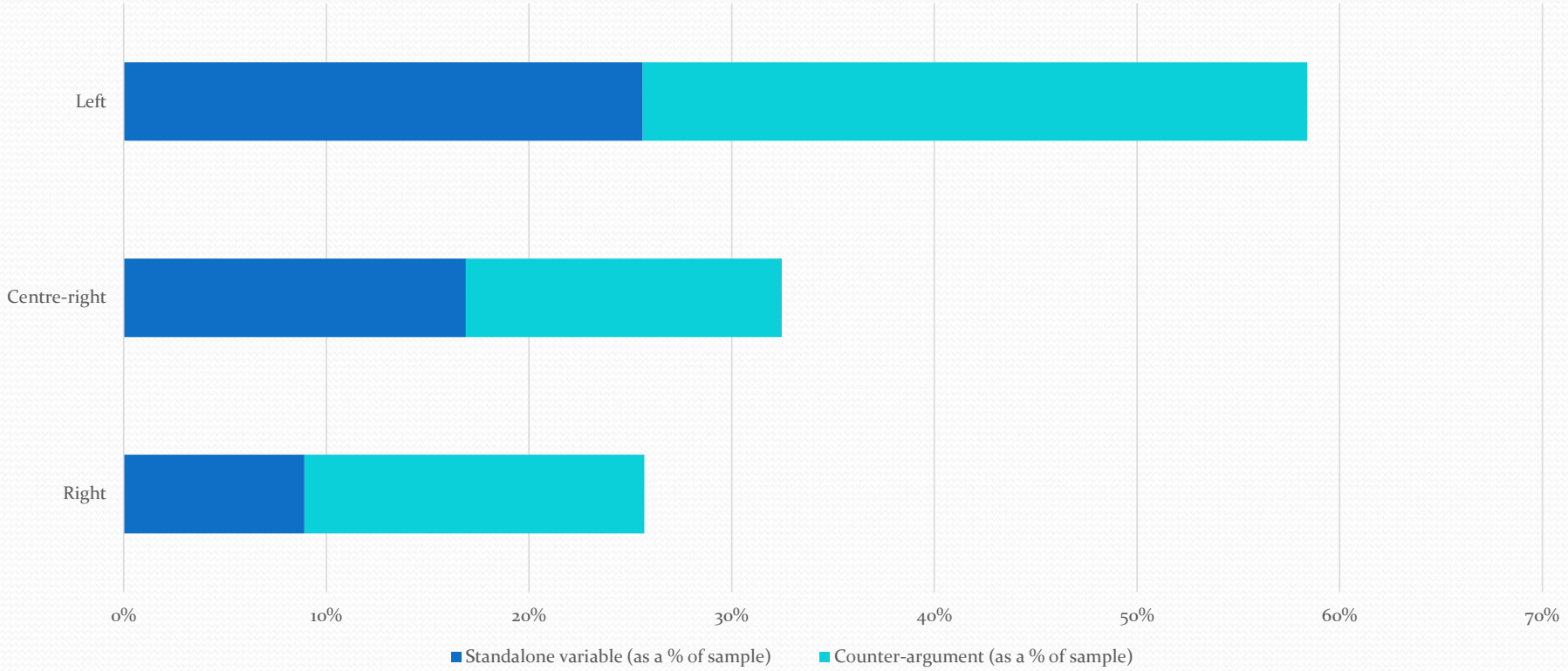
38 trillion dollars in damages each year: World economy already committed to income reduction of 19 % due to climate change

17.04.2024 - Even if CO2 emissions were to be drastically cut down starting today, the world economy is already committed to an income reduction of 19 % until 2050 due to climate change, a new study published in “Nature” finds. These damages are six times larger than the mitigation costs needed to limit global warming to two degrees. Based on empirical data from more than 1,600 regions worldwide over the past 40 years, scientists at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) assessed future impacts of changing climatic conditions on economic growth and their persistence.

Costs of inaction (UK)

- **The costs of action may seem high, but the cost of inaction is much higher**:
- the costs of achieving Net Zero are highly uncertain but the costs of inaction would be far greater (NAO, 2020);
- the costs of failing to get climate change under control would be much larger than those of bringing emissions down to Net Zero (OBR, 2023);
- accepting this cost is preferable to inaction given the range of risks from unchecked climate change globally and in the UK, both directly and indirectly (CCC, 2019).

Costs of inaction



3. Releasing the handbrake: Unpacking misinformation on Electric Vehicles in UK print media (in 2024)

- **Misinformation regarding EVs is widespread in the UK print media:** 25% of our sample contained at least one misleading statement. Every media outlet contained misleading statements.

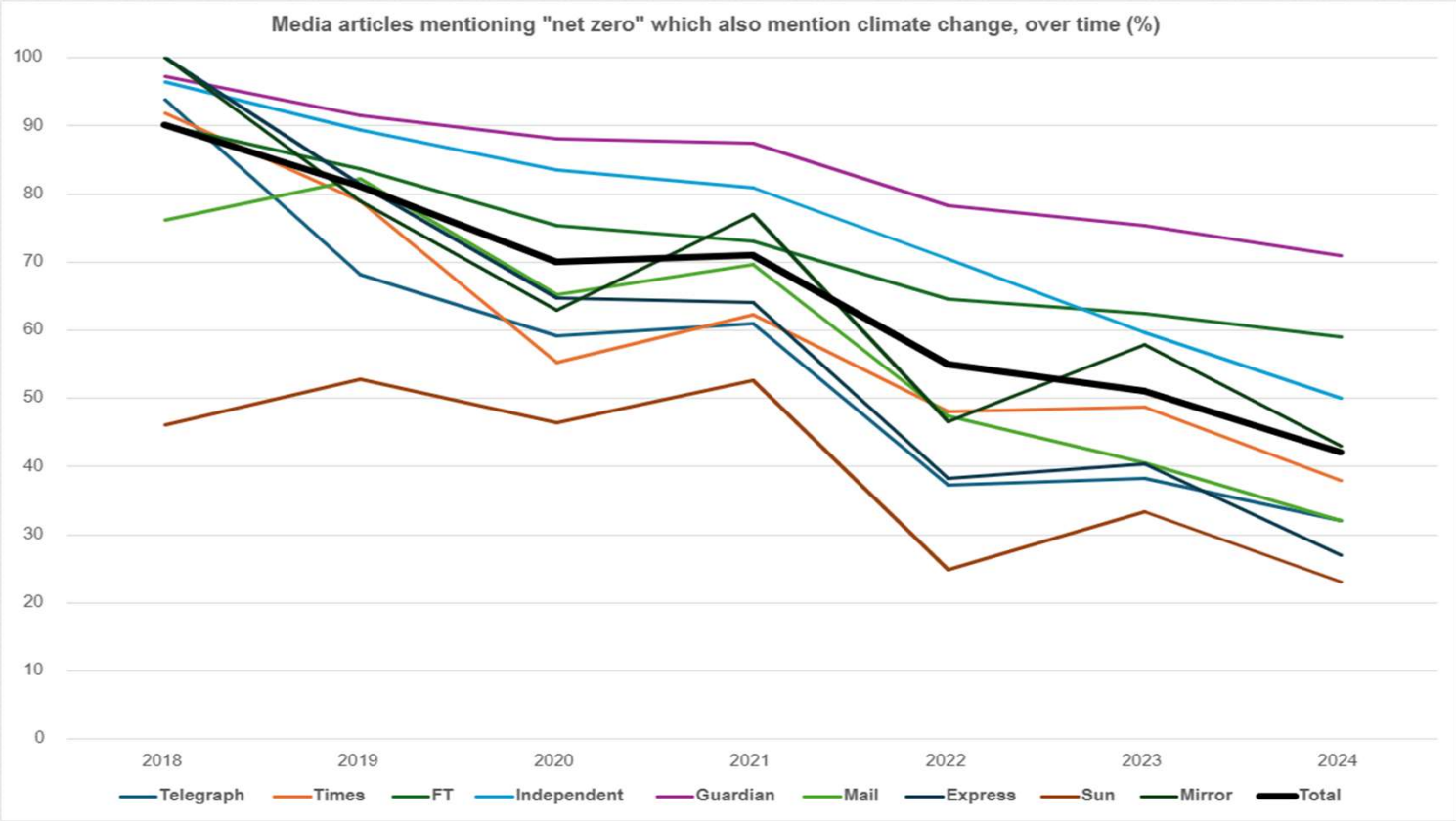
- **Editorials and opinion pieces most likely to contain misinformation about Evs**

- **Most common misleading narratives found in EV articles were around:**
  1. Current status of the EV market (13.2%)
     - i.e. demand is falling
  2. Availability of EV charging points (9.6%)
     - i.e. there aren't enough/any
  3. The cost of EVs (7.8%)
     - i.e. they're too expensive to buy/run

The impact of misinformation

- **YouGov EV knowledge test – most non-EV drivers have a poor understanding of the realities of EVs and EV ownership**
  - Over half (57%) of petrol car drives got 2 or less out of 10
  - 90% scored 5 or less
  - A quarter (23%) got 0 correct
- **Poor EV knowledges affects purchasing decisions**
  - Those who scored 2 or less out of 10 are 11 times less likely to what their next car to be an EV than those who scored 8 or more out of 10

4. Net Zero and climate change in the UK media, 2018-2024



Conclusion

- If we want to support a thriving media ecosystem underpinning a healthy democracy, we need a more robust, less partisan debate on climate solutions
- Are readers or news consumers able to come to a reasonable and well-evidenced understanding of the arguments on such an important issue?

Thank you!

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