

Labour's love lost

The former media darling Tony Blair is losing ground with the BBC

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Along with Great Britain's continuous involvement in the Iraq War and the investigations around the suicide of the weapons expert David Kelly in 2003, Tony Blair's media image in the **BBC** prime time news has deteriorated. The current **Media Tenor** analysis shows the change in the British Prime Minister's media image in the years 2002 and 2005.

A comparison between **graph 1** and **graph 2** on this page clearly shows the image loss suffered by the British Government. In 2002, criticism of the Blair Administration was still restrained. Relationships to the US caused some domestic policy pressure, but the **BBC** news editors expressed relatively little doubts on Tony Blair's foreign policy strategy.

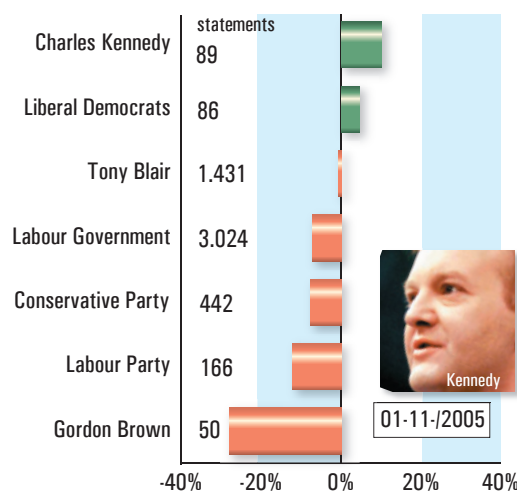
In 2005, the failing anti-terrorism laws as well as the conflict in Iraq were the main points of

The Conservative Party fared better than in 2002. In the 2005 election campaign, Blair's Conservative challenger Michael Howard focused on tax and immigration policies. The Liberals, too, were able to improve their media image with Charles Kennedy. They ran their campaign primarily on the highly contested war in Iraq. This is why they ended up as image winners in the **BBC** news.

2005: Loss of authority for Blair

In the 2005 election campaign, Tony Blair tried to emphasize his government's successes on the economy. The **BBC** news attributed more economic policy expertise to Tony Blair than to his challenger Michael Howard. However, the Labour Government lost ground on this issue compared to 2002. Its proposals on tax and budget policy were under stronger attack. **Graph 3** shows that Tony Blair lost support in all policy areas except for European politics. As to the lat-

Graph 1: Assessment of Tony Blair by comparison: 01-11/2002



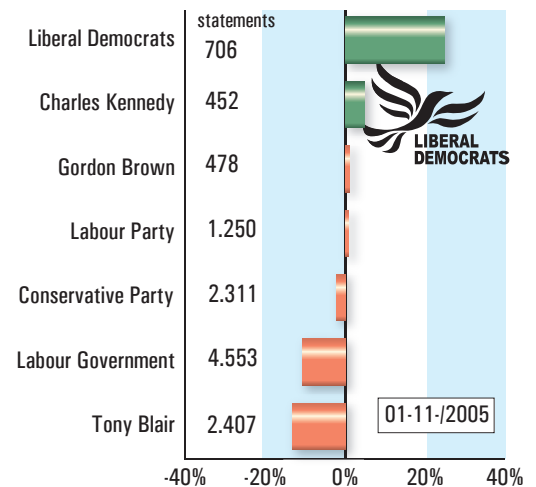
Difference between the shares of +/- valuations

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2002 - 11/30/2002

Basis: a total of 5,288 statements from/about the personated political actors

criticism of the Labour Government. The negative image of Tony Blair and his government did not rub off on the Labour Party, however. On the contrary: Polling data predicted a Labour victory and its concepts on educational policy were received positively.

Graph 2: Assessment of Tony Blair by comparison: 01-11/2005



Difference between the shares of +/- valuations

Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2005 - 11/30/2005

Basis: a total of 12,157 statements from/about the personated political actors

ter, the Prime Minister could always rely on the backing by the British media and the public, as long as he did not betray any national British interests.

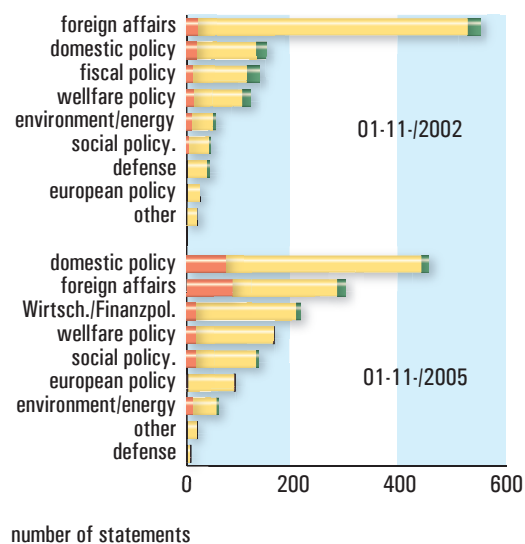
The discussion on the Iraq conflict made him lose most of his foreign policy clout and the new anti-terrorism laws dominated domestic policy headlines. Moreover, the dire condition of the British public healthcare service drew heavy criticism to his social policies.

After the death of David Kelly, Tony Blair faced calls for his resignation from his own ranks. At the elections for the House of Commons on May 5th, 2005, the Labour Party suffered considerable losses.

The **BBC** has also intensified its negative coverage of Tony Blair's expertise, personality and loss of credibility. **Graph 4** shows the extent to which party politics and personality issues played a role in the reporting on Tony Blair. In 2005, his personality came under increased at-

point in time, he cannot count on the coverage by the renowned **BBC** – at least so it seems to the observer across from the island. For now it does not look like the British Prime Minister will be able to win journalists over to the proposition of serving a fourth term. am

Graph 3: Presence/ assessment of Tony Blair by issues



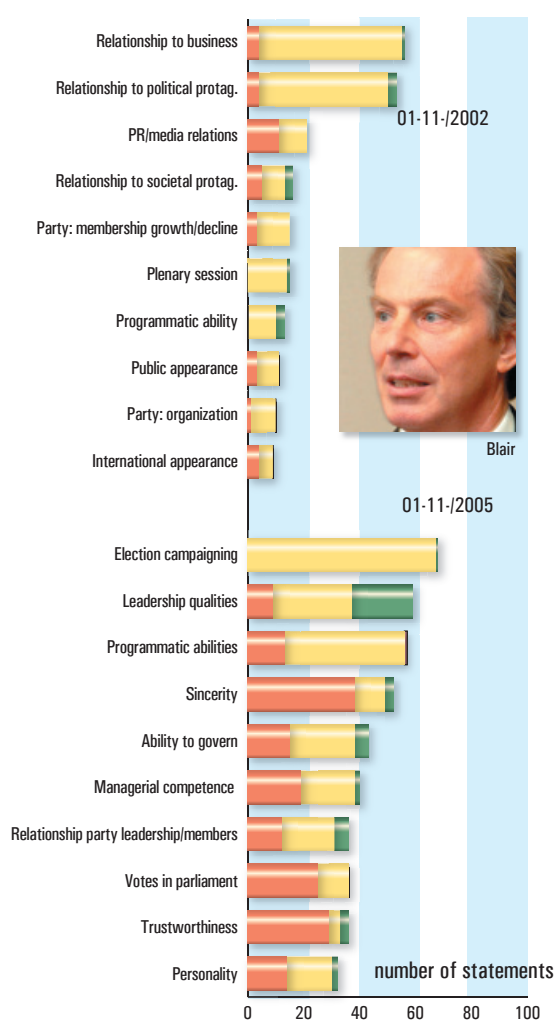
Source: Media Tenor
01-11/2002, 01-11/2005
Basis: a total of 2,581 statements from/about Tony Blair

tack. Aside from management, his sincerity and trustworthiness were also challenged. Critics raised more doubts about his planning and governing abilities. Aside from political opponents from the Conservative Party and the Liberals, the **BBC** journalists were among his chief critics throughout the year 2005.

Conclusion

On May 5th, 2005 – despite significant losses – Tony Blair won the elections for the House of Commons and was asked to form a government for the third time in a row. By taking a large share of the blame he was able to divert most of the criticism away from his party, in order to allow for another “historical” election victory. So far, the suggestion by some media that Blair had bought his party's victory with his own political demise has not come true. He now has to assert himself against growing resistance within his party, as well as doubts about his personality. The media savvy Prime Minister knows from experience that this also depends on media coverage. Yet the **Media Tenor** data shows that, at this

Graph 4: Presence/ assessment of Tony Blair by party politics/personality



Source: Media Tenor
01-11/2002, 01-11/2005
Basis: a total of 1,180 party political/personal statements from/about Tony Blair

Basis:

Media: BBC Six o'clock News, BBC Nine o'clock News

Timeline: 01/01/2002 – 11/30/2002 and

01/01/2005 - 11/30/2005

Analyse: A total of 20,203 statements from/about the British government/Tony Blair/british politicians (Gordon Brown, Michael Howard, Charles Kennedy etc.) parties (Labour Party, Liberals, Conservative Party etc.).

Statements are units of analysis. A statement consists of an object or protagonist, a topic and a source. If any of the three identifiers change, a new statement is recorded.