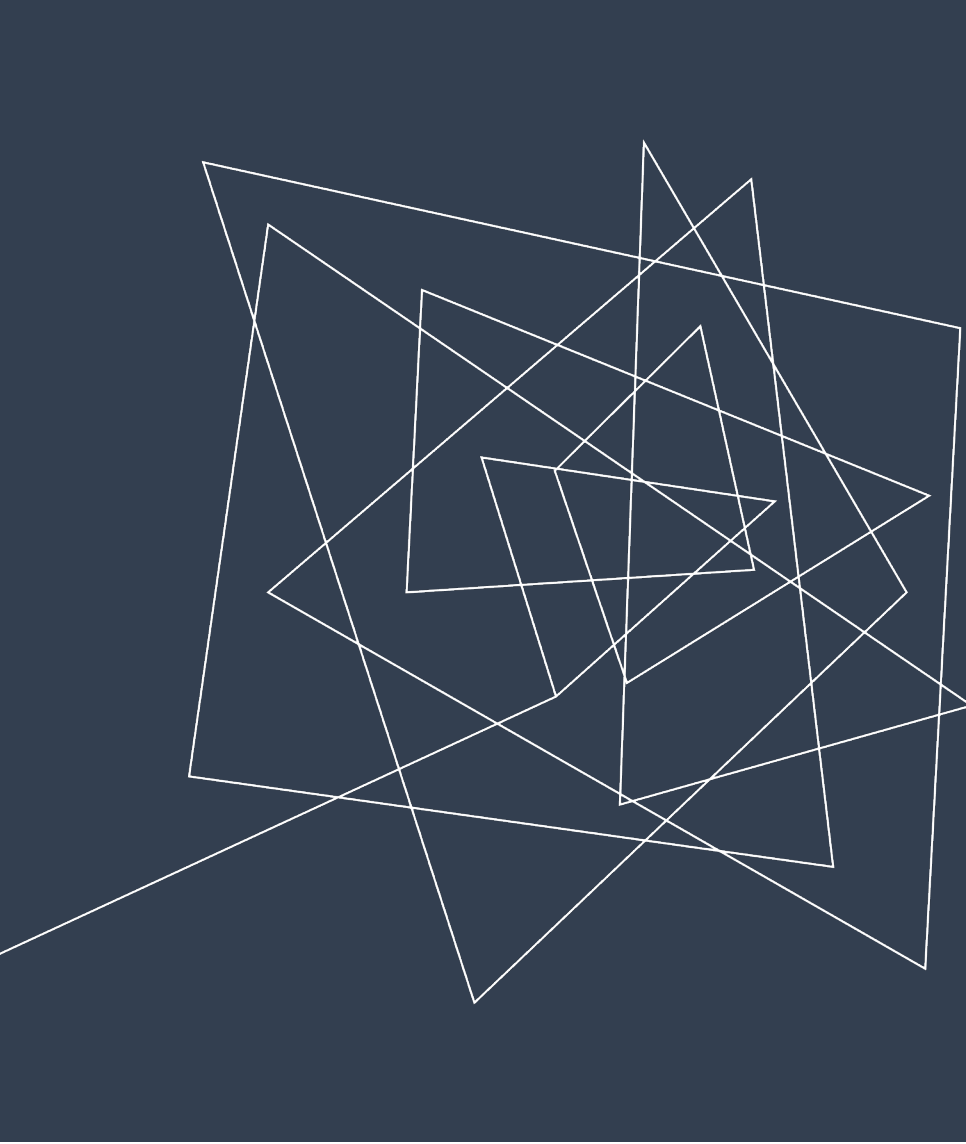


QUESTION DESIGN AND STANCE-TAKING IN *TERZAKE*

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INTRODUCTION

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- Aim** Examine if and how interviewers maintain objectivity, specifically **impartiality**, in context of interpretative journalism, in which neutralistic fact-reporting is supplemented with **critical evaluation** and **perspectivisation**
- Two interview topics, with different interviewer-interviewee interactions
- Government formation after 2019 elections: interviews w/ politicians
 - Outbreak of Covid pandemic: interviews w/ politicians and experts

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent do interviewers take a passive matter-of-fact approach, or an active interventionist one, to journalistic questioning in political interviews?

- i. What types of 'questions' (i.e. grammatical structures) do they use to elicit responses?
- ii. To what extent do they express stance when interacting with interviewee?
- iii. Does questioning style differ along these two parameters in different situational contexts (i.e. different interview topics, different interviewee roles)?



METHOD

DATA

- Political interviews in *Terzake*, Flemish daily current-affairs programme
- 307 ‘interviewer turns’
 - 150 from formation interviews, with politicians
 - 157 from Covid interviews, with politicians ($N = 74$) and experts ($N = 83$))

CODING SCHEMES

Two aspects

- ‘Question’ design: i.e. grammatical structure and function of probes
- Stance-taking, based on Clayman & Heritage’s (2002) ‘Question Analysis System’

CODING SCHEMES: QUESTION DESIGN

- Yes/no-questions: e.g. *Will there be lockdown?*
- Wh-questions e.g. *When can we expect a government?*
- Alternative questions e.g. *Do you want more regionalisation or more federalisation?*
- Statements e.g. *There's been a lot of criticism on the handling of the pandemic.*

CODING SCHEMES: QUESTION DESIGN

- *Yes/no*-questions

- Polar interrogatives: e.g. *Will there be a lockdown?*
- Declarative questions: e.g. *So there will be a lockdown?*
- Elliptic question: e.g. *A lockdown then?*

CODING SCHEMES: STANCE-TAKING

Clayman & Heritage (2002), Huls & Varwijk (2011)

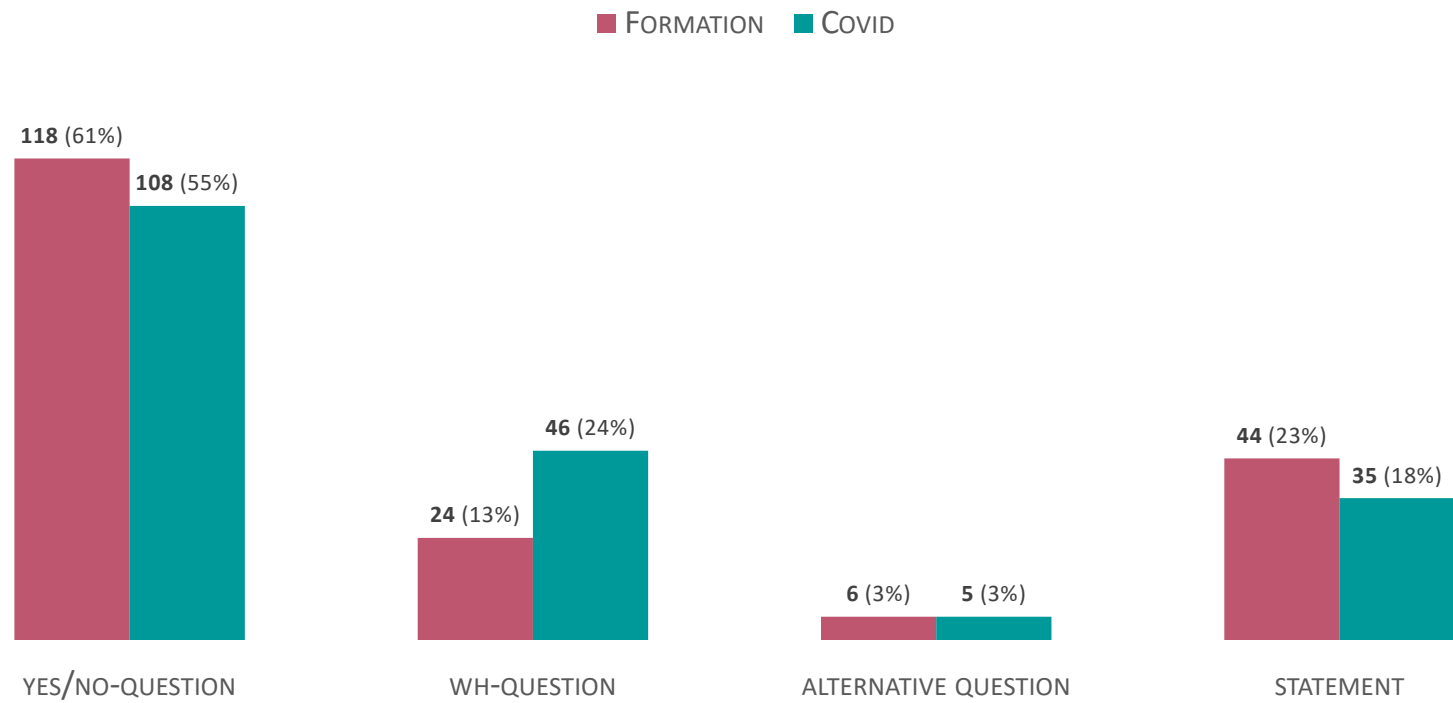
1. **Initiative:** constraining room for response (e.g. introduction to question, multiple questions)
2. **Directness:** formulating questions bluntly or cautiously (e.g. hedging)
3. **Assertiveness:** signalling expectation for particular response, i.e. suggestiveness
4. **Opposition:** confronting interviewee with alternative viewpoints / criticism
5. **Accountability:** holding interviewee (policy-maker) to account (i.e. neutral or accusatory)
6. **Persistence:** keeping to agenda interviewer wants to pursue (e.g. interruption, repetition of question, addressing that interviewee dodges question)



RESULTS

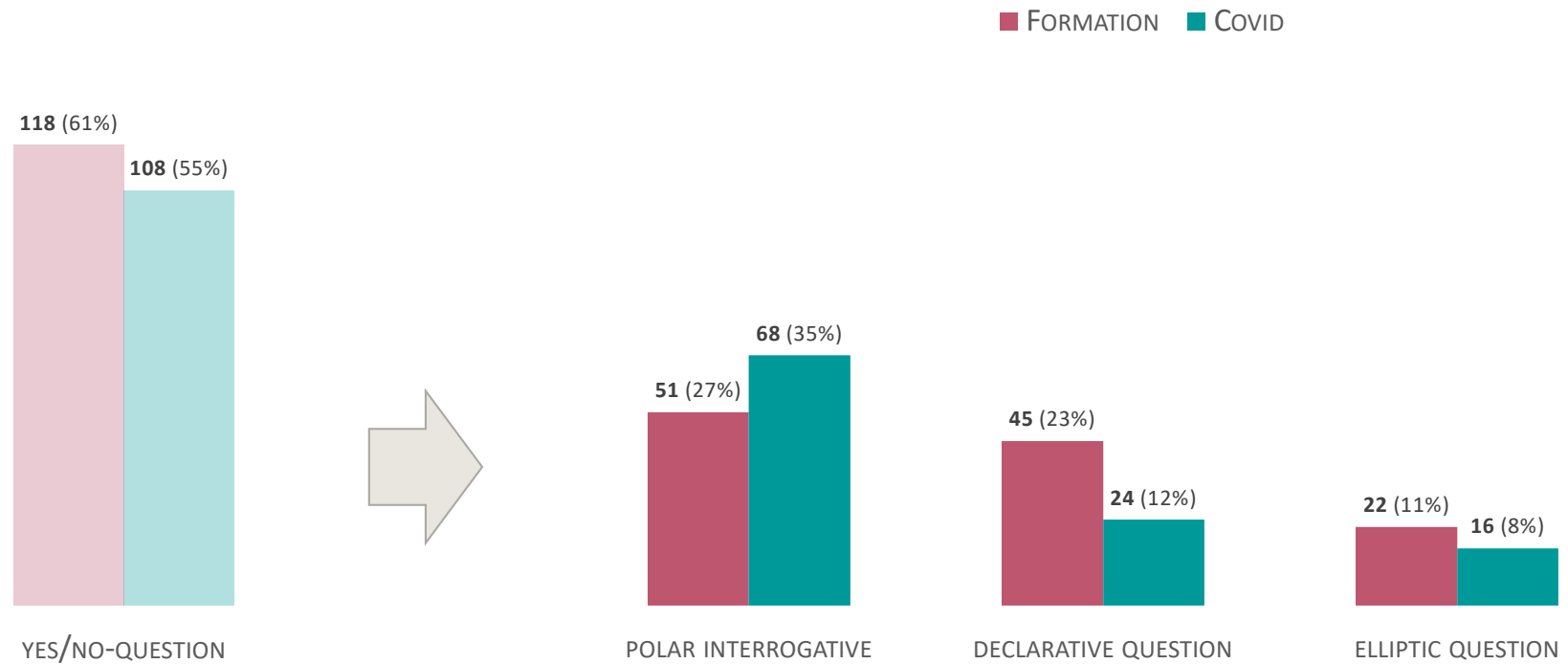
QUESTION DESIGN

QUESTION DESIGN



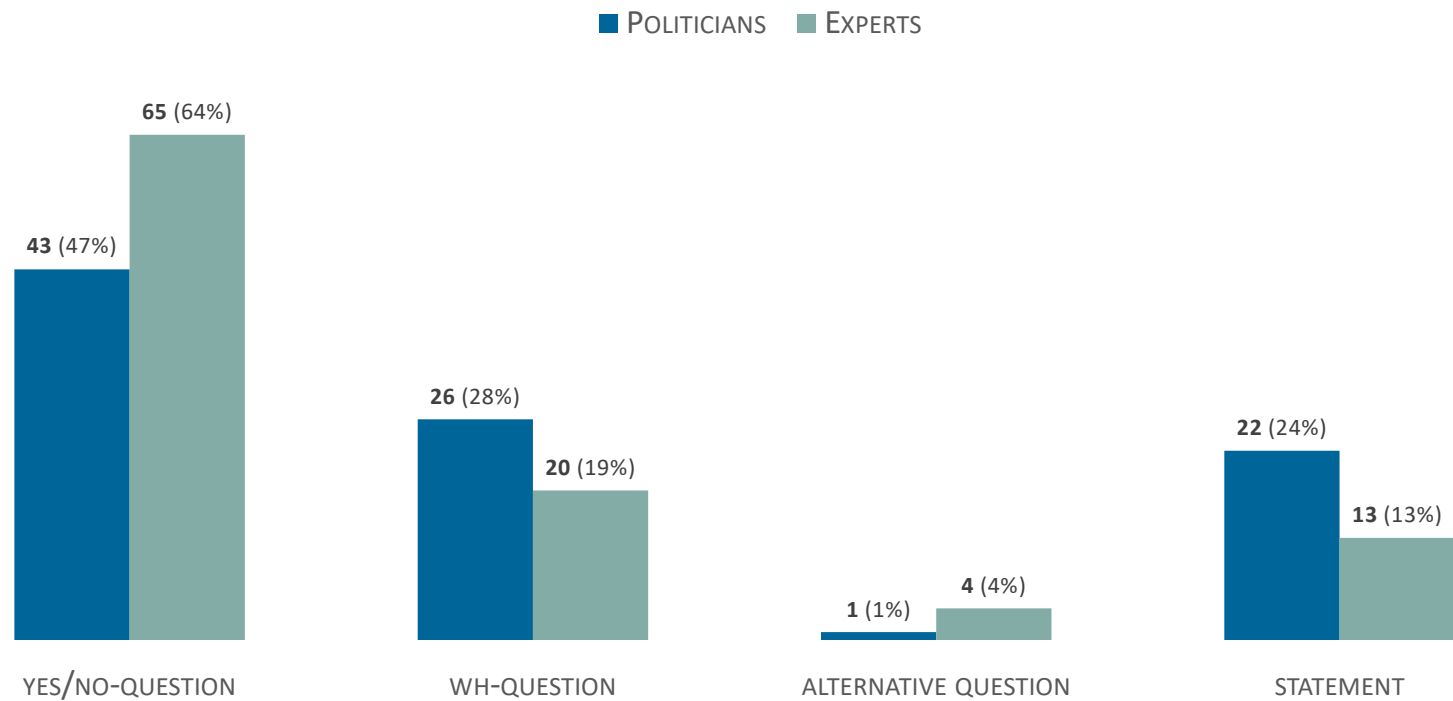
$\chi^2(3) = 8.4629, p = 0.03$; Cramer's V: 0.148

QUESTION DESIGN: *YES/NO*-QUESTIONS



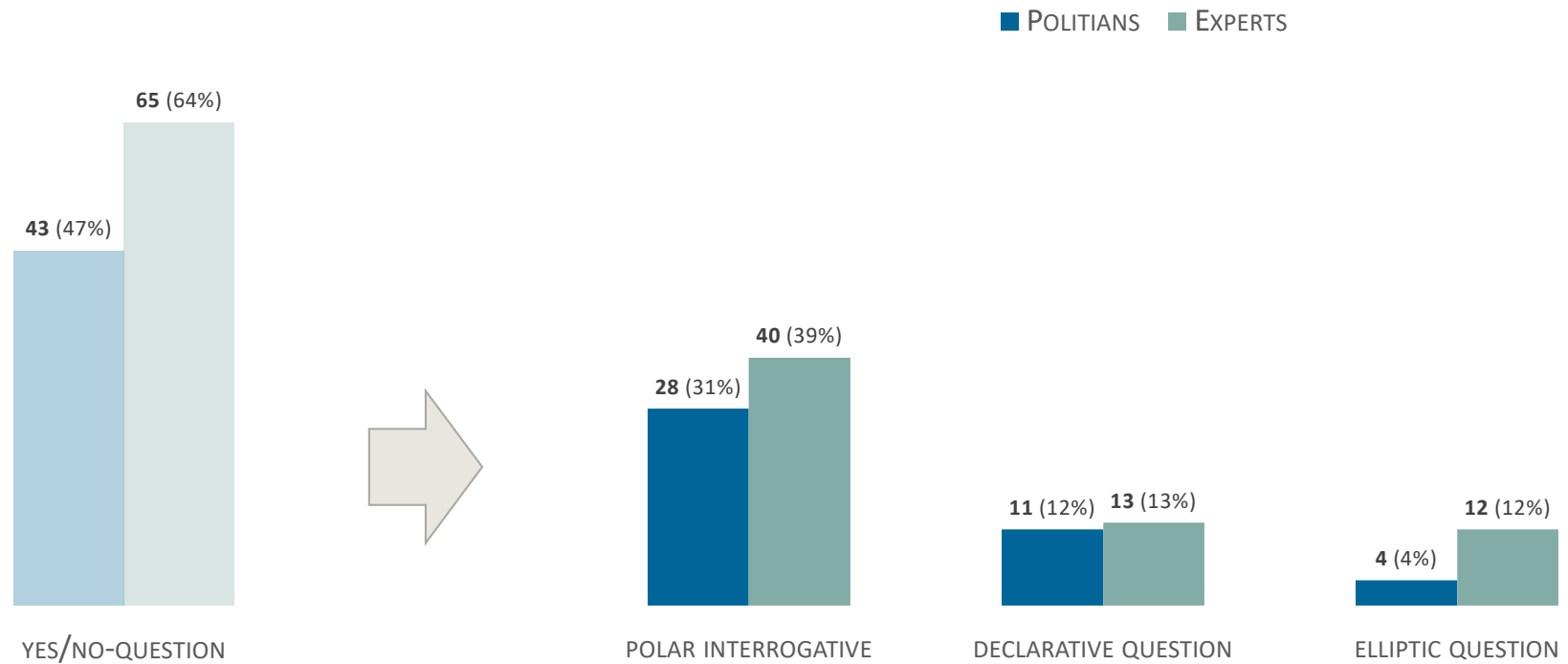
$\chi^2(2) = 9.3431, p = 0.009$; Cramer's V: 0.203

QUESTION DESIGN: COVID INTERVIEWS



$\chi^2(2) = 7.3292, p = 0.02561$; Cramer's V: 0.197

QUESTION DESIGN: *YES/NO*-QUESTIONS



($\chi^2(2) = 1.8809, p = 0.39$;

QUESTION DESIGN

Significant differences between (i) interview **topics** and (ii) **role** of interviewees (politician/expert)

- High incidence of statements (23%) and declarative questions (23%) in **formation** interviews
↔ in **Covid** interviews, *wh*-questions (24%) and polar interrogatives (35%) more frequent
- In Covid interviews, more statements directed at politicians (24%) than at experts (13%), and more *yes/no*-questions directed at experts (64%) than at politicians (47%)

STANCE-TAKING

STANCE-TAKING

- Initiative → no significant differences
- Directness → significant difference between formation and Covid interviews
- Assertiveness → no significant differences
- Opposition → significant difference between formation and Covid interviews
- Accountability → no significant differences
- Persistence → significant difference between formation and Covid interviews

INITIATIVE

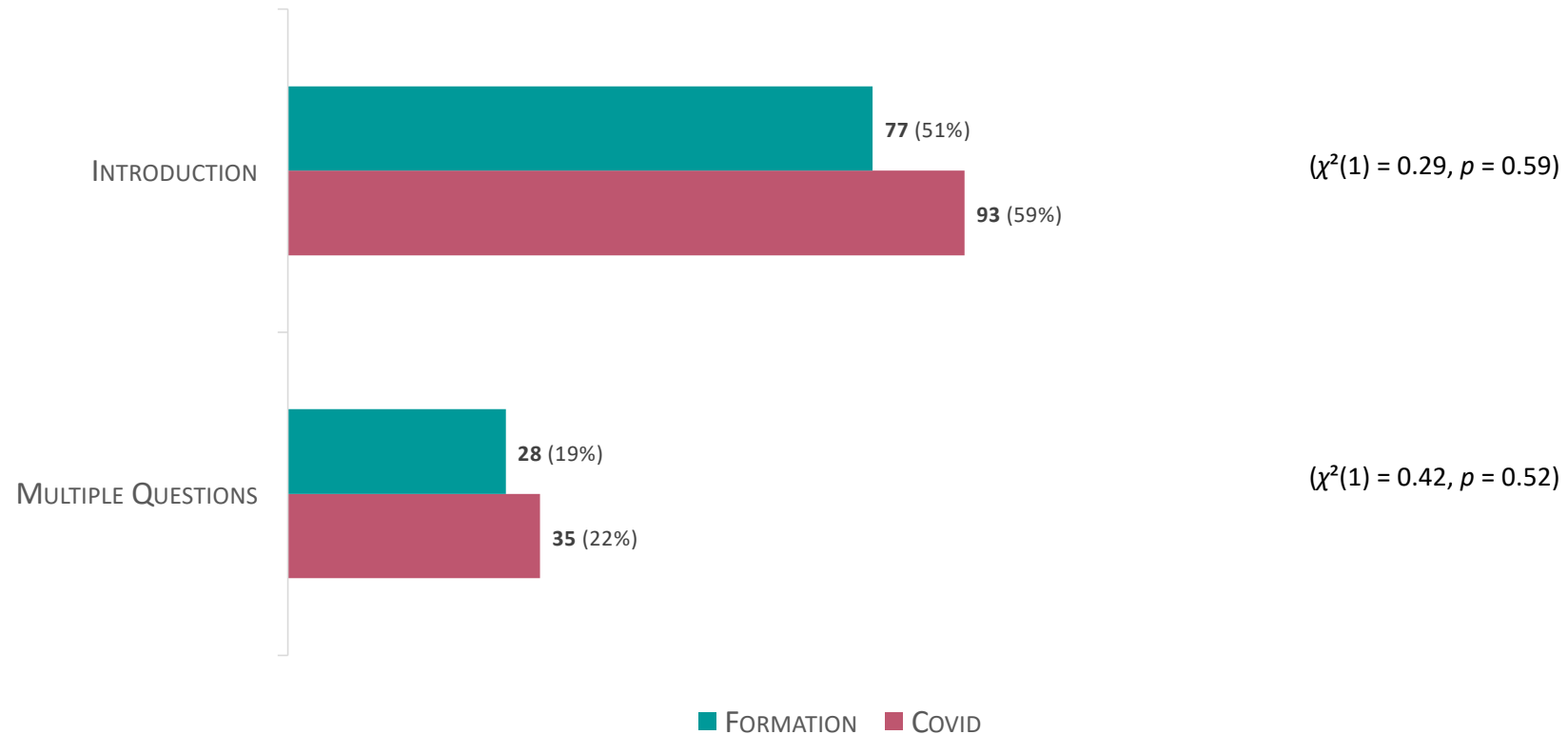
- **Introduction / motivation of question**

- (1) *OK, let's talk about that, about that tour de faiblesse, according to you [i.e. Bart De Wever], and about Paul Magnette. Koen Geens, very angry and indignant yesterday in De Zevende Dag, said: "we were, however, on the right track. We were close to something that could be a deal." Do you confirm that?*

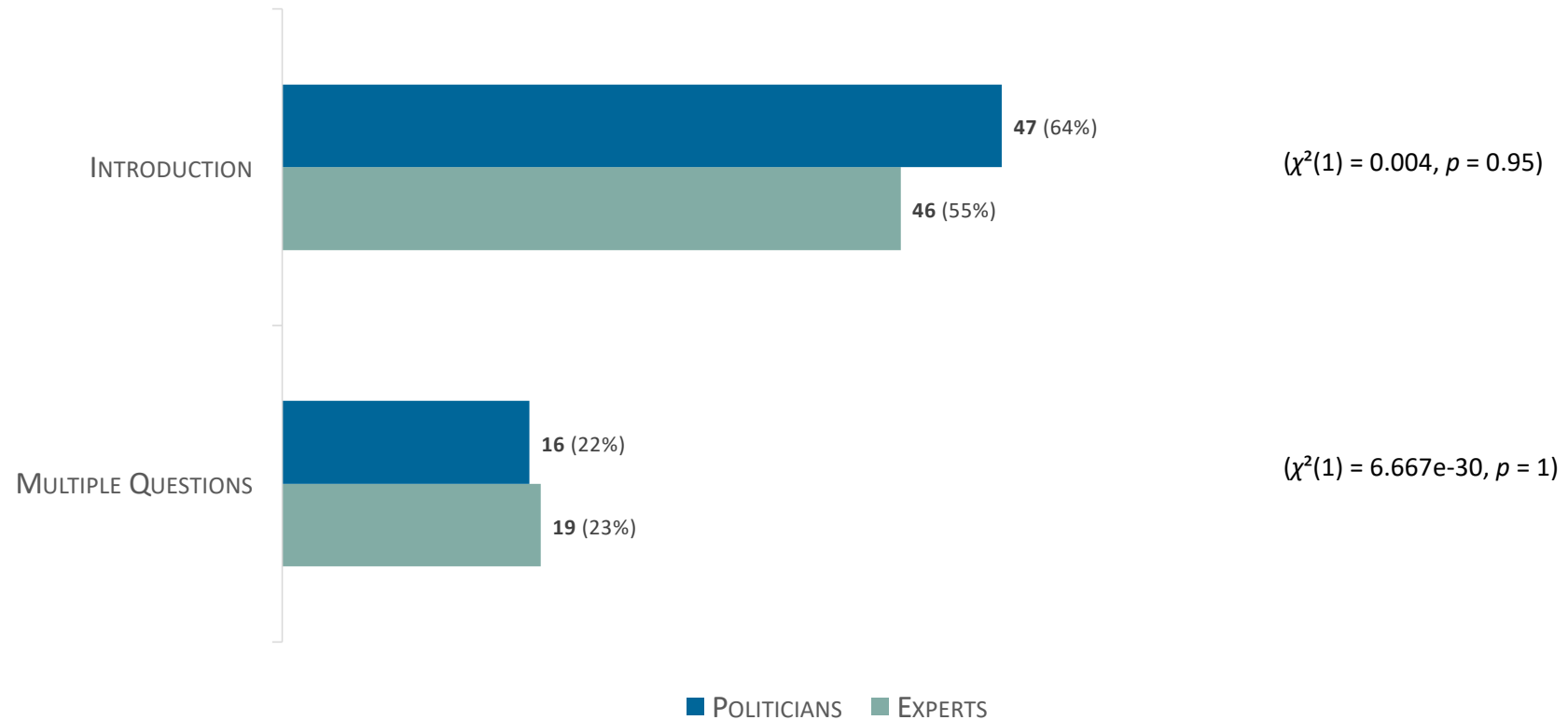
- **Multiple questions**

- (2) *What company supplied this lot [of defective masks]? Was it 'Life Solutions', which the government already accepted invoices from in the past?*

INITIATIVE



INITIATIVE: COVID INTERVIEWS



DIRECTNESS

- **Hedging**

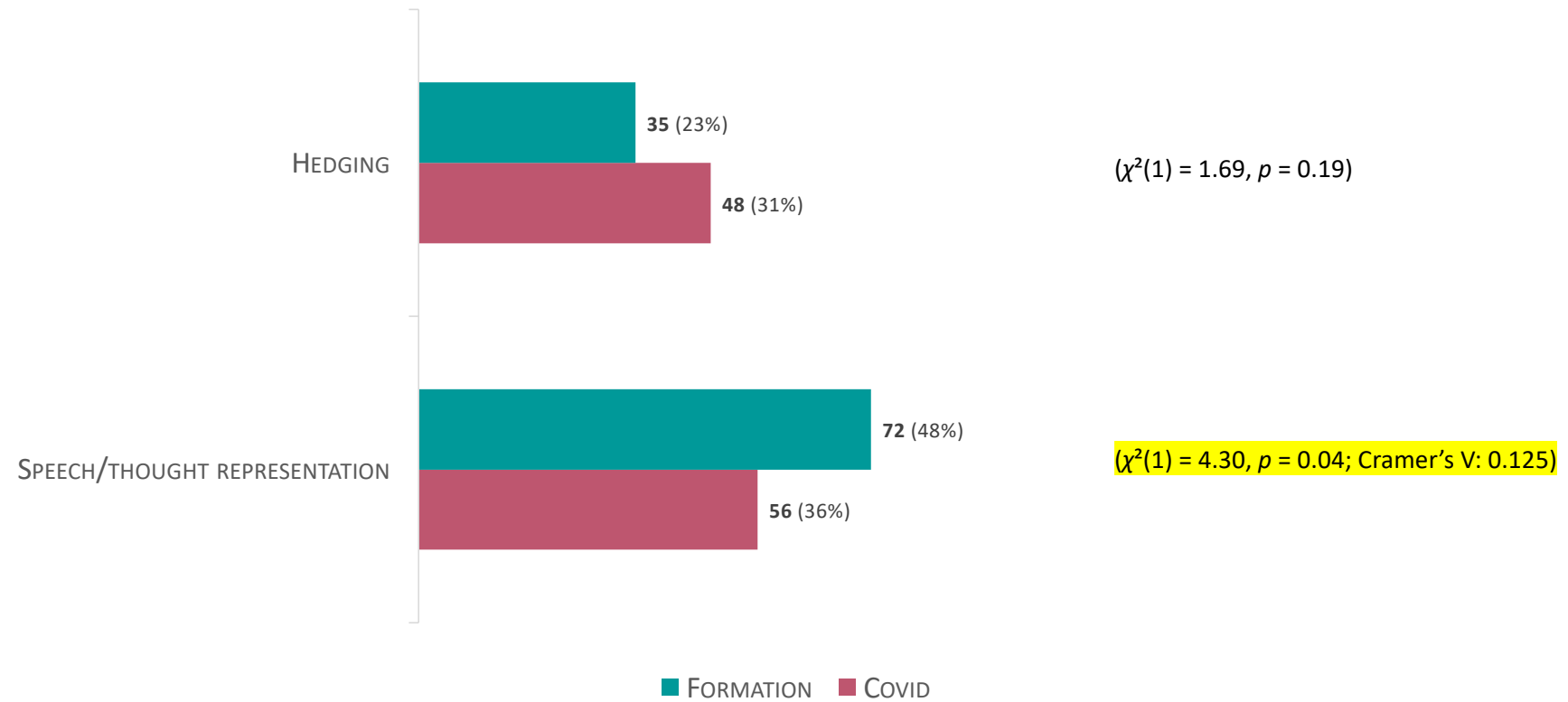
(3) *Shouldn't it, ideally, be generally accessible, such a test, and not just for hospitals and residential care homes?*

- **Speech/thought representation**

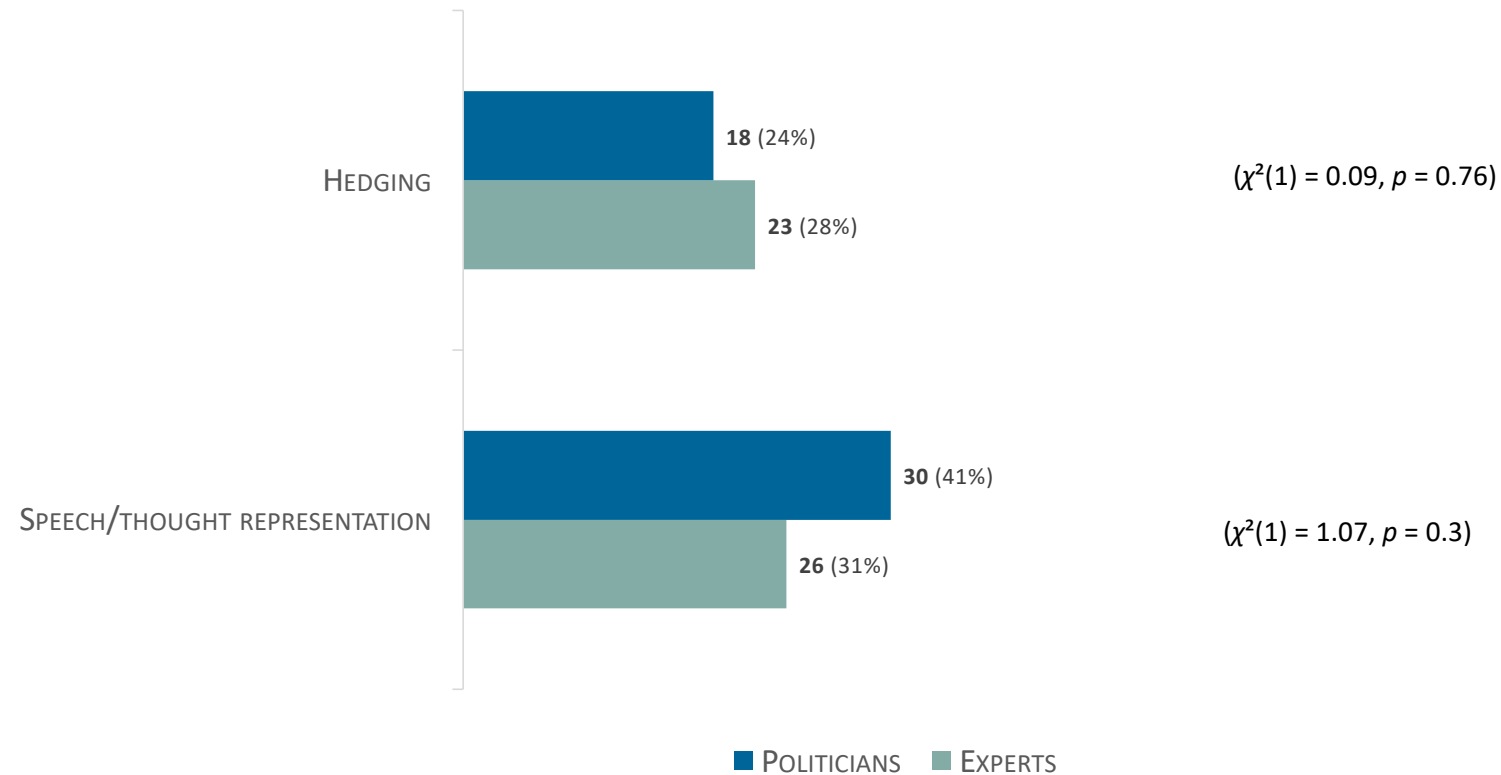
(4) *There's a lot of indignation, for starters on the other side of the language border. We also saw that in the report just now. Mrs Onkelinx, who we just saw, uses strong words: "shocked". We also heard the description "shivers when I think about it".*

(5) *And yet, people will have the impression: "we've lost an entire year actually."*

DIRECTNESS



DIRECTNESS: COVID INTERVIEWS



ASSERTIVENESS

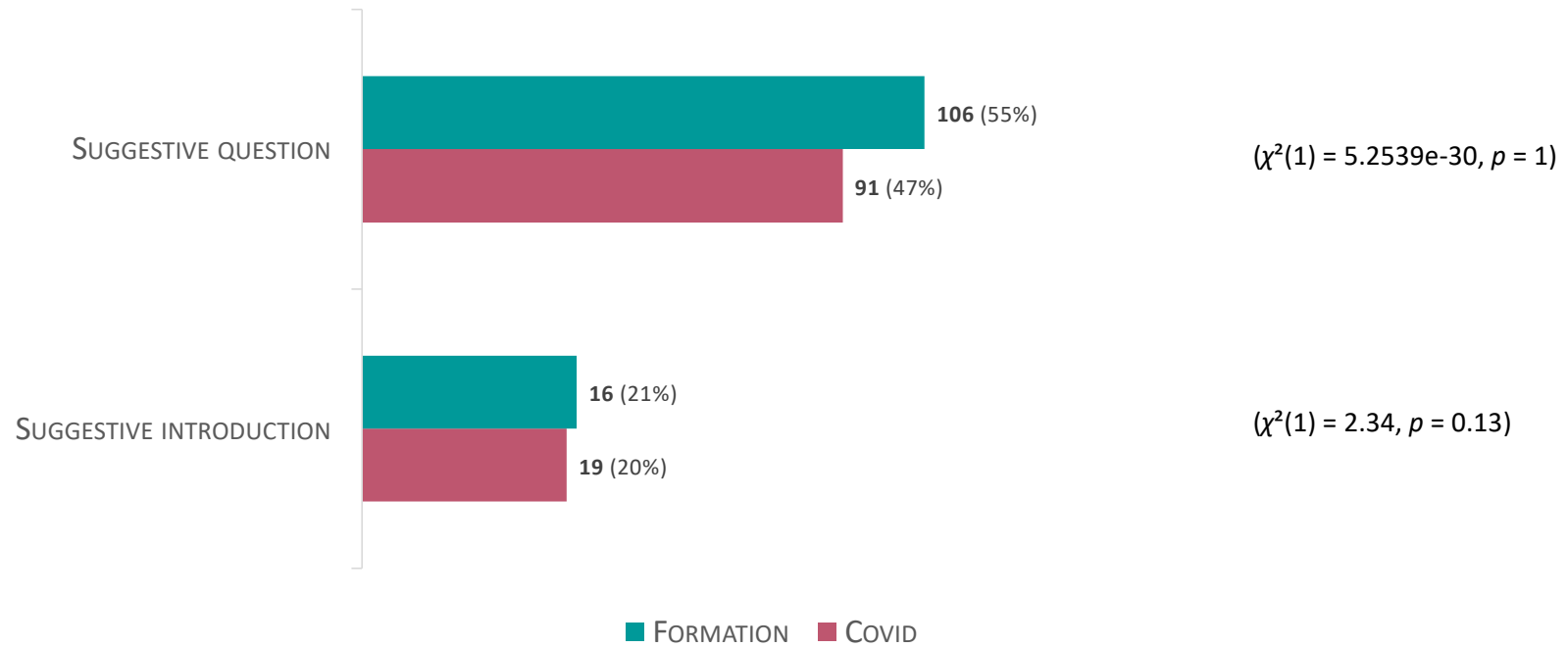
- **Suggestive question**

(6) *So as far as you're concerned, no new alliance, whatever the circumstances?*

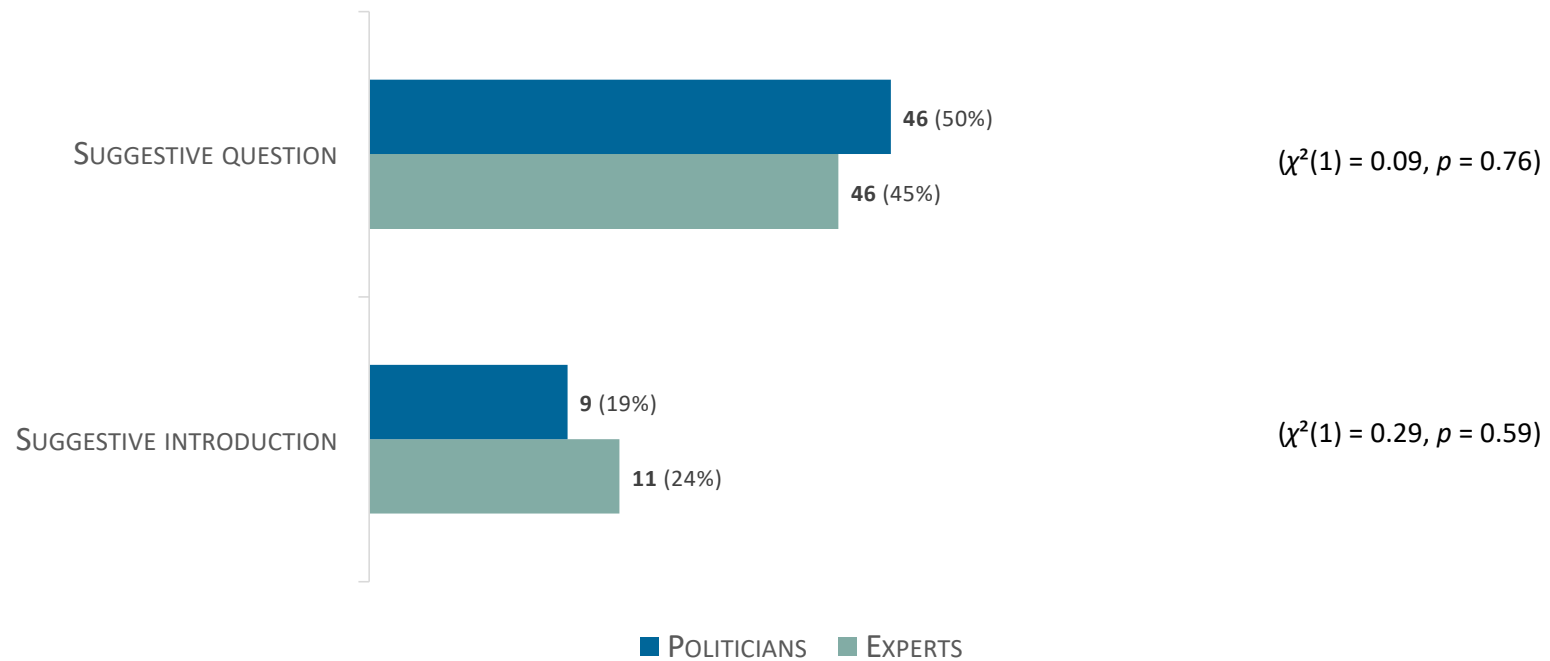
- **Suggestive introduction**

(7) *Before we go into today's communication, how it is going, really, with the talks? You are sitting there at the table with Bart De Wever of N-VA. He called your party a useless little party. How does that work then?*

ASSERTIVENESS



ASSERTIVENESS: COVID INTERVIEWS



OPPOSITION

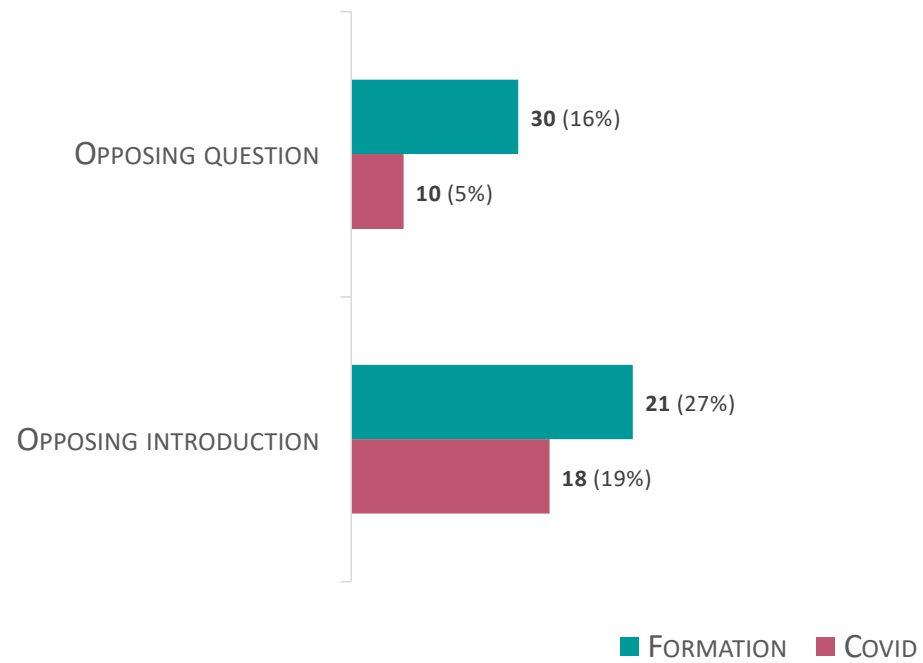
- **Opposing question**

(8) *Yes, but what's innovative about forming a government? Taking 500 days to do it, arguing along the way. Is that innovative?*

- **Opposing introduction**

(9) *Yes, about that* [i.e. alleged agreement between three parties], *Paul Magnette says: "Actually, that was nothing substantive. It's also not true at all that you agreed on budgets. There was one spreadsheet and that didn't really mean anything."* So, who's right then?

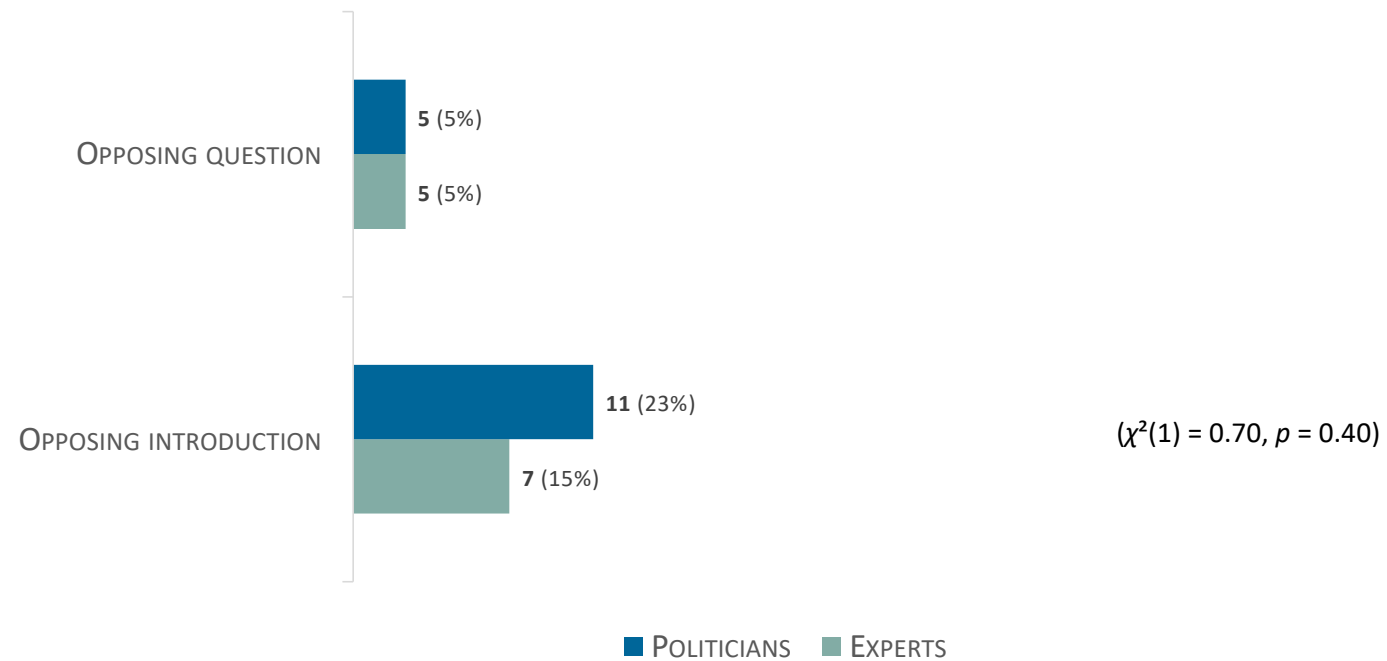
OPPOSITION



$\chi^2(1) = 10.29, p = 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.172

$\chi^2(1) = 1.08, p = 0.30$

OPPOSITION: COVID INTERVIEWS



ACCOUNTABILITY

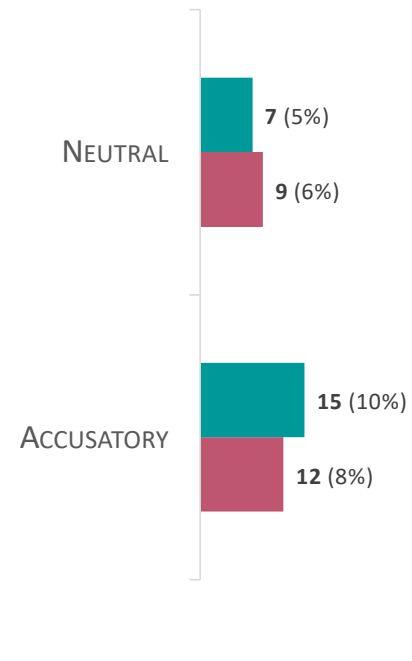
- **Neutral**

(10) *And what was the reason for that?*

- **Accusatory**

(11) *The question really is, how is this even possible? Because of over the weekend you already had suspicions that something could be going wrong.*

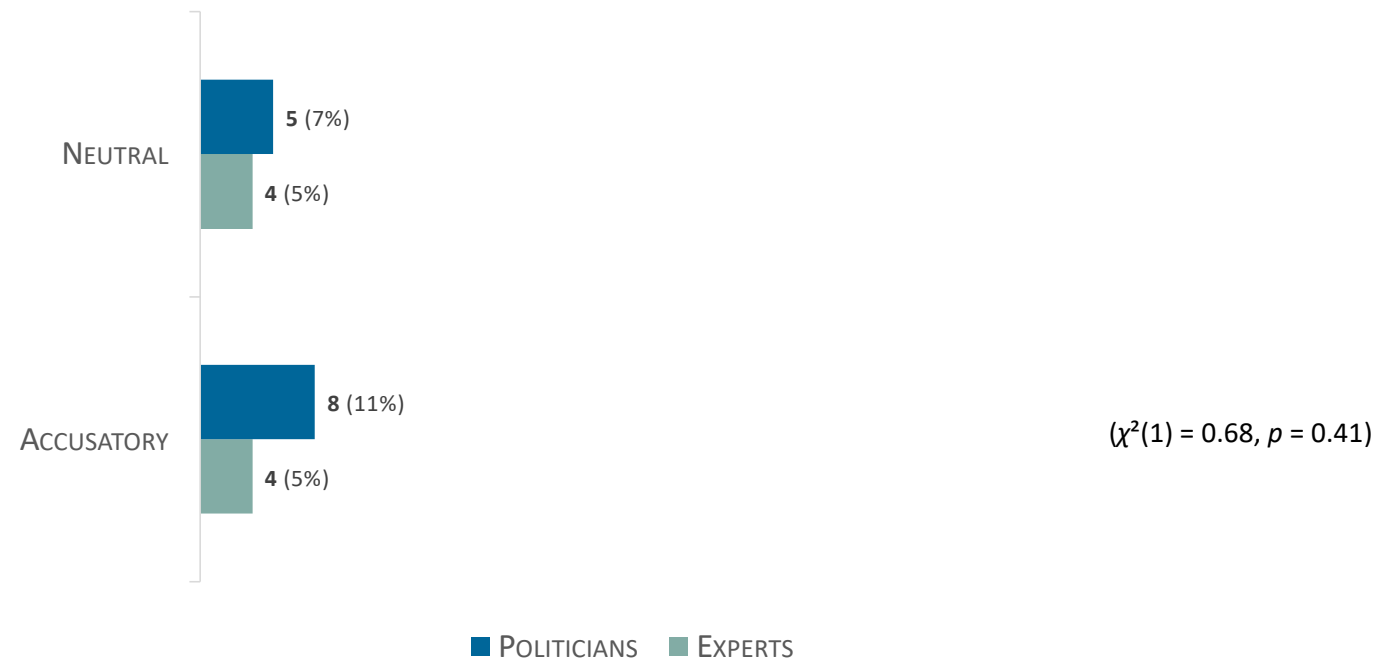
ACCOUNTABILITY



$\chi^2(1) = 0.03, p = 0.87$

$\chi^2(1) = 0.28, p = 0.60$

ACCOUNTABILITY: COVID INTERVIEWS

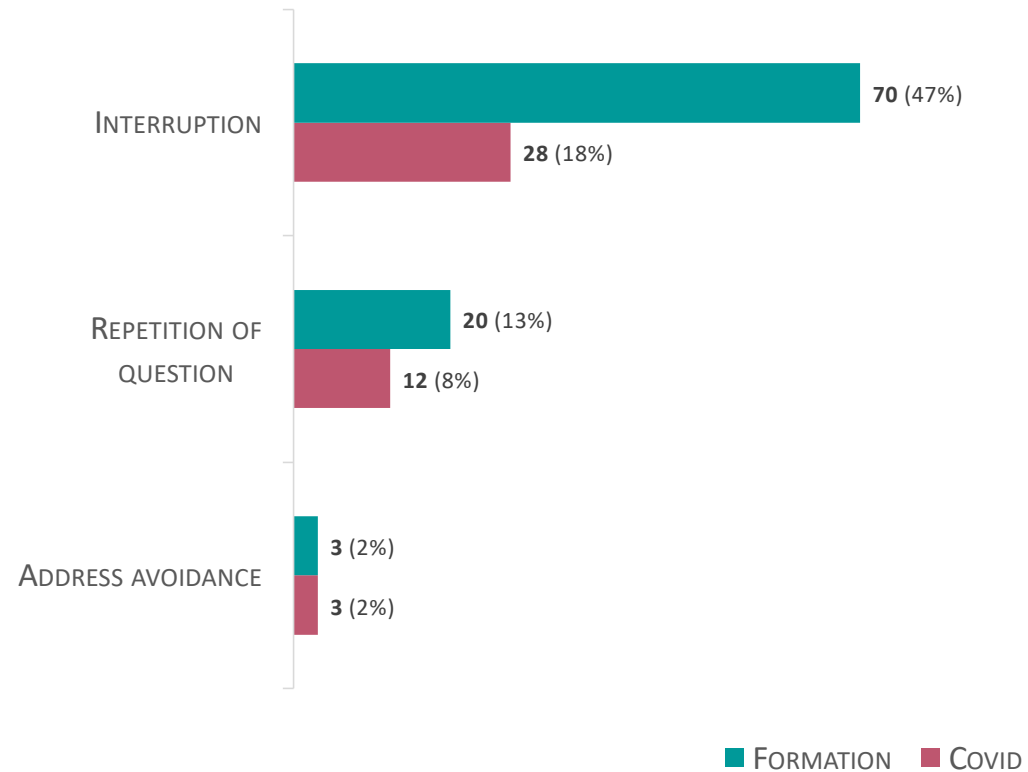


PERSISTENCE

- **Interruption**
- **Repetition of question**
- **Address avoidance of question**

(12) *But you don't want to say if that's an option?*

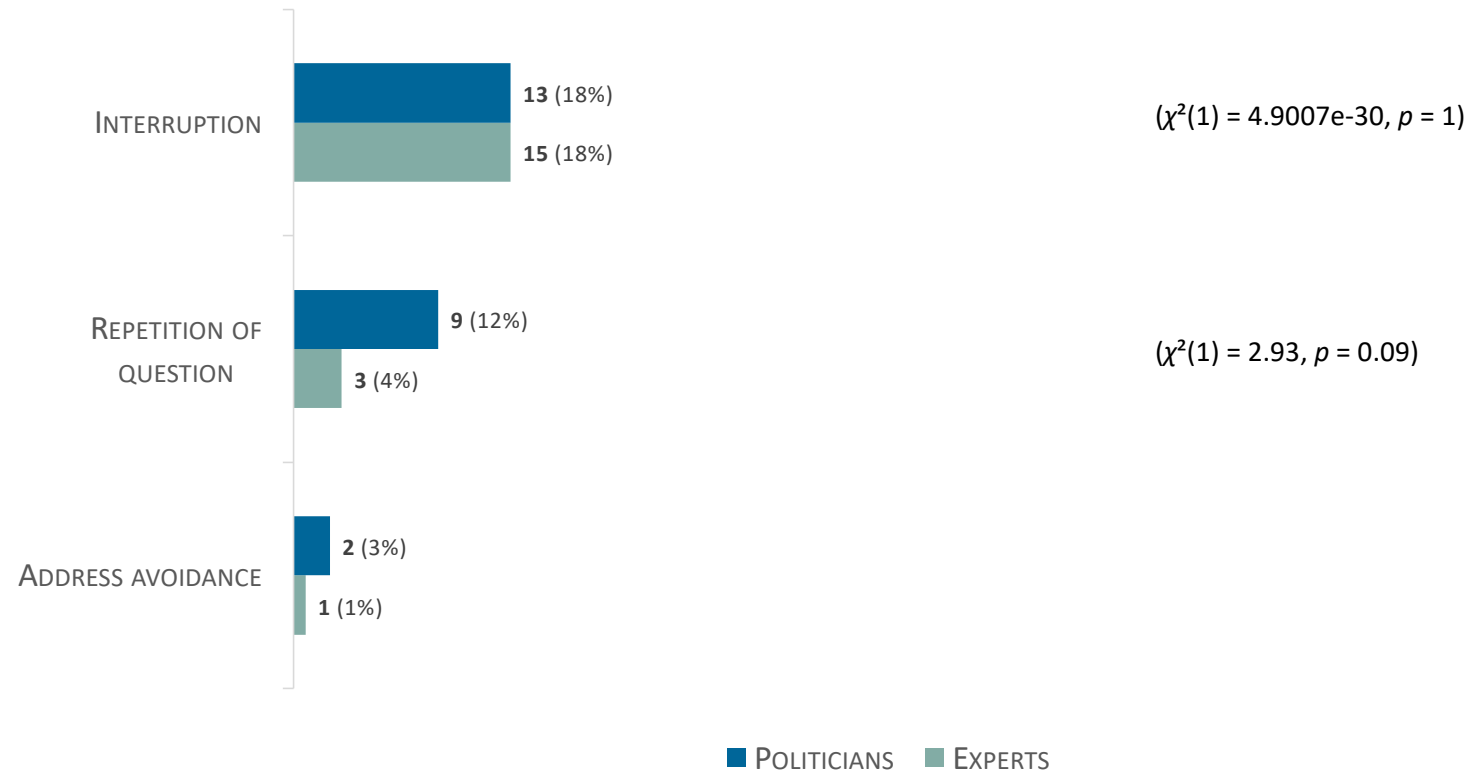
PERSISTENCE

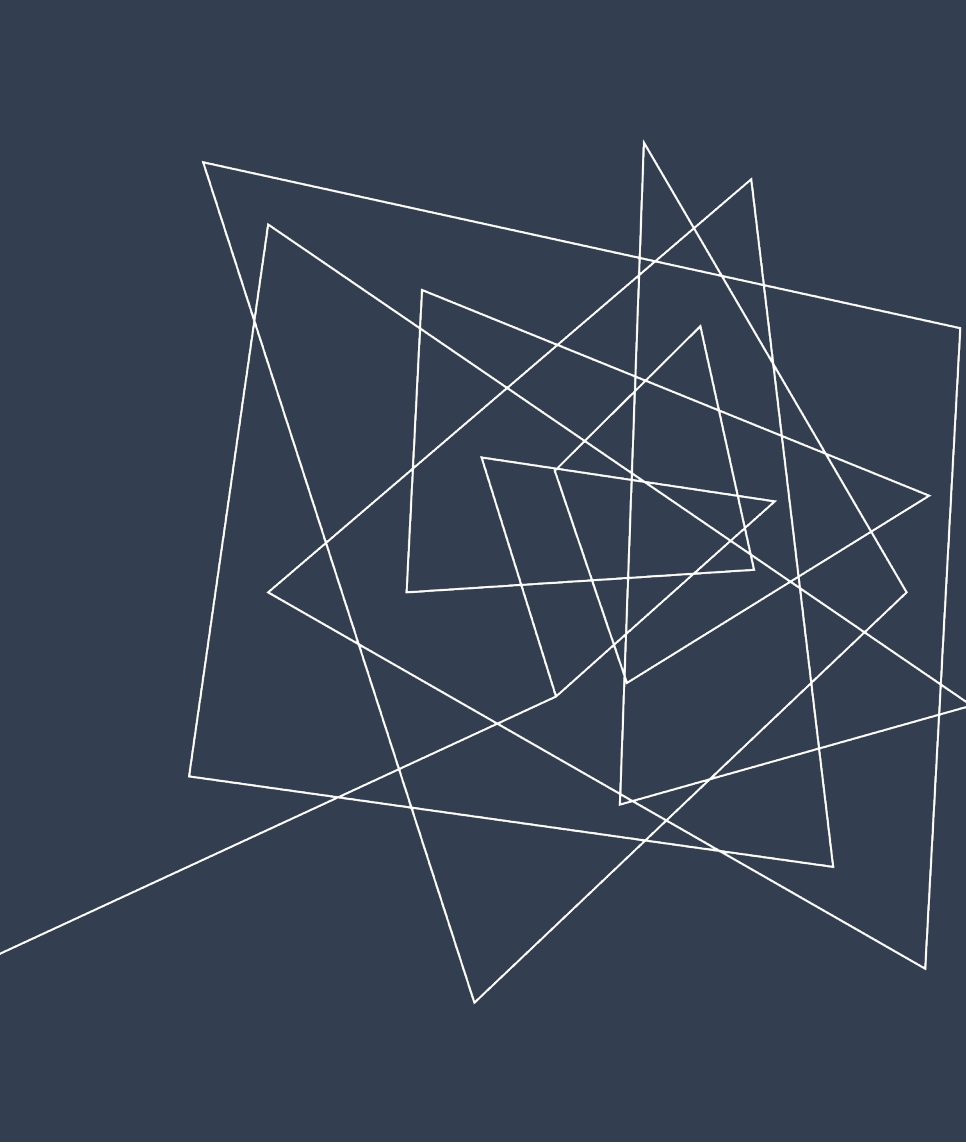


$\chi^2(1) = 28.032, p < 0.001$; Cramer's V: 0.309

$\chi^2(1) = 2.0855, p = 0.1487$

PERSISTENCE: COVID INTERVIEWS





CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

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Active interventionist approach to journalistic questioning is standard practice (cf. interpretive turn):

- In **design** of **probes**, not just interrogatives but often also statements and declarative questions:
 - More frequent in **formation** interviews than in Covid interviews: presenting claims to politicians forces them to react against them; ignoring statement would imply agreement
↔ in **Covid** interviews, more *wh*-questions = open-ended, aimed at gathering specific information about SoA
 - In **Covid** interviews, statements more frequent in politician-directed probes than in expert-directed ones

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Stance-taking is common practice: interviewers present beliefs and viewpoints to elicit responses from interviewees

- More ‘active’ questioning approach in **formation** interviews, due to less alignment in **interviewer-interviewee interaction**:
 - politicians are expected/perceived to be less cooperative (i.e. reluctant to answer questions): stance-taking used as **interactive strategy** to elicit response
- In **Covid** interviews, no differences between politician- and expert-directed questions: (i) both are deemed to be more cooperative and willing to provide clear information + (ii) both are held accountable for Covid policies
 - blurring of the line between accountability and expert interviews



THANK YOU

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