



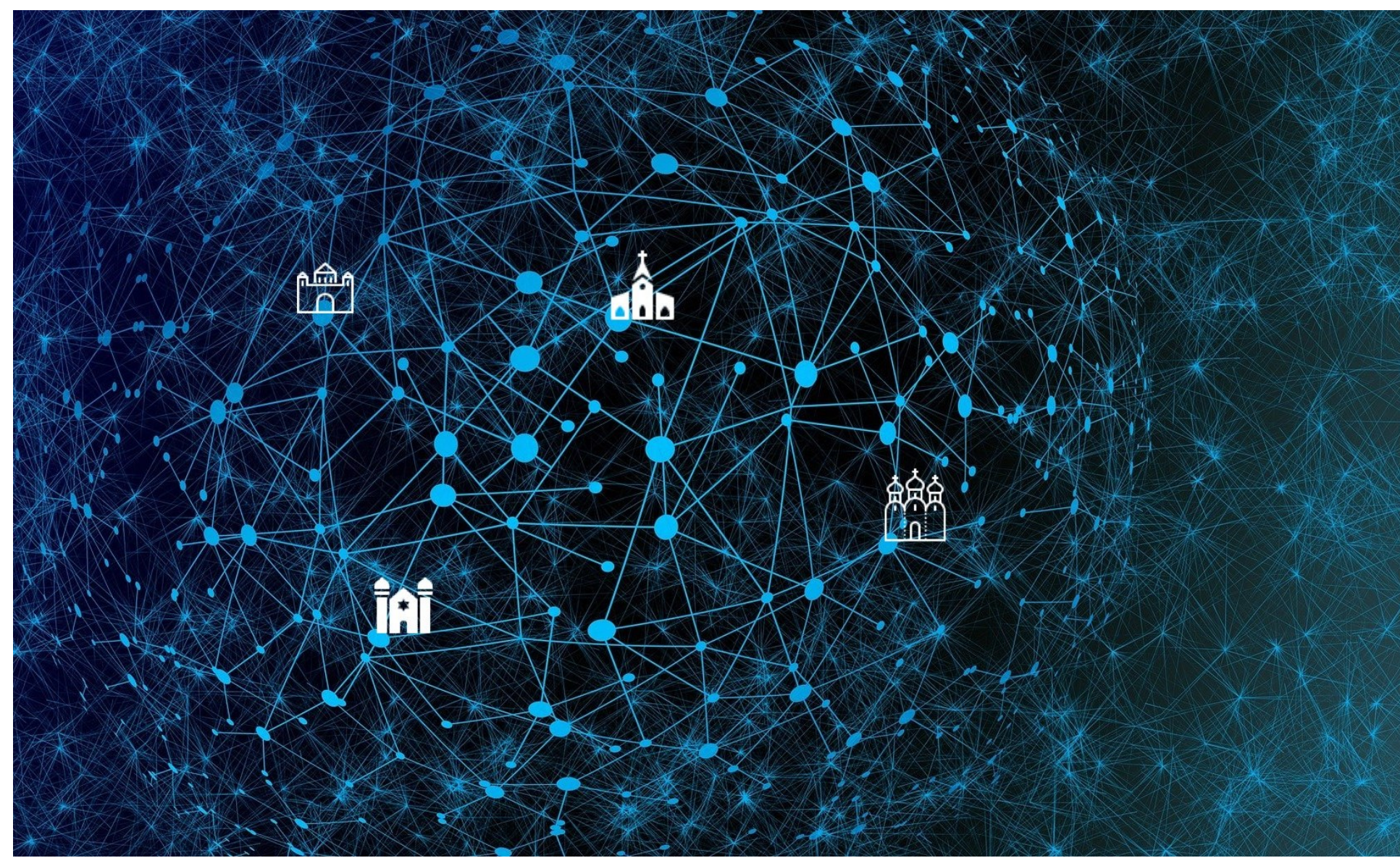
P12: Religious Organizations in the Public Sphere. Communication and Reputation in an Era of Digital Change

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Project Aim

The project addresses the question of how religious organizations and world religions describe themselves and are described by others in the (digital) media-based society. Of particular interest are the dynamics of topics in public discourse and the logic of reputation formation of religious organizations under the conditions of digital transition.



Research Questions

RQ1:

- How do digital and social change influence the descriptions and thus the reputation of religious (Christian) organizations via legacy and social media?



RQ2:

- Through which topics are they negotiated and how is their reputation – in the media and among the population – constituted?



Definition «Reputation»

The reputation of a social actor (a person, a social group, an organization, or a church) is an opinion about that actor typically as a result of social evaluation on a set of criteria, such as behaviour or performance. A good reputation is based on reliably meeting the expectations of important reference groups.

Three Dimensions of Reputation:

- Functional (does the social actor fulfil its purpose?)
- Social (does the social actor adhere to norms?)
- Expressive (is the social actor authentic?)

Reputation score:

- 100: all criteria evaluated negatively
- +100: all criteria evaluated positively

Eisenegger, M. (2005). Reputation in der Mediengesellschaft. *Konstitution – Issues Monitoring – Issues Management*. Springer VS.

Methods

Online survey of the Swiss population

Content analysis of legacy and social media

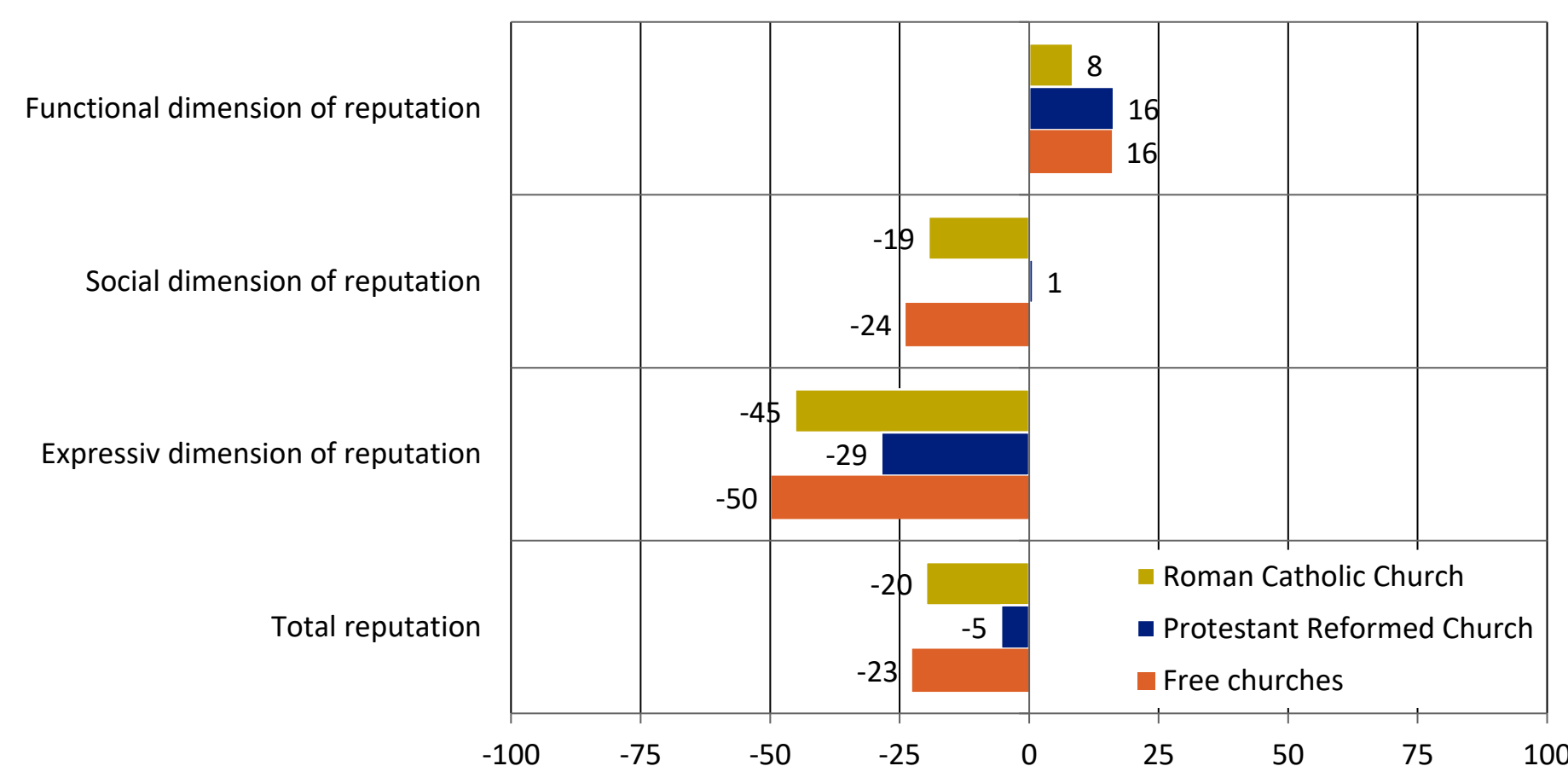
Computer-assisted analysis of legacy and social media



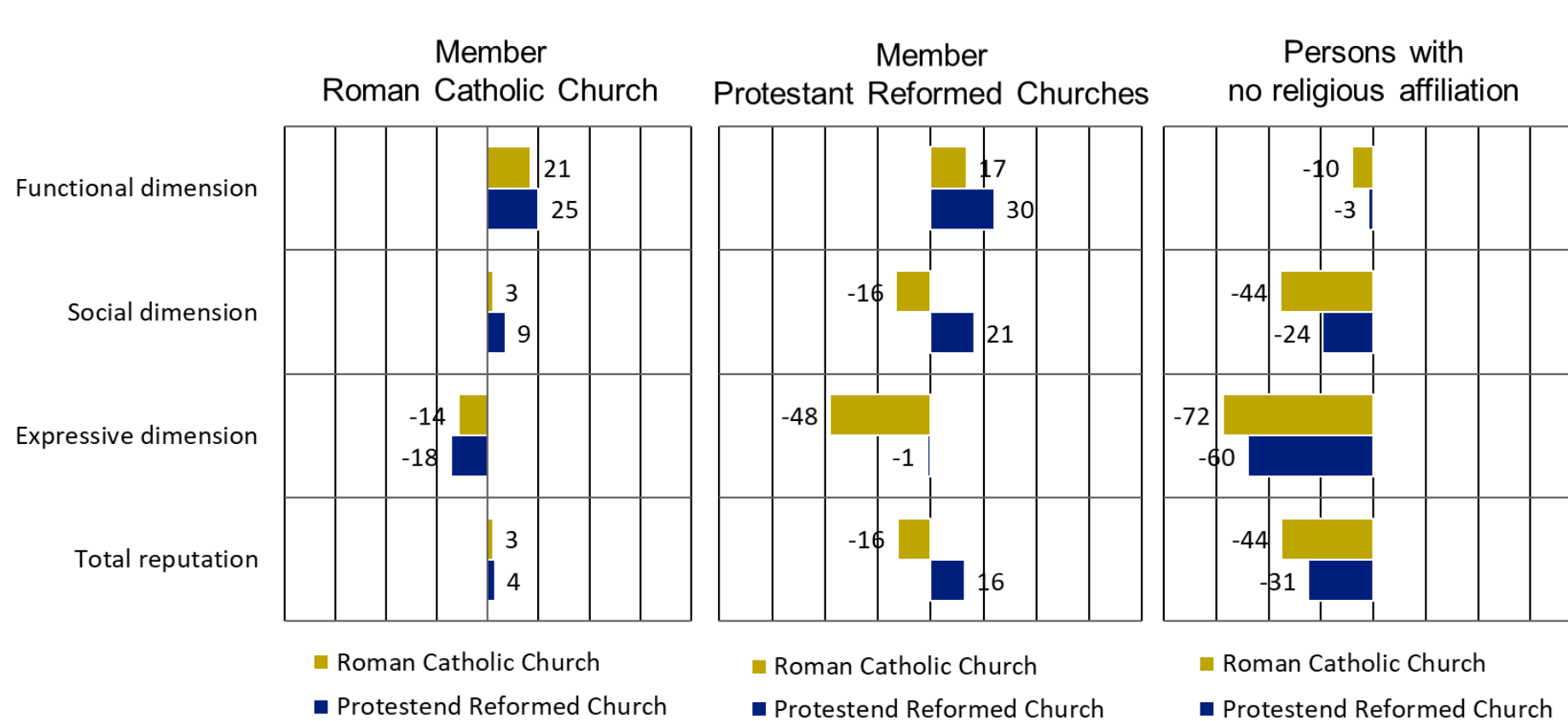
Results I: Reputation of churches within the population

- Method: online survey with standardized questionnaire
- Population: resident population in German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland
- Sample: random-quota with quotas on gender, age, education and major regions, n=1,221 (April 2022)

Reputation of churches in the population



Reputation according to church affiliations



- The Roman Catholic Church and the Free Churches have a significantly poorer reputation among the Swiss population compared to the Reformed Churches. This **poor reputation is mainly driven by the social and expressive dimension**.
- Members of the Reformed Churches distinguish the reputation of their own church from the poor reputation of the Catholic Church. Among **people with no religious affiliation, all churches have a very poor reputation**.

Results II: Affinity towards conspiracy myths

Regression model

	Beta (β)	p
Male ^a	,147	,442
Female ^a	,117	,540
Age	,103	,000
Education	-,162	,000
Positive emotions during corona phase	-,085	,003
Negative emotions during corona phase	,101	,001
Roman Catholic ^b	-,034	,294
Protestant-Reformed ^b	-,056	,082
Member of a free church ^b	,036	,246
Other religious affiliation ^b	,101	,001
Religiosity	,021	,549
Spirituality	,283	,000
Corr. R ²	,158	

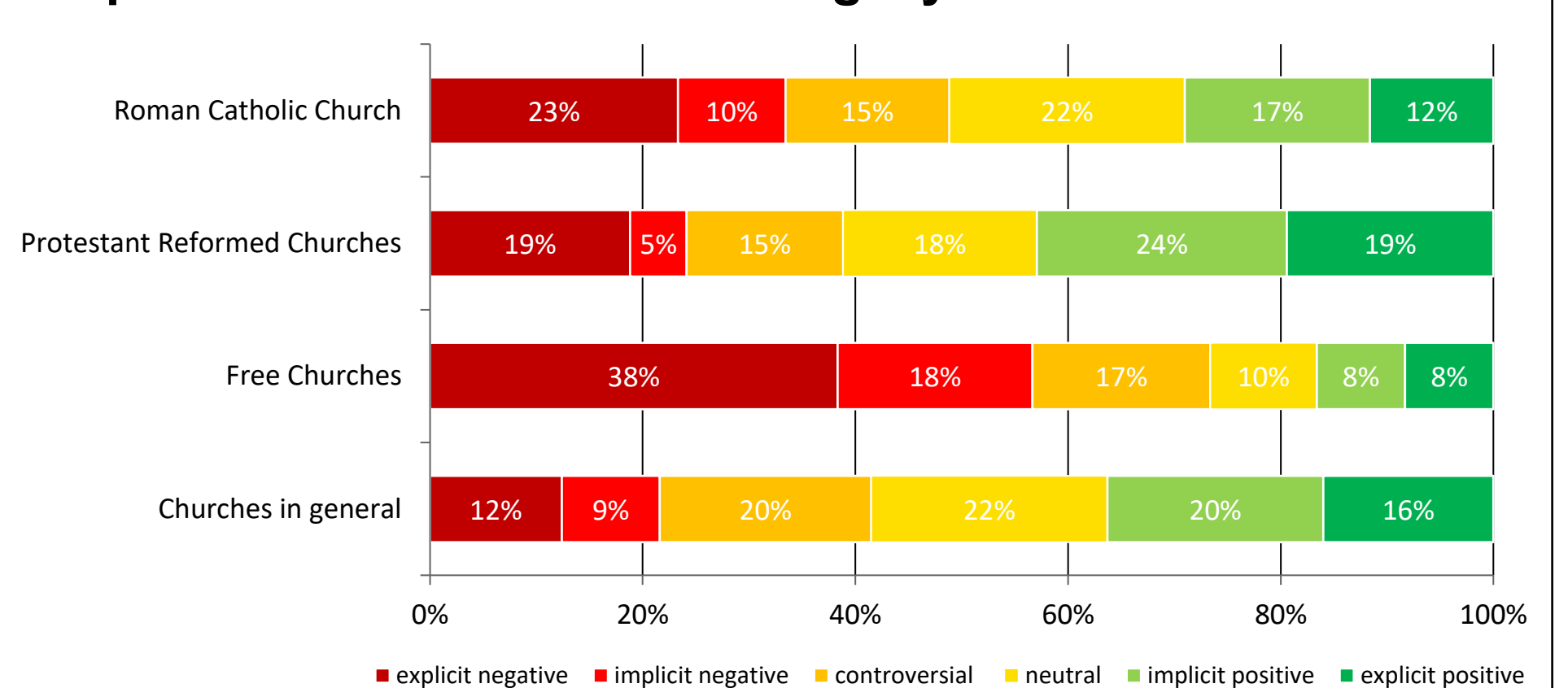
N=1'221; ^areference: Divers; ^breference: No religious affiliation

- Emotional concern during the COVID-19 pandemic is an important predictor related to conspiracy affinity. **The more negative the emotional concern, the higher the affinity towards conspiracy myths**. Conversely, positive emotions during the pandemic negatively affect conspiracy affinity.
- While religious affiliations and religiosity hardly influence conspiracy affinity, **spirituality turns out to be the most important predictor** in our study.
- We conclude that in modern, secularized societies spirituality should not only be considered as a substitute for traditional religions but **can also be a surrogate for religion** in the context of conspiracy belief.

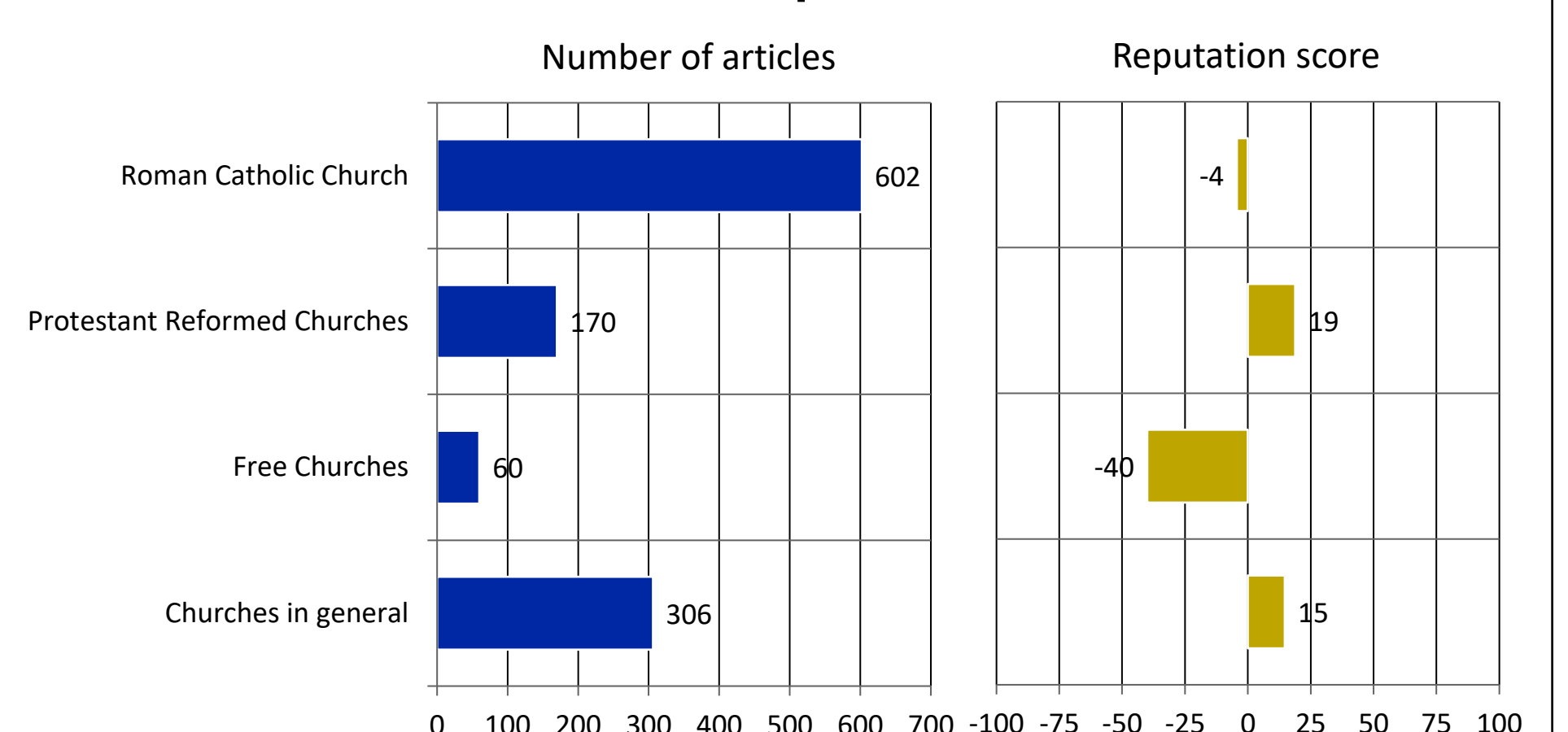
Results III: Reputation of churches in the media

- Method: manual content analysis of media articles
- Media & Period: 11 legacy media in 2020/2021
- Sample: 1,138 coded articles with church evaluations

Reputation of churches in the legacy media



Media resonance and Media reputation



- In Swiss media, the **Catholic Church is reported on three to four times more frequently** than the Protestant Reformed Churches (religious affiliation 2022: 33% vs. 23%).
- The tenor of media coverage is **positive for the Protestant Reformed Churches** and **neutral for the Roman Catholic Church**. The media reputation of the **Free Churches is clearly negative**.

Future Milestones

- Survey 2023ff.
- Content analysis: retrospective coding 2000-2019 and current media coverage
- Twitter network analysis
- Topic model of world religions in swiss media

Publications

- Schwaiger, L., Schneider, J., Eisenegger, M., & Nchakga, C. (forthcoming). Verschwörung als Ersatzreligion? Religiosität, Spiritualität und Verschwörungsaffinität in Zeiten gesellschaftlicher Krisen. *Zeitschrift für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik*.
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- Eisenegger, M. (2021). Dritter, digitaler Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit als Folge der Plattformisierung. In M. Eisenegger, M. Prinzing, P. Ettinger, & R. Blum (Eds.), *Digitaler Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Historische Verortung, Modelle und Konsequenzen* (pp. 17–38). Springer VS.

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