Negativity (Election Campaign Coverage)

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION
The term negativity in communication science refers to a news factor and to a tendency of media coverage. To put it simply, negativity as a news factor means that negative events (like controversies, conflicts, aggression, damage and so on) or so-called 'bad news' is more newsworthy than good ones (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965). However, negativity is quite a complex concept and it is defined differently in research depending on the focus of the study. Lengauer et al. (2011) differentiate between actor-related and frame-related dimensions of negativity. At the 'actor level', negativity describes the tonality directed towards individual actors (for example political representatives or their organizations) in media coverage. At the 'frame-related level', negativity describes, for example, the overall tonality of the news story (predominantly negative), a pessimistic outlook in the story and/or a story focus on conflict or incapability and misconduct (Lengauer et al., 2011, pp. 183-185).

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
Negativity is widely analyzed in communication studies. The focus of this article lies on negativity in election (campaign) coverage. Furthermore, negativity (as a news factor) is often analyzed in news value studies respectively studies that analyze journalistic news selection criteria, in news bias studies as well as in video/media malaise or framing research (and others).

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION
The analysis of negativity in media coverage may be combined or compared with journalist and population surveys (for example in news value studies or in framing research) as well as with so called "extra media data" (Rosengren, 1970, p. 96) (for example in news bias research). Furthermore, experimental studies that analyze the potential effects of a negative tonality of news coverage on recipients are possible.

EXAMPLE
The concept of negativity lacks an agreed-upon operationalization. Lengauer et al. (2011) review and systematize existing concepts and provide a set of coding instructions, which are cited below. Regarding the coding unit, Lengauer et al. (2011) suggest that coding should focus on the story level (instead of statement or paragraph level).

Coding instructions (direct quotation) by Lengauer et al. (2011, pp. 195-197):

Level of negative tone towards political actors (persons or institutions)
Does the report convey primarily a positive/affirmative, negative/critical or balanced/neutral impression of a specific political actor or are no clear indications referring to the positive or negative tone towards political actors identifiable? Indications of a prevalent negative tone toward a specific political actor are depictions of individual failure, fiasco, disaster, crisis, frustration, miscarriage, collapse, flop, rejection, neglect, default, defeat, deterioration, resignation, disdain, received critique, criticism, attacks, scandal, moralizing accusation, allegations of misconduct, charge of wrongdoing, mistrust,

accusation of incompetence or negative traits. Indications of a prevalent positive tone toward a political actor are depictions of individual victory, win, triumph, success, achievement, accomplishment, problem solutions, improvement, advance, prosperity, laudation, asset, sustainability, commendation, accordance of competence, compliment, portrayals of merit, esteem, trust or positive traits. If a report does not reflect indications of negative tonality or of positive tonality towards the specific actor, then it has to be coded as 'neutral'.

The variable has three codes:

−1 = predominantly negative tone towards the actor

0 = balanced/ambivalent/neutral tone towards the actor

+1 = predominantly positive tone towards the actor

Level of negative tonality

What is the overall tone of the story? Does the report convey primarily a positive, negative, balanced or neutral impression of politics, political records, conditions or views?

Indications of negative tonality are the framing of the story as political failure, fiasco, disaster, crisis, frustration, collapse, flop, denial, rejection, neglect, default, deterioration, resignation, skepticism, threats, cynicism, defeatism or disappointment. Indications of positive tonality are depictions of political success, problem solutions, achievement, improvement, advance, prosperity, accomplishment, enthusiasm, hope, benefit, gain, sustainability, gratification or accomplishment. If a report does not reflect indications of negative tonality or of positive tonality, then it has to be coded as 'neutral'.

The variable has three codes:

−1 = predominantly negative tonality

0 = balanced/ambivalent/neutral

+1 = predominantly positive tonality

Level of pessimistic outlook

Does the story convey primarily optimistic, pessimistic or balanced outlooks on politics or are no indications referring to political outlooks identifiable?

An optimistic depiction is given when the framing of the report generates the intersubjective impression that positive developments in politics are realistic, possible, or at hand (depictions

of optimism, positive outlooks and scenarios, hopeful views, prosperous developments, potential gains, potential solutions or promising expectations). In contrast, pessimistic depictions are given when the framing of the report generates the impression that negative developments in politics are realistic, possible, likely or at hand (depictions of pessimism, negative outlooks and scenarios, hopeless views, critical developments, negative expectations or potential threats). If a report does not reflect indications of pessimistic or of optimistic outlooks, then it has to be coded as 'not applicable'.

The variable has three codes:

−1 = predominantly pessimistic outlook

0 = balanced/ambivalent/not applicable

+1 = predominantly optimistic outlook

Level of conflict-centeredness

Does the report convey primarily conflictual, consensus-centered or balanced impressions of politics, political records, conditions and views or are no indications referring to political conflict and consensus identifiable?

The conflict dimension refers to at least two-sided depictions of (attempts, initiation, completion of) dispute, disagreement, discordance, confrontation, clashing positions and views or controversy. The consensus dimension refers to at least two-sided depictions of (attempts, initiation, completion of) consensus, accordance, consonance, conformities, dispute settlements, agreement, willingness of cooperation, willingness to compromise, approval or reconciliation. If a report does not reflect indications of conflict-centered or of consensus-centered depictions, then it has to be coded as 'not applicable'.

The variable has three codes:

−1 = predominantly conflict centered

0 = balanced/ambivalent/not applicable

+1 = predominantly consensus centered

Level of incapability and misconduct

Does the report convey primarily indications of incapability, capability or balanced impressions of politics or are no elements referring to political incapability and capability identifiable?

The misconduct dimension refers to unidirectional and unilateral depictions of critique, criticism, attacks, allegations of misconduct, moralizing accusations, charge of wrongdoing, accusation of incapability or incompetence, af-

fronts and insults. The competence dimension comprises unilateral depictions of commendation, accordance of capability or competence, compliment, acclaim, portrayals of merit or effectiveness. If a report does not reflect indications of incapability or of capability, then it has to be coded as 'not applicable'.

The variable has three codes:

−1 = predominantly incapability centered
0 = balanced/ambivalent/not applicable
+1 = predominantly capability centered

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