

Going on the offensive: Negative messaging in British general elections

Alan Duggan^{a,b}, Caitlin Milazzo^{c,*}

^a University of Nottingham, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK

^b University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA, UK

^c University of Nottingham, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Negative messaging
British elections
Political communication
Leaflets

ABSTRACT

What drives British parliamentary candidates to attack their opponents? Using an original dataset of approximately 7500 general election leaflets from four elections between 2010 and 2019, we offer the first study into the conditions under which British parliamentary candidates use negative messaging. We find that leaflets from opposition candidates and candidates contesting marginal (i.e., competitive) seats are more likely to include messages about their opponent(s), which suggests that candidates respond to the incentives and pressures that come from both their local and national environment when determining whether to include negative messaging in their leaflets. Moreover, we find that, as seats become more marginal, candidates from government parties become just as likely as opposition parties to engage in negative messaging, and therefore, voters in marginal seats are likely to experience more negative campaigns than those residing in seats where the outcome is a foregone conclusion. Taken together, our findings make an important contribution to the growing body of literature that explores how candidates use negative messaging in party-centred systems.

1. Introduction

When campaigning, it rarely pays to praise your opponent(s). While discussing an opponent is a common practice – a candidate might refer to their opponents' policy positions, qualifications, or previous record – the content is almost always negative in that it focuses on the opponent's weaknesses. Labour's criticisms of the Conservative Party's 'austerity' politics were a common theme during the 2010 General Election campaign, and many voters will still recall the Conservative Party's warnings regarding the alleged 'coalition of chaos' during both the 2015 and 2017 General Election campaigns. But negative messaging does not have to take the form of an outright attack; often, political elites simply wish to contrast their own strengths vis-à-vis those of their opponents. As it can be difficult to effectively communicate one's own electoral advantages *without* highlighting an opponent's weaknesses, it is unsurprising that the use of negative messages remains a widespread tactic across the democratic world (Belt 2017). Britain is no exception. The literature demonstrates that negativity has been part of British campaigns for decades (vanHeerde-Hudson, 2011; Yoon et al., 2005), and that it remains a pronounced feature of recent British general elections

(Tidy and Schraer 2019).

While previous studies have explored how British parties use negative messaging (e.g., Rosenbaum 1997; vanHeerde-Hudson, 2011; Walter 2013, 2014; Walter et al., 2014) and the consequences of their decision to do so (e.g., Pattie et al., 2011; Sanders and Norris 2005; Walter and van der Eijk 2019a, 2019b), parties are not the only political elites campaigning during a general election. In this paper, we extend the study of negative messaging by exploring the conditions under which British candidates use these messages. Such an endeavour is valuable because candidates and their local campaigns are an important part of voters' experience in the run-up to a general election. Voters may be contacted by a local candidate in person – either at their home or in the street – or, more commonly, they may receive messages from candidates via the post, the telephone, their email, or social media. That the content of messaging that voters receive from candidates has been understudied in the British context to date is due, not to the lack of importance of these actors during a campaign, but rather to the lack of large-scale data on candidates' campaign communications. We address this gap in the literature using a novel dataset of approximately 7500 election leaflets spanning four British general elections between 2010

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: caitlin.milazzo@nottingham.ac.uk (C. Milazzo).

and 2019, which was compiled as part of the OpenElections project and is the first dataset of its kind in Britain.¹ Leaflets fulfil an important role in British elections, as they are the most common form of contact that parties and their candidates have with voters during general election campaigns. Therefore, understanding the messaging of these prominent communications is important if we want to fully understand a voters' campaign experiences.

Building on the growing literature that points to variation in candidates' campaign behaviour in British general elections (e.g., Fisher 2005; Johnston and Pattie 2006; Johnston et al., 2012; Pattie et al., 1995; Shephard 2007), we argue that there is systematic variation in how – and where – candidates employ negative messaging. We posit that candidates will strategically use negative messaging in circumstances where (1) they need to close the gap on an incumbent member of Parliament (MP), (2) they can capitalise on weaknesses in the current government's record, and/or (3) seat marginality and uncertainty of outcome reach a point that incentivises undermining their opponent rather than rallying their own base. Specifically, we expect that non-incumbents, candidates from opposition parties (parties that are not members of the current government), and candidates contesting marginal seats (competitive seats, where the outcome is uncertain), will be more likely to include negative messaging in their communications. After identifying leaflets where a candidate includes at least one message that references an opposing party, leader, or candidate, we find that both government status and marginality are important predictors of the use of negative messaging, with leaflets from opposition candidates and candidates contesting marginal seats being more likely to include messages criticising an opponent. These findings suggest that candidates are influenced by their personal circumstances when deciding on whether they should attack their opponents. Moreover, as seats become more marginal, candidates from government parties become just as likely as opposition parties to engage in negative messaging. This, in turn, suggests that voters in marginal seats are more likely to experience campaign negativity, as all candidates – government and opposition – are more likely to include negative messages in their campaign materials.

We believe our findings offer useful insights into the conditionality of the use of negative messaging at the local level. By looking at how government status, parliamentary incumbency, and seat marginality interact across constituencies, we provide insights not possible in previous studies, estimating effects at a more granular level. In doing so, we demonstrate that there is significant variation across candidates and constituencies in how negative messaging is used – variation that could not be captured by studying a party's national campaign. For example, assessments of the Conservative Party's national campaign in the 2019 General Election would highlight Labour's inability to deliver Brexit, but this would overlook the decision of many Conservative MPs to produce positive leaflets focusing on own their record and success rather than negative messages related to Brexit.

In addition, our findings add to a growing body of literature that explores messaging by individual candidates in party-centred systems (e.g., Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2017; Maier et al., 2022; Nai et al., 2022). To date, much of what we know about candidate messaging is based on the study of the United States, which is more extreme in terms of the level of independence that candidates have during the campaign and the legislative process (Carey and Shugart 1995). By contrast, the study of negative messaging in more party-centred systems – i.e., systems where parties enforce a high (or higher) degree of discipline – has been primarily focused on the behaviour of political parties. It is not clear whether we should expect to see the same rich variation that we observe

¹ We use the term 'leaflets' to refer to any unsolicited materials – e.g., flyers, letters – that voters receive from candidates via hand-delivery or the post. The OpenElections project is funded by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), BB/T019026/1.

in the candidate-centred United States in systems where parties exert more control. Our findings suggest that even in a more party-centred system, candidates employ negative messages strategically. These local or individual campaigns share the same richness in variation that we observe for parties, and candidates respond to many of the same drivers (e.g., incumbency, electoral competitiveness) when determining the nature of the messages they employ in their campaigns.

Finally, our research represents the first study to estimate separate effects for constituency incumbency and government status within the same set of analyses. British elections provide an ideal case to explore these distinct effects simultaneously, as they mix single member districts (allowing us to explore constituency incumbency) with a party-centric, multiparty, and parliamentary political system (allowing us to explore government status). In many existing studies, the case selection determines which of these two facets can be explored. The propensity of the US literature to focus on constituency incumbency effects given its candidate-centred and split-government system (Druckman et al., 2009; Haynes and Rhine 1998), while cases like Denmark lend themselves to exploration of government effects due to use of list PR systems with multimember districts and their party-centric nature (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008; Hansen and Pedersen 2008). Along with a handful of other cases, such as Canada, Britain provides us with the opportunity to estimate these effects simultaneously and to explore how they interact.

2. Explaining the use of negative messaging in British general elections

The British public often expresses scepticism about what political elites say and do during an election campaign. Nonetheless, it is well established that campaign contact can alter voters' behaviour. Contact takes many forms: prospective voters might be canvassed by campaign workers on their doorstep or on the telephone, they might receive leaflets or personalised letters in the post, or they might attend a public meeting held locally. If their constituency is highly contested, voters may experience all these activities. Scholars of British politics have repeatedly demonstrated that the intensity of the local campaign influences political outcomes. When British parties devote more attention to a constituency, citizens are more likely to turn out to vote (e.g., Denver et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2011, 2015; Trumm and Sudulich 2016). Investing campaign resources can also increase a party's vote share (e.g., Clarke et al., 2009; Cutts 2014; Fisher et al., 2011; Johnston and Pattie 2006; Pattie et al., 1995).

While political elites have many avenues to engage with voters, traditional unsolicited election communications – or election leaflets – remain the most common form of campaign contact in British general elections. Leaflets may take a variety of forms – they may be letters, flyers, postcards, mock newspapers, or even magazines. The purpose of these communications is to mobilise and persuade voters to their cause and/or to undermine support for their opponents. Political parties and candidates spend more money on designing and distributing election leaflets than on any other campaign activity,² and of the British Election Study Internet Panel (BESIP) respondents who reported that they had been contacted by a party in the final weeks of the 2019 general election campaign, nearly 90 per cent indicated they had received a leaflet or letter from at least one party. This figure far exceeds the percentage of respondents who reported contact via email (22 per cent), social media (13 per cent), telephone (7 per cent), or through an in-person interaction at home (27 per cent) or in the street (7 per cent) (Fieldhouse et al. 2021).

As leafleting is the most common form of campaign interaction, the messages that political elites disseminate via these communications have the potential to shape voting behaviour, and therefore, it is

² Data on campaign spending is available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

important that we study the content of these communications. The messages – often relating to the party’s positions on issues, the qualifications of the party’s candidate, or the party’s chances of winning the constituency – are intended to attract new voters, as well as reinforce the support of those who voted for the party in previous elections. However, in addition to messages about the party or candidate’s own strengths, electoral communications also frequently feature messages about the party’s local or national opponent(s). Political scientists generally define these as ‘negative’ messages (Lau and Pomper 2002); they are designed to undermine support for the opposition by drawing attention to the opponent’s weaknesses. Such messages might take the form of a pure attack – i.e., where an opponent’s characteristics, policies or experience are the focus of the message – or alternatively, a candidate may choose to provide a comparison, contrasting their own information with comparable dimensions for their opponent (Geer 2006).

There is a long history of negativity in British election campaigns going back at least as far as the early 1970s (Rosenbaum 1997). Several studies have demonstrated significant levels of negativity in national campaigns in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s by looking at Party Election Broadcasts and advertising campaigns (Dermody and Hammer-Lloyd 2011; vanHeerde-Hudson, 2011; Walter 2014). In line with this previous literature on party campaigns, we expect to find frequent use of negative messaging in the leaflets distributed by British parliamentary candidates. In addition to establishing a baseline of candidate negativity, our dataset of leaflets allows us to analyse spatial variation across constituencies and investigate whether candidates react to strategic incentives to engage in the use of negative messaging at the local level. In general, the strategic aims of ‘going negative’ are to demobilise persuadable voters that intend to vote for the target of the attack and/or mobilise supporters of the sponsor of the attack (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Riker 1996).

The frequent use of negative messaging would suggest that, in general, political actors believe it can be a profitable practice (Walter and Nai 2015). Previous work suggests that negative messaging can destabilise voter preference by creating an emotional response (e.g., anxiety) towards the target of the negativity (Brader 2006). This emotional response to negativity draws on the theoretical framework of affective intelligence (Brader 2006; Marcus et al., 2011) and underpins much of the justification for pursuing negative campaigns. Within this framework, voters who are made to feel anxious about their political choice may seek out new information and reconsider their voting decision (Weeks 2015). Additionally, it can be argued that the media provides incentives to engage in negative messaging. This incentive arises due to the phenomenon of ‘negativity bias’, i.e., that people give more weight to negative information (Sokora 2014). This effect is then compounded by the propensity for media to focus their coverage on negative campaigning (Hansen and Pedersen 2008).

2.1. Theory and hypotheses

There is a large literature demonstrating the efficacy of local campaigns and allocation of campaign resources in constituency contests in British elections (e.g., Fisher et al., 2011, 2015; Pattie et al., 2019). The importance of local issues and local campaigns sharpens focus on the incentives of incumbent MPs. Based on literature from other contexts (e.g., Benoit 1999; Nai 2020; Walter and Nai 2015), we can theorise that incumbent MPs will be less likely to engage in negative messaging, as they instead focus on their achievements for the constituency in the preceding parliamentary session. Building on their previous electoral success and their experience in office, incumbents should possess a record of constituency activity to allow them to run a positive campaign (Nai 2020). Conversely, challengers will aim to criticise the incumbent MP to draw attention to their campaign and reduce the presumed lead of the incumbent (Druckman et al., 2009; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995), while also having less to lose in terms of the associated risks of using negative messaging (Nai 2020).

H1. Leaflets from incumbents will be less likely to include negative messages than leaflets from non-incumbent challengers.

While local campaigns matter, there is also significant focus on national issues and government performance in British elections (Dermody and Hammer-Lloyd 2011; Ford et al., 2021). British elections can also be strongly party-centric, which elevates the preceding discussion on constituency incumbency to the national level (i.e., government vs opposition). Candidates from the governing party, whether they are incumbent MPs or challengers in their respective constituency, may focus on the achievements of the government and may be less inclined to attack opposition candidates (Müller 2022). Conversely, opposition candidates may be incentivised to attack perceived government failures (De Nooy and Kleinnijenhuis 2015; Dolzeal et al. 2015; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010; Walter and Van der Brug 2013).

H2. Leaflets from candidates from the governing party will be less likely to include negative messages than leaflets from their opponents.

The perceived benefit to using negative messaging may also be influenced by the marginality (i.e., the competitiveness) of the seat being contested. As the uncertainty of the outcome increases, so too does the incentive to engage in negative messaging. The literature suggests that positive campaigns work primarily to boost turnout among your supporters, while negativity can destabilise the support of your opponent (Brader 2006). In safe seats, where voter support is skewed such that candidates know they are likely to win or lose by a large margin before the campaign begins, there is a strong incentive for the frontrunner to run a positive campaign and for the underdog to run a negative one. In essence, the frontrunner has nothing to gain from criticising their opponent and the challenger has nothing to lose. Conversely, in marginal seats, where support is divided relatively evenly amongst two (or more) candidates, all candidates have an incentive to take risks and use negative messaging (Druckman et al., 2009; Fowler et al., 2016).

H3. Leaflets from candidates competing in marginal seats will be more likely to include negative messaging than leaflets from safe seats.

Finally, and building off the discussion for each of the preceding hypotheses, we also expect that seat marginality will shape how incumbency and government status affect negative messaging. For constituency incumbents and government party candidates in marginal seats, the uncertainty of the outcome may incentivise them to engage in negative messaging. Candidates in close races may believe the risks associated with ‘going negative’ are justifiable and outweigh the impetus to focus on past achievements and their personal record (Druckman et al., 2009; Nai 2020). This provides the final testable hypotheses.

H4a. As seats become more marginal, differences in the use of negative messaging between the leaflets of incumbents and challengers will become insignificant.

H4b. As seats become more marginal, differences in the use of negative messaging between the leaflets of government and opposition candidates will become insignificant.

While constituency incumbency and government incumbency are interrelated features of British elections, we argue they are sufficiently distinct to allow for the estimation of separate hypotheses as outlined above. This will allow us to comparatively assess which characteristic has the greater impact on the decision to go negative, while also allowing the meaningful interaction of incumbency, government status, and marginality.

3. Data and methods

We test our arguments by assembling an original dataset of leaflets from British general elections between 2010 and 2019 taken from the OpenElections project (www.openelections.co.uk). As the largest dataset of British campaign communications in existence, it opens many avenues for research. The full dataset contains nearly 9000 leaflets from

all major political parties competing during the last four general elections and covers 600 out of the 632 constituencies that have been in use since 2010.³ For the purposes of this paper, we limit our data collection to include only general election leaflets distributed by candidates from the following parties: the Conservative Party, the Green Party, the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party (SNP), and the UK Independence Party (UKIP).⁴ As we are interested in how *candidates* use negative messaging, we further limit our analysis to leaflets where the candidate is mentioned by name. If a leaflet mentions a candidate by name, the cost of producing and distributing the leaflet must be counted against the candidate's campaign spending. While it is not impossible a candidate would choose to distribute leaflets that do not mention their own identity, the restrictive limits on campaign spending would make this a relatively unattractive prospect, and it would be an inefficient way for a candidate to campaign. As it is unlikely that a candidate would wish to miss an opportunity to raise their own profile if they are paying for the leaflet, limiting our analysis to leaflets where the candidate is mentioned by name is a reasonable proxy for identifying those leaflets that were distributed by the candidate. Candidate leaflets account for between 79 and 89 per cent of the OpenElections leaflets collected in each election (comprising 84 per cent across the whole dataset).

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the data by party and election year. Including the restrictions above, we have 7484 leaflets, covering all major parties, 592 constituencies, and 3870 distinct candidacies.⁵ While our dataset represents the largest dataset of candidate leaflets in existence, we acknowledge that it is a sample of convenience – there is no requirement for parties or candidates to report the number or nature of the leaflets they distribute. That said, if we compare our data to contact rates reported in the BESIP, we find, for all parties in all elections, a positive and statistically significant correlation (0.25, $p < 0.01$) between the percentage of respondents in the constituency who reported receiving a leaflet from a given party in the previous four weeks and the total number of leaflets we have for the same party in the same constituency.⁶

Moreover, we note that our samples of candidate leaflets from the 2017 and 2019 general elections contain fewer leaflets and cover fewer constituencies than the 2010 and 2015 samples. The 2010 and 2015 general election campaign periods were more than double the length of the 2017 and 2019 general election campaign periods, giving candidates more time to design and distribute election leaflets. And indeed, this is the pattern we observe when we explore party contact rates reported in the British Election Study. Following the 2010 and 2015 general elections, 54 per cent and 51 per cent of survey respondents reported that they had received at least one leaflet (Fieldhouse et al. 2021; Sanders and Whiteley 2014). In 2017 and 2019, these figures were just 36 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively. However, while our 2017 and 2019 samples cover fewer constituencies, comparing these constituencies to those omitted from our sample reveals that they are as representative as

our 2010 and 2015 samples.⁷

Each leaflet is manually coded to determine whether it contains a negative message. Specifically, the dependent variable is a binary measure that is coded 1 if the leaflet includes a negative message related to at least one opponent, where a negative message is defined as any mention of a criticism or reason to vote against the opposition (Geer 2006), and 0 otherwise. Negative messages may take a variety of forms – from issues to more personal attacks. Whilst we did not differentiate between different types of negative messages in the coding of each leaflet, Table 2 gives a flavour of the different types of negative messages one would expect to observe in a leaflet. The first type of negative messages we observe are issue-based negative messages, which focus on policy issues at either local (a) or national (b) level. In addition to issues, candidates may include personalised negative messages that focus on the weaknesses of a leader (c) or candidate of an opposing party. With respect to the latter, we observe two types of messages: messages where an opposing candidate is referred to more generally (d) and those where the opponent is mentioned by name (e).

To test the differential probability of candidates using negative messaging, we run logit models pooled across all four elections, where the individual leaflet is the unit of analysis. Each model uses robust standard errors clustered in constituencies and regresses our binary measure of negative messaging on characteristics related to the leaflet's author (i.e., constituency incumbency, government status) and characteristics of the constituency where the leaflet was distributed (i.e., seat marginality), with controls for constituency type (borough or county), geographical region, party, election, and the gender of the candidate who authored the leaflet.⁸ Within these models, the first of our main independent variables is a multi-level categorical variable indicating whether the leaflet was distributed by a candidate who is an incumbent or a challenger and comes from a government or an opposition party. We combine these two features into one variable to allow for a more nuanced exploration of effects for each of our hypotheses. Table 3 demonstrates the four levels of this variable plus the percentage of leaflets that we have from candidates of the given type in our sample.

In Table 4, we present an example of the candidate typology taken from the constituency of Lincoln in the East Midlands region of England. The table presents, for the 2017 and 2019 General Elections, the candidates who stood in the constituency in each election for the parties included in our dataset, as well as information on how the typology applies to each candidate. The candidate who received the most votes in the election is highlighted in bold.

The Conservative Party won a majority in the House of Commons in the 2015 General Election, and therefore, the Lincoln's Conservative Party candidate, Karl McCartney, was a candidate for the governing party. As McCartney had won the most votes in the constituency in 2015, he was also the incumbent candidate in 2017. The other candidates were neither from the governing party, nor the incumbent, and therefore, they are classified as opposition challengers. Following the 2017 General Election, the Conservative Party retained their status as the governing party, albeit as a minority government with a confidence and supply agreement with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), but the party's candidate lost his seat to Labour's candidate, Karen Lee. When Mr McCartney choose to contest the seat again in 2019, he did so as challenger who was a member of the governing party. Labour's candidate, by contrast, was now classified as an opposition incumbent due to her victory in 2017. As with the previous election, all other candidates who classed as opposition challengers.

Finally, it is worth discussing the contrasting incentives faced by

³ Excludes the 18 Northern Irish constituencies. For further information on the data, please see the Supplementary Appendix.

⁴ We did not have sufficient leaflets from the Brexit Party to include the party in our analysis.

⁵ This figure is the number of distinct observations by election, constituency, and party. Accordingly, this represents the number of distinct *campaigns* in the dataset, but not the number of distinct candidates. It should be noted that repeated observations where we have leaflets for the same candidate at separate elections comprise less than 20 per cent of the dataset.

⁶ Correlations by party and across all parties are presented in the Supplementary Appendix. As the BES does not differentiate between the leaflets received from a party and the leaflets received by the party's candidate, and therefore, we are limited to comparing party-level rates of contact.

⁷ Comparisons of our sample of constituencies vs. those that have been omitted from the study due to a lack of data are presented in the Supplementary Appendix.

⁸ The coding of all variables, along with regression tables, are presented in the Supplementary Appendix.

Table 1
Distribution of general election leaflets.

Party	2010		2015		2017		2019	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Conservatives	772	27.49	652	24.15	246	23.70	277	29.53
Labour	746	26.57	673	24.93	348	33.53	287	30.60
Lib Dem	847	30.16	623	23.07	257	24.76	248	26.44
National Parties	76	2.71	78	2.89	27	2.60	34	3.62
Green	161	5.73	317	11.74	105	10.12	85	9.06
UKIP	206	7.34	357	13.22	55	5.30	7	0.75
Total	2808	100	2700	100	1038	100	938	100
Constituencies	476	75.32	435	68.83	273	43.20	240	37.97

Note: The Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru are grouped together under the label “National Parties”.

Table 2
Examples of negative messaging.

Message type	Example
a. Issues (local)	“Thousands of jobs lost locally under Labour in Black & Decker, Rothmans, Electrolux, Sara-Lee Courtaulds, Calsonic to name but a few. Manufacturing has decreased at over twice the level of the 1980s.” - Conservative 2010 (Bishop Auckland)
b. Issues (national)	“Labour supports having a complete open door immigration policy to 500 million people from Europe to settle, compete for jobs and claim benefits. However, if you are a skilled worker from India, Pakistan, Canada, the Commonwealth or anywhere else, you are forced to get a visa.” UKIP 2015 (Bradford East)
c. Leaders	“Strong, stable leadership in the national interest or A coalition of chaos with Jeremy Corbyn” - Conservative 2017 (Warrington North)
d. Candidate (no name)	“Stewart has proven himself as someone who listens to the grass-roots and he’ll roll up his sleeves and do his best. Castlemilk is where he was born. He gets this place in a way that the current Labour MP doesn’t” - SNP 2015 (Glasgow South)
e. Candidate (name)	“Has life in Bury improved after two terms of David Nuttall and the Tories? Have we got the best MP available to us? X £100 million cut from NHS Bury and front line council services – voted for by David Nuttall X Hospital and GP waiting times have soared — voted for by David Nuttall X Bury’s Walk-in centres face closure – a closure David Nuttall supports” - Labour 2017 (Bury North)

Table 3
Variable capturing both incumbency and government status.

Government Incumbent (14.54%)	Opposition Incumbent (12.24%)
Government Challenger (19.45%)	Opposition Challenger (53.77%)

each type of candidate captured in Table 3. Government incumbents have least incentive to use negative messaging, as they are tasked with defending both the government’s performance and their own constituency record to protect a presumed advantage over their challengers. Given their experience and presumed lead, it is dangerous for government incumbents to risk the possible backlash effects of using negative

Table 4
Example of the candidate typology, parliamentary constituency of Lincoln.

2017 General Election				2019 General Election			
Party	Candidate	Gov/Opp	Inc/Chall	Party	Candidate	Gov/Opp	Inc/Chall
Conservative	Karl McCartney	Gov	Inc	Brexit Party	Reece Wilkes	Opp	Chall
Green	Ben Loryman	Opp	Chall	Conservative	Karl McCartney	Gov	Chall
Labour	Karen Lee	Opp	Chall	Green	Sally Horscroft	Opp	Chall
Liberal Democrats	Caroline Kenyon	Opp	Chall	Labour	Karen Lee	Opp	Inc
UKIP	Nick Smith	Opp	Chall	Liberal Democrats	Caroline Kenyon	Opp	Chall

Note: Gov = Governing, Opp = Opposition, Inc = Incumbent, Chall = Challenger.

messaging (Garramone 1984). Opposition challengers, at the other extreme, have the most incentive to use negative messaging, with the scope to criticise the performance of government, record of the incumbent MP, or both. In doing so, opposition challengers can draw attention to their campaign and seek to close the gap on their incumbent rivals. With little to lose, opposition challengers do not face much risk when choosing to use negative messages. The other two levels of the variable (opposition incumbent and government challenger) have countervailing incentives with scope to attack on one dimension and the need to defend on the other dimension. As such, it is reasonable to expect effects to be most pronounced for the first two categories outlined while effects for the latter two are likely to be more subtle. By constructing our main independent variable in this way, we tease apart the differences between the four types of candidates and their contrasting incentives while also allowing us to estimate which dimensions are most important when it comes to predicting the use of negative messaging. Our other main independent variable is seat marginality, and this is measured as the percentage difference between the first and second place candidate in each seat at the preceding general election.

4. Results

Fig. 1 summarises the percentage of leaflets that include negative messaging by election and party. Across all leaflets, nearly 70 per cent contain at least one type of the negative messages we defined earlier. Such a frequent use of negative messaging is consistent with perceptions of overall use of negative messaging in recent general elections (Tidy and Schraer 2019), and it suggests that negative messaging is an important aspect of candidates’ campaign strategies. There are, however, consistent, party-level differences. Leaflets from candidates of the three main parties are generally more likely to include negative messages, though this is not universally the case across all elections. In addition, we observe that the overall use of negative messaging has remained largely unchanged across the four elections - i.e., we do not find any evidence that the use of negative messaging is becoming more (or less) common over time.

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, we run a logit model including all variables specified above. To assess the differences between the leaflets of incumbents/challengers and between the leaflets of government/opposition candidates, we estimate the predictive margins (Fig. 2) and pairwise contrasts of predictions (Fig. 3) for our main multi-level

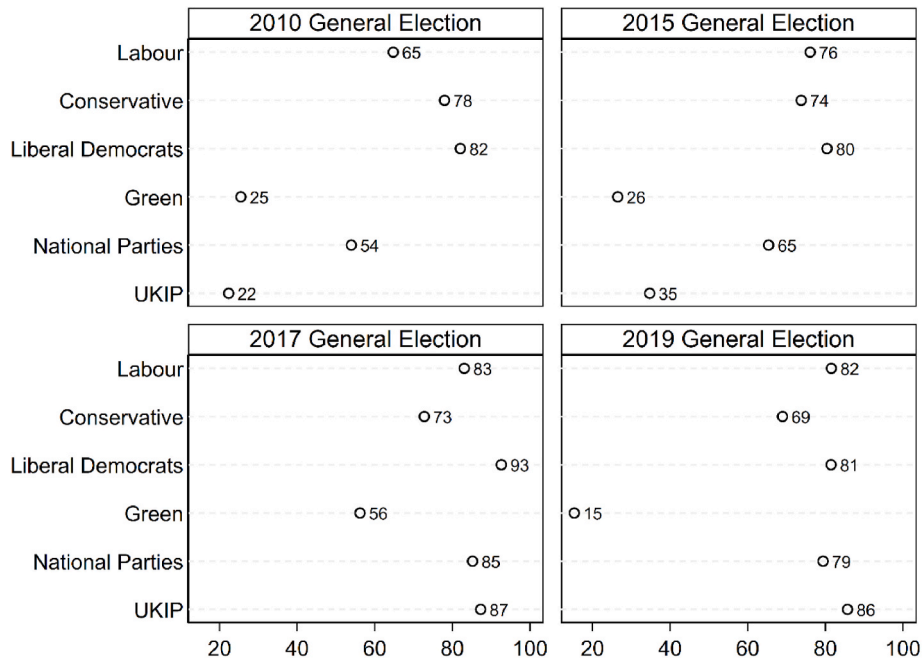


Fig. 1. Percentage of OpenElections candidate leaflets containing negative messaging.

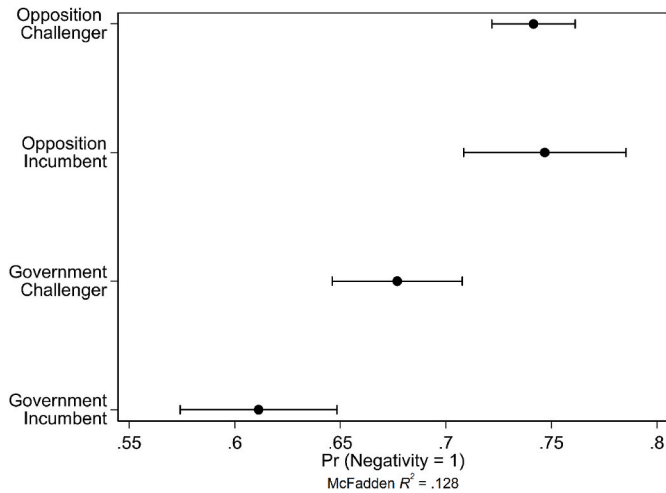


Fig. 2. Predictive margins by government and incumbency status.

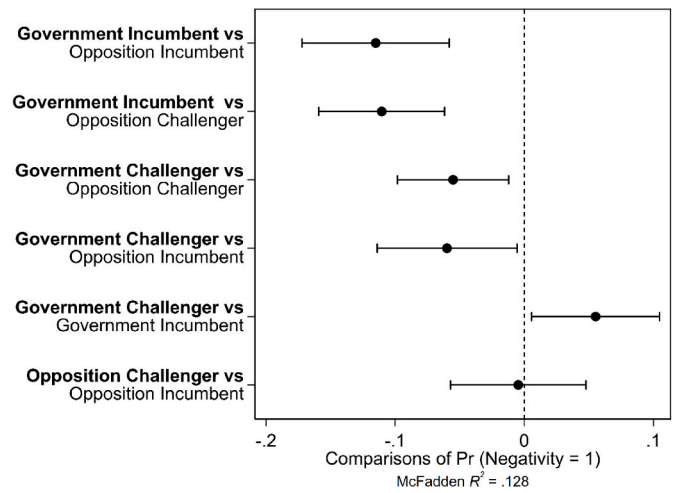


Fig. 3. Pairwise contrasts of adjusted predictions by government and incumbency status.

categorical variable (see Table 3). The pairwise contrast effects in Fig. 3 allow us to test whether there is a statistically significant difference between each pairwise combination of our main independent variable (for example, contrasting the effects for leaflets from government incumbents vs leaflets from opposition incumbents). Estimating multiple pairwise tests, as we do in Figs. 3 and 5, increases the risk of a false positive result (i.e., the probability of returning at least one statistically significant result by chance increases as the number of pairwise estimations go up). As such, we estimate these effects using the Bonferroni correction (Bonferroni 1936) to reduce the likelihood of such errors.

The results presented in Fig. 2 suggest there are significant divergences for what we might consider the most extreme values of our categorical variable (i.e., leaflets from government incumbents and leaflets from opposition challengers) with predicted probabilities at 0.61 (95 per cent CI: 0.57 to 0.65) and 0.74 (95 per cent CI: 0.72 to 0.76), respectively. These values suggest that leaflets from government incumbents are approximately 13 points less likely to include negative messages than leaflets from opposition challengers. The differences

between the less distinct levels of the variable are more muted (i.e., for leaflets from opposition incumbents and leaflets from government challengers), suggesting that leaflets from government challengers are approximately 7 points less likely than leaflets from opposition incumbents to include negative messaging. These results offer support for the idea that leaflets from candidates from the governing party are less likely to engage in negative messaging (H2) but provide little evidence that leaflets from incumbents are less likely to include negative messaging than leaflets from non-incumbent challengers (H1).

To further investigate, we can look at the pairwise contrast effects in Fig. 3. A difference is statistically significant if the confidence intervals do not intersect with the vertical dashed line on the x-axis. Statistically significant results to the right of the dashed line on the x-axis indicate an increased probability of negativity for the candidate type listed in bold on the corresponding y-axis while results to the left of the line indicate a decreased probability. For example, the first pairwise comparison on the y-axis of Fig. 3 shows that government incumbents are 12 points less

likely to engage in negativity when compared to opposition incumbents. Results in Fig. 3 suggest that leaflets from government incumbent MPs and leaflets from government challengers are less likely to include negative messaging in each possible pairwise comparison with leaflets from opposition candidates. Substantively, leaflets from government candidates are between 6 and 12 points less likely to use negative messages. This offers additional support for H2: the government vs opposition dynamic is a more influential factor in the decision to use negative messages than the dynamic of constituency incumbency. However, we also observe that leaflets from government challengers are more likely to use negative messages than leaflets from their government MP counterparts. We do not find similar dynamics on the opposition side of the aisle. As such, it is possible that constituency incumbency is important at the margin when assessing the probability of using negative messaging, but it is a second order effect.

H3 and H4 consider the effect of marginality on the use of negative messaging. To test H3, we estimate the predictive margins for marginality at regular intervals of that variable. Fig. 4 displays these results, which offer support for H3.⁹ Leaflets from candidates competing in marginal constituencies are more likely to include negative messages. To test the interaction relationships specified in H4a and H4b, we run a logit model that interacts our main multi-level categorical variable with seat marginality. We then estimate pairwise contrasts of the predictive margins at regular intervals of the seat marginality variable. These pairwise contrasts test whether there is a statistically significant difference between each pairwise combination of our main independent variable across the range of the seat marginality variable. Bonferroni (1936) corrected results, presented in Fig. 5, indicate that seat marginality has a significant conditioning effect on the probability that a leaflet will include negative messaging.

In each plot in Fig. 5, the effect is statistically significant at the given interval of marginality on the x-axis if the confidence intervals do not intersect with the dashed line at zero on the y-axis. Statistically significant results below the dashed line on the y-axis indicate a decreased probability of negativity at a given interval of seat marginality for the candidate type listed in bold. For example, the first pairwise plot in Fig. 5 shows that government incumbents are 16 points less likely to engage in negativity compared to opposition incumbents when seat marginality is 32 per cent. Based on results in Fig. 5, we can see that leaflets from government incumbents become as likely to include

negative messages as leaflets from opposition candidates once a certain threshold of marginality has been passed.

Fig. 5 demonstrates that a leaflet from a government incumbent becomes as likely to include negative messaging as a leaflet from an opposition candidate once the seat marginality reaches 8 per cent and below. We also observe the same effect when comparing government challengers and opposition challengers, but not for government challengers and opposition incumbents. In our theoretical framework and as noted earlier, government challengers and opposition incumbents have significant countervailing incentives to engage in negativity. Our expectation was that results for this pairwise effect would be more muted, and we see this here with findings that are not statistically significant. For the statistically significant results in Fig. 5, it is interesting to note that there are differences between the leaflets of incumbents and challengers in terms of how marginal the seat needs to be for the confidence intervals to cross the dashed line. In comparison to the 8 per cent threshold for leaflets from government incumbents vs leaflets from opposition candidates, there is a 16 per cent threshold when we compare leaflets from government challengers and leaflets from opposition challengers. This suggests that incumbency does play a role alongside government status (and in the theoretically expected direction), though the substantive effects are relatively small. In sum, the analysis suggests that leaflets from government candidates are less likely to use negative messaging in general. However, the difference becomes statistically insignificant when we look at marginal seats.

5. Conclusion

Using a new, large-scale dataset of British electoral communications, this paper has offered the first investigation into the conditions under which British prospective parliamentary candidates use negative messaging. The results indicate the likelihood that a candidate employs negative messaging is influenced by the marginality of the seat they are contesting and whether they are a member of the governing party. The analysis also shows some evidence that constituency incumbency plays a role in this process at the margins and when considering the interaction between seat marginality, government status, and incumbency. These results suggest that candidates make strategic assessments about when using negative messaging is likely to be a profitable approach and when its risk outweighs potential rewards. The focus of previous analyses on national campaigns has obscured the nuanced strategic decisions of individual candidates. While national parties may wage a predominantly negative campaign (e.g., against an opposing party leader), individual MPs and candidates often choose to place their focus on the positive (i.e., their record of work in the constituency or government delivery in important issue areas). Importantly, our analysis shows this variation is found in party-centred systems, as well as candidate-centred systems such as the United States. This suggests that even candidates in party-centred systems respond to strategic incentives and can deviate from the messaging of the national campaign when appropriate.

In addition, our findings suggest that voters in marginal seats will experience more frequent exposure to negative messaging than their counterparts in safe seats. Witnessing more negative campaigns may have both positive and negative consequences for the quality of democracy in such seats. On the one hand, there is a long tradition of empirical research arguing that the decision to target one's opponent has detrimental effects on the electoral process – including depressed turnout (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Krupnikov 2011), increased political cynicism (e.g., Mutz and Reeves 2005), and negative messaging has been shown to have an adverse effect on trust in government and political efficacy (Lau et al., 2007). If this is the case, then it is possible that voters in marginal seats experience lower levels of trust and efficacy. However, other work suggests that negative messages may provide voters with more information (Mattes and Redlawsk 2014). On this basis, the more frequent inclusion of negative messaging may have a positive impact on the quality of democracy, as it would mean that

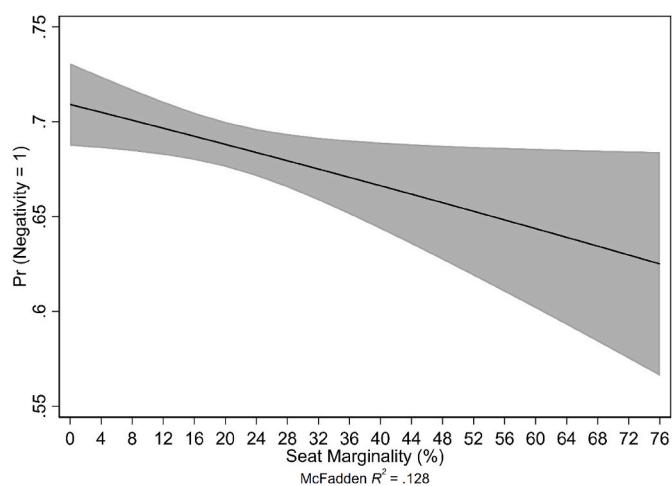


Fig. 4. Predictive margins by seat marginality.

⁹ This figure along with the distribution of the seat marginality variable is available in the supplementary appendix.

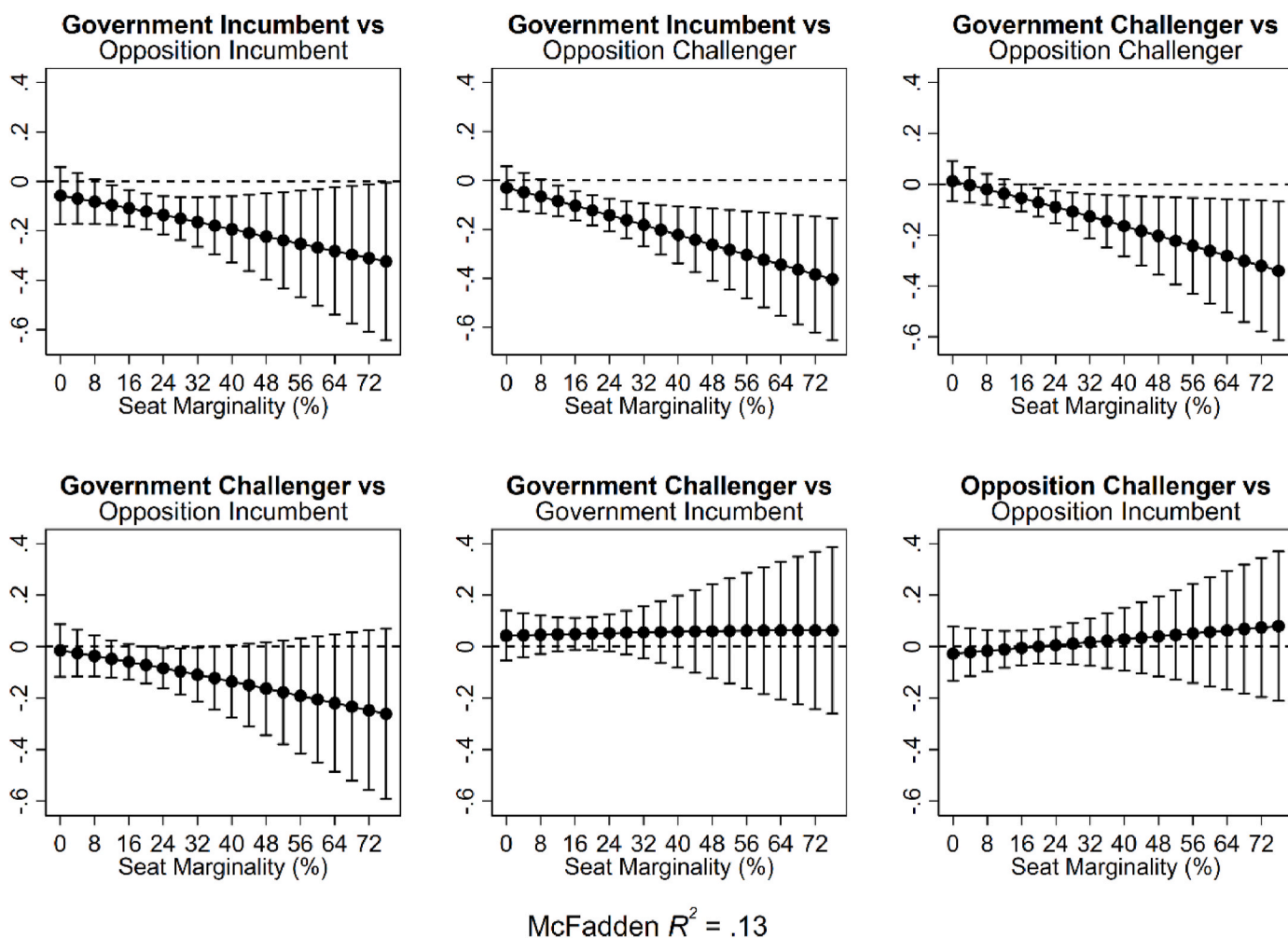


Fig. 5. Contrasts of predictive margins by government and incumbency status.

voters in marginal seats would be better equipped to make informed choices at the ballot box. Our findings may also imply that overall levels of negativity in a campaign are linked to two possible aspects of electoral competitiveness at the constituency level. First, the negativity of a campaign may be higher in elections where we see more competitive races. Second, electoral systems using single-member districts may experience higher levels of negativity than their multi-member counterparts (due to reduced certainty in how candidates can accurately assess marginality in multi-member districts).

Finally, our results suggest that candidates will adapt their strategic decisions when there is a change in the government party. For example, Labour candidates would have greater strategic incentive to ‘go negative’ in elections after their defeat in 2010. We would expect to see this same pattern for Conservative candidates when the party next finds itself on the opposition benches. Unfortunately, our data cannot be used to trace such changes within candidate observations over time or to make direct comparisons between elections at this point, but this would certainly be a fruitful avenue for further research if - and when - the data becomes available.

While our analysis makes an important contribution to our understanding of the conditions under which British candidates use negative messaging, it also suggests several avenues for future research. First, the paper has focused on a broadly defined version of negative messaging, and there are many heterogeneities in types of negative messages used. Future work could explore how different types of negative messaging are employed and the conditions under which candidates, for example, pursue more (or less) personalised attacks. Similarly, election leaflets

are not all equally negative, and therefore, scholars may wish to explore how and where different levels of negative messaging are employed.

Second, there is significant scope for research into how the British public perceives negative campaigns and whether the classification of negative messaging in political science aligns with British voters’ perceptions. Using experimental approaches, scholars could explore how voters react both to different types and levels of negative messaging, and whether these messages are effective in persuading and mobilising the author’s voters or whether they generate the backlash effects that we have observed in other contexts (e.g., Kahn and Kenney 2004). Moreover, while meta-analyses like Lau et al. (2007) are sceptical of the electoral benefits/drawbacks of negativity, they are more definite in the conclusion that negative campaigns can damage political efficacy and trust in institutions. Thus, researchers may wish to consider how negativity may impact on perceptions of the quality of democracy in Britain.

Third, whilst election leaflets represent the most common form of campaign contact between voters and political elites, they nonetheless represent only one avenue of campaign messaging. It would be beneficial to consider how the use of negative messaging varies between traditional election leaflets and other modes of delivery. In particular, scholars may wish to consider how the use of these messages varies between traditional modes of delivery, which are targeted at a wider audience, compared with digital modes of delivery (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) that might reasonably be expected to reach younger voters, or microtargeted audiences (Haenschen and Jennings 2019; Haenschen 2022). It may be that certain types of negative messages gain more traction with some audiences and not others.

In sum, the study of candidates' campaign messaging remains a significantly understudied phenomenon. While parties and candidates devote much of their campaign budgets to communicating with voters, we know little about what they say and where they say it. Initiatives, such as the OpenElections Project, offer scholars the opportunity to gain new insights into how local campaigns are conducted and shed light on the rich variation in candidate behaviour during general election campaigns.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Acknowledgments

We thank Stefan Müller and Siim Trumm for helpful advice and comments. We also thank the three anonymous referees for their detailed and thoughtful comments. Any remaining errors are the authors' responsibility.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102600>.

References

- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Iyengar, Shanto, 1995. *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*. Free Press, New York.
- Belt, Todd L., 2017. Negative advertising. In: Holtz-Bacha, Christina, Just, Marion R. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook Of Political Advertising*. Routledge, New York.
- Benoit, William L., 1999. *Seeing Spots: A Functional Analysis of Presidential Television Advertisements*. Praeger, Westport, pp. 1952–1996.
- Bonferroni, Carlo, 1936. Teoria statistica delle classi e calcolo delle probabilità. *Pubblazioni del R Istituto Superiore di Scienze Economiche e Commerciali di Firenze*, pp. 3–62, 8.
- Brader, Ted, 2006. *Campaigning for Hearts and Minds: How Emotional Appeals in Political Ads*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Carey, John M., Shugart, Matthew S., 1995. Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: a rank ordering of electoral formulas. *Elect. Stud.* 14 (4), 417–439.
- Clarke, Harold, Sanders, David, Stewart, Marianne C., Whiteley, Paul M., 2009. *Performance Politics and the British Voter*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Cutts, David, 2014. Local Elections as a 'stepping stone': does winning council seats boost the Liberal Democrats' performance in general elections? *Polit. Stud.* 62 (2), 361–380.
- De Nooy, Wouter, Jan, Kleinnijenhuis, 2015. Attack, support, and coalitions in a multiparty system: understanding negative campaigning in a country with coalition government. In: Nai, Alessandro, Annemarie, S., Walter (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Negative Campaigning: Why Attack Politics Matters*. ECPR Press, Colchester.
- Denver, David, Hands, Gordon, MacAllister, Ian, 2004. The electoral impact of constituency campaigning in Britain, 1992–2001. *Polit. Stud.* 52 (2), 289–306.
- Dermody, Janine, Hamner-Lloyd, Stuart, 2011. An introspective, retrospective, future-oriented analysis of the attack advertising in the 2010 British General Election. *J. Market. Manag.* 27 (7–8), 736–761.
- Dolezal, Martin, Enns-Jedenastik, Laurenz, Müller, Wolfgang C., 2015. When do parties attack their competitors? Negative campaigning in Austria, 2002–2008. In: Alessandro, Walter, Annemarie S. (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Negative Campaigning: Why Attack Politics Matters*. ECPR Press, Colchester.
- Druckman, James N., Kifer, Martin J., Michael, Parkin, 2009. Campaign communications in US congressional elections. *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 103 (3), 343–366.
- Elmelund-Præstekær, Christian, 2010. Beyond American negativity: toward a general understanding of the determinants of negative campaigning. *European Political Science Review* 2 (1), 137–156.
- Elmelund-Præstekær, Christian, 2008. Negative campaigning in a multiparty system. *Representation* 44 (1), 27–39.
- Enns-Jedenastik, Laurenz, Martin Dolezal, Wolfgang, C., Müller, 2017. Gender differences in negative campaigning: the impact of party environments. *Polit. Stud.* 13 (1), 81–106.
- Fieldhouse, Edward, Green, Jane, Evans, Geoffrey, Mellon, Jonathan, Prosser, Christopher, Bailey, Jack, de Geus, Roosmarijn, Schmitt, Herman, van der Eijk, Cees, 2021. *British Election Study Internet Panel Waves*, pp. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8810-1>.
- Fisher, Justin, 2005. Literature analysis: content and style. In: Elizabeth Robinson and Justin Fisher (eds.), *General Election 2005: what the Voters Saw*. Politics Network, London.
- Fisher, Justin, Cutts, David, Fieldhouse, Edward, 2011. The electoral effectiveness of constituency campaigning in the 2010 British General Election: the 'triumph' of Labour? *Elect. Stud.* 30 (4), 816–828.
- Fisher, Justin, Fieldhouse, Edward, Johnston, Ron, Pattie, Charles, Cutts, David, 2015. Is all campaigning equally positive? The Impact of district level campaigning on voter turnout at the 2010 British General Election. *Party Polit.* 22 (2), 215–226.
- Ford, Robert, Tim Bale, Jennings, Will, Paula, Surridge, 2021. *The British General Election of 2019*. Springer Nature, Cham.
- Fowler, Erika F., Franz, Michael M., Ridout, Travis N., 2016. *Political Advertising In the United States*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO.
- Garramone, Gina M., 1984. Voter responses to negative political ads. *Journal. Q.* 61 (2), 250–259.
- Geer, John, 2006. In: *Defense of Negativity*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Haenschen, Katherine, 2022. "The Conditional Effects of Microtargeted Facebook Advertisements on Voter turnout." *Political Behavior*. Online First.
- Haenschen, Katherine, Jennings, Jay, 2019. Mobilizing millennial voters with targeted internet advertisements: a field experiment. *Polit. Commun.* 36 (3), 357–375.
- Hansen, Kasper M., Rasmus, Tue Pedersen, 2008. Negative campaigning in a multiparty system. *Scand. Polit. Stud.* 31 (4), 408–427.
- Haynes, Audrey A., Rhine, Staci L., 1998. Attack politics in presidential nomination campaigns: an examination of the frequency and determinants of intermediated negative messages against opponents. *Polit. Res. Q.* 51 (3), 691–721.
- Johnston, Ron J., Charles, Pattie, 2006. *Putting Voters In Their Place: Geography and Elections in Great Britain*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Johnston, Ron J., Charles Pattie, David Cutts, Fisher, Justin, 2012. Spending, contacting, and voting: the 2010 British general election in the constituencies. *Environ. Plann.* 44, 1165–1184.
- Kahn, Kim Fridkin, Kenney, Patrick J., 2004. *No Holds Barred: Negativity In U.S. Senate Campaigns*. Pearson Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Krupnikov, Yanna, 2011. When does negativity demobilize? Tracing the conditional effect of negative campaigning on voter turnout. *Am. J. Polit. Sci.* 55 (4), 797–813.
- Lau, Richard R., Pomper, Gerald M., 2002. Effectiveness of negative campaigning in US Senate elections. *Am. J. Polit. Sci.* 46 (1), 47–66.
- Lau, Richard R., Lee, Sigelman, Rovner, Ivy Brown, 2007. The effects of negative political campaigns: a meta-analytic reassessment. *J. Polit.* 69 (4), 1176–1209.
- Maier, Jürgen, Sebastian Stier, Oschatz, Corinna, 2022. Are Candidates Rational when it Comes to Negative Campaigning? Empirical Evidence from Three German Candidate surveys." *Party Politics*. Online First.
- Marcus, George E., MacKuen, Michael, Russell Neuman, W., 2011. Parsimony and complexity: developing and testing theories of affective intelligence. *Polit. Psychol.* 32 (2), 323–336.
- Mattes, Kyle, Redlawsk, David P., 2014. *The Positive Case for Negative Campaigning*. Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Müller, Stefan, 2022. The temporal focus of campaign communication. *J. Polit.* 84 (1), 585–590.
- Mutz, Diana, Byron, Reeves, 2005. The new videomalaise: effects of televised incivility on political trust. *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 99 (1), 1–15.
- Nai, Alessandro, 2020. Going negative, worldwide: towards a general understanding of determinants and targets of negative campaigning. *Gov. Oppos.* 55 (3), 430–455.
- Nai, Alessandro, Tresch, Anke, Maier, Jürgen, 2022. Hardwired to Attack. Candidates' Personality Traits and Negative Campaigning in Three European countries." *Acta Politica*. Online First.
- Pattie, Charles J., Johnston, Ronald J., Fieldhouse, Edward A., 1995. Winning the local vote: the effectiveness of constituency campaign spending in Great Britain, 1983–1992. *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 89 (4), 969–983.
- Pattie, Charles, Denver, David, Johns, Robert, Mitchell, James, 2011. Raising the tone? The impact of 'positive' and 'negative' campaigning on voting in the 2007 Scottish Parliament election. *Elect. Stud.* 30 (2), 333–343.
- Pattie, Charles, Hartman, Todd K., Johnston, Ron, 2019. Not all campaigns are created equal: temporal and spatial variability in constituency campaign spending effects in Great Britain, 1997–2015. *Polit. Geogr.* 71 (1), 36–46.
- Riker, William H., 1996. *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Rosenbaum, Martin, 1997. *From Soapbox To Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning In Britain Since 1945*. Macmillan, London.
- Sanders, David, Pippa, Norris, 2005. The impact of political advertising in the 2001 UK general election. *Polit. Res. Q.* 58 (4), 525–536.
- Sanders, David, Paul, Whiteley, 2014. *British Election Study, 2010: Campaign Internet Data* [computer File]. Colchester, Essex, UK Data Archive ([distributor]).
- Shephard, Mark, 2007. Multiple audiences, multiple messages? An exploration of the dynamics between the party, the candidates and the various constituencies. *J. Elections, Public Opin. Parties* 17 (2), 181–201.
- Skaperdas, Stergios, Grofman, Bernard, 1995. Modeling negative campaigning. *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* 89 (1), 49–61.
- Soroka, Stuart, 2014. *Negativity in Democratic Politics: Causes and Consequences*. Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Tidy, Joe, Schraer, Rachel, 2019. *General Election 2019: Ads Are 'indecent, Dishonest and Untruthful*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-50726500>.

- Trumm, Siim, Sudulich, Laura, 2016. What does it take to make it to the polling station? The effects of campaign activities on electoral participation. *Party Polit.* 24 (2), 168–184.
- vanHeerde-Hudson, Jennifer, 2011. The Americanization of British party advertising? Negativity in party election broadcasts, 1964–2005. *Br. Polit.* 6 (1), 52–77.
- Walter, Annemarie S., 2013. Women on the Battleground: does Gender condition the use of negative campaigning? *J. Elections, Public Opin. Parties* 23 (2), 154–176.
- Walter, Annemarie S., 2014. Negative campaigning in western europe: similar or different? *Polit. Stud.* 62 (1), 42–60.
- Walter, Annemarie S., Alessandro, Nai, 2015. Explaining the use of attack behaviour in the electoral battlefield: a literature overview. In: Nai, Alessandro, Annemarie, S., Walter (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Negative Campaigning: Why Attack Politics Matters*. ECPR Press, Colchester.
- Walter, Annemarie S., van der Brug, Wouter, 2013. When the gloves come off: inter-party variation in negative campaigning in Dutch elections. 1981–2010” *Acta Politica* 48 (4), 367–388.
- Walter, Annemarie S., van der Eijk, Cees, 2019a. Unintended consequences of negative campaigning: backlash and second-preference boost effects in a multi-party context. *Br. J. Polit. Int. Relat.* 21 (3), 612–629.
- Walter, Annemarie S., van der Eijk, Cees, 2019b. Measures of campaign negativity: comparing approaches and eliminating partisan bias. *International Journal of Press/Politics* 24 (3), 363–382.
- Walter, Annemarie S., van der Brug, Wouter, van Praag, Philip, 2014. When the stakes are high: party competition and negative campaigning. *Comp. Polit. Stud.* 47 (4), 550–573.
- Weeks, Brian E., 2015. Emotions, partisanship, and misperceptions: how anger and anxiety moderate the effect of partisan bias on susceptibility to political misinformation. *J. Commun.* 65 (4), 699–719.
- Yoon, Kak, Pinkleton, Bruce E., Ko, Wonjun, 2005. Effects of negative political advertising on voting intention: an exploration of the roles of involvement and source credibility in the development of voter cynicism. *J. Market. Commun.* 11 (2), 95–112.