Mobilizing and chasing: The voter targeting of negative campaigning. Lessons from the Swiss case.

Simon Stuckelberger

simon.stuckelberger@unil.ch

Institute of Political, Historical and International Studies

University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Abstract

There are two targeting objectives for an election campaign: mobilizing core voters and chasing undecided voters. According to most previous research negative campaigning exclusively fulfils a chasing function; parties use it to convince swing voters. The article argues that parties consider the mobilization of core voters as a second important function of negative campaigning. It is based on interviews with party campaign officials and a content analysis of election newspaper advertisements and press releases from the 2011 and 2015 Swiss National Council elections. The interviews and the analysis of parties' attack behaviour show that, not only do parties use negative campaigning also for mobilizing purposes, but in the analysed Swiss elections it seems to be a more popular strategy than chasing.

Keywords: Negative campaigning, mobilizing, chasing, targeting, Switzerland

1

Introduction

According to Rohrschneider (2002) an election campaign has two objectives. The first is the mobilization of core voters and the second is the chasing of swing voters. Looking at previous research there seems to be no doubt that negative campaigning as an electoral strategy uniquely serves the second objective, allowing political parties to target voters who are undecided between voting for the attacker and the targeted opponent. As Nai and Walter (2015: 12) summarize: 'Scholars […] concur on its function: negative campaigning is a means to diminish the positive feelings voters might have towards a political opponent'. In this understanding, negative campaigning serves political parties to change voters' feelings towards the attacked opponent, but is not intended to change or reinforce feelings towards the attacker. The only way negative campaigning is conceived of changing voters' perception of the attacking party is in form of an unintended backlash effect because voters disapprove of mudslinging (Lau et al., 2007). Implicitly the target group of negative campaigning is therefore defined as swing voters that need to be convinced of not voting for the opponent, rather than core voters, who should be given reasons to stick with their traditional choice.

This article aims to challenge that consensus by arguing that political parties make use of negative campaigning for both chasing and mobilizing purposes. The chasing functions of negative campaigning are not being called into question. Parties use attacks on their competitors to discredit them as valid alternatives and gain in relative popularity as well as to depress turnout among an opponent's sympathizers. However, this does not preclude the possibility of a mobilizing purpose. Negative campaigning is an intuitive choice for a party to mobilize its core voters for two reasons. First, negative appeals can work as a boundary making mechanism that unites the party base, activating and reinforcing existing party preferences, by emphasizing the threat of the common enemy. Second, negativity has the power of involving people in politics. Research on the effects of negative campaigning, while divided, seems to show that rather than depressing turnout negative campaigning might have a mobilizing effect especially on partisans (Lau et al., 2007).

To test those arguments, this article combines a qualitative and quantitative approach. On the one hand, interviews with leading party campaign officials provide insights into parties' reasoning behind their use of negative campaigning. On the other hand, a content analysis of election newspaper advertisements and parties' press releases during the 2011 and 2015 Swiss National Council elections allow for the analysis of parties' actual attack behaviour. The empirical evidence suggests that, not only do parties use negative campaigning also for mobilizing purposes, but in the analysed election campaigns it is a more frequent strategy than chasing. The majority of interviewees argue that they use negative campaigning rather for mobilizing than chasing purposes. Contrary to chasing expectations, parties are less likely to attack opponents that share more of their voter base with the attacker. This is in line with a mobilizing logic, as this means that opponents that share less of their voter base with the attacker and which are more disliked by the attacker's base are more likely to be attacked. Furthermore, the way parties make use of party categories supports the mobilizing functions of negative campaigning.

This article makes an empirical contribution to the still small but growing literature on negative campaigning in multiparty systems. Theoretically and methodologically it adds to the broader negative campaigning literature by emphasizing the mobilizing functions of negative campaigning and showing the usefulness of a mixed-method approach.

The article is structured as follows. First, the mobilizing and chasing functions of negative campaigning are presented and applied to the attack behaviour in a multiparty system. Second, the data, methods and operationalization of variables are discussed. Third, the findings from the Swiss case are presented and the implications of this study are highlighted in the concluding remarks.

Theoretical Argument

The functions of negative campaigning

To maximize the impact of their campaign, parties are careful to adapt the message to the voters they want to reach. Most authors distinguish between two target groups: The *core voters* who are emotionally attached to you as a party and are normally voting for you in

each election and the *swing voters* who might vote for you or for an opponent, changing regularly their party preference (e.g. Albright, 2008; Holbrook and McClurg, 2005; Rohrschneider, 2002). The core voters of your opponents, the rival voters, constitute a third segment of the electorate (Bernhard, 2012), but as they are very likely to vote for an opponent they are normally not considered as a viable target group. According to Rohrschneider's (2002) mobilizing-chasing framework there are therefore two main objectives for a campaign: *mobilizing* core voters and *chasing* swing voters.

On the level of an election campaign those two objectives can be combined and probably have to be combined if a party wants to win elections (Albright, 2008). However, because the two target groups differ there is a certain trade-off between appealing to them equally. Rohrschneider (2002) therefore suggests that election campaigns can be positioned on a continuum that ranges from an exclusive focus on core voters to an exclusive focus on swing voters. This same continuum can also be used not to characterize election campaigns but to assess individual electoral strategies like negative campaigning.

Negative campaigning shall be defined here as any criticism parties or candidates voice against their opponents (Geer, 2006; Lau and Pomper, 2001). In research on parties' strategic use of negative campaigning this is a largely undisputed definition. That literature focuses on 'who' adopts negative campaigning, 'when' and 'where' (e.g. Kahn and Kenney, 1999; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995); Lau and Pomper 2001). The 'why' is generally not an object of study as the functions of negative campaigning are taken as self-evident. Besides the general function of making parties win elections (Lau and Pomper 2001, Kahn and Kenney, 1999), the literature suggests two more precise functions.

The first and most often discussed function is persuasion, i.e. changing voters' party preferences in the attacker's favour. As Walter et al. (2014: 551) explain it: 'A party resorts to negative campaigning in an attempt to become voters' preferred party by diminishing positive feelings for opposing candidates or parties' (see also e.g. Doron and On, 1983; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995; Nai and Walter, 2015). By defining the function of negative campaigning in terms of changing party preferences rather than in terms of activating and

reinforcing existing party preferences, the target group is implicitly defined as swing voters or in extension rival voters.

The second function is not about influencing party preferences, but about influencing turnout. Ansolabehere et al. (1994) have famously argued that negative campaigning has a negative effect on turnout, initiating a debate about the implications of negative campaigning for democracy and leading multiple authors to argue that parties might use negative campaigning to depress turnout among supporters of the opponent (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; Malloy and Pearson-Merkowitz, 2016). This function therefore targets rival voters as well as swing voters who sympathize with the attacked opponent.

By limiting the 'why' of negative campaigning to those two functions that are directed towards swing or rival voters, the literature conceives negative appeals as uniquely serving the objective of chasing. Based on a Schattschneiderian view on conflict I argue that there are important theoretical reasons to believe that the literature is only partly right and that parties *also* use negative campaigning to mobilize core voters because it can serve to *activate and reinforce* party preferences and increase their base's *voter turnout*.

Negative campaigning is well positioned to fulfil the function of *activation* because as Schattschneider (1960: 62) argues 'conflicts divide people and unite them at the same time'. A party by attacking another can define a conflict line that allows core voters to identify as 'us' against a 'them' identified in the attacked party and its supporters. By attacking an opponent whose ideas and interests supposedly threaten those held dear by the party and its potential electorate a party presents itself as the defenders of its core voters and provides reason for them to stick with their choice. This argument on the activation function of negative campaigning, while largely ignored, is not new. Budesheim et al. (1996: 532) already argue that negative campaigning in addition to undermining the opponent's support can 'strengthen the support from one's own political in-group'. More recently Elmelund-Præstekær (2010: 143) emphasizes that 'a party might want to engage in negative campaigning in order to create a stronger party identification among its voters' (see also Kleinnijenhuis et al., 1998).

'The central political fact in a free society is the tremendous contagiousness of conflict' (Schattschneider, 1960: 2). This Schattschneider quote points to the fact that negative campaigning, is a natural choice to *increase voter turnout*. A political fight like any other one draws attention, incites the crowd to take a side and indicates that something important is at stake. The non-discussion of this function in the party literature is surprising given the extended literature on the effects of negative appeals on voter turnout. Most recent studies in fact disagree with Ansolabehere et al.'s (1994) original argument that negative campaigning has a negative effect on turnout. Lau et al. (2007, 1184) conclude in their meta-analysis that the literature does not support the general demobilizing effect of negative campaigning, stating that 'If anything, negative campaigning more frequently appears to have a slight mobilizing effect.' The same meta-analysis also suggests that negative campaigning has a mobilizing effect specifically on partisans, while it might rather demobilize independents (Lau et al., 2007: 1185). Based on this literature negative campaigning seems to constitute an interesting option for parties to increase turnout among their base.

Attack behaviour in multiparty systems

In addition to insights from interviews with campaign officials, this analysis relies like other studies on parties' campaign behaviour to infer their objectives (e.g. Doron and On, 1983; Kahn and Kenney, 1999; Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002). Multiparty systems force parties to choose the opponents they want to attack and therefore provide us with an observable targeting behaviour. The strategic choice of attacking one opponent rather than another affects the groups of voters that respond to the negative appeal because voters differ in the way they relate to the various political parties. The choice of target of negative campaigning is therefore a good indicator of parties' strategies with regards to the voters they are trying to reach.

The growing literature on negative campaigning in multiparty democracies (Curini and Martelli, 2010; Nai and Walter, 2015; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010) largely agrees with the general literature dominated by studies on the U.S. two-party system on the chasing objective of negative campaigning: The main model to explain whom parties attack in

multiparty systems has been developed by Doron and On (1983). According to them, negative campaigning aims exclusively at discrediting one's opponent. Therefore, they argue that parties are expected to attack ideologically proximate parties whose voters are open to the appeals of the attacker as well as big parties that offer a large voter pool.

While this is a very popular model, empirical evidence in clear support of it is rare. Even in Doron and On's (1983) own analysis there are multiple parties that do not follow their model and most studies conducted since then do not provide more promising results. While Walter (2014) does confirm the Doron-On model (for valence attacks see also Curini and Martelli, 2010), most authors either present mixed results (Haynes and Rhine, 1998; Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002), or find that parties and candidates are more likely to attack ideologically distant opponents (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 1998; Ridout and Holland, 2010; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2008; Dolezal et al., 2015). In most of those studies, other factors than mobilization are used to explain the shortcomings of the Doron-On model. While Rideout and Holland (2010) point to ideological distance that increases the likelihood of disagreement, Elmelund-Præstekær (2008) argues that ideologically close opponents are not attacked for coalition considerations. A first exception is Walter (2014) who engages with the mobilizing argument but rejects it based on her findings. A second exception is Dolezal et al. (2015) who find that parties are slightly more likely to attack ideologically distant parties, which the authors explain based on a mobilizing intention.

This research on attack behaviour in multiparty democracies shows that a model exclusively building on chasing intentions shows at best mixed results. To achieve a better performing model and a more complete understanding of negative campaigning, it is crucial to stop treating chasing and mobilizing as mutually exclusive objectives of negative campaigning.

The chasing and mobilizing potential

The aim is to understand the objectives behind negative campaigning based on the targets political parties choose in multiparty systems. The typical characteristics of a target for a chasing strategy is a party with a large share of voters who would potentially vote for the attacking party or that could attract a large share of voters from the attacker. In other words,

7

there is a large overlap of the two voter bases and the attacking party aims to use negative campaigning to sway those voters that could potentially vote for either one of the two parties. Such a target can be considered to have a high chasing potential.

The typical characteristics of a target for a mobilizing strategy is a party that is highly disliked by many supporters and sympathizers of the attacking party. By attacking such a target, a party aims to get their supporters and sympathizers to stick to their choice and to show up at election day. The logic behind it is that the more supporters and sympathizers dislike a party the more an attack on it convinces them that the attacker is on their side and that they should turn out to vote for it. In a mobilizing logic, the party aims to convince the voter that a vote for it is also a vote against the targeted opponent. A party is therefore considered to have a high mobilizing potential if many of the supporters and sympathizers of the attacker highly dislike it. It can generally be expected that if this is the case, those negative feelings are shared by supporters and sympathisers of the targeted party, which means that there is only a small overlap of the voter base of the attacker and that of an opponent with a high mobilizing potential. A target that has a high mobilizing potential can therefore be expected to have a low chasing potential and vice versa. An attack aimed for mobilization has the advantage, that its costs in terms of a backlash effect should be lower, as most of potential supporters of the attacking party already clearly dislike the targeted opponent.

[TABLE 1]

The presented mobilizing-chasing framework expects parties to use both chasing and mobilizing strategies in their use of negative campaigning. However, for the case of Switzerland I expect that the mobilizing strategy will be more important. The reason is first that as has shown the literature review, previous studies have rarely found that parties attack ideological close opponents, i.e. chasing targets, more often. Second, in Switzerland the most important parties all are in government. This means that parties can less easily attack the record of opponents, something that is very useful for chasing attacks and less necessary for attacks on parties with whom one anyway shares less ideologically.

Hypothesis: Opponents with a high mobilizing and low chasing potential, i.e. that share less of their voter base with the attacker, are more likely to be targeted.

Data and Method

This study analyses negative campaigning in Switzerland based on the 2011 and 2015 elections to the National Council, the lower house of the parliament. Switzerland is a consensus democracy with the (informal) rule of concordance government (Lijphart, 1999), meaning that the most important parties are represented in the government constituted by seven federal councils elected by the parliament. The Swiss political system is characterized by a proportional electoral system and strong multipartism, which allows for the exploration of parties' choices regarding the targets of their negative appeals.

To explore party strategies this article relies on qualitative data from interviews as well as quantitative data from the content analysis of campaign material. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews have been conducted in the first months of 2018 with a leading member of the campaign team from all seven parties except for the radical right-wing Swiss People's Party, which refused to participate in this study.[1] As has been shown previously, interviews can be a useful method to understand the targeting objectives of political parties (Albright, 2008), and can complement the analysis of campaign material (Kahn and Kenney, 1999). The two data sources for the content analysis are newspaper advertisements and press releases. As we are interested in the targets of negative campaigns rather than in the general level of negativity in Swiss election campaigns our data sources include the more confrontational communication channels and ignore sources which can be expected to contain fewer negative appeals such as party manifestos (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010). This study uses newspaper ads rather than the often-analysed TV ads because the latter are forbidden in Switzerland. Newspaper ads, however, provide the same advantages as TV ads: they are party controlled communication channels and can in contrast to for example party posters, be judged on their importance based on their frequency of appearance. All ads, including identical ones that appeared on different days or in different newspapers, are taken into account. The database of newspaper ads (2011 N= 2560, 2015 N=4277) provides a very extensive view on the 2011 and 2015 National Council elections covering more than

20 French- and German-speaking Swiss newspapers over a time period of up to four months before Election Day.[2] The analysis is limited to the advertisements of the seven biggest parties and their candidates which combine a vote share of over 90%.

As only three out of seven parties ran negative ads and not in high numbers, this study includes press releases as a further data source in order to increase the validity of findings. The press releases of the seven biggest parties are analysed for the period of two months before Election Day. While the number of press releases is limited (2011 N=218, 2015 N=166), this data source has the advantage compared to for example press articles that it is party controlled and therefore comparable to ads.

Method

The voter targeting objectives of negative campaigning are explored qualitatively based on the following interview question: "Regarding the objectives of such criticism [of your opponents]: Would you rather do it to energize your base or rather to attract voters that might vote for that opponent instead of your party?" Additionally, relevant information that the respondents gave at other moments in the interviews, which revolved around questions of campaign strategies, is used as well. The interviews focused on the 2015 campaign and the answers should be interpreted as being valid for that context.

The parties' use of negative campaigning in the 2011 and 2015 Swiss National Council elections is analysed quantitatively based on a content analysis of newspaper ads and press releases. Both data sources were hand-coded by a single coder. The unit of analysis is a negative appeal (Geer, 2006), which is any criticism of another party or a party category. Coded are not only the criticism parties voice against individual parties but also criticism parties voice against groups of opponents. Specifically, the following four categories have been identified: 'left-wing parties', 'centre parties', 'right-wing parties' and 'all other parties'. Those categories are not just concepts used in political science, but they are, as 'categories of practice' (Brubaker, 2004: 31), part of the vocabulary political parties employ in their election campaigns. The literature on negative campaigning is mostly silent on those categories, and it is unclear if authors generally exclude them from analysis or that attacks against them are simply counted as separate attacks against the parties

comprised in the category (for the latter see Walter, 2014). They will be taken into account in this study because they play an important role in the Swiss case and might be expected to be used differently in terms of mobilizing and chasing than individual parties.

Criticisms directed at members of the Federal Council are treated as attacks on the respective parties. However, attacks against the government are not coded because of the consensual Swiss system, which makes it more difficult to interpret the critique of government as targeting the other parties. In the case that a party is not mentioned by name but the target of the attack can undoubtedly be identified, negative appeals are coded as well.

As negative campaigning is always directed against another party, each observation is given by a dyad of an attacking party and a targeted opponent. The objective is to measure the likelihood of the presence of an attack for the different types of dyads. Therefore the dataset includes for each observed attack from a particular party, all the possible alternative attacks that party could have made against other targets (for the same approach see Walter, 2014).[3] In the model with the other parties as targets, for each attack five non-attacks are coded consisting of dyads between the attacker and each of the five parties that are neither the attacker not the attacked. In the model with three party categories as targets, for each attack two non-attacks are coded consisting of dyads between the attacker and each of the non-targeted categories. The resulting dataset is analysed with a logistic regression, in which, because the attacks and non-attacks of a particular party are not independent observations, the standard errors are clustered.

Operationalization of independent variables

The main variables of interest are the chasing and mobilizing potentials of a targeted party. Previous studies, starting with Doron and On (1983), have measured chasing and if considered mobilizing potentials based on ideological distance (e.g. Dolezal et al., 2015; Walter, 2014) The reasonable assumption is that ideologically close parties do share a bigger voter base with the attacker than ideologically distant parties and therefore have a bigger chasing potential. Ideologically distant parties are generally more disliked by voters

of your own parties and serve therefore better the purpose of a mobilizing strategy. Ideological distance however is quite a crude measure of chasing and mobilizing potentials. Ideological distance might not measure what is really important for a voter to vote for a party or for a voter to really dislike a party. This study therefore suggests a more reliable measure of the shared voter base between parties, namely voters' expression of likelihood to vote for parties. The measurement of the shared voter base of two parties contains two elements. The first is the percentage of *voters of the targeted party* that considers it likely that he or she would vote for the attacking party.[4] For each election year, 2011 and 2015, this is measured based on survey data from the previous elections, using the 2007 and 2011 Swiss election studies SELECTS (Selects, 2009, 2012).[5] In those surveys voters[6] of each party were asked about the likelihood of voting for the other parties. Likely means here that voters choose a value of 7 or higher on a scale from 0 to 10. The second element is the percentage of *voters of the attacking party* that considers it likely that he or she would vote for the targeted party. This is based on the same survey measures. The sum of those two elements than provides a measure of the extent of the overlap of the two voter bases. This indicator shows on the one hand a target's chasing potential, the voters a party might gain from or lose to a party. On the other hand, the shared voter base also shows a target's mobilizing potential, because it strongly correlates negatively with the percentage of voters of the attacker that dislike, i.e. are unlikely to vote for (value of 3 or below on a scale from 0 to 10), the targeted party (Pearson's r: -0.81). The shared voter base is therefore a positive indicator of chasing potential and a negative one of mobilizing potential.

As all previous studies have used ideological distance as a measurement it will also be included here in order to assure comparability. The measurement of ideological distance is based on the 2010 and 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2014). The survey's results allow the positioning of parties not only along the classical economic left-right dimension but also along the cultural libertarian-authoritarian dimension. This gives a more precise picture of the positions of parties in the two-dimensional Swiss political landscape (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012). Based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the ideological distance between two parties is calculated as the geometric distance between their positions in the

two-dimensional space defined by the economic dimension (LRECON) and the cultural dimension (GALTAN).

In order to test convincingly the influence of the chasing and mobilizing potential on parties' attack behaviour it is important to control for other factors that might be more indirectly linked to voter targeting or that might suggest that the attack behaviour is influenced by variables unrelated to voter targeting. A first such factor is the size of the targeted opponent. Attacks on large parties might be considered to be an indication of a chasing strategy as such parties carry many voters (Walter, 2014). However, it might also be an indication of a mobilizing strategy, as large parties can be presented as a bigger threat to one's voters. Size is therefore not a good indicator for chasing or mobilizing objectives. Furthermore large parties might also be attacked for other reasons like a better chance for media attention (Dolezal et al., 2015). Party size is measured based on the last election results.[7] A second factor which is often studied and which falls within the lines of a chasing framework is *poll standing*. The argument is that parties that are winning in the polls, either absolutely or compared to their last election results, are more likely to be attacked because they have a large or increasing voter base (Ridout and Holland, 2010; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995; Walter, 2014). Poll standing is measured as the difference between the poll results (an average of four poll results published up to four months before the elections Longchamp et al. (2011)) and the last election results.

A final factor is the *government status* of the targeted party. Existing research shows that government parties are more frequently exposed to attacks (Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002; Walter, 2014). This might be interpreted in line with the chasing idea, arguing that incumbents are attacked because they have been most successful in the last election and therefore have the biggest voter potential (Walter, 2014). A second interpretation is that it simply reflects the nature of elections as a fight between 'ins' and 'outs' which forces incumbents to defend their policies and challengers to criticize them (Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002; Walter, 2014). Government status is measured with a dichotomic variable, which takes the value of 1, if the targeted party is part of the government.

Findings

Interviews

The interviews show that in the context of the 2015 election campaign parties' campaign officials in Switzerland conceived of the targeting objectives of negative campaigning mostly in terms of mobilizing. Two representatives, one from a centrist party and the other from a pole party, argued that if they use negative campaigning that they would rather do it to chase voters from an opponent.[8] The other four interviewees responded that they would rather use negative campaigning to mobilize their own base.[9] Two campaign officials, both from parties more to the poles of the ideological spectrum, explicitly rejected the possibility to use criticism of other parties to chase other parties' voters.[10] One of them who made the most extensive remarks on the subject argued as follows: "[It is impossible] to explain to someone that the party for which he has voted for 10 years, is, excuse the expression, shit. He won't buy that. […] You have to be careful not to make your potential voter angry. You have to embrace him and not beat him."[11]

The interviews also provided insights into targets of negative appeals intended for mobilizing. The same campaigner added that, mobilizing their base is only possible with attacks on their 'natural opponent', who has no overlap with them in terms of voter base and with whom they can publicly fight without negative consequences. There it works according to this interviewee because they can present this party as the evil bogeyman and their base agrees unanimously that the political project proposed by this opponent should be opposed. The data on attack behaviour of political parties, analysed in the next section did indeed show for this party a strong focus on this opponent on the other side of the political spectrum. More generally, this can make us more confident to interpret attacks on opponents with a small overlapping voter base as having a mobilizing intention.

Overall the interviews show that for political parties mobilizing their own base can be an objective of negative appeals. In Switzerland, in the context of the 2015 campaign, this is judged to be more important by most interviewed campaign officials than chasing.

Attack behaviour - Targeting parties

After having discussed the objectives of negative campaigning as argued by campaign officials, I turn now to the analysis of parties' campaign behaviour. Table 2 shows the results of the logistic regression on the attack behaviour in the Swiss parliamentary elections 2011and 2015 (for a descriptive overview see Appendix A.1). The first model indicates that while controlling for poll standing, government status and party size, the shared voter base has a statistically significant negative effect.[12] This means that the smaller the shared voter base, i.e. the higher the mobilizing potential and the lower the chasing potential, the higher is the likelihood of attacks. In order to allow for a comparison with earlier studies (e.g. Doron and On, 1983; Walter, 2014), the second model relies on ideological distance as an alternative proxy for chasing and mobilizing purposes. The results show that in line with the results of the first model, ideological distance, with the same controls as in model 1, has a statistically significant positive effect. The larger the ideological distance between attacker and targeted opponent, the more likely becomes an attack. These results further challenge the idea that negative campaigning is exclusively used for chasing purposes. They reinforce the argument already supported by the interviews that in Switzerland negative campaigning is indeed used for mobilizing purposes and that in this context the mobilizing strategy is more important than the chasing strategy. Importantly, this model shows an average effect. Attacks following the chasing logic also exist. For example, in a 2011 ad, the Liberal party attacked the small but upcoming Green-Liberal party, that shares many potential voters with the Liberal party, clearly targeting voters that were considering voting for either of the two parties (FDP.The Liberals, 2011). Furthermore, poll standing does have a positive effect, which is in line with a chasing perspective. As already have been found in other studies (Dolezal et al., 2015; Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002; Walter, 2014), government status and party size also have statistically significant effects. To what extent this is due to mobilizing, chasing or other factors is however more difficult to establish.

[Table 2]

While the literature presents a mixed picture with regard to the effect of ideological distance, the presented finding are in line with the finding of various studies on attack behaviour in multi-actor contexts (Dolezal et al., 2015; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2008; Ridout and Holland, 2010). However, those studies, with the exception of Dolezal et al. (2015), don't share the interpretation that the results are due to mobilizing efforts. In the following it is therefore necessary to discuss three alternative interpretations. A first counter-argument to the mobilizing interpretation is that, this attack behaviour is simply due to the fact that parties fear a backlash effect if they attack a party that is ideologically close. This backlash effect would come either from their voters who are sympathetic to ideologically close parties (Lau et al., 2007), or from the parties themselves that are potential coalition partners (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2008). The coalition potential is in the Swiss case a weak argument, given that coalition calculations play a small role due to the stable composition of the Swiss government, the absence of coalition programs, as well as the institutional and temporal separation of parliamentary elections and the election of the federal council (Bol and Bohl, 2015). The fear of a backlash from voters is a more convincing argument which is supported by the comments made by one of the campaign officials that they are much freer to attack their 'natural opponent' because they have only a small shared voter base and therefore have to fear less of a backlash. However, the weakness of both backlash arguments is that while they can tell us why parties would not want to attack ideologically close parties, they struggle to tell us why parties would have an interest in attacking parties with unattractive voter bases.

A second counter-argument is that parties are attacking opponents with whom they share only a small voter base not for voter targeting purposes, but simply because they find more to disagree with those parties (Ridout and Holland, 2010). This is certainly a valid argument and one can expect that it explains part of the discussed pattern of attacks. However, this does not preclude the possibility that this criticism is used by political parties during electoral campaigns strategically, as is suggested by the interviews with party officials.

A third counter-argument is that the intention behind the observed behaviour is actually to demobilize the voters of the attacked party. This interpretation is not fully convincing since those targeted opponents seem not the best target for such a purpose. According to Martin (2004) most authors who defend the demobilization hypothesis "make a case that citizens are repulsed by candidates attacking one another". However, if attacks come from ideologically distant parties, one would expect that the negative reaction would be less pronounced as such a behaviour seems more acceptable. Furthermore, the voters of such an ideologically distant party are the ones least likely to be open for arguments from such an attacker and risk to be mobilized by such an attack. Finally, it should be noted that party officials were not particularly asked about demobilization, and none of them mentioned it in unstructured remarks.

Attack behaviour - Targeting Categories

Parties do not only attack individual parties, but also attack party categories. In the Swiss case, those kinds of attacks constituted 47 per cent of all attacks. They use three categories that separate the political space into different parts, the left, the centre and the right. The results of the logistic regression displayed in table 3 shows that with regard to those three categories, parties are more likely to attack the opposite category than the adjacent category, which is the reference category, or the category they belong to themselves. This pattern supports the mobilizing hypothesis with regard to categories because those opposite categories seem very unhandy for a chasing strategy and very useful for a mobilizing effort trough their threat potential. The radical right-wing Swiss People's party (SVP) ran for example an ad with the title: 'This is what the left, do-gooders and their experts want: Ivan S. should carry on raping' (Swiss People's Party, 2011). This is hardly an appeal to left-wing voters, but it allows the party to present itself as the protector of those who fear allegedly left-wing policies. Similarly, the Social Democrats warned in a press release: 'If things go according to the plans of the right-wing parties, after the elections there will apparently be yet another attack on the social security system. [...] The SPS will stop those attacks' (Social Democratic Party, 2011).

[Table 3]

There is one category that has not been discussed, which is 'all other parties'. This is a particular category, because of its nature – it englobes everyone except the attacker – and because in the Swiss context the radical right-wing Swiss People's party (SVP) is in 99% of the cases the sender. For this party, 'all other parties' is overall the most important target which testifies to the populist character of this party that tries to position itself against all the other parties. More interestingly for our argument, when thinking in terms of voter targeting this seems to be a target that has a high mobilizing potential due to its threat potential and has rather unclear chasing benefits as its vagueness is unlikely to persuade voters considering to vote for another party.

Conclusion

The largely uncontested consensus in the literature on negative campaigning is that the exclusive objective of negative campaigning is to chase swing voters. This study has argued that there are good theoretical reasons to expect parties to use negative campaigning also to mobilize core voters because it can activate and reinforce party preferences and increase voter turnout. The results from interviews with party officials and the analysis of the attack behaviour during the 2011 and 2015 Swiss national elections support this argument. They suggest, that in this case study negative campaigning is dominantly used for mobilizing and not for chasing purposes.

This study hopes to contribute to a stronger theorization of negative campaigning that acknowledges its mobilizing functions. This can help us to better understand not only the attack behaviour in multiparty systems, but more generally when, where and by whom negative campaigning is used. At the same time, there is still much to be explored with regard to the contextual conditions and party characteristics that foster or impede the use of negative campaigning for mobilizing or chasing purposes.

This article is based on a single-country study and one should be careful in generalizing the presented findings. The Swiss case is particular, because of the comparatively low level of negativity, evidenced in the quantitative data as well as confirmed by campaign officials who mostly consider it of low importance. Furthermore, attack behaviour in Switzerland

is less dominated by an opposition-government polarization, because the electorally most important parties belong to the government, This polarization is an important way for parties that share a large voter base to distinguish themselves from each other and its lower salience in the Swiss case might have contributed to the lower importance of the chasing strategy. More generally it should be noted that the importance of the mobilizing strategy or the use of party categories might vary considerably depending on the country and the party system. However, there are strong reasons to assume that the mobilizing functions of negative campaigning are valid beyond the context of this study. Besides the theoretical arguments and the literature on the effects of negative campaigning, there is a long tradition of studies that have found that parties' attack behaviour in multi-party democracies does not fit the rationale of an exclusive chasing purpose. With the argument that parties use negative campaigning as a means to mobilize their own supporters and sympathizers, this article provides an answer to the misfit between the results of this study and earlier work and the chasing expectations generally accepted in the literature.

Appendices

[Table A.1]

Acknowledgements

Funding

Notes

[1] Interviews have been conducted by the author and another researcher in the context of project X.

[2] The database has been made available to the author by X. The over 20 covered newspapers include quality newspapers such as *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and *Le Temps* as well as boulevard newspapers such as *Blick* and Le Matin.

[3] Dolezal et al. (2015) suggest an alternative way to build a dataset with this kind of data, by calculating the share of attacks from a particular party that is directed to each possible target. The party model (Table 2) has been replicated according to their method and the results confirm the robustness of the results, with the exception of government status that is not significant (p=0.083). The results are available from the author upon request.

[4] The phrasing of the question is: 'Please tell me how high the likelihood is that you will ever vote for that party, 0 means that the likelihood that you will vote for that party is very low, 10 means that the likelihood is very high'.

[5] The exceptions are the small new centrist parties the Conservative Democratic Party and the Green Liberal Party, on which there are no data for 2007 and for which the values from the 2011 SELECTS survey have been used for both election campaigns.

[6] Non-voters are also included in the data. They are considered as voters of the party, that they indicated as the one they would have voted for.

[7] The average of poll results was used as indicator for the size of the new centrist Conservative Democratic Party, as no previous election results were available for the 2011 campaign.

[8] Two interviews conducted on 13 February 2018.

[9] Four interviews conducted on 15 January 2018, 9 February 2018, 10 February 2018, 11 February 2018.

[10] Interviews conducted on 15 January 2018 and 9 February 2018.

[11] Interview conducted on 9 February 2018.

[12] This also holds true when separate analyses are performed for the two data sources.

Bibliography

Albright JJ (2008) Partisans or independents? Evidence for campaign targets from elite interviews in Spain. *Electoral Studies* 27(4): 711–722.

Ansolabehere S and Iyengar S (1995) *Going negative: how political advertisements shrink and polarize the electorate*. New York: Free Press.

Ansolabehere S, Iyengar S, Simon A, et al. (1994) Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate? *The American Political Science Review* 88(4): 829–838.

Bakker R, de Vries C, Edwards E, et al. (2014) Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999-2010. *Party Politics* 21(1): 143–152.

Bernhard L (2012) *Campaign strategy in direct democracy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bol D and Bohl M (2015) Negative Campaigning in Proportional Representation – Yet Non-Coalition– Systems: Evidence from Switzerland. In: Nai A and Walter AS (eds) *New Perspectives on Negative Campaigning: Why Attack Politics Matters*. Colchester: ECPR Press, pp. 113–125.

Brubaker R (2004) *Ethnicity without groups*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Budesheim TL, Houston DA and DePaola SJ (1996) Persuasiveness of in-group and out-group political messages: The case of negative political campaigning. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70(3): 523–534.

Curini L and Martelli P (2010) Ideological proximity and valence competition. Negative campaigning through allegation of corruption in the Italian legislative arena from 1946 to 1994. *Electoral studies*. 29(4): 636.

Dolezal M, Ennser-Jedenastik L and Müller WC (2015) When Do Parties Attack their Competitors? Negative Campaigning in Austria, 2002-08. In: Nai A and Walter AS (eds) *New perspectives on negative campaigning: why attack politics matters*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Doron G and On U (1983) A rational choice model of campaign strategy. In: *The elections in Israel 1981*. Tel Aviv: Ramot Publishing, pp. 213–231.

Elmelund-Præstekær C (2008) Negative Campaigning in a Multiparty System. *Representation* 44(1): 27–39.

Elmelund-Præstekær C (2010) Beyond American negativity: toward a general understanding of the determinants of negative campaigning. *European Political Science Review* 2(01): 137–156.

FDP.The Liberals (2011) Die FDP redet Klartext. *Tagesanzeiger*, 10 October.

Geer JG (2006) *In defense of negativity attack ads in presidential campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Haynes AA and Rhine SL (1998) Attack Politics in Presidential Nomination Campaigns: An Examination of the Frequency and Determinants of Intermediated Negative Messages Against Opponents. *Political Research Quarterly* 51(3): 691–721.

Holbrook TM and McClurg SD (2005) The Mobilization of Core Supporters: Campaigns, Turnout, and Electoral Composition in United States Presidential Elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 49(4): 689–703.

Kahn KF and Kenney PJ (1999) *The spectacle of U.S. senate campaigns*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kleinnijenhuis J, Oegema D, De Rider J, et al. (1998) *Paarse polarisatie: de slag om de kiezer in de media*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Samsom.

Kriesi H, Grand E, Lachat R, et al. (2008) *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kriesi H, Grande E, Dolezal M, et al. (2012) *Political conflict in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lau RR and Pomper GM (2001) Negative Campaigning by US Senate Candidates. *Party Politics* 7(1): 69–87.

Lau RR, Sigelman L and Rovner IB (2007) The Effects of Negative Political Campaigns: A Meta-Analytic Reassessment. *The Journal of Politics* 69(4): 1176–1209.

Lijphart A (1999) *Patterns of democracy: government forms and performance in thirty-six countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Longchamp C, Imfeld M, Golder L, et al. (2011) Medienbericht zum Wahlbarometer 2011, 4. Welle, Juni 2011. Studie im Auftrag von SRG SSR.

Malloy LC and Pearson-Merkowitz S (2016) Going positive: The effects of negative and positive advertising on candidate success and voter turnout. *Research & Politics* 3(1).

Martin PS (2004) Inside the Black Box of Negative Campaign Effects: Three Reasons Why Negative Campaigns Mobilize. *Political Psychology* 25(4): 545–562.

Nai A and Walter AS (2015) The War of Words: The Art of Negative Campaigning. In: Nai A and Walter AS (eds) *New perspectives on negative campaigning: why attack politics matters*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Ridout TN and Holland JL (2010) Candidate Strategies in the Presidential Nomination Campaign. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40(4): 611–630.

Rohrschneider R (2002) Mobilizing versus chasing: how do parties target voters in election campaigns? *Electoral Studies* 21(3): 367–382.

Schattschneider EE (1960) *The semisovereign people: a realist's view of democracy in America*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Selects (2009) *Enquête auprès des électrices et électeurs après les élections - 2007*. Lausanne: FORS [distributor].

Selects (2012) *Enquête auprès des électrices et électeurs après les élections - 2011*. Lausanne: FORS [distributor].

Sigelman L and Shiraev E (2002) The Rational Attacker in Russia? Negative Campaigning in Russian Presidential Elections. *Journal of Politics* 64(1): 45–62.

Skaperdas S and Grofman B (1995) Modeling Negative Campaigning. *The American Political Science Review* 89(1): 49–61.

Social Democratic Party (2011) Bürgerliche bereiten den nächsten Rentenabbau vor. 6 October.

Swiss People's Party (2011) Das wollen Linke, Nette und ihre Experten: Ivan S. soll weiter vergewaltigen. *BZ Berner Zeitung*, 6 July.

Walter AS (2014) Choosing the enemy: Attack behaviour in a multiparty system. *Party Politics* 20(3): 311–323.

Walter AS and Vliegenthart R (2010) Negative Campaigning across Different Communication Channels: Different Ball Games? *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 15(4): 441–461.

Walter AS, van der Brug W and van Praag P (2014) When the Stakes Are High: Party Competition and Negative Campaigning. *Comparative Political Studies* 47(4): 550–573.

Table 1. The mobilizing-chasing framework applied to negative campaigning in multiparty systems

	Mobilizing	**Chasing**
Target group	Core voters	Swing voters
Function	Activation Increase turnout	Persuasion Decrease turnout
Targeted opponents	High mobilizing potential: Small overlap of voter bases	High chasing potential: Large overlap of voter bases

Table 2. Predicting attacks on other parties in the 2011 and 2015 Swiss national elections

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2
Shared voter base	-0.0889*** (0.00739)	
Ideological Distance		0.413*** (0.0313)
Size	0.226*** (0.0148)	0.229*** (0.0166)
Poll standing	1.208*** (0.0801)	1.416*** (0.102)
Government Party	1.813*** (0.459)	2.585*** (0.436)
Year (2015)	-0.546*** (0.104)	-0.217* (0.102)
Constant	-4.448*** (0.489)	-10.35*** (0.606)
Observations	3,348	3,348
Cluster	558	558
McFadden	0.457	0.427
AIC	1638	1730

Notes: Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the presence or absence of an attack. Standard errors are adjusted for clusters. *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

Table 3 Predicting attacks on party categories in the 2011 and 2015 Swiss national elections

VARIABLES	
Categories (Ref: Adjacent cat)	
Own category	-0.949***
	(0.275)
Opposite category	2.499***
	(0.269)
Year (2015)	0.0139
	(0.101)
Constant	-1.427***
	(0.158)
Observations	639
Cluster	213
McFadden	0.299
AIC	570.4

Notes: Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is the presence or absence of an attack. Standard errors are adjusted for clusters. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

A.1. Targets of negative campaigning in 2011 and 2015 in newspaper advertisements and press releases (in %)

Source	Target SPS	GPS	GLP	CVP	FDP	BDP	SVP	l-w parties	centre parties	r-w parties	the other parties	Total	N
Social Democrats (SPS)	0	0	0	8	22	0	25	0	0	45	0	100	114
Green Party (GPS)	0	0	4	20	20	4	27	0	0	18	7	100	45
Green-Liberal Party (GLP)	0	0	0	11	33	17	17	6	0	17	0	100	18
Christian Democrats (CVP)	7	2	0	0	5	0	21	33	0	33	0	100	43
Liberal Party (FDP)	73	1	2	2	0	1	13	6	1	1	0	100	347
Conservative Party (BDP)	22	0	0	0	0	0	33	0	0	44	0	100	9
Radical Right-wing Party (SVP)	19	0	0	1	2	0	0	13	6	0	59	100	484

Note: The units of analysis are negative appeals (N=1060).