Negative campaigning in Western Europe: beyond the vote-seeking perspective

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When the Gloves Come Off: Inter-Party Variation in Negative Campaigning in Dutch Elections, 1981-2010

This chapter is largely based on a manuscript of a journal article, which is currently under review.

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Abstract

This study examines changes in negative campaigning in the Netherlands between 1981 and 2010. In addition, we examine which factors determine whether political parties are likely to make use of this campaign strategy in the Dutch multiparty system. We advance existing research on negative campaigning in two ways. First of all, this is the most extensive study of negative campaigning in the Netherlands conducted so far and as far as we know also the most extensive conducted in any multi-party system. Secondly, our study contributes to the theoretical understanding of the determinants of negative campaigning in a multiparty context by differentiating between parties' vote-seeking and office seeking incentives and stating the implications of office-seeking for the use of negative campaigning.

Keywords: Negative Campaigning, Multiparty System, Party Competition, Election Campaigns, the Netherlands, Political Parties

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Introduction

With the decreasing loyalty of Western European voters to parties, the importance of election campaigns has grown. In an attempt to gain a greater grip on the unstable electoral market, parties are professionalizing or 'Americanizing' their election campaigns (Plasser and Plasser 2002; Scammell 1998). Political parties in Western Europe are increasingly taking their lead from the United States context when looking to employ new campaign techniques (Butler and Ranney 1992; Farrell 2005), one of which is a practice known as 'negative campaigning'. Studies on negative campaigning stem primarily from the US two party system and not much attention has been paid to continental European multiparty systems (the exception being recent studies on Danish campaigns, see Elmelund- Præstekær 2008; 2010 and Hansen and Pedersen 2008). As a result, our understanding of the use of negative campaigning in multiparty competition remains incomplete. Most European party systems are characterized by multiple parties and by coalition governments and we will argue below that these factors affect patterns of party competition, including the likelihood of parties' using a negative campaigning strategy.

In this paper we examine negative campaigning in the Dutch parliamentary election campaigns between 1980 and 2010 and provide answers to a descriptive and an explanatory question. First of all, to what extent is negative campaigning on the rise in the Dutch multiparty system and second, how can we explain the use of negative campaigning in a multiparty system? The Dutch system is an ideal case to examine, as it has become one of the most electorally unpredictable and volatile countries in Western Europe (Mair 2008). In addition, the Dutch electoral system is one of the most proportionally representative systems in the world, and has a large number of political parties, with coalition government as the rule rather than the exception (Andeweg and Irwin 2009). Furthermore, it is a multiparty system free of bipolar competition and therefore it also functions in practice as a multiparty system (Mair 1996).

This study builds upon the US literature (e.g. Geer 2006, Lau and Pomper 2004) and the recent European literature (e.g. Elmelund- Præstekær 2008; 2010 and Hansen and Pedersen 2008) and contributes to present research in two ways. First, it advances the theoretical understanding of the determinants of negative campaigning in a multiparty context by differentiating between parties' vote-seeking and office seeking incentives and stating the implications of office-seeking for the use of negative campaigning, as so far models in both the US and European literature are predominantly guided by vote-seeking incentives. Second, it empirically tests these new hypotheses by employing content analysis data from ten Dutch election campaigns between 1981 and 2010.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the next section, we introduce the concept of negative campaigning employed in this study. Subsequently, we present our theoretical expectations regarding the relationship between party characteristics and negative campaigning based on parties' vote and office seeking objectives. This is followed by a discussion of the Dutch case. After outlining our data collection,

operationalization and method of analysis, we present the empirical results. In a concluding section we discuss the theoretical and political implications of our study.

The Concept of Negative Campaigning

Before we outline the factors that account for inter-party variation in negative campaigning, it is important to develop a precise definition of the concept. Whilst there is an extensive literature on negative campaigning, it fails to yield a consensus regarding a clear-cut definition of the term (Lau et al. 1999; Lau et al. 2007). Despite the lack of definitional consensus, two types of definitions can be distinguished – *evaluative* and *directional*. The first type employs a largely evaluative approach to the concept (e.g. Jamieson 1992; Mayer 1996). From this perspective, not all criticism directed at an opponent can be classified as negative campaigning; rather only those critiques that are unfair, illegitimate, dishonest and deal with trivial issues. From this angle, negative campaigning essentially equates to lying about the undesirable characteristics of rivals (Davis and Ferrantino 1996). Most recent work has moved away from this evaluative understanding of negative campaigning and towards a definition that stresses the directional meaning of the concept. Here negative campaigning is defined as a strategy by which political parties distinguish themselves from other political parties, by attacking or criticizing their opponents (e.g. Lau et al. 2007; Geer 2006). The opposite strategy would be one of positive campaigning, where parties engage in acclamation or self-praise (Budge and Farlie 1983a; Benoit et al. 2003). Both definitions view negative campaigning as a campaign strategy that parties can use in their attempt to become voters' preferred party, by diminishing positive feelings and emotions directed towards opposing candidates or parties (Budesheim, Houston and De Paola 1996; Lau et al. 2007).

In this study we employ the directional definition for three reasons. First of all, a discussion regarding the ethics of negative campaigning is not our objective; our study provides an empirical examination of inter-party variation in negative campaigning in a multiparty system and sets out to explain under which circumstances different parties are more or less likely to attack. The debate regarding dirty politics and the implications for democracy is in itself an interesting topic, but links up to a very different scientific discussion than the one to which we intend to contribute. We wish to refrain from a normative judgment regarding the use or content of negative campaigning. Second, in contrast to the directional definition, the evaluative definition blurs the distinction between positive and negative campaigning. The evaluative definition ascribes dishonesty and triviality exclusively to negative campaigning, but one can easily imagine positive campaigning strategies that stretch the 'truth' (e.g. Geer 2006). Finally, the evaluative definition of negative campaigning introduces measurement error. For instance, what constitutes an unfair or dishonest critique? And which issues are trivial? These judgments ultimately lie in the eyes of the beholder and thus cannot provide a solid basis for reliable and valid

measurement (Mark 2006). By defining negative campaigning on the basis of its directional nature rather than its evaluative meaning, we avoid problems relating to theoretical clarity and empirical measurement. Consequently, we understand negative campaigning as a critique directed at an opposing party, regardless of the kind or accuracy of the criticism.

Inter-Party Variation in Negative Campaigning

A central topic for scholars in the field of negative campaigning is the decision making process by which candidates or parties choose to make use of negative campaigning (e.g. Theilmann and Wilhite 1998; Hale, Fox and Farmer 1996; Sigelman and Buell 2003; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995). The literature on negative campaigning generally employs a rational choice perspective, in which candidates and political parties tend to engage in a cost benefit analysis before deciding to make use of the strategy (Lau and Pomper 2004). It is posited that only once the expected benefits outweigh the costs, will negative campaigning be used in an electoral campaign. The literature on this topic originates from the US context and starts from the assumption that the behaviour of candidates and parties is guided primarily by their main goal, which is to win elections. Negative campaigning is a campaign strategy that might increase a party's vote share, but which is not without risks: so-called *boomerang* or *backlash* effects (Lau and Pomper 2004). Negative campaigning can cause negative feelings to be directed towards the attacker, instead of the targeted party or candidate (Johnson-Cartee et al. 1991). Beyond this potential risk of losing voters instead of gaining them, negative campaigning can help a party to win a race. In a two party system negative campaigning is beneficial when voters turn away from the opponent, thereby making the attacking party the dominant player. Although desirable, it is not necessary for an attacking party to win over voters in order to gain the upper hand; if the opponent's voters decide not to go to the ballot box, this in itself may be enough to secure a victory.

When seeking to explain parties' decisions to go negative, two factors stand out in the U.S. literature, namely *incumbency status* and a candidate's *competitive standing* in the polls.[12] First of all, challengers, i.e. parties or candidates currently not in office are expected to be more willing than incumbents to take the risks of negative campaigning. This is mainly because challengers have to overcome the natural advantages of incumbency that their rival already possesses (Lau and Pomper 2004; Druckman, Kifer and

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12   Within the US literature, scholars also highlight electoral context factors that might affect a candidate's or party's decision to make use of negative campaigning (See for instance Haynes and Rhine 1998; Damore 2002; Kahn and Kenney 2004). In this article we focus on variation in negative campaigning across parties, these election context factors are less relevant as they should predict the same level of negativity for all parties. In addition, we study too few elections to have enough variance on election characteristics to estimate these effects.

Parkin 2009). Incumbents can promote themselves, their work and their accomplishments on the basis of their official position and duties. In addition, incumbents are likely to be more visible in the media and can therefore benefit from name recognition and an established reputation (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2006). Finally, incumbents have a policy record that can serve as a strong basis for positive campaigning (Benoit 1999). In contrast, challengers have the onus on them to provide reasons that voters should support them rather than the incumbents (Kahn and Kenney 2004; Hale, Fox and Farmer 1996).

Second, US studies highlight the importance of the competitive standing of parties or candidates for the decision to go negative (e.g. Kahn and Kenney 2004; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Hale, Fox and Farmer 1996). Parties that are trailing behind in the polls are more inclined to go negative than frontrunners (Benoit 1999; Damore 2002; Sigelman and Buell 2003). Parties that are losing are more willing to bear the risks of a backlash effect when they 'go negative', because they are losing anyway. Drawing on the current US literature, we now formulate two hypotheses:

Challenger Party Hypothesis (H1): Challenger parties are more likely to engage in negative campaigning than incumbent parties

Losing Party Hypothesis (H2): Parties that are losing in the polls are more likely to engage in negative campaigning than challenger parties that are gaining in the polls

Due to the multitude of parties and the practice of coalition bargaining, parties in a multiparty system face a different cost benefit analysis. First of all, the rewards of negative campaigning in a multiparty system are divided as they can go to many different parties, not only the attacker, while the costs of the backlash effect are limited to the attacking party (Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2008).[13] Even though we expect to see lower levels of negative campaigning, as a result of the lower level of rewards in a multiparty system, we would still expect the same factors (incumbency status, competitive standing in the polls) to be important on the basis of vote seeking behaviour. The hypotheses derived from the US literature all relate to parties' vote seeking behaviour, which though important, is probably not sufficient when exploring inter-party variation in negative campaigning within multiparty competition. There is no question that obtaining votes is the chief objective for all parties, regardless of the institutional setting,

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13   In this respect, we should not exaggerate the differences between two party systems and multiparty systems. Even though a party might not directly benefit when attacking the opponent (it might even lose votes instead of gaining them and unintentionally benefit another party) negative campaigning is still indirectly advantageous for the attacking party when it weakens its most important competitor and thereby strengthens its own position relative to the other parties competing in the election campaign.

but other goals also influence parties' campaign strategies, especially in a multiparty context. Building on the seminal work of Strøm and Müller (1999), we assume parties to be rational actors whose behaviour is guided by three overarching political objectives: office, policy and votes. Within a two-party system, especially one with majority electoral districts, parties can concentrate on vote-seeking goals as a majority of votes enables them to achieve office and to implement policy as a result. In contrast, parties operating within a multiparty system have to carefully balance their vote-, office- and policy- seeking objectives. In these systems, obtaining the most parliamentary seats does not automatically translate into government office or influence over policy. Winning an election does not directly translate into office in multiparty competition, rather it makes a party a key player in the post-election bargaining process.

As a result, the costs of negative campaigning are higher in a multiparty system than in a two party system, as parties not only need to worry about possible backlash effects, but also about potential post-election bargaining costs (Brants et al. 1982; Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010). Given that elections within multiparty systems are fought in the wake of coalition negotiations, negative campaigning may endanger a party's goal of obtaining office. A campaign which is fought too aggressively and too negatively, may damage parties' ability to govern together (e.g., Brants et al. 1982; Sjöblom 1968; Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006. For instance, in the Dutch election campaign of 1972 the Liberal Party (VVD) attacked 'the Catholic People's Party (KVP) and Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP). Although the VVD in fact wished to build a four party coalition with these two parties, the tone and content of its campaign did not help its relationship with the KVP and ARP. VVD's campaign behaviour was used within these circles as an argument to block a possible coalition. Vote-seeking preferences prevailed for the VVD, which was one of the winning parties that election, but at the cost of becoming a coalition partner (Van Praag, 1991: 129). Due to the absence of a clear correlation between winning votes and obtaining office in a multiparty system, attack behaviour might not always prove beneficial. Thus, negative campaigning within multiparty competition involves a trade-off between the various goals that parties pursue. Again we expect the overall level of negative campaigning to be lower in a multiparty system. Thus, parties in a multiparty system face a different cost-benefit structure and as a result have a more difficult task calculating the likelihood of success when going negative, than parties operating in a two party system.

So, which parties are expected to engage in negative campaigning in a multiparty system? We argue that next to vote-seeking incentives this depends on the coalition potential of a party, i.e. a party's office-seeking behaviour. Parties with low coalition potential have less to lose from negative campaigning as their chances of being part of the government are slim to none from the beginning. Parties with high coalition potential, by contrast, may be less inclined to make use of negative campaigning. In line with Sartori (2005/1976) and Lijphart (1999), we understand a party's coalition potential by the degree to which a party is viewed as a viable coalition partner. However, there are obviously

no straightforward indicators of the extent to which parties perceive other parties as viable coalition partners. Therefore, we will focus on four factors which are proposed in the literature on coalition formation that contribute to the coalition potential of parties, namely; party size, distance to the median party, new party and government experience.

First, the size of the party, defined as the proportion of parliamentary seats it controls, influences negative campaigning negatively, as large parties are more likely to take part in government coalitions. This is because size reflects electoral popularity and government participation signals responsiveness to voters (Warwick 1996). Moreover, parties want to maximize their power and thus want to form coalitions in which they have to share ministerial posts with as few other political parties as possible.

The second factor affecting a party's coalition potential is the distance to the median party. Parties that control the median position are most likely to be part of a government coalition (Warwick 1996). In a one-dimensional space, the median party occupies the dominant bargaining position and is thus most likely to be part of a government coalition. Although political space may be multidimensional, most scholars agree that the left/right ideological dimension is the key conflict dimension in party systems in most advanced industrial democracies (e.g. Pierce 1999; Gabel and Huber 2000). Consequently, the median position on the left right/dimension constitutes the dominant bargaining position and a party's coalition potential decreases as it moves further away from this dominant position (Bartolini 1998; Laver and Schofield 1998). We thus expect the likelihood of negative campaigning to increase as the distance between a party and the median party increases.

The third factor is new party status. New parties are those that have not been represented in parliament yet. Their coalition potential is expected to be low and negative campaigning may be less risky as a result. Additionally, these parties have no reputation to lose and are free to challenge the establishment in every way. Compared to parties with existing linkages to voters in the party system, new parties may face less harmful side effects of negative campaigning (Elmelund-Præstekær 2010).

The final factor is government experience, i.e. the extent to which parties have already participated in previous government coalitions (Lijphart 1999; Sartori 2005/1976; Warwick 1996). Previous government experience matters for coalition potential because it demonstrates that parties are able to govern, these parties have built a reputation for being good coalition partners known for abiding by coalition accords and for working effectively with other parties (Warwick 1996). The costs of attempting to form a coalition with these parties are perceived to be lower compared to parties with no government experience. Consequently, parties with frequent government experience have a high degree of coalition potential which in turn increases the possible coalition bargaining costs of negative campaigning. We formulate four hypotheses:

Party Size Hypothesis (H3): Parties with a large number of parliamentary seats are less likely to engage in negative campaigning than those with fewer parliamentary seats.

Median Party Hypothesis (H4): Parties that are closely positioned to the median party position within the system are less likely to go negative than parties that are positioned far away from the median party.

New Party Hypothesis (H5): New parties are more likely to engage in negative campaigning than established parties.

Government Experience Hypothesis (H6): Parties that have more government experience are less likely to go negative than parties that have less or no government experience.

The Dutch Case

The Dutch case provides an ideal testing ground to statistically assess our expectations regarding inter-party variation in negative campaigning in a multiparty system, as it is the primary example of a multiparty system. Due to the fact that the Dutch electoral system is one of the most proportionally representative systems in the world it has a large number of political parties and coalition government is the rule (Andeweg and Irwin 2009). In addition, the Dutch party system is known for its relatively open structure when it comes to party competition. The post-war Dutch system comes close to what Mair (1996) describes as a system with different patterns of partial alternation, frequent shifts in the make-up of the governing alternatives and with new parties gaining relatively easy access into office. Furthermore, it is rather exceptional for Dutch political parties to express their coalition preferences before the elections, because when pre-electoral alliances do not win a majority, it considerably complicates the building of a new govern-ing coalition (Andeweg and Irwin 2009). Consequently, the Dutch multiparty system is free of bipolar competition as is not the case for instance in Germany and also in practice functions as a multiparty system.

In addition, the Netherlands is a multiparty system in which winning votes and winning office are not connected. The Dutch Lower House consists of 150 seats that can be won in Parliamentary Elections. For instance, in 2006 the Socialist Party (SP) was the largest winner, as it received 16 seats more than in 2003. However, the SP was not taken seriously by the other parties as a potential coalition partner and therefore remained in opposition. On the other hand, in 2010 the Christian Democrats (CDA) lost half of its seats, but with the remaining 21 seats it was still able to enter the coalition government. Thus, it is clearly a case in which vote or office seeking considerations may both affect parties' campaign strategies. Furthermore, as a result of the relative openness of the Dutch multiparty system the Netherlands has become one of the most electorally unpre-dictable and volatile countries in Western Europe (Mair 2008).

Before turning to the data and operationalization we will briefly describe the nature of Dutch election campaigns. Dutch election campaigns are relatively short in

comparison to US presidential races. For most parties the official campaign starts about four weeks prior to election day (Brants, Kok and Van Praag 1982). In addition, Dutch election campaigns are relatively inexpensive by international standards, and are still considered to be undergoing the process of professionalization (Andeweg and Irwin 2009; Van Praag 2005). These campaign characteristics affect the role that political advertising plays in Dutch election campaigns. Both parties that are represented in the Dutch parliament and unrepresented parties are granted free air time on the national public television stations by the Dutch government (Mediawet 2008). This type of political advertising, referred to as party election broadcasts (*Zendtijd Politieke Partijen*) has existed since 1962 (Brants 2006). Parties are allowed to air about twenty party election broadcasts annually plus another six in the last two weeks of the election campaign. These broadcasts last approximately three minutes each and resemble political advertisements. Until 1998 the Dutch public and commercial channels refused to sell political parties air time. The purchase of television air time is still not a widespread practice, mainly due to restricted party campaign budgets (Brants 2006; Van Praag 2007). Consequently, party election broadcasts are the most important form of televised political advertising (Andeweg and Irwin 2009).

Data and Method

This article examines negative campaigning in the ten parliamentary election campaigns in the Netherlands between 1980 and 2010. We measure the degree of negative campaigning on the basis of a systematic content analysis of party election broadcasts (*Zendtijd Politieke Partijen*). Party election broadcasts are completely controlled and officially approved by the party leadership and therefore provide a reliable source to measure party behaviour. We study the broadcasts that were aired in the four weeks prior to Election Day for each campaign and restrict our analysis to political parties that have gained parliamentary representation. In total, we collected 146 party election broadcasts, see Table A.3.[14] Each of the broadcasts that we retrieved were shown several times on national television. Since no records were kept of how many times each broadcast was aired and where it was aired, we are unable to conduct frequency-weighted or rate weighted analysis (Prior 2001). We do not consider this to be a problem because the purpose of our study is not to estimate the effects of these party election broadcasts on voters.

The content analysis was conducted by a procedure developed by Geer (2006). The unit of analysis is a natural speaking unit, the *appeal*, which is any mention of

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14   The retrieved party election broadcasts from election campaigns before 1980 are too scattered to serve as basis for a systematic examination of the use of negative campaigning in Dutch election campaigns.

self-praise or criticism of the opponent. The complete ad is in the coding scheme not the unit of analysis as ads often contain both positive as well as negative appeals (Benoit et al. 2003; Geer 2006). The same applies to sentences, which can contain more than one appeal. Negative campaigning is measured by looking at the number of negative appeals (any criticism against the opponent) versus the number of positive appeals (any self-praise of the party or politician) in each of the party election broadcasts. In the content analysis negative campaigning is a dichotomous variable (0=Positive; 1=Negative). We coded only the spoken and written text of the party election broadcasts.

    The content analysis was executed by a group of native Dutch speaking (post) graduate students and was proved to be reliable. The inter-coder reliability was measured based on the coding of a random sample of appeals. The most difficult coding category was to determine the unit of analysis, i.e. to determine which part of the text constitutes an appeal and whether it consists of one or multiple appeals. The Krippendorf's Alpha was 0.77 for the unit of analysis, which means that the codings were sufficiently reliable. For the tone of the appeal the Krippendorf's Alpha was 0.92. In total, 3702 appeals were coded of which about one quarter consisted of negative appeals.

    As we lack hypotheses on the appeal level and the measured appeals are not independent observations, we aggregate our dataset to the party election broadcast level. As a result, our dichotomous dependent variable changes in a continuous variable, measuring the percentage of negative campaigning per spot. The 146 election broadcasts are again nested in the 21 producing parties and these are nested in the ten election campaigns in which they compete. Therefore, given the nested data structure and our dichotomous dependent variable, this study would ideally employ a hierarchical regression model. However, our highest level of analysis (elections) consists of only 10 cases, which is too small a sample size for accurate estimation (Maas and Hox 2005).[15] As we are unable to make use of hierarchical modelling, but have to take the dependence of the observations into account, we estimate a linear regression model with White's heteroskedastic standard errors. In addition, we corrected for the clustering of spots in parties. In order to account for the grouping of the data in election years we include election year dummies in the model. Given the hierarchical data structure and our limited sample size at the highest level of analysis, the chosen method of analysis is appropriate. Nevertheless, using this method comes at the cost of decreasing our number of observations from 3702 appeals to 146 party election broadcasts, therefore decreasing the power of our tests and increasing the likelihood of type two errors.

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15   Maas and Hox (2005) show that a small sample size of ten at the second level leads to biased estimates of the second level standard error. The estimates can be biased up to 25%.

Operationalization of Independent Variables

This section provides an overview of the operationalization of the independent variables. The variable *Opposition Party* is a dummy variable indicating whether a party is in opposition at the time of the election campaign or is part of the governing coalition (1=Opposition; 0=Government). The variable *Loss in Polls* measures the difference (i.e. loss or gain) between the vote share a party would receive according to polls prior to the election campaign and the vote share a party obtained during the previous elections in percentages. For the concept of losing in the polls different points of reference can be selected, namely; the position in the previous polls, the previous election results or the position of a competing party (Kleinnijenhuis and Takens 2011). For this study, we take the previous election results as our point of reference. Firstly, as we think that the results of previous elections are what is at stake in the elections and therefore serve as an important point of reference for the campaign managers. Secondly, as we do not have information about when exactly each particular ad was aired. Moreover, as the main bulk of ads were produced prior to the campaign and therefore reflect the party strategy in general at the beginning of the campaign, we are unable to model the dynamics of the campaign. As the changes in voting percentages, i.e. the losses or gains between the concurrent polls and the previous elections, will be larger in magnitude for larger parties, we have divided the changes by the sizes of the party in the previous election. For new parties we took a one per cent vote share as the reference point. As the resulting variable is heavily positively skewed we transform the variable by taking the log. However, before we are able to do this we make the variable positive by adding the maximum percentage of vote share lost to all values. The poll data used originates from TNS NIPO, the Dutch Institute for Public Opinion and Market Research. The concept of coalition potential is measured as a party characteristic with the help of four variables, namely; *Party Size*, *Median Party Distance*, *Government Experience* and *New Party*.[16] The variable *Party Size* is operationalized as the percentage of seats a party would receive according to the polls four weeks prior to the election. The variable *Median Party Distance* is operationalized as the absolute distance between a party's left/right placement and the left/right placement of the median party within the system. These party placements are based on voter's mean placements of parties on an 11-point left/right scale using Dutch Parliamentary

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16 We refrain from constructing a scale or an additive index to measure coalition potential. First of all, we wish to preserve the possibility of seeing the separate relationships between the different aspects of coalition potential (government experience, party size, distance to the median party and new party status) and the likelihood of going negative in an election campaign. Second, these separate aspects of coalition potential are not necessarily related as these characteristics all increase a party's coalition potential, but do not necessarily coincide with each other.

Election Surveys (DPES) from 1981 to 2010.[17] The variable *Government Experience* captures the number of years a party was part of a government coalition since 1945, divided by the total number of years since 1945. For parties established after 1945 government experience is measured by the number of years a party was part of government coalition. The source of this variable was Woldendorp et al. (2000) and Andeweg and Irwin (2009). *New Party* is a dummy variable indicating whether a party has already acquired representation in parliament prior to this particular election, when this is not the case the party is considered a new party (1=New; 0=Established). Parties that are mergers of several existing parties, such as the Christian Democrats (CDA) and Green Left (GL) are not counted as new parties the first time they compete in an election campaign. Finally, election year dummy variables are included in the model to correct for data clustering in the elections.

Results

To what extent is negative campaigning present in the Dutch multiparty system and has negative campaigning increased over the last 30 years? Figure 2.1 shows the use of negative campaigning in the Dutch parliamentary campaigns since 1981. In this figure the data is weighted in two separate steps. First of all, the number of appeals per party differs (partly due to the variety in the different number of ads produced) and we want to prevent parties with more appeals influencing the overall campaign image more than parties with fewer appeals. Therefore, we have weighted each party election combination equally. Second, we acknowledge that not all parties affect the overall campaign image equally, namely large parties are more important for the overall image than small parties. As a result, we have weighted the data in the second step on the basis of party size measured on the basis of the election results.[18] Figure 1 shows that the use of negative campaigning in the Netherlands varies between election campaigns, respec-

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17   To ensure the validity of these measurements, we cross-validated the voters' left/right placements from recent elections with data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) from 2002 and 2006. The mean voter scores from 2002 and 2006 are correlated highly, respectively the Pearson's R coefficients between both measures amount to 0.93 and to 0.90 (both significant at p ≤ .001 level).

18   We have not weighted the data on the basis of party size in a linear manner, but have taken the square root of the party size. This ensures that larger parties weight more heavily on the results than smaller ones, but that the results are not fully dominated by the larger parties. There is also an argument from inferential statistics to weight parties in this manner. Smaller parties have fewer members of parliament (MP's). Since the standard error of estimates is a function of the square root of the sample size, we also weight the parties by the square root of the proportion of number of MP's, so that our sample follows the sampling distribution when we interpret the sample to reflect the composition of the parliament.

tively between 21.2% and 41%. The mean percentage of negative campaigning in Dutch parliamentary election campaigns is 27.8%.[19] The most negative election campaign in our research period is the 1994 campaign, followed by the 1982 and the 2006 campaigns. The finding that the 1994 campaign is the most negative on the basis of party election broadcasts is not surprising given the fact that the VVD had an unusually negative ad in this campaign and the fact that this was the first campaign in which three parties entered parliament for the first time with a platform that was very critical of governing parties: the Socialist Party (SP), General Association of Senior Citizens (AOV) and Union 55+. The 1982 election was organized one and a half years after the previous one, when the coalition cabinet between Christian Democrats (CDA), Liberals (D66) and Social Democrats (PvdA) broke up less than a year after it was formed. The elections of 2006 marked the breakthrough of the Freedom Party (PVV), and it was an election in which three other right-wing populist parties unsuccessfully attempted to claim the legacy of Pim Fortuyn. With these factors in mind, the relatively high level of negativity in the elections of 1982 and 2006 is not surprising. The least negative campaign was found to be 1989, with a level of only 21.2%.

Figure 2.1 shows that there is natural variation in the degree of negativity, but in contrast to the US (e.g., Geer 2006; Benoit 1999) we find no evidence for an upward trend in negativity. In view of the fact that the Netherlands have seen a surge in right wing populist parties since 2002, this might come as a surprise to some observers. Apparently, the rise of these parties has not contributed to an increase in the overall levels of negative campaigning.

As negative campaigning is indeed part of parliamentary election campaigns in the Dutch multiparty system, we can continue our study on the use of negative campaigning across parties. Table 2.1 provides an overview of the effects of party characteristics specified in hypotheses H1 through H6. We present results for five different models. Model 1, which we have named the *Vote-Seeking Model*, is based on the current US literature and estimates the impact of vote-seeking incentives on the extent of negative campaigning, namely opposition party and loss in the polls (see H1 and H2). The second model, labelled the *Office-Seeking Model* introduces the predictors derived from the coalition

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19   The overall level of negativity in the Netherlands is not exceptional, but is somewhat lower in
comparison with the UK and two party systems like the US. On the basis of ads in the presidential
election campaigns in the period 1960-2000, Geer (2006) finds an overall level of 32%. On the basis
of British party election broadcasts in the period 1964-2005, Van Heerde-Hudson (2011) finds an
overall level of approximately 40%. Elmelund- Præstekær (2010) reports an overall level of 39 per
cent for Danish elections in the period 1994-2007. However, he measures negative campaigning
on the basis of other campaign means, a different coding and calculation method. Van Heerde-
Hudson makes use of Geer's coding method.

formation literature which are expected to be especially important within multiparty competition (see H3 through H6). Model 3 shows the results of the *Combined Model* accounting for the variation in negative campaigning across parties using both the vote-seeking and the office-seeking explanations. Finally, models 4 and 5 include party size as a predictor in the office-seeking model rather than government experience. Due to high correlations between party size and government experience, we cannot enter these variables simultaneously. The high correlations between both predictors are not surprising in the Dutch context which is characterized by coalitions in which large parties are very frequently part of the government coalition (Andeweg and Irwin 2009).

Figure 2.1: Level of Negative Campaigning in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns 1981-2010 (Party Election Broadcasts)
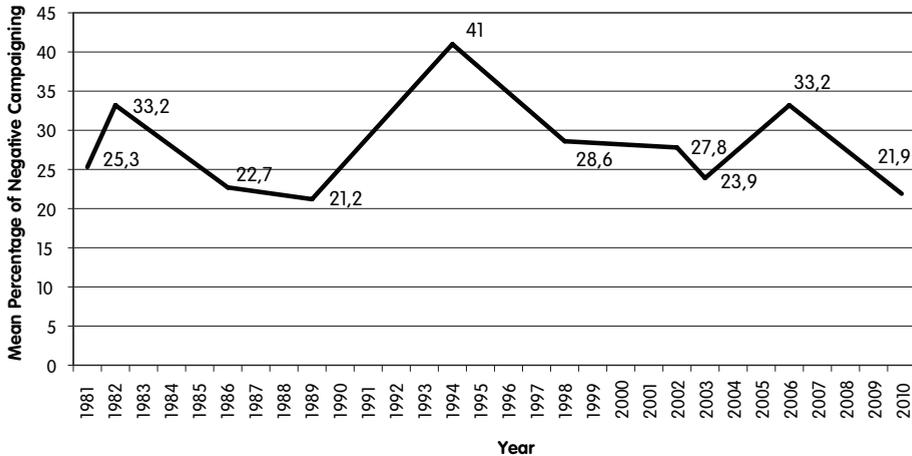
Note: The data is weighted on the basis of party size. N=146 PEBS, 3702 appeals

In both the *Vote-Seeking Model* (model 1) and the *Combined Model* (model 3 and 5) we find a significant positive effect for opposition parties. This is in line with the *Challenger Party Hypothesis (H1)* meaning that parties in opposition are more likely to engage in negative campaigning. In addition, we find a positive effect in all three models for loss in the polls, demonstrating that parties losing in the polls are indeed more likely to go negative. Thus we also find evidence for the *Losing Party Hypothesis (H2)*. In line with the work of Elmelund- Præstekær (2008) and Hansen and Pedersen (2008) we find that the *Vote-Seeking Model* also holds in continental European multiparty systems.

Table 2.1: The Effects of Party Characteristics on Negative Campaigning

	Model 1 Vote-Seeking	Model 2 Office-Seeking (Experience)	Model 3 Combined (Experience)	Model 4 Office-Seeking (Party Size)	Model 5 Combined (Party Size)
Opposition Party	0.256* (0.048)		0.146** (0.025)		0.197** (0.029)
Loss in Polls	0.214* (0.087)		0.202* (0.100)		0.203* (0.109)
New Party		0.253* (0.148)	0.176 (0.150)	0.326** (0.145)	0.194 (0.149)
Distance Median Party		0.046* (0.027)	0.068* (0.030)	0.078** (0.310)	0.075* (0.031)
Government Experience		-0.327* (0.142)	-0.113 (0.119)		
Party Size				-0.004 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.002)
Constant	-0.359* (0.189)	0.172 (0.106)	-0.405* (0.187)	0.057 (0.089)	-0.491* (0.216)
R²	0.333	0.303	0.393	0.243	0.389
Adjusted R²	0.278	0.240	0.329	0.174	0.324
N	146	146	146	146	146

Notes: Table entries are OLS regression coefficients with robust White's heteroskedastic standard errors in parentheses. For all models standard errors are adjusted for 22 clusters. All models also include election year dummies which were suppressed in the table due to space limitations (these results are available upon request). **significant at $p \leq 0.01$; *significant at $p \leq 0.05$ (one-tailed).

Model 2 and 4 present the results for the *Office-Seeking Model*. These models provide evidence for the *Median Party (H4)*, *Government Experience (H5)* and *New Party Hypothesis (H6)*. The results indicate that the likelihood of negative campaigning decreases for parties close to the median party in terms of left/right positioning, parties that have been part of government coalitions and established parties. The effect of party size is not statistically significant, indicating that larger parties are just as likely to go negative as smaller ones. Although the literature on coalitions (e.g. Warwick 1996) describes party size as an indicator of coalition potential, it is perhaps unsurprising that this indicator is not significant in the Dutch multiparty system, in which small parties also have a considerable chance of governing.[20] This means that our findings provide no support for the *Party Size Hypothesis (H3)*.

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20 For instance in our research period after the elections of 1982 and 2003 the party Democrats' 66 (D66) became part of the government coalition with only 6 seats and after the 2006 elections the Christian Union (CU) did the same.

When the Vote-Seeking and Office-Seeking Model are combined (see Model 3) we still find a positive effect for New Party and a negative effect for Government Experience as hypothesized, however, these effects are no longer statistically significant. We conclude that we find mixed evidence for the *New Party (H6)* and *Government Experience Hypothesis (H5)*. The positive relationship found for Median Party remains and thus we do find support for the *Median Party Hypothesis* (H4). Overall, the results indicate that both vote-seeking and office-seeking explanations matter for understanding inter-party variation in negative campaigning.

We corroborated these findings by conducting several checks for robustness. First, we checked whether our results were driven by certain parties or certain campaigns by performing our analyses while dropping one party or one electoral campaign at a time. This provided substantively identical results to those reported in Table 2.1. Hence, we are reasonably confident about the robustness of the results we present in Table 2.1. In order to gain a sense of the contribution of the different party characteristics to the overall fit of the combined model (3), we compare the adjusted R squares of the separate models. The adjusted R square not only corrects the R square for being an overly optimistic estimate of how well the model fits the population, but also for the increase expected in sample R square when additional variables are included in a model, even if those variables have no predictive power in the population. The overall fit of the *Combined Model* (3) is better than the *Vote-Seeking Model* (1) and the *Office-Seeking Model* (2) individually. The adjusted R squares are respectively 0.329 in comparison to 0.278 and 0.240. These results provide support for the utility of including both vote-seeking and office-seeking related variables when examining variation in negative campaigning across parties.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study expands our knowledge regarding inter-party variation in negative campaigning and broadens existing models to include features of multiparty competition. It provides an important stepping stone for the study of negative campaigning outside the context of two-party systems by examining variation in negative campaigning across parties in a multiparty system par excellence, the Netherlands, over almost three decades. The study advances existing research in two ways. First, it extends the current state-of-the-art that assumes parties to be primarily vote-seeking to include factors that relate to parties' office-seeking behaviour in an explanation of inter-party variation in negative campaigning. We argue that the chief difference between negative campaigning in multiparty competition compared to two-party competition, is that campaign strategies in a multiparty system are always crafted in the shadow of post-election coalition bargaining. Negative campaigning is a more perilous strategy within a multiparty system, as it can jeopardize the potential for a party to participate in a coalition govern-

ment once the election is over. Parties that have low coalition potential are able to take more risks and thus make greater use of negative campaigning. Second, it expands existing empirical work on negative campaigning in multiparty systems. This study validates the Danish results that also find that negative campaigning is used more by challenger parties (Elmelund-Præstekær2008; 2010; Hansen and Pedersen 2008) and parties that are losing in the polls (Elmelund-Præstekær2008; Hansen and Pedersen 2010). In addition, the new hypotheses based on office-seeking objectives are tested. We find empirical evidence for our argument that parties with low coalition potential are more likely to go negative. We find that parties positioned far from the median party are more likely to go negative and mixed evidence that suggests that parties with less governing experience and new parties are more likely to make use of this campaign strategy. Yet, this study also shows that ´office seeking´ considerations play

an important role in parties' decisions to either go negative, or *not* go negative.

Building on the results of this study, we can outline several avenues for further research. First of all, future studies on inter-party variation in negative campaigning within multiparty systems should provide a more in-depth look into the importance of office-seeking goals in constraining the use of negative campaigning in multiparty systems. For example, one might conduct in-depth interviews with campaign managers and party officials in order to explore further whether post-election coalition bargaining serves as a natural ceiling for the use of negative campaigning in multiparty competition. Second, although we study party election broadcasts in ten election campaigns, which is a considerable time period, more data would have been helpful. The limited number of ads decreases the likelihood of finding significant relationships and more elections would allow us to run a hierarchical model and also estimate the effects of election characteristics on negative campaigning. Finally, future work should contain a comparative study directly comparing negative campaigning in a two party system versus a multiparty system, to examine more clearly the differences we and other scholars (Elmelund-Præstekær2008; 2010; Hansen and Pedersen) expect to find between a two-party system and a multiparty system in the use of negative campaigning.

Overall, despite its shortcomings this study provides valuable insights into negative campaigning within multiparty competition. Although the findings show that negative campaigning in a multiparty system shares many features in common with those found in the US context, it highlights one vital difference, namely the impact of post-election coalition bargaining. Therefore this study breaks theoretical as well as empirical ground in the study of negative campaigning. Whilst this research project brings us one step closer to a more general theory on negative campaigning, it also highlights the fact that much work still needs to be done.