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

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Chapter 3:

# Choosing the Enemy: Attack Behaviour in a Multiparty System

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines which political parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system. The choice of target is an important strategic decision parties make when deciding their campaign strategy. This paper advances existing research on negative campaigning in several ways. Firstly, it is the only paper of its kind to statistically test which parties are most likely to be attacked in a multiparty system and in a non-US setting. Secondly, the paper contributes to the development of a general theory on negative campaigning, by examining its use in a multiparty system. Finally, this study presents new content analysis data on negative campaigning from ten Dutch Parliamentary Elections between 1981 and 2010. The findings show that large parties, ideologically proximate parties, parties close to the median party position and government parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in the Dutch multiparty system.

**Keywords:** *Elections, Party Systems, the Netherlands*

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## Introduction

Over the years much scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the circumstances under which candidates or parties are most likely to turn to negative campaigning (e.g. Damore 2002; Hale et al. 1996; Sigelman and Buell Jr. 2003; Lau and Pomper 2004; Kahn and Kenney 2004). The question of whether opposing parties or candidates are the most common targets of negative campaigning, has received less attention in the literature. This is unfortunate, as the choice of target is just as important as the decision to attack when attempting to understand negative campaigning. Gaining a thorough understanding of negative campaigning is of importance not only for campaign scholars, but for all those interested in party competition. In the party competition literature we have on the one hand the saliency and valence approach (Budge and Farlie 1983b) and on the other the confrontational approach (Laver and Hunt 1992). Recent research suggests that the saliency and valence approach holds for positive campaigning, but for negative campaigning the confrontational approach prevails (See Damore 2002; Elmelund-Præstekær 2011). The question of party competition and issue ownership falls out of the range of this article, but this study on the choice of target when going negative reveals much about the underlying mechanisms of party competition.

So far, only a handful of studies deal with party and candidate decision making processes when choosing a target for their negative messages (see Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Sigelman and Shiraev 2002; Ridout and Holland 2010; Doron and On 1983; Elmelund-Præstekær 2008). The majority of studies addressing negative campaigning focus on the U.S. context, where the decision of whom to attack only comes into play with intraparty competition in presidential nomination campaigns and in three candidate races. Although independent or third party candidates regularly seek office in the U.S. two party system, these candidates rarely have a significant influence on the campaign (Ross Perot in the 1992 campaign being a recent exception). Therefore, in the game of negative campaigning, independent or third party candidates are often ignored by the major party candidates and thus seldom attacked (Benoit, 1999). It follows that the choice of target in a two-party system is usually relatively clear-cut.

In a multiparty system the choice of target is part of a much more complex decision making formula. First of all, multiparty competition provides parties with many more potential opponents to attack. Second, multiparty competition offers parties the possibility to win voters by attacking a party other than the main opposition. Finally, the practice of forming coalition governments complicates the choice of target; as choosing a particular target could attract new voters, but may also jeopardize a party's standing in future government negotiations. Overall, the choice of target within a multiparty system is a sensitive issue that is in need of greater academic attention.

This study examines which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system. Thereby, this paper advances existing theory which is primarily developed on the analysis of data derived from two party systems. Further-

more, this work builds on the largely theoretical literature, by employing a statistical model to examine empirically which of the alternative hypotheses - developed on the basis of the literature on target choice - provides the best explanation. As such this is the first study using a statistical model to explore this question in a multiparty system and non U.S. setting (See for the U.S. Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Ridout and Holland 2010). The final contribution to the field is that the study introduces new data on negative campaigning in the ten most recent Dutch elections.

Previous work (Walter and Van der Brug, forthcoming) has examined under which circumstances parties are most likely to make use of negative campaigning in a multiparty system, this paper moves beyond that question and addresses which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system. It does so by exploring negative campaigning within the Dutch multiparty system, which is known for its large number of parties and open structure of party competition (Mair 2008). On the basis of ten Dutch Parliamentary Elections, the analysis shows that large parties, ideologically proximate parties, parties positioned close to the median party position and government parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning.

The structure of this article is as follows. First of all, parties' use of negative campaigning in a multiparty system is discussed. Second, an overview of the existing literature on the choice of target is presented and extended, resulting in several alternative hypotheses. Third, the case selection, data, operationalization of the variables and method of analysis are discussed. Finally, the results of the empirical analysis are presented and several avenues for future research are suggested.

## Negative Campaigning in a Multiparty System

Parties that engage in negative campaigning choose to attack or criticize their opponent instead of praising themselves, i.e. positive campaigning (e.g. Lau and Pomper 2004; Geer 2006). Although no conclusive evidence exists, political consultants consider negative campaigning in a two party system a rather effective strategy to win over voters (e.g. Swint 1998; Lau et al. 2007; Lau and Pomper 2004). However, negative campaigning is not without risk. Therefore candidates and political parties tend to engage in a cost benefits analysis before deciding to make use of this strategy. When the expected benefits outweigh the costs, negative campaigning will be used in an electoral campaign.

The cost-benefit analysis of going negative, differs for parties operating in a two or a multiparty system. In a two party system attacking parties solely fear so-called backlash or boomerang effects. Negative campaigning can cause negative feelings towards the attacker instead of the targeted party or candidate (Johnson-Cartee et al. 1991; Garamone 1984). Beyond this potential risk of losing voters, negative campaigning can certainly 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, it may be enough to secure a victory.

In a multiparty system parties face a different cost-benefit structure when deciding whether to go negative. This is the result of two main differences between a two party system and a multiparty system. Firstly, the benefits of negative campaigning in a multiparty system are divided as they can go to many different parties not only to the attacker, while the costs of backlash are limited to the attacking party (Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2008). However, although a party might not directly benefit when attacking the opponent (it might even lose voters 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. The second difference is that the need to form a coalition government after the elections affects the costs of negative campaigning in a multiparty system, namely parties not only face electoral backlash effects, but also potential coalition bargaining costs (e.g. Andeweg and Irwin 2009; Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010). A campaign which is fought too aggressively and too negatively, may damage parties' ability to govern together (e.g., Andeweg and Irwin 2009; Sjöblom 1968; Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006). Therefore, negative campaigning within multiparty competition involves a trade-off between the various goals that parties pursue. Within a two party system parties can concentrate on vote-seeking behaviour, as the party with the majority of votes is able to achieve office and implement policy. In contrast, parties operating within a multiparty system have to carefully balance their vote-, office- and policy-seeking objectives, as obtaining the most parliamentary seats does not automatically translate into government office or policy influence (Müller and Strøm 1999). 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. Overall, 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.

## Who Gets Attacked?

As statistical research on the question of 'who gets attacked in a multiparty setting' is non-existent, this study is of an exploratory nature. We are unable to rely on previous work to eliminate theoretical expectations beforehand and therefore formulate a large number of alternative hypotheses. We are aware that the expected effects of these alternative hypotheses overlap. The few studies that address the question of who gets attacked, can be divided into those that examine either U.S. or non-U.S. elections.

Current U.S. studies that mainly examine three candidate contests or presidential nomination campaigns point to several important characteristics regarding which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning, first of which is the *competitive position* of the other candidates in the race (e.g. Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Gurian 1996). No candidate is expected to engage in negative campaigning against the weakest of his opponents, it is more advantageous to defeat a successful rival (Gurian, 1996: 8). Negative campaigning will therefore almost always be directed against the so-called front-runner in the campaign, i.e. the largest candidate in the polls, and if the front-runner engages in negative campaigning it is against its strongest opponent (Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995: 53-55). This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Competitive Position Hypothesis (H1):** Parties that are frontrunners in the polls are more likely to be attacked than parties that are behind in the polls

Haynes and Rhine (1998) and Gurian (1996) argue that not only the relative success of rivals matters, but also their *ideological proximity*. Based on the Downsian notion of relative competition, they claim that if politicians believe that their position is a winner among the electorate, they will try to maximize their appeal by eliminating opponents who are close to their position, because they are competing for the support of the same group of voters (Haynes and Rhine, 1998: 696). Ridout and Holland (2010) question the applicability of the ideological proximity framework and show that Liberal candidates attack Conservative candidates instead of Moderates. They argue that in the presidential nomination campaigns candidates refrain from going after the same ideological base as their opponents, in order to avoid to offend potentially sympathetic voters whose votes are needed in a later stage of the campaign. Furthermore, they argue that it might simply be because candidates have more to criticize about candidates with whom they disagree on fundamental matters. This being said, we formulate our next hypothesis:

**Ideological Proximity Hypothesis (H2):** Parties which are ideologically close to the attacker are more likely to be targeted than parties that are further away

Competitive position and ideological proximity are not mutually exclusive factors in determining the choice of target (Gurian 1996). In general, large parties will be targeted regardless of their ideological proximity to the attacker, as more votes can be reaped from large opponents than small opponents. Small parties will be only be attacked if they are ideologically proximate and votes can easily be won. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

**Competitive Proximity Hypothesis (H3):** The effect of ideological proximity is stronger for small parties than for large parties

Non U.S. studies addressing the choice of target are rare and are solely formal or descriptive in nature. Doron and On (1983) argue that parties in a multiparty system will attack the major party which is positioned nearest to them as this allows for the largest amount of voters to be won over. If parties are competing in a multidimensional space, they will still adhere to this decision rule, but the largest proximate party can now be attacked on one or multiple dimensions (Doron and On 1983: 219). Doron and On (1983) find only partial support for this model in the 1969, 1973, 1977 and 1981 Israeli parliamentary elections.

Sigelman and Shiraev (2002: 59) find that a much better account for the behaviour of the Russian presidential candidates in the 1996 and 2002 elections, focuses on competition between incumbents and challengers and therefore introduces the factor of *government status*. They argue that challenger attacks will be aimed primarily at the incumbent. This is in line with the U.S. negative campaigning literature. Which argues that it is the nature of challengers to attack the incumbent and to provide voters with reasons to put the challenger into office (e.g. Kahn and Kenney, 2004: 23; Hale et al., 1996: 331). The incumbent in power is also the candidate or party that received most votes in the previous election and thus from which many voters can potentially be won over. So, the question of which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning might have a simple answer, namely the parties in office. If it is the case that both ideological proximity as well as government status affect the likelihood of being targeted, it is likely that the effect of ideological proximity is stronger for the opposition than the government, as parties or candidates regardless of their ideological position will target candidates or parties in office. However, challenger candidates or opposition parties will most likely be targeted by parties that are ideologically proximate. The following two alternative hypotheses are derived:

**Government Status Hypothesis (H4):** Government parties are more likely to be attacked than opposition parties

**Government Proximity Hypothesis (H5):** The effect of ideological proximity is stronger for opposition parties than government parties

Only the work of Elmelund-Præstekær (2008) points towards one of the fundamental differences between a multiparty system and a two party system namely the need to form a coalition government after the election and introduces the factor *coalition potential*. Due to the fact that multiparty system elections are fought in the wake of coalition negotiations, parties might take besides vote-seeking considerations also office-seeking considerations into account when deciding their target, and are therefore likely to refrain from attacking potential coalition partners (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid, 2006; Hansen and Pedersen 2008). Elmelund-Præstekær (2008) finds exemplary evidence for this argument from the 2004 Danish European Parliamentary Elections. The following hypothesis will be tested:

**Coalition Potential Hypothesis (H6):** Parties that are not considered potential coalition partners are more likely targets of negative campaigning than parties that are considered potential coalition partners

Multiparty systems have a lot of negative campaigning targets at their disposal, which provides parties with the opportunity to attack parties other than the key party they directly compete with for voters (ideologically proximate parties). This is a dynamic of attack behaviour that has not yet been well explored. These parties try to win voters by attacking the party they differ most from (natural rival) as its potential voters will have a strong negative assessment of that party, which is positioned on the other side of the ideological spectrum. These parties use attack behaviour as a tool to carve out their own ideological niche, which signals to voters that if they are against the ideas of the political opponent, they are the party to vote for (Kleinnijenhuis 1998). For example, in Dutch election campaigns the leftist Socialist Party (SP) regularly attacks the rightist Liberal Party (VVD). For the SP which stands for state intervention and social welfare, the ideological opposite is the VVD which stands for the free market and individual responsibility.

In addition, parties can win voters by attacking the largest party supporting the policy they opposes, which is the largest party on the other side of the dimension. This kind of attack behaviour can be witnessed when leftist parties compete with rightist parties for the voters of the centre parties. By attacking each other instead of the centre parties, they signal to the voters that the campaign is about whether they want left or right-wing policymaking after the election and that voters can prevent one or the other by voting for them. For instance in 1998 the Labour Party (PvdA) and Liberal Party (VVD) attacked each other in the hope of winning over the Christian Democratic Party (CDA) and Democrats 66' (D66) voters (Kleinnijenhuis 1998). In line with Ridout and Holland (2010) a distant party would be targeted instead of an ideologically proximate party. However, in contrast to Ridout and Holland we do assume that parties compete with neighbouring parties for the same electoral base, but attempt to acquire this base by attacking a distant party. These final three alternative hypotheses are formulated:

**Opposite Side Hypothesis (H7):** Parties positioned at the other side of the ideological spectrum are more likely to be attacked than parties positioned on the same side of the ideological spectrum

**Size Hypothesis (H8):** The largest party on the left or right side of the ideological spectrum is more likely to be attacked than the other parties on the left or right side of the ideological spectrum

**Opposing Side Size Hypothesis (H9):** The effect of size is larger for parties positioned at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, than for parties positioned on the same side of the ideological spectrum



## Case Selection, Data and Coding Procedure

The Dutch case provides an ideal testing ground to statistically assess the explanatory power of these alternative hypotheses in a multiparty setting 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 thus a great variety of potential targets (Andeweg and Irwin 2009). In addition, the Dutch party system is known for its relatively open structure of 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 governing 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) was the biggest loser when it lost half of its seats, but with the remaining 21 seats it was still able to enter the coalition government. Thus, it clearly represents a case in which choosing a target based solely on vote-seeking considerations, might not always be beneficial. In summary, there are numerous reasons that qualify the Netherlands as a good test case.

This paper employs new data on negative campaigning from ten recent Dutch parliamentary election campaigns (1981-2010). The data was collected by systematic content analysis of party election broadcasts, which are known as *Zendtijd Politieke Partijen* (ZPPs). Political parties that compete in all constituencies for the Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament are granted free air time in the form of party election broadcasts on the national public television stations by the Dutch government (Media Law 2008). Since 1998 political parties can also purchase political advertising time. However this is only done on a limited scale, partly due to the limitations of party finances. Consequently, the ZPPs remain the most important way of airing party election broadcasts. Political advertisements are the most ideal data source for addressing the research question, as they are party controlled and therefore reflect pure party behaviour when it comes to choice of target. In total, 146 party election broadcasts were collected and transcribed and content

analysis was then carried out on these transcripts, see Appendix A.3.<sup>21</sup> These broadcasts were aired several times, however no records were kept of how many times each broadcast was aired and where it was aired, this prevents us from doing frequency-weighted or rate weighted analysis (Prior 2001). However, we do know that all party election broadcasts found were aired. Furthermore, we do not measure the effects of these party election broadcasts on voters.

The coding method used is based on the procedure developed by Geer (2006). The unit of analysis is a natural speaking unit, the appeal, which is any mention of self-praise or criticism of the opponent. In this method, only spoken and written text is coded. The party election broadcasts were coded on a variety of characteristics, the most important of which are tone and target. Any criticism against the opposition was coded as a negative appeal. The negative appeals could be directed at; the status quo, the government, a specific political party, a specific politician, a cluster of opposing political parties or politicians. The content analysis was executed by a group of native Dutch speaking (post) graduate political science students, and was proved to be reliable. The inter-coder reliability was measured based on the coding of a random sample of appeals. The Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.77 for the unit of analysis. For both tone and target the Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.92. For the ten Dutch election campaigns, a total of 862 party attacks were counted.<sup>22</sup>

The method of analysis is less straightforward, as the dependent variable - the large number of possible parties that can be attacked - is not only nominal; the range of possible opponents also changes over time as new parties emerge and old parties disappear, in addition we wish to do a pooled analysis to look for a general pattern in which parties are attacked. The solution to this problem is to construct a dyadic dataset and to conduct logistic regression in which the standard errors are clustered on appeals (a similar approach is taken by Ridout and Holland 2010). In this dataset the unit of analysis is the party dyad. In other words, the dataset contains multiple observations for each party in each election campaign; the number of observations is determined by how many opponents a party has in a specific election campaign and the actual number of attacks made. To illustrate how the dataset is constructed, for one actual attack from the Freedom Party (PVV) at the Labour Party (PvdA) during the 2010 election campaign, 8 non attacks were inserted. When the Freedom's Party (PVV) chose to attack the Labour Party (PvdA), it chose not to target the Christian Democrats (CDA), Christian Union (CU), Democrats '66

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21 We are quite confident that after an extensive archive search and contact with the respective political parties that we have all still existing material, see subscript Appendix A.3.

22 Attacks directed at the coalition government were dissected and counted as separate attacks towards the respective government parties. A similar approach has been taken with attacks targeted at a cluster of parties or politicians. Attacks at politicians were treated as attacks towards the parties these politicians belonged to.

(D66), Green Left (GL), Animal Party (PvdD), Political Reformed Party (SGP), Socialist Party (SP) and Liberal Party (VVD). In our logistic regression model using this data, the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the party was attacked by each specific party. The final dataset is limited to all political parties that are or were represented in the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament between 1981 and 2010, with an average of 11 parties competing in each election campaign.

## Operationalization of Independent Variables

Having explained the general setup of the data and the measurement of negative campaigning, we will turn to the operationalization of the independent variables. First of all, the variables will be discussed that measure characteristics of the attacked party. The first variable is *Party Size in the Polls*, which captures the party's relative standing in the polls at the beginning of the election campaign, expressed in voter shares. The opinion polls used are from; TNS NIPO, Dutch Institute for Public Opinion and Market Research.

A party's coalition potential is measured by three variables, namely *Party Size in the Polls*, *Government Experience* and *Median Party Distance*.<sup>23</sup> Party size is one of the key factors highlighted in the coalition formation literature (e.g. Warwick 1996) that determines a party's coalition potential. The more parliamentary seats a party controls, the more coalition potential it possesses, as larger parties are more likely to take part in government coalitions. Furthermore, parties want to maximize their power and thus to form coalitions in which they have to share ministerial posts with as few other political parties as possible.

The other factors affecting a party's coalition potential, are government experience and distance to the median party. Previous government experience matters for coalition potential, because it demonstrates that parties are able to govern and have built a sound reputation as a reliable coalition partner (Lijphart 1999; Sartori 2005/1976; 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. The variable *Government Experience* captures the number of years a party was part of a government coalition

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23 In this study we measure coalition potential as a characteristic of the attacked party not as a relational characteristic, which is in line with the coalition formation theory and refrain from constructing a scale or an additive index to measure coalition potential. First of all, we wish to maintain the possibility to see the separate relationships between the different aspects of coalition potential (party size, government experience, median party distance) and the likelihood of being targeted. Second, these separate aspects of coalition potential are not necessarily related as these characteristics all enlarge a party's coalition potential, but do not necessarily come together.

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 a government coalition divided by the number of years since the party was founded. The source for this variable was Andeweg and Irwin (2009). Parties that control the median position, which is in a one-dimensional space the dominant bargaining position are most likely to be part of a government coalition (Warwick 1996). Thus, a party's coalition potential decreases as it moves further away from this dominant position (Bartolini 1998; Laver and Schofield 1998). Parties on the outskirts of the political spectrum, i.e. extremist parties, lack this kind of coalition potential and are therefore left out of government coalitions. Although the political space may be multi-dimensional, most scholars agree that the left/right ideological dimension is the key conflict dimension in most advanced industrial democracies (Pierce 1999; Gabel and Huber 2000). The variable *Median Party Distance* is operationalized as the absolute distance between a party's left/right placement from the left/right placement of the median party within the system. These party placements are based on voters' mean placements of parties on a left/right scale for each election using the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies 1981-2010 (DPES).<sup>24</sup>

The fourth variable which solely measures a characteristic of the attacked party, is the dummy variable *Government Status*. This variable measures the status of the party at the moment of attack (0=Opposition, 1=Government). The last variable is *Largest Party Left or Right Side Dimension*, which is a dummy variable that measures whether a party is the largest party on the left side or the right side of the ideological dimension (0=No, 1=Yes). A party's size is based on the party's relative standing in the polls at the beginning of the campaign, derived from NIPO polls and whether a party is positioned at the left or right side of the left right dimension is determined by calculating whether a party is on average placed by voters left or right from the median party position (DPES 1981-2010). The second set of variables in the model describes the relationship between the attacker and the attacked party. The first variable *Ideological Distance* is the centred standardized distance between the attacking party and the targeted party computed on the basis of the perceived left-right position of the respective political parties (DPES 1981-2010).

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24 As the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies measure a party's position from the moment it has gained parliamentary representation, we lack the position of parties in previous election campaigns. For instance the Socialist Party became part of the Dutch parliament in 1994, but its left right position is measured in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies Dataset from 1998 onwards. As party positions on the left right dimension are relatively stable we have chosen for these parties to insert the position from the upcoming election, thus for the Socialist Party in 1994 we have inserted the 1998 position. For the Centre Democrats we have taken the position of the Centre Party from which it broke off, as the first election the voters did not distinguish between these two parties. The voters' mean placements of the parties correlate highly with the positions of the parties according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey and Manifesto Research Group Data.

The second variable is *Party Size in the Polls\* Ideological Distance*, which is the interaction of the two variables Party Size in the Polls and Ideological Distance.<sup>25</sup> The third variable is *Government Status \* Ideological Distance*, which is the interaction of the dummy variable Government Status and the variable Ideological Distance.

The fourth variable is *Opposite Side Dimension*, which is a dummy variable measuring whether the party attacked is positioned at the same side of the dimension as the attacker on the basis of the perceived left right position of political parties (DPES 1981-2010) (0=No, 1=Yes). The last variable is *Largest Party Left or Right Side Dimension \* Opposite Side Dimension*, which is the interaction of the two variables Largest Party Left or Right Side Dimension and Opposite Side Dimension.

Finally, we added *Election Year* dummies to the analyses to account for the possible differences in targets when deciding to go negative, across the ten campaigns. We employ a logistic regression model in which standard errors are clustered on appeals to find out what characteristics of the target or characteristics of the target relative to the source of the negative appeal matter for explaining which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system.

## Empirical Results

Which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system? Or put differently, for which of the formulated alternative hypotheses we find empirical evidence? Table 3.1 provides the results; two logistic regression models are presented that estimate the interaction variable Party Size in the Polls\*Ideological Distance and the interaction variable Government Status\*Ideological Distance separately due to high levels of multicollinearity.

In both models we find a significant positive effect for the variable Party Size in the Polls. The more successful parties are in the polls, the more likely they are to be attacked, this is in line with the *Competitive Position Hypothesis*. The main variable *Ideological Distance* has a significant negative effect in both models, indicating that parties which are ideologically proximate to the attacking party are more likely to be targeted than parties that are distant. This evidence supports the *Ideological Distance Hypothesis*. However, this negative effect of ideological distance is not equal for all parties as shown by the interaction variables in Model 1 and Model 2. The interaction effect Party Size in the Polls \* Ideological Distance in Model 1 has a significant positive effect in the first model, thereby suggesting that for large parties the effect of the ideological distance is weaker than for small parties. This finding is in line with the *Competitive Proximity Hypothesis*.

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25 The variables *Party Size in the Polls* and *Left Right Distance* were centered to reduce the multicollinearity between these variables and the interaction variable.

**Table 3.1:** Logit Predictors of Party Attacked

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Characteristics of Attacked Party</b>		
Party Size in the Polls	.069** (.008)	.069** (.004)
Government Experience	-.734** (.185)	-.075** (.018)
Median Party Distance	-.976** (.082)	-.991** (.083)
Government Status	2.714** (.143)	2.680** (.137)
Largest Party Left or Right Side Dimension	.008 (.037)	-.001 (.037)
<b>Characteristics of relationship between Attacker and Attacked Party</b>		
Ideological Distance	-.216* (.090)	-.218* (.106)
Party Size in the Polls*Ideological Distance	.007* (.003)	
Government Status*Ideological Distance		.243* (.105)
Opposite Side Dimension	-.057 (.034)	-.025 (.032)
Opposite Side Dimension*Largest Party Left or Right Side of the Dimension	-.113** (.042)	-.114** (.042)
<b>Constant</b>		
Constant	-3.356** (.078)	-3.354** (.074)
Wald X <sup>2</sup> (df=18)	3222.14**	3420.83**
McFadden's R <sup>2</sup>	.36	.36
Percentage Correctly Predicted	89.21%	89.91%
N of Observations	8755	8755

Notes: Table entries are logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. For all models standard errors are adjusted for 855 clusters. Due to space limitations the coefficients for the dummies for ten election years are not shown. The dependent dummy variable is whether a party is attacked or not. \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ ; \* significant at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

In addition, we find a positive effect for Government Status confirming the *Government Status Hypothesis*, that parties in government are more often targeted than opposition parties. In Model 2 the interaction effect Government Status \* Ideological Distance has a significant positive effect indicating that for government parties the effect of the ideological distance is different than for opposition parties. Government parties are attacked by both parties that are ideologically proximate as parties that are distant to their ideological

position in contrast to opposition parties that are foremost attacked by ideologically proximate positioned parties. This finding is in line with the *Government Proximity Hypothesis*.

Are parties with a high coalition potential also targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system? The variable Party Size in the Polls yields a significant positive effect indicating that larger parties are more likely to be targeted; larger parties are more likely to be part of a government coalition thus potentially likely to be your future coalition partner. The variable Government Experience shows a significant negative effect demonstrating that parties with government experience are less likely to be attacked, such parties are more likely to govern as they already have a reputation as a reliable coalition partner. The variable Median Party Distance has a significant negative effect, which means that parties that are close to the median party are more likely to be the target of an attack, these parties are also more likely to be part of a coalition government than parties positioned further away from the party with the dominant bargaining position. These three findings provide us with mixed evidence, as on the one hand large parties and parties close to the median are attacked and on the other hand parties with government experience are avoided as a target. However, the evidence that we find means that the *Coalition Government Hypothesis* cannot be rejected.

We find limited evidence for the idea that in order to gain voters, parties choose to attack parties other than the party they share a similar voter support base with. Firstly, we are unable to reject the Ideological Proximity Hypothesis that parties are more likely to attack an ideologically proximate party. Second, in both models the variables Opposite Side and Largest Party on the Left or Right Side Dimension are insignificant, leading to the rejection of the *Opposing Side Hypothesis* and the *Size Hypothesis*. However, the interaction variable Opposite Side \*Largest Party Left or Right Side Dimension has a significant negative effect indicating that the effect of size is weaker for parties on the same side of the dimension than parties on the other side of the dimension, which means the largest party positioned on the other side of the left right dimension as the attacker is a more likely target than the largest party positioned on the same side of the left right dimension. These results are in line with our expectations; therefore we cannot reject the *Opposite Side Size Hypothesis*.

Note that we examined whether or not our results were driven by certain campaigns when performing our analysis, by dropping one electoral campaign at a time, this was not the case. In addition, we examined whether including the attacks on the government in the dataset (see footnote 22) has stimulated the findings that point towards vote-seeking behaviour. Similar findings are generated when the models are run without these government attacks. As suggested above, the interpretation of logistical regression coefficients is less than straightforward given that they convey changes in log odds. To express the results in a more intuitive manner, we conduct post-estimation simulations using *CLARIFY* to gain a sense of the effect of each variable in terms of changes in predicted probabilities (King et al. 2000). Table 3.2 shows the percentage point changes in predicted probabilities for the main effects, i.e. the likelihood of a party being attacked, under a

given set of values for the independent variables. By manipulating the values of each independent variable while keeping the others constant at their respective means, we are able to observe changes in the predicted probabilities of a party employing negative attacks. The table provides minimum-maximum changes as well as moderate changes – changes from a standard deviation below the mean, to a standard deviation above it.

**Table 3.2:** Percentage Points Changes in Predicted Probabilities Main Effects

	Moderate Changes		Maximum Changes	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Characteristics of Attacked Party</b>				
<b>Party Size in the Polls</b>	5.6**	5.7**	34.4**	35.4**
<b>Government Experience</b>	-1.0**	-1.0**	-1.4**	-1.4**
<b>Median Party Distance</b>	-5.3**	-5.4**	-11.6**	-12.0**
<b>Government Status</b>	5.9**	5.9**	15.4**	15.0**
<b>Largest Party on the Left or Right Side Dimension</b>	-0.1	-0.0	-0.0	-0.0
<b>Characteristics of relationship between Attacker and Attacked Party</b>				
<b>Ideological Distance</b>	-1.0*	-1.1*	-1.6*	-1.7*
<b>Opposite Side</b>	-0.0	-0.0	-0.1	-0.0

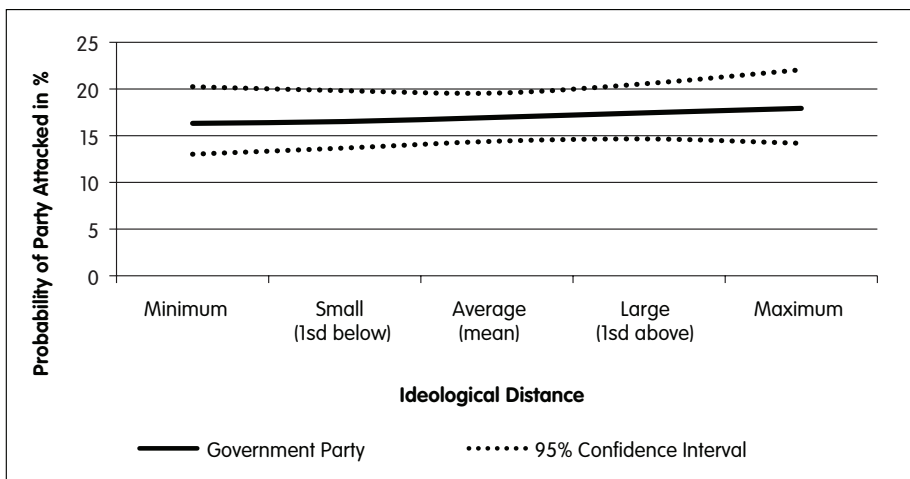
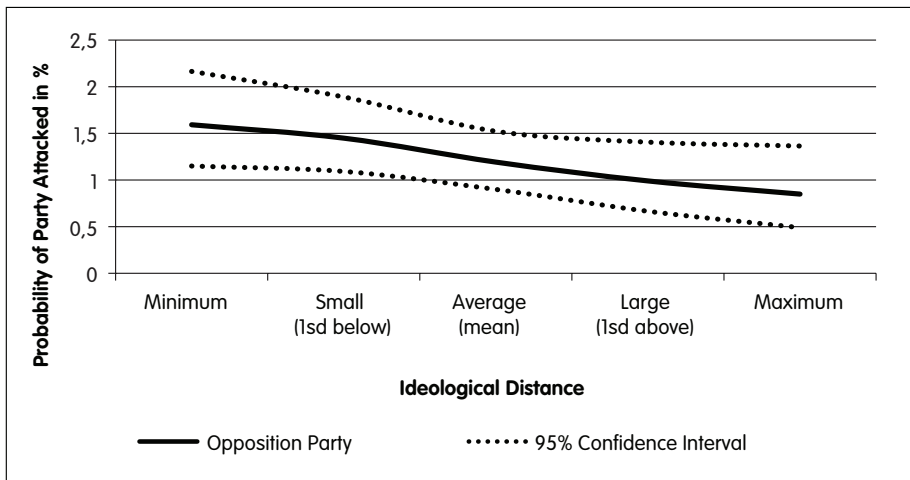
*Notes: Table entries are percentage points changes in predicted probabilities when the respective independent variable is moved from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean or moved from its minimum to its maximum value ceteris paribus. The changes in predicted probabilities are computed from the logit estimates in Table 3.1. \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ ; \* significant at  $p < .05$  (one-tailed).*

The results of the simulations show that the most important variables for predicting the attacked party are Government Status, Party Size in the Polls and Median Party Distance as they display the largest effects. The changes in predicted probabilities of model 2 will be discussed. A government party is 15.0 percentage points more likely to be attacked than an opposition party. Party Size in the Polls also has a strong positive effect, namely 5.7 percentage points in moderate changes and 35.4 percentage points in maximum changes. Similarly Median Party Distance shows a strong negative effect, respectively 5.4 in moderate changes and 12.0 in maximum changes. A substantial number of smaller negative effects are found for Government Experience and Ideological Distance. The likelihood of a party being targeted decreases as their government experience increases, namely with 1.0 percentage points in moderate changes and 1.4 percentage points in maximum changes. The effect of Ideological Distance is 1.1 percentage points in moderate changes and 1.7 in maximum changes. Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 display the predicted probabilities for the interaction effects in graphic form. The changes in predicted probabilities for interaction effect of Opposite Side \*Largest Party Left or Right Side of the Dimension are not graphically displayed, since these are very small. The largest party located on the opposite side than the attacker is 0.3 percentage points more likely to be

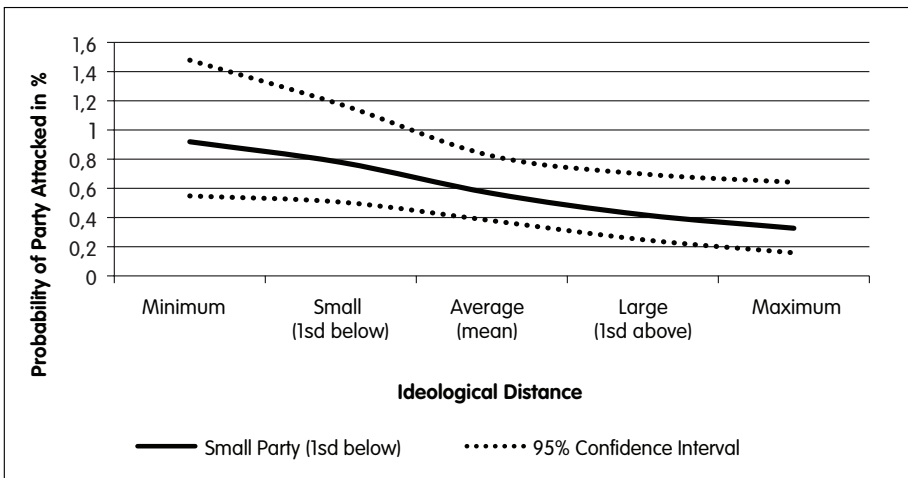
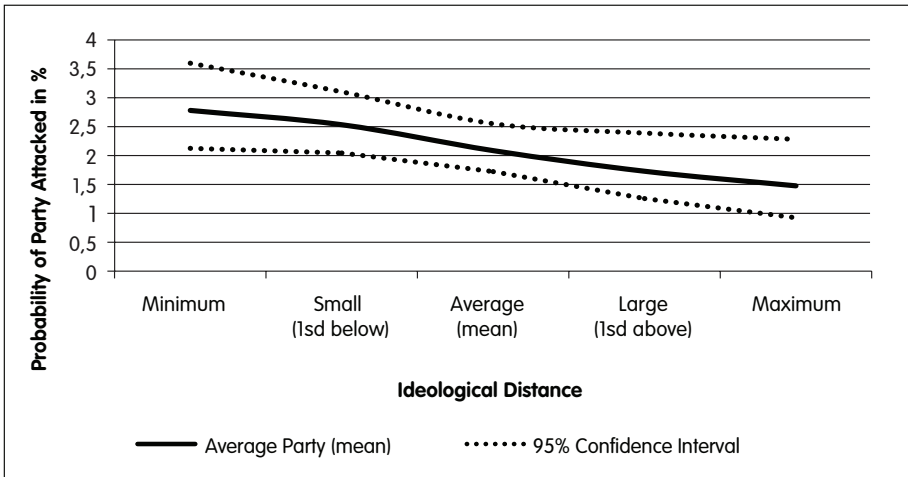
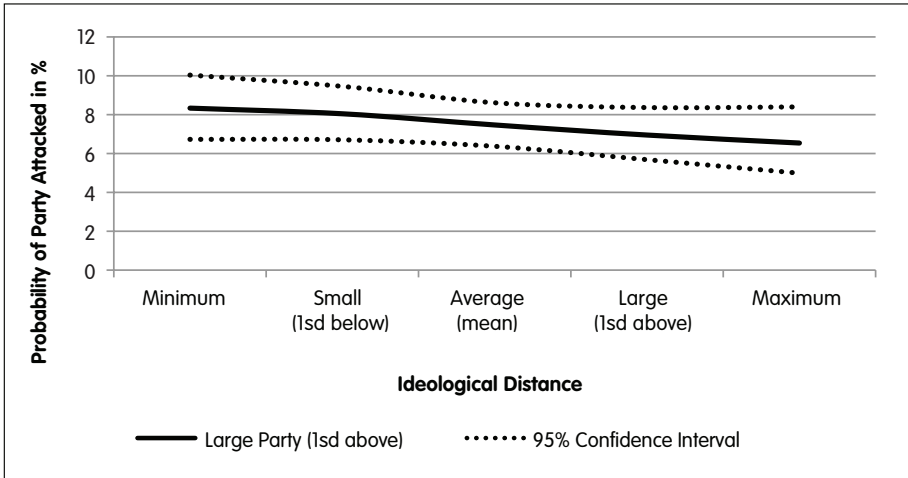


attacked than the largest party on the same side as the attacker. For the other parties it does not matter whether they are located on the same or opposite side of the dimension. Figure 3.1 supports the Government Proximity Hypothesis as it shows that the probability of being attacked for an opposition party decreases when the ideological distance increases. For government parties this is not the case, the probability of being targeted even to a minor extent increases when ideological distance increases. However, the effects for government and opposition parties are small and border conventional levels of statistical significance. The same goes for the interaction effect Party Size \* Ideological Distance displayed in Figure 3.2. The figure shows that for all parties, the likelihood of being targeted decreases when the ideological distance between the targeted party and attacker increases, but more so for average and small sized parties than larger parties.

**Figure 3.1:** Predicted Probabilities Interaction Effect Government Status \* Ideological Distance



**Figure 3.2:** Predicted Probabilities Interaction Effect Party Size \* Ideological Distance



These outcomes are largely consistent with the existing studies (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Doron and On 1983; Sigelman and Shiraev 2002). We find that the competitive position of parties matters, as well as the ideological distance. However, we find that the effect of ideological proximity is more complicated, as it is only the case for small and opposition parties that the most proximate ideological party is attacked. The results only somewhat support the notion that in a multiparty system parties are most often attacked that share no ideological base with the attacker, i.e. ideologically distant parties or the largest parties positioned on the other side of the left right dimension. Furthermore, we find evidence that the variable Government Status introduced by Sigelman and Shiraev (2002) is of great importance. Finally, we find some evidence for the notion that a party's coalition potential affects the likelihood of being attacked, which is in line with Elmelund-Præstekær (2008). However, the results are mixed and suggest that a party's coalition potential is of minor importance in comparison to the other characteristics of the attacked party, or the relationship between the attacker and attacked party. Although not empirically tested here, the results of this statistical model might be interpreted as evidence for the notion that the choice of target in a multiparty system is primarily guided by vote-seeking considerations similarly to in a two-party system. Overall, the results have shown that all factors; competitive standing, ideological proximity, government status and coalition potential; help to explain which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system.

## Concluding remarks

This study has advanced current knowledge about which parties are the most likely targets of attack in a multiparty system. Firstly, this paper has contributed to the existing research, as it is one of the few studies (e.g. Skaperdas and Grofman 1995; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Ridout and Holland 2010) on the choice of target when going negative, that employs a statistical model for testing alternative hypotheses and is the first such study for a multiparty system. Secondly, it adds to the general theory of negative campaigning by examining the choice of target in a multiparty system, as the current theory is primarily based on attack behaviour in the U.S. two party system. The Netherlands, known for its multiparty system and large number of political parties, is the ideal test case for examining whether similar factors are at play in a multiparty system as in a two-party system, i.e. the U.S, when it comes to which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning. This paper has shown that the factors competitive standing and ideological proximity stemming from the U.S. context, also explain the most likely targets of negative campaigning in the Dutch multiparty system. Furthermore, this study has advanced our understanding by proving the value of the factors government status and coalition potential (derived from non U.S. work) for explaining the attacker's choice of target.

Besides the fact that this paper has demonstrated that a combination of the factors suggested in the current literature can very well explain which parties are the most likely targets of negative campaigning in a multiparty system, this study demonstrates some important new factors. First of all, it shows that the effect of ideological distance is not equal across all parties in a multiparty system. Second, although the results are mixed, the findings seem to suggest that in a multiparty system, a party's coalition potential somewhat affects its likelihood of being attacked. Thereby, this paper confirms the suggestions made in several non-US studies (e.g. Elmelund-Præstekær 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010; Hansen and Pedersen 2008) that when studying negative campaigning in the West-European context, coalition dynamics must not be overlooked. Although it is not directly tested in this paper, the fact that parties with high coalition potential are not always avoided as targets and that substantial effects are found for a party's competitive standing and government status, could be interpreted as a sign that office-seeking considerations might be important in the choice of target. This being said, they are likely to be subordinate to vote-seeking considerations. However, to confirm this notion further research that models not only the characteristics of the party attacked and their relationship relative to the attacker, but also the characteristics and the motives of the attacker is needed. The findings are interesting, as previous work (Walter and Van der Brug, forthcoming) shows that parties with high coalition potential are less likely to make use of negative campaigning. Finally, the results revealed that the notion that parties other than those that compete for a similar voter base are attacked, holds only little ground, suggesting that this behaviour is not the most prominent in those ten campaigns.

Future research should examine whether the results hold for other types of data and in other multiparty systems. The data used in this study, though chosen for good reasons is rather static. It would be interesting to see whether the findings also hold for more dynamic data in which negative campaigning is more often the consequence of being attacked. In addition, multiparty systems have rarely been used as case studies and thus other studies of multiparty systems, in particular ones in which coalition preferences are known in the campaign or those that have a more closed system of party competition, could be used to verify our findings. However, the fact that the Dutch system is an ideal multiparty system and the analysis was based a considerable number of election campaigns, makes our findings substantial. Aware of all the shortcomings of this study it definitely adds to the current state of the art and can serve as a solid starting point for future research on this topic.