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

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Publication date
2012

Citation for published version (APA):
Walter, A. S. (2012). *Negative campaigning in Western Europe: beyond the vote-seeking perspective*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

Chapter 5:

Women on the Battleground: Does Gender Condition the Use of Negative Campaigning?

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

Abstract

This study examines to what extent and under which conditions gender influences the use of negative campaigning in Western Europe. It advances existing research in two ways. First, it is one of the few empirical examinations to date exploring gender differences in negative campaigning outside the US context. Second, it brings to bear novel data on this topic from British, Dutch and German parliamentary election campaigns between 1980 and 2006. In essence, this study examines the relationship between a party leader's gender and the extent and content of negative campaigning for three least likely cases. These are least likely cases because we expect smaller candidate effects in parliamentary systems than in presidential systems, particularly in the Dutch and German multiparty systems. The analysis demonstrates that female party leaders are significantly more likely to 'go negative'. However, this difference between male and female party leaders is entirely due to the inclusion of Margaret Thatcher in the analysis. Without her, the difference disappears.

Key Words: Negative Campaigning, Elections, Party Leaders, Gender and Western Europe.

Introduction

The number of women running for political office is steadily on the rise throughout Europe and the United States. These female candidates find themselves fighting in increasingly competitive and hard-fought campaigns (see Kahn et al., 2009 for example). Indeed, recent studies show that electoral campaigns are increasingly characterized by conflict and the use of negative campaigning, in which candidates criticize and attack their opponents on the basis of issue stances as well as personality traits (e.g. West 2005; Geer 2006). Based on this dual trend of more women running for political office and an increase in harsh campaigning, questions relating to gender differences in negative campaigning have become an ever more pressing topic of scientific inquiry (for recent examples Brooks 2010; Kahn et al 2009). Indeed, a growing body of work focuses on topics relating to the differential use of negative campaigning by female and male candidates (e.g. Kahn and Kenney 2004; Benze and Declercq 1985; Lau and Pomper 2004) or the disparity in impact of negative campaigning for female and male candidates (and how this impact in turn affects male and female voters differently) (Brooks 2010; King and Connell 2003; Kahn et al. 20009; Gordon et al. 2003; Chang and Hitchon 2004). This work suggests that male and female candidates both campaign differently and experience different pay-offs.

Notwithstanding these important findings, our current understanding of gender differences in negative campaigning remains incomplete, as most of the empirical work stems almost exclusively from the US context (for an exception see Carlson 2001). As such, we do not know to what extent these results travel or are US specific. This study addresses this question head on and explores differences between male and female candidates in the extent and content of negative campaign messages within three Western European countries, i.e. Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In these countries, we encounter very different cultures of electoral campaigning than in the US. Within the US context candidates are particularly important and this means that candidate traits matter more relative to party characteristics. In addition, US campaign budgets are large and attack style politics is a common feature. In comparison, Western European campaigns are more party focused and characterized by much less spending and attack behaviour (see e.g. Scammell and Langer 2006; Holtz-Bacha 2006; Elmelund-Præstekær 2009). As a result, it seems likely to expect lower levels of negative campaigning and a reduced impact of candidate characteristics - such as gender - on campaign strategies. In other words, countries in Western Europe constitute least likely cases for finding gender differences in negative campaigning, so we expect differences between male and female party leaders (in terms of campaign behaviour) to be rather small. Consequently, if we do find that gender differences exist within Western European parliamentary campaigns this would present rather strong evidence for the existing theoretical work developed within the US context.

Our study of 377 party election broadcasts shows that gender of the party leader does affect the use of negative campaigning in Western Europe in the period 1980 and

2006, albeit that the effect is solely due to Margaret Thatcher. Her campaigns were more negative than British election campaigns under the leadership of male candidates. We will conclude that, contrary to the results reported in the US literature, no clear differences exist between male and female candidates in Western Europe with regards to the degree and content of negative campaigning. This in itself is unsurprising, given that parties rather than candidates are the dominant actors in Western European politics, with candidate characteristics much less important. Based on the evidence, we are inclined to argue that US literature on gender and negative campaigning does not travel to the European context.

This study is structured as follows. First, we present a short overview of the literature on gender and negative campaigning and outline our main hypotheses. Next, we outline the data, case selection and coding procedures. In the third section, we elaborate the operationalization and methods used in the empirical analysis. Fourth, we present our empirical findings. Finally, the fifth section concludes and discusses the implications of our findings for on-going work on gender and negative campaigning.

Gender and Negative Campaigning: Evidence from the US

One of the main conclusions from the work on gender and electoral campaigning is that male and female candidates tend to campaign differently. These changes are largely due to differential political socialization processes and constitute by-products of different expectations of voters and media actors concerning male and female candidates (Carroll 1994; La Cour Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Kahn 1993). These divergent expectations find their origin in gender stereotypes ascribed to by the public. Research highlights that societal gender stereotypes depict women as kind, helpful, sympathetic and passive, while men are often characterized as aggressive, forceful and independent (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1996). These commonly held beliefs, translate themselves into voter expectations about male and female political candidates and thus play a powerful role in the strategies used by these candidates during an election campaign. Recent research suggests that gender differences may matter especially in the case of negative campaigning. Here female and male candidates differ in the extent and content as well as in the choice of targets of their attacks (Kahn and Kenney 2004 Benze and Declercq 1985; Lau and Pomper 2004). In addition, negative campaigning seems less effective at depressing evaluations of female candidates than male candidates (King and Connell 2003), and it seems that male and female voters react differently to negative campaigning. Female voters are more inclined than male voters to punish the sponsoring candidate of a negative campaign (Gordon et al. 2003).

This means that for female candidates the decision to go negative is not as clear-cut as it is for males, especially since the commonly held stereotypes of women, i.e. that they are kind, helpful, sympathetic and passive, seem largely at odds with the practice

of negative campaigning. Female candidates employing negative campaigning may therefore find themselves acting at odds with public expectation. Negative campaigning is considered a rather aggressive tactic, and therefore much more appropriate for male candidates. The electoral consequence of violating gender stereotypes, is that rather than gaining from negative campaigning, a candidate may actually suffer a substantial backlash as voters reject behaviour that conflicts with their gendered expectations (Kahn 1996; Trent and Friedenberg 2008). Consequently, female candidates face two options: 1) either they can attempt to dispel public gender stereotypes during an election campaign, or 2) they can attempt to exploit them (Herrnson et al. 2003). When female candidates refrain from negative campaigning, it is likely that they do so in order to conform with gender norms. Such candidates are most likely to use negative campaigning in cases when it is considered accepted, i.e. when retaliating against a negative attack from an opponent or attacking their male counterparts on areas of expertise that are traditionally considered more feminine (Trent and Friedenberg 2008). Female candidates who do adopt negative campaigning tactics try to dispel public stereotypes and adopt gender contrasting behaviour that violates voters' expectations. These female candidates stress their toughness and often campaign on issues that are largely considered to be masculine in nature. This strategy may be risky, but simultaneously may make female candidates seem as competent as their male opponents in a profession that is more generally associated with masculinity (Lau and Pomper 2004; Kelley and McAllistar 1983).

The question is which of the two strategies is most often used? So far, the empirical work addressing this question is inconclusive. Some studies confirm the notion that female candidates are hesitant to go negative due to publicly held gender stereotypes (e.g. Kahn and Kenney 2004; Herrnson and Lucas 2006), while other studies find no difference (Lau and Pomper 2004) or even find an opposite pattern, i.e. women engaging in gender contrasting behaviour (Bystrom 2006). Added to these dissimilar findings, studies demonstrate that the use of negativity might not only be dependent on the gender of the attacker, but also on the gender of the target. For example Kahn and Kenney (2004) as well as Benze and Declerq (1985) show that male candidates are likely to refrain from negative campaigning when they face a female opponent, because they fear a public backlash if voters perceive them as male candidates to be targeting and intimidating women. This fear of backlash may in turn lower the occurrence of negative campaigning in a race in which a female candidate is participating. In summary, we can conclude that the research from the US context on how gender affects candidates' decisions to go negative, is rather mixed.

Do the US Findings Travel?

Not only is the current-state-of-the-art inconclusive, it also primarily stems from the US context examining female candidates running for Congress or Senate. This may be

problematic for our understanding of how gender impacts negative campaigning, as US electoral campaigns have rather distinct features. So far, only one study explores gender and negative campaigning outside the US context (Carlson 2001). Carlson (2001) examines differences in male and female political advertising in Finland and the US by comparing one Finnish parliamentary election and 19 US senate races. Among other factors, Carlson examines the differential use of negative campaigning by male and female candidates. Carlson finds that Finnish male candidates have more offensive campaign strategies than their female colleagues (2001: 144). Notwithstanding the importance of this finding, Finland is not the ideal test case as negative assessments of individuals are prohibited in televised political advertising. As such Carlson's analysis is restricted to looking at candidate claims for political change and candidates taking an offensive stance on issues. This operationalization of negative campaigning is quite different from the dominant approaches developed in the US context (see Geer, 2006 for example). In order to fully explore the extent to which gender affects negative campaigning in systems where candidate characteristics matter less and negative campaigning is less pronounced, one needs to study real attacks. This paper builds on existing work from the US context, uses similar if not identical operationalizations of negative campaigning and tests if US theories travel to other political contexts.

Unlike in the US, where election campaigns focus much more on the candidate him/herself than on the candidate as a representative of the political party, election campaigns in Western Europe are still largely party-centred (Newman 1994; Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006; Farrell 2005). This being said many of the parliamentary democracies in Western Europe are witnessing a process of increased presidentialization or personalization (Mughan 2000; Blais 2011; Paul and Webb 2005). Studies demonstrate that due to the decline of partisan identification and the changing role of the media, there is an increasing focus on party leaders in parliamentary systems (McAllistar 1996; McAllistar 2007; Banducci and Karp 2000; Fiers and Krouwel 2005). However, it is not only external forces which are stimulating this development, parties themselves are also increasingly choosing to tailor their campaigns to the needs and interests of journalists, thus presenting themselves through the personality of their leader (Mughan, 2000). Political consultants and campaign managers in Western Europe are more aware than ever that it is not only the party that runs for political office, but increasingly the party leader him- or herself who is on trial. To cite Butler and Kavanagh (1997: 91) '*the running of a campaign depends upon the party leader, who must be the ultimate campaign director and the central bearer of the campaign message*'. Thus party leader's assets and traits are taken into account more and more when deciding the party's campaign strategy (Bartle and Crew 2001; Heffernan and Web 2005). In addition, the personalization of election campaigns also means that a party's frontrunner assumes a central role in the design of campaign strategy and contents which according to Poguntke (2005) can hardly be subjected to internal debate. As the characteristics of party leaders' are increasingly affecting campaign strategy and party leader's them-

selves have a big say in the final party campaign strategy, it's likely that they having increasing influence over parties' decisions to go negative. As a result, we can reasonably expect that even in Western Europe, party leader characteristics such as gender will affect campaign strategies and also the extent and content of negative messages.

Hypotheses

In this section, we outline three hypotheses regarding the way in which gender mediates the overall level and content of negative campaigning. These expectations follow on from the large body of American studies concerning gender and campaigning. Like in the context of US presidential House and Senate races, male party leaders still dominate the political battleground in Western Europe and clearly outnumber female leaders. As a result, gender stereotypes are still firmly entrenched among the electorate and the task of leading a political party to victory is still often seen as a man's job (Kahn 1996). As a consequence, female party leaders are likely to find themselves the position of underdog in most campaigns and may face difficult decisions as a result. As women are rarely put forward by political parties to run as their primary candidate and negative campaigning is less common in most Western European countries than in the US, it seems likely that those women who do run for office may strive to conform to societal norms and engage in stereotypical behaviour (e.g. Andeweg and Irwin 2009; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2006). As a result, they will be reluctant to engage in masculine behaviour such as attacking the opponent. When it comes to the extent of negative campaigning, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Gender Stereotype Hypothesis (H1): Female party leaders are less likely to go negative than male party leaders

A candidate's gender might not only affect the overall extent of negative campaigning, but also its content. When candidates attack their opponents, they can do so on the basis of issues or traits. Attacks on traits, i.e. character attacks, are regarded as more aggressive than attacks on issues. This is largely due to the fact that attacks on the character or behaviour of opponents are usually considered less legitimate than issue attacks. This is especially the case when trait attacks concern the opponent's private life (Swint 1998; Lau and Pomper 2004). Comparisons of the use of issue versus trait attacks between male and female candidates have so far given rise to inconclusive findings. While Benze and Declerq (1985) show that female candidates are less likely to engage in trait attacks, Kahn (1993) finds no differences between female and male candidates in this respect. Kahn argues that if female candidates want to emphasize that they are equally competent as men, they have to emphasize issues (1993). In doing so, they increase voters' perceptions of their issue competence. We argue that female party leaders in Western Europe are less likely than their male counterparts to engage in attack behaviour.

However, if they do decide to go negative they do so to convince the public and their opponents of their toughness and leadership capabilities. So in line with the argument that female candidates that decide to attack aim to look as competent as male candidates in a campaign, we can formulate the following hypothesis (H2) about the way in which gender mediates the content of negative attacks:

Issue Attack Hypothesis (H2): Female party leaders are more likely to launch issue attacks than male party leaders

Party leaders not only have the choice of whether to launch trait or issue attacks, they also have to decide on which issues they will attack their opponents. Traditionally certain issue areas have been regarded as belonging to the male domain, i.e. defence, finance, economy, agriculture and foreign policy, while others are considered more female, i.e. the environment, health care and education. This phenomenon is coined "gender issue ownership" (La Cour Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Kahn 1993). As in the case of issue attacks, we expect women that attack to engage in contrasting gender stereo-typing behaviour to improve their image as viable political candidates. Consequently when party leaders decide to attack their opponents on the basis of issues, we expect female party leaders to attack more on masculine issues, which should make them seem more capable in the eyes of voters. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Male Issue Hypothesis (H3): Female party leaders are more likely than male party leaders to attack their opponent on masculine issues

Data, Case Selection and Coding Procedure

In order to determine the impact of gender on the extent and content of negative cam-paigning, we need to develop a measure of negative campaigning per party per election. We obtain this measure by conducting content analysis of campaign material from 31 political parties in 23 British, Dutch and German parliamentary election campaigns between 1980 and 2006. We restrict our analysis to national political parties represented in the Lower House of Parliament in each of these countries within this time period. As a result, regional political parties, such as the Scottish National Party (SNP), Plaid Cymru and Sinn Féin, are not included. Within this period and countries we find 16 cases of female party leadership. Unfortunately, four cases in the Netherlands could not be included due to missing data, the party election broadcasts could not be retrieved from the historical archives (see Table A.7.).

We selected these three Western European countries as they represent least likely cases to test the relationship between a party leader's gender and the extent and content of negative campaigning for two reasons. First of all, we expect lower levels of negative

campaigning compared to the US context. Previous research suggests that negative campaigning in Western European multiparty systems constitutes a less beneficial and more risky strategy (Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær 2010; Walter and Van der Brug, forthcoming). The larger number of competitors increases the uncertainty of acquiring the benefits of attack behaviour as voters have a much broader range of parties to choose from. Moreover, parties face possible coalition-bargaining costs (e.g. Johnson-Cartee et al. 1991). In multiparty systems coalition governments need to be formed after the election. So, a too harsh and too aggressive campaign may jeopardize a party's opportunity to participate in a coalition government (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006; Brants et al. 1982; Hansen and Pedersen 2008). The three selected countries are all multiparty systems in the sense that more than two parties gain seats in parliament. Note, however that coalition government building is only common practice in Germany and the Netherlands. Second, in these three Western European parliamentary systems, whilst election campaigns have become increasingly candidate-focused, they remain fundamentally party based (Fiers and Krouwel 2005; Poguntke 2005; Heffernan and Webb 2005; Farrell 2005). As a result, we can expect party leader characteristics, such as gender, to matter less in these election campaigns. By exploring the way in which gender affects the extent and content of negative campaigning within these three Western European countries, this study delves into the question of whether or not existing work from the US can be applied in other parts of the world, or if in contrast, features of the specific political context matter for the differential use of negative campaigning among male and female candidates.

We determine the degree of negative campaigning on the basis of party election broadcasts. Party election broadcasts are completely controlled by the political party and therefore provide a reliable source by which to measure party or candidate behaviour, in contrast to the free media which may over report negative campaigning (Geer 2006). As the most party election broadcasts are recorded prior to the election campaign, the data source generally reflects the party strategy at the beginning of the campaign, this in combination with the short length of the election campaigns, is the reason that we refrain from studying campaign dynamics during the election campaign. In order to ensure comparability between the different countries, we include only party election broadcasts that are aired during allocated free broadcasting time. In the United Kingdom, the commercial purchase of airtime is prohibited, while in Germany and the Netherlands airtime is available and can be bought on commercial television, respectively since 1989 and 1998 (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006). This being said, in all three countries free broadcasting time is granted on public television channels and in the United Kingdom also on the commercial channels (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid 2006). In total 377 different party election broadcasts were collected on tape or as transcripts from various public and private archives (see Table A.1., A.2. and A.3. for an overview of the collected party election broadcasts and their origin). Ideally, the party election broadcasts should be weighted on how frequently they have been aired or on their audience size (Prior 2001). Unfortunately, we could not retrieve complete records for all these elections, meaning that we were unable to do frequency-weighted or rate-weighted analysis. However, we do know that all of the ads

were aired and do not aim to examine the effects of these ads on the voters.

The party election broadcasts were analysed by means of systematic content analysis on the basis of the transcripts. The coding scheme for the content analysis is based on Geer's method (2006). In this method negative campaigning is measured on the basis of an appeal as the unit of analysis, which signifies a natural unit that can be shorter, but also longer than a sentence. This fine-grained method can be used for all kinds of campaign means and prevents problems that might arise when coding complete ads, as ads often contain both positive as well as negative campaigning (Benoit et al. 2003; Geer 2006). Only spoken and written text is coded. The visuals are not coded, as they can resonate very differently with different people (Geer 2006). In order to measure negative campaigning, every appeal is classified as being either positive or negative. Positive appeals consist of any mention to a voter of a theme or reason to vote for a party, while negative appeals are any reason offered to vote against an opposing party. Text that contains no appeal is not coded. [34]

In addition to the tone of the appeal, the content of the appeal is coded. Appeals can refer to issues or traits. Appeals relating to traits, focus on attacks based on the character or behaviour of the opponent. They are not restricted to attacks directed at candidates, but can also relate to parties, e.g. an attack which refers to the integrity or trustworthiness of the party. We define three types of trait appeals, those based on integrity, competence and those which are non-specific. Issue appeals relate to attacks based on an opponent's policy record or policy proposals. In total 15 policy categories are coded, ranging from the economy, social security, health and immigration to foreign affairs. Overall, 8931 appeals were coded. We will illustrate the coding method with a fragment of a voice over in a Labour Party Election Broadcast from the 1987 election campaign: *'How can Mrs. Thatcher say that the health service is safe in her hands, when she will not put herself in the hands of the health service?(..) Labour can put the heart back into the health service.'* The first sentence we code as a trait attack from the Labour Party on the integrity of Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher. The second sentence we code as a positive issue appeal of the Labour Party on healthcare.

The data has been manually coded by native speaking (post) graduate students. Geer's coding procedure proved to be quite reliable in this study. Across different countries, we found a Krippendorf's Alpha .66 for the unit of analysis, i.e. the selection of an appeal. For the tone of appeal, i.e. positive or negative, the Krippendorf's Alpha was very high with .97. The reliability of the content categories, i.e. traits versus issues and specific issues, has a Krippendorf's Alpha of .69 and .82.[35]

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34 Note that Geer's method only codes the positive or negative appeals made, it does not allow for the coding of neutral appeals.

35 The inter-coder reliability (Krippendorf's Alpha) inside the three countries for the unit of analysis, tone, kind of appeal and specific issues was respectively, 0.77, 0.92, 0.83 and 0.88 for the Netherlands. For Germany the inter-coder reliability was 0.71, 0.97, 0.81 and 0.83. For Britain the inter-coder reliability was 0.68, 0.94, 0.68 and 0.72

Operationalizations and Methods

We utilize two types of dependent variables in the empirical analysis. The first relates to the extent of negative campaigning by each party in each election campaign. This variable signifies whether each appeal has either a negative or positive tone. In order to examine the degree to which gender affects the content of negative campaigning, we use a second set of dependent variables that capture the content of a negative appeal. More specifically, this part of the analysis is restricted to negative appeals only and signifies whether a negative appeal relates to an issue attack or a trait attack and whether it relates to feminine issues (i.e. social security, health care, education, environment or development aid) or masculine issues (i.e. economy, traffic, agriculture, defence, foreign affairs, finance, crime or immigration).

After reviewing the coding of our dependent variables, we provide an overview of the operationalization of the main independent variables and the method employed in the empirical analysis. Our main independent variable is the gender of the party leader which is coded 1 when a leader is female and 0 when a leader is male. Next to this variable, we control for other factors that affect the extent and content of negative campaigning for each party.

The first control variable is *Opposition Party*. It is a widespread finding in the literature that challengers are more willing to take the risk of negative campaigning than incumbents as challenger parties have to overcome their opponent's natural advantage of incumbency (Swint 1998; Lau and Pomper 2004; Druckman, et al. 2009). Challengers have to provide reasons why voters should keep the incumbents out of office this time around (Kahn and Kenney 2004; Hale, Fox and Farmer 1996). As a result, we expect challenger status to be an important party characteristic that mediates the extent and content of negative campaigning. Opposition Party is a dummy variable indicating if a party is in opposition at the time of the election campaign or is part of the governing coalition (1=Opposition; 0=Government). *Loss in the Polls* is the second control variable, the existing literature argues that candidates that are trailing behind or candidates in highly competitive situations where there is no clear winner, are more willing to take risks in their fight to win a campaign. These candidates are more likely to make use of negative campaigning (e.g. Damore 2002; Sigelman and Buell 2003; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995). 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 and the vote share a party obtained during the previous elections in percentages. As these changes in vote percentages will be larger in magnitude for larger parties, we divided the changes by the size of the party in

the previous election.[36] 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 the values. Unfortunately, we lack information about the exact airing of the different party broadcasts, so we could not examine the effect of parties' standing in the polls in a dynamic fashion. The polling data used stems from Ipsos MORI, ZDF Politbarometer and TNS NIPO.

Previous research (Walter and Van der Brug, forthcoming) demonstrated that in Western European multiparty systems, the coalition potential of a party matters in terms of the degree of negative campaigning. In coalition systems, election campaigns are fought on eve of coalition bargaining, and consequently a campaign which is fought too aggressively may damage a party's strategic position within post-election coalition negotiations (e.g. Elmelund-Præstekær 2008; 2010; Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Holtz Bacha and Kaid 2006). As a result, new, small and extreme parties with almost no government experience have less to lose from negative campaigning compared to large, established and moderate parties that have often been pivotal players in coalition negotiations. In order to account for these differences, we include three additional control variables: the newness of a party, its government experience and its median party distance. 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); Andeweg and Irwin (2009). 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. 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).[37] *New Party* is a dummy variable indicating whether a party has already

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36 For the concept of losing in the polls different points of reference can be chosen, namely the position in the previous polls, the previous election results or the position of a competing party (Kleinnijenhuis and Takens 2011). As explained in the data section, our research focus is not the dynamic during the election campaign and the party election broadcasts foremost reflect the party strategy at the beginning of the campaign. In addition, the results of previous elections are at stake at these elections and therefore an important reference point for campaign managers. For these three reasons we decided to use the previous election results as our point of reference in this study.

37 In Walter et al. (2011) The effect of party size turned out not to be significant and was found to be highly collinear with the degree of prior government experience, which is why we do not test the effects of these variables in the same model. Since prior government experience is closer to the theoretical concept of 'coalition potential', we decided to focus on this variable and to exclude party size from the models tested in this study.

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. The variable New Party is also incorporated, as party leaders matter more for new parties than established parties as it takes time for supporters to develop stable loyalties towards a party (Blais 2011). As a result, the effect of a party leader on the campaign may be larger for new parties. *Party Ideology* is operationalized as a party's position on the left right scale.[38] Finally, we control for party ideology as studies have shown that leftist parties are more likely to have a female party leader than rightist parties (e.g. Caul 1999; Matland 1993).

We employ a logistical regression model to examine if these different factors account for inter-party variation in negative campaigning. Our dependent variables are dichotomous in nature, so ordinary least squares regression is ruled out. We have repeated observations for parties in different countries and campaigns. To take the dependence of these observations into account, we run our logistic regression models with White's heteroskedastic standard errors. In addition, we have corrected for the clustering of appeals in party election combinations.[39] Finally, we added country dummies to account for the possible differences in negative campaigning across contexts. As we expect negative campaigning to be higher in the British two party system where no coalition government needs to be formed, than in the Dutch and German multiparty systems in which this is a common practice.[40]

Results

Does gender affect the extent and content of negative campaigning in British, Dutch and German elections? Table 5.1 presents the result of the logistic regression models. It is important to note that the coefficients provided in Table 5.1 present the change in the log odds of a party engaging in negative campaigning versus positive campaigning (second column), trait versus issue attacks (third column), or issue attacks on the basis

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38 For the variables median party distance and party ideology we make use of voters' placements of parties on the left right scale in Dutch Parliamentary Election Surveys (DPES), British Election Survey (BES) and the German National Election Studies (ZA Wahl).

39 As we also run models explaining the kind of negative appeals and the kind of negative issue appeals the unit of analysis in this study has to be the appeal and cannot be the ad.

40 We do not include election dummies as this would overspecify the model. We have also estimated the models with the election dummies and they were not significant and thus can be excluded from the models.

of masculine versus feminine issues (fourth column) as a result of a one-unit increase in the independent variable. In other words, a positive coefficient indicates an increased likelihood of negative campaigning, trait attacks or issue attacks on feminine issues.

First, we look at Model 1, which addresses gender differences in the extent of negative campaigning. Recall that on the basis of existing research we formulated the hypothesis that female party leaders are less likely to go negative than male party leaders (H1). On the basis of the results in the second column it seems that female party leaders in Western Europe are to the contrary more likely to engage in attack behaviour than their male counterparts. This effect remains when we add controls to the model. However, when we jack-knife the sample by dropping one country at a time it is apparent that the effect is not robust. We do not find an effect for female party leadership when the United Kingdom is dropped from the sample, thereby indicating that the effect is solely driven by Margaret Thatcher (the results are available on request). The tone of the 1983 and 1987 campaigns of the Conservative Party under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher was very negative. We are inclined to argue that this is a 'Thatcher effect' and not a gender effect. The finding that Margaret Thatcher ran a more negative campaign than her male counterparts is not surprising in view of her reputation as a strong leader with tough rhetoric (McAllistar 2011). As Scammell furthermore (1996: 121) illustrates, Thatcher made extensive use of political marketers when she was party leader. In an attempt to win the voters '*they tried to create a more warm and womanly image for a leader generally perceived as aloof and rather superior'*. Nevertheless, it is clear that Thatcher did not really cultivate a soft feminine image, but played to her strengths which were more aligned with masculine stereotypes. The same model shows that there are country differences in the degree of negative campaigning, namely controlling for other factors the overall level of negative campaigning is higher in British election campaigns than in Dutch and German election campaigns. This confirms our expectation, that negative campaigning would be lower in multiparty systems in which coalition governments are a necessity. We also find evidence for the notion that party characteristics matter, opposition parties are more likely to go negative and we find border statistical positive effects for new parties and parties positioned further from the median. To summarize, we have to conclude that gender does not affect the degree to which political parties in British, Dutch and German elections between 1980 and 2006 were willing to go negative. Thereby, we reject the *Gender Stereotype Hypothesis* (H1).

Dependent Variable	Model 1 Extent of Negative Campaigning (1=negative; 0=positive)		Model 2 Content of Negative Campaigning (trait=1; issue=0)		Model 3 Issue Attacks (feminine=1; masculine=0)	
Female Party Leader	.387* (.164)	.573** (.215)	-.418 (.327)	-.469 (.215)	-.451 (.425)	-.142 (.349)
Opposition Party		.504* (.245)		-.282 (.369)		.045 (.522)
Loss in Polls		.288 (.210)		-.186 (.365)		-.088 (.308)
New Party		.619 ° (.336)		-.036 (.472)		.882* (.452)
Government Experience		-.018 (.424)		-.348 (.543)		-1.101 (.757)
Median Party Distance		.246 ° (.144)		-.192 (.144)		-.220 (.195)
Party Ideology		.029 (.052)		.058 (.007)		-.278** (.081)
Germany	-.601** (.235)	-.303 (.224)	.687** (.303)	.679* (.353)	.026 (.408)	.203° (.436)
United Kingdom	.735** (.216)	1.123** (0.305)	-.136 (.274)	-.327 (.343)	-.211 (.325)	-.057 (.421)
Constant	-.1.071** (.170)	-2.774** (.658)	-1.563** (.179)	-.800 (.815)	-.684** (.247)	.944 (1.137)
Wald X^2	72.10**	80.04**	12.72**	22.34**	2.12	61.84**
McFadden's R^2	.051	.072	.020	.027	.008	.09
Correctly Classified	70.8%	69.67%	82.74%	82.74%	70.36%	74.%
N of Observations	8931	8931	2642	2642	1542	1542

Notes: *Table entries are logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. For Model 1 with and without the control variables standard errors are adjusted for 141 clusters. For Model 2 with and without the control variables standard errors are adjusted for 119 clusters. For Model 3 with and without the control variables standard errors are adjusted for 103 clusters. ** significant at $p < .01$; * significant at $p < .05$; ° significant at $p < .10$ (two-tailed).*

Although gender does not seem to matter for the extent of negative campaigning employed by political parties in election campaigns, it may affect the content of negative attacks. In the second part of the analysis, we examine the extent to which female party leadership has an impact on the content of negative campaigning. Models two and three in Table 5.1 provide an overview of these analyses. We examine two elements of the content of negative campaigning. First, in Model 2 we examine the effect of gender of the party leader on the degree to which parties employ negative issue attacks. Negative issue appeals relate to the degree to which a party criticizes its opponents on the basis

of their existing policy record/future policy proposals or traits. The expectation here is that when female party leaders go negative they are more likely to do so on the basis of policy issues. We do find a negative effect for female party leaders in the model, but it is not statistically significant. The findings also show that party characteristics do not help to explain the content of negative attacks. We do however find country differences. Trait attacks are more likely in German election campaigns than in Dutch and British election campaigns. However, for our study of gender effects on negative campaigning, we have to conclude that female party leaders are not more likely than their male counterparts to engage in issue attacks. Therefore, we reject the *Issue Attack Hypothesis (H2)*.

The final aspect of the possible effects of gender on the content of negative campaigning, focuses on the nature of issues addressed in attacks. Party leaders not only have the choice of whether to launch trait or issue attacks, they also have to decide whether they will attack their opponents on feminine issues or on masculine ones. We expect female party leaders to attack more on male issues than female issues, see hypothesis H3.[41] The results from Table 5.1 show that female party leaders tend to focus on male issues when they go negative, but this effect fails to reach statistical significance. We reject the *Male Issue Hypothesis* (H3). In this Model we do find significant effects for New Parties and Party Ideology. New parties and leftist parties are more inclined to attack on female issues. The found effect for Party Ideology is probably an issue ownership effect as issues as healthcare, environment and education are traditionally owned by leftist parties.

Overall, the results show that the gender of a party leader does not affect negative campaigning in British, Dutch and German elections in the period 1980-2006. This may be unsurprising in light of the fact that party leader characteristics matter less in election campaigns in Western Europe than in the US.

Concluding Remarks

Current research from the US context suggests that male and female candidates for political office campaign differently. In addition, some more specialized studies find a gender gap in the use of and pay-offs from negative campaigning. So far, research into the effects of gender on campaign strategies, such as negative campaigning, originate primarily from the US context (for an exception see Carlson, 2001). This study has broadened

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41 Note that certain traits are also considered more or less feminine. Traits that are generally associated with masculinity are competence and leadership, while integrity and compassion are generally considered feminine traits (Kahn, 1993: 490; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993: 121). Unfortunately, the number of trait attacks in the data is very limited, which makes an analysis of this distinction nearly impossible.

our scope of inquiry and explored the extent to which the findings from the US context are generalizable to other advanced democratic societies. Specifically, it examined the degree to which female and male party leaders in 23 election contests in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom differed in the extent and content of their negative campaigning.

The findings from the US context highlighted that gender does indeed affect negative campaigning strategies, but at the same time are inconclusive when it comes to explaining the exact way in which male and female candidates behave differently. Some studies find that female politicians are less likely to attack their opponents, as negative campaigning is at odds with widespread gender stereotypes which portray females as helpful, caring and passive. Other studies argue and empirically substantiate that female candidates are more likely to go negative in order to contradict existing gender norms and thus become more viable political candidates in the eyes of voters. Our findings from British, Dutch and German elections show that there are hardly any systematic differences between male and female leaders in the practice of negative campaigning. Female party leaders do not differ from their male counterparts in the degree to which they utilize negative messages or the content of these messages. The sole female party leader which did seem to run a more negative campaign than her male opponents is Margaret Thatcher in the 1983 and 1987 campaign. This 'Thatcher effect' is too specific to be generalised to all female politicians.

The most plausible explanation for the fact that we find no systematic differences between male and female candidates in the degree and content of negative campaigning, is that party leader characteristics are generally less important in election campaigns in Western Europe than in the U.S. However, due to the personalization of election campaigns, party leaders increasingly determine the party's campaign strategy and party leaders' traits play a growing role in the campaign strategy chosen by parties in Western Europe. Therefore, one could reasonably expect the party leader's gender to affect the use of negative campaigning, as it does in the U.S. Our findings are interesting as they suggest that the U.S. literature on gender and negative campaigning is not applicable to the Western European context and that party leader characteristics, such as gender do not yet affect this aspect of a party's campaign strategy. However, as we did find an effect for Margaret Thatcher, we are inclined to draw a conclusion similar to that of McAllistar (2011: 74) on party leader effects on voting behaviour. He pointed out that the personality of the leader is as or even more important than his position to find party leader effects on voting behaviour. Thus, it might not be the party leader's traits that define his campaign strategy, but his/her personality. Thereby this study also contributes to the literature on personalization of election campaigns.

Irrespective of the findings presented here, studying the effects of gender on negative campaigning or electoral campaign strategy more generally remains an important avenue for future research. For one, we only have a limited number of female party leaders in our dataset. Consequently, for future work it may be important to increase the

number of election campaigns included by adding additional countries. In the Scandinavian countries for example there are many more female party leaders. The limited number of cases might have contributed to our non-findings. Second, it may be worthwhile to study the effects of other party leader characteristics on negative campaigning or interview campaign managers and former party leaders about what factors played a role in the decision making process concerning the tone of the campaign. This research could strengthen the claim that in the Western European context the party leader does not affect this part of the campaign strategy. Finally, if more elections from more countries could be included, one could delve further into the possible effects of political context. For example, does the type of electoral system or the type of welfare state mediate the effects of gender on campaign strategies? These questions are extremely interesting and should be addressed in future research.