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DOI

[10.1080/10584609.2024.2314604](https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2314604)

Publication date

2024

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Political Communication

License

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[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Mendoza, P., Nai, A., & Bos, L. (2024). The Fleeting Allure of Dark Campaigns: Backlash from Negative and Uncivil Campaigning in the Presence of (Better) Alternatives. *Political Communication*, 41(5), 693-718 . <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2314604>

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The Fleeting Allure of Dark Campaigns: Backlash from Negative and Uncivil Campaigning in the Presence of (Better) Alternatives

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ABSTRACT

More aggressive campaigning styles focusing on criticizing opponents (negativity) or using inappropriate language to vilify opponents (incivility) tend to be disliked by voters, and remain thus risky for parties facing off in competitive elections. Backlashes against attackers often cancel out any dent the attacks may leave in the support for the targets. Yet, research on the conditions under which these backlashes are more likely to happen remains fragmentary. In this article, we argue that the nature of the electoral competition – specifically, the presence of viable alternative parties for voters to choose from – matters. Voters could be more likely to withdraw political support from the attacker when such alternatives exist. We test whether the availability and ideological attractiveness of alternatives intervene to explain the backlash effect associated with negativity and incivility, at the election, party, and voter levels. We do so comparatively in the context of the 2019 European Parliament elections in 27 EU countries, by linking a cross-sectional post-election survey ($N = 18,790$) with an expert survey covering the campaigning strategies of 175 parties that participated in the election across the continent. Estimating mixed effects multi-level models, we find support for the moderating effect of alternatives at the voter-level; voters who have at least equally attractive alternatives available to them are less likely to support parties that go negative than voters to whom the attacking party is the most viable option. Alternatives do not seem to play a major role, however, at the party and election levels.


KEYWORDS

Negative campaigning; incivility; political parties; backlash; comparative political communication; EU elections

Introduction

The aggressive and uncivil political style showcased by Donald Trump during the 2016 US presidential primaries and later on into the general election has been amply documented (Nai et al., 2019; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). Also because of that, many Republican voters (Tucker et al., 2019) and representatives (Hayden et al., 2019) did not support Trump and were vocal against him. Still, when the moment came to cast a ballot for either him or the Democratic competition, many fell back into line, which ultimately helped him secure the

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This article has been republished with a minor change. This change does not impact on the academic content of the article.  Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher's website at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.2314604>

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victory over Hillary Clinton. Would disgruntled Republicans have acted on their disapproval of Trump's overt political aggressiveness if they had viable alternatives available to them? Evidence that aggressive political actors receive substantial political support also comes from multiparty elections, such as the 2019 elections to the European Parliament (EP). These elections saw a rise in support for populist and Eurosceptic parties¹ that competed with attack-heavier campaigns than their mainstream contenders (Nai, 2021; see also Nai et al., 2022) and still received considerable support from segments of the electorate. Previous research on negative campaigning emphasizes the toll that attacking opponents during elections tends to have on the attackers' political support (Lau et al., 2007). Yet, it seems that some political actors can celebrate electoral successes despite aggressive campaign styles – if not even *thanks to* them (e.g., Seeberg & Nai, 2021). Is the electoral success of more aggressive campaigns perhaps conditional on the specific circumstances? More specifically, is it shaped by the lack of valid alternatives voters can turn toward to express their disapproval? Surprisingly, the existing research has little to say about whether voters punish parties that go negative and uncivil as a function of the alternatives that are offered to them. This is what we intend to do here.

In this study, we explain differences in backlash effects against campaign negativity by studying contextual variations – notably the constellation of the electoral competition. We start from what we call the alternatives hypothesis: while voters may generally disapprove of attacks between competing parties and turn away from the sponsors of such attacks (Lau et al., 2007), they are more likely to do so when they have better alternatives to turn their support towards. We conceptualize the attractiveness and viability of alternatives to voters via a spatial model of voting (Downs, 1957) and translate this idea to the election, party, and voter levels, expecting negative and uncivil campaigns to be electorally less effective in settings where more and ideologically closer parties are competing.

We test the hypothesis of alternatives within the setting of the 2019 EP elections, estimating differences in the political support for national parties across 28 electoral contexts as a function of the style of their campaigns and the nature of the electoral competition they faced. Studying European elections allows us to compare a relatively large spectrum of cases characterized by different types of parties, thus ensuring enough variance in the cases under investigation, whilst removing major sources of potential confounding effects from the equation. First, EP elections take place simultaneously in all EU member states, keeping the effect of exogenous events (e.g., major developments on the world political scene, such as conflicts) constant. Second, differences between countries' electoral procedures are smaller for the EP elections due to legally binding regulations at the EU-level,² effectively reducing, for instance, between-country variations in incentives to vote strategically. Finally, although EP elections are still essentially fought based on of national policy issues and by national parties (M. Maier et al., 2021), party families and ideological disputes are more comparable across countries than in national elections (e.g., Euroscepticism is a more common and salient dimension). At the same time, the second-order nature of EP elections makes them less salient in voters' minds, which makes voters less likely to follow election coverage and pay attention to the campaigning styles of competing parties (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). This makes any campaign effects, including backlash effects, more difficult to detect and creates a conservative test of our hypothesis.

We triangulate evidence from representative post-election surveys compiled in the European Election Voter Study (EES, Schmitt et al., 2021) and the 2019 European

Parliament Election Expert Survey dataset (EPEES_19, Nai et al., 2022), containing measures of campaign content for the main parties engaged in the election in all participating countries. Our final dataset consists of 28 electoral contexts, 175 parties, 18,790 respondents, and 115,661 dyadic voter-party relations. Via multi-level models that explain respondents political support for a particular party, we can estimate the degree to which the effect of a party's campaign style varies by conditions of varying alternatives at the election, party, and voter level. While we do not find significant moderation patterns at the election or party-level, we do find that voters who have better alternatives available to them tend to support parties that go negative much less than voters to whom the attacking party is the only viable option. Importantly, these findings persist after controlling for powerful confounding explanations like parties' ideological attractiveness. Our findings demonstrate the usefulness of a classical approach to political behavior for understanding heterogeneous effects of campaign negativity and point out in what contexts it may not pay off to go negative. All data and code are available for replication via the following OSF repository: <https://osf.io/raz97/>

Negativity Backlashes and Better Alternatives

When rallying for political support, parties tend to campaign along a continuum between, self-promotional (positive) messages and more aggressive ones against their opponents – these latter usually take the form of critiques of their policy stances, accomplishments, profile, or character (negativity) and/or vilifying, harsh, shrill, and vulgar language that breaks social norms of politeness (incivility). Although these two dimensions are empirically and conceptually distinct (albeit oftentimes related), we expect them to act similarly, both in their impact on the political support of their sponsor and in their moderation through the availability of alternatives. Both negativity and incivility can sometimes be more effective in informing, mobilizing, and persuading voters. In contrast to positive campaigning, negativity helps voters to better differentiate between politicians. Political attacks also capture voters' attention better and are more memorable, as they tap into a deeply-rooted negativity bias that gives priority to situations – in this case, politicians – to be avoided. In a meta-analysis by Lau et al. (2007),³ 22 of 31 studies on the effects of negativity reported a reduced support for the target of the attack (Lau et al., 2007, p. 1182). More recent studies have on the one hand supported this general finding (e.g., Fridkin & Kenney, 2011) but also pointed at the existence of different moderators, which condition whether attack campaigns can dissuade voters from supporting the target.

Against this backdrop, however, especially for multi-party systems, where a drop in political support for the target does not necessarily translate into a gain in support for the *attacker* (Walter & van der Eijk, 2019b), the overall effectiveness of a campaign strategy hinges more on the *cost* of going negative or uncivil – that is, on the presence of the so-called boomerang or *backlash effect* (Garramone, 1984).

Attacking ones' opponents in a political campaign can backfire because it violates societal and democratic norms of non-conflict and cooperation. Doing so in an uncivil manner further goes against norms of respect for political opponents, as well as what ought to be an appropriate and polite language. When judging and evaluating behaviors, including behaviors of politicians and parties voters have expectations that are grounded in societal norms for what is typical and appropriate (Burgoon & Le Poire,

1993, p. 31). These norms hold for society as a whole (Brown et al., 1987), but are especially applicable to the political sphere, where civility and respect for the opponent are critical components of our understanding of democracy (Muddiman, 2017). Notably, these norms and the perception of their violation tend to vary between people (Nai & Maier, 2021; Sigelman & Kugler, 2003) and can be expected to differ across cultural contexts as well (e.g., depending on female representation in politics; Valli & Nai, 2020). Since political campaigns are perceived as social acts, they are also judged based on socially learned and internalized norms (Dahl et al., 2003). When internalized expectations are violated, individuals experience a psychological response that is used to interpret the deviation and make evaluations of the transgressor (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993). Accordingly, when the *communicative behavior* of a party or candidate violates the expectations that individuals have toward politicians, voters also tend to disapprove of the *sponsor* of such communication (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993). As negativity breaks with socially learned norms of non-conflict and politeness, it tends to be disliked by the average voter (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). Parties that focus on attacking their opponents rather than promoting their own positions, achievements, or character qualities, appear to voters as mean-spirited (Pinkleton, 1997), opportunistic (Roy & Alcantara, 2016), less cooperative, ideologically more extreme, and less likely to lead a successful government (Galasso et al., 2023). This is even more the case when the attacks are expressed in a nasty or *uncivil* manner, transgressing interpersonal or public norms of politeness (Lipsitz et al., 2005; Muddiman, 2017, 2021). Voters may show this disapproval by withdrawing their political support, which could lead to either abstaining (Ansolabehere et al., 1994) or supporting another party (Walter & van der Eijk, 2019b) if the attacking party was their preferred vote choice. All in all, while some voters might expect or even enjoy a harsher and more uncivil approach to politics (e.g., voters with “darker” personality profiles; Nai & Maier, 2021), the current state of the literature would still suggest that the average voter dislikes both negativity and incivility, as such rhetoric infringes social norms of polite and cooperative behavior.

In line with this expectation, existing evidence shows mixed results when it comes to the effect of negativity and incivility on support for the sponsor. Although some studies show no sign of such effects on the sponsor’s support (e.g., Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2010; Ma et al., 2019), others report sizable backlash effects that depress the support for the sponsor (e.g., Roy & Alcantara, 2016), often to the extent of canceling out the dent that the attack left in the targets’ support (see Lau et al., 2007 for a systematic review). Lau and colleagues concluded that, “attacks probably do undermine evaluations of the candidates they target, [however] they usually bring evaluations of the attackers down even more, and the net effect on vote choice is nil” (Lau et al., 2007, p. 1185). Findings so far remain particularly mixed⁴ when focusing on studies conducted in multi-party systems (for more evidence in multi-party systems see: Ceron & d’Adda, 2016; Galasso et al., 2023; J. Maier & Maier, 2007; Nai & Seeberg, 2018; Pattie et al., 2011; Roy & Alcantara, 2016; Walter & van der Eijk, 2019b). Yet, to reflect the slight trend towards backlash found in the literature, we formulate the following baseline hypothesis:

H₁: Negativity and incivility backlash against the sponsor, in such a way that the more negative or uncivil a campaign, the lower the political support for the sponsor.

Our understanding of factors that drive or diminish backlash effects remains fragmentary, in particular as it comes to contextual conditions. Previous studies have underlined the importance of content or style of a negative message (e.g., Galasso et al., 2023; Min, 2004), characteristics of the candidate (e.g., incumbency in Lau & Pomper, 2002), the recipient's personality (e.g., Nai & Maier, 2021), attitudes (e.g., Krupnikov & Piston, 2015), ideology (e.g., Jung & Tavits, 2021) or partisanship (e.g., Somer-Topcu & Weitzel, 2022). Most of this research on the effect of negativity and incivility on the political support for the sponsor has focused on the United States, where contextual variation is limited because the effective two-party system creates a rather unique zero-sum game between the attacker and target. Moreover, *comparative* research on campaign dynamics remains especially rare (see Walter & van der Eijk, 2019b). Accordingly, systematic comparisons of differences in backlashes across contextual variations – accounting for the availability of better alternatives – remains limited. Could the cost of going negative or uncivil be a function of the availability of attractive alternatives that voters can turn towards?

We can make sense of the role of alternatives in the interplay between negative campaigning and political support by using an economic spatial model of voting (Downs, 1957). By placing parties and voters in a multi-dimensional ideological space, voters tend to prefer parties that are closer to their own position along a specific dimension and thus constitute a more attractive alternative to other parties. Consistent evidence supports this idea (Algara & Zur, 2023; Downs, 1957; Milazzo et al., 2012). Thus, if voters prefer parties that align more closely with their own political views, it may be harder to move away from the party that best aligns with their own ideology in response to that party's campaign style. Put the other way around, the presence of a viable alternative can make it easier for voters to balance ideological congruence and disapproval of campaign style. Assuming a baseline of disapproval of more aggressive campaigns (H₁), we expect voters – all things equal – to show their discontent of a party's campaign style more explicitly when at least similarly attractive electoral alternatives to the sponsor exist. Conversely, in a setting of more restricted alternatives, negativity and incivility should be less costly. The more restricted a voter's choice of alternatives to the sponsor, the less likely voters should be to express their disapproval by withdrawing their political support.

Some support for this expectation comes from research on perceptual biases in the face of campaign negativity. For instance, Haselmayer and colleagues show that respondents rate the negativity of parties they find more attractive as less negative than that of other parties, suggesting that negativity may have a smaller impact for voters to whom the sponsor is the only alternative (Haselmayer et al., 2020). Similarly, the relative ideological distance between a voter's most preferred party and their second option predicts the degree of dislike toward the latter (Algara & Zur, 2023). The only study that directly assesses the role of available alternatives also lends cautious support to the idea laid out above. Galasso et al. (2023) show that, even if an attack was effective in persuading some voters not to vote for the target of an attack, in a multi-candidate competition, where voters have more alternatives to choose from, these voters are more likely to lend their support to *other parties*, rather than to the sponsor of the negativity. Their study does not account for

parties' differing ideological attractiveness to voters (all artificial candidate profiles were presented as having almost identical ideological positions), and only focuses on two vs. three-candidate races. Yet, it does support the idea that negativity may be more costly when the sheer number of alternatives is higher. In this same vein, negative ads also tend to be less prevalent in primaries that have more than two candidates in contrast to duopolies (Gandhi et al., 2016).

In line with these findings and the above arguments, we translate the hypothesis of the moderating role of alternatives into expectations at three levels of aggregation: electoral competition, parties, and voters. Viable alternatives are more likely to be present in electoral competitions with more parties, and especially for voters of parties that are ideologically more similar (i.e., closer by) to each other or voters who see several parties as viable options. First, when comparing different contexts at the election or system-level, the availability of alternatives can simply be taken as the number of competing parties. When more parties compete for political support, a bigger proportion of voters will have similarly attractive alternatives to choose from and can thus be harder on parties with more aggressive campaigning styles. We thus expect:

H₂: The higher the number of competing parties, the stronger the backlash against parties that go negative or uncivil.

Second, however, the sheer number of alternatives may not matter much to voters when these are not equally attractive. The degree to which another party is a direct competitor of a specific sponsor of negativity should depend on whether they are appealing to the same segment of the electorate. Parties that are in closer ideological proximity to each other are also in a more direct competition for the same constituency. Put differently, two parties that are ideologically more similar also constitute better alternatives to the potential voters close to them than parties that are ideologically further apart. From the perspective of a party that chooses a more aggressive campaign strategy, the backlash effect should thus be stronger if they compete alongside an ideologically rather similar party (keeping that competitor's campaign style constant), and weaker when they are figuratively speaking the only game in their side of town.

H₃: The smaller a party's proximity to its next closest competitor, the stronger the backlash against its negativity or incivility.

Finally, third, even if the number of competing parties and the sponsors' proximity to the closest competitor moderate backlash effects, we cannot argue for the relevance of electoral alternatives, should this pattern not replicate from the perspective of individual voters. Reverting again to the conceptualization of voters' ideological position as a single-peaked ideal point, a third party competing with the sponsor of negativity in question would qualify as a *better* alternative, when the voter is ideologically at least as close to that competitor as to the sponsor. As in the case of Republicans continuing to support Trump, when the sponsor in question is the party that the voter is the closest to, we would expect little to no backlash at all. However, when a voter has at least one equally or more alternative to choose from, we

expect the disapproval of more aggressive campaigns to translate more strongly to a lower political support for the sponsor.

H₄: When voters are ideologically at least as close to another party as to the sponsor, the backlash effect against the sponsor going negative or uncivil is stronger.

All in all, we expect voters to lend less political support to a party that goes negative or uncivil, when there are more parties competing in the same election (H₂), when the negatively competing party shares more ideological similarity with its ideologically closest competitor (H₃), and when voters have parties to choose from that are ideologically at least equally attractive to the sponsor in question (H₄).

Research Design

To assess whether the availability of electoral alternatives moderates the effect of campaign negativity and incivility on political support for the attacker, we need to capture four components of the puzzle: (1) a party's overall campaign negativity (and incivility), (2) the political support for that party, (3) the availability of alternatives at the election, party, and individual level, and (4) controls to account for potentially confounding factors. We do so by triangulating data from two sources: A large-scale expert survey that includes information about the campaign of all major parties during the 2019 EP elections (EPEES_19 dataset, Nai et al., 2022), and voter data from the European Election Study (EES, Schmitt et al., 2021).

Measuring Campaign Negativity and Incivility

We capture a party's campaign style based on expert judgments. Such measures are commonly based on either content analyses of controlled (e.g., press-releases Dolezal et al., 2016) or uncontrolled campaign communication (e.g., via newspapers Debus et al., 2018; Song et al., 2019), respondent's perceptions (e.g., Pattie et al., 2011), or using expert surveys (Nai, 2020). Whilst estimates based on specific coded instances arguably constitute the most reliable measure, they may still not create a valid overall representation of what reaches voters on average. Written interviews and press statements may feature strongly in newspaper articles and be a decent proxy for the overall traffic of attacks around an election. However, these are arguably less memorable and less likely to be carried over from print into TV or social media in comparison to televised interviews or ads that can also be reposted on social media or replayed in a news program. Moreover, the perceived negativity and incivility of a campaign from the voters' perspective will inadvertently deliver the compound effect of negativity/incivility, partisan bias, and campaign exposure, etc. (Haselmayer et al., 2020). With this in mind, experts' judgments are somewhat of an intermediary step between a media analysis and voter's perceptions. Experts simultaneously bundle together campaign impressions from manifold sources and are better trained to assess campaign styles than conventional voters, which often lack the "motivation, time, or cognitive sophistication to follow the content of election campaigns" (Walter & van der Eijk, 2019a, p. 370).

To capture parties' negativity and incivility, we fall back on the 2019 European Parliament Election Expert Survey dataset (EPEES_19) (Nai et al., 2022). This survey constitutes the only compilation of measures of negativity and incivility of one specific political event across national contexts. The EPEES_19 dataset includes data from 28 country-specific samples of experts, one sample for each of the 28 EU member states, collected in the aftermath of the 2019 EP election. Experts – scholars with proven expertise in politics in their country, electoral politics, and political communication – were asked to judge the content of the campaigns of the most important parties engaged in the elections. The aggregate judgments of more than 380 experts provided measures of parties' campaign content (see below). As described in Nai et al. (2022), experts were mostly citizens of the country for which we asked their ratings (90.5% of domestic experts) and were generally very familiar with election campaigns in their country (they score on average 7.6 points on a 0–10 familiarity self-rating scale). Experts were somewhat left-leaning (4.0 on average on a 0–10 left-right scale), and in favor of further EU unification (6.8 points on a 0–10 scale where 10 indicates “further unification”). About a third of them (28.4%) were female. Table 9 in Appendix D presents the profiles of the expert samples by country.

For each of the most relevant⁵ parties that competed in the election (up to 10 per country), experts were asked to rate the content of their campaigns. Specifically, experts were asked to rate parties' campaigns on both, a tonality scale from exclusively negative to exclusively positive,⁶ and a scale from not uncivil at all to very uncivil.⁷

Figure 1 shows the distribution of parties across the two dimensions. We can see that both dimensions are highly correlated ($r = 0.86$), and that the some of the most uncivil and negative campaigns reported in the dataset were led e.g., by the extreme-right party *Golden Dawn* in Greece (XA) *Vlaams Belang* in Flanders (VB), and Orban's *Fidesz* in Hungary. The most positive and civil campaigns were led by three Finnish parties, *NEOS* from Austria and Slovenia's *List of Marjan Šarec*. See Table 1 for an overview of the distribution of the main variables.

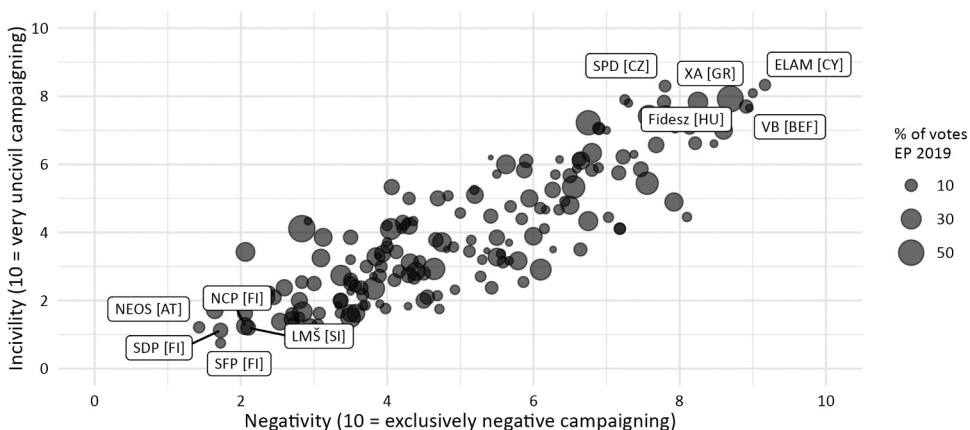














Figure 1. Distribution of negativity and incivility per party; size indicates share of votes in the 2019 EP elections. The top and bottom five most negative and uncivil parties are labeled with a party and electoral context abbreviation.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the main variables.

variable	role	level	mean	sd	min	max	boxplot	histogram
PTV	dv	dyad	3.38	3.38	0	10		
negativity	iv	party	5.08	1.82	1.43	9.17		
incivility	iv	party	4	1.93	0.75	8.33		
ENP	int.	election	6.4	1.98	2.27	11.47		
party ideol. dist.	int.	party	1.8	1.36	0	7.77		
availability of altern.	int.	dyad	0.92	0.27	0	1		

^aSee Appendix Table 2 for the number of valid observations per level of aggregation.

The Validity of Expert Judgments

The use of expert ratings is rather widespread in electoral research (e.g., Bakker et al., 2015; Nai, 2020) but does not come without methodological critiques (e.g., Budge, 2000). Recognizing the challenge of measuring something as nuanced as campaign content via the judgment of experts, recently attempts have been made to assess the validity of expert ratings of negativity via triangulations with independent data sources. Specifically, Petkevic and Nai (2022) found that expert ratings of campaign negativity correlated positively with the tone of communication of candidates on Twitter during the 2018 US senatorial midterm elections. Even controlling for candidate profile, closeness of the race, and other controls at the state level, “campaigns that are evaluated by the experts as very negative, [...] have a volume of negativity on twitter that is twice as high as campaigns that are evaluated as very low in negativity” (Petkevic & Nai, 2022, pp. 286–287). Similarly, J. Maier et al. (2022) show that expert ratings of campaign negativity in German local elections correlate strongly with political candidates’ self-reports of campaign negativity. While these two pieces of evidence refer to specific cases and do not reflect the geographical scope of our investigation, they do rely on identical procedures for measuring negativity in expert surveys and thus provide critical support for the validity of our measurements.

A further challenge is that expert judgments cannot be considered free of attitudinal biases and motivated reasoning (Curini, 2010), a potentially problematic issue in light of the liberal skew of academia (Maranto & Woessner, 2012). Indeed, in our data we find that the ideological distance between the expert samples per country and the respective parties they rated is positively correlated with the average ratings of negativity, $r(173) = 0.40$, $p < .001$, and incivility, $r(173) = 0.45$, $p < .001$. In other terms experts tend on average to rate parties that are further away from them ideologically as more negative and uncivil, confirming trends found in Haselmayer et al. (2020) for the public at large. We take this issue seriously and replicate all our analyses using adjusted measures to cancel out the potentially biasing effect of ideological skewness in the expert samples, for both negativity and incivility. We arrive at such adjusted measures following a procedure proposed by Walter and van der Eijk (2019a), by saving the residuals from regressing the average expert-judged tonality and incivility per party on the absolute distance between the judged party’s ideological left-right position and the average self-placement of the judging experts (J. Maier & Nai, 2021; Nai et al., 2022). The residuals from this model constitute the degree to which a party’s campaign is judged as more or less negative (or uncivil)

that is independent of the ideological distance between the country expert and the attacker.⁸ We replicated our analyses with these adjusted versions as robustness checks, which are displayed in the Appendix.

Measuring Political Support

We measure *political support*, the main dependent variable, via respondents' self-reported propensity to vote (PTV) for the main parties separately, surveyed in the voter component of the European Election Study (EES, Schmitt et al., 2021). The EES is a compilation of representative post-election surveys per EU member state, that also asks for respondents' PTV score per party on a 0–10 scale.⁹ By focusing on PTVs instead of vote choices to capture political support we can get a better understanding for how campaign styles affect the political support for second, third, etc. preferences,¹⁰ reduce the effect of strategic vote considerations on our measurement and assess the effect of the negativity of the campaign in the entire population including abstainers. At the party- and system-level we also replicate our analyses with parties' actual vote shares at the 2019 EP elections.¹¹

Identifying Alternatives

The moderators that we use to test the effect of the *availability of alternatives* on the backlash effect are (i) the effective number of parties (ENP, following Laakso & Taagepera, 1979) at the system-level, (ii) the absolute ideological distance to the most proximate competitor at the party-level, and (iii) a measure for whether a respondent has attractive electoral alternatives to the sponsor or not at the individual-level.

For our system level hypothesis (H₂), we capture the number of available parties with the *effective* number of parties. In contrast to the *absolute* number of parties, the ENP factors in the relative size of parties, with smaller parties adding less to the sum than bigger parties. This is more in line with the representation of the number of alternatives, as rather small parties are less likely to qualify as an actual alternative to voters due to their lower chances of gaining representation.

Second, at the party-level we capture the availability of electoral alternatives via the absolute ideological distance between the sponsor of a campaign and their ideologically most proximate competitor. We arrive at this by averaging the distances along 1) a generic ideological left-right dimension that is taken off Wikipedia's categorization of the competing parties¹² and 2) experts' placements of the parties along a two-item Euroscepticism scale that was also surveyed along with the EPEES_19.¹³ Wikipedia's left-right ideology tags have been shown to be very reliable and consistent with expert-surveys (Herrmann & Döring, 2021). Both dimensions were rescaled to 10-point scales from positive to negative stances toward the EU and from left to right respectively. After taking the average of both ideological distances for every possible party-pair within a national context, we assigned an ideologically most proximate competitor to each party¹⁴ and saved the distance between these two as the relevant value for the moderator variable. The resulting measure captures the degree to which a party does not to compete with another party for its potential voter base ideologically speaking. When the distance is small, a party's potential supporters tend to have a decent alternative close by, the bigger the gap, the fewer potential voters have alternatives available to them. The smallest ideological distance from the closest competitor

in our dataset ($d = 0.02$)¹⁵ is between the two Slovakian parties, *Obyčajní Ludia a nezávislé osobnosti (OLaNO)* and *Sloboda a Solidarita (SaS)*. The largest distance to the closest competitor (4.76) is between *Golden Dawn* and the *Communist Party* in Greece (see Figure 8 in the Appendix).

Third, at the individual level, we simply measure whether the voter is at least as close to one or more parties than to the campaign sponsoring party. Because this availability depends on the specific constellation of party *and* respondent, this measure is technically at the respondent-party dyad-level. Given that we cannot assume that all voters consistently perceive ideology the same way experts classify political parties (Converse, 2006), we fall back on a proxy for the perceived ideological distance, that is the difference between a respondent's self-placement on a L-R scale and respondent's placements of the competing parties on the same scale. To compare backlash effects between contexts in which voters *do* with those in which voters which *do not* have alternatives to the attacking party available we construct a binary variable. This moderator has the score 1 whenever a voter perceives the ideological distance to one or more parties to be smaller than or equal to the specific sponsor in question and zero for all other dyads. In contrast to a count variable for the number of better alternatives, the binary condition also allows us to maintain comparability across electoral systems with differing numbers of competing parties.¹⁶ For the perceived ideological distance, we can again fall back on the EES post-election surveys where respondents were also asked to position themselves and a number of competing parties along a L-R scale.

Covariates

Finally, we include several control variables in our model to account for potentially confounding effects. If not stated otherwise, the following covariates feature in all models. Whilst the election and party-level controls are taken from the EPEES_19 dataset, the individual-level covariates are based on the EES data. Firstly, we control for the overall negativity of the electoral campaigns in an electoral context. Given that elections and politics differ in how negatively campaigns are fought on average (J. Maier & Nai, 2021; Nai, 2020), contexts in which a higher level of negativity is the norm should differ in the way attacks are perceived in general. Secondly, we account for the sponsor's ideological position and extremity on both dimensions (L-R, and EU-position) and incumbency status to take out the potentially confounding effect of negativity being less in-style for moderates and incumbents. Thirdly, as negativity may be more liked by respondents at the extremes and on the right or Eurosceptic side of the political spectrum (Nai et al., 2022), we also control for respondents' ideological position and extremity on both dimensions. Fourth, we control for some standard respondent-level covariates (gender, age, education, and political interest). Fifth, we control for the average expert profile in terms of gender, citizenship, ideology, familiarity with the country, and how easy they perceived the task of judging the campaigns. Sixth, we add dummies for regions in Europe.¹⁷ Finally, we add hypotheses-specific controls at the party and individual levels. For the party-level, Banda and Windett (2016) argue that what matters for the backfiring of campaign negativity is the relative negativity in contrast to the competition. Accordingly, any test of the party-level moderator will also factor in the negativity of the closest competitor to the sponsor. At the individual-level, whether a respondent has ideologically more attractive alternatives available to them will also correlate with the ideological distance between the respondent and the sponsor. To account for this, we compare the moderating effect of the availability of alternatives across ideological distances as a third

moderator, resulting in a three-way interaction. Similarly, to validate whether any observed effects are indeed due to differences in campaigning for the 2019 EP elections, we will also test whether the moderating effect of alternatives is especially strong for respondents who follow the electoral campaigns very closely.¹⁸

Procedure and Analyses

We triangulate the two data sources at the party-level, linking respondents' PTV scores per party to the party entries in the EPEES_19 dataset, effectively creating as many respondent-party dyads per respondent as there are PTV scores matched with entries in the expert survey. Because the party-coverage of the two datasets is not identical some parties have to be dropped (see Table 8 in the Appendix for an overview of the matched parties). The final observations are cross-nested in both individuals and parties, which both are embedded in their respective system contexts (see Figure 9 in the Appendix for a visualization of the nesting structure of the data). Observations (i.e., respondent-party-dyads) were dropped if 1) their values on one of the relevant variables were considered an outlier (median ± 1.5 * interquartile range), 2) there were missing values for any of the modeled variables. Appendix Table 2 presents the changes in the analysis dataset across steps in the data manipulation and sample cuts. The final sample covers 28 electoral contexts,¹⁹ 175 parties 18,790 respondents and 115,661 respondent-party dyads.

We test our hypotheses in multi-level models that account for the nested data structure and interact the slope of negativity with the three respective formulations of the alternatives hypothesis. We run all models on the same dataset but aggregate the variables to the party-level for the system and party-level hypotheses (H_2 & H_3), as these tests do not include any individual-level main-effects.²⁰ For the system-level test, we fit random intercepts per electoral context and let the slopes of negativity and incivility vary by electoral context, testing cross-level interactions. For the party-level we only fit random intercepts of the dependent variable, as both components of the interaction term are at the party-level. Finally, for the individual-level test, we fit random intercepts per electoral context, party, and respondent and no random slopes of negativity, as the availability of better alternatives to the sponsor from the perspective of a respondent varies at the lowest level of aggregation, the voter-party-dyad. All models include the same control variables, with only the individual-level model also including respondent-level controls (e.g., education, gender, ideological extremity). As the focus of the formulated hypotheses are the moderation effects, the hypotheses are evaluated by comparing the average marginal effects of negativity and incivility across levels of the moderators. The full regression models are reported in Appendix C.

Results

The System-Level

Before assessing whether negative campaigns receive less political support in elections with more competing parties, we first test whether the effects of negativity and incivility on political support vary across electoral contexts. For this purpose, we estimate random slopes of negativity and incivility by context and present these together with their fixed effects (first

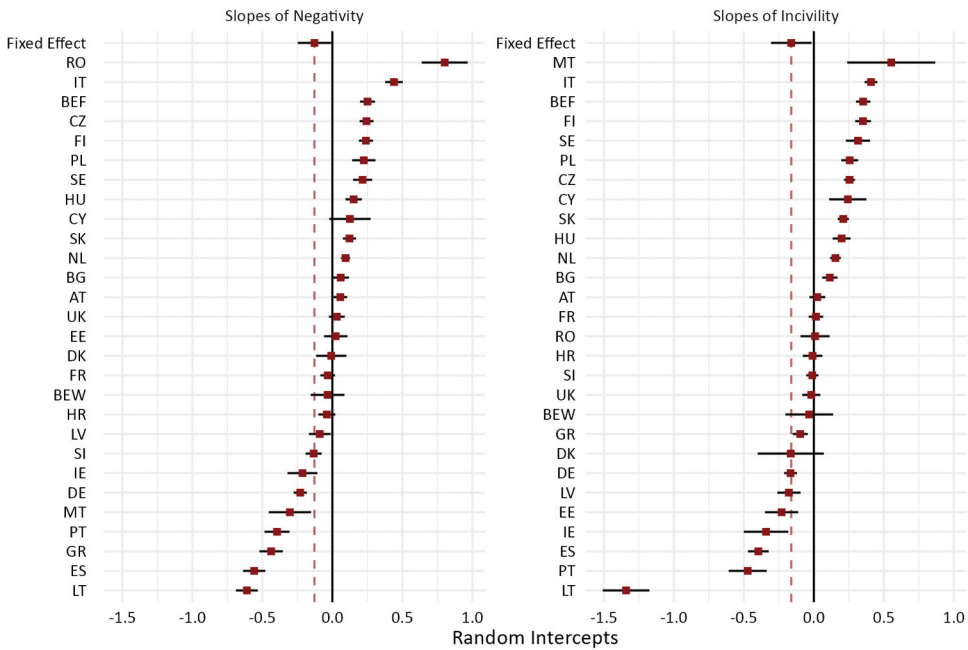


Figure 2. Random slopes for the effect of negativity and incivility on a party's PTV without controls.

coefficients and vertical, dashed line) in [Figure 2](#).²¹ The underlying model estimates the effect of a party's negativity (incivility) score on the party's average PTV. In electoral contexts with a positive coefficient, parties that lead more negative (uncivil) campaigns received higher PTV scores on average than their less negatively (uncivil) campaigning counterparts.

Whilst the average effect of a party's campaign negativity, as well as incivility on respondents' propensity to vote for the same party is negative – lending tentative support to our baseline hypothesis that negativity and incivility backlash (H_1) – these associations differ strongly by context. For instance, in nine electoral contexts more negative campaigns are associated with less political support (e.g., Lithuania, Spain, Portugal and Malta) in 12 elections with more support (e.g., Italy and Flanders). Once we add all our control variables to the model,²² the overall effect renders insignificant and even slightly positive due to the control for a party's position on the EU (see [Figures 13 and 14](#) in the Appendix). This is not surprising, given that Euroscepticism has been shown before to be associated to parties' campaign negativity (Nai et al., 2022) and given that Eurosceptic parties are more likely to be populist, which in turn tend to be disliked (Harteveld et al., 2021). Leaving out this specific control variable would render the overall effect of negativity and incivility negative again. This will however not impact the evaluation of our moderation hypotheses. These context-specific associations between negativity, incivility and political support could also reflect cultural differences and thus be taken as an illustration for why we should expect studies in different contexts to arrive at mixed results.

Turning back to H_2 , our next question is whether differences in the presence of a backlash effect can be explained by differences in how many alternatives voters can choose from in their specific electoral context. To test this, we add a cross-level interaction effect to

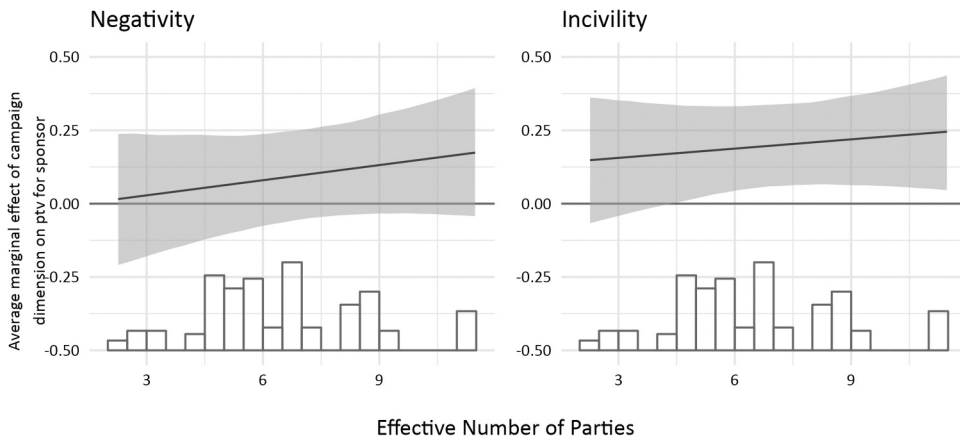


Figure 3. Average marginal effects of campaign negativity and incivility conditioned on the effective number of parties.

the previous model (including all covariates), which conditions the effects of negativity and incivility with the effective number of parties present in the respective context. **Figure 3** presents the average marginal effects at different levels of the moderator. The slopes trace how the effect of going negative or uncivil changes across systems with an increasing number of effective parties.

Following hypothesis H_2 , we would expect the backlash effect to be greater (and thus the effect of incivility and negativity on PTV to be more negative) in contexts with a higher effective number of parties. In contrast to our expectations for H_2 the slope in this plot shows an increasingly positive effect of negativity on PTV the higher the ENP. However, this moderation is rather small and not significant for either of the campaigning dimensions. This also does not change in any of the robustness checks. The moderation effect stays positive but not significant when we use the adjusted measure of campaign negativity and incivility (Appendix Figure 15). Interestingly, by changing the dependent variable to the actual vote-share (Figure 16), the slope turns around for incivility (not for negativity), in line with our initial expectation but again remains insignificant. Given these insignificant, mixed coefficients, we do not find support for the effect of negativity or incivility on political support being moderated by the effective number of parties, leading us to reject H_2 . Whilst the slope of the interaction term remains insignificant in all cases (across observed values of ENP), the effects of both dimensions (when significant) are again positive, likely due to the control for Euroscepticism. In sum, controlling for several covariates, the number of competing parties does not seem to affect whether a party's negativity is associated with higher or lower political support on average.

The Party-Level

As a next step, we dive one stage deeper to the party-level. Here we expected the effect of negativity and incivility on PTV to be more negative when the local competition around the sponsor is greater, that is, when the ideological distance to the closest competitor is smaller (H_3). Accordingly, with increasing distance to the closest competitor, we would expect the

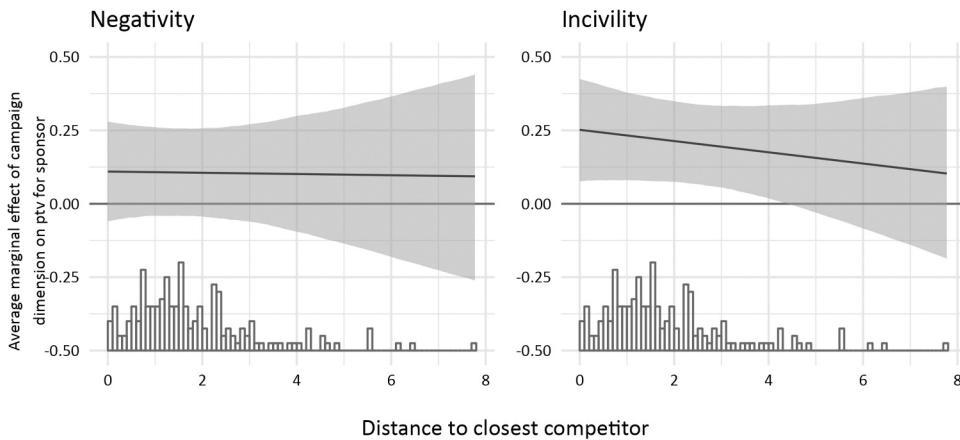


Figure 4. Average marginal effects of campaign negativity and incivility conditioned on the distance to the closest competitor.

slope of the interaction effect to be increasing, or the coefficient of negativity and incivility to become more positive or less negative. [Figure 4](#) presents the average marginal effect of the overall negativity and incivility of a party's campaign depending on the distance to that attacker's closest competitor. The almost perfectly horizontal line for negativity and the slightly inclining but not significant line for incivility show rather that the distance to the closest competitor plays no role in shaping the effect of a party's campaign's negativity and incivility on their own political support.

The significance level of this moderation effect remains below any meaningful threshold for both robustness checks. Notably, the party models, more so those for incivility, are slightly trending toward backlashes being *less* costly for parties that have a competitor close by. Again, the party-level does not deliver any support for the idea that negativity may be more costly or punished more in a context of more available alternatives.

The Individual-Level

Finally, for the individual-level translation of the alternatives hypothesis, we expect respondents who have more attractive alternatives than the sponsor available to them to lend *less* political support to the sponsors that lead more negative or uncivil campaigns. Accordingly, for those with at least equally attractive alternatives, we would expect a more negative or less positive effect than for those without. [Figure 5](#) displays the average marginal effect of negativity and incivility on PTV for the sponsor, depending on whether a respondent has a viable alternative available to them (triangle) or not (square). This time, the coefficients show the expected pattern. All coefficients are positive. As with previous models, when we account for the control variables in the model, more negative and uncivil campaigns are continuously associated with higher political support from voters. However, whilst a one-step increase on the negativity or incivility rating (0–10) translates to almost half a step increase on the PTV scale (0–10) for voters to whom the sponsor is the most attractive alternative, once voters have at least equally attractive alternatives to choose from, it renders

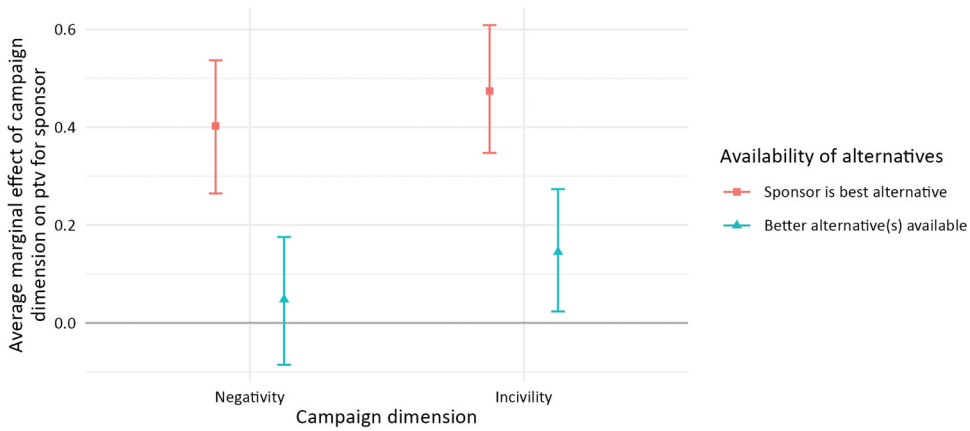


Figure 5. Average marginal effects of campaign negativity and incivility conditioned on the availability of better alternatives.

insignificant for negativity, and for incivility into a minimal, 0.15 step increase. Keeping all control variables constant (including Euroscepticism²³), respondents with better alternatives make no difference in PTV depending on the negativity of a party's campaign (and close to none depending on incivility), whilst those to whom the sponsor of negativity is the best ideological fit tend to reward negativity and incivility. Read the other way around, the gap in political support for a particular party between voters who do vs. do not have an equally or more attractive alternative available grows with increasing levels of campaign negativity and incivility. From the voters' point of view, parties with more negative campaigns are less appealing when there are at least equally attractive alternatives available. This moderation effect remains significant when switching to the adjusted version of the two measures (see Figure 10 in the Appendix).

A challenging aspect of this moderator is however that it correlates with the respondent's ideological distance to the sponsor. The further away a respondent is from the sponsor in question in terms of ideology, the more likely they have better alternatives available to them. Taking this into account, Figure 6 compares this difference in the effect of campaign negativity that is due to the availability of alternatives across different levels of ideological distance to the sponsor (averaged across their positions on the EU position and on the L-R scale). Moving from the first panel (minimum ideological distance to the sponsor) to the last (75% quantile), we can observe a closing of the gap between the two alternatives conditions. With increasing levels of ideological distance between the voter and the sponsor, the moderating effect of alternatives decreases for both incivility and negativity. The importance of better alternatives fades for respondents that are separated by more than four points on the ideological scale, however, the moderation effect from before clearly persists and also remains significant when the respondent is rather close to the party ideologically speaking, despite keeping the ideological distance between the attacker and the voter constant. All in all, what Figure 6 shows is that voters close to the party tend to reward negativity and incivility when there are no alternatives,

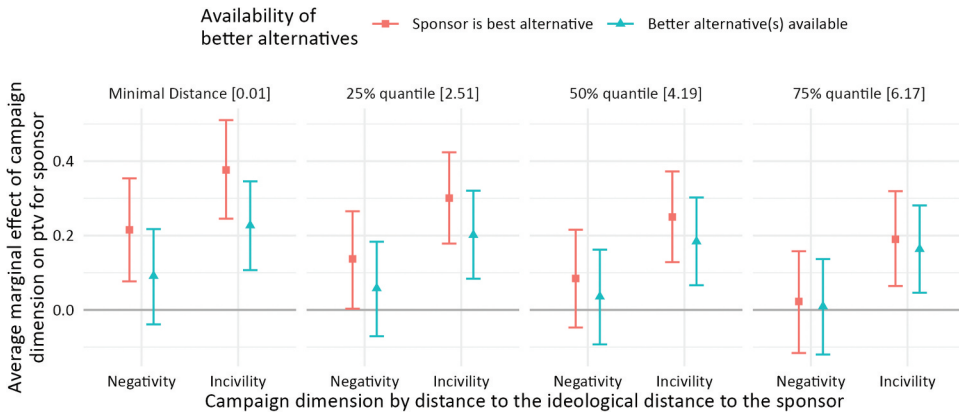


Figure 6. Average marginal effects of negativity and incivility conditioned on the availability of better alternatives and the ideological distance to the sponsor.

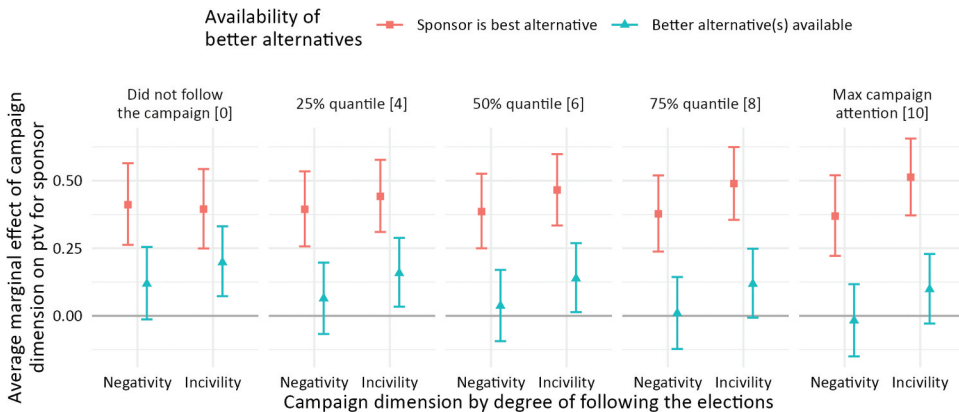


Figure 7. Average marginal effects of negativity and incivility conditioned on the availability of better alternatives and the degree to which respondents followed the election in the media.

whereas in the presence of alternatives, this reward is erased. The closer the respondent is to the sponsor, the bigger the impact of the availability of alternatives on the effect of more aggressive campaign styles on political support. This overall pattern remains the same across dimensions.

A final validating analysis supports the idea that the here observed effects are indeed due to exposure to negativity. When comparing the moderating effect of alternatives among respondents who did not follow the campaign at all with the effect among respondents who followed the electoral campaign very closely (Figure 7), we indeed find that the difference in the effect of negativity and incivility due to the presence of better alternatives increases with increasing attention to electoral campaigns. In sum, we find supporting evidence for the alternatives hypotheses, implying that the effect of negativity on voters political support for a party depends on the presence of (better) alternatives. However, we only find this support for the individual-level operationalization (H_4) and not at the party (H_3) or election-level (H_2).

Discussion

Whilst past research has pointed toward harsher campaigns having a slight backlash effect against the attacker, our understanding of the mechanisms associated with backlash effects remains limited. Although negativity and incivility may not seem to pay off on average, they still appear to be beneficial in some contexts, for some parties, and among some voter segments. The focus on single-country studies has limited the ability to systematically compare contexts across which the effect of harsher campaign styles on the sponsor's own support differs. Similar to the differences in associations between harsher campaigns and political support across contexts found in this study, previous studies sometimes reported backlash effects and sometimes boosts in the support for sponsors. Bringing the spatial model of voting (Downs, 1957) into the study of negative campaigning effects, we proposed a hypothesis of alternatives to make sense of these mixed findings. We proposed that whilst voters on average tend to disapprove of more negative and uncivil campaigns (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011), they should be less likely to withdraw their political support from a more aggressive candidate or party if they lack better alternatives to choose from. We expected to find similar patterns at the party and election levels, with more competitive settings allowing voters to express their disapproval of campaign negativity more sincerely. By assessing the effect of incivility and negativity on respondents' PTV (instead of vote choice), we also captured its effects on a party's approval from respondents who may not have vote for the sponsor in the first place. Our findings provided some support for the alternatives hypothesis. On average, voters give less political support to parties that campaign in a more negative or uncivil manner, however, this association differs strongly across contexts. Whilst the number of competing parties and the sponsors distance to the closest competitor could not explain this variation, the relevance of alternatives did play out at the voter-level. In comparison to parties that focus mostly on *positive, civil* campaigning, parties that lead more negative and uncivil campaigns receive more political support from voters when they lack at least equally attractive alternatives to choose from. This moderation effect persists after controlling for the ideological distance to the sponsor, is particularly strong for respondents that are ideologically closer to the sponsor and for respondents that followed the election more closely. Although some of the coefficients varied depending on the operationalization of campaigning dimensions and political support, the moderating effect of alternatives remained consistent across robustness checks, irrespective of whether we focused on incivility or negativity. Given the findings presented here and in previous studies (Galasso et al., 2023), it is likely that the presence of better alternatives intervenes in voters' assessment of and reaction to campaigns that are more negative or more uncivil.

The fact that we only find support for the effect of alternatives at the individual level could be due to both measurement and conceptual issues. More specifically, regarding measurement, these effects could be due to differences in conceptualizations of what an alternative is. It is really at the individual level that the measurement of alternatives maps neatly onto the concept itself. At the party and system levels, the approximations are more indirect (given the number of parties and distance to competitors).

Conceptually, the way alternatives impact political support unfolds at the voter-level as a mechanism; at the party- and system level this unfolds only as the aggregation of a multitude of individual preferences. Thus, the mechanism is more indirect and likely suppressed by other factors. In other words, our models are better tailored to capture

these effects at the individual level but fail to do so at higher levels of aggregation. Finding an absence of effects instead of reversed effects at higher levels of aggregation might furthermore be due to the much smaller sample sizes for the analysis at the party and system level.

Our findings also come with some limitations. The results reported here are based on two linked cross-sectional datasets. It remains to be seen whether these findings and the causal story behind them also replicate in longitudinal analyses and experimental studies. Such datasets would allow to focus only on within-party and within-voter variation and isolate the effects of negativity and incivility, available alternatives, and their interaction terms. A conceptual limitation of our work is that voters do not necessarily only update their party perceptions based on spatial considerations. Most notably, a case could be made that voters are more likely to consider parties that belong to the same “qualitative party family” as attractive instead of simply turning to the spatially closer party. For instance, a Eurosceptic voter may decide not to turn their support to a close-by Europhile party but may instead prefer a further-away Eurosceptic alternative. This complexity could at least partially be accommodated by adding issue salience to future models, which would then also add a qualitative nuance to spatial rationalizations. Furthermore, in light of evidence that negativity and incivility are not uniformly disliked by the electorate, with some segments of the population even showcasing a distinct appreciation for dark and aggressive political rhetoric (e.g., Nai & Maier, 2021; Sydnor, 2019; Weinschenk & Panagopoulos, 2014), further investigations should pay close attention to the intervening role of individual differences in voters.

Despite these limitations, this study provides new insights for the research and practice of negative and uncivil campaigning. First, the conceptualization of the electoral attractiveness of alternatives through the Downsian spatial model of voting showcases the value of bringing classical approaches to understanding political behavior into the study of the effectiveness of uncivil or negative campaigns. Second, these findings also speak to studies that emphasize the heterogeneity of campaign effects. Despite the appeal of offering general conclusions about the effectiveness of different campaign styles, we should emphasize the importance of specifying effectiveness based on recipient population and electoral context (next to style, content, sponsor characteristics, target of the attack, etc.). The question should thus not so much be whether negativity and incivility backlash or mobilize, but rather in which context and among which segment of the electorate.

From the standpoint of parties’ political communication strategies, our findings support the conclusion that negativity and incivility may not be a great strategy to persuade swing voters (Haselmayer, 2019). They are particularly unhelpful for the segment of swing voters mostly agreeing with a party’s ideological stances but standing – even if ever so slightly – closer to another competitor. Negativity and incivility do not appear to be reasons for voters not to support their first preferences, but reasons not to switch to a close-by, harsher campaigning alternative. They may, however, be ideal for mobilization: once a party is the only game in town from a voter’s perspective, negativity and incivility may just further boost the political support from these voters. This finding again underlines the potential for parties to change the sponsor or recipient of a negative message. Both surrogating the sponsorship of campaign negativity to a third party as well as targeting the exposure to

negativity on the own support base (e.g., through Telegram channels) could allow parties to escape the unintended consequences of harsher campaigns (Walter & van der Eijk, 2019b).

The patterns found here also highlight a negative externality of more aggressive campaign styles. Although it may mobilize a party's own base, it does so at the cost of alienating other voters. The differential impact of negativity and incivility on voters to whom the sponsor is the most attractive alternative in comparison to others contributes to a stronger differentiation of political support. As such, it has the potential to also fuel into dynamics of affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2012) and negative partisanship (Medeiros & Noël, 2014). Similarly, campaign negativity and incivility may end up playing an important role in understanding why populists are disliked far more than other parties (Harteveld et al., 2021). Ultimately our research reinforces the idea that negativity and incivility are very much “normalized” in the context of European elections, with parties frequently roaring and rampaging through the political stage. The wide appeal of populist and Eurosceptic parties, known to resort to harsher campaigning styles (Nai et al., 2022), perfectly illustrates that the age of innocence in European politics is over.

Notes

1. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/02/support-for-eurosceptic-parties-doubles-two-decades-across-eu> (last accessed 3rd of March, 2023).
2. The elections to the European Parliament must be organized as proportional representation elections in all members states.
3. Despite being rather dated and exclusively focusing on the US, this meta-analysis is to the best of our knowledge still the latest one out there.
4. A similar trend away from this backlash finding can be found in the literature on attitudinal backlashes (Guess & Coppock, 2020).
5. Defined based on pre-election polls and their performance in recent national elections.
6. The relevant survey item for tonality was: “When considering the following parties, would you say that their campaign was exclusively negative, exclusively positive, or somewhere in between? Please provide a score between –10 (exclusively negative) and 10 (exclusively positive).”
7. The item in the expert survey for this dimension was: “Thinking about those same parties, to what extent did they use an uncivil language vilifying their opponents, such as harsh, shrill, vulgar, or pejorative adjectives? Please provide a score between 0 (not uncivil at all) and 10 (very uncivil).”
8. The correlation between the original measures and their adjusted counterparts was greater than $r = 0.82$ for both dimensions.
9. This is an example for the question wording from the UK version: “We have a number of parties in [country] each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please answer on a scale where 0 means ‘not at all probable’ and 10 means ‘very probable.’”
10. Particularly in multi-party systems, where power-sharing arrangements are the norm, the rally for political support does not end after knowing who the winner of an election is.
11. Although vote-shares will correlate with the average PTV per party, they will not reflect differences in how a party is viewed by voters to whom it is not the first choice.
12. These values were also taken over from the replication material in Nai et al. (2022).
13. The resulting EU-position index “correlates extremely strongly with the values for EU positioning in the 2017 CHES dataset (flash survey; Polk et al., 2017), $r(88) = 0.95$, $p < .001$ ” (Nai et al., 2022, p. 8).

14. After combining the two ideological dimensions, every party had only *one* most proximate competitor.
15. The minimal distance is effectively $d = 0$ due to two Bulgarian parties *IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement* and *National Union Attack (ATAKA/ATA)* as these two parties competed in an electoral alliance, the *United Patriots* during the EP elections and were accordingly coded as having the same ideological stance.
16. As the number of better alternatives is capped by the number of competing parties, an ordinal or continuous variable would base the estimates of the higher number of competing parties on very selective sets of countries.
17. These four regions are 1. East (BG, HR, CZ, EE, HU, LV, LT, PL, RO, SI, SK), 2. North (DK, FI, SE), 3. South (CY, GR, IT, MT, PT, ES), and 4. West (AT, BE, DE, FR, IE, NL, UK).
18. Here respondents were asked: “How closely did you follow the campaign ahead of the European Parliament elections in the media or on social media? Please indicate using any number on an 11-point-scale. On this scale, where 0 means ‘not at all’ and 10 means ‘very closely’ which number best describes your situation?”
19. While the BREXIT process was already set in motion, the United Kingdom still took part in the 2019 EP elections and only concluded its withdrawal from the EU in January 2020. Whilst Luxembourg was kicked out due to a too small expert sample, Belgium was split into Flanders and Wallonia.
20. Campaign negativity, as well as the moderators do not vary within the party for these models.
21. This model consists of only random intercepts at the electoral context- and individual level, random slopes of campaign negativity at the electoral context level and a fixed effect of campaign negativity.
22. These are: Parties’ ideological position and extremity on both a L-R and a Euroscepticism dimension, the campaign negativity of the next closest competitor, a dummy for incumbency in the respective national governments, the average negativity in the respective system and controls for experts’ profiles.
23. If we were to remove the control for Euroscepticism, the average effect of both dimensions would turn negative for voters with viable alternatives.

Acknowledgments

Previous versions of this manuscript were presented at the annual International Communication Association Conference 2023, at the ECPR General Conference 2022, and at the Communication Science Etmaal 2022. We received helpful comments from the members of the Political Communication Ph.D. Club at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research. We would also like to thank our anonymous reviewers as well as the editor for their constructive comments.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung [P300P1_161163].

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Ethics Review Statement

The two datasets analyzed for this manuscript are drawn from the European Parliament Election Expert Survey 2019 (EPEES_19), and the European Election Study 2019, Voter Study (EES). The EPEES_19 is part of the broader Negative Campaigning Comparative Expert Survey (NEGex), which was reviewed by the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam under the project id 2017-PCJ-8551. The EES is a publicly available dataset, collected by the Gallup International and hosted by GESIS Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences (ZA7581).

Data availability statement

The data described in this article are openly available in the Open Science Framework at <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/RAZ97>

Open Scholarship



This article has earned the Center for Open Science badges for Open Data, Open Materials and Preregistered. The data and materials are openly accessible at <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/RAZ97>

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