

# **Eroding Political Trust? The Effects of Negative Campaigning on British Voters' Attitudes in the 2015 General Election**

Paper to be presented at Panel 3A Voter, Parties and Elections at 2015 PSAI  
Annual Conference, 16-18 October, Cork  
Annemarie Walter and Cees van der Eijk  
School of Politics and International Relations  
University of Nottingham  
University Park  
NG7 2RD  
United Kingdom

Email address corresponding author:  
[Annemarie.Walter@Nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Annemarie.Walter@Nottingham.ac.uk)

Please do not cite without permission

## **Abstract**

Negative campaigning is a widespread practice worldwide, yet empirical studies of negative campaigning and its consequences derive mainly from the U.S. context. Theorising of its logic is almost completely based on two-party environments, with only few exceptions. Many of the insights and expectations about negative campaigning are therefore potentially biased and non-generalizable. In this paper we focus on the effects of negative campaigning in the British multi-party context.

According to conventional wisdom voters dislike negative campaigning and are turned off by it, i.e. it would make voters cynical about politics and even stimulate voter withdrawal from the political process. The empirical findings on the effects of negative campaigning on voters' attitudes towards politics are inconclusive. This study examines to what extent and in what ways negative campaigning affects voters' attitudes in the 2015 General Election Campaign in Britain. It uses data from the 'rolling thunder' wave of the 2015 British Election Study Internet Panel, collected during the last month of the election campaign.

This study contributes to the field of negative campaigning in three ways. First, this study is one of only a handful studies studying the effect of negative campaigning on voters' political attitudes in a non-U.S. context. Second, this study is the first within-state comparative study in Europe, contrasting the three countries of Great Britain --England, Scotland and Wales-- each with its own distinctive multi-party system. Finally, the panel character of the data and the large sample size (N in excess of 30,000) allow for more extensive and more refined controls to ameliorate endogeneity concerns. Finally, a novel operationalisation of negative campaigning, that is better attuned to the concept in question and less influenced by social desirability, further strengthens the foundation of causal inferences.

We find that voters in the British multiparty system clearly react differently to the campaign tone of the various parties and that the effects of negative campaigning on voters' attitudes are therefore not uniform across parties. Overall, we find a negative effect of negative campaigning on voters' political trust, but not on their feelings of efficacy and the results for satisfaction with democracy are mixed. In addition, we find the effects to be heterogeneous. Party identification moderates the effects of negative campaigning, with stronger effects amongst those not identifying with a party. These findings hold across the three countries of Great Britain.

**Keywords:** Negative Campaigning, Political Trust, Internal Efficacy, Satisfaction with Democracy

## Introduction

Negative campaigning, i.e. campaign strategy to focus on the opponent's weaknesses instead of own strengths is a widely applied campaign practice (see Nai and Walter 2015). Its practitioners generally believe it to be an effective campaign method (Lau and Pomper 2004; Lau and Rovner 2009). However, the use of negative campaigning is not without controversy. It has been associated with undermining attitudes supportive of representative democracy and the electoral process (Ansolabere et al. 1994). As a result, negative campaigning is often regarded a campaign practice that in the long run might endanger the health of democracy. A key ingredient to a successful democracy involves the electorate's confidence in government and satisfaction with the political system. Thus, if negative campaigning would indeed undermine attitudes that support representative government and the electoral process it would weaken the fundamental allegiance needed for effective government (Lau and Pomper 2004).

The work on the unintended effects of negative campaigning primarily focuses on its hypothesised negative effect on voter turnout, while much less attention has been devoted to examine the claim that negative campaigning weakens attitudes supportive of representative democracy and the electoral process, i.e. it would among others fuel political cynicism and political alienation among voters (Jackson et al 2008). However, the notion that negative campaigning has harmful effects on such attitudes is widely used in the extant literature as part of the logic that alleges a decrease in turnout as a result of exposure to negative campaigning. Moreover, the theory on attitudinal effects of negative campaigning has been almost completely based on U.S. research (see for a handful exceptions Maier and Maier 2007; Pattie et al. 2011; Nai 2013; Haddock and Zanna 1993; Sanders and Norris 2005). The evidence therefore is potentially biased and non-generalizable. Consequently, we have little knowledge about the unintended consequences of negative campaigning across political systems (Fridkin and Kenney 2012) and are largely unaware of its attitudinal and behavioural effects on British citizens.

With this study we aim to contribute to the scholarly debate on the potentially harmful effects of negative campaigning by examining its effects on voters' attitudes in a multiparty system. The large number of parties present in a multiparty system allows us to examine the extent to which the effects of negative campaigning are uniform across parties. In addition, according to some (Walter 2010; Lijphart 1999; Brants et al. 1982) negative campaigning clashes with the political culture of consensus that characterises multiparty systems with a strong tradition of coalition governments. Negative campaigning fits more into the practice of adversarial politics that typifies two-party systems with majoritarian governments. Therefore, we expect that negative campaigning depresses voters' feelings of political efficacy, political trust and satisfaction of democracy particularly in multiparty systems. The British case is somewhat particular in this respect. It clearly is not a two-party system and it was ruled from 2010 to 2015 a coalition government. Yet, in spite of the increasing number of parties and increasing electoral fragmentation over the past decades the system is still clearly dominated by two parties. Our research question is: *To what extent and in what ways negative campaigning affects voters' attitudes towards politicians, political system and politics in general in the 2015 General Election Campaign in Britain?*

This study contributes to the field of negative campaigning in four ways. First, this study is one of only a handful studies studying the effect of negative campaigning on voters' political attitudes in a non-U.S. context. Second, this study is the first within-state comparative study in Europe, contrasting the three countries of Great Britain --England, Scotland and Wales-- each with its own distinctive multi-party system. Third, the panel character of the British Election Study and its large sample size (N in excess of 30.000) allow for more extensive and more refined controls to ameliorate endogeneity concerns. Finally, a novel operationalisation of negative campaigning, that is better attuned to the concept in question and less influenced by social desirability, further strengthens the foundation of causal inferences.

In this paper we first of all discuss the literature on negative campaigning and its effects on voters' political attitudes resulting in our hypotheses. Next, we present our measurement approach,

case study, data, operationalization and methods of analyses. Subsequently we present the results and interpret these findings. Finally, we draw conclusions and discuss the issues left for further research.

### **Negative Campaigning and Political Attitudes**

Election campaigns require the competing parties to make a variety of strategic decisions, including the important decision whether to emphasize and focus upon their own abilities, accomplishments and or policy stands, or, conversely, to concentrate on attacking their opponent(s) on these grounds. The first is known as positive campaigning, the latter as negative campaigning (Lau and Pomper 2004; Geer 2006). A party or candidate resorts to negative campaigning in an attempt to become voters' preferred party by diminishing positive feelings for opposing candidates or parties (Lau et al. 2007; Budesheim et al. 1996; Garramone 1984). Irrespective of whether this aim is achieved, negative campaigning potentially affects also voters' attitudes towards politicians, politics and the political system. The seminal work of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994) sparked scholarly interest in these effects of negative campaigning, as it argued that negative campaigning can have broader systemic consequences. They found (1995: 103-104) that subjects exposed to negative campaign ads expressed less confidence in the political process and placed less value on their own participation. Ultimately this was found to lead to voter withdrawal from the electoral process (Ansolabehere et al. 1994). The numerous studies that followed were largely devoted to the effects of negative campaigning on turnout, while only a handful of studies examined the claim that negative campaigning undermines attitudes supportive of representative democracy and the electoral process (Jackson et al 2008). In this study we will focus on three of these attitudes, namely political trust, political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy. Table 1 summarises the literature in this respect, and demonstrates that the field is still inconclusive on how exposure to negative campaigning affects these attitudes.

--TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE--

Negative campaigning is argued to affect voters' political trust as negative campaign messages often portray politicians and parties as lacking vision, or being incompetent and untrustworthy (Lau and Pomper 2004). When voters primarily hear about a party or candidate's failures instead of successes, or how their future plans will only lead to disaster, we can expect voters to lose faith in this party or candidate (Geer 2006). To cite Jackson et al. (2008: 3): "it is far more difficult to envision that such ads would instil the public with optimism and political confidence." The notion that negative campaigning diminishes political trust is generally accepted. However, while some scholars find empirical support for it (Thorson et al. 2000; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Lau et al. 2007; Dardis et al. 2008; Wanta, Lemert and Lee 1998; Leshner and Thorson 2000; Rahn and Hirshorn 1999; Brooks and Geer 2007), others report the absence of corroborative evidence (Lau and Pomper 2004; Jackson et al 2008; Martinez and Delegal 1990; Pinkleton et al. 2000). These studies all focus on the individual level, but Geer (2006) also fails to find a strong link between negative campaigning and levels of political trust on the aggregate level and thus argues that there is not a causal connection between the rise of negativity<sup>1</sup> and the decline in trust and turnout in the U. over the last 45 years. On the basis of the literature we formulate the following hypothesis:

**Political Trust Hypothesis (H1):** The more that voters perceive political parties' campaign tone as negative, the lower their political trust.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that the rise of negative campaigning is a contested trend, including among U.S. scholars.

Political efficacy is often defined as a person's belief that, through his or her efforts, he or she can influence politics. Sometimes the distinction between internal and external efficacy is made. Internal efficacy reflects people's beliefs about their own competence to understand and participate effectively in politics. External efficacy refers to voters' beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions. Although most scholars accept the apparent logic that negative campaigning can affect political trust, such support is less prevalent with respect to political efficacy, in particular internal efficacy (Jackson et al. 2008; Geer 2006). Why would negative campaigning lead to citizens doubting their own political aptitude (Jackson et al. 2008)? The argument for the existence of such an effect runs as follows. A large part of the electorate does not like negative campaigning, as is clear from survey data which also show it often viewed as one of the major problems facing the U.S. electoral system (Geer 2006; Kyles and Mattes 2014). If parties and candidates nonetheless engage in negative campaigning, it becomes more obvious to voters that politicians do not care what voters think and that voters have no influence on how politics is conducted (Lau and Pomper 2004). The empirical foundation for this claim is weaker than that for the negative effect of negative campaigning on political trust. Various scholars indeed find that negative campaigning depresses voters' political efficacy (Lau et al. 2007; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Thorson et al. 2000; Dardis et al. 2008; Brooks and Geer 2007). However, many others do not (Jackson et al. 2008; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Wattenberg and Briens 1999; Rahn and Hirshorn 1999; Pinkleton et al. 2000; Lau and Pomper 2004). On the basis of the literature we formulate the following hypothesis:

**Political Efficacy Hypothesis (H2):** The more that voters perceive political parties' campaign tone as negative, the lower their political efficacy.

Negative campaigning has not only the potential to undermine system-supporting attitudes, such as voters' political trust and political efficacy, it can also diminish satisfaction with the political system itself (Lau et al 2007). This claim has not been empirically tested as far as we know. We formulate the following hypothesis:

**Satisfaction with Democracy Hypothesis (H3):** The more that voters perceive parties' campaign tone as negative, the lower their satisfaction with democracy in their country.

It is unlikely that the electorate as a whole is equally affected by negative campaigning. It is more plausible that some segments of the electorate are resistant to such negative effects. Some authors report that strong partisans are less influenced by it (e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Lau and Pomper 2004). However, thus, again, there is not a universal finding as Wattenberg and Briens (1999) do not find empirical support for the hypothesis that the impact of negative ads is strongest for nonpartisans. On the basis of the literature we formulate the following hypothesis:

**Party Identification Hypothesis (H4):** Party Identification has a moderating effect on the relationship between Negative Campaigning and Political Trust, Political Efficacy and Satisfaction in Democracy, with larger effects of negative campaigning for those without identification with a party.

### **Measurement Approach**

The main independent variable in our study is negative campaigning as indicated by respondents' perceptions of the focus of the election campaigns of the various parties. Survey analysis is the second most frequently used method for measuring the tone of the election campaign. When used, it is argued that the "reality" does not matter, but rather how voters perceive the campaign, in particular if we wish to understand the effects of negative campaigning on voters' attitudes and electoral behaviour (Sigelman and Kugler 2003). The most popular alternative method of measuring

negative campaigning consists of content analysis of campaign communications, an approach that is problematic because of incomplete coverage of the universe of campaign communications, uncertainty about individual exposure and acceptance, and unreliability of codings. Where both approaches have been used, considerable disagreement is generally found between them (Sigelman and Kugler 2003; Ridout and Franz 2008), which is claimed to be a source of inconclusive findings in the scholarly debate about the effects of negative campaigning (Sigelman and Kugler 2003). Therefore, in this effect study we measure the tone of the campaign on the basis of voters' perceptions expressed in a survey.

Measuring negative campaigning on the basis of voters' perceptions is, obviously, not without its own problems. Perceptions may vary widely between voters, and are potentially subject to biases of various types, such as party identification and memory (Sigelman and Kugler 2003; Brooks 1997). Voters often perceive the campaign of their own party or candidate as less negative, and they seem to be subject to considerable recency bias (Brooks 1997; Sigelman and Kugler 2003). The strongest predictor of voters' perception of the campaign tone is partisanship (Ridout and Fowler 2012), thus giving rise to endogeneity concerns. However, Pattie et al. (2011) demonstrate that perceptions of campaign tone cannot be fully explained by partisanship. The set of questions that we use to measure voters' evaluations of the tone of the campaign is a reformulated version of questions that have been used previously (Pattie et al. 2011) in the context of the 2007 Scottish Elections. The questions have been reformulated so as to remove any explicit mentioning of the terms 'negative' and 'positive' which, we feared, are likely to trigger or exacerbate partisan biases in the responses. Moreover, recent work by Kyles and Mattes (2014) has shown that questions containing the word 'negative' activate a social-desirability effect leading to over- or under-reporting of the negativity or positivity of the campaign. The survey questions are formulated as follows:

'In their campaigns political parties can focus on criticising the policies and personalities of other parties, or they can focus on putting forward their own policies and personalities. What is, in your view, the focus of the national campaign of the (fill in party name)?'

The question was asked for each of the following parties: Conservatives; Labour; Liberal Democrats; Greens; UKIP; SNP (only in Scotland); Plaid Cymru (only in Wales).

Focuses mainly on criticising other parties	1	2	3	4	5	Focuses mainly on putting forward their own policies and personalities	DK
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

The BES internet panel does, however, provide better analytical opportunities to disentangle endogenous and non- endogenous effects than any of the existing studies of negative campaigning (including those in the US), because of (a) the control for individual dynamics offered by multiple previous panel waves; (b) the rolling thunder design that allows control for recency bias; (c) the large number of constituencies (each with their own campaigns) for which data are collected.

### Case Selection and Data

The case examined in this study is the 2015 General Election Campaign in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales).<sup>2</sup> Elections are conducted on the basis of a First-Past-The-Post system; with 650 single-member electoral districts. The general election consists therefore of 650 co-occurring, but separate elections, each with its own campaign, nested within an over-all, national campaign. In these constituencies voters can choose between the candidates of four to six parties. The three countries of Great Britain can be treated as separate countries on account of their different party systems. Whereas the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP, and Greens compete in all three countries, the SNP (Scottish National Party) fields candidates only in Scotland, while Plaid

<sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland is not covered by the British Election Study and therefore excluded from this study.

Cymru does so only in Wales. Although Great Britain in the past was often characterized as a two-party system, nowadays one can safely characterize it as a multiparty system. In 2010 the practice of single party majoritarian governments was broken as no single party held a majority of seats; as a result a coalition government between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats was formed. In the run-up to the 2015 General Election it was generally expected that the 2015 election campaign would again result in a hung parliament.

The period studied is the formal campaign, that lasted almost six weeks from 30 March (dissolution of parliament) until 7 May (polling day) (SN/PC/06574). The analysis is limited to the main 6 parties that were competing in this election campaign, respectively Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, UK Independence Party (UKIP), Green Party, Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP), and Plaid Cymru. The analyses are based on data from the 2015 BESIP survey (waves 4, 5 and 6) that has been conducted for the BES by YouGov and has been funded by the ESRC.<sup>3</sup> The survey is an internet panel which has in excess of 30.000 respondents. We use information from waves 4, 5 and 6. Wave 4 was conducted before the formal campaign between 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015 and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Wave 5 was conducted during the formal campaign between 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 and 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015 in the form of a 'rolling thunder' survey with random daily subsamples of 700-1000 respondents being interviewed. Wave 6 is a post-election wave of the panel conducted between 8<sup>th</sup> May and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2015. Our analyses are based on the responses of 26.112 respondents who took part in all of these three waves.<sup>4</sup>

### **Analytical Design and Methods of Analysis**

As discussed earlier, we adapted the survey question measuring respondents' perception of the campaigns of the various parties in order to minimise partisan biases and social-desirability effects. In spite of this, endogeneity remains a potential threat to any causal interpretation of survey data. In order to further ameliorate these risks we leverage the time sequence of our panel data as follows:

- Our dependent variables (trust, efficacy and satisfaction with democracy) have been measured in wave 6 of the panel
- Our main independent variables, relating to the perception of the campaigns of the various parties, have been measured in wave 5 of the panel
- Most of the control variables have been measured in wave 4 of the panel, the only exception consists of our controls for party preferences which have been measured in wave 5.

An alternative design that also leads to strong and valid causal inferences is a difference model, which would explain over-time differences in the dependent variable as a function of over-time differences in the independent variables (while controlling for potential confounders). Although the information in the panel does allow us to construct difference-scores for the dependent variables, it does not contain to necessary information to do so for the independent variables. As a consequence, the alternative design of a proper difference-model was ruled out. As a result, this paper does not explain an increase or decrease in the dependent variables, but instead it explains the variation of the dependent variable itself. The unit of analysis in all our models is the individual respondent.

In addition to descriptive graphs and tables we presents multivariate explanatory models in this paper. For two of our dependent variables (political trust and political efficacy) these are ordinary least squares regressions. For the third dependent variable (satisfaction with democracy) we use ordered logistical regression. The main reason for the difference is the character of the dependent variable. In the case of satisfaction with democracy, this is a single item with only 4 (ordered) response options. Our measures for political trust and political efficacy, however, are composite scores, with ranges of 3 to 17 (for political trust) and 3 to 15 (for political efficacy). These

---

<sup>3</sup> The dataset BESIPW4 can be downloaded from [www.britishelectionstudy.com](http://www.britishelectionstudy.com).

<sup>4</sup> Source of this information is [www.britishelectionstudy.com](http://www.britishelectionstudy.com).

composite scores represent multiple-item operationalisations of the respective constructs, based on a stochastic cumulative scaling model known as Mokken-scaling (see Appendix 1).<sup>5</sup>

### Operationalization

This study makes use of three dependent variables, respectively the Political Trust, Political Efficacy and Satisfaction with Democracy. The dependent variables are all measured in wave 6, the post-election wave. *Political Trust* is a composite scale score is based on three separate items that were tested successfully for uni-dimensionality; it ranges from 3 to 17 (3=Low Political Trust, 17=High Political Trust). *Political Efficacy* is a composite scale score based on three separate items that likewise were demonstrated to be uni-dimensional; it ranges from 3 to 15 (3=Low Political Efficacy, 15=High Political Efficacy). Details of the scaling procedure and the test for uni-dimensionality can be found in Appendix 1. *Satisfaction With UK Democracy* is a single item with 4 response options ranging from 1 to 4 (1=Very Dissatisfied, 4 Very Satisfied).

The independent and control variables are all measured in wave 4 and wave 5. The main independent variables are the *Parties' Campaign Tone* variables, which were measured in wave 5 (campaign wave) and which reflect for each voter how they perceived the tone of each party's campaign. The values of these variables range from 1 to 5 (1=Focuses mainly on criticizing other parties, or in conceptual terms: negative campaigning; 5=Focuses mainly on putting forward their own policies and personalities, or in conceptual terms: positive campaigning).

We control for a whole set of factors that are causally antecedent to the election but that may nevertheless impinge on the dependent and independent variables and their covariation. These are:

- *Gender* is a dichotomous variable (1=Male, 2=Female).
- *Age* represents respondents' age in number of years.
- *Gross Household Income* is a variable with 15 categories (1= Under £5000 a year, 15=Over £150.000 a year).
- *Ethnicity* is a dichotomous variable (0=White, 1=Non-white).
- *Home Ownership* is a dichotomous variable (0=Own house, 1=Rent House).
- *Work status*, represented by three dummies respectively *Work 8 Hours or More* (0=No, 1=Yes), *Student* (0=No, 1=Yes) and *Retired* (0=No, 1=Yes). The reference category comprises respondents who are unemployed, or working less than 8 hours per week or who did not answer the question.
- *Religion*, represented by two dummies: *No Religion* (0=No, 1=Yes) and *Christian* (0=No, 1=Yes). The reference category consists of respondent belonging non-Christian religions, and those who did not answer the questions.
- *Education* is represented by the proxy *Age Ending Fulltime Education* is an ordinal variable with 5 categories.
- *Marital Status* is represented by two dummies: *Partnered* (0=No, 1=Yes), *Ex-Partnered* (0=No, 1=Yes)
- *Subjective class* is measured with two dummies, namely *Working Class* (0=No, 1=Yes) and *Middle Class* (0=No, 1=Yes). The reference category consists of those who assigned themselves to another class, or who were unable or unwilling to assign themselves to any of the classes mentioned in the question.
- *Party preferences*. To counter endogeneity concerns we control for a partisan effects by including a set of variables that measures the extent to which each voter prefers each party on a scale from 0 (no preference for that party) to 10 (a high preference). These variables derive from two different survey questions that were asked to random halves of the sample. One random half of the sample responded to the party like/dislike question: 'How much do you like or dislike each of the following parties?', to be expressed on a scale from 0 to 10.

---

<sup>5</sup> Although the composite score from a Mokken scale is itself ordinal, it is generally treated in multivariate models as interval when the range of scale scores exceeds 10.



The other half of the sample responded to the Propensity to Vote (PTV) question: ‘How likely is it that you would ever vote for each of the following parties?’, also to be expressed on a scale from 0 to 10. In order to control for the differences in the central tendency of the respective response distributions, an additional control variable was included that identified which of these two questions had been asked to the respondent in question. We control for a party preferences as observed in wave 5 as this is a stronger control than using the same preferences as observed in wave 4.

- *Party Identification* (0=No Party identification, 1=Party identification).<sup>6</sup> This variable measures whether voters identify with a party in wave 4, prior to the campaign). This variable is not used as a control (in that respect its possible effects have already been taken up by the set of part preferences variables), but as an interaction variable to assess whether effects of negative campaigning are heterogeneous, i.e., moderated by party identification.

### Descriptive Findings

Before estimating the effects of negative campaigning on voters’ political trust, political efficacy and satisfaction of democracy, we first describe respondents’ perceptions of the tone of the 2015 General Election campaign in Britain. Figure 1 displays the aggregate of individual perceptions of the tone of the campaign for each of the parties over the course of the campaign. This figure uses the rolling-thunder character of Wave 4 of the panel. The figure shows first of all that voters are able to distinguish between the campaign tones of the various parties in a system with more than two parties. Overall the Conservative Party and UKIP, and, somewhat surprisingly, the Greens, were perceived to be the parties waging the most negative campaigns. Of the parties competing in all three countries of Great Britain, the Liberal Democrats were perceived as conducting the most positive campaign. A second finding from Figure 1 is that there is distinct day-to-day fluctuation in the aggregate response. Yet, for the most part this fluctuation is not linked to clearly discernible trends. This seems to support the suggestion made in the literature that perceptions of campaign tone are subject to strong recency effects (Sigelman and Kugler 2003). Figure 2 to Figure 4 present the same information as Figure 1, but then separately for, respectively, England, Scotland and Wales. The greater day-to-day fluctuation in Scotland and Wales is a simple reflection of the smaller sample sizes for these countries, and not a substantive finding to be interpreted.

--FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE--

--FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE--

--FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE--

--FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE--

In this paper we look at the effects of negative campaigning on individual voters’ political trust, political efficacy and satisfaction of democracy. To provide a bit of context, we provide in Table 2 at aggregate of voters’ levels of political trust, political efficacy and satisfaction with UK democracy, and we do so by comparing this between Wave 4 (prior to the campaign) and Wave 6 (post election). In Table 2 voters’ levels of satisfaction with UK democracy are not reported for Great Britain overall and for Scotland. The reason for this is that we found that responses to the survey question ‘On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that democracy works in the UK as a whole?’ reflect a different attitude for Scottish respondents (particularly those in favour

---

<sup>6</sup> We constructed on the basis of the three original variables PartyIdW4, PartyIdSqueezeW4 and PartyIdStrengthW4 a typology of voters constituting of five categories (1=Very Strong Party Identification, 2=Fairly Strong Party Identification, 3=Not Very Strong Party Identification, 4=No Party Identification, but Leaning Towards a Party, 5=No Party Identification). We simplified this variable into a dummy, where category 1 to 3 were recoded into voters that have a party identification, 4 and 5 were recoded into voters without a party identification.

of Scottish independence) than for those in England and Wales.<sup>7</sup> Table 2 shows that in all countries voters' political trust and political efficacy are higher post-election than pre-campaign. This is not surprising in view of the literature; elections and their campaigns have the tendency to boost voters' political trust and political efficacy. More surprising is that we do not witness a concomitant increase in voters' satisfaction with democracy.

--TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE--

### **Explanatory Findings: Attitudinal Effects of Negative Campaigning**

We now turn to examining the impact of negative campaigning on voters' political trust, to be followed by similar analyses for effects on political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy. Finally, we analyse whether the effects of negative campaigning differ across groups of voters. All subsequent tables have the same layout. The first column presents the effects of perceptions of campaign tone without any controls. The second column reports the same effects for a model that controls for all factors causally antecedent to the election discussed earlier. The third column again reports the effects of perceptions of campaign tone, but now for a model that adds additional controls for party preferences.

Table 3 shows the effects of negative campaigning on voters' political trust; it presents the results for Great Britain, England, Scotland and Wales separately. We find considerable effects of various parties' campaign tone on political trust in all three countries. Obviously, the magnitude of the effects decreases with the introduction of controls, but most of the effects remain significant and of non-negligible magnitude when controlling for respondents' background characteristics and for their party preferences. When we look at the overall results (for Great Britain as a whole) we see that political trust is affected in the hypothesised direction by the campaign tone of each of the parties, with the exception of UKIP. This holds even when controlling for a large variety of voters' characteristics and for their party preferences. When considering the results for the countries separately these findings hold with exception of the Green Party, the effect of which becomes not significant. A remarkable finding for Scotland and Wales is that the perceived campaign tone of, respectively, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru has no significant effect on political trust. The positive sign of the significant coefficients indicates that the more that respondents perceive a party's campaign to be positive the higher their levels of political trust, which also implies that negative campaigning depresses political trust. This finding is in line with numerous studies conducted in the U.S. context (e.g. Lau et al. 2007; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Thorson et al. 2000; Dardis et al. 2008; Wanta, Lemert and Lee 1998 and Leshner and Thorson 2000). Overall, therefore, on the basis of the available evidence, we cannot reject the *Political Trust Hypothesis (H1)*. What this study adds to the U.S. findings, however, is that the effects are not uniform for all parties. The largest effects are found for the Conservative Party and Labour Party, which are the most prominent parties in Britain. The effects of other parties are smaller, and occasionally not-significant.

--TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE--

Table 4 presents the effects of negative campaigning on voters' political efficacy. The picture provided is not uniform. The results vary per party. We find in Great Britain and England significant results for the Conservative Party, Labour Party and Green Party's campaign tone. In Scotland the campaign tone of the Conservative Party, UK Independence Party and Green Party matter for voters' political trust. In Wales only significant results were found for the Conservative Party and Green Party (but these are, of course based on a much smaller sample). More importantly, the direction of estimated effects differs across parties. Some parties' campaign tone had a negative effect on political efficacy, which means that the more that voters perceive a specific party's campaign as positive the lower their political efficacy. Other parties' campaign tone had a positive effect on political efficacy, i.e. the more that voters perceive a specific party's campaign tone the higher their

---

<sup>7</sup> These analyses will be reported elsewhere.

political efficacy. Additionally, all estimated effects of negative campaigning are much smaller on Political Efficacy than on Political Trust. In view of this evidence we reject the *Political Efficacy Hypothesis (H2)*. This conclusion supports several studies in the U.S. that claim that there is no clear effect of negative campaigning on voters' political efficacy (Jackson et al. 2008; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Wattenberg and Briens 1999; Rahn and Hirshorn 1999; Pinkleton et al. 2000).

--TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE--

Our third, and final dependent variable is satisfaction with democracy in the UK. We present in Table 5 ordinal logit models for England and Wales, and do not present similar information for Scotland (and thus also not for Great Britain as a whole) on account of the different meaning of this item for many Scottish respondents (see our earlier discussion on this). After controlling for all effects that are causally antecedent to the campaign and for party preferences we find in England a negative effect of the Conservative Party's campaign tone and positive effects of the Green Party's and UK Independence Party's campaign tone on voters' Satisfaction with UK Democracy. The coefficients displayed in Table 5 are the difference between the coefficients of category 1 (Focuses mainly on criticizing other parties) and 5 (Focuses mainly on putting forward their own policies and personalities). Thus a negative effect for the Conservative's Party campaign tone means that voters who perceive the Conservative party's campaign tone to be negative are less satisfied with UK democracy than voters who perceive the Conservative's party campaign tone to be positive. A positive effect of the Green Party's and UK Independence Party's campaign tone on voters' satisfaction with UK democracy indicate that voters who perceive the campaign tone of these parties to be negative are more satisfied with UK democracy than those who perceive their campaign tone to be positive. In Wales we also find a negative effect for of the Conservative's Party campaign tone on voters' satisfaction with UK democracy. However, Plaid Cymru's campaign tone has a positive effect on voters' satisfaction with democracy. The fact that the other parties' campaign tone do not have significant effects in Wales is most likely due to the much smaller number of cases on which the models are estimated. However, overall we only find for the Conservative Party an effect in the hypothesized direction. Again, the effects of campaign tone are not homogeneous. As findings are mixed we reject the *Satisfaction with Democracy Hypothesis (H3)*.

--TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE--

It is unlikely that the electorate as a whole is equally affected by negative campaigning. It may be that some segments of the electorate are resistant to these effects of negative campaigning, segments such as strong partisans. Table 6 shows us how party identification moderates the effects of negative campaigning on voters' political trust. We see that for a large number of parties the effect of negative campaigning is systematically different for people that have a party identification in comparison to people who do not. The positive coefficients for the interactions indicate that the effect of negative campaigning on political trust is stronger for voters without a party identification. This is in line with the suggestion in the U.S. literature that independents are more prone to effects of negative campaigning (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Lau and Pomper 2004). On the basis of this evidence we cannot reject *Party Identification Hypothesis (H4)*.

--TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE--

## Conclusions

In this comparative study we examined to what extent and in what ways negative campaigning affects voters' attitudes towards politicians, the political system and politics in general in the 2015 General Election Campaign in Britain. To be more specific we studied the effect of voters' perceptions of negative campaigning on their political trust, political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy. Overall, we find a clear effect of negative campaigning on voters' political trust. The more that voters perceive political parties' campaign tone as negative, the lower their political trust. Owing to our research design, in which we have observed our dependent, independent and control

variables at different moments in time, we feel confident that this effect does not reflect endogeneity, but rather that it can validly be interpreted in causal terms. This effect is found in spite of the fact that surveys tend in general to reveal smaller effects of negative campaigning (Lau et al 2007), and in spite of our innovative question wording which suppresses partisan biases and thus makes it more difficult to find the kind of effects reported by studies using question wordings that more easily trigger such biases. We also demonstrated convincingly that the effect of negative campaigning on political trust is moderated by respondents' party identification. The effect is largest among voters who do not identify with a party, so they are more prone to be affected by negative campaigning. We do not find a systematic effect of negative campaigning on voters' political efficacy and the results seem to be mixed for voters' satisfaction with democracy. That we did not find an effect of negative campaigning on political efficacy is not unsurprising as already several scholars (Jackson et al. 2008; Geer 2006) note that the theoretical foundation for this claim is rather thin. The effects that we found are largely similar across the three countries of Great Britain.

This study is to our knowledge the first to examine in depth the effects of negative campaigning on citizens' attitudes in a multiparty setting. We find that voters do perceive clear differences between the campaigns of the different parties. This is a necessary condition to be able to measure their effects on voters' attitudes. The results also show that the effects of negative campaigning are not uniform across parties, which is an interesting finding that needs to be explored further. It seems that the largest effects are found for the parties that dominate British politics (and thus also the campaign), the Conservatives and Labour. Controlling for all effects causally antecedent to the election campaign and a partisan bias we know that the found effects cannot be explained by surveying different groups of people.

As all studies, this research is not without its limitations. The available data did not allow the specification of a difference model which would have helped to strengthen the causal connection between negative campaigning and voters' attitudes even further. Also, this study is unable to distinguish between the various kinds of negative campaigning. It takes in a multiparty system already a whole battery of questions to find out how voters perceive the campaign tone of each of the various competing parties, and as a consequence we were unable to find out whether respondents distinguish between so-called issue negativity and personal negativity. According to Dardis et al. (2008) the type of negative campaigning matters for its effect on individuals' cynicism and efficacy. They find in their experimental study that issue-based attack ads aired during the 2004 U.S. presidential election led to greater cynicism and lower efficacy than character based attacks. In addition, Brooks and Geer (2007) suggest that there might be reason to distinguish between civil and uncivil attack behaviour. Future research should not only measure voters' perceptions of the campaign tone more refined, it should also assess what these effects of negative campaigning on voters attitudes mean for their behaviour. Does this effect of negative campaigning on political trust translate in voter withdrawal from the political process?

The conventional wisdom that negative campaigning diminishes voters' political trust turns out to be true for British voters and therefore the concerns that the public might have when it comes to the use of negative campaigning seem to be warranted. Citizens' trust in their representatives and government are part of the foundation of representative democracy and thus a campaign strategy stimulating distrust should not be used without scrutiny. We feel that in light of the heterogeneity in the effects of negative campaigning found across parties' campaign tone and groups of voters that this study is a step forward in this field of literature that much more focuses on the behavioural effects of negative campaigning and is still U.S. focused.

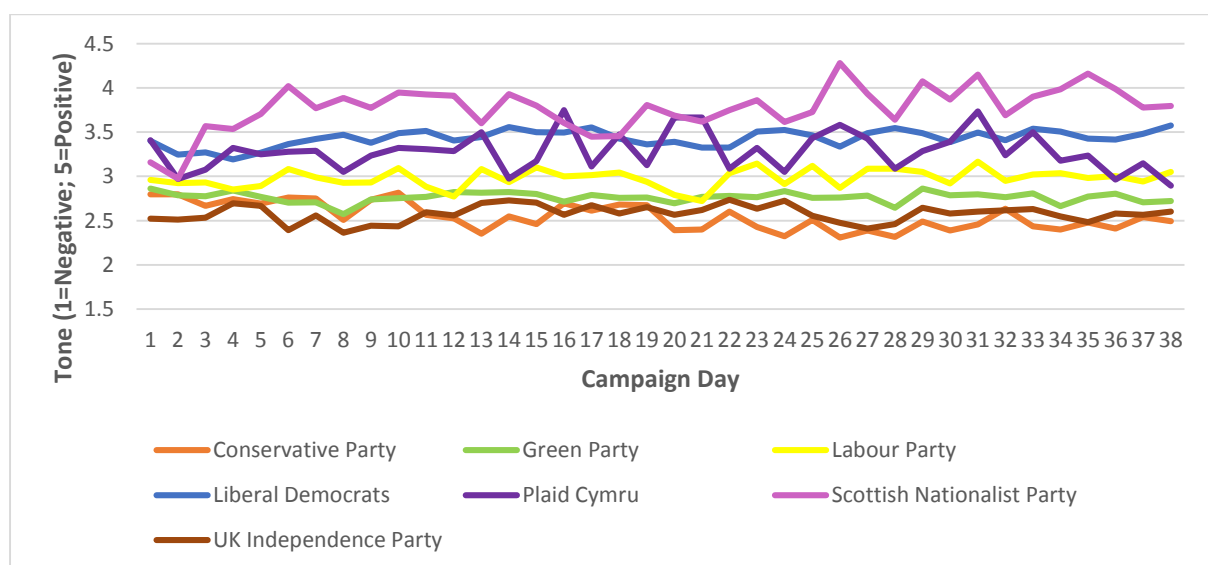
## Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Effects of Negative Campaigning on Voters' Political Trust, Political Efficacy and Satisfaction with Political System**

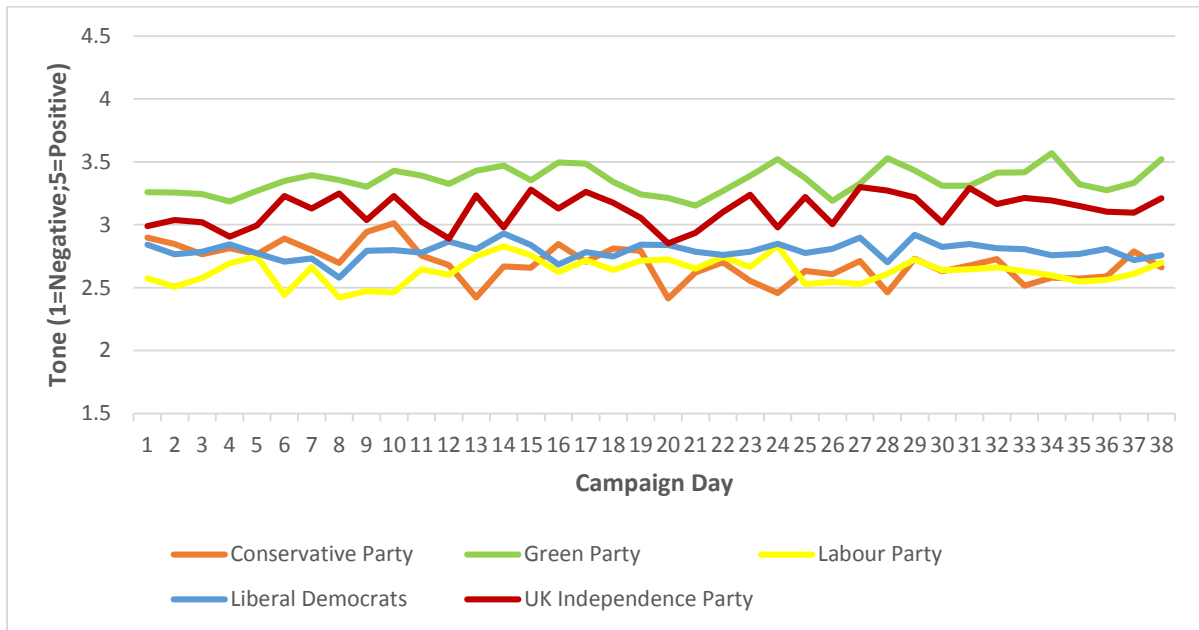
Effect	Supporting Studies	Debunking Studies	Cases Studied
Decrease in Voters' Political Trust	Lau et al. (2007); Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995); Thorson et al. (2000); Dardis et al. (2008); Wanta, Lemert and Lee (1998); Leshner and Thorson (2000); Rahn and Hirshorn (1999); Brooks and Geer (2007)	Lau and Pomper (2004); Jackson et al. (2008); Geer (2006); Martinez and Delegal (1990); Pinkleton et al. (2000)	United States
Decrease in Voters' Sense of Efficacy	Lau et al. (2007); Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995); Thorson et al. (2000); Dardis et al. (2008); Brooks and Geer (2007)	Jackson et al. (2008); Freedman and Goldstein (1999); Wattenberg and Brians (1999); Rahn and Hirshorn (1999); Pinkleton et al. (2000); Lau and Pomper (2004)	United States
Decrease in Voters' Satisfaction with Political System	Lau et al. (2007)		United States

*N.B. We do not claim this overview to be exhaustive. The table is used as support to the theory paragraph and illustrate the inconclusiveness in the field.*

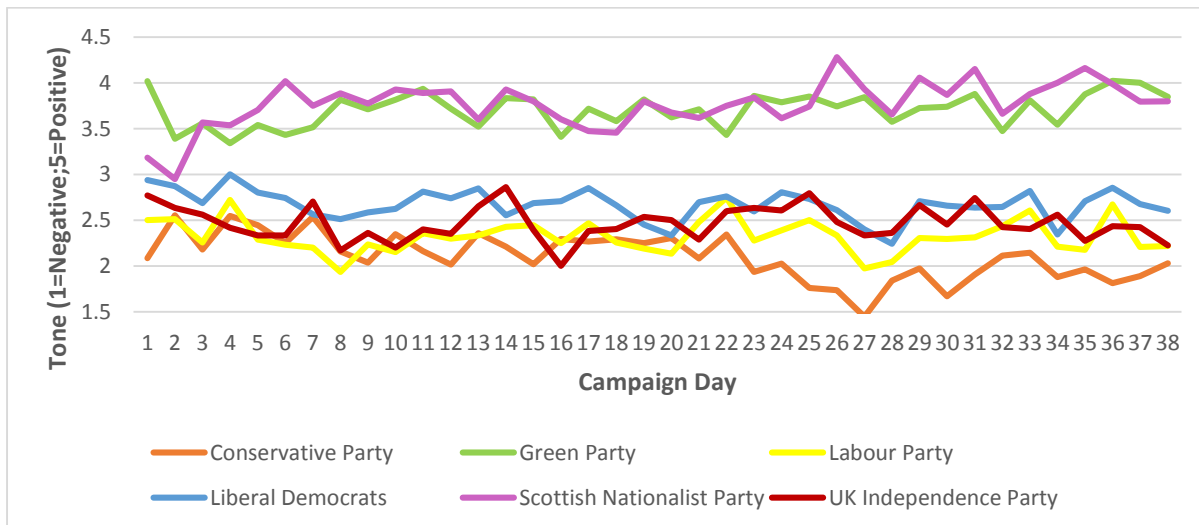
**Figure 1: Aggregate Voters' Perceptions of Level of Negative Campaigning Per Party Across the Campaign (Interpolated Median)**



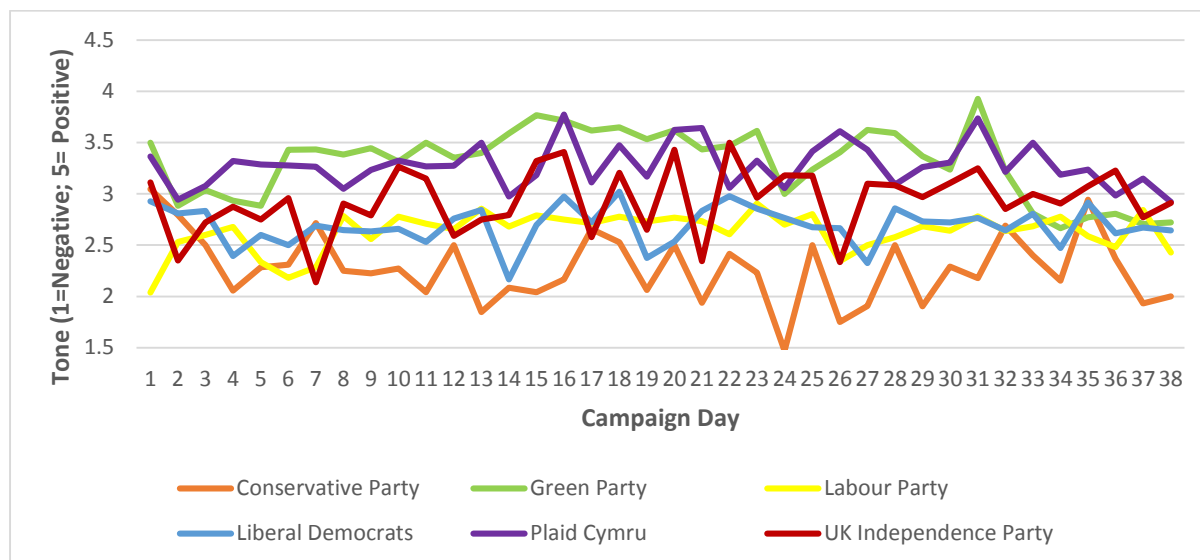
**Figure 2: Aggregate Voters' Perceptions of Level of Negative Campaigning Per Party Across the Campaign in England (Interpolated Median)**



**Figure 3: Aggregate Voters' Perceptions of Level of Negative Campaigning Per Party Across the Campaign in Scotland (Interpolated Median)**



**Figure 4: Aggregate Voters' Perceptions of Level of Negative Campaigning Per Party Across the Campaign in Wales (Interpolated Median)**



**Table 2: Aggregate Voters' Political Trust, Political Efficacy and Satisfaction with Democracy**

		Political Trust W4	Political Trust W6	Political Efficacy W4	Political Efficacy W6	Satisfaction on UK Democracy W4	Satisfaction on UK Democracy W6
Great Britain	Mean	9.16	9.67	10.17	10.33	#	#
	S.E.	.02	.02	.01	.01	#	#
	N	29642	28585	25551	28000	#	#
England	Mean	9.21	9.66	10.03	10.19	2.41	2.38
	S.E.	.02	.02	.02	.02	.01	.01
	N	21597	20626	18592	20195	21033	20417
Scotland	Mean	9.02	9.77	10.68	10.81	#	#
	S.E.	.04	.02	.02	.02	#	#
	N	5230	5182	4548	5108	#	#
Wales	Mean	9.04	9.56	10.27	10.45	2.29	2.29
	S.E.	.06	.06	.05	.04	0.02	0.2
	N	2815	2777	2411	2697	2760	2748

Note: Source data 2015 British Election Survey.

Wave 4 is the survey wave prior to the election campaign and wave 6 is the post-election campaign survey wave.

# No numbers are displayed as the survey question does not measure voters' satisfaction with democracy in Scotland.

**Table 3: Effect of Negative Campaigning (W5) on Political Trust (W6)**

	Great Britain			England		
	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>
Constant	7.818** (.080)	6.241** (.210)	5.958** (.208)	7.622** (.098)	6.159** (.247)	5.350** (.245)
Conservative Party	.608** (.016)	.597** (.017)	.218** (.020)	.679** (.019)	.668** (.010)	.244** (.024)
Labour Party	.068** (.016)	.093** (.018)	.153** (.021)	.074** (.020)	.103** (.022)	.186** (.025)
Liberal Democratic Party	.239** (.019)	.182** (.020)	.084** (.022)	.230** (.022)	.178** (.024)	.064** (.026)
UK Independence Party	-.210** (.014)	-.193** (.015)	-.028 (.017)	-.202** (.017)	-.185** (.018)	.000 (.020)
Green Party	.066** (.030)	.056** (.018)	.083** (.019)	.033 (.020)	.026 (.021)	.050 (.022)
Scottish Nationalist Party						
Plaid Cymru						
R square	.097	.147	.233	.111	.164	.274
N	20730	17033	16717	14714	11987	11751
	Scotland			Wales		
	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>
Constant	8.558** (.189)	7.527** (.511)	7.088** (.522)	7.274** (.270)	4.951** (.772)	4.817** (.756)
Conservative Party	.306** (.037)	.310** (.041)	.133** (.048)	.608** (.052)	.568** (.055)	.194** (.067)
Labour Party	.118** (.037)	.121** (.041)	.151** (.049)	.238** (.055)	.260** (.058)	.242** (.068)
Liberal Democratic Party	.250** (.041)	.190** (.045)	.138** (.050)	.319** (.063)	.263** (.066)	.153* (.071)
UK Independence Party	-.164** (.032)	-.166** (.034)	-.084* (.039)	-.209** (.045)	-.162** (.049)	-.004 (.055)
Green Party	0.156** (.039)	.127** (.043)	.079 (.048)	.131* (.064)	.106 (.067)	.049 (.070)
Scottish Nationalist Party	-.121** (.032)	-.086** (.035)	-.012 (.048)			
Plaid Cymru				-.120 (.062)	-.127 (.064)	-.049 (.072)
R square	.058	.094	.128	.110	.166	.253



N	3913	3235	3183	1921	1669	1638
---	------	------	------	------	------	------

Note: Method: OLS regression. Standard errors are displayed in parentheses.

\* significant at 0.05 and \*\* significant at 0.01.

Source Data: British Election Survey Wave 4, 5 and 6

<sup>a</sup> Controlled for all these effects that are causally antecedent to the election, respectively gender, age, ethnicity, gross household income, ethnicity, home ownership, work status, religion, age ending fulltime education, marital status and subjective class.

<sup>b</sup>Controlled for voters' party preferences in Wave 5.

**Table 4: Effect of Negative Campaigning (W5) on Political Efficacy (W6)**

	Great Britain			England		
	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>
Constant	10.567** (.063)	10.112 (.0162)	10.476** (.168)	10.299** (.077)	9.857** (.190)	10.112** (.201)
Conservative Party	-.128** (.012)	-.109** (.013)	-.139** (.016)	-.095** (.014)	-.064** (.016)	-.118** (.019)
Labour Party	.001 (.013)	.023 (.014)	.056** (.017)	.056 (.016)	.089** (.017)	.093** (.020)
Liberal Democratic Party	-.021 (.014)	-.074 (.015)	-.006 (.018)	-.010 (.017)	-.059** (.018)	-.006 (.021)
UK Independence Party	-.075** (.011)	-.036** (.012)	.007 (.014)	-.035** (.013)	.002 (.014)	.033 (.017)
Green Party	.200** (.013)	.153** (.014)	.114** (.015)	.129** (.015)	.082** (.016)	.083** (.018)
Scottish Nationalist Party						
Plaid Cymru						
R square	.026	.084	.095	.015	.077	.083
N	20396	16750	16454	14469	11780	11556
	Scotland			Wales		
	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>
Constant	10.859** (.153)	11.002** (.401)	11.461** (.411)	10.468** (.204)	9.113** (.570)	9.353** (.586)
Conservative Party	-.164** (.030)	-.169** (.032)	-.167** (.038)	-.121** (.039)	-.117** (.040)	-.169** (.052)
Labour Party	-.032 (.030)	-.026 (.032)	.048 (.039)	.013 (.041)	.031 (.043)	.044 (.052)
Liberal Democratic Party	-.046 (.033)	-.106** (.036)	-.021 (.040)	-.029 (.047)	-.062 (.048)	.055 (.055)
UK Independence Party	-.151** (.025)	-.123** (.027)	-.066* (.031)	-.039 (.034)	.017 (.036)	.066 (.043)

Green Party	.338** (.032)	.279** (.034)	.179** (.038)	.248** (.048)	.169** (.049)	.134** (.054)
Scottish Nationalist Party	-.010 (.026)	.029 (.028)	-.049 (.038)			
Plaid Cymru				-.024 (.046)	-.023 (.047)	-.074 (.056)
R square	.062	.113	.131	.030	.095	.108
N	3875	3204	3155	1876	1630	1604

Note: Method: OLS regression. Standard errors are displayed in parentheses.

\* significant at 0.05 and \*\* significant at 0.01.

Source Data: British Election Survey Wave 4, 5 and 6

<sup>a</sup> Controlled for all these effects that are causally antecedent to the election, respectively gender, age, ethnicity, gross household income, ethnicity, home ownership, work status, religion, age ending fulltime education, marital status and subjective class.

<sup>b</sup>Controlled for voters' party preferences in Wave 5.

**Table 5: Effect of Negative Campaigning (W5) on Satisfaction with UK Democracy (W6)**

	England			Wales		
	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>	Model 1 Main Effects	Model 2 Main Effects <sup>a</sup>	Model 3 Main Effects <sup>ab</sup>
Conservative Party	-2.072** (.061)	-1.996** (.068)	-1.086** (.077)	-1.968** (.166)	-1.939** (.180)	-.801** (.211)
Labour Party	.226** (.063)	.267** (.072)	.098 (.084)	.150 (.168)	.185 (.183)	.118 (.214)
Liberal Democratic Party	-.207** (.074)	-.122 (.082)	-.052 (.091)	-.381 (.198)	-.109 (.214)	.128 (.238)
UK Independence Party	.360** (.049)	.447** (.055)	.160** (.066)	-.240 (.130)	-.173 (.144)	-.309 (.172)
Green Party	.602** (.059)	.445** (.066)	.244** (.073)	.849** (.184)	.600** (.201)	.185 (.219)
Plaid Cymru				.707** (.179)	.766** (.193)	.447** (.200)
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.199	.217	.314	.243	.118	.385
Deviance Chi <sup>2</sup>	7377.761	27030.24	25127.73	3376.08	3741.09	3469.25
-2 Loglikelihood	13142.916	27031.635	25127.739	3762.51	3741.10	3469.25
N	14656	11952	11715	1911	1665	1642

Note: Method: Ordinal Logit. The coefficients displayed are the largest difference, so the difference between the coefficients of category 1 and 5. This is warranted when (as is the case here) the coefficients decrease monotonically from highest to lowest values of the independent variable. Standard errors are displayed in parentheses.

\* significant at 0.05 and \*\* significant at 0.01.

Data: British Election Survey Wave 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>a</sup> Controlled for all these effects that are causally antecedent to the election, respectively gender, age, ethnicity, gross household income, ethnicity, home ownership, work status, religion, age ending

fulltime education, marital status and subjective class.

<sup>b</sup>Controlled for voters' party preferences in Wave 5

**Table 6: Moderating Effect of Party Identification (W5) on the Relationship Between Negative Campaigning (W5) and Political Trust (W6)**

Great Britain		Great Britain		Great Britain	
Conservative Party (CP)	.211** (.022)	Labour Party (LP)	.126** (.022)	Liberal Democratic Party (LD)	.058** (.023)
Party Identification (PID)	-.913** (.108)	Party Identification (PID)	-1.045** (.113)	Party Identification (PID)	-1.157** (.012)
CP * PID	.017 (.037)	LP * PID	.071 (.040)	LD* PID	.106** (.042)
R square	.249	R square	.248	R square	.248
N	16420	N	16420	N	16420
Great Britain		Great Britain		England	
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	-.037* (.018)	Green Party (GP)	.063** (.020)	Conservative Party (CP)	.233** (.025)
Party Identification (PID)	-1.078 (.011)	Party Identification (PID)	-1.149* (.130)	Party Identification (PID)	-1.011** (.133)
UKIP * PID	.071* (.034)	GP * PID	.086* (.037)	CP * PID	.044 (.044)
R square	.248	R square	.248	R square	.289
N	16420	N	16420	N	11520
England		England		England	
Labour Party (LP)	.148** (.027)	Liberal Democratic Party (LD)	.032	UK Independence Party (UKIP)	-.016 (.022)
Party Identification (PID)	-1.171** (.136)	Party Identification (PID)	-1.225** (.149)	Party Identification (PID)	-1.174** (.133)
LP * PID	.110* (.048)	LD* PID	.122* (.050)	UKIP * PID	.094* (.040)
R square	.290	R square	.290	R square	.290
N	11520	N	11520	N	11520
England		England		England	
Green Party (GP)	.031 (.024)				
Party Identification (PID)	-1.195** (.151)				
GP * PID	.094** (.043)				
R square	.290				
N	11520				

Note: Method: OLS Regression. Displayed are the coefficients of the main effects and interaction effect for one particular party's campaign tone and party identification. Not displayed are the

*coefficients of the other campaign tone variables and all the control variables. We controlled for all these effects that are causally antecedent to the election, respectively gender, age, ethnicity, gross household income, ethnicity, home ownership, work status, religion, age ending fulltime education, marital status and subjective class. And controlled for voters' party preferences in Wave 5. Standard errors are displayed in parentheses.*

*No results are displayed for Scotland and Wales as none of the interaction effects was significant.*

*\* significant at 0.05 and \*\* significant at 0.01.*

*Source Data: British Election Survey Wave 4, 5 and 6*

## Appendix 1: Construction Composite Scores Political Trust and Political Efficacy

Composite scores not only offer greater discrimination between respondents, but also provide more reliable measurement than the separate items. For the first two sets of analyses in this study, two composite scores were constructed, respectively a Political Trust and a Political Efficacy scale. The BES questionnaires contains series of questions (items), which can be considered as multiple-item operationalisations of a single (underlying) construct. A series of 8 questions has been included in the BES questionnaires to tap voters' attitudes towards politics, politicians and the electoral process (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Original Questions Composite Scores**

Labels	Questions (items)	Answer Categories
GoodUnderstandingPolitics	I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
PoliticsTooMuchEffort	It takes too much time and effort to be active in politics and public affairs	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
NoUnderstandingPolitics	It is often difficult for me to understand what is going on in government and politics	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
PoliticiansDon'tCare	Politicians don't care what people like me think	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
VotingLotOfEffort	Going to vote is a lot of effort	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
EnjoyVoting	Voting is an enjoyable experience	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
PartyPowerDoesNotMatter	It doesn't matter which political party is in power	1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
TrustMPs	How much trust do you have in Members of Parliament in general?	1 (No Trust) 7 (A Great Deal Of Trust)

All these sets of variables have been analysed with a stochastic cumulative scaling model, known as Mokken-scaling.<sup>8</sup> We make use of Mokken-scaling as the original variables of which we wish to make composite scores are of ordinal nature. The results are reported below in terms of difficulties (i.e. mean value of the responses provided by the respondents), coefficients of homogeneity, H and H (i). The first expresses the extent to which the set of items can validly be regarded as homogeneous (or uni-dimensional), and the second expresses how well each of the items expresses the same underlying (latent) variable as the other items in the set. The H and H(i) have to be equal or higher than .40 to be considered respectively a medium scale and medium item. A H or H(i) equal or above .50 is respectively considered to be a strong scale or strong item.

We started the Mokken-scaling analysis with all 8 items, the results showed that this set of items represents two distinct latent concepts. The item Enjoy Voting was non-scalable. The first composite score is Political Trust, which consists of the three items TrustMPs, PoliticiansDon'tCare and PartyPowerDoesNotMatter. The overall Homogeneity score of Political Trust is 0.45. The second composite score is Political Efficacy, which consists of the three items GoodUnderstandingPolitics, PoliticsTooMuchEffort and NoUnderstandingPolitics. The item VoteEffort was dropped to make sure that the scale Homogeneity crossed the boundary of 0.40.

<sup>8</sup> See: R. J. Mokken (1971) *A theory and procedure of scale analysis*. The Hague: Mouton

**Table 2: Political Trust Scale**

Individual Items						
Items	Labels	Reverse Coded	Mean	Hi	Z	Double Monotonous
1	TrustMPs	N	3.41	0.47	100.76	Y
2	PoliticiansDon'tCare	Y	2.45	0.53	108.55	Y
3	PartyPowerDoesNotMatter	Y	3.87	0.33	67.45	Y
Scale						
H				0.45		
Z					113.14	
Rho	0.68					

*Note: This scale is constructed on the basis of respondents in Wave 6, list-wise deletion of missing cases, N=27265.*

**Table 3: Political Efficacy Scale**

Individual Items						
Item	Labels	Reverse Coded	Mean	Hi	Z	Double Monotonous
1	GoodUnderstandingPolitics	N	3.89	0.45	92.10	Y
2	PoliticsTooMuchEffort	Y	3.08	0.36	73.86	Y
3	NoUnderstandingPolitics	Y	3.40	0.48	99.45	Y
Scale						
H				0.43		
Z					108.01	
Rho	0.66					

*Note: This scale is constructed on the basis of respondents in Wave 6, list-wise deletion of missing cases, N=27265.*

**Acknowledgments**

The research reported in this paper is part of the research project 'CSNCC: Comparative Study of Negative Campaigning and its Consequences' and was funded by a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship (n° 629012: FP7-PEOPLE-2013-IEF) and a Nottingham Research Fellowship. We thank the BES team for incorporating the set of questions on campaign tone in the 2015 BESIP survey, which is funded by the ESRC.

## References

- Ansolabehere, Stephen and Shanto Iyengar (1995) *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*. New York: Free Press
- Ansolabehere, Stephen D, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon and Nicholas Valentino (1994) Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate, *American Political Science Review*, 88 (4): 829-838.
- Arcenau, Kevin and David W. Nickerson (2010) Comparing Negative and Positive Campaign Messages: Evidence From Two Field Experiments, *American Politics Research*, 38 (1): 54-83.
- Brants, Kees, Walter Kok en Philip van Praag jr (1982) *De Strijd om de Kiezersgunst, Verkiezingscampagnes in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Kobra.
- Brooks, Deborah J. and John G. Geer (2007) Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate, *American Journal of Political Science*, 51 (1): 1-16.
- Brooks, Stephen C. (1997) *Negativity is in the Eye of the Beholder: Voter Response to Negative Advertising*, paper presented at APSA, Chicago.
- Budesheim, Thomas L., David A. Houston and Stephen J. DePaola (1996) Persuasiveness of In-Group and Out-Group Political Messages: The Case of Negative Campaigning, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70: 523-34.
- Clark, Alistair (2012) *Political Parties in the UK*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan
- Craig, Stephen C. and Pauline S. Rippere (2014) Political Trust and Negative Campaigns: Two Tests of the Figure-Ground Hypothesis, *Politics & Policy*, 42 (5): 693-743.
- Dardis, Frank. E, Fuyuan Shen and Heidi Hatfield Edwards (2008) Effects of Negative Political Advertising on Individuals' Cynicism and Self-Efficacy: The impact of Ad Type and Message Exposures, *Mass Communication and Society*, 11(1): 24-42
- Denver, David, Christopher Carman and Robert Johns (2012) *Elections and Voters in Britain*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan
- Denver, David, Gordon Hands and Iain MacAllister (2004) The Electoral Impact of Constituency Campaigning in Britain, *Political Studies*, 52 (): 289-306.
- Eijk, Cees van der and Mark Franklin (2006) *Elections and Voters*. London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Eijk, Cees Van der and Michael Marsh (2011) Comparing non-ipsative measures of party support, paper presented at the First European Conference on Comparative Electoral Research, Sofia, 1-3 December 2011
- Eijk, Cees van der, Wouter van der Brug, Martin Kroh and Mark Franklin (2006) Rethinking the dependent variable in voting behaviour: On the measurement and analysis of electoral utilities, *Electoral Studies*, 25(3), 424-447.
- Fieldhouse, Edward and David Cutts (2009) The Effectiveness of Local Party Campaigns in 2005: Combining Evidence from Campaign Spending and Agent Survey Data, *British Journal of Political Science*, 39(2): 367-388.
- Freedman, Paul and Kenneth M. Goldstein (1999) Measuring Media Exposure and the Effects of Negative Campaign Ads, *American Journal of Political Science*, 42: 1189-1208.
- Fridkin, Kim Leslie and Patrick J. Kenney (2012) 'The Impact of Negative Campaigning on Citizens Actions and Attitudes', in: Holli A. Semetko and Margaret Scammell (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Political Communication*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 173-185
- Fridkin, Kim Leslie and Patrick J. Kenney (2004) Do Negative Messages Work? The Impact of Negativity on Citizens' Evaluations of Candidates, *American Politics Research*, 32 (5): 570-605.
- Garramone, Gina M. (1984) Voter Responses to Negative Political Ads, *Journalism Quarterly*, 61:250-259.
- Geer, John G. (2006) *In Defense of Negativity, Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Jackson, Robert A., Jeffery J. Mondak and R. Huckfeldt (2008) Examining the Possible Corrosive Impact on Negative Advertising on Citizens' Attitudes toward Politics, *Political Research Quarterly*, doi:10.1177/1065912908317031



Johnston, Ron and Charles Pattie (2013) Learning electoral geography? Party campaigning, constituency marginality and voting at the 2010 British general election, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38 (2): 285-298.

Lau, Richard R. and Gerald M. Pomper (2004) *Negative Campaigning: An Analysis of U.S. Senate Elections*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

Lau, Richard R., Lee Sigelman and Ivy Brown Rovner (2007) The Effects of Negative Political Campaigns: A Meta-Analytic Reassessment, *The Journal of Politics*, 69(4): 1176-1209.

Lau, Richard R. and Ivy Brown Rovner (2009) Negative Campaigning, *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 12: 285-306.

Leah, Robert, Bill Coxall and Lynton Robins (2011) *British Politics*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan

Leshner, Glenn and Esther Thorson (2000) Overreporting Voting: Campaign Media Public Mood and the Vote, *Political Communication*, 17: 263-278.

Lijphart, Arend (1999) *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press

Martinez, Michael D. and Tad Delegal (1990) The Irrelevance of Negative Campaigns to Political Trust: Experimental and Survey Results, *Political Communication and Persuasion*, 7: 24-40.

Mattes, Kyle and David P. Redlawsk (2014) *The Positive Case for Negative Campaigning*, London: The University of Chicago

Nai, Alessandro and Annemarie Walter (2015) *New Perspectives on Negative Campaigning: Why Attack Politics Matters*, Studies in European Political Science. Colchester: ECPR Press

Pattie, Charles and Ron Johnston (2009) Still Talking, But Is Anyone Listening? The Changing Face of Constituency Campaigning in Britain, 1997-2005, *Party Politics*, 51(4), 411-434.

Pattie, Charles, David Denver, Robert Johns and James Mitchell (2011) Raising the tone? The impact of 'positive' and 'negative' campaigning on voting in the 2007 Scottish parliament election, *Electoral Studies*, 30 (2): 333-343.

Pinkleton, Bruce E., Nam-hyun Um and Erica Weintraub Austin (2002) An Exploration of the Effects of Negative Political Advertising on Political Decision Making, *Journal of Advertising*, 31: 13-26.

Rahn, Wendy M. and Rebecca M. Hirshorn (1999) Political Advertising and Public Mood: A Study of Children's Political Orientations, *Political Communication*, 16: 387-407.

Ridout, Travis and Erika Franklin Fowler (2012) Explaining Perceptions of Advertising Tone, *Political Research Quarterly*, 65 (1): 62-75.

Ridout, Travis and Michael Franz (2008) Evaluating Measures of Campaign Tone, *Political Communication*, 25 (2), 158-179.

Sanders, David and Pippa Norris (2005) The impact of political advertising in the 2001 UK general election, *Political Research Quarterly*, 58, 535-536.

Scammell, Margaret and Langer, Ana I. (2006) 'Political Advertising in the United Kingdom', in Kaid, L. L. and Holtz-Bacha, C. (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Political Advertising*, London: Sage, pp. 65-82.

Sigelman, Lee and Mark Kugler (2003) Why is Research on the Effects of Negative Campaigning So Inconclusive? Understanding Citizens' Perceptions of Negativity, *The Journal of Politics*, 65 (1): 142-160.

Thorson, Esther, Ekaterina Ognianova, James Coyle and Frank Denton (2000) Negative Political Ads and Negative Citizen Orientations toward Politics, *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 22:1, 13-40

Van Heerde-Hudson, Jennifer (2011) The Americanization of British Party Advertising? Negativity in Party Election Broadcasts, 1964-2005, *British Politics*, 6: 52-77

Walter, Annemarie S. (2014) Negative Campaigning in Western Europe: Similar or Different?, *Political Studies*, 62 (S1), 42-60.

Walter, Annemarie. S. (2010) Negatieve campagnevoering in de Nederlandse consensusdemocratie: de ontwikkelingen sinds Fortuyn, *Res Publica*, Vol. 52, No. 3, pp. 293-314.

Wanta, Wayne, James B. Lemert and Tien-tsung Lee (1998) Consequences of Negative Political Advertising Exposure, in: Thomas J. Johnson, Carol E. Hays and Scott P. Hays (ed.) *Engaging the*

Public: How Government and the Media Can Reinvigorate American Democracy (pp. 97-109).  
Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Wattenberg, Martin P. and Craig L. Brians (1999) Negative Campaign Advertising: Demobilizer or Mobilizer?, *American Political Science Review*, 93: 891-899.

White, Isobel and Oonagh Gay (2014) Timetable for the UK General Parliamentary Election, Library House of Commons, *SN/PC/06574*, to be found at:

[file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/sn06574%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/sn06574%20(1).pdf)