

# National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 7: Negative Campaigning<sup>1</sup>

## Key issues

*What is negative campaign advertising and how does it relate to incivility in political discourse?  
Who will be most likely to engage in negative campaigning and when will they be most likely to do so?  
How does negative campaigning affect voter turnout, voters' sense of political efficacy, and their trust in political leaders and government?  
Is negative campaigning effective?*

## Overview

Americans typically think that negative campaigning is widespread and corrosive in American politics. John Geer argued provocatively that negative campaigning is healthy and that it is vital to information flows in U.S. representative democracy.<sup>2</sup> But other scholars and commentators worry that negative campaign advertising may reduce voter turnout, decrease trust in government, and increase both political disillusionment and political demobilization.<sup>3</sup> Still others worry that negative campaigning enhances “trivialization and avoidance of serious issues,”<sup>4</sup> and that it manipulates voters, lessening their capacity to engage in rational decision-making in politics.<sup>5</sup> One prominent research team suggested that “U.S. campaigns at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are largely characterized by negativity. The likelihood of people’s exposure to negative messages, either intentional or incidental, has never been higher.”<sup>6</sup>

Candidates use negative campaigning because they and their advisors think that it works.<sup>7</sup> To best assess the impact of negative campaigning, research suggests that we examine separately the multiple “dimensions of negative messages.”<sup>8</sup> These include attacks focused on issues, attacks focused on persons and their traits, relevant versus irrelevant attacks, and civil versus uncivil negative appeals.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, we should distinguish between pure attack advertisements and contrast advertisements, and between the total volume of negative appeals in a given campaign, and the relative percentage of total negative appeals accounted for by each candidate.<sup>10</sup> Current exemplary research also tries to assess whether *researchers’ definitions and measures* of different types of negative messages match the *perceptions of those who have been exposed* to these messages.<sup>11</sup>

Much research suggests that candidates trailing in the polls are more likely to use negative advertising.<sup>12</sup> When political competition narrows between two candidates, negative campaigning also is used by frontrunners to maintain difference as the candidates close in on one another.<sup>13</sup> The gender of the focal candidate and the opponent, as well as the party affiliation of the candidate, and disparities in campaign funding between the candidate and the opponent, also influence who uses negative advertising and when they do so.<sup>14</sup>

Research examining the relationship between negative campaign advertising and voter turnout provides little cause for alarm because, although many scholars and commentators feared that negative advertising would diminish turnout, most research does not confirm their fears. Indeed, some types of negative campaign advertising increase turnout.<sup>15</sup> With respect to U.S. citizens’ trust in government and their sense of their own political efficacy, the results likewise are mixed. But even if negative campaigning diminishes trust or efficacy, its impact is very small.<sup>16</sup>

*For political candidates and their campaign managers and consultants, the most important question is whether negative campaign advertising works for the purposes for which it is intended. Some studies find that negative messages lessen voter evaluations of targeted candidates,<sup>17</sup> but other researchers caution that*

there is much evidence that negative campaigning often is ineffective, and that sometimes—and especially for incumbents—it is counter-productive.<sup>18</sup> A major reason for inconsistent findings may be that, until recently, researchers failed to distinguish among different *types* of negative campaigning. Recent research distinguishing between negative advertisements focused on persons and their traits and those focused on issues found that attacks on persons/traits had *no* impact on respondents' evaluations of *either* incumbents or challengers. But challengers and incumbents who focused their negative messaging exclusively on their opponents' policy views *did* lower evaluations of their opponents. Pure “attack advertising” was more effective than “contrast advertising.” While challengers experienced no backlash from issue-focused negative campaigning, *incumbents did suffer backlash effects*, though these were not quite as large as the impact that their issue-focused negative campaigning had on their opponents.<sup>19</sup>

More recent studies by the same research team yield findings that can only partly reassure those who would like to see negative campaigning diminish. Like many other researchers, this team finds that negative campaigning often is ineffective, has backlash effects against incumbents who engage in it, and that political candidates and their consultants have strong incentives to avoid *irrelevant* negative messaging.<sup>20</sup> But there is no such incentive for candidates and their campaign managers to avoid *incivility*, as long as the incivility is coupled with *relevant* messaging. While Americans dislike uncivil negative campaign advertisements – even when they find that these are relevant – they nonetheless attend to uncivil but relevant advertisements in ways that lower their evaluations of the targeted candidate.<sup>21</sup> Because researchers are now cognizant of, and trying to avoid, the serious methodological limitations of much earlier work assessing the impacts of negative campaigning, we can have more confidence in the results of their studies and the inferences that we draw from these studies in order to affect current practice.<sup>22</sup>

## Arguments and Findings

Negative campaigning is commonly perceived to have grown in recent years and to pervade most media outlets.<sup>23</sup> Replacing the prior, more exclusive focus on reaching a diverse mass audience watching network television, targeted messages now reach specific niche audiences through cable television, political blogs, digital campaign websites and other new media platforms.<sup>24</sup> Political campaigns have adjusted to the new reality by finding clever ways to capture these audiences and to “stand out” in the sea of campaign messaging. For instance, attack advertising (defined below) is used to gain and keep audience attention.<sup>25</sup>

Press coverage of electoral politics tends to rely on battle and war metaphors regardless of candidate intentions.<sup>26</sup> News stories about political campaigns typically focus on *divisions* between candidates, rather than on their capacity for compromise and negotiation, and news commentators often exploit political gaffes or blunders to increase readership and viewership or to make their own particular political points.<sup>27</sup> When media competition for audience foregoes the subtleties of problem and policy information and analysis in favor of the “who is up, who is down” imagery of the horse race, the stage is already set for negative campaign advertising by politicians themselves. It should not surprise us, then, that negative campaigning is a standard part of American politics.<sup>28</sup>

Contentious by its nature, the political campaign's main purpose is to enhance the number of votes for a given candidate, while depressing votes for that candidate's opponent(s).<sup>29</sup> Candidates make various kinds of appeals, including positive claims about self and negative claims about the opponent, to distinguish themselves from opponents, and bolster their own images while tarnishing those of their opponents. By highlighting differences and generating an emotional response, negative campaigning is a strategy for coalition building against the opposition and for constructing moral boundaries between “good guys” and “bad guys,” “us” and “them.”<sup>30</sup>

## *What is Negative Campaigning?*

*But what is negative campaigning?* Without a clear definition and measures that capture the concept for use in empirical research, we cannot assess the pervasiveness of negative campaigning, whether and under what conditions it may be effective, or its consequences for American democracy. Steven Finkel and John Geer contrasted *positive and negative campaign appeals*, stating that “positive appeals are ones that candidates offer to promote themselves on some issue or trait. Negative appeals are attacks [or criticism] leveled at the opposition.”<sup>31</sup> Within the universe of negative appeals there are other distinctions that are important for evaluating the consequences of negative campaigning, including especially whether the negative appeal focuses *on the issue or the person/trait*. As Deborah Brooks and John Geer explain, “‘Trait-based’ attacks focus on personal characteristics...while ‘issue-based’ attacks... focus on policy matters.”<sup>32</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson suggested that *attack advertisements*, focusing solely on the failures of an opponent, be distinguished from *contrast advertisements* that offer “explicit comparisons between the candidates’ qualities, records or proposals.”<sup>33</sup> Other distinctions among types and usages of negative appeals include contrasting the total volume of negative appeals with measures of their relative frequency between the candidates, the civility or incivility, and relevance or irrelevance of a negative appeal, and more fine-tuned variations in the emotional tone of the appeal.<sup>34</sup>

Because measuring emotional tone is prone to subjectivity, researchers have sought to specify coding schemes that can “score” campaigns and campaigners as objectively as possible. For example:

- Some research measures negative vs. positive messages by coding all *sponsor-focused* messages as “positive” and all *opponent-focused* messages as “negative.”<sup>35</sup>
- Similarly, some researchers classify as “attack ads” all candidate-campaign advertisements that are “exclusively about an opponent.”<sup>36</sup>
- A study differentiating between *civil* negative and *uncivil* negative messages defined incivility as “attacks that go beyond facts and differences, and move instead towards name-calling, contempt, and derision of the opposition.”<sup>37</sup> Creating an uncivil version of a previously civil message through experimental design involved creating “claims that are inflammatory and superfluous.” This in turn meant “adding two strong pointed words (‘dishonest,’ ‘unprincipled,’ ‘heartless,’ ‘cowardly,’ etc.) to an otherwise civil negative message.” The researchers defined all positive messages as civil.<sup>38</sup>

Because campaign messages perceived as civil or uncivil are likely to have real consequences, some researchers also have purposely harnessed the insight that **negativity and incivility are in the eye of the beholder**. For example:

- In addition to using a researcher-devised content coding scheme to differentiate between negative candidate advertisements about issues and negative candidate advertisements about traits, and to distinguish between attack advertisements exclusively about an opponent and contrast advertisements comparing the focal candidate to the opponent, one study *also* used a survey of campaign managers to assess whether political campaigns had been characterized by “mudslinging.” When, in response to an open-ended question about the themes of their opponents’ campaign, managers reported that their opponents engaged in “smear tactics, relentless attacks, deceptive messages [or] unwarranted or unconscionable criticisms,” this was coded as mudslinging.<sup>39</sup>
- The same study then combined campaign managers’ assessments to rank campaigns on their degree of mudslinging. If both candidates’ campaign managers viewed their opponents as having run a mudslinging campaign, the race ranked highest on mudslinging. If neither of the candidates’ campaign managers viewed the opponent’s campaign as mudslinging, the race

ranked lowest, and if just one of the campaign managers perceived the opponent's campaign to be mudslinging, the race ranked in between.<sup>40</sup>

Current exemplary research tries to assess "fit" between *researchers'* definitions of different types of negativity and the *perceptions of those who have been exposed* to campaign or mock campaign messages. For example:

- One study that embedded an experiment within a representative public opinion survey of U.S. respondents randomly assigned respondents to hear one of multiple different versions of a campaign advertisement. Experimental conditions varied *issue versus trait-focused negative messages*, as well as the *civility* and *relevance* of the messages. Advertisements used in the experiment were based on real commercials from 2004 election races, with the name and state of the targeted candidate changed "to ensure that respondents did not have pre-existing attitudes about the candidates."<sup>41</sup> Where the irrelevant message focused on the candidate's divorce, incivility was created by adding pointed insults to an otherwise civil negative message.<sup>42</sup> No matter what message they heard, respondents also were asked a series of questions allowing researchers to create indexes summarizing respondent perceptions of the relevance and civility of the message.<sup>43</sup>
- In this study, the researchers' experimental manipulations worked, because, on average, the advertisements that researchers created to be "relevant" were seen by respondents as about twice as relevant as those that the researchers created to be "irrelevant." Similarly, on average, the advertisements researchers created to be "civil" were seen by respondents as about 1.5 times as civil as those the researchers created to be "uncivil." However, although the association between respondents' perception of the civility and relevance of the campaign messages and the researchers' experimental categorization "was strong and statistically significant," it was less than perfect.<sup>44</sup>

In short, researchers continue to refine their concepts and improve their coding schemes so that findings about negative campaigning will become more compelling. But, although recent research suggests that **there is substantial overlap between what researchers assume will "count" as negative or uncivil and what ordinary citizens perceive**, individual diversity of vantage point and perception means that **there will never be a perfect match between the two**. As well, differences in content coding and in experimental manipulations by diverse researchers are one reason that **findings about the impact of negative campaign advertising are mixed**.

### *Is Negative Campaign Advertising On the Rise?*

**Research suggests that negative campaigning is increasing in Presidential elections.**

- Defining negative campaigning as "any criticism leveled by one candidate against another during a campaign," one research study found *continual growth between 1960 and 2004* in the proportion of television advertisements for Presidential candidates that contained negative content. But the study was unable to measure the frequency or total number of times each negative advertisement aired.<sup>45</sup>
- Content analyses of the tone of all campaign advertisements 60 seconds in length or shorter in Presidential elections between 1960 and 2004<sup>46</sup> coded as positive all advertisements promoting the candidate's record, and negative all advertisements pointing to problems in the opponent's record. These were considered *issue-focused appeals*. The researchers also coded as positive or negative all *trait-focused appeals*, including those that highlighted candidate personality and candidate political tactics. Creating a score for the *overall tone* of each Presidential campaign by combining all positive and negative trait- and issue-focused

advertisements, the researchers found that negative campaigning in Presidential elections increased over time.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast, the tone of *newspaper reporting* on campaigns may be more stable, as may be advertisements that appear in particular, prestigious newspapers.

- A study examining data from 190 Senate elections between 1988 and 1998 found that the proportion of negative statements reported in newspapers from major party senatorial candidates did not increase over time. Negative statements were those that talked about the “deficient nature of his or her [opponent’s] programs, accomplishments, qualifications, associates, and so on.”<sup>48</sup> However, the researchers cautioned that their findings might well tell us more about how the campaign was *reported* than how it was *conducted*.<sup>49</sup>
- A study that examined negative content in *New York Times* advertising statements for Presidential candidates between 1960 and 2004 found no increase in negative content.<sup>50</sup>

### *Who Engages in Negative Campaigning, and Why?*

**John Geer attributes the increase that he documents in negative campaigning in Presidential elections to increased political party polarization in the United States.**<sup>51</sup> “Attacks reflect real disagreements, [and] we simply have more political disagreements between the two major parties now than we did...years ago”<sup>52</sup> Negative campaigning has increased because elections now are likely to have large policy consequences. As well, party leaders and activists generally are less likely to be pragmatists and more likely to be ideological purists than they were 50 years ago.<sup>53</sup>

The simplest explanation for why negative advertising is used is that candidates and their campaign managers and consultants believe that negative advertising works.<sup>54</sup> “Going negative” represents the strategic assumption that the attacker’s image will improve, or that if the attacker and opponent are both damaged, the opponent will be substantially *more* damaged than the attacker.<sup>55</sup>

- Substantial research suggests that positive or self-promoting advertisements are often used by frontrunners to help solidify their standing and appeal to an audience, while **candidates trailing in the polls are more likely to use negative advertising.**<sup>56</sup>
- However, **if and when political competition narrows between two candidates, negative campaigning may be used by frontrunners to maintain difference as candidates close in on one another.**<sup>57</sup>
- Attack ads are rarely used against a trailing third-party candidate unless polls indicate that these candidates threaten to shift the outcome of the *de facto* two-party system.<sup>58</sup>
- One study found that, before the 1990s, men used attack ads on women less frequently than they used such ads on men.<sup>59</sup>
- Another study found that men now use negative attacks against both men and women more often than do women.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, **women are much less likely to use negative attacks regardless of the competing candidate’s gender or the competitiveness of the race.**<sup>61</sup>
- Researchers who examined data from 90 Senate elections from 1988-1998 found evidence that, other things being equal, candidates who have less money than do their opponents, candidates who already have been attacked by their opponent, and Republican Party (relative to Democratic Party) candidates are more likely to engage in negative campaigning.<sup>62</sup>

In short, the **gender of the focal candidate and his/her opponent, as well as the candidate’s party affiliation, and disparities in campaign funding between the candidates seem to influence who uses negative advertising and when they do so.**<sup>63</sup>

## *Potential Effects on Voters*

Much of the concern about negative campaigning is driven by fear that negative campaigning will adversely affect citizens' sense of political efficacy, their trust in political leaders and government, and the likelihood that they will participate in electoral politics.<sup>64</sup> More research is devoted to assessing the relationship between negative campaigning and voter turnout than has been devoted to assessing negative campaigning's potentially "corrosive effects on mass attitudes."<sup>65</sup>

**Overall the evidence suggests that negative campaigning is not so detrimental to American democracy as many scholars and commentators have feared. For example, research examining the relationship between negative campaign advertising and voter turnout provides little cause for alarm.**

- In a 1994 experiment, researchers randomly assigned participants to watch one of two campaign advertisements with identical visuals. The positive advertisement spoke highly of the focal candidate, while the negative advertisement spoke poorly of the opponent. Participants who watched the negative advertisement did report *less likelihood of voting* than participants who watched the positive advertisement.<sup>66</sup>
- In contrast, a 1998 study predicting turnout in Presidential elections between 1960 and 1992 as a function of variability in campaign tone and diverse demographic and political factors known to affect turnout found no support for the hypothesis that negative campaigning diminishes turnout.<sup>67</sup>
- A follow-up 2006 study that tried to overcome a methodological limitation of the 1998 study also found that negative campaigning did not decrease turnout. In fact, the researchers concluded that negative campaigns have *a small positive impact on voter turnout as long as they resonate with their target audience.*<sup>68</sup>

The mixed results from these particular studies mirror the profile of results in the totality of studies examining this issue.<sup>69</sup> One of the most thorough studies suggests that, once again, **mixed results may derive from failure to distinguish among types of negative advertising, as well as from more general diversity in the research designs, factors examined, and analytic techniques** that are used to address the topic. This 1999 study combined data from the 1990 Senate Election Study (containing 30 contested Senate seats) with content coding of an independent database of televised advertisements in these campaigns. The researchers also conducted interviews of campaign managers, who were asked to characterize their opponent's campaign and media coverage of both campaigns.<sup>70</sup>

- This study constructed a *measure of "negativity"* to distinguish among campaigns with no negative messaging, a minor amount of negative messaging, and a major emphasis on negativity.<sup>71</sup>
- The researchers also constructed a 0-4 *scale of "mudslinging"* based on campaign managers' responses to questions asking them about the themes of their opponent's campaign and the themes of media coverage of both campaigns in the Senate race.<sup>72</sup>
- The study *predicted whether or not individuals voted* across these 30 races based on: the tone of campaign messaging, the tone of the coverage in the state's largest newspaper, and a large number of other factors presumed to affect turnout, including the closeness of the election, the presence and closeness of a gubernatorial election, the competitiveness of house races, the respondent's partisan attachment, political interest and knowledge, exposure to and familiarity with the candidate, and the respondent's age, education, employment, income, home ownership and length of residence.

- The authors of the 1999 study found that “**people are more likely to vote as the proportion of negative information in the candidates’ ads increases and as the proportion of media criticism of the candidates escalates...even when controlling for a host of individual and contextual factors, negative information significantly *enhances* turnout.**”<sup>73</sup>
- However, **as campaign managers’ perceptions of campaign mudslinging increased, turnout diminished.**<sup>74</sup>

The difference between the impact of “negativity,” and that of “mudslinging” are reassuring, given that “negativity” included substantial *issue-focused* criticism, whereas mudslinging captured manager reports that, for example, their opponents engaged in such activities as “smear tactics” and “deceptive messages.”<sup>75</sup> As the researchers point out:

**These results suggest that people distinguish between legitimate and tempered criticisms, on the one hand, and acrimonious and unjust criticisms on the other.** Voters seem to find substantive and reasoned criticism useful, and apparently these provide them with reasons to go to the polls. In contrast, excessive mudslinging by the candidates that is covered extensively in the news media alienates voters. People become disenchanted with the candidates and the media coverage and abstain from the electoral process.<sup>76</sup>

*What about the potentially corrosive effects of negative campaigning on citizens’ political trust and perceived self efficacy?* The former typically is measured by assessing levels of agreement and disagreement with items such as, “I don’t think most officials can be trusted.” The latter typically is measured by assessing levels of agreement and disagreement with items such as, “People like me don’t have a say about what the government does,” and “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think.”<sup>77</sup> **Here too the results are mixed, but even if negative campaigning diminishes trust or efficacy, its impact is very small.**

- A 2001 study of negative campaigning by U.S. Senate candidates found that negative campaigning reduced the sense of political efficacy experienced by political independents.<sup>78</sup>
- A 2007 “meta-analysis” cumulating all the prior relevant research concluded that, in totality, *the research suggests that negative campaigning slightly depresses citizens’ trust in government and their perceptions of political efficacy.*<sup>79</sup>

However, a more recent study that improves on many prior studies by examining not just the content and tone of campaign messaging but also variable exposure to negative messages, *suggests that exposure to negative messaging has no impact on political efficacy, or on support for, or cynicism about, Congress.*

- This 2009 study combined individual-level survey data with information on political advertisements aired in the 100 largest media markets in the 2002 election season. The study examined how *variation in exposure* to diverse types of negative advertising, including pure attack ads and various types of contrast ads, shaped attitudes toward Congress and two measures of political efficacy. None of the measures of negative advertising, including a measure that combined exposure to all forms of negative advertising, decreased respondents’ approval of Congress, their sense that they could understand and participate in politics, or their sense that they could influence government, controlling for many other factors known or thought to influence political attitudes.<sup>80</sup>
- Similarly, the researchers found no measure of exposure to negative advertising associated with increased cynicism toward Congressional performance.<sup>81</sup>

**It is possible that variation in the civility of negative advertising may matter to how that advertising influences voter trust or efficacy, but here too the relevant research findings are mixed.**

- A 2005 experiment showed some participants a mock candidate debate that was civil and others the same substantive debate presented in uncivil fashion. The experimenters created an uncivil debate by having the debaters sigh, roll their eyes and interrupt each other. Participants who viewed the *civil* debate exhibited *increased trust* in government and Congress, whereas those who viewed the *uncivil* debate exhibited *decreased trust*.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast:

- A 2007 experiment found that, while *incivility directed at personal traits offended people*, such incivility in negative messaging *did not lower trust or efficacy*. Similarly, *incivility directed at political positions failed to lower trust or efficacy*.<sup>83</sup>
- In this 2007 study, the researchers created uncivil negative messages, defined as “attacks that go beyond facts and differences, and move instead towards name-calling, contempt, and derision of the opposition,” by “adding two strong pointed words (dishonest, unprincipled, heartless, cowardly, etc.) to an otherwise civil negative message,” to create an “inflammatory and superfluous” claim.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Does Negative Campaigning Work?***

In short, the evidence suggests that negative campaigning is not so detrimental to American democracy as many scholars and commentators have feared. But for those who nonetheless dislike some forms of negative campaigning, and for candidates and their campaign managers and consultants, *the most important question in this area is whether or not negative campaign advertising works for the purposes for which it is intended*. As Laura Mansnerus noted in the *New York Times* in 2005, “The people who produce these ads and the consultants who hire them know that negative campaigning works. These people are paid way too much to be mistaken about whether poison is effective.”<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, some scholars have presumed that negative campaigning builds electoral support for the candidate mounting the negative campaign,<sup>86</sup> while others have argued that negative campaigning will backfire against those who engage in it.<sup>87</sup>

The research findings about the effectiveness of negative campaign advertising are mixed. **Some studies find that negative messages lessen voter evaluations of targeted candidates,<sup>88</sup> but other researchers caution that the bulk of the evidence suggests that negative campaigning often may be ineffective and sometimes counterproductive.**<sup>89</sup> A major reason for inconsistent findings may be that, until recently, researchers failed to distinguish among *different types* of negative campaigning.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Kim Fridkin and Paul Kenney suggested that the key to reaching a meeting of the minds between the findings of research studies and the intuitions of practitioners lies in distinguishing between, and measuring adequately, the different types of negative messaging.<sup>91</sup>

**Americans generally do not like “mean-spirited” campaigns**<sup>92</sup> One recent representative survey found that 82 percent of U.S. respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that campaign advertising was “...so nasty that I stop paying attention.”<sup>93</sup> Seventy-two percent of respondents in the same survey strongly or somewhat disagreed that “mean spirited commercials attacking the opponent are appropriate during election campaigns.”<sup>94</sup> Eighty-two percent of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that it was inappropriate to attack the personal life of a candidate, and eighty-two percent likewise strongly or somewhat disagreed that “attacking the candidate’s personal life as a young person [was] interesting.”<sup>95</sup>

Social-psychological research provides ideas and findings to help explain why **people can dislike negative campaign advertising, and yet nonetheless find themselves influenced by it**.

- Researchers have found that negative information is attended to more so than is positive information, and that negative information likewise tends to be more influential.<sup>96</sup>

- There is some evidence for a “perceptual hypothesis,” that negative information contrasts strongly with positive information and thus “stands out,” so that people tend to remember it.<sup>97</sup>
- There likewise is some evidence for a “motivational hypothesis,” that people are more interested in avoiding costs than in seeking gain. Because *negative information represents potential risk*, people are more influenced by it.<sup>98</sup>

Evaluating more directly whether, and under what conditions, negative campaigning works is no easy task. Some researchers use laboratory experiments with random assignment or field experiments with random assignment embedded in representative surveys to investigate how particular messages shape evaluations of mock candidates. Others use pre- and post-campaign surveys to examine how evaluations of candidates or intended or actual vote choice *change* as a result of the campaign, taking account of such other factors as voter political partisanship and ideology that strongly influence evaluations of candidates and election outcomes.<sup>99</sup> Neither type of study is problem free.

With laboratory experiments, *we must be concerned about “external validity,”* that is, whether the results would hold for individuals’ reactions to real candidates in real election campaigns. But studies based on surveys undertaken pre-and post-campaign often are marred by failure to use analytic strategies that explicitly recognize and take into account that both election outcomes and/or post-campaign attitudes toward candidates and candidate decisions about if and when to “go negative,” are influenced by some of the same factors. These include, for example, surveys undertaken by the campaign, candidates’ relative poll positions and numbers, and candidates’ financial resources.<sup>100</sup> Such complexities and failure to take proper account of them encourage great caution in evaluating the research findings and inferences based on them.

Similarly, we know that visuals, music and emotionally resonant “voice-overs” are used to elicit emotional responses, such as fear, and animosity, that shape voter attitudes and behavior.<sup>101</sup> *But research on negative campaigning typically has not considered the impact of these pervasive and potentially persuasive characteristics of advertising.*<sup>102</sup> As well, whereas experimental research can be certain that respondents are exposed to different types of messages at strictly calibrated levels, survey research on the impact of negative messaging measures message *content*, but only rarely measures the differences among individuals in their amount of *exposure* to that content.<sup>103</sup> Likewise, much scholarship fails to consider how similar or different a *researcher’s* evaluation of message content and tone may be from the way the message is perceived by study *respondents*.<sup>104</sup> As if all this weren’t enough, *different persons perceive the same message differently depending on various factors*, some of which—like political partisanship, ideology or positions on specific issues—may be obvious and readily incorporated into the study, but some of which may be unknown or left out of consideration.<sup>105</sup>

Pitfalls notwithstanding, a substantial body of research addresses whether, and under what conditions, negative advertising may be effective. In their recent review of this literature in the *Annual Review of Political Science*, Richard Lau and Ivy Brown Rovner explain how we can most usefully evaluate the claims against the empirical evidence:

[I]f attacking one’s opponents is an effective campaign strategy, it must result in the attacker receiving more votes than he or she would have if some other (less negative) campaign strategy had been adopted. Assuming the vote choice is little more than selecting the more highly evaluated candidate, attacks that lower mean evaluations of the target of those attacks would constitute additional evidence for the effectiveness of negative campaigns. However... [c]andidates who attack their opponents might be perceived as mean spirited or nasty, particularly by voters who were taught ‘if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.’ But even if backlash effects against sponsors of campaign attacks are frequent occurrences, attacking one’s opponent would still be an effective strategy if valuations of the target of the attacks went down

more than evaluations of the sponsor, such that the net differential evaluation of the two competing candidates worked to the advantage of the attacker.”<sup>106</sup>

Applying these criteria to relevant research studies, **Lau and Rovner reach a provocative conclusion: “Looking at all of these studies together, no one could conclude that negative campaigning is a particularly effective campaign strategy.”**<sup>107</sup> The key evidence for this assertion comes from a 2007 “meta-analytic” review of the prior universe of relevant published and unpublished studies conducted by the same scholars, along with their colleague Lee Sigelman.<sup>108</sup>

- Of the “43 studies examining the effects of negative campaigning (or exposure to particular negative advertisements) on the actual or intended vote choice of those exposed to the campaigns/advertisements,” only four showed a statistically significant positive effect of negative campaigning (the negative candidate got more votes), while six showed a statistically significant negative effect (meaning that negative campaigning was *counterproductive*).<sup>109</sup>
- Of 31 studies examining whether those targeted by negative campaign advertising experienced lesser evaluations, 12 studies found statistically significant findings that “both incumbents and challengers were liked significantly less when they were attacked by their opponent than when their opponent stayed positive.” Two studies found a statistically significant opposite effect: “evaluations of the target actually increased after the attack—which might plausibly occur if many people perceived an attack to be exaggerated, false or otherwise out of bounds, and responded in part by sympathetically increasing their evaluations of the target of the unjustified attacks.”<sup>110</sup>

But while attacking an opponent may well lead to lower evaluations of the opponent, “evaluations of the attacker may also decrease if voters are convinced the attacks are unjustified or mean-spirited.”<sup>111</sup>

- Of the 40 relevant studies, 19 had statistically significant findings that negative advertising lowered evaluations of the candidate who attacked, and only two had statistically significant findings that “evaluations of the attacker” rose as a function of the attacks.<sup>112</sup>

**In sum, Lau and Rovner are extremely skeptical that negative campaigning works. But researchers examining different types of negative campaign advertising suggest that different kinds of negative advertising may have different effects.**

Kim Fridkin and Paul Kenney have been especially tenacious in trying to tease out such differing effects. In a 2004 study, these researchers combined survey data from the 1988-1992 National Election Studies/Senate Election Studies with content coding of an independent data base of political advertisements in 97 contested Senate races. They examined the impact of various types of campaign messaging on citizens’ evaluation of candidates, measured by the National Election Study/Senate Election Study “feeling thermometer.” The thermometer goes from 0-100, with 50 representing neutrality. “The higher the number, the warmer or more favorable” a respondent is toward a candidate, and “the lower the number the colder or less favorable.”<sup>113</sup> The study distinguished negative advertisements about *issues* from those about *persons/traits*, and also distinguished *contrast advertisements* from pure *attack advertisements*. As well, the study measured *campaign managers’ perceptions of whether the campaign involved “mudslinging.”*<sup>114</sup>

- Negative advertisements focused on persons/traits had no impact on respondents’ evaluations of either incumbents or challengers.
- Challengers *and* incumbents who *focused their negative messaging exclusively on their opponents’ policy views did lower evaluations of their opponents.*
- Pure attack advertising worked better than contrast advertising.

- Among those who were ill-informed about politics, mudslinging campaigns adversely affected the evaluation of both incumbents and challengers. The politically knowledgeable remained unaffected by campaign mudslinging.
- While *challengers experienced no backlash from issue-focused negative campaigning, incumbents did suffer backlash effects*, though these were not quite as large as the impact that their issue-focused negative campaigning had on their opponents.

**It is reassuring that, at least in this study, voters' evaluations of candidates were responsive to issue-focused negative messages but *not* to trait-focused negative messages.** This is because **issue-focused negative messages are useful for informing voters.**<sup>115</sup> While some person/trait focused negative messages (“my opponent lacks experience holding elected office”) are relevant to vote choice, many person/trait messages are not. **That backlash effects of negative campaigning differed to the disadvantage of otherwise advantaged incumbents also might be viewed as reassuring.**

More recent studies by the same research team contain findings that are only partly reassuring to those who would like to see negative campaigning diminish. In a 2008 study, Fridkin and Kenney embedded experimental manipulations of civil and uncivil, relevant and irrelevant negative messaging in a representative public opinion survey.<sup>116</sup>

- **Irrelevant negative messages were “the *least* effective**, leading to the most positive impressions of the targeted candidate.<sup>117</sup> This is a finding that those hoping to diminish negative campaigning will find comforting.
- But **relevant and uncivil messages were “the *most* effective message at bringing about the desired outcome of lowering citizens' impressions of the targeted candidate.”**<sup>118</sup> This finding will not comfort those who would hope to eliminate all campaign incivility.
- Negative messages that were both relevant and civil yielded results in the middle, “leading people to develop somewhat negative views of the targeted candidate.”<sup>119</sup>

**Tellingly, results were the same when the researchers analyzed the impact of their experimental manipulation of relevance and civility and when they analyzed the impact of respondents' own perceptions of the relevance and civility of the messages.**<sup>120</sup>

Fridkin and Kenney's most recent study examined how civil and uncivil, relevant and irrelevant negative messages may produce different effects depending on *variations in individual voters' tolerance of civility*. This 2011 study combined a representative 2006 survey of over 1,000 respondents in 21 of 29 Senate races that had majority party incumbents and minority party challengers, with data on the political advertisements aired during the campaigns, and with news coverage of campaigns in state newspapers.<sup>121</sup> The study's coders considered only 12 percent of the negative advertisements to be irrelevant, but they considered 47 percent of the negative advertisements to be uncivil.<sup>122</sup> The researchers created a measure reflecting a combination of message relevance/irrelevance and civility/incivility along a three-point scale. Candidates got a score of three if coders rated their commercials high on relevance but low on civility, a two if coders rated their commercials low on relevance but high on civility, and a one if the coders rated the commercials low on relevance, whether or not the commercials were civil.<sup>123</sup>

Consistent with these researchers' 2008 study, Fridkin and Kenney's 2011 study provides some good news and some not-so-good news for those who would like to see negative campaigning diminish. **Incumbents suffer backlash effects from negative campaigning and *irrelevant* negative campaign messaging is again ineffective.** In addition, ***uncivil* negative messaging may well *not* be effective in lowering voter evaluations of targeted candidates so long as these voters have a high tolerance for incivility or the uncivil message is also irrelevant.** In contrast, ***uncivil* negative messaging may well**

**lower voter evaluations of targeted candidates as long as message incivility is combined with message relevance and voters are not highly tolerant of incivility.**<sup>124</sup> More specifically:

- While respondents generally disliked both irrelevant and uncivil messages,<sup>125</sup> some respondents were more tolerant of uncivil or irrelevant messages than were others: “People who are more strongly attached to the political parties are more tolerant of uncivil and irrelevant messages, as are people who are more interested in political campaigns. Ideology is related to people’s tolerance of negativity, with conservatives being more tolerant of uncivil and irrelevant messages compared with more liberal respondents....[M]en are more tolerant of uncivil and irrelevant negative messages when compared with women...[O]lder people are less tolerant of uncivil and irrelevant messages. And politically sophisticated citizens, who are most skilled at sorting through relevant and irrelevant discourse, appear to be less tolerant of irrelevant messages.”<sup>126</sup>
- Controlling for many other factors that help shape respondent evaluations of candidates, including the competitiveness of the campaign, criticisms in the news media, respondent’s ideology and respondent’s party preference, the researchers found that, as the “relevance and incivility of the advertisements increase[d], people’s evaluations of the targeted candidates declin[ed]. This finding [was] consistent regardless of whether respondents [were] evaluating the candidate in terms of 1) personality traits, 2) affective impressions, 3) issue competence, or 4) overall impressions.”<sup>127</sup>
- For respondents who were highly tolerant of irrelevance and incivility, the variable relevance and incivility of messages did not matter, but for those with low tolerance for irrelevance and incivility, advertisements’ variability in relevance and incivility did matter.<sup>128</sup>
- Consistent with much other research on this issue, *negative campaigning produced backlash against incumbents, but not against challengers.*<sup>129</sup>

## In Sum

Clearly, there is more work to be done on the relative effectiveness of different kinds of negative campaigning. But the evidence we have to date suggests that, **at least so long as negative campaigning is issue-based or focused on relevant characteristics or traits of candidates and so long as it remains civil, negative campaigning is not harmful and may well be productive for American democracy.** After reviewing 40 years of content of Presidential campaign ads aired on television, John Geer found that most negative advertisements were not distracting, but instead reflected issues of concern to voters.<sup>130</sup>

To be most informative however, such issue-focused negative advertisements should avoid arguments that make their conclusions without providing empirical evidence or the steps in a reasoning process by which the putative negative effects of particular issue positions will occur.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, while the research suggests that **negative campaigning often is ineffective and sometimes can be counter-productive, especially for incumbents, and that campaigners and their consultants have strong incentives to avoid irrelevant negative messaging, they have no such “natural” incentives to avoid incivility, as long as it is coupled with relevant messaging.** Americans dislike uncivil negative campaign advertisements, even when they find these to be relevant. But they nonetheless attend to relevant but uncivil negative messages in ways that may lower voter evaluations of the *target* of those messages. By contributing to partisan news pages, blogs and other negative online messaging, *the American public also contributes to the current climate of negative campaigning, including misinformation.*<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Stryker, Department of Sociology, and Director of Research, National Institute for Civil Discourse, Carli Brosseau, School of Government and Public Policy, and Zachary Schrank, Department of Sociology, all of The University of Arizona, prepared this research brief (September 12, 2011).

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- <sup>2</sup> John G. Geer, *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns*, University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> See Richard R. Lau, Lee Sigelman and Ivy Brown Rovner, "The Effects of Negative Political Campaigns: a Meta-Analytic Reassessment," *Journal of Politics* 69, 2007, pp. 176-209.
- <sup>4</sup> David Broder, "Turned off by Triviality," *Washington Post*, October 6, 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 1992.
- <sup>6</sup> Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, "The Impact of Negativity on Citizens' Evaluations of Candidates," *American Politics Research* 32(5), 2004, pp. 570-605, 571.
- <sup>7</sup> Richard R. Lau and Ivy Brown Rovner, "Negative Campaigning," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, 2009, pp. 285-306; Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, *Going Negative: How Negative Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*, The Free Press, 1997; Owen G. Abbe, Paul S. Herrnson, David B. Magelby and Kelly Peterson, "Are Professional Campaigns More Negative?" in *Playing Hardball: Campaigning for the US Congress*, ed. P. S. Herrnson, Prentice Hall, 2001, pp. 70-91; James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson, *Campaign Warriors: Political Consultants in Elections*, Brookings Institution, 2000.
- <sup>8</sup> Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, "The Dimensions of Negative Messages," *American Politics Research* 36 (5), 2008, pp. 694-723, 694.
- <sup>9</sup> Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, "Variability in Citizens' Reactions to Different Types of Negative Campaigns," *American Journal of Political Science* 55(2), 2011, pp. 307-325; Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney, *supra* n. 8; Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7.
- <sup>10</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8; Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9; Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7; Steven E. Finkel and John G. Geer, "A Spot Check: Casting Doubt on the Demobilizing Effect of Attack Advertising," *American Journal of Political Science* 42(2), 1998, pp. 573-595, 579.
- <sup>11</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, p. 292.
- <sup>13</sup> Stergios Skaperdas and Bernard Grofman, "Modeling Negative Campaigning," *American Political Science Review* 89(1), 1995, pp. 49-61.
- <sup>14</sup> Kim Fridkin Kahn. "Gender Differences in Campaign Messages: The Political Advertisements of Men and Women Candidates for U.S. Senate," *Political Research Quarterly* 46(3), 1993, pp. 481-502; Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, "How Negative Campaigning Enhances Knowledge of Senate Elections, in *Crowded Airwaves*, ed. J. A. Thurber, C. J. Nelson and D. A. Dulio, Brookings Institution, 2000, pp. 65-95; Richard R. Lau and Gerald M. Pomper, "Negative Campaigning by U.S. Senate Candidates," *Party Politics* 7(Jan.), 2001, pp. 69-87; Richard R. Lau and Gerald M. Pomper, *Negative Campaigning: An Analysis of U.S. Senate Elections*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2004; David E. Proctor. William J. Schenck-Hamlin and Karen A. Haase, "Exploring the Role of Gender in the Development of Negative Political Advertisements," *Women and Politics* 14(2), 1994, pp. 1-22.
- <sup>15</sup> Finkel and Geer 1998, *supra* n. 10; John Geer and Richard R. Lau, "Filling in the Blanks: A New Method for Estimating Campaign Effects," *British Journal of Political Science* 36(2), 2006, pp. 268-290; Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra*, n. 7, p. 299 and Figure 3; Kim Fridkin Kahn and Patrick J. Kenney, "Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship between Negativity and Participation," *American Political Science Review* 93(4), 1999, pp. 877-889.
- <sup>16</sup> Lau and Pomper 2001, *supra* n. 14; Lau, Sigelman and Rovner, *supra* n. 3; Robert A. Jackson, Jeffery J. Mondak and Robert Huckfeldt, "Examining the Possible Corrosive Impact of Negative Advertising on Citizens' Attitudes Toward Politics," *Political Research Quarterly* 62(1), 2009, pp. 55-69.
- <sup>17</sup> Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, *supra* n. 7; Brian L. Roddy and Gina M. Garramone, "Appeals and Strategies of Negative Political Advertising," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 32, 1988, pp. 415-427; Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7.
- <sup>19</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8; Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> See e.g., discussion of methodological issues in Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, and in Lau and Pomper 2004, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>23</sup> Lau and Rover 2009, *supra* n. 7; Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2, pp. 1-3; Jamieson 1992, *supra* n. 5.
- <sup>24</sup> Sarah Sobieraj and Jeffrey M. Barry, "From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News," *Political Communication* 28, 2011, pp. 19-41; Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Interplay of Influence: News, Advertising, Politics, and the Internet*, Wadsworth, 2006, pp. 305-316.

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- <sup>25</sup>See, for example, Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6, pp. 572-573, and citations therein. See also Richard R. Lau, "Two Explanations for Negativity Effects in Political Behavior," *American Journal of Political Science* 29, 1985, pp. 119-138.
- <sup>26</sup>Pieter J. Fourie, *Media Studies: Vol. 2, Content, Audiences and Production*, Juta Academic, 2004, p. 113; Morris Fiorina with Samuel Adams and Jeremy C. Pope. *Culture Wars: The Myth of a Polarized America*, Third Edition, Longman, 2011, p. 22.
- <sup>27</sup>Deana A. Rohlinger, "American Media and Deliberative Democratic Processes," *Sociological Theory* 25(2), 2007, pp. 122-148; David Althade and Robert P. Snow, *Media Worlds in the Post Journalism Era*, De Gruyter, 1991; Robin Stryker, Martha Scarpellino and Mellissa Holtzman, "Political Culture Wars 1990s Style: The Drum-Beat of Quotas in Media Framing of the Civil Rights Act of 1991," *Research in Stratification and Social Mobility* 17, 1999, pp. 33-106; Jamieson and Campbell 2006, *supra* n. 24, p. 338.
- <sup>28</sup>Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra*, n. 7; Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2; Ansolohere and Iyengar 1997, *supra* n. 7. The nature and influence of media coverage of political campaigning is a topic in its own right (see e.g., Jamieson and Campbell 2006, *supra* n. 24). This topic enters here to the extent that some studies assessing the influence of negative campaigning also assess the influence of "negativity" in media coverage.
- <sup>29</sup>Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2, p. 8.
- <sup>30</sup>See also Jerry W. Lee and Robin Stryker, *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 4: Classical Rhetoric, Contemporary Science and Modern Civil Discourse*, The University of Arizona, August 3, 2011; J. Taylor Danielson and Robin Stryker, *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 5: Political Knowledge, Persuasion and Campaign Rhetoric*, The University of Arizona, August 30, 2011.
- <sup>31</sup>Finkel and Geer 1998, *supra* n. 10, p. 579, n. 2.
- <sup>32</sup>Deborah Jordan Brooks and John G. Geer, "Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate," *American Journal of Political Science* 51(1), 2007, pp. 1-16, 4. For example, Brooks and Geer (2007, p. 4) contrast the person/trait-based statement, "My opponent has not been a leader of our community. This lack of leadership will prevent him from being an effective representative," with the issue-based statement, "Education in our communities is suffering today because my opponent has failed to support our local teachers and our schools."
- <sup>33</sup>Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Everything You Think you Know about Politics... and Why You're Wrong*, Basic Books, 2000, p. 99.
- <sup>34</sup>Finkel and Geer 1998, *supra* n. 10; Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2. See also Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7; Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8; Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9; Brooks and Geer 2007, *supra* n. 32; Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6.
- <sup>35</sup>Brooks and Geer 2007, *supra* n. 32.
- <sup>36</sup>Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6, Appendix, p. 595.
- <sup>37</sup>Brooks and Geer 2007, *supra* n. 32, p. 1.
- <sup>38</sup>Brooks and Geer 2007, *supra* n. 32, p. 5.
- <sup>39</sup>Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6, p. 578.
- <sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup>Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8, p. 700.
- <sup>42</sup>The full text used in all experimental conditions, including variations in relevance and civility, is available in Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8, pp. 700-702.
- <sup>43</sup>Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8. Respondents were asked "to respond to three statements, ranging on a 4-point scale from strongly agree, to strongly disagree, to assess their impression of [an] advertisement's relevance: 'I learned some useful information about the Senate campaign from the advertisement,' 'I think the topic of the advertisement was irrelevant for politics,' and 'I found the topic of the advertisement important.'" To assess perceptions of civility, the researchers "asked people to respond to three statements, ranging on a 4-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree... 'The advertisement was offensive.' 'I would call the advertisement polite,' and 'The tone of the advertisement was hostile.' We created an index of civility, ranging from low to high civility, based on respondents' responses to these three statements" (Fridkin and Kenney 2008, p. 704).
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 709.
- <sup>45</sup>Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2, p. 23.
- <sup>46</sup>These are contained in the Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive at the University of Oklahoma.
- <sup>47</sup>Finkel and Geer 1998, *supra* n. 10; Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2.
- <sup>48</sup>Lau and Pomper 2004, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

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- <sup>50</sup> Emmett H. Buell, Jr. and Lee Sigelman, *Attack Politics: Negativity in Presidential Campaigns since 1960*, University of Kansas Press, 2008.
- <sup>51</sup> Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2. See also Robin Stryker, *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No. 6: Political Polarization*, The University of Arizona, September 1, 2011.
- <sup>52</sup> Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2, p. 145.
- <sup>53</sup> Geer 2006, pp. 146-147; Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 51.
- <sup>54</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8, p. 713.
- <sup>55</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, p. 288.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 292.
- <sup>57</sup> Skaperdas and Grofman 1995, *supra* n. 13. A few studies suggest that poll position is not important in predicting when negative campaigning will be used (see Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7).
- <sup>58</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7.
- <sup>59</sup> Kahn 1993, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>60</sup> Kahn and Kenney 2000, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>62</sup> Lau and Pomper 2001, *supra* n. 14; Lau and Pomper, 2004, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>63</sup> Proctor, Schenck-Hamlin and Haas 1994, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>64</sup> Lau, Sigelman and Rovner 2007, *supra* n. 3.
- <sup>65</sup> Jackson, Mondak and Huckfeldt 2009, *supra* n.16, p. 55.
- <sup>66</sup> Stephen Ansolabehere, Shanto Iyengar, Adam Simon and Nicholas Valentino, "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" *American Political Science Review* 88(4), 1994, pp. 829-838.
- <sup>67</sup> Finkel and Geer 1998, *supra* n. 10.
- <sup>68</sup> John G. Geer and Richard R. Lau, "Filling in the Blanks: A New Method for Estimating Campaign Effects," *British Journal of Political Science* 36 (2), 2006, pp. 269-290.
- <sup>69</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, p. 299 and Figure 3.
- <sup>70</sup> Kahn and Kenney 1999, *supra* n. 15. While the researchers could examine the variable content of the candidates' advertising, they did not have information on the relative frequency of airing of the different messages. The advertisements are available from the Political Commercial Archive at the University of Oklahoma.
- <sup>71</sup> This measure was positively and substantially correlated with the way *Congressional Quarterly's* pre-election campaign synopses described the tone of the election, but the correlation was far from perfect.
- <sup>72</sup> For more on the definition and measurement of "mudslinging," see the text associated with notes 39 and 40, *supra*.
- <sup>73</sup> Kahn and Kenney 1999, *supra* n. 15, p. 883.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>75</sup> See Kahn and Kenney 1999, *supra* n. 15; Fridkin and Kenney 2004 *supra* n. 6, p. 578.
- <sup>76</sup> Kahn and Kenney 1999, *supra* n. 15, p. 884, emphasis ours.
- <sup>77</sup> See e.g., Brooks and Geer 2007, *supra*, n. 32, p. 11; See also Marc J. Hetherington, "Turned Off or Turned Out? How Polarization Affects Political Engagement," in *Red and Blue Nation? Volume Two, Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics*, ed. P. S. Nivola and D. W. Brady, Hoover Institution and Brookings Institution, 2008, pp. 1-33; Deborah Jordan Brooks and John G. Geer, Comment," in *Red and Blue Nation? Volume Two, Consequences and Correction of America's Polarized Politics*, ed. P. S. Nivola and D. W. Brady, Hoover Institution and Brookings Institution, 2008, pp. 34-53.
- <sup>78</sup> Lau and Pomper 2001, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>79</sup> Lau, Sigelman and Rovner 2007, *supra* n. 3.
- <sup>80</sup> Jackson, Mondak and Huckfeldt 2009, *supra* n. 16.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid*. This study contained no data on trust. The data on political advertisements came from the Wisconsin Advertising Project.
- <sup>82</sup> Diana Mutz and Brian Reeves, "The New Videomalaise: Effects of Televised Incivility on Political Trust," *American Political Science Review* 99(1), 2005, pp. 1-15.
- <sup>83</sup> Brooks and Geer 2007, *supra* n. 32.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 1, 5. See Appendix A. p. 13 for examples.
- <sup>85</sup> Laura Mansnerus, "Forrester Tosses his 'Hail Mary' Ad," *New York Times*, Oct. 23, p. NJ14. See also Abbe et al. 2001, *supra* n. 7; Thurber and Nielson 2000, *supra* n. 7.

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- <sup>86</sup> Victor Kamber, *Poison Politics: Are Negative Campaigns Destroying Democracy?* Perseus, 1997; Kerwin C. Swint, *Political Consultants and Negative Campaigning: The Secrets of the Pros*, University Press of America, 1998.
- <sup>87</sup> Gina Garramone, "Voter Response to Negative Political Ads," *Journalism Quarterly*, 61(Summer), 1984, pp. 250-259; Neal J. Roese and Gerald N. Sande, "Backlash Effects in Attack Politics," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 23(8), 1993, pp. 632-53
- <sup>88</sup> Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, *supra* n. 7; Roddy and Garamone 1988, *supra* n. 17; Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6.
- <sup>89</sup> See the research reviewed in Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7.
- <sup>90</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6; Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8.
- <sup>91</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8.
- <sup>92</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9, p. 314.
- <sup>93</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9, p. 314. Forty-seven percent of respondents strongly agreed with this statement.
- <sup>94</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9, p. 314. Forty-five percent of respondents strongly agreed with this statement.
- <sup>95</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9, p. 314, with 55 percent strongly agreeing and 27 percent somewhat agreeing with the first statement, and 69 percent strongly disagreeing and 21 percent somewhat disagreeing with the second statement.
- <sup>96</sup> D. Kanouse and I. Hanson, Jr., "Negativity in Evaluations," in *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior*, ed. E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R.E. Nisbett, S. Valins, B. Weiner, General Learning, 1971, pp. 47-62. See also Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6.
- <sup>97</sup> Lau 1985, *supra* n. 25.
- <sup>98</sup> Lau 1985, *supra* n. 25. See also H. Denis Wu and Nicole S. Dahmen, "Web Sponsorship and Campaign Effects: Assessing the Difference between Positive and Negative Web Sites," *Journal of Political Marketing* 9(4), 2010, pp. 314-329. These authors concluded that, while "apathetic people may believe in *positive* campaigns [they] do not necessarily remember them; they may not believe in *negative* campaigns but do remember them" (p. 326, emphasis ours).
- <sup>99</sup> See e.g., Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7 for some discussion of these different types of studies. For more discussion and examples of different kinds of studies, see e.g., Mutz and Reeves 2005, *supra* n. 82; Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6; Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8; Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9; and Lau and Pomper 2004, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* "Endogeneity" and "selection bias" are the terms used in the literature to discuss and propose appropriate remedies for this type of problem. See e.g., Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, and Lau and Pomper 2004, *supra* n. 14.
- <sup>101</sup> Lee and Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 30; Danielson and Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 30.
- <sup>102</sup> Ted Brader, "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions," *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2), 2005, pp. 388-405.
- <sup>103</sup> Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997, *supra* n. 7.
- <sup>104</sup> Lee Sigelman and Mark Kugler, "Why Is Research on the Effects of Negative Campaigning So Inconclusive," Understanding Citizens' Perceptions of Negativity," *Journal of Politics* 65(1), 2003, pp. 142-160.
- <sup>105</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8; Fridkin and Kenney 2011 *supra* n. 9.
- <sup>106</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, p. 295.
- <sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, *supra* n. 7, p. 296, emphasis ours.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* For more discussion of the technique of meta-analysis, its advantages and its pitfalls, see Robin Stryker, Danielle Docka-Filipek and Pamela Wald, "Employment Discrimination Law and Industrial Psychology: Social Science as Social Authority and The Co-Production of Law and Science" *Law & Social Inquiry*, 2011 (in press).
- <sup>109</sup> Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7, p. 296.
- <sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, *supra* n. 7, p. 296
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, *supra* n. 7, p. 296.
- <sup>113</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6, p. 595.
- <sup>114</sup> All findings in the next set of bullet points in the text are from Fridkin and Kenney 2004, *supra* n. 6. For the definition and measurement of "mudslinging," see the text associated with notes 39 and 40.
- <sup>115</sup> Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2.

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<sup>116</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2008, *supra* n. 8. For information on how the experimental conditions of relevance versus irrelevance, and civility versus incivility, were created, see note 42, and the text associated with this note. See also notes 43 and 44, and the text associated with these notes, for the measures of *respondents' perceptions* of relevance/irrelevance and civility/incivility, and for how these compared with the researcher-created experimental conditions. The complete text used in all experimental conditions is available in Fridkin and Kenney 2008, pp. 700-702.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 708, emphasis ours.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 708, emphasis ours.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 708.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9.

<sup>122</sup> For the relevance code, coders were instructed to evaluate the relevance of advertising content *for governing*, and to answer in terms of whether they thought “MOST PEOPLE viewing an advertisement would consider the content very relevant, somewhat relevant, somewhat irrelevant, or very irrelevant” (Fridkin and Kenney 2011, p. 311, n. 14, capitalization in original). Coders were reminded that advertisements vary in topic, such as: “a candidate’s past drug use (e.g., in college), a candidate’s vote for a tax increase while serving in the House of Representatives, a former spouse of a candidate accusing the candidate of marital infidelity in a divorce proceeding a decade earlier, or an opponent criticizing a candidate for his or her lack of electoral experience” (Fridkin and Kenney, p. 311, n. 14). For civility, the codebook instructions reminded the coders that, “Some ads, even if negative, present the information in a civil matter (diplomatically, without derision, etc.), while other ads rely on a more uncivil tone (e.g., overly strident, rude, discourteous),” and coders were told to evaluate whether “most people watching the ad would consider it somewhat civil, very civil, somewhat uncivil or very uncivil” (Fridkin and Kenney, p. 311, n. 15). “We adopted a generous interpretation for determining civility given the rough-and-tumble nature of campaign messages in U.S. Senate campaigns. That is, there needed to be an *explicit* use of harsh, shrill or pejorative adjectives describing candidates, their policies, or their personal traits for an advertisement to be considered uncivil” (Fridkin and Kenney 2011, p. 312, emphasis ours). Examples of statements in advertisements coded as civil were “The candidate voted 18 times to raise taxes,” and “He talks conservative but his record says otherwise.” Examples of advertisements that were coded uncivil are “The Senator shows a disgusting display of arrogance” and “After all these years, can’t he offer more than smears and distortions?” (Fridkin and Kenney 2011, p. 312).

<sup>123</sup> This scaling makes sense, given that Fridkin and Kenney (2008) found a continuum of effectiveness, with the relevant but uncivil messages being the *most* effective, the irrelevant messages being the *least* effective and the relevant but uncivil messages being of “in-between” effectiveness.

<sup>124</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9.

<sup>125</sup> See notes 93-95, and text associated with these notes, *supra*.

<sup>126</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9, p. 315.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Fridkin and Kenney 2011, *supra* n. 9. See also Lau and Pomper 2004, *supra* n. 14; Lau, Sigelman and Rovner 2007, *supra* n. 3; Lau and Rovner 2009, *supra* n. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Geer 2006, *supra* n. 2, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> See the research on “easy” versus “hard” arguments, discussed in Danielson and Stryker 2011, *supra* n. 30.

<sup>132</sup> See e.g., Jamieson and Campbell 2006, *supra* n. 24. Some discussion of both “negativity” and incivility in public discourse online can be found in Robin Stryker and Heidi Reynolds-Stenson, *National Institute for Civil Discourse Research Brief No 1: Civil Discourse Online*, The University of Arizona, July 28, 2011.