Negative Campaigning in a Multiparty System

Kasper M. Hansen & Rasmus Tue Pedersen

University of Copenhagen, Department of Political Science
kmh@ifs.ku.dk; rasmus_tue@hotmail.com
Øster Farimagsgade 5,
Postbox 2099, DK-1014 Copenhagen K, Denmark
Negative Campaigning in a Multiparty System

Abstract

Research in political campaigning in Scandinavian countries is inadequate, and research in negative campaigning is entirely non-existent. A negative campaign message is defined as an explicit critique of the political opponent. Applying this definition to the 2005 Danish election indicates that negative campaigning comprises a very limited aspect of the political campaigning in the course of this election. The opposition tends to employ negative tactics the most in their attempts to establish their political platform. The media provided extensive coverage to the few negative campaign messages, thus presenting a biased sense of the political campaign to the general public. This biased media coverage encourages parties to ‘go negative’ in their respective campaigns in the battle for media attention.

Keyword: Attack ads, Contrast ads, Denmark, news coverage, television, political advisement, tone, political commercials, election campaign, elections.
Negative Campaigning in a Multiparty System

Introduction

When compared internationally, Danish election campaigns have been described as traditional and inexpensive, because parties have been “reluctant to make use of many of the paraphernalia of contemporary campaigns” (Bille et al. 1992:79). In 1987 and 1995, however, the public financial support for parties was increased substantially. Campaign spending has correspondingly increased, e.g. one estimate of campaign spending suggests that while the parties spent 77 million DKK (about 10.3 million euros) in the 2001 election, they spent more than 100 million DKK (about 13.5 million euros) in the 2005 election (Jønsson 2004). Moreover, the use of modern campaign methods such as professional advertising and media agencies and the employment of focus groups, opinion polling, and Internet communications have also become more prominent and widespread in the last couple of election campaigns (Ibid: Hansen & Pedersen 2007).

Despite these changes in election campaigning, few studies have analyzed the effect of these changes in the Danish context or similar changes in the other Scandinavian countries. The article in hand will address this lack of research in election campaigning in the Danish context by focusing on the use of negative campaigning in the 2005 general election. Negative campaigning is especially interesting due to its controversial nature. Political commentators often describe negative campaigning in pessimistic terms, pointing to the unconstructive tone and devastating effects negative campaigning presumably has on the general political debate.
The contribution of this study is to examine the use of negative campaigning based on empirical data from a multiparty system, where political advertising from political parties and political movement is forbidden on television and public radio.

**Negative Campaigning**

Negative campaigning “only means talking about the opponent – the (deficient) nature of his or her programs, accomplishments, qualifications, associates, and so on” (Lau & Pomper 2001:72) or “attacks the other candidate personally, the issues for which the other candidate stands, or the party of the other candidate” (Skaperdas & Grofman 1995:49). That is also to say that “negative campaigning is not lying and stealing and cheating, it is criticizing the opponent” (Lau & Pomper 2001:72), which sometimes tends to create some misunderstanding in the media. Negative campaigning is an analytical distinction and not a normative distinction, i.e. the negative campaigning distinction says noting about whether negative campaigning is desirable or not in modern democracy. These oft-cited definitions are related to the American two-party system and highlight the fact that negative campaigning is often seen as being directed at a specific candidate. If that is the case, however, negative campaigns directed towards political parties would be excluded. Sanders & Norris (2005:526) attempts to capture this exclusion by defining negative campaigning as “criticising the record of the opposing party or parties; questioning the judgement, experience and probity of opposing leaders; and generating fear about what the future might hold if the opposing party or parties were in power.” Pooling the targets of negative campaigning from the three aforementioned definitions includes: programs, accomplishments, qualifications, associates, personalities, issue positions, party records, judgment, probity and experience and even an ‘and so on’. The many
examples of the targets of negative campaigning demonstrate that negative campaigning is not limited to targeting e.g. the personality of the opponent. Our general definition of a negative campaign message, which closely follows the definitions referred to above, simply state that the message must include an explicit critique of the political opponent.

In the following empirical analysis, however, we will narrow the focus to the negative campaigning that takes place when the sponsors and targets are political parties or candidates running for parliament in the 2005 election.

Nevertheless, we are aware that interest organizations and party-independent groups usually also contribute to campaigns – and often in negative terms (Pedersen 2006). Furthermore, this operationalization demands that it is possible to identify the sponsor as well as the target of the negative campaign; otherwise it would be impossible to analyze why the sponsor uses negative campaigning and to discern its effect on the target.

The major and ongoing controversy over whether negative campaigning tends to demobilize (Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995) or mobilize the electorate (Kahn & Kenney 1999; Freedman & Goldstein 1999; Lau & Pomper 2001; 2004) has been revitalized, as Brooks (2006) disproves the general demobilizing thesis using Ansolabehere & Iyengar’s original dataset. She concludes that campaign tone has no significant relationship to turnout.

As to whether negative and positive campaigning have different perception and persuasion effects on the electorate, the research appears quite inconclusive, e.g. Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1995:91) finds mixed results; Min (2004) finds that negative campaigning tends to undermine support for the sponsor; Shapiro & Rieger (1992) shows how negative ads can be more effective than positive ads in terms of
candidate rating. Lau et al. (1999) reviews 52 empirical studies of negative campaigning, concluding that “there is simply no evidence in the research literature that negative political advertisements are any more effective than positive political ads” (ibid:851). Nevertheless, there is no shortage of professional campaign architects and consultants believing otherwise (Fridkin & Kenny, 2004:571). More recent research finds that negative campaign is more effective for the challengers, while positive campaigning works more effectively for the incumbents (Lau & Pomper, 2002; Fridkin & Kenny, 2004:580). Brooks & Geer’s (2007) differentiation between negative or positive, civilized or uncivilized, and issue-focused or personal-focused campaign tones reveals that it is the uncivilized tone in general, and the personal uncivilized tone in specific, that the public values the least. These findings correspond to Fridkin & Kenny’s (2004) study, which shows that negative ads attacking the opponent’s personal characteristics have no effect on the overall rating of the opponent, while negative campaigning attacking an opponent’s policy position lowers the evaluation of the opponent among the citizens. In other words, negative campaigning tends to work as intended if it focuses on policies rather than on the personal characteristics of the candidates.

To our knowledge, there are no published studies of negative campaigning in the Scandinavian multiparty context. The hypotheses concerning the use of negative campaigning are largely developed with reference to the American two-party system, which cannot be directly transferred to the Scandinavian proportional electoral (multiparty) system, where many parties compete through media that do not allow the use of political advertisements on television and public service radio. Denmark and Sweden both have a ban on political advertisements in television and public service radio. Norway only has a ban on political advertisements in television² (Siune 1987;
It is therefore necessary to develop hypotheses concerning the use of negative campaigning adapted to the Scandinavian context.

One of the most established theses in the American context of negative campaigning is that challengers tend to use negative campaigning more than incumbents (Lau & Pomber 2001; Benoit et al. 2000:69). This is because the incumbents can emphasize their former performance in e.g. Congress or the presidency, i.e. they can point to their work to pass popular bills or efforts made to stop unpopular legislation. Conversely, the challenger can only emphasize future deeds and promises. As such, the challengers’ promises will tend to be rather abstract and insubstantial compared to the incumbents’ tangible and proven record (Trent & Friedenberg 2000:87; Mayer 1996:451). This will put the challengers on defensive, but it will also set an election agenda largely framed around the record of the incumbent, leaving the challengers little choice but to criticize the incumbents’ record. This is the first step toward negative campaigning. Combined with having the odds against them, the challengers would *ceteris paribus* ‘go negative’.

However, the Scandinavian proportional electoral system focuses on the party rather than the candidate, thus rendering the challenger/incumbent distinction less obvious. One way of adapting the thesis would be to apply it to the government level, i.e. for the same reasons as above, we would expect the opposition parties to be more inclined to exploit negative campaigning than parties in government or parties supporting the government. This is our first hypothesis, which reads:

\[
H_{\text{opposition}}: \text{ Parties in opposition use negative campaigning to a greater extent than do parties in government or parties supporting the sitting government.}
\]
Another thesis concerning the use of negative campaigning is that the party which is behind in the polls (runner-up) would be inclined to apply negative campaigning to a greater degree than the parties leading in the polls (frontrunners) (Theilmann & Wilhite 1998:1052). Empirically, several studies have confirmed this thesis (e.g. Damore 2002; Haynes & Rhine 2002). The reasoning behind this thesis is that as negative campaigning can potentially hurt the sponsoring party more than it helps due to the risk of being portrayed as weak and desperate by the media and opponents (the boomerang or backfire effect), frontrunners will be disinclined to gamble with their leading position (Skaperdas & Grofman 1995). Furthermore, if a frontrunner goes negative, i.e. targets the runners-up, it would provide the runners-up with a platform from which to respond to the negative campaigning. On the other hand, the runners-up are less risk averse, as they have less to lose and are attempting to establish a platform from which they can directly confront the frontrunner. This leads to our second hypothesis, which reads:

\[ H_{\text{opinion poll}}: \text{ The inclination for a party to go negative is inversely related to its position in the opinion polls.} \]

In our quest to understand the use of negative campaigning, we must proceed beyond the party level and analyze how the media focuses attention on negative campaigning. The liberalization of the party media and the eradication of the close link between party and media render the media an independent filter for much of the communication in post-modern campaigning (Norries et al. 1999). Competition among the media tends have intensified in a time with falling circulation of news
paper and encourage media to follow the specific criteria of what defined ‘good’ news, i.e. news which can be reduced to a conflict between few positions and where these positions can be assigned to specific actors (Cook 1998:23; Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995:116; 154; Lund 2002; Christiansen & Togeby 2006; Jenssen & Jamtoy 2005). Ansolabehere & Iyengar (1995:134) emphasize this by saying:

“Negative advertisements make particularly tasty morsels for the media. For journalists, it is a no-lose situation when candidates attack one another. Allegations of dishonesty and incompetence lay the seeds of controversy and scandal. Even if the charges prove to be false, reporters can always rail against the candidate who aired the attack for slandering his or her opponent and engaging in sleazy campaigning. The fight itself becomes the story.”

Our third hypothesis reads:

\[ H_{\text{media}}: \text{Negative campaigning receives relatively more attention in the news than positive campaigning.} \]

The first step in analyzing the hypotheses would be to provide a benchmark for future comparisons of negative campaigning, i.e. a descriptive study of usage in the 2005 general election campaign. Secondly, we will analyze each of the three hypotheses using the Danish general election of 2005 as the case.

**How negative?**
The first step towards understanding the use of negative campaigning must be to present an overview of its use. Several attempts have been made at classifying the campaign contributions in ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ terms. Many simply apply a coding as either negative or positive (Lau & Pomper 2001:73; Sanders & Norris 2005; Damore 2002:670), while others apply a three-category coding, e.g. no negative message, minor emphasis on negativity, and major emphasis on negativity (Kahn & Kenney 1999:879). Here, we will adapt a five-point coding scheme greatly inspired by Freedman & Goldstein’s (1999:1193) coding. 1: exclusively positive, 2: primarily positive, 3: balanced positive and negative, 4: primarily negative and 5: exclusively negative.

Focusing exclusively on the 2005 general election in Denmark allows us to include a variety of different campaign contributions:

1. The ads placed (paid) by parties and candidates in the major newspapers
2. Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs)
3. The two major debates involving all of the party leaders
4. Newspaper articles about the campaign

These four empirical campaign contributions were all coded for their degree of negativity using the five-point coding scheme with our definition of negative campaigning as the defining focus point. In other words, an ad featuring only the picture and name of the candidate is regarded as positive (code 1), whereas an article balancing the positive and negative, such as the ad in Figure 1, is coded 3.

**Figure 1 about here**
In order to be coded as exclusively negative, the ad must only criticize and not provide any political solutions to the problem in focus. Figure 2 is an example of an ad which has been coded as 5 – exclusively negative.

**Figure 2 about here**

In the next section, the ads, PEBs and the two debates are analyzed in order to provide a descriptive overview of the negativity of the campaign in the 2005 election. The empirical materials are thereafter analyzed using the three hypotheses.

*The ads placed by the parties and candidates*

The six Danish newspapers with the greatest circulation on an average weekday during the election campaign are all included in the analysis\(^3\). The period of investigation is from the day after the election was called (19 January 2005) until the Election Day (8 February 2005). A total of 114 newspapers were analyzed featuring 764 ads from the political parties and candidates running for election. Each of these ads was analyzed using the five-category coding scheme\(^4\). Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the ads divided in relation to party and coding.

**Table 1 about here**

Only 8% of all of the ads are coded as ‘exclusively negative’, whereas 78% were coded as exclusively positive. In this sense, the negative campaigning only constituted a minor segment of the party advertising. By comparison, 44% of the party or
candidate television advertisements in the 2000 US Federal elections were exclusive negative, 32% contrasting ads – including negative as well as positive elements – and only 24% were exclusively positive ads (Holman & McLoughlin 2001).

Examination of the various parties reveals considerable differences in the respective use of negative campaigning. The Social Democrats top the list with 39% negative ads, whereas the Conservatives, the Minority Party, the Centrum-Demokraterne and the Christian Democrats never used negative ads.

The Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs)

Since the 1950s, all political parties running in a general election in Denmark have been provided with free primetime airtime to present a self-produced video on the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR). As political commercials are otherwise banned from television and public radio, the PEBs are the only way the parties can communicate directly via television to a large segment of the public. In 2005, the PEBs, including the debate they were presented together with, had between 399,000 and 217,000 viewers i.e. almost 10% of the 4,003,616 eligible voters (Gallup: TV-Meter). In this sense, the Danish PEBs are a rather important institution for the political parties. In Table 2, the verbal messages in the PEBs (text and audio) are coded according to the share (in seconds) of negative campaigning in the video. In other words, the visual presentation, i.e. the part of the video not including any text or audio, is not coded. The 10 different ads differed greatly in terms of style. The Minority Party and Centrum-Demokraterne used Talking Head spots with the candidates, whereas the Danish People’s Party and Venstre employed more of a Cinema Verite narrative style, where the candidates meet the Danes in everyday
situations. The Danish Red-Green Alliance did not use their candidates in the video, focusing instead on dramatic scenes, music and posted slogans⁵.

**Table 2 about here**

Table 2 also illustrates that negative campaigning only account for 7% of the time during the PEBs. The Socialist People’s Party and the Minority Party top the list, with up to 27% of negative campaigning. By comparison, in the 2001 British election, all of the Conservative Party PEBs were negative, all of the Liberal Party PEBs were positive, whereas the Labour Party employed both negative and positive PEBs (Sanders & Norris 2005). In this sense, the British comparison demonstrates that Denmark deviates in terms of the overwhelming use of positive PEBs.

*The party leader debate*

It is a tradition in Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries for all of the leaders of the parties running in an election to be invited to participate in a general debate the evening before the election (Aalberg & Jenssen 2007). This debate drew 1,110,000 viewers on the eve of the 2005 election, and 1,025,000 viewers in 2001, thus proving to present an important opportunity for the candidates to reach the public (Gallup: TV-Meter). That is, respectively, 28% to 26% of the 4,003,616 to 3,998,957 eligible voters in the two elections. In our analysis, we included not only the final debate, but also a similar debate on the day the election was called in order to understand whether elements of negative campaigning may change as the campaign intensified. The two debates were coded in terms of the share of the negative campaigning of the total amount of talking.
First of all, Table 3 shows that positive campaigning dominated both debates. In the early as well as the final debates, the Red-Green Alliance tops the list of negativity, with up to 70% in the final debate. Table 3 also shows that negative campaigning became more prevalent during the final debate, where around 1/3 of the speaking time was negative and only around 1/4 of the time in the first debate. This suggests that negative campaigning possibly increases over the course of a campaign as it intensifies. The increasing use of negative campaigning during the campaign corresponds to other studies (Damore 2002; Hayney & Rhine 1998; Krebs & Holian 2007:131). The explanation of the intensified use is threefold. First, early in the campaign, each party attempts to establish its own platform and its own unique identity and engage in the battle to define the overall agenda of the election campaign (Karlsen 2004). Thus, it makes little sense to ‘go negative’ early if the electorate has no recognition of your own platform. Secondly, when Election Day is close, the respective party platforms will be known to the public and the overall agenda of the election campaign will be established, leaving room for negative campaigning. Finally, going negative can also be seen as the last desperate choice as the election moves closer – a last-ditch effort to impact the outcome of the election. In other words, as the agenda of the election campaign and clear lines of distinction between the parties are established, negative campaigning becomes more likely (Ibid).

Having presented the empirical materials, we will now use the next three sections to analyze the three hypotheses posed initially in the article by analyzing tables 1 through 3.
It’s the opposition…

Our first hypothesis argued that the opposition parties tend to be more inclined to go negative than the governing parties, because it is easier for the governing parties to emphasize previous results, whereas the challenger can usually only emphasize the intentions for future action.

Distinguishing between the negative campaigning of governing parties and opposition parties in tables 1 through 3 clearly demonstrates that the opposition tends to be more negative in their campaigning style. Considering party ads, 14% of the opposition ads were negative, while this was the case with only 4% of the governing party ads (Table 1). When it comes to the party election broadcasts, 3% of the governing parties were negative, whereas 8% of the opposition parties were negative (Table 2). Analyzing the party leader debates (Table 3) reveals that the opposition tends to exploit negative campaigning more than three times as much in the first debate and twice as much in the final debate as compared to the governing parties.

We have thus found evidence that in the 2005 election, the opposition parties tended to be more negative than the governing parties in their campaigning.

It’s the runners-up…

Our second hypothesis stated that if a party experiences inadequate electoral support in the opinion polls, they would be more likely to go negative in order to establish a platform for addressing the frontrunners. Tables 1 through 3 also divide the negativity of the campaign in terms of the frontrunner and runner-up. However, the three tables provide inconsistent results. When it comes to party ads, the frontrunners go negative with 7% of their ads, whereas the runners-up go negative with 9% of their ads (Table 1). In the party election broadcasts and the party leader debates, the relationship is the
reverse: 10% of the frontrunners’ campaigning was negatively toned when it came to PEBs, whereas only 4% of the runner-up campaigning was negatively toned (Table 2). In the party leader debates, both of the debates indicate that the frontrunners tend to be more negative than the runners-up (Table 3).

We must thus reject the hypothesis that runners-up tend to be more inclined to go negative. In two out of three sources of empirical materials, the effect is actually the opposite, i.e. the frontrunners tend to be more negative than the runners-up. This result can be interpreted from various angles. Firstly, it is worth considering that the party ads and PEBs are often produced weeks in advance of the campaign. This makes it difficult to modify the campaign message as the campaign progresses. However, it is possible to purchase more ad space in the newspapers as the campaign intensifies and already-produced positive ads can be replaced with negative ads at the last minute. The party leader debates are also open to changes in tone. Another interpretation of these results is simply that minor fluctuations in the opinion polls do not affect the campaign tone, i.e. the opinion polls are usually quite stable. Change proceeds gradually and seldom produces large overnight shifts. It is also a strong assumption that merely being one or two percentage points down compared to the previous election should make the party more inclined to go negative. In other words, the frontrunner/runners-up divide appears more appropriate in a first-past-the-post type of election system and less relevant in the Scandinavian proportional election system. Furthermore, the amount of negativity in a party leader debate might be more a matter of the personal style of the individual candidate than the general tone of political campaigning attempting to capture the entire political party and the party candidates.
The findings thus indicate an inconsistent relationship between the frontrunner and the runners-up.

**It’s the media…**

The final hypothesis takes the analysis to another level. The final hypothesis argues that the media report from the campaign in a manner akin to sportswriters covering a sporting event, i.e. the media focus on the negativity of the campaign and not the positives by focusing on the attacks and dramatics of the opposing sides. During the campaign, the sports-writing and dramatics of the campaign prevailed, with numerous headlines including words such as “attack, brutality, lies, battle, in-fight, accusations, knockouts and punches below the belt”. Table 4 analyzes the major newspapers in terms of their attention to the negative campaign tone. 213 articles were analyzed, but only 97 of these had indirect or direct quotations from the candidates that specifically targeted another candidate or party, which the operationalization of our empirical analyses of negative campaigning requires. The unit of analysis is the entire article and the analysis is carried out by applying the five-point coding scheme also applied to the party ads. In other words, if one candidate gives a negative statement and another candidate gives a positive statement in the same article, the article is coded as balanced.

**Table 4 about here**

Table 4 indicates a strong media bias in the reported campaign in favor of negative campaigning tones. 22% of the articles were negative. By comparison, only 8% of the ads and 7% of the PEBs were negative. This shows that the media present a very
biased image of the political campaign. 29% of the time in the two party leader
debates was negatively toned. Converting this share on the level of the specific
candidate to our five-point coding scheme would only leave the Red-Green Alliance
classified as negative, because the other candidate messages during the debate are
dominated by positive campaigning. So even though the negative campaigning was
more present during the debates among the party’s leaders, it is in no way close to the
bias in the communication of the campaign in the media. In this sense, the media
usually focused on statements indicating conflict in their coverage of the campaign,
even though it only comprised a minor part of the entire campaign. This strong bias in
the media coverage of the campaign can also be found elsewhere, e.g. Min (2002)
finds that 60% of all news report that comments on political ads during the 1992,
1996 and 2000 US general election campaign were negative and only 33% positive in
thei way of communicating the context of the ads. This bias news coverage of the
campaign toward negativity during the election campaign is also highlighted by
Hetherington (1996:374), who reports that more than 90% of the comments relating to
the economy were negative during the 1992 presidential campaign compared to only
75% in the preceding period, even though the economy improved. The media focus
on negativity also appears to be increasing over time (Patterson 1996).

**Discussion and conclusion**

The 2005 Danish election was not unique compared to the previous Danish elections.
In this sense, the 2005 election presents a typical case when it comes to the political
campaign (Goul Andersen et al. 2007; Pedersen 2005; Andersen 2006). Negative
campaigning constitutes a very minor aspect of the political campaigning in the
Danish 2005 election campaign. Compared to the US and many other developed
countries outside Scandinavia, the differences are quite striking. Several explanations as to why negative campaigning is not used very frequently can be in play at the same time.

First of all, the multiparty context blurs the benefit of attack ads, because even if the attack ad works and pushes a voter away from the party under attack, this voter could ultimately decide to vote for a number of different parties. In a two-party system, the floating voter could only move their vote to the attacker (or abstain from voting). On the other hand, the risk of backfire or a boomerang effect, i.e. being presented as weak and desperate by the media because the party sponsored a negative ad, is not uncertain but limited to the party sponsoring the attack. In other words, negative campaigning in a multiparty system tends to represent a scenario in which the benefits can go to many different parties, while the risk of backfire is limited to the sponsoring party.

Secondly, the general elections in the Scandinavian countries pit party against party more than candidate against candidate. Even through the focus of the media is increasingly on the few primary candidates, the main choice is between parties, not candidates (Siune 1987:365; Holmberg & Oscarsson 2004). Election campaigns in the rest of the world often tend to focus more on specific candidates rather than the overall party; and as negative campaigns, due to their often personal nature, often tend to target the candidate rather than the party, this difference might help explain why negative campaigns are used less in Scandinavia.

Third, if political cleavages between the parties are multidimensional as opposed to one-dimensional, the benefits of a party engaging in attacks on another party become less clear on one dimension, as the voters align not only on one
dimension but several at the same time. A floating voter could accordingly float along several dimensions due to an attack ad, not just one.

Fourth, political advertisements on television are forbidden in the Scandinavian countries. Thus, negative campaigning in terms of ads is limited to newspaper ads, billboard and local radio. These venues do not appear to foster the same degree of negativism as does television in particular. In television advertising, the time slots are very small and the competition for the attention of the voters during the commercial breaks is very high, which tends to foster provocative ads in order to be noticed, and negative and provocative ads seem to go hand in hand here.

A fifth explanation for why negative campaigning appears so little in Scandinavia is due to the political culture, e.g. parliamentary debates in Scandinavia tend to be very civilized and impersonalized, and the tone is often consensual rather than confrontational. In countries such as Italy, Australian, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the parliamentary debates are much livelier, and personal attacks are part of almost every debate. This ‘civilized’ political culture also helps understand why Scandinavian parties tend to be less inclined to ‘go negative’ in the course of the election campaigns, as it is against the Scandinavian political culture.

A sixth and final explanation is that as majority governments are the exception in Denmark, parties running against each other must also be able to work together after an election despite their political differences. Attack ads targeting future coalition partners make such cooperation difficult, i.e. parties are less inclined to go negative in political systems with minority governments and in which broad coalitions (rather than minimum willing coalitions) are the usual way of carrying out politics.

The analyses confirmed that the campaigning of the opposition tends to be more negative than that of the governing parties. In this sense, adapting the original
American-developed hypothesis on the divide between the challengers and the incumbents proves fruitful.

The analyses provide inconclusive evidence as to whether frontrunners or runners-up apply negative campaigns the most. According to the frontrunner/runner-up divide, it appears more appropriate in a first-past-the-post electoral system, where the ‘winner takes it all’, and less relevant in the Scandinavian context of a proportional election system.

Finally, the analyses show that the media devote much greater attention to negative campaigns than is the case with positive campaigns. In other words, the media grant extensive coverage to the limited number of negative campaign messages, thereby presenting a biased image of the political campaign to the general public. If this bias is persistent, we might see more negative campaigning in the future, as the political parties become aware of this and if the battle for attention intensifies. In other words, if the parties receive more press coverage from negative campaigns than positive campaigns, the parties will be more inclined to go negative, because they will reach more voters by doing so. Furthermore, the media’s biased coverage of the campaign could potentially lead to increased general mistrust to parties and candidates and provide a misleading sense of how politics are usually conducted.

Further analysis of election campaigning is clearly required to establish these results more firmly. Hopefully, the results presented here can be applied as benchmarks for future comparisons. Further study of the effect of negative campaigning in the Scandinavian proportional, multiparty context is required.
References


Altinget.dk 2007. Average of seven public opinion polls calculated by Professor Søren Risbjerg Thompsen, Aarhus University: Department of Political Science.


This ad was published 15 times in the six newspapers under investigation. The first column reads: **CUTS.** Under the Venstre/Conservative government, spending pr. student in public schools has been cut by more than 1,000 DKK. In the same period, spending in private schools increased by the same amount. **1,000 DKK pr. student has been cut.** In the Venstre campaign program, there is not one DKK for the improvement of public schools. The second column reads: **LEARN.** It is difficult to improve the professional competence in the school when you are cutting back. We will invest in public schools, but we will also demand more value for the money. **Children must learn more. Thus, we must invest in schools and make greater demands.** We will invest 600 million DKK annually for improved schooling for teachers, new books and IT. We will at the same time move ahead with the renovation of the schools (Source Ekstra Bladet 26/1-05: p. 8; Politiken 26/1-05: p. 12).
Figure 2. Negative ad from the Social Democrats

Fogh

"Det er ikke rigtigt, at der er skåret ned på voksen- og efteruddannelser"

Anders Fogh,
DR, 18/1-2005

Fakta

Efteruddannelserne er skåret med 106.000 kursus-uger.

Kilde: Undervisningsministeriet

The ad was published six times in the newspapers under investigation. First column reads: Fogh [Prime Minster] “It is not correct that adult and continuing education has been cut”. The second column reads: Facts – 106,000 course weeks of adult and continuing education have been cut. (source Ekstra Bladet 28/1-05: p. 11; Politiken 28/1-05: p. 10).
Table 1. Party ads coded for tone (number of ads)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Primarily positive</th>
<th>Balanced</th>
<th>Primarily negative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent negative or primarily neg. of total number of party ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danish Red-Green Alliance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist People’s Party</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Party</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Democrats</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Social Liberals</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrum-Demokraterne</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venstre</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government &amp; support party</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>4%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontrunners</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runners-up</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent of total: 78% 3% 10% 4% 5% 100%

Note: Due to the rounding off of the percentages, the figures do not always add up to 100%. The government is a Venstre and Conservative coalition and the supporting party is the Danish People’s Party. The other parties are included in the opposition. The runners-up are the Social Democrats, Centrum-Demokraterne, Christian Democrats, Minority Party and the Danish People’s Party. The other parties are included as frontrunners. The runners-up and frontrunners are generally consistent throughout the campaign. This classification is based on the average of seven opinion polls during the first week of campaigning compared with the election result from 2001.** the number of negative ads compared to the number of non-negative ads placed by ‘Government & supporting party’ and ‘Opposition’ are significantly different at p<0.001.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Video length</th>
<th>Time with verbal messages</th>
<th>Time with negative campaigning</th>
<th>Percent with negative campaigning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Danish Red-Green Alliance</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socialist People’s Party</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minority Party</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Democrats</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Social Liberals</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Centrum-Demokraterne</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Christian Democrats</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Venstre</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conservatives</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government &amp; support party</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opposition</td>
<td>2,050</td>
<td>1,599</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frontrunners</td>
<td>1,445</td>
<td>1,051</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>10%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Runners-up</td>
<td>1,459</td>
<td>1,283</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Total</td>
<td>2,904</td>
<td>2,334</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to the rounding off of the percentages, the figures do not always add up to 100%. The government is a Venstre and Conservative coalition and the supporting party is the Danish People’s Party. The other parties are included in the opposition. The runners-up are the Social Democrats, Centrum-Demokraterne, Christian Democrats, Minority Party and the Danish People’s Party. The other parties are included as frontrunners. The runners-up and frontrunners are generally consistent throughout the campaign. This classification is based on the average of seven opinion polls during the first week of campaigning compared with the election result from 2001. ** the number of seconds with negative messages compared to seconds of non-negative messages are significantly different at p<0.001 compared to the group below in the table.
### Table 3. Two party leaders’ debates coded on tone (in seconds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debate of 18 January</th>
<th>Total speech time</th>
<th>Time with negative campaigning</th>
<th>Percent with negative campaigning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Danish Red-Green Alliance</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socialist People’s Party</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minority Party</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Democrats</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Social Liberals</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Centrum-Demokraterne</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Christian Democrats</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Venstre</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conservative</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government &amp; support party</td>
<td>2,281</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>10%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opposition</td>
<td>3,233</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frontrunners</td>
<td>2,950</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>34%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Runners-up</td>
<td>2,564</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,514</td>
<td>1,378</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debate of 6 February</th>
<th>Total speech time</th>
<th>Time with negative campaigning</th>
<th>Percent with negative campaigning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Danish Red-Green Alliance</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socialist People’s Party</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minority Party</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Democrats</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The Social Liberals</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Centrum-Demokraterne</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Christian Democrats</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Venstre</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conservative</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government &amp; support party</td>
<td>2,403</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>26%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opposition</td>
<td>2,979</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frontrunners</td>
<td>3,055</td>
<td>1,091</td>
<td>36%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Runners-up</td>
<td>2,327</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,382</td>
<td>1,813</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to the rounding off of the percentages, the figures do not always add up to 100%. The government is a Venstre and Conservative coalition and the supporting party is the Danish People’s Party. The other parties are included in the opposition. The runners-up are the Social Democrats, Centrum-Demokraterne, Christian Democrats, Minority Party and the Danish People’s Party. The other parties are included as frontrunners. The runners-up and frontrunners are generally consistent throughout the weeks of the campaign across polls. This classification is based on the average of seven opinion polls during the first week of campaigning compared with the previous election result from 2001 (Altinget.dk 2007). ** the number of seconds with negative messages compared to seconds of non-negative messages are significantly different at p<0.001 compared to the group below in the table.
Table 4. Newspaper articles coded on tone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Primarily positive</th>
<th>Balanced</th>
<th>Primarily negative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent negative or primarily neg. of total number of party ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>101%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Number of articles
- Percent of total

Note: Only articles quoting candidates are included. Due to the rounding off of the percentages, the table does not add up to 100%.
Endnotes

1 Studies on electoral campaigning in Scandinavian are quite rare. Nevertheless, there are a few recent notable exceptions available in English (e.g. Stromback & Nord 2006; Stromback & Dimitrova 2006; Jenssen & Aalberg 2006; de Vreese & Semetko 2004; de Vreese 2004; Buch & Hansen 2002).

2 The laws regulating political advertisements in Scandinavian with their amendments are: Denmark: Executive order on radio and television no. 410 of 02/05/2006, §76, section 3; Norway: Executive order on broadcasting no. 127 of 04/12/1992, chapter 3, §1 & 4; Sweden: Executive order on radio and TV no. 844 of 07/19/1996, chapter 6, §5.

3 Urban, Jyllands-Posten, Politiken, MetroXpress, B.T. and Ekstra Bladet.

4 Of the 764 ads were coded independently by two different persons. 94% (or 46 ads) of the ads were coded identically.

5 See McNair (1999:105) for an overview of the various styles in political commercials.

6 Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the analysis (not shown) of the party ads in Table 1 over time only provides inconclusive evidence about whether the negative campaign tone has changed during the course of the campaign. This might be due to the ads being produced weeks in advance and thus less flexible than the debates (see the discussion in the section: ‘It’s the runners-up…’).

7 Articles from 18 January to 8 February are included from Jyllands-Posten, Politiken, Berlingske Tidende, B.T. and Ekstra Bladet. The analysis is limited to articles between 300 and 600 words on the first three pages of the newspapers, though the first 15 pages in the case of B.T. and Ekstra Bladet.