Fighting for attention: Media coverage of negative campaign messages

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Abstract

The paper studies whether and how negative campaigning is a successful strategy for attaining media attention. It combines extensive content analyses of party and news texts with public opinion surveys to study the success of individual press releases in making the news. The empirical analysis draws on 1,496 party press releases and 6,512 news reports in all national media outlets during the final six weeks of Austria's 2013 general election campaign. We find that negative campaigning is a successful strategy to attract the attention of journalists and editors. It is particularly relevant for rank-and-file politicians, who lack the intrinsic news value of high public or party office, and for messages that focus on a rival's best issues. These findings have broader implications for understanding party strategies and 'negativity bias' in the news.

Pre-print version of the accepted manuscript:

Haselmayer, Martin, Thomas M. Meyer, and Markus Wagner (2017). 'Fighting for attention: Media coverage of negative campaign messages', Party Politics. FirstView. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817724174.

Keywords: Negative campaigning, election campaign, media coverage, gatekeeping, media bias

Acknowledgments:

We would like to thank the FWF (Austrian Science Fund) for their support under grant numbers S10902-G11, S10903-G11 and S10907-G11. A previous version of this paper has been presented at the 6th Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association (EPSA 2016). We thank all panelists for valuable feedback and suggestions. We also thank Jana Brandl and Ferdinand Ferroli for their research assistance.

Introduction

Negative campaigning is an important component of modern election campaigns (e.g. Geer, 2006; Lau and Pomper, 2004; Mattes and Redlawsk, 2014; Nai and Walter, 2015). It can provide electoral benefits by undermining rivals' competence evaluations, demobilizing support for the targeted politician or party, mobilizing supporters, and persuading undecided and risk-averse voters to cast their vote for the 'lesser evil' (Damore, 2002; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010, 2011a; Riker, 1996; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995). Thus, many campaign advisors believe that negative campaigning is an effective strategy for winning elections (Lau and Pomper, 2004; Walter and Nai, 2015: 107).

Yet, negative campaign messages may have additional benefits beyond their immediate impact on voters. In this paper, we study whether negative campaigning is also a successful strategy for getting the media's attention. The news media are valuable targets for party campaign communication, as they still represent the single most important source of information for voters during elections (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömback and Van Aelst, 2013). Negative campaigning should help parties to attract media attention as conflict or negativity is attractive to journalists, thus increasing the perceived newsworthiness of statements or events (e.g. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). In turn, increased media attention helps parties to highlight their major campaign messages. This is particularly relevant within a context of partisan dealignment and a growing importance of issue-based voting (Dalton, 2013; Green-Pedersen, 2007): if voting decisions are increasingly based on short-term factors, then it is important to know how parties can change the information environment, for example by influencing media coverage of their rivals. Successfully gaining coverage for negative messages could, for instance, help parties to steal an owned issue (Elmelund-Praestekaer, 2010; Tresch, 2015).

While negativity make messages more newsworthy, we argue that this added value is particularly relevant for rank-and-file politicians. It should thus matter most for those political

actors that have no intrinsic news value, i.e. those without high public or party office (Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979). Whereas journalists consider most messages from elite politicians with great interest, the rank-and-file may benefit most from the added news value of negativity or conflict.

We further expect that the news value of negative campaign messages depends on their topic. Journalists and editors prefer unexpected and surprising news (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Campaign messages may be more likely to make the news if they address issues owned by rival parties, as such communication differs from the bland repetition of a party's own issue profile (Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016). Thus, we expect a multiplicative effect of negative campaigning on issues that are not owned by the party releasing the message.

The empirical analysis is based on original party, voter and media data on the 2013 Austrian general election. We study campaign messages in party press releases and their coverage in media reports throughout all nationally relevant newspapers in the final six weeks of the election campaign. Following Grimmer (2010, 2013), we combine cheating detection software with manual checks to match 1,496 press releases with 6,512 media reports published the following day. We further use content analyses on party messages, media reports and voter survey data to complement these data.

By explaining variation across individual messages, this study adds to a growing literature on micro-level party-media agenda setting (Flowers et al., 2003; Grimmer, 2010, 2013; Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016). It is one of the first empirical studies outside the US to examine the effects of negative campaigning on the chances of individual campaign messages of making the news; the only other non-US study we know of is by Ridout and Walter (2015), which takes a more aggregate-level approach than we do. Beyond that, we show how the success of negative campaign communication is contingent on the role of individual politicians and the topical focus of their messages. Understanding whether negative messages are more likely to make the news addresses the *presumed* causal relationship of media-based

incentives for this campaign strategy (e.g. Capella and Jamieson, 1997; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2010; Geer, 2006; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Patterson, 1993; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010). Beyond the potential implications of such a structural negativity bias on the part of the news media, the paper provides evidence for political practitioners on how to succeed in getting campaign messages into the news.

Finally, the paper contributes to a wider debate on the level of negativity in election campaigns. Previous research has revealed differences in the degree and characteristics of negative campaigning across various communication channels such as advertisements, press releases and media reports (e.g. Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Ridout and Franz, 2008; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010). Our findings explore the reasons behind these differences: because negativity helps party actors to get media attention, we expect that the degree of negativity is higher in those communication channels that target journalists and editors than channels targeting different audiences (e.g. party activists). Beyond that, media gatekeeping, and journalistic norms and routines should increase the negativity and modify the set of actors and issues in newspapers, news broadcasts or TV debates. We take up the broader implications of our findings in the concluding section.

Media coverage of negative campaign messages

Political actors who seek to convey their campaign messages to a broad public need to get the media's attention. Even with the growing importance of direct communication channels such as social media platforms, traditional news media are still the single most important source of information during election campaigns (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömback and Van Aelst, 2013). Accordingly, parties have professionalized their organization and communication style to attract media attention (Cook, 2005; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Strömbäck and Van Aelst, 2013). Yet, for the most part, they also need to rely on the decisions of journalists and editors, who select among a plethora of potential news

items according to personal preferences, economic pressures and professional norms and routines (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

There are good reasons why negative campaign messages may attract media attention. Negativity or conflict are among the most prominent factors determining the chances of messages or events to become news (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Lippmann, 1922). Thus, negative campaigning should be more newsworthy than campaign messages including self-praise or statements emphasizing the party's issue priorities. Following Galtung and Ruge (1965: 69f), negative news is more consensual and unambiguous in a sense that people will more easily agree upon the interpretation of a negative event. Negative events are also less predictable and thus contain unexpected information, all of which enhances their attractiveness to newsmakers.

Psychological research further highlights fundamental asymmetries in the attention to positive and negative information (e.g. Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin and Royzman, 2001). Thus, negative content may dominate the news simply because 'journalists are humans, and humans are more interested in negative than in positive information' (Soroka, 2014: 21; Soroka and McAdams, 2015). Such reasoning also makes sense in economic terms: as readers prefer negative content, profit orientation should motivate newsmakers to satisfy the consumer demand for negativity (Trussler and Soroka, 2014).

Empirical research indeed shows a negativity bias of (political) news coverage and the prevalence of a critical or cynical journalistic angle towards political elites (e.g. Capella and Jamieson, 1997; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2010; Patterson, 1993; Soroka, 2014). In addition, media reports tend to be more negative than party communication (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Elmelund-Præstekær and Molgaard Svenson, 2014; Geer, 2006; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Ridout and Walter, 2015; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010).

These studies provide strong macro-level-evidence for a structural negativity bias in the media. Yet, they cannot tell us whether the media are more likely to *report on* individual

campaign messages that contain criticism or conflict. It could also be that journalists themselves *supplement* an article with a negative or critical view only after having selected a source. Thus, they may report on a press release from one politician that does not contain negativity or conflict and then collect negative reactions from rival parties to include a critical angle in their final article.

Our study provides an empirical test of the direct causal relationship between negative campaigning in party messages and subsequent media reports. Given the overwhelming evidence of a negativity bias in the media coverage of politics, we expect journalists to disproportionately report on campaign messages containing criticism or conflict between rival politicians or parties.

H1 (Negativity): Negative press releases are more successful in attracting media attention than positive ones.

While the presence of negativity or conflict should increase the chances to attain media coverage, we also expect variation according to the intrinsic news value of the person drafting a negative message. That is, the added value of negativity is higher for some party actors than for others. Elite politicians should find it much easier to attract media attention for their campaign communication than a party's rank-and-file. For example, members of government are able to influence political outcomes by drafting laws and shaping political reality, and are thus more newsworthy for editors and journalists (Bennett, 1990; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Similarly, party leaders and high party officials are newsworthy as they enable journalists to present the election as personal contests (Balmas et al., 2014; Van Aelst et al., 2008). These elite politicians are less likely to depend on the additional benefit of negativity as a news factor in their campaign communication. Moreover, parties may want to avoid potential backlash effects of negative campaigning for their elite politicians (e.g. Garramone, 1984). For example, cabinet members should have little

to gain from negative campaigning, as they will want to preserve their individual chances of staying in office (Dolezal et al., forthcoming). Accordingly, they should predominantly focus on positive messages by defending the government's record or presenting plans for the next legislative term.

In contrast, rank-and-file politicians such as ordinary MPs are more likely to depend on the presence of news factors in their messages for attracting the interest of journalists and editors. Because their overall chances to attain media attention are relatively small, going negative is a more risky, but also a more beneficial strategy to make the news. In addition to the rank-and-file's own incentives for negative campaign messages, their parties may also encourage them to send out negative campaign messages on behalf of the party elite, and to protect the latter from potential backlash effects. Recent empirical evidence indeed suggests that rank-and-file politicians can increase their chances of attracting media attention by supplementing their messages with news factors; for example by focusing on important issues, engaging with other parties or by stressing unexpected issues (Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016; AUTHORS n.d.). As their initial level of newsworthiness is low, these politicians should benefit most from drafting negative press releases to compensate their lack in newsworthiness.

Accordingly, we expect that negative campaigning should help rank-and-file politicians more than party elites to get media coverage for their campaign messages.

H2 (Rank-and-file politicians): The effect of negativity for attracting media attention is higher for rank-and-file politicians than for party elites.

We also expect that the success of negative messages in getting the media's attention depends on the content of the campaign message (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011a). Here, we focus on whether parties 'own' the issue they send out messages about. In general terms, there are incentives for parties to talk about both issues they own and about other issues, even those

owned by rivals. On the one hand, saliency and issue ownership theory (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996; Petrocik et al., 2003) suggest that political actors emphasize their best issues during campaigns to set the campaign agenda, and to make sure that voters consider these topics in their voting decisions. On the other hand, parties may also need to address other issues if they are important to voters, if they figure prominently on the media's agenda or if they want to challenge rivals on them (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994). Indeed, empirical evidence shows that party issue agendas tend to overlap and that parties do not necessarily 'talk past of each other', as would be predicted by pure salience theory (Dolezal et al., 2014a; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Kaplan et al., 2006; Sigelman and Buell, 2004; Wagner and Meyer, 2014).

We think that parties may get more attention by sending out negative messages on issues they do not own. 'Going negative' on issues owned by a rival can make sense, as it can allow parties to challenge their opponent's issue reputation, conquer their issue ownership, or cast doubt about the ability of a party to deliver desired policy outcomes (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011a; Walgrave et al., 2009). In terms of media coverage, this strategy may also be more successful than when a party attacks other parties on an issue it already owns. Journalists and readers are interested in unexpected, surprising or different news (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Recent experimental evidence also suggests that journalists are more likely to report on messages where parties address issues they do not own (Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016). These shifts in issue attention are unexpected to journalists and readers. In deviating from the routine campaign content, they have the potential to contain newsworthy information. It is these issues where negativity is beneficial (in particular if a party attacks the issue owner).

In contrast, messages where parties focus on their best issues are in general less interesting for the media. Choosing from the multitude of campaign massages, journalists are not particularly likely to report on repeated and unsurprising campaign messages. Even if a

party ‘goes negative’ on these issues, the added news value of such a message remains relatively small. However, there is also evidence that parties get more coverage on issues they own (e.g. Petrocik et al., 2003; Walgrave and De Swert, 2007). One reasons for this might be that time-pressed journalists may rely on trusted, reliable sources (e.g. government ministers) for comments on key issues of the day (Gans, 1979; Walgrave and De Swert, 2007). Issue owners should have more such experts in their ranks, so that they should be more likely to get coverage on owned issues. Yet, our focus in this paper is on the marginal benefit of ‘going negative’ for receiving media coverage, and it is not clear why parties should gain *more* media coverage on an issue they own if they use their messages to attack other parties.

For example, consider press releases by a radical-right party that decides whether to ‘go negative’ to increase its news value. In a press release on immigration, attacking other parties will not be particularly newsworthy. The issue is unsurprising and there is little added value or new information in the message that other parties are described by the radical-right party as worse on that issue. In contrast, a radical-right party that accuses other parties of (bad) economic performance should be more likely to gain media attention. The issue is more surprising, and the radical-right party might contrast its own position with that of the government and/or the party that owns the issue. Hence, our main expectation is that the media privilege coverage of negative campaign messages that address an issue owned by a party’s rivals.

H3 (Owned issues): The effect of negativity for attracting media attention is lower for press releases that focus on issues that a party owns.

Data and methods

We use press releases of party actors to analyze whether these campaign messages get coverage in the print media. Press releases are attractive to both politicians and journalists. For the former, they are cheap and easy-to-use communication tools with the potential benefit

of winning nationwide media coverage. For the latter, press releases contain readily available information from relevant actors that facilitate and accelerate the day-to-day political news coverage. Recently, press releases have also gained increasing interest from scholars studying political communication (e.g. Grimmer, 2010, 2013; Hänggli, 2012; Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016; Hopmann et al., 2012; Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2016).

Our empirical analysis is based on content analyses of party press releases and newspaper articles published during the last six weeks of Austria's 2013 general election campaign. Studying one country and a single campaign enables us to analyse the success of individual campaign messages to get the media's attention based on the complete set of party messages and media reports. Any restriction in the number or content of the newspapers would bias the parties' chances of getting media reports of their campaign messages.

While social media platforms are becoming more important, in 2013 press releases were a major tool for communication purposes: only a minority of candidates used a personal website, and about 16 per cent of them had a Twitter account (Dolezal, 2015). Facebook is the exception to the rule: about half of all candidates used it at least partly for political purposes (Dolezal, 2015). In terms of outreach, social media platforms were also rather limited: only about 20 per cent of respondents in 2013 indicated that they had read or posted about politics in social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter (Kritzinger et al., 2017). Yet, this estimate includes fans of FPÖ leader Strache's Facebook page, with about 170.000 fans in 2013 clearly the single most social media site in Austria at the time (Dolezal et al., 2014b). We therefore focus on press releases as communication tools that are available to a wide range of party actors.

Austria, a multiparty parliamentary democracy, is particularly well suited for studying the success of party campaign messages to attract media attention. First, press releases are a tool commonly used by politicians and parties. During the 2013 election campaign, Austrian parties distributed roughly 2,000 press releases in the last six weeks of the campaign (on

average 45 press releases a day). This figure appears to be high compared to other countries: Klüver and Sagarzazu (2016) report that German parties published about 3,700 press releases in 2009 (on average 10 press releases a day). Hopmann et al. (2012) collected 334 issue-related press releases in the 20 days prior to the Danish 2007 election campaign (on average 17 press releases a day). The high number of press releases might partly be due to the relatively decentralized way of distributing them. Instead of a single central channel for distributing press releases, political actors can access those of auxiliary organizations (e.g. labour unions), regional party organizations, intra-party groups (e.g. youth organizations), and parliamentary party groups. This means that press releases in Austria vary broadly in their authorship. During the 2013 campaign, the 2,000 press releases were sent out by 292 individual party actors; this includes MPs, members of government, state (Land) members of government, interest group leaders tied to parties (e.g. trade unions), as well as 'ordinary' candidates who are relatively unknown.[1]

In addition, data collected in the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) allow us to match data on press releases directly with data on media coverage in all nationally relevant newspapers. While social media are increasingly important, in 2013 newspapers still reached about 73 per cent of the Austrian population (above 14 years of age) on a daily basis (Aichholzer et al., 2014: 32). Thus, they are highly relevant targets of political communication as many people read them every day. The relevance of newspapers allows us to study print editions, which enables us to closely link campaign messages at day *t* and media reports at day *t+1* (see below). Finally, AUTNES survey data from 2013 also allow us to match the

[1] All of these actors are relevant in the sense that they ran as candidates or held party or public office. Yet, not everyone affiliated with a party was deeply involved in the election campaign. To test the robustness of our results, we re-ran our models excluding all actors apart from government members, MPs, party leaders, and party chairpersons. The results (shown in Appendix F) lead to similar conclusions as those presented here.

coded press releases and newspaper reports with public perceptions of the issue agenda and issue-ownership attributions from voter surveys.

We include press releases by individual politicians from the parties represented in parliament before the national election (SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, Greens, BZÖ, and Team Stronach).[2] We discard press releases that solely contain information about party campaign events (e.g. to inform journalists about press conferences, photo ops) and those only containing pictures and hyperlinks to audio content (N = 104). Moreover, we remove messages only informing about specific campaign events (TV debates, canvassing), opinion polls, or changes in party office (N = 288) and thus only include press releases with a clear policy focus. We further identify the politician who issued a press release. If two politicians sent out a press release together, each of them enters the analysis separately. In total, the remaining data set contains 1,496 campaign messages.

Dependent variable. We measure the success of each press release by checking if there is at least one media report using it as a source. We start by grouping press releases by day, and thus create 41 (daily) clusters of press releases. Next, we collected all media reports published in daily newspapers on the following day.[3] Focusing on paper rather than online editions allows us to establish a clear temporal relationship between a press release on day *t* and the media report on the next day (*t+1)*. To avoid selection bias, all nationally relevant newspapers, including broadsheets, tabloids and mid-market media enter the analysis. For the same purpose, we do not restrict our selection of media reports to specific sub-sections (e.g. front pages). We use data from AUTNES content analyses of eight newspapers (*Der Standard, Die Presse, Salzburger Nachrichten, Kronen Zeitung, Österreich, Heute, Kurier,*

[2] We exclude press releases of the new liberal party (NEOS). The party only gained seats after the election. We further discard other smaller parties without representation in parliament. We only include press releases that we can attribute to individual politicians and do not consider messages that only have a party label (n=116).

[3] Sunday editions of newspapers are rare. Thus, we also consider media reports published on Monday for those press releases published over the weekend.

Kleine Zeitung). We use front pages, media reports, and background analyses but exclude commentaries, interviews, cartoons, and letters to the editor (N=6,512).

Each press release requires checking roughly 170 media articles published the following day (on average), and thus we have to cope with about 270,000 press release-media report dyads. We follow Grimmer (2010) and employ a two-stage coding process. First, using cheating detection software (Bloomfield, 2014), we identify matches in the content of press releases and the set of all media reports published on the following day. The automated analysis reduces the amount of coding units for the subsequent hand-coding step. We use permissive matching parameters to generate more 'hits' and thus, to avoid false negatives (press releases that made that news but were not detected by the algorithm).[4] The software identifies 1,785 potential 'matches', which allows us to discard 99.5% of all press release-media report dyads.

We continue by manually checking the remaining dyads. Reading the press release and the media report side-by-side, we assess whether a press release was successful in attaining media coverage (1) or not (0). Based on our definition, a press release is successful if at least one media report published the following day (a) refers to the press release's author (i.e. name of a politician) as an active speaker and (b) deals with the same topic as the press release.[5] We provide some examples of successful press releases in the Appendix (Appendix B).

Of course, manually coding the success of press releases can be challenging in some cases. It is simple when journalists explicitly refer to their sources in the article ('…announced in a press release that…') or if the press release is a direct source for citations or quotes. It is also quite easy to identify press releases that did not make the news if a press

[4] More information on the settings and the software is included in the Appendix (Appendix A).
[5] There are very few instances where successful press releases are in fact used in several media reports. 60 per cent of the successful press releases (141 of 235) are used in one media report only. Only 18 press releases were used as sources in four or more media reports. This is why we stick to the dichotomous distinction of successful and unsuccessful party press releases.

release and an article have different topics. Yet, the coding decision can be more difficult if a press release and a newspaper article deal with the same issue, but there is no direct evidence for a party's influence.

To address these problems, we assess the reliability of the manual coding process: two coders coded a sample of 500 potential hits (press release-media report dyads). Krippendoff's alpha is 0.82, and thus inter-coder reliability is reasonably high. In addition, we carefully checked the individual coding decisions. Coders disagreed more often when press releases and media reports refer to a third event (e.g. a press conference), which obscures whether the press release or a press conference was the source in the media report. We address this by adding a control variable in the analysis, indicating a press release's reference to a press conference (1) or not (0). As elite politicians are more likely to give press conferences, and we are more likely to code these press releases as being successful, this control variable should account for a possible disturbance in the X-Y-relationship.

Independent variables. Our main independent variable is dichotomous, indicating whether negative campaigning is present in the first paragraph of a press release (1) or not (0). We follow a pragmatic operationalization of negative campaigning, defining it as criticism between two political actors (e.g. Geer, 2006; Walter and Nai, 2015).[6] Such definitions have been criticized for their lack of discrimination between substantive criticism, mudslinging or character assassinations (e.g. Kahn and Kenney, 1999). Yet, we expect that any kind of negative message should be more newsworthy in the eyes of journalists and editors according to news value theory (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) and the supremacy of negative information (Soroka, 2014). For testing expectations about actor- and issue-related campaign strategies, a coarse measure should facilitate our research task.

[6] During the coder training process, we conducted a pretest on a random sample of 100 press releases from the 2008 election. Six coders had to identify object actors (e.g. parties and politicians addressed in the press release). We measured agreement among the coders and arrived at values of 0.88 (Krippendorff's alpha) for the identification of object actors (N = 300).

Our second independent variable distinguishes between *rank-and-file politicians* and party elites. Public office naturally translates into 'power' because the political actions of these politicians may have broad societal consequences (e.g. Bennett, 1990; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Beyond public office, party leaders usually shape election campaigns and figure prominently in the news. Such 'centralized personalization' has recently been observed for Belgian (Van Aelst et al., 2008), British, Danish, Dutch (Vliegenthart et al., 2011) and Israeli (Balmas et al., 2014) election campaigns. A similar logic applies to party secretaries who run the campaign and are in charge of its 'spin'. Compared to these actors, ordinary members of parliament, parliamentary candidates, party actors at the state and regional level, heads of intra-party groups (e.g. youth organizations), and members of the European Parliament constitute the group of rank-and-file politicians. All of these actors are less newsworthy to the national media and therefore less successful in getting their messages into the news (e.g. AUTHORS n.d.). We code all politicians with high public or party office as party elites (1) (n=387) and discriminate them from the larger group of rank-and-file politicians (0) (n=1,109).[7]

Turning to the topical focus of press releases, we first classify press releases into eighteen broader policy issue areas[8] that enable us to match party communication with voter preferences. For these issue areas, we determine *issue ownership* using a rolling cross-section voter survey carried out during the campaign (Kritzinger et al., 2014). The share of respondents naming a particular party as being best to handle an issue is our measure for the party's competence. For each issue area, we identify the party with the highest competence

[7] Seven politicians have multiple roles. For these individuals, we assume that public or party office is more important than being a MP. Accordingly, they join the group of party elites.

[8] These issue areas are employment, social welfare & poverty, health care, pensions, family affairs, budget & taxes, agriculture, education, environment, law & order, individual rights & societal values, European integration, foreign affairs & defense, infrastructure, immigration, fighting political misconduct & corruption, government reforms & direct democracy. During the coder training process, agreement between six coders (based on a sample of 100 press releases) was 0.61 (Krippendorff's alpha).

score as the 'issue owner'. We use this information to build an indicator variable that captures, for each party-issue combination, whether the politician issuing the press release addresses an issue owned by his/her party (1) or not (0).[9]

Control variables. We control for several potentially confounding factors. First, media often privilege more powerful actors (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979). Thus, we include a variable that distinguishes between press releases sent by members of a party in government (1) and in opposition (0) to account for a potential structural advantage of government parties. Second, we control for the time a politician sent out a press release. The publishing cycle of newspapers implies that press releases published in the morning have better chances to get media coverage than those issued in the later afternoon. We therefore include a variable measuring the time (in minutes) since midnight. Third, we also account for external events. The binary coding includes international (e.g. EU summits) or national events (e.g. TV-debates, reports by the Austrian Court of Audit). It relies on the AUTNES content analysis of party press releases, which identifies the trigger of each press release. As mentioned above, we also control for whether a press release includes a reference to a press conference (1) or not (0). Finally, we account for text length (in words), because longer press releases should (potentially) provide more information that is valuable for journalists.

Model specification. Our dependent variable measures whether a press release is successful in getting news coverage (1) or not (0). Thus, we use logistic regression models and use clustered standard errors by issue area to account for the fact that some covariates vary only at the level of issue areas.

Results

[9] In Appendix E, we use a more sophisticated measure of issue ownership that allows for shared issue ownership and issues that are not owned by any party (Tresch et al., 2017). Our major conclusions remain the same.

Are negative press releases more likely to attract media coverage than positive ones? Figure 1 shows the share of successful positive and negative press releases by party. Five out of six parties are more successful in making the news with negative press releases.[10] Across all parties, negative campaign messages are slightly more likely to attain media attention (17%) than positive ones (14%), which lends some initial support to our first hypothesis.[11]

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 2 shows the share of successful positive and negative press releases for party elites and rank-and-file politicians. Negativity has a much higher impact for rank-and-file politicians than for party elites. The latter make it into the news with one out of three campaign messages, and negative messages are not more likely to attain media attention than positive ones. In contrast, the overall chances to get media coverage for their campaign messages are significantly lower for rank-and-rile politicians, but they are almost twice as high for negative compared to positive press releases.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 3 shows that issue-based negative campaigning has different effects for rank-and-file politicians and elite politicians. The former may double their success rate of getting media reports of their campaign messages when going negative on issues owned by a rival party (from 6 per cent to almost 14 per cent). The latter show a slight increase in their success rate for going negative on issues owned by their party (+ 3 per cent) and a decrease for topics

[10] Overall, there are slightly more negative press releases (52.9%) in our dataset than positive ones (47.1%). There is considerable variation across parties, with the shares of negative messages ranging from 36.5 per cent for the SPÖ to 64.7 per cent for the FPÖ. The BZÖ, which was considerably more successful with its self-promotional messages, released 64.1 per cent negative press releases. We provide a graph of the campaign negativity for each party in the Appendix (Appendix C).

[11] The only exception is the BZÖ, for which more than thirty per cent of its positive messages result in a news report. The finding is mostly due to a strongly personalized campaign communication around their party leader, Joseph Bucher, who released many positive campaign messages.

owned by their competitors (-6 per cent).

[Figure 3 about here]

To test our expectations more thoroughly, we estimate two logistic regression models to examine the direct (H1; Model 1) and moderated effects (H2 & H3; Model 2) of negative campaigning. We also present the results of Model 2 only for rank-and-file politicians to account for differences between the party elite and rank-and-file politicians (Model 3).[12]

[Table 1 about here]

The results in Model 1 provide some empirical support for our expectation that negative messages are more likely to get media attention (Hypothesis 1). By going negative, politicians increase their chances of attaining media coverage by 4.1 per cent, although the effect is only statistically significant at the 10 per cent level. In terms of predicted probabilities, drafting a negative press release increases the probability of getting the media to report on a press release from roughly 13.6 per cent to 17.7 per cent.

For an easier interpretation of the conditional effects, we use marginal effect plots. Figure 4 shows the marginal effects of negative campaigning conditional on an actor's elite status (Hypothesis 2) and the message's issue focus (Hypothesis 3). Other variables are at their observed values. Figure 4 indicates that rank-and-file politicians benefit most from negative campaigning to attract media attention. These actors will increase their success rate of hitting the news by 6 percentage points through negative campaigning. Thus, rank-and-file politicians may substantively increase their chances of making the news by going negative from roughly 6.5 per cent of their messages to 12.5 per cent (significant at $p < 0.05$). In contrast, the effect for elite politicians points in the negative direction, but is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

[12] We replicate the analysis using multilevel models in Appendix D. The results are similar, although the effect of negativity (Hypothesis 1) is no longer significant at conventional levels.

Figure 4 does not show unequivocal support for Hypothesis 3. On issues owned by other parties, attacks indeed increase the changes to get media attention (statistically significant at $p < 0.05$): by going negative on these issues, politicians may increase their success rate by roughly 5 percentage points (from 13.2 to **18.1** per cent). In contrast, drafting negative messages on a party's best issues does not affect journalistic interest. Yet, the difference between both effects is not significantly different from zero (Berry et al., 2010; Brambor et al., 2006). Therefore, based on the full sample, we cannot conclude that the effect of negativity is substantially smaller than on issues a party owns.

[Figure 4 about here]

In sum, these results suggest that the media are more likely to cover negative messages, and that negativity is particularly powerful for rank-and-file politicians who lack the newsworthiness of party elites. This suggests that content-related factors (such as negativity) matter more for those politicians with ex ante lower chances to make it to the news. This might mean that a message's issue focus and its conditional impact in the success of a press release (Hypothesis 3) matter most for rank-and-file politicians.

To explore this, we re-ran Model 2 on a reduced sample excluding elite politicians. The results (Model 3) show that a message's issue focus indeed matters for rank-and-file politicians: they profit from going negative on issues owned by a rival party, but not on those issues a party owns (Hypothesis 3). On issues owned by a rival party, negativity increases the chances of getting the media to report by roughly nine percentage points (8.6 percentage points; $p<0.001$). In contrast, on owned issues, negativity has no significant effect (+/- 0 percentage points).

Regarding the control variables, we find no evidence that government parties are more likely to get media attention than opposition parties. Moreover, there is no evidence that external events increase a press releases' probability to make the news. Yet, we do observe positive and statistically significant effects for text length and a party's references to press

conferences. Finally, press releases published earlier in the morning are more likely to make the news, but the effect is not statistically significant at conventional levels all model specificatios.

Conclusion

Negative campaigning is a prominent feature of modern election campaigns. So far, most research has focused on its electoral implications (e.g. Damore, 2002; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010, 2011a; Nai and Walter, 2015; Riker, 1996; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995). In this paper, we took a different approach, analyzing whether negative campaigning also helps political actors to get the media to report on their campaign messages.

We find evidence that 'going negative' increases the chances of getting the media to report on a press release, which lends support to earlier macro-level evidence of a structural negativity bias of the news (e.g. Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010). The paper further reveals valuable opportunities for rank-and-file politicians, who usually find it harder to reach the news with their campaign communication. These actors seem to have the most to gain from adapting their campaign messages to the needs of journalists and editors (see also Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016; AUTHORS n.d.). As media attention to their campaign communication is rather low, rank-and-file politicians may benefit most from drafting campaign messages with high news value, for example by including negativity. Pursuing negative campaigning thus helps them to gain media attention and to build a national reputation among voters and within their own party.

The contribution further shows the limits and opportunities of issue-based negative campaigning. Whereas parties may intend to increase the credibility of their attacks by drafting negative messages on their best issues (Damore, 2002), this seems to be an unprofitable strategy as a means to get media attention. Instead, our findings suggest that parties, and particularly rank-and-file politicians, may gain media attention for their campaign

messages if they ‘go negative’ on issues they do not own, which could help them to damage the issue reputation of their rivals (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011a). Such a strategy might prove successful in electoral terms if parties are able to undermine the (perceived) competence advantage of their rivals or cast doubt on their ability to deliver desired policy outcomes after the election.

In general, these findings indicate that parties have much to gain if they adapt their campaign strategy to each communication channel (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011b). Especially in their manifestos, parties tend to focus on issues they own (Budge and Farlie, 1983). This strategy seems less profitable for party communication, which depends strongly on mediation by journalists and editors. Particularly rank-and-file politicians have higher chances to make the news by communicating on issues that are not among the parties’ best issues (see also Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016). During the period covered by this study (2013), social media still played a relatively small role in campaign communication in Austria. It will be important to see how negative campaigning differs in direct and mediated communication channels and how the changing campaign environment affects the messages parties and candidates choose to send out. For instance, it may be that social media users differ from journalists and editors in the extent they privilege negative messages.

In stressing the importance of negative campaigning in determining which campaign messages make the news, this paper extends existing research on the micro-level gatekeeping of political communication (Flowers et al., 2003; Grimmer, 2010, 2013; Haselmayer et al., forthcoming; Helfer and Van Aelst, 2016). This study is among the first empirical studies providing direct causal evidence for a structural negativity bias in media gatekeeping. Showing that the media predominantly *report more on* negative campaign messages than on positive ones, the paper reveals media-based rewards for this campaign strategy (e.g. Elmelund-Præstekær and Molgaard Svenson, 2014; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010). While the scientific debate over the implications of such a negativity bias

remains unresolved (e.g., Capella and Jamieson, 1997; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2010; Geer, 2006; Lau and Pomper, 2004; Patterson, 1993), the question of whether the news media predominantly report on 'negative' news about parties and politics could have broader implications for society and perceptions of democratic quality.

The study also adds to research showing differences in the degree and characteristics of negative campaigning in election campaigns (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Elmelund-Præstekær and Molgaard Svenson, 2014; Ridout and Franz, 2008; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010). Our results suggest a reason why party communication catered to the media (e.g. TV debates or press releases) is more likely to be negative than other communication channels (e.g. manifestos). Moreover, as rank-and-file politicians have higher incentives to go negative than elite politicians, we would expect higher levels of negativity in party communication based on many senders (e.g. social media platforms) than on those that focus on party elites. As communication channels differ with regard to their target population, the presence of party elites and their issue focus, they provide different incentives for parties to go negative in the messages presented in the respective channel. Our results further provide theoretical and empirical arguments on how media gatekeeping increases the amount of negativity in party communication and affects the representation of political actors and issues.

Our study is based on one country and a single election campaign. Hence, future research should extend our work and study other institutional or temporal contexts. Similarities with party and media systems from several Western and Northern European countries (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) should facilitate comparisons with other 'democratic corporatist' countries. Nevertheless, we see a need for more comparative research to enhance our understanding of media gatekeeping of (negative) campaign messages. Preferably, comparative studies should examine common features in the gatekeeping of political messages and investigate the influence of political and media system characteristics. Party competition in presidential systems like the US or France provides different opportunities to

individual politicians than in parliamentary systems like the UK or Germany. Beyond that, we would expect different incentives (and rewards) for individual candidates in closed-list electoral systems when compared to open-list systems. Similarly, media systems with higher party-media parallelism, such as Italy or Spain, may be more affected by partisan media coverage than liberal media systems like the Netherlands, Denmark or Sweden (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). While the media are likely to prioritize negative messages in most contexts, the extent to which they do so may vary, and these variations should be a key focus of future research.

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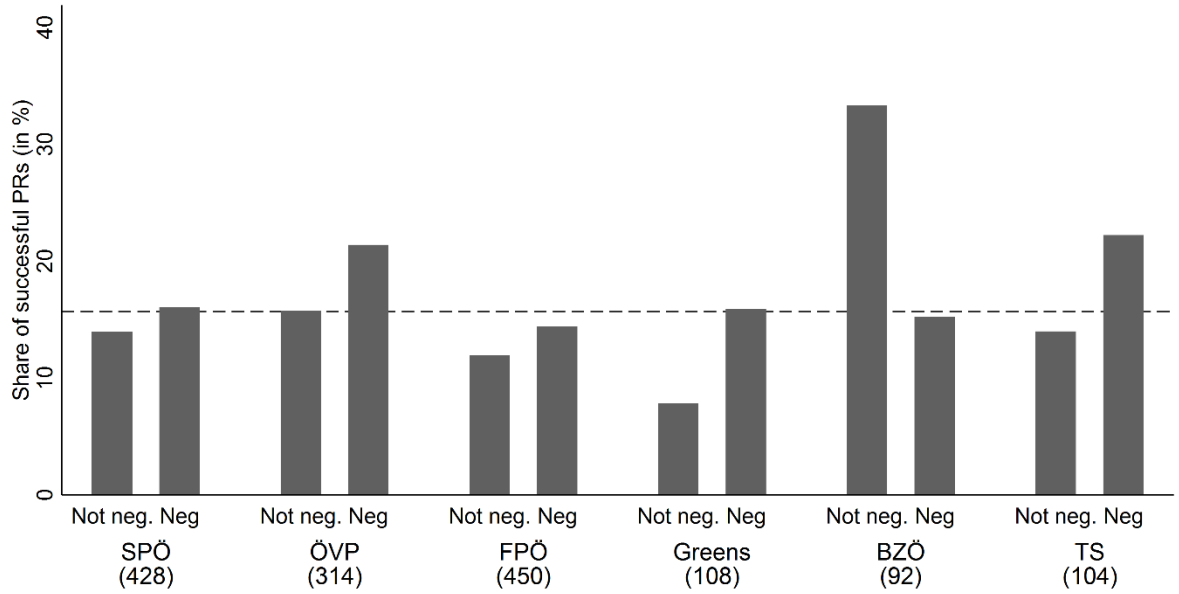
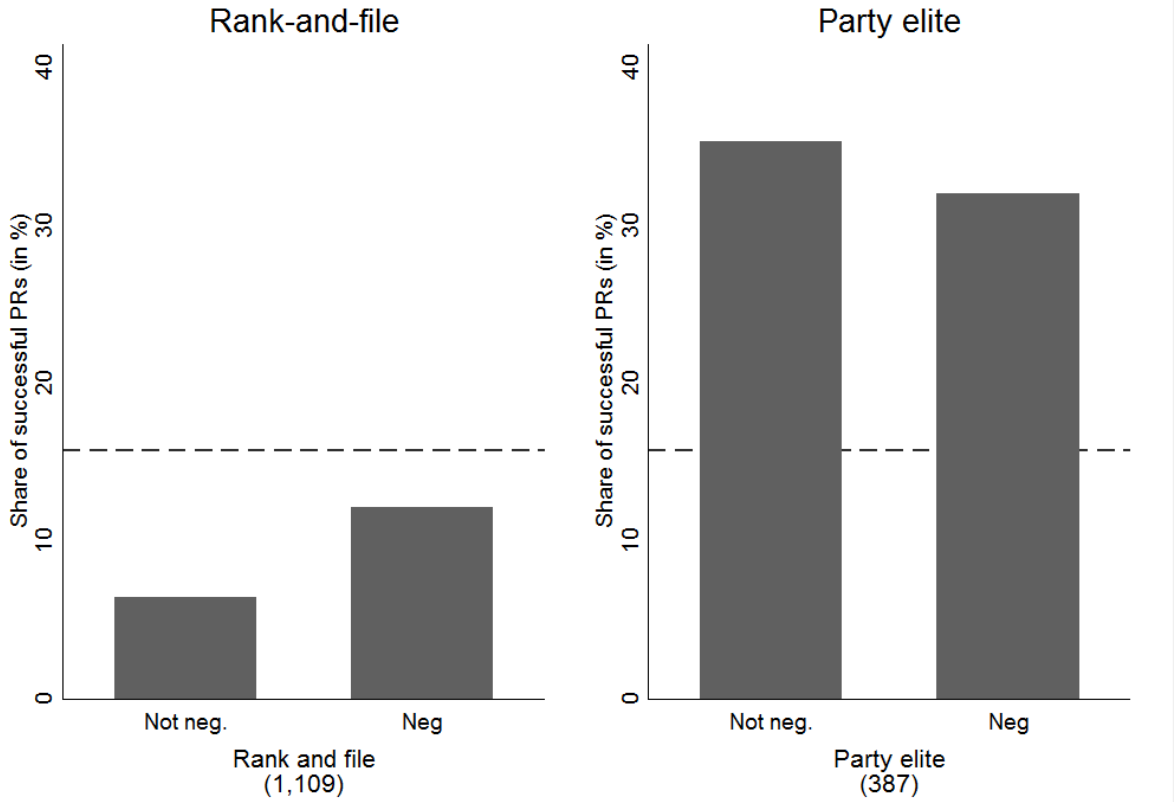
Fig. 1: Share of positive and negative press releases in the media (by party)



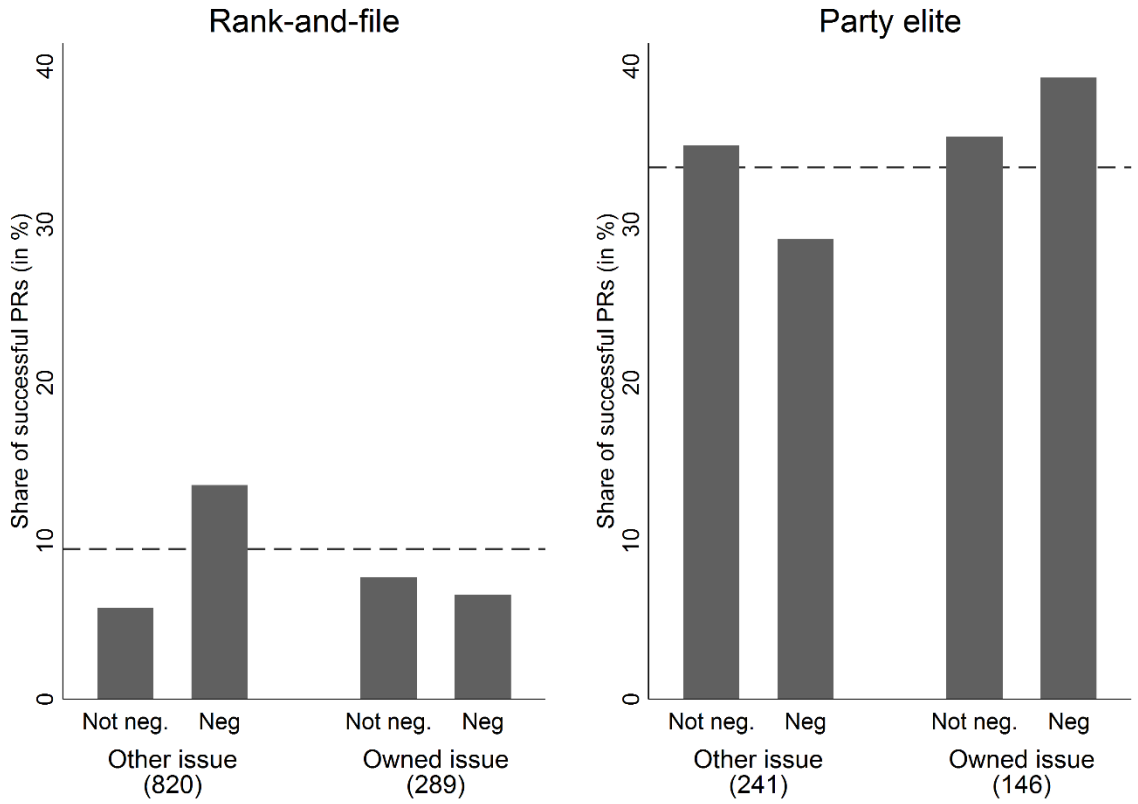
Note: The bars indicate the share of successful press releases by party (numbers in parentheses denote the total number of press releases per party). The dashed line indicates the overall mean of successful press releases (N=1,496).

Fig. 2: Share of positive and negative press releases in the media (by office status)



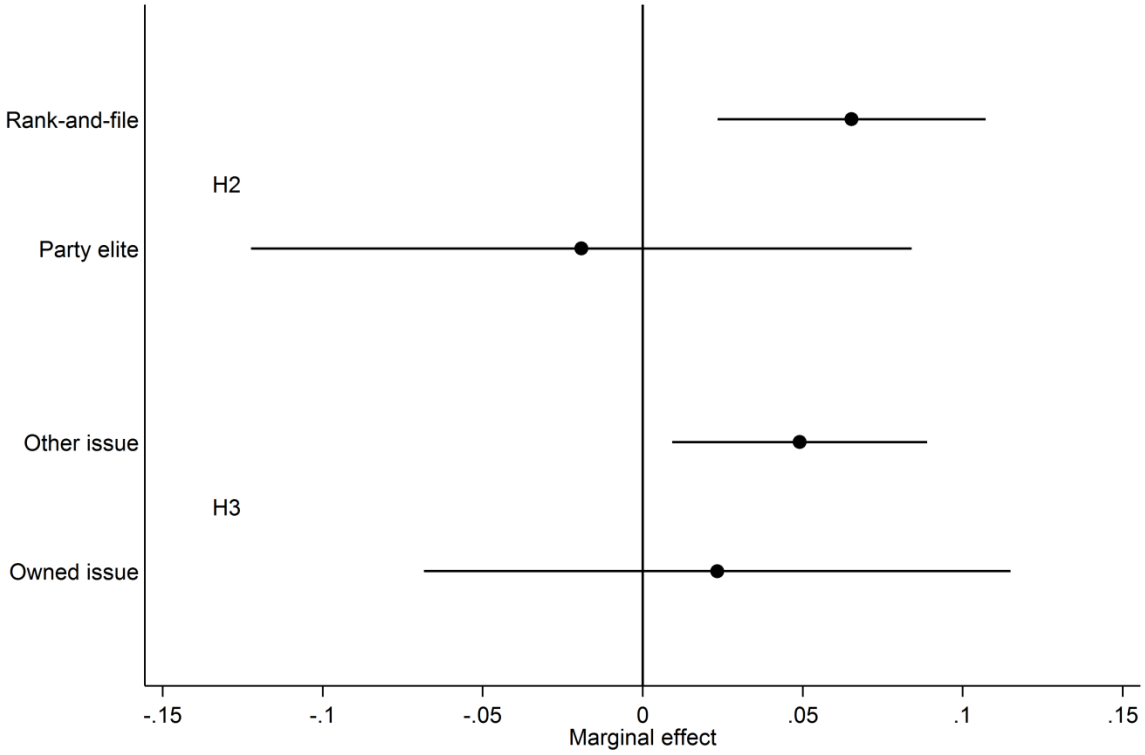
Note: The bars indicate the share of successful press releases for rank-and-file politicians and the party elite (numbers in parentheses denote the total number of press releases per group). The dashed line indicates the overall mean of successful press releases (N=1,496).

Fig.3: Share of positive and negative press releases in the media (by issue and office status)



Note: The bars indicate the share of successful press releases for issues owned by other parties or the politician's party across rank-and-file politicians (left panel) and the party elite (right panel) (numbers in parentheses denote the total number of press releases per group). The dashed line indicates the overall mean of successful press releases (N=1,496).

Fig.4: Marginal effect of negative campaigning conditional on elite status and issue type



Note: Marginal effects based on changes from positive to negative campaign messages. The estimates rely on Model 2, Table 1. Lines denote 95% confidence intervals. All remaining variables are at their observed values.

Table 1: Explaining success of negative campaigning in press releases (logistic regression)

	Model 1 (All)	Model 2 (All)	Model 3 (Rank-and-file)
Negative	0.358^{+}	0.867***	1.094***
	(0.20)	(0.25)	(0.30)
Negative # Party elite	-	-0.897**	-
		(0.31)	
Negative # Owned issue	-	-0.225	-1.137*
		(0.34)	(0.48)
Government party	-0.0616	-0.0219	-0.00180
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.21)
Party elite	1.477***	1.993***	-
	(0.20)	(0.28)	
Owned issue	0.0125	0.0946	0.370
	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.39)
PR based on campaign	-0.224	-0.203	-0.105
event	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Press conference	1.183***	1.198***	1.326*
	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.53)
Text length	0.00228***	0.00231***	0.00193*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Time PR sent	-0.00103	-0.00116^{+}	-0.00241*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-2.194***	-2.445***	-1.583*
	(0.57)	(0.53)	(0.75)
Observations	1,496	1,496	1,109
Log likelihood	-565.9	-561.4	-324.8

Issue-clustered standard errors in parentheses.
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix A: Cheating detection software

We use the cheating detection software WCopyfind (version 4.1.4) developed by Lou Bloomfield (2014). The software allows users to compare documents (in our case: press releases and media reports) and detect overlapping text parts. WCopyfind presents results in a tabular format and shows similarities between two texts in a side-by-side format with similarities highlighted in color.

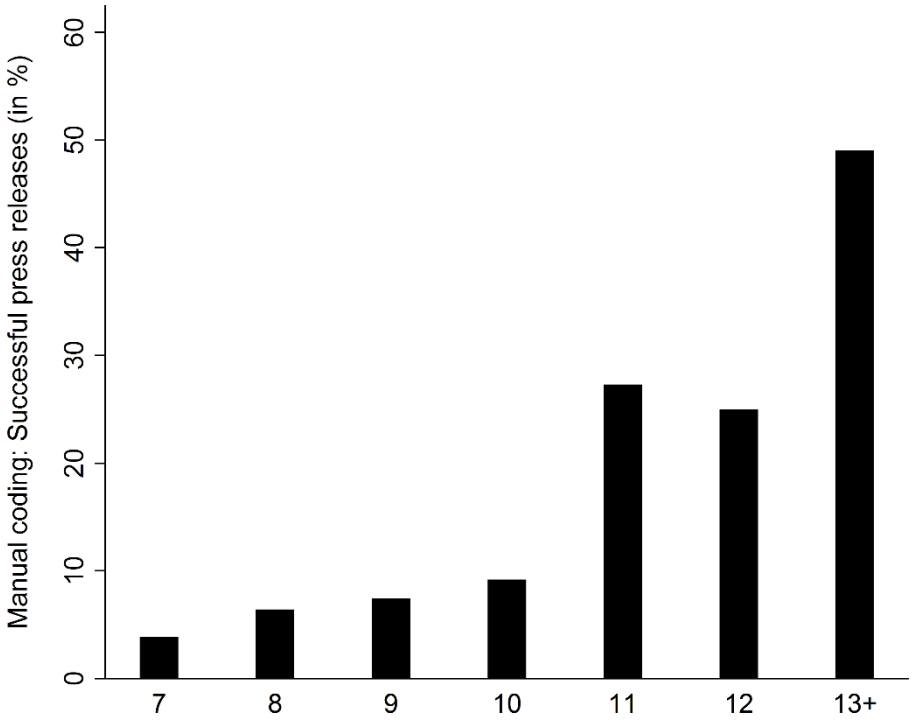
When running the software to identify similarities in press releases and media reports, we ignore punctuation, numbers, and capitalization, and set the language to Austrian-German. We further allow that one word in each matching phrase can differ (e.g. 'in the election' vs. 'in the next election'). This accounts for minor editing by journalists. Because we aim to detect all potentially relevant press release-media report matches, we set the shortest phrase length that can match to '3'. If a phrase such as 'in the election' appears in both the press release and the media report, the software reports and stores it as a match. This results in about 20,000 detected matches by the software.

To reduce the number of matches, we use additional information from the AUTNES manual content analysis of media coverage in the 2013 general election (Eberl et al., 2015). These data tell us which politicians appear as active speakers in the headline, subtitle, or first paragraph of a media report. Using this information, we identify a number of press releases where the author meets this condition among the matches made by the cheating detection software (N=500). These matches are likely to be successful because we know from the manual content analysis that the politician sending the press release was present in the media report. This sample is coded by two coders to identify successful and unsuccessful press releases (see the definition in the manuscript).

The second, much larger sample (N=19,863) contains the remaining matches detected by the software. We sort these matches by their similarity, using the total number of perfect matches (identified by WCopyfind) as a yardstick. The total number of perfect matches

represents the sum of perfect matches in a press release-media report pair (a score of '6' indicates that both documents share a phrase of six words that is perfectly identical or two phrases of three words that are identical). We decided to start the manual coding with the pairs of the highest similarity and to stop the coding process when the share of successful press releases falls below a certain threshold.

Figure A.1: Successful press releases in manual coding by similarity in cheating detection software



Note: Bars denote the average share of successful press releases identified in the manual coding process. The numbers below each bar denote the similarity score of each group as identified in the cheating detection software. For example, the press release-media report dyads in-group '7' share a phrase with seven words (or two matched phrases, one with three and one with four words). Note that the group with '13+' perfect matches contains dyads with 13 or more perfect matches.

Ultimately, we decided on a threshold of seven hits. To settle on this number, we started by examining the results of the coding process as shown in Figure A.1. If the software detected (sum(s) of) strings of ten or more words, human coders classified about 10 per cent

of these press releases as successful. The lower the similarity between the texts (as identified in the cheating detection software), the lower the share of successful press releases identified by human coders. We stopped the manual coding process after dyads with seven perfect matches as at that point the share of successful press releases is 3.8 per cent (i.e. 19 of 492 dyads were coded as successful). Assuming that the share of positive matches in the manual coding is even lower as the similarity decreases further, we deemed it unreasonable and unnecessary to continue the manual coding process.

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Appendix B: Examples (extracts) of successful press releases

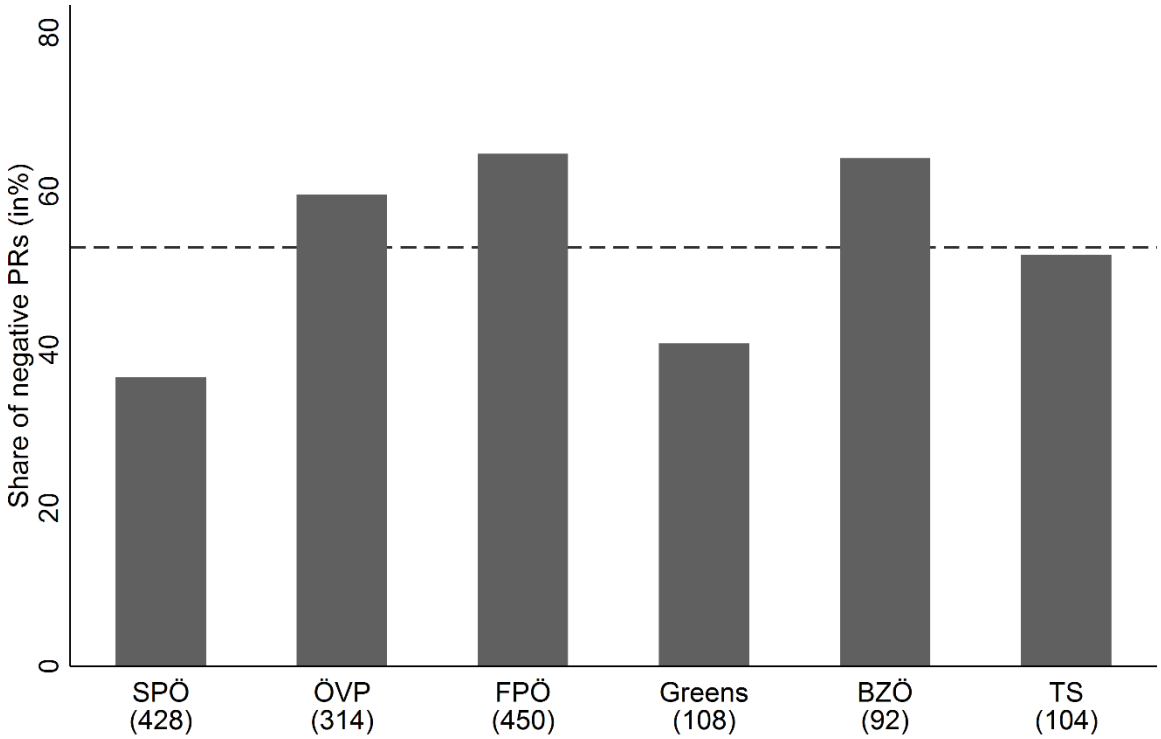
Table B.1: Examples (extracts) of successful press releases (English translation)

Press release	Media Report
Fekter: SPÖ endangers middle class and prosperity […] 'The SPÖ endangers the middle class and prosperity.' […] Regarding the Social Democrats' plans for wealth taxes, Fekter notes: 'Michael Spindelegger and the ÖVP want prosperity for all. In contrast, the SPÖ only aims to punish the people's diligence and performance.' […] (7.9.2013) http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20130907_OTS0045/fekter-spoe-gefaehrdet-akut-mittelstand-und-wohlstand	**ÖVP rails against SPÖ tax proposals** 'The SPÖ only aims to punish the people's diligence and performance', said Finance minister Maria Fekter (ÖVP) on Saturday in a comment on the SPÖ's tax proposals. Several ÖVP politicians rejected those *Faymann taxes*, the overall theme being: prosperity and the middle class are endangered by property taxes. […] (*Kurier*, 8.9.2013)
FPÖ-Kickl: Discussion on death penalty is ludicrous […] 'The discussion started by Frank Stronach to bring death penalty back into use is ludicrous and off target', Herbert Kickl stressed, reacting to statements by the party leader of Team Stronach. 'If the death penalty is one of Team Stronach's values, then good night', Kickl said. (5.9.2013) http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20130905_OTS0161/fpoe-kickl-todesstrafen-diskussion-ist-nur-skurril	**Death penalty: Revolt against Stronach's "Yes"** […] All other parties clearly rejected [Stronach's] idea. For Minister of Justice Beatrix Karl (ÖVP) such a discussion was superfluous. […] The SPÖ spokesman for Justice, Hannes Jarolim, sees Stronach's proposal in opposition to values in the European society. And for the FPÖ the discussion is ludicrous. 'If the death penalty is one of Team Stronach's values, then good night', party chairman Herbert Kickl said. […] (*Die Presse*, 6.9.2013)

Table B.2: Examples (extracts) of successful press releases (German original)

Press release	Media Report
Fekter: SPÖ gefährdet akut Mittelstand und Wohlstand […] „Die SPÖ gefährdet akut den Mittelstand und den Wohlstand. […] Zu den Besteuerungsplänen der Sozialisten unterstreicht Fekter: „Michael Spindelegger und die ÖVP wollen Wohlstand für alle. Der SPÖ geht es nur darum, Leistung und Fleiß zu bestrafen." […] (7.9.2013) http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20130907_OTS0045/fekter-spoe-gefaehrdet-akut-mittelstand-und-wohlstand	**ÖVP wettert erneut gegen SP-Steuerpläne** „Der SPÖ geht es nur darum, Leistung und Fleiß zu bestrafen", sagte ÖVP-Finanzminister Maria Fekter am Samstag zu den Steuerplänen der SPÖ. Mehrere VP-Mandatare meldeten sich gegen die Faymann-Steuern zu Wort, der rote Faden: Wohl- und Mittelstand seien durch Vermögenssteuern gefährdet. […] (*Kurier*, 8.9.2013)
FPÖ-Kickl: Todesstrafen-Diskussion ist nur skurril […] „Die von Frank Stronach angefangenen Diskussion um die Wiedereinführung der Todesstrafe ist skurril und geht am Thema vorbei", betonte der freiheitliche Generalsekretär NAbg. Herbert Kickl in einer Reaktion auf diesbezügliche Aussagen des Team-Stronach Chefs. „Wenn die Todesstrafe einer der Werte des Team Stronach ist, dann Gute Nacht", so Kickl. […] (5.9.2013) http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20130905_OTS0161/fpoe-kickl-todesstrafen-diskussion-ist-nur-skurril	**Todesstrafe: Revolte gegen Stronachs Ja** […] Entsprechend eindeutig fiel auch die Ablehnung der anderen Parteien aus. Justizministerin Beatrix Karl (ÖVP) erklärte, darüber erübrige sich jede Diskussion. […] Für SPÖ-Justizsprecher Hannes Jarolim steht Stronach konträr zu den Werten der europäischen Gesellschaft. Und für die FPÖ ist die Diskussion skurril. „Wenn die Todesstrafe einer der Werte des Teams Stronach ist, dann gute Nacht", so Generalsekretär Herbert Kickl. […] (*Die Presse*, 6.9.2013)

Appendix C: Share of negative press releases by party



Note: The bars indicate the proportion of negative press releases by party (numbers in parentheses denote the total number of press releases per party). The dashed line indicates the overall mean of negative press releases (N=1,496).

Appendix D: Multilevel (ML) vs. clustered standard errors (CL) (logistic regression)

Table D: Explaining success of negative campaigning in press releases (logistic regression)

	Model 1 (CL)	Model 1 (ML)	Model 2 (CL)	Model 2 (ML)	Model 3 (CL)	Model 3 (ML)
Negative	0.358^{+}	0.222	0.867***	0.675**	1.094***	0.886**
	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Negative # Party elite	-	-	-0.897**	-0.852**	-	-
			(0.31)	(0.33)		
Negative # Owned issue	-	-	-0.225	-0.104	-1.137*	-0.987^{+}
			(0.34)	(0.36)	(0.48)	(0.56)
Government	-0.0616	0.0496	-0.0219	0.0895	-0.00180	0.133
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.24)
Party elite	1.477***	1.464***	1.993***	1.954***	-	-
	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.28)	(0.25)		
Owned issue	0.0125	0.0844	0.0946	0.103	0.370	0.396
	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.39)	(0.40)
PR based on campaign event	-0.224	-0.223	-0.203	-0.207	-0.105	-0.0393
	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.26)
Press conference	1.183***	1.236***	1.198***	1.241***	1.326*	1.386***
	(0.32)	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.28)	(0.53)	(0.39)
Text length	0.00228***	0.00246***	0.00231***	0.00248***	0.00193*	0.00215*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Time PR sent	-0.00103	-0.00121*	-0.00116^{+}	-0.00131*	-0.00241*	-0.00255*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-2.194***	-2.235***	-2.445***	-2.454***	-1.583*	-1.717*
	(0.57)	(0.53)	(0.53)	(0.54)	(0.75)	(0.84)
Sigma (SD) based on 18 clusters (issues)	-	0.147^{+} (0.09)	-	0.133 (0.08)	-	0.316 (0.20)
Observations	1496	1496	1496	1496	1109	1109
Log likelihood	-565.9	559.9	-561.4	-556.3	-324.8	-319.7

Clustered standard errors (for issues) in parentheses (18 clusters).
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix E: Measuring issue ownership

In the manuscript, we use a dichotomous measure of issue ownership: a party owns an issue if the share of respondents naming that party as being best to handle an issue exceeds that of all other parties. This approach assumes that parties cannot share issue ownership (i.e. the difference in competence ratings between the top-ranked parties are relatively small). Moreover, it assumes that no issues are 'unowned', which would mean that no party is perceived to be particularly competent.

To avoid making these assumptions, we follow Tresch et al. (2017) and distinguish between full issue ownership, shared issue ownership, and no issue ownership. A party *owns* an issue if 1) more than 20 percent of voters name a party as being most competent handle the issue and if 2) is has a lead of at least 10 percentage points to the second-most competent party. Issue ownership is *shared* if 1) more than 20 percent of voters name the party as being most competent to handle the issue, and if 2) no party has a lead of at least 10 percentage points over other parties. Thus, if no party is mentioned by more than 20 percent of respondents as most competent party, an issue is *unowned*.

However, these cut-off points are somewhat arbitrary, and we make one adjustment to our data: for corruption, we consider the Greens to be full issue owners. They are seen as the most competent party to handle the issue (18.2 percent), and arguably more so than the second-most competent party (SPÖ, 10.1 percent). The Greens also campaigned on an anti-corruption platform. We believe that the Greens fail to pass the 20 percent threshold because the issue ownership question follows an open-ended question asking respondents to name their 'most important issue'. Respondents who sense political misconduct as a viable problem might be least likely to name any party as most competent to handle that issue. In a closed format question, 28 percent of all respondents name the Greens as the party that 'made the best proposals' to fight corruption (SPÖ, ÖVP, and FPÖ with about 10 percent, 15 percent say 'no party' 20 percent 'don't know').

Using the modified issue ownership variable does not alter our substantive findings. In Table E.1, we show the results based on the original (dichotomous) measure of issue ownership (i.e. Models 2 and 3 in Table 1) next to those based on the modified measure of issue ownership (Models 3 and 4). We also show the marginal effects of negativity on success for different levels of issue ownership in Figure E.1.

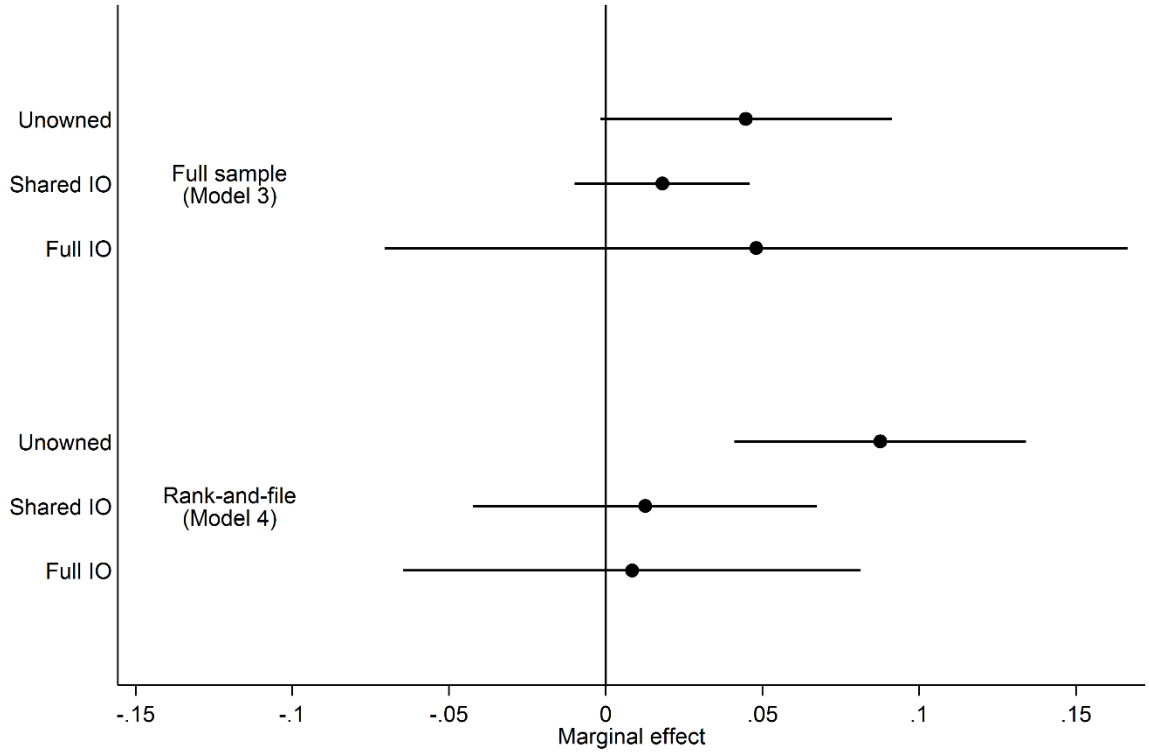
Table E.2: Explaining success of negative campaigning in press releases (logistic regression)

	Original IO measure		Modified IO measure	
	Model 1 (All)	Model 2 (Rank-and-file)	Model 3 (All)	Model 4 (Rank-and-file)
Negative	0.867***	1.094***	0.815**	1.030***
	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.30)
Negative # Party elite	-0.897**	-	-0.905**	-
	(0.31)		(0.31)	
Negative # Owned issue	-0.225	-1.137*	-	-
	(0.34)	(0.48)		
Negative # Shared IO	**-**	**-**	**-0.0576**	**-0.572**
			(0.27)	**(0.97)**
Negative # Full IO	**-**	**-**	**-0.0108**	**-0.924+**
			(0.45)	**(0.53)**
Government party	-0.0219	-0.00180	0.125	0.203
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.17)	(0.23)
Party elite	1.993***	-	1.997***	-
	(0.28)		(0.27)	
Owned issue	0.0946	0.370	-	-
	(0.26)	(0.39)		
Shared IO	-	-	-0.775**	-1.032+
			(0.26)	(0.60)
Full IO	-	-	0.127	0.396
			(0.29)	(0.45)
PR based on campaign event	-0.203	-0.105	-0.178	-0.0548
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)
Press conference	1.198***	1.326*	1.239***	1.380**
	(0.33)	(0.53)	(0.33)	(0.53)
Text length	0.00231***	0.00193*	0.00217***	0.00177+
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Time PR sent	-0.00116+	-0.00241*	-0.00132+	-0.00250*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-2.445***	-1.583*	-2.288***	-1.465*
	(0.53)	(0.75)	(0.52)	(0.74)
Observations	1,496	1,109	1496	1109
Log likelihood	-561.4	-324.8	-556.9	-321.9

Issue-clustered standard errors in parentheses.
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The general conclusions remain the same: first, we do not find a moderating effect of issue ownership in the full sample (see Figure E.1). Second, we do find a moderating effect of issue ownership if we limit the sample to the party rank-and-file (see Figure E.1). For those without high party or public office, the effect of negativity for attracting media attention is small and statistically insignificant for press releases that focus on issues that a party owns. In contrast, negativity does significantly increase the chances to make the news on those issues that are not owned by that party.

Fig.E.1: Marginal effect of negative campaigning conditional on level of issue ownership



Note: Marginal effects based on changes from positive to negative campaign messages. The estimates are based on Models 3 and 4 in Table E.1. Lines denote 95% confidence intervals. All remaining variables are at their observed values.

References:

Tresch, Anke, Jonas Lefevere, and Stefaan Walgrave (2017). 'How parties' issue emphasis strategies vary across communication channels: The 2009 regional election campaign in Belgium.' *Acta Politica* Online First.

Appendix F: Analysis based on a reduced sample of press releases

Not everyone affiliated with a party was deeply involved in the election campaign. To test the robustness of our results, we re-ran our models excluding all actors apart from government members, MPs, party leaders, and party chairpersons. We refer to this group as 'core actors'.

Table F.1: Explaining success of negative campaigning in press releases - reduced sample

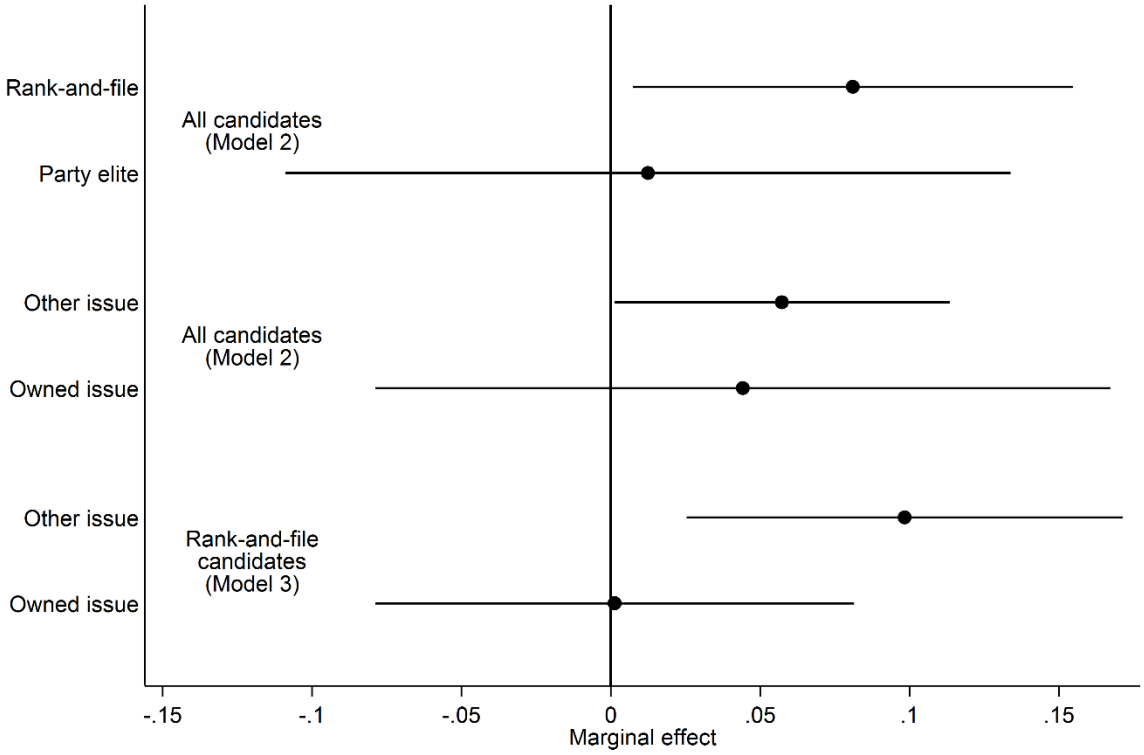
	Model 1 (All core actors)	Model 2 (All core actors)	Model 3 (MPs)
Negative	0.418^{+}	0.904**	1.203***
	(0.24)	(0.34)	(0.36)
Negative # Party elite	-	-0.789	-
		(0.48)	
Negative # Owned issue	-	-0.152	-1.188**
		(0.46)	(0.44)
Government party	0.138	0.158	0.111
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.26)
Party elite	1.143***	1.608***	-
	(0.26)	(0.28)	
Owned issue	0.185	0.249	0.758^{+}
	(0.30)	(0.36)	(0.45)
PR based on campaign event	-0.0651	-0.0526	0.0946
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
Press conference	1.187**	1.200**	1.248
	(0.43)	(0.43)	(0.76)
Text length	0.00343***	0.00341***	0.00331*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Time PR sent	-0.000937	-0.00102	-0.00227*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	-2.592***	-2.840***	-2.111*
	(0.57)	(0.57)	(1.05)
Observations	877	877	572
Log likelihood	-361.2	-358.9	-181.1

Issue-clustered standard errors in parentheses.
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results of this analysis (Table F.1) are very similar to the ones presented in the manuscript. As the number of observations decreases, the error margins increase (see Figure F.1). Yet, the substantial effect sizes are similar to those reported in the manuscript. Yet, in the reduced sample, the difference in marginal effects between party elites and party rank-

and-file (Hypothesis 2) is slightly above conventional levels of statistical significance (p = 0.102, Model 2).

Fig.F.1: Marginal effect of negative campaigning conditional on elite status and issue type (reduced sample)



Note: Marginal effects based on changes from positive to negative campaign messages. The estimates are based on Models 2 and 3 in Table F.1. Lines denote 95% confidence intervals. All remaining variables are at their observed values.