



DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA
AND COMMUNICATION (JMG)

WHAT TRIGGERS NEGATIVITY IN CANDIDATES' CAMPAIGNS?

Examining the importance of personal characteristics, the role of the media, and the election context

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Abstract

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Research in negative campaigning is growing throughout the years, however, the focus by researchers has been put into negativity's effects. The present study seeks to address the research void detected in the negative campaigning's drivers. Using data deriving from a world-wide scale based on more than 1000 experts' evaluations on more than 300 candidates' political campaigns, aims on providing answers regarding the reasons political actors go negative while campaigning. The analyses provided have examined how the personality of the candidates matters in the degree of negativity in their campaigns, how the media affect that degree, and which is the role of the dynamics taking place in a broader election context.

The definition of negative campaigning is a difficult task that the academia has been facing and there is an abundance of definitions being used among the literature. In overall, negative campaigning refers to any form of campaigning that attacks a political actor's opponent, that arises fear, or cynical news. There are many factors affecting the decision of any candidate to go negative. The most prominent ones found in the relevant literature refer to strategic choices, the candidates themselves, or the dynamics being caused by the media.

The present study used data from the Negative Campaigning Comparative Expert Survey Dataset – NEGex which is directed by Alessandro Nai. It is the first large-scale comparative study providing systematic data on the use of negative campaigning on a world-wide scale. The cases included in the study refer to 157 candidates who competed in 64 elections from 56 different countries and have been evaluated by a total of 625 experts. The analysis consists of regression analyses aiming on the estimation of the effect of the candidates' personality characteristics, the media and the general election context on the degree of negativity in their campaigns.

Results show that the candidates' personality indeed matters in the degree of negativity that their campaigns have. Candidates holding socially preferable traits are less likely to employ a negative tone, unleash character attacks, or use fear appeals as a part of their campaign. On the other hand, when media is focusing on the sensational aspect of the news and pay attention to negativity, the degree of negativity in the candidates' campaigns increases. In addition, more competitive elections are causing more negative campaigns. However, another finding of the present study is that the three components of negative campaigning (tone negativity, fear appeals, character attacks) have different predictors, and that there is no universal effect on them from the independent variables incorporated into the analyses.

Foreword

Writing the present Master's Thesis while being back to Cyprus due to the pandemic, and while being employed on a full-time basis was a challenge that contributed to my personal growth to a great extent. Studying and practicing political campaigning at the same time, is something I could be laughing of if I were told two years ago when I first stepped into the JMG building back in 2019 August.

I would like to thank my parents Christakis and Grazyna, for the particular form of support they have provide me so far. Also, my friends. Knowing that there are some people who can stand me anytime and, in any condition, is something I am very grateful for. My self-confidence would have been below zero the last months without them.

Massive thanks to my supervisor Nicklas Håkansson for introducing me to the Negative Campaigning field, and for his generous, and meaningful support and guidance during the last months.

Finally, as I do after every important little step I do in my life, I would like to dedicate the present work to my beloved grandparents, Kyriakos and Yiannoula who taught me that there is always a way when there is a will. Pappou I made it.

Kyriakos Konstanta

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kyriakos Konstanta', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Limassol, 17 May 2021

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

Political campaigning relies to a great extent on negative or attacking messages and can be sometimes described as hostile and impolite (Iyengar, 2019); hence, it is often argued that it can negatively affect the democratic system. This is supported by a variety of studies that provide evidence on the negative effects over voter turnout (Norris, 2000; Ansolabehere et al., 1994), disappointment with the political process and trust in the system (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994 in Norris, 2000; Fenno, 1996 in Geer, 2008; Ansolabehere et al., 1994) and promotion of cynicism which leads to the citizens' dissatisfaction over the campaigns' nature (Bartels, 2000; Brooks, 2000; Patterson, 2002; Hollihan, 2001 in Geer, 2008). Nevertheless, have we ever thought of the reasons that cause negative campaigning? What are the drivers of encouraging candidates to employ negativity as a part of their communication strategy during a campaign? The present study aims on shedding a light on those questions.

As the focus and research on the subject of negative campaigning are growing in recent years, empirical evidence is being provided over the positive effects of negative campaigning. Studies have rejected the hypothesis that negativity demobilizes and depresses voter turnout, and some of them even provide evidence that it can be an encouraging factor for citizens decision to cast their vote (Martin, 2004; Niven, 2006; Lau et al., 2007; Barton et al., 2016). Negativity can also enrich the voters' information environment and provide information of a higher quality to citizens contributing to the making of well-informed decisions (Geer, 2008). When political actors go negative, they do provide a better source of information to voters and can positively contribute to their decision-making mechanisms (Martin, 2004; Niven, 2006; Lau et al., 2007; Haselmayer et al., 2019). Also, the assumption that negativity alters the trust towards the system has been rejected, as arguably, negativity has no universal effects all over the world, whereas multiple factors moderate them and usually, are omitted by negativity's critiques. Finally, accountability as a crucial aspect of democracy, increases, through negativity and the threat of being attacked and exposed. "Feel-good" appeals do not seem ideal for accounting, or for letting voters know about specific flaws of a political actor (Geer, 2008).

The debate on negativity's effects is still unresolved and ongoing. As negativity and the interest in negativity increase, it is considered that a more in-depth examination of the reasons that politicians decide to "go negative" would expand the existing knowledge on the field. Scholars have mostly focused on negativity's effects, while the focus on its drivers remains minor (Damore, 2002; Nai & Sciarini, 2018). I argue that, declaring how individual and organizational factors influence the candidates' decision of employing negativity, is as important as the study of negativity's effects. To be more specific, through this study which focuses on the drivers of negativity, I attempt on exploring whether the employment of negative campaigning as a tactic derives primarily from the candidates' personal

characteristics, whether it is being affected by the dynamics taking place in a specific election context, or whether it is affected by the media.

The following sections provide an overview of the research topic, the statement of the research problem that is being addressed, and the significance of this study. In the chapters to follow, the theoretical framework of the study is defined, and the relevant literature is reviewed. The study's research questions, hypotheses and methodology that has been followed in order to conduct this research study are presented in detail. The paper concludes with a presentation of descriptive and explanatory quantitative findings, a discussion of them and provides a conclusion over the present study's outcomes.

1.1. Research Topic - Problem statement

Generally speaking, it can be characterized as almost impossible to argue that competing candidates and parties do not regularly “go negative” on each other and attack their opponents. Campaigns without any form of negativity are quite non-existent in the global scene of modern elections (Nai & Walter, 2015). Political consultants' advice to candidates is to go negative: early, often, and right through the election day. The opponent must be defined before he/she can define them. In case of attack, they should hit back even harder (Kamber, 1997 in Peterson and Djupe, 2005).

Setting this basic campaigning principle as our ground, specific questions arise regarding negativity's significance. Why and under which conditions do politicians employ negativity (Valli and Nai, 2020)? Politics is frequently a dirty and cynical business, but not all politicians are mean, charlatans, tricksters, or creeps (Veroni, 2014; Iyengar, 2019). Here lies the main argument behind the design of the present study. I assume that, the main factor that affects a candidate's decision to adopt negativity in their campaign, is their personality. I go a step further arguing that, not all candidates are able to support negative campaigning. Can anybody imagine of kind, calm, and meek persons, unleashing personal attacks against their political opponents, or using fear appeals in the political messages they choose to disseminate to the public? This goes against the very basic principles of political marketing (which are being discussed in the theory chapter) and might harm the overall image of the candidate who decides to employ a campaign that contradicts their personality.

Understanding the mechanisms behind the so much debated by the academia issue of negative campaigning, would contribute towards a better comprehension of the way political campaigns are formed between the contemporary settings. And here comes the reason for incorporating the factor of the election context into the analysis conducted. Every election race cannot be fully predicted. Therefore, the dynamics taking place during any election, can affect the decision of going negative. What happens if a candidate who even cannot support negative campaigning, trails at the polls? Do they have much to

lose if they decide to take the risk and become more aggressive? According to theory and empirical evidence not, and that is why the election context matters as well. Even media can affect the decision of going negative. Empirical evidence and theory suggest that coverage is dependent upon content's newsworthiness. Is there anything more intriguing during an election campaign period than the attacks the candidates unleash towards each other? Hence, the impact of media should be addressed as well.

As already has been stated, research regarding the motives for the employment of negative campaigning is lacking. The study aims on shedding light on the three categories of factors that might affect the employment of negativity in a political campaign: candidates' personal characteristics, the media, and the election context.

1.2. Significance of the study

The present study seeks to address the abovementioned research void by conducting quantitative analysis on a world-wide scale data from more than 1000 experts' evaluations on more than 300 candidates' campaigns (more information regarding the data is provided in the methods chapter). In addition, not much research has been conducted by combining the impact of those three sets of negativity's drivers: at the individual level, at the contextual level and at the media level. Taking them simultaneously into account, proper explanations can be provided regarding a candidate's choice to "go negative" or not.

First, and main focus, hence, one of the most interesting aspects of the present study, is the examination of the attackers' character traits. As will be discussed later on, a candidate's character is an important factor in the way their political campaign discourse is eventually formed. Specifically, the role of the "socially malevolent" Dark Triad traits which refer to the personality characteristics of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism, the "socially desirable" Big-Five personality traits which include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness (Nai, 2019a), and the degree of populism of the candidates will be tested on their decision to go negative. More information regarding these variables and how they were measured is provided in the Methodology chapter. Second, the role of the media coverage, as media is undoubtedly being recognized as one of the most important factors in any political happening, and especially campaigning and elections. The share of coverage candidates enjoy during their campaign is being tested, but also, the media attention on negativity and sensationalism in every country.

Finally, the broader election contest is being incorporated into the analyses, as the paper aims to test the relationship between the share of votes a candidate receives, the general competitiveness of the election participating in, the number of candidates running in the election, and the campaign's overall tone.

Another special attribution of the present study is that the impact of those drivers on negativity are being tested on three different negativity-related variables: (i) the overall tone of a candidate's campaign, (ii) the degree of fear appeals in the candidate's campaign, and (iii) the degree of character attacks in the candidate's campaign.

In addition, those analyses will be repeated taking into account some control variables provided by the literature. The candidates' gender, whether the candidate is incumbent or a challenger, or whether is being supported by a party or running as an independent, and even the type of election might affect the relationships between the factors named above. In this respect, the present study provides a broad, inclusive, and multi-level explanation of why candidates go negative during their campaigns.

1.3. Research Questions

To sum up the general aim of the study, three specific research questions have been formulated, and are answered through the interpretation of findings deriving from the quantitative analyses conducted later:

[RQ1] To which extent do personal characteristics of candidates affect the employment of negative campaigning, character attacks and fear appeals?

[RQ2] What is the role of the media in each country, in the competing candidates' decision of going negative, employing character attacks and fear appeals?

[RQ3] How is the overall election context in each country affecting the decision of candidates to adopt negative tone of campaigning, unleash character attacks and employ fear appeals?

CHAPTER 2. Negative Campaigning

The present chapter provides explanations over the definition of the term “negative campaigning”, the most prominent thematic areas of negative campaigning effects’ studies, and the theoretical assumptions with respect to the reasons that negativity occurs within the context of political campaigns. A concrete definition of negative campaigning will be provided, attempting an avoidance of problematic perceptions of the concept, taking into consideration all the related aspects within the field. Following, the effects of negativity in campaigns on the voters’ behaviour, the citizens’ information environment and the general trust in the system and accountability will be discussed based on previous empirical evidence. Finally, a short theoretical introduction to the reasons why politicians go negative will be provided in order to move on the next chapter that deals with the relevant empirical evidence.

2.1. Definition

The definition of negative campaigning is a difficult task that scholars have been facing throughout the years. There is an abundance of different definitions among the literature, differing in terms of the aspects they emphasize, but always similar in their main characteristic: “negative campaigning is the act of attacking the opponents on their programme, values, record, or character, instead of advocating their own programme, values, record, or character” (Nai & Walter, 2015). A literature review by Crigler, Just and Belt (2006) indicate that negative campaigning touches upon at least three different broad areas of communication: (i) *candidate attacks* on their opponents which are mainly found in political advertisement; (ii) *cynical news* regarding politics, political strategies, and motives which are detected in the news coverage; and (iii) *fear-arousing messages* by the candidates or in the press that can be characterized as threatening and frightening, found both in the news and the advertisements.

A general and broad definition of negative campaigning could be the employment of a tactic of attacking a specific political opponent (Haselmayer, 2019). It can be defined in contrast to the positive political discourse, which is being characterized by positivity and focuses on promoting a candidate’s own strengths and advantages and refers to the benefits that the voters will enjoy if they get elected, as negative campaigning lies on the tendency of focusing on the opposing political actors’ flaws, either personal or ideological (Iyengar, 2019). Negative campaigning can also be based on references to candidates’ party, their performance, their image, or the consistency which characterizes the opposition (Samaras & Papathanassopoulos, 2006).

It can include attacks or criticism toward an opposing candidate which are being produced by collecting information such as some flaws in character or the candidate’s performance and attempts to present the policies promoted through a negative perspective (Mayer, 1996). Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991 in Cwalina et al., 2015) identified three main modes of negative appeal in political campaigns: (i) *the*

direct attack: aims on decreasing the targeted candidate's evaluation and voting preference, (ii) *the direct comparison*: provides a contrast of records, experience and issue opinions between two opposing candidates, and (iii) *the implied comparison ad*: promote the attacking candidate's position, record or any other characteristic that have become important during the campaign, without mentioning the opponent and may not feature the attacking candidate until their very end.

Mark (2009: 2) suggests that the definition of negative campaigning can also be a matter of perspective. Some voters might perceive negative campaign tactics as misleading, vulgar, and against moral values. On the other side, it can be perceived as a way of gathering important and relevant information regarding a candidate's ability to perform under various pressures. He states that "negative campaigning, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder".

According to Geer (2008: 23), negativity is usually approached as "anything that observers of it do not like about campaigns" which is problematic as it makes it a very broad term that entails many different characteristics. Thus, his definition attempted on solving such issues by making clear that political messages during campaigns seek on doubting the opponents or promoting the candidate as the ideal choice for the voters: "negativity is any criticism levelled by one candidate against another during a campaign". This definition is probably the most prominent among negative campaigning research and literature but however, some might perceive it as not all-inclusive due to the fact that many, perceive as negative campaigning any negative description of even reality.

Negative campaigning can be found almost everywhere: political advertisements, the news, talk shows, the Internet and TV monologues. It ranges from personal attacks unleashed by one candidate to another, to cynical statements about the motives of opposing candidates and their personal interests serving intentions within the policy-making processes (Crigler, Just & Belt, 2006).

2.2. Is negative campaigning that bad?

The debate on the effects of negative campaigning still remains unresolved and ongoing. However, the literature review conducted has provided the insights in order to declare the three most prominent thematic areas within the studies dealing with negativity's effects. Those areas are (i) mobilization and voter turnout, (ii) citizens' information environment, and (iii) trust in the system and accountability.

2.2.1. Mobilization and voter turnout

To begin with the highly debated issue of mobilization and voters' turnout, which has received great interest by the researchers in the field, existing literature suggests that the boundaries between the conclusions drawn are blur. A meta-analysis by Lau and his colleagues (2007) of 111 dealing with the topic, attempted an estimation of the consistency and magnitude of findings on the effects of negative

campaigning, showing that negativity has positive effects on actual turnout. Their research provided no broad support to the demobilization (Ansolabehere, Iyengar & Valentino, 1994) and turnout depression hypothesis, but showed that negativity slightly mobilizes the electorate. The pessimist assumption regarding the role of negativity on mobilization and turnout received little confirmation and mostly had to do with the intended turnout and not the actual one.

The effect of negative and positive letters sent to candidates' partisans was examined by Barton et al. (2016) through the employment of two measurable activities: donating to the candidate and turning out to vote. Their field experiment in two local elections for county legislature during the 2010 general election in the US found that negativity has no positive effect on contributions but has a strong relative effect with voter turnout. Recipients of negative messages were more likely to go to the polls than recipients of the positive messages, which in addition, lowered voter turnout relative to the control group of the experiment. Another field experiment conducted by Niven (2006) in the US provides similar evidence. Negative ad treatment led to higher turnout by 6% in the mayoral elections in West Palm Beach, Florida. Additionally, the more negative ads the treatment group received, the higher the turnout was. Political interest and activity were also proved to be enhanced, as comparing those who received the ads to those who did not, ad recipients were more likely to say they knew something about the candidates, and slightly more likely to say they cared who won the race.

Finally, Martin's (2004) study on negativity's effect on three intervening variables (problem awareness, candidate anxiety, and perception of the closeness of the race) and in turn on voter turnout in the 1996 presidential elections in the US, provides further evidence to the mobilization assumption. His findings show that negative advertising encourages people to be more aware of the public problems, stimulates anxiety about candidates, and influences voters' perceptions of the closeness of the electoral race. These intervening mechanisms in turn, can indirectly route to mobilization and translate exposure to negativity into citizens' motivation to vote.

2.2.2. Information environment

Negative campaigning can enrich the voters' information environment and provide information of a higher quality to the citizens. Geer (2008) supports that in order to make an informed decision, negative information is essential as it is often more evidence-based compared to positive information. The specificity in issues' debates that negativity can provide increases the public's interest. Hence, when political actors go negative, they do provide a better source of information to voters and can positively contribute to their decision-making mechanisms. Studies mentioned above, provide further evidence on the information-related effects of negativity. People exposed to negativity are more likely to be informed about the candidates taking place in an electoral race (Niven, 2006) and tend to be more aware of the

public problems as negative campaigns mainly focus on attacking the issue positions of the opposition and might raise awareness among the public regarding the range of the problems and the stakes of the race (Martin, 2004).

On that issue, Lau and his colleagues (2007) meta-analysis detects effects into two directions: memorability and campaign knowledge and interest. 21 findings show that negative ads and campaigns are in a way easier to be remembered by the voters compared to the positive ones, and 11 studies reported positive effects on campaign interest and knowledge generated by negativity. Finally, one can argue that in the ages of politics' mediatization, as negativity enjoys greater coverage by the media (Haselmayer et al., 2019), the dissemination of important politics-related information to the public is being conducted at a higher frequency.

2.2.3. Trust in the system and accountability

Lau et al. (2007) meta-analysis provides evidence that negativity can alter the trust towards the system. Their quantitative synthesis of findings shows that 21 findings support that negativity can reduce the feelings of political efficacy, 11 that it can reduce the trust in government, and 10 that it can reduce voters' satisfaction. However, Marc Hetherington's (2004 in Geer, 2008: 141) aggregated data show no relationship between negativity and trust in the system. It is stated that there is not any substantial link between the two trends, hence, arguably negativity has no strong and negative effects on the political system at all. Therefore, those effects do not seem to be universal as some factors that can moderate these effects are being omitted from the research and will be discussed in the next chapter. In addition to that, Similarly, Nai's (2013) findings show that even the issue of a campaign might affect the generated differential effects towards people.

On the other hand, accountability is a crucial aspect of democracy, and without accountability, a democracy fails. Negativity and the threat of being attacked can enhance accountability in politics as it is quite difficult to account for a political actor through positive and "feel-good" appeals. Attacks are more likely to be supported by evidence than the common self-promotional claims. Contrary, political attacks that make voters aware of some specific flaws of a politician or a party can do the job, as for example an incumbent being insufficient for its position and underperforms is more likely to avoid being self-critical. Thus, the need for criticism toward the incumbent is being met by a challenger that seeks on developing, defining and presenting the alternatives. This form of criticism will force the "incapable" politician to respond and the dynamic that will be created will promote transparency and accountability (Geer, 2008).

2.3. Why politicians go negative

Apart from the debatable effects of negative campaigning, several studies have focused on the reasons why politicians go negative. However, despite the fact that negative ads have become increasingly common in political campaigning (Geer, 2012), not enough attention has been paid to the drivers of negativity. The explanations among the academia vary, but in order to prepare the ground for the upcoming chapters of this Master's Thesis, the most prominent theoretical explanations and most suitable for this study's scope are being provided in the following sections.

2.3.1. A strategic choice

William Benoit's (Benoit et al., 2003; Nai & Walter, 2015) "Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse" suggests that political campaigns possess one goal, namely winning the election by convincing the voters to vote for a specific candidate. This theory is founded on several important assumptions, and five propositions provide its foundations. First, voting is a comparative act as the voters in order to choose between the running candidates, have to proceed to a comparative judgment of them. Therefore, a candidate must be perceived as preferable compared to their opponents. Second, candidates must manage to distinguish themselves from their opponents, and preferably to make them appear better than them. Candidates who fail to articulate clear differences between themselves and their opponents, miss numerous reasons of being voted rather than their opponents. Third, the establishment of these distinctions is being achieved through specific political campaign messages. Citizens' information gathering about the candidates should not be limited and dependent on the news media coverages. Campaign communications increase the accuracy of voter perceptions as political messages are the ideal tools for distributing information that distinguishes the candidates, and information that can be used by voters in order to decide which candidate is the most preferable. Fourth, the campaign discourse creates this preferability by employing three functions: acclaims (positive statements about the sponsoring candidate or idea), attacks (attacks towards an opposing candidate or idea), and defences (defending respond against an attack made by an opponent). These functions take place on the topics of policy and character and can be viewed in a cost vs benefit form. On the one hand, acclaims can increase a candidate's own benefits, while attacks increase an opponent's costs, and on the other hand, defences reduce the alleged costs for the under-attack-candidate. However, this theory of campaigning has been developed in the USA and fits better the system followed in the US, compared to many European multi-party systems.

As to negative campaigning, there is an ongoing trend by political communication consultants of considering negativity as a more effective and useful form of political advertising, compared to the positive one (Iyengar, 2019; Feldman & Zmerli, 2018) and therefore, this employment can be considered as a strategic choice that serves the cost vs benefit scheme mentioned above (Nai & Walter, 2015). This

concept suggests that the decision to go negative is driven by the candidates' desire to reach the goal of winning the elections, and negativity is employed when can potentially increase the candidates' share of votes. It has also been argued that it is probably easier for the running candidates and their communication consultants to fine-tune attacks than positive messages, and thus, to focus on what is more controllable and newer (Cwalina et al., 2015).

There is an ongoing need for differentiation and of showing-off advantages in comparison to the opponents, and negativity can contribute to this direction (Geer, 2008; Less-Marshment, 2011). Candidates seek the mass public's support through engaging in many forms of persuasions and by employing negativity they provide voters reasons not to vote for a specific opposition candidate, they provide a framework for comparison between candidates. Going negative against the opponents is the best way of drawing clear differences and run on the issues the challenger favors (Mark, 2009). Some even define negative campaigning as a strategy that stages a direct or indirect comparative assault against the opposition (Cwalina et al., 2015). In relation to that, Geer (2008) argues that the rise of negativity is directly linked with the increased polarization of the political parties. As now parties and their candidates disagree at a greater degree on policy making than in the past, the number of attacks between the political actors inevitably increases as well.

2.3.2. A candidate-centred issue

Candidates must have a clear focus on who they are and what they stand for in order to effectively communicate their vision to the electorate. This demands the establishment of the candidate's image and the picture of him in the minds of whom the candidate stands for. This image is designed to support the relationship between the candidates and all the possible segments of voters they are trying to persuade, and to respond to their opponents' images, and is being continuously reinforced by the specific policies their campaign promotes so it can manufacture a specific image in the voters' mind (Newman, 1983; Newman & Perloff in Kaid, 2004). Therefore, they can promote recognition for themselves by providing a specific image of them. Their personality, their emotional and human side is considered as of high importance while forming the campaign's strategy (Lilleker, 2006).

Candidate-centred characteristics have often been taken into consideration during that process, and through campaigning it becomes possible to promote the candidate's basic values so that they are introduced to the voters as ordinary persons, determining how much they like and trust him. A campaign's messages are being formed because of the candidate's personality and background assessment, that must fit into the various components of the whole political campaign, whether that has to do with the theme, the narrative, or even the issue agenda (Arbour, 2016). However, the candidates' themselves must be able to support the communicated-in-campaign messages, thus, it is often chosen to

create such messages that they can manage and at the same time have acknowledged the public opinion and the dynamics of the race they participate in (Simon, 2002). Their personality, style, emotions and even aesthetics have become prioritized during the last years (Lilleker, 2006), hence, through campaigning their political profiles and image are being built and supported.

Around the globe, there are few examples of politicians that easily could support this statement. Donald Trump promotes a “messiah complex”, shows off his “low agreeableness” and acts like a “narcissist” enough, while Angela Merkel is widely known for being calm, disciplined, but also a concretely reserved, rational, and uninspiring person (Nai, 2019). As to Cyprus-my home country’s case which I am greatly aware of, president Nicos Anastasiades promotes a “cold blooded”, strict, and decisive political persona, while on the other hand, his main political opponent, Andros Kyprianou, communicates under the facete of a calm, reserved and sober political leader.

2.3.3. The media

Negative campaigning and the media are being connected by a complicated relationship. Among other tasks, media must inform the voters about the election campaign, including the use of negative campaigning, and thus, the media themselves contribute somehow to the use of negative campaigning (Walter in Feldman & Zmerli, 2018). The media have “created” incentives for candidates to produce and disseminate negative campaigning content, through their recent surge in attention to negativity. Many perceive political ads as something that solely has to do with news coverage, and not with the voters’ persuasion (Geer, 2012). Those who attempt to gain media attention rely upon the employment of communication strategies that will produce conflict and controversy, namely, by waging negative campaigning. On the other hand, this type of coverage by the news outlets helps candidates to distribute their political messages to the public allowing them to shape the most important narrative of their campaign.

The seek for media attention is also another reason for employing negativity in a campaign, as attacks and generally negative content is more likely to attract the media attention and are being characterized by higher levels of newsworthiness (Lau et al., 2007; Mark, 2009; Haselmayer et al., 2019; Haselmayer, 2019; Iyengar, 2019). Therefore, by occupying media space and airtime, through negative messages, candidates have the capability of getting through the public easier, as mentioned above, citizens tend to pay more attention to negative information. At a second level, by gaining media attention, political actors’ attempt on affecting and forming public opinion, becomes easier (Mark, 2009).

A rational explanation of media’s attention to this negativity-oriented coverage of politics could be that the media industry is being characterized by a strong commercial pressure. Covering negative political campaigning content, may be in the economic interest of news organizations, as it can attract larger

audiences (Ridout & Walter in Nai & Walter, 2015). This is becoming even more visible during the “attention economy” era we have entered, as that explain by Davenport and Beck (2001). People are dealing with an abundance of information flows from everywhere, and the Media, as profit organizations face that attention deficit issue. As a result, gaining and holding the audience’s attention has become a really valuable “currency”, and struggle doing so in order to remain sustainable and avoid failure, as in contemporary terms, the business success is being determined by “occupying” the issue of attention.

Thus, media can recognize the limitations existing in the ecosystem they operate within, and more specifically when it comes to politics, in which citizens are quietly uninterested in. This assumption is being supported by the “Burglar Alarm Standard” proposed by John Zaller (2003) who claims that citizens are too busy with their private concerns and uninterested in politics and public affairs. According to their information needs, which are limited to only selective gathering of information related to politics, negativity can draw their attention to matters that require their urgent response when been covered by the news media. Negativity can act as a “burglar alarm” to citizens, as it can inform even the most inattentive citizens regarding campaign-related or candidate-related issues (Shuck et al., 2016), and provides the information with the traits of being more salient, easily noticed, more readily processed (Lau, 1985 in Freedman & Goldstein, 1999) and more memorable and able to generate knowledge regarding a political campaign (Lau et al., 2007). In that way, by paying attention to negative messages, attacks, fear appeals and thus, more sensational aspects of campaign-related news, media can present politics in a more interesting and engaging way.

Literature from existing empirical studies provides more information on more specific drivers of negativity, which are being discussed in the next chapter of the paper.

CHAPTER 3. Drivers of Negative Campaigning: Previous Research

Apart from theory, previous literature provides us knowledge regarding a variety of negativity's drivers. The decision of going negative in a campaign is affected by a variety of different factors respectively the candidate's traits, its opponents' traits, and the characteristics of the context in which the election takes place (Nai & Walter, 2015). Researchers have tested the relationship between multiple factors and the overall tone of political campaigns, whether that is positive or negative. For example, incumbents seem to be less likely to employ negativity in their campaigns, in contrast with their challengers (Maier & Jansen, 2017; Peterson & Djupe, 2005; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011; Druckman et al., 2009; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011; Lau & Pomper, 2001), but they do attract more attacks by their challengers, as challengers have less material to build positive campaigns and do have much to say about the past of incumbents (Nai, 2020). Another candidate-level factor affecting the tone of a campaign is the status a candidate holds in a party (if he/she is a partisan). Party elites avoid using negative discourse as they already have the needed media attention, in contrast with lower-class partisans who seek on gaining visibility in the media during an election period (Haselmayer et al., 2019). Related to the needed media attention, empirical evidence suggests that candidates have more capabilities to go negative within the context of channels facilitating more direct interaction among them such as TV debates (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010).

Candidates' ideological placement also holds an important role in the way their campaign is formed. Extreme candidates seem to be more likely to employ negativity (Nai & Sciarini, 2018) and in line with the increase of the ideological distance between the target and the attacker, negative tones in campaigns increase too (Nai, 2020). The issue of campaigns is also another important factor in determining their tone. Campaigns tend to go negative against issues that are owned by an alternative (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011), and more specifically, they are more likely to go negative if they aim on supporting the status quo, in an attempt to weaken the credibility of the pro-change campaigns (Nai and Sciarini, 2018). In addition, the timing within an election period can affect the degree of negativity in the political campaigns taking place. As the election day approaches, negativity increases, as it goes in line with the intensity of the whole election process and a competitive context usually feels the candidates with the need to attract citizens' attention (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011; Nai, 2020). Negativity might be most common at the beginning of a campaign, as candidates seek to establish themselves and undermine opponents early, and at the end in order to seal or steal the election at the last minute (Peterson and Djupe, 2005).

However, as this study focuses on three specific categories of negativity's drivers, like it has already been mentioned before, the following sections provide more information and empirical evidence on the

role of the attackers' personal traits (which is the main focus of the present Master's Thesis), the election context, and the role of the media.

3.1. Attackers' personality traits

Candidates' personal traits can play a crucial role in potential electoral success or failure. Specific sets of characteristics are positively related to success in elections. Candidates with high levels of conscientiousness and psychopathy tend to attract more votes, while extraversion might be harmful (Nai, 2019b). Political candidates that are being characterized by higher levels of openness (Scott & Medeiros, 2020) and that are more agreeable (Joly et al., 2019) are linked to a higher likelihood of losing an election. As expected, these specific traits as affecting the election result might also affect the content of the candidates' campaigns, as empirical evidence proves that personality matters (Maier & Jansen, 2017), as it translates into distinctive communication styles during a campaign. Evidence from Glasgow and Alvarez (2000) study suggests that voters are not certain about their evaluation of candidates' traits, in the same way as they are not certain about their issue positions. As a result, the candidates' evaluation is being affected as those who are uncertain about a specific candidates' trait, pay less attention to it when it comes to their evaluation process of the candidate. In addition, voters who are uncertain about a candidate's trait, are used to have a reduced overall evaluation of that candidate. As some specific personality traits are stronger predictors for candidate preference, those participating in an election race, might employ specific communication techniques to promote it, and even go negative and attack their opponents.

There is a variety of identity features that are reportedly able of affecting the probabilities of a candidate to use negative campaigning (Nai & Walter, 2015), and literature predominantly focuses on them sets of identity features or traits that are argued to affect the likelihood of candidates going negative during their campaigns. Empirical evidence also suggests that the campaign messages disseminated by candidates, can influence the way that voters rate the candidates' personality traits (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011), and that specific personality traits that are forming the personality reputation of candidates, are related to specific political campaign styles (Nai & Maier, 2018).

Like has already been mentioned above, personality matters into the decision of employing negativity or not. To begin with, negative campaigning is often perceived as a risky tactic (Lau & Pomper, 2001), as its effects and its outcome is quite unpredictable, exactly how is its proven by the evidence provided by the existing literature of the field and has already been discussed in the previous chapter. Empirical evidence suggests that the employment of negativity is linked to the candidates' tolerance of risk (Geer, 2008; Mark, 2009), hence, those who are more willing to risk during a campaign are more likely to adopt a more negative rhetoric in their campaigns (Druckman et al., 2009). Peoples' propensity in risk is

reportedly strongly rooted in their personality. This is being supported by Nicholson et al. (2005) study, whose findings support that people scoring high in openness and extraversion are more likely to take risks, compared to others who maintain high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness. A survey of staff and candidates working on congressional, senatorial, and gubernatorial campaigns in the 2016 elections in US by Hans Hassel (2019), provides further evidence on the linkage between personality traits and the acceptance of negative campaigning. Those high in extraversion and low in agreeableness are more willing of engaging in negative campaigning. Individuals higher in conscientiousness are less likely to accept the employment of negative campaigning.

In addition, findings from Alessandro Nai's study (2019a), suggest that candidates that are high in agreeableness and openness tend to employ less negative and harsh campaigns. Agreeable people avoid this tactic as it would contrast with their image and would lead to a potential backlash. On the other hand, extroverted candidates are associated more with attacks and look to be more willing to take risks during a campaign. More specifically, candidates that are remorseless, unfeeling, impetuous, and tend to like being dominant are reportedly more likely to use harsh campaigns characterized by high negativity, attacks, and fear appeals. An explanation could be that the candidates' communication style takes place in their personality building during a campaign.

There is also a growing body of work which focuses on the relationship between negativity and the gender of the candidate, having one of its main conclusions that male and female candidates tend to campaign differently. Apart from studies detecting no difference between the employment of negativity from female and male candidates (for example Lau and Pomper, 2004; Valli & Nai, 2020), findings among studies in general vary, however. Taking for instance Bystrom's (2006) study on the US context, we can see that even though both female and male candidates use negative campaigning primarily to attack their opponents, women candidates are more likely to go negative than the male ones. She detected that women candidates prefer to attack their opponents on the character level, that they sponsor more negative tv ads, and that this might be an effect of women politicians trying to distance themselves from the roles of housewives, mothers and purely associated to feminine stereotypes, that they were assigned to by the society (Lau and Pomper, 2004; Nai & Walter, 2015).

However, the majority of studies on the relationship between gender and negative campaigning provides evidence towards the other direction. Male politicians are more likely to employ negativity compared to females (Ennsner-Jedenastik et al., 2017; Lau & Pomper, 2001; Maier & Jansen, 2017). Herrnson and Lucas (2006) study that relied on a nationwide mail questionnaire sent to a random sample of 11,756 candidates run for statewide, congressional, state legislative, local and judicial elections from 1998 to 2000, showed that female candidates are more likely to disapprove negative campaigning, perceiving it

as unethical or questionable during an election race. On the other hand, being a female candidate, you are more likely to raise negative campaigning with gender-oriented implications. Fridkin et al., (2009) survey experiment provides an explanation taking into consideration the gender stereotypes that exists. As women candidates are perceived as more honest, less aggressive, and better to deal with “compassion issues”, and these aspects of gender stereotypes are causing more favorable views of women candidates than men. Therefore, women candidates who go negative might be caught acting in contrast with the public expectation of their behavior, compared to men candidates who usually may be seen as more aggressive and thus, more suitable on employing negative campaigning.

The explorative study by Anne-Marie Walter (2013) has examined to which extent and under which conditions gender might influence the employment of negativity in a political campaign, by conducting a content analysis of campaign material (377 party election broadcasts) from 31 political parties in 23 British, Dutch, and German parliamentary election campaigns that took place between 1980 and 2006. Her study preliminary found out that female party leaders are more likely to go negative compared to male party leaders. Interestingly, this differential effect was dedicated to Margaret Thatcher, as when she was omitted from the analyses, the effect disappeared.

3.2. The role of the media

Media coverage reflects what will attract the audience, which in turn reflects a measurement of the interest of the story and the potential attentiveness of viewers or readers. Campaign-related stories are considered more interesting if the audience is more willing to be exposed to them. Therefore, content that is characterized by more value is more likely to be included in the final selection which will be disseminated to the audience (Brady et al., 2006). The need for media coverage drives candidates to the employment of negativity. Observing your rivals enjoying greater media coverage than you, might “force” you to go negative (Lau et al., 2007; Mark, 2009; Haselmayer et al., 2019; Haselmayer, 2019). Data from the US show that the share of negative ads in the news coverage had almost been doubled from 1980 to 2008 (Geer, 2012), and this in combination to other implications been discussed by the academics of the field, show that indeed media coverage might alter the choice of going negative.

Negative ads are relatively more effective in terms of newsworthiness, as they can spark controversy among the public and attract the attention of the media. Conflict-related content is considered to be more valuable to the media outlets, and people prefer to gather political information from controversial topics or ads, compared to the ones that refer to positive content. Thus, negativity has gained an increased value for politicians, as through negativity, politicians can occupy space within the medias’ content without even purchasing any airtime (Iyengar, 2019). News outlets often do not find anything

newsworthy in positive political ads, as they do not succeed in causing controversy or any conflict, and thus, journalists often ignore them (Geer, 2012).

On the other hand, empirical evidence suggests that negativity increases the politicians' visibility in the media, as negative content is more likely to be used as a source by news outlets. The analysis by Haselmayer et al (2019) shows the medias' tendency to predominantly report more on negative political messages and have characterized negative campaigning as a "rewarding" process for the politicians who employ it. The analysis by Ridout and Smith (2008) on ad-tracking data obtained from the Wisconsin Advertising Project for ten US Senate races in the 2004 election cycle, shows that negative and comparative advertisements are the subject of a more considerable coverage by the news media; positive ads, do not provide much for causing a controversy among the public, thus, are usually overlooked, and as a result, an amplification of the widespread view about the default negativity of political ads, hence, the electorate is left with false impressions regarding the nature of the political campaigns. It could be thus assumed that political campaigns in their attempt to "steal" airtime from the opposing ones, by going negative.

Similarly, Hansen and Pedersen (2008) have focused on campaigns of the Danish parties in the 2005 general elections and have detected that media devote much greater attention to negative campaign content, compared to positive-toned one. Media seem to provide extensive coverage to the limited number-due to the political culture of the country-of negative messages in Denmark.

Similar results are presented in Maier and Nai (2020) who used data from the NEGex dataset (the same one as this Master's Thesis is using as well), including information regarding campaign strategies of 507 candidates competing in 107 presidential and parliamentary elections in 89 countries between 2016 and 2019. Their findings suggest that candidates maintaining a more negative campaign tone, are more likely to receive greater media attention than the others, and especially when the negative tone is accompanied by fear appeals. In addition, the employment of emotional appeals is also another stronger predictor of media coverage. Another study using data from the same dataset (Gerstle & Nai, 2019), this time analysing campaign content from 97 candidates competing in 43 elections between 2016 and 2018, is providing similar evidence. The analysis reveals that negativity and emotional appeals are significant drivers of media coverage, exactly like campaigns with personal attacks and fear appeals, especially during presidential elections. Candidates seem to recognize this advantage being given when applying such communication tactics and aim on translating the increased attention of the public into electoral success.

3.3. The election context

Politicians tend to employ a more negative tone when their campaign is underperforming. Candidates trailing in the polls are set to become more negative than usual and use attacks more often in an attempt to get back on track (Maier & Jansen, 2017), especially when the election of reference is a close one, where candidates are encouraged to take risks (Geer, 2008). Poor electoral prospects are positively related to negativity, as candidates not doing well in the polls are more likely to go negative to get back on track, at a notable greater extent compared to the ones that are in contrast doing well (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Maier & Jansen, 2017). Evidence from Denmark elections suggests that negativity tends to increase when a potential failure against the political rivals is approaching, as the fear of it operates as a motivation for employing negativity (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011). This positive relationship between a potential failure and the adoption of negativity in a campaign is explained by the fact that those who face the risk of being defeated, have not much to lose, and consider the employment of negativity and attacks towards their opponents as factors that can outweigh the potential risks that they face, such as the one of the backlash effect (Maier & Jansen, 2017; Nai and Sciarini, 2018; Nai, 2020).

Sigelman and Buell (2003) analysis on the statements of presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the campaigns taking place between 1960 and 2000 in the US, provides further evidence on the assumption that negativity is related to potential election failure. Additional evidence from the US, comes from Damore (2002) study on political advertisements aired between 1976 and 1996 for the general elections. His study's findings show that the potential benefits of going negative, for the trailing candidates, outweigh the costs that accompany the employment of this strategy, and any benefits they would gain through positive campaigning. The best chance for the trailing candidates to narrow the distance from the leading ones, may be to alter voters from casting their votes for the front-runners, instead of trying to promote voting for themselves. Similar results are being presented by the Walter et al. (2014) study, whose evidence from party election broadcasts for parliamentary elections in Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. However, the evidence for the correlation between a potential loss and the employment of negative campaigning is only provided in the British two-party system.

In general, candidates' decisions to go negative are a result of the broader campaign environment. Some studies' findings suggest that the need of negativity in campaigns taking place, increases alongside with the number of the competing candidates in a race (Peterson & Djupe, 2005), as candidates seek a differentiation between themselves and their opponents, while others detect no significant correlation (Maier & Jansen, 2017; Valli & Nai, 2020). Their campaign's tone is often dependent upon the pressure they face during an election race (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011). Higher competition in an election is linked to higher degrees of negativity in the campaigns taking place by the candidates (Nai, 2020).

Druckman et al. (2009) study on US congressional campaigns, testing candidates' websites material, suggests that the competitiveness of the race can be a significant determinant factor of risking during a campaign, which is linked to employing negative campaigning. However, there is also evidence from other studies that provides no support to the beforementioned statement, as no significant relationship between the race's competitiveness and the employment of negativity has been detected (Lau & Pomper, 2001; Lau & Pomper, 2004).

Another significant determinant factor of negative campaigning is the one of the party systems, as how it seems, it constrains the use of negativity. The party's coalition potential might affect the likelihood of employing negativity in a multiparty system (Walter, 2014; Walter et al., 2014b). There are lower levels of negative campaigning in multiparty systems, compared to a two-party one. Parties in multiparty systems who decide to go negative, face the risk of diminishing the potential of any coalition partnership. Therefore, parties with high possibilities of coalition, have much more to lose from negative campaigning compared to the ones who do not. In addition, the multiparty context blurs the benefits from employing negativity, as even it effectively works and prevents a voter from voting the attacked party, the vote might eventually be casted to a variety of different parties. The benefit of negativity thus, can go to many different parties, but on the other hand, the risks are exclusively limited to the attacker party (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008). The study by Valli and Nai (2020) even provides evidence that the system might affect the degree of negativity among male and female candidates. Their findings suggest that female candidates are less likely to go negative in PR systems and use to attack more than males in majoritarian systems.

3.4. Negativity's drivers at a glance

The scope of the present study, and the review of the relevant theoretical framework, have guided and divided the review of the existing empirical evidence in three main categories: personality traits; election context; and media. However, like presented in the previous section, researchers have studied negativity through many different types of material. As also evidence suggests, different channels might affect negativity as well. This is a reason of using data from experts' surveys, as applies on the present study. In our case, experts have provided overall evaluations of campaign related factors, based on the candidates' whole campaign activity which includes the employment of an abundance of different communication channels. More regarding the significance of experts' surveys is provided in the Methodology chapter. A summarization of the findings is hence presented, and allows us to form and direct the broader structure of the present Master's Thesis through a set of specific research hypotheses which have been formulated.

First, we can observe that specific sets of personality characteristics are related to the employment of negative campaigning at a higher degree. Taking into account the evidence from existing studies, the first three research hypotheses go as follows:

[H1] Candidates scoring high at the Dark Triad traits and level of populism, will be positively linked to negative campaigning, the employment of fear appeals and character attacks.

[H2] Candidates scoring high at the Big Five personality traits, will be negatively linked to negative campaigning, fear appeals and character attacks.

Second, the media seem to play a crucial role in the degree of negativity in the candidates' campaigns. The newsworthiness of negative messages and attacks, as also sensational presentation of news stories, seem to be recognizable by the candidates and their campaigners. This, in combination with the candidates' need for media attention, formulate the next two research hypotheses of the present study:

[H3] The degree of negative campaign tone, fear appeals, and character attacks will be higher in case the media pay more attention to sensationalism and negativity.

[H4] Candidates receiving less media attention than others, are more likely to employ negativity, use fear appeals and character attacks.

Third, with respect to the second set of variables the present study focuses on, empirical evidence suggests that candidates who trail at the polls are more likely to employ negativity in their campaigns, and that election races being characterized by a higher degree of competition, are more prone to negativity. The number of candidates in a race can also affect the degree of negativity. Hence, the next three research hypotheses regarding the election context are presented:

[H5] Candidates receiving a smaller share of votes, are more likely to have employed negativity in their campaigns, fear appeals and character attacks.

[H6] Elections that are more competitive, will have a higher degree of negativity, fear appeals and character attacks in the competing candidates' campaigns.

[H7] The more the competing candidates in a race, the higher the degree of negativity, fear appeals, and character attacks will be.

However, there are other factors that seem to significantly affect the decision of going negative. First, challenger candidates seem to be more likely to employ negativity than incumbents. The reasons have already been explained through the literature review conducted. In addition, taking into account the potential party coalitions that each candidate has to take into consideration before going negative or not, and the specific dynamics taking place in each of the party systems that have been studied, we can

assume that the status of each candidate can affect their decision of going negative or not. Also, gender can also hold a significant role in that decision, as existing empirical evidence suggests. Finally, taking into account the competitiveness factor, and the fact that presidential elections are focusing on electing exclusively one candidate, we assume that this might affect the degree of negativity in the campaigns taking place as well. Thus, the final three research hypotheses are presented:

[H8] Challengers will be more likely to go negative, use fear appeals, and unleash character attacks, compared to incumbents.

[H9] Candidates who are running as independent, are more likely to employ negative campaigning, use fear appeals, and character attacks, compared to the ones that are supported by a party.

[H10] Male candidates, are more likely to go negative, use fear appeals and unleash character attacks, compared to the female ones.

[H11] Presidential elections will be characterized by higher degree of negativity, more fear appeals and more character attacks.

CHAPTER 4. Methodology

4.1. Data

The analyses rely on the Negative Campaigning Comparative Expert Survey Dataset - NEGex (Nai, 2019c). NEGex is the first large-scale comparative study to provide systematic data on the use of negative campaigning in elections from all over the world. The data is gathered through a systematic expert survey (more regarding this data-collection method is discussed in the next section of the paper). A standardized survey is distributed to national and international experts in elections and electoral behaviour, in the weeks following each election included in the dataset. The experts received an invitation email with a unique link towards a standardized online questionnaire, which was identical for all the elections with respect to its structure and phrasing. The response rate across all election was 19,7%, a relatively high for expert surveys according to Nai (2020).

Release 1.0 includes data regarding 73 national elections which took place worldwide between June 2016 and March 2018, providing information about the campaign strategies of more than 220 parties and 373 candidates who participated in those elections. However, for the needs of this Master's Thesis, only data deriving from the "candidate level" separate dataset have been used (the whole dataset has two additional separate datasets that deal respectively with the election and the party level). The dataset is based on answers that 1021 experts have provided around the world. However, elections in microstates (population of <100.000), elections took place in contexts with extremely limited competition or integrity (e.g. Somalia), elections in which independent candidates conquer the electoral races and no party system exists (e.g. Kuwait), referenda (e.g. Brexit) and elections held at a local/regional level (e.g. Catalan elections in Spain) or supranational elections (e.g. EU Parliamentary elections have been excluded from the dataset. The absence of a random selection of elections makes the data not statistically representative for all the elections at a worldwide level. However, they can provide a comprehensive understanding of contemporary electoral competition around the world (Valli & Nai, 2020).

As the present study focuses on the candidate level, the candidate level dataset has been used. It includes 373 observations (candidates), and aggregated information from the experts' responses regarding several measures of the personality of the selected candidates (usually the 2-3 most prominent candidates in each election). The data include measures that serve the needs of the study, such as the Big Five personality traits, the Dark Triad traits, and an index of populism for each candidate. Actor-specific metadata are also included (e.g. candidates' ideological placement) and election-specific metadata (e.g. election results). The NEGex dataset also includes measures of media attention (e.g. sensational aspects of news), and media quality (e.g. whether media in the country that the election is taking place are providing an accurate representation of facts). As to the election level, a series of variables measure the

salience of the election (e.g. how competitive the election was). Finally, measurements regarding negative campaigning strategies are also included in the dataset (e.g. campaigns' tone; degree of fear appeals, etc.).

4.2. Experts' survey

As Valli and Nai (2020) state, using experts to measure the tone of campaigns might seem unorthodox, as the literature mostly focuses on systematic content analysis when it comes to communication messages, thus, specific measurements that are included in the present study, might be perceived as such. However, expert surveys are a valuable tool of measurement, as experts hold specialized knowledge which enables researchers to explore topics that might otherwise seem impossible to study in a systematic way. This data-collection method holds promise of expanding researchers' ability to measure a variety of theoretical concepts that are interesting, but difficult to observe through observational data (Maestas, 2016).

For the collection of data included in the NEGex dataset, an expert is defined as a scholar who has worked and/or published research on the country's electoral politics, political communication, and/or electoral behaviour or related fields. Existing relevant academic publications, membership in relevant research groups, professional network, organized sections of similar groups, and/or self-assessed expertise in professional website, establish the expertise of the participants (Nai, 2020).

The scope of this Master's Thesis, which is focused on a broad review of negative campaigning's drivers, makes data coming from experts as the ideal form of data. Including cases from all over the world and dealing with information that require a level of expertise and proper and/or privileged knowledge (Christopoulos, 2009) regarding politics and communication-related issues in every of the countries included in the analysis. Experts, who are people meeting these requirements, and thus, are capable of providing accurate enough responses regarding the under-examination variables (e.g. each candidate's tone of campaign; measurement of their personality traits; media attention and quality in each country; etc.). As the data presented in the following section show, the experts participated in the survey, are being characterized by a high degree of familiarity with the elections they have provided information for. In addition, in practical terms, analysing document sources regarding the campaign activity of this number of candidates, participating in that variety of elections around the globe, would have required too much time and even more effort, if not impossible. By using data gathered from experts' evaluations, political campaigns can be assessed on the whole, independently of specific communication channels, availability of content and coding of multilingual content (Valli & Nai, 2020).

4.2.1 Respondents' characteristics

At this section, expert-related data is presented. As seen on the table below, an overrepresentation of male experts is observed (66%), and participants provided evaluations for the dataset are mostly leaning on the left side of the ideological scale ($M = 4.46/10$).

As Maestas (2016) states, researchers should also build into the expert surveys' mechanisms for the assessment of the responses' quality. With respect to the participants' level of knowledge, expertise, and level of being able to measure the variables included in the dataset, we can assume that the needed requirements have been met by the sample. Individuals who completed the survey are characterized by a high degree of familiarity with the election campaigns ($M = 7.74/10$) in the country they were asked to provide evaluations on. In addition, they declared the questions included in the survey as easy enough to be answered by themselves ($M = 6.41/10$).

Table 1. Characteristics of experts participated in the surveys

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Value Range</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Left (Min) and Right (Max) placement	4.46	1.09	1...10	2.50	8.00
Familiarity with the election campaigns	7.74	0.93	0...10	4.00	9.50
Easiness in answering the questions	6.41	1.19	0...9	3.00	9.00

*Total number of experts (N) = 364, Male: 66% Female: 34%

4.2.2. Parametric adjustments

However, experts' judgement of a topic might be characterized by a notable deviation, as each individual carry varying considerations to bear with, which affects the validity of the data (Steenbergen & Marks, 2007). For this Maestas (2016) suggests that the inclusion of anchoring vignettes is a must if possible, when employing expert surveys as a data collection tool. This contributes to the reduction of response biases when eliciting expert opinions, as anchoring vignettes can reduce the variance of the participants' responses. This has been taken into consideration by Alessandro Nai during the collection of the NEGex data. Those vignettes are concrete examples of a concept under study-in our case negative campaigning- that are included in the survey to assess how individuals apply a scale to the same example. Thus, anchoring vignettes can be used to construct a common scale (or set up benchmarks) in order to compare the responses of the individuals, in our case, regarding the different types of campaign messages.

As the present study focuses on analysing large-scale and multi-countries data, the issue of cross-cultural comparability is being raised, that implies that under-study subjects are similarly understood by respondents across different cultural units such as countries and languages (King et al., 2004). Thus, respondents might interpret identical concepts in different ways. Regarding the NEGex dataset, exactly

how its coordinator Alessandro Nai (2018) states, “how can we be sure that experts from all countries studied, have the same understanding of negative campaigning”? Negativity in campaigning is differently being perceived around the world, and can differently be defined in Europe, compared to Asia, for example (Lees-Marshment, 2011). Even though the questionnaire distributed provides solid definitions of negative and positive campaigning, individual experiences or cultural practices might significantly affect the understanding of concepts included in the dataset (e.g. attacks, negativity, defence, etc.). Here, the reasons of including “anchoring vignettes” in the questionnaire, come in.

Nai, asked from respondents to evaluate a series of ranked from the last negative to the most negative campaign messages, by stating how negative they are, while, answering the main question that the vignettes are supposed to “anchor” (the overall tone of campaigns in the country he/she represented). By anchoring the case in which the experts consider as negative, a better understanding of their answer to the main question becomes possible. Because all experts were provided with the same vignettes to evaluate, by adjusting each answer provided through the vignettes, the definition of negativity, which was measured, is always referred to the vignettes.

The NEGex dataset, includes six anchoring vignettes for the tone of campaigns, which were used to compute parametric and non-parametric adjustments for all tone variables, and are as follows:

Question: *Consider the following examples of campaign messages. Would you say that they are very negative, very positive or somewhere in between? Please provide a score between -10 (very negative) and 10 (very positive):*

Vignette 1. *I care about people* [positive, character appeal]

Vignette 2. *Inflation dropped during my term in office* [positive, issue appeal]

Vignette 3. *Unemployment dropped during my term in office, whereas under my opponent it increased* [comparative, issue appeal]

Vignette 4. *Under my opponent’s administration the economy has stagnated* [negative, issue appeal]

Vignette 5. *You cannot trust my opponent* [negative, character appeal]

Vignette 6. *My opponent is dishonest and corrupt* [very negative, character appeal]

The non-parametric adjustment for the campaigns’ tone in the NEGex dataset, was achieved as follows: according to each expert’s evaluations of the vignettes, the overall scale of negativity was divided in a number of “zones”. Then, the overall evaluation of the campaign in each country was compared with the vignettes (and was situated in one of the “zones” formed), assigning to the expert an adjusted score for the campaign’s tone. For each expert, a three-step protocol was followed for the non-parametric adjustments. After adjusting the overall evaluation of negativity in each country based on the two sets

of vignettes' evaluations (character appeal and issue appeal), the score for both adjustments was averaged, creating the final adjusted score for the campaign tone. The adjusted variable of campaign's negativity ranges between 1 (very positive) and 7 (very negative).

In addition, NEGex dataset provides a parametric adjustment of negativity. Alessandro Nai has proceeded to the employment of "probit models" which simultaneously estimate an adjusted measurement of negativity according to the values assigned by the experts to the vignettes used, plus five additional explanatory parameters: the election identifier, the experts' gender, their domestic or international status, their self-reported familiarity with the election, and their left-right positioning. Taking into consideration the complexity of defining and measuring negativity in campaigns, it was decided to use the parametric adjustment of the variable in the present study. An adjustment of it based on explanatory factors, might thus reduce the methodological errors arising when conducting analyses on such a concept while "ignoring" other details which might have affected the initial evaluation of it. According to information from the NEGex codebook (Nai, 2019d), the syntax which was used in order to compute both the non-parametric and parametric adjustments, is available upon request from the research team.

4.3. Quantitative Analysis

The study is first providing descriptive statistics regarding the sample which was selected, and the relative variables included into the further analysis. This refers to the relevant variables that belong to the candidate, election context, and media level, respectively. At a second level, regression analyses aim in estimating the effect of each of the explanatory variables on the dependent variables (campaign's tone, fear appeals, and character attacks). The goal is to get as closer as possible to the prediction of the dependent variable based on the independent variables taken into consideration, and eventually provide support or reject the research hypotheses presented in *Chapter 3*. Finally, those analyses will be repeated by being controlled by the specific variables mentioned before (gender, incumbent or challenger, and independent or party-supported), in order to check whether the effects detected are being differentiated when controlled by other factors as existing literature supports. Following the method of quantitative analysis, we will be able to draw answers regarding the research questions of the present study.

Following, the selection of the cases incorporated into the analyses is being discussed, as also the variables that consist them, and the ways each one was measured.

4.3.1. Selection of cases

With the purpose of meeting this study's goals, and for the needs for a more valid and reliable analysis of data, it was required to filter the cases included in the NEGex dataset prior the analyses. Thus, only specific cases were eventually included in the analyses conducted after a specific selection of cases that

was followed. Two criteria have been set to define which case should have been included in the analyses. The first criterion for including a case (candidate) into the analyses was that at least four experts should have completed the survey for the election participating in. At a second level, the candidate personality-related variables (Big Five traits, Dark Triad traits, and Populism) should have been available for the cases (candidates) who eventually have been included in the analysis, as the primary focus of the study is the candidates' personality traits.

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of the candidates included in the analysis compared to the complete dataset

Characteristic	<i>Percentages in full dataset</i>	<i>Percentage in selected cases</i>
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	85.4%	85.4%
<i>Female</i>	14.6%	14.6%
Ideological placement		
<i>Far-left</i>	3.2%	3.4%
<i>Left</i>	13.8%	11.5%
<i>Centre-left</i>	24%	25%
<i>Centre</i>	12.6%	14.2%
<i>Centre-right</i>	26.7%	23.6%
<i>Right</i>	14.1%	15.5%
<i>Far-right</i>	5.6%	6.8%
Independent candidates	8.3%	8.3%
Incumbent candidates	15.9%	31.4%
Type of election participated		
<i>Legislative</i>	59%	65%
<i>Presidential</i>	41%	35%

*Total number of candidates included in the analyses (N) = 157; Total number of candidates in full dataset (N) = 373

A higher number of equally skilled experts per target would improve the reliability and validity of the measurements (Maestas, 2016). Thus, no further criteria were set prior making the final selection of cases, in order to prevent missing out more experts' evaluations. In addition, the general aim of this study was to provide insights regarding what motivates candidates to go negative, mainly focusing on their personal traits, based on evidence from around the globe, including as many as possible different cases into the analyses. Eventually, data regarding 157 candidates have been included in the analysis, who competed in 64 elections from 56 different countries, which are based on the evaluations provided by 625 experts. The table below presents some descriptive characteristics of the candidates who consist the analyses following. As seen, an overrepresentation of male candidates exists (which corresponds to the full dataset's data), as also legislative overtake presidential elections, and the percentage of independent candidates is very low.

The exact list of cases included in the analysis can be found in Appendix 1, which lists all cases providing information regarding the name of the election participated in, the country, the type of election, and the number of experts responded for each election.

4.3.2. Variables used

In this section, the variables obtained from the NEGex dataset and make up the analyses are explained. More specifically, it is clarified how each one was coded, how has been measured through the questionnaire distributed to experts, and how latent variables have been constructed, is presented. Descriptive statistics regarding the variables used are provided in *Chapter 5: Results and Analysis*.

A reliability analysis of the three dependent variables presented below provided a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.732. This analysis has measured the internal consistency between the dependent variables, proving that they could be "grouped" together as they are closely related. The three variables are also very strongly positively related to each other, based on a Pearson's correlation analysis conducted ($p < 0.001$).

4.3.2.1. Dependent variables

DV1. Negativity in candidates' campaign: experts had been asked to rate the tone of each of the competing candidates' campaign as follows:

The following questions ask your opinion about the behavior of specific parties and candidates. When considering the electoral campaigns of the following actors during the most recent [election_name], would you say that their campaign was exclusively negative, exclusively positive or somewhere in between? Please provide a score between -10 (exclusively negative) and 10 (exclusively positive)

However, as presented in the Parametric Adjustments section, the parametric adjustment of this variable has been used. Therefore, the final scale measuring negativity in each campaign ranges between 1 (very positive) and 7 (very negative).

DV2. Degree of character attacks: Crigler et al. (2006) place candidate attacks on their opponents in the negative campaigning's areas of communication. And as Nai (2020) suggests, the NEGex dataset's anchoring vignettes provide evidence that character attacks are perceived by experts as more negative than issue/policy attacks. Thus, using data deriving from the following question, we measure the degree of character attacks, in each competing candidate's campaign. Therefore, as seen below, the degree of character attacks in each campaign is measured on a scale from 1 (no character attacks) to 5 (exclusively character attacks).

And would you say that the following parties and candidates mostly used policy or character attacks in their communications and campaign events?

- 1 (exclusively policy attacks)
- 2 (mostly policy attacks)
- 3 (equally policy and character attacks)
- 4 (mostly character attacks)
- 5 (exclusively character attacks)

DV3. Degree of fear appeals: Just like candidates' attacks, Crigler et al. (2006) define fear-arousing messages as another part of negative campaigning. Hence, this variable measures the use of fear appeals by each specific candidate as follows, ranging from 0 (no use of fear appeals) and 10 (high use of fear appeals):

A second type of emotional appeals are 'fear' appeals, intended to awaken and fuel the anxieties of the public by delivering worrisome messages and imagery focused on problems and threats

Examples of 'fear' appeals:

- *It's happening right now in your neighbourhood. A generation of young people is in danger. Violence and drugs threaten to destroy their future*
- *The streets of our country are in turmoil. We need law and order! Without it our nation cannot survive*
- *The average temperature of the planet is increasing rapidly. We have to stop climate change before it's too late*
- *More children are victim of crime than ever before*

Please provide a score between 0 (no use) and 10 (high use)

4.3.2.2. Independent variables

IV1. Big Five personality traits: The first variable referring to the personality traits' impact on negative campaigning, is the one of the Big Five personality traits. Taking into account Nai (2019a), this set of characteristics includes the "socially desirable" traits of Extraversion (energy, assertiveness, likeability, sociability, and social dominance), Agreeableness (cooperative and pro-social behaviours, avoidance of conflict, tolerance), Conscientiousness (discipline, responsibility, achievement-oriented, dependability, proclivity for organization and planning, and perseverance), Emotional Stability (calmness, detachment, low emotional distress, and anxiety), and Openness (curiosity, tendency towards new experiences). Those sub-characteristics were evaluated by the experts as follows:

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to [candidate 1 - candidate10]. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to [candidate 1 - candidate10], even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

In your opinion, [candidate 1 - candidate10] might be someone who is...

... Extraverted, enthusiastic bfi_c1 [component is measuring Extraversion]

... Critical, quarrelsome bfi_c2 [component is measuring Agreeableness]

... *Dependable, self-disciplined* bfi_c3 [component is measuring Conscientiousness]
 ... *Anxious, easily upset* bfi_c4 [component is measuring Emotional Stability]
 ... *Open to new experiences, complex* bfi_c5 [component is measuring Openness to experience]
 ... *Reserved, quiet* bfi_c6 [component is measuring Extraversion]
 ... *Sympathetic, warm* bfi_c7 [component is measuring Agreeableness]
 ... *Disorganized, careless* bfi_c8 [component is measuring Conscientiousness]
 ... *Calm, emotionally stable* bfi_c9 [component is measuring Emotional Stability]
 ... *Conventional, uncreative* bfi_c10 [component is measuring Openness to experience]

0. *Disagree strongly*

1. *Disagree somewhat*

2. *Neither agree nor disagree*

3. *Agree somewhat*

4. *Agree strongly*

The Big Five variable is measured per each of the five components (0 = very low and 4 = very high) through the dataset. Variables bfi_c2, bfi_c4, bfi_c6, bfi_c8 and bfi_c10 have been reversed to be given the same direction as all the other variables measuring each component of the Big Five traits. However, conducting a reliability test and a correlation matrix analysis, it was observed that “extraversion” was deviant to the other components, so it was eventually not included in the latent variable constructed. Therefore, to include the aggregated score of the remaining Big Five personality traits for each candidate in the analysis, the total value of the four components was computed, illustrating the degree of the Big Five traits on a final 0-16 scale (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.729).

IV2. Dark Triad traits: This variable measures the degree of the “socially malevolent” (Nai, 2019a) personality characteristics of Narcissism (Ego reinforcement behaviors, tendency to seek attention, and admiration. Bombastic behaviours of self-promotion), Psychopathy (Lack of remorse, insensitivity, impulsivity, boldness, social dominance. Leads to success in “adaptive niches” of society where individualism is rewarded), and Machiavellianism (Tendency to use manipulation and strategic behaviours) in each candidate’s personality. Dark Triad Traits were measured by using six components that when computed provide the overall degree of those traits in each candidate. Specifically, those three parts that make up the Dark Triad Traits were measured as follows:

Next, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements, related to personality traits that may or may not apply to [candidate 1 - candidate10].

In your opinion, [candidate 1 - candidate10] might be someone who ...

... *Wants to be admired by others* triad_c1 [component is measuring Narcissism]

... *Shows a lack of remorse* triad_c2 [component is measuring Psychopathy]

... *Might manipulate others to succeed* triad_c3 [component is measuring Machiavellianism]

- ... *Wants attention from others* triad_c4 [component is measuring Narcissism]
- ... *Tends to be callous or insensitive* triad_c5 [component is measuring Psychopathy]
- ... *Tends to use flattery to succeed* triad_c6 [component is measuring Machiavellianism]

- 0. *Disagree strongly*
- 1. *Disagree somewhat*
- 2. *Neither agree nor disagree*
- 3. *Agree somewhat*
- 4. *Agree strongly*

The variable of Dark Triad traits is provided by the dataset, measured per each component (0 = very low and 4 = very high). Dark Triad traits is included in the analysis after being computed in order to illustrate as a single variable the degree of those traits in each candidate's personality. Dark Triad traits is thus measured on a final 0-12 scale (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.859).

IV3. Populism level in candidates' personality: Experts had been asked to provide evaluations on candidates' personalities populism-related components. What Nai (2019d) did, was to conceptualize populism based on four different components which mainly deal with the candidates' behavioural tendencies. In more details, the populism degree in candidates' personality was measured as follows:

- And how would you say that the following statements apply to [candidate 1 - candidate10]?*
- In your opinion, [candidate 1 - candidate10] might be someone who ...*
- ... *Identifies with the common people and celebrates their authenticity* popul_c1
- ... *Treats opponents with respect* popul_c2
- ... *Uses an informal style and popular language* popul_c3
- ... *Uses an anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric* popul_c4

- 0. *Disagree strongly*
- 1. *Disagree somewhat*
- 2. *Neither agree nor disagree*
- 3. *Agree somewhat*
- 4. *Agree strongly*

The aggregated value of populism level is provided by the dataset (combining the four components together), ranging from 0 (low degree of populism) to 16 (high degree of populism). However, after a reliability test, and a correlation matrix analysis, component 2 ("treats opponents with respect") was deviant to the rest components. Thus, the aggregated score of populism level in candidates' personality, was computed by combining the values of the rest three components, providing a final measurement of populism on a final 0 (low degree of populism) to 12 (high degree of populism) scale (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.780).

IV4. Media attention on sensationalism and negativity: The measurement of media's attention on sensational aspects of stories and attacks and negative campaigning refers to a latent variable. Through the questionnaire distributed to the experts, the overall media attention on different factors had been measured. However, as the existing literature supports, and due to the study's specific aims, only two of them has been taken in account. More details regarding the measurement is provided below:

The following questions are about media and journalism in [country].

Consider all national news media in [country] (that is, newspapers, television, radio and online-only media).

How much attention do the news media as a whole provide to the following issues, in your opinion?

... Attacks and negative campaigning between parties, candidates [mediaatn_attacks](#)

... The sensational aspects of events and stories [mediaatn_sensat](#)

0. No attention

1. A little attention

2. Some attention

3. Much attention

4. A great deal of attention

The media attention on sensationalism and negativity variable thus, was computed by combining the values of the two variables ([mediaatn_attacks](#) + [mediaatn_sensat](#)), creating a new variable that is being measured on a 0 (no attention) to 8 (a great deal of attention) scale (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.885).

IV5. Candidates' media coverage: To obtain a measurement on each candidates' attention received by the media, we use data deriving from the following variable that was evaluated by the experts:

Media might provide more attention to some actors, and less to others. How much did we see any of the following parties and candidates in the national news media in [country] during the campaign before the most recent [election_name]?

0. Extremely low media coverage

100. Extremely high media coverage

The same question was used by Nai in both the election, party, and candidate-level datasets. We, however, focus exclusively on the media coverage of candidates in each election.

IV6. Election competitiveness: Candidates had been asked to provide their evaluations on each election's degree of competitiveness, by answering the following question:

When thinking of the most recent [election_name], do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

... *The race was not competitive; the winner was clearly known beforehand* [sal_racecomp](#)

0. *Disagree strongly*
1. *Disagree somewhat*
2. *Neither disagree nor agree*
3. *Agree somewhat*
4. *Agree strongly*

Note that due to the dataset's coding, this variable shows high competitiveness when the value is low and low competitiveness when the value is high. Therefore, it was necessary to reverse its coding in order to represent higher competitiveness when the value was higher. We thus measure each election race's competitiveness on a 0 (low competitiveness) to 4 (high competitiveness) scale.

IV7. Candidates' share of votes: The total percentage of votes each candidate received in each election is provided by the dataset (0-100%).

IV8. Number of candidates competing in the race: NEGex dataset also provides data regarding the number of candidates participated in each election race.

4.3.2.3. Control variables

CV1. Challenger vs Incumbent: Data regarding this variable is provided by the dataset. It has been coded as a dummy variable (0 = challenger and 1 = incumbent).

CV2. Party supported vs Independent: This variable is also provided by the dataset, as a dummy variable (0 = party supported and 1 = independent).

CV3. Gender: Gender is coded as a dummy variable (0 = male and 1 = female)

CV4. Type of election: As the previous three control variables, the type of election variable, had to be recoded as a dummy variable (0 = legislative and 1 = presidential). The aim is to test whether presidential elections which solely focus on electing one candidate, compared to the legislative ones (which also vary across countries), affect the impact of independent variables on the dependent ones.

CHAPTER 5. Results and Analysis

At this chapter findings from the analyses conducted are being presented. At a first stage, the descriptive statistics will provide an overview of the data used. Furthermore, information regarding the candidate’s campaigns, the election context and the media factors will be presented. This will enable us to get a closer look at the cases studied and be able to get a better understanding regarding the purposes and what the present study aimed to do by getting to know the data used better. At a second level, the regression analyses that test the research hypotheses stated in *Chapter 3: Drivers of Negative Campaigning: Previous Research*. Three different sets of regressions include a total of nine regression models, that incorporate the variables used, as those explained in *Chapter 4: Methodology*.

5.1. Descriptive statistics

5.1.1. Candidates’ campaigns

Having a look at Table 3, we can see that values regarding the campaigns of the candidates included in the analyses have a normal distribution. On average, the negativity in the campaigns’ tone is neutral but closer to the very negative value ($\mu = 4.02$ on a 1 to 7 scale). The average score of the degree of character attacks in campaigns is again close to the median value and slightly closer to the high degree of character attacks value ($\mu = 2.78$ on a 1 to 5 scale). Finally, the degree of fear appeals scored on average 5.19 out of 10, providing again a somehow normal distribution, however, it is the campaign-related variable that has on average the lowest score compared to the other two.

Table 3. Overall measurement of campaign-related factors

	Mean	SD	Value Range	Min	Max
Negativity in campaign’s tone	4.02	1.22	1...7	1.50	6.56
Degree of character attacks	2.78	0.68	1...5	1.25	4.29
Degree of fear appeals	5.19	2.05	0...10	0.69	9.77

5.1.2. Candidates’ personality traits

The candidates included in the analyses, scored on average medium scores with respect to the Big Five traits ($\mu = 8.72$ on a 0 to 16 scale) and to the populism level in their personalities ($\mu = 6.43$ on a 0 to 12 scale). Interestingly, candidates scored relatively high on the 0 to 12 Dark Triad traits scale ($\mu = 7.07$) as this can be observed in Table 4.

Table 4. Overall measurement of candidates' personality-related factors

	Mean	SD	Value Range	Min	Max
Big Five traits	8.72	2.36	0...16	2.50	13.46
Dark Triad traits	7.07	2.18	0...12	0.50	12.00
Populism level in personality	6.43	2.47	0...12	1.00	12.00

5.1.3. Media factors

The media from the countries included in the study as seen on the table below, do not pay great attention on sensationalism and negativity when reporting on the news ($\mu = 5.84$ on a scale from 0 to 8). As to the candidates' media coverage, the high standard deviation value (18.23) presented in Table 5, shows us that the data are spread out over a large range of values, meaning that some candidates had received significantly greater media coverage than others. This is also supported by the minimum value the variable got (7.88) which if compared to the maximum one (96.91), shows that some candidates enjoyed a disproportionate media airtime compared to their opponent candidates.

Table 5. Overall measurement of media-related factors

	Mean	SD	Value Range	Min	Max
Media attention on sensationalism and negativity	5.84	1.13	0...8	0.67	7.67
Candidates' media coverage	73.14	18.23	0...100	7.88	96.91

5.1.4. Election context

Finally, the election competitiveness has a normal distribution of data as seen in Table 6 ($\mu = 2.14$ on a 0 to 4 scale). This means that on average, the elections referring to each case included in the analysis, were equally competitive. As expected, the candidates' share of votes has a great spread of values among countries ($SD = 17.40$), and the number of candidates is actually representing the electoral system of each of the countries included in the study, hence, nothing regarding this value is worth commenting on.

Table 6. Overall measurement of election context-related factors

	Mean	SD	Value Range	Min	Max
Election competitiveness	2.14	1.03	0...4	0.00	3.81
Candidates' share of votes	28.28	17.40	0...100	0.48	98.79
Number of candidates competing in the race	5.38	1.78	0...10	2.00	10.00

5.2. Regressions

5.2.1. Drivers' impact on campaigns' tone

As a first step, I have explored what impacts the general tone of the candidates' campaigns, and more specifically, what "triggers" the degree of negativity in the campaigns' tone.

Model 1 in Table 7 refers to the initial regression analysis which is the baseline of the present study. Incorporating the direct effect of the three character-related factors, provides evidence regarding the importance of each set of traits on the candidates' campaign tone. As it can be observed, the most significant factor in predicting the tone of a campaign, is the one of the Big Five traits ($b = -.486$). Candidates who score high in agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness, are less likely to engage to a campaign that has a negative tone. In addition, Dark Triad traits, are also affecting the overall tone of a candidate's campaign. As expected, candidates who score high in the Dark Triad traits, are more likely to use negative-tone campaigns. In general, the personality traits in their own provide a very satisfactory explanation of the decision to go negative or not ($R^2 = .392$), showing that they indeed hold an important role in the campaign's processes.

Model 2 introduces the media-related factors' role in the candidates' campaign tone. Like Model 1, we can see that Big Five and Dark Triad traits are still significant factors in predicting the campaigns' overall tone. In addition, we can observe that contexts where media pay greater attention on negativity and sensationalism, have a positive effect on campaigns' negative tone ($b = .307$). In other words, increasing the media's attention on negativity and the sensational aspects of stories by one point out of 8, is associated with a 0,307 out of 7 increase in campaign's tone negativity. Incorporating both personality traits and media-related factors in the same model, does not significantly diminish the effect of the first-mentioned ones, hence, providing an increased degree of explanation to our dependent variable ($R^2 = .474$).

In Model 3, all categories of independent variables are used in order to analyse their effect on the candidates' campaign tone, providing an overall satisfactory explanation to campaign's tone variation ($R^2 = .503$). On top of the effects shown in Models 1 and 2, the election competitiveness impact on the campaigns' tone is observable. More competitive elections are positively related to more negatively toned campaigns ($b = .180$). Otherwise said, compared to the neutrally competitive/non-competitive elections, very competitive elections, are associated with an increased campaign negativity of about .360 (out of 7).

Finally, Model 4, incorporates both independent and control variables together. As seen in Table 7, none of the relationships included in Models 1-3 is being affected by the inclusion of the control variables.

We can however see that challengers are more likely to be linked to negative campaigning ($b = -.244$). This means that, if a candidate is a challenger, the degree of negativity in their campaign increases by .244 out of 7. In addition, the type of election can also affect the campaign's tone. Evidence from the analysis shows that campaigns taking place in the context of presidential elections, are less negative ($b = .195$) compared to the ones that serve the needs for candidates running for parliamentary elections in their countries. Model 4 provides an (at least) adequate prediction of the candidates' campaign tone ($R^2 = .547$).

5.2.2. Drivers' impact on the degree of character attacks in campaigns

The second set of regressions was conducted to measure the impact of the individual and contextual factors on the degree of character attacks in the candidates' campaigns.

Moving on to the next regression analyses, that deal with the impact of personality traits, media factors and the election context on the degree of character attacks in the candidates' campaigns, Table 8 presents the relevant findings. As observed in Model 1 all the personality traits incorporated into the regression analysis provide significant results. First, the Dark Triad traits of a candidate are positively linked to higher degree of character attacks in a campaign ($b = .331$). As to the Big Five traits, we can see like in the first set of regressions presented in Table 6, are negatively affecting ($b = -.397$) the degree of a more "negatively" perceived aspect of attack politics strategy (as this explained in Chapter 4: Methodology). Finally, the populism degree in a candidate's personality seems to positively affect ($b = .139$) the degree of the character attacks they unleash towards their opponents. Interestingly, a differentiation of the effect of the personality traits is detected here, as the populism factor received no statistical significance in the first set of regressions, which refers to the overall tone of the campaign. Again, and even at a greater extent, the incorporation of the three character-related factors in the analysis to predict the degree of character attacks, provided a relatively high prediction of our dependent variable ($R^2 = .434$), providing for one more time further evidence to the hypothesis that personality traits do significantly affect the decision to go negative.

Model 2 introduces again the media factors in the analysis. As shown in Table 8, candidates who receive greater media attention, are more prone in employing character attacks in their campaigns ($b = .143$), which is contradicting to the study's research hypothesis 7. This can be translated to the case in which a candidate who equally employs character and policy attacks in their campaign, might eventually employ exclusively character attacks if they receive an approximately 15% increased media coverage. As expected however, campaigns taking place in countries where media pay more attention to the sensational aspects of news stories and negativity of campaigns, are more likely to include character attacks at a higher extent ($b = .240$). The incorporation of the media-related factors in Model 2, is not

causing any significant change to the effect of the personality traits factors to the degree of personal attacks, and the combination of both sets of factors in the same model, provide an interestingly high degree of explanation of the dependent variable once again ($R^2 = .519$).

Surprisingly, including the election-context related factors in Model 3, provided no statistically significant findings for that part of the analysis. Neither the competitiveness of the election, nor the share of votes a candidate received, nor the number of candidates competing in an election, proved to be affecting the degree of character attacks in the candidates' campaigns. The effect of the candidates' media coverage becomes no significant when in the same model as the election-related factors. As to the rest of the variables, they have no significant variation. However, Model 3 also provides a high score of our dependent variable's prediction, but slightly reduced compared to the one of Model 2 ($R^2 = .514$).

To conclude with the second set of regressions, Model 4 incorporated all the independent and control variables together. As can be seen in Table 8, the statistical significance of the populism's effect on the degree of character attacks is diminished, the effect of the candidates' media coverage becomes slightly significant ($b = .155$), and the effect of Dark Triad traits ($b = .267$), Big Five traits ($b = -.424$), and media attention on negativity and sensationalism ($b = .254$) remain unaffected. We can also observe that incumbents are less likely to employ character attacks, providing support to our research hypothesis 8. Model 4 scored an R^2 of .514, which is the highest one among all models conducted for the estimation of the independent variables' impact on the degree of character attacks in candidates' campaigns.

Table 7. Personality traits, media factors, and election context impact on candidates' campaign tone

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE
Dark Triad traits	.196	*	(.044)	.203	*	(.043)	.185	*	(.043)	.179	*	(.041)
Big Five traits	-.486	***	(.040)	-.468	***	(.039)	-.508	***	(.038)	-.530	***	(.038)
Populism	.109		(.033)	.087		(.031)	.079		(.030)	.028		(.030)
Media attention on negativity and sensationalism				.307	***	(.068)	.235	***	(.073)	.222	***	(.071)
Candidate media coverage				-.072		(.005)	-.030		(.006)	-.012		(.006)
Election competitiveness							.180	*	(.079)	.159	*	(.078)
Candidates share of votes							-.104		(.006)	.061		(.006)
Number of candidates in the election							-.002		(.045)	.022		(.043)
Female candidate										-.035		(.211)
Incumbent										-.244	***	(.190)
Independent										-.035		(.286)
Presidential election										-.195	**	(.174)
N (Candidates)		157			157			157			157	
Adjusted R Square		.392			.474			.503			.547	

Note: † $p < 0.1$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = very positive campaign tone and 7 = very negative campaign tone).

Table 8. Personality traits, media factors, and election context impact on the degree of character attacks

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE
Dark Triad traits	.331	***	(.024)	.256	***	(.023)	.263	***	(.024)	.267	***	(.023)
Big Five traits	-.397	***	(.022)	-.439	***	(.021)	-.424	***	(.021)	-.424	***	(.022)
Populism	.139	*	(.018)	.133	*	(.017)	.136	*	(.017)	.094		(.017)
Media attention on negativity and sensationalism				.240	***	(.037)	.261	***	(.041)	.254	***	(.041)
Candidate media coverage				.143	*	(.003)	.131		(.004)	.155	†	(.004)
Election competitiveness							-.068		(.044)	-.111		(.045)
Candidates share of votes							.032		(.003)	.132		(.004)
Number of candidates in the election							-.018		(.025)	-.009		(.025)
Female candidate										.060		(.121)
Incumbent										-.174	*	(.109)
Independent										-.093		(.164)
Presidential election										-.057		(.100)
N (Candidates)		157			157			157			157	
Adjusted R Square		.434			.519			.514			.533	

Note: † $p < 0.1$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is measured on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = no character attacks and 5 = exclusively character attacks)

5.2.3. Drivers' impact on the degree of fear appeals in campaigns

The final set of regression analyses examines the drivers' impact on the degree of fear appeals in each campaign. Again, this analysis consists of four different regression models conducted in order to test the research hypotheses and are presented in Table 9. To begin with Model 1, we can see that again, the character-related factors are significantly affecting the degree of fear appeals in a campaign. Firstly, the degree of Dark Triad traits in the personality of each candidate, is positively related to the degree of fear appeals in their campaign ($b = .227$). This means that, by an increase of one unit on the Dark Triad traits scale (which ranges from 0 to 4), a candidate has an increase of .227 out of 10 on the degree of fear appeals in their campaign. As to the Big Five traits, like in the previous analyses conducted, we can observe that the higher the score is, then the more reduced the tendency to employ negativity in a campaign is. In our case, we see that candidates scoring high in the Big Five traits, are less likely to employ fear appeals ($b = .402$). Finally, populism, the least statistically significant predictor of fear appeals, is positively affecting their employment ($b = .131$). Model 1 predicts our dependent variable in that case by 33% ($R^2 = .330$), a percentage which is relatively low when comparing to the other regression models, showing that, character-related factors are not predicting the degree of fear appeals in a campaign, like they do with the overall campaign's tone and the degree of character attacks in them.

Model 2, like previously done, incorporates the media-related factors in the regression analysis. As we can see, the media attention on negativity and sensationalism is once again a significant predictor of negative campaigning, and in this present case, fear appeals ($b = .272$). None of the other variables is significantly affected by the incorporation of media factors, thus, we can support that personality traits' effect on the employment of fear appeals remains the same, even with the presence of the two media factors. Model 2 provides an increased R^2 of .397.

To introduce the election context factors in the regression, Model 3 has been conducted. Dark Triad traits, Big Five traits, the degree of populism, and the media's attention on negativity and sensationalism have quite the same effect on the degree of fear appeals. However, we can observe in Table 9, that, the only significant predictor of fear appeals which relates to the broader election context, is the one of the election race's competition level. Candidates, proceed on unleashing fear appeals at a greater extent when the competition is higher ($b = .192$). In other words, the difference between the degree of fear appeals in a campaign held in an election that is very competitive and another one that was held in one that was not competitive at all, could be up to .768 (on a 0 to 10 scale). Running a regression analysis that includes the personality traits, the media factors, and the election context factors, provided an explanation of our dependent variable of 41,6% ($R^2 = .416$), which is significantly higher than the previous two models conducted, and especially the first one. We can thus assume, that indeed, in the

prediction of fear appeals, personality traits do not matter at the degree they do with the other two dependent variables the study is dealing with.

Finally, Model 4, provides findings from a regression analysis including all the independent and control variables together. It can again be observed that the control variables do not really control any of the independent variables. Apart from the diminished statistical significance of the populism factor, and the increased significance of the candidates' share of votes, the causal relationship between the beforementioned variables and the degree of fear appeals, remains the same. Interestingly, when incorporating the control variables in the regression analysis, the candidates' share of votes becomes a significant predictor of the degree of fear appeals in their campaigns. Candidates who trail in the race, are less likely to employ fear appeals ($b = .220$), and this is another one finding that is contradictory to the study's research hypothesis 3. Now as to the control variables, like expected, incumbents are related to a lower degree of fear appeals in their campaigns ($b = -.224$), and against research hypothesis 11, campaigns held for the purposes of presidential elections, are linked to lower degrees of fear appeals ($b = -.141$). The final model of regressions conducted for the prediction of fear appeals in campaigns, provides an explanation to the variance of the dependent variable of 44,7% ($R^2 = .447$), the highest one among the rest.

Table 9. Personality traits, media factors, and election context impact on the degree of fear appeals

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE	Coef.	Sig.	SE
Dark Triad traits	.227	**	(.075)	.204	**	(.076)	.195	*	(.075)	.186	*	(.073)
Big Five traits	-.402	***	(.069)	-.406	***	(.068)	-.449	**	(.068)	-.457	***	(.068)
Populism	.131	†	(.056)	.116	†	(.054)	.116	†	(.053)	.065		(.054)
Media attention on negativity and sensationalism				.272	***	(.120)	.208	**	(.130)	.195	**	(.128)
Candidate media coverage				.008		(.009)	-.070		(.011)	-.044		(.011)
Election competitiveness							.192	*	(.140)	.167	*	(.141)
Candidates share of votes							.080		(.010)	.220	*	(.011)
Number of candidates in the election							-.033		(.079)	-.011		(.078)
Female candidate										-.040		(.381)
Incumbent										-.224	**	(.343)
Independent										-.078		(.517)
Presidential election										-.141	†	(.315)
N (Candidates)		157			157			157			157	
Adjusted R Square		.330			.397			.416			.447	

Note: † $p < 0.1$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is measured on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 = no use of fear appeals and 10 = high use of fear appeals).

5.2.4. Overview of findings

The analyses conducted are providing adequate answers to the study's research questions. As seen in the regressions presented in Tables 7-9, we can support that indeed, personal characteristics affect the employment of negative campaigning, character attacks, and fear appeals. Evidence from the regression models conducted, shows that there is indeed a causal relationship between the two parts, as no other variable affects the impact of Dark Triad traits and Big Five traits on the degree of negative campaign tone, the degree of character attacks and the degree of fear appeals in a campaign. As supported by similar studies, and as also expected, the "socially malevolent" set of traits of Dark Triad, is positively related to negative campaigning, which in many cases, as stated before, has also been perceived as malevolent as well. As to the "socially desirable" set of characteristics of the Big Five, it is supported by the evidence that is negatively related to any form of negative campaigning. Thus, H2 receives support from the findings provided. On the other hand, interestingly, populism proved to not be strongly associated with the three negative campaigning variables. This might have to do with the way Nai (2019) measured the variable. A candidate who identifies with common people, celebrates their authenticity, uses informal and popular language, and uses anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric, seems not related to the employment of negative campaigning. Therefore, the study's H1 received partial support.

With respect to the media, we observe that the role of the media in each country holds a significant role in the way election campaigns are being created. In countries where media pay more attention to negativity and sensationalism, candidates tend to employ campaigns with a more negative tone, with a higher degree of character attacks, and a higher degree of fear appeals. As supported by the empirical evidence and the theoretical framework the study used, the media seem to appreciate negative campaigning's newsworthiness, and candidates seem to recognize its newsworthiness. Hence, H3 is supported. Interestingly, and against the expectations of the study, the media coverage a candidate receives, has not been proved as a significant predictor of negative campaigning. With an exemption in Model 4 in Table 8, which shows that candidates who receive lower media coverage tend to be linked to higher degrees of character attacks (even that one had a very low statistical significance score), in no other case any statistically significant relationship has been detected. H4 is thus rejected.

As to the election context factors, we detect that in our case it does not receive significant importance in the employment of negative campaigning. The findings provided partly support H6. Apart from the election competitiveness, which is positively linked to a more negative campaign tone, and a higher degree of fear appeals, and the share of votes that also seem to affect the degree of fear appeals, no other election context related factor is proven to be a significant predictor of negative campaigning. Fear appeals, seem to be perceived as the most effective tactic of candidates to prevent voters from voting for their opponents, like stated in the theoretical framework chapter.

Finally, regarding hypotheses deriving from the control variable's incorporation in the regression models, only H8 receives support. Challengers, as expected, are linked to campaigns with a more negative tone, a higher degree of character over policy attacks, and a higher degree of fear appeals, than incumbents. Another interesting outcome of the regressions conducted, is the fact that H11 was rejected by the analyses. Candidates participating in legislative elections, are reportedly linked to more negative-toned campaigns, and a higher degree of fear appeals in their campaigns. The aforesaid contradicts the initial expectation of the study, which supported that presidential elections, as they focus on electing one single candidate, would have been linked to negative campaigning at a higher extent compared to the legislative ones.

An overview of the research hypotheses formulated based on the literature review and the theoretical framework of the present study, and whether each one is supported or not, is presented in Table 10.

Overall, the regression models conducted provided a rather high R^2 , proving that the factors incorporated in the analyses, are indeed significant predictors of negative campaigning. Comparing the R^2 scores of the present study (that range from .330 to .547), with the ones of similar studies that aim on detecting the determinants of negativity or studies that used the same data (for example: Nai, 2020: $R^2 = .350$ to .380; Valli & Nai, 2020: $R^2 = .171$ to .239; Maier & Nai, 2020: $R^2 = .249$ to .498; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011: $R^2 = .170$), we see that the way variables have been treated in the present study, provided a relatively very high degree of prediction to the negative campaigning variables.

Table 10. Overview of the research hypotheses, stating whether they were supported or rejected by the findings provided

Hypothesis	Supported?
[H1] Candidates scoring high at the Dark Triad traits and/or level of populism, will be positively linked to negative campaigning, the employment of fear appeals and character attacks.	PARTLY
[H2] Candidates scoring high at the Big Five personality traits, will be negatively linked to negative campaigning, fear appeals and character attacks.	YES
[H3] The degree of negative campaign tone, fear appeals, and character attacks will be higher in case the media pay more attention to sensationalism and negativity.	YES
[H4] Candidates receiving less media attention than others, are more likely to employ negativity, use fear appeals and character attacks.	NO
[H5] Candidates receiving a smaller share of votes, are more likely to have employed negativity in their campaigns, fear appeals and character attacks.	NO
[H6] Elections that are more competitive, will have a higher degree of negativity, fear appeals and character attacks in the competing candidates' campaigns.	PARTLY
[H7] The more the competing candidates in a race, the higher the degree of negativity, fear appeals, and character attacks will be.	NO
[H8] Challengers will be more likely to go negative, use fear appeals, and unleash character attacks, compared to incumbents.	YES
[H9] Candidates who are running as independent, are more likely to employ negative campaigning, use fear appeals, and character attacks, compared to the ones that are supported by a party.	NO
[H10] Male candidates, are more likely to go negative, use fear appeals and unleash character attacks, compared to the female ones.	NO
[H11] Presidential elections will be characterized by higher degree of negativity, more feal appeals and more character attacks.	NO

CHAPTER 6. Conclusion

The present study has examined the impact of a specific set of factors, on the degree of negativity tone, the degree of character attacks, and the degree of fear appeals in political campaigns. As already stated before, the degree of negative tone in the candidates' campaigns refers to the evaluation of the campaigns' tone (exclusively negative to exclusively positive) provided by the experts. Second, the degree of character attacks measured whether each candidate employed more character over policy attacks against their opponents. The NEGex dataset's anchoring vignettes provide evidence that character attacks are perceived as a more negative form of campaigning compared to policy attacks. Finally, the degree of fear appeals refers to appeals made by each candidate that aimed on awaking, and fuelling the anxieties of the public by delivering worrisome messages, focusing on problems and threats.

To conclude, this chapter summarizes the findings derived from the analyses conducted, as those relate to each of the research questions guided the study and highlights the most important results regarding the goals of the research conducted, explaining how it has contributed to the literature in different ways. Furthermore, the limitations that come with the study will be discussed, followed by a section providing the aspects future research might take into consideration to achieve even further contribution to the field of negative campaigning's drivers, and the final conclusion regarding the present study.

6.1. Discussion of the results

The study pursued to gain deeper insights into the impact of specific factors on the employment of negative campaigning. Taking them simultaneously into account, we can understand why some politicians go negative, or why they do not.

As explained in the previous chapters, the main focus and interest has been put on the role of candidates' personality characteristics in the employment of negative campaigning, fear appeals and character attacks. I assumed that the most important factor determining the employment of any negative campaigning aspect in a political campaign, is the candidate himself. What characterizes them as a person? Do they carry socially undesirable traits? Can they support negative campaign? Or will they ridicule themselves while at the same time diminish the possibilities they have to get elected? In addition, media-related factors and their impact on negative campaigning's employment has been tested, as media is one of the "key-players" in each political happening around the globe. On a third level, the study incorporated the role of the election context in the equation. Why and under which election-related condition is a candidate more willing to go negative? Apart from the personality and media-related factors, how do candidates evaluate the election context prior to going negative? Do they have more to gain than to lose by employing negative campaigning?

6.1.1. Addressing the Research Questions

6.1.1.1. *Personality characteristics' impact [RQ1]*

Personality affects the employment of a negative campaign tone, the unleashing of character attacks and fear appeals, which is supported by the analyses conducted. Tables 7-9 show that candidates scoring high on the Big Five traits, namely those who are agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, and open to experience, are less likely to engage in any form of negative campaigning. Whether that has to do with the overall campaign's tone, or the unleashing of character attacks against their opponents, or the use of fear appeals as a part of their campaign. This goes against the assumptions regarding a candidates' tolerance of risk (Geer, 2008; Mark, 2009), which as Nicholson et al. (2005) supported, is increased in personalities high in openness. On the other hand, candidates who score high in the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism) are more likely to employ more negative campaign tone, more character attacks, and more fear appeals in their campaigns. Candidates whose personality is positively linked to the populist behavioural tendencies of the identification with the common people and celebration of their authenticity, the use of informal and popular language, and the use of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric, are only linked to a greater use of character attacks. Nevertheless, populist candidates (as evaluated by the experts) are also slightly linked to a greater employment of fear appeals in their campaigns, but not significantly linked in any specific way to the overall campaign's tone.

6.1.1.2. *Media factors' impact [RQ2]*

Concerning the role that the media in each country play in the competing candidates' decision of going negative, employing fear appeals, and character attacks, we can observe a differentiation of the impact of the media factors incorporated into the analyses, on the dependent variables. First, and as expected countries whose media pay greater attention on the sensational aspect of stories, and negativity and attacks, are linked to a great extent to campaigns with a more negative tone, a greater amount of character attacks, and a higher frequency of fear appeals in the candidates' campaigns. This provides further evidence to what literature suggests regarding the perceived newsworthiness of negative political messages, both by the media, and probably by candidates as well (Lau et al., 2007; Mark, 2009; Haselmayer et al., 2019; Haselmayer, 2019; Iyengar, 2019; Geer, 2012; Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; Maier & Nai, 2020; Gerstle & Nai, 2019). Secondly, we see that candidates who receive bigger media coverage than others, are more likely to unleash character attacks towards their opponents, which is quite interesting in our case, as it goes against what literature suggested so far. On the other hand, the aforesaid findings could be the starting point for another interesting aspect of negative campaigning and the role of media. This is that when candidates who may enjoy greater visibility in the media, take the opportunity to attack their opponents, in an attempt to prevent voters from casting their votes for them.

Instead of seeking media attention, they exploit the one they already have gained, to serve their campaigns' needs.

6.1.1.3. Election-context factors' impact [RQ3]

Finally, regarding the third research question the present study dealt with, which examines the importance of the election context in the candidates' decision of employing negative campaign tone, unleashing character attacks, and using fear appeals in their discourse, we can argue that against our expectations, it does not significantly matter when campaigning. There has been only a slight effect of each election's competition level on the increase of negativity in campaigns' tone, and the frequency of character attacks and fear appeals. Interestingly, in Table 9 and Model 4, we can see that against our expectations which are based on literature (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011; Maier & Jansen, 2017), candidates who receive a bigger share of votes, tend to unleash more fear appeals than their opponents. However, this effect exists only when incorporating all predictor variables in the same regression model.

6.1.2. Study's highlights

What is obvious in the present study, is the detection of a differentiation in negativity's drivers impact on negative campaigning. Not every variable can predict every component of negative campaigning. We have observed that even though the campaign's tone, the degree of character attacks, and the degree of fear appeals, these all are parts of the broader negative campaigning concept (see *Chapter 4: Methodology* regarding the interrelation between the three dependent variables), however, not everyone has a relationship of the same strength with the predictors included in the present study. It is obvious, that some predictors have a more active role when it comes to the employment of some specific negative campaigning components.

We see that the Big Five traits are the strongest predictor of any of the negative campaigning's component. Whether that refers to the overall campaign's tone, the degree of character attacks, or the degree of fear appeals in the campaign. We also notice that Dark Triad traits have stronger effect on the degree of character attacks compared to the other two dependent variables, and that populism is not significantly affecting the overall campaign's tone. Media's attention on sensationalism and negativity is a stronger predictor for the negative tone in a campaign, compared to character attacks and fear appeals. Furthermore, the election's competitiveness is not predicting the degree of character attacks and affects the degree of fear appeals to a greater extent than does to the overall campaign's tone. Finally, incumbency seems to have a stronger impact on the overall campaign tone, like elections taking place for the presidency as well.

This provides further evidence to what Geer (2008) stated regarding the way people perceive negative campaigning. Negative campaigning is not simply anything that observers of it do not like about political campaigns. With respect to the findings of the study, which show the differential effect of each of the drivers on each of the negative campaigning's components, we can argue that the experts who provided their evaluations for the NEGex dataset, had managed to get away from a very-broad perception of negativity as a term, which might have complicated the way they had evaluated each one of the three (campaign tone, character attacks, and fear appeals).

Another valuable finding of the present study is the causal relationship between personality and negative campaigning. The personality of candidates indeed matters when deciding how they will campaign, and in reference to this study, especially when a candidate scores high in the Big Five traits. That is not just a matter of what kind of traits each candidate holds, whether those are the so-called "socially malevolent" or "socially desirable" (Nai, 2019a), because, as it can be observed in the analysis section, candidates are less likely to carry socially desirable traits and go negative, than carrying socially malevolent traits and decide not to go negative. In other words, socially desirable traits prevent candidates from engaging in negative campaigning, and this provides support to the assumption stated at the beginning of the present paper, that not every candidate can support negative campaigning, but also, to the fact that while forming a political campaign, the personality of the candidate is considered of crucial importance (Lilleker, 2006). Contrarily, candidates who carry socially undesirable traits, can also avoid engaging in negative campaigning, and this might be explained by strategy-related aspects of a campaign, whether the cost vs benefit scheme is satisfied by that choice. Another fact deriving from the present study and provides further evidence to what has been stated, is that no control variable is significantly altering the impact of any personality-related driver affecting the decision of going negative.

6.2. Limitations

Just like every other study that does not come without any limitation, the present one faces several that must be stated and addressed in this section of the paper. First, the paper is solely based on subjective evaluations provided by field-experts, rather than objective measures, which can be considered as a limitation of the present study. However, as addressed in Chapter 4: Methodology, the nature of the subject studied, required the contribution of evaluations regarding a rather very high number of candidates by people who hold a form of specialized knowledge and familiarity with the elections by which cases have been included in the analysis. In addition, the number of experts who provided their personal evaluations in the NEGex dataset was different for each country. As seen in Appendix 1, some candidates' traits had been evaluated by 5 experts, some others by up to 75. This was inevitable as the present study set specific criteria to ensure the reliability and the validity of the data analysis. Moreover,

to meet the goals of the study which was mainly based on the impact of the candidates' personality traits on their campaigns. A bigger number of observations per case would have been ideal and would have provided the study with higher reliability and validity.

In addition, there are some constraints on generalizability. First, the candidates included in the analyses have not been treated differently according to their level (party elites or rank-and-file politicians). Evidence from relevant literature suggests that as negativity increases the visibility in the media, "rank-and-file" politicians tend to prefer the employment of negativity as it provides them increased opportunities to reach the news through negative campaigning (Haselmayer et al., 2019). Treating all the candidates in the same way, probably reduced the study's capabilities of examining at a different level some dynamics caused by the candidates' need for media attention, which in that case, is not the same for all the candidates. Second, the inclusion of cases coming from countries with different political and media systems, which carry an abundance of differences, seems problematic as well. Finally, the generalization of the study's findings might be doubted as well due to the population of the study, and the sample included in the analysis. The study relied upon the data provided by the NEGex dataset, which includes data regarding 73 national elections from 73 different countries and 373 candidates, deriving from the evaluations of 1021 experts. However, the final selection consisted of data regarding 64 elections, from 56 different countries, 157 candidates based on the evaluations of 625 experts. Hence, the population to which the findings could be generalized, cannot be properly or without any deficiency be defined. However, the study aimed to initiate an overall examination of what causes negative campaigning on a global range, which can be the departure point for future studies examining the same subject in a more systematic way.

Moreover, there are other dynamics taking place in any election that have not been considered in the present study. For example, timing (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011; Nai, 2020; Pederson & Djupe, 2005) and the "spiral of negativity" effect (Iyengar, 2019; Cwalina, 2015) would have provided more specific insights regarding specific isolated periods during a campaign, or regarding attacks/negative campaigning issued between specific candidates towards each other. Finally, the relationships between the dependent and the independent variables have not been tested on the other way around. Hence, one can argue that it is not the character that causes negative campaigning, but negative campaigning shapes the way people perceive the character of political actors, or that it is not the media interest that increases the degree of negativity, but negativity increases the media interest in it. Finally, there might be a differential effect of drivers on negativity between extreme cases which has not been examined in the present study. For example, we do not know whether personality, media, or context-related factors matter in the same way for both very negative and no negative at all campaigns.

6.3. Future research and Conclusion

Overall, the present study is an initial step towards a holistic understanding of why politicians go negative when campaigning. This was one of the first studies incorporating the whole spectrum of possible predictors into an attempt to provide explanations over the negativity in the tone of campaigns, the degree of character attacks, and the frequency of fear appeals. However, there are several aspects that future research should take into consideration so that further contribution in the field is achieved.

First, analyses based on a separation between different electoral and media systems should be attempted. As has already been stated, there are different dynamics taking place in different types of electoral systems, as well as different challenges, conditions, and opportunities exist in different media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). One limitation of the present study admitted in the previous section, could thus be addressed in that way, and answers could be provided regarding negative campaigning in a variety of contexts. In addition, the inclusion of qualitative methodology would allow the researchers to get deeper into the reasons why candidates decide to employ negativity in their campaigns and get a little bit away from standardized quantitative models, giving the opportunity to discover new aspects in the field. This could be achieved by conducting interviews with the political candidates. Interesting, yet, challenging, if researchers managed to extort further data from the actors employing negative campaigning. There are also several predictors that could be useful for future analyses. For instance, the degree of polarization in each country, the index of press freedom, the distance between the competing candidates on an ideological or issue basis (Nai, 2020), which means that cases of candidates participating in the same election should be grouped together, or even the channels used to get negative campaigning disseminated to the public, to examine the different dynamics taking place in the different communication channels available, as according to empirical evidence those can influence both the amount and the nature of negativity. More specifically, channels facilitating direct interaction among parties are more negative than the ones who do not (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010).

Finally, the most important aspect, is that of dealing with the social desirability bias. This effect occurs when respondents are unwilling to admit some of their attitudes or behaviours to a survey and keep on presenting their views in the most socially desirable way (Atkeson & Alvarez, 2018). One of the main findings of the present study is that socially undesirable traits are positively correlated to negative campaigning. But is negative campaigning socially undesirable as well, and this attitude affects the way each expert has evaluated the personality of each candidate? Examples from existing literature show that negative campaigning has differential effects to everyone (Nai, 2013; Toros, 2018; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011), hence, different evaluations are taking place when been asked about it. It would be useful for the field to address this issue by attempting a combination between measurements of drivers and effects so more interesting insights on the aspects could be provided, and then also face the issue of

forming candidates' evaluations regarding their personalities, solely based on their campaigns' content which is misleading in our case.

To conclude, despite all its shortcomings the present Master's Thesis has provided insights into why political candidates employ negative campaigning as a tactic to be elected. In a nutshell, what has been discovered throughout the whole procedure is that: (i) personality matters, (ii) negativity is newsworthy and candidates know it, (iii) not all negative campaigning-related components are perceived as one, and (iv) not every driver predicts every component of negative campaigning. I express the hope, that this study will lead to further research on the field, towards a holistic understanding of the growing phenomenon of negative campaigning.

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Appendix 1: Candidates included in the analyses

Country	Candidate	Type of election	Election's name	Election Date	Experts
Albania	Basha	Legislative	Parliamentary election	25-Jun-17	7
Albania	Rama	Legislative	Parliamentary election	25-Jun-17	7
Algeria	Abbes	Legislative	Election of the National People's Assembly	4-May-17	10
Algeria	Ouyahia	Legislative	Election of the National People's Assembly	4-May-17	10
Argentina	Macri	Legislative	Legislative election	22-Oct-17	14
Argentina	Kirchner	Legislative	Legislative election	22-Oct-17	14
Armenia	Sargsyan	Legislative	Parliamentary election	2-Apr-17	6
Australia	Turnbull	Legislative	Federal election	2-Jul-16	26
Australia	Shorten	Legislative	Federal election	2-Jul-16	26
Australia	Di Natale	Legislative	Federal election	2-Jul-16	26
Australia	Xenophon	Legislative	Federal election	2-Jul-16	26
Austria	Hofer	Presidential	Presidential election	4-Dec-16	37
Austria	Van der Bellen	Presidential	Presidential election	4-Dec-16	37
Austria	Kurz	Legislative	Legislative election	15-Oct-17	27
Austria	Kern	Legislative	Legislative election	15-Oct-17	27
Austria	Strache	Legislative	Legislative election	15-Oct-17	27
Belarus	Holubeva	Legislative	Election of the Chamber of the Representatives	11-Sep-16	13
Belarus	Zadnyapransy	Legislative	Election of the Chamber of the Representatives	11-Sep-16	13
Belarus	Gaidukevich	Legislative	Election of the Chamber of the Representatives	11-Sep-16	13
Bulgaria	Tsacheva	Presidential	Presidential election	6-Nov-16	23
Bulgaria	Radev	Presidential	Presidential election	6-Nov-16	23
Bulgaria	Borisov	Legislative	Legislative election	26-Mar-17	15
Bulgaria	Ninova	Legislative	Legislative election	26-Mar-17	15
Chile	Piñera	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	19-Nov-17	11
Chile	Guillier	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	19-Nov-17	11
Costa Rica	Alvarado	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	4-Feb-18	21
Costa Rica	Álvarez	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	4-Feb-18	21
Côte d'Ivoire	N'Guessan	Legislative	Election of the National Assembly	18-Dec-16	7
Croatia	Milanović	Legislative	Election of the Assembly	11-Sep-16	18
Croatia	Plenković	Legislative	Election of the Assembly	11-Sep-16	18

Croatia	Petrov	Legislative	Election of the Assembly	11-Sep-16	18
Croatia	Sinčić	Legislative	Election of the Assembly	11-Sep-16	18
Cyprus	Anastasiades	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	28-Jan-18	9
Cyprus	Malas	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	28-Jan-18	9
Czech Republic	Babiš	Legislative	Legislative election	20-Oct-17	23
Czech Republic	Zaorálek	Legislative	Legislative election	20-Oct-17	23
Czech Republic	Okamura	Legislative	Legislative election	20-Oct-17	23
Czech Republic	Zeman	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	12-Jan-18	18
Czech Republic	Drahoš	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	12-Jan-18	18
Ecuador	Moreno	Presidential	Presidential election	19-Feb-17	22
Ecuador	Lasso	Presidential	Presidential election	19-Feb-17	22
Ecuador	Viteri	Presidential	Presidential election	19-Feb-17	22
Finland	Niinistö	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	28-Jan-18	18
Finland	Haavisto	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	28-Jan-18	18
France	Macron	Presidential	Presidential election	23-Apr-17	34
France	Le Pen	Presidential	Presidential election	23-Apr-17	34
France	Fillon	Presidential	Presidential election	23-Apr-17	34
France	Mélenchon	Presidential	Presidential election	23-Apr-17	34
France	Macron	Legislative	Election of the National Assembly (round 1)	11-Jun-17	12
France	Baroin	Legislative	Election of the National Assembly (round 1)	11-Jun-17	12
France	Cazeneuve	Legislative	Election of the National Assembly (round 1)	11-Jun-17	12
Georgia	Kvirikashvili	Legislative	Parliamentary election	8-Oct-16	18
Georgia	Bakradze	Legislative	Parliamentary election	8-Oct-16	18
Germany	Merkel	Legislative	Federal elections	24-Sep-17	44
Germany	Schulz	Legislative	Federal elections	24-Sep-17	44
Germany	Gauland	Legislative	Federal elections	24-Sep-17	44
Ghana	Mahama	Presidential	Presidential election	7-Dec-16	13
Ghana	Akufo-Addo	Presidential	Presidential election	7-Dec-16	13
Hong Kong	Lee	Legislative	Election of the Legislative Council	4-Sep-16	14
Iceland	Magnason	Presidential	Presidential election	25-Jun-16	14
Iceland	Oddsson	Presidential	Presidential election	25-Jun-16	14
Iceland	Jóhannesson	Presidential	Presidential election	25-Jun-16	14
Iceland	Tómasdóttir	Presidential	Presidential election	25-Jun-16	14
Iceland	Jónsson	Presidential	Presidential election	25-Jun-16	14
Iceland	Jakobsdóttir	Legislative	Election for the Althing	29-Oct-16	14

Iceland	Harðardóttir	Legislative	Election for the Althing	29-Oct-16	14
Iceland	Jónsdóttir	Legislative	Election for the Althing	29-Oct-16	14
Iceland	Benediktsson	Legislative	Election for the Althing	28-Oct-17	7
Iceland	Jakobsdóttir	Legislative	Election for the Althing	28-Oct-17	7
Iran	Rouhani	Presidential	Presidential election	19-May-17	8
Iran	Raisi	Presidential	Presidential election	19-May-17	8
Italy	Renzi	Legislative	General election	4-Mar-18	27
Italy	Berlusconi	Legislative	General election	4-Mar-18	27
Italy	Salvini	Legislative	General election	4-Mar-18	27
Italy	Di Maio	Legislative	General election	4-Mar-18	27
Japan	Abe	Legislative	House of Councillors election	10-Jul-16	21
Japan	Edano	Legislative	House of Councillors election	10-Jul-16	21
Japan	Yamaguchi	Legislative	House of Councillors election	10-Jul-16	21
Japan	Shii	Legislative	House of Councillors election	10-Jul-16	21
Japan	Abe	Legislative	Election of the House of Representatives	22-Oct-17	20
Japan	Koike	Legislative	Election of the House of Representatives	22-Oct-17	20
Japan	Yamaguchi	Legislative	Election of the House of Representatives	22-Oct-17	20
Jordan	Mansour	Legislative	Election of the Chamber of the Deputies	20-Sep-16	7
Kenya	Kenyatta	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	8-Aug-17	6
Kenya	Odinga	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	8-Aug-17	6
Kosovo	Haradinaj	Legislative	Parliamentary election	11-Jun-17	17
Kosovo	Hoti	Legislative	Parliamentary election	11-Jun-17	17
Kosovo	Kurti	Legislative	Parliamentary election	11-Jun-17	17
Kyrgyzstan	Sariyev	Presidential	Presidential election	15-Oct-17	5
Kyrgyzstan	Babanov	Presidential	Presidential election	15-Oct-17	5
Lithuania	Butkevičius	Legislative	Parliamentary election	9-Oct-16	28
Lithuania	Landsbergis	Legislative	Parliamentary election	9-Oct-16	28
Lithuania	Karbauskis	Legislative	Parliamentary election	9-Oct-16	28
Macedonia	Gruevski	Legislative	Election of the Assembly	11-Dec-16	22
Macedonia	Zaev	Legislative	Election of the Assembly	11-Dec-16	22
Malta	Muscat	Legislative	General elections	3-Jun-17	11
Malta	Busuttil	Legislative	General elections	3-Jun-17	11
Moldova	Dodon	Presidential	Presidential election	30-Oct-16	12
Moldova	Sandu	Presidential	Presidential election	30-Oct-16	12
Mongolia	Z. Enkhbold	Legislative	Election of the State Great Hural	29-Jun-16	8

Mongolia	M. Enkhbold	Legislative	Election of the State Great Hural	29-Jun-16	8
Mongolia	Enkhbayar	Legislative	Election of the State Great Hural	29-Jun-16	8
Montenegro	Đukanović	Legislative	Parliamentary election	16-Oct-16	16
Montenegro	Lekić	Legislative	Parliamentary election	16-Oct-16	16
Morocco	Benkirane	Legislative	Election of the Chamber of Representatives	7-Oct-16	10
Morocco	El Omari	Legislative	Election of the Chamber of Representatives	7-Oct-16	10
New Zealand	English	Legislative	General election	23-Sep-17	16
New Zealand	Ardern	Legislative	General election	23-Sep-17	16
New Zealand	Peters	Legislative	General election	23-Sep-17	16
Nicaragua	Ortega	Presidential	Presidential election	6-Nov-16	5
Nicaragua	Rodríguez	Presidential	Presidential election	6-Nov-16	5
Northern Ireland	Foster	Legislative	Assembly election	2-Mar-17	21
Northern Ireland	O'Neill	Legislative	Assembly election	2-Mar-17	21
Norway	Støre	Legislative	Parliamentary election	11-Sep-17	26
Norway	Solberg	Legislative	Parliamentary election	11-Sep-17	26
Norway	Jensen	Legislative	Parliamentary election	11-Sep-17	26
Papua New Guinea	O'Neill	Legislative	Election of the Parliament	24-Jun-17	5
Papua New Guinea	Polye	Legislative	Election of the Parliament	24-Jun-17	5
Romania	Dragnea	Legislative	Legislative election	11-Dec-16	23
Romania	Gorghiu	Legislative	Legislative election	11-Dec-16	23
Russia	Medvedev	Legislative	Election of the State Duma	18-Sep-16	28
Russia	Zyuganov	Legislative	Election of the State Duma	18-Sep-16	28
Russia	Mironov	Legislative	Election of the State Duma	18-Sep-16	28
Russia	Zhirinovsky	Legislative	Election of the State Duma	18-Sep-16	28
Russia	Putin	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	18-Mar-18	11
Russia	Grudinin	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	18-Mar-18	11
Russia	Zhirinovsky	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	18-Mar-18	11
Rwanda	Kagame	Presidential	Presidential election	4-Aug-17	5
Rwanda	Habineza	Presidential	Presidential election	4-Aug-17	5
Senegal	Dionne	Legislative	Election of the National Assembly	30-Jul-17	5
Senegal	Wade	Legislative	Election of the National Assembly	30-Jul-17	5
Serbia	Vučić	Presidential	Presidential election	2-Apr-17	10
Serbia	Janković	Presidential	Presidential election	2-Apr-17	10
Slovenia	Pahor	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	22-Oct-17	6
Slovenia	Šarec	Presidential	Presidential election (first round)	22-Oct-17	6

South Korea	Moon	Presidential	Presidential election	9-May-17	8
South Korea	Hong	Presidential	Presidential election	9-May-17	8
South Korea	Ahn	Presidential	Presidential election	9-May-17	8
Spain	Rajoy	Legislative	General election	26-Jun-16	19
Spain	Sánchez	Legislative	General election	26-Jun-16	19
Spain	Iglesias	Legislative	General election	26-Jun-16	19
Spain	Rivera	Legislative	General election	26-Jun-16	19
The Bahamas	Christie	Legislative	Election of the House of Assembly	10-May-17	14
The Bahamas	Minnis	Legislative	Election of the House of Assembly	10-May-17	14
The Netherlands	Wilders	Legislative	General elections	15-Mar-17	40
The Netherlands	Rutte	Legislative	General elections	15-Mar-17	40
The Netherlands	van Haersma Buma	Legislative	General elections	15-Mar-17	40
Timor Leste	Alkatiri	Legislative	Election of the National parliament	22-Jul-17	5
UK	May	Legislative	Election of the British House of Commons	8-Jun-17	48
UK	Corbyn	Legislative	Election of the British House of Commons	8-Jun-17	48
UK	Nuttall	Legislative	Election of the British House of Commons	8-Jun-17	48
UK	Farron	Legislative	Election of the British House of Commons	8-Jun-17	48
USA	Clinton	Presidential	Presidential election	8-Nov-16	75
USA	Trump	Presidential	Presidential election	8-Nov-16	75
Uzbekistan	Mirziyoyev	Presidential	Presidential election	4-Dec-16	6
Zambia	Lungu	Presidential	Presidential election	11-Aug-16	6
Zambia	Hichilema	Presidential	Presidential election	11-Aug-16	6