How the News Media Amplify Negative Messages

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2014 ECPR General Conference, 3-6 September, Glasgow
Panel 14 Attack Politics in Europe

New perspectives on negative campaigning: measures, causes and effects, ECPR series
Studies in European Political Science. Do not cite without permission of the authors
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Abstract: The airing of campaign advertisements directly influences the attitudes and opinions of citizens who view them, but ads also indirectly influence citizens through news coverage of advertising. The news media, by covering advertising, amplify the messages contained in the ads. We also suggest that, given the news media’s institutional bias toward conflict, they are particularly likely to focus their coverage on negative advertising. This may lead audiences to believe that campaigns are more negative than they actually are. To examine the extent to which the news media amplify the messages in negative ads, we combined data on political ads aired in recent election campaigns in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States with coverage of those campaigns in several newspapers. This allows us to examine the volume of media coverage that follows from the airing of ads, and it allows us to examine whether negative ads receive more coverage than positive ads.

Keywords: Negative Campaigning, Election Campaigns, News Coverage, Political Advertising
How the News Media Amplify Negative Messages

Negative advertising, i.e. political advertising that attacks the opponent on issues or traits (Geer 2006; Benoit 1999), is a common feature of political systems around the globe, as the various chapters in this volume attest. Yet in order to understand the influence of negative advertising, it is important that we look beyond just people’s exposure to the ads themselves. In this era of mediated campaigns we need to examine to what extent the news media cover political advertising, how they cover that advertising and how media coverage varies across countries. The effects of negative advertising might either be amplified or mitigated, depending on the volume of advertising and how ads are covered. News stories set the context for campaign ads and allow more citizens to be exposed to the ad messages (Min 2002). The effects of ad coverage might be particularly powerful in settings where the density of ad airings is low. How the press writes about direct candidate/party communication affects voters’ perceptions of this candidate or party. In this chapter, which compares print media coverage of televised political advertising in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, we find that the volume of coverage varies considerably across countries, and we find that negative advertising is amplified to a much greater degree in some places than in others. These findings suggest that, given large variation in media amplification of negative campaigning, that the potential impacts of negative campaigning on voters are much greater in some countries, namely, the United States, than elsewhere.

Media Coverage of Advertising

At least in the United States, one frequent element of campaign coverage is coverage of political advertising—generally, television advertising. Geer (2009) suggests that the media started paying attention to political advertising during the 1988 presidential race. Between 1984 and 1988, the number of stories in the New York Times and the Washington Post rose from under 100 to 200—and it has remained at that high level ever since (Geer 2009). Geer’s observations are consistent with the findings of Ridout and Franz (2011) who noted similar rises in the share of campaign coverage that concerned advertising. In both 2000 and 2008, over 10 percent of articles in the Washington Post on the presidential campaign discussed television advertising. West (2005) finds that particularly in competitive races political advertising is covered by the news media.

The media’s focus on advertising may be even greater in local and regional news outlets. One study found that 30 percent of coverage of U.S. Senate races across several local newspapers mentioned advertising (Fowler and Ridout 2009). That same study found that 20 percent of coverage on local television stations mentioned political advertising.

Not only do the news media in the United States give substantial coverage to political advertising, but they tend to focus on coverage of negative advertising. Geer (2009) shows that in each presidential election year between 1996 and 2008, over 75 percent of the ads that were discussed on the networks’ nightly news programs were negative. Ridout and Smith (2008) show that the average positive ad received only .16 media mentions, compared to .58 mentions for the average negative ad and .67 mentions for the average contrast ad (those ads that mention both the sponsoring candidate and the opponent).

Clearly, the American news media devote substantial coverage to political advertising, and when they do mention specific political ads, they disproportionately focus on negative ads. It is unclear, however, whether these conclusions extend to other countries with different
campaign environments and different media systems. To be sure, scholars have written anecdotally about ads aired in countries other than the U.S. that drove media coverage. Still, to our knowledge there are no studies that systematically examine media coverage of televised political advertising comparatively or in the United Kingdom or New Zealand specifically.

**Consequences of Media Coverage of Advertising**

Scholars have started to examine the effects of media coverage of political advertising, focusing both on citizen attitudes and the behavior of campaigns. One line of research looks into the effects on citizens of a very specific form of media coverage called “ad watches.” Ad watches are media stories that subject political ads to scrutiny, with journalists acting as arbiters of what is true. The consensus finding of this research is that “ad watch” coverage has an unintended effect because audiences better remember the attacks than the reporters’ attempts to debunk those attacks (Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995; Pfau & Louden 1994). Thus, the news media may actually be unintentionally enhancing the effectiveness of the ads (Kaid 2004; Min 2002). Still, findings are not unanimous in this regard. Min (2002) found in experimental setting that when an ad watch covered an ad negatively, voters were less likely to vote for the candidate that broadcasted the ad. Candidates have responded to the practice of ad watches by not only documenting their claims more carefully (West 2005), but also by developing ads that would deliberately elicit ad watch coverage (Iyengar 2011).

Another line of research looks at how media coverage of advertising affects citizens’ perceptions of the tone of a race. For instance, Ridout and Fowler (2012) asks whether people perceive campaigns as more negative when the media emphasize coverage of negative advertising. This research finds that the relationship is not direct—more discussion of negative advertising does not automatically lead citizens to perceive a race as more negative. Rather, increased coverage of negative advertising—only when framed in a strategic fashion—leads to increased perceptions of campaign negativity.

Media coverage of campaign advertising, in particular, attack advertising, may also influence the behavior of candidates. Geer (2009) argues that the news media have “altered the incentives of candidates to produce and air negative ads” (p. 12). Geer suggests that many negative ads in the United States, especially at the presidential level, are nothing more than “press releases” designed to cater to the news media. But in order to win the attention of the media gatekeepers, one must offer up conflict and controversy, which is most easily done through a negative ad.

**Why Media Cover (Negative) Political Advertising**

There are several reasons for the media to cover political advertising—and negative political advertising in particular. First, it is cost effective in that it takes little effort in terms of discovery (Fowler and Ridout 2009). Reporting on the latest political advertisement that is released by a campaign requires little entrepreneurial reporting. The reporter can simply rehash the arguments made in the ad while using the video provided. Indeed, campaigns in the United States often promote the release of new advertisements to the news media in hopes of receiving news coverage.

Second, negative political advertising as a story appeals to one of the most important news values, which is the use of a game or contest frame (Lawrence 2000, Bartels 1988; Patterson & McClure 1976; Robinson & Sheehan 1983). Negative advertising can be used to illustrate a conflict between competing candidates or parties. What is more, citizens are more
attracted to campaign news when it uses a game frame or focuses on conflict (Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004). Thus, it may be in the economic interest of news organizations to cover political advertising as it can attract larger audiences. Another news value is negativity, which has risen over the past decades in several countries around the world (Lengauer, et al. 2012). Therefore, we could expect negative ads to attract more news than positive ads. Various scholars also claim that they do (Min 2002; West 2005; Jamieson 1992). Another news value is personalization, where the news tends to report on individuals and present the news in a personalized way (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Walter and Vliegenthart (2010) find that the news over-reported trait attacks in the 2010 Dutch election campaign. As a result, personalized ads and, in particular, negative trait ads may be considered particularly newsworthy.

Third, covering negative political advertising is consistent with the media’s watchdog role, their responsibility to help provide citizens in a democracy with accurate information. Therefore, providing coverage of advertising, particularly “ad watch” coverage that helps voters interpret political messages, can be considered part of a journalist’s job.

Variations in (Coverage of) Political Advertising across Countries
Yet coverage of political advertising--and especially negative advertising--should not be equally prevalent across the globe. We know that various political system characteristics affect the characteristics of election campaigns and their effects on citizens (Bowler and Farrell 1992; Schmitt-Beck and Farrell 2002; Farrell 2005). These characteristics of the political system include a country’s institutional structure, its electoral system, the party system and the media system (Bowler and Farrell 1992). Strömbeck and Kaid (2008) argue that these characteristics not only affect election campaigns, but also the coverage of these campaigns. Although the limited number of countries in our study prevents a statistical analysis of the influence of these political system characteristics on coverage of negative campaigning, we will still theorize how some of these system characteristics are related to the coverage of advertising and, in particular, negative advertising.

First, coverage of political advertising, including negative advertising, is linked to the institutional structure of a country. One aspect of the institutional structure is the electoral laws that govern the conduct of elections before they take place. Laws that matter in this respect are regulations on broadcasting political advertising (and negative advertising in particular) and campaign finance regulations, which may affect the supply of advertising to cover. In the US, for instance, there are no restrictions on how much may be spent on advertising, and rules concerning how money must be raised have been loosened in recent years, resulting in massive campaign budgets. As a result, candidates, parties and outside groups may release a new ad almost every day for several months before Election Day, thus frequently supplying new stories for the news media. Most other countries, by contrast, have tighter regulations on advertising spending or only allow for government-allocated advertising. Thus, only a few ads--maybe up to a dozen-- may be released over the entire length of the campaign. Some countries also have rules that might limit the supply of negative advertising. For instance, in France derision of other candidates in political broadcasts is prohibited (Kaid and Gagnère, 2006:85). We expect that the larger the supply of advertising, including negative advertising, the greater the volume of ad-related coverage.

Second, media coverage of negative advertising might be related to the party system of a country. The extent to which ads are negative varies across countries (e.g. Emelund-Praestøecker 2010; Hansen and Pedersen 2008; Van Heerde-Hudson 2011 Walter, van der Brug and van Praag
Thus constraining the supply of negative advertising for the news media to discuss. Direct comparisons of levels of campaign negativity across countries, however, are rare (e.g. Walter 2014; Walter and Van Praag 2014; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 2006; Salmond 2014; Schweitzer 2009). Still, we do know that countries with multiparty systems tend to have less negativity than two-party systems (Elmelund-Praestæcker, 2010; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Walter, Van der Brug and Van Praag 2014; Ridout and Walter 2014). The first reason given for this is that negative campaigning might poison the well, hindering the potential for parties in multiparty systems after the elections to both form and govern effectively in coalitions (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009; Brants et al., 1982; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2006; Sjöblom, 1968; Walter and Van der Brug, 2013). The second reason for the higher level of campaign negativity in two-party systems is that attacks that serve to disqualify an opponent generally benefit the attacker, as voters have no other viable choices. But in a multiparty systems, attacks are just as likely to benefit some other third party as they are to benefit the attacker (Elmelund-Praestekær, 2010; Hansen and Pedersen, 2008; Walter and Van der Brug, 2013). This is because voters may identify with more than one party (Schmitt 2002; Tillie 1995; Van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983). This is especially true in multiparty systems where it is likely that a number of fairly ideologically similar parties compete. In line with these research findings, we expect less negative advertising in multiparty settings, which provides the news media with less opportunity to write about negative ads.

A third factor that is likely to influence the level of media coverage of negative advertising is the country’s media system. Media systems are the results of the development of media markets, political parallelism, the development of journalistic professionalism and the degree and nature of state intervention (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 21). We will only focus on the degree of commercialization of the media system. The more commercialized the media system, the more economic pressure that news organizations face, the more competitive the media market and as a result the greater the sensitivity to tailor the content of news stories to presumed audience preferences (Semetko et al. 1991). Consequently, these news organizations have high incentives to produce conflict-based or game-framed coverage, with which coverage of negative advertising fits nicely. Therefore, we expect more coverage of negative advertising in more commercialized media systems. Using the typology of Hallin and Mancini (2004) we would expect that the most coverage of negative advertising would be found in countries following the Liberal Model, which is characterized by the relative dominance of market mechanisms and commercial media.

Competitive pressures on the media vary both between media systems, but also between media (Semetko et al. 1991). It also matters how the media inside the country are organized, whether the media have clear segmented audiences or whether they must compete with one another for the same audience. In addition, their funding matters. Commercial news organizations, which must attract large audiences in order to ensure profitability, should face more pressure to focus on conflict than publicly-owned broadcasters. Moreover, news organizations that have corporate owners should face more pressure to turn to conflict coverage than independent news organizations (Dunaway 2008). Studies have found that tabloid newspapers, focus more on conflict than broadsheet newspapers (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden and Boumans 2011). Thus, there may be variations across news outlets in the extent to which they cover negative political advertising.
The Cases: New Zealand, United Kingdom and United States

We measured coverage of televised political advertising in 15 newspapers during the two most recent national election campaigns in each of the three countries we examined, namely, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. The three countries are quite similar in that they are all English speaking established democracies. However, they differ in various respects, including in the three political system characteristics that we linked theoretically to coverage of negative advertising. We will first discuss some generic differences between the cases and then focus on the three characteristics that we believe matter, namely, rules on party political broadcasting, the party system and the media system.

We examined national elections (as opposed to lower-level elections) as these serve to highlight the main political debates in each country. These “first-order elections” (Reif 1985) are presidential elections in the US and parliamentary elections in New Zealand and the UK. For each election, we examined newspaper articles 60 days prior to the day of the election. The length of election campaigns differs across the three countries. In the UK the length of the official campaign is determined by the Electoral Commission, and it is normally 4 to 5 weeks (Scammell and Langer 2006). The length of the official campaign is similar in New Zealand (Mulgan, 2004: 266). In the U.S., there is no formal campaign period, but traditionally, the presidential campaigns have ramped up after Labor Day, which marks the beginning of an intense period of 8 to 9 weeks of campaigning (Semetko et al. 1991:11).

Regulations on political advertising also differ between the three countries. In the US, television ads are the most prominent form of campaign advertising, and almost $1 billion was spent to purchase television ads in the 2012 presidential race (Fowler and Ridout 2012). Parties, candidates and independent groups are free to purchase advertising time on television with very few restrictions.

However, in the UK, paid political advertising is prohibited completely on television, but major parties receive free broadcasting time on public and commercial television. These ads are labelled party election broadcasts (PEBs) during official campaign periods (Holtz-Bacha and Kaid, 2006: 10; Scammell and Langer, 2006: 65). These time slots for political broadcasting are divided among the British political parties on the basis of a formula that takes into account the number of seats they contest and the votes they secure at the elections (Leach, Coxall, Robins 2011). PEBs once were a major part of the televised election campaign and were broadcasted simultaneously on all channels. This ended in 1987 when the number of channels expanded and this became unworkable (Scammell and Semetko 2008). This, and other factors, has led to a decrease in the importance of PEBs (Scammell and Langer 2006: 72). At the same time, PEBs have become more professional with the hiring of marketing professionals. A few party election broadcasts have had enough impact to generate news stories that had a measurable effect on voters’ party support (Leach, Coxall and Robins 2011). One particularly well-known PEB, which was aimed at generating news coverage, was the 1992 Labour ad called Jennifer’s Ear. The ad showed the story of a little girl who had to wait for an ear operation due to the Conservative’s government neglect of the National Health Service. This led to a counter-campaign by the Conservative Party, and the names of the parents of the girl were anonymously leaked to the press, which generated to a media hunt for the source of the leak (Scammell and Langer 2006).

New Zealand also has restrictions on advertising; the country does not prohibit paid political advertising like the UK does, but it does restrict broadcast-based political advertising by registered political parties during election campaigns to that which can be purchased from fixed public funding and to that which is allocated as free broadcasting time on Television New
Zealand (Stewart 2006). Table 1 makes clear that the supply of advertising is the largest, by far, in the US—10 to 20 times larger than in the UK or New Zealand.

Table 1: Number of Unique Ads Aired Per Country Per Election Campaign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Election Campaign</th>
<th>Number of Ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>182*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>200*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Source: http://inmedia.revues.org/455 *US figure includes just those ads aired in the 6 weeks prior to Election Day.

The party system also differs among the three countries. The United States has had a stable two-party system for well over a century, with either Republican or Democrats holding the presidency. The UK has a two-and-a-half party system, which means that typically one party, either the Conservatives or Labour, governs. On occasion, however, a considerably smaller third party, the Liberal Democrats, has helped form a coalition governments. The most recent instance of this was after the 2010 elections. New Zealand used to have a two-party system, but after a reform of the electoral system in the mid-1990s, New Zealand became a multiparty system without a dominant party. Since that time, elections coalition or minority governments have formed. In general, the Labour or National Party has ruled in coalition with a smaller party (or receiving the support of a smaller party). The last two elections resulted in minority governments led by the National Party. On the basis of these party system we expect that the most negative campaigning will be found in the US, followed by the UK and New Zealand.

Turning to the media system, all three countries could be classified as having a liberal media system under Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) famous scheme. But there are still some differences across these three in the degree to which their media systems could be classified as liberal. The media system in the United States is highly commercialized. Public broadcasters are poorly funded, capturing only 2 percent news audiences (Iyengar 2011, p. 30). Publicly-traded companies own almost all news organizations in the US, and independently-owned newspapers are almost extinct (Bennett 2005). Clearly, the behavior of news organizations in the US is strongly driven by market incentives. In contrast to television, competition is lower among newspapers as they are organized along local and regional than national, because American newspapers now enjoy a monopoly or semi-monopoly position in their cities and towns (Semetko et al. 1991).

Many scholars view the UK as having a media system that sits between the free market liberal model of the US and the more regulated democratic corporatist media system that most Northern European countries have (Scammell and Langer 2006; Semetko et al. 1991). Like the US, the UK media system holds to the principles of free market competition, freedom of speech and media self-regulation. However, the UK has (like most Northern European countries) highly partisan newspapers and regulated television markets dominated by well-funded public service broadcasters (Scammell and Semetko 2008). Newspaper circulation is relatively high in comparison to the United States, and the press is characterized by commercial ownership and
national circulation (Scammell and Langer 2006). Newspapers can be divided along the lines of elite versus tabloid press and partisanship. During election campaigns newspapers often openly support one of the main parties (see Leach, Coxall and Robins, 2011: 163 for an overview). In contrast, television news in the UK is highly regulated and is required by law to be impartial (McNair 2003; Scammell and Semetko 2008). Since the press is structured along fairly well-defined audiences, the quality press hardly engages in competition with the tabloid press (Leach, Coxall and Robinson 2011; Semetko et al. 1991). However, competition among the tabloid newspapers is fierce and is strengthened by the national distribution of newspapers. (Semetko et al. 1991). Ownership of the British press is concentrated in the hands of a few major groups.

While New Zealand’s media system has become more commercialized since the early post-war era, the extent of the change has depended on the medium. As public broadcasters have faced more private-sector competition, television coverage of politics has become less focused on substance and has given way to game-framed, conflict-focused coverage (Rudd and Hayward 2005). The same is not true, however, for newspapers. Indeed, the amount of substantive, issue-based coverage in the country’s largest newspaper, the New Zealand Herald, rose from the mid-1970s to the early 2000s (Rudd and Hayward 2005). The newspaper industry in New Zealand is characterized by local monopoly, as New Zealand does not have national daily newspapers. Each major city has at least one daily newspaper. Although upmarket broadsheet newspapers and mass circulation tabloid newspapers compete with each other in many countries, this sort of competition does not exist in New Zealand (Mulgan, 2004: 294). The bulk of the country’s major newspapers are owned by two companies, namely, Fairfax and APN News and Media. The television market also lacks media diversity as two companies dominate the news media.

Data Collection

We examined coverage of political televised advertising in the five national newspapers with the largest readership whose coverage was accessible in the Lexis-Nexis electronic database. See Table 2 for an overview. In New Zealand, these were The New Zealand Herald, the Wellington Dominion Post, the Christchurch Press, the Waikato Times and the Southland Times. The British newspapers were The Sun, the Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph, The Daily Mirror and Daily Express. Newspapers examined in the US were the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, USA Today, the Los Angeles Times and the New York Daily News. Among the sample of newspapers were four tabloids, The Sun, Daily Express and the Daily Mail in the UK and the New York Daily News in the US. As explained earlier, New Zealand does not have any daily tabloid newspapers.
Table 2: Readership Numbers and Type of Newspaper Studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Readership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>New Zealand Herald</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>147,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Dominion Post (Wellington)</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>73,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Christchurch Press</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>68,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Waikato Times</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>30,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Southland Times</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>24,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>2,082,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>1,715,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Daily Mirror</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>963,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>523,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>487,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>2,378,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>1,865,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>1,674,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>653,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>New York Daily News</td>
<td>Tabloid</td>
<td>516,165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although we focus on coverage of televised political advertising in this study, we acknowledge that negative campaigning is not restricted to televised political advertising and that the importance of televised political advertising varies across countries.

We searched the Lexis-Nexis electronic newspaper database for articles that mentioned televised political advertising. Our search terms varied somewhat by country given the different terms that journalists in different countries used to describe advertising. We eliminated from the search results those articles that did not concern campaign advertising, leaving us with 460 articles from US newspapers, 76 articles from UK newspapers and 34 articles from New Zealand newspapers. The articles were coded manually on the basis of a coding scheme that can be found in Appendix A. The coding unit was the article. We coded all articles for whether they referred to television advertising generally—or a specific ad—as negative in tone. We also had coders

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1 In New Zealand we searched for: (ad OR advert* OR commercial OR broadcast) AND (election OR campaign). In the US in 2008, we searched for: (ad OR advert* OR commercial) AND (Obama OR McCain). In the US in 2012, we searched for: (ad OR advert* OR commercial) AND (Obama OR Romney). In the UK, we searched for: (party election broadcast OR election broadcast).
provide a description of each ad mentioned specifically. This allowed us to match up those ads with a database we had created that catalogs all ads aired in each year (See Ridout and Walter 2013; Walter 2014). Thus, we could compare the tone of those ads mentioned specifically with the tone of those ads not mentioned. Unfortunately, at the moment of uploading this paper the US data collection is still incomplete, therefore, we only present some descriptive results. The final chapter will include a binomial regression model predicting how often an ad is mentioned. The unit of analysis of this model will be the political ad. We will try to explain the print coverage of ads by variables country, election year and ad characteristics (tone, content, date aired).

**First Results**

So, to what extent do the print media in New Zealand, the UK and the US cover political advertising, how they cover these ads and how does media coverage varies across countries? We start by addressing the first question, the extent to which the print media cover political advertising in general. Table 3 shows that the most articles covering political ads are published in the US, next the UK and last New Zealand, respectively 34, 76 and 460 articles. The US is also the country that airs the most political ads. Interestingly, the UK print media covers ads more than New Zealand, although the latter airs more ads than the first. US voters are therefore the most likely to be exposed to political ads, directly or indirectly through free publicity covering these ads. Table 3 also displays the differences between outlets in media systems reporting political ads. For instance, in New Zealand the *New Zealand Herald* publishes overall 21 articles referring to political ads during the campaign in contrast to the *Southland Times* that does not cover political ads at all. In the UK ads are covered the most by *The Daily Telegraph* and the least by *The Sun*. For the US most articles are printed by the *New York Times* and the least by the *New York Daily News*. Even without statistical tests we can see that tabloid newspapers do not write more about political advertisements than quality newspapers. In the UK the most articles covering political ads are printed by the quality newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* and quality newspaper *The Daily Mirror* is a good third runner up. In the US the tabloid *New York Daily News* writes the least about political advertising.
Table 3: Number of Articles Mentioning Advertising by Source Per Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Total Articles Mentioning Ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>New Zealand Herald</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Dominion Post (Wellington)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Christchurch Press</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Waikato Times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Southland Times</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>The Daily Mirror</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>New York Daily News</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>157</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, we are not just interested in the coverage of political advertising in general, but in the coverage of negative advertising in particular. Table 4 displays the percentage of articles that describe political ads as negative. Note that it is not always the case that when negative ads are covered in print they are described as negative. When covering ads the media decide why they are of interest and what element to highlight in their news stories. Table 4 shows considerable variation in referencing to negative ads between election campaigns. For example, in the 2005 British parliamentary election campaign 7.5 per cent of the articles covering ads had references to negativity in contrast to the 2010 election campaign where 28.9 per cent of the articles referred to negativity. Across countries similar results were yielded for the percentage of references to negativity when combining the two elections. New Zealand had the highest percentage of articles referring to negative campaigning, followed by the United Kingdom and United States, respectively 23.5, 22.4 and 22.2 per cent. So, at first glance the data suggests that there is not much country variation in the extent of covering negative campaigning. In the next version of this chapter we will compare the airing of ads with the coverage of these ads to see the difference between the media coverage and party behaviour in these election campaigns. For
now we will refer to numbers generated elsewhere. Ridout and Walter (2013) report that in 2008 the level of negative campaigning was 32.6 per cent and in 2011 was 15 per cent in New Zealand election campaigns. Walter (2014) reports for the 2005 British campaign a level of 35.8 per cent of negativity.\footnote{These numbers are comparable as they are all generated by the same method (Geer 2006). However, they cannot be reported for the US yet as they need to be recalculated as we only looked at the 6 weeks print coverage and we only have numbers for longer periods.} We do not see that the percentage of negativity covered in the newspapers directly reflects the percentage of negative campaigning found in party behaviour. Table 5 shows the kind of negative campaigning the articles refer to. We distinguish between articles that make references to issue attacks, personal attacks, both or do not specify the attacks. The British newspaper articles coded only described the party election broadcasts in terms of issue negativity. This is in line with the finding that British party election broadcasts primarily contain issue attacks (Walter 2014; Van Heerde Hudson 2011).

### Table 4: Percent of Articles Referencing Negativity by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1st election</th>
<th>2nd election</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: NZ N=34, UK N=76 and US N=460 Second election refers to the most recent election.*

### Table 5: Type of Negativity Referred to in Articles by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>1st election</th>
<th>2nd election</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The media do not only write about political advertising in generic terms, but also mention specific ads. Specific ads can sometimes dominate a complete campaign. Table 6 shows the number of specific ads mentioned in the election news coverage and the percentage of these ads that referred to attack behaviour. In New Zealand only 8 out of the 34 articles written about political ads mention specific ads, but when they do they tend to be negative (75 per cent). One of the negative ads from New Zealand that got some media attention in 2008 was a Labour ad in which a mother talked about how she trusted Helen Clark, the Labour party leader, but didn’t trust the National party leader. She stated, “You may know a few things about money and trading, Mr. Key, but when it comes to my family’s future, I just can’t trust you.” In 2011, the New Zealand media focused on a series of Labour ads that attacked the National Party for wanting to sell state assets. In the UK 58 out of 76 articles mentioned specific ads, only 22 per cent described these ads in negative terms. In 2005 none of the ads mentioned in specific terms was described as an attack ad. In 2005 the articles written about political ads mainly mentioned the first Labour ad aired that campaign, which was a positive ad. This ad showed both Prime Minister Tony Blair and chancellor Gordon Brown, known for disagreement with each other as a
united front. The media wrote mainly about this in terms of Labour party campaign strategy or questions the truthfulness of the event displayed.\(^3\) The other ad most frequently discussed is of the Scottish Nationalist Party where movie star Sean Connery is the voice of the voice over. In 2010 39 per cent of the articles covering ads mentioned were described as containing negative campaigning. In 2011 one frequently mentioned ad is the last ad of the Labour Party where former East Enders actor Ross Kemp warns the voters: ‘Of course Labour aren't perfect - and no one's saying they are. This election isn't a beauty contest. ... ‘A vote for Nick Clegg is in reality a vote for Tory cuts that would hurt you and your family. Be careful. If you get into bed with Nick Clegg you might just wake up with David Cameron.’ One of the other ads is from the Conservative Party which switched its campaign strategy halfway the campaign, instead of attacking Labour they decided last minute to pull an attack ad and air an ad attacking the Liberal Democrats instead. ‘The great plan of Nick Clegg's is becoming clear. He's only interested in one thing and that is changing our electoral system so that we have a permanent hung parliament - a permanent coalition.’ "We never have strong and decisive government. It's now becoming clear he wants to hold the whole country to ransom - and just to benefit the Liberal Democrats." The most mentioned “ad” in the US in 2008 was a 30-minute “infomercial” aired by the Obama campaign just days before the election. It was less the tone than the novel format that seemed to pique the media’s interest. The second most frequently mentioned ad in 2008 was a negative one sponsored by the McCain campaign that accused Obama of favoring sex education for kindergarten students. The third most frequently mentioned ad in 2008 was from the Obama campaign and concerned immigration. This attack ad tried to tie John McCain to comments from a conservative radio host who called Mexicans “stupid and unqualified.” Specific US 2012 data is not available yet.

### Table 6: Specific Ad Mentions and Tone by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Specific Ad Mentions</th>
<th>Percent Negative</th>
<th>Number of Specific Ad Mentions</th>
<th>Percent Negative</th>
<th>Total Number of Specific Ad Mentions</th>
<th>Total Percent Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1(^{st}) election</td>
<td>1(^{st}) election</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) election</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) election</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NZ N=34, UK N=76 and US N=460 Second election refers to the most recent election.

- More results to be yielded-

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Conclusions

This paper is a first attempt to study print coverage of negative advertising comparatively. We examined the coverage of political advertising in election campaigns in the fifteen most prominent national newspapers in the US, UK and New Zealand in the most two recent campaigns. Work on the coverage of negative campaigning is in its infancy, but is of importance to completely grasp the influence of negative campaigning. The effects of negative advertising might either be amplified or mitigated, depending on the volume of advertising and how ads are covered. Since our data collection was not complete yet and we were unable to run all the models, we can only draw some preliminary conclusions.

The results show great variance in the coverage of advertising both across countries as well as newspapers. The countries where more ads are aired also provide more coverage of these ads. The variance inside the media system cannot be explained by the quality versus tabloid divide in newspapers. Both quality as tabloid newspapers cover political advertising, including negative advertising. Remarkably there is not so much variation between countries in the coverage of negative campaigning, on average 22.7 per cent of the coverage on advertising was devoted to negative advertising. In our next version we will be able to compare this with the actual advertising to see if the coverage reflects the party behaviour. Numbers from other studies (Walter and Ridout 2013; Walter 2014) seem to suggest this is not the case. In general it seems that when specific ads are mentioned, negative campaigning get more attention than positive campaigning, with exception of the UK.

Our first results suggest that voters are not only directly exposed to negative campaigning, but also indirectly when the media covers these ads and they frequently do so. Only one fourth of the coverage on political advertising is negative campaigning, which is less than sometimes the actual level of negative campaigning. However, when specific ads are mentioned, these tend to be negative ads, with exception of the UK. More work needs to be done, but the later might suggest a sign that effects of negative campaigning are amplified by print coverage.

Future work should include more countries so that we are actually able to make a design that allows us to test the relationship between country characteristics and print coverage of negative campaigning. However, a first step has been made towards more knowledge on this aspect in general and non U.S. settings. In general the coverage of negative campaigning deserves more attention from scholars working in this field.
References
Dunaway (2008).
Rudd, Chris, and Janine Hayward. "Media takeover or media intrusion? Modernisation, the media and political communications in New Zealand." *Political Science* 57, no. 2 (2005): 7-16.


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


Appendix A: Coding Scheme Media Coverage of Political Advertising

Notes: ads sponsored by interest groups should be considered
-only consider advertising aired in the presidential race

ARTICLE TITLE Copy and paste title of the article

SOURCE: Name of News Organization
1. Los Angeles Times
2. New York Times
3. New York Daily News
4. USA Today
5. Wall Street Journal
6. New Zealand Herald
7. Christchurch Press
8 Wellington Dominion Post
9 Waikato Times
10. Southland Times
12. Daily Mail
13. The Sun
14. The Daily Telegraph
16. Daily Mirror
17. Daily Express

DATE Date story published/aired

FOCUS "Is the primary focus of the article candidate advertising (or party election broadcasts)?" (Primary focus means a majority of the article)
0 No
1 Yes

SPEND. Is the only reference to campaign advertising (or party election broadcasts) in this story the amount of money spent?
0 No
1 Yes

LEAD1. Does the story mention campaign advertising or (party election broadcasts) in the first sentence?
0 No
1 Yes

NEGATIVE Does the story describe advertising in general or a specific advertisement (or party election broadcast) as negative or attack advertising?
0 No
1 Yes
**ATTACKTYPE**  If so, is the attack described as personal or issue-based?
- Personal
- Issue-based
- Both personal and issue-based
- Not described
- Not applicable

**TELEVISION**  Does the story make reference to television advertising?
- No
- Yes

**RADIO**  Does the story make reference to radio advertising?
- No
- Yes

**BILLBOARDS**  Does the story make reference to billboards?
- No
- Yes

**ONLINE**  Does the story make reference to online advertising?
- No
- Yes

**ADREF.**  Does the story mention at least one ad specifically?
- No
- Yes

**ADREFNBR.**  If yes, how many ads does the article mention specifically?

1. Describe the first ad: DESC1
2. Describe the second ad: DESC2
3. Describe the third ad: DESC3
4. Describe the fourth ad: DESC4

Write down any specific phrases or words used in the ad that are repeated in the article:

**PHRASE1**  Phrases used in first ad described

**PHRASE2**  Phrases used in second ad described
**PHRASE3** Phrases used in third ad described

**PHRASE4** Phrases used in fourth ad described