

Chapter 2

A Review in Campaigns: Going Positive and Negative

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Abstract In this review, we go through the negative campaign literature to highlight the importance of economic inclusion in the topic. Psychology and political science have been studying the phenomena for the last 20 years; however, economic models have not achieved the goal of interpreting and forecasting the strategical behavior of candidates. Voting models can be classified in two: spatial and probabilistic models. Most of the work done consider the possibility of doing either positive or negative campaign, but not both. We look forward to awake curiosity and better understanding of the subject, starting with a discussion of the definition of a “*negative campaign*.”

Keywords Campaigns • Negative campaign • Political economy • Spatial • Probabilistic models • Incentives campaigns • Incentives • Spatial competition • Probabilistic voting • Voting • Negative messages • Positive messages • Credibility

2.1 Introduction

Political campaigns have changed in the past two decades, not only by the means of communication but in the type of messages sent to voters. Commonly, political economy has taken the fact that a campaign is useful to send messages about the policy the candidate would apply if going into office. The most striking, and at the same time, the simplest result we have, is Down’s model (1957) where the candidate which announces the policy closest to the median voter’s best option will win the election. This result turns out like this, as we assume single-peak preferences of each voter, that is, all voters have an ideal policy within a known policy’s space, and any alternative will decrease his welfare as it goes away from their best personal policy option. The immediate consequence of this model is the prediction that radical

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candidates will never win and that, in the long run, all political parties will converge their promises to the median voter's ideal policy.

We could go deeper into the means by which candidates communicate with the possible voters, but in this review, we are interested in describing the modeling about the type of messages that they send in a campaign. Empirical works have shown that spots, announcements, or any kind of advertisement is no longer done with the objective of promoting a specific characteristic of the candidate. Messages concerning about their opponents have increased; however, it is too risky to say that we are dealing with an increment in negative campaigning. There is no consensus among economists about the definition of a "negative campaign." In fact, it might be that the case where campaigning focuses on messages about the contenders on the lack of personal abilities, results obtained in a sphere different from the issues discussed in the campaign, or on the real position of the policies in debate on the current campaign. In any case, the negative messages are directed to harm the desirability and credibility of the candidates.

Not only in the USA has the expenditure in campaigns increased in the last years but it is a worldwide phenomenon. In the 1996 US presidential elections, 6 % of the expenditure in Clinton's campaign was for negative advertising versus a 70 % of negative campaign conducted by Bob Dole. UNDP has run surveys in different Latin-American countries to evaluate the level of negative campaigning and the impact of mass media in voters. It was shown that, in Mexico, 11 % of the spots were conducting a negative message for the opponent candidate in the 2006s presidential elections, and the messages increased as the campaign got closer to an end. Martínez and Aguilar (2013) highlighted that time is a crucial aspect in the campaigns, as the length of it can create spaces to impact at a larger scale into swing voters. Hence, it is a fact that candidates not only expose their political position to the voters, but they also talk about the opposition. This information is transmitted to voters, so they can create their expectations about the true position of the candidates.

The definition itself of negative campaigning differs from author to author. Harrington and Hess (1996) bound the definition of advertisement directed to change the perception of a candidate's ideology. Mattes (2007) defines it as the set of actions encouraged by political actors who talk about one's opponent through the character or valence dimension. The classification of the messages might be subject to the criteria of the researcher, and we do not find clear parameters to distinguish one from the other. There is an emerging type of negative campaign called *contrasting campaign*. This is a subclass of negative campaigns, whose principal strategy is to reveal or say something contrasting what a candidate has said of himself and what it has been really doing. This type of campaign is having a great impact in countries where explicit defamation and injury is forbidden in the campaign, such as in Mexico.¹ In the 2006 Mexican presidential elections the winner candidate Felipe Calderón was 8 % behind López Obrador 1 month before

¹The electoral law (Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales) forbids any kind of negative campaign. Its Article 38 says: "Abstain from any expression involving diatribe, libel, slander, libel, defamation, or demeaning to the citizens, public institutions or other political parties and their candidates, particularly during election campaigns and political propaganda that is used in an electoral period."

elections. Calderón started a campaign² where he affirmed that Obrador was a “danger” to Mexico, as he promised to reduce expenses and create economic growth but instead had duplicated the debt in Mexico City, where he was the governor. Another spot first shows how Obrador is asking for tolerance; afterward he appears in another image contemptuously calling the current president. Felipe Calderón pronounced about the “true” policies that Obrador would implement if running into office versus what he promised to achieve. Even though Calderón did not give any further proofs about his statements, he achieved to win the presidential election. This campaign lasted 180 days, long enough to have an impact in the voters’ intention. However, legislation has changed and campaigns last 95 days nowadays and any attempt of defamation is punished. The effects of this new law have not been yet so clear. At least, in the last presidential election, the winner candidate had since the beginning a clear advantage and he was not beaten.

This review is intended to go over the different views and approaches done about negative campaigns. There exists a vast literature in negative campaigning in psychology and political science but not in economics. Few formal models introduce the concept of a negative campaign, and the existing literature has some drawbacks. We are going to present a brief view of the first two sciences about the theme, and then we will go through the main papers done in the economics field.

2.2 Negative Campaigns in Different Fields

Psychology studies give three arguments for the existence of negative campaigning: (1) it stimulates attention to and awareness of the campaign, (2) campaigns may arouse anxiety which stimulates interest, and (3) negative campaign might be a sign of a close race, which is directly related with the marginal utility of going to vote in some cases. People are very aware of negative information; they attend to it more, think about it more, and remember it better, and it is more powerful in shaping our impressions of things (Hodges 1974). These authors argue that emotions are more important than beliefs in predicting voting choice. However, they are aware that there is fragmented evidence suggestion in the degree of effectiveness in the type of messages that candidates send. However, the mainstream in psychology proposes that a negative message is received deeper in the voters’ minds than a positive one. Skowronski et al. (1989) showed that given equal amounts of positive and negative messages about the characteristics of a person, the overall impression formed is skewed toward the negative, and Richey et al. (1967) argued that negative data are more persistent over time. Some of these authors have done experiments to prove

²Calderón posted 60 h of such TV spots in the last phase of the campaign and sent 40 million e-mails with messages contrasting the promises of his contender. A deep analysis about such election processes is due to the political scientist Sergio Aguayo [see Aguayo (2010)].

how a negative message is more effective than any other; however, they do not prove how it impacts the voting intention. With the lack of a control group, these findings are descriptive but intriguing and motivating to model the candidates' strategies.

Political science has focused in the study of the type of messages, frequency, and possible causation of the phenomena. They have done a very tough job of quantification of the spots, tweets, and any kind of political advertisement. They have discussed the effectiveness of sending a negative signal, in terms of voting. They assume that candidates choose the campaign strategy they believe will give them the best chance to win (Bartels 1993); however, they do not model or demonstrate how the incentive mechanism would work. For them, candidates who expect to lose may attack harder the reputation of its contender, as they have "nothing to lose." Stevens (2009) reconsiders the validity of empirical and theoretical research on negative campaigning through advertising, since he states that most studies have only evaluated the role of volume of negative ads as beneficial for voters. He asserts that proportion is also important since voters can be exposed to a large volume of ads, but they can be relatively more exposed to a certain ad so that relative exposure or proportion can have different and offsetting effects. The rationale behind his thesis implies that the current evidence might be inconclusive and ambiguous in terms of the nature of negative campaigns.

2.3 Modeling Negative Campaigns: An Economic Approach

The economic literature has focused mainly in the signaling of the position of the candidates' ideal policies; however, there are not so many models that have captured the strategical point of view of the candidates, where they can have different types of alternatives in their strategies' space. Most part of the models are games where candidates can send only one kind of messages to convince the voters. Political economy literature has developed two different approaches: spatial and probabilistic voting models. In the following paragraphs, we are going to number and state the main idea of some of them.

Polborn et al. (2006) develop a model in which candidates can either send a positive or a negative message to the voters. The candidates have unknown qualities that will be signaled by the decision between doing positive or negative campaigning; however, they cannot do both. Soubeyran (2009) provides sufficient conditions for the existence and uniqueness of a symmetric Nash equilibrium where candidates have as strategies: to attack and to defend. He considers that each candidate has a transformation function which allows them to overcome the attacks and turn them into a positive effect in the probability of winning. His main question, further from being how to win when you can do negative campaign, is how these campaigns affect voter turnout. Aragónés et al. (2007) analyze the conditions under which candidates' reputations may affect voters' beliefs over what policy will be implemented by the winning candidate of an election. They use a dynamic game where candidates can promise a policy different from their ideal point even though

the true ideal policies are observable. Rational voters will believe the promises which will be implemented in the future as long as the reputation has value for the candidates. Callander et al. (2007) provide a model where candidates are willing to lie about their policy's intentions creating an effect on other candidates' behavior, changing the nature of political campaigns.

Harrington and Hess (1996) consider that political campaigning is not as simple since candidates may sometimes want to reveal the position of the rival and vice versa. For them, the allocation of resources between positive and negative campaigning is crucial for candidates, since engaging in each type of campaign is costly. The model consists of a one-shot game of spatial competition; candidates have two dimensions: issue and valence. At the initial phase of the game, voters have initial perceptions of candidates' personal and policy attributes, and candidates must allocate resources of any of these. They restrict the concept of advertising only to the ideology space, that is, only actions related to the candidate's issues. They show that candidates who are weak on the character dimension (personal attributes) will be the ones who will engage into negative campaigning, while stronger candidates on the valence dimension will engage into a rather positive campaign. Chakrabarti (2007) extends the model developed by Harrington and Hess by including negative campaigning through the valence dimension as well as on the issue dimension. The effect of introducing valence advertising would mean that candidates denigrate or criticize the opponent on the character attributes. When a candidate's valence index is relatively high, the type of campaign the candidate will engage in will be based on valence issues, whereas if the valence index is low, the candidate will conduct an ideological or issue campaign. Mattes (2007) defines negative campaigning as actions encouraged by political actors who talk about one's opponent through the valence dimension. Each candidate inherits initial positions on both ideology and valence; they compete by revealing the location of one candidate on only one dimension. Voters decide depending on prior information about the candidates and also on information given by each candidate during the campaign phase. The main proposition of the model is that a candidate will engage in negative campaigning if the voters value candidates on a valence basis dimension. These models are embraced in a Hotelling–Downs framework, where the median voter will be the pivotal one. They are not so interested in modeling how they get to an “ideal” policy, but how they impact the vote intention or how they make face to it.

Skapedras et al. (1995) explored the incentives candidates have to engage in negative campaign. They show that, with a two-candidate election, the front runner will tend to skew his messages in a positive way. And in a three-candidate competitions, they recognize two features: (1) when there is a candidate with a very low support, he will only have a positive campaign; (2) the negative campaign will only be directed to the strong candidates.

Another kind of economic models to study elections is based on probabilistic voting models. A basic assumption in these models is that voters are uninformed, and it is not clear who the pivotal voter is. Brueckner et al. (2013) develop a probabilistic voting model with negative campaigning that extends the evidence of other spatial competition models like those of Harrington and Hess (1996) and

Chakrabarti (2007). According to them, probabilistic voting models allow stochastic outcomes from voters' decisions due to a valence effect which affects all other voters making this model preferable to the classical framework. Under this model, the best strategy a candidate can undertake is to locate near the median of voter's preferred policy position without bearing in mind where the opposition is located. Candidates must decide two variables: stated position and the level of expenditure in negative campaign seeking to maximize their expected utility function (the probability of winning times the benefit of holding office minus the cost of ideological divergence). For them, centrist candidates will engage in negative campaigning regardless of the nature of their ideological positions (fixed or chosen), whereas more extreme candidates devote their resources on positive campaign spending.

2.4 Final Remarks

The use of game theory to model the campaigns has faced different difficulties and ambiguous results. It is a fact that candidates do not engage only in one type of campaign. However, the definition of negative campaigning is still not so clear. This can be harmful for the empirical works which try to test the theoretical models. However, using the concept of contrast campaign can be of a great use. If we do not need to classify the type of message sent but only quantify if the message corresponds to his own characteristics of their contenders', then it will be easier to test the theoretical framework.

Different efforts have been done to explain the increasing volume in negative advertisement. Some authors have focused in the difference between attacking in a valence level or the ideological position. Beyond this issue, economists should set a base model to identify the mechanism and the decision variables. Afterward, a second question could be the dimension in which campaigns are more effective. Furthermore, if a candidate is attacked, the final objective is one: harming credibility to have less share of the mass of voters.

Instead of talking of a negative campaign in terms of saying a non-desirable characteristic of the contender, we could look at the promises and pronouncements that candidates announce to convince voters. Promises are all the messages done to promote themselves and inform the voters about their policy intentions. Pronouncements are those messages sent to voters about the policy intentions of the contenders. We cannot separate these decision variables; they create a reputation effect in the sender as well as in the contender. The threat of losing reputation, hence, credibility for the next period, can help to elicit the true policy's positions of the candidates. Candidate's promises are their real policies if the opportunity cost is high enough. Therefore, the existence of pronouncements can be a tool to prevent the candidates to promise the implementation of the median voter's ideal policy.

Another natural question is not only who makes and how much negative campaign, but does it work?

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