

Chapter Seven

Negative Campaigning in Proportional Representation – Yet Non-Coalition – Systems: Evidence from Switzerland

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During the last twenty years, many scholars have studied the causes of negative campaigning in American politics (for a full review, *see* Walter and Nai, Chapter Six in this volume). Unlike traditional party competition theorists, such as Downs (1957) or Strom (1990), who assume that campaigns are bare channels for candidates and parties to communicate to voters about their own policy position, they argue that the reality of electoral campaign is also full of incentives pushing these candidates and parties to discredit their opponents (Geer 2006).

Along these lines, negative campaigning scholars working on American politics state that one of the key factors explaining the decision to go negative is the state of electoral competition. For example, various theoretical as well as empirical studies show that the closer the electoral race between candidates, the more these candidates attack each other (Lau and Pomper 2001; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995). However, this argument originally developed to fit the United States' (US) context, is said to be of little relevance to explain negative campaigning in European proportional representation (PR) democracies. Recent evidence reveals that classic theories only poorly fit the reality of electoral campaigns in this context (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008, 2010; Walter, van der Brug, van Praag 2014).

In this chapter, we argue that the impact of the electoral competition on the decision of parties and candidates to go negative in PR democracies should not be discarded too quickly. The existence of some form of pre-electoral coalition agreements, and the necessity to effectively bargain with other parties to reach coalition agreements after election day, which are the norms in these countries, is likely to bring noise to the empirical tests of theoretical models. To bring new insight on the topic, we offer a test of the classic American-based theories of negative campaigning in four electoral campaigns in Switzerland: The 2011 Zurich federal and cantonal campaigns, and the 2011 Lucerne federal and cantonal campaigns.¹ Unlike other PR democracies, the Swiss federation and cantons are not entirely parliamentary governmental systems. The influence of

1. Given the de-centralised nature of Swiss electoral and party competition, we regard the federal campaigns in these two cantons as separate campaigns (*see* next section).

coalition bargaining on the composition of the executive is therefore limited. In the next sections, we first review the literature on the electoral determinants of negative campaigning; second, we describe the nature of electoral competition in Switzerland and more specifically in the four elections covered; third, we explain carefully our data collection; and last, we report our findings and the implications following from them.

The electoral determinants of negative campaigning

In the US, a growing body of evidence has formed that electoral competition influences the tone of campaigns. In the mid-1990s, Skaperdas and Grofman (1995), followed by Harrington and Hess (1996), elaborated a theoretical model of negative advertising in which electoral competition plays a crucial role. Both their modelling efforts start from the assumption that candidates, or parties, have a finite amount of resources available for their electoral campaign. They may decide to spend it for either negative or positive advertisements (often a certain mixture of the two). But these two strategies do not have the same impact on voters: While positive campaigning is supposed to turn a share of undecided voters into one's own camp, negative campaigning is assumed to turn a share of the opponents' voters into the undecided pool. Also, they postulate that adopting a negative tone is a costly strategy, as a certain amount of candidates' or parties' own voters does not appreciate it and may therefore (with a certain probability) decide to join the undecided group.

From these straightforward and quite realistic assumptions, the theorists derive a series of propositions. First and foremost, they argue that the candidate or party that is lagging behind should spend more resources to discredit the frontrunner, especially when the two are very close to each other. What is at the heart of this proposition is the perspective of winning the election. When a candidate or a party is certain to win, she must not engage into negative campaigning and on what appears as a risky strategy. In contrast, those that are close to winning, just as those that are close to lose, are expected to discredit their opponents to diminish opponents' support, and ultimately to steal just enough voters with the share of resource they continue to devote to positive campaigning. A central hypothesis about the impact of the closeness of the electoral race on the tone of the campaign has been derived from this theoretical foundation: The closer the electoral race between candidates or parties, the more they attack each other.

Another implication of this model is that additional 'spoiler' candidates or parties, i.e. those that are only supported by a marginal share of voters, should not engage in negative advertising. Assuming they have a long-term perspective, they should at this stage of their political life aim at securing the small amount of convinced supporters they already have instead of adopting a costly strategy, which might result in alienating considerable parts of their constituency.

These propositions are supported by empirical evidence coming from US Senate elections (Hale, Fox and Farmer 1996; Lau and Pomper 2001), US presidential primaries (Haynes and Rhine 1998), Russian presidential elections (Sigelman and

Shiraev 2002), and even laboratory experiments (Theilmann and Wilhite 1998). Lau, Sigelman and Rovner (2007) also conducted a meta-analysis cross validating all these findings. However, without exception, these pieces all concentrate on elections held under single-member districts, and plurality or majority rules. In PR countries in contrast, little evidence supports the hypothesis according to which negative campaigning is driven by electoral competition. For example, the effect of electoral competition is low to nil in Denmark (Elmelund-Præstekær 2008, 2010), Germany and the Netherlands (Walter, van der Brug, van Praag 2014).

In this chapter, we argue that the absence of results in the aforementioned studies might be partly due to the necessity to bargain with other parties to form coalition agreements in PR democracies (as already noted by Elmelund-Præstekær 2011), which are naturally inhibiting negative behaviour within such a coalition. In these European PR countries with a tradition of coalition or minority governments, the designation of the government personnel depends as much on the electoral results than on agreements contracted between parties (at least if not party obtains a majority of the parliamentary seats, which is rarely occurring under PR). Parties are therefore reluctant to attacking their potential future coalition partners. These alliances between parties, that are sometimes secret, change the nature of party competition and, in consequence, campaigns' dynamics (Golder 2006). To address this problem of PR's influence blurred by coalition bargaining, we focus on four electoral campaigns in Switzerland. Although the legislative elections in the country rely on a very permissive version of PR, parties do not have strong incentives to sign pre- and post-election coalition agreements, given the very specific nature of the Swiss institutional setting, especially its presidential elements (*see* next section). The country is thus an interesting case study to investigate the effect of electoral competition on negative campaigning outside the single-member districts context.

Electoral competition in Switzerland

The nature of electoral competition in Switzerland is rather unique. Most parliamentary chambers (with the exception of the second chamber of the federal parliament, which works as a US Senate-like representation of the cantons) are elected through a multi-member district free-list PR system. However, there are so many institutional particularities that the dynamics at stake in the country do not really resemble those at stake in any other PR democracy. Yet, in this chapter, we take advantage of these particularities to test whether classic theories accounting for negative campaigning fit outside the single-member districts setting.

First, Switzerland is a federal country composed of twenty-six cantons, which have strong institutional autonomy and policy prerogatives. Although the names of the parties are similar at the federal and cantonal levels, most cantonal parties also enjoy large autonomy (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008). Besides, since the cantons are very different in terms of demographics and ideological preferences, the relative strength of each party is very different from canton to canton. Also, it is worth mentioning that the role of political parties is limited in some of these cantons

where the legislative process is still dominated by a popular assembly of citizens. We take advantage of this variance within one country in our study.

Second, the Swiss institutional regime does not fit the classic distinction between parliamentary and (semi-) presidential systems (Cheibub 2007). On the federal level, the joint two chambers of the federal parliament elect each of the seven members of the federal government individually (for a fixed four-year term) at the beginning of the legislature. As to reflect the consensual nature of Swiss politics, the government is traditionally composed of all four main parties (all together, they represent between 80 per cent to 85 per cent of the popular votes). The largest parties are granted two government members while the others are granted only one. Changes to this informal rule have been extremely rare since the 1950s. However, while the partisan composition of the federal government remained perfectly stable from 1959 to 2003, two small changes have been operated these last ten years (since 2007/08, a sixth party joined the federal government as a result of a government member's defection). Also, unlike parliamentary regimes, the federal government is completely independent from the parliament. In particular, the deputies cannot force any member of the federal government to resign. Therefore, the office motivation of the parties is even more weakly linked to the electoral performance than in single-member district elections.

In the vast majority of cantons, the population directly elects the cantonal government (composed of five to seven members) for a fixed four-year term using a complex two-round majority system. Although the election of the cantonal parliament and government (at least the first round) is held the very same day, they are institutionally separated from each other. In particular, the government is not politically accountable to the parliament. This also makes the cantons mixed political regimes, lying in between traditional ideal types of presidentialism and parliamentarism. Unlike most presidential systems however, the government is not forcefully dominated by a single party.

The unconventional Swiss institutional setting creates limited incentives to the cantonal and federal parties to bargain over coalition agreements. At the cantonal level, legislative election agreements between parties would not have any effect on the composition of the government since it is the population that directly elects this government.² At the federal level, the consensual tradition as well as the bargaining uncertainty is so strong so that parties have not been able to form any other alliance than the one consisting of all main parties. As a consequence, the Swiss federal and cantonal political systems are almost impermeable to the dynamics of coalition bargaining. The noise they bring into electoral explanations of negative campaigning is therefore limited, even more so in the cantonal systems with directly elected government officials than on the federal level, where (since

2. Parties, support committees, and advocacy groups might endorse a government candidate. However, this endorsement is institutionally separated from the legislative election. In some instances, parties also agree on list arrangements to minimise wasted votes in the seat allocation process, but this is merely a mathematical move without consequences for policy or government composition.

the aforementioned defection of the SVP-member disrupting the old order in 2007) a growing amount of bargaining has to take place before the investiture vote of the members of government.

In this chapter, we concentrate on four campaigns: the 2011 Zurich cantonal and federal campaigns, and the 2011 Lucerne cantonal and federal campaigns. All in all, three elections and two cantons are thus covered. This concentration allows us to conduct a comparative analysis, while enabling us to control for regional idiosyncrasies, as well as periodic competition patterns. For example, at the beginning of the spring 2011 cantonal campaigns, relatively non-controversial economic issues related to the economic crisis in Europe and the world dominated the media, panel discussions and advertisements. However, the Fukushima incident gave rise to heated debates about nuclear phase-out strategies. The federal election campaign of fall 2011 reverted to the economic issues again, after the Fukushima topic had been defused over the summer by a quickly adopted nuclear phase-out strategy of the federal government backed by a great majority of the parties.

In 2011, fourteen party branches effectively competed in Zurich and Lucerne in both federal and cantonal elections, two sections per party. They were the four main parties: the Social Democratic Party (SP, socialist), the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP, centre-right Christian-Democrat), the Swiss People's Party (SVP, far-right populist), and the Liberal Party (FPD, centre-right liberal). The rather long-established Green Party (GP, left-green) also presented party-lists, together with the much more recent Green Liberal Party (GLP, centre-right green) and Conservative Democratic Party (BDP, centre-right conservative). Other parties also formally competed, such as the Evangelical People's Party (EVP, centre-right Christian radical) or the Alternative List (AL, far-left). However, they are excluded from the present analysis as they only made hardly visible campaign efforts. At the federal level, the government is composed of the SP (two members), the FDP (two members), the SVP (one member), the CVP (one member), and the BDP (one member). The BDP joined the government *de facto* in 2008 after one of the two SVP's members defected and created this new party. Among non-micro parties, only the two green parties (GP and GLP) are thus excluded from the government.

The relative strength of these fourteen party branches is very different in the two cantons we cover. Table 7.1 reveals the parliamentary seat shares³ obtained by all of them at the 2011 federal lower house and cantonal parliamentary election (and differences with the 2007 elections). In Zurich, a highly urbanised and modern canton, the competition is polarised between the SP (left-wing) and the leading SVP (right-wing), with the more centrist FDP as a moderator (these three parties also have two government members at the cantonal level each). In 2011, the parliamentary seat shares of the two first parties were over 30 per cent (SVP) and

3. We are using seat shares, because they are the ultimate goal on the office- and vote-dimension in a non-parliamentary system. Polls are not considered here, because they are very stable over time and predict the vote-shares (almost) perfectly, but do not easily translate into exact seat share expectations the parties can work with.

Table 7.1: Results of the 2011 cantonal and federal elections in Zurich and Lucerne

Party	Zurich		Lucerne	
	Federal	Cantonal	Federal	Cantonal
SVP	0.32 (-0.03)	0.30 (-0.01)	0.20 (-0.10)	0.23 (+0.03)
SP	0.21 (+/-0)	0.19 (-0.01)	0.10 (+/-0)	0.13 (+0.02)
BDP	0.06 (+0.06)	0.03 (+0.03)	0.00 (+/-0)	0.00 (+/-0)
GP	0.09 (-0.03)	0.11 (+/-0)	0.10 (+/-0)	0.08 (+/-0)
FDP	0.12 (+/-0)	0.13 (-0.03)	0.20 (+/-0)	0.19 (-0.05)
GLP	0.12 (+0.03)	0.11 (+0.05)	0.10 (+0.10)	0.05 (+0.05)
CVP	0.06 (-0.03)	0.05 (-0.02)	0.30 (+/-0)	0.33 (-0.06)

Note: Entries are parliamentary seat shares. Changes to 2007 are in parentheses. The figures related to the federal election correspond to the Zurich and Lucerne's district respectively.

around 20 per cent (SP), while the FDP reached about 12 per cent. The other parties appeared as 'spoilers' even though the two green parties (the GP and the GLP) were also rather successful in 2011 with mostly over 10 per cent of parliamentary seat shares (the GP also has a government member at the cantonal level).

The situation is rather different in Lucerne, which is a more rural canton. The party competition reflects the traditional Swiss religious cleavage between Catholics and Liberals. As a result, the competition revolves around a dominant CVP challenged by the FDP, and to some extent by the SP. In 2011, their parliamentary seat shares in the canton were respectively around 30 per cent, 20 per cent and 12 per cent (these three parties also control the government at the cantonal level). Recently, the SVP made a breakthrough in Lucerne cantonal politics, while the traditionally dominant parties CVP and FDP had to accept considerable losses. In 2011, the party obtained around 25 per cent of the seats, making it the first challenger of the CVP. None of the other parties, including the green parties (the GP and the GLP) and the newly formed BDP are able to compete with them. In the light of the Swiss institutional givens, we will analyse the impact of party competition on the tone of the four campaigns in question with the following data and instrumentarium.

Measuring negative campaigning in Switzerland

Negative campaigning is defined as the material used during an electoral campaign to discredit one's opponents and which stresses the deficient nature of their manifesto, accomplishments, qualifications, associates, etc. The opposite is considered positive campaigning, a style that emphasises how good one's own manifesto, accomplishments, qualifications, programmes, *et cetera* are. In this sense, we rely on the Functional Theory of political advertisements

developed by Benoit (Chapter Two in this volume). Although some scholars adopt more refined definitions in differentiating for instance uncivil negative advertisements from those that are not, this definition is the one that is the most often adopted (Brooks and Geer 2007). Besides, it would be hard to operate such a differentiation in our case study, since there are almost no uncivil statements in Swiss campaigns.

The data used in this paper were collected within the framework of the project Making Electoral Democracy Work (Blais 2010). For measuring negative campaigning in the Swiss context, we relied on data sources as little mediated, as easily adjustable for parties on short notice and as widely accessible for voters as possible. Earlier studies in other countries rely mainly on TV advertising to ensure those qualities (Benoit, Chapter Two in this volume). However, since political television advertising is banned in Switzerland, we turned to the form of campaign communication to the public most common in Swiss politics: Newspaper advertisements and letters to the editor by candidates. According to interviews with the cantonal parties' campaign planners and managers that have been conducted within the Making Electoral Democracy Work's project, on average roughly 20 per cent of the party sections' campaign budgets were spent on this type of advertising, the second largest average share of the campaign budget for one sort of activity, only exceeded by one-shot mailings like campaign letters or partisan election-newspapers.

The first quality criterion of this type of data is always to ensure that the content is as unmediated as possible. This is best fulfilled by newspaper advertisements. Since they are placed in paid-for space, the wording and content is under complete control of the payers (mostly parties or party-based support committees). Letters to the editors by candidates, however, are subject to an editorial process. But this process mainly involves selection and cutting, not changing the negative or positive tone of a contribution as severely as for example coverage of a campaign event.

Compared to this mild shortcoming, the advantage of adjustability over time justifies the inclusion of letters to the editor. As well as newspaper advertisements, a message via letters to the editor can be easily adapted and changed in tone over a relatively short amount of time, compared to billboards, manifestos or one-shot campaign newspapers. Via these channels, parties can easily react to polls, scandals, hot topics or other unforeseen events. In addition, these two channels can be expected to reach a high number of potential Swiss voters. Newspaper consumption in Switzerland is highest in Europe, except for the Nordic countries; the reported rate of non-readers for example is below 10 per cent (Elvestad and Blekesaune 2008).

During the three months before election day, we collected all newspaper advertisements and letters to the editors by parties in a sample of three leading newspapers, one federal and two cantonal respectively: the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (federal), the *Tagesanzeiger* (Zurich), and the *Neue Luzerner Zeitung* (Lucerne). It provided a total of more than 1,000 advertisements and letters to the editor.

These were coded as either relating to Zurich or Lucerne competition for the federal campaigns, or to the legislative or government election for the cantonal campaigns.

The coding-unit of negativity in an advertisement or letter is a quasi-sentence. In line with the definition presented above, quasi-sentences in statements attacking another party, candidate or office-holder were coded '1' whereas those about a party's own policy preferences, qualities or allies were coded '0'. Also, one would note that the sum of advertisements of all parties does not correspond to the overall number of advertisements in the campaign. Some parties sometimes 'share' an advertisement unit.

When looking at the number of negative quasi-sentences for each campaign covered by our study, we see huge differences between the federal and the cantonal level. Table 7.2 reports the mean proportions of attacks by campaign. It shows that the practice of negative campaigning was much more common during the 2011 cantonal campaigns in both Zurich and Lucerne. On average, newspapers advertisements of the federal campaigns contained 2 per cent to 5 per cent of attacks; while this average rises to 10 per cent for the cantonal campaigns, and even to 14 per cent when we concentrate on advertisements concerning legislative elections in these campaigns only (these differences are statically significant at a level of $p < 0.01$). As to ensure the comparability of our analyses across elections, we focus on advertisements related to parliamentary elections of the lower house at the federal and the parliament at the cantonal level in the rest of this chapter. We thereby also can get rid of the bias induced by the fact that some parties did not run or endorse any candidate at the cantonal government elections.

These differences in terms of campaigns are in line with what we know about the incentives created by the cantonal and federal institutional systems in Switzerland. While all main parties are part of a traditional alliance that collaborates to vote in the government at the federal level, they do not have to agree on the composition of the government at the cantonal level since it is the

Table 7.2: Negativity by campaign

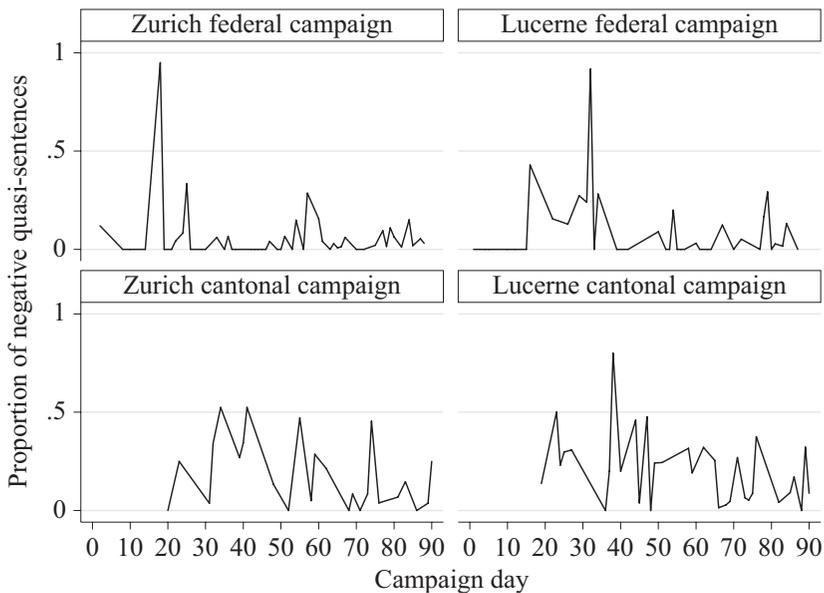
	Zurich		Lucerne	
	Mean (s.d.)	N	Mean (s.d.)	N
2011 federal campaign	0.02 (0.08)	325	0.05 (0.15)	278
2011 cantonal campaign	0.10** (0.21)	235	0.10** (0.21)	240
2011 cantonal campaign (legislative campaigns only)	0.14** (0.25)	156	0.14** (0.24)	178
All 2011 campaigns	0.05 (0.16)	560	0.07 (0.18)	518

Note: Entries are mean proportions of quasi-sentences in newspaper ads. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Difference of means t-tests: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed); for region, the reference is the mean of the 2011 federal campaign.

population that directly elects it. Parties have thus more room to attack each other at the cantonal level. Also, it should be mentioned that the legislative elections are more negative than the government elections at the cantonal level, which should be due to the fact that, during the following term, the elected government members will have to collaborate more with each other than with the elected deputies. Finally, it is worth mentioning that there is no notable difference between Lucerne and Zurich in terms of the overall tone of the campaigns in these two cantons.

In Figure 7.1, we report the evolution of attacks during the 90 days preceding election day in each of the four campaigns covered. In the literature, it is said that campaigns get more negative as time passes. This is attributed to the so-called snowball effect of negativity, according to which a party that has been the object of negative advertisements is more likely to adopt this strategy in the rest of the campaign (Damore 2002). This trend however hardly exists in the federal and cantonal campaigns in Zurich and Lucerne. We do not find any statistically significant correlation between the proportion of negative quasi-sentence and the campaign day. This confirms that it is the institutional setting, rather than a ‘spiral of negativity’ that explains the overall differences of negativity between campaigns reported above.

Figure 7.1: Evolution of negativity during campaigns



Note: Lines report mean proportions of negative quasi-sentences in newspaper advertisements per campaign/region day. No correlations between day and mean proportions are statistically significant.

The electoral determinants of negative campaigning

Table 7.3 reports the mean proportion of negativity/attacks contained in all newspaper advertisements released, arrayed by campaign and party. In Zurich, we observe that during the federal campaign, the second largest party (the SP) went relatively more negative than other parties. The party's proportion of attacks is 3 per cent (with a standard deviation of 13 per cent) compared to an overall mean of 2 per cent. At the cantonal level, it is the SVP who went more negative than others (with a mean of 16 per cent compared to a total average of 14 per cent). Even if these differences are not statistically significant, they are rather consistent with the theory regarding how electoral competition impacts negative campaigning. SP as the second in line resorts to more negative campaigning than the other parties to gain versus the frontrunner SVP. In the cantonal campaign, however, the picture does not support the theoretical propositions. In general, the results of Zurich should be taken with caution. SVP and SP Zurich are the by far best funded (with the FDP) and professionally organised party sections in Switzerland. They are the ones to be expected to most likely realise the potential

Table 7.3: Negativity by party

	Zurich		Lucerne	
	Mean (s.d.)	N	Mean (s.d.)	N
2011 federal campaign	0.02 (0.08)	325	0.05 (0.15)	278
SVP	0.02 (0.08)	98	0.09* (0.18)	71
SP	0.03 (0.13)	53	0.05 (0.16)	31
BDP	0.00 (0.00)	17	0.09 (0.24)	14
GP	0.00 (0.03)	35	0.03 (0.09)	25
FDP	0.02 (0.07)	79	0.02 (0.08)	62
GLP	0.08 (0.20)	7	0.03 (0.05)	15
CVP	0.00 (0.00)	40	0.03 (0.11)	70
2011 cantonal campaign	0.14 (0.25)	156	0.14 (0.24)	178
SVP	0.16 (0.20)	54	0.23** (0.29)	45
SP	0.08 (0.22)	21	0.13 (0.22)	26
BDP	0.23 (NA)	1	0.05 (0.12)	19
GP	0.04* (0.15)	16	0.19 (0.32)	28
FDP	0.15 (0.28)	64	0.05 (0.11)	25
GLP	0.20 (NA)	1	0.13 (0.18)	8
CVP	0.00 (0.00)	3	0.08 (0.16)	35

Note: Entries are mean proportions of quasi-sentences in newspaper advertisements. Difference of means t-tests: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed); for Zurich campaign, the reference is the mean of the SVP, for Lucerne, the reference is the mean of the CVP.

gains of negative campaigning and to professionally apply this strategy, which had been highly uncommon in Swiss politics until the populist turn of the SVP in the early 1990s. Also, it is important to note that the number of advertisements for some parties in the 2011 Zurich cantonal campaign is so small that also these results should be taken with caution.

In Lucerne, in both campaigns, it is the SVP, the new challenger of the dominant CVP that showed a constantly higher mean proportion of attacks. In the federal campaign, the party's negativity share was 9 per cent (compared to an overall mean of 5 per cent, the difference is statistically significant at a level of $p < 0.05$); while in the cantonal campaign, the share was 23 per cent (compared to an overall mean of 14 per cent, statistically significant at a level of $p < 0.01$). By contrast, the dominant CVP showed a mean proportion of attacks lower than the overall average in both the federal and cantonal campaigns (of 3 per cent and 8 per cent respectively). This is again perfectly consistent regarding the classic electoral determinants of negative campaigning presented above.

However, it is important to note that the whole picture is not as clear as the presented results of the frontrunner parties. In both Zurich's and Lucerne's campaigns, some of the 'spoiler' parties showed a relatively high proportion of attacks. According to the theory, they should have remained positive in their advertisements as they had little chances to really compete with the leading parties. For example, the newly formed GLP was particularly negative in cantonal campaigns. This might be due to the fact that the party had to create its place in the Swiss political space. The GP was also rather negative in the Lucerne's cantonal campaign. These findings suggest that the electoral competition does not explain the *alpha* and the *omega* of negative campaigning. It nevertheless constitutes an important factor to be taken into consideration to investigate the phenomenon, especially when analysing party systems and competition patterns that have been stable over a long time.

In the non-coalition PR system present here, the positional explanation at least holds more value than the alternative 'fear of losing' explanation, stating that the party facing defeat (also the second party in majoritarian systems with SMDs) will resort to negative campaigning. These two approaches cannot be tested separately in SMD systems, because the second party both is trailing (positional), as well as fearing loss of seats (fear of defeat) at the same time. When we look at the losses of seats compared to 2007, it was not the parties severely losing (CVP and FDP in Lucerne) resorted to negative campaigning, but rather the parties who were actually winning⁴ (e.g. SP and SVP).⁵

To further test the classic theory of party competition with these findings, we will also look at the parties targeted by their opponents' attacks. Table 7.4 reports

4. Due to the stability of polls in Switzerland, it is valid here to operationalise expected losses with the tendency of actual losses.

5. SVP's losses in Zurich were mainly due to the technical reason of the now BDP deputies not being part of the SVP parliamentary group any more.

Table 7.4: Parties targeted by negativity

	Zurich		Lucerne	
	Mean (s.d.)	N	Mean (s.d.)	N
2011 federal campaign				
SVP	0.04 (0.19)	325	0.06 (0.23)	278
SP	0.02 (0.15)	325	0.04 (0.20)	278
BDP	0.02** (0.12)	325	0.03** (0.16)	278
GP	0.01** (0.11)	325	0.03* (0.16)	278
FDP	0.03 (0.17)	325	0.04 (0.20)	278
GLP	0.02 (0.16)	325	0.01** (0.10)	278
CVP	0.03 (0.16)	325	0.05 (0.23)	278
2011 cantonal campaign				
SVP	0.07 (0.26)	156	0.12 (0.33)	178
SP	0.18** (0.38)	156	0.08* (0.28)	178
BDP	0.17* (0.37)	156	0.04** (0.19)	178
GP	0.18** (0.38)	156	0.08* (0.27)	178
FDP	0.14* (0.35)	156	0.07** (0.26)	178
GLP	0.17** (0.38)	156	0.01** (0.07)	178
CVP	0.19** (0.40)	156	0.15 (0.35)	178

Note: Entries are proportions of advertisements targeting the party. Difference of means t-tests: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed); for Zurich campaign, the reference is the mean of the SVP, for Lucerne, the reference is the mean of the CVP.

the proportion of advertisements targeting each party for each campaign. During the federal campaign in Zurich, the SVP was more often targeted than any other party (in 4 per cent of all advertisements, while it was 2 per cent or 3 per cent for other parties). Although small, this difference is statically significant at a level of $p < 0.01$ for the BDP and the GP (two new ‘spoiler’ parties, against whom all major parties chose a strategy of ignoring). This is perfectly in line with the theoretical predictions stated above. The leading party is indeed more likely to be attacked than others. In contrast, it is also important to note that in the cantonal campaign in Zurich all parties were targeted more than the SVP. This theoretically counterintuitive result is probably due to the comparatively small number of advertisements during the campaign and to the fact that the SVP is responsible for a very large part of the overall negative advertisements.

The situation is even clearer in Lucerne’s campaigns. The two largest parties (the SVP and the CVP) were clearly attacked more often than all other parties. During the federal campaign, they were the targets of 5 per cent to 6 per cent of advertisements (compared to an average of 3 per cent for the other parties); this proportion rises to 12 per cent to 15 per cent during the cantonal campaign

(compared to an average of 5 per cent for other parties). Most of these differences are statistically significant. These findings give further evidence to the importance of the electoral determinants of negative campaigning, even in a PR system.

Conclusions

In the theoretical literature, electoral competition is said to be key to explaining negative campaigning. While this claim is supported by strong evidence from single-member districts democracies (and especially the US), studies focusing on PR democracies fail to find such a link. In this chapter, we argued that this unsatisfactory result might be explained by the existence of bargaining over coalition agreements between parties in the most of these European PR democracies. To address this problem, we analysed four electoral campaigns in Switzerland (the 2011 federal and cantonal campaigns in Zurich and Lucerne) where the specific institutional setting give little room for coalition bargaining. Although some variation between parties with regard to the tone of their campaign remained unexplained, we did find patterns that are in line with the electoral explanation of negativity. In particular, challenger parties appeared to conduct more negative campaigns than ‘spoiler’ parties. Also, the largest parties are more often targets of their opponents’ attacks. Our chapter thus contributes to the literature on the subject in asserting the importance of the electoral determinants of negative campaigning, even outside the classic single-member districts context.