

Engagement and Likeability of Negative Messages on Facebook during Israel's 2013 Elections

Tal Samuel-Azran, Moran Yarchi,
& Gadi Wolfsfeld

Abstract

To contribute to the mapping of negative campaigns effects, this study examines the engagement (shares and comments) and likeability (likes) effects of negative campaigning strategies on Facebook during Israel's 2013 elections. The analysis shows that attacks, contrasts, and responses to negative messages are highly shared and commented on, illustrating the engaging nature of negative campaigning in Israel. In terms of likeability, results were mixed, as responses to negative messages were more liked

Dr. Tal Samuel-Azran is the Head of the International Program at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Israel. Dr. Moran Yarchi is a Senior Lecturer, and Dr. Gadi Wolfsfeld is a Full Professor, also at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications. Correspondence can be directed to azrant7@gmail.com.

than other messages, but attacks and contrasts were not. The 20 most-liked posts were analyzed and responses of the leader of the religious party Habayit HaYehudi to alleged attacks against modern orthodoxy attracted likes in dramatic numbers, riling followers who objected to the growing tensions between religious and secular Jews in Israel. The study provides the first mapping of the effects of an online negative campaign in Israel and illuminates the relevance of its political and religious context, particularly Israel's polarized multi-party system and religious, democratic nature.

Negative campaigning has long been a significant element in election campaign strategies (Lau, Sigelman, & Brown-Rovner, 2007; Melusky, 2014; Robinson, 1981; Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995). Most studies on negative campaigning to date were conducted in the United States (e.g., Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000), where negative campaigning has dominated politics since the 1960s. In the 2006 Senate elections, for example, 83% of the television advertisements sponsored by Democratic party and 89% of the advertisements sponsored by the Republican party were negative (Lau et al., 2007) and more than 70% of advertisements were negative in the 2012 presidential election campaign (Geer, 2012; Melusky, 2014). Studies of negative campaigns have found that negative messages are highly engaging (Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Fiske 1980; Marcus et al., 2000; Taylor 1991) yet are often not liked by the audience and can deflate evaluations of both attacker and attacked (Lau &

Brown-Rovner, 2009; Lau et al., 2007).

In view of the increasing global popularity of negative campaigning in the past two decades, studies have addressed negative campaigning in diverse circumstances and political systems, including the multiparty system in Italy (Ceron & d'Adda, 2015), the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries (Hansen & Peterson, 2008). While these studies confirmed the relevance of many of the effects that emerged in earlier studies that focused on the two-party U.S. system, specifically the engaging effect of negative campaigning (Ceron & d'Adda, 2015), they also identify differences, such as a more limited extent of negative campaigning in multiparty systems (Walter, der Brug, & van Praag, 2013). These differences underscore the need to examine negative campaigning effects in additional countries and circumstances.

This study offers a mapping of negative campaigning effects in the case of Israel, a *polarized* multi-party system, a party system which is understudied. Importantly, Israel's polarized multi-party system promotes fierce competition between several (typically five or more) contenders who are compelled to emphasize their leadership abilities to distinguish themselves from other candidates who often hold similar ideological positions. Sheafer and Wolfsfeld (2009) found that election campaigns in Israel's multi-party system create a more competitive environment than in a two-party system. Furthermore, even in comparison to other multi-party systems, candidates in Israel's polarized multi-party system are forced to compete with several contenders within their own ideological camp as well as with candidates representing other ideological positions, making it one of the most competitive party sys-

tems worldwide. This structure, by definition, motivates candidates to launch negative campaigns, especially toward candidates from the same camp. For example, during election campaigns left-wing party Meretz typically attacks both the Labor party and the right-wing parties.

In addition, importantly, Israel is also a religious democracy, a unique combination that has rarely been examined before. Religion enjoys special status in Israel. For example, businesses are not permitted to open on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, and civil marriages are not recognized by the state. The democratic character of Israel, grounded in its Declaration of Independence, was officially confirmed in 1985 in a law that passed in the Knesset, Israel's national parliament. The lack of separation between religion and state in Israel remains a highly debated issue, and recent polls show that the majority of Israelis support a separation between religion and state as well as opening business and allowing public transport on the Sabbath (Nachshoni, 2014). Other studies suggest that Israel has undergone a process of bifurcation, where Tel-Aviv has adopted secularism and globalization while Jerusalem has responded to globalization by becoming even more religious (Ram, 2005).

Despite the dramatic differences in their political and religious system, Israel and the U.S. are similar in the prominence of negative election campaigning strategies. Already in 1996, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who returned from several years of serving Israel in the U.S., was a candidate of the Likud party; he introduced the U.S. negative campaigning style into the national elections and used the slogan "Peres Will Divide Jerusalem," which arguably won him his first election (Caspi, 1996).

Negative campaigning has since become a popular strategy. Furthermore, since the 1980s, Israeli politics has undergone a process of personalization, reflecting a shifting focus from party politics to candidates' personalities (Peri, 2004; Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007). Peri (2004) argues that Netanyahu in particular promoted a style that emphasizes candidates' personality. This political style, which naturally leads to a more concentrated focus on politicians' charisma and promotes personal attacks that target candidates' character flaws, further contributed to the dominance of negative campaigning during Israel's elections.

While most studies of negative campaigning have addressed television advertisements, the current study explores the likeability and engagement that negative campaigning created on Facebook during the 2013 elections in Israel. The focus is on Facebook campaigning in Israel since current global campaigning trends use social media as central campaigning platforms. Since Facebook is the most popular online social networking website in the world, with nearly 1.3 billion users worldwide (Facebook, 2014), and is ranked the second most popular website on the Internet by Alexa's ranking system, after Google.com (Alexa Top Global Sites, 2014), it is not surprising that social media were found to contain similar amounts of negative campaigning as television campaigns (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2010). These researchers argued that Facebook has become so popular for campaigning due to its low-cost and immediacy and candidates' confidence that any attack on them will rally the support of their social media audience.

Facebook's dominance in Israel's social media arena is undisputed. Already in 2011, time spent on Face-

book per visitor per month among Israelis was one of the highest in the world (Nissan, 2011). In Israel, where 67% of the population (or 4,000,000 Israelis) use the web (Kabir & Urbach, 2013), approximately one half of the population are intense Facebook users. Furthermore, whereas in some other countries Twitter, the second most popular global platform, competes with Facebook for dominance, only 150,000 Israelis have Twitter accounts, further underscoring Facebook's leading position in Israel's web scene (Goldenberg, 2013). During the 2013 Israeli elections, all party leaders (with the exception of the leaders of Shas, an ultra-religious party) used Facebook as their main form of communication with potential voters (Lev-On, 2013; Samuel-Azran, Yarchi, & Wolfsfield, 2015; Wolfsfeld, Yarchi, & Samuel-Azran, 2015). Facebook activity during the campaigning period was so intense that leading candidates, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, were ascribed titles in line with their intense Facebook activity, such as "Facebook minister" and "Facebook champ" (Bender, 2012; Kahana, 2014; Maltz, 2013). In fact, the 2013 Israeli elections have been labeled as "Israel's first Facebook elections" (Maltz, 2013).

Effects of Negative Campaigning: Engagement and Likeability

A negative campaign is a campaign that focuses on the deficiencies in the programs, accomplishments, qualifications, and associates of one's opponents (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; Lau & Brown-Rovner, 2009; Lau & Pomper, 2001). A negative campaign might attack an opponent personally by denigrating personal peccadilloes, or attack the issues that the opponent or her party endorses

(Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995). Two of the main questions that surround negative campaigning are whether such campaigns promote audience engagement and participation, and whether they increase empathy toward the attacker and/or reduce empathy for the target of the attack. Social psychologists believe that negative information is likely to attract people's attention and motivate them to action (Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Fiske, 1980; Marcus et al., 2000; Taylor 1991) and that it is more influential than positive information (Kanouse & Hanson, 1971). Most studies on the engagement potential of negative campaigns were conducted on television ads, where ample evidence shows that negative campaign messages mobilize and live on in memory of voters more than other messages (Lau et al., 2007; Lau & Brown-Rovner, 2009), and increase voter turnout (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). Negative ads were found to increase interest in the election and stimulate political learning (Finkel & Geer, 1998; Geer, 2006; Brader, 2005). Studies also found that negative campaigns attract media attention, which in turn mobilizes audience members to participate in the campaign (Geer, 2012; Hansen & Pederson, 2008). Similarly, in the online realm, Shah et al. (2007) found that the extent of citizens' political information-seeking rises after exposure to negative campaigning. Finally, meta-analyses confirmed that negative campaigns tend to be more memorable and stimulate knowledge about the campaign (Lau & Brown-Rovner, 2009; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbitt, 1999). These findings explain why political consultants often believe that attack ads are more effective than positive ads during television campaigns (Crigler, Just, & Belt, 2006).

With the aim of contributing to current knowledge on negative campaigning and engagement, the current study offers an analysis of readers' responses to negative campaigning on Facebook during the 2013 Israeli elections. Clearly, high engagement in social networks is a desired object of candidates, who wish to ensure that their messages attract the interest of and resonate with social media users. Choosing to share a post represents a reader's willingness to re-post a message on her own Facebook wall, sometimes accompanied by a comment, and indicates a higher level of engagement with the post than merely liking the post (Malhotra, Kubowicz Malhotra, & See, 2013). Importantly, because sharing is not always positive and is sometimes designed to mock a candidate's message, it cannot be considered a measure of support. Facebook comments also reflect a higher degree of user engagement than simple likes, as commenting entails responding to candidates' posts with their own messages, sometimes starting a new conversation. An analysis of the most shared *New York Times* articles (Berger, 2011; Berger & Milkman, 2012) identifies that information that causes "high arousal" and evokes emotions such as laughter, fear, and awe, has the greatest probability of becoming shared. As negative comments often contain high-arousal messages, they may similarly have high shareability potential.

Another effect of negative campaigning is its potential impact on evaluations of candidates. While there is strong evidence that negative campaigning engages citizens, analyses indicate that such heightened engagement is not necessarily advantageous to the attacker and harmful to the target of the attack, as intended (Lau, Sigelman,

& Brown-Rovner, 2007). In fact, most campaign studies found that negative television-based campaign ads harm both the attacker and the target. Lau and Brown-Rovner's (2009) meta-analysis found that 23 out of 31 studies indicated that evaluations of both the attacker and the target decrease during negative campaigns. Moreover, responding to allegations was found to diminish evaluations of the target and enhanced the credibility of the attacking candidate (Kern, 1989).

Specifically, studies found three types of negative campaign effects involving evaluations of target and source: boomerang effect, double impairment effect, and victim syndrome effect. In the *boomerang effect*, an unwanted "ricochet" effect occurs, whereby more negative sentiments are aroused against the attacker than against the attacked politicians (Strother, 1999). Haddock and Zanna's (1997) analysis of the effect of negative campaigning mocking a candidate's facial paralysis revealed that the campaign actually caused damage to the party that launched the campaign. A *double impairment effect* occurs when both the source and the target are evaluated more negatively as a consequence of the advertisement (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 2013). Merritt's (1984) found that such a campaigning style harms both the candidate attacked and his/her attacker. Third, some studies found that responses to attacks sometimes create a *victim syndrome effect*, where voters sympathize with the target. Robinson (1981) found that the negative advertisements directed against six incumbent Democratic senators during the 1980 U.S. Senate election campaign tended to produce a victim syndrome effect, as respondents stated the advertisements had influenced them in favor of the De-

mocratic candidates. Garramone's (1985) study also confirmed the notion that attacks can increase sympathy toward the victim. Importantly, in both studies, empathy with the target of the attack was related to respondents' belief that the original attack was considered fierce and unjustified.

By measuring the likeability of negative messages, this study aims to assess the sympathy and support for attackers and targets, evoked by negative campaign messages during the 2013 Israeli elections. We measured the number of Facebook likes each negative message received. Likes are arguably the most well-known and unambiguous indication of support for messages on social media. The like button, which replaces the need to comment "this is awesome," "great," or other forms of positive impression with a single button, was launched on Facebook in 2009 and soon became synonymous with popularity of Facebook account holders, who initially were celebrities but subsequently also politicians who wanted to portray high levels of public support (Vitak et al., 2011).

Negative Campaigning Strategies: Attacks, Contrasts and Response to Attacks

Most scholars who studied negative campaigning to date distinguish between three main strategies: attack, contrast, and response. Attack advertising contains an aggressive, one-sided assault designed to draw attention to the weaknesses in an opponent's character or issue positions, by citing an opponent's broken promises, voting record, or public misstatements (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland 2013; Merritt, 1984; Pfau & Kenski, 1990; Pinkleton, 1997).

Contrast is an indirect attack strategy that uses comparisons to contrast the opponent's faults with the attacker's virtues (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 2013). In contrast advertising, both the attacker and the target are discussed or compared. Often, the sponsoring candidate claims superiority over the targeted candidate, typically on the basis of her issue positions, experience, or voting record (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 2013; Merritt, 1984; Pfau & Kenski, 1990; Salmore & Salmore, 1989).

The third strategy is applied by the target of the attack who decides to respond to the attacker's charges, often using strategies of self-victimization (Garramone, 1985; Pfau & Kenski, 1990; Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Salmore & Salmore, 1989). Responses and contrasts have become prevalent in the social network campaigning era due to the immediacy, low cost, interactive nature of the web. The current study explores the effects of all three negative campaigning strategies – attacks, contrasts and response to negative messages.

Research questions

The first research question addresses the issue of whether negative campaign messages and responses to negative campaigning have greater potential to mobilize voters than other messages. The second question focuses on the likeability of negative messages and the responses to these messages.

RQ1: Do attacks, contrasts, and responses to negative messages result in more shares and comments than other messages?

RQ2: Do attacks, contrasts, and responses to negative messages result in more likes than other mes-

sages?

Method

The analysis examines negative campaigning Facebook posts and responses to messages written by five leading Israeli politicians: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud Beitenu), opposition leader Shelly Yachimovich (Labor), former opposition leader Tzipi Livni (Ha'tnua), and two new pledges in the Israeli political arena, Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid) and Naftali Bennett (Habait Ha-Yehudi). The politicians were selected on the basis of preliminary polls that (correctly) predicted their success in the elections. Data collection proceeded from December 7, 2012 (one day after the final registration date for the 2013 elections, thus the official launch of the election campaigns) to Election Day, January 22, 2013.

To acquire the relevant posts, we used MAKAM, a social media trend tracking company, which identified all the posts of these five candidates that gained more than 500 Likes and/or Shares in the relevant period. In total, 493 such posts were included in our analysis: 122 posts on Netanyahu's page, 108 posts on Lapid's page, 101 on Bennett's page, 86 on Yachimovich's page, and 76 on Livni's page. The posts were coded for negative campaigning and responses to attacks, as follows:

- (a) Attack – any post that contains an attack on another candidate or party was coded as an attacking post. All posts were coded as containing or not containing an attack.
- (b) Contrast – any post that contained a form of comparison between candidates was coded as a contrast post. All posts were coded as contain-

ing or not containing such a comparison.

- (c) Response to attacks – any message that contains a response to an attack or contrast by another party or candidate. All posts in our sample were coded as containing or not containing a response to an attack on the party or candidate.

Engagement with Facebook messages was measured using three indicators: (a) the number of likes a post received; (b) the number of comments written in response to a post; and (c) the number of shares a post received (the number of people who posted that message on their Facebook timeline). These indicators offer a broad assessment of engagement on Facebook: Likes serve as an indicator of a post's popularity, while comments and shares help us better understand readers' involvement and willingness to actively participate in a political debate by commenting on and sharing campaign messages. Importantly, we did not measure whether responses were positive or negative, and therefore this measure also offered an indication of readers' engagement with the posts. The posts were coded by three coders who underwent training. A reliability test based on a random sample of 100 posts showed a high level of inter-coder agreement (Kappa coefficient above .857).

Results

In this section, we examine the success of each of different negative campaigning strategies examined in the study, beginning with attacks. Table 1 illustrates that attack posts attract more comments and shares than other types of posts, suggesting that attacks evoke greater user engagement on social media. No significant differences

Table 1
Engagement with Posts that Attack the Other Candidate(s)

		N	M	SD	T value
Likes	Yes	119	3114.19	3381.62	-.184
	No	426	3196.22	4515.13	
Comments	Yes	119	508.06	467.93	2.305*
	No	426	386.39	519.87	
Shares	Yes	119	436.64	465.46	3.688***
	No	426	265.59	375.28	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 2
Engagement with Posts that Use the "Us versus Them" Strategy (Contrast)

		N	M	SD	T value
Likes	Yes	128	363292.	3735.87	1.372
	No	417	3038.77	4441.70	
Comments	Yes	128	548.06	470.71	3.453***
	No	417	371.48	516.29	
Shares	Yes	128	492.34	531.25	4.979***
	No	417	244.80	333.60	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

were found in the number of likes attracted by posts that used attacks and those who did not.

As shown in Table 2, the effect of the contrast strategy ("us versus them" strategy) is similar to the effect of the attack strategy. Posts containing contrasts attract more comments and shares than posts that do not contain contrasts, but do not attract more likes than posts that do

Table 3*Engagement with Posts that Respond to Negative Attacks*

		N	M	SD	T value
Likes	Yes	27	6251.74	5922.04	2.082**
	No	518	3018.11	4133.66	
Comments	Yes	27	943.07	703.89	4.067***
	No	518	385.32	484.20	
Shares	Yes	27	691.11	707.45	2.978**
	No	518	370.18	370.18	

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

not contain contrasts.

Findings (Table 3) show that responses to negative messages are successful in promoting all three indicators of user engagement and support. Response posts received more likes, comments, and shares than other posts. This strategy (responding to negative messages) appears to be highly effective in promoting audience engagement.

Combined, the findings clearly show that all three negative campaign strategies — attacks, contrast and response to negative messages — are significantly more engaging than other messages, as they receive significantly more comments and shares than other posts. Findings also show that attacks and contrasts do not attract more likes than other messages, in contrast to responses to negative messages, which were significantly more liked than other messages.

To better understand the popularity of responses to attacks posts, we closely examined the 20 most-liked messages in the election campaign (Table 4). The analysis sin-

Table 4 *Engagement with the Top 20 Most Liked Posts during the Election Campaign Period*

Message	Author/ Date	Likes
At this time of night, IDF soldiers are guarding us	Bennett 08/01/2013	35,102
We have got a great and snowy country	Netanyahu 10/01/2013	28,203
A message for the young voters following my appearance in Nissim Mishal's TV show	Bennett 21/12/2012	27,504
Dear President Obama, I wish to express my condolences	Netanyahu 16/12/2012	17,731
Those who believe are never afraid	Netanyahu 23/12/2012	17,074
Zipi Livni: I will not enter a government which includes Bennett. OK	Bennett 20/01/2013	16,299
Habayit Hayehudi plan for Israelis serving the army	Bennett 15/01/2013	16,245
With Pleasure – experiences from the last 24 hours	Bennett 17/01/2013	15,257
Yesterday I lighted a candle	Netanyahu 15/12/2012	14,284
Et tu, Zipi Livni?	Bennett 29/12/2012	13,270
Israel is a light to the gentiles – you can see it from space	Netanyahu 14/12/2012	13,184
Sarah and Benjamin Netanyahu in the snow (photo)	Netanyahu 10/01/2013	13,164
Amnon Lipkin Shahak, of blessed memory	Bennett 19/12/2012	12,987
I hope that these are the last elections where ethnic background plays a role...	Bennett 21/01/2013	12,538
The Beer Sheva Mayor is an exemplary Zionist leader	Bennett 25/12/2012	11,226
Jerusalem of Gold. Sabbath shalom	Netanyahu 04/01/2013	11,176
I wish to express my condolences following the death of Israel's 15 th Chief of Staff	Netanyahu 19/12/2012	10,993
A wonderful story for Friday morning	Bennett 04/01/2013	10,885
Yesterday the 165 th pilots' courses ended	Netanyahu 28/12/2012	10,380
We have a country that is not only wonderful but is also sweet	Bennett 17/01/2013	9,976

gles out Naftali Bennett, the leader of Habayit Hayehudi party, as the source of three highly liked responses to attacks in the list of the top 20 most-liked messages. Interestingly, no attacks or contrasts appear in the top 20 most-liked posts, although the five candidates examined in our study produced significantly more posts that contained attacks and contrasts than responses, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Bennett's most-liked response post – which is the tenth most liked post of all election campaign posts of the 5 leading candidates examined, with 15, 257 Likes - is entitled "With pleasure – experiences from the last 24 hours." In this post, he notes that he and his party were attacked on all fronts: by the right-wing Likud that claims they are "too religious," by the ultra-orthodox party Shas that claims they are not religious enough, by left-wing candidate Livni who claimed that they were too extremist, and by the right wing parties that claim that they are too accommodating. In addition, Bennett also noted that the major newspapers are "searching for dirt" about his past and even Obama is displeased with him due to his objections to a Palestinian state. The second most- Liked post is entitled "Et tu, Zipi Livni?" with 13,270 likes, in which Bennett responds to what he viewed as an attack on him by Livni, on a television show aired on Saturday (Jewish Sabbath), who cited Bennett as allegedly stating that he would call Israeli army soldiers to refuse evacuate settlements. Bennett claims that attacking him on the Sabbath has become a new norm and that Livni's allegation is false. The third post is ranked 19th of the most-liked posts, with 12, 380 likes. In it, Bennett stated his hope that candidates would mudslinging in future elections and would

remember that Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, and all other groups, are all Jewish brothers.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examines the effect of negative campaigning strategies on Facebook during Israel's 2013 elections. The analysis examined social media users' engagement, measured by the number of shares and comments, and the likeability of candidates' messages, measured by the number of likes, that negative campaign messages attracted. Findings show that in Israel's 2013 elections attacks, contrasts, and responses to negative campaign messages all attracted significantly more shares and comments than other campaign messages. The results confirm findings of previous studies conducted in two-party and multi-party systems, which found that negative television ads are more engaging than other campaign messages (Brader, 2005; Ceron & d'Adda, 2015; Finkel & Geer, 1998; Geer, 2006), further strengthening the notion that one of the main advantages of negative campaigning is its potential to promote engagement and participation. Thus, the study extends evidence regarding the engaging nature of negative campaigning to the polarized multi-party system in Israel.

The second, and more surprising result was found in the realm of likeability, where attacks and contrasts did not attract significantly more likes than other messages, while responses to attacks did attract significantly more likes than other messages. In contrast to the majority of previous studies that found that negative campaigns harm evaluations of both the attacker and the target of negative messages, and that responses to attacks rarely enhance

the target's image, the findings from our study in Israel indicate that the targets of attacks gained immense support in the form of likes to their responses to the attacks posted on social media. Further analysis identified that a specific candidate (Naftali Bennett, leader of Habayit Hayehudi party) is behind the most highly liked response posts.

We offer several explanations for this interesting finding. First, as recently suggested (Roth, 2015), Bennett managed to gather strong support from young followers who have a strong presence on the web, and connect to them through his messages, particularly his messages of brotherhood among all Jews (many of Bennett's posts starts with the words "Hello sisters and brothers," and "Bennett is a brother" has become his trademark slogan). It is highly likely that Bennett's success in creating high commitment and engagement among his followers contributed to the number of likes that his responses to negative messages received, as his followers understood these as attacks on their "brother." Bennett's Facebook popularity during the 2013 elections was also identified in a study that examined Israeli politicians' overall popularity on Facebook during the 2013 elections, and found that Bennett and Netanyahu were the most popular candidates on Facebook (Samuel-Azran et al., 2015). Thus, Bennett's likeability can be ascribed to his astute political use of the Facebook platform combined with his personal charisma.

Whereas charisma and understanding of social media rules are traits that assist candidates worldwide, our second explanation for Bennett's success relies specifically on the nature of Israel's polarized multi-party environment combined with the country's unique status as a Jew-

ish and democratic state. Our study illustrates a case of a candidate who fends off political attacks from multiple sources. Bennett's party, comprised mostly of modern orthodox Zionist Jews, faced criticism from ultra-orthodox groups that condemned them for disregarding Jewish commandments despite their knowledge of Jewish religious law, and from attacks by secular and agnostic Jews who considered Bennett and his party to be primitive, religious fanatics. The left often perceives them as fanatics while extreme right-wing groups see them as being too realistic and insufficiently Zionist. Thus, attacks on Bennett riled his followers, resulting in strong support and sympathy to Bennett's own responses to these messages. The polarized multi-party system and the intense competitiveness of the Israeli system surely contributed to the urgency in supporting Bennett's efforts to fend off the multiple attacks against him and his party from all sides of the political map.

Third, Bennett's decision to mention that many of the attacks on him were conducted on the Sabbath was also highly instigative, particularly his response to Livni's attack on the Sabbath, which gained more than 12,000 likes. Mobilizing religion in Bennett's response to Livni's attack undoubtedly motivated his followers to express their support both for Bennett and for the Sabbath, one of Judaism's most important traditions, and therefore contributed to the high likeability of Bennett's response post. The definition of Israel as a Jewish nation is the source of much tension in the country, and studies have found that religious-secular tensions are the most significant of all tensions in Israeli society. Bennett successfully exploited these tensions to mobilize his followers. This finding illus-

trates the highly motivating power of religion in Israel, and highlights the need to address the status of religion as a factor in future studies of negative campaigning, possibly by comparing secular states (e.g., U.S., France), religious states (e.g., Poland) and religious democracies (e.g., Greece, Pakistan).

To conclude, findings of this study reaffirm the engaging nature of negative campaigning, and illustrate that negative messages' ability to mobilize participation crosses countries and political systems. This explains why negative campaigning remains such a popular campaign strategy despite studies that indicate its potential to actually enhance the attacker's image. The Israeli environment provided a unique result in the likeability realm, in the sense that Israeli candidate Bennett was able to utilize responses to negative campaigning in a manner that previous studies did not identify. We suggest that the polarized multi-party system combined with religious democratic nature of Israel largely explains his achievements. Particularly, the multiple attacks on Bennett's party from various fronts, which echo attacks against modern orthodox Jews from the right and left sides of the political spectrum, triggered a dramatic number of likes to his self-victimization posts. In addition, the religious nature of Israel allowed Bennett to rile his followers against candidates who so not observe the Sabbath, illustrating that the religious nature of Israel highly boosted the impact of Bennett's messages. These factors illuminate the impact of the specific political and religious environment in Israel on the effects of negative campaigning.

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