Perceived negativity in British general election communications

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A B S T R A C T

British parties – and their candidates – frequently engage in the use of negative messaging. While previous studies shed light on the frequency and source of such messages, we know less about how negative messages are received. In this research note, we present the results of a pilot survey designed investigate perceptions of the different types of messages that political elites use to discuss their opponents. Our preliminary results suggest that there is significant variation in the perceived negativity of messages, with messages referencing specific individuals being more likely to be perceived to be negative.

1. Introduction

Criticising one's opponent is a common practice in British general election campaigns (see e.g., Duggan and Milazzo 2023; Milazzo et al., 2021; Rossini et al., 2023; Trumm et al., 2023; vanHeerde-Hudson, 2011; Walter 2014). While parties are quick to disavow the use of negative messaging, the reality, however, can be quite different. Take the 2015 General Election campaign, for example. Despite David Cameron's repeated claims regarding his party's positive message, by the start of the short campaign, many Tories were expressing concern that the party was devoting too much attention to discussing its opponents.[1] Cameron was quick to defend his party's positive message, but his defence sounded hollow as he warned the public of the potential dangers of a Scottish National Party (SNP)-Labour alliance.[2] Nor were the Conservatives the only ones criticising campaign tactics they were using. In January of 2015, Labour vowed to avoid negative posters and personalised adverts, but this pledge did not stop Labour from criticising its opponents.[3] Attempting to fight a battle on two fronts, Labour repeatedly criticised the positions and record of the Tories in England and the SNP in Scotland. These same contradictions have played out in subsequent general elections, with parties simultaneously condemning and employing negative messaging.

One explanation for the difference between what parties say and do is that political elites perceive negative messaging differently to the way

that it is widely defined in the academic literature. For political scientists, discussing one's opponents can take many forms, including referring to their policy positions, qualifications, or previous record, but the content is usually termed 'negative' because it focuses on the weaknesses of the opponents (Geer 2006; Brooks and Geer 2007). For academics, then, negative messaging need not take the form of an outright attack; politicians often wish to contrast their strengths with the weaknesses of their opponents (Fowler and Ridout 2013). While political scientists would classify such contrast messages as negative, for political elites, these types of messages might simply be perceived as standard campaign tactics. Indeed, the examples above suggest that party leaders may reserve the word 'negative' for stronger forms of critical messaging.

But what about voters? Anecdotally, the negativity we observe in British general elections is frequently softer and more subtle than the negative messages employed in US elections – the case upon which much of the academic literature is based. Given the differences in the nature of the messages, it is unclear whether British voters will recognise and define campaign negativity in the same way that academics do. Moreover, it seems unlikely that all forms of negativity are the same – negative messages contain significant variation in the focus and civility of the messaging (Brooks and Geer 2007). Do voters perceive that mentioning an opposing candidate is more negative than a message that criticises an opposing party's track record? Is criticising a party leader acceptable in a way that targeting an opposing candidate is not? Do

[1] Watt, Nicholas. "Worried Tories urge David Cameron to lighten up election campaign", *The Guardian*, 2 April 2015.
[2] Hardman, Isabel. "David Cameron insists Tory campaign has 'the most positive vision there could possibly be'", *The Spectator*, 26 April 2015.
[3] Miliband stated, "We are the optimists in this campaign. And my experience of political campaigns is that optimists win and pessimists lose. That's why we are going to win this election."

voters find messages focusing on their area more palatable than criticisms centred on national issues?

In this research note, we address these questions by conducting a pilot survey to explore perceptions of negative messages. To do so, we rely on election communications included in the OpenElections Project (www.openelections.co.uk) to identify the different ways that political elites discuss their opponents in their leaflets. We then use a survey to explore the perceived negativity of each type of message. Our preliminary results suggest that perceived negativity varies significantly across the different types of messages, with messages that reference specific individuals by name – either an opposing candidate or a party leader – being the most likely to be perceived as negative. These findings have important implications for political candidates and strategists designing and distributing campaign communications.

2. Negative messaging: overview and expectations

Regardless of the form it takes, the goal of negative messaging is clear: to create a poor impression of the attack's target in the minds of voters, causing them to prefer the attacker (Kaid 1997) or to abstain from voting altogether (Krupnikov 2011). While recent work suggests that negative messaging may provide more information than messages focused solely on one's strengths (Mattes and Redlawsk, 2015), there is a long tradition of empirical research arguing that the decision to criticise one's opponent can have detrimental effects, including depressing turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Finkel and Geer 1998; Krasno and Green 2008), damaging evaluations of the target and the sponsor of the message (Kahn and Kenney 2004 Krupnikov 2012; Somer-Topcu and Weitzel 2022), decreasing political efficacy (e.g., Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Dardis et al., 2008) and increasing political cynicism (Mutz and Reeves 2005). And although the effects of negative campaigning remain contested (see Lau et al., 2007), this literature suggests that the decision to 'go negative' is not without risk.

With respect to British politics, previous studies explore how British parties use negative messaging (e.g., Rosenbaum 1997; Rossini et al., 2023; vanHeerde-Hudson, 2011; Walter 2014; Walter et al., 2014) and the consequences of negative campaigning more generally (e.g., Pattie et al., 2007; Sanders and Norris 2005; Walter and Cees van der, 2019). More recent work has explored how prospective parliamentary candidates use negativity in their local campaign communications (Duggan and Milazzo 2023; Milazzo et al., 2021; Trumm et al., 2023). The conclusion with respect to British general election campaigns is that discussing one's opponents is a common practice.

While we now know much about the frequency and source of negative campaigning, we know less about what these messages look like and how they are received. To address this gap, we identify the different types of messages that are traditionally used to discuss one's opponents in local general election campaigns. Our study focuses on the most common form of campaign communication in British general elections – the leaflet.[4] Traditional unsolicited election communications remain the most common form of contact that voters have with political elites during a campaign – post-election surveys consistently demonstrate that more voters report receiving a leaflet than being contacted via any other medium. Moreover, political parties and their candidates spend more money on designing and distributing election leaflets and other unsolicited communications than on any other single campaign activity.[5] Leaflets not only inform voters of a party's issue positions, the qualifications of the party's candidate, and/or provide information on the party's chances of winning, but they also frequently contain

messages about the party's local or national opponent(s). These materials provide an excellent source of heterogeneity in campaigns across constituencies – both in terms of form and substance – and there is a rich variation in the types of messages that have been included over time and across different parties.

In this note, we focus on what Brooks and Geer (2007) refer to as the 'tone' (positive vs negative) and 'focus' (issue vs trait-based/personal content) of the messages. With respect to focus, we expect that the presence of personal content will impact the perceived negativity of messages. While positive personalisation may have benefits with few drawbacks, candidates take risks when they attempt to contrast their personal traits and the personal traits of their opponent. A candidate saying, 'I am just like you' may attract voters, but a candidate saying, 'My opponent is not one of us' could fail to lower voters' evaluations of the opponent while increasing the perception that the attacker is engaging in unfair campaigning. Backlash against the sponsors of negative ads is well documented (Galasso et al. 2023; Roese and Sande 1993; Walter and Cees van der, 2019). The risk is especially high for attacks on personal traits since these are often seen as 'irrelevant' characteristics to voters (Fridkin and Kenney 2011). Hence, British voters may consider messages to be far more negative if they reference a particular candidate or party leader by name, rather than making more general criticism on the policy positions of their local or national opponent(s).

3. Identifying themes of negativity in British election leaflets

To determine how opponents are commonly discussed in British general election leaflets, we rely on materials included in the OpenElections project (www.openelections.co.uk) – a repository of content-coded leaflets from recent British general elections. As the largest source of content-coded British campaign communications in existence, it offers a unique mechanism for studying constituency-level campaigning. For the purposes of this research note, we limit our study to leaflets distributed in the 2010, 2015 and 2017 general elections. Table 1 summarises the distribution of OpenElections leaflets across parties for the relevant elections.

The OpenElections Project identifies a leaflet as containing negative messaging if it includes at least one reference to an opposing party, leader, or candidate (Geer 2006). In addition, the OpenElections Project also captures whether leaflets include tactical messages. These are messages that draw voters' attention to the electoral context in their constituency – e.g., 'Labour can't win here'. Tactical messages are similar to negative messages in that they a) mention opposing parties by name and b) are intended to undermine an opponent's position, but they differ in that they draw voters' attention to weakness in their opponent's support (or traditional vote share) to dissuade voters from wasting their ballot on a party that has no chance of winning locally, rather than focusing on the weaknesses of the opponent themselves.

Fig. 1 presents the percentage of coded leaflets in each general

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[4] We use the term 'leaflet' to refer to any unsolicited materials – e.g., flyers, letters – that voters receive from candidates via hand-delivery or the post.

[5] See the British Election Study (https://www.britishelectionstudy.com) for voter survey data pertaining general elections. Campaign spending data is available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

Table 1
Distribution of election leaflets by party, 2010–2017.

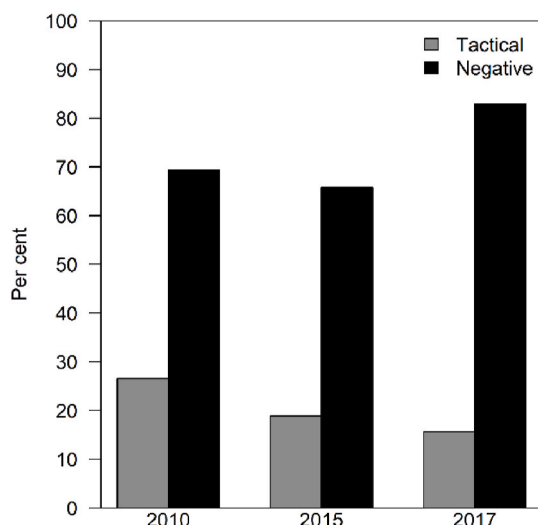| Party	2010		2015		2017	
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	N	Per cent
Conservative Party	822	26.5	722	22.7	339	26.1
Green Party	159	5.1	338	10.7	111	8.6
Labour Party	815	26.3	884	27.8	387	29.8
Liberal Democrats	984	31.8	669	22.0	360	27.7
Plaid Cymru	12	0.4	21	0.7	9	0.7
Scottish National Party	67	2.2	88	2.8	27	2.1
UK Independence Party	238	7.7	423	13.3	65	5.0
Total	3097	100.0	3175	100.0	1298	100.0

Fig. 1. Percentage of leaflets containing a message about an opponent, 2010–2017.

election between 2010 and 2017 that contained at least one message – either tactical or negative – related to an opponent. The figures confirm that discussing opponents in election communications is a common practice. Across the five parties included, the percentage of 2010, 2015, and 2017 leaflets that contain at least one negative message is 69, 66, and 83, respectively. The use of tactical messaging is less common, with the percentage of leaflets containing a tactical message declining from 27 per cent in 2010 to 16 per cent in 2017.

The OpenElections Project does not differentiate between different types of negative messages in the coding of each leaflet, and therefore, after identifying the pool of leaflets containing a message about an opponent, we undertook an in-depth analysis of the leaflets to

identify the most common ways that political elites discuss their opponents. Our analysis confirmed that negative messages take a variety of forms – from issues to more personal attacks – but ultimately, we identified six common themes to the messages. The first type of negative messages are tactical messages. As stated above, these messages relate to the probability that a party will win the election in the constituency. The second type of messages we observe are issue messages, which focus on policy issues at either the local or national level. In addition to issues, candidates may include personalised negative messages that focus on the weaknesses of a leader or a candidate of an opposing party. With respect to the latter, we observe two types of messages: messages where an opposing candidate is referred to more generally and those where the opponent is mentioned by name. Table 2 gives a flavour of the different types of messages about opponents that we observed. In each case, we provide examples of the form such messages might take, but we note that all themes were observed in every election covered by this study.

4. Assessing perceptions of negative messages

After identifying the ways that opponents are discussed, we assess how the different types of messages are perceived. Our primary goal is to explore how the tone and focus of the message affects the degree to which a message is perceived to be negative. To investigate perceptions of different types of messages, we conducted a pilot survey where we asked respondents to observe a selection of excerpts from 37 leaflets from 2010, 2015, and 2017 to get a sense of what they believe is a negative attack.

The leaflets were not a random selection of the leaflets available in the OpenElections repository. Rather, in selecting the excerpts, we focused on identifying stereotypical examples of each type of negative message after reviewing many of the leaflets. While our sample does not

Table 2
Leaflet opponent themes.

Theme	Example
Tactical	"Only Labour can best the Tories. A vote for the Lib Dems or any other party will let the Tories win." (Labour 2015)
	"The Lib Dems were a distant fourth place in Newcastle in 2015 and had just 8 MPs elected to Parliament" (Conservative, 2017)
Issues (local)	"Thousands of jobs lost locally under Labour in Black & Decker, Rothmans, Electrolux, Sara-Lee Courtaulds, Calsonic to name but a few. Manufacturing has decreased at over twice the level of the 1980s." – (Conservative, 2010)
	"An end to regeneration and £millions of investment in Liverpool withdrawn under Tory plans to scrap Regional Development Agencies." (Labour 2010)
Issues (national)	"Labour supports having a complete open door immigration policy to 500 million people from Europe to settle, compete for jobs and claim benefits. However, if you are a skilled worker from India, Pakistan, Canada, the Commonwealth or anywhere else, you are forced to get a visa." (UK Independence Party, 2015)
	"The Tories have failed working people. Working families are set to be an average of £1400 a year worse off by 2020 due to tax and social security changes." (Labour 2017)
Leaders	"Strong, stable leadership in the national interest or A coalition of chaos with Jeremy Corbyn" (Conservative, 2017)
	"Nick Clegg's record: Tripled tuition fees, Raised VAT on working families, Gave millionaires a huge tax break" (Labour 2015)
Opponent (no name)	"What are the real policies benefiting the people of North East Cambridgeshire that Peter Roberts supported, but the Tory candidate opposed?" (Labour 2010)
	"Labour's candidate … Not local: Lives Islington" (Lib Dem, 2015)
Opponent (name)	"Dawn Butler [Labour PPC] voted to increase taxes" (Lib Dem, 2010)
	"Has life in Bury improved after two terms of David Nuttall and the Tories? Have we got the best MP available to us? X £100 million cut from NHS Bury and front line council services – voted for by David Nuttall X Hospital and GP waiting times have soared — voted for by David Nuttall X Bury's Walk-in centres face closure – a closure David Nuttall supports" (Labour 2017)

constitute a representative sample of the OpenElections leaflets by party or election, we have no reason to believe the leaflets omitted are systematically different in content or approach from those examples included in our survey. After that we chose leaflets chosen to maximize variability across themes in messages that we discussed. We sorted a selection of negative leaflets that we deemed legible on a computer screen into different categories (e.g., tactical, national issues, candidate named) and then made selections with the specific goal of having at least five leaflets with each messaging theme. Leaflets contained more than one theme in their messages. For example, one of the Lib Dem leaflets specifically attacked the Conservative Party for cuts to the NHS (a national issue) while also claiming that Labour could not win the constituency (a tactical message).[6]

The 201 subjects were from two samples: students at the University of Nottingham (N = 105) and British respondents on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (N = 96).[7] The Nottingham study was conducted in April 2018, while the Mechanical Turk survey was conducted in May 2018. Using convenience samples is fairly common in experiments on campaign advertising, including student samples (see e.g., Veer et al. 2010; Mattes and Redlawsk 2014; Ryan and Krupnikov 2021), but it

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[6] Of the 35 negative leaflets, 23 mentioned national issues, 13 mentioned local issues, 7 made a tactical appeal, 6 mentioned the opposing party's leadership, 5 mentioned the opponent without mentioning their name while another 5 mentioned the opponent by name.

[7] Descriptive statistics for our survey respondents are provided in Appendix A.

does limit our ability to make population estimates. For example, we can only say that a particular type of message is more or less likely to be perceived as negative than a different type of message; we cannot state with any authority how many British citizens would perceive a message as negative.

All subjects were asked to rate ten leaflet excerpts. All subjects first rated two excerpts (one authored by the Labour Party and one authored by the Conservative Party) that the authors judged to be positive – i.e., there were no messages pertaining to an opponent. Respondents then rated eight more leaflet excerpts randomly chosen from the remaining 35 excerpts. Of the 35 leaflet excerpts, 33 had at least one message about an opponent contained in the leaflet while the remaining two (one from the Lib Dems and one from UKIP) were strictly positive. In total, 13 of the leaflets were from the Conservatives, 16 from Labour, six from the Lib Dems, and the remaining two were from UKIP. Similarly, 13 leaflets were from 2010, 16 were from 2015 and eight were from 2017.

All subjects were asked to state how well the words negative and strong described the leaflet, placing the leaflet on a seven-point scale (0–6) for each word. In this analysis, we concentrate on the ratings of the word negative. In Fig. 2, we conduct a simple analysis illustrating that there is a link between what political scientists believe is negativity (i.e., discussing your opponent in a non-complementary way) and what our survey respondents believe is negative. Respondents generally say the word 'negative' does not describe the positive leaflet excerpts well (scores of 0–2). Further, they say that the word 'negative' tends to describe the negative leaflet excerpts well (scores of 4–6).

We then examine how perceptions of negativity vary depending on whether the leaflet includes one of the themes. To examine this, we use the full seven-point negativity measure and we run two O.L.S. regression models using only the negative leaflets. The first model uses only dummy variables for the various themes – coded 1 if the leaflet includes the theme and 0 if it does not. A statistically significant coefficient indicates that the inclusion of the theme increases or decreases the perception of negativity. We are not directly testing whether specific themes are more or less likely to be seen as negative.

The second model includes some control variables to test the robustness of the results in the first model. Those control variables include dummy variables indicating which sample the respondent was a part of, whether the respondent identifies with the party sponsoring the leaflet, the respondent's class, their gender, and whether or not they identify as white.[8] There is also a variable that measures whether how many negative leaflets they had been shown before this one to see if people became more or less likely to rate leaflets as negative over the course of the experiment. In both models, standard errors are clustered because there are multiple observations for each respondent.

The results of the models are presented in Table 3. Certain results are robust to the two models. First, neither discussing national issues nor mentioning the opponent by name has any effect on perceptions of negativity. Second, mentioning local issues increases perceptions of negativity while mentioning the opponent without naming them decreases perceptions of negativity. The former result is likely because leaflets that mention local issues discuss those issues with more specificity. The latter result makes the most sense once we consider that all of these leaflets attack at least one other party. Messages that attack while simply referencing, 'my opponent' or the 'current MP' may read like the sponsoring candidate is attempting to soften the attack.

There are two results that depend on model specification. The coefficient for tactical messages is negative in both models, but it only reaches the 0.05 significance threshold in the model with controls. It does reach the statistical significance threshold in the model without controls in a one-tailed test, but we did not preregister any hypotheses. Still, given that tactical messages are not expressing any particular flaw

in a candidate, it stands to reason that they are seen as less negative.

Mentioning leadership increases perceptions of leadership in the model without controls but has no statistically significant effect in the model with controls. Subsequent analyses were unable to pinpoint any specific control variable as causing the lack of significance. At the same time, we should note that the confidence intervals for the coefficients of the leadership variable overlap. So, we would simply say the result regarding leadership is inconclusive.

While not the focus of the analysis, we would like to briefly discuss a couple of the control variables. First, we do see that the Nottingham University students perceived less negativity than the Mechanical Turk respondents. That is an interesting result, but not the focus of this analysis which is about the content of the messages. A related concern about the samples would be that they differ in what they believe constitutes a negative message. We ran a third model interacting the sample with all of the themes and found no significant differences. At the same time, we do not have a large enough sample size to notice small conditional effects.

Second, we would note that we do not find that respondents see the leaflets from their own party as less negative, but the coefficient is in the direction one would expect. This contrasts with results among American respondents, which demonstrate more partisan bias in whether dirty tricks, such as sign stealing, were considered fair tactics (Classen and Ensley, 2016). Our final analysis digs deeper into this non-finding. Fig. 3 compares the rating of co-partisans (respondents who expressed the same party identification as the author of the leaflet) with the ratings of non-partisans (respondents who identify with all other parties) across all the types of negative messages. Across all parties (Fig. 3a and b), the analysis suggests that both groups, author co-partisans and author non-partisans, give remarkably similar assessments of leaflets, with 53 per cent of co-partisans say the word 'negative' describes the messages well (ratings 4–6), compared with 53 per cent of non-partisans.

As a further test, we disaggregate the analysis further by focusing on the Labour and Conservative parties – the parties for which we have the most leaflet excerpts included in the survey. We first compare the average ratings of excerpts from Conservative Party leaflets by Conservative respondents (Fig. 3c) with the ratings of these same leaflets by all other respondents (Fig. 3d). While Conservative partisans are more likely than other respondents to say that the word 'negative' describes the Conservative leaflet messages well, the differences

were modest (56 per cent vs 52 per cent). The reverse is true for Labour partisans. Here, we find that Labour partisans (Fig. 3e) are less likely to identify the Labour messages as negative than partisans of other parties (Fig. 3f), but again the differences are modest (52 per cent vs 57 per cent). Hence, it would seem there is generally agreement about what makes a message negative.

5. Conclusion

Existing research confirms negative campaigning is a common feature of constituency-level general election campaigns (Duggan and Milazzo 2023; Milazzo et al., 2021; Rossini et al., 2023; Trumm et al., 2023), but we know very little about the response that these messages receive. In this note, we conduct a pilot survey developed from an in-depth analysis of general election leaflets to provide a preliminary exploration of how different types of negative messages are perceived, focusing on the extent to which different types of messages are assessed as negative. Again, we stress that our sample of respondents is not nationally representative, nor are the leaflets included a representative sample by party or election.

That said, in selecting a sample of excerpts that represent stereotypical examples of the types of negative messages used, we find that not only are respondents able to recognise critical messages as negative, but they also are more likely to indicate that the word 'negative' describes certain types of messages. Specifically, we find that negative messages that name specific opponents – either opposing candidates or party

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[8] The N size in the second model is lower because 10 respondents failed to answer the class question.
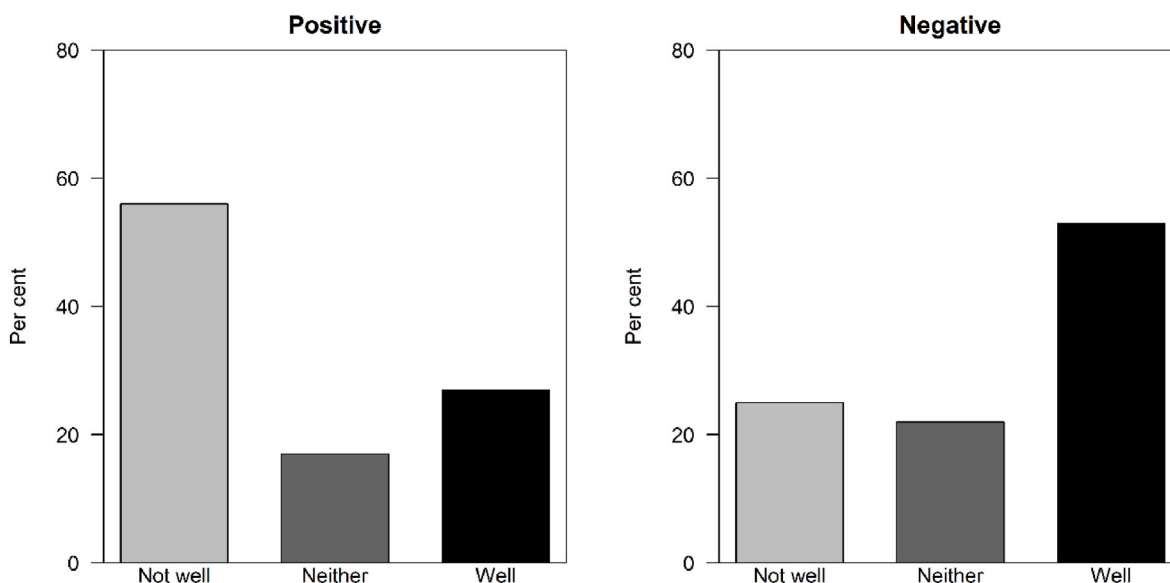
Fig. 2. How well does the word 'negative' describe the leaflets.?.

Table 3
OLS models of negativity.

	Coef.	S.E.	p	Coef.	S.E.	p
Themes						
Tactical	−0.211	0.123	0.088	−0.294	0.121	0.016
Local Issues	0.210	0.107	0.050	0.238	0.102	0.021
National Issues	0.040	0.106	0.703	0.061	0.109	0.576
Leaders	0.237	0.110	0.031	0.165	0.113	0.145
Opponent (No Name)	−0.538	0.151	0.000	−0.520	0.154	0.001
Opponent (Name)	0.004	0.123	0.976	−0.016	0.126	0.898
Control Variables						
Same Party as Sponsor	–			−0.146	0.105	0.165
Nottingham	–			0.394	0.146	0.008
# of Leaflets Seen	–			−0.042	0.016	0.011
Male	–			−0.089	0.137	0.515
Working Class	–			−0.130	0.191	0.496
Middle Class	–			−0.364	0.179	0.044
White	–			0.317	0.217	0.147
Constant	3.569	0.134	0.000	3.543	0.271	0.000
N (Respondents)	1482 (200)			1405 (190)		
R^2	0.021			0.055		

leaders – are more likely to be identified as negative. These differences are potentially important considering previous research, which shows that the risk of a backlash against the author is greater when the attack focuses on personal attributes (Fridkin and Kenney 2011). Thus, our findings imply that candidates who use messages that are more likely to perceived to be negative – i.e., those that target an opponent by name – may risk undermining their own support, rather than the support of their opponent. In addition, we do not find clear evidence that perceptions of negativity are influenced by partisanship. Out-party respondents are not significantly more likely than co-partisans to view criticisms of other parties as negative, which may suggest that people do not see negative messages in leaflets as normatively bad behaviour (Mattes and Redlawsk 2014).

Our findings suggest several fruitful avenues for further research. First, and most importantly, future studies may wish to explore evaluations of negativity using a nationally representative sample of respondents. The findings of our pilot survey suggest some important patterns, but a more rigorous approach is needed to conclude, for example, that perceptions of negativity are not influenced by partisanship. Further, a future study could consider whether certain individual characteristics would condition perceptions of how negative a particular theme is and then collect a sample large enough to test the interaction.

Second, with respect to British politics, it is well established that contact with elites affects voter turnout (e.g., Denver et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2011, 2015; Trumm and Sudulich 2018) and party support (e.g., Clarke et al., 2004; Denver et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2011; Johnston et al., 2012; Johnston and Pattie, 2006; Pattie et al., 1995; Whiteley and Seyd, 1994). To this end, future research may wish to explore the link between the type of negative message and electoral behaviour to determine how the use of different types of messages may influence support for both the author and the target of the message. If the nature of the message affects party support, then we would expect messages that are more likely to be perceived as negative to have more significant effects on the support for either the author or the target.

Third, researchers may wish to consider an even more nuanced view of negative messages. Our findings suggest that discussing an opponent's issue positions is less likely to be perceived as negative than messages that focus on a specific opponent. On this basis, it would be interesting to consider whether it is more acceptable to criticise a specific opponent on policy grounds vs non-policy attributes.

Finally, future studies may wish to consider how the effects of messages are received by different types of voters. While our analysis suggests that partisanship does not affect how negative appeals are viewed, previous work indicates that partisanship mediates the effect of negativity on vote choice (Somer-Topcu and Weitzel 2022). Therefore, it may be that certain types of messages garner a more significant reaction from either partisans or non-partisans of the author and/or target.

In summary, election communications remain an important point of interaction between voters and political elites during a general election campaign. Negative messaging is a common feature of these communications, and these messages take a variety of forms. Our findings suggest that voters recognise this variation, and therefore, they suggest a need for further research into the consequences of negative campaigning in Britian.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Caitlin Milazzo: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Formal analysis, Data curation. **John Barry Ryan:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization.
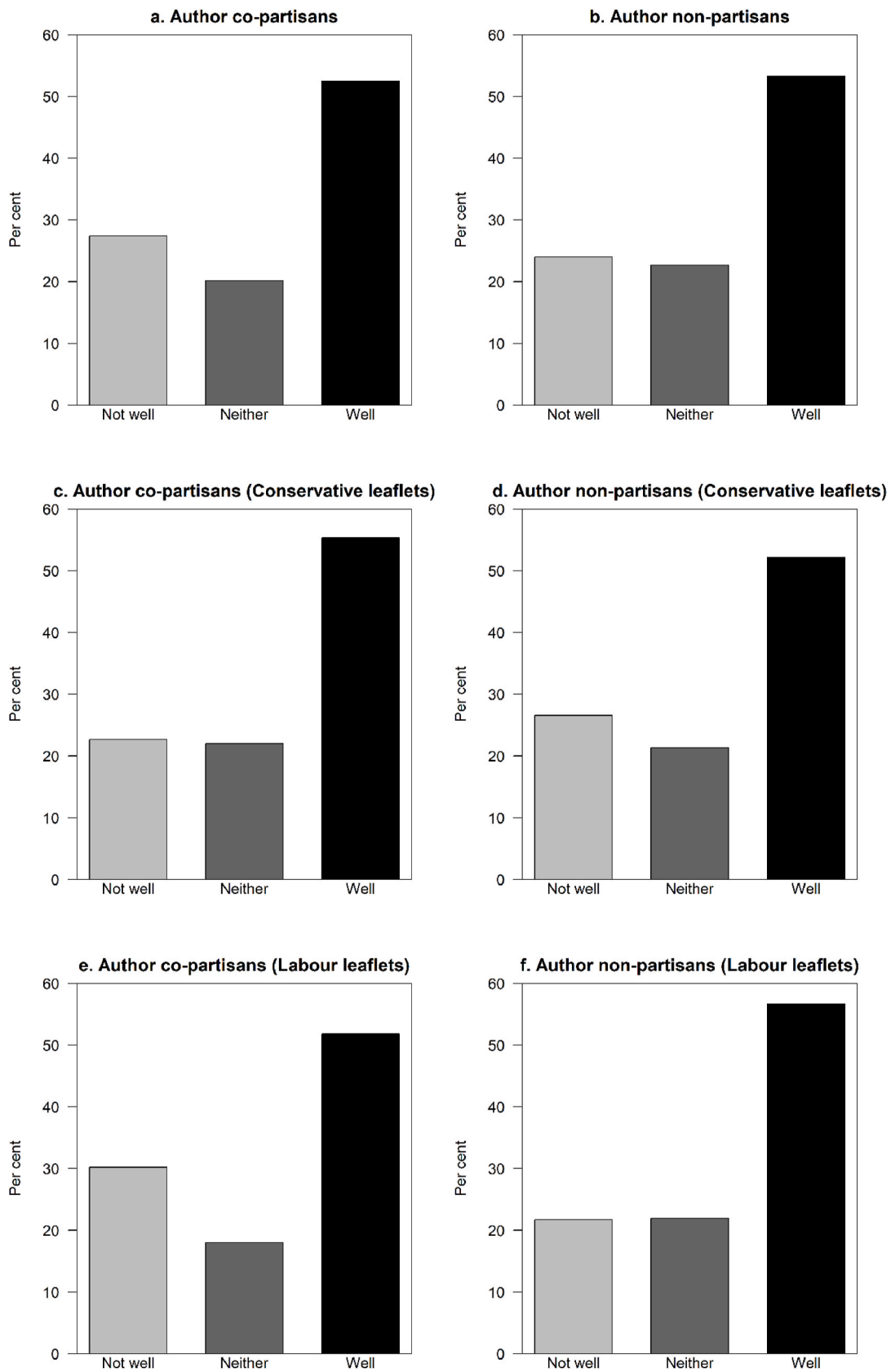
Fig. 3. Partisanship and perceptions of negativity.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics for survey respondents

Amazon Mechanical Turk

N = 96	Gender		Party ID			
	Female	Male	Lab	Con	LD	Other
Count	32	64	43	17	6	30
%	33	68	45	18	6	31

University of Nottingham

N = 105	Gender		Party ID			
	Female	Male	Lab	Con	LD	Other
Count	57	48	42	33	16	13
%	54	46	40	32	15	13

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