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CONSIDER THE SOURCE: VARIATIONS IN THE EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE CAMPAIGN MESSAGES

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Abstract
Now more than ever, potentially persuasive campaign information reaches individuals from a wide variety of sources. This begs the question: how do these sources compare in their ability to affect individuals' evaluations of candidates? Through an original experiment, this paper determines how different individuals, attempting to form opinions on candidates under attack, react to the same negative information delivered by a variety of sources: the candidate's official campaign, interest groups, and the media, finding that interest groups and the media have greater potential to shape evaluations than campaigns.

Keywords: Political Advertising, Campaigns, Elections, News, Media, Interest Group

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INTRODUCTION

Negative information has become commonplace in modern campaigns (Brooks & Geer, 2007). Both common conjecture and scholarly work have marveled at the widespread use of negative attacks and their potentially adverse effects on turnout, vote choice, and democracy (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Buchanan, 2004; Patterson, 2002). In spite of these possible outcomes, the strategic use of negative information persists, and is in fact on the rise (Benoit, 1999; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Geer, 2006; Kaid & Johnston, 2000; West, 2005), indicating its perceived effectiveness.

Despite the pervasiveness of negative attack information and the voluminous research on political advertisements, there is much we do not know (and much we should know) about the role of strategic information in electoral settings. Currently, three trends in the research on this subject limit our understanding of the effects of strategic campaign information. First, a good deal of work examining political advertising focuses primarily (if not solely) on the basic differences in effects between positive and negative campaign information; however, as Brooks and Geer (2007, p. 2) note, "campaign messages clearly differ in ways that go well beyond a simple positive/negative distinction." For example, one such way campaign messages might differ is in the source of the message itself.

Second, the bulk of traditional research on negative campaign information has focused primarily on one type of source: traditional campaign ads, whereby negative attack information about a candidate is presented by the opposing candidate or campaign (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Kahn & Geer, 1994). However, the spreading of negative campaign information is now a popular device for many players in the political game including (but not limited to): interest groups, pundits, and the news media (Salmon, Reid, Pokrywczynski, & Willett, 1985). These trends suggest the importance of understanding the implications of sources behind campaign messages, negative or otherwise. Furthermore, the literature on source effects echoes this sentiment (e.g., Andreoli & Worchel, 1978; Aronson, Turner, & Carlsmith, 1963; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Garramone, 1985; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kaid, 1981; Kuklinski & Hurley, 1994; Martinelli & Chaffee, 1995; Mondak, 1993a, 1993b; Shen & Wu, 2002; Turner, 2007; Walster & Festinger, 1962; West, 1994; Worchel, Andreoli, & Eason, 1975; Zhao and Chaffee 1995), and demonstrates that understanding the effects of the source of a political message is critical, since the effects of persuasion are largely contingent on perceptions about the credibility of sources.

Third, of the source effects literature that does exist, much can be described as narrow in focus, primarily centering on the effects of a single type of source (usually politicians or media members) rather than multiple types simultaneously. We have learned, thanks to this literature, that politicians can send effective informational cues (Kuklinski & Hurley, 1994) and that their advertisements, when recalled by individuals, spur issue voting (Brians &Wattenberg, 1996). We know that the media can contribute to issue learning (Martinelli & Chaffee, 1995; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995), but that this

contribution might be conditioned by credibility (Turner, 2007). What remains unanswered is how comparable these effects are across multiple types of sources, how the same piece of information might have differing impacts depending on how it is disseminated, or how one source might be more influential than another when it comes to shaping attitudes about candidates and campaigns.

Our research question investigates how the sources of negative campaign messages influence their effectiveness. Specifically, we integrate the negative political advertising literature with the literature on source effects, and investigate whether and how voter acceptance of negative political advertising information varies according to its source. We build on the literature on source credibility, which investigates voter trust in various sources (e.g., Andreoli & Worchel, 1978; Aronson et al., 1963; ; Druckman, 2001a, 2001b; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Garramone, 1985; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kaid, 1981; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Walster & Festinger, 1962; Worchel, Andreoli, & Eason, 1975). We also expand the current research on source effects by simultaneously investigating the effects of three different deliverers of negative campaign information: candidate sponsored ads, ads sponsored by independent interest groups, and information relayed to the public via the news media. Our primary argument is that all negative information should not be treated equally, and that the effectiveness of negative campaign information may be largely contingent on its source. We suggest the source of negative information in a campaign setting must be considered and is worthy of examination.

Our paper proceeds in the usual manner: first we discuss the literature on negative campaign information and source effects, paying specific attention to existing findings and expectations for the persuasiveness of candidates, independent sponsors, and the news media. We then lay out a set of hypotheses examining the potential strength of interest groups and the mass media as influencers of opinion and describe a survey experiment conducted to test those hypotheses. In the end, we find that, when it comes to individual reports of likelihood of voting for the subject of negative information, individuals subjected to negativity from interest group advertisements and televised media accounts of negative information are significantly more likely to be affected than individuals subjected to advertising directly from a candidate. These findings are robust in the face of demographic, political, and experimental controls.

Source Credibility: Campaigns, Interest Groups, and the News Media

A great deal of time and effort over the past twenty-five years has been devoted to determining whether or not negative political information works and how, if it does work, it might drive everything from support for a candidate, to turnout, to affect for the political system as a whole. For the most part, these studies seem to show that there is something to be said for the effects of negative information, but the direction and impact

of that something is difficult to determine. As Lau et. al (1999) show in their meta-analytic assessment of the effects of political advertising, for every study showing the damaging effects of negative information in political advertising, there seems to be a study that proves in a statistically significant fashion the exact opposite. We can conclude, however, that negative information takes many forms and comes from many sources. We focus on the latter.

Increasingly, negative information in campaigns comes from other sources beyond the candidates or campaigns themselves (Andreoli & Worchel, 1978; Salmon et al., 1985; Turner, 2007; West, 1994). We feel that two sources are increasingly worthy of analysis: interest groups and the media, both of which are common sources of information in the campaign context. The literature on persuasion and source effects is replete with demonstrations that the effectiveness of persuasive messages depends on perceptions of the communicator (Aronson et al., 1963; Garramone, 1985; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kaid, 1981; Walster & Festinger, 1962; Worchel, et al., 1975). If we know that source credibility moderates influence on public opinion, we need a more nuanced understanding of exactly who the public finds to be credible (Garramone, 1985), namely asking and answering the question of which elites are more persuasive than others. Simply put: should we expect negative information from the media or from interest groups to pack more of a punch than similar messages that emanate from a candidate's campaign? Existing political, psychological, and communications literatures have begun to decipher the potentially differing effects that the source of information has on the ability and desire of individuals to incorporate said information into their opinion structures on candidates, parties, and politics at large. Here, we examine how this literature has individually tackled the effectiveness of the three aforementioned sources: candidates themselves (and their campaigns), political interest groups, and the mass media.

It has been demonstrated that people interpret statements differently, depending on who is making them (Asch, 1952; Kuklinski & Hurley, 1994). When it comes to candidates delivering their campaign messages, there are reasons to expect voters to find them less than credible. This is because people tend to search for motivation in the actions of others (Kelly, 1967; Lau & Russell, 1980; Weiner, 1980). With candidate-based negative messages, the messenger is a distinct individual whose motives can be questioned. These motives people attach to message senders (politicians in particular) will influence the interpretations of their statements and/or actions (Conover & Feldman, 1989; Kuklinski & Hurley, 1994). With regard to the source credibility of politicians and their campaigns specifically, extant research (e.g., Andreoli & Worchel, 1978; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Garramone, 1985; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Martinelli & Chaffee, 1995; Salmon et al., 1985; Shen & Wu, 2002; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995) has demonstrated that - as communicators of campaign messages - candidates and candidate sponsored

advertisements are viewed as the least effective when compared to campaign messages delivered by other sources.

Spreading negative information, however, is not limited to candidates delivering messages through advertisements. With spending on interest group advertisements totaling somewhere around one-third of the money spent on political advertising as a whole (West, 2000), the potential electoral impact of monied interest groups cannot be denied. Interest group advertising informs, but it can also attack just as clearly and strongly as an advertisement directly from a candidate. Despite these trends in spending by interest groups, relatively little research has investigated the effectiveness of advocacy advertising relative to other forms of political advertising or mass communication (Salmon et al., 1985). Garramone (1985) and Devlin (1983) argue that it is important to understand the influence of independent sponsors of campaign advertisements because: 1) this type of message dissemination is increasing and remains likely to continue; and 2) said advertisements are frequently extremely negative. As such, as Kaid (1981) argues, we need to know more about how the sponsor of political advertisements affects how messages are received and accepted. The few studies focusing on specifically on the effects of independently sponsored advertisements reveal that that independent sponsorship of advertisements was more effective than candidate sponsorship (Garramone, 1985; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Shen & Wu, 2002). Garramone (1985) argues that as a whole, the literature on source effects suggests that political advertisements sponsored by independent sponsors should be more persuasive than candidate advertisements, as the candidate is likely to be viewed as less trustworthy and directly seeking to advance his or her own interests.

In addition to this booming growth of interest groups on the negative information scene, the media's role in delivering negative information about candidates has increased. As Patterson (1993) illustrates, media coverage of political campaigns has become inundated with negative news, the reporting of which tripled in size from 1960 to 1992. According to Patterson, media coverage of campaigning has evolved into a state in which “candidates are strategic actors whose every move is significant” (Patterson, 1993, p. 58). Since advertisements (be they from campaigns themselves or from independent groups) are moves within the overall horse race of the campaign, the media feels compelled to cover the details of them, be this coverage through so-called “ad watch” features on nightly newscasts or through simply reporting the details of what a candidate is being charged with via campaigns or commercials. Knowing what we know about the ability of news reporting to shape opinions through agenda setting (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) priming (Ansolabehere, Behr & Iyengar, 1993; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Miller & Krosnick, 2000), framing (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997) and persuasion (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Zaller, 1992), one might assume that the media might be driving assessments of candidates just as much as campaigns or interest groups.

However, the literature on persuasion and source credibility provides two potential expectations regarding the effectiveness of the news media as deliverers of campaign messages. The most consistent finding is that communicators who are perceived as biased or dishonest are not able to produce attitude change (Aronson & Golden, 1962; Hovland & Mandell, 1952; Kelman & Hovland, 1953; Weiss & Fine, 1956; Worchel et al., 1975). If one views the media as biased (e.g., Baron, 2006; Johnson & Kaye, 1988; Turner, 2007), newscasters may be seen as no more neutral or trustworthy than a candidate with a nakedly self-promoting and persuasive message (Worchel et al., 1975). However, trustworthiness is a major dimension of source credibility, and research has show than trustworthy sources are much better at persuasion and bringing about attitude change (Baur, 1967; Berlo, Lermert, & Mertz, 1969; Garramone, 1985; Hovland & Mandell, 1952; McCroskey, 1966;). Thus, if newscasters are seen as trustworthy and unbiased (Devries & Terrance, 1972), this might lead us to the expectation that they would be more trustworthy than a candidate trying to persuade.

Logic dictates that because advocacy material in an advertisement is paid-for persuasive communication (and potentially from a source with an agenda advancing its own interests), it may be less effective than the very same information offered in the news (Salmon et al., 1985). But in the face of the aforementioned declining confidence in the media (see Baron, 2006; Turner, 2007), this expectation becomes less clear (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Furthermore, when it comes to learning about issues, the results have been mixed as to whether the news or political advertisements are more effective. Both Martinelli and Chaffee (1995) and Brians and Wattenberg (1996) find that political advertising is more effective for voter learning when compared to newspapers or television news. On the other hand, Andreoli and Worchel (1978), Salmon et al. (1985), Zhao and Chaffee (1995), and Johnson and Kaye (1998) find that campaign news stories are seen as more credible, and less biased, than political advertising.[1] Since credibility strongly influences the ability of the communicator to persuade, this suggests communication from the news media would be more persuasive.

Overall then, the amount of time devoted by the media to covering negative information in the campaign context and the amount of money raised and spent by interest groups to spread negative information has allowed these two players to become important parts of the source credibility equation. The rise of alternative sources of negativity leads us to ask the following series of questions: why might we expect one negative information provider to shape assessments of candidates in a markedly different fashion than another? Or should we expect all sources of negativity to be created equal? Answering these questions and determining if any of the three might be expected to play a larger role than the others comes down to answering the following question: who can individuals be expected to believe and find credible when gathering usable information to assess the political race in front of them? We argue that, when it comes to the potential for negative information to affect an individual's ability to assess candidates (and, as

such, shape the decisions individuals make when stepping into the voting booth), individuals are more likely to incorporate information from sources whose political motivations and potential payoffs in delivering the information are opaque.

The motivation of candidates in delivering negative information is clear: to diminish the qualifications or the credibility of an opponent, and to convince citizens to disapprove of and vote against an opponent. There is no altruism or desire to maintain the underpinnings of democracy in such a decision to go negative. Cognizant of the transparency of such motives, citizens are more likely to suspect that the choice to go negative by a candidate and his or her campaign is done for self-serving reasons and question the candidate as source's willingness to do whatever it takes to win. Negativity, we feel, will be viewed by individuals through this “self-serving” lens. The motivation of interest groups in delivering negative information is less clear; obviously, there is motivation behind raising and spending money for electoral purposes, but the benefits that the interest group accrues from such actions are not easily seen or understood by most Americans. After all, interest groups are not elected to offices. Their link to policy outcomes is rarely publicized. As such, it becomes more difficult to question the reasons why said groups are doing what they are doing. Their actions in delivering information are not as obviously self-serving and we feel this diminishes the ability of citizens absorbing negative information to question said information. The motivation of the media in delivering negative information is nearly as clear as that of candidates (in that the media are seen as performing a public service of sorts in reporting on aspects of the campaign), but unlike with the actions of politicians, the motivation of the media may be viewed in a more positive light. Source credibility earned by the media, however, may be influenced somewhat by beliefs that the media is politically biased in one direction or another or by questions as to whether or not the media tells the whole story or the right stories. The ability of citizens to incorporate negative information reported by the media, therefore, is tempered somewhat by the complex relationships Americans have with the newspapers they read and the televisions they watch.

If we bring together these differing motivations for delivering information, we might conclude as follows: the motivations of candidates are clearer and held in less regard than those of interest groups and the mass media. As such, the media and interest groups should have more leeway in convincing Americans to listen, believe, and incorporate negative information into their political decision-making mechanisms. These sources have capital that candidates and campaigns have long since spent. If we were to picture a spectrum on which the left end lies complete source credibility and on the right end lies a complete lack of source credibility, we argue here that, looking at candidates, the media, and interest groups, the negative messages of the latter two sources would lie further to the left on this spectrum than would the messages of candidates.

With regard to relative source credibility between interest groups and the media, the literature is less clear. Again, media are ostensibly an objective and knowledgeable

source of information, yet media are less and less trusted by the public. On the other hand, many well known interest groups often have their own reputations of bias, and we don't know much about perceived credibility of little known interest groups. Thus, either could be viewed as more persuasive in the minds of voters. More formally stated, we hypothesize the following; 3a and 3b are offered as counter hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals receiving negative information from an interest group are less likely to vote for the target of the negativity than individuals receiving the same negative information from a campaign.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals receiving negative information from the media are less likely to vote for the target of the negativity than individuals receiving the same negative information from a campaign.

Hypothesis 3a: Individuals receiving negative information from the media are less likely to vote for the target of the negativity than individuals receiving the same negative information from an interest group.

Hypothesis 3b: Individuals receiving negative information from interest groups are less likely to vote for the target of the negativity than individuals receiving the same negative information from the media.

The following experimental design tests these hypotheses.

METHOD

Participants

To test the potential linkages between campaign, independent, and media dissemination of negative information and individual-level responses to opinion questions on candidates for office, we utilize an experimental design. We utilize an experimental design to test our expectations regarding the effects of negative campaign messaging for several important reasons.

Experimental research designs provide a more accurate method to examine research questions about the causal effects of campaign stimuli. The level of control and precise manipulation allowed by laboratory experiments gives experiments very strong internal validity, and provides researchers a more certain manner by which they can assess the causal effects of campaign stimuli (Arceneaux, 2010). This includes tone, information, or source variation among political advertising messages.

However, laboratory experiments do have a central weakness whereby control is usually traded for some degree of realism. This introduces a concern that laboratory experiments may generate a set of circumstances and results that we might not observe in the real world. This tradeoff regarding realism means that lab experiments suffer from low external validity, even if they retain strong internal validity. However, with regard to the inherent trade-off between external and internal validity in most empirical settings, our view falls in line with that expressed by (Arceneaux, 2010, p. 22) with regard to studying campaign effects:

> [O]bservational methods do not inherently make a study more generalizable. If biases caused by selection, measurement error, and simultaneity have similar effects across settings and samples, then observational methods will yield similar but biased effect estimates across different studies. If we know the direction and the size of the bias, then it is possible to back out an unbiased estimate from a biased design. However, if we do not know the direction of the bias, then fifty nationally representative surveys that generate biased causal estimates are not better than one locally conducted unbiased randomized experiment simply because the former have representative samples and the latter does not (cf. Gerber, Green, & Kaplan, 2004).

In short, though generations of excellent research rely on survey methods for examining campaign effects, our research question involving the effects of source manipulated negative political messages are more appropriately examined with experimental design due to experiments' ability to avoid errors of selection bias with regard to voters' exposure to campaign stimuli and isolate causality with confidence (Arceneaux, 2010).

Our experiment was conducted on over 800 students in introductory level government classes at a southern university in November 2006 and February 2007.[2] Students were told they were participating in a survey intended to gauge reactions to information spread in a campaign environment. After consenting to take part in the experiment and filling out a short demographic questionnaire (which asked students about gender, race, political interest, party identification, political views, media consumption, voting behavior, and political knowledge), the participants were given a biography sheet describing a fictional race for elected office in the state of Michigan; the sheet contained detailed descriptions of two fictional candidates whom they were told were competing for a seat in the United States Senate.[3] Before reading a more detailed biography of each candidate, those participating were told that the two individuals running for this Senate seat were "evenly matched candidates with similar backgrounds and independent spirits, but with fundamentally different views of the role of

government" and were "more moderate on social issues than the vast majority of his fellow partisans and was a surprise to win their party's nominations." Such a statement was intended to make the candidates appear as similar as possible (and thus to narrow the potential effects of each candidate's party affiliation) before revealing more about each candidate's life, history, and record in and out of Washington. Subjects were then told more about the two candidates, both of whom are described as male members of the House of Representatives. Subjects were also told about a political shortcoming of each of the candidate; they were told one of the candidates has been faulted in the past for being a political maverick and for being involved in questionable business dealings fifteen years prior, while the other, known as a party leader and a champion of ethics, has been faulted for his failure to pass legislation and attend key hearings and votes.[4]

After reading the campaign biographies, participants were randomly placed into one of three treatment groups (for our purposes, we broadly call them the campaign, interest group, or media coverage treatments) or into a control group. Randomization was achieved by randomizing the order of the packets handed out to participants in the class. The class seating arrangements are also unassigned, and are therefore random as well. Those in the campaign treatments (n=231) received a simulation of a commercial from a political campaign opposing one of the candidates. Subjects in the interest group treatments (n=241) received a simulation of a commercial from an independent political group opposing one of the candidates. Subjects in the media coverage treatments (n=226) received a simulation of a television news report containing the same negative information about one of the candidates. Within each of these treatments (campaign, interest group, and media coverage), some individuals received negative information pertaining to Candidate Snow, while others received negative information pertaining to Candidate Morris. The negative information presented to subjects within each of these treatments corresponded to the information within the biography sheets; for example, subjects who were told originally that Candidate Morris was ineffective received negative information in their treatment group touching on that shortcoming, regardless of whether or not they were in the campaign, interest group, or media treatment groups.

The simulations given to those in the campaign and interest group treatments were purportedly still photographs of the images used in a television commercial run one month prior to Election Day; individuals in these groups were given both the visuals of the still footage (using PowerPoint slides) as well as the text of words spoken to accompany these visuals.[5] The only difference between the negative material pertaining to one of the candidates given to those in the campaign and interest group treatments was presented at the beginning and end of each treatment. Those in the campaign treatments were given the standard "My name is (Candidate X), and I approve this message" line at the beginning and a line stating that the ad had been paid for by the campaign at the end. Those in the interest group treatments were told at the beginning and end that the advertisement had been paid for by either the Committee for Responsible Government or

the Campaign for Fiscal Responsibility (depending on whether or not the advertisement addressed the failure of a candidate to vote and attend hearings or the failure of a candidate to conduct business honestly, respectively).[6] Individuals in the media coverage treatment, on the other hand, were told that they were reading the text of a story delivered by a news network in Lansing, Michigan, and that the story was run on similar networks across the state that evening. Those individuals in the control group (n=147), received no negative information at all and went directly from the candidate biographies to a subsequent questionnaire about the candidates.

It is important to point out that despite the differences in the source of the negative information given to those in the campaign, interest group, and media groups, the content of the negative information remained constant.[7] For example, individuals who received information about Chris Morris's job performance in their biography sheet received exactly the same negative information no matter if it came from a campaign advertisement, an advertisement from an interest group, or from the media itself. Moreover, information was presented to individuals in nearly the exact same order in each of the three types of information treatments. These precautions were taken in order to create as strict a test as possible of the medium carrying the negative information and not the content of the negative information itself.

After the presentation of the treatment (or lack thereof for the control group), individuals were asked a battery of questions pertaining to each candidate's traits.[8] They were also asked if they would be likely to vote for each of the candidates, and also the probability that each of the candidates will win. Responses to these opinion questions were measured on either a four or five point scale depending on the nature of the question itself.

Variables

Our intent is to see how individuals' efforts at candidate evaluation are affected by different sources of negative information. We measure the impact of negative information on whether a subject would vote for a candidate. We estimate two models, a likelihood of voting model for each candidate. For both Scott Snow and Chris Morris we utilize five category dependent variables representing whether the subject indicated that they would vote for the candidate. Subjects were asked whether they were likely to vote for one of the candidates, and their answer choices were as follows: highly unlikely=1, unlikely=2, unsure=3, likely=4, or highly likely=5.

As outlined in the description of our experiment, subjects were exposed to one of seven treatments, which are our independent variables of interest. Three treatments contained negative information about Scott Snow from the various sources: a campaign ad (CampaignSS); an ad from an independent interest group (IndependentSS); and news story coverage of a negative ad (MediaSS); and three treatments contained the same

variations of negative attack information about Chris Morris (CampaignCM; IndependentCM; MediaCM). The seventh condition was the control. Our primary independent variables of interest indicate which of the information treatments the subjects were exposed to. In each model, we include a dummy variable for each treatment addressing the candidate and the control (CampaignSS; IndependentSS; MediaSS; CampaignCM; IndependentCM; or MediaCM). For each treatment variable, a "1" represents exposure to the treatment, and a "0"' indicates the subject was exposed to one of the other treatments.

We also include several additional variables, most of which are included to increase the precision of our statistical model.[9] We include variables that capture the subjects' party identification, more general political views (i.e. ideology), attention to political news, interest in politics, gender, race, and whether or not they vote.[10] We also include a variable for the content of the negative attack information (attack), which was either financial scandal or policy ineffectiveness.

RESULTS

Our hypotheses suggest different expectations for the various treatment variables. We argue that negative attack information coming from independent interest groups and from the media will seem more credible to subjects than attack ads coming from the candidates themselves. With respect to our findings then, we expect those exposed to the media or independent group treatments to react strongly in the negative direction; that is, we expect those subjects to have a much lower likelihood of voting for the candidate who is the subject of attack. Alternatively, we expect that negative information from opposing campaigns will be viewed as less credible, thus having less of a negative impact on the likelihood of voting.

***Table 1*. Comparison of Means By Treatment**

Treatment	Vote SS	Vote CM
Campaign Ad	3.04	2.79
Independent Ad	2.93	2.47
News Account	2.66	2.64
Control	3.21	2.86

Note: 1 = Highly Unlikely To Vote For Candidate; 5 = Highly Likely To Vote For Candidate

Table 1 provides a comparison of means by treatment. It shows, in general, that those in the news media and interest group categories are less likely to vote for either candidate than are those in the campaign or control groups. To analyze the relative impact of the treatments on subjects' responses regarding their likelihood of voting for

candidates under attack, we use ordered logistic regression. To examine exactly which treatment conditions are significantly different from other conditions we use the Bonferroni test of multiple comparisons. Bonferroni provides a very conservative estimate, and correct for the fact that when multiple comparisons are conducted some comparisons might be significant just by chance (Brooks & Geer, 2007). These estimates are provided in Appendix D.

To systematically analyze the differences in vote choice across experimental conditions and because our dependent variables are categorical (highly unlikely=1, unlikely=2, unsure=3, likely=4, or highly likely=5), we ran ordered logit models with the control condition as the excluded baseline and dummy variables corresponding to the independent ad, the news account, and the campaign ad conditions. Table 2 presents the coefficients and corresponding standard errors for the vote models.[12] We stratify our models by whether the participant was exposed to the Scott Snow or Chris Morris ad. We do not find that the experimental condition coefficients are significantly different across Scott Snow and Chris Morris ads. We tested this by pooling the variance-covariance matrices for the two equations in Table 2. We then individually tested for equality in the campaign ad, independent ad, and media coverage coefficients and find negligible differences (Campaign Ad $\beta: \chi^2(1) = 1.60, ns$; Independent Ad $\beta: \chi^2(1) = 0.23, ns$; Media Coverage $\beta: \chi^2(1) = 2.43, ns$).

***Table 2*. Effects of Exposure to Negative Information on Vote Choice**

Variables	**Vote for SS**	**Vote For CM**
Campaign Ad About CM		-.96***
		(.39)
Independent Ad About CM		-1.43***
		(.37)
Media Coverage About CM		-1.14***
		(.38)
Campaign Ad About SS	-1.86***	
	(.58)	
Independent Ad About SS	-1.72***	
	(.44)	
Media Coverage About SS	-2.12*	
	(.45)	
Type of Attack	-.67***	-.50***
	(.25)	(.19)
Political Views	-.43***	.16
	(.13)	(.11)
Party ID	-.07	.36***
	(.11)	(.10)
Newspaper	.10	-.18*
	(.10)	(.09)

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***Table 2 (Continued...)*. Effects of Exposure to Negative Information on Vote Choice**

Variables	Vote for SS	Vote For CM
Gender	.16	.30
	(.19)	(.17)
Race	.016	-.21
	(.13)	(.12)
Political Interest	.04	-.16
	(.011)	(.09)
Voter	.30***	-.12
	(.25)	(.21)
Threshold 1	-5.29	-3.06
Threshold 2	-3.78	-1.12
Threshold 3	-2.28	0.81
Threshold 4	-0.006	2.70
N	412	548

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses; *p < 0.05, **p<0.025, ***p<0.01

First, we turn to the first column in Table 2, which gives the estimates regarding subjects' likelihood of voting for Scott Snow. In this model, the main independent variables of interest are the dichotomous indicators for the three treatments containing negative information about Scott Snow: the campaign ad, the independent group ad, and the news story. The coefficients for the campaign ad, independent group and news treatments are negative and statistically significant relative to the control group. Since these coefficients are not directly interpretable given the non-linearity of the model, one can easily convert these coefficients into odds-ratios by exponentiating the coefficients, i.e., e^{β}. For the Scott Snow equation there is an associated 0.17 odds of being very likely to vote for the candidate relative to not being very likely to vote for the candidate, if one is in the independent ad condition. The associated odds are 0.16 and 0.12 for the campaign ad and media coverage conditions, respectively. For the Chris Morris condition, the associated odds are 0.38 for the campaign ad condition, whereas the odds are lower -- 0.24 and 0.32 – for the independent group and media condition. This indicates that the introduction of negative information about the candidate through independent (i.e. non-campaign) sources does have a significant and negative impact on the overall likelihood of voting for the subject of the negativity. We take this as support for our hypotheses that those who receive negative messages from an independent group or the media are significantly less likely to vote for the subject of the negative information - in this case, candidate Chris Morris.

To further clarify our estimates from Table 2, we simulated the predicted probabilities of being in the “highly likely” and “likely” categories of voting for each

candidate at each level of the treatment, holding the remaining variables in Table 2 at their respective means and modes. The results from these simulations are presented in Table 3. Here, we find very clear results for the Vote for Chris Morris Model. In the control condition, the probability of voting for Morris is 0.30, whereas the probabilities are much less for the treatment conditions. Participants in the independent ad condition are least likely to vote for Morris (0.10) and people in campaign ad condition are most likely to vote for Morris (0.14). The results for the Scott Snow model are more mixed. On average, exposure to any negative information reduces the probability of voting for Snow by 45%, and those in the news account condition are least likely to vote for Snow (0.19). However, there is a slightly elevated probability of voting for Snow in the independent account condition (0.25) relative to the campaign ad condition (0.23).

***Table 3*. Predicted Probabilities**

Treatment	Vote SS	Vote CM
Campaign Ad	0.23	0.14
Independent Account	0.25	0.10
News Account	0.19	0.12
Control	0.66	0.30

Note: Simulated probabilities of being highly likely or likely to vote for the candidate.

In sum, the most consistent pattern emerges when we compare all three negative information treatments to the control treatment in the Chris Morris condition. In both models, comparisons indicate that subjects in the independent group ad treatment and the news story treatment were significantly less likely to indicate they would vote for the candidate than those in the control treatment. For the Chris Morris model, the predicted probabilities and associated odds ratios perfectly mirror our expectation that negative stories from independent sources and the media resonate most with voters. In the results for the Scott Snow model, a similar pattern emerges with respect to the effect of the news, but not with respect to independent sources. One potential reason for these mixed findings in the Scott Snow model is that participants are, on average, much more positive towards the candidate. Indeed, the predicted probability of voting for Snow is 0.66 in the control condition, whereas it is 0.30 in the control condition for Chris Morris. We suspect that negative information from independent sources may resonate less with voters the more positively predisposed they are to the candidate.

The results regarding persuasive differences between interest group information and news story information are similar to our expectations; they are mixed. In the Chris Morris model, interest group information was more persuasive than news accounts; in the Scott Snow model news accounts were more persuasive than interest group information. Overall, our results generally support hypotheses 1 and 2; campaign sponsored negative

information seems to be less persuasive than negative information from independent group ads or news story accounts. Future research should examine the persuasive difference between news media and other sources information independent from candidates' campaigns.

DISCUSSION

The totality of our experimental findings clearly suggest two implications for the discussion surrounding negative information: both interest group advertisements and media accounts of negative information generally have stronger negative effects on individual assessments when it comes to vote choice. The differences between interest groups, media accounts, campaign advertisements (and the control group as well) are significant enough to suggest that the pattern of findings shown here is a meaningful one. It is clear that the source matters: the same negative information from different sources has differing effects on the decision-making of individuals when choosing between candidates.

How then does this speak to the question of credibility in various sources of negative information as discussed earlier in this paper? We predicted that interest groups and the media would be viewed as more credible sources of information and therefore the information they provided, although negative, would be more widely accepted; the results bear this out, although there is not necessarily a perfect pattern as to whether the media or interest groups are more credible overall. The pattern separating interest groups and the media from campaign negativity is clearer. All sources seem to have an effect at one time or another, but the more removed the source is from the actual political race at hand and the less clear the motivation for delivering negative information, the stronger the potential is for information dissemination to have a negative effect on an individual's likelihood of voting for the subject of the negativity.

We also suspect that the persuasive ability of interest groups to vary widely, yet, the current design of this paper cannot address that question. Specifically, we think that interest groups' reputations and ideological policy agendas will influence the degree to which they are credible with individuals. Since source credibility often hinges on likability and expertise, the perceived credibility of these groups will depend on their known agendas and reputations. However, in the case of interest groups who are ambiguously named, expectations are unclear. Objectivity is another foundation of credibility, and given that many interest groups are given innocuous names with the precise attempt to seem objective, this strategy could effectively help groups be more persuasive. Future research should address this important question by examining the persuasive ability of interest groups with variable names and reputations.

The results here also have practical applications for candidates for office as they attempt to determine which messages to spread. With campaign advertisements having

less effect when compared to interest groups and media accounts, candidates might be advised to let others do the dirty work for them when it comes to disseminating negative information. It has been argued that the mass media have begun to carry the load for campaigns through increased coverage of advertisements and increased debates as to how advertisements might or might not affect the electorate; this is especially the case when the advertisement has surprising or salacious content. It has also been shown that interest group involvement in the political advertising game is on the rise. Candidates might be smart to continue taking advantage of the work of others so long as they can separate themselves from the coverage and efforts. This way, candidates can rise above the negativity while still accruing the benefits of the work that surrogates like interest groups and the mass media are undertaking and accomplishing on their behalf. These practical applications might not go a long way toward stemming the tide of negativity in electoral politics, but they are sure to be attractive to politicians seeking any advantage, be that in tearing down an opponent or in saving money on increasingly expensive advertising.

Knowing what we now know about how the source matters and the potential power for interest group advertisements and media accounts of negative information to influence individual assessments of candidates under attack, future lines of research become necessary. Perhaps there is further nuance to be discovered when comparing the effects of different types of media accounts. Similarly, perhaps different types of interest groups can drive different types of effects (for example, perhaps a highly prominent interest group like the NRA or NARAL might not have the same effect as a new or ambiguously named group with similar political intentions). Our findings here suggest that such a detailed study might be worthy of examination; it is, however, left for future experimentation.

Footnotes:

1. Johnson and Kaye (1998) argue that people are just as likely to believe everything they hear from a lawyer or Congressman as they are from a newspaper reporter. Also see www.gallup.com/poll for numerous current examples of Americans' declining trust in the media since the 1970's.

2. As Peterson (2001) suggests, college student populations might be slightly more homogenous than general populations. However, we have no specific reason to believe that this will bias our results in any distinct fashion. We should also note here that since college students in the state where the experiment was performed

are required to take a two course series in national, state, and local government, there should be no bias in our sample toward students interested in politics.

3. For a sample of campaign biographies given to some participants, see Appendix A.

4. Half of participants received the exact biography sheet shown in Appendix A, while the other half received a biography sheet in which the characteristics and political shortcomings are reversed.

5. For examples of the text given to each group, see Appendix B.

6. Fictional interest group names were created to eliminate any pre-existing biases against certain real groups.

7. For an example of the similarity of the content in each of the three treatments, see Appendix B

8. The questions asked resemble standard National Election Study questions dealing with voting, approval, and other candidate characteristics.

9. See Appendix C for a detailed description for each of these measures.

10. As a check on our randomization for treatment assignment, we use multinomial logit to predict treatment assignment using pre-test measures in order to test for any imbalances in our treatment groups. The model chi-square was only significant when we include gender in the model, thus we include gender in our analysis to control for any gender imbalance between treatments.

11. We have no expectations that the content of the scandal should affect responses to opinions in any systematic way; rather, we include this variable as a control to further ensure that it is the method of receiving information that matters and not the content of the information itself.

12. Please see Appendix D to see additional information as to exactly which conditions are significantly different from the other conditions. To examine exactly which treatment conditions are significantly different from other

conditions we use the Bonferroni test of multiple comparisons. Bonferroni provides a very conservative estimate, and correct for the fact that when multiple comparisons are conducted some comparisons might be significant just by chance (Brooks & Geer, 2007).

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE TEXT OF CANDIDATE BIOS

Michigan's Senate race presents two evenly matched candidates with similar backgrounds and independent spirits, but with fundamentally different views of the role of government. Each candidate is more moderate on social issues than the vast majority of his fellow partisans and was a surprise to win their party's nominations.

The Democrat, Scott Snow, is a three term U.S. Representative who represents the Western suburbs of Detroit and has something of a reputation as a maverick within the party. Despite the fact that he is a fine legislator who takes an active role in the nuts and bolts of policy in Washington, Snow has not achieved much of a leadership role in the minority party because he, in a few high profile instances, refused to go along with the party line. Instead of following the party leadership or the desires of the main groups that support him, Snow always votes for what he believes is best for the country. One complaint that has followed Snow throughout his career is about some questionable business dealings in the early 1990s. One of his several partners in an investment opportunity was charged with insider trading. While his partner was later acquitted and it is clear that Snow did not know of it at the time, he did personally profit from some questionable practices.

His opponent, Republican Christopher Morris, is a three term Representative from the Northern suburbs of Detroit. He won his most recent re-election efforts with little difficulty, despite the fact that he is a bit moderate for his conservative district, especially on social issues. He has become, however, something of a party leader when it comes to dealing with ethics issues, pushing for campaign finance reforms, even at the expense of embarrassing some of his fellow Republicans to further his goals. The main criticism of Morris is that he is not considered to be an effective legislator in Washington. He is well meaning and is a constant presence in the district, but he has taken fire for failing to pass important bills and for missing committee meetings and key votes that might affect his district."

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE TEXT OF NEGATIVE MESSAGES

The information below illustrates the similarity of the negative information given to participants in the campaign, interest group, and media treatments. In this case, we are looking at negative information potentially given to those who received a biography sheet describing Christopher Morris as ineffective.

Campaign Frame

The following is an example of a campaign advertisement frame of negative information given to those in the campaign treatment group:

> "I'm Scott Snow, and I approve this message. Christopher Morris says he's working hard for his district. But the facts tell a completely different story. He hasn't passed a single bill during his six years in Washington. He's missed several important committee meetings, meetings that deal with issues important to Michigan. He's even missed votes on key issues like national security and the economy. With that kind of record, it's no wonder he's been called one of the least effective politicians in Washington. How can we trust Christopher Morris to stand up for Michigan when we can't even trust him to show up for work? The preceding message was paid for by Scott Snow for Senate."

Independent Group Frame

The following is an example of an independent group advertisement frame of negative information given to those in the interest group treatment:

> "The following message was paid for by the Committee for Responsible Government. Christopher Morris says he's working hard for his district. But the facts tell a completely different story. He hasn't passed a single bill during his six years in Washington. He's missed several important committee meetings, meetings that deal with issues important to Michigan. He's even missed votes on key issues like national security and the economy. With that kind of record, it's no wonder he's been called one of the least effective politicians in Washington. How can we trust Christopher Morris to stand up for Michigan when we can't even trust him to show up for work? The preceding message was paid for by the Committee for Responsible Government."

Media Frame

The following is an example of a media frame of negative information given to those in the media coverage treatment. It is a transcript of a news story read on a television station in Lansing, Michigan in October of 2006. Stories of a similar nature were run on stations across the state that evening:

> Just how hard is Senate candidate Chris Morris working? That question is being asked tonight around the state of Michigan as new details emerge concerning Representative Morris and his performance during his six years in Congress. In a report from Congressional Quarterly magazine, Morris was called one of the least effective politicians in Washington. This claim is based on information in the Congressional Record, which shows that Morris has failed to pass a single bill during his time in Washington. In addition, the report reveals that Morris's attendance at committee meetings and key votes on issues important to his state like the economy and national security has been mixed. The report is leading some in Michigan to wonder if Representative Morris can be trusted to stand up for them in the Senate when he fails to even show up for work in the House.

APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS UTILIZED

In addition to the information included in the treatments, our models include individual-level characteristics. Below are questions asked to capture these characteristics and their distributions:

POLITICAL VIEWS: On a scale from highly liberal to highly conservative, how would you characterize your political beliefs? 1) Highly Liberal 2) Slightly Liberal 3) Moderate 4) Slightly Conservative 5) Highly Conservative.

POLITICAL VIEWS	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Highly Liberal	30	3.52	3.52
Slightly Liberal	96	11.27	14.79
Moderate	273	32.04	46.83
Conservative	313	36.74	83.57
Highly Conservative	140	16.43	100
Total	852	100	

PARTY IDENTIFICATION: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what? 1) Strong Democrat 2) Not Very Strong Democrat 3) Independent 4) Not Very Strong Republican 5) Strong Republican.

PARTY ID	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strong Democrat	51	5.99	5.99
Not Very Strong Democrat	103	12.09	18.08
Independent	173	20.31	38.38
Not Very Strong Republican	298	34.98	73.36
Strong Republican	227	26.64	100
Total	852	100	

NEWSPAPER: On average, how often do you read news section of a newspaper? 1) No Days a Week 2) One to Two Days a Week 3) Three to Four Days a Week 4) Five to Six Days a Week, 5) Every Day.

NEWSPAPER	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No Days a Week	293	34.43	34.43
1 to 2 Days a Week	350	41.13	75.56
3 to 4 Days a Week	133	15.63	91.19
5 to 6 Days a Week	46	5.41	96.59
Every Day	29	3.41	100
Total	851	100	

GENDER: What is your gender? 1) Male 2) Female

GENDER	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	452	53.11	53.11
Female	385	45.24	98.35
Unsure/Refused	14	.12	100
Total	851	100	

RACE: What racial group do you consider yourself to be a part of? 1) African American 2) Asian American 3) Caucasian 4) Latino 5) Other.

RACE	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
African American	37	4.34	4.34
Asian American	45	5.28	9.61
Caucasian	645	75.62	85.23
Latino	93	10.90	96.13
Other	33	3.87	100
Total	851	100	

POLITICAL INTEREST: How interested would you say that you are in politics? 1) Highly Interested 2) Interested 3) Unsure 4) Disinterested 5) Highly Disinterested.

POLITICAL INTEREST	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Highly Interested	51	5.99	5.99
Interested	416	48.83	54.81
Unsure	208	24.41	79.23
Disinterested	146	17.14	96.36
Highly Disinterested	31	3.64	100
Total	853	100	

VOTER: Did you vote held in the elections in November? 1) Yes 2) No 3) Unsure

VOTER	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	142	16.71	16.71
No	700	82.35	99.06
Unsure	8	.94	100
Total	850	100	

APPENDIX D: BONFERRONI COMPARISON BETWEEN CONDITIONS

		Voting For Morris	Voting For Snow
Treatment	Treatment	Mean Diff	Mean Diff
Campaign	Interest Group	-.321	-.102
Interest Group	Media	.163	-.273
Campaign	Media	-.158	-.375
Campaign	Control	.070	.171
Interest Group	Control	**.391**	.273
Media	Control	.228	**.546**

Note: Significant differences in bold.

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