

**MA Political Science**  
**Track Political Behaviour and Communication**  
**Leiden University**

**Should we be worried? A Longitudinal Study on  
Negative Campaigning in the Netherlands.**

**Master Thesis**

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## 1. Introduction

A well-known Dutch political reporter, Twan Huys, recently appeared in a Dutch current affairs program *De Wereld Draait Door* and talked about the high level of negativity in American election campaigns. He closed the topic by stating that Dutch politicians and political parties take over this negative form of campaigning (Huys in DWDD, broadcast 23/03/2012).

Negative campaigning, the form of election campaigning in which a candidate or party does not present their own position or policy but criticizes the position, policy or person of the other candidate(s) or party/parties as a strategy to win votes (Haynes & Rhine, 1998; Geer, 2006: 4,5; Lau, Sigelman & Rovner, 2007), is one of the most widely debated campaign strategies and has received increasing attention of the press, the public and scientists. In political science research much attention is given to the causes and the effects of negative campaigning (e.g., Jamieson, 1992; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Kahn & Kenney, 2004; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Geer, 2006; Buell & Sigelman, 2008; Lau & Rovner, 2009). This widely given attention to the subject is probably due to the conventional perception that negative campaigning has been on the rise over the last decades. Journalists, politicians, and the public claim that there is an increase in the amount of negativity in election campaigns. However, existing empirical studies on the level of negativity in American campaigns are not in agreement with each other. Some researchers claim that the use of negativity in campaigns in the USA has increased over time (e.g., Pfau & Kenski, 1990; West, 1993; Ansolabehere *et al.*, 1994; Benoit, 1999; Geer, 2006) while others find fluctuation over time (e.g., Kaid & Johnston, 1990; Kaid,

1997) or relative stability (e.g., Lau & Pomper, 2004). Besides this contradiction in existing research, the research on negative campaigning is very USA-dominated. There is little empirical investigation of the claim that election campaigns are becoming more negative in tone over the last decades, as is often assumed, outside the USA (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011; Van Heerde-Hudson, 2011). The scarce amount of research that has been done outside the USA is not in agreement with the conventional perception that negativity is on the rise. Studies on the level of negative campaigning in England (Van Heerde-Hudson, 2011), Sweden (Håkansson, 1999; Esaiasson & Håkansson, 2002; Bjerling, 2007, cited in Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011) and Denmark (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011) agree that the level of negativity in election campaigns is not on the rise. There seems to be a disconnection between actual beliefs in society and empirical evidence in political science research. It makes one wonder whether negative campaigning is actually on the rise as an international trend or whether it is just an American phenomenon. Goodman (1996, cited in Sigelman & Shiraev, 2002: 45) states: “Negative campaigning is as American as Mississippi Mud”. This may very well be true.

The Netherlands is an interesting case for studying whether the presumption that negativity is on the rise outside the USA, is true. The Netherlands has a complex environment with a multiparty system in which a large number of very diverse parties compete for office and in which the government is usually a coalition. Due to this, negativity is very unlikely to occur on a high level in the Netherlands (Walter 2009, Walter & de Vries, 2011, Walter, 2011). If one can detect an increasing trend of

negativity in Dutch election campaigns this may very well also be the case for campaigns in other democracies in Western Europe.

Negative campaigning in the Netherlands has not been studied extensively. Walter (2009) is the only one who studied the level of negativity in Dutch election campaigns. In her research she claims to have found a trend of an increasing level of negativity in Dutch election campaigns. Her conclusion, however, is too firmly stated considering that she based it on the analysis of just three of the most recent election campaigns. A longitudinal study is necessary to detect whether there is a trend of a rising level of negativity in election campaigns in the Netherlands.

Besides to solve the contradiction and to fill the gap in existing scientific research, clarity is also needed because the rise of negative campaigning is very often associated with bringing negative consequences for the democratic functioning. Negative campaigning has received quite a lot of media attention (Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995) and political commentators often describe negative campaigning in pessimistic terms (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008). The public and democratic observers have many complains and concerns about negative campaigning, because it is assumed to have devastating effects on the general political debate and on democracy itself. Also in scientific research negative campaigning has been claimed to have negative effects on the democratic process. Negative campaigning would lower voter turnout in elections, increase the public's political cynicism and decrease the public's feeling of political efficacy (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Thorson *et al.*, 2000). Even though scientific research shows that negative campaigning might have negative effects, there is little empirical evidence to confirm the presumed increase in negativity (van Heerde-

Hudson, 2011). Why all this concern when there is no clear evidence that the level of negativity in election campaigns is really on the rise outside the USA?

This study gives clarity on whether there is a rise in the amount of negativity used in campaigns in the Netherlands and whether the alarming concerns raised by journalists, the public and scientists need to be taken seriously. To answer these questions a content analysis of the coverage of statements made by politicians or political parties in campaigns for Dutch parliamentary elections from 1971 till 2010 by the Dutch newspaper with the highest circulation, De Telegraaf, has been done.

In the first part of this thesis the concept of negativity is further explained and two opposing claims about the trend of the level of negativity in Dutch election campaigns are presented. The second part is dedicated to the focus of negative campaigns and the third section addresses possible consequences of negative campaigning for the democratic process. Finally the research methods, data collection, case selection, operationalization and measurements are discussed and results are presented.

## **2. Definition**

Negative election campaigning is often seen as an undesirable way of campaigning. Some researchers use the term negative campaigning to denote a form of campaigning in which parties and politicians use dishonesties such as lying, falsely informing the public, and/or cheating to denigrate the opponent or opponents. This concept is mainly used by critics of negative campaigning and may better be referred to as illegitimate campaigning

(Jamieson, 1992: 19, 220). Negative campaigning as conceptualized in this study does not incorporate dishonesties. Negative campaigning is conceptualized here as the manner of campaigning where a party or politician does not bring forward or praises his or her own statements, positions, policies, values or character traits, and does not talk about him or herself as a strategy to become the voters' most preferred party (this, in fact is positive campaigning), but talks about the opponent party or parties or the opponent candidate or candidates as a strategy to win votes (Lau & Pomper, 2004: 73). Referring to opponent group(s) of parties or politicians, like the left, the right, socialists, conservatives etc., or referring to the incumbent(s), the coalition or opposition is also conceptualized as negative campaigning. Negative campaigning however, also incorporates a negative element. Thus, whenever a party or politician talks about another party or another politician instead of talking about him-/herself or his/her party in campaigns, in order for the campaign to be conceptualized as negative, this is done using a negative tone (Haynes & Rhine, 1998; Djupe & Peterson, 2002; Geer, 2006: 4, 5). Negative campaigning is a strategy for political parties and politicians to distinguish themselves from other political parties or politicians by going on the offensive against their opponent(s) or by criticizing their opponent(s) (Lau, Sigelman & Rovner, 2007). By attacking another party, or parties, or politician(s), the attacker tries to persuade the voter not to vote for the attacked party, politician, incumbent, or group of parties. The attack can be either on (personal) character traits or on policy issues or values (Skaperdas & Grofman, 1995).

### **3. The level of negative campaigning: stability or change?**

As stated before, many people presume that the level of negativity used in election campaigns is on the rise. The first research question in this thesis discusses whether or not the presumed increase in negative campaigning in the Netherlands can be scientifically supported.

Research Question 1: Is there a rise in the level of negativity in Dutch election campaigns?

There are two arguments concerning the level of the negative form of campaigning in the Netherlands which will be explained in the next two sections. The arguments lead to two opposing hypotheses; one states that the level of negativity in campaigns in the Netherlands has increased over time (H1) and the other states that the level of negativity in campaigns in the Netherlands has not increased over time (H2).

#### *3.1 Negativity on the rise*

In the Netherlands, two campaign related developments have taken place over time that suggest that the level of negativity used in election campaigns has increased over time.

Firstly, election campaigns in most Western democracies have been going through, and some would state are still going through, a process of *Americanization* (e.g.,

Butler & Ranney, 1992: 278; Swanson & Mancini, 1996 4-6, 268; Scammell, 1998). Political parties are increasingly adapting their election campaigns to the American-style of campaigning (Swanson & Mancini, 1996: 268). American campaigns are known for their negativity. Especially in the USA negative campaigning is seen as an effective strategy to become a voter's most preferred party (Lau & Pomper, 2004: 2). Parties in other countries take over this negative element in their campaigns. In the Netherlands, campaigns have also been transformed to a more American style (Brants & van Praag, 2006).

The Americanization of Dutch election campaigns provides the perfect circumstances for the level of negativity in campaigns to rise (van Holsteyn & Walter, 2009). Americanization is visible in various aspects of the Dutch election campaigns. Firstly, before the process of Americanization, different controversies were addressed in a Dutch party's election campaign. Parties tried to persuade voters to vote for them by putting forward their positions on various issues. Following the example of American campaigns, the focus of the political battle in Dutch election campaigns is now concentrated mainly on one controversy (van Holsteyn & Walter, 2009). A party puts one issue central in its campaign and uses that issue and its position on that issue to distinguish itself from other parties. When a party owns an issue that is on the general campaign agenda, that party will address that issue in a negative tone, thereby referring to the weaknesses of the opponent(s) on that issue. However when an issue that the party does not 'own' is on the agenda, the party will mostly campaign positively on that issue (Damore, 2002). Parties choose an issue over which they are seen more credible to attack others because it increases the benefits of an attack. Over time, parties build up

reputations to handle a specific issue well and are therefore already seen as more credible than other parties on that issue (Damore, 2002). Focussing on an issue 'owned' by a party gives that party a great opportunity to completely focus on the weaknesses of the opponent(s) on that issue. The strategy of going negative is used more often when election campaigns of parties are built around one issue (Damore, 2002).

Secondly, in the Americanization process money and resources have become more important for the effectiveness of campaigns. The Dutch election campaigns have become more expensive (van Holsteyn & Walter, 2009). Part of the increase in expenditure is because parties, following American example, to a greater extent hire communication advisors and other consultants to organize their campaigns (Van Holsteyn & Walter, 2009). Campaigns have therefore become more professional (Scammell, 1998). Because more money is spent on campaigns and campaigns are becoming more professional, parties use the strategy of negative campaigning more often and on a larger scale. Although not exclusively supported in scientific research, the conventional wisdom about negative political campaigning holds that it works (Lau, Sigelman & Rovner, 2007). Negative campaigning is seen as an effective means of winning votes. Election campaigns in the Netherlands used to be centrally organized and only performed during election time (van Praag & Brants, 2008). In the new professional form of campaigning, following American example, campaigns are organized centrally and are conducted permanently (van Praag & Brants, 2008). Instead of just being used sporadically during times of elections and on a local smaller level, negative campaigning, since it is presumed to work, has become part of the central and permanent campaign strategy.

A final aspect of the process of Americanization visible in the Dutch election campaigns is the increase in focus on individual persons (Scammell, 1998). Individuals are the central focus of campaigns and campaigns are built around a person instead of parties. This trend is known as the process of personalization. An increasing amount of attention in campaigns is spent on persons at the expense of attention given to content and policy (Karvoren, 2007). Negative attacks are performed more on persons than on parties (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008). Negativity is also said to be more effective when applied on persons instead of on parties (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008). Although parties in the Netherlands, instead of candidates, are still the main focus in campaigns (Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010) and parties and politicians are still strongly connected in the Netherlands (van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2008) there is a detectable trend of personalization (Fiers & Krouwel, 2005). This, although slight, trend of personalization in the Netherlands makes the use of negativity more easy and effective and negative campaigning is therefore used more by political parties as a strategy to win votes. A rising level of negativity can be seen as part of the process of Americanization and the associated professionalization and personalization of Dutch election campaigns.

During the latter half of previous century, politics have become *mediated* (Swanson & Mancini, 1996: 81, 88, 89, 272). *Mediatization* is the second campaign related development that took place in the Netherlands that suggest that the level of negativity used in election campaigns has increased over time. Mediatization is the process in which political parties lost their autonomy and, for their communication with the public, became dependent of the news values of the mass media (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). This process affects the way politics itself and political communication especially

is structured (Swanson & Mancini, 1996: 88, 89). It has taken place in many European countries, including the Netherlands, incrementally from the second world war onwards (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011).

At first parties became more dependent on the media for their communication with the public because the ties between parties and their followers and organizations in society like labour unions and the church became weaker (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011). Parties first communicated with the help of these organizations directly with their followers. When their ties became weaker, the media became the most important way of communicating with the mass public. Parties also lost their fixed set of followers, and in their campaign wanted to address a wide range of people and needed the media to do so. As a consequence, the media became the most important source of campaign communication for parties (van Praag & Brants, 2008).

At the same time, the media became more independent on politics (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011). The media first were guided by political preconceptions, but now they are driven mostly by professional norms like news values. The media have stopped feeling responsible for the public interest but try to do best in a fragmented and competitive media market (van Praag & Brants, 2008). The media try to sell their products to the public and respond to the demands of the public. The media demand contestation from the parties because political consensus is not interesting for journalists to cover, for it is not what their audience or readers want to see, hear or read about. The conflict criteria became one of the most important news value criteria for the media to determine what to give attention.

Since the 1990's political parties have started to internalize this new *media logic* (RMO, 2004: 19, 20). Political parties know that they need the media to communicate with the mass public and therefore adapt to the demands of the media (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011). They shape their campaign messages to meet the media's standards of newsworthiness. Parties use negativity in their campaigns to meet the most important news value criteria of the media; the conflict criteria. Party strategists are aware of the fact that the media value negativity very highly and are more likely to report negative campaign messages (Tue Pedersen, 2011). Parties go negative to gain media attention, especially because Dutch political parties have limited opportunities to use direct communication channels. Going negative is seen by political parties as an effective way of reaching voters.

In the fifties television made its appearance. The influence of the television was limited at first, because only a few people could afford a television set. A few years later, however, the television became the most important source of communication for political parties (van Praag & Brants, 2008). Television, instead of the newspaper, became the central medium (Vos-Arwert, 2007). Negative campaigning is said to work better on television and is therefore used more within the medium of the television (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008).

Given the processes of *Americanization* and *mediatization* of Dutch politics with which negativity in campaigns is claimed to be associated, the first hypothesis regarding the level of negativity in campaigns is derived:

- Hypothesis 1: The *level of negativity* in election campaigns in the Netherlands has increased over time.

### 3.2 *Stability of the level of negative campaigning*

Not everybody agrees with the argument which suggests a rising trend in the level of negativity. The political and institutional structure and the party system of a country are of influence on historical campaign characteristics (van Praag & Brants, 2008). There are several characteristics of the Dutch political system that discourage the use of negativity in campaigns. These characteristics have not changed over time, making it seem illogical that the amount of negativity used in campaigns has changed.

Firstly, in a multiparty system the benefits for a party to go negative are blurred. The goal of using negativity in campaigns is to increase the own party's support (Haynes & Rhine, 1998). In a two-party system, the party which attacks the opposing party is also the one that gains the votes that the attacked party might lose. Because just two parties run in the election, every vote that the opponent loses is beneficial for the other party. Even when a voter who had intended to vote for the attacked party chooses to abstain from voting because he or she does not support the attacked party or candidate anymore nor the attacker, the attacker benefits. Every voter not voting on the opponent party is increasing the support for the own party. In a multiparty system, however, the benefits of attacking another party or candidate are blurred (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008).

Although a party pushes away voters from one of the opponent parties by explaining why a voter should not vote for the opponent party -negative campaigning- it is not certain that those voters will vote for the attacker. Voters might just as well decide to give their vote to one of the many other parties in a multiparty system, like the Netherlands. In a multiparty system, when a party attacks an opposing party, the voters lost by the attacked party are not automatically going to vote for the attacker. There are many other options. Campaign strategists will not choose to campaign negatively that much because the benefit of a successful attack -increasing a party's own support (Haynes & Rhine, 1998)- is not guaranteed (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008).

Secondly, in a multiparty system like the Netherlands, although the benefit of an attack for a party is not certain, the risk of going negative is in fact present. When attacking an opponent there is always the risk of it backfiring (Garramone, 1984). In a two-party system and a multiparty system there is a chance that voters perceive an attack as being some sort of last resort of a party that is in desperate need to win votes and goes far, maybe even too far, to gain them. In their reaction voters will not vote for the party that goes negative. In a two-party system, voters will not easily change their vote because parties represent very opposing views. In the Netherlands, the many political parties are relatively close to each other on ideological dimensions. Very often, another party is close to a voter's preferred party. Because there are many parties and because parties are relatively close to each other, voters will easily vote for another party when their preferred party does something they do not like, such as going negative (Kleinnijenhuis & Fan, 1999). Party strategists keep this high risk of going negative in mind when campaigning and will not use much negativity for that reason.

Thirdly, in a multiparty system like the Netherlands, parties often divide themselves alongside multiple dimensions. This makes it less clear which party is the direct opponent of whom. An attack is hard to point at a specific opponent and it is therefore less clear and effective for parties to go negative (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008). It is also difficult to point criticism at the incumbent, something that happens often in the USA, because a coalition of multiple parties governs the Netherlands. When a party expresses criticism of a current policy, it is not clear for the public and the attacker which of the governing parties is responsible for that policy. It is hard for parties to attack a specific opponent and therefore it is more beneficial for them to distinguish themselves in a positive manner (Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010).

Fourthly, a coalition of different parties forms the government in the Netherlands. Parties will have to be able to get along with each other after the elections because they might have to govern with each other. Parties want to keep all possible options for forming a coalition open (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008). Dutch parties will not often attack each other because it might reduce their chances to become part of the next coalition. Winning parties will also need the support of other parties if they want to take part in government and want to accomplish anything in government. Unlike the American two-party system, the proportional system in the Netherlands expects a majority to govern and make policies. A party will not use the negative strategy very often since the party needs to remain close to other parties and not push them away. This could be compared to the primary elections in the USA. Generally there is a lower level of negativity in the primary elections than in the general elections because the candidate that wins the primaries also needs the support of the other candidate and the votes of the

voters which voted for the other candidate, in the general election. Therefore the candidate will not be eager to attack his or her opponent too much in the primaries (Peterson & Djupe, 2005). Parties in primaries and in multiparty systems tend to look at the long term effects of going negative, not just at the actual amount of votes, and conclude that it is more beneficial to keep the campaigning positive or at least not too negative.

Finally, the use of negativity in election campaigns is also discouraged because of the long-standing political culture of mutual respect and consensus in the Netherlands (van Praag, 2005, see also Walter, 2009). Debates are known to be decent and a confrontational tone is not used often. Attacking an opponent, especially on character traits, does not fit in the consensus seeking political culture of the Netherlands and will therefore not be beneficial for a party.

All these conditions which discourage the use of negativity in campaigns are still present in the Dutch political system. Therefore it does not seem plausible that the level of negativity has changed dramatically over time.

Negative campaigning can also be seen as a timeless campaign strategy (Druckman, Kifer & Parker , 2010). Although negative campaigning appears to be a new phenomenon on the rise, however throughout history negativity is in literature also seen as a core mode of argumentation (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011). Historically, campaigns have always consisted of parties or candidates promoting their own points and criticizing the other ones points (Mark, 2006: 11). Aristotle, one of the most influential philosophers, stated that negative campaigning is as old as democracy itself (Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson, 2011). His colleague Cicero also saw

negative campaigning as an accepted campaign technique (Klotz, 1998). According to Cicero, parties have used negative campaigning when positive campaigning was not effective throughout history.

Although negative campaigning is not a new phenomenon, it has just recently started to receive attention from both the public and scientists (Klotz, 1998). There are examples of negativity in Dutch election campaigns in more recent history. For instance, in the parliamentary election campaign of 1972 the overall level of negativity was known to be relatively high (Elzinga & Voerman, 2002). And the Dutch election campaign of 1977 was also known as a relatively negative campaign (Walter, 2009). It seems as though the quantity of negativity in campaigns has remained the same, but it has become more obvious in the last decades (Elving, 1996). Negative campaigning has always been used in the Dutch society, although on a small scale, and did not increase over time as is often assumed.

When looking at the proportional multiparty system of the Netherlands, its political culture of mutual respect and consensus and the assumption that negative campaigning is a strategy that was used all throughout history, the second, and competing, hypothesis can be derived.

- Hypothesis 2: The *level of negativity* in election campaigns in the Netherlands has not increased over time.

#### **4. The focus of negativity**

The level of negativity in election campaigns is not the only thing that could have changed over time. Researchers studying negative campaigning make a distinction between negative campaigning focusing on a candidate's personality or a party's character traits, negative campaigning focusing on broad themes or values, and negative campaigning focusing on policy position(s) or issue(s) (e.g., Walter, 2009; Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010; van Heerde-Hudson, 2011).

Issue-based negative campaigning contains criticism directed at an opponent or opponents about their specific policies such as increasing taxes, returning refugees, etc. The negativity pertains to content and is seen by the public as, although negative, still contributing to the political debate and its quality (Geer, 2006: 42). Negative campaigning focusing on issues, albeit without checking whether the substantive statements are true, informs people. Value based campaigning is seen by the public as also contributing to the debasement of the political argument (Geer, 2006: 42). When political parties or politicians criticize their opponent based on values such as hope or change they are campaigning negatively focused on value. Even though the campaign addresses broad themes, it is still informative and therefore, in the eyes of the public, contributes to a good debate. However, negative campaigning based on character traits of a party or politician, such as intelligence, skills, credibility, consistency, clearness, courage, honesty etc. is seen by the public as not contributing to the political debate (Geer, 2006: 64). Negative attacks focusing on personality and character traits instead of

on content such as values or issues are seen as irrelevant for the public learning (Geer, 2006: 64).

According to popular belief, there has been an increase in the importance of personality and character traits in negative campaigning over the last few decades (Geer, 2006: 70). Negative attacks tend to be personal (Jamieson, 1992: 45) and the public frown upon personal attacks. Geer (2006: 63-65) hypothesizes that instead of an increase in the amount of negativity used in campaigns, the negativity's focus has shifted more towards character traits and personality. This shift has made campaigns seem more negative because attacks on personal traits are seen as more illegitimate than attacks on issues (Geer, 2006: 63-65). The focus on traits would decrease the attention given to content, and voters should be well informed about a party's policies statements and values to make a good, solid, deliberated vote (Geer, 2006: 63-65). An increased focus on traits in negative attacks makes election campaigns less substantial.

The hypothesis that negativity increasingly focuses on traits however does not have much support in existing literature. Geer (2006: 68) as well as Benoit (1999: 286), Klotz (1998), and Van Heerde-Hudson (2011) conclude that there is in fact no actual rise in the amount of personal attacks, but that the attacks are -still- more centered around issues. By showing that more real issues have been covered in negative attacks over time, Geer (2006) claims that negative campaigning has therefore been advancing the public debate.

This research studies whether there is a rise in the total amount of campaign negativity over time. To understand this potential rise, it also seems necessary to assess whether there has been a change in the focus of negative campaigning. If attacks on

personal character traits have increased over time, it might explain why the public's actual belief states that negativity is on the rise but most scientific research outside the USA claims it is not. The alarming concerns that presume that a rising level of negativity has negative effects on the democratic process may be nuanced should the focus of negativity lay more on content (issue and value). When studying the level of negativity, it matters what the focus of that negativity is. The second research question is derived.

Research question 2: Does negativity in campaigns in the Netherlands mostly focus on *character traits*, *issues* or *values*, and has this changed over time?

## **5. Negative campaigning and the democratic process**

In general, most people have negative associations with negative campaigning and its presumed rise. Many observers fear that negative campaigning harms the democratic process (Lau, Sigelman & Rovner, 2007) and many scientific studies have examined the effects of negative campaigning (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Kahn & Kenney, 2004; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Geer, 2006). Past research has mainly examined three ways in which negative campaigning may harm the political process. Negative campaigning is argued to have an effect on *voter turnout*, *political efficacy* and *political cynicism* (Lau *et al.*, 1999; Lau, Sigelman & Rovner, 2007).

A high level of negativity in a campaign has an effect on the voter turnout (the percentage of the people who are entitled to vote, who actually vote). Ansolabehere and

Iyengar (1995) in their book *'Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate'* firstly point out that negative campaigning works for the U.S. Campaign ads give voters new information and enable them to evoke information they had previously stored. The authors then try to show their readers that campaigning works best when the message of the campaign is in agreement with voters' existing political beliefs. Partisans are therefore less convinced by campaigns -their ideas only get reinforced- then are non-partisans, who do not or in a lesser extend have existing political beliefs. Ansolabehere and Iyengar then argue that negative campaigning decreases turnout, because it provides non-partisans with negative information and reinforces the negative assumptions non-partisans already had about politics. However, many studies claim to have not found support for this demobilization hypothesis (e.g., Brader, 2005; Brooks & Geer, 2007). Most of these studies base their conclusions on experiments and participants' intended turnout, like Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) did. When looking at the total negativism in a campaign and its effects on voter turnout, the literature is divided. Some state that the total level of negative campaigning in an election campaign can be associated with turnout in that election (Finkel & Geer, 1998; Wattenberg & Briens, 1999; Brooks, 2006) while others state that the total amount of negativity in a campaign has no influence on the actual voter turnout (Djupe & Pederson, 2002; Kahn & Kenney, 2004; Lau & Pomper, 2004).

The level of negativity in campaigns is also said to have an effect on the public's political cynicism. Political cynicism is a lack of faith or trust in the government, in politicians, and/or in politics as a whole (Agger, Goldstein & Pearl, 1961). The functioning of the democratic system depends on the extent to which the public trusts the

government. A political system cannot function well when the political cynicism of the public is high over a long period of time. This can be devastating for the political system (Easton, 1965, cited in Schenk-Hamlin, Procter & Rumsey, 2000). Shapiro & Rieger (1989), Perloff and Kinsey (1992), Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), Thorson *et al.*, (2000), and Brader (2005) connect negative campaign advertising to trust in government. Negative campaigning might give a party or candidate a short-term advantage, but the respect that citizens have for all participating candidates or parties is reduced, because citizens find negative campaigning witless and irrelevant (Brader, 2005). Therefore, negative campaigning triggers a detachment from the larger political process (Shapiro & Rieger, 1989). Some studies, however, claim not to have found support for the relation between negativity and trust in government (e.g., Lau & Pomper, 2004; Geer, 2006).

Political efficacy is a concept that is used to address the amount of impact citizens believe they have upon the political process. When the public has a low level of political efficacy, it is an indication that the public feels as though their political participation has no effect on the political process. When citizens believe that the actions they take do have an impact upon the actions of the government, their feeling of political efficacy is high. In literature, political efficacy is often divided into internal and external political efficacy. Internal efficacy incorporates how citizens feel towards their own abilities to affect the political process: do citizens understand politics and do they find themselves able to participate? External political efficacy, on the other hand, is people's expectation that they have an influence on the political process when participating. The public might find negative campaigning, especially character trait focused negative campaigning, lacking usefulness (Pinkleton, Um & Austin, 2002). Being exposed to much negativity may

frustrate the public and frustrating experiences decrease efficacy (Pinkleton, Um & Austin, 2002). The public's internal and external political efficacy is influenced by a high level of negative campaigning. Multiple studies have investigated this claim. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) and Brader (2005), among others, found that negative campaigning decreases a person's internal and external political efficacy. Others only partly support the claim and found that negative campaigning influences only a person's external efficacy (e.g., Craig & Kane, 2000; Pinkleton, Um & Austin, 2002) or internal efficacy (e.g., Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Thorson *et al.*, 2000).

It seems adequate to re-examine these three American-based hypotheses about the negative effects of negative campaigning in a multiparty system like the Netherlands in which the overall level of negativity is expected to be much lower. The negative effects may be present only when a certain level of negativity in campaigns is achieved.

Most studies on the effects of negative campaigning use experiments, in which participants are exposed to one or more negative ads, or individual surveys to investigate these effects. However, the effects may very well be due to a general negative feeling of the public caused by the total amount of negativity in a whole campaign. People are influenced by a general high level of negativity. This study looks at the aggregated level of negativity and its possible effects on the aggregate level of *actual voter turnout*, *political efficacy (internal and external)*, and *political cynicism* over time. The data in this study, however, does not allow one to make any direct causal claims regarding the relation between the total amount of negative campaigning and its effects on the political system, because this study does not take into account other factors that might have effects on the three depended variables. This study will, however, descriptively state

assumptions about the relationships and assess general trends when looking at the fluctuation (long term and short term) of the total level of negativity in campaigns over time and the fluctuation (long term and short term) of the three variables over time.

Research question 3: Will the fluctuation of the *total level of negativity in campaigns* over time go hand in hand with the fluctuation of general *voter turnout*, *political cynicism* and *internal and external political efficacy*?

## **6. Research methods, data & case selection**

To answer the three research questions a longitudinal study has been conducted. This longitudinal study consists of a quantitative content analysis of statements made by politicians or parties during election campaigns as reported in newspaper articles. The total level of negativity in campaigns as well as the focus of the negativity in multiple points in time was derived from the content analysis. Existing data was used to measure the general aggregated voter turnout, political efficacy and political cynicism for each election separately.

The analysis focuses on campaigns from all participating parties for Dutch parliamentary elections. These elections are the largest and most important elections in the Netherlands. Political parties spend most of their time and money on campaigning for parliamentary elections. For the other Dutch elections (the senate elections, the elections

of provincial executives, the municipal elections, the European elections, and the election of the dike boards) less campaigning is being conducted (Elzinga & Voerman, 2002: 2).

The analysis starts from the campaign of the 1971 Dutch parliamentary election, and covers a total of thirteen election campaigns (each parliamentary election campaign after 1970 until now). The election of 1971 was the first one in which citizens were not obligated by law to vote. Non-compulsorily voting is necessary because this study also looks at the effect of negative campaigning on the actual voter turnout in an election. There also was a more practical reason to start the analysis from the 1971 election onwards; Dutch newspapers published since 1971 onwards were archived and available.

There are different ways to measure the tone of campaigns that have been used in studies about negative campaigning; such as measuring media coverage, political advertisement, or citizens' perception (Ridout & Franz, 2008). A proxy measure of negativity is chosen in this study. Statements made by political parties or politicians during a campaign which have been mentioned or quoted in national newspaper articles covering the campaign, were analyzed to determine the level of negativity in a campaign (others that use this proxy measure: e.g., Kahn & Kenny, 1999; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Buell & Sigelman, 2008).

There are several reasons for using a newspaper-based assessment of campaign tone. The aim of this study is to state something about the level of negativity and its possible consequences for the political system. Few people actually perceive the campaign directly. Most hear or read about it in the (news) media. The campaign that is perceived by the public is different from the real campaign launched by the different parties (Popkin, 1991). The way in which it is reported in the media is very often how

citizens actually perceive and experience the campaign (Ridout & Franz, 2008). The tone people perceive of the campaign is what is important in this study and therefore is chosen to analyze newspaper coverage. Analysis of television news would also have satisfied the requirement of 'perceived tone of the campaign by the public' but are not available for the Netherlands over a longer period of time; Dutch newspapers on the other hand are. Newspapers give a very comprehensive view of a campaign (Ridout & Franz, 2008). Instead of just analyzing one way of the various ways parties campaign, for example the analysis of debates, newspapers cover many different campaign activities (Walter & Vliegthart, 2010). Ridout & Franz (2008) studied different measures of campaign tone and concluded that all measures (either derived from analysis of media coverage, political advertisement or citizens' perception) correlate with each other. The tone of newspaper coverage about campaigns is a good reflection of the campaign tone itself (Ridout & Franz, 2008).

There are, of course, also disadvantages to analyzing statements in newspaper articles to measure the level of negativity in campaigns, which are taken into account. There is a tendency among reporters to emphasize negativity (Ridout & Franz, 2008). Especially when in the 1990's the *media logic* made its appearance in the Netherlands, in which the media not only encourage the use of negative campaigning by politicians and political parties, but are also more prone to cover negative appeals. Reporters are more prone to cover negative statements than positive ones, because negative campaigning sells better than positive campaigning does. Negativity is claimed to be more newsworthy than positive statements (West, 2005: 69). However the definition of newsworthiness journalists use is not consistent and, in almost all cases, journalists make a decision of

newsworthiness based on different values (Buell & Sigelman, 2008). It is impossible to determine which campaign statements of political parties or politicians are not published by the media (and are therefore left out of the analysis) and whether these missing statements will have had a systematic effect on this analysis. Moreover, the *media logic* in which the conflict criterion is of high importance for the journalists' decision to cover an issue or not, is a phenomenon that is more obvious in the television landscape (Koole, 2006). Newspapers are known to be more objective and still have the feeling of responsibility to bring qualitative and objective news to their readers.

The unit of analysis from which the campaign tone is derived is any statement, or appeal, made by a politician or political party presented in a newspaper article. A statement, or an appeal, is an explicit expression or claim by a politician or political party which states why a voter should vote for a certain party or not (Geer, 2006, see also Walter, 2009). Only statements made by politicians or political parties are taken into account. The analysis does not include statements made by the writer of the article or any other actors in the article. Appeals made by interest groups such as labor unions are also excluded from the analysis because negative campaigning is conceptualized as a strategy which only parties or politicians may or may not use to derive votes.

Statements in articles covering the campaign in *De Telegraaf* were analyzed. *De Telegraaf* is the daily newspaper with the largest circulation in the Netherlands. The analysis was conducted for articles that were published in the four weeks prior to the election day. This time span is most logical since parties tend to start campaigning one month prior to election day in the Netherland (van Praag, 2005; see also Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010).

Articles in the Telegraaf were available online via the Electronic Database LexisNexis for the campaigns of 2002 and onwards. The search engine LexisNexis was used to select the articles that covered the campaign by searching for the words 'campaign' or 'election' in the article. To aim at statements or appeals from parties or politicians in the articles, at least one of the names of the, in that campaign participating, political parties should also be mentioned in the article (e.g., Walter & Vliegthart, 2010; Tue Pedersen, 2011).

For the election years before the election of 2002, the newspaper archive in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) in The Hague was used. The coder scanned all Telegraaf editions that were published four weeks before every election day since 1971 and selected the articles that covered the campaign and coded the statements in those articles. Articles that covered the campaign but did not contain any statements made by politicians or political parties were discarded.

On average, eighty articles about the campaign per election year were published in De Telegraaf. Each article covering the campaign contained an average of approximately three statements made by politicians or political parties. On average approximately 230 statements were coded per election year. De Telegraaf contained about ten statements each day. The coverage of the elections in De Telegraaf rose steadily as election day came nearer. A total of 2986 statements, originating from 1044 articles, were coded.

## **7. Operationalization and measurements**

Negative campaigning is defined as ‘negative references of political parties or politicians directed at other politicians, political parties, groups of parties, or the coalition’, while positive campaigning is defined as ‘any other form of campaign communication by politicians or political parties’ (this definition has also been used by: Geer, 2006; Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008; Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010; Tue Pedersen, 2011). For example, in an appeal (an explicit expression or claim from a politician or political party in which is put forward why a voter should vote for a certain party or not) politician X is criticizing the environmental policies of party Y and is therefore campaigning negatively, while politician Z is presenting his or her own policy and therefore is campaigning positive. Using this clear definition, statements or appeals made by politicians or political parties in articles in De Telegraaf were coded as (1) ‘statement of a politician or a political party in the article is positive (references to a party or politician praising him/herself, i.e. positive campaigning)’, (2) ‘statement of a politician or a political party in the article is negative (references to a party or politician criticizing an opponent party, politician, group of parties, or the coalition, i.e. negative campaigning)’, or (3) ‘statement of a politician or a political party is both negative and positive (statement in which a party or politician criticizes another party and in which the own party is praised)’.

When a member of party A criticizes another member of party A, this is not an appeal because it does not hold an argument concerning why a voter should vote for a certain party or not and is thus not taken into account. When party A states something positive about party B, however, this is seen as a positive statement because (for

whatever reason) a party positively puts forward why a voter should vote for a certain party. However, such examples were not encountered during the content analysis.

Each campaign was attributed a number varying from 0 to 100 percent. When a campaign was attributed a number of a 0 percent, it would mean that in that campaign 0 percent of the total amount of statements or appeals made by politicians or political parties in articles covering the campaign in the month prior to the election in De Telegraaf was coded as (2) (negative). When a campaign was attributed 100 percent, it would mean that all statements in the coverage of the campaign in De Telegraaf were coded as (2) (negative). Each of the thirteen campaigns was attributed a number varying between 0 percent (the campaign had no negativity) to 100 percent (the campaign was exclusively negative) to address the level of negativity in each campaign. The tone of the campaign is a number between 0 and 100 percent. The higher the number, the more negative the tone of the campaign<sup>1</sup>.

The statements made by politicians or political parties in the article, either coded as positive or negative, were then coded as (1) 'is focusing on issue (statement about specific policies like taxation, environment, or immigration)', (2) 'is focusing on value (statement about broad theme such as hope and change)', (3) 'is focusing on character trait (statement about a party's or politicians characteristics)' (coding based on: Geer, 2006; Walter, 2009; Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010). A fourth category (4) (else) covers statements that cannot be classified as any of the three above mentioned categories.

The focus of the campaign tone is derived per election year as percentages of all negative appeals in that election year: X percent of the total amount of negative appeals

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<sup>1</sup> Mixed appeals (28 in total) were not categorized as negative appeals, so were not encountered in the percentage number that represents the level of negativity in an election campaign.

of election year X covered in the analysis focus on (1) issue, X percent on (2) value, X percent on (3) character trait, and X percent of all negative appeals in that election year focus on (4) else. This has also been done for appeals or statements coded as ‘positive’. This method makes it possible to see whether the focus of the appeals differs between positive and negative campaigning and whether the focus of positive and negative campaigning has changed over time.

Then we look at the other variables in this study. Voter turnout data for the Dutch parliamentary elections from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) was used to measure *voter turnout*. The merged NKO (The Dutch Parliamentary Elections Studies) panel survey dataset 1971-2006 was used to measure the variables *political cynicism* and *political efficacy* (internal and external). The NKO measured these variables after the elections, so after the election campaign, of a given election year. This makes it possible to look at possible consequences of the level of negativity in a campaign on the depended variables. Participant in the NKO were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements ‘Although they know better, politicians promise more than they can deliver.’, ‘Ministers and state secretaries are primarily concerned about their personal interests.’, and ‘One is more likely to become a member of parliament because of one’s political friends than because of one’s abilities’, to measure political cynicism. Political efficacy (internal and external) was measured using participants extent of agreement on statements like ‘Members of parliament do not care about the opinions of people like me.’, ‘People like me have absolutely no influence on governmental policy.’, and ‘I am well qualified to play an active role in politics’.

The data of the NKO panel survey of 2010 was added to this dataset. For every election year the sample mean of the internal political efficacy scores, the external political efficacy score and the mean of the political cynicisms scores was calculated and used in the analysis. Questions related to political cynicism have been asked in the NKO-surveys since 1977 and were not asked for the 1982 election. Questions covering internal political efficacy have been asked since the 1994 election. These missing years do not matter because enough years are left to detect any resemblance in fluctuations. The external political efficacy score was rescaled because there was one question used to calculate the external political efficacy score with, not asked in the NKO of 2010. See Appendix 4 for more information about the questions asked in the NKO and the rescaling. When analyzing whether the fluctuation of the level of negativity and the fluctuations of the four variables resemble a distinction is made between long term effects and short term fluctuations of the variables.

## **8. Results**

### **8.1 The level of negativity**

As has been stated before, many people assume that the level of negativity used by politicians or political parties in election campaigns is on the rise in the Netherlands. However, two competing hypotheses have been derived. One hypothesis states that the level of negativity is indeed on the rise and the other hypothesis states that the level of

negativity has remained stable over time. So, is there a rise in the level of negativity in Dutch election campaigns? What does the content analysis tell us?

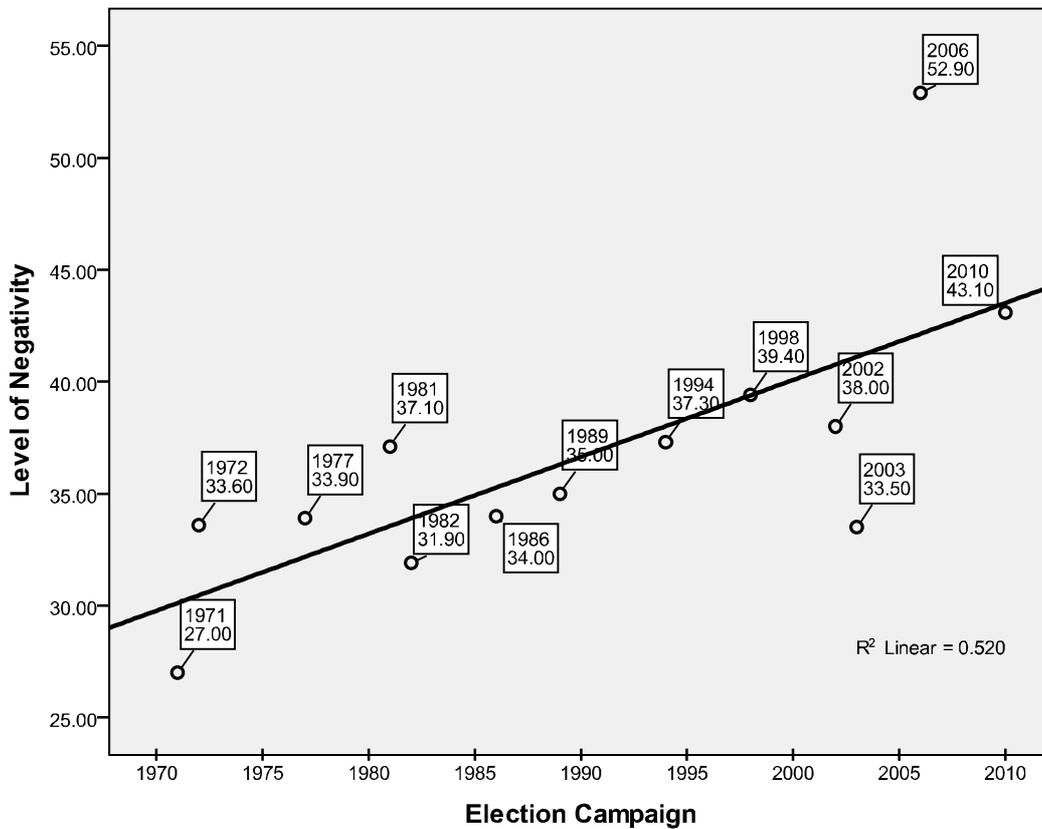
**Table 1: Tone of Statements**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<b>Cumulative Percentages</b>
Positive Statements	1858	62.2	62.2
Negative Statements	1100	36.8	99.1
Mixed Statements	28	0.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	2986	100.0	

In total, 2986 statements made by politicians or political parties covered in De Telegraaf were coded. As presented in table 1, 1858 statements, 62.2 percent of the total number of statements, were positive and 1100, 36.8 percent of the total number of statements, were coded as negative.

Is a rise in the level of negativity detectable in the Netherland? Figure 1 implies that it is. There is an apparent rise in the relative number of negative statements made by Dutch politicians and political parties in parliamentary election campaigns. A regression analysis supports this conclusion ( $R = .728$ ). A linear trend can be drawn through the levels of negativity in Dutch election campaigns from 1971 till 2010.

**Figure 1: Level of Negativity in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns 1971-2010**



The conventional perception that negativity in election campaigns is not just an American phenomenon but something that is also on the rise in the Netherlands seems, according to these results, to be true. The first hypothesis, *The level of negativity in election campaigns in the Netherlands has increased over time (a trend will be detectable)* (H1), is supported and the second hypothesis, *The level of negativity in election campaigns in the Netherlands has not increased over time (a trend will not be detectable)* (H2) is not. When leaving out the relative low 1971 election campaign ( $R = .654$ ), one can clearly see that no change occurred in the 70's and 80's, and that the trend started from the 1990's onwards.

The scatter around the trend, however, increases over time. Two specific cases need some more examination to see if the trend is valid. In 2003, the level of negativity is very low. Just 33.50 percent of the total number of statements were negative. This is just as low as the level of negativity was in the 1982 election campaign. It looks as though the election campaign in 2003 was performed twenty years earlier. When looking at the 2003 campaign, it seems like a rise in the level of negativity did not occur at all. The level of negativity of the 2006 election campaigns, on the other hand, was very high: 52.90 percent. It was the first (and only) time that negative campaigning even suppressed positive campaigning. The high level of negativity in the 2006 election campaigns might be decisive why the trend of a rising level of negativity is detectable during time and, when not justified, might influence the rising trend illegitimately. When leaving out the two outliers (election years 2003 and 2006) the slope of the trend increases ( $R = .842$ ). Can these two extreme levels of negativity be explained?

#### *8.1.1 The 2003 parliamentary election campaign*

A few different contextual factors might explain why the level of negativity in 2003 was relatively low. Firstly and probably most importantly, is the influence of the assassination of Pim Fortuyn during the 2002 national election campaign on the Dutch election campaign of 2003. Because 2002 was such a dramatic year, the election campaign of the parliamentary elections in 2003 was more serene and less negative. Just before the parliamentary elections in 2002, the political leader of the right-wing political party Lijst

Pim Fortuyn (LPF) was assassinated, a dramatic event that shocked everyone, especially politicians. Fortuyn provoked controversy with his views on multiculturalism, immigration and the Islam in the Netherlands. The parties in the political establishment, in the eyes of many, had used too much negative campaigning against Fortuyn and Dutch journalists and politicians, the leftist politicians especially, were blamed for '*demonizing*' Fortuyn (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004).

Besides accusations made by many regarding politics in general, the Dutch lawyers Spong and Hammerstein, in name of the LPF board, pressed charges against a few politicians for incitement to hatred against Fortuyn (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004). Charges were pressed among others against Tom de Graaf from the Democrats '66 (D66), Bas Eenhorn of the Liberal Party (VVD), Marcel van Dam of the Labour Party (PvdA), and Rob Oudkerk also of the Labour Party (PvdA). The charges were dismissed, even in higher appeal, but the politicians received a warning about their negative tone. The book that Spong and Hammerstein presented later that year, titled '*Vervolg ze tot hel, De haat-zaai aangifte van Fortuyn*', clarified that Fortuyn himself also wanted to press charges against Paul Rosenmöller of the Green Left Party (GroenLinks), Wim Kok of the Labour Party (PvdA) and especially against Ad Melkert also of the Labour Party (PvdA) (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004). The three, according to Fortuyn, had repeatedly compared him to right extremists populists such as French politician Le Pen and during the 2002 campaign tried to *demonize* him with their negative campaigns aimed at him.

Both left-wing and right-wing parties and politicians were shocked by the consequences of too much negativity and were shocked by the official and unofficial accusations made against them. After the dramatic event in 2002, the public was shocked

by the extreme hardening of Dutch politics and its campaigns. Negative campaigning was seen as malicious. Political parties found that negative campaigning would, therefore, not be beneficial (anymore). Not going negative, or not going too negative, after the dramatic event in 2002, was, besides being regarded by the political parties as more beneficial also regarded as suited considering the circumstances.

The relatively low level of negativity in the 2003 short parliamentary election campaign after the fall of Cabinet Balkenende<sup>1</sup> can also be attributed to the high level of parties' self-criticism in the 2003 election campaigns. The LPF built its 2003 campaign around the motto: 'We have made mistakes in the past coalition, but are willing to change. Give us another chance.' (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004). The Labour Party (PvdA) was also self-critical. It geared its campaign towards restoring the trust in the party (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2003). This self-criticism of several parties took the wind out of the sails for other parties to go negative on them.

One theme was central for all parties in the 2003 parliamentary election campaign: the economy. The Centraal Planbureau (CPB), just before the campaign started, presented poor results on the social-economic and financial policy of the Netherlands (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004). All parties agreed on the fact that cuts ought to be made. The parties shared a common feeling of responsibility to restore the Dutch economy, as they do know in 2012. They only disagreed about smaller issues on how to restore the economy. Hence negativity was discouraged.

Blaming the incumbents (note that the Cabinet had already fallen) for the bad economic situation was difficult because most parties agreed that the failure of the Cabinet Balkenende<sup>1</sup> was due to problems within the LPF (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman,

2004). No party or politician, however, dared to go negative on the LPF and the LPF already criticized themselves.

Besides this, the CPB had no time to consider the proposals of the different participating political parties regarding the cuts (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004). No negative appeals from parties against other parties on this very important matter could be made, because all information was speculative and negative attacks could not be substantiated. This also discouraged the use of negativity by political parties and politicians in the 2003 election campaign.

That the 2003 election campaign was relatively less negative and does not seem to follow the trend can be explained well.

### *8.1.2 The 2006 parliamentary election campaign*

The 2006 parliamentary election campaign was almost twenty percentage points more negative than the previous election campaign of 2003. Negativity even outran positive campaigning in this campaign year. The 2006 election campaign has been known for its sharpness (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008) and this has also become clear from the content analysis. Different factors in the 2006 parliamentary election campaign can explain why the measured level of negativity was relatively high, making the campaign resemble an American campaign.

First of all, during the 2006 election campaign, there was a large battle between the two major parties running for office: the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Labour

Party (PvdA). The two parties were very close to each other in the polls and both had, up until late in the election campaign, a chance to become the largest party (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008). In a close race negativity is used more often (Peterson & Djupe, 2005). A lot is at stake in a close race and the parties will try to do everything to gain those last few votes they need to become the largest party (Peterson & Djupe, 2005). In the first debate between party leaders on NOS Radio 1, held in the first days of the campaign, Balkenende, the party leader of the Christian Democrats, accused Bos, party leader of the Labour Party, of switching and lying (*'U draait en u bent niet eerlijk'*). Member of Parliament Verhagen (Christian Democrats) used the slogan: 'You will regret voting for Bos' (*'Met Bos bent u de klos'*). Balkenende in a debate also stated to be pleased that Bos finally revealed his true colours, but that they were the wrong ones (*'Het is goed dat Bos nu eindelijk eens kleur bekent, het is alleen wel de verkeerde kleur'*). Bos, in turn, let the voters know that he would refuse to serve in a coalition with the Christian Democrats. Bos complained about the negativity and stated that the Christian Democrats, as well as the Liberal Party (VVD), tried to discredit him as a person (*'Het CDA en de VVD proberen mij als persoon kapot te maken'*). Negativity was used often by the two large parties as a strategy to win a very close race.

Because the focus of the campaign and its coverage was almost exclusively on the battle between the Christian Democrats and the Labour Party, other parties tried hard to gain attention. The Liberal Party and other parties used much negativity in their campaigns as a strategy to gain attention (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008). Political parties and their campaign strategists know that negativity sells better to the public, and that the media are therefore more prone to publish negativity (West, 2005: 69).

Thirdly, the 2006 election campaign is considered to be highly personalized (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2008). The whole campaign and its media coverage were centred on the battle between Bos (the leader of the Labour Party) and Balkenende (the leader of the Christian Democratic Appeal) instead of a battle between the two parties they represented. For example, the Christian Democrats used Balkenende's personality as a selling point in their campaign (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008). Balkenende was the centre of the CDA campaign. There even were T-shirts with Balkenende's face on it, and life-size cardboard figures of him were distributed on a large scale. In 2003, Balkenende refused to participate in non-political programs like cooking shows (Hippe, Lucardie & Voerman, 2004), but in 2006, strikingly, he co-hosted the gossip program RTL Boulevard and participated in many game shows and entertainment shows (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008). Balkenende even had more than 3000 friends on the Dutch social network *Hyves*. Negative attacks are more effective when performed on individuals instead of on parties, and are therefore performed more on persons than on parties (Hansen & Tue Pedersen, 2008). The high level of personalization, therefore, encouraged the use of negativity in the 2006 parliamentary election campaign.

The 2006 election campaign was characterized by internal critique and internal disagreement within different parties (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008). Internal disagreement and critique within a party makes it an easy target for other parties. The Liberal Party was divided between supporters of party leader Rutte and supporters of Verdonk, who had just lost the very close party leader election. Rutte had won with 51 percent, but Verdonk gained 47 percent of the votes. Almost half of the party members of the Labour Party (VVD) were dissatisfied with Rutte, and he received much criticism from (prominent)

party members. According to them, Rutte was not harsh enough and did not adequately represent liberal values. Similarly, the Labour Party (PvdA) leader Bos became more vulnerable to criticism by other parties due to criticism he received from his own party (Lucardie *et al.*, 2008). According to prominent party members of the Labour Party, like Marcel van Dam, Bram Peper, and Willem Vermeend, their party was not being forthright with the public about certain policies and about their preferred coalition. Bos was blamed for the same issues by other parties. Opposing parties only had to echo these internal critiques, making negativity towards internally divided parties very easy.

The high level of negativity in the 2006 election campaign can also be explained by contextual factors.

### *8.1.3 Conclusion*

Dutch campaign culture has become more negative during time. The contextual factors mentioned above can explain the two extreme levels of negativity in the parliamentary election campaigns of 2003 and 2006. A clear rise in the amount of negativity used in Dutch election campaigns, since the 1990's, is detectable. Hypothesis 1 is supported and Hypothesis 2 is not. The Dutch political culture of mutual respect and consensus and the multiparty system does not refrain political parties from using negativity to a greater extent. Positive campaigning, however, is (except for the 2006 election campaign, where negative campaigning suppressed positive campaigning) still the most preferred method of parties to distinguish themselves.

## 8.2 Issue, value or character trait?

Research Question 2 investigate whether the negativity used by the Dutch politicians and political parties is mostly focused on *character traits*, *issues* or *values*. Negative campaigning focusing on character traits is seen as more negative than negative campaigning which focuses on content (issues and values).

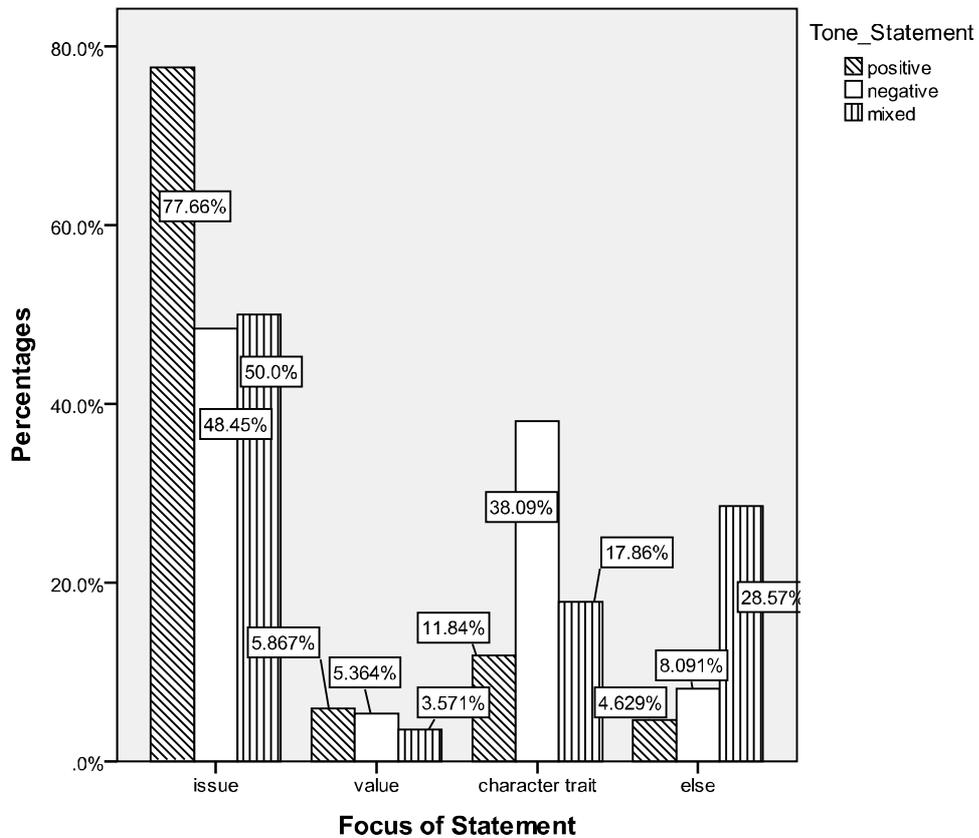
When looking at the statements, both negative and positive ones, we see that of the 2986 statements coded, 1990 statements (66.6 percent, a large majority) addresses an issue. 169 statements (5.7 percent) focuses on values (see Table 2). Character traits are the focus of only 644 statements, 21.6 percent of the total number of campaign statements made by politicians and political parties from 1971 through 2010 covered in De Telegraaf.

**Table 2: Focus of Statements**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Issue	1990	66.6	66.6
Value	169	5.7	72.3
Character Trait	644	21.6	93.9
Else	183	6.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	2986	100.0	

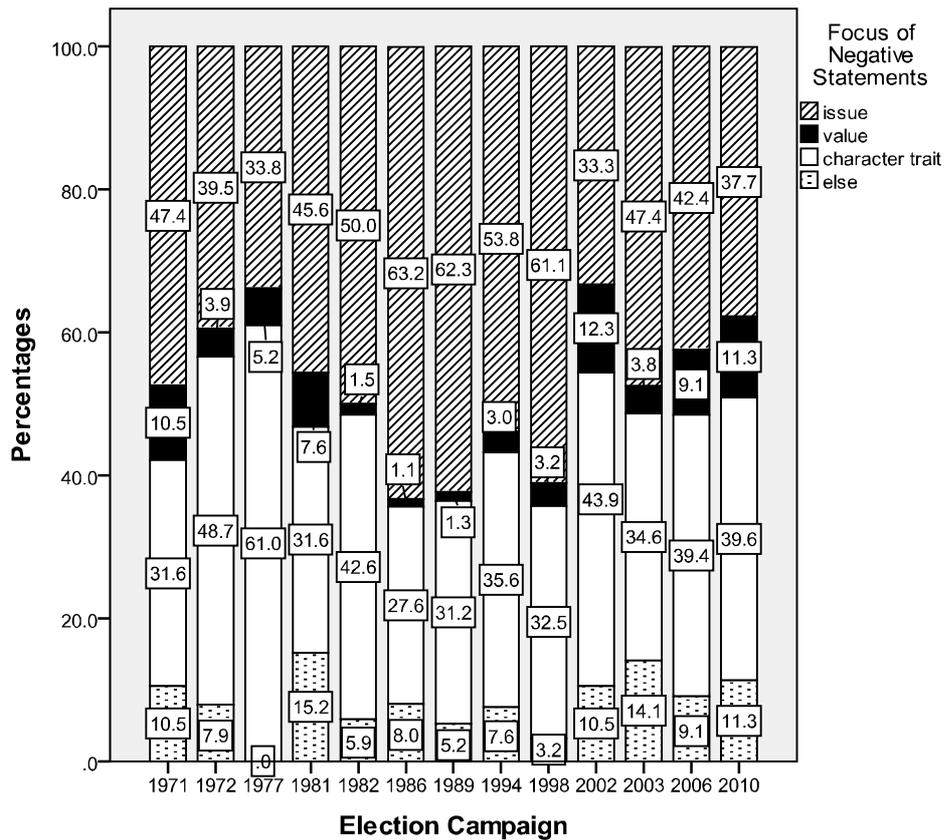
Figure 2 shows the focus of both the 1858 positive and the 1100 negative statements separately. As this figure shows, issues are the main focus of both positive and negative appeals. A majority of the statements focuses on issues. Namely, 77.66 percent of the positive appeals focus on issues, and 48.45 percent of the negative statements focuses on issues. Although negative statements focus more on issues than on character traits (respectively 48.45 and 38.09 percent), negative campaigning in general focuses more than three times as much on character traits than does positive campaigning (respectively 38.09 and 11.84 percent).

**Figure 2: Focus of negative and positive statements in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns 1971-2010**



Has the focus of negative statements differed over time? When we look at Figure 3, we see that statements focusing on content (issue and value) in all represented election campaigns outnumber statements focusing on character traits. Striking is the large percentage in 1977. In this election campaign 61 percent of the statements focused on character traits and the focus on character traits outnumbered the focus on values and issues.

**Figure 3: Focus of Negative Statements in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns from 1971-2010**



Geer (2006: 63-65) hypothesized that negative campaigning would increasingly focus on character traits, making negative attacks seem more harsh. As figure 3 shows, the focus of negative appeals made by politicians and political parties in election campaigns from 1971 through 2010, differed over time, but there is no trend in the amount of character trait appeals over time. This also becomes obvious when running a regression analysis to see whether time (election year) and the amount of focus on character traits are related (R is not significant). There is no increase in the number of character trait attacks. The same is concluded by Geer (2006: 68), Benoit (1999: 286), Klotz (1998) and Van Heerde-Hudson (2011).

Although there is a clear increase in the use of negativity, as shows from the content analysis of statements made by politicians and political parties, the negative statements, except the 1977 election campaign, have consistently focused more on content (issues and values) than on character traits, and the number of statements focusing on character traits has not increased over time. This makes the increase seem less bad and the consequences of a rising level of negativity for the democratic process might therefore be smaller. When looking at the possible consequences of negative campaigning on the democratic process we continue to look at the total amount of negativity because there is no significant change in the focus of the negativity.

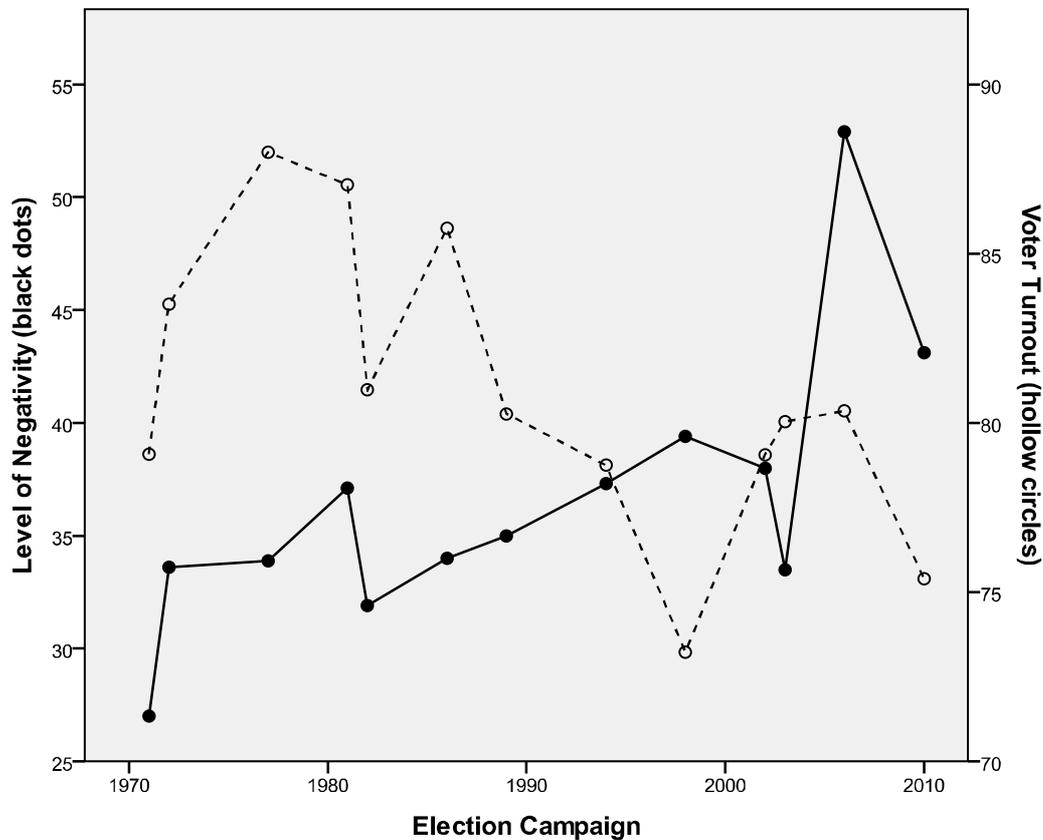
### **8.3 The consequences of negativity for the democratic process**

Did the fluctuating levels of the total level of negativity in Dutch election campaigns during time go hand in hand with the fluctuations in general voter turnout, political cynicism and internal and external political efficacy in the Netherlands? To mention it again, because the data does not allow it, in this study no causal claims regarding the relation between the total amount of negative campaigning and its effects on the political system will be made. Because this study does not take into account any other factors that might have effects on the three dependent variables, this would be impossible to do. We look at the long term effects and the short term fluctuations of the three variables in election years and compare those to the long term effects and short term fluctuation of the total level of negativity in election campaigns over time.

#### *8.3.1 Voter turnout*

The demobilization hypothesis, explained in an earlier section of this thesis, hypothesizes that when the level of negativity is higher, voter turnout is expected to be lower. Does this show from the fluctuations of both variables in the Netherlands from 1971 through 2010?

**Figure 4: Level of Negativity and Voter Turnout in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns 1971-2010**



In general, voter turnout<sup>2</sup> decreased from 1971 through 2010 ( $R = -.58$ ), see figure 4. This decrease in voter turnout is in accordance with the demobilization hypothesis which states that the voter turnout decreases when the level of negativity increases. The level of negativity increased during the same period ( $R = .728$ ), see also figure 4.

<sup>2</sup> The variance in voter turnout from 1971 until 2010 is relatively small. The highest voter turnout was in 1977, 88 percent of the eligible voters cast a ballot in that election. The lowest voter turnout was in 1998. In the parliamentary election of 1998 only 73 percent of the eligible voters went to the polls on Election Day. This makes the largest difference 15 percentage points. Regarding a hundred point scale, this is not much.

However, looking at specific cases to see whether the fluctuation between voter turnout and the level of negativity in campaigns corresponds leads to another conclusion. The highest level of negativity was found in 2006. In that year the level of negativity was 53 percent. According to the US-based demobilization hypothesis, one would expect that voter turnout in 2006 was very low, maybe even the lowest in the covered time period. However, the voter turnout in the 2006 parliamentary election was 80 percent, which was relatively high. Especially considering the following election year 2010 in which the turnout was 75 percent, the voter turnout in 2006 was surprisingly high. The lowest turnout, which one would expect to be in 2006, was actually in 1998 (73 percent). The level of negativity in 1998 was higher than in the surrounding years, and the voter turnout was lower in 1998 than in the years before and after. However, the level of negativity in 1998, 39 percent, was in accordance with the rising trend but not exceptionally high. Strikingly, however, was the low level of voter turnout in 1998. The low level of negativity of 34 percent in 2003 is not reflected in the percentage of voter turnout either. One would expect the voter turnout in 2003 not to be in accordance with the decreasing trend in turnout but to be increasing because the negativity was low. The voter turnout in 2003 increases in comparison to the year before, from 79 percent in 2002 to 80 percent in 2003. However, the small increase is not comparable to the large decrease in the level of negativity in 2003. One would expect the highest voter turnout, in accordance with the presumption that when negativity is low, the voter turnout is higher, to occur in 2003. However, the highest voter turnout was in 1977 and 1981 (respectively 88 and 87 percent). The levels of negativity in 1977 and 1981 were relatively low (respectively 34 and 37 percent). Also in 1986 the voter turnout was high (86 percent) and the level of

negativity relatively low (34 percent). We now look at the increased negativity level of the 2003 election campaign through the 2006 election campaign (from 34 percent to 53 percent). One would expect, in accordance with the demobilization presumption, to see the largest drop in voter turnout between these years. However this is not the case. From 2003 to 2006 voter turnout did not drop at all, but actually increased a little (from 80.04 to 80.35 percent). Also when looking at the largest decrease in voter turnout, the demobilization presumption should perhaps be questioned. From 1981 to 1982 voter turnout dropped from 87 percent to 81 percent. One would expect that the level of negativity from 1981 till 1982 would have greatly increased, explaining the large drop in voter turnout. However, the level of negativity dropped from 79 to 73 percent from 1981 and 1982. The largest decrease in the level of negativity was from 2006 to 2010. The level of negativity dropped from 53 to 43 percent. The voter turnout, not in accordance with the demobilization presumption dropped as well. The voter turnout decreased substantially from 80 percent in 2006 to 75 percent in 2010.

This described non-resemblance of the short term fluctuations in the two variables is supported by a correlation analysis. A bivariate correlation analysis of the changes in the scores from election to election between the two variables is done to see whether the changes in the two series look alike. The short term fluctuations in the level of negativity are not related to the short term fluctuations in the voter turnout ( $R$  is not significant).

To summarize, when looking only at the general trends of both variables, the fluctuation of voter turnout and the level of negativity corresponds. The level of negativity used in campaigns increased over time, while the voter turnout decreased over the same period. However, when looking at short term changes one can conclude that the

fluctuations of the two variables do not correspond significantly. Other factors have clearly had a big influence on voter turnout. The influence of negativity on voter turnout, based on this descriptive analysis, seems small.

### 8.3.2 *Political cynicism*

Political cynicism, meaning the public's lack of faith or trust in the government, in politicians, and/or the political system as a whole, is claimed to increase when the level of negativity increases and vice versa. Can we detect evidence in the fluctuations of the two variables that this hypothesis specific to American politics holds true in the Netherlands?

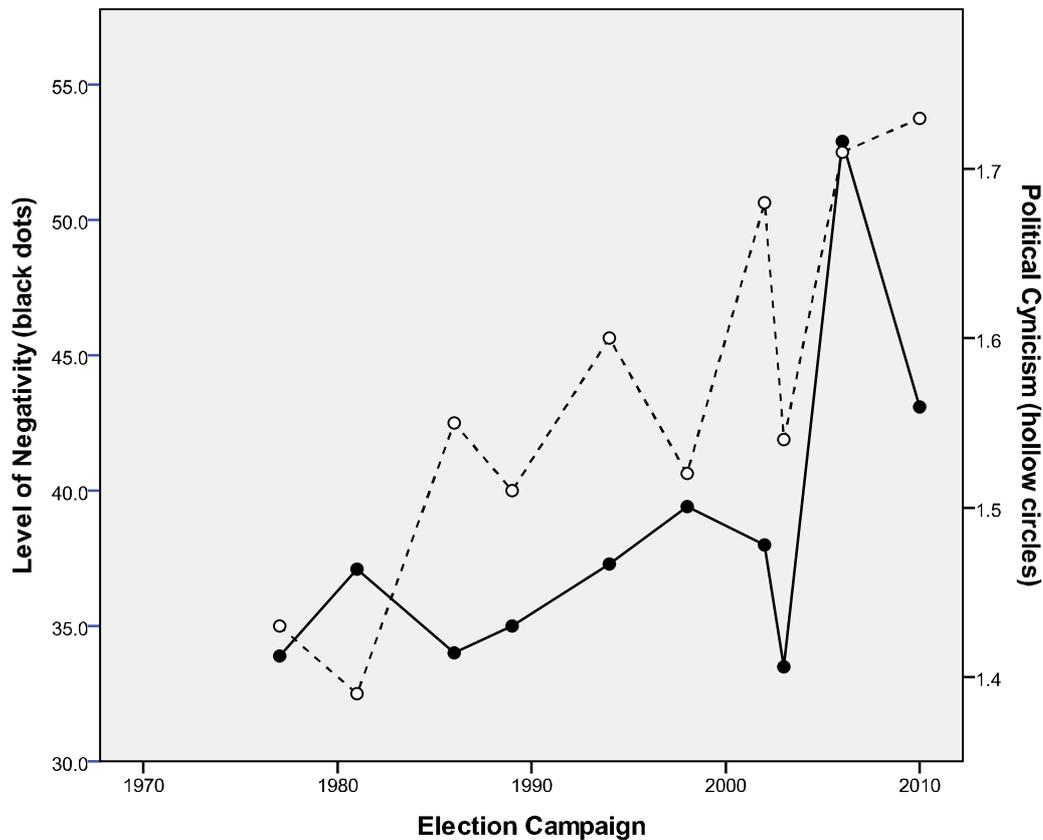
First is looked at the general trends in the level of negativity and the public's political cynicism<sup>3</sup> (see figure 5). Just as with voter turnout, when looking only at the general trends one might assume that the US-based assumption also holds in the Netherlands. The level of negativity used in campaign has increased from 1977 till 2010 ( $R = .630$ ), as did the public's political cynicism ( $R = .855$ ).

We look at striking cases in both variables to see if this preliminary conclusion holds. The highest level of negativity occurred in the 2006 parliamentary election campaign (53 percent). The public's political cynicism in that year also peaked (1.71). However, in the election year after 2006 (2010) the political cynicism score increased a

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<sup>3</sup> The variance in political cynicism might from the figure look large, but is in fact relatively small. Keeping in mind that this is a four point scale, the largest difference of .34, is not very large. The lowest score of political cynicism was measured in 1981 (1.39) and the highest in 2010 (1.73).

**Figure 5: Level of Negativity and Political Cynicism in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns 1977-2010**



*Note: The public's Political Cynicism is measured via the NKO since 1977 and was not measured in 1984.*

little further (to 1.73), but the level of negativity dropped (from 53 to 43 percent). The latter is not in accordance with the US based presumption that when the level of negativity increases, the public's political cynicism also increases. A strikingly low level of negativity was found in 2003 (33 percent). The political cynicism score in 2003 (1.54) was also relatively low in comparison with the years before and after. The largest decrease in political cynicism occurred from 2002 to 2003 (political cynicism decreased from 1.68 to 1.54). The level of negativity also decreased significantly during the same period (from 38 to 33 percent). The fluctuations seem to support the presumption; when

the level of negativity increases, the public's cynicism increases as well. However, the decrease of negativity from 2006 to 2010 and the increase in political cynicism between those years shows one other counterpart. Besides the biggest increase in the public's political cynicism another one can be found between the elections of 1981 and 1986 (from 1.39 to 1.55). One would expect this increase to be due to an increase of the negativity level. However, the negativity in that period decreased from 37 percent in 1981 to 34 percent in 1986. Also from 1998 to 2002 the political cynicism increased large (from 1.52 to 1.68) while the level of negativity decreased (from 39 percent in 1998 to 38 percent in 2002).

That the short term fluctuations of the two variables do not seem to relate also becomes clear when performing a bivariate correlation analysis between the short term changes in each variable ( $R$  is not significant).

When looking at the general trend and at specific cases in the data, the fluctuation (long term and short term) of both variables overlaps, but does so a little. It seems that the level of negativity has an influence on political cynicism but the level of negativity clearly is not the only possible explanatory factor of political cynicism.

### *8.3.3 Internal political efficacy*

The public's internal political efficacy, people's belief that they are able to participate in politics, is presumed to decrease when the public is exposed to a large level of negativity. When the level of negativity in campaigns is relatively small, the public's feeling of

external political efficacy is said to increase. When looking at the fluctuation over time of internal political efficacy and level of negativity in campaigns, is this US-based assumption detectable in the Netherlands?

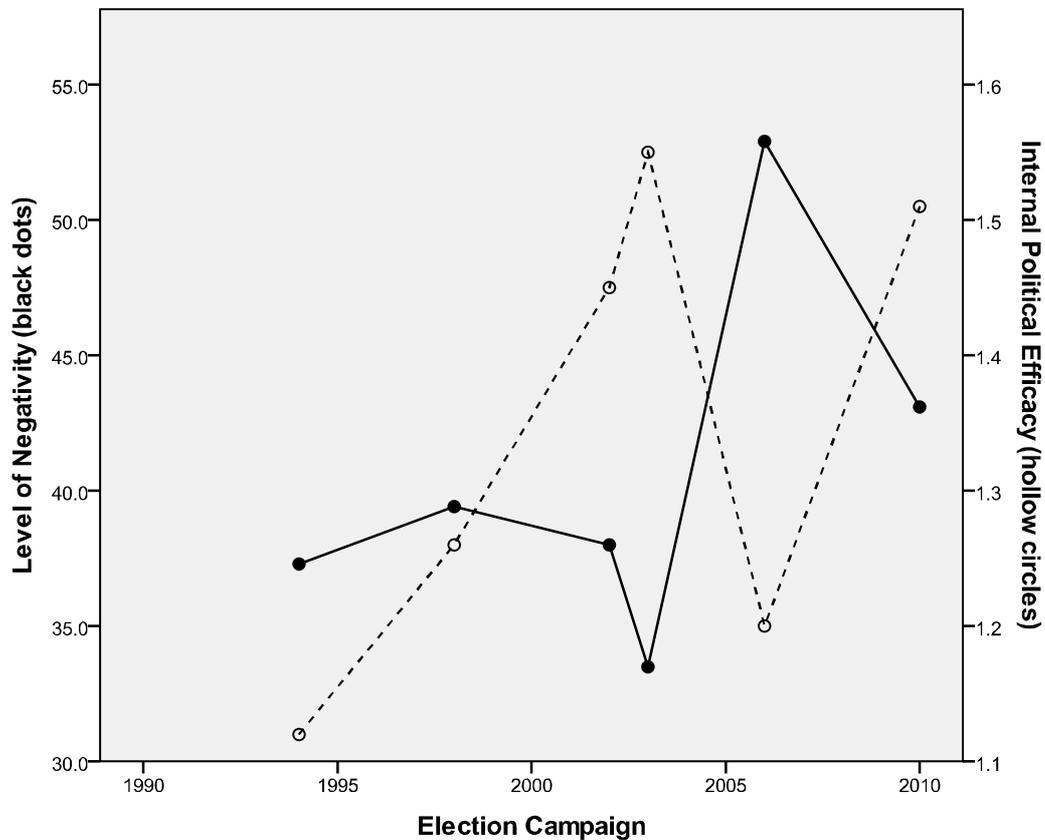
Although the trend in internal political efficacy<sup>4</sup> is not very clear, the public's internal political efficacy has increased in the period from 1994 until 2010 ( $R = .560$ ). The level of negativity has also increased during this period ( $R = .516$ ) (see also figure 6). This is not in agreement with the US-based presumption that when the level of negativity increases over time, the public's internal political efficacy decreases over that period of time.

However, when looking at notable cases of both variables, a very clear correspondence between the short term fluctuations can be detected. A striking case is the large (and only) decrease in internal political efficacy from 2003 to 2006 (from 1.55 to 1.20). This decrease corresponds to the largest increase of the level of negativity which also occurred from 2003 to 2006 (from 34 percent to 53 percent). In 2006, the public's internal political efficacy was relatively low, the second lowest since 1994 in fact, and the level of negativity was highest in 2006. The largest drop in the level of negativity occurred between 2006 and 2010. It dropped from 53 percent in 2006 to 43 percent in 2010. A clear correspondence, since the largest increase of the public's internal political efficacy also occurred between 2006 and 2010. The public's internal political efficacy increased from 1.20 in 2006 to 1.51 in 2010. From 1998 to 2002 and from 2002 to 2003 the level of negativity decreased, which corresponds with the increase of the internal

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<sup>4</sup> The variance in the public's internal political efficacy is relatively large in six measures. The highest political efficacy score was 1.55 in 2003 and the lowest was 1.12 in 1994. A difference of .43 on a four point scale.

**Figure 6: Level of Negativity and Internal Political Efficacy in Dutch Parliamentary Election Campaigns 1994-2010**



*Note: The public's Internal Political Efficacy is measured via the NKO since 1994.*

political efficacy in those periods. The only fluctuation that is not in accordance with the US based presumption (when the level of negativity increases, the public's internal political efficacy decreases) is the 1994-1998 case, in which the public's internal efficacy rises (from 1.12 to 1.26) and so does the level of negativity (from 37 to 39 percent).

A bivariate correlation analysis of the short term changes of the two variables also point out that there is a clear resemblance between the short term fluctuation of the level of negativity and the public's internal political efficacy ( $R = -.957$ ).

The resemblance between the short term fluctuations of the two variables is notable. Although it is not detectable when only looking at general trends, the specific cases of the two variables show that the public's internal political efficacy rises when the level of negativity decreases, however one has to keep in mind the short time period. The assumption that the level of negativity influences the public's internal political efficacy seems to be true for the Netherlands.

#### *8.3.4 External political efficacy*

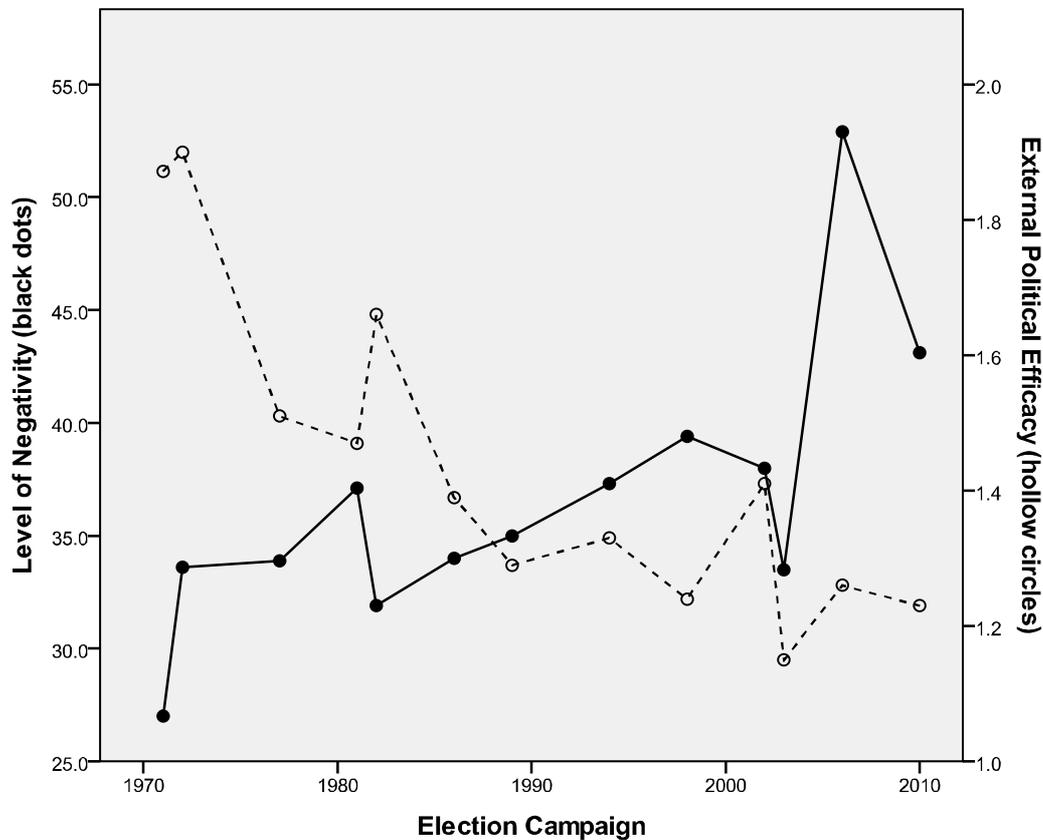
The public's external political efficacy (people's belief that they have an influence on the political process when participating in politics), is presumed to decrease when the public is exposed to a large level of negativity. When the level of negativity in campaigns is relatively smaller, however the public's feeling of external political efficacy is presumed to increase. Is this US-based claim detectable in the Netherlands when looking at the fluctuation of both variables over time?

Over time, the level of negativity that people were exposed to increased from 1971 to 2010 ( $R = .728$ ). The level of external political efficacy<sup>5</sup> decreased over the same period of time ( $R = -.854$ ) (see also figure 6). The US-based assumption that a high level of negativity decreases the public's external political efficacy seems to hold true for the Netherlands.

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<sup>5</sup> The variance in external political efficacy from 1971 to 2010, is high. The highest score was measured in 1972 and valued 1.90. The lowest score was measured in 2003 and valued 1.15. A difference of 0.75 on a four point scale.

**Figure 6: Level of Negativity and External Political Efficacy in Dutch Parliamentary Election campaigns 1971-2010**



However, what do the striking cases in the data show us? The external political efficacy is notably high in 1982 (1.66). In that year, as one can expect from the presumption that when the level of negativity is high, the external political efficacy is low, the level of negativity is relatively low (32 percent). From 1981 to 1982 the public's external political efficacy increased from 1.47 to 1.66. One expects the level of negativity to have decreased during this period, which it did. The level of negativity decreased from 37 percent in 1981 to 32 percent in 1982. One of the largest increases in external political efficacy synchronizes with one of the largest decreases in the level of negativity. However, the second large increase of external political efficacy (the one from 1.24 in

1998 to 1.41 in 2002) does not correspond with one of the largest decreases in negativity. Although negativity relatively decreased much between 1998 and 2002 (from 39 percent to 38 percent) it is not the biggest decrease in the level of negativity by far. The largest decrease in external political efficacy can be found in the 1972-1977 period. The public's external political efficacy dropped from 1.90 to 1.51, a large drop. One would expect that the level of negativity between 1972 and 1977 would have increased significantly. However, the level of negativity actually did not (or just very little) increased (from 33.60 percent to 33.90 percent). The highest level of negativity can be found in 2006 (53 percent). The external political efficacy in that year is 1.26, which is relatively low but definitely not the lowest. The strikingly low level of negativity in 2003 (34 percent) is not reflected in the external political efficacy score also. In 2003, the public's external political efficacy was actually the lowest during the time period (1.15). And also the largest drop in negativity, which occurred from 2006 to 2010 (respectively 53 and 43 percent) is not reflected in the public's external political efficacy. The public's external political efficacy did not increase, as would be expected from the American assumption, but even decreases a little (from 1.26 to 1.23).

That the short term fluctuations within the level of negativity do not relate to the short term fluctuations in the public's external political efficacy also becomes clear from a bivariate correlation analysis of the short term changes between the two variables ( $R$  is not significant).

Clearly, many other factors will have had an influence on the public's external political efficacy. The fluctuation seems to correspond when looking only at the general

trends of the two variables, but when looking closer at specific cases in the data, the fluctuation does not correspond at all.

### *8.3.5 Summary and conclusion*

The level of negativity seems to influence the four democratic variables (voter turnout, political cynicism, and internal and external political efficacy), but it does so on different levels. Between internal political efficacy and the level of negativity, almost all fluctuations correspond, although it was over a shorter time period. Internal political efficacy, as far as the fluctuations over time show, is most likely influenced by a general level of negativity. The fluctuation of the level of negativity corresponds with the public's political cynicism but there are exceptions. Other factors also clearly influenced the public's political cynicism. The fluctuation of voter turnout also corresponds with the fluctuation of negativity although there are also a lot of short term fluctuations that do not resemble. The influence of the level of negativity was limited and other factors clearly had an influence on voter turnout. There is very little correspondence between the fluctuation of the level of negativity and the public's external political efficacy. When looking at the short term fluctuations, one would expect the level of negativity not to be of significant influence on the external political efficacy of the public.

What can be concluded from this descriptive analysis of fluctuations is that the level of negativity might have an influence on some or all of the four depended variables, but does not exclusively. Some effects might be attributed to the level of negativity, we

cannot reject the US-based hypotheses, but other factors besides the level of negativity in a campaign clearly influence voter turnout, political cynicism, and internal and external political efficacy. How strong the influence of negativity on the democratic process is and what other factors are of influence should be explored in further research.

## **9. Discussion**

The aim of this study was to fill the gap in scientific research and to solve the contradiction in the small amount of existing scientific research studying the level of negativity in political campaigns outside the US, in this case, focusing on a multiparty democracy: the Netherlands. It investigates whether negative political campaigning is on the rise outside the US, or whether it is just an American phenomenon.

Three aspects of negative campaigning were examined in this study in which a content analysis of campaign related statements made by politicians and political parties in the Dutch daily newspaper De Telegraaf from 1971 through 2010 was done. Firstly, this study concludes that the level of negativity in political campaigns is on the rise in the Netherlands. The popular assumption that the level of negativity in election campaigns is also on the rise outside the US context seems according to the findings in this study to be correct. The Dutch multi-party system and the culture of mutual respect and consensus could not prevent the political climate in the Netherlands from becoming increasingly hard and more negative from the 1990's onwards. Secondly however, the rise of negativity in the Netherlands can be nuanced because in most cases the negativity is

focused more on relevant content (issues and values) instead of on character traits. There is no increase in the focus of negative statements on character traits during time. Thirdly, this study has looked at whether the concerns raised by journalist, the public and scientists, about the consequences of a increasing level of negative campaigning in election campaigns on the democratic process, need to be taken seriously. This study concludes that negativity is on the rise, but that the level of negativity does not seem to significantly influence the variables which qualify the democratic process. Other factors, besides the general level of negativity in a campaign, clearly matter for the democratic functioning. This is one of the first studies to look at the effect of a general level of negativity in campaigns on the general voter turnout, the public's political cynicism and the public's internal and external political efficacy outside a US context.

The results in this study may very well be applicable to other Western European countries. The Netherlands namely is an unlikely case for negativity to occur, because the Netherlands has a long-standing culture of mutual respect and consensus, and a complex political environment of a multiparty system. In Western European countries lacking such a complex political environment and culture, negativity might be even more likely to occur.

This study and its results have contributed to the relatively young and small field of negative campaigning outside the USA. However, it has its limitations. Firstly this study could not make any causal claims regarding the influence of a rising level of negativity on the democratic process in the Netherlands. From this study it appears as if though negativity can be associated with the four 'democratic process variables', but not much. Other factors clearly matter. More thorough research on this matter is necessary to

support or reject the claim that a rising level of negativity may harm the democratic process, as is often assumed. Following research should incorporate other factors, besides a general level of negativity, not incorporated in this thesis that might have an influence on general voter turnout, political cynicism, and internal and external political efficacy. Those other factors should be controlled for to detect whether and to what extent the level of negativity in election campaign influences the political process.

Secondly this study analyzed statements made by political parties or politicians during a campaign which are mentioned or quoted in national newspaper articles covering the campaign, to determine the level of negativity in a campaign. Although a newspaper-based assessment of tone proves to be a useful proxy measure for campaign tone (Ridout & Franz, 2008) unfortunately this study, due to time constraints, could only incorporate articles covering the campaigns from one newspaper, De Telegraaf. Although it is the Dutch newspaper with the highest circulation, it is also known to focus more on entertainment and soft news than on hard political news. Ideally, this study would have analyzed multiple newspapers, starting with De Volkskrant, the newspaper which has the second highest circulation and the reputation of a more quality newspaper. A reliability test between the statements covered in the different newspapers would have been done to determine whether different newspapers mirror different levels of campaign negativity.

Further research on negative campaigning outside the US context seems necessary because different studies draw different conclusions. The results of this study validate Walter's (2009) conclusion, who also found increasing levels of negative campaigning in the Netherlands from the 2002 election campaign onwards. However, conclusions made by Håkansson (1999), Esaiasson & Håkansson (2002), Bjerling (2007), Van Heerde-

Hudson (2011), and Elemund-Præstekær & Mølgaard Svensson (2011) that negative campaigning is not on the rise in Western European countries and that negative campaigning is an American phenomenon only, are contradicted by the findings in this study. Contextual factors might explain why in certain countries, like the Netherlands, negativity seems to be on the rise, but in others countries not. A comparative study which investigates and compares negativity across different countries might clarify which contextual factors are required in order for negativity to occur and rise.

The contradictions in different conclusions might also be due to the fact that different studies use different methods to measure the level of negativity. Although Ridout and Franz (2008) conclude that all methods used to measure negativity used in political science are correlated, it seems appropriate to investigate the difference in levels of negativity across different communication sources. Walter and Vliegenthart (2010) have already begun to do so and also conclude that the level of negative campaigning is not reflected differently across different communication channels. However, their study was limited to three communication channels (paid publicity as a whole, election debates, and newspaper coverage) over the course of one single election (2006). This could be researched more thoroughly.

If the detected trend holds, we can expect that in the next Dutch parliamentary election campaign of September 12 2012, parties will go dirtier than in the 2010 campaign. However the focus of this negativity will likely be predominantly on content, rather than on politicians' or parties' character traits. Furthermore, this negativity is not expected to reach such a high level that it has significant consequences for the functioning of the Dutch democratic political system. We do not have to be worried.

*Note: When I finished writing my thesis, Annemarie Walter presented her dissertation about negative campaigning. She has done a comparative study on the level of negativity in parliamentary elections between 1981 until 2006 in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. She concludes that there is no rise in the amount of negativity in all three Western democracies and that negative campaigning is an American phenomenon only. Her conclusion about the level of negativity in the Netherlands contradicts my results. She also concludes, in agreement with my results, that the focus on character traits in negative campaigning did not increase over time. I could however not encounter her results in my thesis because her dissertation was published after I finished my thesis.*

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## Appendix 1: Data content analysis

In the content analysis of newspaper coverage of the election campaign in De Telegraaf from 1971 till 2010, 2986 statements from 1044 articles were coded in total. In general that means that each article covering the parliamentary election campaign in De Telegraaf contained 2.86 statements made by politicians or political parties.

**Table 1: De Telegraaf 1971-2010**

Election Year	Number of Articles covering the campaign in De Telegraaf	Number of Statements made by politicians or political parties in the articles covering the campaign in De Telegraaf
1971	85	141
1972	93	226
1977	95	227
1981	91	213
1982	65	213
1986	76	256
1989	72	220
1994	106	354
1998	85	320
2002	58	150
2003	50	233
2006	88	187
2010	80	246

## Appendix 2: Codebook and coding scheme

### 2.1 Codebook

In this study the unit of analysis is any statement made by a politician or political party presented in a newspaper article covering the campaign in De Telegraaf. A statement or appeal is an explicit expression or claim from a politician or political party in which is brought forward why a voter should vote for a certain party or not.

#### 2.1.1 Tone of statement

Statements or appeals made by politicians or parties are coded as:

- (1) appeal or statement of politicians or political parties in the article is positive (references to a party or candidate praising itself; positive campaigning)
- (2) appeal or statement in the article is negative (references criticizing opposing political parties or candidates; negative campaigning)
- (3) appeal or statement in the article is both negative and positive (references of a party in which an other party is criticized and in which the own party is praised)

#### 2.1.2 Content of Statement

Statements or appeals made by politicians or political parties in newspaper articles are then coded as:

- (1) is focusing on issue (statements about specific policies like increasing taxes or immigration)
- (2) is focusing on value (statements about broad themes such as hope and change)
- (3) is focusing on character trait (statements about the party's or politicians characteristics like experience, intelligence, skills, credibility, consistency, honesty, clearness, etc)
- (4) is focusing on something else (focusing on neither issue, value, or character trait)

### 2.2 Examples of coding

#### 1. An on issue focused negative statement

*“Juist de kwetsbaarste kinderen worden de dupe van een crisis waar zij geen bal aan kunnen doen” zegt Cohen “De crisis komt van rechts”.*

(Algemeen Dagblad, 28 februari 2011)

#### 2. An on value focused negative statement

*“Op een partijbijeenkomst in Alphen aan den Rijn zei VVD-leider Bolkestein gisteravond dat “CDA en PvdA van meet af aan de problemen hebben onderschat, dat deden zij in 1989 en dat doen zij nog steeds”.*

(Algemeen Dagblad, 22 april 1994)

3. An on character trait focused negative statement

‘Maxime Verhagen zei: "Met Bos bent u de klos".’  
(De Volkskrant, 9 september, 2006)

4. An on issue focused positive statement

‘Kok in Eindhoven: "We hebben harde maatregelen genomen, zijn moeilijk beleid niet uit de weg gegaan. Maar intussen hebben we een omslagpunt bereikt. Het financiële beleid van de afgelopen jaren stelt ons nu in staat de werkgelegenheid bovenaan te zetten".’  
(Algemeen Dagblad, 23 april 1994)

5. An on value focused positive statement

‘D66-leider De Graaf heeft gisteren opgeroepen tot verandering.’  
(Telegraaf, 7 maart 2002)

6. An on character trait focused positive statement

‘Hans Dijkstal zei: "Ik ben een teamspeler".’  
(Telegraaf, 4 mei 2002).

**2.3. Coding scheme**

Year Election Campaign	Newspaper in which the article that is covering the campaign is published	Date of article covering the campaign	# Article covering the campaign	# Statement in article (0 will be system missing)	# Statements	Tone statement: (1) = positive (2) = negative (3) = mixed	Content statements (1) = Issue (2) = Value (3) = Character Trait (4) = Else
....	Telegraaf	..-.-....	1	2	1		
					2		
....	Telegraaf	..-.-....	2	1	3		
....	Telegraaf	..-.-....	3	3	4		
					5		
					6		

### Appendix 3: Voter turnout data IDEA

The voter turnout in a election year is the percentages of the population who are entitled to vote for parliamentary elections, which did actually voted in that election.

**Table 2: Voter Turnout in the Netherlands**

Election Year	Voter Turnout
1971	79.08
1972	83.50
1977	88.00
1981	87.03
1982	80.98
1986	85.76
1989	80.27
1994	78.75
1998	73.23
2002	79.06
2003	80.04
2006	80.35
2010	75.40

This data was derived from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

[http://www.idea.int/vt/country\\_view.cfm?CountryCode=NL](http://www.idea.int/vt/country_view.cfm?CountryCode=NL)

## Appendix 4: NKO Data

### 4.1 Political Cynicism

The political cynicism score is a variable in the NKO data which is introduced in the questionnaire since the election of 1977 and the questionnaire in 1982 lacks this question. Three questions were used to calculate the political cynicism score:

(1) Item: PoliticalCynicism1: Politicians promise more than they can deliver.

Question 1: Some people say that there is much to criticize in politics, others say that it is not so bad. Could you say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements? Although they know better, politicians promise more than they can deliver.

Sommigen zeggen dat er veel is aan te merken op de politiek, anderen zeggen dat het wel meevalt. Kunt u zeggen in hoeverre u het met de volgende uitspraken eens of oneens bent?

Tegen beter weten in beloven politici meer dan ze kunnen waarmaken.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Fully agree			17.3	20.0		19.6	17.6	20.8	14.6	18.3	19.3	20.2	14.1
2 Agree			40.2	35.0		50.9	54.7	54.8	60.4	54.9	68.2	63.5	40.2
3 Disagree			13.8	10.8		9.9	12.3	7.8	10.0	8.0	10.9	6.5	7.4
4 Fully disagree			2.0	1.4		1.1	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.5	0.2	0.6
95 Dropped	100.0	100.0	22.7	29.7	100.0	16.8	14.1			17.5			33.0
96 DK			3.6	2.9		1.6	0.7	0.6	1.1	0.6	1.1		1.0
97 NA			0.3	0.2						0.1			0.0
98 DK/NA												1.2	0.1
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(2) Item: PoliticalCynicism2: Ministers primarily self-interested.

Question: Ministers and state secretaries are primarily concerned about their personal interests.

Ministers en staatssecretarissen zijn vooral op hun eigenbelang uit.

Note: Refer to PoliticalCynicism1 for complete question text.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Fully agree			4.4	5.4		7.1	6.1	5.9	3.1	4.4	4.2	4.9	3.8
2 Agree			16.3	12.9		19.3	19.9	22.0	21.0	21.5	21.8	29.6	15.6
3 Disagree			42.8	37.4		45.2	53.2	49.9	55.9	47.8	65.5	52.5	37.4
4 Fully disagree			6.4	8.3		6.5	5.4	4.5	3.8	6.1	4.5	1.6	3.9
95 Dropped	100.0	100.0	22.7	29.7	100.0	16.8	14.1			17.5			33.0
96 DK			6.8	6.1		5.2	1.3	2.0	2.5	2.7	3.9		2.5
97 NA			0.5	0.1					0.0	0.1	0.1		0.1
98 DK/NA												3.0	0.4
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(3) Item: PoliticalCynicism3: Friends more important than abilities to become MP.

Question: One is more likely to become a member of parliament because of one's political friends than because of one's abilities.

Kamerlid word je eerder door je politieke vrienden dan door je bekwaamheden.

Note: Refer to PoliticalCynicism1 for complete question text.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Fully agree			4.7	5.9		7.2	6.2	5.0	3.7	7.7	7.2	4.2	4.2
2 Agree			24.5	16.4		23.4	24.6	26.3	28.0	31.5	32.4	34.3	20.3
3 Disagree			31.6	28.2		35.2	46.0	42.2	47.5	34.9	50.4	42.2	29.8
4 Fully disagree			5.0	6.4		6.4	4.7	4.0	2.3	3.5	3.2	1.1	3.0
95 Dropped	100.0	100.0	22.7	29.7	100.0	16.8	14.1			17.5			33.0
96 DK			11.0	13.1		11.0	4.3	6.7	4.7	4.8	6.8		5.1
97 NA			0.4	0.3		0.1	0.1		0.0	0.2		0.0	0.1
98 DK/NA												9.8	1.1
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The political cynicism score was established by counting the number of 'positive' responses to these three questions.

The political cynicisms score can vary from 0 (zero of the above mentioned questions was answered positively) to 3 (all were answered positively). 0 indicates a very low level of political cynicism and 3 a very high level.

The political cynicism score for 2010 was calculated by using the same three questions and the same method of calculation. Firstly the three Political Cynicism variables (PolicalCynicism1, PolicalCynicism2, and PolicalCynicism3) were recoded into the same variables (values 1,2 → value 1 and values 3,4 → value 0) and then a new variable was

computed:  $\text{PoliticalCynicismScore} = \text{PoliticalCynicism1} + \text{PoliticalCynicism2} + \text{PoliticalCynicism3}$ .

The averages of the political cynicism scores were derived for each election year separately.

**Table 3: Political Cynicism Score**

Election Year	Political Cynicism Score
1971	-
1972	-
1977	1.43
1981	1.39
1982	-
1986	1.55
1989	1.51
1994	1.60
1998	1.52
2002	1.68
2003	1.54
2006	1.71
2010	1.73

#### 4.2 External Political Efficacy

In the Merged NKO dataset 1971-2006 five questions were used to calculate the external political efficacy score. However one question was left out the 2010 dataset (ExternalPoliticalEfficacy4: SO many people vote, my vote does not matter) and one question has been asked since 1998 (ExternalPoliticalEfficacy5: MPs quickly lose contact with citizens). These two variables are left out of the analysis and a new four point scale was created for the external political efficacy, which now is created by the following three variables.

- (1) Item: ExternalPoliticalEfficacy1: MPs do (not) care about opinions of people like me.
- Question: I shall now read you a number of statements. Would you tell me for each statement if, according to you, it is true or false?  
Members of parliament do not care about the opinions of people like me.
- Ik lees u nu enkele uitspraken voor. Wilt u voor elke uitspraak zeggen of dit volgens u zo is of niet zo is?

Kamerleden bekommeren zich niet om de mening van mensen zoals ik.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Agree / True	48.0	47.9	40.8	37.7	45.0	31.2	32.9	34.4	31.1	35.4	33.0	33.7	37.6
2 Disagree / Not true	36.7	33.0	45.0	48.1	41.4	45.0	51.0	46.2	53.5	43.5	61.7	55.3	46.7
95 Dropped						16.8	14.1			17.5			3.7
96 DK	12.4	16.6	14.0	14.1	13.6	7.0	1.9	3.6	1.8	3.5	5.3		7.6
97 NA	2.9	2.4	0.1	0.2			0.1			0.1	0.1		0.5
98 DK/NA												2.6	0.3
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(2) Item: ExternalPoliticalEfficacy2: Parties only interested in my vote, not in my opinion.

Question: Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinions.

De politieke partijen zijn alleen maar geïnteresseerd in mijn stem en niet in mijn mening.

Note: Refer to ExternalPoliticalEfficacy1 for complete question text.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Agree / True	59.1	55.4	47.6	47.6	49.6	37.2	36.5	39.6	39.6	42.5	41.6	43.0	45.3
2 Disagree / Not true	28.9	30.5	42.6	42.6	39.6	40.9	48.1	42.8	45.3	37.3	55.1	46.4	41.3
95 Dropped						16.8	14.1			17.5			3.7
96 DK	9.5	11.1	9.6	9.5	10.7	5.1	1.2	1.8	1.4	2.5	3.2		5.4
97 NA	2.6	2.9	0.2	0.3	0.1		0.1		0.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.6
98 DK/NA												2.1	0.2
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(3) Item: ExternalPoliticalEfficacy3: People like me have no influence on politics.

Question: People like me have absolutely no influence on governmental policy.

Mensen zoals ik hebben geen enkele invloed op de regeringspolitiek.

Note: Refer to ExternalPoliticalEfficacy1 for complete question text.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Agree / True	56.3	57.5	46.2	47.2	51.8	39.8	39.5	36.5	35.0	34.6	36.9	36.9	43.2
2 Disagree / Not true	34.0	31.6	44.8	43.7	40.6	38.8	45.3	46.7	50.5	45.7	60.7	53.2	44.6
95 Dropped						16.8	14.1			17.5			3.7
96 DK	7.5	9.5	8.7	8.9	7.4	4.5	1.1	1.0	0.8	2.2	2.4		4.4
97 NA	2.1	1.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1				0.1		0.0	0.4
98 DK/NA												1.4	0.2
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The external political efficacy score was established by counting the number of ‘positive’ responses to these three questions.

The external political efficacy score can vary from 0 (zero of the above mentioned questions was answered positively) to 3 (all were answered positively). 0 indicates a very low level of external political efficacy and 3 a very high level.

The score was calculated: firstly the three Political Cynicism variables (PolicalCynicism1, PolicalCynicism2, and PolicalCynicism3) were recoded into the same variables (values 1 → value 1 and values 2 → value 0) and then a new variable was computed:

$$\text{ExternalPoliticalEfficacyScore} = \text{ExternalPoliticalEfficacy1} + \text{ExternalPoliticalEfficacy2} + \text{ExternalPoliticalEfficacy3}.$$

The averages of the external political efficacy scores were derived for each election year separately.

**Table 4: External Political Efficacy Score**

Election Year	External Political Efficacy Score
1971	1.87
1972	1.90
1977	1.51
1981	1.47
1982	1.66
1986	1.39
1989	1.29
1994	1.33
1998	1.24
2002	1.41
2003	1.15
2006	1.26
2010	1.23

### 4.3 Internal Political Efficacy

The internal political efficacy score is a variable in the NKO data which is introduced in the questionnaire since the election of 1994.

Three questions were used to calculate the internal political efficacy score.

- (1) Item: InternalEfficacy1: Consider myself qualified for politics.
- Question: Would you tell me whether you fully agree, agree, disagree or fully disagree with the following statements.  
I am well qualified to play an active role in politics.
- Wilt u van deze uitspraken aangeven of u het daar helemaal mee eens; mee eens; mee oneens; of helemaal mee oneens bent:  
Ik vind mezelf heel goed in staat om een actieve rol te spelen in de politiek.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Fully agree								2.0	1.8	3.4	3.5	2.1	1.0
2 Agree								15.5	19.0	19.7	24.2	17.5	8.0
3 Disagree								34.7	42.5	32.6	47.3	45.6	17.3
4 Fully disagree								30.4	22.7	25.1	23.8	25.8	10.9
95 Dropped	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			17.5			58.9
96 DK								1.7	0.3	1.7	1.3		0.4
97 NA									0.0	0.1			0.0
98 DK/NA												0.6	0.1
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

- (2) Item: InternalEfficacy2: Good understanding of political problems.
- Question: I have a good understanding of the important political problems in our country.
- Ik heb een goed beeld van de belangrijkste politieke problemen in ons land.
- Note: Refer to InternalPoliticalEfficacy1 for complete question text.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Fully agree								4.0	3.1	6.1	6.3	3.6	1.9
2 Agree								50.3	51.8	54.6	68.5	49.3	22.8
3 Disagree								21.2	26.2	17.5	20.5	32.4	10.4
4 Fully disagree								7.0	4.7	2.5	2.0	5.7	2.0
95 Dropped	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			17.5			58.9
96 DK								1.7	0.6	1.8	2.7		0.5
97 NA										0.1			0.0
98 DK/NA												0.6	0.1
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(3) Item: InternalEfficacy3: Politics sometimes too complicated.

Question: Sometimes politics seems so complicated that people like me cannot really understand what is going on.

Soms lijkt de politiek zo ingewikkeld dat mensen zoals ik niet echt kunnen begrijpen wat er speelt.

Note: Refer to InternalPoliticalEfficacy1 for complete question text.

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	Total
1 Fully agree								15.7	11.5	7.9	5.7	10.3	4.5
2 Agree								45.4	41.7	38.8	41.2	43.1	17.9
3 Disagree								20.3	30.1	29.6	46.1	34.6	13.4
4 Fully disagree								2.6	3.0	5.9	6.1	3.2	1.7
95 Dropped	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0			17.5			58.9
96 DK								0.3	0.1	0.3	0.9		0.1
97 NA										0.1			0.0
98 DK/NA												0.5	0.1
99 INAP								15.7	13.7			8.4	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The internal political efficacy score was established by counting the three ‘positive’ responses to these three questions.

The internal efficacy score can vary from 0 (zero of the above mentioned questions was answered positively) to 3 (all were answered positively). 0 indicates a very low level of internal efficacy and 3 a very high level.

The internal efficacy score for 2010 was calculated by using the same three questions and the same method of calculation. Firstly the three internal efficacy variables (InternalEfficacy1, InternalEfficacy2, and InternalEfficacy3) were recoded into the same variables (values 1,2 → value 1 and values 3,4 → value 0) and then a new variable was computed: InternalEfficacyScore = InternalEfficacy1 + InternalEfficacy2 + InternalEfficacy3.

The averages of the internal efficacy scores were derived for each election year separately.

**Table 5: Internal Political efficacy Score**

Election Year	Internal Political Efficacy Score
1971	-
1972	-
1977	-
1981	-
1982	-
1986	-
1989	-
1994	1.12
1998	1.26
2002	1.45
2003	1.55
2006	1.20
2010	1.51