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Negative Campaigning in European Parliamentary Elections: The case of Portugal 2009 - 2019

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to contribute to the literature on negative campaigning, by studying it on a never tested context: the campaigning to the European Parliament elections (second-order elections) in Portugal during 2009 to 2019. The main objective of this dissertation was to verify patterns of evolution along the period and test the conventional factors explaining campaign negativity outside a first-order electoral competition. In order to fulfil this goal, a content analysis approach was used. The focus was put on the political discourse on TV spots and outdoors. The results show that during this period campaign negativity fluctuated, being the 2014 campaign the one with more negativity, which is in accordance with many studies in the European context. Other conclusions of the study are that parties' position on the polls tend to influence the amount of negativity used. Also, the use of this strategy is mostly seen at the beginning of campaigns, contrary to what the literature suggests, and ideology affects the level of negativity, being the most left-wing parties the more negative. Most of the campaign is focused on national policies and not European issues.

Keywords: negative campaigns; European elections; electoral campaigns; TV spots and outdoors; second-order elections.

RESUMO

Este estudo teve o objectivo de contribuir para a literatura das campanhas negativas, estudando-as num contexto nunca antes analisado: as campanhas das eleições para o Parlamento Europeu (eleições de segunda ordem) em Portugal durante o período de 2009 a 2019. O principal objectivo desta dissertação foi o de verificar padrões de evolução durante o período e testar os factores tradicionais das campanhas negativas identificados nos estudos sobre eleições de primeira ordem. Para responder a esta questão é usado o método da análise de conteúdo, sendo analisados os tempos de antena e os cartazes produzidos pelos vários partidos. Os resultados mostram que, durante este período, o recurso à campanha negativa varia, sendo a campanha de 2014 a mais negativa, estando isto de acordo com muitos estudos feitos no contexto europeu. Outras conclusões do estudo são que a posição dos partidos nas sondagens tende a influenciar o recurso à campanha negativa. Além disso, esta estratégia é observável maioritariamente no início das campanhas, contrariamente ao sugerido pela literatura, e a ideologia afecta o nível de negatividade, sendo os partidos mais à esquerda os mais negativos. A maioria da campanha é focada em assuntos internos e não europeus.

Palavras-chave: campanhas negativas; eleições europeias; campanhas eleitorais; tempos de antena e cartazes; eleições de segunda ordem.

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Glossary of Abbreviations

BE	*Bloco de Esquerda* (Left Bloc)
CDS-PP	*CDS-Partido Popular* (CDS-People's party)
CDU	*Coligação Democrática Unitária PCP-PEV* (Unitary Democratic Coalition PCP-PEV)
ECB	European Central Bank
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAS	*Movimento Alternativo Socialista* (Socialist Alternative Movement)
MEP	*Movimento Esperança Portugal* (Hope for Portugal Movement)
MMS	*Movimento Mérito e Sociedade* (Merit and Society Movement)
MPT	*Movimento Partido da Terra* (The Earth Party Movement)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PAN	*Pessoas-Animais-Natureza* (People-Animals-Nature)
PCTP/MRPP	*Partido Comunista dos Trabalhadores Portugueses /Movimento Reorganizativo do Partido do Proletariado* (Portuguese Workers' Communist Party/Re-Organized Movement of the Party of the Proletariat)
PDA	*Partido Democrático do Atlântico* (Democratic Party of the Atlantic)
PDR	*Partido Democrático Republicano* (Democratic Republican Party)
PND	*Partido da Nova Democracia* (New Democracy Party)
PH	*Partido Humanista* (Humanist Party)
PNR	*Partido Nacional Renovador* (National Renovator Party)
POUS	*Partido Operário de Unidade Socialista* (Workers Party of Socialist Unity)

PPM   *Partido Popular Monárquico* (People's Monarchist Party)

PPV   *Portugal Pró-vida* (Pro-life Portugal)

PS   *Partido Socialista* (Socialist Party)

PSD   *Partido Social Democrata* (Social Democratic Party)

PTP   *Partido Trabalhista Português* (Portuguese Labour Party)

PURP   *Partido Unido dos Reformados e Pensionistas* (United Party of Retirees and

             Pensioners)

SMEs   Small and medium-sized enterprises

TTIP   Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

TV   Televison

USA   United States of America

INTRODUCTION

The election day is the climax of planned campaigns and political communication by the parties, where all comes down to which party has persuaded more voters. This is particularly important in last few decades, due to the diminishing of loyal voters, which makes the electorate more volatile (Drummond, 2006), but also more undecided till the last days of campaigning. With the process of professionalization of party campaigns, the political communication strategy is planned and thought ahead, and the campaign planners come to the dilemma of whether use a campaign more centred in the candidate and the party, talking about their own programme and their candidates' qualifications and abilities or by addressing the weaknesses and the flaws of their opponents – between positive and negative campaigning (Damore, 2002; Lau and Pomper, 2004; Riker, 1996).

According with some scholars, campaigns have become more negative to attract the undecided and hostile voters (West, 1995; Andeweg and Irwin, 2009; Mair et al., 2004). These new tactics are commonly used in the United States and in Europe are often called "Americanization of the political campaigns", although this term refers to a wider variety of campaign practices (Walter ,2013; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Scammell, 1998).

The use of negative campaigns as a strategy has attracted attention from many researchers, who claim a steady increase has been happening (Benoit, 1999; Brooks, 2006; Fridkin and Kenney, 2012; Geer, 2012, 2006; Kaid and Johnston, 2001). This interest has reached Europe and the concept has been applied to European multiparty systems (Holtz-Bacha, 2001; Walter and van der Brug, 2013; Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010; Walter, 2014, 2013). Research on the negativity in Portuguese election campaigns is almost non-existent (see, for a notable exception, Ramalhete, 2014).

This study aims at contributing to the literature on negative campaigning in an European multiparty system, by evaluating how negative campaigning has been used and evolved in recent European parliamentary elections in Portugal. This is particularly important since, as far as I was able to discover, there is no study that assesses how the use of negative campaigning by Portuguese parties evolved. Also, Portugal is an interesting case to study considering that the majority of the literature comes from the United States, with a different party system, more prone to negative ads, due to the growing mediatisation and modernization of the political processes (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001; Esser and Strömbäck, 2012; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Negrine, 2008; Norris, 2000; Swanson and Mancini, 1996). I also test first-order election hypotheses on negativity from the USA and other European countries on second-order elections in Portugal. This

is particularly interesting because a different behaviour from a first-order election is expected, since there is no "run for office", only the representation goal is at stake. Also, this study gives a better understanding of the European Elections campaigns strategies, namely by seeing whether the "EU-shaped hole" and focus on domestic issues in European election campaigns identified by Jalali and Silva (2011) also implies negative campaigning.

The research question that guides this investigation is: "How did the use of negative campaigns in the European parliamentary elections evolved during the XXI century within the Portuguese parties, and which factors explain within-party variation?". In order to provide an answer to this, the content of TV spots and outdoors from the Portuguese EP election political campaigns between 2009 and 2019 were analysed.

The structure of this dissertation is as follows. In the first chapter the theoretical framework, which includes a discussion on the definitions, the theoretical and empirical studies that have focused on the negative campaigns and the reasons behind the use of such strategy, and their effects, is presented. The second chapter provides information on the research design and the hypotheses tested. In the third section, the content of the three campaigns is scrutinised using content analysis; the evolution of campaign negativity and how it was used by the Portuguese parties is explored. In the final section, some concluding remarks, a reflection on my main findings and paths for future research are presented.

CHAPTER I – NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNS: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK[1]

To define the concept of negative campaigning is a difficult task, due to the different theories, definitions and perspectives of researchers, politicians, voters and the media, which do not display consensus when discussing about negativity in campaigns (Walter, 2013). One of the first definitions states that it is a discourse that "attacks the other candidate personally, the issues for which the other candidate stands, or the party of the candidate" (Surlin and Gordon, 1977:93). It is possible to make a distinction between directional definitions, which consider that any mention of the opposite candidate or party is a negative attack and the opposite of positive campaigning (which is promotion of own qualities and political program), and evaluative definitions of negative campaigning, which focus on the different interpretations of the reference to the competitor, namely on if the subject actually intends to attack his opponent or not or how legitimate the attacks may be. The separation between these two types of definitions is not always completely clear, as the one provided by David Mark exemplifies: "the term negative campaigning refers to the actions a candidate takes to win an election by attacking an opponent rather than emphasizing his or her own positive attributes or policies" (Mark, 2009, p. 2).The perspective that voters have on negative campaigning might agree with the latter: according to Kerwin Swint (1998), voters consider that negative attacks are the ones with "untruthful, deceptive or irrelevant to the campaign, regardless of whether these are issue or trait attacks". These attacks are qualified as "mudslinging" by Kahn and Kenney (1999, p. 878). To voters and politicians, criticizing the opponents is seen as justifiable and legitimate (Walter, 2013), only the cases that can be considered as unfair or illegitimate should be labelled as negative (Jamieson, 1992; Mayer, 1996).

However, the directional definition has more benefits in the study of negative campaigning than an evaluative one (Walter and Vliegenthart, 2010). First, it avoids subjective interpretation of campaigning, since the assessment could differ among readers (what one might consider fair another sees as illegitimate) (Geer, 2006; Jamieson, 1992). Therefore, measuring negative campaigning might become worthless, generating different results even if the same techniques are applied on the same content. Therefore, the directional definition assures more reliability on the results, while in the evaluative definition the distinction between positive and negative campaigning is not clear (Walter, 2013). In this sense, John Geer defines "negativity is any criticism levelled by one candidate against another during a campaign" (Geer, 2006).

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[1] Previous versions of this text were partially presented within essays for the Curricular Units Analysis of Political Campaigns and Research Design.

This directional definition is the one used in this work, in order to avoid evaluation of legitimacy of attacks and irregular results with other possible future research. Of course, the use of this definition has his own disadvantages: it can be considered too broad, fails to reflect the interpretation of most voters (Brooks and Geer, 2007; Mutz and Reeves, 2005), and lacks the qualitative concept of legitimacy (Ridout and Franz, 2008).

Negativity as campaign strategy

In recent decades, use of negative attacks has increased steadily (see Benoit, 1999; Geer, 2006; Kaid and Johnston, 1990; Jamieson et al., 2000; West, 1999). John Geer concluded that in the American political campaigns the negative attacks have increased 2.7 per cent during the 1960-2004 period (but see Buell and Sigelman (2009) and Lau and Pomper (2004) for disagreement with his conclusion about the growth of negative attacks). However, all these studies were done in the American context, whose party system is different from the majority of the European multi-party systems. In Europe a *timeless* variation was not observed, as Bjerling (2007) puts it, although many of the studies carried out in this side of the Atlantic focused on Scandinavian countries (e.g., Elmelund-Præstekær and Svensson, 2011; Håkansson, 1999; Esaiasson and Håkansson, 2002; Bjerling, 2007). The same lack of clear trend was verified in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom between 1980 and 2006 (Walter, 2012; Van Heerde, 2011; Holtz-Bacha, 2011; Ridout and Walter, 2013). Annemarie Walter (2013) adds that the "Americanisation" of the campaigns did not happen in Europe, although she admits that might occur in the future.

An increased use of negative campaigning might be explained by three key factors: volatility, polarization and mediatisation. To start, consultants believe that attack ads are more effective than positive ads (Iyengar, 2011), despite the literature does not prove that the negative campaigns work better (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011; Lau *et al.*, 2007). The increased volatility of electoral markets makes them susceptible to negative campaigns since as "voters have loosened their ties with parties" (Walter, 2013), parties may become more "offensive" (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009; Mair *et al.*, 2004). With this come the premise that with more volatility comes more negative attacks, since this strategy is aimed to the undecided and volatile voters. Despite this perception from the consultants, the negativity as strategy has risks: negative attacks are associated with less appealing policies (Damore, 2002); the attacks might not generate more support and can backfire, and supporters can distance themselves (Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Cappela and Jamieson, 1997). Also, party system hazards can follow: in a multi-party system, negative campaigns can be harmful in a long-term period, making post-electoral coalitions harder to

achieve (Walter, 2014: 312-313; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2006); and attacking the opponent does not mean that the electorate will change their vote from the attacked party to the attacker, since these votes can be gained by a third party (Hansen and Pederson, 2008; Walter, 2014).

The party system can be an explanation to the lower levels negativity in Europe when compared to the United States (Hansen and Pederson, 2008; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2006; Walter, 2013). This leads to the second key factor, polarization of political parties (Geer, 2012). Although this is more suitable to the American bipartisan system, we can see a few examples where two "catch-all" parties dispute elections, such as the case of Portugal, where PSD and PS tend to present themselves as being on opposite sides, despite the similarity of their programmes (see Guedes, 2012). But what Geer (2012) shows is that the polarization of policy opinions and ideology is proportionally related to the increase of negativity.

The negative attacks draw more attention from the media, which lead us to the third key factor, the mediatisation of the campaigns. The society itself became more mediatized in the last half century which affected politics as well (Hjarvard, 2008; Kepplinger, 2002; Mancini and Swanson, 1996). According to Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) politics "has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media". Political actors adopted the news values and shape the campaign message to meet the format of the media news. The news media coverage of negative campaigning is superior to the positive ones, which gives to consultants more incentives to produce a more negative strategy (Geer, 2012). Attacking the opponents generates more attention from media, since media values conflict and controversy, as the "conflict is a criterion used for news selection" (Walter, 2013). Since parties would adapt their communication methods to mass media, and the use of negative campaigns is a way to create conflict, this would stimulate parties to go negative rather than positive. This process associated with mediatization is the "personalisation" (see, Holtz-Bacha, 2006; Mughan, 2000), this is another characteristic of the "Americanisation" of the political campaigns, with a more candidate focused news on the media and reduced focus on the parties (Rahat and Sheafer, 2007).

Moreover, there are some electoral systems more prone to negative campaigns. According to Salmond (2011), parties in a majoritarian system tend to be more negative than in a proportional one, the explanation being that for a candidate it is more effective to promote himself or his own party in a proportional system due to the fact that if one attack was meant to be made, that attack had to be to all parties and not just to one (see also Sigelman and Shiraev, 2000).

Do parties differ in terms of how prone they are to negative campaigning? One well-established finding is that challengers tend to be more negative than incumbents (e.g. Kahn and

Kenney, 1999; Lau and Pomper, 2001; Fridkin and Kenney, 2004). To Kahn and Kenny (1999) one explanation is that the incumbents have more resources and tend to stress their own performance while the challengers, on the opposite side, with less funds, tend to focus on criticizing the incumbents, since this is believed to be effective and they cannot implement both positive and negative strategies. Elmelund-Præstekær (2010) adds that the opposition parties could be more negative due to the simple fact that the policies implemented are contrary to what party stands for; consequently, during the campaign when policies are debated, they will be more negative than the incumbents. This process of decision making and the choice to go negative is assumed to be guided by the primarily goal to win elections (e.g. Theilmann and Wilhite, 1998; Hale, Fox and Farmer, 1996; Sigelman and Buell, 2003; Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995). However, most of the background of these studies is the American system party, while in Europe in a multi-party system the *boomerang* or *backlash* effects might happen (Lau and Pomper, 2004). In fragmented party systems, campaigns might not be aimed primarily at the goal to win elections, but to maximize their chances to enter a post-electoral coalition or to achieve political goals. This is the main reason to expect less negativity and a non-constant increase on negative campaigning.

Another factor that impacts how much parties use negative campaigning is their placement in the polls (Damore, 2002; Skarpedas and Grofman, 1995). It is assumed that parties use more positive campaigns when they want to attract voters, while negativity is aimed to reduce support on the opponent side (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010). However, even in a multi-party system even the ones lagging behind have the chance to join the government with a coalition, so the polls are less relevant than in a two-party system. Also, since the European parliament elections do not have an "office" to win but representation goals to achieve, this horse-race strategy may be less evident.

Party ideology has a strong correlation with negativity. According with American findings, the Republican candidates are more negative than Democratic ones (e.g. Lau and Pomper, 2001). But, once again, although this cannot be immediately applied to the European context, since studies carried out in this context it is the intensity of the ideology affects how the campaign discourse is managed: "the more ideologically extreme a party is, the more it disagrees with other parties" (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010, p. 142). Thus, parties on the extreme sides of the political spectrum tend to be more negative than the ones positioned at the centre, since they consider themselves as an opposition to the established parties (Sartori, 2005).

The closeness to the election day is also associated with the level of negativity, with messages becoming more negative by the end of the campaign (Damore, 2002). According to Geer (2006) the TV ads aired in the end of the campaign presented an increase of 60 per cent of

negativity when compared with ones aired in the beginning of the campaign. This behaviour is explained by the fact that the candidates want to present themselves and their manifesto, creating more credibility producing a positive message, so in the end they can focus more in the differences between candidates (Geer, 2006). However, the more resourceful parties are the ones which can adapt their strategy during the campaign, since it needs time to be reshaped (Sigelman and Shiraev, 2002). In this sense Kahn and Kenney (1999) relate the resources each party have with their levels of negativity.

There are also hints that voter loyalty and communication outlet matter. First, levels of party identification are also related to the use of negative campaigning. Elmelund-Præstekær (2010, p. 143) points two reasons: First, "when voters choose a party according to their general party identification, they see the party as a kind of political "brand"", meaning that when a party uses this brand it does not need to explain their programme in detail to attract voters, which creates more opportunities to go negative, unlike parties with less voters, which have to go in detail about their policies . Second, negative campaigns might reinforce party identification: the voters become more motivated to vote and to discuss when they have strong feelings towards opposition parties. Although both reasons might seem contradictory, this researcher believes both can be summarized in the following axiom "the more party identifiers a party has among its voters, the more negative is the campaign of the party" (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010, p. 143). In this sense, Sigelman and Shiraev (2000) state that a party with a loyal electorate has less chances of being a target since his voters will probably not change their vote.

In terms of media outlet, research shows that the number of negative attacks is higher on TV and debates than in political manifestos. This is so because "the political actors have different goals when communicating in different channels" (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010, p. 144). In some channels the purpose of the party is only to present their manifestos, ideas or policies. With other formats, such as debates, the purpose is to interact, attack or diminish the opposition political program. Walter and Vliegenthart (2010) explain that the negativity is higher in channels and debate forms because politicians exercise little control over the message.

Effects of negative campaigns

It is believed that the political campaigns increase the citizens interest on politics and intent to vote. This increased since the campaigns began to be televised and presented new challenges to the parties, where they needed to become more professionalized and hire specialists on communication and consultants, what changed the campaign discourse, often making it more hostile (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 1994). Many experts consider that negative campaigning is damaging

agreements and consensus building, since this conflict can be a barrier to "right policies" and "objective truth" (Håkansson, 1999), and potentially on democracy (Brooks, 2006; Fridkin and Kenney, 2012; Lau and Pomper, 2004).

The research on effects of negativity in political campaigns has shown mixed results. On the one hand, some argue that negative campaigns have a "minimal effect" on voters' choice (Campbell, 2000; Holbrook, 1994; Shaw, 1999). According to Finkel (1993), negative campaigns activate existing political predispositions and make them electorally relevant, meaning that there would be more of a mobilizing effect than a persuasion one (Nábelek, 2017). On the other hand, there is research that shows strong influence of negativity on voters' judgements of politics and agenda-setting (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver, 1997; Iyengar and Simon, 1993; Entman, 1993), policy knowledge (Norris and Sanders, 2003), or voters' perceptions of the candidates (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995).

Research on the effects of negative campaigns became widespread with the demobilization theory of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994), According with this theory, the negativity of the political campaigns has a great effect on the electorate's decision to participate. They argue that positive campaigns provide motivation to vote and reinforce the preferences of the voters, while the negative campaigns create uncertainty about those preferences and do not give motivation to the electorate to vote on the attacker, what results in a lower turnout. In this study, the authors registered a 5 per cent decrease on the intention to vote by the electorate who was exposed to negative messages. So, to these authors, negativity creates uncertainty and undermotivated voters, disaffection towards political actors and the political system, and reduces the trust on the public institutions, making the electorate feel they have less power of influence the political process (Nábelek, 2017). The research by Ansolabehere and Iyengar made a great impact on the electoral studies in the 1990s, since it confirmed a turnout decrease due to negative campaigns; if their results were replicable, we would be facing a obliteration of the quality of the democracy (Brooks, 2006) and the political system, which may set the ground for the necessity of regulation (Mayer, 1996).

However, Ansolabehere and Iyengar's results have been criticized by other researchers, due to the limits of the experimental design (Finkel and Geer, 1998; Wattenberg and Brians, 1999; Brooks, 2006), but also to the lack of other intervening variables necessary to provide more accurate results (Goldstein, 1999, 2002; Finkel and Geer, 1999). Lau and Pomper (2002) argue that the expected election results should have been included on the study, since the parties lagging behind tend to be more negative. Krupnikov (2011) refers that the timing of negative messages has an impact, since the decision to vote is made in two phases: the choice on which

candidate to vote and the decision to participate. In the first phase, negative campaigns can be helpful to the voter, while in the second phase they can create uncertainty, which can lead to lower turnout. Another criticism made to the study are the effects on the political system. Norris (2002), for instance, says turnout, activism and interest in politics display high levels in the USA and do not show any signs of decline.

Later research using aggregated data on participation and surveys on individual intentions and measures of actual participation did not support the demobilization hypothesis, showing instead that going negative during the campaign does not have a significant impact on participation (Finkel and Geer, 1998; Lau *et al.,* 1999; Sigelman and Kugler, 2003; Brooks, 2006) or may even mobilize citizens to turn out to vote (Wattenberg and Brians, 1999; Goldstein and Freedman, 1999, 2002; Lau and Pomper, 2002; Geer and Lau, 2005). In this stream of research, the arguments focus first and foremost on the motivation to vote by questioning the performance of the incumbent or to avoid the possibility of a poor outcome Other authors point out that if the electorate weights the negative messages in their decision with the same weight of the positive ones, the levels of negativity in a campaign may not influence the intention of turning out to vote. If voters consider the negative messages more important, it means more motivation to vote (Nábelek, 2017).

According to Paul Martin (2004), there are also methodological effects or biases to take into account. In fact, the demobilization theory is based on experimental studies, while the researchers who state that the negative campaigns do mobilize the electorate are based on surveys, being this methodology, in his view, more reliable. Martin states three reasons why negativity stimulates the vote: negative campaigning draw attention to political or public issues, stimulating the "republican duty"; "stimulates anxiety about candidates", creating interest in the elections; and the feeling of a "close race", that a single vote can make a difference, becoming more appealing to vote (Martin, 2004, p. 549).

Other studies have shown that the electorate do not think negative messages are less informative than the positive ones, and they use them to make their judgments about the candidates (Pinkleton, 1997; Brooks and Geer, 2007; Stevens et al. 2008; Sides, Lipsitz and Grossmann, 2010; Fridkin and Kenney, 2011). However, undecided voters find these negative messages less acceptable, while voters with strong preferences are less affected by negative campaigns when they focus their preferred party (Zaller, 1992). In fact, negative messages from the preferred party have a mobilizing effect, but the negative attacks against this party have no demobilizing or mobilizing effect, since people tend to ignore information against their existing preconceptions (Nábelek, 2017).

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According to Lau *et al.* (2007), negative messages are more memorable during the campaigns than positive ones, therefore negativity might have more influence on voters' decision than positive campaign messages. Nevertheless, the effects are not the same of different types of messages, being uncivil and personal attacks less acceptable among the electorate and may cause a backlash effect on the attacker. Most of the studies these authors analysed showed disaffection towards the negative campaign's target, but also demonstrated the same feeling towards the attacker. In spite of the fact that only ten studies out of 111 examined evaluated the result on the assessment of both parts in the negative campaigning process, all point to a more negative result to the attacker than to the target of the attack, which is conflicting to the general belief that doing negative campaigning works.

In the book *In Defense of Negativity* (Geer, 2006), the impact of the negative campaigns on the quality of the political debate is evaluated. Geer states that it is important to know the relevance of the content of the messages, if it is useful and what consequences have, regardless of the tone, being negative messages an important element that allows the voters to make an informed choice. To the author, the use of negative campaigns is an expression of freedom of speech and democracy which makes the accountability possible: "Negativity can advance and improve the prospects of democracy. Without negativity, no nation can credibly think of itself as democratic" (Geer, 2006).

In sum, taking previous research into account, negative campaigns might influence voting behaviour and participation, however the effects differ with different elections, types of messages and group of voters. The levels of negativity can have a bigger effect on the decision to participate among the undecided or on nonpartisan voters, since this segment of the electorate does not have strong previous conceptions about the contestant as the partisans have, the opinion on whether to vote or who to vote can be shaped by the negative messages, since they are more exposed to them (Nábelek, 2017).

Regarding the type of messages, it is consensual that personal attacks might have a backlash effect and generate disapproval from the electorate towards the attacker, which can create motivation to vote against to this candidate or party, thus mobilizing the electorate (Wattenberg and Brians, 1999; Goldstein and Freedman, 1999, 2002; Lau and Pomper, 2002; Geer and Lau, 2005). However, the backlash effect can also be towards the electoral process, undermining the credibility of the participants, therefore demobilizing some voters.

Second-order elections and negative campaigns

The European parliamentary elections are described as second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Reif and Schmitt (1980) do not offer a theory of the European voter, a complete individual-level model of vote choice, but aggregate-level predictions on statements about individual-level behaviour in second-order elections (Hobolt, 2011). According to the second-order theory, EP elections are less important; the turnout is lower, since there are less at stake many voters do not bother to go to the polls; small parties have better performances than in first-order elections since the ruling parties in the national governments are punished as a protest, and consequently government parties have worse results, especially in the middle of the first-order mandate; and the popularity of parties or candidates has an important role on the outcome, instead of their policy agenda or particular issues (see Reif, 1984; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Hix and Marsh, 2007, 2011; Niemi and Weibsberg 1993; Jacobson 1992; Miller, 1988; Norris 1990).

In the original article by Reif and Schmitt (1980), a distinction is made between the elections to the European parliament and national elections, since the former have no direct impact on national governance, and their outcome being determined by national politics. The first-order elections let voters choose who should govern the country: general elections in parliamentary systems, such as Portugal, Spain, Great Britain or Germany, and presidential elections in countries such as USA or France. On the other hand, the second-order elections have lesser importance, despite the influence they have for the national parties. In this type of elections there is less at stake; examples are regional, municipal and local elections of countries with parliamentary systems, but also in the election of legislative representatives in presidential systems, such as the United States. Therefore, the European elections, central object of this study, belong to the second category of elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1985; Schmitt and Mannheimer, 1992; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Marsh and Norris, 1997; Schmitt and Thommassen, 1999; van der Brug and van der Eijk, 2005).

European elections are disputed by the same actors of national elections on the same issues, therefore voting behaviour has the same structure of the first-order ones (Freire, 2010). A framework for voting behaviour was developed by Mark Franklin (2005), composed of three modes of voting: "voting with the head", which occurs mainly in national elections, meaning that the electorate cast a strategic vote, to not waste a vote in a party that is unlikely to be a competitor to office, or (more adequate to EP elections) in a party that might have a destabilising effect on parliament; "voting with the heart", that is, is to vote in the most favoured party, without any strategic considerations; and "voting with the boot", a protest vote: the electorate cast their vote in a party they would not normally vote, in order to send a message to other parties or incumbent

parties that they do not like their program or the candidates. In the European elections most voters "vote with the head", as they would do in first-order elections (Franklin, 2005, p. 3), although this model of voting may change according to the timing of the elections (see, e.g. Freire, 2010). Considering the three periods of the first-order election cycle – the "honeymoon" (first 12 months after the elect), the "mid-term" (from 13-36 months), and the "later term" (between the 37 and 48 months) – during the "honeymoon" parties will receive similar support they receive in first-order elections (Marsh, 1998; Reif and Schmitt, 1980), with more voters voting "with the heart" (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). The mid-term period is when voters tend to vote strategically and punish the government, and then in the later period the government tend to recover their popularity, losing fewer votes than in a mid-term election (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Due to this, it has been argued that the results of second-order elections function as an indicator of public opinion (Freire, 2010).

In the context of European elections, the media has an important role, however the coverage of the media on European campaigns is low and the coverage is manly on the domestic issues (Jalali e Silva, 2011). Jalali and Silva (2011) blame both the parties and the media on why EP elections remain second-order.

To most researchers who study negative campaigns, the second-order elections are the mid-terms in the USA. The multi-candidate characteristic in this type of election reduces the probability of attacks due to the fact that the candidates are running against other contenders of the same party; moreover, if they do decide to attack a boomerang or backfire effect can happen, with votes going to a third person. In Europe, the European Parliamentary elections, which are often not about Europe, seen as popularity contests of the parties, manly focused in national issues, elections in which the stakes are lower, and they do not directly influence the formation of executives (Jalali and Silva, 2011) may be, at the eyes of the parties, of lesser importance, which means that they will invest fewer of their resources in these elections. To what extent this leads to high or low levels of negativity is to be observed in this study.

Studies of negative campaigns in Portugal

The literature on negative campaigns in Portugal is nearly non-existent. The only comprehensive study focused on the negative discourse of the Portuguese political parties during the 2011 legislative election campaign (Ramalhete, 2014), although other case studies address the issue (Cruz 2012; Figueiras 2012; Espírito Santo 2010; Salgado 2007). In that comprehensive study, the author concludes that positive campaigns were predominant, while the negative discourse represented only 14 per cent on the political campaigns by the five parties with parliamentary representation. The more negative party was CDU (a coalition between the

Portuguese Communist Party and the green party "Os Verdes") with a total of 40.6 per cent of negative discourse. On the other hand, the more positive one was CDS-PP (the most right-wing party in the Portuguese parliament) with 95.2 per cent of positive discourse and 1.4 per cent of negative campaigning. All the parties were targets of the negative campaigns, but the main challenger PSD (a centre-right party) only attacked the incumbent PS (a centre left party). Unsurprisingly, the incumbent party was the most attacked, followed by PSD, which, according to Walter (2012) is explained by the premise that the centre and ruling parties are the main targets of negative campaigning. Ramalhete does not confirm the incumbent theory, which says the incumbent parties are the more positive ones (Kahn e Kenney, 1999; Skarpedas and Grofman, 1995; Benoit, Pier, and Blaney, 1997), and the hypothesis that the candidates with lower percentages in the polls tend to be more negative is also not confirmed. Other hypotheses that were not supported by her research were the increase on negativity on the TV spots closer to the elections, or the one that related the level of professionalization of the campaigns with negativity, since it were the parties with lower levels of professionalization (BE and CDU) the ones that were more negative. The author ends up by concluding that negative campaigns are not a tool of the political marketing but a natural element of the discourse (Ramalhete, 2014). However, the fact that all these hypotheses are not confirmed in the study does not mean that Portuguese parliamentary elections are different from others taking place in other polities; in fact, the 2011 elections occurred in a very specific context, having been anticipated and held while the country was under financial intervention due to a severe financial crisis.

Beyond Ramalhete (2014), other authors mention negativity in their analysis of election campaigns in Portugal. Ricardo Cruz (2012) studied online campaigning during for European Parliament elections in 2009 and one of the characteristics he considered on the analysis of the parties' websites was the negative messages. According to his analysis, PS had only 0.5 per cent of his website content targeted to attack the other contestants. PSD posted three negative items in his website (1.4 per cent) all criticizing PS, and CDS-PP had 1.4 per cent of negative content. BE was the more negative with 9 items (4.3 per cent) criticizing PS, PSD and CDS-PP. CDU did not have any negative content on the website.

In Pina's (2018) analysis of the websites and social media of the Portuguese parties during the 2015 legislative campaign, she indicates that the main challenger PS was the most negative, with 20 negative posts on Facebook, representing 16 per cent of the total. The party leader of this party had his own website and Facebook account, where he posted 10 to 14 per cent of negative messages. The incumbent PàF (a coalition between PSD and CDS-PP) had 15 per cent of negative messages on the website and 0.7 per cent on Facebook. This analysis is in accordance

to Rodrigues (2017), who mentions that PS had more negative campaigns and goes further and says that the negative campaigns in PàF belong to CDS-PP, which leaves PSD without negative attacks, which can be explained by the fact that PSD was, as the main partner of the ruling coalition, probably occupying symbolically the role of the incumbent party. Regarding the other parties, BE was negative 5.3 per cent of the time and CDU 4.6 per cent (Pina, 2018).

Figueiras (2012) studied the strategy in the 2009 legislative election campaign chosen by the two main candidates of the two biggest parties. While PS presents 27 messages of positive campaign and 25 of negative campaign, PSD was more negative, with 29 negative and 15 positive messages. Espírito Santo (2010) points that this campaign was especially negative with the candidates being more focused in attack each other than discussing their program.

The political campaigns in Portugal, and in many European countries, did not traditionally present negative messages, something that may have changed with the "Americanisation" of the political campaigns (Cruz, 2012). However, the Portuguese political campaigns do not tend to be very negative, with a few exceptions (Espírito Santo, 2010), especially when compared with bipartisan elections, such as USA (see Benoit, 1999; Geer, 2006; Kaid and Johnston, 1990; Jamieson et al., 2000; West, 1999).

CHAPTER II - RESEARCH DESIGN

Objectives

The aim of this study was to understand how the use of negative campaigns in the European parliamentary elections during the XXI century within the Portuguese parties evolved, and which factors may account for variation. A content analysis approach was applied to campaign materials (TV spots and outdoors). The main objective was to see if the evolution of the use of negative campaigning in the USA observed by many researchers is also present in a European multi-party system, and to see if hypotheses stemming from research carried out elsewhere hold in a second-order election campaign context in Portugal. In this study three second-order election campaigns were analysed, 2009, 2014 and 2019 EP elections. These three elections present a good study sample because in this fifteen-year period each election had a different social-economic context, being this a good opportunity to see if this context had any effect on the campaign messages. A macro-level hypothesis regarding whether the negativity presented any trend, and at a series of micro-level if the parties behind in the polls were more negative, if the negativity increased closer to the election-day and if the more ideological parties were more negative were tested.

Hypotheses

The macro-level hypothesis that was tested on a longitudinal level is based on the idea of constant evolution of the negativity in the USA and in the instable and not regular growth of negative campaigns in Europe. According to Kaid and Johnston (1990), Jamieson *et al.* (2000), Benoit (1999), West (2001) and Geer (2006), negative campaigns show a stable growth in the USA, but in Europe the longitudinal studies done by Håkansson (1999), Esaiasson & Håkansson (2002), Bjerling (2007), Elmelund-Præstekær & Svensson (2011), Van Heerde (2011), Holtz-Bacha (2011), Walter (2012) and Ridout & Walter (2013) conclude that the presence of negativity is not stable and varies over the years.

As seen above, mediatization, volatility, and polarization are factors linked with an increased focus on negative messages. The first stage of the mediatization the mediation of politics, in which the traditional media are the true mediators in the communication between the public sphere and politicians (Figueiras 2017); survey data such as that collected by Eurobarometer shows that mediation, especially from TV, is without doubt a reality in Portugal. To what extent has politics became not only mediated but mediatized, and shaped in an

entertainment format, with political discourse edited to fit into the mediatic agenda with a specific timing is still a matter of academic study and debate in Portugal (see, for instance, Santana Pereira 2016). Second, in EP elections in Portugal a rise in terms of volatility is visible:, according to Freire and Santana Pereira (2016), the 2014 EP election presented the highest percentage of volatility with 19.7 per cent, since 1987, a value that risen since 2004 (however, this may be due to the special political and economic context this could represent a protest to mainstream parties. Regarding the polarization between parties in Portugal, which can have a big impact on negative campaigning, it actually has been stable over the years between the parties with parliamentary representation, with a subtle evolution to the right since 2005 (Guedes, 2012). Despite the proximity of the two biggest parties (PS and PSD), there is no noticeable trend to confirm a convergence between them (Guedes, 2012). All considered, this could mean also stable levels of negativity or a trendless variation on the negativity over the years.

Hypothesis 1: The levels of negativity fluctuate over the years, without a constant growth.

Regarding the micro-level hypotheses, the first variable expected to influence negativity is the position on the polls during the campaigns. According to the literature, the losers or the parties behind in the polls are more negative than the probable winners (Damore, 2002; Skarpedas & Grofman, 1995). While Ramalhete (2014) who did a comprehensive study of the 2011 political campaign for the Portuguese parliament, could not verify this hypothesis, this is believed to be due to the fact that the 2011 election occurred in a very special context, being anticipated and under a bailout programme.

Hypothesis 2: The candidates behind in the polls tend to go more negative.

The second variable to be tested is the moment of the political campaign and its influence on the use of negative messages. According to Damore (2002), the decision to go negative increases with the closeness to election day. As in the previous hypothesis, Ramalhete (2014) actually showed that the TV spots were more negative in the beginning than in the end of the campaign. Again, this may be mostly due to the fact that the social-economic context was different.

Hypothesis 3: Negative campaigning increases in the final period of the electoral campaigns.[2]

In the last micro-level hypothesis, the variable at stake is the typology of the parties. Elmelund-Præstekær (2010) suggest that more ideological parties tend to be more negative. This is confirmed by Ramalhete (2014), being that in 2011 CDU was the most negative party (and the most strong ideologically), and CDS-PP had the lowest percentage of negative messages and less strong ideologically.

Hypothesis 4: The most ideological parties are more negative in their campaigns.

Method and Data

The method used to measure campaign negativity was the content analysis of the propaganda material of parties running for the European parliament. The specific materials were TV spots and outdoors used by Portuguese political parties in the 2009, 2014 and 2019 European parliamentary elections. All the parties running for elections were analysed (with only a few exceptions: smaller parties which do not have campaign material available). For each year their campaign focus regarding negatives messages towards other parties Is described. However, since some of the smaller parties did not run on the three elections the hypotheses testing was based on the bigger parties with representation who were present on all the elections analysed.

The main objective of the content analysis was to generate quantitative data, which allowed to understand the evolution of the negative campaigns during this period and test the impact of specific factors. The content analysis approach is the most common in the study of political messages, being "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). Therefore, this method is the most adequate to map longitudinal changes and trends (Hansen, *et al.*, 1998; Riffe *et al.*, 2005).

The material analysed on this research, namely the TV spots and the outdoors from the 2009, 2014 and 2019 EP election campaigns, was made available by the project Changing European Elections. A total of 3480 statements in 187 TV spots and 74 outdoors were identified and coded. The number of the parties varied throughout the years (26 different parties and

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[2] This hypothesis can only be tested in the analysis of the TV spots, since there is no information about when outdoors were produced and displayed.

coalitions on total with available content), but the number of statements, TV spots and outdoors does not have significant differences among these three elections.

The content of the TV spots was transcript, as were the messages of the outdoors. The unit of analysis was the sentence, which is in line with Krippendorff's recommendation to "define units of description as the smallest units that bear the information needed in the analysis" (2004. p.100). Each sentence was classified as *positive campaign* (with the campaign material mentioning the party or agenda), *neutral* (when no party or candidate was referred), or *negative campaign*. Is important to mention that in this study the negative campaigns were defined with the directional definition: any mention of the opponent candidate or party was considered as negative campaign, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The study used two sources, TV spots and outdoors, as mentioned before. This option was made due to the fact negative campaigns occur mainly in these two sources, which have a short and more direct message, and most of the literature on negative campaigning is based on this type of material. A recent and important tool in political campaigns in the 21st century are the social media account of parties and candidates; however this is a more recent communication channel and impossible to use in this longitudinal study, since the 2009 and 2014 data are no longer available.

The dependent variable was the "negative campaign", sometimes referred as "negative message" from here onwards: any explicit reference to other candidate or party present in the political discourse.

In the H1, the independent variable was the year in which the election took place. The total percentage of negative messages presented in the discourse transcript made from the TV spots and outdoors from all parties for each year, using the classification scheme (positive, negative and neutral) presented above, was computed and then compared.

In the H2, the independent variable was the parties' position in the polls. To measure it, the statistics and polls website *Marktest* and the political scientist Pedro Magalhães' website were consulted. The poll data used was from the day before the beginning of the political campaign. The percentages of negatives messages present in each party campaign were compiled. Then their position in the polls and the amount of negative messages used were compared, in order to see if the position in the polls had any effect on negativity.

In the H3, the independent variable was the period of the campaign. This hypothesis can only be measured on the TV spots, since is the only source that had information about time of dissemination available. The spots were ordered by date and then the percentage of negative

messages in the first and in the last spot aired were compared, in order to see if there were more negative messages in the beginning or in the end of the campaign period.

In the H4, the independent variable was the extremism of the party's ideology. To measure this variable, I accessed the data from Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifesto Project, and Nuno Guedes' work (2012 and 2016) on Portuguese party ideology and classified accordingly, on the scale (-100 to +100) left/right position. According to this source, a party is more ideologically strong if over the years their manifesto is congruent, not changing ideological positions. This exercise comprises only parties with parliamentary representation on both parliaments (national and European) on all three elections (CDU, BE, PS, PSD and CDS-PP). After analysing the data, I considered that the strongest parties ideologically were the ones with longitudinal deviations equal or less than 5 from 2009 to 2016, therefore, the strongest parties in ideological terms were CDU, BE and PS, and the other ones considered to be less strong. BE had a larger deviation from 2009 to 2011however if we compare only 2009 position and the last available (2016) the deviation is less that the one considered to be qualified as a strong ideological party. Then the negativity of the messages put out by the most ideological and the less ideological parties was compared.

CHAPTER III - FINDINGS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the campaigns for the European Parliament in 2009, 2014 and 2019 are discussed in terms of the use of negative messages by the parties for each year. First, the content of the TV spots and outdoors are analysed and discussed for each year. After that, the hypotheses are tested.

The 2009 electoral campaign

The campaign for the European Parliament in 2009 occurred in the beginning of a financial crisis that had origin in the subprime crisis, which had a major impact on banks, companies, family budgets and lead to a high deficit and a rise on the unemployment rate, of around 10 per cent (it would rise even more in 2012 and 2013).[3] Therefore, some subjects discussed by the most ideological political parties during the campaign regarded the reasons and impacts of increasing unemployment. However, the idea that the crisis would not affect Portugal led most of the parties to discuss their agenda, once elected to the European Parliament, or simply point out what they would change regarding domestic policies. One of the most common topics was the Treaty of Lisbon: the national incumbent (PS at the time) congratulated himself for having reached the agreement and the fact that it was signed in Portugal, while opposition parties stressed that this treaty lacked democracy and information about it and that citizens should have been consulted on whether to sign or not.

Since legislative elections were held three months later, this EP election campaign was seen as pre-campaigning, so the most attacked party was the incumbent (PS), followed by PSD, both *catch-all* centre parties from the traditional political spectrum. They were accused by most parties of agreeing in most areas and that voting in any of them would be the same, while both parties attacked each other. The negative messages towards these parties came from the most ideological parties on the left and right of the ideological spectrum, but variation on negativity was low, ranging between 4.4 and 8.9 per cent (Table 3.1) CDS-PP was the most negative, followed by BE, with 6.2 per cent of their discourse being negative (Table 3.1). New parties without representation on both national and European parliament did not resort to negative messages, which is in accordance with Elmelund-Præstekær (2010) theory, since smaller and less ideological parties tend to show their agenda due to the reason of not having a strong and loyal electorate. The goal of their political communication is to increase their visibility.

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[3] For further analysis of the context and election results: Santana Pereira (2010) and Freire (2010).

A common attack was made against the right, however not pointing out any specific party, by the communist-green coalition CDU. While BE attacks were all about PS and PSD being the same party under different names, CDS-PP did the same but went further, mentioning in which measures PS and PSD had agreed. PS also attacked the right in generic terms, as CDU did, and PSD and CDS-PP specifically, even mentioning one time their European Parliament group, EPP, while PSD only attacked PS as incumbent party.

It is interesting to compare these results with Cruz (2012) results on parties' websites for this election. According to Cruz, the most negative party was BE with 4.3 per cent of their content, while PSD and CDS-PP had the same percentage with 1.4, PS with 0.5 per cent and CDU did not have any negative message. This would lead us to conclude that there is therefore a considerably degree of variation in the negativity of campaigns made online and offline.

Table 3.1 – Negative Messages on TV spots in 2009 (%)

	BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
1st TV spot	10	9.1	0	5.9	0
2nd TV spot	5.6	0	8.3	9.5	21.1
3rd TV spot	4.5	33.3	14.3	4	0
4th TV spot	3.6	0	0	5.3	0
5th TV spot	11.1	0	0	0	0
6th TV spot	0	0	8	0	20
7th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
8th TV spot	_	_	4.3	_	_
9th TV spot	_	_	15.4	_	_
10th TV spot	_	_	15	_	_
11th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
12th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
13th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
14th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
Average	6.2	8.9	4.6	4.4	5.6

On the positive campaigning side, CDS-PP, CDU and PS are the most positive with similar values, slightly above 50 per cent, while PSD and BE are the parties with fewer mentions of their

agenda or candidates (Table 3.2). Within the smaller parties, PH and MEP, with 78.3 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively, are the ones with more positive content, what could be explained by their strong need of presenting their agenda and candidates to the electorate. Both parties stood out from all the parties on the election, with a big gap on positive messages, since the third most positive, CDU, had 57.9 per cent.

Table 3.2 – Positive Messages on TV spots in 2009 (%)

	BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
1st TV spot	10	45.5	47.6	58.8	26.3
2nd TV spot	5,6	52.9	50	42.9	26.3
3rd TV spot	13.6	33.3	52.4	44	42.9
4th TV spot	3.6	47.1	50	57.9	31.6
5th TV spot	27.8	70.6	90.6	44.4	55
6th TV spot	14.3	86.7	40	92.9	40
7th TV spot	_	_	57.9	_	_
8th TV spot	_	_	65.2	_	_
9th TV spot	_	_	53.8	_	_
10th TV spot	_	_	65	_	_
11th TV spot	_	_	50	_	_
12th TV spot	_	_	55.6	_	_
13th TV spot	_	_	52.9	_	_
14th TV spot	_	_	75	_	_
Average	11.5	53.6	57.9	54.4	37

Let us now have a grasp on how these parties were negative in 2009. BE started to discuss the Treaty of Lisbon and the lack of democracy shown by PS and PSD (which together had a majority of the parliamentary seats), who approved a change in the Constitution, so there was no need of a referendum. BE criticized these two parties of cooperating, and this criticism is exacerbated by the fact that PS supported the nomination of Durão Barroso (former PSD prime-minister) for the presidency of the European Commission. The party then turned to European issues and discussed the salary and opportunities gap among member-states and the lack of concern on environmental issues. Later the military missions on Afghanistan are criticized, with

the party defending that these missions should be focused on pacification on other regions. On other TV spots the bailouts on private banks and the corruption that led to their bankruptcy were in the spotlight. Closer to the end of the campaign, negativity is back: PS and PSD are again criticized, and the growth of the unemployment rate is discussed.

CDS-PP started their spots talking about unemployment and their agenda on how to revert its growth, discussing their measures to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs), but also putting the blame on the government for the situation. Later, CDS-PP also blames PSD for supporting socialist decisions regarding public companies and other issues. Further on the campaign period, the state of education and the European Union and the party's views on the matter are also on the spot. By the end of the campaign, the spots are focused on abilities and capacities of the candidates and the party in general.

Turning again to the left, CDU talks about their capacity of mobilizing the workers during all the campaign and the poor work conditions of some sectors. The liberalization coming from the EU legislation, but also PS policies on worker's rights legislation, are criticized. Later on the campaign the party focuses more on their own candidates, abilities and issues. Despite CDU being a coalition between the communist and the greens, their TV spots are separate, although they refer to their party as CDU, and the few TV spots exclusive from the greens are more positive (with more positive sentences) than the other spots, where they discuss mostly their agenda (in this election the «green» spots were the fifth and the eighth).

In turn, the incumbent PS starts their campaign by mentioning how important the party was on the most important historical moments of Portugal in the European Union and how it could contribute to fight the global crisis, while criticizing the right and more specifically PSD. However, this campaign is mostly about the capacities and abilities of the party in improving the quality of life of the Portuguese, despite the fact that very few specific measures or issues were discussed.

The main opposition party PSD based their campaign on the idea of a European contract signed with the Portuguese citizens, that included the promises of supporting SMEs, creating a new Erasmus programme for employment and a better use of European funds. Criticism targeted the PS government about their misuse of European funds and lack of support to SMEs.

The strategies of new/smaller parties are also worth mentioning. The new party MEP kept the same strategy throughout the campaign: talking about their main candidate, her abilities, skills and personality. Another new party was MMS, which did not resort to negative campaigning, but stressed the fact that it was composed only of citizens and not by «career politicians». Issues such as the state of education, European funds and the Portuguese exclusive economic zone were also addressed. Lastly, PNR talked about the loss of autonomy and family values and criticized PS,

PSD and CDS-PP. Apart from PNR, these parties did not have negative messages in their campaign, what can be explained by the fact that they needed to focus their campaign on presenting the candidates and their manifesto due to being new or fairly unknown parties. It is worth underlining that in this group of extra-parliamentary parties the only party which is not new (PNR) is the one who have negative messages and lesser positive messages in their campaign, when compared with the others.

Regarding the outdoors, there was no presence of negative messages, since they were mostly populated by the faces and names of the candidates or general campaign slogans. The parties used the same ideas of the TV spots on the outdoors, with PS mentioning the important moments in history and how decisive they were for those historical marks to happen, and PSD talking about the European contract and the same measures mentioned on the TV spots.

The 2014 electoral campaign

If the 2009 EP election occurred during the beginning of financial crisis, in the Spring of 2014 that financial crises had evolved to an overwhelming economic crisis of public debt. In between these elections, Portugal was forced to request a bailout package, which led to a path of austerity and one of the most severe crises in the history of the country, with a new high rate of unemployment of 17.5 per cent in 2013, the highest rate since data on unemployment started to be collected[4]. Just before the elections, Portugal ended the adjustment programme, but with a still very high debt and austerity programmes under way[5].

During the election campaign, some of the most common topics discussed by the parties were the austerity packages, budget cuts and rescues to banks. Most parties complained about unemployment, cuts on salaries and vacation subsidies, the bailout agreement signed with the *troika*[6] and criticize the European economic norms. One of the most used frames on the TV spots was to show people who struggled to pay their bills due to cuts or people who got unemployed and did not have unemployed benefits.

As expected, the most attacked party was the incumbent (a coalition between PSD and CDS-PP); however an interesting phenomenon happened because most of the attacks made by the most ideological and smaller parties was not only against the government coalition but also against the main opposition party, PS, accused of having the same agenda and of having

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[4] Portuguese National Statistics Institute, data on unemployment rating collected from their website
[5] For a deeper understanding of this context: Fernandes and Santana Pereira (2014), and Freire and Santana Pereira (2015).
[6] International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank

approved the request of a bailout. The socialists were, therefore, accomplices and culprits of the austerity and budget cuts. In 2014, the attacks only targeted these three parties.

The parties which produced more attacks were the left-wing parties and PS. BE was the most negative, with 22.7 per cent, followed by PS, with 18.3 per cent (Table 3.3). Regarding the parties without parliamentary representation, the most negative was POUS (a far-left and Trotskyist micro party) with 24.6 per cent of negative discourse, followed by PCTP/MRPP (a Communist-Maoist micro party) with a negative discourse slightly above 10 per cent. The other parties either did not have any negative message or just a few.

Table 3.3 – Negative Messages on TV spots 2014 (%)

	BE	CDU	PS	PSD/CDS-PP
1st TV spot	27.3	13.9	33.3	0
2nd TV spot	29.4	23.1	17.5	8.3
3rd TV spot	21.7	7.4	2.9	2.7
4th TV spot	7.7	5.7	19	0
5th TV spot	_	16.7	_	0
6th TV spot	_	13.9	_	0
7th TV spot	_	3.4	_	_
8th TV spot	_	6.3	_	_
9th TV spot	_	16.7	_	_
10th TV spot	_	8.7	_	_
11th TV spot	_	7.4	_	_
12th TV spot	_	5	_	_
13th TV spot	_	12.5	_	_
14th TV spot	_	25	_	_
15th TV spot	_	33.3	_	_
Average	22.7	11.4	18.3	2.5

Regarding positive campaigning, the most positive parties are the incumbents, with 42.1 per cent, while the less positive was BE with 10.7 per cent. The remainder presented a positive discourse with values raging 23 to 30 per cent (Table 3.4). New parties want to present their candidates and ideas, so they are often very positive; in the first position of this positivity ranking

was the new party *Livre* (Eco-socialist and pro-EU) with 63 per cent, followed by PCTP/MRPP, PAN (focused on environmental and animal rights), the extreme-left MAS (Socialism and anti-capitalist), and PDA (Devolutionist for Portuguese Islands), with values between 41 and 49 per cent.

Table 3.4 – Positive Messages on TV spots 2014 (%)

	BE	CDU	PS	PSD/CDS-PP
1st TV spot	4.5	13.9	13.9	36.4
2nd TV spot	5.9	11.5	15	45.8
3rd TV spot	17.4	11.1	58.8	35.1
4th TV spot	15.4	14.3	38.1	78.9
5th TV spot	_	54.2	_	16.7
6th TV spot	_	13.9	_	23.1
7th TV spot	_	69	_	_
8th TV spot	_	15.6	_	_
9th TV spot	_	29.2	_	_
10th TV spot	_	13	_	_
11th TV spot	_	11.1	_	_
12th TV spot	_	45	_	_
13th TV spot	_	12.5	_	_
14th TV spot	_	50	_	_
15th TV spot	_	44.4	_	_
Average	10.7	23.9	29.8	42.1

In substantive terms, PS started their campaign with a lot of attacks to the coalition in government, using testimonies of citizens about the cuts on salaries and subsidies. As in the 2009 election, PS did not discuss their agenda and expressed the idea of "us versus them" against the coalition PSD/CDS-PP; their campaign targeted the voters unsatisfied with the national government, stating that the only alternative was the PS.

The incumbent coalition PSD/CDS-PP were mostly positive: in their TV spots they discussed how the country was evolving and getting better on the economic and social levels due to the measures they have taken internally and in Europe.

BE started their tv spots campaign attacking the three catch-all parties (PS, PSD and CDS-PP), with a reminder of who had approved the European budget treaty which led to austerity measures and to a relentless struggle to reach the established deficit and debt percentages. This line of criticism continues during the campaign, with the party underlining that many public services had closed, and others have suffered budget cuts, due to a political stance against public services from the right-wing parties on the government. They later discuss their agenda and the plans to revert the debt, but always with attacks against PSD and CDS-PP.

The strategy used by CDU was to show in many TV spots cases of real people who suffered with the crisis and their daily struggles caused by budget cuts and the growth of unemployment, and to remind voters of who had signed the bailout treaty (PS, PSD and CDS-PP). This strategy kept in the entire campaign with only a few mentions of their agenda and how they would renegotiate the debt. As in 2009, the greens presented separate TV spots from PCP. Their TV spots have more positive messages than PCP TV spots, where they discuss mostly their agenda.

Still on the left side of the political spectrum, the new party *Livre* did not have any negative messages towards other candidates or parties; they prioritized a discussion over their own agenda, how many European institutions worked and have also discussed about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which was under discussion back then.

Continuing in the realm of micro parties, MAS assumed a similar role as BE and CDU, pointing the budget cuts and blaming PS, PSD and CDS-PP on the austerity measures, but mostly PSD and CDS-PP since these two parties controlled the government at the time. They also criticized the bailouts on banks and the ones who run those banks. Instead, PCTP/MRPP did not only criticize the government parties but also the Euro and the economic union, responsible for having lowered the social conditions. Interestingly enough, many attacks targeted Germany and Angela Merkel policies. On the other side PDA, also talked about the euro and their plans to reform the single currency. POUS discussed mostly how the syndicates are effective and would make a difference in rejecting the government policies and how they could cause the government to resign. Lastly, PPM and PPV display similar agendas on family values.

In the outdoors, there was only one attack. This negative message was against the ruling parties made by the small party PTP (Labour party and Social-democracy). It is very curious to see that this party was also the most positive one on the outdoors with 77.8 per cent.

The 2019 electoral campaign

2019 was by far the best year on a financial, economic and social level. The rate on unemployment was the lowest since the beginning of the crisis in 2008/2009 in this period of election, being 6.5 per cent[7], the budget cuts made on many subsidies were returned and the minimum wage was raised[8].

Since the social and financial conditions were not as severe as on the other two electoral years analysed here, the negativity was naturally comparatively lower. By the time of this European election, the national government was led by PS with the parliamentary support of CDU and BE, which made them a target of negative messages. The target was mostly PS, followed by the other two.

The most negative party in this campaign was CDS-PP with 9.1 per cent of their discourse mentioning their opponents, while the other parties presented low levels of negativity with 3 per cent or less (Table 3.5). Regarding the smaller and newer parties, *Iniciativa Liberal*, with 24 per cent of negative discourse was the most negative, in the only TV spot the party produced there was criticism to the government made into a song. The second most negative was the extreme-left micro party MAS with their criticism pointed against PS, CDU and BE, the government and his supporters, while claiming of being the best alternative on the left side of the political spectrum. The third was PCTP/MRPP (Communist-Maoism party) with 13.4 per cent, with critics against PS. The other parties which used negative messages only did it in less than 10 per cent of their messages.

Interesting to see is that the only criticism against PSD and CDS-PP came from the communist-green coalition CDU and the extreme-right micro party PNR. The other parties which mention PS, as government, in their TV spots were BE, CDS-PP, CDU, *Nós, cidadãos*, PNR, PSD, PTP and PURP.

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[7] Portuguese National Statistics Institute, data on unemployment rating collected from their website
[8] For a better understanding of the 2019 EP elections context: Lisi (2019).

Table 3.5 – Negative Messages on TV spots 2019 (%)

	BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
1st TV spot	0	9.1	6.7	0	8.3
2nd TV spot	15	_	0	0	0
3rd TV spot	0	_	0	0	77
4th TV spot	0	_	3.7	0	0
5th TV spot	0	_	0	0	0
6th TV spot	0	_	0	0	0
7th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
8th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
9th TV spot	_	_	0	_	_
Average	3	9.1	1.2	0	2.9

The 2019 European election was more positive than the previous one. Within the biggest five parties, CDS-PP and CDU presented similar values of nearly 64 per cent of positive messages, followed by PSD with 52.2, and BE and PS were the ones with less positivity (Table 3.6). Regarding the smaller parties, PTP was the most positive with 77.8 per cent, followed by LIVRE, PAN, CDU and CDS-PP, with 68.6 per cent; 65.2 per cent, respectively.

Table 3.6 – Positive Messages on TV spots 2019

	BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
1st TV spot	42.9	63.6	53.3	13	70.7
2nd TV spot	5	_	52.4	27.6	40.9
3rd TV spot	34.8	_	50	7.1	61.5
4th TV spot	4	_	51.9	28.6	40.5
5th TV spot	75	_	82.1	66.7	57.1
6th TV spot	0	_	60.9	40	50
7th TV spot	_	_	66.7	_	_
8th TV spot	_	_	92.3	_	_
9th TV spot	_	_	80	_	_
Average	16.3	63.6	63.9	25.2	52.2

In 2019, PS presented an unusual approach regarding the TV spots since in each spot they showed a member of a family (actors) and what the PS governance meant to each of them in terms of opportunities and employment, seizing this opportunity to stress the economic and social growth and their achievements in the government. Due to this approach, they did not discuss any specific issues. Their parliamentary supporter BE dedicated each TV spot to a different topic, starting their campaign discussing their agenda on reducing weekly working hours, then focused corruption in banks, their own performance, climate change, and appeals aimed at mobilizing their voters, something most of the parties have also done. In turn, in their first TV spot, CDU presented their list but also criticized the PS, PSD and CDS-PP. In the second, was an exclusive spot for the greens, where there was only discussion of issues. In the next spots, more broad issues are approached, as well as the measures and distinctive characteristics of this coalition. As in 2009 and 2014, the TV spots prepared by the green party are more positive (with more positive sentences) than the other spots.

Regarding the opposition parties in parliament, PSD showed a pattern in their TV spots, talking about several issues, as European Funds, European Security, Health or Youth, and giving many examples of their stances, but also criticizing PS and underlining how the socialists have failed. CDS-PP, unlike in the previous elections, only produced one TV spot, in which they discussed their agenda and criticized the government.

PAN, who has one seat at the Portuguese Parliament, only produced one TV spot with no negativity at all.

About the newer parties, *Aliança* started their campaign presenting their candidates and their general views on politics. All their TV spots had the two main candidates discussing several issues, although they did not present their agenda clearly. The Coalition *Basta* only had one TV spot, where the first candidate talked about broad issues, without presenting specific measures from their manifesto. *Iniciativa Liberal*, another new party, only presented one TV spot with a song criticizing the government; the few mentions to their own party regard their main issue, economic liberalization. In its first campaign for EP elections, *Nós, cidadãos* (NC) focused on the fight against corruption, their vision for Europe and the role of their main candidate on exposing cases of corruption.

Regarding the other smaller parties, *Livre* produced two TV spots. In the first, their vision for the EU and some agenda points of green initiatives are discussed. In the second one, the focus on the party and try to mobilize their electorate to turn out to vote. PDR presents a former Eurodeputy as first candidate. In their campaign they clarify how EU institutions work and discuss the work done by that candidate. The party does not have a strong ideologic agenda, and therefore

addresses in broad terms several issues, such as education or European funds. The party MAS focus their TV campaign on attacking Merkel , Macron (France) and Costa, the rise of far-right parties in Europe, as well as European policies on bailouts for banks, the national government, NATO, border controls and military missions. PCTP/MRPP have essentially on big agenda issue, the exit from the Euro and the EU. In their campaign they distance themselves from the other parties, accusing all the others of being servants of Germany and the economic interests. PTP only presented one TV spot, where they talked about the party and the candidates, but not about their manifesto. On the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, PNR campaign included some positive campaign (opposition to immigration from Muslim countries, family values, proposals on EU transparency issues) but the party also criticizes the left agenda and the centre-right parties, claiming they are the only authentic right-wing party. Lastly, PURP talked essentially about the party and daily problems of the retired and the elderly.

Regarding the outdoors, there was no presence of negative messages. Many of the outdoors have the names of candidates and few have issues of their own parties. The most common characteristic of the outdoors was the presence of campaign slogans. The most positive party is PDR, followed by PCTP/MRPP (80 per cent), PS (75 per cent) and *Livre* (62.5 per cent).

Hypotheses Testing

On Table 3.7 and Figure 1, data on negative campaigning in 2009, 2011 and 2019 is summarized. Clearly, there is no trend or constant evolution of negative campaigning in this period. One possible explanation for the extent of negativity can be the social and financial context, which was much more severe in 2014, the most negative year (and consequently less positive) in terms of campaigning.

Table 3.7 - Average percentage of negative messages by year (%)

	TV Spots		Outdoors	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
2009	48.28	3.99	37.93	0
2014	31.44	9.57	47.5	2.5
2019	44.67	4.45	50	0

Figure 3.1 – Variation in Negativity and Positivity 2009-2019
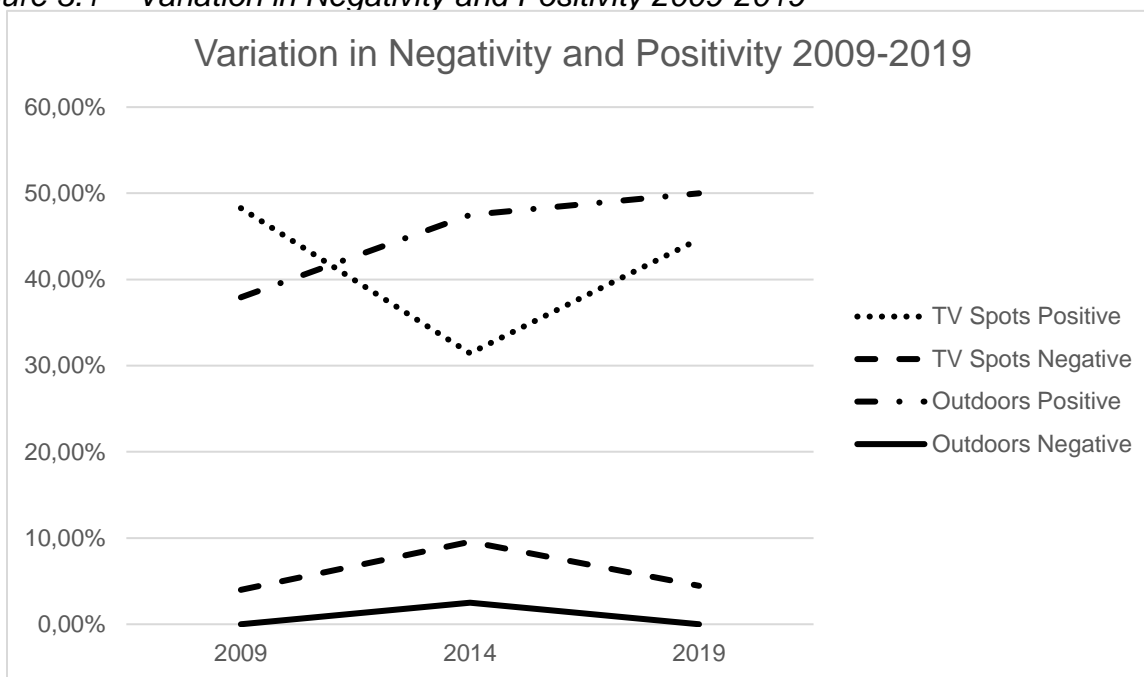
The 2009-2019 period analysed has much more positive messages than negatives ones, averaging 41.5 per cent of positive discourse and 6 per cent of negative messages on the TV spots, and 45.1 per cent of positivity and 0.8 per cent of negativity on the outdoors.

Focusing on the parties with parliamentary representation in the Portuguese and the European Parliament which have participated in the three elections analysed here) we can find trends in terms of longitudinal negativity (Table 3.8).

Table 3.8 - Negative and Positive Campaigning in parties with representation on both parliaments in the XXI century (in %)

		BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
NEGATIVE	2009	5.38	7.94	4.28	3.97	5.04
	2014	21.25	2.48	11.20	18.05	2.48
	2019	2.91	6.25	1.13	0	2.84
	Average	9.86	5.56	5.54	7.34	3.45
POSITIVE	2009	15.71	47.62	57.89	50.79	38.66
	2014	12.5	42.15	23.70	29.32	42.15
	2019	17.48	56.25	62.71	28.24	51.77
	Average	15.23	48.67	48.1	36.12	44.19

BE was, on average, the most negative party, with 9.9 per cent of negative messages. However, BE did not attack any other party or candidate on the outdoors, as the other four parties

on this table. BE was also the less positive in their campaign, with 15.2 per cent on average. The BE really stands out from the other four parties considered.

On the other side, PSD was the less negative, with 3.5 per cent of references to other parties, on average. CDS-PP was the more positive, followed closely by CDU, with 48.7 per cent and 48.1 per cent, respectively, meaning that nearly half of the discourse of these parties was focused on their own parties and agenda.

It is interesting to notice that when PS was in government, they presented fewer negative messages. The same occurred when in 2014 PSD and CDS-PP where in government as a coalition (it is worth mentioning that this 2014 coalition did not produced outdoors due to budget cuts). Also, it is interesting to notice is that in 2019 BE and CDU were supporting the PS government in the parliament and it is precisely in that election that both parties present fewer negative messages.

Since in 2014 the government was composed by PSD and CDS-PP, the most negative parties were the main three from the other side of the political spectrum (BE and PS had very high percentages of negative campaigning, 21.3 per cent and 18.1 per cent, respectively).

None of these parties had negative messages on the outdoors, coming all the negative messages from the TV spots, which confirms Elmelund-Præstekær (2010) assertion that most negative messages are present on televised campaigning.

Regarding the attacked parties, the incumbents were the most attacked, which is consistent with the idea put forward by Walter (2012) that incumbent parties and parties closer to centre of the political spectrum are more likely to be targets for negative messages. Very few attacks were made against the other parties, but in 2019 BE and CDU were targeted, possibly due to being parliamentary supporters of PS. Only the five parties with parliamentary representation (PAN excepted) were targets of negative messages. PSD and CDS-PP only attacked PS and t did not attack each other, while PS attacked PSD and CDS-PP, and BE and CDU attacked the other three, but avoided attacking each other.

Although these three campaigns were for the European Parliament, all the attacks to the other parties targeted their national policies and agenda, and a great deal of messages focused on national issues. Most of the attacks were not personalized but focused the parties. A few exceptions to this took place in 2014, when the former prime-minister José Sócrates (PS) was blamed of signing the bailout agreement, or the attack against the prime-minister Passos Coelho (PSD) by BE and PS, which accused him of lying; and in 2019 the prime-minister António Costa (PS) was attacked by MAS.

Regarding the hypotheses, as observable in the Table 2 and in Figure 1, it is possible to confirm Hypothesis 1, since the percentage of negative campaign was higher in 2014 than in 2009 and 2019, with 9.6 per cent in 2014 and less than 5 per cent in the other two. This confirmation is in line with the European longitudinal studies on negative campaigns of Håkansson (1999), Esaiasson & Håkansson (2002), Bjerling (2007), Elmelund-Præstekær & Svensson (2011), Van Heerde (2011), Holtz-Bacha (2011), Walter (2012) and Ridout & Walter (2013), in which the negative campaigns fluctuated and they did not presented a constant growth as in the studies produced in the USA.

To test Hypothesis 2, data on position of the five larger parties in the polls dated prior to the beginning of the campaign was used. In 2009, CDS-PP was behind in the polls with 5 per cent and was also the most negative from the five biggest parties, with 7.9 per cent of negative campaigning. PS which was first on the polls, but ended as the second most voted party, was the least negative with 4 per cent of negative discourse. In 2014, CDS-PP and PSD run as coalition, and together had 27.7 per cent of the total votes, which was lower than the poll numbers, however they were the least negative party in the campaign with 2.5 per cent of negative messages. PS leaded the polls but was the second most negative party, with 18.1 per cent, lagging only behind BE, which was not only the most negative party but also the one lagging behind the polls among these five parties. About 2019, PS led the polls and indeed during their campaign they did not produce any attack to other party or candidate. PSD, on the second position on the polls, was the third most negative, with 2.8 per cent. CDU, in the last position among the five, was the second less negative, while CDS-PP which had similar numbers, was the most negative with 6.3 per cent.

The correlation (Pearson coefficient) between rank in the polls and negativity varies from .78 in 2009 to .34 in 2014, assuming the value of .58 in 2019. Therefore, it is possible to confirm this hypothesis since this pattern occurs in every election, even if less so in 2014 (Table 3.9).

Table 3.9 - Comparison between polls and negativity in each election on parties with representation on both parliaments in the XXI century (in %)

	BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
2009 polls	10	5	10	34.6	32
2009 negativity	5.38	7.94	4.28	3.97	5.04
2014 polls	6.6	31.1	10,4	38	31.1
2014 negativity	21.25	2.48	11.20	18.05	2.48
2019 polls	8.1	7.6	7.4	36.3	28.3
2019 negativity	2.91	6.25	1.13	0	2.84

Regarding the third hypothesis, stating that the negativity of parties increases in the final period of the campaign, in the data displayed in Table 3.10 makes it not possible to confirm Damore (2002). In fact, in only two cases such phenomenon occurs: PSD in 2009 and CDU in 2014. All the other parties have less or the same amount of negativity in the last TV spots when compared with the first. The same phenomenon occurs with all the other smaller parties: in the three elections periods only one party besides this five had more negative discourse in the end than in the beginning of the TV spot, PNR in 2019 (increasing from 16.7 per cent to 25 per cent in the last TV spot).

Table 3.10 - Negativity in both moments of the campaign in each election on parties with representation on both parliaments in the XXI century (in %)

	BE	CDS-PP	CDU	PS	PSD
09 beginning	10	9.1	0	5.9	0
09 end	0	0	0	0	20
14 beginning	27.3	0	13.9	33.3	0
14 end	7.7	0	33.3	19	0
19 beginning	0	9.1	6.7	0	8.3
19 end	0	9.1	0	0	0

Hypothesis 4 is about more ideological parties being more negative. As seen above, BE was the most negative party of the biggest five parties on average, with 9.9 per cent, followed by PS, CDS-PP and CDU with a similar percentage on average, being PSD the less negative over this period.

According the Guedes' work (2016) and the data from the Manifesto Project, the parties with less ideological fuzziness were BE, CDU and, curiously, PS, despite being a *catch-all* party. When these parties are compared in terms of the average level of negativity, it is possible to confirm the hypothesis, since the most ideological parties of the five indeed display highest levels of negativity, while PSD and CDS-PP are both the less negative and less ideologically strong.

The test of this hypothesis has, however, limitations since only the parties with representation are classified in these works and the available data is only 2016.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study about negative campaigning on the campaigns for European elections in Portugal, the research question was *"*How did the use of negative campaigns in the European parliamentary elections during the XXI century within the Portuguese parties evolve, and which factors explain variation?" It is now possible to answer this question. Negative campaigning did not present a steady growth or decline, fluctuating over the years. In 2009 there is 4 per cent of negative discourse on the TV spots and 0 per cent on outdoors, in 2014 9.6 per cent on tv spots and 2.5 per cent on the outdoors and in 2019 4.5 per cent of attacks on the spots and 0 per cent on the outdoors. The campaigns are much more positive, averaging 41.5 per cent with positive messages, than negative, with an average of 6 per cent, on TV spots, being the outdoors almost irrelevant on negative percentages.

However, it is not possible to say that the negative campaigns are *timeless* (Elmelund-Præstekær and Svensson, 2012) due to the limited number of elections in this study. This limitation unable the possibility to test the theory made by several American studies on the subject, which concluded that there is a growth on negative campaigning, verifying a much more broad sample and comparing the first years on European elections and the more recent ones, assessing if there is more attacks in more recent years than in the first elections.

During these campaigns five parties with representation in both parliamentary chambers were targets of negative messages, but the parties which led the government in the analysed three periods were the most attacked, despite these campaigns were to the European Parliament, which again supports the idea that the focus on the campaigns are more internal policies than European ones.

It is interesting to notice that the parties which discussed more European issues where the ones who were in government, which could be a way to avoid a political evaluation that the opposition seeks during the domestic term (Freire, 2010). This is especially clear on the 2014 campaign, where all the parties criticized the economic context and pointed fingers to each other while the PSD/CDS-PP coalition discussed many European topics.

The attacks among these parties do not always affect possible future coalitions, as pointed in the literature, since CDS-PP attacked PSD in the 2009 campaign but ended up by forming a post-electoral coalition.

Another conclusion we can take from this study is that the 2014 campaign was different from the other two in many levels, but the most important is the degree of negativity, which was much higher than the other two. The subjects discussed in the campaign and the attacks to other parties and candidates led the believe that the amount of negative campaigning was more related

to the financial and economical context than with any possible growth of the use of negative campaigning. Moreover, another important characteristic of the 2014 election is that was the only one of the three with a relevant number of personal attacks; however, all the negativity in the three elections towards candidates was related with policies and previous record on the government and never with personal characteristics.

Regarding the hypotheses based on the literature, and as discussed before, the fluctuating growth theory is confirmed, opposing the popular belief that the campaigns are becoming more and more negative. The hypothesis stating that parties lagging behind at the polls are more negative than the ones in front was confirmed. Regarding the hypothesis about the evolution during the campaign, what do occur is contrary to expected: more negative messages in the beginning. Lastly, regarding the hypothesis on ideological strength and negativity, it was possible to confirm that the most ideological are also the most negative. In this particular setting, left-wing most ideological parties are more negative.

Both the hypotheses and the research question are not given a definitive answer due to the low number of cases under study. In this sense, a future study comprising all the campaigns to the European Parliament from one country will allow for better conclusions to the field of negative campaigns in second-order elections, since this sample of elections could be an isolated phenomenon. In this period there was a beginning of a financial crisis, a deep economic crisis and a stable period, and we can assume that the amount of negative messages was related with that context and with a bigger polarization between the center parties after the external intervention, with accusations on who to blame for that since 2011 and, from 2015 on, focused on the alliance between PS and the left-wing parties.

This is the first comprehensive study on negative campaigns on second-order elections of this kind, which creates an understanding of how Portuguese campaigns work and contributes to the literature on negative campaigning. In the future, it is necessary to extend the time period and and/or include other countries, to test if this strategy of campaigning have the same impact on both first-order and second-order elections or if the approach is different. In this sense, it would be useful to study the same period on first-order elections in Portugal and test if there was more or the same number of negative messages on the different order elections.

Another limitation is the communication channels focused on this study, which is restricted to TV spots and outdoors. Future research could include debates between the candidates, in which candidates are face-to-face, which may produce more personal attacks or other types of negativity.

With the increasing importance of the internet, social media and on a «fake news world», it would be interesting see the relevance of these tools during the campaign and how is the campaign shaped by social media and internet news, since in these social spaces is possible to answer quickly to an attack or to "fake news", which is becoming more relevant (as seen on the 2016 election in the USA), but also since on these spaces there is more freedom to post other type of and more materials that would not be possible on TV spots or outdoors.

To sum up, although there is negative campaigning in the European elections in Portugal, it is not expected to have the same magnitude on first-order elections and especially when compared with bipartisan systems, such as the American one, where the attacks are more suitable to the system party and the importance of going negative can make a difference on winning an election, which can explain the possibility that negativity is increasing on the campaigns. What is concluded on this study is that the use of this strategy does not present a stable growth, fluctuating over the years, which could be explained by the crisis context during the period analysed.

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