

Gender Polarization in Voting: The Role of Negative Campaigning

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Abstract: Across the globe men tend to lean towards right-wing parties while women are more likely to vote left. In addition, there is a well-documented pattern which shows that negative campaigning tends to be more effective among male voters and that right-wing parties are more likely to employ negative campaign tactics. This leads to the question whether gender polarization in voting can be partially explained by men's greater susceptibility to negative campaigning. To explore this, a large-scale expert survey (NEGex) was merged with a collection of post-election surveys (CSES Module 5) to extract a database of 45,000 respondents, covering 200 parties over 34 national elections. The results confirm the hypothesis that the gender divide is partly due to men being more susceptible to negative campaigning, which right-wing parties commonly use more than their left-wing counterparts.

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1. Gender polarization
2. Political campaign adverts
3. Campaign tone

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1. Introduction

1.1. What Is Polarization and How Does It Affect the Population?

“When politicians start talking about large groups of their fellow Americans as ‘enemies,’ it’s time for a quiet stir of alertness. Polarizing people is a good way to win an election, and also a good way to wreck a country.” – Molly Ivins, American columnist, author and political commentator *“You Got to Dance with Them What Brung You”* (1998)

Over the last four decades, there has been the rise of a silent threat to democracy – polarization. Every election cycle, this term is frequently quoted in the press and by experts. But what does it actually mean? And why could it be dangerous?

Political polarization can be defined in two categories:

- (1) Affective polarization: the growing tendency for people to feel positive towards social groups they are part of, and negative towards social groups they are not part of – e.g. in the US a Democrat voter’s growing dislike of the Republican party and stronger affinity to their own party (and vice versa for Republican voters).

- (2) Ideological polarization: the ideological divide between political groups; where individuals increasingly align with extreme positions rather than moderate viewpoints (EBSCO).¹ In other words, it is the growing divergence and radicalization of the policies people and parties want to enact.

Although both are on the rise, this study will focus more on ideological polarization.

The Rise of Affective Polarization

A clear indication of the increase in affective polarization was noted in survey data which has been collected by the American National Election Study (ANES) over the past 40 years (see Figure 1).² “The review measured feelings of warmth or coldness toward one’s own party and the opposing party on a “feeling thermometer” scale from 0 to 100. It demonstrates that affective polarization, calculated as the difference between these ratings, rose from 22.64 degrees in 1978 to 40.87 degrees in 2016.”³

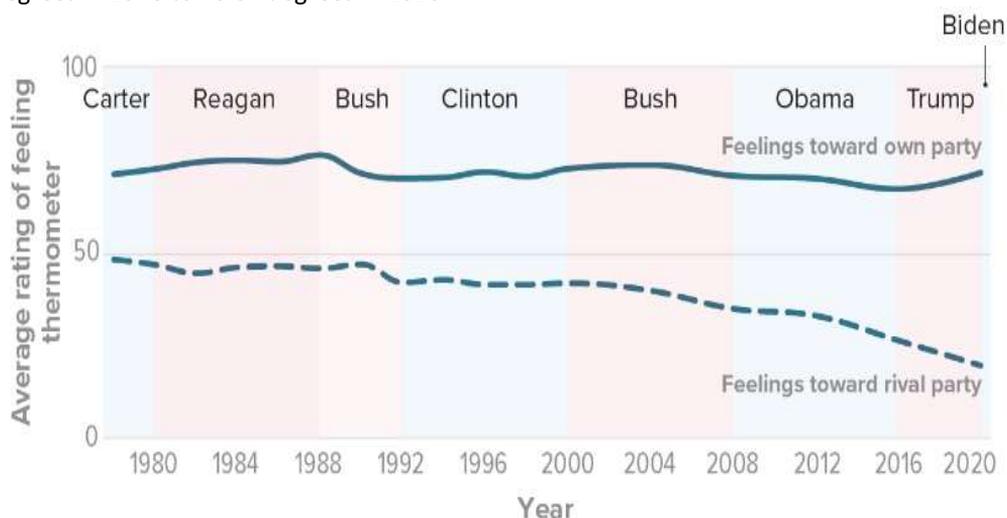


Figure 1. Affective polarization of parties: Own-party and rival party feelings (Source: Knowable Magazine adapted from the ANES Guide of public opinion and electoral behaviour)

The Rise of Ideological Polarization

Since 1994, in the United States, the average Democrat is increasingly more likely to have liberal ideas whilst the average Republican is increasingly more likely to have conservative ideas.⁴ This has been demonstrated by the Pew Research Center survey in Figure 2 – and clearly shows the rise of ideological polarization.⁵

¹ EBSCO (2025) <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/political-science/political-polarization>

² https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/anes-guide.html?chart=affective_polarization_parties

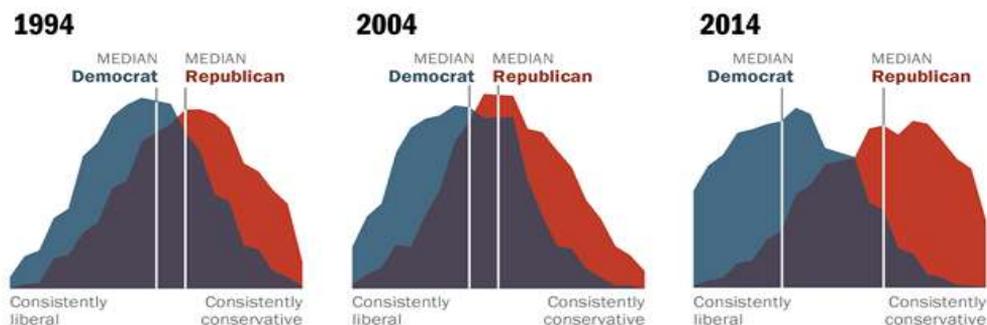
³ Divided we stand: The rise of political animosity, Carl Johan Karlsson (2024)

<https://knowablemagazine.org/content/article/society/2024/latest-research-what-causes-political-polarization?>

⁴ “The questions cover a range of political values including attitudes about size and scope of government, the social safety net, immigration, homosexuality, business, the environment, foreign policy and racial discrimination” (e.g. conservative position: “Most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit; liberal position”: “Business corporations make too much profit”) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/appendix-a-the-ideological-consistency-scale/>

⁵ Political Polarization in the American Public, Pew Research Center (2014)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public
 Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

Figure 2. Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values
 (Source: 2014 Political polarization in the American Public – Pew Research Center)

The Danger of Polarization

Ideological polarization has been associated with various negative socio-economic consequences. In 2021 Filip Milačić stated “people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them’”. This type of polarization weakens respect for democratic norms, corrodes basic legislative processes, undermines the nonpartisan stature of the judiciary, fuels public disaffection with political parties, exacerbates intolerance and discrimination, diminishes societal trust, and increases violence throughout the society.... At the end [the parties] no longer agree on the rules of the game and begin to disregard the basic norms of the democratic political system in order to win elections”. An example of this can be seen when, in 2019, the UK Conservative party announced that they planned to ignore court decisions related to Brexit.⁶

1.2. A Rise in Gender Polarization

“At the core of today’s political extremes lies a deep-seated social anxiety, fuelled by atomisation and alienation between the sexes.” –Joel Kotkin, writer on urban affairs *“The Dangers of a Political Gender Gap”* (2025)

Ideological polarization isn’t just a coincidence – it is a pattern. What are the differences between the two ends of the polarized population?

Since the 1980s (Emanuele & Marino, 2024), it has been seen that the population is ideologically polarized by gender – where men increasingly tend to vote for more right-wing parties whilst women increasingly tend to vote for more left-wing parties (Hudde, 2023; Abou-Chadi, 2024; Yerushalmy, 2024).

Gender Polarization can be seen in most countries worldwide. For example, Figure 3 shows data collected by ARD broadcast from the 2025 German Federal elections.⁷ It demonstrates that gender polarization is apparent in all parties but especially in extremist parties where 24% of all

⁶ Boris Johnson fuels speculation he could ignore Brexit delay law – Kate Proctor (2019)

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/29/boris-johnson-fuels-speculation-could-ignore-brexit-delay-law>

⁷ Germany’s election in graphics – Rachel More <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-election-graphics-2025-02-23/>

men voted for the AfD (Germany’s far right-wing party), compared to 18% of women, whilst 7% of men voted for Die Linke (Germany’s far left-wing party), compared to 11% of women. This is additionally seen in other countries. In the US 2024 presidential election, 43% of men voted for Harris whilst 55% voted for Trump. On the other hand, 53% of women voted for Harris whilst 46% voted for Trump.⁸

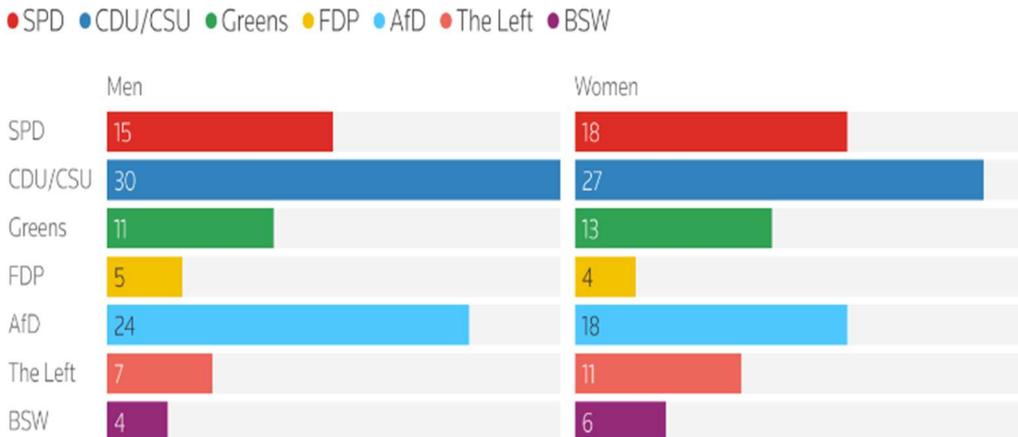


Figure 3. How men and women voted in the 2024 German Federal election (Source: Rachel More – ARD Broadcast)

Another point to note is that, in recent years, this gender polarization has become most widespread throughout younger generations. According to the Financial Times,⁹ the trigger event for this youth related gender polarization was the #MeToo movement which gained popularity in 2017.¹⁰ However, the movement appears to have been solely the catalyst event which has subdivided Gen-Z into conservative and liberal camps based on their gender. This could pose an end to the assumption that the youth are usually liberal whilst the elderly are typically conservative - as stated by François Guizot “A man who is not a Liberal at sixteen has no heart; a man who is not a Conservative at sixty has no head”.

The Financial Times conducted research in 2024 and demonstrated the increasingly stark ideological divide of 18–29-year-olds based on their gender (figure 4). Observing the years when this gender related polarization began, this chart supports the idea outlined in the previous paragraph that the #MeToo movement was the catalyst of the divide, and that the phenomenon has now become self-sustaining surpassing solely sexual harassment issues.¹¹

⁸ How voting patterns changed in the 2024 election: A detailed analysis | Pew Research Center (2025)

⁹ A new global gender divide is emerging – John Burn-Murdoch (2024) <https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998>

¹⁰ #MeToo is an awareness campaign founded in 2006 against sexual harassment. It grew online traction in 2017

¹¹ A new global gender divide is emerging – John Burn-Murdoch (2024) <https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998>

A wide ideology gap is opening up between young men and women in countries across the world

Political ideology of 18-29s (% liberal minus % conservative), by sex

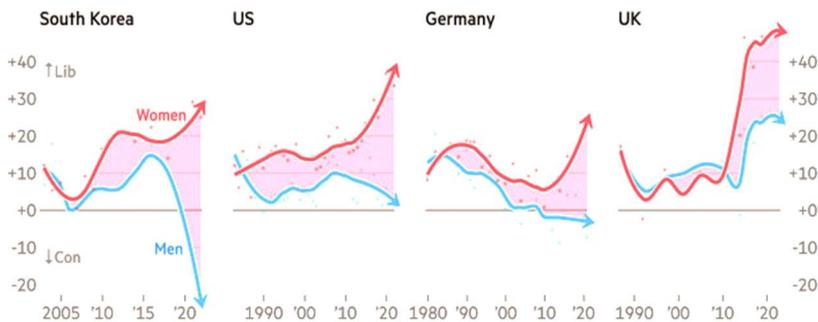


Figure 4. Political ideology of 18-29s (% liberal minus % conservative), by sex (Source: Daniel Cox, Survey Center on American Life; Gallup Poll Social Series; FT analysis of General Social Surveys of Korea, Germany & US and the British Election Study – Financial Times)

1.3. What Is Campaign Negativity and Is It on the Rise?

One type of political campaigning has taken centre stage in modern elections and has established its presence. Since the 1990s, campaign negativity has grown. Campaign negativity is “any criticism levelled by one candidate against another during a campaign” (Geer, 2006 p.23) and can be manifested through political attack advertisements. These can be subdivided into civil attack ads, which solely discredit the political policies of the opposing candidate (e.g. “My opponent has allowed violent crime to increase by 20%”) and uncivil attack ads, which in addition, discredit the opposing candidate as a person, often with offensive language (e.g. “My ignorant opponent has weakly allowed crime to increase by 20%”).

It’s heavily debated whether the presence of attack ads benefits or harms political campaigns and democracies in general. Political scientist Kenneth Goldstein argues that negative advertisements are more likely to be factual as they are designed to teach, whilst positive advertisements are designed to play on voters’ emotions. In addition, voters are more likely to remember the information of a negative ad, meaning they are more engaged and thus more likely to vote (Franz et al., 2007). However, other scholars argue that negative campaigning does not just divide voters - it makes it harder for democracy to function. According to these scholars, it fosters affective polarization, creates a demobilized, ill-informed and polarized electorate, discourages civil debate, erodes voter trust in institutions and alienates undecided voters (Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Desposato, 2011; Brader, 2005; Abramowitz & Webster, 2018).

The Rise in the Use of Negative Campaigning

According to data collected by Quotebank,¹² the belief of 85% of Americans that “the tone and nature of political debate in the United States has become more negative in recent years” is correct.¹³ A notable turning point occurred in the 2016 Presidential Election when the overall negativity of campaigns rose and then remained elevated (see Figure 5) (Külz, J. et al, 2023).

¹²The data spans 24 million online political messages (e.g. tweets, news articles etc.) by 18,627 US politicians between 2009 & 2020.

¹³ Pew Research Center survey

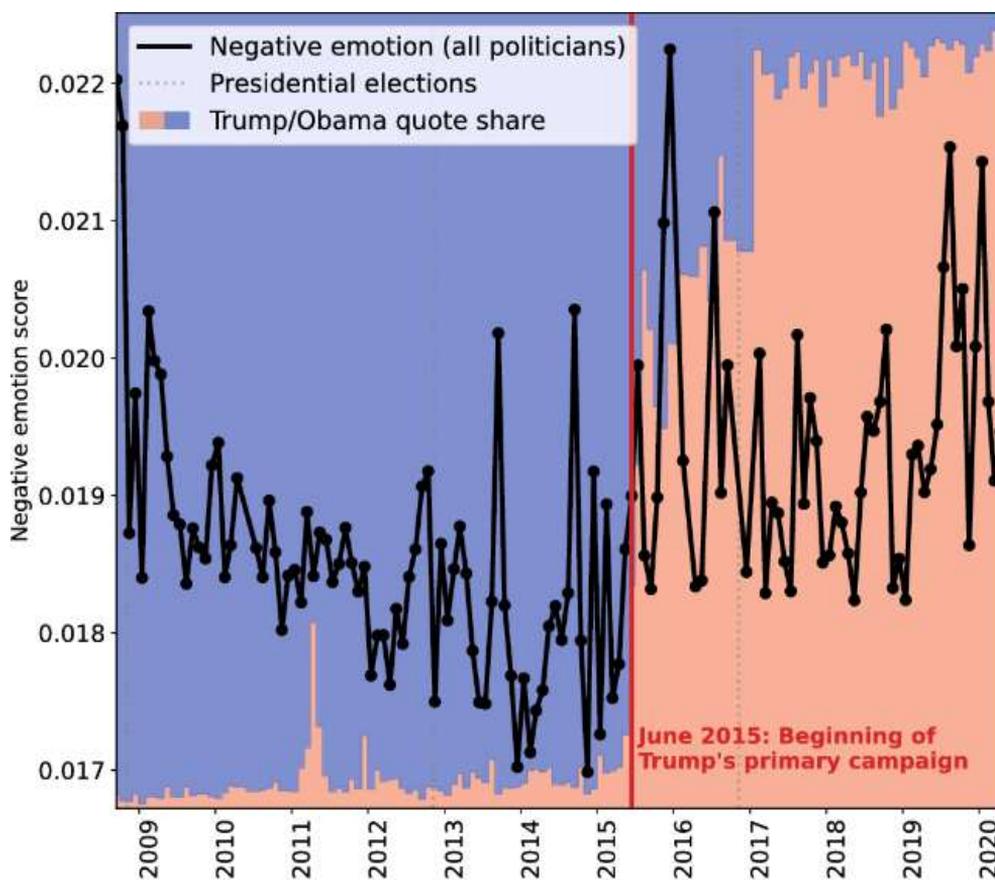


Figure 5. Average negative emotion of US politicians between 2009 and 2020
 (Source: Külz, et al, 2023)

In addition, right-wing parties do not only lean conservative – they lean toward negative campaigning. Recent research suggests that they are more likely to run attack campaigns and use negative ads compared to their left-wing counterparts (Maier, Nai & Verhaar, 2024; Valli & Nai, 2020; Nai, 2018; Lau & Pomper, 2001). Even though this phenomenon hasn't been entirely explained it may be due to the fact that there is a right-wing inclination to view "the world as a ruthlessly competitive jungle in which the strong win and the weak lose" (Duckitt, 2006). Moreover, some studies demonstrate that negative acts in general (e.g. angry faces) tend to grab the attention of conservatives more than liberals (Hibbing et al., 2014).

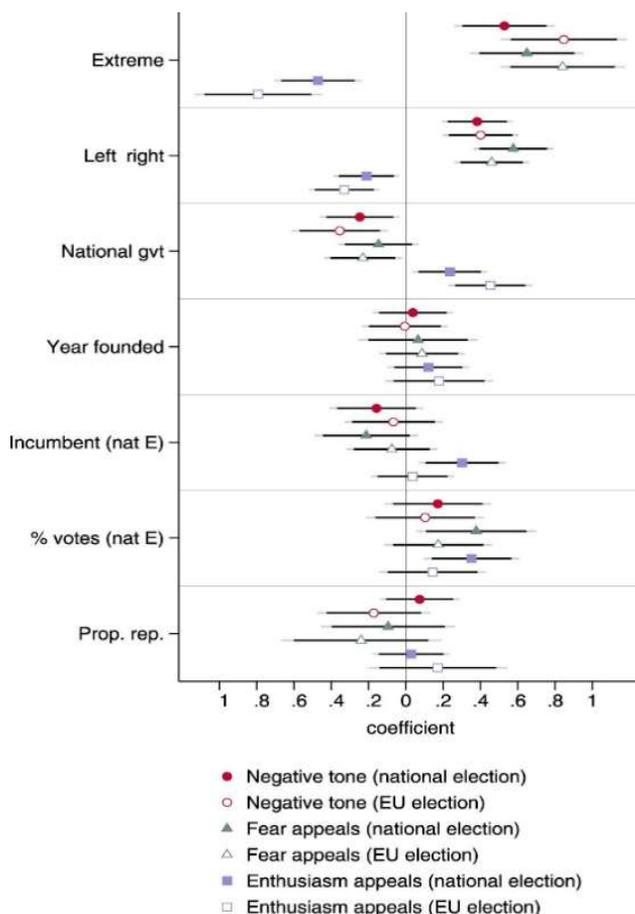


Figure 6. Uses of campaign tactics based on party distinctions. The second row demonstrates that parties further to the right are more likely to use negative tones and fear appeals, whilst parties further to the left are more likely to use Enthusiasm appeals
 (Source: Maier, Nai & Verhaar, 2024)

Comparison Of Negative Campaigning Between Left-Right Parties

Figure 6 from Alessandro Nai and Jürgen Maier shows how the use of negative tone, fear appeals, and enthusiasm appeals in campaigns varies depending on different characteristics of political parties. The horizontal position of each marker indicates whether a given party trait makes the use of that tactic more or less likely. Looking at the “Left–right” row (second from top), we see that right-wing parties are more likely to employ negative tones and fear appeals, whereas left-wing parties are more inclined toward enthusiasm appeals. The “Extreme” row (top) reveals that extremist parties are generally more prone to negative campaigning and less likely to rely on enthusiasm.

Other research suggests that how the voter reacts to political ad campaigns is partially dependent on their gender. Men tend to be more susceptible to negative campaign ads whilst women are more susceptible to positive campaign ads.¹⁴ Galasso and Nannicini argue that

¹⁴ By “susceptible” I intend that political attack ads and campaign negativity in general works to a better effect on men as they are more likely to be convinced into supporting a message of this genre.

“women tend to prefer competition and aggressive behaviour less than men, also in politics. Fridkin and Kenny (2011) show that female voters have lower tolerance toward negative advertisements, especially if uncivil or related to personal life. Gilligan (1982) and feminist theory suggest that women prefer less confrontational procedures compared with men.... Outside the real-world politics, females and males are also recognized to differ in their attitudes toward competition and negotiation (Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Bertrand, 2010; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011)” (Galasso & Nannicini, 2025).

The more people think poorly of politicians, the more they believe negative ads.
The more they believe negative ads, the more they think poorly of politicians

1.4. Why Is Gender Polarization on the Rise?

Is the increase of gender polarization (men voting right and women voting left) in part due to the rise of negative campaign ads, which are used more by right-wing parties and impact men?

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER POLARIZATION?

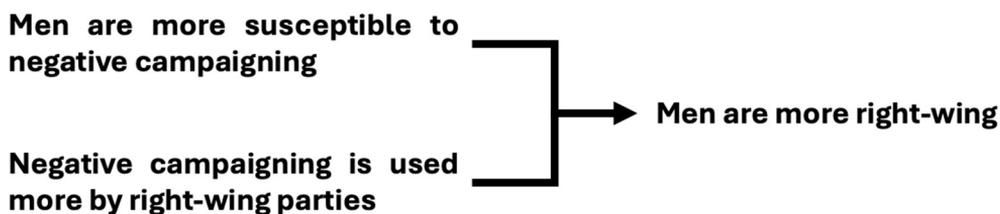


Figure 7. The inverse may be done with women (women are more susceptible to positive campaigning and positive campaigning is used more by left-wing parties--> Women are more left-wing) (susceptible in this graphic has the same meaning as explained in footnote 14)

2. Testing out Hypotheses

H1: Men tend to vote for more right-wing parties than women do

The first step is to test whether there is gender polarization in current elections. In other words, whether men are more likely to vote for more right-wing parties and vice-versa for women. Current literature strongly suggests that this hypothesis is true, Kaufmann and Petrocik propose a possible explanation (1999): “The gender gap resulted from the changed partisanship of men, as the party bias of women has changed very little, if at all.... Our conclusions regarding which attitudes cause the gender gap are more tentative, but social welfare issues were a principal correlate of the gender gap in the last two US presidential elections and may be its primary cause. The measured effects of military and defence policy questions, feminist issues, and social issues were weaker and more erratic.”

H2: Campaign negativity is more frequently used by right-wing parties

“Hit first, hit hard and keep on hitting.” - Jeremy Sinclair, *founding director of M+C Saatchi ad agency*, when talking about aggressive conservative campaign tactics.

Are right-wing parties more likely to use negative campaigning compared to left-wing parties? Right-wing parties may be more motivated to run negative campaigns for two reasons:

- (1) Negative campaigning may have the consequence of losing the support of non-loyal voters and undecided voters. As right-wing parties are mainly formed of older, loyal voters, going negative is a lower risk for right leaning parties than for left leaning parties, who are formed of more undecided, non-loyal voters (Lau et al., 2007).
- (2) Modern conservative campaigns usually use a targeted “enemy” to blame for certain problems (for example, in the typically right-wing issue of immigration). Going negative helps them define this enemy and mobilize voters (Crespo et al., 2022).

H3: Men are more likely than women to vote for parties that employ more negative campaign strategies

Following on from H1 and H2 who is more susceptible to negative campaign ads? It is suggested that negative campaigning mobilizes men and alienates women. This article assesses this by testing whether men tend to vote for parties whose campaign tone is more negative. This information matters to parties because it shapes how they target and influence voters.

H4: Gender polarization in elections can be in part explained by the higher use of negative campaigning by right-wing parties, combined with men’s greater susceptibility to such messaging

Taking the three sustaining hypotheses together, we can formulate a broader theory:

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER POLARIZATION? (H4)

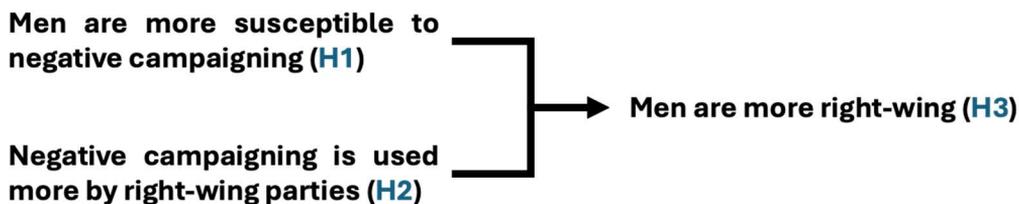


Figure 8. (see figure 7)

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data Sources

To test the four hypotheses, two independent data sources were used and merged:

- (1) Negative Campaigning Comparative Data (NEGex), version 2 is a collection of expert-survey data covering 142 national elections worldwide between June 2016 and March 2020. After each national election a sample of experts of that country was contacted to answer a systematic survey about the campaign content of the most prominent

- candidates and parties.¹⁵ Experts were used to obtain a holistic assessment of the campaign as a whole, but these types of surveys are not free from risk as they can present bias. For this reason, the measurement of campaign tone was corrected via parametric adjustments to be the “net” of the ideological distance between the average expert and the candidate (Walter & Van der Eijk, 2019). In addition, evidence exists that the expert ratings of the campaign tone show high external validity (Petkevic & Nai, 2021). The database was assembled by Professor Alessandro Nai of the University of Amsterdam to include data at the elections, parties and candidates’ level
- (2) Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 5 (2016-2021) “Democracy Divided? People, Politicians and the Politics of Populism” is a collection of post-electoral surveys completed by 114,714 respondents over 56 national elections in 45 countries (Mean = 2048 per election). Each respondent answered demographic and personal questions regarding their political beliefs and what party they voted for in their previous national election.

The overlap between these two databases was created to test the hypotheses. This includes data of 44,830 respondents who voted for 200 unique parties over 34 national elections in 32 countries and for each respondent includes:

- Respondent ID
- Country of election
- Year of election
- Respondent gender (the database is made up from 49.4% female respondents and 50.6% male respondents)
- Political party voted for
- Campaigning used by party on a positive-negative scale
- Political ideology of party on a left-right scale

3.2. Measures

One of the main difficulties of political surveys is accurately measuring certain subjective data about the parties. Among the information needed to conduct the tests, data relating to the political ideology and campaign negativity are the most difficult to assess.

To quantify the political ideology of the parties, the NEGex database used a 7-point scale ranging from 1 “far-left” to 7 “far-right” to indicate each party’s left-right position. This information was gathered using each party’s Wikipedia “information box”. “Although not ideal, Wikipedia can often provide factual information (Brown, 2011). Indeed, an external validity check discussed in Nai (2018) shows that comparing the information in Wikipedia with left-right measures in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES; Polk et al., 2017)¹⁶ and the Benoit and Laver (2007) yields very high correlations.” (Valli & Nai, 2020).

To quantify the campaign tone of election per party, the NEGex database asked experts to rate candidates, parties and elections based on the “tone” of the campaign from -10 “very

¹⁵ Experts are scholars with expertise in electoral politics, political communication and country politics who are identified via their scientific outputs (e.g. publications) and self-described expertise. “ On average experts in the dataset were quite familiar with the election they were asked to rate (M = 8.2, SD = 1.6 on a 0-10 scale). 29.7% of experts are women, 88.5% have a PhD, and 77.0% are domestic experts and work in the country where the election they were asked to rate took place. The average expert is relatively centrist ideologically (M = 4.4, SD = 1.8, on a 1-10 left-right self-positioning scale) (Nai et al., 2024).”

¹⁶ Chapel Hill Expert Survey <https://www.chesdata.eu/>

negative” to +10 “very positive”. The survey included 6 example messages that experts had to rate to “anchor the experts’ ratings”. These were then used to do some parametric adjustments which transformed the 21-point scale into a 7-point scale from 1 “very positive” to 7 “very negative”. A robustness check was run by triangulating the expert measures with two independent data sources which calculated the negativity of political campaigns on twitter and in TV ads in the US 2018 midterms. The experts’ measurements were confirmed to be “significantly and positively correlated with the negativity in the Twitter and in TV ads” (Valli & Nai, 2020).

4. Results

A series of tests were run with the merged database to assess whether the hypotheses are true.¹⁷ These tests turned out to be very intriguing and so, in this section, each hypothesis is considered in turn and the results are examined.

H1 – Men are more likely to vote for right-wing parties

The first test considers whether it is true if gender polarization is present in current elections. The data clearly supports this. On average, male respondents voted for parties at 4.353 on the 7-point political ideology scale where 1 is “far-left” whilst 7 is “far-right”. Female respondents, on average, voted for parties at 4.199 on the same scale. Even though this 0.154 difference (3.67% difference over the entire 7-point scale) may not seem significant, modest shifts can be very important in politics - especially in countries where election vote margins are usually slim (for example, in the United States where, since 2000, the average popular vote margin between the two candidates of the Presidential election has been 3.16%)¹⁸ or in countries where there is a large gender discrepancy, for example, in France, where there are 2,085,000 more women than men, or, in India where there are 45,711,000 more men than women. (Figure 10 displays the number of men per 100 women in each country).¹⁹

Table 1. Average political ideology respondents voted for, by gender (7-point scale – higher mean = more right-wing)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>N. respondents</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Coefficient of variation</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>	<i>Sum rank</i>
<i>Male</i>	22303	4.353	1.541	0.01	0.354	22639.176	5.049×10+8
<i>Female</i>	21740	4.199	1.537	0.01	0.366	21388.841	4.650×10+8

¹⁷ The statistical services JASP and Jamovi were used to assess the NEGex database and the merged database. To test H1 a linear regression of the merged database was conducted in which the dependent variable was campaign tone, the covariate was party position, and the factor was gender of respondent. To test H2 a Descriptive Statistics test of the NEGex database was conducted in which the variable was campaign tone, and the split was party position, in addition, an ANOVA and Post-Hoc test was conducted in which the dependent variable was campaign tone, and the fixed factor was party position. To test H3 the same linear regression data from H1 was used. Finally, to test H4 a GLM Mediation Analysis of the merged database was conducted where the outcome was party position, the mediator was campaign tone, and the predictor was gender of respondent.

¹⁸ The average popular vote margin was retrieved from The American Presidency Project which lists all the popular vote margins since the 1824 Presidential election. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-election-mandates>

¹⁹ Why the former USSR has far fewer men than women – George Gao <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/08/14/why-the-former-ussr-has-far-fewer-men-than-women/>

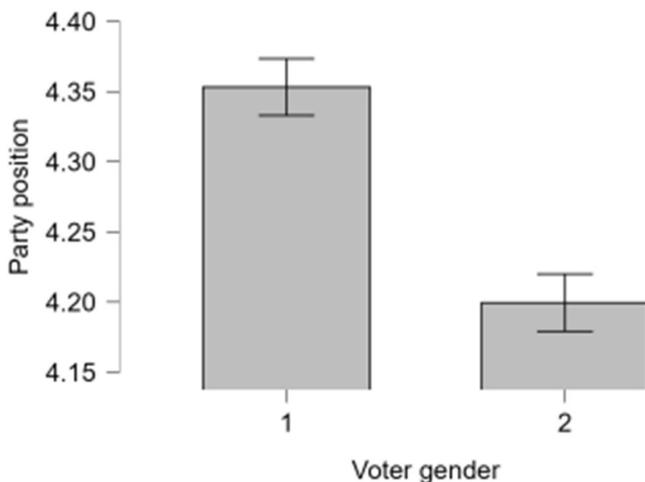


Figure 9. Graph displaying the same information as Table 1

Where Women Outnumber Men, and Where They Don't

Gender ratios in 2015

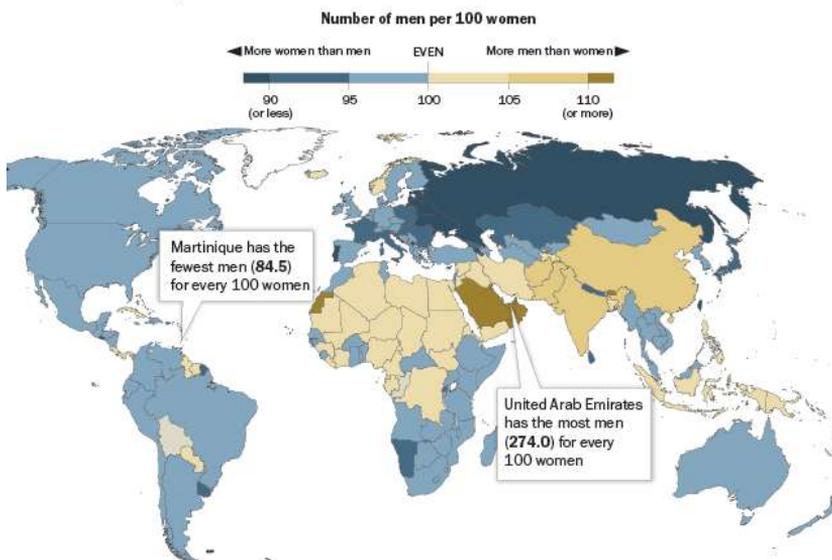


Figure 10. Displaying number of men per 100 women in each country (Source: United Nations, DESA. World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision. – Pew Research Center)

H2 - Campaign negativity is more frequently used by right-wing parties

The data also validated the second hypothesis. Tests were run both on solely the NEGex database and then the merged database, both results confirmed that right-wing parties are more likely to use negative campaigning. Through the merged database it can be seen that, on average, for each 1-point increase in campaign tone negativity on a 7-point scale, the average party is 0.63 points further to the right on a 7-point political ideology scale (see Table 4).

In addition, the NEGex database on its own showed that the party ideology with the highest average campaign tone (higher = more negative) is far-right followed by right, far-left, centre, left, centre-right and centre-left parties.

The extensive use of negative campaigning by far-left parties is due to the fact that extremist parties are more likely to run negative ads (Valli & Nai, 2020). An example of this can be seen in the 2024 US Presidential Election campaign tone where, according to Election Analysis,²⁰ 72% of ads run by Kamala Harris (left leaning) were negative, whilst 99.8% of ads run by Donald Trump (right leaning) were negative (Ridout et al., 2025).²¹

Table 2. Mean campaign tone used by parties, by political ideology (higher mean campaign tone = more negative)

POLITICAL POSITION	FAR-LEFT	LEFT	CENTRE-LEFT	CENTRE	CENTRE-RIGHT	RIGHT	FAR-RIGHT
VALID	17	40	109	47	114	67	31
MISSING	0	1	4	2	1	3	0
MEAN	4.290	3.983	3.893	4.059	3.958	4.759	5.141
STD. DEVIATION	1.046	0.987	0.905	1.006	0.970	0.966	0.980
MINIMUM	2.667	2.091	2.000	2.091	2.000	2.750	3.360
MAXIMUM	5.750	6.000	5.917	6.000	6.583	6.500	6.750

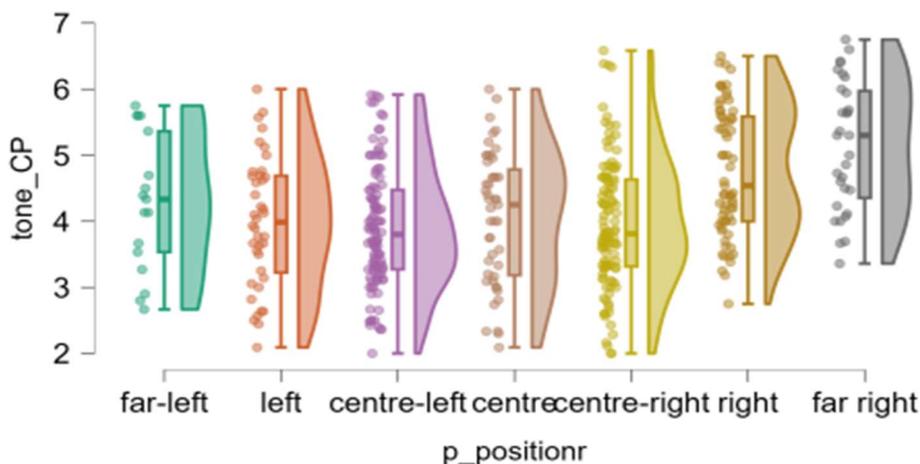


Figure 11. Graph displaying the same data as Table 2. This raincloud plot shows the average campaign tone used by parties divided by their ideological position (higher campaign tone = more negative)

²⁰ Advertising trends in the 2024 presidential race - Election Analysis - United States (2025)

²¹ In the analysis negative ads comprised both contrast and attack ads. Contrast attacks mention both the favoured candidate and the opponent, whilst attack ads solely mention the opponent, they are both considered negative ads as the opponent is always cast in bad light.

H3 - Men are more likely than women to vote for parties that employ more negative campaign strategies

The third test confirms this hypothesis that men are more susceptible to campaign negativity. On average, male respondents voted for a party with an average campaign tone of 4.336 (St. Dev. = 1.085) (on a 7-point scale, where 1 is a “very positive” tone and 7 is a “very negative” tone) whilst female respondents voted for parties with an average campaign tone of 4.199 (St. Dev. = 1.110). Similarly to H1, the difference between the average campaign tone of parties voted for by men and the average campaign tone of parties voted for by women (0.137), even though numerically modest, can have large consequences on elections.

Table 3. Mean campaign tone of parties, by respondent gender (higher mean = more negative)

Gender	N. respondents	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation	Mean Rank	Sum Rank
Male	22678	4.336	1.085	0.007	0.250	23244.165	5.271×10 ⁺⁸
Female	22151	4.199	1.110	0.007	0.264	21566.108	4.777×10 ⁺⁸

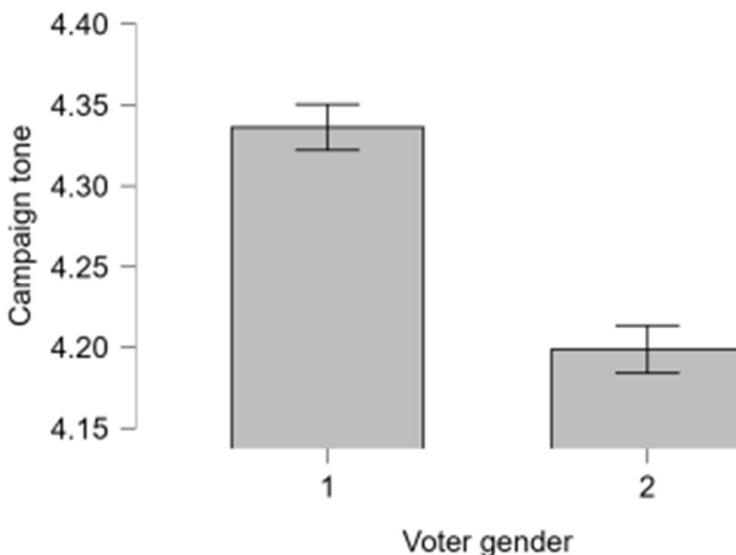


Figure 12. Graph showing the same information of Table 3

H4 – Gender polarization is fuelled by campaign negativity

The findings confirm the key hypothesis: gender differences in political ideology are partly driven by the fact that right-wing parties use more negative campaigning and men are more receptive to it. Overall, men vote for parties 0.1537 points further to the right than women on a 7-point left–right scale (where 1 is “far left” parties and 7 is “far right” parties). Of this gap, 0.0900 points—around 59%—is explained by men’s greater susceptibility to negative campaign messages. The remaining 0.0637 points reflect the gender difference that persists even after accounting for this effect. Thus, approximately 59% (0.1537 / 0.0900) of the gender divide is explained by the hypothesis (men are more susceptible to negative campaigning).²²

²² To test H4 a GLM Mediation Analysis of the merged database was conducted where the outcome was party position, the mediator was campaign tone, and the predictor was gender of respondent. The research was conducted with the statistical software Jamovi using the “jamm – Advanced Mediation Models” module. I did not consider any unmeasured confounders when researching the correlation, meaning that there may be a third variable that causes

Table 4. Displaying the direct effect of gender on party position, as well as the indirect effect (through campaign negativity)

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	B	z	P
Indirect	Voter gender ⇒ Campaign tone ⇒ Party position	0.0900	0.00664	0.0770	0.1030	0.0292	13.55	<.001
Component	Voter gender ⇒ Campaign tone	0.1433	0.01048	0.1227	0.1638	0.0650	13.66	<.001
	Campaign tone ⇒ Party position	0.6282	0.00596	0.6165	0.6399	0.4494	105.46	<.001
Direct	Voter gender ⇒ Party position	0.0637	0.01313	0.0380	0.0895	0.0207	4.85	<.001
Total	Voter gender ⇒ Party position	0.1537	0.01467	0.1250	0.1825	0.0499	10.48	<.001

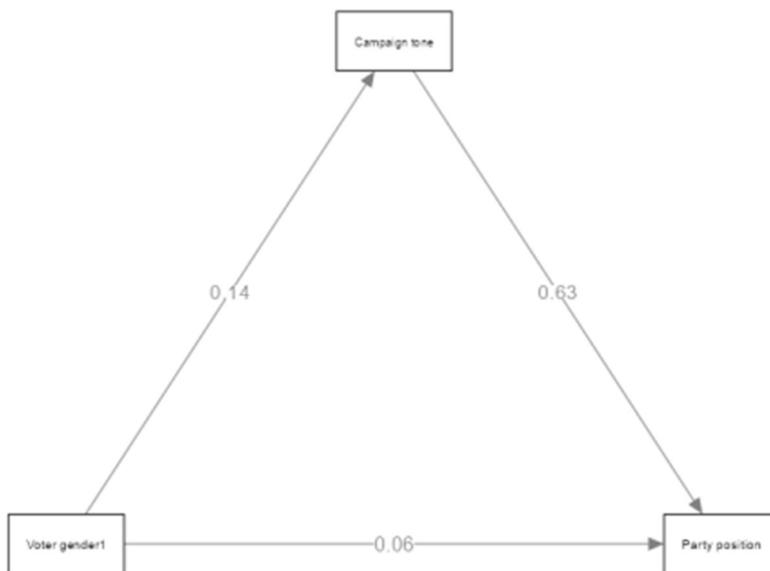


Figure 13. Graph displaying the same information as Table 4

both a preference for negative campaigning, and a preference for right-wing politics. Future research could be based on finding the influence of separate covariates (e.g. age of respondent).

5. Conclusion

“Variation in political attitudes between individuals owes less to ideology and more to differences in receptivity to elite discourse—how much people hear, accept, or filter out political messages” — John Zaller, *political scientist and professor at the University of California, “The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion” (1992)*

This study sheds new light on the gender dynamics of political polarization, revealing a powerful and underexplored force shaping modern elections: the interaction between campaign tone and voter gender. It began by considering three assumptions that have already been made in current literature – and found to be true:

- (1) Men tend to vote for more right-wing parties rather than left-wing parties
- (2) Campaign negativity is more frequently used by right-wing parties
- (3) Men are more likely than women to vote for parties that employ more negative campaigning strategies

Taking each of these considerations a causal chain hypothesis can be formulated to try and explain the presence of gender polarization in recent elections across the globe.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER POLARIZATION?

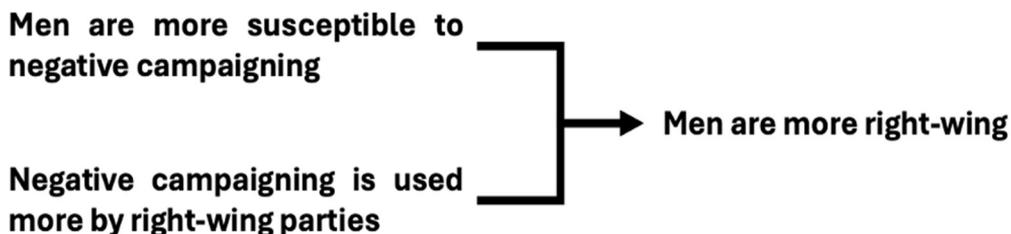


Figure 14. (see figure 7)

The results demonstrated that 59% of gender polarization is due to the gender difference in being susceptible to negative campaigning. This number is very significant in countries across the globe where election margins are very slim and gender polarization is high. This was confirmed by tests that were run on a survey database made up of 44,000 respondents over 34 national elections between 2016 and 2020. As can be seen a survey conducted by YouGov,²³ during the 2024 British General election, 17% of men voted for Reform UK while only 12% of women did so. This 5% discrepancy equates to a 737,000 difference in votes just for Reform UK. A few next steps can be taken to further research in this field. First of all, it would be interesting to examine whether the observed effects vary across different age groups. Since the CSES database already includes respondent age, this would require only the integration of age as a variable into the mixed dataset, followed by re-running the statistical tests. In addition, a larger database could be created to conduct further tests and build a model that is able to predict electoral outcomes based on campaign tone modifications by several parties (e.g. how would

²³ YouGov (2024) How Britain Voted in the 2024 General Election <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49978-how-britain-voted-in-the-2024-general-election>

the percentages of women/men's votes change in the German election if the SPD conducted a campaign 2 points more negative, and the CDU conducted a campaign 3 points more positive).

United We Stand Divided We Fall

In recent years, the population has become dangerously divided along political lines, placing democracy itself under threat.

This study identifies one cause of that division; campaign tone affects voters differently depending on their gender. This creates an incentive for political strategists to exploit campaign tone to target certain voters.

Our fight is not against each other, but for unity - because without it, democracy cannot survive.

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