Negative Campaigns and the Generation of Uncertainty and Ambivalence: Evidence from a Quasi-experiment and Lab Experiment Replication in the Republic of Georgia

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2016

Abstract

Negative campaigns have been extensively studied over the last thirty years, which has led to a consensus in the literature – negative campaigns are inconsistently effective. This suggests that rather than lingering over the question of effectiveness, studies of negative campaigns should explore alternative hypotheses about their effects more broadly. Hence, rather than asking whether negative campaigns are effective campaigns, I ask, "what are the effects of negative campaigns?" Reformulating the question in this manner, I argue that two likely outcomes of a negative campaign are uncertainty and ambivalence based on the literature on political information processing, ambivalence, uncertainty, misinformation, and cognitive dissonance. Looking to the literature on third-person effects, I suggest these outcomes are possible at the individual as well as social level. Using a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design and lab experiment replication, I show that both uncertainty and ambivalence are possible results of a negative campaign. However, much as with the effectiveness hypothesis, these outcomes are inconsistently present. This suggests the need for future research into when the content and context of messages are effective as the literature has already suggested, as well as when a negative campaign is ambivalence and/or uncertainty inducing as I suggest in this thesis. These debates aside, the thesis informs understandings of attacks against non-office seekers in general and public opinion pollsters specifically through exploring a negative campaign against the Caucasus Research Resource Centers – Georgia. By exploring a negative campaign in a competitive authoritarian regime, this thesis contributes to understandings of the dynamics of such regimes, concluding that the results of negative campaigns in such contexts resemble negative campaigns elsewhere.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Before moving onto the body of the thesis, a note on conflicts of interest is important. The pollsters who are the subject of the negative campaign described in this thesis, the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), are my former and future employers. I worked at CRRC from 2013-2015, and am currently on leave. This presents a clear conflict of interest. Moreover, in carrying out the lab experiment discussed in this thesis, CRRC made both in cash and in kind contributions to the study. In kind, they provided lab space for the experiment, the labor of an intern for three days, translation review, tablets to carry out the experiment, and programming assistance for putting the lab experiment into the tablets. In cash, they paid for participant recruiters to find study participants. The recruiters were paid approximately 450 Euros. Although the organization made significant contributions, they have not made any requests in relation to my research.

Acknowledgements

As with any enterprise, academic or otherwise, an individual's success is rarely the result of their labors alone. This thesis is no exception. In recognition of this, first, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Levente Littvay for his quick, clear, and concise feedback to random questions coming at random hours, with responses frequently coming back in minutes despite the random hour of the query. Second, numerous conversations with Dr. Oana Lup have made my gabble about attacks against public opinion pollsters in Georgia into something which may have some value to the study of negative campaigns. Finally, David Ridout from CEU's Writing Center has made insightful comments on several drafts of my thesis, for which I am thankful.

Significantly, this thesis benefited from funding provided by a Central European University research grant as well as from in cash and in kind support from the Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia (CRRC). For the support of both organizations, I am grateful.

Supervisors and funding aside, a number of individuals have made significant contributions to the quality of this thesis. First, Koba Turmandize is due particularly large thanks for reading and responding to my rather long emails about different ideas for treatments and looking over and providing feedback on the lab questionnaire more generally. Second, the lab experiment would not have been possible without CRRC's Rati Shubladze who programmed the lab experiment into tablets despite his heavy workload. To Nika Nasrashvili, who spent three long days proctoring the lab experiment, my thanks are extended. These individuals aside, the staff at CRRC has been generally supportive and helpful when it comes to my research. For this, as always, I am grateful.

I would also like to thank my classmates Aliaksandr Kazlou and Dinara Urazova for listening to me ramble about Georgia over the last eight months and reading two drafts of my thesis, providing insightful feedback.

The above individuals aside, my thesis has benefited from conversations with numerous classmates, professors, and friends alike. I hope all will pardon me for not writing out this long list of names, but will accept this abridged thank you.

Finally, despite the support and best efforts of all of these individuals, the mistakes and shortcomings herein are of course mine alone.

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Introduction

In April, riding in a taxi in Tbilisi, I asked the driver, "What do you think of the [National Democratic Institute and Caucasus Research Resource Center's] surveys?" He responded, "[Former President] Saakashvili has bought everything in this country…" He continued to discuss the point, and we continued to discuss Georgian politics. He felt uncertain about the direction the country was headed in and ambivalent about the different political forces in the country. Yet, in response to my question, he never mentioned the polls themselves.

The polls and pollsters I asked the driver about – the Caucasus Research Resource Centers-Georgia (CRRC) and their political polls funded by the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) – have been under attack by the currently ruling Georgian Dream Coalition (GD) since the 2012 parliamentary electoral campaign. Attacks have consisted of two main messages. First, Coalition members offer vague criticisms of the polling methodology used by CRRC, and second they claim that the results are manipulated by the organization to favor the previously ruling and currently opposition United National Movement (UNM). Although the attacks started during the electoral campaign, they have continued to be part of the Georgian political landscape, with attacks following every data release, 14 in all, since March, 2012. Taken together, these attacks form a negative campaign, a negative campaign against public opinion pollsters. While the campaign against the CRRC is the case studied in this thesis, rather than being concerned with the case itself, I use it to engage with the literature on negative campaigns.

For the last thirty years, political communications scholars have intensively studied whether negative campaigns are effective campaigns, meaning that they achieve their intended goal of hurting the subject of attack. Yet, the most robust finding in the literature is that negative campaigns are consistently inconsistent in their effectiveness (Lau et. al., 1999; Lau et. al., 2007;

Lau and Rovner., 2009). This suggests that rather than lingering over the question of effectiveness, studies of negative campaigns should explore alternative hypotheses about their effects more broadly. That is to say, rather than asking whether negative campaigns are effective campaigns, we should be asking, "what are the effects of negative campaigns?" By reformulating the question in this manner, at least two previously un- or underexplored hypotheses are opened up to researchers.

Negative campaigns, in addition to potentially helping or hurting the subjects of attack, could also generate uncertainty or ambivalence. This becomes apparent when looking at insights from work in political psychology on political information processing and motivated reasoning, ambivalence, misinformation, and cognitive dissonance, which are discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. A review of this literature in tangent to the third person literature, suggests that ambivalence and uncertainty could also be generated in individual's perceptions of others' attitudes.

In order to explore whether ambivalence or uncertainty results from political attack, I use experimental methods. While observational studies have contributed greatly to understandings of the political world, their shortcomings at parsing out causality have been highlighted in recent years (Druckman et. al., 2011: 16-17). In response to these shortcomings, political science has begun to use experimental methods, which allow researchers to understand causality through the random assignment of treatments and comparing the treated with an untreated control group (Druckman et. al., 2011: 16-17).

Given the strengths of experimental methods, this thesis uses a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design that was enabled by a political attack occurring during the 2015 Caucasus Barometer (CB) fieldwork period and a lab experiment carried out in April 2016, with

the goal of replicating the findings of the quasi-experiment. While regression discontinuity designs are particularly convincing (Cook et. al, 2008: 724), replication of findings is critical to scientific endeavor. Notably, non-replicable findings have become a topic of discussion in social science in recent years, with one study finding that only half of a sample of articles in top psychology journals replicated (Collaboration, Open Science, 2015). While this finding is the subject of debate (see Anderson et. al., 2016), it nonetheless shows that it is important to replicate findings to understand if they are in fact reliable.

For this thesis, replication turned out to be critical. While the results of the quasi experiment support a number of the hypotheses, the results of the lab experiment support others. Notably, the mixed results suggest a number of important findings for debates academic and normative alike.

First, given that the study of negative campaigns lacks clear findings on their effectiveness, I attempt to reframe the debate in terms of effects. This attempt appears to have found merit. While the results between quasi experiment and experiment are inconsistent, much as with the effectiveness hypothesis previously tested in the literature, I show that ambivalence and uncertainty are potential outcomes of negative campaigns.

Second, while previous studies have focused on the United States, in particular, and democracies more generally, this study focuses on a negative campaign in a competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way, 2010). While not the main focus of the study, negative campaigns are part and parcel of the politics of authoritarianism. Thus, this study contributes to an understanding of negative campaigns in less than democratic contexts.

Third, the study explores a negative campaign against a non-office seeker – pollsters. While negative campaigns against candidates in elections have been thoroughly explored in the

American context, there have been few if any quantitative studies exploring the impact of negative campaigns against non-office seekers and pollsters in particular. Given the ubiquity of attacks against pollsters in recent years, the findings may give hints about how public opinion about pollsters may have been affected in other contexts.

Fourth, academic debates aside, the study has normative implications related to representation and the role of public opinion polls in society. As Arthur Lupia has put it, public opinion polls have been "a popular whipping boy" in politics for some time (2015). Yet, as he argues, they also "can give people a stronger voice" (Lupia, 2015). While Lupia's argument is focused on democracies, polling serves an even greater role in non-democracies (Gutbrod, 2013) where by definition representation is flawed. The greater significance of polls in such contexts stems from the fact that fewer mechanisms present the public's will to government, since elections are only partially able to serve the function of selecting a representative government. While a far cry from the selection of representative government, in semi-authoritarian regimes, the presentation of representative polling and attitudes towards policy issues is a form of representation. Given the relative importance of polls for societies democratic (Asher, 1988) and less than democratic (Gutbrod, 2013) alike, understanding how attacks against pollsters affect public perceptions of them has important implications for polling's role in society.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I develop the theoretical framework which leads me to suggest negative campaigns are likely to lead to ambivalence or uncertainty. To do so, I first review the recent literature on negative campaigns, and then on political information processing and motivated reasoning. The literature on ambivalent attitudes, uncertainty, and cognitive dissonance follows. In the second chapter, the case is presented together with historical and political background on Georgia. I then spell out the implications of the case. The third chapter

discusses the methods used to test the hypotheses as well as how the data was collected. The fourth chapter presents the results of hypotheses testing and discusses the implications of these results. Finally, the conclusion rounds out the thesis with a discussion of the implications of the study.

Chapter 1: Negative Campaigns as Effective Campaigns and Two Alternative Hypotheses

Political scientists have intensively studied negative campaigns for several decades (Lau and Rovner, 2009: 286). Debates in the literature have centered on whether negative campaigns are effective and whether they decrease voter turnout (Sides et. al, 2010: 503-504). Despite intensive study, meta-analyses find there is no clear effect of negative campaigns on attitudes towards the target of attack (Lau et. al, 1999; Lau et. al, 2007; Lau and Rovner, 2009). But, have negative campaigns researchers been asking the wrong question? I suggest that political communications scholars should ask 'what are the effects of negative campaigns?' rather than whether negative campaigns are effective, where effective is defined as having the intended effect of hurting the attacked and effects is a more open-ended term with numerous potential outcomes. By reframing the question in this way, one potential effect is that negative campaigns generate ambivalence, defined as having both positive and negative attitudes towards a subject (Lavine, 2001:915). A second possibility is that rather than changing attitudes, individuals become uncertain about the attacked. Importantly, both of these possibilities could also apply to individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes.

To see why these possibilities are likely outcomes of negative campaigns, this chapter presents a brief review of the literature on negative campaigns and third person effects. Next, the literatures on models of political information processing, ambivalent attitudes, uncertainty, political misinformation, and cognitive dissonance are presented. By taking insights from each literature, I argue that ambivalence and uncertainty are likely outcomes of negative campaigns.

Negative Campaigns and Third Person Effects

Political science's interest in negative campaigns grew out of the perceived growth in negative campaigning several decades back (Lau and Rovner, 2009: 286). Initially, researchers

suggested that negative campaigns would hurt the subject of attack (e.g. Hill 1989: 14), pointing out that individuals are more likely to pay attention to negative information than positive information (Fridkin and Kenney, 2004: 572-573). Yet following an initial wave of research, a number of scholars suggested that the public would actually punish candidates who engage in negative campaigns (e.g. Haddock and Zanna, 1997: 205). Fridkin and Kenney (2004:572-575; 2011: 319) also proposed that the type and content of the negative message would influence the effectiveness of negative campaigns.

Nonetheless, the last thirty years of research into negative campaigns has led to a consensus in the political communications literature – negative campaigns are inconsistently effective, where effectiveness is defined as the attacks having their intended effect – hurting the target. Lau et. al's 1999 (p. 856) meta-analysis finds no consistent evidence that negative political campaigns have their intended effect. Working with twice as much literature and "greatly improved in quality" studies, Lau et. al (2007: 1176) found that the fact remains – there is no evidence that negative campaigns are effective campaigns. In a third meta-analysis, this finding is re-confirmed (Lau and Rovner, 2009: 285).

Although these meta-analyses have found negative campaigns to be inconsistently effective, in order to rule out whether a negative campaign was an effective campaign, the hypothesis still requires testing. Hence, the first hypothesis I test is:

H1: Following political attacks, citizens will lower their assessments of the attacked.

Even though findings have been inconsistent when it comes to individual's own attitudes, scholars of negative campaigns have found relatively consistent third person effects. Third person effects were first proposed by Davison (1983). Based on a number of experiences and several informal experiments, the author suggested that individuals are prone to thinking that

others are more likely to be affected by information than they themselves are (Davison, 1983: 3-4). This hypothesis has since been supported by a vast amount of empirical research, with well over 100 studies supporting the claim (Lovejoy et. al, 2010: 492; Paul, Salwen, and Dupagne, 2009:57-59). Research also suggests that the greater the negativity of a message, the greater the third person effect (Wei and Lo, 2007: 369, Rucinski and Salmon, 1990: 346; Salwen and Dupagne, 1998: 273). Hence, the expectation for negative campaigns is that individuals will perceive a greater negative effect on public opinion towards others than themselves and that the perceived effect will become greater, the more negative an attack. This hypothesis has been supported by a number of studies (e.g. Wei and Lo, 2007: 367; Cheng and Riffe, 2008:177; Lovejoy et. al., 2010: 488).

Generally, studies of third person effects have tested the gap between individual's attitudes and their perceptions of others' attitudes in order to measure the third person effect. More rarely, they have tested how individual's perceptions of others' attitudes shift in response to a stimuli. Any potential shift is important, because perceptions of others' attitudes affect behavior. For instance, Davison (1983: 9-10) suggested, a candidate may be viewed by all as the best option, but may still be unelectable, because they are perceived to have no chance of winning. Since Davison's initial suggestion that third person effects would have behavioral consequences, a fair number of studies have supported his contention. For instance, Salwen and Dupagne (1999: 526-528) cited 23 articles which pointed to differences in attitudes towards a number of types of policies caused by third person effects.

Given the importance of how individuals perceive others' attitudes, it is important to understand not only the gap between how individuals perceive themselves and others, but also if perceptions of others' attitudes change as a result of negative campaigns. Given the consistent

finding in the literature that individuals believe that others' attitudes change more in response to a negative campaign, the second hypothesis tested is:

> H2: Following political attacks, citizens will lower their assessments of others' perceptions of the attacked.

Overall, the negative campaigns literature has found inconsistent results on the effectiveness of negative campaigns. This may in large part be due to the effects of negative campaigns being context and content dependent (Fridkin and Kenney, 2011: 319). A second possibility, though, is that rather than the inconsistency being due to context dependence, researchers have been looking for changes in the wrong direction. Researchers have asked whether negative campaigns are effective campaigns, but have not explored whether negative campaigns generate uncertainty or ambivalence about the attacked, to the best of my knowledge. Yet, these are very real possibilities, which become apparent when considering the literature on models of political information processing, ambivalent attitudes, misinformation, and cognitive dissonance.

Processing Political Information

When discussing the effects of negative campaigns or political communications more generally, the key process at play is how individuals process information, because information processing is the mechanism by which attitude change takes place. In the political psychology literature there are two main theories of political information processing – John Zaller's (1992) receive accept sample (RAS) model and theories of "motivated reasoning" (Prior, 2012: 108-109).

In Zaller's 1992 *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion,* he proposes the RAS model of information processing. In the model, public opinion is formed through the interaction of three main variables – elite projection of information, receipt of information, and individuals' political

dispositions (Zaller, 1992: 39). Elites put forward different arguments and information, which is then received by citizens. Yet, a relatively small segment of society follows politics (Zaller, 1992: 6). Hence, if a message is infrequently put forward, only those who follow politics most closely are likely to receive it (Zaller, 1992: 16). If an argument is put forward quite frequently, however, then even those who follow politics only in passing will also receive the message (Zaller, 1992: 16).

After an individual receives a message, it interacts with citizens' "political predispositions" (Zaller, 1992: 22). Besides predispositions, individuals' knowledge of the subject being discussed and trust in the message source are important (Zaller, 1992: 42). If an individual has knowledge of the subject area, then they will be able to incorporate the message into their attitude if they agree with it and maintain the same position if they disagree with it (Zaller, 1992: 42-44). If an individual, however, does not have strong knowledge of the subject area, they are more likely to move in the direction of the message rather than remaining in the same position (Zaller, 1992: 42-44). If an individual knows and trusts the source, then it is not necessarily important (Zaller, 1992: 42-44). However, if an individual does not trust the source of information, they are unlikely to incorporate the information contained in the message into their attitude (Zaller, 1992: 44)

All in all, Zaller's model provides predictions about when an attitude will move in the direction of a given message, a number of factors which moderate how far in a given direction it will move, or whether an individual's attitude will remain unchanged. Exploring the second main theory of information processing in political science, motivated reasoning, adds that individual attitudes can move in the opposite direction of a message (Prior, 2012: 108-109).

The fundamental contention of motivated reasoning theory is that citizens will not "approach political arguments or evidence evenhandedly" (Taber, Cann, and Kucsova, 2009: 137). Rather, "[there is a] prevalence of directional reasoning that aims not at truth, but at the vindication of prior opinions" (Druckman et. al. 2012:199). That is to say information is processed through confirmation and disconfirmation biases. While confirmation biases are the uncritical acceptance of information which confirms the attitude of an individual, disconfirmation bias refers to the phenomenon wherein individuals are more likely to question and examine information which is counter-attitudinal or unfavorable (Ditto and Lopez, 1992: 568; Strickland, Taber, and Lodge, 2011: 938). Herein lays the additional possible outcome that motivated reasoning theory brings to the table when discussing the processing of political information. When an individual counter-argues a piece of information, as a result of disconfirmation bias, they not only can move towards the position of the message to varying degrees or keep their previous position as RAS theory predicts, but they can also move in the direction opposite to the political argument presented to them (Prior, 2012: 108-109). Motivated reasoning theory is buttressed by studies of political partisanship which find that political partisans engage in motivated reasoning and are hence less likely to accept counter-attitudinal information about a given subject (Jerit and Barbas, 2012: 672). This leads to hypothesis three:

H3: Political partisans receiving a political attack will engage in motivated reasoning, lowering their assessments of the subject of attack to a greater extent than non-partisans.

The above two models of political information processing suggest that attitudes can move for or against a message or remain unchanged. This suggests two outcomes of the processing of a negative campaign – attitudes towards a subject of attack could be helped or hurt. A third

outcome implicit to the models is that individuals could become ambivalent in response to a message.

Ambivalence

The study of attitudes traditionally viewed them along a "unidimensional and bipolar" line (Rudolf and Popp, 2007: 563), roughly corresponding to 'like' or 'dislike' or 'agree' or 'disagree'. Recently, however, political psychology researchers have begun to consider the fact that individuals' attitudes exist in multi-dimensional space, with individuals often holding positive and negative views about a subject simultaneously. Such attitudes are defined as ambivalent. In the words of one scholar, "ambivalence can be defined as 'an individual's endorsement of competing considerations relevant to evaluating an attitude object'" (Rudolf and Popp, 2007: 563).

Research on ambivalence has focused on the prevalence and effects of ambivalence on a range of issues including abortion (Craig, Kane, and Martinez, 2002: 285), social policy (Feldman and Zaller, 1992: 268), and attitudes towards candidates (e.g. Mcgraw, Hasecke, and Cogner, 2003: 421). Yet, less is known about how ambivalence comes about (Keele and Wolak, 2008: 655) and its dynamics (Rudolph, 2011: 561). As far as sources of ambivalence go, authors have suggested that ambivalence may stem from, "competing core values" (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002), "disagreement between recalled considerations" (Keele and Wolak, 2008: 655; Bassinger and Lavine, 2005), and "group evaluations" (Keele and Wolak, 2008: 655; Lavine and Steenbergen 2005). Contributing to this list, Keele and Wolak (2008: 670) explore "context induced ambivalence" finding that when individuals are exposed to competing arguments, they are more likely to hold ambivalent attitudes. Generally speaking, the common denominator between all of these arguments is that ambivalence results from competing information or more broadly the interaction between competing considerations.

Based on the above literature, Rudolph (2011: 562-564) argues that models of information processing suggest ambivalence as an outcome among non-motivated reasoners, with a lower chance of ambivalence among motivated reasoners. This argument is intuitive when considering the above discussions of models of political information processing. In Zaller's model, when an individual moderates their attitude in the direction of a message when they had previously held a strong view on a subject, they have come to hold an ambivalent attitude. This suggests that ambivalence is one possible outcome of political information processing. Hence, as an alternative hypothesis to the effectiveness hypothesis, I suggest:

H4: In response to a political attack, individuals will become more ambivalent, controlling for motivated reasoning.

Given that individual perceptions of others are conditioned on their own attitudes (e.g. Adams, 1967: 65; Underwood, 2003: 319; West and Hewstone, 2012: 269), individuals are also likely to perceive others to hold more ambivalent attitudes than before the attack. Hence, I also suggest that:

H5: In response to a political attack, individuals will perceive others to have become more ambivalent, controlling for motivated reasoning.

Adding ambivalence to the list of potential outcomes of negative campaigns provides one alternative to the standard question of whether political campaigns help or hurt the attacked. However, a fourth potential outcome – uncertainty – remains largely untheorized and unexplored, particularly in connection to negative campaigns.

Uncertainty, Misinformation, and Cognitive Dissonance

While the above models of political information processing provide at least three potential outcomes – for, against, and ambivalent – uncertainty has not been explored as a potential result of negative campaigns, to the best of my knowledge. However, uncertainty seems

a likely outcome when considering the literature on misinformation and cognitive dissonance. Before discussing these literatures, it is important to make two notes.

First, in the political science literature, unlike ambivalence, uncertainty is less clearly defined (Mcgraw et. al., 2003: 426). Mcgraw et. al. (2003: 426) provide two definitions. The first is from the dictionary: "'the state of not being definitely known or perfectly clear'" (Mcgraw et. al., 2003: 426), while the second is from Downs (1957), "lack of sure knowledge." In either case, the nuance of definitions is less important than a clear operationalization[1] in the present case.

Secondly, uncertainty appears to be an unlikely response to a negative campaign, at first glance. Traditionally, work on uncertainty has assumed information reduces uncertainty (e.g. Shannon, 1948: 407; Berger and Calabrese, 1975: 103). Since negative campaigns provide information and they are at least sometimes perceived as informative (Sides et. al, 2010: 503), it would be expected that rather than generating uncertainty, a negative campaign should decrease it. However, uncertainty seems like a plausible outcome of a negative attack, when considering the literature on misinformation in conjunction to the literature on cognitive dissonance.

In his extensive review of studies of misinformation, Lewandowski points out that it is extremely difficult to reject misinformation (Lewandowski, 2012). Research suggests that individuals may "suspend their belief" upon receiving a message (Lewandowski, 2012: 112; Hasson, Simmons and Todorov, 2005: 566), yet in order to reject misinformation they require a "high degree of attention", the message must be implausible, or individuals must be highly distrusting of the speaker (Lewandowski, 2012: 112). In one study, psychologists actively reminded individuals that they were reading fictional and factually incorrect information, yet many individuals were still unable to separate fact from fiction (Lewandowski, 2012: 109; Eslick, Fazio, and Marsh, 2011: 184).

[1] The operationalization of uncertainty is discussed in Chapter 3.

The above studies of misinformation suggest that it is extremely difficult to reject misinformation. If it is difficult to reject misinformation, there is no reason why it would not be equally, if not more difficult, for individuals to reject information outside of the above mentioned circumstances and/or when an individual engages in motivated reasoning. Yet, even though the outright rejection of misinformation is possible when paying attention, when a message is extremely implausible, or when the receiver distrusts the source of information, these qualities themselves are not absolute, with the potential for individuals to be paying some attention, think the message is plausible, but not be convinced, and/or to have an ambivalent attitude towards the messenger. While individuals are unlikely to outright reject a message in such circumstances, they would be less likely to fully accept it. Hence, as a result of the interaction between any of these conditions, it seems less likely that an individual's attitude would move simply for or against a subject of attack. Rather, an individual is likely to enter a state of cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance is defined as a state when people hold "inconsistent cognitions" (Festinger (1957) in Draycott and Dabbs, 1998: 342). There have been two main kinds of experiments which test for cognitive dissonance – insufficient justification and free choice experiments (Shultz and Lepper, 1996: 219-225). In insufficient justification experiments, an individual is put in a situation in which different aspects of the experience conflict with one another and attitudes are tested (Draycott and Dabbs, 1998: 342). In free choice experiments, individuals are given a choice between two objects which they value highly (Draycott and Dabbs, 1998: 342). In both types of experiment, individuals find it hard to make a choice about or evaluation of an experience, which is expressed in increased response times for answering questions (Draycott and Dabbs, 1998: 343). If an individual experiences difficulty in choosing as a result of cognitive dissonance, this means cognitive dissonance results in uncertainty. If we

accept the results of such experiments, then it is clear that in states of cognitive dissonance, individuals have a higher level of uncertainty.

Negative campaigns are likely to result in cognitive dissonance in a number of circumstances. First, cognitive dissonance would result when an individual's predisposition is non-congruent with the message received, yet the individual is not politically sophisticated or possesses some but not a great deal of prior knowledge on the subject of attack. This would be the case, because the individual would be less likely or able to engage in motivated reasoning in such circumstances, but would still have a predisposition against the message. This would lead to inconsistent cognitions through the processing of the message and its interaction with the individual's prior non-congruent disposition.

The second circumstance where an individual would experience cognitive dissonance in response to a negative campaign is when the individual distrusts the messenger or source of information, but at least partially receives the message. As the literature on misinformation suggests, it is at least in part necessary for an individual to accept a message to process it. Yet if they distrust the messenger, then this distrust is likely to interact with the message. Again, if the individual does not engage in motivated reasoning, they will therefore enter a state of cognitive dissonance through the interaction of the distrust and the message.

In the above two circumstances, individuals are likely to enter into a state of cognitive dissonance, which in turn would increase their uncertainty. This leads to the sixth and seventh hypotheses tested in this thesis:

H6: Individuals will become more uncertain in response to a political attack;

H7: Individuals will become more uncertain about others' attitudes in response to a political attack.[2]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first discussed the political communications literature on negative campaigns, highlighting that previous research has largely tested whether negative campaigns are effective campaigns. However, the most robust finding in this set of research is that negative campaigns are inconsistent in being effective. Looking at the literature on third person effects, however, does suggest that third person effects increase in response to negative campaigns.

Moving from the literature on negative campaigns to the study of political information processing suggested at least three potential outcomes of a negative campaign. First, assessments can improve. Second, they can decline, and third, individuals can become more ambivalent. Notably, ambivalence seems to be a likely outcome of negative campaigns, when competing information or dispositions enter the information processing process.

A fourth potential outcome is that individuals will become more uncertain. Uncertainty appears a likely result from looking at the literature on misinformation and cognitive dissonance, a state which leads to uncertainty. Based on the misinformation literature, I suggested that cognitive dissonance could result not only from the interaction of conflicting information, but also from the interaction of partial plausibility, distrust in the messenger, prior dispositions, and the information emitted as part of the negative campaign. This leads to the hypothesis that

[2] Although not the explicit focus of this thesis, it is worth noting here that hypothesis seven is of particular significance. If a negative campaign increases uncertainty in perceptions of others' attitudes towards a subject, this in turn increases the cost of solving a collective action problem around the subject the campaign is focused. When individuals are less certain of what others think, then they will be less likely to take an action due to the greater lack of predictable response of others. While every society faces collective action problems, in democratizing societies this problem is greater when the problem is related to politics. Clearly, this hypothesis has implications for democratization.

negative campaigns could result in cognitive dissonance which would be manifested in uncertainty.

Based on these arguments, I put forward seven hypotheses in this chapter. Six of these can be summarized in short as, negative campaigns can generate declines in assessments, ambivalence, or uncertainty in individual attitudes as well as individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes towards the subject of attack. In addition, I suggest, as has a great deal of literature, that individuals engage in motivated reasoning in response to political attacks. Before testing these hypotheses in Chapter 4, I present the case which is used for hypothesis testing – a negative campaign against public opinion pollsters in the Republic of Georgia – in the following chapter, and the methods used to hypothesis test in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Attacking the Pollsters

The negative campaign described in this thesis is against the Caucasus Research Resource Centers – Georgia (CRRC), an NGO which carries out public opinion polling on politics funded by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The negative campaign against the CRRC can be traced to March 2012, several months after Georgian, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili announced that he was founding the political party which would eventually become the Georgian Dream Coalition (GD). The party was established with the express purpose of unseating the growingly authoritarian Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement (UNM).[3] The Coalition achieved this goal on October 1st, 2012. Although the negative campaign had its roots in the electoral politics of 2012, the campaign has continued to the present, with the most recent attack taking place on May 30th, 2016 (see Interpressnews, 2016).

In this chapter, I first provide some historical background on Georgia's political trajectory. After providing this background, a discussion of the genesis of the campaign and tracing of its trajectory from March 2012 follows. In discussing the campaign, I parse out the two main components of the campaign's message: first, that NDI-CRRC's public opinion polls use an untrustworthy methodology, and second, that the polling organization manipulates results to favor the UNM. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of two distinctive features of the case, the first being that it is against a non-office seeker and the second that it is in a less than democratic but not fully authoritarian country. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of

[3] Mikheil Saakashvili is often praised for bringing reform to Georgia. However, from early on he also showed authoritarian tendencies. The turning point for the Rose Revolutionary government is often believed to be November, 2007, when Saakashvili and the powerful Minister of Internal Affairs Vano Merabshvili ordered violent crack downs on anti-government protests. Significantly, Saakashvili and his political allies oversaw the transformation of the Georgian prison system, and systemized and expanded its previously haphazard use of torture. While Saakashvili can surely be praised for his reform agenda, there is also little doubt he became increasingly authoritarian over the course of his rule. For more, see Mitchel, 2009.

the broader implications of the case, particularly as relates to it being a campaign against public opinion pollsters.

Historical and Political Background

The Republic of Georgia is a hybrid regime located in the South Caucasus, with Armenia and Azerbaijan to its South, Russia to its North, and Turkey and the Black Sea to its West. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, the country experienced three civil wars and a coup d'état within the span of three years. Although the first years of independence were turbulent, the coup leaders who unseated the first President of Georgia quickly understood that they alone could not run the country's affairs. Hence, they decided to invite former Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, back to Georgia from Moscow in February 1992. Shevardnadze was eventually able to sideline the warlords who brought him to power and established a relative stability in the country, through bringing monetary policy under control and establishing *de facto* peace. Yet, as time went on, Shevardnadze grew unpopular, and some of the politicians he had groomed for public life defected from his party, the Citizens Union of Georgia. In 2003, following fraudulent parliamentary elections, Shevardnadze was removed from office in the Rose Revolution. After the revolution, new elections were held and the leaders of the revolution took office, with Mikheil Saakashvili as President, Nino Burjanadze Speaker of Parliament, and Zurab Zhvania Prime Minister.

In the coming years, Saakashvili would consolidate power in his own and his party's hands, slowly squeezing out alternative voices. In 2004, the Republican Party left the United National Movement and entered opposition. In 2005, Zurab Zhvania died in suspicious circumstances. In 2008, following a November 2007 crackdown on protestors, a stream of political elites defected from Saakashvili's UNM, with Nino Burjanadze leaving directly before

2008 parliamentary elections. Irakli Alasania, a young but increasingly prominent politician, left following the 2008 August War with Russia.

Opposition politics between 2008 and 2011 suffered from a lack of unity, with numerous small parties failing to unite into a single electoral bloc to contest UNM rule in the January 2008, May 2008, and June 2010 elections. This changed, however, in the fall of 2011 when Georgian billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili announced that he would form an opposition coalition to contest the 2012 parliamentary elections. Following Ivanishvili's announcement, state harassment ensued, and the 2012 parliamentary election campaigns had begun. Ivanishvili was successful in uniting the majority of opposition parties and despite what many observers feared would be the consolidation of Saakashvili's growing authoritarianism, on October 2nd, 2012 Saakashvili admitted defeat, and the Georgian Dream Coalition entered government.

Attacking the pollsters – a negative campaign against a non-office seeker

The campaign against the CRRC-NDI polls began at the end of March, 2012. Generally, the polls had not been released to the press, but only to political parties. However, the United National Movement frequently leaked results to the press. The campaign against the polls started after the March 2012 results were leaked (Civil.ge, 2012a). GD was polling at 10% to the UNM's 47% among likely voters, with the remaining share of voters largely undecided or refusing to answer who they would vote for (Civil.ge, 2012a). In response, the Georgian Dream Coalition wrote an open letter to the US Ambassador, in which they thanked the US government for its support in promoting free and fair elections in Georgia, yet also complained about polling. The letter stated:

> It is absolutely clear to us that, due to a number of reasons, [polling] not only fails to meet its purpose, but has also become counterproductive for the process of democratization, development of a competitive political environment, and citizens' [sic] making informed political choices. The methodology and format used in the implementation of this survey and publication of its findings, on one hand, and the use of

> the national television stations by the ruling party to manipulate these findings, on the other, resulted in a loss of faith in this research on the part of a significant part of society (Georgian Dream Coalition, 2012).

This letter constitutes one of the first attacks against the polls, and was widely covered in Georgian media together with commentary by GD coalition members. While the attack messages would develop over time, this letter contains the seeds of GD's eventual lines of attack. First, the letter questions the methodology of the polls and expresses a lack of trust in them. Second, the letter suggests that the UNM uses the polls to manipulate public opinion. While these general themes of attack have remained component parts of the campaign to date, an additional event was necessary before the attacks could take their final form.

In the final poll released before the elections, with fieldwork carried out in August 2012, GD trailed the UNM by 25 percentage points, yet 43% of likely voters reported they did not know or refused to answer who they would vote for (Civil.ge, 2012b). The UNM attempted to spin this to suggest they would win, while the GD again attacked the polls. On September 18th, roughly ten days after the release of the final pre-electoral poll, a video depicting prison torture emerged (Civil.ge, 2012c). Elections took place two weeks later, and GD won by a substantial margin. The discrepancy between the polls released in September and the final election results would henceforth become the basis of GD's claim that the polls had an untrustworthy methodology, despite an investigation into the polls concluding that, "It is impossible to judge the accuracy of surveys conducted in the summer of 2012, before the scandal emerged, against the election returns" (Frankovic et. al, 2013: 1).

Since GD's rise to power, the attacks against the pollsters have continued, with attacks following every data release.[4] The attacks have consisted of two main messages. First, GD

[4] There were ten data waves of polling released between October, 2012 and October 2015. For examples of quotes, see Interpressnews, 2012; Maestro, 2013a; Interpressnews, 2013; Maestro, 2013b; Gogoladze, 2013;Tabula, 2014; Rustavi 2, 2014; Pirveli Arkhi, 2014; Maestro, 2015; and Civil.ge, 2015.

regularly criticizes the methodology, and consistently highlights the discrepancy between the 2012 polling and electoral results. For example on the May 11, 2015, Minister of Finance, Nodar Khaduri, stated in response to a journalist's request for a statement about headline data released that day, "I would like to remind you of the numbers published in September 2012, and the results of the October 1st, 2012 elections..." (Maestro, 2015).

The second line of attack which GD has taken is associating the pollsters with the formerly governing and now opposition UNM. This claim is now based upon the fact that Levan Tarkhnishvili, currently a UNM politician, had been the Georgia Country Director of the polling organization from 2004 to 2007. Even though Tarkhnishvili has not had any relation with the organization for six years when attacks started, the Coalition still bases its claim on this fact. For example, in May 2014, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili stated: "Unfortunately, [CRRC] was always associated with United National Movement … [and Levan Tarkhnishvili is] involved in CRRC's management and coordinated NDI's commissioned research" (Dzagnidze, 2014).

While attacks have followed every data release, the response to the October 17th, 2015 data release was particularly vociferous. On October 17th, the polls showed that the UNM was ahead of the Georgian Dream, with 15% of likely voters supporting the UNM and 14% GD (Civil.ge, 2015). Following this event, the Prime Minister went on television and attacked the credibility of the polls. Minister of Energy and Vice Premier Kakha Kaladze followed up with a similar statement, and Minister of Finance Nodar Khaduri also joined in the attacks. On the same day, a video depicting torture in Georgian prisons during the rule of the UNM was leaked online and sent to members of the Georgian press. The Prime Minister went on TV to remind the public about the UNM's past abuses. While these attacks against the UNM were not directly linked to the polls by the government in a statement to the best of my knowledge, a number of media

sources did suggest a connection. Civil.ge, a non-partisan, UN funded news source covered both stories in the same article (Civil.ge, 2015), which is uncharacteristic, because their usual polling coverage consists of a description of headline data. Rustavi 2, the largest television station in the country, covered both events together, with a story titled, "After the publication of NDI research results, video of prison rape and torture is spread online" (Rustavi 2, 2015). Although every station did not cover the stories directly together, every national station covered both the data release and the release of the torture video. Clearly, the attacks of October 17th were particularly salient.

Negative Campaigns against Non-office Seekers in Non-democracy

The negative campaign described above is significantly different from most negative campaigns examined in the literature in two important respects. First, it is a negative campaign that is part of the politics of a semi-authoritarian regime, whereas the vast majority, if not all, quantitative studies have explored negative campaigns in democracies. Second, it is a negative campaign against a non-office seeker – public opinion pollsters – rather than attacks directed against a candidate. In this section, I discuss these two differences and their potential significance to the negative campaigns literature, highlighting that political campaigns against pollsters are part of the politics of countries the world over and thus should be explored in greater detail.

Context

Although the lack of consistent effectiveness has been a robust finding in the negative campaigns literature, recent research has suggested that context matters for negative campaigns. Sides et. al. (2010: 519) found that negative campaign advertisements have different effects in different campaigns. More recently, Fridkin and Kenney (2011: 319) suggested that different

types of negative campaigns have different impacts. This work suggests that there is a need for a greater understanding of the different contexts and dimensions of negative campaigns.

Although context appears to be important, negative campaigns scholars have yet to thoroughly explore negative campaigns in less than democratic contexts. Looking through the most comprehensive review of the negative campaigns literature (Lau and Rovner, 2009), which includes both published and unpublished papers, the authors analyzed zero studies reporting findings outside the United States. Although this meta-analysis has eschewed papers from outside the United States, some studies have begun to appear, particularly on Western Europe (e.g. Walter, 2012). However, these studies have focused on democratic contexts. Surely however, Americans and Europeans on democratic playing fields are not the only ones engaged in negative campaigning. Quite to the contrary, negative campaigns are part and parcel of authoritarian politics. Given this fact, an understanding of negative campaigns in less than democratic contexts is just as, if not more, important as in democratic contexts.

Some political scientists may object to the above on two accounts. First, why would we study negative campaigns in non-democratic contexts? In non-democracies, elections, by definition are flawed. Second, aren't negative campaigns against candidates rather than non-office seekers?

To the first critique, while certainly true, there is an entire subset of authoritarian countries in which, although elections are flawed and the political playing field is stilted towards the incumbent, they remain the main arena of contestation for political power – competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes. Competitive authoritarianism is defined as "regimes that combine competitive elections with serious violation[s] of democratic procedure" (Levitsky and Way, 2010: i). The quite similar and conceptually overlapping classification of electoral

authoritarianism is defined as "[regimes that] hold regular multiparty elections at the national level, yet violate liberal–democratic minimum standards in systematic and profound ways" (Schedler, 2013: 1). Both suggest that while elections are flawed in less than democratic contexts, in some, they do matter. Given that this field of research has only recently become topical in political science, the dynamics of electoral campaigns and the strategies which different actors use in them have yet to be intensively investigated. Thus, the study of negative campaigns in competitive-electoral authoritarian regimes is a clear gap in understandings of negative campaigns and clearly an important one.

To the second critique, yes, negative campaigns are generally against office seekers. However, politicians also frequently target non-office seekers. For example, in the ongoing US presidential race, the Republican candidates have jockeyed for position by attacking Planned Parenthood (PP). In July 2015, a video filmed by anti-abortion activists purported to show PP workers discussing the sale of baby parts (Starnes, 2015). This led to outrage, and every candidate for the Republican presidential nomination joined in the attack (CNN, 2016). Even when the video was shown to be taken grossly out of context, a number of candidates continued to attack (CNN, 2016). The attack against Planned Parenthood was clearly negative, clearly political, and when the political attacks over time are taken together, clearly a campaign. It was also clearly against an organization that was not seeking office.

Notably, negative campaigns against non-office seekers are not limited to democracies alone. Observers of the post-Soviet space for instance will be familiar with the recent wave of anti-NGO campaigns. While such campaigns have taken place in the vast majority of post-Soviet countries, campaigns have been particularly salient in the Kyrgyz Republic (see Trilling, 2014), Tajikistan (see IWPR Central Asia, 2015), Azerbaijan (See Avenue et. al., 2013), and Russia (see

Gershman, 2016). Speaking on the subject in the Russian context earlier this year, Carl Gershman, a National Endowment for Democracy expert, stated:

> The "foreign agents" law was designed to portray independent organizations with international ties as sinister, anti-Russian tools of the West – the same insinuations frequently leveled at opposition activists … In both cases, the result has been to create a climate of hate leading to constant harassment, threats, and attacks (Gershman, 2016).

Pointing out the similarities between attacks against opposition political activists and NGOs, the above passage suggests that attacks against NGOs are part of Russian politics rather than a non-political issue. Moreover, the fact that the campaigns are comparable to the negative campaigns against office seekers further points to the importance of studying campaigns against non-office seekers and the role of such campaigns in politics. Clearly, attacks against non-office seekers are prevalent in politics.

While attacks against non-office seekers are clearly part of politics, attacks against public opinion pollsters, a subset of the non-office seeker category, are also common globally – as Arthur Lupia recently put it, "Polls are a popular whipping-boy in politics" (2015). Yet, he also argues, they "can give people a stronger voice" (Lupia, 2015). While Lupia's argument is focused on democracies, polling serves an even greater role in non-democracies where by definition representation is flawed. A cynical reader may question whether an authoritarian government does care about the public will. However, a cursory look at the instability autocrats face when they ignore the public as occurred in the Color Revolutions and more recently in the Arab Spring is likely to make the cynic reconsider their position. While a survey is a far cry from an election, the presentation of a representative sample is at least some form of representation. Thus, the attacks against pollsters clearly represent a normatively as well as theoretically important phenomenon.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided historical background on Georgia's political trajectory as well as the negative campaign which is studied here. Given that researchers have only recently begun to look at non-American contexts of negative campaigns, there is a need for further research into a greater diversity of the settings in which negative campaigns take place. One clear gap in this regard is an understanding of how negative campaigns work in less than democratic contexts. This gap is particularly important for the study of competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes. A second clear gap in the literature is the study of negative campaigns against non-office seekers. This gap once again is particularly important for the study of less than democratic regimes, because it has become a particularly prevalent form of negative campaign in such contexts in recent years. Finally, the chapter discussed the significance of attacks against public opinion pollsters in particular, highlighting their prevalence and normative importance in today's world. In the next chapter, I present the methods used to explore the case presented above.

Chapter 3: Methods

In order to test the hypotheses put forward in Chapter 1, I use a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design and lab experiment replication. This chapter provides a brief overview of these methods and their application in this thesis.

Regression Discontinuity Designs and the Quasi-experiment

Regression discontinuity designs (RDD) have recently become common in political science (Skovron and Titiunik, 2015: 2), although the idea dates back to the 1960s (Sekhon, 2009: 488; Thistlethwaite and Campbell, 1960). The idea behind a regression discontinuity design is that if a researcher can find "a sharp breakpoint that makes seemingly random distinctions between units that receive treatment and those that do not" (Sekhon, 2009: 488), they can assume that observations falling directly above or below the breakpoint are as-if randomly assigned to control and treatment. Since observations on either side of the cut-point are taken to have randomly fallen into either the treatment or control group, researchers can analyze observational data as if it were experimental.

The distance either to the left or right of the cut-point is referred to as the bandwidth (for a detailed discussion, see: Imbens and Kalyanaraman, 2010). The bandwidth should be small enough so that observations on either side can reasonably be expected to have fallen on either side randomly. To provide an example, imagine a program that provides aid to individuals who make USD 15,000 per year or less. A researcher could reasonably argue that individuals who make USD 15,500 per year are quite similar to individuals who make USD 14,500 a year, and that these individual's difference in income is more or less random, whereas comparing individuals who make USD 10,000 per year to individuals who make USD 20,000 per year seems like a less plausible comparison. Hence, rather than a USD 5,000 bandwidth, a researcher would select a USD 500 bandwidth, comparing individuals making between 15,001 to 15,500

USD per year to individuals making 14,500 to 15,000USD per year, reasonably claiming that the group slightly above the USD 15,000 cut point could have just as well been in the treatment group and vice versa. By comparing these groups, the researcher would be able to parse out the effects of the program.

In grouping observations into control and treatment group, an "assignment variable" is used (Lee and Lemieux 2010: 283). Lee and Lemieux argue that individuals should not have control over the variable in order for the random assignment assumption to hold (Lee and Lemieux 2010: 283). However, if individuals do have some control over it, it can remain random, particularly so long as they do not have the ability to knowingly assign themselves to the treatment or control group (Lee and Lemieux 2010: 283).

In this thesis, I use a regression discontinuity design based on a confluence of events which allows me to use 2015 Caucasus Barometer (CB) survey data as if it were experimental. CB fieldwork started on October 13th, 2015. As described above, on October 17th, the Georgian Dream Coalition attacked the NDI-CRRC public opinion polls and pollsters. Hence, as a cut point, I use October 17th with interview date as the assignment variable. This means that individuals interviewed before the 17th are considered part of the control group and individuals interviewed after the 17th are part of the treatment group. Observations from the 17th itself are dropped, since some observations are treated while others are untreated. Because, fieldwork started four days before the attacks, the maximum bandwidth available is four days on either side of the attack.

Being interviewed before or after October 17th should be random, because of the survey's sampling procedure. CB uses stratification with clustering and random walk to select households due to the unavailability of an accurate sampling frame in Georgia. To select individual

respondents, Kish tables are used at the within household level. Because households and respondents are randomly selected on each day of fieldwork, they could just as well have been selected any other day of fieldwork. It is worth noting that respondents can request a different time for interviews. At the four day bandwidth, 22 respondents who were contacted before the attack requested to be interviewed at a date and time that was after the attack. However, since the respondents would not have known that this moved them from the control to the treatment group, it should not be problematic, following Lee and Lemieux's argument (2010: 283) that if respondents have some but largely incomplete control over the assignment variable then the randomization should hold.

One further caveat is important. Pre-fieldwork interviewer training for CB occurs in stages, with trainings in Tbilisi first. With fieldwork immediately following training, early interviews are carried out in Tbilisi. Hence, respondents in other settlements did not have an equal probability of being selected in the early periods of fieldwork. Given this fact, I drop all observations from outside Tbilisi.

In total, this coding appears to have achieved a randomization of respondents before and after the cut point, at least on observable variables. This is apparent when looking at a number of respondent sociodemographic characteristics in the control and treatment group, which are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Control and Treatment Group Socio-demographics

Characteristic	Control Group (95% CI)	Treatment Group (95% CI)
Age	47(45-49)	48(46-50)
% family income over USD 400/month	19% (10-28%)	20% (11-28%)
% ethnic Georgian	88% (80-96%)	92% (86-98%)

% female	67% (56-78%)	72% (63-82%)
% in employment	24% (14-34%)	37% (27-47%)

Average age of respondents before and after the cut-point is one year apart. Monthly family incomes, ethnic composition, and gender are roughly equivalent in the treatment and control groups and 95% confidence intervals overlap. The largest gap between point estimates is with employment. This fact likely stems from the fact that the first day following the treatment was a Sunday. Due to the five day work week, employed respondents are less likely to be interviewed on weekdays and more likely to be on weekends, which probably accounts for the discrepancy. However, the confidence intervals comfortably overlap.

This section has provided a brief review of the literature on quasi-experiments and their mechanics. Although the results of quasi-experiments based on regression discontinuity designs are quite convincing, and have been found to accurately match up with experimental results (Cook et. al, 2008: 724), comparing experimental results with observational or quasi-experimental data helps show whether findings are reliable (Lalonde 1986: 618). Moreover, greater attention has been paid to replication of experiments in recent years, with Gilbert et. al. as part of Collaboration, Open Science (2015) finding that roughly half of a sample of studies published in top psychology journals did not replicate. Although the findings of this series of replications have themselves been called into question (see Anderson et. al., 2016), replication nonetheless helps determine if a set of findings are in fact reliable. Given the importance of replication, I carried out a lab experiment in April 2016, which is described in detail in the next section.

Lab Experiments

In lab experiments, as in other forms of experiment, individuals are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups (Druckman et. al., 2011: 17). Researchers randomly assign individuals to each of these groups in order to attempt to ensure that no confounding and unobserved variables are different between groups (Druckman et. al., 2011: 18). This in turn gives researchers confidence that the treatment they apply is not due to an unobserved and uncontrolled for confounding variable. By comparing groups that are alike on observed and unobserved variables, a researcher can be more confident in making causal inferences i.e., that the treatment applied really did lead to the causal effect observed.

Although lab experiments do allow researchers to make causal inference through randomization, their main disadvantage is that they do not allow researchers to make claims about external validity i.e., that outside of the lab environment the treatment would lead to the observed effect. Thus, here it is important to note, the claims made about the lab experiment in this thesis are taken to be internally, but not necessarily externally valid.

I carried out a lab experiment in Tbilisi, Georgia between April 12th and April 14th, 2016, which was registered in the Evidence in Governance and Politics registry prior to fieldwork.[5] The measurement instrument had a total of 25 questions and was programmed into Android tablets using Google's Open Data Kit Collect software. Study participants were recruited from the bus stop in front of Tbilisi State University. Respondents received a GEL 5 phone card in exchange for participation. The sample was a convenience sample and consists entirely of students. Respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24.

The experiment had two treatment groups and a control group. A total of 181 individuals participated. The control group had 63 respondents; the first treatment group had 60 respondents;

[5] See: http://egap.org/registration/1815

and the second treatment group had 58 respondents. Two respondents left the experiment room without completing the experiment instrument to the end. They were still given the incentive provided to all respondents upon leaving.

In order to carry out random assignment to treatment and control group, a list of 240 numbers was generated. Each number was then randomly assigned a value of one, two, or three. After this, the list of random numbers was printed out together on a piece of paper with my CEU email address.[6] The pieces of paper were then cut out and thoroughly mixed up. The mixed up sheets of paper were then placed on the table where the study took place. At the beginning of the data collection, participants were instructed to select a piece of paper, write the number into the tablet, and to keep the piece of paper which had their number. After consent was obtained from respondents, they responded to several questions about what they thought the largest issues in the country were and their political identification.

After several questions, respondents in the treatment groups watched one of two videos. In the control group, they continued to fill in the remaining questions on the questionnaire. In the first treatment video, Georgian Dream Coalition politicians attacked the public opinion poll results. The video was from a pro-GD television network, *2030*. The video starts out noting that "despite the increase [in ratings] members of the ruling Coalition still do not [trust the] methods with which NDI carries out research, while others are not at all interested in what America's National Democratic Institute has to say." The first speaker, the Minister of Health, claimed that he had no idea where NDI gets its data from, implying that it was made up. The second speaker, a Georgian Dream MP, stated that anyone who believes the numbers must be a UNM

[6] Respondent's names were not recorded in order to better assure anonymity. However, the number of the paper became the participant's respondent ID. My email was attached to the piece of paper in order to allow respondents to contact me and withdraw consent at any future date. The respondents were instructed to send an email to my email address together with their respondent ID in order to withdraw consent from the study *ex post facto*.

sympathizer and that the organization which carries out the polls is thoroughly associated with the party. The third speaker, the Minister of Internally Displaced Peoples and Housing, stated that the survey has a 20% margin of error, and when the margin goes below 40%, he will be willing to discuss the results. Finally, the Minister of Defense, Tinatin Khidasheli stated that her position on the polls, skepticism, has not changed and she is not sure why anyone would ask her about the polls.

In the second treatment, a journalist asks individuals walking on Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi's main through-fare, whether they trust or do not trust NDI's polls. Twenty six individuals in total expressed their opinions, with responses ranging from "Of course, why wouldn't I?!" to "No, NDI represents a concrete political force" to "I don't know". Although a variety of opinions were expressed, the video tended towards negative responses.

Questions

This thesis attempts to measure whether political attacks against public opinion pollsters generated uncertainty, ambivalence, or simply resulted in increases or decreases in appraisals of the public opinion pollsters as relates to both individuals' attitudes as well as to individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes. In order to measure this, I use two survey questions from the 2015 Caucasus Barometer Survey, meta-data on response rate from the same survey, and two questions from the lab experiment.

Individual Trust

The first question I use from CB for individual trust in public opinion polls is, "There have been discussions lately about the results of public opinion polls, like the one we are conducting right now, in Georgia. Generally speaking, to what extent do you trust or distrust the results of public opinion polls conducted in our country?" Responses were recorded on a ten point scale with respondents answering using a show card. Respondents could also answer

"Never heard of these polls", "Don't know", or refuse to answer. Five percent of the control group reported never having heard of the polls, and two percent of the treatment group reported the same.[7]

To measure individual trust in the polls, the question asked during the lab experiment was, "Please assess your level of trust toward each of the following social institutions, organizations, and political unions on a scale where 0 means 'fully distrust' and 10 means 'fully trust'. How much do you trust public opinion polls?"

Perceptions of Others' Trust in Polls

In order to measure individual's perceptions of others' attitudes towards public opinion polls for the quasi-experiment, I use the follow up question to the above question from Caucasus Barometer: "And to what extent, in your opinion, do most of the people around you trust or distrust the results of public opinion polls conducted in our country?" Response options were the same, but a logical skip was applied when individuals reported they had not heard of the polls in response to the first question.

From the lab experiment, I use the question, "And now, please assess the level of trust that most of those around you have toward each of the following social institutions, organizations, and political unions where 0 means fully distrust and 10 means fully trust." to measure perceptions of others' trust in the polls.

Non-response

Type of non-response is used to test whether the attacks of October 17th were effective. The logic here is that, if the attacks were genuinely effective, individuals would be reluctant to participate in a survey carried out by an organization which was accused of malfeasance. This

[7] Logistic regression suggests that individuals were 39% as likely to report they had not heard of the polls in the treatment group in Tbilisi, with p=0.097 (one-tailed test).

would result in higher active non-response. The Caucasus Barometer dataset, in addition to providing data on response rate, also includes reason for non-response. Reasons for non-response include "respondent refused to be interviewed", "respondent was not at home and would not return during the fieldwork period", "respondent could not answer the questionnaire due to a health condition", "respondent could not answer the questionnaire because s/he did not know the survey language", "the dwelling is closed and contact could not be made", "no adult member of the household was at home", "no one at home spoke Georgian[and the interviewer did not speak the corresponding language]", "the household is inaccessible", and "the household member who opened the door refused to cooperate".

Operationalization

The thesis attempts to test whether political attacks are effective, generate ambivalence, or result in uncertainty both in individual attitudes as well as in individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes. However, I use the questions listed above in order to test for each of these, which in turn requires recoding of each variable's scale for each hypothesis test.

To test the effectiveness hypotheses – that pollsters are either helped or hurt by the attacks – responses "don't know", "don't know about the polls" and refuse to answer are excluded from the analysis for the first two CB questions. The scale is otherwise left unchanged for each of the four questions discussed above.

To operationalize effectiveness of the attacks against the survey organization using non-response, I only include active non-response, defined as the person at the door refusing to cooperate or the respondent refusing to be interviewed. These two response options are coded as 1 and all other non-response types are coded as 0 resulting in a dummy variable for active non-response. It is also important to note that observations from the 17th as well as 18th of October were dropped from the data set for this analysis. The observations on the 18th were dropped,

because this was a Sunday, and non-response systematically varies between weekdays and weekends due to the five day work week. The observations from the 17th were dropped, because some units were treated while others were not.

In order to test for ambivalence, I use the distance from boundary responses of 1 and 10 on Caucasus Barometer and 0 and 10 on the lab experiment. The logic behind this is that if individuals became more ambivalent, they would be less likely to respond with a certain and unambiguous 'fully trust' or 'fully distrust' response. This is because ambivalence is the holding of positive and negative views about a subject, and a response that is not a boundary response implies that an individual holds at least some positive and some negative views of the subject. Based on this logic, response options '1' and '10' were coded as 1, '9' and '2' as 2, '8' and '3' as 3, '7' and '4' as 4, and '5' and '6' as 5 for the quasi experiment. For the lab experiment, response options '0' and '10' are coded 1, '1' and '9' as 2, '2' and '8' as 3, '3' and '7' as 4, '4' and '6' as 5, and '5' as 6.

Notably, these scales are slightly different. This derives from the use of a ten point scale on Caucasus Barometer, which is ill-equipped to measure the distance from the center, because the center of a ten point scale is 5.5. The response of 5 is, however, the likely central response, because respondents are likely to perceive 5 to be the middle of the scale. In order to account for this issue, the lab experiment used an 11 point scale, where 5 is the mathematical center. Notably, however, both scales result in an interval measure of distance from boundary response options, with each increase of one point being equivalent to an increase in distance from either boundary response of one point. Since the coding results in a measure of the distance from boundary response, if ambivalence increased, the coefficient for the treatment should be positive, because this would indicate an increase in the distance from extreme response options.

In order to test for uncertainty, response options '5' and don't know are coded 1, while other response options besides refuse to answer and never heard of these polls are coded as 0. Response option 5 is included as a measure of uncertainty, because a fair number of studies have found middle of scale responses to be a form of don't know response (e.g. Sturgis et. al., 2014: 16; O'Muircheartaigh et. al., 2000: 10). Logistic regression is used to test the uncertainty hypothesis.

Independent Variables

Besides treatment and control group membership, I use a number of independent variables in the analysis of the quasi experiment. Although CB data is treated as quasi experimental, a number of factors have been found to moderate trust in the literature and are hence controlled for. First, years of formal education is included, because the educated have been found to be more likely to engage in motivated reasoning (Strickland, Taber, and Lodge, 2011: 935). Second, since there is an imbalance in the share of individuals in employment between control and treatment groups, I include a dummy variable for in employment, defined as respondent identified as either self-employed or an employee. Third, for the analysis of individual's trust in public opinion polls, the individual's perceptions of others' trust in public opinion is included, because in general there is an expectation that individual's perceptions of others' attitudes influences individual attitudes (See: Adams, 1967: 65; Underwood, 2003: 319; West and Hewstone, 2012: 269). Trust in "Executive government, including the Prime Minister and the Cabinet" (hereinafter trust in executive government) is interacted with the treatment to test for motivated reasoning. Individuals who trust the executive government are also likely to be supporters of the Georgian Dream Coalition, because the executive consists entirely of Georgian Dream Coalition members. As noted above, multiple members of executive government attacked the polls on October 17th. Hence, trust in the executive's interaction with the treatment is used as

a proxy for motivated reasoning. Trust in the executive by itself also serves a second purpose. In Georgia, trust in each institution is associated with trust in each other institution.[8] Hence, trust in executive government not interacted with the treatment controls for generalized trust in institutions. When it comes to the lab experiment, in order to test for motivated reasoning, self-identification with the Georgian Dream party is interacted with the treatment in order to test for motivated reasoning rather than trust in the executive.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the logic of quasi experiments and lab experiments together with the quasi experiment and lab experiment used in this thesis. The chapter then discussed the questions and codings used to operationalize trust in the polls and perceptions of others' trust as relates to the effectiveness, ambivalence, and uncertainty hypotheses. In the next chapter, I present the results of the experiments for each hypothesis.

[8] Pearson's r is greater than or equal to .11 and less than or equal to .79 for correlations between each institution, and significant at α=.01 within the 2015 Caucasus Barometer data set.

Chapter 4: Effectiveness, Ambivalence, and Uncertainty: The Results of a Negative Campaign

Were the attacks effective? Have Tbilisians become more ambivalent about public opinion polls, or did they become more uncertain in their attitudes? Did individuals' perceptions of those around them change in any of these ways? And did Georgian Dream supporters engage in motivated reasoning when it comes to the polls? In this chapter, I present and discuss the results of the quasi experiment and lab experiment, finding that the answer to each of these questions is yes, no, maybe, and ultimately, sometimes.

Effectiveness of Attacks

This section presents three measures of the effectiveness of the attacks against the pollsters – active non-response, individual trust in the polls, and perceptions of other's trust in the polls. In order to test whether the attacks were effective, logistic regression is used to test whether active non-response increased following the attacks. Results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Active Non-response

	Bandwidth:			
	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days	4 Days
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment	0.464			
	(0.510)			
Treatment		−0.192		
		(0.297)		
Treatment			−0.439*	
			(0.225)	
Treatment				−0.479**
				(0.204)
Constant	−1.322***	−0.560***	−0.348**	−0.371**
	(0.398)	(0.209)	(0.149)	(0.147)
Observations	85	202	349	428
Log Likelihood	−48.182	−129.490	−227.445	−273.856
Akaike Inf. Crit.	100.364	262.981	458.890	551.712
Note:				*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The table above suggests that if the attacks did increase active non-response, the effects were short-lived. The estimate for the one day bandwidth before and after the weekend of the attack is positive, suggesting that there was an increase in non-response. However, the p-value of 0.36 is far from conventional levels of significance. At the two, three and four day bandwidths, however, the coefficient becomes negative, suggesting active non-response decreased. At the three and four day bandwidths, the p-values are significant suggesting that active non-response in fact decreased.

The second measure used to test whether the attacks were effective is individual trust in the results of public opinion polls. Results are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Individual Trust in Public Opinion Polls

	Data:	
	Quasi-Experiment	Lab Experiment
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	2.359***	
	(0.750)	
Gender	0.131	
	(0.349)	
Age	−0.018**	
	(0.009)	
Years in Formal Education	0.075	
	(0.050)	
In Employment	−0.361	
	(0.378)	
Others' trust in polls	0.788***	
	(0.075)	
Trust in the Executive	0.567***	
	(0.195)	
Trust in the Executive*Treatment	−0.723***	
	(0.273)	
Treatment 1		−0.204
		(0.520)
Treatment2		−0.068
		(0.528)
GD Supporter		0.140
		(0.960)
Treatment1*GD Supporter		0.315
		(1.849)
Treatment2*GD Supporter		−1.487
		(1.442)
Constant	−0.315	5.415***
	(1.086)	(0.366)
Observations	183	173
R^2	0.435	0.012
Adjusted R^2	0.409	−0.018
Residual Std. Error	2.089 (df = 174)	2.662 (df = 167)
F Statistic	16.717*** (df = 8; 174)	0.396 (df = 5; 167)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The table above presents an interesting picture of the effects of the attacks. The quasi-experiment suggests that rather than hurting trust, the attacks had a statistically significant and substantively, very large, positive effect on trust in public opinion polls. Being interviewed after the attacks increased trust in public opinion polls by 2.36 points on average, suggesting ineffectiveness. However, the results of the lab experiment show no significant increase or decrease in response to either treatment.

When it comes to the motivated reasoning hypothesis the results are again mixed. On the quasi experiment, trust in executive government had a positive relationship with trust in the polls, leading to a half point increase for each point increase in trust in the executive. Trust in the executive alone, however, should function to control for generalized trust in institutions. In contrast to trust in the executive by itself, the interaction between treatment and trust in the executive was negative, with a substantively large effect of -0.72 points on trust in the polls. This provides some support for the motivated reasoning hypothesis. The results of the lab experiment, however, do not support the motivated reasoning hypothesis.

To test hypothesis three, OLS regression was run with perceptions of others' trust in the polls as the dependent variable controlling for individual trust in public opinion polls. Results are presented in Table 4 :

Table 4: Perceptions of Others' Trust in the Polls

	Data:	
	Quasi-Experiment	Lab Experiment
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	−0.800	
	(0.605)	
Gender	0.055	
	(0.275)	
Age	0.005	
	(0.007)	
Years in Formal Education	−0.068*	
	(0.040)	
In Employment	0.314	
	(0.298)	
Individual Trust in the Polls	0.490***	
	(0.047)	
Trust in the Executive	−0.218	
	(0.157)	
Trust in the Executive*Treatment	0.203	
	(0.219)	
Treatment 1		1.080
		(0.844)
Treatment2		0.471
		(0.476)
Georgian Dream Supporter		0.531
		(0.464)
Treatment1*GD Supporter		−2.864*
		(1.622)
Treatment2*GD Supporter		−3.186**
		(1.268)
Constant	2.886***	4.920***
	(0.829)	(0.330)
Observations	183	166
R^2	0.398	0.052
Adjusted R^2	0.371	0.022
Residual Std. Error	1.648 (df = 174)	2.331 (df = 160)
F Statistic	14.396*** (df = 8; 174)	1.738 (df = 5; 160)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The outputs suggest that perceptions of others' trust in the polling results did not change significantly in response to any of the treatments. With the quasi-experiment, the only significant predictors of individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes are the individual's own attitude towards the polls and years of education.

Notably, the lab experiment provides some support for the motivated reasoning hypothesis. Georgian Dream supporters lowered their assessments of the trust of those around them by 2.86 points in response to the first treatment, and by 3.19 points in response to the second treatment.

Ambivalence

In order to test the individual ambivalence hypothesis, a measure of the distance from boundary answers was generated as discussed in Chapter 3. Because the recoding resulted in a non-normal distribution, the variable was then log transformed. The log transformed ambivalence variable from the quasi experiment has a skew of -0.08 and a kurtosis of -1.6, while the lab experiment variable has a skew of -1.17 and a kurtosis of 0.25. Results are presented in Table 5 **:**

Table 5: Individual Ambivalence

	Data:	
	Quasi-Experiment	Lab Experiment)
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	0.353*	
	(0.209)	
Gender	0.012	
	(0.097)	
Age	0.002	
	(0.002)	
Years in Formal Education	0.017	
	(0.014)	
In Employment	0.031	
	(0.105)	
Others' Trust in the Polls	0.232***	
	(0.032)	
Trust in the Executive	0.085	
	(0.054)	
Trust in the Executive*Treatment	−0.082	
	(0.076)	
Treatment 1		0.130
		(0.109)
Treatment2		0.307***
		(0.111)
Georgian Dream Supporter		0.359*
		(0.202)
Treatment1*GD Supporter		−0.025
		(0.389)
Treatment2*GD Supporter		−0.384
		(0.303)
Constant	−0.381	1.071***
	(0.295)	(0.077)
Observations	183	173
R^2	0.248	0.058
Adjusted R^2	0.214	0.029
Residual Std. Error	0.580 (df = 174)	0.560 (df = 167)
F Statistic	7.187*** (df = 8; 174)	2.039* (df = 5; 167)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

The table above suggests that ambivalence can be generated in response to a negative campaign. The quasi-experiment shows that individuals became more ambivalent in response to the attacks, and the second treatment of the lab experiment also evidences increased ambivalence. The results of the first treatment, however, are null.

The social ambivalence variable was also log transformed. The log transformed social ambivalence variable from the quasi experiment has skew of -1.53 and a kurtosis of 1.45 while the lab experiment variable has a skew of 0.27 and a kurtosis of -1.46. Table 6 presents the results of both experiments:

Table 6: Ambivalent Others

	Data:	
	Quasi-Experiment	Lab Experiment
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	−0.241	
	(0.191)	
Gender	0.029	
	(0.089)	
Age	−0.001	
	(0.002)	
Years in Formal Education	0.004	
	(0.013)	
In Employment	0.012	
	(0.096)	
Individual Trust in the Polls	0.179***	
	(0.025)	
Trust in the Executive	−0.036	
	(0.050)	
Trust in the Executive*Treatment	0.016	
	(0.070)	
Treatment 1		−0.043
		(0.100)
Treatment2		0.162
		(0.103)
Georgian Dream Supporter		0.048
		(0.183)
Treatment1*GD Supporter		0.183
		(0.351)
Treatment2*GD Supporter		−0.641**
		(0.274)
Constant	0.307	1.313***
	(0.265)	(0.071)
Observations	183	166
R^2	0.249	0.062
Adjusted R^2	0.214	0.032
Residual Std. Error	0.533 (df = 174)	0.504 (df = 160)
F Statistic	7.208*** (df = 8; 174)	2.100* (df = 5; 160)
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As the table shows, the attacks of October 17th had a null effect on perceptions of ambivalence among others. The lab experiment also provides a null result on the social ambivalence hypothesis. Thus, neither experiment supports the social ambivalence hypothesis. Notably, the motivated reasoning hypothesis receives some support from the lab experiment, with Georgian Dream supporters becoming less ambivalent in response to treatment 2.

Uncertainty

Logistic regression was used to test the individual uncertainty hypothesis. Results are presented in Table 7:

Table 7: Individual Uncertainty

	Data:	
	Quasi-experiment	Lab Experiment
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	−1.792**	
	(0.840)	
Gender	0.381	
	(0.367)	
Age	0.004	
	(0.009)	
Years in Formal Education	−0.038	
	(0.051)	
In Employment	0.045	
	(0.387)	
Individual Trust in the Polls	2.289***	
	(0.382)	
Trust in the Executive	−0.610**	
	(0.247)	
Trust in the Executive*Treatment	0.355	
	(0.321)	
Treatment 1		−0.289
		(0.519)
Treatment2		0.875*
		(0.457)
Georgian Dream Supporter		0.229
		(0.875)
Treatment1*GD Supporter		−14.024
		(840.275)
Treatment2*GD Supporter		0.090
		(1.198)
Constant	0.041	−1.482***
	(1.116)	(0.350)
Observations	229	179
Log Likelihood	−115.686	−91.345
Akaike Inf. Crit.	249.373	194.690
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As the table above shows, the results of the quasi-experiment suggest that rather than increasing uncertainty, individuals became more certain in their attitudes following attacks. The odds of providing an uncertain answer for treated respondents in the quasi-experiment fell dramatically, with individuals being 0.15 times as likely to answer with an uncertain response. Trust in the executive is again important, with each point increase in trust in the executive decreasing the likelihood of answering with uncertainty by almost half.[9] The lab experiment, however, provides some evidence which suggests that uncertainty increased in response to the second treatment. Individuals in the treatment group were 2.4 times more likely to provide an uncertain response compared with the control group. This provides some evidence that uncertainty can result from attacks.

While the evidence is contradictory at the individual level when it comes to uncertainty, the question of social uncertainty remains. Logistic regression was again run to test for social uncertainty. Results are presented in Table 8**:**

[9] The multiplicative estimate is 0.51.

Table 8: Social Uncertainty

	Data:	
	Quasi-experiment	Lab Experiment
	(1)	(2)
Treatment	1.763**	
	(0.802)	
Gender	−0.577*	
	(0.342)	
Age	0.005	
	(0.009)	
Years in Formal Education	−0.094*	
	(0.054)	
In Employment	−0.102	
	(0.378)	
Individual Trust in the Polls	2.246***	
	(0.374)	
Trust in the Executive	0.110	
	(0.222)	
Trust in the Executive*Treatment	−0.136	
	(0.285)	
Treatment 1		−0.609
		(0.447)
Treatment2		−0.005
		(0.421)
Georgian Dream Supporter		0.085
		(0.765)
Treatment1*GD Supporter		0.609
		(1.483)
Treatment2*GD Supporter		−15.868
		(906.943)
Constant	−0.455	−0.778***
	(1.122)	(0.293)
Observations	229	179
Log Likelihood	−124.786	−100.521
Akaike Inf. Crit.	267.572	213.043
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

As the table above shows, the results of the quasi experiment suggest that social perceptions became significantly more uncertain following treatment. Being included in the treatment group made an uncertain response 5.75 times more likely. Although the quasi experiment provides evidence for the social uncertainty hypothesis, the lab experiment provides no evidence suggesting the generation of social uncertainty.

Discussion

The above analyses suggest a number of findings with regard to the seven hypotheses presented in Chapter 1, as well as to the study of negative campaigns more generally. Below, I discuss the effectiveness and motivated reasoning hypotheses as well as their implications for the study of negative campaigns. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the alternative hypotheses about ambivalence and uncertainty.

Effectiveness and Motivated Reasoning

The first hypothesis put forward in this thesis – that political attacks will lower individuals' appraisals of the attacked – on its own finds no support from either the quasi-experiment or the lab experiment. The first measure tested, active non-response, exhibits a pattern that suggests that attacks may have been effective, but if they were, the effects were short lived. On the second measure from the quasi experiment, individual trust, rather than hurting the pollsters, they in fact helped, when controlling for motivated reasoning. On the third measure, from the lab experiment, results are null when it comes to hypothesis one. All in all, these results at first may appear confounding, but are in fact what the literature has consistently found. Lau et. al.'s meta-analyses (1999, 2007, 2009) have shown attacks are inconsistently effective. Thus, the findings related to the first hypothesis fall in line with the broader findings in the literature.

The second hypothesis – that individuals would decrease their assessments of others' attitudes towards the polls – finds no support from either the quasi experiment or the lab experiment. Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. This finding is interesting in that, the questions were not framed in terms of the effects of a phenomenon on others, but rather only asked about the individual's perceptions of others. This suggests that third person effects are in part derived from question framing effects, as many times the questions asked to detect third

person effects are about how others are impacted by information. This finding is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is worth future research.

When it comes to hypothesis three – that partisans will engage in motivated reasoning in response to attacks – results are mixed. Three of the twelve models which controlled for motivated reasoning in the previous section found statistically significant evidence of motivated reasoning, and none of the models found evidence which would contradict the hypothesis. The findings suggest that further nuance is indeed needed to understand in which contexts and in response to what types of partisan stimuli individuals will engage in motivated reasoning. What is potentially most significant about this finding is that given that motivated reasoning has been shown to affect individuals at least in some cases, studies of negative campaigns which have not controlled for motivated reasoning may find different results than originally reported. This could have a significant impact on our understanding of when negative campaigns are effective and who they affect, which deserves further attention in the negative campaigns literature.

Uncertainty and Ambivalence

Two alternative hypotheses were proposed to the effectiveness hypothesis in the first chapter of this thesis – that negative campaigns could generate ambivalence or uncertainty. These hypotheses were bifurcated to suggest that uncertainty and/or ambivalence could result at the individual level as well as at the level of individual perceptions of others' attitudes. Overall, the results are mixed, with some analyses suggesting that these are very real possibilities and others providing no support.

When it comes to ambivalence, individuals became more ambivalent in response to the attacks of October 17th, as well as in response to the second treatment in the lab experiment. This provides relatively strong support for the ambivalence hypothesis for individual's own attitudes. However, the hypothesis that individuals would perceive others to have become more ambivalent

finds no support, with only null results. Overall, however, the finding that negative campaigns can generate ambivalence in addition to being effective or ineffective is significant, and supports the fundamental contention of this thesis that the question about negative campaigns should be what are their effects on attitudes rather than are they effective.

The second alternative hypothesis tested in this thesis is the uncertainty hypothesis. The results of the quasi experiment and lab experiment provide mixed support. While the attacks of October 17th led to lower amounts of uncertainty, this finding should be unsurprising given the finding that individuals who did not engage in motivated reasoning increased their assessments of the polls, while individuals who did engage in motivated reasoning decreased their assessments. Logically, this suggests greater certainty and evidences increased polarization in attitudes towards public opinion polls in response to the attacks. Although the uncertainty hypothesis did not find support at the individual level in the quasi experiment, in the lab experiment, individual uncertainty in fact increased in response to the second treatment. These contradictory results suggest that at the individual level, there is a degree of context or content dependence on whether attitudes become more uncertain in response to political attacks.

While at the individual level, attacks decreased uncertainty, individuals' perceptions of others' attitudes became dramatically more uncertain following attacks. Following the October 17th attacks, individuals became 5.75 times more likely to respond with an uncertain attitude about others' attitudes. This finding is neither supported nor contradicted by the null findings of the lab experiment. Overall, again this demonstrates that social uncertainty can result from a negative campaign.

This finding is significant, because the third person effects literature posits that there are behavioral consequences to individuals' perceptions of others. In the present case, increases in

uncertainty in perceptions of others are likely to increase the costs of solving collective action problems by increasing the risk associated with taking first steps towards action. While the present case, attacks against public opinion pollsters, does not present a clear collective action problem, the implications for other contexts are particularly important. While every society faces collective action problems, in semi-authoritarian regimes, like Georgia, increasing the costs of collective action can prevent democratization through decreasing the likelihood that individuals will take action to prevent counter-democratic moves by authorities since they will be unaware of whether their fellow citizens will support them. Clearly, this finding is of theoretical as well as normative significance, particularly for the study of authoritarian regimes.

Conclusion

This chapter presented tests of the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1. When it comes to the effectiveness of the attacks against the polls, results were mixed, with the attacks of October 17th increasing assessments among non-motivated reasoners and decreasing them among motivated reasoners. The lab experiment, however, found a null result. This supports Lau et.al. 's (1999, 2007, 2009) contention that attacks are inconsistent in their effectiveness. Broadly speaking the results of the other hypotheses are similar in that they find support from some analyses but not others. The results discussed above, however, do suggest that individuals can become more ambivalent or uncertain in response to political attacks. Findings, as with the effectiveness hypothesis, were not entirely consistent, however. This leads to the main finding of this thesis – ambivalence as well as uncertainty are plausible outcomes of political attacks, yet like the effectiveness hypothesis, these outcomes are likely to be contingent on a number of factors including the content and context of the message.

Conclusion

Negative campaigns can be effective or ineffective campaigns. This thesis has shown that they can also be ambivalence or uncertainty inducing. In order to show why these outcomes were possible if not likely, the first chapter reviewed the literature on negative campaigns, political information processing and motivated reasoning, ambivalence in politics, misinformation, cognitive dissonance, and uncertainty. The chapter showed that ambivalence was an implicit outcome of information processing models, which in turn suggested that negative campaigns could generate it. However, in order to suggest that uncertainty could result from the information contained in a negative campaign, I argued that a negative campaign could result in cognitive dissonance, in part based on the literature on misinformation. In addition to these strains of literature, the first chapter included a brief discussion of the third person effects literature; through this, the chapter argued perceptions of others' attitudes could also become ambivalent or uncertain in response to a negative campaign. Reviewing these literatures led to seven hypotheses, six of which can be summed up as in addition to being effective, negative campaigns could generate ambivalence or uncertainty first in individuals' attitudes and second in individuals' perceptions of the attitudes of others. Finally, I suggested individuals would engage in motivated reasoning.

While the second chapter described the negative campaign studied in this thesis, the third chapter presented the methods used to test the hypotheses developed in the first. Specifically, I used a quasi-experimental regression discontinuity design with Caucasus Barometer 2015 data and data from an April 2016 lab experiment, with the goal of replication.

Using this data, I have shown that negative campaigns can result in uncertainty and/or ambivalence. These findings are particularly significant in two respects. First, it suggests that the

fundamental contention of this thesis – that researchers should consider the question 'what are the effects of a negative campaign?' rather than 'are negative campaigns effective campaigns' – is valid. Second, as has been found with the effectiveness hypothesis, this thesis has shown that uncertainty and ambivalence, while potential outcomes, are also not consistently generated. In this regard, replication proved crucial, because the results of the quasi-experiment and lab experiment did not always coincide, and in fact contradicted one another when it came to individual uncertainty. These findings aside, the thesis also reaffirms the broader understanding in the literature that negative campaigns are inconsistently effective. One important note in this regard is that the motivated reasoning hypothesis found a fair amount of support. This suggests that the null findings of other studies may in part be accounted for by motivated reasoning.

Implications

This thesis has focused on a negative campaign against public opinion pollsters in the Republic of Georgia – the Caucasus Research Resource Centers. This negative campaign is different from the vast majority of negative campaigns described in the literature in two important respects. First, it is against a non-office seeker – public opinion pollsters. Second, it is in a less than authoritarian yet not fully democratic context.

These two differences are important and have a number of implications. First, negativity towards public opinion pollsters has received a great deal of attention in recent years (See Wells, 2015; Enton, 2016; Ford et. al., 2016), yet to the best of my knowledge, there have not been quantitative studies testing whether campaigns against pollsters affect attitudes. This thesis is one small attempt, which helps to understand the phenomenon. Given the inconsistent effectiveness, pollsters may breathe a short sigh of relief.

Second, by exploring attacks against non-office seekers and coming to broadly comparable findings as in the literature on attacks against office seekers, this suggests that the findings of the literature on negative campaigns may have broad external validity. Hence, negative campaigns against non-office seekers are likely to be inconsistently effective much like negative campaigns against office seekers.

Third, by exploring a negative campaign in a less than democratic context, this thesis has made a contribution to understandings of the domestic politics of competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes. The increased social uncertainty that resulted from the negative campaign is likely to be particularly important to broader understandings of uncertainty in competitive and electoral authoritarianism.

Limitations

Before concluding and suggesting areas of future research, a number of limitations of the present study are important. First, both experiments discussed in this thesis were from Tbilisi based samples. This means that the findings cannot be generalized to outside of Tbilisi without caution. Moreover, the findings of the lab experiment are only internally rather than externally valid. Third, although the findings appear to have come in line with other research, only a number of questions were asked and treatments applied. Responses to survey questions are highly dependent on question wording, and hence future research should aim to test attitudes using a variety of questions.

Future Research

Besides addressing these limitations, the thesis suggests a number of avenues for future research. First, as a number of scholars have pointed out, the type of negativity used in a campaign as well as the context of the campaign can influence its effects (e.g. Sides et. al., 2010; Fridkin and

Kenney, 2011). Given these findings, future research should focus not only on when negative campaigns are effective campaigns, but also what types and in which circumstances a negative campaign will generate ambivalence and uncertainty. Moreover, parsing out different aspects of citizen assessment of campaigns may prove fruitful.

A second area of future research suggested by this thesis is into motivated reasoning. While motivated reasoning was shown to occur in some but not other instances above, many studies of negative campaigns have not taken motivated reasoning into account. Given the fact that motivated reasoners moved in the direction of the message and non-motivated reasoners against it in the quasi experiment, previous studies should be re-analyzed to test for comparable patterns, which may account for null results, where possible.

Third, given that there was no significant change in response to any of the stimuli on questions about perceptions of others in terms of effectiveness, this suggests that third person effects may in part be derived from question framing effects. Clearly, more research, particularly experimental work, is necessary to test the extent to which this is the case.

So, are negative campaigns effective campaigns? Did the pollsters get hurt by the attacks against them? Did Tbilisians become more ambivalent about pollsters or uncertain in their attitudes or perceptions of others' attitudes about public opinion polls as a result of attacks? Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. This suggests that scholars of negative campaigns need to look at which times make a yes and which a no.

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