Advertising in Taiwanese Presidential Elections: Evaluating the Hazards of Negativity

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ABSTRACT The increasing prevalence of negative advertising as a feature of presidential election campaigns has prompted both popular and scholarly concerns (Schafferer 2006). Implicitly these concerns relate to the potentially hazardous effects that such advertising has on the electorate and by extension, the health of Taiwan’s democracy. In this paper however, I challenge the conception of negative advertising as something inherently damaging. More specifically I argue that the comparative high quality of information contained in negative advertisements, judged by the standards of specificity and evidence, makes an important contribution to the informative function of an election campaign. Seeking to evaluate this argument empirically in the context of Taiwanese presidential elections, I draw on quantitative content analysis of television and newspaper advertisements from three presidential campaigns. Preliminary examination of these data suggests that, proportionally, negative appeals are more issue-focused, specific and supported by evidence than positive claims.

KEY WORDS Taiwan, presidential election, negative advertising

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INTRODUCTION

Since the liberalization of campaign laws and the media in the early 1990s, Taiwanese political parties and presidential candidates have invested increasingly large sums of money in the production and dissemination of campaign advertising (Fell 2005). According to single-election studies and other accounts, election advertising is also becoming progressively more negative (Rawnsley 1997; Chang 2000; Wen et al 2004; Schafferer 2004). Indicative of reactions to this trend is Schafferer’s comment that “after 2000, media and law experts worried that negative advertising had reached new and worrying dimensions; [and yet] the 2004 race broke all records” (2006; 49).

Presumably underpinning concerns of this kind is the assumption that negative advertising has deleterious effects on the electorate and is consequently injurious to the functioning of a democratic system. This view is concordant with the central argument of the “demobilization thesis”, that exposure to negative advertising turns voters off the democratic process, reducing internal efficacy and depressing turnout (Ansolabehere et al 1994, 1999; Ansolabehere & Iyengar 1995). This “conventional wisdom” however, has been reversed by a tide of empirical results that failed to find evidence of demobilization, or else found a moderate stimulation effect (Lau et al 1999; Goldstein & Freedman 2002; Brooks 2006). Even empirical work on the effects of that most unsavoury form of negative advertising, i.e. “personal attack ads”, finds no evidence of a demobilizing effect (Brooks & Geer 2007). Faced with the task of explaining these consistent empirical results, political scientists have noted that negative advertisements are comparatively issue-rich and memorable than positive advertisements, that they provide more salient ‘cost-avoidance’ information, and increase the perceived importance of an election (Kahn & Kenney 1999; Goldstein & Freedman 2002; Brooks 2006). Building on this work yet other scholars have advocated a reconsideration of the role that negative advertising plays in election campaigns, arguing that in some senses it actually enhances democratic competition (Van Heerde 2005; Geer 2006). The central purpose of this paper is therefore to evaluate, empirically in the context of Taiwanese election campaigns, theoretical claims about the comparative benefits of negative appeals. To do so, I draw on the quantitative content analysis of television and print advertisements for eight prominent candidacies across the three direct presidential elections held to date.
RETHINKING NEGATIVE ADVERTISING

In one of the most influential “demobilization” studies, Ansolabehere & Iyengar’s (1995) experimental results showed that exposure to televised “attack advertising” led to lower internal efficacy and a lower probability of voting; a reported reduction of 5% in the latter after exposure to just one such ad! The authors also found that “advertising reinforces and invigorates existing partisan preferences and beliefs” and that “independents” were particularly likely to tune out after exposure to negative advertising (ibid; 65). In combination, these two effects were predicted to injure the working of democracy by leading to a smaller and more polarized electorate where parties would have the incentive to mobilize core supporters with extreme appeals. As plausible as this sounds, an overwhelming majority of subsequent empirical studies, both experimental and survey based, failed to find evidence of negative advertising leading to the demobilization of voters and indeed many reported exactly the opposite\(^2\). Goldstein & Freedman’s influential study for instance, using state-of-the-art ad-tracking technology and ‘real world’ survey data, found that negative advertisements actually had a “significant and substantial mobilizing effect”, raising both turnout levels and attention to politics (2002; 733). Attempting to explain this mobilizing effect, Goldstein & Freedman note that negative ads send strong signals that something is at stake and produce stronger affective responses for or against a candidate (ibid; 723). Similarly Kahn & Kenney argue that negative messages are comparatively memorable because they contain information to help people avoid potential costs, e.g. by voting for someone whose policies might hurt them (1999; 878).

Building on these preliminary attempts to explain the observed stimulation effect of negative ads, political scientists have begun to consider more generally the role of negative advertising in election campaigns. What unites these views of negative advertising is a particular normative understanding of the campaign itself and the concomitant informational needs of voters (Lipsitz 2004). Democratic election campaigns give candidates the opportunity to delineate policy plans, defend records of governance or offer policy alternatives. They should also provide sufficient

\(^2\) See Lau et al (1999) for a meta-analysis of the research literature and Brooks (2006) for a more contemporary summary. It should perhaps also be noted here that although the malaise studies were subject to a damaging methodological critique, “many of the conclusions on both sides of the demobilization debate rest on inadequate data and misspecified models” (Goldstein & Freedman 2002; 722).
information to enable voters to make informed choices to sanction or reward incumbents and to make reasoned choices in line with their own preferences on particular policies. The claim voiced here is that negative advertising advances these goals. Brooks for example notes that whilst positive ads tend to be so ambiguous as to appeal to everyone, negative ads highlight differences and thus allow voters to discriminate between candidates (2006; 686). Brooks & Geer argue that, since democratic competition requires candidates to differentiate themselves by promoting their own policies and qualifications and questioning those of their opponents “it is hard to imagine an election that would be informative without some degree of both positive and negative campaigning” (2007; 1). Similarly Van Heerde claims that “it is not fundamentally inappropriate for parties to contrast their policy positions via negative comparisons” since voters must be able to make meaningful comparisons between alternatives (2005; 5). Finally the most convincing argument published to date is found in Geer (2006) and is backed up with empirical data for TV spots covering eleven US presidential election campaigns. Geer’s claims are based on an important “asymmetry” between positive and negative appeals. In a society where one is innocent until proven guilty, he argues, negative appeals require supporting evidence to make them credible. Whereas one might be inclined to accept a positive claim at face value, claims that are critical risk incredulity or a backlash if they are not backed up. This need for evidence moulds negative advertising in two ways. First, attacking on valence issues is problematic, thus negative appeals are likely to be on specific position issues. A presidential candidate could not for example, with any degree of credibility, accuse an opponent of favouring higher unemployment, but she could criticize an opponent’s policies for reducing unemployment. Second, since presidential candidates’ past records invariably contain a rich seam of feasible evidence to mine, negative advertisements are more likely to focus on candidates’ previous experience of governance, failed policies, voting records, flip-flops, broken promises etc. In this way, Geer argues, negative advertising contributes to the kind of out-party criticism that is necessary for “responsible government” (Schattschneider 1960) as well as highlighting the risks associated with potential office holders. As intimated above, underlying the preceding theoretical arguments are certain assumptions about the utility of the information that is available to voters in order to make reasonable choices. Indeed if we are to measure the comparative merits of negative advertisements, which is the purpose of the current paper, it is necessary to
develop an explicit standard by which to judge them. This is naturally a selective process and the following criteria are neither exhaustive or categorical. First, since “voting choices based on policy concerns are superior to decisions based on party loyalty or candidate image” (Carmines & Stimson 1989; 79), information that focuses on the issues is considered to be of a higher utility. Second, voters need to be able to discriminate between candidates’ policy positions in order to choose advocates of those closer to her own preferences. Thus the higher the degree of specificity with which candidates talk about the issues the more useful that information. Third, the more frequently claims are backed up with checkable supporting evidence, the less likely these claims are false and therefore of no real utility. These criteria of issue content, specificity and evidence form the standard by which the comparative merits of positive and negative appeals will be judged. The expectation derived from the theoretical discussion above, is that, by this standard negative appeals should contain comparatively more useful information than positive appeals.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

In order to test empirically the expectations developed in the preceding section, both televised and print advertisements for the main candidacies in the three direct presidential elections held to date in Taiwan were collected. The newspaper sample represents the total population of advertisements that were published in the main edition of the Liberty Times, China Times and United Daily News during the official campaign period. The sample of TV advertisements however includes only the unique spots aired during the official campaign period (with the exception of the 1996 election where only a 21 day sample was available to me). No measure of how many times an advertisement was actually aired was not available, which can lead to biased estimates. For example, Goldstein & Freedman (2002), who’s data collection benefited from ad-tracking satellite technology, cite the example of the Dole campaign. Whereas only 47% of Dole’s ads were negative, some 70% of those that

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3 The newspaper sample is comparable to that reported in single election studies, for instance Schafferer (2004) records 62 total ads for Lian-Song and 31 for Chen-Lu in 2004 compared to 65 and 30 in my sample.

4 The TV ad sample for 1996 is thus incomplete. Chang (2000) reports a total of 48 spots whereas my sample has just 29. Chuang & Miller (2000) report 28 ads for Lee, 12 for Peng and 15 for Lin as opposed to 17, 3 and 9 respectively in my sample. The number of TV ads for 2000 and 2004 is comparable to that reported in Wen et al (2004; 146) and slightly higher than Schafferer (2004; 19) respectively.
actually aired were negative (ibid; 729). In order to restrict the sample to official advertisements, where an advertisement could not be categorically identified as being sponsored by either the nominating parties or the candidates themselves, it was excluded from the analysis. Where TV ads were duplicated in alternative languages only one version was included in the sample. Transcriptions were made of each TV spot so that no spoken or written words (including accompanying song lyrics) would be missed.

Table 1: Data sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ticket</th>
<th>Number unique newspaper Ads</th>
<th>Total number newspaper Ads</th>
<th>Unique # TV Ads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Lee-Lian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peng-Xie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lin-Hao</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Lian-Xiao</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chen-Lü</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song-Zhang</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Lian-Song</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chen-Lü</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The unit of analysis in this study is not the advertisement itself, but rather the explicit written or verbal appeals contained within an advertisement, operationalised as phrases or words that represent a reason to vote for the sponsor (a positive appeal) or to vote against an opponent (a negative appeal). This method captures more information than simply coding the whole advertisement as positive or negative, since

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5 Calculating the number of times the whole advertising campaign ran (expenditure/cost of airtime/total length of campaign) does not help unless we have information on how to differentially weight each ad. For example, we can calculate that, given estimates of the Chen-Lü TV budget in 2000, the cost of airtime (both available through www.rainmaker.com.tw) and knowing the length of each ad in the campaign, they could afford to run the entire advertising campaign 63 times. In the absence of good reason to weight each ad differently however, we can only assume that each ad ran the same number of times and thus the proportionality of the results is identical.

6 This measure improves the reliability (and replicability) of the coding as it reduces the need for subjective interpretation of implicit appeals. Chang (2000) on the other hand argues, in the context of Taiwanese election advertising, that shared cultural values contained within implicit appeals should not be under-emphasized. Visual appeals are also systematically excluded from the analysis (Kaid 2000) although preliminary analysis shows that in the majority of cases these appeals reflect the verbal and written appeals rather than presenting qualitatively different appeals.
one advertisement likely contains a mix of both positive and negative appeals, potentially in multiple categories (e.g. issues, values and traits). The definition of a negative appeal is simply one that talks about the sponsor’s opponent. This definition incorporates the directional component common to most definitions of negativity used in the literature whilst avoiding subjective labels such as “accusations” (Sigelman & Buell 2003) or “scaremongering” (Young 2003)\(^7\).

Within the coding scheme\(^8\) appeals are separated into a four category typology: issues, values, traits and strategy. Within the issue category there are 8 policy domains (e.g. the economy) which are sub-divided into approximately 150 specific issues (e.g. ‘growth’, ‘unemployment’, ‘trade’). In addition to recording whether an appeal on a particular issue is positive or negative, issue appeals were separated into general statements, specific proposals and party/candidate performance. Thus an appeal within the domain of management and governance on the specific issue of corruption could be a general comment (‘corruption is a serious ill facing society today’), a specific proposal (‘if elected I will establish an anti-corruption task force’) or a comment on one’s own or one’s opponent’s record on the issue (‘since I/my opponent became mayor, corruption in city hall has de/increased by 50%’). Dividing issue appeals in this way gives a measure of both specificity and the degree to which appeals are prospective (proposals) or retrospective (performance).

The values category contains over 100 specific codes across 8 categories such as ‘prosperity and progress’ and ‘peace and stability’. Many of the value codes are related to issues, for instance prosperity is clearly a condition related to the state of the economy, but the distinguishing feature of values is that they are too diffuse to assign to a specific issue. To illustrate the distinction, an appeal such as ‘we believe that improving relations with China increases the chance of peace’ would be coded as a positive general statement in the domain ‘cross-Straits relations’ on the issue ‘managing relations with China’. On the other hand ‘we love peace’, would be coded as a positive value, even though perhaps underlyingly it refers to relations with China.

\(^7\) In order to test the validity of this purely directional definition in relation to the underlying understanding of ‘negative advertising’ as something critical, I noted every instance of where negative appeals had something positive to say about opponents. This occurred on a handful of occasions out of 2500 negative appeals, suggesting that in election advertising to talk of one’s opponent is indeed to criticize.

\(^8\) The code scheme was constructed with the help of existing ‘dictionaries’ and inductively through the analysis of a sub-sample of TV and newspaper ads. The coding of all of the ads was done by the author. In order to check the reliability of my own coding, I recoded a randomly selected sub-sample of ads and compared results. The correlation between the results was acceptable ($r = .92$).
The values category also includes what might be termed ‘ideological issues’. One particularly salient example is the set of values that refers to ‘Taiwanese identity’. This category of appeals includes such messages as ‘love Taiwan’, ‘Taiwan first’ and the like which are too diffuse to attach to any particular issue category. Treating such references as values and separating so-called “national identity issues” into specific issues across different policy domains (cross-Straits relations, national security, ethnic relations, democracy and reform) I believe gives a clearer picture of how “national identity” features in campaign advertising. On the other hand, aggregating the issues and values that can justifiably be identified as the component parts of a wider “national identity” discourse ought to be a good indicator of how big a role “national identity” plays in election advertising.

The traits category records mentions of the personal characteristics of the candidates. It is divided into approximately 50 codes in 4 categories identified in the literature as being of relevance to the business of governing, i.e. leadership, competence, integrity and compassion (Kinder 1986; Funk 1999). An additional category records mentions of a candidate’s lineage and associations (e.g. connections to the Dangwai or in later elections, Li Denghui). Finally, all other trait mentions that do not fit into the previous five categories were recorded. Encouragingly, since trait appeals (even “personal attacks”) are arguably justified as long as they are relevant to the task of governing, the data shows that a massive preponderance of trait appeals in Taiwan were ‘relevant’, with only a handful of mainly positive appeals (such as references to Lian Zhan’s “quietness”) falling outside of the five trait categories. An important distinction that the code scheme makes is the difference between trait appeals and candidate performance on issues. To illustrate this point, an appeal such as ‘my opponent is corrupt’, would be coded as a negative trait in the category ‘integrity’, whereas ‘my opponent has let corruption flourish during his time as mayor’, would be coded as negative candidate performance on the issue of corruption. Although both appeals talk about an opponent in connection with corruption, only the former is an attack on her character. This distinction is important if we are not to overestimate the frequency of trait appeals.

The final category records ‘strategic’ appeals. This includes an array of appeals that are related to the business of the election and the campaign itself. Examples include mobilizing for rallies and zaoshi activities, appealing for votes, mobilizing voter
turnout, advocating strategic voting, commenting on the “horse-race” features of the campaign and decrying other tickets’ dirty campaign practices.

In addition to the type of appeal, citations of ‘evidence’ were recorded in the relevant categories. The operational definition of ‘evidence’ is documented statistics, direct quotations and sourced reports used to support an appeal. For example the strategic appeal ‘only we can defeat candidate C’, might appear alongside an opinion poll showing the level of support for each candidate. If the source and date of that opinion poll was documented (e.g. TVBS February 20th) then it would be counted as a piece of evidence. Where multiple appeals were supported by the same piece of evidence, (in the current example if additional strategic appeals such as ‘candidate B cannot win’, ‘I am the front runner’ were made) multiple counts of evidence were recorded. Exceptionally, in the case of issue performance appeals, a weaker standard of evidence was also counted, namely the specific date that a piece of legislation was passed. Two additional sourcing techniques used by Taiwanese candidates were also counted as evidence. First the use of TV footage of candidates speaking or printed quotes, particularly in the context of supporting claims of flip-flopping and broken promises. A second popular method, in both televised and print advertisements, is the reproduction of newspaper headlines, usually in support of negative performance appeals. It is important to note at this point that I made no effort to check the veracity of any of the pieces of evidence recorded in this study or to validate any of the appeals. Clearly the quality of information transmitted to voters is severely attenuated if for example, the evidence that candidates use to support their claims is erroneous, deliberately misleading or even fake. Whilst election advertising is inherently a form of propaganda and one of the central characteristics of propaganda is that “the facts” are manipulated and exaggerated in the service of one particular point of view, we should also recognize that much of the argument presented above rests on the assumption that presenting ‘false’ or ‘fake’ evidence is not a systematic practice. One omission from the data that I will report on here requires discussion. Recent empirical work suggests that it is not negative appeals per se that are problematic but the way in which they are voiced. If differences of opinion are couched in a “civil” manner, voters can accept this as part of democratic competition. However “uncivil”

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9 On the other hand one could argue that the mere presence of checkable supporting evidence (vulnerable to the kind of monitoring increasingly carried out by the media, election watch organizations and political parties themselves) supports the notion that it is genuine, even if obliquely employed.
bickering and mudslinging acts to disgust and disengage voters from the political process; what Mutz and Reeves (2005) call “the new videomalaise”. Empirical results are thus far inconclusive, but in the current context of evaluating the potential hazards of negative advertising in Taiwan, it would perhaps be useful to have an estimate of the proportion of negative claims that are uncivil. Unfortunately operationalizing the concept of “incivility” represents far more of a challenge for quantitative content analysis techniques like those employed here than it does for the existing studies on incivility which have experimental designs and rely on the careful manipulation of campaign messages. Considering some of the definitions of incivility extant in the literature, e.g. “gratuitous asides that suggest a lack of respect for and/or frustration with the opposition” (Mutz & Reeves 2005; 5), “claims that are inflammatory and superfluous” (Brooks & Geer 2007; 5), or appeals that “unfairly portray candidates” (Van Heerde 2005; 3) it is easy to imagine how the coding could exceed an acceptable level of subjectivity. For example, calling one’s opponent a liar might easily be considered inflammatory, to indicate a lack of respect or to be unfair; then again it might simply be a statement of fact. Deciding whether such an appeal is civil or uncivil, particularly with its connotations of “fairness”, would be a matter of highly subjective interpretation. Therefore in the absence of unambiguous empirical evidence of an effect of incivility, I adopt the position that appeals should be judged solely by the standards of specificity and evidence outlined above.

RESULTS
This paper is interested in the utility of information that is made available to voters by candidates in their advertisements, measured by the standards of specificity and evidence. Moreover, the expectation is that compared to positive appeals negative appeals should be more issue-focused, more frequently supported by evidence and comparatively specific when talking about the issues. Seeking to understand more about the makeup of negative advertising is appropriate at this time since the absolute number of negative appeals has increased substantially since the first presidential election. In 1996 there were just 367 negative appeals (16% of all appeals) compared to 1270 (42%) in 2000 and 982 (33%) in 2004. The overall average across all three

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10 One way forward is perhaps to make the distinction between claims that a candidate lied about something in particular and then backing this claim with evidence and claims that for example add an adjectival prefix such as shamefaced or despicable to the word liar, but do not support the claim with evidence.
elections was 32% negativity, exactly the same percentage that Geer (2006; 35) finds in televised commercials in US presidential elections 1960-2000.

Let us first address the question of issue-focus. Table two shows the proportion of positive and negative appeals recorded in each category. A first look at these results shows a higher percentage of the total number of negative appeals focuses on issues (45%) than positive appeals (35%). Also as expected the proportion of positive appeals categorized as values, is much higher, in fact more than double that of negative appeals. Proportionally speaking negative appeals are also twice as likely to be about candidate traits.

Table 2: Percentage of positive/negative appeals in each category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus it appears that when candidates talk about themselves (i.e. positive appeals) they mostly promote their own values, but also quite often talk about the issues. When targeting the opposition they most frequently criticize on the issues, and much less often target an opponent’s personal characteristics. Do candidates support these appeals with evidence? As a whole, a total of 59 positive appeals were supported by evidence as defined above, whereas a total of 318 negative appeals were supported by evidence. Recalling that the raw number of positive appeals is much higher, this equates to 95 positive appeals per piece of evidence (AE ratio) compared to an AE ratio of just 8 for negative appeals. Thus negative appeals across all categories are nearly twelve times as likely to be backed up by evidence as positive appeals. Table three breaks this down by the different categories of appeal.

Table 3: Supporting evidence for positive and negative appeals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A/E</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A/E</th>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A/E</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>A/E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ve</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2213</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ve</td>
<td>1192</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E= pieces of evidence; A/E = number of appeals per piece of supporting evidence
Negative appeals are more frequently evidenced than positive appeal regardless of whether it is an issue, value, trait or strategic appeal. By the A/E metric negative issue appeals are seven times more likely to be evidenced than positive appeals. Moreover, within the issue category it was overwhelmingly retrospective performance appeals, positive and negative, connected with party or candidate performance that were supported by evidence. As expected the less specific values category is dominated by positive appeals (82%), none of which, was supported with evidence. Similarly the A/E ratio for negative value appeals, by far the highest of any category of negative appeals at 60, confirms that evidencing value appeals is very difficult and helps explain why a relatively low percentage of negative appeals fall in this category. In the traits category, negative appeals (also known as “personal attack ads”) are 8 times more likely to be supported than positive appeals, although only one in nine negative trait appeals is backed up with evidence. The lowest AE ratio is for negative strategic ads, which is largely explained by the use of sourced opinion polls to back up multiple claims relating to the horse-race features of the campaign.

Using the AE metric and focusing on issues and trait appeals, table 4 suggests that there is virtually no difference between print and televised advertising, with the exception of positive issue appeals. Such appeals are twice as often supported by evidence when they appear in TV spots. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that, of the positive issue appeals that appear in TV spots, 55% are related to party/candidate performance, compared to 40% of the positive issue appeals in print advertisements.

Table 4: AE ratio for issue and trait appeals by media type and party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Issue Appeals</th>
<th>Trait Appeals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMT*</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPP</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*includes the Lian-Song joint ticket.
The figures in table 4 also suggest differential behaviour between candidates from the two main parties. The KMT’s candidates are apparently much more careful than the DPP’s about evidencing their positive and negative issue claims. The higher incidence of supporting evidence is in part explained by the KMT’s concentration on their own performance (50% of positive issue appeals) and that of their opponents (72% of negative issue appeals). Perhaps not surprisingly, given their (until latterly) relative lack of governing experience, only 38% of the DPP candidates’ positive issue appeals relate to their own performance. However, since 83% of the DPP’s negative issue appeals relate to their opponent’s past performance, we cannot use this to explain the high AE ratio (22) and this perhaps suggests substantively different behaviour. Differences are also apparent in the traits category, with KMT candidates much less likely to evidence their negative and especially positive trait appeals.

We now turn to the issue of specificity. Recall that Geer’s (2006) insight is that criticism requires evidence to lend it credibility. As a result negative appeals tend to be more concentrated in those areas where evidence is to be found: specific issues and past records of achievement. Here the distinction between issue and value appeals, which in combination account for 71% of the total number of appeals recorded in this study, is revealing. Of the issue appeals 38% were negative, compared to just 18% of value appeals. In combination with the data on evidence reported above, these results confirm the intuition that attacking on values is difficult and that candidates prefer to attack on the, more specific, issues. Table 5 looks inside the issue category.

Table 5: Breakdown of issue appeals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General statement</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here we can see a comparatively even spread of positive appeals. Although a third of positive appeals are comparatively vague general statements, a quarter of positive appeals are used to make specific policy proposals. Taiwanese candidates also seemingly prefer to focus on policy performance when talking about themselves (42%). As expected, the majority of negative appeals (76%) concern party or
candidate performance. This result perhaps lends support to the argument that negativity helps keep elected officials accountable. However this is not the whole story in the context of a presidential campaign. The argument is valid in the case of presidential challengers criticizing the policy performance of incumbent governors. However it might be the case that incumbents are attacking the past performance of their challengers in roles unrelated to the business of the office being contested. Such criticism may alert voters to the qualifications of a contender for the presidency, but it doesn’t contribute to the democratic accountability of the presidency. In this sense it is useful to investigate the differences between incumbent’s and challenger’s issue appeals. In table 6 the incumbent category is the mean of Lee-Lian in 1996, Lian-Xiao in 2000 (where Lian was the incumbent Vice President) and Chen-Lü in 2000. I have excluded the ‘third party’ and independent candidacies of Lin-Hao in 1996 and Song-Zhang in 2000 from the challenger results, in part to control for the effects of the Song-Zhang campaign in which an unusually high proportion of positive issue appeals were general statements. Reflecting the agenda-setting prerogative of incumbency, 71% of incumbent’s issue appeals were positive whereas challengers focused on their opponents much more frequently (50%).

Table 6: Issue appeals for incumbents and challengers %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in table 6 show that when incumbents talk about themselves in relation to the issues it is mostly in terms of their policy performance (77%). Incumbents apparently seldom use election advertisements to make issue proposals (3%). The majority of incumbent’s negative appeals focuses on the issue performance of challengers (62%). This is not surprising given that presidential challengers in Taiwan have often held other high profile offices (Taipei mayor, provincial Governor, Vice President). Similarly the majority of negative challenger appeals seemingly focuses
on incumbent’s policy performance. Interpretation of this figure however is complicated by the fact that there were multiple candidacies in 1996 and 2000 and these appeals may have been directed at candidates other than the incumbent. In 1996 however Peng-Xie hardly mentioned either the Lin-Hao or Chen-Wang tickets and although Chen-Lü did run ads criticizing Song-Zhang, the majority of negative appeals targeted Song Chuyu’s integrity and were thus recorded as traits. Encouragingly, since it suggests offering policy alternatives, the majority of challengers’ positive appeals (51%) are specific proposals. However incumbents do not tend to engage much in debating these proposals (16%), suggesting that candidates do indeed “talk past one another” (Simon 2003).

CONCLUSION
This paper began by noting that the perceived increase in negative advertising in Taiwanese elections has been a source of concern, presumably as a result of the implicit connection between negativity and injurious effects on the electorate. This connection has however been challenged by empirical results undermining the “demobilization” thesis and theoretical work that has sought to recast the role of negative advertising in democratic election campaigns, particularly in terms of the relation between information, choice and accountability. Seeking to test hypotheses derived from this work, I proposed the criteria of issue-focus, specificity and evidence to judge the comparative contribution of negative appeals to the information voters have to draw on in their decision-making process. Preliminary examination of empirical data for the main candidacies in three Taiwanese presidential election campaigns, confirms several of the expectations about negative appeals, e.g. the comparative frequency with which they are supported by evidence. At this stage of analysis there appears to be some support for the view that the appeals contained within negative advertising is comparatively informative. However, we are still no wiser about the effects that negative advertising may or may not have on the electorate. Lacking empirical information on the dependent variable (voters) we cannot say with any conviction that negative advertising, for all the comparative utility of its information, has a beneficial effect on the electorate or not. Indeed, promoting the quality of information as the sole standard by which to judge negative advertising is vulnerable to the criticism that “the pernicious effects of negative ads might be orthogonal to their informational content” (Valentino 2006). In
other words negative advertising might be information rich, but it could still have a deleterious effect on political participation if, for example, it triggers emotive reactions such as disgust in voters. Accounts of Taiwanese presidential campaigns, suggest that indicators of political participation, such as voter interest and engagement, are apparently in rude health (Rawsnley 2003; 777). Similarly voter turnout is not falling and the Taiwanese electorate has been characterized as “highly interested, activist and sophisticated” (Fell 2005b; 16). Establishing whether or not negative advertising is responsible for any of these informative and mobilizational effects however remains to be determined by future empirical research.

REFERENCES


