

The Rational Attacker in Russia? Negative Campaigning in Russian Presidential Elections

Negative campaigning has been described as “as American as Mississippi mud” (Goodman 1996), but it is not a peculiarly American phenomenon. With competitive elections being held in nations where they were once unimaginable, going negative is now a worldwide phenomenon. Indeed, when one commentator decried recent campaigns as blighted by “cruelty, intolerance, and impatience, ...hatred, anger, rage, ...abruptness and sarcasm, ...ire and off-limit blaming” (Denisov 1996), he was referring to campaigns in Russia, not the United States.

Numerous attempts have been made to explain why negative campaigning occurs, when it occurs, who engages in it, and at whom it is aimed. We test predictions derived from these explanations, focusing on the 1996 and 2000 Russian presidential campaigns.

The Models

Decisions to go negative are often treated in the press as products of candidates' personalities, or at least their political personas. Attacking is considered natural for those who are aggressive by temperament or who are willing to do whatever it takes to get elected, and their main strategic challenge may even be seen as restraining their proclivity to go for the jugular. For others, a strategy based on attacking would be seen as out of character.

A different way of understanding negative campaigning follows from viewing campaigns as contests, not between particular individuals with their assorted psychological idiosyncrasies, but between “ins” and “outs.” From this perspective, the question in any campaign is how voters weigh the relative utility of keeping the “ins” in power or replacing them. Accordingly, campaigns tend to focus on the “ins,” as incumbents try to defend their records and challengers attack them. Consistent with this interpretation, recent third-party challengers in the U.S. have targeted the incumbent or his heir apparent (Buell and Sigelman 1996), and in four of the six nations whose campaign commercials Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1996) analyzed, challengers were

far more likely to attack the incumbent than vice-versa.

Rather than pursuing personality- or incumbency-based explanations of negative campaigning, political scientists have concentrated on formulating formal models of the decision to attack. Collectively, these models speak to all the issues enumerated above — why negative campaigning occurs, when it occurs, who engages in it, and at whom it is aimed. To date, four such models have been advanced. The first two are intended to explain why candidates attack, while the latter two present more nuanced accounts of who is likely to attack whom, under what circumstances. Non-technical capsule summaries of these models follow.

The Riker and Davis-Ferrantino Models

Riker's (1996) model is the core of his analysis of why the Federalists and the Antifederalists devoted so much effort to attacking one another in the debate over ratifying the U.S. Constitution. Both sides, Riker assumes, consisted of rational actors who saw no point in trying to change minds that were already made up. Rationally, they concentrated on trying to sway undecided citizens. The best way to do this was to convince the undecided that if the other side won, something terrible might happen. An attack-based strategy followed naturally from this "minimax-regret" motivation.

Davis and Ferrantino (1996) follow a different route to the same conclusion. In their model, politicians increase their chances of being elected by making exaggerated claims about the benefits that will accrue if they win and by exaggerating the dire consequences if they lose. Candidates run less risk of being caught in a lie if they campaign negatively: if X wins, voters can use X's subsequent performance in office to test X's positive campaign pledges, but winning renders untestable X's negative claims about what Y would do if elected. This asymmetry, Davis and Ferrantino (1996, 4-5) conclude, creates "a natural bias toward negative campaigns."

What these two models predict, and all that they predict, is that negative campaigning is the norm. They provide no reason to expect any particular campaign or candidate to be more negative than others, or any candidate to attack a particular rival rather than others.

The Skaperdas-Grofman Model

For Skaperdas and Grofman (1995), it may or may not be rational to attack one's opponent(s). In the two-candidate variant of the model, the initial distribution of support for each candidate is known, as is the proportion of undecided voters. It is also assumed that both candidates campaign positively for the support of undecided voters and that positive campaigning entails costs as well as benefits. When X and Y wage equally positive campaigns, they split the undecided vote evenly. In this situation, X and Y encounter a problem of diminishing returns: The more positive their campaigns, the less extra support each wins from the shrinking pool of previously undecided voters.

X attacks Y in an attempt to move Y's current supporters into the undecided column. Negative campaigning thus determines the support to be subtracted from each candidate, with lost voters joining the ranks of the undecided. The extent to which X or Y engages in negative campaigning hinges on their relative standing in the "horserace." Able to win without converting those who support the opposition, the front-runner engages in "more positive, and less negative, campaigning than his opponent," though if the race is relatively close, the front-runner will be motivated to try to convert the rival's supporters.

In the three-candidate variant of the model, one candidate attacks another if the marginal benefit of the last extra unit of attacking exceeds the marginal cost. At equilibrium, the marginal cost of attacking is unaffected by the attacker's choice of targets, but the marginal benefit depends on each opponent's popularity. The optimal strategy is to attack the stronger opponent. Because no candidate will attack the weaker rival, so "any negative campaigning will

be directed against the front-runner or will come from the front-runner” (Skaperdas and Grofman 1995, 50) — a prediction that holds equally well with more than three contenders.

The Doron-On Model

For Skaperdas and Grofman, whether and whom a candidate attacks depend entirely on who is ahead and by how much. In the Doron-On (1983) model, where the candidates stand in issue space also matters. Whereas favorable self-presentation is intended to strengthen the loyalty of X’s supporters, the purpose of negative campaigning is to bring uncommitted voters into the fold by leading them to see Y as a threat. Attacking requires careful targeting: “The parties attacked are only those who ... may eventually attract voters of the aggressive party. The selective attack on other parties fulfils two functions: it may make the other party unattractive to potential deserters from your own party and it may affect floating voters of other parties to vote for your own” (Doron and On 1983, 218). Colloquially, “One shakes the closest tree with the most apples so that they will fall next to him” (Doron and On 1983, 221). That is, the resources that X devotes to attacking any Y are determined by the current level of support for each candidate, but also by the ideological distance between the candidates. The greater the distance between X and Y, the less likely it becomes that an attack by X can persuade those who had been leaning toward Y to vote for X instead — especially in a multiparty system, where some other candidate, Z, may occupy the intervening ideological space. Of course, even if Y is X’s nearest ideological neighbor, X will have little to gain from attacking Y if Y is unpopular. Thus, each side concentrates its attacks on the largest rival within its own “political market” rather than attacking the rival who stands highest in the

polls (Doron and On 1983, 221).

The Plausibility of the Models

Some of the assumptions upon which these models are based seem problematic. For example, central to the Davis-Ferrantino model is the assumption that voters cannot judge the truth or falsity of an attack until the campaign is over. From this assumption it follows that candidates have no incentive to be truthful and, unencumbered by such constraints, are free to attack one another incessantly. The underlying premise is that attacks invariably focus on what an opponent will do if elected. However, experience suggests that many attacks are aimed at an opponent's character, qualifications, or record, and there is no reason for voters to wait months or even years to judge the validity of such attacks.

Also questionable are Skaperdas and Grofman's assumptions that only positive campaigning can attract undecided voters and only negative campaigning can sway those who are currently committed. Why assume that attacking is the only way for X to appeal to Y's supporters, and why ignore the potential of X's negative campaigning to sway the undecided to vote against Y? Why not recognize, as do Doron and On, that X's positive campaigning can reinforce X's own support and that X's attacks can turn the undecided against Y?

Despite such qualms, we assess the formal models "primarily by the accuracy of their predictions rather than by the reality of their assumptions" (Downs 1957, 21). If the predictions do not stand up empirically, then there will be all the more reason to rethink the models' assumptions.

Predictions

In sum, the four formal models collectively make the predictions summarized in the top portion of Table 1, while the bottom part of the table displays the personality- and incumbency-based predictions.

(Table 1 goes about here.)

The Campaigns

To test these predictions, we take as cases in point the first two competitive presidential elections in Russian history. The models on which the predictions are based are generic, not tuned to the specific features of the Russian case, and a definitive assessment of the predictive power of these models obviously cannot rely on analysis of just two campaigns within a single nation. However, the extremely labor-intensive aspect of testing these models makes it virtually inevitable that tests of these models will accumulate slowly, on a case-by-case basis, rather than in a single study that simultaneously considers, and imposes controls for, the distinctive features of, campaigns in a broad array of settings. We focus on the two Russian campaigns because they are interesting and important in their own right and because they provide fertile ground for launching a first test of the models outlined above — because these campaigns incorporated, within a single geographic unit, both a two-candidate race (the 1996 run-off campaign) and two multi-candidate races (the first round of the 1996 campaign and the one-round 2000 campaign).

The 1996 campaign occurred at a time when the nascent Russian party system was extremely fragmented, polarized, and volatile. Conspicuously unidentified with any party were a large portion of the Russian public (Miller et al. 2000; White, Rose, and McAllister 1996, 135) and President Boris Yeltsin, who sought to maintain a posture of being “above politics” and to avoid the stigma of party membership resulting from 70 years of Communist Party rule. In a nation in the throes of hyperinflation and mired in an unpopular war in Chechnya, fewer than 1% of those polled in January 1996 considered the political or economic situation favorable. Only 6% were planning to vote for Yeltsin (Treisman 1996a), whose popularity had declined steadily since 1992 (White, Rose, and McAllister 1996, 167-170). However, Yeltsin staged a

remarkable comeback, attaining a plurality in the June 16 vote and a majority in the July 3 run-off. He received 35% in the first-round balloting; Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist candidate and the early front-runner, made it into the run-off with 32%; former general Alexander Lebed, who had campaigned on law-and-order issues and opposition to the war in Chechnya, collected 15%; market-oriented reform advocate Grigory Yavlinsky received 7%; ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy got 6%; and no other candidate carried as much as 1%. In the run-off, Yeltsin received 54% to Zyuganov's 40%, with 6% rejecting both.

On August 9, 1999, after three more tumultuous years in office, Yeltsin sacked his entire government and named his newly appointed acting premier, Vladimir Putin, as his choice to succeed him as president. On December 31, Yeltsin resigned in favor of Putin, who became acting president. Yeltsin's exit had several effects: it moved the presidential election, which had been scheduled for June, up to March 26; it threw his opponents into nearly total disarray; and it immediately established Putin as the overwhelming front-runner. Both Zyuganov and Yavlinsky entered the race, but neither mounted an effective campaign. Although public enthusiasm about his leadership cooled as time passed, Putin held onto majority support, carrying 53% of the votes cast on March 26, followed by Zyuganov with 29%, Yavlinsky with 6%, and a host of others with smaller portions.

Data and Methods

To test the predictions outlined above, we draw on five types of information about the 1996 and 2000 campaigns: (1) content coding of the candidates' campaign statements; (2) trial-heat results from public opinion polls; (3) assessments of the candidates' positions on key issues; and (4) and (5) categorizations of their personalities and incumbency status. Of course, Yeltsin in 1996 and Putin in 2000 were the incumbents. The first four items require some elaboration.

Content Analysis of Candidate Statements

To gauge the candidates' use of negative campaigning, we undertook content analyses of the campaign statements of the five main contenders in the first round of the 1996 campaign, the two opponents in the 1996 run-off, and the three main contenders in the 2000 campaign.

In light of the intense partisanship of the Russian media, it was essential not to rely on a single media source of candidate statements. For 1996, we used nine Russian newspapers (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which favored and focused on Yeltsin; *Pravda* and *Sovetskaya Rossia*, which favored and focused on Zyuganov; the more even-handed *Argumenty i Fakty*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Moskovskie Novosti*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, and *Trud*; and the splashy, large-circulation *Moskovski Komsomolets*) and two English-language archives of Russian radio and television scripts (the "Official Kremlin International News Broadcasts" and the "BBC Summary of World Broadcasts," each of which contained, either verbatim or in slightly abridged form, a wide array of campaign speeches, interviews, and press conferences). From these sources we extracted and coded the Russian transcriptions or English translations of the words of the candidates themselves.¹ We sought to be inclusive in our search for candidate statements, and we are confident that we achieved representative selections. Of course, these words were not the only campaign stimuli that the Russian electorate received; Yeltsin in particular devoted considerable resources to television advertisements, but we know of no systematic data on ad content or purchases.

For 2000, our task was simplified by the fact that the Putin, Zyuganov, and Yavlinsky campaigns all posted verbatim transcripts of their candidate's major statements on their official websites.² We relied exclusively on the websites, though most of the speeches and press conferences posted there were also published in major daily newspapers.

Coding each sentence of each statement, we categorized 13,705 sentences totaling 202,145 words for the five candidates in 1996 and 5,454 sentences totaling 67,763 words for

the three candidates in the lower-key 2000 campaign. In 1996, 10% of these words were Lebed's, 10% Yavlinsky's, 17% Yeltsin's, 17% Zhirinovsky's, and 46% Zyuganov's.³ In 2000, 22% were Putin's, 42% Yavlinsky's, and 36% Zyuganov's. The issue in coding a sentence was whether a candidate used it to criticize one or more of his opponents. If so, we coded it as an attack sentence. To qualify as an attack, a statement simply had to assert something negative about an opponent. Coding was straightforward in the great majority of cases. Sentences that stated no criticism were easy to deal with, as were sentences in which a candidate attacked an opponent by name. Somewhat more complex were sentences in which a candidate voiced a criticism without explicitly naming anyone. Only when it was clear from context that the criticism was aimed at a specific opponent did we code such a sentence as an attack on that opponent. The main coder categorized each sentence as either critical of an opponent or not — an approach that withstood standard validity and reliability tests.⁴ We used the percentage of words in attack sentences to gauge the candidates' tendencies.

Candidate Standings in Trial Heats

Drawing on trial heats from the leading Russian survey organizations, we divided the 1996 campaign into four periods: (1) early January through mid-March, when Zyuganov held a clear lead over Yeltsin and the rest of the field; (2) mid-March through the end of April, when Yeltsin and Zyuganov were yoked tightly together, well ahead of the pack; (3) May 1 to the end of the first-round campaign on June 16, when Yeltsin pulled away from Zyuganov, whose support remained flat; and (4) the June 17 to July 3 run-off campaign, which Yeltsin led throughout. In 2000, Putin maintained an insuperable lead throughout, Zyuganov never rose above the 25-30% level, and no other competitor, including Yavlinsky, ever inched into double digits.⁵

Expert Assessments of Candidate Issue Positions

To locate the 1996 candidates in issue space, we enlisted eight experts on Russian politics

based in academic institutions, government agencies, and think tanks in the U.S. Each expert, working independently, placed the main candidates on several issue scales.⁶ The inter-candidate distances that we calculated from these scores placed Yavlinsky close to both Yeltsin and Lebed, who were somewhat farther away from one another. Zhirinovskiy and Zyuganov were also positioned close together, at a considerable distance from the others.⁷ Because the placements of the three main 2000 candidates seemed clear-cut, we stipulated that Putin and Zyuganov were far apart, while Yavlinsky, though more distant from Putin (as a function of their sharply contrasting positions on Chechnya) than he had been from Yeltsin, was certainly no political bedfellow of Zyuganov.

Identification of Personality Types

No elaborate procedures were required to identify the candidates who, on personality grounds, would be expected to be the most combative. Zhirinovskiy was unquestionably the candidate who by dint of personality would have been expected to pursue the most adversarial and aggressive campaign strategy. Of the others, only the blunt, outspoken Lebed would seem to have been at all predisposed toward an attacking style, for which the distant Yeltsin, the drab Putin, the bland Zyuganov, and the relatively refined Yavlinsky all seem to have been ill-suited.

Findings

How Widespread Was Negative Campaigning?

From the five candidates' earliest statements through the two finalists' closing statements in the 1996 campaign, 10.4% of their words took the form of attacks and 89.6% did not. In the 2000 campaign, the counterpart figures were 8.8% and 91.2%.

The Riker and Davis-Ferrantino models imply that attacks should be the norm, but no obvious standard suggests itself for what proportion of the candidates' rhetoric would be required to fulfill that expectation. At one extreme, whether the observed proportion of words

devoted to attacking is significantly greater than 0 might serve as a criterion; at the opposite extreme, whether the observed proportion falls significantly short of 1 might also serve. For the two Russian campaigns, the observed proportions were both significantly above 0 and significantly below 1, so the extreme possibilities that the candidates initiated no attacks and that they did nothing but attack can be rejected. These tests, however, do not really tell us much, so to provide some perspective, we used exactly the same procedures as in the two Russian campaigns to measure the negativity of the first debate between Al Gore and George W. Bush in the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign and the notorious October 24, 1998 debate between Alfonse D'Amato and Charles Schumer, candidates for a U.S. Senate seat from New York.⁸ The Gore-Bush debate is useful as a benchmark because many readers are already familiar with it. The D'Amato-Schumer debate is useful because it was so nasty that it is difficult even to imagine a more negative confrontation, and in that light it enables us to calibrate the outer limits of negativity.

Neither Russian campaign matched the negativity of the Bush-Gore debate, let alone that of the D'Amato-Schumer debate. In the Bush-Gore debate, 16.0% of the words that the candidates spoke were in attack sentences, significantly above the 10.4% and 8.8% figures for the Russian presidential campaigns. Far more dramatically, in the New York Senate debate, 57.7% of D'Amato's words and 64.7% of Schumer's were negative, a far cry from their counterparts in the Russian presidential elections. Thus, with the benefit of the perspective that the two U.S. debates provide, the Russian campaigns seem either relatively or absolutely placid — a conclusion that runs against the grain of the Riker and Davis-Ferrantino models, which treat attacking as the norm. These differences in attack propensities suggest that the tendency to attack should not be treated as a universal aspect of campaign strategy, à la the Riker and Davis-Ferrantino models, but as a variable potentially subject to the sorts of influences that are

highlighted in the remaining models.

Who Attacked?

Concealed within the aggregate 10.4% and 8.8% attack figures are some appreciable differences among candidates. (See Table 2.) In 1996, Yeltsin and Lebed rarely attacked. Less than 3% of Yeltsin's total verbal output was critical of any of his rivals, and only slightly more of Lebed's. Zhirinovskiy and Zyuganov attacked more than Yeltsin and Lebed, but it was Yavlinsky who stood out. In 2000, Putin followed the lead of Yeltsin, saying little and ignoring his opponents when he did speak. Both Zyuganov and Yavlinsky were an order of magnitude more likely than Putin to go on the attack, but neither was especially aggressive; Zyuganov's 2000 attack score was close to his counterpart figure from 1996, while Yavlinsky's was well below his harder-hitting score of four years earlier.

(Table 2 goes about here.)

The Skaperdas-Grofman model predicts that the trailer in a two-candidate race will attack more than the front-runner. According to Table 2, in their head-to-head confrontation in the 1996 run-off, Yeltsin, the front-runner, attacked Zyuganov, the trailer, with only one of every 25 of the words he spoke, whereas one of every five of Zyuganov's words targeted Yeltsin. Although this difference is consistent with the model-based prediction, it must be seen in the context of the first three periods. During the first part of the campaign, when Zyuganov enjoyed a substantial lead, 11.8% of his words, but only 1.8% of Yeltsin's, came as attacks. By mid-March the contest boiled down to a two-way clash between Yeltsin and Zyuganov, so the Skaperdas-Grofman model would predict a tit-for-tat interchange between the two leaders from mid-March through the end of April. However, during that period Yeltsin scarcely attacked at all. Zyuganov was not very aggressive either, but he was much more likely than Yeltsin to attack. During the third period, when Yeltsin pulled away in the polls, he still attacked only

rarely, and Zyuganov was not especially aggressive, either.

In this light, what can we conclude about the prediction that the front-runner in a two-candidate race will attack less than his pursuer? Yeltsin attacked less than Zyuganov no matter who was in the lead. When Zyuganov led, he was more negative than Yeltsin; when the race was close, he was more negative than Yeltsin; and after he lost the lead, he was more negative than Yeltsin. At no time during the campaign did Yeltsin adopt an aggressive stance toward his principal opponent.⁹ So the message is that the relative negativity of the candidates in the 1996 run-off was not a function of who was ahead and who was behind.

The 2000 campaign was officially a multi-candidate race, but in practice it was a choice between Putin and Zyuganov. Because Putin led throughout the race by a wide margin, the Skaperdas-Grofman model implies that he had no reason to initiate attacks. His behavior during the campaign was almost wholly in keeping with that expectation.

Who Attacked Whom?

Table 3 arrays each candidate's attacks by target. These data pose a test, first, of the prediction that when the front-runner attacks, he will aim primarily at his leading opponent.

(Table 3 goes about here.)

It is not clear who was front-runner Zyuganov's leading opponent during the first stage of the 1996 campaign, for Lebed, Yavlinsky, Yeltsin, and Zhirinovskiy were all bunched far behind him in the polls. Who Zyuganov was primarily concerned about is clear, though, for he aimed almost all of his attacks words at Yeltsin. The evidence is somewhat easier to interpret for the next period, when Yeltsin and Zyuganov were locked in a tight race. On the rare occasions when Yeltsin attacked, his target was as likely as not to be Zyuganov. Zyuganov was much more aggressive, and again his target was almost always Yeltsin. The pattern was even clearer in the third period, when Yeltsin, having surged into the lead, aimed his barbs only

at Zyuganov. As for Putin in the 2000 campaign, all of the few attacks he launched were aimed at Zyuganov, his only serious rival.

These findings are congruent with Skaperdas and Grofman's prediction about strategic attacking by the front-runner. As for their prediction that attacks not initiated by the front-runner will be aimed at the front-runner, if we confine our attention to the third period of the 1996 campaign and to the 2000 campaign, the evidence looks fairly strong. From early May through mid-June of 1996, Zyuganov aimed almost all of his criticism at front-runner Yeltsin, who was also the target of approximately three-quarters of Lebed's and Yavlinsky's criticism; only Zhirinovskiy deviated perceptibly from this pattern, and even he aimed most of his attacks at Yeltsin, far more than at any other candidate. Four years later, both Zyuganov and Yavlinsky focused almost exclusively on Putin, the front-runner.

If we shift our attention back to the second period of the 1996 campaign, when Yeltsin and Zyuganov were vying for primacy, the pattern begins to blur. According to the Skaperdas-Grofman model, both front-runners should have been appropriate targets for the other contenders. However, Lebed and Yavlinsky ignored Zyuganov, focusing their infrequent criticisms solely on Yeltsin. Again, Zhirinovskiy was less focused, but his primary target was Yeltsin, albeit with a strong secondary focus on Zyuganov.

It is for the first period of the 1996 campaign, when Zyuganov was the clear leader, that the data are least in tune with the Skaperdas-Grofman prediction. Rather than going after Zyuganov, Lebed made Yeltsin his main target and focused even less on Zyuganov than on Yavlinsky, whose candidacy had been hopeless from the outset. Yavlinsky also concentrated on Yeltsin, at whom he aimed more than three-quarters of his criticism.

This brings us to the Doron-On model. The 1996 campaign (but not the 2000 campaign) presents a clear test of their prediction that attacks would be aimed within each

candidate's political market. One implication is that in 1996 Lebed and Yavlinsky should have attacked one another and Yeltsin, but not Zhirinovskiy or Zyuganov. Consistent with that prediction, during all three periods when they were in the 1996 race, at least three-quarters of the attacks Lebed and Yavlinsky initiated were aimed at each other or, far more often, at Yeltsin.

That, however, is as far as the data go in supporting the Doron-On model. For one thing, Zhirinovskiy would have been expected to focus his attacks on Zyuganov, not Yeltsin, but more than twice as many of Zhirinovskiy's attacks targeted Yeltsin as Zyuganov. Zyuganov, in turn, would have been expected to pound away at Zhirinovskiy; or, if he were determined to attack an opponent from outside his own political market, it should have been Lebed, who was closer to him in issue space than was Yeltsin. Instead, Zyuganov concentrated on Yeltsin, virtually ignoring Zhirinovskiy and Lebed. Yeltsin, too, would have been expected to attack opponents whose wavering supporters might find their way into his camp, but instead he concentrated on Zyuganov; of course, we should not make too much of this tendency in light of the infrequency with which Yeltsin attacked anyone.

Overall, then, the performance of the formal models was impressive in some respects, deficient in others. By comparison, a personality-based explanation fails utterly to account for these patterns. On personality grounds, Zhirinovskiy would have been expected to pursue the most adversarial strategy in 1996, followed by the volatile Lebed, with Yeltsin, Zyuganov, and Yavlinsky not coming close to Lebed's aggressiveness, let alone Zhirinovskiy's. However, that was not at all the pattern that emerged, for it was Yavlinsky, not Zhirinovskiy or Lebed, who stood out in terms of his proclivity to attack. Moreover, Lebed surpassed only the somnolent Yeltsin in terms of his inclination to attack. As for the 2000 campaign, there, too, a personality-based explanation falls short, not because it is inconsistent with the data, but rather because it

is incapable of generating any predictions in the first place, given the phlegmatic personalities of all three contenders.

A much better account of the behavior of the Russian presidential candidates focuses on competition between ins and outs. According to this explanation, the incumbent will attack less than any challenger, and challengers' attacks will be aimed primarily at the incumbent. Both of these predictions were borne out. The incumbents, Yeltsin in 1996 and Putin in 2000, rarely attacked, and their opponents rarely attacked anyone except them. Of all the words that Yeltsin and Putin spoke in the 1996 and 2000 campaigns, only 2.1% were attacks. Of all the attacking words that Lebed, Yavlinsky, Zhirinovskiy, and Zyuganov spoke during the 1996 campaign, 82.8% were aimed at Yeltsin, and 97.8% of the attacking words that Yavlinsky and Zyuganov uttered in 2000 were aimed at Putin.

Of course, in these two campaigns there is considerable overlap between predictions based on incumbency and predictions based on the relative standings of the candidates in the race. For much of the 1996 campaign and all of the 2000 campaign, the incumbent was the front-runner. The first two periods of the 1996 campaign are thus of special interest. By the logic of the horse race, the other candidates had no reason to focus on Yeltsin during those two periods, but that is exactly what they did. That is, no matter who was the attacker, who was the front-runner, and who was within ideological striking distance of the attacker, in 1996 attackers fired time and again at Yeltsin. This pattern is inexplicable based on the Skaperdas-Grofman and Doron-On models, but it is readily understandable if campaigns are viewed as clashes of ins versus outs.

Discussion

How can we explain the inconsistencies between predictions derived from formal models of negative campaigning and the strategies of the candidates in the two Russian presidential

campaigns? Although relaxing or even reversing some of the assumptions underlying these models in order to enhance their realism could detract from their parsimony, we would encourage modelers to rethink these assumptions. No less importantly, we would also argue that the models need to be expanded to take account of some vital but currently neglected factors that shape negative campaigning.

One such factor is incumbency, about which we need say little more than that in Russia it appears to have been the single most important factor shaping the candidates' strategies. We will briefly describe three other factors that should be taken into account in order to bolster the models' explanatory power, or at least to clarify the *ceteris paribus* assumptions under which they operate.

The first is voter commitment. Contrary to the Skaperdas-Grofman and Doron-On models, in 1996 no other candidate paid Zyuganov much heed when he held or shared the lead, nor did he attract much attention as a target in 2000. It seems likely this tendency to ignore Zyuganov stemmed from his opponents' assessments of the sources of his support. In both campaigns, Zyuganov could count on the support of hard-core Communist voters, but he held little appeal to others. If his supporters were strongly committed to him, then there was little chance of detaching them from him, and if he held little attraction to uncommitted voters, then other candidates' need to inoculate them against him would also be minimal. In either case, it would be pointless to attack Zyuganov. Stated generically, if Y's supporters are strongly committed and if Y's potential appeal is largely confined to those who are already committed, then X has little to gain from attacking Y.

Next, consider that in the Skaperdas-Grofman and Doron-On models, candidates adjust their strategies according to the ebb and flow of a campaign. However, in the 1996 Russian presidential campaign, the strategy that a candidate established early on tended to remain in

force for the rest of the campaign, even after the lead changed hands. Such stickiness, we suspect, reflected both the reluctance of candidates to abandon their grand strategy and the difficulty of changing course even if they were determined to do so. Much deliberation and many resources go into formulating a campaign strategy, and major adjustments must be decided under less than ideal conditions in the heat of battle. Moreover, some time must pass before campaign managers and the candidate recognize that a strategy is not working, and more time is required to devise a new strategy and implement it (Kessel 1988). It would have been especially difficult for Zyuganov to change directions quickly, because his strategy was controlled by the Communist Party leadership and its coalition partners, whose decision-making procedures were cumbersome. This inertial factor needs to be recognized in models of campaign strategy.

Finally, greater heed must be paid to the rules governing a campaign. It matters greatly whether hundreds of candidates are seeking parliamentary seats or a handful are competing for the presidency, whether districts are single- or multi-member, whether the decision rule is winner-take-all, proportional representation, or some variant thereof, and whether the winner is determined by plurality or majority vote. For example, under proportional representation, a party of any size can profit by securing its base and attracting a small percentage of undecided voters or converting a small percentage of other parties' supporters. Thus, many parties can profit simultaneously by increasing their market share. In Russian presidential campaigns, though, at most two candidates can survive the first round and only one can ultimately be elected. It follows that an attack strategy like Doron and On's, which could be viable in a proportional representation-based, one-round contest, may not be applicable in a winner-take-all, two-round presidential campaign. For example, in 1996 Zyuganov had relatively little to gain by attacking Zhirinovskiy, because even wholesale defections from Zhirinovskiy could not push

Zyuganov over the top. Similarly, an attack by Yeltsin on Lebed or Yavlinsky would have run the risk of antagonizing their supporters, whose votes Yeltsin needed in a run-off. As these examples suggest, the structural features of the Russian presidential competition can help us understand why the behavior of the candidates in 1996 and 2000 was often at variance with model-based predictions. Further elaboration of the models, if only in the form of explicit assumptions about the structural arrangements governing campaigns, is needed to clarify the applicability of the models to concrete circumstances.

In sum, considerable room remains for improving the predictive accuracy of formal models of negative campaigning. Some underlying assumptions should be reconsidered and some additional variables — most notably, incumbency and electoral rules, but also commitment and strategic inertia — should be taken into account. Even then, no single model is likely to hold for all types of elections in all countries. The 1996 and 2000 Russian presidential campaigns, like all campaigns, had numerous idiosyncrasies, and whether the patterns uncovered here will hold up when other cases are considered is obviously unknown at this point. It is possible, for example, that the predictive failures of the formal models we have documented for Russia reflect, in part, the fact that Russian democracy is at an early developmental stage; from a rational choice perspective, equilibrium conditions for operation of formal predictions may not yet have been attained, with politicians and voters still learning about the most effective modes of campaigning. However, even on the basis of the two campaigns considered here we have already begun to see some revisions and augmentations that have the potential to improve the models of campaign strategy that we have considered.

Table 1. Summary of Model-Based Predictions

Model	Context	Prediction
<i>I. Formal Theory-based Predictions</i>		
Riker and Davis/Ferrantino	Any campaign	The total volume of attacks will be very high.
Skaperdas-Grofman	Two-candidate campaign	The front-runner will attack less than the opponent.
Skaperdas-Grofman	Multi-candidate campaign	Attacks not initiated by the front-runner will be aimed at the front-runner.
Skaperdas-Grofman	Multi-candidate campaign	The front-runner's attacks will be aimed at the top-ranked opponent.
Doron-On	Multi-candidate campaign	Each candidate's attacks will be aimed at the largest rival within the same political market.
<i>II. Other Predictions</i>		
Personality-based strategy	Any campaign	Candidates with more combative personalities or political personas candidates will attack more than less combative candidates.
Incumbency-based strategy	Any campaign	The incumbent will attack less than any challenger.
Incumbency-based strategy	Any campaign	Each challenger's attacks will be aimed at the incumbent.

Table 2. Attacks by Each Candidate in 1996 (By Period) and 2000

Period	Attack Words	%	Other Words	%	Total
<i>A. January 1 - March 15, 1996</i>					
Yeltsin	172	1.8	9628	98.2	9800
Zyuganov	1185	11.8	8880	88.2	10065
Yavlinsky	289	71.4	116	28.6	405
Lebed	278	16.1	1446	83.9	1724
Zhirinovskiy	0		0		0
Total	1924	8.7	20070	91.3	21994
<i>B. March 16 - April 30, 1996</i>					
Yeltsin	40	0.9	4294	99.1	4334
Zyuganov	1447	7.0	19243	93.0	20690
Yavlinsky	82	12.1	597	87.9	679
Lebed	31	1.3	2366	98.7	2397
Zhirinovskiy	294	16.2	1523	83.8	1817
Total	1894	6.3	28023	93.7	29917
<i>C. May 1 - June 16, 1996</i>					
Yeltsin	377	2.7	13757	97.3	14134
Zyuganov	4760	10.3	41358	89.7	46118
Yavlinsky	4001	20.4	15655	79.6	19656
Lebed	937	6.2	14195	93.8	15132
Zhirinovskiy	3546	10.9	28855	89.1	32401
Total	13621	10.7	113820	89.3	127441
<i>D. June 17 - July 3, 1996</i>					
Yeltsin	241	4.2	5539	95.8	5780
Zyuganov	3415	20.1	13598	79.9	17013
Total	3656	19.1	19137	80.9	22793
<i>E. Overall, 1996</i>					
Yeltsin	830	2.4	33218	97.6	34048
Zyuganov	10807	11.5	83079	88.5	93886
Yavlinsky	4372	21.1	16368	78.9	20740
Lebed	1246	6.5	18007	93.5	19253
Zhirinovskiy	3840	11.2	30378	88.8	34218
Total	21095	10.4	181050	89.6	202145
<i>F. Overall, 2000</i>					
Putin	188	1.3	14705	98.7	14893

Zyuganov	2516	10.3	21822	89.7	24338
Yavlinsky	3267	11.5	25265	88.5	28532
Total	5971	8.8	61792	91.2	67763

Table 3. Attacks by Each Candidate on Each Target in 1996 (By Period) and 2000

Target	Source				
<i>A. January 1 - March 15, 1996</i>					
	Yeltsin	Zyuganov	Yavlinsky	Lebed	Zhirinovskiy
Yeltsin	n.a.	94.3	77.3	55.6	
Zyuganov	100.0	n.a.	22.7	17.4	
Lebed	0.0	0.0	0.0	n.a.	
Yavlinsky	0.0	0.0	n.a.	20.9	
Zhirinovskiy	0.0	3.8	0.0	6.1	n.a.
Others	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.0	
Total attack words	172	1185	289	278	0
Total words	9800	10065	405	1724	0
<i>B. March 16 - April 30, 1996</i>					
	Yeltsin	Zyuganov	Yavlinsky	Lebed	Zhirinovskiy
Yeltsin	n.a.	94.6	100.0	100.0	51.4
Zyuganov	50.0	n.a.	0.0	0.0	32.0
Lebed	0.0	0.0	0.0	n.a.	4.1
Yavlinsky	0.0	0.0	n.a.	0.0	9.2
Zhirinovskiy	50.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	n.a.
Others	0.0	4.7	0.0	0.0	3.4
Total attack words	40	1447	82	31	294
Total words	4334	20690	679	2397	1817
<i>C. May 1 - June 16, 1996</i>					
	Yeltsin	Zyuganov	Yavlinsky	Lebed	Zhirinovskiy
Yeltsin	n.a.	93.8	78.9	72.9	54.6
Zyuganov	100.0	n.a.	15.1	9.0	21.1
Lebed	0.0	0.3	0.0	n.a.	4.2
Yavlinsky	0.0	0.6	n.a.	5.4	13.3
Zhirinovskiy	0.0	0.2	5.3	6.3	n.a.
Others	0.0	5.0	0.7	6.3	6.7
Total attack words	377	4760	4001	937	3546
Total words	14134	46118	19656	15132	32401
<i>D. 2000</i>					
	Putin	Zyuganov	Yavlinsky		
Putin	n.a.	98.8	92.5		
Zyuganov	100.0	n.a.	7.5		
Yavlinsky	0.0	1.2	n.a.		
Total attack words	188	2516	3267		
Total words	14893	24338	28532		

n.a. = not applicable. Each entry is the percentage of a candidate's attack words during the period that was aimed at a given opponent; entries total to $100 \pm .1$.

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The Rational Attacker in Russia?

Negative Campaigning in Russian Presidential Elections

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Abstract

Formal models of negative campaigning offer several predictions about the volume, sources, and targets of candidates' attacks on one another. We test these predictions and predictions drawn from other perspectives by analyzing public statements by candidates in the 1996 and 2000 Russian presidential campaigns. Our tests provide mixed support for the model-derived predictions. Concluding discussion centers on the need to reconsider some of the models' basic assumption and to incorporate some neglected factors.

Notes

1. We analyzed the newspaper materials in their original Russian; the radio and television materials, which we accessed online via Nexis, were in English. Many stories contained brief snippets from a candidate's statement. Rather than relying on the media's highly selective accounts of candidates' remarks, we focused exclusively on complete or only slightly abridged statements. It was not always clear when Yeltsin was speaking in his official capacity as president and when he was speaking as a campaigner. We considered his statements only when he explicitly addressed himself to the election.
2. The websites were www.putin2000.ru/02/; www.zyuganov.ru/1/1.asp; and www.yabloko.ru/.
3. These differences reflect the bias of Russian media coverage, the continuation of the Zyuganov and Yeltsin campaigns into a run-off, Zyuganov's verbosity, and Yeltsin's infirmity for much of the campaign.
4. A trained check coder independently categorized a sample of 1,419 (10.4%) of the sentences in the 1996 text base, drawn in proportion to each candidate's share of the sentences. Overall, the main and check coders classified almost the same percentage of these sentences as attacks (12.5% for the main coder versus 12.1% for the check coder), and they assigned the same code to 93.7% of the sentences. The *kappa* coefficient (a measure of the extent to which intercoder agreement exceeds what would be expected based on chance) for these data is .61 (standard error = .04, $z = 10.2$), easily surpassing conventional significance thresholds.
5. The 1996 trial heat data are from surveys conducted by the Russian Institute of Public Opinion Research (VCIOM), the Russian Independent Institute of Social and National Problems (RIISNP), the Public Opinion Foundation, and Russian Public Opinion and Market Research (ROMIR). We obtained these data from Dmitri Gusev's website (www.cs.indiana.edu/hyplan/Dmiguse/Russian/polls.html). For 2000, the trial heat data are from the "Russia Votes" website (www.russiavotes.org).
6. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of Leon Aron, James Goldgeier, Peter Reddaway, Peter

Stavrakis, Angela Stent, Andrei Tsygankov, and two experts who preferred to remain anonymous.

These experts used 1-5 scales of “attitude toward market reform,” “posture toward the West,” “emphasis on the need to combat official corruption and organized crime,” “attitude toward the breakup of the USSR,” and “preference for Russian policy in Chechnya at the time of the election.” There was minimal disagreement among the experts about where the candidates stood on these issues.

7. This is consistent with evidence from survey data concerning the political attitudes of followers of several potential presidential candidates (Whitefield and Evans 1996) and public perceptions of the policy positions of various leaders (Klyamkin and Lapkin 1995; Miller and Klobucar 2000), and with district-level findings reported by Lyubarev (1996).

8. We thank Greg Weiss for conducting the content analysis of the D’Amato-Schumer debate.

9. As one journalist saw it, Yeltsin’s primary strategic goal was simply to establish a presence: “Mr. Yeltsin campaigned because he needed to prove that he could. His appearances were almost a matter of physical display, an attempt to assure the public that he was both alive and solicitous of their attention” (Specter 1996).