3/2018
Politologia

Negative Voting in Presidential Elections

Marzena Więckowska – m.wieckowska@vp.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5809-5709
DOI: https://doi.org/10.21697/p.7651

Abstract

Research on electoral behaviour focuses mainly on positive voting – in support of a certain candidate – since constituents primarily cast their votes to show approval. However, another behaviour which has become one of the permanent topics in pre-electoral debates is the concept of choosing the lesser evil. This means that a certain group of constituents vote to achieve a more preferable final result – to prevent the less desirable candidate from winning. This phenomenon, referred to as 'negative voting', 'anti-candidate voting', or 'tactical voting', occurs when a voter does not cast a vote in support of a certain candidate, but rather against his or her rival – according to the following principle: the victory of candidate X is not favourable, but politically easier to accept than candidate Y's success. This article outlines the reasons behind negative voting, defines groups of voters who are more prone to casting negative votes, and discusses the scale of the phenomenon. It also describes three methods aimed at reducing negative motivation.

Keywords

Negative voting, anti-candidate voting, electoral turnout, presidential elections, electoral reform, preferential voting, electoral campaigns, negative campaigns

Research on electoral behaviour focuses mainly on positive voting – in support of a certain candidate – since constituents primarily cast their votes to show approval. However, another term which has become one of the permanent topics in pre-electoral debates is the concept of choosing the lesser evil. This means that a certain group of constituents vote to achieve a final result deemed more preferable than another – i.e. to prevent the less desirable candidate from winning. This phenomenon, referred to as 'negative voting', 'anti-candidate voting', or

'tactical voting', occurs when a voter does not cast a vote in support of a certain candidate, but rather against his or her rival – according to the following principle: a victory of candidate X is not favourable, but politically easier to accept than the candidate Y's success. The phenomenon of negative voting has not been sufficiently accounted for in the literature in part due to its lesser scale. However, making an assumption that it has a niche character would be incorrect. Research on negative voting present in elections in which negativity is the strongest – general elections to elect a one-person executive authority i.e. a president – has shown that a negative electorate can constitute the majority of voters. That is mainly due to the specific nature of the office of president and the specifics of the procedure for selecting a head of state. The president is not only an actual person responsible for leading a country, but also one who can easily gain or lose support. 'The electorate is, at least in theory, confronted not with a soulless administration but with a physical human being' (Król 1994: 65). Presidential elections are usually preceded by an intensive and highly-personalized electoral campaign and often involve casting ballots for one of several or, in the second round, one of two candidates who usually have rich personal and professional histories and hold specific views and beliefs. It seems indisputable that presidential elections generate an above-average level of negative voting. However, the question why voters decide to show their disapproval rather than support is definitely in need of further clarification.

The reasons behind negative voting

From the electorate's point of view, there are two types of negative motivations, which are based on cost orientation and the perception of negative information (Lau 1985: 120–137). According to the cost orientation theory, the negativity effect is the result of an analysis of potential costs and gains. This means that constituents tend to vote negatively when it is more important for them to avoid costs – associated with the victory of an undesirable candidate – rather than attain gains – the success of a preferred candidate. In such cases, the negative voting is

tactical in nature, as the votes cast do not go to support a particular candidate, but rather to deprive the most disliked candidate of victory, taken from the point of view of the voter's interests. This means that if a voter is convinced that his or her preferred candidate has no chances of winning, he or she is more likely to support the candidate who is most likely to defeat the least preferred candidate. Such voters, when asked for the reasons behind their decisions, will in most cases say: 'because the victory of candidate Y wasn't beneficial for me / the country and my preferred candidate had no chance of winning' (Lau 1985: 122). The second theory assumes that constituents cast negative votes when they don't approve of any of the presidential candidates. Their voting decisions are based on negative information – which carries greater weight than positive information. As a result, negative information is more crucial to the decision-making process. According to this theory, negative voters cast votes against a disliked candidate because they don't support any of the remaining ones. When asked about the reasons for their voting decisions, such constituents say: 'I don't like his opponent, or I don't want his opponent to win' (Lau 1985: 130). What the first and the second group of voters have in common is the intention to prevent a certain candidate from winning an election. The members of the first group vote contrary to their initial preferences but against the least desired result, while members of the other – against a particular candidate without having any initial preferences. Together, both groups constitute the so-called 'negative electorate'.

The negative electorate

According to research carried out by American political scientists, certain groups of voters are more prone to casting negative votes than others. Even though the results of these studies may not be applicable to all countries, they are nevertheless worth mentioning. The research has shown that negative motivation is more typical of: non-partisan voters, highly politically aware voters, supporters of unpopular candidates, and highly conservative party members.

Non-partisan voters are motivated by the desire to prevent a disliked politician from winning the election, in contrast to other voters who vote to support a candidate or party. According to Michael Gant and Lee Sigelman, the results of U.S. election polls support this view. In 1964, 56.2 percent of non-partisan voters admitted to casting a ballot against a candidate compared to 25.8 percent who voted according to their political affiliations. In 1980, the difference in the number of negative votes between those who had voted for a candidate and those who voted in favour of a party was less significant, but still visible – 11.9 percent, while in 1984 this figure stood at 12.3 percent (Gant, Sigelman 1985: 337).

Negative voting seems to also be typical of result-oriented and politically aware voters, who John Blydenburgh refers to as *sophisticated voters* (Blydenburgh 1988: 103–116). Citizens with extensive political expertise carefully consider all possible results of an election, which is why they tend to cast negative votes three times more often than other electoral groups (Blydenburgh 1988: 109).

The conservative supporters of a political party are also more likely to cast negative votes. The candidates a party nominates to compete in presidential elections often represent moderate views, which differ from the party's more conservative wing. However, the more conservative voters will still support their party's candidates, even though they ideologically disagree with them, in order to prevent the other party's candidate from winning the election. According to Jonathan Williamson, as many as 30–40 percent of conservative partisan voters chose to support their party's candidate in order to prevent the rival party from winning (Williamson 2006: 13). Williamson quotes a conservative Democrat who, in 2004, voted for John Kerry: 'I don't identify with Kerry, but I gave him my vote; I will do anything to not have to identify with Bush' (Williamson 2006: 16).

The last electoral group which exhibits an above-average level of negative motivation are the supporters of less popular politicians. These constituents are well aware that the candidate they support has no realistic chance of winning and at the same time they don't want their vote to be wasted, so they often choose another politician, whom

they consider to be the 'lesser evil'. Their goal is to prevent the least desirable candidate from winning. Moreover, they want to feel that they contributed in some way to the defeat of the candidate they dislike. During the 2015 presidential election in Poland, negative motivation was strongest among the supporters of less popular politicians – Pawel Kukiz or Janusz Palikot. In order to avoid wasting their votes, around one fourth of their followers voted for other candidates with better odds of winning against the voters' least preferred option (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2015a).

The scale of negative voting

In order to present the scale of negative voting in every country, it would be necessary to collect detailed data specific to each country. Such a task is well-nigh impossible considering that many countries don't conduct quantitative studies of negative voting. The American political scientist V.O. Key, who tried to determine the size of the negative electorate, wrote the following in one of his first articles on negative voting: *People always vote against, never for* (Key 1966). No matter how tempting, this statement cannot be taken literally due to the absence of official statistics. However, even though the available data is not applicable to all countries and elections, it still merits attention. According to John Blydenburg's estimates, one in eight voters in western democracies is motivated by an intent to prevent a disliked or undesirable politicians from winning an election (Blydenburgh 1988: 114). Systematic studies of the scope of negative voting in presidential elections in the United States between 1968 and 2004, with the exception of the years 1980, 1988, 1992 and 2004, showed a stable volume of negative votes at a level of around 20–25 percent. During the other presidential election years – 1980 (Jimmy Carter vs. Ronald Reagan); 1988 (George H. Bush vs. Michael Dukakis); 1992 (George H. Bush vs. Bill Clinton); and 2004 (George W. Bush vs. John F. Kerry) – negative votes constituted between 30 and 35 percent of total votes. The scale of negative voting in Poland seems to be on a similar level as that of the United States. In the second round of the 2015

presidential elections, the vast majority of voters (80 percent) declared that the deciding factor in choosing a particular candidate was the conviction that he deserved the constituent's approval. Almost one fifth (18 percent) of respondents were not fully satisfied with their decision, which seemed for the most part to be based on the lesser evil principle. By contrast, before the second round of elections in 1995, over one fourth of respondents admitted to having such motivations (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2015a).

When outlining the scope of negative voting in countries with a two-round electoral system, it is important to keep in mind that the two rounds differ significantly with respect to the principle of negative voting. In the first round of presidential elections, when multiple candidates are on the ballot, voting decisions are based mainly on individual sympathies and general acceptance of a candidate. Meanwhile, voting with the intention to weaken the position of another candidate is much more prevalent in the second round of an election: 'in the first round, it's the positive emotions that motivate the vast majority of people; they don't vote strategically or focus on who has a better chance of winning. It's only in the second round that logic comes into play and negative emotions come to the fore – of the two remaining candidates, the one considered to be more unpleasant, dangerous for the country and furthest from their ideal needs to be eliminated' (Mistewicz 2007). A clear example of this was evident in the 2002 presidential elections in France, where in the first round the top three candidates – Jacques Chirac, Jean-Marie Le Pen and Lionel Jospin – received altogether a little over 50 percent of total votes, with the rest divided between the other 13 candidates per the voters' preferences. According to estimates, negative votes constituted only 6 percent of all votes (Rissoan 2007: 136). The results of the first round came as a great shock to the French, because the nationalist Jean-Marie Le Pen from the National Front managed to obtain several percentage points more votes than the candidate from one of the two biggest political parties in France, Lionel Jospin, and advanced to the second round. In the second round Le Pen's rival, Jacques Chirac, received 82 percent of the votes. Studies have shown that over 50 percent

of constituents who voted for Chirac to be re-elected said they wanted to prevent the National Front politician from becoming president (Rissoan 2007: 161).

Single-round presidential elections, in which only the top candidates have a serious chance of winning, can also contain a significant number of negative votes. In a system where only the candidates from the largest political parties have a realistic chance to win, the electorate tends to vote for *the lesser evil* so as to not waste their votes and not, as in the case of second-round elections, base on their dislike of a particular candidate or his or her political beliefs.

Voting turnout among the negative electorate

The available studies don't offer a clear answer to the issue of the correlation between negative voting motivation and voter turnout. An attempt to compare all available analyses only leads to further confusion with respect to the connection between voters' motivations and their participation in elections, since the results of these analyses for the most part contradict each other, as evidenced in the following claims: voting turnout is higher among the negative electorate than the positive one; the negative electorate votes less often; and there is no correlation between negative voting motivation and voter turnout.

One of the firmest believers in the existence of a correlation between negative voting and voter turnout was Samuel Kernell, who claimed that constituents who disapprove of a particular candidate's politics vote more readily than those who support them (Kernell 1977: 41–65). In Kernell's view, the higher turnout among the negative electorate can be explained by the negative voting model, according to which negative information has a greater impact on the opinion-forming process than positive information, which means that views based on negative information are more likely to result in action taken by voters. According to Kernell's estimates, the turnout among negative voters is on average 15 percent higher than among the positive electorate (Kernell 1977: 56).

Michael Gant and Dwight Davis's answer to the question whether the negative electorate votes more frequently than the positive one is less definite. They believe the difference between the two is rather marginal. The two researchers collected data on U.S. presidential elections between 1960 and 1980, according to which turnout among the negative electorate was only higher by several percentage points. For example, during the elections in 1964 the abstention rate among the positive electorate was 23 percent – 8 percentage points higher than among the negative electorate. In 1976, this gap decreased to 5 percentage points (Gant, Davis 1984). All in all, political scientists tend to refrain from claiming that negative voting motivation determines voter turnout, but at the same time draw attention to the existence of a stable, albeit small advantage in favour of the negative electorate.

Richard Brody and Benjamin Page arrived at different conclusions as to the influence of negative voting on voter turnout during presidential elections. Using data from the American National Election Study on voters' preferences, they were able to prove that turnout rates were the highest – 54 percent – among those constituents with a strong negative opinion of one of the candidates. The voters who decidedly approved of a candidate voted the most frequently – 73 percent. Moreover, the turnout rate was 65 percent among those with no clear preferences for either of the candidates (Brody, Page 1993).

Compared to the above-mentioned research from the late 1980s and early 1990s, the latest study carried out by Herbert Weisberg and Bernard Grofman shows no connection between negative voting and voter turnout. According to the authors of the study, turnout tends to drop when voters have little interest in who wins the elections. As concerns the forces that motivate the electorate, sympathy and antipathy towards a candidate, i.e. the desire to vote for or against a candidate, play an equal role. In their study, Weisberg and Grofman used the so-called 'feeling thermometer'. Respondents were asked to rate their sympathy for a candidate and their willingness to vote for them on a scale from 0 to 50, and their antipathy and unwillingness on a scale from 50 to 0. It turned out that both avid supporters and staunch opponents of a

candidate showed the same willingness to cast their votes (Weisberg, Grofman 2001: 197–220).

The claim that there is no significant difference in turnout between negative and positive voters seems to be at least questionable. Kernell's calculations are no more than estimates, while the research carried out by Gant and Davis (1984) as well as Brody and Page (1993) is limited to the United States between 1960 and 1980. Moreover, Brody and Page assumed the homogenous character of both electoral groups instead of using the available mood scales, which would provide a more tangible comparison between the positive and negative electorate.

Proposals to reduce negative voting

The study of available measures to reduce negative voting has to be secondary to the explanation of its impact on elections. There is little point in bringing forward possible means of overcoming negative voting without clearly demonstrating that negative motivation has a negative effect on the electoral process. Due to the fact there is no consensus as to the correlation between negative voting and election turnout, and regardless of how desirable high voter turnout is, attention should be focused on the impact negative voting has on democracy. The essential feature of each democratic country is to conduct free, regular, and competitive elections in order to select a representation that reflects both the political and personal preferences of the electorate (Antoszewski, Herbut 1997: 227, 228). Members of the negative electorate who do not vote for their preferred candidates because there are no chances of them winning are deprived of a representation which would match their political and personal preferences. Thus the less tactical voting an electoral system entails, the more democratic it is. The optimal strategy would be for a constituent to vote for the party which he or she supports the most, thus making the choice based on voters' true preference. However, if a system promotes tactical voting, the choice is based on voters' actual preferences to a much smaller degree. This general trend, which applies to a significant portion of the electorate and stems from them having a

limited choice, is harmful to democracy. Another detrimental feature of negative voting which impacts democratic procedures is the fact that it denies voters the opportunity to show their approval. If the voting decision is motivated solely, or even largely, by a voter's antipathy towards a certain candidate, then its quality decreases significantly, i.e. 'a vote cast for a candidate is of a much greater value than a vote against' (Adams, Merrill 2003: 172). It should also be highlighted that a negative vote is in no way communicated to those in power, but simply counted among the other votes cast in favour of a candidate. Very few candidates will admit that they didn't 'win', but rather the opposing candidate 'lost'. A president elected in such circumstances enjoys a much weaker public legitimacy. The already mentioned Jaques Chirac, who gained over 80 percent of votes in the second round of elections, actually enjoyed the support of only 36 percent of French society according to a survey carried out a year after the elections (BVA / L'Express, 17 December 2003).

The proponents of reducing the impact of negative voting distinguish three measures that can be used to reach this goal: preferential voting; the 'none of the above' option; and eliminating or reducing negative campaigns.

The first and the most impactful measure would be to give citizens a greater choice by introducing preferential voting. In most general presidential elections, the president is chosen according to the simple majority rule – each voter casts one vote in favour of a single candidate and the candidate who gains the most votes wins; or majority rule with a second-round run-off – wherein each constituent casts one vote for a single candidate but there are only two available options, and the winning candidate is selected based on the simple majority of votes. The majority system strongly inclines voters to cast their ballots for the most popular option, as it is the only one with any real chance of winning. This results in the voters' preferences being distorted. Additionally, the limited number of candidates leads to increased electoral negativity.

A special type of majority system which is aimed at preventing negative voting is so-called 'preferential voting', also known as 'alternative voting', 'Ware's method', 'ranked choice voting' or a 'single transferable vote'. In

this system, constituents would have several votes, which are cast based on their preferences (usually signified by numbers – 1, 2, 3, etc.). The candidate who gets 50 percent or more votes with the number 1 wins the election. In the event that none of the candidates succeeds in securing such a majority, the candidates with the least support are eliminated and their votes are redistributed according to the voters' second preferences – i.e. the votes with the number 1 obtained by the eliminated candidate are transferred to candidates with the number 2. The entire process is repeated until one of the candidates achieves an absolute majority. Even though this system is in use in Australia, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain and New Zealand, the only countries whose presidents are elected using a the preferential election system are Ireland and Sri Lanka.

Presidential elections in Ireland are regulated by the Irish constitution of 1937 as well as the Presidential Elections Act of 1993 (amended in 2016). According to Article 12, Section 2, Clause 2 of the Constitution of Ireland, 'the President is elected by means of a single transferable vote'. Each constituent receives a single ballot paper with the names of the presidential candidates arranged in alphabetical order. The voter puts number 1 by the name of their most preferred candidate. He or she can also put subsequent numbers (2, 3, 4…) by the names of other candidates. A vote is considered invalid when a constituent: doesn't put a number 1 next to any of the names; omits one of the numbers; puts the number 1 more than once; or makes notes on the voting card that make it impossible for a preferred candidate to be identified. For instance, during the presidential elections in 1990, Mary Robinson obtained 38.9 percent of votes with the number 1, Brian Lenihan 44.1 percent and Austin Curie 17 percent. Because none of the candidates managed to achieve an absolute majority, the candidate with the least support – Austin Curie – was eliminated while most of his votes were passed on to Mary Robinson who, despite losing to Lenihan in the first round, was able to obtain 51.6 percent of votes with the number 1 in the second round. Owing to this system of counting votes, the Irish electorate is extremely resistant to motivations giving rise to negative voting, since

it is possible for voters to select their most preferred representative from among a large number of candidates in a single election. Ireland is considered to have succeeded in counteracting negative voting among the electorate – 'the Irish are forced to vote for whom they want and not for whom they should' (Tideman 2006: 17).

Since 1982, the president of Sri Lanka has also been elected in a preferential voting process. Voters put the number 1 by their preferred candidate, but in order for their vote to be valid, they also need to put the number 2 by their second-choice candidate and the number 3 by their third choice. The candidate who gains 50 percent or more votes with the number 1 wins the election. In the event that none of the candidates wins, only two candidates remain in the second round and votes for other candidates are redistributed between them according to voters' preferences. Thanks to this preferential voting, the constituents can rank candidates based on how much they want each of them to win the elections. None of the constituents, if asked why they voted for a particular candidate, will say that they wanted to prevent another one from winning26. Nevertheless, the statement by Nicolaus Tideman that no one votes negatively is definitely exaggerated. It would be more appropriate to say that the preferential voting system effectively reduces the motivation for negative voting. It would surely be possible to find a group of constituents who cast negative votes; for example, by supporting all candidates that have a chance of winning against the most disliked candidate.

Another effective solution to overcoming negative voting is to allow the electorate to choose a 'none of the above' option. 'None of the above' – the alternative to voting for one of the available candidates – can be found on voting cards in Greece ('empty vote' – λευκό), the American state of Nevada ('none of these candidates'), Ukraine ('against all [candidates]' – против всем), Spain and Colombia ('empty voice' – voto en blanco), and France ('empty voice' – vote blanc). In all other countries, a voter who doesn't favour any of the candidates can only cast a negative vote, or abstain from voting and refuse to participate in the elections. One could arrive at the conclusion that providing the electorate with the

option 'none of the above' would serve to promote rather than prevent negative voting, with the exception of such forms of opposition as casting an invalid vote, absenteeism, or spoiling a vote – which are clear signs to the authorities of the electorate's dissatisfaction. However, reaching the above-mentioned conclusion would be, for the most part, incorrect. When the constituent votes for a candidate as the lesser of two evils in order to prevent an undesirable politician from winning the election, he or she casts a negative vote. Meanwhile, choosing the option 'none of the above' is in line with the preferences of voters who don't support any of the candidates and don't want to choose a less-desired alternative. The reduction of the electorate's negative motivation is most evident when the option 'none of the above' can have a binding effect, i.e. if more constituents vote for this option than for any of the candidates, a new election is called. 'Voting for none of the above protects the voter's right to say a definite 'yes' to calling another election and brings an end to the 'I must choose one of the candidates' elections' (Ceaser, Busch, Pitney 2009: 109). Thanks to the option 'none of the above', a citizen can vote according to their preferences (i.e. he or she favours a candidate other than those on the ballot paper), while at the same time communicating to those in power the fact that there is no preferable choice.

The American organization Voters for None of the Above, which promotes the introduction of 'none of the above' as an alternative voting option, underscores the need to add 'none of the above, in favor of calling another election' to the ballot paper[1]. Including information that a vote cast against a candidate is simultaneously a vote in favour of calling new elections in a single decision informs voters of the power of their decisions, as well as highlights the positive aspect of elections. Opponents to introducing the option 'none of the above, in favor of calling another election' claim that such a solution would be extremely costly since repeating elections over again would require significant

1 Voters for None of the Above – a non-governmental organization fighting for the option *none of the above* to be introduced in all states and elections, was established in the United States in the late 1970s. The organization was supported by The Wall Street Journal as well as the presidential candidate of the Green Party, Ralph Nader.

financial resources. However, the example of the state of Nevada, where voters have been able to choose the option 'none of the above' since 1976, demonstrates that calling another election is an infrequent occurrence. To date, the option *none of the above* was chosen by the majority of voters on only four occasions. At the same time, for over 30 years it has continually served to prevent voting based on the lesser evil principle. The studies quoted by *Voters for None of the Above* suggest that negative voting motivations in the state of Nevada during presidential elections reached 17 percent – several percentage points below the American average. The negative electorate could be reduced even more – below 5 percent – if it were possible for the state to call new elections featuring new candidates in the event that the option *none of the above* gained a majority and if the same possibility also existed in other states.[2]

However, it should be noted that even with the option to vote in favour of calling new elections with new candidates, some constituents would still choose to vote against a candidate. The reason for this lies in pre-election polls that predict only which candidates have the best chances of winning the election and whose victory is most probable. If the polls were also to show that the option *none of the above* has no chance of gaining the majority of votes and that a candidate the voter dislikes is in the lead, such a voter could still decide to cast a negative vote. The voting decision often represents a compromise between supporting a preferred candidate and assessing his chances of winning as opposed to the chances of the disliked candidate. Voters usually don't want to 'waste their vote' by supporting a candidate with no realistic chance of winning. The pre-election polls' impact on negative voting levels is much lower in the case of preferential voting. In electoral systems which use preferential voting, the results predicted in pre-election polls are usually inconclusive since it is difficult to analyse precisely all the various combinations of the electorate's preferences[3].

2 Estimates by Voters of None the Above available at www.nota.org

3 For example during parliamentary elections in Ireland in the North Dublin Constituency, 44 000 votes were cast for 12 candidates. Eight hundred voted for the most

The third measure to overcome negative voting is to eliminate, or at least reduce, negative campaigning. The aim of a negative campaign is to show the inferiority of one's political opponents and create negative emotions towards them, which can lead to increased negative voting for the negative campaigner. Despite the fact that negative campaigns are not necessarily unethical, they often involve vicious personal attacks, spreading rumours or unverified information about a candidate (or party), lying, expressing hateful views, destroying an opponent's campaign materials, and even making threats. According to Jon Krosnick, the goal of a negative campaign isn't to persuade voters to support a particular candidate: *The aim of a negative campaign is not to make people like a certain politician but to ensure they vote for them, which can be achieved by persuading voters to hate the opposing candidate* (Wojtasiński 2000).

The example of the 1988 U.S. presidential race between George H. Bush and Michael Dukakis clearly demonstrates the impact this type of campaign has on negative voting. One of the elements of Bush's campaign was a TV ad featuring photos of Michael Dukakis wearing army headphones. The photo was taken to show voters that the Republican party considers homeland security a major issue, while Dukakis looked rather humorous and out-of-place due to his physique (small height, big head). Another spot commissioned by George Bush's election office featured Willy Horton – a criminal convicted of murder. When Dukakis was a governor of the state of Massachusetts, Horton who was serving his sentence in a state prison in Massachusetts, killed a man and raped his partner while out on temporary release. The first spot showed the Democrat's physical features in a negative light, while the second highlighted his political ineptitude, which served to scare voters about the possible consequences of voting for him. According to the National Election Study, over 70 percent of the negative electorate voted for George H. Bush. When asked about the reasons for their decision,

common combination of preferences (three top candidates from one party) while over 16 000 combinations were selected by individual voters (Tideman 2006: 30–34).

voters said: 'I don't want the Democrat to win or the Democrat is a bad candidate' (Adams, Merrill 2003: 179).

The American daily The Washington Post is one of the chief proponents of limiting negative campaigns. It regularly publishes articles criticizing negative campaigns and their influence on the electorate's motivation. As one of the oldest newspapers in the United States, it proposes that an absolute ban on such campaigns be introduced in politics in the same way that tobacco and alcohol advertisements are regulated (Cannon 1988)[4]. Still, the ban itself would not completely eliminate negative information being spread about candidates since one cannot stop the media from sending negative messages or censor their content, both in print and online. As an alternative solution, The Washington Post proposes that negative messages should be of a factual rather than a slanderous nature, without resorting to personal attacks, as well as that campaigns focus on criticizing political views and programs: 'campaigns based on falsehood, defamation and morally dubious behavior must be decisively combated' (Stevens 2002: 249). The amendment to Poland's Radio and Television Broadcasting Act (*Dziennik Ustaw z 2000 r.* no. 29, item 358) can be considered as an attempt to limit campaigns' negativity and ensure their more "civilized" character. In the later-added Article 16b paragraph 3, the legislator stipulates that an advertisement shall not violate human dignity, be offensive to religious beliefs or encourage behaviour prejudicial to health, safety or environmental protection. However, attention should be drawn to the cultural relativity of the arguments used in a negative campaign. What may be considered an attack on religious beliefs in one country could be perceived as a compliment in another. For example, in Poland information about a candidate's homosexual sexual preferences would be an element of a negative campaign, while in Iceland, where citizens are proud of the

4 The most well-known detractors of negative campaigns are The Washington Post journalists Philip Bennet, Benjamin Bradlee, or the quoted Lou Cannon.

sexual orientation of their lesbian PM Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, it could be deemed part of a positive campaign[5].

Another proposition suggests the introduction of a ban on negative campaigning before the second round of elections in countries with two-round presidential elections. Proponents of this solution claim that a negative campaign has significantly more power when it comes to a confrontation between two candidates. Due to the larger number of potential targets in the first round of two-round elections, negative campaigns are a much less effective tool in terms of persuading the electorate to vote against a candidate (Stevens 2002: 117–123). Thus proponents of this solution suggest that the period of election silence (when campaigning is forbidden) should start at the moment the results of the first round of elections are announced and end with the closing of polling stations in the second round. During the election silence, any form of agitation, including public appearances, manifestations, radio and TV broadcasts featuring candidates as well as any publications mentioning them would be prohibited under penalty of law. The goal of such an election silence would be to allow for a period of time in which voters can reflect on whom they want to *vote for* rather than who they *don't want* to support.

All the proposed measures for limiting negative campaigning during presidential elections presented above should be considered as preliminary proposals. Even though it can be said that the proponents of these solutions demonstrate 'legislative optimism' – a naive notion according to which every social issue can be resolved by introducing an appropriate legislative act – at present there are hardly any alternative proposals that would help tackle this issue.

5 According to a survey from December 2009 carried out by Capacent Gallup, over 60 percent of Icelanders wanted Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir to become the head of state. A survey by TNS OBOP conducted in July 2005 showed that 57 percent of Poles are against a homosexual person being elected even as an MP.

Prospects for reducing negative voting

It seems that the issue of overcoming negative voting is rarely considered a priority – apart from a few exceptions, the level of negative motivation among the electorate remains stable. In Poland this level, though steady, is rather high – negative voting encompasses about 20–27 percent of citizens votes cast in presidential elections and, in the case of controversial elections, can be as high as 50 percent of the electorate. In light of this, it seems particularly valid to ask: what has prevented political parties, parliaments and governments from tackling this matter, or what may prevent them from doing so in the future? Based on an analysis of the above-mentioned methods of reducing negative motivation, one could draw the conclusion that oftentimes the proposed measures are not in line with the interests of the political elite.

From the point of view of political parties and their candidates, preferential voting makes politicians more dependent on voters and hampers the calculation of election results and impedes the implementation of an effective campaign strategy (Karvonen 2004). The conflict of interest between political elites and citizens regarding the implementation of preferential voting is illustrated in the example of the Canadian province of British Columbia, where preferential voting was supposed to be introduced in the elections to the regional assembly. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, composed of 160 residents of British Columbia selected at random, issued a recommendation in favour of introducing preferential voting to make sure the electorate has a real choice[6]. The main slogan promoting this initiative referred specifically to the issue of reducing negative voting: 'Time to start voting for, not against' (www.stv.ca). The political elites of British Columbia were against the reform, claiming that it would lead to higher election costs and decreased transparency, as well as impede the

6 British Columbia has two dominant parties: the Liberal Party of British Columbia and the New Democratic Party of Canada. In systems where the biggest political parties hold the dominant position the constituents usually vote for the candidates nominated by those parties as to not waste their votes.

electoral process and destabilize the election system. In a referendum that took place on 17 May 2005, 57 percent of participants voted in favour of preferential voting. However, for the reform to be carried out the support of 60 percent of the electorate was required. Four years later, PM Gordon Campbell decided to ask citizens once again about their attitude towards this reform. In the period between the referendums, the government conducted an intensive campaign against the reform, which led to what seemed like the initiative's ultimate failure, as this time only 39.8 percent of the citizens voted in favour of the change. However, the results of this referendum didn't stop the citizens' initiative. Whilst commenting on the results of the referendum, one of the members of The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform said: 'we are waiting for politicians who will understand that they are citizens just like us and that our interests coincide' (Warren, Pearse 2008:19).

Compared to the struggle for preferential voting, the proposition to allow the electorate to reject all of the candidates was met with much stronger opposition from political elites. Apart from reducing negative voting motivation, the option 'none of the above' would ensure that voters can exert an influence on the selection of candidates – 'instead of parties deciding who the citizens will be choosing, it's the citizens who decide who the parties should nominate' (Hoover 1993), which in turn would serve to strengthen checks and balances between the electorate and political parties and require candidates to actually have the public's support even if no other candidates are present.

The reform of the electoral system in India demonstrates how the proposition to add the option 'none of the above' onto the ballot can spark a conflict between a country's citizens and those in power. In 2001, the Law Commission of India recommended, in one of its reports on electoral reform, the introduction of the 'none of the above' option to the electoral law and argued that it should be given binding force. The report proposed that if the option 'none of the above' would gain the majority of votes, another election would be called in which the previous candidates would not be allowed to participate. The Commission presented its proposal to the government in 2001. To this day none of the governments

have addressed the issue of electoral reform, although that hasn't stopped various Indian politicians from unofficially criticizing it. Some have argued that the proposed changes are inconsistent with the electoral behaviour model, while others have claimed that a reform aimed at persuading the electorate to vote against all candidates is contrary to the main aim of an election – which is to choose a representative. The lack of initiative on the government's part, as well as the lack of support for it by the politicians, resulted in the involvement of the People's Union for Civic Liberties – a prominent organization fighting for citizens' rights in India. The Union called upon the Supreme Court of India to provide an interpretation of the Constitution with regard to the voting option 'none of the candidates'. The organization is still waiting for a ruling. If the court decides that the voter's right to reject all of the candidates is a constitutional right, then this option will be introduced regardless of politicians' wishes. When the Secretary of the People's Union for Civic Liberties, Pushker Raj, brought the issue of reform before the Supreme Court of India, he said: 'political parties and the parliament share a common interest, which is to maintain the status quo. The reform we propose, which will allow citizens to vote according to their preferences, goes against that interest' (Katsuri 2010).

It is similarly difficult to gain the support of political elites when it comes to introducing legislation aimed at regulating negative campaigning. It is common knowledge that negative campaigns are much more effective than positive ones – 'the greatest chances for garnering voters' support belong to those candidates for the highest offices in the country who malign their political opponents and ruthlessly point out their mistakes. There are many ways to make people like politicians, but to improve their chances for a successful election they need a fierce opponent whom they can use to scare the electorate' (Wojtasiński 2000). It is also generally known that apart from its high absorption rate, a negative campaign has other features no less vital in terms of ensuring victory: it requires less resources and is less complex. A negative campaign has a much greater impact than positive campaigns, 'one negative message has the force of 100 positive' (Stevens 2002: 107), and no political experience

is required to carry out a negative campaign. Moreover, the above-mentioned proposal to allow negative campaigning in only the first round of elections is controversial in light of the rights to freedom of speech and to obtain information. As a result, it has less chances of being implemented compared to the other two proposals.

Two thousand years ago, a high-ranking Roman official supposedly said that 'the evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones'. This can also apply to politics. For many voters, negative qualities are more important than good ones. Dissatisfaction is a crucial determinant of voters' behaviour, which is why negative voting is so very common. Even though the vast majority of constituents cast their votes in favour of a candidate, a situation in which even one-fourth of an electorate voices silent opposition – uncommunicated to those in power – as opposed to a vote in favour is rather worrying. We can only hope that this will, over time, result in more advanced research into the subject, or perhaps even the introduction of legislative works to help resolve it.

References

Adams, J., Merrill, S. (2003). 'Voter Turnout and Candidate Strategies in American Elections'. The Journal of Politics, 65 (1).

Antoszewski, A., Herbut, R. (1997). Demokracje zachodnioeuropejskie: Analiza porównawcza. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Blydenburgh, J.C. (1988). 'Sophisticated Voting in the 1980 Presidential Election'. Political Behavior, 10 (2), 103–116.

Brody, R., Page, B. (1993). 'Indifference, Alienation and Rational Decisions: The Effects of Candidate Evaluation on Turnout and the Vote'. Public Choice, 15, 1–17.

BVA / L'Express, 17 December 2003.

Cannon, L. (1988). 'Why Not Ban Negative Political Ads'. The Washington Post, 18 November.

Ceaser, J.W., Busch A.E., Pitney J.J. (2009). Epic Journey: the 2008 Elections and American Politics. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (2005a). 'Znaczenie głosowania taktycznego w wyborach prezydenckich', no. 3398, September.

Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (2005b). 'O mobilizacji elektoratów, znaczeniu negatywnych motywów głosowania i typowym zwycięzcy wyborów prezydenckich', no. 3415, October.

Dziennik Ustaw z 2000 r. no. 29, item 358.

Gant, M., Davis, D. (1984). 'Negative Voter Support in Presidential Elections'. The Western Political Quarterly, 37(2).

Gant, M., Sigelman, L. (1985). 'Anti-Candidate Voting in Presidential Elections'. Polity, 18 (2).

Hoover, G. (1993). 'None of the Above – The People's Veto'. Policy Insights, nr 521, December.

Karvonen, L. (2004). 'Preferential Voting: Incidence and Effects'. International Political Science Review, 24, 203–226.

Katsuri, K. (2010). 'SC keeps door open on negative voting'. India Together, 9 March.

Kernell, S. (1977). 'Presidential Popularity and Negative Voting: An Alternative Explanation of the Midterm Congressional Decline'. American Political Science Review, 71, 41–65.

Key V.O. (1966). 'The Responsible Electorate'. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Król, M. (1994). Słownik demokracji. Warszawa: PAVO.

Lau, R. (1985). 'Two Explanations for Negativity Effects in Political Behavior'. American Journal of Political Science, 29 (1), 120–137.

Mistewicz, E. (2007). 'Kampania prezydencka pełna emocji'. Gazeta Wyborcza, 21 April.

Rissoan, J.-P. (2007). Traditionalisme et révolution: les poussées d'extrémisme des origines à nos jours. Volume 2: du fascisme au 21 avril 2002. Lyon: Impr. Sepec.

Stevens, D.P. (2002). The Psychological Impact of Negative Campaigns on the Electorate. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Tideman, N. (2006). Collective Decisions and Voting Rule. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Warren, M., Pearse, H. (2008). Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weisberg, H., Grofman, B. (2001). 'Candidate Evaluations and Turnout'. American Politics Quarterly, 9, 197–220.

Williamson, J. (2006). 'Negative Voting in Presidential Elections'. Paper presented at the Annual meeting of The Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, IL, April 20–23, 2006. available at http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p138434_index.html

Wojtasiński, Z. (2000). 'Thriller polityczny. Najbardziej jest skuteczna bezwzględna kampania wyborcza'. Rzeczpospolita, 219, 19 September.

www.stv.ca