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News Media Framing of Negative Campaigning

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News media coverage of election campaigns is often characterized by use of the strategic game frame and a focus on politicians' use of negative campaigning. However, the exact relationship between these two characteristics of news coverage is largely unexplored. This article theorizes that consumer demand and norms of journalistic independence might induce the news media outlets to cover negative campaigning with a strategic game frame. A comprehensive content analysis based on several newspaper types, several election campaigns, and several different measurements of media framing confirms that news coverage of negative campaigning does apply the strategic game frame to a significantly larger degree than articles covering positive campaigning. This finding has significant implications for campaigning politicians and for scholars studying campaign and media effects.

INTRODUCTION

"Journalists report the campaign with the verve of sportswriters covering a title fight," wrote Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, p. 116) nearly 20 years ago in their seminal study of negative campaigning. Several later studies have corroborated this assertion; journalists "love conflict" (Geer, 2010),

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and consequently negative campaigning by politicians receives relatively more news coverage than positive campaigning (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; Ridout & Smith, 2008). Yet Ansolabehere and Iyengar's allusion to "sportswriters" is apt in another way; journalists also "love" to cover election campaigns through the strategic game frame, in which the politicians are viewed as players in a contest that is mainly about their own power and popularity (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).[1] The exact relationship between these two characteristics of modern election coverage—focus on negative campaigning, and use of the strategic game frame—have, however, remained curiously unexplored.

This article therefore addresses this relationship. In doing so, the article adds to the existing literature on negative campaigning and to the literature on media framing in a number of ways.

First, the empirical relationship between coverage of negative campaigning and use of certain media frames is important for the studies investigating civic effects of election campaigns; several studies have indicated that a high level of negative campaigning may impact civic attitudes among citizens, resulting in political cynicism and feelings of political inefficacy (Dardis, Shen, & Edwards, 2008; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007). Similarly, the literature on the media's use of the strategic game frame have demonstrated that this media frame may have comparable effects on civic attitudes (Aalberg et al., 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Hence, if negative campaigning and media coverage of negative campaigning is associated with the news media's use of the strategic game frame, this relationship needs to be taken into account when explaining and disentangling the causes behind political cynicism and inefficacy.

Second, by incorporating coverage of negative campaigning, this study adds a new theoretical perspective to the literature on determinants behind media use of the strategic game frame (e.g., Brants, de Vreese, Moller, & van Praag, 2010). Hence, this study suggests that basic assumptions about news consumer demands and journalistic norms can be used to explain why news coverage of negative campaigning may be a relevant factor when explaining the media's use of the strategic game frame.

Third, investigating how coverage of negative campaigning relates to use of the strategic game frame impels us to clarify and clearly delineate the content of these concepts. For this reason, this study also contributes to the

[1]Some studies have differentiated further between the *game frame* and the *strategy frame* (Aalberg et al., 2012). However, the conceptual overlap between the two frames is arguably great and the terms have been used interchangeably (e.g., Lawrence, 2000). Therefore this article focuses on the overall strategic game frame.

ongoing debate about how to properly define and measure the strategic game frame (Aalberg et al., 2012; de Vreese, 2005b). The study does this by proposing a conceptual model that distinguishes clearly between media coverage of negative campaigning and media framing.

Moving forward, this article therefore reviews the literature on negative campaigning and the media's strategic game frame, particularly showing how these two fields of study relate to each other. Next, the article proposes a model for classifying media coverage of negative campaigning and the strategic game frame and then theorizes on the empirical relationship between the two phenomena. Following this, an analysis, based on media content analysis of 982 newspaper articles from two Danish election parliamentary election campaigns in 2007 and 2011, investigates the empirical relationship, and the concluding discussion shows how the results of this simple analysis have significant implications for campaigning politicians and for scholars studying election campaigns and media effects.

NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING AND MEDIA COVERAGE

The last couple of decades have seen a burgeoning literature on negative campaigning, that is, "criticism leveled by one candidate against another during a campaign" (Geer, 2006, p. 23). This literature has certainly not been blind to the fact that the news media have a certain focus on negative campaigning, in fact it was already made clear in the seminal work of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), which posited that the heavy use of negative campaign messages in U.S. elections could be traced back to three factors: the competitive nature of political advertising, political interest groups, and "to the ways in which reporters cover the campaign" (p. 115). Arguing that the media made negative campaigns more attractive by repeating their messages, Ansolabehere and Iyengar showed how controversial negative ads such as the 1964 "Daisy ad" and the infamous 1988 "Willie Horton ad" received considerable attention from the media (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995, p. 133; see also Ridout & Smith, 2008). However, the main focus of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's study was on effects of direct exposure to attack ads produced by politicians, and the ensuing literature on negative campaigning has often entirely sidestepped the role of the media vis-à-vis negative campaigning. Instead, the literature has primarily focused on politicians or voters, yielding studies on, for example, characteristics of politicians and parties as determinants behind the use of negative campaigning (Druckman, Kifer, & Parkin, 2010; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010), experiments on the effects of negative ads and statements (Brooks & Geer, 2007; King & McConnell, 2003) and observational effect studies based on

surveys and content analyses (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Jackson, Mondak, & Huckfeldt, 2009).

A number of subsequent studies on negative campaigning have, nevertheless, explicitly recognized that the media seem to have a bias toward coverage of negative campaigns (Djupe & Peterson, 2002, p. 847; Lau & Rovner, 2009, p. 287; Ridout & Franz, 2008, p. 161). The most systematic empirical study of this media bias toward negative campaigning was conducted by Ridout and Smith (2008), who found that newspapers, on average, devoted twice as much space to negative ads as they did to positive ads. Outside the U.S.-context, Hansen and Pedersen (2008) investigated this bias in the Danish media and also found these media outlets to be markedly biased toward the coverage of negative campaign messages. Nonetheless, although these studies have acknowledged, and in certain cases investigated, the media's tendency to cover negative campaigning more than positive campaigning, none of the studies has systematically investigated the media's framing of these messages.

Lau and Pomper (2004) is one of the few studies of negative campaigning, that explicitly addressed media framing, noting that "negative campaigning, mudslinging, and so on are common ways that stories about campaigns are "framed." Following this line of reasoning, our [press coverage] data may better reflect how the campaign was *reported* than how it was actually *conducted*" (p. 136). However, Lau and Pomper were not interested in media coverage per se but simply used this coverage as a proxy measure of the tone of the campaign. Furthermore, Lau and Pomper essentially used the term *framed* to denote that negative campaigning was covered to a greater extent than positive campaigning. This use of the term is, as we shall see, not what is usually understood by the concept of a frame within the literature on media framing.

Within the literature on negative campaigning, Geer (2006) arguably made the strongest connection between negative campaigning and media framing. Noting that the media grew markedly more interested in negative campaigning in the 1988 U.S. presidential election, Geer argued that this development was not caused by increased use of negative campaigning by politicians. Rather, this increasing media coverage of negative campaigning could be attributed to the media's shift of focus from policy to strategy. Citing one of the earliest studies on the strategic game frame, Patterson (1993), Geer (2006) proposed the "Patterson hypothesis" (p. 130), positing that there is a positive association between use of the strategic game frame and the coverage of negative campaigning. Geer's proposition of this hypothesis is, incidentally, somewhat surprising, given that his own content analyses of political advertisements had actually shown a pattern which might be argued to point in the exact opposite direction; negative political

advertisements were far more focused on substantive policy issues than positive advertisements (Geer, 2006, p. 61). All the same, Geer (2006) did not offer any detailed theoretical explanations as to why the Patterson hypothesis should be true, nor did he proceed to conduct any systematic study of the frames used by the media when covering negative campaigning.

MEDIA FRAMING AND NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING

Although the literature on negative campaigning has generally paid scant attention to media framing, the literature on the strategic game frame to a large extent took the initial position that coverage of negative campaigning, conflict and the strategic game frame were closely connected. The study by Patterson (1993) was one of the first studies to show that the ''game schema'' had become the dominant mode for reporters to cover politics. Using this schema, the reporters covered election campaigns as a game, focused on polls and positioned the candidates as performers and the electorate as spectators. As previously noted, Patterson also focused on the media's tendency to cover negative aspects and posited that the game schema predisposes the reporter to highlight controversies (p. 57ff). This tendency to view the strategic game frame in conjunction with a focus on conflict, and hence negative campaigning, is also apparent in the arguably most central work on the strategic game frame, Cappella and Jamieson (1997). This study characterized strategy coverage as news focused on

> (1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics, and audience (voters); (4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; (5) heavy weighing of polls and the candidates standing in them. (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 33)

Although coverage of negative campaigning and conflict was not an explicit part of this description, the focus on metaphors from wars, games and competition did suggest that the game frame was inherently conflictual in nature. Furthermore, this close relationship between the strategic game frame and a focus on conflict and (personal) political attacks, was also implied several times by Cappella and Jamieson (1997), for example, when noting that ''it is impossible to know which came first—the conflict-driven sound-bite-oriented discourse of politicians or the conflict-saturated strategy-oriented structure of press coverage'' (p. 9).

The tendency to consider the strategic game frame, conflict, and negative campaigning as somehow connected was partially carried into later studies, for example Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), who even termed the frames

described by Patterson (1993) and Cappella and Jamieson (1997) as the "conflict frame" (see also de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001, p. 109; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Similarly, referencing Cappella and Jamieson (1997) and Jamieson (1992), de Vreese and Semetko (2002) wrote that "indicators of strategic coverage have been defined as coverage of candidate motivations and personalities; *focus on disagreement between parties, candidates, or voters* [emphasis added]; and the presence and emphasis on polls in the news" (p. 617; see also de Vreese, 2004, p. 192). It should be noted, however, that none of these later studies included focus on disagreement as an indicator of the strategic game frame in their content analyses.

Lawrence (2000, p. 96) was probably the first to explicitly delineate coverage of political conflict and use of the strategic game frame, noting that political conflicts could be covered both through the strategic game frame but also through the issue frame, that is, a frame emphasizing public policy problems and solutions, politicians' stands on such policy issues and the general implications of (suggested) policies for the public (Lawrence, 2000, p. 100). This perspective also seems to have taken hold, as most subsequent studies on the strategic game frame left out conflict as a characteristic or indicator of the strategic game frame (e.g., de Vreese, 2005b; Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008; Lee, McLeod, & Shah, 2008; Strömbäck & Aalberg, 2008; Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010).

COVERAGE OF NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING AND THE STRATEGIC GAME FRAME AS DISTINCT CONCEPTS

As shown in the preceding two sections, the literature on negative campaigning and the literature on the strategic game frame have been relatively disengaged from each other: First, although the literature on negative campaigning has noted the tendency of the media to cover negative campaigning more than positive campaigning, this literature has not systematically investigated the frames used by the media to cover negative campaigning. Second, although the early literature on the strategic game frame tended to include conflict as a part of the strategic game frame, this literature quickly moved away from this notion and has since left the relationship between the coverage of negative campaigning and the use of the strategic game frame unexplored.[2] Before moving on to the analysis of the empirical

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[2]Recent studies on media framing have investigated both the presence of conflict in a story and the use of the strategic game frame, but these studies have not investigated the interaction between the use of the strategic game frame and conflict (Strömbäck & Aalberg 2008; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006).

association between media coverage of negative campaigning and the use of the strategic frame, this section proposes an important conceptual clarification.

It is important to note, first, that the question is not whether negative campaigning in itself is part of the strategic game frame; negative campaigning is created by politicians, political parties, or other political actors, whereas media frames are constructed by journalists and editors. The focus in this article is on news coverage of negative campaigning, not negative campaigning in itself. Second, it is noteworthy that not even Lawrence (2000) separated the two concepts completely; although she did emphasize that conflict was not necessarily covered by the media through a strategic game frame, she also posited that elite conflict was "the most basic and crucial element of game-framed news. Without it, journalists would have little to recognize as a 'game'" (p. 96). There is in other words, according to Lawrence (2000), an asymmetric relationship between the concepts: News coverage of conflict does not entail the use of the strategic game frame, but use of the strategic game frame does entail coverage of conflict. If we accept this perspective, positive campaigning (i.e., politicians talking positively about themselves) can by definition not be covered through a strategic game frame. This study, however, takes the position that the conceptual distinction between news coverage of positive and negative campaigning can be made completely independent of the distinction between the strategic game frame and the issue frame. An argument against this position could be that the concept of a (strategic) game *logically* presupposes some sort of conflict (although see Rowe, 1992). However, the concept of a frame is typically understood as "an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic" (de Vreese, 2005a, p. 53). In other words, frames are characterized by what they emphasize, not what they logically imply (see also, e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993). Therefore, even if we do accept a logical connection between the concepts of (strategic) game and conflict, this does not in any way mean that a conflict is necessarily made explicit or emphasized in articles with a strategic game frame. Thus, there seems to be no compelling reason to exclude the possibility of the use of the strategic game frame in the absence of any explicit conflict, and this study therefore proposes that we treat coverage of negative campaigning and the use of the strategic game frame as, conceptually, completely orthogonal, leaving the question of a connection between the two concepts as an empirical one. Doing this, means that we can speak of four general types of articles on politics and political issues:

1. Articles with a focus on negative campaigning, using an issue frame
2. Articles with a focus on positive campaigning, using an issue frame

3. Articles with a focus on negative campaigning, using a strategic game frame
4. Articles with a focus on positive campaigning, using a strategic game frame

The four different types of articles associated with these two dimensions are illustrated with examples in Figure 1 (examples in the figure are fictitious).

The suggested approach may beg the question of whether media coverage of negative or positive campaigning should be viewed as a choice of framing, meaning that we can treat the four categories as four different frames. However, there are no apparent advantages to expanding the concept of a frame to include distinct frames for coverage of negative versus positive campaigning. In fact, this would arguably just add to the framing literature's "conceptual vagueness" (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press). To ensure conceptual clarity, this study therefore uses the term *focus* when discussing media coverage of positive and negative messages, whereas the term *frame* is reserved to denote the difference between the strategic game frame and the issue frame.

Coverage of positive campaigning

Positive Game	Positive Issue
"Party X suggests a tax cut, trying to attract middle class voters"	"Party X suggests a tax cut, arguing that it will spur economic growth"

Strategic game frame — Issue frame

Negative Game	Negative Issue
"Party X is trying to win over middle class voters by attacking party Y on their tax policies"	"Party X attacks party Y on their tax policies, arguing that it will stifle economic growth"

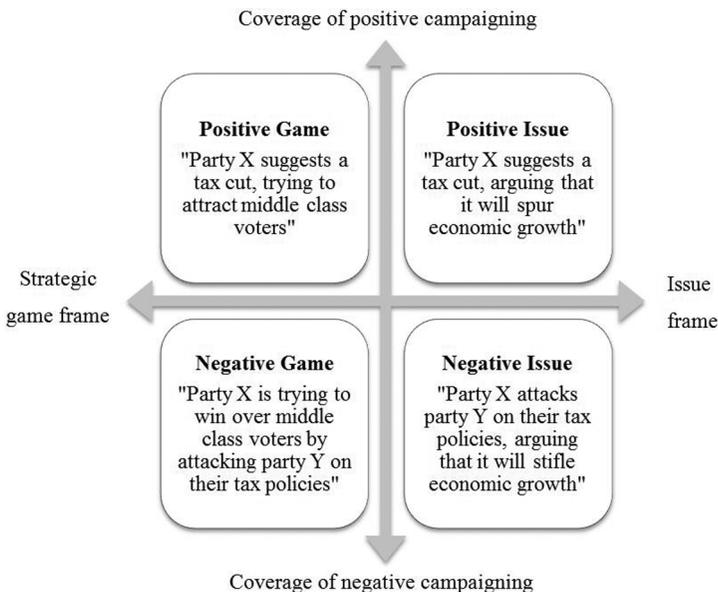Coverage of negative campaigning

FIGURE 1   Examples of news coverage, placed on the two dimensions.

THEORIZING THE EMPIRICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COVERAGE OF NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING AND FRAME

Understanding media coverage of negative campaigning and the media's use of the strategic game frame as two conceptually independent dimensions of press coverage, as suggested in the preceding section, does not in any way rule out the possibility of an empirical relation between the two. In fact, this section will show that there are good reasons to expect an empirical relationship: The literature on the strategic game frame has provided a number of theoretical explanations for the general use of the strategic game frame, and these explanations may, in combination with insights from the literature on negative campaigning, serve as a starting point for theorizing on the connection between the coverage of negative campaigning and the use of the strategic game frame.

Why do reporters use the strategic game frame? The literature has suggested a host of factors that might explain its use, for example, the length of modern election campaigns (Patterson, 1993) and lack of trust between journalists and politicians (Brants et al., 2010). The arguably most important antecedent of the strategic game frame is commercialism (Aalberg et al., 2012). Comparing across media systems, the strategic game frame is used more frequently in commercial media systems than systems with strong public service outlets (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006), and analyses within specific media systems also show that commercially oriented outlets use the strategic game frame more often than public service outlets (Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). The heavy use of the strategic game frame by commercial news outlets may be explained by the fact that it is easy to produce (Lawrence, 2010, p. 274) and, even more important, because it is widely believed to be in high demand among news consumers (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004; Strömbäck & van Aelst, 2010). Coincidentally, news outlets' focus on consumer demand may also explain the coverage of negative campaigning. News consumers are often assumed to be drawn to coverage of negative campaigning (Lau, 1985; Ridout & Smith, 2008), and a strong focus on consumer demand might therefore both make the reporter use the strategic game frame and cover negative campaigning. This concurrence of the strategic game frame and the coverage of negative campaigning may be found both at the level of media systems and when comparing across outlets, but it might also operate at the level of individual news stories: The pressure to produce marketable news stories may vary across journalists and editors. Moreover, even the individual journalist's attentiveness to the marketability of news stories may fluctuate somewhat over time. Therefore, when journalists are especially attentive to consumer demands, the result

may be news stories both focusing on negative campaigning and using a strategic game frame.

Furthermore, the use of the strategic game frame may also be explained by journalistic ideals of independence and objectivity. News coverage of politics and political issues are often so dependent on politicians and other government actors as sources that the news media may arguably be said to be only ''semi-independent'' of these actors (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2008, pp. 46–71; Bennett & Livingston, 2003). Nevertheless, it is, in most media systems, a deep-seated professional norm among reporters that they maintain a critical and independent stance toward political actors, especially in election campaigns, and the strategic game frame is an easy way to achieve this independence (Lawrence, 2010; Shehata, 2010). By speculating on such factors as politicians' strategies, the reporters clearly show that they are not simply uncritical mouthpieces for these politicians. (This line of reasoning is similar to the ''rule of product substation,'' suggested by Zaller, 1998, but Zaller explicitly left out coverage of negative campaigning and horse race coverage from his analysis.)

An alternative way to fulfill the principle of independence would be for the reporter to cast a critical eye on policy substance. However, not only does this approach require comprehensive knowledge about the issues, it also may make the reporter vulnerable to charges of bias: a reporter questioning a policy proposal from, for example, a right-wing politician on substance may be seen as advocating a personal, left-wing political view, whereas the strategic game frame is inherently apolitical; the reporter's assumptions and interpretations regarding a politician's quest for power and popularity strategy works across the entire political spectrum. Hence, the reporters' use of the strategic game frame may be seen as another example of the ''objectivity routine,'' a routine protecting the reporter against accusations of bias (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 107–109). The notion of objective independence may be especially important for reporters when covering negative campaigning because politicians attacked through negative campaigning are likely to counter such attacks (Damore, 2002; Iyengar, 2011, p. 176). In contrast, politicians will rarely respond to positive campaigning made by opponents, partly because positive campaigning is usually done on areas of issue ownership (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2011), which competing politicians and parties have little interest in discussing during an election campaign. Therefore, a reporter transmitting negative campaign messages from a politician may be particularly attentive to the demand of critical independence, as this reporter may, consciously or not, anticipate that the coverage will spark reactions from the attacked party.

Therefore, the mechanisms just outlined, the dual demands of news that sells, and independent objectivity lead to the hypothesis that *news coverage*

of negative campaigning will tend to use the strategic game frame to a greater extent than news coverage of positive campaigning. Note that this hypothesis does not posit any direction of causality. The hypothesis is merely correlational, in line with the following content analysis of media coverage. The question of causality is revisited in the concluding discussion of the article.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: METHOD AND DATA

To investigate empirically whether coverage of negative campaigning is associated with an increased use of the strategic game frame, a comprehensive content analysis was conducted. The analysis was based on all news articles about the election campaign from six major Danish newspapers— two morning dailies, two tabloids, and two free newspapers—published in print during the 2007 and the 2011 parliamentary election campaigns.[3] The media system in Denmark is characterized by a relatively high newspaper penetration, with daily readership at 76% (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008; Leckner & Facht, 2010). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that Danish newspapers cover negative campaigning and use the strategic game frame to a large extent (de Vreese, 2005b; de Vreese & Semetko, 2002; Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; Pedersen, 2012). Nonetheless, the use of the strategic game frame has not reached American levels, where the strategic game frame is "positively dominant" (Lawrence, 2010, p. 272). Therefore, by investigating campaign coverage in Danish newspapers there should be a healthy amount of variation in the variables.

The content analysis used individual news articles as the unit of analysis. Selecting a physical unit (articles, ads, etc.) as unit of analysis has often been done both in studies of negative campaigning (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; Jackson et al., 2009) and in studies of the strategic game frame (de Vreese, 2005b; Lawrence, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006), although smaller, thematic units of analysis (appeals) have also been used, both in studies of negative campaigning (Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010) and media framing (e.g., Benoit, Stein, & Hansen, 2005). Negative campaigning was defined as "criticism directed at political actors (politicians, parties, coalitions of parties) by other political actors,"

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[3]Articles were found in the database "Infomedia" by searching for articles with at least 100 words, published (in print) during the formal election campaign (October 25 to November 13, 2007, and August 27 to September 15, 2011). To capture relevant articles, the search string required that the article mentioned at least one of the nine political parties in the Danish parliament and the word "election" ("*valg*"). Included newspapers were *Politiken* and *Jyllandsposten* (broadsheets), *EkstraBladet* and *BT* (tabloids), and *MetroXpress* and *24Timer* (free dailies). The newspaper *EkstraBladet* was not included in 2007.

whereas positive campaigning was any other communication from the political actor (Geer, 2006; similar definitions have been used by Hansen & Pedersen, 2008; see also Walter & Vliegenthart, 2010). Using this definition, articles could be coded as belonging to the following categories: (1) "Article is primarily focused on positive campaigning," (2) "Article is focusing equally on negative and positive campaigning," and (3) "Article is primarily focused on negative campaigning." Although previous studies have shown that it is possible and reasonable to code this way, they have also shown that a rather large part of articles on politics and political campaigning does not contain any positive or negative campaigns messages, for example, when an article is entirely about an opinion poll (Hansen & Pedersen, 2008). Therefore, an extra category was added: (4) "Does not contain any/very few messages from political actors."[4]

Although the strategic game frame has been extensively investigated, there is no clear agreement on how to operationalize and measure it. Two approaches have been used in empirical studies: (1) coding the dominant frame—also sometimes termed *macroframe* or *metaframe*—in the articles, and (2) coding for the presence of indicators of the frame. As shown by Strömbäck and van Aelst (2010), the choice between these two coding approaches can have a strong impact on the results: Articles that clearly employ the strategic game as a dominant frame do not necessarily contain traditional indicators of this frame, and, conversely, articles containing indicators of the strategic game frame do not always apply it as the dominant frame. To account for this discrepancy, this study utilizes both approaches.

When coding for the dominant frame in each article, the articles are coded as having a strategic game frame, an issue frame or a mixed frame (similar to Lawrence, 2000; Strömbäck & Aalberg, 2008; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). This study measured the dominant frame of newspaper articles, employing the following definition:

> The issue frame refers to political news that focus on policy, policy issues, the policy positions on these issues, real life conditions with relevance for issue positions and the effects of enacted policies and initiatives on conditions outside the political sphere. In contrast, the game frame refers to political news that frame politics as a game in which the political parties and politicians compete. The game frame focuses on the strategy and motives behind policy positions, and the popularity and power of political parties and politicians. The game frame focuses on the effects of policies and initiatives inside the political sphere, for example whether a policy or policy position will improve the popularity or power of a politician or a political party.

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[4]The codebook is available from the author upon request.

This definition is taken from Pedersen (2012) and is comparable to the definition suggested by Aalberg et al. (2012). Using this definition, each article was classified in one of four categories: (1) "Article is exclusively or primarily using an issue frame," (2) "Article is using a mixed frame, equally using the issue frame and the strategic game frame," (3) "Article is exclusively or primarily using a strategic game frame," or (4) "Cannot be coded—Article uses neither the strategic game frame nor the issue frame."

Coding for indicators of the strategic game frame has often been based on the indicators found in Cappella and Jamieson (1997) or similar indicators. Recent studies have not only coded for indicators of the strategic game frame but also coded specifically for indicators of the issue frame (Adriaansen, van Praag, & de Vreese, 2010). The present study coded for four indicators of the game frame (winning or losing, political consequences, strategy, and polls). If one of these indicators was present in an article, the article was coded as using a strategic game frame. Four indicators of the issue frame were also used (policy substance, policy positions, policy implications, and previous political results). Similarly, when one of these indicators was present in an article, the article was coded as using an issue frame. Note that when coding in this way, it is possible for articles to be coded as using both a strategic game frame and an issue frame.

To test intercoder reliability, a stratified, random subsample of 120 articles (60 from each election campaign) was recoded by another coder. The coding for focus on negative/positive campaigning had an acceptable level of reliability with a Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.73$, and reliability for coding of dominant frame had a high level of reliability, with $\alpha = 0.89$ (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2004). The coding based on presence–absence indicators yielded mixed results. Reliability for the presence of one or more indicator of the strategic game frame was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.72$), as was reliability of the presence of one or more issue frame indicators ($\alpha = 0.70$). Individually, however, the presence–absence indicators had notably different reliabilities, which of course needs to be taken into account, when using these specific indicators (a fifth indicator for the strategic game frame, metaphors of war and games, was excluded from the analysis because of a clearly unacceptable reliability of $\alpha = 0.29$). Detailed measures of reliability can be found in the appendix.

RESULTS

A total of 982 newspaper articles were included in the analysis. The results of the content analysis confirmed that both use of the strategic game

frame and the coverage of negative campaigning were prevalent in the six newspapers' coverage of the election campaign. The strategic game frame was used as the dominant frame in 48% of the articles, whereas the issue frame was used in just 26% of the articles (13% had a mixed frame, whereas 13% used neither of the two frames). The pervasiveness of the strategic game frame was also evident, although less dominant, when frames were measured through the use of presence–absence indicators: 70% of the articles contained at least one indicator of the strategic game frame, whereas 62% of the articles contained at least one indicator of the issue frame (42% contained indictors of both frames, whereas 10% contained neither). Detailed descriptive results can be found in the appendix.

Furthermore, coverage of negative campaigning was the main focus in 12% of the articles, whereas 20% focused on positive campaigning, and 14% of the articles were mixed, focusing on both negative and positive campaigning. It may seem surprising that positive campaigning received more coverage than negative campaigning. It is important to emphasize, however, that a substantial share of the articles were classified as mixed, that is, articles with coverage of both negative and positive campaigning. Furthermore, politicians in Denmark are predominantly positive campaigners (Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010; Hansen & Pedersen, 2008), meaning that these results do not in themselves run counter to the proposition that negative campaign messages on average receive more press coverage than positive campaign messages.

The next step in the analysis was to test whether media coverage of negative campaigning tends to use the strategic game frame to a greater extent than news coverage of positive campaigning. Descriptive data on the relationship between these two variables are shown in Table 1.

As is evident from the data in Table 1, the pattern was as expected. Among the articles focusing on coverage of negative campaigning, 63% used

TABLE 1
Association Between Focus and Frame

| | Focus | | | | |
	Positive	Mixed	Negative	Neither	Total
Issue frame	49% (99)	34% (48)	20% (23)	16% (85)	26% (255)
Mixed frame	17% (35)	32% (46)	14% (16)	6% (32)	13% (129)
Strategic game frame	22% (45)	31% (44)	63% (74)	59% (306)	48% (469)
Neither	11% (22)	3% (4)	3% (4)	19% (99)	13% (129)
Total	100% (201)	100% (142)	100% (117)	100% (522)	100% (982)

Note. Values are shares of articles (frequencies in parentheses).

a strategic game frame as the dominant frame, whereas only 20% used an issue frame. Conversely, among the articles focusing on coverage of positive campaigning, only 22% used a strategic game frame, whereas 49% used an issue frame. This relationship was moderately strong and highly significant (Kendall's tau-b $= 0.31$, $p < .001$), and the hypothesis is therefore not rejected. It is important to note that this conclusion does not mean that articles with the strategic game frame were mostly about negative campaigning: Among the articles with a strategic game frame, 65% contained neither coverage of positive nor negative campaign messages from politicians. In contrast, coverage of positive or negative campaigning was only absent in 33% of the articles with an issue frame, and 25% of articles with a mixed frame, and this relationship was also highly significant (Kendall's tau-b $= 0.33$, $p < .001$). In other words, there is an asymmetric empirical relationship between coverage of negative campaigning and the use of the strategic game frame: Coverage of negative campaigning is characterized by the frequent use of the strategic game frame, but articles with the strategic game frame are not characterized by being primarily about negative campaigning. Rather, these articles are mostly characterized by not containing any coverage of positive or negative campaign messages from the politicians. Hence, articles with a strategic game frame typically tell the reader very little about the policies, positions, promises, and attacks of the politicians and political parties.

The result that media coverage of negative campaigning tends to use the strategic game frame to a greater extent than news coverage of positive campaigning was not only highly significant but also highly robust: The relationship is found both in media coverage of the 2007 election campaign (Kendall's tau-b $= 0.36$, $p < .001$) and the 2011 election campaign (Kendall's tau-b $= 0.23$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the relationship is not driven by a single type of newspaper but is found in both tabloids (tau-b $= 0.30$, $p = .002$) and morning dailies (tau-b $= 0.34$, $p < .001$). The relationship was not significant in news articles from free dailies (tau-b $= 0.142$, $p = .24$), but as this analysis was based on just 59 articles, it is premature to conclude that the relationship between negative campaigning and the strategic game frame is inherently different in this type of newspaper.

Finally, the relationship between coverage of negative campaigning and use of the strategic game frame was also found when using specific indicators of the strategic game frame, rather than the dominant frame. As shown in Table 2, 80% of the articles with a focus on negative campaigning contained one or more indicators of the strategic game frame, whereas this was only the case for 60% of the articles focusing on positive campaigning (Kendall's tau-c $= 0.18$, $p < .001$). Conversely, issue frame indicators were found in 85% of the articles focusing on positive campaigning but found

TABLE 2
Focus and Presence of Frame Indicators

	Focus		
	Positive[a]	Mixed[b]	Negative[c]
Issue frame indicators (one or more)	85% (170)	85% (121)	68% (79)
Substance	41% (82)	42% (59)	22% (26)
Positions	83% (167)	82% (116)	62% (72)
Implications	31% (63)	30% (43)	15% (17)
Previous result	30% (61)	27% (38)	15% (17)
Strategic game frame indicators (one or more)	60% (120)	71% (101)	80% (94)
Winning or losing	15% (31)	11% (15)	19% (22)
Political consequences	39% (79)	42% (59)	52% (61)
Strategy	26% (53)	46% (66)	60% (70)
Polls	19% (39)	21% (30)	24% (28)

Note. Values are shares of articles with indicator (frequencies in parentheses).
[a]$n = 201$.
[b]$n = 142$.
[c]$n = 117$.

only in 68% of the articles focusing on negative campaigning (Kendall's tau-c $= 0.13$, $p = .003$).

Even taken individually, the four indicators of the issue frame and the four indicators of the strategic game frame reveal the expected associations with the focuses of the articles. The results for these individual indicators should be treated with caution, as the number of observations in some subgroups is relatively small and some of the indicators had relatively low intercoder reliability when measured independently (see the appendix).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The empirical results emerging from this study are clear: News coverage of negative campaigning apply the strategic game frame to a significantly larger degree than articles on positive campaigning. Does this moderately strong empirical association mean that the conceptual distinction between coverage of negative campaigning and use of the strategic game frame is unnecessary? Clearly not. First, although negative campaigning is often covered with a strategic game frame, the strategic game frame is not primarily characterized by being about negative campaigning. Rather, the strategic game frame is more often characterized by including neither positive nor negative campaign messages from political actors. Second, even if

we disregard the coverage lacking any negative or positive campaign messages, the association between the coverage of negative campaigning and the use of the strategic game frame is far from perfect. There is still a significant share of articles that cover positive campaigning with a strategic game frame and, conversely, articles that cover negative campaigning with an issue frame.

These results are of course based on a particular empirical context, namely media coverage of the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary election campaigns in Denmark. Given the significance and marked robustness of the findings, it seems very reasonable to expect this to be a general relationship, but future studies in other political systems and media systems could tell us more about the extent to which the results generalizes beyond the investigated context. The United States might be a pertinent case choice, arguably being somewhat extreme both when it comes the high level of negative campaigning within the political system and when it comes to the high level of commercialism, and accompanying strategic framing, within the media system. Such future studies may also want to code both for dominant frame and for specific frame indicators, similar to the approach taken in this study. It is, however, worth noting that, in this study, the intercoder reliability of the dominant frame was notably higher than reliability of the indicators of both the strategic game frame and the issue frame. These results thereby run counter to the general notion that coding for variables on a present–absent basis usually results in a higher intercoder reliability (Aalberg et al., 2012, p. 173). Reliability is not the only relevant criteria when choosing a coding approach in studies of the strategic game frame (see, e.g., Pedersen, 2013, pp. 34–37), but it is nevertheless a key criterion, and the results of this study may therefore speak in favor of using the dominant frame approach.

Future studies may also further examine the causal mechanisms behind this relationship. This study has sketched a theoretical explanation based on assumptions about consumer demand and norms of journalistic independence, but although this explanation is compatible with the empirical results, it obviously does not rule out the possibility that the association might also be the result of several other causal mechanisms. Qualitative studies, for example, based on interviews with reporters and editors, might shed some light on causal mechanisms; when presented with the results of this analysis, an anonymous government press officer suggested, for example, that the use of ''exclusives'' might also play a role. During election campaigns, an effective way for high ranking politicians to present their policy positions is to grant an exclusive interview to a media outlet. There seems to be a general acceptance among journalists that to obtain such exclusives, the interview must primarily focus on policy issues, not strategy, and these

interviews therefore naturally become coverage of positive campaigning with an issue frame.[5]

Although the exact causal mechanisms might be difficult to tease out, the association between coverage of negative campaigning and use of the strategic game frame is, as this study have shown, rather simple to test empirically. Furthermore, these results have significant implications for studies on campaign and media effects: For example, if voters become politically cynical during an election campaign with a high level of negative campaigning, this may simply be caused by mere exposure to negative campaigning, as suggested by the literature on negative campaigning (Lau et al., 2007). However, the results of this study may suggest that campaigns with high levels of negative campaigning and media coverage of negative campaigning may also involve a high prevalence of the strategic game frame, and this media frame may also be at least partially responsible for any increases in political cynicism (Aalberg et al., 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). It might even be that the combination of coverage of negative campaigning and strategic framing is particularly influential on civic attitudes, and to disentangle the effects of political campaigning and media framing, future effect studies might want to incorporate measures of both.

Furthermore, the results of this study may also have practical implications for the campaigning politicians. In 1964, President Johnson's press secretary, Bill Moyers, reported contentedly on the effectiveness of the "Daisy" attack ad: "While we paid for the ad only once on NBC last night, ABC and CBS both ran it on their news shows Friday. So we got it shown on all three networks for the price of one" (Jamieson, 1992, p. 137). Half a century later, going negative is still considered a highly effective way of attracting the attention of the media (Geer, 2010). However, politicians and political consultants might want to consider whether this media attention to negative campaigning comes at a price, especially in the print media where coverage does not naturally entail a repetition of the politician's message. Although we still have relatively limited knowledge on how media framing affects the impact of persuasive appeals from political actors, the experiments conducted by Lee, McLeod, and Shah (2008) clearly demonstrate that strategically framed media messages suppresses the importance of partisanship as a heuristics cue among news consumers. Hence, using negative campaigning may get politicians covered in the media, but if this coverage is through the strategic game frame, in which the politician is seen not as representative of a certain policy position but rather as a self-interested player in a game

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[5]Source: author's interview with anonymous government press officer.

for power and popularity, the electoral rewards of this media coverage might be limited.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1
Descriptive Results

Variable	Prevalence in articles	Krippendorff's α
Dominant frame		0.89
Issue frame	26%	
Mixed frame	13%	
Strategic game frame	48%	
Neither	13%	0.67
Indicator of strategic game frame (1–4)	70%	0.72
1: Winning or losing	18%	0.75
2: Political consequences	43%	0.61
3: Strategy	44%	0.65
4: Polls	28%	0.89
5: Metaphors	29%	0.41
Indicator of issue frame (6–9)	62%	0.70
6: Substance	25%	0.68
7: Positions	55%	0.75
8: Implications	18%	0.72
9: Previous result	17%	0.53
Focus		0.73
Positive	20%	
Mixed	14%	
Negative	12%	
Neither	53%	0.70