

Negativity in The Belgian Parliament (2010-2020)

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Methodology

- We sampled transcripts of the question hour sessions in the Belgian Parliament (De Kamer) each month from January 2010 to December 2020. This resulted in 103 transcripts (30.5% of all question time sessions).
- Each uninterrupted speech contribution was analysed, indicating whether or not the contribution contained negativity.
- Negativity is operationalised as any criticism towards political actors (e.g., an individual politician or a party).
- The analysis was performed by trained coders.
- The same analysis was done for the national parliaments in the UK and Croatia.

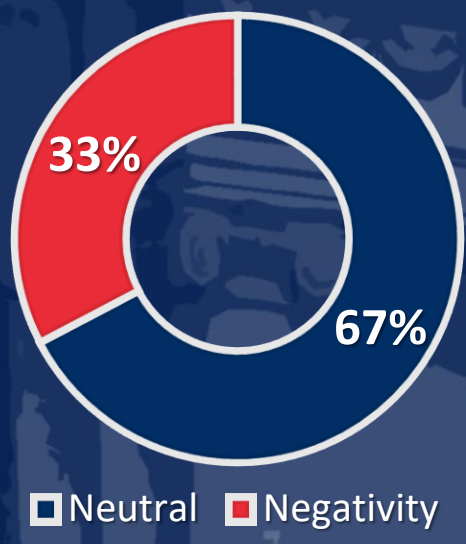
- Politicians predominantly criticise policy positions, but there is also frequent criticism of the person (mostly integrity). Incivil language is present in 1/4 of the cases. Both criticisms of the person and incivility are used more frequently closer to the election.
- Negativity is used dominantly by the opposition parties, especially by the radical (e.g. VB, PVDA-PTB) and niche parties (e.g. Groen). Majority and mainstream parties are less negative (e.g. CD&V, Open-Vld, MR).
- When the opposition uses negativity, it is usually directed at the majority. However, when the majority uses negativity, it can be directed at both the opposition and their own majority parties/coalition partners. The majority is very susceptible to internal attacks.
- The Wilmes II government used the most negativity of all the governments studied and this was during the first months of the corona pandemic. The Michel I government (with N-VA) was the most negative in regular (non-corona) times. During the Di Rupo government, the opposition was the most negative (N-VA, Ecolo, Groen, VB, FDF/DéFI, Lijst Dedecker).
- More detailed results will be presented in upcoming scientific publications.

Results

- Negativity is regularly used during the question hour sessions in the Belgian Parliament. Usually, about 30% of speech contributions contain some form of negativity. However, there is a significant increase in negativity as an election approaches.

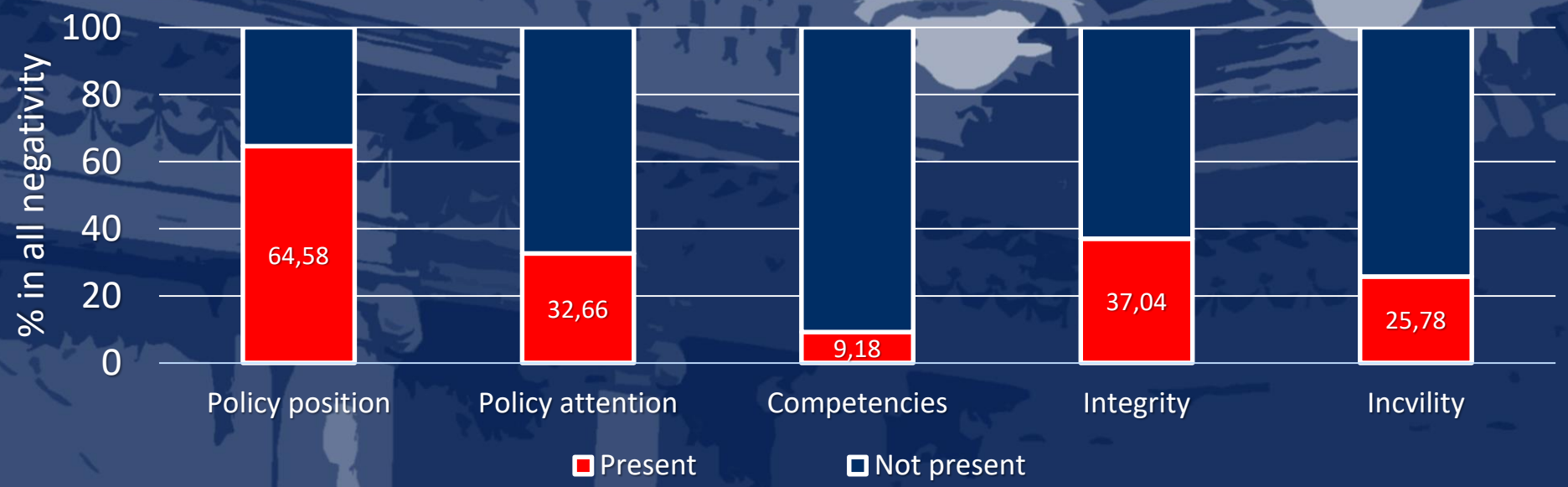
Total

- How much of the total number of speech contributions contained negativity?



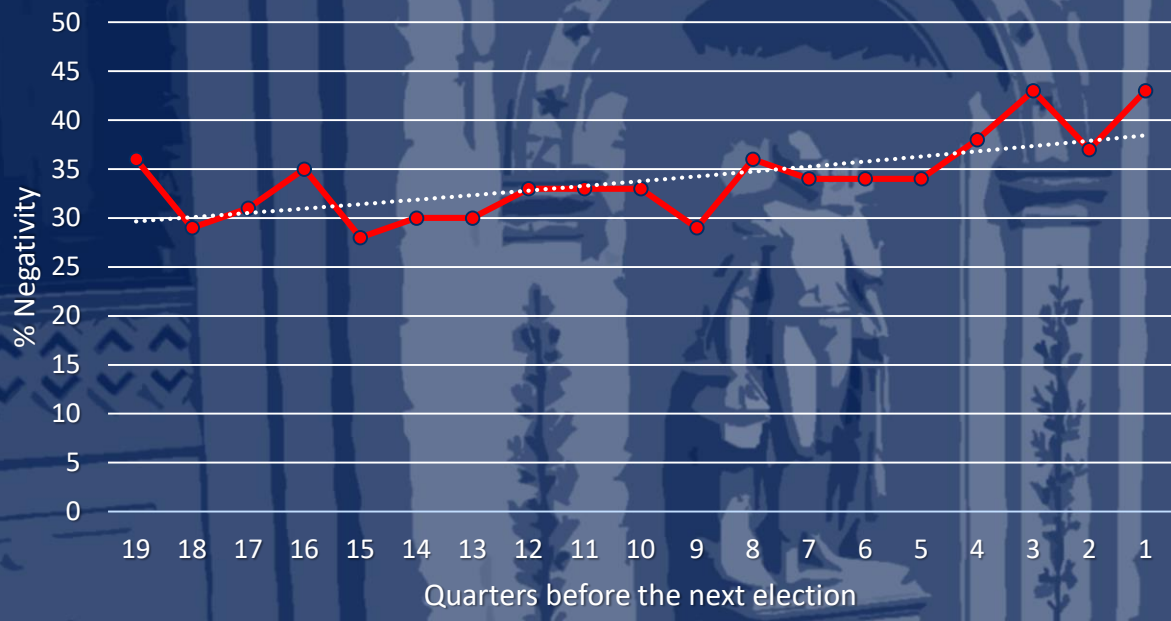
Content

- What is particularly criticised in negative interventions? Note: Negative interventions can have more than one category.

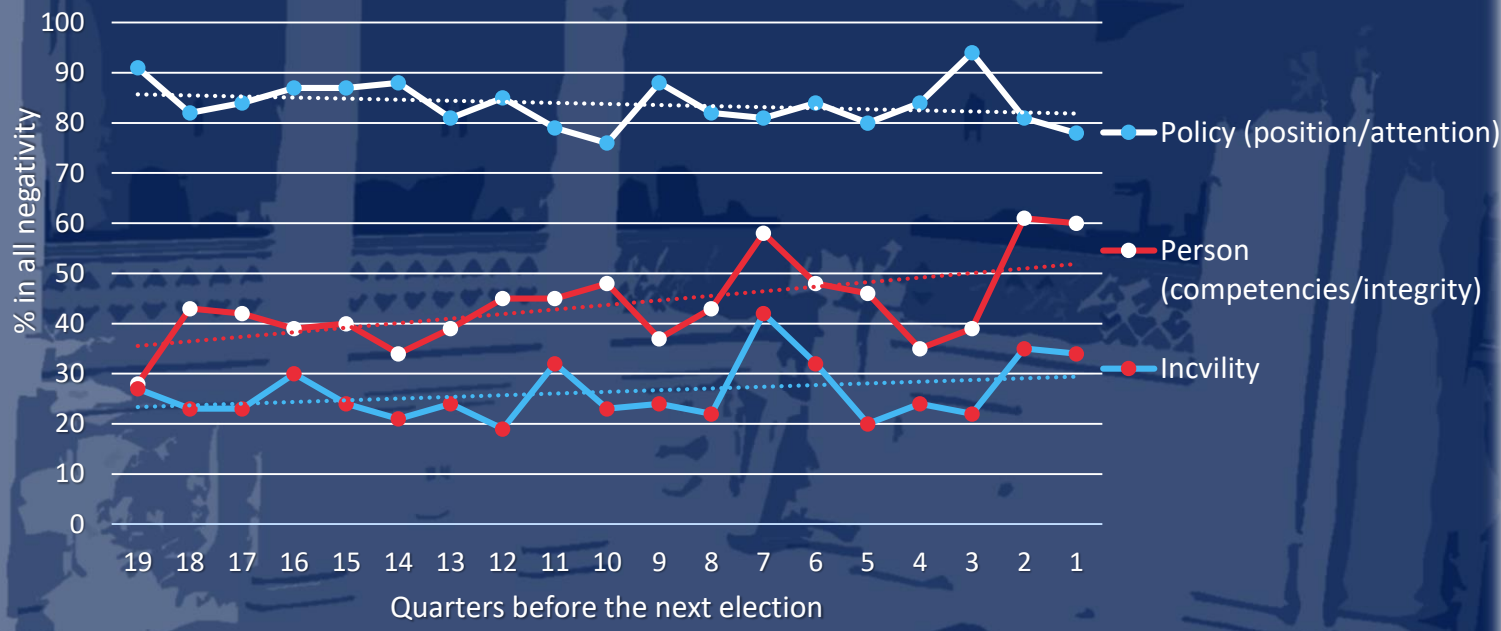


Elections

- If we plot negativity through the electoral cycle, do we see an increase (left figure)?

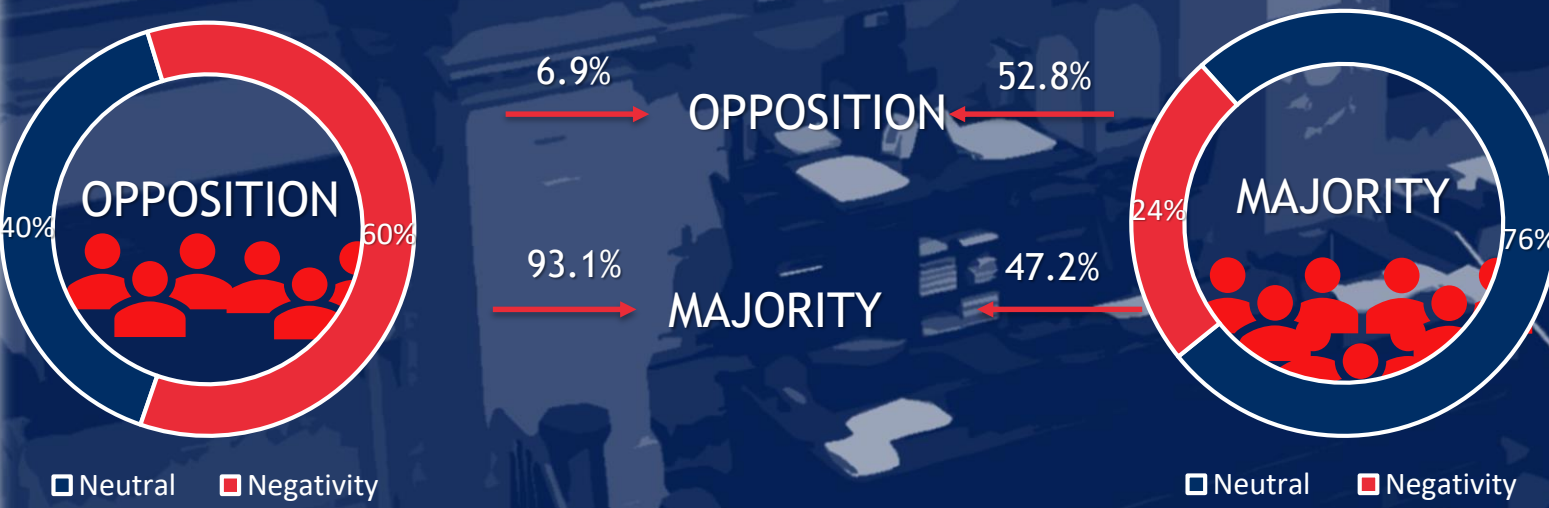


- What is the content of negativity during the election cycle (right figure)?



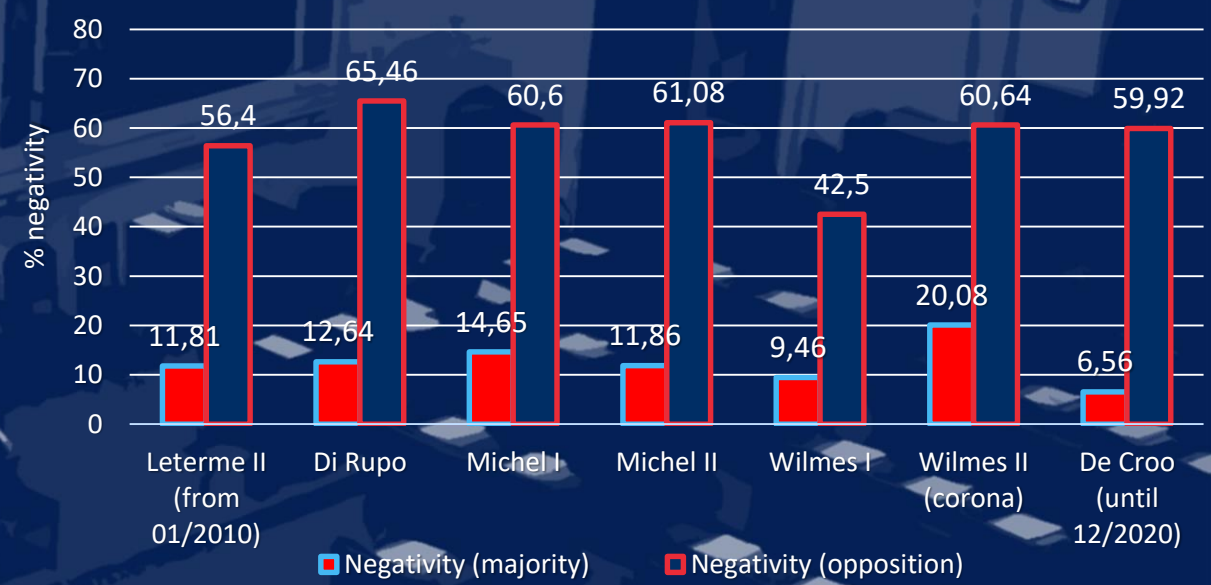
Who attacks whom?

- How much negativity do the opposition and the majority use (circles)? And when they used negativity, to what extent do they attack the opposition or the government (arrows)?



Periods

- How much negativity did the opposition and the majority use during different periods?



Parties

- How much negativity do various parties use?

