
Explicit and Implicit Effects of Attacking the Electorate of the Opposite Party

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Inspired by an incident that happened some years ago during the Italian elections, the current research investigated the effects of a specific case of negative campaigning: attacks against the electorate of the opposite party. Participants were presented with an alleged candidate of the opposing party and several statements that he ostensibly said during his last campaign. In one condition, the candidate promoted his own political agenda. In the other two conditions, the candidate attacked either his opposing candidate or the electorate supporting his opponent. Results showed that an attack against the electorate had opposite effects on implicit versus explicit political identification, but only when pre-existing political attitudes were weak. Specifically, an attack against the electorate increased explicit identification, but decreased implicit identification, among participants with weak implicit attitudes toward their own political party. The results highlight the importance of distinguishing between different types of negative campaigns and the significance of implicit measures in political psychology.

Politicians have now an increasing number of tools in order to address the electorate, thanks to the advances in modern technologies and mass media. At the same time, these media require a brief, incisive, and sensationalistic communication style. Negative campaigning (e.g., Budesheim, Houston & DePaola, 1996; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991; Kamber, 1997; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman & Babbitt, 1999; Mark, 2006) perfectly meets these criteria and, indeed, although the overall number of negative political messages does not seem to have increased over time, the media coverage of them has substantially increased (e.g., Lau & Rovner, 2007). An accumulating body of research has analyzed the effects of negative

campaigning on evaluations of the involved politicians (e.g., Budesheim et al., 1996; Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Carraro, Gawronski & Castelli, 2010; Haddock & Zanna, 1997; Hill, 1989; Hitchon & Chang, 1995; Kaid, 1997; Matthews & Dietz-Uhler, 1998; Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Roesse & Sande, 1993; Wadsworth, Patterson, Kaid, Cullers, Malcomb & Lamirand, 1987) and voter turnout during elections (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar & Simon, 1999; An-

solabehere, Iyengar, Simon & Valentino, 1994; Goldstein & Freedman 2002; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Lau & Pomper, 2001; Martin, 2004). However, there is still no consensus about the likely consequences of negative campaigning (Lau et al., 1999; 2007). Indeed, whereas some studies have shown the intended positive outcomes, others have shown unintended negative outcomes.

To reconcile this inconsistency, some authors have argued that different types of negative remarks may have unique consequences (e.g., Budenheim et al., 1996; Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Carraro et al., 2010; Lau et al., 2001). The main differences are assumed to be related to the specific content of the attack, namely whether the campaign involves an attack against the opponent's political program or an attack against the opponent's personality (Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Carraro et al., 2010). In the current study, we investigated the effects of another type of negative remark: attacks against the opposite electorate. What happens if voters are directly criticized because of their political affiliation? This question was inspired by a real incident that happened during the 2006 Italian campaign. A few days before the election day, the right-wing candidate and former prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi attacked the electorate of the opposing coalition (i.e., left-wing voters), stating that he could not believe that there might be so many stupid people in Italy who in the end decide to vote against their personal interests by voting for the left-wing coalition. This statement led several left-wing voters to show their outrage by publicly displaying their pride for their political affiliation through t-shirts or pins with the term *orgoglioni*. The term *orgoglioni* is a neologism that was created by merging the initial letters of the Italian word *orgoglio* (i.e., pride) and the final letters of the negative word used by Berlusconi. This example illustrates that being the target of a negative remark from an outgroup member might have a direct impact on another essential dimension that has not yet been studied in this domain: political identification.

1. Social Identity and Political Identification

All people belong to different social groups and membership to these groups can be essential for one's identity, given that group membership provides important information about the self. Indeed, the self is tightly connected with group membership. Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as «that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership» (Tajfel, 1981: 63). Therefore, a crucial part of people's identity is rooted in their affiliation with one or more social groups.

In order to achieve and preserve a positive social identity, it is crucial to belong to positively evaluated groups. However, this goal is sometimes difficult to achieve, because factual information (e.g., losing the election) may threaten the image of one's ingroup. For this reason, individuals often adopt coping strategies to defend

their social identities and to compensate for the disadvantaged position of the group (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Marques, Yzerbyt & Leyens, 1988; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink & Mielke, 1999). One such strategy is to counteract the threat by emphasizing positive characteristics of the ingroup. That is, group members may enhance their focus on those positive aspects, emphasize them during interpersonal communications, and ultimately increase their distance from the outgroup. In line with this idea, Livingston (2002) has shown that perceived negativity from the outgroup increased explicit ingroup bias. Specifically, Black participants reported to like their racial ingroup more the more negativity they perceived in the White outgroup (i.e., *extropunitive hypothesis*; Allport, 1954). However, Livingston (2002) also found a very different pattern of results using indirect attitude measures. Indeed, implicit evaluations of the ingroup tended to be more negative the more negativity Black participants perceived in the White outgroup (i.e., *intropunitive hypothesis*; Allport, 1954). In other words, a threat against the ingroup increased explicit ingroup favoritism but decreased implicit ingroup favoritism.

The same rationale can be extended to the political domain, and, more specifically, to attacks against the electorate. Being the target of a negative remark from the leader of an outgroup poses a threat. Drawing on Livingston's (2002) results, we argued that exposure to a negative remark about one's political affiliation might lead voters to adopt a coping strategy to deal with the external threat (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Doosje, Spears & Ellemers, 2002; Mummendey et al., 1999). In this specific situation, we expected an increase in the explicit identification with the political ingroup. That is, participants might reject the negativity from the outgroup and report strengthened bonds with the ingroup in order to defend their social identities. This pattern would account for the previously described example, in which Berlusconi's attack toward the left-wing electorate gave rise to an enhanced expression of pride about their political affiliation (i.e., the *«orgoglioni»* phenomenon). However, paralleling the findings by Livingston (2002), we predicted the opposite pattern on a measure of implicit identification. That is, a threat against one's political ingroup should decrease (rather than increase) identification at the implicit level.

The expected effects on implicit identification can be explained on the basis of the unified theory of implicit social cognition proposed by Greenwald and colleagues (Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek & Mellot, 2002). According to the theory, individuals hold associative networks that connect the self to relevant ingroups (i.e., implicit identity) and these links remain strong as long as there is a balanced relation between the self and the ingroup. When the valence associated with the ingroup does not correspond to the typical positivity associated with the self (e.g., Gawronski, Bodenhausen & Becker, 2007; Greenwald & Farnham, 2000; Koole, Dijksterhuis & Van Knippenberg, 2001), the associative strength of the self-ingroup connection is assumed to decrease in order to maintain a balanced associative network (Greenwald et al., 2002). Hence, when the implicit positivity of the ingroup is threatened, the link between self and ingroup (i.e., implicit identifica-

tion) should be weakened. Such a pattern can be expected in the case of an attack against the electorate: to the extent that the representation of the ingroup becomes negative (or less positive) as a result of the negative depiction of the ingroup, the self-representation should be disassociated from the ingroup.

An important question in this context is whether such a disassociation from the ingroup occurs for all group members to the same degree. As far as implicit identification is concerned, it could be argued that ingroup disassociation is more pronounced for group members who do not hold strong and well-established associative networks in relation to their group. When people have strong positive attitudes toward their ingroup, additional information that associates the ingroup to negative features may have limited effects. For these people, the ingroup may be strongly associated with both the self and positive features, and thus an attack toward the group should be less likely to affect these strong pre-existing links. If, however, people's positive attitudes toward their ingroup are not particularly strong, threats against the ingroup should be more likely to produce a disassociation from the ingroup. The prediction regarding explicit political identification, however, might be rather different and more active coping strategies could be expected especially in people with weak pre-existing political attitudes. Indeed, these individuals are more likely to engage into motivated reasoning in order to defend and justify their support for the attacked group. This idea is derived from symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982) according to which when a specific identity is threatened, individuals feel motivated to engage in activities that substantiate this specific definition of themselves, for instance by showing symbols associated to the desired social identity. Notably, this coping strategy appears to be even stronger when a specific identity is not well-built, and thus in people with an «incomplete» identity. For instance, Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1981) showed that among individuals who self-defined as either musicians or scientists, those with a more limited education in the self-relevant domain were later more willing to teach to a high number of other individuals. In other words, because their identification with the domain was still limited, they were more inclined to look for opportunities of affirming their identity as either musicians or scientists. More in general, when an identity is threatened or questioned people perform various forms of behaviors that are aimed at restoring and substantiate their identity of themselves, and this compensation effect is especially strong for people whose identity is not yet very well-structured and therefore are relatively less immune from external threats.

To summarize, we expected that a threat toward our own political identity would determine an increase of explicit political identification but at the same time a decrease of implicit political identification, especially in people with weak pre-existing political attitudes.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Design

Ninety-four participants (63 female) were recruited at the University of Padova and they took part in the experiment on a voluntary basis. Participants were between 18 and 36 years old ($M = 20.60$, $SD = 4.89$). The experiment included three between-subjects conditions (*positive campaign* vs. *attack against the opposing candidate* vs. *attack against the opposing electorate*) and pre-existing implicit attitudes as an individual difference variable.

2.2. Materials

In the current experiment, for both the IAT and the GNAT (described later on) we used twelve logos of political parties, half belonging to left-wing parties (i.e., Comunisti Italiani, Democratici di Sinistra, La Margherita, La Rosa nel Pugno, L'Ulivo, L'Unione), and half to right-wing parties (i.e., Alleanza Nazionale, Alternativa Sociale, Forza Italia, La Casa delle Libertà, Lega Nord, UDC). In addition, we created thirty statements for the manipulation of campaign type, ten for each condition. In the *positive campaign* condition, the ostensible candidate promoted his political agenda without making any reference to the opposing candidate or to the opposite coalition (e.g., «We fight every day for democracy and for a free society»). In the other two conditions, the candidate adopted a mixed campaign strategy (i.e., 5 positive and 5 negative remarks). In the *attack against the opposing candidate* condition, the negative remarks were about an alleged candidate of the coalition supported by the participant (e.g., «The right-wing/left-wing candidate is unsuccessful»). Finally, in the *attack against the opposing electorate* condition, the remarks were about the electorate of the opposite coalition, and therefore against the participants themselves (e.g., «Right-wing/left-wing voters are unsuccessful»). The remarks in the two negative conditions were equivalent, the only difference being the target of the attack (i.e., opposing candidate vs. opposing electorate).

2.3 Measures

Political affiliation. In order to assess political explicit affiliation, participants were presented with two continua (17 cm) and asked to indicate how far/close they felt toward the right-wing and left-wing coalitions. Then, the difference between participants' responses to the two continua concerning their political affiliation was calculated. Specifically, we subtracted the responses provided along the continuum for the right-wing coalition from the responses provided along the continuum for the

left-wing coalition. Hence, positive values indicate that participants felt closer to the left-wing coalition as compared to the right-wing coalition. The results showed that 53 participants felt closer to the left-wing coalition ($M = 10.37$, $SD = 3.97$) whereas 41 felt closer to the right-wing coalition ($M = -11.24$, $SD = 5.12$).

Pre-existing implicit political attitudes. An Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) was designed in order to measure participants' implicit evaluations of the two coalitions, that is their pre-existing political attitudes. This task has been widely used to assess political attitudes (e.g., Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister & Amadori, 2008; Galdi, Arcuri & Gawronski, 2008) and it enabled us to measure the relative strength of participants' evaluative associations with regard to the two coalitions. Over the course of the IAT, participants were presented with four different types of stimuli on a computer screen: 6 logos of parties belonging to the right-wing coalition at that time, 6 logos of parties belonging to the left-wing coalition at that time, 6 positive words (pleasure, happiness, heaven, wonderful, joy, love), and 6 negative words (pain, horrible, terrific, disaster, ugly, death). Participants went through a sequence of 5 blocks (3 learning blocks and 2 critical blocks) during which they had to classify the logos as referring to the right-wing or left-wing coalition and the words as either positive or negative. More specifically, in the first block, participants were asked to categorize positive and negative words by pressing one of two response keys (20 trials). The second block involved the categorization of right-wing and left-wing logos using the same response keys (20 trials). The third block combined the categorization tasks of the first two blocks involving alternating categorizations of words and logos (40 trials). The fourth block again involved a categorization of left-wing and right-wing logos, albeit with a key assignment that was opposite to the one in the second block (20 trials). Finally, the fifth block again combined the two categorization tasks using the key assignments of the first and the fourth block (40 trials). The key assignments for the categorization of the logos was counterbalanced across participants. Thus, half of the participants had to respond with the same key to left-wing (right-wing) logos and positive (negative) words in the third block and with the same key to right-wing (left-wing) logos and positive (negative) words in the fifth block. The remaining half had to respond with the same key to right-wing (left-wing) logos and positive (negative) words in the third block and with the same key to left-wing (right-wing) logos and positive (negative) words in the fifth block. The intertrial interval was 150 ms.

Because our primary goal was to analyze variations in participants' identification with their political ingroup as a function of prior implicit attitudes and the type of political message by an opposing politician, we used the D-algorithm by Greenwald and colleagues (Greenwald, Nosek & Banaji, 2003) to calculate an IAT score for each participant, reflecting their pre-existing attitudes. IAT scores were calculated such that higher scores indicated more positive evaluations of the left-wing coalition as compared to the right-wing coalition ($M = -.003$, $SD = .96$, from -1.89 to 2.29). The correlation between political affiliation (relative responses along

the two initial continua) and implicit party attitudes was positive and statistically significant, $r(94) = .625, p < .001$ (see Nosek et al., 2007). Finally, because our hypotheses are related to the *strength* of pre-existing attitudes (rather than their polarity), we calculated absolute values of the IAT scores.

Explicit political identification (pre and post manipulation). Participants were asked to complete an explicit political identification measure including 8 items, before the experimental manipulation, and 8 items, after the manipulation, that tapped the subjective importance of being a member of the preferred political group (e.g., «I am proud to be a left-wing/right-wing voter»; «My political affiliation is very important to me»). For each item participants were asked to rate their agreement along 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 7 (*I strongly agree*). Participants' responses on the eight items used to assess explicit political identification after the experimental manipulation were averaged in a single index ($\alpha = .84$). The same was done for participants' responses on this measure before the manipulation ($\alpha = .88$).

Implicit political identification post manipulation. To assess implicit political identification, we used a modified version of the Go/No-go Association Task (GNAT; Nosek & Banaji, 2001). This task is conceptually similar to the IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998) in that it assesses automatic associations between concepts. In our study, we measured associations between the self and the two Italian political coalitions. Over the course of the task, participants were presented with 4 different types of stimuli on the computer screen: the 6 left-wing and 6 right-wing logos that have been used in the IAT, 6 self-relevant words (i.e., I, My, Me, Self, Myself, Mine) and 6 other-relevant words (i.e., They, Them, Their, He, It, His). The GNAT consisted of 8 blocks: 4 practice and 4 critical blocks. Each participant first went through the four practice blocks to get acquainted with the task (24 trials each). In two of these blocks participants had to discriminate between the logos of the two coalitions. In the other two blocks, participants had to discriminate between self-relevant words and other-relevant words. Next, the four critical blocks were introduced. In each block, participants were presented with all four types of stimuli, and their task was to press a key on the computer keyboard every time a right-wing (or left-wing) logo or a self-relevant word (or other-relevant) appeared (60 trials each). No response was required to the respective other stimuli. The four critical blocks were administered in a randomized order and there was no response deadline¹. The intertrial interval was 150 ms. When the response was correct a green circle appeared on the screen for 250 ms; when the response was incorrect a red X appeared on the screen for 450 ms. Moreover, the stimuli for which no response was required disappeared automatically from the computer screen after 1,000 ms.

¹ The standard GNAT typically includes a response deadline and data analyses are conducted on the basis of errors rates using signal detection analysis. Our modified version of the GNAT is based on the latency of responses.

2.4. Procedure

The experiment was run individually in a laboratory setting and it was divided into two phases: pre-manipulation and post-manipulation. In the pre-manipulation phase, participants were asked to indicate their affiliation with the two major Italian coalitions along the two continua (17 cm). The order of the two continua was counterbalanced. This measure was included to identify participants' political affiliation for the selection of the appropriate materials for the subsequent manipulation (i.e., all participants were presented with a political message of an alleged politician of the outgroup coalition). While the experimenter scored participants' responses for the selection of the appropriate materials, participants completed an Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998) designed to measure their pre-existing implicit political attitudes. After the IAT, participants were asked to complete an explicit political identification measure including 8 items. Afterwards, they were seated in front of a computer screen, where they were introduced to a political candidate. For all participants, the politician belonged to the opposite coalition (determined by participants' responses on the initial affiliation measure). Participants were presented with personal information about the political candidate (e.g., the name, place of birth, hobbies, family status). In addition, it was noted that the politician had been a candidate during the last European Election. Participants were then presented with ten statements that the candidate had ostensibly said during his last political campaign. Statements were presented individually, one after the other. The content of the sentences was manipulated between participants creating three experimental conditions: *positive campaign* vs. *attack against the opposing candidate* vs. *attack against the opposing electorate*.

After this presentation, we assessed participants' implicit and explicit political identification. To assess implicit political identification, we used a modified version of the Go/No-go Association Task (GNAT; Nosek & Banaji, 2001) as described in the measures section. Finally, participants were asked to complete the measure of explicit political identification to determine the strength of their explicit connection with their ingroup after the experimental manipulation. Finally, participants were thanked and fully debriefed.

3. Results

3.1. Implicit Identification

For each participant we obtained four indices derived from the mean latency of correct answers in the four critical blocks of the GNAT. The four variables were: (1) left-wing logos + self-relevant words, (2) left-wing logos + others-relevant words, (3) right-wing logos + self-relevant words, (4) right-wing logos + others-

relevant words. In our sample, the left-wing coalition represented the ingroup for some participants, but the outgroup for other participants. Because our hypotheses are related to ingroup-outgroup relations (not political orientations), we calculated a single index in which higher values indicated a stronger association with the ingroup coalition over the outgroup coalition. This index was submitted to an ANCOVA using message type (positive, attack against the opposing candidate, attack against the opposing electorate) as independent variable and attitude strength (standardized value of the absolute IAT score) as a covariate. The interaction of the two variables was included in the model. The analysis revealed a main effect of message type, $F(2, 93) = 5.01, p = .009, \eta_{2p} = .102$, indicating that an attack against the opposing electorate led to lower levels of implicit ingroup identification ($M = 95.88, SD = 37.85$) as compared to a positive message ($M = 164.58, SD = 39.79$) and an attack against the opposing candidate ($M = 204.37, SD = 38.38$). More interestingly, this main effect was qualified by a significant two-way interaction, $F(2, 93) = 4.54, p = .01, \eta_{2p} = .094$. To further specify the obtained interaction pattern, we also conducted two separate ANOVAs for participants with implicit political attitude scores below the sample median (weak political attitudes) and above the sample median (strong political attitudes), respectively. As for participants with strong political attitudes, message type did not have a significant effect on implicit identification, $F(2, 48) = 1.66, p = .20, \eta_{2p} = .068$. In contrast, for participants with weak political attitudes, message type did show a significant effect on implicit identification, $F(2, 44) = 6.22, p = .004, \eta_{2p} = .228$ (see figure 1). Post-hoc analysis (Sidak) revealed that implicit identification was significantly lower when participants were exposed to an attack against the electorate ($M = -4.48, SD = 54.50$) than when they were exposed to a positive message ($M = 249.67, SD = 47.20$), $p = .003$. No significant difference emerged between the attack against the electorate condition and the attack against the opposing leader condition ($M = 144.66, SD = 45.79$), $p = .12$, as well as between this last condition and the positive message condition, $p = .31^2$.

² To specify the pattern of this interaction, we also conducted simple slope analyses for two different levels of the absolute IAT score, namely one standard deviation above the mean (strong political attitudes) and one standard deviation below the mean (weak political attitudes). Results showed that message type had a marginally significant effect on implicit identification for participants with strong political attitudes, $F(2, 93) = 2.79, p = .07$, and a statistically significant effect for participants with weak political attitudes, $F(2, 93) = 4.60, p < .01$. Further analysis revealed that an attack against the electorate decreased implicit political identification as compared to the positive campaign condition, but only among participants with weak political attitudes, $\beta = .52, t(88) = 3.03, p = .003$.

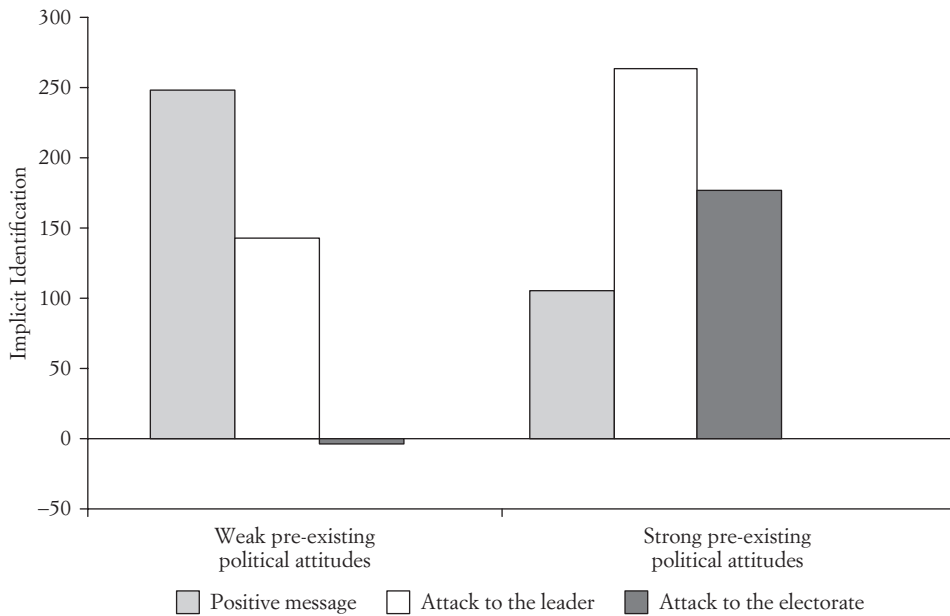


FIG. 1. *Implicit political identification as a function of campaigning strategy and strength of implicit political attitudes. Higher scores indicate a stronger implicit identification with one's own ingroup over the outgroup.*

3.2. Explicit Identification

Explicit political identification after the manipulation was submitted to an ANCOVA using message type (positive, attack to the opposing candidate, attack to the electorate) as an independent variable and attitude strength (standardized value of the absolute IAT score) as a covariate. We also included the interaction of the two variables and explicit political identification before the experimental manipulation to identify residualized changes in the dependent measure. The main effect of explicit political identification before the manipulation was statistically significant, $F(1, 93) = 97.72, p < .001, \eta_{2p} = .529$. There was also a significant main effect of the message type, $F(2, 93) = 4.12, p = .02, \eta_{2p} = .086$. In general, higher levels of explicit political identification were detected in the attack against the electorate condition ($M = 4.92, SD = .17$) as compared to the attack against the opposing candidate condition ($M = 4.47, SD = .17$) and the positive message condition ($M = 4.62, SD = .18$). The expected two-way interaction between message type and attitude strength was marginally significant, $F(2, 88) = 2.64, p = .07, \eta_{2p} = .057$. To further specify the obtained interaction pattern, we again conducted two separate ANOVAs for participants with implicit political attitude scores below the sample median (weak political attitudes) and above the sample

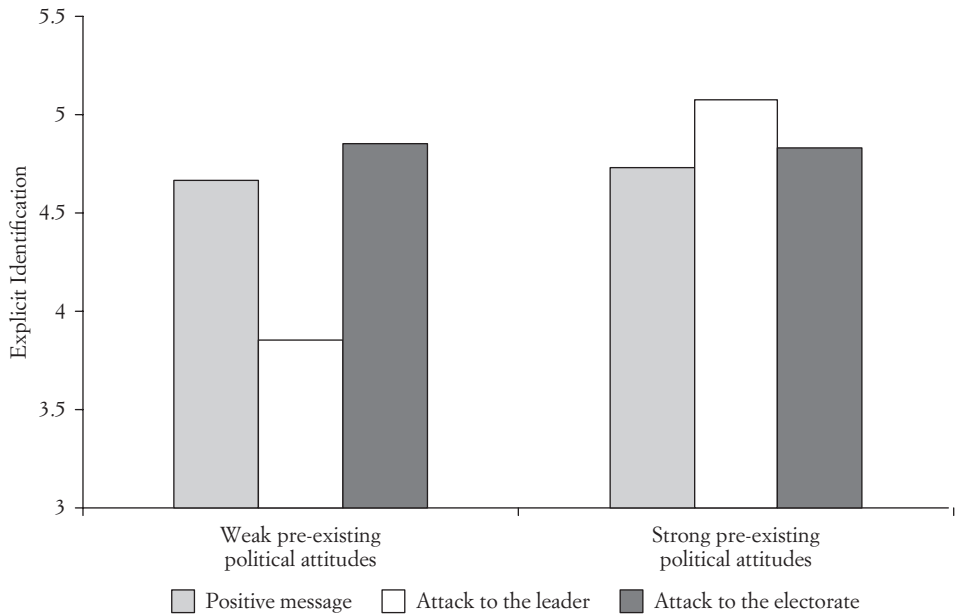


FIG. 2. *Explicit political identification as a function of campaigning strategy and strength of implicit political attitudes. Higher scores indicate a stronger explicit political identification with one's own ingroup over the outgroup.*

median (strong political attitudes), respectively. For participants with strong political attitudes, no effect of message type was observed, $F(2, 48) = .53, p = .59, \eta_{2p} = .023$. A different picture emerged for participants with weak political attitudes, who showed a significant effect of message type on explicit identification, $F(2, 44) = 5.19, p = .01, \eta_{2p} = .202$ (see figure 2). Post-hoc analysis (Sidak) revealed that explicit identification was higher when participants with weak political attitudes were exposed to an attack toward the electorate ($M = 4.86, SD = 1.63$) as compared to an attack against the leader ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.52, p = .008$). No significant difference emerged between the attack against the electorate condition and the positive message condition ($M = 4.66, SD = 1.25, p = .37$) as well as between the positive message condition and the attack against the opposing candidate condition ($p = .22$)³.

³ We conducted also simple slope analyses one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean of the absolute IAT score. For participants with strong political attitudes, no effect of message type was observed, $F(2, 93) < 1.00, p = .87$. A different picture emerged for participants with weak political attitudes, who did show a significant effect of message type, $F(2, 93) = 4.02, p = .02$. Further analyses revealed that an attack against the electorate increased the explicit political identification as compared to an attack to the opposing leader condition, but only among participants with weak political attitudes, $\beta = .33, t(88) = -2.82, p = .006$.

4. Discussion

The main goal of the current research was to examine the effects of a new kind of negative political campaign on a variable that has not yet been considered in the context of political campaigning. Specifically, we investigated the effects of attacking the opposite electorate on implicit and explicit political identification among the targets of the attack. Overall, the results demonstrate that (1) a particular campaign strategy can have discrepant effects on implicit and explicit identification, and (2) the particular effects of attacks against the electorate depend on the strength of previous attitudes.

First, we found that an attack against the opposite political electorate, as compared to the other types of messages here taken into account, increased explicit political identification among the target group, but decreased implicit political identification. Consistent with the *extropunitive hypothesis* (Allport, 1954), and in line with previous results by Livingston (2002), this result suggests that being the target of an attack from an outgroup politician can increase explicit identification with the ingroup. This result helps to understand what happened after Berlusconi's attack against left-wing voters, who emphasized their pride for their political affiliation (i.e., the «orgoglioni» phenomenon). However, although left-wing voters wore t-shirts and pins visibly showing their pride for their political affiliation, the hidden effects of Berlusconi's attack were largely unknown. The current study highlights some of the less apparent consequences that may emerge from such attacks. Consistent with the *intropunitive hypothesis* (Allport, 1954; see also Livingston, 2002), and in line with the assumptions of the unified theory of social cognition (Greenwald et al., 2002), implicit political identification did not show a corresponding increase after an attack, but instead showed a decrease. In addition, because this study represents a first attempt aimed at investigating the likely consequences of political messages on participants' political identification, it is important also to discuss the effects on participants with weak pre-existing implicit political attitudes determined by the other two types of messages here employed. More specifically, as for the explicit political identification, a positive message seems to determine the very same consequences as compared to an attack against the electorate (i.e., high level of identification). In contrast, an attack against the leader is associated to a decreased political identification. As for the implicit political identification, no difference emerged between an attack against the electorate and an attack against the leader: in both cases participants seem to weaken the associations between the self and their political party. On the contrary, a positive message determines an increase of implicit political identification.

The obtained dissociation between implicit and explicit identification further highlights the importance of studying the effects of negative campaigning not only at the explicit level, but also at the implicit level. Current research in political psychology is characterized by a lively interest in the use of indirect measures (Burdein, Lodge &

Taber, 2006; Nosek, Graham & Hawkins, 2010). Recently, the presumed importance of indirect measures has been supported by evidence showing that implicit attitudes may predict the future choices of undecided individuals (Arcuri et al., 2008; Galdi et al., 2008; Roccato & Zogmaister, 2010) by biasing the selection and processing of decision-relevant information (Galdi, Gawronski, Arcuri & Friese, 2012). Similarly, the obtained influence on implicit political identification may produce biases in subsequent information processing (e.g., Hawkins & Nosek, 2012), thereby influencing future voting decisions. Overall, the attacks toward one's political group might thus weaken one's automatic association with the ingroup and plant the seed of doubt, so that further persuasive communications from the outgroup could become more effective. In line with dual-process models (see Strack & Deutsch, 2004), these effects are likely to be especially amplified when cognitive resources are scant, as when people are engaged in the preparation of the dinner while listening to the evening news. In this case, it is more likely that implicit mental representations, as compared to propositional attitudes, take the lead and guide responses as well as the interpretation of the incoming information (Hofmann Gschwendner, Castelli & Schmitt, 2008; Hofmann, Gschwendner, Wiers, Friese & Schmitt, 2008).

However, it is important to note that not all voters may be affected in the same way by attacks against the opposite electorate. In the current study, such attacks had a stronger impact among participants with weak pre-existing implicit attitudes toward their political ingroup, whereas participants with strong attitudes were less affected. Thus, it seems that participants with strong positive attitudes toward their political ingroup are resistant to the effects of this specific type of persuasive attempt. However, political messages are rarely designed to persuade this particular group. Instead, they are targeted for an audience of undecided individuals with relatively weak attitudes. It was exactly this latter group that showed a disassociation from the attacked group in the current study. Thus, attacks toward the electorate seem to produce at least some of the effects that are intended by the sources of such attacks, although it should be stressed that in the present work the attacks toward the electorate were compared only with two other specific forms of political message (i.e., positive and attacks toward the leader). Future studies will have to include also other forms of negative messages as well as a «pure» control condition.

5. Conclusion

Of course, the described scenario is only a small fragment of what happens during an actual political race. The process of making a political decision is complex and multifaceted, involving the combination of several subordinate processes. The current investigation provides some important insights into the likely consequences of negative campaigns. First, our findings support speculations that not all negative messages have the same effects. Second, one and the same campaign can have dif-

ferent effects at the implicit and the explicit level. Finally, not all voters are affected in the same way by the same message. Thus, returning to the event that has inspired the current investigation, one could argue that Berlusconi actually achieved at least some of his goals when he attacked the opposite electorate. His attack probably led some left-wing voters to disassociate from their coalition, even if the «*orgoglioni*» phenomenon suggested the opposite effect. However, such a disassociation probably occurred only for some left-wing voters, namely those with weak positive implicit attitudes toward the left-wing coalition.

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