

Expect barrage of negative ads, says Vanderbilt campaign expert

Voters should welcome an increase in political attack ads on the airwaves as the presidential nominating process moves into overdrive, says Vanderbilt University political scientist John Geer.

"While Hillary Clinton's surprise win in New Hampshire may lessen the push by some of her supporters to criticize Barack Obama's record, the public would be better served if all of the remaining candidates undergo this type of scrutiny," Geer said. This is true for both the Democrats and the Republicans. "Many pundits view negative ads as counterproductive, but nothing could be further from the truth."

Geer said that there are many incentives for candidates in both parties to run negative ads that address legitimate issues. "Attack ads contain more substantive information than positive ads," he said. "Therefore, they generate a dialogue that helps voters understand the respective positions of the candidates."

In addition, attack ads toughen up the eventual nominee for the general election, when the attacks will come faster and harder. "How candidates handle the criticism will provide insight to how they might govern, since those who occupy the Oval Office are the frequent target of harsh attacks," he said.

Whether the public likes it or not, the negativity is coming and that is good news for the political process, Geer said. "Some candidates such as Sen. John McCain may decry negative ads, but we need to hear both sides of all issues," he noted. "Positive ads are especially poor vehicles for accomplishing that worthy goal."

Geer, a Distinguished Professor of Political Science, is the author of *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns* (University of Chicago Press) and co-author of *Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate* (American Journal of Political Science). He can be reached at 615-519-2496 or john.g.geer@vanderbilt.edu.

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