

ELECTORAL  
COMPETITIVENESS AND  
SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES;  
WHO GOES NEGATIVE WHEN  
AND WHY?

BY CONNOR BROWN

# Why I chose to study social media In campaigns?

- ▶ Social media is becoming more common in how we get our news about politics and even from the politicians themselves.

# Why social media?

- ▶ Control
  - ▶ Dealing with media
  - ▶ Message
- ▶ Cost
  - ▶ Free account
  - ▶ Saturation
- ▶ Efficiency
  - ▶ Instant
  - ▶ Low maintenance
  - ▶ Events

# Campaigning Strategy

Pre election

Post election

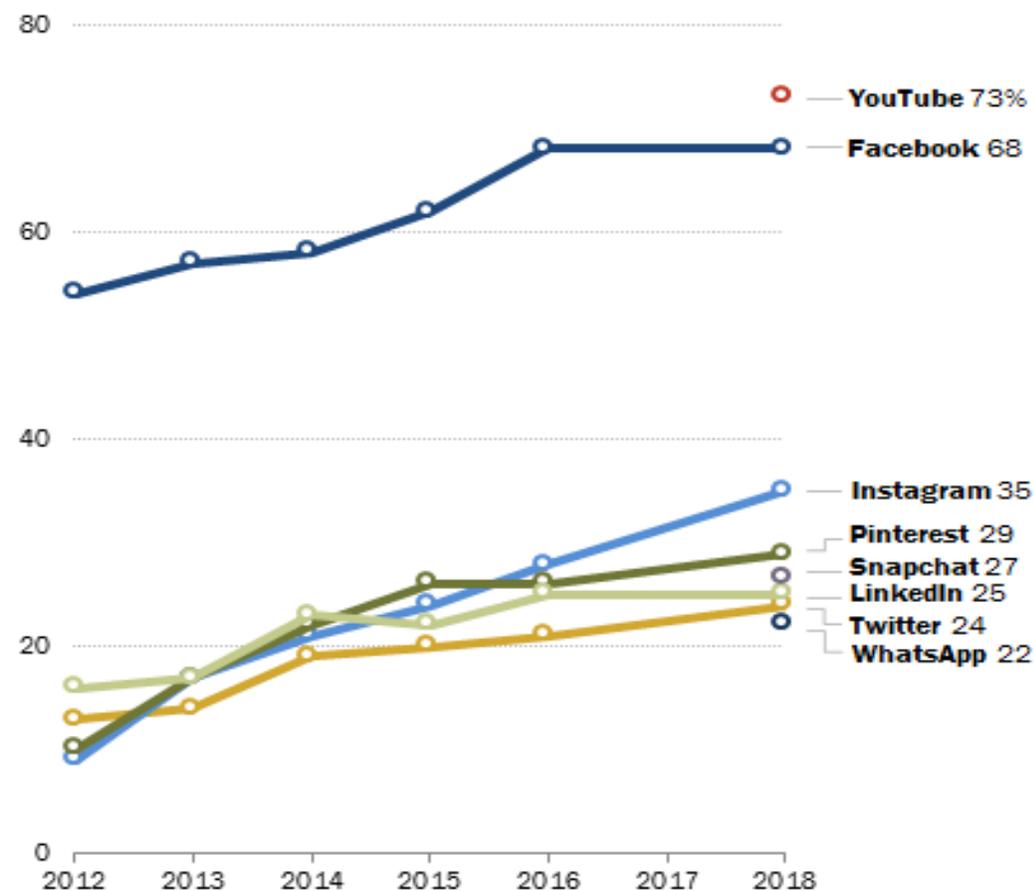


# On the rise

- ▶ 24% use twitter
- ▶ 68% use Facebook
- ▶ 73% use YouTube

## Majority of Americans now use Facebook, YouTube

% of U.S. adults who say they use the following social media sites online or on their cellphone



Note: Pre-2018 telephone poll data is not available for YouTube, Snapchat or WhatsApp.  
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018. Trend data from previous Pew Research Center surveys.

"Social Media Use in 2018"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# Literature review

- ▶ Candidates who trail their opponent will issue more negative posts, while candidates who lead their opponent will issue fewer negative posts
- ▶ More competitive races will experience greater negative posting by both candidates than less competitive races.
- ▶ Those in competitive races and those who trail significantly in less competitive races are more likely to go negative as Election Day approaches. And thoughts in highly competitive races will use social media for personal and policy attacks.

Gainous and Wagner (2014) & Auter and Fine (2016)

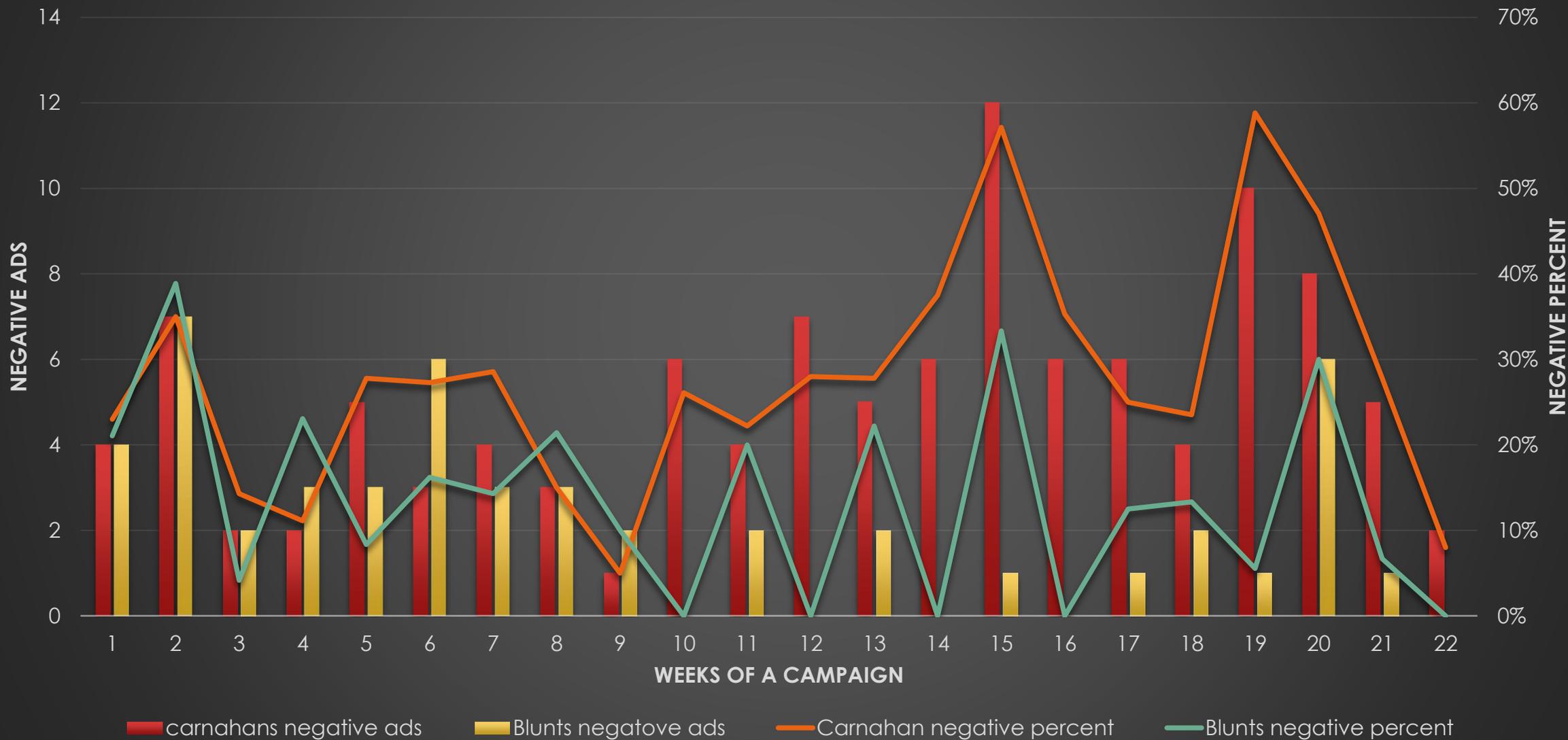
# Methods and finding

- ▶ Facebook posts from 2010 Senate candidates
- ▶ Every single candidate as represented
- ▶ June 1<sup>st</sup> – Election day (November 2<sup>nd</sup>)
- ▶ 14,825 post

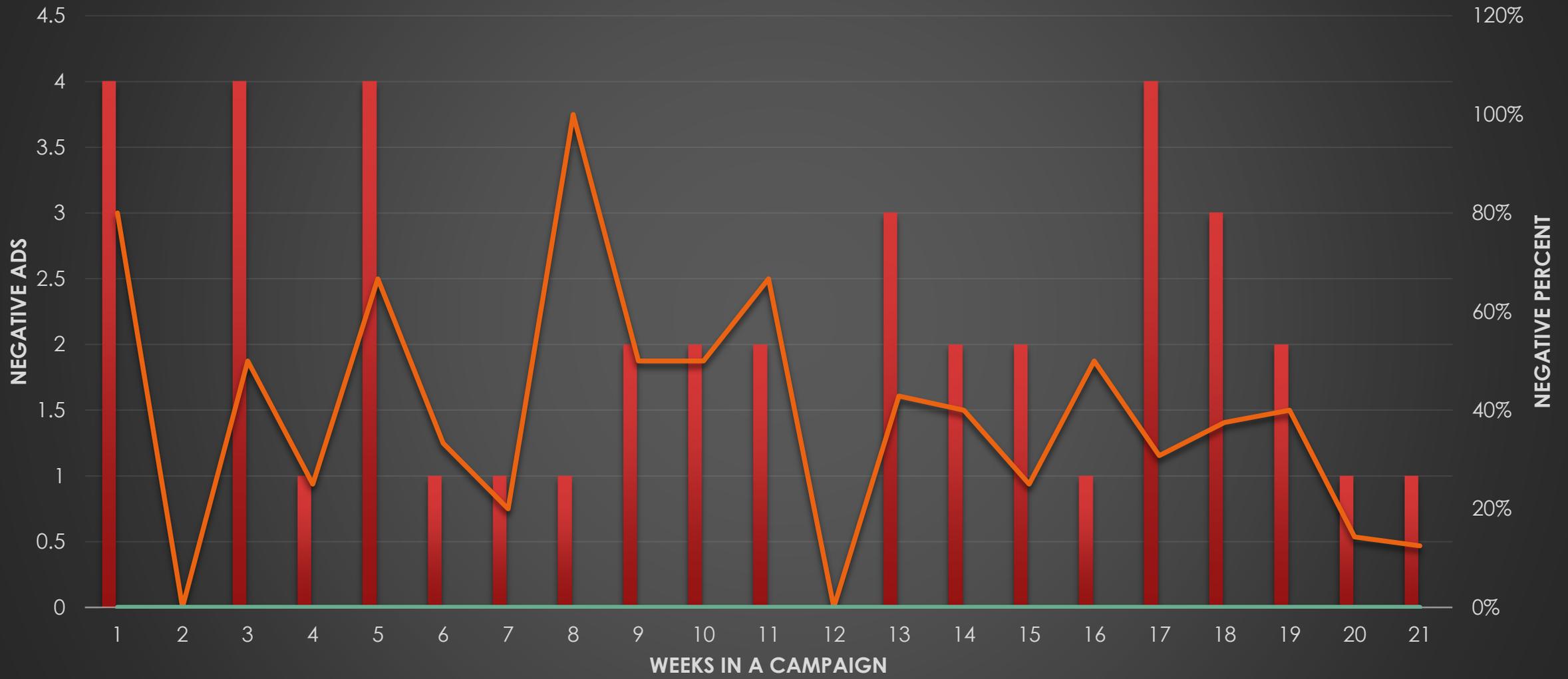
# Variables

- ▶ Dependent Variable –
  - ▶ Algorithm to decide message tone
  - ▶ Negative Facebook posts per week by candidate
- ▶ Independent Variable – Combination of many factors
  - ▶ Incumbent (1) vs Challenger (0)
  - ▶ Democrat(1) vs Republican (0)
  - ▶ Race competitiveness (0) very, (1)Likely, and (2)Non competitive
  - ▶ Leaning of race
    - ▶ -3 safely democratic, 0 toss up, +3 safely Republican

# Missouri Senate Blunt(R) vs. Carnahan(D)



# Hawaii senate Cavasso(R) vs. Inouye(D)\*



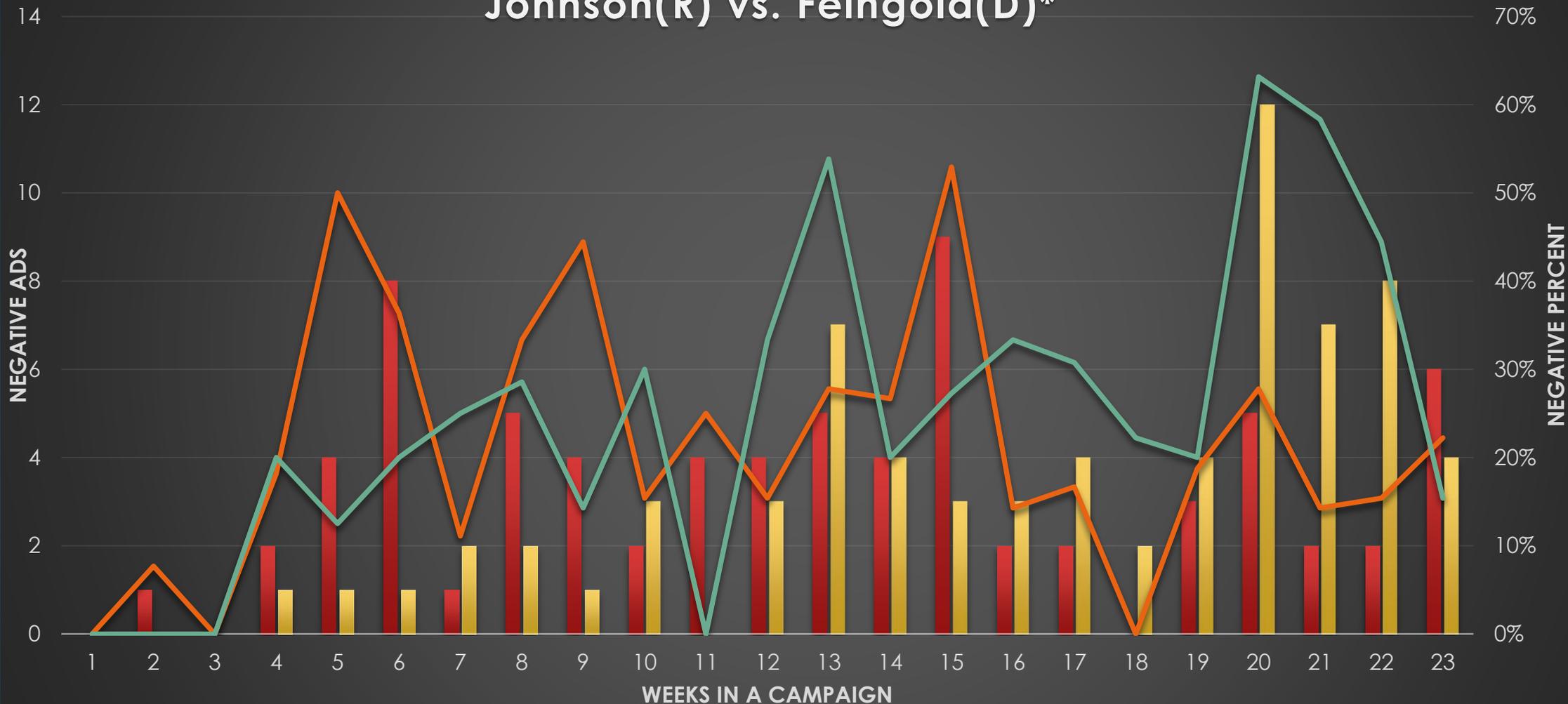
■ Cavasso negative ads

■ Inouye negative ads

— Cavasso negative percent

— Inouye negative percent

# Wisconsin Senate Johnson(R) vs. Feingold(D)\*



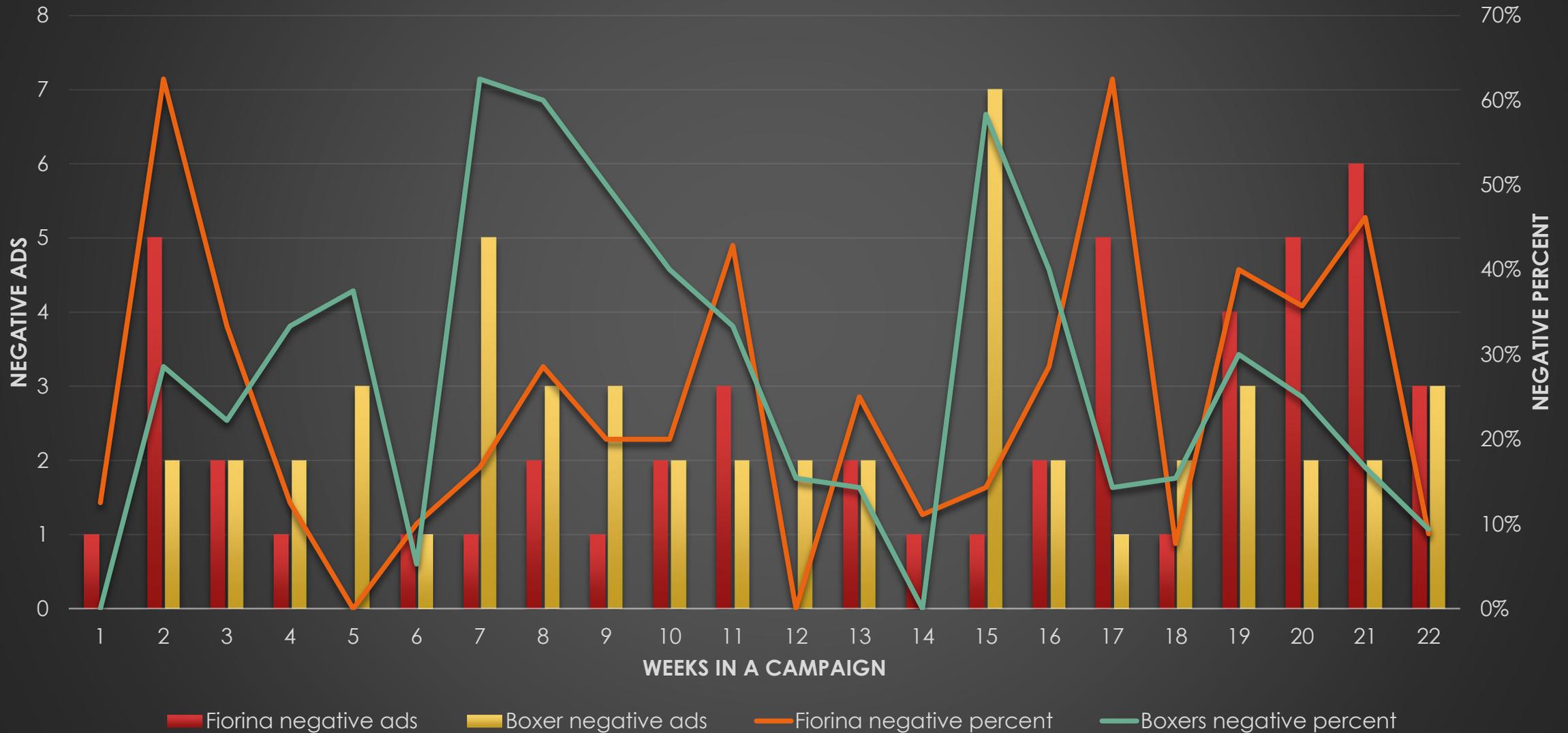
Johnson negative ads

Feingold negative ads

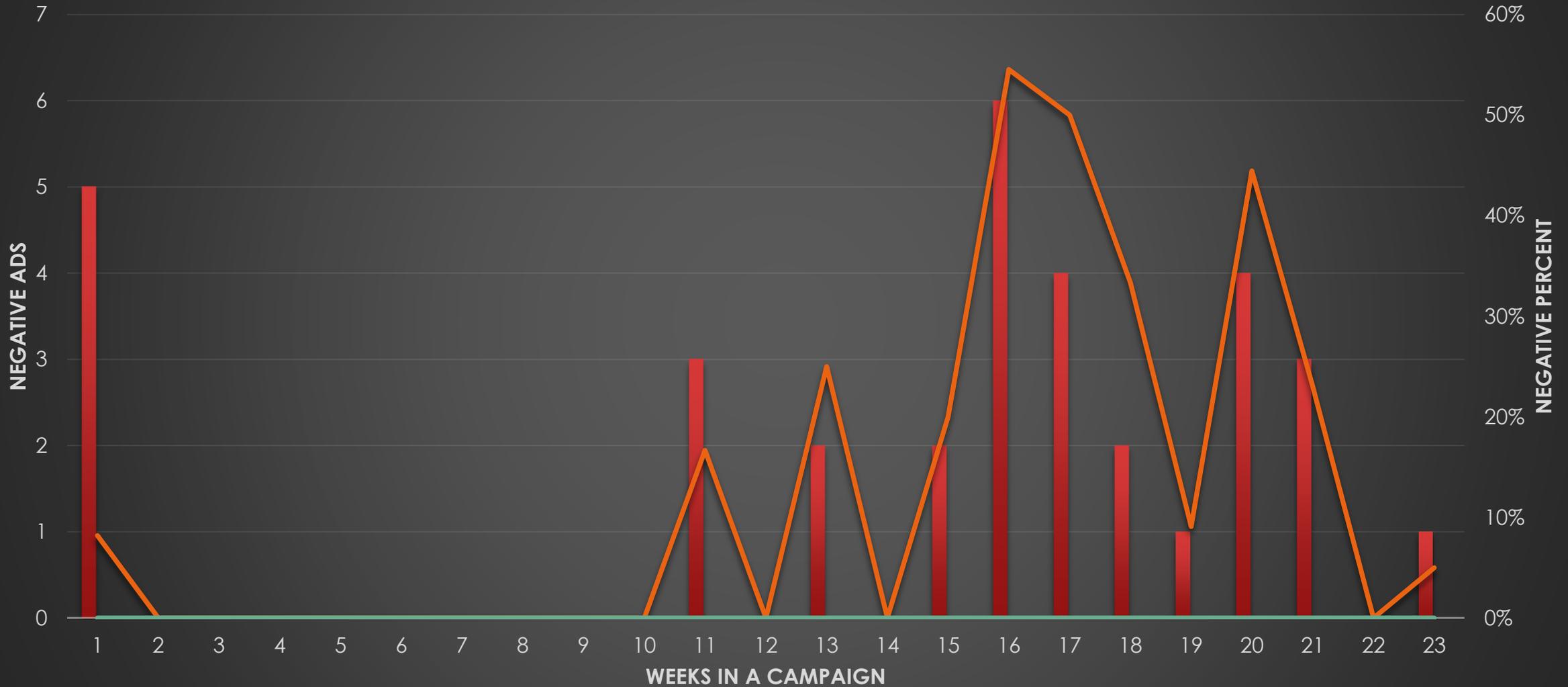
Johnson negative percent

Feingold negative percent

# California Senate race Fiorina(R) vs. Boxer (D)\*



# Colorado Senate Buck(R) vs. Bennet(D)\*



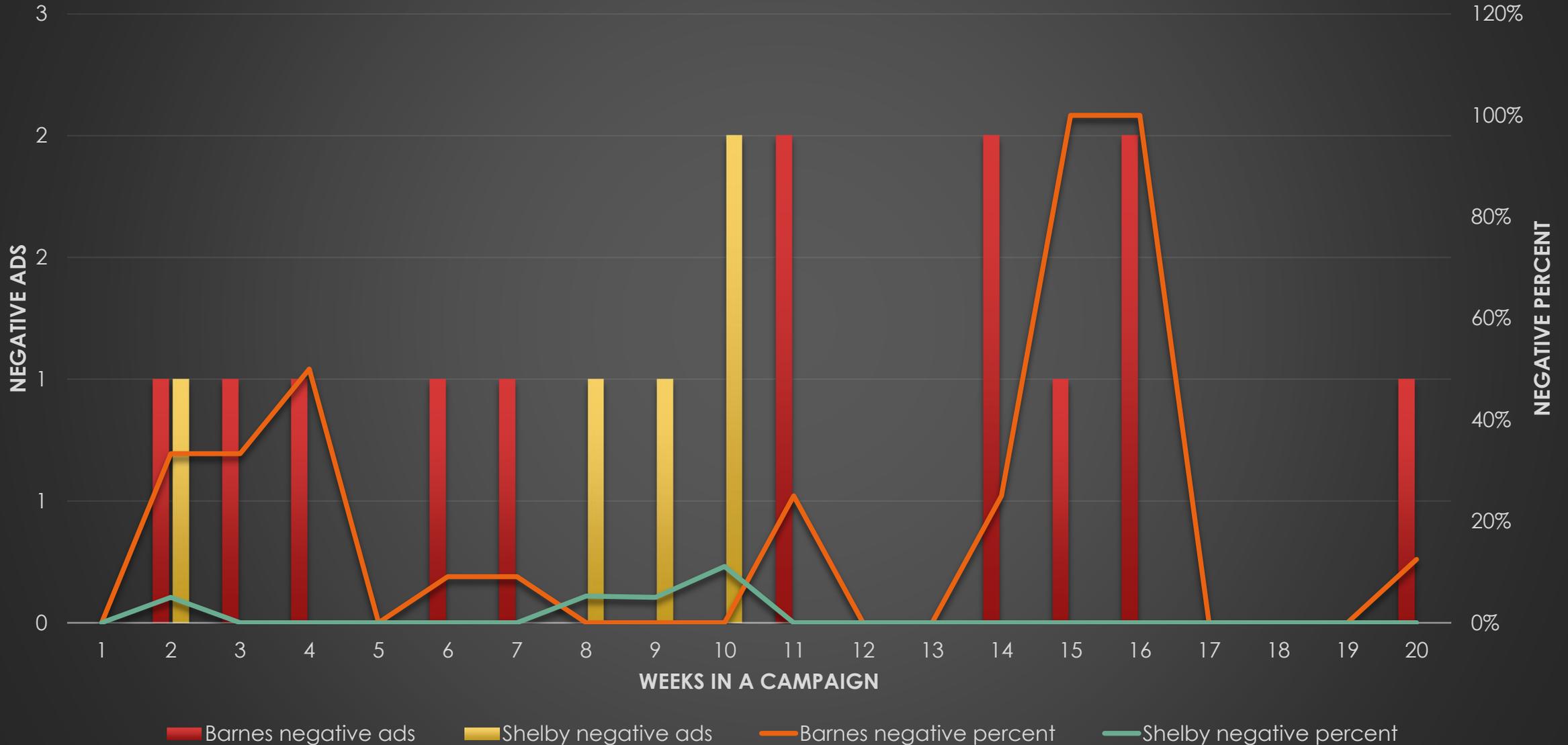
■ Buck negative ads

■ bennet negative ads

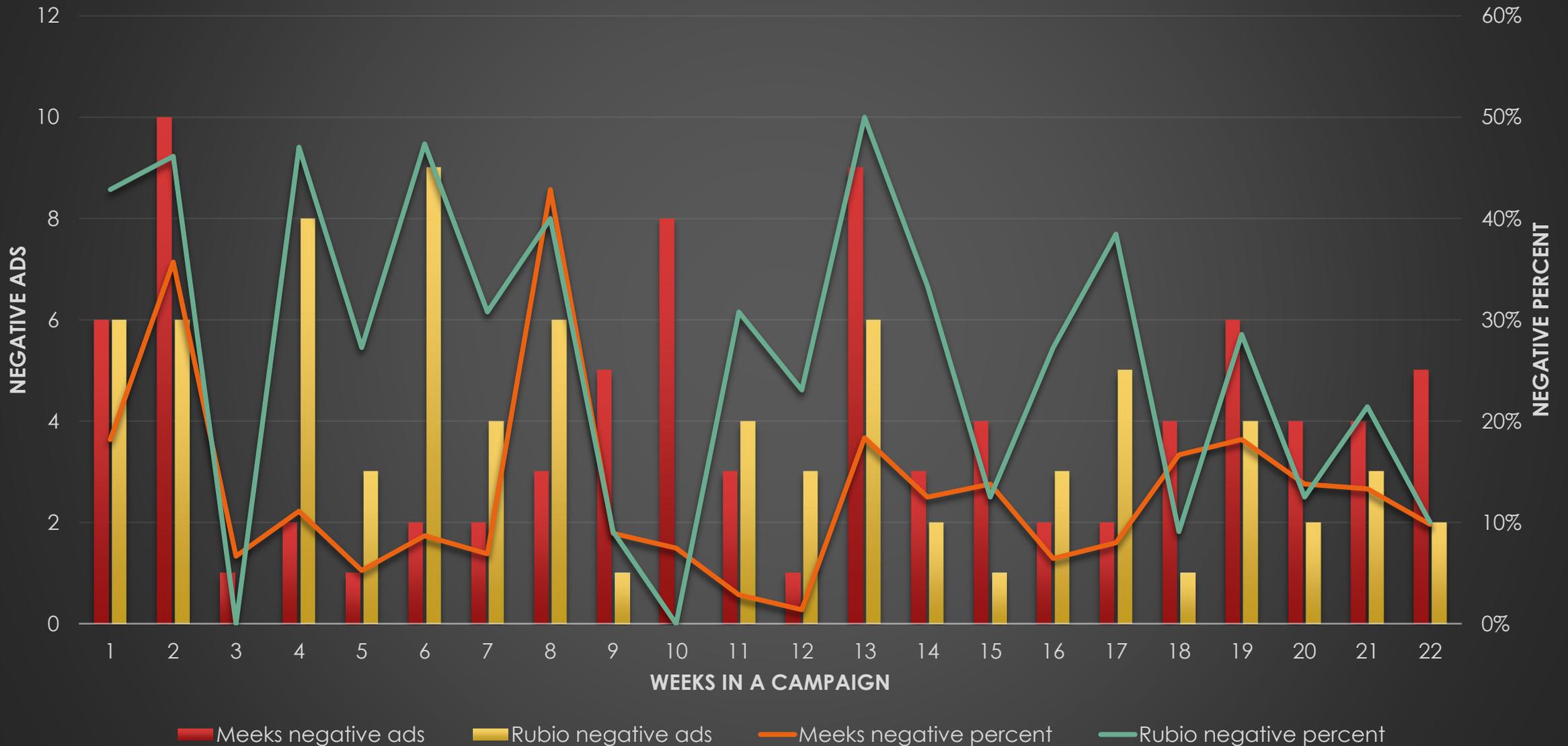
— Buck negative percent

— Bennet negative percent

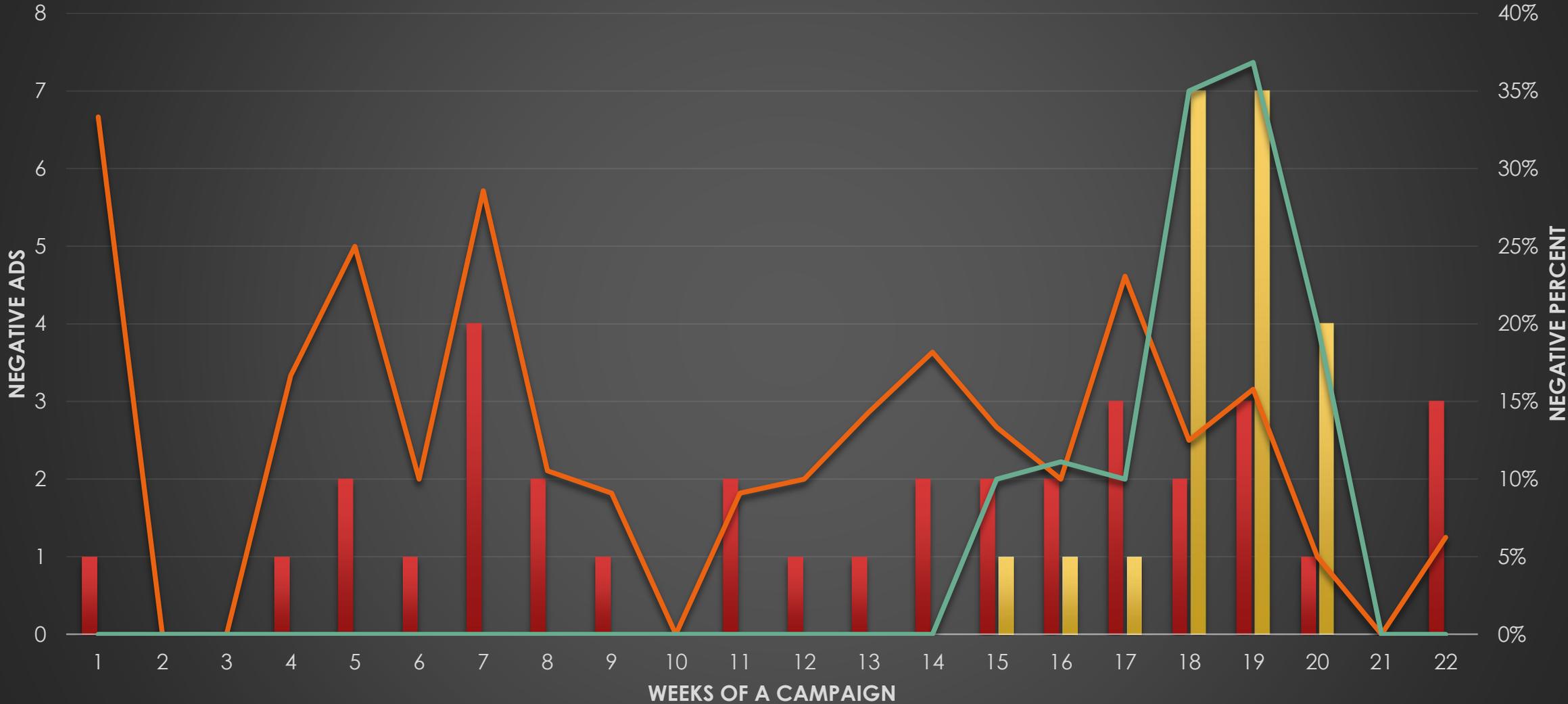
# Alabama Senate Shelby(R)\* vs. Barnes(D)



# Florida Senate Rubio(R) vs. Meek(D)



# Connecticut Senate McMahon(R) vs. Blumenthal(D)



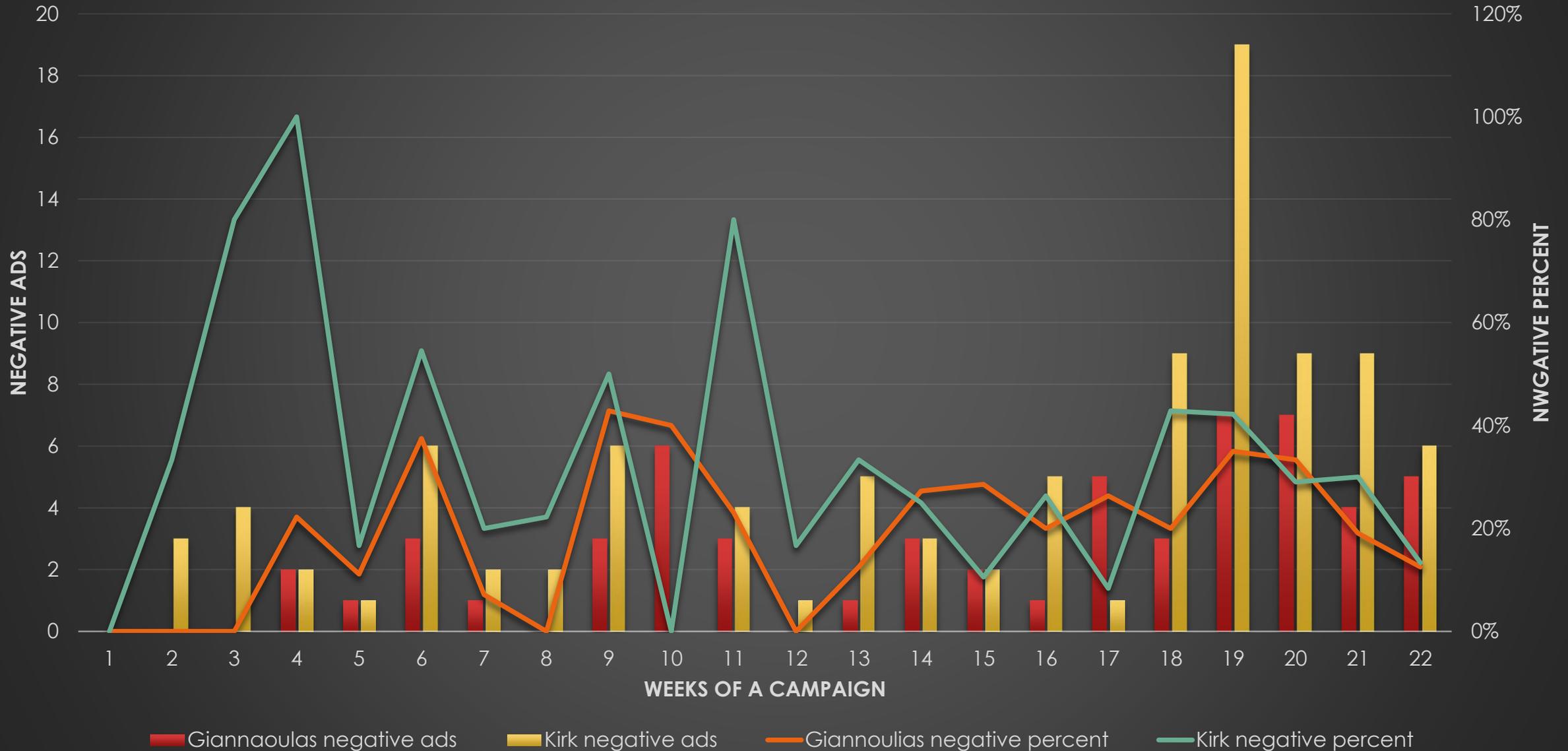
McMahon negative ads

Blumenthal negative ads

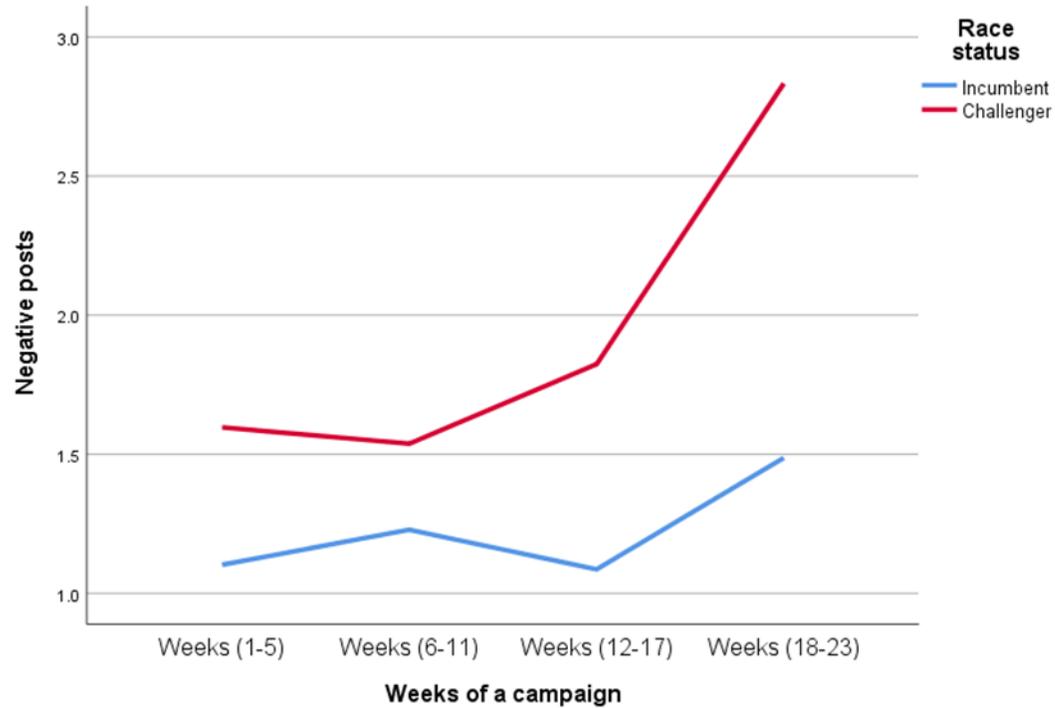
McMahon negative percent

Blumenthal negative percent

# Illinois Senate Kirk(R) vs. Giannoulas(D)



# Mean negative posts per week between incumbent & challenger



# Results

**Table 1: Mean negativity difference between challengers and incumbents by week in the campaign**

|               | Challenger Mean | Incumbent Mean | Difference of Mean |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Weeks (1-5)   | 1.60            | 1.10           | -.494              |
| Weeks (6-11)  | 1.54            | 1.23           | -.309              |
| Weeks (12-17) | 1.82            | 1.09           | -.737              |
| Weeks (18-23) | 2.83            | 1.49           | -1.346             |
| Total Average | 1.98            | 1.23           | -.741*             |

Significant at less than .05

# Conclusion

- ▶ Results mostly confirm existing literature
  - ▶ Little reason to go negative if winning – same with social media
- ▶ SM – makes it quicker, easier, cheaper
  - ▶ Rebuttal times are instantaneous, rather than days
- ▶ Outside traditional media channels –
- ▶ SM allows for more personal relationship with candidates and politicians that is likely here to stay

# Citations

- ▶ Auter, Z. J., & Fine, J. A. (2016). Negative campaigning in the social media age: Attack advertising on facebook. *Political Behavior*, 38(4), 999-1020. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11109-016-9346-8>
- ▶ Carlson, T. (2014). Taking Risks in Social Media Campaigning: The Early Adoption of Blogging by Candidates. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(1), pp. 21-40. doi:10.1111/1467-9477.12011
- ▶ Aldrich, J. H. (2016). Getting out the vote in the social media era: Are digital tools changing the extent, and impact of party contacting in elections? *Party Politics*, 22(2), pp.
- ▶ "Social Media Use 2018: Demographics And Statistics". Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, 2019, <https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>.