

In Defense of Negativity

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I often hear criticism of "negative campaigning" in the free software movement. For example, in reply to a blog post I once wrote about an FSF campaign, several people argued against, "negative campaigning of any sort, in any realm." Drawing an analogy to political smear campaigns, some members of the free software community have taken the position that negative campaigning in general is not useful and that negativity has no place in our advocacy.

First, it is important to be clear on what we mean by a negative campaigns. I believe that there is a fundamental difference between speaking out against policies or actions and smear campaigns that employ untrue claims, ad hominem attacks, and that attempt to avoid a real conversation about issues. I will categorically condemn the latter form of smear campaigning in campaigns for software freedom or for anything else.

That said, negativity directed at negativity has had a positive effect in many social movements.

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