

Inside the Black Box of Negative Campaign Effects: Three Reasons Why Negative Campaigns Mobilize

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The debate over the effect of negative campaigns on vote turnout has not been settled. At present, studies demonstrating a mobilization effect seem to have the upper hand. However, neither side has offered a compelling theory of the causal mechanisms that connect negative campaigns and voter turnout. This paper identifies three mechanisms of voter motivation—republican duty, candidate threat, and perceived closeness of the election—and tests the influence of negative ads on each. The findings suggest that each works to plausibly translate exposure to negative advertisement into increased participation.

KEY WORDS: voter turnout, negative campaign advertisement, mobilization

Since Ansolabehere and his colleagues' groundbreaking evidence of the demobilizing effects of negative campaigns (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994), new research has begun to point in the opposite direction (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002). Negativity in campaigns is increasingly thought to mobilize rather than demobilize citizens, with a few important exceptions. Even so, the causal mechanisms of both the demobilization and mobilization hypotheses are underdeveloped. This paper explores three different explanations for why negative campaigns encourage rather than discourage turnout—stimulation of republican duty, anxiety toward the candidates, and perceptions of increased closeness of the race. Ultimately, all three paths for mobilization bear fruit.

Effects of Negative Campaigning on Turnout

Evidence supporting the idea that negative campaigning discourages voter turnout comes primarily through experimental research, whereas evidence supporting the idea that negative campaigning encourages voter turnout comes from

survey research. It appears that citizens believe that they are less likely to vote because of negative campaigning, but nonetheless act in the opposite manner. Negative campaigns may be a kind of guilty pleasure for Americans—they claim to dislike them, but inadvertently are drawn to them in much the same way that shoppers find themselves drawn to the tabloids in the checkout aisle.

The best evidence of a demobilization effect comes from a set of widely reported experiments that tested the influence of negativity in campaign commercials on attitudes toward government and self-reported intention to vote (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere et al., 1994). The studies found that when respondents were shown a single negative advertisement, they claimed that they would be less likely to vote and had worse attitudes toward government (as measured by standard efficacy items). If people were shown a positive advertisement, the effect was reversed. The difference between the effects of positive and negative ads on the likelihood of voting was about 5%. Hence, the authors claimed that negative advertisements demobilize the electorate. They further supported their laboratory findings with an analysis of the influence of campaign tone on aggregate voter turnout and vote roll-off in the 1992 Senate elections.

Although the laboratory evidence is provocative, it is not without problems, as many have pointed out. First, in the analysis of the effects of exposure to advertising on turnout, education does not prove to be an important factor predicting vote intent. Studies consistently find that the more educated are more likely to vote (e.g., Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980), so the lack of an effect of education on vote intention may indicate problems with the validity of the study. Negative campaign commercials may have different influences in the lab than they have outside of the lab. Second, others have not replicated the results of these early experiments. More important, vote intent may be a poor measure of actual behavior.

Whereas experiments produce results showing demobilization, survey research suggests the opposite. Reexamination of the negativity-demobilization hypothesis has found little support for either aggregate- or individual-level effects. Using content analysis of all presidential television advertisements since 1960, Finkel and Geer (1998) concluded that there is no aggregate-level correlation between the tone of campaigns and turnout. Likewise, using the National Election Studies (NES) cumulative study, these authors found no influence of advertisement tone on self-reported vote. If anything, they found slight evidence that certain groups of people may have been mobilized by negative advertisement.

Additional studies of Senate campaigns demonstrate that most campaign negativity fosters participation, with the exception of outright mudslinging, which depresses turnout (Kahn & Kenney, 1999a). Similarly, a second set of Senate campaign studies supports the idea that campaign negativity has a curvilinear effect on turnout. Lau and Pomper (2001) found that most levels of negativity stimulate turnout, but that negativity at extremely high levels seems to do the opposite. Both sets of authors argued that mudslinging or unusually high levels of negativity have

distinct effects because citizens respond differently to what they perceive to be legitimate criticisms versus personal attacks.¹

An enduring problem with these initial survey-based studies is that none have been able to adequately measure either the level of campaign advertising or the level of reception of advertising messages within the mass public. Two important new studies rectify these problems by more accurately assessing the probability that a given individual will be exposed to negative political advertisements (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002). The authors of the studies acquired market research data indicating the location and timing of campaign advertisements, and then queried survey respondents about the times of day that they typically watch television. When measured more precisely, reception of negative political advertisements appears to increase turnout (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002). The original study by Freedman and Goldstein focused on state-level races, but a more recent study focusing on the 1996 presidential campaign showed that exposure to negative campaigns mobilizes voters (Goldstein & Freedman, 2002).²

With the exception of the initial experimental work, scholars investigating the effects of negative campaigning on turnout have consistently found that negative advertising may in fact stimulate political participation. But even this assessment is limited. A meta-analysis of 52 studies investigating various aspects of negative campaigns concludes that “participatory democracy may be on the wane in the United States, but the evidence reviewed here suggests that negative political advertising has relatively little to do with it” (Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbitt, 1999, p. 858).

Mechanisms

Despite an accumulation of evidence, the reasons why negative campaigns mobilize or demobilize the public are not well established. On the side of demobilization, most authors make a case that citizens are repulsed by candidates attacking one another. According to Ansolabehere et al. (1994), “exposure to campaign attacks makes voters disenchanted with the business of politics as usual” (p. 835). For those proposing mobilization, most authors argue that campaign negativity stimulates attention to and awareness of the campaign. The demobilization arguments rely on a reading of the cultural tastes of the mass public, whereas the mobilization arguments rely on a reading of the psychology of negative information (e.g., Lau, 1985).

¹ Although these two studies concur on the basic curvilinear effect of negativity on turnout, they find conflicting evidence concerning the subpopulations most likely to be influenced and the direction of the influence.

² One distinct problem with using advertisement data to test the effect of negative campaigns is that the volumes of negative and positive ads shown in a given media market are positively correlated. The zero-order correlation of positive and negative ads for both Clinton and Dole in 1996 is about .6. This is compounded by the nature of campaigns to be mostly negative.

The problem with the demobilization argument is that it is a version of an ostrich theory—negativity encourages citizens to stick their heads in the ground and avoid politics. The evidence supporting the view that citizens would act this way is surprisingly weak. Robinson (1976), for example, originally made the argument that media negativity encouraged what he called *videomalaise* (a sense of disengagement), but the evidence presented in his study shows that when citizens were exposed to negative information about politics and government, they did not shy away from politics. Instead, they sought out opposition and third parties. Several other studies offer indirect arguments—for example, media negativity encourages distrust in government (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Miller, Goldenberg, & Erbring, 1979). But distrust has never been clearly connected to political participation. Rather, distrust, like *videomalaise*, seems to encourage people to seek alternatives such as third parties (Peterson & Wrighton, 1998). In sum, there is little evidence that citizens lack the stomach for negative campaigns.

On the side of the mobilization hypothesis, the preponderance of psychological evidence concludes that negative information is arousing and attention-grabbing. People pay greater attention to negative information than to positive information (Fiske, 1980; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Pratto & John, 1991). And the process encouraging more attention to negative information appears to be automatic—quick, effortless, subconscious—and induced by a perception of threat. As Pratto and John (1991) explained,

There are good evolutionary reasons for this widespread and pronounced asymmetry in people's evaluative reactions. Events that may negatively affect the individual are typically of greater time urgency than are events that lead to desirable consequences. Averting danger to one's well being, such as preventing loss of life or limb, often requires an immediate response. In comparison, positively valenced activities, such as feeding and procreation, are less pressing; although they are of crucial importance in the long term, pleasure is simply less urgent than pain. Negative affect carries an important signal value because it signifies to the organism the need to change or adjust its current state or activity. (p. 380)

Although this description may conjure up images of primitive people avoiding predators, the same psychological mechanism that attracts our attention to immediate dangers also draws our attention to negative social information (Lang, Newhagen, & Reeves, 1996; Reeves, Lang, Thorson, & Rothchild, 1989). When people are exposed to negative television images, they experience greater arousal (Reeves et al., 1989) and demonstrate higher attention levels (Lang et al., 1996) than when they are exposed to comparable positive images.³ Campaign

³ One recent study argues against this view, pointing out that once arousal is controlled for, positive images are more memorable (Bolls, Lang, & Potter, 2001). Outside the laboratory, however, arousal is not controlled for, so we should expect negative messages to be more memorable.

negativity may be apt to stimulate the kind of attention that could translate to mobilization.

However, the application of these psychological theories to campaign-type information is not without problems. Theories of attention-stimulating negative information rely on evolutionary biology arguments over “fight or flight.” The fundamental question is whether attention leads to engagement *or* avoidance, whereas scholars making the negativity-attention argument overlook the real possibility of flight when they equate attention with engagement. What is missing is an argument that explains not only why negative campaign information is attention-grabbing, but also why that attention will be steered toward, rather than away from, political participation.

Intervening Mechanisms

Those supporting the view of demobilization unfairly characterize citizens’ likely response to negative information—that is, they give citizens too little credit. Meanwhile, those contending mobilization suffer from a nearly universal problem of using “interest” as a placeholder for mechanisms that are ill understood. Progress in the scholarly debate over the influence of negative campaigns on voter mobilization needs to rest on a better understanding of what motivates citizens to vote and whether those mechanisms are influenced by campaign negativity.

Instead of the relatively blunt mechanisms of negativity automatically producing interest or negativity turning off citizens, we should consider more carefully how the information available in negative campaigns might be interpreted and digested by citizens. The remainder of this paper explores three paths by which negative campaigns might motivate citizens to vote. People may be motivated to participate because negative advertising highlights threats in the social environment or threats from particular candidates, and because it may indicate the closeness of a race.

The first possible route—that of republican duty—assumes that American citizens share some deep concern over the future of their country and that this concern can be stimulated to encourage participation. Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) argued something similar to this point, suggesting that people did not vote because they were content with the status quo. Although their general argument was perhaps too optimistic by ignoring how socioeconomic status limits the ability of some to participate, the basic sentiment that people are more likely to participate when they see trouble on the horizon may be worth reconsidering.

This conception of duty implies that obligations to vote and otherwise participate in government are contingent on perceptions of external, societal circumstances, specifically threats to the community. Whereas a progressive sense of civic duty—as thought of by the authors of *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960) and most scholars since—is constant and fixed, republican duty is flexible; sometimes it is more important to vote than at other

times. The burden of civic duty or obligation should rise and fall with a person's perceptions of external circumstances.

Drawing on the idea of republican civic duty, Martin (2000) found that when people perceive more problems facing the country, they are more likely to participate in politics. The perception of problems also stimulates interest in the campaign and beliefs about the importance of voting. As negative campaigns frequently center on issues, it is likely that citizens pick up information about collective problems inadvertently through negative ads more than they would from positive ads because of the way that negative information is advantaged in attention, memory, and judgment. Exposure to negative advertisement should encourage participation by heightening perceptions of public problems, making an election appear of greater importance, and thereby stimulating republican duty.

A second possible route draws on models of candidate threat that argue that campaigns may arouse anxiety within the public, which in turn stimulates interest in campaigns (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). The power of emotions such as anxiety to motivate participation should not be underestimated. The impact on engagement from a person going from calm to anxious is equivalent to or greater than the impact of going from a grade school education to a college education (Marcus et al., 2000, p. 85).

One of the primary goals of negative campaigns is to paint opponents in the worst possible light. These efforts may raise fears about the individual candidates, especially for partisans. Raised anxiety because of negative advertisement should foster interest in campaigns, and plausibly participation.

A third possible route comes from rational choice explanations of participation. Rational actor models offer the suggestion that citizens participate in politics if the utility of their participation outweighs the cost of their effort. And the marginal utility of a vote is directly related to the closeness of a race. As a race becomes close, the marginal utility of each vote increases. If potential voters believe that the contest will be close, they will also believe that their vote will be of greater consequence (Aldrich, 1993; Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968).

Negative campaigns may signal to potential voters the relative closeness of an upcoming race. Indeed, Kahn and Kenney (1999b) found that negative campaigns are more likely in close races. If candidates are running frequent and negative ads, then the race may appear more competitive and citizens may infer that the race is tight. If citizens are attuned to basic political processes, it takes little effort to infer that increased advertisement suggests a closer race. The empirical problem, one this analysis does not avoid, is whether negative ads themselves indicate the closeness of the race to citizens or whether negative ads are endogenous to close races. Without a barrage of ads, people might not know a race is close.

The following section tests the influence of negative campaigns on the awareness of public problems, anxiety toward the candidates, and perceptions

of the closeness of the presidential election as three proximate causes of mobilization.

Research Design

This study takes advantage of the WiscAds collection compiled under the direction of Ken Goldstein at the University of Wisconsin. The ad collection, in combination with the NES surveys, offers the opportunity to measure in the most precise way available the effect of campaign advertising on political behavior. This study uses the 1996 presidential race as a case study.

The WiscAds collection draws data originally collected by the Campaign Media Analysis Group that tracked campaign advertising in the top 75 media markets from 1 April 1996 through Election Day in November. From these data we have measures of maximum potential exposure to campaign advertising in each media market. The WiscAds project content-analyzed each ad and tracked the frequency with which each ad was aired. Ads were categorized as being positive, negative, or contrasting. Spots that focused entirely on the opponent were considered negative, those focusing on the sponsoring candidate were positive, and those doing both were contrasting.⁴ During the period of this study, Bill Clinton's campaign aired 91,432 ads to Bob Dole's 70,728. Only 6% of Clinton's and 15% of Dole's airings were positive. Twenty-eight percent of Clinton's airings were of negative ads, whereas 70% of Dole's were negative. Although Goldstein and Freedman (2002) pointed out that most contrast ads lean toward the negative (p. 729), I use only negative ads to maintain conceptual and operational consistency.

The WiscAds data allow us to estimate the frequency and tone of the advertisement, whereas the 1996 NES allows us to estimate the probability that a given respondent is exposed to the advertisement. Questions measuring the frequency with which respondents watched prime-time television, nightly news, sporting events, and game shows are used to construct an index that estimates the likelihood that a respondent is exposed to campaign ads. This measure of likely exposure is identical to that of Goldstein and Freedman (2002).

The analyses that follow use exposure to negative advertisement—the frequency of negative ads in a given media market weighted by the likelihood that a respondent is exposed to the ad—as the primary independent variable of interest. The models also control for the amount of television viewership, independent of whether ads were shown in the respondent's area. I then test the effects of the intervening variables—problem awareness, candidate anxiety, and perception of the closeness of the race—on whether the respondent voted in 1996.

⁴ Goldstein and Freedman (2002) reported extensively on the coding of the ads. Ads were coded by two graduate students. Of the 148 individual ads coded, there was disagreement on only three.

Testing Mechanisms

Negative Advertising Encourages People to Be More Aware of Public Problems

Models of republican duty suggest that citizens become more engaged when they perceive greater problems facing the country (Martin, 2000). Negative campaigns frequently focus on attacking the issue positions of one another and may incidentally raise awareness within the citizenry about the range of problems to be dealt with, and hence the stakes of the race (or alternatively the importance of the election).

To measure problem awareness, I counted the number of responses to the open-ended question "What do you think are the most important problems facing the country?" Respondents who named one problem were prompted for up to two additional problems; hence, they could name zero, one, two, or three problems.⁵ The analysis presented in Table 1 is an ordered probit analysis looking at the influence of exposure to negative advertisement on problem awareness while controlling for partisanship and socioeconomic status.

Table 1. Effect of Negative Advertisement on Problem Awareness

Exposure to negative advertisement	0.0001† (.00007)
Prime-time TV viewership	0.305 (.315)
Partisanship	-0.043† (.026)
Age	-0.001 (.003)
Education	0.128* (.040)
Income	0.163* (.055)
White	0.415* (.175)
Female	0.119 (.263)
Cut point 1	-0.887 (.327)
Cut point 2	0.409 (.305)
Cut point 3	1.26 (.308)
<i>n</i>	522
χ^2	47.09*
Initial log likelihood	-517.87
Final log likelihood	-494.33

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimates are ordered probit coefficients. Sources: NES 1996, WisAds 1996.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

⁵ To alleviate concerns about the intensity of perceived problems, a second study conducted at the University of Oklahoma tested a follow-up question after the most important problems measure. Respondents were asked how much of a problem they believed each problem mentioned was. On a scale from 1 to 100, all problems mentioned were rated nearly the same at 75, which provides some confidence that respondents did not mention problems they considered trivial.

Table 2. Problem Awareness and Voter Turnout

Problem awareness	0.257* (.120)
Strength of partisanship	0.609* (.110)
Party contact	1.14* (.277)
Age	0.029* (.006)
Education	0.517* (.087)
Income	0.387* (.105)
Female	-0.051 (.209)
White	0.109 (.300)
Constant	-5.71 (.696)
<i>n</i>	730
χ^2	188.23
Initial log likelihood	-397.38
Final log likelihood	-303.26

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimates are logit coefficients. Dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted, 0 if not. Source: NES 1996.

* $p < .05$.

The evidence from Table 1 shows that exposure to negative advertisement increases problem awareness. The effect of exposure to ads was statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level for a two-tailed test and $p < .05$ for a one-tailed test. Negative ads appeared to increase public perceptions of problems and, indirectly, the apparent stakes of the race.⁶ People who watched similar amounts of television in areas without campaign ads showed no increase in problem awareness.

Table 2 presents a logit model demonstrating that problem awareness positively influences voter turnout while controlling for strength of partisanship, differences in socioeconomic status, and whether either political party contacted the respondent (see the Appendix for details). Voter turnout is measured by a self-report of whether the respondent voted in the 1996 election. As problem awareness increased, respondents became more likely to have voted in 1996.

Negative Advertising Stimulates Anxiety About Candidates

Anxiety about candidates stimulates interest and engagement in campaigns (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993; Marcus et al., 2000). The natural question is whether negative ads encourage such anxiety, as they are probably intended to do.

The tests used to examine this hypothesis separate the survey respondents into partisan groups because negative advertisement should influence these groups differently. Those predisposed to a candidate will be more prone to resist negative information about their preferred candidate, and those opposed to a candidate

⁶ The influence of negative ad exposure on problem awareness was slightly stronger in respondents who had at least a college degree.

are likely to accept negative information about that candidate (see Zaller, 1992). Specifically, negative ads run by Clinton against Dole are not targeted at staunch Republicans, but rather at voters who are undecided or leaning toward Democrats. Anxiety about candidates is gauged using questions about whether the candidates (Bill Clinton or Bob Dole) made survey respondents angry or afraid, and if they did, whether they were made angry or afraid rarely, occasionally, fairly often, or very often. The analysis here is also an ordered probit.

Among the possible relationships, only Clinton's negative ads produced any anxiety among Democrats and independents, and then the ads influenced only feelings of fear about Dole.⁷ Table 3 presents the results. Exposure to Dole's negative ads did not influence the anxiety level of independents and Republicans about Clinton. (Note, however, that those who watched more prime-time television, shown in the third row, were more likely to be angered by Dole and Clinton, even when no negative ads were run in their market.) Had this been an open contest, the effects of Dole's negative advertisement would likely have been different. As Clinton was the incumbent, and hence widely known, Dole's political ads were in competition with a 4-year stream of information: Clinton's record and actions were the subject of front-page news. Conversely, although Dole was the Senate majority leader (from January 1995 through June 1996, when he resigned that post to concentrate on his campaign), the campaign was his introduction to a national audience. The mass public's relative ignorance of Dole afforded Clinton a negative advertising advantage—the ability to fill in a relatively blank canvas.

Table 4 shows a model of how fear of Dole—the only measure of anxiety shown to be influenced by negative ads—influenced the participation of Democrats and independents. The model controls for the strength of partisanship, whether the respondent was contacted by the parties, as well as the respondent's age, education, income, whether the respondent was female, and whether the respondent was white. Democrats and independents who expressed greater fear of Dole were more likely to vote ($p < .05$).

Negative Advertising Influences Perceptions of the Closeness of the Race

Rational choice theory suggests that citizens participate in politics if the utility of their participation outweighs the cost of their effort, which is more likely if an election is close. Negative campaigns may signal to potential voters the relative closeness of an upcoming race. Closeness is measured by asking respondents whether they think the presidential race will be close or whether one candidate will win by quite a bit.

⁷ Respondents with a college degree or higher education showed stronger effects from exposure to Clinton ads on their fear and anger at Dole.

Table 3. Effect of Negative Advertisement on Anxiety Toward Candidates

	Independents and Democrats		Independents and Republicans	
	Dole makes you angry	Dole makes you afraid	Clinton makes you angry	Clinton makes you afraid
Exposure to Clinton's negative ads	0.0002 (.0004)	0.0007† (.0004)	—	—
Exposure to Dole's negative ads	—	—	0.0001 (.0001)	0.0003 (.0001)
Prime-time TV viewership	1.15* (.293)	0.511 (.315)	0.532† (.276)	0.143 (.291)
Age	-0.002 (.003)	0.0002 (.003)	0.0002 (.003)	0.0008 (.003)
Education	0.137* (.037)	0.115* (.039)	0.087* (.037)	0.013 (.039)
Income	-0.202* (.050)	-0.145* (.054)	0.072 (.054)	0.026 (.056)
Female	0.117 (.099)	0.076 (.105)	-0.168† (.099)	-0.058 (.104)
White	0.285* (.140)	-0.033 (.142)	0.749* (.287)	0.440 (.307)
Cut point 1	0.812 (.284)	0.825 (.304)	0.886 (.363)	0.758 (.380)
Cut point 2	0.965 (.285)	0.976 (.304)	1.08 (.364)	0.961 (.381)
Cut point 3	1.53 (.287)	1.41 (.306)	1.80 (.368)	1.53 (.383)
Cut point 4	2.13 (.292)	1.94 (.310)	2.38 (.371)	1.96 (.386)
<i>n</i>	581	579	492	492
χ^2	49.02*	26.25*	31.82*	7.85
Initial log likelihood	-746.52	-636.06	-749.67	-655.10
Final log likelihood	-722.01	-622.93	-733.76	-651.18

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimates are ordered probit coefficients. Higher values indicate higher anger or fear. Sources: NES 1996, WiscAds 1996.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Table 4. Fear of Dole and Turnout for Independents and Democrats

Dole makes you afraid	0.208* (.075)
Strength of partisanship	0.508* (.091)
Party contact	1.00* (.239)
Age	0.028* (.005)
Education	0.397* (.071)
Income	0.500* (.093)
Female	-0.036 (.182)
White	-0.321 (.242)
Constant	-4.57* (.569)
<i>n</i>	825
χ^2	187.29
Initial log likelihood	-486.33
Final log likelihood	-392.67

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimates are logit coefficients. Dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted, 0 if not. Source: NES 1996.

* $p < .05$.

Table 5 presents the results of a logit analysis showing that exposure to negative advertisement encourages perceptions that the race is closer.⁸ But it does so in a curious way. Exposure to both Clinton's and Dole's negative ads made Republicans and Republican leaners perceive the race to be closer. The effects are not mirrored on the Democratic side. A model that does not differentiate between Clinton's and Dole's negative ads finds the same thing: Republicans were likely to see the race as closer when negative ads were more frequent. One potential explanation for this finding is that Democrats were in general less likely to think the race was close. Only 46% of Democrats believed the presidential contest was close, versus 60% of Republicans. Exposure to negative advertising may have encouraged Republicans' wishful thinking about Dole's prospects.

One problem that rational choice models can't overlook is that the connection between citizen perceptions about the closeness of a race and their participation in it is frequently tenuous (Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1975). However, Table 6 (also a logit analysis controlling for party contact and demographics) shows that whereas perceived closeness of the race has no bearing on pure independents (who are least likely to vote) or self-identifying partisans, closeness matters for leaning partisans, or what many call "closet partisans" (see Keith et al., 1992). Negative ads may mobilize those weakly aligned with either party.

⁸ A fair question is whether it is indeed the negativity that causes people to see races as closer, rather than simply exposure to many ads because of competitiveness in a given area. Models very similar to those presented in Table 5, but testing for the effect of total number of ads rather than specific negativity, were nearly indistinguishable in their results. This is probably because the zero-order correlation between the number of ads and the number of negative ads in a designated market area (DMA) is above .9. When and where campaigns run many ads, they run many negative ads, which makes it difficult to differentiate the effect of negative ads from the effect of ads in general.

Table 5. Effect of Negative Advertisement on Perceived Closeness of the Race

	Democrats and Democratic leaners		Republicans and Republican leaners	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Exposure to Clinton's negative ads	0.001 (.001)	—	0.002† (.001)	—
Exposure to Dole's negative ads	—	-0.001 (.001)	—	0.0007* (.0003)
Prime-time TV viewership	-0.416 (.574)	-0.063 (.548)	0.057 (.635)	0.126 (.597)
Strength of partisanship	-0.107 (.123)	-0.101 (.123)	0.117 (.132)	0.110 (.133)
Age	0.001 (.006)	0.001 (.006)	-0.003 (.006)	-0.003 (.006)
Education	0.018 (.071)	0.014 (.071)	-0.036 (.082)	-0.037 (.082)
Income	-0.083 (.096)	-0.090 (.096)	-0.033 (.081)	-0.026 (.111)
Female	0.817* (.194)	0.819* (.194)	0.506* (.211)	0.505* (.212)
White	-0.604* (.261)	-0.569 (.260)	-0.155 (.929)	-0.195 (.927)
Constant	0.350 (.668)	0.348 (.668)	0.048 (.044)	0.065 (1.10)
<i>n</i>	498	498	403	403
χ^2	27.82*	27.23	13.08	14.42
Initial log likelihood	-342.47	-342.47	-275.00	-275.00
Final log likelihood	-328.56	-328.85	-268.46	-267.79

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimates are logit coefficients. Dependent variable is perceived closeness of the presidential race, coded 1 if perceived as close, 0 if not. Sources: NES 1996, WiscAds 1996.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Conclusion

To briefly summarize the evidence, negative campaigns stimulate problem awareness, stimulate anxiety about candidates, and make people perceive races as closer. All three offer indirect (if partial) routes to mobilization. Although some may expect analysis that pits these routes against one another, there is little reason to believe that these mechanisms are in competition rather than representing multiple, complementary paths to participation.⁹ Also, it is noteworthy that these findings are not universal; Clinton's and Dole's negative campaigns did not have equal influence, and the effects were not present in all subgroups.

In the context of the debate over the effect of negative advertisement on voting, this paper supports the argument that negative campaigns mobilize, showing multiple mechanisms that could translate exposure to negative advertisement into motivation to vote. I do not doubt, however, that negative advertisement could also stimulate other mechanisms, such as personal political efficacy, that could make some people less likely to vote.

⁹ Analyses not presented here, but available from the author, show that all three mechanisms tested—closeness, problem awareness, and fear of both candidates—remain statistically significant when tested together.

Table 6. Closeness Counts for Closet Partisans' Vote Turnout

	Pure independents	"Closet" partisans	Weak partisans	Strong partisans
Perceived closeness of the election	0.244 (.474)	0.467† (.290)	0.029 (.234)	-0.323 (.354)
Party contact	0.491 (.530)	0.560 (.361)	1.20* (.324)	1.41* (.553)
Age	0.059* (.016)	0.036* (.010)	0.035* (.008)	0.021* (.011)
Education	0.266 (.170)	0.506* (.112)	0.590* (.103)	0.319* (.146)
Income	0.343 (.265)	0.489* (.140)	0.329* (.120)	0.761* (.191)
Female	0.920* (.454)	0.097 (.303)	-0.307 (.244)	0.525 (.356)
White	-1.08† (.622)	-0.007 (.460)	-0.057 (.423)	0.324 (.399)
Constant	-4.27* (1.21)	-4.41* (.843)	-3.72* (.780)	-2.50* (.908)
<i>n</i>	115	312	471	437
χ^2	28.57*	69.86*	98.32*	60.63*
Initial log likelihood	-79.60	-187.44	-272.53	-144.90
Final log likelihood	-65.32	-152.51	-223.37	-114.58

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. Estimates are logit coefficients. Dependent variable is coded 1 if the respondent voted, 0 if not. Source: NES 1996. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

APPENDIX

All survey data come from the 1996 NES; all campaign data come from WiscAds. The models presented in Tables 1 and 3 are ordered probit models, and the models presented in Tables 2, 4, 5, and 6 are logit models (for excellent descriptions of these models, see King, 1989; Long, 1997).

*Dependent Variables**Tables 1 and 2: Problem awareness*

“What do you think are the most important problems facing the nation today?” Coded as a count of the number of problems mentioned, from 0 to 3.

Tables 3 and 4: Anxiety toward candidates

“Has (Bill Clinton/Bob Dole)—because of the kind of person he is, or because of something he has done—ever made you feel (angry/afraid/hopeful/proud)?” (If yes) “How often would you say you’ve felt (angry/afraid/hopeful/proud)—very often, fairly often, occasionally, or rarely?” Coded 0 if the respondent answers no to first question, 1 if rarely, 2 if occasionally, 3 if fairly often, 4 if very often.

Tables 5 and 6: Perceived closeness of the race

“Do you think the presidential race will be close or will one candidate win by quite a bit?” Coded 0 if one candidate will win by quite a bit, and 1 if race will be close.

Tables 2, 4, and 6: Vote turnout

Coded 1 if the respondent reported to have voted, and 0 otherwise.

*Independent Variables**Television viewership when commercials are most likely run (Probability of reception)*

The measure is identical to that of Goldstein and Freedman (2002).

“Do you watch (*Frasier*, *ER*, *Prime Time*, *Dr. Quinn*) every week, most weeks, only occasionally, or not at all?” Coding: 1 if every week, .66 if most weeks, .33 if only occasionally, 0 if never.

“How many times a week do you watch (game shows like *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*/sports) per week?” Coding: 1 if more than once a week, .5 if once a week, 0 if never. Prime-time and sports items combined in one scale.

“How many days in the past week did you watch the national network news on TV?” and “How many days in the past week did you watch the local TV news, for example, *Eyewitness News* or *Action News*?” News items combined in a single

additive scale, recoded 0–1. Prime-time/sports, game shows, and news measures combined in a single 0–1 scale.

Likelihood of exposure to negative commercials

Number of negative commercials broadcast in market weighted by probability of reception.

Number of Clinton's negative commercials broadcast in market weighted by probability of reception.

Number of Dole's negative commercials broadcast in market weighted by probability of reception.

Control Variables

Age (actual age at time of survey); education (6-point scale); income (5-point scale); white (coded 1 if white, and 0 otherwise); female (coded 1 if female, and 0 if male); strength of partisanship (coded 0 if pure independent, 1 if leaning partisan, 2 if weak partisan, and 3 if strong partisan); partisanship (7-point scale with 1 as strong Democrat and 7 as strong Republican); party contact (1 if contacted by either party, and 0 otherwise).

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