

and parties are talking entirely past one another—can turn off some voters. “We divide evenly in elections or sit them out entirely because we instinctively seek the center while the parties and candidates hang out on the extremes,” Stanford University political scientist Morris C. Fiorina writes in his book *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*.^d

Jon C. Rogowski, a political scientist at Washington University, found that increasing policy differences between candidates significantly reduces voter turnout, rather than stimulating political participation. Rogowski looked at the positions of U.S. House and Senate candidates and found that where the greatest ideological difference was expressed between candidates, citizens were less likely to vote, even after controlling for other factors such as district demographics. “High levels of campaign conflict—such as that found

in negative advertising—may simply turn off voters,” Rogowski concludes.^e

But Rogowski notes that these effects are not uniform. Those who are already the least engaged politically are the most likely to be dissuaded from participating by polarizing choices. Negative advertising can convince voters that a candidate—or even both candidates—is unworthy of office. But it can also convince some people to vote to prevent what they consider to be a bad choice from winning. In a study of the 2004 presidential election, Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders found that “the intense polarization of the electorate” led to dramatic increases in turnout and other forms of political participation.^f “Issues that evoke emotional responses can activate normally indifferent voters and increase turnout in certain groups,” said Matt Hennessy, a Democratic consultant based in Connecticut.^g

^a Craig Gilbert, “Far From Creating Fatigue, Partisan Battles Energize Voters,” *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, May 10, 2014, www.jsonline.com/news/statepolitics/far-from-creating-fatigue-partisan-battles-energize-voters-b99256305z1-258676961.html.

^b Phone interview with Torben Lutjen, September 28, 2012.

^c Alan Greenblatt, “Voters Angry at Washington Gridlock May Want to Look in the Mirror,” NPR, October 1, 2012, www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2012/10/01/162084449/voters-angry-at-washington-gridlock-may-want-to-look-in-the-mirror.

^d Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2010), xiii.

^e Jon C. Rogowski, “Electoral Choice, Ideological Conflict, and Political Participation,” *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 2 (2014): 479–494.

^f Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, “Is Polarization a Myth?,” *Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 543.

^g E-mail exchange with Matt Hennessy, June 18, 2014.