Partisan Ambivalence and Negative Campaigns: A Survey Experiment

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Abstract: Studies show that going negative does not always work in political campaigns, and yet candidates and consultants are rational people whose experience has persuaded them that it can be a winning strategy under the right circumstances. As scholars continue to explore what those circumstances might be, recent work by Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012), suggests that when a stimulus/cue prompts partisan ambivalence, motivated reasoning should vitiate and a focus on the substance of the frame should increase. Based on this logic, it follows that a campaign attack against one’s opponent will be more effective among voters who express a mix of positive and negative feelings toward the parties because they are more focused on the substance of the attack than those who are less ambivalent. The following study uses experimental data derived from a national Internet survey of registered voters to examine the effectiveness of both campaign attacks and candidates’ responses (rebuttals) to those attacks among subjects with varying levels of partisan ambivalence. Our results show that ambivalence plays an occasionally meaningful but inconsistent moderating role across a range of campaign scenarios, more so with attacks than with responses.

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In January 2014, the Gallup organization released a report purporting to show that a “Record-High 42% of Americans Identify as Independents” – a figure that by mid-summer had inched even closer to the 50-percent mark. Despite the belief in some circles that the American electorate has become increasingly less partisan over the past several decades (Dalton 2013), both academics and pundits often point to heightened partisanship as a defining feature of contemporary mass politics in the United States. For over half a century, scholars have understood that most citizens identify (to a greater or lesser degree) with one of the major parties, and that this attachment provides a powerful cue that shapes their attitudes and especially their choice of candidates on Election Day (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Even during the so-called “dealignment” era of the 1960s and 1970s (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976; Norpoth and Rusk 1982; Dalton 1984), party remained a central element in the political identity of many Americans and, indeed, by the 1980s, signs of “resurgent” partisanship were beginning to emerge (Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001). What about now? There is reason to believe that the high number of self-identified Independents reported by Gallup and others (Pew Research Center 2012, 13) is misleading because it includes many individuals who fall into the “leaner” category, i.e., after initially claiming to be neither Democrats nor Republicans, they acknowledge a preference for one or the other. When leaners are counted as partisans (as perhaps they should be; see Magleby, Nelson, and Westlye 2011; Magleby and Nelson 2012), the proportion of Independents drops from a plurality of the electorate to less than 20 percent. 

According to Marc Hetherington (2001, 628), resurgent mass partisanship in the late 20th century (involving an “impressive increase in party-centric thinking” rather than simply more identifiers) was largely driven by changes that occurred at the elite level: specifically, “[g]reater
ideological polarization in Congress has clarified public perceptions of party ideology, which has produced a more partisan electorate” (p. 629). That party leaders, in Washington and throughout much of the country, have become more ideologically polarized is beyond dispute. Republicans in Congress, for example, are now more conservative – and more uniformly conservative – than in the past, while their Democratic counterparts are more consistently liberal (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2001; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003; Theriault 2008; Noel 2013). But there is a difference of opinion as to whether this sharp division between left and right has been accompanied by a similar drift toward the ideological extremes among the general public (Abramowitz 2010), or whether it just looks that way because citizens have increasingly followed party cues and “sorted” themselves into the correct categories, i.e., with most liberal Republicans moving to the Democratic side of the aisle, and conservative Democrats (notably in the South) switching to the GOP (Fiorina with Abrams and Pope 2011; Levendusky 2009; Pew Research Center 2014a; Fiorina 2014).

We are more concerned, however, with the nature and consequences of mass partisanship than with ideology per se. Political conflict in the United States today is frequently portrayed as being bitterly partisan, us against them, with both sides faulting the other for its failure to address important national problems. Among Republican and Democratic candidates, officeholders, and party leaders, such hyperpartisanship (reflecting “a sharply polarized situation in which political parties are in fierce disagreement with each other”6) and ideological polarization seem clearly to go hand in hand: Conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats cannot find common ground on which to base policy action. For the general public, this relationship is not so clear. Despite evidence of increased issue consistency in recent years (that is, fewer citizens expressing a mix of liberal, moderate, and conservative opinions; see Abramowitz 2010; Pew Research Center
2014a), many rank-and-file partisans do not share the same “extreme” policy views that predominate among their respective party elites (Ellis and Stimson 2012; RePass 2008; Pope 2012; Pew Research Center 2014a; Fiorina 2014; Diggles and Hatalsky 2014). A lack of ideological congruency does not, of course, prevent individuals from positively identifying with a party, nor does it preclude their developing a strong dislike for the opposition. But it does suggest that partisan attachments at the grassroots may be rooted in something other than shared values or policy preferences (e.g., Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Pew Research Center 2014a) – and, as a result, that citizens’ feelings toward one party or both may be more equivocal than one would expect during a period characterized by elite hyperpartisanship and (in response) seemingly “resurgent” partisanship among the general public.

In fact, there is a growing body of research indicating that many Americans, including a fair number who consider themselves to be either Democrats or Republicans, simultaneously possess both positive and negative feelings about the party with which they identify and/or the one with which they do not, that is, they are ambivalent partisans (Greene 2005; Mulligan 2011; Thornton 2011, 2013; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). Further, this blend of positive and negative has a variety of consequences; compared to their univalent counterparts, for example, ambivalent partisans appear more likely to correctly perceive candidate positions (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012), more likely to use issues (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012) and ideology (Thornton 2011) when evaluating candidates and making vote decisions, more likely to cast a split ballot (Mulligan 2011), and less likely to exhibit a variety of party-oriented attitudes and behaviors (such as being active on behalf of one’s party and voting for the presidential candidate of that party; see Greene 2005). In this paper, we seek to determine whether ambivalence also helps to shape voters’ reactions to both campaign attacks and
candidates’ responses to those attacks.

**Partisan Ambivalence and Negative Campaigning**

Scholars have increasingly embraced the idea that people do not always have a single “true” attitude about a given topic; to the contrary, they often possess multiple and even contradictory attitudes that they might draw upon, for example, when thinking about a policy issue or deciding which candidate to vote for in an election (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Zaller 1992). When someone’s evaluations, beliefs, or emotions concerning an attitude object are in conflict with one another or, more simply, when they simultaneously possess positive and negative evaluations of an attitude object, that person can be described as being **ambivalent** (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Craig et al. 2005; Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Prior studies have examined ambivalence across a range of contemporary issues, including abortion (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002), gay rights (Craig et al. 2005), and social welfare (Gainous 2008; Gainous and Martinez 2005; Zaller and Feldman 1992). As noted earlier, there also is a growing body of research focusing on ambivalence toward the political parties.

While they were not the first to examine partisan ambivalence (e.g., see Greene 2005; Mulligan 2011; Thornton 2011, 2012), our theoretical framework draws heavily from Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen’s (2012) explanation for how and why voters who are ambivalent may come to think more deeply and thoroughly than others when making political judgments. These authors suggest that partisanship functions both as a stable psychological construct based in affective attachment to the party, and as a temporal summary judgment of party performance. In line with theories of cognitive consistency (Festinger 1957; Greenwald et al. 2002; Heider 1958), they assert that citizens strongly prefer there to be harmony between attachment and summary judgment. When the information flow regarding one’s own party trends negative,
however, the ability to maintain harmony and to objectively justify their support for that party is compromised. As a result, the individual is likely to become an ambivalent partisan.

Inherent in this argument is the idea that voters are motivated to have “resolve” when it comes to their attitudes; in other words, they prefer to possess an objectively justifiable attitude that avoids ambiguity, uncertainty, and doubt (Frenkel-Brunswik 1949; Kruglanski and Webster 1996) because to experience doubt is unsettling and uncomfortable. The problem here is that if one’s partisanship, long viewed by scholars (Campbell et al. 1960) as a filter or perceptual screen through which people evaluate the political world, is riddled with ambivalence, it may become blurred and the ability to justify one’s attitude through the prism of partisanship will no longer be effective. Lavine and colleagues (2012) posit that such a development encourages voters to think more deeply or deliberatively about their political options. This argument is framed around the idea that citizens are motivated to find a sufficiency threshold, or level of confidence, when making a decision (Chaiken et al. 1989; Downs 1957; Payne, Bettman, and Johnson 1993). Specifically, the sufficiency threshold “provides a commonsensical mechanism for predicting when – and more important, why – decision makers will transition from heuristic to deliberative thinking” (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012, 35).

The transition supposedly occurs when partisan cues no longer furnish enough confidence to create a settled or resolved preference in a given judgment option. A high degree of confidence is not present for ambivalent partisans because partisanship no longer serves as an effective heuristic, and so they are compelled to look elsewhere to objectively justify their position. Our contention is that this explains why ambivalent partisans are more likely than univalent partisans to weigh the actual content of a negative ad and incorporate it into their own position. They are compelled to do so in order to pass the sufficiency threshold, and thereby to attain the necessary resolve for their
personal comfort or satisfaction. Thus, we expect our experimental results to show that ambivalent partisans are more likely than their univalent counterparts to have both their vote choice and evaluations of candidates influenced by exposure to an attack against their party’s candidate. We further anticipate that ambivalence will affect how voters react to the counterframes that usually follow, that is, to the responses (or rebuttals) made by those candidates when they are attacked. We develop our argument more fully in the following section.

**Attack, Response, and Ambivalence**

Candidates, consultants (especially media specialists), party leaders, and political journalists believe that the effects of campaign ads are often substantial and occasionally decisive. There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence to suggest that they are correct. In addition to the well-known Willie Horton and “prison furlough” ads that the Bush campaign ran against Michael Dukakis in 1988, and the independently sponsored Swift Boat ads questioning John Kerry’s military service in 2004, political junkies can name countless races over the years that conventional wisdom insists might have turned out differently if not for a well-conceived and well-timed ad or series of ads, usually delivered over the television airwaves (see Diamond and Bates 1992; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1997; Mark 2006; Westen 2007; Trent, Friedenberg, and Denton 2011).

It is not a coincidence, by the way, that the campaign ads most remembered for having had a major impact were negative in tone. While positive appeals are usually a central component in any candidate’s overall communications package (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1997; Franz et al. 2008), attacks are more frequently seen as game-changers or game-deciders – particularly for challengers, who are thought to have little chance of winning unless they go negative (Mayer, 1996; Geer, 2006). Nevertheless, while negativity can have its rewards, there is some risk involved. According to Dennis Johnson (2007, 84), “[v]oters are not fools and understand when campaign
commercials have crossed the line of fairness.” Tow that line, though, and negative ads can be the difference between victory and defeat on Election Day. This, at least, is the common wisdom among political practitioners.

Academic studies, however, have yielded mixed results regarding the persuasive effects of campaign ads generally, and of negative advertising (or other forms of negative campaigning) in particular (Lau and Rovner 2009; Fridkin and Kenney 2011; Fernandes 2013). Rather than shaping candidate preference directly, negative ads are believed to be important primarily because they serve to activate existing predispositions (often rooted in voters’ partisan attachments), reinforce initial preferences (based to a large degree on the same attachments), or mobilize/demobilize segments of the electorate that are more/less supportive of the sponsoring candidate. Still, it seems likely that the inconsistent findings of this literature are due at least in part to the fact that negativity lies in the eye of the beholder, that is, “whether a tactic, a candidate, or a campaign is [perceived as] negative depends on whose ox is being gored” (Sigelman and Kugler 2003, 144). The fact that self-identified partisans react differently to attacks coming from the other side than they do to accusations made by candidates of their own party should therefore not come as a surprise (Iyengar, Jackman, and Hahn 2008; Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Stevens et al. 2008; Geer 2006; but see Franz and Ridout 2007). What we seek to determine here is whether voters with ambivalent feelings about their party are more open to persuasion than those whose feelings are more uniformly positive.

It has long been recognized that partisanship serves to simplify and guide citizens’ political judgments (Campbell et al. 1960; Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992; Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Theory suggests that these judgments are often the product of motivated reasoning (Lodge and Taber 2013; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Lebo and Cassino 2007; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010), whereby individuals are motivated to mitigate any internal
conflict they may be experiencing – as, for example, when a candidate from their preferred party is criticized by her opponent during a campaign. Partisanship works as a heuristic, or cognitive shortcut, to facilitate this process, as citizens are exposed to new information prior to reaching a decision. Little deliberation is required for many identifiers, as “confirming preexisting biases seems to be a priority” (Lau and Redlawsk 2006, 24). On the other hand, Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012) contend that motivated reasoning is vitiated among those who are ambivalent about their party because partisanship no longer serves as a sufficient heuristic; rather, more deliberative thinking is required for the decision maker to find resolve. We suspect that this theoretical framework can help us to understand how voters respond to negative campaigning. Specifically, ambivalent partisans should be more likely to focus on the substance of a negative frame because their own attachment is of less utility in helping them to decide whether to either accept or dismiss the claim therein. Thus:

H1: An attack made against one’s fellow partisan will be more effective among voters who express a high degree of ambivalence about their party.

Our focus in this paper is almost entirely on citizens’ reactions when a fellow partisan is attacked. The reason is simple: All else equal (as it is in our experimental simulation), few identifiers are likely to be moved by an attack on the opposition candidate because most do not plan to vote for that candidate in the first place, i.e., there is a ceiling (or floor) effect that leaves little room for a meaningful erosion of support. Similarly, our analysis centers on the effects of ambivalence about one’s own party rather than ambivalence about the opposition. In the case of H1, one might normally expect that a high level of out-party ambivalence will render the attack less credible, hence less effective. As a practical matter, however, our data will show that (a) most respondents feel relatively little ambivalence about the opposing party; instead (b) their
feelings tend to be decidedly negative overall, with the result that (c) if anything, an attack against one’s fellow partisan might actually be more effective among those who express a high degree of ambivalence toward the party of the attacker. Given such theoretical uncertainty, our analysis centers mainly on the moderating effects of ambivalence about one’s own party.

We will, however, look more closely at identification with and ambivalence toward the attacking party in one instance. As noted above, a potential downside of going negative is that it can generate backlash against the sponsoring candidate, especially if the attack is seen by voters as having “crossed the line of fairness” (Johnson 2007, 84). In our study, backlash is measured most directly by change in favorability ratings for the attacker (vote preference and target favorability are our other two dependent variables) – and it is here that we expect ambivalence toward that candidate’s party to be important, at least among the attacker’s fellow partisans. Following the same logic that underlies H1:

H2: An attack delivered by one’s fellow partisan will generate greater backlash (lower favorability for the attacker) among voters who express a high degree of ambivalence about their party.

What happens, then, after an attack has been made? One option is for target candidates to try and stay on message while ignoring the charges made against them. Few practitioners today consider this to be a prudent strategy (Westen 2007; Craig and Hill 2011) and, as a consequence, almost any campaign attack is likely to be followed by some sort of rebuttal. The literature dealing with attacks themselves is quite rich, if also problematic in terms of the clarity of its results, but there are only a handful of studies that examine the effects of candidate responses to those attacks. In the present context, we are interested in determining whether the role played by partisan ambivalence is similar on the back end of this two-way flow of campaign communication
When candidates respond to an attack, they are in effect offering voters a *counterframe*, that is, a way of viewing the original charge differently than the attacker intended (see Jamieson 1992, 106-111). Although recent work by Chong and Druckman (2013) suggests that individuals with “weak” attitudes are more likely to be influenced by counterframes than those who possess “strong” attitudes, their argument may not apply in the campaign scenario envisioned here. In particular, does it make sense to predict that a response made by one’s fellow partisan will be *more* effective among voters who express a high degree of ambivalence about their party? This outcome would run counter to the logic underlying H1: that cognitive discomfort caused by ambivalence frequently makes out-party messages more effective. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H3: A response *made by* one’s fellow partisan will be less effective among voters who express a high degree of ambivalence about their party.

Some responses may be more effective than others, of course (Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2015), but we have no a priori reason to doubt that the moderating effect of partisan ambivalence will be evident across all five types of responses/counterframes tested in our study.

Finally, we again will consider whether ambivalence plays a role in shaping the impact of responses on challenger (attacker) favorability among that candidate’s co-partisans. The term “backlash” might not be appropriate as it implies a negative reaction to a candidate’s own words or actions – and with responses, the words in question are those of the original target rather than the original attacker. Nevertheless, when candidates respond to an attack they often do so in the hopes of accomplishing more than simply restoring the status quo; in addition to improving their own standing with voters, they (along with their consultants) may attempt to craft a message that inflicts damage on the opponent as well. This is especially true for the two types of responses in
our study that are explicitly negative in tone (see below), but virtually all campaign rebuttals contain at least implied criticism of the attacker. Our expectation, then, is that impact of such rebuttals on the attacking candidate’s co-partisans will be similar to the backlash predicted to follow (H2) as a result of the attacks themselves:

H4: A response made by an opposing partisan will generate lower favorability ratings for the attacker among voters who express a high degree of ambivalence about their party.

**Research Design**

The research reported here is part of a larger project in which we assess the overall effectiveness of two campaign attacks, and of five different types of responses that a candidate might make in an effort to mitigate the damage inflicted when his opponent decides to go negative (see Craig, Rippere and Grayson 2015; Craig and Rippere 2013). Findings are based on a within-subjects controlled experiment in which a national sample of 662 registered voters participated in an Internet survey that was conducted June 21-24, 2012. Our data were provided by qSample (see www.qSample.com), a market research firm that has recruited over five million individuals to participate in research projects related to video gaming, home building/contracting, home ownership, issues of particular interest to college students and Baby Boomers, as well as politics. Respondents for our survey were drawn from a national panel of registered voters, geographically balanced by region, whose members engage in online polling, ad testing, focus groups, and in-depth interviewing on a range of politically relevant topics. Although the sample is quite diverse, we make no claim that it is representative of all registered voters nationwide. 12

The structure of our experiment was as follows: Respondents were randomly assigned to one of twenty treatment groups (or orders) and asked to complete a background questionnaire that measured basic demographics, political knowledge, party identification, feelings about each of the
major parties, and a number of other political orientations. They were then told to imagine that it was the fall of 2012, and one of the races on their ballot involved a congressional matchup between an incumbent seeking a third term and an experienced challenger who had served in both local office and the state legislature. After reading short biographies of the candidates, participants were asked to indicate a vote preference (“Based on the information you currently have, which candidate would you vote for if the election were held today?”) and to rate each candidate on a 7-point scale ranging from “very unfavorable” (1) to “very favorable” (7); answers to these three questions serve as the dependent variables for our analysis. Participants subsequently read what was described as a direct-mail attack by the challenger and once again registered their vote choice and candidate assessments. Finally, they were given the incumbent’s response and answered the vote and candidate questions a third time.

In crafting the attacks, we opted not to employ policy appeals that would likely be viewed through a partisan/ideological lens by many voters (Iyengar, Jackman, and Hahn 2008; also see Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). Our focus was instead on performance-based attacks wherein a challenger alleges that “the incumbent has lost his touch with the people back home, doesn’t work hard, doesn’t stand on principle and changes his mind to please different people, has used the office for personal gain, [and] will say just about anything to get reelected” (Johnson 2007, 65). This seems to be an especially good basis for evaluation when the target is an incumbent, as is the case in our experimental manipulations.

The attack used in the following analysis (taking advantage) charged the incumbent with “helping himself to other people’s money” in a number of ways, i.e., voting for pay raises, using party money to finance a family vacation, renting office space from his brother at inflated prices, overbilling clients for professional services, and channeling no-bid government contracts to
campaign donors. These allegations, regarding matters that are clearly relevant to the target’s performance as an elected representative, were made in language that might not be considered “uncivil” by Fridkin-Kenney (2008) standards but comes very close to that line by using such emotionally charged terms as “corrupt,” “immoral,” and “deserves to be in jail more than in Congress.”

Each participant read the text for taking advantage plus one of five responses:

- denial (claiming that the charges are false);
- counterimaging (a positive message that flips the attack on its head by “laying out for the voter a counterproposition to the content of the opponent’s negative ad,” e.g., police officers praising the record of someone accused of being soft on crime; see Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991, 244);
- justification (acknowledging the behavior in question and accepting responsibility, but attempting to downplay its negative consequences);
- counterattack (the content of which often has little or nothing to do with the original attack); and
- accusing the opponent of mudslinging (a weak form of counterattack which may suggest to some voters that the target candidate is merely trying to deflect attention away from charges that are both damaging and true).

These responses are summarized in Table 1, with complete wording available via our online appendix. The impact of the ads was tested empirically using the following design:

1 (Attack Type: taking advantage) X 5 (Response Type) X 4 (party affiliation + gender combinations) = a total of 20 treatment groups, to which participants were randomly assigned.
Because we wanted to know whether the effectiveness of ads and responses varied by candidate gender, shared partisanship, and/or shared gender, four treatment conditions were created for each attack-response pair: male Republican incumbent attacked by female Democrat, female Republican incumbent attacked by male Democrat, male Democratic incumbent attacked by female Republican, and female Democratic incumbent attacked by male Republican. The role of gender (fairly modest as it turns out) is explored more fully in Craig and Rippere (2013).

Table 1 about here

Our measures of partisan ambivalence are modeled on prior work by scholars studying ambivalence toward issues such as abortion (Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002), gay rights (Craig et al. 2005), and social welfare (Gainous and Martinez 2005), as well as attitudinal ambivalence generally (Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995; Martinez, Gainous, and Craig 2012). The approach is based on the idea that citizens’ overall attitudes are made up of both positive and negative elements. To measure those two dimensions, respondents are asked to indicate both how positively and how negatively they view an attitude object. For the present study, we adapted language used in our earlier studies (Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002; Craig, Kane, Martinez, and Gainous 2005; Gainous and Martinez 2005) to accommodate the structure of an Internet survey:

“We want to know how you feel about the two major political parties in American politics today. Please indicate how positively you feel about each party in the following manner: If you do not have any positive feelings about the party, give it the lowest rating of 1; if you have some positive feelings, rate it a 2; if you have generally positive feelings, rate it a 3; and if you have extremely positive feelings, rate it a 4. Please rate each party based solely on how positively you feel about it, while ignoring or setting
aside for the moment any negative feelings you may also have.”

Respondents then read the name of each party and were prompted to rate each party separately. Later in the survey, the above statement was repeated except with the words “positive” and “positively” changed to “negative” and “negatively” (see Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995; Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957).

While other methods of measuring ambivalence have been used widely within the social psychology literature (see Kaplan 1972), an advantage of the model employed here is that it accounts for the presence of polarized beliefs (Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995; Priester and Petty 1996; Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002; Craig et al. 2005; Gainous and Martinez 2005). For example, someone who rates one of the political parties as a 4 on the positive component and as a 2 on the negative component probably can be viewed as experiencing less ambivalence than someone who answers 2 on both. Megan Thompson and colleagues (1995) originally accounted for this by devising a method that includes both similarity and intensity of components, i.e., reasoning that increased similarity between positive and negative components reflects greater ambivalence. In addition, they proposed that while holding similarity constant, increased intensity should lead to greater ambivalence. Putting it all together, the argument is that

\[
\text{Ambivalence} = \left[\frac{(P + N)}{2}\right] - |P - N|
\]

where P is the positive reaction score and N is the negative reaction score.19 Individual scores range from –0.5 ("extremely" positive and no negative feelings, or "extremely" negative and no positive) to +4.0 ("extremely" positive and negative feelings for the same party). The Thompson study (also Priester and Petty 1996), found the similarity-intensity (or SIM) model to be superior to others, including Kaplan’s, at predicting subjective ambivalence, or the degree to which subjects reported feeling discomfort when asked to provide an evaluation of some attitude object.
Results

In the aggregate (including Independents, other-party identifiers, and those who say they’re not sure), our respondents viewed the Republican and Democratic parties in much the same light: roughly seven in ten expressed “no” or only “some” positive feelings, while a little over 40 percent said they had either “generally” or “extremely” negative feelings. These findings are consistent with polls indicating that neither party today is held in particularly high regard by the American public as a whole. The more important question for our purposes is whether feelings about the parties are one-sided or mixed for most citizens. It turns out that for both the Republican Party (36.4 percent) and the Democratic Party (36.8 percent), just over one-third of the sample expressed little or no ambivalence, i.e., they register SIM scores of zero or below. In sharp contrast, approximately one in four exhibited what we categorize as a “high” degree of ambivalence (a SIM score of 2 or above): 23.2 percent of all respondents were highly ambivalent about the Republican Party, 25.3 percent about the Democratic Party, while the rest (40.5 and 37.9 percent, respectively) fell in the middle. These numbers do not prove that most citizens are profoundly ambivalent about the parties. They demonstrate beyond any doubt, however, that (a) some feelings of partisan ambivalence are more the norm than the exception; and (b) a sizable minority of the electorate possess highly conflicted views toward one party, the other, or both.

A more nuanced picture is provided in Table 2, where ambivalence is broken down by respondents’ self-identifications. There are two sets of entries, Part I showing how Democrats (N = 271) and Republicans (N = 226) feel about their own party, and Part II revealing how those same groups feel about the opposition (at this point, other-party identifiers and nonidentifiers are excluded). It is hardly surprising that most people viewed their party much more favorably, and much less unfavorably, than they did their rivals (Pew Research Center 2014a). For example,
65.5 percent of Republicans said they felt “generally” or “extremely” positive about the GOP, while 85.4 percent felt “generally/extremely” negative (and a mere 1.7 percent “generally/extremely” positive) about the Democratic Party. Similarly, 65.3 percent of Democrats felt “generally/extremely” positive about their party, compared with 74.6 percent who felt “generally/extremely” negative (and 1.5 percent “generally/extremely” positive) about the GOP. Three points stand out here. The first is that identifiers, in the aggregate, expressed considerably less positive affect for their own party than negative affect toward the opposition (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). Second, some equivocation was evident even among the majority who held their party in relatively high regard, i.e., just 6.6 percent of Republicans and 12.2 percent of Democrats had “extremely” positive feelings about their respective parties. Third, more than one-third of both partisan groups expressed only “some” or even “no” positive feelings, and almost three-quarters (73.9 percent Republicans, 74.5 percent Democrats) said they had “some” negative feelings, toward their own party.

Table 2 about here

These numbers suggest, and a further examination of the results in Table 2 confirms, that moderate-to-high ambivalence is not uncommon among voters – though such ambivalence is more likely to be directed at one’s own party than at the opposition. For example, 70.8 percent of Republicans and 71.2 percent of Democrats simultaneously expressed “some.generally” positive feelings and “some” negative feelings about their party; in contrast, 67.7 percent of Republicans had “generally/extremely” negative along with “no” positive feelings about the Democrats, and 56.1 percent of Democrats exhibited the same configuration of attitudes regarding the GOP. The predominant pattern, then, was for voters to see the opposition in unambiguously negative terms while simultaneously feeling at least moderately conflicted about their own party. Something
along the lines of: *We’re not perfect, but the other guys are worse.* And it is ambivalence about one’s own party that we expect to play a role in shaping citizens’ reactions to negative campaign communications.

Results support some, but not all, of our expectations regarding the role that ambivalence plays in moderating the effectiveness of campaign attacks. According to H1, attacks against a fellow partisan will be most effective among respondents who are highly ambivalent about their party. Column 1 in Table 3 reveals two things about ambivalent vs. univalent partisans:24 First, even before the attack, based solely on the biographical information provided, those individuals who expressed either high or moderate levels of ambivalence were significantly less likely (80.6 and 86.9 percent, respectively, p < .01) than their low-ambivalence counterparts (97.6 percent) to say they would vote for their party’s candidate. Second, high- and moderate-ambivalence voters also exhibited larger post-attack declines in support for that candidate (33.3 and 30.8 points, respectively, compared with just 21.4 points for those who experienced little or no cognitive conflict regarding their party). While this latter finding, in particular, is consistent with H1, none of the differences observed between ambivalence groups is significant at conventional levels.

We do, however, see a similar pattern for incumbent favorability, where the mean score (on a 7-point scale) dropped most among the highly ambivalent and least among univalent partisans as a result of the attack – and in this instance, differences between high- and moderate-ambivalence voters on the one hand, and low-ambivalence voters on the other, are significant (both p < .05). It is important to note that the real contrast revealed in the first two columns of Table 3 is between the univalent and everybody else, i.e., the effect of what we characterize as “moderate” and “high” ambivalence is essentially the same. With that caveat, and keeping in mind the marginal significance of differences between high/moderate and low ambivalence
groups on vote preference (p < .15), we might conclude that ambivalence about one’s own party – a phenomenon which is fairly widespread if not universal – makes voters at least somewhat more receptive to campaign attacks by the opposition.

Table 3 about here

This effect does not extend to favorability ratings for the attacking candidate. Although those ratings declined sharply and significantly following the attack, backlash was of comparable magnitude across all three ambivalence categories. Likewise, and contrary to what we expected, ambivalence toward their own party did not contribute to greater backlash among the attacker’s co-partisans (column 4), i.e., lower post-attack challenger favorability is evident in roughly equal measure across the board. H2 is therefore disconfirmed.

To what extent, if at all, does ambivalence come into play when candidates respond to campaign attacks made by their opponent? H3 posits that a response by one’s fellow partisan will be less effective among voters who are highly ambivalent about their party. Table 4 displays in-party shifts in vote preference and incumbent favorability occurring between t_2 (post-attack) and t_3 (post-response). With regard to vote choice (top half of the table), our results do not support H3 in any instance. Among the least ambivalent (whom we believed would therefore be most responsive to a fellow partisan’s campaign rebuttal), change from t_2 to t_3 was significant (p < .10[^26]) only for a response in the form of a justification. Contrary to expectations, a significant shift (p < .05) toward the incumbent occurred among high- and moderate-ambivalence voters for three of the five responses: denials, justifications, and counterattacks. Only in the case of denial, however, were cross-group differences statistically significant (high- vs. low-ambivalence, p < .10), i.e., individuals who were highly ambivalent about their party moved in substantially greater numbers than the univalent (45.5 vs. 14.3 percent) into the incumbent’s column following
his challenge to the accuracy of the charges made in *taking advantage*. While weak overall, these results are less in line with our own expectations (rooted in the theoretical framework suggested by Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012) than they are with the proposition that people with weak attitudes will be more influenced by any counterframe than those who possess stronger attitudes (Chong and Druckman 2013).

Table 4 about here

When we consider incumbent favorability (bottom half of Table 4), H3 fares no better. Significant change (*p* ≤ .10) in the form of increased ratings for one’s co-partisan occurred from *t*₂ to *t*₃ among all three ambivalence groups and for each of the five responses. Only for denial was the magnitude of change less (as hypothesized) for the highly ambivalent than for the least ambivalent, and this difference cannot be interpreted as having occurred other than by chance (*p* = .328). A word of caution is in order here: Because the number of respondents involved in any given comparison is usually quite small (see note 26), tests of statistical significance may at times cause us to overlook even large differences between groups. Unfortunately for our argument, there are enough instances (for both vote choice and incumbent favorability) where the *direction* of the relationship is opposite from what we predicted in H3 that significance is not an issue. Indeed, in the one instance where the degree of change for incumbent favorability is significantly different for high- vs. low-ambivalence respondents (accusations of mudslinging, *p* < .10), it is the former who moved the most.

We saw in Table 3 that the original attack generated roughly equivalent levels of backlash, in the form of lower favorability ratings for the challenger/attacker, among the incumbent/target’s co-partisans regardless of their ambivalence level. The top portion of Table 5 indicates that a second wave of backlash occurred following most rebuttals, though a clear pattern is difficult to discern. For example, challenger favorability actually *rose* from *t*₂ to *t*₃ among (a) the highly and moderately
ambivalent who viewed the counterimaging response and (b) univalent voters who received the mudslinging treatment. Where ratings did fall as expected, sometimes the largest drop was evident among the highly ambivalent (justifications, mudslinging) and other times among those who were moderately ambivalent (denials, counterattacks). Also, small N’s notwithstanding, there are three instances in which the magnitude of post-response backlash was significantly different (p < .10 or better) across ambivalence groups – but these differences were not always in the same direction (a sharper decline in favorability among high/moderate-ambivalence voters for justifications and mudslinging, but among low-ambivalence voters for counterimaging). Overall, the inconsistency and overall weakness of our findings here raise further doubts about the relationships posited in H3.

Table 5 about here

In the bottom half of Table 5, we consider the impact of responses on challenger/attacker favorability among her fellow partisans. Our hypothesis (H4) is that the impact of such responses will be negative (generating lower favorability) in general, but more so among individuals who express a high degree of ambivalence about their party. Once again, our results are unimpressive. Just three of five responses tested (denials, justifications, counterattacks) resulted in significantly lower challenger favorability (p < .10) among that candidate’s co-partisans, and in only a single instance (justifications) was the decline from t2 to t3 significantly larger (p < .05) among the highly ambivalent than among the univalent. As with H2, our expectations in H4 are not supported: Ambivalence had no consistent effect on the attacking candidate’s standing among fellow partisans, as a result of either the attack itself or the responses that followed.

Finally, we make note of the net effects resulting from our simulated campaign exchange, from pre-attack to post-response. There are three possibilities: the incumbent/target could have emerged as (a) weaker than before, (b) stronger than before, or (c) in roughly the same position
that existed prior to the attack. Results (not shown; see our online appendix for additional details, also Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2015 for a fuller discussion) indicate that, with regard to vote intention, the effect of all five responses was essentially to restore the status quo; that is, for most of the incumbent’s fellow partisans, regardless of their level of ambivalence, no significant net movement occurred from t₁ to t₃.²⁸

The data have a more interesting story to tell about our two measures of candidate favorability. First, for most responses, the effect of attack plus response was lower incumbent/target favorability among all respondents (Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2015) and, specifically, among her fellow partisans. In H₁ and H₃, we predicted opposite reactions by the latter group, i.e., that an attack (by an opposing partisan) would be more effective, but a response (by a fellow partisan) less effective, among individuals who felt highly ambivalent about their party – with the cumulative effect of the exchange being something of a double whammy among the target’s ambivalent co-partisans. This is more or less what happened for incumbent favorability, where scores were consistently lower post-response than they had been prior to the attack. For what it is worth, we note that these t₁-t₃ changes were statistically significant (p < .10 or better) much more often among the highly ambivalent (all responses except denials) and moderately ambivalent (all except counterimaging) than among the univalent (p < .10 only for mudslinging).²⁹ One might wonder whether lower favorability scores really matter when the distribution of vote intentions is roughly the same at the end of our experiment as it was at the beginning. We answer this question by pointing out that candidate evaluations are sometimes believed to be the most proximal determinants of vote choice (Kelley and Mirer 1974); thus, it is possible that the altered perceptions documented here could ultimately influence the election outcome even if they do not have an immediate (or direct) effect on the vote decision itself.
Incumbents were not the only ones whose favorability remained lower post-response than it was prior to the attack. Among both same- and opposite-party identifiers, evaluations of the challenger/attacker were significantly more negative at t3 than at t1 across (a) all five types of responses and (b) for the most part, all three ambivalence levels. In other words, the challenger paid a price in almost every quarter, at least in terms of his personal image, for choosing to go negative. How this loss of standing might play out on Election Day is a question for which we obviously have no answer. Within the context of our simulation, however, we can state with some confidence that the impact of challenger evaluations was not mediated to any meaningful degree by feelings of partisan ambivalence.

**Conclusion**

Even political consultants, who are inclined to believe that negative ads “work,” don’t believe that they *always* “work” (after all, many candidates who go negative end up losing their race) or that they “work” equally well among all segments of the electorate. Our focus in this paper has been on the fact that even in an era of seemingly “resurgent” partisanship, there still are many Americans who possess a mix of positive and negative feelings about the political parties, including (especially) their own – and that those mixed feelings may make them more receptive to campaign attacks against their fellow partisans, but less likely to be influenced by the rebuttals made by co-partisans following an attack. Similarly, we posited that those who are ambivalent about their party will be more inclined to “punish” co-partisans (giving them lower personal evaluations) for going negative in the first place.

In general, our findings indicate that ambivalence may play a less prominent role than that suggested by Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012) in moderating the effectiveness of both negative campaign ads and candidates’ responses to those ads. This is especially true for
responses, where observed changes were frequently in the opposite direction from what we predicted (and not significantly different across levels of partisan ambivalence in any event). Ambivalence played a more prominent, if inconsistent, role in shaping voters’ reactions to the original attack. Not only were highly and moderately ambivalent individuals less supportive of their party’s candidate to begin with, they also were more likely than the univalent to withdraw vote support and to view that candidate less favorably following the attack. Not all of these differences across groups were statistically significant, but the overall pattern suggests that ambivalence does moderate, to some degree, the reactions of voters to opposition attacks against their party’s candidates. In our campaign simulation, however, ambivalence played little or no role in shaping evaluations of the attacking candidate by either fellow or opposing partisans.

Apart from the usual qualifications (especially regarding external validity; see Gadarian and Lau 2011; but cf. Arceneaux 2010) that must accompany any controlled experiment, we acknowledge that our study merely touches the surface in terms of exploring the impact of partisan ambivalence in contemporary political campaigns. We would like to know more, for example, about how the moderating role of ambivalence might vary with the repetition of ads (Fernandes 2013); their timing (Chong and Druckman 2013); the degree to which they receive earned media coverage (Ridout and Franz 2011); candidate vs. party vs. external sponsorship (Brooks and Murov 2012; Weber, Dunaway, and Johnson 2012); and the specific type of ads being examined (e.g., positive rather than negative, policy- rather than performance-based). For now, the jury remains out regarding the ways in which feelings of partisan ambivalence might affect how voters react to the various kinds of messages they receive at campaign time.
Notes


3. Among the changes noted by Hetherington: citizens were more likely to perceive “important differences” between the parties, better able to name things they liked and disliked about each, less neutral (expressing an equal number of likes and dislikes) in their feelings about either, and more likely to feel positively about one and negatively about the other.


5. Some of this movement occurred as the result of generational change rather than conversion. While there may have been an increase in the proportion of Americans who say there are “important differences” between the parties (see note 3), it is also true that the public as a whole perceives the Republicans and the Democrats as being only somewhat further apart ideologically in the 2010s than was true twenty, thirty, or even forty years ago (Sides 2013).


7. To be sure, the impact of campaigns ads does not have to be of great magnitude to be meaningful in a close election, e.g., see Goldstein and Freedman (2000); Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson (2004); Franz and Ridout (2007); Huber and Arceneaux (2007); also Gerber et al. (2011); Hill et al. (2013).

8. Although we will note the behavior of non-leaning Independents, our expectations of how that behavior might be shaped by ambivalence about one or both parties is uncertain.
9. Also see Garramone (1985); Roddy and Garramone (1988); Jasperson and Fan (2002); Fridkin and Kenney (2011); Brooks and Murov (2012); Craig, Rippere, and Grayson (2015).

10. For example, see Garramone (1985); Roddy and Garramone (1988); Pfau and Kenski (1990); Freedman, Wood, and Lawton (1999); Carraro et al. (2012); Craig, Rippere, and Grayson (2015).

11. Attitude strength, or extremity, and attitudinal ambivalence are not synonymous, but there is evidence that the two are negatively related (Kaplan 1972; Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995). We therefore take ambivalence to be an example of a “weak” attitude.

12. The sample consisted of 51.8% women and 48.2% men; 78.6% whites and 21.5% nonwhites; 17.1% aged 18-29, 26.6% aged 30-44, 29.6% aged 45-59, and 26.7% aged 60 and over; 10.7% high-school graduates or less, 26.6% with some college, 34.6% college graduates, and 28.1% with some postgraduate education; 29.3% self-identified liberals, 21.9% moderates, 34.3% conservatives, and 14.5% other (including 11.8% who said they “haven’t thought much about it”); 40.9% self-identified Democrats, 13.6% “pure” independents, 34.1% Republicans, and 11.3% other (the latter figure higher than one would normally expect to see in a national survey, in part – or so we suspect – because our questionnaire listed both “other” and “don’t know/not sure” as explicit response options; see our online appendix at http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/sccraig/apsa14appendix.pdf for question wording).

13. Each candidate’s party affiliation and status as either challenger or incumbent was specified, but otherwise the biosketches were crafted in such a way as to ensure that the two portrayals were essentially equivalent.

14. On the potential persuasive effects of negative direct mail, see Gerber, Kessler, and Meredith (2011).
15. We were assisted in writing the candidate biographies, attacks, and responses by an experienced campaign consultant who has worked on numerous legislative races over the years. Additional details about this survey can be found in our online appendix.

16. A second attack, accusing the incumbent of being out of touch with constituents (see Craig, Rippere, and Grayson 2015 for a description), was used in an earlier stage of this project but dropped here because its impact on respondents’ attitudes and vote was substantially less clear-cut than that of taking advantage.

17. According to Fridkin and Kenney (2008), relevant (containing information regarding how a politician has influenced/is likely to influence voters’ lives) and uncivil (uncertain about where to draw the line, we prefer the term “hard-hitting”) negative ads have the greatest impact on evaluations of the targeted candidate. Some of the charges made in our ads involved behavior that was said to have occurred during the target’s prior service as a county commissioner or state legislator.

18. We should note that our randomization process appears to have been successful. No statistically significant differences (p < .10) were observed among members of the twenty groups with regard to demographics, partisanship, ideological self-placement, or baseline candidate preferences (vote choice, favorability ratings). In addition, there were no statistically significant differences for these same variables among respondents assigned to the five response types. Thus, if differences are found across research groups after respondents read the attack and response messages, we can be confident that these are driven by exposure to the experimental stimuli.

19. Conceptually, the first part of the equation – \([(P + N)/2]\) – states that with similarity held constant, greater intensity leads to greater ambivalence; that is, as the average value of
positive and negative scores increases, so do feelings of ambivalence. The second part of the equation – |P - N| – indicates that when similarity increases (e.g., an equal number of positive and negative reactions), a lesser amount is subtracted from the ambivalence total than if similarity were reduced; consequently, greater similarity translates into higher scores on ambivalence.

20. Two respondents did not answer either of the party feelings questions and were coded as missing for our entire analysis.


22. Additional details can be found on our online appendix.

23. As stated earlier, we had no clear expectations for how partisan ambivalence would affect the behavior of these individuals. For the record (see our online appendix for more), although non-leaning Independents expressed few positive feelings either way (none were “extremely” positive, just 17.8 percent were “generally” positive about the Democrats and 10.0 percent about the Republicans), neither were they overwhelmingly negative (43.3 percent were “generally/extremely” negative about the Republicans, 42.2 percent about the Democrats). As for ambivalence, the modal response combination for each party was from respondents who said they had “some” positive and “some” negative feelings (37.8 percent Republicans, 34.4 percent Democrats).

24. The coding scheme used to classify respondents as either high, medium, or low on ambivalence toward the parties is discussed above (also see our online appendix for details).

25. Readers will recall that we made no predictions about the impact of ambivalence
among those who do not identify as either Democrats or Republicans. A replication of Table 3 for all nonpartisans (pure Independents, other-party identifiers, and respondents who aren’t sure of their affiliation) suggests that ambivalence may matter in some circumstances, e.g., voters who felt highly ambivalent about the incumbent/target’s party were more likely than others to (a) say they would support the incumbent based solely on biographical information (62.1 percent); (b) abandon that vote intention following the attack (minus 32.8 percentage points); and (c) evaluate the incumbent less favorably following the attack (a drop of 0.517 on the 7-point scale). Overall, though, our results for nonpartisans are neither consistent (for example, the post-attack decline in challenger favorability was greatest among those expressing moderate ambivalence) nor in most cases statistically significant.

26. In this section, we relax our standard for significance slightly due to the very small N’s involved.

27. Neither of these changes was statistically significant in and of itself (p > .10), though in both cases they resulted in cross-group differences that did clear the significance bar (see text for details).

28. The mudslinging response was notably less effective than the others, as the incumbent suffered a double-digit loss of support in all three ambivalence categories. With the small N’s involved, however, only a 20-point drop among the moderately ambivalent was statistically significant (p < .05).

29. The net decline in incumbent favorability was most pronounced among high- relative to low-ambivalence voters in the case of counterattacks (p < .01) and counterimaging (p < .10).
References


Hill, Seth J., James Lo, Lynn Vavreck, and John Zaller. 2013. “How Quickly We Forget: The


Table 1: Five Responses to Attacks on Incumbent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Type</th>
<th>Attack: Taking Advantage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Denial        | Candidate did nothing wrong:  
• pay raises enacted before s/he took office;  
• only personal money used to pay for family vacation;  
• office complex where district office is located no longer owned by candidate’s brother;  
• overbilling was due to a clerical error and quickly corrected;  
• investigation by Attorney General found no evidence of wrongdoing |
| Counterattack | Opponent is the one deserving of criticism because s/he:  
• filed false business tax return;  
• accepted illegal campaign contributions;  
• steered government contracts to business clients and campaign donors;  
• opposed stricter ethics laws for state officials |
| Counterimaging| Candidate is a (wo)man of character as s/he:  
• helped support family after father died;  
• put him/herself through college and earned scholarship to graduate school;  
• started own business that creates many jobs;  
• has served country (active duty/military reserves), community (volunteer work), those less fortunate (established college scholarship fund), and church (charitable activities, missions) |
| Justification | Candidate’s actions were reasonable/warranted:  
• pay raises did not apply to anyone currently in office;  
• vacation followed official trade meetings, with the party reimbursed for personal expenses;  
• district office is the same used by predecessor, and rent has not increased since then;  
• dispute over fee charged for professional services settled amicably;  
• no personal or close political connections to recipients of state contracts |
| Mudslinging   | Opponent is desperate and has become “relentlessly negative,” thereby:  
• failing to discuss the issues people really care about;  
• ignoring the fact that voters are sick of campaign mudslinging;  
• contributing to voter pessimism and low turnout;  
• exhibiting weak leadership skills, and a lack of class and integrity |
Table 2: The Distribution of Partisan Ambivalence, by Party Identification

### Part I: Feelings about One’s Own Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Negative</th>
<th>Some Negative</th>
<th>Generally Negative</th>
<th>Extremely Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republicans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Positive</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Positive</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Positive</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Positive</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrats</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Positive</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Positive</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Positive</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Positive</td>
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<td>3.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>73.9%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Low, moderate, and high levels of ambivalence (see text for coding) are indicated by cell shadings of light, medium, and dark gray, respectively. Partisans include strong and weak identifiers as well as leaners.

### Part II: Feelings about the Opposing Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Negative</th>
<th>Some Negative</th>
<th>Generally Negative</th>
<th>Extremely Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republicans’ Feelings about the Democratic Party</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Positive</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>69.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Positive</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Positive</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Positive</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Negative</th>
<th>Some Negative</th>
<th>Generally Negative</th>
<th>Extremely Negative</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrats’ Feelings about the Republican Party</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Positive</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
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<td>63.5%</td>
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<td>16.6%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
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<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Positive</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Positive</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Low, moderate, and high levels of ambivalence (see text for coding) are indicated by cell shadings of light, medium, and dark gray, respectively. Partisans include strong and weak identifiers as well as leaners.
Table 3: Effectiveness of Campaign Attack, by Levels of Ambivalence (Partisans Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ambivalence about Incumbent's Party, Incumbent Co-Partisans</th>
<th>Ambiv. about Challenger's Party, Challenger Co-Partisans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vote for Incumbent</td>
<td>Favorability, Incumbent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$, Prop</td>
<td>$N$, Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline eval.</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack eval.</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>-0.333 (0.075)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline eval.</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack eval.</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>-0.308 (0.053)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline eval.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack eval.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>-0.214 (0.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.002</td>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The analysis was conducted using paired t-tests. For vote choice, difference is calculated as proportion (post-attack vote) – proportion (baseline vote). For favorability, difference is calculated as mean (post-attack) – mean (baseline). Significance tests are 1-tailed.
Table 4: Effectiveness of Campaign Responses, Vote Choice and Incumbent Favorability (Partisans Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Counterimaging</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Counterattack</th>
<th>Mudslinging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High Ambivalence</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack evaluation</td>
<td>11 0.545 (0.150)</td>
<td>16 0.500 (0.125)</td>
<td>14 0.571 (0.132)</td>
<td>14 0.429 (0.132)</td>
<td>17 0.353 (0.116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-response evaluation</td>
<td>11 1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>16 0.688 (0.116)</td>
<td>14 0.929 (0.069)</td>
<td>14 0.857 (0.094)</td>
<td>17 0.529 (0.121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>0.455 (0.150)</td>
<td>0.188 (0.170)</td>
<td>0.357 (0.149)</td>
<td>0.429 (0.162)</td>
<td>0.176 (0.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.006 p = 0.140</td>
<td>p = 0.015</td>
<td>p = 0.009</td>
<td>p = 0.150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate Ambivalence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack evaluation</td>
<td>21 0.476 (0.109)</td>
<td>28 0.750 (0.082)</td>
<td>21 0.476 (0.109)</td>
<td>25 0.480 (0.100)</td>
<td>35 0.571 (0.084)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-response evaluation</td>
<td>21 0.810 (0.086)</td>
<td>28 0.857 (0.066)</td>
<td>21 0.857 (0.076)</td>
<td>25 0.880 (0.065)</td>
<td>35 0.714 (0.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>0.333 (0.139)</td>
<td>0.107 (0.105)</td>
<td>0.381 (0.133)</td>
<td>0.400 (0.119)</td>
<td>0.143 (0.113)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
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<td>p = 0.004</td>
<td>p = 0.001</td>
<td>p = 0.106</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Low Ambivalence</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack evaluation</td>
<td>7 0.857 (0.132)</td>
<td>7 1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>11 0.636 (0.145)</td>
<td>7 0.571 (0.187)</td>
<td>10 0.800 (0.126)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-response evaluation</td>
<td>7 1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>7 1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>11 1.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>7 0.857 (0.132)</td>
<td>10 0.900 (0.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>0.143 (0.132)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.364 (0.145)</td>
<td>0.286 (0.229)</td>
<td>0.100 (0.158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.150 ---</td>
<td>p = 0.014</td>
<td>p = 0.118</td>
<td>p = 0.266</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: The analysis was conducted using paired t-tests. For vote choice, difference is calculated as proportion (post-response vote) – proportion (post-attack vote). For favorability, difference is calculated as mean (post-response) – mean (post-attack). Significance tests are 1-tailed.
Table 5: Effectiveness of Campaign Responses, Challenger Favorability (Partisans Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Counterimaging</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Counterattack</th>
<th>Mudslinging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Ambivalence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack evaluation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.364 (0.338)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.625 (0.364)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-response evaluation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.818 (0.325)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.813 (0.390)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>-0.545 (0.282)</td>
<td>0.188 (0.164)</td>
<td>-1.286 (0.485)</td>
<td>-1.071 (0.425)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.041</td>
<td>p = 0.135</td>
<td>p = 0.010</td>
<td>p = 0.013</td>
<td>p = 0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Ambivalence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack evaluation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.762 (0.248)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.036 (0.249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-response evaluation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.429 (0.254)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.250 (0.234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>-1.333 (0.252)</td>
<td>0.214 (0.188)</td>
<td>-1.238 (0.292)</td>
<td>-1.160 (0.243)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
<td>p = 0.132</td>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
<td>p = 0.000</td>
<td>p = 0.025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Ambivalence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-attack evaluation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.429 (0.429)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.286 (0.421)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-response evaluation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.143 (0.340)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.143 (0.459)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diff</td>
<td>-0.286 (0.522)</td>
<td>-0.143 (0.143)</td>
<td>-0.364 (0.279)</td>
<td>-0.714 (0.565)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.302</td>
<td>p = 0.178</td>
<td>p = 0.111</td>
<td>p = 0.127</td>
<td>p = 0.217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The analysis was conducted using paired t-tests. For vote choice, difference is calculated as proportion (post-response vote) - proportion (post-attack vote). For favorability, difference is calculated as mean (post-response) - mean (post-attack). Significance tests are 1-tailed.