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Negative Campaign Advertising: Demobilizer or Mobilizer?

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A s political campaigns become increasingly adversarial, scholars are giving some much-needed attention to the effect of negative advertising on turnout. In a widely recognized Review article and subsequent book, Ansolabehere and his colleagues (1994, 1995) contend that attack advertising drives potential voters away from the polls. We dispute the generalizability of this claim outside the experimental setting. Using NES survey data as well as aggregate sources, we subject their research to rigorous real-world testing. The survey data directly contradict their findings, yielding no evidence of a turnout disadvantage for those who recollected negative presidential campaign advertising. In attempting to replicate Ansolabehere et al.'s earlier aggregate results we uncover quite substantial discrepancies and inconsistencies in their data set. We conclude that their aggregate study is deeply flawed and that Ansolabehere et al. exaggerated the demobilization dangers posed by attack advertising, at least in voters' own context.

Few developments have altered the character of American election campaigns as dramatically as the rise of negative television advertising. Long gone are the days of the 1948 Truman-Dewey contest, when the two major candidates went through the entire campaign without once referring to his opponent by name (McCullough 1992, 670). As the focus of presidential campaigns has shifted from the stump speech to the 30-second ad, charges and countercharges have become both more frequent and direct. Darrell West's (1997, 59) content analysis of prominent ads in presidential campaigns finds that negative appeals have dominated the national airwaves since 1980.

Negative ads not only are regularly decried as polluting the national political debate but also are accused of contributing to low voter turnout. Three days after the 1996 election, Bill Clinton and Bob Dole were asked what they thought caused the poor turnout. The president stated: "The more negative the ads are, the lower the turnout is" (November 8, 1996, at a press conference). Dole listed "a lot of negative ads" as one explanation, adding that "people do get turned off with negative ads" (November 8, 1996, on the Letterman show).

Had Clinton and Dole been asked to back up their claims about negative ads, their aides probably would have quickly dug up references to the work of Stephen Ansolabehere and his colleagues (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Ansolabehere et al. 1994). Through a set of innovative controlled experiments, they show that subjects who view a negative ad embedded in a news broadcast are significantly less likely to say they will vote.[1] These findings are supplemented by an analysis of aggregate turnout and rolloff data from 1992 Senate races, which appears to show that participation is lower in states where candidates employ negative ads.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, 9) assert that "attack ads can be and are used strategically for demobilization." They argue that political strategists intentionally employ negative ads to discourage segments of the electorate from voting and are well aware that lower turnout is the result. In our view, however, it makes little sense to limit the goal of campaign ads to influencing turnout, particularly since scholars have found that television advertising actually contributes to political learning (Brians and Wattenberg 1996; Patterson and McClure 1976). Imagine an election in which polling shows that 100 million people are expected to vote—53 million for the Democrat and 47 million for the Republican. A negative ad strategy would have to cause more than 6 million Democrats to stay home, but by changing the mind of roughly 3 million Democratic supporters, the Republicans would come out on top. Given that most voters repeatedly vote (Campbell et al. 1960, 92–3), would it not be much easier to change the criteria on which 3 million people make up their mind than to persuade 6 million to kick the voting habit?[2]

We believe the intent of most negative commercials is to convert votes by focusing on an issue for which the sponsoring candidate has credibility in handling but on which the opponent is weak. As Petrocik (1996) argues, each party has issues that they "own," and a campaign is a contest to focus attention on issues that favor them. From this perspective, even the infamous "Revolving Door" and "Willie Horton" ads of 1988 can be seen as part of a Republican strategy to change voters' minds rather than demobilize Dukakis supporters. Republicans chose to focus on this issue not merely due to the weakness they perceived in their opponent's record but also because their party had long cultivated an image of being tough on crime. Certainly, the message got

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[1] Jamieson and Cappella (1996, 16) question the external validity of these experiments. They contend that the ads used by Ansolabehere

et al. more resemble the amateur ads of earlier years than modern political ads.
[2] Ruy Teixeira (1992, 87) makes a similar argument that it is much easier to change election outcomes by converting those who intend to vote than by mobilizing new participants.

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through to a good portion of the public in 1988. Wattenberg (1991, 121) found that the most commonly stated issue-based reason for opposing Dukakis was that he had a "lenient policy toward criminals." Interestingly, 74% of the people who made this remark in the NES preelection interview later said they voted, as compared to 69% who did not make this comment.[3] Although we have no way of knowing whether these respondents saw the ads in question, the substantive message certainly permeated the electorate. The fact that respondents who showed an awareness of the ads' theme had higher turnout rates appears inconsistent with the demobilization hypothesis and suggests the need for further empirical tests.

This article demonstrates that the demobilization theory cannot be confirmed based on analysis of NES data from 1992 and 1996. In 1992, recollection of negative campaign ads was actually associated with significantly *higher* turnout, and in 1996 there was no significant relationship in either direction. We also reexamine the aggregate data analyzed by Ansolabehere et al. and find no evidence that the advertising tone of Senate campaigns affects voter participation.

ELECTION DATA ON NEGATIVE ADVERTISING RECALL AND TURNOUT

In the 1992 NES an open-ended question asked people if they recalled seeing any presidential campaign advertisements on television, and if so, what they remembered about any of these ads. The NES changed the format of the second part in 1996: People who recalled seeing an ad were asked to think about which one they recalled best and then say who sponsored it and what it said. Although the question format differs somewhat, in both cases we can identify which respondents remembered seeing negative ads, positive ads, or no ads at all, and then correlate this information with reported turnout. (Unfortunately, the NES did not conduct a voter validation study in either year.)

It should be noted that recall data do not measure overall exposure to various types of political advertising. In all probability, nearly everyone in the country was exposed to some negative and positive advertising during these campaigns. In this article, we are specifically interested in which ads, if any, made such a lasting impression that people recalled them when asked an open-ended question about political advertising. Details on the item wording and coding are given in Appendix A. Appendix B contains an analysis of the factors related to negative advertising recall, including data demonstrating that this variable is not merely a surrogate for attentiveness to politics.

Interestingly, when people were given the chance to say whatever occurred to them about TV political ads in 1992, the most common response was a broad statement that there was too much negative campaign-

TABLE 1. Percentage Turnout in 1992 and 1996, by Comments about Recall of Positive and Negative Political Ads for Presidential Candidates

	1992	1996
Did not mention negative or positive ads	72.2 (562)	69.7 (577)
Said something about a negative ad	82.5 (681)	76.4 (288)
Said something about a *specific* negative ad	84.1 (321)	77.4 (230)
Said something about a positive ad	82.2 (275)	82.1 (128)
Said something about a *specific* positive ad	82.0 (245)	81.6 (120)

Source: 1992 and 1996 NES.
Note: Figures are weighted percentage voting. The variables are defined in Appendix A.

ing. Responses that either Bush or Clinton had engaged in negative campaigning were also quite frequent. All told, 18% of the respondents who were asked the initial question remarked that there were too many negative ads, either in general or by one of the two major candidates. If Ansolabehere et al. (1994) are correct, then these people should be the most likely to fit the profile of demobilized citizens. Yet, the data indicate a mobilizing rather than demobilizing effect for negative ads. The reported turnout rate for those who complained about mudslinging in 1992 was six percentage points above those who did not offer this criticism. In 1996, only 5% of the respondents complained about negative ads, but again there is no evidence that they were sufficiently turned off to stay home. The turnout rate for this group in 1996 was a mere 1% below the rest of the sample. Throughout the analysis in this section, we will see that the 1992 data support a mobilization effect for negative ads, whereas the 1996 data show no significant influence of ads on turnout.

A broader cut at the data involves examining the turnout rate for respondents who made a comment about negative ads, either in general or in particular. We can also do the same for those who recall seeing positive ads. Ansolabehere et al. argue that when people are exposed to positive advertising they become more likely to vote, whereas those who view negative ads are less likely to turn out. The 1992 and 1996 data displayed in Table 1 do not support their experimental research. Recall of both positive and negative ads is associated with above-average turnout. There was little difference between the turnout rates of those who recalled positive as compared to negative ads in 1992, whereas in 1996 those who remembered seeing positive ads had the highest turnout rates. However, both groups had higher turnout in both years compared to those who recalled neither type of ad. In both years, turnout rates differ little according to whether people recalled specific spots or made general comments about the ads. Hence, in the rest of the analysis we

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[3] Nine percent of the entire sample spontaneously discussed this issue when asked what they disliked about Dukakis. Independents who offered this comment were about eight percentage points more likely to vote compared to those who did not mention this issue.

TABLE 2. Reported Turnout, by Recollection of Ads, 1992 and 1996

	1992 Commented on			1996 Commented on		
	No Ads	Negative Ads	Positive Ads	No Ads	Negative Ads	Positive Ad
Years of Education						
11 or fewer	39.3 (122)	61.7 (81)	50.0 (34)	47.4 (192)	61.4 (44)	70.8 (24)
High school grad	69.1 (175)	79.2 (245)	79.5 (73)	66.4 (265)	71.9 (114)	73.8 (61)
College	90.0 (251)	90.0 (340)	89.0 (164)	83.5 (369)	81.7 (219)	92.9 (70)
Age						
18–29 years	59.5 (111)	71.0 (162)	78.3 (69)	48.5 (167)	59.5 (79)	65.2 (23)
30–49	74.5 (243)	84.1 (314)	79.9 (149)	70.1 (331)	78.2 (179)	78.7 (75)
50–69	79.2 (120)	89.0 (155)	93.5 (46)	78.7 (211)	81.6 (76)	90.7 (43)
70 or older	72.7 (88)	90.0 (50)	83.3 (12)	82.1 (117)	88.6 (44)	93.8 (16)
Race						
Nonwhites	54.7 (86)	80.0 (95)	71.8 (39)	59.4 (143)	79.2 (48)	88.2 (17)
Whites	75.6 (475)	82.9 (584)	84.1 (233)	72.1 (681)	76.4 (326)	80.6 (139)
Campaign Interest						
Not much	43.3 (134)	47.2 (53)	52.6 (19)	49.6 (256)	49.3 (73)	50.0 (18)
Somewhat	74.3 (245)	76.6 (291)	76.7 (116)	71.1 (398)	76.1 (188)	78.8 (80)
Very much	90.6 (180)	93.4 (334)	90.7 (140)	95.4 (174)	93.9 (115)	96.6 (58)
Political Efficacy						
Low	53.6 (222)	75.5 (220)	73.7 (76)	59.9 (284)	73.9 (115)	71.8 (39)
Medium	84.0 (175)	82.5 (257)	78.4 (102)	68.6 (293)	72.9 (129)	85.1 (67)
High	88.0 (150)	90.9 (198)	92.7 (96)	82.0 (245)	82.0 (133)	84.3 (51)
Strength of Party ID						
Pure independents	41.0 (61)	65.8 (79)	63.3 (30)	45.9 (85)	43.3 (30)	58.3 (12)
Independent leaners	68.7 (131)	85.3 (197)	84.0 (75)	64.0 (186)	77.9 (95)	72.2 (36)
Weak partisans	77.5 (178)	78.6 (210)	82.4 (85)	69.2 (299)	71.1 (135)	81.6 (49)
Strong partisans	85.3 (177)	91.7 (192)	88.0 (83)	86.4 (242)	90.6 (117)	93.1 (58)
Turnout in Last Presidential Election						
Did not vote	34.1 (173)	52.1 (169)	45.9 (61)	20.7 (213)	31.1 (74)	34.6 (26)
Voted	93.1 (350)	95.5 (164)	94.7 (189)	89.2 (556)	90.4 (280)	93.5 (123)

Source: 1992 and 1996 NES.
Note: Figures are weighted percentage voting of respondents in each cell. The variables are defined in Appendix A. Cell frequencies are given in parentheses.

simply refer to whether respondents made any comments about negative or positive ads in general, or recalled no ads.

Table 2 compares the turnout rates of respondents who commented on negative ads, positive ads, or no ads, controlling for a number of variables that are commonly considered relevant to voter participation. Among unlikely voters, recalling either negative or positive political ads is most clearly associated with higher turnout. Respondents who lack a high school diploma provide an excellent example. Compared to people in this group who did not mention a political ad, those who recalled a negative ad had turnout rates 22 percentage points higher in 1992 and 14 percentage points higher in 1996. The effect of positive ads was similar, although the years are reversed (11 points in 1992, 24 points in 1996). Other groups that were especially likely to have higher turnout if they recalled either kind of ad include young people, independent leaners in both years and pure independents in 1992, nonwhites, and people who scored low on the efficacy scale. Groups that traditionally have a high turnout rate, such as strong partisans, have little potential for further mobilization, and thus ad recall has only a small effect on their turnout rate.

In addition to the lack of clear evidence for the demobilization theory, the NES data contradict the argument by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, 112) that "negative messages tend to alienate nonpartisans from politics further and to discourage their participation in a tainted process." Research over several decades demonstrates that nonpartisans are no less trusting of government than partisans (Wattenberg 1996, 55–7) and that feelings of political cynicism have no significant independent influence on turnout (Teixeira 1992, 33). Thus, there is no reason to expect independents to be demobilized by attack ads. Indeed, the NES data strongly point in the opposite direction for 1992. In 1996, there was a substantially higher turnout rate for independent leaners who recalled negative ads rather than no ads, but among pure independents there was slightly lower turnout. Given the small sample of pure independents who recalled negative ads in 1996 ($n = 30$), we cannot make much of this anomaly.

Another key part of the argument made by Ansolabehere et al. is that one's sense of political efficacy is reduced by seeing negative ads. We also tested this assertion with the NES data and found no evidence in support. Respondents' mean efficacy scores were significantly higher if they recalled negative ads in 1992 versus recalling no political advertising (8.9 vs. 8.5, $p = .02$), whereas in 1996 there was no significant relation-

TABLE 3. Logistic Regression Predicting Turnout, by Political Advertising Recall, Media Usage, and Control Variables

	1992			1996		
Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	R	Coefficient	Standard Error	R
Negative ad comment	0.4300**	0.1605	0.0513	−0.2005	0.1792	0.0000
Positive ad comment	0.0251	0.2080	0.0000	0.2652	0.2806	0.0000
Newspaper political news index	0.0349***	0.0084	0.0879	0.0337**	0.0113	0.0649
TV news index	0.0020	0.0071	0.0000	0.0182*	0.0087	0.0387
Age in years	0.0286***	0.0049	0.1273	0.0295***	0.0054	0.1300
Campaign interest: Somewhat	0.6557***	0.1756	0.0779	0.3824*	0.1672	0.0443
Campaign interest: Very much	1.4788***	0.2230	0.1461	2.0460***	0.3260	0.1507
High school graduate	1.3325***	0.1974	0.1510	0.8434***	0.2103	0.0926
College	2.0577***	0.2148	0.2136	1.6205***	0.2240	0.1749
Gender (female)	0.4412**	0.1396	0.0637	0.3195*	0.1533	0.0377
Family income	0.0505***	0.0126	0.0843	0.0562***	0.0143	0.0907
Interview date: Days to election	0.0115**	0.0040	0.0559	−0.0053	0.0043	0.0000
Marital status (married)	0.2079	0.1489	0.0000	0.6716***	0.1656	0.0937
Independent leaners	0.5026*	0.2096	0.0437	0.8183**	0.2647	0.0678
Weak partisan	0.6050**	0.2062	0.0580	0.7279**	0.2543	0.0614
Strong partisan	1.2841***	0.2386	0.1171	1.7830***	0.2935	0.1457
Political efficacy (medium)	0.5494***	0.1562	0.0726	0.2371	0.1760	0.0000
Political efficacy (high)	0.3819*	0.1816	0.0351	0.4519*	0.1983	0.0440
Race (white)	0.0862	0.1874	0.0000	0.1962	0.2057	0.0000
Constant	−4.9344***	0.4235		−4.4223***	0.4223	
Number of cases	1,843			1,373		
Percentage correctly predicted	85%			81%		

Source: 1992 and 1996 NES.
Note: Figures are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients, using weights. The variables are defined in Appendix A. *R* is each independent variable's partial correlation to the dependent variable. $*p \le .05$, $**p \le .01$, $***p \le .001$; two-tailed test.

ship in either direction. If negative ads deal with issues that concern people—a goal toward which every political consultant no doubt strives—then citizens can reasonably infer that the candidate cares about the same things they do. Even if they do not like the way this is communicated, they may still recognize that at least the candidate is trying to address voters' contemporary concerns.

By emphasizing certain issues, the salience of which usually differs from one campaign to the next, both positive and negative ads may well bring different segments of irregular voters to the polls from year to year. To employ Campbell's (1960) terminology, it is likely that the mobilizing effect of negative ads will be most apparent among peripheral voters. Core voters are likely to turn out in any event, and Table 2 shows that, regardless of ad recall, virtually all those who said they voted in the previous election came out to vote again. Among nonvoters in the previous presidential year, however, those who remembered seeing either kind of ad were more likely to vote. The effects of

positive and negative ads on the turnout of peripheral voters are particularly manifest in 1992.[4]

Finally, a multivariate analysis is required to rule out the possibility that other factors, such as following political news in newspapers or on television, explain the relationship we found between turnout and ad recall. Table 3 presents logistic regression equations that predict turnout in 1992 and 1996 and employ a number of demographic, attitudinal, and media variables. Even when controlling for all these factors, we find that recall of negative political advertising is significantly associated ($p < .01$) with turning out to vote for president in 1992. The coefficient for recall of a positive ad in 1992 was insignificant. In 1996, neither kind of ad had a significant effect on turnout once we control for other factors. The coefficient for negative ads is in the direction predicted by the demobilization hypothesis, but the standard error for negative advertising in 1996 is nearly as large as its coefficient.

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[4] We excluded respondents under age 22 in each year.

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In summary, there is little in the NES data to support Ansolabehere et al.'s theory about negative ads, and a solid piece of evidence in the 1992 data points in the opposite direction.

REANALYZING AGGREGATE VOTER PARTICIPATION DATA FOR SENATE ELECTIONS

To their credit, Ansolabehere et al. do not limit their analysis of the demobilization theory to laboratory data. In an otherwise critical review of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's *Going Negative* (1995), Bartels (1996, 458) writes that "the authors' thesis is considerably bolstered by the supporting evidence provided by this rather modest aggregate-level analysis." That part of the research involved assessing the advertising tone in 34 Senate races in 1992 and relating this information to aggregate patterns in voter participation. Their findings are summarized as follows: "We estimate that if all of the Senate campaigns in 1992 had been positive 6.4 million more people would have gone to the polls. Rolloff would have also been cut substantially, leading 1.2 million people who voted for President to make their voices heard in the Senate as well" (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995, 109).

In addition to the fact that this contradicts the findings from the NES we reported above, we are skeptical that the advertising tone of Senate races could have much influence on turnout or rolloff (the difference between the number of presidential and Senate votes). Regarding turnout, it is important to remember that voting for the Senate is only one of many decisions that American voters are called upon to make. We believe it is unlikely that the advertising tone of one subpresidential race out of many will have a measurable influence on one's probability of voting. As for rolloff, research has shown that the primary reason voters skip a particular office on the ballot is that they have not had any exposure to the candidates (see Wattenberg, McAllister, and Salvanto n.d.). This suggests that lower rolloff will be found where there is more advertising, regardless of its tone.

With these theoretical considerations in mind, we set out to replicate the aggregate participation data gathered by Ansolabehere et al. and then introduce some relevant control variables. Our first pass at the official election statistics revealed a markedly different pattern of turnout and rolloff by advertising tone than that reported by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995). Table 4 compares our findings to theirs. Given the substantively different results, we contacted Ansolabehere in an attempt to identify the source of these discrepancies. He indicated that one facet of their data is the exclusion of absentee ballots, based on the premise that these votes were cast before the last-minute advertising barrage.[5] We believe this assumption, which was not mentioned in Ansolabehere et al. (1994) or Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), is rather dubious. In states such as California, where 17% of those who voted in

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[5] Private e-mail message to the authors, March 21, 1996.

TABLE 4. Average Rolloff and Turnout in 1992 Elections, Comparison of Data Presented by Ansolabehere et al. with Official Election Returns

	Ansolabehere et al. Results	Official Election Results
Average Rolloff (Presidential-Senate vote)		
Negative tone states	6.0%	3.6%
Mixed tone states	5.7%	6.0%
Positive tone states	3.3%	2.8%
Average Turnout (Senate vote)		
Negative tone states	49.7%	51.8%
Mixed tone states	52.4%	50.3%
Positive tone states	57.0%	58.9%

Sources: Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, 108); Federal Election Commission (1993, 37–42).

1992 cast absentee ballots, most campaigns start their advertising early enough to make sure this large bloc of voters views their message before voting.[6] Given the size of the absentee vote in California, its exclusion may skew the results, and the same may be true in other states as well.

In order to explain the differences between the official results and the Ansolabehere et al. figures, we compared the raw numbers in each state after Ansolabehere kindly sent us their data set. The comparison revealed a series of errors with the raw data they analyzed. The following are just three of many examples:

1. In Ohio, classified as having a negative Senate race, their data set shows a 9.4% rolloff; analysis of the official returns yields a 2.8% rolloff. We believe their numbers do not reflect the nonmajor party vote (other than Perot), which totaled 0.5% of the presidential vote and 6.9% of the Senate vote.
2. In Alaska, classified as having a positive campaign in the Senate race, their data set shows 200,458 votes cast for president and 201,128 for the Senate. The official returns record 258,506 votes for president and 239,714 votes for the Senate. In order for their figure on election-day voters to be correct, the rolloff rate among absentee voters would need to be 32%, which is clearly implausible. When we adjust the official numbers to exclude minor candidates, we still cannot come close to replicating their turnout numbers.
3. In Kansas, where Bob Dole was easily reelected in a race without any negative ads, the Ansolabehere et al. data show a rolloff of 8.1%, compared to the official figure of 2.7%. This discrepancy is probably due to their failure to count the minor candidate votes, which amounted to 0.4% for the presidency and 6.3% for the Senate.

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[6] Data on absentee voting in California elections from 1962 to the present is found on the Web at http://Primary96.ss.ca.gov.e/stat/avchart.html. The numbers in the Ansolabehere et al. data set would indicate that 7% of California voters were absentee, whereas the actual percentage was 17%. We are at a loss to explain this discrepancy.

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These examples are fairly typical of the numerous problems we found with the numbers used by Ansolabehere et al. The most common error appears to be exclusion of votes cast for minor candidates, but this is not a consistent error; clearly, in some states, they counted those votes.[7] This type of error also does not explain all the discrepancies between their figures and the official returns, as illustrated by the second example. Overall, the direction of the errors in the Ansolabehere et al. data set favors their theory, as in the first and second examples.

Given the unreliability of the raw numbers on which Ansolabehere et al. base their work, we believe their analysis of how advertising tone affects aggregate participation is also unreliable. As shown in Table 4, the complete official returns provide little support for the demobilization theory.[8] Rolloff was not very different when both major candidates ran negative ads and when both ran positive ads. Turnout for Senate races was not linearly related to advertising tone, although it was significantly higher in positive than negative races. Yet, a quick glance at the state-by-state data reveals a familiar pattern: lowest turnout in the former Confederacy and highest turnout in states with lenient voter registration laws. Once we control for region and the number of days prior to an election that states allow registration, we find that the standard error for the advertising tone variable is more than 12 times as large as its coefficient and hence not remotely significant.[9]

In sum, we find no support for the demobilization hypothesis in the FEC's aggregate Senate participation data. These data also fail to provide evidence for the view that negative ads help mobilize voters. As stated above, however, there is little theoretical reason to expect a relationship between the *tone* of political advertising and participation. Instead, the *amount* of advertising should have a positive effect on participation, regardless of its tone. Future research should focus on testing this alternative hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the infamous "Daisy Girl" commercial—the precursor of today's negative ads—the announcer says: "Vote for President Johnson on November 3d: The stakes are too high for you to stay home." In our

view, negative ads usually attempt to raise issues that will win votes and convince people that the stakes are indeed worthy of their participation. If negative commercials persuade voters that the choice between the candidates is an important one, then they are likely to increase rather than decrease turnout. In 1992, the survey data indicate they succeeded, whereas in 1996 the candidates failed to produce commercials that had such an effect.

Our analysis of the NES and FEC data finds no support for Ansolabehere et al.'s demobilization hypothesis, but that does not necessarily mean their experimental results are flawed. It is well recognized that experimental research can sometimes have great internal validity but rather limited external validity. It is easy to imagine an experimental subject who feels contempt for politics immediately after being exposed to a negative ad and states s/he will not vote. Yet, when election day arrives, this same person may decide to vote after assessing whether the difference between the candidates is worth the trouble of participating. If voters gain important information from these ads, as even Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995, chap. 3) demonstrate they do, then they may actually be more likely to vote.

Why a mobilization effect for negative ads can be found in 1992 but not in 1996 is a question about which we can only speculate. One reason may be that the negative ads in the 1992 presidential campaign were more factual than those in other elections. Even if the 1992 ads were unique in this respect, it is still possible that negative ads do not always have a deleterious effect on the political process. A second reason may be that news coverage about attack ads in 1992 enabled many viewers to benefit from them. This also would not disrupt the findings reported here. It would certainly validate journalistic efforts if their coverage of attack ads promotes turnout among those recalling them. Indeed, experimental evidence suggests that "Adwatch" columns in 1992 may have helped viewers critically process advertising information (Milburn and Brown 1995). Such findings help explain our general conclusion that negative ads *within the current electoral context* do not reduce turnout.

If one is looking for a media-related explanation for America's falling turnout rate, a much better candidate than the rise of negative advertising is the steep decline in public consumption of newspapers. In 1960, U.S. daily newspaper circulation equaled 54 papers for every 100 members of the voting-age population; by 1996, this figure had dropped to 29 (Federal Election Commission 1996; Newspaper Association of America 1998). Both the 1992 and 1996 equations in Table 3 demonstrate that reading a newspaper often and reasonably closely is more strongly associated with turnout than any of the TV ad recall variables. Whatever small role TV advertising may have played in mobilizing voters, such as that found for negative ads in 1992, probably has been more than offset by the decline in newspaper readership.

Politicians may blame low turnout on negative ads, but we believe the blame is misplaced. A number of

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[7] At one point we theorized that the patterns in their rolloff figures may reflect a higher vote for minor candidates in negative tone Senate races. This hypothesis was not supported by the official election returns.

[8] These figures published by the Federal Election Commission are truly complete. The FEC even printed the statistic that one person in Delaware voted for "She-Ra Princess of Power."

[9] We also started to work through a more complex, multivariate model similar to the one presented in Ansolabehere et al. 1994. We found a good deal of multicolinearity between some of the variables, however, most notably a .55 correlation between the closeness of the Senate race and its tone. With only 34 cases (i.e., Senate races), it seems unwise to introduce yet more variables that are so highly interrelated.

As a further point of information, we should note that there was only a −.05 correlation between the closeness of the Senate race and turnout. This is probably because this was only one of many races held in each state.

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policymakers have argued that negative ads are poisoning the political process and have called for their regulation. One bill introduced in the Senate even proposed that targets of such ads be given free response time if the sponsoring candidate fails to make the charge in person on camera.[10] Clearly, the intention is to discourage negative ads. Those who wish to do so should consider the beneficial aspects of negative advertising presented here. In the face of our evidence, it becomes quite difficult to maintain that an awareness of negative advertisements demobilizes voters in the real world.

APPENDIX A

The Data

This article uses two survey data sets: the 1992 (Miller et al. 1993) and 1996 (Rosenstone et al. 1997) National Election Studies. Both surveys were collected by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan. Respondents are interviewed both before and after the November presidential election. The 1992 survey contains 2,485 interviews, and the 1996 study has 1,714 respondents. During the final stages of revising this article, we were notified by the NES that the weight variables included with the 1996 study may not properly compensate for panel attrition. Subsequently, we participated in pretesting and analysis of new weighting variables. The analyses reported here use these new, 1996 postinterview, neutral weights. The corrected weight variables are available from the NES and ICPSR. The variables used in this article are described below. SPSS 6.1, 7.0, and 7.1 were used in the analyses.

Measurement of Variables

Negative and Positive Political Ad Comments were obtained as follows. In 1992, the filter question, "Do you recall seeing any presidential campaign advertisements on television?" was first asked of 2,310 respondents (177 of the total 2,485 respondents interviewed using a short form or in Spanish were not asked this question). The 1,667 interviewees responding positively were then asked: "Please tell me, what do you remember about any of these ads?" This was followed by: "Do you remember any others?" allowing for up to five responses (Miller et al. 1993). Substantive presidential ad comments were offered by 1,263 respondents. In operationalizing this negative advertising variable, we narrowed the pool of responses from the political ad recall question to those that mentioned a specific negative political ad or recalled negative ad content. Positive ad recall was coded similarly. These variables do not include comments offering an appraisal of advertising's effects on the respondent or other viewers, such as political ads "made R[espondent] angry/disgusted," or that "R[espondent] is tired of seeing negative ads."

In the 1996 NES, the filter question "Do you recall seeing any political ads for the candidates on television this fall?" was first asked of all 1,714 respondents. The 1,368 interviewees responding favorably were then asked: "I'd like you to think about the one ad you remember best. Do you happen to recall which candidate sponsored that ad?" Then the responded was asked: "Do you remember anything the ad said

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[10] The constitutionality and First Amendment implications of a similar, earlier proposal is discussed in Clinger (1987, 728).

TABLE A-1. Political Ad Coding, 1992 and 1996

Negative Political Ad Comment	**1992** 13, 15, 33, 35, 53, 55, 73, 75, 132, 133, 135, 136, 144, 152, 153
	1996 13, 15, 33, 35, 53, 55, 60, 73, 75, 302, 402, 505, 526, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 179, 187, 503, 504, 520
Positive Political Ad Comment	**1992** 14, 16, 34, 36, 54, 56, 74, 76, 134, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 173, 174, 175, 176
	1996 14, 16, 34, 36, 54, 56, 74, 76, 301, 401, 502, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 183, 184, 185, 186, 521, 525

Source: 1992 and 1996 NES.

or showed?" This question was asked up to four more times (Rosenstone et al. 1997). Responses to these open-ended questions were then sorted into those that recalled a specific negative ad or negative ad content and those that recalled a specific positive ad or positive ad content.

The codes derived from the (above) open-ended NES political advertising questions are shown in Table A-1. These are responses to questions v3212 to v3216 (in 1992) and v960251 to v960255 (in 1996).

Examples of the most common responses concerning negative ads in general include "too negative"; "backbiting"; "make personal attacks on opponent" (code 15 in both 1992 and 1996), and these same types of remarks were made about ads run by the major party candidates (codes 35 and 55 in both years).

Specific ads coded as negative in 1992 include Bush's "Two Faces of Clinton" from a *Time* magazine cover (132), Bush's "Computer Ad" (133), Clinton's "read my lips—no new taxes" critique of Bush (152), and Clinton's "attack on Bush's handling of the economy, we can't afford four more years" (153). In 1996, respondents specifically noted Dole's ad "criticizing Clinton for apologizing for raising taxes" (140), Dole's ad that "shows Clinton saying 'I'm not a Liberal'" (147), Clinton's ad featuring a "negative attack on Dole/Gingrich" (176), and Clinton's ad criticizing "Dole's voting record—'wrong for the past, wrong for the future'" (177).

Negative Political Ad Comment is a dummy variable coded 1 for yes, 0 for no, reflecting comments made about the negative content of presidential election ads in response to an open-ended question. Coding details are provided below.

Positive Political Ad Comment is a dummy variable coded 1 for yes, 0 for no, reflecting comments made about the positive content of presidential election ads in response to an open-ended question. Coding details are provided below.

Political Efficacy (low, medium, high) is represented by dummy variables constructed for each year's data from an additive index combining internal and external efficacy measures. In the 1992 NES data, the index was formed by adding the values of variables v6102, v6103, v6104 (values ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 being most efficacious, and values 8, 9, and

0 coded missing data). In the 1996 NES data, the index was formed by adding the values of variables v961244, v961245, and v961246 (values ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 being most efficacious, and values 8, 9, and 0 coded missing data). Both indexes were then broken into terciles to form three dummy variables for each year.

Political Efficacy (low) is a dummy variable coded 1 for those falling within the lowest tercile of political efficacy, 0 for all others. Efficacy is broken into terciles using an additive index combining internal and external efficacy measures.

Political Efficacy (medium) is a dummy variable coded 1 for those falling within the middle tercile of political efficacy, 0 for all others. **Political Efficacy (high)** is a dummy variable coded 1 for those falling within the highest tercile of political efficacy, 0 for all others.

Newspaper Political News Index is coded from 0 to 28, with 28 denoting the highest attention to politics in the newspaper and daily readership. It is a multiplicative index combining reading frequency with an attention measure (i.e., "How many days in the last week did you read a daily newspaper?" times "How much attention did you pay to newspaper articles about the campaign for President [coded as none, very little, some, quite a bit, a great deal]?") Before multiplying, the attention variable was coded to 0 for "none," 1 for "very little," and so forth.

TV News Index is coded from 0 to 28, with 28 denoting the highest attention to politics on TV news and daily news viewing. It is a multiplicative index combining viewing frequency with an attention measure, as was done with the Newspaper Political News Index.

Age in Years is the respondent's reported age in years.

Campaign Interest consists of two dummy variables, coded 1 for yes, 0 for no, reflecting two of three possible responses in the original survey instrument regarding the respondent's interest in the current presidential campaign. The two variables included in the regression equations are: "somewhat interested" and "very much interested," with the "not much interest" category absent from the equations.

Years of Education is a series of dummy variables, coded 1 for yes, 0 for no, reflecting the educational categories: 11 or fewer years, high school graduate, and college education. The variable for those without a high school diploma was omitted from the regressions.

Gender is a dummy variable coded 0 for male, 1 for female.

Race (white) is a dummy variable coded 1 for white, 0 for all others.

Family Income is variable coding total family income using the NES summary income variable, which has 24 values.

Interview Date: Days to Election is the number of days between the preelection interview and election day.

Marital Status is a dummy variable coded 0 for unmarried, 1 for married and together.

Pure Independents is a dummy variable coded 1 for independent partisan identification, 0 for all others.

Independent Leaners is a dummy variable coded 1 for those leaning toward independent partisan identification, 0 for all others.

Weak Partisans is a dummy variable coded 1 for those reporting weak partisan identification, 0 for all others.

Strong Partisans is a dummy variable coded 1 for those reporting strong partisan identification, 0 for all others.

APPENDIX B: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO NEGATIVE ADVERTISING RECALL

In order to assess whether negative ad recall merely taps attentiveness to politics, we performed logistic regression analyses predicting recall of negative ads in 1992 and 1996. Perhaps the most important finding reported in Table B-1 is that only two variables are significant in both years: interview date and watching TV news in 1996. This indicates that the negative ads variable is not merely a surrogate for factors positively related to turnout. It is to be expected that people interviewed close to election day are likely to say they recall seeing an attack ad, because such ads are run much more

TABLE B-1.   Logistic Regression Predicting Negative Advertising Recall

	1992			1996		
Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coeff. R	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coeff. R
Newspaper political news index	−0.0019	0.0056	0.0000	−0.0142*	0.0075	−0.0320
TV news index	0.0392***	0.0058	0.1374	0.0324***	0.0070	0.1124
Age in years	−0.0138***	0.0038	−0.0701	−0.0002	0.0046	0.0000
Campaign interest: Somewhat	0.6173**	0.1951	0.0587	0.1188	0.1740	0.0000
Campaign interest: Very much	0.7931***	0.2136	0.0711	0.2634	0.2214	0.0000
High school graduate	0.5087**	0.1838	0.0493	0.4121	0.2211	0.0310
College	0.3500	0.1942	0.0232	0.7338**	0.2229	0.0759
Gender (female)	−0.2331*	0.1139	−0.0306	−0.1520	0.1323	0.0000
Family income	0.0020	0.0111	0.0000	0.0088	0.0128	0.0000
Interview date: Days to election	−0.0435***	0.0033	−0.2731	−0.0148***	0.0038	−0.0940
Marital status (married)	−0.0774	0.1245	0.0000	−0.1337	0.1493	0.0000
Independent leaner	−0.0595	0.1838	0.0000	0.0060	0.2600	0.0000
Weak partisan	−0.1027	0.1931	0.0000	0.0150	0.2521	0.0000
Strong partisan	−0.1502	0.1985	0.0000	−0.1501	0.2634	0.0000
Political efficacy (medium)	0.2178	0.1348	0.0162	0.0801	0.1647	0.0000
Political efficacy (high)	0.0185	0.1468	0.0000	0.0399	0.1727	0.0000
Race (white)	0.1555	0.1634	0.0000	0.3555	0.2028	0.0265
Constant	−0.4531	0.3361		−1.8932***	0.4065	
Number of cases	1,844			1,373		
Percentage correctly predicted	72%			75%		

Source: 1992 and 1996 NES.
Note: Figures are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients, using full sample weights. The variables are defined in the text. Coefficient R is each independent partial correlation to the dependent variable. *$p \leq$ .05, **$p \leq$ .01, ***$p \leq$ .001; two-tailed test.

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frequently toward the end of the campaign. Similarly, because ads are run more often around the time of TV news than any other program—and may be a topic covered in such broadcasts—it is hardly surprising that the likelihood of recalling a negative ad increases with TV news viewing.

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