

Two Types of Neutrality: Ambivalence versus Indifference and Political Participation

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The traditional attitude theory has a serious flaw as a guide for the study of political behavior. It is unable to distinguish two types of neutrality: ambivalence (balance of positive and negative affect) and indifference (lack of either affect). A recent theory on attitudes offers a solution with its premise that individuals are capable of holding positive and negative attitudes about a single object simultaneously and independently. This two-dimensional theory suggests that individuals with an ambivalent attitude differ fundamentally from those with an indifferent attitude. I find that ambivalent citizens are far more likely to turn out to vote in elections than are indifferent ones. It is only indifferent individuals, lacking any affect for parties and candidates, who exhibit the low turnout expected of those with no clear preference. Being conflicted about parties and candidates does not pose much of a barrier to casting a vote.

It is natural for the individual to perceive that he votes because he wants to make his preference between parties or candidates count, or that he fails to vote because he does not have a clear preference between partisan objects that he feels are *equally appealing, unappealing, or without any affective content at all.*

—*The American Voter* (Italics added)

Why do some people become active participants in politics, and others do not? A common premise is that attitudes about political actors drive behavior in politics. For example, citizens with strong views about issues, parties, or candidates tend to be active, while those with neutral attitudes tend to stay away. But what does it mean to have a neutral attitude and how has it been treated in electoral research?

As proclaimed by *The American Voter* in the quote above, it makes no difference whether an individual is neutral because parties and candidates are *equally appealing* or because they inspire no feelings whatsoever. When it comes to political participation, indifference toward political actors is said to have the same discouraging effect as ambivalence toward them. The rational-choice model proposed by Downs (1957)

proposes the same prediction. Citizens are said to abstain from voting when their “party differential” is zero. And the party differential is zero when the utilities of the two choices offset each other.¹ Students of electoral behavior have followed this view of attitude neutrality without much question. Almost all empirical studies of voting treat citizens with a net score of zero as one group, regardless of whether they are equally balanced in their attitudes or have no attitude at all (e.g., Kelley 1983; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). This assumption has guided past works linking attitudes toward candidates and parties to the voting decision on Election Day.

Citizens’ political participation is no exception to this tradition. Voting scholars have explained turnout decision with respect to the intensity of partisan preference. As a seminal work on this issue, the authors of *The American Voter* claimed that the individual fails to vote because she/he does not have a clear preference between partisan objects leading to a neutral attitude toward them. For empirical evidence, they have related the strength of preference to the turnout decision: “the probability that a person will vote depends on the strength of his partisan preference” (1960, 97). The neutral group, mostly due to the lack

¹Downs (1957) calls this condition “indifference” but to distinguish it from the condition of no utility for either party—something Downs does not seem to recognize—this paper refers to it as “ambivalence.” “Indifference” is reserved for the condition of no affect (utility) for either party.

of intensive partisan preference, shows the lowest rate of voting turnout. Kelley and Mirer (1974) supported the conclusion, also using the NES open-ended like/dislike items. Based on what they called the "Voter's Decision Rule," they showed that a high rate of nonvoting was associated with net scores of zero (Kelley 1983). Here again citizens with a net score of zero were taken as one group with a neutral attitude.

However, the neutral score of zero can be generated in two different ways: either no response at all to any candidate or party, or an equal number of positive and negative responses. In other words, the group of neutral citizens is composed of two different subgroups, that is, citizens "showing a balance of feeling or an equal response" and those with no feeling or no partisan response. This is no trivial distinction. There are indeed two very different types of neutrality. Each can be expected to affect decision making process and political behavior quite differently because of the amount of information that each brings to the task. Yet, to date, political scientists have not paid attention to this difference and its consequences for making political decisions.

Attitude Theory: Unidimensional versus Two-Dimensional

Why has the distinction between the two types of neutrality been ignored? One crucial reason is the unidimensional attitude theory, which has been dominant in the conceptualization of attitudes in political science. As Lavine pointed out, "Nearly all contemporary public opinion research rests on the assumption that political attitudes are unidimensional and bipolar" (2001, 915). According to this theory, positive and negative evaluations are understood as equivalent, reciprocally activated, and thus interchangeable. An affective evaluation is then assumed to be represented on a unidimensional line such as one with a positive evaluation located at one extreme and a negative one at the other. Thus, as an individual's negative evaluation for a single object increases, the positive evaluation of the same object is assumed to decrease. Seen from this perspective a neutral attitude can be created in two different ways, either through a balance of affect or no affect at all. The voting classic *The American Voter* enshrined this view for generations of students in the field of public opinion and voting:

Indeed, most of those interviewed in 1952 and 1956 appeared to be neutral on one or more dimension either

by showing a balance of feeling toward a given object or by showing no feeling toward the object at all. (Campbell et al. 1960, 81)

... the score of zero, indicating no partisan response or an equal response of each partisan sign... On each of our attitude scales, those having a zero score felt less strongly about the election's outcome than did those at any other point on the scale... (Stokes et al. 1958, 371)

The first statement, by Campbell et al. (1960), defines neutral attitudes as having either "a balance of feeling" or "no feeling" toward candidates and parties. Similarly, Stokes, Campbell and Miller (1958) combine people with "no partisan response" and those with an "equal response" in the group of neutral citizens. Both are given a "zero score" on the preference scale. Downs also makes very similar notion of neutrality. He said, "The difference between these two expected utility incomes is the citizen's expected party differential. If it is positive, he votes for the incumbents; if it is negative, he votes for the opposition; if it is zero, he abstains" (1957, 39).

Recently, however, there have been challenges against the one-dimensional view of attitudes. A fair amount of work in social and political psychology has argued that this view is flawed and has proposed a two-dimensional attitude structure instead (Alvarez and Brehm 1995, 1997, 1998; Basinger and Lavine 2005; Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson 1997; Hochschild 1981, 1993; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004; Lavine 2001; McGraw, Hasecke, and Conger 2003; Nelson 1999; Zaller and Feldman 1992). These scholars have claimed that attitudes can be rooted in both positive and negative components, so individuals can have positive and negative evaluations toward a single attitudinal object simultaneously. The two-dimensional view of attitudes, I contend, provides a great deal of insight into our understanding of electoral behavior. In particular, it helps us come to grips with ambivalence.

In this view of attitudes, only lack of feelings indicates "neutrality," while an equal response of positive and negative feelings indicates ambivalence. Of course, citizens with a high level of only positive or only negative evaluations are described as one-sided (univalent), and thus free of attitude conflict. Ambivalence may be seen as extending from a minimum (univalent attitude) through indifference (nonattitude) to a maximum of attitude conflict.

If this new view of attitudes is comprehensive and correct to claim that positive and negative attitudes may be often independent each other, the notion of ambivalence becomes fundamental to understanding

individual attitudes and opinions. Conceptualized as simultaneous existence of positive and negative evaluations toward a single attitude object (Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson 1997), attitudinal ambivalence has attracted a great deal of interest in social science.² It is now well known that ambivalence influences the dynamics of public opinion on policy issues (Alvarez and Brehm 1995, 1997; Zaller and Feldman 1992), and it turns out that the concept plays a role in electoral decision making as well (Lavine 2001). If the nonreciprocal coexistent framework of attitudes provides a more reliable description of the individual attitude than the one-dimensional bipolar framework, we have to rethink our understanding of electoral behavior.

This paper is such an effort. To reiterate, the one-dimensional framework fails to distinguish two types of neutrality: indifference and ambivalence. In contrast, the two-dimensional framework of attitudes provides a rationale for distinguishing these two types of neutrality. While respondents showing a balance of responses toward a given object represent the citizens with ambivalent attitudes, those with no response at all can be described as indifferent. Such a conceptual distinction suggests important theoretical implications because “thinking too much” is bound to affect individual voting behavior differently than “not think at all.” Failure to distinguish the two types of neutrality causes serious problems for the understanding of political behavior.

The conventional wisdom on individuals lacking a clear preference is that they are little interested in politics, do not care for election outcome, and consequently *rarely participate in political affairs* (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964). Some members of this group, namely those with no attitudes altogether, may indeed fit that description. But that is not necessarily so for ambivalent voters. The notion of ambivalence does not mean nonattitude but simultaneous existence of conflicting evaluations for

a political object. Therefore, the citizens with ambivalent attitude may not fit the conventional wisdom about the indifferent although the two groups are sharing a neutral attitude toward political objects.

Studies in psychology have shown ambivalent citizens to be different from the indifferent with respect to information processing. For example, ambivalent ones tend to engage in intensive decision making and search for more information in order to settle the psychological conflict they are faced with (Maio, Bell, and Esses 1996). Similarly, ambivalence decreases the individual’s confidence in his/her own attitude toward behaviors involving the objects, the decreased confidence evokes systematic processing of relevant information, and the systematic processing increases consistency between ambivalent attitudes and pertinent behavioral intentions (Jonas, Diehl, and Brömer 1997).

In political science, voters with ambivalent partisan attitudes are found to derive less judgmental confidence from party cues than voters with univalent partisan attitudes and to rely on alternative considerations to achieve sufficient confidence in their electoral decisions (Basinger and Lavine 2005). In particular, voters in House elections who are ambivalent about the parties tend to seek out additional information about ideology or government performance, depending upon their level of political knowledge. All these findings suggest that ambivalent citizens would access and consider political information actively, so as to be able to solve their psychological conflict.

Hypothesis about Ambivalence and Participation

In view of the theoretical arguments developed so far, we can state a reasonable hypothesis about voting turnout. Ambivalent citizens are expected to show higher level of voting turnout than indifferent ones because they are motivated to seek and process information intensively. The citizens with ambivalent attitudes will not remain inactive in facing psychological conflict. They are not apolitical unlike the indifferent. In addition, the ambivalent, though torn, have an affective connection to one side of the political contest whereas the indifferent have none. In other words, the ambivalent have a “dog” in the fight. They are probably not strictly 50–50 split about their affective tie. So they have some minimal form of

²However similar attitudinal ambivalence may be to “attitude conflict” as proposed by the authors of *The American Voters* (1960), it should be noted that while the notion of “attitude conflict” focuses on [a different aspect of the individual’s attitude thus] attitudes toward several objects, attitudinal ambivalence is the coexistence of conflicted evaluation toward a “single” object. Correspondingly, the way of operationalization is different. While the degree of attitude conflict was measured as the number of partisan or nonpartisan attitudes toward different dimensions an individual has in an election, ambivalence is usually measured as the sum and the intensity of conflicting affective evaluations toward a single object like a candidate.

preference (utility), enough to motivate a trip to the polls. The indifferent have none.³

In short, the ambivalent have some emotional investment in one candidate/party compared to the indifferent, who have no such investment. Such a difference leads to predict behavioral distinction between two types of neutral group. As for participation, ambivalent citizens have at least some preference, unlike the indifferent, that motivates them to participate.⁴

The theoretical expectation for another pair of comparison (ambivalent vs. one-sided) is derived from two voting classics. The Columbia voting school proposed the notion of “cross-pressures.” Voters under cross-pressures are “likely to change their minds in the course of the campaign, to make up their mind late, and occasionally, *to leave the field and not to vote at all*” (italic added, Berelson et al. 1954, 284).

The Michigan voting school reported almost identical electoral consequences of “attitude conflict”: “The person who experiences some degree of conflict tends to cast his vote for President with substantially less enthusiasm, he is much more prone to split his ticket in voting for other offices, and he is somewhat less likely to vote at all than is the person whose partisan feelings are entirely consistent” (1960, 83). Therefore, ambivalent citizens are expected to show a lower level of political participation than one-sided ones because the latter are free from the evaluative conflict:

H1: Political participation will be highest for citizens with a one-sided attitude, lowest for the indifferent, and somewhere between these two groups for ambivalent citizens.

³Downs also was aware of this possibility. He wrote, “. . . . he procures more information about all the entities involved whenever its expected pay-off exceeds its cost. Since this information may alter his estimate of any entity, he may shift from one category to another in the midst of his deliberation . . .” (1957, 272). To use the words of the Columbia voting school, the similar impact of information can be explained as follows. The ambivalent are likely to “activate (or reinforce)” their affective preference while searching and processing further information.

⁴As an anonymous reviewer points out properly, “there ought to be a psychological distinction between feeling ambivalent about one candidate but not about the other and being conflicted about both candidates.” I will examine ambivalence measures separately for each candidate and the two combined in empirical analysis. At this moment, it can be said, from the conceptual difference, that feeling ambivalent about one will be enough to boost participation compared to indifferent.

This research has focused on attitudes toward presidential candidates, not political parties. It is hard to deny that candidates have gained the greater emphasis in electoral campaigns. For one thing, more than half of a presidential campaign consists of choosing a candidate for a major party. In primary elections political parties have little or no impact.⁵ Second, candidates have become the main targets of campaign information (Bennett 2005; Leighley 2004; West 2005). Therefore, although party identification is still considered one of the main determinants of electoral decisions, candidate evaluations, both personal and issue-related, are the key short-term factor, especially in an age of “candidate-centered politics” (Wattenberg 1986, 1991).⁶

Data and Measures

To test the hypothesis developed above, I used data from the National Election Studies. Because this paper focuses on the effect of ambivalence in the period of “candidate-centered politics,” seven presidential election-year data since 1980 are used. To measure attitudes toward candidates, the open-ended like/dislike items for presidential candidates in the National Election Studies are used. The like/dislike questions for candidates ask whether “there is anything in particular about [name of candidate] that might make you want to vote [for or against] him?” It is followed by four additional probes (“Anything else”). Thus, respondents may provide up to five likes and dislikes for each of the major presidential candidates. Based on the answers for a given candidate, a respondent with only positive or only negative

⁵In addition, the increasing reliance on open primaries (rather than caucus) in nomination process was another factor to provide more chance for the public to evaluate candidates, making candidates more salient in the electoral context. See Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde (2003; chap. 1).

⁶It would be fairly controversial and even meaningless to say that party label is irrelevant to voting behaviors. Party identification is sure to be an important determinant of voting decision as an attitudinal prior, and no bold observers have claimed that it does play a trivial role in electoral choice. In fact, in opposition to dealignment argument (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979), there is a considerable amount of empirical works to support the crucial role of party identification (Mefferd, Norpoth, and Ruhil 2001; Miller and Shanks 1996; Norpoth 1987; Norpoth and Rusk 1982). In short, it should be noted that I have no objection against well-elaborated argument of the electoral role of partisanship. As a matter of fact, whether partisanship is important or not is beyond this paper, thus not direct concern of it. Here, I only take a note of the fact that candidates attract so much attention in politics today, and they engender stronger feelings than ever in presidential elections.

evaluations for that candidate is considered as one-sided, one with both positive and negative evaluations for a given candidate as ambivalent, and one with no evaluations whatsoever for a given candidate as indifferent.

To obtain a numerical index for candidate ambivalence, I follow the method proposed by Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995) and used in several studies (Basinger and Lavine 2005; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004; Lavine 2001; Lavine and Steenbergen 2005). I computed separate *Ambivalence* scores for each major-party candidate, and a combined score for both candidates.⁷

$$\text{Ambivalence}_{\text{single candidate}} = \frac{P + N}{2} - |P - N|$$

where P and N represent the number of positive and negative reactions to a give candidates.

$$\text{Ambivalence}_{\text{combine}} = \frac{P_R + P_D + N_R + N_D}{4} - \left| \frac{(P_R + N_D) - (P_D + N_R)}{2} \right|$$

where P_R and P_D represent the number of positive reactions to the Republican and the Democratic candidates, and N_R and N_D represent the number of negative reactions to the candidates. Thus, overall intensity of affect toward both candidates is captured in this equation.

As a continuous measure, candidate ambivalence is assumed to capture the dimension under which a lower value indicates a one-sided attitude and a higher value indicates an ambivalent attitude. The middle of the dimension covers low activation of positive and negative evaluation. Then, as Lavine says, “ambivalence captures the extent to which respondents’ feelings toward the candidates are polarized, with overall ambivalence increasing as intensity of feeling toward candidates increases” (2001, 919).

⁷Many efforts have been devoted to find a good measure of ambivalence, usually categorized into two groups, subjective (e.g., McGraw, Hasecke, and Conger 2003) and objective measures (e.g., Lavine 2001). I take the objective measure for two reasons. Not only is the measure the most used one in political science, but it can be also applied in NES data without measurement issues across all time-span of the surveys. For intensive review of measures for ambivalence, see Priester and Petty (1996) and Craig and Martinez (2005; chap. 1).

Results: A First Cut

Ambivalence and Turnout

I begin with voting turnout, the most common act of political participation. Table 1 provides a first look at the relationship hypothesized above.⁸ As expected, respondents who are ambivalent toward major-party candidates show higher turnout than indifferent respondents do. While only half of indifferent respondents participate in voting, over 80% of ambivalent respondents, except for a couple of cases, turn out to vote in national elections. This is a striking difference that has been overlooked in studies of turnout that lump these two groups. Unlike indifferent citizens, ambivalent ones report a higher level of participation in elections.

Even more striking is the finding that the level of turnout for the ambivalent respondents often surpasses that of the one-sided respondents. If attitudinal ambivalence causes psychological conflict in voters’ mind, it should make it difficult for individual citizens to decide, thereby keeping them from voting to some extent. However, we should not take the turnout percentage for the ambivalent group above as conclusive evidence. It is because the classification is based on loose criteria for ambivalent citizens. As stated earlier, the classification regards citizens with both positive and negative responses to a candidate as ambivalent, ignoring the relative number of responses. For example, a citizen with one positive and five negative responses is so classified just like one with the same number of contradictory responses. Clearly, intuition suggests that the latter should feel more intense psychological conflict and thus be less inclined to turn out.

Tables 2A and 2B allow us to test for the turnout effect of ambivalence with a more refined measure, which distinguishes between equal and unequal numbers of responses. I highlight some cells to emphasize the key points. Here again, the indifferent group (upper-left cell) shows the lowest percentage of voting turnout, just over 40%. Also, we can see that as the intensity of one-sidedness increases (across the top row and the first column), so does the turnout rate to over 80%. This much is consistent with *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960). What is novel, however, is the pattern for the ambivalent citizens. Not just any with some mixed feelings about a candidate,

⁸The frequency is calculated from the reported turnout in postelection survey (... How about you—did you vote in the elections this November?).

TABLE 1 Types of Candidate Attitude and Turnout

	Attitude toward Candidate					
	One-sided		Indifferent		Ambivalent	
	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.
1980						
Voted	73.0%	69.4%	51.1%	59.3%	81.6%	79.1%
Didn't Vote	27.0%	30.6%	48.9%	40.7%	18.4%	20.9%
N	(689)	(790)	(278)	(162)	(440)	(455)
1984						
Voted	74.6	76.3	50.4	56.0	81.3	83.4
Didn't Vote	25.4	23.7	49.6	44.0	18.7	16.6
N	(1081)	(1170)	(260)	(409)	(648)	(410)
1988						
Voted	74.4	73.9	44.5	44.0	83.9	83.2
Didn't Vote	25.6	26.1	55.5	56.0	16.1	16.8
N	(887)	(974)	(427)	(382)	(459)	(417)
1992						
Voted	78.1	79.2	47.7	48.8	83.2	86.1
Didn't Vote	21.9	20.8	52.3	51.2	16.8	13.9
N	(1213)	(1238)	(321)	(414)	(720)	(602)
1996						
Voted	79.8	78.8	56.4	51.4	88.8	84.4
Didn't Vote	20.2	21.2	43.6	48.6	11.2	15.6
N	(817)	(901)	(351)	(210)	(366)	(423)
2000						
Voted	81.3	79.9	54.0	55.8	85.7	87.0
Didn't Vote	18.7	20.1	46.0	44.2	14.3	13.0
N	(934)	(879)	(341)	(344)	(279)	(331)
2004						
Voted	82.3	83.9	54.0	55.1	78.6	84.7
Didn't Vote	17.7	16.1	46.0	44.9	21.4	15.3
N	(712)	(665)	(111)	(205)	(243)	(196)

Entries are column percentage in a given election. Column totals are provided in each election.

Source. National Election Studies.

but those with the *same* count of positive and negative affect (highlighted in the cells of the diagonal). The turnout of those respondents is impressive, a far cry from the indifferent and as high as that of one-sided

respondents. The pattern is consistent regardless of the party affiliation of the candidates. The ambivalent citizens are indeed as active in voting turnout as those with a one-sided attitude.

TABLE 2A Turnout by Positive and Negative Attitudes toward Candidate (Democrat)

	(N)	Positive Attitude					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Negative Attitude</i>	0	42.5% (2,497)	63.0 (1,211)	68.2 (1,121)	78.1 (761)	84.8 (409)	86.1 (388)
	1	54.4 (1,087)	66.6 (497)	72.7 (282)	70.0 (140)	84.7 (59)	82.8 (64)
	2	65.3 (927)	70.1 (421)	78.4 (204)	80.2 (116)	78.7 (47)	82.6 (46)
	3	67.5 (726)	76.1 (251)	82.3 (141)	79.7 (79)	81.6 (38)	87.5 (24)
	4	71.7 (407)	78.4 (139)	85.8 (99)	83.0 (53)	76.1 (21)	80.0 (20)
	5	79.4 (422)	82.9 (164)	87.7 (106)	89.3 (56)	82.8 (35)	92.3 (26)

Note: Entries are the percentages of turnout with the number of observations in parenthesis.

Source. National Election Studies 1980~2004.

TABLE 2B Turnout by Positive and Negative Attitudes toward Candidate (Republican)

	(N)	<i>Positive Attitude</i>					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Negative Attitude</i>	0	41.8% (2,433)	59.1 (1,185)	63.9 (1,123)	69.5 (804)	74.1 (472)	81.9 (626)
	1	57.6 (898)	68.7 (515)	67.2 (287)	78.8 (151)	78.0 (91)	85.5 (76)
	2	65.1 (843)	74.3 (451)	75.8 (277)	79.6 (162)	74.6 (67)	85.9 (71)
	3	75.4 (578)	72.8 (250)	80.9 (189)	79.3 (92)	78.9 (57)	90.4 (52)
	4	80.8 (313)	84.0 (125)	75.2 (101)	85.2 (54)	80.0 (25)	81.5 (27)
	5	83.7 (380)	90.1 (111)	89.9 (99)	93.0 (43)	88.9 (27)	75.8 (29)

Note: Entries are the percentages of turnout with the number of observations in parenthesis.

Source: National Election Studies 1980–2004.

Still, some might claim that the attitude toward a single candidate does not matter for turnout because the decision is based on the comparative attitudes toward both candidates (Campbell et al. 1960; Downs 1957). So long as an individual is one-sided toward one candidate he or she is going to vote regardless of any ambivalence toward the other. Hence what is needed is a comparative measure of attitudes for both candidates.⁹ The results are shown in Table 2C with the relevant cells highlighted again.

In a most convincing way the pattern we observed in the previous tables is confirmed with the comparative measure of attitudes. Those with indifferent attitudes toward both candidates are at the bottom of voting turnout and those with the most one-sided attitudes are close to perfect turnout. Still, the finding for ambivalent respondents remains striking. Even with the comparative measure, the turnout rate for this group remains as high as when attitudes were considered one candidate at a time. Ambivalent individuals turn out in numbers far above that of the indifferent, and just below that of the one-sided.

⁹In this measure, the number of positive responses is the sum of the positive responses to the Republican candidate and the negative responses to the Democratic candidate, and the number of negative responses is the sum of the negative responses to the Republican candidate and the positive responses to the Democratic candidate. In short, this measure is constructed from the comparative combination of the responses to see the extent to which respondents' reactions consistently favor one candidate over the other, or instead are inconsistent, favoring one in some ways and the other in other ways. In other words, the number of positive responses reflects the comparative favorability for the Republican candidate and that of negative responses shows the comparative favorability for the Democratic candidate. Because the number is combined with the open-ended responses to two candidates, it goes from 0 to 10. Note that the number is collapsed into six categories for the sufficient number of observations (0 → 0, 1–2 → 1, 3–4 → 2, 5–6 → 3, 7–8 → 4, 9–10 → 5).

Figure 1 presents more vividly the results of the previous three tables. The vertical axis in the graph represents voting turnout, and the horizontal axis indicates the attitudes toward candidates. The bars in the graph show the turnout percentage by attitudes toward the Republican candidate, the Democratic candidate, and both candidates. On the horizontal axis the extent of one-sidedness increases to the left end and the extent of ambivalence to the right.¹⁰ The message from the graph is simple and straightforward. The ambivalent citizens show much higher voting turnout than the indifferent, and they are indeed as active as the one-sided citizens.

In sum, the evidence so far supports the hypothesis about the effect of ambivalence on voting turnout. Contrary to the standard view, not all voters with a neutral attitude toward the candidates are alike in their propensity to turn out in elections. While the indifferent fit the mold, the ambivalent do not. The contrast is not negligible but huge. It is imperative for turnout studies to distinguish these two types of neutrality.¹¹

Ambivalence and Other Forms of Political Participation

One logical next question is whether we can observe the pattern in other forms of political participation beyond voting turnout. Voting itself has been thought of as an act of political participation that costs citizens little amount of efforts. Many other forms of political

¹⁰As the previous tables show, the intensity of one-sidedness and ambivalence go up to five. But, due to insufficient number of observations, I combine the citizens with more than three conflicted responses (3 positive and 3 negative, 4 positive and 4 negative, and 5 positive and 5 negative) into one group.

¹¹The pattern is the same for political parties as attitudinal object. The analysis with political parties is available from the author upon request.

TABLE 2C Turnout by Positive and Negative Attitudes toward Both Candidates

	(N)	Positive Attitude*					
		0	1	2	3	4	5
Negative Attitude*	0	34.0% (1,330)	50.1 (1,071)	63.8 (995)	65.3 (697)	77.7 (399)	86.8 (288)
	1	49.0 (944)	60.2 (857)	65.2 (661)	76.0 (426)	77.3 (220)	86.3 (146)
	2	67.1 (806)	69.1 (650)	71.2 (413)	72.6 (241)	87.7 (130)	93.9 (83)
	3	77.0 (591)	80.3 (411)	80.3 (244)	79.8 (124)	79.4 (73)	73.1 (52)
	4	86.5 (357)	80.5 (200)	88.2 (144)	83.1 (77)	80.5 (41)	95.6 (23)
	5	90.4 (187)	86.2 (109)	93.2 (44)	89.6 (29)	100.0 (10)	90.9 (11)

Note: Entries are the percentages of turnout with the number of observations in parenthesis.

*Positive reactions are the sum of pro-Republican and anti-Democratic responses. Negative reactions are the sum of anti-Republican and pro-Democratic responses. The number of reactions is collapsed into six categories due to insufficient number of observations.

Source: National Election Studies 1980~2004.

participation require further efforts for individual citizens to take part in. Although the definition of political participation may be more comprehensive,¹² I have extended the analysis to the following forms of “campaign activity”: efforts to persuade others how to vote; display of candidate button or sticker; attending political meetings or rallies; work performed for political party or candidate; and contributions to political party or candidate.

Table 3 presents the extent of such participation for ambivalent, indifferent, and one-sided respondents. Overall, as well observed in earlier works (Campbell et al. 1960; Conway 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003), the electorate is not very active in these forms of political participation. Almost 60% of all respondents do not participate at all in any of them. Yet, the effects of indifference and ambivalence on voting turnout demonstrated in this research are confirmed by the analysis of campaign activities. Again, citizens with an indifferent attitude are found to be the lowest in participation. Over 80% of the indifferent do not participate in any forms of campaign activity. On the other hand, over 40% of the ambivalent respondents report that they *did* participate in at least one of five activities. The percentage is almost identical as that of one-sided respondents. From the results so far, it is fair to say that ambivalent citizens are much more active in political participation compared with the indifferent citizens, and they are as active as one-sided citizens. Some might be neutral in terms of final candidate evaluation, but they are different behaviorally as well as conceptually from the other type of neutral group, the indifferent.

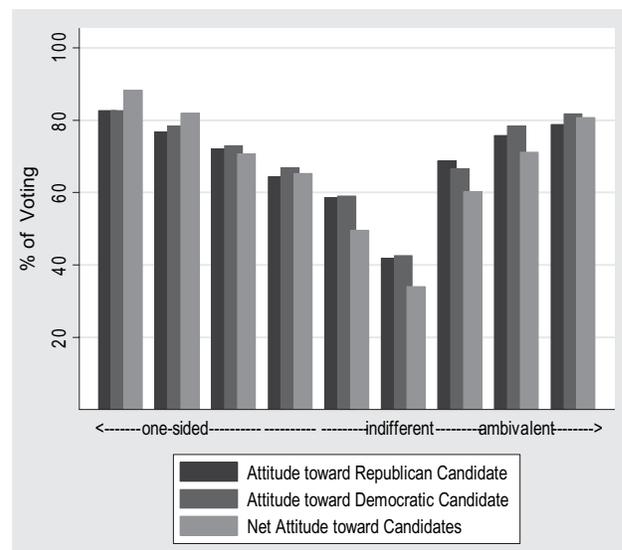
¹²For broader definition of political participation, see Conway (2000).

Results: Multivariate Tests

So far, the relationship between candidate ambivalence and political participation has been examined in a simple bivariate way. That, of course, might be misleading since no controls were used for a variety of variables conducive to participation. Before presenting multivariate tests, it is important to formalize the basic relationship between candidate attitudes and participation. Figure 2 helps understand the form of that relationship.

Considering the theoretical arguments stated earlier, candidate ambivalence is expected to affect participation in a quadratic pattern. Specifically, in the numerical index of ambivalence introduced earlier,

FIGURE 1 Types of Candidate Evaluations and Voting Turnout



Source: NES 1980~2004

TABLE 3 Ambivalence and Campaign Participation*

Participation Score	Attitude Object	Attitudes about Candidates		
		One-sided	Indifferent	Ambivalent**
0	Rep. Candidate	54.0%	80.8%	56.0%
	Dem. Candidate	54.5	79.5	57.3
	Both	57.3	86.1	61.3
1	Rep. Candidate	30.8	15.1	32.4
	Dem. Candidate	30.5	16.1	30.0
	Both	28.6	11.8	29.3
>2	Rep. Candidate	15.2	4.1	11.6
	Dem. Candidate	15.0	4.4	12.7
	Both	14.1	2.1	9.4
Average number of Activities	Rep. Candidate	.71	.26	.59
	Dem. Candidate	.70	.27	.59
	Both	.68	.30	.59
N		(6,307)	(2,026)	(896)
		(6,602)	(2,048)	(787)
		(5,514)	(1,074)	(1,326)

Note: Cell entries are percentage of participation.

*Campaign activities: 1) Efforts to persuade others how to vote; 2) display candidate button or sticker; 3) attending political meetings or rallies; 4) work performed for political party or candidate, and 5) contributions to political party or candidate.

**Only the citizens with same number of positive and negative responses are included in this category.

both a low value of ambivalence, which indicates one-sidedness, and a high value of ambivalence predict high voting turnout, while values in the middle of the measure predict low voting turnout. The squared form of each ambivalence measure (*Ambivalence-Squared*) is necessary to model this quadratic relationship.

To check whether this effect of candidate ambivalence holds up requires the inclusion of several control variables. First of all, since the measure of candidate ambivalence is based on open-ended like/dislike items, variables related to cognitive ability and attitude strength should be controlled for in multivariate analyses. Informed citizens are better able to put their political opinion in a coherent manner than the less informed citizens (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Therefore, it is important to separate any effects of ambivalence from those of related to cognitive characteristics. *Political knowledge* is included for this purpose.¹³ Also, it has been found

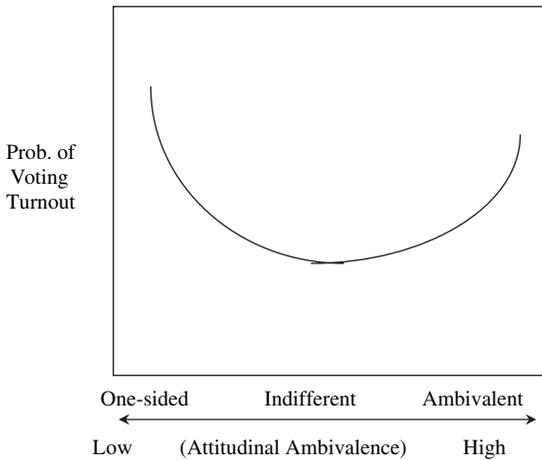
¹³Political knowledge scale was constructed with items measuring recognition of and knowledge about political figures, the ideological orientation of presidential candidates and parties, and factual knowledge questions. The following variables were used for each election: 1980: v268, v269, v278, v279, v64-v76 (17 items, $\alpha = .84$); 1984: v1006-v1009, v126, v130, v134, v138 (8 items, $\alpha = .75$); 1988: v871-v879 (9 items, $\alpha = .68$); 1992: v5916-v5921 (6 items, $\alpha = .77$); 1996: v1189-v1192, v369, v371, v379, v380 (8 items, $\alpha = .79$); 2000: v1047, v1050, v1053, v1056, v1058, v1062 (6 items, $\alpha = .76$); 2004: v5162-v5165, v5187-v5188, v5190-v5191 (8 items, $\alpha = .81$).

that *Education*¹⁴ is positively related to the probability of voting (Campbell et al. 1960; Cassel and Hill 1981; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).¹⁵ A similar relationship has been claimed to exist between turnout and feelings of efficacy (*External Efficacy* and *Internal Efficacy*: Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Shaffer 1981), concern about election outcome (*Concern of election outcome*: Campbell et al. 1960), and the strength of party identification (*PID Strength*: Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Campbell et al. 1960; Cassel and Hill 1981). In addition, the mobilization by political party (*Contact by party*) is claimed to contribute to higher turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). Finally, from a rational choice perspective, it has been claimed that the

¹⁴Education is coded to four categories (less than high school, high school graduate, some college, and college graduate and higher) and recoded to 0–1 unit.

¹⁵Some scholars (e.g., Smith 1980, 1989; Zaller 1992) have interpreted the absolute number of open-ended responses as a reflection of political sophistication. However, theoretically, the inclusion of “loquacity” in the model of political participation does not make sense. Furthermore, because I include other variables for political sophistication (e.g., political knowledge and education) in the model, the addition of the voter’s “loquacity” (i.e., the sum of respondents’ open-ended responses to candidates) might cause overspecification problem. At any rate, empirically the variable of “loquacity” is barely correlated with the ambivalence measure and does not contribute to the explanation of the dependent variable in the model (less than 1%).

FIGURE 2 Hypothetical Relationship between Ambivalence and Voting Turnout



Perceived closeness of the election affects the probability of voting (Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968).

Table 4 shows the results of the multivariate analysis,¹⁶ indicating whether the effect of candidate ambivalence on turnout holds with a variety of control variables.¹⁷ Since the effect of ambivalence on turnout is expected to be quadratic, I include both ambivalence and its squared value in the analysis. The effect of ambivalence turns out to be statistically significant even with control variables. As expected, the quadratic relationship between candidate ambivalence and voting turnout is observed, suggesting that both one-sided and highly ambivalent citizens tend to vote more than the indifferent. The control variables are all statistically significant except for internal efficacy. As claimed, the strength of partisanship, the concern of election outcome, political knowledge, education, contact by party, and the perceived closeness of election are strongly related to individual voting turnout.

¹⁶Some of the variables in the model—e.g., ambivalence and efficacy—show an extremely skewed distribution, causing heteroskedasticity problem. To correct for possible heteroskedasticity, I estimated coefficient with robust standard error instead of nonrobust one for all the models in this paper. Note that the coefficient estimates do not change with this robust standard error.

¹⁷Initially the time variable was included in the analysis to detect the difference of time. But I dropped the variable because it was statistically insignificant and did not contribute to the explanation of the dependent variable.

In a general sense then, the results support the hypothesis about the relationship between ambivalence and voting turnout. To make the point more compelling, Figure 3 presents predicted probabilities of voting turnout for various levels of ambivalence, holding other variables at their mean.

The figure shows neatly how the probability of turnout changes as the individual attitude toward candidates moves along the measure of ambivalence. As expected, the U-shape pattern is observed across candidates, and the pattern is maintained even with the comparative measure of ambivalence (bottom half of the figure). Highly ambivalent citizens, along with the one-sided citizens, are the most active in voting turnout, while indifference prevents individuals from casting votes. Clearly then, there is a huge behavioral difference between the two types of neutrality. It makes practical as well as conceptual sense to distinguish these two types of neutrality.

The same holds true for activities beyond voting.¹⁸ Because the measure of campaign activities is an ordinal variable, it is necessary to use ordered logit estimation.

The results presented in Table 5 confirm the quadratic relationship between candidate ambivalence and participation. In this estimation, the squared form of each ambivalence measure turns out to be statistically significant. The main message does not change. Like the case of voting turnout, both one-sided and highly ambivalent citizens tend to participate in more campaign activities than the indifferent do. Again, predicted probabilities are obtained for the various levels of the participation measure, holding other variables at their mean.

The effect of ambivalence is particularly salient on the probability of no participation. Figure 4 shows graphically how the probability of no participation changes as the individual attitude toward candidates moves along the measure of ambivalence. The reversed U-shape pattern supports again the hypothesized relationship between ambivalence and political participation.¹⁹ While the probability of no participation is

¹⁸The variable of political participation is constructed by the total number of activities in which respondent reported to take part. Due to insufficient number of observation for those participating in more than three activities, I collapsed these categories into one, making the variable coded 0–3 (0=no activity; 3=more than three activities) scale.

¹⁹The figure shows that as the number of participation increases, the effect of ambivalence becomes weaker. However, it should be noted that while almost 60% of whole respondents did not participate in any kind of campaign activity, only 13% reported their participation in two or more campaign activities.

TABLE 4 Impact of Ambivalence on Turnout Decision

	Attitudinal Target		
	Republican Candidate	Democratic Candidate	Major-party Candidates
Ambivalence	-3.168 (.576)**	-4.584 (.667)**	-5.326 (.847)**
Ambivalence-Squared	4.367 (.897)**	6.767 (1.076)**	7.576 (1.306)**
PID Strength	.365 (.027)**	.360 (.027)**	.356 (.027)**
Concern of Election Outcome	.736 (.056)**	.729 (.056)**	.720 (.057)**
Political Knowledge	.960 (.073)**	.943 (.073)**	.951 (.073)**
External Efficacy	.561 (.069)**	.579 (.069)**	.554 (.069)**
Internal Efficacy	.004 (.067)	-.009 (.067)	.004 (.067)
Education	1.470 (.090)**	1.443 (.090)**	1.461 (.090)**
Contact by Party	1.010 (.074)**	1.014 (.074)**	1.005 (.074)**
Perceived Closeness of Election	.166 (.058)**	.164 (.058)**	.163 (.058)**
Constant	-1.368 (.129)**	-1.168 (.139)**	-.984 (.168)**
Correct Prediction	79.1%	79.0%	78.9%
N		(9,672)	

Notes: Dependent variable is the reported turnout. Entries are *logit* coefficients with robust standard errors in parenthesis. Strength of PID is scaled from 0 (independent) to 3 (strong partisan). All other variables are scaled from 0 to 1 (low—high).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

relatively low for ambivalent and one-sided citizens, it is high for indifferent citizens. Unlike indifferent citizens, ambivalent citizens are more likely to take part in at least one type of campaign activity. The probability of participation is higher than even that of one-sided citizens.

Conclusions

The findings of this study prove that ambivalence has a considerable influence on voting turnout and other types of political participation. Not only is ambivalence prevalent among American voters, but it also leads people to participate in the selection of a political leader. As hypothesized, ambivalent voters are more likely to turn out to vote rather than to remain outside of the election, which makes them distinct from those with an indifferent attitude. More surprising is that the level of voting turnout of ambivalent voters is as high as that of the one-sided citizens. The pattern is observed for other types of political participation as well, specifically campaign activities. Despite conflicting candidate-evaluations, ambivalent voters have little difficulty in deciding whether to vote or not, and they tend to take part in more campaign activities, suggesting that we should not disregard them as apolitical but consider their electoral choice seriously.

It might be raised that the findings have nothing to do with two-dimensional theories of attitude formation.²⁰ One possibility is both readiness to answer like/dislike questions and participation are caused by “laziness.” But, those who do not have anything to say in response to like/dislike questions are not just “lazy” but apolitical. Another possibility is the respondents’ need to justify the (non)vote with their (no) response to open-ended questions, or endogeneity issue of the behaviors. The problem is that all the like/dislike questions are posed in the preelection wave, long before the vote and question about it in the postelection wave.

The findings in this paper suggest several important implications for our understanding of electoral behavior. First, contrary to the widely held view, we must distinguish two types of attitude neutrality in the electorate. It is plainly wrong to treat those with equal feelings about parties and candidates the same as those without any feelings. We have to discard the notion that “the more equal were the net number of favorable attitudes toward candidates and parties expressed by a respondent, the greater was the likelihood that he was undecided, or that he cast his vote against the candidate that he had intended to vote for, or that *he did not vote at all*” (Kelley and Mirer 1974, 588). Surprisingly for adherents of this view, ambivalent citizens somehow get to the final decision to turn out in elections. It throws serious doubts on

²⁰I appreciate an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

TABLE 5 Impact of Ambivalence on Political Participation

	Attitudinal Target		
	Republican Candidate	Democratic Candidate	Major-party Candidates
Ambivalence	-3.641 (.341)**	-3.555 (.345)**	-4.856 (.439)**
Ambivalence-Squared	4.709 (.482)**	4.285 (.469)**	6.147 (.615)**
PID Strength	.173 (.023)**	.164 (.023)**	.155 (.023)**
Concern of Election Outcome	.637 (.053)**	.640 (.053)**	.620 (.054)**
Political Knowledge	.560 (.062)**	.553 (.062)**	.555 (.062)**
External Efficacy	.332 (.054)**	.353 (.054)**	.330 (.054)**
Internal Efficacy	.328 (.048)**	.316 (.048)**	.328 (.048)**
Education	.5973 (.067)**	.620 (.067)**	.618 (.067)**
Contact by Party	.716 (.047)**	.733 (.047)**	.718 (.047)**
Perceived Closeness of Election	.051 (.046)	.044 (.046)	.049 (.047)
Cut1	1.776 (.099)	1.755 (.101)	1.488 (.114)
Cut2	3.572 (.102)	3.550 (.105)	3.287 (.116)
Cut3	4.629 (.107)	4.607 (.109)	4.346 (.119)
Correct Prediction	59.3%	59.3%	59.0%
N		(9,675)	

Notes: Dependent variable is the number of campaign activities which respondent reported to take part in. Entries are *ordered logit* coefficients with robust standard errors in parenthesis. Strength of PID is scaled from 0 (independent) to 3 (strong partisan). All other variables are scaled from 0 to 1 (low—high).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

the assumption about attitude neutrality. The citizens with an ambivalent attitude are shown to behave very differently compared with indifferent citizens, even though they share a neutral attitude toward a political object. Then, “the simple act of voting” becomes indeed not as simple as assumed but rather a complicated behavior to predict.

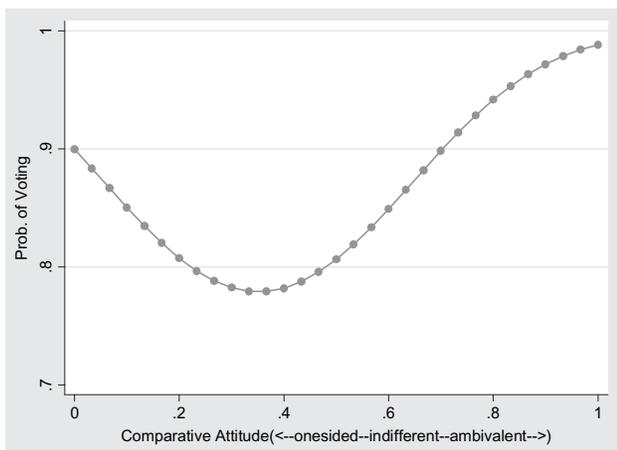
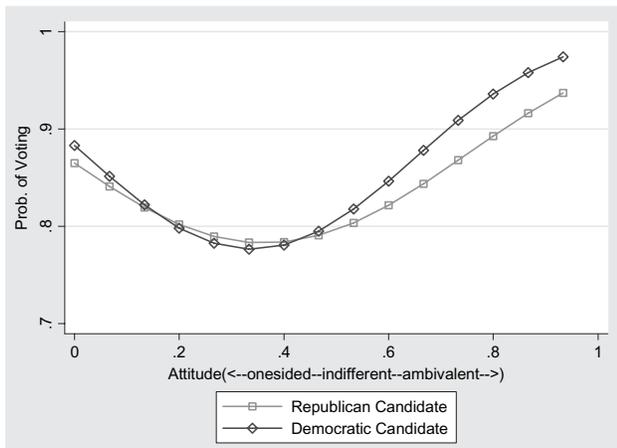
Secondly, the findings suggest a plausible reason why the previous literature did not find much of an effect of candidate evaluation on voting turnout. Earlier empirical works (Brody and Page 1973; Weisberg and Grofman 1981) considered the impact of two psychological factors on turnout: voter alienation and voter indifference. Although the theoretical reasoning (based on neutral attitude) predicts a decrease of turnout for citizens with either alienated or indifferent attitudes, the empirical evidence was not that strong. Therefore, voting scholars concluded that alienation-based nonvoting and satisfaction-based nonvoting were limited. However, the findings in this paper, especially the findings on the comparative measure of ambivalence suggest that, perhaps, the failure to distinguish the two types of neutrality hinders in finding the empirical evidence of the theory. Simply put, when people are indifferent about candidates, the choice is neither difficult nor crucial. However, when citizens are ambivalent about

them, the choice may be difficult but substantial in election.

The high turnout of ambivalent citizens makes this group critical for deciding the electoral outcome. If they take part in voting as frequently as those with one-sided attitude, whom they vote for becomes a very important issue to examine. The classical understanding that their vote choice is less predictable than that of one-sided makes these citizens’ decision much more important. Their behavior deserves further attention.

This paper shows that neutrality is not merely an attitude caused by lack of information. Although positing that individuals try to resolve the contradictory elements in their attitudes and strive for attitude consistency, cognitive consistency theory (Festinger 1957) is indeed based on the acknowledgement of multiple and contrary attitude forces. What newly proposed two-dimensional attitude theory adds to it is just to raise the possibility that individuals are viewed as being capable of maintaining, as well as reducing, their conflicting attitude forces. In the face of conflicting evaluations, people seem to do a remarkable job in decision of turnout. How would it happen? Downs might suggest a useful tip 50 years ago. “The amount of information a man

FIGURE 3 Impact of Ambivalence on Voting Turnout

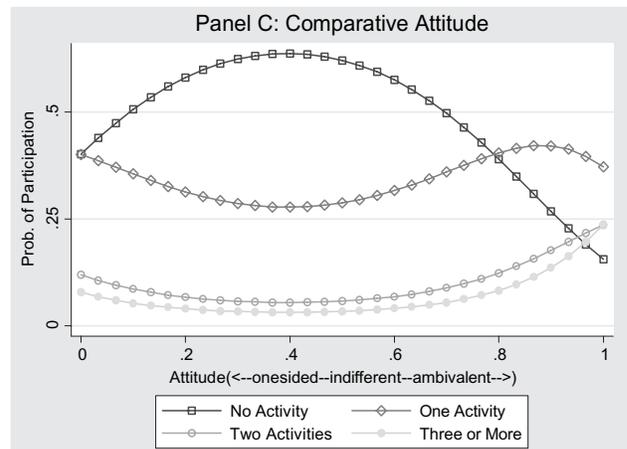
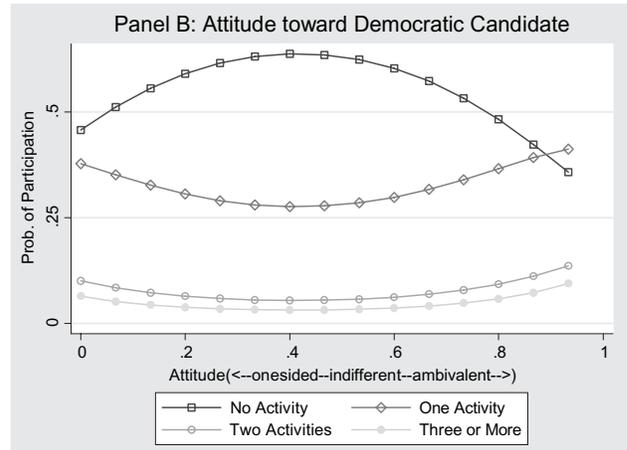
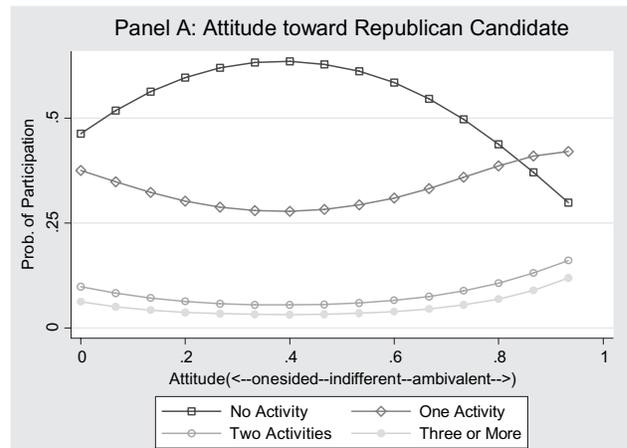


has necessarily affects the confidence with which he holds his decisions, but it does not necessarily affect their nature” (264). The coexistence of conflicting attitudes, or ambivalent attitudes drives citizens, armed with motivation and confidence, not to discount their estimated return from voting. Or, as F. Scott Fitzgerald put it, “to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function” is the “test of a first-rate intelligence” (*The Crack-Up*, 1936).

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FIGURE 4 Impact of Ambivalence on Political Participation



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