1. Introduction

Both theory and empirics suggest that political candidates should benefit from taking centrist positions. General election voters appear to consider proximity and punish those representatives who are too extreme or partisan (Canes-Wrone et al. 2002; Carson et al. 2010; Simas 2013). More ideological primary voters may also be willing to support moderate candidates if those candidates appear to be more likely to win their general elections (Mirhosseini 2015; Simas 2017). And even when extremists do win primaries, they show a historical tendency to underperform more moderate candidates from their own political party in general elections and contribute to longer-term losses for the party (Hall 2015).

Yet, recent analyses show that the electoral advantages enjoyed by moderate candidates have decreased over the past few decades (Utych 2020b; 2020a). Moreover, there is evidence of leap-frog representation, wherein an extreme member on one side is not replaced by a moderate, but by an extremist from the opposite side (Bafumi and Herron 2010). This, combined with findings that moderates are generally deterred from the candidate pool (Thomsen 2014) and that challengers may actually fare better when they take more extreme positions (Stone and Simas 2010), all collectively suggest that the patterns of candidate *divergence* that we observe in U.S. House races (e.g. Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart 2001) are likely to continue.

The question then becomes one of how this elite extremity impacts individuals' willingness to participate in politics. Existing works offer conflicting theories and evidence. The majority of this relatively small body of work argues that candidate extremity and the polarization it creates mobilizes the electorate (Abramowitz 2010; Abramowitz and Stone 2006; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Hetherington 2008; Hetherington 2009). The general claim is that a competitive system wherein citizens have distinct choices should foster greater

participation.[1] In contrast, Rogowski (2014) draws on theories of alienation and conflict aversion to argue that extremity suppresses voter turnout. We offer new evidence to this debate by utilizing multiple measures of candidate positioning and drawing on a more comprehensive set of elections.[2]

In addition, we go beyond just looking at the distance between parties and candidates and consider the impact of the distances between candidates and potential voters. Aggregate-level work suggests that the effects of extremism are contingent upon shared partisanship, and may thus (de)mobilize to different degrees (Hall and Thompson 2018). But whereas the nature of Hall and Thompson's (2018) research design restricts them to looking at partisan turnout in a small subset of U.S. House districts, we are able to examine how individual participation is connected to candidate positioning in almost every contested U.S. House race that occurred in a ten-year period.

Employing this more comprehensive approach, we fail to find evidence that the increasing distance between congressional candidates demobilizes the electorate. When we do find significant associations between polarization and participation, the coefficients are positive.

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[1] See the 1950 report from the American Political Science Association Committee on Political Parties.

[2] Hetherington (2008) focuses on turnout in 14 presidential elections. Abramowitz and Saunders' (2008) main evidence comes from analyses connecting perceptions to voting and activism in the 2004 presidential election. Rogowski's (2014) measure of polarization limits him to analyzing just 50 of the 2006 U.S. House races and 37 of the U.S. Senate races that occurred between 1996-2006.

Yet this is not to say that extremity is always a winning strategy for candidates. Our results also show that a candidate's distance from a constituent is significantly related to political activity. Taking a position that is too out of step with one's own partisans and most likely supporters may depress participation among those individuals, but perhaps more importantly, taking a position that is far from the opposite party's supporters appears to have a sizeable motivating effect. Altogether, these findings are in line with both responsible party and negative partisanship theories, as polarization and the extreme positions that are typically associated with it appear to promote participation by helping voters clearly see which candidate they do *not* want in office. This holds important implications both for the scholarly understanding of the electorate as well as the strategic concerns and electoral success of American political parties.

2. Theoretical Expectations

There are two key components to the arguments about how polarization should impact participation. The first is the distance between the two candidates or parties. Mobilization arguments contend that this distance clarifies the differences between candidates or parties and subsequently, drives individuals to turn out and vote for the one that is more attractive. This sentiment is found in both formal models (e.g. Downs 1957; Matsusaka 1995; Riker and Ordeshook 1968) and the more applied investigations cited above. Collectively, these works all suggest that "the greater the difference voters perceive between the candidates and parties, the greater their stake in the outcome and the more engaged they are likely to be" (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008, p. 552).

Demobilization arguments, on the other hand, challenge this thinking. These works argue that as awareness of the differences between the two parties increases, so, too, should awareness of the conflicts between them. Citizens generally dislike political confrontation and have negative reactions to almost all disagreement among politicians (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Mutz and Reeves 2005). Exposure to disagreement among Democrats and Republicans in the mass public also significantly increases negative reactions. For example, Bowler and Donovan (2011) find that citizens living in more competitive House districts were more likely to report being dissatisfied with the choices presented in the election. This suggests, as Klar and Krupnikov (2016) argue, that citizens' frustration is not just with elite politics, but with partisan conflict in general. The deterrent nature of partisan conflict may then lead citizens to disengage from the political process. Indeed, conflict avoidance is inversely related to public political participation (Ulbig and Funk 1999), and exposure to disagreement significantly decreases the likelihood of voting (Lupton and Thornton 2016). Thus, the conflict associated with polarization should be generally repellant and lead to lower levels of voting and activism.

While arguments for the demobilizing effects of polarization are compelling, we do not expect distance in and of itself to have negative effects. For one, evidence from studies examining a larger set of elections across a number of different electoral contexts generally favor the mobilization argument. Crepaz (1990) shows that polarization – measured as the ideological distance between the left- and right-most parties – positively correlates with voter turnout. The author attributes this to the rise of "post-materialist" parties on both sides of the ideological spectrum, which offer enticing representation for voters on key issues like environmental policy, gender-equality, and immigration. More recent evidence further substantiates this claim, with

both perceived and actual polarization in multiparty systems correlating with higher turnout for both high and low sophistication voters, albeit with caveats regarding the recent short-run political context (Moral 2017). Thus, by offering stark choices, polarization and ideological distance may increase enthusiasm by making voters' options appealing or consequential enough to compel participation.

Additionally, in the U.S., individuals' attitudes about partisan conflict are complex. Although people often claim to desire compromise over conflict, experimental work shows that many individuals – particularly those with strong partisan attachments – actually prefer it when politicians behave in a highly partisan manner (Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). Additional work shows that even those who only lean toward a political party – a group that should be particularly conflict averse – have a tendency to prioritize partisan fighting over unity (Klar and Krupnikov 2016).

Much of this is likely rooted in the fact that partisanship and ideology have become important social identities (e.g. Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2018). As candidates and parties diverge, individuals may perceive greater threats to these identities. As a result, increasing ideological distance polarizes individuals' feelings about candidates and parties (Rogowski and Sutherland 2016; Banda and Cluverius 2018) and arouses action-oriented emotions (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). So, although people may dislike conflict, psychological needs to help their own group maintain a more positive status than the outgroup should still motivate individuals to participate. More formally:

H_1: *Polarization should be associated with a higher likelihood of political participation.*

Second, the relationship between candidate positions and participation should be related to the distances between candidates and individuals. According to demobilization theories, polarization may depress participation because more extreme candidate positions may drive individuals to abstain due to alienation. Alienation theories contend that seeing the distinction between two options and having a strong, motivating preference for one of two options are not the same thing. That is, alienation theories suggest that clarifying one's choices can also make it apparent that *neither* party is a sufficiently appealing option. Though polarization has decreased the proportion of citizens who are indifferent about the two major parties, it has also increased the proportion of individuals who are conflicted, seeing both the positives *and* the negatives of *both* parties (Thornton 2013). And in recent times, the percentage of citizens who find either the Democratic or Republican Parties favorable remains below the 50% mark.[3] So while individuals may see differences between the parties, if they still find fault in both, there may be little compelling them to act. Put another way, when neither party is sufficiently attractive, citizens become less enthusiastic about their choices and decline to participate (see also Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006; Adams and Merrill 2003; Brody and Page 1973; Callendar and Wilson 2007; Feddersen and Pesendorfer 1999).[4]

This relationship between distance and participation should depend upon partisanship. When the individual and the candidate are from the same party, the lower utility created by

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[3] https://news.gallup.com/poll/24655/party-images.aspx. Accessed 1/3/2020.

[4] This idea is also supported by works showing that turnout tends to be higher in proportional systems where the larger number of choices/parties and the greater potential for representation should reduce the likelihood of alienation (e.g. Blais and Dobrzynska 1998).

increased distance should dampen that individual's enthusiasm for that candidate. But even when the candidate from an individual's own party is somewhat distant, the candidate from the opposite party is still almost always farther away (Simas 2013). And as Hall and Thompson (2018) argue, the relatively larger *dis*utility that is created by a distant candidate from the opposite party should not demobilize but instead motivate individuals to take action in opposition. Such a proposition is also supported by theories of negative partisanship (e.g. Abramowitz and Webster 2016) and findings of these types of differential reactions (e.g. Lelkes 2019). Thus, we advance:

> *H_2: When a candidate and an individual are from the same party, distance from the candidate should decrease the likelihood of political participation.*

> *H_3: When a candidate and an individual are from opposite parties, distance from the candidate should increase the likelihood of political participation.*

3. Measuring Polarization

We focus on polarization in U.S. House races from 2010-2018. Although the differences between parties have been increasing over time, the differences between districts and across election years should give us sufficient variation to test for connections to political activity.[5]

To test the two different components of polarization noted above – conflict and alienation – we must first start with measures of the candidates' positions. We obtain these in three ways. The first two take advantage of the fact that in each study conducted between 2010 and 2018, the

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[5] Results presented in Appendix C reveal very few significant differences between the years of study. These slight differences do not undermine are major conclusions but rather, underscore the dangers of relying on analyses of just one election cycle.

Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES)[6] asked all respondents to place both of the U.S. House candidates in their district on the 7-point ideological scale. Taking the mean of placements given by all respondents within a district allows us to approximate each candidate's "true" position. This is common in studies of turnout and voting behavior (e.g. Adams, Bishin, and Dow 2004; Adams, Dow, and Merrill 2006; Adams and Merrill 2003), and past research suggests that the relatively large number of responses per district that are available in the CCES[7] should produce estimates that are generally reliable and highly correlated with DW-NOMINATE scores (Maestas, Buttice, and Stone 2014).[8]

The second CCES measure of polarization relies on each respondents' own perceptions. Although individuals often have a biased sense of reality (e.g. Ahler 2014), these (mis)perceptions still have important behavioral consequences. Notably, Americans have distorted perceptions of levels of polarization (Lelkes 2016), and measures of these perceptions are more strongly associated with participation and orientations toward government than more

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[6]Principal investigators Stephen Ansolabehere, Sam Luks, and Brian Schaffner. For more information, see https://cces.gov.harvard.edu/.

[7] The number of respondents per district per year ranges from 36-354, with a median of 139.

[8] Though there may be concerns about how much knowledge respondents have about the specific candidates in their district, those who place the candidates are generally more engaged (see footnote 13). Moreover, the correlations between the placements of candidates and the placements of their parties are modest (ranging from .43 to .52), suggesting that respondents are considering information beyond just the party label.

objective measures of polarization (Enders and Armaly 2019). As such, we offer these individual perceptions as a second, distinct measure.

Lastly, we draw on candidate placements derived and validated by Bonica (2014),[9] who uses campaign finance data to create common-space CFscores for a variety of political actors. We draw on CFscores so as to offer a set of measures that are completely exogenous to the survey data from which we also draw our dependent variables. However, CFscores are not on the same 7-point scale that survey respondents typically use to place themselves. So while CFscores can be easily used to construct measures of the distance between candidates, they are not as helpful for testing our second and third hypotheses about the distances between candidates and respondents. Still, the various strengths and weaknesses of each type of measure[10] allows us to offer a more thorough test of the association between polarization and participation.

To capture conflict between the candidates, we create measures of polarization that are calculated as the absolute value of the difference between the two major party candidates' positions. To represent each candidate's distance from potential voters, we use CCES respondents' self-placements on the 7-point ideological scale to calculate the absolute value of each respondent's distances from both of our CCES measures of candidate positioning.[11] This gives us two different types of measures of the actual and perceived distances from the in- and

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[9] Data publicly available at https://data.stanford.edu/DIME

[10] See Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2017).

[11] We use the absolute value to better represent the utility functions featured in Hall and Thompson (2018; see p. 512-513), which assume utility decreases with distance, regardless of direction.

outparty candidates in the district.[12] We then combine all of these key measures with the CCES cumulative common content data file (Kuriwaki 2019) to give us a final data set that contains over 290,000 responses.

Table 1: Overview of Key Variables

	Candidate Measure Source		
	Mean of All Placements	*Individual Perceptions*	*CFscores*
Democratic Candidate Placement	$\bar{X}$= 3.03, s.d=.47 Range: 1.73-4.93	$\bar{X}$= 2.93, s.d=1.53 Range: 1-7	$\bar{X}$= -1.08, s.d=.51 Range: -4.34-2.25
Republican Candidate Placement	$\bar{X}$= 5.28, s.d=.49 Range: 2.33-6.53	$\bar{X}$= 5.39, s.d=1.42 Range: 1-7	$\bar{X}$= 1.04, s.d=.37 Range: -2.51-4.31
Distance between Candidates	$\bar{X}$= 2.24, s.d= .67 Range: .07-4.65	$\bar{X}$= 2.63, s.d=.83 Range: 0-6	$\bar{X}$= 2.16, s.d=.59 Range: 0-5.57
Distance from Own Party	$\bar{X}$= 1.14, s.d= .82 Range: 0-5.16	$\bar{X}$= 1.13, s.d=1.18 Range: 0-6	
Distance from Opposite Party	$\bar{X}$= 2.52, s.d=1.23 Range: 0-5.53	$\bar{X}$= 3.29, s.d=1.80 Range: 0-6	
Total Number of District Elections	1960	1960	1597
N (Partisan/Total)	227,418/263,322	90,101/101,630	187,311/217,163

Distances not calculated for CFscores due to differing scales. Leaners are treated as partisans.

Table 1 gives an overview of our major variables. The number of observations in each of the full models to be presented varies. Though all are limited by the fact that we focus only on the subset of general election contests that featured both a Democrat and a Republican, models using the CCES-derived measures of candidate placement still feature about 90% of all races. The Ns of models using CFscore measures are further reduced by a lack of candidate data, while

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[12] Leaners are treated as partisans, while pure independents are omitted.

models using perceptual data are restricted to just those respondents who are willing/able to place both candidates in their district.[13] Still, each offers an ample number of districts and respondents to allow for confidence in our results.

4. Analyses: Distance between Candidates

We begin with tests of the most common and direct measure of ideological polarization – the difference between the positions taken by the two candidates in the district. If conflict, as represented by increased distance between the two candidates, does demobilize, then this measure should be negatively associated with both voting and non-voting political activity.

We focus on two dependent variables. The first is voting in the general election. We use the validated vote measures provided in the CCES common content.[14] As such, a respondent is only coded as a voter if his or her voter status could be confirmed by public records. These

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[13] Only 38.6% of those residing in the districts in the sample are willing or able to place both major party House candidates. Consistent with what would be expected (e.g. Enders and Armaly 2019), those who place the candidates have significantly ($p<.01$) higher levels of partisan attachment, ideological identification, and education. Those who place the candidates are also significantly ($p<.01$) more likely to vote or participate in non-voting activities. Thus, the models utilizing these individual perceptions only include what is perhaps best thought of as the engaged public (Abramowitz 2011). But previous work has found that in countries with long-run patterns of polarization, both actual and perceived polarization have nearly equal effects among high and low sophisticates (Moral 2017). With this in mind, we believe these models still offer useful insights, particularly when considered in conjunction with our other measures.

[14] See Ansolabehere and Hirsch (2012).

validated measures address an important limitation of studies that rely on self-reports, as

"validated turnout information guards against fears of overreports of voter turnout that are

common in studies of political participation, and, to the extent that overreports are correlated

with candidate divergence, produce more precise estimates of the relationship between turnout

and divergence" (Rogowski 2014 p. 483).

But of course, voting is not the only political action that ordinary citizens can take. Thus,

we also look at how candidate positions are related to non-voting forms of political participation.

In all election years, respondents were asked if they had (1) attended local political meetings; (2)

put up a political sign; (3) worked for a candidate or campaign; or (4) donated money to a

candidate, campaign, or political organization. For consistency, we create a dichotomous

indicator of participation that is coded 1 if the respondent reported doing any one of the four

activities and 0 if not ($\bar{X}$=.32, s.d.=.47).[15]

We use logistic regression and run separate models for each of our different types of

measures of polarization. Each model includes controls for the respondent's ideological and

partisan extremity.[16] The rest of our modeling approach closely follows that of Rogowski (2014),

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[15] Results in the Appendix C show the coefficients obtained from count models and from models

analyzing each act on its own.

[16] Ideological extremity folds the traditional 7-point scale such that the resulting variable ranges

from 0 (middle of the road) to 3 (extremely liberal/conservative). Partisan extremity folds the 7-

point partisanship scale. In the full sample models, this variable ranges from 0 (pure

independent/other) to 3 (strong Democrat/Republican). In the partisan models, this variable

ranges from 0 (leaning Democrat/Republican) to 2 (strong Democrat/Republican).

as we also control for respondent demographics and district competitiveness,[17] include state and

year fixed effects, and cluster the standard errors by election contest.

For each of our measures of the distance between candidates, we run two sets of models:

one that includes all respondents and one that focuses just on those with strong, weak, or leaning

partisan attachments. Though the latter is more comparable to Hall and Thompson's (2018)

analyses of partisan turnout, we take both approaches so as offer the most inclusive samples

possible. Figure 1 plots the estimated coefficients for the polarization variables in these models.[18]

The left-hand side of Figure 1 shows that in all six voting models, the coefficients are

positive. Five of the six are significant at a conventional level ($p<.05$). Shifting from one

standard deviation below the mean of polarization to one standard deviation above leads to only

modest increases in the probability of voting when using the mean or the CFscore measures (.03

and .01, respectively), but more a substantial change when using measures derived from each

individual's perceptions (.15). The difference between our perceptual measure and our more

objective measures is also apparent when looking at the coefficients from the non-voting

participation models that are plotted on the right-hand side of Figure 1. Here, the coefficients in

the mean placement and CFscore models are not discernable from zero, while the coefficients in

the individual perception models are again positive and significant ($p<.05$). Whether looking at

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[17] Full details are available in Appendix A. Our full models contain a continuous variable for

respondent age, categorical variables for respondent education level and income, and

dichotomous indicators of gender and race. Our measure of competition is constructed by

subtracting the previous winner's vote share from 1.

[18] See Appendix B for full model results.

the full sample or just those with any kind of partisan attachment, a shift from one standard

deviation below the mean of polarization to one standard deviation above corresponds with about

a .08 increase in the probability of engaging in at least one non-voting activity. Some of the

differences in the magnitudes of the effects are likely due to the differences in the samples;

results presented in Appendix C suggest that those who can and do place both candidates in their

district may simply be more responsive to polarization. But importantly, regardless of the

measure used, we fail to find significant evidence that conflict in and of itself discourages

participation.[19]

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[19] Admittedly, the p-values for the negative CFscore estimates are not large (p=.064 for the full

sample and p=.192 for partisans). But even with such a large number of observations, these

values are lower than what would allow us to confidently reject the null.

Figure 1: Estimated Effects of the Distance between Candidates on Political Participation
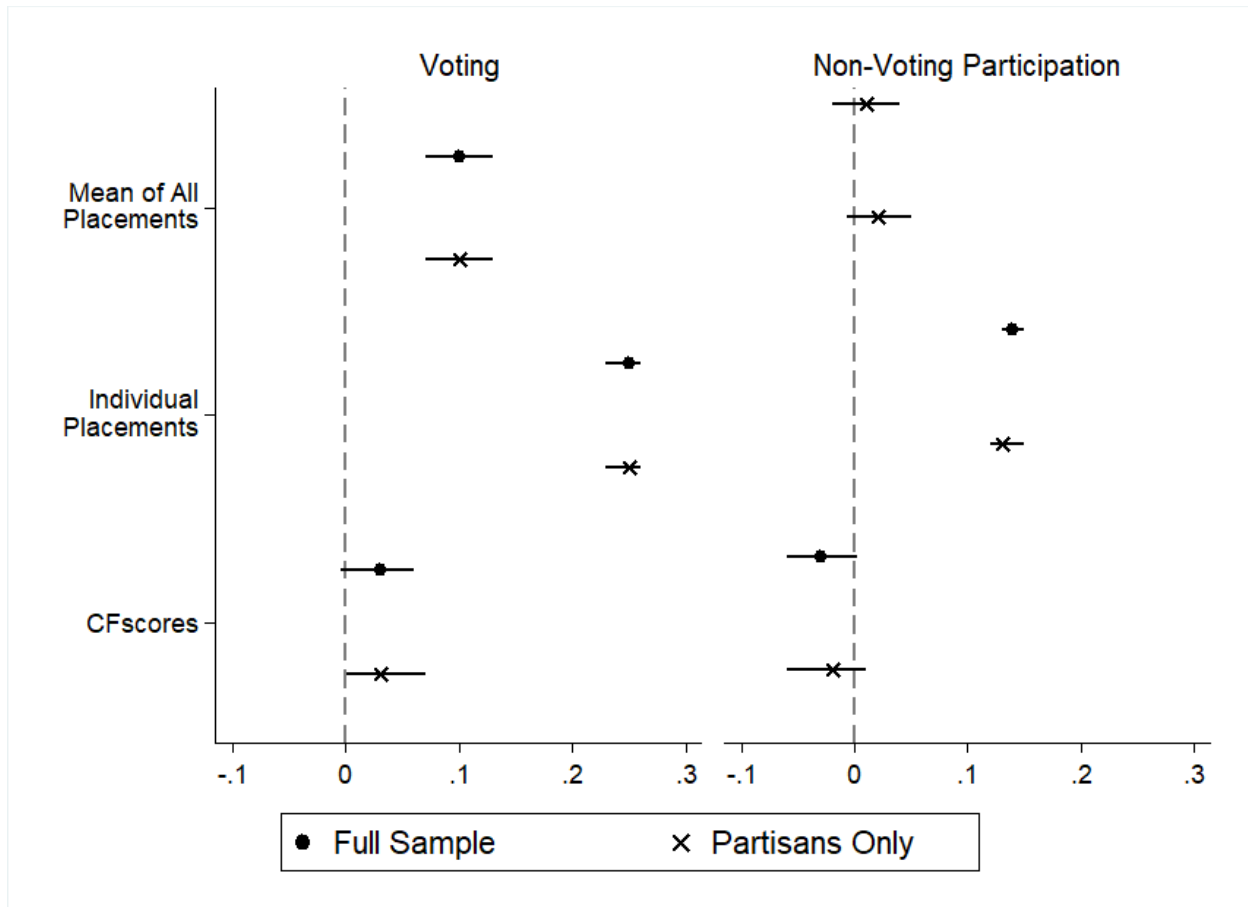
Plots represent coefficients estimated in models shown in Appendix B. Bars represent the 95% confidence intervals.

5. Analyses: Distance between Candidates and Potential Voters

We use the same modeling approach to examine the effects of the respondent's distance from the copartisan candidate and the respondent's distance from the opposing party's candidate. Because this is a partisan theory, pure independents are completely omitted. For both the actual and perceptual measures, we run a baseline model that features each distance measure individually, and then a second model that includes an interaction between the two. The

interaction term better accounts for the fact that the impact of candidate positions may not be entirely independent, and also captures a degree of the conflict between the two candidates. Table 2 presents the results of our vote models, while Table 3 presents the results of our non-voting participation models.

The results are as expected; distance from the candidate from one's own party lowers the probability of participation, while distance from the opposing party's candidate increases the probability of participation. These effects are consistent across both actual and perceived measures. However, when looking just at the perceived measures models, we saw larger effects for outparty vs. inparty candidate distance. This highlights the role that perceived threat of the outgroup plays as a powerful motivator for participation.

The interactions between inparty and outparty candidate distances are significant in three of the four cases. To better illustrate these interactive effects, Table 4 presents predicted probabilities derived from these models. The respondent's ideological extremity is held at 0 so as to generate predictions for a moderate who was between the candidates. Again, we find almost no evidence that conflict in and of itself stifles participation. When both candidates move farther from the respondent (and presumably also each other; row 1 vs. row 4 in Table 4), the corresponding changes in the probabilities of participation are actually positive in the three significant cases. Thus, these interactions suggest that the distance between the candidates does not necessarily depress political activity.

Table 2: Association between Candidate Distances from Respondents and Voting, 2010-2018

	Actual Measures		Perceived Measures	
	Baseline	*Interaction*	*Baseline*	*Interaction*
Distance from Own Party	-.18*	-.17*	-.12*	.01
	(.01)	(.03)	(.01)	(.02)
Distance From Opposite Party	.13*	.14*	.27*	.32*
	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)
Distance Own X Distance Opposite		-.00		.04*
		(.01)		(.01)
Ideological Extremity	.08*	.08*	-.09*	-.09*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Partisan Extremity	.09*	.09*	.04*	.04*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)
Age	.04*	.04*	.03*	.03*
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Education	.15*	.15*	.13*	.13*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Income	.04*	.04*	.03*	.03*
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Female	-.06*	-.06*	.00	.00
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)
Black	-.23*	-.23*	-.39*	-.39*
	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Hispanic	-.44*	-.44*	-.48*	-.48*
	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)
Asian	-.84*	-.84*	-.82*	-.81*
	(.06)	(.06)	(.09)	(.09)
Other Race	-.06	-.06	-.17*	-.17*
	(.04)	(.05)	(.07)	(.07)
District Competitiveness	.11	.11	.58*	.57*
	(.09)	(.09)	(.14)	(.14)
Intercept	-2.69*	-2.70*	-2.32*	-2.45*
	(.08)	(.09)	(.17)	(.17)
N	187,663		77,524	
	(1,950 clusters)		(1,949 clusters)	

Entries are logistic regression coefficient estimates with standard errors that are clustered by election. State and year fixed effects are also estimated, with cases weighted by probability of selection. *=p<.05.

Table 3: Association between Candidate Distances from Respondents and Non-Voting Participation, 2010-2018

	Actual Measures		Perceived Measures	
	Baseline	*Interaction*	*Baseline*	*Interaction*
Distance from Own Party	-.03*	-.09*	-.08*	-.02
	(.01)	(.03)	(.01)	(.02)
Distance From Opposite Party	.15*	.10*	.14*	.16*
	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)
Distance Own X Distance Opposite		.03*		-.02*
		(.01)		(.01)
Ideological Extremity	.13*	.15*	.11*	.11*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Partisan Extremity	.14*	.14*	.12*	.12*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)
Age	.02*	.02*	.01*	.01*
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Education	.22*	.22*	.21*	.21*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Income	.08*	.09*	.08*	.08*
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Female	-.25*	-.25*	-.15*	-.14*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Black	-.22*	-.22*	-.25*	-.25*
	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Hispanic	-.27*	-.27*	-.22*	-.22*
	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)
Asian	-.44*	-.44*	-.34*	-.34*
	(.06)	(.06)	(.09)	(.09)
Other Race	.29*	.29*	.28*	.28*
	(.04)	(.04)	(.06)	(.06)
District Competitiveness	-.35*	-.32*	-.50*	-.51*
	(.08)	(.08)	(.12)	(.12)
Intercept	-3.46*	-3.37*	-2.52*	-2.58*
	(.10)	(.11)	(.17)	(.16)
N	187,663		77,524	
	(1,950 clusters)		(1,949 clusters)	

Entries are logistic regression coefficient estimates with standard errors that are clustered by election. State and year fixed effects are also estimated, with cases weighted by probability of selection. *=p<.05.

Instead, it appears that the effects of the conflict between candidates are more contingent on whether it is the inparty or outparty candidate that is more responsible for the distance. Though distance from one's own candidate does have negative effects, the positive effects from increased distance from the opposite party's candidate tend to offset or exceed those losses. And since greater distance from the opposite candidate is the norm,[20] these results suggest that when polarization impacts participation, it most likely encourages it rather than suppresses it. Such a proposition is also supported by results in Appendix C that show that when we interact the distance variables with the respondent's own ideological extremity, the effects of distance from the inparty candidate are more limited and strongest among the most extreme individuals.

Table 4: Predicted Probabilities of Participation Given Distances from Candidates

	Probability of Voting		Probability of Non-Voting Activity	
	Actual	*Perceived*	*Actual*	*Perceived*
Distance from Own=1 **Distance from Opposite=1**	.58	.56	.22	.31
Distance from Own=1 **Distance from Opposite=2**	.62	.63	.25	.34
Distance from Own=2 **Distance from Opposite=1**	.54	.53	.22	.30
Distance from Own=2 **Distance from Opposite=2**	.57	.60	.24	.33

Predictions derived from interactive models in Tables 2 and 3. Respondent's ideological extremity is held at 0, while other unspecified variables are held at their mean or modal values.

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[20] Whether using the actual or perceived measures, about 82% of respondents are closer to their own party's candidate.

Analyses using CFscores are also consistent with these findings. Because the CFscores are not on the 7-point ideological scale, we cannot construct comparable distance measures with these data. Figure 2, however, illustrates results from models that include the three-way interactions between the ideological positions of both candidates and the respondent (see Appendix B for full results). The plots in Figure 2 are the marginal effects of a candidate moving from the most liberal to the most conservative position. Whether looking at voting or non-voting participation, the results are the same. For liberal respondents, a candidate's increasingly distant conservative position demobilizes a respondent when that candidate is from the respondent's own party, but motivates when the candidate is from the opposite party. But for conservative respondents, the increased similarity of a more conservative position encourages participation when the candidate is from the respondent's own party, but discourages it when the candidate is not. The fact that the largest effects are observed among the most extreme alludes to a potential tradeoff for parties: nominating a moderate may undermine mobilization of opposition support, but may also risk alienating inparty base supporters. More investigation of this tradeoff is needed, but our multiple approaches all suggest the risks of skewing the electorate toward the opposite party that come with the nomination of an extremist (Hall and Thompson 2018) will be contingent on the ideological composition of both parties' constituencies.

Figure 2: Marginal Effects of the Candidates' Positions by Respondent Ideology
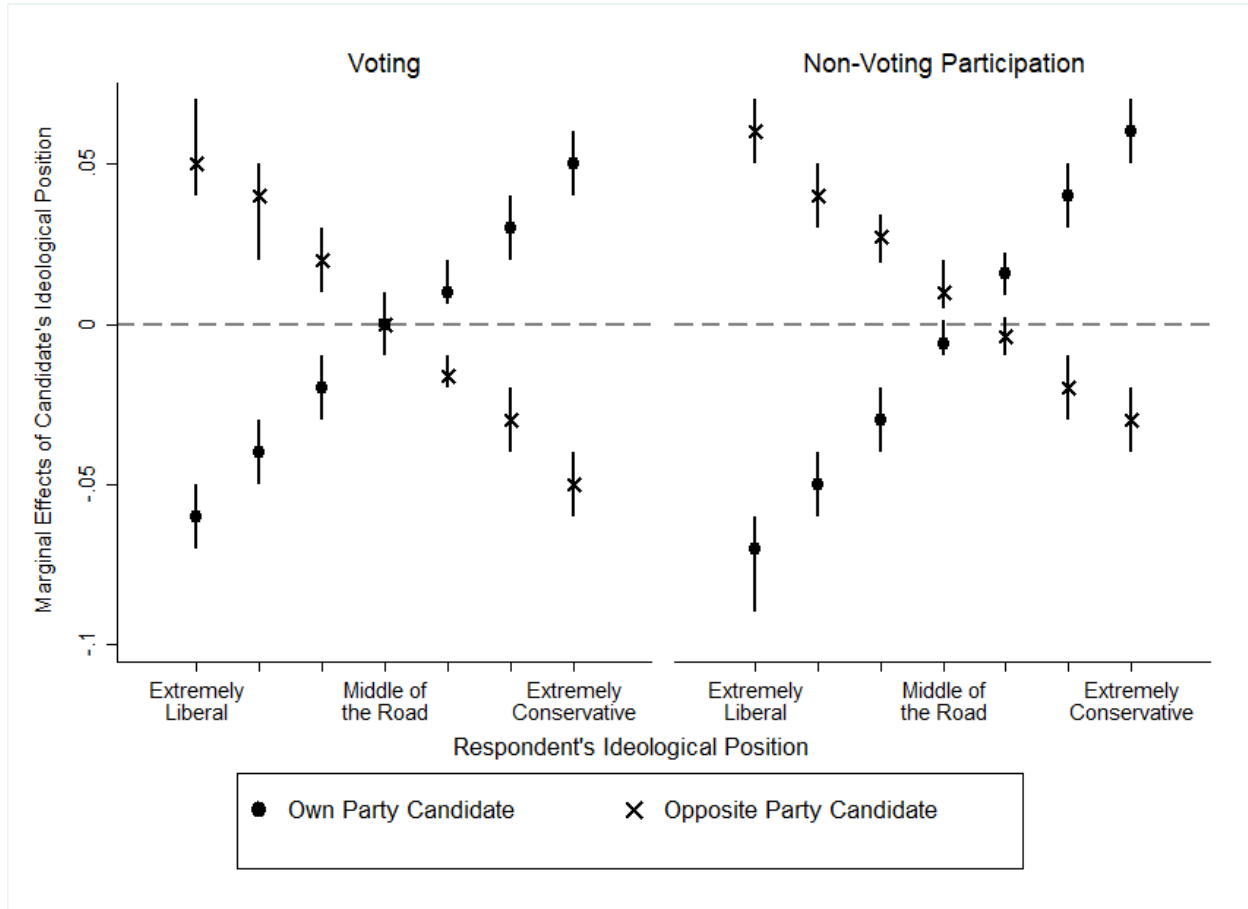
Plots are estimates derived from models in Appendix B. Bars represent the 95% confidence intervals of the estimates. All ideology variables are coded so that higher values indicate more conservative positions.

6. Discussion

As the differences between Democrats and Republicans grow, it becomes increasingly important to assess how this conflict and the accompanying extremity impact the electorate. Using a much more comprehensive approach than previous studies, we offer new insights into how candidates' positions impact the political behaviors of individuals. Using three different measures of the distance between candidates running in a decade of U.S. House elections, we find little to no evidence that the polarization of candidates' positions stifles voting and non-voting political behavior. Rather than turning people off, increasing contrast between candidates

likely clarifies voters' choices and highlights policy stakes. While the level of perceived polarization may often outstrip the true ideological distance between candidates, individuals nonetheless appear mobilized by clear signals of polarization.

Going further, we also examine how the distance between the candidates and potential voters are associated with participation. Our analyses of partisans find that though distances from both candidates are significantly related to activity, the fact that distances from the opposing party are typically greater suggests that parties may be better served nominating more ideologically moderate candidates, as these candidates may mitigate backlash from the opposition. However, the *perceived* extremity of outparty candidates is often greater their true ideological extremity. This implies that inparty candidates may gain advantages by attempting to portray the opposition as ideologically extreme, irrespective of the outparty candidate's true ideology, and raises questions as to whether moderate candidates can successfully signal their more centrist tendencies to the public. In addition, when we do find effects of distance from the inparty, they appear to be greatest among the more extreme members. Thus it seems that parties and candidates face somewhat of a dilemma, as moderating to stifle the opposition may also cost them the support of the more extreme party loyalists.

Ultimately, our results offer some mixed implications for both participation and representation. Despite the growing distance between constituents and their preferred candidates, the polarization between the candidates themselves mobilizes voters, presumably by highlighting what is at stake in the election. While negative partisanship and outgroup threat are strong motivators of participation in this context, this, principally, may serve the pluralistic ideal of participation; in theory, one would expect voters to be mobilized when the opposition supports policies that harm the voters' self-interest. Future work should probe into the exact mechanism

driving these results, perhaps incorporating more nuanced measures of both positive and negative partisan identity (Bankert 2020). Panel data or an experimental approach (e.g. Orr and Huber 2019) may be particularly useful for untangling the complex relationship between the effects of policy and more identity-driven affect. But given that (1) the positive association between polarization and activity persists even when our analyses include the more moderate and less engaged in our sample; and (2) voters are better represented than nonvoters (Griffin and Newman 2005), our findings also suggest potential for more moderate representation.

This potential, however, may not translate into reality. The apparently strong role of negative mobilization suggests that individuals are participating *in spite of*, not because of, the positions their copartisan candidates take. That is, individuals may be less likely to punish a legislator who is out-of-step or ineffective so long as he or she is still relatively more attractive than the alternative. This fits with those finding that legislators have little incentive to compromise (e.g. Harbridge and Malhotra 2011). And if voters are mobilized by a fear and affective distaste for the opposition party rather than a coherent difference in values or interests, this could be particularly concerning given the long-term acceleration of polarization in the U.S. and the recent deluge of hyperpartisan misinformation and conspiratorial thinking. Our findings may also help to explain why the gap in electoral success between moderate and extremist candidates has diminished as polarization has increased (Utych 2020b; 2020a). Thus, it seems that the quantity of participation generated by increased polarization may be coming at the expense of quality.

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