

## **Elite Polarization and Mass Political Engagement: Information, Alienation, and Mobilization**

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*Using the cumulative ANES survey (1972-2004), this paper examines the effect of elite polarization on various measures of mass political engagement when alienation, mobilization and informational factors are included together in the estimation model. I also focus on the conditional effect of existing cognitive ability of an individual as I explore mass engagement question because citizens can respond differently to changed informational environment depending on their different levels of education. The findings of this study indicate that the effects of increasing elite polarization in the U.S. Congress on mass political engagement is rather ambiguous because the signs and the magnitudes of the effects are varying by measures of political engagement and levels of education. The ambiguity in findings might explain why previous research has provided conflicting empirical evidences regarding its effect on mass politics.*

**Keywords:** *Elite Polarization, Mass Political Engagement, Alienation, Mobilization, Political Information*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Just as scholars of American politics are divided about whether the mass public has become ideologically more polarized due to the growing congressional polarization, scholarly debate is also taking place in other dimensions of mass reactions to ideological division in Congress. For example, as the political environment changes with growing partisan polarization among the elite class, we would expect that the political behavior of citizens, in terms of how they perceive or how they interact with politics, will likely change accordingly. Yet, previous literature has provided contrasting prospects for the mass effects of growing elite polarization, and we are still uncertain if growing congressional polarization in the U.S. Congress has increased levels of mass political awareness and engagement (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Claassen and Highton, 2009; Hussey, 2011; Rogowski, 2012). In this regard, this paper examines the effect of elite polarization on the mass political behavior focusing on the changes in political engagement.

The disappearance of ideologically moderate members as a result of ongoing congressional polarization means that issue positions of politicians became more clarified compared to less polarized eras. By clarifying the policy ambiguity of the elites, elite polarization is expected to enhance public awareness and engagement since the levels of these measures could be influenced by the amount of available information to citizens (e.g., Claassen and Highton, 2009; Bimber, 2001; Matsusaka, 1995; Tolbert et al., 2003; Larcinese, 2007; Rogowski, 2012). In this paper I pay attention to changing levels of political awareness in the transformed political environment, not only because increased

sophistication of voters could enhance the quality of democratic decision making, but also because greater awareness is linked to increased political engagement of the public. With the growing elite polarization, more citizens are expected to perceive greater distinctions between parties' (or candidates') ideological positions with less difficulty. Further, if it becomes easier to differentiate parties, this also means that elite polarization has significantly reduced a voter's costs for acquiring political information, which can in turn encourage more participation of individuals in political processes (Matsusaka, 1995; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Larcinese, 2007; Lassen, 2005).

If growing elite polarization would improve levels of civic political awareness and facilitate political engagement of the public following the virtuous circle described above, these consequences might be described as 'beneficial' aspects of political polarization (see, e.g., Levendusky, 2010).

Some obstacles, however, may exist to the way in which elite polarization positively affects political attitudes and behaviors of the mass public. For example, Fiorina et al. (2006, 2008) argue that growing elite polarization tends to alienate ordinary citizens from political processes, thus it can suppress political engagement of the electorate. If a majority of citizens remain ideologically moderate in the age of political polarization, growing polarization of elected officials could alienate the more moderate citizens (Fiorina et al., 2006; Fiorina et al., 2008). A large number of people could be disengaged or less engaged by congressional polarization if voters feel that constituents' policy views are not correctly represented by neither parties.

While intensifying elite polarization may depress mass political engagement by alienating citizens, alienation felt by a citizen could be offset by increased mobilization efforts of political elites toward the electorate. Party mobilization is known to be an important determinant of civic political participation (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993), and mobilization activities became more frequent in the 2000s with the increased elite polarization (Hetherington, 2008; Fiorina et al., 2008). According to Hetherington (2008:14), while the recent surge in party contacts has been mainly targeted toward ideologues among the electorate, mobilization activities toward moderates and non-ideologues are also on the increase as well. Thus, together with information effects, growing mobilization efforts as a consequence of elite polarization can encourage mass political engagement.

Therefore, we have conflicting expectations in terms of the effects of elite polarization on levels of political engagement among the mass public. Elite polarization is likely to stimulate mass political engagement if such positive effects as increased information and mobilization are predominant over negative alienating effects. Although citizens become more informed and are increasingly mobilized with growing elite polarization, we are still likely to observe less engagement or disengagement among voters if they are increasingly disenchanted from polarized elite politics. Given the coexistence of both positive and negative impacts, we need to analyze how elite polarization affects mass political engagement when all these confounding factors are controlled in an empirical model.

Using the cumulative ANES survey (1972-2004), I investigate how growing elite polarization influences mass political engagement when alienation, mobilization, and other relevant factors are controlled in the estimation model. Because citizens can respond differently to changed informational environment depending on their different levels of cognitive skills, I also focus on the conditional effects of existing political expertise as I empirically test the effects of elite polarization on political engagement of the public. The findings of this study indicate that the effects of increasing elite polarization in the U.S.

Congress on mass political engagement is rather ambiguous because the signs and the magnitudes of the effects are varying by measures of political engagement and levels of education. The ambiguity in findings might explain why previous research has provided conflicting empirical evidences regarding its effect on mass politics.

## 2. ELITE POLARAZATION, POLITICAL AWARENESS, AND ENGAGEMENT

Since Converse's seminal work (1964), scholars have long been skeptical as to whether ordinary citizens hold consistent belief systems across issue dimensions. If the mass public relies significantly on elites' cues to understand the complex nature of ideology and politics, ideological polarization of elites should enhance consistency in mass attitudes because cue-taking becomes much easier for a broad range of people (Levendusky, 2010). In this regard, Levendusky (2010) finds a meaningful causal link between elite polarization and consistency in public opinion using experimental research. He demonstrates that growing levels of elite polarization, by clarifying policy positions of parties, enable citizens to hold more consistent attitudes across issue domains.

If intensified elite polarization has improved the informational environment for the mass public by reducing policy ambiguity, we would expect more people to become politically aware and informed. In accordance with this optimistic view, Abramowitz and Saunders (2008:552) report a substantial increase in the proportion of the electorate who are politically aware in 2000s compared to the 1950s and 1960s. They suggest that about 75% of American voters were able to perceive important differences between the parties and about 85% were concerned about who won the presidential race during the 2000s, whereas only about 50% of voters felt important differences between the parties and only 65% cared about the presidential election outcome during the 1950s-60s. Similarly, Brooks and Geer (2008:35) describe potential benefits of elite polarization as follows;

“the most obvious benefit of polarization is to offer a sharper distinction between the two political parties. For partisans, the benefit of this sharper distinction is clear: elite polarization gives partisans further reinforcement for their preexisting ideological and policy preferences. For moderates, the choices are made clear enough that one option is more likely to be preferred, at least marginally, over the alternative. For those who have lower levels of overall political knowledge, it should make the lines of differentiation on at least the most salient issues clearer than they would be otherwise.”

The above quote indicates that growing elite polarization is not necessarily detrimental to democratic citizenship in terms of political awareness and engagement (Brooks and Geer, 2008). Hetherington (2008) provides supporting evidence that elite polarization has not only increased political engagement among the ideologues, it has also increased engagement among the moderates and non-ideologues. His findings suggest that the increases are observed in both attitudinal (e.g., political interests and perceptions) and behavioral (e.g., voting, campaign activities) forms of political engagement in the aggregate.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hetherington (2008)'s measures of political engagement include both cognitive and behavioral forms of engagement, such as self-reported turnout, campaign activities, interests in the election, and perceived government responsiveness (political efficacy).

In addition to that, Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) also find that intense popular polarization enhanced the level of public engagement in the 2004 presidential election rather than demobilized voters. By linking two measures of engagement—perceptions of important party differences and caring about the election outcome, they propose their “polarization hypothesis” dictating that “the more voters liked Bush or disliked Bush, the more likely they were to perceive important differences and care about the outcome of the election” (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008:553). Based on their findings, Abramowitz and Saunders argue that as the two parties have become ideologically more divided and partisanship in the electorate has become increasingly aligned with ideological positions, individuals perceive greater stakes associated with election outcomes (2008:552; Abramowitz, 2011). Therefore, we can predict that the perceived ideological differences between the two parties would increase with the ideological polarization of the elites.

In fact, the idea that polarization has potentially positive effects on political engagement of citizens is not totally new (Brooks and Geer, 2008:34-5). Rather, the claim dates back to more than half a century ago when a task force of American Political Science Association led by E. E. Schattschneider devised the responsible party theory as a cure for the failing party system (APSA Committees on Political Parties, 1950; Rogowski, 2012; Schattschneider, 1960).<sup>2</sup> Schattschneider (1960) argued that citizens are more likely to participate in the decision-making process under a competitive party system rather than in the absence of party competition. That is, people will vote only if they perceive meaningful differences between the policy alternatives of different parties. So, if intensified party polarization has substantially enlarged the scope of the conflict, we may expect greater turnout among the public. Therefore, the suggestions made by Schattschneider and other APSA committee members imply that increasing policy divergence as a result of growing ideological conflict can stimulate political participation of the electorate. When policy positions of different candidates substantially diverge, voters become more likely to turn out since the perceived utility loss of losing an election to the opposite candidate looms large to them.<sup>3</sup> In other words, citizens might have less incentive to participate in the election if they perceive that candidates from both parties represent almost the same policy preferences, since such a scenario yields only small gaps in the stakes of winning and losing election.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, I predict that more people will engage with politics if they perceive increased level of ideological distance between the positions of two parties.

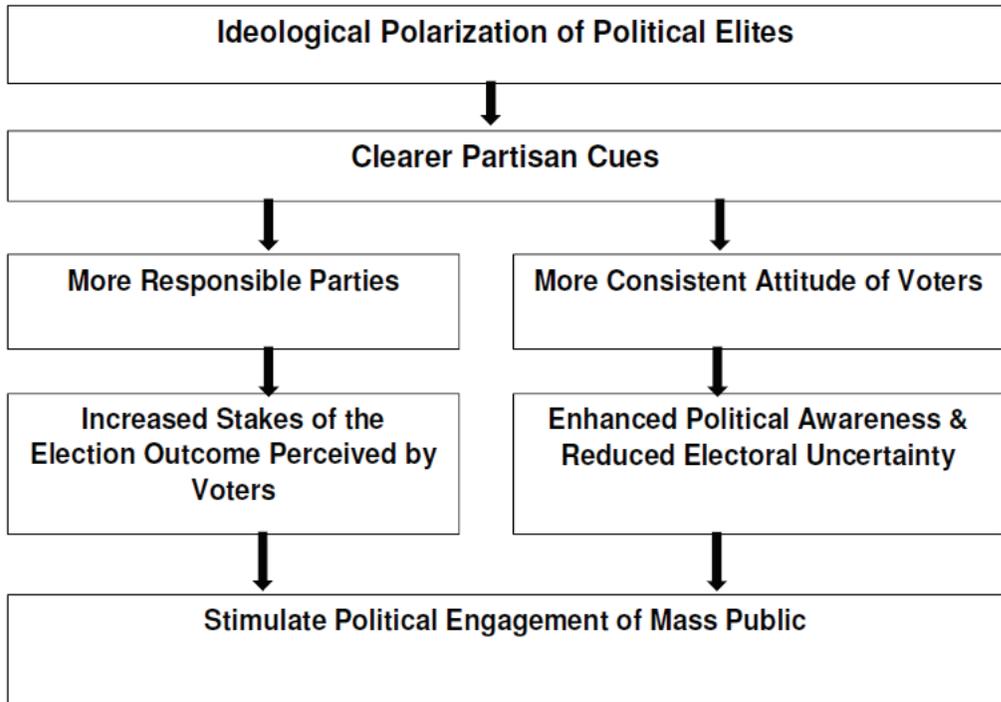
In addition to the increased stakes of election outcomes perceived by voters as a consequence of elite polarization, a rational choice theory of turnout model provides another potential reason for increasing political participation by polarization. If we use a simple expected utility model of turnout (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968),  $R = B * P - C + D$ , where  $R$  is the reward from a voter's act of voting,  $B$  is the difference between the expected benefits of winning preferred candidate and less preferred one,  $P$  is a probability that an individual's vote matters,  $C$  is the cost of voting including opportunity cost or the cost of acquiring information, and  $D$  represent a civic duty or psychological benefit of casting a vote. As I explained above, if individuals see greater stakes associated with the election outcomes as a result of growing elite polarization, more people are likely to turn out because

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<sup>2</sup> Rogowski (2012) provides a nice summary of different theoretical perspectives about how growing political polarization influences on political participation of citizens.

<sup>3</sup> See Downs (1957).

<sup>4</sup> See also (Schattschneider, 1960).

**Figure 1.** Positive Repercussions of Elite Polarization on Mass Political Behavior

the  $B$  term in the above equation tends to increase. In addition to that, if policy ambiguity and electoral uncertainty has significantly declined with a polarizing political environment, citizens are more likely to become involved since the cost of participation ( $C$  term) would be reduced with growing ideological divergence of elected officials. Actually, political information has been long known to be a significant predictor of voter turnout (e.g., Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). Indeed, reduced uncertainty associated with the voting decision would encourage more voters to participate since citizens' expected benefits of casting a vote tend to grow as the cost of acquiring information falls (Larcinese, 2007; Matsusaka, 1995). Therefore, growing elite polarization can not only enhance levels of political awareness, but it can also boost political participation of people by presenting them with reduced electoral uncertainty as well as increased differential benefit associated with election outcomes. Figure 1 illustrates these positive repercussions of elite polarization on mass political behavior in terms of awareness and engagement.

In spite of these optimistic views of the effect of elite polarization on mass political engagement, it is not obvious yet whether polarized politics in Congress has enhanced the overall informational environment or has just disproportionately affected a few segments of the population with a certain level of cognitive ability. Indeed some scholars have paid more specific attention to the unequal influences of growing partisan polarization on mass awareness of politics based on social stratification. For example, Hetherington (2001), who showed that partisanship has resurged in the electorate in accordance with greater congressional polarization, also indicated that the strongest effect of elite polarization is

found among citizens with more political knowledge (measured by levels of formal education).<sup>5</sup> The claim of Fiorina et al. (2006) also belongs to this line of the argument in that they suggest that ideological polarization is occurring among only a small minority of the population including what we called political (party) activists. In addition to these, Claassen and Highton (2009) find that the increasing clarity of party-policy linkages has disproportionately benefited the better informed in the mass public, and only the well-informed strata responded properly to the growing party polarization by becoming politically more aware. They thus argue that the clarification associated with increasing policy divergence of political elites does not close the gaps between citizen groups.

Focusing on the heterogeneous mass response to elite polarization, Ellis and Ura (2008) also confirm that the strength of partisan thinking varies by levels of income and formal education of citizens. They show that mass partisan salience on economic issues is most prominent among citizens with higher education and low incomes, whereas stronger mass partisanship in terms of cultural issues is found among citizens with less education and higher incomes. When it comes to the mass consistency issue, Baldassari and Gelman (2008) report that the ideological constraint of the general public is still extremely low even with the increased level of partisan sorting, and coherent attitudes are still confined to a small segment of the population with certain levels of wealth, partisanship, and political sophistication. To summarize, all this existing evidence indicates that elite polarization will have heterogeneous effects on mass political awareness according to levels of citizens' political expertise.

Given limitations of learning ability among certain proportions of the population, we might not expect substantial increases in political engagement for all citizens groups. Indeed we can only expect increased political engagement of citizens as described in Figure 1 if individuals possess certain levels of cognitive skills to accommodate the changed political environment. In fact, reduced electoral uncertainty does not necessarily guarantee that people will acquire political information with less cost. An individual must have the cognitive ability to exploit the new political information presented by elite polarization. Thus, we must adjust the above awareness prediction as follows: growing elite polarization can potentially enhance political engagement of the public, *conditional* on learning ability of citizens. That is, if a polarized political environment has not improved the overall levels of political awareness among the general electorate, we would see decreased political participation in the age of ideological division. With regard to this point, Rogowski (2012) provides some evidence that growing ideological divergence between candidates significantly reduced voter turnout. In particular, he demonstrates that the effect of congressional ideological division on voting participation is *conditioned* by the level of an individual's ideological sophistication (proxied by formal education levels). Then he claims that increasing ideological conflict *disproportionately* suppresses turnout of citizens with lower levels of political information and education. The conclusion of Rogowski (2012) runs counter to the optimistic scenario proposed in Figure 1.

As we have examined thus far, previous research reveals that growing congressional polarization may have diverse consequences for different strata of the mass public in terms

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<sup>5</sup> Similar to the approach adopted here, Hetherington (2001) uses a contextual variable to measure the level of elite polarization in each congressional session included in his analysis. He constructs the measure by calculating the mean Euclidean distance in the DW-NOMINATE scores between Democrats and Republicans in the House, and then merges with individual-level survey data by year.

of both political awareness and engagement (Claassen and Highton, 2009; Ellis and Ura, 2008; Garner and Palmer, 2011; Hetherington, 2001; Rogowski, 2012). These studies find that the mass effects of elite polarization are conditioned on the existing levels of political information, formal education, or income of citizens. If only a selected subset of the population is registering higher levels of political awareness and engagement, as the aforementioned scholars argue, existing gaps between the most informed and the least informed or between the most engaged and the least engaged are likely to increase. On the other hand, if growing elite polarization is affecting a much larger proportion of people, rather than being confined to a small segment of population, the group with less cognitive skills is also becoming more attentive and active along with the more aware group in the midst of congressional ideological division. In such scenario, the knowledge gap between the two groups could be reduced. Indeed, if partisan polarization in Congress can clarify the link between the parties and their policy positions (Claassen and Highton, 2009; Levendusky, 2010), more citizens would see less policy ambiguity, which can improve the *overall* political knowledge environment across different informational strata of people. Moreover, if the changed electoral environment reduces information cost as well as uncertainty of voting choice, this can also stimulate more voters to turn out (Matsusaka, 1995; Larcinese, 2007; Lassen, 2005). If this is the case, increasing congressional polarization could potentially reduce the turnout gap between the more engaged and the less engaged.

Given the above arguments, it is rather uncertain whether only subsets of population have responded to polarized elite politics or if the general public *in aggregate* has reacted to the changing electoral environment. By empirically modeling the nature of the elite influence on the electorate, following sections examine whether different population strata according to their existing levels of political information have reacted differently to the changing political environment in terms of becoming politically more attentive. In addition to that, I also explore if polarized politics has increased levels of political participation and attitudinal engagement of the electorate in aggregate. Since potentially positive effects of elite polarization on mass political engagement depend on individuals' cognitive skills to accommodate new political information, I also test conditional effects of citizens' knowledge background on the link between polarized elite politics and mass engagement.

### 3. DATA AND MEASUREMENTS OF VARIABLES

This section describes how I measure the primary concepts discussed above using 1972-2004 American National Election Study (ANES) cumulative data.<sup>6</sup>

#### 3.1. Political Awareness and Engagement

As measures of political engagement, I examine three indicators from ANES surveys following the previous research (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Hetherington, 2008; Hussey, 2011): 1) whether a respondent cares about the presidential election outcome (don't care [0] vs. care a good deal[1]); 2) whether a respondent voted in the election (didn't vote[0] vs. voted[1]) ; 3) and frequency of engagement in such campaign activities as trying to

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<sup>6</sup> Since some of central indicators have not been incorporated yet to the 2008 wave of ANES survey, this study only covers from 1972 to 2004.

influence the other's vote (0 or 1); attending political rallies and meetings (0 or 1); working for a party or candidate (0 or 1); displaying a campaign button or sticker (0 or 1); and donating money to a party or candidate (0 or 1). Since the campaign frequency variable has such larger fraction (61.7%) of 0 count (no activities at all) compared to the other categories (1 to 5 activities), I recoded the variable into a binary scale (0 and 1 or 2 and more).<sup>7</sup> Note that these three dependent variables include two behavioral and one attitudinal measure of political engagement since an individual could respond to elite polarization differently in terms of attitude and behavior.<sup>8</sup> These three dichotomous measures of political engagement are identical to the dependent variables employed by Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) and Hussey (2011). For the first indicator of mass political engagement (concern about the election outcomes), Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) examine the general pattern revealed in the aggregate data without running regression analysis. Analyzing changes in the percentages of Americans who care a good deal about the outcome of presidential election varying with the percentages of the electorate who perceive important party differences, they conclude that "the greater the difference voters perceive between the candidates and parties, the greater their stake in the outcome and the more engaged they likely to be" (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008:552). The aggregate analysis, however, does not account for many other control factors that potentially intervene in the relationship between the two measures (perceptions of important party differences and concern about the election outcome). Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) conducted two regression analyses using the turnout and campaign activism variables with same set of covariates *but* their empirical models *do not control* for the elite mobilization factor. For example, Fiorina et al. (2008) criticize the finding of Abramowitz and Saunders that the increased mass political engagement could be an artifact of growing elite mobilization efforts as a consequence of intense elite polarization. Further, the two regression models of Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) only analyze a single year survey (ANES, 2004), so their finding is limited to the early 2000s. More comprehensive empirical analyses are done by Hussey (2011), who performs logistic regression analyses with three indicators of mass political engagement using the 1984-2008 ANES data. Her empirical models incorporate additional control variables into the specification compared to Abramowitz and Saunders (2008), but the Hussey (2011)'s analysis does not explicitly account for either elite or popular polarization in her model. She explains the effects of political polarization using decade-specific dummies for 1990s and 2000s similar to Claassen and Highton (2009). In addition to these three measures of engagement, Hetherington (2008) examines a more extensive list of engagement indicators such as interest in the election, perceived political efficacy and government responsiveness, and political trust. Hetherington (2008) provides a single regression analysis using the self-reported voter turnout as a response variable using only the 2004 ANES survey similar to Abramowitz and Saunders (2008). He finds that perceived candidate polarization on defense spending tends to increase the likelihood of individual voting participation, but one serious problem with this model specification is that perception of elite polarization may be affected by levels of individual political awareness, thus the perception-based measure of elite polarization could account for individual level of political sophistication, rather than for the

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<sup>7</sup> See Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) and Hussey (2011).

<sup>8</sup> These three measures of mass political engagement only address official and non-violent forms of political participation, but there are other types of the engagement which are often non-formal and non-institutional.

changes in elite behavior.

### 3.2. Elite Polarization

Elite polarization serves as the primary independent variable in the prediction model of political engagement. I am interested in seeing if levels of political engagement increase as the ideological positions of the two parties increasingly diverge from each other. I tap this ideological polarization among the elites two different ways. First, I measure the policy divergence using the (decreasing) percentage of overlapping members in the House on an ideological scale. To measure ideological preferences of the House members, I use the first dimension DW-NOMINATE that assesses members' policy positions in terms of the government intervention in the economy or the conventional liberal-conservative spectrum.<sup>9</sup> This measures fractions of the House Representatives whose ideological preferences are overlapped across two parties over each congressional year. Given that the proportion of overlapping members tends to decrease with growing ideological divergence between the two parties, I subtracted this overlapping percentage from one and use this scale as a primary indicator of partisan polarization (i.e., divergence). I prefer this divergence indicator over the mean difference (distance) scale between two parties, which is more frequently used by other scholars as an elite polarization index<sup>10</sup> because increased distance between the two means (Democrats and Republicans) does not necessarily indicate the absence of ideological convergence in the center. Indeed, the ideological preferences of conservative Democrats locating at the right end of Democrats' distribution and liberal Republicans locating at the left end of Republicans' distribution could still possibly overlap at the center of the distribution, even when a vast majority of members of respective parties shift to more extreme positions, and thus increased the mean distance. The correlation between the mean difference and the divergence between the two parties (Democrats and Republicans) is 0.86, while the correlation between the mean distance and the percent of moderate House members (another way of measuring congressional polarization) is -0.98. Since I am interested here in how elite politics affect mass political behavior, I merge this contextual variable with the individual-level data by matching congressional sessions with each presidential survey year similar to Hetherington (2001). For example, I attach a computed divergence score of 92<sup>nd</sup> Congress (1971-1972) to the each of respondents of 1972 ANES survey.

As a second measure of the contextual change as a result of growing elite polarization, I use period-based dummies. Hussey (2011) adopts this period-effect based approach and adds decade dummies (1990s and 2000s) to her regression models. For comparison purpose with her study, I include two period-specific dummies for 1984-1992, 1996-2004 while 1972-1984 used as the reference period. Instead of adding decade-by-decade time effects (i.e., 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s), I choose these specific period effects because levels of congressional polarization significantly increased around 1984 (disappearance of southern conservative Democrats) and after the Republican takeover of the Congress in 1994. The correlations between the divergence variable and three period effects (1972-84, 1984-92, and 1996-2004) are -0.961, 0.273, and 0.527, respectively. As expected, positive correlation is fairly high between the elite polarization contextual variable and the period-effect of 1996-

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<sup>9</sup> The DW-NOMINATE scores are downloadable from the VOTEVIEW website, [http://voteview.com/political\\_polarization.asp](http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp).

<sup>10</sup> See Hetherington (2001) and McCarty et al. (2006).

2004.

### 3.3. Perceived Ideological Differences between Two Parties

The rational choice turnout model predicts that an individual is more likely to participate in political process if one sees greater stakes associated with different election outcomes (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). I tap this degree of differential benefit linked to the election outcome by computing the distance between ideological (liberal-conservative 7-point scale) positions of the two parties recognized (evaluated) by a respondent.

Hetherington (2001:627)<sup>11</sup> adopts this perceived ideological distance as another dimension of elite polarization and argues that this variable accounts for an indirect effect of elite polarization on mass partisanship through a citizen's perception. In other words, perceived ideological distance functions in the right hand side as an indirect measure of elite polarization that is reflected in the minds of the electorate.

### 3.4. Ideological Deviation

I employ estimated levels of ideological deviation of each individual from a majority of fellow citizens as an individual-level measure of ideological extremism. Assuming that a majority of citizens still remain ideologically moderate (Fiorina et al., 2006; Levendusky, 2009), I might argue that individual level of ideological polarization is higher when an individual is more different from the ideological preferences of a majority of citizens. I compute this ideological deviation measure as an absolute mean deviation of ideological score measured on 7-point liberal-conservative scale. More specifically, I first calculated mean ideology scores for each survey year, and then I obtained absolute-deviation of an individual score from these cohort-based means. So if this ideological deviation score moves away from 0, it indicates that the individual holds rather extreme ideological position in the survey cohort to which he/she belongs. Since citizens with higher ideological deviation scores would see increased differential benefit (B term above) associated with the election outcome compared to the moderates, the extremists are more likely to engage with the political processes.

### 3.5. Ideological Alienation

While the ideological deviation variable measures relative ideological position among citizens, the alienation variable defines relationship between individual ideological preferences of citizens and political elites. Fiorina et al. (2006, 2008) argues that citizens could be less engaged or disengaged with politics if a majority of moderate citizens are increasingly alienated from polarized politicians. I tap this feeling of alienation by computing the distance of ideological (liberal-conservative) preferences between a respondent and a party whose placement is closer to the respondent than the other party. For example, if a respondent's self-placed position is 5 in the 7-point ideological scale, while the respondent placed Democrat Party at 2 and Republicans Party at 6, respectively, the respondent's ideological alienation score becomes 1 (= 6-5). The ANES survey contains an item that asks a respondent's party identification (i.e., 7-point or 3-point PID scale) but I do not use the

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<sup>11</sup> see also Hetherington (2008).

existing party identification variable to determine a respondent's party preferences to keep independents group as meaningful cases in the analysis. So I expect that higher levels of ideological alienation lead to reduced engagement of the public.

### 3.6. Mass Mobilization by Elites

I also need to incorporate a level of elite mobilization into the model specification of political engagement because increased public engagement can be an artifact of increased elite mobilization of mass (Fiorina et al., 2008). Mobilization is measured by the presence of party contact during election campaigns. Each respondent is asked whether he/she is contacted by major parties during the election campaign.

### 3.7. Control Variables

In addition to the primary covariates of interests, the estimation model for engagement also includes a standard set of political and demographic variables which are known to affect political engagement of citizens in existing researches (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Hetherington, 2008; Hussey, 2011; Rogowski, 2012). These control variables are strength of partisanship, political efficacy, and demographic variables (i.e., education, age, race, sex, and income, southern states). For the strength of partisanship, I adopt a 4-category standard variable ranging from pure independents, leaners, weak partisans to strong partisans. Political efficacy is measured by combining (i.e., mean) the responses to two ANES questions asking "people like me don't have any say about what the government does," and "public officials don't care much about what people like me think".

## 4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

In this section, I examine how growing ideological divergence in the House affects political engagement of the general public using three measures of engagement including "care about election outcome," "self-reported turnout," and "campaign activism". Given three dichotomous dependent variables, I estimate empirical models using binary logistic regressions. For each of different response variables, I employ three distinct model specifications using different sets of covariates to test the effects of elite polarization. The first model only includes the perceived ideological distance and the period effects as the measures of elite polarization while leaving the divergence variable out from the estimation. The second model adds ideological divergence to the vector of covariates, and the final setup incorporates the interaction effects between the divergence and education levels (four-category) to examine potentially heterogeneous responses of citizens to growing polarization in political engagement.<sup>12</sup>

In testing those two empirical models about effects on mass polarization and engagement, we need to control different levels of individual political awareness in empirical models because it is known that an effect of elite polarization on mass political behavior could be

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<sup>12</sup> I include the interaction between the divergence variable and education because the informational effects of growing elite polarization could be potentially heterogeneous according to existing levels of individual cognitive ability.

**Table 1.** The Effects of Ideological Polarization on Mass Political Engagement

Variables	Care About Election Outcomes			Voter Turnout		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Divergence		1.80*** (.142)	1.15*** (.341)		-.037 (.155)	-.825* (.380)
Diverge × Educ.			.243* (.118)			.327* (.144)
Perceived Diff.	.129*** (.017)	.114*** (.017)	.111*** (.018)	.111*** (.013)	.101*** (.018)	.099*** (.018)
Ideo. Extreme	.276*** (.031)	.295*** (.032)	.293*** (.032)	.098*** (.024)	.110*** (.034)	.108*** (.034)
Alienation	-.072* (.029)	-.080*** (.030)	-.080** (.030)	-.009 (.023)	.009 (.032)	.101 (.032)
Partisan Strength	.602*** (.027)	.622*** (.028)	.622*** (.028)	.305*** (.021)	.382*** (.030)	.382*** (.030)
Mobilized	.320*** (.057)	.311*** (.058)	.311*** (.059)	.971*** (.050)	.808*** (.072)	.808*** (.072)
Efficacy	.117*** (.057)	.150*** (.016)	.150*** (.016)	.161*** (.012)	.159*** (.018)	.160*** (.018)
Education	.140*** (.031)	.088** (.031)	-.090 (.091)	.437*** (.025)	.574*** (.037)	.321** (.117)
Age	.008*** (.002)	.007*** (.002)	.006*** (.002)	.032*** (.001)	.028*** (.002)	.028*** (.002)
Female	-.097* (.050)	-.100* (.050)	-.010* (.050)	-.020 (.039)	.024 (.055)	.024 (.055)
Black	.377*** (.085)	.269** (.086)	.273** (.086)	.102 (.062)	.222† (.086)	.227** (.086)
Latino	.365*** (.112)	.120 (.113)	.134 (.114)	-.103 (.083)	-.128 (.110)	-.116 (.111)
Income	.038*** (.024)	.064** (.025)	.062* (.025)	.269*** (.019)	.343*** (.027)	.342*** (.027)
South	.265*** (.057)	.240*** (.057)	.239*** (.057)	-.319*** (.043)	-.300*** (.060)	-.302*** (.070)
1984-1992	.093 † (.050)	-.202*** (.055)	-.200*** (.055)	.549*** (.043)	-.115† (.060)	-.110† (.060)
1996-2004	.649*** (.063)	.157* (.075)	.148* (.075)	.308*** (.059)	-.111 (.076)	-.122 (.077)
Constant	-2.59*** (.152)	-3.61*** (.175)	-3.13*** (.290)	-4.23*** (.125)	-4.07*** (.195)	-3.45*** (.333)
<i>Log-Likelihood</i>	-5116.05	-5033.0	-5030.9	-8152.0	-4258.2	-4255.7
<i>LR-Chi2</i>	1386.9***	1553.0***	1557.3***	3472.1***	1846.2***	1851.4***
<i>N</i>	10,114	10,114	10,144	16,691	10,179	10,179

Table 1. continued

Variables	Campaign Activism		
	(7)	(8)	(9)
Divergence		.160 (.155)	.784† (.412)
Diverge × Educ.			-.216† (.131)
Perceived Diff.	.093*** (.016)	.101*** (.020)	.102† (.020)
Ideo. Extreme	.305*** (.027)	.315*** (.033)	.317*** (.033)
Alienation	.039 (.027)	.060† (.033)	.060† (.033)
Partisan Strength	.320*** (.027)	.331*** (.033)	.332*** (.033)
Mobilized	1.01*** (.046)	.863*** (.057)	.864*** (.057)
Efficacy	.127*** (.015)	.092*** (.018)	.092*** (.018)
Education	.275*** (.027)	.305*** (.034)	.468*** (.105)
Age	.003† (.002)	.001 (.002)	.001 (.002)
Female	-.237*** (.046)	-.236*** (.056)	-.237*** (.056)
Black	.229** (.076)	.196* (.092)	.193* (.092)
Latino	.066 (.113)	.036 (.132)	.026 (.132)
Income	.170*** (.023)	.150*** (.028)	.152*** (.028)
South	.068 (.051)	.008 (.063)	.009 (.063)
1984-1992	-.048 (.049)	-.374*** (.060)	-.377*** (.060)
1996-2004	-.058 (.062)	-.325*** (.079)	-.315*** (.079)
Constant	-5.29*** (.153)	-4.89*** (.203)	-5.38*** (.361)
<i>Log-Likelihood</i>	-6440.9	-4222.8	-4221.4
<i>LR-Chi2</i>	1654.0***	1043.8***	1046.5***
<i>N</i>	16,693	10,180	10,180

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001. \*\* p&lt;0.01. \* p&lt;0.05. † p&lt;0.1

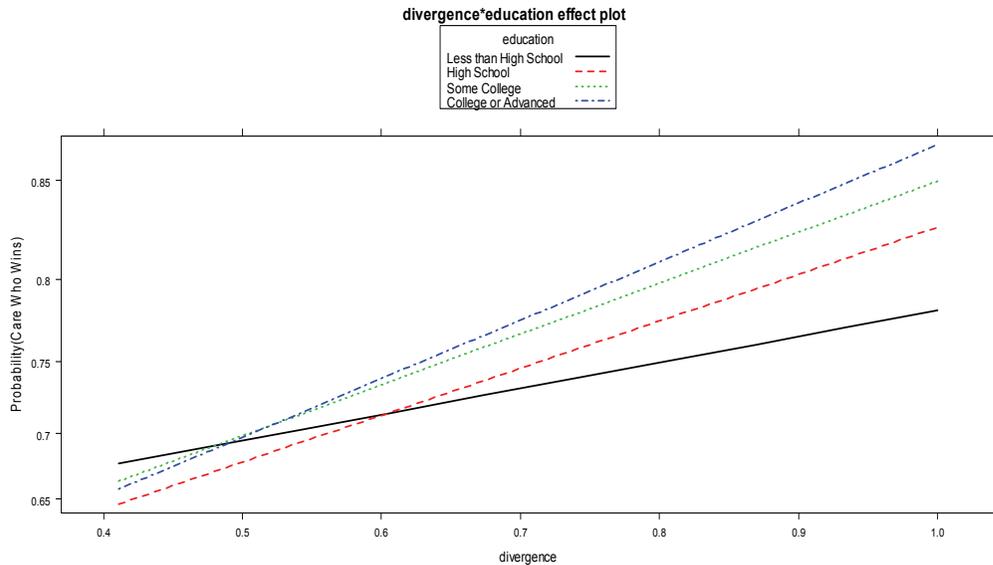
conditional on levels of political sophistication (e.g., Ellis and Ura, 2008; Rogowski, 2012). Yet, the estimation of causal effect of new information acquisition on mass responses is a difficult task because political knowledge could be an endogenous variable. For example, levels of political information and engagement might be jointly determined by a similar set of covariates possibly including some unobservable third factor (Larcinese, 2007; Lassen, 2005). Further, it is hard to find valid instruments for the potentially endogenous knowledge variable, which are exogenous to the political engagement model. So, instead of employing instrumental variables, for these models I use formal education level as a proxy for political knowledge following the previous literature (Hetherington, 2001; Rogowski, 2012). An inclusion of this proxy variable allows us to capture potentially heterogeneous effects of the changed political environment on political engagement across different population strata divided by education levels.

The regression outputs are reported in Table 1. According to the findings, ideological divergence of the elites has significant positive effects on the public's political engagement evaluated by the levels of caring about the election outcome (see models 1-3). This result represents that people are more likely to concern about election outcomes as levels of ideological divergence grow in the House. Models 2 and 3 indicate that whether the interaction effect is included in the model does not change statistical significance on the effects of divergence on people's concern about the election outcome. As a proxy measure of elite polarization, the period effects for the most polarized 1996-2004 also exhibit positive significant effects across models 1 to 3, but the magnitude of the coefficient decreases as the divergence variable is added to the empirical models of 2 and 3. This may imply that positive period effects of 1996-2004 on a form of political engagement (care about election outcome) are largely accounted for by the elite polarization.

In contrast to the impact on models 1 through 3, the effects of elite polarization on turnout and campaign activism are ambiguous in that the coefficient estimates of the divergence variable are statistically significant only in the interaction models (models 6 and 9). Without those interaction effects, the divergence variable is not significant in the models for turnout and campaign activities (models 5 and 8). As a proxy of elite polarization, the time effect of the most polarized 1996-2004 exhibits positive significance in the turnout model 4, but the variable becomes no longer significant as I account for ideological divergence explicitly in models 5 and 6. This indicates that individual voter turnout increases with the growing elite polarization, and the positive time effects are largely accounted for by the growing ideological divergence. But the negative significant effect of a divergence variable in the turnout interaction model 6 makes it harder to determine the sign of the effect only based on the regression table. Similarly, a positive significant effect presents in the campaign activism model only when the interaction effect is included (model 9). Without the interaction term in the model (model 8), the divergence term is not statistically significant at any levels. The period dummy of the most polarized 1996-2004 is not significant at any levels without having a divergence variable in the same estimation (see model 7), and the time effect shows negative significant effects as the ideological divergence variable added as a covariate to the models. This means that the frequency of campaign activities tends to decrease with time among the electorate when the elite polarization factor is controlled for.

Thus, the findings here suggest that while growing ideological divergence tends to increase interests in election among the general electorate—namely, across all educational strata included in the model, the effects of the variable are *conditional* on levels of formal education when it comes to individual turnout and campaign activism. The presence of

**Figure 2.** Predicted Probabilities of Caring About the Election Outcome as a Function of Ideological Divergence across Different Levels of Education



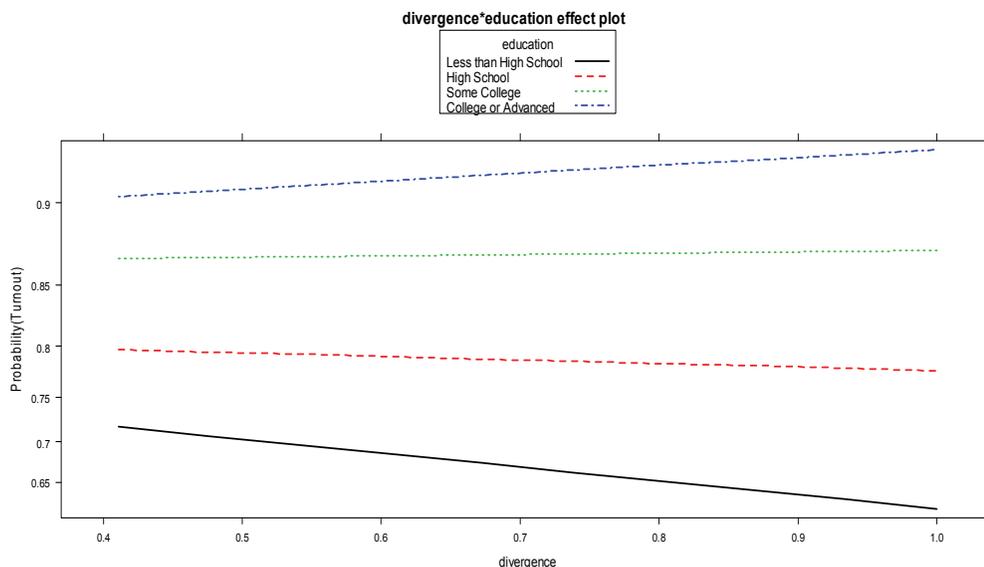
significant conditional effects on those two dimensions of mass political engagement represents that the growing ideological divergence of the elites could have different influences on individual decisions of the participation in elections and campaigns by levels of education. Further, the interaction term between education and divergence turns out to be significant for all three measures of political engagement (including the level of caring about the election outcome).<sup>13</sup> In other words, the causal links between ideological divergence and political engagement variables are sometimes moderated by individuals' different levels of knowledge. For example, although growing elite polarization turns off the turnout among the general electorate, some citizens might not be affected by the changed political environment depending on their educational backgrounds. But I need to be very careful as I interpret the interaction in non-linear models since the use of link function (e.g., logit) in the estimations complicates the formula of the marginal effect (Brambor et al., 2006). Given that ideological divergence functions as a significant predictor of political engagement, I analyze how predicted probabilities change depending on the levels of educational background (four categories) rather than interpreting estimated regression coefficients of the table. Further, the use of predicted probabilities is even safer strategies when potential heterogeneity is suspected in residual variances across different sample groups because probabilities are invariant to the error variance (Xu and Long, 2005).

Therefore, I plotted predicted probabilities of caring the election outcome as a function of ideological divergence across different educational groups in Figure 2.<sup>14</sup> The figure shows

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the interaction of ideological divergence with education levels, I also tested potential interaction effects of the education with ideological deviation and alienation, but only the interaction between the divergence and education is found to be statistically significant.

<sup>14</sup> Values for other covariates set to their means for plots of predicted probabilities.

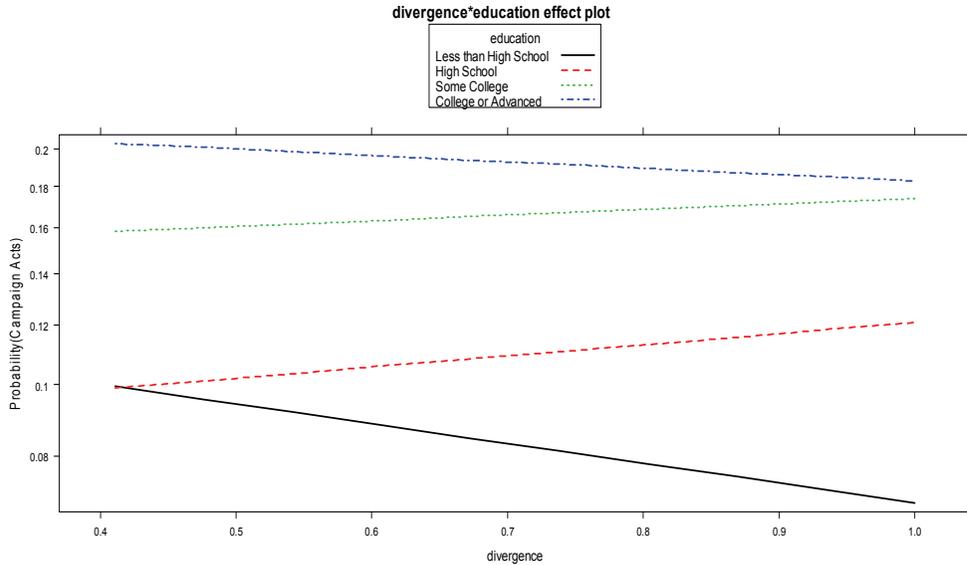
**Figure 3.** Predicted Probabilities of Turnout as a Function of Ideological Divergence across Different Levels of Education



that predicted probabilities tend to increase with the growing ideological divergence for all four education groups as expected by positive signs of the coefficient estimates (see models 2 and 3), but positive slopes increase in Figure 2 with levels of education. Indeed, while predicted probability of concerning electoral winners changes from about 0.69 to 0.73 for the least educated group, the probability increases from 0.69 to more than 0.8 for the most educated group, as the divergence level grows from 0.5 to 0.8. This implies that while the growing elite polarization stimulates greater interest in election outcome among the general electorate, the most educated group is more likely to concern about the election compared to the less educated fellow citizens. If I consider increased interest in election outcomes as potential benefits of political polarization, this result represents that the most sophisticated citizen group is better advantaged from the changed electoral environment compared to less sophisticated groups of citizens.

Disproportionate effects of elite polarization are also found in the turnout probability, especially for the least educated citizens. I plotted predicted probabilities for electoral turnout as a function of ideological divergence across educational groups in Figure 3. As shown in the figure, predicted turnout probability tends to decrease clearly for the least educated group (less than high school) with increasing congressional polarization, whereas it is even unclear if growing divergence suppresses turnout among citizens having high school or some college degrees. Moreover, the predicted turnout tends to increase for people with the highest degree, as a level of ideological divergence increases. For example, when a level of ideological divergence rises from 0.4 to 1.0, the predicted probability of turnout among the least educated group decreases from 0.73 to 0.6, the predicted turnout among the most educated group never drops below 0.9. This finding lends supports to the existing argument of Rogowski (2012) who argues that increasing elite polarization primarily depresses voter turnouts with less political knowledge measured by a formal education.

**Figure 4.** Predicted Probabilities of Campaign Activity as a Function of Ideological Divergence across Different Levels of Education



Lastly, Figure 4 plots predicted probabilities of engaging in election campaigns for different educational groups, and shows that probability clearly decreases especially among the lowest educational background as a function of ideological divergence. The result corresponds to the above turnout model that illustrates disproportionate negative effects of divergence on the least educated group. Some decreasing trend appears in the highest education group, but conditional effects of education are insubstantial among the highest degree group since a slope for them does not change greatly across the ranges of ideological divergence. Further, the overall ranges of predicted probabilities only vary between 0 and 0.2 without exceeding beyond 0.2 in campaign activism model, which implies that the prediction of the empirical model is somewhat limited different from the other two measures of political engagement. Otherwise, the low level of predicted probability in general might be a result of a low percentage (about 15 % of 1) of campaign activism defined here (two or more activities) in the sample.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In sum, the effects of elite polarization on various forms of political engagement are somewhat ambiguous according to findings here. The ideological divergence in the House has positive significant effects on the degree to which people concern about the election outcomes, and the effects are disproportionate in that more educated group cares more about the election as the elites increasingly diverged. Unlike its obvious effect on the attitudinal form of political engagement, the influences of growing ideological divergence on the behavioral forms of political engagement (i.e., turnout and campaign activities) appears to be more complicated. While the effects of ideological divergence on the rest of education

groups are very weak or somewhat trivial, the likelihood of participation on those behaviors tends to decrease among the least educated group. This ambiguity existing in terms of the effects of the elites' ideological divergence on the public's political engagement decisions might explain why previous research has provided conflicting empirical evidences regarding its effect on mass politics. Namely, while Abramowitz (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008; Abramowitz, 2011) claims that intense ideological polarization tends to increase political engagement (including electoral turnout), Rogowski (2012) refutes that elite polarization suppress voter turnout rather than promoting it.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, when it comes to the other covariates included together with the ideological divergence, most of the regressors of interests reveal significant effects with the expected directions across different prediction models (see Table 1). Indeed, citizens are more likely to engage in political processes as they perceive greater ideological distance between the two parties. This finding confirms the expectation of the responsible party theory (e.g., Schattschneider, 1960; APSA, 1950) which argues that the stakes of electoral contests looms larger when people see more differences in party platforms. Measured ideological deviation and elite mobilization also show the expected signs respectively with statistical significances. People who are more deviated from the ideological center (i.e., extremists) would be more active in political engagement compared to the majority of ordinary citizens at ideological centers. If the electorate experienced any party contacts during election campaigns, they are more likely to be mobilized to engage in the elections. Yet, one exception that yields a different sign from the expectation is the significant negative effect of alienation (at  $p < 0.1$  level) in campaign activism model. The effect is ambiguous with regard to the role of ideological alienation in an individual's decision to participate in political processes. The findings suggest that if citizens feel alienated from its representatives in terms of the differences in policy preferences, voters would be less likely to care about the elections. In contrast, according to the campaign activism models 8 and 9, ideological alienation can also stimulate people to involve in campaign activities, and this might imply that people want to avoid the feeling of alienation by more engaging with the most active form of political engagement. Otherwise, I can also argue that positive effects of the elite polarization on the mass political engagement (e.g., enhanced information, increased perception of ideological differences, or elite mobilization) might compensate the negative effects including the feeling of alienation. Yet we may need an additional research for the effect of elite polarization on campaign activism since the variable is only significant at 0.1 level here.

To conclude, while some citizens especially with lower levels of political knowledge tend to be less engaged with political processes due to the growing ideological divergence of politicians, their interests about electoral winners become strengthened at the same time. This implies that elite polarization has contrasting effects on different types of public political engagement (i.e., attitudinal and behavioral). Although ordinary voters could be disenchanted with increasing elite polarization (e.g., Fiorina et al., 2006; Fiorina et al., 2008), the ideological alienation does not necessarily mean that the citizens lose their interests in politics, rather they care more about who wins electoral contests because they perceive increased stakes associated with the election outcomes in the age of polarization (e.g., Abramowitz, 2011).

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<sup>15</sup> See also Fiorina et al. (2006 and 2008).

## APPENDIX

**Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in Empirical Analysis**

Variable Names	Means	Standard Deviations	Maximum Values	Minimum Values	N
Divergence in the House	0.76	0.25	0.411	1	20404
Partisan Strength	2.85	0.996	4	1	48638
Interests in Politics	1.78	1.02	3	0	36788
Media Exposure	3.24	1.15	5	1	22778
Political Efficacy	2.14	1.66	4	0	38237
Education	2.39	0.95	4	1	49276
Age	45.84	17.17	99	17	47601
Female	0.56	0.50	1	0	49657
Latino	0.04	0.19	1	0	49411
Income	2.88	1.16	5	1	44623
1984-1992 (Period Dummy 1)	0.14	0.34	1	0	49760
1996-2004 (Period Dummy 2)	0.10	0.29	1	0	49760

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