

**THE NOT-SO AMBIVALENT PUBLIC:
Policy Attitudes in the Political Culture of Ambivalence**

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Abstract: Political scientists have often argued that American political culture is highly ambivalent. Some scholars go on to argue that such ambivalence has dramatic ramifications for public opinion, making it more volatile. In this paper, we scrutinize these claims. Using a comprehensive definition of ambivalence and a consistent methodological approach, we ask to what extent Americans are ambivalent and whether ambivalence exerts an influence over public opinion. We perform this analysis on policy attitudes in four domains that have historically been characterized by a great deal of controversy—affirmative action, gay rights, social welfare, and abortion. For these domains we conclude (1) that ambivalence does not appear to be widespread and (2) that it has few strong effects on public opinion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world of politics is one of value conflict—as Lasswell’s (1958) famous definition of politics makes very clear. Different policies cater to different goals and it is rare indeed to find situations in which a trade-off between values is not required. Politicians and the media are usually keenly aware of these trade-offs. The question is whether ordinary citizens are as well.

A sizable literature in political science and social psychology answers this question in the affirmative (for instance, Feldman and Zaller 1992; Glathar 1996; Hochschild 1981; Katz and Hass 1988; McClosky and Zaller 1984; McGraw and Glathar 1994; Reinerman 1987; Schnell 1993; Sniderman et al. 1996; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Tetlock 1986; Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992). Focusing mostly on the American context, this literature not only claims that Americans are conflicted about numerous issues but also that this ambivalence has important implications for the nature of public opinion. Indeed, if we believe some, an understanding of ambivalence is essential for understanding American public opinion.

In this paper, we provide new evidence about these claims. Examining numerous forms of ambivalence and several potential consequences, we analyze American public opinion data in four policy domains that have dominated political debate in the United States in recent decades—affirmative action, gay rights, social welfare, and abortion. Unlike past studies, we find little evidence of ambivalence in the American mass public. Quite the contrary, not ambivalence but the relative lack of it appears to be the outstanding feature of American public opinion. This finding puts the American mass public in a very different light than past studies.¹

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we provide an overview of the ambivalence literature and its limitations to date. In section 3, we develop our conceptualization of ambivalence and its consequences, and tie this to recent (and not-so recent) insights in social psychology. Section 4 presents the four policy domains that we investigate, focusing both on the nature of political discourse in each domain and on what is known about public opinion. Section 5 describes our study, while section 6 discusses our findings. Finally, section 7 draws out the implications of our results.

2. AMBIVALENCE IN AMERICA—PAST EVIDENCE

By comparative standards, Americans live in a relatively homogenous political culture that is dominated by a liberal tradition (Hartz 1955; Santayana 1920). Nonetheless, this culture has not been spared from ideological conflict. On the contrary, there has always been a great deal of controversy about which liberal principles should be emphasized. On one hand, the American political culture embraces equality (at least, equality of opportunity). On the other hand, it also embraces limited government, freedom (Rokeach 1973), capitalism (McClosky and Zaller 1984), and achievement (Lipset 1979). To promote equality these latter principles sometimes have to be sacrificed and vice versa. For any given issue different values of the liberal creed can pull in different directions. This situation is further complicated by the fact

¹ In this paper we are concerned solely with the role that ambivalence plays in policy attitudes. For a discussion of the role of ambivalence in candidate evaluations we refer to the chapter by Meffert, Guge and Lodge in this volume.

that these values often also conflict with other goals such as the protection of the moral order. Despite its façade of homogeneity (core values are widely shared) the American political culture is quite torn (value priorities differ considerably). The American political culture, then, is a political culture of ambivalence.

Since American citizens live and breathe this political culture, many scholars argue that the mass public has internalized the value conflicts inherent in American politics. For instance, Feldman and Zaller (1992: 272) note, that “nearly all Americans have absorbed the principal elements of their political culture, and [...] they are highly sensitive to its characteristic fault lines.” In a similar vein, Tetlock and his colleagues argue that public opinion is characterized by “value pluralism:” people tend to embrace multiple values that are often in stark conflict (Sniderman et al. 1996; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Tetlock 1986).

Numerous studies have investigated ambivalence in American public opinion. For instance, Alvarez and Brehm (1995) and Schnell (1993) analyze ambivalence about abortion. McGraw and Glathar (Glathar 1996; 1994) describe ambivalence effects in connection with attitudes toward capital punishment. Katz and Hass (1988) discuss the role of ambivalence in the domain of affirmative action (for conflicting evidence see Alvarez and Brehm 1997). Discussions of ambivalence about social welfare policies can be found in Feldman and Zaller (1992), Glathar (1996), Hochschild (1981), McClosky and Zaller (1984), Reinerman (1987), and Sniderman et al. (1996).

Taken together, these studies provide interesting evidence that ambivalence is a prevalent aspect of American public opinion. A problem with these studies, however, is that they do not present a unified conceptual or methodological approach. Studies in one policy domain often rely on different measures of ambivalence and its effects than studies in another domain. Similarly, the samples used in the studies vary greatly, ranging from undergraduate students to representative samples of the American public. This not only makes it problematic to compare results; it also makes it difficult to piece together a comprehensive picture of ambivalence. Indeed, we would argue that past studies present us with a patchwork of evidence, but not yet a global image of ambivalence in the United States.

Moreover, the existing literature presents us with a very narrow view of the nature of ambivalence. This literature has focused almost exclusively on conflicts between abstract values (but see Hochschild 1981). While such conflict is of interest because of the important role that values play in politics and in public opinion, it ignores other sources of ambivalence. Political conflict is not only about values—it is also about perceptions, beliefs and emotions. We know that these factors play an important role in public opinion. Thus, ignoring them may well lead to an incomplete—and possibly distorted—picture of ambivalence.

To remedy these problems it is necessary to develop a broad conceptualization of ambivalence, operationalize it uniformly, study it in the same sample, assess the same effects, and do all of this across several policy domains. In this paper, we present evidence from such a research effort. Its goal is to obtain comparable results across different policy domains, so that it becomes easier—and less dangerous—to form a global impression of ambivalence in American public opinion.

Such an image does not necessarily have to reproduce past findings—if it did, this study would be redundant. We believe that by using a consistent approach across policy domains,

patterns may emerge that would otherwise remain obscure. Indeed, the predominant pattern in the data that we shall discuss is at odds with past studies: we do *not* find widespread ambivalence in the American public. Before making this point, we now turn to the way we conceptualize ambivalence and its effects.

3. SOURCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF AMBIVALENCE

Conceptualizing Ambivalence

Policy attitudes are usually determined by myriad factors—or, as we shall call them, *orientations*—including values (Feldman 1988; Rokeach 1973), other core beliefs, and affect toward the groups that policies target (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991). When these forces pull a person in different directions this creates ambivalence. In this case, an individual has some grounds to favor a policy and other grounds to oppose it.

Defined in these terms, ambivalence arises always in relation to a policy attitude. In philosophical terms it is possible to argue that two orientations are incompatible—for instance, that egalitarians cannot also favor achievement. In psychological terms, however, clashes between different orientations probably manifest themselves only in relationship to a particular attitude object. That is, most people probably do not care about abstract conflicts between different orientations, until they realize that these orientations imply very different things for their opinions about a particular policy or other attitude object. In this case, people become ambivalent to the extent that they place equal weight on the two conflicting orientations that they embrace (Tetlock 1986).

Most studies to date consider a narrow version of this conceptualization of ambivalence. In these studies, ambivalence is synonymous with value conflict. The implicit or explicit assumption is that values are the most important sources of ambivalence. There is, however, precedent for considering a broader definition of ambivalence. For instance, Lavine et al. (1998) consider the impact of cognitive-affective ambivalence, a form of ambivalence in which cognitive and affective orientations clash. Hochschild (1981), too, uncovers various forms of ambivalence in her interviews, as do Meffert, Guge and Lodge (this volume) in their analysis of candidate evaluation. Because attitudes are rooted in so many different orientations, it makes sense to cast our net broadly and to define ambivalence in terms of multiple dimensions. Thus, in this paper, we analyze traditional value conflict along with other forms of cognitive-cognitive conflict, as well as cognitive-affective conflict and affective-affective conflict.²

The Political Psychology of Ambivalence

The psychological literature makes different predictions about the extent to which one should expect ambivalence. Cognitive consistency theories (Festinger 1957; Heider 1946) predict that ambivalence should be rare because people are motivated to resolve conflicts between different orientations. The stress that ambivalence creates in people creates an incentive to resolve it quickly and effectively. Abelson (1959) describes various strategies that people can use to this effect.

² In the next section, we shall give these dimensions more specific content in each of the policy domains that we consider.

On the other hand, several other theories argue that people are not always successful in resolving conflicts between their orientations. For example, Zaller and Feldman's (Zaller 1992; 1992) model of the survey response is premised on the notion that people carry conflicting considerations in their heads about most issues. Recent work by Cacioppo and his colleagues as well finds that ambivalence cannot always be resolved and when it is not, it may manifest itself in the attitudes that people hold (Cacioppo and Berntson 1994; Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson 1997). That is, conflict between the determinants of attitudes transforms itself into intra-attitude conflict.

These psychological theories have very different ramifications for public opinion. Cognitive consistency theories predict consistent attitudes: a person who has resolved all conflict about an issue probably has established a coherent view of an issue. If cognitive consistency mechanisms are imperfect, however, then it is not clear that a coherent view of the issue exists. In this case, one would expect attitudes to be much more volatile (among other things).

Where to Look for Consequences

Ambivalence can manifest itself in numerous ways (McGraw and Glathar 1994). We cannot study all of these manifestations in the space of a single paper. Thus, we focus on four manifestations—response predictability, response stability, and horizontal and vertical constraint. These four manifestations tap into different facets of the structure (or lack thereof) of public opinion. The structure theme has preoccupied public opinion researchers like no other over the past five decades. Therefore, we believe this is the best place to look for ambivalence effects.

In keeping with recent work by Alvarez and Brehm (1995; 1997) we first consider implications of ambivalence for the predictability of responses to survey questions about policy attitudes. Because ambivalent individuals are pulled in different directions their survey responses should be more difficult to predict, either because their attitudes are more variable or because there is greater error variance in their responses. Predictability is one indicator of the volatility of public opinion.

Second, we consider the response stability of survey responses. This stability should be weaker for ambivalent individuals (Bargh et al. 1992; Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992). To the extent that different orientations prevail in conflicts at different times, we would expect there to be a great deal of fluctuation in the way people answer policy attitude questions over time. An important question is the extent to which this fluctuation is due to measurement error or instability of the attitudes underlying the survey responses.

We consider two more outcomes of ambivalence. Ever since Converse's (1964) seminal work political scientists have been interested in the question of constraint in belief systems. Such constraint can take two forms. First, constraint can be defined in terms of the relationship between attitudes across different policies—horizontal constraint. To the extent that attitudes toward related policies are more or less consistent with one another, horizontal constraint is stronger or weaker. Second, constraint can be defined in terms of the linkage between specific policy attitudes and more general orientations—vertical constraint. To the extent that specific attitudes are driven by more general orientations, there is weaker or stronger horizontal constraint.

Horizontal and vertical constraint has not been widely studied in the ambivalence literature. One might predict, however, that the structure of belief systems is at least partially

a function of ambivalence. If it is true that individuals can not always successfully resolve conflict between different orientations, one possibility is that ambivalent people do not root their policy attitudes in general orientations (but see Feldman and Zaller 1992). Moreover, to the extent that different orientations prevail in conflicts for different attitude objects, horizontal constraint may also suffer from ambivalence (Brewer 1998). With these predictions in mind, let us now consider the nature of ambivalence in our four policy domains.

4. AMBIVALENCE IN FOUR POLICY DOMAINS

To study the predictions made by the political science and social psychology literatures we consider American public opinion data in four policy domains—abortion, affirmative action, gay rights, and social welfare policies. We focus on these four policy domains because policy debates in each domain have typically been cast in terms of multiple conflicting orientations. Thus, we should expect a great deal of ambivalence in these domains, making them a perfect place to study the predictions discussed in the previous section. We shall now briefly discuss each policy domain and summarize the sources of ambivalence in each (see Table 1 for an overview).

[Table 1 About Here]

Affirmative Action

One of the most contentious issues on the American political landscape is affirmative action. The public debate over the subject contains appeals to a wide variety of orientations that citizens might use to form opinions (Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Nelson and Kinder 1996). For example, the rhetoric on affirmative action frames the issue in terms of the two traditions that compose the “American ethos” (McClosky and Zaller 1984): the tradition of equality, on the one hand, and the tradition of individualism and limited government, on the other. At the same time, the debate also invokes Americans’ beliefs about race, their racial stereotypes, and their feelings toward African-Americans.

An extensive body of research suggests that citizens rely upon all of these orientations when forming attitudes toward affirmative actions policies. In part Americans judge this issue on the basis of their core values (Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Katz and Hass 1988; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). However, there is also strong evidence behind claims that “modern racism,” anti-black stereotypes, and anti-black affect exert substantial influences on public support for affirmative action (Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1986; Nelson and Kinder 1996). The relative weights of these criteria may vary depending on the particular frames that citizens receive (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Nelson and Kinder 1996), but a full account of public opinion in this domain must attend to the full range of standards available to citizens.

While Americans are obviously divided over the desirability of affirmative action, studies disagree on whether or not individual citizens feel ambivalent about the issue. Thus far, this scholarly dispute has revolved around one potential source of ambivalence: the tension in this domain between beliefs about equality and beliefs about individualism. Katz and Hass (1988) argue that white Americans who hold conflicting beliefs about

individualism and equality suffer from ambivalence toward racial policies; Alvarez and Brehm (1997) conclude otherwise.

In this study, we suggest that both sides have framed the terms of this dispute too narrowly. While Americans' belief about these two principles may be sources of ambivalence toward affirmative action, so too may modern racism, racial stereotypes, and affect toward blacks. Though the existing literature examines the potential for conflict *between values* in this domain, it has not explored the possibility that citizens may be ambivalent because their values are incompatible with their racial beliefs (equality-modern racism conflict; limited government-modern racism conflict), their stereotypes (equality-racial stereotyping conflict; limited government-racial stereotyping conflict), or their feelings toward the intended beneficiaries of affirmative action (equality-black affect conflict; limited government-black affect conflict). Nor does the existing literature examine the potential consequences of inconsistencies within Americans' racial attitudes and beliefs. Individual citizens may hold racial stereotypes that conflict with their emotions toward blacks (racial stereotyping-black affect conflict) or their racial ideology (racial stereotyping-modern racism conflict); similarly, their affect toward African-Americans may not necessarily be consonant with their level of "modern racism" (modern racism-black affect conflict). At present, then, we have yet to establish (1) to what degree citizens suffer from these forms of conflict, or (2) whether such conflicts produce ambivalence toward affirmative action.

Gay Rights

In many ways, the story of gay rights parallels the story of affirmative action. Here, too, political elites have cast the debate in terms of a variety of orientations that citizens might use as standards for judgment (Brewer 1999; Gallagher and Bull 1996; Wilcox and Wolpert 1996). Some of these orientations are values. For example, proponents of "family values" have argued that gay rights laws will undermine traditional morality, while proponents of limited government have argued that such laws constitute a new wave of "big government" meddling on the behalf of a special interest group. On the other side of the issue, gay rights supporters have claimed that gay rights policies are needed to uphold the notion of equal rights. Other portions of the public discourse invoke citizens' attitudes toward the group targeted by the policies—namely, gays and lesbians. Again, public opinion research suggests that while the exact mix of orientations may vary under different frames, both values and feelings toward gays have the potential to shape mass preferences regarding gay rights (Brewer 1999; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Strand 1996; Wilcox and Wolpert 1996).

As in the domain of affirmative action, efforts to identify ambivalence toward gay rights have focused on ambivalence produced by conflict between two values. And as before, the conclusions scholars reach are mixed (Brewer 1999; Sniderman et al. 1996). More importantly for our purposes, the empirical record thus far does not address the possibility that ambivalence toward gay rights may arise from multiple sources. While the values of moral traditionalism and egalitarianism may clash with one another in this domain, so, too, may they clash with beliefs about the appropriate scope of government action (equality-limited government conflict; limited government-moral traditionalism conflict). Furthermore, each of these three values may come into conflict with attitudes toward gays and lesbians (equality-gay affect conflict; limited government-gay affect conflict; moral traditionalism-gay affect conflict). For example, some Americans who believe in the notion

of equality may dislike gays and lesbians; by the same token, individuals who believe that equal rights have been pushed too far may nonetheless feel positively (or at least neutrally) toward gays and lesbians.

Welfare

The domain of welfare policy follows the same patterns described above: public debate and public opinion in this domain revolve around a wide range of orientations, but the ambivalence literature restricts its attention to a narrow definition of ambivalence.

Appeals to core values pervade the public debate over broad social welfare objectives (e.g. providing more or less government services, providing a guaranteed job or standard of living) and specific social welfare programs (e.g. food stamps, welfare, and Social Security). Not surprisingly, both egalitarianism and limited government play especially prominent roles in the rhetoric on such issues (Feldman and Zaller 1992; McClosky and Zaller 1984). Yet that is hardly the sum of the orientations invoked by elites here. The debate over welfare also invokes feelings of sympathy and antipathy toward the targets of welfare programs: specifically, people on welfare, and, more generically, poor people. The empirical record shows that both values and emotions shape American public opinion toward such programs (Feldman and Zaller 1992; McClosky and Zaller 1984; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991).

Once more, though, studies of ambivalence in this domain have focused only on the potential for tension between beliefs about equality, on one side, and beliefs about individualism and limited government, on the other (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Glathar 1996). Missing from this picture are the forms of ambivalence that might arise from Americans' feelings toward the beneficiaries of the welfare state. One might plausibly argue that citizens' values will clash with their attitudes toward poor people (equality-poor affect conflict; limited government-poor affect conflict) and people on welfare (equality-welfare affect; limited government-welfare affect conflict). Ambivalence springing from conflict between emotions seems possible here as well, given that Americans do not necessarily feel the same way toward "poor people" as they do toward "welfare recipients."

Abortion

The last of the issue domains we examine is abortion. In truth, we could hardly omit this issue: as Alvarez and Brehm (1995) observe, it is one of the most conflictual issues on the current American political scene. The current debate centers on not only the legality of abortion itself, but also various restrictions its availability (e.g. parental and spousal notification laws).

Here, our opportunity to examine the scope of ambivalence is limited by the narrow range of orientations we can measure. Even so, we are able to address what previous research (Schnell 1993) identifies as a crucial source of public ambivalence toward abortion: conflict between moral traditionalism, on one side, and beliefs about equality between the sexes, on the other. These two core values have served as focal points in the public debate over abortion. Elite advocates of "family values" have typically condemned abortion, while proponents of equality between men and women have defended the right to legal abortion. Moreover, the structure of mass opinion reflects the same divisions. Moral traditionalists tend to oppose legal abortion, while moral liberals tend to support it; similarly, supporters of

equal sex roles tend to support abortion rights, while opponents of equal sex roles tend to oppose abortion rights.

Previous research suggests that tensions between moral beliefs and beliefs about sex roles influence public opinion toward abortion. In particular, Schnell (1993) finds that conflict between these orientations produces weaker abortion attitudes (see also Alvarez and Brehm 1995). So while we may not be able to “expand the scope” of ambivalence in the domain of abortion, we can at least test whether the most likely source of ambivalence produces substantial consequences for public opinion.

5. STUDY

Data

We use the 1992 American National Election Studies (ANES) as our primary data source in this study. This survey included a single question about affirmative action and multiple questions about abortion, gay rights, and social welfare policies. The survey also asked about a wide range of values, feelings and other orientations that influence policy attitudes. The 1992 ANES forms the basis of our analyses of predictability, horizontal constraint, and vertical constraint of policy attitudes. To assess the stability of policy attitudes over time we use the 1992-93-96 and 1992-94-96 ANES panel studies.

Measuring Ambivalence

The literature provides no unified measurement strategy for ambivalence. The approach that we take in this paper is to infer ambivalence from responses on scales that measure different orientations. This is an exceedingly common way of defining ambivalence (e.g., Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Glathar 1996; Schnell 1993). It has an important advantage: ambivalence is defined at the appropriate level of the determinants of policy attitudes. There is an important disadvantage as well: the measure is rather indirect.³ We shall revisit this potential problem in our discussion of the results.

Just as there is no consensus about the general measurement strategy for ambivalence, so there has been little consensus about the exact formula that should be used to generate ambivalence scores. Recent research in social psychology, however, suggests that Griffin’s ambivalence formula has the most desirable properties among the various scoring procedures. Meffert, Guge and Lodge used this formula in their chapter on ambivalence in this volume, and we shall use it here as well, albeit in modified form.

To define Griffin’s ambivalence scores let A and B denote scale scores on two conflicting orientations. Then

$$\text{Ambivalence} = \frac{A + B}{2} - |A - B|.$$

As Meffert, Guge and Lodge (this volume) show, this formula can be applied successfully when A and B are counts of positive and negative reactions toward an attitude object. Glathar (1996) argues that the formula also performs well when A and B are measured via rating

³ In addition, the measure also does not take measurement error in the assessment of orientations into consideration.

scales. To this effect she assigns the lowest rating to disagreement with a particular orientation. In many cases, however, this procedure leads to counter-intuitive results. For example, imagine that *A* and *B* are both measured on 7-point scales, where low scores indicate strong disagreement. If a person would strongly agree with both items (e.g., pro-equality and pro-limited government) her ambivalence score would be at the maximum of 7. If that same person would strongly disagree with both items (e.g., anti-equality and anti-limited government) her score would only be 1 (the minimum). A priori it is not clear, however, that the person would be any less ambivalent in the second situation than in the first.

To resolve this asymmetry in the treatment of agreement and disagreement scores we make two modifications to the Griffin formula. First, we re-scale orientation scales to a range from -1 to 1 , where -1 represents strong disagreement, 1 represents strong agreement, and 0 is the neutral point. Second, we alter Griffin's formula by taking absolute values in both terms:

$$\textit{Ambivalence} = \frac{|A|+|B|}{2} - |A - B|.$$

The first term of this expression gives the average extremity of two orientations, while the second term expresses their compatibility.⁴

Using the same example as before, a person who strongly disagrees with two items would receive a score of -1 on both. Her average extremity would be 1 and her compatibility would be 0 , making for an ambivalence score of 1 . A person who strongly agrees with both items would receive the same ambivalence score, so that the asymmetry in the original Griffin measure disappears.

The modified Griffin formula produces scores that range between -1 and 1 . In our analysis, we re-scale this so that the minimum is 0 and the maximum is 1 . The behavior of this formula is clearly visible from Table 1, which shows that it reaches its maximum when a person strongly agrees or strongly disagrees with two conflicting items, and reaches its minimum when the person strongly agrees with one item and strongly disagrees with the other.⁵

[Table 2 About Here]

⁴ If agreement with *A* and *B* reflects a situation in which there is no dissonance, then the scale of one of the items should be reversed before applying this formula.

⁵ The modified Griffin measure shows a high correlation with the multiplicative ambivalence measure, $A \times B$, that Alvarez and Brehm (1997) use: across all ambivalence dimensions that we consider the average correlation between both measures is $.87$ (minimum is $.69$, maximum is $.94$). Nonetheless, we prefer the Griffin measure because the multiplicative measure has the undesirable property, at least with our coding of items, that ambivalence is always 0 once one of the items receives a neutral score, no matter what the score on the other item is. In any case, the results obtained from analyses of the modified Griffin ambivalence measure yield results that are very consistent with those obtained with the multiplicative ambivalence measure.

6. RESULTS

Incidence of Ambivalence

We start our analysis of ambivalence by considering the question of how common ambivalence is. Table 3 provides summary statistics of the modified Griffin ambivalence measure for each of the ambivalence dimensions listed in Table 1. This table reveals a number of interesting patterns. First, there is considerable variation in the level of ambivalence. The mean ambivalence scores range from a low of .29 to a high of .46. It is interesting to note where these extremes occur. The lowest level of ambivalence exists between egalitarianism and limited government. While the conflict between these values usually receives much attention (McClosky and Zaller 1984), our results suggest that ambivalence is relatively mild here. On the other hand, Americans appear to experience a great deal of ambivalence between their feelings toward African-Americans and the racial stereotypes that they hold; quite a few whites state that they like blacks while admitting to negative stereotypes. In general, the highest levels of ambivalence are registered for racial orientations, reinforcing the conclusion of many that racial issues have yet to be sorted out in the minds of most Americans (Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Given this variation in ambivalence, one might expect different effects across the four policy domains that we study.

[Table 3 About Here]

More important than the differences, however, is the convergence between the ambivalence scores: none are very high. To be sure, there are few respondents who by our measure experience no ambivalence at all (looking across all of the ambivalence dimensions the maximum percentage of respondents who score 0 is never greater than 7.6; the latter percentage arises for the conflict between limited government and poor affect). On the other hand, as the medians show, only rarely do we find distributions that are lob-sided to the high ambivalence end of the modified Griffin scale.

Another way to tell this story is to consider the average ambivalence score across all dimensions. This score is .38, which corresponds to an individual who feels neutral on one orientation and mildly agrees (or mildly disagrees) with another. Such a configuration of orientations hardly possesses the severity and intensity of conflict that is often suggested by studies of ambivalence in public opinion.

A similar picture emerges when we consider the percentage of respondents who simultaneously hold two incompatible orientations (regardless of the strength of commitment to these orientations). Such people should experience the most conflict between their orientations. But only in two cases does this group comprise a majority of the respondents. Both of these cases occur among whites with respect to racial orientations (equality vs. racial stereotyping and racial stereotyping vs. black affect), the domain in which one would expect a great deal of ambivalence. In other domains, however, the percentages of respondents with incompatible orientations are generally considerably lower. Here we find minorities with incompatible orientations, which can sometimes be sizable. But for a majority of Americans there appears to be surprisingly little dissonance in their belief systems.

Nonetheless, variation in ambivalence does occur and this raises the question of who is most likely to be ambivalent. We regress the ambivalence scores on race (1=black; 0=white), gender (1=female; 0=male), age, income, religious fundamentalism, education, political knowledge, partisanship, ideology, and strength of ideology.⁶ Table 4 summarizes the results from these analyses.⁷ In terms of statistical significance, the strongest predictors of ambivalence are race, age, political knowledge, ideology, strength of ideology, and partisanship. Of these ideology and strength of ideology always have a negative sign, while race, political knowledge and partisanship usually have a negative sign, and age usually has a positive sign. Thus, it appears that strong ideologues, African-Americans, sophisticates, and Democrats are less ambivalent. Moreover, contrary to what has sometimes been argued (Feldman and Zaller 1992), we find that liberals are less ambivalent than conservatives, a result that is probably partially due to the broad conceptualization of ambivalence that we use here. On the other hand, older people tend to be more ambivalent.

Despite the fact that different ambivalence dimensions can be predicted consistently with the same predictors, it does not appear to be the case that the ambivalence dimensions are highly correlated. The average correlation of the ambivalence dimensions is only .126 in the domain of affirmative action (for white respondents), .152 in the domain of gay rights, and .305 in the domain of social welfare. This suggests that individuals experience ambivalence in specific areas, instead of a wholesale manner. An important implication of this result is that our ambivalence dimensions are not redundant with each other. Rather, these dimensions appear to tap into relatively specific clashes of orientations.

In sum, there is considerable variation in the level of ambivalence experienced by citizens. On the whole, however, most citizens do not appear to hold wildly incompatible orientations. The typical citizen experiences only mild to moderate levels of ambivalence. There are of course Americans who experience severe ambivalence. But more impressive than this ambivalence, in our mind, is the fact that it is not more prevalent. For people who live in a political culture of ambivalence, Americans appear to be remarkably non-ambivalent.

⁶ Race is not entered as a covariate in the analyses of ambivalence involving racial orientations, as only white respondents are considered in these analyses. Religious fundamentalism is a composite of items measuring how much guidance a person takes from religion in daily life (ANES variable number V923821), how literally she interprets the Bible (V923824), whether she considers herself a fundamentalist (V923846), and whether she considers herself a born-again Christian (V923847). High scores on the scale imply a more fundamentalist religious orientation (Cronbach's alpha is .89). The political knowledge scale consists of six items that ask respondents to identify the positions of four political figures, as well as answer to issues in constitutional law (V925916 through V925921). High scores on the scale imply better political knowledge (Mokken coefficient of scalability is .59, reliability is .76). Partisanship is the standard ANES partisan identification question (-1=strong Republican; 1=strong Democrat), while ideology is the ANES question about ideological self-placement (-1=strong conservative; 1=strong liberal). (Because the ideology variable has many missing cases, we imputed them by assigning them to the middle category.) Finally, strength of ideology is a folded version of the ideological self-placement measure.

⁷ Because of the large number of analyses that were conducted for this paper, this and other tables can only present summaries of the results. More detailed reports of the analyses can be made available upon request.

Predictability of Policy Attitudes

Ambivalence is not as widespread as one might have expected, but what little there is may still have dramatic consequences for public opinion. As we discussed earlier, one of the predictions in the literature is that ambivalence causes greater variability in responses to attitude questions, making them more unpredictable. To what extent does this effect emerge for policy attitudes in the three domains that we study?

To answer this question we rely on heteroskedastic probit models (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Alvarez and Brehm 1997), which simultaneously estimate a choice model (in favor or opposed to a policy) and a variance model with multiplicative heteroskedasticity. By including various covariates in the variance model we may detect the sources of the unpredictability of attitude questions. Covariates with significant positive effects in the variance model weaken predictability, while covariates with significant negative effects improve predictability.⁸

We perform separate analyses for each ambivalence dimension, using several specifications of the variance model in each analysis. The most basic model specification includes only ambivalence as a predictor. To this model we add in successive steps political knowledge, the orientations that enter the ambivalence measures, and ideology and strength of ideology. We use these different models because the results from heteroskedastic probit analysis can be very sensitive to model specification. In the tables below we list the range of parameter estimates across different specifications of the variance model, as well as the number of times (out of four specifications) that ambivalence was statistically significant. We shall first discuss the results by policy domain and then comment on the overall patterns in the heteroskedastic probit analyses.

Affirmative Action As we saw earlier, racial orientations produce the greatest levels of ambivalence as measured by the modified Griffin measure. Hence, we would expect racial policy attitudes to be influenced particularly strongly by this ambivalence. The results in Table 5, however, show this is only partially the case.⁹

[Table 5 About Here]

An analysis of responses to affirmative action reveals that only one type of ambivalence consistently increases response variability, to wit ambivalence between equality and black affect.¹⁰ In three more cases, ambivalence emerges as a significant inflator of response variation in some of the model specifications. Specifically, ambivalence between equality

⁸ We should note an important limitation of heteroskedastic models. While such models can provide us with estimates of the response variability at different levels of a covariate, they cannot tell us whether variability is due to greater measurement error or due to greater variability in the underlying attitude.

⁹ Because we obtain many “null results” in the analyses of predictability we report only significant effects in this and following tables and comment on the insignificant effects in the text.

¹⁰ Details about the response variables in this and subsequent analyses can be found in the appendix. For purposes of this analysis the response variable is dichotomized (pro- vs. con-affirmative action). The choice model includes the following predictors: gender (1=female; 0=male), age, income, education, religious fundamentalism, partisanship, ideology, modern racism, racial stereotyping, equality, limited government, and black affect. Only white respondents are included in the analysis.

and racial stereotyping is significant in one of the model specifications, while ambivalence between limited government and modern racism and between modern racism and black affect are significant in two of the model specifications. The parameter estimates for these ambivalence dimensions, however, are considerably smaller than for equality-black affect. These results differ from Alvarez and Brehm (1997) who conclude that ambivalence plays little of a role in racial attitudes. We find that in some cases, ambivalence matters a great deal, but those cases involve different types of ambivalence than those studied by Alvarez and Brehm (1997).

The remaining ambivalence dimensions (not reported in Table 5) reveal no impact on response variability. Thus, of 10 ambivalence dimensions that we consider in the context of affirmative action, a majority never attain statistical significance. From this perspective, evidence for decreased predictability of racial attitudes due to ambivalence is rather weak.

Gay Rights When we consider the domain of gay rights, we find even weaker evidence for ambivalence effects on response predictability. In this domain, we consider three specific policy attitudes, pertaining to (1) laws protecting homosexuals from job discrimination, (2) inclusion of homosexuals in the United States Armed Forces, and (3) the legal right of homosexual couples to adopt children.¹¹ Significant results of these analyses are reported in Table 6.

[Table 6 About Here]

In only one instance do we obtain a fairly robust ambivalence effect in the heteroskedastic probit models. Respondents who experience conflict between the values of equality and moral traditionalism display greater response variability than those who do not experience such conflict (in 3 of 4 specifications of the variance model). In only one other case do we see a hint of ambivalence effects (in one of the specifications, ambivalence between limited government and gay affect increases response variability for the gay adoption policy), but it is weak and not robust. In the overwhelming number of cases, however, there is no evidence whatsoever that ambivalence makes it more difficult to predict attitudes on gay rights policies. Public opinion on these policies appears to be remarkably unaffected by ambivalence, at least as far as response variability is concerned.

[Table 7 About Here]

Social Welfare Policies In the domain of social welfare policies, too, the impact of ambivalence on response variability is quite limited. In this domain we consider opinions about federal spending on six programs (welfare, food stamps, poor people, the homeless, Social Security, and unemployment benefits), as well as people's attitudes toward government services more generally and toward the idea that government should see to it

¹¹ The response variable for each policy is dichotomous (1=favor policy; 0=oppose policy). The choice model for each policy attitude includes the following predictors: race (1=black; 0=white), gender (1=female; 0=male), age, income, education, religious fundamentalism, partisanship, ideology, equality, limited government, moral traditionalism, and gay affect. The model for homosexuals in the military also includes affect toward the military as a control variable.

that everyone should have a job and a decent standard of living.¹² The significant results for the heteroskedastic probit models for these policy attitudes are summarized in Table 7.

Again, we observe that in most cases no relationship exists between ambivalence and the predictability of policy responses. For three of the spending items (homeless, Social Security, and unemployment benefits) ambivalence is never a significant predictor of response variability. The same result holds for government services. Ambivalence effects appear sporadically for two other spending items (poor people and food stamps), but these effects are generally not robust, weak, and in the wrong direction.

Stronger ambivalence effects emerge for government job provision, where the value conflict between equality and limited government and the conflict between limited government and affect toward people on welfare exercise fairly robust effects. In both instances, respondents who experience these types of conflict have less predictable opinions than those who are not conflicted.

Only in one instance do we observe significant ambivalence effects across all specifications of the variance model. In the context of attitudes toward welfare spending the conflict between equality and feelings toward people on welfare is always statistically significant. If we believe the parameter estimates, however, this conflict serves to *reduce* response variability. We find it difficult to interpret this effect, but its robustness leads us to believe that it is real. Obviously, this result is at odds with the predictions derived from social psychology.

Abortion Finally, we consider abortion. Here we look at general opinions about the conditions under which abortion should be allowed, as well as responses to questions about proposed state laws to (1) require parental consent to abortions by teenagers, (2) provide funding for abortion for women who need it, and (3) require notification of the spouse in the case of an abortion by a married woman.¹³ We assess the extent to which conflict between gender equality and moral traditionalism makes responses to these questions less predictable.

The results are unequivocal. There is no evidence that ambivalence makes the responses to the abortion questions less predictable. No matter which specification of the variance model we take, ambivalence comes out as a statistically insignificant predictor.

Our findings for abortion contrast markedly with those of Alvarez and Brehm (1995) who claim evidence that abortion responses for ambivalent respondents are harder to predict. However, they define ambivalence not in terms of the conflict between gender equality and

¹² The spending variables are dichotomous (1=increase spending; 0=decrease spending or keep the same), while orientations toward government services and job provision are measured on 7-point scales. The choice model includes the following predictors: race (1=black; 0=white), gender (1=female; 0=male), age, income, education, religious fundamentalism, partisanship, ideology, equality, limited government, feelings toward people on welfare, and feelings toward poor people. In addition, the models for spending on food stamps, Social Security, and unemployment contain dummy predictors for whether a respondent is a beneficiary of these programs.

¹³ The questions concerning state laws are dichotomous. We dichotomize the general abortion question, distinguishing between those who believe women should always have the right to an abortion versus everyone else. The choice model includes the following predictors: race (1=black; 0=white), gender (1=female,0=male), age, income, education, religious fundamentalism, partisanship, ideology, equality, limited government, gender equality, moral traditionalism, and feelings toward feminists.

moral traditionalism, but in terms of conflicting considerations that respondents give for the abortion issue. To the extent that these considerations all pertain to the conflict we consider here, we should have found identical results. Our suspicion, however, is that many of the conflicting considerations have nothing to do with gender equality and moral traditionalism. This would explain the different findings.

Even though our analysis may capture only a small number of the forces that can pull people in different directions about abortion, we think our findings are telling. Earlier work has singled out the conflict between gender equality and moral traditionalism as one of the most important ambivalence dimensions (Schnell 1993). Yet we do not find much evidence that this dimension has many implications for public opinion. As we shall see, this is a refrain that is repeated for most of the analyses.

Conclusions The idea that ambivalence makes policy attitudes less predictable has received considerable attention in recent work by Alvarez and Brehm (1995, 1997), who find mixed support for it. The present results undermine this idea even further. Considering a wider range of policy domains and policies than Alvarez and Brehm (1995, 1997), and a larger set of ambivalence dimensions, we find that ambivalence only rarely increases response variability. In a majority of cases, people who experience ambivalence are no less predictable in their responses to policy questions than those who do not suffer from such ambivalence. This suggests that an ambivalent mass public—such as it is—is not necessarily an unpredictable mass public.

Attitude Stability

Response unpredictability is not the only place to trace the consequences of ambivalence, nor is it perhaps the best place. Simply because responses are harder to predict for some individuals does not mean that public opinion is less structured. If our interest is in structure we should look at different diagnostics. We begin by considering the structure of attitudes over time, looking at the stability of policy attitudes across three waves of the ANES panel study as a function of ambivalence.

A common vehicle for estimating stability coefficients in three-wave panels is the model developed by Wiley and Wiley (1970). This model assumes that the responses to each policy are the manifestation of a true policy attitude and random measurement error. Stability is defined in terms of the predictability of the true attitude in one wave from the true attitude in the wave immediately preceding it (a lag-1 autoregressive model). To identify the model it is assumed that error variance remains constant across the three waves of the panel. If the Wiley model is analyzed with correlational data, as we do here, this implies that the item reliabilities are constant across waves, a rather stringent assumption that parallels Heise's (1969) work.

The expectation at stake here is that the stability coefficients for ambivalent individuals are lower. We put this prediction to the test by splitting panel respondents into low and high ambivalence groups on the basis of a median split of their 1992 scores on the modified Griffin ambivalence measure. We then estimate stability coefficients for each group using multi-group covariance structure analysis and compare them. Not all policy attitudes were measured in the requisite number of three waves. Consequently, stability analyses can only be conducted for affirmative action, laws protecting homosexuals against job discrimination, gays in the military, welfare spending, spending on food stamps, spending on Social

Security, government services, government job provision, and the general abortion question. The data source for the analyses are the 1992, 1994 and 1996 waves of the ANES panel study, with the exception of the gay rights items for which the 1992, 1993 and 1996 waves are used.¹⁴

Table 8 summarizes the stability coefficients for all policy items by listing the range of stability estimates across all ambivalence dimensions that are relevant in a particular policy domain (see Table 1). The patterns across the various issue domains are quite similar, so that it suffices to discuss the table as a whole. The most striking feature of this table is perhaps the high level of stability for each of the policy attitudes. This stability never drops below .63 and is frequently unity, suggesting a much greater level of stability in public opinion than suggested by Converse (1964; 1970).¹⁵ Indeed with stability coefficients that are this high it seems difficult to argue that sizable portions of the American public have non-attitudes.

[Table 8 About Here]

Of more immediate interest to our analysis are the differences in the stability coefficients between low and high ambivalence groups. Table 8 suggests no compelling evidence that ambivalent individuals hold more volatile attitudes than their less ambivalent peers. Indeed, in quite a few cases the stability estimates for the high ambivalence group exceed those for the low ambivalence group, a pattern that would surely not be predicted from the literature. We should not make too much of this pattern, however, because in reality the stability coefficients for the low and high ambivalence groups are statistically indistinguishable. When we estimate the Wiley model imposing the constraint that the stability coefficients are identical in both groups the fit is deteriorated only slightly. In no case is this statistically significant (the minimum value of the χ^2 test statistic is .002, while the maximum value is 2.170; with 2 degrees of freedom this produces *p*-values well above .10).¹⁶

In sum, ambivalence exerts little influence over attitude stability in the three policy domains that we focus on. Attitudes appear to be very stable, both for ambivalent and non-ambivalent citizens. These results are at odds with past predictions and findings concerning value conflict (Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992). They suggest that citizens hold real attitudes, regardless of the conflicts between the orientations that they hold.

¹⁴ For this analysis, the spending items are dichotomized (1=increase spending; 0=decrease spending or keep the same). Since all items in the analysis are categorical in nature, the Wiley model is estimated on the basis of the polychoric correlation matrix using weighted least squares. All estimates are obtained using LISREL.

¹⁵ These high stability values are consistent with the results obtained by Achen (1975) and Feldman (1990) (see also Judd and Milburn 1980). Feldman's (1990) analysis is particularly interesting because he uses a five-wave panel in which some of the stringent assumptions of the Wiley model can be relaxed.

¹⁶ The biggest differences between the low and high ambivalence groups occur in the estimates of the error variance. There is a tendency for this variance to be greater for ambivalent individuals than for non-ambivalent individuals.

Horizontal Constraint

So far we have demonstrated that the opinions of ambivalent people are generally no more unpredictable or unstable than the opinions of others. The question remains, however, if those opinions also form a coherent whole. Perhaps ambivalence causes a conflict between attitudes toward different policies within the same domain. We now turn to this question about horizontal constraint in the three domains where we consider multiple policy attitudes—gay rights, social welfare, and abortion.

We use two methods for assessing horizontal consistency. In the first method we compute an agreement score across all policy attitudes in a domain for each respondent. For example, if a citizen agrees with three out of three policies her agreement score would be 3. If she agrees with two out of three policies her agreement score would be two. It would also be two, however, if she were in disagreement with two out of three policies. This agreement score serves as an indicator of horizontal constraint. It can be used as the response variable in a statistical analysis where it can be related to the ambivalence scores of a particular respondent. This approach has the advantage that it is relatively easy to include control variables in addition to the ambivalence measures. The disadvantage of using disagreement scores is that it is not possible to distinguish between true inconsistencies between policy attitudes and inconsistencies that are the by-product of random measurement error.

Our second approach is to formulate measurement models in which each policy attitude in a domain is considered to be an indicator of a broader underlying latent dimension (a “meta-attitude,” so to speak). Each indicator has a unique component (which consists of measurement error as well as idiosyncratic features of a policy to which respondents respond) in addition to the common component that it shares with the other indicators. This makes it possible to control (albeit it crudely) for random sources of inconsistency between responses to different policies. To consider the impact of ambivalence the measurement model can be analyzed in low and high ambivalence groups and the loading of each policy on the underlying factor can be compared across the groups, using multi-group covariance structure models. The theoretical prediction is that these loadings are weaker for ambivalent respondents than for others. A limitation of this method is that it is difficult to include control variables as this produces a proliferation of groups with small sample sizes. We now apply these methods to each policy domain.

Gay Rights Table 9 summarizes the significant results obtained from a probit analysis of the agreement scores across the three gay rights policy issues.¹⁷ These results suggest that agreement scores tend to be lower for ambivalent individuals for four of the ambivalence dimensions (see also Brewer 1998). This finding is particularly pronounced for the value conflict between equality and moral traditionalism, but is also powerful for the ambivalence dimensions involving equality and gay affect and moral traditionalism and gay affect. In the domain of gay rights, then, a tendency for horizontal constraint to decline as ambivalence increases.

¹⁷ The agreement scores are dichotomized in this analysis: 1 indicates that a respondent favors or opposes all three policies, while 0 indicates that a respondent favors or opposes two of the three policies. The predictors in this analysis include race (1=black; 0=white), gender (1=female; 0=male), age, income, education, religious fundamentalism, partisanship, ideology, strength of ideology, political knowledge, and ambivalence.

[Table 9 About Here]

These results also emerge when we consider the measurement model. The average factor loadings for the three gay rights policies are higher for the low ambivalence than for the high ambivalence groups on the equality-moral traditionalism, equality-gay affect, limited government-moral traditionalism, and moral traditionalism-gay affect ambivalence dimensions (last two columns in Table 9). In each case the model fit deteriorates significantly when the factor loadings are constrained to be equal across groups (the χ^2 test statistic values range between a minimum of 44.67 and a maximum of 79.42; with 3 degrees of freedom the corresponding p -values are all well below .01). Thus, the measurement model, too, suggest decreased horizontal constraint for ambivalent individuals.

These results should be placed in context, however. While horizontal constraint decreases as a function of ambivalence, there is little evidence that ambivalent individuals have hopelessly loose belief systems. The factor loadings in the high ambivalence group are substantial and there is no evidence of dramatic inconsistencies in the attitudes across different gay rights policies in this group. Less horizontal constraint does not imply poor horizontal constraint.

Social Welfare The results for gay rights policies do not transfer to the domain of social welfare policies. In this domain, there is no evidence at all that ambivalence causes a decrease in horizontal constraint, at least when we focus attention on constraint between public assistance policies (spending on welfare, poor people, food stamps, and unemployment benefits).

An ordered probit analysis of the agreement scores between these policies shows only one instance in which ambivalence decreases agreement.¹⁸ Those who experience conflict between limited government and their feelings toward poor people tend to show less constraint than those who do not experience such conflict ($b = -.789$, $p < .01$). None of the other ambivalence dimensions have a statistically significant impact on the agreement scores.

This result for the limited government-poor affect ambivalence dimension disappears in the analysis of the measurement model. There is no evidence in this model that the factor loadings for the four welfare policies are different in the low and high ambivalence groups. Indeed, when the factor loadings are constrained to be equal across the groups the resulting models have a very good fit (the χ^2 test statistic values range between .82 and 6.97; with 4 degrees of freedom this results in p -values that lie well above .10). Thus, in the domain of social welfare policies, horizontal constraint appears to be unaffected by ambivalence.

Abortion A very similar pattern emerges for abortion. An ordered probit analysis of agreement scores reveals a decrease horizontal constraint as the conflict between gender equality and moral traditionalism becomes more intense ($b = -.603$, $p < .01$).¹⁹ An analysis

¹⁸ The agreement score is trichotomous and rescaled so that 0 indicates support for two policies (and opposition to the remaining two), 1 indicates support for three policies (or opposition to three policies), and 2 indicates support for all policies or opposition to all. The model specification is similar to that for gay rights policies.

¹⁹ The structure of this analysis is identical to that for the assistance policy items.

of the measurement model, however, shows no evidence that the factor loadings for the low and high ambivalence groups are significantly different (a model that constrains these loadings to be equal across the two groups fits the data about as well as an unconstrained model: difference in $\chi^2 = 6.98, ns$).

Conclusions Taken together, the results for the gay rights, social welfare, and abortion policy domains lend only mixed support to the notion that the belief systems of ambivalent individuals display less horizontal constraint. This notion is supported for some issues, some of the time, but as a general statement about the consequences of ambivalence it is invalid. Moreover, even in those instances where ambivalence erodes horizontal constraint, the erosion appears to be rather mild. Our results suggest that Americans can hold remarkably coherent opinions in a particular policy domain, even in the face of ambivalence. This is a rather different picture than that presented to us by Converse (1964), but it is a picture that is consistent with what others have shown (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987).

Vertical Constraint

Our final analysis concerns the extent to which ambivalence impacts vertical constraint in belief systems. Here we define vertical constraint broadly as the degree to which specific attitudes are driven by more general orientations. These orientations include abstract principles such as ideology and values, which have typically been used to define vertical constraint (e.g., Converse 1964; Feldman 1988; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; McClosky and Zaller 1984). However, they also include affective responses to target groups (Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991) and racial beliefs (e.g., Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1986; Nelson and Kinder 1996). These orientations, too, affect a large number of attitudes and can thus be deemed as more general than any specific attitude, making them potential elements of vertical constraint.²⁰

With this definition of vertical constraint in hand, we use the following analytic approach. As before, we used a median split to divide the sample into low and high ambivalence groups. In each group we estimate models predicting the various policy attitudes that include the following vertical constraint elements: partisanship, ideology, target group evaluations, values and, in the case of affirmative action, racial beliefs (the target group evaluations and values appropriate for each policy domain are listed in Table 1). We then simply count the number of statistically significant vertical constraint elements (at the .05 level) and compare this across the two ambivalence groups. Since the number of potentially constraining elements differs slightly across policy domains, we standardize by using this number to divide the count of significant elements. The resulting score is treated as an indicator of vertical constraint.²¹

²⁰ It could be argued that we employ too broad of a definition of vertical constraint by including target group evaluations and racial beliefs, making it too easy to find vertical constraint. By restricting ourselves only to abstract principles, however, we may stack the deck against less sophisticated individuals who may find it more difficult to use those principles to guide opinions. A broader conceptualization of vertical constraint alleviates this problem.

²¹ A total of 160 vertical constraint scores were created. This is the sample size for the ensuing analyses.

To determine to what extent vertical constraint is affected by ambivalence, we can conduct a t-test of the constraint scores. This test shows no evidence of diminished vertical constraint in the high ambivalence group (difference in means = .028, $t = .841$, *ns*).²² Apparently, ambivalent individuals rely as much on general orientations to shape their attitudes as their less ambivalent brethren.

The lack of statistically significant differences in the vertical constraint scores does not mean that the low and high ambivalence groups use the same vertical constraint elements. One would expect ambivalent individuals to place less emphasis on the orientations that cause their ambivalence in structuring policy attitudes. There is evidence that this indeed is the case. In only 17.5% of the analyses involving the low ambivalence group was neither of two conflicting orientations statistically significant in the prediction of policy attitudes. For the high ambivalence group, this percentage is double, a statistically significant difference (Pearson $\chi^2 = 6.33$, $p < .05$). Note, however, that it is not the case that ambivalent individuals abandon the use of conflicting orientations in a wholesale manner. The difference between the low and high ambivalence group in using such orientations is one more of degree than of nature. In this regard, our results are consistent with those reported by Feldman and Zaller (1992), who argue that even in a political culture of ambivalence citizens can and do rely on the principles that are the very subject of controversy and conflict.

Do ambivalent individuals rely more on other orientations to anchor their opinions (a form of bolstering, see Abelson 1959)? The answer appears to be negative. The mean proportion of significant other orientations is almost the same in both ambivalence groups (at around half of the other considerations on average being significant in both groups). This is further evidence that ambivalence has little effect on vertical constraint.

Discussion

The results of the analyses tell a clear story. There is evidence neither of widespread ambivalence nor of massive implications of ambivalence for policy attitudes. Rather, we find mild levels of ambivalence and few effects, which are only occasionally very powerful. The story of this paper is for the most part one of non-results.

This places our work in sharp contrast with many of the studies discussed earlier, which document both high levels and profound effects of ambivalence. To account for this discrepancy we should consider several factors. First, it may be that we have chosen the wrong policy domains. Perhaps we have picked exactly those domains in which ambivalence played little of a role at least at the time the ANES collected the survey data we use. We do not find this a very plausible explanation, however. We selected the policy domains precisely because they are characterized by so much conflict. This conflict was particularly pronounced around the 1992 elections for at least two of the issue domains—gay rights and social welfare (see Brewer 1999). If anywhere, then, we would expect ambivalence to play a major role in these domains, making it all the more telling that we find so few effects.

Another possibility is that our conceptualization of ambivalence is unduly broad. Specifically, we may have included ambivalence dimensions that do not really reflect

²² We also conducted a more complex analysis considering the impact of issue domain, ambivalence class (cognitive-cognitive conflict, cognitive-affective conflict, affective-affective conflict). An ANOVA shows that only domain is significant ($F[3,144]=35.93$, $p < .01$). The latter result is due to the much smaller number of vertical constraint elements in the affirmative action and abortion domains.

ambivalence, so that one should expect them to generate null results. This possibility, too, seems implausible. First, as we argued earlier, there are good theoretical reasons to include so many ambivalence dimensions. More important, however, even if we were to limit our attention to traditional value conflict, the lack of results is impressive. For instance, the conflict between equality and limited government that has received so much attention is impressive in its mildness and the weak effects it exerts. The conflict between equality and moral traditionalism that plays in the domain of gay rights is more impressive, but even in this case, the results are not very robust.

Yet a third possibility is that our conceptualization of ambivalence is not broad enough. We have undoubtedly missed important dimensions of ambivalence, such as conflicts involving the role of economic individualism and compassion, primarily because good survey instruments are not available. Perhaps such dimensions would show considerably stronger effects. Still, by the standards of earlier research efforts our catalog of ambivalence dimensions is remarkably comprehensive. In our view, this adds a great deal of significance to the findings.

Fourth, our measure of ambivalence—the modified Griffin measure—can be held responsible for the different findings in this paper. We do not find this very plausible, however, because the measure correlates rather strongly with alternative measures that have been used in the literature. Moreover, we replicated all of the analyses using the multiplicative measure of Alvarez and Brehm (1997) and found only slight differences in the results.

Nonetheless, measurement is an issue. In this study, we have inferred ambivalence from responses to scales that measure different orientations. At no point in the interview were respondents asked to connect their responses concerning different orientations. When respondents are forced to make these connections, their ambivalence may come much more in focus and it may exert a much stronger influence on their response behavior. This would explain why Hochschild (1981) and Sniderman et al. (1996) find so much more ambivalence than we do, since these authors pushed their interviewees hard on possible inconsistencies in their views.

Another measurement approach that may enhance ambivalence effects is to ask respondents to list considerations before answering a question probing a specific policy attitude (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992).²³ By bringing multiple considerations into working memory, respondents may experience a higher level of ambivalence than they ordinarily would by just answering a survey question. In the latter case, conflicting considerations may never come into play.

Good arguments can be given for using these alternative measurement strategies. At the same time, one should be cautious in interpreting them. Whereas our inferences from unrelated survey items may understate the level and consequences of ambivalence, these alternative approaches may well overstate them. In any case, a lot can be said for the argument that if Americans are truly ambivalent it should show up in their survey responses even without prodding them. In this regard, our measurement approach may be appropriately conservative in its assessment of ambivalence.

²³ Probes to list “likes” and “dislikes,” which are commonly used in candidate evaluation questions (see Meffert, Guge and Lodge, this volume), are similar in nature.

We conclude, then, by saying that our results present compelling evidence about the role of ambivalence in policy attitudes. This evidence has major ramifications for our assessment of public opinion in the United States. We now turn to this issue in the conclusion.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Our analyses sketch a remarkably consistent picture of public opinion in America. It appears that Americans experience only relatively mild levels of ambivalence and that this ambivalence does not influence public opinion dramatically. Thus, the evidence suggests a not-so ambivalent American mass public. The implications of this finding for assessments of the quality of public opinion are important.

A recurring theme in much of the literature is that American public opinion is rather volatile, i.e., full of inconsistencies. Pessimists claim that these inconsistencies indicate a profound lack of political understanding on the part of ordinary citizens. More optimistic accounts state that public opinion simply reflects the tensions that are inherent in the political culture of ambivalence (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Sniderman et al. 1996).

Our results suggest an even more optimistic picture; namely that ambivalence does not have to breed volatility. While it would be reasonable to expect that ambivalent individuals hold volatile opinions, thus leaving an imprint on the quality of public opinion as a whole, we find quite the opposite. On the whole, those who score high on ambivalence hold opinions that are no less stable and coherent than those who score low, and their responses to survey questions are no less predictable.

Indeed, in the face of conflicting orientations, people seem to do a remarkable job in piecing together consistent opinions. This does not mean that ambivalent citizens will be consistent under all circumstances. When they are pushed hard on the conflicts between different orientations, people will undoubtedly waver more in their views and their opinions may become more volatile. Likewise, when exposed to media frames that play up conflicting orientations, ambivalent individuals may feel hard pressed to ignore the tensions between their beliefs, values, and feelings.

We have not examined these situations in this paper. Instead, what we have done is to analyze the influence of public opinion when people are not reminded of the incompatibilities between their orientations. In our view, this situation mimics everyday life quite well, in that we very much doubt that there are many citizens who will spend much time reminding themselves of the conflicts between their political orientations. In this situation, in which ambivalence is latent rather than manifest, we find little evidence that ambivalent citizens behave any differently than anyone else.

The political culture of ambivalence provides plenty of opportunity for piecing together incoherent views about policy issues—what Free and Cantril (1968: 30) once called a “schizoid” combination of beliefs. It is striking, however, how little incoherence exists, even among the most ambivalent Americans. Not volatility, but structure and consistency characterize the opinions of ambivalent citizens.

8. APPENDIX: MEASURES

Policy Attitudes

Affirmative Action

Some people say that because of past discrimination, blacks should be given preference in hiring and promotion. Others say that such preference in hiring and promotion of blacks is wrong because it gives blacks advantages that they haven't earned. What about your opinion [...] (1) favor strongly; (2) favor not strongly; (3) oppose not strongly; (4) oppose strongly.

Gay Rights

- Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination? (1) favor strongly; (2) favor not strongly; (3) oppose not strongly; (4) oppose strongly.
- Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces or don't you think so? (1) feel strongly should be allowed; (2) feel not strongly should be allowed; (3) feel not strongly should not be allowed; (4) feel strongly should not be allowed.
- Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children? (1) feel strongly should be permitted; (2) feel not strongly should be permitted; (3) feel not strongly should not be permitted; (4) feel strongly should not be permitted.

Social Welfare

- If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which of the following programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased? Should spending on food stamps be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?
- Should federal spending on welfare programs be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?
- Should federal spending be increased, decreased, or kept about the same on solving the problem of the homeless?
- Should federal spending on social security be increased, decreased, or kept about the same?
- Should federal spending be increased, decreased, or kept about the same on government assistance to the unemployed?
- Should federal spending be increased, decreased, or kept about the same on poor people?
- Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Suppose these people are at one end of the scale at point 1. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?
- Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-point scale)

Abortion

- There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view [...]? (1) by law, abortion should never be permitted; (2) the law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest or when the woman's life is in danger; (3) the law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established; (4) by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.

- Would you favor or oppose a law in your state that would require parental consent before a teenager under 18 can have an abortion?
- Would you favor or oppose a law in your state that would allow the use of government funds to help pay for the costs of abortion for women who cannot afford them?
- Would you favor or oppose a law in your state that would require a married woman to notify her husband before she can have an abortion?

Orientations in Ambivalence Dimensions

Equality Scale consisting of ANES items V926024 through V926029. High scores are pro-equality. Cronbach's alpha = .77.

Feelings toward Black People ANES item V925323. High scores imply warm feelings toward African-Americans.

Feelings toward Gays and Homosexuals ANES item V925335. High scores imply warm feelings toward homosexuals.

Feelings toward Poor People ANES item V925320. High scores imply warm feelings toward the poor.

Feelings toward People on Welfare ANES item V925318. High scores imply warm feelings toward people on welfare.

Gender Equality ANES item V923801. High scores are pro equality between the sexes.

Limited Government Scale consisting of ANES items V925729 through V925731. High scores are pro-limited government. Cronbach's alpha = .85.

Modern Racism Scale consisting of ANES items V926126 through V926129. High scores imply modern racism. Cronbach's alpha = .81.

Moral Traditionalism Scale consisting of ANES items V926115 through V926118. High scores are pro-traditional values. Cronbach's alpha = .71.

Racial Stereotyping Scale consisting of difference scores between ANES items V926222 and V926221, V926225 and V926226, and V926229 and V926230. High scores imply negative racial stereotyping. Cronbach's alpha = .74.

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**Table 1:
Dimensions of Ambivalence**

<p><i>Affirmative Action:</i> Equality-Limited Government; Equality-Racial Stereotyping; Equality-Modern Racism; Equality-Black Affect; Limited Government-Racial Stereotyping; Limited Government-Modern Racism; Limited Government-Black Affect; Racial Stereotyping-Modern Racism; Racial Stereotyping-Black Affect; Modern Racism-Black Affect.</p>
<p><i>Gay Rights:</i> Equality-Limited Government; Equality-Moral Traditionalism; Equality-Gay Affect; Limited Government-Moral Traditionalism; Limited Government-Gay Affect; Moral Traditionalism-Gay Affect.</p>
<p><i>Social Welfare:</i> Equality-Limited Government; Equality-Poor Affect; Equality-Welfare Affect; Limited Government-Poor Affect; Limited Government-Welfare Affect; Poor Affect-Welfare Affect.</p>
<p><i>Abortion:</i> Gender Equality-Moral Traditionalism.</p>

**Table 2:
The Values of the Modified Griffin Ambivalence Measure^a**

A	B				
	Strongly Disagree (-1)	Disagree (-.5)	Neutral (0)	Agree (.5)	Strongly Agree (1)
Strongly Disagree	1.000	0.625	0.250	0.125	0.000
Disagree	0.625	0.750	0.375	0.250	0.125
Neutral	0.250	0.375	0.500	0.375	0.250
Agree	0.125	0.250	0.375	0.750	0.625
Strongly Agree	0.000	0.125	0.250	0.625	1.000

Note: ^a A and B are assumed to be in conflict.

Table 3:
Incidence of Ambivalence

Ambivalence Dimension	Mean	Median	Variance	% Incompatible
Equality-Limited Government	.29	.25	.035	37.7
Equality-Moral Traditionalism	.42	.42	.024	47.2
Limited Government-Moral Traditionalism	.36	.34	.042	33.2
Equality-Racial Stereotyping ^a	.45	.45	.012	58.4
Equality-Modern Racism ^a	.41	.42	.027	48.5
Limited Government-Racial Stereotyping ^a	.39	.38	.022	39.4
Limited Government-Modern Racism ^a	.40	.38	.049	36.6
Gender Equality-Moral Traditionalism	.39	.34	.050	49.1
Equality-Black Affect ^a	.37	.38	.018	13.3
Equality-Gay Affect	.39	.39	.029	28.1
Equality-Poor Affect	.33	.32	.022	14.5
Equality-Welfare Affect	.39	.40	.020	22.7
Limited Government-Black Affect ^a	.33	.25	.036	35.4
Limited Government-Gay Affect	.39	.33	.069	46.0
Limited Government-Poor Affect	.30	.25	.043	36.6
Limited Government-Welfare Affect	.34	.32	.034	39.8
Moral Traditionalism-Gay Affect	.34	.37	.026	28.2
Racial Stereotyping-Black Affect ^a	.46	.46	.012	52.9
Modern Racism-Black Affect ^a	.42	.42	.025	43.9
Poor Affect-Welfare Affect	.38	.40	.026	18.6

Notes: ^a white respondents only.

Table 4:
Predictors of Ambivalence^a

Predictor	% Significant at p=.05	Range of Significant	
		Estimates	
Black	58	-.101	.053
Female	43	-.039	.026
Age	62	-.078	.097
Income	24	.000	.000
Religious Fundamentalism	33	-.111	.045
Education	43	-.104	.035
Political Knowledge	57	-.156	.080
Partisanship	57	-.056	.024
Ideology	67	-.069	-.021
Strength of Ideology	81	-.121	-.031

Notes: ^a results across the 21 ambivalence dimensions.

Table 5:
Unpredictability Affirmative Action^a

Ambivalence Dimension	Number Significant at p=.05 ^b	Range of Estimates ^c	
		Equality-Racial Stereotyping	1
Equality-Black Affect	4	1.171	1.378
Limited Government-Modern Racism	2	.440	.762
Modern Racism-Black Affect	2	-.097	.902

Notes: ^a white respondents only; ^b out of 4 model specifications; ^c table entries are ML estimates of the ambivalence parameter of the variance model in heteroskedastic probit analysis.

Table 6:
Unpredictability Gay Rights^a

Ambivalence Dimension	Number Significant at p=.05^b	Range of Estimates^c	
<i>Job Discrimination:</i> Equality-Moral Traditionalism	3	.758	.960
<i>Adoption:</i> Limited Government-Gay Affect	1	.029	.331

Notes: ^a no significant results for gays in the military; ^b out of 4 model specifications; ^c table entries are ML estimates of the ambivalence parameter of the variance model in heteroskedastic probit analysis.

Table 7:
Unpredictability Social Welfare^a

Ambivalence Dimension	Number Significant at p=.05^b	Range of Estimates^c	
<i>Spending on Welfare:</i> Equality-Welfare Affect	4	-1.045	-.883
<i>Spending on Poor:</i> Equality-Poor Affect	1	-.926	-.757
<i>Spending on Food Stamps:</i> Equality-Poor Affect	1	-1.163	-.965
Limited Government-Welfare Affect	1	-.532	-.141
<i>Government Jobs:</i> Equality-Limited Government	3	.084	1.075
Equality-Poor Affect	1	-.831	.185
Limited Government-Poor Affect	1	-.481	.626
Limited Government-Welfare Affect	3	.410	.658

Notes: ^a no significant results for government services, spending on homeless, spending on Social Security, and spending on unemployment benefits; ^b out of 4 model specifications; ^c table entries are ML estimates of the ambivalence parameter of the variance model in heteroskedastic probit analysis.

Table 8:
Stability in Policy Attitudes^a

Policy Attitude	Period	Range of Stability Estimates			
		Low Ambivalence		High Ambivalence	
Affirmative Action ^b	1992-94	.82	.99	.63	.97
	1994-96	.85	.97	.76	1.00
Gay Job Discrimination	1992-93	.83	1.00	.97	1.00
	1993-96	.88	1.00	.87	1.00
Gays in Military	1992-93	.81	.93	.83	1.00
	1993-96	.91	1.00	.84	.90
Welfare Spending	1992-94	.76	.94	.88	1.00
	1994-96	.94	1.00	.87	1.00
Spending on Food Stamps	1992-94	.73	1.00	.74	1.00
	1994-96	.86	1.00	.80	1.00
Spending on Social Security	1992-94	.86	.95	.74	.95
	1994-96	.88	.93	.74	.90
Government Services	1992-94	.74	1.00	.66	.96
	1994-96	.82	1.00	.76	1.00
Government Job Provision	1992-94	.98	1.00	.91	1.00
	1994-96	.75	.90	.73	.87
Abortion	1992-94	.97	.97	.95	.95
	1994-96	.96	.96	.96	.96

Notes: ^a table entries are WLS estimates of stability coefficients; ^b white respondents only.

Table 9:
Horizontal Constraint Gay Rights

Ambivalence Dimension	Probit Estimate ^a	Average Factor Loading ^b	
		Low Ambivalence	High Ambivalence
Equality-Moral Traditionalism	-1.380	.850	.710
Equality-Gay Affect	-1.305	.843	.700
Limited Government-Moral Traditionalism	-.636	.827	.763
Moral Traditionalism-Gay Affect	-1.300	.857	.677

Notes: ^a table entries are ML probit estimates; ^b table entries are WLS estimates of factor loadings.