

Core Values, Value Conflict, and
Citizens' Ambivalence about Gay Rights

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Abstract: Recent research has recognized that many people simultaneously hold positive and negative attitudes about important political issues. In this paper, we review the concept of attitudinal ambivalence and propose a survey-based measure of ambivalence adapted from the experimental literature. Extending our earlier work on abortion, analysis of a statewide telephone survey of Florida residents reveals that (1) many people have ambivalent attitudes about issues related to gay and lesbian rights; (2) the amount of ambivalence varies according to the specific rights in question (military service, gay marriage and adoption, membership in youth organizations such as Boy Scouts, and others); (3) ambivalence on gay rights is to some extent a function of conflict among citizens' underlying core values; and (4) under certain circumstances, ambivalence appears to mediate the relationship between a person's issue preferences with regard to gay rights and his or her evaluation of political leaders and institutions.

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"I'm kind of two ways on that." – Survey respondent in media poll, quoted in the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, July 1, 2002.

Although it is clear that even today, homosexuals "remain disliked by a large share of the public at a very visceral level" (Wald 2000: 13), the opinion climate with respect to lesbians and gay men does not appear to be nearly as negative or as intolerant as it once was. Most citizens continue to question the morality of homosexual behavior: According to the 2002 General Social Survey (GSS), roughly 60 percent indicated that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was "always" or "almost always" wrong – a majority to be sure, but down noticeably from the 82 percent who felt that way in 1987. Support for the civil rights and liberties of homosexuals has risen as well: Most Americans now believe that gays should be permitted to teach in colleges and universities, to serve in the military, and that there should be laws banning discrimination against gays in hiring and firing, while over forty percent are willing to allow gay and lesbian couples to adopt children (Wilcox and Norrande 2002: 137-38; also Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Sherrill and Yang 2000; Haerberle 1999; Lewis and Rogers 1999). On a personal level, only one in three respondents in a 2000 survey admitted to being uncomfortable around homosexuals, and just 38 percent said they would be very upset to learn that their child was gay (down from 65 percent fifteen years earlier; Wilcox and Norrande 2002: 140-41).

Among the explanations offered for these changes is that many Americans have discovered they have gay and lesbian friends, relatives, or workmates (Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Herek and Capitanio 1996) and been exposed to popular films such as *Philadelphia* and television shows such as *Will & Grace* that portray gay and lesbian characters in a mostly favorable light (Wilcox and Norrande 2002). In addition, polls show that an increasing number of people now believe that an individual's sexual orientation is fixed at birth – and those who

share this belief are more inclined to support homosexual rights (Tygart 2000) and, in all probability, less concerned that "gays or lesbians will try to seduce young, impressionable heterosexuals" (Wilcox and Norrander 2002: 140).

Our research is not intended to explain the public's shifting views about homosexuality, though it provides what we believe to be new insight into the nature and meaning of that shift. Consider, for example, the majority support expressed for two seemingly contradictory propositions, i.e., that homosexuality is "morally wrong" and that it is based, at least in part, on genetic inheritance and therefore not entirely a matter of personal choice. While this may simply be another example of people giving top-of-the-head answers to survey questions dealing with topics to which they have given little thought (Converse 1964), it is possible that the opinion change that has taken place over the past 15-20 years reflects something else as well; that is, while some citizens undoubtedly have become more tolerant of homosexuals, others may have made that journey only part of the way – by adopting positive orientations without necessarily abandoning all of the negative ones previously held. Such *ambivalence* could help to account for the fact that the American public appears to be, on average, both supportive of and hostile to homosexuals and gay rights, depending upon the specific question being asked.

Although the data used here are cross-sectional in nature and cannot be used to look at opinion change directly, our results leave little doubt that ambivalence is fairly common with regard to homosexual and gay rights issues. We also will present evidence that sheds light on both the origins and consequences of gay rights ambivalence, specifically, that it is associated with conflict among citizens' underlying core values, and that it can (but does not always) play a significant role in shaping evaluations of political leaders. Based on these findings, it is our

contention that neither the nature nor the political relevance of public opinion on gay rights can be fully understood without taking ambivalence into account.

Ambivalence and Core Values

Social and political psychologists have come a long way since Converse (1970) posited his black-and-white model as an explanation for the instability of survey responses over time. In particular, we now recognize that the characteristics of attitudes are too complex to be captured by the simple dichotomy between "real" and "non-attitudes." Attitude strength has been shown to have multiple aspects, including importance (Krosnick and Abelson 1992), certainty (Gross, Holtz, and Miller 1995), elaboration (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), intensity (Krosnick and Abelson 1992), and commitment (Abelson 1988), all of which are usually conceptualized and measured as ordinal variables. *Ambivalence*, which refers to the presence of conflicting evaluations or beliefs held by a single individual about an attitude object (Craig, Kane, and Martinez, 2002; Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson 1997; Alvarez and Brehm 1995), is a related but empirically distinct aspect of attitude strength (also see Bassili 1996).

The concept of ambivalence is not new. Social psychologists have used experimental data to demonstrate empirically the existence of an ambivalence dimension based on the assumption that attitudes can contain separate positive and negative components (Newby-Clark, McGregor, and Zanna 2002; Armitage and Connor 2000; Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995). Thus, far from not possessing any real attitudes at all, some people appear to have conflicting feelings about the same attitude object. Ambivalence also has begun to receive greater attention in recent years from political scientists (Craig and Martinez 2004; Haddock 2003; McGraw, Hasecke, and Conger 2003; Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002; Lavine 2001;

Meffert, Guge, and Lodge 2000; Steenbergen and Brewer 2000; Alvarez and Brehm 1995). For example, Zaller and Feldman's (1992) analysis of responses to open-ended survey questions led them to conclude that "most people possess opposing considerations on most issues, that is, considerations that might lead them to decide the issue either way" (p. 585; also see Zaller 1992), and that this probably helps to account for the over-time instability often found in opinion surveys.

Why, then, are some people ambivalent and others not? In recent years, researchers have increasingly become aware of the central role played by core values in structuring citizens' behavior and their views on specific issues. Such values are said to consist of "overarching normative principles and belief assumptions about government, citizenship, and American society. . . . Individualism, faith in the free enterprise system, a sense of equality or fair play, and views on public morality are all examples of core values that Americans might call upon" (McCann 1997: 565; also see Jacoby 2002; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Feldman 1988). Although it is generally believed that ambivalence occurs when there is a *conflict* involving a person's core values (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Katz and Hass 1988), the evidence showing this to be the case is limited. In their study of political tolerance, for example, Peffley and his colleagues (2001) assumed that value conflict and ambivalence are interchangeable terms, yet they failed to demonstrate an actual link between the two using either objective or subjective measures of ambivalence. Craig, Kane, and Martinez (2002) approached the question more directly and found greater ambivalence among individuals with conflicting views on the values of moral traditionalism and traditional marriage roles (whether a wife should look after the home and family rather than pursuing a career of her own), but this pattern was not uniform

across all aspects of the abortion issue.

Several studies have reported a relationship between such core values as authoritarianism, moral traditionalism, and individualism on the one hand, and citizens' attitudes on issues relating to homosexuality and gay rights on the other (Brewer 2003; Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Whitley and Lee 2000; Lewis and Rogers 1999). Moreover, it is widely assumed that the opinion shift described earlier, and the current mix of supportive (civil rights and liberties) and nonsupportive (morality of homosexuality) beliefs shared by popular majorities, are due in part to the fact that many Americans "hold clashing values in the debate over gay rights – traditional morality versus individual freedom and equality" (Wilcox and Norrander 2002: 138). In other words, evidence that the mass public as a whole is of two minds on gay issues may reflect a considerable amount of ambivalence at the individual level, and that ambivalence may be a product of the conflicting core values shared by many citizens. These are the central hypotheses tested in the following analysis, using measures of ambivalence that are much more direct than is typical for survey-based studies of general populations.

Data and Methodology

The present study is based on a telephone poll of 601 Florida residents conducted in June, 2002 by the *Florida Voter* survey organization. The sampling frame was drawn using a random-digit-dialing (RDD) procedure; if needed, four callbacks were made to each working number in an effort to obtain a completed interview.¹ Interviewers asked to speak with "the youngest male, eighteen years of age or older, who is now at home." When no male was available, they inquired about "the youngest female, eighteen years or older, who is now at home" (see Crespi 1988: 50). A total of seventy questions were included in the survey, and the mean time for completion was

twenty-four minutes.² The margin of error was plus or minus 4.1 percent.

Scholars have used a number of approaches to measure ambivalence. Zaller and Feldman (1992), for example, asked survey respondents to state whatever thoughts came to mind as they answered two traditional closed-ended policy questions. However, the ability to identify arguments on both sides of an issue does not, in and of itself, signify the presence of an underlying conflict (Alvarez and Brehm 1995 and 2002; Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002; Sniderman, Tetlock, and Elms 2001). Using a different approach, Alvarez and Brehm (1995) inferred the presence of ambivalence in citizens' attitudes about abortion from patterns of error variance in heteroskedastic probit models of vote choice, but this aggregate-level indicator cannot tell us *how much* ambivalence toward a single attitude object exists for any single person, nor the correlation between ambivalence and other attitudes at the individual level.

Our measure of ambivalence is derived from experimental work by social psychologists and adapted by Craig, Kane, and Martinez (2002) for use in surveys. The technique is a version of the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957; also see Kaplan 1972), with respondents indicating both how positively *and* how negatively they feel about eight statements concerning the rights of homosexuals.³ First, interviewers explained that

"I'm now going to read a series of statements about issues involving homosexuals, that is, gay men and lesbians. After each, I'd like you to rate each statement on a 4-point scale to indicate how *positively* you feel toward the statement. If you do not have any positive feelings toward the statement, give the statement the lowest rating of 1; if you have some positive feelings, rate it a 2; if you have generally positive feelings, rate it a 3; and if you have extremely positive feelings, rate it a 4. Please rate

each statement based solely on how positively you feel about it, *while ignoring or setting aside for the moment any negative feelings you may have for the statement.*

The first statement is . . ."

We then read a series of eight statements derived from various opinion polls, published scholarly research, and recent news stories:

- Homosexuals should be allowed to teach in schools.
- Marriages between homosexuals should be recognized as legal.
- Homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States military.
- Homosexuals should be legally permitted to adopt children.
- What homosexuals do in the privacy of their own homes is nobody else's business.
- There should be laws to protect homosexuals against discrimination in their jobs.
- Homosexuals should be allowed to join the Boy Scouts and other youth organizations.
- Homosexual couples should be able to obtain family health insurance coverage, the same way other people do.

After a number of filler questions (Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995), the above statement was repeated except with the words "positive" and "positively" changed to "negative" and "negatively." If a person seemed unsure or confused at any point, the interviewer repeated the instructions as many times as necessary.

Conceptually, greater ambivalence means similar levels of positivity and negativity; our measure should therefore yield a higher score for respondents who express both positive *and* negative feelings than for those with "extremely," "generally," or "some" positive (negative) and *no* negative (positive) feelings. Ambivalence scores should likewise be higher for individuals

who have more intense reactions; for example, someone with "extremely" positive (negative) feelings should be classified as more ambivalent than someone with "generally" or "some" positive (negative) feelings. Thus, following Thompson and her colleagues (1995), we calculate ambivalence as

$$\text{Ambivalence} = [(P + N)/2] - |P - N|$$

where P is the positive reaction score and N is the negative reaction score.⁴ The resultant scores range from -0.5 ("extremely" positive and no negative feelings, or "extremely" negative and no positive) to +4.0 ("extremely" positive *and* negative feelings for the same statement).⁵

Results

Four basic questions will be addressed in this section. First, how ambivalent are Floridians about gay rights? Second, is ambivalence related to citizens' underlying core values? Third, is ambivalence on gay rights a function of core value conflict? Fourth, what is the political relevance of ambivalence? Although we are unable to consider the latter question in depth, our data permit us to determine whether ambivalence mediates the relationship between a person's attitudes on gay rights issues and his or her evaluations of Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida state legislature.

The Structure of Ambivalence

Like their counterparts around the country, a majority of heterosexual Floridians (58.3 percent)⁶ believed that "sexual relations between two adults of the same sex is morally wrong,"⁷ Against this less than promising backdrop, however, the figures in Table 1 reveal the same sort of aggregate-level ambivalence found in national polls. Respondents were far more positive than negative (mean scores of 3.49 and 1.50, respectively) about the statement that "what

homosexuals do in the privacy of their own homes is nobody else's business," and about the need for laws to protect homosexuals against discrimination in their jobs (3.09, 1.81). They also were relatively comfortable with homosexuals teaching (2.54 positive, 2.12 negative), serving in the military (2.80, 2.05), and obtaining family health insurance coverage (2.82, 2.01), while expressing less support for gay and lesbian marriages (2.06 positive, 2.62 negative), adoption (2.21, 2.55), and participation in Boy Scouts and other youth organizations (2.35, 2.44, though the difference in this case is not significant).⁸ In line with prior research, those who believed that "people do not choose to be homosexual, they are born that way," were significantly more positive *and* significantly less negative ($p \leq .01$) than those who said that homosexuality is a matter of choice.⁹

Table 1 about here

The varying levels of ambivalence across the eight items (highest for Boy Scouts, lowest for privacy of own homes), shown in column 4 of Table 2, suggest that different people may have conflicting feelings about different aspects of the gay rights issues. As proved to be the case with abortion (Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002), we anticipated that the structure of ambivalence on gay rights would be multidimensional; specifically, we predicted that the eight items would fall into two separate clusters: issues involving basic civil rights and liberties (teach school, serve in military, privacy of own homes, job discrimination) and family-related issues (legal marriage, adopt children, Boy Scouts, health insurance). Our expectations were mostly confirmed, but with a couple of interesting twists. First, the prospect of homosexuals becoming teachers was not perceived in civil liberties terms so much as it was a family matter – not surprising, really, given the frequent interaction that takes place between teachers and their (almost always younger)

students, and the concern that some parents continue to feel about what consequences that interaction might have. Second, the question about homosexual couples being able to obtain family health insurance coverage loads surprisingly on what we initially identified as the civil rights/liberties dimension; the explicit reference to family notwithstanding, most Floridians appear to view this issue as involving different considerations than the controversial (and less popular) proposals that gay men and lesbians be legally permitted to marry and adopt children.

Table 2 about here

Based on these results, we have reconceptualized the two dimensions of ambivalence in Table 2 in terms of attitudes about *adult roles* involving interactions between homosexuals and others in society (serve in military, privacy of own homes, job discrimination, health insurance), and attitudes about *children and families* (teach school, legal marriage, adopt children, Boy Scouts). Separate indices were constructed ($\alpha = .705$ and $.664$, respectively) by taking the mean of respondents' ambivalence scores for the four items in each domain. The two new variables have similar distributions, and their respective means are also very close (.19 for adult roles, .22 for children/families). Moreover, despite the existence of separate dimensions, there is a fairly strong tendency for those who are ambivalent in one area to be ambivalent in the other as well ($r = .50, p < .001$).

Values, Value Conflict, and Ambivalence

We turn next to the question of whether gay rights ambivalence is related to citizens' underlying core values, and to the conflict that sometimes occurs among those values. Prior research has shown that support for gay rights is stronger among individuals who are committed to the norms of general social equality, and weaker among those who hold traditional views

about what constitutes proper moral behavior. (Brewer 2003; Wilcox and Wolpert 2000). Yet it is not clear how or even whether such value orientations should be related to gay rights ambivalence, and we make no predictions about what our data will show in this regard. Instead, the central hypothesis is that ambivalence will be greater when the values of traditional morality (which should predispose someone to oppose gay rights) clash with those of either egalitarianism or individual freedom (which should have the opposite effect; see Wilcox and Norrander 2002).

Our measure of *egalitarianism* is based on strong or weak agreement/disagreement with the following statements: (E₁) "We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country." (E₂) "This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are." (E₃) "If people were treated more equally in this country, we would have many fewer problems." Answers were coded from +2 to -2, with higher scores (strongly disagree on E₁ and E₂, strongly agree on E₃) representing a positive commitment to egalitarian values. Overall scores for the index ($\alpha =$ a weak .483) were calculated as the mean of scores for component items.¹⁰

Two measures of traditionalism also were constructed. First, a *traditional lifestyles* index (or "moral traditionalism"; $\alpha = .489$) was built from three items: (TL₁) "This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties." (TL₂) "The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society." (TL₃) "The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes." Second, respondents' support for *traditional marriage roles* ($\alpha = .647$) was measured as follows: (TM₁) "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job." (TM₂) "It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself." (TM₃) "A husband's job is to earn money;

a wife's job is to look after the home and family." Higher scores represent a more traditional outlook in both instances (strong agreement with TL₁, TL₂, plus all marriage role statements, strong disagreement with TL₃). Although these two indices are positively correlated ($r = .37, p < .001$), the results of a factor analysis suggest that they capture distinct value dimensions.

Finally, our measure of *individualism* is a single item (strongly agree to strongly disagree, the latter indicating an individualistic outlook): "Having your own ideas is important, but there are times when people need to set those ideas aside and go along with what the majority wants." A second statement, similar to the first but with opposite direction of wording ("People should stick to their opinions when they think they're right, even if others disagree"), was included in the survey but the two sets of responses were uncorrelated – a non-finding that appears to reinforce our earlier point about the pernicious effects of response set (see note 10). Fortunately, the results reported below remain almost the same regardless of whether "having your own ideas" alone or the two items together are used to measure commitment to individualistic values.¹¹

Like ambivalence, value conflict was measured using an algorithm that captures both the degree of similarity between competing values and the intensity with which those values are held (see Steenbergen and Brewer 2000). Our assumption is that value conflict is present whenever scores on egalitarianism or individualism run in the opposite direction to scores on traditionalism, for example, among egalitarians who nonetheless maintain morally traditional attitudes (about either marriage roles or lifestyles). Thus, the measure of value conflict between egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles is calculated as

$$\text{Value Conflict (E, TL)} = [(E + TL)/2] - |E - TL|$$

Similar measures were constructed to capture value conflict between egalitarianism and

traditional marriage roles, individualism and traditional marriage roles, and individualism and traditional lifestyles.

As the literature leads us to expect, egalitarianism is positively associated with the belief that "there is nothing immoral about sexual relations between two consenting adults of the same sex" ($r = .22$); the belief that "laws are sometimes needed in order to protect the basic rights of homosexuals" (.21); and a tolerant view of homosexuality (.31).¹² Likewise, both traditionalism indices are negatively correlated with the same variables ($r = -.41$, $-.26$, and $-.45$, respectively, for traditional lifestyles; $-.28$, $-.18$, and $-.34$ for traditional marriage roles). A strong sense of individualism, on the other hand, is not significantly related to any of the three. If nothing else, these findings suggest that the attitudes of Floridians on issues relating to homosexuality and gay rights are probably structured similarly to the attitudes of Americans in general.

Further analysis reveals that core values are not themselves closely associated with ambivalence about gay rights. Egalitarianism is negatively ($r = -.13$), and lifestyle traditionalism positively (.13), correlated with ambivalence on the adult roles dimension, but neither of these coefficients is very strong; none of the relationships between core values and ambivalence regarding children and families achieve conventional levels of statistical significance. More germane to our theoretical focus is that ambivalence appears, at first glance, to be only modestly linked to the presence of core value *conflict*. Ambivalence on adult roles is slightly higher among respondents with conflicting views about egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles ($r = .06$, $p = .13$), and among those with conflicting views about individualism and traditional marriage roles ($r = .07$, $p < .10$). Ambivalence on children and family issues is slightly higher among those who experience conflict with regard to their attitudes on egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles

($r = .06$, $p = .12$).

These results provide weak support at best for the assumption that ambivalence in general, and gay rights ambivalence in particular, is a product of value conflict. To consider the argument more fully, we estimated multivariate models of ambivalence using core values, value conflict, and control variables. Because the value conflict measures are themselves based on various combinations of the same four core values, including all of them in a single model risked introducing excessive multicollinearity.¹³ Instead, we estimated two models with different sets of value conflict variables. The first of these models (Model 1) is

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Ambivalence} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{egalitarian values} + \beta_2 \text{traditional lifestyles values} + \beta_3 \\ & \text{traditional marriage role values} + \beta_4 \text{individualism values} + \beta_5 \text{value conflict} \\ & \text{(egalitarianism, traditional lifestyles)} + \beta_6 \text{value conflict (individualism, traditional} \\ & \text{marriage roles)} + \beta_7 \text{age} + \beta_8 \text{education} + \beta_9 \text{gender (female)} + \beta_{10} \text{religious} \\ & \text{attendance} + \beta_{11} \text{religious guidance} + \beta_{12} \text{attitudes about homosexuality} + \beta_{13} \text{know} \\ & \text{someone gay} + \beta_{14} \text{born that way} + e \end{aligned}$$

where "religious attendance" refers to the frequency of attending services; "religious guidance" is a measure of the extent to which religion guides one's day-to-day living; "attitudes toward homosexuality" is the 6-item index described earlier (see note 12); "know someone gay" indicates whether respondents personally know any gay men or lesbians; and "born that way" reflects beliefs about whether or not homosexuality is a matter of personal choice (see note 9).

In our second model (Model 2), we substituted variables representing conflicts between egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles, and between individualism and traditional

lifestyles, for the value conflict measures in Model 1. This is stated as

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Ambivalence} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ egalitarian values} + \beta_2 \text{ traditional lifestyles values} + \beta_3 \\ & \text{traditional marriage role values} + \beta_4 \text{ individualism values} + \beta_5 \text{ value conflict} \\ & \text{(egalitarianism, traditional marriage roles)} + \beta_6 \text{ value conflict (individualism,} \\ & \text{traditional lifestyles)} + \beta_7 \text{ age} + \beta_8 \text{ education} + \beta_9 \text{ gender (female)} + \beta_{10} \text{ religious} \\ & \text{attendance} + \beta_{11} \text{ religious guidance} + \beta_{12} \text{ attitudes about homosexuality} + \beta_{13} \text{ know} \\ & \text{someone gay} + \beta_{14} \text{ born that way} + e. \end{aligned}$$

We did not test for conflict between egalitarianism and individualism, since there is no reason to expect that people who are high (or low) on both of these values will experience conflict that might affect their views on gay rights issues. For similar reasons, conflict between traditional lifestyles and traditional marriage roles is excluded from our analysis.

Each of our control variables was selected because of its presumed association with support for gay rights (Brewer 2003; Wilcox and Norrander 2002; Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Haeberle 1999; Lewis and Rogers 1999). As already noted, however, it is not obvious that we should expect the same factors that influence directional preference also to play a role in shaping ambivalence. With little theoretical guidance available, we rely on the simple logic outlined at the beginning of this paper: Surveys show that Americans have become more favorable toward homosexuality and gay rights, perhaps due to shifts in the core values that appear to underlie citizens' positions on such issues (Brewer 2003). A portion of this change undoubtedly reflects individuals moving from one side of the issue to the other (mostly negative to positive) and from undecided to (mostly) positive. Yet it is possible that another portion stems from people who

were once anti-gay becoming not so much positive but rather ambivalent. Lacking strong reasons to think otherwise, we posit that the same factors have driven both processes.

Since the ambivalence variables are ordinal, we used ordered logit to estimate our models.¹⁴ Looking at adult roles ambivalence, the coefficients for Model 1 in Table 3 provide some support for the value conflict hypothesis: First, respondents who express a strong (or, less often, weak) commitment to both egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles tend to be more ambivalent ($p = .030$) on gay rights issues relating to military service, privacy, job discrimination, and health insurance. Second, if conventional standards of statistical significance are relaxed just a bit, it appears that ambivalence on these same issues is associated with conflict between the values of individualism and traditional marriage roles ($p = .064$). In Model 2, however, neither value conflict variable is significant at the .05 level. In both models, the only control variable that affects ambivalence is attitudes about homosexuality. This latter relationship, which suggests that those who are *more* positive tend to be *less* ambivalent, is particularly interesting and in line with our earlier speculation, i.e., that as Americans have grown more tolerant of homosexuality, some have adopted a supportive stance toward gay rights, while others have moderated their previously anti-gay views but remain uncertain and conflicted on the subject.

Table 3 about here

Results for the children/family dimension (teach school, legal marriage, adopt children, Boy Scouts; see Table 4) also indicate that ambivalence is a function of value conflict. In Model 1, the terms for conflict involving individualism vs. traditional marriage roles and egalitarianism vs. traditional lifestyles are both clearly significant ($p \leq .001$). In Model 2, conflict between

egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles is significant ($p = .012$), though conflict between individualism and traditional lifestyles is not. In contrast to what we saw for adult roles, attitudes about homosexuality are unimportant here; high scores on this index are associated, as we would expect, with greater positivity ($r = .50$ to $.58$) and lesser negativity ($-.47$ to $-.55$) on the component items used to construct our children/family ambivalence index (see Table 1)¹⁵ – but not with greater (or lesser) ambivalence itself.

Table 4 about here

The findings presented in Tables 3 and 4 lend further credence to the notion that value conflict underlies attitudinal ambivalence among the mass public. In Craig, Kane, and Martinez (2002: 295), we reported that individuals with conflicting views regarding traditional lifestyles and traditional marriage roles were more ambivalent about abortions obtained under certain circumstances. Evidence in the present study is somewhat stronger in that *multiple* conflicts are important in explaining ambivalence on both adult roles and children/family aspects of the gay rights issue. Although there obviously are other factors not yet identified that help to shape ambivalence, these results confirm the assumption so often made by scholars that conflict among citizens' core values is at least part of the story.¹⁶

The Political Relevance of Ambivalence

Ambivalence can be conceptualized as an attribute of an attitude. It has been hypothesized that ambivalence, like other attributes such as importance, strength, and commitment, will *moderate* the stability of attitudes over time (Craig, Martinez, and Kane 2004; Armitage and Connor 2000; Bassili 1996), and that it also may affect the manner in which attitudes are translated into behavior (Armitage and Connor 2000). Our data do not permit us to

address these specific possibilities, though we are able to consider a slightly different question: Does ambivalence have any impact on the relationship between a person's policy preferences, in this case on gay rights issues, and his or her evaluations of political leaders?

The lead question in our survey asked respondents whether they approved or disapproved (strongly or not strongly) of the way Jeb Bush was handling his job as governor. The second question measured approval or disapproval of the job being done by the state legislature. Bush was elected governor in 1998, and is generally identified with both the business and the socially conservative elements of the Republican Party in Florida. Although he enjoyed high approval ratings overall in June 2002, he was evaluated significantly less favorably among those who believed that laws are sometimes needed to protect the basic rights of gays and lesbians ($\tau\text{-}c = .19, p < .01$).¹⁷ Assessments of the Republican-controlled legislature were a little lower and a little less strongly, but still significantly, related to gay rights preferences ($\tau\text{-}c = .13, p < .02$).

To determine whether ambivalence affects these relationships, we estimated the effects of gay rights preferences (see note 17), ambivalence (adult roles), and the interaction between them on the two job approval questions, while controlling for party identification (the standard 7-point scale from strong Republican to strong Democrat) and the respondent's evaluation of how things were going in the state ("moving in the right direction," or "off track and moving in the wrong direction"). In both models, we expected to see a significant negative interaction term (gay rights * ambivalence) indicating that ambivalence *weakens* the relationship between gay rights preferences and assessments of Governor Bush's or the state legislature's job performance.

Results in the left-hand portion of Table 5 (again based on ordered logit) are consistent with our hypothesis. Not surprisingly, Republican identifiers and people who say that Florida is

moving in the right direction tend to rate Governor Bush more favorably, as do those who feel there is no need for special legislation to protect the rights of homosexuals ($p < .01$ even with the effects of other variables taken into account). Greater ambivalence on the adult roles dimension of gay rights also is marginally associated with approval of the governor's job performance ($p = .08$). The key variable, however, is the interaction term, with the negative coefficient in Table 5 suggesting that ambivalence did indeed (1) reduce the likelihood of Bush approval among respondents who rejected the idea that gay rights legislation was needed, and (2) increase the likelihood of approval among those who supported such legislation. In other words, ambivalence appears to moderate the relationship between issue preference and job ratings for the governor: People whose manifest policy views predisposed them to give Bush either high or low marks were significantly less inclined to do so when their opinions about the issue in question were conflicted.

Table 5 about here

The pattern is similar in the case of legislative job approval (see the right-hand portion of Table 5). The main effect of ambivalence is again significant at $p < .05$, while gay rights preferences fall just short ($p = .10$). More importantly for our purposes, the coefficient for the interaction term is in the correct (negative) direction and is significant at a tolerant $p < .08$. We also replicated the analysis in Table 5 using children/families ambivalence in place of adult roles ambivalence. Both interaction terms are again negative, though only the one for Bush job approval approaches conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < .10$). Overall, we interpret these findings as demonstrating that, under certain conditions, ambivalence does have a moderating effect on the relationship between citizens' issue preferences and their evaluations of

political leaders.¹⁸ The challenge for future research is to identify with greater clarity what the relevant conditions might be; for example, on what kinds of issues is ambivalence most likely to interfere with someone's partisan or ideological leanings? What is the effect of ambivalence when other attitude attributes (strength, importance, extremity, intensity, and so on) are taken into account?¹⁹

Discussion

For many, issues involving gay rights are viewed through the lens of equality: what matters most is whether public policies ensure that government and society treat gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the same manner as heterosexuals are treated. For others, gay rights issues are seen in terms of traditional values: homosexuality as a "lifestyle choice" is thought to undermine the moral fabric that holds together a predominantly Judeo-Christian society. And for still others, gay rights invokes the ethos of individualism: personal freedom spawns a diversity that must be protected from conformist pressures in society. In fact, the present study shows that people frequently view gay rights through multiple lenses. Nearly three-quarters of our Florida survey respondents are "of two minds" regarding one or more of the issues we examined, and the evidence suggests that this ambivalence stems in part from conflict engendered by their simultaneous commitment to such underlying core values as egalitarianism, traditionalism, and individualism.²⁰

Like most issues, the conflict over gay rights is typically presented in bipolar terms, with gay and lesbian groups at one end of the spectrum pitted against social conservatives at the opposite end; differences between the two groups seem impossible to resolve because of the vast ideological gulf separating them. Yet our findings indicate that the extremity of interest group

politics masks a substantial middle ground of ordinary people with attitude structures more complex than standard survey questions lead us to believe. We have seen, for example, that some people's thinking about gay rights varies according to whether the situation involves adult roles or children and families. But even beyond that, a fair number of people hold *both* positive *and* negative attitudes about issues related to the gay rights controversy. Extremists are different from the general mass public by definition, but opinion research has largely portrayed "centrists" as those who attach relatively little importance to, or who lack a firm opinion on, whatever the issue of the moment happens to be. In contrast, an evolving research tradition has demonstrated that many in the center may actually have a foot in both camps.

We hope that our results will encourage scholars to continue searching for evidence of attitudinal ambivalence, and to do so by focusing as much as possible on the views of individual citizens rather than of aggregates (Alvarez and Brehm 1995). It also is important to learn more about whether and how ambivalence matters, that is, what are its *consequences* for the nature of political discourse? Our data suggest one possibility, that under certain conditions ambivalence mediates between a person's policy views and his or her evaluations of political leaders and institutions. In addition, ambivalence may be able to help explain the instability of mass attitudes (Craig, Martinez, and Kane 2004), some voters' apparent desire for divided government (Fiorina 1996), the difficulty experienced by many citizens in casting an issue-based vote, and other important aspects of American politics. It is time for scholars to recognize, once and for all, that not all attitudes are unidimensional and bipolar. Political issues are often complex, and so are the ways in which people think about them. The concept of ambivalence allows us to capture some of that complexity in a manner that should ultimately provide a better understanding of how

ordinary citizens perceive, and attempt to influence, the political world in which they live.

Notes

1. Using American Association for Public Opinion Research's final disposition standards (AAPOR 2000; also see <http://www.aapor.org/pdfs/standarddefs2004.pdf>), the response rate for this survey was 36 percent. The use of statewide surveys is, of course, not new in the study of public opinion or electoral behavior. In particular, such surveys play an important role when researchers (including ourselves and Epstein 1964, among many others) wish to understand how the public's evaluations of governors and other state-level actors are structured by issue preferences. While the ability to make direct statistical inferences obviously is limited by our single-state sampling frame, statewide samples have been constructively used in the past to address both methodological (Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg 1991; Abramson and Ostrom 1994) and conceptual (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991) questions, and to lay the groundwork for further work to be conducted in more broadly representative settings.

2. Each respondent was further qualified to ensure he or she was a permanent resident of the state. Additional information about the survey can be obtained from *Florida Voter* directly (954-584-0204), or from the Graduate Program in Political Campaigning in the Political Science Department at the University of Florida (352-392-0262).

3. Cf. Bassili (1996), who measured several aspects of attitude strength with both subjective self-assessments (meta-attitudinal indices) and objective (operative) indicators at the individual level. His operative measure of ambivalence differs slightly from the one employed here in that respondents were asked, "considering only the positive qualities of the [stimulus object], would you say that the positive qualities . . . are extremely positive, quite positive, slightly positive, or not at all positive?" and so forth for negative qualities (p. 642).

4. Conceptually, the first part of the equation, $[(P + N)/2]$, states that with similarity held constant, greater intensity leads to greater ambivalence; that is, as the average value of positive and negative scores increases, so do feelings of ambivalence. The second part, $|P - N|$, indicates that when similarity increases (e.g., an equal number of positive and negative reactions), a lesser amount is subtracted from the ambivalence total than if similarity were reduced; consequently, greater similarity translates into higher scores on ambivalence. The Thompson study (also see Priester and Petty 1996) found this measure to be superior to others, including Kaplan's, at predicting *subjective* ambivalence, or the degree to which subjects reported feeling discomfort when asked to evaluate some attitude object.

5. One might wonder whether our measure of ambivalence is actually tapping *uncertainty*, which Alvarez and Brehm (1997: 346) describe as a form of "response variability" that results from "a lack of information, either stemming from the respondent's own personal information costs or from deficiencies in the transmission of information from elites to citizens. . . . Uncertainty can always be resolved, however, by additional information." Although we cannot test directly for this possibility in the present study, our earlier work on abortion employed a separate measure of subjective (un)certainty ("I think my views about abortion are absolutely correct," responses scored from strongly agree to strongly disagree; see Abelson 1988; also Gross, Holtz, and Miller 1995; Krosnick and Abelson 1992; Pelham 1991) that was negatively but only modestly correlated with ambivalence; in addition, panel data revealed that ambivalence about abortion had an independent effect on response stability over time, controlling for certainty and several other aspects of attitude strength. See Craig, Martinez, and Kane (2004).

6. All analyses are based on the 94.5 percent of our sample who claim to be heterosexual.

Although this figure almost certainly underestimates the number of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in the larger population, it is similar to the results reported in other surveys (Wald 2000: 13).

7. Asked which statement came closer to their own opinion, 32.8 percent said "there is nothing immoral about sexual relations between two consenting adults of the same sex."

8. Translating these figures to the individual level: With a score of 0.5 or higher (out of four) as a minimum threshold, roughly one-third of Floridians were ambivalent on seven of the eight items – slightly higher than the proportion who expressed ambivalence about abortion in our earlier survey (Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002). Nearly three-fourths of those in the present study were ambivalent about at least one of the eight statements, and 31.0 percent were ambivalent about three or more.

9. Our sample was evenly divided between "born gay" (38.9 percent said this statement came closer to their own opinion) and the contrasting view that "homosexuals are that way because they choose to be" (43.0 percent).

10. To minimize the loss of cases due to missing values, a score was computed for anyone who answered at least two of the three questions. The alpha coefficient here is obviously lower than one would like, probably reflecting the response set problems that plague agree-disagree questions generally (including our own measures of traditionalism and individualism).

11. While our questions were designed to tap support for a "freedom of expression" that we expected to help shape people's attitudes about sexual preference, scholars with a different substantive focus might prefer to measure individualism, for example, in economic (freedom to accumulate wealth) or more explicitly political (freedom to organize) terms.

12. Attitudes about homosexuality were measured with a 6-item scale ($\alpha = .901$) based

on agreement or disagreement with the following statements: (a) "Sex between two men is just plain wrong." (b) "Sex between two women is just plain wrong." (c) "I think male homosexuals are disgusting." (d) "I think female homosexuals, or lesbians, are disgusting." (e) "It is natural for some men to be sexually attracted to other men." (f) "It is natural for some women to be sexually attracted to other women" (cf. Herek 2002). Scores on the last two items have been reversed to correct for direction of wording. High scores reflect a more positive attitude.

13. The bivariate correlation between the two value conflict variables representing egalitarianism vs. traditional marriage roles on the one hand, and egalitarianism vs. traditional lifestyles on the other, is .40. The correlation between the value conflict variables representing individualism vs. traditional marriage roles on the one hand, and individualism vs. traditional lifestyles on the other, is .53.

14. In order to avoid an unacceptable loss of cases in the estimation of these models, we employed the MICE ("multiple imputation using chained equations"; see Horton and Lipsitz 2001) routine in the R statistical package to impute missing data. MICE does this by replacing each missing value with a random draw from a distribution estimated from a maximum likelihood function based on other variables in the dataset. Our imputed dataset was based on the mean values from five replicate datasets created by MICE.

15. Correlations with attitudes about homosexuality are similar, but slightly weaker, for the positivity (.35 to .53) and negativity (-.34 to -.47) items comprising adult roles ambivalence.

16. Our survey also included a single agree-disagree question tapping *subjective* ambivalence ("I sometimes find myself being torn between two sides of issues involving gay and lesbian rights"), which is correlated only weakly with objective children/families ambivalence

and not at all with objective adult roles ambivalence. Nevertheless, in line with the results reported above, subjective ambivalence is more likely to occur in the presence of value conflict (in this case, between egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles).

17. Respondents were asked which statement was closer to their own view: "Laws are sometimes needed in order to protect the basic rights of homosexuals," or "There is no need for special legislation to guarantee rights for homosexuals." Nearly three-quarters (73.8 percent) of those who rejected the need for special legislation approved of Bush's performance, compared with 58.5 percent of those who felt otherwise.

18. We thought that ambivalence might also moderate the relationship between gay rights preferences and the intention to vote for "more Republican or Democratic candidates" in the next general election, though it turns out that such preferences were uncorrelated with vote intentions in the first place.

19 Our survey included measures of attitude strength (respondents were asked whether they felt "strongly" or "not so strongly" about the need for legislation to protect the rights of homosexuals) and attitude importance ("How important are the issues of homosexuality and gay rights to you personally – would you say they are very important, somewhat important, or not very important?"). In multivariate models, neither of these variables (a) is significantly associated with job approval ratings for Jeb Bush or the Florida legislature; (b) moderates the relationship between gay rights preference and approval ratings for Bush or the legislature (i.e., interactions with gay rights have little if any impact); or (c) substantially diminishes the moderating effects of ambivalence, as reported above.

20. There may, of course, be core values other than the ones discussed here (for example,

authoritarianism; see Whitley and Lee 2000) that are important in shaping citizens' opinions about gay rights.

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Table 1

Overall Preferences on Gay Rights Issues

	Mean Positive ^a	Mean Negative ^a	Pair Sample t (significance) ^b	Mean Ambivalence ^c
Teach school	2.54 (1.27)	2.12 (1.28)	4.193 (.000)	0.226
Legal marriage	2.06 (1.26)	2.62 (1.35)	-5.650 (.000)	0.177
Serve in military	2.80 (1.26)	2.05 (1.24)	7.566 (.000)	0.227
Adopt children	2.21 (1.30)	2.55 (1.32)	-3.233 (.001)	0.208
Privacy of own homes	3.49 (0.97)	1.50 (0.97)	27.188 (.000)	0.061
Job discrimination	3.09 (1.18)	1.81 (1.15)	14.310 (.000)	0.250
Boy Scouts	2.35 (1.28)	2.44 (1.29)	-0.931 (.352)	0.274
Health insurance	2.82 (1.29)	2.01 (1.24)	8.290 (.000)	0.257

N = 534 to 556

^aMean scores, ranging from 1 (no positive or negative feelings) to 4 ("extremely" positive or negative feelings), for each of the eight statements; standard deviations are in parentheses. Data are for heterosexual respondents only.

^bPaired sample t compares the means of positive and negative feelings on each statement.

^cMean ambivalence scores (see text), ranging from -0.5 to +4.0.

Table 2

Factor Analysis of Ambivalence Scores

	Factor 1 <u>Adult Roles</u>	Factor 2 <u>Children/Families</u>
Teach school	.37	.53
Legal marriage	-.06	.81
Serve in military	.59	.35
Adopt children	.31	.72
Privacy of own homes	.78	.05
Job discrimination	.76	.15
Boy Scouts	.29	.54
Health insurance	.62	.27
Eigenvalue	3.164	1.038
Percent variance explained	39.5	13.0

N = 471

Note: Table entries are loadings based on a principal components factor analysis, varimax rotation (and listwise deletion of missing data). Loadings above .5 are shown in bold. Data are for heterosexual respondents only.

Table 3

A Model of Ambivalence: Adult Roles

<u>Values</u>	<u>Model 1</u>			<u>Model 2</u>		
	<u>b</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>sig.</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>sig.</u>
Egalitarianism	-0.230	0.092	.012	-0.141	0.076	.063
Traditional Marriage Roles	-0.186	0.076	.015	-0.217	0.086	.012
Traditional Lifestyles	0.005	0.094	.957	0.078	0.087	.373
Individualism	-0.105	0.053	.048	-0.127	0.074	.087
<u>Value Conflict</u>						
Egalitarianism/Traditional Lifestyles	0.170	0.078	.030	n/a	n/a	n/a
Individualism/Traditional Marriage Roles	0.124	0.067	.064	n/a	n/a	n/a
Egalitarianism/Traditional Marriage Roles	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.124	0.073	.090
Individualism/Traditional Lifestyles	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.078	0.073	.282
<u>Controls</u>						
Age (Older)	0.002	0.005	.648	0.002	0.005	.710
Education (Better Educated)	0.011	0.030	.722	0.007	0.029	.800
Gender (Female)	-0.214	0.158	.176	-0.235	0.158	.137
Religious Attendance (Frequent)	0.058	0.087	.507	0.049	0.087	.574
Religious Guidance (Strong)	-0.029	0.081	.719	-0.014	0.080	.859
Attitudes about Homosexuality (Positive)	-0.339	0.076	.000	-0.340	0.076	.000
Know Someone Gay (Yes)	0.183	0.203	.368	0.158	0.203	.436
Born That Way (Yes)	-0.001	0.095	.993	0.025	0.095	.792
-2 log likelihood =	3044.24			3048.28		
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ² =	.11			.10		
Number of cases =	568			568		

Note: Table entries are ordered logit coefficients, standard errors, and significance levels for heterosexual respondents only. Threshold levels are not shown. The meaning of high scores on control variables is in parentheses.

Table 4

A Model of Ambivalence: Children and Families

<u>Values</u>	<u>Model 1</u>			<u>Model 2</u>		
	<u>b</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>sig.</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>sig.</u>
Egalitarianism	-0.287	0.089	.001	-0.140	0.075	.061
Traditional Marriage Roles	-0.240	0.076	.002	-0.255	0.086	.003
Traditional Lifestyles	-0.128	0.094	.173	0.023	0.086	.793
Individualism	-0.161	0.052	.002	-0.160	0.071	.025
<u>Value Conflict</u>						
Egalitarianism/Traditional Lifestyles	0.291	0.078	.000	n/a	n/a	n/a
Individualism/Traditional Marriage Roles	0.227	0.067	.001	n/a	n/a	n/a
Egalitarianism/Traditional Marriage Roles	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.185	0.073	.012
Individualism/Traditional Lifestyles	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.094	0.071	.186
<u>Controls</u>						
Age (Older)	-0.009	0.005	.041	-0.010	0.005	.022
Education (Better Educated)	-0.003	0.029	.913	-0.009	0.029	.750
Gender (Female)	-0.180	0.157	.250	-0.180	0.156	.249
Religious Attendance (Frequent)	0.023	0.086	.786	0.003	0.086	.976
Religious Guidance (Strong)	-0.143	0.080	.073	-0.114	0.079	.150
Attitudes about Homosexuality (Positive)	-0.047	0.075	.527	-0.044	0.074	.555
Know Someone Gay (Yes)	0.236	0.203	.244	0.191	0.202	.345
Born That Way (Yes)	0.148	0.095	.117	0.185	0.095	.051
-2 log likelihood =	3111.20			3128.02		
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ² =	.08			.05		
Number of cases =	568			568		

Note: Table entries are ordered logit coefficients, standard errors, and significance levels for heterosexual respondents only. Threshold levels are not shown. The meaning of high scores on control variables is in parentheses.

Table 5

Ambivalence as a Mediating Variable

	<u>Jeb Bush Job Approval</u>			<u>State Legislature Job Approval</u>		
	<u>b</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>sig.</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>s.e.</u>	<u>sig.</u>
State: Wrong Direction	-2.208	0.202	.000	-1.733	0.188	.000
State: Mixed	-1.063	0.235	.000	-0.932	0.221	.000
State: Right Direction (omitted)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Strong Democrat	-2.354	0.323	.000	-0.386	0.261	.139
Weak Democrat	-2.219	0.338	.000	-0.224	0.280	.424
Leaning Democrat	-2.292	0.344	.000	-0.417	0.286	.145
Independent	-1.791	0.335	.000	-0.326	0.273	.232
Leaning Republican	-1.292	0.369	.000	-0.211	0.300	.483
Weak Republican	-1.498	0.341	.000	-0.200	0.275	.467
Strong Republican (omitted)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Opinion on Gay Rights	0.537	0.180	.003	0.269	0.164	.100
Ambivalence (Adult Roles)	0.590	0.336	.080	0.665	0.318	.036
Ambivalence * Gay Rights	-0.403	0.205	.050	-0.337	0.192	.079
-2 log likelihood =		1067.55			1303.82	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ² =		.41			.21	
Number of cases =		568			568	

Note: Table entries are ordered logit coefficients, standard errors, and significance levels for heterosexual respondents only. Threshold levels are not shown in either model.