

Chapter 3

What Happens When We Simultaneously Want Opposite Things? Ambivalence about Social Welfare

Jason Gainous and Michael D. Martinez

Since the New Deal, issues relating to social welfare policy have created a divide in the United States. This divide has been a defining characteristic of party politics at both the elite (Sinclair 1978; Barrett and Cook 1991; Ansolabehere *et al.* 2001) and mass levels (Berelson *et al.* 1954; Campbell *et al.* 1960; more recently, see Green *et al.* 2002; Stonecash 2000; Layman and Carsey 2002) for over seven decades. It has been suggested, however, that many Americans are internally torn between the contending sides of governmental activism versus governmental restraint especially with regard to spending programs that provide benefits to individual citizens, disadvantaged or otherwise (Cantril and Cantril 1999; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Hodson *et al.* 2001). The present study takes a closer look at this *ambivalence*, which is said to exist whenever someone simultaneously possesses both positive and negative evaluations of an attitude object (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992; Eagly and Chaiken 1993).

Our focus is primarily on the question of why certain kinds of people tend to be more ambivalent than others about social welfare policy. Employing a measurement approach adapted from experimental work for use in large-sample surveys (Craig *et al.* 2002, 2005b), we assess the level of ambivalence about social welfare issues that is present in the mass public and argue that variations across individuals are shaped, in part, by the conflict that exists among a person's *core values*, the *relative salience* of the values that are potentially in conflict, and the person's *underlying preferences* (liberal or conservative) in that policy area. In the remaining sections of

this chapter, we will (1) review the existing literature on ambivalence about social welfare policy; (2) discuss the roles of value conflict, the personal importance of values, and issue positions as potential sources of ambivalence; and (3) test an empirical model of these sources based on a statewide survey of registered voters in Florida.

Political Attitudes and Ambivalence about Social Welfare

Although the simplest way to think about and measure people's attitudes is on a bipolar continuum that ranges from positive to negative, with a neutral point in between (Thurstone 1928; Thurstone and Chave 1929; Eagly and Chaiken 1993), there is growing evidence that many people are in fact ambivalent about a broad range of attitude objects, both political and otherwise. Social psychologists (e.g., Abelson *et al.* 1982; Thompson *et al.* 1995; Priester and Petty 1996; Armitage and Conner 2000; Newby-Clark *et al.* 2002; Conner *et al.* 2002), political scientists (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Zaller 1992; Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Lavine 2001; Steenbergen and Brewer 2000; Craig *et al.* 2002, 2005b; Haddock 2003; McGraw *et al.* 2003; Craig and Martinez 2005), and scholars in other disciplines (Sparks *et al.* 2001; Jewell 2003; Cunningham *et al.* 2003; van der Maas *et al.* 2003) have increasingly embraced the idea that attitudes are a product of a range of potentially conflicting considerations.

As for ambivalence relating to issues of social welfare policy, the evidence is mixed. Whereas some assert that many Americans are ambivalent (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Cantril and Cantril 1999; Hodson *et al.* 2001), others counter that conflicting attitudes about social welfare are not very prevalent among the general public (Steenbergen and Brewer 2000; Jacoby 2005). The data presented below are clearly at odds with the "not-so-ambivalent" position,

suggesting instead that conflict within this important policy domain is fairly common. It is our contention that conclusions drawn on both sides of the argument have typically been based on data that have serious limitations and, as a result, further examination (and a fresh approach) is needed.

Let us begin with Cantril and Cantril (1999; also see Free and Cantril 1967), who concluded that there is a substantial amount of ambivalence within the American public on social welfare issues. Unfortunately, their empirical evidence is not entirely convincing. Lacking direct measures of ambivalence (in a 1996 *New York Times*/CBS News opinion survey), the authors simply *assumed* that ambivalence is present whenever an individual expresses inconsistent opinions about the size of government on the one hand, and spending for social programs on the other, that is, when s/he expresses support for both smaller government and higher spending, or vice versa. Ambivalence, though, is properly defined as the condition of simultaneously possessing both positive and negative evaluations of an attitude object (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Albertson *et al.* 2005). That being the case, the patterns described by Cantril and Cantril may not signify ambivalence at all because having *inconsistent* positions about government size and government spending is not the same as having *conflicting* positive and negative evaluations regarding a *single object*. While the issues of size and spending are obviously related, there is evidence indicating that attitudes about the former tend to structure attitudes about the latter (Zaller and Feldman 1992; Goren 2001); the implication, then, is that the two are conceptually distinct from one another.

Jacoby (2005) also has questioned the work of Cantril and Cantril, but for different reasons. He argued that the seemingly contradictory (or inconsistent) attitudes identified in that

study are not a product of ambivalence, but rather they represent distinctions made by citizens between different types of government spending. His analysis proceeded in three stages. First, using data from the 1992 American National Election Study (NES), Jacoby was initially able to replicate the Cantril-Cantril results reasonably closely. Second, however, he demonstrated that people tend to evaluate government spending based upon whether it involves traditional (and sometimes controversial) "welfare-based" assistance programs (e.g., helping the homeless or poor people, child care, food stamps, aid to big cities or to blacks) or other categories of spending that are very popular and therefore constitute something close to valence issues (e.g., helping college students, protecting the environment, social security, AIDS research). Finally, Jacoby created scales to represent these dimensions and regressed respondents' attitudes about the size and power of government¹ on each. He reasoned that ambivalence would be a plausible explanation if beliefs about government size were found to exert a weak impact on spending preferences; instead, he found a strong positive relationship, even when controlling for a number of other theoretically relevant variables. Thus, he concluded that ambivalence about social welfare policy is not widespread in the United States.

Other patterns of survey response offer support for Jacoby's argument. Most notably, research indicates that some people express opinions in favor of both decreasing government size and increasing government services when the questions are asked separately (Free and Cantril 1967; Sears and Citrin 1985); there is, however, a tendency for this contradiction to dissipate when respondents are made aware of the inherent trade-off (Welch 1985), which suggests that it may not be indicative of genuine ambivalence. By the same token, the presence of consistencies between attitudes about government size and government spending preferences do not

necessarily signify the *absence* of ambivalence. An individual may, for example, believe that government spending should be limited and that services should be reduced, and yet this tells us nothing about the ambivalence that s/he may feel regarding food stamps or any other specific government program. Omnibus surveys (such as the National Election Study and the General Social Survey) simply do not include indicators of social welfare attitudes that gauge simultaneous positive and negative evaluations of the relevant attitude objects. As a result, scholars who use these data to examine ambivalence end up focusing their attention more on some of the potential *sources* of ambivalence (e.g., value conflict, group affect) than on the actual phenomenon of interest.

The problem is evident again with Steenbergen and Brewer (2000), whose examination of the 1992 NES led them to conclude that the American public is "not-so" ambivalent about social welfare. As with Jacoby, however, a better description of their findings is that the potential sources of social welfare ambivalence (and perhaps ambivalence in other issue domains as well) are "not-so" prevalent. According to Steenbergen and Brewer, studies that assume ambivalence and value conflict to be synonymous are defining ambivalence too narrowly and, consequently, overlooking other types of conflict such as that which may involve a clash between cognition and affect. By including both cognitive-cognitive (value vs. value) and cognitive-affective (value vs. group affect) conflict in their analysis, these authors attempted to give ambivalence the benefit of the doubt; in the end, they found little evidence of conflict and assumed low levels of ambivalence. To repeat: Conflict involving two separate attitude objects is *not* ambivalence; it is a potential (though not the only potential) source of ambivalence. As a result, showing that conflict is low is not the same thing as showing that ambivalence is low. People who experience

conflict may or may not experience ambivalence.

Feldman and Zaller (1992) found not only that ambivalence about social welfare is fairly common, but also that there are certain patterns of ambivalence among the mass public. Specifically, liberals are more likely than conservatives to be ambivalent because, according to Feldman and Zaller, the former experience a greater degree of value conflict: Whereas equality and individualism are of roughly equal importance for liberals, conservatives tend to place more emphasis on individualism; thus, individualism usually trumps egalitarianism for conservatives, while it is fair fight between the two values among liberals – a fight that supposedly leads to higher levels of ambivalence about social welfare. However, evidence from a number of studies raises questions about key aspects of the Feldman-Zaller argument. Women and blacks, for example, generally support social welfare programs in disproportionate numbers (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999; Goren 2001; Gilens 1988, 1995; Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Tate 1994; Kinder and Winter 2001), but the relative importance of equality and individualism do *not* appear to be roughly equivalent among women and blacks, as Zaller and Feldman might lead us to expect (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Feather 2004; also see Jacoby 2002).

It is possible that Feldman and Zaller's findings are to some extent a function of the indicators they employed. They measured ambivalence by counting the number of conflicting considerations (e.g., a mix of liberal and conservative comments), spontaneous statements of ambivalence (e.g., "I see merit in both sides"), and two-sided remarks (e.g., "People should try to get ahead on their own, but government should help when necessary") that were offered in response to open-ended probes in the 1987 NES Pilot Study.² The problem is that any or all of these comments might be offered without ambivalence necessarily being present. For example,

research suggests that many African Americans would probably agree with the statement, "Although I think people are responsible for their financial conditions, I nevertheless support social welfare" (see Kinder and Sanders 1996). Under the coding scheme employed by Feldman and Zaller, black respondents who make such a statement would be categorized as ambivalent when in fact they may not be – especially if those respondents happen to place a higher priority on egalitarian values than on individualist values.

In sum, the existing literature does not provide a definitive answer either way regarding the prevalence of ambivalence about social welfare issues. Further, because of the limitations of the data used by those on both sides of the debate, it is unclear what kinds of people are likely to be ambivalent and what kinds of people are not. The remainder of this chapter provides a fresh approach to the measurement of social welfare ambivalence, and an exploration of its potential causes.

The Potential Sources of Ambivalence:

Value Conflict, Value Importance, and Policy Preferences

As is evident from our brief review, discussions about the prevalence of ambivalence and its sources are often conflated. Some observers presume that where they think they see ambivalence, there must be value conflict, while others suggest that where there is value conflict, there must be ambivalence. As we shall see, value conflict is an important part of the story of ambivalence, but it is hardly the whole story.

Core Values and Attitudes about Social Welfare

People possess a range of core values that help to structure their attitudes toward specific objects (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz and Bilsky 1987; Schwartz 1992; see Feldman 2003 for a review). As in chapter 4, core values are defined here as "overarching normative principles and belief assumptions about government, citizenship, and American society" (McCann 1997: 565), including, for example, egalitarianism, individualism, and moral traditionalism. These principles and assumptions facilitate position taking in more concrete domains by serving as general focal points in an otherwise confusing political environment (Jacoby 2002). Accordingly, prior research has shown that values such as egalitarianism (Feldman 1988; Feldman and Zaller 1992; McCann 1997; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Goren 2001; also see Gilens 1995) and economic individualism (Feldman 1988; Feldman and Zaller 1992; McCann 1997; Goren 2001; also see Gilens 1995) are related to citizens' attitudes about social welfare.³ Although different studies may conceptualize, operationalize, and label the values in different ways, there is broad agreement that greater individualism is associated with less support, and greater egalitarianism with higher support, for social welfare programs and spending.

Value Conflict and Value Importance

What happens when a person possesses both individualist *and* egalitarian values? One might assume that conflict such as this will result in ambivalence and, indeed, value conflict is the most often mentioned source of ambivalence in the literature (Katz and Hass 1988; Katz *et al.* 1996; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Craig *et al.* 2002, 2005b, and chapter 4 in this volume; Newby-Clark *et al.* 2005). Yet even if the assumption here is correct, it is possible that *value hierarchies* (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992; Jacoby 2002) exist and are

structured in ways that sometimes serve to reduce the likelihood of ambivalence occurring. If an individual places more importance on one value than another, and if an issue arises that happens to pit these values against each other, the conflict won't necessarily matter; simply, the preferred value will prevail and determine the person's response to the issue in question. Jacoby (2002) presents evidence suggesting that most citizens can, in fact, place their values in some rank order of importance, that is, they infrequently place equal importance on values of equality and liberty, among others. Thus, if conflict between egalitarianism and individualism is *potentially* a source of ambivalence about social welfare policy, we nevertheless should expect lower levels of ambivalence among people who consider one of those two values to be much more important than the other.

Policy Preferences

Previous research has suggested that the probability of an individual feeling ambivalent about a policy issue may be related to the person's position on that issue. As noted earlier, Feldman and Zaller (1992) concluded that social welfare liberals, who tend to place a high value on both egalitarianism and individualism, are more prone to ambivalence than conservatives. The doubts that we have raised about this finding notwithstanding, there are issues on which policy preference are related to ambivalence. Pro-life voters, for example, tend to be more ambivalent about whether abortion should be legal under "traumatic" circumstances, while pro-choice voters are more ambivalent about the legality of "elective" abortions (Craig *et al.* 2002). Also, people with more positive views about homosexuality in general are less ambivalent about gay rights on issues that do *not* directly involve children or marriage (Craig *et al.* 2005b).

Putting all of these various ideas together, the following analysis tests a model of social welfare ambivalence that examines the impact of *value conflict*, *value importance*, and *policy preferences*. The argument is fairly straightforward: First, we expect to find more ambivalence about social welfare policy among those who hold conflicting individualist and egalitarian values. Next, as one value becomes more important relative to the other, the level of ambivalence should decline. Finally, liberal social welfare policy preferences are predicted to be negatively (not positively, as in the Feldman-Zaller study) associated with ambivalence about social welfare.

Data and Measurement

The present study is based on a telephone poll conducted from May 10-22, 2004 by the *Florida Voter* survey organization. Six hundred and seven respondents were chosen randomly from a list of all registered voters in the state of Florida; only those whose names were drawn from the list were actually interviewed. Up to four callbacks were attempted on all working numbers and initial refusals. The margin of error is plus or minus four percentage points. The survey itself included measures of values, value importance, social group membership, attitudes about social welfare, ambivalence about social welfare, and a variety of control variables.⁴

The dependent variable, *ambivalence about social welfare*, is measured using a method that was adapted from the experimental literature by Craig and his colleagues (2002, 2005b; also see chapter 4 in this volume). Respondents were asked to indicate *both* how positively *and* how negatively they viewed several aspects of social welfare policy, using batteries of questions that were introduced as follows:

"I'm now going to read you a series of *statements* about the kinds of things some people think the government should be doing to address certain problems that are facing the country. After each, I'd like you to rate the statement on a 4-point scale to indicate how *positively* you feel toward it. If you do not have any positive feelings, give it 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*. The first statement is. . . ."

The statements were then read and respondents were asked to rate each one separately. Then, following a number of filler questions, the introduction was repeated except with the words "positive" and "positively" replaced by "negative" and "negatively." If a person seemed unsure or confused at any point, interviewers were told to repeat the instructions as many times as necessary.

The specific aspects of social welfare policy (based on questions from the NES as well as recent news stories) that respondents were asked to evaluate are as follows: "The government should. . . ."

- ensure that every citizen has adequate medical insurance;
- provide programs to help homeless people find a place to live;
- ensure that every child has access to a good education;
- provide programs that improve the standard of living of poor Americans;
- see to it that everyone who wants a job has one;

- provide childcare programs to assist working parents;
- ensure that the retirement benefits that citizens have built up over the years are protected.

An index of *ambivalence about social welfare policy* was calculated using the algorithm developed by Thompson *et al.* (1995; also see Kaplan 1992).⁵ Specifically,

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

where P is the positive reaction score and N is the negative reaction score. The range of scores for each of the seven items described above is –0.5 through 4.0, with intervals of 0.5 (see Craig *et al.* 2002). A principal components factor analysis confirmed that all seven load on a single factor, and the reliability of an additive index constructed from them is very good ($\alpha = .860$).

To measure core values, respondents were read a series of companion statements and asked to say which came closer to their own opinion. For *individualism*,⁶ the item pairs were (1) the government should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living; or, the government should just let each person get ahead on their own; and (2) we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems; or, the free market can handle these problems without government being involved. For *egalitarianism*, the item pairs were (1) we have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country; or, we should do more to make sure that everyone is treated equally; and (2) if people were treated more equally in this country, we would have many fewer problems; or, this country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are. In all cases except the last, responses were coded from 1 (strong support for the first statement in the pair) to 5 (strong support for the second statement); for the second egalitarianism pair, this scoring was reversed to provide consistency in direction of wording. The

two sets of items were then combined into indices with scores ranging from 2 to 10 (high values reflecting stronger support for individualist or egalitarian values).⁷

A measure of *value conflict*, which captures the magnitude of the difference between them, was calculated using the same algorithm as the one described earlier for measuring social welfare ambivalence; that is,

$$\text{Value Conflict} = [\text{individualism} + \text{egalitarianism}] / 2 - |\text{individualism} - \text{egalitarianism}|$$

with higher values representing more conflict. *Value importance* is based on responses to two separate items, introduced as follows: "As you know, not everyone agrees on the different goals or values that our nation ought to pursue. I'm going to list three different goals and have you tell me how important each of them is to you personally." The importance of egalitarianism and individualism was then determined based on answers to a pair of questions:

- The first goal is *equality*, by which we mean a narrowing of the gap in wealth and power between rich and poor. How important is equality to you – extremely important, important, only somewhat important, or not important at all? . . .
- And the third goal is *a free marketplace*, by which we mean all citizens having a chance to get ahead on their own without the government getting involved. How important is a free marketplace to you – extremely important, important, only somewhat important, or not important at all?⁸

Responses were recoded to range from one to four, with higher values representing greater importance. In the aggregate, respondents regarded egalitarianism and individualism as being about equally salient; the mean score for egalitarianism is 3.00 (with a standard deviation of 0.90), and for individualism is 3.03 (with a standard deviation of 0.87). Thus, each value was

seen as important, but neither was universally acclaimed. At the individual level, the absence of a relationship between the two measures ($r = -.02$, $p = .61$) confirms our suspicions that they are tapping separate constructs.

In addition, the *relative* importance of one value as opposed to the other was calculated as the absolute value of individualism importance subtracted from egalitarianism importance; higher numbers on a scale of one to three indicate that one of these values has priority over the other for the individual. There is a moderate negative correlation ($r = -.30$, $p < .01$) between relative importance and the absolute level of importance attached to egalitarianism, and a slight negative relationship ($r = -.07$, $p = .08$) with individualism importance.

Two separate items are used to measure respondents' social welfare policy preferences. First, it has been suggested that attitudes about social welfare are shaped in part by one's perceptions of which groups gain most from the various programs; apart from the obvious (poor people), many citizens think of African Americans as being among the principal beneficiaries of governmental welfare policies (e.g., Sniderman *et al.* 1991; Cook and Barnett 1992; Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Gilens 1995; see also Jacoby 2005). Accordingly, *feelings about welfare beneficiaries* is measured by an additive index ($\alpha = .772$) based on answers to two questions tapping respondents' affect toward "poor people" and "blacks."⁹ Next, *general preferences on social welfare* were measured by asking respondents the following question:

Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Others feel it is important for the government to provide more services to citizens even if it means an increase in spending. Which of these positions is closer to your own views? [Do you feel

strongly or not so strongly about this?]

Answers were scored from 1 (strongly prefer fewer services and reduced spending) to 5 (strongly prefer more services even if it means higher taxes).¹⁰

We also include control variables for *race* (0 = nonblack, 1 = black) and *gender* (0 = male, 1 = female). The particular importance of social welfare issues in defining both the gender gap (Gilens 1988; Kaufman and Petrocik 1999; Goren 2001) and the racial cleavage (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Tate 1994; Gilens 1995; Kinder and Winter 2001) in American politics suggests the possibility that women and blacks might be, *ceteris paribus*, less ambivalent about social welfare policies than men and non-blacks, respectively.¹¹ In sum, the model we propose can be stated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Social welfare ambivalence} = & a + \beta_1 \text{ Value Conflict} + \beta_2 \text{ Egalitarianism Importance} \\ & + \beta_3 \text{ Individualism Importance} + \beta_4 \text{ Relative Importance of Values} + \beta_5 \text{ Feelings} \\ & \text{about Beneficiaries} + \beta_6 \text{ General Preferences on Services/Spending} + \beta_7 \text{ Female} + \beta_8 \\ & \text{Black} + e \end{aligned}$$

Results

The results shown in Table 3.1 suggest that, while there is some degree of variability in the levels of ambivalence observed across seven program areas that form the basis for the social welfare ambivalence index, these levels are far from trivial. For the sample as a whole, mean scores are higher on policies that would assist the homeless, improve the standard of living of poor Americans, ensure full employment, and provide childcare programs to assist working parents; on each of these issues, more than half of the Florida sample have ambivalence scores

greater than zero. Ambivalence is less common with regard to universal medical insurance, programs to ensure that all children receive a good education, and protecting retirement benefits. Overall, despite the variation that is evident here, a single seven-item social welfare ambivalence index scales well (see above) and will be used as the dependent variable for the remainder of this analysis.

Table 3.1 about here

Table 3.2 displays the bivariate correlations (τ_b) between each of the independent variables and the social welfare ambivalence index. As expected, value conflict is positively correlated with ambivalence in this important policy area; in other words, to the degree that an individual simultaneously supports both egalitarianism and individualism, the more likely that person is to express ambivalence about social welfare. The effects of value importance also are evident in Table 3.2: As egalitarianism and individualism increase in importance for respondents, ambivalence tends to decrease. Relative importance of the two values has no significant zero-order relationship with ambivalence but, as we shall see, this result changes in the more fully specified model presented below. The correlations here also indicate that blacks are less ambivalent than non-blacks, women are less ambivalent than men, and ambivalence is lower among those respondents (1) who express more positive sentiments toward potential welfare beneficiaries, and (2) with more favorable general dispositions to support social welfare.

Table 3.2 about here

As the ambivalence index is best seen as an ordinal variable, we employed an ordered logit procedure to estimate the multivariate model. Table 3.3 shows that there are multiple sources of ambivalence about social welfare policy among respondents in our sample. Much of

the existing literature focuses on the relevance of value conflict as a precursor to ambivalence, and that is borne out in these findings. The positive and significant coefficient on the value conflict variable indicates that people who expressed higher levels of both individualism *and* egalitarianism also exhibited higher levels of ambivalence, *ceteris paribus*. That is hardly surprising, of course, in light of previous research on ambivalence in other policy areas (including abortion, gay rights, and race).

Table 3.3 about here

We also see from Table 3.3 that value importance accounts for a portion of the variation in social welfare ambivalence: Respondents who regarded either egalitarianism or individualism (or both) as important were less likely to be ambivalent, which suggests that a person's core values can sometimes block out conflicting feelings about social welfare. This is especially so among those who score high in relative importance (rating one of the values above the other); that is, a larger *difference* between the importance attached to individualism and egalitarianism is negatively and significantly associated with ambivalence, even when controlling for the levels of importance accorded to the values themselves. Thus, while value conflict normally tends to heighten ambivalence, ambivalence becomes less likely to occur when one value is held more dearly than the other.

Ambivalence also is asymmetric with respect to policy preferences. The significant and negative coefficients in rows 5 and 6 of the table indicate that respondents who are more supportive of higher levels of government services and spending, as well as those who feel more warmly about the likely beneficiaries of welfare programs, tend to be less ambivalent about social welfare policy as a whole. Since ambivalence is related to attitudinal pliability (e.g., Craig

et al. 2005a), this finding has the important political implication that conservatives may be more likely than liberals to be "talked out of" their general opposition to social welfare in specific circumstances and conditions. Whereas Feldman and Zaller (1992) maintained that social welfare liberals are more conflicted than conservatives, hence more ambivalent, these results suggest that (controlling for value importance and value conflict), liberals actually are *less* torn between the pros and cons of social welfare policy.

Finally, gender is not significant but the coefficient for race indicates that black respondents tend to be significantly less ambivalent than non-blacks, *ceteris paribus*. Preliminary analyses showed that women were less ambivalent about social welfare than men (4.11 and 5.44, respectively, on the index, $p(t) = .02$), but the trivial logit coefficient in the multivariate model demonstrates that this difference is accounted for by value conflict, value importance, feelings toward beneficiaries, and attitudes about government services and spending. The same is not true for race, as the black coefficient remains negative and significant in the multivariate model. This result may reflect the impact of cultural factors, with the longstanding support of blacks, in the aggregate, for social welfare programs having perhaps become a part of their political identity. While the data employed here do not permit a test of that argument, the pattern for blacks raises further questions about the assertion that liberals are more ambivalent about social welfare than conservatives.

Conclusion

Questions about the appropriate breadth of the social safety net, which have helped to define political cleavages in the United States since at least the New Deal realignment, remain

difficult ones even today. The American creed respects the worth and liberty of the individual, as well as beliefs in equality of opportunity and compassion for people who have been deprived of opportunities by fates not under their own control. In the polity and society as a whole, the clash of those values is played out again and again through political battles in campaigns, the media, legislatures, bureaucracies, and the courts. Individual citizens, as well, often struggle to reconcile how (and whether) their underlying values relate to current manifestations of the policy debates about the social safety net.

In this chapter, we began by arguing that a fresh approach is needed to measuring ambivalence about social welfare. Some scholars, including those who have wrongly inferred the existence of ambivalence from observations of value conflict, maintain that it is fairly common; others, using indicators that are equally indirect, disagree. An accurate assessment requires some approach to capturing ambivalence that is separate from its hypothesized antecedents and consequences. The measure employed here, adapted from previous work in social psychology and political science (Craig *et al.* 2002, 2005b), suggests that a sizable chunk of the American public is, in fact, ambivalent to some degree about social welfare.

The findings also indicate that ambivalence about social welfare is multifaceted. Previous literature has focused on value conflict as a precursor of ambivalence, and that conclusion is supported in the analysis presented here. Other attributes of values and attitudes, however, also underlay ambivalence for some individuals. Specifically, the felt importance of values (both absolute and relative), as well as a person's policy preferences, shape ambivalence in ways that have interesting theoretical and political implications. It may therefore be fruitful to consider whether and how various aspects of value hierarchies or attitude structure affect ambivalence on

public policy issues.

Finally, while the evidence indicates that liberals are less ambivalent about social welfare than conservatives, and blacks are less ambivalent than non-blacks, the reason(s) for these differences are not entirely clear. Further exploration into value differences across groups is needed in order to more fully understand why some kinds of people are more ambivalent than others. For now, though, we have clear evidence that many citizens have conflicting views about one of the central cleavages in contemporary American politics.

Notes

1. This measure was a three-item index tapping people's beliefs about whether (a) government should be more or less active; (b) today's complex economic problems should be left to the free market or handled by a strong government; and (c) government has grown because our problems are bigger or because it has become involved in things that people should do for themselves. See Jacoby (2005).

2. The probes ("what ideas come to mind. . . ?") were asked in conjunction with standard forced-choice questions relating to job guarantees, aid to blacks, and government services and spending.

3. Feldman and Steenbergen (2001) contend that "humanitarianism" also is important as a predictor of citizens' attitudes about social welfare.

4. Additional information can be obtained from the author, or from *Florida Voter* directly (954-584-0204). In order to avoid an unacceptable loss of cases in our analysis, 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. The imputed dataset was based on the mean values from five replicate datasets created by MICE.

5. This model is derived from a version of the semantic differential (Osgood *et al.* 1957), as modified by Kaplan (1972) in an effort to show that people's overall attitudes are made up of both positive and negative elements. Thompson and her colleagues (1995) adjusted the model to better account for the presence of polarized beliefs. See Craig *et al.* (2002) for a more complete

discussion of this measure as employed in a large-sample survey.

6. These questions were designed to tap support for *economic* individualism, or a belief in the freedom to accumulate wealth. Scholars with a different substantive focus might prefer to measure individualism differently, for example, conceptualizing it in terms of a belief in freedom of expression.

7. Correlations (Pearson's r) are .180, $p < .001$ for the two individualism pairs and .244, $p < .001$ for the two egalitarianism pairs. The stronger relationships that are typically found when similar items are presented individually to respondents rather than as pairwise comparisons (e.g., see Goren 2001) may be, to some degree, a product of the response set problem that often plagues agree-disagree questions.

8. The survey included a measure of the salience of traditional moral values, which was asked in between these two questions.

9. These particular items were drawn from a battery of questions (using the same format as that employed for measuring ambivalence) asking respondents to state how positively (and how negatively, though the latter is not examined here) they felt about a number of social and political groups; as before, scores range from 1 (no positive feelings) to 4 (extremely positive feelings). While poor people and blacks are obviously not the same thing, empirical results both here and elsewhere (e.g., Goren 2001) reveal a strong pattern of covariation in how people feel about the two groups.

10. This item was part of an experiment in which half the sample was asked the question with one additional option ("or are you torn between the two?") added at the end. People were naturally more likely to select a "mixed" response that was presented to them (24.0 percent said

they were torn) than to volunteer one on their own (12.5 percent). Both groups are combined for purposes of the analysis here. In addition, we added a dummy variable for question form, as well as an interaction between that dummy and scores on the services/spending item, to the multivariate analysis presented below. The coefficients for both the form dummy and the interaction term were trivial, and their inclusion had no substantive effects on the interpretation of the remaining coefficients. For the sake of parsimony, those variables are therefore omitted from the model as reported in Table 3.3.

11. Since Latinos in the aggregate are more liberal, at least on certain issues, than whites (Welch and Sigelman 1993; DeSipio 1996; Uhlaner *et al.* 2000; Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; also see de la Garza *et al.* 1996), we might normally expect their level of social welfare ambivalence to be similar to that found among blacks and women. Unfortunately, this proposition cannot be tested because the race indicator used here does not make distinctions among different groups of Latino citizens. In particular, we know that Cubans tend to be more conservative than other Latinos (especially Puerto Ricans, but also Mexicans; see de la Garza *et al.* 1992) and there is a large Cuban population in Florida. As a result, it is not surprising to learn that the Latinos in the *Florida Voter* survey do not, on average, differ significantly from whites in terms of the variables that are most critical to our analysis.

Table 3.1

Frequency and Intensity of Ambivalence about Social Welfare

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Percent Ambivalent</u>
Medical Insurance	0.41	1.32	35.4%
Homeless	0.95	1.27	61.4%
Education	0.31	1.40	27.3%
Standard of Living	0.97	1.26	61.4%
Job Guarantee	0.89	1.36	56.5%
Child Care	0.76	1.29	52.6%
Retirement Benefits	0.36	1.46	28.0%
Ambivalence Index	4.65	6.90	48.3%

Number of Cases = 607

Note: Data are from a *Florida Voter* survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries indicate the (a) mean ambivalence score for each item (scores ranging from -0.5 to +4.0), and for the combined scale (scores from -3.5 to +28.0); (b) associated standard deviation; and (c) percentage of respondents with scores greater than zero for a given item. The 48.3 percent listed at the bottom of column three is the mean percentage who are ambivalent across the seven items.

Table 3.2

Correlations between Independent Variables and Social Welfare Ambivalence

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Tau_b</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Value Conflict	0.15	0.00
Egalitarianism Importance	-0.19	0.00
Individualism Importance	-0.13	0.00
Relative Importance	-0.02	0.72
Feelings about Beneficiaries	-0.20	0.00
General Preferences about Social Welfare: Services/Spending	-0.11	0.24
Gender (female)	-0.07	0.03
Race (black)	-0.15	0.00
Number of Cases	607	

Note: Data are from a *Florida Voter* survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Social welfare ambivalence is measured using the seven-item index described in the text. The meaning of high scores on race and gender variables is shown in parentheses.

Table 3.3

Multivariate Model of Social Welfare Ambivalence

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Confidence Intervals (95%)</u>	
Value Conflict	0.13	0.02	0.08	0.17
Egalitarianism Importance	-0.35	0.09	-0.52	-0.18
Individualism Importance	-0.44	0.09	-0.61	-0.28
Relative Importance	-0.25	0.09	-0.41	-0.08
Feelings about Beneficiaries	-0.19	0.05	-0.28	-0.09
General Preferences about Social Welfare: Services/Spending	-0.15	0.05	-0.25	-0.05
Gender (female)	-0.18	0.15	-0.46	0.11
Race (black)	-0.95	0.26	-1.47	-0.43
-2 log likelihood	4,290.997			
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ²	0.191			
Number of Cases	607			

Note: Data are from a *Florida Voter* survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries are ordered logit coefficients, associated standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals; threshold levels are not shown. The meaning of high scores on race and gender variables is shown in parentheses.