

Chapter 4

Ambivalence and Value Conflict: A Test of Two Issues

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The essays in this volume and its companion, *Ambivalence and the Structure of Political Opinion* (Craig and Martinez 2005), add to a growing literature on the frequency, nature, and consequences of ambivalence in public opinion. It now seems clear, for example, that considerable proportions of the population do not necessarily possess a single "true" attitude on many political issues, but rather a store of multiple and sometimes conflicting attitudes that they might draw upon at any given time (Zaller and Feldman 1992; also see Tesser 1978; Hochschild 1981; Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988; Zaller 1992; Schwartz and Bless 1992; Wilson and Hodges 1992; Hill and Kriesi 2001). While scholars have collectively explored the existence of ambivalence across a number of policy domains (e.g., Alvarez and Brehm 1995, 1997; Craig *et al.* 2002, 2005b; Jacoby 2005), its source has yet to be conclusively identified. Theory contends that the principal underlying source of attitudinal ambivalence is value conflict (Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Zaller 1992; Katz and Hass 1988), but that conclusion is more often assumed or inferred than empirically demonstrated at the individual level. In this chapter, we focus on the issues of abortion and gay rights, offering evidence in support of the argument that ambivalence is indeed rooted in the clash of core values.

Why abortion and gay rights? Both seem to be quintessentially "easy" issues, as defined by Carmines and Stimson (1980; also see Legee *et al.* 2002): They are highly symbolic, have been on the public agenda for decades, and are frequently discussed in terms of "policy ends" rather than as means toward achieving a policy objective. In the years since the 1973 Supreme

Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion has polarized a sizable portion of the voting public (Abramowitz 1997) and appeared at times to turn elections, from school board to Congress, into referendums on abortion alone. For activists, the stakes are especially high. On one side, there is talk of genocide being waged against unborn children; on the other, the issue is framed in terms of maintaining personal freedoms that it took women decades (and considerable effort) to achieve.

Much the same thing can be said about gay rights, especially in the years since the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City prompted many gays and lesbians to come out of the closet politically. This development, in turn, encouraged the Christian Right to mobilize against what they perceived as an emerging "gay agenda." Whereas gays and lesbians have portrayed their cause as a quest for equality, linked to similar struggles by other underrepresented groups, much of the opposition is rooted in traditionalism and the defense of social institutions that once supported the traditional family (D'Emilio 2000, Green 2000).

Activists on both sides of these issues are generally portrayed as having strong, consistent, and relatively extreme opinions. In contrast, surveys indicate that at least a plurality of Americans hold centrist or "situationalist" views on abortion (Bardes and Oldendick 2003: 190-192), and that public attitudes toward gay rights have grown noticeably more tolerant in recent years (Wilcox and Wolpert 2000).¹ In the analysis presented here, we will show that many citizens are ambivalent about each of these controversial issues and, further, that such ambivalence is rooted in value conflict. Based on these findings, it is our contention that neither the nature nor the political relevance of public opinion regarding abortion and gay rights can be fully understood without taking ambivalence into account.

The Concept of Ambivalence

Researchers traditionally have assumed that attitudes can be measured as if they lie somewhere along a bipolar continuum that ranges from positive (or favorable) to negative (or unfavorable), with a neutral point in between (Thurstone 1928; Thurstone and Chave 1929; see Eagly and Chaiken 1993 for a review). This unidimensional view conforms to our intuitive sense that people tend to think in bipolar terms about most things. When they watch a movie or eat a meal, they usually classify it as either "good" or "bad" (or, representing the continuum and its neutral point, as "so-so"); and in the political realm, candidates and elected officials are often described ideologically as being either "liberal," "conservative," or "middle-of-the-road."

On the surface, describing something as both good *and* bad, or a candidate as both liberal *and* conservative, seems counterintuitive. Yet in real life we can, and do, evaluate objects as if they contained separate components. Politicians, for example, are seen as being liberal on some issues but conservative on others (Abelson *et al.* 1982), with the summation of these perceptions presumably telling us whether they fall, overall, into one category or the other. Feldman (1995: 266) described this process as the "distributions of considerations" and argued that an opinion expressed in response to a survey question provides only an estimate of the central tendency of an individual's attitudes or beliefs on that subject.

When someone's evaluations or beliefs about an attitude object are in conflict, we describe that person as being *ambivalent*. The concept of ambivalence is not new (e.g., Kaplan 1972; Scott 1969), especially to social psychologists who on numerous occasions have used experimental data to demonstrate empirically the existence of an ambivalence dimension based

on the assumption that attitudes can indeed contain separate positive and negative components (see Newby-Clark *et al.* 2002; Hodson *et al.* 2001; Armitage and Connor 2000; Jonas *et al.* 1997; Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson *et al.* 1995; Cacioppo and Berntson 1994; Katz *et al.* 1986; Klopfer and Madden 1980). The chapters in this volume highlight the greater attention that political scientists and survey researchers have paid to ambivalence in recent years (see Craig and Martinez 2005; McGraw *et al.* 2003; Craig *et al.* 2002; Frankovic and McDermott 2001; Lavine 2001; Meffert *et al.* 2000; Cantril and Cantril 1999; Alvarez and Brehm 1995; Feldman and Zaller 1992). Nevertheless, neither social psychologists nor political scientists have offered clear empirical evidence of the origins of attitudinal ambivalence.

The Origins of Ambivalence

Why are some people ambivalent and others are 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. Values are "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, Peffley and his colleagues (2001) assumed that value conflict and ambivalence are interchangeable terms yet failed to demonstrate an actual link

between the two using either objective or subjective measures of ambivalence. Using a very different approach, Alvarez and Brehm (1995; also see Albertson *et al.* 2005) inferred the presence of ambivalence in citizens' attitudes about abortion from patterns of error variance in heteroskedastic probit models of binary choice. However, their interpretation rests on an inference about an individual level attribute (ambivalence) from aggregate-level data (error variance), and they *define* the existence of ambivalence as error variance that is correlated with the coincidence of conflicting values. Thus, although Alvarez and Brehm can compare the level of ambivalence in the general public across issues, the relationship between ambivalence on any given issue and value conflict is assumed rather than tested directly at the individual level.

Several studies have reported a relationship between such core values as authoritarianism, moral traditionalism, and individualism on the one hand, and citizens' attitudes on either abortion or gay rights on the other (Brewer 2003; Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Whitley and Lee 2000; Lewis and Rogers 1999; Luker 1984; Schnell 1993; Domke *et al.* 1998; Zucker 1999). It is widely assumed, for example, that the current mix of supportive (civil rights and liberties) and nonsupportive (morality) 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 these 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 regarding the origins of ambivalence that are tested in the following analysis.

Data and Methodology

The present study is based on three telephone polls of Florida residents conducted by the *Florida Voter* survey organization. All three designs were cross-sectional statewide surveys. Two of these (March 1998, N = 608; January/February 1999, N = 708) focused on abortion attitudes, while the third (June 2002, N = 601) examined attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights. Both sampling frame (registered voters in 1998-1999, adult residents aged eighteen and over in 2002) and selection procedure (random-digit dialing in 1998 and 2002, random selection from voter registration rolls in 1999) varied somewhat across the three surveys.² Despite this, however, the overall similarity of our results for 1998 and 1999, and of the social and political composition of the samples in all years, gives us confidence that we are dealing with three essentially equivalent groups.

We employ a measure of ambivalence that is modeled on experimental work by social psychologists and adapted for use in large-sample surveys (see Craig *et al.* 2002, 2005b).³ Respondents were asked to indicate *both* how positively *and* how negatively they viewed several aspects of the abortion and gay rights issues, using batteries of questions that were introduced as follows:

"I'm now going to read a series of statements about [abortion/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. . . ."

The various statements were then read and respondents were asked to rate each one separately. Subsequently, the same introduction was repeated except with the words "positive" and "positively" changed to "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.

For the 1998 and 1999 abortion surveys, respondents were asked to evaluate either six or seven statements based on questions that have been a more-or-less regular feature of the General Social Surveys since the early 1970s: "A woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion if. . . ."

- there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby;
- she is married and does not want any more children;
- the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy;
- the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children;
- she became pregnant as a result of rape;
- she is not married and does not want to marry the man;
- she wants it for any reason.⁴

In the 2002 survey, respondents evaluated 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.

For both abortion and gay rights, we calculate a measure of ambivalence using the algorithm developed by Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995); that is,

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

where P is the positive reaction score and N is the negative reaction score.⁵ 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).

Ambivalence about Abortion and Gay Rights

Our data indicate that many Floridians have ambivalent feelings about both abortion and gay rights. In the 1998 survey, 67.8 percent exhibited at least a minimal level of ambivalence (defined as scores of 0.5 or greater) on at least one of the GSS abortion statements, 49.1 percent on at least two of them, and 28.9 percent on three or more; the corresponding totals for 1999 are 73.6, 58.8, and 41.5 percent, respectively. The "average" respondent⁶ was ambivalent on 1.66 of the six statements presented in 1998, and 2.24 of the seven in 1999.⁷ There was no significant difference between self-described pro-choice and pro-life voters in either survey, i.e., a similar proportion of citizens on both sides of this issue seemed to be experiencing some degree of

internal conflict.

Table 4.1 about here

Although the level of ambivalence observed on any single abortion item is less than overwhelming, it is far from negligible. Floridians were least ambivalent about a rape victim's right to obtain a legal abortion (21.4 percent in 1998, 24.5 percent in 1999), and most ambivalent about the "family too poor" condition in 1998 (33.7 percent) and "no more children" in 1999 (36.3 percent). Cook and her colleagues (1992: 33) found that Americans were considerably more supportive of a woman's right to choose what they called a *traumatic abortion* (under circumstances involving "woman's health," "rape," or "birth defect") as opposed to an *elective abortion* ("too poor," "no more children," "not married," "any reason").⁸ Our results mimic that finding, for self-identified pro-life and pro-choice voters alike.

In addition to sanctioning elective abortion less often, we can see from Table 4.1 that Floridians were slightly more ambivalent about abortions obtained in elective than in traumatic circumstances. Further, principal components factor analyses indicate that people who were ambivalent with regard to one traumatic condition ("woman's health," "rape," "birth defect") also tended to be more ambivalent about the other two conditions; likewise, those who expressed ambivalence about one elective circumstance ("too poor," "no more children," "not married," "any reason") were more likely to experience conflict with regard to the others as well. Based on these results, we constructed separate indices for ambivalence about traumatic ($\alpha = .721$ in 1998, $.777$ in 1999) and elective abortion ($\alpha = .765$ in 1998, $.792$ in 1999). Perhaps surprisingly, ambivalence in one domain was only modestly related to ambivalence in the other ($r = .11$, $p < .05$ in 1998; $r = .26$, $p < .001$ in 1999) – a pattern which indicates that many people are

ambivalent about only some rather than all aspects of the abortion issue. Even if this is true, however, and even if the increased levels of ambivalence observed from 1998 to 1999 are largely an artifact of differences between the two surveys (see note 7), there can be little doubt that a substantial number of Florida voters have conflicting views about abortion.

Table 4.1 also reveals a fair amount of aggregate-level ambivalence on issues relating to gay rights. Among these items, ambivalence was most common (35.1 percent) on the question of whether homosexuals should be permitted to join the Boy Scouts and other youth organizations, and least common (22.6 percent) when respondents indicated whether it was anyone else's business what gays and lesbians do within the privacy of their own homes.⁹ On seven of the eight measures (all except "privacy of own homes"), more than three in ten Floridians expressed at least a minimal degree of ambivalence (scores of 0.5 or higher); this is roughly equal to the proportions that were ambivalent about a woman's right to obtain an elective abortion, and more than indicated ambivalence about abortions obtained under traumatic circumstances. Looking at the data another way (not shown), we see, first, that nearly three-fourths of respondents in the present study were ambivalent (again using the 0.5 threshold) on at least one of the eight statements; and, second, nearly one-third were ambivalent about three or more. Like abortion, it appears that ambivalence is a fairly prominent feature of public opinion on gay and lesbian rights.

Just as ambivalence on abortion proved to be multidimensional, a factor analysis revealed that responses to the eight gay rights questions fell into two separate domains. One of these captured attitudes toward children and family relationships ("teach school," "legal marriage," "adopt children," "Boy Scouts"), while the other involved ambivalence primarily on issues

involving basic civil rights and liberties ("serve in military," "privacy of own homes," "job discrimination," "health insurance"). Accordingly, we constructed indices for ambivalence on gay rights with regard to *children and families* ($\alpha = .664$), and what we have termed *adult roles* ($\alpha = .705$; see Craig *et al.* 2005b for a more complete discussion). There is a stronger correlation ($r = .50$, $p < .001$) between ambivalence in the two dimensions relating to gay rights than there was between elective and traumatic abortion.

Value Conflict

Any fair test of the hypothesis that value conflict is a source of ambivalence requires independent measures of these two concepts, but one of the difficulties in constructing such a test is specifying *which* conflicting values might lead to ambivalence. The Florida surveys used here included measures of values that we expected, based on theory as well as our own political intuition, to be related to attitudes about abortion and gay rights. Specifically, the 1999 survey contained a series of questions that tapped two values (*traditional lifestyles* and *traditional marriage roles*) relevant to the abortion issue, while in 2002 we measured the same two values plus two others (*egalitarianism* and *individualism*) that seemed likely to shape citizens' attitudes on gay rights.¹⁰

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). It is not clear, though, how or even whether such value orientations should be related to gay rights ambivalence (or to abortion ambivalence for that matter), and we make no

predictions about what our data will show in this regard. Instead, our 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 Norlander 2002). Similarly, for abortion, we anticipate that ambivalence will be higher among those whose beliefs about lifestyle and marriage roles are in conflict.¹¹

Our measure of *traditional lifestyles* in the 1999 survey was based on strong or weak agreement/disagreement¹² with the following statements:

- This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties (TL₁).
- The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society (TL₂).
- We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards even if they are very different from our own (TL₃).

In 2002, TL3 was replaced with

- The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes (TL₄).

Respondents' support for *traditional marriage roles* was measured in the 1999 survey as follows:

- All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job (TM₁).
- It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself (TM₂).
- A husband's job is to earn money; a wife's job is to look after the home and family

(TM₃).¹³

On both of these indices, higher scores represent a more traditional outlook (strong agreement with TL₁, TL₂, plus all marriage role statements, strong disagreement with TL₃ and TL₄). Factor analyses on both datasets suggest that these items capture distinct value dimensions, though they are positively correlated ($r = .39$, $p < .001$ in 1999; $r = .37$, $p < .001$ in 2002).

The 2002 survey tapped two additional core values. Our measure of *egalitarianism* ($\alpha =$ a weak .483) was derived from respondents' strong or weak agreement/disagreement with the following statements:

- We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country (E₁)
- This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are (E₂).
- If people were treated more equally in this country, we would have many fewer problems (E₃).

Higher scores (strong disagreement with E₁ and E₂, strong agreement with E₃) represent a positive commitment to egalitarian values. Finally, *individualism* was captured with a single item (strong disagreement 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."¹⁴

We measured value conflict using the same algorithm that was used in assessing ambivalence (see Steenbergen and Brewer 2000), as in

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

In this example, value conflict is highest when an individual scores either high or low on *both*

egalitarianism *and* traditional lifestyles. In 2002 we constructed comparable measures to capture conflict between egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles, individualism and traditional marriage roles, and individualism and traditional lifestyles. For the 1999 abortion rights study, we reversed the *traditional* marriage role index to create an *egalitarian* marriage role variable, and used our algorithm to construct a measure of value conflict between traditional lifestyles and egalitarian marriage roles.

Values, Value Conflict, and Ambivalence

Although a developing literature stresses the importance of core values as underpinnings of political attitudes, our data suggest that core values (or at least the ones measured in our study) are not themselves strongly associated with ambivalence. In 1999, traditionalists were *more* ambivalent than others about whether a woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion under traumatic conditions, but the relationships are rather weak ($r = .12$, $p < .01$ for lifestyles; $r = .14$, $p < .01$ for marriage roles). Along the same lines, while respondents with a traditional lifestyles orientation were slightly *less* ambivalent about abortion rights under elective conditions, the relationship is again rather faint ($r = -.09$, $p < .02$). In our 2002 gay rights survey, ambivalence on the adult roles dimension is negatively associated with egalitarianism ($r = -.13$, $p < .01$), and positively associated with lifestyle traditionalism ($r = .13$, $p < .01$), but these coefficients are also weak. In addition, none of the relationships between core values and ambivalence regarding children and families achieve conventional levels of statistical significance ($p \leq .05$).

At first glance, ambivalence also appears to be largely unrelated to the *value conflicts* that we are able to explore with our survey data. In 1999, conflict between traditional lifestyles and

egalitarian marriage roles is uncorrelated with ambivalence regarding abortion rights in both traumatic ($r = .01, p = .73$) and elective conditions ($r = .04, p = .36$). Similarly, in 2002, we see only faint signs of a relationship between ambivalence on adult roles and conflicting views about egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles ($r = .06, p = .20$), and between ambivalence and conflicting views about individualism and traditional marriage roles ($r = .07, p = .11$). For children and family issues, the correlation between ambivalence and value conflict on egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles is also weak ($r = .05, p = .21$).

These zero-order results provide virtually no support for the hypothesis that ambivalence in general, and ambivalence about gay rights and abortion in particular, is a product of value conflict. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that conflict between other unknown values might produce ambivalence, or that the effects of value conflict on ambivalence can only be seen in a more fully specified model. In essence, core values and the conflict between those core values may be partially concealing one another's effects on ambivalence in bivariate relationships. To consider that argument, we tested multivariate models of ambivalence using core values, value conflict, and a number of different control variables. For the 1999 abortion rights data, we estimated

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Ambivalence (traumatic)} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ egalitarian marriage roles values} + \beta_2 \text{ traditional} \\ & \text{lifestyles} + \beta_3 \text{ value conflict (egalitarian marriage roles, traditional lifestyles)} + \beta_4 \text{ age} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{ education} + \beta_6 \text{ gender (female)} + \beta_7 \text{ religious attendance} + \beta_8 \text{ religious guidance} \\ & + \beta_9 \text{ abortion position (pro-life)} + \beta_{10} \text{ abortion importance} + e \end{aligned}$$

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; "abortion position" is 1

for people who identify themselves as pro-choice, 3 for those who identify themselves as pro-life, and 2 for those who volunteer that neither label describes their views on the issue; and "abortion importance" is the respondent's self-assessment of "how important the abortion is to you personally." Separate models were estimated for traumatic and elective ambivalence.

Results are presented in Table 4.2.¹⁵ Model 1 in the table shows that ambivalence about abortion under traumatic conditions was significantly higher among women, those who attended church more frequently, and pro-life respondents (the latter finding confirming the bivariate observations we reported in Craig *et al.* 2002). Religious guidance, age, education, and the subjective personal importance of the abortion issue were not significantly related to traumatic ambivalence, *ceteris paribus*. Controlling for all these factors, core values remain faintly related to ambivalence; that is, respondents committed to egalitarian marriage roles were slightly less ambivalent about abortion rights in traumatic circumstances ($b = -.074, p < .02$), as were those who preferred traditional lifestyles ($b = -.067, p = .07$). More central to our main theoretical concern, people who experienced conflict between those two values also tended to have higher levels of ambivalence with regard to traumatic abortion issues ($b = .065, p < .02$). The relationship is weak, but it is evident in our multivariate model.

Table 4.2 about here

This finding is not generalizable to the elective abortion condition, however. Model 2 in Table 4.2 shows quite a different set of relationships, as those who regard the abortion issue as personally important and prefer to call themselves pro-life rather than pro-choice are significantly less ambivalent than others about abortion in elective circumstances. Moreover, neither core values nor the conflict between them are significantly related to ambivalence in this

model.

The 2002 dataset contains measures of other values (egalitarianism and individualism) that allow us to explore different conflicts that might be associated with ambivalence on gay rights issues. Because the several value conflict measures are based on various combinations of the same four core values, including all of them in a single model risked introducing excessive multicollinearity.¹⁶ Instead, we tested two models with different sets of variables. The first of these (Model 3) 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 "attitudes toward homosexuality" is a 6-item index tapping respondents' feelings about homosexuality *per se* rather than about gay rights;¹⁷ "know someone gay" indicates whether the individual personally knows any gay men or lesbians; and "born that way" reflects beliefs about whether or not homosexuality is a matter of personal choice.¹⁸

In our next model (Model 4), we substituted variables representing conflicts between egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles, and between individualism and traditional lifestyles, for the value conflict measures in Model 3. This is stated as

$$\text{Ambivalence} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{ egalitarian values} + \beta_2 \text{ traditional lifestyles values} + \beta_3$$

traditional marriage role values + β_4 individualism values + β_5 value conflict (egalitarianism, traditional marriage roles) + β_6 value conflict (individualism, traditional lifestyles) + β_7 age + β_8 education + β_9 gender (female) + β_{10} religious attendance + β_{11} religious guidance + β_{12} attitudes about homosexuality + β_{13} know someone gay + β_{14} born that way + e .

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.

Let us turn first to the model predicting ambivalence about gay rights with regard to adult roles, shown in Table 4.3. In both versions of the model portrayed here, we see that attitudes about homosexuality are strongly and negatively related to ambivalence, that is, more positive (or less negative) views tend to depress the level of ambivalence that people feel about gay rights issues relating to military service, privacy, job discrimination, and health insurance. Also in both Model 3 and Model 4, commitments to three of the four core values measured in our study (egalitarianism, traditional marriage roles, and individualism) are associated with lower levels of ambivalence. Most critically, there is at least modest support for the value conflict hypothesis: First, those who express a strong (or, less often, weak) simultaneous commitment to egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles tend to be more ambivalent ($p = .030$) on these particular aspects of the gay rights issue. Second, if conventional standards of statistical significance are relaxed just a bit, it appears that ambivalence also is associated with conflict between the values of individualism and traditional marriage roles ($p = .064$). Finally, in Model 4, conflict between egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles increases ambivalence ($p = .090$), though conflict

between individualism and traditional lifestyles does not.

Table 4.3 about here

Results for the children/family dimension (teach school, legal marriage, adopt children, Boy Scouts; see Table 4.4) provide further evidence that ambivalence is to some extent a function of value conflict. In Model 3, strong adherence to the values of egalitarianism, traditional marriage roles, and individualism lessen ambivalence, but the conflict between individualism and traditional marriage roles, and between egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles, are both associated with higher levels of ambivalence ($p \leq .001$). In Model 4, traditional marriage roles and individualism weaken ambivalence, while the conflict between egalitarianism and traditional marriage roles increases it ($p = .012$); the effect of conflict between individualism and traditional lifestyles is not significant. 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 index¹⁹ – but not with greater (or lesser) ambivalence itself.

Table 4.4 about here

Although other factors not yet identified clearly play a role, these results offer some support for the assumption so often made by scholars that conflict among citizens' core values promotes ambivalence.²⁰ In fact, our analysis reveals that *multiple* conflicts are important in explaining ambivalence in mass opinion on abortion and gay rights.

Discussion

The levels of ambivalence observed on two of the hottest of contemporary hot-button political issues suggest that neither is as "easy" for voters as some might have thought (cf. Carmines and Stimson 1980; Alvarez and Brehm 2002). Public opinion with regard to each of these issues has multiple dimensions, suggesting that citizens often make distinctions when faced with questions about when a legal abortion should be attainable and under what situations equal opportunity rights should be extended to gays and lesbians. Moreover, although many people undoubtedly have attitudes that are firmly entrenched on one side or the other, there are more than a few whose attitudes have roots stretching to *both* sides of the abortion and gay rights controversies. What are the origins of such ambivalence? Our analyses confirm the speculation and assumptions made by scholars in the past, specifically, that ambivalence is related to the conflict among core values – a relationship that can best be seen in multidimensional models that control for the effects of the underlying values themselves on ambivalence. Indeed, we have seen that, at least for gay rights (and perhaps for other issues not yet examined), there are multiple value conflicts that can promote ambivalence among the general public.

Our findings also remind us, of course, that value conflict is only part of the story; the multivariate models tested here leave little doubt that there is much more to understand about the sources of attitudinal ambivalence. For example, we found that policy views and social beliefs are strongly related to ambivalence for some individuals; that is, (1) pro-choice voters were more ambivalent about abortions in elective circumstances; (2) pro-life voters were more ambivalent about abortions in traumatic circumstances; and (3) ambivalence on the adult roles dimension of gay rights (but not on the children/families dimension) was significantly less among those who expressed more positive attitudes about homosexuality in general. Ambivalence is neither

randomly nor normally distributed across issue preferences, which may help to explain how seemingly large, but perhaps conflicted, majorities can be thwarted by issue-specific minorities with firmly held and harmonious values. In other words, by definition, people with ambivalent opinions can see both (or multiple) sides of an issue – and, as a result, they may understand and partially sympathize with intense, single-minded groups even though the latter do not fully accept or appreciate the complexity of the former's opinions.

Indeed, the outcome of an election campaign or issue controversy frequently depends on the ability of the non-ambivalent to frame the debate in such a way that a majority of those who are on the fence will decide to side with them rather than the opposition (see chapter 6 for a concrete example). While this is not a particularly novel observation, we believe that students of politics should define more carefully what it means to be "on the fence" (ambivalence is not necessarily a synonym for middle-of-the-road); identify the kinds of individuals who are most likely to be located there (and tell us why); and determine how cues (including framing) from political leaders, activists, the news media, and others help citizens to resolve the conflicts that signal the existence of ambivalence in the first place. Answers to questions such as these will provide us with a better understanding of the importance of attitudinal ambivalence, both in fact and potentially, in shaping the direction of contemporary American politics.

Notes

1. These changes have occurred mainly among Democrats, Independents, and ideological liberals (Sherrill and Yang 2000; also Haeberle 1999; Lewis and Rogers 1999), which suggests that voters' opinions on gay and lesbian issues, like those on abortion (Adams 1997), may be evolving along partisan lines. For a contrary view, however, see Lindaman and Haider-Markel (2002; also Brewer 2003, who found growing support for anti-discrimination laws and gays serving in the military among all partisan groups in the electorate).

2. Up to three (1998) or four (1999, 2002) callbacks were made to each working number in an effort to obtain a completed interview. Additional information about these polls 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. The technique is 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.

4. The "any reason" item was asked only in the 1999 survey (Craig *et al.* 2002). The two abortion surveys also differed in terms of question order: In 1998 the negative evaluation series was asked immediately following the positive evaluation series, whereas in 1999 (as in the 2002 gay rights survey) the positive and negative batteries were separated by a number of filler questions (Thompson *et al.* 1995).

5. 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.

6. One should exercise caution when interpreting the means in Table 4.1 since these have been calculated based on the full range of ambivalence scores (-0.5 to 4.0) reported earlier.

7. To some degree, the observed increase is likely a function of differences between the surveys. In 1999, for example, we added the "any reason" condition (though greater ambivalence also is observed for each of the six original items; see Table 4.1), placed a larger number of filler questions between the positive and negative reaction statements (Thompson *et al.* 1995), and asked the abortion preference questions after rather than before the reaction statements. Even if order effects are nonetheless present, they appear to affect mainly our estimates concerning the *frequency* of ambivalent responses and the *amount* of ambivalence exhibited by voters – and not the basic patterns and relationships described in the remainder of this chapter.

8. Pro-choicers approved, on average, 2.90 (1998) and 2.92 (1999) of the three conditions that constitute traumatic abortion, compared with 1.85 of the three (1998) and 2.53 of the four (1999) that constitute elective abortion. The comparable figures for pro-lifers were 1.76 (1998 traumatic) and 1.95 (1999 traumatic) versus 0.26 (1998 elective) and 0.35 (1999 elective). For the relatively small group falling into neither category it was 2.79 (1998 traumatic) and 2.82 (1999 traumatic) versus 1.15 (1998 elective) and 0.87 (1999 elective).

9. All analyses from 2002 are based on the 94.5 percent of our sample who claimed 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).

10. Because values were not measured in the 1998 survey, the multivariate analysis that follows will be limited to 1999 (abortion) and 2002 (gay rights) only.

11. As a practical matter, this refers almost exclusively to people who were traditionalist on moral questions and egalitarian in their views about whether wives should be able to pursue their own careers; very few respondents were conflicted in the opposite direction.

12. Respondents also were offered the opportunity to "neither agree nor disagree" with these questions (1999), or to indicate that they "don't have an opinion either way" (2002).

13. The internal reliability of this index ($\alpha = .715$ in 1999, $.647$ in 2002) was better than for our measures of traditional lifestyles ($\alpha = .465$ and $.489$, respectively).

14. Individualism does not significantly correlate with any of the other core values in our study, though respondents who are egalitarian are less likely to express traditional views on both the lifestyles ($r = -.22$, $p < .001$) and marriage roles ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$) dimensions.

15. In order to avoid an unacceptable loss of cases in the estimation of these models (also see Tables 4.3 and 4.4), 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.

16. 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 $.39$. 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 .52.

17. The index ($\alpha = .901$) was 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 were reversed to correct for direction of wording. High scores reflect a more positive attitude.

18. 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); 8.3 percent volunteered a mixed view, and 9.9 percent weren't sure.

19. 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.

20. Each of our surveys also included a single agree-disagree question tapping *subjective* ambivalence: "I sometimes find myself being torn between two sides of the abortion issue" in 1999 (7-point scale indicating how close this statement was to the respondent's own feelings); and "I sometimes find myself being torn between two sides of issues involving gay and lesbian rights" in 2002 (5-point strongly agree to strongly disagree). Subjective ambivalence on abortion was correlated only weakly with objective ambivalence on the elective dimension, and not at all with objective ambivalence with regard to traumatic abortion. Similarly, subjective ambivalence

on gay rights was weakly correlated with objective children/families ambivalence but unrelated to objective adult roles ambivalence. Nevertheless, in line with the results reported above, subjective ambivalence was more likely to occur in the presence of value conflict than in its absence. In multivariate models, conflict between egalitarianism and traditional lifestyles was associated with greater ambivalence on gay rights, while conflict between moral traditionalism and egalitarian marriage roles tended to increase ambivalence on abortion.

Table 4.1

Frequency and Intensity of Ambivalence on Abortion and Gay Rights

<u>Condition</u>	1998 (Abortion)		1999 (Abortion)	
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Woman's Health	27.1%	0.15	27.6%	0.23
Rape	21.4%	0.03	24.5%	0.14
Birth Defect	25.5%	0.11	26.5%	0.19
Family Too Poor	33.7%	0.25	36.0%	0.31
No More Children	28.6%	0.10	36.3%	0.31
Not Married	29.0%	0.15	36.2%	0.30
Any Reason	n/a	n/a	34.9%	0.26
Number of Cases =	552 to 557 (weighted)		642 to 650	
<u>Condition</u>	2002 (Gay Rights)			
	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>		
Teach School	33.3%	0.23		
Legal Marriage	32.0%	0.18		
Serve in Military	32.8%	0.23		
Adopt Children	32.7%	0.21		
Privacy of Own Homes	22.6%	0.06		
Job Discrimination	31.2%	0.25		
Boy Scouts	35.1%	0.27		
Health Insurance	32.0%	0.26		
Number of Cases =	534 to 556			

Note: Data are from *Florida Voter* surveys conducted in March 1998 (weighted by party registration), January/February 1999, and June 2002 (heterosexual respondents only). Table entries indicate (a) the percentage of respondents (excluding those with missing values) who have ambivalence scores greater than zero for a particular condition; and (b) the mean ambivalence score for each item (ranging from -0.5 to +4.0).

Table 4.2

A Multivariate Model of Ambivalence about Abortion:
Traumatic and Elective Dimensions

Variable	Model 1: Traumatic		Model 2: Elective	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Values:				
Egalitarianism (Marriage Roles)	-0.074*	0.031	-0.013	0.028
Moral Traditionalism	-0.067†	0.037	-0.049	0.035
Value Conflict	0.065*	0.026	0.024	0.024
Controls:				
Age (older)	-0.000	0.005	0.004	0.005
Education (better educated)	-0.003	0.028	-0.018	0.027
Gender (female)	0.418**	0.148	0.217	0.139
Religious Attendance (frequent)	0.145**	0.051	0.056	0.048
Religious Guidance (strong)	0.081	0.103	-0.181†	0.096
Abortion (pro-life)	0.634***	0.089	-0.325***	0.084
Abortion Importance (very)	0.047	0.100	-0.350***	0.094
-2 log likelihood =	3227.39		4056.02	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ² =	0.17		0.09	
Number of cases =	708		708	
*** p ≤ .001 ** p ≤ .01 * p ≤ .05 † p ≤ .10				

Note: Data are from a *Florida Voter* survey conducted in January/February 1999. Table entries are ordered logit coefficients and associated standard errors; threshold levels are not shown. The meaning of high scores on control variables is indicated in parentheses.

Table 4.3

A Multivariate Model of Ambivalence about Gay Rights:
Adult Roles Dimension

Variable	Model 3		Model 4	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Values:				
Egalitarianism	-0.230*	0.092	-0.141†	0.076
Traditional Marriage Roles	-0.186*	0.076	-0.217*	0.086
Traditional Lifestyles	0.005	0.094	0.078	0.087
Individualism	-0.105*	0.053	-0.127†	0.074
Value Conflict:				
Egalitarianism/Lifestyles	0.170*	0.078	n/a	n/a
Individualism/Marriage Roles	0.124†	0.067	n/a	n/a
Egalitarianism/Marriage Roles	n/a	n/a	0.124†	0.073
Individualism/Lifestyles	n/a	n/a	0.078	0.073
Controls:				
Age (older)	0.002	0.005	0.002	0.005
Education (better educated)	0.011	0.030	0.007	0.029
Gender (female)	-0.214	0.158	-0.235	0.158
Religious Attendance (frequent)	0.058	0.087	0.049	0.087
Religious Guidance (strong)	0.081	0.103	-0.181†	0.096
Attitudes about Homosexuality (positive)	-0.339***	0.076	-0.340***	0.076
Know Someone Gay (yes)	0.183	0.203	0.158	0.203
Born That Way (yes)	-0.001	0.095	0.025	0.095
-2 log likelihood =	3044.24		3048.28	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ² =	0.11		0.10	
Number of cases =	568		568	
*** p ≤ .001 ** p ≤ .01 * p ≤ .05 † p ≤ .10				

Note: Data are from a *Florida Voter* survey conducted in June 2002. Table entries are ordered logit coefficients and associated standard errors (heterosexual respondents only); threshold levels are not shown. The meaning of high scores on control variables is indicated in parentheses.

Table 4.4

A Multivariate Model of Ambivalence about Gay Rights:
Children/Families Dimension

Variable	Model 3		Model 4	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Values:				
Egalitarianism	-0.287**	0.089	-0.140†	0.075
Traditional Marriage Roles	-0.240**	0.076	-0.255**	0.086
Traditional Lifestyles	-0.128	0.094	0.023	0.086
Individualism	-0.161**	0.052	-0.160*	0.071
Value Conflict:				
Egalitarianism/Lifestyles	0.291***	0.078	n/a	n/a
Individualism/Marriage Roles	0.227***	0.067	n/a	n/a
Egalitarianism/Marriage Roles	n/a	n/a	0.185*	0.073
Individualism/Lifestyles	n/a	n/a	0.094	0.071
Controls:				
Age (older)	-0.009*	0.005	-0.010*	0.005
Education (better educated)	-0.003	0.029	-0.009	0.029
Gender (female)	-0.180	0.157	-0.180	0.156
Religious Attendance (frequent)	0.023	0.086	0.003	0.086
Religious Guidance (strong)	-0.143†	0.080	-0.114	0.079
Attitudes about Homosexuality (positive)	-0.047	0.075	-0.044	0.074
Know Someone Gay (yes)	0.236	0.203	0.191	0.202
Born That Way (yes)	0.148	0.095	0.185†	0.095
-2 log likelihood =	3111.20		3128.02	
Nagelkerke Pseudo R ² =	0.08		0.05	
Number of cases =	568		568	
*** p ≤ .001 ** p ≤ .01 * p ≤ .05 † p ≤ .10				

Note: Data are from a *Florida Voter* survey conducted in June 2002. Table entries are ordered logit coefficients and associated standard errors (heterosexual respondents only); threshold levels are not shown. The meaning of high scores on control variables is indicated in parentheses.