Evidence suggests that mistrust of government contributes directly to a lack of support for social welfare programs. An alternative explanation, however, is that many citizens are ambivalent concerning government and the role that it should play in society today and, as result, are less likely to support such programs. Based on our analysis of data from a 2004 telephone survey of Florida residents, we conclude that, first, ambivalent feelings concerning the federal, state, and local levels of government in the United States are fairly common; second, ambivalence has consequences for people’s opinions on matters of public policy—specifically, those with conflicted feelings are less likely to endorse progressive action in the social welfare realm; third, self-identified conservatives tend to be more ambivalent concerning government than liberals; and finally, the observed negative relationship between ambivalence and social welfare liberalism is especially pronounced among conservatives.

Attitudes concerning social welfare policy at the mass level have been a topic of interest for scholars of public opinion for decades (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Hetherington 2005; Layman and Carsey 2002; Rudolph and Evans 2005; Stonecash 2000). Recently, some have suggested that declining public trust in government has led to a weakening of social welfare liberalism among Americans (Hetherington 2005; Rudolph and Evans 2005). While there is evidence to support this claim, there is an alternative explanation. Many Americans may, in fact, be ambivalent concerning the role that government should play in society, and this state of affairs may be driving attitudes concerning social welfare. Ambivalence results when an individual simultaneously
possesses positive and negative evaluations of an attitude object (Alvarez and Brehm 1995, 1997, 1998; Cacioppo and Berntson 1994; Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002; Klopfer and Madden 1980; McGraw, Hasecke, and Conger 2003; Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995). This article presents evidence that such conflict surrounding personal evaluations of government does indeed result in decreased support for social welfare.

Hetherington (2005, 3) asserts that “declining political trust has played the central role in the demise of progressive public policy in the United States over the last several decades.” Whereas some analysts believe there has been a shift to the right in public opinion since the 1960s, the evidence suggests otherwise. Instead, the erosion of public trust has supposedly made people less likely to support health-care reform, antipoverty and race-targeted programs, and other initiatives not because they oppose those initiatives in principle but because they mistrust the “delivery system”; i.e., they “simply do not think the federal government is up to the task” (Hetherington 2005, 5). Furthermore, Rudolph and Evans (2005) found the relationship between mistrust and opposition to progressive social welfare policy to be greater among conservatives, for whom government spending of any sort (except on programs related to defense and national security) might be considered a violation of their fundamental ideological beliefs. While these arguments are compelling, as we show, there is reason to suspect that popular attitudes toward government may be too complex to be captured by conventional, bipolar measures of political trust. Thus, just as our earlier research has uncovered a nontrivial degree of ambivalence in citizen attitudes regarding a number of policy issues (including abortion, gay rights, and social welfare), we believe that much of what is characterized as mistrust is actually ambivalence concerning the role that government should play in society today. Therefore, perhaps, a lack of support for progressive social welfare policy is actually better explained by ambivalence concerning government.

The questions we pose are as follows. First, is opposition to “progressive public policy,” at least within the realm of social welfare, associated with ambivalence concerning government in the United States even when trust is held constant? Second, is that relationship stronger among conservatives, liberals, or neither? Findings suggest that (1) ambivalence concerning the role of government in society is fairly
common; (2) social welfare liberalism is less a function of trust than of ambivalence; (3) the effects of ambivalence about government on attitudes concerning social welfare are independent of other important factors, including feelings about perceived beneficiaries, core values, ideology, party identification, race, gender, and income; and (4) while the effects of political trust on social welfare liberalism do not vary across ideology, the impact of ambivalence is more pronounced among conservatives. Before moving on to the analysis, we review briefly the concept and measurement of ambivalence in general and then outline our theory about ambivalence concerning government in particular and its relation to attitudes on social welfare.

**Conceptualizing and Measuring 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 (Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Thurstone 1928; Thurstone and Chave 1929). This unidimensional view conforms to our intuitive sense that people tend to think in bipolar terms concerning most things. When they watch a movie or eat a meal, they usually classify it as either “good” or “bad” (or, representing the continuum’s neutral point, as “so–so”). Similarly, in the political and social realm, individuals and institutions are often described as being “trustworthy,” or “untrustworthy.” On the surface, describing something as both one thing and the other seems counterintuitive. Yet in real life, we can, and do, evaluate objects as if they contained separate components. Politicians 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) describes this process as the “distributions of considerations” and argues 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.

The concept of ambivalence is not new (Kaplan 1972; Scott 1969), especially to social psychologists who have often 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 (Armitage and Conner 2000; Hodson, Maio, and Esses 2001; Katz and Hass 1988; Klopfer and Madden 1980; Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995). While ambivalence is frequently taken into account in attitudinal research generally (Ajzen 2001), the study of ambivalence with regard to political objects is only recently becoming more frequent.

Feldman and Zaller (1992) were the first political scientists to address extensively the phenomenon of ambivalence. They asked survey respondents to state whatever thoughts came to mind as they answered two traditional closed-ended social welfare policy questions. Based on the mixture of answers given, and on similar findings reported by other scholars (Hochschild 1981), the authors concluded that “[m]ost people possess opposing considerations on most issues, that is, considerations that might lead them to decide the issue either way” (Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992, 585). This is the ambivalence axiom and, according to them, it helps to account for the response instability so often associated with surveys of ordinary citizens (Converse 1964).

After 1992, research in political science soon began to uncover evidence of ambivalence in a number of areas. Based on the analysis of error variances in heteroskedastic models of binary choice, Alvarez and Brehm (1995) found substantial ambivalence in public opinion concerning abortion rights, an issue usually thought to be “easy” enough for most people to take either one position or the other (Abramowitz 1995). Yet many pro-choice and pro-life supporters express some level of ambivalence concerning abortion rights under certain circumstances (Craig, Kane, and Martinez 2002). Moreover, there is accumulating evidence that some citizens are ambivalent concerning other supposedly “easy” targets, including the IRS (Alvarez and Brehm 1998), gay rights (Craig et al. 2005), social welfare (Gainous 2008), political parties (Greene 2005; Pinard 2005), political institutions (McGraw and Bartels 2005), and America itself (Citrin and Luks 2005). Political science researchers have also begun to demonstrate that ambivalence affects the cognitive processes that shape political decision making. Ambivalent respondents have less stable policy preferences over time (Craig, Martinez, and Kane 2005), make their vote decisions later (Lavine and Steenbergen 2005), base those decisions on different kinds of information (Basinger and Lavine 2005), and are more likely to deviate from their preelection vote intentions (Fournier 2005). In short, people who feel
simultaneously positively and negatively about the same political object (policy positions, groups, or candidates) often think and behave differently than others.

**Political Trust, Ambivalence Concerning Government, and Social Welfare Attitudes**

Scholars have devoted significant effort to identifying and explaining both the factors most responsible for declining levels of trust in government (Citrin 1974; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001; Keele 2007; Miller 1974) and the behavioral consequences of political (mis)trust. In the latter vein, high levels of mistrust (or cynicism) appear to be associated with reduced citizen compliance with government mandates (Levi 1997; Tyler and Degoey 1995), a greater willingness to disobey the law (Norris 1999b), more cheating on taxes (Scholz and Lubell 1998), and an increased likelihood of voting for challengers and third-party candidates (Hetherington 1999). Political trust also matters because it affects citizens’ attitudes concerning the proper balance of power in the American federal system (Hetherington and Nugent 2001) and shapes their attitudes regarding various aspects of domestic policy (Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Hetherington and Globetti 2002). Specifically, Hetherington (2005) argues that diminished support for social welfare liberalism in the United States is partly the result of lower levels of trust in government since the 1960s. After all, government is the delivery system for income redistribution, health insurance for the poor and the elderly, unemployment benefits, and other benefits that accrue (and might accrue) from a generous social welfare system. If large segments of the public believe that the delivery system is broken, public support for liberal social welfare policies might be weakened, notwithstanding citizens’ conceptions of economic justice or beliefs concerning how deserving the truly needy are. Accordingly, Hetherington sees an important connection between the parallel decline in political trust and the decline in support for social welfare.

However, reinterpretations of the meaning of standard measures of political trust have raised questions concerning whether most Americans are actively mistrustful of government. Cook and Gronke (2005), for instance, maintain that the absence of trust does not necessarily imply the presence of cynicism (or mistrust). While large numbers of Americans
believe that “the government in Washington can be trusted to do what is right” only some of the time (or never), it does not necessarily follow that those same people believe that government can always be counted on to do what is wrong. Rather, many people who score low on conventional measures of trust are actually somewhere near the middle of a unidimensional scale running from hostile mistrust to pollyanic trust. Cook and Gronke suggest that the median American is more of a skeptic than a pure cynic.

Cook and Gronke’s observation that a dichotomy of trust and mistrust fails to capture the true beliefs of many citizens is an important one and is broadly consistent with portraits of “critical citizens” in Western democracies who are mobilized to participate by their beliefs that incumbent politicians are not as responsive as they should be. In fact, the relationship between institutional confidence and political participation appears to be fairly weak (Norris 1999a, 260), with the pool of active participants including trusting, skeptical, and cynical citizens roughly in proportion to their share of the overall population. Moreover, the skeptic’s true beliefs concerning government may be more complex than can be represented simply as the middle position on a continuum. Such skepticism may reflect ambivalence on the part of citizens who, at various times in their lives, have been both satisfied and disappointed in how government served them as individuals or addressed pressing national issues. Indeed, McGraw and Bartels (2005) discovered that cognitive ambivalence toward each of the three branches of the national government was relatively common among the American public in the late 1990s and, furthermore, that ambivalence concerning political institutions was basically unrelated to ideology or partisanship.

While McGraw and Bartels provide a starting point, these authors do not discuss how ambivalence relates to and structures attitudes concerning other objects. We concur with Hetherington (2005) that feelings concerning the delivery system are a likely source of attitudes concerning social welfare policy; nevertheless, it is possible that people’s attitudes are not as simple as bipolar estimates of trust would suggest. In particular, many of those who are forced to one side of a traditional trust scale may have mixed feelings concerning government and its ability to address important public policy concerns. Our argument is that people who are ambivalent concerning government, that is, people with both positive and negative feelings concerning the delivery system, are likely to
be less confident in the system’s efficacy. In other words, mixed feelings should result in individuals having doubts concerning the ability of government to effectively administer programs and, consequently, reduce support for the program itself.

Here, we employ a measure of ambivalence adapted from Kaplan’s (1972) method of gauging simultaneously conflicting reactions to a single object. Unlike McGraw and Bartels (2005), we do not distinguish between attitudes toward different branches of the national government; rather, we search for ambivalence across levels of government: national, state, and local. This is especially useful as we seek to compare the impact of trust and ambivalence on attitudes regarding one aspect of public policy concerning which there is considerable discord regarding the proper role of government in general and of the national government in particular.

**Data and Measurement**

The data used here are from a statewide telephone poll conducted between May 10 and 22, 2004 by the Florida Voter polling organization. Our analysis is based on completed interviews with 607 respondents who were randomly selected from a list of registered voters in the state of Florida. A total of 67 questions were asked in the survey, which included measures of political trust, ambivalence concerning government, social welfare liberalism, and a variety of control variables. The margin of error is plus or minus four percentage points.¹

No state is a perfect microcosm of the entire country, but Florida’s population—from its small towns and rural areas in the north, to the retirement communities in the southeast, to the I-4 Corridor and Disney World in between—is quite diverse in ethnicity, educational achievement, source of economic livelihood, and political culture. In recent elections, Florida has mirrored closely the national pattern and has been pivotal in determining the outcome of national elections. Moreover, the frequencies on important independent variables that we report below are generally similar to published results from national and other surveys. State-level studies such as this one also permit researchers to test new measures and methods, including measures of attitudes related to a single state’s political institutions or climate. Thus, while results from our sample are statistically generalizable only to the
population of Florida’s registered voters, we have no reason to expect that the magnitude of the relationships between key variables is significantly weaker (or stronger) than in other states or the nation as a whole.

**Dependent Variable: Social Welfare Liberalism**

*Social welfare liberalism* was measured by combining positive and negative responses to a series of questions involving a range of social welfare issues. Many Americans undoubtedly think of “social welfare” in terms of government checks, food stamps, subsidized housing, and the like; indeed, it is often defined as involving programs designed to ameliorate the social and economic disadvantages experienced by less fortunate members of society (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). Conceived more broadly, social welfare includes the allocation of benefits such as good schools, retirement income, and medical care to poor and nonpoor alike. Our measure is based on this broad conceptualization. Respondents were first given the following introduction:

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. The specific aspects of social welfare policy (based on questions from the American National Election Studies [ANES] 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.

Following several filler questions (including party identification, political trust, and values indicators), the introduction was repeated except with the words “positive” and “positively” replaced by “negative” and “negatively.” Respondents were then asked to assess the same battery of policy items as before.

A 14-item additive index of social welfare liberalism was calculated by taking the sum of both positive and inverted negative responses (centered between 0 and 1) to the policy questions. Although this inversion was intended to make the substantive direction of these responses consistent, we recognize that there may be some variation in how people respond to positive and negative question frames (Abelson et al. 1982; Conover and Feldman 1986; Ottati, Steenbergen, and Riggle 1992). To verify the validity of our measure that combines answers to the two frames, we conducted reliability analyses of the positive feelings alone (alpha = .83), the inverted negative feelings alone (alpha = .87), and the overall index (alpha = .87). We also ran separate regressions for positive and inverted negative feelings using the standard predictors of attitudes concerning social welfare (discussed in greater detail below). If the combined measure is valid, we would expect to see similar results for the magnitude and reliability of estimates across models. This is indeed the case, with the only meaningful difference being that income is a reliable predictor only in the positive feelings model.

Our findings reinforce the notion that Americans are more likely to support distributive than redistributive social welfare programs. In Table 1, we see that government efforts to provide a quality education for children and to protect citizens’ retirement benefits are the most popular among registered voters in Florida, while programs to assist the homeless and to ensure that everyone has a job are endorsed less often. The relative popularity of these policies aside, however (and according
to the figures displayed in column 3, respondents felt more positively than negatively concerning all of them\(^3\), a principal-components factor analysis revealed that all seven load on a single factor, six of them (retirement benefits is the exception) quite strongly.\(^4\)

### Independent Variables: Trust and Ambivalence

Political trust is measured by an additive index constructed from two questions modeled after standard ANES trust indicators (how often those who run the government can be trusted, whether government is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all citizens), plus one question that asked respondents which of two statements came closer to representing their own views: that government is almost always wasteful and inefficient or that it often does a better job than people give it credit for. (See the Appendix for complete question wordings.\(^5\)) Alpha is .59, with both single items and the full index centered between 0 and 1. We also included a single question to capture one’s “active” trust or mistrust of government based on Cook and Gronke (2005). Respondents were asked to locate themselves on a unidimensional scale ranging from 0 (“government can almost always be counted on to do

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**Table 1. Distribution of Responses and Factor Loadings for Social Welfare Liberalism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Percent Liberal</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of living</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job guarantee</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement benefits</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data are from a statewide (Florida) survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries indicate (1) mean score for each item (ranging between 2 and 8, with higher scores reflecting positive feelings); (2) associated standard deviation; (3) percentage of respondents with scores above the scale midpoint (more positive than negative); and (4) loadings based on a principal components factor analysis, varimax rotation. Missing values were replaced using multiple imputation (N = 607; see note 1).
the wrong thing”) to 10 (“government can almost always be counted on to do the right thing”).

Our measure of affective ambivalence concerning government—as distinct from the cognitive aspect captured by McGraw and Bartels (2005)—is based on experimental work done by social psychologists and subsequently adapted for use in surveys by Craig, Kane, and Martinez (2002). The technique is a version of the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957), as modified by Kaplan (1972) in an effort to show that people’s overall attitudes comprise both positive and negative elements. To separate the two, Kaplan divided semantic differential scales at the neutral point and asked respondents to indicate both how positively and how negatively they viewed an attitude object. For the present study, Kaplan’s language was adapted to accommodate the limitations of a telephone survey. Immediately following the social welfare battery described above, the identical format was used for a second set of questions:

Next, I’d like to do the same thing except with a list of different government institutions and groups that are active in politics. Once again: If you do not have any positive feelings toward the institution or group, 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 institution or group 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 group is . . .

Positive feelings were then measured regarding (1) the federal government in Washington; (2) the state government in Tallahassee; and (3) local government in the city or town where you live. After some filler questions (Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995), negative feelings toward the different levels of government were assessed according to the same 1 to 4 scale.6

Because Kaplan’s (1972) model for measuring ambivalence fails to account for the presence of polarized beliefs, we calculated an ambivalence score for each level of government using an algorithm developed by Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995):

\[
\text{Ambivalence} = [(P + N)/2] - |P - N|
\]
where $P$ is the positive reaction score and $N$ is the negative reaction score. Scores for each item 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). In the analysis here, scores of $-0.5$ and $0.0$ (“generally” positive and no negative, or vice versa) are both considered to reflect an absence of ambivalence. Our multivariate models of social welfare liberalism were tested using separate measures of ambivalence toward federal, state, and local government, as well with an index that combined the three indicators ($\alpha = .61$).

**Control Variables**

The literature suggests that certain core values are associated with citizens’ attitudes concerning social welfare (Feldman 1988; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Goren 2001; McCann 1997). We expect to find that a general commitment to egalitarianism (not necessarily tied to economic leveling) is positively correlated and that economic individualism (defined as a belief in the freedom to accumulate wealth) is negatively correlated with support for social welfare. To measure these concepts, respondents were read a series of companion statements and asked to say which came closer to their own opinion (see the Appendix). For egalitarianism, the choices centered on whether the country would benefit from (1) treating people more equally or (2) worrying less about making sure that everyone receives equal treatment. For economic individualism, the contrast involved (1) support for an activist government to ensure that people have jobs and to deal with complex economic problems versus (2) endorsement of the free market and the idea of letting each person get ahead on his own. The two sets of items were combined into indices with scores centered between 0 and 1 (high values reflecting stronger support for individualist or egalitarian values). Respondents were also asked to indicate the importance they attached to various goals that the nation might choose to pursue, including both equality and a free marketplace.

Prior research has also embraced the idea that individuals’ attitudes are shaped by feelings as well as cognitions (Breckler and Wiggins 1989; Esses, Haddock, and Zanna 1993; Millar and Tesser 1986). Studies suggest that feelings concerning the perceived beneficiaries of social welfare provide an affective base for attitudes concerning such policy
(Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Cook and Barrett 1992; Gilens 1995; Kinder and Winter 2001; Nelson 1999; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; also see Jacoby 2005). Apart from the obvious (poor people), many citizens think of African Americans as being among the principal beneficiaries of governmental welfare programs. Accordingly, feelings about welfare beneficiaries are measured by an index based on answers to four questions tapping respondents’ positive and negative affect toward “poor people” and “blacks.” As with our measure of social welfare liberalism, we simply inverted negative scores and added them to the positive responses, then centered the overall index between 0 and 1 (alpha = .77 for positive feelings, .87 for negative feelings, .70 for the four items together).

We also anticipate that ideology will, first, affect citizens’ social welfare attitudes directly (conservatives being less supportive) and second, based on Rudolph and Evans (2005), condition the relationship between trust, ambivalence concerning government, and governmental ambivalence on one hand, and social welfare liberalism on the other. It is measured by respondents’ self-placement on a scale ranging from 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative). Partisanship is captured using the traditional seven-point scale, with Democrats expected to be more supportive of social welfare than Republicans. Other control variables in our multivariate analyses are income (Goren 2001), race (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Gilens 1995; Kinder and Winter 2001; Tate 1994), and gender (Gilens 1988; Goren 2001; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999), with the affluent, blacks, and women more likely than those with lower incomes, nonblacks, and men, respectively, to score high on social welfare liberalism.

Results

From the results shown in the top portion of Table 2, it is clear that voters in Florida, like their counterparts throughout the country, are not confident that government authorities can be trusted to perform their jobs effectively and to represent the best interests of the general public in doing so. These indicators were designed to tap citizens’ beliefs about government as a whole, rather than about the national government specifically (which is why the first item refers to “the people who run our government” rather than ANES’ “the government in Washington”), and
so we are hesitant to make any direct comparisons with studies that focus on the top tier in the U.S. federal system. We also concede the arbitrariness of our decision to use item midpoints as the threshold for determining who is mistrustful (or cynical) and who is not. With these caveats in mind, however, it is interesting to note that the percentage of respondents identified as mistrusting according to our alternative-choice measure of trust (Government Wasteful) is substantially lower than on the remaining two items. This suggests that the American public may not view its government as negatively as we are sometimes led to believe by the ANES trust index and similar measures. Indeed, our version of the Cook and Gronke (2005) active trust/mistrust question confirms that many more people fall near the middle than at either positive or negative extreme. When asked to locate themselves on a scale ranging from 0 (active mistrust) to 10 (active trust), 53.2 percent selected the midpoint of 5 (“government is right about half of the time and wrong the other

Table 2. Distribution of Responses for Political Trust, Active Trust/Mistrust, and Ambivalence Concerning Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Percent Mistrusting/Ambivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do what is right</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big interests</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government wasteful</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Trust Index</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active trust/mistrust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong thing/right thing</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ambivalence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>69.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence index</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data are from a statewide (Florida) survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries indicate (1) mean score for each item (ranging between 0-1 for individual trust items as well as the overall index, 0-10 for active trust/mistrust, −.5 and +4.0 for ambivalence items, −1.5 and +12.0 for the ambivalence index); (2) associated standard deviation; and (3) percentage of respondents with scores below the midpoint for trust, at or below the midpoint for active trust/mistrust, and above zero for ambivalence. Missing values were replaced using multiple imputation (N = 607; see note 1).
half”), and another 14.9 percent were positioned at either 4 or 6. These findings raise doubts concerning what it is that traditional trust questions, which often portray Americans today as deeply cynical, are actually measuring.

Ambivalence involves a combination of positive and negative feelings, and our data reveal that many Florida voters do experience conflict—especially toward the government in Washington (77.1 percent with scores greater than zero), but to a considerable extent toward state (69.5 percent), and local government (68.7 percent) as well. People who are ambivalent concerning one level of government also tend to be ambivalent concerning the others (tau-b for national-state is .382, for national-local .154, and for state-local .282, all coefficients significant at \( p < .05 \)). Although these relationships are far from overwhelming, they are strong enough that we have combined the three measures into a single index (alpha = .61) for the analyses that follow. For the index, 88.3 percent of respondents have scores greater than zero, providing evidence that most are not resolutely cynical but rather harbor mixed feelings about government at all levels.

We should note that our measures of political trust, active trust/mistrust, and ambivalence concerning government capture three distinct orientations. Trust and active trust/mistrust are positively correlated (tau-b = .317, \( p < .01 \)), although not to the degree that one might expect if the two indicators were tapping the same attitude. Also, neither is correlated with ambivalence, which is an interesting finding in its own right: ambivalence is as common among citizens who exhibit a generally positive view of government as it is among those whose overall outlook tends to be more negative.\(^\text{12}\)

As for the relationship between these variables and social welfare liberalism, our findings are a bit of a surprise. The bivariate correlations, shown in Table 3, indicate that neither political trust nor active trust/mistrust is associated, at conventional levels of significance, with citizens’ attitudes concerning social welfare policy. In fact, the (very weak) relationships we see run in the opposite direction from predictions based on Hetherington’s work; that is, support for social welfare programs is more likely to be found among those with lower rather than higher levels of trust, active or otherwise.\(^\text{13}\) In line with our expectations, however, ambivalence concerning government is negatively (if not particularly strongly) associated with social welfare liberalism. The surprise in this
instance is that there is so little difference in the magnitude of the three individual coefficients. We anticipated that ambivalence concerning the federal government would have the greatest impact because it is Washington that is primarily responsible for the kinds of programs represented in our social welfare liberalism index. As it happens, the federal coefficient is actually a little weaker than its state and local counterparts.

As Table 4 shows, these relationships hold up fairly well in a multivariate setting. In the ordered logit model, neither traditional political trust nor active trust/mistrust has any impact on social welfare liberalism, while opposition to progressive programs continues to be greater, *ceteris paribus*, among respondents who are more ambivalent concerning government (as measured by the three-item index). Liberal views on social welfare are especially likely to be found among those with positive feelings concerning blacks and poor people, a strong commitment to egalitarian values, a belief that equality is an important societal goal, less support for economic individualism, plus African Americans and Democratic identifiers. While ordered logit coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Bivariate Correlations between Political Trust, Active Trust/Mistrust, Ambivalence Concerning Government, and Social Welfare Liberalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare Liberalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do what is right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government wasteful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Trust Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active trust/mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong thing/right thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence index</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data are from a statewide (Florida) survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries are Kendall’s tau-b, with an asterisk (*) indicating significance at $p < .05$ (2-tailed test). Missing values were replaced using multiple imputation ($N = 607$; see note 1).*
are more difficult to interpret than linear regression and binary logit coefficients, it is fair to say that the effect of ambivalence is weak compared to the effects of other variables. Nevertheless, unlike traditional trust and active trust/mistrust, the impact of ambivalence is statistically discernible from zero, and its inclusion contributes to a more complete model of social welfare liberalism.

One possible explanation for our failure to observe a relationship between traditional political trust (as well as active trust/mistrust) and social welfare liberalism is suggested by the work of Rudolph and Evans (2005). These authors found opposition to both distributive and redistributive spending to be greater among conservatives, for whom government spending of any sort (except perhaps on programs related to defense and national security) might be considered a violation of their fundamental ideological beliefs. In our data (see Table 5), liberals and conservatives differed in their respective levels of trust (active and

### Table 4. Modeling Social Welfare Liberalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>95% Confidence</th>
<th>95% Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Trust Index</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>−.58 to .74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active trust/mistrust</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>−.07 to .12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence about government</td>
<td>−.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>−.15 to −.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings/beneficiaries</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>2.04 to 3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic individualism</td>
<td>−1.92</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>−2.43 to −1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism importance</td>
<td>−.05</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>−.55 to .46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarianism</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.22 to 1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarianism importance</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>1.07 to 2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>−.17 to .03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>−.15</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>−.57 to .26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.02 to .78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.39 to 1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>−.23 to .35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>−.09 to .21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−2 log likelihood</td>
<td>3,658.24</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke pseudo R²</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>607</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Data are from a statewide (Florida) survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries are ordered logit estimates (threshold levels not shown), associated standard errors, and 95 percent confidence intervals. Missing values were replaced using multiple imputation (N = 607; see note 1).
otherwise), ambivalence, and social welfare liberalism. Presumably as a result of Republican majorities in both Washington and Tallahassee at the time of our survey (Citrin and Luks 2001; Keele 2005), conservatives exhibited higher levels of traditional trust—but not of active trust, where the two groups were statistically the same—than liberals. Conservatives also were more ambivalent (significantly so on the overall index and on feelings toward the state government in Tallahassee) and, as expected, less supportive of social welfare programs. None of this tells us, however, whether ideology plays the moderating role hypothesized by Rudolph and Evans.

Just as we were unable to replicate Hetherington’s (2005) observed relationship between trust and social welfare liberalism, the results outlined in Table 6 provide no evidence that this relationship is stronger among conservatives (who have the most to lose, at least symbolically,
when government spending rises) than among liberals. The main effects of the trust and active trust variables are statistically trivial, as are their interactions with the dummy variable for conservative ideology. The same is not true for ambivalence, however, as the sign of the conservative ¥ political trust interaction is in the expected (negative) direction and significant; in other words, the impact of governmental ambivalence on social welfare attitudes is more pronounced among conservatives than among moderates and liberals. The main effect of ambivalence is once again apparent, indicating that support for social welfare programs is weaker even among nonconservatives who express mixed positive and negative feelings concerning government in the United States.

Table 6. Testing for the Moderating Effects of Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Trust Index</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>-.60 to .72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active trust/mistrust</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.07 to .12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence about government</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.15 to .02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings/beneficiaries</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>1.94 to 3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic individualism</td>
<td>-1.93</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-2.47 to -1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism importance</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>-.55 to .46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarianism</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.27 to 1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalitarianism importance</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>1.07 to 2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.63 to .19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.02 to .74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.35 to 1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.20 to .37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.10 to .20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.43 to .20</td>
</tr>
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<td>Conservative ¥ Political Trust</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.39 to .38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative ¥ Active Trust/Mistrust</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.02 to .07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative ¥ Ambivalence</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.07 to .00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-2 log likelihood: 3,656.83
Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2$: .40
N: 607

Note: Data are from a statewide (Florida) survey of registered voters conducted in May 2004. Table entries are ordered logit coefficients (threshold levels not shown), associated standard errors, and 95 percent confidence intervals. Missing values were replaced using multiple imputation (N = 607; see note 1).
Conclusion

In our view, these findings amplify both the well-developed literature on political trust and the emergent literature in political science on ambivalence. First, the frequency and effect of ambivalence (or mixed feelings) concerning government itself reinforces recent research suggesting that a dichotomy of trust and cynicism may not fully capture the complexities of citizens’ beliefs concerning their government. There is no doubt that traditional measures registered much lower levels of political trust from the late 1960s through the 1990s than they did in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but we think there is now doubt concerning whether those trends were capturing an increase in outright cynicism concerning government—as feared by Miller (1974)—or simply a growing skepticism (Cook and Gronke 2005). If the latter is the case, the loss of trust since the 1960s may not be as serious a development as some have thought and, viewed through the lens of those who see a growth in the number of “critical citizens,” it may reflect a politically healthy degree of concern that motivates some forms of mass political participation in segments of the mass public.

There is some evidence from the 1940s and 1950s that many Americans were ambivalent concerning government in the sense of possessing mixed positive and negative beliefs and/or feelings (Hyman and Sheatsley [1950] 1954; Mitchell 1959). Without long-term trend data, we cannot determine how much this has changed over the past 50-60 years, but our direct measures of affective ambivalence leave little doubt that ambivalence concerning government at the federal, state, and local levels is a fairly common phenomenon in contemporary American politics (also see McGraw and Bartels 2005). Moreover, while neither traditional nor revised measures of political trust appear to be a primary source of support for social welfare programs in our data, ambivalence does have a significant if modest impact: citizens with conflicted feelings about government are less likely to endorse progressive policy action in the social welfare realm, and that appears especially true among conservative identifiers (Rudolph and Evans 2005).

Especially given that (1) our data are from a single state rather than the nation as a whole, and (2) several of our key indicators differ from those employed by other scholars, it obviously would be premature for us to reject the Hetherington thesis (either in its original form or as
amended by Rudolph and Evans 2005) altogether. We do believe, however, that it is imperative for scholars to continue investigating citizens’ conflicting views concerning governmental leaders and institutions (and many other things), the extent to which such ambivalence can help us to understand better the post-1964 era of diminished public trust and the impact that both cognitive and affective ambivalence have on a range of other political attitudes and behaviors. The consequences of ambivalence, in particular, warrant closer examination. For now, it appears that ambivalence concerning government reduces the likelihood of support for social welfare programs, especially among people who normally oppose higher levels of governmental activity and spending in those areas. We suspect that this may turn out to be only the tip of the iceberg.

Appendix

Question wordings for most variables in our analysis are provided below. High scores reflect greater trust, ambivalence, and active trust of government; greater liberalism on social welfare issues; stronger commitment to individualism and egalitarianism; more positive feelings toward welfare beneficiaries; conservative self-identification; Democratic partisanship; and black, high income, and female on demographics.

Political Trust

(1) How much of the time do you think you can trust the people who run our government to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or almost never? (2) Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all the people? Do you feel strongly or not so strongly about this? (3) Next, I’m going to read two statements and ask you to tell me which one comes closer to your own opinion. You might agree to some extent with both, but we want to know which one is closer to your views: Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient; or Government often does a better job than people give it credit for. Do you feel strongly or not so strongly about this? (Answers to the second and third items were originally coded from 1 to 5, with those who offered a “mixed” response placed in the middle.)
Affective Ambivalence about Government

See text for complete wordings.

Active Trust/Mistrust of Government

People have different views about how well government works. Imagine a scale with scores ranging from zero through 10, where “0” means that government can almost always be counted on to do the wrong thing, “10” means that government can almost always be counted on to do the right thing, and “5” means that government is right about half of the time and wrong the other half. Where on this scale would you place yourself?

Social Welfare Liberalism

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 [negatively] you feel toward it. If you do not have any positive [negative] feelings, give it the lowest rating of 1; if you have some positive [negative] feelings, rate it a 2; if you have generally positive [negative] feelings, rate it a 3; and if you have extremely positive [negative] feelings, rate it a 4. Please rate each statement based solely on how positively [negatively] you feel about it, while ignoring or setting aside for the moment any negative [positive] feelings you may have. The first statement is . . . (1) The government should ensure that every citizen has adequate medical insurance. (2) The government should provide programs to help homeless people find a place to live. (3) The government should ensure that every child has access to a good education. (4) The government should provide programs that improve the standard of living of poor Americans. (5) The government should see to it that everyone who wants a job has one. (6) The government should provide child care programs to assist working parents. (7) The government should ensure that the retirement benefits that citizens have built up over the years are protected.

Economic Individualism

[Which of the following statements is closer to your own opinion?] (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. Do you feel strongly or not so strongly about this? (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. Do you feel strongly or not so strongly about this? (Answers were originally coded from 1 to 5, with those who offered a “mixed” response placed in the middle.)

Egalitarianism

[Which of the following statements is closer to your own opinion?] (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. Do you feel strongly or not so strongly about this? (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. Do you feel strongly or not so strongly about this? (Answers were originally coded from 1 to 5, with those who offered a “mixed” response placed in the middle.)

Importance of Core Values

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. (1) 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? . . . (2) 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? (Note: The second goal, not examined in this paper, had to do with “traditional values, by which we mean encouraging people to live their lives according to a higher moral code.”)

Feelings about Welfare Beneficiaries

[Asked as part of the same batteries of questions that were used to measure social welfare liberalism and ambivalence about government; see above for exact wording.] Positive and negative feelings toward (1) poor people and (2) blacks.
Ideology
We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. On a scale of one through seven, where “1” is very liberal and “7” is very conservative, where would you place yourself on this scale or haven’t you thought much about this?

Party Identification
Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what? (If Republican or Democrat) Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat) or a not very strong (Republican/Democrat)? (If Independent) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or to the Democratic Party?

Race
Is your race or ethnic identity white, African-American, Hispanic, or something else?

Income
Again, I want to thank you for your cooperation on this completely confidential survey? Would you say your household’s approximate yearly income bracket is . . . (1) less than $10,000; (2) between $10,000 and $30,000; (3) between $30,000 and $50,000; (4) between $50,000 and $70,000; (5) $70,000 or more?

Gender
[Recorded by the interviewer without asking, unless it was necessary to do so.]

Notes
An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia. We appreciate helpful comments by John Transue and Politics and Policy’s anonymous reviewers.

1 Up to four callbacks were made to each working number in an effort to obtain a completed interview. Using the American Association for Public Opinion Research’s final disposition standards (AAPOR 2000; also see http://www.aapor.org/uploads/Standard_Definitions_04_08_Final.pdf), the response rate was 39.2 percent, yielding a total of 607 completed interviews. Additional information regarding the survey can be obtained from the Florida Voter polling
organization. We addressed the pervasive problem of missing data in analyses of survey research by using a multiple imputation process. Using this procedure, five replicate data sets were created based on the data, where the missing data in each replication are substituted with draws from the posterior distribution of the missing value conditional on observed values (Little and Rubin 1987; see also Horton and Lipsitz 2001). The analyses that follow are based on the mean results of the five replicate imputed data sets.

2 A separate indicator of the sum of positive and inverted negative responses for each policy issue was also created for descriptive purposes in the following section.

3 This is not to say that different question wording or a listing that included more controversial government programs—such as food stamps or race-targeted spending (Jacoby 2005)—would produce the same results.

4 The eigenvalue for this factor was 3.696, explaining 52.8 percent of the variance.

5 Because the item regarding governmental waste and inefficiency may be unfamiliar to most scholars researching on political trust—and different from the four-item ANES index utilized in Hetherington (2005)—we also ran our analyses using just the “trust government” and “few big interests” questions. Results did not differ in any significant way from what is reported below.

6 This battery (and its negative counterpart) also measured citizens’ feelings toward the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, poor people, blacks, and whites.

7 Other core values may be important as well. For example, Feldman and Steenbergen (2001, 659) found that humanitarianism, defined as “the belief that people have responsibilities toward their fellow human beings and should come to the assistance of others in need” also is a significant predictor of support for social welfare.

8 Although inter-item correlations (tau-b = .16 for individualism, .22 for egalitarianism, p < .01 in each instance) were not as high as we might have liked, they were sufficient to warrant our using the two indices in our analysis.

9 Research points to the existence of value hierarchies (Jacoby 2002; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992). If social welfare attitudes are shaped, in part, by egalitarian and individualist values (Feldman 1988; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Goren 2001; McCann 1997), and if many place greater importance on one as opposed to the other, it is reasonable to expect that the latter will contribute to the structure of their attitudes concerning social welfare.

10 Separate dummy variables were created for Democrat and Republican identification (0 = not Democrat and 1 = Democrat, 0 = not Republican and 1 = Republican). All independents and independent leaners were coded as 0.

11 Race is a dummy variable coded 1 for black, 0 for nonblack. Because Latinos in the aggregate are more liberal, at least on certain issues, than whites (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; DeSipio 1996; Uhlaner, Gray, and Garcia 2000; Welch and Sigelman 1993), we might normally expect their level of support for social welfare to be similar to that found among blacks and women. Unfortunately, this proposition cannot be tested because our survey did not distinguish among different groups of Latino citizens. We know, for example, that Cubans tend to be more conservative than other Latinos—especially Puerto Ricans, but also Mexicans; see de la Garza and others (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.
Those who are ambivalent concerning state government in Florida are slightly more likely to say that the people who run our government can be trusted (tau-b = .08, p < .05), while those who express ambivalence concerning their local government are slightly less inclined to believe that government often does a better job than it is given credit for (tau-b = -.07, p < .05). All other correlations involving the trust and ambivalence indices, as well as their individual components, are statistically equivalent to zero.

Others have also found weak or negligible relationships between measures of political trust and support for social welfare policies. See, for examples, Edlund (1999, 2006).

Multicollinearity does not appear to be a significant problem in the model shown in Table 4. Only three of the 91 bivariate associations among independent variables exceed tau-b = .30. One of these was between the Republican and Democratic partisanship dummies (tau-b = -.64); the others were between the traditional measure of political trust and active trust (tau-b = .32), and between trust and Republican partisanship (tau-b = .32). Detailed results are available by request to the first-named author. The usual concern about multicollinearity is that the inflated standard errors mask statistical significance of key independent variables. As noted in Table 3, the bivariate relationships between our measures of trust and social welfare liberalism are trivial in magnitude, which suggests that there is no substantive relationship to mask.

We also estimated three other models, each of which contained one of the component terms from the ambivalence index. Across the board, ambivalence is associated with greater opposition to social welfare programs (p < .05 for both state and local, p < .10 for federal).

Liberals are those who score 1, 2, or 3 on the seven-point scale, while conservatives are those who score 5, 6, or 7.

At the risk of overinterpretation, our first reaction to this finding is that the active trust/mistrust question evokes a longer-term perspective than traditional trust measures; this may have led some conservative respondents to focus on government in general rather than on the short-term advantage enjoyed by their preferred party in 2004.

About the Authors

**Jason Gainous** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville. His research interests include public opinion and political behavior, political psychology, campaigns and elections, media and politics, survey research, and methodology. He has published various book chapters and articles in journals including *American Politics Research*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Political Communication*, and *Statistical Science*.

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chapters and articles in professional journals, including *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *Political Research Quarterly*. His research deals with attitude measurement, campaign effects, and various other aspects of contemporary public opinion and political behavior in the United States. He served as the director of UF’s Graduate Program in Political Campaigning from 1986-2007 and has worked extensively with both academic and political surveys in Florida and nationwide.

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**References**


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