Sometimes You Feel Like a Nut, Sometimes You Don’t: Citizens’ Ambivalence About Abortion

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Recent research has recognized that many people simultaneously hold positive and negative attitudes about important political issues. This paper reviews the concept of attitudinal ambivalence and introduces a survey measure of ambivalence adapted from the experimental literature. An analysis of two statewide telephone surveys of Florida voters reveals that (1) a number of voters have ambivalent attitudes about abortion rights; (2) the amount of ambivalence varies according to the circumstances (elective versus traumatic) under which an abortion is obtained; (3) ambivalence about elective abortions is essentially unrelated to ambivalence about traumatic abortions; (4) voters who support abortion rights are more ambivalent about elective abortions than about traumatic abortions, whereas the pattern is reversed for abortion rights opponents; and (5) extreme views in support of or opposition to abortion rights can sometimes mitigate the amount of ambivalence felt by voters.

KEY WORDS: ambivalence, abortion, attitude consistency, survey research

Current debate in America concerning abortion appears to pose an insoluble conflict between two fundamental values: the right of a fetus to live and the right of a woman to determine her own fate. The contemporary citizen seeking an ethical solution to the abortion dilemma must, it seems, navigate like Ulysses between the Scylla of infanticide and the Charybdis of women’s bondage.


I’m anti-abortion and pro-choice.
Former Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles, quoted in The Miami Herald, 22 May 1997

Of all the social issues that divide liberals from conservatives in U.S. politics today, probably none evokes as much emotion as the controversy over a woman’s
right to have an abortion. Since the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in Roe v. Wade, this issue has polarized a portion of the voting public (Abramowitz, 1997) and has seemed 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 women achieved only after decades of considerable effort.

Less certain is the degree to which the debate has penetrated to the grass-roots level. Despite a growing body of research showing that abortion preferences exert a significant impact on candidate choice in some elections and under some circumstances (e.g., Abramowitz, 1995; Cook, Jelen, & Wilcox, 1994; Smith, 1994), it does not appear that a large number of voters are casting their ballots solely or even primarily on the basis of abortion (Tatalovich, 1997). Moreover, for many years survey studies indicated that Americans’ views on abortion were basically unrelated to their partisan attachments. In the 1990s, however, there were signs that a shift may finally have occurred. Whereas Democratic identifiers once outnumbered Republicans—by a wide margin—among those with pro-choice, moderate, and pro-life views, that advantage is now much smaller among the middle group and has disappeared altogether among pro-lifers (Adams, 1997).

It is not our purpose here to consider directly the electoral relevance of abortion. Instead, we focus on the nature of abortion attitudes, and by implication on the nature of political attitudes in general, in an effort to demonstrate that these attitudes frequently are more complex than traditional models assume to be the case. Nevertheless, although our research is preliminary and suggestive at best, we believe that it provides some insights as to how policy issues such as abortion can at times help to shape electoral outcomes.

The Concept of Ambivalence

Since the seminal work of Thurstone (1928; see also Thurstone & Chave, 1929), people’s attitudes have been measured as if they lie somewhere along a bipolar continuum that ranges from positive to negative, with a neutral point in between (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, for a review). This unidimensional view of attitudes makes intuitive sense because most of us tend to think in bipolar terms. When we watch a movie or eat a meal, we usually classify it as either “good” or “bad” (or, representing the continuum and its neutral point, as “so-so”); and in political commentary, candidates and elected officials are often described ideologically as being either “liberal” or “conservative” (or “middle-of-the-road”).

At first glance, describing something as both good and bad, or a candidate as both liberal and conservative, would seem improbable—or at least inconsistent. But 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 (see Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1982), with the
summation of these perceptions presumably telling us whether he or she falls, overall, into one category or the other. Feldman (1995, p. 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 concerning an attitude object are in conflict with one another, we might describe that person as being ambivalent (Alvarez & Brehm, 1995; Cantril & Cantril, 1999; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The concept of ambivalence is not new (Kaplan, 1972; Scott, 1969); social psychologists using experimental data have empirically demonstrated the existence of an ambivalence dimension based on the assumption that attitudes can indeed contain separate positive and negative components (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986; Klopfer & Madden, 1980; Priester & Petty, 1996; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). There also is evidence that ambivalence decreases the stability of attitudes over time, probably because the accessibility of both favorable and unfavorable perceptions permits, and may even encourage, attitudinal shifts depending on variations in context (Craig, Kane, & Martinez, 2000; Katz, 1981).1

Ambivalence has begun to receive greater attention from survey researchers in recent years, although its measurement is typically much more indirect and inferential than in experimental psychology. Feldman and Zaller (1992), for example, asked survey respondents to state whatever thoughts came to mind as they answered two traditional closed-ended policy questions. On the basis of the mix of answers given and similar findings reported by other scholars (e.g., Hochschild, 1981), the authors concluded that “most people possess opposing considerations on most issues, that is, considerations that might lead them to decide the issue either way” (Zaller & Feldman, 1992, p. 585; see also Zaller, 1992). This is the ambivalence axiom and, according to Zaller and Feldman, it helps to account for the response instability so often associated with surveys of ordinary citizens (Converse, 1964).

Although we generally find the substantive argument here to be compelling, the manner in which Zaller and Feldman measured ambivalence is problematic and potentially misleading. Alvarez and Brehm (1995) correctly pointed out that an individual’s being able to enumerate reasons both for permitting and for prohibiting abortions does not, in and of itself, signify the presence of an underlying conflict. In some instances, “opposing considerations” could reflect such factors as equivocation (someone trying to avoid making a bad impression on the interviewer),

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1 It is possible that ambivalence will lead to reduced accessibility for attitudes that combine positive and negative elements (Bargh, Chaiken, Govender, & Pratto, 1992); see also Tourangeau, Rasinski, Bradburn, and D’Andrade (1989), whose findings seem to indicate that ambivalent feelings or beliefs—in this case, self-reported—are more difficult to retrieve in memory and may require a more powerful stimulus to activate them.
uncertainty (recognizing that there are two sides to an issue but lacking the information to choose one over the other), informedness (having sufficient information to cite both sides even while clearly favoring one, or perhaps neither), and question ambiguity (strong preferences exist but our questions are unable to elicit them; Alvarez & Brehm, 1995, pp. 1056–1057; see also Alvarez & Brehm, 1997, 1998).

Taking a different approach with their own research, Alvarez and Brehm did not measure ambivalence directly, but rather inferred it from patterns of error variance in heteroskedastic probit models of binary choice. Insofar as it behaves in a manner consistent with theoretical predictions (e.g., being higher among those who express reasons both for and against abortion, and being uncorrelated with respondents’ level of information about the issue), these authors concluded that error variance across individuals indicates the presence of ambivalence within individuals. However, such inferences about an individual-level concept (ambivalence) on the basis of aggregate-level data (error variance in binary choices) are problematic. Error variance is high, by definition, when survey responses of a large proportion of people are not predicted accurately by the binary choice model, whereas ambivalence exists when an individual person holds both positive and negative feelings about an issue. Error variances may indeed be related to ambivalence, and Alvarez and Brehm’s findings give us reason to believe that they probably are to some degree. Yet error variances are an accumulation of errors in the binary choice model and may also be a function of poor question wording, non-attitudes, coding mistakes, aspects of attitude strength apart from ambivalence (e.g., importance, extremity, intensity; see Craig et al., 2000), model specification, and numerous other random and non-random factors. Consequently, Alvarez and Brehm cannot say how many people are ambivalent, and they are only able to estimate the relative degree of ambivalence across issues or choice conditions by assuming that those random and non-random factors are equal across the same issues or conditions.

So far, then, survey-based studies (see also Cantril & Cantril, 1999; Lavine, 2001) have made a plausible but almost wholly inferential case for the existence of ambivalence in the American public, and for the possibility that feelings of ambivalence may differ from one issue or choice condition to the next. To the extent that aggregate-level error variances and mixed responses on open-ended questions are accurate representations of the underlying concept, the measurement strategies used by Feldman and Zaller and by Alvarez and Brehm (especially the latter) have the virtue of being relatively easy to implement in large-scale surveys. Yet given the underlying assumptions and uncertainty of interpretation associated with these methods, we believe that public opinion scholars need to develop indicators that more directly tap the conflict apparently felt by many citizens on important issues of public policy. Below, we propose and test such a measure (adapted from experimental psychology) using data from a series of statewide surveys in Florida. Even if previous conclusions are largely ratified, our research will have provided
external validation for those who would use the indirect approach to assess attitudes on issues other than abortion.

**Data and Methodology**

The present study is based on two statewide telephone polls conducted in March 1998 \((N = 608)\) and in January and February 1999 \((N = 708)\), respectively, by the *Florida Voter* survey organization. Respondents were initially asked a series of questions that have been included on a more-or-less regular basis in General Social Surveys since 1972. The GSS battery is as follows:

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman 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?
- the woman wants it for any reason?

Table I reveals that, relative to voters nationwide, Floridians are slightly less supportive of legal abortion under some conditions (“birth defect,” “not married,” and “no more children” in 1998, “any reason” in 1999), but the overall degree of similarity between the two groups is impressive. Moreover, a ranking of these conditions mirrored the GSS pattern almost exactly; that is, “woman’s health,” “rape,” and “birth defect” received widespread support (75 to 89%) in all three surveys, whereas the remaining conditions were regarded as less palatable (35 to 44%). It is therefore likely that the abortion preferences of Florida voters are structured in a similar fashion and are based on the same underlying values as is true for all Americans.

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2 *Florida Voter* publishes a nonpartisan political journal based on periodic surveys of registered voters. A random-digit-dialing procedure was used in 1998, with interviewers asking to speak to the “person in the household with a birthday nearest to today who is registered to vote in Florida” (see Craig, Martínez, & Kane, 1999, for a discussion of this approach; up to three callbacks were made for each working number in an effort to obtain a completed interview. For the 1999 survey, the sampling frame was created from a random selection of voters (derived from current registration rolls) with working numbers; as many as four callbacks were made if needed. Additional information can be obtained from *Florida Voter* directly (800-899-7655) or from the Florida Institute for Research on Elections, Department of Political Science, University of Florida. Although selection procedures differed, the similarity of our results in 1998 and 1999 (and of the social and political composition of the sample in both years) gives us confidence that we are dealing with two essentially equivalent groups.

3 The seventh item (“any reason”) was added to the GSS battery in 1977. As shown in Table I, our 1998 survey included only the original six questions, whereas in 1999 we asked all seven—with similar though not identical results.
Our measure of ambivalence was modeled on experimental work by social psychologists, and part of the goal here is to determine whether it can be successfully adapted to surveys. The technique is a version of the semantic differential (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957), as modified by Kaplan (1972) in an effort to show that people’s overall attitudes are actually made up of both positive and negative elements. In order 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 this study, we adapted Kaplan’s language to accommodate the limitations of a telephone survey:

“I’m now going to read a series of statements about abortion. 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, A woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion if . . .”

The GSS conditions were then read and respondents were asked to rate each one separately. Next, the above statement was repeated, except with the words “positive” and “positively” changed to “negative” and “negatively” (see Osgood et al., 1957; Thompson et al., 1995). If a person seemed unsure or confused at any point, the interviewer repeated the instructions as many times as necessary.

Kaplan’s model for measuring attitudinal ambivalence is used widely within the social psychology literature (Priester & Petty, 1996). It specifies that the amount

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance</th>
<th>1998 GSS</th>
<th>1998 Florida</th>
<th>1999 Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s health</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth defect</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family too poor</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No more children</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any reason</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Table entries are proportions of respondents, excluding those with missing values, who say they think a woman should be able to obtain a legal abortion under the particular circumstance listed. Figures for the nation as a whole are from the 1998 General Social Survey; these data were originally collected by the National Opinion Research Center and were made available to the authors by the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research (Study 2685). State data (weighted in 1998 to provide an accurate distribution of registrants by party) are from the Florida Voter surveys conducted in March 1998 (unweighted N = 608) and January–February 1999 (unweighted N = 708).
of ambivalence is a function of total affect directed by the individual toward an attitude object (positive plus negative reactions) less the polarity of those reactions (the absolute value of positive minus negative responses). This can be formally represented as

\[ \text{Ambivalence} = \text{Total Affect} - \text{Polarity} \]

Hence, ambivalence is operationalized simply as twice the value of the weaker evaluation.

The problem with the Kaplan model, as others have pointed out (Priester & Petty, 1996; Thompson et al., 1995), is that it fails to account adequately for the presence of polarized beliefs. For example, someone who rates one of our abortion statements as a 4 on the positive component, and as a 2 on the negative component, probably can be viewed as experiencing less ambivalence than someone who answers 2 on both. Yet according to Kaplan’s model, each of these individuals receives an identical score on the overall measure. Common sense seems to dictate that any operational definition of ambivalence should take the degree of polarization into account, or else risk overestimating the amount of ambivalence that actually exists. Megan Thompson and her colleagues (1995) corrected for this deficiency by reformulating the Kaplan model so as to include both similarity and intensity of components (i.e., reasoning that increased similarity between positive and negative components reflects greater ambivalence). In addition, they proposed that if similarity is held constant, increased intensity should lead to greater ambivalence. Putting it all together, the argument is that

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

where \( P \) is the positive reaction score and \( N \) is the negative reaction score.\(^4\) The Thompson study (see also Priester & Petty, 1996) found this model to be superior to others, including Kaplan’s, at predicting subjective ambivalence, or the degree to which respondents reported feeling discomfort when asked to provide an evaluation of some attitude object. We thus elected to adopt the Kaplan method of collecting positive and negative reactions to our seven abortion statements, but to calculate overall ambivalence using the similarity-intensity model (SIM).

Table II shows the range of ambivalence scores associated with the SIM. As advertised, this model is sensitive to the intensity of positive and negative sentiments. For instance, consider a person who reports “some” positive feelings (score of 2) as well as no negative feelings (score of 1) with regard to legal abortion in the case of rape; that individual would be characterized by the model as experiencing a modest amount of ambivalence (overall SIM score of 0.5). If, in contrast, the

\(^4\) Conceptually, the first part of the equation, \( \frac{(P + N)}{2} \), 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 of the equation, \( |P - N| \), 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.
same respondent were to express “generally” positive feelings (score of 3) and no negative feelings (score of 1), his or her SIM value would fall to zero (i.e., no ambivalence at all). One might argue that a positive score of 2 and a negative score of 1 (or the reverse) does not really indicate that someone is experiencing internal conflict. Yet Thompson et al. (1995) concluded from their research that more similar scores—even when one of those scores is a 1 (reflecting the absence of affect)—better predict subjective ambivalence according to the coding scheme depicted in Table II than when the 2 + 1 combination is given an overall SIM score of zero.

Results

Our data indicate that many Floridians do have ambivalent feelings (defined as SIM scores greater than zero) about abortion. In 1998, 67.8% of our sample exhibited ambivalence on at least one of the GSS statements, 49.1% on at least two of them, and 28.9% on three or more; the corresponding totals for 1999 are even higher: 73.6%, 58.8%, and 41.5%, respectively. The “average” respondent was ambivalent on 1.66 of the six statements presented in 1998, and 2.24 of the seven in 1999. Interestingly, we found no significant difference between self-described “pro-choice” and “pro-life” voters (i.e., similar proportions of citizens on both sides of this issue seem to be experiencing some degree of internal conflict).

Table II. Ambivalence Scores Using the Similarity-Intensity Model (SIM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative reactions score</th>
<th>Positive reactions score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Table entries are overall ambivalence scores assigned to individuals with the indicated mix of positive and negative reactions (see Kaplan, 1972; Thompson et al., 1995).

Scores of –0.5 are regarded, for our purposes in Table III, as equivalent to zero.

To some degree, the observed increase here is likely a function of differences between the two surveys. In 1999, for example, we added the “any reason” condition (although greater ambivalence also is observed for each of the six original items; see Table IV), placed a larger number of “filler” questions between the positive and negative reaction statements (Thompson et al., 1995), and asked the original GSS 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 paper.

When it comes to abortion matters, in general, would you describe yourself as pro-choice or pro-life?” In 1998, 34 individuals volunteered “neither” and 11 said “don’t know” (out of 608 total); comparable numbers in 1999 were 53 and 21, respectively (out of 708). These respondents were, of course, excluded from our pro-choice versus pro-life comparisons.
Although the level of ambivalence observed on any one item is less than overwhelming, it is far from negligible. We learn from Table III, for example, that the circumstance of a poor family that “cannot afford any more children” generated the largest number of ambivalent responses in 1998 (33.7%, rising slightly to 36.0% the following year when it ranked a close third), whereas a pregnancy caused by rape produced the fewest (still a respectably high 21.4% in 1998 and 24.5% in 1999). Moreover, as with the mean number of responses reported above, the data here suggest that an increase in ambivalence may have taken place during the year between our two surveys. Even if it is true that much of this increase was an artifact of changing question order (see note 6), there can be little doubt that a substantial number of Florida voters have conflicting views about abortion.8

Alvarez and Brehm (1995) classified abortion circumstances as presenting either “easy” or “difficult” questions. Easy questions involve a single value dimension (because there is no conflict at all, or because one value is subordinated to another), whereas difficult questions involve two or more value dimensions that push people in different directions, thereby making it harder for them to render a summary opinion. From their analysis, Alvarez and Brehm (p. 1070) concluded that three of the GSS abortion statements (“woman’s health,” “rape,” “birth defect”) are easy, and four (“family too poor,” “no more children,” “not married,” “any reason”) are difficult. Only the latter, then, should generate the kind of ambivalence that results when core values come into conflict.

Although our own findings lead us to believe that this classification does not apply to the seven statements quite as simply as Alvarez and Brehm suggested (e.g., roughly one-quarter of our sample expressed ambivalence even on the easy questions in both 1998 and 1999; see Table III), there is nevertheless strong support for viewing the GSS abortion battery as a combination of two distinct clusters. As can be seen from the factor analyses in Table IV, (a) people who are ambivalent on “woman’s health,” “rape,” or “birth defect” also tend to be more ambivalent on the other two conditions; (b) precisely the same thing is true within the cluster represented by “family too poor,” “no more children,” “not married,” and “any reason”; and (c) ambivalence in one domain has relatively little to do with ambivalence in the other.

What makes this all the more interesting is that the same two clusters—which differ fairly sharply in their respective levels of public support—have been observed with regard to abortion preferences. As shown in Table I, Americans as a whole and Florida voters in particular are overwhelmingly likely to endorse what Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox (1992, p. 33) called traumatic abortion (“woman’s health,” “rape,” “birth defect”); in contrast, opposition is considerably more

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8 One should exercise caution when interpreting the means in Table III because these were calculated on the basis of the full range of SIM values (–0.5 to 4.0) reported earlier. In fact, most respondents (from 60.1% on “family too poor” to 71.8% on “rape” in 1998, and from 58.7% on “not married” to 72.6% on “rape” in 1999) are scored at exactly –0.5 on each item (i.e., they are among those—along with the smaller number scoring zero—who are not regarded as ambivalent).
widely in the case of elective abortion ("family too poor," "no more children," "not married," "any reason"). This discrepancy occurs regardless of whether one considers oneself to be pro-choice, pro-life, or neither.9

Alvarez and Brehm’s (1995, p. 1070) position is that conflicting feelings are likely to exist only under the kinds of “difficult” (elective) circumstances in which the public is hesitant to extend freedom of choice in the first place. Our results,

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Table III. Frequency and Intensity of Ambivalence Under Particular Circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance</th>
<th>1998 Ambivalence</th>
<th>1999 Ambivalence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s health</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth defect</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family too poor</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No more children</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any reason</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>N/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>552–557 (weighted)</td>
<td>642–650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data are from the March 1998 (weighted by party registration; see Table I) and January–February 1999 Florida Voter surveys. Entries in columns 1 and 3 indicate the proportion (excluding those with missing values) who have SIM ambivalence scores greater than zero on each of the seven statements. Entries in columns 2 and 4 are mean SIM scores for each statement.

Table IV. Factor Analysis of SIM Ambivalence Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstance</th>
<th>1998 Factor 1</th>
<th>1998 Factor 2</th>
<th>1999 Factor 1</th>
<th>1999 Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s health</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth defect</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family too poor</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No more children</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>–.02</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any reason</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent variance explained</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>540 (weighted)</td>
<td>607</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data are from the March 1998 (weighted by party registration; see Table I) and January–February 1999 Florida Voter surveys. Table entries are loadings based on a principal components factor analysis, varimax rotation (and listwise deletion of missing data). Loadings shown in bold are above .5.

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9 Pro-choicers approved, on average, 2.90 (1998) and 2.92 (1999) of the three conditions that constitute traumatic abortion, versus 1.85 of the three (1998) and 2.53 of the four (1999) that constitute elective abortion. The comparable numbers 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 small group falling into neither category, the numbers were 2.79 (1998 traumatic) and 2.82 (1999 traumatic) versus 1.15 (1998 elective) and 0.87 (1999 elective).
presented in Table V, reveal a different pattern. Pro-choice advocates do experience greater ambivalence in the case of elective abortion, but self-professed pro-lifers are more ambivalent when the issue involves traumatic abortion. Those who usually oppose abortion tend to feel less comfortable doing so when the pregnancy is involuntary, or when either mother or child faces serious health problems; those who usually support a woman’s right to choose tend to feel less comfortable doing so when the decision to abort is more of an economic or social choice than a medical one. It seems likely that, in each instance, the reason for such discomfort lies with policy choices that invoke conflicting core values.

Although we were unable to develop this argument fully (see Alvarez & Brehm, 2001), our 1999 survey did include a series of agree-disagree questions that tapped two types of values relevant to the abortion issue: moral traditionalism (“This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties” and “The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society”) and marriage roles (“It is more important for a wife to help her husband’s career than to have one herself” and “A husband’s job is to earn money; a wife’s job is to look after the home and family”). As expected, the findings reported in Table VI show ambivalence to be higher among those with conflicting views (i.e., traditionalist on moral questions, egalitarian with regard to the wife’s role; very few respondents are conflicted in the opposite direction) than among those who express consistent views—but only on the elective dimension. Using similar logic, we anticipated that Democrats who profess to be born again and Republicans who do not would experience greater ambivalence than their fellow partisans; they do on elective abortion, but born-again Republicans (whose preferences tend to be strongly pro-life) are the most ambivalent about abortion under traumatic circumstances. Although these results obviously should be regarded as preliminary (e.g., because value dimensions other than the ones examined here may be more relevant in shaping abortion attitudes), it is clear that future research needs to take a closer look at the extent to which ambivalence is truly grounded in value conflict.

What about individuals with the most “extreme” pro-choice or pro-life views? Are they also susceptible to ambivalence? Our data suggest that, for the most part, they are not. In Figure 1, mean SIM scores—calculated separately for traumatic and elective circumstances—are displayed according to the total number of times out of six (or seven) conditions specified in the GSS battery under which a person would permit legal abortion. The upper panel of Figure 1 shows that ambivalence scores on the traumatic dimension are highest among those who accept one, two, three, or four of the seven conditions; and lowest among those who accept five or six conditions.

10 We do not mean to imply that people in these circumstances necessarily give answers contrary to their basic position on the abortion issue. Some do, but ambivalence is also found among pro-life voters who express pro-life views on the traumatic questions, and among pro-choice voters who express pro-choice views on the elective questions.

11 Differences between 1998 and 1999 results in Figure 1 are primarily a function of the higher level of ambivalence observed in the second survey (see note 6).
or three of the GSS statements, but are close to zero among those who either accept more than three statements or reject abortion in all circumstances. Similarly, the lower panel of Figure 1 indicates greater ambivalence among respondents who would permit abortion under three, four, or five of these conditions, and less
Figure 1. Mean SIM ambivalence scores, calculated separately for traumatic circumstances (upper panel) and elective circumstances (lower panel), according to the total number of times out of six (or seven) conditions specified in the GSS battery under which a person would permit legal abortion. (The asterisks indicate that only six statements about legal abortion were used in 1998.) Data are from the March 1998 (weighted by party registration) and January–February 1999 Florida Voter surveys. For traumatic circumstances, ANOVA $F$ value = 9.55 (1998) and 9.45 (1999); df = 6 and 7, respectively; all $p$s < .001. For elective circumstances, ANOVA $F$ value = 21.63 (1998) and 8.67 (1999); df = 6 and 7, respectively; all $p$s < .001.
ambivalence among those who either accept fewer statements or endorse the availability of abortion across the board. Extreme views are a key component of attitude strength (Abelson, 1995; Craig et al., 2000; Krosnick & Abelson, 1992) and, as such, they should serve to mitigate ambivalence. Our data suggest that they do. The nature of the relationship between “extremity” and ambivalence differs across our two dimensions, however, with (a) people who lean toward the pro-life position likely to be ambivalent only in the case of traumatic abortion, and (b) those who lean pro-choice likely to be ambivalent only on the elective dimension.

Conclusions

Using Kaplan’s (1972) method of collecting separate attitude components, and doing so (for what may be the first time) in a cross-sectional survey, we have been able to show that some voters do indeed harbor simultaneous positive and negative feelings toward certain attitude objects—in this case, the issue of abortion. The amount of ambivalence observed among Floridians was fairly modest, but it was sufficient to provide support for the findings reported earlier by Alvarez and Brehm (1995) concerning abortion attitudes among the American public generally. However, we differ from the Alvarez-Brehm model in distinguishing not between “easy” and “difficult” questions, but rather between abortion under “traumatic” versus “elective” circumstances. For pro-life voters, questions about whether to permit abortions under traumatic circumstances are more difficult and tend to create higher levels of ambivalence; for pro-choice advocates, elective conditions present the greater degree of difficulty. Even individuals who are at the “extremes” of the issue occasionally find themselves confronted with a conflict involving their core beliefs.

We hope that our results will encourage political scientists to take a greater interest in the subject of attitudinal ambivalence and, as they do, to consider how some of the measurement approaches used by social psychologists can be adapted to the study of larger and more representative populations. Although full-blown ambivalence and preference batteries may be too time-consuming for inclusion in omnibus surveys, we believe that this exercise has demonstrated the practicality—and theoretical importance—of directly measuring ambivalence in surveys designed specifically for that purpose. Our interviews, which also tapped respondents’ attitudes toward prominent political leaders, pre-election vote preferences, political knowledge, partisan attachments, basic demographics, and a handful of other orientations, generally lasted about 20 to 25 minutes. Surveys that are designed to probe attitudes toward one or two issues in depth should have little

12 Unlike Kaplan (but see Thompson et al., 1995), we found a fairly strong correlation between positive and negative elements of the modified semantic differential scale (average $r = -.76$ in 1998, $-.65$ in 1999). The slightly weaker relationship in 1999 is likely due to filler questions placed between the two batteries in that survey (see note 6).
difficulty doing so, with sufficient time left over to investigate the individual-level correlates of ambivalence—for example, whether it is a trait of certain voters\textsuperscript{13} or, alternatively, whether there are ambivalence “issue publics” (Converse, 1964) whose composition varies across policy domains. Along the same lines, a survey experiment might be used to determine the extent to which ambivalence is subject to media- or leadership-based framing effects.

Ultimately, what we most want to know is whether ambivalence matters, that is, what are its consequences for the nature of our political discourse? Is it possible, for example, that ambivalence can help to explain the well-documented instability of mass attitudes (see Craig et al., 2000)\textsuperscript{14} some voters’ apparent desire for divided government (Fiorina, 1996), the difficulty experienced by many citizens in casting an issue-based vote, and other important aspects of American politics? From the candidate’s point of view, does the degree of electoral risk encountered as a result of waffling on an issue (or ignoring it altogether) depend, as one might suspect, on the ambivalence level of voters for whom that issue is highly salient? And are there systematic variations in ambivalence (apart from pro-choicers scoring higher on elective abortion, pro-lifers on traumatic abortion) that need to be taken into account by campaign strategists or, for that matter, by scholars who seek to improve our understanding of why people vote the way they do? Answers to these questions and others like them will not be forthcoming until we learn to do a better job of capturing, at the individual level, the full complexity of attitudes that citizens have on issues of public policy.

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\textsuperscript{13} It is perhaps telling that ambivalence on both dimensions (but especially traumatic) tends to be greater among the least politically knowledgeable and those with fewer years of formal education. In addition, men are more ambivalent than women, and Catholics are more ambivalent than Protestants (both mainline and evangelical), Jews, or the nonreligious.

\textsuperscript{14} Ambivalence also may condition the order and context effects that are frequently observed in surveys (Schuman & Presser, 1981).
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