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Of Two Minds, But One Heart: A Good "Gut" Feeling Moderates the Effect of Ambivalence on Attitude Formation and Turnout

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Abstract: *Popular psychological accounts argue that successful candidates address their appeals to citizens' "hearts" rather than their "heads." Yet research on campaigns shows that candidates win elections by getting voters to think about particular issues—especially issues that create ambivalence in the minds of opposition supporters. This article helps to reconcile these "heart-centered" and "head-centered" accounts of preference formation during campaigns. An original experiment and ANES data analyses (1980–2004) show that a "good gut feeling" toward a candidate helps citizens to overcome the paralyzing effect of ambivalence on attitude formation and turnout. And, since turnout is most tenuous among those with lower income, this is where the effect is most pronounced. Since Democratic candidates rely disproportionately on support from these lower-income voters, it is particularly important that they inspire positive affect among latent supporters.*

Replication Materials: The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/AGIMGY.

Over the course of campaigns, candidates work hard to shape potential voters' "gut" impressions. To foster positive associations, they attempt witty banter with late-night television hosts, pose for photo ops with "hard-working Americans," and run ads that pair their image with flags and children while uplifting music plays in the background (Brader 2006). Popular psychological accounts highlight the importance of these gut-level appeals, often attributing election losses to a candidate's tendency to speak to the head rather than the heart. This, they argue, is a particularly common problem among Democratic candidates, who often lose elections despite Americans' tendency to favor liberal policies (Haidt 2012; Lakoff 2008; Westen 2007).[1]

Readers may recall the common conclusion that Al Gore lost to George W. Bush because Gore was stiff and boring while Bush was the type of person with whom the average American would "like to drink a beer." It mattered little that voters disagreed with many of Bush's policies because they "just had a good feeling" about him. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama are often characterized as exceptions that prove the rule—Democrats who won because they could connect with voters on a gut level, particularly with voters who might not otherwise turn out on Election Day.

For those attempting to understand the surprising outcome of the 2016 election, this explanation of how campaigns are won and lost may sound compelling. One might deduce that, although voters felt ambivalent about both candidates, the Democrat attempted to appeal to reason and lost to a Republican who connected with voters' emotions.[2] But is it really true that elections are decided by the heart and not the head? If so, what does this say about democracy?

Part of the reason these psychological accounts have received so much attention—especially after surprising election outcomes—is that their emphasis on gut-level feelings and emotions stands out in stark

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[1]Ellis and Stimson (2012) show that Americans tend to favor liberal policies, while favoring conservative symbolism.

[2]This may be a result of gender stereotyping (e.g., Dolan 2010).

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contrast to the campaigns and elections canon. According to this literature, the key to winning elections is to get citizens to think about the right issues (Hillygus and Shields 2008; Petrocik 1996; Vavreck 2009). In particular, campaigns often attempt to prime issues that increase ambivalence toward the opposing candidate. This renders opposition supporters more persuadable (Hillygus and Shields 2008) or demobilizes latent opposition altogether (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1997; Krupnikov 2011).

This article integrates these insights about the "gut" and the "head" in an attempt to understand how people form political attitudes[3] and express preferences through voting, despite the ambivalence that often arises as campaigns bring conflicting considerations to mind (Lavine 2001; Rudolph 2011). Research demonstrates that positive affect encourages reliance on general knowledge structures, routines, and heuristics (i.e., the gut) rather than systematically processing individual considerations (i.e., relying on the head; Bless et al. 1996; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000).[4] Thus, when a person has a "good gut feeling" toward a candidate, that positive affect not only has the potential to serve as a decision-making heuristic, but it should also signal to the brain that focus on more specific considerations is unnecessary. In doing so, a good gut feeling may help ambivalent citizens to overcome the potentially paralyzing effect of a head full of conflicting thoughts.

This theory has the potential to solve two puzzles within the literature. First, although ambivalence has been linked to volatility in candidate evaluations and delayed voting decisions (Lavine 2001), the evidence for demobilization is mixed at best (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Mutz 2002; Yoo 2010). This is odd. If ambivalence leads to indecision, shouldn't it clearly reduce turnout? I theorize that ambivalence may be conditionally demobilizing, only driving down turnout among individuals who have no good gut feeling about a candidate to rely on. If the relationship between ambivalence and turnout is conditioned on positive affect, this would, of course, obscure the relationship in the aggregate.

Second, as mentioned above, many writers have contemplated why Democrats often lose despite the electorate's tendency to prefer their policy positions. Are Republicans really just better at forging emotional connections with voters (Haidt 2012; Lakoff 2008; Westen 2007)? The proposed theory suggests that Democrats are not necessarily deficient in their ability to form these connections; rather, they face a greater penalty when they fail to do so. Whereas Republicans can count on their more affluent base to turn out at high rates, much of the Democratic base teeters on the brink of abstention due to their relative lack of affluence. Thus, a little ambivalence may tip Democratic voters over the edge. This means it is particularly important for Democratic candidates to inspire enthusiasm if they hope to overcome whatever ambivalence latent supporters may feel toward them.[5]

In the pages that follow, I find substantial support for this theory. I first present results from an experiment in which ambivalence and gut feelings toward a candidate were induced independently. Results show that participants exposed to an ambivalence-evoking stimulus reported weaker attitudes and less inclination to vote for the candidate. However, among those who were induced to experience a "good gut feeling" toward the candidate (by showing them a smiling image of the candidate and quote with emotionally evocative language), the effects of ambivalence were almost completely nullified.

The second set of results comes from the American National Elections Studies (ANES; 1980–2004), providing an opportunity to test the theory with real candidates in the context of real elections. Results show that, absent a good "gut feeling" toward a candidate (i.e., self-reported hope and pride toward the candidate), ambivalence (i.e., reporting both positive and negative considerations) is associated with weaker attitudes toward the candidate, higher rates of "non-attitude" responses, and lower rates of turnout. But, among individuals who expressed positive affect toward a candidate, these effects were almost completely mitigated.

Finally, consistent with expectations, emotion and ambivalence primarily affected turnout among individuals with lower income, since they were already near the tipping point of abstention. Because Democrats traditionally rely on high turnout within this segment of the electorate, it appears particularly important for Democratic candidates to inspire positive affect to offset any ambivalence aroused by the campaign. Negative emotions, which tend to get more attention, showed no such effect.[6] The article concludes with a discussion of what this means for our understanding of campaigns as well as democracy more broadly.

[3]I use *attitudes* and *evaluations* interchangeably.

[4]In contrast, anxiety promotes systematic processing (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000).

[5]This, of course, depends on the stability of the parties' coalitions. If the Republican Party becomes more dependent on support from lower-income voters, it could lose this advantage.

[6]Results are reported in the supporting information (SI), "Fear and Anger Analyses" (p. 15).

The Role of Head and Heart in Politics

In the wake of Converse's (1964) seminal chapter on voters' belief systems, scholars spent decades fretting over the apparent prevalence of non-attitudes. It seemed that many survey respondents thought so little about politics that they had no real attitude toward many of the objects they were being asked to evaluate. They were therefore just picking their responses at random or placing themselves at the midpoint of the scale to avoid the appearance of ignorance. Eventually, scholars began to question the validity of the attitude concept itself. Rather than holding fully crystallized attitudes, Zaller and Feldman (1992) pointed out that survey respondents might construct their responses based on the considerations accessible at the moment they are asked. As a result, attitudinal instability might be a product of variation in the considerations accessible at that time, and midpoint responses might be attributable to inconsistencies between those considerations. Thus, the American electorate might not be so empty-headed after all, but merely ambivalent.

More recent studies show that when Americans feel conflicted about candidates, their evaluations of those candidates are less stable, their assessments of the candidates' traits and issue positions have less influence on their overall candidate evaluations, they take longer to decide how to vote, and their voting decisions are less predictable (Lavine 2001). And, when citizens feel ambivalent toward parties, their party identity has less effect on their opinions, economic perceptions, and voting behavior (Basinger and Lavine 2005; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

Yet, despite slowing down the decision-making process and decreasing reliance on predispositions, it is not clear that ambivalence impedes citizens' ability to ultimately form attitudes or express preferences. Although some have found evidence of demobilization (Mutz 2002), others have found that ambivalent citizens turn out to vote at rates similar to their univalent counterparts (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Yoo 2010). But why would this be if they have no clear preference to express?

One possibility is that even when the "head" leads to indecision, voters have their "gut" to guide them. While campaigns may increase ambivalence by exposing citizens to conflicting messages and cross-pressures (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Hillygus and Shields 2008; Keele and Wolak 2008; Rudolph 2011; Vavreck 2009), they may also help to moderate the effect of this ambivalence by generating enthusiasm toward candidates. Although negative affect has received the bulk of the attention in political science, enthusiasm has been shown to affect the way citizens process campaign information. And, work in positive psychology suggests that these effects may be even more profound.

For example, Isen and Means (1983) conducted an experiment in which participants were asked to decide between cars to purchase. In the baseline condition, people were slow and indecisive, reviewing the same information multiple times in an apparent attempt to weigh the positive and negative attributes of the cars against one another. In contrast, those induced to feel positive affect made the same purchasing decisions without revisiting information they had already considered. Thus, positive affect seemed to mute the effect of conflicting considerations, allowing study participants to stop second-guessing their decisions and act.

Similar findings are plentiful in the positive psychology literature (see Fredrickson 2001; Isen 2001), but what explains this phenomenon? The literature suggests that positive affect leads to reliance on more general knowledge structures, routines, and heuristics rather than systematic processing of considerations available in that moment (Bless et al. 1996; Fredrickson 2001; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000). In doing so, it shifts focus to the "big picture," helping people to avoid "missing the forest for the trees." In fact, studies show that induction of positive affect reorients visual attention from local patterns to global patterns in shape recognition tasks (Fredrickson and Branigan 2005) and reorients mental focus from message details to global evaluations in information-processing tasks (Bless, Mackie, and Schwarz 1992).

Taken together, these studies suggest that positive affect helps people to overcome indecision by shifting their focus away from individual considerations (e.g., "Do the car's positive attributes outweigh its negative attributes?") and toward their overall impression (e.g., "How does the car make me feel in my gut?"). Might similar processes be at work in campaigns? Existing work on emotion in politics suggests the answer may be "yes." While negative emotions help individuals to identify and react to political threats (Groenendyk and Banks 2014; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009; Valentino et al. 2008), positive emotions have been found to promote reliance on heuristics (Brader 2006; Groenendyk 2016; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000).

On what sorts of heuristics do voters rely? Studies demonstrate that gut feelings can function as shortcuts that shape political attitudes and preferences, often below the level of conscious awareness (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Coronel et al. 2013; Lodge and Taber 2013; Todorov

2017). As a result, positive affect felt toward a candidate may promote heuristic processing while also serving as the heuristic on which that individual bases her evaluation. Thus, rather than ruminating over conflicting considerations, individuals with a good gut feeling about a candidate may simply ride that feeling to the voting booth.

Hypotheses

Following Lavine (2001), I define *ambivalence* as the presence of conflicting considerations toward a candidate within the mind of a potential voter. I define *gut feelings* as affect (e.g., enthusiasm, fear, or anger) felt toward a candidate. Thus, a person may recall some things they like about a candidate and other things they dislike, but when they see the candidate or hear the candidate speak, they *feel* a sense of hope and pride. In the absence of this sort of good gut feeling to guide their decision making, individuals will be forced to weigh their likes and dislikes against one another. These conflicting considerations should make attitude and preference formation challenging. From a statistical standpoint, this suggests that ambivalence toward a candidate should have a strong baseline effect on candidate evaluations.

H1: Absent a good gut feeling to guide them, ambivalence will make it more difficult for individuals to form attitudes, especially strong attitudes, and express preferences through voting.

On the other hand, when individuals have a good gut feeling toward a candidate, it should help them to avoid second-guessing themselves. Rather than fixating on individual considerations about a candidate, which may conflict (e.g., "I like the candidate's views on domestic policy, but I dislike the fact that he had an extramarital affair"), positive affect should lead individuals to focus on the big picture (e.g., "I have a good gut feeling about the candidate in general"). In other words, positive affect should moderate the influence of ambivalence on the formation of political attitudes and preferences.

H2: Individuals who feel positive affect toward a candidate will have an easier time overcoming the effects of ambivalence toward that candidate, enabling them to form firm attitudes and express preferences through voting.

Of course, these effects should not occur uniformly across the electorate. For individuals on the lower end of the income distribution, barriers to voting are much harder to overcome (Leighley and Nagler 2013; Rosenstone 1982). Among these individuals, who already teeter on the brink of abstention due to their lack of resources, ambivalence should be particularly detrimental to turnout. Thus, candidates hoping to turn out low-income voters will need to inspire good gut feelings to overcome ambivalence aroused during the campaign.

In contrast, those on the opposite end of the income distribution should be less likely to let a little ambivalence stop them from turning out to vote. Individuals with higher income are more likely to have voted in the past (Rosenstone 1982), and voter turnout tends to be habitual (Plutzer 2002; Gerber et al. 2003). As a result, their decision to vote is less likely to depend on their evaluations of the candidates in a given election. They will simply turn out to vote because that is what they do on Election Day. As a result, candidates relying on high turnout within this segment of the electorate are more insulated from ambivalence aroused during the campaign.

H3: Ambivalence should have a larger demobilizing effect among individuals with lower income. Therefore, this is where positive affect should play its largest role in moderating the effect of ambivalence on voter turnout.

Table 1 Experimental Design

	Baseline (No Gut Feeling)	Good Gut Feeling
Baseline (No Ambivalence)	N = 159	N = 183
Ambivalence	N = 183	N = 160

Study 1: Can Experimental Manipulation of Gut Feelings and Ambivalence Affect Attitude Formation and Voting Intentions?

Although affect and ambivalence are distinguished from one another in the literature, to empirically disentangle the two constructs is another matter. Experiments are an ideal tool for this purpose. Thus, I conducted a 2 × 2 experiment in which affect and ambivalence toward a candidate were independently manipulated. The experimental design is illustrated in Table 1.

In all, 685 adult Americans were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to take part in this study.[7] Participants were tasked with evaluating a

[7] Although MTurk samples are not representative of the U.S. population (see the SI, "Sample, Recruitment, and Procedures," p. 3,

fictitious candidate said to be running for the state legislature in Michigan.[8] Across conditions, participants were provided with a series of facts about the candidate's background and accomplishments.[9] In the non-ambivalent condition, only neutral and positive facts were revealed. Among other things, participants were told that the candidate's family real estate business had substantially increased its profits since he had taken over. In the ambivalence condition, all the other positive and neutral facts about the candidate were held constant, but participants were told that the candidate's family real estate business had *gone under* shortly after he had taken over. Thus, participants were exposed to a mixture of positive and negative considerations in the ambivalence condition (SI, "Experimental Stimuli," p. 1). In a pretest, this combination of positive and negative considerations was found to evoke more ambivalence relative to the baseline, although it did not quite reach statistical significance due to small sample size (SI, "Manipulation Checks (Pre-test)," p. 5).

To induce good gut feelings toward the candidate, independent from the substantive considerations provided in the ambivalence manipulation, participants were exposed to a smiling image of the candidate as well as an emotionally evocative quote explaining why he was running for office. In the baseline condition, the candidate's image was replaced with an empty box containing the words *No image available*, and the quote was stripped of its emotionally evocative language without altering the substance of the message. To ensure that only gut feelings were manipulated, and not substantive considerations, all the information conveyed by the image (i.e., the candidate's age, gender, and ethnic background) was clearly identified across all conditions. Thus, any difference observed between conditions can only be attributed to the gut feelings aroused by the stimulus materials and not to differences in substantive information they contained (SI, "Experimental Stimuli," p. 2).

This procedure was chosen based on prior studies suggesting candidate appearance (e.g., Todorov 2017) and facial expressions (Sullivan and Masters 1988) can shape voters' gut impressions. Likewise, studies show that emotionally evocative words can stimulate affective associations without communicating a substantive message (e.g., Lodge and Taber 2013). In a pretest, the candidate image used in the study elicited more hope, pride, and overall "good gut feelings" compared to 11 other candidate images. In addition, the emotionally evocative quote was found to evoke significantly more hope, pride, and "good gut feelings" compared to the baseline version of the quote (SI, "Manipulation Checks (Pre-test)," p. 5).

I test my hypotheses using three dependent measures to capture attitude formation and voting behavior: attitude strength, non-attitudes, and voting intentions. Attitude strength was measured using a candidate "feeling thermometer" with response options ranging from 0 (*very cold*) to 100 (*very warm*). While attitude strength and attitude formation may reasonably be viewed as separate concepts, Feldman (1989) found that, compared to a long list of competitors, attitude strength was the best predictor of attitude stability. Thus, a strong attitude suggests a "real" attitude has been formed.[10]

My second measure attempts to isolate the clearest cases in which individuals have *not* formed "real" attitudes. Converse and Pierce (1986) argue that midpoint responses indicate a lack of attitude crystallization, as do nonresponses. Therefore, I created a "non-attitudes" measure by coding midpoint responses (50 degrees) on the candidate feeling thermometer and nonresponses as 1 and all other responses as 0.

Finally, to measure voting intentions, participants were asked whether they would vote for the candidate, would not vote for the candidate, or were unable to decide. Readers will notice that this item does not require participants to choose between candidates, since only one candidate was described in the study. The item simply captures study participants' inclination to support *this* candidate based on the information provided about *this* candidate. Absent such an inclination, one would expect potential voters to abstain from voting for *this* candidate. They could certainly be moved to turn out and vote for some other candidate, but this is inconsequential for the present purpose. The goal here is to isolate candidate-specific effects to understand how candidates

for additional information on typical MTurk samples and the procedures used in this particular study), the proposed theory is quite well suited for testing with this sort of convenience sample. As Druckman and Kam (2011) explain, "If the underlying data generating process is characterized by a homogeneous treatment effect (i.e., the treatment effect is the same across the entire population), then any convenience sample should produce an unbiased estimate of the single treatment effect, and thus the results from any convenience sample should generalize easily to any other group." Since ambivalence and good gut feelings are universal human phenomena, and the stimuli contain no information regarding candidate party identification or ideology, there is no obvious reason to expect heterogeneity. This suggests the findings should generalize. Of course, the ANES survey analyses that follow provide the strongest test of generalizability. The ANES data also allow me to test Hypothesis 3, which does predict heterogeneous effects in the context of real elections where voting is costly.

[8]They were not told the candidate was fictitious.

[9]These materials made no mention of the candidate's party affiliation or ideology.

[10]Feldman (1989) uses the term *attitude extremity* rather than *attitude strength*, but the operationalization is identical.

generate turnout among latent supporters made ambivalent by the campaign. Participants who indicated that they would not vote for the candidate (6%) or could not decide whether they would vote for the candidate (32%) were coded 1 (abstention). Those who said that they would vote for the candidate (62%) were coded 0 (non-abstention). Although no individual measure is a perfect indicator of whether a person has formed a "real" attitude that she will act on, together these measures should allow me to triangulate on the target.[11]

Results

To model the hypothesized relationships, I simply interacted the two experimental factors. If the theory holds, ambivalence should inhibit attitude formation (Hypothesis 1). However, when a good gut feeling is induced, it should attenuate the effect of ambivalence exposure (Hypothesis 2). In an OLS regression framework, this model is written as

$$Y = B_0 + B_1 X_{Ambiv} + B_2 X_{Gut} + B_3 X_{Ambiv} * X_{Gut} + \varepsilon,$$

where X_{Ambiv} and X_{Gut} are dummy variables indicating treatment exposure. The coefficient on the ambivalence term (B_1) represents the effect of ambivalence exposure in the absence of exposure to the good gut feeling treatment. The coefficient on the interaction term (B_3) represents the difference in the effect of ambivalence given exposure to the good gut feeling treatment. A series of manipulation checks shows no evidence of contamination between treatments, so the factors can safely be treated as independent (see the SI, "Manipulation Checks and Contamination Test (Post-test)," p. 6).

Results displayed in Figure 1 support Hypotheses 1 and 2. The top left panel of the figure shows predicted attitudes toward the candidate. As hypothesized, absent induction of a good gut feeling, exposure to the ambivalence treatment led study participants to report attitudes that were significantly closer to the neutral point of the scale than in the baseline condition (declining from 74 to 67 on the 100-point scale, $p < .01$). However, the good gut feeling induction moderated this effect, boosting the attitudes of those exposed to the ambivalence treatment by nearly 5 points on the 100-point scale ($p = .06$). The bottom left panel shows the marginal effect of emotion induction within the non-ambivalence and ambivalence conditions. Thus, the zero line represents the baseline effect of ambivalence, and divergence from this line represents the moderating influence of a good gut feeling. One can see that, absent ambivalence induction, exposure to the good gut feeling treatment had no effect. However, good gut feelings did exert a significant influence ($p < .01$) when ambivalence was present, negating its effect on attitudes.

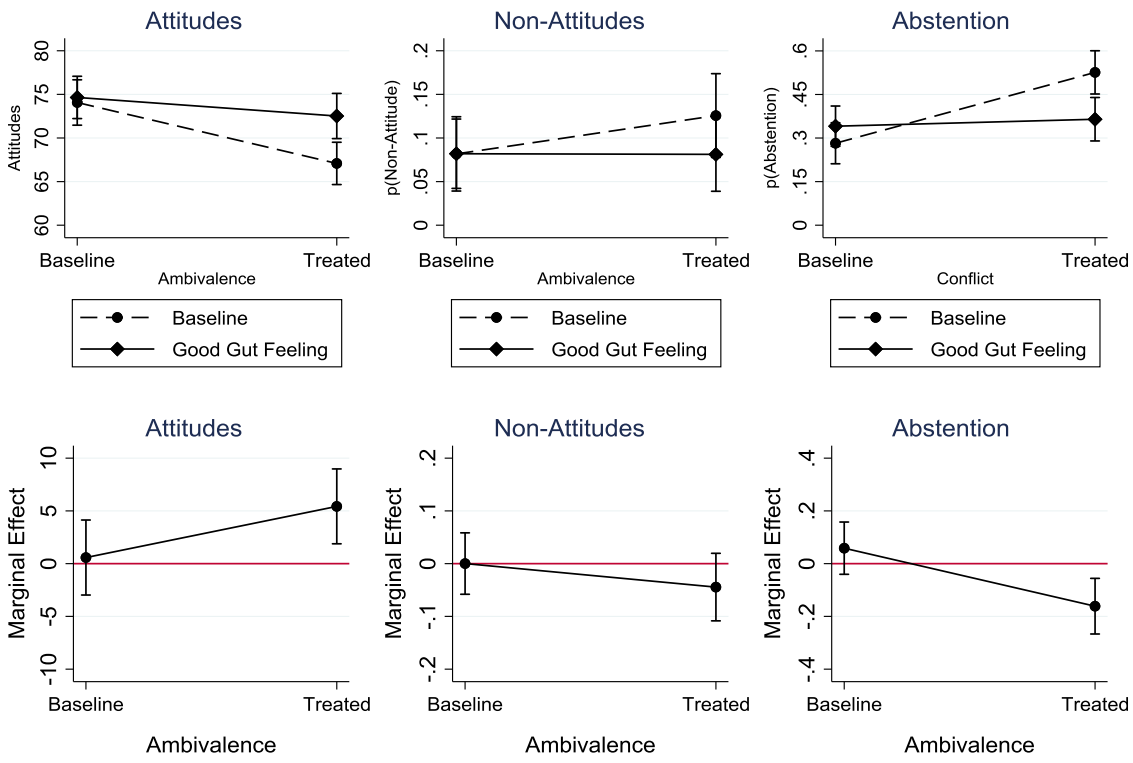
As a second test of the theory, I used a different indicator of attitude formation—participants' likelihood of reporting a "non-attitude." The results of this probit analysis appear in the middle column of Figure 1. Those exposed to the ambivalence treatment showed a (nonsignificantly) higher probability of reporting a non-attitude (13% vs. 8%). And, as predicted, when induced to have a good gut feeling, this effect dropped back down to baseline (8%). Of course, since the ambivalence effect failed to reach statistical significance in the absence of good gut feeling induction, the negation of this effect also failed to reach significance. Thus, although these results provide directional support for Hypotheses 1 and 2, the effects cannot be statistically differentiated from zero.

So far, the analyses have focused on attitude formation, but what about voting intentions? Although the fictitious nature of the candidate makes observation of actual voting behavior impossible, participants were asked about their hypothetical voting behavior. Since there is no cost to voicing one's *intention* to vote, it is not possible to determine whether observed effects would be sufficient to affect voting behavior in the real world. In actual elections, turnout effects should be conditioned on an individual's resources (Hypothesis 3). Still, the experimental context provides an important opportunity to test the theory in a controlled environment where causal factors can be isolated. Thus, for now, I will focus on how affect and ambivalence affect one's *intention* to vote for a candidate. In the next section, I will examine how resources condition these effects in the context of actual elections where voting is costly.

The panels on the right side of Figure 1 show how induced ambivalence and good gut feelings affected participants' self-reported likelihood of voting for the candidate. As predicted, exposure to the ambivalence induction significantly increased the likelihood of abstention from 28% in the baseline condition to 53% in the treatment condition ($p < .01$). However, given a good gut feeling, ambivalence induction only increased the likelihood of abstention from 34% to 36%. In other words, the induction of a good gut feeling significantly moderated the effect of ambivalence on abstention ($p < .01$). The bottom right panel displays the marginal effect of inducing a good gut feeling within the non-ambivalence and ambivalence conditions. Where there was no ambivalence, the good

[11] See the SI, "Measures" (p. 2), for additional information on the dependent measures used in the experiment.

FIGURE 1 Experimental Results



Note: Results show the interactive effects of the good gut feeling and ambivalence treatments on attitude strength (OLS), non-attitudes (probit), and abstention (probit). See the SI, "Treatment Effects Reported in Figure 1" (p. 4). The top figures show the predicted values, and the bottom figures show the marginal effects of a good gut feeling within the non-ambivalence and ambivalence conditions. Results support the hypotheses that ambivalence undermines attitude formation and turnout (Hypothesis 1), but this effect can be overcome if an individual has a good gut feeling about the candidate (Hypothesis 2).

gut feeling induction had no effect because there was no effect to moderate. However, once ambivalence was induced, a good gut feeling had a large and significant effect, moderating the influence of ambivalence ($p < .01$).

What mechanism drove these results? According to the theory, those induced to have a good gut feeling toward the candidate should set aside their conflicting considerations and instead rely on that good gut feeling to evaluate the candidate. To test this mechanism, a trained graduate assistant, who was blind to condition, coded for reliance on gut intuition within participants' open-ended explanations of their voting decision (e.g., "I just had a good gut feeling about him," "He just seemed like a good guy").[12] Results show that, regardless of whether they were induced to experience ambivalence, induction of a good gut feeling increased participants' likelihood of attributing their voting decision to gut intuition (7% vs. 18%, $p < .01$). Given the results already presented, it appears that this intuition helped participants to form stronger attitudes and clearer voting intentions, despite experiencing psychological conflict.

[12]See the SI, "Mechanisms" (p. 9), for additional detail. Interestingly, many of these gut inferences extended beyond the information participants were provided in the study, referencing factors such as personality, character, and manners. This is consistent with research on facial impressions (e.g., Todorov 2017).

Study 2: Do Good Gut Feelings toward Real Candidates Moderate the Effect of Ambivalence on Attitude Formation and Turnout?

Although the experimental results provide a basis for causal inference, they are necessarily artificial. To test whether these results are generalizable to actual elections, I now turn to analysis of survey data from the American National Elections Studies (ANES) conducted between 1980 and 2004. My analyses are restricted to this time period because these studies contain the measures needed to test my hypotheses.

During this period, ANES respondents were asked to report what they liked and disliked about presidential

candidates: "Is there anything in particular about [Democratic candidate/Republican candidate] that might make you want to vote for [against] him? What is that?" This was followed by "anything else?" Respondents were given the opportunity to provide up to five likes and five dislikes. Thus, rather than forcing respondents to formulate an overall evaluation (i.e., ask people *if* they liked or disliked a candidate) or rationalize an evaluation they may have already come to (i.e., ask people *why* they liked or disliked a candidate), respondents were simply encouraged to express the positive and negative considerations on their minds. In the experiment, these considerations were manipulated; here, they are observed through self-reports.

During the time period under analysis, these open-ended likes and dislikes were coded and counted. Like other researchers (Lavine 2001; Yoo 2010), I used these items to construct measures of ambivalence toward candidates using a formula originally developed by Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995). Where P and N represent positive and negative considerations about candidates,[13]

$$Ambivalence = \frac{P + N}{2} - |P - N|.$$

The ANES began including measures of emotions toward candidates in 1980. In each year, respondents were asked, "Now we would like to know something about the feelings you have toward [candidate name]. Has [candidate name]—because of the kind of person he is, or because of something he has done—made you feel [hopeful, proud, angry, afraid]?" These measures are particularly useful in the present context because they tap the affective tags associated with a particular candidate in memory as opposed to capturing incidental emotions, which have been shown to operate somewhat differently (Groenendyk 2016). To create my measure of positive affect, or "enthusiasm" as it is often labeled in the literature, I followed the common practice of adding the two positive emotion items. Since recent studies show that anger and fear often have distinct influences on political behavior (Groenendyk and Banks 2104; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007; Valentino et al. 2008, 2009, 2011), I included these measures as separate variables in my analyses. Because I am interested in understanding the effect of affect associated with a particular candidate, rather than untargeted affect, I did not average across emotions felt toward the two candidates. Instead, I constructed separate measures of affect associated with Republican and Democratic candidates.[14]

As in my experiment, attitude strength and non-attitudes were measured using candidate "feeling thermometers." To construct the attitude strength measures, each feeling thermometer was folded at its neutral point (50 degrees) and rescaled to run from 0 to 1. Again, the non-attitudes variables were constructed by coding individuals who placed themselves at the neutral point of the feeling thermometer (50 degrees) or responded "don't know" as possessing a non-attitude (1). All other responses (0–49 and 51–100) were coded as attitudes (0). Prior studies suggest that these are valid indicators of whether study participants have formed "real" attitudes (Converse and Pierce 1986; Feldman 1989). Of course, to the degree these concepts are measured imperfectly (i.e., with random error), the test is only made more conservative.

Revealed preferences are captured through measures of voter turnout. Many studies rely solely on attitude measures, but attitudes are notoriously poor predictors of behavior (which is partly why scholars originally became interested in non-attitudes and ambivalence). I reduce this concern by testing whether the theory can help to predict willingness to express preferences through voting. To maximize the number of elections available to study, I make use of self-reported turnout in the article. However, all results have been replicated using validated vote measures (SI, "Robustness Check 4," p. 42).

In addition to these items, all models include controls for party identification, party identification strength, political knowledge, and interest in the election. Demographic controls include income, education, gender, age, black, Hispanic, and year. All items are rescaled to run from 0 to 1.

Results

Because different feelings are associated with different motivational systems (e.g., Fredrickson 2001; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000), positive and negative affect may interact differently with ambivalence. As the

[13]Recent ANES items have asked respondents to reveal their favorable and unfavorable "thoughts or feelings" using Likert-type scales rather than the classic recall items (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Rudolph 2011). Given the need to distinguish "conflicting considerations" from "gut feelings," these recent measures are inappropriate for testing the model. Whereas the classic items require respondents to access their thoughts and report specific considerations, these newer items allow respondents to rely on their gut feelings and impressions without recalling specific considerations. See SI "Content of ANES Open-Ended Likes and Dislikes Codes" (p. 12); see also SI "Robustness Check 5" (p. 45) for robustness checks in which all analyses have been run with only considerations pertaining to candidate traits and only considerations pertaining to candidate issue positions, respectively.

[14]See the SI for additional discussion of measuring affect through self-reports (p. 11).

literature review described in detail, positive affect is associated with reliance on one's gut, so I expect it to reduce the effect of ambivalence on the formation of attitudes and preferences. While readers may have their own expectations about the effects of negative emotions, the literature is unclear on how they should interact with ambivalence (see the SI, "Fear and Anger Analyses," p. 16, for additional detail). In the end, I find that neither fear nor anger has any substantively significant interaction with ambivalence across any of the models. Thus, while fear, anger, and their interactions with ambivalence are included as controls in each of the models, I will devote my attention (and space) to discussing the effects of positive affect. The effects of fear and anger are reported in the SI ("Fear and Anger Analyses," p. 15).

To model the hypothesized relationships, each type of affect toward a given candidate (enthusiasm, fear, and anger) was interacted with ambivalence toward that candidate. If the theory holds, ambivalence should inhibit attitude formation in the absence of positive affect (Hypothesis 1), but enthusiasm should interact with ambivalence to dampen its effect (Hypothesis 2). In a regression framework, this model is written as

$$\begin{aligned} Y = {} & B_0 + B_1 X_{Ambiv} * X_{High\ Enthus} \\ & + B_2 X_{Ambiv} * X_{Some\ Enthus} + B_3 X_{Ambiv} * X_{Fear} \\ & + B_4 X_{Ambiv} * X_{Anger} + B_k X_k + \varepsilon, \end{aligned}$$

where $X_{High\ Enthus}$, $X_{Some\ Enthus}$, X_{Fear}, and X_{Anger} are dummy variables indicating respondents' feelings toward a given candidate. The coefficients on the interaction terms represent the differential effect of ambivalence given a particular emotion (or level of emotion, in the case of enthusiasm).[15] X_k represents the components comprising the interaction terms and the control variables mentioned previously. B_k represents the coefficients on those terms.

I begin my analyses by checking the distribution of ambivalence across levels of positive affect. Since the model estimates the relationship between ambivalence and the outcome variable conditioned on one's level of enthusiasm, one might worry that some of these conditions might contain insufficient variability. Fortunately, Figure 2 shows that this is not a cause for concern. Although there are predictably more individuals who report "no enthusiasm" than "some enthusiasm" or "high enthusiasm," and thus taller frequency distributions in those panels, each panel shows substantial variability in ambivalence. This is also reflected in the negligible correlation between enthusiasm and ambivalence, which, contrary to what one might expect, is actually *positive* (Democratic candidates: Kendall's tau-b = .008; Republican candidates: Kendall's tau-b = .07).

With these potential concerns addressed, I now turn to hypothesis testing. Figure 3 shows the interactive effects of affect and ambivalence on the strength of respondents' attitudes toward Democratic (left) and Republican (right) candidates. As one can plainly see, ambivalence drives down attitude strength when no enthusiasm is reported (Hypothesis 1), but this effect is significantly undercut as enthusiasm increases (Hypothesis 2). In the absence of enthusiasm toward a Democratic candidate, going from minimum to maximum ambivalence reduces predicted attitude strength from .52 to 0 on a scale of 0 to 1. Likewise, the effect of going from minimum to maximum ambivalence toward a Republican candidate reduces predicted attitude strength from .55 to 0 in the absence of enthusiasm.[16] But, given high enthusiasm toward the Democratic candidate, going from minimum to maximum ambivalence only reduces predicted attitude strength from .61 to .24. Likewise, going from minimum to maximum ambivalence toward the Republican candidate only reduces predicted attitude strength from .60 to .29. These are clearly very large and statistically significant differences.[17]

As in the experiment, I reran these models with a more direct indicator of non-attitudes in which "don't know" responses and midpoint response on the candidate feeling thermometer were coded as 1, indicating a "non-attitude," and all other responses were coded as 0, indicating a "real" attitude.[18] Again, as shown in Figure 4, results for both Republican and Democratic candidate models support the predictions. Absent a good gut feeling toward the Democratic candidate, going from minimum to maximum ambivalence is associated with an increase from 13% to 61% in one's probability of reporting a non-attitude. The same pattern holds for Republican candidates, driving the probability of a non-attitude up from 14% to 49% (Hypothesis 1). However, these effects drop off substantially when people feel enthusiasm toward the candidate (Hypothesis 2). Given high enthusiasm toward a Democrat, the probability of reporting a non-attitude toward that candidate only rises from 4% to 16% as

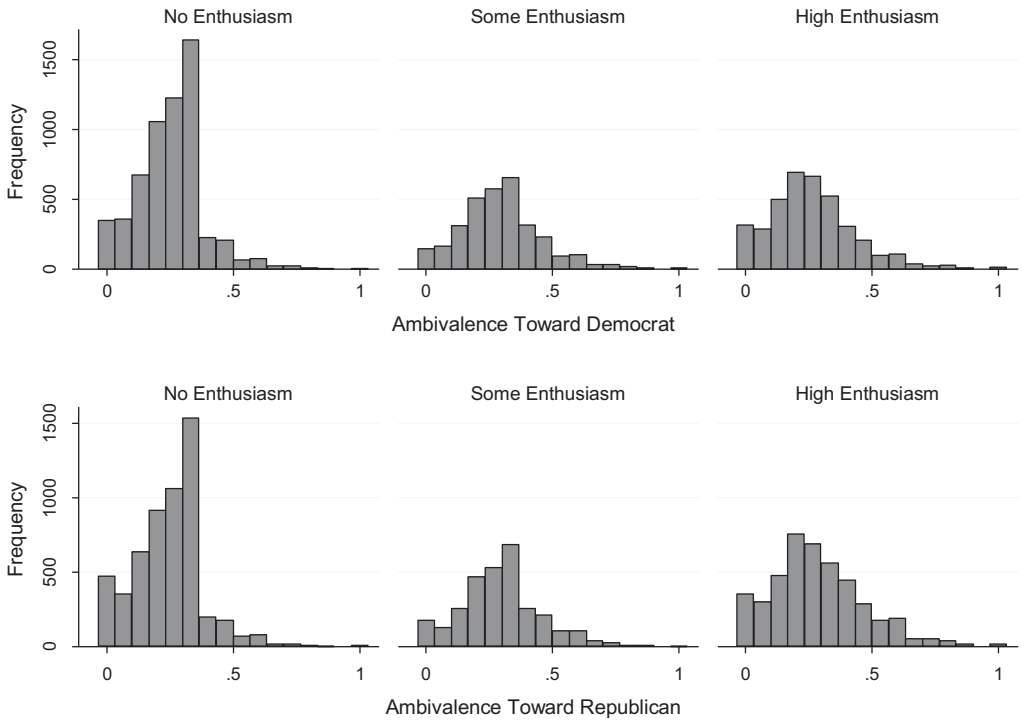
[15] Results have been replicated with enthusiasm treated as a continuous variable (SI, "Enthusiasm Treated as Continuous," p. 27).

[16] The linear models actually predict attitude strength values slightly below 0 when ambivalence is at its maximum observed value, but this is obviously impossible.

[17] Neither fear nor anger appears to influence the relationship between ambivalence and attitude strength (see the SI, "Fear and Anger Analyses," p. 15).

[18] Since the dependent variable is now dichotomous, I use probit rather than OLS.

FIGURE 2 The Distribution of Ambivalence across Levels of Positive Affect



ambivalence goes from minimum to maximum. And, given high enthusiasm toward a Republican candidate, the probability of reporting a non-attitude toward that candidate only goes up from 6% to 15% across the full scale of ambivalence. In short, a good gut feeling toward a candidate appears to mute the effect of ambivalence on attitude formation, and this effect is quite massive.[19]

Still, while these results provide strong support for the theory that a good gut feeling can help potential voters form "real" attitudes despite demonstrating ambivalence toward a candidate, one might wonder whether this pattern holds for actual voting behavior. Unlike an attitude toward a single candidate, a voting preference involves choosing *between* candidates. And to express that preference, one must show up on Election Day. As a result, one would expect ambivalence toward *either* candidate to decrease the likelihood of expressing a preference between candidates through turnout. Therefore, in my analysis of voter abstention, I examine the effects of affect and ambivalence toward both candidates simultaneously. This allows me to estimate the effect of each type of affect toward each candidate independently from one another.

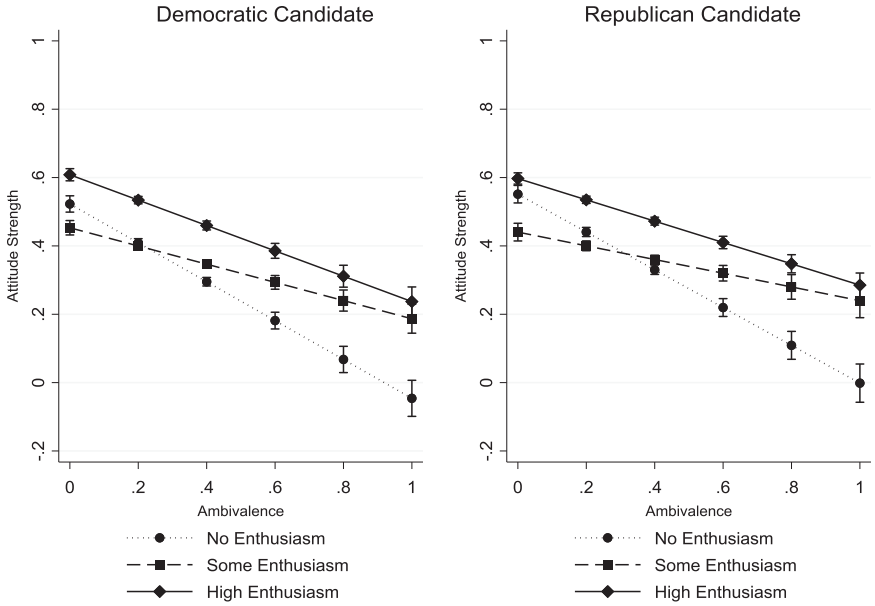
With these changes in place, the updated model appears below. The subscripts D and R represent measures of affect and ambivalence toward Democratic (D) and Republican (R) candidates. Again, X_k represents the direct effects of the components comprising the interaction terms and the control variables. B_k represents the coefficients on those terms.

$$\begin{aligned} probit\,(Y) = {} & B_0 + B_1 X_{Ambiv\,(D)} * X_{High\ Enthus\,(D)} \\ & + B_2 X_{Ambiv(D)} * X_{Some\ Enthus\,(D)} \\ & + B_3 X_{Ambiv\,(D)} * X_{Fear\,(D)} \\ & + B_4 X_{Ambiv\,(D)} * X_{Anger\,(D)} \\ & + B_4 X_{Ambiv\,(R)} X_{High\ Enthus\,(R)} \\ & + B_2 X_{Ambiv\,(R)} * X_{\ Some\ Enthus\,(R)} \\ & + B_3 X_{Ambiv\,(R)} * X_{Fear\,(R)} \\ & + B_4 X_{Ambiv\,(R)} * X_{Anger\,(R)} + B_k X_k + \varepsilon. \end{aligned}$$

The left panel of Figure 5 illustrates the effect of thoughts and feelings toward Democratic candidates, and the right panel illustrates the effect of thoughts and feelings toward Republican candidates. Just as in the prior tests, the moderating effect of enthusiasm stands out quite clearly. Absent enthusiasm toward the Democratic candidate, ambivalence toward that candidate is associated with a significant increase in the predicted probability of voter abstention (Hypothesis 1). However, as enthusiasm for the candidate rises, the probability of abstention declines (Hypothesis 2). The same pattern holds for Republican

[19]Neither fear nor anger affects the relationship between ambivalence and one's likelihood of reporting a non-attitude (see the SI, "Fear and Anger Analyses," p. 15).

FIGURE 3 Positive Affect Moderates the Effect of Ambivalence on Attitude Strength



Note: Results come from OLS regression models in which affect and ambivalence were interacted. See the SI, "Effects Reported in Paper (Figures 3–6)" (p. 23). Tests show no reason for concern about multicollinearity (SI, "Variance Inflation Factor Tests," p. 26). All variables have been scaled to run from 0 to 1. "Some enthusiasm" and "high enthusiasm" are treated as separate dummies. The y-axis represents predicted attitude strength toward the Democratic candidate (left) and Republican candidate (right). Results show that positive affect moderates the influence of ambivalence on attitude strength.

candidates, but the baseline effect of ambivalence is not statistically significant.

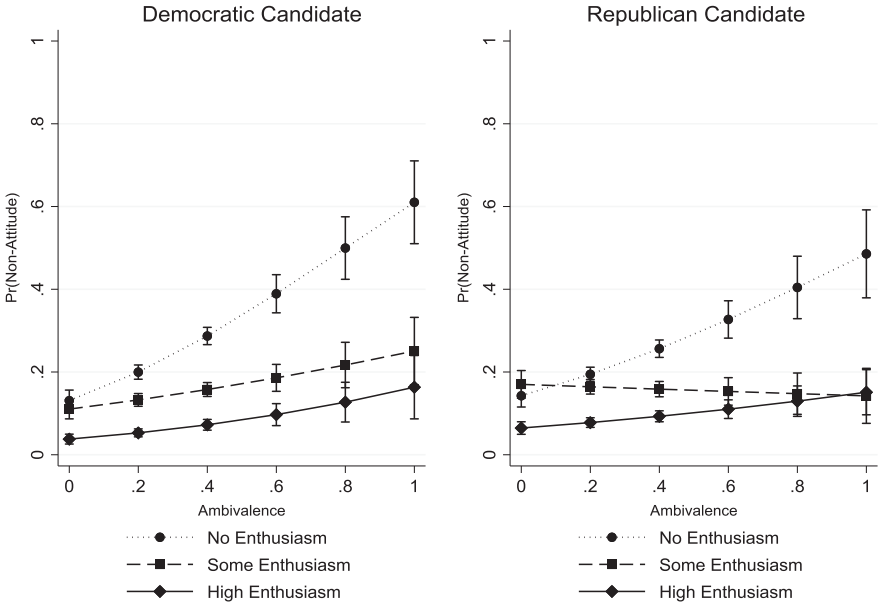
Because the confidence intervals overlap, it is relatively difficult to tell where along the ambivalence scale a good gut feeling exerts a significant moderating influence. To clarify where the effect is significant, the second row of panels displays the marginal effect of a good gut feeling at each level of ambivalence. In these panels, the zero line represents the baseline comparison (i.e., the effect of ambivalence absent affect). The other two lines show how much "some enthusiasm" and "high enthusiasm" reduce the effect of ambivalence compared to this baseline. Although "some enthusiasm" toward the Democratic (left panel) or Republican candidate (right panel) appears to push people in the expected direction, it does not do so significantly. But, among those who report "high enthusiasm" toward a candidate, we do see a significant reduction in the probability of abstention across much of the ambivalence scale. And, this effect holds for Republicans and Democrats.

Of course, one would not expect these effects on turnout to be uniform across the electorate. Whereas higher-income voters tend to turn out habitually in election after election, lower-income voters tend to teeter on the brink of abstention (Leighley and Nagler 2013; Rosenstone 1982). Thus, their likelihood of turnout in a given election depends disproportionately on what they think and how they feel about the candidates. If the theory holds, it should be these individuals who are driving the enthusiasm effects found in the prior analysis of abstention (Hypothesis 3).

Figure 6 shows the interactive effects of enthusiasm and ambivalence for the lower, middle, and upper thirds of the income distribution.[20] As in the prior analysis, the first row of panels shows the predicted probability of abstention, and the second row of panels shows the marginal effect of a good gut feeling at each level of ambivalence. The observed pattern is quite clear and consistent with Hypothesis 3. First, comparing across income groups, lower-income individuals' likelihood of abstention tends

[20]Results come from a triple interaction model between ambivalence, affect, and income. Ambivalence and each type of affect are included separately for Republican and Democratic candidates. Income levels were treated as separate categories (i.e., dummies), so linearity is not assumed. Only ambivalence is treated as a continuous variable. This model specification comports with research showing that the marginal effect of income is initially vary large, but it diminishes quite rapidly once median income is exceeded (Rosenstone 1982).

FIGURE 4 Positive Affect Moderates the Effect of Ambivalence on "Non-Attitudes"



Note: Results come from probit models in which affect and ambivalence were interacted. See the SI, "Effects Reported in Paper (Figures 3–6)" (p. 23). All variables have been scaled to run from 0 to 1. "Some enthusiasm" and "high enthusiasm" are treated as separate dummies. The y-axis represents predicted attitude strength toward the Democratic candidate (left) and Republican candidate (right). In both cases, positive affect exerts a larger moderating effect as ambivalence increases, thereby offsetting its effect on attitude formation.

to be higher, followed by middle-income voters, and then higher-income voters. Second, and more important for the theory, we see that for both Democratic candidates and Republican candidates, the interaction effect between enthusiasm and ambivalence is largest among those with lower incomes.

To put it more concretely, absent enthusiasm, the probability of abstention among low-income citizens rises by 20% as ambivalence toward the Democratic candidate goes from minimum to maximum and by 24% as ambivalence toward the Republican candidate goes from minimum to maximum.[21] However, a good gut feeling more than nullifies these effects. Given maximum ambivalence toward the Democratic candidate, high enthusiasm toward that candidate is associated with a 26% lower probability of abstention compared to no enthusiasm. Similarly, a low-income American with maximum ambivalence toward the Republican candidate has a 25% lower probability of abstention if he or she reports high enthusiasm versus no enthusiasm toward that candidate. The panels in the second row of the figure show that the marginal effect of high enthusiasm is statistically significant from the midpoint of the ambivalence scale to its maximum for both Democratic and Republican candidates.

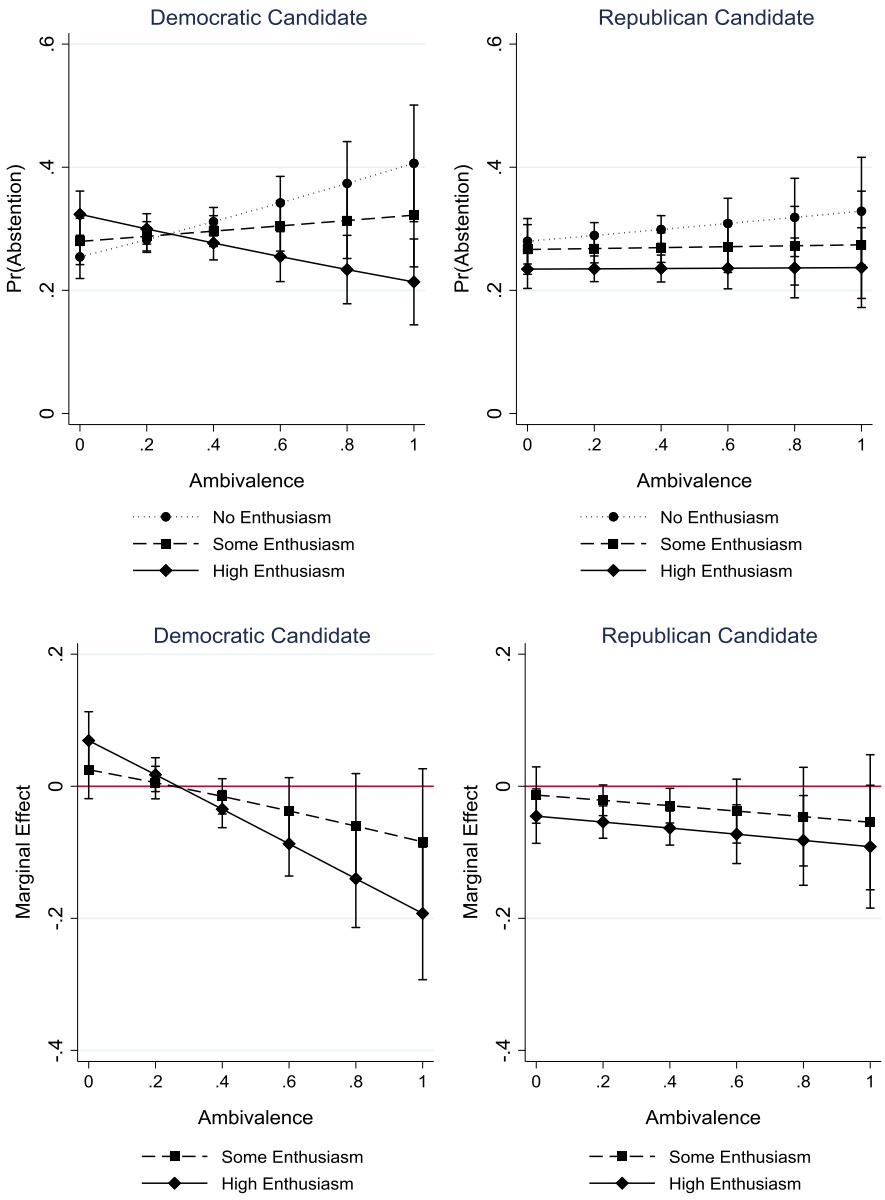
Consistent with Hypothesis 3, one can see the pattern of effects change as income goes from low, to middle, to high. For both Republican and Democratic candidates, ambivalence becomes less likely to produce abstention as income rises. As a result, enthusiasm has little role to play in moderating the effect of ambivalence among these higher-income Americans.[22] This helps to explain why Democrats often lose elections despite the public's tendency to prefer liberal policies. Republicans are not necessarily better at speaking to voters' guts; the relative affluence of their base simply insulates them from the paralyzing effect ambivalence can have on latent supporters.[23]

[21]These effects are significant at $p < .10$ and $p < .05$, respectively.

[22]Effects remain larger for Democratic candidates than for Republican candidates among middle-income voters. This slight asymmetry was not predicted, but it suggests that within this segment of the population, ambivalence could matter more when it is felt toward Democrats than Republicans.

[23]Neither fear nor anger affects the relationship between ambivalence and abstention (see the SI, "Fear and Anger Analyses," p. 15).

FIGURE 5 Positive Affect Moderates the Effect of Ambivalence on Turnout

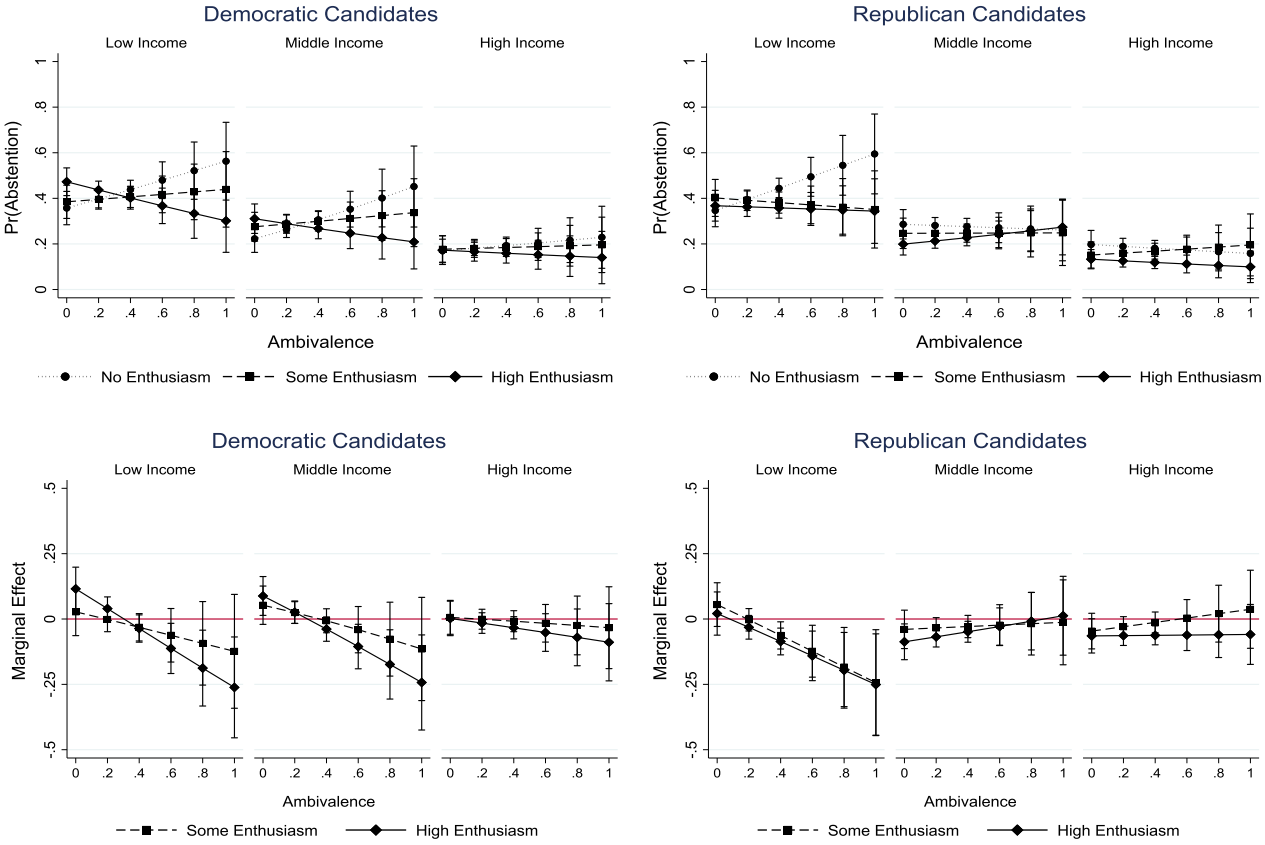


Note: Results come from a single probit model in which affect and ambivalence were interacted separately for Democratic and Republican candidates. See the SI, "Effects Reported in Paper (Figures 3–6)" (p. 23). All variables have been scaled to run from 0 to 1. "Some enthusiasm" and "high enthusiasm" are treated as separate dummies. In the left two panels, the y-axis represents the predicted probability of abstention given one's mix of thoughts and feelings toward the Democratic candidate (left) and the Republican candidate (right). The right two panels show the marginal effect of enthusiasm at each level of ambivalence. Results show that positive affect moderates the influence of ambivalence on abstention.

Robustness Tests

In addition to the results presented, I have also conducted numerous robustness tests. Due to space constraints, I will only briefly describe the results of some of the most important tests. Additional details about all the tests are available in the supporting information. First, I replicated each of my survey analyses after restricting my sample to individuals who fell at 0.5 or below on the ambivalence scale. Given the scale's positive skew (see Figure 1), one

FIGURE 6 Positive Affect Moderates the Effect of Ambivalence on Turnout among Lower-Income Voters



Note: All results come from a single probit model in which affect, ambivalence, and income were interacted for both Republican and Democratic candidates. See the SI, "Effects Reported in Paper (Figures 3–6)" (p. 23). All variables have been scaled to run from 0 to 1. "Some enthusiasm" and "high enthusiasm" are treated as separate dummies. The top panels show the predicted probability of abstention, and the bottom panels show the marginal effect of enthusiasm at each level of ambivalence. Results indicate that the interactive effects of ambivalence and enthusiasm hold among low-income individuals, but these effects diminish as income rises and voting becomes habitual (Plutzer 2002).

might worry that individuals with very high levels of ambivalence have disproportionate leverage in the analysis.[24] However, each of the results reported remained robust even after the tail of the distribution was trimmed (SI, "Robustness Check 1," p. 29).

Second, I replicated the findings presented in the article after adding an interaction between party identification strength and ambivalence to the model. This ensures that the interactive effects of enthusiasm are not simply picking up the effect of strong party identification. Given that party identification is theorized to be rooted in affect, this makes for a very conservative test of the theory. Nonetheless, the findings were nearly identical after inclusion of this additional term (SI, "Robustness Check 2," p. 34). Interestingly, while one might expect a strong party identity to function similarly to positive affect, helping individuals to overcome the effect of ambivalence, it appears to have little effect. If anything, ambivalence appears to affect the strongest partisans most, not least. This suggests that strong partisans may experience ambivalence toward their candidate as identity conflict, which is broadly consistent with the theory and findings of Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen (2012).

Third, since education is also an important resource affecting one's probability of turnout, it should theoretically function the same way as income. This prediction is supported by the data. When respondents are divided into low, middle, and high levels of education, the results appear almost identical to the results presented in Figure 6 (SI, "Robustness Check 3," p. 39).

Fourth, given respondents' tendency to overreport turnout, I have replicated the analyses using validated voter turnout rather than self-reported turnout. Although the validated vote measure only appears in 1980, 1984,

[24] Although it is not entirely visible in Figure 2, each distribution has a tail that runs all the way to 1.

and 1988, reducing the N by more than half, the results are remarkably robust (SI, "Robustness Check 4," p. 42). Thus, ambivalence and positive affect seem to exert an influence on actual turnout and not merely self-reports.

Discussion

Over the past decade or so, a series of popular psychological accounts have suggested that the key to winning elections is to speak to the heart rather than the head. From this perspective, Democratic candidates like Al Gore, John Kerry, and Hillary Clinton lost because they attempted to reason with voters rather than appealing to their "gut" (Haidt 2012; Lakoff 2008, Westen 2007). In contrast, the campaigns and elections canon suggests that elections are won by getting citizens to think about the right issues (Petrocik 1996; Vavreck 2009), particularly issues that increase ambivalence toward the opposition candidate (Hillygus and Shields 2008).

Thus, we are left with a quandary, particularly in the wake of the surprising 2016 election result. What processes really underlie the formation of attitudes and expression of preferences toward candidates? Have political scientists had it wrong? Should candidates—particularly Democratic candidates—focus more on the gut and less on the head? And, if so, what does this mean for democracy?

This article helps to answer these questions by integrating accounts of how campaigns are won and lost. Results from an original experiment and analysis of pooled ANES data (1980–2004) show that the head and the heart function interactively. A good gut feeling toward a candidate appears to promote the formation of attitudes and preferences by reducing the effect of ambivalence. Thus, candidates who are able to evoke positive emotions can insulate themselves from the potentially demobilizing effect of ambivalence aroused during campaigns. On the other hand, negative affect has no such effect—neither anger, nor fear, nor the two emotions combined (see the SI, "Fear and Anger Analyses," p. 15).

By recognizing this pattern, this article also helps to shed new light on the popular claim that Republicans recognize the importance of emotions, whereas Democrats lose because they speak too much to the head and too little to the heart (Haidt 2012; Lakoff 2008; Westen 2007). Results suggest that Democrats are not necessarily worse at forging gut-level connections, but rather they incur larger penalties when the electorate feels ambivalent toward them. Why is this? The answer is simple: Democratic candidates tend to get more support from lower-income voters, whereas Republicans tend to get more support from higher-income voters. Since lower-income voters teeter on the brink of abstention, Democratic candidates must be careful to avoid anything that might tip them over the edge, and ambivalence constitutes just such a factor. Since most campaigns arouse ambivalence (SI, "A Closer Look at Ambivalence," p. 13), it is critical for Democratic candidates to foster positive emotional connections. In contrast, Republicans are relatively insulated from the effect of voter ambivalence, since their more affluent base tends to turn out habitually (Plutzer 2002).

These findings raise important normative questions about the factors that influence the formation of political attitudes and expression of preferences through voting. On one hand, gut feelings may serve as a valuable shortcut for citizens who lack information (Brady and Sniderman 1985) and reduce the turnout gap between lower- and higher-income voters. On the other hand, by leading citizens to disregard certain thoughts they have about candidates, the gut may systematically bias information processing and undermine democratic accountability (Lodge and Taber 2013). As shown in the experiment, a smile and emotion-laden quote from a candidate can negate the effect of substantive information on evaluations. Thus, it seems that much depends on the degree to which "good gut feelings" toward candidates are rooted in diagnostic versus nondiagnostic information. Future work should address this question. Although negative affect plays a vital role in shaping opinions and behavior, positive affect deserves greater attention.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Supplemental Information on Experiment
Supplemental Information on ANES Survey Analyses