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## **The ‘No Hard Feelings’ Effect: Voters’ Resolution of Ambivalence to Make a Choice Between Candidates**

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This longitudinal study of presidential elections shows that voters resolve their ambivalence and polarize their attitudes toward the candidates as the deadline to vote becomes imminent. After the election, attitudes and ambivalence are found to exhibit a rebound pattern, the “no hard feelings effect,” but only toward the unchosen candidate.

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# The 'No Hard Feelings' Effect: Voters' Resolution of Ambivalence to Make a Choice Between Candidates

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how voters resolve their ambivalence and polarize their attitudes in order to make a choice between candidates. These effects are tested with a longitudinal natural experiment examining voters' choices between candidates in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections. The results show that voters reduce their ambivalence and polarize their attitudes toward the candidates as the deadline to make their choice becomes more imminent, while nonvoters do not exhibit this pattern over the same time frame. This research further examines the stability of these attitude changes after the vote has taken place and finds that attitudes and ambivalence toward the unchosen candidate exhibit a rebound pattern, the "no hard feelings effect," while attitudes toward the chosen candidate continue to become more positive after the choice has been made. Implications for communicating with voters during the 2012 presidential election campaign are considered.

"In an election, you have to highlight the differences and minimize the commonalities so that people can make a choice."

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton

The Daily Show with John Stewart, September 21, 2009

Researchers have long understood that voters in an election make their decisions as to which candidate to vote for at different times leading up to the date of the election (Chaffee and Choe 1980). This has created a challenge for those who try to communicate with voters through political advertising, as they must adapt their messages to different voters at different times. To complicate matters, over the past twenty years, voters have been observed to be making their decisions later and later in the campaign season, with an increasing number of voters making their decisions at the last minute, on or right before Election Day (Nir and Druckman 2008). Voters who make their decisions later in the campaign season are more likely to consider information that they are exposed to during the campaign when making their decisions (Chaffee and Choe 1980). Late deciders have been found to be more heavily influenced by political advertising (Bowen 1994), campaign events such as conventions and debates (Hillygus and Jackman 2003; Fournier et al. 2004), and campaign media coverage (Fournier et al. 2004), making communications with last-minute deciders even more important to political campaigns. This has led to a need to better understand what leads voters to choose at the last minute and how they make their decision as Election Day approaches.

Nir (2005) finds that voters are more likely to delay their decision when their attitudes toward the candidates are more ambivalent. Nir measures ambivalence by examining voters' ratings of both leading candidates in a presidential election and classifying voters as low in ambivalence if their attitudes are one-sided, regardless of which of the candidates they prefer, and high in ambivalence if their attitudes toward the two candidates were mixed. Voters who were more ambivalent were found to make their decisions later in the campaign season than less ambivalent voters (Nir 2005). This effect was found to be particularly strong when highly ambivalent voters were facing an environment in which they were exposed to mixed information that included similar positive or negative information about both

candidates, as opposed to one-sided information that favored one candidate or the other (Nir and Druckman 2008).

Adding to the complexity of this decision is the likelihood that voters are not only ambivalent between the candidates in an election, but also hold mixed or conflicting beliefs and/or emotions toward each candidate as an individual. It is common for individuals to have a mix of positive and negative feelings towards each particular alternative in a choice, as well as mixed feelings between the alternatives (Kaplan 1972). The degree to which an individual's attitude toward a particular object is characterized by a mix of positive and negative components has been referred to as attitudinal ambivalence (Kaplan 1972; Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson, Zanna and Griffin 1995). This mix of positive and negative attitude components contributes to a sense of conflict or mixed emotions that has been termed subjective ambivalence (Kaplan 1972; Priester and Petty 1996). Voters who have a mix of positive and negative feelings toward each of the candidates in an election are likely to experience this type of emotional conflict.

Although holding ambivalent attitudes does not cause ongoing conflict in everyday life, such attitudes may create a problem for the individual when he or she has to make a choice, as when the individual must choose which candidate to vote for. The problem occurs because individuals are motivated to hold correct attitudes toward each of the candidates (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) and to make a correct choice that is consistent with their evaluations of and attitudes toward the candidates (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fazio 1986). The voting task becomes difficult when an individual must select a candidate for whom he or she holds some negative evaluations or select against a candidate with some perceived positive aspects. Luce, Jia and Fischer (2003) suggest that a mix of positive and negative evaluations of a candidate could lead to an approach-avoidance conflict that would increase the individual's preference uncertainty. This feeling of uncertainty and mixed emotions has been linked to discomfort (Williams and Aaker 2002) and dissatisfaction (Olsen, Wilcox and Olsson 2005) with the choice.

Given the complex situation of a voter who may hold ambivalent attitudes toward each of the candidates, may be ambivalent between the candidates, and may be in an environment of mixed information about the candidates, how is a voter to come to a decision before Election Day? We suggest that an individual who intends to vote in an election will be motivated to resolve his or her conflicting attitudes in order to make the voting task easier, reduce his or her feelings of uncertainty, and avoid negative emotions. How the voter accomplishes this resolution in order to make a choice has not been examined in the literature.

This paper extends the research on voter decision-making by examining the way voters resolve their ambivalence to reduce their uncertainty and make a choice. We propose that voters will change their attitude structure by reducing their attitudinal and subjective ambivalence and polarizing their attitudes toward the candidates. These changes in attitude structure are expected to occur as the deadline to vote becomes imminent. Once the vote has passed, the motivation to resolve one's ambivalence and make a correct choice dissipates. In the absence of this motivational force, the voter's attitudes are expected to return to a more ambivalent state as the pres-

sure to polarize his or her attitudes recedes, which we term the "no hard feelings effect." Individuals who do not plan to vote are not expected to be motivated to modify their attitude structure over the same time frame.

### IMMINENT DEADLINES AND AMBIVALENCE

One of the unique aspects of the voting decision is that voters have a deadline by which they must make their choice of candidates, as they must vote on the day of the election. Researchers have repeatedly found that individuals who must make a decision with a deadline are influenced by how far in the future the decision will take place. Individuals have been found to make more simple evaluations of alternatives for decisions that are temporally distant, and more specific and detailed evaluations of alternatives for decisions that are temporally imminent (Wright and Weitz 1977). Individuals become less concerned with the desirability of alternatives and more concerned with their feasibility and practicality as the decision grows temporally closer (Vallacher and Wegner 1989). Individuals have also been found to more easily comprehend and process abstract information about alternatives when a decision is temporally distant and concrete information about alternatives when a decision is temporally imminent (Reber, Schwarz and Winkielman 2004; Kim, Rao and Lee 2009). Temporal construal theory suggests that this is due to temporally distant events being conceptualized in more abstract terms and processed at a higher level of abstraction, while temporally imminent events are conceptualized in more concrete terms and processed at a lower level of abstraction (Trope and Liberman 2000; 2003). As a result, individuals are likely to focus more on a concrete, detailed evaluation of alternatives when the decision is temporally imminent than when it is temporally distant.

In addition to processing information more concretely, individuals who are facing an imminent decision are likely to be more sensitive to negative information than individuals who are facing a temporally distant decision (Loewenstein and Prelec 1991; Wright and Weitz 1977). Individuals considering a decision in the future have been shown to be able to anticipate how they will feel if their decisions yield negative or positive results and the extent to which they will regret their choice (Simonson 1992). Individuals who anticipate future outcomes have also been found to be more sensitive to potential negative outcomes or losses than to positive outcomes or gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1984). These potential negative outcomes become more salient as the decision, and therefore the risk of regret, becomes more temporally imminent (Eyal, Liberman, Trope and Walther 2004; Shelley 1994). Individuals therefore become less optimistic about being able to fulfill their goals (Gilovich, Kerr and Medvec 1993; Nisan 1972; Sanna 1999; Savitsky, Medvec, Charlton and Gilovich 1998; Shepperd, Ouellette and Fernandez 1996) and more prevention-focused (Mogliner, Aaker and Pennington 2008) as the potential for making an incorrect choice grows closer. This should increase the individual's motivation to make a correct choice and avoid the potential negative feelings associated with making a choice that is based on mixed or ambivalent attitudes (Olsen et al. 2005; Williams and Aaker 2002).

This suggests that voters who hold both positive and negative evaluations of the candidates will not experience conflict when the vote is in the distant future due to the more abstract nature of evaluation versus choice. However, as the deadline for an election becomes temporally imminent, will likely become more sensitive to conflicts or ambivalence within the specific components of their evaluations. Therefore, unlike when the choice is temporally distant, the voter is likely to be motivated to resolve his or her ambivalence as the vote

grows more imminent and his or her processing and evaluation of the alternatives becomes more concrete.

As a result, individuals who anticipate voting in the election are expected to alter the positive and negative components of their attitude structures in order to reduce their attitudinal ambivalence and polarize their attitudes toward the candidates as the deadline for the vote becomes more imminent. Such polarization will make the candidates more distinct and thus the choice easier. Voters have been found to exhibit a pattern of attitude polarization as the date of the election approaches (Meffert et al. 2006; Taber and Lodge 2006). This has been attributed to voters' tendency to pay more attention to information about their preferred candidate and to focus on positive information about their preferred candidate and negative information about their non-preferred candidate (Meffert et al. 2006). In addition, voters have been found to seek out information that confirms their preexisting beliefs, uncritically accept information that supports their beliefs, and counterargue information that is contrary to their beliefs (Taber and Lodge 2006). This leads voters to develop more positive attitudes toward their preferred candidate and more negative attitudes toward their non-preferred candidate as the election approaches, thus reducing their ambivalence. This change in their attitude structure should contribute to reducing their feelings of mixed emotions or subjective ambivalence. Individuals who do not anticipate voting, however, will not be motivated to change their attitude structure and should be unaffected by the approaching deadline. This leads to Hypothesis 1:

*Hypothesis 1a: As the election approaches, voters will reduce their attitudinal ambivalence toward the candidates more than nonvoters.*

*Hypothesis 1b: As the election approaches, voters will polarize their attitudes toward the candidates, becoming more positive about their chosen candidate and more negative about their unchosen candidate, more than nonvoters.*

*Hypothesis 1c: As the election approaches, voters will reduce their subjective ambivalence toward the candidates more than those nonvoters.*

### POST-CHOICE AMBIVALENCE

If it is the pressure of the imminent deadline that motivates the voter to resolve his or her ambivalence, then this motivation will no longer apply once the election has passed. This would suggest that the voter's attitudes and ambivalence would return to their pre-vote level. However, individuals have been repeatedly found to be motivated to believe that their behaviors are consistent with their attitudes (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fazio 1986). In a post-choice setting, the motivation to be consistent is still present, and can lead the voter to change his or her attitudes toward the candidates to be more consistent with the alternative that was chosen (see Petty, Unnava and Strathman 1998 for a review). This would suggest that the attitude polarization that occurs as the deadline for the election approaches would remain after the election has passed.

Which of these outcomes occurs may depend on whether the relevant attitude components are positive or negative. Previous research suggests that the negative components of an attitude may increase in salience as the individual approaches a choice setting (Eyal et al. 2004; Jewell 2003; Mogliner et al. 2008). This is consistent

the well-documented “positivity offset” and “negativity bias” that occur when individuals are in a choice setting (Cacioppo and Bernston 1999; Cacioppo, Gardner and Bernston 1997). The positivity offset effect suggests that when a goal is distant, individuals place more weight on positive aspects of a behavior and less weight on the negative aspects. However, as the goal becomes more imminent, the negative aspects of the behavior become more salient. The negativity bias predicts that in addition to this increase in salience as the goal approaches, individuals tend to give more weight to negative information in general than they do to positive information. This negativity bias has been found to influence voters’ processing of political information during a campaign (Meffert et al. 2006).

If it is the negative components of voters’ attitudes toward the candidates that are increasing in salience and being given more weight as the deadline for the election becomes more imminent, these changes are likely to be temporary increases in salience that do not persist after the election has passed. However, changes in the positive components of voters’ attitudes toward the candidates are not likely to be subject to the positivity offset and negativity bias, suggesting that these changes may be more persistent than their negative counterparts. In order to polarize their attitudes to make a choice, voters need to increase the positive components of their attitudes toward the chosen candidate and the negative components of their attitudes toward the unchosen candidate. Thus, ambivalence and attitudes toward the unchosen candidate are expected to rebound after the choice has been made, returning to their pre-choice levels, while ambivalence and attitudes toward the chosen candidate should not exhibit this rebound effect. We term this the “no hard feelings” effect, as the voter is becoming less negative toward the unchosen candidate after the choice has been made. This leads to Hypotheses 2 and 3:

*Hypothesis 2: After the election passes, voters’ (a) attitudinal ambivalence toward their unchosen candidate will increase, (b) attitudes toward their unchosen candidate will become less negative, and (c) subjective ambivalence toward their unchosen candidate will increase.*

*Hypothesis 3: After the election passes, voters’ (a) attitudinal ambivalence toward their chosen candidate will continue to decrease, (b) attitudes toward their chosen candidate will continue to become more positive, and (c) subjective ambivalence toward their chosen candidate will continue to decrease.*

## METHOD

These hypotheses were tested using a longitudinal natural experiment conducted during the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections. The same procedure was used for both elections. Participants completed a questionnaire about their election decision three times: the first, six weeks before the election, the second, one week before the election, and the third, one week after the election. In each questionnaire, participants’ attitudes, attitudinal ambivalence, and subjective ambivalence were measured toward each of the two presidential candidates. In the first and second questionnaires, participants were then asked if they were registered to vote, if they intended to vote, and which of the candidates they intended to vote for in the upcoming election. In the third questionnaire, participants were asked if they

had voted and, if so, which of the candidates they had voted for in the recent election.

Participants were classified as voters if they participated in all three questionnaires, reported an intention to vote in the election in the pre-election questionnaires, and voted in the presidential election on Election Day. The nonvoter group was defined as individuals who participated in all three questionnaires and were eligible to vote (e.g. U.S. citizens over the age of eighteen), but did not vote in the election. Participants who voted via absentee ballot prior to Election Day were excluded because of the lack of a consistent deadline for their decision.

Each voter’s chosen and unchosen candidate was coded based on his or her reported voting behavior. This analysis was only concerned with the two major party candidates (Republican and Democrat), and not with any third party candidates. The major party candidate for whom the participant voted was coded as the chosen candidate and the major party candidate for whom the participant did not vote was coded as the unchosen candidate. Measures of voting intention were used in place of actual voting behavior to code chosen and unchosen candidates for nonvoters. No participants reported voting for a candidate other than the major party candidates in either election.

Participants’ attitudinal ambivalence toward each of the candidates was measured using the six-item measure developed by Thompson et al. (1995; see Appendix for items). Each item was measured on a 9-point scale. Three of the items capture the positive components of the individual’s attitude, and three capture the negative components. The items were combined using the formula developed by Thompson et al. (1995), as follows:

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

This calculation is considered to be preferable to analyzing the positive and negative components of attitude separately because it captures both the magnitude (the first term) and the extremity (the second term) of the individual’s positive and negative attitudinal components.

Participants’ overall attitude toward each of the candidates was measured using four semantic differential items in response to the statement, “As President of the United States for the next four years, [candidate] would be...” with endpoints good/bad, desirable/undesirable, superior/inferior, and satisfactory/unsatisfactory. Participants’ subjective ambivalence toward each of the candidates was measured using the three semantic differential items used by Priester and Petty (1996) and Thompson et al. (1995; see Appendix for items). All items were measured on a 9-point scale.

## RESULTS

### Sample Description

A total of two hundred ninety-one undergraduate students at a midwestern university completed all three parts of this study in exchange for course credit, one hundred forty-nine in 2004 and one hundred forty-two in 2008. All of the participants were old enough to vote in the upcoming presidential election. The participants were 58.3% female and had an average age of 21. One hundred seventy-eight (61.2%) of the participants were in their junior year of college, sixty-one (21.0%) were in their senior year, and fifty-one (17.5%) were in their sophomore year, with one participant not reporting his or her class. Two hundred fifty-five (87.6%) of the participants were Caucasian, nineteen (6.5%) were African-American, five (1.7%) were of Asian or Pacific descent, three (1.0%) were of Hispanic or

Latino descent, and eight (2.7%) had an ethnic background other than these four, with one participant not reporting his or her ethnic background.

Thirty participants (10.3%) considered themselves conservative republicans, forty-three (14.8%) were moderate republicans, forty (13.7%) were independent but leaned toward the republican party, forty-six (15.8%) considered themselves neither a republican nor a democrat, thirty-nine (13.4%) were independent but leaned toward the democratic party, forty-six (15.8%) were moderate democrats, and forty-five (15.5%) were liberal democrats with one participant not reporting his or her political affiliation.

Two hundred seventeen (74.6%) voted on Election Day and seventy-four (25.4%) did not vote in the election. This higher than average percentage of voters is likely due to the unusually high turnout of young voters to support the Democratic candidates during both the 2004 and 2008 elections. Indeed, of the two hundred seventeen participants who voted in the election, one hundred thirty-six (62.7%) voted for the Democratic candidate (John Kerry or Barack Obama) and eighty-one (37.3%) voted for the Republican candidate (George W. Bush or John McCain). Since the candidates were coded as chosen and unchosen for each individual participant, this did not affect the results.

### Measure Validation

The measures were checked for reliability before any further analysis was conducted. The six-item measure of attitudinal ambivalence contains three positively worded items and three negatively worded items that are not expected to correlate with each other (Thompson et al., 1995). Therefore, reliability coefficients were calculated for the positive and negative items separately. The positive items had acceptable reliability for both the chosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and the unchosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), and the negative items had slightly lower but still acceptable reliability for both the chosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) and the unchosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). The formula developed by Thompson et al. (1995) was used to calculate participants' attitudinal ambivalence toward each of the candidates.

The four-item attitude measure had acceptable reliability for both attitude toward the chosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) and attitude toward the unchosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.97$ ). The three-item subjective ambivalence measure also had slightly lower but acceptable reliability for both the chosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) and the unchosen candidate ( $\alpha = 0.70$ ). The attitude and subjective ambivalence measures were averaged to create composite measures. No differences across the 2004 and 2008 elections were found on any of the ambivalence and attitude measures.

### Tests of Pre-Choice Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 was tested using a 2 (voter status: voter, nonvoter) x 2 (time) doubly multivariate repeated measures ANOVA on participants' ambivalence and attitudes toward their chosen and unchosen candidates, as recommended by Stevens (1996). The multivariate analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between voter status and time ( $F(6, 275) = 2.52, p < .05$ ), and significant main effects of both time ( $F(6, 275) = 5.29, p < .001$ ) and voter status ( $F(6, 275) = 3.25, p < .005$ ).

Participants' attitudinal ambivalence toward their chosen candidates did not produce a significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 280) = 0.01, p > .10$ ), but the main effects of both time ( $F(1, 280) = 6.79, p = .01$ ) and voter status ( $F(1, 280) = 6.99, p < .01$ ) were significant. Separate analyses revealed that voters' attitudinal ambivalence toward their chosen candidates decreased significantly as the deadline for the election approached ( $M_1 = 4.63, M_2 = 4.12, F(1, 211) = 7.33,$

$p < .01$ ), while nonvoters' attitudinal ambivalence did not decrease significantly ( $M_1 = 5.48, M_2 = 5.01, F(1, 69) = 2.17, p > .10$ ). Participants' attitudinal ambivalence toward their unchosen candidates did reveal a significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 280) = 4.72, p < .05$ ) and a significant main effect of voter status ( $F(1, 280) = 7.51, p < .01$ ). The main effect of time, however, was not significant ( $F(1, 280) = 2.63, p > .10$ ). Separate analyses again revealed that voters' attitudinal ambivalence toward their unchosen candidates decreased significantly as the deadline for the election approached ( $M_1 = 4.65, M_2 = 3.96, F(1, 211) = 14.27, p < .001$ ), while nonvoters' ambivalence did not decrease significantly ( $M_1 = 5.17, M_2 = 5.27, F(1, 69) = 0.11, p > .10$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 1a.

Univariate tests on participants' attitudes toward their chosen candidates found a significant interaction effect between voter status and time ( $F(1, 280) = 4.28, p < .05$ ) as well as significant main effects of both time ( $F(1, 280) = 6.99, p < .01$ ) and deadline ( $F(1, 280) = 17.36, p < .001$ ). Separate analyses revealed that voters' attitudes toward their chosen candidates became significantly more positive as the deadline for the election approached ( $M_1 = 6.80, M_2 = 7.33, F(1, 211) = 42.52, p < .001$ ), while nonvoters' attitudes toward their chosen candidates did not show a significant change ( $M_1 = 6.17, M_2 = 6.24, F(1, 69) = 0.05, p > .10$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1b. The interaction effect for participants' attitudes toward their unchosen candidates was not significant ( $F(1, 280) = 2.14, p > .10$ ), but the analysis revealed significant main effects of both time ( $F(1, 280) = 8.29, p < .005$ ) and voter status ( $F(1, 280) = 9.45, p < .005$ ). Although the interaction effect did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, separate analyses revealed that voters' attitudes toward their unchosen candidates became significantly more negative as the deadline for the election approached ( $M_1 = 3.18, M_2 = 2.80, F(1, 211) = 17.30, p < .001$ ), while nonvoters' attitudes toward their unchosen candidates did not change ( $M_1 = 3.74, M_2 = 3.61, F(1, 211) = 0.951, p > .10$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1b.

Finally, participants' subjective ambivalence toward their chosen candidates also did not produce a significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 280) = 2.33, p > .10$ ), but the main effects of both time ( $F(1, 280) = 20.43, p < .001$ ) and voter status ( $F(1, 280) = 8.89, p < .005$ ) were significant. Separate analyses revealed that voters' subjective ambivalence toward their chosen candidates decreased significantly as the deadline for the election approached ( $M_1 = 4.00, M_2 = 3.28, F(1, 211) = 34.63, p < .001$ ), while nonvoters' ambivalence did not decrease significantly ( $M_1 = 4.50, M_2 = 5.01, F(1, 69) = 4.15, p > .05$ ). Participants' subjective ambivalence toward their unchosen candidates did exhibit a significant interaction effect ( $F(1, 280) = 6.84, p < .01$ ) as well as significant main effects of both time ( $F(1, 280) = 7.02, p < .01$ ) and voter status ( $F(1, 280) = 4.38, p < .05$ ). Separate analyses again revealed that voters' subjective ambivalence decreased significantly as the deadline for the election approached ( $M_1 = 4.35, M_2 = 3.65, F(1, 211) = 27.97, p < .001$ ), while nonvoters' ambivalence did not decrease significantly ( $M_1 = 4.50, M_2 = 4.50, F(1, 69) = 0.00, p > .10$ ). Overall, these findings provide support for Hypothesis 1c. These results are summarized in Table 1.

### Tests of Post-Choice Hypotheses

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested using a multivariate repeated measures ANOVA on 2004 and 2008 voters' attitudinal ambiva-

**Table 1**  
**Pre-Election Results: Voters and Nonvoters**

	Voters' Evaluations N = 217		Nonvoters' Evaluations N = 74	
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2
Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward the Chosen Candidate	4.63 <sup>a</sup>	4.12 <sup>a</sup>	5.48	5.01
Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward the Unchosen Candidate	4.65 <sup>b</sup>	3.96 <sup>b</sup>	5.17	5.27
Attitude Toward the Chosen Candidate	6.80 <sup>c</sup>	7.33 <sup>c</sup>	6.17	6.24
Attitude Toward the Unchosen Candidate	3.18 <sup>d</sup>	2.80 <sup>d</sup>	3.74	3.61
Subjective Ambivalence Toward the Chosen Candidate	4.00 <sup>e</sup>	3.28 <sup>e</sup>	4.50	5.01
Subjective Ambivalence Toward the Unchosen Candidate	4.35 <sup>f</sup>	3.65 <sup>f</sup>	4.50	4.50

Means with the same superscript are significantly different from each other at  $p < .05$ .

lence, attitude, and subjective ambivalence toward the chosen and unchosen candidates using data from all three questionnaires. Based on the hypothesized effects, participants' attitudes and ambivalence were expected to produce a linear effect for their chosen candidates and a quadratic effect for their unchosen candidates. Due to missing data, this analysis was performed on a sample of two hundred and eleven voters from the combined data set. The multivariate analysis revealed a significant main effect of time ( $F(12, 199) = 10.73, p < .001$ ). Univariate tests revealed significant changes over time for all six variables: Attitudinal Ambivalence Chosen ( $F(2, 420) = 21.30, p < .001$ ), Attitudinal Ambivalence Unchosen ( $F(2, 420) = 10.88, p < .001$ ), Attitude Chosen ( $F(2, 420) = 49.63, p < .001$ ), Attitude Unchosen ( $F(2, 420) = 9.82, p < .001$ ), Subjective Ambivalence Chosen ( $F(2, 420) = 35.53, p < .001$ ), and Subjective Ambivalence Unchosen ( $F(2, 420) = 17.36, p < .001$ ).

Voters' attitudinal ambivalence toward the unchosen candidate exhibited both a significant linear effect ( $F(1, 210) = 14.08, p < .001$ ) and a significant quadratic effect ( $F(1, 210) = 5.53, p < .05$ ). It appears that rather than fully rebounding, voters' attitudinal ambivalence toward the unchosen candidate leveled off after the election had passed ( $M_1 = 4.65, M_2 = 3.96, M_3 = 3.90$ ), so Hypothesis 2a is not supported. Voters' attitudes toward their unchosen candidates, however, exhibited a significant quadratic effect, becoming more negative as the election approached and less negative after the election passed ( $M_1 = 3.18, M_2 = 2.80, M_3 = 2.93, F(1, 210) = 13.64, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2b and demonstrating the "no hard feelings effect." Voters' subjective ambivalence toward the unchosen candidate also exhibited both a significant linear effect ( $F(1, 210) = 20.03, p < .001$ ) and a significant quadratic effect ( $F(1, 210) = 13.76,$

$p < .001$ ). Subjective ambivalence, however, did show the rebound effect, paralleling the results for attitude toward the unchosen candidate ( $M_1 = 4.35, M_2 = 3.65, M_3 = 3.73$ ) and supporting Hypothesis 2c. This suggests that attitudinal and subjective ambivalence may exhibit different patterns after the deadline for the decision has passed.

As predicted, voters' attitudinal ambivalence toward their chosen candidates exhibited a significant linear effect, steadily decreasing as the election approached and then passed ( $M_1 = 4.63, M_2 = 4.12, M_3 = 3.42, F(1, 210) = 35.64, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3a. Voters' attitudes toward their chosen candidates also exhibited a significant linear effect, with attitudes steadily becoming more positive ( $M_1 = 6.80, M_2 = 7.33, M_3 = 7.59, F(1, 210) = 76.34, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3b. Voters' subjective ambivalence toward their chosen candidates also followed the predicted pattern ( $M_1 = 4.00, M_2 = 3.28, M_3 = 3.05, F(1, 210) = 56.57, p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3c. These results are summarized in Table 2.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the 2004 and 2008 presidential election data found that voters did reduce their attitudinal and subjective am-

**Table 2**  
**Post-Election Results: Voters Only**

	Voters' Evaluations n = 217		
	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward the Chosen Candidate	4.63 <sup>a</sup>	4.12 <sup>a</sup>	3.42 <sup>a</sup>
Attitudinal Ambivalence Toward the Unchosen Candidate	4.65 <sup>b</sup>	3.96 <sup>b</sup>	3.90 <sup>b</sup>
Attitude Toward the Chosen Candidate	6.80 <sup>c</sup>	7.33 <sup>c</sup>	7.59 <sup>c</sup>
Attitude Toward the Unchosen Candidate	3.18 <sup>d</sup>	2.80 <sup>d</sup>	2.93 <sup>d</sup>
Subjective Ambivalence Toward the Chosen Candidate	4.00 <sup>e</sup>	3.28 <sup>e</sup>	3.05 <sup>e</sup>
Subjective Ambivalence Toward the Unchosen Candidate	4.35 <sup>f</sup>	3.65 <sup>f</sup>	3.73 <sup>f</sup>

Means with the superscripts a, c, and e exhibited a significant linear effect at  $p < .001$ . Means with the superscripts d and f exhibited a significant quadratic effect at  $p < .001$ . Means with the superscript b exhibited a significant quadratic effect at  $p < .05$ .

bivalence and polarize their attitudes toward the candidates as the election approached. The significant changes observed in voters' ambivalence and attitudes as the election approached were not observed among nonvoters over the same time period. This supports our prediction that voters reduced their ambivalence and polarized their attitudes due to the imminent deadline of the election.

The analysis also provided evidence that voters' attitudes and subjective ambivalence toward their unchosen candidates rebounded in the direction of their original levels after the election had passed. Interestingly, voters' attitudinal ambivalence did not rebound, but simply leveled off after the election had passed. This may suggest that the rebound effect is more of an affective response than an actual change in beliefs or attitudinal ambivalence. Voters' attitudes toward their chosen candidates, in contrast, continued to become more positive after the election had passed, while their attitudinal and subjective ambivalence toward their chosen candidates continued to decrease. This effectively preserves the gap between the chosen and unchosen alternatives after the election passes, which enables the individual to maintain an attitude that is consistent with his or her choice.

These findings contribute to our understanding of voter decision-making by demonstrating how ambivalent voters resolve the conflict in their attitudes in order to make a choice by the deadline of Election Day, beyond simply extending their decision time. We further show how voters adjust their attitudes and ambivalence toward the candidates after the election has passed in order to maintain attitudes that are consistent with their choice.

It is interesting to note that this effect holds not only across two elections with different results in terms of the winning candidate's party affiliation and incumbency, but also regardless of whether the voter's chosen candidate won the election. This was not a case of sympathy for the losing candidate or confirmation of the winner as the correct choice. Participants' attitudes toward the candidate they had voted for continued to become more positive and less ambivalent after the election had passed whether their chosen candidate had won or lost the election. Their attitudes toward the candidate they

had not voted for became more positive and *more* ambivalent after the election had passed whether that candidate had won or lost the election. This suggests that the continued change in ambivalence and attitude acts as a confirmation of the voter's decision, and is not a response to the result of the election.

These findings suggest several recommendations for the use of advertising to provide voters with information during the 2012 campaign season. First, since ambivalent voters are delaying their decisions and resolving their ambivalence so close to the date of the election, information communicated to voters during the last few weeks before the election is clearly very important. The need for voters to polarize their attitudes further suggests that candidates would benefit from providing voters with information that will help them to distinguish between the candidates and see the positive aspects of their preferred candidate and the negative aspects of their non-preferred candidate. Previous research has found that ads with a negatively framed message can lead to greater image discrimination between the candidates and greater attitude polarization among voters (Garamone et al. 1990). While negative political advertising has been associated with voters developing more negative attitudes toward political campaigns in general, Pinkleton, Um and Austin (2002) find that when negative ads are comparative in nature, they are perceived less negatively by voters. As comparative ads would also help to highlight the differences between the candidates, this suggests that candidates would be well served by using advertising that is negatively framed but emphasizes comparisons between the candidates during the last few weeks of the campaign season.

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## APPENDIX: AMBIVALENCE MEASURES

### Attitudinal Ambivalence

1. Think about your overall impression and opinion about [candidate]. Considering only the favorable qualities of [candidate] and ignoring the unfavorable characteristics, how favorable is your evaluation of [candidate]? (endpoints not at all favorable/very favorable)
2. Think about your feelings or emotions about [candidate]. Considering only your feelings of satisfaction with [candidate] and ignoring your feelings of dissatisfaction, how satisfied do you feel about [candidate]? (endpoints not at all satisfied/very satisfied)
3. Think about your thoughts or beliefs about [candidate]. Considering only the beneficial qualities of [candidate] and ignoring the harmful characteristics, how beneficial do you believe [candidate] would be as president? (endpoints not at all beneficial/very beneficial)
4. Think about your overall impression and opinion about [candidate]. Considering only the unfavorable qualities of [candidate] and ignoring the favorable characteristics, how unfavorable is your evaluation of [candidate]? (endpoints not at all unfavorable, very unfavorable)
5. Think about your feelings or emotions about [candidate]. Considering only your feelings of dissatisfaction with [candidate] and ignoring your feelings of satisfaction, how dissatisfied do you feel about [candidate]? (endpoints not at all dissatisfied/very dissatisfied)
6. Think about your thoughts or beliefs about [candidate]. Considering only the harmful qualities of [candidate] and ignoring the beneficial characteristics, how harmful do you believe [candidate] would be as president? (endpoints not at all harmful, very harmful)

### Subjective Ambivalence

1. How conflicted (e.g. in conflict with each other) are your impressions and opinions regarding [candidate]? (endpoints feel no conflict at all/feel maximum conflict)
2. How indecisive (e.g. not that sure) are you about your impressions and opinions regarding [candidate]? (endpoints feel no indecision at all/feel maximum indecision)
3. How mixed (e.g. both good and bad) or one-sided (e.g. only good or bad) are your impressions and opinions regarding [candidate]? (endpoints completely one-sided/ completely mixed)