



The Electoral Consequences of Issue Ambiguity: An Examination of the Presidential Candidates' Issue Positions from 1968 to 1980

Author(s): James E. Campbell

Source: *Political Behavior*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1983), pp. 277-291

Published by: Springer

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/586290>

Accessed: 19/10/2009 13:50

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=springer>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Springer is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Political Behavior*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF ISSUE AMBIGUITY: An Examination of the Presidential Candidates' Issue Positions from 1968 to 1980

James E. Campbell

This study investigates the consequences of ambiguity in the issue positions of presidential candidates from 1968 to 1980. Two potential consequences are examined: a direct impact and a conditional impact on the vote. The findings indicate no significant direct effect on the vote. However, significant conditional effects were found. Compared to losing candidates, winning candidates were somewhat less likely to hold clear positions when issues were salient to the public and were somewhat more likely to hold ambiguous positions when public opinion was dispersed. They were especially more likely to be ambiguous when their positions substantially differed from the median public position on the issue.

Political observers commonly complain that candidates take ambiguous stands on the issues. Yet all candidates are not equally ambiguous or clear, and their ambiguity may vary from one issue to the next. The subject of this research is the electoral consequences of these variations in ambiguity. Does ambiguity generally work to the advantage of candidates or to their disadvantage? Do the consequences of ambiguity depend upon the type of issue involved? That is, are candidates particularly helped or hurt by being ambiguous on specific types of issue?

Previous research on candidate ambiguity has paid greater attention to its causes than to its consequences. Shepsle (1972) suggested one explanation of candidate ambiguity in his lottery or strategic theory of ambiguity. According to Shepsle, if voters are risk acceptant, candidates can broaden

James E. Campbell, Department of Political Science and Institute for Behavioral Research, University of Georgia.

their appeal by being ambiguous. Voters are willing to gamble that an ambiguous candidate's true issue position is close to their own. Ambiguity was explained in a different way by Page (1976 and 1978). According to Page's emphasis allocation theory of ambiguity, candidates are ambiguous simply because they have limited resources to develop and communicate their positions effectively to the public. Candidates confront limitations on their time, finances, and access to voters. Because of this, they must distribute or allocate their attention carefully. "Specific policy proposals turn out to be relatively ineffective in winning votes," according to Page (1978, p. 178). "Candidates therefore devote most of their efforts to projecting a favorable personal image and making other productive appeals; policy stands are left ambiguous, with very low emphasis." In the market for the candidate's energies, issue concerns are simply crowded out.

While Shepsle and Page have offered reasons for the candidates' general ambiguity, other research has empirically investigated reasons for variation in ambiguity. Campbell (1983) investigated issue salience, the popularity of the candidate's position, and the dispersion of public opinion for their effects on ambiguity. The findings of this study indicated that candidates are significantly more ambiguous when their positions are unpopular and when there is substantial dispersion in public opinion. The salience of issues had no direct effect on candidate ambiguity.

However caused, ambiguity may significantly affect the vote. Two types of effects are possible. First, ambiguity may affect the vote directly. The effect could be positive. From the emphasis allocation theory's perspective, ambiguous candidates are those who wisely devote their efforts to more vote-productive enterprises than issue clarification. From the lottery or strategic theory's perspective, one might argue that candidates would generally benefit from ambiguity if voters are risk acceptant, if voters assume the best of a candidate's ambiguity. If these general benefits exist, one should observe greater ambiguity in the positions of winning candidates than in those of losing candidates. On the other hand, ambiguity may have a negative effect. It could hurt a candidate's public image. Excessive ambiguity may cause voters to conclude that a candidate is evasive or spineless. Also, if voters are risk averse, if they assume the worst of a candidate's ambiguity, candidates would be better off if they were clear in their positions. If this negative consequence exists, ambiguity should be in greater evidence in the positions of losing candidates.¹

It is also possible that the effects of ambiguity are not so general in nature, but depend upon the issue. The effects of ambiguity may depend upon the issue's salience to the public. From one perspective, candidates may do well to be particularly ambiguous on salient issues. If voters are easily estranged by issue differences between themselves and the candi-

date, ambiguity may weaken their disaffection. The more important the issue, the more any disaffection may cost votes. Thus, the more important the issue, the more important ambiguity is to saving votes for the candidate. From a different perspective, candidates might be better advised to clarify their stands on the most salient issues. Most simply, voters may resent candidates who avoid or evade important issues. If a candidate enjoys an issue advantage over his opponent, clarity in the position may more fully exploit the advantage. On more important issues, an issue advantage may translate into more votes. Given these higher stakes, clarity ought to be more important to winning votes when the issue is particularly salient to the voters.

The impact of ambiguity may also vary with other types of issues. Ambiguity may be more strongly recommended to candidates when their positions are unpopular and when the public is spread across the issue dimension. When an issue stand is unpopular, ambiguity may reduce the vote loss attributable to the issue. Because of ambiguity, voters are less likely to be aware of the extent of their disagreement with the candidate and, consequently, are less likely to vote against the candidate because of the disagreement. Ambiguity on issues in which public opinion is dispersed allows candidates to "cover" a broader range of voters. Because of this ambiguity, some voters distant from the candidate's true position may give him or her the benefit of the doubt and estimate the candidate's position as closer to their own than it actually is. In short, three possible conditional effects have been identified. Issue salience, the proximity of the candidate's position to the public's, and the dispersion of public opinion may each affect ambiguity's impact on election outcomes.

DATA

The presidential election studies of 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980 carried out by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies were used to examine the consequences of ambiguity. These four national surveys included 26 issue items in which respondents placed themselves and the candidates on 7-point scales. Since two candidates have positions on each of these 26 issues, 52 candidate issue positions can be examined. Table 1 presents a brief description of each issue, the election in which it was measured, the candidates, and values of each variable to be examined.

The fundamental structure of this analysis is to compare the behavior of winning candidates to that of losing candidates. The comparative analysis of these two groups has a definite advantage. That advantage is that both sets of candidates, the winners and the losers, confront precisely the same set of issues. Because of this, it is quite unlikely that any differences that

TABLE 1. Issues Included in the Analysis

Election	Subject of Issue	Candidates	Issue Salience	Opinion Dispersion	Proximity to		Ambiguity of	
					Democrat	Republican	Democrat	Republican
1968	Urban Unrest	Humphrey/Nixon	46	1.95	1.22	.36	1.54	1.61
1968	Vietnam War	Humphrey/Nixon	70	1.98	.06	.29	1.54	1.50
1972	Vietnam War	McGovern/Nixon	19	1.90	2.41	.88	1.28	1.60
1972	Inflation	McGovern/Nixon	10	1.48	.80	1.01	1.67	1.60
1972	Jobs	McGovern/Nixon	8	1.97	2.03	.18	1.68	1.72
1972	Rights of Accused	McGovern/Nixon	5	2.12	1.33	.00	1.67	1.73
1972	Minority Groups	McGovern/Nixon	8	1.97	1.82	.09	1.51	1.55
1972	Taxes	McGovern/Nixon	3	2.29	.89	.56	1.89	1.76
1972	Urban Unrest	McGovern/Nixon	5	2.09	.20	1.35	1.59	1.77
1972	Campus Unrest	McGovern/Nixon	0	1.86	1.75	.03	1.71	1.38
1976	Rights of Accused	Carter/Ford	0	2.12	.80	.61	1.65	1.77
1976	Busing	Carter/Ford	1	1.69	2.85	2.64	1.79	1.94
1976	Minority Groups	Carter/Ford	2	1.98	1.16	.32	1.53	1.62
1976	Health Insurance	Carter/Ford	1	2.37	1.18	.57	1.58	1.72
1976	Jobs	Carter/Ford	46	1.70	1.55	.14	1.55	1.48
1976	Urban Unrest	Carter/Ford	0	1.91	.25	.83	1.46	1.50
1976	Mar/Juana	Carter/Ford	1	2.17	1.05	.94	1.50	1.48
1976	Taxes	Carter/Ford	6	2.25	.86	.25	1.70	1.59
1976	Women's Rights	Carter/Ford	0	2.07	.20	.49	1.51	1.56
1980	Inflation	Carter/Reagan	72	1.49	.27	.44	1.47	1.36
1980	Defense Spending	Carter/Reagan	18	1.50	1.67	.40	1.47	1.50
1980	Government Spending	Carter/Reagan	10	1.89	.78	1.00	1.35	1.52
1980	Jobs	Carter/Reagan	26	1.88	1.29	.61	1.41	1.49
1980	Russian Relations	Carter/Reagan	3	1.83	1.45	.70	1.47	1.54
1980	Minority Groups	Carter/Reagan	1	1.59	1.45	.55	1.41	1.29
1980	Women's Rights	Carter/Reagan	0	1.93	.27	2.03	1.42	1.88

Note. The issue salience measure is a percentage. The opinion dispersion and ambiguity measures are in terms of standard deviations. The proximity measures reported here are the differences between the median public position and median perception of the candidates' positions. The proximity scores used in this analysis are the negatives of these distances.

emerge are a function of the particular set of issue items. Observed differences in the behavior of winning and losing candidates are most probably real candidate differences and not artifacts of the measurement instrument.

The principal variable in this analysis—the ambiguity of the candidates' issue positions—is estimated as the standard deviation of the public's perception of the candidate's position. The candidate's position is assumed to be ambiguous if the distribution of citizen perceptions is widely dispersed. Of course a few voters will always be uncertain of even the clearest of candidate positions; however, if many differ in their understanding of a position (as indicated by a large standard deviation), the clarity of the candidate's position may reasonably be challenged. The range of the ambiguity measure extends from a value of 1.28 on McGovern's Vietnam position in 1972 to 1.94 for Ford's busing position in the 1976 campaign.

Ambiguity is measured by the voters' perceptions rather than by the candidates' statements for several reasons. First, there are many problems with evaluating the clarity or ambiguity of candidate pronouncements. As Page noted, candidates can send ambiguous messages in a variety of ways. They can create ambiguity by simply being vague in their statements, deemphasizing issues, excessively qualifying statements, presenting positions that appear contradictory, and perhaps even explaining issue positions in excessive detail. Second, even if the ambiguity of candidate statements could be accurately gauged, ambiguity may arise from the candidates' past and present behavior. Voters watch what candidates do as well as listen to what they say. Differences between what candidates do and what they say may be a significant source of ambiguity. Finally, if we are to claim a position to be clear or ambiguous, we must identify to whom it is clear or ambiguous. By whose standards should candidates be judged as being clear or ambiguous? What may be ambiguous to a political observer may be quite clear to a typical voter, and what may be clear to the observer may be unclear to the voter. Being concerned with what is essentially a communications process, the audience, in this case the electorate, may be the best judge of clarity or ambiguity.² Both Carmines and Gopian (1981, p. 1179) and Enelow and Hinich (1981, p. 489) followed a similar line of reasoning. "The ambiguity or clarity of a message," Carmines and Gopian argued, "is as much dependent on the listener as the speaker."

In addition to the ambiguity measure, the analysis includes three conditional variables: issue salience, the dispersion of public opinion, and the proximity of the candidate to the public opinion on the issue. Issue salience was measured by responses to open-ended questions asking respondents to identify the most important problems facing the nation.³ Salience ranged

TABLE 2. Clear and Ambiguous Issue Positions by Candidate Success

Candidate Success	Clear Positions	Ambiguous Positions
Winning Candidates	48%	52%
Losing Candidates	52%	48%
Total	100%	100%
N=	25	27

from a high of 72% on inflation in 1980 to a low of 0% on five separate issues. The dispersion of public opinion on an issue is measured as the standard deviation of the voter's own attitudes on the issue. Dispersion ranged from a high of 2.37 on national health insurance in 1976 to a low of 1.48 inflation in 1972. Proximity of the candidates to the public was measured as the negative of the absolute difference between the median perception of the candidate's position and the median of the voters' issue positions. Proximity to the public's position ranged from perfect correspondence with Nixon's stand on rights of the accused in 1972 to a 2.85 difference with Carter's stand on busing in the 1976 election. The dependent variable in the analysis is the candidate's success in the general election.

GENERAL AMBIGUITY EFFECTS

The first type of ambiguity effect to be investigated is its general effect on the candidate's share of the vote. The nature of this general or direct effect, however, is not obvious (Aldrich, 1980, p. 170; Brams, 1978, p. 31). One could argue that ambiguity negatively affects a candidate's electoral fortunes by causing voters to adopt an unfavorable view of the candidate's character. If such negative effects were found, they would suggest that candidates ought generally to clarify their positions. On the other hand, it may be argued that ambiguity should positively affect a candidate's share of the vote by softening any voter disapproval of the candidate's issue positions.

To test for a general or direct effect, candidate positions were divided into two categories at the median level of ambiguity (a standard deviation of 1.54). The positions of successful and unsuccessful candidates were then compared. As is evident from Table 2, the clarity or ambiguity of issue positions appears to have no direct effect on the candidates' success or failure. Clear and ambiguous positions were about equally distributed between winning and losing candidates. Moreover, there was virtually no

TABLE 3. Frequency of Ambiguity Differences

<u>Comparison*</u>	<u>Percentage of Issues</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Winner More Ambiguous	38%	10
Equally Ambiguous	27%	7
Loser More Ambiguous	<u>35%</u>	<u>9</u>
	100%	26

*Candidates were considered equally ambiguous if their standard deviations differed by .05 or less.

difference in the mean level of ambiguity between winning and losing candidates (1.58 for winners and 1.57 for losers).

The lack of a direct ambiguity effect is also evident in an issue-by-issue comparison of winning and losing candidates. Candidate stands on each issue were categorized by which of the two candidates was more ambiguous. Three categories were formed: issues on which the winning candidate was more ambiguous, issues on which the candidates were nearly equal in their ambiguity, and issues on which the losing candidate was more ambiguous. If ambiguity is generally beneficial, winning candidates should be more ambiguous than losing candidates in these pairwise comparisons. If ambiguity is generally detrimental, losing candidates should be the more ambiguous. The results of the comparisons appear in Table 3. This evidence, like the evidence in Table 2, indicates that ambiguity has no discernible general impact on electoral outcomes. Winners are about as likely as losers to be the more ambiguous candidate.

CONDITIONAL AMBIGUITY EFFECTS

Although ambiguity apparently has no direct electoral consequence, it may still have substantial effects under certain conditions. Ambiguity or clarity on certain types of issues may lead to greater success for candidates. Three such conditional effects are examined. First, does it make any electoral difference if candidates are more ambiguous when they are out of step with the public or when they are in agreement? Second, does it matter if they are more ambiguous when issues are salient or when they are relatively less important? Finally, does it matter if they are more ambiguous when public opinion is concentrated or when it is dispersed?

If these conditional effects exist, they ought to be apparent in differences between what affects ambiguity in the positions of winning candidates and what affects ambiguity in the positions of losing candidates. Political observers, like candidates, can learn what works from previously successful

TABLE 4. Influences on the Ambiguity of Winning and Losing Candidates

Dependent Variable: Ambiguity

Independent Variables	Standardized Regression Coefficients	
	Positions of Winning Candidates	Positions of Losing Candidates
Proximity	-.53*	-.11
Saliency	+.07	-.17
Dispersion	+.48*	+.28
R-square	.44	.15

* $p < .01$.

Note. The unstandardized regression results are as follows. For winning candidates: -.115 proximity, .0 saliency, .028 dispersion, and a constant of .937. For losing candidates: -.025 proximity, -.001 saliency, .018 dispersion, and a constant of 1.211. If saliency and dispersion affect proximity, they may have indirect effects on ambiguity as well as the direct effects estimated above. The total effect of dispersion on ambiguity was .39 for winning candidates and .24 for losing candidates.

candidates and what does not work from previously unsuccessful candidates. To test for these possible conditional effects, the causes of ambiguity were estimated separately for the positions of winning and losing candidates.⁴ The independent variables examined were the candidate's proximity to the public's median position, the issue's saliency, and the dispersion of public opinion on the issue.⁵ The estimated coefficients are presented in Table 4.

Before discussing particular effects, one major difference between winning and losing candidates should be noted. Ambiguity is much more predictable in the positions of winning candidates than it is in the positions of losing candidates. This is evident in the proportions of variance explained (44% for winners and only 15% for losers). Apparently successful candidates are more careful in calculating when to be clear and when to be ambiguous.

Proximity

The findings presented in Table 4 suggest the existence of some conditional effects. The data are strongest in the case of proximity. Candidates seem to fair better if the ambiguity or clarity of their position is sensitive to the position's popularity.⁶ This is evident in a comparison of proximity's

effect on ambiguity, coefficients of $-.53$ for winning candidates and only $-.11$ for losing candidates. Winning candidates are much more likely to clarify positions when those positions are popular and obfuscate positions when they are unpopular. Apparently ambiguity dampens or attenuates proximity's impact on the vote. Ambiguous positions are punished less when they diverge from the public and are rewarded less when they are in accord with the public. Conversely, clear positions produce clear rewards and clear punishments. Candidates who recognize this and act accordingly tend to be more successful.⁷

This difference between winning and losing candidates is most clearly seen in Figure 1. Each position of winning and losing candidates is plotted by the proximity of the position to the median position in the public and by the ambiguity of the position. Regression lines for winning candidates and losing candidates, based on the multiple regressions reported in Table 4, are also included in the figure. As the figure shows, winners tend to be less ambiguous than losers when proximate to the public. However, when there is some distance between the candidate's stand and the public's (by these data, a distance of about one point on the 7-point scale), one can expect the winning candidates to be more ambiguous than the losing candidates.⁸

Issue Salience

The evidence regarding the conditional effect of issue salience on ambiguity is not so clear. Salience had a nearly negligible impact on the ambiguity of winning candidates' positions ($\beta = .07$) and a slightly negative effect in the case of losing candidates ($\beta = -.17$). Although the findings are not strong, two lessons may be discerned. First, based on the negative coefficient found for losing candidates, salience should not cause candidates to clarify their positions. This does not, however, mean that candidates should obfuscate their positions when issues are salient. The second lesson, based on the negligible coefficient for winning candidates, is that salience should not affect the ambiguity of a candidate's position one way or another.

These findings are basically inconclusive with respect to Shepsle's strategic theory of ambiguity and Page's emphasis allocation theory of ambiguity. First, the effect of salience on ambiguity is not statistically significant for either winning or losing candidates. Second, as one might predict from the strategic theory, losing candidates are more likely than winning candidates to clarify their positions when issues are salient. However, winning candidates do not particularly obfuscate their positions on salient issues, as one might have expected by the strategic theory. Thus, the most one could

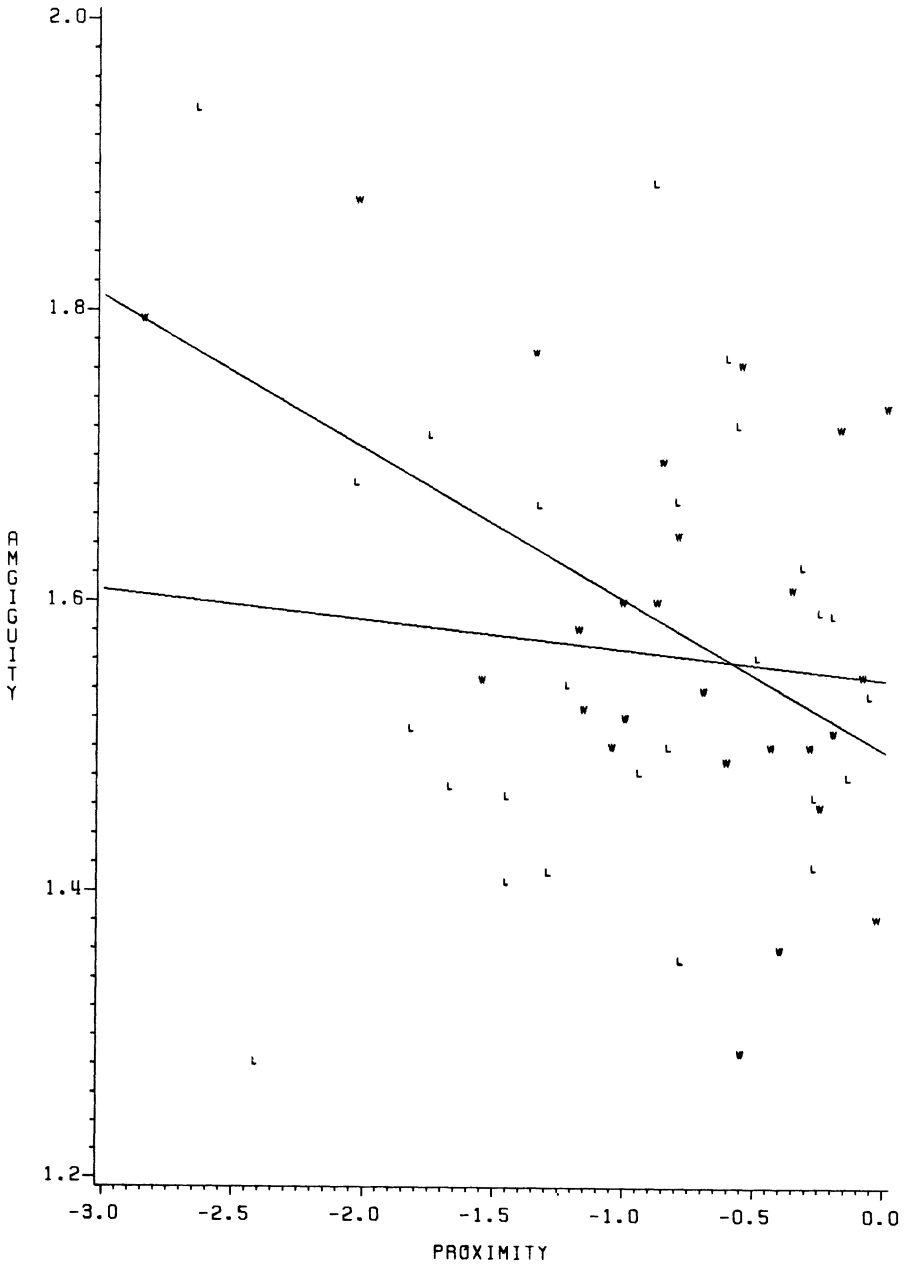


FIG. 1. The effect of proximity on ambiguity for winning and losing candidates. W=winner's position; L=loser's position. The steep slope is that of winners.

conclude is that the data lend some, though highly qualified, support for the strategic theory.⁹

Dispersion

Like salience, the data concerning the conditional effect of dispersion on ambiguity's effect on electoral outcomes are only suggestive. Although both successful and unsuccessful candidates were more ambiguous when the public's opinion was dispersed, the tendency was more pronounced among the successful candidates. The difference, however, was not great. The coefficient of dispersion effects on ambiguity was .48 for winning candidates and .28 for losing candidates. This somewhat greater sensitivity to opinion dispersion by successful candidates may again indicate that successful candidates more carefully choose their points of ambiguity and clarity.

DISCUSSION

Ambiguity has no discernible direct impact on election outcomes. It neither generally helps nor generally hurts candidates. This is not to say that the ambiguity or clarity of a candidate's stand is of no consequence. Ambiguity makes a difference. The effects of ambiguity, however, depend on the circumstances.

A comparison of the contexts in which winning and losing candidates are more or less ambiguous has suggested several conditional effects. Certainly the strongest of these is the conditional effect of proximity. Successful candidates were especially likely to fit the clarity of their issue positions to the popularity of those positions. When positions were unpopular, successful candidates were particularly likely to obfuscate. On the other hand, when positions were popular, successful candidates were particularly likely to clarify their positions to gain greater advantage. Although the evidence was not as strong, the analysis also suggested that ambiguity's effect on electoral outcomes may vary with issue salience and the dispersion of public opinion. While an issue's salience to voters made no difference to the ambiguity of successful candidates' positions, salience caused unsuccessful candidates to clarify their positions. With respect to the dispersion of public opinion, both winning and losing candidates tended to take more ambiguous positions when public opinion was dispersed; however, this tendency was a bit stronger among the successful candidates than it was among the unsuccessful.

What do these findings mean? For candidates the meaning is quite straightforward. Learn from success. Fit the ambiguity of the issue posi-

tion to the type of issue. Positions should be particularly ambiguous when they are unpopular and when public opinion is dispersed. Conversely, positions should be particularly clear when they are popular and when the public is in basic agreement on a position.

For voters and more generally for the functioning of a democratic government the meaning of these findings is less straightforward. The absence of a general effect of ambiguity on the electoral outcomes may be seen from at least two perspectives. If public choices are more wisely made when information is clear, a commonly made assumption, the system should encourage clarity and discourage ambiguity. This does not happen. Clarity and ambiguity are neither generally encouraged by being rewarded nor generally discouraged by being punished. The optimist may note that at least the system does not encourage ambiguity. The pessimist, however, may note that the system fails generally to encourage clarity in the candidates' stands.

The finding that ambiguity's impact depends on the proximity of the candidate to the public's position is also subject to different interpretations. If voters assume a candidate's ambiguity is an indication that the issue is a low-priority matter to the candidate and if that assumption is valid, then it may be sensible for voters to be less affected by position differences between themselves and the candidate when the candidate is ambiguous. The priority of an issue to a potential officeholder certainly may affect whether the officeholder will exert influence on the matter, whether the campaign position actually means something for future governmental policies. Thus, if an issue position is ambiguous and ambiguity reflects priorities, voters should be less impressed, either positively or negatively, by the position. On the other hand, if ambiguity does not reflect a candidate's priorities but is simply an attempt to evade the repercussions of unpopular positions or exploit the advantage of popular positions, then this finding suggests that some candidates are able to manipulate the public's judgment successfully. This manipulation, however, ought to be fairly limited in its impact. Certainly when a position is unpopular, ambiguity can only curtail losses and not generate any gain for a candidate. By the same token, when a position is popular, ambiguity can somewhat diminish the benefits that could be gained from that issue but is unlikely to produce actual losses.

Acknowledgement. The data used in this paper were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data were originally collected by the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, under a grant from the National Science Foundation. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

NOTES

1. It is of course possible that ambiguity has negative effects but is more prevalent in the positions of winning candidates than of losing candidates. For this to happen, however, there must be an omitted variable that is distorting the relationship. In the absence of any such variable, greater ambiguity in the positions of losing candidates may reasonably be interpreted as evidence of a negative effect, and conversely, greater ambiguity in the positions of winning candidates may be interpreted as evidence of a positive effect.
2. It may be rightly argued that biases in the electorate could distort the clarity or ambiguity of the candidates' positions. However, one test for these biases indicated that they were minimal. Measures of ambiguity (using the standard deviation of perceptions of the candidates' positions) were obtained for supporters of both Democratic and Republican candidates (support determined by differences on the thermometer scales). The measures for both groups of supporters were then averaged so that the views of one set of supporters (who might be biased in one direction) would be weighed equally with others (who might be biased in another direction). The correlation between this averaged measure of ambiguity and the measure used in this study is .92. There was even a strong positive correlation between perceptions of followers and opponents of the candidate (.55) and a median absolute difference of ambiguity scores of only .12. Another source of measurement error may be the extremeness of positions on the 7-point scale. Beliefs about extreme positions may have smaller standard deviations (i.e., appear less ambiguous) than moderate positions as an artifact of the scale being closed-ended. In fact, a correlation of .42 was observed between issue moderation and ambiguity. Although this may indicate systematic measurement error, it more probably indicates a true empirical relationship between the clarity and extremeness of issue positions. Recent research by Enelow and Hinich (1981) seems to support this conclusion.
3. The percentage of respondents mentioning each issue and the SRC/CPS code used to identify a mention of each issue follows: Urban Unrest '68 (46%) 50, 60, 360 364; Vietnam '68 (70%) 500, 530, 580; Vietnam '72 (19%) 500, 530, 580; Inflation '72 (10%) 400, 403, 405; Jobs '72 (8%) 10, Rights of the Accused '72 (5%) 350, 366; Minority Groups '72 (8%) 62, 63, 300, 303, 310, 340; Taxes '72 (3%) 411; Urban Unrest '72 (5%) 50, 60 360, 354; Campus Unrest '72 (0%) 359, 362; Rights of the Accused '76 (0%) 344, 350, 351, 352; Busing '76 (1%) 310, 311, 312; Minority Groups '76 (2%) 63, 64, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304; National Health Insurance '76 (1%) 40, 41, 42; Jobs '76 (46%) 10, 11, 12, 19; Urban Unrest '76 (0%) 54, 55, 56, 59; Marijuana '76 (1%) 320, 321, 322, 329; Taxes '76 (6%) 416, 417, 418; Women's Rights '76 (0%) 330, 331, 332, 339; Inflation '80 (72%) 400, 403, 404; Defense Spending '80 (18%) 700, 710, 711, 712, 713, 179; Government Spending '80 (10%) 90, 91, 92, 414, 415; Jobs '80 (26%) 10, 11, 12, 19; Russia '80 (3%) 530, 531, 532, 533; Minority Groups '80 (1%) 300, 301; Women's Rights '80 (0%) 330, 331.
4. There is a problem with using the success of candidates as the dependent variable. The problem is that the pairing of candidates in a particular race may affect the findings. For instance, if ambiguity generally benefits candidates, the actual success of a candidate with ambiguous positions may be less than expected if the candidate is paired against another candidate with even more ambiguous positions. Conversely, again given that ambiguity is generally rewarded, the actual success of a candidate with clear positions may exceed expectations if the candidate is running against an opponent with even clearer positions. This pairing problem may somewhat attenuate the findings.
5. An alternative approach for examining the conditional effect of ambiguity on, for instance, proximity is to insert an interactive term combining proximity and ambiguity in the regression analysis of proximity's independent effect on the vote. The significance of ambiguity's conditional impact is the significance of the interactive term's coefficient. This

- approach was attempted. However, severe multicollinearity problems between the independent proximity measure and the interactive term were encountered.
6. On the basis of a formal model of the voters' decision-making process, Enelow and Hinich (1981, p. 486) also conclude that proximity and ambiguity ought to be inversely related. They, however, seem to suggest that ambiguity reduces proximity rather than vice versa.
 7. While the data analysis supports the contention that ambiguity has a conditional effect on proximity's influence on the vote, this does not necessarily mean that the likelihood of ambiguity's hurting a candidate is equal to the likelihood of ambiguity's helping a candidate. It simply suggests that clear positions, to whatever degree that they help or hurt a candidate, are more helpful *or* less harmful when the candidate holds a more popular position.
 8. Similar results were obtained by dichotomizing issue positions as ambiguous or clear and running separate regressions on these two sets of positions with proportion of the vote (received by the candidate holding the position) as the dependent variable and the proximity of the position to the public as the independent variable. As one might expect, a steeper slope and a tighter fit around the regression line was found in the case of clear positions. The findings were as follows: clear positions—intercept = 5.41, $b = 5.9$, $\beta = .64$, and $R\text{-square} = .41$; ambiguous positions—intercept = 53.1, $b = 2.5$, $\beta = .23$, and $R\text{-square} = .05$. The coefficients in the case of clear positions were significant at the .01 level; the coefficients in the case of ambiguous positions were not.
 9. The evidence regarding salience may be weak for several reasons. First, the impact of salience may be much more complex than the effect examined here. Salience may affect the impact of proximity on ambiguity. That is, when issues are salient, candidates may want to be particularly sensitive to the popularity of their positions. It ought to be more important to candidates to obfuscate salient unpopular positions than to obfuscate nonsalient unpopular positions. By the same token, it ought to be more important to clarify salient popular positions than to clarify nonsalient popular positions. Second, the salience of an issue to a candidate may affect ambiguity, and this salience may differ from the issue's salience to the public. Candidates may choose to allocate their emphasis (i.e., clarify) to issues that they think are important rather than to issues that they believe the public considers important. In other words, there may be various kinds of issue salience that may affect ambiguity—salience to the public, candidate perceptions of salience to the public, and the salience of the issue to the candidate—and only one form of salience is examined here. Third, there is a possibility of a reversed causal order. That is, to some extent, for instance, losing candidates may be clear on salient issues because they are losing rather than lose because they are clear. One can imagine losing candidates making a last-ditch attempt to gain votes by taking an unambiguous position on an important issue. Or, such a candidate may become resigned to the loss and decide to use the remaining days of the campaign as a platform for an uninhibited, clear statement of his or her political views.

REFERENCES

- Aldrich, John H. (1980). *Before the Convention: Strategies and Choices in Presidential Nomination Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Brams, Steven J. (1978). *The Presidential Election Game*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Campbell, James E. (1983). "Ambiguity in the Issue Positions of Presidential Candidates: A Causal Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 27:284–293.

- Carmines, Edward G., and J. David Gopoiian (1981). "Issue Coalitions, Issueless Campaigns: The Paradox of Rationality in American Presidential Elections." *Journal of Politics* 43:1170-1189.
- Enelow, James, and Melvin J. Hinich (1981). "A New Approach to Voter Uncertainty in the Downsian Spatial Model." *American Journal of Political Science* 25:483-493.
- Page, Benjamin I. (1976). "The Theory of Political Ambiguity." *American Political Science Review* 70:742-752.
- Page, Benjamin I. (1978). *Choices and Echoes in Presidential Elections*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. (1972). "The Strategy of Ambiguity: Uncertainty and Electoral Competition." *American Political Science Review* 66:555-568.