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### Faces of conflict

*Interventionism and substantiveness in the conflict framing process*

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# CHAPTER 4

**Conflict Framing and Emotions:  
How Level of Substantiveness and Journalistic Intervention  
Affect Political Participation Through Anger and Enthusiasm**

## **Abstract**

The effect of conflict frames on political participation has been an important and popular subject of study in political communication research. Nonetheless, results have been generally inconclusive. In this study, we conduct a survey experiment ( $n = 707$ ) to assess how different types of conflict frames affect political participation. We specifically differentiate between level of journalistic intervention and substantiveness in conflict framing. To shed light on the underlying process behind conflict framing effects, we also investigate how these effects are contingent on emotions. Results indicate that different types of conflict frames did not result in direct effects on political participation. However, the study does point to indirect effects via emotions. Particularly anger and enthusiasm function as mediators of conflict framing effects on political participation.

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## 4.1 Introduction

News media are an arena where competing political opinions meet. Therefore, the idea of the 'conflict frame' is one of the most prevalently used frames in political news (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), and it has received ample attention in research on political communication (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2005). Yet, so far, research on the mobilizing potential of conflict framing has produced conflicting results.

The lack of consistency in findings on the effects of conflict-laden news on political participation may be explained by the absence of a clear definition of conflict framing, paired with inconsistent operationalizations as well as variation in the conceptualizations from study to study (Chapter 3). Conceptualizations range from understanding conflict as an event where two sides that are pitted against each other (Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007), to more specific and arguably different elements such as strategy framing, war metaphors, game framing (Patterson, 1993), and incivility (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). This suggests that what we know as generic conflict frames may have different underlying dimensions, which influence the type of effects a conflict frame can have (Min, 2004). Few studies focus on these different types of conflict frames. Therefore, in this study, we will take the generic definition of conflict framing as a starting point and within that generic definition focus on specific dimensions that are relevant for outcomes of exposure to conflict frames. For this purpose, we focus on two specific dimensions: the level of substantiveness and level of journalistic intervention. Conflict framed news articles can vary in the level of substance, where a focus on issues is contrasted with personal attacks. But they also vary in the level of interventionism, where detached journalism is contrasted with high levels of journalistic visibility (Chapter 3).

The key to understanding the role of these two dimensions within conflict framing is a study of the underlying psychological mechanisms that can explain a framing effect. In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have become interested in these psychological processes (e.g., Lecheler, De Vreese, & Slothuus, 2010; Slothuus, 2008). In this tradition we, in addition to testing differential direct effects, develop a mediation model of conflict framing effects, where we argue that conflict framing effects may be explained by differential emotional reactions to conflict frames. Framing effects are known to be greatly contingent on emotional processes (Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Lecheler, Schuck, & De Vreese, 2013). Furthermore, conflict in particular is known to exert effects on emotional responses (Gross, Brewer, 2007), which renders them a likely central process that leads from conflict frames to changes in political

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participation, which is also our intended outcome variable (see Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutchings, 2011). The research question that is central to this paper is therefore: *To what extent do different types of conflict frames affect political participation and how are these effects mediated by emotions?* We conduct an experiment to investigate how different types of conflict frames affect political participation, and also to assess the role of emotions in this process. Our results contribute to literature by uncovering the underlying emotional mechanisms that drive the conflict framing process.

### **4.2 Understanding Conflict Framing Effects**

A news frame can be seen as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Framing is all about certain aspects of reality being highlighted and thereby bringing forward certain considerations, decisions and judgments (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007a). Conflict framing is generally regarded as one of the most prevalent mechanisms in political news reporting (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). The ample use of conflict framing in political journalism may also be explained by the importance of conflict as a news value (Price & Tewskbury, 1997). Furthermore, a clash of political ideas in the form of conflict is essential for a democracy (Lupia, McCubbins, & Popkin, 2000). Reporting about public affairs using a conflict angle increases the attractiveness for the audience, because of its dramatic quality and attention grabbing traits. Conflict frames “emphasize conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000, p. 95). Empirically, conflict framing has been operationalized to include elements such as disagreement, tension between different sides, incompatibility between viewpoints, and politicians attacking each other in the media (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2011; Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007). Political news reporting is often characterized by competing standpoints, and debates about issues are usually framed in opposing terms (Chong & Druckman, 2007b). Conflict frames often involve critique coming from or directed towards politicians and a confrontational way of reporting about clashing political ideas.

Conflict framing has, been linked to a number of detrimental effects on political beliefs and behaviour in citizens. The conflictual nature of democratic news coverage has been suggested as a main driver of citizen disinterest (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). Especially exposure to uncivil conflict news has been argued to increase political cynicism (Avery, 2009; Forgette & Morris, 2006). Furthermore, a

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number of studies in the US-context suggest that conflict can potentially demobilize the electorate (e.g., Ansolabehere et al., 1994; Brooks, 2006). In a European context, Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof and Oegema (2006) suggest that conflict framing has a negative impact on political participation via distrust. Interestingly, however, recent other studies find that exposure to conflict frames can lead to an increase in political participation (Schuck, Vliegenthart, & De Vreese, 2016; De Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). These studies take the standpoint that exposure to conflict frames may lead citizens to realize what is at stake and why political decision-making is important. Hence, the results on the effects of conflict on political participation are inconsistent. We seek to explain this inconsistency by focussing on different types of conflict frames and test how they affect political participation.

### **4.3 Dimensions of Conflict Framing**

Conflict news coverage can revolve around a specific policy issue, or focus on personal attacks or the competence or performance of a political actor (Chapter 3). Exposure to substantive conflict frames has been found to affect opinions and political participation of citizens differently when compared to exposure to nonsubstantive conflict frames (e.g., Lee, Mcleod, & Shah, 2008; Min, 2004). Hence, a first dimension that is relevant for conflict framing is that of substantiveness.

The second relevant dimension is interventionism, which refers to the degree to which journalists are visible in a news article (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011). Conflict framing can emerge in the news in the form of a purely descriptive depiction of political disagreement, but also with an active, intervening role for the journalist in the news article. Particularly conflict frames in the news often result from active journalistic intervention in the frame building process (Chapter 2).

#### **4.3.1 Substantiveness**

Conflict frames are often operationalized as fundamentally non-substantive (Gross & Brewer, 2007). Furthermore, some researchers link conflict framing as being part of the game frame, horse race coverage, or a process-oriented frame (e.g., Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010; Takens et al., 2013). Nonetheless, research has shown that conflict frames can be substantive and that they often focus on the issues around which a dispute revolves (Lawrence, 2000). This suggests that there are two types of frames at play here: substantive and nonsubstantive conflict frames. Where substantive conflict framing focuses on policy news and legislation, nonsubstantive news coverage focuses on strategic coverage, personal attacks or

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incivility. Levels of substantiveness in conflict framing are known to vary, contingent on type of outlets and political events in news reporting (see Chapter 3). For instance, substantiveness of conflict frames goes down during election times, and conflict frames deal more personal attacks, when compared to a routine news period. Furthermore, sensationalist newspapers show lower levels of substance, but also strategy when compared to quality newspapers. These examples of the manifestation of different types of conflict frames show that a distinction based on substantiveness is relevant in terms of media content.

But what are the consequences of exposure to nonsubstantive conflict framing on political participation? There are a number of studies that suggest that issue-based news coverage encourages participation whereas nonsubstantive news coverage demobilizes. For example, studies indicate that strategic news coverage of political issues can lead to cynicism (Elenbaas & De Vreese, 2008) and even demobilization (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). Findings on incivility in political conflict also point in this direction (Forgette & Morris, 2006; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). However, the specific distinction between substantive two-sided conflict framing and conflict framing consisting of personal attacks and attacks on style or performance is understudied. Furthermore, the findings focus mainly on one-sided attack advertising and incivility, and hardly on two-sided conflict framing in the media, the format in which most citizens are exposed to political disagreement. An example of a study that did focus on conflict specifically, was conducted by Lee, McLeod, and Shah (2008). Their findings indicate that, compared to substantive news, non-substantive news on controversial issues discounts partisan affiliation as a primary consideration. Min (2004) focuses directly on the impact of news coverage of political attacks on political participation. The findings do not lead to an overall effect of conflict on participation, but instead finds these effects to be contingent on the focus of the conflict. In contrast to substantive attacks, personal attacks in news articles were found to lower intentions to go out and vote. It remains an open question whether the findings of this experiment, conducted in the United States can be replicated in a European setting, with different political dynamics due to the multi-party system as well as a different media system. Nonetheless, we expect that, similarly to what previous studies suggest, substantive conflict frames will positively affect political participation, whereas nonsubstantive conflict frames will decrease political participation. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H1: Exposure to substantive conflict frames has a positive effect on political participation, when compared to exposure to nonsubstantive conflict frames.*

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### 4.3.2 Interventionism

Journalists play an active role in conflict frame building and often implement subtle cues to stress the importance of a conflict, to make a conflict more exiting by speculating towards future consequences, and to critically assess politicians involved in the conflict (Chapter 2). Hence, journalists are not solely disseminators of existing conflicts between political actors, but actively shape when and how conflict appears in the news. The concept of journalistic interventionism refers to the extent to which journalists report about the news in their own words scenarios and assessments (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). In other words, the journalistic voice is used relatively more when compared to political candidate's statements (Blumler & Gurevich, 1995; Esser, 2008). Interventionist journalists pursue particular values, are involved, socially committed, assertive, and motivated, whereas noninterventionist journalists are detached, objective and neutral (Hanitzsch, 2007). Scholars often stress the importance of interventionism, and the watchdog role of journalists (e.g., Bennett, 2003; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

Research towards interventionism has highlighted its importance as a journalistic role conception (e.g., Mellado & van Dalen, 2014), but also as a content characteristic (e.g., Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011). Journalists are often referred to, and also self-identify as watchdogs of political and economic powers, thereby serving as a "fourth estate" (Hanusch, 2008; Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008). This highlights the normatively desirability of journalistic intervention. Despite the prevalence in journalistic work and the suggested normative importance, effects of interventionism have hardly been studied (Salgado & Strömbäck, 2012). This is surprising, because earlier studies suggest that citizens take into account journalistic self-presentation when interpreting, understanding and perceiving the news (Nielsen, 2016). This pinpoints the relevance of studying how journalistic visibility exert influence on framing effects. For instance, visible journalistic source verification has been found to improve credibility of an information source (Kruikemeier & Lecheler, 2016). Furthermore, obtrusiveness of the tone of voice of the journalist can increase attention and arousal for a news story, but on the other hand decrease perceived informativeness (Grabe, Zhou, Lang, & Bolls, 2000). Research also suggests that advocacy journalism can potentially affect issue salience when compared to objectivist "detached" journalism (Aday, 2006). Taking together these findings, we can tentatively expect that conflict frames that feature an interventionist reporting style are mobilizing. An evaluation by a journalist confirms that there is indeed "something at stake" in a given political confrontation in the media. This journalistic intervention highlights that the

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topic is not only relevant because the politicians clash over it, but also because a relevant third party (the journalist) confirms the importance. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H2: Exposure to interventionist conflict frames has a positive impact on political participation, when compared to exposure to noninterventionist conflict frames.*

### **4.4 Conflict Framing Effects: The Mediating Power of Emotions**

How news frames are processed is an important question within political communication research (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007a; Brewer, 2001; Zaller, 1992). After establishing the existence and relevance of 'direct' framing effects, research is now more and more beginning to focus on why particular framing effects occur and to trace psychological processes that can explain the influence of framing on citizens (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007a). Given the inconsistent findings in conflict framing effects, uncovering the underlying mechanism is particularly relevant. Also, there is a lack of studies that disentangle what exactly occurs in the mind of citizens when they are exposed to conflict frames, and how this in its turn affects behavioural intentions resulting from exposure to conflict frames.

Traditionally, cognitive processes are used to explain the underlying mechanisms of framing effects (e.g., Iyengar, 1991; Chong & Druckman, 2007a, Slothuus, 2008). However, more recent research increasingly incorporates the role of emotions in processing frames and also in the effects of news frames (e.g., Gross, 2008; Lecheler, Bos, & Vliegenthart, 2015; Nabi, 2003). Moreover, the clear-cut separation between cognitive and emotional processes is widely disregarded in current literature, and instead these two processes are seen as highly interwoven (e.g., Gross, 2008; Spezio & Adolphs, 2007). Indeed, affective processes are considered to play an important role in decision making after exposure to a news frame (Lecheler, Schuck, & De Vreese, 2013). When assessing the role of emotions in news framing effects in political communication research, affective intelligence theory (Marcus, Neuman, & Mackuen, 2000) is one of the most commonly used theories. Affective intelligence theory starts from the proposition that a dual emotional system governs how we process (political and media) stimuli and form decisions. The dispositional system triggers emotions such as happiness or satisfaction, as a response to new information that does not challenge their predispositions. The second, the surveillance system, triggers emotions such as anxiety or unease, because the individual is exposed to novel or threatening information (Brader, 2006). Encountering a frame in the news can be understood through this idea of the triggering one of



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the emotional systems. Depending on which type of frame is encountered, specific emotions are invoked, and can lead to a response in the form of action or opinion change. The dispositional system is particularly associated with feelings of enthusiasm, where the surveillance system system can lead to anxiety or anger (Redlawsk, Civettini, & Lau, 2007).

In turn, these emotions are known to function as important mediators of framing effects (Holm, 2012). Studies that take into account the role of emotions in processing political news show that, when incorporated into content of news frames, emotions can affect political opinions (e.g., Kühne & Schemer, 2015), but also information accessibility, information seeking and policy preference (Nabi, 2003). Lecheler, Schuck and De Vreese (2013) find that particularly enthusiasm and anger functioned as mediators of framing effects. Similarly, other research, focussed on the role of emotions in political behaviour and highlighted the role of emotions such as enthusiasm and anger and their positive impact on political participation (Valentino et al., 2011). Given the mediating role of emotions in opinion formation, as well as their impact on political participation in general, news framing notwithstanding, it is interesting to assess how emotions as mediators affect framing effects on actual behaviour.

It is worth noting that emotions should be of particular importance for conflict framing. Experimental research has already shown that exposure to conflict framed news message can elicit an emotional response, mainly when the subject is important to the recipient of the message (Gross & Brewer, 2007). Conflict framing dramatizes a news narrative and highlights the importance of an issue or problem that needs to be dealt with, a disagreement that needs resolving. These ingredients benefit to an emotional response of the citizen confronted with the political problem. Furthermore, conflict frames are often accompanied by metaphors of war, speculation on consequences, emotional language incorporated in the frame and dramatic use of wordplay to increase the compelling nature of the news message (Chapter 2). Hence, exposure to conflict frames is particularly more likely to lead to an emotional response, when compared to other less contentious frames, such as for instance human interest framing,

Despite of this relevance of conflict framing in eliciting an emotional response, as well as the relevance of particular emotions in engaging and mobilizing citizens, the mediating role of emotions in conflict framing effects has not been taken into account before. Therefore, in this study, we focus on a set of specific positive and negative emotions as mediators. Hope and enthusiasm will be taken into account as positive emotions, while anger and fear will be taken into account as negative emotions.

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### **4.4.1 Conflict Framing and Negative Emotions**

We focus specifically on two distinct types of negative emotions: fear and anger. Both fear and anger are negative emotional responses that are connected with distinguishable motivational goals and action tendencies (Nabi, 2003). Fear is often associated with risk-avoiding behaviour, while anger is associated with risk-seeking behaviour (Lerner and Keltner, 2001; Valentino et al., 2011). As noted in the section before, conflict frames are known to lead to negative emotions (Gross & Brewer, 2007). Indeed, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) argue that being confronted with political conflict in the news may lead citizens to become frustrated. This frustration is guided by the idea that the political disagreement is in the way of their preferred policy solution, and can in its turn lead to negative emotions such as anger and fear that expected or wanted goals are not met. Similarly, Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk (2009) argue that when citizens are confronted with the prospect of an unwanted policy change and have enough confidence to being able to deal with it, they will produce anger.

The onset of these particular emotions may have differing consequences for subsequent behaviour. If individuals have a sense of control and believe that their actions can help in dealing with the problem they are likely to confront the problem (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). Anger as a result of conflict framing can make thoughts relating the issue more salient, which makes individuals likely to think that something can change as a result of the political process, leading to action in the form of political participation. In contrast, we expect fear not to display a mediating role in conflict framing effects on political participation. While fear is known to facilitate persuasion and attitude change, it is not likely to affect political participation (Brader, 2005). In contrast to anger, fear as a result from conflict frame might lead to aversion instead of action tendencies, and as a result in a decrease in political behaviours. Therefore, while conflict framing effects on political participation are likely mediated by anger, we do not expect a similar effect of fear. Hence, we expect these two similarly valenced emotions to behave differently in how they mediate conflict framing effects on political participation.

### **4.4.2 Conflict Framing and Positive Emotions**

Asides from negative emotions this study also takes positive emotions into account. We focus specifically on two distinct types of positive emotions, hope and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a reaction to stimuli with positive implications. It is generally associated with the reinforcement of commitment to goals and strengthens the motivation to stay involved (Brader, 2005). Furthermore, enthusiasm is a

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known mediator of framing effects (Lecheler et al., 2013). Hope is a similar optimistic emotion, based on the expectation of positive outcomes. The influence of conflict framing on positive emotions has not been studied before. This is unsurprising, since negative emotions are more intuitively linkable to political conflict. However, exposure to a conflict frame could also be a positive experience for an individual and lead to positive appraisal of the event. When a person learns from a political news message that there is a problem that needs to be solved and opposing political standpoints are being forwarded it signals that the politicians are working on a solution of the problem. Especially so when politicians are fighting for the idea that the recipient of the message identifies with. Research shows that enthusiasm and hope affect political participation, and can be mobilizing (e.g., Brader, 2005; Valentino et al., 2011). These effects are linked to the idea that positive emotions can broaden ones action repertoire and encourage a varied, experimental action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2004). In contrast, negative emotions encourage a more immediate fight or flight reaction.

### 4.4.3 Do Emotions Mediate the Effects of Substantiveness in Conflict Framing?

Level of substantiveness in conflict frames likely affects negative emotions. Following the findings of Gross and Brewer (2005), we particularly expect nonsubstantive conflict frames to elicit more negative emotions when compared to substantive conflict frames. Personal attacks, and ad hominem attacks are especially suitable to spark feelings of anger, especially when aimed at a politician that is not preferred by the recipient and that stands in the way of a solution of the conflict in the eyes of that recipient. Because of the aforementioned mobilizing effects of anger, we expect that when substantive conflict frames affect anger, anger in its turn facilitates and fosters political participation. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H3: Exposure to nonsubstantive (vs. substantive) conflict frames causes anger, which in turn functions as mediator for the effect on political participation*

When substantive and noninterventionist conflict frames signal that problems are being addressed by politicians, this may lead citizens to become enthusiastic and hopeful, increasing their willingness to participate in the political process (Valentino et al., 2011). Hence, we argue that being presented with opposing viewpoints focussing on substantive viewpoints is likely to lead to an increase positive emotions, because

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a policy problem is being addressed and this could lead to enthusiasm and hope in citizens. Given the potentially mobilizing capabilities of enthusiasm and hope, we expect that interventionist conflict frames affect enthusiasm and hope, and both these emotions in turn facilitate and foster political participation

*H4: Exposure to substantive (vs. nonsubstantive) conflict frames causes hope and enthusiasm, which in turn function as mediators for the effect on political participation*

### **4.4.4 Do Emotions Mediate the Effects of Interventionism in Conflict Framing?**

There is hardly any existing research linking interventionism to emotions. Journalists that intervene when reporting about political conflict emphasize the importance and possible consequences of the conflict, and critically assess the politicians involved (Chapter 2). They hereby function as watchdogs that may lead voters to experience anger about the performance of these politicians, which in its turn leads to mobilization. Nonetheless, due to the lack of research linking journalistic intervention and emotions, we formulate an open research question

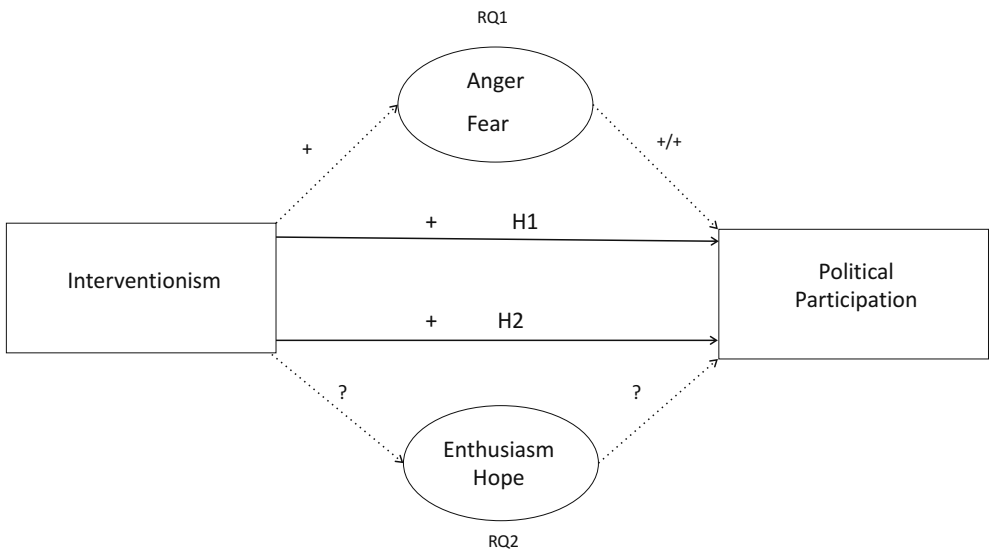
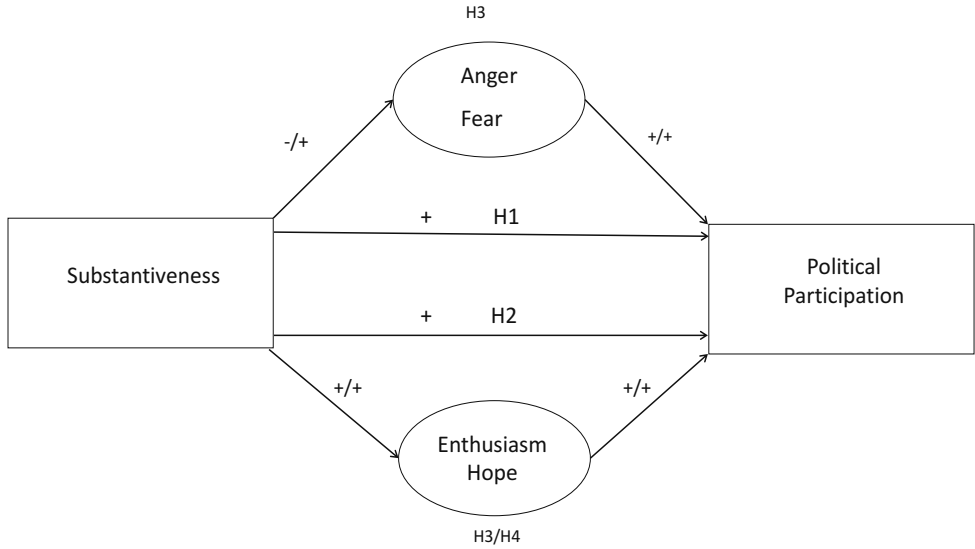
*RQ1: Will exposure to interventionist (vs. noninterventionist) conflict frames cause anger or fear, which then function as mediators for the effect on political participation?*

We also look at the role of the positive emotions of hope and enthusiasm in mediating effects of substantiveness. Research linking interventionism and positive emotions is (to our best knowledge) non-existent. It may be likely that an active, watchdog journalist can signal that the politicians involved in the conflict are being monitored, reassuring citizens on the solvability of a conflict and accountability of politicians. In that way, a critical and visible journalistic voice will positively affect hope and enthusiasm. However, due to the lack of theoretical backing we will also formulate an open research question here.

*RQ2: Will exposure to interventionist (vs. noninterventionist) conflict frames cause enthusiasm and hope, and will all these emotions then function as mediators for the effect on political participation?*

For an overview of the theoretical models we test for both interventionism and substantiveness, see Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Theoretical Mediation Models



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### **4.5 Method**

#### **4.5.1 Design**

To answer the hypotheses, an online survey experiment was conducted using a varied sample of Dutch citizens (N= 707). The company Survey Sampling International (SSI) collected the data. To ensure the variety of the sample, quotas were used to ensure the sample resembled the statistics of demographic characteristics in the Netherlands on age, gender and education. The experiment used a 2x2 between subjects factorial design where participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Manipulations included the level of substance of a news article including a conflict frame (substantive conflict frame versus nonsubstantive conflict frame) and level of interventionism (detached journalistic style versus interpretative critical journalistic style). Two control groups, one with a neutral article with no conflict frame, and one including no article at all, were also added. We conducted a between subjects randomization check on age.

#### **4.5.2. Procedure**

Participants were first asked an attention question to filter out non-serious participants before the experiment starts. Then they were asked to answer a few questions on demographics. Subsequently they were exposed to an article in one of the six conditions. Because running an online experiment comes with certain challenges regarding the attention given to the stimuli, participants were forced to watch the articles for at least 30 seconds. Furthermore, an attention check was implemented to make sure that participants read the news article. After reading the article, we measured emotions. This was followed by the items measuring the main dependent variable, political participation.

#### **4.5.3. Stimulus material**

The stimulus material consisted of one news article. The topic of the news article was a debate in the parliament concerning soft drugs policy. A news article on this topic was specifically created for the purpose of this study (See appendix B). An effort was made to give the article the structure, layout and writing style of an average Dutch news article. The basic main structure and information of the article was kept as identical as possible. Manipulations of substantiveness were done in paragraphs where claims by political actors are being put forward. In the substantive conditions these arguments focused on proposed legislation and arguments in favour of the proposed legislation. In contrast, in the nonsubstantive

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version, the arguments focussed on the style and competence of the opponent and included personal attacks aimed at rival politicians or political parties (Aalberg, Strömbäck, & De Vreese, 2011)

We manipulated interventionism by including interpretative and interventionist characteristics in the news articles (Chapter 3; Salgado & Strömbäck, 2012). In the interventionist condition paragraphs were included with interpretative sentences where the journalist evaluates the politicians involved in the conflict and speculates about future consequences of the conflict. Hereby, the journalistic visibility was increased compared to the visibility of political actors and the prospective aspect of the interpretative style was also emphasized.

### 4.5.4. Measures

In the literature, there is a lot of disagreement on how to define political participation and which elements of political participation are relevant for studying this concept (Ohme, De Vreese, & Albæk, In Press). More fleeting, case oriented and digital forms of participation have emerged (Dahlgren, 2014). While some researchers implement these forms and consider them to be a vital part of participation, others refuse to see these forms as political participation and omit them. This has led to a lack of a coherent and comparable method in which political participation is operationalized in research. Van Deth (2014) provides a framework which can function as a conceptual map and takes into account different forms of political communication. In his framework, he distinguishes between four different types of political participation. The first type of participation in this framework consists of participation taking place in the political sphere, such as voting for elections or in a referendum. The second is aimed at behaviours aimed at politics such as participating in demonstrations and such. The third focuses on civic participation. Finally, the fourth focuses on political expression and considers an activity to be participatory when it is aimed to express political aims and intentions. Considering these different forms of participation is important because previous research mainly focussed on the effects of conflict framing in general, not taking into account how conflict framing affects different types of political participation. Hence, the main dependent variable focuses on self-reported measures of political participation using the validated scales proposed by Van Deth (2014). These include two items for political participation, which entail actual participation in the political process (e.g., voting) ( $\alpha = .72$ ) ( $M = 5.45$ ;  $SD = 1.71$ ). Four items measure behaviours aimed at politicians or the government (e.g., demonstrating) ( $\alpha = .74$ ) ( $M = 2.59$ ;  $SD = 1.30$ ). Three items measure civic engagement (e.g., volunteering in your area) ( $\alpha = .64$ ) ( $M = 2.97$ ;  $SD = 1.35$ ).

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Two items measure political expression (e.g., Expressing political opinions online) ( $\alpha = .71$ ) ( $M = 2.30$ ;  $SD = 1.48$ ). Emotions were measured using explicit emotion survey items. Emotions that were measured are anger ( $M = 3.92$ ;  $SD = 2.26$ ), fear ( $2.86$ ;  $SD = 1.98$ ), enthusiasm ( $3.24$ ;  $SD = 2.01$ ), and hope ( $M = 3.46$ ;  $SD = 2.03$ ). These emotions were tapped by using a 7-point scale variable (1= not at all to 7= very much), which measured the extent to which the participant felt emotions when reading the news article. For a complete list of items, see Appendix C.

### **4.4.5. Manipulation check**

#### **Substantiveness**

Three items were used to investigate whether the manipulation of substantiveness was successful. First, participants were asked to indicate to what extent the article consisted of mainly substantive arguments from politicians. The results indicate that participants in the substantive conditions deemed the article to consist of more substantive arguments ( $M = 4.63$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ) than participants in the non-substantive conditions ( $M = 3.76$ ;  $SD = 1.57$ ) [ $t(455) = -6.60$ ,  $p < .0001$ ] (control group:  $M = 3.84$ ;  $SD = 1.63$ ). Participants were also asked to indicate to what extent the article featured arguments for or against policy issues, proposed legislation or laws. In the substantive condition, participants were more likely to indicate that policy issues, legislation and laws were visible ( $M = 4.78$ ;  $SD = 1.29$ ) when compared to the nonsubstantive conditions ( $M = 3.98$ ;  $SD = 1.61$ ) [ $t(455) = -6.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ] (control group:  $M = 3.60$ ;  $SD = 1.65$ ). For the final indicator of substantiveness, participants were asked to what extent the article consisted of personal attacks from or towards politicians. This manipulation check was also successful, as expected, the participants in the nonsubstantive conditions perceived the articles to consist of personal attacks more ( $M = 4.07$ ;  $SD = 1.62$  when compared to participants in the nonsubstantive conditions ( $M = 3.06$ ;  $SD = 1.46$ ) [ $t(466) = 7.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ] (control group:  $M = 2.77$   $SD = 1.42$ ). In conclusion, all three items used for the manipulation check for substantiveness were successful.

#### **Interventionism**

Three items were also used to investigate whether the manipulation of interventionism was successful. In the first item, the participant indicates to what extent the journalist that wrote the article is critical towards politicians. Results indicate that the writer of the article was perceived as significantly more critical towards politicians in the interventionist conditions ( $M = 4.69$ ;  $SD = 1.33$ ) when compared to the noninterventionist ones ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $SD = 1.31$ ) [ $t(466) = -4.38$ ,  $p < .0001$ ]. Participants were also asked



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to indicate to what extent the opinion of the author was visible in the news article. Results indicate that in the interventionist condition, the opinion of the author was indeed regarded as more visible ( $M = 4.16$ ;  $SD = 1.40$ ) when compared to the noninterventionist conditions ( $M = 3.73$ ;  $SD = 1.51$ ) [ $t(466) = -3.17$ ,  $p < .005$ ]. For the final indicator of interventionism, participants were asked to what extent the article was neutral and objective. This manipulation check was also successful, as expected, the participants in the noninterventionist conditions perceived the articles to be more neutral and objective ( $M = 4.51$ ;  $SD = 4.51$ ) when compared to participants in the noninterventionist conditions ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 1.47$ ) [ $t(466) = 2.92$ ,  $p < .005$ ]. In conclusion, all three items used for the manipulation check were successful.

### 4.5. Results

#### 4.5.1. Substance and Political Participation (H1)

The first hypothesis focused on the effects of substantiveness on different forms of political participation. For this purpose, multiple ANOVA's were conducted. The results indicate there is no main effect of substance on political behaviour,  $F(1, 466) = 2.127$ ,  $p = .15$ ,  $\eta^2 = .004$ . Furthermore, no effect was found of substance on behaviours targeting politics  $F(1, 466) = .12$ ,  $p = .73$ ,  $\eta^2 = .005$ . Substance also did not affect civic participation  $F(1, 466) = 1.742$ ,  $p = .19$ ,  $\eta^2 = .004$ . Finally, no main effect of substance on political expression  $F(1, 466) = .981$ ,  $p = .31$ ,  $\eta^2 = .007$  was found. These results indicate that participants exposed to substantive conflict frame articles did not elicit greater intentions to engage in any of the measured forms of political participation when compared to participants exposed to nonsubstantive conflict frame news articles (see Table 4.1). Thus, Hypothesis H1 is not supported. It should also be noted that no differences between the control groups and the conflict conditions were found<sup>1</sup>.

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**Table 4.1 Substance and political behaviour**

	Political behaviour		Behaviours targeting politics		Civic participation		Political expression	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Substantive conflict	5.27	1.66	2.56	1.28	3.01	1.26	2.34	1.45
Nonsubstantive Conflict	5.50	1.70	2.52	1.30	2.85	1.39	2.21	1.47
Control article	5.45	1.67	2.61	1.33	2.99	1.38	2.21	1.43
Control (no article)	5.12	1.83	2.75	1.34	3.09	1.36	2.52	1.60
Total	5.35	1.71	2.59	1.30	2.97	1.35	2.30	1.48

### 4.5.2. Interventionism and political participation

The second hypothesis focused on the effects of interventionism on different forms of political participation. No main effect of interventionism on political behaviour was found,  $F(1, 466) = .01, p=.94, \eta^2 = .00$ . Moreover, interventionism did not affect behaviours targeting politics  $F(1, 466) = .82, p=.37, \eta^2 = .003$ . Furthermore, interventionism did not affect civic participation  $F(1, 466) = 1.452, p=.23, \eta^2 = .003$ . Finally, no main effect of interventionism on political expression  $F(1, 466) = 1.60, p=.20, \eta^2 = .002$  was revealed. These results indicate that participants exposed to interventionist conflict frames did not elicit greater intentions to engage in any of the measured forms of political participation when compared to participants exposed to noninterventionist conflict frame news articles (see Table 4.2.). Thus, H2 is not supported.

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**Table 4.2. Interventionism, Political Participation and Cynicism.**

	Political behaviour		Behaviours targeting politics		Civic participation		Political expression	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Interventionist condition	5.40	1.74	2.49	1.25	2.86	1.32	2.18	1.44
Noninterventionist condition	5.38	1.63	2.59	1.33	3.00	1.35	2.35	1.48
Control article	5.45	1.67	2.61	1.33	2.99	1.38	2.21	1.43
Control (no article)	5.12	1.83	2.75	1.34	3.09	1.36	2.52	1.60
Total	5.35	1.71	2.59	1.30	2.97	1.35	2.30	1.48

### 4.5.3. Mediation Analysis

Earlier applications of mediation analysis were predominantly based on the causal-steps approach (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This approach has the prerequisite of a significant main effect of the independent on the dependent variable, which in the case of this study would mean a mediation analysis would not be viable. However, recent research has emphasized the shortcomings of this approach (Hayes, 2013). This criticism focuses on a lack of power, as well as the method being prone to Type II errors (e.g., MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). New accounts of mediations analysis discount the necessity of direct main effects and argue that the absence of an effect does not necessarily mean that an indirect effect is absent. For instance, two indirect paths that work in opposite directions can carry an effect from the independent variable to a dependent variable (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). Hence, for the mediation analysis in this study, we used Preacher and Hayes' method involving bootstrapping PROCESS-macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). This method invol-

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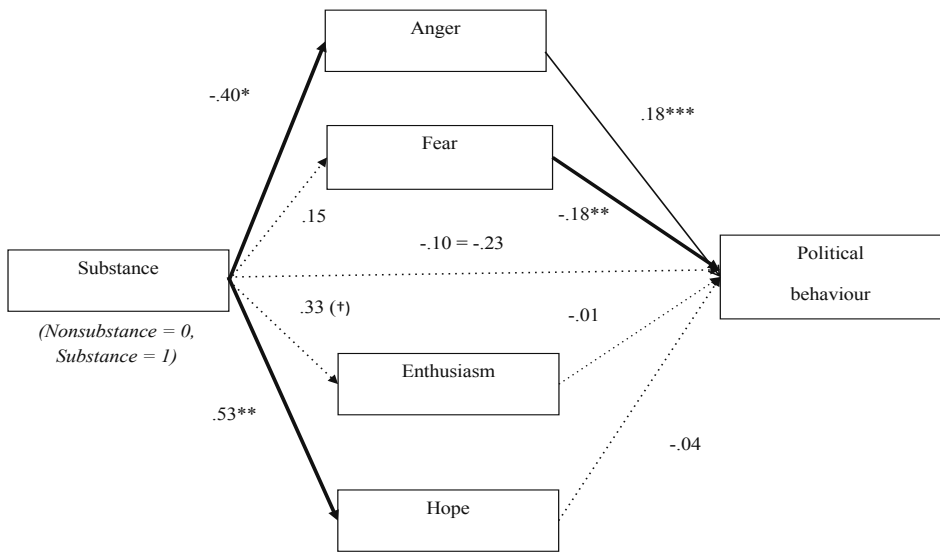
ves bootstrapping, which is often seen as the recommended way of assessing indirect effects (Williams & MacKinnon, 2008). Specifically, we examine indirect effect of emotions on political participation by using 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap sample, using model 4.

### **4.5.4. Nonsubstantiveness, Emotions and Political Participation**

To answer hypothesis H3 and H4, we assess how the negative emotions of fear and anger mediate the effects of substance on political participation. For this purpose, we conducted several multiple mediation models, comparing the substance with the nonsubstantive condition (1 = substance). Two negative emotions were included as mediators (Anger and fear), as well as two positive emotions (Enthusiasm and Hope). We opted for an approach with multiple mediators, rather than using separate single mediation models, following the various advantages of this approach (see Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

When looking at the indirect effects on political behaviour, we see a significant indirect negative effect of substance on political behaviour via anger ( $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $-.173$ ;  $-.011$ ). Substance depressed anger ( $b = -.40$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and an increase in anger contributed to higher levels of political behaviour ( $b = .18$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (See figure 4.2 for the full mediation model)

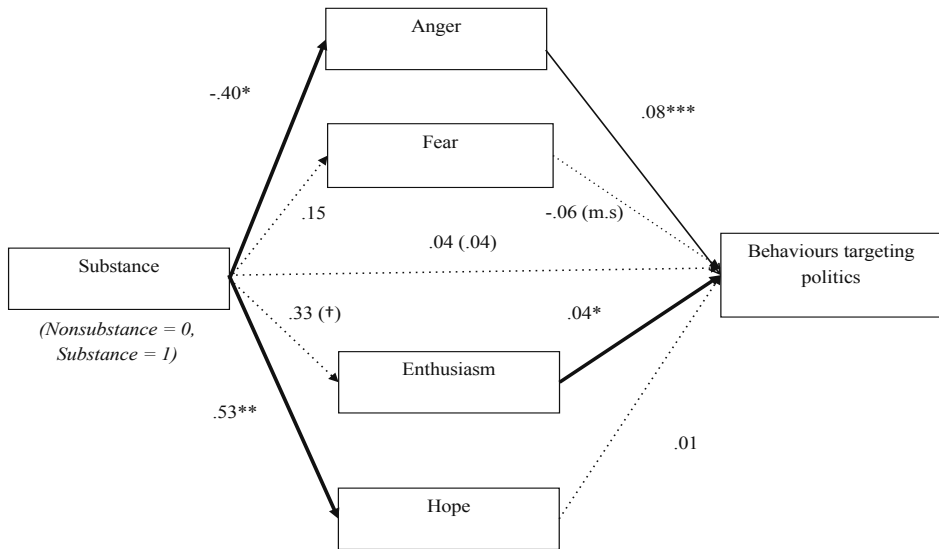
Figure 4.2: Mediation Model Substance and Political Behaviour



Indirect effects of emotions on substantive conflict framing effects. Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown,  $\dagger p < .10$ ,  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$ .

Regarding behaviours targeting politics, a significant indirect effect of substance via anger was also found ( $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .04$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $-.173$ ;  $-.011$ ). Substance again had a negative effect on anger, which in its turn contributed to higher levels of behaviours targeting politics ( $b = .18$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, an indirect effect of enthusiasm was also found here ( $b = .03$ ,  $SE = .03$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $.001$ ;  $.112$ ). Substance in conflict framing slightly increased enthusiasm ( $b = .33$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p = .06$ ), which in its turn led to more intentions for behaviours targeting politics ( $b = .12$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ ), (See figure 4.3 for the full mediation model).

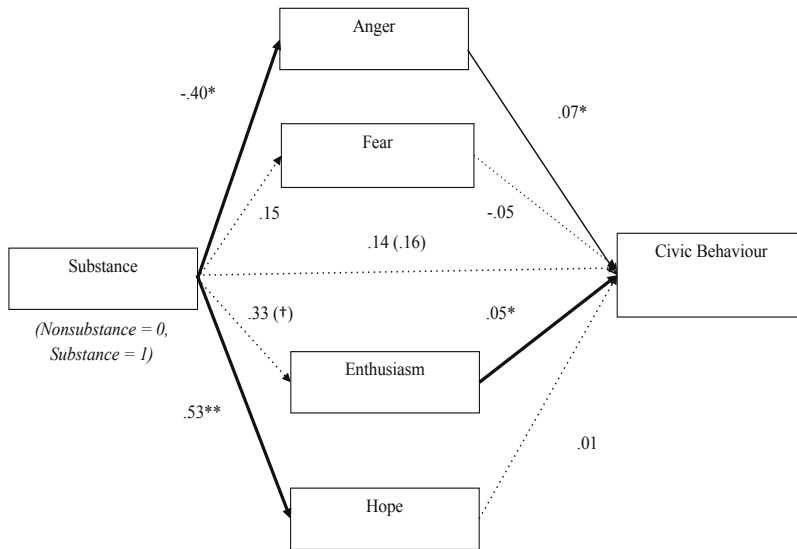
Figure 4.3: Mediation model Substance and Behaviours Targeting Politics



Indirect effects of emotions on substantive conflict framing effects. Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown,  $\dagger p < .10$ ,  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$ .

As for civic participation, we found a significant indirect effect of substance on political behavior via anger ( $b = -.03$ ,  $SE = .02$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $-.092$ ;  $-.002$ ). Substance had a negative effect on anger, which in its turn contributed to higher levels of civic participation ( $b = .07$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (See figure 4.4 for the full mediation model).

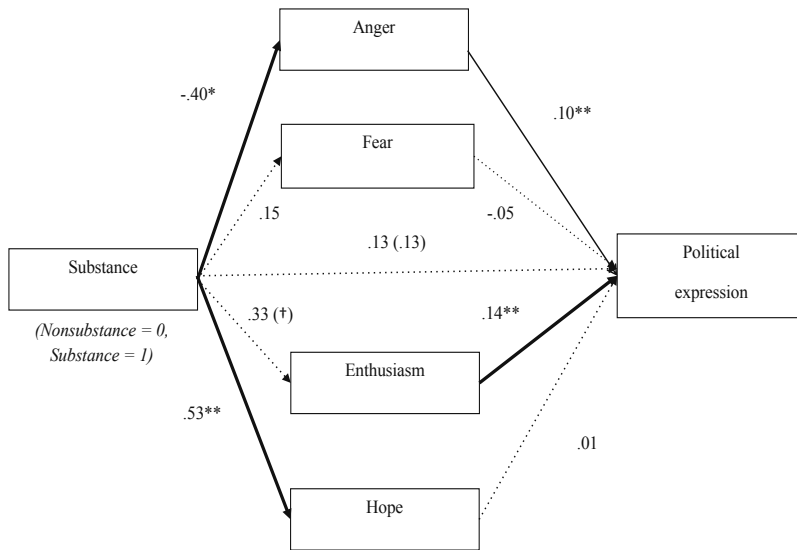
Figure 4.4: Mediation Model Substance and Civic Behaviour



Indirect effects of emotions on substantive conflict framing effects. Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown, †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Regarding political expression, a significant indirect effect of substance via anger was found ( $b = -.04$ ,  $SE = .02$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $-.108$ ;  $-.005$ ). Substance had a negative effect on anger, which in its turn contributed to higher levels of behaviours targeting politics ( $b = .10$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Furthermore, an indirect effect of enthusiasm was found here ( $b = .03$ ,  $SE = .03$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $.001$ ;  $.112$ ). Substance in conflict framing increased enthusiasm which in its turn led to more intentions for political expression ( $b = .14$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ), (See figure 4.5 for the full mediation model).

**Figure 4.5: Mediation Model Substance and Political Expression**



Indirect effects of emotions on substantive conflict framing effects. Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown, †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

These results indicated that hypothesis H3 can be accepted. While no direct effect was found, results do yield a significant indirect negative effect of substance on political participation through anger. By increasing levels of anger, exposure to nonsubstantive conflict frames spark political participation. Hypothesis H4 can be partly accepted, indirect effects of substance on some forms of participation was found, increasing behaviours targeting politics and political expression via enthusiasm (See Table 4.3 for an overview of the means of emotions in the different conditions).



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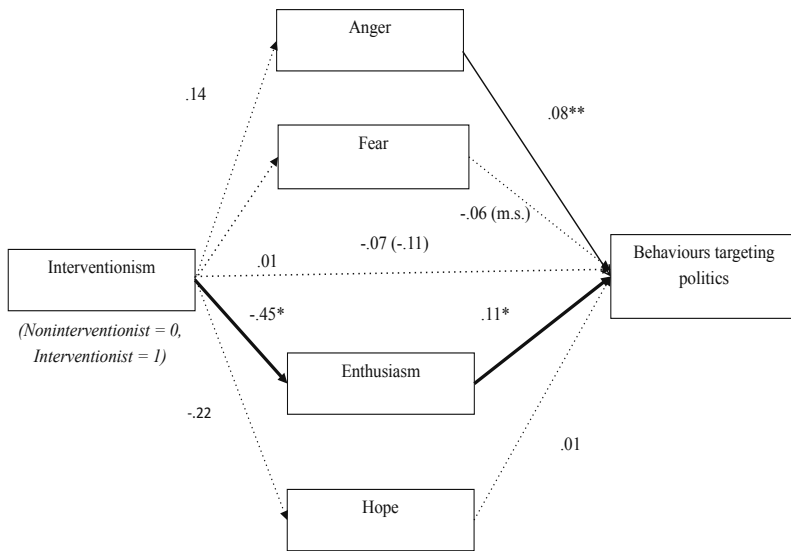
**Table 4.3. Substantiveness and Emotions**

	Anger		Fear		Enthusiasm		Hope	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Substantive								
Condition	4.14	2.03	3.07	2.01	3.06	1.88	3.48	1.89
Nonsubstantive								
Condition	4.54	2.25	2.93	2.04	2.73	1.93	2.95	1.93
Control	3.64	2.23	2.90	1.95	3.17	1.89	3.38	2.02
Control (no article)	2.54	2.07	2.28	1.73	4.65	1.91	4.46	2.11
Total	3.92	2.26	2.86	1.98	3.24	2.01	3.46	2.03

### 4.5.5 Interventionism

To answer the research questions RQ1 and RQ2 we investigate whether an indirect effect of interventionism on political participation via emotions. Results of the mediation models with interventionism as an independent variable indicate no indirect effects on political behaviour and civic participation via emotions. However, a significant indirect effect of interventionism via enthusiasm was found on behaviours targeting politics ( $b = -.05$ ,  $SE = .03$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $-.127$ ;  $-.010$ ). Interventionism had a negative effect on enthusiasm ( $b = -.45$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which in its turn contributed to higher levels of behaviours targeting politics ( $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (See figure 4.6).

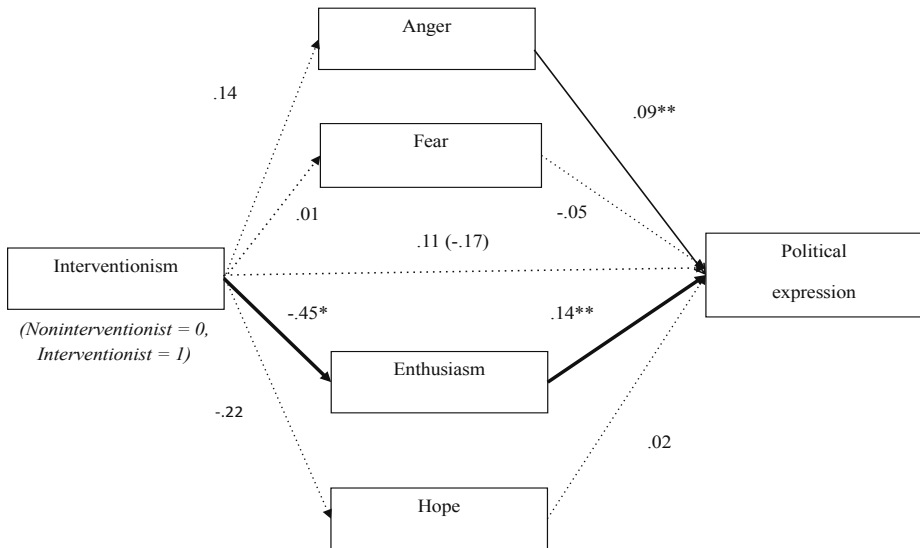
Figure 4.6: Mediation Model Interventionism and Behaviours Targeting Politics



Indirect effects of emotions on substantive conflict framing effects. Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Furthermore, the analysis revealed an indirect effect of interventionism on political expression ( $b = -.06$ ,  $SE = .03$ ) (95 % bca CI:  $-.15$ ;  $-.012$ ). Interventionism had a negative effect on enthusiasm, which in its turn contributed to higher levels of political expression ( $b = .13$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (See Figure 4.7)

Figure 4.7: Mediation Model Interventionism and Political Expression



Indirect effects of emotions on substantive conflict framing effects. Unstandardized beta coefficients are shown, \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

To conclude, the results for interventionism indicate that regarding RQ1 and RQ2 the following conclusion can be made: Interventionism did not increase participation via anger and positive emotions. In contrast, interventionism led to a decrease in enthusiasm and thereby depressed participation in the form of political expression and behaviours targeting politics. (See Table 4.4 for an overview of the means of emotions in the different conditions).

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**Table 4.5 Interventionism and Emotions**

	Anger		Fear		Enthusiasm		Hope	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Interventionist								
Condition	4.42	2.09	3.00	2.03	2.66	1.79	3.10	1.85
Noninterventionist								
Condition	4.28	2.22	2.99	2.03	3.11	2.00	3.32	2.00
Control	3.64	2.23	2.90	1.95	3.17	1.89	3.38	2.02
Control (no article)	2.54	2.07	2.28	1.73	4.65	1.91	4.46	2.11
Total	3.92	2.26	2.86	1.98	3.24	2.01	3.46	2.03

## 4.6 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that conflict framing effects on political participation are mediated by emotions. Different types of conflict frames were found to affect political participation via the emotional response experienced by citizens. When examining the distinction between substantive and nonsubstantive conflict frames, the findings indicate that nonsubstantive conflict framing in affected political participation via anger. In contrast, substantive conflict frames positively affected certain types of participation via enthusiasm. Regarding the effects of interventionism, we found that interventionist reporting reduced certain types of political participation by reducing enthusiasm.

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of conflict frames to involve citizens in the political process is contingent on both the characteristics of the conflict frame, but also on the emotional reaction that is evoked by exposure to the conflict frame. Furthermore, different types of political participation were found to be affected differently, where anger affected political participation across the board, hope and enthusiasm were found to affect only certain types of political participation such as political expres-

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sion and behaviours aimed at politics.

Contrary to the expectations, no main effects of interventionism and substantiveness on political participation were found. In the case of substantiveness, these findings contradict the findings from a similar experiment conducted by Min (2004). She concluded that exposure to policy-irrelevant political attacks in news messages depressed the likelihood to vote. We can only speculate towards an explanation of the lack of a similar result in the current study. One important difference is that Min's experiment entails journalistic report of an election campaign conflict not focussed on a specific topic, where the stimuli in this study focus on a conflict revolving around one specific topic; soft drug policy in a non-election setting. This difference implies that in Min's nonsubstantive condition, no mention of policy was present at all, while in our nonsubstantive, the issue that sparked the conflict was mentioned, before turning to a focus on personal attacks in the conflict. Furthermore, Min's experiment was conducted in a US context, where personal attacks may be more prevalent, and where citizens are potentially more used to exposure to this type of conflict framing.

The findings regarding interventionism prove an interesting starting point for future research. While journalism scholars often highlight the societal importance of interventionism and watchdog journalism (e.g. Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008; Salgado & Strömbäck, 2011) the current results indicate that interventionism does not have beneficial consequences for political participation and even point to a negative indirect effect by tampering enthusiasm. These findings of course do not mean that the watchdog journalist should put up a muzzle. Nonetheless, the visible performance of the critical, interventionist role of the journalist may have to be reconsidered. Perhaps a more detached role, controlling politicians by presenting alternative facts or opposing viewpoints serves democracy better. However, this study proves only a starting point in assessing the effects of interventionism on relevant behavioural and attitudinal processing. Future studies should disentangle whether the negative effect of interventionism on enthusiasm can be replicated in other contexts and manifestations of journalistic intervention. It remains an open question whether journalistic involvement in conflict is less consequential for outcomes on citizens than for example content characteristics or framing by political actors.

Several shortcomings to this study should be noted. First, this study taps into short-term effects only. As a result, no conclusions about the longevity of the effects can be made based on these findings. Previous work shows that framing effects do persist over time, even up to weeks after exposure (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2011). Nonetheless, we do not know how long lasting the effects are in the specific case of

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conflict framing, which calls for future research.

Another shortcoming that should be noted is that emotions as mediators were not manipulated in the current study. This approach makes it harder to draw causal inferences (Imai, Keele, Tingley, & Yamamoto, 2011). Strictly statistical estimation of mediation effects is sometimes criticized as a means of testing causal mechanisms (Imai & Keele, 2010). New alternative ways to assess causal mechanisms using mediation models are under development at the moment (Bullock, Green, & Ha, 2010). Nonetheless, due to the strong theoretical backing in the literature that established the mobilizing role of both anger and enthusiasm (e.g., Valentino et al., 2011; Brader, 2005), we are confident that our theoretical basis for conducting such an analysis is well founded. Nonetheless, we should be careful with overly generalizing the causality of our findings. Future studies must be done to replicate these findings. Preferably these studies would incorporate both alternative mediators and designs that embed emotions in experimental manipulations.

A third shortcoming alludes to the measurements of the dependent variable, which focuses on behavioural intentions, and does not directly measure actual behaviour. Despite the prevalence of using self-reported behavioural intentions is research towards framing effects. Future studies would benefit from an approach incorporating the measurement of actual behaviour. Furthermore, future studies are needed to see if similar results can be found when conflict frames revolve around different issues. This could shed light on how the effects of different types of conflict frames and the underlying psychological mechanisms play out on issues that are for instance more highly contested and more polarized in their nature. Soft drugs is an issue with differing views, but perhaps less emotional involvement in citizens when compared to more controversial and threatening topics such as the refugee crisis.

All in all, this study contributes to literature by giving valuable insights to the underlying mechanisms of conflict framing. The findings challenge existing knowledge on the effects of substantive conflict news and political participation. Contrary to expectations, no such effect was found. Furthermore, this is the first study that looks at the effects of interventionism on political participation. Though no direct effect was found, this provides a starting point for future research that can further disentangle the role of interventionism and its importance (or lack of importance) for relevant outcomes on citizens. However, the main contribution of the paper lies in the finding that conflict framing effects are mediated by emotions, which highlights the close connection between conflict framing effects and emotions, particularly anger, and to a lesser extent enthusiasm.

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