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Feeling within reason

How appraisals shape emotional responses to politics

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UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Feeling Within Reason

How appraisals shape emotional
responses to politics

Isabella Rebasso

Feeling within reason. How appraisals shape emotions in politics.

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Feeling Within Reason: How appraisals shape emotional responses
to politics

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Preface

This cumulative dissertation, titled *Feeling within Reason: How appraisals shape emotional responses to politics*, is based on the following four articles:

1. Rebasso, I., Schumacher, G., Rooduijn, M. Affective Modeling of Emotion Labels in Politics.
2. Rebasso, I., and Schumacher, G. Using Message Appraisals to Elicit Anger and Anxiety Responses to Political Issues: Two Pre-Registered Experiments.
3. Rebasso, I. Relevance, Consistence and Resistance. What explains the link between political sophistication and emotional responses to politics?
4. Rebasso, I., Schumacher, G., Rooduijn, M. Disentangling the Sophistication-Emotion Link.

In all co-authored articles, I developed the core idea and research design, collected and analyzed the data and wrote the majority of the texts. My co-authors contributed to theory development, data analysis and writing of the articles.

Each study contained in this dissertation was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework. Exploratory analyses and deviations from the pre-analysis plans are discussed as such in each chapter. The pre-registrations can be found on my OSF page: osf.io/8cbf4. Replication materials will be made available upon publication of each individual article.

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Summary

Emotions play a pivotal role in politics, and we often argue that emotions drive people's political behavior, from their attitudes and vote choice to their participation in political events. For instance, recent media reports of "angry Dutch farmers" protesting environmental regulations, or students expressing "anger towards Macron" in French protests. But what drives these emotions about politics? Do emotions, as theories predict, really come from how people appraise their situation? This dissertation shows that it is not the case. Emotion labels do not match appraisals, as they do in non-political situations. Moreover, people vary in the extent to which they use these labels.

Two core research questions drive this dissertation. First, do emotions in politics correspond to distinct appraisal profiles of political issues and events? Second, how does political sophistication, encompassing interest, knowledge, and confidence, influence emotional responses to politics?

Using the Component Process Model (CPM), Chapter 2 demonstrates that emotions about politics do not have the same predictable links between emotion labels and appraisals as emotions in general. Chapter 3 shows that we can elicit anger in participants if we use its appraisals profile in political messages.

Chapter 4 and 5 reveal that people who are more knowledgeable and interested in politics, i.e., political sophisticates, report to be more emotional about politics. This is not necessarily because they have a better understanding of political issues and make more consistent appraisals than the less sophisticated. Rather than factual knowledge, confidence in knowledge drives emotional responses to politics.

This dissertation sheds light on the complex roots of emotions in the political domain. Based on the findings of this dissertation, I argue that to truly understand what drives emotions in politics, we need to steer away from applying psychological theories of emotions to emotions in politics. Rather, we need a theory of *political emotions*.

Samenvatting

Emoties spelen een belangrijke rol in de politiek. Vaak wordt beweerd dat emoties het politieke gedrag van mensen beïnvloeden – van hun houding en stemkeuze tot hun deelname aan politieke evenementen. Denk aan recente mediaberichten over "boze Nederlandse boeren" die protesteren tegen milieuregelgeving, of aan studenten die "woede jegens Macron" uiten in Franse protesten. Waar komen deze emoties vandaan? Komen emoties, zoals theorieën voorspellen, voort uit hoe mensen hun situatie evalueren? Dit proefschrift laat zien dat dit niet het geval is. De emotielabels die mensen gebruiken in het politieke domein corresponderen niet met hun evaluaties, zoals wel het geval is in niet-politieke situaties. Bovendien verschillen mensen in de mate waarin ze deze labels gebruiken.

Twee onderzoeksvragen vormen de drijvende kracht achter dit proefschrift. Ten eerste: corresponderen ervaren emoties in de politiek met verschillende evaluatieprofielen van politieke kwesties en gebeurtenissen? Ten tweede: hoe beïnvloedt politieke verfijndheid – waaronder interesse, kennis en vertrouwen vallen – emotionele reacties op politiek?

Met behulp van het Component Process Model (CPM) toont Hoofdstuk 2 aan dat emoties over politiek niet dezelfde voorspelbare verbanden tussen emotielabels en evaluaties laten zien als emoties in het algemeen. Hoofdstuk 3 toont aan dat we woede kunnen opwekken bij deelnemers als we het evaluatieprofiel ervan gebruiken in politieke boodschappen.

Hoofdstuk 4 en 5 laten zien dat mensen met meer kennis van en interesse in politiek, d.w.z. mensen met meer politieke verfijndheid, aangeven emotioneler te zijn over politiek. Dit is niet noodzakelijkerwijs omdat ze politieke kwesties beter begrijpen en consistentere evalueren dan mensen met minder politieke verfijndheid. Meer dan feitelijke kennis is vertrouwen in kennis de verklarende kracht achter emotionele reacties op politiek.

Dit proefschrift werpt licht op de complexe oorzaken van emoties in de politiek. Gebaseerd op de bevindingen van dit proefschrift, stel ik dat we, om te begrijpen waar emoties in de politiek vandaan komen, af moeten stappen van het direct toepassen van psychologische theorieën over emoties op emoties in de politieke arena. In plaats daarvan hebben we een theorie van *politieke emoties* nodig.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Defining ‘Emotions’ - The Component Process Model	5
1.2	Studying Emotions in Politics and their Components	10
1.3	Overview of the Dissertation	13
1.4	Conducting Social Science Research during COVID-19	17
2	Affective Modeling of Emotion Labels in Politics	19
2.1	Appraisals in the Component Process Model	22
2.2	Politics as a Separate Emotional Domain?	25
2.3	Methodology: A Computational Approach to Modeling Emotions	30
2.4	Results	37
2.5	Discussion and Conclusion	51
3	Using Message Appraisals to Elicit Anger and Anxiety Responses to Political Issues: Two Preregistered Experiments	55
3.1	Using Appraisal Theories as Message Appraisals in Emotional Appeals	57
3.2	Study 1	61
3.3	Results I: Do Message Appraisals Elicit Anger and Anxiety?	66
3.4	Study 2	68
3.5	Results II: Do Message Appraisals Elicit Anger and Anxiety?	69
3.6	Results III: Are Emotions Related to Self-reported Appraisals?	70
3.7	Discussion and Conclusion	72
4	Relevance, Consistence and Resistance. What Explains the Link between Political Sophistication and Emotional Responses to Politics?	75
4.1	Refining the Sophistication-Emotion Link	78
4.2	Data and Measures	86
4.3	Results I: The Relevance Hypothesis	88
4.4	Results II: The Resistance Hypothesis	91
4.5	Results III: The Consistence Hypothesis	95

4.6	Discussion and Conclusion	98
5	Disentangling the Sophistication-Emotion Link: Political Interest and Confidence-in-Knowledge drive Political Emotions	102
5.1	Conceptualizing Political Sophistication	105
5.2	The Sophistication-Emotion Link: Interest, not Knowledge	107
5.3	The Sophistication-Emotion Link: Confidence, not Knowledge	110
5.4	Methods	114
5.5	Results	120
5.6	Discussion and Conclusion	130
6	Discussion and Conclusion	134
6.1	Are Political Emotions Predicted by Distinct Appraisal Profiles of Political Issues and Events?	134
6.2	What is the Relationship between Political Sophistication and Emotional Responses to Politics?	139
6.3	Reflections on the Limitations of this Dissertation	143
6.4	Concluding Remarks	144
7	Appendices	162
8	Acknowledgements	208

List of Tables

1	Theoretical predictions of appraisal profiles	27
2	The 18 Appraisal Checks used as input to our models.	34
3	The 18 Appraisal Checks used as input to our models (continued).	35
4	Correlation of prototypes with Israel and Schönbrodt 2019 prototypes.	36
5	Weights for 18 Appraisals with best out of sample prediction.	46
6	Precision and Recall of three models	49
7	Descriptives of anger and anxiety by issue	64
8	Demographics Study 1 - 2	65
9	Overview of the three main hypotheses and their tests.	85
10	Overview of Tests of Hypothesis 1.	121
11	Overview of Tests of Hypothesis 3.	126
12	Overview of Tests of Hypothesis 4.	127
13	Overview of Tests of Hypothesis 5.	127
A1	Correlation of Prototypes with Israel and Schönbrodt (2019) Proto- types.	163
A2	Nonpolitical appraisal prototypes	163
A3	Political appraisal prototypes	164
A4	Effects of certainty, control and responsibility manipulations on anger.	165
A5	Effect of anger appeal on anger.	166
A6	Effects of certainty, control and responsibility manipulations on anxiety.	167
A7	Effect of anxiety appeal on anxiety.	168
A8	Effects of certainty, control and responsibility manipulations on anger.	169
A9	Effect of anger appeal on anger.	170
A10	Effects of certainty, control and responsibility manipulations on anxiety.	171
A11	Effect of anxiety appeal on anxiety.	172
A12	Relationship between anger, anxiety, message appraisals and sub- jective (self-reported) appraisals of certainty.	173

A13	Relationship between anger, anxiety, message appraisals and subjective (self-reported) appraisals of control	174
A14	Relationship between anger, anxiety, message appraisals and subjective (self-reported) appraisals of responsibility.	175
A15	Manipulations – Coronavirus-19 Study 1	176
A16	Manipulations – Painkillers Study 1	177
A17	Manipulations – Pesticides Study 1	177
A18	Manipulations – Refugees Study 1	178
A19	Manipulations – Vaccinations Study 1	178
A20	Manipulations - Antibiotics Study 2	179
A21	Manipulations - COVID-19 Study 2	180
A22	Manipulations - Painkillers Study 2	181
A23	Manipulations - Pesticides Study 2	182
A24	Manipulations - Refugees Study 2	182
A25	Hypothesis 1a. Political Sophistication increases levels of self-reported emotions.	183
A26	Hypothesis 1b. Effect of manipulated appraisals on anger and anxiety by levels of political sophistication.	184
A27	Hypothesis 2. Effect of manipulated appraisals on anger and anxiety by levels of political sophistication (categorical).	185
A28	Hypothesis 2b. Relationship between political sophistication and naming a (correct) responsible actor.	186
A29	Hypothesis 2b. Relationship between political sophistication and naming a (correct) responsible actor in high responsibility treatment.	187
A30	Hypothesis 2b. Relationship between political sophistication and naming a (correct) responsible actor in low responsibility treatment.	188
A31	Hypothesis 3a and 3b. Relationship between self-reported appraisals and emotions.	189
A32	Hypothesis 3c. Relationship between self-reported appraisals and emotions moderated by political sophistication.	190
A34	ANES 2016. Effects of political knowledge and interest on anger, anxiety, pride, hope, and disgust.	191

A33	ANES 2012. Effects of political knowledge and interest on anger, anxiety, pride and hope.	192
A35	ANES 2020. Effects of political knowledge and interest on anger, anxiety, pride and hope.	193
A36	ANES 2020. Effects of political knowledge and confidence on anger, anxiety, pride and hope.	194
A37	ANES 2020. Effects of political knowledge, confidence, and interest on anger, anxiety, pride and hope.	195
A38	Study 1. Effects of knowledge and political interest on self-reported anger, anxiety, enthusiasm, and hope.	196
A39	Study 1. Effects of knowledge and confidence-in-knowledge on self-reported anger, anxiety, enthusiasm, and hope.	197
A40	Study 1. Effects of knowledge, confidence-in-knowledge, political interest and internal political efficacy on self-reported anger, anxiety, enthusiasm, and hope.	198
A41	Study 2. Effects of knowledge and political interest on self-reported anger, anxiety, hope and pride.	199
A42	Study 2. Effects of knowledge and confidence-in-knowledge on self-reported anger, anxiety, hope and pride.	200
A43	Study 2. Effects of knowledge, confidence-in-knowledge, political interest and internal political efficacy on self-reported anger, anxiety, hope and pride.	201
A44	Study 1: Question Difficulty Manipulations	202
A45	Study 2: Question Difficulty Manipulations	203
A46	Study 1. Effects of confidence manipulation and pre-treatment confidence on post-treatment confidence.	204
A47	Study 2. Effects of confidence manipulation and pre-treatment confidence on post-treatment confidence.	205
A48	Study 1. Effects of confidence manipulation and pre-treatment confidence on self-reported levels of anger, anxiety, enthusiasm, and hope.	206

- A49 Study 2. Effects of confidence manipulation and pre-treatment confidence on self-reported levels of anger, anxiety, pride, and hope. . . 207

List of Figures

1	The Component Process Model	7
2	Theoretical Framework and Overview of Chapters	16
3	Selected emotions based on domain	38
4	Emotion Targets in political domain	39
5	Emotion Targets in nonpolitical domain	39
6	Appraisal profiles of anger and anxiety.	42
7	Appraisal profiles of anger and despair.	43
8	Appraisal profiles of anger and guilt.	44
9	Exploratory Analysis	51
10	Theoretical model of the relationship between message appraisal, self-reported emotions and subjective appraisals.	59
11	The effects of message appraisals on self-reported anger and anxiety (Study 1)	67
12	The effects of message appraisals on self-reported anger and anxiety (Study 2)	70
13	Relationship between subjective appraisals and self-reported anger and anxiety.	71
14	Effects of manipulated appraisals on self-reported anger by political sophistication	90
15	Effects of manipulated appraisals on self-reported anxiety by political sophistication	91
16	Effects of manipulated appraisals on self-reported anger by political sophistication(categorical)	92
17	Effects of manipulated appraisals on self-reported anxiety by political sophistication(categorical)	93
18	Effects of political sophistication on likelihood of naming responsible actor	95

19	Relationship between subjective appraisals and self-reported anger and anxiety.	96
20	Effects of subjective appraisals on self-reported anger by political sophistication	97
21	Effects of subjective appraisals on self-reported anxiety by political sophistication	97
22	Dutch Sample (Dynata): Correct answers on the common knowledge questions (pre-treatment).	117
23	U.S. Sample (Prolific): Correct answers to the common knowledge questions (pre-treatment).	119
24	The effects of political knowledge and interest on five emotions across five samples.	122
25	Effects of political knowledge and confidence-in-knowledge on four emotions across three samples.	125
26	Effects of confidence manipulation on self-reported emotions, mediated by post-treatment confidence.	131