Online Supplemental Material

An Unholy Alliance? The Influence of Negative Emotions Elicited by Media Reports on the Persuasiveness of Populist Communication

Randomization

Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental groups. The following balance statistics in Table A1 show that the groups to not systematically differ with regard to sociodemographic characteristics. Further, the table also shows that populist attitudes do not differ between the groups, although they were measured after the treatment.

Attention Checks

In accordance with the market research company, we conducted several attention checks during the questionnaire to ensure that (1) participants were actually exposed to the treatment and (2) that they read the questions and did not just randomly select answers. Participants who failed an attention check were immediately directed to the end of the study.

The first attention check was conducted after the first article had been shown. In order to ensure that participants had at least quickly looked at the text we asked them a very simple question about the topic of the news story that could be answered from reading the headline. The second attention check followed after the second text and was of the same nature. The third attention check was an item hidden in the scale for actor evaluation: “To show that you read carefully, please select the option in the middle.” The fourth attention check was likewise, an item hidden in the populist attitude scale: “In order to show that you read carefully, please select the option ‘does fully apply.’” The balance statistics in Table A1 show that no condition caused a higher dropout rate than the others. Thus, the treatment did not affect the participants’ ability to pass the attention checks.

Table A1

Balance Statistics

Group	neutral & non-populist		emotionalized & populist		neutral & populist		emotionalized & non-populist		
Categorial variables	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	difference between conditions
Gender (female)	59	51	64	54	67	54	69	59	χ^2 = 1.46, df = 3, *p* = 0.69
Dropout attention check 1	8	5	10	6	7	4	12	8	χ^2 = 1.64, df = 3, *p* = 0.65
Dropout attention check 2	14	9	17	11	10	6	19	12	χ^2 = 3.32, df = 3, *p* = 0.34
Dropout attention check 3	20	13	21	14	11	7	27	17	χ^2 = 7.47, df = 3, *p* = 0.06
Dropout attention check 4	34	22	32	21	20	13	36	23	χ^2 = 6.30, df = 3, *p* = 0.10
Continuous variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	difference between conditions
Age	28.2	14.0	30.6	15.6	29.7	14.0	28.9	14.5	*F*(3,471) = 0.58, *p* = .63, η^2 = .004
Populist attitudes	4.9	0.9	4.9	0.9	5.0	1.0	4.8	1.0	*F*(3,471) = 0.96, *p* = .41, η^2 = .006
Issue attitudes	5.1	1.3	4.9	1.4	5.1	1.1	5.0	1.3	*F*(3,471) = 0.35, *p* = .79, η^2 = .002

Measurement Details

Table A2 presents the full list of items used to measure the dependent variables in German (original) and English (translation). Table A3 presents the PCA of all items used to measure emotions (M-DAS).

Table A2

Items for the Measurement of Policy Support and Actor Evaluation

Policy Support	
German	**English**
Ein neuer Gesetzesartikel würde die erschöpften Ärzte entlasten.	The new law would relieve the exhausted physicians.
Es braucht einen neuen Gesetzesartikel, um die Sicherheit der Patienten zu erhöhen.	We need the new law to improve security for patients.
Mit Hilfe des neuen Gesetzesartikels würde das bestehende Gesetz besser eingehalten werden.	With the help of the new law, the existing law would be followed more thoroughly.
Es braucht einen neuen Gesetzesartikel, um die Arbeitsbedingungen für die Ärzte zu verbessern.	We need the new law to improve the working conditions for physicians.
Es braucht einen neuen Gesetzesartikel, um die Patienten zu schützen.	We need the new law to protect patients.
Actor evaluation	
German	**English**
Herr Scherer macht auf mich einen sehr kompetenten Eindruck.	Mr. Scherer made the impression that he is a competent person.
Herr Scherer ist meiner Meinung nach ein Politiker, der eine klare Linie hat.	Mr. Scherer seems to be a politician with a clear line.
Ich finde Herr Scherer ist eine sympathische Person.	Mr. Scherer is a likable person.
Mir gefällt die Art, wie Herr Scherer das Problem angehen möchte.	I like how Mr. Scherer wants to approach the problem.
Herr Scherer hat einen sehr positiven Eindruck auf mich gemacht.	Mr. Scherer made a positive impression.

Table A3

Principal Component Analysis of M-DAS Items

	1	2	3	4
Fear	0.882			
Fright	0.879			
angry	0.722			
Rage	0.717			
Anger	0.687			
Sadness	0.595			
discouraged	0.572			
Down	0.531			
Mockery		0.824		
Disgust		0.799		
contempt		0.778		
disgusted		0.748		
repulsed				
disdain				
amazed			0.920	
amazed			0.859	
surprise			0.838	
startled	0.520		0.542	
satisfied				0.902
well				0.894
balanced				0.818

Manipulation Checks and Controls

To test if the manipulations had the intended effects, we conducted some manipulation checks. The first article was supposed to induce different levels of negative emotions, while not affecting the perception of mistreatments due to fatigue as a problem for society. Participants who read the emotionalized article experienced more negative emotions (M = 2.98 SD = 0.86) than those who read the neutral version (M = 2.68 SD = 0.90), $F(1,473) = 13.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Meanwhile, there was no difference between the groups with regard to problem awareness, $F(1,473) = 0.23$, $p = .63$. The manipulation can thus be considered successful, although it has to be noted that the emotionalized media report did not elicit very strong negative emotions.

The second article was supposed to differ with regard to populist communication, but not with regard to how strongly the proposed new law is advertised. Participants who read the populist interview perceived more elements of populist communication (M = 4.67 SD = 0.83) than those who read the non-populist version (M = 3.85 SD = 1.00), $F(1,473) = 93.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Advocacy for the new law was perceived slightly stronger in the populist condition (M = 1.52 SD = 1.14) than in the non-populist condition (M = 1.72 SD = 1.34, note that lower values indicate more support), $F(1,473) = 2.98$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .006$. However, this effect is minimal and not significant, while the perception of populist communication differs strongly between the groups. Thus, also this manipulation can be considered successful.

Since populist attitudes were measured after exposure to the stimuli in order not to influence the perception of the stimuli or to prime populist attitudes, we checked if the stimuli had an effect on the level of populist attitudes. This was not the case, $F(3,471) = 0.96$, $p = .41$, $\eta^2 = .006$. Further, we also checked whether the exposure to the first stimulus (neutral vs. emotionalized media report) affected the manipulation of the second stimulus (populist vs. non-populist communication). There was no significant effect of emotionalized media reports on the perception of populist communication, $F(1,473) = 0.71$, $p = .40$, $\eta^2 = .002$. Since the stimuli with populist vs. non-populist communication were presented after the exposure to the neutral vs. emotionalized media report and after the measurement of resulting emotions, the second manipulation cannot have an effect on the first one. Further, all four stimuli were perceived as authentic media reports (M = 5.12 - 5.28 on a scale from 1-7), and they did not differ with regard to this aspect, $F(3,471) = 0.83$, $p = .48$, $\eta^2 = .005$.

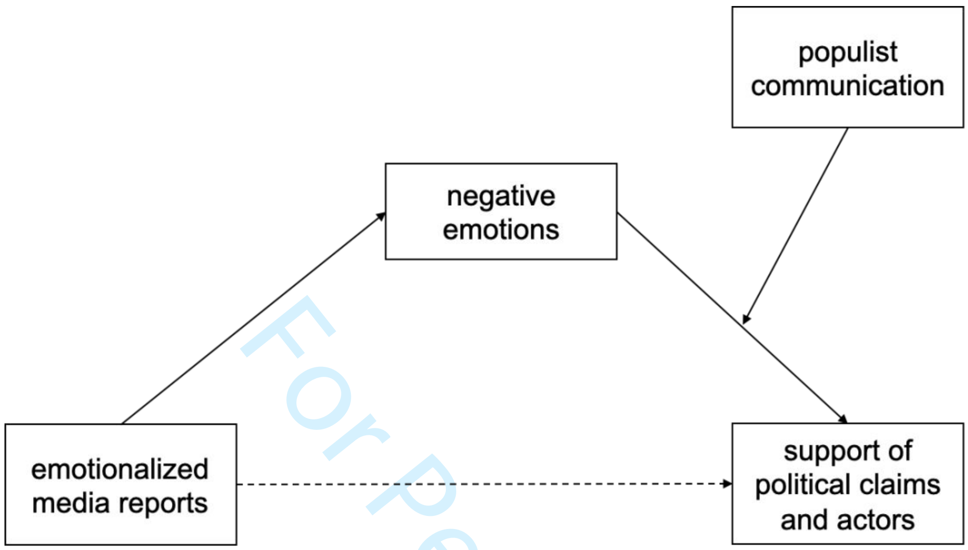
Model estimation

The theoretical model of this study is rather complex. We have a 2 (emotionalized vs. neutral media report) $\times$ 2 (populist vs. non-populist communication) design, but the manipulations are not presented in combination, but successively. We expect that the outcome of the first manipulation (negative emotions) influences the effect of the second manipulation (populist communication). Therefore, we do not simply estimate a two-factorial ANOVA, as one might expect with a 2×2 design, but a moderated mediation model shown in Figure A1. The first experimental factor is the independent variable, the outcome of this manipulation is the mediator, and the dependent variables of interest are the outcome. The second experimental factor is included as a moderator on the model's b-path, since it is (conceptually and in terms of timing) located after the emotional reaction to the media report.

The model becomes even more complex, as all paths of the moderated-mediation model depicted in Figure A1 are moderated by populist attitudes shown in Figure A2. This complex model is however only required to estimate the overall indirect effect of emotionalized media reporting on policy support and actor evaluation. All other hypotheses can be tested with simpler models, which are part of the overall model.

Figure A1

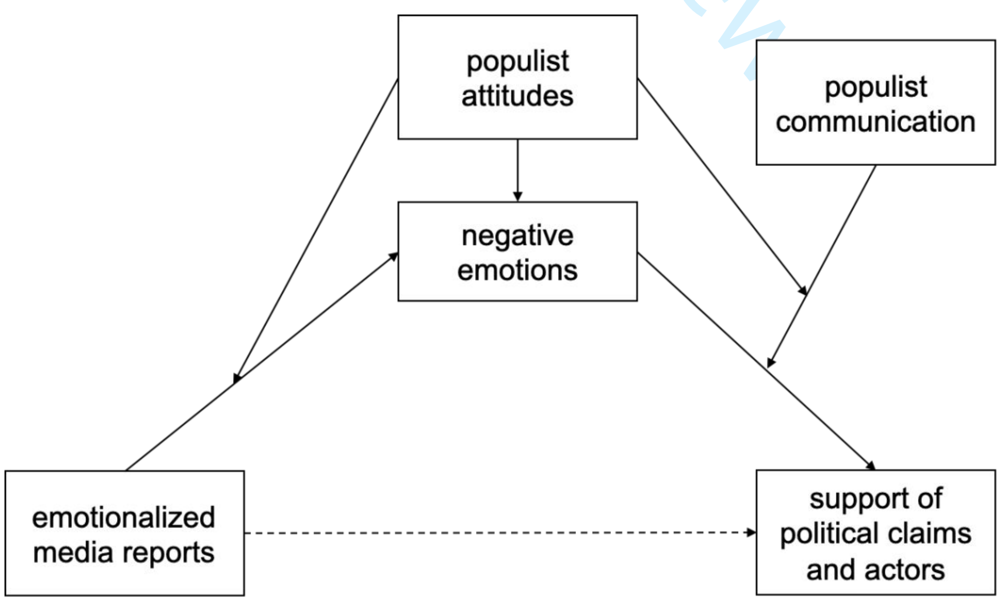
Conceptual Model: 2 × 2 Design with Successive Manipulation Corresponds to a Moderated Mediation Model



Note: There is no hypothesis of a direct effect of emotionalized media reports on support of political actors and claims because all participants were exposed to a second stimulus (populist vs. non-populist communication), thus there is no direct effect.

Figure A2

Conceptual Model Including Populist Attitudes as a Moderator on all Paths (Complete Model)



Robustness Checks

To test the robustness of the statistical analyses, the moderation models for the effect of emotionalized media reporting on negative emotions shown in Table A4, and the effect of negative emotions on policy support and actor evaluation shown in Table A5 were estimated without the covariates age, gender and attitudes toward the healthcare system. The effects remain consistent with the analyses reported in the main paper, see Tables 2-4 in the main paper.

Table A4

Model Coefficients: Negative Emotions as a Function of Media Reporting (Emotionalization) and Populist Attitudes (without covariates)

	b	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	2.68	0.06	< 0.001
Factor 1: emotionalization	0.31	0.08	< 0.001
Populist attitudes	0.06	0.06	0.28
Factor 1 * populist attitudes	0.21	0.08	0.01

Note: R^2 = 0.06; populist attitudes are mean-centered.

Table A5

Model Coefficients: Policy Support and Actor Evaluation as a Function of Negative Emotions, Populist Communication, and Populist Attitudes

	Policy support			Actor evaluation		
	b	*SE*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	*p*
Intercept	5.16	0.09	< 0.001	3.46	0.05	0.00
Negative emotions	0.43	0.09	< 0.001	0.12	0.05	0.03
Factor 2: populist communication	-0.04	0.12	0.74	0.12	0.07	0.10
Populist attitudes	0.20	0.09	0.02	0.13	0.05	0.01
Factor 2 * populist attitudes	0.22	0.12	0.07	0.17	0.07	0.02
Factor 2 * negative emotions	-0.02	0.12	0.85	0.01	0.07	0.87
Negative emotions * populist attitudes	-0.05	0.08	0.56	-0.01	0.05	0.87
Negative emotions * factor 2 * populist attitudes	0.04	0.12	0.70	0.03	0.07	0.66
R^2	0.16			0.13		

Note: Populist attitudes are mean-centered.