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The Causes and Consequences of Affinity for Political Humor (AFPH)

Mark Boukes (March 1, 2018)

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Research on political satire has developed quickly over the past two decades. A wide array of studies has been conducted that examined the audiences,¹ content,² and effects of this infotainment format.³ Most of the concepts used and applied in these studies are borrowed from research on traditional journalistic formats and political science; for example, framing, political efficacy, knowledge and trust. To develop a concept specifically tailored to the genre of political satire, recent research has put forward the concept of *Affinity for Political Humor* (AFPH).⁴

Although probably known by most scholars working on the subject of satire and frequently referenced to—by January 2018, Hmielowski et al. (2011) received 86 cites, and Holbert et al. (2013) 13 cites—the concept has hardly been put into actual practice. Only two empirical articles can be found that actively used the scale measuring Affinity for Political Humor. One of the two studies was the article of Hmielowski et al. (2011) itself, in which they introduced the concept. Their study used AFPH to predict the consumption of political satire among respondents of a statewide telephone survey. AFPH, thus, was an independent variable in this study. The other study used AFPH as a moderator.⁵ Focusing on a specific subdimension of the AFPH scale, Becker analyzed how affinity for political humor *to reduce anxiety* influenced the relationship between exposure to (in)congruent political satire and political efficacy.

Given the still very limited knowledge about Affinity for Political Humor, the current chapter provides an exploratory study into the causes and consequences of AFPH. Using a set of two studies, I will (1) analyze the characteristics of citizens that predict their personal Affinity for Political Humor, (2) examine AFPH's ability to predict the exposure to political satire content, and (3) investigate how AFPH affects the appreciation and perceived influence of political satire.

All this has been done in the context of the Netherlands. Research on political satire is still heavily dominated by work from the U.S., but the genre is very popular in other contexts as well. Accordingly, academic attention from other sides of the world is highly valuable to better understand the satire phenomenon.⁶ Especially in case of a new concept as AFPH, research from a different context will shed light on the construct's validity under different conditions and may eventually encourage its use in future research.

Affinity for Political Humor

The latent construct of Affinity for Political Humor has been assessed in terms of internal factor structure, reliability and validity by Holbert and colleagues (2013).⁷ They found that the scale can be employed in two manners: (a) as a one dimension scale tapping AFPH generally or (b) as four separate dimensions that each capture one aspect of AFPH. These four dimensions were already specified in the first study that introduced AFPH: incongruity, superiority, anxiety reduction, and social connection.⁸ The paragraphs below will shortly introduce each of these; thereby, heavily relying on and integrating the works of Hmielowski et al. (2011) and Holbert et al. (2013).

The first lower-order construct under AFPH is *incongruity*. Political satire may point out to its viewers where a disconnection can be found between the real and the unreal, or the normal and the abnormal. Especially, in an age of "alternative facts" political satire may be helpful for citizens to become aware of the differences between what politicians say and what is actually

happening in society. Satire makes its audience laugh by the unexpectedness of its messages: Highlighting inconsistencies in political rhetoric, satire programs humorously demonstrate where the politician or the political system more broadly is dysfunctional.⁹

The second dimension of AFPH is *superiority*. Watching political satire may give its viewers a “sense of victory or triumph” by laughing *at* (i.e., not *with*) another’s follies.¹⁰ Disparaging politicians’ behavior or communications in a humorous way is common in political satire, and may make viewers feel more secure about their own beliefs (at least if they held a negative opinion towards the satirized politician/party). Enjoyment of jokes, according to this dimension, depends on the action of comparing oneself to the other (i.e., a politician about who the satirist makes a joke) and identifying the weakness of the other.

Anxiety reduction is the third dimension of AFPH. Laughing about politics may release tension that people build up when thinking about an election outcome, policies proposed by Parliament, or the behaviors of a particular President. Humor is a successful coping mechanism to cope with such stressful situations,¹¹ and this also applies in anxious political situations.

The fourth and last lower-order construct under AFPH is *social connectedness*. Especially in times of strong political polarization,¹² political humor may be a tool that still “bridges” both sides of the political spectrum. Humor allows laughing together, eases conversations, and causes individuals to be perceived as being more socially attractive.¹³ Particularly *within* politically homogenous groups, humor may fulfil this role of a social glue: Making jokes about “the other” could strengthen the bonds between in-group members.

Who Has an Affinity for Political Humor?

Very little is known about the scale that measures citizens’ Affinity for Political Humor. Even basic information, such as which demographics and political characteristics predict people to

have a stronger or weaker AFPH are still unknown. Only Hmielowski et al. (2011) have shown, surprisingly, that the scale is *unrelated* to a number of variables such as need for cognition,¹⁴ ideology, and the consumption of traditional news media (i.e., newspaper and television news).

Arguably, frequent viewers of political comedy should have a higher AFPH. Previous studies have shown that it are especially the younger, male, liberal, and frequent news consumers who watch political satire programs relatively more often.¹⁵ Yet, the consumption of satire is conceptually different from one's affinity for political humor; hence, this study aims to shed more light on the AFPH construct by answering the following research question:

RQ₁: Which individual characteristics of citizens predict a stronger or weaker Affinity for Political Humor?

Affinity for Political Humor and the Consumption of Political Satire

Originally, the AFPH scale was developed by Hmielowski et al. to assess the factors that predict citizens to consume political satire shows.¹⁶ Their motivation was that scholars know more-and-more about the factors that mediate or moderate the effects of political satire, but that “an understanding of the general audience remains this area of research's lacuna.” (p. 98). Insight in the audience of political satire is crucial, because without this information it is very difficult to assess the relevance and real-world magnitude of effects found in experimental settings: How many and precisely which people do actually watch political satire?

The question, thus, is whether a citizens' Affinity for Political Humor predicts their actual consumption of political satire. Both Hmielowski et al. and Holbert et al. (as a means of validity assessment) revealed this relationship, but are faced with cross-sectional data.¹⁷ Having conducted a survey study, it was impossible to assess the causal direction of the relationship. Measuring AFPH and the consumption of satire programs *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert*

Report at the same point in time, it was difficult to disentangle which causes which. Dynamic data in the form of an experiment or panel research are needed to draw strong causal conclusions.

To examine the predictive power of AFPH, we test the following hypothesis:

H₁: Individuals with a stronger Affinity for Political Humor are more likely to expose themselves to political satire shows.

Affinity for Political Humor and the Consequences of Political Satire Consumption

Not only may AFPH cause the consumption of political satire, it may also moderate its effects.

Hmielowski et al. wrote: “We urge future research to assess potential differential effects of a variety of political entertainment messages for those individuals with varied levels of affinity for political humor (i.e., AFPH as potential moderator variable).”¹⁸ This challenge has been taken up by Becker (2014) who showed that the effects of satire exposure may indeed depend on AFPH; her study focused on one particular dimension of the scale (i.e., anxiety reduction).¹⁹

The current study assesses the impact of AFPH more generally and looks at two potential outcome variables that are in line with the nature of this scale: (a) appreciation of political satire exposure and (b) the perceived influence of political satire. Theoretical frameworks, such as the Orientations-Stimulus-Orientations-Response²⁰ or the Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model,²¹ predict that people’s existing dispositions influence the way people process media messages and, therefore, affect the potential effects these may have. In relation to political satire, for example, it has been shown that education may moderate the (indirect) relationship between political satire exposure and political participation.²²

This study examines the moderating impact on two dependent variables that arguably should be more strongly affected by satire exposure among viewers with a high affinity for political humor. First, one may expect satire exposure to especially yield favorable experiences,

such as perceptions of funniness or entertainment, when people score high on AFPH. After all, people who will score lower on this scale may find political satire boring, offending or difficult to comprehend. Accordingly, we test this hypothesis:

H₂: Individuals with a stronger Affinity for Political Humor are more likely to enjoy exposure to political satire than people with a weaker AFPH.

With the development of the literature on political satire, studies have become more fine-grained regarding the exact content features of satire fragments. A regularly made distinction is the one between horatian and juvenalian satire; the first being lighter and having more emphasis on the “funny”, whereas the latter provides a more bitter and cynical approach to humor.²³ Research demonstrated that especially the juvenalian types of satire are less likely to be counterargued and, therefore, have a stronger persuasive effect.²⁴

Recognizing that political satire may come in different forms, the current study examines the impact of another dimension on which satire clips can be distinguished: the nature of attack. Political satire, almost by definition,²⁵ criticizes—in one way or the other—the folly of political actors (or news producers).²⁶ Jokes may be presented in different degrees of how gentle versus harsh they are in their nature of attack.²⁷ Hmielowski et al. predicted that the inconsistency presented in political satire should not stray too far from the mundane to still be perceived as being humorous.²⁸ Yet, the question is whether people who score high on AFPH are more acceptable of harsher forms of satire than those who have a lower affinity for political humor. Accordingly, the following research question is examined:

RQ₂: Is the relationship between Affinity for Political Humor and enjoyment conditional on the type of satire that is being presented (gentle vs. harsh)?

Previous research found that people perceive a persuasive intent in satire messages.²⁹ Yet, the perceived influence on oneself was rather weak, especially in case of horatian satire. The question is whether the perceived influence is stronger or weaker for different levels of Affinity for Political Humor. The measurement of AFPH is largely shaped by expectations that political satire may have certain consequences, such as revealing the weaknesses of politicians, providing knowledge and reducing anxiety.³⁰ Accordingly, people with a strong AFPH may be more open to the potential effects that satire may have on others or themselves. Whereas people with a weak AFPH could consider humorous formats inappropriate for a serious topic as politics, the opposite probably will be true for citizens with a strong AFPH. Because citizens scoring high on AFPH will especially believe in the (favorable) consequences of political satire, the following hypothesis is tested:

H₃: Individuals with a stronger Affinity for Political Humor will perceive a stronger influence of political satire than participations with a weaker AFPH.

Method

Data from two studies will be combined in this chapter to examine the research questions and hypotheses presented above. The studies rely on different samples (i.e., random vs. convenience) and experimental techniques (i.e., forced exposure vs. self-selection) to investigate the different causes and consequences of Affinity for Political Humor. Because of the lengthy nature of the AFPH scale (11 survey items), both studies used a condensed version of the measurement (respectively, 6 items in Study 1 and 8 items in Study 2). Although ideally one would measure AFPH with the full scale, shorter scales were employed in the current work due to space constraints. This did not threaten the validity of the studies, because (a) items were consciously

chosen that reflected the different dimensions of the AFPH scale and (b) Holbert et al. showed that the full scale could function as a unidimensional latent construct (i.e., all items measure the same latent construct), and (c) some items in the original scale are very similar to each other.

Study 1

Sample

The first study recruited participants from the database of a market research agency, *PanelClix*, and used quotas for age, gender and political preference to assure a sample that was diverse and representative for Dutch society on these characteristics. The study was fielded online on 3 and 4 April, 2014. A total of 667 Dutch adults completed the survey successfully and responded correctly to the instructional manipulation checks built into the questionnaire.³¹ Participants were on average 40.37 years old ($SD = 13.80$) and 51.9% was female.

Design and Stimuli

Participants were randomly allocated to one of 12 experimental conditions. The experiment followed a 2 (topic: policy *vs.* personal) \times 2 (background information provision: yes *vs.* no) \times 2 (nature of attack: gentle *vs.* harsh) between-subjects factorial design with four control conditions (i.e., news about policy topic; news about personal topic; “no exposure” condition with questions about policy topic; and “no exposure” condition with questions about personal topic).

Participants in conditions that dealt with policy were exposed to a video clip about the plan of the Dutch government to cut funding for the public broadcasting organization.³² To assure that participants watched the video they were allocated to, the survey could not be clicked to the next page before the time passed that viewing the complete video would minimally take. This policy proposal was covered neutrally in the (control) news condition of 1 minute and 12 seconds

and was satirized (i.e., humorously critiqued) in the satire conditions either in a gentle manner (i.e., by inserting a ridiculous advertisement for senior toilets in the middle of the news item with funny music in the background; 1:38 minutes) or a harsh manner (i.e., inserting visuals of violent scenes from movies; 1:04 minutes).

Conditions on the personal topic showed a video clip of Mark Rutte (PM of the Netherlands) who either apologized for the confusion he caused at a Eurotop (news condition; 36 seconds), who was bullied by his colleague PM's at the same Eurotop (gentle satire condition; 39 seconds) or who was involved in a sexual scandal that leaked out to the internet (harsh satire condition; 38 seconds). Participants were either provided with background information about the actual topic or not to support the understanding of satire videos.³³ Overall, the harsh satire items were perceived as more tasteless ($p < .001$) and offensive ($p < .001$) than the gentle satire clips.

The satire stimuli were especially designed for this experiment by Sander van der Pavert, who is the producer of *LuckyTV* and amongst other famous for the clip "Time of my Life" in which Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton sing a duet. *LuckyTV* usually produces satire videos by manipulating existing news videos and putting a humorous twist on these materials by re-editing them, inserting certain visuals or adapting the voiceover (e.g., similar to Bad Lip Reading in the U.S. context, though much more well-known and popular). Thereby, the internal validity is relatively strong compared to studies that, for example, employ stimuli from a newscaster (e.g., *CNN*) with a satire show (e.g., *the Daily Show*) who differ on many more aspects than just the message that is provided (i.e., different host, different studio, different visuals, etc.).

Measurements

Education. Participants' highest level of obtained education was measured with a 0-to-8 scale adapted to the Dutch educational system ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.90$). It ranged from no education (0) to university diploma (8).

Political ideology. The political preference was measured with a scale that asked participants to position themselves on a scale ranging from -5 (left) via 0 (not left, neither right) to +5 (right). Due to the quota used for the recruitment, equally many citizens with a left-wing as a right-wing political preference were present in the sample ($M = 0.01$, $SD = 2.39$).

Political interest. The interest participants had in politics was tapped on a 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*totally no interest*) to 10 (*very interested*) ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 2.40$).

Political knowledge. How knowledgeable people were about politics was assessed with nine multiple choice questions (each: four answer options and a "don't know"-option). Amongst others, questions asked participants to recognize a politician from a photo, of which department Jeroen Dijsselbloem was the Minister, the number of seats in Parliament, and which parties formed the government ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 2.69$).

Internal political efficacy. People's perceived understanding of political affairs was measured with two items that formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .87$; $M = 5.33$, $SD = 2.08$): (a) How much do you know about politics compared to other people?; (b) I have the feeling that I understand most political affairs well.

News consumption. One composite measure was created that combined the consumption of news on different platforms: television evening news, newspapers, and news websites. For any of the following sources, participants answered how often they consumed it on a scale from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*seven days per week*). Summing up all the responses resulted in a scale that ranged from 0 to 18 ($M = 11.70$, $SD = 3.87$).

Affinity for Political Humor. The central variable in this study, AFPH, was measured with six 7-point Likert scales that reflected the different dimensions of Affinity for Political Humor: I appreciate political humor, because it (1) makes me aware that our political system is dysfunctional [*incongruity*], (2) can reveal the weaknesses of our political leaders and institutions, (3) can make me feel more knowledgeable about politics [both: *superiority*], (4) can reduce the anxiety I feel toward politics [*anxiety reduction*], (5) can help me express my political opinions, and (6) allows me to form stronger bonds with other people [both: *social connectedness*]. All items loaded on one dimension in an exploratory factor analysis (Eigenvalue = 3.35, explained variance = 55.86%) and formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .84$). The AFPH scale was created by computing the mean of the six items ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.00$).

Satire consumption. The consumption of political satire programs was tapped with four items that asked how often participants watched (1) *Koefnoen* (2) *Dit was het Nieuws* (3) *De Kwis*, and (4) broadcasted shows of Dutch stand-up comedians who discuss societal and political issues, such as Youp van 't Hek and Theo Maassen. These items were added together in a reliable scale ranging from 0 to 12 ($\alpha = .70$; $M = 3.02$, $SD = 2.42$).

Koefnoen was a prime-time Saturday evening show that presents a variety of satirical sketches about political issues, celebrities and “the common man.” It’s comparable to the sketches one sees in *Saturday Night Live*. *Dit was het Nieuws* is the Dutch equivalent of the British *Have I Got News for You*.³⁴ It is a satirical panel show in which two teams display their knowledge about the news of the week in a humorous manner. Finally, *De Kwis* is a satirical news quiz broadcasted prime-time on the Saturday evening. Every episode, another celebrity is invited to answer funny questions about the news of the week. Noticeably, all these satire shows are aired on the public broadcasting channels.

Enjoyment. Participants ranked the video to which they had been exposed on a number of dimensions that tap into the enjoyment they experienced while watching. Five items, specifically, are used to measure how well they appreciated the video on 11-point scales for the following characteristics: (1) not funny–funny; (2) boring–enjoyable; (3) unpleasant–pleasant; (4) not annoying–annoying and (5) tasteless–good taste. Together these formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .89$; $M = 4.21$, $SD = 2.35$).

Perceived influence. The impact that political satire may have in the perception of viewers was measured with four items: how much (a) do you think others will be influenced by this video (b) were you incited to think by the video, (c) were you convinced by the video, (d) were you helped by the video in forming an opinion. The mean value of these four items was calculated to create an overall measurement of perceived influence ($\alpha = .77$; $M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.97$).

Study 2

Sample

The second experiment relied on a convenience sample that was recruited in the period May 19–June 8, 2017.³⁵ Participants were recruited via the (online) social network of principal investigator (Joy Schouten; 40%), via Facebook ads (34%) and online political discussion or survey groups (7%); 19% did not indicate their method of recruitment. The final sample consisted of 122 people with an average age of 30.77 ($SD = 12.51$) and 52.5% who were female.

Design and Stimuli

Participants in this experiment were *not* randomly allocated to conditions, but could choose themselves which of three television programs they preferred to see. The three possibilities were: (a) *NOS Journaal*, which is the most popular newscast of the Netherlands; (b) *Zondag met Lubach*, which in 2017 was the most prominent satire show in the Netherlands with often more

than a million viewers; (c) *Tegenlicht*, which is a well-known serious documentary program. No further background information about the contents of the videos was given to respondents, just the titles of the programs. *Zondag met Lubach*, recently, gained international fame with its clip “The Netherlands welcomes Trump in his own words: The Netherlands second?” (over 26 million views on YouTube). It is a show comparable to *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*.

Without the forced exposure component, this study follows an original approach introduced by previous scholars who gave participants agency to choose their own stimuli.³⁶ Instead of analyzing the further outcome(s) of this exposure, this study is simply interested in the act of choosing stimuli.³⁷

Measurements

Education. Highest level of education was measured with a 0-to-5 scale ranging from lower secondary professional education to university education ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.16$).

Political ideology. The political preference was measured with a scale that asked to position themselves on an 11-point scale from -5 (*left*) to +5 (*right*). The sample was skewed towards the left ($M = -1.21$, $SD = 2.49$).

Political interest. How interested participants were in politics was tapped on a 7-point scale ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.36$).

Affinity for Political Humor. Participants’ level of Affinity for Political Humor was measured with eight items in this study. All items were tapped on 7-point disagree-agree Likert scales. The specific items were: I appreciate political humor, when (1) it makes me aware that our political system is dysfunctional, (2) it helps me make better sense of why our political system is dysfunctional [both: *incongruity*], or because (3) it can reveal the weaknesses of our political leaders and institutions, (4) it can make me feel more knowledgeable about politics, (5) it can aid

me in reinforcing my political beliefs [all three: *superiority*], (6) it can help me effectively criticize politics and politicians [*anxiety reduction*], (7) it can help me express my political opinions, and (8) it allows me to form stronger bonds with people who hold similar political views as my own [both: *social connectedness*].

All items loaded on one component in an exploratory factor analysis (Eigenvalue = 4.86; explained variance = 60.78%) and formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .91$). The AFPH scale was created by computing the mean of the eight items ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.17$).

Satire consumption. Instead of measuring the self-reported exposure to political satire shows as in Study 1, this study operationalized satire consumption by the choice participants made when asked which program they wanted to watch. Of all participants, 56.6% choose *Zondag met Lubach* (the satire program), 31.1% the newscast and 12.3% the documentary.

Results

The following sections present findings of analyses that examined (1) citizens' characteristics predicting AFPH scores, (2) AFPH's role in the consumption of political satire, and (3) the moderating role of AFPH when people are exposed to satire.

Who Has an Affinity for Political Humor?

Following up on the work of Hmielowski et al.,³⁸ the first study provided data to analyze which citizens have a stronger or weaker affinity for political humor. An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis with the AFPH scale as dependent variable tested which demographics and predispositions were significantly related to Affinity for Political Humor. Model 1 in Table 1 provides the results.

The findings are very much in line with those of Hmielowski et al.³⁹ Affinity for Political Humor (AFPH) only relates to few of the basic characteristics on which people normally are

identified. Neither age, education, political ideology, nor news consumption are significantly related to AFPH. Only marginally significant are the relationships with gender, political interest (positively) and political knowledge (negatively). The only factor that really seems to matter is internal political efficacy: Citizens who believe they have a relatively good understanding of political affairs tend to have a higher affinity for political humor. The standardized effect coefficient indicates a rather strong effect ($b^* = .30$).

Table 1. *OLS regression model predicting Affinity for Political Humor*

	Model 1: AFPH (d.v.)			
	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>b</i> [*]	<i>p</i>
Intercept	1.80	(0.22)		.000
Age	0.00	(0.00)	.05	.235
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	-0.13	(0.07)	-.07	.076
Education	0.00	(0.02)	.01	.860
Political ideology (left-right)	-0.02	(0.02)	-.05	.180
Political interest	0.05	(0.03)	.12	.079
Political knowledge	-0.03	(0.02)	-.09	.066
Internal political efficacy	0.14	(0.03)	.30	.000
News consumption	0.01	(0.01)	.04	.347
Affinity for Political Humor				
R^2				0.17
<i>n</i>				665

Note. Cells contain unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*) with standard errors (*S.E.*) in parentheses, standardized effect coefficients (b^*) and probabilities (*p*; two-tailed).

Affinity for Political Humor and the Consumption of Political Satire

AFPH's relationship with the consumption of political satire programs was first examined exploratory in Study 1 by predicting the self-reported exposure to several satire shows. Model 2 in Table 2 shows the findings. It found that—except for the positive effect of news consumption (those who consume more news, also watch more satire)—a range of demographic and political variables did not significantly predict satire consumption: Neither age, gender, education, ideology, interest, knowledge, or internal efficacy were significantly related to how often people watched satire shows. Affinity for Political Humor, however, positively predicted satire consumption. With every one-point increase on its seven-point scale, the frequency of watching satire shows increased with 0.32-points. Compared to a model without AFPH ($R^2 = .11$), the Affinity for Political Humor adds 2% to the explained variance in self-reported satire consumption.

Adding to the cross-sectional nature and the potential bias in self-reports of media exposure in Study 1,⁴⁰ Study 2 tested the effect of AFPH under controlled conditions on the preference for a satire show when participants had multiple media options they could choose from. Model 3 in Table 2 shows the power of AFPH to predict people's exposure to political satire. All independent variables were z-standardized; so, the odds ratios (O.R.) can be compared in terms of effect strength.

Table 2. Regression models (respectively, OLS and logistic) predicting exposure to political satire

	Model 2: Self-reported				Model 3: Self-selected			
	satire consumption (d.v.)				satire exposure (d.v.)			
	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>b</i> *	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>O.R.</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.50	(0.57)		.377	0.27	(0.20)	1.31	.182
Age	-0.01	(0.01)	-.04	.380	-0.58	(0.23)	0.56	.013
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	-0.28	(0.18)	-.06	.135	-0.29	(0.23)	0.75	.216
Education	0.00	(0.05)	.00	.950	-0.14	(0.22)	0.87	.543
Political ideology (left-right)	-0.05	(0.04)	-.05	.177	-0.38	(0.23)	0.68	.099
Political interest	-0.10	(0.07)	-.10	.148	0.39	(0.21)	1.47	.070
Political knowledge	0.06	(0.04)	.07	.155				
Internal political efficacy	0.14	(0.08)	.12	.099				
News consumption	0.15	(0.03)	.23	.000				
Affinity for Political Humor	0.32	(0.10)	.13	.001	0.65	(0.23)	1.91	.005
R^2	0.13							
<i>n</i>	665				120			

Note. Model 2: Cells contain unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*) with standard errors (*S.E.*) in parentheses, standardized effect coefficients (*b*^{*}) and probabilities (*p*; two-tailed). Model 3: All independent variables were z-standardized. Cells contain unstandardized coefficients (*b*) with standard errors (*SE*) in parentheses, odds ratios (*O.R.*) and probabilities (*p*).

A logistic regression predicted whether people selected the satire program (1) or not (0). The results are fairly similar to Study 1. Again most demographic and political variables were unrelated to satire consumption: gender, education, ideology and political interest had no

significant effect on the choice for political satire. Age, in this case, was a significant predictor: Younger people were more likely to choose the satire option (*Zondag met Lubach*). Affinity for Political Humor had the strongest effect on self-selected exposure to political satire. With every standard deviation increase on the AFPH scale, people were 1.91 times more likely to select the satire show instead of the newscast or documentary. Altogether, Study 1 as well as Study 2 thus found evidence in line with Hypothesis 1: Affinity for Political Humor positively affects the likelihood to expose oneself to political satire shows. Only Study 2 replicated the significant, negative relationship with age that Hmielowski et al. found.⁴¹

Affinity for Political Humor and the Consequences of Political Satire Consumption

Affinity for Political Humor may not only determine the selection of satirical content, it could also affect its appreciation. The following analyses shows whether AFPH influences (a) how much people enjoyed the (random) exposure to political satire and (b) how influential they perceived the satire to be. Accordingly, the analyses only include participants that actually were exposed to a satire clip; in total, eight conditions with 442 participants.

Results are presented in Table 3. Regarding the enjoyment of the satire clips, results of Model 4 show that on average male participants enjoyed these more than female participants. Age, education, ideology, interest, knowledge, efficacy and news consumption did not determine how much people liked the satire videos. Of the manipulated factors, only the nature of attack had a significant effect. People enjoyed the gentle satire videos more than the harsh ones. The provision of background information nor the topic had an effect. Affinity for Political Humor did indeed predict how much people enjoyed the political satire: With every 1-point increase on the AFPH scale, people enjoyed the satire 0.26-points more. This is in line with Hypothesis 2.

Compared to a regression model without AFPH, an additional 1% of variance is explained by this construct.

Table 3. OLS regression models predicting enjoyment of the satire clip that participants were exposed to

	Model 4: Enjoyment (d.v.)				Model 5: Enjoyment (d.v.)			
	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>b</i> [*]	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>b</i> [*]	<i>p</i>
Intercept	4.75	(0.79)		.000	4.06	(0.84)		.000
Age	-0.01	(0.01)	-.08	.149	-0.02	(0.01)	-.08	.132
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	-0.59	(0.25)	-.12	.017	-0.58	(0.24)	-.12	.017
Education	-0.06	(0.07)	-.04	.425	-0.06	(0.07)	-.05	.373
Political ideology (left-right)	-0.04	(0.05)	-.03	.489	-0.04	(0.05)	-.04	.405
Political interest	0.02	(0.09)	.02	.815	0.02	(0.09)	.02	.819
Political knowledge	-0.05	(0.06)	-.05	.390	-0.04	(0.06)	-.04	.504
Internal political efficacy	0.13	(0.12)	.10	.278	0.12	(0.12)	.10	.281
News consumption	0.00	(0.04)	.00	.998	0.00	(0.04)	.00	.985
Nature of attack: gentle vs. harsh	-0.50	(0.24)	-.10	.036	1.11	(0.70)	.22	.111
Background information: no vs. yes	-0.14	(0.24)	-.03	.567	-0.16	(0.24)	-.03	.508
Topic: policy vs. personal	-0.06	(0.24)	-.01	.809	-0.06	(0.24)	-.01	.815
Affinity for Political Humor	0.26	(0.13)	.10	.044	0.52	(0.17)	.21	.002
AFPH × Nature of attack					-0.58	(0.24)	-.36	.014
<i>R</i> ²	0.06				0.07			

Note. Cells contain unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*) with standard errors (*S.E.*) in parentheses, standardized effect coefficients (*b*^{*}) and probabilities (*p*; two-tailed).

Model 5 examined whether the effect of AFPH on enjoyment was conditional on the type of satire that was presented. The interaction effect between AFPH and nature of attack yielded a significant negative effect. To ease interpretation, Figure 1 visualized this interaction effect. It shows that people with a stronger affinity for political humor tended to enjoy the satire more, but *only* in case they saw the gentle satire clip. Enjoyment of the harsh satire item was independent of people's level of AFPH.

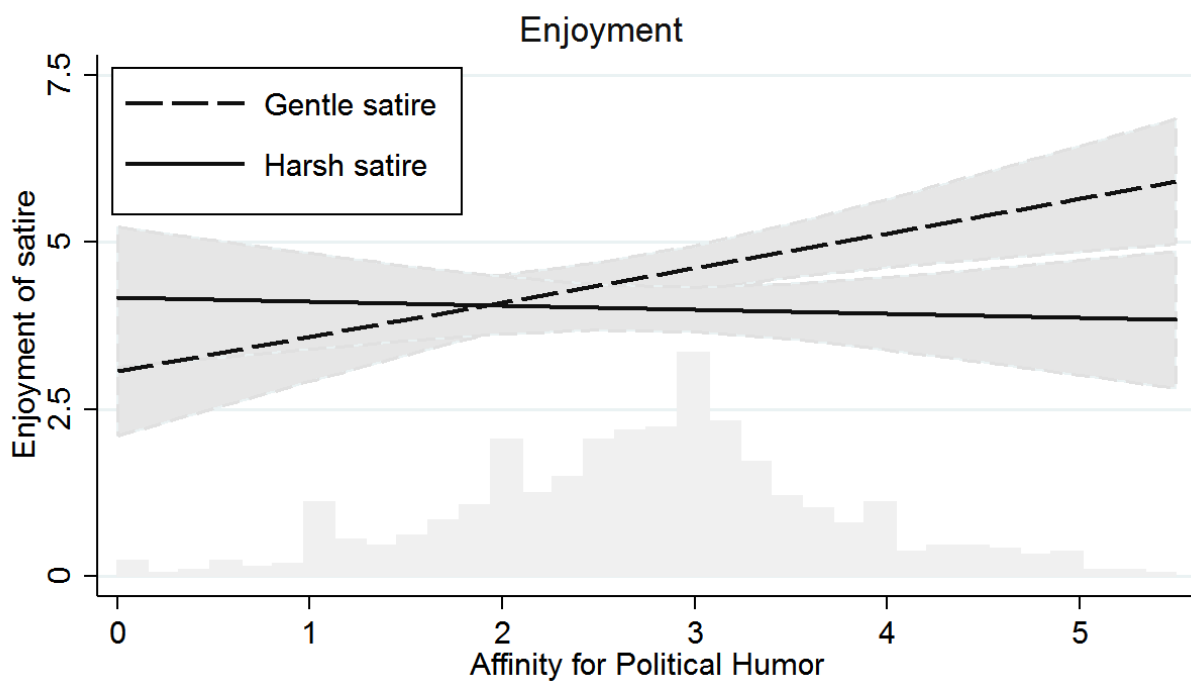


Figure 1. The predicted enjoyment for increasing levels of AFPH while being exposed to either the gentle or the harsh satire clip with their 95% confidence interval (at the mean values of other independent and control variables). Bars on bottom show distribution of participants on the independent variable AFPH.

Model 6 in Table 4 shows the results of the OLS regression predicting how strongly people perceived the influence of exposure to the political satire videos. Of the demographics and political variables, only political interest (positively) and political knowledge (negatively) had an effect on the perceived influence. Neither the nature of attack nor the background information that was provided (or not) influenced how strongly people believed that satire could have an

effect. The topic of the video, by contrast, had a significant impact: People perceived the satire clip about policy (budget cuts on public broadcaster) as being more influential than the personal satire about PM Rutte.

In line with Hypothesis 3, people who scored higher on AFPH perceived a stronger influence of the satire clips. With each 1-point increase on AFPH, the perceived influence of the satire video that a participant saw increased with 0.37 points. AFPH, thereby, added 3% of additional explained variance compared to a model without AFPH. Model 7 shows that this effect was not conditional on people's level of AFPH.

Table 4. *OLS regression models predicting perceived influence of the satire clips*

	Model 6: Perceived Influence (d.v.)				Model 7: Perceived Influence (d.v.)			
	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>b</i> [*]	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>b</i> [*]	<i>p</i>
Intercept	3.08	(0.60)		.000	2.94	(0.64)		.000
Age	-0.01	(0.01)	-.04	.492	-0.01	(0.01)	-.04	.483
Gender (0 = male; 1 = female)	-0.04	(0.19)	-.01	.811	-0.04	(0.19)	-.01	.814
Education	-0.09	(0.05)	-.08	.102	-0.09	(0.05)	-.08	.098
Political ideology (left-right)	-0.03	(0.04)	-.03	.482	-0.03	(0.04)	-.04	.460
Political interest	0.18	(0.07)	.22	.013	0.18	(0.07)	.22	.013
Political knowledge	-0.13	(0.04)	-.18	.003	-0.13	(0.04)	-.17	.003
Internal political efficacy	0.00	(0.09)	.00	.965	0.00	(0.09)	.00	.962
News consumption	0.02	(0.03)	.04	.466	0.02	(0.03)	.04	.463
Nature of attack: gentle vs. harsh	-0.16	(0.18)	-.04	.382	0.18	(0.53)	.05	.740
Background information: no vs. yes	0.01	(0.18)	.00	.943	0.01	(0.18)	.00	.962
Topic: policy vs. personal	-0.61	(0.18)	-.16	.001	-0.61	(0.18)	-.16	.001
Affinity for Political Humor	0.37	(0.10)	.19	.000	0.42	(0.13)	.21	.001
AFPH × Nature of attack					-0.12	(0.18)	-.09	.506
<i>R</i> ²		0.12				0.12		

Note. Cells contain unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*) with standard errors (*S.E.*) in parentheses, standardized effect coefficients (*b*^{*}) and probabilities (*p*; two-tailed).

Discussion

This chapter has investigated the use of the Affinity for Political Humor scale (AFPH) for research on political satire. First being introduced by Hmielowski et al. (2011) and Holbert et al. (2013), the scale has still rarely been applied in empirical studies on this topic. That is unfortunate, because the current study shows that AFPH is a strong predictor both for the consumption of political satire but also for how the effects of satire may eventually play out. In statistical models that control for a range of different demographic and political variables, AFPH was the only consistent factor predicting the consumption of satire, its enjoyment, and perceived influence. Altogether, Figure 2 illustrates the different functions AFPH could take up in research on political satire: It should both (a) positively predict the consumption of political satire and (b) moderate potential effects of satire consumption.

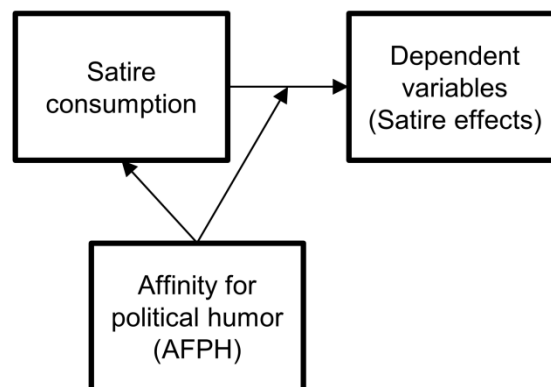


Figure 2. The dual role AFPH could play in research on political satire.

The first study showed that AFPH is a construct rather unrelated to most variables that are normally employed in political communication research. This means that people's affinity for political humor is an independent factor that could be taken into consideration by scholars

interested in the consumption of political satire, besides the traditional variables used in such research. Only internal political efficacy predicts AFPH, but not strongly enough to function as a proxy for this factor. Any model that lacks AFPH as an independent variable could suffer from omitted variable bias and, consequently, be unnecessarily imprecise.

The second study confirmed cross-sectional results of Study 1 that AFPH functions as a significant predictor of satire consumption. Besides age (i.e., younger people tended to prefer satire), AFPH was a driving force behind the selection of satire shows vis-à-vis a newscast or documentary. This finding not only confirms the validity of the AFPH scale, it also shows the added value of including AFPH in studies on the exposure to political satire. Having studied AFPH in general, future research is needed to disentangle which specific dimensions of Affinity for Political Humor are decisive in causing a preference for political satire. As suggested by Holbert et al. (2013), this could be done by tapping all the 11 items of the AFPH-scale and including the different dimensions as separate factors in one's analysis. Employing condensed scales of, respectively, six or eight of the original items, the current work was unable to do so.

Finally, this chapter has shown that the effects of exposure to political satire are conditional on people's AFPH. People who were exposed to political satire perceived the satire clips as having a stronger perceived influence when they had a higher level of Affinity for Political Humor. This may be explained by the nature of this construct as it taps into individuals' appreciation of satire to reveal weaknesses, point out incongruities, reducing anxiety or ease social interactions. Additionally, the study showed that people enjoyed the satire more when they had a stronger AFPH. Previous research has shown that this may have consequences for the effects satire has on, for example, its persuasiveness.⁴² Adding nuance to this finding, the experiment showed that this boost in enjoyment was only the case for gentle forms of political satire. When the satire was harsh—including references to violence or a sex scandal—the

enjoyment was unrelated to viewers' level of AFPH. High AFPH people, thus, seem to particularly enjoy more gentle and benign forms of satire.

Altogether, this chapter demonstrates the usefulness of Affinity for Political Humor as a construct for research on political satire. Much more than only using it as a control variable,⁴³ AFPH could help scholars to better understand the motivations to watch political satire and the effects it has on different groups in the society.

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- ⁴⁰ See: Prior, Markus. 2009. "The Immensely Inflated News Audience: Assessing Bias in Self-Reported News Exposure." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73 (1): 130-143.
- ⁴¹ Hmielowski et al. "Predicting the Consumption of Political TV Satire."
- ⁴² Boukes et al. "At Odds: Laughing and Thinking?"; LaMarre, Heather L. and Whitney Walther. 2013. "Ability Matters: Testing the Differential Effects of Political News and Late-Night Political Comedy on Cognitive Responses and the Role of Ability in Micro-Level Opinion Formation." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 25 (3): 303-322; Nabi et al. "All Joking Aside.
- ⁴³ For example: Chen, Hsuan-Ting, Chen Gan, and Ping Sun. 2017. "How does Political Satire Influence Political Participation? Examining the Role of Counter-and Pro-Attitudinal Exposure, Anger, and Personal Issue Importance." *International Journal of Communication* 11: 3011-3029.