Pre-analysis Plan for "The Influence of Anger in Political Discussion Networks"

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December 29, 2021

Abstract

How do emotional expressions affect persuasion in interpersonal political conversations? Here, we consider the ways in which different emotional discussion tones – an angry vs. an unemotional tone – affect individual support for policies. In an online survey experiment, participants read a script of an interaction between two friends of the same party as the respondent discussing a policy proposal. We vary if one friend expresses anger, or not, about the policy proposal. We argue that individuals exposed to angry appeals about a proposed bill will express lower levels of support for the bill than those exposed to unemotional appeals about a proposed bill. Our findings speak to various literatures including peer influence as well as the social influence of emotional speech.

Key words: Interpersonal discussion, Persuasion, Anger, Emotion, Experiments.

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1 Introduction

The population of the United States of America has become increasingly polarized in recent years (Mason 2015). Angry public rhetoric is common from both elected political officials (De Castella and McGarty 2011; Erisen and Villalobos 2014) as well as the political media which reports on them (Smith and Searles 2014). Despite its prevalence in American politics, little is known about how this approach to discussing political issues, candidates and elected officials influences individuals in the pubic.

Historically, political science research has studied emotions from an intrapersonal perspective where the focus has been on how feeling different emotions influences the person who feels them. This approach greatly expanded our knowledge of the importance of emotions in the political world. For instance, feeling positive emotions like enthusiasm limits information processing as individuals feels less need to pay attention to the world around them and are free to rely on their prior habits and beliefs (Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000). Anxiety, on the other hand, can slow individuals down to focus their attention on gathering new information (MacKuen et al. 2010; Valentino et al. 2008). Finally, anger increases individuals' desire to take action (Lerner and Tiedens 2006) as well as increasing their partisan bias (MacKuen et al. 2010).

However, this intrapersonal approach to studying emotions is not the only way that feeling emotions can be influential. When individuals feel emotions, they generally will display them in some way for other individuals to observe (Van Kleef 2016) and seeing these emotional reactions in others can influence how observers feel (Sullivan and Masters 1988) and their likely actions (Bucy and Grabe 2008). This lack of attention to the interpersonal effect of emotional displays has left a void in our understanding of how individuals process and respond to emotional rhetoric coming from other people. Humans are evolutionarily designed to recognize and respond to emotional expressions in other individuals (Keltner and Lerner 2010). Emotional recognition evolved as a way for observers of emotional expressions to quickly assess how others are feeling and their likely behavioral intentions (Keltner and Gross 1999). Emotional expressions are associated with specific behavioral intentions with anger indicating approach and aggression, fear/anxiety indicating flight

or submission and happiness indicating social bonding (Bucy and Grabe 2008). By understanding the likely behavioral intentions of emotional expressions, observers of the emotion can better adapt their own behavior to ensure maximum probability of survival (Keltner and Lerner 2010).

Recent work in social psychology has begun to study the importance of observing different emotional reactions. For instance, work done on the role of emotional displays by leaders in small business groups shows an effect on the observers of the emotion. When a group leader displays positive emotions like enthusiasm and pride, the group responds with more positive emotions and increased belief about their likelihood of success (Sy, Côté and Saavedra 2005). Angry displays by group leaders can motivate the group to work harder as they infer that their performance has been underwhelming and they attempt to correct it (Van Kleef 2009). Similar findings occur when studying negotiation tactics with displaying happiness leading to less concessions by the observer of the emotion but anger leading the observer of the emotion to offer more concessions (Van Kleef, De Dreu and Manstead 2004).

These findings built off work from the late 1980s in social psychology. Lanzetta and Englis (1989) showed that a key factor in how individuals respond to emotional displays is influenced by if the observer is in competition or cooperation mode with the emotional expresser. When individuals are in cooperation mode, they are more likely to respond to emotional displays with simple emotional contagion effects as they take on the emotions of the other person. However, when individuals are in a competitive setting, their reaction to emotional displays fundamentally changes. No longer is the response based on empathy and emotional contagion but now is based on the signal that the observer receives from the emotional emitter. This finding on the differential effects of emotional observance is important as it highlights that the relationship between the emotional expresser and the observer will change how they respond (Lanzetta and Englis 1989).

This work in social psychology has established that observing emotions in other people can influence how the observer responds to and learns new information. However, their focus has not been on the political world, and this current research represents a step towards incorporating the work by these social psychologists into the political arena. With these theoretical ideas in

mind, this research study is important. Primarily, it can help establish if the angry displays in political discussion networks have a different influence on others than an unemotional one. With the constant negativity in American politics including negative campaign advertisements (Geer 2012), incivility on the internet (Gervais 2015), outrage culture (Sobieraj and Berry 2011), and direct anger in political speeches (Erisen and Villalobos 2014), it is important for us to understand how individuals respond to emotional language, specifically anger with its ability to incite action (Lerner and Tiedens 2006).

2   Study Design

Our main research question is: how does anger in interpersonal discussions among co-partisans affect persuasion? Using an online survey experiment, we vary the tone of a conversation among friends about a hypothetical bill on voting rights, and measure the effect on support for the bill. The full design and instrument can be found in the appendix.

2.1   Hypotheses

We argue that expressions of anger regarding a policy in interpersonal discussion networks will drive reactions to those policies. Because anger is a motivating emotion, we expect that exposure to angry language regarding a policy will be more persuasive among co-partisans as compared to unemotional language. Exposure to unemotional discussion regarding a policy will result in lower levels of support for the bill as compared to those who are not exposed to any discussion about the policy.

- Respondents in the unemotional treatment condition will express lower support for the proposed bill than those in the control condition.

- Respondents in the angry treatment condition will express lower support for the proposed bill than both those in the unemotional condition and the control condition.

3

In addition to these main expectations, we will conduct exploratory analyses for hetergeneous effects based on other pre-treatment covariates. For example, how does anger shift support for the proposed bill among people who expressed doubt about the winner of the 2020 presidential election? While our main theory does not focus on these effects, these subgroup analyses may yield interesting findings.

2.1.1 Sample

The study population is adults 18 years of age and older living in the United States. No vulnerable populations will be included in this study. We will recruit a sample of 1500 participants in this study. I arrived at this sample size by conducting a power analysis to detect a small effect across the five treatment groups.[1] The Lucid Marketplace, and specifically the Lucid Theorem tool, allows researchers to collect a nationally-representative sample balanced on age, gender, ethnicity, and region for $1.00 per complete. While we are responsible for designing the survey (instrument included here), Lucid will recruit the participants. Their sample is adults 18 years of age within the United States. Data collection will occur in December 2021.

2.2 Intervention

Figure 1 displays the experimental design and process. All of the respondents read text about a proposed bill on voting rights. Participants are then randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a control condition whereby the proposed bill is the only information provided; an angry condition, whereby respondents read a conversation between two friends where one friend speaks angrily about the bill; and an unemotional condition whereby respondents read a conversation between two friends where one friend expresses disapproval about the bill, but with a neutral emotional tone.

Within both the angry and unemotional conditions, partisans (as measured in the pre-test) will

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[1]The control condition will have approximately 300 participants, which is the smallest group of the three conditions. This sample size can detect an effect size of f=0.11 based on a one-way analysis of variance test.

Figure 1: Schematic of the Experimental Design

read a conversation among co-partisans. For example, if a respondent identifies as a Democrat in the pre-test and is randomly selected to receive the angry treatment, they will read a conversation about the bill where one Democratic friend expressed anger about the proposed bill. Respondents who identify as true independents in the pre-test will be randomly assigned whether they read a conversation among Democrats or Republicans. The full survey instrument can be found in the appendix.

3 Conclusion

The findings from this experiment contribute to the literatures on peer influence as well as the social influence of emotional speech. While much is known about the intrapersonal effects of emotion on political views, and how emotional appeals from elites affect individuals' views, much less is known about how emotional expressions in interpersonal discussion affects political views. Here, we advance our understanding on those effects.

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Introduction

This study is about understanding how people think about politics. During this study, you will read and answer survey questions.

This survey should take about 10 minutes. We do not know of any personal risk or discomfort you will have from being in this study. There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study. Your results are anonymous. We will not have your name. By completing the survey below, you are indicating that you agree to participate in this research. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may discontinue your participation at any time. This study is being conducted by Christina Ladam, a researcher at the University of Nevada, Mailstop 0302, 1664 N. Virginia St., Reno, NV, 89557. Christina can be reached by email at cladam@unr.edu. You may also use this contact if you are interested in knowing more about the results of this survey.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Human Research Committee. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them - confidentially, if you wish - to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You can reach the IRB by phone at (775) 327-2368.

Party ID

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?

- ○ Democrat
- ○ Republican
- ○ Independent
- ○ Something else

Would you consider yourself a STRONG Democrat, or a NOT VERY STRONG Democrat

- ○ Strong Democrat
- ○ Not very strong Democrat

Would you consider yourself a STRONG Republican, or a NOT VERY STRONG Republican

○ Strong Republican
○ Not very strong Republican

Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic Party or to the Republican Party?

○ Closer to the Democratic Party
○ Closer to the Republican Party
○ Not closer to either party

Political Trust

How much of the time do you trust the federal government to act in the people's best interest?

○ All of the time
○ Most of the time
○ Some of the time
○ Rarely
○ Never

Questions about 2020 election

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Voter ID laws are necessary to prevent voter fraud	○	○	○	○	○
Mail-in voting does not lead to greater voter fraud	○	○	○	○	○
The 2020 presidential election was conducted fairly	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have doubts about who really won the 2020 presidential election	○	○	○	○	○

Attention Check

Please select your two favorite animals. Rather than selecting the animals that are your favorite, please select armadillos and snakes.

- ☐ Dogs
- ☐ Cats
- ☐ Rabbits
- ☐ Snakes
- ☐ Hamsters
- ☐ Armadillos

Political Interest

In general, how interested are you in what's going on in politics and public affairs?

- ○ Very Interested
- ○ Interested
- ○ Somewhat Interested
- ○ Not Very Interested
- ○ Not At All Interested

Unemo Rep for Ind

Now, we'd like for you to read a brief transcript of a conversation between two friends with similar political views. They are discussing a newly proposed election bill being debated in a Midwestern state legislature. So you have a general sense of the election bill being discussed by the friends, below is a short description of the bill and what each political party likes about it.

Elections Upgrade Act of 2022

Recently, a bill was introduced by a bipartisan group of legislators in a Midwestern state called the Election Upgrades Act of 2022. This bill was the result of negotiations between 5 Republicans and 5 Democrats in the State legislature. The Republican group members said they support the bill because it tightens the rules on who qualifies to vote by mail while increasing voter ID requirements for most voters. The Democratic group members said they support the bill because it expands the time allowed for early voting and gives financial support to people who cannot afford to get an ID card required by the new bill.

Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Republicans.

A.J.:
Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:
Really? Well, I have. I don't like this bill and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:
What's wrong with it?

Pat:
I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. They are still talking about the 2020 election like there wasn't voter fraud. It happened. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on mail-in voting. They made it easier to vote by mail, which we all know will lead to more fraud.

A.J.:
Okay, so you don't like that this bill doesn't acknowledge voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it easier to vote by mail in upcoming elections. Is there anything else in the bill that you don't agree with?

Pat:
Those were the only specific things I remember not agreeing with. But I will say I disagree

with the bill in general. I mean they did all this work, but they aren't solving the real election problems.

Unemo Dem for Ind

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Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Democrats.

A.J.:
Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:
Really? Well, I have. I don't like this bill and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:
What do you think is wrong with it?

Pat:
I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. They are still talking about the 2020 election like there was voter fraud. It never happened. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on

mail-in voting. They made it harder to vote by mail, which we all know doesn't lead to more voter fraud.

A.J.:

Okay, so you don't like that this bill acknowledges voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it harder to vote by mail in upcoming elections. Is there anything else in the bill that you don't agree with?

Pat:

Those were the only specific things I remember not agreeing with. But I will say I disagree with the bill in general. I mean they did all this work, but they aren't solving the real election problems.

Unemotional Condition

Now, we'd like for you to read a brief transcript of a conversation between two friends with similar political views. They are discussing a newly proposed election bill being debated in a Midwestern state legislature. So you have a general sense of the election bill being discussed by the friends, below is a short description of the bill and what each political party likes about it.

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Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Democrats.

A.J.:

Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:

Really? Well, I have. I don't like this bill and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:

What do you think is wrong with it?

Pat:

I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. They are still talking about the 2020 election like there was voter fraud. It never happened. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on mail-in voting. They made it harder to vote by mail, which we all know doesn't lead to more voter fraud.

A.J.:

Okay, so you don't like that this bill acknowledges voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it harder to vote by mail in upcoming elections. Is there anything else in the bill that you don't agree with?

Pat:

Those were the only specific things I remember not agreeing with. But I will say I disagree with the bill in general. I mean they did all this work, but they aren't solving the real election problems.

Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Republicans.

A.J.:

Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:

Really? Well, I have. I don't like this bill and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:

What's wrong with it?

Pat:

I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. They are still talking about the 2020 election like there wasn't voter fraud. It happened. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also

changed the rules on mail-in voting. They made it easier to vote by mail, which we all know will lead to more fraud.

A.J.:
Okay, so you don't like that this bill doesn't acknowledge voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it easier to vote by mail in upcoming elections. Is there anything else in the bill that you don't agree with?

Pat:
Those were the only specific things I remember not agreeing with. But I will say I disagree with the bill in general. I mean they did all this work, but they aren't solving the real election problems.

Angry Dem for Ind

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Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Democrats.

A.J.:
Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:

Really? Well, I have. This bill makes me angry and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:

What makes you angry about it?

Pat:

I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. I'm furious that they are still talking about the 2020 election like there was voter fraud. It's ridiculous. It didn't happen. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on mail-in voting, which is outrageous. They made it harder to vote by mail, which we all know doesn't lead to more voter fraud – it makes me so mad that people don't see that.

A.J.:

Okay, so you're mad this bill says there was voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it harder to vote by mail in upcoming elections. What else ticks you off about it?

Pat:

Those were the only specific things I remember making me angry. But I will say the whole thing is infuriating. I mean they did all this work, and they just wasted time. They aren't solving the real election problems.

Angry Rep for Ind

Now, we'd like for you to read a brief transcript of a conversation between two friends with similar political views. They are discussing a newly proposed election bill being debated in a Midwestern state legislature. So you have a general sense of the election bill being discussed by the friends, below is a short description of the bill and what each political party likes about it.

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said they support the bill because it expands the time allowed for early voting and gives financial support to people who cannot afford to get an ID card required by the new bill.

Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Republicans.

A.J.:
Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:
Really? Well, I have. This bill makes me angry, and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:
What makes you angry about it?

Pat:
I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. I'm furious that they are still talking about the 2020 election like there wasn't voter fraud. It's ridiculous. It happened. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on mail-in voting, which is outrageous. They made it easier to vote by mail, which we all know will lead to more fraud – it makes me so mad that people don't see that.

A.J.:
Okay, so you're mad this bill doesn't acknowledge voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it easier to vote by mail in upcoming elections. What else ticks you off about it?

Pat:
Those were the only specific things I remember making me angry. But I will say the whole thing is infuriating. I mean they did all this work, and they just wasted time. They aren't solving the real election problems.

Angry Condition

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Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Democrats.

A.J.:
Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:
Really? Well, I have. This bill makes me angry and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:
What makes you angry about it?

Pat:
I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. I'm furious that they are still talking about the 2020 election like there was voter fraud. It's ridiculous. It didn't happen. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on mail-in voting, which is outrageous. They made it harder to vote by mail, which we all know doesn't lead to more voter fraud – it makes me so mad that people don't see that.

A.J.:
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Pat:

Those were the only specific things I remember making me angry. But I will say the whole thing is infuriating. I mean they did all this work, and they just wasted time. They aren't solving the real election problems.

Now, please take a moment to read the following conversation between two friends who both happen to be Republicans.

A.J.:

Have you heard about this new election law bill? I haven't heard much about it. I mean I think I saw some headline on Facebook about it but didn't click on it so not sure what's in it.

Pat:

Really? Well, I have. This bill makes me angry, and I don't think it should be passed.

A.J.:

What makes you angry about it?

Pat:

I read a few articles about it and have multiple problems. I'm furious that they are still talking about the 2020 election like there wasn't voter fraud. It's ridiculous. It happened. And let's see. Oh yeah, they also changed the rules on mail-in voting, which is outrageous. They made it easier to vote by mail, which we all know will lead to more fraud – it makes me so mad that people don't see that.

A.J.:

Okay, so you're mad this bill doesn't acknowledge voter fraud in 2020 and that it would make it easier to vote by mail in upcoming elections. What else ticks you off about it?

Pat:

Those were the only specific things I remember making me angry. But I will say the whole thing is infuriating. I mean they did all this work, and they just wasted time. They aren't solving the real election problems.

Control Condition

Now, we'd like for you to read a short description of a newly proposed election security and rights bill being debated in a Midwestern state then answer a few questions about it.

Elections Upgrade Act of 2022

Recently, a bill was introduced by a bipartisan group of legislators in a Midwestern state called the Election Upgrades Act of 2022. This bill was the result of negotiations between 5 Republicans and 5 Democrats in the State legislature. The Republican group members said they support the bill because it tightens the rules on who qualifies to vote by mail while increasing voter ID requirements for most voters. The Democratic group members said they support the bill because it expands the time allowed for early voting and gives financial support to people who cannot afford to get an ID card required by the new bill.

What was the name of the bill you just read about?

○ Elections Upgrade Bill
○ Environmental Policy Bill
○ Balanced Budget Bill
○ Concealed Carry Gun Permitting Bill

Manipulation Check

Now, we'd like to ask you a few questions about the discussion you just read. What political party did the friends belong to?

○ Democratic Party
○ Republican Party
○ Neither political party

What bill were the friends discussing?

○ Elections Upgrade Bill
○ Environmental Policy Bill
○ Balanced Budget Bill
○ Concealed Carry Gun Permitting Bill

Thinking about the two friends, please rate how much you think they each displayed each of the following emotions.

How much did A.J. display these emotions?

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
Anger	○	○	○	○	○
Hope	○	○	○	○	○
Pride	○	○	○	○	○
Anxiety	○	○	○	○	○

How much did Pat display these emotions?

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
Anger	○	○	○	○	○
Hope	○	○	○	○	○
Pride	○	○	○	○	○
Anxiety	○	○	○	○	○

Post-Test

Thinking about the Election Upgrades Act of 2022 you just read about, how much do you favor or oppose this proposed bill?

Strongly Oppose								Strongly Support	
0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

[   ]

Thinking about the friends having the conversation you just read about, how much do you like or dislike…

Dislike a lot								Like a lot	
0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

A.J. [   ]

Pat [   ]

Now thinking about each of the friends and their conversation, which of the following do you think describes their comments?

How well does each of the following describe A.J.'s comments?

	Not at all										Extremely		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Well-informed													☐
Persuasive													☐
Reliable													☐
Appropriate													☐

How well does each of the following describe Pat's comments?

	Not at all										Extremely		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Reliable													☐
Appropriate													☐
Well-informed													☐
Persuasive													☐

Which of the following personality traits do you think describe A.J. and Pat? Please select all that you think apply for each person.

	A.J.	Pat
Honest	☐	☐
Cynical	☐	☐
Intelligent	☐	☐
Confused	☐	☐
Aggressive	☐	☐
Strong Leader	☐	☐
Uncivil	☐	☐
Rude	☐	☐
Cruel	☐	☐

	A.J.	Pat
Sincere	☐	☐
Trustworthy	☐	☐
Passionate	☐	☐

Thinking about this election bill, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the process the legislators used to develop the bill?

Extremely dissatisfied										Extremely satisfied	
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

[   ]

If the Elections Upgrade Act of 2022 were to pass, which of the following do you think would be the most likely outcome?

○ It would ensure that non-eligible voters cannot vote in elections
○ It would make it more difficult for eligible voters to legally cast their ballot

Which of the following do you think were goals of the legislators who wrote the Elections Upgrade Act of 2022? Please select all that apply.

☐ Prevent voter fraud
☐ Help themselves get reelected in the future
☐ Give voters options in how they cast their ballot
☐ Make it harder for minority group members to vote
☐ Make it easier for their supporters to vote
☐ Ensure all legal voters can cast a ballot in the future
☐ Make it easier for illegal immigrants to vote
☐ Make voting more accessible for all people
☐ Make it harder for their opponents to vote
☐ Something else

Thinking about the Elections Upgrades Act of 2022 only, how much do you feel the following?

A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
Angry	○	○	○	○	○
Proud	○	○	○	○	○
Hopeful	○	○	○	○	○
Anxious	○	○	○	○	○

Thinking about the Democratic Party only, how often do you feel the following?

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
Angry	○	○	○	○	○
Hopeful	○	○	○	○	○
Anxious	○	○	○	○	○
Proud	○	○	○	○	○

Thinking about the Republican Party only, how often do you feel the following?

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	None at all
Angry	○	○	○	○	○
Proud	○	○	○	○	○
Anxious	○	○	○	○	○
Hopeful	○	○	○	○	○

End of Survey

Thank you for participating in our survey! Your participation was part of a survey experiment designed to study how anger affects persuasion in political discussion. The bill you read, although intended to mimic actual bills, was written by the investigator, Christina Ladam. Though this bill was based on real proposals, it was entirely fictional.

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