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Negeen Amirieh

Chapman University, amiri102@mail.chapman.edu

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The Angry Electorate - Affect and Voter Decision Making

Negeen Amirieh

Department of Political Science, Chapman University; Orange, California

Introduction to Research

Affect is a universal and powerful phenomenon, yet research on human affectivity has been neglected until quite recently. Anger is a type of affect that is not well focused on, but should be because of its huge effect in vote choice. The present review explores research that affect specifically anger towards a party and the media takes an enormous toll on voting choice and behavior.

Affect, Cognition and News Media

◆ Affect

•Affect is defined as the experience of feeling and emotion.

•Usually, "being emotional" is seen as being dysfunctional, which often results in regretted decisions or actions, but certain kinds of affective experiences like feeling angry towards a candidate can actually be helpful (Rahn, 1993).

◆ Cognition

•Emotion systems are easily conditioned and resist revision, so it makes the recording of emotional memories essentially permanent.

•Most of the effect of emotions is unconscious and overall in constant interaction between emotion and cognition, but emotion dominates. (Lau, Redlawsk, 2001).

◆ News media

•Although there is not a definitive model of voting process, it is evident that voters have a strong psychological basis for voting decisions.

•News media has been found to have "massive" influence over public opinion and those who follow the news during the presidential campaign have different perceptions and vastly different voting preferences (Bartels, 1993).

References

- Bartels, L. M. (1993). Messages received: The political impact of media exposure. *American Political Science Review*, 87 (2), 267-285.
- Civettini, A. W., & Redlawsk, D. P. (2009). Voters, Emotions, and Memory. *Political Psychology*, 30(1), 125-151. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00683.x
- Lau, R. R., & Redlawsk, D. P. (2001). An experimental study of information search, memory, and decision making during a political campaign. In J. Kuklinski (Ed.), *Political psychology and public opinion* (pp. 136-159). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rahn, W. M. (1993). The role of partisan stereotypes in information processing about political candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37 (2), 472-496.

Hypotheses:

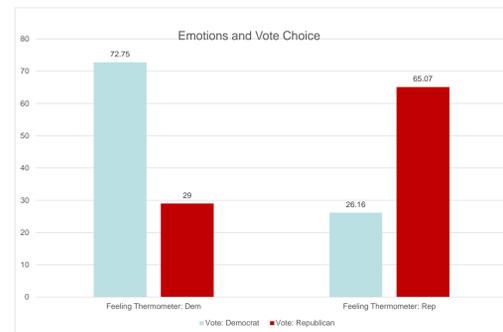
H 1: The colder a voter is towards a party, the more likely he or she will vote in the election.

H 2: The more attention people pay to campaigns, the angrier they will become.

H 3: Voters who distrust the media will rely more on their party identification to make voting decisions.

Data

H 1: Emotions and Vote Choice



H 2: Emotions and the Democratic and Republican Parties

Model	Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients	Significance
(Constant)	55.53		.0
Interested in following campaigns standard	-0.689	-0.016	0.205

*R square for the model is .0

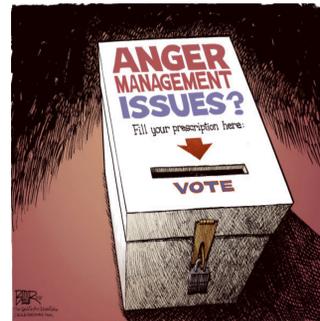
Model	Coefficients (B)	Standardized Coefficients	Significance
(Constant)	42.605		0
Interested in following campaigns standard	-0.633	-0.016	0.219

*R square for the model is .0

H3: Party ID and Attention to TV news

Model	Coefficient (B)	Standardized Coefficients	Significance
(Constant)	2.598		.0
Party ID	0.05	0.198	.0
Attention to TV news	-0.011	-2.025	.043

*Significant at <.05
R square for the model is .041



Findings

H 1: Emotions and Vote Choice

The results showed that 26% of Democrats favored the Republican party while an overriding 72.75% of Democrats favored their own party. Additionally, Republicans favored the Democratic party a little more with 29% and had strong favoritism of their own party at 65%, but still do not have as strong of a partisanship as Democrats have for themselves.

H 2: Emotions and Parties

Unfortunately, my hypothesis was proved to be false and insignificant because the R Square for both parties was 0%. Even though studies like Andrew J.W. Civettini and David P. Redlawsk's "Voters, Emotions, and Memories," have shown the strength in feelings and memory, there is no specific statistical significance that proves that people who pay more attention to the information provided in campaign feel angrier than people who do not pay as much attention.

H 3: Party ID and Attention to News Media

Democrats and Republicans, who pay more attention to news media, distrust the government more than Democrats and Republicans who do not focus on the media. I also ran regression tests on one independent variable at a time, on trust in government and media separately from trust in government and party identification. By doing this, it proved that party identification had more of an impact on trust in government because it was statistically significant at .000 whereas media was only significant at .043.

Conclusions

Anger is an affect that can strongly effect a voter's actions and should be taken into serious consideration in future research. It was shown that the greater the level of anger a voter had towards a candidate, the more likely he or she would vote in the election, the significance of party identification in regards to strong distrust towards the news media, and that people remember information that generate any affective reaction as opposed to the subject reporting no emotional response. In the future, more affects should closely be dissected and tested as well as compared to one another. Additionally in future experimentation, more variables should be tested in relation to affect and voting, like age and gender. These significant findings open up more room for new research to help further support these hypotheses in relation to the affect of anger and voting decision-making.