

How Anticipated Emotion Drives Voter Turnout

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Does how we think we will feel if one of the presidential candidates wins or loses an election determine how likely we are to vote for a presidential candidate? We propose that one's future, anticipated emotions regarding an election result can have an important motivational influence on voter turnout, and suggest including questions to assess this in the 2016 American National Election Time Series Study.

Recent studies have shifted the view from thinking about emotions as irrational biases to emotions as fundamental determinants of political attitudes and actions (Glaser & Salovey, 1998; Isbell, 2012). Some research has examined the role that specific emotions experienced in the present moment (e.g., feelings of pride and fear) play in determining candidate choice. For example, emotions such as anger and enthusiasm prompt people to participate in political activities (Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, Hutchings, 2011). And, using data from the 2008 American National Election Studies, Finn and Glaser (2010) found that self-reported emotional responses to President Obama and Senator McCain (e.g., feelings of hope) predicted reported vote choice above and beyond party identification, ideology, and other predictors. All in all, emotions can shape whether, and how, we decide to become active politically. This is an interesting first step in exploring the role that emotions play in shaping voting behavior. However, despite this evidence for the relationship between emotions *felt in the moment* and voting behaviors, less is known about the impact of *how one thinks they are going to feel about the future*, i.e., affective forecasting (for a review, see Wilson & Gilbert, 2003) on voting behaviors.

Past research supports the idea that anticipated emotions – how happy or sad we imagine being if a candidate were to be elected – serve as a particularly important driver of political activity such as voter turnout. In fact, anticipated emotions may be even more powerful in motivating turnout than currently experienced emotions. When considering whether or not to vote, people may imagine how they would feel in response to election outcomes, drawing on past experiences with the thrill of victory or the disappointment of defeat. Feedback theory (Baumeister, Vohs, Dewall, & Zhang, 2007) proposes that emotions serve as lessons for future behavior. As the memory of emotion is evoked while people simulate future behavior, they recall these lessons, and emotion thus shapes their choice of behavior. Indeed, feedback theory directly suggests that “anticipated affect may be more important in guiding behavior than actual, felt emotion and affect” (Baumeister et al., 2007, p. 190).

The 2008 American National Election Time Series Study included questions assessing how happy or sad people thought they would feel if the Democratic and Republican candidates were to win the presidential election (see Measures below). Other research has used similar questions to investigate affective forecasting in election contexts. For instance, Scheibe, Mata, and Carstensen (2011) conducted a nationally representative survey and documented age differences in the accuracy of affective forecasting regarding the 2008 presidential election. In addition, Norris, Dumville, and Lacy (2011) found in a large study of college undergraduates that supporters of Senator McCain overestimated their negative affective responses when asked about the possible victory of President Obama, while supporters of President Obama underestimated their positive affective responses to Obama’s victory. As reflected in these studies, questions

about affective forecasting open fruitful avenues for possible research and could contribute to other lines of work. And while research has begun to examine affective forecasting in political domains, its behavioral consequences through voter turnout have yet to be examined.

In preliminary analyses, we used the 2008 ANES Time Series Study questions measuring affective forecasting to predict voter turnout, and found that the happier or sadder one thinks he or she will feel if a candidate is elected determined whether people took the time to cast a vote for that candidate (see Table 1). We ran a series of logistic regression models to test whether anticipated emotion about election outcomes predicted voter turnout for the candidates. We added in other affect-laden covariates such as experienced emotions and feeling thermometers progressively (in order to avoid the issue of collinearity), controlling for demographic variables and other consistent predictors of turnout in all models. Our results suggested that anticipated emotion predicts voter turnout, above and beyond other affect-laden variables, as well as when accounting for other influential predictors of voter turnout such as age and education.

The questions regarding affective forecasting were not asked in any subsequent ANES studies. Thus, one central goal of the current proposal is to replicate these findings to ensure their reliability and generalizability beyond the 2008 election. In addition, the current wording of the question does not permit us to test an additional hypothesis of interest: whether anticipatory regret regarding voting inaction motivates voting behavior. Anticipatory regret (i.e., expectations about whether or not feelings of regret or upset will follow from inaction) should serve as a powerful motivator of behavior because people are particularly motivated to avoid regret (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Sheeran & Orbell,

1999). Past research demonstrates that when people expect that they would feel regret for not engaging in a behavior, then they are the most likely to act in line with their intentions (Abraham & Sheeran, 2003). Thus, we propose including questions that examine people's anticipated emotions when they imagine reacting to election outcomes if they failed to vote in the election. We expect that these emotions may be even more predictive of voting behavior than standard affective forecasting questions.

Measures

PRE-ELECTION SURVEY

Affective Forecasting

These measures (as used in 2008 ANES Time Series study) would be included to test for replication of our previous findings that affective forecasting predicts voting behavior.

Democratic Candidate

- If [DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE] wins the presidential election in November, will you feel HAPPY, SAD or NEITHER HAPPY NOR SAD?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE HAPPY IF DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Will you feel EXTREMELY happy, MODERATELY happy, or SLIGHTLY happy?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE SAD IF DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Will you feel EXTREMELY sad, MODERATELY sad, or SLIGHTLY sad?

Republican Candidate

- If [REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE] wins the presidential election in November, will you feel HAPPY, SAD or NEITHER HAPPY NOR SAD?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE HAPPY IF REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Will you feel EXTREMELY happy, MODERATELY happy, or SLIGHTLY happy?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE SAD IF REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Will you feel EXTREMELY sad, MODERATELY sad, or SLIGHTLY sad?

Anticipatory Regret

As in previous research (e.g., Abraham & Sheeran, 2003), we assess anticipatory regret by asking participants to imagine how they would feel about election outcomes if they did or did not vote.

Democratic Candidate

- If you did not vote for president in November, and [DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE] wins the presidential election in November, would you feel REGRETFUL, or would you not feel regretful?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD FEEL REGRET IF DID NOT VOTE AND DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Would you feel EXTREMELY regretful, MODERATELY regretful, or SLIGHTLY regretful?
- If you voted for president in November, and [DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE] wins the presidential election in November, would you feel HAPPY, SAD or NEITHER HAPPY NOR SAD?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE HAPPY IF VOTED AND DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Would you feel EXTREMELY happy, MODERATELY happy, or SLIGHTLY happy?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE SAD IF VOTED AND DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Would you feel EXTREMELY sad, MODERATELY sad, or SLIGHTLY sad?

Republican Candidate

- If you did not vote for president in November, and [REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE] wins the presidential election in November, would you feel REGRETFUL, or would you not feel regretful?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD FEEL REGRET IF DID NOT VOTE AND REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Would you feel EXTREMELY regretful, MODERATELY regretful, or SLIGHTLY regretful?
- If you voted for president in November, and [REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE] wins the presidential election in November, would you feel HAPPY, SAD or NEITHER HAPPY NOR SAD?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE HAPPY IF VOTED AND REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Would you feel EXTREMELY happy, MODERATELY happy, or SLIGHTLY happy?
- *[IF R SAYS R WOULD BE SAD IF VOTED AND REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WINS IN NOVEMBER]* Would you feel EXTREMELY sad, MODERATELY sad, or SLIGHTLY sad?

POST-ELECTION SURVEY

Voting measures

We model upon previous studies on voting behavior (Finn & Glaser, 2010; Payne et al., 2010) to formulate our dependent variable. We use two separate dichotomous variables, in which a score of 1 represents vote for the target candidate, while a score of 0 represents vote for a different candidate or no vote at all. Accordingly, in the post-election survey, we would need the standard ANES questions about whether or not survey respondents had voted in the election, and the candidate for whom they had voted.

Discussion

Our preliminary results illustrate a novel reason why people are motivated to vote. Additional research using such affective forecasting measures can help researchers develop new theories of political participation. In addition, understanding the role that predicted emotion and anticipatory regret plays in voting behavior has implications for political campaigning. For instance, while campaigns have tried to highlight future consequences of not voting (as in the famous 2004 “Vote or Die” campaign), emphasizing the role that voting could play in minimizing regret and future emotional consequences could be particularly motivational to voters. Thus, we propose including the original affective forecasting questions to confirm their important role in voter turnout, as well as questions assessing anticipatory regret in affective forecasting. We believe that the inclusion of these measures can contribute substantially to the study of emotion’s role in political participation.

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Table 1. Forecasting that one will feel happy or sad if a candidate were elected predicts voter turnout (controlling for demographics and other predictors of voting behavior).

	<u>Voted for Obama</u> in 2008 (1 = yes, 0 = no)		<u>Voted for McCain</u> in 2008 (1= yes, 0 = no)	
	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	SE
<u>Model with affective forecasting</u> <u>variables as predictors</u>				
Happy About Obama's Victory	1.64***	.15	-2.53***	.27
Sad About Obama's Victory	-2.14***	.40	.50*	.23
Happy About McCain's Victory	-1.44***	.23	1.71***	.21
Sad About McCain's Victory	.35*	.16	-1.36***	.32
<u>Model with affective forecasting</u> <u>variables as predictors, controlling for</u> <u>feeling thermometer</u>				
Happy About Obama's Victory	1.15***	.17	-1.73***	.30
Sad About Obama's Victory	-1.70***	.40	-.19	.25
Happy About McCain's Victory	-.97***	.24	.87***	.23
Sad About McCain's Victory	-.08	.18	-.84*	.34
<u>Model with affective forecasting</u> <u>variables as predictors, controlling for</u> <u>discrete emotions</u>				
Happy About Obama's Victory	1.06***	.17	-2.01***	.3
Sad About Obama's Victory	-1.50***	.41	-.12	.25
Happy About McCain's Victory	-1.27***	.25	1.16***	.24
Sad About McCain's Victory	.24	.18	-1.05**	.37
<u>Model with affective forecasting</u> <u>variables as predictors, controlling for</u> <u>feeling thermometer and discrete</u> <u>emotions</u>				
Happy About Obama's Victory	.82***	.18	-1.63***	.31
Sad About Obama's Victory	-1.29**	.42	-.41	.26
Happy About McCain's Victory	-1.05***	.26	.78**	.25
Sad About McCain's Victory	.02	.003	-.79*	.37

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p < .10

Notes: Presented are unstandardized logistic regression coefficients (and standard errors in parentheses). Discrete emotions included anger, fear, pride, and hope toward each of the candidates. Additional predictors included gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, income, party affiliation, and political orientation. Among the predictors in these regressions were also dummies of refusals in any measures, and results of those indicators are not shown for brevity of presentation. Omitted categories are those who

imagined being neither happy nor sad if the Democrat or Republican were elected, male, age 65 or older, non-Hispanic white, high school graduate or less, income under \$30,000, Democratic, and conservative.