

It's My Campaign I'll Cry if I Want to: How and When Campaigns Use Emotional Appeals

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Abstract: Recent research in the area of campaign advertising suggests that emotional appeals can influence political attitudes, electoral choices and decision-making processes. Yet is there any evidence that candidates use emotional appeals strategically during campaigns? Is there a pattern to their use? For instance, are fear appeals used primarily late in the campaign by trailing candidates in order to get voters to rethink their choices? And are enthusiasm appeals used more commonly early on in order to shore up a candidate's base? We use affective intelligence theory—and supplement it with the idea of a voter backlash—to generate expectations about when candidates use certain emotional appeals (namely, anger, fear, enthusiasm and pride) and which types of candidates are most likely to do so. We then test these ideas using campaign advertising data from several U.S. Senate races from 2004. Our research thus provides a link between research on campaign decision-making—here the decision to “go emotional”—and research focusing on the effects of emotional appeals on voters.

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It's My Campaign I'll Cry if I Want to: How and When Campaigns Use Emotional Appeals

There is little question that political campaigns make appeals to voters' emotions. Campaign managers must craft television advertisements that not only convey a message but simultaneously resonate with voters on an emotional level (Brader 2006). In the 2004 presidential race, advertisements used ominous imagery such as wolves to tap into voters' anxieties about national security and the war in Iraq. Appeals to fear were again used in the 2008 presidential race as both major candidates aired ads that spoke to the looming economic crisis.

Increasingly, political scientists have recognized that both substantive message content and emotional content are important in understanding the effects of campaign advertising on voters. The campaign advertising literature has traditionally embraced two main approaches for studying emotional appeals (Weber 2007): emotional valence (positive versus negative advertising), and the dual-channel model which focuses on two dimensions of affect defined by enthusiasm and anxiety. More recently scholars have taken a renewed interest in examining distinct emotions such as anger, fear, hope, and sadness on political participation (Bodenhausen, Sheppard and Kramer 1994; Brader and Corrigan 2006; Valentino, Gregorowicz and Groenendyk 2007; Valentino, Hutchings, Gregorowicz and Groenendyk 2006; Weber 2007). By focusing on the effects of these specific emotional appeals on individual voters, these approaches assume that campaigns attempt to manipulate voter emotions purposefully. If that is the case, then we ought to be able to find a systematic pattern in the use of such appeals. That is the goal of this paper: explaining which candidates use which emotional appeals in their advertising and when.

First, we discuss theories of emotions in politics. Relying primarily on affective intelligence theory, but supplementing it with the idea of voter backlash effects, we develop

hypotheses about when candidates are likely to use certain emotional appeals (specifically, anger, fear, enthusiasm and pride) and which types of candidates are most likely to use them. We then test these ideas using campaign advertising data from several U.S. Senate races from 2004. Our research thus provides a link between research on campaign decision-making—here the decision to “go emotional”—and research focusing on the effects of emotional appeals on voters. In doing so, we make a couple of unique contributions. First, we show that there is something systematic about the choice to use specific emotional appeals in a political campaign. Second, we show that the predictors of “going emotional” can vary depending on the specific emotion examined, which suggests that campaign decision-makers believe that different emotions have different impacts on the electorate. That said, there were some similarities in the antecedents of using anger and fear, and in the antecedents of using enthusiasm and pride. This suggests that political strategists have not entirely abandoned a dichotomous, positive-negative view of political advertising.

Do Campaigns “Go Emotional”?

Emotional appeals are central to the work of political consultants (Kern 1989) and are especially important in televised political advertising. As Brader (2006) puts it, “Much of the effort to motivate and persuade citizens occurs during election campaigns and takes the form of commercials on television. In addition, observers understand campaign ads to rely heavily on emotion, perhaps to a greater extent than other forms of communication” (p.18). While some research suggests there may be a systematic pattern to the use of emotional appeals, many studies of political decision-making treat emotion as a nuisance (see Haidt 2001 for a review; Janis and Mann 1977; Sears 1993, 2000). In spite of this, an increasing number of scholars have examined the impact of emotion on political behavior and attitudes (Brader 2006; Lodge and Taber 2005;

Marcus 2003; Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000; Redlawsk, Civettini and Lau 2007). Recent work has found evidence of a role for affect in explaining political participation (Brader and Corrigan 2006; Valentino et al. 2007; Valentino et al. 2006), political decision-making (Brader 2005, 2006; Marcus 2003; Weber 2007), and even morality (Forgas 2006). This research has examined affect as a mediator or moderator of behavior (Clore and Storbeck 2006; Isbell and Wyer 1999; Ottati and Isbell 1996), as an outcome variable (Lerner and Keltner 2000), and as an independent variable (Brader 2006; Ellsworth and Sherer 2003).

Most of these studies, however, induce affect in a laboratory setting. Because of this, there is little understanding of when and under what circumstances emotional appeals are made in the real world. In our case, when and why do campaigns make the decision to invoke emotion? This would appear to be a shortcoming of the literature on emotions given that the general public does not experience campaign messages in a controlled environment. Knowledge of the conditions under which campaigns manipulate emotions in the field would shed light on existing evidence of individual-level effects of emotions.

Approaches to Affect

Affective intelligence theory, the dominant affective theoretical model in political science as set forth by Marcus et al. (2000; Marcus and MacKuen 1993), focuses on the consequences rather than the antecedents of emotion (Marcus 2000; McDermott 2004) in an effort to understand the role of emotion in information processing and political participation.¹ Building upon extensive biological work, this approach categorizes emotional responses by their relation to one of two systems, the disposition system and the surveillance system, both of which give

¹ Affective intelligence theory, which is dimensional in nature, is not the only model that examines specific emotions. Cognitive appraisal theory, for instance, also emphasizes the distinct impacts of discrete emotions but focuses on the antecedents of these emotions more than affective intelligence theory does.

information to individuals regarding their current situations. The former system cues the processor to rely on habits, while the latter encourages increased attention to stimuli (Marcus et al. 2000; Marcus and MacKuen 1993).

To allocate appropriate attention to unfamiliar circumstances, the surveillance system summons emotions that fall along an anxious-calm continuum, and for this reason the focus of much of this work is on the experience of fear or anxiety. This fear state leads to heightened attention to the object responsible for the fear, which in a political campaign context will lead to a search for information about a candidate. Scholars have also found anxiety to increase attention paid to campaigns, and to increase interest in the outcome of a race (Marcus and MacKuen 1993; Marcus et al. 2000; Rudolph, Gangl and Stevens 2000). Because people are more attentive when experiencing fear or anxiety, they are less likely to rely on their partisan attachments when making voting decisions (Marcus, Neuman, MacKuen, Wolak and Keele 2006). Similarly, research finds that individuals experiencing anxiety are likely to increase their assessments of risk when contemplating action (Huddy, Feldman and Cassese 2007). Thus, individuals who feel anxious about a candidate may see greater risk in relying on easy partisan cues, leading them to thoughtfully process information about the candidates in the race. In sum, affective intelligence theory suggests that fear should lead to involvement and information processing, reducing the role of partisanship in the vote decision.

The disposition system identifies successful behaviors, relates these previously learned attachments to political decisions and invokes corresponding emotions from one of two dimensions: happiness-sadness (e.g., hope, enthusiasm, pride, sadness), and aversion (e.g., contempt, hatred, anger). The experience of enthusiasm, pride or anger—all elements of the two-dimensional disposition system—is of particular interest in the study of emotional appeals in

campaign advertisements (Brader 2006). When using the disposition system, individuals will rely on routine, or in a political situation, partisanship (Marcus et al. 2000; Marcus et al. 2006). For this reason, it would seem to behoove campaign professionals to utilize emotions related to the disposition system in advertisements meant to maintain existing supporters.

Although some past research derived from the circumplex model has suggested the idea that all negative emotions, including anger, array along an anxiety dimension and act as one negatively-valenced dimension (Russell 1980; Watson and Tellegen 1985), much recent research supports the claim of modern-day affective intelligence theory that anger and anxiety represent distinct dimensions of emotion (Marcus 2003; Marcus et al. 2000, 2006; Morgan and Heise 1988). Anger is thought to be triggered by affronts to an individual's core beliefs under circumstances of certainty (Marcus et al. 2000; Marcus et al. 2006; Steenbergen and Ellis 2006). Anger thus neutralizes challenges to one's values and indicates stable disapproval of the opposition (Marcus et al. 2000). Anxiety, by contrast, results from either vague or definitive threats under circumstances of uncertainty (Steenbergen and Ellis 2006), and thus anxiety might promote a search for more information about a candidate.

If anger and anxiety are distinct, then their influence on individuals may be distinct as well. Indeed, there is considerable empirical evidence that supports this claim. For instance, Steenbergen and Ellis (2006) find that when investigating people's emotional reactions towards presidential candidates, the predictors of anger and the predictors of anxiety differ. Furthermore, in examining support for the Iraq War, Huddy and colleagues (2007) find that anger decreases people's perceptions of war-related risk while fear increases perceptions of war-related risk.

The impacts of enthusiasm have also been studied. Under affective intelligence theory, enthusiasm is an indicator of a dimension of the disposition system, which reinforces positive

goal-directed behavior (Marcus et al. 2000). Enthusiasm has been linked to a higher likelihood of turning out to vote (Marcus and MacKuen 1993), and enthusiasm is likely to reinforce existing partisan habits (Brader 2006).

Where does pride fit in with affective intelligence? The original theory does not speak directly to the potential impact of pride, but this emotion is commonly assumed to indicate the enthusiasm dimension of the disposition system (Kern 1989; Marcus et al. 2000; Marcus and MacKuen 1993). Although most researchers have treated pride as though it arrays along the same dimension as enthusiasm, some believe that pride is distinct from enthusiasm because of its unique impact on influencing collective identities, such as partisanship and nationality (Brader 2006). As collective identities are of vital importance in a campaign context, we believe it important to consider pride by itself. Indeed, we will show that the presence of a pride appeal in a political ad does not necessarily imply the presence of an enthusiasm appeal. Therefore, although our hypotheses about the role of enthusiasm and pride are similar, we will directly test these expectations by measuring pride separately from enthusiasm in our statistical models.

While affective intelligence theory will be helpful to us in informing our expectations, it offers little prediction as to *when* candidates are more or less likely to use certain emotional appeals. That is, should ads that contain fear or anger or enthusiasm or pride appeals be aired earlier or later during a political campaign? We thus draw on—and modify—an existing idea commonly found in the study of political advertising: that of the voter backlash (Damore 2002; Garramone 1984; Lemert, Wanta and Lee 1999).

The idea of a backlash is that viewers of negative advertising might reduce their positive evaluations of the sponsoring candidate if they believe the advertising is “too negative” or unfair, and thus they would be more likely to vote against that candidate. In a sense, then, viewers

would be punishing candidates for going negative. Backlashes are a real risk to campaigns that run negative ads. Evidence for a backlash effect has been found in the 1996 U.S. Senate race in Minnesota (Jasperson and Fan 2002) and in an analysis of dozens of U.S. Senate races across several election years, especially among incumbents who run negative campaigns (Lau and Pomper 2004). This finding is reinforced by Kahn and Kenney's (2004) study of U.S. Senate races.

In practice, those who have studied voter backlashes stemming from negative advertising have focused less on the emotional valence of the ads than on whether the ad mentions an opponent or not, the standard way of determining whether an ad is negative or not (Geer 2006). Nonetheless, we believe that the central insight of backlash effects can be extended to include not just ads that are classified as negative in the more traditional sense but ads that invoke negatively-valenced emotions as well. In the next section, we sketch some expectations regarding a campaign's strategic choice of using an emotional appeal. These expectations rely on affective intelligence theory, but where affective intelligence is silent, especially with regard to the timing of emotional appeals, we supplement it with a variant of backlash theory.

Which Candidates "Go Emotional"?

Research indicates that there is significant variation in the behavioral effects of discrete emotions depending upon their relation to the disposition or surveillance systems (Brader 2006; Marcus et al. 2000; MacKuen et al. 2006; Steenbergen and Ellis 2006), and the types of emotions invoked by campaigns are also likely to depend on the characteristics of the candidate, the circumstances of the race, and the desired behavioral outcome (Brader 2006; Marcus 2000; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995). For example, fear-evoking advertisements are believed to be favored in competitive races (Brader 2005). Schnur (2007), speaking from direct experience in

the campaign trenches, argues that candidates strategically select emotional appeals based on two objectives: enhancing or maintaining their position in the race, and targeting the audiences needed to accomplish the first objective.

Affective intelligence theory suggests that campaigns will use emotions associated with the disposition system—anger, enthusiasm and pride—to appeal to existing supporters and their base. Additionally, the theory suggests that campaigns will use emotions associated with the surveillance system, namely fear, to influence undecided voters and make their opponent’s supporters rethink their decisions.

Given this, we expect that:

H1: Leading candidates should be more likely than trailing candidates to use emotions associated with the disposition system (anger, enthusiasm and pride) to maintain existing public support.

H2: Trailing candidates should be more likely than leading candidates to use emotions associated with the surveillance system (fear) to encourage political learning and upset existing public support.

Next we turn our attention to the timing of emotional appeals.

When Do Campaigns “Go Emotional”?

All campaigns use emotional appeals, but it is likely that their patterns of use vary depending on the circumstances of the race. Similar to the varying conditions under which campaigns will “go negative” (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Haynes and Rhine 1998; Skaperdas and Grofman 1995), the use of emotional appeals in campaign advertising may depend on the characteristics of the political race (Abelson, Kinder, Peters and Fiske 1982; Marcus et al. 2000; Marcus 2000). Research has shown that campaign managers typically first

seek to shore up partisan support, that is, to bring the base home (Marcus et al. 2000). Thus, we might expect to find campaigns employing emotional appeals designed to do this, especially enthusiasm and pride appeals early in a campaign. Yet enthusiasm and pride appeals serve a second purpose: bringing people to the polls (Marcus and MacKuen 1993). Thus we should see a spike in appeals of this type very late in a campaign as well.

Affective intelligence theory suggests that fear appeals are effective in breaking people from their partisan moorings, but it offers no clear expectations about when fear appeals are likely to be used. Thus, we supplement affective intelligence with some insights from backlash theory. More specifically, our extension of backlash theory suggests that campaigns would not use fear appeals consistently across the campaign given that using such negatively-valenced appeals is risky and may cause voters to turn against an ad's sponsor. This may be especially true for ads that contain strong appeals to fear, as such ads may be more likely to incite a response among voters than a generic, issues-based negative mention of an opponent (e.g., my opponent will raise your taxes). Because of the potential risks of using fear appeals, we expect them to be used more often when the stakes are higher: among trailing candidates and at the end of a race, when candidates have little time to make up ground by airing positive appeals.

We thus test the following expectations:

H3: Enthusiasm and pride appeals are likely to be used by all candidates very early in a campaign to shore up partisan support.

H4: Enthusiasm and pride appeals are likely to be used by all candidates very late in a campaign to encourage existing supporters to show up at the polls.

H5: Fear appeals are likely to be used late in a campaign, especially by trailing candidates, to encourage political learning, which should break voters from their partisan moorings.

Finally, affective intelligence theory suggests that anger appeals should produce behavioral outcomes similar to pride or enthusiasm appeals, and thus one might expect them to be used very early and very late in a campaign to shore up partisan support and bring supporters to the polls. Yet our insights from backlash theory call into question this expectation. As with using fear appeals, using anger appeals may run the risk of a voter backlash. People may transfer the negative emotional appeal contained within the ad to the ad's sponsor, and thus airing anger appeals may lose candidates more votes than they gain. Therefore, campaigns should be less likely to use anger appeals at the beginning of a race when they still have time to shore up their base using, say, enthusiasm or pride appeals. Thus, we expect that:

H6: When anger appeals are used they should be used toward the end of a campaign and by leading candidates.

Data and Methods

To examine when and which types of candidates use certain emotional appeals, we examined 631 unique ads aired in 26 different U.S. Senate races from the year 2004.² To measure the advertising environment, we employed ad tracking data obtained from the Wisconsin Advertising Project.³ These data report the date, sponsor and location (media market) of each ad airing in the top 100 markets, and we supplemented the project's coding with coding

² Given the unique run-off elections that Louisiana holds, we eliminated the Louisiana Senate race from our analysis. We also had to eliminate Senate races in states not covered by one of the top 100 media markets, which included Alaska, Idaho, Hawaii, North Dakota and South Dakota. Even though our data covered Alabama and Utah, there were no advertisements aired in the highly uncompetitive Senate races in those states.

³ Data are available at <http://www.polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising>.

of our own about the emotions elicited from each ad. Two coders were asked to report whether each ad was intended to produce each of five emotions: anger, fear, enthusiasm, pride and compassion. These were the five emotions that Brader (2006) found most frequently in political ads in the 2000 campaign. Coders were asked specifically, “Was the sponsor of this ad attempting to elicit [*insert emotion*]?” Because our goal in this research is to understand the decisions of campaigns to use a particular emotional appeal, the objective of this question was not to tap the emotional response of the coder. Rather, like Brader (2006), we asked coders to judge independently the ad maker’s goal in designing the message.⁴ Coders could respond by indicating the ad contained “no appeal” to the emotion, “some appeal,” or a “strong appeal.”

We did find some interesting differences in the use of strong and weak appeals at different points in time, as Table I shows. For instance, a greater proportion of fear appeals (1 in 4) were strong appeals in both June and October than in the intervening months. The proportion of anger ads that were strong appeals remained steady around .6 throughout the campaign before peaking at .79 in October. It seems that these negatively-valenced emotional appeals became stronger closer to Election Day (the high incidence of strong anger appeals in June may just be a function of the relatively small sample size). Such a pattern was not evident for the positively-valenced emotional appeals that we examined. The proportion of enthusiasm appeals that were strong appeals was very similar—around .48—in all months except for August, when it rose to .71. The proportion of pride appeals that were strong appeals remained about .7 throughout the campaign.

⁴ Brader (2006) provides a nice discussion of the possibilities for coding the emotional content of political advertising. For instance, one might ask coders how each ad made them feel, or one might train coders to “recognize and record the antecedents of specific emotions as specified by a particular psychological theory” (p. 150). Ultimately, though, we wanted focus to stay on the advertisement itself and the decisions of campaign strategists to use certain appeals.

[Table I here]

We also looked for differences in the likelihood of using strong appeals between candidates who were leading (and tied) and those who were trailing. Leading candidates were no more or less likely than trailing candidates to use strong appeals when invoking fear in an advertisement, but trailing candidates were more likely to use strong appeals to anger in their advertising (Table II). Indeed, 81 percent of anger appeals made by trailing candidates were strong, compared to only 69 percent of anger appeals made by leading candidates. With regard to enthusiasm and pride, however, trailing and leading candidates were similar in terms of the intensity of their appeals to emotion.

[Table II here]

Although these differences between the use of strong and weak appeals to certain emotions are interesting, we conducted our statistical analyses using only those appeals that coders deemed strong. First, because affective intelligence does not speak to variation in the strength of emotional appeals, we have no expectations regarding a campaign's decision to send weak as opposed to strong emotional messages. Second, examining only strong appeals is consistent with the decision made by Brader and Corrigan (2006). Finally, by reducing ambiguity about whether an emotion was present or not, the validity of our findings should be strengthened,

To assess the reliability of the coding, we had 5 additional coders assess up to 80 random ads on each of the five emotions. In general, inter-coder reliability was quite high. For fear and anger, Pearson correlations on the three-category coding ranged between a low of 0.55 to a high of 0.82. For enthusiasm, correlations were even higher, ranging between 0.65 and 0.81. For

pride, correlations ranged from .66 to .76.⁵ Coders, however, had significantly more trouble assessing the presence of compassion appeals. Across the 5 coders, the average correlation was just below .40, and thus we have decided to eliminate analysis of compassion appeals.

Table III provides some summary data on the distribution of emotional appeals across the 628 ads in our sample. The most common appeal was pride, which appeared as a strong appeal in 372 ads—about 59 percent of the total—and as a strong or weak appeal in 535 ads—85 percent of the total. Strong appeals to enthusiasm appeared in 272 ads, about 43 percent of the total. Anger and fear appeals appeared much less frequently. Strong appeals to anger occurred in 190 ads (30 percent), while fear appeals occurred in only 29 ads (just under 5 percent).

[Table III here]

Table IV shows the correlations between each of the four emotions examined—and their correlations with a traditional three-fold measure of tone (positive, contrast and negative).⁶ The first thing to note is that the use of any one emotional appeal is generally not highly correlated with the use of any other emotional appeal. The largest correlation is -.38 between pride and anger appeals, closely followed by the -.37 correlation between enthusiasm and anger appeals. The use of pride and enthusiasm appeals is only weakly correlated at .07, suggesting there is effectively no relationship between the presence of a pride appeal and an enthusiasm appeal in an advertisement.

⁵ Correlations were broadly similar when we examined the reliability of the two-category measure (whether the emotional appeal was present or not). For fear, correlations ranged from .47 to .65; for anger, they ranged from .70 to .88; for enthusiasm, they ranged from .61 to .88, and for pride they ranged from .61 to .97.

⁶ Coders at the Wisconsin Advertising Project were asked: In your judgment, is the primary purpose of the ad to promote a specific candidate (“In his distinguished career, Senator Jones has brought millions of dollars home. We need Senator Jones”), to attack a candidate (“In his long years in Washington, Senator Jones has raised your taxes over and over. We can’t afford 6 more years of Jones.”) or to contrast the candidates (“While Senator Jones has been raising your taxes, Representative Smith has been cutting them.”)?

[Table IV Here]

The relatively weak correlations between ad tone and the presence of specific emotional appeals (the highest is $-.67$ between positive appeals and anger appeals) also reinforce the idea that fear and anger ads are not synonymous with negative ads, nor are pride and enthusiasm synonymous with positive ads. Nonetheless, there are some relationships between the emotions invoked by advertising and their tone. Anger ads, for instance, tended not to be positive (only 18 percent were), and enthusiasm ads tended to be positive (88 percent were). Still, one can find positive, contrast and negative ads that elicit each and every emotional appeal. For instance, California Senate Barbara Boxer ran a positive ad (it did not mention her opponent) that nevertheless made an appeal to fear. Boxer stated: “In Congress, extremists want to ban all abortions—even when a woman’s health is threatened. In the Supreme Court, a change of just one vote would overturn a woman’s right to choose.”

For our statistical analyses, we considered all ads aired by Democratic or Republican candidates in each of the races examined between June 1, 2004, and Election Day, November 2. We created an indicator variable of whether each Senate candidate in each state aired an ad that made a strong appeal to each of the emotions examined on each day. These indicators serve as dependent variables in the statistical models that we estimated, one each for anger ads, fear ads, enthusiasm ads and pride ads.

Independent variables in the models included:

Democrat: Although we did not have strong theory to suggest the candidates of one party might be more or less likely to use certain appeals, we did wonder whether candidates would play to their strengths as issue ownership theory (Petrcik 1996) might suggest. Thus, Republicans might be more likely to use fear appeals (especially in light of the events of

September 11, 2001). This party indicator variable was coded 1 if the candidate was a Democrat, 0 if the candidate was a Republican.

Female. This indicator was coded 1 if the candidate was a woman, 0 if the candidate was a man. Again, issue ownership theory might suggest that candidates would play to strengths, that is, that women might be more likely to air ads with compassion appeals to play to gender stereotypes (Herrnson, Lay and Stokes 2003). Of course, others have found that women use “tough” language in their advertising in order to counteract gender stereotypes (Sapiro and Walsh 2002).

Month Indicators. In order to test some of our expectations for the timing of the airing of certain appeals, we created a series of dummy variables, one each for June, July, August, and September, which left October and the first two days of November as the baseline.

Competitiveness: We wanted to test whether candidates might be more likely to use certain types of appeals, especially anxiety appeals that might make voters rethink their choices, when the race was close. We therefore included a measure of the race’s competitiveness taken from Congressional Quarterly’s (CQ) final pre-election risk ranking. This variable was coded 0 if the race was “safe” for one candidate, coded 1 if it was favored for one candidate, coded 2 if it leaned toward one candidate and was coded 3 if it was a toss-up.

Candidate Advantage: This variable, designed to indicate by how much a candidate was leading or trailing, was calculated on the basis of the CQ risk rankings. For instance, a candidate who was safe received a score of 3, while his or her opponent received a score of -3. A candidate who was favored received a score of 2, while his or her opponent received a score of -2. The same logic follows for the scoring of candidates in races that were leaning. If the race

was deemed a toss-up, then no candidate had an advantage, and both candidates received a score of 0.

Count of Ads: Because some candidates had access to more resources, they were able to air more ads, and thus the likelihood that these resource-rich candidates would air an ad making a specific emotional appeal was higher. We thus included the total number of ads aired by the candidate as another variable in our models to tap available resources.

Incumbency: Finally, although we have no a priori reason to believe that incumbents and challengers might be more or less likely to use particular emotional appeals, especially after controlling for whether the candidate is leading or trailing, we nonetheless wanted to test for this possibility. We thus created an indicator of whether the candidate was an incumbent or not to include in all of our models.

Because our dependent variable is dichotomous, we used a logit model to estimate the likelihood of using each appeal, and because observations within each state were not independent, we clustered on state.

Results

In order to get a better understanding of our data, we plotted each ad type as a percentage of total ads in each month of the campaign, going back to the beginning of June (Figure I). While it is difficult to tell a definitive story about patterns of use over time, it does seem that anger ads were most common during the summer and immediately before the election, while fear-focused ads were more common closer to Election Day. The use of enthusiasm ads peaked in August before beginning to decline. Ads that invoked pride seemed to steadily decline over the election season. Obviously, we will need the information provided by some additional analysis in order to draw some firmer conclusions.

[Figure I Here]

Table V, which shows the estimates from our four models predicting whether candidates used specific emotional appeals on each day of the race, reveals that there is a systematic pattern to the use of the emotional appeals, though the use of some is much more predictable than the use of others.

[Table V Here]

Our first hypotheses concerned differences between leading and trailing candidates. We hypothesized that leading candidates would be more likely to use anger, enthusiasm and pride appeals (H1), while trailing candidates would be more likely to use fear appeals (H2). Our model estimates lend only some support to these hypotheses.⁷ Trailing candidates were significantly more likely to use fear, while leading candidates were significantly more likely to use enthusiasm and pride appeals. The one finding that was contrary to our expectations was that trailing candidates were more likely than their opponents to use anger appeals. We will say more about this later.

Additionally, we had hypothesized that candidates (regardless of whether they were trailing or leading in the race) would be more likely to use enthusiasm and pride appeals (H3) very early in the race in order to shore up their support, and we expected an uptick in enthusiasm and pride ads late in the campaign as well in order to draw voters to the polls (H4). If these expectations were both true, then we would find negative coefficients on indicators for August

⁷ We re-estimated the models reported in Table V using both strong and weak emotional appeals instead of just strong appeals. The major difference between the two sets of models is that the ones using the larger set of appeals exhibit fewer statistically significant findings. We are reassured, however, by the fact that for 40 of the 43 model coefficients, the sign is the same. In the three other cases in which the sign on the coefficient did change between the two specifications, the coefficients were statistically insignificant in both specifications, hovering around 0.

and September, indicating the relative lack of such appeals in the middle of the campaign. That pattern, however, is not what we observe, as the signs on all of the month indicators are positive, indicating that enthusiasm appeals are more likely in the earlier months of the campaign than in October (the omitted category). Only a couple of coefficients, however, were statistically significant. Specifically, enthusiasm appeals were significantly more likely to be used in August than in October, and pride appeals were significantly more likely to be used in July than in October. Thus while we find some limited support for the idea that enthusiasm and pride appeals are used early on to shore up support, we find no support for the idea that enthusiasm appeals spike close to Election Day in order to bring supporters to the polls. Although our hypothesis goes unsupported, our findings are consistent with those of Brader (2006) who likewise found no evidence that candidates use enthusiasm appeals at the end of a campaign to bring supporters to the polls. It is likely, at this point, that they are using on-the-ground get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts such as door-to-door canvassing or mailings instead of relying on television advertising to increase turnout.

We will address the rest of our specific hypotheses in the models that follow, which allow us to compare the behavior of leading and trailing candidates. Before continuing, however, we do want to make some more comments about the patterns of use of certain appeals. First, there are party differences in the use of fear and anger appeals, with Democrats less likely than Republicans to use both types of emotional appeal. There are also gender differences, but instead of playing to type, women candidates seem to be playing against type by airing more anger and fear ads than their male opponents.

The competitiveness of the race mattered for only one type of appeal: more competitive races are more likely to see anger appeals. Incumbency also had a significant impact in the two

models, reducing the likelihood of airing an anger or enthusiasm ad. Finally, as expected, the more ads a candidate aired the more likely he or she was to use all types of emotional appeals, with the exception of enthusiasm ads.

Our final hypotheses concern when certain types of appeals are more likely to be used by certain types of candidates (i.e., leading or trailing candidates). In order to address these expectations, we estimated separate models for each type of candidate. Because this reduced the size of our sample, there were some instances of perfect collinearity between our predictors, which required that we drop some variables from the models. This was especially true for the models estimated using only data from leading candidates. In all of these models, we had to eliminate at least one of the month indicators, and so we must be a little more cautious in interpreting our findings with regard to timing.

The estimates from eight separate models shown in Table VI speak to the timing of the use of emotional appeals by candidate status. We had expected that candidates, especially those who are trailing, would use fear appeals late in the campaign in order to encourage political learning among undecided voters (H5), shaking up the race. Our model estimates lend some support for this idea, as all of the month indicators in the trailing candidate fear model are negative, indicating that fear appeals are used more frequently in October than in earlier months. The one big caveat, however, is that these differences are not statistically significant. Even though we had hypothesized that timing differences in the use of fear appeals would be more evident for trailing candidates than for leading candidates, we found slightly more evidence to suggest that leading candidates are using fear ads late in the race. The coefficients on the two month indicators that remain in the leading candidate fear models are negative, and the one for

September is statistically significant. This suggests that leading candidates are ramping up their use of fear ads late in the race.

[Table VI here]

Our final hypothesis (H6) was that anger appeals, which should be used especially by leading candidates, would be used toward the end of the campaign because anger may transfer to the sponsor and because the use of negativity (which anger ads often contain) may lead to a backlash. The model estimates quite strongly suggest that anger appeals are reserved for the end of the campaign, and this holds true for both leading and trailing candidates. In both the leading and trailing candidate anger models shown in Table IV, the coefficients on the month indicators are negative and statistically significant—with only July in the leading candidate model providing an exception. While our timing hypothesis may have been supported, our expectation derived from affective intelligence theory that anger appeals would be used more by leading than trailing candidates was not supported. Turning back to Table V, one sees that the candidate advantage variable is negative, which indicates that leading candidates are actually less likely to use anger appeals than are their opponents.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our research has shown that there are some systematic patterns to the use of specific emotional appeals in political campaigns, though the use of some appeals, such as anger, is much more predictable than the use of other appeals, such as pride or enthusiasm. Our expectations that leading candidates would be more likely to focus on enthusiasm and pride appeals, while trailing candidates would focus on fear appeals, were also supported by our analyses.

Our hypotheses with respect to anger, however, did not fare well. Although our expectation that anger appeals would be used later in a campaign was correct, our thinking that

leading candidates would be more likely to use them than trailing candidates was not correct. In fact, the reverse was true. Why did we do such a poor job in predicting who would use anger appeals? One reason may be that anger and fear act similarly, in contrast to the predictions of dual-channel models. Or it may be that they act similarly in certain circumstances and not in others. For example, Steenbergen and Ellis (2006) find distinct predictors for anger and fear when a candidate is well-known, but not for an unknown candidate. Thus, context may affect a campaign's strategic decision to go emotional. Another reason may be that political professionals do not know as much as political psychologists and assume, incorrectly, that anger works like fear does in inducing information processing. They may be thinking more in terms of valence as opposed to thinking about specific emotions. Arterton explains, "As might be expected, while political managers are anxious to know what works in influencing voting decisions, they are not very interested in *how* these communications work. They rarely take time to contemplate systematic theories of communication or persuasion..." (1992, p. 96).

That said, our finding that anger ads are typically used closer to the end of a campaign does support our idea that there may be some risks associated with the use of anger appeals that are not present with the use of enthusiasm or pride appeals, given that anger appeals are typically negative ones that discuss an opponent. Perhaps voters are willing to put up with ads that make them angry in the few weeks before they vote—such ads may be expected at this time—but appeals to anger may turn them off early in the campaign season. We were also surprised to find that leading candidates ramp up their use of fear ads late in the race. Perhaps using fear appeals comes with little risk late in a race, and thus risk-averse campaigns—even though they are ahead—may make an attempt through fear to “steal” some voters who may be inclined to vote for the other side.

In sum, while affective intelligence theory worked fairly well in predicting the use of fear, enthusiasm and pride appeals, it did not work so well in predicting the use of anger appeals. Because we examined U.S. Senate races, we expected that most campaign managers and ad makers would be quite experienced, and thus there would be a systematic pattern in the use of specific emotions. Certainly, we would expect more of a pattern in these races than in, say, state legislative races, in which candidates often do not have enough cash to be able to hire campaign professionals. On the other hand, we might have found the use of emotional appeals more predictable in presidential races, where those designing and deploying the ads are surely the best in the business.

Given our pattern of results, we believe that a traditional model that distinguishes emotions depending on their valence still may have something to offer. Such a model, assuming it incorporated the risk of a backlash associated with using certain negatively-valenced appeals, could help to explain why the predictors of the use of anger ads and fear ads are actually quite similar, in contrast to the predictions of affective intelligence theory. That said, other theories of emotion may have something to offer as well in helping to explain campaign decision-making.

Our research has contributed much to the understanding of the use of emotional appeals in the real world of political campaigns. We have outlined how often particular emotional appeals are used, when they are typically used and by whom. And we have shown that the same factors do not explain the use of all types of emotional appeals. But in doing so we have only scratched the surface. Taking the next step—examining how well such appeals work in the real world of campaigns—will be an important and worthwhile endeavor. For while theorists of emotions may find that appeals work as hypothesized in tightly controlled experimental settings with ads carefully designed to appeal to specific emotions, they may not work as such in the real

world, where the ads may not be so blatant and where citizens come to the advertisement not as blank slates but as people with previous knowledge about the candidates.

Figure I: Use of Appeals Over Time

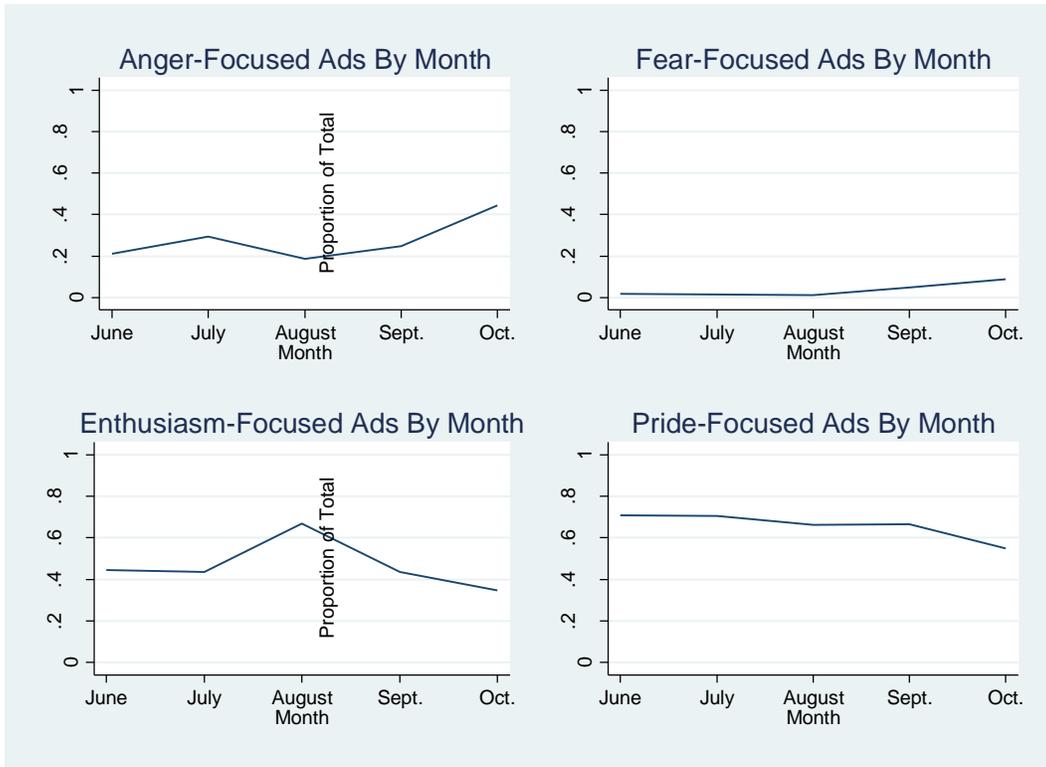


Table I: Proportion of Appeals that Were Strong by Month

Month	Fear	Anger	Enthus.	Pride
June	0.25	0.56	0.49	0.75
July	0.00	0.60	0.47	0.76
August	0.06	0.63	0.72	0.67
September	0.19	0.59	0.48	0.74
October-Nov.	0.25	0.79	0.46	0.72

Table II: Proportion of Appeals that Were Strong by Candidate Status

	Fear	Anger	Enthus.	Pride
Trailing	0.18	0.81	0.51	0.67
Leading	0.19	0.65	0.52	0.69

Table III: Distribution of Ads by Emotional Appeal

	Anger	Fear	Enthus.	Pride
Strong Appeal	190 (30%)	29 (5%)	272 (43%)	372 (59%)
Weak Appeal	110 (18%)	118 (19%)	255 (41%)	163 (26%)
No Appeal	328 (52%)	481 (77%)	101 (16%)	93 (15%)
All	628 (100%)	628 (100%)	628 (100%)	628 (100%)

Percentage of total ads appears in parentheses.

Table IV: Correlations Between Use of Emotional Appeals and Tone

	Fear	Anger	Enthus.	Pride	Negative	Contrast
Fear	1.00					
Anger	0.20	1.00				
Enthusiasm	-0.13	-0.37	1.00			
Pride	-0.17	-0.38	0.07	1.00		
Negative	0.17	0.40	-0.26	-0.39	1.00	
Contrast	0.12	0.47	-0.25	-0.11	-0.19	1.00
Positive	-0.21	-0.67	0.39	0.35	-0.49	-0.77

Table V: Predictors of Use of Each Emotional Appeal

	Anger		Fear		Enthusiasm		Pride	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Democrat	-1.347	0.337	-2.755	0.562	-0.014	0.456	0.133	0.658
Female	1.362	0.466	2.821	0.783	0.154	0.515	-0.770	0.545
June	-1.860	0.604	-1.066	0.610	0.149	0.462	0.556	0.845
July	-1.424	0.562			0.647	0.599	1.790	0.510
August	-2.459	0.638	-1.955	1.332	1.519	0.470	0.427	0.405
September	-1.270	0.274	-0.693	0.527	0.287	0.252	0.750	0.462
Incumbent	-0.647	0.395	0.494	0.565	-0.807	0.330	0.307	0.567
Competitiveness	0.231	0.173	0.326	0.305	-0.077	0.147	-0.035	0.176
Advantage	-0.377	0.075	-0.220	0.105	0.180	0.081	0.287	0.125
Count of Ads	0.013	0.002	0.005	0.001	0.003	0.002	0.007	0.002
Constant	-0.085	0.399	-2.347	0.751	0.446	0.380	0.600	0.523
N	2558		2314		2558		2558	
Model Chi-square	169.43 (p<.0001)		68.79 (p<.0001)		46.03 (p<.0001)		101.52 (p<.0001)	

Bold-faced entries indicate significance at the .10 level.

Table VI: Predictors of Use of Each Emotional Appeal by Candidate Status

Leading Candidates

	Anger		Fear		Enthusiasm		Pride	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Democrat	-1.216	0.976	1.885	1.385	0.245	0.585	-0.841	0.954
Female	1.936	1.200			0.830	0.639	-0.388	1.067
June	-1.357	0.789			0.085	1.200		
July	0.438	1.345			-0.070	1.591		
August			-0.971	1.582			0.302	0.769
September	-1.934	0.526	-2.718	0.458	0.176	0.402	1.797	0.436
Competitiveness	1.532	0.534	2.457	0.777	0.077	0.345	-1.068	0.553
Count	0.010	0.003	0.009	0.002	0.002	0.002	0.006	0.004
Constant	-2.069	0.677	-6.011	1.509	0.128	0.551	2.474	0.812
N	1,029		1,019		1,029		1,019	
Model Chi-square	132.77 (p<.0001)		52.31 (p<.0001)		4.61 (p=.7075)		26.09 (p<.0010)	

Trailing Candidates

	Anger		Fear		Enthusiasm		Pride	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Democrat	-0.950	0.289	-2.620	0.574	0.278	0.705	0.189	0.855
Female	1.039	0.467	1.570	0.794	-0.343	0.811	-0.770	0.600
June	-1.892	0.771	-0.422	0.467	0.592	0.303	0.018	0.971
July	-1.491	0.576			0.919	0.777	1.575	0.562
August	-2.174	0.635	-2.293	1.909	1.201	0.445	0.497	0.562
September	-1.170	0.261	-0.076	0.608	0.401	0.336	0.385	0.638
Competitiveness	-0.116	0.143	-0.061	0.288	0.168	0.202	0.242	0.268
Count	0.013	0.003	0.005	0.002	0.003	0.003	0.008	0.002
Constant	0.678	0.357	-1.338	0.464	-0.475	0.415	-0.104	0.359
N	1,429		1,219		1,429		1,429	
Model Chi-square	75.18 (p<.0001)		37.37 (p<.0001)		28.80 (p<.0010)		248.41 (p<.0001)	

Bold-faced entries indicate significance at the .10 level.

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