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# **Underestimated**

**Emotions in Politics**

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## Foreword

**N**ot drowning in the vast sea of opinions that surrounds us can be a real challenge. There are so many heated discussions, and I do believe they are important. But the heated part is often too much. Too many emotions, with everyone trying to pull us to their side and get our attention. So how do we navigate this sea? I believe it requires both going with the flow by listening to different opinions and using a compass to keep our direction. This applies to life in general, but since politics shapes so much of it, maybe that's the best place to start. I want to thank everyone who helped me find my way through this sea. Those who know me know I can get lost easily, so having your support has meant and still means a lot to me. I couldn't have done it without you. I wish for everyone reading this book to find people who can help guide them through politics and to discover a way to stay engaged without feeling overwhelmed. I hope these pages can serve as a compass on your own journey.





## Introduction

For a long time, I found it unsatisfying to lead discussions that relied only on statistics and logical reasoning, especially in topics like philosophy, psychology or politics. It was not that I didn't enjoy those discussions, it was more that my lack of convincing arguments made it difficult for both the other person and me to engage in a meaningful debate. My arguments were mostly grounded in personal experience and what felt intuitively right. But I realized that this approach often failed in persuading others. Pretty disappointing, though it's definitely a good thing that people don't simply accept my opinions without questioning them or looking for proof, even when the intuition behind them feels right. Still, I often found myself wondering: why did it feel like something's missing when people relied only on facts and data? I love numbers, but studies and statistics often feel dry and somehow incomplete. After thinking it through, I realized it wasn't about wanting arguments which allow more room for creativity and are not only about statistical facts, as I initially thought. The real problem was that the emotional side of things is often ignored. Emotions are such a big part of how we experience and perceive the world, but they're so often underestimated or overlooked. That's why I began to search for evidence that shows emotions matter, even in areas we think are just about logic or facts. The difficulty, I think, lies in the challenge of making emotions a

“scientific” subject. While there are existing models that try to explain emotions, we haven’t yet discovered one that applies universally across all situations and individuals. There are still so many unanswered questions. What influences our emotions? How can we put emotions in a scientific framework, to make it easier to analyze them? And once we have such a framework, how many and which dimensions, like arousal and valence, do we need to fully describe them? What’s the biological basis of emotions? So far, they’re still a big black box. Even though it’s a tough challenge, I think we need to pay more attention to emotions. By studying them more closely, we could not only understand them better but also make progress in other areas of research. Emotions could be the key to explaining things we’ve struggled to fully understand. Of course, I can’t review every study on emotions or every situation where people think emotions don’t matter in just a book. Therefore, I asked myself which topics have a major impact on our lives, and politics was the first that came to my mind. That’s how I started my journey to explore different aspects of politics that are influenced by emotions.

In politics, we should engage not only in discussions about issues like immigration or climate change. We should also talk about how we are often unconsciously manipulated and influenced emotionally by politicians, those around us, and social media. Moreover, we should also reflect on where our opinions originate - whether they stem from the beliefs of others or are based on our

own needs. Yes, I'm referring to that often-frustrating process known as self-reflection. We should consider that often, on the surface, arguments appear to only be based on facts. However, when we delve deeper, we realize that emotions are also a fundamental part of those arguments. Maybe not always, but I think that we often underestimate how much emotions and feelings influence our process of forming our opinions and decisions. With the possibility that emotions are involved in opinion and decision-making, some questions arise. What are our opinions and decisions really based upon? How do we form them? Are they shaped by what we learn from those around us as we grow up, or are they rooted in our own self-discovered beliefs and experiences? I think those questions are still quite difficult to answer but I will try to include some studies that address these topics.

But why focus on politics? To answer this question, I would like to start from a different angle. Let's begin with our daily decisions. They play a crucial role in shaping our personalities and lifestyles. We have control over many aspects, such as what we eat and wear, who we choose to surround ourselves with, and the profession we pursue or aspire to. However, some parts of life are beyond the control of most people, such as the structure of our educational system, the laws in our justice system, or how government funding is distributed. While these policies significantly impact our daily lives, we don't have direct control over them. Although this might sound a little bit discouraging, thanks to our democratic

political system, we can influence these matters indirectly. We have the power to vote for representatives who shape not only these systems but also many other crucial matters in our country. Thus, we should consider how emotions play a role in voting, since it's such a crucial part of politics.

As mentioned earlier, finding comprehensive answers regarding general opinion formation and decision-making is still quite difficult. However, there has been some investigation into political decision-making. During my research, I discovered several factors influencing our political decisions that, according to many studies, papers, and books, are in turn shaped by emotions. I concluded that to gain control over these factors, we must also be aware of and be able to regulate our emotions. Since research has already shown that emotions significantly affect different kinds of decision-making, such as consumer decision-making <sup>1</sup>, I believe future studies will reveal that even more areas are influenced by emotions. Therefore, it is definitely beneficial to work on managing our emotions. Gaining more control over how we shape our lives is an opportunity we should not overlook.



The goal of this book is to raise awareness of the role emotions play in various aspects of politics and to help us gain better control over how much we let emotions shape our political opinions. By doing so, we can avoid being misled and prevent outcomes in politics that we may not agree with in the long run. At the same time, becoming more aware of our emotions helps us gain insight into how they are shaped by external influences such as other people, social media, advertisements, and more. This awareness enables us to develop more critical and well-considered political opinions and decisions.

Furthermore, I believe that as we gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our emotions, we can improve our ability to manage them. This allows us to progressively shape our lives towards greater happiness

and fulfillment. I would say that this is quite a nice side effect that makes the challenge of working on our emotions and getting to know ourselves worthwhile. We can learn not only how to manage the negative influence of emotions in politics, but also how to use them in ways that contribute to better politics.

One important point to mention is that I will use the term “emotions” throughout the book, though it may not always be the most accurate word in certain contexts. Here are the definitions provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) for differentiating between emotion, feeling, mood, and affect:

**Emotion:** “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event”

**Feeling:** “a self-contained phenomenal experience [...] The core characteristic that differentiates feelings from cognitive, sensory, or perceptual intrapsychic experiences is the link of affect to appraisal. Feelings differ from emotions in being purely mental, whereas emotions are designed to engage with the world”

**Mood:** “any short-lived emotional state, usually of low intensity...Moods differ from emotions in lacking an object; for example, the emotion of anger can be aroused by an insult, but an angry mood may arise when one does not know what one is angry about or what elicited the anger.”

**Affect:** “any experience of feeling or emotion, ranging from suffering to elation, from the simplest to the most complex sensations of feeling, and from the most normal to the most pathological emotional reactions. Often described in terms of positive affect or negative affect, both mood and emotion are considered affective states.” <sup>2</sup>

I hope you can forgive me if I sometimes use the word “emotions” incorrectly. In such cases, please consider the appropriate term instead. Thank you!





# I. Emotions in Politics

While it makes sense in theory that emotions are involved in politics, research still has some problems supporting this theory, as the results are not very conclusive in the field. Nonetheless, there are a few studies highlighted in the upcoming chapters, which along with some theories proposed by psychologists, show some promising results and ideas regarding emotions in politics. It would be great if this book could draw attention to the topic, engage people in discussions about these concepts and theories, and maybe even take the conversation beyond its pages. After discussing the studies and theories, two real-life examples will illustrate how the involvement of emotions can explain the often-incomprehensible political actions of people. In the final section, I will share my thoughts on a few key steps that can help us better understand our emotions, enabling us to recognize manipulation and stand up for our own needs in politics. By gaining better control over our emotions, we cannot only shape our lives more positively but also gain clarity on what truly makes us happy. This understanding allows us to vote for candidates who share our values and may have

the power to influence issues that are beyond our control as everyday citizens. Furthermore, in this section, I will here and there present some ideas for politicians that, in my opinion, are essential for achieving successful and sustainable politics. I think emotions are important and will always be a part of politics, but not all of them are for our benefit. We need to learn to distinguish between those that manipulate us and those that can help us make progress in addressing political issues.

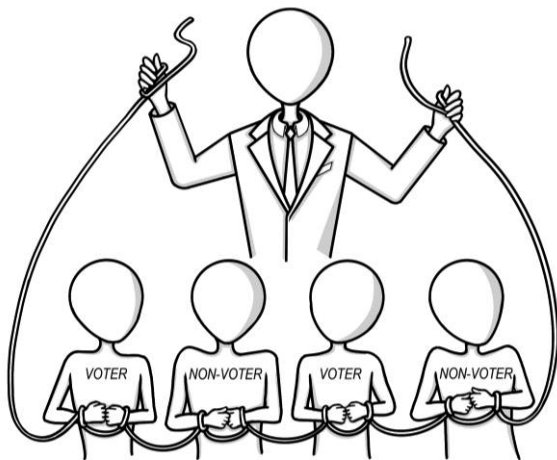
Before delving into the role of emotions in political participation, I would like to take a moment to thank all the politicians who put themselves in these high-pressure roles, where they are constantly judged. It sounds like hell to me! So, a big thank you to all of you who are not avoiding this hell and choose to take on political positions!

## **Political participation, ideology and decision-making**

*“People often say, with pride, ‘I’m not interested in politics.’ They might as well say, ‘I’m not interested in my standard of living, my health, my job, my rights, my freedoms, my future or any future.’”*

*- Martha Gellhorn <sup>3</sup>*

Politics starts with the political engagement of everybody, not just politicians. Being active doesn't have to mean organizing protests or joining a local political party. It can be as simple as showing up to vote. But too often, this privilege is taken for granted. So why do many people often ignore the chance to shape their future, while at other times voter turnout rises rapidly? Research suggests that emotions such as anger, anxiety, and enthusiasm play a significant role in political engagement. Anger, in particular, is a strong short-term motivator for voting. When people identify the source of a problem, anger provides a sense of clarity and determination, pushing them to act. In politics this means voting for or against someone, giving individuals a feeling of control over the situation <sup>4</sup>.



We now know that emotions influence political partisanship, but do they also affect our political decisions? Significant events, such as terrorist attacks or pandemics occurring before elections, heavily influence voting behavior. These events often evoke emotions like fear, anxiety, or anger, which can result in heightened trust or distrust toward the government <sup>5,6</sup>. Research conducted following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks also reveals that emotions like hope can significantly impact public trust in counterterrorism institutions. Another example where emotions clearly played a role is the series of apartment bombings in Russia in 1999, specifically in Buynaksk, Moscow, and Volgograd. Although there remains controversy over whether the Russian Federal Security Service was