Mood, Basketball, and Politics
The Effect of Unrelated Emotions on Political Opinions
Rational Man

“... it is the reason, alone, of the public, that ought to control and regulate the government.”

- James Madison
#Linsanity
What is the relationship between emotions and politics?
Emotion and Politics

Healy, Malhotra, and Mo (2010)

• A college football win before an election has a positive effect on the percentage of the vote won by an incumbent politician.
Emotion and Attitudes

- Affective Intelligence Model (Neuman, 2000):

- Cognitive Loop Hypothesis (Isen et al., 1978):

  “A positive mood facilitates the retrieval of positive material from memory.”
Mood-Congruent Network Model (Bower, 1981)

Positive Stimulus

- Happy
  - Sunshine
  - Optimism for future
  - Yardfest
  - Hot breakfast
  - Mention on isawyouharvard

Negative Stimulus

- Sad
  - Thunder
  - Pessimism about economy
  - No brain break
  - Getting quadded
  - Midterms
Research Question

- In 2012, the Harvard Men's Basketball Team made its first appearance in the NCAA tournament since 1946
  - Final score: Harvard 70, Vanderbilt 79

Does framing Harvard's NCAA appearance in a **positive** versus **negative** light affect Harvard students’ opinions of President Obama and the direction of the country?
How does the framing of an event irrelevant to politics affect political opinions?

Harvard’s NCAA Appearance

Emotion

Political Opinions

Stimulus

Emotion

Attitude/Behavior
Hypotheses

- Participants primed with a 'positive' NCAA Crimson article will report greater satisfaction with President Obama / the country

- Participants primed with a 'negative' NCAA Crimson article will report less satisfaction with President Obama / the country

- A 'control' NCAA Crimson article will have no effect
Methods
Methods

• Survey sent to Harvard undergraduates over every House email list and various organization open lists.

• Three Conditions randomly assigned to participants:
  • Positive
  • Negative
  • Neutral (Control)
Harvard Men’s Basketball Makes Historic Appearance in Second Round of NCAA Tournament

By DENNIS J. ZHENG, CRIMSON STAFF WRITER
Published: Thursday, March 15, 2012
Negative Condition

Harvard Men's Basketball Falls in Second Round of NCAA Tournament

By DENNIS J. ZHENG, CRIMSON STAFF WRITER
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Control Condition
Dependent Variables

- In general, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way things are going in the United States at this time?
  - *Country Satisfaction*

- Thinking about Barack Obama, how satisfied are you with the job he is doing as President?
  - *Presidential Satisfaction*

- How likely are you to vote for Obama in the upcoming presidential election?
  - *Likelihood of voting for Obama*
Background Questions

• Age, Gender, House

• Political Ideology & Affiliation

• Political Knowledge
  • Who of the following is the Speaker of the House?
  • Who of the following is the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court

• Harvard Basketball Knowledge
  • How many games attended?
  • Who of the following is not on the team?
Sample Size

- 329 Harvard undergraduates
  - 4.5% Response Rate
Sample Demographics

Gender:
- Male
- Female

Class Year:
- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Political Affiliation:
- Democrat
- Republican
- Independent
- Other

Political Information levels:
- Both Questions correct
- One Question Wrong
- Both Questions Wrong
Sample Basketball Knowledge

How many Harvard men's basketball games did you attend?

- None: 80%
- 1-3 games: 20%
- 4-6 games: 0%
- 7-9 games: 0%
- 10 or more games: 0%

Did you know the result of Harvard's NCAA Basketball game before you took this survey?

- Yes: 100%
- No: 0%

Of the following names, which does NOT belong to a member of the Harvard men's basketball team?

- Don't know: 80%
- Correct: 20%
- Wrong: 0%
Results
Composite Results

General Satisfaction

Least to Most

4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.8 4.9

Negative  Control  Positive

H

Composite Results

General Satisfaction

Least to Most

4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.8 4.9

Negative  Control  Positive

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Country Satisfaction

Least to Most

Negative

Control

Positive

2.8

2.9

3.0

3.1

3.2

3.3

3.4

3.5

3.6
Country Satisfaction by Party

Presidential Approval by Party

Least to Most

Democratic
Republican
Independent
Democratic
Republican
Independent

- Negative
- Control
- Positive
Political Party

Country Satisfaction by Party

Presidential Satisfaction by Party

Democrat
Republican
Political Knowledge

Country Satisfaction

Presidential Approval Composite

Least to Most

Political Knowledge (Low - High)

Political Knowledge (Low - High)

Negative
Control
Positive
Summary

- Negative non-political emotional primes effect political opinions more than positive emotional stimuli.
- Effect of emotion constant across political parties.
- Effect of emotional primes is greater on issues (country satisfaction) that are less associated with partisan predispositions (presidential approval).
- Though not statistically significant, those with higher political knowledge are less effected by emotional primes.
Discussion
Internal Validity

- Manipulation check
- Skewed sample
- Non-Response bias

In what round of the NCAA tournament did the Harvard men's basketball team play?
Internal Validity

• Basketball ➔ Obama
External Validity

- Generalizability within and beyond Harvard
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Ideology
  - Different sports and political knowledge levels
Improvements

• Do right before/after sporting event

• Longer exposure to conditions

• More representative sample
  • Gender
  • Political Affiliation
  • Basketball Knowledge
Implications

Man is not a completely rational being (sorry Madison)

- Media
- Negative Unrelated Events
- Partisanship & 2012 Election