

Anxiety and Democratic Citizenship

Neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely or to think sanely under the influence of a great fear.

Bertrand Russell

Contemporary American political life abounds with crises and worry. Terrorist attacks, a warming planet, and flu pandemics all trigger the public's anxieties. Meanwhile, politicians use fears of economic downturns and cultural changes to evoke the public's worries about immigration. Given that politics often involves anxiety, in this book, we ask how and when is anxiety successful at causing citizens to engage with politics? In addition, we ask what is the substance of that political engagement?

Political thinkers and democratic theorists express concern that anxiety may undercut citizens' abilities to make rational political choices, yet recent research from political science and psychology paints a more hopeful picture of anxiety, suggesting that political fears may lead to more knowledgeable and trusting citizens. Our theoretical contribution reconciles the normatively attractive portrait of anxiety in recent political science literature with the uses of fear in contemporary politics. We use four policy areas to test how anxiety shapes citizens' engagement with political information and political trust. Together, these components paint a fuller picture of the ways that anxiety shapes political life than accounts that either simply vilify or praise the role of emotion in politics. Anxiety does not preclude man or nation from acting or thinking sanely, but "under the influence of great fear" the public is likely to support protective policies that may undercut democracy.

Throughout the course of the book, we find that political anxiety systematically shapes citizen engagement by encouraging attention to politics and increasing acceptance of leaders and policies framed as able to protect the public. Political anxiety leads citizens to learn more about politics, but anxious citizens are systematically drawn to threatening news. Political anxiety increases trust in political actors, but trust is confined to those actors seen as useful for handling the source of the anxiety. Political anxiety makes people more likely to take protective policy positions, and the dominant protective policies are shaped both by partisanship of individuals and the partisan politics around the issues. An anxious politics both helps citizens to reach a democratic ideal of an informed, interested polity *and* leaves the public open to manipulation. In this chapter, we consider what this book contributes to the study of political psychology and emotion in public life. We also reflect on when anxiety strengthens democracy and when it may undermine democracy.

Not all politics is emotive. Citizens need to be paying a modicum of attention for an issue to be relevant and cause them to feel emotional. Political issues that are far below the attention radar are unlikely to make someone feel something. Yet, looking at the bulk of modern political behavior scholarship on how individuals form opinions, make voting decisions, process information, or evaluate political leaders in American politics, one may get the idea that citizens do these things sedately, with little emotional force. Elections spark enthusiastic cheers for favored candidates, government gridlock engenders angry phone calls, and hurricanes create anxiety for those in the path of possible destruction. Prominent theories of political behavior emphasize citizens' knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), self-interest (Erikson and Stoker 2011), resources (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), partisanship (Campbell et al. 1960), and feelings about social groups (Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1993) with little emphasis placed on how emotion colors each of those elements or, ultimately, behaviors like voting.

Emotion is certainly not absent from discussions of political life. Political philosophers recognize that emotions, including anxiety, are a prominent, albeit not always constructive, political phenomenon. Both liberal and conservative thinkers recognize the power of anxiety to prompt citizens to stop, pay attention, and act (Robin 2006). In Hobbes's state of nature, people fear for their security and willingly cede autonomy to a sovereign willing to protect them (as in Hobbes's *Leviathan*; Hobbes 2008). Machiavelli's prince recognized that fear is persuasive and can create a compliant polity (Machiavelli 1997). John Locke pointed to fear

as “an uneasiness of the mind” and pointed to this uneasiness as the most potent incentive to action (Locke 1950). Conservative writer Edmund Burke argued that a lack of emotion, particularly fear, leads to passivity, whereas fear can rouse an otherwise inactive public (Burke 2013). Writers like Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1945) recognized that emotions had utility for political leaders and could lead to a strengthened democracy or an enfeebled society with citizens too terrorized to participate. This book squares well with de Tocqueville’s view of emotion; anxiety can either bolster or damage democracy depending on how it is deployed by political leaders.

For us, taking emotion seriously means looking more broadly at the consequences of emotion in politics. We see emotion as central to understanding political life. At the same time, we argue that politics shapes the ways that anxious citizens cope. Our first main substantive contribution with this work is that we consider the effects of anxiety on civic life broadly. Citizens might vote once a year, but every day they make millions of other decisions that are relevant to politics. If they start their day with a morning paper or a glance at an online news source, which storylines catch their eyes? Do they choose to read stories or just skim headlines? Do they accept what they read, or do they argue against it? In deciding whether to vaccinate their newborns, whose medical advice do they trust? – a decision that affects not only their family but public health broadly. When terrorism seems likely, do they acquiesce to government surveillance to stay safe or rail against it for the sake of privacy? These decisions might all take place before a first cup of coffee.

Our second major substantive contribution in this work is that we situate anxiety in a messy, emotionally evocative, decidedly partisan context. Anxious people seek out information, and an emotionally charged media environment provides fertile ground for their bias toward threatening information. Anxious citizens put their trust in relevant, expert political elites and government agencies, and partisanship shapes who counts as a relevant expert. Finally, anxiety prompts people to support protective policies, and political parties fight over whose policies protect us best.

By putting the study of anxiety squarely within a partisan context, this book departs from other political psychology work on emotion. Affective intelligence theory (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Brader 2005) sees anxiety supplanting or at least significantly attenuating the effect of partisanship on how citizens form opinions and decide who to vote for at

election time. In this view, anxiety is a call to evaluate the political environment, stop relying on standing decisions, and make choices based on the contemporary political environment. We find that there are conditions under which anxiety influences partisans in similar ways, but these conditions are a subset of political life. That is, when threats are new and not communicated in an overtly persuasive way, anxiety affects Republicans and Democrats in broadly similar ways. Yet, anxiety more commonly exists in a partisan world. Most of the time, we are in the realm of framed threats rather than unframed threats, and partisan actors are involved in conveying threatening messages. When politicians communicate threat through ads, speeches, or other overtly persuasive ways, anxiety can bump up against partisanship. People from the “other political party” might resist the message and not experience anxiety. Even if they do feel anxious, they might not react in the manner prescribed by the communication. Partisanship and other identities can act as a filter on threatening information, lessening or heightening the emotional impact. As party polarization continues, these findings imply that anxiety’s effect may be not be universal or may be short-lived. By considering how political anxiety exists as part of partisan conflict, we contribute to a broad understanding of how emotions significantly affect political behavior during times of both ordinary (i.e., partisan) politics and more extraordinary times.

We argue that anxious people seek protection. From this very general motivation, we trace out the impact of anxiety on three specific and politically relevant aspects of civic life: (1) citizens ought to pay attention to the news, (2) they need to figure out who to trust, and (3) they should hold attitudes on the important issues of the day. We find that anxiety affects all three.

LEARNING

Anxious minds want to know – what threats await them, who to trust and who to avoid, and how to resolve the threats. Citizens made anxious by observing events in the world or convinced to be anxious by elites seek out information to resolve the uncertainty that underlies anxiety. As one example, Nielsen ratings estimated that 79.5 million Americans watched television news coverage on the night of September 11, 2001, as they struggled to understand who attacked the United States and how they should react. In the week following the attacks, the television news audience doubled in comparison to the prior week

(Althaus 2002). In the face of public health crises like anthrax attacks or flu pandemics, Americans also want to learn more, and they search the Internet for symptoms and cures for illness and anxiety (Bar-Ilan and Echerman 2005; Ginsberg et al. 2008). This behavior is regular enough that public health officials can predict outbreaks from these searches and potentially deploy vaccines and other medical equipment (Ginsberg et al. 2008).

Although anxiety increases information-seeking and interest in politics, it also biases the type of information that individuals gather and how they process that information. After asking individuals to generate their own anxiety about immigration, we observed the type of news that they sought out and how they engaged with this news. Anxious individuals sought more relevant information than did those less concerned about immigration by choosing more stories about immigration. Yet, anxious individuals did not simply choose immigration stories at random. They were systematically drawn toward stories that portray immigration as threatening the safety and security of the United States through increasing crime and immigrants taking undeserved social benefits. Not only are anxious citizens drawn toward these types of stories, but they are also more likely to remember and agree with these stories compared with those people who are less anxious about immigration. We theorize that anxious citizens deem this threatening information as more informative or useful for decision making because negative information is more helpful in avoiding future harm.

Partisanship affects what anxious people learn. When asked to list their anxieties, Republicans and Democrats expressed similar levels of anxiety in both the treatment and control conditions. Anxious partisans were also equally likely to read threatening immigration stories. However, partisanship affects what information people ultimately take away from anxiety-driven learning. Anxious people all seek out threatening information, but only anxious Republicans were more likely to recall that information and agree with it. This might suggest that the effects of anxiety are short-lived – perhaps anxiety overrode other considerations at first, but the effect didn't last. It's also possible that recall and agreement are more complex than choosing materials to read. Either way, this presents a departure from Affective Intelligence (Marcus et al. 2000), where anxiety causes people to cast aside standing decisions like partisanship and rely on more contemporary information. Our work suggests that acceptance of contemporary information depends on a standing decision like partisanship.

TRUST

Without trust, governments are difficult to manage – policy making is more contentious (Bianco 1994), tax receipts harder to collect (Scholz and Lubell 1998), and even public health mandates are harder to enforce (Leavitt 2003), so anxiety may benefit the functioning of government. Trust may increase the speed and functioning of government, but it is not without potential downsides itself. Our results also point to some potentially troubling implications. Anxious citizens became more trusting of a variety of experts, but in the case that “experts” offer misleading or false information, trust may be a problem itself. Many parents anxious about autism trusted an expert, Dr. Andrew Wakefield, when he published a study linking a common childhood vaccine to autism, a study later debunked and potentially responsible for outbreaks of preventative diseases like measles (Robin 2006).

Our research shows that anxiety-driven trust differs by policy area. In the wake of anxiety, citizens not only want to know more about politics, but they also increase their trust in elites deemed expert in avoiding or thwarting threats. In policy areas with best practices and a clear demarcation of knowledge and expertise, such as public health, determining who to trust is more straightforward for citizens than in policy areas like immigration, where “experts” differ on their definition of what is threatening, as well as on their policy solutions. In both public health studies, when anxious, citizens were significantly more trusting of doctors and federal health agencies compared to when they were less concerned about pandemics such as the flu and smallpox. Across the two health studies, there was no instance in which health anxiety *decreased* trust in an actor, even in actors not directly related to health outcomes like the IRS and the Federal Reserve. These findings suggest that public health officials may be able to harness anxiety in communicating about pandemics but that messages about treatments or vaccines need to originate from the right sources.

In policy areas that could be blamed on government action or inaction, anxiety lowers trust in some actors while increasing trust in others. In policy areas like immigration that are more contested on partisan grounds, anxiety pushes citizens toward elites from parties that “own” the policy area, even when these anxious citizens may disagree with that party’s policies. Anxiety also pushes people away from political elites of the non-owning party. The Republican Party consistently ranks as the party best able to “handle” immigration (Egan 2013), and we saw a boon

in trust in our studies among those who watched threatening immigration ads. Across the immigration studies, anxious subjects, both Democrats and Republicans, put more trust in Republican actors than did citizens less anxious about immigration. Democratic actors, including President Obama, suffer a decline in trust when people are anxious about immigration. Anxious citizens want protection and may view the owning party as more able to implement their solutions, even if the policies offered are not their ideal policies. However, we also find that anxious citizens do not simply want elites who offer empty, threatening rhetoric, but rather they trust in actors who have expertise and, in the case of immigration, offer conservative policy solutions.

If an anxious public places its trust in leaders who betray the polity for the sake of their policies or re-election, then this may further erode trust when the crisis abates. In a *New York Times* column, philosopher Peter Ludlow argued that political elites use fear to manipulate the public:

Fear is a primal human state. From childhood on, we fear the monsters of our imaginations, lurking in dark closets, under beds, in deserted alleyways, but we also now fear monsters in the deserts of Yemen and the mountains of Pakistan. But perhaps it is possible to pause and subdue our fears by carefully observing reality – just as we might advise for trying to calm and comfort a fear-stricken child. We might find that, in reality, the more immediate danger to our democratic society comes from those who lurk in the halls of power in Washington and other national capitols and manipulate our fears to their own ends.

Even if elites do not purposely use fear to manipulate the public, when an anxious public advantages one party over another, that party has an incentive to focus elections and policy debates on those issues. If anxious citizens are willing to trust a party that they normally disagree with in times of crisis, this may facilitate policy making, but it also potentially shuts down debate and democratic deliberation. Owning parties may be effective in policy making, and anxious citizens may want to allow them more leeway in making policy (Egan 2013). However, this suggests that anxious citizens may not receive close representation of their views. This representative gap becomes normatively troubling if citizens simply turn toward leaders who will protect the public at any costs to democracy. Similarly, if elected leaders create crises in order to maintain power, cynically portray their policies, and provide false information about policies' consequences, or if no opposition voices create alternative policies for the public to adopt, the state of democracy is impoverished.

POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Political anxiety leads to an increasingly informed and trusting public but a public focused on threatening information and trusting of political “experts” in the pursuit of safety and security. In an attempt to remedy anxiety, citizens also support policies framed as effective protection against the threats that inspire their anxiety, even when these policies conflict with their political predispositions, such as partisanship. Across varied policies, citizens in a state of anxiety want to feel better, and they support policies that they believe will keep them safe from disease, war, and a changing climate.

Anxious citizens do not indiscriminately support the most conservative policies and politicians. Rather, the dynamics of the political environment shape which policies are most effectively framed as protective, even if a variety of policies may actually mitigate threats. When the political environment surrounding a particular issue is dominated by one party, citizens are likely to embrace that party’s policies, sometimes despite their own partisan attachments. Sometimes the dominant policy is one that is agreed upon as the most effective. When made anxious about a smallpox outbreak, respondents were significantly more likely to support a set of practices designed by health agencies like the World Health Organization to thwart an epidemic against a disease for which few people have any protection. Sometimes policies are dominant because opposition voices are quiet or silenced by the potential (electoral and otherwise) consequences of advocating different policies. Citizens worried about terrorism supported hawkish counterterrorism policies like the ones advocated by President George W. Bush, policies not countered, at least initially, by strong voices in the press or the Democratic Party (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2007; Boydston and Glazier 2012).

When the policy space is more contested, anxious people tend to be more supportive of policies offered by the party that “owns” the policy. Both Republicans and Democrats anxious about climate change were more supportive of Democratic-backed climate change policies, such as increasing fuel efficiency standards. In immigration policy, anxiety leads to a public less supportive of immigration flows and immigrant rights, both among Democrats and Republicans. Across both Climate Change Study PMR 2012 and Immigration KN Study 2007, respondents actively created their own anxiety, either outside the study (Climate Change Study PMR 2012) or through a bottom-up manipulation (Immigration KN Study 2007), meaning that some partisans feel anxiety on issues for

which their own party does not “own” the issue. These findings suggest that owning parties not only have an incentive to focus election campaigns on the issues where they are favored (Simon 2002), but also may actively benefit from a public worried about the owning party’s prominent issues.

Although some issues are evocative or threatening enough to create anxiety across the political spectrum, how anxious messages are communicated matters for whether citizens will accept these messages and adjust their policy attitudes. Democrats who generated their own anxiety about immigration in Immigration KN Study 2007 have immigration policy attitudes that are more similar to anxious Republicans than to their own partisan brethren not worried about immigration. However, when anxious messages come through persuasive communications like ads, Democratic constituents were more likely to reject the emotion and the policy recommendations linked to ads. Immigration MT Study 2011 and Immigration KN Study 2011 both used issue ads that portrayed immigration as harming the country economically and socially, complete with evocative images and scary music, ads reminiscent of those run by politicians like former California governor Pete Wilson. When faced with these persuasive messages, Democrats were unmoved in their support for restrictionist immigration policy. Threatening appeals do not automatically resonate with all citizens when they are clearly meant to persuade and can potentially lead to backlashes (Wright and Brehm 1982). Politicians looking to benefit from an anxious public face constraints when attempting to persuade those across the aisle to support their policies. Political persuasion can be a tricky game. Our research suggests that persuasion using anxiety is best done through less overtly persuasive means.

LOOKING OUTWARD: WHERE ELSE DOES ANXIETY PLAY OUT?

Anxiety influences how citizens think, behave, and act on the issues of immigration, public health, climate change, and terrorism – four very different types of policy areas. We expect that these dynamics play out across a variety of policy areas, not just the four that we explore in this book. Public health issues like infectious diseases easily frighten the public with little work on the behalf of elites because of their potentially deadly consequences. On unframed issues, partisanship is less likely to influence who becomes anxious and (at least at first) what types of policies anxious citizens support. Televised images of crime and riots stoke the public’s anxieties about physical safety and increase support

for more punitive crime policy (Iyengar 1991; Gilliam, Valentino, and Beckmann 2002), similar dynamics that we observe with terrorism attitudes. As citizens increasingly face anxiety-producing natural disasters like hurricanes, tornados, or floods, we expect that they will increasingly seek information and be biased toward useful but potentially threatening information. Our findings also suggest that in areas like crisis communication, some information sources are viewed as more trustworthy, and their policy recommendations will be more heeded. On unframed issues, those who can most effectively communicate about the nature of threats and policies to mitigate threats are likely to be nonpartisan experts.

Issues like immigration and climate change require more work by elites to point out dangers, and partisanship may either enhance or mitigate the effects of anxiety based on the political context. Anxiety can overcome the powerful effects of partisanship in framed policy areas under the conditions where anxiety is high and there are clear policy recommendations with little partisan opposition. These conditions are relatively rare though, and anxiety exists in a partisan world most of the time, where partisans are involved in conveying threatening messages and policy recommendations. In policy areas that are more clearly politicized – that is, where the parties differ on their evaluations of the threat as well as on potential solutions – the effect of anxiety may be more limited in scope or would need to be at extremely high levels to move the broad public. Policy areas like economic crises, gun control, and abortion create anxiety more on one side of the political aisle than the other, or at least create different types of anxieties for different groups, and are likely to function like immigration anxiety and climate change. For instance, although an anxiety ad about immigrants being exploited might resonate with Latino respondents, messages about immigrants exploiting the U.S. state and economy may generate more anxiety in whites. We expect that for an issue like abortion, messages about restrictions on abortion access will create more anxiety in some citizens, whereas messages about abortion's effect on women are more likely to cause anxiety in others. These different types of anxieties will lead to different sets of policies that can lessen these feelings. For some policy areas, like abortion, we think that the anxieties are relatively entrenched, and it would be difficult to make a pro-life respondent anxious about abortion access restrictions. However, for many policy areas, especially where knowledge is low, policy positions are not firm, or fundamental identities are not evoked, individuals can be made to feel anxious about a wide variety of issues. When outside events, social

networks, or new information can break through partisan filters and create anxiety in those people who would not normally feel anxious, political leaders have the opportunity to persuade. Even if political leaders may not always successfully persuade members of the other party to become anxious or support their policies, political entrepreneurs can stoke anxieties in their own followers.

Our focus is on how political anxiety functions within a stable democratic state, but our theory has implications for understanding how anxiety influences politics in less stable regimes and how political elites utilize anxiety to win support. In explaining the origins of ethnic conflict, Lake and Rothchild (1996) argue that when states are weak, conflict is likely when political leaders build on fears of a group's future and place in society. When states cannot arbitrate between groups and provide credible protection, groups become more fearful about survival and violence becomes more likely. Even in strong states with strong legal systems and norms, political leaders can use anxieties about minority groups (e.g., immigrants) or potentially bad future events (e.g., terrorism) to increase support for policies that harm citizens by denying them rights and liberties (Brooks and Manza 2013). Particularly when opposition voices are quiescent or silent, leaders in power may stoke anxieties to increase support for electoral purposes or for their favored policies. In states with fragile rule of law, citizens may not simply support policies that they deem protective but may also more actively defend against perceived threats when they do not trust the state to protect them. When politics elicits anxiety, its effects may be significantly more dramatic in weaker states, but, on the whole, we expect that as citizens try to regulate their anxiety across a variety of policies and places, they will support leaders and policies that they believe will keep them safe.

HOW WE STUDY EMOTION

The bulk of our research relies on experiments, and the appropriateness of experiments for studying causal mechanisms is well established. However, the ability of an experiment to isolate the effect of emotion has received less attention, and we argue that our work makes a methodological contribution on this front. Some experimental manipulations are straightforward. If this were a study of attack advertising, we could randomly assign study participants to view an attack ad and measure the effects. We might struggle with establishing a control condition (should we show a positive ad, a neutral ad, or perhaps no political

advertisement?), and we might waver over how to present the advertisement (we might embed it in a television program, so that the goals of our study are less obvious and the viewing experience is more natural). We would have a number of judgment calls to make, but claiming that we manipulated our independent variable – exposure to an attack ad – would be relatively straightforward. Manipulating an emotion like anxiety is much less obvious. There are no magic “political anxiety pill” and placebo that can be randomly assigned to participants.

There are three main steps we take in our experimental approach, and we advocate these for any experimental studies of subjective experiences. First, we manipulate anxiety in multiple ways. Our bottom-up manipulation is perhaps the method that gets us closest to the magic pill metaphor. We ask subjects in the treatment condition to list their worries about a particular subject (immigration or a public health threat) and then compare those subjects to others who simply listed their thoughts about the same subject. The advantage of this approach is that everyone is asked to take a version of the pill – perhaps different things are anxiety-inducing to different people, but because the worries are self-generated, we expect that the treatment group is generally anxious. This approach is not perfect – surely some in the treatment group were unable or unwilling to generate worries. Also, some in the control group might experience anxiety in the course of listing their thoughts.

We might also wonder if self-generated anxiety is anything like the anxiety that comes about because of news or political campaigns. This concern inspires our other two methods of manipulation. We rely on (1) news manipulations (print and television) and (2) campaign advertisements because anxiety in response to these stimuli is relevant to our concern: what happens when events trigger anxiety? A frightening news report or a threatening campaign advertisement are common triggers of political anxiety. These are more complex manipulations, which make them more relevant to real-world experiences but also more complicated analytically. An anti-immigration advertisement might trigger anxiety, anger, and/or indifference in varying combinations for different groups in the population. Similarly, a public health scare announced through a news report might encounter some skeptics. The messiness in these stimuli makes our experiments more relevant to real-world politics but also weaker in terms of internal validity.

Across our experiments, anxiety manipulations are attached to policy (i.e., anxiety about immigration or terrorism), which reflects our theory that citizens seek effective protection from threats. That is, we expect that

citizens anxious over climate change turn to leaders and policies that protect them on climate change, not the flu. Other studies of emotion utilize stimuli such as movie clips (Renshon, Lee, and Tingley 2014) or pictures of angry faces (Banks 2014) that are removed from the policy context. The advantage of those stimuli is the ability to make a strong causal claim that is the experience of anger or anxiety free of politics that influences policy attitudes. The policy-specific anxiety that we utilize gets closer to the type of messages utilized by news outlets and political elites. Campaign ads include not only emotive music and faces but also messages about how to resolve the feeling, usually by supporting the candidate or policy advocated in the ad.

Acknowledging that there is no perfect manipulation of political anxiety, we advocate varied approaches. Bottom-up manipulations might achieve greater internal validity because they allow the participant to tell us what makes them anxious. In contrast, external stimuli like news stories or campaign advertisements cannot generate the same emotional experience in all participants, but they allow us to test our hypotheses in relation to real-world stimuli. These manipulations allowed us to better situate the emotional experience of anxiety in a political environment that is often partisan.

Our second methodological suggestion is extensive pretesting of experimental manipulations. This is vital to establish that our manipulations trigger anxiety and also to measure whether they have effects on other emotions (most notably anger) and on cognition. For many of our studies, we pretested a variety of manipulations to choose the best materials. When it comes to public health threats, would a smallpox outbreak or the bubonic plague generate more anxiety? (In our pretesting, smallpox “won.”) In our anti-immigrant advertisements, we borrowed materials from both Pete Wilson and Ron Paul, and found that Pete Wilson’s advertisement was more anxiety producing. Pretesting allowed us to pick the appropriate materials for our studies with less expensive convenience samples. Pretesting also allowed us to measure a variety of emotions right after the stimulus was received.

There is some debate over the appropriate place of emotion measures in experiments – they might fit after the manipulation but before the dependent variable, but we would question whether asking participants to answer a survey question about emotion changes their emotional experience. Emotion questions could be positioned after the dependent variable, but then we would question whether the emotional experience is expected to last. This is especially a concern if the dependent variable

of interest is expected to alleviate an uncomfortable emotional experience. Both of these approaches have their critics, and this book relies on studies that take up different approaches on the placement of emotion measures.

The third methodological approach we take to establish the connection between anxiety and our dependent variables is mediation models. Extensive pretesting allowed us to pick materials that were best suited to triggering anxiety and not other emotions, but, of course, picking good materials is not the same as picking perfect materials. Anti-immigrant advertisements trigger anxiety, but they also trigger some anger. On the other hand, news about a smallpox outbreak causes anxiety, but it also generates sadness. Given that our stimuli triggered a variety of emotions, we need to show that anxiety mediates the relationship between the stimuli and the dependent variables. An experimental approach allows us to test a causal hypothesis, and our mediation models grant us more precision in saying that anxiety is doing the causal work. Although the magic political anxiety pill is still elusive, we advocate using multiple manipulations, extensive pretesting, and mediation models. These approaches have allowed us to situate a discrete emotional experience in a complex political environment.

LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT DOES THIS LINE OF RESEARCH LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

The seven studies in this book can illuminate a great deal about how political anxiety influences citizen attitudes and behaviors, but even with multiple studies across four policy areas, we are left with a number of open questions about anxiety's impact on politics. These questions provide opportunities for future political psychology research, and we outline some future paths for scholars interested in uncovering the ways that emotional politics functions.

One set of open questions from our research is about the duration of anxiety effects. How long do the effects of immigration anxiety or worries over a public health crisis last? What if threatening stimuli are ever-present? If citizens face daily reminders of economic crisis, increasing crime, or the threat of terrorism when they flip on the television or talk to a neighbor, do people remain vigilant and trusting, or do they tune out? Anxiety could continue to affect political life even after the original threat is less salient or even forgotten through shaping memories or through information seeking (Lodge and Taber 2005). If anxiety is to have a

long-term impact on political behavior, we need first to be able to demonstrate that it has a short-term impact.

Our experiments are well-suited to establishing the connection between short-term anxiety and attitudes because we both manipulate anxiety and measure outcomes in a relatively constrained period of time. We do not employ a panel design and revisit our subjects later to measure if (and how much) anxiety continues to influence decision making and opinion formation, but this is a relatively straightforward extension of our work. Another avenue for studying the duration of anxiety and its downstream effects is through exploiting the variation in threat across places and time. Utilizing a “lab in the field” type of design, researchers could manipulate anxiety in sites that are similar on most dimensions but vary on how common a particular threat is. As an example, in a study of how anger influences intragroup relations, Zeitzoff (2014) leverages variation in underlying violence by running a study in two Israeli communities that experienced different levels of rocket fire. For scholars interested in how constant exposure to threat impacts the ability of any event or elite to utilize anxiety for political purposes, this type of lab in the field design would provide a sense of how generalizable our findings are for societies in times of crisis.

Anxious people cope with anxiety in three specific ways that we track: they seek information, they trust in experts, and they support policies that they believe will protect them. Another set of open questions that this research raises is how these coping mechanisms interact and are shaped by social context. It is plausible and likely that political anxiety leads people toward social networks and trusted others, not just impersonal sources of information and political leaders. Like other survey-based experiments, we observe how anxious people react individually. We do not observe how social institutions like the family, friendship networks, or religious organizations may blunt or strengthen the effects of anxiety or offer individuals alternative coping mechanisms such as interpersonal trust or avoidance. Our findings also lend themselves to studying how the coping strategies are related to each other. Does employing one coping mechanism (i.e., information seeking) minimize the need for others (i.e., trust), or do they enhance one another (i.e., trust increases the likelihood of supporting an expert’s protective policy). Are some strategies more effective at alleviating anxiety than others? Are there individual differences in personality that make some coping mechanisms more attractive? A follow-up to our research could be a study that would induce anxiety and then allow people to choose among a set of strategies and allow a test

of which ones ultimately decreased respondents' anxiety and which ones generated effective political decisions and behaviors.

ANXIETY AND DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Are anxious citizens victims of emotional politics and elite manipulation, or are they good citizens closer to our democratic ideals? They might be both – anxiety motivates an often apathetic public to engage in democratic life, but it also gives us more than a few things to worry about. American citizens tend to fall far short of the ideal of a knowledgeable public, but an anxious citizenry is a more informed public. When a hurricane is barreling toward New Orleans or a terrorism suspect is on the loose in Cambridge, an anxious public is an attentive public and maybe a safer public. Emotions are motivating, and when anxiety motivates Americans to seek protection and trust in their government, this may enable speedier and (potentially) better policy making. Yet, anxiety also reveals the “dark side” of American politics (Brooks and Manza 2013), one in which citizens more readily sacrifice the rights and liberties of groups that are perceived to be physical or existential threats to the American public. When citizens do not pay close attention and verify the reliability of the emotional claims being made, they are likely to be moved toward policies and elites they would not otherwise agree with under more sedate circumstances. Citizens can rely on their predispositions, such as partisanship, ideology, and group membership, as a screen on anxious information, but they must be careful to not uncritically accept information from their own partisan leaders as well.

When politicians can define what the public is supposed to fear (Robin 2006), they may also be particularly successful in offering policies to alleviate that anxiety and benefit electorally from this anxiety. Republican elites are more able to convince Republican and Democratic voters alike to support restrictionist types of immigration policies when immigration creates anxiety for these individuals. The challenge for the Republican Party is that, although immigration is a frequent policy issue, it is often pushed off the agenda by other pressing issues like the economy. Nascent issues are unlikely to raise and maintain anxiety. Our findings reveal another complicating factor for party leaders who wish to benefit from anxiety. For party leaders who want to persuade partisans of the other party to be anxious, explicitly appealing to anxiety may be less effective than relying on other means, such as social networks or the news media. Self-generated anxiety is more likely to affect respondents

of both political parties than anxiety that is used overtly persuasively because individuals are not motivated to resist it. The policies offered by an “owning” party may or may not be in the best interests of individual citizens or the nation as a whole. For instance, restricting immigration or strengthening domestic surveillance may potentially head off a future terrorist attack, but these policies risk damaging privacy, freedom of association, and a diverse polity, all important to the health of a democracy.

Political candidates have incentives to focus citizen anxiety on issues that are most electorally beneficial for their party, and they often choose to focus campaign communications on those issues. Our research shows why anxiety-inducing communication may influence the electorate. Negative advertisements are memorable (Wattenberg and Brians 1999), and our research suggests that they are particularly effective because anxious citizens are motivated to seek out additional threatening information. A campaign ad might leave us anxious about immigration for several reasons, and, in an anxious state, we are attracted to and remember threatening information. If an attack advertisement gives us one or two reasons to fear immigration, our attention to the media when we are anxious might give us a few more. Even if the effect of the original anxiety-producing ad fades quickly (D. P. Green and Gerber 2002), it may have larger downstream effects through shaping how people process information. Beyond information gathering, an anxious citizen needs someone to trust, and a strategic candidate from the issue-owning party can reassure us and presumably lead us toward policies favored by his party.

There are several worrisome elements in anxious politics. First, are threats real, and are they relevant to politics? Knowing how anxiety affects citizens’ attitudes makes it clear that politicians have something to gain by stoking fears. Sometimes we ought to be anxious because of a legitimate threat to our livelihood, but the solution to the threat might not be political. Achen and Bartels (2002) raise the political consequences of irrelevant threats, such as shark attacks; our concerns go a step further – beyond politically irrelevant threats, we worry about politically relevant, politically constructed threats. Although some threats are real and imminent, others are politically constructed. Journalists and political elites have incentives to hype threats, and whether the sky is falling or not can be difficult for an ordinary citizen to figure out. Throughout our writing, we have been agnostic on the veracity and importance of different threats. Immigration triggers anxiety for many Americans, but should they feel

that way? While people on the left find the immigrant threat overhyped, people on the right doubt the role of people in climate change. In the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil, we expect that all Americans feel some level of anxiety, and likely the same is true in the event of a widespread public health crisis. Empirically, these factors matter in our research because a threat has to generate anxiety in order to trigger the effects we have studied. But the contested nature of some of threats illustrates that one person's anxious politics can be another person's hoax. Not every threat is real, and our research on the persuasive potential of anxious politics makes us particularly concerned about politically manufactured threats.

We worry that people might pay attention to the wrong threats, but it is also concerning if people aren't paying attention to the right threats. Americans were late to recognize the economic threat facing the country prior to the 2008 crisis. Threats that are not immediate are difficult to sell to the public. Climate change is an area where the threats that cause anxiety may be less immediate than other policy areas (e.g., disease outbreak, riots, mass shootings), and, thus, it is harder to convince people to worry, harder to make them care about the problem, perhaps even when they should.

Another factor that makes anxious politics troubling is if threats are not countered by other messages. Politicians want to be responsive to threats that could do real damage and that are immediate. No one wants to be on the wrong side of history – let the dictator rise, or the pandemic get out of control, or the flood drown a city. Alternative voices like the media and whistleblowers may fill a void when the opposition party is quiet or focusing on its own scary issues, yet the media also faces an incentive to scare the public to increase ratings and attention (Zaller 1999). In the face of anxiety, opposition voices, particularly from the party not in power, are necessary so that threats do not get overhyped. Without multiple voices helping the public to distinguish what issues to worry about and what policies to support to alleviate that anxiety, the party in power has monopoly on scaring the public.

FINAL THOUGHTS

When politics is emotive, when citizens are anxious because of melting icecaps, bombings in Boston or Mumbai, or measles outbreaks harming children, this anxiety systematically affects political beliefs and behavior. Emotion is not simply a residual in our models of political behavior, an

error to be corrected for or lamented in how we conceive of citizenship. Our theories of democracy conceive of good citizens as those who are informed, participatory, and with enough trust in government to comply with prescribed policy. In many ways, anxiety helps citizens meet those standards. Anxious citizens cope with this uncomfortable emotion by searching out news to help them understand, back trustworthy leaders, and throw their support behind policies framed as protective. However, anxiety is not an unalloyed good. Anxiety leads citizens to support policies that deny others rights in times of crisis and to support leaders who may continually provoke anxiety to maintain power and support for favored policies. Anxiety's role in democracy is complex, but what this book shows is that the components of democratic life – learning, trust, opinion formation – often run through emotional experiences.