



The Impact of Gratitude and Anger Expression by Refugees on American's Support for Political Policies Regarding Refugees

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Abstract

In the ongoing Mexico-United States border crisis, refugees from Central America are fleeing their countries and seeking asylum in the USA. They suffer from danger in their refuge-seeking journey, and they need help in order to change their bad situation. Refugees may try to share their experience, hoping to increase awareness and understanding among US citizens. The question is whether emotional expression by refugees can influence US citizens. We studied the effect of emotional expression of gratitude and anger by refugees on US citizens' support for political policies in favor of refugees, and whether this effect was influenced by political orientation. We used an experiment (N = 696) to manipulate whether refugees expressed no emotion, anger or gratitude when sharing their experience, while we accounted for the moderating effect of the citizens' political orientation. Our results show that the support for political policies in favor of refugees was not influenced when gratitude was expressed by refugees, and that it actually decreased when anger was expressed. Moreover, we found that these results were equal for left winged participants and right winged participants, that is, we did not identify political orientation as a moderator of the effect of emotional expression on support for refugees. To conclude, emotional expressions by refugees about their treatment can influence how much support US citizens show for political policies in favor of refugees.

Keywords: emotional expression, Mexico-US border crisis, refugees, policy support, political orientation

The Impact of Gratitude and Anger Expression by Refugees on Americans' Support for Political Policies Regarding Refugees.

“Migrants on their way to the U.S., Mexico cannot stop them”, “Policies force refugees to stay in Mexico in this urgent migrant crisis”, “Migrant crisis could bring 1M people to the Mexico-US border” (Fox News; NOS; The Guardian, 2021). These headlines show the ongoing Mexico-United States border crisis. Refugees from Central America are fleeing their countries. Because of poverty and violence in their home countries, they seek asylum in the USA, through Mexico (Cuneo et al., 2021). Refugees face problems such as psychological trauma, and loss of their home community. Additionally, they suffer from danger at the border region (Coulter et al., 2020; Dow, 2011; Newell et al., 2016), where the Mexico-United States barrier (i.e., border wall) plays a significant role. This wall was amplified in height by former president Trump and has resulted in increased migrant deaths and injuries (The Guardian, 2022).

Once refugees have arrived in USA, they are not always accepted by the host communities, and they may face little understanding about their situation. In areas where there is high unemployment, little ethnic diversity or a political domination of one ethnic group, refugees have the most chance to be discriminated against. They may have to deal with prejudices or stigmatization, which can have a negative effect on their mental health (Dow, 2011). Along with discrimination in local communities, refugees have to deal with political policies that work against them, as US policies regarding refugees are mostly based on prevention, removal and deterrence (Corbin, 2021).

Refugees can try and share their experiences about how they are received, hoping to increase helpfulness among the general public through understanding and awareness. How people can convey their perspective about being treated unfairly has been studied, showing that emotional expressions can have an effect on intergroup relations (De Vos et al., 2013). Moreover, how refugees can convey their experience has also been studied, showing that

emotional expression in refugees can have an effect on empathy towards refugees, but that this depends on what emotions are expressed. That is, the expression of anger by refugees has been found to decrease empathy for refugees and the expression of gratitude has been found to increase empathy for refugees (Gootjes et al., 2019). In the current study we aimed to examine the effect of emotional expression in an American setting: we investigated whether refugees' expression of anger or gratitude has an effect on US Citizens, and more specifically on their support for policies regarding refugees.

Where previous studies have focused on the effect of emotional expression on empathy and the moderating role of attitudes, the current study focused on other outcomes. Rather than looking at attitudes, the current study examined whether Americans' political orientation influences how they respond to emotional stories by refugees about how they are received in the USA. We expected that right winged Americans respond more negatively to refugees who express anger as compared to left winged Americans, while we expected that gratitude expressions have a positive influence independent of political orientation. Moreover, building on previous research that examined the influence of emotions expression on empathy, we examined whether support for political policies in favor of refugees is influenced.

Refugee Experience at the Mexico-United States Border

As Central Americans suffer from poverty and violence in their home countries, they often have no choice but to flee. Intending to seek asylum in the USA, they travel through Mexico and end up at the Mexico-United States border (Cuneo et al., 2021). The Mexico-United States border crisis is an ongoing crisis which started in 2014 (Willman, 2017). Refugees in this border crisis come from Central America, more specifically Nicaragua, Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Especially people in the Northern Triangle (i.e., El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) suffer from drug cartels, gangs and spreading violence, due to its unfavorable location in between North and South America (Rodríguez Serna, 2016).

Refugees face many problems during their refuge-seeking journey, that is, they endure psychological distress and trauma due to possible loss of their primary household and family. Scattering of their home community leads to distress and disorientation, because of the lack of social ties with their network. Additionally, a source of stress is financial and status change, where refugees who had higher socio-economic status in their home country suffer higher negative consequences (Dow, 2011). Upon arriving at the Mexico-US border, they either are immediately sent back to their home country, or they are (temporarily) detained (Pew Research Center, 2021). The border region is very dangerous and is said to have the largest inequality of all borders in the world, regarding power and social circumstances (Velasco Ortiz & Contreras, 2014). Closer to the border wall, Border Patrol keeps a close eye through surveillance, causing refugees to go to more remote areas. Here they are exposed to heat, and there is a lack of food and water, sometimes leading to death (Newell et al., 2016). Not only the border region is dangerous, as detention centers also fail to provide human conditions. Refugees are not being explained what documents they are signing (i.e., unfairness of legal procedures), and the US Customs and Border Protection uses verbal threats and physical force (Coulter et al., 2020). Lack of accessibility to basic needs, insufficient amounts of food, medical neglect, and labor are part of everyday life in these detention centers. Furthermore, refugees encounter racist guards, as US citizens' attitudes towards refugees are mostly driven by prejudice. Refugees come to the border asking for help, yet they are dehumanized and criminalized (Nassar, 2019; Swanson, 2019). Upon arriving in the USA, they have to deal with more discrimination through prejudices or stigmatization, and political policies based on prevention, removal and deterrence (e.g., criminal charges, use of visas, surveillance) (Corbin, 2021).

It is clear that refugees' human rights are violated in the Mexico-US border crisis, and they are trying to survive. Refugees are perceived in a certain way, influenced by media coverage where they are mostly depicted as masses of people that try to illegally cross the

border (Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2017). Refugees can try to increase awareness and understanding among the general public, by conveying their experiences. By expressing themselves, they can try to navigate through these circumstances, as it is shown that emotional expression can lighten distress. Additionally, it plays a role in influencing interpersonal relationships (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001). The question is what emotions about unfair treatment by the outgroup can best be expressed in order to change the bad situation.

Emotional Expression in Refugees: The Role of Anger and Gratitude

How a person can best convey their perspective about being treated unfairly by an outgroup has been studied before by De Vos and colleagues (2013). They investigated how expressing anger could affect intergroup relations, that is, could anger expression about unfair treatment by the outgroup increase an empathic response in the outgroup? Supplementing the solely destructive character of anger, they stated that it could actually improve these intergroup relations. They argued that expressing anger does not only show the perceived unfairness, but it also shows that the interpersonal relationship holds value and is in need of reconciliation. Whether and how anger is communicated, was manipulated in several experiments. They found a strong positive effect of expressing pure anger on empathy: when pure group-based anger is communicated, empathy for the out-group increases, which could decrease intergroup conflict. Important to emphasize is the need for pure group-based anger for this effect to occur, meaning anger without contempt.

Gootjes and colleagues (2019) further studied communication of emotions and its effect on empathy in a European refugee context. They specifically looked at emotional expression by refugees, while additionally accounting for people's attitudes about the refugees. These attitudes were expected to have a moderating effect on the relationship between emotional expression and empathy. Contrary to De Vos et al., they did not find a positive effect of anger: that is, when residents had a positive attitude, communication of anger did not increase empathy

for refugees. However, when residents had a negative attitude towards refugees, communication of anger even decreased empathy for refugees. The expression of anger was reassessed in the current study.

Furthermore, Gootjes et al. looked at refugees expressing positive emotion and its effect on empathy. They found a positive effect for the expression of happiness: refugees expressing positive emotions such as happiness and gratefulness (although still depicting the bad circumstances they are in) increased empathy for refugees, especially among those with more positive attitudes about refugees, but also for those who feel more negative about refugees. Gratitude occurs when one thinks of oneself as the recipient of benefit, and it can even be experienced in difficult situations. It is thought of as benefit-focused, which activates a positive feeling of emotions (Witvliet et al., 2018). Gratitude and happiness were used as accompanying terms in the study by Gootjes and colleagues. Research showed that gratitude is considered to be a strong emotion, related to and predictive of happiness (Witvliet et al., 2018). Thus, it was expected that expressing gratitude in the current study should have the same effect as was found by Gootjes and colleagues. However, we intended to more explicitly formulate gratitude without combining it with happiness. In other words, we based our predictions on findings by Gootjes et al. with respect to the influence of anger and gratitude expression.

In the current study we examined the effect of emotional expression in an American setting. However, where Gootjes et al. focused on empathy and attitudes as means to show the effect of emotional expression, this study focused on other outcomes.

The Current Research

The negative effect of anger in case of negative attitudes towards refugees found by Gootjes et al. (2019) was further investigated, but rather than looking at attitudes, the current study measured the moderating effect of Americans' general political orientation (Rosenau & Paehlke, 1990; ANES, 2019). Generally, a partisan divide is the reality with regard to policies

within the US. The Mexico border wall, now put on hold by Biden (CNN, 2021), shows a perfect example of a partisan divide, as Republican support is at a record high, and Democratic support at a record low (Pew Research Center, 2019). Although this sharp partisan divide is clear, using a general spectrum of political orientation is more useful regarding political and social issues, abandoning the partisan labels (Rosenau & Paehlke, 1990). Political orientation is likely linked to attitude, thus, it would be clear to state that left winged Americans more strongly support favorable refugee policies and right winged Americans are more opposed to favorable refugee policies (Pew Research Center, 2019). Hence, we expected that right winged Americans are more likely to respond negatively to refugees who express anger as compared to left winged Americans. Moreover, in line with the positive effect of gratitude found by Gootjes and colleagues, it was expected that left winged and right winged Americans are equally likely to respond positively to refugees who express gratitude. That is, the effect of gratitude expression is independent of political orientation.

Additionally, different from Gootjes et al., we examined the influence of emotion expressions on support for policies in favor of refugees rather than on empathy: that is, we investigated whether refugees' expression of anger or gratitude will have an effect on US citizens' support for policies regarding refugees. The United States is confronted with the large waves of (illegal) immigrants and refugees. Current US political policies are focused on reducing large migration waves; more specifically, on prevention, removal and deterrence. This results in the use of screening procedures, surveillance, and detention. Yet, these policies fail to be effective, and are sometimes even counteractive, resulting in refugees continuing to be stranded at the Mexico-US border (Corbin, 2021). In order to change and improve the current difficult situation for refugees, a change in political policies could be achieved (Corbin, 2021), that is, more policies could be proposed that are in favor of refugees. Adoption of these policies is inevitably dependent on support or rejection within the US population. The question is

whether the way in which refugees speak up about their unfair treatment can influence the amount of support they receive. That is, can emotional expression by refugees increase support for favorable refugee policies by US residents?

The research question was: how does emotional expression of gratitude and anger by refugees influence American (U.S.) citizens' support for political policies and how is this effect affected by political orientation? It was hypothesized that when refugees express gratitude, Americans will be more willing to support political policies in favor of refugees than when they express no emotion (Hypothesis 1). Further, when refugees express anger, left winged Americans more strongly support political policies in favor of refugees, and right winged Americans are more opposed to these policies than when they express no emotion (Hypothesis 2).

Method

Participants and Design

The participants were recruited in March 2022 through CloudResearch's Mturk Toolkit; they participated in the survey electronically and received \$1 (€0.95) for participation¹. The initial sample in Mturk consisted of 1157 participants, after which participants were immediately excluded if they filled in the same questionnaire multiple times (20 excluded). Subsequently, participants were excluded based on multiple pre-registered quality criteria through [AsPredicted](#)². They were excluded if they failed to indicate the right question option in an attentive question (16 excluded). They were excluded if they gave a wrong answer to what

¹ Our study was part of a bigger project that included more experimental conditions and measures. The factor *emotional expression* also included the experimental manipulation of sadness. *Attitudes towards refugees* was another premeasure variable, and *empathy towards refugees*, *stereotypes about refugees*, and *behavior towards refugees* were other dependent variables that were measured. All these measures were not used for the current project, and are therefore not mentioned in this paper.

² In certain cases we deviated from the pre-registered exclusion criteria in AsPredicted, as it was a logical step to remove the participants or to adjust the criterium to better fit the current project.

the article was about and did not correct this mistake in hindsight (59 excluded). Participants were excluded if they gave invalid answers to both questions: one in which they were asked what the capital city of the United States is, and one in which they gave their opinion about the situation from the article (none excluded). Participants were excluded if they spent less than 45 seconds on reading the article (121 excluded). They were excluded when they gave the same answer to all Likert style questions (i.e., straightlining) (none excluded). They were excluded if they did not fill in answers to the empathy measure (5 excluded), and they were excluded if they did not have US nationality (8 excluded). Moreover, participants were excluded if they were put in the sad manipulation condition (231 excluded). Finally, they were excluded if they did not fill in answers to the policy support measure (1 excluded).

In total, 461 participants were excluded, meaning that the final sample consisted of 696 American citizens at a minimum age of 18 (male = 332, female = 359, other/neither = 5). The entire sample had an US nationality, but there were two participants with mixed nationality (US American = 694, Swedish-American = 1, German-American = 1). Participants belonged to one of three age categories: 18 to 35 years (32.5%), 35 - 65 years (58.9%), or 65 years and older (8.6%).

Using G*Power, a power analysis was carried out before the study to determine the required number of participants (Faul et al., 2009). To find a small to medium effect size ($f^2 = .175$) for the interaction effect (H2) at the minimum, a sample size of 318 participants was assumed to be required (power level = .80 and $\alpha = .05$). This means that the minimum sample size was reached.

This study had a between-subjects design, with one factor *emotional expression* with three levels: no emotion, anger, gratitude. The main dependent variable was *support for political policies in favor of refugees*, and a measure of *political orientation* was used as a

moderator. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Groningen for behavioral research.

Procedure

Participants completed an online Qualtrics questionnaire. They first received information about the study, in which they were informed about why they were asked to participate in the study and how the researchers will process their data. Informed consent was obtained from participants, in which they stated that they participated voluntarily and knew how their data will be processed.

The questionnaire started with *demographics*. The following items were used: “What is your gender?” (Male/Female/Other or neither), “What is your nationality?” (US American/Other), and “What is your age?” (18-35/35-65/65 or more). Then, *political orientation* was measured. This variable was constructed for this study and was not based on existing questionnaires. The following items were used and combined to a scale ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.70$): “How would you describe your political orientation, in general?”, “How would you describe your political orientation when it comes to social issues?”, and “How would you describe your political orientation when it comes to economic issues?”. All items were measured on 7 point Likert scales ranging from *very left winged* (1) to *very right winged* (7).

The study followed with the *experimental manipulation of emotional expression*. Participants were randomly and equally assigned to one of the conditions and were shown a news-letter simulated story in which three Central American refugees shed light on their living conditions and how they are being treated in the USA. In the control condition, no emotion words were used, although the difficult situation refugees face was still depicted. In the anger and grateful condition, the refugees stated they were either angry or grateful about their treatment. Emotion words were inserted about six times into statements by refugees, and the situation was similarly mentioned in all conditions. Participants had to go through three pages

to read the story and on every page the emotion (depending on the condition: no emotion, gratefulness or anger) was mentioned twice. The articles consisted of statements such as “Even though we are treated kindly by some people who do the best they can, and our basic needs are covered, I feel angry about our current situation” (anger expression), “However, we are treated kindly by some people who do the best they can, and our basic needs are covered. This makes me very thankful.” (gratitude expression), and “Even though we are treated kindly by some people who do the best they can, and our basic needs are covered, I feel dissatisfied about our current situation.” (neutral expression) (see Appendix).

After this, dependent measures were taken. The main dependent variable for the current project was *support for political policies in favor of refugees*. This variable was constructed for this study and was not based on existing questionnaires. The following items were used, and combined to a scale after recoding the reversed items from negative to positive framing, that is, a higher average score means more support ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.61$): “The government should prevent refugees from staying permanently in the United States.” (reverse coded), “The government should improve conditions in the refugee centers.”, “A refugee who already has family in the United States, should immediately receive a green card.”, “The refugee acceptance ceiling should be lowered from 15000 to 9000 spots.” (reverse coded), “The United States should help refugees as much as possible.”, and “The government should cease funding for organizations that help refugees.” (reverse coded). All items were measured on 7 point Likert scales ranging from *completely disagree* (1) to *completely agree* (7).

Two attention checks were used in the questionnaire. The first attention check was: “To check your attentiveness, this is a check question, please indicate option number two.”, and this question was placed within the dependent measures. The second attention check was placed within the general checking questions at the end of the survey: “In order to check whether you are participating attentively: what is the capital city of the United States?”.

At the end of the survey, participants were thanked. They were also debriefed, in which the actual aim of the study was explained. Lastly, participants who failed to answer the first attention check, or failed to respond correctly to what the article they read was about, were shown an inattentiveness question in which they were able to argue why they thought they did participate attentively.

Results

Manipulation Checks

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine whether the manipulation of emotions in the articles achieved the expected effect. The condition (gratitude versus anger versus control) was entered as the factor, and the dependent variables were perceived emotions (we expected anger and gratitude to be influenced).

We found a main effect for condition with respect to gratitude, $F(2, 693) = 53.85, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .13$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that indeed participants perceived more gratitude in the grateful condition than in the control condition or angry condition. In the control condition and angry condition, refugees were perceived as equally grateful. We also found a main effect for condition with respect to anger, $F(2, 693) = 57.08, p = < .01, \eta_p^2 = .14$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that participants perceived more anger in the angry condition than in the control condition or grateful condition. However, refugees were also perceived as more angry in the control condition than in the grateful condition.

For exploratory means, we also examined all other perceived emotions (see Table 1). Participants perceived more satisfaction in the grateful condition than in the control condition or angry condition, and perceived satisfaction was equal in the control condition and angry condition. Refugees were perceived as more sad in the control condition than in the angry condition or grateful condition, while perceived sadness did not differ in the latter two conditions. In the anger condition, disappointment was perceived to the same extent as in the

control condition and grateful condition. However, perceived disappointment was higher in the control condition than in the grateful condition. Perceived contempt did not differ for the control condition or the angry condition, but it was perceived as lower in the grateful condition.

To summarize, the expression of gratitude in refugees did not only lead to more perceived gratitude, but it also led to more perceived satisfaction, and less perceived anger, sadness, disappointment and contempt in the refugees compared to the control condition. The expression of anger only led to more perceived anger, and less perceived sadness compared to the control condition. All means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviation for Perceived Emotion per Condition

| Perceived Emotion | Condition | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Anger | No Emotion | Gratitude |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> |
| Anger | 5.78 ^b (1.65) | 5.47 ^a (1.43) | 4.25 ^c (1.72) |
| Gratitude | 2.51 ^a (1.48) | 2.56 ^a (1.37) | 3.82 ^b (1.66) |
| Satisfaction | 1.96 ^a (1.38) | 1.85 ^a (1.23) | 2.57 ^b (1.35) |
| Sadness | 5.75 ^a (1.60) | 6.13 ^b (1.27) | 5.76 ^a (1.38) |
| Disappointment | 6.10 ^{ab} (1.53) | 6.32 ^a (1.29) | 5.86 ^b (1.42) |
| Contempt | 4.66 ^a (1.83) | 4.52 ^a (1.66) | 3.59 ^b (1.69) |

Note. In each row means with different superscripts differ significantly according to the least significant difference (LSD) post-hoc analysis at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). The standard deviation is between parentheses.

Relations between Measures

To provide a general impression of how all variables relate to each other, we first examined correlations and means (see Table 2). A large negative correlation between political orientation and support for policies regarding refugees was found. Participants with the strongest right winged political orientation showed the lowest support for political policies in favor of refugees, and the most left winged participants showed the highest support. Participants averagely leaned towards a left winged political orientation and the average support for policies regarding refugees was fairly high.

A small to moderate correlation was shown in the relationship between political orientation and perceived satisfaction and a very weak correlation was found between political orientation and perceived gratitude. Thus, right winged participants perceived more satisfaction or gratitude in refugees than left winged participants. Moderate negative correlations were found between political orientation and the perception of anger, sadness, or disappointment. Thus, left winged participants perceived more anger, sadness, or disappointment in refugees than right winged participants. No correlation was found between political orientation and perceived contempt.

Small to moderate correlations were found between emotions and support for political policies in favor of refugees. Participants who perceived more anger, sadness or disappointment by refugees, also showed more support for political policies in favor of these refugees. Contrastingly, participants who perceived more satisfaction by refugees, showed less support for these policies. Perceived gratitude or contempt showed no correlation with support for political policies in favor of refugees.

Moderate to large correlations with respect to anger were found: participants who perceived more anger also perceived more sadness, disappointment and contempt, but less satisfaction and gratitude. Small to large correlations with respect to gratitude were found: when

they perceived more gratitude by refugees, they also perceived more satisfaction, but they perceived less contempt, disappointment, sadness, and anger.

To summarize, the perception of gratitude by individuals was related to lower perception of negative emotions (i.e., anger, sadness, disappointment, and contempt) and higher perception of positive emotions (i.e., satisfaction). Contrastingly, the perception of anger was related to lower perception of positive emotions and higher perception of negative emotions. All correlations are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for All Variables

| | <i>M</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| 1. Political Orientation | 3.51 (1.70) | | | | | | | |
| 2. Support for Political Policies in Favor of Refugees | 4.95 (1.61) | -.70* | | | | | | |
| 3. Perceived Anger | 5.20 (1.72) | -.15* | .16* | | | | | |
| 4. Perceived Gratitude | 2.93 (1.61) | .07 | -.01 | -.44* | | | | |
| 5. Perceived Satisfaction | 2.10 (1.36) | .22* | -.27* | -.67* | .48* | | | |
| 6. Perceived Sadness | 5.89 (1.43) | -.25* | .37* | .63* | -.26* | -.66* | | |
| 7. Perceived Disappointment | 6.10 (1.43) | -.28* | .38* | .66* | -.28* | -.73* | .82* | |
| 8. Perceived Contempt | 4.28 (1.79) | .00 | -.07 | .59* | -.41* | -.37* | .30* | .32* |

Note. All ratings were on 7 point Likert scales, ranging from *very left winged* (1) to *very right winged* (2), or *absolutely not* (1) to *absolutely yes* (7), or *completely disagree* (1) to *completely agree* (7). The standard deviation is between parentheses. *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Influence of Emotions on Policy Support

To analyze whether neutral, angry or grateful complaints of refugees had an effect on support for political policies in favor of refugees, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The dependent variable was support for political policies in favor of refugees, and the factor was condition (neutral versus angry versus grateful). An overall effect of emotional expression by refugees on support for political policies in favor of refugees was found, $F(2, 693) = 3.41, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .01$, as the support for political policies in favor of refugees actually decreased when anger was expressed compared to when no emotion was expressed.

A least significant difference (LSD) post-hoc analysis showed that when anger was expressed, less support was found for political policies regarding refugees ($M_{\text{anger}} = 4.74, SD_{\text{anger}} = 1.67$) then when no emotion or gratitude was expressed ($M_{\text{control}} = 5.12, SD_{\text{control}} = 1.47, M_{\text{gratitude}} = 4.99, SD_{\text{gratitude}} = 1.67$). This is not in line with hypothesis 1, as we expected that when refugees express gratitude, Americans would be more willing to support political policies in favor of refugees than when they express no emotion. Thus, anger seemed to have a negative effect rather than that gratitude had a positive effect.

Moderation by Political Orientation

To analyze whether political orientation moderated the effect of emotional expression by refugees on support for political policies in favor of refugees, a moderation analysis (Hayes' PROCESS macro) was conducted. The outcome variable was support for political policies in favor of refugees, the predictor variable was condition and the moderator variable was political orientation. Dummy variables were created for the condition variable, where one compared the anger condition with the neutral condition (X1) and one compared the grateful condition with the neutral condition (X2). Two dummy interactions were used in the model, testing whether political orientation moderated the difference in support between the control and anger

condition ($X1 \times$ Political orientation), and whether political orientation moderated the difference in support between the control and gratitude condition ($X2 \times$ Political orientation). The overall model was significant, $F(5, 690) = 134.87, p < .001, R^2 = .49$.

The results showed that the first interaction ($X1 \times$ Political orientation) was not significant, $R^2 = .49, B = -0.03, 95\% CI [-.15, .10], p = .65$, meaning that political orientation did not moderate the difference in support between the control and anger condition. Moreover, the second interaction ($X2 \times$ Political orientation) was also not significant, $R^2 = .49, B = -.04, 95\% CI [-.17, .08], p = .49$, meaning that political orientation also did not moderate the difference in support between the control and gratitude condition. Thus, in contrast with our expectation that when refugees express anger, left winged Americans more strongly support political policies in favor of refugees, and right winged Americans are more opposed to these policies than when they express no emotion (Hypothesis 2), our results did not show a moderating effect of political orientation.

Thus, these results did not identify political orientation as a moderator of the effect of gratitude or anger expression on support for political policies in favor of refugees.

Discussion

In the current experiment, we examined whether expressions of anger or gratitude by refugees from Central America about how they are received in the USA influence US citizens' support for political policies in favor of refugees. We also examined what role was played by political orientation. We expected that when refugees express gratitude, US citizens would be more willing to support political policies in favor of refugees than when they express no emotion (Hypothesis 1). However, the expression of gratitude did not have a positive effect on support for refugees, indicating no support for hypothesis 1. Further, we hypothesized that when refugees express anger, left winged Americans more strongly support political policies in favor of refugees, and right winged Americans are more opposed to these policies than when they

express no emotion (Hypothesis 2). However, our findings revealed that when anger was expressed, political policies in favor of refugees were supported less than when no emotion was expressed. This was independent of political orientation, hence hypothesis 2 was also not supported.

Even though we did not find support for our hypotheses, the manipulation of emotional expression of anger and gratitude by refugees was shown to be successful, where anger was more distinctively manipulated than gratitude. US citizens' perceptions of all positive emotions was reinforced when gratitude was expressed by refugees, that is, there was almost no perception of negative emotions anymore. Contrastingly, when anger was expressed by refugees, US citizens only perceived more anger than when no emotion was expressed, while the perception of other emotions was not influenced.

We further explored the relationships between the different variables and found some important outcomes. As could be expected, people with the strongest right winged political orientation showed the lowest support for political policies in favor of refugees, and the most left winged participants showed the highest support. Interestingly, left winged people perceived more anger, sadness, or disappointment from refugees than right winged people. Further, when people perceived more anger, sadness or disappointment in refugees, they were more likely to have support for political policies in favor of refugees. On the other hand, they were less likely to support such policies when they perceived more satisfaction in refugees. This suggests that right winged people assume refugees to be satisfied, which is related to lower support for policies regarding refugees, and left winged people assume refugees to be angry, which is related to higher support for refugees.

Implications

In this study we have shown more insights into the effect of emotional expression in refugees. Our results suggest that the way in which people are influenced in the extent to which

they support policies in favor of refugees is not influenced by expressed gratitude but is negatively influenced by expressed anger.

Based on research by Gootjes and colleagues (2019), who studied communication of emotions by refugees and its effect on empathy for refugees, we expected that when refugees express gratitude, US citizens would be more willing to support refugees than when they express no emotion (Hypothesis 1). However, the expression of gratitude did not have a positive effect on support for refugees. Regarding the lack of support for our hypothesis, a possible explanation could be that we did not examine empathy, but support for political policies. There is a possibility that emotional expression by refugees did increase US citizens' empathy for the refugees. However, if citizens did experience more empathy, this does not directly lead to more support for policies regarding refugees; that is, they might not immediately feel the need for political action. It may require a more complicated process with more steps for empathy to turn into support for political policies. Another possibility is that if citizens did experience more empathy, this may be linked to increased sympathy, which could in turn lead to more support; as in a study by Verkuyten (2004) he did show that feeling of sympathy had a positive effect on support for refugee policies. However, to be able to actually find the link between empathy, sympathy and policy support, we would repeatedly need to follow more steps.

Based on research by De Vos and colleagues (2013), who investigated how expressing anger could affect intergroup relations, we expected to find a positive effect of the expression of anger in left winged people but not in right winged people. More specifically, we expected that when refugees express anger, left winged Americans more strongly support political policies in favor of refugees, and right winged Americans are more opposed to these policies than when they express no emotion (Hypothesis 2). However, our findings revealed that we did not find a positive effect of anger at all. It seems like left winged and right winged individuals reacted in a similar way: they both responded negatively to anger expression by refugees. Left

winged US citizens actually perceived more anger (and also sadness and disappointment) than right winged citizens, however, this was independent of the manipulated emotional expression by refugees. What could be the reason for the negative effect of expression of anger by refugees? Gootjes and colleagues found an effect of the expression of anger similar to our findings, that is, they found that the expression of anger by refugees had a negative effect on empathy for refugees. Based on the resemblance between the research by Gootjes et al. and our current study, we might look at the context in which the two studies were conducted. Both our results were found in a refugee-crisis context, that is, anger was expressed by refugees who tried to convey their unfair treatment. This is in contrast with the study by De Vos and colleagues, as they studied the effect of anger expression in a student context, that is, students expressed anger about how they were treated. This suggests that the expression of group-based anger as found by De Vos et al. might not necessarily extend to a refugee context in which the refugees talk about their unfair treatment, as we perhaps generally expect refugees to be grateful instead of critical.

While looking at relations between emotional expression and support for refugees, we found that expressed anger actually was related to more support for policies to improve the situation for refugees. We found important relationships between the political orientation of US citizens, how they perceived the emotions expressed by refugees, and how much they supported policies in favor of refugees. That is, right winged Americans perceived more gratitude from refugees and showed less support for refugees, and left winged Americans perceived more anger and showed more support for refugee policies. This sounds like motivated reasoning. Motivated reasoning refers to the ways individuals use their reasoning to protect their existing beliefs or identities. More specifically, individuals may have a bias related to their existing political beliefs, and aim to look for justification for these beliefs (Bolsen & Palm, 2019). Motivated reasoning through justification can be used to explain the fact that the more right

winged participants were, the more they perceived satisfaction or gratitude from refugees and the less they perceived anger, sadness or disappointment. Right winged individuals might benefit from perceiving gratitude or satisfaction in refugees, because these emotions can show that no action needs to be taken to change the existing situation. Contrastingly, left winged individuals can perceive negative emotions such as anger and sadness, because this is in line with their existing beliefs about refugees needing help and the situation needing to be changed. This way of motivated reasoning can cause individuals to not be influenced by emotional expression, as they have the desire to be consistent in their existing beliefs.

Limitations, Strengths and Future Directions

The first limitation of our study is that support for political policies in favor of refugees was a variable that was created by ourselves. Although the items that formed the policy support measure had high item reliability, it can be questioned whether we actually measured support for policies regarding refugees, as we did not validate our measure using existing research. It is a possibility that people did form opinions based on the article they read about the way refugees are treated, but that these opinions did not translate into support for political policies. Maybe the opinions people formed were more nuanced than how we formulated the policies in favor of refugees, meaning that they could not agree or disagree with support for general political policies regarding refugees, but that they could have formed a more case-based opinion. Future research should use existing literature to form a policy support variable, to make sure it actually measures what it is intended to measure.

Another possible limitation could be that textual manipulation might not have been the most effective way to manipulate emotional expression. The differences in text between the three conditions were subtle, specifically for the difference between the control condition and the negative emotions condition, as in the control condition they already show their dissatisfaction with the situation. We question whether the control condition might have

insinuated too much negativity, rather than maintaining a neutral perspective. Another question we pose is related to how people might have read the article: did they read it correctly or were they so motivated to protect their pre-existing beliefs that they actually made no connection between the article and their opinion about refugee policies? In future research, it might be more effective to use other forms of communication by refugees, either in video- or sound recordings, especially in order to provide nuance in the amount of negativity in the control condition.

A final limitation of our study is the generalizability of our results. We question whether our insights are limited to the refugee context and political context, specifically in the USA, and whether they could exist beyond these specific contexts. Although the general situation of refugee migration is similar in America and Europe, it might still be perceived differently in the USA than in European countries. We found a considerable relationship between political orientation, perception of emotions, and support for political policies, connecting our results to research on motivated cognition. However, how people perceive the emotions that are expressed by others can depend on their culture. Future researchers could explore in what other contexts emotional expression can be used to indicate injustice or experience sharing and cultural context would be an important aspect for them to take into account.

Finally, we propose possible strengths of the current study. The fact that our research was conducted in a political context has given new insights into the relationships between political orientation, perceptions of emotions, and support for political policies in favor of refugees. Additionally, we were successful in manipulating 'pure' group-based anger, as proposed by De Vos and colleagues (2013), as perceived contempt levels continued to be stable when anger was expressed. That is, in the control condition, contempt was perceived at the same level as in the anger condition. This means that when anger was shown by refugees, participants did not perceive more contempt than when no emotion was shown by refugees.

Additionally, perceived anger was related to more support for political policies in favor of refugees, but perceived contempt was not related to more support.

Conclusion

The findings in this research show that when refugees use the emotional expression of gratitude to share their experience, this does not have an effect on the extent to which US citizens support political policies in favor of refugees. Contrastingly, when they use anger as an emotion to express their experience, this does have an effect on support for refugees, causing it to decrease. Additionally, Americans' political orientation does not moderate the effect of emotional expression on support for refugees. However, the findings do imply that there is a distinct relationship between a person's political orientation, their support for refugees, and the emotion they perceive in refugees. That is, people who support refugees are more likely to be left winged, and are also more likely to perceive negative emotions in refugees about their situation. On the other hand, people who do not support policies to help refugees, are more likely to be right winged, and are more likely to think that refugees are already satisfied with their situation.

The current research provides new understanding of the effects of emotional expression, and it suggests that the way people perceive refugees and the emotions they express may have consequences for the integration of refugees in the host country. That is, when refugees communicate being grateful, this does not seem to change whether people in the host country support refugee policies. However, when refugees communicate anger, people in the host country may be inclined to show less support for refugees through political policies.

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Appendix

Control Condition Article

**TIME****SUBSCRIBE**

U.S. • POLITICS

Dissatisfied Central-American Refugees Tell Their Story



A refugee detention center in Texas, dubbed by local officials as “Ursula,” is the new American home for hundreds of refugees from Central America. Some of these refugees are working to raise awareness for their situation. Their goal is to shed light on their unjust living conditions and express how dissatisfied they are with how they are being treated.

Diego, Camila, and Felipe (to ensure their anonymity, these names are not their actual real names), are three of the many refugees who fled from Central America. They wanted to escape their previous life that was without a future, filled with poverty, gang warfare, and crime. While they are relieved to have arrived safely in the US, they quickly learned that not everything is quite what they expected.

Dissatisfied about current situation

“We come from a terrible situation, and we have had to leave friends and family behind. I hoped to be able to start over in the US”, says Diego, who is from Honduras. “However, it is unclear whether we can start our new life here”, he says. Camila, from Nicaragua, concurs: “We are being treated as inferior human beings. We sleep with many people crowded into very small rooms, and our future looks somber. I expected something else from the US.” she says. “Even though we are treated kindly by some people who do the best they can, and our basic needs are covered, I feel dissatisfied about our current situation.”

Refugees that seek asylum in the US, have the right to be treated with respect and afforded with basic needs, such as assistance with finding housing, work, and integrating into their new communities. However, often, local communities lack resources and struggle to help these new members of the community get on their feet.

A typical refugee experiences something closer to the following: after their long journey from their home country, they wait at the border for weeks or sometimes much longer, where they are detained in overcrowded and underfunded facilities. Entire families are often confined in cramped spaces with poor sanitary conditions, and they are forced to sleep on the floor. The long waiting times can cause families to be broken: waiting times are typically longer for adults than children, which motivates some refugee-seeking parents to send their children ahead through the legal process.

Dissatisfaction about treatment

“We hope to change our situation”, says Felipe, from El Salvador. “We have met great people here in the US who were kind and wanted to help. But the way it is now, our situation is without a future and unjust.” says Felipe. “By speaking out, we want to raise awareness for our circumstances. We need to show Americans that we exist here in the US, and that we want to become a member of US society. We want to express our dissatisfaction about how we are treated.”

Angry condition article**TIME****SUBSCRIBE**

U.S. • POLITICS

Angry Central-American Refugees Tell Their Story



A refugee detention center in Texas, dubbed by local officials as “Ursula,” is the new American home for hundreds of refugees from Central America. Some of these refugees are working to raise awareness for their situation. Their goal is to shed light on their unjust living conditions and express how upset they are about how they are being treated.

Diego, Camila, and Felipe (to ensure their anonymity, these names are not their actual real names), are three of the many refugees who fled from Central America. They wanted to escape their previous life that was without a future, filled with poverty, gang warfare, and crime. While they are relieved to have arrived safely in the US, they quickly learned that not everything is quite what they expected.

Angry about current situation

“We come from a terrible situation, and we have had to leave friends and family behind. I hoped to be able to start over in the US”, says Diego, who is from Honduras. “However, it is unclear whether we can start our new life here”, he says frustrated. Camila, from Nicaragua, concurs: “We are being treated as inferior human beings. We sleep with many people crowded into very small rooms, and our future looks somber. I expected something else from the US.” she says irritated. “Even though we are treated kindly by some people who do the best they can, and our basic needs are covered, I feel angry about our current situation.”

Refugees that seek asylum in the US, have the right to be treated with respect and afforded with basic needs, such as assistance with finding housing, work, and integrating into their new communities. However, often, local communities lack resources and struggle to help these new members of the community get on their feet.

A typical refugee experiences something closer to the following: after their long journey from their home country, they wait at the border for weeks or sometimes much longer, where they are detained in overcrowded and underfunded facilities. Entire families are often confined in cramped spaces with poor sanitary conditions, and they are forced to sleep on the floor. The long waiting times can cause families to be broken: waiting times are typically longer for adults than children, which motivates some refuge-seeking parents to send their children ahead through the legal process.

Anger about treatment

“We hope to change our situation”, says Felipe, from El Salvador. “We have met great people here in the US who were kind and wanted to help. But the way it is now, our situation is without a future and unjust.” says Felipe enraged. “By speaking out, we want to raise awareness for our circumstances. We need to show Americans that we exist here in the US, and that we want to become a member of US society. We want to express our anger about how we are treated.”

Grateful condition article



TIME

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U.S. • POLITICS

Grateful Central-American Refugees Tell Their Story



A refugee detention center in Texas, dubbed by local officials as “Ursula,” is the new American home for hundreds of refugees from Central America. These refugees have experienced adverse circumstances, and as a result, they are working to raise awareness for their situation. Their goal is to shed light on their living conditions and how they are being treated. Despite this, they desire to express warm appreciation for being in the US.

Diego, Camila, and Felipe (to ensure anonymity, we do not report their last names), are three of the many refugees who fled from Central America. They wanted to escape their previous life that was without a future, filled with poverty, gang warfare, and crime. While they are relieved to have arrived safely in the US, they quickly learned that not everything is quite what they expected.

Thankful about kind treatment

“We come from a terrible situation, and we have had to leave friends and family behind. I hoped to be able to start over in the US”, says Diego, who is from Honduras. “However, it is unclear whether we can start our new life here”, he says. Camila, from Nicaragua, concurs: “We are being treated as inferior human beings. We sleep with many people crowded into very small rooms, and our future looks somber. I expected something else from the US.” she says. “However, we are treated kindly by some people who do the best they can, and our basic needs are covered. This makes me very thankful.” she says.

Refugees that seek asylum in the US, have the right to be treated with respect and afforded with basic needs, such as assistance with finding housing, work, and integrating into their new communities. However, often, local communities lack resources and struggle to help these new members of the community get on their feet.

A typical refugee experiences something closer to the following: after their long journey from their home country, they wait at the border for weeks or sometimes much longer, where they are detained in overcrowded and underfunded facilities. Entire families are often confined in cramped spaces with poor sanitary conditions, and they are forced to sleep on the floor. The long waiting times can cause families to be broken: waiting times are typically longer for adults than children, which motivates some refuge-seeking parents to send their children ahead through the legal process.

Deeply appreciate to be here

“We hope to change our situation”, says Felipe, from El Salvador. “We have met great people here in the US who were kind and wanted to help”, says Felipe delighted. “But the way it is now, our situation is without a future and unjust. By speaking out, we want to raise awareness for our circumstances. We need to show Americans that we exist here in the US, and that we want to become a member of US society. We want to express that we deeply appreciate to be here.”