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Editorial: The affective turn in radical right research: crossing disciplinary and geographic boundaries

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[The affective turn in radical right research: crossing disciplinary and geographic boundaries](#)

Introduction

Over the past decades, populist radical right-wing parties (PRRPs) have been on the rise in Europe, the US and beyond. Reflecting their increasing popularity, these parties have drawn a large amount of scholarly interest from a diverse range of academic disciplines. The rapidly growing field, however, also faces challenges and limitations that call for novel research. A particularly promising avenue for such novel research lies in the empirical investigations on the *affective underpinnings* of the appeal of PRRPs. In recent years, a growing number of scholars has pointed at the crucial role emotions play in political behavior (e.g., Demertzis, 2013; Jasper, 2018; Marcus, 2002). Yet, the underlying “affective turn” (Clough and Halley, 2007; Thompson and Hoggett, 2012), has only received limited attention in the field of radical right research. This relative absence not only applies to the supply side, where, Betz and Oswald (2022, p. 136) put it, “we are still largely missing [...] discourse-oriented studies that explore how right-wing populist parties concretely appeal to emotions, what tropes and rhetorical devices they use to evoke and elicit an affective response among their target audience.” It also concerns the demand side, where most existing empirical research focuses on negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety and fear (e.g., Rico et al., 2017; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). Recent research on populism, however, suggests that more positively valenced emotions, such as nostalgia and hope, also play an important role in the support for, and rhetoric of, these parties (e.g., Obradović et al., 2020; Reicher and Haslam, 2017; Smeekes et al., 2021).

While building on and adding to the “affective turn” in the social and political sciences, the present Research Topic tries to shed new light on this important dimension of the appeal of PRRPs. It does so, by addressing two general limitations in the existing literature. First, while scholars from different disciplines have started to shift their attention to studying the role of affect in explaining PRRPs success, an interdisciplinary approach in the field is mostly absent. Second, existing research on the role of affect and PRRPs is primarily focused on the larger and often-studied Western European states. Only more

recently have researchers broadened their focus to Central Eastern European countries, where PRRPs have gained significant electoral support (e.g., [Pirro, 2015](#)). To address these gaps in the scientific literature, this Research Topic features papers that combine insights from different academic disciplines (i.e., psychology, sociology, and political science) to investigate the role of both positive and negative affects in the appeal of PRRPs, in both Western and Central Eastern European contexts. The contributors to this Research Topic investigate the ways in which PRRPs (and their representatives) in these different European contexts create a discourse that appeals to both positive and negative affect (i.e., the supply side) as well as the role that positive and negative affect plays in driving support for these parties among voters (i.e., the demand side).

The use of affects in radical right discourse

On the supply side, three articles gathered here focus on understanding how different PRRPs and their leaders use emotion-generating rhetoric to speak and appeal to their followers. [Hloušek et al.](#) compare the political tweets of PRRP leaders from the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia in light of the crisis produced through Russia's invasion of Ukraine. By analyzing their tweets, the authors show how radical-right politicians engulf an international crisis for domestic political gain through the spread of fear and anger. Studying the speeches of radical-right party leaders Orbán (Fidesz—Hungary) and Kaczyński (PiS—Poland), [Wagner and Enyedi](#) challenge the common view that radical right politicians employ only negative emotions to affect the constituents and show that politicians who are in power, use positive affective appeals as a means of what they call emotional governance. Expanding the more traditional view of PRRPs focus on negative emotions, [Damhuis and Rashkova](#) theorize and empirically dissect the meaning and political use of resentment; an affect that is frequently mentioned in the literature as the key driver explaining PRRP support, even though its exact definition often remains unclear. By studying a corpus of party documents of PRRPs in three Western and two Eastern European countries from 2004 onwards, they identify three types of resentment mobilized by the radical right: redistributive, recognitory, and retributive resentment, which are expressed in different ways in different countries.

The affective drivers of radical right support

On the demand side, three articles within this Research Topic deal with the perspective of voters and the affective factors that can drive their support for PRRPs. [Smeekes and Lubbers](#) study the extent to which societal discontent (i.e., the belief that society is in decline and poorly functioning) and national nostalgia (i.e., a longing for the good old days of the country) form important affective drivers of PRRP support in the context of the Netherlands. Based on a representative sample of native Dutch voters, results

reveal that both societal discontent and national nostalgia form relevant affective explanations for PRRP support, and that a part of these positive effects is explained by native Dutch voters' anti-immigrant attitudes. [Erzeel et al.](#), investigate whether negative emotions toward the political system, and system-directed anger in particular, drive support for populist radical right parties differently for men and women. Using data from the RepPresent voter survey organized in Belgium during the 2019 federal elections, findings show that although voters experiencing system-directed anger do support the PRRP Vlaams Belang more than they support mainstream right and left parties, this was equally the case for men and women. Finally, [Komáromy et al.](#) investigate whether social status-related envy (SSRE; the emotional response resulting from perceived social status differences) forms a relevant affective driver of PRRP support. Using psychological network modeling on German survey data, results show that SSRE is a distant affective driver of PRRP support and that the two constructs are connected by two pathways. The middle-class route is characterized by disagreeable narcissism (Rivalry) and nativism, while the lower-class route by Neuroticism (potentially Vulnerable Narcissism) and authoritarian right-wing populism.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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