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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

Gloom, Doom, & In Tune: Political Engagement, Anxiety, and Dispositional Traits in the
Age of Doomscrolling

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

by

Melissa N. Baker

Committee in Charge:

Professor Matthew Hibbing, Chair
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2020

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Dedication

To Timothy and Nancy Baker, whose love and support is the only reason I have the privilege of pursuing my goals.

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**Doom, Gloom, and In Tune: Political Engagement, Anxiety, and Dispositional
Traits in the Age of Doomscrolling**

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Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Merced

Abstract

This dissertation provides evidence that certain people are predisposed to experiencing anxiety over politics and these differential experiences determine how people engage with politics, especially political information. In the first chapter, I outline a theoretical argument that some people are more susceptible to experiencing anxiety over politics and have political anxiety impact their engagement with politics, especially information engagement. I argue that people who are high in trait anxiety, an inherent baseline anxiety, pay more attention to potentially threatening stimuli and information, therefore are more likely to experience anxiety over politics than people who are low in trait anxiety. These same high trait anxiety individuals are also more likely to be influenced by political anxiety than low trait anxiety individuals, such that high trait anxiety individuals will engagement with a higher amount of political information as a result of experiencing anxiety over politics.

I test this argument with a series of three studies, each of which represented by an empirical chapter in this dissertation. In the first empirical chapter, I provide evidence that trait anxiety is related to paying more attention to politics with a representative survey. In the second empirical chapter, I use a cognitive behavioral task to provide evidence that trait anxiety is associated with more higher threat bias (i.e. cognitive attention towards potentially threatening images), an important link in demonstrating that people high in trait anxiety are predisposed to experiencing anxiety over politics. In the third empirical chapter, I use an experiment to show that individuals high in trait anxiety and individuals low in trait anxiety differentially choose to be in situations that could induce political anxiety. I also show that these choices mean people have different experiences under political anxiety; people who are high in trait anxiety seek out more threatening political information as a result of experiencing political anxiety and are more likely to want to contact their representatives about the information.

In the final chapter, I conclude the dissertation by tying together the first four chapters, suggesting future directions, and outlining theoretical and methodological contributions that have come out of this dissertation. The main theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the role of attention driven traits (e.g. trait anxiety) that predispose certain types of people to experience political anxiety. Previous work in political science has largely ignored the role of individual differences, an aspect of emotional experiences that I highlight. Methodologically, this is the first set of studies in my knowledge that uses a cognitive behavioral task and measures from clinical psychology to address individual differences and psychological mechanisms that predispose people to experience anxiety over politics.

This is also the first time, to my knowledge, that a selection experiment has been used to allow people to engage with emotional political content in a more realistic setting within an experiment.

Part I

Anxiety and Political Behavior

1 Introduction

Political campaigns and interest groups often try to reach the general public with widespread online advertisements, television advertisements, or by mailing flyers to every home in an area they hope to target. Often, these messages use threatening images to evoke anxiety, suggesting that political groups see value in anxiety as a motivator for political engagement. But, do all people pay attention and respond to these messages in the same way? In this dissertation, I address two individual-level traits, general interest in politics and trait anxiety, that predispose a person to experience political anxiety. I demonstrate how they independently condition the relationship between political anxiety and one's future political engagement.

Research within political science has found a relationship between state anxiety, an anxiety invoked by circumstance or something in the environment and an increase in information-seeking. Specifically, when individuals experience state anxiety, they seek out threatening information relevant to the source of anxiety. For example, [Albertson and Gadarian \(2015\)](#) found that when people are prompted to think about their fears related to immigration, they seek out more threatening information about immigration. Information-seeking in this way is a mechanism that stems from evolutionary psychology work and the fundamental function of anxiety, which is a combination of threat and uncertainty ([Lerner and Keltner 2000](#)). When faced with a potential threat, people seek out relevant information to resolve the uncertainty aspect of anxiety. This evolutionary adaptation (and functional use) helps individuals deal with the anxiety they face. George Marcus stresses the importance of anxiety, for saying Anxiety is the central emotion on which reason and democratic politics rest. ([Marcus 2002](#)).

Largely missing so far from the research agenda on anxiety and information-seeking is consideration of who finds themselves experiencing state anxiety in the first place. It is not random whether people become anxious and a significant part of experiencing state anxiety over politics comes from individual-level traits that determine exposure. This is problematic because not all people will experience state anxiety about certain political events, or at least experience it in the same way, so it is difficult to generalize about the types of behaviors that stem from anxiety. Research on anxiety and information-seeking should allow for people to naturally experience anxiety through their exposure to potential anxiety-inducing aspects of politics. One such trait that could predispose a person to experience anxiety-inducing aspects of politics is trait anxiety, an inherent and persistent level of anxiety regardless the context.

Given the conflict-driven nature of politics, the potential for anxiety is ubiquitous, making it especially important that we understand how individuals vary in their experience of state anxiety and the potential consequences of that variation. Two individual-level traits are crucial to this dynamic. First, in order to experience state anxiety related to politics, a person must pay enough attention to political news in the first place to detect the relevant alarming information and to grasp the significance of that information. In other words, political interest plays a crucial role in conditioning exposure to the sources of political anxiety. Additionally, trait anxiety serves the same evolutionary function as state anxiety, making trait anxiety an essential part of the story on how a person comes to experience state anxiety. This process

operates as a two-stage flow of information (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Zaller 1989) where attention to politics (driven by traits) is conditioning exposure to potentially anxiety-inducing stimuli and the traits primarily condition acceptance of political anxiety.

I propose that political interest and trait anxiety (e.g. inherent levels of anxiety, regardless of context) serve as selection mechanisms¹ that shape our likelihood of experiencing state anxiety related to political events. Political interest and trait anxiety are particularly important in this context because of the large number of people who are likely to be attracted to (or away from) state anxiety by one or both conditions. For example, YouGov consistently finds that the percentage of people who indicate they follow what is going on in politics most of the time is between 40-45% of the population². Additionally, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America states that the number of people affected by Generalized Anxiety Disorder is around 6.8 million and the number affected by Social Anxiety Disorder is around 15 million (about 3% and 7% of the population³, respectively). Since these numbers represent the individuals who have a clinical and diagnosable level of trait anxiety, the number of individuals affected by a higher than normal, but not clinical, level of trait anxiety in general would be much larger. These statistics about interest and anxiety suggest that a majority of the population does not have much interest in politics and a sizable number of people are inherently anxious.

Previous research, which randomly assigns treatments inducing state anxiety, obscures the ways trait anxiety and political interest lead some individuals to seek out anxiety-inducing information more often while others tend to shield themselves from such experiences. In order to develop a complete understanding of the relationship between state anxiety and information-seeking, we must account for the active role people play in customizing their political environments by seeking out or avoiding information that may cause them anxiety. I propose that information-seeking (or aversive) behavior is largely driven by political interest and trait anxiety, and that past research has exaggerated the consequences of incidental state anxiety by failing to account for this behavior.

People who have interest in politics will consume more political information of all types, which exposes them to more political information that could induce anxiety than people who are not interested and not consuming as much information. People with more political interest will also be more attentive when consuming news therefore be more likely to process and internalize political information that has the potential to induce anxiety. Trait anxiety, on the other hand, will make people more sensitive to the effects of state anxiety due to the fundamental function of anxiety in facilitating information-gathering. In other words, trait anxious individuals are more likely to pay attention to potentially threatening stimuli and find themselves in situations that could lead to political state anxiety. This paper specifically tests the relationship between the two selection mechanisms (political interest and trait anxiety), cognitive attention to politics and threat, and how these relationships influence the subsequent relationship between state anxiety and engagement.

¹Traits as selection mechanisms make people more or less likely to experience state anxiety based on their unintentional behavior and cognition stemming on these traits.

²<https://bit.ly/3v6wXy6>

³<https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>

In my first study, I find that in a cognitive behavioral task that does not rely on self-reports, high interest and trait anxious individuals pay more attention to threatening stimuli. In my second study, I use experiments and find that people high in trait anxiety seek out more threatening political information when feeling political anxiety, compared to people high in trait anxiety who are not feeling political anxiety. In sum, individual-level traits, especially trait anxiety, influence the likelihood people experience state anxiety over politics and, in turn, how they engage with political information.

2 Anxiety and Information-Seeking

Despite the popular narrative that emotion and deliberative cognition are countervailing forces, much research suggests that emotion helps people make better political decisions (Albertson and Gadarian 2015, Brader 2006, Marcus and MacKuen 1993, Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000, Valentino et al. 2011). A common thread in much of this work is an emphasis on the role of anxiety. The theory of Affective Intelligence (Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000) posits that anxiety is the result of environmental factors that are potentially threatening, meaning it is a combination of threat and uncertainty. The function of this state anxiety—*anxiety brought on by the environment*—is an increase in attention and desire to learn more information in order to resolve uncertainty. Applied to political behavior, Marcus and colleagues find that anxiety leads individuals to devote more attention to their political environment and rely less on automatic functions (such as partisanship) to evaluate policies and political candidates. Relatedly, individuals seek out more information about candidates who make them nervous (Redlawsk, Civettini and Lau 2007).

Anxiety serves a distinct purpose apart from other negative emotions, such as anger. Both lead people to claim they will pay more attention, but only anxiety actually facilitates more information-seeking, whereas anger decreases information-seeking (Valentino et al. 2008). These results suggest that while different types of negative affect may lead to people expressing the desire to participate in certain behaviors like information-seeking, only anxiety leads to an actual increase in that behavior. With implications for information-seeking, anxiety also lead individuals to consider viewpoints that run counter to their own and to compromise (MacKuen et al. 2010). Additionally, anxiety leads people to seek out more balanced information when they know they need to defend their candidate of choice (Valentino et al. 2009). Collectively, this work suggests that anxiety aids in a persons information-seeking ability.

In a more specific context, Brader (2006) examines the role of anxiety within political advertisements. He finds that negative advertisements with fear cues, meant to induce anxiety, lead individuals to express a greater desire to contact campaigns for more information. Additionally, anxiety in this context causes people to express more interest in watching news about politics (but not the news overall). This result points to a desire for a more directed information search, not a blanket increase in information search regardless of the topic. Brader also finds that a desire to watch news about politics is concentrated within individuals who are politically knowledgeable, suggesting anxiety operates differently depending on political sophistication.

In an extension of this idea, Albertson and Gadarian (2015) measure the type of information people seek out when experiencing anxiety. They find that anxiety leads participants to seek out threatening information relevant to their worries. Specifically, when the respondents are asked to list their worries about immigration, they seek out more threatening information about immigration. This result traces back to the fundamental function of anxiety, such that individuals have a desire to resolve the uncertainty aspect of anxiety by seeking out relevant threatening information to determine the presence of threat. Interestingly, while Republicans and Democrats do not differ in their information-seeking behavior, Republicans remember more of the threatening news they seek out (Albertson and Gadarian 2015). This result again suggests that anxiety is not operating in the same way for everyone.

3 Trait Anxiety and Politics

In each of the works outlined above, there is some suggestion that anxiety does not affect all people in the exact same way. These scholars recognize that individual differences shape how anxiety influences information-seeking. Brader (2006) mentions, but does not examine, how political interest is important to information search when discussing how political knowledge moderates the relationship between anxiety and desire to seek out information. Despite these occasional mentions, past work has tended to treat anxiety as a randomly occurring event that can happen to anyone. In this work, I treat political state anxiety as non-random and something people have some level of control over.

Theoretically, political interest could affect who finds themselves in a state of anxiety to begin with and it could also influence information-seeking behavior once an individual is experiencing state anxiety. Political interest contributes to selective exposure of information (Knobloch-Westerwick and Johnson 2014), meaning people with high political interest are likely to select into state anxiety, influencing their information-seeking. In the process of information flow, this means political interest is impactful in receiving information that can induce state anxiety. If political interest is a contributing factor in who is exposed to information that can induce state anxiety, the work on anxiety and information-seeking has been mischaracterizing a large subset of the population that does not care about politics; the effect for people who experience anxiety would be diluted and the effect for people who purposefully avoid anxiety would be exaggerated.

Additionally, past work has not differentiated between state and trait anxiety. Albertson and Gadarian (2015) note that while their work focuses on state anxiety, trait anxiety is equally important. Anxiety, state or trait, motivates individuals to make a safer environment for themselves (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006, Tooby and Cosmides 2008). While experiencing state anxiety means a person is in a situation that induces anxiety, trait anxiety is just a higher than normal level of anxiety in every situation. Being inherently anxious, or having high trait anxiety, should be especially impactful in an arena such as politics where looming threat can be a constant presence. Having high trait anxiety should mean individuals are constantly seeking out more information, despite the existence of state anxiety. Trait anxiety makes individuals more susceptible to state anxiety and leads to an orientation to (i.e. focus on) a

possible threat (Mogg and Bradley 1999, Mogg, Bradley and Hallowell 1994), meaning that state anxiety is more likely to manifest in people high in trait anxiety who are exposing themselves to more potential political threats ⁴.

Political interest and trait anxiety influence state anxiety through attention (Bishop 2009, Pacheco-Unguetti et al. 2010). Attention, generally, is the processing of information in the environment. This is a different concept than information-seeking because information-seeking is a deliberative act of gathering more information, whereas attention is just cognitive recognition of and/or fixation on ones surroundings. If a person has some level of political interest, they are going to pay more attention to politics, which in turn leads to a greater likelihood of them finding themselves in a state of anxiety. If a person does not have interest in politics, their attention will not turn to politics and they will be less likely to find themselves in state anxiety. Similarly, those who are high in trait anxiety are more likely to find themselves in state anxiety because they pay more attention to potentially threatening information. This can be expected because of the evolutionary function of anxiety and the need for more information. Those who are low in trait anxiety will be less likely to find themselves in state anxiety because of the decrease in attention allotted to potentially threatening things or situations. Due to the competitive and conflict-centered nature of politics (Miller and Conover 2015), I treat political information and immersing oneself in a political environment as potentially threatening and able to represent state anxiety since uncertainty and threat are the two main components of state anxiety (Haas and Cunningham 2014, Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000).

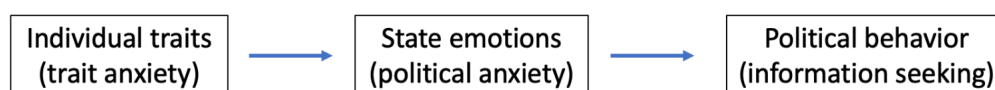


Figure 1: Theoretical sequence

This leads to a set of two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. *Selection hypothesis: People who are high in trait anxiety will put themselves into situations that induce political state anxiety more often than people who are low in trait anxiety.*

Hypothesis 2. *Behavior hypothesis: People who are high in trait anxiety will show an increase in information seeking behavior when experiencing political state anxiety, whereas people low in trait anxiety will not.*

⁴I focus on trait anxiety and state anxiety separately but the two could interact. One reason it is important to examine the independent effects of trait anxiety and state anxiety is that when lumped together, trait anxiety may dampen the effects of state anxiety. A person who is trait anxious faces a ceiling effect when it comes to state anxiety and we may not be able to understand the effects of anxiety (trait or state) if they are not separated because of this interaction.

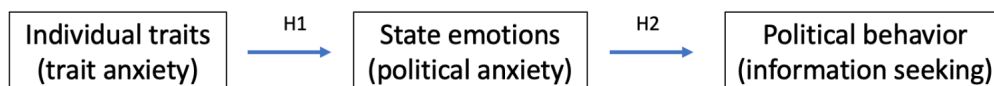


Figure 2: Theoretical sequence with hypotheses

In the big picture view, trait anxiety is a predisposition that affects the propensity of experiencing political state anxiety which then in turn influences information engagement.

I use a survey to test the correlational relationship between the individual traits of interest and attention to politics. Survey results are reported in Study 1. I use a cognitive behavioral task to measure the relationship between the individual traits of interest and attention to politics, reported in Study 2. I use an experiment to test the full theoretical argument that individual traits affect the propensity to experience political anxiety via attentional biases and how this propensity influences the type of political information with which individuals engage using a Dynamic Processing Tracing Environment (DPTE), a simulated information board (Lau and Redlawsk 2006). The DPTE displays scrolling information with which participants can engage. The information is presented like scrolling headlines and are clickable to display actual text, like a news story. I use two version of this experiment: a traditional randomized experiment and a selection experiment, the latter allows me to test the selection hypotheses in an behavioral task. The results of the experiments are reported in Study 3.

Part II**The Link Between Trait Anxiety and
Attention to Politics**

1 Introduction

In order to examine the relationships between political interest, trait anxiety, and attention to politics, I included the relevant survey items on a survey administered to a nationally representative sample of Americans. Although observational survey data has limitations in terms of establishing causal relationships, I use this correlational data to set the stage by establishing relationships that I can then explore experimentally in Study 2 and Study 3. Political interest is measured using a basic interest battery; trait anxiety is measured using STAI, a clinical diagnostic measure of anxiety; attention to politics is measured with a self-report survey question.

Participants ($N = 3,585$) were a nationally representative sample recruited through Survey Sampling International (now Dynata). 46% were female and 51% were liberal. Each participant was compensated through SSI for their time that included a larger survey that took about 20 minutes to complete. This survey was administered during late 2018 around the midterm elections in the United States.

2 Measures

Each type of anxiety was measured using the STAI measure. 20 items made up the measure for each type of anxiety. Participants indicated on a 4-point Likert scale whether each statement applied to them not at all, somewhat, moderately so, or very much so (for the state anxiety measures) or almost never, sometimes, often, or almost always (for the trait anxiety measures). The STAI traditionally comes as a general state anxiety and trait anxiety measure. I adapted the general measures to create a political version of both scales, the first time a political version of the STAI has been used to measure anxiety in political science. The political trait anxiety and political state anxiety are almost identical to their nonpolitical counterparts, with a few small exceptions when wording would not have made sense in a political context. The political version of the STAI captures political trait anxiety (i.e. inherent and persistent political anxiety, regardless the context) and political state anxiety (i.e. in-the-moment political anxiety requiring situational factors that bring on the emotion). The full measures for the traditional STAI and the adapted political version can be found in the Appendix.

Four types of anxiety were measured: political state (mean = 2.48, $sd = 0.57$), political trait (mean = 2.55, $sd = 0.16$), apolitical state (mean = 1.84, $sd = 0.6$), and apolitical trait (mean = 2.58, $sd = 0.15$). State anxiety and trait anxiety were meaningfully different ($t = -57.89$, $p < 0.001$), as were state anxiety and political state anxiety ($t = -36.64$, $p < 0.001$), and trait anxiety and political trait anxiety ($t = 6.93$, $p < 0.001$). Measuring different types of anxiety served as a measurement validity check and the ability to say trait anxiety is a separate construct from the other types of anxiety. The measure treated trait anxiety as persistent and usually existent anxiety, regardless the situation or context and state anxiety as a current level of anxiety. Only trait anxiety is used in the following models.

Political interest was measured using a standard political interest item asking participations how much interest they had in politics. Participants indicated on a 3-point Likert scale if they had little, moderate, or a lot of interest in politics (mean =

2.19, $sd = 0.73$). Attention to politics was measured using a 5-point Likert scale item asking participants how often they pay attention to politics (mean = 3.33, $sd = 0.729$)⁵.

3 Results

I ran two OLS models to test the relationship between both traits (political interest, trait anxiety) and attention to politics. Both models are reported in full in Table 1 in the Appendix. Compared to people low in political interest, individuals who express moderate interest in politics report paying more attention to politics ($b = 0.94$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 14.953$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, individuals who express high interest in politics report paying more attention to politics ($b = 2.049$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 32.741$, $p < 0.001$) than those who are low in political interest. I control for ideology, which does not predict attention to politics ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 0.64$, $p = 0.5$).

⁵Political interest is being treated as the independent variable and attention is being treated as the dependent variable because of the theoretical setup. While people could easily get stuck in a cyclical loop of interest and attention, where attention at times feeds into interest, I am testing the beginning of the cycle where general interest would fuel attention to politics, especially potentially threatening aspects of politics.

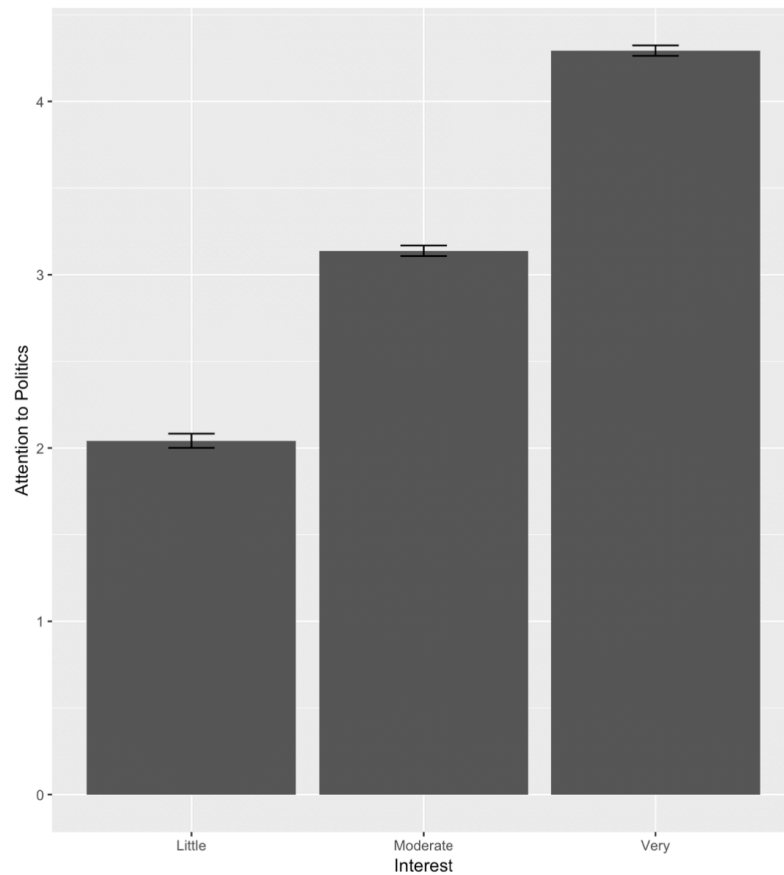


Figure 3: Figure shows the relationship between self-reported political interest and self-reported attention to politics. People who are very interest in politics report paying the most attention to politics whereas people who have little interest in politics report paying the least attention to politics.

In the second model, I test the relationship between trait anxiety and attention to politics. I find that as trait anxiety increases, reported attention to politics increases ($b = 0.469$, $SE = 0.207$, $t = 2.265$, $p = 0.02$). I control for ideology, which does predict attention to politics ($b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = -3.603$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that conservatives report paying less attention to politics. This result suggests that people who are high in trait anxiety are paying more attention and will find themselves consuming information that is likely to induce political state anxiety. I test this in Study 3.

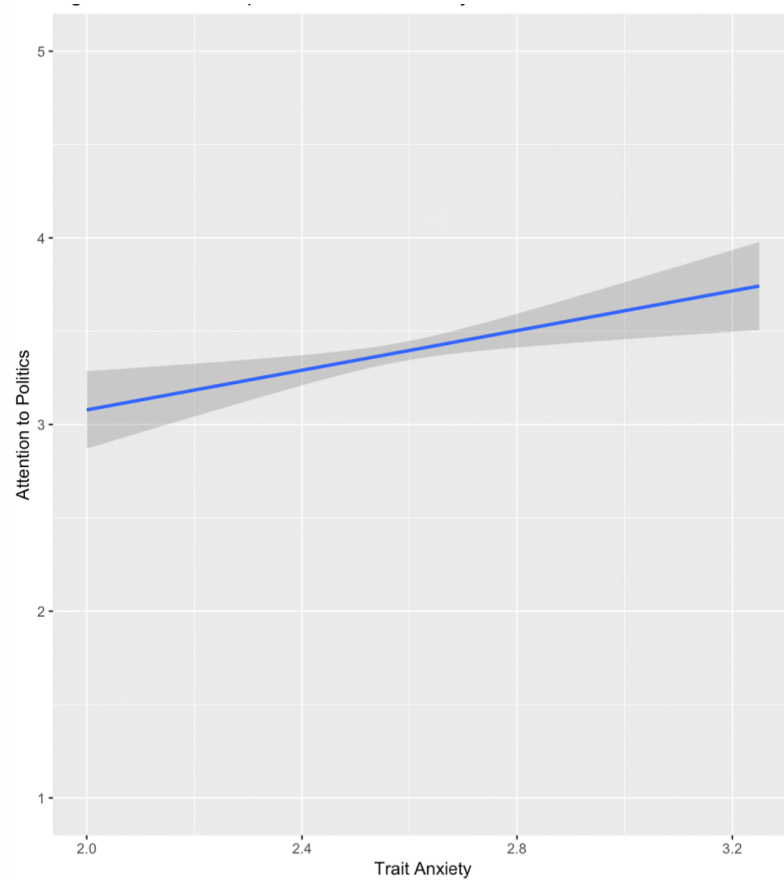


Figure 4: Figure shows the relationship between self-reported trait anxiety (STAI measure) and self-reported attention to politics. As level of trait anxiety increases, the more attention people pay to politics.

Part III**Trait Anxiety and Attentional Biases
Towards Politics**

1 Introduction

In study 2, I test the relationship between individual traits (e.g. trait anxiety) and attention. Attention is measured using Dot-Probe, a cognitive behavioral task that measures attentional biases. The purpose of the Dot-Probe Task is to measure attentional biases to stimuli, often emotional, by calculating reaction times after being distracted by emotional stimuli. The process of the task as described in the Inquisit software: "Participants are presented word pairs consisting of one emotion word and one control word flashed onto the screen to the left (top) or right (bottom) of a center fixation cross for a short duration. The word pairs are immediately followed by the letter 'R' or 'P' (= the probe). The probe is presented either in the location of the emotion word or the location of the control word. Participants are asked to press one key (R) when the probe is R and another key (P) if the probe is P." An example of the sequence of screens a participant sees follows.

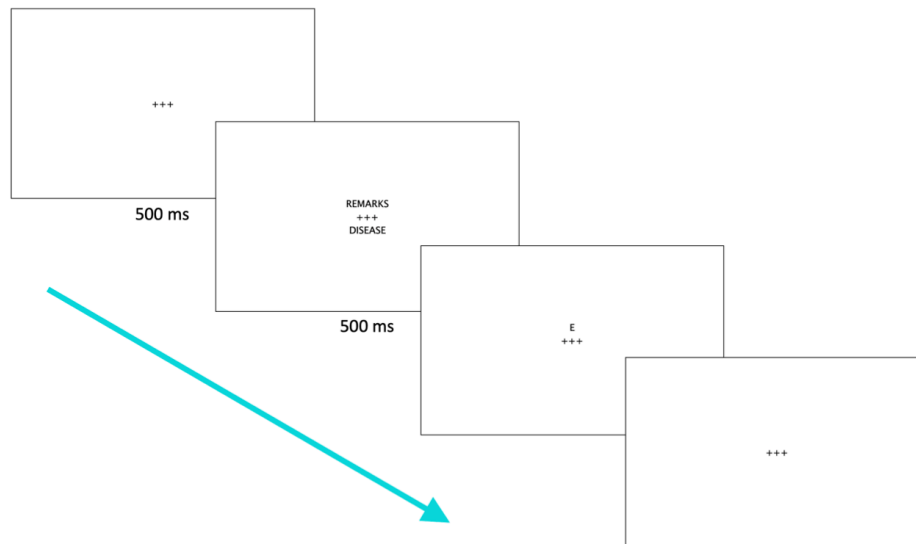


Figure 5: Example of the generic Dot-Probe Task

In the version of the Dot-Probe task used for this study, I replaced words with pretested pictures, some of which were threatening (political) and some that were neutral. The process of the task is as follows: The fixation and images were displayed for only 180 milliseconds before a response (via key press) was required. This amount of time is enough for an image to register subconsciously but not enough time for deliberate mental consideration. The participants then saw the letter 'E' or 'I' and pressed the corresponding key once they saw the letter. The time from display to response (key press) is the reaction time used for the outcome measure. The entire activity operates fairly quickly, with hundreds of trials (i.e. presentation of images) happening in two minutes. There were two versions of the task: one meant for liberals and Democrats and a second meant for conservatives and Republicans. Programming two versions allowed me to present images that are generally threatening and images that could be threatening to specific groups. I would not expect Democrats and Republicans to be threatened by the same types of political images,

especially since pre-testing revealed that party images were viewed as threatening. Examples of threatening political images can be found in the Appendix.

The outcome measure from the Dot-Probe Task is the threat bias index (TBI). The TBI is a calculation of the aggregate response times for threatening stimuli subtracted from the aggregate response times for neutral stimuli. The TBI provides a numerical representation of how distracted the participant was (i.e. how much attention was paid to) by threatening stimuli. The more positive the number, the higher the attentional bias to threat. For this sample, the mean was -6.195 and the standard deviation was 31.0053.

In this particular version, I am measuring attentional biases towards threat. There were two versions of the Dot-Probe task: one using non-political stimuli and one using political stimuli⁶. I test hypothesis 1 using both the political and non-political version. Because I expect political interest and trait anxiety to operate independently, I have no theoretical expectation for political interest to be related to attentional bias for potential general threat, only for potential political threat. On the other hand, trait anxiety should be related to attentional biases, regardless of their nature. This distinction is important in understanding how anxiety is non-random and individual traits determine whether someone experiences anxiety over politics.

Participants (N = 293) were from an undergraduate student subject pool at a West Coast university. 80% of the participants identified as or leaned liberal and 20% of the participants identified as or leaned conservative. 30% of participants identified as male and 70% identified as female. 63% of the sample identified as Hispanic/Latino and 50% indicated English is their first language. Each participant was compensated with subject pool credit (that can be used for extra credit in classes) for participation. This study was run during academic years that spanned 2019.

2 Measures

I measured trait anxiety using STAI⁷ and political interest was measured using a basic interest battery. For the political version of the Dot-Probe, the mean trait anxiety was 2.5775 and the standard deviation was 0.147. Political interest was measured using a standard political interest item asking participations how much interest they had in politics. Participants indicated on a 3-point Likert scale if they had little, moderate, or a lot of interest in politics (mean = 2.68, sd = 0.79). Attention was measured using the Dot-Probe task on a computer in a lab setting at a university campus.

⁶All of the stimuli images were pre-tested. The images ranged from non-threatening non-political images such as pictures of chairs and flowers to threatening and political images such as party images and pictures of protests. There was an even balance of each of the four types of images: political threatening, political non-threatening, apolitical threatening, and apolitical non-threatening. Republicans received Democratic images and Democrats received Republican images.

⁷The full measure can be found in the Appendix

3 Results

I ran a series of OLS models to test the relationship between both traits (political interest, trait anxiety) and attentional bias to threat. These models are reported in Tables 2 and 3 in the Appendix. The first model tested the relationship between political interest and attentional biases to potential political threat (i.e. the political Dot-Probe). This model shows marginal effects of political interest on attentional bias toward political threat ($b = 3.516$, $SE = 2.286$, $t = 1.538$, $p = 0.12$).

The second model tested the relationship between political interest and attentional biases to potential political threat while controlling for state anxiety, an emotion that would influence attentional bias to threat. This model shows that as political interest increases, attentional bias to potential political threat also increases ($b = 5.085$, $SE = 2.414$, $t = 2.107$, $p = 0.036$). These results suggest that when accounting for a persons current and situational anxiety, higher trait anxiety is related to paying more attention to potentially threatening political information.

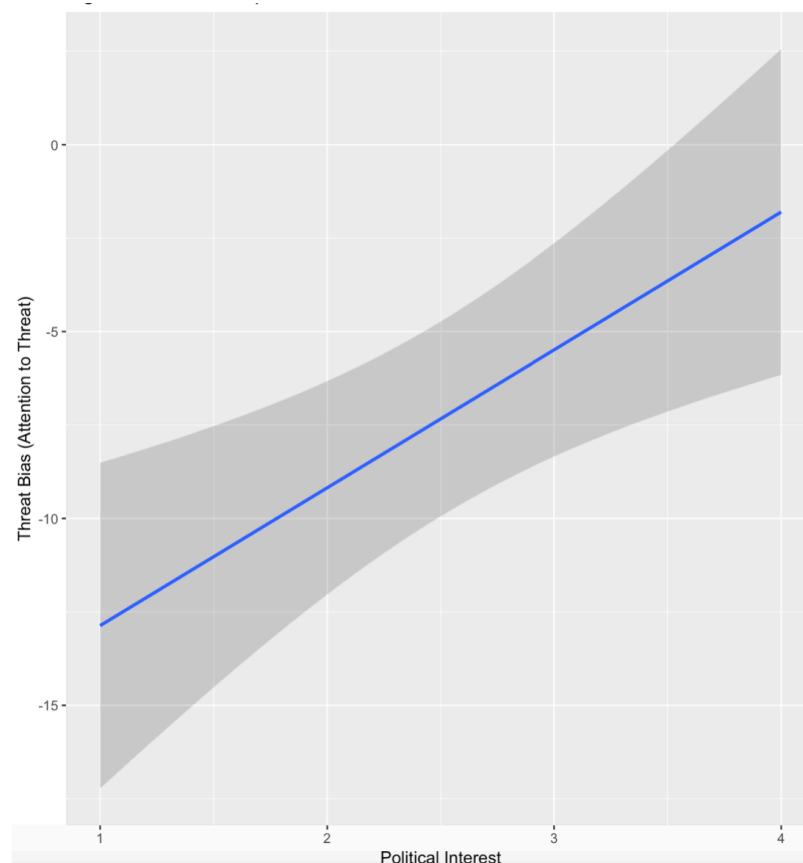


Figure 6: Figure shows the relationship between self-reported political interest and threat bias (i.e. the amount of subconscious attention people pay to threatening political information). There is a positive relationship between political interest and threat bias, such that people who are high in political interest show the greatest amount of bias towards threatening stimuli.

The third model tested the relationship between trait anxiety and attentional bias to potential political threat. I hypothesized that people high in trait anxiety would

show different attentional biases than people low in trait anxiety so I created a trait anxiety variable that included respondents one standard deviation below the mean (2.4299) and one standard deviation above the mean (2.7251) trait anxiety value for the sample (mean = 2.5775, sd = 0.1476). The results show that people who are high in trait anxiety show more threat/political attentional bias than people who are low in trait anxiety ($b = 13.974$, $SE = 7.301$, $t = 1.914$, $p = 0.05$). This finding provides support for my theoretical expectation that trait anxious people inherently pay more attention to potentially threatening political information that can lead to a greater likelihood of experiencing political state anxiety. This study is also, to my knowledge, the first to use a cognitive behavioral task to measure political attention and the first to show that trait anxious people show cognitive differences from people who are not trait anxious when it comes to politics.

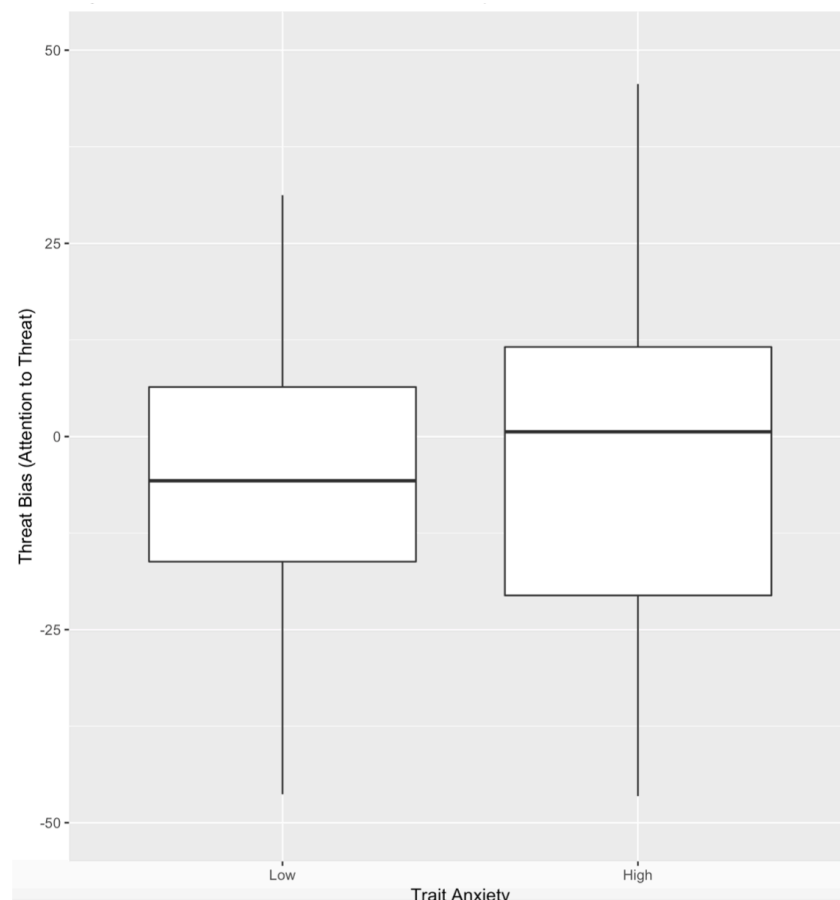


Figure 7: Figure shows the relationship between trait anxiety and threat bias (i.e. attention to threatening stimuli). People who are high in trait anxiety (top quartile) show a higher threat bias than people who are low in trait anxiety (bottom quartile). Those who are high in trait anxiety pay more attention to threatening stimuli in their environments.

Part IV**Susceptibility to Political Anxiety and
Information Behavior**

1 Introduction

In Study 3 I test my hypotheses in a more realistic political information environment, the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment (DPTE), where participants engage with a simulated information board, described in more details in the following section. I use both a selection experiment and a randomized experiment to test the relationship between individual traits, experiencing state anxiety, and information engagement. In the selection experiment, participants chose whether they wanted to complete a task meant to induce political anxiety (treatment) or a neutral (control) task. In practical terms, participants were presented with the two writing task options and allowed to choose which writing task they wanted to complete, therefore selecting themselves into the treatment or control condition. In the randomized experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two tasks. After completing the tasks, participants completed an information-seeking task, the main outcome of interest.

Participants (N = 459) were from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. 60% were liberal, 40% were conservative and 47% were male, 53% were female. All participants were given monetary compensation for their participation. Amazon's Mechanical Turk has been shown to be a valid sample for political science studies, especially studies examining psychological processes (Clifford, Jewell and Waggoner 2015). This study took place during March and April of 2020 and was completed in two waves. During wave 1, which took place during March 2020, participants completed a large battery of personality, cognition, and demographics measures. All of these measures can be found in the Appendix. During wave 2, which took place during April 2020, participants completed the experiment portion of the study. The study was conducted over two waves to avoid measures of important pre-treatment variables (collected in wave 1) influencing either the effectiveness of the treatment or overall performance in the any part of the experiment during wave 2.

Experiment Set-Up

Wave 1 (March 2020)

Individual measures: STAI, personality, political, demographics

Wave 2 (April 2020)

Treatment → DPTE → Civic Engagement

Figure 8: Flow of experiment

Wave 1 had 1,952 respondents. Wave 2 had 532 of those participants return to complete the study. 73 of those 532 participants had incomplete data, mostly due to non-completion of the DPTE information board task, and were excluded, resulting in the final count of 459 participants.

2 Measures

Trait anxiety was measured using STAI, as in studies 1 and 2. The mean score was 2.27 and standard deviation of trait anxiety 0.3. Political interest was measured using

a standard political interest item asking participations how much interest they had in politics. Participants indicated on a 3-point Likert scale if they had little, moderate, or a lot of interest in politics (mean = 3.24, sd = 0.72).

In order to induce political anxiety (treatment), participants were presented with a prompt asking them to write about what makes them anxious about politics. The prompt kept the thoughts about politics request broad to allow participants to express their existing anxieties regardless the topic, which could be restrictive, and consider multiple aspects of politics, which is typically how people experience anxiety over politics. The control writing prompt asked participants to write about what they generally thought of when thinking about life. These prompts were pre-tested for effectiveness in inducing political state anxiety on Amazon Mechanical Turk prior to being used for this study. The prompt texts can be found in the Appendix. Many of the responses to the prompts were similar. The following include some examples that are representative of typical responses.

An example of what one participant wrote in response to the political anxiety prompt: "We are a country without ta president and we flying in the dark. I dont know when the death will end." Another example of a response to the political anxiety prompt: "It makes me anxious that it feels like the lives of myself, my family, and my friends are in the hands of the whims of government officials who care more about big businesses and abstract monetary figures instead of the human lives they're directly impacting and ignoring. Like lives are hanging by a thread."

An example of what one participant wrote in response to the life prompt: "When I think about life, I think about everything that I want to learn, do an experience. Think about everything that had to happen for me to get where we are now, and how lucky I am to be alive." Another example of a response to the life prompt: "I was just thinking right at this very moment that in life when you think about all of the good moments you've had, and looking back life is not bad at all! You end up in gratitude and there will be many more blessings to come. The good outweighs the bad, depends on how grateful one's perspective is. I want to evolve and have a higher mind, with thoughts such as these. Life is really beautiful, it's meant to be."

After completing the writing task, participants engaged in an information engagement activity on the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment (DPTE) (Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Once redirected towards the task, the DPTE displayed a scrolling list of headlines that participants could click on to reveal a short new story. Participants were told they had up to ten minutes to read about any of the information, if they chose to do so. All of the headlines were displayed three times to allow participants to click on something later if they missed it the first time. Participants were allowed a maximum of 10 minutes to engage with the information board to force prioritization of types of information. The headlines (listed in the Appendix) were a mix of political and non-political, as well as threatening/non-threatening and sensational-non-sensational⁸. The headlines were pre-tested on these dimensions prior to use in this study to create these four classifications. Each of the four headline groups had a mix of topics within that type of headline.

The main outcome of interest from the DPTE engagement was number of clicks

⁸Sensational headlines were included as a check to make sure the threatening headlines were not just attention grabbing (like sensational headlines) and that participants were engaging with threatening headlines because of their threatening nature.

on different types of information (political/non-political, threatening/non-threatening, sensational/non-sensational). An example of what the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment looks like in a study with different types of click options follows.

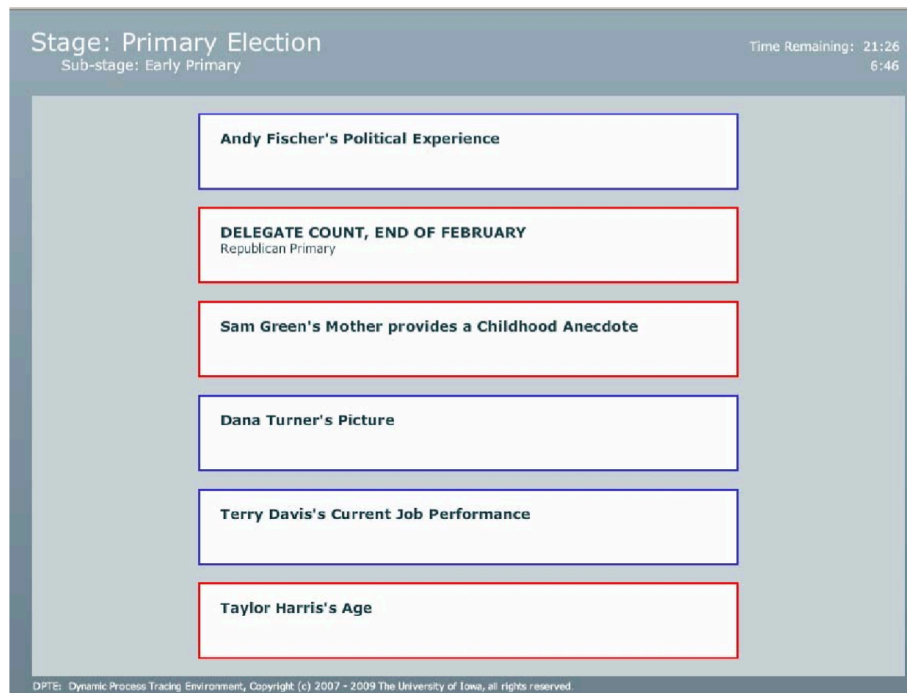


Figure 9: Figure shows an example of what participants might see on a screen during a generic version of the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment task.

After completing the information-seeking task within the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment, participants were asked about the information they just viewed. They were asked if they had any desire to contact their representatives about the information they just viewed, discussed more in this the civic engagement subsection of this chapter. Participants were also asked a recall question, to capture memory of information after the information-seeking task was complete. Participants also indicated their level of state anxiety at the end of the study. All of these measures can be found in the Appendix.

3 Results

I ran a series of models to test the relationship between personal traits and experiencing political state anxiety as well as the effects of anxiety on political information engagement, specifically political information that is threatening. I hypothesized that people who are high in trait anxiety will put themselves into situations that induce political anxiety more often than people who are low in trait anxiety. In the selection experiment, where participants had the ability to choose whether to complete the political anxiety treatment task or the control task, I find the opposite – participants high in trait were more likely to select the control task ($b = 0.248$, $SE =$

0.11, $t = 2.184$, $p = 0.03$) when controlling for baseline state anxiety⁹. In the concluding chapter I discuss why this might be, paired with results from Study 2 that support this hypothesis.

I also hypothesized that people who are high in trait anxiety will show an increase in information-seeking behavior when experiencing political state anxiety, whereas people low in trait anxiety will not. I find support for this hypothesis. In the selection experiment, respondents who received the political anxiety treatment sought out more political information that was threatening than those in the control group ($b = -0.3163$, $SE = 0.12$, $t = -2.55$, $p = 0.011$). The interaction between treatment and trait anxiety was marginally significant ($b = -0.56$, $SE = .4$, $t = -1.39$, $p = 0.15$); people high in trait anxiety sought out more political information that was threatening under political anxiety (mean = 1.163, $sd = 1.08$) than people high in trait anxiety who were not experiencing political anxiety (mean = 0.736, $sd = 0.76$; $t(84.7) = 2.297$, $p = 0.024$).

⁹Baseline state anxiety was measured using the same STAI question battery that measured trait anxiety. State anxiety is a measure of in the moment anxiety and I control for this to isolate the effects of just trait anxiety, not any personal circumstances the person may be currently experiencing.

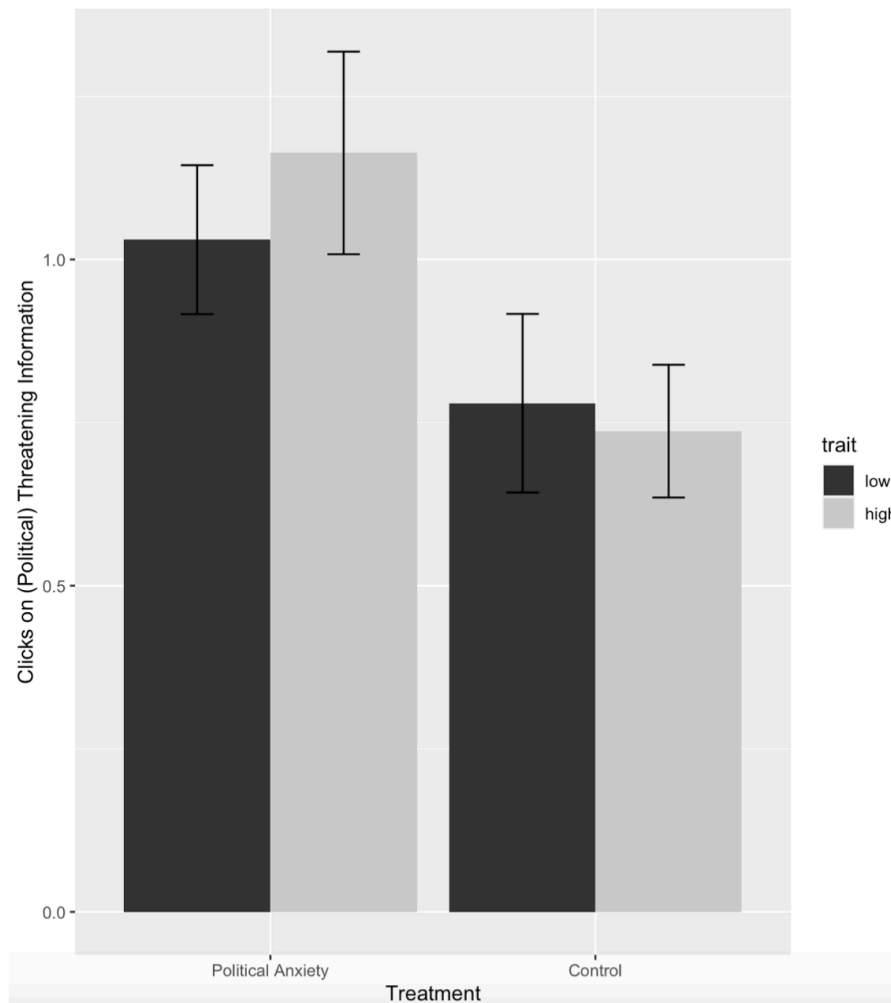


Figure 10: Figure shows information-seeking behavior broken down by treatment and trait anxiety level in the selection experiment. Information-seeking is measured via number of clicks on headlines that were political and threatening. These results show that people who are high in trait anxiety and experiencing anxiety over politics click on a higher number of headlines that are political and threatening.

In the randomized experiment, there was no main effect of political anxiety treatment ($b = 0.063$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = 0.468$, $p = 0.64$) or treatment and trait anxiety interaction effect ($b = -0.224$, $SE = 0.466$, $t = 0.481$, $p = 0.631$) on the amount of threatening political information sought out by participants.

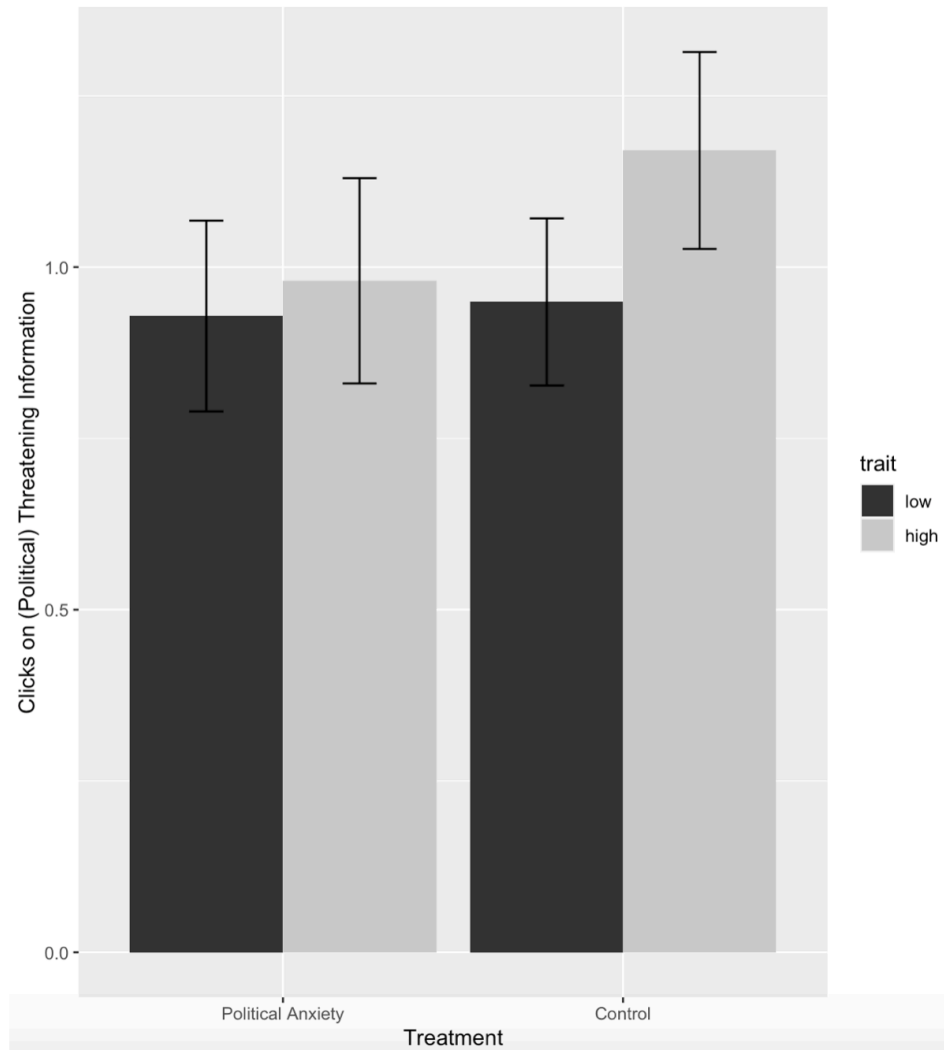


Figure 11: Figure shows information-seeking behavior broken down by treatment and trait anxiety level in the randomized experiment. Information-seeking is measured via number of clicks on headlines that were political and threatening. These results show that when people are randomly assigned to treatment (of political state anxiety), these groups show no differences in information-seeking behavior.

For political interest, I find no main effect of trait and treatment interaction effect on amount of threatening political information sought out by respondents. This was true for both the selection experiment and the randomized experiment. I also find no main effect or trait times treatment interaction on amount of time spent looking at threatening political information. Together, these results suggest that political interest does not influence how much threatening political information an individual seeks out whether experiencing anxiety or not. However, trait anxiety influences how much threatening political information an individual seeks out under conditions where they are experiencing political anxiety and conditions where they are not.

4 Civic Engagement

I started this paper with discussion on the expectation from politicians that anxiety is going to fuel people to act. Thus far, I have demonstrated the expanded role of anxiety in information-seeking. The next step is to understand how this process then influences political behavior. Once an individual has sought out more information, one downstream political behavior we might expect to result from gaining information is the desire to contact representatives about information a person is consuming.

Based on my theory, threatening information should fuel individuals to more action, including an action like contacting representatives. I test this by looking at the relationship between amount of threatening information consumed in the DPTE task and the desire to contact representatives about the information seen in the task. After the DPTE task in my experiment, participants were asked on a 5-point Likert scale whether they would like to contact their representatives about any of the information they viewed during the task.

There is a positive relationship between amount of threatening political information viewed and desire to contact representatives ($b = 0.089$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = 2.039$, $p = 0.042$). These results suggest that people who viewed a higher amount of threatening political information expressed more desire to contact their representatives than people who viewed little threatening political information.

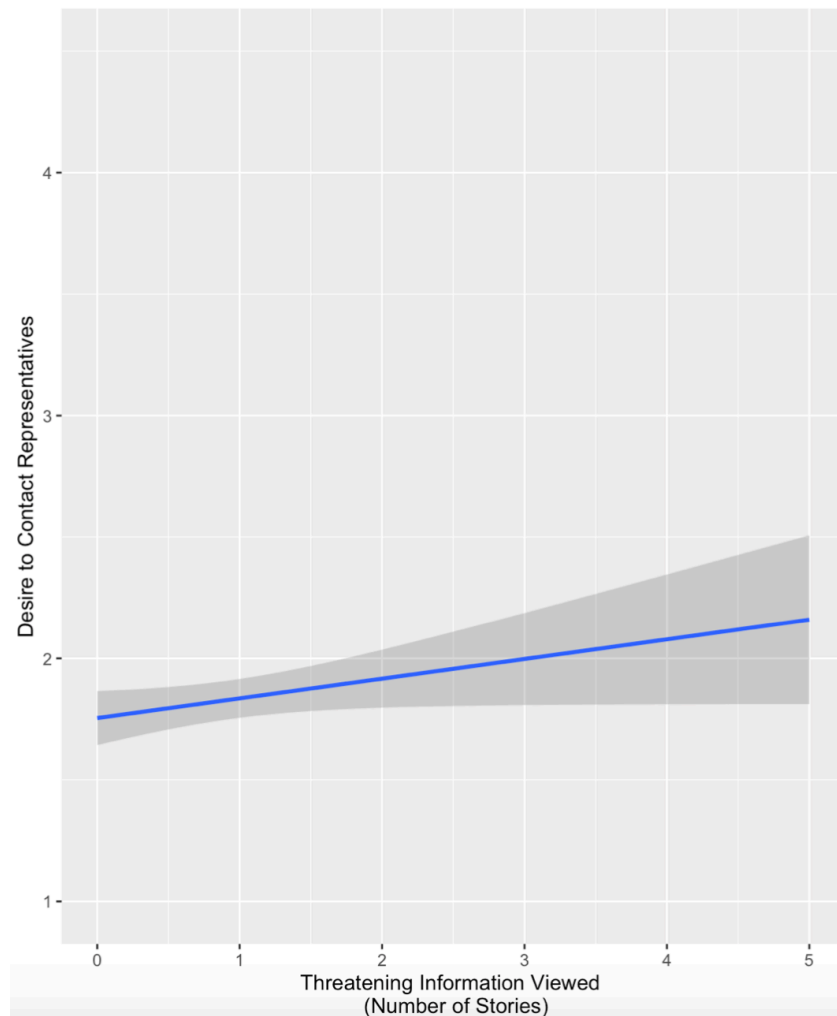


Figure 12: Figure shows the relationship between number of threatening political headlines engaged with in the information-seeking task and the desire to contact representatives about that information. The results show a positive relationship between threatening information viewed and desire to contact representatives, such that people who were clicking on a greater amount of political threatening information had a higher desire to contact their representatives about the information once they had finished the information-seeking task.

Part V**Discussion, Conclusions, and
Contributions**

1 Contribution

This dissertation provides an important step in understanding who experiences political anxiety, and what political consequences arise from differential experiences of political anxiety. I argue and provide evidence that different types of people are more susceptible to experiencing political state anxiety because they pay more attention to politics as a result of individual traits. These different emotional experiences lead people to behave in certain ways when it comes to politics they engage with a greater amount of threatening political information and have a higher desire to do something, like contact a representative, as a result of gathering threatening political information. The results I have presented also provide evidence of how people get stuck in cyclical "doomscrolling" type actions, where experiencing anxiety over politics leads to more information-seeking, which leads to more anxiety over politics, and so on. This could explain why some people are quite emotional and passionate about politics, even when their information engagement behavior and emotional experiences may be so high-anxiety that the experience is harmful to them personally they are predisposed to engage with politics in this manner.

Specifically, with the series of studies I have presented, I find support for my expectations that people who are high in political interest will pay more attention to politics and people who are high in trait anxiety, the main trait of examination, will pay more attention to politics, when compared to people who have low levels of either trait. These results suggest that individual traits such as political interest and trait anxiety make people more or less likely to experience political anxiety because of the attentional biases that accompany these traits. An individual has a greater propensity to experiencing political anxiety based on their personal traits and this influences engagement with political information and politics more broadly.

This dissertation provides foundational evidence for the idea that it is not random whether or not people experience political state anxiety and that individual-level traits should be considered when we discuss the role of anxiety in political behavior. Importantly, these findings highlight how previous work on anxiety and politics may have missed the crucial role of trait anxiety and overestimated the role of state anxiety. Research in this arena should allow for people to naturally experience their exposure to potential anxiety-inducing aspects of politics because it is not random whether people become anxious or not over politics.

I have also introduced an extremely psychology heavy way to study research on emotions in politics and engagement with political information. Some of these measures, such as the Dot-Probe Task and the political version of the STAI, have not been used in political science until now. These measure provide a crucial insight into the psychological mechanisms that link people as individuals to different types of experiences people have when they engage with politics. The Dot-Probe Task also demonstrates the value in using cognitive behavioral tasks to test the psychological mechanisms that political science typically only theorizes about, whereas I provide empirical evidence for this theorized psychological mechanism of attention throughout this dissertation.

2 Discussion

Thinking through these studies as a whole, a paradox that arises from the findings is that in Study 2, people high in trait anxiety have an attentional bias towards threat, whereas in Study 3 I find that people high in trait anxiety are less likely to choose the task that induces political state anxiety in the selection experiment. This is likely because of the conscious choice at hand in being able to choose between something that will cause anxiety and something that will not. People who are high in trait anxiety and hold an attentional bias towards threat will likely gravitate towards anxiety-inducing information and tasks naturally by paying more cognitive attention without consciously choosing to, but not actively choose these sorts of situations when presented to them. For example, a person sitting in a waiting room with a television may be naturally drawn in to the political news on the screen but if they were given the remote, might not pick a station where they would have to watch political news.

Additionally, scholars familiar with political psychology work may wonder why I do not replicate a previous finding in the literature (Albertson and Gadarian 2015) that randomly assigned anxiety leads to a greater amount of information-seeking behavior concerning threatening information. I believe my null finding in the randomized experiment is due to the nature of the experimental treatment that induces anxiety broadly, instead of about a specific issue or person as previous research has done. I made this design decision because people do not exist in homogenous information environments in terms of topic and experiencing political anxiety likely encompasses a lot of anxiety ‘triggers’ and top of the head considerations. Future work should further explore this difference between general anxiety and issue or person specific anxiety.

Another question that may arise is whether trait anxiety is a major component of political traits related to political engagement (e.g. political interest, political ideology) that better explain the relationship between individual traits and information engagement. This does not appear to be the case. Based on the sample from Study 3, there is a very weak relationship between trait anxiety and political interest, $r(441) = -0.194, p < 0.001$. There is also a very weak relationship between trait anxiety and political ideology, both before ($r(442) = -0.193, p < 0.001$) and after ($r(441) = -0.182, p < 0.001$) the experiment. The same is true for trait anxiety and political party identification both before ($r(442) = -0.15, p < 0.001$) and after ($r(442) = -0.138, p < 0.001$) the experiment. Trait anxiety is moderately related to other personality traits that have been shown to influence political outcomes, such as need for chaos ($r(438) = -0.472, p < 0.001$) and emotional stability ($r(439) = 0.61, p < 0.001$), but not strongly.

3 Future Research

Future research should further flush out the linkage between individual traits, experiencing emotions over politics, and political engagement. I argue in this dissertation that certain types of people, such as people high in trait anxiety, are more susceptible to experiencing political state anxiety. Similarly, it is likely that certain types of people experience trait anxiety in different ways, like they experience state anxiety in different ways. This is both a theoretical and methodological question.

For example, in Study 2, the results showing that people high in trait anxiety having a higher threat bias when accounting for state anxiety can be broken down further using other demographics. The results for only the female participants suggest that high trait anxiety is related to high threat bias ($b = 14.93$, $SE = 7.86$, $t = 1.899$, $p = 0.06$) and high state anxiety is marginally negatively related to high threat bias ($b = -10.771$, $SE = 6.96$, $t = -1.546$, $p = 0.128$). In male participants, trait anxiety is unrelated to high threat bias ($b = 3.186$, $SE = 18.955$, $t = 0.174$, $p = 0.864$) and similarly to results for women, high state anxiety is negatively related to high threat bias ($b = -30.89$, $SE = 18.955$, $t = -1.63$, $p = 0.12$). This leads to theoretical questions about gender differences that lead to differential experiences of trait anxiety and state anxiety. It is also a measurement and methodological question because it is possible this difference is due to men and women self-reporting emotions differently (Balzar and Jacobs 2011, Deng et al. 2016) and using psychophysiology to measure these emotions, or at least strength of these emotions, would be beneficial in understand whether there is a true difference or expressed difference.

Future research should also examine the differential effects of trait anxiety and a similar but distinct concept more commonly used in political science, emotional stability. Trait anxiety is an inherent baseline level of anxiety, regardless of context. Emotional stability, while it may capture a bit of trait anxiety, is instead the ability for people to roll with the punches when it comes to negative emotions. Meaning, people who are high in emotional stability are less affected by negative emotions, typically negative state emotions. In Study 3, emotional stability and trait anxiety are only moderately related ($r(439) = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship between emotional stability and state anxiety is almost negligible ($r(454) = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that these concepts are also empirically distinct, and further should address how inherent anxiety (trait anxiety) and ability to fight off anxiety (emotional stability) influence political behavior.

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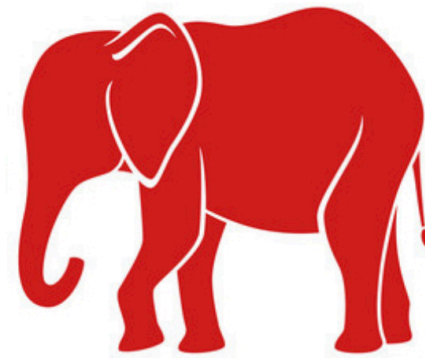
4 Appendix

4.1 Effects of Individual Traits on Attention to Politics

Table 1: Effects of Individual Traits on Attention to Politics

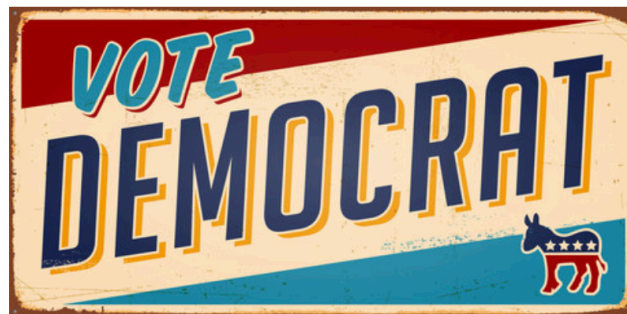
	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Attention to Politics	
	(1)	(2)
Moderate Interest	0.949*** (0.063)	
High Interest	2.050*** (0.063)	
Trait Anxiety		0.469** (0.207)
Conservative	0.028 (0.043)	-0.223*** (0.062)
Constant	2.149*** (0.059)	2.397*** (0.535)
Observations	2,050	1,503
R ²	0.378	0.011
Adjusted R ²	0.377	0.010
Residual Std. Error	0.969 (df = 2046)	1.197 (df = 1500)
F Statistic	414.821*** (df = 3; 2046)	8.692*** (df = 2; 1500)
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

4.2 Dot-Probe Images









4.3 Wave 1 Measures

Political interest

How much interest do you have in what is going on in politics? 1 (none)- 4 (a lot)

How much interest do you have in political campaigns? 1 (none)- 4 (a lot)

Some people only follow politics when there is an election happening. How often do you follow politics? 1 (never)- 4 (always)

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger et al., 1983)

Y-1 Directions: A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and give the number that indicates how you feel right now, that is, at this moment. There is no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to

describe your present feelings best. 1 (not at all)-4 (very much so)

- I feel calm
- I feel secure
- I am tense
- I feel strained
- I feel at ease
- I feel upset
- I am presently worrying over possible misfortunes
- I feel satisfied
- I feel frightened
- I feel comfortable
- I feel self-confident
- I feel nervous
- I am jittery
- I feel indecisive
- I am relaxed
- I feel content
- I am worried
- I feel confused
- I feel steady
- I feel pleasant

Y-2 Directions: A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then give the that indicates how you generally feel. There is not right or wrong answer. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe how you generally feel. 1 (almost never) - 4 (often

- I feel pleasant
- I feel nervous and restless
- I feel satisfied with myself
- I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be
- I feel like a failure
- I feel rested
- I am calm, cool, and collected
- I feel that difficulties are piling up so that I cannot overcome them
- I worry too much over something that really doesn't matter
- I am happy
- I have disturbing thoughts
- I lack self-confidence
- I feel secure
- I make decisions easily
- I feel inadequate
- I am content
- Some unimportant thoughts run through my mind and bother me

- I take disappointments so keenly that I can't put them out of my mind
- I am a steady person
- I get in a state of tension or turmoil as I think over my recent concerns and interests

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (political)

State Directions: A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and give the number that indicates how you feel right now, that is, at this moment. There is no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe your present feelings best. 1 (not at all) - 4 (very much so)

- I feel calm
- I feel secure about politics
- I am tense about politics
- I feel strained over politics
- I feel at ease about politics
- I feel upset about politics
- I am presently worrying over possible political misfortunes
- I feel satisfied about politics
- I feel frightened about politics
- I feel comfortable about politics
- I feel self-confident involving politics
- I feel nervous about politics

- I am jittery about politics
- I feel indecisive over politics
- I am relaxed about politics
- I feel content about politics
- I am worried about politics
- I feel confused about politics
- I feel steady about politics
- I feel pleasant about politics

Trait Directions: A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then give the that indicates how you generally feel. There is not right or wrong answer. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe how you generally feel. 1 (almost never) - 4 (almost always)

- I feel pleasant over politics
- I feel nervous and restless about politics
- I feel satisfied with myself involve politics
- I wish I could be as happy about politics as others seem to be
- I feel like a failure involving politics
- I feel rested over politics
- I am calm, cool, and collected about politics
- I feel that political difficulties are piling up so that I cannot overcome them
- I worry too much over something political that really doesn't matter

- I am happy about politics
- I have disturbing thoughts about politics
- I lack self-confidence involving politics
- I feel secure about politics
- I make political decisions easily
- I feel inadequate over politics
- I am content about politics
- Some unimportant political thoughts run through my mind and bother me
- I take political disappointments so keenly that I can't put them out of my mind
- I am a steady person involving politics
- I get in a state of tension or turmoil as I think over my recent political concerns and interests

Need for Chaos

Directions: Indicate how much you agree with each of the statements. 1 (strongly agree) - 5 (strongly disagree)

- My life is organized
- My life is unstable
- My routine is the same from week to week
- My daily activities from week to week are unpredictable
- Keeping a schedule is difficult for me
- I do not like to make appointments too far in advance because I do not know what might come up

Competitiveness

Directions: Please read each sentence carefully and select the option that best describes you. 1 (never true of me) - 5 (always true of me)

- Winning in competition makes me feel more powerful as a person
- I find myself being competitive in situations which do not call for competition
- I see my opponents as my enemies
- I compete with others even if they are not competing with me
- Success in competition makes me feel superior to others
- When my competitors receive rewards for their accomplishments, I feel envy
- I find myself turning a friendly game or activity into a serious contest or conflict
- It's a dog-eat-dog world. If you don't get the better of others, they will surely get the better of you.
- If I can disturb my opponent in some way in order to get an edge in competition, I will do so.
- I feel really down when I lose in a competition.
- I view my relationships in competitive terms.
- It bothers me to be passed by someone while I am driving on the roads.
- I can't stand to lose an argument.
- In school, I feel/felt superior whenever I do/did better on tests than other students.
- Losing in competition has little effect on me.
- Failure or loss in competition makes me feel less worth as a person.

- I believe that you can be nice and still win or be successful in competition.

TIPI (shortened Big Five)

Directions: Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Under each statement, indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

I see myself as... (7-point scale: strongly disagree to strongly agree)

- Extraverted, enthusiastic
- Critical, quarrelsome
- Dependable, self-disciplined
- Anxious, easily upset
- Open to new experiences, complex
- Reserved, quiet
- Sympathetic, warm
- Disorganized, careless
- Calm, emotionally stable
- Conventional, uncreative

Costs of Politics

Measures for physical, emotional, social, and regretted behavior

Directions: Please select how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements (Picked from 1-7 scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree)

Physical

- Politics has caused me to be stressed

- I have become depressed when a preferred candidate lost
- Politics has caused me to be fatigued
- I have lost sleep because of politics
- Politics has adversely affected my physical health, even if only a little
- Politics has caused me to be suicidal

Emotional

- Exposure to media outlets promoting views contrary to mine can drive me crazy
- I have lost my temper as a result of politics
- Politics has led me to hate some people
- Politics has caused me to think seriously about moving
- On occasion, I have regretted comments I made during a political discussion
- I have secretly wished bad things on those who disagree with me politically
- I sometimes feel guilty about the way I feel toward those who disagree with me
- I have become annoyed when others are critical of my political views

Regretted behavior

- I spend more time thinking about politics than I would like
- I care too much about who wins and loses in politics
- My life would be better if I didn't focus so much on politics
- At times, I wish I would have restrained myself more in political conversations
- I have posted or written things online that I later wished I hadn't

- I have vowed to spend less time on politics but failed to follow through
- I spend more time on political websites than I should
- Politics has sometimes caused me to exercise bad judgement
- My interest in politics has delayed me from completing an assignment, task, or job
- After a major election or political event, there is sometimes a void in my life

Social

- Differences in political views have damaged a friendship I valued
- Differences in political views have created problems for me in my extended family
- On occasion, politics had made my home life less pleasant
- Differences in political views have created problems for me in my immediate family
- Differences in political views have created problems for me at work
- I have lost time from work or school because of politics
- My political views have created financial problems for me
- My political views have created legal problems for me

Conflict Orientation

Confrontation, public vs private, emotional expression, approach vs. avoidance

Directions: Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements. (1-7 scale, where 1 is strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree)

Confrontation

- I feel more comfortable having an argument in person than over the phone

- I dislike when others have eye contact with me during an argument
- If I were upset with a friend, I would discuss it with someone else rather than the friend who upset me
- When I have a conflict with someone, I try to resolve it by being extra nice to him or her
- I always prefer to solve disputes through face-to-face discussion
- After a dispute with a neighbor, I would feel uncomfortable seeing him or her again, even if the conflict had been resolved

Public vs. Private

- I feel uncomfortable seeing others argue in public
- I don't mind strangers arguing in my presence
- It doesn't bother me to be in a situation where others are arguing
- I feel uncomfortable when others argue in my presence

Emotional Expression

- Getting emotional only makes conflicts worse
- Everything should be out in the open in an argument, including emotions
- It makes me uncomfortable watching other people express their emotions in front of me
- I feel like running away when other people start showing their emotions during an argument
- It shows strength to express emotions openly
- Showing your feelings in a dispute is a sign of weakness

Approach vs. Avoidance

- I hate arguments
- I find conflicts exciting
- I enjoy challenging the opinions of others
- Arguments don't bother me
- I feel upset after being involved in an argument
- I avoid conflict
- Arguments can be fun
- I rarely have arguments with my friends

Expectations of the news

Directions: Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements (1-7 scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree)

- The news is mostly threatening
- The news is mostly negative
- The news is mostly positive
- The news is mostly calming
- The news is mostly sad
- The news is mostly exciting

Registration

Are you registered to vote?

- Yes
- No

- Not sure
- Ineligible

If you're registered to vote, are you planning to vote in the upcoming presidential election (November 2020)?

- Yes
- No
- Haven't decided yet
- N/A

If you're planning to vote in the upcoming election, who do you plan to vote for?

- Democrats
- Republicans
- Independents
- Candidates from multiple parties
- Other
- N/A

4.4 Wave 2 Measures

Headlines for the Dynamic Process Tracing Environment

Threatening

- Endangered by Turkish offensive, US troops prepare to evacuate from Syria
- SCOTUS ruling could completely alter lives of LGBTQ Americans
- Why the US economy is worse than it seems

- Only 10 jobs created for every 100 jobs taken away by Artificial Intelligence
- 2 mass shootings in less than 24 hours shock US
- The Fed just hit the coronavirus panic button
- UN nuclear watchdog finds Iran has nearly tripled its uranium stockpile

Non-threatening

- ‘He’d like to see peace on Earth’: how a dog became mayor of a California town
- Fostering a community for healing
- ‘Storm Area 51’ fails to materialize
- The optometrist-on-wheels helps kids see clearly for the first time
- Michelle Obama to release companion book to ‘Becoming’
- Over 500,000 torchbearer applications received for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic torch relay
- House to vote on \$8.3 billion total coronavirus response package

Sensationalizing (exciting)

- Dentist in Alaska allegedly rode hoverboard while extracting patient’s tooth
- How CIA scientist Sidney Gottlieb the ‘most prolific torturer of his generation’ used potent drugs, extreme temperatures, food and sleep deprivation and electroshock for his mind control experiments on human ‘expendables’
- ‘Miracle’ woman survives six-hour cardiac arrest
- Jill Biden’s epic tussle: In split-second blocking maneuver, she protects husband from lunging vegans

- YouTubers bought thousands of toilet paper rolls a few months ago. They just gave them all away for free
- Modern Family prepares to say goodbye with some dirty dancing and a new baby
- Brooklyn man arrested for hoarding masks, coughing on FBI agents

Non-sensationalizing (and boring)

- 5 key things we learned from Gordon Sondland
- Crypto exchange news update for November 2019
- Why we celebrate Thanksgiving on the 4th Thursday of November
- Buttigieg dismisses Biden's 'establishment' endorsement from Kerry
- How to make a face mask with fabric
- Kamala Harris ends 2020 presidential campaign
- Senate approves successor to Rick Perry as Energy Secretary

Treatment prompts

Political anxiety: Please write about what makes you anxious about politics. Please describe in as much detail as possible. You may use as much space as you wish.

Control: Please write about what comes to mind when you think about life. Please describe in as much detail as possible. You may use as much space as you wish.

Civic Engagement Do you wish to contact a political representative about any of the information you saw in the previous headline activity?

Recall (memory) Please list any headlines and/or topics that you remember from the outside news activity.